RICE UNIVERSITY

An Ethnographic Study of Gender Dynamics in Benin Religion and a Pentecostal Congregation in Benin City, Nigeria

by

Itohan Mercy Idumwonyi

A THERESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Doctor of Philosophy

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE

Elias K. Bongmba, Chair
The Harry and Hazel Chavanne Chair in Christian Theology and Professor of Religion

Professor Jeffrey J. Kripal
J. Newton Rayzor Chair in Philosophy and Religious Thought

Professor Elaine Howard Ecklund,
Herbert S. Autrey Chair in Social Sciences, Professor of Sociology and Director, Religion and Public Life Program

HOUSTON, TEXAS
April 2, 2018
ABSTRACT

An Ethnographic Study of Gender Dynamics in Benin Religion and a Pentecostal Congregation in Benin City, Nigeria

By

Itohan Mercy Idumwonyi

Pentecostalism empowers its adherents, women, and men, equally. Such impulsive avowal merely points to the deficit in gender equality that places currency on one gender and limits another in an increasingly diverse twenty-first-century Nigerian (Benin) society. This thesis examines the framing of gender dynamics, and suggests that cultural beliefs and social constructions have exploitative impacts on gender relations in ways that are imagined, not real; this conception that Pentecostalism empowers all gender equally is not practical because specific practices show Nigerian Pentecostalism’s (NP) unwavering commitment to male dominance.

This dissertation engages insights from the study of power, domination, society, and culture to analyze categories that are considered “normative” in a tradition that continues to be patriarchal but whose categories function to ignore, deny, or fight against recognition of women through a confrontation with cultural beliefs and social constructions. This ethnographic study of a well-known Nigerian Pentecostal congregation—the Church of God Mission International (or CGMi)—acclaimed by many to be at the vanguard of modern NP, offers the ideal lens through which to consider the subtle relegation of women to second-class status in the Nigerian Pentecostal tradition (NPT). It suggests that the hegemonic forms of masculinity shaped by the concepts of cultural beliefs and social construction arrangements present and rooted in Benin religion still influence and structure NPT in Benin.
Though not limited to Benin, historically the NPT has been unwilling to embrace the concept of inclusivity. I foreground the trope of “tokenism” and theorize that the token number of women who preach in Nigerian Pentecostal churches is nothing more than symbolic and should not be the only lens by which one views gender in/equality. I suggest instead that we consider the acceptance of women in significant leadership positions. I also consider how individual Pentecostal women devote most of their energy to forming organizations or situations that help them express themselves both inside and outside of the mainstream church. Finally, I suggest that it is crucial that women and men create and inhabit equitable relationships and roles in a world where interdependence is imperative and that this involves correcting male dominance. I focus on the effects of male dominance on females who desire authoritative leadership positions in the male-founded and dominated Pentecostal domain specifically and African religions broadly.
Acknowledgments

“A person is a person because of other people.”
(Sotho proverb)

“The people around you are your covering.”
(Benin proverb)

“One head cannot go into counsel.”
(Ashanti proverb)

“I am because you are, and you are because I am.”
(John Mbiti)

Finally, it is done! I have gone through numerous shifts and turns to reach this moment. Yet this journey was certainly not made in isolation; instead, it has been a vivid enactment of the above-quoted proverbs. And now, I draw on my knowledge of such African proverbs to call myself to order because “I am,” indeed, “a person because of other people in my life who are my covering.” This journey has been achievable only because of the support and counsel of various people and institutions. They have been the ladder by which I have reached this academic height. Therefore, I bear witness to them here. I am indebted to colleagues and friends from the academic community who provided helpful suggestions, and whose comments immeasurably strengthened this project. Though I could not possibly name everyone who made an impact on me during my education, the following persons stand out as contributing to the ideas offered in this dissertation, and/or on my ability to articulate them.

My most significant debt of gratitude I owe to my doctoral father, friend, and adviser, Professor Elias Kifon Bongmba. Besides his constant guidance, reading of and feedback on the many drafts of the dissertation, I thank him for his invaluable support, generosity, vision, patience, and encouragement. I thank him for believing in me and for showing me how to bring this project to fruition. His mentorship is a true paradigm of the role that personal relationships play in determining a student’s collegiate success. I am also pleased to thank his wife, my dear big sister, Odelia Bongmba, for opening her warm heart and home to me. I am grateful for and indebted to each member of my superb dissertation committee for their time and energy. I appreciate Professor Jeff Kripal for
providing suggestions for engaging theories and methods of the discipline; and to the
inimitable Professor Elaine Howard Ecklund, whose guidance enabled a significant
component of the project to fall into place. I thank them for reading the full draft of my
dissertation manuscript. I appreciate all my teachers, past and present.

I am a product of many additional individuals. I bear witness to the truth of the
African maxim that says, “a beautiful child has many attenders/parents.” To my many
learned “attenders” and generous “parents” who “became my covering and pillar,” I
express gratitude.

I am mostly indebted to the late Professor Dorcas Olubanke Akintunde of the
University of Ibadan, Nigeria, a mother of mothers who challenged, encouraged, and set
me on this path but joined the saints triumphant before I reached its end. Mama Dorcas,
Ese Modupe lopolopo (Thank you, so much)! Sun ree o (Sleep well o)! I know she
continues to support me even in her afterlife. Importantly, I thank her for creating the
network that enabled me to cross paths with the father of fathers, Professor Jacob K.
Olupona of Harvard University. I am indebted to him for believing in me and setting me
on this path. He was instrumental to my being at Harvard University; his mentorship,
guidance, and counsel prepared me for this research effort and has kept me going. I thank
Professor Nimi Wariboko of Boston University for providing the steady support for me to
complete this journey, and whose suggestions I have incorporated into the final draft. Our
many rewarding critical engagements helped to shape my thoughts and enriched my
intellect. The impact of his ideas on my intellectual formation has been fascinating. I am
grateful to Professor Toyin Falola of the University of Texas at Austin. I benefited
tremendously from his generous counsel and guidance. Incredibly, he gave me room
under his academic “wings” without even setting eyes on me. I owe particular thanks to
Professor Uyilawa Usuanlele, whose enriching conversations, thoughtful encouragement,
and feedback on the first chapter of this work makes him more of a co-author than a
supporter. I have learned a great deal from the inspiring conversations we have had. I
express my appreciation to Dr. Enoch Olujide Gbadegesin, a colleague and a senior
friend, with whom I have shared experiences both in Nigeria and during our years
together at Rice University. He held the light for me in my beginning days at Rice
University. I profited immensely from discussions with colleagues at the University of
Benin, Nigeria: Professor Osarhiemen Benson Osadolor of the History Department, Professor Kokunre Eghafona of the Sociology Department, and Professor Otakpor of the Philosophy Department. Their close friendship and encouragement sustained me in my doctoral studies. I especially thank the Vice Chancellor and the Executive Council of the University of Benin for believing in me and granting my request to be away to complete this doctoral program at Rice University. To my colleagues, friends, and members of the Religions Department at the University of Benin, I thank you.

I am grateful to The American Association of University Women (AAUW), the Center for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality (CSWGS), and the Forum for Theological Exploration (FTE) for their support and the fellowship/grants they awarded in support of my doctoral work. I am thankful to the FTE for opening the doors for me to journey with seasoned comrades who know what they do and do what they love passionately. I thank these fellow FTE comrades for lending a supportive shoulder and attentive ears. I appreciate the Rice University Department of Religion, Humanities Research Center, and the Graduate Students Association for conference travel assistance and a variety of opportunities.

I thank my closest family that has been at the foundation of all that I am and have become; they have been of more importance than they could imagine. I am profoundly grateful for the unwavering support and doting care of my husband, Festus Aisiriuwa, for his willingness and openness to be a dedicated husband when duty called for it. Our children, Ijesuo-ekpeneide and Izoduware, I cannot thank enough for their friendship, understanding, and willingness to think through ideas with me. I am proud of them. Their faith in me inspired me to come this far. I thank both the departed and living heroes of my family: my father, Joseph Enogieru Omoigui, who laid the foundation and taught me never to say “I cannot;” my eldest brother, Sunny Omorodion Omoigui, who was a pillar and joined hands with our father to set the stage for achieving this milestone, but has since joined the saints triumphant; and my great praying and caring mother, Comfort Egbebalo-akhamen Omoigui: all of them supported and cheered me all along my way. Their prayerful support is still effective, and I salute them for it. How can I forget to appreciate my well-meaning brother, Idemudia, and sisters Osarumwense, Esohe, Osayemwenre, Oghogho, for their encouragement? For the prayerful support of my
siblings-in-law: Chris Eke-Uwubanmwen, Victor Omogiate, Sunny Abuwa, Edwin Obasogie, Nosa (Omoigui) Okundaye, and Onyenmwen Idemudia: I thank you. I also appreciate all my nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Other family members provided encouragement and support to me in the course of this study. I am most grateful to my in-laws who showed me the possibilities that a wife can attain when she humbles herself. I am particularly and forever indebted to Mary, Jacob, Bayode, Titilayo, Bisiayo, and Oloruntobi Fashemi for opening their hearts, their homes, and their finances from the beginning to this very day. It is no exaggeration to say that I do not know how I would have completed this journey without their various acts of support and love, particularly for their help with childcare. The members of my husband’s family are too numerous to name individually, so I mention only their family names: the support of the Idumwonyis, Omoregie-Edewi, and the Osadolors has been all-encompassing.

I express my gratitude to Professor Offor Francis of the Philosophy Department, and Professor Jacob K. Ayantayo of the Religion Department, both of the University of Ibadan; and Dr. Ruth Oluwakemi Oke of the Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, Nigeria. I thank Mrs. Osariemen Rosemary Awelewa (née Okunoghae) for her constant friendship; and Kasim Abdul and Babatunde Babalola for their helpful support at different stages of this journey.

I am incredibly thankful to all the people who contributed to my work while I was in Benin City, Nigeria in 2015 and 2016 for my fieldwork: the Benin palace functionaries and citizens of Edo, the pastors, church leaders, and members, and other people whom I interviewed and with whom I spoke. I am thankful for the time they spent with me and for the information they shared about their lives and the institutions they represented. Thanks in particular to Rev. (Dr. Mrs.) Nosa and Dr. Dcn. Victor Aladeselu; Rev (mother) Grace U. Ekperigin (popularly called ‘mama Koko; Professor (Mrs.) Norah Omoregie; Archbishop Joseph Ojo of Calvary Kingdom Church (CKC) (who anointed and ordained me into ministry in the course of this research), Lagos; Bishop J.O.S. Imafidon; Elder Joseph Akioya; Rev. Professor John Okhuoya; Pastor Dickson Ogbahon; Rev. (Mrs.) Josephine and Elder Sunday Kpere-Daibo; Rev. Humphrey Areghan; and Comfort Omoigui. Others whom I thank for their openness and willingness to share...
information include Chief Osayomwanbo Osemwegie-Ero, Patrick Oronsanye, Chief Priest Osemwegie Ebohon, and many others too numerous to mention.

I am grateful to the following people who made my field research very easy by facilitating my meeting with research respondents: Osamameh Edionwe and Patience Iziengbe Omoregie for leading me to Benin personalities. I thank Chief Eric E. Idumwonyi (JP) (my senior husband) for granting me an audience and connecting me with respondents. I owe special thanks to my elder sister, Grace Esohe Eke-Uwubanmwen for her hospitality and for lending me her car during my research, and to many other people too numerous to mention here individually.

I am thankful for my church family in Houston, Texas. Thank you, Pastors Tayo and Rachel Salau, and members of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Christ Chapel, for your prayers. I am grateful to Pastors Bridget and John Aikhionbare and members of the Born Again International Ministry; “the little church with a BIG heart” in Quincy, (Boston) Massachusetts that allowed me to serve in the vineyard and was my “pillar” when my father passed. I appreciate the many saints, those who have passed—the late pastor Efe Omodamwen—and those living—Pastor Edith Omodamwen and members of the Eagles Wings’ Ministry in Benin City, Nigeria—who have inspired me during my life journey. My upbringing in the CGMi certainly provided a foundation that fostered the passion for critically engaging sociological and historical topics, and this laid the foundation for my research interest in women’s religious history and space for asking probing questions about gender inequality in Nigerian (African) Pentecostalism. The CGMi offered me the tools and inspiration which sustain my inquiries and research interests.

My immense and endless thanks go to my colleagues and friends at Rice University whose love and support cannot be quantified. But for them, I would have journeyed in isolation: Erin Prophet, Linda Ceriello, Minji Lee, Reyhan Erdogan Basaran, and Wambui Wa-Ngatho. Our “Brilliant and Beautiful ladies” group, enriched by our diversity, turned out to be very supportive; our conversations and collegiality helped so much to sharpen my thinking and complete this study in a timely fashion.

Lastly and very humbly, I thank myself for being able to “walk” like the chameleon. The chameleon keeps its head straight as it “walks,” but it constantly looks in
different directions. I am grateful that I did not deviate or fall apart from my set goal; rather, I grew wiser through the knowledge gleaned from the different people and perspectives I met in the course of this doctoral journey. In the midst of several hurdles, challenges, and distractions, I was cautious, goal-oriented, adaptable, and open-minded so that “I came, I saw, and I conquered” to the glory of God. Therefore, I thank the Lord for helping me to turn this challenge into a laudable reality. Now that I am a “Dokita, I joke that I can now prescribe APC and Panadol!

Itohan Mercy Idumwonyi

May 2018
Contents

Abstract ......................................................... iv - v
Acknowledgement ........................................... vi - xi
Table of Contents ........................................... xii - xiv
Dedication Page ................................................ xv

CHAPTER ONE:  
Introduction: The Research Perspective .................. 1 - 5
  1.1 Justification and Scope of the Study .................. 5 - 7
  1.2 Structure of the Central Argument .................. 7 - 8
  1.3 Research Methodology, Sources, and Data Collection
      1.3.1 The CGMi’s Habitat ............................ 8 - 18
  1.4 Literature Review ..................................... 18 - 19
  1.5 Outline of the Chapters .............................. 24 - 29

CHAPTER TWO:  
Benin City: The Ethnographic Research Setting .......... 30 - 33
  2.1 Benin City and People: Socio-Historically Speaking
      ... ... 33 - 41
  2.2 Benin: Mythically-Historically Speaking ............ 41 - 42
  2.3 Women in Benin (Kingdom) Tradition: Cultural Beliefs
      and Related Dilemmas ................................ 42 - 54
  2.4 The Politicization and Dehistoricization of Women as
      Historical Agents: A Sociological Exploration ...... 54 - 60
      2.4.1 Rituals and Repression: Politicizing Women’s
      Physiology ............................................ 60 - 62
      2.4.2 Omo Okpia Syndrome: The Mythical Ideology
      of Male Supremacy and its Exaggeration ............ 62 - 72
  2.5 Concluding Thoughts .................................. 72 - 75

CHAPTER THREE:  
Socio-Historical Backdrop to the Emergence of
Modern Pentecostalism in Benin City .................... 76 - 78
  3.1 Emergence: A New Breed of Pentecostalism in Benin –
      Its Concept and Practices .......................... 78 - 92
  3.2 Benson Andrew Idahosa: Notes and Autobiographical
      Texts on the Life and Times of a Hero of Faith and
      Father of Modern Nigerian Pentecostalism .......... 93 - 102
      3.2.1 The CGMi’s Doctrine ............................ 102 - 104
      3.2.1.1 CGMi’s Organizational Structure ............ 104 - 107
3.2.2 The CGMi’s Ministries Arms ... ... ... ... 107 - 108
3.3 And “Mostly Women:” An Analysis of the CGMi Organizational chart ... ... ... ... ... ... 108 - 114
3.4 Expansion and Connection of CGMi to other Pentecostal Denominations ... ... ... ... ... ... 114 - 116
3.5 Concluding Thoughts ... ... ... ... ... ... 116 - 117

CHAPTER FOUR:
The Dawn of a New Era: The Framework for Policing and Re-producing Gender Boundaries in Nigerian Pentecostal Tradition 118 - 121

4.1 The Dawn of a New Era for Pentecostal Tradition and Religious Gate-Keepers ... ... ... ... ... 121 - 133
4.2 Patterns of Gender Dynamics in Nigerian Pentecostal Churches ... ... ... ... ... ... 133
4.2.1 Representative Rites of Gender Relations ... ... ... ... ... ... 133 - 149
4.2.2 Cultural Expectations and its Implications on Gendered Patterns in NPC ... ... ... ... ... ... 149 - 151
4.2.3 Sacred Masculinity, Profane Femininity, and the Capital of Power ... ... ... ... ... ... 151 - 152
4.3 Theorizing the Weight of Femaleness ... ... ... ... ... 152 - 158
4.4 Concluding Thoughts ... ... ... ... ... ... 158 - 159

CHAPTER FIVE:
Margaret Ekhoeragbon Idahosa: Towards the Religious History of the First Woman Archbishop in Nigerian (Benin) Pentecostal Tradition ... 160 - 161

5.1 The Socio-Religious-History of Margaret Ekhoe Idahosa: An Emblem for Gender Inclusivity? ... ... ... ... ... ... 161 - 173
5.2 The Succession Crisis and the Making of the First Female Archbishop in the NPT ... ... ... ... ... ... 173 - 179
5.3 Women in Ministry and Margaret Idahosa’s Theological Stance ... ... ... ... ... ... 179 - 184
5.4 Margaret Idahosa Today: The Struggles, Achievements, and Expansion since 1998 ... ... ... ... ... ... 184 - 191
5.5 Margaret’s Relevance to the History of the Pentecostal Tradition 191 - 194
5.6 Concluding Thoughts ... ... ... ... ... ... 194 - 195

CHAPTER SIX:
Lived Religion: The Weight of Femaleness and Women Negotiating Gender Boundaries 196 - 198

6.1 The Weight of Femaleness in Nigerian Pentecostal Congregations 198 - 205
6.2 Women Negotiating Gender Boundaries ... ... ... ... 205 - 210
6.3 African Women’s Theology ... ... ... ... ... 210 - 212
6.4 The Birth of a Counter-Culture in Nigerian Pentecostalism ... 213 - 214
6.5 Women’s Network:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter/Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Concluding Thoughts</td>
<td>224 - 226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>CHAPTER SEVEN: Conclusion</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Transcending Gender Inequality and Weaving Models for Change and Continuity</td>
<td>227 - 232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>The Relevance of Gendered Inclusiveness</td>
<td>232 - 236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Research Findings</td>
<td>236 - 238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.3.1: Attitude of Male Pastors to Women Leaders/Pastors</td>
<td>238 - 239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.3.2: Marriage as Excuse for non-Inclusion</td>
<td>239 - 241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.3.3: Women as Change Agents in CGMi</td>
<td>241 - 242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Methodological Challenges Considered</td>
<td>242 - 245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>Research Implications and Contributions</td>
<td>245 - 249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>Directions for Future Research</td>
<td>249 - 252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.6.1: The Principle of Nego-Feminism</td>
<td>252 - 255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>BIBLIOGRAPHY</strong></td>
<td>256 - 271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendix</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DEDICATION

In gratefulness
to my husband, Festus Asiriwu,
my children, Ijesuoekpeneide and Izoduware

and

in loving memory of
my father,
Elder Joseph Enogieru Omoigui
and eldest brother,
Sunny Omorodion Omoigui
“When Paul said, women should keep quiet; I was not there. God is not mad at women when they preach the gospel. They were present with Jesus from the beginning to the end of [Jesus] ministry. Jesus gave them the message to the world while men were hiding. So I will instead obey my Lord Jesus than hear from a man. I will preach and do the work that the Lord ordered me to do. When we get to heaven, they can ask Jesus why women preached; Paul will also answer for himself. The power of God does not know gender; God’s Spirit is one as long as you have God’s spirit in you, go ahead, and God will append the signature to what God calls you to do.”

---

1 Tell (magazine): Nigeria’s Independent Weekly,” Interview with Bishop (Mrs.) Margaret Idahosa (Special ed.), No. 23, (June 8, 1998), 6.
Chapter One

Introduction: The Research Perspective

I came to graduate school with a craving to come to terms with the constraints of religion and culture on gender dynamics and gender politics in African Christianity, in ways that take seriously gender and women’s scholarship more broadly and the existential concerns of modern-day Nigerian Pentecostal traditions (NPT) in particular. I had a simple though socially and epistemologically major research problem steering my primary academic interests. Though there are narratives of religious male missionaries’ icons such as Bishop Ajayi Crowther and William Wilberforce, I ask: Where were/are the narratives of the women who lived and worked in that period? Did they not support the growth of the ministry? And if so, how? In further studies, I found an iteration of that same lack within the Pentecostal tradition, a tradition that claims to be unlike the missionary (mainline) churches and specifically to be egalitarian in their dealings with women and men within the fold.

Consequently, my interest in the gendered dynamics in NPT stems from my curiosity to excavate the lost narratives of women in African Religious history. I am drawn to the contributions of women in African religion, particularly in Pentecostalism, for as it appears, they are the “pillars” of support that keeps Nigerian Pentecostalism (NP) growing. Their numerical strength and visual participation give Pentecostalism its growth, relevance, and meaning.

That the system of patriarchy and the religious leadership dominated by men continues its tasks of sidelining and subjugating women when it comes time for a few of these NP women to assume an authoritative leadership position only spurred my interest
in exploring these gender dynamics. That interest was unexpectedly fanned into flame when the succession to the office of the archbishop of a Nigerian Pentecostal Church (NPC), the Church of God Mission International (CGMi), which sets the pace for modern NP, experienced an “unexpected” emergency in the shape of the sudden and unexpected demise of the founding pastor, Archbishop Benson Idahosa, in March 12, 1998. The issue of who should take the mantle and assume the office of the archbishop suddenly became a critical matter for the CGMi and, by extension, the NPT. This conundrum along with the silence about church women’s narratives in African history books spurred me into intellectual action.

Although the late archbishop’s widow, Rev. Mrs. Margaret Idahosa, eventually assumed this church leadership office, it was not without dissent. This dissent came mainly from male members of the church who had concluded that the “crown does not fit a woman” simply because of her femaleness. These male members who, as bishops, were high up on the hierarchical ladder assumed that their maleness qualified them more than her gifts and graces did Margaret Idahosa. When their plans did not thrive, some of them left the CGMi to form their own churches. As of today, many of these churches, that I refer to as “branch churches” of CGMi, still follow the CGMi’s pattern of ministry.

I have chosen the CGMi as my focus because of its national and international presence, and because it is a microcosm of modern Nigerian Pentecostal churches. The CGMi was a really “big thing” in Nigeria and Africa at the time of Benson Idahosa; indeed, it was the beginning of modern Pentecostalism in Africa as we know it.² This church’s influence further fueled my intellectual curiosity to explore the gender dynamics

² Throughout this dissertation, I use the term “branch church” to distinguish a local Pentecostal congregation from the headquarter church and NPC. A “branch church” is a geographic area for which a specific pastor and members of a church community are responsible.
of the NPT, a tradition that claims to offer equal opportunity to women as to men. So, in addition to my initial intellectual desire to expand the scholarly and religious history of Nigerian Pentecostal women, the CGMi succession situation opened a new vista for me to investigate the nuances of gender in/equality in male-founded NPT using the CGMi as a lens.³

Male leaders explicitly control the church’s polity and form majority of the ordination committee and so accepting women into significant leadership positions is typified by intermittent conflicts. Scholars of African Christianity⁴ argue that the emergence of Pentecostalism empowers female as well as male adherents while largely ignoring the impact of social construction and cultural beliefs on gender inequality. This project has examined the evidence, and the evidence demonstrates that gender equality in Nigerian (Benin) Pentecostalism is imagined, not real. This dissertation examines the framing of gender relations, the categories of gender inequalities, and illuminates the various ways that women and men get treated differently and unequally. While we cannot disregard the successes of some women who have positions of authority in Pentecostal churches, this project explores the common gendered patterns among women in this church. It mostly focuses on women’s late entry into leadership positions, the result from the weight of femaleness such as child-rearing, pervasive views of women as temptresses, and the sexist view of women’s intellect, and autonomy that they reproduce in their day-to-day experiences as women and men in male-founded churches, and its consequences on women and the church.

³ Benson’s demise opened a new chapter, and this study underscores the drama that ensued with Margaret’s consecration and primarily gives attention to the conceptual framework that enables the reproduction of gender inequality in a Pentecostal church that claims to be egalitarian.

This project theorizes that the social-cultural production of gender boundaries that are rooted in the Benin Religions has found its way into the Benin (variant of) Nigerian Pentecostal Tradition (BNPT). It offers insight into the influence of cultural beliefs and social constructions combined with religious ideation of personhood (and specifically female personhood) in ways that are considered normative. It attends to how women negotiate dominant boundaries of religion, culture, and gender within the Pentecostal churches.

In a world where those who speak up get concessions, it is crucial that religious historians, Pentecostal studies scholars, women, and gender scholars begin to re-examine the scarcity of women’s religious history and the nuances of gender relations that negatively affect women’s leadership in male-founded Pentecostal denominations. Such a re-examination would illuminate and deepen our understanding of the social-cultural norms that shape gender relations in NP. This critical re-examination opens up a space to think about the drivers of gender inequality in a church that professes egalitarianism, the concealed mechanisms that accentuate gender inequality, and possible alternative approaches by which women might negotiate gender boundaries. Such critical negotiations are imperative for women to break the religious glass ceiling in the face of male dominance in male-founded/dominated congregations. Given unequal gender relations, which the data I gathered from fieldwork in Nigeria support, it is imperative that scholars of religion, particularly Pentecostal theologians, women, and scholars of gender re-take note of the subtle ways that households of faith reproduce gender inequality. Not only is this alternative way of seeing, thinking, and knowing necessary, but unmasking negative gender dynamics gives scholars a lens by which to interpret
socio-cultural constructions that have wrongly been assumed to be the official stance and normative structure in BNPT and by extension, NP.

1.1: Justification and Scope of the Study

My ethnographic study reveals that it is still difficult for women in NPT to assume leadership positions. Thus, the critical and thought-provoking questions that ground my ethnographic research are: Is the NPT, pictured through the lens of CGMi, really gender egalitarian as it claims? What drives the reproduction of gender inequalities in a Pentecostal tradition that claims to treat women and men equally? What impact do the socio-cultural constructions of gender have on women in these settings? How do women negotiate the realities of gendered margins in male-headed/founded Pentecostal churches? These are legitimate and key questions because gender issues have become such potent symbols of inequality, and women are most directly affected by the way the churches of which they are a part resolve these hitches.

The investigation seeks to understand how socio-cultural constructions are reproduced to disenfranchise females in male-dominated Pentecostal congregations and how women who are dissatisfied yet remain committed to the Pentecostal tradition negotiate the gender boundary to find meaning and voice in the church. My findings expand existing research on gender dynamics and have implications for the study of religious transformation. Throughout this dissertation, I illustrate and analyze the masked gender inequality (and politics) that are at play, and the daily lived experiences of women and men in these settings. I do this by analyzing the NPT through the life, history, and ministry of this first woman Nigerian Pentecostal archbishop who succeeded her late
husband.\textsuperscript{5} I do this because some have argued that her succession is a “historic accident,” that her femaleness disqualifies her from becoming a leader of such prominence.\textsuperscript{6}

This dissertation illuminates the practice of gender inequality in NPT. Notably, my finding shows that there is a gap in knowledge about the gender dynamics that are at play in the NPT, and scholars of African religions and Pentecostal studies have overlooked this difference because of lapses in the study of gender dynamics. This research reveals the gender gap and its implications. One significant takeaway from this study is that scholars must be invited to develop sensitivity to the study of the subject matter to give a robust understanding of what Pentecostal theology is in relations to gender relations. For that reason, this study pays particular attention to the place of gender relations within the NPT is both compelling and provides broad theoretical perspectives that a local context must test, and the CGMi offers the framework for the test.

The choice of CGMi in Benin City, Nigeria raises methodological questions. How does one collect or generate data about gender inequality in religious institutions that claim to be gender sensitive and gender egalitarian? I chose this site as my research location first because of its historical position and the pioneering work of Benson Idahosa

\footnote{Certain ideas come up throughout this dissertation because they provide the anchorage for the argument. I have done this intentionally so that my readers using this study as a reference guide will encounter the same information no matter which chapter they read. However, I also realize that I have omitted some highly desirable materials; for example, the historical, sociological and theoretical approach. All I could do is to try to assemble a representative sample of this abundant literature captured in the bibliography. I hope that textual and footnote references will provide further invitations to explore beyond my offerings.}

\footnote{The election/nomination of women continues to invoke questions as such top positions tend to be the monopoly of men in the society. For example, following the male agenda requires one to participate in masculine God-language and dwell on the maleness of Jesus. The church ties the ordination of women into ministerial positions with the gender of God. They argue that the woman’s body does not look like the male body of Jesus. This position, in my view, represents the “stained-glass ceiling” that constitutes barriers to women’s leadership and advancement in the society like Benin. This practice may explain why gendered relations and particularly, women’s history have not received much attention and now forms part of the missing pages of world history. Very often, scholars discuss women’s history as a “distant fantasy” in the historical study of Benin, and where they discuss it, they articulate it in passing.}
with gender relations in the Benin variant of NP.\textsuperscript{7} Second, Benin City also provides a basis for comparing gender relations between two traditions. For Benin City houses the CGMi, which many Pentecostal adherents acclaim as the foremost and trail-blazing Pentecostal church in NP. The CGMi continues to be at the vanguard of NP and thus a good case for studying the effect of social-cultural constructions. However, not much scholarly attention has been accorded the founder and the church’s involvement with gender relations in NP. Because CGMi consecrated the first woman archbishop in NP, it seems fitting to interrogate gender dynamics in the NP through its lens.

Third, by locating this study in Benin City and examining the history, culture, and perspectives on women and gender relation in pre-colonial and postcolonial Benin, I fill a gap in NP scholarship. For this study not only focuses on Pentecostalism in Benin City, but it also hypothesizes that Benin traditional religion constructs social-cultural ideas that normalize the dominance of male gender over and above the female gender. While I acknowledge that Benin City is a patriarchal and male-dominated society, I also found that this location may have influenced the gender practices in the Pentecostal church that I studied.

\textbf{1.2: Structure of the Central Argument}

How to determine this church’s beliefs and practices about gender? I theorize that the token number of women that the NPC has ordained is merely symbolic, and ought not

\textsuperscript{7} Benson Idahosa was a central charismatic figure and his highly publicized healing, and miracle crusades typified the church to many people within and outside its immediate location. The wave of expansion and gender inclusion positioned CGMi in such a way that it influenced many Pentecostal (and non-Pentecostal) denominations to follow its trail. Although Benson Idahosa introduced women into ministry and encouraged many to attend the Bible Institute, there is no record that he let a woman become a head-pastor of the least branch church in this congregation. Even as Benson Idahosa is dead, many still respect him as being the quintessential champion of charismatic Pentecostalism that introduced Pentecostal women into the Ministry.
to be the only lens by which scholars examine gender in/equality. This project reveals that the consecration of a particular woman into an authoritative leadership position should not connote gender equality and inclusivity. It thus interrogates the means by which women negotiate gender boundaries while striving for spiritual empowerment in male-founded/dominated Pentecostal churches. I also explore the factors that facilitate the reproduction of gender inequality from the vantage point of CGMi members and leaders to reveal their unique insights and their cultural and religious perspectives. These ideas are valuable because, from my research, it is apparent that gender inequality has been thriving in the Pentecostal tradition, albeit in concealed ways; and that Pentecostal, women, and gender scholars, and scholars of African religion have not subjected these practices to rigorous theoretical and scholarly investigation.

1.3: Research Methodology, Sources, and Data Collection

To study gender dynamics in Benin Religion and NP, I situated my study within the rubrics of multidisciplinary and theoretical research approaches and used the analytical tools of sociological, qualitative research methods, historical, religious, gender theories and methodologies with religious history and ethnography as the primary methods for this dissertation. I investigated the social-cultural practices that influence gender imbalance and explore women’s negotiating patterns that influence how women shape the NP. Specifically, my research aimed to dispel the assumption that Pentecostal tradition is egalitarian and to enhance understanding of the diverse ways that cultural practices drawn from Benin religion help to shape gender dynamics in the NP. I submitted an IRB that was approved by Rice University.

---

8 This study addresses an aspect of gender relations with particular focus on the narratives of the first woman archbishop within the NP. The study shows that despite all-time rhetoric that abounds about
My research question was concerned with how social-cultural constructs borrowed from Benin Religion help to reproduce gender inequality. I mostly did this by testing cultural assertions about women’s leadership positions in CGMi and by extension, the NPC. ⁹ (See Appendix A for the interview guide and the questions used for these interviews.) To interrogate the gender inequality, injustice, and their social-cultural implications, I chose ethnography and the qualitative research method because they enhance ethnographic data collection. Martin Hammersley and Paul Atkinson observed that ethnography involves “participating, overtly, and covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extensive period, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and asking questions through informal and formal interviews, and collecting documents. In fact, gathering data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the Pentecostalism (how open, and welcoming of all people); it is still an androcentric institution and has been primarily influenced by the indigenous Benin Religion. In modern Benin, one would assume that the indigenous views on and about the place of women would be progressive with the presence of contemporary Christianity, particularly the Pentecostal churches that claim to be egalitarian. My study suggests that Pentecostalism is the women’s movement and provides a space to share experiences as sisters. For examples scholars like Fatokun (2006) was upfront when he argued that the emergence of Pentecostal churches has turned a new page in the history for women, and Allan Anderson (2013) confirmed these positions when he identified women’s involvement to be central to the global Pentecostal expansion. Moreover, critiques of women in leadership roles in the society are quick to hold that male and female are complementary in many respects in Benin society. They also cite the example of the growing number of women who now assume important leadership positions which were not a common practice in the early days of the church or even in Benin indigenous society. They are quick to point to the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) that appoints women to key positions since 1998. They, however, turn their attention from the likes of Winners’ chapel of David Oyedepo and Deeper Life of William Kumuyi who although are also Pentecostals but would not have a woman in important leadership positions, or the struggles Mrs. Idahosa endured to assume the important leadership position. Therefore, I am using Margaret’s experience to expose the lived experience of women within the Pentecostal tradition and to imagine new possibilities for checking gender (relations) inequality. Recognizing the modes of repression that exist “behind the scenes,” helps me account for the cultural laws and social reality that impact on women within the Pentecostal polis; which in themselves are relevant for understanding modes of power and normative forces that drives gender relation in the polis. ⁹ An Ethnographic (qualitative) approach was more appropriate than a survey because I was interested in how social-cultural constructions aid the reproduction of gender inequality and how women negotiate this gender boundary in the NPC. Although ethnographies typically rely on a smaller sample, they have the advantage that we gain a more comprehensive understanding of the respondents. The research participants are allowed to speak for themselves, and the researcher can observe the respondents in the context of their everyday living. As is evident in this study, the qualitative approach shows information that is mostly undermined by survey research.
The ethnographic study enables a researcher to participate in the day-to-day activities of the locals and Pentecostal tradition. I was able to learn how women negotiate religious boundaries in a male founded and dominated church. Such ethnographic study helped me to conduct fieldwork in the most natural environment of the participants, to observe Pentecostal praxis and listen to local Pentecostals’ narratives, rather than be under conditions created by the researcher.

Seeking to uncover the gender injustice in the Benin Religion and NPC, this research used data from a variety of sources: I consulted and analyzed secondary library materials, and the church’s literature including editions of the Redemption Faith Magazine, Annual Church Convention Programs, and Women’s Convention Programs. I also collected data through qualitative sociological research as I engaged in participant observation and held unstructured in-depth one-on-one interviews. By unstructured, I mean that the research and data collection did not follow a fixed and detailed research design with a fixed sequence of questions; the interviews were free to the extent that I asked questions which gave the respondents an opportunity to reflect and discuss the issues in a dialogical manner. These meetings I recorded to capture the conversations more accurately than mere note-taking would allow. I employed a relatively open-ended approach to such meetings and focused on cases of individuals and small groups of people to facilitate discussions. I modified my initial questions in the course of the study. I took note of oral accounts that many times provided unsolicited information not included in my open-ended questions. The verbal reports allowed me to use what people said as evidence about their perspectives and the more critical cultures to which they

---

belong. The interviews with members and leaders took into consideration information participants provided to one another, as well as information unsolicited by the researcher.

My process of decoding and analyzing the data developed from my observation of what people said and did during the research, not through the use of observation schedules or questionnaires. Last of all, the analysis of the data required an interpretation of the meanings of the data I collected, and how the local and broader context implicated them. Hammersley and Atkinson have argued that “ethnography is not far removed from the means we all use in each day life to make sense of our surroundings, of other people’s actions, and perhaps even of what we do ourselves.”\(^\text{11}\) This insight was helpful when I was in the field because it reinforced the notion that I had to work with the knowledge available through observation and critical dialogue as I listened to and evaluated what I was hearing in response to my interaction with the members of the church and the community at large.

I found these approaches helpful and crucial as they opened new vistas for a holistic approach to the study of religion and gender practices in line with what Clifford Geertz advocated. For Geertz, culture is a text that adopts a “writing” method that he called the “thick description”; this thick description allows an ethnographer to understand how the people of that culture interpret their experiences and themselves as cultures is a complex assemblage of texts that constitute a web of meanings.\(^\text{12}\) Geertz is correct to assert that one best learns about a culture holistically, meaning in ways that consider all aspects of that culture’s social relations.\(^\text{13}\) Although this theory does not always offer a

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 4.


\(^{13}\) Ibid., xxii.
clear path for understanding complex questions, the theoretical approaches I used as the researcher brought me closer to different modes of thinking than would have happened if I had depended solely on a literary analysis of the religion and religious practices of these folks. Personally, conducting the interviews enabled me to observe behaviors directly in the course of interactions, to reflect on the experiences (during the research), and to illuminate the phenomenon under examination. I transcribed the interviews and coded them for themes related to the central research question—that of the place of women in significant leadership positions.

