

'The Personal is Political': Political and Ethical Considerations of Neonate Breast Feeding

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Abstract

Generations of humans have been nurtured by women's breast milk as neonates and infants from time immemorial. This underscores the importance of women's role as breast-feeders to the survival of the human race, past, present and future. The role of a woman as a breast-feeder is taken, in many societies, to be a duty which nature has saddled women with and for which unless properly performed, women cannot be considered to be complete or responsible. In most African societies, for example, it is believed that the role of breastfeeding is one of the fundamental roles that define the female. However, if juxtaposed with the equally demanding task of developing a career on a paid job, breastfeeding is relegated to the level of little or no worth in the public domain. This is a reflection of marginalization, oppression and subjugation which women have been made to endure for generations because certain aspects of their feminine experiences are considered private and of no relevance in the public domain. In spite of the rigor involved in nurturing, especially in breastfeeding, it is not recognized as a form of labor and the basis for the relegation of this and other traditional roles that women perform is traceable to John Locke's dichotomization of production and reproduction.

Keywords: Neonate breastfeeding, postpartum employment, maternal career, John Locke, Production/Reproduction Dichotomy.

1. Introduction

The focus of the political idea of John Locke, one of the most prominent political philosophers of the modern period, was how to engender an equitable socio-political order. Robert Filmer, before Locke, theorized about the divine rights of kings. The divine rights of kings, according to Filmer, placed the kings above every other person in society. Locke's reading of Filmer's postulation on the rights of kings made explicit the idea of inequality embedded in the theory of divine rights. Locke repudiated this position and argued that equality is the basis of any legitimate rule. For Locke, equality of all humans' dates back to the state of nature and even with the formation of the civil society, a recognition and promotion of egalitarianism still remains a defining feature of a legitimate sovereignty or society.

Considering the fact, therefore, that equality and liberty are the two pillars upon which Locke erected his political idea, one would ordinarily expect that his idea would be the classic of egalitarianism. However, a close examination of Locke's political idea reveals that it only took power from the kings to redistribute it among men, while it places women at a disadvantage. Locke's theory places value on labor as the basis or justification of private property ownership, which is the core of Locke's political theory. However, Locke completely disregards labor exerted by women in the private sphere in his day and in contemporary societies. For Locke, only labor exerted in the public sphere is deserving of reward in the form of private property acquisition. This marginalizes women as it does not take into cognizance the worth of many of their laborious activities carried out in the private sphere.

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One of such important activities which women have performed for millennia is breastfeeding. This paper contends that breastfeeding is a form of labor and any theory that sees it otherwise is oppressive and it marginalizes women.

2.0 Rethinking Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is basically an under-discussed aspect of women's experiences. This is because breastfeeding is viewed, in most cases, as a personal issue that falls only within the ambit of the private sphere of a woman's life. Rhonda Shaw points out that "because breastfeeding is such an immanently somatic, in-the-body practice, it is often viewed as morally, philosophically, and politically insignificant" (Shaw, 2004: 100). One other reason responsible for the view of breastfeeding as a "private affair" is that in most societies, a woman's breast is usually viewed predominantly as a sexual object (Stearns, 1999: 309). However, breastfeeding is an ethical issue because the phenomenon of breastfeeding raises a number of ethical concerns in contemporary times. For example, in light of the rift which ensues whenever a woman has to perform her role as a breast-feeder, and at the same time, ensure that she contributes to the wealth and knowledge of society through her career, breastfeeding becomes a political or ethical issue. Also, it is important to consider whether breastfeeding enhances or inhibits women's autonomy, agency and liberty. Also, since what makes any issue a moral issue has to do with whether it affects another person apart from the agent of the action alone, which means ethics is concerned with whether our behavior towards the other is fair or not; and since breastfeeding goes beyond a woman and is also about the needs and wellbeing of an infant, then breastfeeding is essentially a moral issue.

