

# Children's everyday work in rural Muslim *Yorùbá* communities in North Central Nigeria

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*Abstract:* Proponents of children's freedom to work agree that work is socially, culturally, and relationally constructed. However, more remains to be known about these constructions, particularly in rural sub-Saharan Africa. This article explores the cultural childrearing beliefs or ethnotheories of *Yorùbá* parents in rural Northern Nigeria, and parents' role in organising children's everyday intra-familial and intra-communal work. Data were generated within a broader ethnographic study which explored parents' perspectives and practices around formal schooling. Participant observation, including after school observations of children, and partly structured interviews were employed. Findings reveal children's activities aligned with parents' ethnotheories about what and how children should learn towards becoming functional, communal adults or *Ọmọ̀lúàbí*s. Parent's ethnotheories also broadened to accommodate new realities, resulting in additional expectations of children. The article highlights the need to further examine the wider structures which underpin parents' ethnotheories and thereby determine children's capabilities to realise their everyday lives.

*Keywords:* Ethnotheories, *Yorùbá*, *Ọmọ̀lúàbí*, children's agency.

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## Introduction

Work, or participation in ‘labour’ or wage activities remains a contested notion in the literature on global childhoods. While opponents of work generally argue that children are to be cared for and made available for learning, proponents argue against what they perceive is a Western liberal conception of childhood and for plural conceptualisations situated within diverse cultural, social, and economic contexts (Bourdillon 2006). Moreover, some proponents highlight that work produces social benefits alongside other types of learning (Bourdillon & Spittler 2012; Liebel 2004) and generates necessary earnings and opportunities for vulnerable children (Bourdillon 2006; 2011). Despite these arguments, both groups broadly agree that there are different types of work, some exploitative and potentially harmful, others benign and even useful, particularly those contributing to the household economy and equipping children with workplace skills (Bass 2004).

Accordingly, Bourdillon (2006) proposes conceptualising work on a continuum between benefits and harm and including activities such as school and sport which can induce benefits *and* cause harm. More recently, however, scholars have suggested distinguishing work—activities embedded into family/community life which incorporate, either explicitly or implicitly, a learning or developmental aim—from ‘labour’—activities designed for wages (or as a form of payment) which extract children from families and communities, expose them to hazards and may not incorporate a learning aim (Lancy 2016). Examples of such work, thus, include chores (e.g. fetching water, cleaning, farming, caring for livestock, etc.), care work (e.g. for younger siblings, or the elderly) and economic activities (e.g. farming, hawking, helping in a shop, etc.) (Bourdillon 2006; Lancy 2016). This distinction between work and labour is also spatial: work typically occurs around the home, and usually under the guidance of family/community members (particularly for younger children) (Rogoff 1995) while labour takes place away from home (though may remain within the wider community) and under the supervision of adults with whom the child has a weaker affiliation.

Notably, the guidance of a more knowledgeable other, whether actively or passively (Lancy 2016), in children’s work suggests an intentionality which reflects the dominant dispositions and ideas in the environments in which such children grow up. For young children in particular, learning or developmental aims are embedded within their developmental niches or culturally constructed environments which comprise three mutually reinforcing components: children’s everyday physical and social settings; the culturally regulated customs and practices of childrearing; and the cultural childrearing beliefs (or ethnotheories) of those who care for them (Harkness & Super 1996).

Ethnotheories, moreover, illuminate the social and cultural contexts as well as relationships within which children's work is embedded. While pluralists would accept that children's work is socially, culturally, and relationally constructed, more remains to be known about these constructions. To deepen insight about them, this article explores the ethnotheories of parents in rural Northern Nigeria and their role in the organisation of children's everyday work understood as children's intra-familial and intra-communal activities. The children whose activities are of interest in this article are aged 15 or below. The term 'children' follows conventional reference to children under the biological age of 18 in the literature, owing to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). However, this usage is for simplicity only and neither implies a homogeneity of all children below eighteen (Bourdillon 2006) nor a uniform construction of childhood across all cultures and contexts (see, e.g. Abebe 2019). As others have argued, a more heterogeneous, pluralist conception recognises the intersectionality of temporality—individual linear progression and change through time—and spatiality—relational process within the material and symbolic production of space or social life (Farrugia & Wood 2017).

The article begins by exploring the concept of ethnotheories and briefly reviewing the literature relevant to sub-Saharan Africa. It provides an overview of the research context and then discusses the methods used to generate data for the broader study upon which the article is based. It goes on to present the findings and concludes with a discussion of some implications of these findings.

## **Conceptual framework and literature review**

### **Parental ethnotheories and role construction in rural sub-Saharan Africa**

Parental ethnotheories are parents' perspectives or cultural beliefs which serve as the organising principles for children's everyday life (Harkness & Super 2006). They are the cultural models inherent in taken-for-granted ideas about the 'right way[s] to think or act' (62), demonstrating that children's activities are not arbitrary but organised as part of a cultural system with its own system of meanings (Harkness & Super 1996). Though many studies of ethnotheories focus on parental beliefs around valued traits and aptitudes in children (e.g. Nsamenang & Lamb 1993; Harkness & Super 1992; Harkness *et al.* 2010), this article takes a slightly different focus towards parents' broader beliefs about the range of children's everyday activities and the purpose these activities fulfil. Nevertheless, among some of the existing studies are insights into children's activities in rural sub-Saharan Africa and parents' role within them.

