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**A Study of Men's Roles in Churches/Ministries
Founded by Women in Yorubaland**

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Abstract

The Yoruba ethnic group, predominantly found in southwestern Nigeria and West Africa, relies on oral literature to preserve and understand its culture, including gender relations. Yoruba society emphasizes balance and complementarity between genders, allowing women to hold significant leadership roles in religion and culture. This influence extends to Christianity, where women lead in Orthodox, African Independent, and Pentecostal churches. Some women have even founded churches with male and female congregations.

This study examines gender dynamics in Yoruba Christian churches, exploring questions about men's roles, the alignment with Biblical gender roles, and implications for church development. Using a mixed research design, data were collected through interviews with four female church founders and 100 questionnaires distributed across six churches. Each church contributed responses from 15 male and 5 female members, selected via purposive and random sampling methods. Descriptive analysis revealed that 95.8% of respondents reported male

cooperation with female church founders, marking a significant shift from traditional Biblical views of male-dominated leadership. This study highlights the evolving gender roles within Yoruba Christianity, reflecting a broader cultural emphasis on shared responsibilities.

Keywords

Men's roles, church, Women founders, Gender, Christianity

Introduction

The first attempt to Christianise Nigeria was in the fifth century, in Benin and Warri in the present day Edo and Delta States, Nigeria, respectively. But this attempt failed due to language and environmental problems. However, in 1842, Christianity, finally arrived in Nigeria at Badagry through the efforts of missionaries, which included Thomas Birch Freeman of the Wesleyan Mission and Henry Townsend of the CMS/Anglican Mission. These missionaries represented and pursued the interests of the Methodist, and Anglican Missions.¹ These Missions had practices that are heavily coloured with Western culture and condemned African worldview and culture. For instance, realities for Africans such as witchcraft, spiritual attacks, polygamy and mysticism were classified as superstitions by missionaries and condemned outrightly. By the 19th century, African Independent and Pentecostal churches came on the scene with practices and Biblical remedies that addressed the afore-mentioned realities, resulting in a remarkable number of Africans converting from the Missionary churches to the African churches. Over the years, Christian practices under-went changes that have resulted in the emergence of other Christian denominations in Nigeria.

Thus, Christian churches in Nigeria could be classified into three broad groups: the Orthodox/Mission churches (with the Anglican, the Baptist, the Roman Catholic, and the Methodist being examples); the African Independent churches (Celestial, Cherubim & Seraphim, and Yahweh as examples) and the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches (with Deeper Life, Living Faith,

¹ R. W. Omotoye 'Christianity as a Catalyst for Socio-Economic and Political change in Yorubaland, Nigeria: An Account of a Church Historian' 159th Inaugural Lecture, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria, 2015, p. 6.

and Redeemed as examples).² Each of these groups also has some peculiarities. The Orthodox churches are characterized largely by a strong hierarchical male dominated clergy, and promotion of Western culture; the African Independent churches prioritize African cultural sensitivities; while the Pentecostal churches prioritize manifestations of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues, charismatic leaders, women in ministry and preaching of the 'prosperity gospel'. The roles of women in the three categories of churches among the Yoruba stated above have been severally researched into in the last two decades. The main findings include the non-ordination of women into formal leadership positions in many of the Orthodox churches, the barring of menstruating women from the altar in the African Independent churches and the act of spouses of Christian leaders operating on derived authority (as opposed to call from God) in Pentecostal churches. These issues and more have been analysed academically and recommendations proffered to address them.³ Thus in today's Yorubaland, especially in Ilorin, Kwara State, there are to be found women who are leaders of Christian missions and even others who are founders of African Independent and Pentecostal churches. Examples of such women are Prophetess Aimela, Reverend Mrs. Ailara and Pastor Mrs. Olotu.⁴ This paper is a flip of the coin by examining the roles of men in churches and ministries founded by women.

The paper utilized the mixed research design by sourcing data through interviews, participant observation and the administration of a questionnaire. The paper explored a variety of

² Oyeronke Olademo 'New Dimension in Nigerian Women's Pentecostal Experience: The Case of DODIM, Nigeria' *Journal of World Christianity*, Vol 5 , No. 1, 2012, pp. 62-74.