In a lot of cases, some women view breastfeeding as a duty to the neonate. This is because lactation, it is popularly believed, is one of the fundamental features that define and differentiate females, not only humans but also animals. It is as a result of this that most mothers, especially in Africa, feel guilty if they are, for any reason, incapacitated and therefore unable to perform the role of breastfeeding. The report of a research, carried out by some psychologists, states that among the professional women studied, there is a resulting considerable inner guilt experienced by them which is as a result of neglecting aspects of their maternal role (Gilbert et al, 1981: 424). The trend of research in recent times also lends credence to the importance of breastfeeding. A number of researchers recently discovered, for example, that "All the nutritional needs for...children are provided by breast milk in the right amounts and duration." (Salami, 2006:2) The benefits of breastfeeding are aptly summarized thus: Breastfeeding has been encouraged because it is believed to provide superior nutrition and immunological and psychological benefits to the infant, and for the mother, reduced risk of breast cancer, faster weight loss following delivery, and improved mother-child bonding (Lindberg, 1996: 239). Advantages of breastfeeding discovered and popularized by studies lately also tend to draw an important link between breastfeeding and ideal mothering. This position has become so popular and widely-accepted that the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Educational Fund (UNICEF) now advocate that breastfeeding be given a much higher, if not the only, priority than formula feeding. Breastfeeding has been said to be of benefit not merely to the new-born, but also to the mother. According to a publication by the United States Government Accountability Office, Infants who are breastfed are less likely to develop infectious diseases and chronic health problems, such as diabetes and asthma, while breastfeeding mothers are less likely to develop certain types of cancer (GAO, 2006: 1).

It is also pointed out that in light of the foregoing, breastfeeding is in the long term interest of society. This is because it has been stated that the United States, for instance, "would save a minimum of \$3.6 billion in health care costs and indirect costs... if breastfeeding increased" (GAO, 2006:1). Finally, breastfeeding has been described as being "more convenient than bottle-feeding for women whose work does not separate them from their infants" (Esterik and Greiner, 1981: 190). However, in spite of the benefits of breastfeeding that have been discovered, as well as those that later research would still bring to the fore, women sometimes find themselves incapacitated to breastfeed. One dominant incapacitation in breastfeeding is ill health. For example, researchers in medical science have discovered that it is possible to transmit HIV from mother to child through breastfeeding. In fact, statistics has it that by the end of the year 2000, UNAIDS estimated that 1.3 million children were living with HIV/AIDS and that 4.3 million children already died of the disease.

Almost all HIV-infected children acquire HIV from their infected mothers, and one significant means of this transmission is through breastfeeding (WHO, 2001: 4). It has therefore been argued that the ethical conundrums raised by the risk of transmission of HIV from mother to child do not end at childbirth: breastfeeding remains a major source of HIV transmission to children around the world today. Because breastfeeding lasts longer than parturition, antiretroviral therapy to prevent transmission is more complex and less well studied. Furthermore, breastfeeding is the major if not the only source of safe infant nutrition in many parts of the world. Thus, counseling women to avoid HIV by eschewing breastfeeding is a complex and evolving topic (Bernat, 2008: 452). Also, apart from the fact that breastfeeding when a mother is infected with HIV is especially precarious to the health of the infant and that it is a notable cause of infant mortality, there are also concerns about possible negative effects of prolonged breast-feeding on the health of the HIV positive mother (Wilfert and Fowler, 2007:165). In addition, however, to the risk of transmitting the HIV from an infected mother to her child through breast milk, it has also been raised that there is the possibility of transmitting the Hepatitis B to a child through the infected mother's breast milk. Breastfeeding has been suggested as an additional mechanism by which infants may acquire HBV infection, because small amounts of Hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) have been detected in some samples of breast-milk (GPV et al, 1996: 1).

Meanwhile, there is also a deliberate attempt by certain women to withhold breast-milk as a result of the idea that such women hold about the woman's breast. Because certain women view a woman's breast as a primarily sexual object, they tend to disrupt the act of breastfeeding since prolonged breast-feeding is believed to mar the shape or flatten a woman's breast. Many people believe that the perkier a woman's breasts are the more attractive and the saggier, the less attractive or less appealing to the woman's sexual partner. In other words, there is mostly a constant rivalry between the sexual breast and the nurturing or nursing breast. It, therefore, depends largely on the idea that a woman holds about the function of the breast which affects her decision on whether the primary function of the breast is to nurture or to attract her spouse. In spite of the factors which have been identified as militating against breast-feeding, one very important factor which cannot be overlooked at this contemporary period in time, in relation to breast-feeding, is maternal career or postpartum employment, to be specific. As a matter of fact, at times even when a woman is willing to breast-feed her baby and also when she does not have any health constraints or medical condition to prevent her from performing this role, her career can be the factor which would not enable her to be able to do this.