The Six Cultures Study of Socialization (SCSS) of the late 1950s, by the Whittings and their colleagues, was among the earliest to narratively expand knowledge about parental ethnotheories in predominantly non-Western, subsistence-level agricultural communities, one of which was the Gusii of Kenya (LeVine 2010; Munroe & Gauvain 2010; LeVine 2003). Towards meaningful contribution to community, school-aged Gusii children (post-infancy and pre-marital) were expected to respect, obey, be responsible and do domestic work at home (LeVine *et al.* 1994). Parents perceived their roles not directly as teachers or instructors but as disciplinarians, managers, and protectors whose children would receive the necessary education along with other children within a prescribed, hierarchically structured environment. Likewise, Lancy (1996)'s 1970s study of Liberian Kpelle children between six and 13 revealed young children were not directly instructed but instead expected to play on the 'mother ground'—open spaces in villages nearby parents, adults or older siblings who were working—under the watchful eye of these adults which facilitated children's observation of, and learning from, them. These observations were reproduced in children's varied play-forms which mimicked observed practices and served an important means through which young children acquired their culture. Slightly older Kpelle children engaged in household economic activities while even older ones engaged in structured activities such as organised apprenticeships and 'bush schools' which transmitted core values necessary for adulthood, e.g. those required for relations with the opposite sex and authorities, and for participation in religious and mystical activities.

Among the Kipsigis of Kenya, domestic chores (e.g. sweeping, washing, foraging, etc.) and younger sibling childcare were expected of girls while boys were expected, among others, to care for livestock, and carry out minor domestic repairs without parents' direct instructions or supervision (Harkness & Super 1992). These duties, for parents, were purposeful in developing children's socially responsible intelligence, the absence of which was exemplified by children's neglect of such activities to play (Super *et al.* 2011). Gendered differentiation of children's chores and other work types have been identified in other parts of Africa including, among the Tchokwe (Angola), Touareg, Hadza (Tanzania), Igbo (Nigeria) (Lancy 2016; see also Robson 1996 in relation to the Hausa in Northern Nigeria). However, among other non-African, though indigenous, peoples such as the Tsimané (Bolivia), boys can be assigned to 'typical' girls' work such as sibling care when no girls are available (see Stieglitz *et al.* 2013, as cited in Lancy 2016). Lancy, moreover, suggests that girls spend more of their days working while boys appear to have more freedom to play.

Subsequent studies have corroborated the ethnotheories, expectations and daily organisational patterns of rural Africans such as the afore highlighted Gusii, Kpelle and Kipsigis. For instance, among the Nso of Cameroun, good 'prototypical' children (i.e. obedient, respectful, hardworking, helpful, honest and intelligent) are expected to dutifully undertake chores at home, including run errands, and attend and progress

in school, the latter's more recent emergence suggestive of parents' acceptance of the reality of their contemporary lives within which schooling is perceived inevitable (Nsamenang & Lamb 1993). Among the Yorùbás of Nigeria on whom this article focuses, children are given household duties and sent on errands, including fetching objects and making purchases, to train them to be responsible, helpful and to respectfully relate with others, particularly elders (Ogunaike & Houser 2002; Omobowale *et al.* 2019; Zeitlin 1996). Parent and adult involvement includes doling out instructions, i.e. for errands or chores, and monitoring and assessing children's itineraries or tasks. Historically, such tasks are gendered, with girls expected, and thus trained, to assume household chores within the kitchen and around the home (examples: cooking, cleaning, washing, sweeping, tidying, etc.) as well as care responsibilities, and boys expected to take on more external chores which involve physical strength (e.g. cutting grass, lifting heavy items, etc.) (Akanle & Omolara 2012). For both genders, such training contributes to the development of an *Ọmọlúàbí*,—a person of good character—a central concept in Yorùbá beliefs around child rearing and social cohesion (Busari *et al.* 2017) and a goal of Yorùbá traditional education alongside useful membership in community (Akinyemi 2003).

Notably, expectations of children's communality are not unique to the Yorùbás but common across various African societies and reflected in the widely used Southern African concept of Ubuntu (often interpreted as '*I am because we are*'), and its ethnocultural correlates (Mugumbate & Chereni 2019: 29). As others have suggested, African parents and communities employ children's work not only to develop cognition and inculcate specific knowledge and skills, but also to socialise values which contribute to social integration and cohesion (for example, Nsamenang 2006).

While some Yorùbá scholars have focused on how *Ọmọlúàbí* is achieved through rhetorical and physical child discipline (Busari *et al.* 2017), others have explored how it is transmitted through verbal art forms such as riddles, songs, folktales among others (Akinyemi 2003). Others still have outlined the range of values an *Ọmọlúàbí*-focused traditional education seeks to instil which includes tangible skills in domestic work, hunting and farming, alongside intangible values of spirituality, respect, communality, among others (Akinwale 2013). Though scholars such as Ogunaike & Houser (2002) have alluded to the connection between *Ọmọlúàbí* and children's chores and childcare, few scholars have shed light on the range of rural Yorùbá children's activities and how Yorùbá parents themselves construct these in relation to *Ọmọlúàbí*.