³ Mercy Amba, Oduyoye, and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, (eds). *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*. New York: Orbis Books, 1992, Andrew O. Igenzoa *Polygamy and the African Churches: A Biblical Appraisal of an African Marriage System*. Ibadan, Nigeria: African Association for the Study of Religions Publication Bureau, 2003, O. Olajubu *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2003, Afe. Adogame, "Engaging the Rhetoric of Spiritual Warfare: The Public Face of Aladura in Diaspora." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34, no. 4, 2004, pp. 493-522, O. Olademo 'Church and State in Western Africa' in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 238-239

⁴ O. Olademo 'Women Empowerment and Pentecostal Experience' in D. O. Ogungbile and A. E. Akinade (Eds.) *Creativity and Change in Nigerian Christianity* Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, 2010, pp. 161-171

theories on masculinity but proposed and adopted the theory of relational masculinity which is context bound, marked by cooperation for common good and sustainability. Quantitative and qualitative data are analysed by the SPSS software and content analysis respectively.

Theoretical Framework

Masculinity study mainly examines how masculine power is constructed and represented⁵ (Bhatti 2022). Masculinity is generally construed as a uniform group marked by sameness but this is largely unrealistic and this stance has been variously problematized. Masculinity refers to behaviours associated with boys, Men and males, which are socially constructed but with accompanied biological features such as testosterone and physical strength. Certain misconceptions are generally conceived as marking masculinity, including perceiving the expression of emotions as weakness, as being always physically strong as well as being leaders in all settings at all times. An illustration is the assumption that all women must be subject to any man always. In addition, many societies enact and maintain structures of the State and Laws that are patriarchal in nature, though recent approval for paternity leave for fathers is a commendable exception.

According to Connell, there are multiple kinds of masculinity because what is considered 'masculine' differs by race, class, ethnicity, sexuality and gender. Socially, all men share in common gender privilege/patriarchy which is described as having 'a sense of entitlement', however not all men are powerful in all settings at all times. In addition, not all males are men in every culture because to be a man in many cultures the male must be socially responsible hence masculinity is a value not a fact in society. Connell⁶ (2005) identifies four different types of masculinities: hegemonic, complicit, subordinate and marginalized. The hegemonic refers to the dominant, heterosexual, physical strength, suppressed emotions and legitimizes patriarchy. The complicit does not challenge the dominant forms of masculinities as long as it benefits them. The subordinate acts in feminine manners, emotional, homosexual; and the marginalized is unable to conform to prevailing expectations, example is the disabled. Each

⁵F. Bhatti *Masculinity Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach* University of Edinburgh, 2022.

⁶ R. W. Connell 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept' SAGE.

of these types of masculinities may manifest in the same society at once at different times.

Eric Anderson and others have subsequently identified new conceptual and theoretical frameworks including inclusive masculinity theory and precarious manhood theory. The precarious manhood theory asserts that masculinity is earned and maintained through public manifest actions that meet societal expectations; while the inclusive masculinity theory asserts that masculinity may also encompass emotional relationships, thus recognizing experiences of subordinate and marginalized men as significant component of masculinity⁷.

The distinct character of Yoruba contemporary worldview subscribes to hegemonic masculinity but with emphasis on complementary gender relationships aimed at sustaining the common good. This reflects the Yoruba stance of no absolutism, sustained by checks and balances hence this paper utilized the relational masculinity to discuss men's roles in churches founded by women in Yoruba land.

Gender construction in the Bible

Gender refers to defined capacities and attributes assigned to persons based on their alleged sexual characteristics. Gender construction is a product of a people's lived experiences and philosophy and reflects at the theoretical and practical levels among the people. It manifests as expectations for females and males in the society in different contexts. It is also evident in a people's language, rituals, and perceptions of the ecosystem.