I used a grounded theory approach for my data analysis. Here, I framed the context for my auto-ethnographic research and laid out my stance to show the personal and subjective position that I bring to this study. I focused on the subjective perspective that influenced how I analyzed my auto-ethnographic data. I described the ethnographic/qualitative method to illuminate the conventions I used for collecting my data. My research participants guided the mode of inquiry and orientation of the investigation to understand the specific subject matter. For example, the data I collected and the participant-observations in which I engaged in this research allowed in-depth analysis of choices and meanings.\(^\text{14}\) That is, this approach enabled me to match a respondent’s response with the data collected from the one-on-one interviews. My respondents spoke about their understanding of gender inequality and how the church reproduces it. I paid attention to the reasons respondents gave for women filling or not filling crucial leadership positions and whether they interpreted such ideas as a social-cultural creation that is subtly grounded in the Scriptures.

I was an active listener in the interview process. As a result, I was able to ask for clarification on the spot if needed and could decide how to shape the interview by how it was going and what information the respondent was giving me. As much as possible, I avoided leading questions and made an effort to remain aware of what was and what was not said by my interviewee, realizing that people make such choices for particular reasons. Every interview was audio-taped.

Such choices had another underlying reason. In Nigeria, studies on women focus chiefly on three major linguistic groups, so that we know little of the gender dynamics that are at play in cultural groups that are considered “minor” within each of the linguistic enclaves. The result is that in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, what we have are the silenced voices of many women, their stories, and experiences. It is thus not enough to read narratives of scholars who would not know how to translate theories into practice; it is the right thing to invite the people to speak for themselves and to consider their understandings of being through their own eyes and words.

I visited the site of my ethnographic research, Benin City, on two occasions. First, from April to July 2015, I did a pre-field study for four months to develop and clarify research problems and questions before the actual fieldwork began. At this time, I attended religious services to identify potential individuals and groups for an interview and to interact and establish contact with potential research participants. Through these encounters, I was able to watch, listen, and ask questions. These interactions are in line

---


with the social research methods and goals that enable the researcher “to acquire a good sense of the social structure of the setting and begin to understand the culture(s) of participants.”\textsuperscript{17} I approached both the church and the Benin religion adherents by personal visitation and engaging them in conversations.

I returned to Benin for another eight months (February to September 2016), bringing my research period to a total of twelve months. Despite my promises of confidentiality, many of my respondents specifically requested that I should not mention their names. To protect their privacy, I used pseudonyms for most of the respondents I discuss in this project. Some persons expressed their willingness to participate but could not do so for lack of time. Another challenge I had in the social setting was the reluctance of some leaders to talk with me as they felt doing so would be tantamount to betraying the church. During this time, I made visits to CGMi headquarters, to six branches of the church, and to other Pentecostal denominations in Benin City to observe, meet, and interact with members and leaders in the church. I met with women and men members and leaders of the CGMi—most of whom are founding members, and a handful of others who joined the church over the course of time. Most had bachelor’s degrees while a few had master’s or doctoral degrees; while a few members were affluent, most were middle class. The data presented here include extended interviews and participant-observation of congregation services and women’s meetings. To examine the approach to women’s leadership, I re-enacted the dramatic event that came with the nomination and consecration of Margaret as the archbishop of CGMi.

I conducted interviews with selected leaders and members of the two religious traditions in private settings such as their homes, offices, and spiritual spaces. To

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 79.
complement the oral history interviews, I was present to observe several conferences and meetings, and public ritual events. For example, during my research I went to the Holy Aruosa Cathedral, the CGMi headquarter and local branch-churches and the CWFI prayer meetings as sites of communal meetings. I encouraged women and men to feel free to tell me about their lived-experiences of gender relations.

The time of my research coincided with the passing of the Oba (King) of Benin (‘Uku Akpolokpolor, Oba Erediauwa) and the installation of the current Oba, Oba Ewuare II. Because of social-cultural constructions of binaries, there was a limit to where I was allowed to go to as a female. For example, there was a limit to how far I could go into the Holy Aruosa church (that is representative of the Benin religion) because I am a woman. Also, for me to access the Ohen Osa (high priest), I was taken out of the church building and went into the building through the door at the back of the church building.

I conducted extended interviews with a total of fifty-six participants: twenty-one people of Benin origin; fifteen CGMi leaders, and twenty members who were willing to share their stories. Thirty-five of the respondents were female. The remaining interviews were with males. I had three focused group discussions with women who have formed alternative groups to that of the church. The participants with whom I did in-depth interviews ranged from twenty-five to eighty-nine years of age.\(^{18}\) Most of the respondents were married, a few were widowed, and some were single and never married. They were mainly engaged in formal leadership in their local churches. Some regularly attended church, at least weekly services, even though they were not leaders, while others were involved in other religious activities outside of weekly worship.

\(^{18}\) The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between one and two hours.
I observed in the NPC that although women were in some leadership positions, the church accepted them as necessities. Women’s leadership (including Margaret being an archbishop) was/is considered to be less than ideal, occurring merely to fill a gap, or on the death of the male founder. I do not claim that my sample is representative of all NPCs, but I do think, as noted above, that the CGMi mirrors the larger NPC and thus raises important questions about modern NP. Given the information, I gathered, and given the influence and impact of the particular church I studied, it is fair to make some broad observations about gender dynamics from this Church to the universe of NPC and to show the ways that Pentecostal tradition may have been influenced by gender relations as practiced in Benin religion. I chose this particular method of collecting data through interviews and participant-observation because it seemed likely to produce useful information.

While there are several benefits to one-on-one interviews, Stephen Everett notes that this technique has some limitations. For example, interviewees may be dishonest or unwilling to discuss certain matters or errors “even years after the fact.”\(^\text{19}\) Everett also argued that some interviewees may not be able to provide an accurate account of the past because of memory deficits. Although Margaret Idahosa became the archbishop about nineteen years ago, it did not necessarily diminish the value of the interviews. During the study, some leaders who started the church in its early days were able to recall significant events and experiences that they have experienced since joining the church.\(^\text{20}\) In addition to these interviews, I also consulted several earlier interviews done by other researchers and journalists since the assumption of Margaret Idahosa as the Presiding Bishop. It thus


\(^{20}\) Ibid., 3.
makes sense for this study to have employed a multidisciplinary approach as it combined a variety of analytical constructs and applications with the diverse methodological design. The multidimensional framework gives room for scholars and readers to see gender relations within the Pentecostal tradition in a more robust way that allows them to see the religious implication of emphasizing one gender over and against another.

I am aware that religion and theological arguments contribute to and form part of the gender struggles; therefore, this dissertation also uses theological tools of analysis. In my assessment and discussion, I connected and appropriated the works of Womanist theologians such as Mercy Oduyoye, the arrow-head of African women theology and the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, and Cheryl Gilkes’ narrative understanding of theology, which offers critiques of patriarchal religion. My dissertation is an African religious history founded on the pioneering work of the Circle. Oduyoye and the Circle’s dedication to research and publish have motivated and continue to motivate many African women by giving them the Will to Arise, and I am a product of that project. The Circle’s theology encourages African women, like me, to develop theologies of empowerment from their histories and struggles. The now-famous women that launched the Circle discourses inspired this scholarly endeavor as I hold theology to be the beliefs that guide the behavior and action of faith communities.²¹ I studied Margaret Idahosa’s sermons to examine her theological stance towards gender inequality and how she now informs the choice of the moment for the NP.

The church holds Bible study on Wednesdays, have the end of the weekly prayer session on Friday, and Sunday is, of course, a significant day of worship. Such meetings are typically from 5 pm to 7 pm, and 9 am respectively, except for other special times/days that are announced individually. In between these days, there were/are meetings for various groups/units in the church: choir, ushers, the Bible study group, Youth meetings, the young women’s meeting, the women’s meeting, the follow-up and counseling units, and prayer groups. While I was in Nigeria doing research, the church launched the men’s network (tailored like the CWFI). This launch provoked in me some questions and concerns, primarily: How did men who could not form themselves into groups become leaders in the mainstream church while women who successfully organized themselves into a group network were/are not considered fit for authoritative leadership positions such as the men are?

1.4: The CGMi’s Setting

Walking into the Faith Drive that houses the Faith Arena, CGMi’s headquarters, the first image that greets you is the billboard that displays the pictures of the late and current archbishops, along with a message of welcome to the CGMi headquarters. When you stroll into the circular building, you see an outer court that could be named the picture gallery, which displays pictures of the founding archbishop and his feats in the course of his ministerial exploits. You see Benson along with his wife—the current archbishop—in some pictures. Other pictures have political and traditional leaders in attendance at some significant church events. Then you walk into the main church hall.22

As a participant observer, I sat down, observed and asked questions during the Bible

---

study sessions. I also visited the CWFI prayer meetings as a primary site of communal aspects of women navigating gender boundaries.

### 1.5: Literature Review

Ogbu Kalu in *African Christianity: An African Story* and *The History of Christianity in West Africa* noted that the history of Christianity was formerly written by and for Europeans to the extent that some African scholars and modern European writers still tend to study the history of Christianity in Nigeria from the outside, through such literature. They do this by focusing predominantly on what missionaries did or did not do. In my view, the one-sided account reflected in their actions, writings, songs, and prayers presupposes that Nigeria, like other African countries, had no history beyond the male and Europeanized dominated activities in the country/continent. Adiegbo Afigbo is right to suppose that this one-sided adaptation is baseless. There are many neglected themes in Nigerian history broadly and in Nigerian Pentecostal history more specifically. Moreover, the bits of information we have on the few subjects captured tend to suggest that, contrary to biased popular opinion, women and men were treated equally in Benin religion and NP. Because scholars have yet to investigate the subject in detail from the inside, they are less likely to carry into their study new (and more accurate) ideas and assumptions; their favorite books continue to repeat the distorted views.

When studying gender relations in Benin and Pentecostal traditions, my project troubles the dual binary and examines the resistance that women formulate in Pentecostal faith traditions which Pentecostal scholars overlook. I discuss ways that women engage

---


in negotiating gender boundaries in male-dominated faith communities. By providing a focused interdisciplinary analysis of the social-cultural constructions and by interviewing folks of Benin origin along with the CGMi leaders and members, my research provides a more detailed and careful argument of the social-cultural creations that have become normative. This interdisciplinary analysis is vital because issues of gender inequality in the Pentecostal denominations do not receive the attention they deserve.

Other scholars such as Samson Fatokun, Ogbu Kalu, Matthew Ojo, and Nimi Wariboko have commented on aspects of Pentecostalism at different times. Although the focus of these scholars does not relate to my particular research interest, their failure to discuss gender dynamics within Pentecostalism reinforces my point that NPT masks gender inequality. These historians of African Christianity give attention to women issues only in passing; they pay no serious consideration to the gender dynamics in the Pentecostal tradition.²⁵ In his work titled “Women and Leadership in Nigerian Pentecostal Churches,” religious historian, Samson Fatokun focuses on the increase in women-founded Pentecostal churches. He explores the place of women in NPC and highlighted the contributory roles they played, but pays only passing attention to their marginalization.²⁶ Ogbu Kalu in his *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* focuses on ways that the growing Pentecostal adherents engage with the supernatural in diverse contexts. He shows how African Pentecostalism is distinctly African and discusses controversial issues such as church teachings on the prosperity gospel. Since his primary focus is to explain the identity of Pentecostal tradition, Ogbu pays only marginal attention

---

²⁶ Fatokun, Ibid., 193–94.
to women’s issues and fails to consider gender inequality. Nimi Wariboko in his work titled *Nigerian Pentecostalism* suggests that Nigerian Pentecostals stress divine agency over the human agency. He explores how Nigerian Pentecostals perceive and engage with a spirit-filled world in relations to different aspects of life. Although he addresses gender issues, he fails to include gender inequality among those problems.

Nimi Wariboko, like Ogbu Kalu and Matthew Ojo, proffers excellent narratives replete with insightful details about the historical formation of NP. They center their history on the different formative eras and the social-economic development that aided the explosion of the Pentecostal church in Nigeria. Their works are invaluable to my dissertation as they document several specific ways that Pentecostal leaders and members factored into the early formation of the church. These scholars’ analysis centers more on the involvement of male members than on that of female members. Since this thesis examines gender relations, I endeavor to explore the place, role, and contribution of women through the lens of Margaret Idahosa’s life and ministry.

In addition to these religious scholars, African theologian Mercy Oduyoye discusses the involvement of patriarchy in the reproduction of gender inequality in Africa. She pays explicit attention to patriarchal tradition in Africa and its churches. She argues that patriarchal culture has and has had a significant impact on the formation of the church in Africa.

My work focuses on the history of CGMi in Benin City and analyzes how they evade gender inclusion and re-enact gender inequality. I focus on CGMi in Benin City, Nigeria because it is an acclaimed trailblazer for modern Nigerian Pentecostalism and

---

28 Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*.
29 Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*. 
was the first church to consecrate a woman into the highest position as the presiding bishop and the spiritual head of the church. I have yet to find significant works that relate closely to this particular research focus.

While a few church historians have provided detailed accounts of the CGMi and its founder Benson Idahosa, there has yet to be a comprehensive narrative of Margaret Idahosa, the first female archbishop of a Pentecostal church in Africa and the drama that played out over the course of her consecration. Her story has been in the shadows, often told only as an appendix to that of her husband. Although existing works, therefore, focus more on Benson than on Margaret Idahosa, they help me to contextualize the social-cultural constructions in the framework of the broader NPT. Furthermore, his biography by Ruthanne Garlock provides in-depth and well-documented research on aspects of CGMi’s gender practices. Because her objective was to offer biological sketches and formation of the CGMi and Benson Idahosa’s contributions to modern Pentecostalism, she did not give focused attention to matters of gender in the church. She mainly discussed the roles and diverse charismatic orientations that Benson introduced into the Pentecostal tradition in Nigeria.

Although my work looks at the writings of some of these scholars like Adelagan and Ruthanne Garlock that have examined Benson Idahosa, and although I build upon their historical analysis, our studies have different scopes and objectives. My dissertation concentrates on gender relations in the CGMi. Through focusing my analysis on gender dynamics and the path women travel to negotiate gender boundaries in male-founded and


dominated Pentecostal congregations, and through employing more recent findings, my research uncovers subtle ways that the church reproduces gender inequality that Adelagan, Fatokun, Ogbu, and Wariboko did not highlight. My approach is primarily historical and ethnographic in its examination of gender practices of NPC, and this aspect of my exploration is therefore much more detailed than that of previous scholars’ works.

Focusing on the perspective of CGMi leaders and members helps me to analyze how their theology factored into their engagement with gender relations. I recognize and investigate ways some members and leaders’ beliefs prevent them from standing up for gender equality. My analysis also differs from that of Pentecostal scholars who focus more on the historical formation and liturgical practices rather than critically interrogate gender relations. I discuss how Margaret Idahosa’s theological stance factored into the engagement of CGMi/NPC’s position on gender inclusion. Consequently, I provide a more expansive discussion of how her theology impacts NPC’s position on gender equality.

Pentecostals have long demonstrated their basic cultural stance that negates the Pauline position on equality as captured in Galatians 5:28. I propose that gender inclusion and gender equality are essential for social change. I am of the view that Ogbu Kalu’s focus on the Holy Spirit is relevant for my analysis. He did not underestimate the influence that spiritual empowerment has on social and gender justice, or how such empowerment has profound implications for liberation from gender injustice and inequality. He deduced that the valuable struggle for freedom comes through a valid encounter with the Holy Spirit. He also maintained that people who encounter the Holy
Spirit are inspired to engage in opposing social evil such as gender injustice.\textsuperscript{32} Similarly, Andrew Davies is of the view that it is the Spirit that fosters \textit{koinonia}, an ardent sense of community among believers, and that allows a genuine promotion of egalitarianism with the congregation (Ephesians 4:3; 2 Corinthians 13:13).\textsuperscript{33} While spiritual striving can have significant implications for social change, spiritual quest will further compel many Pentecostal women to embrace their femininity along with their spiritual calling. It is evident that spiritual experience empowers many women in male-founded Pentecostal traditions to negotiate gender boundaries and establish their spiritual callings. I discuss ways in which some women’s beliefs in divine power led them to advance their callings in telling ways. For example, some women informed me that “they continue to be part of God’s process in NPC because they trust God was divinely directing them to do his will.” Certainly, prayers and other spiritual traditions have given some Pentecostal women the nerve to step into the public arena to address gender injustice, gender inequality, and social change. The women think that the Holy Spirit can boost the strength and power of all humans to respond to the spiritual calling for their lives, irrespective of gender.

\textbf{1.5: Outline of the Chapters}

This dissertation, divided into seven chapters, each with specific theses, bears witness to and supports my findings that the gender dynamics that are at play in Benin religion and Pentecostal tradition subtly borrow some gender practices from the culture in which they are situated. I call upon my readers to understand this dissertation as a response to the lacuna already created by various scholars of religion, particularly Pentecostal studies scholars. Furthermore, this thesis recognizes Nigerian Pentecostal

\textsuperscript{32} Kalu, \textit{African Pentecostalism}, 30.
women as resources that contribute to the development and continuous expansion of NP. Every chapter of this dissertation provides information on the subtle gender relations that are at play with the two religious traditions—Benin religion and a Pentecostal denomination—selected for this study.

Chapter 1 is entitled *Benin City: The Ethnographic Research Setting*. This chapter traces the history of gender relations in Benin tradition, and how this history has impacted the way the Benin people interpret gender relations. It is divided into two sections. The first section sketches a socio-historical genealogy of traditional Benin society as the location of my research inquiry. In the second section, I first situate and chart the utility of social-cultural markers through sociological theories. I analyze the social-cultural construction of gendered ideology that creates binaries—superior/inferior, profane/sacred, with specific attention to gender binaries. I suggest that these binaries strengthen normative hegemony and exaggerate male supremacy over women’s inferiority to set the exclusionary mechanism in place. I theorize that social-cultural beliefs and practices produce gender injustice. I discuss the origin of gender difference within the Benin City religious tradition by examining beliefs as they inform and form ideologies about male and female—an idea that illogically reproduces and perpetuates existing social ills. I then problematize the reproduction and continuation of gender as a popular frame of reference. The social-cultural priority afforded male superiority forbids female from assuming authoritative leadership position such as becoming an *Oba* (king), *odionwere* (street head), *okaegbe* (family head), or *enogie* (community/town head). Moreover, because a male-dominated bureaucracy established and maintained Benin tradition and administration, it is no surprise that the new dispensation efficiently and
deliberately excludes women. Therefore, I argue that the struggle for the agency and the conceptualization of binaries are grounded in social-cultural ideation. I posit that this pervasive gender injustice in Benin reproduces a distinctive gender relationship from which Pentecostal tradition in Benin City, Nigeria takes root, and on which it draws and builds to continue their gender (policing) dynamics efficiently. As a counterpoint to such articulations, I suggest that gender inclusivity should be blind to gender preferences.

Chapter 2 is entitled *The Emergence and Socio-Historical Backdrop of Modern Pentecostalism in Benin City*. The primary goal of this chapter is to focus on the emergence and the socio-historical formation of a revolutionary Pentecostal congregation—the CGMi—which informed the shaping of modern Nigerian Pentecostal tradition (NPT). I do this to draw scholarly attention to the pioneering efforts of local people in my research location to the formation of modern NPT. Using the CGMi as a lens, I focus on how the NPT borrows social-culturally constructed gender practices from the locale in which it took root and became established. This chapter provides evidence that CGMi is still a male-dominated institution, although it brackets the fact that right now a woman holds the highest position of leadership, insisting that “Margaret occupies the exalted position ‘in trust’ for another male,” meaning her son.

Chapter 3 is titled *The Dawn of a New Era: The Framework for Policing and Reproducing Gender Boundaries in Nigerian Pentecostal Tradition*. Here, I move into the heart of the dissertation, foregrounding the conceptual, sociological, and analytical framework of the social-cultural ideologies that are normalized and employed to police gender boundaries and reproduce gender inequality in generally unnoticed day-to-day...

---

ways. I appeal to thinkers like Pierre Bourdieu and Cecilia Ridgeway as a corrective to the troubling dimensions of this church’s existential thinking. I suggest that humans exaggerate the worth and abilities of themselves more than other humans to solidify and secure their sense of identity and position. I discuss ways in which gender stereotypes and inequality affect holistic gender inclusion. Here, I argue that gender inequality is a social-cultural construction that impacts the treatment of females and males in different ways but will fade away if the church adequately addresses its biased belief about status and gender. The chapter begins a complicated process of charting the social consequences of creating and sustaining a gender gap, as well as unpacking the connective fiber that church members believe at the social, cultural, and personal levels. This chapter focuses on this marker and makes sense of the process that fuels an imaginary ideology that ultimately comes to be considered a norm – a “truth.”

Chapter 4 is titled *Margaret Ekhoeragbon Idahosa: Towards the Religious History of the First Woman Archbishop in Nigerian (Benin) Pentecostal Tradition*. It begins the process of exploring Margaret’s religious history while challenging the de facto power of tradition and patrilineal norms that male leaders invoke to disinherit female members of the faith community. Here, I invoke the drama, and I outline the response that shrouds Margaret eventual consecration as Presiding Bishop to validate my hypothesis that aspects of Pentecostal tradition continue to perpetuate gender inequality even though they claim to empower their members. This outline is a response predicated on uncertainty and the embrace of limitation. I begin by offering an explication of how the social and religious orientation reinforces itself in perpetuity. I then suggest a twist and reiterate that historicizing women narratives as a means of coming to terms with
gender injustice will foreground the interpretation of femaleness in ways that give more credit than it presently does.

Chapter 5 is titled *Lived Religion: The Weight of Femaleness and Women Negotiating Gender Boundaries*. In this chapter, I argue that women bear the weight of femaleness in NPC and therefore underscore ways that women oppose this weight of gender injustice. I show that women in male-founded Pentecostal churches are perceived as having less status than their male counterparts, with the result that they are rarely allowed, let alone encouraged, to assume authoritative leadership positions. This chapter shows how women embrace constraining patriarchal religion in an unequal social-cultural environment and at the same time resiliently negotiate their continuous relevance by constructing alternate paths to express and expend their ministerial calling to reach their goals. They negotiate their identities and empower themselves within and outside of the mainstream.\(^{35}\) Either an individual does this on her own, or women employ group tactics to negotiate gender boundaries. I describe women’s networking through CWFI, the “women’s Church,” as a way of empowering themselves through the shared message of Christ with men to transcend gender injustice and eventually be recognized as legitimate candidates ordination in the mainstream church. The study demonstrates the potential ability of women and the process of negotiation as tools of day-to-day living that adds to our knowledge of the nature and meaning of gender inequality in Pentecostal tradition in the daily lives of Nigerian Pentecostal women.

Chapter 6, entitled *Transcending Gender Injustice and Weaving Models for Change and Continuity* is the summation of this dissertation. Here, I present an expansion

of the subject matter, methodological implications, and the subject consideration for future research in religion. The chapter demonstrates how the creative embrace of gender inclusion and equality could help the Pentecostal faith community. This chapter offers a glimpse into the complicated lives of women and how they negotiate the gender boundaries in their everyday lives. I challenge the categorization of the Pentecostal tradition as egalitarian because patriarchy seems not to have loosed its dominant hold on the culture. At least the drama of Margaret Idahosa’s consecration shows that the women’s inclusion is still a hard sell. I argue that equality between the female and male need not be a gender “war;” and should not be. I reflect that the creation of complementary space that welcomes women as well as men will enable the wholesome expansion of the Pentecostal faith community. This attitude will birth the feeling of ownership and open the door to a share in a fair process where everyone’s values are not isolated but given consideration.36

Chapter 7 concludes this study. Here I suggest change and continuity models for transcending gender inequality and the relevance of gender inclusiveness. I specifically draw attention to the principle of nego-feminism as a way forward. I argued that a Pentecostal “pattern of redistribution” will promote a common good that is devoid of religious and gender biases. I also discussed my research findings, methodological challenges, implications, contributions, and directions for future research.

36 Nnaemeka, Nego-Feminism, 377.
Chapter Two

Benin City: The Ethnographic Research Setting

[M]uch of what we have learned about ourselves and the world is historically false, psychologically harmful, and culturally noxious.

Ahati N.N. Toure

This chapter contextualizes a socio-historical genealogy of traditional Benin society and analyzes the gender ideology that affects the Pentecostal tradition in Benin (Nigeria) City. The genealogy of the Benin tradition introduces my concept of “male supremacy” in Benin. My concept of “male supremacy” positions Benin religion and culture in response to the challenge and struggles that are confronting the people of Benin (Nigeria) society. It further provides a lens through which to interpret what such a historical society says about hermeneutical aspects of Benin religious and cultural practices. Through this lens, I gain an understanding of the ways women are perceived and the peripheral position they are often left to occupy. Such an in-depth analysis of Benin religion and culture enables a more clear and precise understanding of the role of religiosity in Benin culture and life, its value and weight in daily practices. Broadly, this chapter situates the data of Benin religion and culture within historical moments from the pre-colonial to post-colonial times.

I divide this chapter into two sections. Section one explores the history of Benin and how narratives are manipulated to relegate women in ways that are mostly tangential while section two focus on the gender dynamics within Benin society. To reveal the nuances associated with gender relations, I employ the works of Benin historians like Jacob Egharevba, Osadolor Benson Osarhiemen, Uyilawa Usuanlele, Flora Edowaye

---

Kaplan, Alan Ryder, Ben-Amos, G.P., along with other Benin scholars. To achieve a critical analysis of the Benin historical account, I will bring these scholars into conversation with sociological theorists. Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of masculine domination and Emile Durkheim’s ritual theory, and others will help chart the respective places of women and men in Benin religion, society, and culture.³⁸ I engage a sociological and critical analysis of the cultural ideation that considers binaries such as the sacred/profane, superior/inferior, holy/unholy identity creation that further categorizes women and men in Benin society. With particular attention to the gender relations, I will reveal how these binaries impact the Benin religious and social-cultural structuration. Finally, I draw an inference on how this normative structure effects the Benin Pentecostal tradition, particularly the CGMi. In my reflection, I suggest that the gender discourse that emerges from the context of Benin Religion is a forerunner to contemporary religious dialogue, and is particularly characteristic of modern Nigerian Pentecostalism.

Isidore Okpewho’s critical study of folklore in Once upon a Kingdom³⁹ has significant implications for thinking about gender relations in Benin. Okpewho’s use of primary sources helps me situate the historical, religious, socio-cultural, and political trajectories that aid the construction of maleness and femaleness in Benin. Perhaps his study of gender relations did not go far enough, but it was a good beginning, and in my

³⁸ I chose these theorists because Durkheim laid the foundation for sociological analysis and around the late twentieth century, Bourdieu developed the theory that have opened up new vistas for critically engaging and questing the social spheres for which gender is part of it.
³⁹ Myth is a traditional sacred narrative that embodies a belief regarding some fact or phenomenon of experience. For Okpewho, myth is the essence of African traditions, and he examines its places in life and thought-pattern of the people. He shows myth to be the basic imaginative resource from which the larger cultural values derive. Okpewho is particularly relevant for my work because of his caution in exploring the links amongst historical interpretation, contemporary politics, and the meanings of gender patterns in myths. He raises the legitimate question about the interpretative framework and how the gender of a storyteller affects the style and substance of the telling. For details see Okpewho Isidore, Once upon a Kingdom: Myth, Hegemony, and Identity. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Uni. Press, 1998). Also see Okpewho Isidore, Myths in Africa. (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 1983).
view, this is not unconnected with the intrigues that we see in the historical narratives. The upshot of this is that few works treat women’s history even in passing, though women’s contributions enabled the formation of the Great Benin Kingdom. Jacob Egharevba makes brief mention of the aborted crowning of women as Obas. Subsequent studies on Benin touch on the historical narratives of significant women (such as Emotan and Imaguero), or highlight occasions where history negatively branded them (as is true of Esagho), or (like Emokpolor) remain entirely silent about the marginalization of women in Benin. This chapter, therefore, explores the often unarticulated gendered palace intrigues that resulted in the ousting of women Obas. Because gender relations in

---

40 Jacob Egharevba, *The Murder of Imaguero and the Tragedy of Idah War* (Sapele: Central Press, 1948); Irene Isoken Salami, *Emotan: A Benin Heroine* (Jos, Nigeria: Mazlink Nigeria Ltd., 2001). Emotan was a market woman who sold wares at Eki-Oba (Oba’s market) and warned the fifteenth-century Oba of a murder plot against him. See Osemwegie Ebohon, *Olokun Worship in Benin Kingdom* (Benin City, Nigeria: Ebohon Centre Publications, 2010), 34–5. The Benin people remember Esagho for her intrigues in scheming to kill the Oba’s only son. Efosa Odeh in a conversation stated that “the Oba recognizes the major role of women in Benin society and usually commemorates these key women.” Odeh’s allusion is of concern and raises some questions: Why does the commemoration of these women not enjoy a national attention as such commemoration would for men? And why are the historical narratives of key women in Benin so few?  

41 Nkiru Nzegwu, “Iyoba Idia: The Hidden Oba of Benin” in *JENDA: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, 9 (2006). Cited in *Rain Queens of Africa*. [http://rainqueensofafrica.com/2012/11/IyOba-Idia-the-hidden-Oba-of-benin/](http://rainqueensofafrica.com/2012/11/IyOba-Idia-the-hidden-Oba-of-benin/) (posted November 4, 2012), accessed on July 26, 2017. There are ongoing debates on Benin history generated by the works of Jacob Egharevba, the pioneering local historian of Benin (1953); for example, see contrary views that Emose and Ororo were males by Osaren S.B. Omorogbe, *Great Benin 3: The Age of Ogiso Foundation (900-1050 AD)* (Benin City, Nigeria: Neraso Publishers Ltd., 1997) and Osayomwanbo Osemwegie-Ero, *The History of Benin: Ogiso Dynasties (40 BC – 1200 AD)* (Benin City, Nigeria: Nosa Computers, 2003). In their bid to advance their de-historicization project, they argued that Emose and Orhorho bore their mothers’ names. This is an instance of mis-information, as there is no other account in which a child bore or bears his mother’s name in Benin. I, however, find Egharevba’s account compelling in situating my argument. He makes it clear that women were crowned as Edaiken during the Ogiso dynasty (e.g. Emose, 584AD to 600AD) (albeit, manipulatively ousted by the Uzama nihiron or seven kingmakers because of severe power rivalries) so that the issue of women as rulers is not supposed to be contentious. The kingmakers manipulated gender relations because they considered the place of the woman to be in private and not public spaces. They employed the hermeneutical capital (using Pierre Bourdieu’s economic metaphor) with which the culture endows them to shortchange Benin women. This bias turned out to be the beginning of the history of legalized gender inequality in Benin City. This structure has since left the distribution of authority, power, position, and prestige in the guardianship of males, while inhibiting and sidelining females from important leadership positions. The political crisis in pre-colonial Benin was gender specific in the sense that the power structure which generated competition for positions, power, and prestige manipulated and sidelined women. This narrative is useful for understanding and interpreting the political and cultural developments since pre-colonial days. This rule has since become a binding norm. The power struggles led to fundamental changes
Benin City cannot be understood without first telling the history of the Benin people, it is to this I now turn.

2.1 Benin City and People: Socio-Historically Speaking

Benin City, also called Edo by its populace, is formally the foremost city of the Edo kingdom of Benin. It is now the capital, the largest and most populous city of Edo state in South-Southern Nigeria. It lies about 40 kilometers north of the Benin River and 320 kilometers east of Lagos. At the apex of its military and political might, Benin kingdom’s borders spanned from Igbirra in the north, the Igala and the Ibo in the east, to the Itsekiri and Ijaw in the south, and as far as Eko in the west. Its last known population in 2017 was 1,125,058.

Not everyone in Benin is Benin. Although the principal group is Benin, other significant ethnic groups like the Esan, Ora, and Afemai exist. So in particular contexts individuals from all parts of the kingdom refer to the Benin-born as Oviedo (child of

in the culture that undermined women’s ascension to the throne. They terminated the place of the woman as an Oba. They balanced this development against the political and cultural constraints. Ultimately, the reforms which were also carried out beyond the Benin society came from the social and cultural construction of gender relations.

42 Ebohon, Olokun Worship, 5–14. The ancient Benin, a West African empire centered in Benin City in modern day Nigeria should not be confused with the modern-day and unrelated Benin Republic, which was then known as Dahomey.


Edo). The term “Edo-speaking peoples” appear first to have been used by N.W. Thomas, who carried out ethnographic work in Nigeria in the early years of the twentieth century. According to R. E. Bradbury, the language is derivative of the vernacular name of Benin City, Edo which they apply to those who speak either Edo proper or closely related dialects spoken within the old Benin Empire, as a first language. These other significant ethnic groups/communities have a long history of linkages and integration between the various ethnic groups. They also trace their descent to the ancient Benin kingdom, so that the dialects, system of marriage, family organization, dance, dress forms, food, handcrafts, music, and other traits vary with their geographical proximity to Benin City. Benin is characterized by dynamic ethnic pluralism in ways that involve cultural fusion because of trade, conquest, diplomacy, travel, and intermarriage. Moreover, because Benin City is home to many ethnicities and several languages, Pidgin English is the major means of communication. (A Pidgin, or contact vernacular, language arises when two speakers of different languages with no language in common try to create a makeshift conversation.)

The long history of the Benin people is captured and preserved in their cultural heritage and can be accessed mostly only by oral tradition. Some sources of early Benin history are scarce, hard to interpret, and lost. Thus, the complexity of Benin history

---

48 For a detailed discussion on this, see Edward Akintola Hubbard. Creolization and Contemporary Pop Iconicity in Cape Verde (PhD Dissertation, Harvard University, 2011).
requires scholars, ethnographers, historians, and archaeologists to depend primarily on oral rather than written history. This complexity poses a great challenge for historians and ethnographers, who therefore mostly depend on written records rather than oral history because they are suspicious of and often undermine oral history as defective.\(^{50}\)

Osarhiemen Osadolor, a professor of Benin history, argues credibly and I think rightly for the relevance of oral history because of its significant contributions to history and as a historical source for the reconstruction and reconnection of the missing dots in preserving historical accounts.\(^{51}\) Martin Cortazzi, a professor of intercultural communication, supports Osadolor when he argues that the oral history/narratives work well if the informed and right local people are approached and not undermined as ‘uneducated’ in Western ways.\(^{52}\) Thus, oral tradition is authentic when writing from/in a tradition without a writing culture, and oral history is a useful point of departure in Benin history/studies, a tradition that did not consider women’s history particularly noteworthy.

To this end, it is necessary to be cautious in selecting historical accounts of these people through indigenous forms of knowledge, which Andrew Apter calls “hermeneutics of power.”\(^{53}\)

This dearth of accounts is unfortunately detrimental to the analysis of data. And such historical reports are many times vague. Case in point: it is still debatable as to whether, when, and from where the Benin people migrated, and whether they

\(^{50}\) Osadolor, *The Military System of Benin*, 17.

\(^{51}\) Osadolor, Ibid, 13.


encountered people who were in the land before their arrival. Thus, a new construal of the origin of Benin often incites reconsideration of the subject. Against this backdrop, I am of the view that what is not in doubt and is of particular concern for this study is the scarcity of any history of women in Benin historiography, and that various perspectives conspire to undermine women as historical agents.

In addition to gleaning narratives from oral tradition, the literature on Benin studies as well as works by Benin historian Osarhiemen Benson Osadolor, Benin freelance writer Ena B. Eweka, and anthropologist Girshick Paula shows that Benin has preserved its past in its unique royal art. Scholars continue to be more fascinated by this royal art than by any other aspect of Benin’s heritage and history. Since 1957 when the Scheme for the Study of Benin History and Culture was set up, diverse research projects have been studying the oral history, language, social, and political institutions, economic organization, the religion, and the art. However, the effect of cultural norms on gender relations and its inference for women in Benin is a topic that none of these research projects has explored. This fact once again supports my argument that women’s history in Benin studies and academic exploration of gender relations has been under-

---

researched. The evidence from previous scholarship shows that the perception, treatment, and dehistoricization of women as historical agents is the effect of the historical narratives that affect religious and cultural arrangements.

The history of Benin origin is traced back and claimed to have begun under the rule of *Ogiso* (ruler or king of the sky) and called *Igodomigodo*. Tradition has it that human habitation of the area dates back to at least 9,000 BC. After the reign of the last *Ogiso*, Eweka became the *Oba* (monarch) and named the city *Ubinu* (land of vexation) which was later corrupted by the Portuguese as ‘Benin.’ Around 1470, Ewuare renamed *Ubini* to Edo in honor of a deserving servant who helped to save his life from execution by his brother Uwaifiokun, the usurper. (Although this claim is debatable, it is not within the purview of this study to explore it.)

Whatever the contention about its origin might be, scholars like R.E. Bradbury and more recently Osarhiemen Osadolor and Uyilawa Usuanlele, amongst others, agree that Benin kingdom is one of the oldest, most stable of the larger political entities, and the most important historical kingdoms of the Forest region of pre-colonial West Africa. Benin kingdom was for a long time unscathed by any world religion before the British, who had an “open” imperialistic agenda that culminated in the infamous punitive expedition of the kingdom under Admiral Sir Harry Rawson’s invasion of February 17th, 1897. This conquest, Usuanlele Uyilawa argues, aided a radical incursion of some

---

59 Ebohon, *Olokun Worship*. 38. Tradition holds it that Ewuare the Great reigned from 1440 and 1474 AD
60 Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin*, 100; Ebohon, *Olokun Worship*, 7, 41.
religions, including “multiple forms” of Christianity, and tradition has it that the
Portuguese built churches in Benin City. Osadolor opines that with this intrusion, “even
though the Oba ordered his son and two of his greatest noblemen to become Christians he
yet maintained his autonomy despite pressure from the Portuguese, Dutch, and British.”
To this day, there remains a traditional symbol of resilience that patterns its liturgical
practice after the Benin religious tradition—the Holy Aruosa (literally the eyes of God,
but it can also mean altar, like Aro Ebo, Aro Olukun) Cathedral on Akpapava Road.