### The research context

This article is drawn from a qualitative ethnographic study carried out amongst two rural Yorùbá communities (henceforth commA and commB) in a North Central Nigerian state, between November 2018 and December 2019. Nigeria is a West African country

subdivided into 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory (Abuja). These 37 areas are further divided into six administrative geopolitical zones—South South, South East, South West, North Central, North West and North East—groupings of states generally with similar ethnicities and socio-political histories. The country's largest ethnic groups are the Yorùbás, Igbos, and Hausas but scholars suggest there are hundreds of other ethnolinguistic groups of which estimates range between 250 and 400 (Brann 1991), including sub-groups of the three largest groups. The study's state is sometimes called a 'bridge' state given its Southwestern (Yorùbá) cultural origins and its North Western (Islam) religious alignment. Thus, the state is usually not considered part of the 'core' North, i.e. North West and North East, and is multi-religious, with adherents to Islam (Muslims), Christianity (Christians) and traditional religion (pre-Islamic and pre-Christianic theisms practised by different ethnic groups around the country). Major industries in the state include farming, traditional textile weaving and pottery.

Public pre-tertiary schooling in Nigeria comprises universal basic (one year of early childhood, six of primary, and three of junior secondary) and three years of senior secondary schooling, a 1-6-3-3 structure. Universal basic education (UBE) is free by Federal policy but in reality, states charge a variety of fees including entrance, term, end of term along with significant examination costs at the end of secondary. Unsurprisingly, UBE implementation is fraught with challenges such as gross underestimation of enrolment, shortage of certified teachers and significant underfunding (Bolaji *et al.* 2016). In the majority Muslim North West and North East, these challenges alongside those related to attendance and learning outcomes, are particularly severe. For instance, the majority of the estimated 10 million Nigerian children between ages five and 14 who are out of formal, public schools are in the North (UNICEF 2017), though this data includes children who are only attending Quranic/Arabic schools (not considered formal, public schools). The challenges with schooling in Northern Nigeria reflect, on one hand, the slower implementation of previous Federal universal schooling schemes, and on the other, tensions between religious (in this case, Islamic) and secular schooling (in this case, European style public schooling founded on Christian ideals and values). States in the North Central face similar educational challenges, albeit to a somewhat lesser degree. For instance, on indicators such as primary/junior secondary net attendance rate, schooling status, etc. the research state is usually grouped with those in the South West (see NPC 2015).

## Methods

Multiple methods are best for understanding parental ethnotheories and a particularly useful starting point is observations of the organisation of children's everyday life (Harkness *et al.* 2006) which, complemented with parent interviews, may be

analysed to reveal the principles underpinning children's routines. The diversity of methods further serves to infer across data sources to determine those most likely to be valid (Atkinson & Hammersley 2007). Observations of children's everyday lives may be conducted not only within homes but in other spaces children inhabit such as schools, and religious and other institutions (Ntarangwi 2012).

Fieldwork for the broader ethnographic study occurred in two phases: first, through an initial intensive five-month period and thereafter through a month-long follow-up visit which enabled validation of the emerging ideas from the first. Two small communities, each with a public primary and junior secondary school, were selected for the study with the help of key contacts in the state (one, a former colleague) to explore parents' understandings of and practices in relation to children's schooling as well as relationships with schools. The communities were predominantly Muslim and practised polygyny. Men primarily engaged in commercial driving (commA) and farming (commB) while women across both communities engaged in farming and small-scale, off-farm micro-enterprises, including the sale of farm produce, cooked food or snacks and provisions. CommA is located alongside a busy interstate road and is nearer to the main town than commB which is not only farther from the main town, but also located along a quieter interstate road. Thus, more commA families than those in the more rural commB farm both for subsistence and small-scale commerce, the produce from the latter being sold at the five-day market in a nearby town. Given the challenges of the broader Nigerian economy, many commA fathers who also own farms near commA have begun to supplement their livelihoods with subsistence and small-scale farming.

Given generally higher levels of parental involvement at lower levels of schooling, the broader study focused on basic schooling which, as already noted, includes one year of pre-primary, six of primary and three of junior secondary schooling (JSS). The communities' public primary schools (schoolA and schoolB) anchored the study and facilitated access to parents. School heads initially helped select 16 parents (eight per community). Five more were added who self-volunteered, were spouses of already selected parents, or later recognised as information-rich community members (three in commA and two in commB). Thus, there were, in total, 21 parents including one grandmother (commA) and three grandparents (commB: two grandfathers and two grandmothers), three of whom were carers of primary school children.

The main methods were partially structured recorded qualitative interviews—gently guided discussions with a conversational partner (Rubin & Rubin 2012)—with parents and casual age-appropriate interactions with children, all in Yorùbá; and participant observation, the central method in ethnography (Delamont 2016). Participant observation requires balancing participation—being involved and subjective—and observation—being distant and objective, while capturing data on the interaction and

what is being observed (O'Reilly 2012). In the study, participant observation occurred alongside interviews with parents and children. Fieldnotes were typed on a mobile phone to document observations while interviews, aided by partly structured interview guides, sought parents' perspectives around schooling. The intensive fieldwork period also included a month of dedicated after school observation of children's activities which typically began by 1.30 p.m. until around 5 p.m. or whenever children had departed for their after-school activities. For this, a printed observation schedule was used to document children's activities and parent-child interactions during the period of observation.