3.0 The Challenge of Maternal Career

The difficulties which families face in coping with the challenges of the economy in contemporary times make it increasingly unfeasible for women to be left in the home-front just to perform the traditional duties of only taking care of the home without taking up a paid work. In much earlier times, women were believed to belong in the home where they were required to care for the family – that is, taking care of children and old people in the house, cooking for the family, cleaning the house, and exclusively attending to other related household chores. In line with this worldview, men are usually seen as the principal provider of the basic as well as the other needs of the family since they used to be the ones to go to the public domain to work and earn the money required to procure the basic needs of the family.

Things have however changed in recent times as the per capital of most families has been adversely affected by the economic hardship brought on many countries by various factors like wars and conflicts, consumerism, inability of many men to solely provide for the family as a result of ill-health, among other factors. As a matter of fact, contemporary Nigeria is not left out of the current global economic crises. In many traditional African communities, there were rarely poor people because their simple ways of life made their needs very minimal; survival in a traditional African society did not require so many things that people cannot do without these contemporary times. Another important reason why there were not many poor people was grounded in the communalistic nature of the traditional societies, which made it possible for the people to support everyone, whether poor or rich. In traditional Igbo society, for example, the 'poor are those who are unable to support themselves and thus were supported by the whole community members. This was a popular and accepted practice among the Igbo people.

The poor, therefore, are taken care of by the community in Igboland. The traditional Igbo man holds that life is not lived alone, rather with others who are one's fellow pilgrims' (Achunonu, 2012: 55).

Contrary, however, to what obtained in traditional African societies, contemporary societies are characterized by individualism, which necessitates that each family solely supports its members. Therefore, in most of the cases where contemporary Nigerian women work alongside their men, it is usually as a result of the fact that it is rather very difficult, if not outrightly impossible, for a family to comfortably depend on only one source of income. In other words, in Nigeria just like in the West, a woman is required to take up a paid work not only for the purpose of affirming her productive worth, but in order to also to be able to support her family.

Another principal factor that compels women to leave the home and take up paid jobs is the overbearing culture of capitalism which emphasizes free market economy, a social arrangement which ensures that each person works in order to contribute his or her quota to the aggregate wealth of the economy of the nation or the global economy. Hayek supports this line of argument by positing that the modern market economy was founded on a *division of knowledge*, which means every bit is important as the division of labor which had been emphasized by Adam Smith. (Feser, 2006: 114) In other words, a capitalist economy does not favor an arrangement whereby a woman works at home alone or performs the function of nurturance like breastfeeding at the expense of what she is required as a citizen to contribute to the national or global economy.

Also, a number of feminists contend against the idea of confining women to the home, otherwise referred to as the private sphere. The reason for the feminists' contention against public/private dichotomy is that not only does it specify gender roles or encourage division of labor, but it also grades labor such that labor exerted in the one realm is acknowledged and rewarded, while labor expended in the other realm is viewed as commonplace and not deserving of rewards. However, as argued in the subsequent section, this belief is both a reflection and a reaction to patriarchal domination of women over the years. Hence, the power play associated with the public/private divide is the basis of the feminists' rejection of the idea.

The public realm is characterised by engaging in paid work, and exercising political and democratic rights, under the overall jurisdiction of government and the state. The private realm, on the other hand is believed to be outside the jurisdiction of the state. This is the realm of the household, of home and of personal or family relationship. ... Each realm is believed to be characteristic of a particular gender. Historically, it is men who have acted within the public realm and have moved freely between it and the private realm, while women (and children) have been mostly restricted to the private realm, and subjected to the authority of the men within it (Pilcher and Welehan, 2004: 125).

This line of thought is, however, frowned at by a number of feminists who see it as a way of subjugating women. Contemporary theorists deny that only men are capable of acting within the public realm (Kymlicka, 2002: 386). As a result therefore, women have been variously called out to take up paid employments outside the home, as well as encouraged to participate actively in political and democratic processes of their societies. It is generally believed that women can only affirm their worth and, agency and autonomy if they traverse the public sphere and compete favorably with their male counterparts.