As background to my context, I note that Benin is a polytheistic society with
deeply inscribed traditional theological imperatives that are used to organize power. That
is, even though, as a result of the Portuguese and Christian missionaries, who first visited
Benin arrived during the reign of Oba Ozolua between 1472 and 1485 AD, most
inhabitants claim to be Christians, many still (also) believe in Benin traditional religions
and practice Benin customs. Stated differently, Benin is a pluralistic society; the Benin
people have adopted Christianity and Islam side by side with the traditional religion that
already exists.

The Benin Division (Nigeria) Experience 1897-1960” in the Contemporary Journal of African Studies
Britannica - https://www.britannica.com/place/Benin-City, accessed July 5, 2017; Mawuna koutonin,
“Story of Cities #5: Benin City, the Mighty Medieval Capital now Lost without Trace” in The Guardian -
capital-lost-without-trace (posted March 18, 2016), accessed July 5, 2017; Femke van Zeiji, “The Oba of
Benin Kingdom, accessed on July 11, 2017.
64 Wilson Ehianu, “Holy Aruosa Cathedral in Benin: Historical and Phenomenological Perspectives,” in
predates early Portuguese missionary contact with the Benin kingdom and thus it is not a relic of the
missionary presence in the Benin. It is necessary to point out that information about the modes of worship
in the pre-colonial era is scarce and the present mode of worship appears to have borrowed some liturgical
elements from the Roman Catholics.
65 Adelegan, Nigeria’s Leading Lights of the Gospel, xxxviii; Naiwu Osahon, The Correct History of Edo,
Osadolor Osarhiemen argues that, in line with traditions of modern state formation, the kingdom of Benin should be considered a state. Mawuna Koutonin agrees with Osadolor when he holds that Benin Empire was incontestably the oldest and most highly developed in sub-Saharan Africa dating back to the eleventh century and having defined political structures. For example, early foreign explorers describe Benin City as having a semblance of street lighting and being free of crime and hunger. Huge metal lamps, many feet high, were built and placed around, especially near the Oba’s palace. Fueled by palm oil, their burning wicks were lit at night to provide illumination for traffic to and from the palace. The Portuguese were stunned to find a well-developed and vast kingdom in the heart of an African rainforest. They named it the “Great City of Benin” at a time when Europeans acknowledged few other places in Africa as a city. Immediately, Europeans saw the (economic) need to develop trade relations with the wealthy and developed kingdom. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, word quickly spread around Europe about the wealthy and beautiful Benin kingdom, so much so that new and more visitors were attracted to the Benin Kingdom from all parts of Europe.

Femke van Zeiji, a Dutch freelance reporter, supports Osadolor and Koutonin’s position, writing: “When the Portuguese first set foot [in Benin] at the end of the 15th century, Benin was an empire in the center of the rainforest that surpassed many late medieval European cities in urban development and the streets were lit at night by palm oil lanterns.”

Thus, as noted earlier, an array of beliefs influences the structure of everyday lived experience in Benin City. As a sacred center, it still invokes religious fervor among

---

the Edo-speaking people, so that there are cultural parallels in religious worship, folklore, festivals, and dress. Varied religious festivals mark historic and cultural occasions and seasons. These festivals involve both priestly activities in the palace and ritual dramatization in parts of the kingdom. The most spectacular festivals require the presence and participation of the *Oba* (monarch). Ugie *Igue* and the *ugie-Erha Oba* (festivals) are the most popular and notable of the Benin festivals.\(^69\)

The Benin people believe in the Supreme Deity (God the creator) and call him *Osanobua* or *Oghene-Osa*.\(^70\) The Benin peoples unreservedly accept the Oba’s authority. Historically, the *Oba* has been deified; he is believed to be sovereign, immortal, and divine god-king (God personified/chief representative) with a celestial mystique attached to him. This god-king is first among equals (*primus inter pares*), the principal custodian of customs and traditions; he is the hub of the social, cultural, political, and religious life of the kingdom.\(^71\) The Oba occupies the central seat of customary government in Benin;

---

\(^69\) *Ugie-Obama* is a ritual in commemoration of the royal fore-fathers, and in the *Ugie igue* they ritually venerate the ‘head.’ In Benin, the head is considered the nerve and energy center of one’s destiny. During this festival, the *Oba* celebrates the history and culture of his people and blesses the land and the people for the coming year. During these festivals, the religious priests offer prayers for the blessing of their cult-group, the kingdom, the nation, etc. Benin remains the prestigious sacred center and continues to retain its reputation as the place of cosmogony. For further details, see Wilson Ehianu and Itohan Idumwonyi. "Igue Festival among the Benin People: Response and Resilience of Indigenous Religion," in David O. Ogungbile, ed., *African Indigenous Religious Traditions in Local and Global Contexts: Perspectives on Nigeria*. (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 2015), 227-244; Also see Flora Kaplan. “Understanding Sacrifice and Sanctity in Benin Indigenous Religion, Nigeria,” in Jacob Olupona, ed., *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity*, (NY: Routledge, 2004). During these festivals, the religious priests offer prayers for the blessing of their cult-group, the kingdom, the nation, etc. Benin remains the prestigious sacred center and continues to retain its reputation as the place of cosmogony.


he retains control over the central administration and outside the kingdom, authority is delegated to local rulers in the Oba’s name.\textsuperscript{72}

The monarchical role in Benin is over one thousand years, and succession to the throne is not rotational but hereditary, done through the principle of primogeniture, passing from father to the senior child, in this case, the son.\textsuperscript{73} This primogeniture structure was not always so; tradition has an account of women who were considered fit to ascend the throne during the Ogiso era. I argue that it was palace intrigues that changed primogeniture in favor of the male child.

2.2 Benin: Mythical-Historically Speaking

Their mythic belief positions Benin as the cradle of humanity (Isiagbon), thus the saying, \textit{Edo orisigbon} (Edo is the source of the world and human race). It is a land not considered to be spatially confined or defined, the original home of all beings/things, the enchanted city, the home of divinities, and inexplicable spirit beings which predates other civilization.\textsuperscript{74} The people consider Benin-land as the sacred and political nerve center of not only the Benin kingdom but of the entire world. Thus the maxim – \textit{Obayantor yar se evbo ebo} (the Oba owns the land up to the Western world).\textsuperscript{75}

The Benin people believe and hold strongly to their traditions, customs, belief system, and norms.\textsuperscript{76} Benin filled and still fills the people with a deep sense of awe. This logic of ‘center of creation’ tends to create, I observe, a sense of pride for its male inhabitants as they continue to assume that there is no other place in the world like Benin.

\textsuperscript{72} See Egharevba, \textit{A Short History of Benin}, 78-79; Bradbury and Morton-Williams, \textit{Benin Studies}, 46-47.
\textsuperscript{73} Ebohon, \textit{Olokun Worship}, 14, 57.
\textsuperscript{74} Omo N’Oba Erediauwa (Oba of Benin). “The Evolution of Ruler-ship in Nigeria” in \textit{a paper delivered at the Institute of African Studies}, (University of Ibadan), September 11\textsuperscript{th} 1984, 2.
\textsuperscript{75} P.I. with Omoruyi Aigbe (pseudonym), a palace functionary in his house in Benin City on April 6, 2017.
\textsuperscript{76} Ugiagbe, “Pre-conquest,” accessed on July 11, 2017.
City. This sense of pride necessitates the maxim, *agha sè Edo, Edo o re Ṫ dịọ̀n, Edo gha sè Isi, Edo o re ye re Ṫ dịọ̀n* (if one gets to Benin, Benin is senior, and if Benin goes out, Benin is still senior). This model defines the posturing of oneself and one’s society as more superior in ways that tend to relegate other people or geographical locations. The logic, for me, is an embellishment of a far-reaching contingency. I will argue that it is this same idea of a superior society that informs their idea of male superiority that now works with the social-cultural constructions of maleness and femaleness. The idea produces and reproduces what Pierre Bourdieu calls *symbolic violence*—a state in which the order of the world is one-sided and domineering. In this case, dominated victims perceive and embrace naturally invisible domination as rights and privileges, prerogatives and injustices. Before I draw attention to that theme, I will make a detour to employ my theoretical perspective and methodology to suggest a useful approach to mining and throwing light on women in Benin tradition, and to interrogate the cultural beliefs and the related dilemma that confronts women in Benin tradition.

2.3 Women in Benin (Kingdom) Tradition: Cultural Beliefs and Related Dilemmas

Annette Weiner has argued that women form an essential part of the production and reproduction of the culture within society. Indeed, women in Benin, like other

---

77 For details see Thompson Omorodion, “The Oba of Benin is Born and not Made, Oshiomhole’s Statement, a Sacrilege” in *Otedo: Edo-Nigeria News & Blog* (posted on May 26, 2016) (accessed on July 11, 2017). This is a rejoinder to the claim by one-time executive Governor of Edo State, Adams Oshiomole, who announced publicly that he had appointed the incumbent reigning Oba. Omorodion, in his bid to express how much the Governor has belittled the Oba and the Benin people, categorically said that: “the Comrade Governor, Adams Oshiomole, [should] come out and publicly apologize [to the Benin monarchy and also the Benin people] who feel particularly socially embarrassed, psychologically deflated, and generally hurt by the grievous harm [the] erroneous and annoying announcement has done to the Benin psyche, our collective pride, our cultural heritage....”

women elsewhere, contribute to the making of the society. However, in a patriarchal society like Benin, women are often relegated to the periphery. Even though women are usually well represented in ritual and ceremonial sites, my ethnographic research shows that they are mostly passive actors. From birth, traditio-cultural structures relegate Benin women to the background. As a widely held idea of the downtrodden ‘slave’ and regarded as ‘beast of burden,’ she is considered mere chattel. A model of gender class limitation, she is bound to be dependent despite her virtue, number, industry, and ambitious nature. She is culturally trapped, with hardly any access to basic rights; she has no way of being an authoritative community leader. Her presence is not essential in religious rituals since they consider her profane and inferior. Ebohon Osemwegie, a renowned traditional religion adherent, and advocate in Benin affirmed my suppositions when he stated that women are the objects of religio-socio and cultural isolation. For this reason, men do not take women in traditional Benin into account as a group with a legitimate voice in the community’s affairs. Women are sparingly ‘seen’ and unheard as an okhuo id’agbati. So although in public meetings one hears men say: “This is what the women think” or “This is what the women want us to do,” in fact women are seldom in such meetings to lend their voices to issues that affect them in the community. This stance depicts a Benin that is still very patriarchal and male-centered. It is a situation that resonates with Bourdieu’s theorization of a city “that conspires to sink the [profane]


81 P. I. with Osemwengie Ebohon on July 17, 2016.
female and inflate an atrocious male that is ‘sacred’ and entitled to enjoy the dubious pleasures of power and dominion.”

Religious beliefs and practices contribute greatly to the passive and subordinate status of women in Benin. Lots of inhibitions instituted against the woman in ritual performance turn her into a passive actor in ritual sites. Kokunre Eghafona affirmed this position when she informed me in an interview that “Women are restricted from and yet encumbered with traditional rituals because Benin is still very much a patriarchal and patrilineal society.” Ebohon notes that women are critical actors in the religious spheres such as in the Olokun worship. I am of the view that patriarchal structure is still dominant in this well-preserved andocentric Benin society as I observed during the pre-coronation ceremonies that coincided with my fieldwork in 2016. Women are explicitly left in subsidiary roles and distinctly denied customary leadership positions in public sites.

My interactions with some priests, palace functionaries, and indigenes support my claim that Benin remains patriarchal and male-centered.

For varying degrees, women in Benin hardly form part of the capital class that occupies positions in the customary authoritative leadership structures. According to Bourdieu, religious beliefs and practices contribute greatly to the passive and subordinate status of women in Benin. Inhibitions against women in ritual performance turn her into a passive actor in ritual sites. Kokunre Eghafona confirmed this position during an interview with me. She stated that women are restricted from and yet encumbered with traditional rituals because Benin is still very much a patriarchal and patrilineal society.

Religious beliefs and practices are critical factors in determining the status and role of women in Benin. Ebohon emphasizes that women are crucial actors in the religious spheres, such as in the Olokun worship. The author's observations during pre-coronation ceremonies in 2016 corroborate this view. The interactions with priests, palace functionaries, and indigenes support the claim that Benin remains patriarchal and male-centered.

For varying degrees, women in Benin do not readily become part of the capital class that holds positions in the customary authoritative leadership structures. This is consistent with Bourdieu's perspective, which highlights the role of religious beliefs and practices in shaping the status and role of women in Benin. Inhibitions against women in ritual performance turn her into a passive actor in ritual sites. Kokunre Eghafona confirmed this position during an interview with me. She stated that women are restricted from and yet encumbered with traditional rituals because Benin is still very much a patriarchal and patrilineal society.

Religious beliefs and practices are critical factors in determining the status and role of women in Benin. Ebohon emphasizes that women are crucial actors in the religious spheres, such as in the Olokun worship. The author's observations during pre-coronation ceremonies in 2016 corroborate this view. The interactions with priests, palace functionaries, and indigenes support the claim that Benin remains patriarchal and male-centered.

For varying degrees, women in Benin do not readily become part of the capital class that holds positions in the customary authoritative leadership structures. This is consistent with Bourdieu's perspective, which highlights the role of religious beliefs and practices in shaping the status and role of women in Benin. Inhibitions against women in ritual performance turn her into a passive actor in ritual sites. Kokunre Eghafona confirmed this position during an interview with me. She stated that women are restricted from and yet encumbered with traditional rituals because Benin is still very much a patriarchal and patrilineal society.

Religious beliefs and practices are critical factors in determining the status and role of women in Benin. Ebohon emphasizes that women are crucial actors in the religious spheres, such as in the Olokun worship. The author's observations during pre-coronation ceremonies in 2016 corroborate this view. The interactions with priests, palace functionaries, and indigenes support the claim that Benin remains patriarchal and male-centered.

For varying degrees, women in Benin do not readily become part of the capital class that holds positions in the customary authoritative leadership structures. This is consistent with Bourdieu's perspective, which highlights the role of religious beliefs and practices in shaping the status and role of women in Benin. Inhibitions against women in ritual performance turn her into a passive actor in ritual sites. Kokunre Eghafona confirmed this position during an interview with me. She stated that women are restricted from and yet encumbered with traditional rituals because Benin is still very much a patriarchal and patrilineal society.

Religious beliefs and practices are critical factors in determining the status and role of women in Benin. Ebohon emphasizes that women are crucial actors in the religious spheres, such as in the Olokun worship. The author's observations during pre-coronation ceremonies in 2016 corroborate this view. The interactions with priests, palace functionaries, and indigenes support the claim that Benin remains patriarchal and male-centered.

For varying degrees, women in Benin do not readily become part of the capital class that holds positions in the customary authoritative leadership structures. This is consistent with Bourdieu's perspective, which highlights the role of religious beliefs and practices in shaping the status and role of women in Benin. Inhibitions against women in ritual performance turn her into a passive actor in ritual sites. Kokunre Eghafona confirmed this position during an interview with me. She stated that women are restricted from and yet encumbered with traditional rituals because Benin is still very much a patriarchal and patrilineal society.

Religious beliefs and practices are critical factors in determining the status and role of women in Benin. Ebohon emphasizes that women are crucial actors in the religious spheres, such as in the Olokun worship. The author's observations during pre-coronation ceremonies in 2016 corroborate this view. The interactions with priests, palace functionaries, and indigenes support the claim that Benin remains patriarchal and male-centered.

For varying degrees, women in Benin do not readily become part of the capital class that holds positions in the customary authoritative leadership structures. This is consistent with Bourdieu's perspective, which highlights the role of religious beliefs and practices in shaping the status and role of women in Benin. Inhibitions against women in ritual performance turn her into a passive actor in ritual sites. Kokunre Eghafona confirmed this position during an interview with me. She stated that women are restricted from and yet encumbered with traditional rituals because Benin is still very much a patriarchal and patrilineal society.

Religious beliefs and practices are critical factors in determining the status and role of women in Benin. Ebohon emphasizes that women are crucial actors in the religious spheres, such as in the Olokun worship. The author's observations during pre-coronation ceremonies in 2016 corroborate this view. The interactions with priests, palace functionaries, and indigenes support the claim that Benin remains patriarchal and male-centered.

For varying degrees, women in Benin do not readily become part of the capital class that holds positions in the customary authoritative leadership structures. This is consistent with Bourdieu's perspective, which highlights the role of religious beliefs and practices in shaping the status and role of women in Benin. Inhibitions against women in ritual performance turn her into a passive actor in ritual sites. Kokunre Eghafona confirmed this position during an interview with me. She stated that women are restricted from and yet encumbered with traditional rituals because Benin is still very much a patriarchal and patrilineal society.

Religious beliefs and practices are critical factors in determining the status and role of women in Benin. Ebohon emphasizes that women are crucial actors in the religious spheres, such as in the Olokun worship. The author's observations during pre-coronation ceremonies in 2016 corroborate this view. The interactions with priests, palace functionaries, and indigenes support the claim that Benin remains patriarchal and male-centered.

For varying degrees, women in Benin do not readily become part of the capital class that holds positions in the customary authoritative leadership structures. This is consistent with Bourdieu's perspective, which highlights the role of religious beliefs and practices in shaping the status and role of women in Benin. Inhibitions against women in ritual performance turn her into a passive actor in ritual sites. Kokunre Eghafona confirmed this position during an interview with me. She stated that women are restricted from and yet encumbered with traditional rituals because Benin is still very much a patriarchal and patrilineal society.
are visibly invisible in assuming public ritual ceremonies such as the recent Oba’s
coronation, they are conspicuously absent from the elder's council because exercising
leadership powers is the exclusive preserve of male patriarchs.

A woman can be an Odion-Okhuo. The Odion-okhuo is the senior woman who
sometimes may be the Odionwere’s (or the regent’s) wife. However, this position is not a
political office in the same sense as that of the Okae gbe (family head), Odionwere,
Enogie or an Oba. Within and outside her household, a female has no judicial role; she
lacks the right to do anything without her father, husband or son’s permission. One would
have thought that the royal women are better perceived, but this is only so in principle. A
case in point is that the Iy-Oba and Iye Enogie (Duke’s mother) may, in fact, have
considerable influence, but they express this influence through their kinsman or proxy
rather than act in their capacity as female members of the community. Iy-Oba is the
queen mother and attains her status through female sex roles, but achieves the highest
rank in society as a widow, one who is past menopause, in a role based on male gender
but as a senior chief. In a society suffused with a strong masculine ethos and organized
around a ‘divine’ kingship, she fulfills her destiny as a female, and they honor her as a
male, senior chief. She illuminates both the complimentary and ambiguity of sex and
gender roles as the culture bearer determines. As a wife, she is seldom visible, since
culture confines her to the palace erie or harem. As a widow, in the guise of a senior chief
of the highest rank, she emerges and becomes visible in a male-gendered role. Her
femaleness and sexuality muted, she achieves recognition, expresses her individuality and
identity, and attains immortality within the confines of a traditional society, at the

---

86 See Kaplan, “Understanding Sacrifice and Sanctity in Benin, 401.
crossroads between sex and gender roles. Kaplan observes that the illoi\textsuperscript{87} live in strict seclusion and that one of the palace male chiefs – Osodin – is the head of the erie (harem). Osodin has direct charge of the women, maintains, and reports the conduct and condition of the ikuo-erie (women of the harem) to the Oba.\textsuperscript{88} What is evident from this social-cultural arrangement is the mobility of the Oba and other male citizens of the palace; the illoi, on the other hand, do not enjoy such mobility.\textsuperscript{89}

Power as a resource of social function is currently unequally distributed between male and female, and I argue elsewhere that cultural beliefs and practices help in sustaining this unequal distribution of power.\textsuperscript{90} For example, the oldest man, subject to ‘citizenship qualification’ is the sole head (odionwere) of a community. He and his fellow edion (male elders) make policies, control access to resources, and mediate disputes with the central authority. Traditionally and culturally, a female could never become an \textsuperscript{91}Okai idunwun, odionwere, or enogie whether or not she meets the required criteria for

\textsuperscript{87} Illoi (plural) olloi (singular) also referred to as queens, are the wives of the Oba of Benin.
\textsuperscript{88} Kaplan, “Understanding Sacrifice and Sanctity in Benin, 390.
\textsuperscript{89} Flora Edouwaye S. Kaplan, Queens, Queen Mothers, Priestesses, and Power: Case Studies in African Gender. (New York Academy of Sciences, 1997), v. 810.
\textsuperscript{91} Bradbury and Morton-Williams, Benin Studies, 54, 182–183.
assuming the position; Her age, fame, and wealth hardly count.\textsuperscript{92} Her recognition is usually made through the men in the community so that if a woman meets the criteria for being an \textit{Okai idunwun}, a man in her life—specifically her husband or eldest male child—gets the award.

The titles of class (chieftaincy) are open to all freeborn citizens of Benin, but a Benin woman could never become a regent or gain access to a high ranking title or office. Osadolor Edomwonyi argues that the senior son gets it by right and aspiration.\textsuperscript{93} The woman is not regarded as being ‘freeborn’ like the male because she could not by right gain access, as the male is considered a member of one of the palace \textit{otu} (group). The male child has a formal link with the palace through their fathers, and in this way gain personal identification with the core institution of the state. Bradbury notes that this practice helps to sustain a political, social, and cultural system that exploits females in Benin.\textsuperscript{94}

Although both females and males may enjoy the privilege of an initiation rite into religious cults like \textit{Olokun}, Osemwegie Ero informed me that “female’s duties here are restricted.”\textsuperscript{95} Ebohon asserts that the Ovia, \textit{Ebomisi}, \textit{Okhuae} cults do not admit females

\textsuperscript{92} For details see, Oriyomi Hope Marcellin, “Enogieship and Odionwereship Institutions,” accessed July 11, 2017. For example, the political head of Benin City is an \textit{Odionwere}, a position occupied by the \textit{Esogban} (the second in the hierarchy of town chiefs) who is a male; cited in Osadolor, 21. The \textit{Okaidunmwuns}, \textit{Odionweres} and the \textit{Enogies} help in the administration of Benin kingdom at their various geographical locations within the kingdom. While the \textit{Okaidunmwun} is the street head and must have been the first to build a house on the street (not necessarily the oldest male), the \textit{Odionwere} is the head of a community or number of communities that form a dukedom. And the \textit{Enogie} is the traditional leader or crown head of a community (or dukedom). The Enogie’s position is hereditary; it is usually passed to the \textit{Oba}’s male siblings. Some communities may have \textit{Ohen} (priestess). Conditions for assuming this customary authoritative position is that the person must be the most senior male in the community and must own a house in the community.

\textsuperscript{93} Osadolor Edomwonyi, \textit{Benin Traditional Law}. (Benin: Ribway Printers, 1976), 7.

\textsuperscript{94} Bradbury and Morton-Williams, \textit{Benin Studies}, 61-73.

\textsuperscript{95} P.I. with Osemwegie Ero on May 30, 2016.
The argument advanced here is that although women mythically transform into spirits and although hero deities and worship locally have taken natural forms like a river (the *ovia* and *Ikpoba Rivers*), a tree (*ikhimwin*), and leaves (*ewere*), females could not become a priestess in these shrines. Thus, the most popular cult in Benin is *Ovia*, controlled by two male priests whose offices may be hereditary or elective or assigned through some criteria that the deity uses to indicate selection. Invariably, the priesthood is the male’s preserve while the females become a medium, medicine woman with some knowledge of divination. As an *Ohen* (priestess) in some shrines, she depends on the man to officiate. Because males (elders) are dominant in the priesthood offices, they pass orders to females. Men give an analysis to these orders as ‘divine orders’ that in turn become normative and binding for women and minorities.

Along the same definitional lines of ‘divine order,’ they permit polygamy because it favors the males to have more than one wife. The number of wives and children in a man’s home is typically how one measures a man’s wealth. So, generally speaking, women in Benin are not part of the capital force that accumulates wealth, since owning assets and engaging in economic commodity production is the exclusive preserve of male patriarchs. For example, at the turn of the farming season, she is given a portion to cultivate. While major cash crops like yam belong to the ‘head of the home,’ subsidiary

---

97 Flora Kaplan, “Understanding Sacrifice and Sanctity in Benin, 391.
98 For a detailed discussion of these cults and the role played by women, see Bradbury and Morton-Williams, *Benin Studies*, 185-207.
crops like vegetables are mostly the woman’s preserve. These wives are expected to each feed and look after themselves and their children, and when it is her turn, she must prepare a meal for her husband and maybe extended members of the family who live with them with produce from her farm while the man sells his economic produce—typically yams. This practice, in my view, suggests a denial of her abilities to produce wealth, yet despite her abilities, her contributions are rarely acknowledged.

Families conceive personal relations in master-servant terms. Hence a man’s wives and children are his servants. *Ovbokhanmwen* could either mean “my wife” or “my child, or younger person.” Its effective plural, *Ibieka mwen* means either “my people” or “my little ones,” all implying subservience. The family organizes sexual and supposedly gerontological statue based on subordination. The gerontological plan hardly applies to the woman, as even a mother is *ibieka* or little, so long as she lives in his son’s home (albeit with his love and respect). As her ‘lord’ and ‘master,’ he issues commands, not intimacy.

Women left at the base of society usually become a social force in religious and cultural ritual sites. These women provide music during religious and cultural ceremonies in praise of male folks, particularly the *Oba*. In a personal discussion I had with Madam Atiti Ojo, she proudly said: “We are the ones who provide music in palace ceremonial functions.” My observation also confirms that these women utilize their social capital

---

106 Personal Interview with Madam Atiti Ojo at her house on April 12, 2016.
for eulogizing men in the kingdom. Even in the performance of these secondary roles, males set limits on the ways that females navigate mystic boundaries/rites. Solomon Ikhidero in a conversation with me reiterated Madam Ojo’s stance when he said that: “women could hardly play a role in the coronation ritual ceremonies other than providing songs.”

In addition to being singers, Eric Emokpae affirms Ikhidero and Madam Ojo’s testimony when he informed me that:

“It is an awua (taboo) for a woman to become an Odionwere. Women play important roles in linking the community with the spirit world. Women serve as priestesses and spirit mediums that foretell for the Oba. Women serve as votaries in religious functions and constitute a bridge between the spirit and the human worlds. Women mediums use their spiritual power to support, protect the Oba, and help to counter evil energy from harming the Oba. What I am saying is that although women are the custodian of the spiritual base, they could never hold a customary authoritative leadership position.”

From the conversation with Eric Emokpae, it is easy to deduce that although women possess and exercise ritual and spiritual potency and control the mystic and spiritual realms, yet they become relegated to the background when it comes to assuming customary authoritative leadership positions. As Emokpae informed me: “Women have boundaries because of their ‘profane’ status occasioned by menstrual blood which shows

---

107 I should here state that the Oba of Benin, Omo N’Oba, Erediwu’a’s transition had been made public in 2016. The use of the term “public” here maybe contested as all transitions in Benin have both public and secret/private sides. My ethnographic work coincided with the ritual preparation of the heir apparent as the Ediaken to ascend the throne of his ancestors; he is presently Oba - Ewuare II. I consider my time there as a privilege because it afforded me the opportunity to personally observe some of the ritual activities associated with the coronation of an Oba in Benin City and the public role that women are called to play in such religious and cultural events.

108 Personal observation at the Uselu – Ediaken’s palace on April 20, 2017. In my reflection, I take this personal observation as a representation of how the religious and cultural structure make women visibly invisible in modern Benin. It is right to argue that this apparent passivity of women in the ritual process of making the Oba (monarch) reinforces the attitude of the Benin to the position of women in the society.

109 P. I. with Solomon Ikhidero, a graduate student of African religions at the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State on May 25, 2016.

up anytime and can desecrate a ritual process.” Michael Nabofa, a renowned professor of African Religion, noted that, “The ‘mysterious power’ in the blood that comes out of a woman because of its close connection with the vital life force permeates all things, animate and inanimate. Thus, her biological disposition within the childbearing age forbids her from entering sacred places.”\(^{111}\) Yet Oluwafemi Okunola debunks Nabofa’s theory of blood pollution and argues that menstrual blood has not barred some women from being mediums for the gods and having contact with the spirit-world.\(^{112}\) I am, thus, of the view that the politics of profanity/inferiority tied to menstrual flow constitute an important component of religion and culture. These elements construct and regulate the society to sustain patriarchy. This structure penalizes women’s activity. Victor Turner has observed and argued that this type of notion drive most cultures, such as that of Benin, to label women as “weak” and ascribe to them low status.\(^{113}\) How is this practice not relegation and injustice?

This act of relegation occasions the construction of binaries and the categorization of women as profane, inferior, uncivilized, and weaker vessels. It is clear that the struggle for agency and the concept of profane/sacred identity is grounded in such cultural ideation. I explore in greater detail later why men’s perception of menstrual flow denigrates and denies women and explains the underlying impulse of gender injustice. For otherwise why is it that, even though she is considered mystically superior to the male, men give her biological makeup as the reason they do not allow her access to


religious offices like her male counterpart? This position creates anxiety in women and gives men psychologically satisfying ideas about their superiority. The position also suggests that the Benin male has innate derision and pessimistic feelings for women. The cultural structure embedded in menstrual discourse prompts such denigration, contempt, and fear of women that creating room for her to occupy the position of customary authority as men do is hardly considered. This discourse is where the concept of male superiority and the identity formation of women as inferior, profane, and unintelligible, thus begin to take shape, and Edwin Ardener notes that this creates women that become muted in society.\footnote{Edwin Ardener, “Belief and the Problem of Women, and the “problem” revisited,’ in Shirley Ardener, ed., Perceiving Women (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1975), 1-2.}

In my judgment, binaries become the catalyst for creating a denigrating and gender oppression. This position raises the question: what are the underlying workings that produce and promote this emotional response towards women’s menstrual blood while at the same time her mystical power is prized as being superior to that of a male? I will throw more light on this concern in another section of this chapter.

Overall, and as noted above, the Benin historical development reveals that even before the British colonized Benin, there was a vibrant gender injustice in Benin. Traditions have it that by the fifteenth century, Benin had become a significant power and the largest of the political systems of West Africa engaging in foreign trade;\footnote{Osadolor. The Military System of Benin, 18; Femke van Zeiji, “The Oba of Benin Kingdom, (accessed on July11, 2017).} Benin even exchanged ambassadors with Portugal. By implication, what scholars suggest is that when the first Europeans arrived, they found a highly developed and significant state and kingdom and were impressed by the unique and very sophisticated political, artistic, and
cultural traditions. Therefore, the political system and customs of Benin (Edo) were already well established before the British or other Europeans ever arrived. We know from historical accounts that Europeans fired by missionary zeal were caught up with masculine and patriarchal traditions that were also well established in missionaries’ tenets. That is, missionaries drew on the gender knowledge of Benin traditions to advance the cultural belief structure about women in Benin. This biased gender relation, I argue, is what the Pentecostal tradition taps in to with its gender practices.

Thus, although a school of thought exemplified by Femi Adelegan argues that “the colonialist brought along with them their religious beliefs,” the relegation of women to the periphery in Benin did not come with the arrival of missionaries and colonizers. Rather, their religious belief simply reinforced the cultural foundation that had been laid by the Benin people before the missionaries arrived. The imperial/missionary and local cultural projects allied themselves to perpetuate existing gender relations in Benin. What is most telling is the ethnographic works by European anthropologists like R.E. Bradbury and Ling Roth that showed the extent to which Benin tradition itself undermined and treated women as objects.

Benin tradition has welcomed Benin women’s wombs but not their brains, their bodies but not their minds, and patrilineal descent that celebrates and prefers male to female children as heir. Simply by their presence, men claim that women create their


groups and that Benin tradition does not relegate or exclude them from the center of ritual ceremonies. I shall now turn to the plan to dehistoricize women as historical agents.

2.4 The Politicization and Dehistoricization of Women as Historical Agents: A Sociological Exploration

This section frames the gender dynamics in Benin through the lens of the ousted women *Obas*. The narratives about women *Obas* have yet to be analyzed because they are part of the same female-devaluing schema that emphasizes women’s subordinating identity while limiting her dynamism and power. What, then, is the reality of the gender dynamics in Benin culture?

In this section, I trouble the production of gender inequality as it is captured in Benin history, which mostly fails to give critical attention to the factors that produce and sustain gender inequality in Benin, especially as it relates to political power within the Kingdom. Besides the country’s oral historiography, it was Jacob Egharevba, a foremost Benin cultural historian, who helped to lay the foundation in documenting the historical narrative of the Benin people. According to Jacob Egharevba, thirty-one *Ogisos* reigned during the first dynasty of 600 AD to 900 AD. Egharevba documents the names of a number of the *Ogisos*, some of them women (like Orhorho and Emose), as are some of the titles of chiefs of their court that were considered eligible, and at the time ritually primed to be crowned as *Ogiso*.120 While Egharevba did not note for how long Orhorho reigned, he did record that her chiefs murdered her during a trip to Omi. Emose was noted to have reigned in the *Ogiso* dynasty amidst numerous male monarchs.121 Edeleyo is another woman of interest that historians have yet to explore. She was the daughter of

---

121 Ibid, 2.
Oba Ewuare the Great and sister of Oba Olua. She helped in the political struggle of the ancient Benin kingdom. Tradition holds that when her brother, Olua, refused to accept the crown, and there was no other heir readily available to be crowned, the king-makers ritually crowned the rich, powerful, and influential Edeleyo as Edaiken (heir apparent to the throne). However, Edeleyo never actually ascended the throne of her ancestors, as she became the victim of palace intrigues that the Uzama Nihirion (seven king-makers) concocted. They divested her from being made an Oba after attaining edaikenship and then blamed the ousting on her ‘feminine indisposition,’ meaning her menstrual flow.122

That male king-makers label menstrual blood as “profane” established a manipulative precedent that still today forms an enormous barrier to women’s assumption of customary and political power. This manipulation became the primary political weapon of the Benin patriarchs in advancing the concept of male supremacy for power and prestige, whether of the crown or other positions. This structure of gender relations only exacerbated social, cultural, and gender conflict. The interweaving of interests by the Uzama nihiron illustrates how vital the configuration of gender divide is in a patriarchal society like Benin, yet it is a configuration that underestimates the potential for cultural growth and the advancement of all people’s rights.

I think Alan Ryder’s idea that “the creation of complex political and social hierarchy is a factor in the categorization project in Benin” resonates with the

development of plots that founded gender injustice.\textsuperscript{123} The cultural structure that advances the patriarchal aims of the male members of the kingdom also aids biased categorization. The study of this system illuminates an aspect of Benin history.

Suffice it to say that the documentation of women as \textit{Oba} has continued to be a subject of academic and non-academic debate, and has only underscored the unjust gender (relations) dynamics in the Benin Kingdom. Modern historians critique Egharevba’s work, referring to it as giving only a fleeting impression of Benin history and encouraging others not to pay serious attention to it. However, I find Egharevba foundational historical account helpful for this dissertation and note that many of Egharevba’s critics depend on his foundational account to advance their research.\textsuperscript{124} For he demonstrated the potentials of non-written sources for the reconstruction of the history of Benin before the emergence of academic historiography in Nigeria in the 1950s. He opened new vistas for crucial debates in Benin history and was careful to write women into historical narratives, albeit only sketchily. He is appropriately credited for his work on Benin’s history. Indeed, Osemwegie Ebohon followed in Egharevba’s footsteps but was cautious in documenting the sex of these crowned women \textit{Obas} in his work titled \textit{Olokun Worship in Benin Kingdom}.\textsuperscript{125} His cautious account helps to address and put to rest the works of critiques like O.S.B. Omorogie and Osayomwanbo Ero on this subject.\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{125} Ebohon, \textit{Olokun Worship}, 31-32, 57.
\textsuperscript{126} For details see Osaren S.B. Omorogie, \textit{Great Benin 3: The Age of Ogiso Foundation (900-1050 AD)} and Osayomwanbo Osemwegie-Ero, \textit{The History of Benin: Ogiso Dynasties (40 BC – 1200 AD)}
Historians have assigned dates to the *Obas* whose names they remember.

Osadolor, following the stead of Bradbury, argues that clarification of the chronology of the history of Benin kingdom continues.\(^{127}\) In my view, Egharevba’s historical account is concerned with what happened and why it happened, for as far as he can, he documented why the women Obas were displaced. Sadly, however, newer editions of Egharevba’s classic documentations and subsequent historical narratives have been reworked to dehistoricize and discount the account of women *Oba*.\(^{128}\) Supporting this point, Osadolor, for example, succinctly notes that the king-list published by Jacob Egharevba, and the one collected from Isekhurhe, the priest of the royal ancestors, do not agree with the lists published by European writers.\(^{129}\) To support his stance, he cites Alan Ryder, who blames the conflicting interpretations on the early European accounts. Ryder’s position that European visitors to Benin lacked a sense of history and failed to record anything about the origins of the dynasty resonates with my stance and the ills of deleting women from the historical narratives.\(^{130}\) The accuracy of the time-frame for the king-list, Osadolor thinks, is an issue. It is important to state that the chronological flaw is not the focus of this study.\(^{131}\) Stefan Eisenhofer, a German art historian, argues that chronological conclusion is problematic because of the authenticity of the data.\(^{132}\) I reason with Osadolor that the date does matter to this project. What does not matter is whether Egharevba forced his African oral material into a linear European time scheme.

---

132 Eisenhofer, “The Benin Kinglist/s, 24, 139-156.
What is notable for this project is that Egharevba’s original records had women *Oba* on the list, but that over time women *Oba* were ‘purged’ from subsequent king-lists, and were dispossessed of their historical agency.

Such debates are meant to undermine and discredit Egharevba’s originality. For example, Eisenhofer stated that, “Egharevba’s work is not to be seen as some historical archive, containing oral documents that are handed down and [cannot be] unchanged.”

Yet respected African historians, Uyilawa Usuanlele and Toyin Falola, point us to the novelty of his historical sources. According to them, Egharevba:

> “Benefited from his contacts with Benin chiefs and court historians. [He] started information-gathering from family members and traditional elite. He exploited his intimate friendship with Eweka I (d. 1933) and Akenzua II (1933-1978), both of whom granted him access to the palace. He conducted interviews with the Isekhure palace historians versed in the kinglist, and Ihogbe (the priests of Ani Shrine), and various guild members, prominent men and women, and titleholders.”