Though the focus was on parents, the study positioned children as subjects and agents (Bourdillon 2006) who could also '[give] voice to their own experiences and understanding of their world' (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015). This, moreover, helped triangulate parents' perspectives. Children's voices and experiences were provided by 15 children and grandchildren, three of whom were in JSS1. Apart from two adolescents, children were between the ages of nine and 13. Oral consent was obtained from parents and grandparents, while children provided their assent. The author, being of Yorùbá descent and fluent in the language, conducted interviews in Yorùbá with both parents and children. Ethical clearance was obtained from the author's institution in the United Kingdom as well as the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health. Tables 1 and 2 highlight the parent and children participants.

Transcription (including translation to English) occurred primarily after fieldwork and was carried out by the author and checked with key contacts (some also occurred during fieldwork, and checks made with participants themselves). A thematic analytical approach was used for the primarily qualitative data to identify themes which 'represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (Braun & Clarke 2006: 82). A theme, moreover, consists of one or more group(s) of codes: terms or phrases which capture the essence of parts of the data (Braun & Clarke 2013). NVivo12 qualitative data analysis software was used to identify first level codes which were then aggregated to a second level and thereafter grouped as themes. Given parental ethnotheories were generally consistent across both communities, findings

**Table 1.** Parent sample

	commA				commB				Total
	Male	Female*	Boy	Girl	Male*	Female*	Boy	Girl	
<b>Individual</b>	4	7	1	6	8	2	4	5	37
<b>Group</b>				7	19	10			36
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>70</b>

\*Includes grandparents: one grandmother in commA; two grandfathers and one grandmother in commB



**Table 2.** Children's sample

#	Comm	ID	Selected parent	Age (fieldwork)	Level at fieldwork
1	A	Boy1	Mother1	9	P5
2	A	Boy2	Mother2	12	JSS1
3	A	Girl3	Mother3	10	P6
4	A	Girl3 stepsister*	Mother3	12	P6
5	A	Girl5	Father5	10	JSS1
6	A	Girl7	Mother7	13	P6
7	A	Girl9	Mother9	-	JSS1
8	B	Boy2	Father2	15	P6
9	B	Girl3	Father3	8	P4
10	B	Boy4	Father4	11	P6
11	B	Boy5	Father5	13	P6
12	B	Girl6	Father6	13	P4
13	B	Boy7	Mother7	11	P5
14	B	Girl7	Mother7	11~	P6
15	B	Girl8	Grandmother8	14	P6

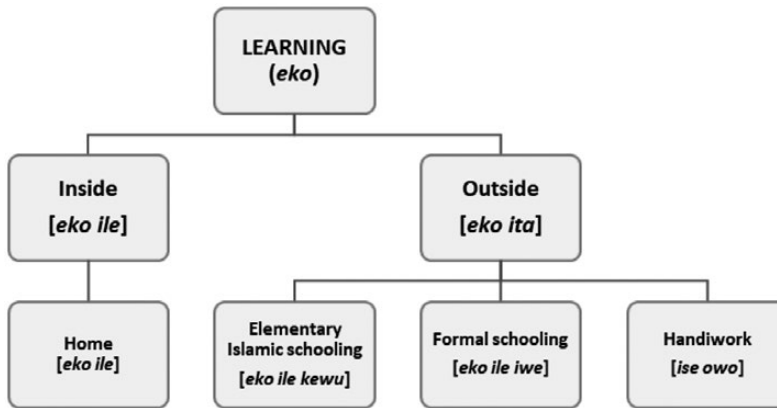
\*Her mother, the Mother3's junior wife was not selected, but she participated in discussions with girl3 and girl7. The total number of parents in this table is less than 21 because not all parents had an upper level child at the public primary school.

are here represented together. For children, where necessary, findings are represented specific to the communities in which they emerged.

## Findings

### Parental ethnotheories

Ethnotheories were uncovered amongst Yorùbá parents when they were asked to elaborate upon the concept of 'ko eko' (to learn), a term they had used widely to convey their reason for sending children to school. They revealed a complex conceptualisation of *eko* as holistic and constitutive of multiple, mutually reinforcing elements, only one of which was *eko ile iwe* (school learning or schooling). The others were *eko ile* (home learning), *eko ile kewu* (elementary Islamic schooling), and *ise owo* (handiwork) where *eko ile iwe*, *eko ile kewu* and *ise owo* together constitute *eko ita* because they occur outside the home. The following diagram illustrates:



**Figure 1.** Yorùbá parents' ethnotheories.

With *eko ile*, parents positioned themselves as teachers who teach children how to take care of their bodies, the home and the natural environment (i.e. through work); how to run errands, including hawking which supported parents' economic activities and inculcated functional skills; how to behave (e.g. respect and discipline); and how to relate appropriately with others in the community, particularly those in age or titular/positional seniority. Though unstructured and informal, these elements represent *eko ile*'s 'core modules' and are intrinsic to fulfilling the outcomes of an *Ọmọlùàbí* 'curriculum' (see Lancy 2012's 'chore curriculum').

*Eko ile kewu*, according to parents, is elementary Islamic schooling taught by Islamic teachers (Aafaas) who teach recitation of the Quran in Arabic (*kewu*) so that children may pray effectively and, where desired, progress further in their Islamic studies. *Eko ile iwe* is taught by schoolteachers who teach children to *ka [i]we*, or *read book*, write in Yorùbá and English and learn other subjects to gain knowledge and skills which may lead to future [usually salaried] employment. While *eko ile iwe* is a structured, institutionalised (i.e. formal) system of learning offered by the public education system, *eko ile kewu* (typically, including that offered in both research communities) is less so, offering greater flexibility for learner attendance and holidays though like *eko ile iwe*, its content is structured by Aafaas.