However, if a woman attempts to develop herself in her chosen career and, at the same time, also breast-feed her infant well, or as recommended by pro-breastfeeding policies – the recommended duration of breastfeeding is now six months (Lindberg, 1996: 239) - this cannot but generate a sort of friction. The conflict between breastfeeding and employment usually comes to the fore as a result of the subtle gradation in terms of worth of the two experiences. In this instance, it is usually either that the woman is stretched beyond limit of her ability and she, as a result, becomes fagged out, angry, depressed, touchy and resentful; or that the organization she works for becomes intolerant. The reason for this is that when work interferes with breastfeeding and other traditional domestic roles of women, there are negative outcomes for everyone involved, including the employer, the child, and mother (Carnedas and Major, 2005: 32). In a lot of cases, employers tend to be so flippant about this challenge (Hughes and Maasdorp, 1991: 27).

This is because the workplace, a bounded, public sphere in which time and activity are externally controlled and often rigidly monitored, assumes that individual workers possess bodily integrity and autonomy (Blum, 1993: 295). With breastfeeding, however, a woman cannot be as autonomous as a man. While enumerating the sources of the friction, which generally engender intolerance on the part of some employers, Seijts identifies the following:

First, the frequency and intensity of breastfeeding a child are likely to be variable and unpredictable. Second, breastfeeding requires the mother and her child to be together, which may not always be possible in a job. Third, employers may be concerned about lowered productivity because they believe that breastfeeding is time-consuming and/or breastfeeding employees can't focus their attention on the job. Fourth, breastfeeding may distract co-workers (Seijts, 2002: 1).

As a result of the problems associated with breastfeeding and postpartum employment, many women usually feel at a loss because while they, on the one hand, feel guilty if they devote more time and attention to career than to their babies, they, on the other hand, feel unfulfilled if they have to dump their career in order to take care of their neonates. Society has made women to believe in a long while that production is what defines a real human and in order for a woman to prove that she is a real human, she has to take up a job in the public domain, that is the only form of labor that deserves to be rewarded. As a matter of fact, many feminists who claim to strive for women's emancipation from patriarchal control also strive to maintain this worldview.

I do not, as a matter of fact, overlook the idea of finding alternative means to take care of neonates. However, it should be reiterated that as argued in the previous section, there is no other alternative that is exactly like breastfeeding in terms of being a perfect substitute that is able to give the entire social and health benefits derivable from breastfeeding. Therefore, when breastfeeding, which is mostly viewed as a duty, conflicts with a woman's sense of agency, worth, fulfillment and autonomy, then breastfeeding becomes an ethical issue and the personal becomes political. At this point however, I will show how John Locke's labor theory is an important justification for production/reproduction dichotomy and how the dichotomy is a basis of women's oppression and marginalization.

4.0 The Lockean Production/Reproduction Dichotomy as a Basis for Women's Oppression in the Public Domain

In light of Locke's labor theory, domestic and biological exertions like breastfeeding are not placed under labor. Likewise, society has taught many, including women and mothers, for generations, to believe that the superiority of career to childrearing, breastfeeding and other domestic tasks which women perform, is natural. According to a mother,

After all, what allowed me to continue to nurse my son and to work at a demanding career was not simply my commitment to breastfeeding but, certainly more significantly, the flexibility of my job situation and the resources available to me in my home life. If one could call my maternal practices evocative of the ancestral pattern, it is only because I was able to marshal significant resources to realize such practices (Hausman, 2003: 127).

John Locke, a prominent modern philosopher, whose political philosophy is highly influential, is a culprit in this discourse. Locke's political philosophy is underpinned by subtle reproduction/production dichotomy, which is a fundamental justification for women's marginalization and subjugation.

Hence, Locke's property rights, which claims that production is what confers property rights on people is essentially androcentric and oppressive. This is because, in Locke's day and even in contemporary times, as is still being practiced in many parts of Africa, women work more in the reproduction and domestic sphere and this makes it difficult for them to compete favorably in the production/public sphere. This is not an attempt to claim or assume that reproduction is synonymous with production. However, the fact that reproduction and nurturing takes more from women and it is not considered of deserving reward is quite worrisome.

Private property ownership is a very germane concept in Locke's contractarianism. This is because the entire project of social contract in Locke is centered on both the ownership or acquisition and preservation of private property. As a matter of fact,

Locke contends that the transition from the state of nature to a form of proper society, though arises from human weakness of unreasonableness, it is for the preservation of property. His social contract, could therefore be described as a way of protecting property because the contract is entered into to protect property acquired in the state of nature (Irele 1999, 45).