Bradbury wrote in 1960 to extol Egharevba for “collecting his data from well-selected informants who had grown to maturity before 1897.” Egharevba’s link with his selected informants validates R.E. Bradbury, Martin Cortazzi, and Osarhiemen Osadolor’s case for the use of oral history/narratives—if they approach the informed and right local people. Also, Uyilawa Usuanlele and Toyin Falola credibly contested Eisenhofer’s stance when they pointed out that the changes which typify later editions of

---

135 Usuanlele and Falola, “The Scholarship of Jacob Egharevba, 304.
Egharevba’s *Short History* may not be distinct from the colonial project that scholars like Eisenhofer pursued to undermine local intellects.\(^{137}\)

This “crawling back” through history to identify the warped art of rewriting history in ways that exclude and demean women relegates cultural structure to a mere system of beliefs passed down in traditional narratives as norms. The singular objective of these debasing debates, in my view, is to dehistoricize women in Benin as historical agents. This elimination, for me, is a political denial and it should be considered provocative, questionable, and problematic. I think that archeological research may one day open a new vista to establishing that women were *Obas* more than is possible at present.

The first section of the chapter explored the mythico-historical narrative of the Benin kingdom. It articulated the religious beliefs and human experiences of the everyday lives of Benin people, especially women. The stereotypes allow scholars to gain a better understanding of the religious imperatives that guide the symbolic violence, modes of cultural, and gender production. What I want to establish here is that the study of the Benin (African) Religion making process allows readers to trace the myth and norms that provide scholars of religion with substantial evidence that can be analyzed sociologically.

In this second section, I draw from ethnographic notes to analyze the effect of cultural norms on gender relations in Benin (African) religions. Here, a sociological approach to my theoretical perspective and methodology help me to interrogate the inequality of gender (relations). I examine the concept of male supremacy and cultural

\(^{137}\) Usuanlele and Falola, “The Scholarship of Jacob Egharevba, 304; also see Jacob Egharevba, 2\(^{nd}\) ed., *Ekhere Vb’ Itan Edo* (Lagos, Nigeria: 1933), 11.
beliefs about females. I show how scholars of Benin (African) religion and gender studies, and primarily Benin scholars, fail to examine the gender (relations) inequality and gender politics that exist within Benin religion and culture. Thus, the primary goal of this section is to offer a sociological and analytical outline that examines the categorization of masculinity/femininity and its implication for Benin society. The next section employs Michel Foucault’s theory of repression to cultural, ritual, and gender politics. This theory is helpful for its insightful ways of conceptualizing the union of human biology with cultural and gender politics. I problematize the cultural discourse and the use of power that treats menstrual blood as a taboo, and, thus, as a tool of exclusion.

2.4.1 Rituals and Repression: Politicizing Women’s Physiology

I analyze Michel Foucault’s theory of repression to problematize the normalization of female physiology as a rationale for women’s exclusion and the system that legitimizes the politics of male supremacy as it resonates with the Benin people’s modern context and historical setting. Foucault’s theory is useful for analyzing the hegemonic sustenance of patriarchal structures. Foucault’s Discipline and Punish is helpful to me not merely for its discussion about physical detention, but for a broader analysis of the function of power. Power becomes a variable and scheming device in societies like Benin City, which continue to “incarcerate” women culturally through continued prejudicial analysis of women’s physiological makeup, analysis that serves only to advance female’s exclusion from the customary and public sites and to increase the power of males, and specifically their power over women.  

While it might seem that the claim of universal patriarchy no longer enjoys the kind of credibility it once had, it remains very much privileged in societies like Benin. For example, amongst the Benin people, menstrual blood continues to function as a taboo, a way to regulate gender relations, specifically to disempower women and keep them from holding powerful public positions. Even at her shrine, she is forbidden to perform certain religious rituals when in her menstrual cycle. Likewise, in a traditional Benin family setting, women are confined to the harem or made to leave the main house for the owehe (private and secluded apartment) during their menstrual cycles, and is forbidden to cook the family meal or be within reach of her husband during her menstrual cycle. If she fails to abide by this rule, the husband has to take a ritual bath to be ‘purified’ again.

Mainstream assumptions about contemporary political actions often fail to take into account the role of rituals in defining gender power relations in the society. Within the context of power analyses in Benin, rituals and taboos have been used to create political and social realities which often appear in the symbolic form. Understanding how efficient ritual processes have become an integral part of modern social-cultural practice is very relevant for expanding our knowledge of how they acquire “disciplinary power” through ritualized mechanisms that characterized the legitimization of power for males.

Yet within the Benin religious tradition, women are assumed to be men’s equal and people judge them according to their “spiritual powers” rather than their gender.

---

139 Ebohon, *Olokun Worship*, 2. If the “sacred” male comes in contact with the “profane” menstruating woman, the “sacred” male is marred and deemed profane. Through this type of gender banning, the superiority of maleness is further reinforced.


differentiation. In fact, in a major religious cult, women and men have equal access to priestly offices. A good example is the *Olokun* worship, which is thought to bring power and wealth to its adherents and the kingdom.\(^\text{142}\) Among ‘*Olokun*’ devotees, women have equal access to the highest priestly office available, thus making feminine authority significant and demonstrating a shift in the power paradigm.

This stance exposes a double-standard, a condition constructed and normalized to exclude females from a position of authority. This stance brings to the fore a much more challenging problem that begs for an answer: what happens during the process of an *Olokun* ceremony if an initiate or priestess in the middle of *ugie* (ritual celebration) begins her menstrual period? Does this action impede the continuation of *ugie*? Will ritualized *Olokun* adulation be suspended? Would the sacred space have been desecrated? If the response to any of these inquiries is in the affirmative, then stigmatizing menstrual blood as profane is a constructed tool to regulate and forbid female’s active participation in traditional political positions and aid the continuous hold on power by males. Through structuring and signifying rituals of gender concerns and decisions, Benin tradition reinforces an overarching male ideal, which gives way to continued reproduction of gender gap. The structure that prevails and subtly propagated is that Benin is a male-dominated society and only males must assume customary and authoritative (chieftaincy) positions. The focus of the next section is to explore the exaggeration of male supremacy.

### 2.4.2 *Omo Okpia* Syndrome: The Mythical Ideology of Male Supremacy and its Exaggeration

In this section, I situate the concept of male supremacy in Benin sociologically and argue that the practice of sustaining ritual activities also structures the ideas and

---

\(^{142}\) Ebohon, *Olokun Worship*, 161, 228-233.
belief systems. I argue that maleness assumes certain superiority. Certainly, from a sociological view, this theory opens the window for interpreting the concept of femaleness that drives subjugation and thus excludes one gender from participating in social-religious ritual spaces. Religious and gender scholars posit that this practice is a means of social oppression that targets women who are supposed to be a functional part of the collective.\(^{143}\)

Bourdieu theorizes that “the social order functions as an immense symbolic machine that tends to ratify the masculine domination” and this stance resonates with Benin society.\(^{144}\) The social construction of maleness is indicative of the prescient weight on gender relations to bring about the social stability that religion and culture offer. It is a fact that gender (relations) inequality structure complexes that advance what is and what is not viable. Christopher Driscoll suggests that gender does some of the heavy liftings to maintain existing power imbalances in society and I agree.\(^{145}\) Maleness is indeed a social construct that is conceived and framed by the individual and then endorsed and perpetuated by the collective.

The social indicators enable the influence of maleness and regulate the social order endlessly. These ritual ideas and actions further favor one gender over the other.\(^{146}\) Female bodies embody certain types of “unwanted stuff” in the ritual domain. Benin is a patrilineal society, and the household domain is ruled by the ‘father.’ Whether in the

---

household or the broader community, it is the male who shapes and enforces laws, laws that only perpetuate this male domination, though under the guise of preserving the family’s ‘integrity.’ Given primogeniture, the most important kinship relation is the one between a father and his omodion (eldest son) birthed by one of his wives, recognized from birth to be his father’s chief heir and successor. On the one hand, an omo ido (son) birthed by enomake ‘wu (a concubine) may not enjoy the same status as omo ne iye ke ewu, but he is placed in the fourth position among the sons even if he was the eldest. However, if the father has no other son, this one enjoys pride of place and inherits the igi’ ogbe (family estate) and titles of his father at the expense of an omodion no okhuo (eldest daughter) ne iye ke ewu (whose mother was duly married).

The Benin man is only guilty of an extra-marital affair except if caught with another man’s wife. The culprit can be sanctioned or penalized by the community, perhaps made to pay for the ritual cleansing that will be done by the family of the husband whose wife was assaulted. While a wife caught in adultery is at the mercy of her husband and his family, an omo ido (child born out of matrimony) is never blamed on a father, as illegitimacy is a non-issue. If the husband loves and still wants her, he will ritually cleanse her, but if he hates her, dire repercussions await her.

Bourdieu argues that people rarely perceive the extent of masculine domination that they embed in their unconscious and therefore rarely call it into question. In this sense, both the dominated and the dominant cooperate. This ritual cleansing situates

147 Bradbury and Morton-Williams, Benin Studies, 158.
148 The implication of the eldest son having a claim to the formal share is that the eldest daughter, even if older than the son, inherits only insignificant items. A female child does not have as much privilege to their father’s estate as the male child.
149 For details of different punitive measures meted out to an adulterous wife, see H. LingRoth, Great Benin, 38–40.
150 Bourdieu, Masculine Domination, 114.
what one can make of the emergence of maleness and femaleness. What becomes of society when it realizes that what it calls norms are merely social-cultural constructions that exacerbate gender (relations) inequality? The wife’s most important status derives from her role as a mother. Motherhood is the focus of her marital, social, cultural, and economic activities and her life. The woman that bears children, particularly the first male child, ensures her status in a polygamous setting and forges lasting ties with her husband, home, and kin. Ogbemudia Imasuen informed me that:

“While a mother’s assurance of support comes through her children, her ‘security’ particularly comes through her male child. Her position and respect are more secured compared to the mother who has a female child as the eldest. This set-up accounts for why a male child is better received at birth than a female child.”

The number and gender of his children determine a father’s socio-economic status. Thus, a wife who bears only female children is responsible for a father’s statusless position.

Consequently, the arrival of omo okpia (a male child) is met with much joy and, in Benin parlance; with the shouts of a “full current,” while the birth of omo okhuo (a female child) is received with lesser joy and with shouts of a “half current!” The female’s birth is almost regarded as “nothing” except for the promise of her future role as a mother. The male child is considered more valuable than the female child. This practice occasions the belief and maxim: “emwin ne Osa ya ye Oba ere a ya ye ogie, no ke ere, ere a ya ye omodion. This maxim literally means: what God used to create the king is what he used to create the prince, and used the leftover to create a son – regardless of his mental fitness or position in the family tree.

151 P. I. with Ogbemudia Imasuen on June 25, 2016.
152 The use of these terms is connected to the incessant power failures (blackouts) often experienced in Nigeria.
153 Ebohon, Olokun Worship, 4.
Benin cultural belief holds the father to be divinely ordained and in possession of the *ukhure egbe* (the family staff of authority/agency). This “staff” is the focal point of ancestor worship at the ancestral altar, and because rituals related to the Benin cosmic view form an intrinsic part of life, only the father can appeal to the ancestors on behalf of the family. At death, the *iye* (mother) therefore rarely enjoys the privilege of being venerated or appeased like the father.\(^{154}\) Although some chiefs, including the *Oba* and some commoners have both *Aro-Iye* (the mother’s shrine/altar) and *Ukhure Erha kevbe Iye*, only male children have the right and privilege to officiate at these shrines. For example, Uyilawa Usuanlele informed me when he offered feedback on this chapter that “I still keep the *Ukhure* of my maternal grandmother’s family as her father had no male child.”\(^{155}\) Thus ancestral veneration rituals overtly affirm the power of male children. The traditional exclusion of women from this process of power and authority influences the construction of social meanings and identities. This ritual process, like many others, is thus an exclusionary tool for negotiating power.

The phrase *ukhure lai ebo* (the staff of agency has returned to the sack) is used to describe an adult male with all female children, while an adult woman who has all female children is stunningly considered childless.\(^{156}\) Childless women (and women who have all female children) were/are considered ‘incomplete in African culture.\(^{157}\) The implication of the *ukhure* returning to the sack is that the absence of a son creates a void in venerating the ancestors, though this is contestable. Communication with the dead accounts for a

---


\(^{155}\) Email response by Uyilawa Usuanlele on September 28, 2017

\(^{156}\) The personal observations by the researcher at different times and locations reveal that it is only in recent times that the Benin people are beginning to reconsider their position on this subject. As the economic downturn continues to take its toll, it is mostly the once debased female children that now care for elderly parents.

high proportion of all rituals and every family forms a group for the worship of its dead.\(^{158}\) Moreover, only male figures are invested with power to venerate ancestors in Benin. Once he has buried his father, the *ehae no’dion* (first son) becomes the sole heir and intermediary between the father’s spirit and the rest of his paternal descendants.

*Uwailomodion* (meaning wealth does not elude the eldest son) refers to the fact that in some lines of descent, hereditary titles or offices pass en bloc with the *igi’ ogbe* as an inheritance to the first son. Nobody approaches “the father” except through the *omo-odion* (first son). The *omo-odion* becomes the priest, and the next surviving brother of his father becomes the *Okaegbe* (family head). The family requires their attendance at all family rites. So the father who dies without a male child leaves a void, and the phrase *ukhure lai ebo* describes the condition of such a father. When this happens, the family transfers the *ukhure* to a second-generation male child.

In no event could a Benin woman break a *kola nut*. This fruit is believed to be a ritual symbol in all religious/ceremonial activities with the ancestors (who are mostly males). It is the eldest male or a palace chief that breaks a kola nut,\(^{159}\) if ever the need arises for a female to perform a rite using a *kola nut*, and then a male child, regardless of his age, is assigned the duty. Ezeaku notes that the rituals of pouring libations and invoking incantations precede breaking the kola nut and that because females never have the privilege or right when a male is present to perform these religious roles, the hand of the male child must first touch the kola nut before any female can break it.\(^{160}\) This belief

---


explains the Benin maxim: *ede na bie omo okpia, ede rio oke rhue okpia* (manhood begins at birth). Esohe Ayere in a conversation with me noted that “This type of practice invests males with certain superiority aura and exalts them to a rank of a demi-god over the females, and then relegates the female to the nadir position where she lacks any claim to authority.”

Ahati Toure, a professor of Africana history, referring to the myth that shrouds male supremacy, including in such rituals, suggests that “much of what we have learned about ourselves and the world is historically false, psychologically harmful, and culturally noxious.”

This idea resonates with the false tradition that elevates the male child as supreme.

Such male supremacy attains a social function by moving beyond individuals to the community that is itself most consequently composed of individual males. My use of “social” here refers to the physical and tangible people in the society. This social function starts with the idea of an individual and then transforms into tangible realities as presented by the *omo okpia* syndrome in Benin. What this means is that individuals construct a specific ideology and with a kind of conviction, hold, absolutize, and pass on these ideologies to the broader community. It is evident from the preceding discussion that the Benin social and cultural world assumes its formation through the construction of ideologies that in turn drive realities and further shape the same tangible realities. For example, it is considered a given that one’s maleness means men should not help with domestic chores and should have more money and property than women. The social and

---

161 P.I with Esohe Ayere on August 2, 2016.
164 In Benin, ancestral spirits are highly regarded and venerated. A male child is alleged to be a connection of continuity between the departed and the generation yet unborn. Their yearning to carry on their line we see in their desire for several children and particularly for an *Omo-Okpia* (a male child), which is considered to be far more important than having innumerable female children.
cultural function of maleness is this ideal played out through quantifiable specifics such as we saw in the discussions on ritual and on marital infidelity. In this way, social and cultural exaggerations reinforce individual ideas that then become societal norms.

The reproduction of the gender gap emanates from the social-cultural exaggeration of the male child. The social-cultural function of this exaggeration is to manipulate the ideological and tangible degree to which the social others face or battle limitations. For instance, the drama that surrounded the ousting of the women Oba emerged as a cultural issue. This drama occasioned the shifting rhetoric regarding social-cultural expectations as a means to uncover what they consider as a sensible social norm. In this way, turning the tables on women-Oba became a norm in Benin culture.

This gender politics that devalues female bodies enables a dramatic denial – a politics of social-cultural utility of males. I agree with Peter Berger when he argued that a society which constitutes in part by individual appraisals of value and later forms part of established institutions is externalization.165 A higher law and order based on demand for social stability is formed based on the cultural ideology that is considered most powerful, in this case, that a woman cannot “head” a man.

In light of this preceding, the social-cultural framework in Benin is formulated based on the ideas of the most powerful religious and cultural capitalist male priests who are empowered to enact religious laws and practices, thereby reinforcing and reproducing structures that control the system already heavily manipulated in favor of men and against women.166 This manipulation and reinforcement of social-cultural exaggerations take shape in multiple ways and showcase the history and culture of the Benin people.

---

165 Berger, The Sacred Canopy, 10.
For a more practical explication of the function of maleness, Bourdieu is quite helpful in outlining the shapes that this reinforcement assumes and their utility through his concept of *symbolic violence*. Bourdieu suggests that a process of cultural consecration which in turn is ascribed a sacred value aids the construction of ideas and social realities as natural and sacred.¹⁶⁷

What is vital for my stance here is the relation between personal ideas and their collective cultural legitimization. Here cultural ideas collude with religious beliefs to absolutize and legitimize the cultural markers such as of women’s worth and ability. What is revealing here is that the concept of male supremacy comes from human reality, and is constructed from the idea that females and males are not equal. This idea, for me, is misconstrued reality and a presumption that men’s lives are more valuable than women’s lives. Maleness carries the seed of its limitation because it cannot function as essence. It means that males break down and fail because they are never really superiors as they claim to be. As a means of perpetuating this bias, males create and sustain fabricated lies through various other exaggerated tales so they can continue to appear as the superior-human. Exaggerated tales are devious narratives about a certain gender that claims supremacy over another gender, narratives that are told or enacted in ways to reinforce the ability of this gender to sustain its positionality. More precisely, these are tales meant to reinforce how superior the male gender is. These exaggerated tales, Driscoll suggests, cover up the lie of human limitation. More specifically, it is a lie told about a particular gender, group, and tribe to create a situation where this gender or group

---

gets a certain form of validation as superior to another. They situate the idea about
gender norms when they justify cultural belief through agreed upon exaggerations of
gender possibility. An example of this is the concept of biological difference and
menstrual discourse that becomes a yardstick for measuring how socially valuable or not
fully human the female is. What follows this misrecognition is the clash for identity
creation.

They form these identities through loyalty to a belief system, customs, and values,
social-cultural archival norms that emerge from traditions, and they house them in the
mythical narration that comes with certain socio-historical factors. They often socialize
these factors in ways that do not offer occasions for women’s active participation in
traditional politics. The effect of this distinction is that the binary described by Emile
Durkheim has masked a person or group’s rapport and duty to another gender or group.

Durkheim yet argues that “belief, myths, and dogmas” present the capital for
plotting profane and sacred. They value maleness as a rubric and certainty in ideal
mode and femaleness as that which smears the specific and sacred male. In this way,
maleness comes to assume an import that is larger than what existed. This practice
implies that maleness becomes constructed in ways that mask the true nature of males
and in the course of time males became the vista of supremacy that drives as the social-
cultural point of reference. And defying this social-cultural principle is met with
sanctions, often in the form of recreating mythical accounts to advance the exclusionary
project. This study, thus, shows the impact of these contrary rites and how it aids the

169 Ezeaku, “Women in Traditional Igbo Society,” 2; also see Bayart, The Illusion of Cultural Identity, 93;
171 Durkheim, Ibid, 37.
construction of gender codes of conduct, but it hopes that future work will focus on the multi-sided allusions of these exclusionary projects.

2.5 Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I have paid attention to my ethnographic location, Benin (Kingdom) City. It is clear that Benin (kingdom) City is an African state whose growth was already established and not engineered by contact with Europe. The kingdom had mastered the intricacies of foreign trade and political expertise long before Europeans arrived. I argued that Benin has always been patriarchal, had established its gender relations, and made patriarchy its organizing principle before the missionaries arrived; however, the Europeans used their system of patriarchy to further reinforce their patriarchal interpretation of a tradition already established in Benin.172 My work advances David Johnson’s stance that “colonialism tends to strengthen the power of male (irrespective of tribe/color/class) over women in Africa in relations to issues ranging from household tasks to the allocation of land and properties.”173 So, the cultural and religious tradition in Benin was reinforced by the European/colonizers’ exclusionary tradition, and they (the Europeans/colonizers) did not help to liberate the womenfolk. They overemphasized the role of husbands as heads of households and treated daughters, sisters, and mothers as socially, politically, and religiously irrelevant in the scheme of things.174 It was/is, therefore, the result of a combined effort that created the traditions that instituted hegemonic normativity and exaggeration of male supremacy in Benin, thus leaving women in peripheral positions.

173 Ibid.
I also argued that gender relations are somewhat flexible in some cults, such as the cult of *Olokun*. Is there any reason, then, why male adherents cannot extend this flexibility to other spheres of life within the Benin Kingdom? The continued exclusion of females apparently slows down the pace of development. Inclusive gender relations are apparently not the hallmark of this society’s framework, and one way to achieve a viable and results-oriented development that will satisfy the broad spectrum of Benin society is to embrace gender perspectives.

The males have been quick to take advantage of this supposedly profane status and call women weak. If women are not quick to disown this label, they have been slow to express what they know and to tell the world in writing that they too, have the “divine” personality and so their biological makeup should not be used unfavorably. Religion and religious rituals are structured to organize gender relations, and everyone evokes it to make meaning – that is, social power and capital. J.S. Mbiti suggests that religion is a strong element that exerts much influence on the thoughts and lives of the people concerned.\(^{175}\) Bourdieu adds that religion is a way of structuring that structures the symbolic medium.\(^{176}\) I invoke Mbiti and Bourdieu to suggest that religion as a tool enables the Benin people to process identity formation and project false and illusory identities that impose on the social less privileged. The imposition becomes a natural and consequential feature of registering symbolic actions as loaded with constructed human meaning, and structuring possibilities for deciphering such meaning in every aspect of the Benin people’s ritual activities. These concepts become ideas that provide humans with a sense of meaning—understood as a sense of social power and capital—meaning forged


as other humans catalyze the meaning-making kiln among the Benin religious and cultural folks. Bourdieu is right to argue that the perception of meaning structures identity.\(^\text{177}\) In light of hermeneutical projection, I foreground the ways this structuring informs the other by treating them as “Other.”\(^\text{178}\)

In my estimation, the exaggerated pronouncements and labels projected onto the self, in this case, “female inferiority,” become the representation that women embrace of their identity and the “Others,” in this case the superior males. Invariably, this scheme produces identities, subjugation, relegation, and denial into customary authoritative leadership positions for women in Benin. This mark instances where they sacrifice women religiously. They perform this sacrifice in ways that the social margins reorganize and reproduce gender inequality with concealed techniques.

Do I argue that this is the beginning of gender preferences? Undoubtedly, gender preference will continue, no matter what; only I argue that they should be preferences for gender inclusivity. Preferences for women who have been held back by centuries of unequal opportunity should go beyond the board. Benin culture and religion should be blind to gender preferences. I am of the view that it is fundamentally baseless to continue to consider the physiology (gender) of women before admitting them into customary positions of authority.

Paradoxically, it is in the midst of this cultural and religious tempo that Pentecostal tradition took root in Benin City. Was Pentecostal tradition influenced? There is something unique about this inculturation that we should not gloss over. We cannot separate the cultural history of Benin from the general history of the Pentecostal tradition

\(^{177}\) Ibid, 2.

which became rooted and emerged in a culture that is exclusively patriarchal and male-dominated. It is not the case that religious inculturation is simply carried out in “masked” ways. So, to what extent did Benin religion and culture impact the Nigerian Pentecostal church? This inquiry will be the focus of the following chapters. But first, I will pay attention to the birth of a revolutionary Pentecostal tradition in Benin – the Church of God Mission International (CGMi).

I hope that my readers will accept the challenge and begin to advocate for the revision of the long-standing view, theory, and doctrine that validates the inferiority and unfair relegation of women in Benin, Benin historiography, and Gender Studies. This challenge, I believe would stir interest among scholars to re-examine the idea of binary identity creation and also produce legitimate scholastic re-readings of the existing data, motivations, and knowledge of women’s relegation within the mainstream.
Chapter Three

Socio-Historical Backdrop to the Emergence of Modern Pentecostalism in Benin City

Many streams flowed into the river of faith that we today know as Nigerian Pentecostalism.

Nimi Wariboko

This chapter aims to survey the emergence of a variant of modern Pentecostal tradition in Post-colonial Benin (Nigeria) City, with a particular focus on the socio-historical formation of the CGMi. It draws from interdisciplinary sources. I was in Benin City, Nigeria for twelve (12) months to research for this dissertation and to study the CGMi. I developed additional theoretical materials in dialogue with Ogbu Kalu, Nimi Wariboko, David Ogungbile, Matthew Ojo, and other scholars of Pentecostalism who have done significant research in Nigerian Pentecostalism. This chapter will study the religious practices that Nigerian Pentecostals ostensibly borrowed from the traditional setting in which it grew up. My interactions with the CGMi leaders and members during my ethnographic research and personal observation (as an insider) are the data I analyze here.

This study reveals there is a revolutionary consensus among research participants and scholars that CGMi is a trail-blazing model in changing the face of modern Nigerian (African) Pentecostal tradition, particularly its religious, economic, and social life. However, Idahosa and the CGMi have yet to receive the academic attention they deserve. It is only very recently that scholars started giving attention to this acclaimed Benin City-born father of Nigerian Pentecostalism who helped to reshape, remap, and redefine Pentecostalism in Benin City, Nigeria. For example, Mission scholar, Matthew Ojo only relates the conversion narrative of Benson Idahosa in his 2006 study, *The End-Time*

---

Army.\textsuperscript{180} Jane Soothill in 2007 discussed Benson Idahosa in passing and particularly in light of his spiritual and ‘genetic’ heritage with his protégés.\textsuperscript{181} In 2011, Israel Olofinjana presented Idahosa from a historical perspective,\textsuperscript{182} and in 2014 Nimi Wariboko touched on the subject of this persona to show that Benson did not have an AIC or Missionary Christian background but transited from one Pentecostal church to another Pentecostal church.\textsuperscript{183} Employing a socio-historical approach, I examine the formation of the CGMi side by side with the life and times of the founding pastor, Benson Andrew Idahosa, as his life is intertwined with and inseparable from the formation of the church.

Further, I will throw light on CGMi doctrine, its organizational structure, and the formation of sub-groups within it. I will also explore CGMi association and its network with other Pentecostal denominations and examine to what extent it influences and contributes to enriching the new face of Nigeria Pentecostal tradition (NPT).

This chapter sets the stage for further analysis of the narratives of Benson and more particularly of Margaret Idahosa (in chapter four), the CGMi, and their pioneering efforts in (Benin) Nigerian Pentecostal tradition, which have yet to gain significant attention amongst historians and religious scholars. One cannot fully understand modern NP and the exponential growth alongside the “reverse mission” from Benin City to the Western hemisphere if one ignores the legendary works of pioneers like Archbishop Benson, Archbishop Margaret, and the CGMi. Notably, CGMi offers the fertile ground for exploring the dynamics of gender relations in the study of Nigerian Pentecostalism.

\textsuperscript{183} Wariboko, \textit{The Nigerian Pentecostalism}, 20.
The reputation of CGMi as the first Pentecostal church that set the pace for gender inclusivity in NPT informed my choice of research in the church. It is imperative to examine the theme of gender relations in Nigeria Pentecostal tradition through the eyes of CGMi because there is a claim that Pentecostal tradition has a better moral and gender inclusive framework by which the broader faith community and society could be run and transformed. Put simply; this chapter depicts how gender is framed in CGMi, and by extension the NPT. The emergence of the CGMi is the focus of the section that follows.

3.1: Emergence: A New Breed of Pentecostalism in Benin – Its Concept and Practices

As noted in chapter one, the first contact of British missionaries with Benin happened around the fifteenth century, but it was not until 1942 that they started establishing Christian stations there, and since then it is Nigerian Pentecostal missionaries who have kept the fire of evangelism alive.\(^{184}\) The orthodox churches consisting of the Catholic and Protestant Churches were the earliest denominations that popularized Benin City. Ethicist, theologian, and Pentecostal scholar Nimi Wariboko asserts that “many streams flowed into the river of faith that we today know as Nigerian Pentecostalism.” Nigerian Pentecostalism did not follow a pre-arranged course; instead, culture, history, religious nationalism, economic, and political dynamics of the country together have shaped it into what it is today.\(^{185}\) Scholars from different disciplines employ periodization to explicate the multiple paths to revival and contrast the earlier and later developmental phases of Pentecostalism in Nigeria.

Scholars often divide the reception and development of modern Pentecostalism in Nigeria into three phases. The first, according to Ogbu Kalu, drew on Ethiopianism as the

\(^{184}\) Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, 22; Also see Adelegan, *Nigeria’s Leading Lights of the Gospel*, xxxiv.

\(^{185}\) Wariboko, Ibid, 17-18, 21.
early form of African Pentecostalism; it was a revival that started before 1910. The second phase began around 1910 and lasted till 1940. During this period, the secession groups began prayer bands within the missionary churches and later became African independent churches, prompted by the *Aladura* churches. The third phase lasted from the 1940s until now. Wariboko notes that there were three strands in this third phase of the response. The first strand he connects with the ‘classical’ indigenous Pentecostal churches of the 1940s, the second happened in the 1960s/’70s, and the third strand, which saw the explosion of neo-Pentecostal churches, began in the 1970s and runs to this day.

I am aware that the narrative of Pentecostalism in Nigeria is incomplete without an allusion to the antecedents of the groups which now form the Christian faith community. However, it is not within the scope of this doctoral research to be involved with the evolutionary synopsis of the historical narratives and development of the Christian and Pentecostal tradition in Nigeria; besides, many historical and religious scholars have already written extensively on this subject.

---

186 Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction*, 32-33. This concept embodied the earliest stirrings towards religious and political freedom in the modern colonial period. Ethiopians started around the 1880s when African mission workers became frustrated with the relegation they endured in the hierarchy of the mission churches. The term was first used by an ex-Wesleyan minister, Mangena Mokone, at the founding of the Ethiopian Church in 1892. This was the beginning of the all-African Independent Church formation. Ethiopia was considered an idealized “African Zion,” given its uninterrupted independence from European colonization. Its usage gained currency when Ethiopia defeated the Italians at the Battle of Adwa in 1896. The term thus represented Africa’s dignity and place in the divine dispensation and provided a charter for free African churches and nations of the future. For details see the entry on Ethiopianism in the Encyclopedia Britannica in *African Religion* [https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ethiopianism updated November 21, 2017 <accessed January 19, 2018.>](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ethiopianism updated November 21, 2017 <accessed January 19, 2018.>)


To claim that Pentecostalism inspired spiritual awakening in Benin (Nigeria) City is no hyperbole. The “fire” which started as a small movement in Benin City is now the most important force that shapes and continues to shape Pentecostal tradition in contemporary Nigeria. Today the CGMi is ranked as one of Africa’s leading evangelistic missions.\textsuperscript{190} The headquarters (named Faith Miracle Center or Arena) in Benin City was dedicated and opened on November 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1986. It is the seat of the Archbishop and is considered the first stadium church in Africa.\textsuperscript{191} Elder Joseph Akioya, in a conversation, excitedly told me that: The church has some established branches in many geographical locations in Benin City, Edo state, across Nigeria, and globally that evolved with the coming of the young, dynamic Pastor, Benson Idahosa.”\textsuperscript{192} Also, Rev. Eghosa Igunbor, supporting Akioya’s position, informed me that,

“The CGMi plays a vanguard role in projecting Pentecostalism in Benin City and beyond, more so in a keenly contested religious space at it sets the pace for a woman to challenge, beat chauvinism, and assume the top-ranking position in Nigerian Pentecostal tradition in the instead of the Archbishop.”\textsuperscript{193}

Around the early 1960s, the story of Christianity in Nigeria shifted from being mostly one of Missionary and African Independent (Initiated) Churches (AICs) to the presence and practice of Pentecostalism whose development was renowned for its “local” forms.\textsuperscript{194} There are three accounts of how Benson Idahosa started his mission work. An

\textsuperscript{190} Margaret E. Benson-Idahosa, \url{http://cgmglObalconvention.com/} cited December 5, 2015.
\textsuperscript{191} \url{http://cgmglObalconvention.com/faith-miracle-center-faith-arena/} cited December 5, 2015.
\textsuperscript{192} P.l. with Elder Joseph Akioya June 12, 2016.
\textsuperscript{193} P. l. with Rev. Eghosa Igunbor on April 21, 2016. At the time of this research, Rev. Igunbor was the Personal Assistant to the present Archbishop Margaret Idahosa. He also served in this capacity for the first archbishop and founding pastor of the CGMi. I think that his insight is particularly fascinating and relevant for my project because Margaret Idahosa, before becoming the first female archbishop in a Pentecostal tradition in Nigeria had been “femininized” and turned into ‘just’ an ‘ordinary’ wife and ‘just’ a mother. So it was hard for the church to assume an extraordinary position in the face of a dominant patriarchal culture. This also parallels with Iyoba – (queen mother) Idia- N’iye Esigie’s narratives.
\textsuperscript{194} Wariboko, 1.
account thought to be controversial and given by an estranged Archbishop Christian Appena held that:

“Reuben Ekubor and few others were having a fellowship. Benson Idahosa was at the time a member of the Assemblies of God Church. When Idahosa was about to marry, Assemblies of God did not want him to marry Margaret, but he … married her. So, he left Assemblies and joined this fellowship which was later called Church of God mission.”

Another account held that in October 1968, Idahosa, claiming instruction from God, left the Assemblies of God and founded a small independent prayer group, later named the Church of God Mission. The third account held that in 1962, Idahosa started a Bible study group, first called Calvary Fellowship and situated in a shop on Ibvizua Street, off Mission Road in Benin, which later became the Church of God Mission. Tradition has it that within a short time, the numerical strength of the Bible study group overwhelmed the size of the store, so they bought and secured property in the Iyaro area of Benin. Idahosa constructed a gigantic building which became its permanent site (today known as the mother church). Iyaro church soon became the religious and spiritual nerve center of Pentecostalism in Benin, and in 1965 it became autonomous with Benson Idahosa as Pastor. With the birth of CGMi, a local Pentecostal church, a new era was born in Nigerian Christianity.

Whatever the true narrative of Idahosa’s beginning is, as Nimi Wariboko observes, Idahosa transitioned from a Pentecostal church to start another Pentecostal church. There is no account that the earlier tradition of African Pentecostalism or that the missionary form of Christianity influenced Benson. Thus Benson’s transition is not in

196 Matthew Ojo, 61.
consonant with the contestation of Amos Yong and Estrelda Alexander that “classical Afro-Pentecostals groups involve denominations that have links to the first generation of the modern Pentecostal movement, in some way tracing their roots back to the Azusa Street revival.” 198 I do not mean to debunk Bishop Appena’s claim that Benson joined the group that was started by Reuben Ekubor. I instead argue that Benson’s creative penchant for preaching had a sense of superior religiosity which Ekubor (as an individual) and the Assemblies of God church (a Pentecostal church from which he was transitioning) did not enjoy. Put simply; he advanced his claim to authority and influence when he offered what it means to be authentically Christian and yet retain one's identity as a Benin (African) person. The evidence seems to point to the view that Idahosa’s dynamic persona and charisma enabled the spread and acceptance of his reputation which Ekubor lacked. Wariboko aptly captures this development when he notes that, “The value of charisma or anointing on the carrier is measured by his or her ability to use it to access the invisible realm of revelation and miracle-working power for the benefit of his or her followers … and to build an unquestioned authority.” 199

Many years later, observers would agree that Idahosa employed his charisma in the manner described by Peter L. Berger, a leading social theorist of religion, when he pointed out that such charisma can be used to “disrupt and [rewrite] the script” to serve his reality and build authority. 200 A development such as this might explain why Ekubor, who was one of the Pentecostal actors, did not make a major impact as Idahosa did.

199 Wariboko, Nigerian Pentecostalism, 4.
200 Peter L. Berger, 20.
Some members of the church who were students at the University of Ife later introduced Idahosa to one of the Apostolic Church’s missionaries, S.G. Elton.\textsuperscript{201} Elton, fondly known as papa, became Idahosa’s friend and spiritual mentor. Elton, in turn, introduced Idahosa to Gordon and Freda Lindsay (healing evangelists of the Latter Rain Movement) who in turn introduced Idahosa up to the American audience. Elton along with Lindsay commissioned and ordained Idahosa into ministry in 1971. These duos were sources of encouragement for Idahosa and the CGMi. Ten years later in November 1985, Dr. David Du Plessis (known as Mr. Pentecost), Dr. John L. Meavers, Bishop Robert McAlister, and other Christian leaders consecrated Idahosa as the Archbishop of CGMi, thus naming him the first Pentecostal Archbishop in Nigeria.\textsuperscript{202}

Idahosa was not trained as a theologian and had not attended any Bible School or seminary when he accepted the call to ministry. Similarly, most modern Nigerian Pentecostal preachers, although educated and established in their careers, have never been to a Bible College or received any seminary training, and many never do so. Some of the leading Pentecostal leaders in Nigeria today who fit this depiction include Pastors E.A. Adeboye (Redeemed Christian church of God, RCCG) and W.F. Kumuyi (Deeper Christian Life Ministry), who in their past careers were university lecturers in mathematics.\textsuperscript{203} While these other leaders were educated people, Idahosa based his ministry on revelatory knowledge and the ability to hear from God.\textsuperscript{204} Femi Adelegan succinctly captures this when he argues that, “He was a genius in his calling; Idahosa did

\textsuperscript{201} P. l. with Deacon (Prof.) Victor Aladeselu at his house on May 27, 2016. He is a member of the board of deacons and an early member of the CGMi.
\textsuperscript{203} Matthew Ojo, 45, 61.
\textsuperscript{204} Adelegan, Nigeria’s leading Lights of the Gospel, 434.
not need to acquire any basic and higher education in the field of his endeavor before he could impact his world.”