Master craftspersons of *ise owo* across and outside both communities, according to parents, teach a skill, craft or trade which, once mastered by the child/youth, may then be used to generate income within the community, i.e. through self-employment. *Ise owo* is a process of informal apprenticeship, the latter defined by the International Labour Office (2009: x) as the system through which 'a young learner (apprentice) acquires the skills for a trade or craft in a micro- or small enterprise learning and working side by side with an experienced craftsperson.' *Ise owo* is not a new phenomenon among Yorùbás or other traditional African societies. Among Yorùbás, for example, traditional, non-formal apprenticeships have always existed where children acquired skills in trades, crafts and other professions from parents or other highly

skilled masters (Obidi 1995). Parents alluded to this historicity when they spoke about their own experiences of learning *ise owo* which sometimes required them to leave their communities to apprentice under a reputable Master in a bigger town.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, parents' conceptualisations of *eko* are also spatial. Unlike *eko ile* which occurs within the home environment and is, as parents view it, the responsibility of parents as teachers, the other forms take place outside the immediate home environment and are taught by relevant teachers within their physical domains. Despite their spatial separation, parents believe the various forms of learning reinforce and buttress each other. As one father explained:

... that monitoring by parents in the home is very important for the child before they'll<sup>1</sup> now be learning *eko ita* ... whatever they learns as *eko ile* even if a little bit, will help them because if they have respect for their teacher [in whichever domain], the teacher will also say, this child is a 'real' child, even if [the child] wants to say they don't want to do well, if [the teacher] has seen [the child's] behaviour, the teacher will say, ahh, this child is responsible ... [and] will also then keep an eye on them differently... (commA Father 2018/12/18)

Put differently by another father, 'if a child doesn't have home learning, s/he can't have that of outside, s/he can't find that of outside' (commB Father 10/12/2018). Thus, for parents, home learning is the basis of all other forms as it inculcates the foundational socio-cultural *Ọmọhùàbí* qualities which characterise a 'real' child or an *omo gidi*; and the environmental and physical (bodily) management capabilities required to thrive in the other domains. Schoolteachers and trainers further reinforce this home learning while imparting new knowledge and skills while Aafaas reinforce home learning as they equip children with the spiritual capabilities necessary to fulfil religious obligations and psychologically withstand life's challenges, i.e. through prayer and the hope it breeds.

For parents, each of the different spheres of learning plays its role in the formation of a faith-filled, functional adult who is financially self-sufficient (i.e. can sustain him/herself) and economically supports immediate and extended families; contributes to the development and harmony of his/her community; and generally lives a life of ease (e.g. of contentment, satisfaction and moderation). These broadened expectations imply an expansion of the notion of *Ọmọhùàbí* beyond the sphere of the immediate home environment and suggests, as earlier noted (e.g. by Nsamenang & Lamb 1993), that rural parents are coming to terms with the realities of their contemporary lives which require modern forms of learning and financial self-reliance.

### Children's everyday activities

Parents in both communities described children's activities ethnotheoretically, namely, in terms of *eko ile*, *eko ile kewu*, *eko ile iwe*, and *ise owo*. *Eko ile* constituted work:

<sup>1</sup> Here, 'they' is a gender neutral reference.

chores (e.g. fetching water, cooking, washing dishes and clothes, sweeping, and cleaning the home environment, running errands, farming, etc.); and economic activities for the household (e.g. farming and hawking) and for children themselves (i.e. to pay school fees) (e.g. micro poultry farming, making charcoal, etc.). No parent mentioned care work as part of children's *eko ile* activities though this is likely because parents did not categorise it as work but as expressions of care which fostered harmonious familial lives (see, e.g. Serpell & Adamson-Holley 2017).

In resonance with the literature, children's chores across both communities were gendered in different ways. First, parents reported that girls, more than boys, were generally assigned household chores such as fetching water, cleaning, cooking, and washing dishes and clothes (sometimes including parents' clothes). One commB father offered that a boy who does such chores does them just to go along with girls but they are not part of his duties. Corroborating this, a commA mother noted that some boys indeed do chores. However, for her and another commA father, this generally occurred if there was no girl child in the household. Though this mother also reported that boys farmed while girls did chores (e.g. on weekends), farming was not consistently gender-differentiated by parents. Particularly in the more rural commB, farming was the remit of both rural boys and girls as it was believed necessary for their subsistence and therefore, survival. As one commB grandfather noted:

because we, we the rural people, we won't want to, we won't want to buy food [out] to eat, or you don't understand me? Hence, they [the children] will do three [types of] work daily: they'll go to *ile iwe*, they'll go to *ile kewu*, and they'll go to the farm. (2018/12/19)

However, it is possible that even in commB, gendered specialization vis-à-vis farming becomes more apparent as children move into adolescence. This relates to the second dimension of gender-differentiation: temporality. Gendered chore expectations appeared to change at different points over time (as children grow) and within time (within day-to-day activities). For instance, while parents acknowledged both girls and boys did chores, boys appeared to be able to get away with doing less in the morning prior to heading to school. A commA mother (Boy1) who reported her son washes dishes, noted that because he needs to quickly prepare for school, he only does them after returning from school. Other mothers of girls reported that girls, unlike boys, are *required* to do chores in the morning, except there is no girl in the household. This was alluded to by a commB father who was usually called upon by girls late for school to advocate on their behalf at school who, during a parent-teacher meeting, advised mothers (the ones 'who own the children') to limit girls' morning errands (2019/02/27). One morning, three upper primary school-aged girls were observed walking by his house on the way to school after lessons had begun. After querying them about their lateness—the girls reported they were doing chores—he advised them to tell their mothers that they can no longer do so many chores in the morning as they would be punished at school.