In fact, no theorist before Locke systematically and rigorously defended the notion of private property ownership like Locke did. The idea of private property is even the locus of Locke's political idea. According to McMurtry,

John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*, published in 1690, is the founding statement and justification of the right to private property and to protection of that property by public law and force. Locke argues that the right to private property and to its secure protection is the foundation of all government legislation and duty, of all individual rights, and – if violated – of the right to rebel against the state or sovereign (McMurtry 1998, 87).

For Locke, God is the creator of the world and he freely gives the natural resources in it to human beings to enjoy. In Locke's own words, God, who hath given the world to men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life and convenience. The earth and all that is therein is given to men for the support and comfort of their being. And though all the fruits it naturally produces, and beasts it feeds, belong to mankind (Locke 1823, 116).

Also, apart from being given the liberty to explore the earthly resources, Locke also holds that even reason compels humans to enjoy such resources for the purpose of survival. Therefore, Locke contends that "the fundamental dominion of the human species over the natural world derived from two chief sources: the need for the members of the species to use nature's bounty to obtain the sustenance without which they could not survive; and the express grants by God of lordship-over-the-earth to human beings" (Kramer 1997, 94).

The level of general ownership, for Locke, is the level of privilege. In other words, any individual person has the right to freely make use of nature's supply at the level of the privilege theory of ownership. There is, however a level beyond this which, for Locke, entitles one to lay claim to private ownership. This is the level of labor, which is the basis of his labor theory of ownership. At the level of labor, argues Locke, a person has the right to lay claim to an exclusive use of a natural good; and the person also has the right to preclude other people from making use of the same resources. Put differently, Locke draws a nexus between work or labor and ownership, and he deems private possession as a just reward for toil. In Locke's own words,

Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that Nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with it, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state Nature placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it that excludes the common right of other men. For this "labour" being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to (Locke 1823, 116). Locke's labor theory of ownership appeals to God and reason as its fundamental justifications. For Locke, a man is not just entitled to what his personal strength makes his, he is also entitled to what the labor of his animals and servants or slaves takes out of the sphere of common ownership. According to Locke, 'Thus, the grass my horse has bit, the turfs my servant has cut, and the ore I have digged in any place, where I have a right to them in common with others, become my property without the assignation or consent of anybody. The labour that was mine, removing them out of that common state they were in, hath fixed my property in them' (Locke 1823, 116). This position of Locke's is, however, very important because, in the first place, this means that it is possible for a person to be entitled to what the labor of another person takes out the state of common possession in as much as he is the person's owner.

Also, this means that even free persons are also limited with regard to how much property they could acquire unless they also have many slaves or servants in their possession. In other words, if society is so structured, like Locke's was, in such a way that women are naturally placed under men, especially in the family, and so are not allowed to possess slaves and servants, then they would also be disadvantaged in property ownership.

Implications of Locke's labor theory of ownership can be seen in two lights: In the first place, Locke's argument for the labor theory of ownership gives a justification for the rights to an exclusive use of the free gift of nature. Similarly, the theory also gives an explanation of the reason why one is justified to exercise such a right. In other words,

This argument seems to serve two vital purposes. First, it gives a reason why the person who has appropriated some item or other has a right to exclude others from it: it contains something which is already that person's, something from which that person already has the right to exclude others. Second, it shows why one's rights to private property are just as strong as rights to one's person or body: they are based on the something very like body rights, rights to control one's own labour (Wolff 1991, 102).

On the issue of how property ownership can be transferred, Locke holds that this can be through charity and inheritance. In the first place, one can give to the needy as an act of charity, although a property owner, according to Locke, is not under any compulsion to give away his possession. This is because 'for Locke, property rights include, as one might expect, the right not to give away what one owns' (Cohen 1995, 191). On the other hand, however, Locke agrees, like Robert Filmer, that property can be passed down to an heir. Nevertheless, the point of departure between the two theorists is that while Filmer avers that both the political power and property ownership can be transferred to an heir, Locke argues on the contrary that although, it is possible to transfer property ownership; political power cannot be so transferred. For Locke, it takes the agreement and consent of the people to empower the Sovereign, and so, the Sovereign lacks the legitimacy to transfer the power that puts him in power because such power actually resides with the people. Hence,

Locke maintains a distinction between political power and paternal power in matters of property: one is private and can be transferred, while the other is public and cannot. In other words, though a parent, as father, can designate a child to inherit private property, the king, as ruler, cannot designate a child to inherit political power (Parker , 115).