This brief introduction to Idahosa’s background is valuable not because it exposes his lack of theological training, but because it gives us an appreciation of the pioneering, ground-breaking, and what has now become a legendary foundation on which Idahosa built the Nigerian (African) Pentecostal tradition.

Some folks claim that Nigeria is a praying and religious nation. It is also common knowledge that the expansion of CGMi in Benin and beyond has been phenomenal, given the incredible growth in membership, human capital advancement, and capital development projects. Of critical importance is the rapid numerical, and perhaps the economic explosion that culminated in the official registration of the church in 1974. However, how did Nigeria garner this label as a praying nation? Is it scholarly right to think that the harshness of Nigeria’s economic recession occasioned by the fallout of its civil war which came with pain and sufferings in deflating and telling ways on Nigerians could have enabled the ‘praying’ identity for Nigeria and the numerical growth of CGMi? Some leading religious and social science scholars like Matthew Ojo, Asonzeh Ukah, Nimi Wariboko, Ruth Marshall-Fratani, and Peter Burgess have addressed these concerns. Some of them have linked this praying (as well as Pentecostal) identity and the unprecedented church growth to the upheaval, political divisions, social, and economic recession that followed the post-Nigeria civil war.

---

205 Ibid, 434.
206 Ibid, xxix.
207 Although these scholars did not particularly point to CGMi, they referred to the general explosion of Pentecostal tradition in Nigeria, and since CGMi is a Pentecostal church, by inference they refer to it. For details, see Matthew Ojo, The End Time Army, 206; Asonzeh Ukah, “Africana Christian: Features, Promises, and Problems,” Working Paper, un-paginated, . 2007; Isichei, The History of Christianity, 335-337; Wariboko, Nigerian Pentecostalism, 26; Richard Burgess, Nigeria’s Christian Revolution: The Civil
imagine that any ambitious person would jump at the prospect of acquiring personal wealth and success that adherents now interpret as signs of God’s favor and abundant blessings to believers.

On the one hand, it is essential to note that while the assertions by scholars may be correct, they might not tell the whole story behind the explosion of Pentecostalism in Nigeria today. They are right in the sense that almost anybody would be willing to embrace an institution that offers solace in the midst of an economic recession. For example, Idahosa’s style of providing solutions and providing answers to questions of ailing people compelled people to seek him out. Also, CGMi’s interest in providing social services to society along with preaching the gospel was and remains very appealing; it greatly benefitted and still benefits the people. Some of the services include education, health care, and job creation.

Yet this may not be entirely the case. I suggest that Idahosa’s following grew exponentially in part because of his charismatic gifts of prayers and healing. Likewise, the vigorous evangelical and outreach activities supported and still support the exponential explosion of the CGMi. Idahosa’s immediate and pressing calling, which also became the church’s task, was evangelism. The slogan of his commission was “evangelism our supreme task.” In short, “soul winning” was and is Idahosa and CGMi’s major concern. The church folks engage in street, hospital, prison, market evangelism and open-air meetings to this day and through such practices “reach out to the unreached in Nigeria, Africa, and beyond with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

208 This practice


of evangelism wins converts and enables church planting. Church planting was a new
trend in Nigerian Christian tradition and the idea of “house fellowship” was unknown
then until Idahosa came along. But more importantly, Nigerian Pentecostals assert that
“the invocation of the move of the Holy Spirit is the potential reason of CGMi’s
vitality.”

The claim, therefore, that CGMi has been a significant catalyst for Pentecostal
advancement in Nigeria and beyond is no exaggeration. For example, Idahosa and his
followers began to organize Gospel and revival meetings in locations such as State
stadiums with thousands of people attending. The first crusade was on a large scale and
held at the Ogbe stadium for five days, from February 25–29, 1972. Tradition has it that
the Ogbe Stadium crusade attracted about ten thousand (10,000) people. With records of
healing and miracles in these meetings, people began to pour into services and attendance
rose so sharply that in no time the mother church at Iyaro could no longer accommodate
the increasing number of worshippers.

Evidently, Idahosa seemed to have used his crusades to convert people to the new
religion in town. That is, the cross of Christ began to replace indigenous and ancestor
worship. Adherents (like me) attribute this growth to the presence of the power of God
which the young pastor manifested in his life. Following the signs that accompanied his
ministry, Pentecostalism increasingly became a dominant faith tradition in Benin City,
and many people deserted the churches instituted by missionaries to become members of
CGMi. An account confirming this standpoint held that: “Crusades played a significant
[part] in his ministry. He was occupied with at least one crusade per month. A record

209 P.I. with Isaac Mowete (Rev.) on May 5, 2016. He is an assistant resident pastor of CGMi headquarters
and one-time National Director of the Youth body. He formed part of the early crusades Team organized by
Benson Idahosa.
crowd of nearly one million people a night attended his Lagos Crusade in April 1985. He established the Redemption Television Ministry with a potential viewing audience of 50 million people.”  

One may question the method used to count the number of people that attended the crusade. Perhaps the numbers were exaggerated. To allay my concerns, senior and longtime members of CGMi like Elder Joseph Akioya affirmed in a personal interview the effectiveness of Idahosa’s methods: “I used to be a member of the St. Matthew Anglican Church in Benin, but Idahosa’s crusades and preaching style were inviting.”

Like others, he jumped ship—or church. Another man, who later became one of the senior Bishops, Joseph Ojo, now founding pastor of the Calvary Kingdom Church (CKC), Lagos, was at this first crusade held at the Ogbe Stadium. Confirming the evangelical practice, he said:

I grew up as an Ogbe boy in Benin. … [We] were notorious boys …. However, I gave my life to Christ at Archbishop Benson Idahosa’s first crusade [at the Ogbe’s Stadium] in Benin. It is only somebody who has experienced both sides [of life] that will understand when you say you experienced a change after conversion. I was religious but was smoking and drinking heavily. The kind of theology in my former church will make you want to sin so that you can have something to confess. When I became born again, I discovered that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.”

Idahosa’s ministry team publicized these evangelistic outreach efforts on radio stations, print posters, and leaflets. Israel Olofinjana asserts that Idahosa’s evangelistic practice

---


211 P.I. with Elder Joseph Akioya June 12, 2016

was a pioneering effort of a ‘native,’ as it was usually American evangelists that engaged in this type of missionary activities in those days.\textsuperscript{213}

These gospel and revival meeting methods, which attracted several people, would later become the defining characteristics of Idahosa and his trendy ministry. Described as a Gospel ‘bulldozer,’ he pioneered the television ministry called “Redemption Hour,” during which he broadcast sermons live on television in Nigeria.\textsuperscript{214} He took the Nigerian Pentecostal world by storm through such use of media and went on to host his daily and weekly “Idahosa and You” television and radio programs for twenty years. Through such programs, he was able to reach millions of people in Africa and increase the popularity of televangelism, though ironically, before and during his time, the television had been called “the devil’s box.”\textsuperscript{215} Of him, the first tele-evangelist in Africa, Mrs. Gordon Freda Lindsay wrote:

“I know of no young black in all of Africa who is reaching millions as Benson is, … in crusades with hundreds of thousands in attendance, in his weekly nationwide telecast, in his Bible School, training eager students from several nations. He also conducts campaigns in Sweden, Singapore, Malaysia, Korea, Australia, and the United States, where he often appears on national religious telecasts. His burden for souls, his ministry of healing and miracles, even to the raising of several dead, demonstrated that the Lord specially called him for this end-time revival.”\textsuperscript{216}

The CGMi grew by leaps and bounds, and to accommodate the phenomenal influx of new converts, Benson appealed to church members for support. Amazingly, members responded to his call; one member donated a piece of land along Airport Road in Benin City. There, Benson laid the foundation for another colossal edifice—the

\textsuperscript{214} P.I. with Archbishop Joseph Ojo in Lagos on July 13, 2016.
\textsuperscript{215} Ibid.
Miracle center (now known as the Heritage Center) in December 1973, and on November 9, 1975, the church dedicated the building for use. By 1981, Benson had launched construction of the grand Faith Miracle Cathedral, which seats over ten thousand and houses the administrative center of the mission, and dedicated it in 1987. Around this time, Idahosa introduced the annual cycle of religious ceremonies, the most important being the National Convention that takes place every November.

By the mid-1990s, Benson Idahosa had established CGMi churches in regions that had never seen missionary enterprise, including in major cities in Nigeria. He sent many ministers to supervise and pastor the churches he founded, both in Nigeria and other nations of the world. Archbishop Joseph Ojo recalled: “I was first ordained a deacon, and later he asked me to go and pastor one of the branches of CGM.” Tradition has it that Benson started over six thousand churches throughout Nigeria and other parts of Africa. Idahosa’s vision to export ministers was caught by the more massive Pentecostal tradition in Nigeria with the result that today large churches across Africa and in several parts of the world are attended to and pastored by Nigerians—what some have called “reverse missions.” Idahosa thus laid the foundation for the shift that is happening in world Pentecostalism today; whereas Benin City once was a mission field and played host to European missionaries around the fifteenth and later centuries is now responsible for sending missionaries out to the West. It is likely that these pastors in Nigeria and in the Diaspora who have been influenced by Benson Idahosa’s ministry are

representative of his ministry. American Pentecostal pastor Benny Hinn confirmed this when he asserted that “it is a very remarkable thing because the [most prominent] churches in the world today are run by Nigerian pastors. They are springing out of the Benson Idahosa Movement.” Likewise, Margaret Benson noted that “Those [who] started with him then have become pillars in the vineyard of God.”

Research respondents and Pentecostals in Nigeria agree that Idahosa was a Pentecostal giant with a manifest destiny to spearhead the reverse mission from Benin City, Nigeria to the Western hemisphere and other parts of the world. Case in point: his Bible College, the All Nations for Christ Bible Institute has alumnae like Bishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams (Christ Action Faith Ministries), Bishop Charles Agyin-Asare (Word Miracle Church International), Bishop Christianah Doe Tetteh (Solid Rock Chapel International), Bishop James Saah, and many others. Bishop Joseph Ojo agrees:

“Most of the ministries around today are derivative of Idahosa. It will be an injustice to his effort to limit the works that God used him to do to only the CGM. The works of Ayo, Oyedepo, [and] Omobude are ‘subsidiary’ of CGM. It may be correct to include, to some extent, the Redeemed Christian Church of God [RCCG] because many contemporary RCCG pastors were members of the CGM…. I cannot exonerate myself; my ministry is an offshoot of CGM. When Mama Idahosa came here, and she said CKC is an extension of CGM; I agreed. The world still feels the footprint of Idahosa. It is progressively more evident that Benin City’s CGMi is destined to play a vital role in not just liberating Nigerians but mainly in exporting the Gospel “to the ends of the earth” as commanded in Acts 1:8.”

The only son of the Archbishops Benson and Margaret Idahosa, F.E.B. Idahosa, had this to say in response to a question by a journalist:

“Every great ministry in Nigeria today can trace their roots somehow to Archbishop B.A. Idahosa because his focus on preaching and evangelism

---

221 Ibid
222 Ibid; also see Adelegan, Nigeria’s Leading Lights of the Gospel, 245.
brought Christianity and the Pentecostal Movement to prominence. That is just to show the influence of what this man from Benin City, Edo State, had on the State, Nigeria, and Africa as a whole. Benin City is set up as a trigger point for change in the rest of Nigeria. Nigeria ... is also a place from which God is going to make a difference in all of Africa... Out of Benin came Archbishop Idahosa and he changed Nigeria and the gospel ministry in Nigeria.  

Indeed, it is clear that Idahosa and the CGMi changed the face of Pentecostal tradition in Nigeria and worldwide. Little wonder, then, that so many, like Osazee Osawaru, say of Benson: “I so much love and [reverence] this man of God; I am proud that such [a] man mightily used by God came [out] of B[e]ni[n], it makes [me] proud to be a B[e]ni[n] man.”

Of equal importance is the role Idahosa played in shaping and molding women in ministry. Women formed and still form a significant percentage of the church’s population. Yet, because the presence of so many women was not a threat to the men of the church, the men excluded women from ordination. So although Benson Idahosa opened new vistas for women to enter the ministry, there were explicit restrictions. Because women could not assume pastoral or other significant positions like men, the men practiced and mostly continue to practice their spiritual leadership skills unhindered, making them feel superior to women.

Male members thus became the most valuable members of the church. For example, they were not only choir directors but Wednesday Bible study teachers and overseers, Sunday school teachers and superintendents, while female members were

expected to sit down and be educated and instructed. In such ways, gender relations are
unassumingly but oppressively practiced in Benin tradition. This predilection for
women’s silence and invisibility is normative for and rooted in the Benin indigenous
worldview. For this sacred/profane and superior/inferior gender identity ideologies and
practices have existed in Benin’s social-cultural setting long before the European
missionaries and British colonizers arrived and cemented those gender traditions.

Being such a flourishing global denomination, CGMi garners respect among other
Pentecostal denominations and has remained upwardly mobile. Yet it was notably the
first among Nigerian Pentecostal churches to invite and encourage women to be part of
the public religious space. Idahosa positioned Benin City and set an agenda for Nigerian
(African) Pentecostalism that now touches every facet of Nigerian society.\textsuperscript{226} Today, the
global community increasingly pays attention to Nigeria because of the vast expansion in
Pentecostal churches, and this growth can undoubtedly be credited to the legendary and
pioneering work of Benson Idahosa and his CGMi. Indeed, because it is known for its
multi-tribal and multi-ethnic outlook offers an excellent opportunity to reflect on how
Pentecostal tradition has matured and contributes to gender relations in Nigerian
Pentecostalism.\textsuperscript{227}

\section*{3.2 Benson Andrew Idahosa: Notes and Autobiographical Texts on the Life and
Times of a Hero of Faith and Father of Modern Nigerian Pentecostalism}

Finding information and resources is a well-known challenge when researching
prominent figures from African Christian history. Perhaps the dearth of comprehensive
works is partly due to the oral nature of documenting historical accounts in Benin

\textsuperscript{226} P.I. with (Rev. Prof.) John Okhuoya on June 13, 2016. He was then the Resident Pastor at the Faith
Miracle Center at the time of Benson Idahosa’s demise. He is a respected professor of microbiology and
was onetime Deputy Vice Chancellor (Admin) at the University of Benin, Nigeria.
\textsuperscript{227} P.I. with Eghosa Igunbor on April 21, 2016.
(Africa) City. Olofinjana captured this dearth when he noted that, “Nigerian Pentecostalism illustrates theology through oral narratives such as testimonies and personal experiences.”\textsuperscript{228} Therefore, I will draw on the biography in \textit{Fire in His Bones}, the \textit{Dictionary of African Christian Biography}, and CGMi’s ministry News. They are particularly helpful for this study as they do not focus only on Benson Idahosa’s life, and because they allow Benson to speak for himself.

To say that Archbishop Benson Idahosa made remarkable contributions to the exponential growth and spread of Pentecostalism in Nigeria and Nigerian Pentecostalism is no exaggeration. The historical narratives of the CGMi connect with Benson’s socio-historical narratives. He is respected all over the world as the father of modern NP and one of the pioneers of modern African Pentecostalism.\textsuperscript{229} He started the most effective evangelistic crusade in Benin (African) history; laid the groundwork for the spread of the Gospel across Africa and around the world; and was the first Pentecostal archbishop in Nigeria, inaugurating a new kind of leadership and hierarchy for a non-Episcopal tradition.

Benson Andrew Idahosa was born on September 11, 1938, into a polygamous and non-Christian family/community. His beginnings were rough because he was a frail and ill child who often fainted. Rejected by his father and left to die in a dumpster when he was only eighteen months old on his father’s orders, his cries compelled his mother to intervene to rescue him.\textsuperscript{230} John Okhuoya interprets his rescue and survival as part of the

\textsuperscript{228} Olofinjana, \textit{20 Pentecostal Pioneers in Nigeria}, xiv.
“divine agenda because if he had been left to die, he would not have made such an impact in Nigerian (Africa) Pentecostalism.”

Growing up in a poor household affected his dreams and aspirations for education, but for all that, he did not succumb to the fate life threw at him. At the age of eight, he was enrolled at an Anglican Mission School, and at eleven was handed over to his Uncle Joseph in Igbanke village to work on his farm for three years. Although his uncle denied him the right to return to school, Benson usually sat with his cousins to read their books in the evenings. Irked by the idea of Benson getting an education, his uncle often burdened him with home and farm work. After three years, he returned to his father’s home, and his mother re-enrolled him in a school at Uromi, a twelve-mile trek from home. When Benson was sixteen, he started living with his paternal grandmother, who enrolled him at Methodist boarding school in Owo in Ondo State. Upon completion of school at age eighteen, he became a newspaper vendor in Benin City, and could finally afford his first pair of new shoes, shirt, and trousers.

Soon after, as a salesperson at the Bata shoe company, despite a meager salary, Benson was able to obtain diplomas in Business Administration and a higher diploma in Office Management. He also pushed and encouraged himself to enroll in correspondence courses from the United States and Britain and earned himself several degrees. He was conferred with an honorary of Doctor of Divinity degree in May 1981 in recognition of his excellent performance and dedication to service in the ministry, and in May 1984,

---

232 Garlock, Fire in His Bones, 15.
an honorary degree as a Doctor of Law.\textsuperscript{234} Evangelist T.L. Osborn from Tulsa, Oklahoma remarked of him that, “Idahosa rose from the [position] of an ordinary man to world leadership as a pastor, builder, counselor, prophet, teacher, apostle, and an evangelist … a man of godly wisdom and of Christ-like passion, whose ministry has blessed millions the world over. Idahosa was the most excellent African ambassador of the apostolic Christian faith to the world.”\textsuperscript{235}

His conversion and Christian experience began in January 1959 and was said to have been very dramatic and intriguing—a case of God using what Idahosa loved most to “arrest” him.\textsuperscript{236} A certain Pastor Okpo of the Assemblies of God church in Benin converted him. Benson tells the story:

“One Sunday in a football field during a friendly soccer match with teammates at a pitch near [a] Salvation Army church, we were distracted by the preaching from an adjoining church. The noise from the preacher was so annoying that I [connived with my friends and] made two fruitless attempts to hit Pastor Okpo’s head with the ball through one of the open windows. At my third effort, the ball bounced back and struck me hard in the chest so that I fell flat on my back and was in a coma. My friends called [for] Pastor Okpo’s attention because of the pain I was in; strangely when I came back to life, it was the same pastor I intended to hit that had come to my rescue. He prayed for me, and I recovered. I knew this was the hand of God, so I became friend[s] with Pastor Okpo. I came to the church and answered the call to serve God. I turned out to be the first Benin member of Pastor’s Okpo’s [Igbo speaking Assemblies of God] church.”\textsuperscript{237}

This incident turned out to be momentous in Benson’s life and has continued to remain a reference point in his ministry. After his conversion, he started preaching to his friends. Pastor Okpo prayed for him, and he was filled with the Spirit and spoke in tongues. In addition to the prayers, tradition says that at the age of twenty-four he also

\textsuperscript{234} Adelegan, 437.
\textsuperscript{236} Adelegan, 435.
\textsuperscript{237} Garlock. Fire in His Bones, 20.
received a divine calling in a midnight vision to preach the gospel. This night-time vision
and the interpretation Benson gave it prompted him to become overzealous as a young
convert and engage in evangelistic outreach in and around Benin villages. He went to his
work at the Bata shoe company during the day and preached enthusiastically in the
evenings.238 Tradition has it that God confirmed his evangelistic outreach with power
and that miracles accompanied his preaching and people were healed. People thought his
persona and his sermons were inviting and offered them the opportunity to gain a “better
life” from the allegedly “spiritually empty” and “dead” religion that the old
denominations and missionary-instituted churches offered.

Benson was the first Benin native Pentecostal pastor and evangelist to be raised in
Benin City. Before that, Christianity in Benin City was too remote and intellectual to
meet the spiritual needs of the Benin people. Benson preached the Gospel in more
practical and contextualized ways to people who previously had steeped themselves in
their traditional religion. He offered an alternative pathway to that of intellectual
Christianity. His aura, language, the structure, and answers he gave his audience gave
him considerable influence and authority. Idahosa enabled Benin (Nigerian) Pentecostals
to experience salvation in a holistic sense, combining the abstract (life in the hereafter)
with the material/tangible substance so crucial to them in the here and now (prosperity,
health, fertility). As Chika Edozien, one of the early members of CGMi said:

“I needed a God that would connect with me, be active in my everyday
struggles and respond to my cries for healing, provision, and prosperity. I was
tired of the “paper prayer,” tired of the God who did not connect with my
present moment but always with the hereafter. Idahosa, at least, presented a
functional God who was present in both the now and the hereafter. This

Idahosa’s God could predict my pain, explain my pain and help to control the supersensible world that is beyond my reach.”²³⁹

Edozien’s assertion shows how much Benson embodied this new religiosity and confirms what Robin Horton describes as his “explanation, prediction, and control of space-time events.”²⁴⁰ Benson’s practice affirms Berger’s theorization that “religion is not simply a spiritual phenomenon; it is a social one as well.”²⁴¹ He was known for discouraging idolatry and preaching the “power of the Gospel.” He soon established a church in a shop on Ibizua Street, off Mission Road in Benin City.²⁴²

The increase in church membership and influence over Nigerian Pentecostal terrain, many respondents agree, was spurred by his preaching and charismatic style. Archbishop Joseph Ojo notes, “He was so spiritual, and his teaching was very much different from what was trendy in his days.”²⁴³ Rev. John Okhuoya likewise stated that, “He developed, expanded, and strengthened a variant and new face of Pentecostalism in Nigeria by his novel leadership schemes. He made an enormous impact on the world just by his charismatic leadership and preaching method.”²⁴⁴

Known for his drive in applying his faith in the supernatural power of God, he brought glamour to preaching the Gospel throughout his ministry. Benson had this to say about himself:

“As a young Christian, I once heard my pastor say in a morning service that Christians could raise the dead in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I believed it with all my heart. Flying about on my bicycle in those days, I went through the city of Benin in search of a dead person to bring back to life. After about five hours of hard searching, I found a compound where a

²³⁹ P. I. with Chika Edozien on May 27, 2015.
small girl had died a few hours before. The dead body had been cleaned and set for burial. I walked boldly up to the father of the dead child. “The God whom I serve can bring your baby back to life,” I told him. “Will you permit me to pray for the child and bring her back to life?” the man was startled, but he agreed. With great enthusiasm, I walked into the room and up to the bed. The child was cold and dead. With strong faith in the Lord, I called on the Lord to restore the child back to life. I turned to the corpse and called it by name, “Arise in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Oh glory to God! The corpse sneezed, heavily, alas. The child had come back to life!245

Indeed, this event, which culminated in a mini-revival, is a small part of Benson’s legacy that shot him to prominence in Benin City. The event heralded his fame, and his reputation spread as it became evident that God had called him. Many who saw and heard of his miraculous exploits were converted to the faith and trooped to join and boost his newly established Pentecostal church. Those who came to surrender their lives included leading traditional rulers, community leaders, Orthodox churches members, drunkards, sorcerers, the destitute, prostitutes, and local traditional religions priests, and many more.246 Tradition has it that raising the dead were one of the hallmarks of his ministry. In all, the record shows that he raised twenty-eight persons from the dead at different times and locations.247

Idahosa’s charismatic personality apparently played a large part in advancing his style of Pentecostalism in Benin and far beyond. Benson Idahosa’s reputation was such that other Pentecostal preachers and government officials desired to be connected to him and sought his advice to advance their evangelistic and political/national assignments, even though they were not members or leaders of CGMi.248

246 Garlock. Fire in His Bones, 22.
Idahosa was fondly called “Papa” by his associates and members. Regarded by Christians as the father of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, he lived up to the fatherly role of influencing emerging Pentecostal neophyte pastors who looked up to him for guidance and direction throughout Africa. Such mentorship was a hallmark of his ministry. Karen Lauterbach in *Christianity, Wealth, and Spiritual Power in Ghana* comments that Benson Idahosa’s “big manity” is an excellent example of how African Pentecostals place high currency on apprenticeship and mentorship. This practice is made evident by the number of younger pastors whom Idahosa influenced. At the height of his ministry, Benson Idahosa oversaw the vast population of Pentecostal Christians, not only of the Benin land/people but across Nigeria and the entire African continent. For example, many of today’s prominent Nigerian Pentecostal pastors, like Bishops Joseph Ojo (Calvary Kingdom Church or CKC in Lagos), David Oyedepo (Living Faith Church, Winners Chapel, Lagos), and Mike Okonkwo (one-time president of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria) were his protégés. Others include Felix Omobude (New Covenant Gospel Church, Benin), Francis Wale Oke (Sword of the Spirit Ministries, Ibadan, Oyo State), Ayo Oritsejafor (Word of Life Bible Church, Warri, Delta State), Chris Oyakhilome, Ilembo, and Fred Addo. These men of God trace their roots to Idahosa’s ministry and influence. Affirming this claim, Archbishop Joseph Ojo said, “I know that

---

249 Soothill, 176-177.
the spiritual father of Bishop David Oyedepo is Benson Idahosa … and he remains my spiritual father as he fathered me well [too].”\(^{253}\)

He mentored many African ministers such as Nicholas Duncan Williams (Christian Action Faith Ministries), The Rev. Christie Doe Tetteh (Solid Rock Chapel), and Charles Agyin-Asare (Word Miracle Church Int’l).\(^{254}\) He also had a strong affiliation with different foreign gospel ministers like Billy Graham, T.L. Osborn, Kenneth Higgins, Benny Hinn, Reinhard Bonnke, Morris Cerullo, and Oral Roberts, amongst others. John Okhuoya, a respected professor of microbiology at the University of Benin who served and was the senior pastor at the Faith Arena up until the time of Idahosa’s demise in a discussion portrayed Benson Idahosa thus: “We called him ‘papa’ (meaning father), an tribute not only to the scope of perspective he pioneered to Benin religion and culture, but largely to the sophisticated, detailed, and resourceful missionary mechanism he had advanced from the church’s inception until his demise.”\(^{255}\)

Under Benson’s watch, Nigerian Christianity was transformed religiously, culturally, socially, and also economically. He helped to put Benin (Nigerian) Christianity back on the map. He also pioneered in encouraging and empowering women to move in the spirit and the ministry. He encouraged women to preach, remain faithful, and committed to the work of God. Archbishop Margaret in an interview she granted a newspaper reporter confirmed that:

“[Benson] cleared the land for all of us. Many years ago, it was a taboo for women to hold the microphone not to talk about preaching in the church. However, he [Benson] encouraged us to move in the spirit of God. He

---

\(^{253}\) Osinaike, “Idahosa, how he turned down the gift of a jet, accessed on August 3, 2017; Archbishop Joseph Ojo also confirmed this stance with me in a personal conversation on July 13, 2016.


\(^{255}\) P.I. with John Okhuoya on June 13, 2016.
encouraged us to preach and do the work. (That was the last message he preached to women…)”256

So at this point, women were being included in the scheme of things and were being somewhat heard and not only seen in the public religious domain. Benson Idahosa’s charge for women “to move with the spirit of God” introduced and spread a Pentecostal culture that seemed to be welcoming and opened opportunities for women to be active in the Pentecostal ministry. Confirming this, Humphrey Areghan informed me that: “Papa Idahosa particularly advanced Pauline theology that ‘there is neither male nor female’ in the kingdom.”257 Corroborating Rev. Areghan’s stance, Rev. Mrs. Maria Omorogieva informed me that, “Archbishop Benson Idahosa personally handpicked her, sponsored her admittance into the All Nations for Christ Bible Institute (ANfCBI), and posted her to Efomo lane branch as an assistant pastor.”258 Also, Rev. Mrs. Sidi Lawal Igioh informed me that the Archbishop Idahosa encouraged her to go to the Bible school.

However, while I applaud Benson’s drive to embrace women in ministry, the record shows that the number of women in ministry is still insignificant. My ethnographic research reveals, for example, that he never sent women members of the church to head newly established branch churches. Sadly, he did not even ordain his wife, Margaret. A partner church in the United States ordained her, and subsequently, the ordination was made public in Nigeria. The tradition has barely changed today, as all the highest-ranking

---


257 P.I. with Humphrey Areghan on May 31, 2016. He was the Church’s Public Relations Officer during the life and times of Benson Idahosa.

258 P. I. with Rev. (Barr. Mrs.) Maria Omorogieva on June 24, 2016.
pastors continue to be males, as do the Boards of Trustees. The church made the religious elite (aka the political elite) of the church head pastors of the branch churches.

Overall, B.A. Idahosa’s movement was a success given that his ministry spurred a religious awakening in Benin City. Idahosa became a global figure, and his disciples remember him as an African apostle to the nations. From his conversion experience in January 1959 to his death on March 12, 1998, tradition has it that Idahosa’s movement caused a surge in religiosity that accelerated the pace of “reverse mission” from Benin to the world. He ministered and made a tremendous impact in over one hundred and forty countries across the world. These countries included Ghana, Cameroun, Kenya, South African, Australia, Sweden, Britain, Mexico, the USA, and Switzerland. He pastored what at the time was the fifth largest church in the world. In the next section, I will focus on that church’s doctrine.

3.2.1: The CGMi’s Doctrine

The CGMi’s doctrine affirms the authority of the Bible, and members’ emphases on the Scriptures provide them with a spiritual guide for living. Elder Joseph Akioya informed me in an interview that CGMi doctrines align with the Bible and that the church believes in preaching and teaching the “unadulterated gospel.” Yet it is not improbable that Akioya and other male members of the CGMi bring their own perceptions to biblical texts and as a result struggle to understand the underlying import of their interpretation on

---

262 P. I. with elder Joseph Akioya in Benin City on June 12, 2016.
the *Other*, specifically women. I suggest that many male members apply biased hermeneutics to interpret the scriptures to advance their personal agendas.

Biblical scholar Rudolph Bultmann argued many years ago “that diverse interpretations of the Bible exist among Christians because interpreters cannot circumvent reading their presuppositions and biases, social, and cultural backgrounds into biblical texts.” Presumably, it would have been understandable for the CGMi to have borrowed some cultural practices from Benin religious tradition and melded them with aspects of Pentecostal tradition, allegedly as Spirit-approved. Indeed, Jean Borgatti has argued that a considerable amount of African-derived symbols and stories have found their way into the Hebrew religious system and folks accept such syncretism as “divinely revealed.”

As an offshoot of Judaism, Christianity logically adopted many African beliefs; and in the same manner, Pentecostalism in Benin adopts many traditional beliefs and practices. Borgatti is correct to affirm that Christianity would not have survived when it first appeared in Rome if it had not borrowed heavily from African-derived spiritual systems – for example, an Egyptian-derived Temples of Isis that served as a rival. I infer that CGMi leaders draw from their immediate environment and socio-cultural phenomenon to interpret the scriptures; and that they do this without considering the import of such biased interpretation and its adaptation into the faith of the community. It is clear that the kind of analysis that has filled the teaching of Idahosa and later Pentecostal denomination has privileged male power as it is done in Benin tradition.

---


CGMi’s Organizational Structure

The diagram below shows the Church’s organizational and administrative structure.

ORGANIZATIONAL FLOW (Pastoral)²⁶⁶

²⁶⁶ Miscellaneous of Amended Constitution of CGMi, Benin City. 2014. Article II, Fig. A, 3; Also see CGMi, “Ministers’ Handbook,” 8-9.
The highest position in the church is that of the archbishop, who also is the spiritual leader. At the time of this research, Margaret, the widow of the founding archbishop, was the only woman to have occupied this seat and to have been a member of the Board of Trustees. My interview with leading male pastors, female members, and my auto-ethnographic observation confirms that most women are struggling to move up the leadership ladder. Two respondents were unanimous in their avowal that she got to that position because of her familiar role as a wife of the founding pastor. I suggest that Margaret’s consecration has yet to influence significantly Pentecostalism’s posture towards gender politics within the Pentecostal tradition in (Benin City) Nigeria. For example, during the annual national convention held in November 2015, seven (7) bishops/zonal coordinators were consecrated as bishops. One of the consecrated persons
was not a member of CGMi. Not a single female member was considered fit for this position.

Beneath this office in structure is the Provincial Presbyter. So far in Benin City, only five women have made it to this position (compared to more than a hundred male pastors heading branch churches). Of these five women, three of them—Rev. (Prof. Mrs.) Nora Omoregie, Rev. Mrs. Esther Adagbonyin, and Maria Omorogieva are still serving but may not get to the Episcopal leadership level. Two further female members—Rev. (Mrs.) Grace Ekperigin and Rev. Mrs. Mary Igunma—have been retired because of age and have bowed out of active service. These two female provincial heads my research respondents considered simply to be widows—rather than (retired) leaders in their own right. In short, the church hardly saw these women as subjects in their own right, let alone ecclesial leaders. They usually give them a concession by allowing them to minister under the shadow of a male head; that is, as leaders, they report to a male head to make it seem as if it is the man that runs the office. Women could never attain these positions simply as female members of the faith community if their husbands were still alive. The less than one percent of women who are in high profile positions in churches is not enough to change the patriarchal structure that speaks to the specific power of male dominance and in turn denies female members the opportunities to occupy such positions in the Pentecostal terrain. It is sad to note that although female members meet the ordination requirements like male members, the goal posts just keep shifting in favor of male members, simply because of their gender, not their intrinsic ministry skills.267

267 For an in-depth understanding of the ordination criteria, see the Miscellaneous section of the Amended Constitution of the CGMi, Article X, 29.
Rev. Mrs. Esther Adagbonyin held the office of a district presbyter at the time of this study. While several women attend the Bible school like the male members, it is mostly women that the church draws from CWFI that they ordained as Rev. ministers. Examples of such ordained women are Rev. (Prof. Mrs) Nosa Aladeselu, Rev. Mrs. Mary Aroko, and Josephine Kpere-Daibo. The church relegates these ordained women to nominal roles; some, for example, are sent to be as assistant pastors to their male counterparts in branch churches. Also, it is only full-time pastors that have the privilege of becoming a district, zonal, and/or regional presbyters, roles that are therefore immediately off-limits to women. This arrangement is no different in the church’s administrative wing. Women are rarely represented in the higher echelons; those who are leaders are typically “heads of department.” Thus no woman can rise to the most authoritative leadership position beside the present archbishop Margaret.

3.2.2 CGMi’s Ministries Arms

The section aims to throw light on the different organizations and ministry arms of the church. The CGMi as a leading ministry succeeds in establishing several arms of ministries that are related to the church. While some of these organs operate within the church, others operate outside it. The ministry arms range from schools to hospitals to the International Leadership Resources Institute (ILRI). These external organs are the Word of Faith Group of Schools, the Bible School – All Nations for Christ Bible Institute, and the Benson Idahosa University. This university is the pioneering Christian university in Nigeria. Other organs include the hospital (Faith Medical Center) and the Idahosa World Outreach (the evangelistic and media organ).
There are also fellowship groups that advance the goals of the church. They include the Men’s ministry, The Christian Women Fellowship Int’l, The Youth Fellowship, The Teenage Ministry, and the Children’s Ministry. Other internal organs include the Evangelism team, Usher’s ministry, Choristers, Prayer band, Protocol, Marriage Counseling, Sunday School Teachers, Kingdom builders, Prison ministry, Hospital ministry, Visitation ministry, Follow up ministry, Welcoming team, and the Decoration team. Though it is not within the purview of this study to discuss all these arms, in chapter four I give detailed attention to the CWFI.

3.3: And “Mostly Women:” An Analysis of the CGMi Organizational chart

Situating my dissertation’s primary demographic and data set is essential. Here, I ground my discussion on women by noting their numerical strength and their role in providing human services in CGMi. As noted elsewhere, the demographic trends in the church have always been to women’s advantage, historically and in modern times. The bulk of the members of the CGMi and by extension the NPT are women. Yet there is no parallel representation of women at the leadership level. It is the males who have ostensibly benefitted from the number and contributions of women, whom they nonetheless describe as “inferior and profane.”

The history of the church is a history in which the visionary women have repeatedly been excluded, whether as missionaries or as pastors. Although CGMi aspires to overcome exclusionary gender practices through sharing the gospel with women and seeking to promote gender-sensitive Pentecostal community, that aspiration is, for the most part, theoretical and not yet implemented, as we see from the previous

---

268 CGMi, “Ministers’ Handbook,” Article IV &VI, 4-6.
organizational charts.\textsuperscript{269} Therefore, in a study such as this, I cannot but write women narratives and women’s organization such as CWFI that have helped to disciple men as well as women.

According to the weekly headcount in the CGMi and other Pentecostal churches the author visited in the course of this research, women, both married and unmarried, make up more than half of the CGMi and NPT populations—and provide more than half of the financial contributions to the ministry. While some of these women hold high-ranking positions in secular jobs, some are middle-class women who work to support their family. Whatever their financial status, they finance faith communities that still identify them as inferior/profane—an identification that they moreover justify biblically—and therefore unfit to occupy authoritative leadership positions. So while women make up the overwhelming majority of the CGMi as well as the Pentecostal faith community in Nigeria, the churches consider the vast majority of them unfit to serve in authoritative leadership positions by virtue of their gender alone. Bidemi Paul in an interview captures this truth: “Women’s numerical strength does not translate to representation in decision-making positions in the NPT.”\textsuperscript{270} Women’s participation has been in the shadows. They are called upon to assume subsidiary ministry roles, such as supplying music or being assistants to men in some capacity. The church justifies this subordination of women culturally and biblically. These norms continue to devalue females’ dignity and worth.