The Bible prescribes subordinate role for the woman in the creation narratives of the book of Genesis, albeit in marital relationship between Adam and Eve. Nonetheless, this position has been used as a principle to impose subordinate roles on females within and outside marital relationships. Patriarchy has been severally identified as a formidable character of Biblical gender relationships, supported with the argument that Jesus had no female disciple among the twelve apostles. As I noted elsewhere, '--the interpretation of passages from the Bible plays a formidable role in prohibiting women from leadership roles in a number of

⁷ L. Gotten, U. Mellstrom, T. Shofer 'Introduction: Mapping the Field of Masculinity Studies' *International Handbook of Masculinity Studies* London: Routledge pp. 1-16.

Christian denominations'.⁸ Similarly, many scholars have analysed Biblical gender prescriptions to show that interpretations of certain passages of the Bible towards entrenching subordinate roles for women were driven by the politics of control⁹. Biblical passages support subordinate roles for women in marital relationship, though also recognizing that each spouse should submit to one another. Outside of marriage, the Bible recognizes that men and women may be leaders and agents of the divine as God wishes. While it is true that none of Jesus' twelve disciples was a woman, the contribution of women to the spread of the gospel, especially after the death of Jesus, cannot also be denied (see John 20, about Mary Magdalene). The patriarchal gender prescription of Biblical interpretation is continually being challenged by re-interpretations from perspectives of a God who loves all and can choose to use anyone in any capacity at any time. Traditional Yoruba gender construct operate on the concept of complementarity rather than oppression and has served to revise gender relations in Christian churches among the Yoruba.

Gender construction in Yoruba land

Yoruba cosmological narratives exert tremendous influence on Yoruba gender categorizations and roles for males and females. It prioritizes complementary roles for the male and female gender with each gender having specific areas of specialization. In addition, Yoruba gender construction is fluid and may be modulated by context, thus it is 'not equivalent to or a consequence of anatomy at all times. The boundaries of Yoruba gender construct is constantly shifting and reconfigurations occur in its expressions often. Furthermore, Yoruba gender construct does not translate the oppression and domination of women by men because complementary gender relation is appreciated. This stance manifests at every level of Yoruba philosophy including ecology, politics, economy, sociology and especially religion, wherein male

⁸ Oyeronke Olademo *Women in Yoruba Religion* New York: New York University Press, 2022, p. 25.

⁹ M. A. Oduyoye *The Will to Arise* New York: Orbis Books, 1992, pp. 135-140; Musa Dube *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* Chalise Press, 2000; O. Olajubu *Women in Yoruba Religious Shpere* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003, O. Olademo 'Doing Christian Theology in Africa from a Feminist Perspective' in Adewale et al (Eds.) *Biblical Studies and Feminism-The African Context* Ibadan: National Association for Biblical Studies (NABIS), pp. 31-44.

and female principles are crucial to positive living experiences. The ultimate aim for gender relationship among the Yoruba is cooperation and the common good for which both female and male principles are needed. Yoruba gender roles have influenced the practice of the two imported religions (Christianity and Islam) among the people from different perspectives. Examples include the creation of leadership for male and female roles in some churches and women led ministries in Islam in Yoruba land today. This informs the focus of this paper to explicate men's roles in some churches founded by women in Yoruba land.

Data Presentation

Four female church founders and one male successor of a female church founder were interviewed. These were Mama prophetess Sarah Samuel of Christ Apostolic church Oke-Iyanu, Eleko Apata Yakuba, Mama Evangelist Deborah Ayoola of Holy church of Christ Ministry, Olunlade, Mama Evangelist Helen Mosunmola Molagun of God is able Evangelical church, and Mama Pastor Busola Olotu of the Daughters of Deborah International ministry. The male successor of Mama Pastor Aimela is Pastor Aina Olusegun Babatunde of Christ the Messiah church, all in Ilorin. These five churches were founded by women in 2013, 2000, 2008, 2008 and 1982 respectively by God's calling. All of them have at least the West African Certificate and have male members, who function in different capacities in the churches. However, there are more female than male members in each of these churches founded by women. During the interviews it came to fore that men's roles in these churches include ushers, choir members, preacher, children department, project management and church council members. In addition, it became apparent that fewer men than women attend church programmes, especially during the week. Of the one hundred questionnaires administered in these churches, seventy-two were retrieved and analyzed through SPSS software. Data analysis and interpretation is here presented according to the objectives of the research.