A third dimension of gender differentiation relates to the teacher of the chore (and by extension, economic activity), and has been alluded to by the commB father's adage of mothers as 'owners of the children'. Some fathers reported that mothers were generally responsible for teaching girls—boys if no girls available—household chores. A commA father who disclosed he had to learn to do chores reported he learned from the Aunt with whom he lived. Some fathers and mothers also noted that children's hawking was generally to support mothers' micro-enterprises, implying that mothers were the main teachers of this activity.

Children's *eko ile iwe* and *eko ile kewu* activities were evident from attendance to schoolA and schoolB and the *ile kewu* located in each community. Although a core part of their ethnotheories, parents did not mention *ise owo* as part of children's activities during fieldwork though this is likely because most children of interest were still young and had yet to begin. However, the follow-up visit revealed three children had begun it in commB, one in commA, and discussions had begun within the other households on children's desired *ise owo* and the identification of Master trainers.

Before and after school observations corroborated and supplemented parents' descriptions of children's activities. Except cooking which was usually done by girls (although boys helped or roasted yams on farms), the various chores described by parents were observed being undertaken by both girls and boys despite parents' gendered articulations. Two commA mothers had a boy as their last child, and while one (Boy2) was observed fetching water and washing dishes as well as his own clothes, the other slightly younger Boy1 was not though, as noted earlier, his mother reported part of his duties after school was to wash dishes before heading to *eko ile kewu* (this couldn't be corroborated as on the day of his observation, he disappeared through the back of the house). In commB, Boy5 was repeatedly observed fetching water even though he had a younger girl sibling (in lower primary). Other boys and girls in both communities were observed fetching water though in commA where there was more observation of this activity, more girls were observed than boys. However, similar differentiation is likely to have been observed in commB as this activity has been equally observed there.

In relation to household economic activities, as parents reported, children were observed hawking; tending to livestock; heading to or coming from the farm; and helping to peel cassava for market day or mothers' micro-enterprises. Hawking was widespread in both communities and children of selected and non-selected parents, both boys and girls, were observed hawking boiled eggs, cooked/fried tofu, cooked yams, local pap (fermented corn meal), dried fish, oranges, bananas, bread, drinks, condiments, tray goods (milk sachets, soap, sugar, etc.), etc. A particularly lucrative economic activity in February and March was cashew nut picking. Mothers (and a few fathers) and boy and girl children were frequently observed heading to farms to

pick cashew fruits whose shelled nuts were then removed, dried and sold to neighbours or cooperatives along the cashew value chain. As reported by children during a classroom observation, some children temporarily dropped out of school to go cashew nut picking in neighbouring towns. For self-regarding economic activities, Boy2 in commB was observed heading back and forth to the farm to make charcoal to sell to teachers and others.

In the mornings, children of various parents were observed getting ready and heading to school, and after school, children ate, rested and either departed to *ile kewu* or went hawking. Perhaps because children were young and most mothers' economic activities were home-based, observed instances of sibling-care were primarily in relation to helping feed, play with and keep an eye on younger siblings at home. As the literature suggests, this was typically done by girls (e.g. Robson 1996), although in this study, girls' sibling care usually occurred within sight of mothers who were occupied nearby in other activities. For children who went to *ile kewu* with younger siblings (some toddlers), care work consisted of their monitoring of these siblings to, from and during *ile kewu*. With other, non-selected children, care work was most evident in schools where older siblings kept watch over younger ones by checking on them during breaks and walking together to and from school. CommB Girl 6's cousin, who had a particularly fussy toddler sister, was permitted to bring the toddler into her own classroom and therefore combined care work with school learning. Given most children had not yet begun *ise owo* and that most *ise owo* took place outside children's immediate home environment, this was not observed amongst selected children.

### Children's everyday activities (children's voices)

Children's voices corroborated the above observations as well as parents' perspectives. Notably, they provided greater detail on their own activities and schedules. Table 3 outlines a typical weekday for a girl in commA and a boy in commB, drawn from conversations with children. The table is not meant to be comparative but to give a sense of children's activities in each community.

With school out of the picture, weekend activities were only marginally simpler as hours of school (8 a.m. to 2 p.m.) were merely redistributed across children's existing work. For example, for commB's Boy4, weekends generally consisted of waking up and praying, fetching water, and going on to morning *ile kewu* between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. This was typically followed by going to the farm from which they (usually he and his siblings) returned by 1 p.m. They then ate and proceeded to afternoon *ile kewu* (same schedule as weekdays). After *ile kewu*, they returned to the farm until around 6.30 p.m. On return, they ate, played or hung out, and trickled to sleep. Like *ile iwe*, *ile kewu*'s schedule is constant Monday to Wednesday and Saturday to Sunday—there is a morning *kewu* and afternoon *kewu*—and there is no *ile kewu* on Thursday and Friday, the