Locke's doctrine of property ownership can be said to be guided by the law of nature. Locke holds that it is obligatory for us as humans to obey the law of nature because they are the guiding principles enacted by God, who created all. 'Creationism, therefore, not only sets forth reasons for our obedience to the Law of Nature, it also describes the individual's relationship to God as part of a theory of property' (Ashcraft 1986, 259). In his view, the right to the possession of nature's good is not synonymous with the right to waste such good. The law of nature forbids an individual to take more than he can manage or to leave the natural resources unkept or unattended to until they get spoilt. In his idea, 'the right to ownership is valid as long as the owner uses his good before they perish or exchange perishable goods against goods which are not perishable, for example, money (Nuss & Heller 1998, 65).

Locke also holds that since God created all human beings, he owns all humans, and consequently, we are his property. This, therefore, explains the reason why nobody can make another person his property and also shows the reason why no one has the right to relinquish himself to another's ownership. In all, however, it is very crucial to note that the whole idea of John Locke's political philosophy revolves around his doctrine of property. He is of the view that 'once the institution of private property is encouraged, that is sure guarantee for all kinds of liberty'(Sharma & Sharma , 429) Locke attaches so much importance to the notion of property, that he considers the importance of protecting one's property a sufficient reason for enacting a social pact to form a civil society. Meanwhile, this does not mean that Locke places the entire control of the private property in the state. Neither the state nor the Sovereign has complete authority over private property, either for redistribution or for confiscation. In other words,

The organization of the state does not require the surrender of all natural rights to the sovereign. The sovereign no longer controls the surplus. Instead, Locke proposed a system of governance that leaves the net benefits of government with the people at large. The key elements are his theory of representative government and his prohibition against the taking of private property by the “supreme power” of the state (Epstein 2000, 294).

It is also very important to note that Locke’s idea of property cannot be separated from his notion of labor. For Locke, labor is the justification or that which gives anyone the entitlement to own property. Locke uses labor as a tool for justifying the fact that people own more property than each other – or to justify the fact that there is economic inequality in society. In other words, Locke’s argument implies that:

If labour is indeed the origin of property, then – at least at its origin, if not necessarily after the operation of inheritance – entitlement and merit are fused together ... At least initially, those who possess more will be those who deserve to do so and they will have nothing to apologise for to those who deserve and possess less (Dunn 1984, 39).

In essence, that, Locke holds that private property ownership and protection is considered the most crucial reason for the existence of a society. As we intend to argue in the next chapter, this is purely androcentric and the implications of founding a society or government on such selfish consideration is essentially undesirable as the basis of a political theory.

5.0 Conclusion

The task of breastfeeding of neonates is popularly viewed as a woman’s private issue. So private that a woman cannot share her frustrations and difficulties except perhaps with members of her family or people very close to her. Breastfeeding is usually seen as an issue that is not open to discussion in the public domain. As a matter of fact, some men would be terribly embarrassed to see a woman breastfeeding in public, not to talk of bringing up such an issue for discussion. Similarly, some women also fear that bringing up such ‘private’ issue for discussion in the public domain denies them of their ‘fundamental woman’s right to privacy’. For them, issues of this nature are private and should remain in the private.

However, the question is: is breastfeeding truly a woman’s private concern or issue such that whatever she decides on the matter has nothing to do with anybody or the society at large? I am of the view that in the case of breastfeeding, ‘the personal is political’. Women that breastfeed should be given feeding allowance by the state because they are indirectly helping to nurture the state’s future citizens and leaders. The issue of breastfeeding of neonates, as a matter of fact, concerns the society because the children are the societies’ future grownups and citizens. Therefore, whether or not they are given the right kind of diet for proper growth definitely concerns the entire society. In fact, it is economical for the society to assist women as breast-feeders because proper breastfeeding will in the long run reduce what government spends to take care of diseases among children.

Feminist ethicists see care as a personal issue, feelings and/or action that flow from one person to the other. However, I am of the view that care cannot be adequately shown in a situation where a carer is not properly empowered to care. Women as carers or breast-feeders should be appropriately empowered by the society. Women in the private sector should be duly empowered to have the required time and resources to care for their newborns, especially to properly breastfeed the babies. Young children should not be viewed as belonging just to their parents alone. Rather, they should be seen as belonging to the society. Hence, how they are brought up should matter to the society at large.

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