1. How do men function in these churches?

Table 1: How men function in churches

Roles	Yes	No	Mean	SD	Rank
Pastor	70	2	1.03	.165	
Council Member	71	1	1.01	.118	
Chorister	71	1	1.01	.118	
Usher	70	2	1.03	.165	
Fund Raising	71	1	1.014	.118	
Evangelism	69	3	1.042	.201	
Church Administration	70	2	1.028	.165	
Management of church fund	66	6	1.083	.278	
construction, church project	68	4	1.083	.402	
marriage family counselling	68	4	1.056	.231	
discipleship training	65	7	1.097	.298	
disciplinary committee	65	7	1.125	.442	
children department	63	9	1.125	.333	
support for the needy	69	3	1.042	.201	
representing the church in CAN, PEN	67	5	1.069	.256	
AVERAGE Mean					

Table 1 showed how men function in the sampled churches and the roles they play. From the descriptive analysis, participants affirmed that almost men in the sampled churches function in all the specified roles. Council Membership, chorister and fund-raising top functions men perform in these churches as only one participant do not perform the three roles in all churches. As revealed in the mean score, most men affirmed that their functions in the church are centred around children department, disciplinary committee, discipleship training, management of church fund, and church project among others.

2. What is the prevailing gender relation in these churches?

Table 2: Demography of Prevailing Gender Relations in churches

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative F
Male	45	62.5	62.5
Female	27	37.5	100.0
Total	72	100.0	

The demographic variable reveals that 62.5% of the total participants were male and 37.5% were female. Therefore, male

members of the church are well represented than their female counterpart in the survey.

Table 3: the prevailing gender relations in these churches

Items	Yes	No	Me an	SD	Standard Error	Deci sion
Relationship of male and female workers in church is cordial	67 93.1%	5 6.9%	1.0 7	.256	.030	
Relationship of male and female workers in church is competitive	37.5%	45 62.5%	1.6 3	.488	.057	
Relationship of male and female workers in church is challenging	28 38.9%	44 61.1%	1.6 1	.491	.058	
Men in church cooperate with the woman founder always	69 95.8%	3 4.2%	1.0 4	.201	.024	
Men in church cooperate with the woman founder often	48 66.7%	24 33.3%	1.3 3	.475	.056	
Men in the church cooperate with woman founder rarely	15 20.8%	57 79.2%	1.7 9	.409	.048	
Men contribute more money than women in this church	43 59.7%	29 40.3%	1.4 0	.494	.058	
Some men have challenges serving in this church	28 38.9%	44 61.1%	1.6 1	.491	.058	

The above table reveals that majority of men in church cooperate with the women founder always (95.8%) and just 20.8% of men in the church cooperate with women founder rarely. Also, 66.7% of men in church cooperate with the women founder, there is also cordial relationship between male and female workers in the church (93.1%) while 37.5% have a competitive relationship between male and female in the church. Some men reported having challenges serving in church (38.9%). While 59.7% of them contributed more money than women in the church, which is also equal to the percentage of those having challenging relationship with female workers in church (38.9%)

However, 79.2% disagreed that men in church cooperate with women founder rarely and 40.3% disagreed that men contribute more money than women in the church. 61.1% disagreed that some men have challenges serving in this church which is also

equal to the percentage of people who disagreed that relationship of male and female workers in church is challenging while 33.3% disagreed that men in church cooperate with women founder often. 4.2% disagreed that men in church cooperate with women founder always. 62.5% disagreed that relationship of male and female workers is competitive and 6.9% disagreed that relationship of male and female workers in the church is cordial.

3. How do these prevailing gender relations differ from biblical gender relations?

Table 3: t-test result of how prevailing gender relations differs from biblical gender relations

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	t-value	p-value
Prevailing_Gender_Relation	72	11.4861	1.49170	71	65.337	.000
Biblical Gender Relation		23.7500	5.70828			

Table 3 indicates that the calculated t-value of 65.3 is significant as the p-value is less than .05 alpha levels. This implies that prevailing gender relations differs from biblical gender relations. In other words, the result suggested that prevailing gender relations and biblical gender relations differs.