\textsuperscript{269} Personal observation at the CGMi, Faith Miracle Center on June 1, 2016.
\textsuperscript{270} P.I. with Paul Bidemi in Benin City on June 1, 2016.
Women thus represent less than one percent of the total population of those “fit” to occupy an authoritative leadership position, least of all as a bishop. Only two women so far have made it to the level of provincial church leadership and were retired because of their age. One such woman is Rev. Mrs. Grace U. Ekperigin, a very loyal member who was at the forefront of the women’s ministries but could not make it past the provincial leadership level. Another is Rev. Mrs. Mary Igunma, who became a District Presbyter through her work with the children’s ministry department and has recently retired. Presently, the number of women at the provincial level in Benin is only two: Rev. (Prof.) Mrs. Norah Omorogie and Rev. (Barr.) Mrs. Maria Omorogieva. Meanwhile, Rev. Mrs. Esther Adagbonyin is a District Presbyter, the first step toward holding an authoritative leadership position. Given her age and the history of women in ministry in Benin, before she becomes a zonal coordinator, she undoubtedly will have retired. This path explains two critical attributes of the NPT: (1) there is an acute gender imbalance in the church hierarchy, despite the numerical strength and ministerial giftedness of women, and (2) it is the male members who appropriate and allot social-religious advantage, a privilege that dramatically favors them.

One way that the CGMi holds back many of the women, according to Rev. Mrs. Alero Ezomo, is actually to reward them in a limited way for their religious commitments. She informed me that, “A good number of women go with the ‘deaconess’ label since the church ordained them into the leadership office. This ordination, for me, is the conformist ‘bait’ that they use to appease women. This title and position gives women a false sense of belonging so that they give, and give, and continue to give of their time.

---

271 This assertion is drawn from my observation and inference from conversations with research participants.
272 Amended Constitution of CGMi, Article IX, nos. b & c, 28.
and finances for the development of the church.”

The deaconess position is the first and lowest level of the leadership ladder. Few women advance beyond this level. As deaconesses, women are “allowed” to “serve the table,” lead other women in washing, cleaning, and decorating the church and its environs, and take care of visiting preachers. Rev. Dr. (Mrs.) Mary Oshomah informed me that, “It was only recently when the cries of women became heard that CGMi started ordaining women into the position of Reverend Ministers.”

Although the church ordinands women as Reverends, in practical terms, they are hardly ever posted to head a branch-church or given ministerial or liturgical responsibilities in their own right as female members of the faith community. Their tasks are drudgery; they serve in subservient and administrative positions where they are not allowed to make decisions without the approval of a male head. These ordained women ministers are most visible during women’s week and annual conventions. When I asked one research participant, Merry Eze (pseudonym), why, as an ordained Reverend Minister, she has no ecclesiastical jurisdiction; she said: “They did not send me to a branch and I refused to go.”

Another respondent, Menah Aize, echoed Merry Eze by noting that “The church ordinands women into minor positions, so they have a sense that the church is meeting their needs and then the church continues to enjoy the women’s support.”

It is such positions as this that encourage women to become “conformist.” I refer to this position of Reverend Ministers as being “without a portfolio and having only the semblance of equality.” Respondent Matthew Ogbe confirmed the data offered elsewhere

273 Auto-ethnography with Alero Ezomo (pseudonym) – June 10, 2016
274 P.I. with Mary Oshomah (Rev. Dr. (Mrs.) (pseudonym) on May 25, 2016
275 P.I. with Merry Eze on May 28, 2016.
276 P.I. with Menah Aize (pseudonym) on April 23, 2016.
by noting that: “Mama would not have assumed the position of the Archbishop in her capacity as a woman if she were not the founding pastor’s wife.” In short, on the one hand, “family” both promoted Margaret into this position, but on the other hand, is used to police and prevent women from assuming ministerial leadership positions. Even so, many male ministers like Solomon Achebe argue that: “Women are taking over as they now occupy leadership positions like men.”

Sadly, only a handful of these CGMi men and even women recognize this structure as a strategy to hold women in check. Their beliefs are as diverse as their socio-economic locations. For example, a good number of these women understand themselves to have some “personal commitment” to God and serving in positions such as deaconess as an expression of their devotion to God. They also believe that when they do “stuff” for God, that God will be attending to their socio-economic, spiritual, and class needs. I recognize this as an indoctrinating structure put in place so that women continue to have a sense of belonging and be satisfied with these honorary titles. It is exploitative. For while these women clean rooms and “serve at the table” without pay, the full-time male pastors line their pockets with monthly income and allowances. The largesse comes from the church from which these same “Reverend Ministers” and/or deaconesses are not entitled to benefit, even though their financial contributions are large because their “rewards are in heaven – a certain form of capitalist tendency.”

To drive home this capitalist tendency, the male pastors believe and promote the idea that God rewards those who labor in his vineyard and so encourage women to “work without pay.” What is worse, men often call out women publicly on Sundays for failing

---

277 P.I. with Matthew Ogbe (pseudonym) on April 26, 2016.
278 P.I. with Solomon Achebe (Rev.) (pseudonyms) in Benin on June 8, 2016
279 Amended Constitution of CGMi, Article IX, no. d, 28.
to show up to clean the church hall and so forth. They are scolded and told what awaits them as rewards or punishment if they continue to fail to be ‘servant-servant,’ as they never have and could never be ‘servant-leaders’ as males. As a corrective and punitive measure, the failing women are instructed to return the following weekend to keep the sanctuary clean. 280

While there are few women in authoritative leadership positions, some have problematized the snail’s pace at which women rise to leadership positions. The people who perceive women’s assumption of positions to be problematic are predominantly the male believers and leaders at CGMi. What does this connote? It signifies that those in power are vested in keeping that power in their own hands.

It is, therefore, appropriate to surmise that male privileges, the social-cultural and economic benefits that create their identity, enables and comes at the expense of women’s subjugation. Males, therefore, are double advantaged: they oppress women because of their sex and in so doing secure their privileged positions. This privilege unites the men, albeit superficially, within the NPT.

Further, the ideology of working in the earthly vineyard for reward in heaven seems to make women adherent blind to the fact that the community they work to create does not amply value or defend their potential. They fail to see the dangers of a community of faith that requires sacrifices—and exclusively women’s sacrifices—to function effectively. Small wonder that women perceive themselves as not sharing in the luxury of “belonging” to the mainstream and enjoying the religious and economic privileges of the men within the same faith community. The supposed superiority of the

male gender is a type of socio-cultural capital that emboldens such limitation by falsely producing a biased order.

Males understandably embrace such difference in status to situate and distinguish themselves from women. This maleness and male superiority is part and parcel of the Benin culture. Sadly, this ideology has become part of the CGMi (NPT) culture as a church that grew up in Benin, borrows cultural traits from Benin tradition, and now helps to further reinforce such an unjust society under the guise of this being God’s will.

3.4: Expansion and Connection of CGMi with other Pentecostal Denominations

In this section, I will explore CGMi’s association or connection with other Pentecostal congregations and investigate to what extent this relationship advances and enriches the growth of Nigerian Pentecostalism. I will draw on the testimonies of Benson Idahosa’s protégés to articulate the relationship of CGMi with other denominations within and outside Nigeria.

Pentecostalism, at least as introduced by Benson Idahosa, was never confined to Benin City or the Benin people. Its effect continues to spread to this day. Indeed, the history of Nigeria’s (Africa) modern Pentecostalism is linked with the birth of CGMi and the extraordinary persona of Benson. Certainly, CGMi is acclaimed as a model, a vanguard that blazes a Pentecostal trail in Nigeria and beyond. Certainly, CGMi has branches the world over, from Europe to Africa, from Asia to America. I do not exaggerate in stating that Pentecostal churches in Nigeria mimic CGMi concepts and practices. The influence of CGMi on the religious, economic, and social life of the Pentecostal tradition has been enormous.

---

281 Observation during ethnographic research in a number of Pentecostal churches visited in the course of my research work.
Even after his death, there is no doubt that B.A. Idahosa’s memory still inspires many Pentecostals who seek to advance the kingdom’s course. Evidence of this is that CGMi, though still under attack from many quarters, is larger and stronger than ever—thanks in part to the spirit of teamwork, and the administrative impact of his widow who currently heads the church. Benson was (and Margaret is) indeed, a real hero of Faith in his time and beyond; dead and alive, their accomplishments are legendary. Daniel Orris supports this claim:

“Benin City respects and salutes this great man of God, even at death. He moved with God, and his people know it. His Bible School attracts [noble] people from different African nations. They also come from Mauritius, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, the Middle East, Europe, and other nations of the world—a truly international Bible Training Centre of dynamic faith. He was the foremost black African evangelist to shake Australia in a massive crusade that got national attention.”

Greg Chibwe Mumba affirms Orris’ words, noting, “What a General he was and will still be even after his death as his works and impart are yet speaking till date. I honor [the] grace [of God] upon his life.” In a similar vein, Archbishop Joseph Ojo, an erstwhile senior member of the CGMi who left after Idahosa’s death to establish the Calvary Church of God Mission Inc. Nigeria, also saluted his deeds.

---

282 “Only time determines true heroes. It is by the time that we judge the actions and the effect of the hero’s deeds. Who is a hero? I am of the view that a hero is a woman or man whose actions have been in the service of the more significant good and whose influence is national or international. A hero is someone who is prepared to act in pursuit of a freer, more equitable and democratic future, without recourse to violence” (Jason Cowley, “Heroes of our Time – the top 50” in New Statesman http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/politics/2014/04/heroes-our-time-top-50 (posted May 22, 2006), accessed on July 31, 2017. I think if nominations for statesmen were to include the dead, Benson Idahosa would receive multiple nominations because he is still very much admired and idealized for his courage, outstanding achievement, and noble qualities (Oxford English Dictionary). His sense of extraordinary courage was defined by his faith in the Gospel, but his compassionate but uncompromising principles for the Gospel elicit admiration too.


Kingdom Church in Lagos, informed me in a conversation concerning Idahosa that “God used Idahosa’s messages to keep us alive in faith today.” Benson Idahosa believed that God’s miraculous provision applies to Africans as well as other nations of the world and strongly believed that Africa has a part in God’s work and that the continent will reap God’s blessings. With this notion, he affected Christians and church leaders in Nigeria and beyond. Benson’s charisma opened new doors for him to hold prestigious positions in numerous Christian organizations including the College of Bishops of the International Communion of Christian Churches; he was said to be the leader of over seven million Jesus People worldwide before he went to be with the Lord on March 12, 1998.

3.5: Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I considered the socio-historical narrative of CGMi to evaluate Benson Idahosa and the CGMi as the subject of modern Pentecostal development. Using CGMi as a lens, I depicted how their new religiosity amongst other ways of acting, thinking, and being introduced and inspired new ways of thinking, doing Christianity, and engaging gender inclusivity in the NPT. Yet one cannot fully understand the exponential growth of NP and its providence for “reverse mission” if we undermine the legendary work of CGMi. I also showed via the organizational charts that the increased number of women in the church has not translated into an increased number of women leaders in authoritative leadership positions. It appears the conventional religious system that mostly upholds male members who believe they are more entitled and better equipped for leadership than female members unfortunately still has currency.

---

285 See Osinaike, “Idahosa, how he turned down the gift of a jet, accessed on August 3, 2017; Archbishop Joseph Ojo also confirmed and reiterated this with me in a P. I. on July 13, 2016.

This chapter provided evidence that CGMi is still a male-dominated institution that cares little for injustices perpetrated against women in its midst. Research respondents noted that the present archbishop occupies the position “in trust” for another male (her son) to take over and advance the patriarchal structure. This claim may not be out of place because the church has indeed already consecrated her son as a bishop. For even though a woman is at the apex of the leadership structure, there is hardly any other female besides Margaret Idahosa who holds a senior leadership position and it is not likely that this will change soon. Evidently, such inequality has an adverse effect on the NPT, in the next chapter I focus on how gender inequality is framed and reproduced.
Chapter Four:

The Dawn of a New Era: The Framework for Policing and Re-producing
Gender Boundaries in Nigerian Pentecostal Tradition

The present discourses on culture ... are based on a historical, one-sided male
construction of custom and cultural practices that must be re-examined. Because
this male-dominant view ... has never been challenged, it has gained legitimacy
and paramount importance. Modern prejudice about women underlies this view,
and such biases have worked to consolidate and protect men’s right.

Nkiru U. Nzegwu\textsuperscript{287}

[This is how we] construct the world, and as products of the world, we become
attuned to it in unnoticeable ways.

Pierre Bourdieu\textsuperscript{288}

In the preceding chapters, I delineated gender practices in Benin City, the
emergence of modern Pentecostal tradition in post-colonial Benin City with particular
reference to the CGMi, and how Benson Idahosa opened women’s broader inclusion in
public ministry. These chapters have laid the foundation for further analysis of gender
boundaries within Pentecostalism and how religious and cultural issues have provided the
framework for policing and reproducing gender inequality in Benin City.

Research data shows that CGMi, and by extension, the Nigerian Pentecostal
Tradition (NPT) continue to frame gender stereotypes for policing and reproducing
gender boundaries. It is, therefore, ironic to think that though they claim to be
egalitarian, Pentecostal congregations still relegate women to certain less desirable and
less prominent aspects of ministry. It is also ironic that it is the same women that so
greatly nurture the community of faith the male leadership prevents from assuming senior
leadership positions. How is gender inequality reproduced in a Pentecostal congregation
like the CGMi, and by extension NPT?

\textsuperscript{288} Bourdieu, Masculine Domination, 5.
The primary goal of this chapter is to offer a sociological and analytical (interpretative) framework for the mechanisms that the church uses to police gender boundaries and reproduce gender inequality. It draws clues from existing patterns to critically illuminate the often taken-for-granted and unnoticed day-to-day exaggerated relational nuances of gender patterns that perpetuate and reinforce gender inequality in the NPT. I choose to focus on the day-to-day experience because it is false objectivity to concentrate on well-documented outcomes and neglect power, deference, privilege, and other critical zones of inequality that are unwritten. Moreover, the day-to-day experiences are fascinating because, in Nigeria, as well as other African nations, religion is the social fabric of everyday life. Nigerians interweave life and thought with religious beliefs; they are inseparable. For example, in all undertakings – from marriage to birth, in work, farm, death, eating, and traveling, religion is naturally embedded. Thus, it is not unusual to find an inscription on a barber or tailor’s shop that reads, “My God is able.” To be born in Nigeria is to be born into a culture that is intensely religious.

This chapter relies on the sociological and gender theories of Cecilia Ridgeway (expectation states theory), Pierre Bourdieu (value production theory), and Emile Durkheim (ritual theory). It also draws on a broad body of ethnographic and empirical evidence to support the notion that Pentecostal congregations employ a cultural mechanism for policing and reproducing gender boundaries that affect women’s

\[\text{290} \text{ Judith Lorber, Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics. (3rd ed). (LA, Calif.: Roxbury Pub., 2005), 9.}\]
\[\text{291} \text{ Kwame Gyeke, 4, cited in Soothill, Gender, Social Change, and Spiritual Power, 9.}\]
expectations and performances. I do this to draw attention to how NPT reproduces and sustains an unequal and therefore unjust social-cultural order.

The inquiry into in/equality in a Nigerian Pentecostal Congregation is crucial for the social scientific study of religion. For one thing, it illumines how gender stereotypes and inequalities are reproduced within NP and its exponential growth and impact on the lives of many faithful women—with male Pentecostal leaders all the while continuing to profess empowerment for women (and men). Studies of gender roles in NP, therefore, need to think through the shifting gender realities and analyze their social effects more adequately. Additionally, such analysis helps to make sense of gender patterns that do not advance the NPT and society but continue to extol males, exclude and relegate females to inferior and undesirable positions (to varying degrees), and show its effects on women within the NPT.

Studies like this remain contested on several grounds, including social, cultural, and religious grounds. The relational analysis I advocate clashes with the narrative mode in which people ordinarily think and speak about gender processes in the Pentecostal congregations because the empowering power of the Spirit liberates women. However, empirical literature emphasizes the contributions made by a token number of women and deliberately ignores and minimizes the gender inequalities that persist. This work, therefore, opens up a necessary debate. Indeed, many of my respondents have argued gender inequalities exist in Pentecostal congregations. Thus, I focus here on the differential and unequal practices that are manifested in different forms of church life and in the lives of women who serve Pentecostal churches in different capacities. My ethnographic and empirical work provides a broad synthesis of thinking concerning
inequality in a NPC, thanks to the fieldwork that gave me deeper insight into the lives and experiences of respondents within that church. Their perceptions provide a window by which one can view the gender in/equality in this church. The question which I address in the following section is: Does Pentecostalism empowers its adherents?

4.1 The Dawn of a New Era for Pentecostal Tradition and Religious Gate-Keepers

In chapter two, I dated the history of Christianity in modern Nigeria back to the missionary enterprises which, after the eighteenth-century evangelical revival in Europe and America, spread the salvation gospel of Christ abroad, including to Africa. In such missionary churches, it is stating the obvious that the public space and positions of authority were men’s exclusive preserve while the private space, depicted as women’s space, was not exempted from patriarchy and other forms of male domination grounded in religious principles. This trend, backed up with the local patriarchal customs, fits well with Benin (African) cultural values, which fostered extreme male dominance but limited women’s domains and spheres of influence. This dominance underscores the assumption that females are crucial for patriarchy, and are less spiritual and less sacred than men, and sets the stage for excluding women from positions of authority in Nigeria’s history of mission for generations.

Consequently, such patriarchal ideas and customs significantly and negatively impacted women’s number in church leadership positions, with the result that many of the early church women lived and died in silence. It is not because they did not have the same charisma and qualities as men, but because they did not have permission to be self-

expressive in matters of church governance. Building on the precedence set by the mission-instituted churches, the African Independent Church (AIC) limited women’s participation in active ministry. Philomena N. Mwaura describes the notable tensions that existed in the church as a result of such relationships. This negativity again was founded on the cultural ideology that portrayed men as the ‘head’ and thus superior to women, which this ideology regarded as an after-thought of creation and therefore the second sex that is, intellectually weak and less analytic. Males who initiated Independent Church movements evidently shared in the missionaries’ masculine ideology for the gender difference, for while men occupied the public space, women remained in the private spaces. The reason for their exclusion, like the missioners, was linked with the idealized women’s biological and emotional frame that was thought to be profane, immature, spiritually deviant, and so could never gain equal authority with men.

The emergence of the African Indigenous Church—for example, the Aladura movement or African Indigenous Pentecostal Movement around the turn of the twentieth century—changed the narratives of missions in the years that followed. The shift came

293 Fatokun, 3.
296 Bolaji O. Bateye, “Forging Identities: Women as Participants and Leaders in the Church among the Yoruba” in Studies in World Christianity. Vol. 13, No. 1 (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, Project Muse, 2007), 1 – 12. Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex refers to the treatment of women for being women. It is the subordinate roles women are made to assume because of their sex and not because of their ability. We mostly find this practice of subordinated roles in male-dominated society, such as in the NPC that I study in this project.
299 J. D. Y. Peel, Aladura: A Religious Movement among the Yoruba. London: Published for the International African Institute, (Oxford University Press, 1977); Deji Ayegboyin and S. Ademola Ishola,
after an increase in women’s higher education, and notably, a desire to reclaim Spirit baptism. For the Christianity of the first-century church dominated by a sense of power and spiritual experience seemed to have brought a ray of hope for women. A shift from the private space to the public space became inevitable, and women began to assume the role of prophetesses and itinerant preachers. Though women now started to have some leverage in the ministry, they were hardly granted the authority of the offices they assumed, certainly not at all to the extent that their male counterparts did.\(^{300}\)

Empirical studies show that some women preached from the podium and were/are co-founders in Charismatic churches.\(^{301}\) Notable amongst these women were Sophia Odunlami of the Precious Stone or Diamond Society which began in St Saviors’ Anglican Church, Ijebu-Ode in 1918,\(^{302}\) and Captain Abiodun Akinsowon, who founded the Cherubim and Seraphim Church in 1925 together with Prophet Moses Orimolade. Interestingly, Ms. Odunlami’s spiritual capabilities saved southern Nigeria from the epidemic that wasted that part of the country after World War I. Her spiritual ability earned the prayer group its fame as a divine-healing group.\(^{303}\)

---


\(^{301}\) Women are less likely to be in positions of authority in the church, and when they are, their positions carry less authority than those occupied by men. That is, even though they become leaders, it was of some sort. They were seldom in control of such positions. The power bestowed did not always lend itself to authority. For example, she may be allowed to prophesy when the spirit came upon her but scarcely to preach on the podium without permission from the superior male in the church. Still, in a subordinate position, she is answerable to the man, irrespective of who was considered more spiritual.


Abiodun Akinsowon’s leadership qualities and spiritual charisma shot African Indigenous Pentecostal churches to the limelight.\textsuperscript{304} Fatokun is right to have probed the possibility of a successful and popular Cherubim and Seraphim Church if they suppressed Ms. Akinsowon’s spiritual gifts on account of her being a woman and thus profane. The transition from African Indigenous to modern Pentecostal churches seemed to have charted a new course for women and men in Nigeria. For instance, Fatokun remarks: “A close assessment of the Neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria reveals that not only are women playing prominent leadership roles in church administration on an equal footing with men, but Nigerian Pentecostalism has, in fact, produced great women church founders.”\textsuperscript{305}

Fatokun’s idea may seem plausible at first, but it is problematic for the following reasons: it implies that the gender gap in leadership positions between women and men is a non-issue and therefore it creates a false assumption about gender equality. While Fatokun may be correct in stating that more women are beginning to ascend to leadership positions, my study shows that women’s access to positions of authority tends to be directly related to their relationship with men—their husbands or fathers—who founded these churches. I observed and therefore suggest that they may not have gained access to such exalted positions simply because of their giftedness. As Fatokun stated, “some of these women whose husbands are church founders have proved themselves suitable helpmates to their husbands in co-running churches/ministries.”\textsuperscript{306}

\textsuperscript{305} Fatokun, “Women and Leadership in Pentecostal Churches,” 5.
\textsuperscript{306} Ibid, 5.
Many people suggest that a new era dawned for women in the history of African Christianity when modern Pentecostalism emerged in Benin City, Nigeria. Many have likewise suggested that the emergence of the Pentecostal Movement, believed to be phenomenal, was liberal on some social issues and created opportunities and narratives to upset the “natural” or God-given balance of the sexes. Pentecostal culture seemed to give women a prominent place by inventing the “preaching mother,” “preaching wife,” “preaching lady,” and to an extent to respect women’s voices around the fire. They noted increased women’s participation in Pentecostal discourse because the folks they once sidelined has assumed public spaces.

Such a view was confirmed through my ethnographic fieldwork in a Nigerian Pentecostal mega-church that is believed to be at the vanguard of Pentecostalism in Nigeria (Africa). It was not surprising to me how frequently many of my respondents emphatically stated that “there exist no gender inequalities in NPCs.” Respondents reminded me that, unlike the missionary instituted churches, only the Pentecostal churches ordain women as deaconesses and pastors as well bishops and archbishops like their male counterparts. For example, Solomon Ikhidero informed me in an email:

“From my observations and sample of opinions from Christians of Pentecostal background, [I can say that] Pentecostals have a liberal attitude towards women. Women have equal rights as men, they ordain them as deacons, evangelists, bishops, and archbishops. Many of these churches, as we know, are a private initiative of founders. So, they tend to follow the personal whims of these founders. In such groups, the practice could easily be decided by consensus with the husband and wife through a simple family agreement. There are some women founders, who made themselves bishop without qualms. In Nigeria, there are many women Bishops such as Bishop Bola Odeleke, founder of Power Pentecostal Church, Archbishop Margaret Benson Idahosa, spiritual leader of the CGMi, and Archbishop Dorcas Olaniyi of the Power Pentecostal Church.”

307 P. I. with Solomon Ikhidero on April 24, 2016.
Supporting this claim, Banji Aluko in a recent independent survey reports on the increasing number of women who are Pentecostal church founders and overseers in Benin City.\textsuperscript{308} Similarly, Theresa Okure, Bolaji Olukemi Bateye, and Samson Fatokun’s studies suggest that an increasing number of women are preachers, heads, and co/founders of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria.\textsuperscript{309} This notion of ordained or self-acclaimed women deaconesses, pastors, bishops, and archbishops presumes gender equality as women now have the opportunity, like men, to occupy the public space and assume positions of authority. Okure, Bateye, and Fatokun are right to have highlighted the contributions of women, even though their analysis deliberately ignored evidence of differential and unequal treatment of women and men, particularly of women in male-founded churches.

Here I focus on women in male-founded Pentecostal churches. Data shows that these religious scholars’ suggestions are generalizations which, when subjected to empirical scrutiny, do not hold up because there is still gender disparity and marginalization. My auto-ethnographic observation dispels the idea that women are becoming visible, because the insignificant percentage in secondary leadership positions does not equate to gender equality; the inequality is all the more incongruous when the women are highly educated and spiritually gifted, at times even more so than their male counterparts. Specifically, research data show evidence that the NPT remains conservative and that they continue to consign women to the private (family) space as a result of their societal and traditional belief systems. Also, although prominent African

Christianity scholars have studied the so-called new face of NPC, I have yet to see any research that is open about the diverse ways women and men get treated differently and unequally.310

How can one explain the insignificant number of women pastors who head branch-churches in a denomination in which the demographic trends are to women’s advantage and which has a woman as its archbishop? It is this insignificant percentage of women in positions as pastors that make male members of the CGMi hold on to and claim that CGMi is gender sensitive and inclusive. Not so: while one can enumerate the number of women who occupy a high level of socio-political positions, the same cannot be done within the modern Pentecostal spheres. This practice is so because male-founded Pentecostal churches perceive women in less status than their male counterparts in gender-congruent roles, and in turn, accord fewer and many times, subsidiary positions to them. For example, there is an insignificant number of females in high profile positions in the church, and those on top face additional challenges. That is, more women are ordained deaconesses’ than head-pastors. The deaconess level is the first in the leadership ladder, and most women remain in this position for the rest of their religious journey. My hypothesis is further substantiated by my discovery that it is only the wife of the founding pastor of CGMi that has risen to the highest leadership position such as the archbishop. In my analysis of this development, and with no other woman in sight occupying a position close in rank/position to the office of the national presbyter or zonal coordinator, the future hardly looks promising for women’s inclusivity and assumption into authoritative leadership positions in the NPC. Although Idahosa’s CGMi is one prominent mega-entity, it is by no means homogeneous. Empirical evidence shows that the degree of

gender inclusivity in religious order varies and that no commonality in gender patterns exists. Indeed, a notable Nigerian religion and gender scholar, Dorcas O. Akintunde, has demonstrated the perverseness of gender inequality in major Nigerian (mega) Pentecostal churches. She is of the view that churches have contradictory rules on the positions women are allowed and welcome to assume, and this also applies to the CGMi, even though the CGMi has a woman as its head presently.\footnote{311 Dorcas O. Akintunde, “Decolonizing Biblical Studies in Nigeria: Women Perspective,” in S.O. Abogunrin, eds., \textit{Biblical Studies and Women Issues in Africa}, (Ibadan, Nigeria: National Association of Biblical Studies, 2005), 95–120.}

To substantiate this claim with NPT, a cursory look at some Pentecostal churches will be helpful. Specifically, the Deeper Life Bible Church (DLBC) reveals the result of the stereotypical cultural schema that yet views women as unclean and situates men as heads of the home and church. They still put women in subordinate positions in matters relating to administration and ecclesiastical order. The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), like the CGMi, allows women some measure of leadership status that they otherwise tie to women’s marital status. The Living Faith Church (Winners Chapel), despite its level of advancement and global outlook, considers it scripturally unethical to give women the same access to positions of leadership authority as men. They further complicate the diverse trajectories by the power and authority they grant to the founding pastors, and this creates tension between women’s social roles and their religious calling.\footnote{312 Soothill, \textit{Gender, Social Change, and Spiritual Power}, 30.}

Of the four churches mentioned above, Deeper Life Bible Church (William Kumuyi) does not ordain women into positions that allow them to preach at the podium. The Living Faith Chapel (David Oyedepo) has not ordained any woman other than the
wife of the founder (and by extension wives of bishops) to the position of pastor. The Redeemed Christian Church of God, (Emmanuel A. Adeboye) did not ordain women until about 1999. In that church, the first female to be ordained as a full pastor was the General Overseer’s wife – Pastor Mrs. Foluke Adenike Adeboye – which became necessary because other women were going to be ordained.

In this context, the CGMi’s account is a unique narrative as Mrs. Margaret Idahosa was first ordained not by the church but by their American partners, and she later came to a head as the first woman archbishop in Africa[^313] — and that only because her husband died. She too had an uphill battle with patriarchy and cultural beliefs in accessing the position — a struggle I describe in chapter four. Critiquing this development, Ehinomen Nelson informed me that, “In the church’s annual national convention held in November 2015, seven (all-male) members were consecrated bishops; whereas there was no one woman in this array of males that was found worthy of consecration.”[^314]

Moreover, at the time of my ethnographic research, there were no women in the offices of Zonal Coordinator or National Presbyter, and only one Provincial presbyter and two District Presbyters in Benin City. Women who are not pastors’ wives may be ordained, but they are almost always ordained as a deacon, assistant pastor, and the likes. The diaconate is the first (level entry) and often last level of promotion for women; my investigation reveals that the church promotes only one in ten women from the diaconate position. Moreover, when the church promotes her, it is usually in the position of an assistant pastor where she continues to play subsidiary roles and is answerable to a


particular male ‘head.’ The church’s organizational chart is, in fact, explicit about a
member’s path to becoming a bishop. S/he first must have become a district, provincial,
national presbyter or zonal coordinator. It is therefore correct to state that this absence of
women in critical positions does not make for gender equality.

What could be responsible for the gender gap between women and men in
positions of authority in CGMi as well as NPT in general? On what basis should gender
inequality be a subject of scholarly interest when Pentecostalism, unlike missionary
churches, claims to be transforming the socio-cultural and religious representation of
women (and men) in several countries, such as Nigeria? A discussion on the limits of
stereotypes support my hypothesis in the following way: 1) Women bear the weight of
exaggerated gender stereotypes; 2) the weight of mother/ing is socially constructed to
impact women’s involvement in ministry; 3) age is another factor in the paucity of
women in leadership positions since women who have assumed office are the ones who
have passed childbearing/rearing age; 4) single women have no chance of becoming head
pastors, and 5) women gain access to positions of authority such as senior pastor,
arch/bishop, only if they are intimately connected to a man (typically her husband or
father) who is already in such a position.

Max Weber noted almost a century ago that “the creation of what he called
‘social closure’ advances efforts by the powerful to exclude less powerful people from
the full benefits of the joint enterprise while facilitating efforts … to organize … the
seizure of benefits” “Social closure” is a monopolizing process whereby the powerful
(asserive) group creates borders to bar the less-powerful group(s) from power and

---

315 Ojo, The End-time Army, 19; Kalu, African Christianity.
46, 341–348.
resources. The powerful group regulates available or scarce resources and power by ‘gate-keeping’ or monitoring who is and who is not eligible for acceptance into a group. Weber further remarked that:

“… a social relationship may provide the parties … with opportunities for the satisfaction of spiritual or material interests. If the participants expect that the admission of others will lead to an improvement of their situation, improvement in degree, in kind, on the protection or the value of the liking, their interest will be in keeping the relationship open. If, on the other hand, their expectations are of improving their position by monopolistic tactics, their interest is a closed relationship.”

Weber’s theory of social closure can be seen at work in Nigerian Pentecostal congregations. I make this claim because NP congregations’ male founders/heads, like any founder of a secular organization, use social closure to draw far-reaching boundaries around themselves and then control the flow across such boundaries. To some degree, I agree with Weber’s theory of social closure that essentially locks inequality in place. However, contrary to Weber, I argue that the fluidity of the boundaries is further complicated by the monopolization and gate-keeping of such boundaries as it becomes problematic for some people to access or crossover. This crossover, in my view, may be one of the reasons why some token allowance is given to women in NPCs; and this token allowance given to negligible numbers of women to access the public space is mistaken for equality in Nigerian parlance.

The impact of this denial and superiority ideal on the social-cultural arrangement of humankind is enormous and costly. To make visible this denial system, I have formulated the theory I call ‘token allowance,’ as a way of capturing the pragmatic

317 Weber and Werner, 1:43.
318 Although the word “organization” may call to mind firms, government, schools, and similar formal, hierarchical structures, here I intend the term to encompass the different Pentecostal typologies which are well-bounded in clusters of social relations. Organizations include corporate kin groups, household, and religious sects. Cited in Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality*, 9.
nuances of ideas like status-belief, patriarchy, chauvinism, and the gender gap. To this end, I will show the correlation between religious belief and social-cultural norms and calls for transformation. This approach also requires all concerned to accept the limitations that now exist in the perception of gender differences as the critical minimum requirement that is needed to come up with new strategies that might aid the Nigerian Pentecostal male leaders in addressing the legacy of their social-cultural inheritance from which they still benefit.

Put differently, while women do have some limited access to leadership positions, that access, by being so limited, is hardly empowering. My formulation, based on my ethnographic data, reveals that it is only a token few women who share the preaching podium or gain access to positions of authority in male founded/headed churches. This limited representation of women in the performance and exercise of religious power and leadership is what I conceptualize as a token allowance. Such token allowance frames the modern reproduction of gender boundaries in the Church and fails to advance gender equality. Prominent African women theologians and American sociologists have discussed such token allowance in their studies and have demonstrated that while this token allowance is changing women’s condition, it is changing so slowly and for so few, that most women continue to be left at the margins.\footnote{Oduyoye and Kanyoro, \textit{The Will to Arise}, 10; Morolake Omonubi-McDonnell, \textit{Gender Inequality in Nigeria}. (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books, 2003); Judith Lorber, \textit{Gender Inequality}, 6.}

So when scholars of African Christianity refer to the increasing number of women who found, lead, and preach in Pentecostal congregations, I counter that they fail to see the token number of women in these positions of authority. For women’s participation in those functions is not in any way proportionate to the numerical strength and spiritual
skills of women who populate those churches. These tokenisms frame the discourse on gender inequality in ways that are problematic for women (and men) connected in filial relationships, since they take these gender patterns for granted and make them normative. The section that follows will show how such gender patterns are reproduced and reinforced in these churches.

4.2: Patterns of Gender Dynamics in Nigerian Pentecostal Churches

Humans have largely embodied the historical structures of the masculine order so that modes of perception have become the product of domination. Bourdieu argues that one way to break the circle of falsehood is finding a practical strategy of objectifying subjects. In this section, I will draw on sociological and gender theorists, and my research investigation, as well as empirical evidence, to explore the day-to-day gender patterns that police gender boundary and reproduce gender inequality in the NPT.

4.2.1: Representative Rites of Gender Relations

I will show in this section that ideas work alongside gender relations historically and can bridge the gap between males as superior and females as inferior beings. The section offers ways to think through the historical legacy that continually reproduce new possibilities for perpetuating gender inequality in the present.

Pentecostal tradition, clearly though subtly, continues to borrow gender practices from Benin religion and so continues to reproduce gender inequality. Male superiority

---


321 Tokenism, in this project, refers to a practice of making only a symbolic effort to recruit a small number of people from under-represented groups to give the appearance of equality within the Pentecostal tradition. Scholars have given attention to the contributions of a token number of women who are in positions of authority but fail to give the same attention to daily enterprises whose certain differentiated operations contribute significantly to the aggregate difference. To document such differences, explain them, and relate them to each other remains a significant task for social scientific scholars of religion.

322 Bourdieu, Masculine Domination, 5.
still seems to achieve the status it once had, and even now new rituals continue to emerge that reinforce this superior status and thus gender inequality. So the reinforcement of male superiority functions in NPT as social redress and impacts NP today.

This gender gap stems from a religio-cultural orientation that sociologist Cecilia Ridgeway refers to as a status-belief in the likeness of exaggerations of sex, utilizing a presumptuous creation story and female biological formation to determine women’s abilities and values. This approach constructs social effects and conceals these corollaries by preserving a belief in the superiority of men, an idea that is inevitably mapped onto social reality; while the gap scholars identify between this constructed normative human creation have an effect on human existence and the process of social mapping. The result of the social-cultural mapping is gender injustice, gender imbalance, and gender inequality.

Whether in the early days of Christianity in Nigeria or in contemporary times, gender inequality has been the norm. Aspects of Emile Durkheim’s ritual theory can help us make sense of this gender situation in religion. He argued that rudimentary rituals could stand in as a reminder of the sacrificial offering, and interestingly, representational rites help to accomplish this work. Gender theorist and sociologist Cecilia Ridgeway subscribes to Durkheim’s theory of social solidarity as framed in “cultural-states theory” when she argues that these theories reproduce in new ways the effects of previous ritualistic actions and practices. Contextualized to the NPT as exemplified in the CGMi, such effects offer a means of making sense of the production of maleness. Durkheim notes that rites survive to “assure the fecundity of the totemic species” (in this case, the

---

323 Bateye, “Forging Identities, 8.
superiority of maleness).\textsuperscript{324} Thus, rites not only perpetuate such supremacy—and injustice—but give it symbolic and religious weight.

Female bodies bear the weight of these types of everyday gendered practices, and as a result, history victimizes the woman. For example, the social value of misreading in Saint Paul’s letters ideas such as that women should obey their husbands, or not talk in public, is to reinforce the social-religious group idea. With these scriptural texts, male leaders in the Pentecostal tradition, and specifically in CGMi, wittingly or unwittingly sexualize women and increase her subjugation, and judge them spiritually profane and emotionally unfit. This sexualization has religio-cultural and historical consequences because a woman’s sexuality was/is exaggerated to exonerate the moral indiscretions of men. This exoneration extends even to the most basic things like where a woman sits in church. I have observed at the Living Faith Church (Winners Chapel) of Bishop David Oyedepo that women are barred from sitting in the front row during service allegedly because they “seduce” the men [of God] by how they dress. It is common for women to come to church on time and thus arrive earlier than their male counterparts. If they do so, church workers deny them front pew seating; it is the preserve of male members, even if they come to church late. This practice remains even when some of these “sacred cows” fall asleep during services, an action that, apparently, does not warrant censure in the same way the mere presence of a woman’s body does.\textsuperscript{325} In this case, they ritualize seating in the church by reserving the front seats for men only, with the excuse that their attire will not distract men from/of God.