Table 3. Typical day-00 for girls and boys

## Children's typical school day activities

Period	Composite girl (commA)	Composite boy (commB)
<b>Before school</b>	Wake up between 5 a.m. and 6 a.m. [Pray] Sweep Fetch water (for siblings' bath) Wash dishes (previous night's) Fetch water (own bath) Help cook Grind peppers (manually) Put bath water on fire Bathe Go to <i>ile kewu</i> around 7 a.m. (sometimes) Hawk (sometimes) Dress up for school Eat Head to school (around 8 a.m.)	Wake up early Pray Fetch water Run errands for parents Go to <i>ile kewu</i> (between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m.) (sometimes) Bathe Eat Prepare for school
<b>After school</b>	Arrive shortly before 2 p.m. (school closes at 1:30 p.m. but children pray and hang out before heading home) Change clothes Wash dishes Sweep Play a little Eat <i>Se faji</i> (i.e. chill, hang out with friends, siblings, mothers) Go to <i>ile kewu</i> (around 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. or 4 p.m. till 6 p.m.) If no <i>ile kewu</i> : Go hawking (if so, misses afternoon kewu) Run errands (i.e. going to buy goods for mother) Go to evening <i>ile kewu</i> (6 p.m. to 8 p.m.)* (some children)	Change school clothes Fetch water Wash clothes (if Wednesday) Eat Go to market (on market day) Go to <i>ile kewu</i> (2 p.m. to 5 p.m. except Thursday/Friday) If no <i>ile kewu</i> : Go to farm (Thursday/Friday) or Hawk or Peel cassava (on Thursday/Friday) or Attend boys' association meeting (every eight days) Play ball Run parents' errands Go cashew nut picking
<b>After after-noon ile kewu</b>	Arrive between 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. (the later they leave home, they later they return) Sweep / clean up environment Help sell pap at home Go hawking (if it is not too late) Help elder siblings cook Eat Do assignment (if there is someone to help) <i>Se faji</i> (chill, hang out with friends, siblings, mothers) Sleep when its time	Arrive at 5 p.m. (if left home at 3 p.m., or later if left later) Gather firewood and/or Go to farm (until about 6:30 p.m.) Watch films (if electricity) (sometimes) <i>Se faji</i> (i.e. play/hang out outside) (if no electricity) Eat Do assignment Sleep (around 8 p.m. or 9 p.m.)

\*second evening kewu was only mentioned by one girl, although it is likely this is a replacement for the missed morning kewu

Islamic weekend which mirrors the secular Saturday/Sunday weekend. In commB, there is no morning *ile kewu* on market day. Notably, the references to *se faji* suggests parental recognition of children's need for leisure and play though unlike Lancy (2016), the data here suggest this was more leisure and rest, rather than an exclusive learning aim.

Children struggled to indicate the timing of their activities and so specified approximate times which often mirrored the timings of the Islamic call to prayer which occurred at very specific times during the day, e.g. 4 p.m. Their struggles resonated with parents, suggesting to some extent, a timelessness of communal activities which is somewhat mitigated by the calls to prayer. Notably, the above activities are non-exhaustive, but a reflection of what children were able to recollect with assistance from siblings and friends who contributed, as compelled, to conversations with children. Similarly, activities have been presented in the order in which children reportedly carried them out. However, it is highly likely that these vary day to day according to the exigencies of the moment.

As observations revealed, children's narratives were not always consistent with their actions. Given the amount of morning work, few went to morning *ile kewu* even though nearly all mentioned it. Attendance to afternoon *ile kewu*, though higher, was irregular and those who went often departed closer to 4 p.m. For children who hawked, *ile kewu* was secondary. For example, commA Girl7 disclosed her *ile kewu* attendance was contingent upon her ability to sell all her goods before the afternoon *kewu* session elapsed:

B: What time do you go to *ile kewu* if you come back quickly from hawking?

Girl7: 4:00 p.m.

B: How many times a week do you go to *ile kewu*?

Girl7: Every day

B: But you don't usually come back early from hawking ...

Girl7: When it's, when it's ... it's how quickly the hawking takes

B: Do you, do you have to sell all of what you're selling before you return?

Girl7: Yes

B: What if you don't sell all of it?

Girl7: If I don't sell all of it, I'll [continue] hawking, I won't go to *ile kewu* anymore then

(2019/01/28)

Likewise, on the day of her after school observation, commA Girl3 did not go to *ile kewu* but went hawking. In relation to schooling, children did not naturally mention assignment completion unless they were asked, to which some responded that they did it after school (i.e. before *ile kewu*) while others in the evening before bedtime. Though assignments were not always given, no child was observed doing assignment or reviewing their books after school. The observation period—after school until departure for *ile kewu*—turned out to be children's leisure time; thus, reported after *ile kewu* activities were based on children's and parents' reports. Notably, while some children readily prepared for *ile kewu*, many were repeatedly reminded and hurried off. Others did not



attend because of fees owed or Aafaa preferences. As parent teacher meetings revealed, not all children who left home to go to school arrived there. Likewise, not all children always liked hawking even if, like commA Girl7, they understood its importance to their families and felt pride in their capability to contribute to the household economy (see also Putnick & Bornstein 2016). CommA Girl7 who hawked nearly every day sometimes grumbled at the task while commB Boy2's sister had to be cajoled and incentivised before she agreed to a brief hawk. To the extent that parental and other opportunities afforded, children evidently exercised agency in the pursuit of their day-to-day activities.