4. What are the implications of men's roles in these churches to development in the churches

Table 4: implications of men's roles to development in the churches

S/N	Item	A	U	D	X	Decision
1	the bible is against women founding churches	14 19.4%	4 5.6%	54 75%	2.10	Reject
2	the holy spirit cannot operate through a woman	59 81.9%	3 4.2%	10 13.9%	4.24	Accept
3	women cannot worship God during menstruation	54 75%	5 6.9%	13 18.1%	4.08	Accept
4	the bible prescribes that women must be supervised by men in the church always	39 54.2%	7 9.7%	26 36.1%	3.44	Accept

5	the bible gives examples of women leaders in Ministry	8 11.1%	4 5.6%	60 83.3%	1.85	Reject
6	the bible records examples of men and women working together in Christ's Ministry	6 8.4%	3 4.2%	63 87.5%	1.67	Reject
7	the bible condemns pride and hypocrisy	64 88.9%	-	8 11.1%	4.38	Accept
8	the bible supports the position that God can women and men as He pleases	66 91.7	1 1.4%	5 6.9%	4.43	Accept
9	the bible describes every Christian as members of the same body	69 95.8%	-	3 4.2%	4.60	Accept
Average					3.42	

The table 4 shows that most of the items on implications of men's role in church for development were accepted and only a few items like the bible gives examples of women's leaders in ministry with a mean score of 1.85, the bible records examples of men and women working together in Christ's ministry with a mean score of 1.67, and the bible is against women founding churches with a mean score of 2.10 were rejected by participants for the accepted items mean score above 3.0 was set as cut-off score and decision point in the study. From the analysis, participants who agreed that the bible describes every Christian as members of the same body with a mean score of 4.6 which is followed by the bible supports the position that God can women and men as He pleases and the bible records examples of men and women working together in Christ's Ministry with the least score of 1.67.

Discussion of Data

Relational masculinity which prioritizes cooperation of the genders, is progress focused and committed to sustainability of a joint destiny in any setting is validated by data from interviews and questionnaire as analysed. The top three roles of men in these churches founded by women are membership of church councils,

chorister and fund-raising activities while the mean score that men perform roles in all departments in the churches, including the children department. Again, that more males than females are represented in the respondents conform to the purposive sampling technique for questionnaire administration since the paper focused on men's roles in these churches. The prevailing gender relation shows a high score of 95.8% for cooperation of males with the female founder/leader in the churches. This is a clear departure Biblical gender prescription which is often translated as prescribing male leadership at all times, being the basis for prohibitions on female ordination in some Christian denominations. In addition, data 93.1% shows a cordial relationship between male and female workers in these churches and this confirms Yoruba preference for complimentary gender relations. Responses on the third research objective present data that buttress the fact that gender roles in these churches differ from Biblical gender prescriptions thus indicating change in prevailing gender roles, which could be attributed to the influence of Yoruba cultural paradigm of complementarity. In addition, majority of the respondents on research objective four subscribe to the stance that for the church to develop, Christians should appreciate the positions that Christians (male and female) are members of the same body; God can use women and men as He pleases; and the Bible gives examples of women and men working together in Christ's ministry.

Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to explicate the roles of men in churches founded by women in Yoruba land. The discourse comprised examination of theories on masculinity with eventual adoption of the novel relational masculinity theory. It came to the fore that Biblical gender construct has been interpreted as ascribing subordinate positions to women in all settings, at all times, but that idea, it was noted, has been challenged by scholars over the years. The paper explored Yoruba gender construction and observed that it is fluid and promotes gender complementary relations, especially in churches in Yorubaland, an observation that the data for this research tend to empirically confirm. Illustratively, men comfortably play diverse roles in churches founded by women, roles such as the care for children and ushers. Thus, the need to maintain peace, sustain growth and please God remains the focus of these churches founded by women.