\textsuperscript{324} Durkheim, 351.
\textsuperscript{325} Auto-ethnographic observation at Winners Chapel in Benin City, Nigeria on April 17, 2016.
These and similar rituals reinforce male superiority and female inferiority and then advance the reproduction of gender injustice and inequality in the NPT. Cecilia Ridgeway uses her theory of status-belief to assert that this practice adds to the structured patterns that support the functional effects of the socio-cultural order. This structure also has the symbolic impact of reinforcing the sacred symbol of maleness and the profane representation of female bodies.\textsuperscript{326}

Another representative rite is the categorization that connects gender stereotypes to alleged behaviors and thus fitness to be a leader in the church. Therefore, men attribute women’s allegedly undisciplined, emotional, nagging, and weak behavior to their small brains, conflating women’s gender with being problematic, dangerous, and disconnected from reality. Referring to Archbishop Margaret as an example of this trait, Bishop Samuel Okpe said: “You know women and the way they think, they do not think straight and so create problems when it comes to decision making. However, what can we do? We let her be.”\textsuperscript{327} Stunningly, Elder Joseph Ekeh\textsuperscript{328} agreed with Bishop Okpe’s stance when he said concerning his wife: “Women will always be women; you do not expect them to think maturely like men. They are too emotional, cannot keep secrets and cause trouble a lot.”

These senior men who occupy authoritative leadership positions in CGMi are biased in their perceptions of gender and thus reproduce gender inequality in this setting. Because of the leadership positions they hold, their ideas and viewpoints enjoy a specific currency that valorizes male power. This practice resonates with Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of value. He argues that the social functions simultaneously as a symbolic system

\textsuperscript{326} Bourdieu, \textit{Distinction}, 53-54.
\textsuperscript{327} P. I. with Samuel Okpe (Bishop) (pseudonym) on June 18, 2016.
\textsuperscript{328} P. I. with Joseph Ekeh (Elder) (pseudonym) on July 13, 2016.
of power relations in which the male leaders legitimize the physical condition that the recognized individuals set because these male leaders impose the opinion and self-image of these charismatic individuals as subjective.\textsuperscript{329} In this case, the value judgment made by these ‘grand’ male members and religious bourgeoisie assume the basis for validating the church’s social and religious judgments, interests, and practices, particularly as those relate to women members of the faith community.\textsuperscript{330} Pierre Bourdieu in his book \textit{Distinction} suggests that society reproduces gender and social structures at the level of the individual’s disposition and lifestyles. Bourdieu’s claim that the judgment of taste is not pure resonates with the NPT as much as anywhere else. For example, when these kinds of “religious grandmasters” make choices and judgment, the weight falls on the class/group that does not have the social currency to flex its muscles in opposition. Their judgment (of taste and lifestyle) in time becomes binding as a norm in everyday life. When this happens, those in power reinvent new forms of gender stereotypes, so that gender inequality is passed on to another generation as a legitimatized value and, eventually, a normative culture.\textsuperscript{331} Bourdieu argues that the “superiority of peculiarities” produces symbolic struggles.\textsuperscript{332} I believe this attitude initiates a specific type of symbolic power that in turn creates symbolic violence. A clear example of the dominant form of judgment of taste is the control over what knowledge is valued, sanctioned, and rewarded within the education system, and the dominant form of analysis of taste in the control of sex and gender. These peculiarities enhance the production of boundaries. With time, these individuals establish the dominance of their trademark and insist that permission

\textsuperscript{329} Bourdieu, \textit{Distinction}, 107, 207.
\textsuperscript{330} Ibid, 26, 28, 208, 291.
\textsuperscript{331} Ibid, 208.
\textsuperscript{332} Ibid, 208.
must be sought from them before any other person gains access to their circle. It is remarkable to know that these (charismatic) male individuals (or groups) hardly relinquish their primary power of objectification to other people considered as an object and forcibly set the agenda for those with lower socio-cultural and hermeneutical capital.

While I find much of the analysis in *Distinction* convincing, I disagree with Bourdieu’s idea that everyone in society has equal capital and symbolic power. One wonders whether numbers matter in helping certain members of the society to gain symbolic power. This notion certainly seems to be the case in the NPT where women do not enjoy equality in cultural and religious spaces. So what do women need to do and do differently?

Cecilia Ridgeway’s Expectation States Theory resonates with Bourdieu’s notion of value judgment and is helpful for my study as it articulates the framework by which the male members use their social position to extend their social esteem, influence, power, and domination.³³³ Ridgeway has argued that “attitudes [and] sentiments summarize past feelings and reflect expectations for future feelings. In addition to the sentiments that an individual subjectively experiences in group contexts, this person might also engage in observable behavioral displays of emotions and sentiments.”³³⁴

What this means is that those without social esteem and power does not measure up to social-cultural expectations, and so they automatically fail to measure up to religious expectation. This expectation is a stigmatizing mark that men use to subjugate and police the women, thus subtly reproducing gender inequality. Is it therefore not right to argue that it is subjective remarks like the ones made by these CGMi male leaders that

---


³³⁴ Ibid, 347.
are representative of the Pentecostal tradition and perpetuate the perspective that women are of less value than men?

In addition to woman’s sexualization and her categorization as unintelligent, I noticed in my research how often men defame women because of their marital status and age. In an interview, Rev. (Mrs.) Josephine Daibo noted how a woman’s past becomes a tool used in policing and perpetuating her subjugation. She tells of a woman whom the church misrecognized because some men thought that her being a single woman could negatively affect her capacity to be the head pastor of a church she had founded. Their behavior was a type of gender retribution. This practice and other forms of concealed horror such as name-calling, which Rev. (Mrs.) Daibo grieved over, undoubtedly reinforce gender bias and inequality, and protect a worldview that is constructed to police and sustains the negative and positive rituals that work concurrently to oppress women.

This ritual is a representational one; it perpetuates male superiority and denies females who attempt to work their way to positions of authority, as do all such forms of defaming women that are the norm in the NPT.

Women demonized by men as religious “mad” deviants are those who bring their experiences from the margins to the center and rupture the sense of social-cultural and religious stability. They shatter religious borders imposed by men, religion, and culture in their effort to become voices to be reckoned with in faith communities. For as far as NPT is concerned, the subjugation and relegation of women is a central part of its practice and reality. The denomination assumes that particular individuals and groups are more valuable than others and so often exaggerates the achievements of those individuals.

What this means is that the NPT manipulates human value. This practice subjectively

---

335 P. I. with Josephine Daibo-Kpere (Rev. Mrs.) on June 1, 2016.
positions values and conceals the negative impact it has on women. In such a setting, male arrogance underscores groundless biases and exaggerates the judgment, significance, and the ability of men vis-à-vis that of women. In this case, the man who is the normative “superior being” benefits socially, culturally, and religiously while the woman defined by the men as the “inferior being” receives a social deficit.

Belief in the inability of women to arise beyond the social-cultural and religious mode that society constructs for them are other forms of exaggeration. Here women’s limitations are exaggerated, situating women, on the contrary, weaker, less intelligent, limited, and helpless position while exaggerating men’s abilities positively.

Another rite is an exaggeration of one’s ability to carry and fulfill one’s responsibility. This ritual of exaggeration refers to discourses and practices that suggest that the awareness and the expressions of human freedom are made possible through dependence on other humans. In many cases, it is the fact that women’s ability to exercise their responsibility is limited or prohibited because of normal bodily functions, such as menstruation (discussed earlier). Here, woman’s biological makeup becomes exaggeratedly marked and assigns the woman to the margin of society; further reinforcing men’s false sense of value and women’s false sense of valuelessness. This false reason seems to be what Erving Goffman had in mind when he argued about the links between “virtual and actual identities.” In my estimation, to suggest that a woman should be outside of the group or left at the margin, in this case, because of her biology, prevents the woman from assuming her full agency and exercising her abilities.

---

336 Ibid, 177.
Women, regardless of their biology, have proven to be capable of a vast array of ideas and actions. Representing women as valueless compared to their male counterparts limits the creativity of women and also restricts both sexes from working together as a homogenous whole. There are people, mostly men, who not only exaggerate their capabilities as human beings but who also rob women of the full actualization of their skills and carrying out their responsibility within the social group. In this instance, the storyteller validates himself as worthy of inclusion in the community and thereby reinforces whatever his agency can permit. At the same time, the person (typically a woman) deemed valueless and labeled unworthy is denied her agency and “imprisoned” by the limits the church puts on her, with the result that she can no longer express her skills freely.\(^{338}\)

Another category of the rite is the social construct that frames mother/ing in ways that affect and specifically limit women’s involvement in ministry. Motherhood for women in Benin, as it is elsewhere, generally means having a biological child; and childlessness is considered culturally anomalous, at least in the Nigerian context.\(^ {339}\) Motherhood is valued highly and together with childcare was once considered a very communal responsibility. Industrialization, capitalism, and desire for gain have shaped both church and society.\(^ {340}\) As members of society, mothers also bear their share of promoting the weight of industrialization. This weight has far-reaching consequences because childcare which used to be communal has now become a mother’s exclusive

\(^{339}\) Auto-ethnographic observation in Benin City, 2015, 2016; also see Ebohon, _Olokun Worship_, 161.
preserve. The cultural ideology that drives women to take up the mother/ing role sustains their primary emotional ties with infants. So women’s mother/ing role has come to have an ideological significance that has increasingly defined women’s lives. Although fathers and other men spend varying amounts of time with infants and children, the father is rarely a child’s primary caregiver. Why? Enoch Ayodeji has argued that, “Women are more in the children’s department [of the church] because they are more patient in taking care of children than men; child rearing is a natural gift for women.”

Research data supports the view that the cultural understanding of mother/ing and gender status facilitates the gender gap and helps to perpetuate gender inequality. Although everyone in society benefits from excellent child care, it is mothers who bear the weight of the spiritual and domestic costs of parenting. Women’s mother/ing role drives them first to have to ‘pay the debt’ of child rearing/caring before taking up an offer to occupy a position in the church. What this means is that, until a child becomes an adult, because they are the primary caregiver's mothers can rarely respond to their ministerial calling. And this is how most men believe it should be. For example, Pastor Dickson Ogbahon informed me that:

“Women should prioritize child nurturing to a spiritual calling. As a pastor with children of school age, I could not imagine my wife running around with me for ministerial work or becom[ing] the head of a branch-church while I head another branch. This plan would be a difficult thing to execute. While I am out there doing the work, she needs to stay home to raise the children and keep the home. A successful ministry depends on the foundation laid in the home, and that involves well-mannered children.

---


342 Chodorow, 3.

343 P. l. with Enoch Ayodeji, in Benin City in June 2015.
could never sacrifice that for a religious call. When the children grow up, then it would be a right time to be out there with me in the vineyard."  

Pastor Ogbahon is explicit. While he is at work (in the public space), for the sake of the society, his wife needs to be in the private space of the home, raising their children. In my interviews, people confirmed that fathers set the standards and values for mothers, as Pastor Ogbahon suggests. Mothers are expected to stay at home to tend the children, while the men attend conventions, training/seminars, night vigils, and many other church events. This practice of husbands having opportunities to attend all the crucial meetings that showcase women and men’s ability to function confirms De Beauvoir and Bourdieu’ idea about positioning women (the dominated) as the Other, as men consider them to lack the qualities of (the dominant) men. Indeed, men’s dominance and women’s domination are not biological phenomena but social constructs—constructed by men.  

Similarly, Nancy Chodorow argues, and I agree, that the cultural understanding of reproducing women’s mothering role implies women’s lack of ecclesiastical mobility. Because of the allegedly natural connection between women, childbearing, and lactation and their responsibility for childcare, men take for granted that women assume those responsibilities and religion undergirds that assumption. Its weight on women’ spiritual upward mobility is hardly ever examined.  

Undoubtedly male-dominance is still predominant in NPT even though it may appear as if the bases of male dominance are eroding. The division of housework is also unequal. Many fathers, despite the Pentecostal emphasis on family primacy, hardly do

---

344 P.I. with Dickson Ogbahon (Rev.) in Benin City in April 21, 2016.
345 Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 267; Nzegwu, 6-8.
346 Lorber, *Gender Inequality*, 7.
any housework or share in and accommodate child care in their (religious) schedule. Since they consider males to be the breadwinners, the female is left to attend to housekeeping and childcare alone. The male dominance and the unequal practice of not helping in the home are, in my view, a form of symbolic violence toward women. When this happens, it is mothers that pay the price. It leaves women with minimal ability to respond to their religious calling. No wonder that sociologists and gender theorists agree that men perpetuate patriarchal privileges.

Consequently, many women are sidelined when it comes time to be elected or appointed to positions of authority in the church. For the church measures members’ faithfulness and performance by attendance at church activities and not by the quality of mother/ing performance that happens in private. This gauge implies that the mother/ing feat, regardless of the hours and efforts spent on it, is not considered sufficiently productive and spiritual to earn a woman credit, recognition, or election into a position of authority. My study shows that with mother/ing roles left mostly to mothers, women of childbearing/rearing ages are automatically excluded from leadership, leaving men to assume those positions.

Age is another representative rite and category by which males define and socially categorize females. Research data shows that although the CGMi ordains a negligible number of women into leadership positions, they assume these positions after a certain age, usually after childbearing/rearing. Whereas single and married men typically assume

---

347 Symbolic violence is the domination of one group by an other. The violence becomes symbolic when the dominated (in this case, the mother) internalizes such practices and the dominators (fathers) conceive of the mothering role as natural. The mothering role is a social construct that falls more heavily on women, and mothers like fathers assume this role to be gender specific. This cultural belief subconsciously compels women to become participants in their domination, as is seen in the personal conversation with Rev. Dickson Ogbahon.
348 Chodorow, 5; Padavic and Reskin, 21, 23; Lorber, Gender Inequality, 12; Beauvoir, 13; Nzegwu, Family Matters: Feminist Concepts, 23-30.
positions of authority long before they grow old, this is almost never the case with women. For example, Feb Idahosa, the son of the archbishop, was only thirty-seven when he assumed the office of the bishop of CGMi, a position no woman could attain at that age for one apparent reason – their mothering responsibilities. Pastor Ogbahon confirmed this in a comment above.

In CGMi, married and unmarried women are committed members of the congregation; and a large percentage of the workforce is usually young women whose works are crucial for the sustenance, growth, and development of a Pentecostal congregation such as the CGMi. Regardless of this contribution, their single status translates to being less valuable: men mistake their singleness for an inability to manage their emotional and personal affairs.\textsuperscript{349} Marriage is highly prized and offers certain privileges for women as well as men. However, data collected demonstrates that single women are treated differently to single men at CGMi. Men regard women’s single status as problematic as these women do not have a male ‘head.’ Such a head or husband can also gain them access to leadership privileges. So while single women have no chance of becoming branch/district/provincial leaders, those who are of retirement age have no means of becoming bishops.

Men in the church are less likely to consider single than older married women for ordination, and many of the women are at least ordained merely as deaconesses, and rarely progress beyond this status. While single men are made pastors and given the opportunity to head, oversee, and manage new branch congregations, the church does not provide those same privileges to single women. Instead, married women-pastors are promoted to be assistant pastors to un/married men. (The rationale for choosing married women-pastors is...)

\textsuperscript{349} Omonubi-McDonnell, \textit{Gender Inequality in Nigeria}, 9.
women as associate pastors to single men could be a subject of future study). If the church does not ordain single women to be pastors, how can such women ever be promoted to head/oversee new branch congregations? They are stuck as deaconesses forever.

One may probe this gender pattern further. Why are single women treated with such prejudice? In CGMi, and broadly within the NPT, single women bear the weight of gender policing. For example, besides being less prized, they are also considered to be not only more vulnerable, but even more infantile, frivolous, and dangerous than men. They bear a double weight of sexual harassment when violated by the same male pastors who are their superiors yet victimize them, yet the church does not take seriously female victims’ stories of abuse.

My research in Nigeria, therefore, shows that single women are not made pastors because they are primarily evaluated on their ‘sexualized’ bodies and less on their spiritual ability. It is the very men who hinder them from leadership who sexualize their bodies—a combination of the power of attraction and seduction. Many women do not have the power to express their sexuality in ways they find attractive because society marks their passion as “dangerous,” polluting, and the work of the devil. The church suppresses their sexuality in many ways, including public comments during sermons when they point fingers at women as temptresses, hardly attributing any fault to men.

The notion that single women are temptresses, seductresses, and sluts relegates them soundly to the margins. The place to find honorable single women (and sometimes single men) is mostly in the choir, ushering, teaching Sunday school, and in the
hospitality department. Like married women, single women are assigned the long, thankless, and tedious tasks of domestic and non-paid labor, such as the cleaning and interior decoration of the sanctuary, and cooking and waiting on ministers during major congregational events while their male counterparts sit and learn. Women are good enough to perform unpaid and underpaid tasks— to sing in the choir, teach Sunday school class, lead cell groups, be ordained as deaconesses to undertake domestic jobs. But they are very rarely deemed good enough to head new branch congregations as pastors, like their male counterparts.

These practices of exclusion deny females the value that society grants to spiritually dynamic folks. It further reveals how men mobilize power and masculinities to evaluate women by their sexuality and not by their talents. This isolation of women by men is what Bourdieu calls “avoidance behavior.”

The categorization of filial attachment is another representative rite that influences women’s access to positions of authority. Religious and sociological scholars posit, and rightly, that social-cultural conditions tie females to males – fathers or husbands, and in some cases, their sons – more closely than to other women. My ethnographic data corroborates the position that the marital relationships of most women in male founded/headed NPC grant them access to positions of authority as specifically exemplified in CGMi. Simone De Beauvoir observed this and referred to a well-known woman who wanted to be in the men’s category but could only access this privilege by

350 The hospitality department of any Pentecostal church in Nigeria has the task of serving food and drinks to guests and resident preachers who most often are male.
351 Bourdieu, Masculine Domination, 30.
352 Oduyoye and Kanyoro, The Will to Arise, 10; Omonubi-McDonnell, Gender Inequality in Nigeria, 12; Beauvoir, Second Sex, 5.
her husband’s influence.”

Archbishop Mrs. Margaret Idahosa’s case uniquely fits into my model for she was the church founders’ wife who gained access to the office only because of her marital currency with a man – her late husband.

Margaret had the privilege of being one of the first women to be ordained into the ministry on May 24th, 1983. On Benson’s death, she was automatically but grandly consecrated as bishop on April 5th, 1998, and on November 5th, 2009, their only son—FEB Idahosa—was ordained a bishop. Study respondent Michael Okonkwo informed me that “this development is a plot crafted because of the deference for hierarchy as Margaret Idahosa was promoted and simultaneously ordained as archbishop.” By this, she becomes the first female Pentecostal Archbishop of a ministry of this magnitude in Africa – a significant milestone in the history of African Christianity. Arguably, she and her performance (as will be shown in chapter 5) represent pushback against ways that women are perceived. It is therefore plausible to theorize that it would have taken a much longer time or near impossible feat for Margaret to become the first married woman bishop if the marital relationship did not connect her to the founding pastor and if the husband had not died.

Also, my research demonstrates that the consecration of FEB Idahosa II as bishop to support the (archbishop) mother is in line with the patriarchal, gender, and cultural ideologies about the male head of the home. The son’s consecration not only affirms my position that women gain access because of their connection to a particular man or men, it also reiterates De Beauvoir and Bourdieu’s idea that particular men’s involvement in

---

353 Beauvoir, Borde, and Malovany-Chevallier, 4.
women’s lives help the women to break the leadership glass ceiling and thus perpetuate a particular family line, and the males in that line. That fulfills a cultural expectation.

4.2.2: Cultural Expectation and its Implication on Gendered Patterns in NPC

The cultural concept of masculine overcompensation gives men control over power and resources over women. The idealized breadwinner head of household ideology has migrated into the Pentecostal ideology. Having women in positions of authority may therefore not only connote a threat to male dominance but also implies a role reversal that upsets the ‘ordinal’ gender hierarchy. Gender inequality, as Ridgeway notes, is at root a status inequality. We have seen that gender equity is hardly a goal of NPC’s male pastors. Gender inequality can take diverse forms and unfold in various ways. It is legitimized in these congregations when men’s dominance is alleged to be a reflection of the male God’s will. For example, Pastor Ephraim Ogbe in Benin City expressed concern about the popularity of women-owned/founded churches and women who assume their husband’s stead as head of the church. He remarked that:

“The tendency that an attitude becomes common does not make it acceptable. Some females gained confidence when the church failed to chastise those who started it, so many of them joined the bandwagon of heading the church. However, the word of God is unambiguous on this. The Bible makes it clear that it is wrong for a woman to preside over a congregation in the presence of qualified men.”

Pastor Ogbe’s position is explicit. He is scarcely alone in defending the subjugation of women on biblical grounds. Ogbe is yet to come to terms with why women who are considered inferior and profane should stand on the podium, to minister to the ‘superior’ and ‘qualified’ males?

355 P. I. with Ephraim Ogbe in Benin City on May 18, 2016.
The comment above indicates that gendered cultural patterns rely on stereotypes, cultural norms, the reproduction of mother/ing, religious interpretations, and status belief and expectations. The stereotypes attached to women’s biological processes as a result of masculine domination make female less worthy than their male counterparts.\textsuperscript{356}

It is evident that the cultural construct is not a simple mental representation; instead, it is a system of structures durably embedded in the bodies. Nancy Chodorow, an American sociologist, argues that the reproduction of mother/ing occurs through social structurally induced psychological processes. This process is not a product of biology or intentional role-training. She draws on the psychoanalytic account of female and male personality development to demonstrate that women’s mother/ing role reproduces itself cyclically. For example, as daughters learn mother/ing capacities the desire to be mothers is ingrained in them. What is significant is that gradually most cultures assume that mothering is the only role a woman can and should play. Since culture value children, anything that takes away a woman from the role of a mother or anything that competes with that role is seen as unnatural. Gender dynamics in CGMi like any significant Pentecostal church in Nigeria has marked unique experiences since the people come with and take up gender-differentiated tasks. That means their daily routine gives men and women unequal access to power as the gender arrangements of this society assume that women will do the work of mother/ing while men will be the ‘breadwinners.’\textsuperscript{357} I will now turn to how the church employs to the politics of power for policing the boundary?

\textsuperscript{356} Tilly, \textit{Durable Inequality}, 5.
\textsuperscript{357} Lorber, \textit{Gender Inequality}, 5.
4.2.3: Sacred Masculinity, Profane Femininity, and the Capital of Power

Ironically, developmental contributions come from the same women that the institution restrains from/in accessing power. This idea of labeling the woman only serves the purpose for situating the woman’s response to the irony of providing a means to address identity-based constructs as they interact with, and is impacted by, the social-cultural landscape. So like the religious tradition that I studied, and on other social groups found in Nigeria, masculinity is considered sacred. Masculinity functions to shape the abilities and the demands society places upon to mold and remold patriarchy in different ways. On the one hand, masculine (and one could add human) abilities are exaggerated (as shown above) to determine who has the wherewithal access or belong to a group/class with capital. Additionally, individual value is exaggerated to protect the already existing abilities of those at the center that use their exaggerated powers and establish new social roles and policies that work against those at the margin. This notion is a portrayal of what happens in these exaggerations. The division of things according to the opposition between the male and the female – profane/sacred, inferior/superior, light/dark, and public/private – distinction constructs an invisible identity for adherents when taken in isolation – and lays the pedestal for the derived exaggerations.358

These amplifications function to re/produce and justify the structuring that determines who should be at the center and whom they should leave at the periphery. Bourdieu argues that religious and hermeneutical capitals are transferable into symbolic political capital.359 Capital is thus procured by governing other bodies while pretending to be interested only in governing one’s own body but in reality constructing and

effecting a form of concealed power. Religious and hermeneutical capital is empowered
to weaken the strong – those who would break the mold and disrupt the social-cultural
order. It determines when one sex thrives and another is left at the margin to sustain those
at the center. The language used over time by leaders and members of the community of
faith reinforces women through exaggerations of value that then shapes the sense of their
persona and duty that everybody in the society tends to hold onto in any given social
setting. In essence, exaggerated texts, language, and religious rituals create a particular
kind of power and label that compels the person at the margin to regulate and discipline
their orientation into accepting a false identity for themselves. The compliance to reorient
and reshape these dynamics can only be feasible after having given up the first illusive
identity – the fantasy that something or somebody is “sacred” and another is “profane,”
and one is “superior” while another is “inferior” are basic.\footnote{Driscoll, “Twilight of the God-Idols,” 188.}
This chapter has answered
the question of “why” so many persist in ignoring the calls for something new, and
interrogate “how” to move forward. More notably, it also considers how NPT might take
stock of their data, understanding themselves as part of that data, and cultivate new
methods receptive to the sensibility of finding oneself within the danger of social context,
that seems to have no end in sight. As this thesis transition to the next chapter, I insist that
learning to live involves learning to live for others.

4.3:   Theorizing the Weight of Femaleness

Cecilia Ridgeway theorizes that gender is a “system of social practice—
economic, political, cultural, interpersonal expectation processes—that constitutes male
and female as different and organize relations between them on unequal terms based on
cultural beliefs and status differences.” Put simply, “gender divides people into two
groups of roughly equal size, but the relevance of one’s sex category for …reproduction
increases the rate of interaction between females and males.” Everyday social
interactions and shared beliefs about gender status transform relational framing and affect
people’s behavior. Ridgeway’s definition speaks to the universality of the gender frame. I
find her definition useful and applicable to the CGMi model, for it helps us to situate our
understanding of self and others.

The nature of cultural beliefs about gender as represented in Benin Religion and
the Pentecostal tradition advances hegemonic gender stereotypes. Gender inequality
persists and is reproduced because of the now embedded beliefs about gender status and
difference. Gender stereotypes coordinate behavior regarding gender and contain
beliefs about gender status. Gender roles are acted out particularly stringently when they
are perceived as being divinely sanctioned.

De Beauvoir notes that “[Although] women are beginning to share in the making
of the world … the world still belongs to men.” Thus although Margaret Idahosa is the
spiritual leader and presiding archbishop of the CGMi today, she nonetheless favors the
patriarchal, gender status, and cultural beliefs she has inherited. She comments: “I
understand I was living in a man’s world.”

---

361 Cecilia L. Ridgeway and Lynn Smith-Lovin, “Gender and Interaction” in Handbooks of Sociology and
Social Research, (Boston, MA; Springer, 2011), 247-274; Cecilia Ridgeway, Framed by Gender: How
363 Mary C. Brinton, Reviewed Work: Framed by Gender: How Gender Inequality Persists in the Modern
364 Ridgeway, Framed by Gender, 185.
365 Beauvoir, 5, 10.
366 Margaret made this comment in response to a question by interviewers. For details, see Folorunso and
This “man’s world” undermines women’s authority. Margaret Idahosa’s experiences at assuming the position of power after her husband’s death is an excellent example of how they undermine women’s authority. The social order that imposes and inculcates the dispositions to disregard women from the noblest tasks and assign them drudging and thankless tasks is authenticating a masculine hegemony. This notion resonates with Bourdieu’s theory of male domination where he argues that embodying the historical structures of the masculine order in the form of the unconscious schemes enable attitudes that become products of domination and permits what he calls symbolic violence. For example, he explicates how the social order functions as an immense symbolic machine which tends to sanction the masculine domination (as male ‘head’) and strictly distributes activities for each sex, with the public site reserved naturally for men and the private for women. What this social order implies is that the suitable place for the woman is the home, not the public sphere. Thus, approaching a male’s space such as the edges of the assembly place was a terrifying ordeal. Anyone who transverses the cultural and occupational boundaries is nonconformist and vulnerable to harassment. Also, the cultural, gender status and patriarchal belief leaves mothering role exclusively for women. The consequence in addition to domination is to widen the gender inequality gap further.


367 Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 7; Ridgeway, *Framed by Gender*, 186.

368 Bourdieu, 39.

369 Bourdieu, 10–11, 39; Padavic and Reskin, 22.

370 This came from an interview with Margaret on her 70th birthday said: “There have been men who wanted my hand in marriage, but I declined. Some would say, ‘Mama, you are looking good.’ I always tell them, thank you.” I am of the view that Margaret Idahosa is discreet about going into details. If a woman at 70 says men yet ask for her hand in relationship, then one could only imagine what the single women are going through in the hands of these “holy” men. What is noteworthy is the differential treatment that plays out in this relationship. While they refer to women as being promiscuous, the single/married men who harass these women are not tagged negatively. (For details, see Folorunsho and Igbinovia 2013).
Similarly, Ridgeway’s theory of the framing effect of cultural beliefs is consistent with and confirms what De Beauvoir’s said decades ago about the *second sex* in many ways. My ethnographic research supports these empirical studies which demonstrate that leaders and members of the CGMi readily form beliefs that people in one social category (in this case, male ‘head’) are higher in status and more competent so that the status-unequal interaction has a characteristic structure. So when a high-status person (dominant, male) tends to be assertive, independent and agentic), in this case, complicated by the power and authority of the head and founding pastor who sets the agenda talks more and has more power than any other to interpret the Scriptures. The exercise of power translates into symbolic imposition and symbolic violence. In this situation, the low-status people (dominated women) are responsive, expressive, and communal, and react to the high-status (dominant) persons by paying close attention to their concerns.

Applying gender status (construction) beliefs (which depict men as higher in status and more competent), Ridgeway argues as Bourdieu has done that that cultural expectations play a critical role in organizing forces that shape gender roles. This attitude implicitly shapes perceptions and behavior in ways that reproduce gender inequality. In my reflection, it is the patriarchal, gender status and cultural beliefs that inform men’s expectation of women in these contexts. It also contributes to how they shape gender roles so that while more females engage in mothering and thankless roles, they engage the men in positions that attract social and ecclesiastical rewards. These attitudes largely

---

372 Soothill, *Gender, Social Change and Spiritual Power*, ix.
373 Oduyoye and Kanyoro, *The Will to Arise*, 10; Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 10; Ridgeway *Framed by Gender*, 66.
affect a person’s performance and the quality of that performance independent of the person’s real abilities. For example, Ridgeway was upfront when she asserted that knowing that others expect you to be less competent at a task can create anxiety that interferes with the ability to perform well.\textsuperscript{374} What this means is that when women with school-age children or widows like Mrs. Idahosa decide to accept positions of authority in the church, the church falls short of stigmatizing these women and deliberately emphasize their sexuality rather than their capability.

It affirms the studies that gender status-belief biases the inference females and males make about their abilities based on their performances. For example, Ridgeway reports a social experiment that shows that when they labeled a task as masculine, women rated their ability lower than men did by same performances but when they disassociated the same task from gender, there were no differences in the way women and men rated their ability from the same performance.\textsuperscript{375} These biased expectations isolate women so that they are less likely to make an assertive speech and the like. I agree with Ridgeway, De Beauvoir, as well as Bourdieu as my research study reveals that such bias expectations disadvantage women mostly in male-founded and male-headed churches.

Women, like men, have internalized the ideology that the headship of the church is men’s exclusive right.\textsuperscript{376} The effect of the symbolic imposition is ‘submission, and this resonates with Bourdieu’ theory of domination. Bourdieu remarked:

\begin{quotation}
“When they structure the thoughts and perception of those dominated by the very structures of the relation of domination that they imposed on them, their acts of cognition are, inevitably, acts of recognition, and submission.”\textsuperscript{377}
\end{quotation}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{374} Ridgeway, \textit{Framed by Gender}, 79.  \\
\textsuperscript{375} Ibid, 79.  \\
\textsuperscript{376} Padavic and Reskin, 23, 24.  \\
\textsuperscript{377} Bourdieu, \textit{Masculine Domination}, 13.
\end{flushright}
Bourdieu further notes and rightly so that: “this practical construction is itself the effect of power that they robustly embed in the bodies of the dominated in the form of schemes of perception and dispositions.”

Also, Ridgeway’s cultural expectation theory yet resonates with the gender patterns in NPCs. What I am also addressing here is that my findings point to actions that should include letting go of the power to distinguish between male and female and between practical realities and social-cultural norms. I argue that these social-cultural norms that bear negatively on the female folks are ideological constructions. Therefore, the church should abandon these presumed social difference that never helps the church or the society to achieve the potentials of the “Othered” gender fully. Sociologically speaking, no one gender is more superior to the other. This notion is an ideological construction that has been nursed overtime to become a norm. This ideological difference holds in tension the limited possibilities of females and the unrestricted power of the males. In my view, this distinction between females and males simply reinforces what Pierre Bourdieu calls the “principle of structuration,” the “hidden imposition” of a system of practices and representations whose structure, objectively founded on a principle of political division, presents itself as the natural-supernatural structure of the cosmos.”

One finds the power of this superior male in the principle of structuration that undergirds human relations and allows for the transformation of a desire for certainty into the material attempt to secure it in the society. Here, I bring the relationship between the male benefactor and the female victim into focus. When this happens, gender inequality

378 Ibid, 40.
is reproduced into new procedures and structures and routinely, but subtly, spread to become normative cultures (blueprints) for the church. Thus they modify disparities for a new generation.

4.4: Concluding Thoughts

This chapter examined the gender patterns that operate in everyday life in Nigerian Pentecostal congregations. It considered day-to-day examples of inequality. The chapter reached two major empirical conclusions: First, although we speak of gender inequality, it is usually females who are disadvantaged relative to similarly situated males. Second, gender is a social construct, and the church draws upon and perpetuates those gendered social constructs. Inequality is perpetuated by collective experience and social interaction. Although the church ordains females into the diaconate, pastorate, and in rare cases into the bishop’s office, the fact that gender inequality is still very much rife in the NPC shows how stereotypical cultural norms enable the differential treatment of males and females.

It is clear from the interviews that I conducted in Nigeria that a small group of males may prosper by stifling females’ potentials, but successful and human-enhancing communities benefit from recognizing that females contribute equally and effectively to productivity and the political and in our case, the spiritual community. The church will undoubtedly achieve more if it genuinely eliminates the social-religious closure of gates if it stops othering people. A token number of women in positions of pastoral leadership will not make for a truly healthy church and society. Thus, it may be correct to predict that gender may disappear when gender status-beliefs fades. The church can realize this if
they eliminate the power differences between females and males, and if they prize females’ humanity and spiritual ability more than her sexuality.

One needs to translate “de-gendering” into the day-to-day interactions. Of course, this is not a static condition, nor, I hope, an inevitable one. Women in CGMi specially and NPC are moving toward inclusion by learning to force their way through the boundaries to respond to the higher spiritual calling. This hitch is no longer a situation of the second sex but of inclusion into the networks leading to the top, even though the obstacles are enormous. This upward mobility is the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter Five:

Margaret Ekhoeragbon Idahosa:
Towards the Religious History of the First Woman Archbishop in Nigerian (Benin) Pentecostal Tradition

God is not after Sex, but after the Spirit.
(Rev. Mrs.) Margaret Agbonifo.

The task of this chapter is to map the religious history of the first woman archbishop in modern Nigerian Pentecostal tradition. I have demonstrated in previous chapters that women’s efforts to advance the NPC are not getting significant attention. I have also argued in the last chapter that these kinds of practices in NP correlate with the cultural practices that promote gender bias against women. In my view, the omission of women’s history from the pages of African history only further reproduces gender inequalities. This omission proves more troubling when women have played significant roles in societies such as Benin. What should religious and gender scholars make of women historical narratives when it is constructed in fading importance and in one-sided and trivialized ways? Given the vital role women have played and continue to play in modern Pentecostal congregations, is it possible to promote gender justice by restoring balanced gender roles in the Church?

I propose that the story of Margaret Idahosa, the widow of Benson Idahosa and the first female archbishop in a male-founded and dominated NPC, offers paths for a critical reconstruction of gender roles and a realignment of power in the church that could address gender biases. Here, her religious history—her struggles, leadership, achievements, impacts, and the extent to which the Church continues to thrive under her as a female archbishop—is my point of departure. I do this to explore the cultural practices implied in the concept of religion, gender, and culture in public and personal
attitudes towards the ordination of women and the elevation of many of these qualified women into leadership positions in the NPC.

I discuss these concerns by first historicizing the meaningful contributions that women bring to the NPC in the face of gender intrigues that are subtly at play in modern Pentecostalism. Second, the religious history of women, like Margaret Idahosa offers narratives of various ways in which women in Benin City in particular and more broadly in the NPC make meaning of their experiences and negotiates gender boundaries. Through such stories, we learn what matters to them as members of the NPC, and as they seek to balance gender biases in the social-cultural settings in which they live.

Here I employ source materials on the life and ministry of Margaret Idahosa to examine her life history and the critical role she plays as an exemplary framework for women in advancing Pentecostal development in Benin City and beyond. I also briefly discuss her theology and reflections on the inclusion of women and her method for pursuing a social-cultural change in the Pentecostal terrain.

5.1: The Socio-Religious-History of Margaret Ekhoe Idahosa: An Emblem for Gender Inclusivity?