In addition to the above activities, children also had social obligations, as alluded to in Table 3 with the boys' association meeting in commB. In both communities, girls' and boys' associations existed for children in various age bands starting from pre-pubesence. Though a means of socialisation, their main functions were to provide children's visible representation and (usually monetary) contribution at communal occasions such as naming ceremonies, weddings, funerals, etc. and to teach children how to participate in occasions. Children who were not members of associations due to age or lack of parental permission attended occasions with parents or older siblings. Likewise, children accompanied parents to occasions outside communities or to visit relatives. Such functions and social obligations taught children how to exist socially, collectively, and harmoniously in the community towards achieving the relational element of *eko ile*.

## Discussion

This article has provided insight into parental ethnotheories around children's everyday lives in rural Muslim Yorùbá communities in Nigeria, demonstrating a range of work activities around the home and community including chores, economic activities, schooling, and elementary Islamic schooling. It has demonstrated that these activities are indissoluble from learning as they are the expression of parents' ethnotheories or perspectives around how childhood should be organized—and the roles parents should play—to inculcate *Ọmọlúàbí* values and equip children with functional skills. While for parents, *Ọmọlúàbí*hood is expected of, and attainable by, both boys and girls, the journey to actualisation typically looks different for boys and girls as the functional skills through which *Ọmọlúàbí*hood is tacitly assessed differs for boys and girls where such difference is possible.

As a result of this gendered *Ọmọlúàbí*hood, socially reproductive household work, such as cooking, cleaning, washing, caring for younger siblings, etc. are gender-differentiated. However, as the evidence presented in this article has shown, this does not imply that boys are exempt from such work. Rather, and as others have demonstrated in the broader Nigerian context, girls do slightly more of it (Putnick & Bornstein 2016). Moreover, Putnick & Bornstein (2016)'s analysis also suggests

that boys do more work than girls overall, given they do more work outside the home (paid or unpaid work in agriculture, services, and industry) and in family work (usually unpaid work done for the family in e.g. agriculture or family enterprises), a phenomenon which renders boys' work outside the home sphere less visible. Though scholars have highlighted the constraints that the temporality of morning household chores poses for the achievement of SDG 4 (quality education), particularly for girls in contexts where their share of chores is significantly higher than those of boys (Rai *et al.* 2019), the evidence in this article suggests parents perceive children's household work as a form of learning which they must inculcate—given that it will not be taught at school—and whose absence challenges children's achievement of necessary, communally valued functional skills. While incorporating a gender perspective (Rai *et al.* 2019) into the concept of *Ọmọ̀lúàbí* enables a deeper exploration of household work among the rural Yorùbá and potentially offers opportunities for increasing rural girls' and boys' participation in schooling, the extent to which formal schooling itself *should* contend with existing parental ethnotheories in the way it currently does merits greater attention in discourse about contemporary rural African childhoods.

Evidently, the findings highlight the importance of the concept of *Ọmọ̀lúàbí* among the Yorùbá. This importance, and the ways in which parents and adult members of Yorùbá communities seek to instil the concept during childhood, have been underscored by various scholars (e.g. Akinwale 2013; Busari *et al.* 2017, etc.). However, while scholars have explored how *Ọmọ̀lúàbí* values are transmitted through verbal and physical discipline (e.g. Busari *et al.* 2017) and traditional (Akinyemi 2003) and popular art forms (Omobowale *et al.* 2019), few have detailed, as this article does, the tangible activities that parents and adults use to develop *Ọmọ̀lúàbí* children and equip them with the requisite functional skills for adulthood (Nsamenang 2006). Such tangible acts are arguably the primary means of *Ọmọ̀lúàbí* transmission unlike discipline which is a response to children who challenge this transmission, and oral art, which supplements these tangible forms.

The findings presented in this article suggest a broadened notion of *Ọmọ̀lúàbí* which incorporates religious and European education as well as economic self-sustenance. This aligns with scholars (for example, Nsamenang & Lamb 1993) who have suggested that rural parents' reconceptualised ethnotheories seek to meet the realities of contemporary lives while maintaining, to some extent, traditional ones. For example, the broader study within which this article is situated demonstrated that while apprenticeships are a traditional practice, their resurgence in the two research communities is a direct reaction to the extreme, protracted unemployment facing young, particularly rural, Nigerians post tertiary schooling.

Socio-cultural and contemporary ethnotheories and conceptions of childhood within rural contexts have, therefore, become interwoven with wider national and transnational socio-economic and political dynamics (Abebe 2007). One implication

of this is the imperative to consider traditional as well as rural lives as they are embedded within their contemporary contexts. Another is that broadened ethnotheories heighten the tensions manifest in children's varied capabilities to realise the range of desired activities and expectations. This is primarily because children's agency is interdependent upon and negotiated with parents, grandparents, siblings, relatives, friends, and other community members; and exercised under certain conditions and in specific situations and spaces (Abebe 2019). Though the findings suggest some parents recognise the contentions which may arise from these intersections, resolving them requires strategies which incorporate the wider national and transnational socio-economic and political structures which underpin such contests. As various scholars have noted (e.g. Bourdillon 2006; Imoh *et al.* 2019, etc.), this ultimately requires eschewing binary categorisations of childhood and ethnotheories towards relational examinations of the intersection of diverse beliefs and structures; the afforded opportunities and inherent tensions; and the everyday, socio-spatial lives (Farrugia & Wood 2017) that children are able to live.

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