Moreover, it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy… (Joel 2:28)

Like biblical women such as Deborah, Esther, and Timothy’s mother, Margaret navigates her way to being part of the pulsating and pioneering leaders that are shaping the contours and trajectories of NP. Her life story is part of a large body of female historical narratives that must be critically examined and valued for the overall contribution these women have made to Nigeria’s religious history. Margaret has been a major inspiration for people, and especially women, from all walks of life. She is a model
figure, and the story of her life shows that the church can overturn the religious modus operandi which by default discriminates against women. What I infer from the biblical passage cited above (Joel 2:28) is that the Holy Spirit does not make a distinction between the sexes, as Margaret Agbonifo affirmed in a personal interview. Rather, in the vineyard of the Lord, women are joint heirs with men.380

Fondly addressed as “mama,” Margaret Idahosa made history when she was consecrated as the presiding bishop on April 5th, 1998, and eleven years later as the archbishop of CGMi in November 2009, the latter an event that made the CGMi a trailblazer for modern Nigerian (Africa) Pentecostal tradition.381

Margaret was born on July 29, 1943, into the family of Pa Luke Izevbegie and Madam Alice (Nee Osawe), both of royal lineages of the Benin kingdom in Edo State, Nigeria. Margaret suffered doubly for having been born into a polygamous home in which her mother was the last favored among the wives, and for being a female child. In this polygamous setting, her family largely disregarded her because of her sex. As alluded to in chapter one, omo-okpia and omo-khuo is how male and female children respectively are called in Benin society, with the male child being the favored one. We have seen earlier that a woman’s status and rights depend primarily on her motherhood and particularly the sex of the children she produces.382 In chapter one, I showed that ancestral spirits are of the utmost importance to the Benin people and that a child is understood to be an essential connection between the departed and the generation yet

380 P.I. with Margaret Agbonifo (Rev. Dr. Mrs.) on July 5, 2016. She is the founding pastor of the Family Prayer Intercessory Fellowship ; I met with her at the FPiF prayer ground in Ekehuan Road in Benin City. Her husband resigned his position to assist his wife in this position.
381 P. I. with Eghosa Igunbor on April 21, 2016.
382 Omoigui, “Tradition, Poverty, and the Church, 52; Also see Onyemaobi, A Pencil in God’s Hands, 64. I had presented the status of the female child and how her birth is received in chapter 1. Margaret Idahosa’s mother is a practical example of what happens to a mother who gives birth to a female child.
unborn. The people of Benin yearn to carry on their line through having several children and most importantly having a son or sons. Thus, it was that even though the Izevbigies were not barren, they had cultural reasons to regret that Margaret was a female child.\footnote{Idumwonyi, “A Deborah in World Pentecostalism,” 48.}

In Margaret’s early days, it was against a father’s conviction to educate a female child. Thus, she got little support from her father who reluctantly paid her school fees through primary school but refused to offer support beyond this level. The separation of her parents further compounded her situation of neglect and rejection. From this time on, she lived with her maternal grandfather (pa Osawe). However, despite daunting odds, Margaret’s ambition to get an education compelled her and her mother to face the struggle squarely and forge ahead.\footnote{Margaret Ekhoe Benson Idahosa. 1999. “Vision in Action” in Redemption Faith Magazine: Make an Impact this Century. Vol. 1, No. 7, 9-11.} Margaret afforded her education by hawking wares on the street for her mother.\footnote{Street hawking is a familiar role for the African child. The researcher did the same. The culture does not consider such street hawking activities to be child abuse, and in any case the economic situation of the country compel parents to enlist their children in this practice. Interestingly, many successful people in Africa today have had to travel this route.}

Margaret gained admission into the Baptist High School in Agbor (a district in present-day Delta State) but could not continue after the first year at the junior secondary level for lack of funds. Her father was unrelenting in his vow not to educate a girl child.\footnote{Margaret E. Benson-Idahosa, Redemption Faith Magazine, 12–14.} From a very tender age, Margaret knew the pains of an aborted dream. It was the intervention of an uncle, T.J. Lawani-Osawe that enabled her entrance into a modern secondary school and the Anglican Teacher’s Training College.\footnote{Idumwonyi. “A Deborah in World Pentecostalism,” 48.} Margaret’s belief in the gains of education inspired her in the face of financial obstacles, and she remained steadfast. Today she holds a Diploma in Home Economics from Leeds Polytechnic, UK;
a Bachelor’s degree in Biblical Studies, and a Master’s Degree in Divinity and Education. She was awarded an honorary Doctoral Degree in Ministry from Friends International Christian University in California, USA.

When young Margaret met her charismatic husband, he had already been called into the ministry. She was one of Benson’s new converts that he led to the Lord. Margaret had been skeptical about Benson’s new ‘religion’ but was careful to observe first hand God’s movement through him. Tradition holds it that she was a beneficiary of the miracles he performed, as the first person to have been raised from the dead was Margaret’s niece. Margaret was reluctant to marry Benson as he had served as a protective big brother who always shielded her from neighborhood bullying. She was particularly loath to marry a pastor, but Benson’s charm and persuasion won out. She eventually gave in to the young pastor’s proposal for marriage, and they got married on April 6, 1969. Margaret has this to say about Benson: “I knew [the] late Archbishop Benson Idahosa when I was young, and we were friends for eight years before we got married. He was not only my husband; he was my brother, my friend, and a confidant.”

Margaret here testifies to her cordial relationship with Benson up until his demise. Thus, it may be right to infer from her narrative that she did not accept Benson’s proposal as a way of “paying” for his service of raising her niece from the dead, but for being a good friend and a protective big brother. However, getting married to a pastor was not free from challenges; her reasons for her reluctance to become a pastor’s wife was soon confirmed; because of his pastoral responsibilities, she essentially became a “weekend

389 The society judged pastors in those days to be the poorest of the poor.
390 Garlock, *Fire in His Bones*, 75-80.
widow.” According to her: “I did not spend as much time with my husband as I would have preferred. Those who are conversant with pastoral work would agree that it is not an easy task to take on.” However, one of the things some would call unintended blessings was that Benson kept urging and encouraging her to preach and teach in the church, even though this was not a common practice at the time. Margaret said: “Benson kept encouraging me to focus my attention on God. [He] was always asking me to be on the same page with him, accusing [me] of [trying] to drag him back because of [my] weak faith.”

Margaret, still under the internal pressure to accept her vocation as a pastor’s wife, continued in prayer for God to help her understand her husband’s vision and stand by it. Margaret said, in 1974:

“God revealed to [me] in a night vision a young tree, which blossomed into a giant tree with leaves and fruit. While [I] was still watching, the darkness melted away as a glimmer of light began to dawn; and eventually shone over everywhere. The tree suffered from irrepressible wind but still stood tall after the wind abated and the leaves sprouted out so much so that it covered the whole tree. The tree flowered and brought forth fruits that were food enough to eat. Still in a state of bewilderment, [I] beheld a horde with famished looks on their faces hunched down with undue weight. These people held their hands out, asking [for food] and [I] saw [my] husband, Benson, plucking the fruit off the trees and giving them out to these people. As each ate, life came back to them. This course persisted until Benson could no longer cope with the surging throng. [I] then began plucking the same fruit and distributing it [to] the crowd. To [my] astonishment, life seemed to come back to him, and he looked revived. Right then, [I] heard a voice, “go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” This voice continued in a resoundingly sonic vibration.”

392 Garlock, Fire in His Bones, 80.
393 Ibid, 80.
394 Onyemaobi, 63.
395 Garlock, 81; also see Adelegan, Nigeria’s Leading Lights of the Gospel, 245.
396 Margaret Benson-Idahosa, Redemption Faith Magazine, 70-71.
As she emerged from this encounter, she realized, without a doubt, that God had given her an understanding of her husband’s calling through the vision. This vision was the first that Margaret experienced, and since God does nothing without confirming it, there was a follow-up revelation to the first one. Tradition has it that God revisited Margaret when she and Benson were on a mission trip to Trinidad and Tobago. She recalled how, in the course of the journey:

“I dozed off and suddenly saw a mass of women occupying the whole space with a dark look in their eyes. They were held back with chains and were crying for help. Their eyes spoke of hunger and deprivation. I tried to turn my eyes from the ugly sight when I heard the voice that sounded like what I had heard in the first vision. The voice came to me as the sound of many glasses of water: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor and proclaim liberty to the captives … to proclaim the year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18). I got up with a start and began to shake with frenzy. Benson grabbed my hands in alarm and looked at me questioningly. I explained, still trembling, how the women in my vision were crying for freedom from their bondage.’’

Benson blessed God for giving her, a ministry—to the women. This vision was the high point of Margaret’s calling to the ministry. This vision along with the value she places on the home and family aided the birth of the Christian Women Fellowship International (CWFI), and ever since then, the drive to fulfilling this call is a testimony that God indeed called Margaret. Benson Idahosa’s drive to boost Margaret’s self-worth and self-development in addition to the vision, inspired Margaret to found the women’s arm of the CGMi—CWFI, the church of women. (I discuss CWFI in detail in chapter six, using the group tactic for negotiating gender boundaries). Margaret had come to believe

398 P.I. Interview with Grace Ekperigin (Rev. Mrs.) (Mama Koko) on May 8th 2016. Mama Koko was the first National President of the CWFI and I was privileged to serve the mission as her administrative secretary for five years. She confirmed that Archbishop Margaret was a part of the ministry and her contributions to the advancement of the mission can be measured by the successes of CWFI. She told me that CWFI was Margaret’s personal dream to engage women in the ministry, and that since that vision she has been utterly committed to it.
that “constant prayers, fasting, and prayers are major keys to walking successfully with
God.”399 Thus, she embraced the interdenominational vision propagated by her husband.
Like Benson, Margaret’s custom was and continues to be to welcome people of diverse
ethnicities, classes, regions, and gender to worship God and to seek spiritual
empowerment at an integrated and an all-embracing congregational platform.400

Pursuing this dream met the resistance and negative responses of the male
members of the church, who saw themselves as religious experts, reiterating Paul’s
injunction that “women must learn in silence with all subjection” (1 Corinthians 14:34; I
Timothy. 2:11–15). This one-sided and uneducated interpretation and application of the
Pauline epistle complicated her drive, as her opponents continued to disapprove of her
involvement in ministry. They thought it an aberration for a woman to mount the podium
or preach. This orientation was the beginning of reviling, mockery, and resentment.
Margaret’s courage almost failed her. Ruminating over her vision and the difficult
position in which she found herself, Margaret felt lost and began to despair. She did not
know whether to pursue her vocation or remain in the shadows. It was at this moment of
dire despair that God sent sustaining arms of strength through the persons of Daisy
Washburn Osborn and Grace Ekperigin to help her bear the burden of the vision.401

At the first meeting held at the Iyaro church, Mrs. Osborn encouraged women to
take up the mantle, stand beside their husbands, and be involved in a special ministry for
women. The meeting was the beginning of CWFI, and Margaret became its founding

400 Anonymous, “Archbishop Margaret Benson-Idahosa” in
http://www.edoworld.net/Bishop_Margaret_Benson_Idahosa.html (posted 2007-2015), accessed on Sept., 8
2017.
401 Idumwonyi, “The Deborah in World Pentecostalism, 50.
It was as a way of overcoming the limitations churchmen tried to impose on her that Margaret negotiated to fulfill the vision outside of the pulpit. Having been raised in a traditional Benin environment in which women were not heard and rarely supposed to be seen, were perceived as sub-human, and were confined to the traditional roles of childbearing and home keeping, she developed a message for liberating and transforming a people that are socio-culturally and spiritually imprisoned. Her message made the women in CGMi begin to see themselves in God’s image and not in the mold that the society had created for them.

In the course of time, the women’s arm expanded and attracted the attention of church women within and outside of the CGMi, including missionary churches. Church women rose up in support, and this culminated in tremendous exposure for Margaret. The women organized seminars and workshops that focused on the “significant roles of women in the ministry” and the “complementary effort of pastors’ wives, and care of the family. Women started receiving training on how to be gospel ambassadors—engaging in evangelism.

This development grew, and the women’s arm emerged from incubation, resulting in the first significant gathering of women at the Miracle Center in 1976.

The male members of the church, with detached interest, uninterested acceptance, and amusement, watched as the women feverishly prepared for the first convention. Nevertheless, as the

---

403 Idumwonyi, “The Deborah in World Pentecostalism,” 51.
404 Auto-ethnographic observation of Margaret Idahosa’s sermon delivered on May 29, 2016. She emphasized and challenged people to “give to others the grace [they] are enjoying.” According to her, this grace can only be given through soul winning. She reminded them that soul winning is the mission of CGMi. She called on them to rise up and be part of this mission, as the best way to exercise dominion is through evangelism and soul winning. Taking her text from Mark 16:15–20 she charged the people to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.
convention wore on, these same male members became aware of God’s hand in the vision and started shifting their perceptions about women in ministry. The topic of this first convention that has since become annual and populous was “And the Women Too.” The convention has not lost its appeal with the passage of time, nor has its vision waned.\footnote{Idumwonyi, 51.} The CWFI proudly celebrated her forty-first anniversary of ministry leadership in August 2016.

Encouraged by this success, women were challenged to establish women’s centers that would reach out to local communities. Margaret started a vocational training program as part of which she taught women trades that help to enhance their socio-economic status. This act enabled Margaret to advance the cause of women beyond the roles of wives and mothers. She taught them how to cook and how to dress modestly but gracefully and be debt-free. These innovations drew the full support of male members and thus started changing their opinions about the role of women in church ministry. Up until the time of my fieldwork, the home economics unit was still involved in training young women in sewing, laundry making, and craftwork to enable their economic empowerment.\footnote{Auto-ethnographic observation at the Restoration Center on March through August 2017; trainees displayed their products every Thursday so that women who come to the School of prayer could patronize them. I bought dish-washing soap from them; the beads and hats they made were pretty impressive.}

Since then, the CWFI has grown enormously. Even with her investment in the growth of the church, it took the guts of an American partner to induct Margaret into the ministry officially on May 24, 1983; CGMi did not ordain Margaret. Following the induction by the external body, CGMi could not help but publicly ratify Margaret’s ordination at the Benin City headquarters. Other women, such as Mary Mitchell
Slessor,408 have done well, but Margaret stands out for her forthright doggedness in helping to change Pentecostal tradition about “women’s place in the church.” She has had a profound impact on the global understanding of women in the Pentecostal tradition. She is an example of a woman who, by breaking out of her ordinary religio-cultural circumstances had a profound impact on people’s lives and the church.

Although Margaret maintains a strong commitment to Pentecostal beliefs and encourages Pentecostal folks to value biblical enrichment, she thinks that striving for spiritual presence and power is essential to women’s struggles for equality and inclusion, particularly because for a time she lacked such power and sense of inclusion, and was therefore unprepared and unwilling to step into her husband’s place. Grace Ekperigin supports this interpretation. She told me that, “Mama was not looking [to lead]; leadership was put on her. She was still in tears when she was called to the office of the Presiding Bishop, but today, God’s grace is speaking for her and through her.”409

Margaret had this to say about herself:

“When my husband died, I had my agenda…. I understood I was living in a man’s world, so, I began planning how I would manage my life … The ministry was not on my agenda… I [know] how male-dominated the world [is]…”410

“[But] when I was called the day I was ordained a bishop; I thought they [had] invited me to pray for me. I came out, and the archbishop who ordained me said: “he did not confer with flesh and blood but that the Holy Spirit had directed him to ordain me as a bishop.” When he made that declaration, there was a thunderous response from the audience. Before then I must confess that my mind was not in ministry. However, to my greatest surprise, there was a great acceptance of the ordination. Honestly, I was not

408 Mary Slessor was a famous Scottish missionary to Nigeria up until 1915. I invoke her and draw attention to the way locals accepted Western women missionaries in Africa, but contested African women’s place in the church.
looking forward to it, and after a while, I had to pray, and God spoke to me and said He had called me and he would give me the enablement and the strength to do the task that was set before me.”

Margaret continued:

“Before my husband’s funeral ceremony, God had spoken with many people about who [was to succeed] him. I recall that when my husband was alive he used to travel a lot and there were times he took people out for lunch in some of the countries he visited. These people often asked him questions. One of the [issues raised] by one of his friends was whether he was preparing somebody to take over from him and he said: “he was not preparing anybody because the anointing breaks the yoke and that the church would put anybody who had the anointing in place. However, he said I think my wife will fit into my shoes.” Somebody brought the video, and we watched it. There was a general acceptance of my person when I was ordained, and God has been helping us in the ministry.”

From the preceding statement, it seemed that Benson had prepared Margaret without her knowing it. Benson was confident that Margaret could fill his shoes after his death. In my analysis of this narration, I think watching the video would have been helpful for giving context to such conversation; unfortunately, I did not see this clip. This kind of narration raises questions that beg for an answer. What was the context and who was present at this scene? Importantly, why was it that Benson did not make this plan clear to his congregations back in Nigeria, or tell his wife, Margaret, that he would be passing on the leadership of the church to her? I suggest that Benson was a product of his immediate environment and that it may have been a hard sell for him to dissociate from the Benin tradition that does not permit a woman to be the head as an *odionwere or enogie*.

So when asked “what it takes to be in ministry in Benin, [being] a peculiar place,” Margaret said: “When God calls you, he gives you the boldness you need to withstand

---

412 Eyoboka, Ibid.
anything. I have asked God to [give me] the ability to perform and do what I am called to do and see and hear the hurt of those around me.”

It seems as if God answered her prayers because this undeniably feminine personality could not be silenced; she rose, unbowed and resolute. When they read and manipulated the socio-cultural and introduced gender obstacles into the scheme that would allow her to succeed her husband, she chose to stand up to the situation. Each challenge that came seemed only to strengthen her determination to follow her calling. Margaret triggers all the cultural stereotypes associated with being the spiritual head of a church influenced by Benin traditional consciousness. To the question of how she felt about being the first ordained female archbishop in Africa, she said: “I do not know how it came… I do not feel any difference, but I feel the responsibility.”

Some of my research participants suggest that she is a beneficiary of family privilege and power. I tend to reason and agree with this suggestion because if she were a male heir, this would not have been an issue. After all, the CGMi did not induct her into the ministry, nor did her husband; it was a partner church in the US that did so in 1983. Margaret could never have risen to such a position if she were just a regular but active and charismatic member of the church, and not the widow of the founding pastor. She could never have assumed this position if their only son, now Bishop in CGMi, had been of age. All these factors further demonstrate that Benin society oppresses women.

Nevertheless, in this increasingly “dirty” world of expedient and cultural politics, Margaret continues to matter significantly in Nigeria’s Pentecostal terrain. She is a beacon of hope, not so much for what she is doing as archbishop of a trailblazing

---

413 Eyoboka, Ibid.
414 Ibid.
Pentecostal church, but for what she represents for women. Importantly, Margaret continues to receive requests from women to help in establishing programs that minister to and support women in Ministry in Nigeria and beyond.

Today, while most know her as a great woman of God, others call her “The man called mama,” and yet others call her “An Elect Lady of the Gospel.” But, we hear little of the difficulties she encountered on her way to her consecration. While scholars often leave unreported the drama that her consecration occasioned, this is the focus of the section that follows.

5.2: The Succession Crisis and the Making of the First Female Archbishop in the NPT

In this section, I problematize and challenge the de facto power of tradition and patrilineal norms that Pentecostals employ to disinherit its female adherents. I describe NPT’s culpability in reproducing and perpetuating the self-same stereotypes for which they decry other faith traditions. For example, my ethnographic data shows that gender inclusivity is still a tough sell in NPT, at least practically. In this section, by focusing on the drama that followed Margaret Benson’s succession and eventual consecration as bishop, I suggest that the concept of male superiority still prevails in NPT.415

Pentecostals define themselves by so many paradigms that diversity has become a primary defining characteristic of Pentecostal identity, such that it is now better to speak of a whole range of types of Pentecostalism. Scholars have employed various ways of defining Pentecostalism, some of which are vague and inconsequential, while others highlight Pentecostal distinctiveness and create unnecessarily strained relationships with other Christians as a result. However, we know little of the narratives of the gender

---

dynamics that are at play in a tradition that prides itself on having radically changed the practices of sidelining women and do not rebuff women as missionary churches do.\textsuperscript{416}

Pentecostal tradition conveys a sense of triumphalism, a claim that tends to clouds its sense of judgment and often puts it at loggerheads with the missionary churches. It claims to empower its adherents equally and struggles not to be labeled with stereotypes like the \textit{other} – missionary (mainline, orthodox) churches – which Pentecostals insist do not empower females like males. For example, comparing CGMi to other Pentecostal denominations, Rev. Eghosa Igunbor proudly stated that, “CGMi is better than most Pentecostal denominations because [CGMi] acknowledge[s] and ordain[s] women into ministerial positions.”\textsuperscript{417} However, a close examination shows that the Pentecostal tradition is just as culpable as the \textit{other} faith traditions they label negatively. They enforce gender exclusion, albeit in concealed ways. For Pentecostals still favor ranks and classes and make distinctions on account of superior and inferior sexes that tie religious tradition with culture.

Case in point: as we have seen, in March 1998, the founding archbishop of the CGMi died without legal succession plans. His widow, Margaret, became the “chosen elect.” Mocking protests within and outside the CGMi for why a woman should assume the exalted position of a bishop went viral. This election cum consecration was the first to happen in a traditional (Benin) environment with a high record of gender exclusion. Sadly, what is often left out in Margaret’s narratives are the odds she was up against


\textsuperscript{417} P.I. with Eghosa Igunbor (Rev.) on April 21, 2016.
before assuming this critical leadership position. I invoke this drama because it demonstrates that although Pentecostal congregations claim to empower their members, aspects of their ministries continue to perpetuate gender inequality—the impact of social constructions and cultural beliefs that engender gender inequality in the mega CGMi, which is the prototypical Nigerian Pentecostal community.

Margaret exemplifies women who have been present as agents of development in NPT. By her consecration, she became the first female Pentecostal Arch/bishop of a church of this magnitude in Nigeria (Africa) — a significant milestone in the history of Nigerian and African Pentecostalism. This elevation positioned her as the official spiritual leader of the CGMi. In my view, this elevation signifies a pushback against ways that the church perceives women. The pushback she encountered is related to the gender status, and patriarchal cultural ideologies deeply entrenched in Benin tradition and held by male leaders concerning women’s place in the church. Nor did her consecration acknowledge her part, alongside her husband, in promoting the church globally.

Arguably, the succession problem is not a phenomenon peculiar to African churches, but Margaret’s case is certainly worthy of scholarly analysis because of her sex. For the confrontation she experienced confirms Simone De Beauvoir’s remark that, “One is unequal because one is a man or woman and not just because one occupies a particular set of organizational positions in society.”

When CGMi was “shaking” in the wake of the unexpected death of the founding pastor, over succession, an American Pentecostal partner of CGMi and personal friend of

---

the late founder, Archbishop Earl Paulk, admonished the church and its leaders to be “united.” He charged them to bring Christ’s vision to fruition by embracing the new “move of the Spirit” to work in support of the emerging presiding bishop. He envisioned a church that embodies Jesus’ idea of love so that the church could be an exemplar of God’s presence and be used by God in more productive ways in the world (John 17:21).

Although Paulk called for unity within the CGMi, particularly amongst the high ranking and predominantly male leaders, the leaders’ ultimate hope and ideal for unity was not in any way connected to changing the gender status quo. It became even more evident that the church fundamentally agreed with the tradition of perpetuating male leadership church. In a personal interview which confirms my position, Rev. (Prof.) John Okhuoya informed me that,

“While some leaders thought it was right for Margaret to succeed Benson, others felt the office was the exclusive preserve of a senior “deserving male” pastor. Even though I was the Resident Pastor and moderated the funeral thanksgiving service, I was not privy to the decision that played out with Bishop Earl Paulk’s public declaration. My duty was to introduce the most senior minister in that service to preach and pray for the family. I was as surprised as everyone (although many of these leaders fail to believe that I was not privy to the decision) when Bishop Paulk announced mama as the presiding bishop.”

When her consecration ensued, many members who used to have a very close relationship with the CGMi deserted the church because they could not cope with the reality of having a female bishop. Five members specifically named two male bishops who protested the naming and the eventual consecration of Margaret as the presiding bishop based on her sex. Bishop J.O.S. Imafidon, who was one of the male leaders that held a senior position at the time, informed me in an interview that in his opinion, “[t]he

422 Auto-ethnographic observation in 1998 after the funeral thanksgiving service and nomination of Margaret as the Presiding Bishop.
CGMi would have headed in the wrong direction if they [had given] the spot to a man.”

For Imafidon, Margaret was the best candidate for the position at the time. Deacon Vincent Ayomide confirmed Imafidon’s position when he informed me that:

“Bishop Imafidon made that statement because of the tiff for power within the leadership cadre. Explicitly, one of the bishops [name withheld] assumed the virtue of his personal and ethnic relationship with papa should be a “pass” for him to [be given] the exalted position; he had openly voiced his grievance at Margaret’s consecration. The aggrieved bishop also said, “I am a Benin man, and the Benin culture forbids him to serve under a woman. No woman lay hands on my head. A woman can never be a head in Benin; no, it is a taboo.”

Note that the aggrieved bishop (whom I shall call Osazee Ediae) was here invoking the Benin tradition that forbids a woman from being an okae-egbe or odionwere (family or community head) in the Benin tradition. Bishop Osazee (and others) who thought they were the most deserving for the office became unpopular with their opposition and subsequently broke away from the CGMi.

Evidently, these male leaders had “femininized” and turned Margaret into ‘just’ an ‘ordinary’ wife and ‘just’ a mother. That made it hard for them to recognize in her the dynamic and female strategist who would in time play a vital role in securing and consolidating the course of CGMi and by extension, the NPT in the face of dominating culture. This relegation parallels the women Oba of Benin who has been dehistoricized and left out of historical narratives.

Given the historical and social-cultural context of the time and the submission by Rev. Okhuoya, it is logical to infer that the church leadership council already had plans to perpetuate the existing customs: to pass leadership from a male to a male. Moreover, if

---

423 P.I. with J.O.S. Imafidon (Bishop) on July 24, 2016.
424 P.I. with Vincent Ayomide (Deacon (Prof.) (pseudonym) on April, 18, 2016. To my mind, the taboo referenced her is connected to women’s menstrual cycle. Will Margaret lay hands on men when she is bleeding?
they had had the chance to execute their succession plot, it evidently would never have been Margaret, although she had been with Benson longer than any of the agitating males. Deacon Victor Aladeselu and Rev. Eghosa Igunbor both argued that, “Mama could never have been elevated to such an exalted authoritative position if the founding archbishop was alive and if the male leaders were left to make the nomination decision.”

So should we call Margaret “a child of circumstance?”

This drama reminds me of Paul Tillich’s argument that “culture is the form of religion, and religion is the content of culture.” There is, in short, a close relationship between the religious and the social-cultural. Both impose beliefs and practices that relegate women’s experiences far behind and show preference to men’s experiences of domination. Culture influences all religions, and all religions have a hermeneutic aspect to them. Therefore, culture informs the choices and actions of some male leaders in CGMi and many faith communities. Faith communities implicate religion in culture, and conversely, culture is made evident in religion; to be right religiously is to be right culturally and to be wrong religiously is to be wrong culturally. Male leaders play significant roles and can employ culture to enable or constrain women in the church. This constraint is the most prominent challenge the church faces in making the church more gender inclusive.

Yet as regards Margaret’s elevation, some male members hold that such behavior is unbecoming to the church. In an interview, Pastor Dickson Ogbahon said, “The church’s response to gender in/equality should be different from the world’s response. The women’s involvement should be informed by their spiritual relationship with God.

---

and based on the teachings of the Scripture that prized the family far and above accepting to being in the ministry.” Like Pastor Dickson, many of the male leaders have yet to embrace the idea of a mother and wife being in ministry. They often cite the Apostle Paul to defend their stance for exclusion and to bar women from holding pastoral positions. They insist that women are to sit down to be taught and to ask their husbands questions at home (1 Corinthians 14:34; 1 Timothy, 2:11–15). In my view, the church employs a double standard in its hermeneutics because when women are called to become Sunday school and weekday Bible Study teachers, these same men interpret these same Pauline passages quite differently to suit their ends. So what did Margaret think of all of this?

What is Margaret’s theological position regarding women in ministry?

5.3 Women in Ministry and Margaret Idahosa’s Theological Stance

My research, as noted above, reveals that CGMi has its share and unique perspectives towards gender struggles. Certainly different groups and individuals do have different angles of vision; people do not view things in the same way. To explore the viewpoints of Pentecostals towards gender relations within the Pentecostal church, I focus on the theological perspective of Archbishop Margaret Idahosa. However, I do not in any way argue that her viewpoint is representative of all Pentecostal members, as her view is distinctive.

To explore and examine Margaret Idahosa’s stance regarding the struggle for gender inclusion, I focus on Margaret’s sermons, teachings, and writings, all of which are rich in personal testimonies. In this section, I quote Idahosa extensively rather than succinctly paraphrasing her words because her voice and perspective have not yet received significant attention among religious historians, gender, and women scholars.
Margaret has authored several theologically oriented books, including: *The Womb of Harvest*, *Tearing the Veil*, *The Female Minister*, *Expansion without Limits*, *A Second Touch for a Clearer Vision*, so there is certainly an emphasis on women’s experience in ministry. This she addresses head-on:

> “God is not mad at men and women according to Gen.1:28-29, men and women were created by God, God gave both of them authority; not the man alone, to go and dominate and multiply. You can increase by the Word of God or biologically. It is religion and tradition that relegate[s] the woman. The mind of God is that men and women work together cordially. Before God, there is no disparity but, traditionally, we have differences. If a man can fulfill his calling why can’t a woman as well? God has called the man and the woman. So, God is not mad at the man preaching and the woman also preaching. If God gives you a vision, He will bring people around to provide for the vision.”

Margaret, in a sermon she titled *Empowered to Occupy Till He Comes*, told her audience that: “The era of women to be seen but not heard is past. Women must know that they must be seen and they must be heard. Don’t die with God’s gift in you; you are empowered to occupy your immediate environment. Your voice must be heard.”

She protests the gender-relegating gospel projected in the Pauline epistle (1 Corinthians 14: 34; I Timothy 2:11–15) that the Pentecostal males in leadership positions engage to sideline the female members of the Pentecostal community. She is far less inclined to endorse the gender relegation because she thinks the philosophy negates the true Pentecostal beliefs as captured in the Pentecostal experience at the Upper Room (Acts 2:1ff).

According to her, the Apostle Paul’s ideology of female exclusion that some Pentecostal chauvinists apply is a political ideology developed to disable female clerics from embracing and expressing their desire to answer the “call” to the public and full-

---

428 Auto-ethnographic observation at the Faith Miracle Center on June 5th 2016.
time ministry and to fulfill their spiritual potential. This control, according to Archbishop Margaret, is an “unchristian” and “un-Pentecostal” approach. Margaret holds that many male Pentecostal leaders are not genuinely concerned with issues relevant for female inclusion, despite the reminder in Galatians 3:28 that everyone is welcome, irrespective of gender or status. In another sermon she said that “Jesus essentially called women first at his resurrection to improve their communities by uniting together, defining, and launching their empowering and ministerial goals.” She calls women to take pride in their positive history. By implication, Margaret is critical of the single-power viewpoint and rhetoric of control that deliberately obstructs women’s use of their spiritual gifts. For her, this philosophy, which colludes in disempowering women and thwarting their spiritual calling, is problematic.

Margaret rebuffs what she calls the gender exclusion in the Pentecostal church. She contends that the “gospel of Jesus Christ” is the solution to gender injustice, which she deems to be rooted in the people’s culture. Moreover, this tradition of the people is an option that transgresses and lacks the will of conformity to God’s will. Supporting this position, Rev. Humphrey Areghan insists:

“Salvation is all-encompassing. It cures anyone of bias and anything that turns people from God’s will. One of the human’s most stubborn and tenacious foes is the “self” or the human ego, which leads a person to reject God’s plan for him or her. Only Christ can save humans from their depraved and selfish nature and regenerate their hearts and minds.”

429 Auto-ethnographic observation of Margaret Idahosa’s sermon titled And the women too on July 5, 2016.
430 Auto-ethnographic observation of Margaret E. Idahosa in a sermon titled “Empowered to Occupy Till He Comes” at the Faith Miracle Center on June 5th 2016.
431 P. I with Rev. Humphrey Areghan on March 4, 2016. He was the Public Relations Officer up to the time of Archbishop Benson Idahosa’s death.
Margaret further asserts that Christianity is not a male religion because many females have proved their calling through the Bible. Referencing the presence of women in the Bible and the history of the church—Deborah, Esther, Mary Magdalene, the four daughters of the Prophet, the Samaritan woman, Mary Magdalene who first announced the resurrection of Jesus—Archbishop Margaret admonished female folks to wake up. Noting women’s continuous contributions, she insisted that women are as responsible for the shaping and spread of Pentecostalism as their male counterparts. She sums up that the presence of women in the Bible and throughout Church history proves that Christianity is neither a male nor female religion; instead, it is a religion available to all humans irrespective of gender who desire to be a part of God’s family.

She continued that the time has come, and is long past, for those who name the name of Christ to do away with biases, exclusionary behaviors, and conceited display of superiority. She admonished her audience to accept God’s plan of redemption for the world, a plan that does not discriminate between male or female. She cited Galatians 3:28 that said: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” By referencing this text, Archbishop Margaret emphasized that if males and females were to accept Christ’s vision, practice Christ teachings, and follow Christ’s example, then gender relations would be advanced positively.

Affirming her Pentecostal heritage, Margaret stressed that gender division should not exist within the Pentecostal tradition or even the larger Christian body. She views gender animosity as opposing the Gospel, and she holds men believers accountable for
not fully embracing and practicing the teachings of Jesus to engage in gender harmony within the Pentecostal tradition.

I offer one final vignette—Archbishop Margaret Idahosa’s response to a reporter after she was consecrated as Presiding Bishop in 1998:

“When Paul said, women should keep quiet; I was not there. God is not mad at women when they preach the gospel. They were present with Jesus from the beginning to the end of [Jesus] ministry. Jesus gave them the message to the world while men were hiding. So I will instead obey my Lord Jesus than hear from a man. I will preach and do the work that the Lord ordered me to do. When we get to heaven, they can ask Jesus why women preached; Paul will also answer for himself. The power of God does not know gender; God’s Spirit is one as long as you have God’s spirit in you, go ahead, and God will append the signature to what God calls you to do.”

At the time, folks viewed her response as a significant “score” for women in ministry. What I have come to value since then is that her comment revealed something much more profound. Her strong aversion to labeling women (when they assume positions hitherto reserved for males) reflects her notion that Pentecostal theology must embrace inclusion in a more practical sense. Also, her insistence that everyone in the CGMi community should have a sense of belonging and know that “they too are God’s children” is telling. Such dedication—and her path-breaking example—have been the hallmarks of her theology.

Nonetheless, I think that Archbishop Margaret Idahosa’s vision for gender harmony is somewhat romantic. I make this claim as her efforts to hold both male and female Pentecostal Christians accountable for practicing the ethics of Jesus seem to me to be more theoretical than pragmatic. Nelly Okojie affirmed this, noting, “Her time as archbishop has not seen to the increase of many women to authoritative leadership

432 *Tell* (magazine): Nigeria’s Independent Weekly,” Interview with Bishop (Mrs.) Margaret Idahosa (Special ed.), No. 23, (June 8, 1998), 6.
positions such as heading a church in their capacities as women and not in their supportive role as the wife of a male pastor.\textsuperscript{433}

Two more participants informed me during a focused group discussion (FGD) of how, even after the present archbishop intervened, a branch of CGMi rejected a senior woman pastor (name withheld) sent to head a local branch. In short, there is still a sense of bias and prejudice by male leaders who profess to be followers of Christ towards females, just because of their gender, and Margaret does not use her position to correct this. Has she, therefore, failed as a female spiritual leader to advance the course of women in the face of cultural practices? Can it be said that she, along with the Pentecostal tradition, has failed in breaking the barriers that restrict believers, especially women? Exploring these questions will be a task for future research.

In the sections that follow, I will focus on the works of Margaret since she assumed office as arch/bishop: her vision and achievements, her leadership style, relevance, and impact on the Pentecostal terrain. What is the implication of Margaret’s consecration as an archbishop for women in leadership?

5.4: Margaret Idahosa Today: The Struggles, Achievements, and Expansion since 1998

Many feared and have continued to express concern that the CGMi may not survive or thrive after Benson’s death. What has become of CGMi since the unexpected departure of the “Gospel Giant” and Margaret’s assumption of office as presiding bishop and eventual elevation as archbishop? Has Margaret been able to manage and pilot the affairs of the mission? This section illuminates her struggles and achievements since the founder’s demise, both of the CGMi and of Nigerian Pentecostalism. I focus on her programs, and her interaction with other arms of the mission, and how she is influencing

\textsuperscript{433} P.I. with Nelly Okogie (pseudonym) on June 23, 2016.
women’s involvement in ministry. This exploration offers insights into how women negotiate the socio-cultural boundaries in ministry to become a beacon of hope to others.

In an interview with *The Guardian* Newspaper after her consecration as the archbishop, Margaret said: “I am happy that [God] counts me worthy. [God] has faith and believes in me, just as I have faith and believe in [God]. I see [this elevation] as a responsibility not to the CGM alone, but to humanity in general.”

Margaret expressed how timid and unprepared she was at the start of this journey. Recounting her stressful experiences, she said: “[W]hen I [assumed] this position, I cried to God about how timid I was and how male-dominated the world [is] … God said to me: ‘Margaret if your faith says yes, I God will not say no.’ Again, God spoke to me: ‘if I made the appointment, I would release to you the ability to perform and excel.’ When you look at the CGM God has done all these [things].”

Although assuming this position was not smooth-sailing for her as a woman, she has continued in her husband’s charismatic footsteps, and like him, she has preached the gospel in the continents of the world in her capacity as a woman. Her personae along with her spiritedness play a considerable part in helping her to stand tall against the odds, and she continues to expand the frontiers of the CGMi in a global world and to travel to different parts of the world with the Gospel. She has not failed to show her worth in her ability to manage and pastor the five thousand capacity Faith Miracle Center church.

---

in Benin. In her own words, before she was elevated to the office of the Presiding Bishop:

“I reminded God that I was a woman in a society that marginalizes women. However, the most-High informed me that [God] was not of a particular gender, but wanted that person who was available to do [God’s] work. If I make the appointment, God Almighty told me [at] that time that I will release to you the ability to perform. I then accepted and asked for the ability to speak as I did not believe in myself. However, here I am today, and I think that the best is yet to come.”

Initially, Margaret was cowed by the male-dominated world and thought that she could not stand by herself. She recalls: “I thought I had finished... I did not know where I was heading when my husband passed on, but today, I give glory to God. There are challenges, but God is always there to take care of the big ones. [God] is there with me and the mission.”

Since Margaret assumed the office of the arch/bishop and became the spiritual leader of the mission, she has been working hard with some success to harmonize and unite both women and men in the church to create spiritual and physical balance. She superbly uses her ministerial and administrative gifts. Stepping into the shoes of her husband has been a daunting task, but Margaret notes that “the grace of God has been more than sufficient.”

Margaret has not only sustained what was left but has pushed the borders of the work with breath-taking results. Grace Ekperigin informed me that: “All through these seventeen years since Papa passed on, Mama has set a path for us to follow. She kept the

437 Auto-ethnographic observation during the course of my field work in congregations I visited on May 8, 15, and 22, 2016.
439 Ibid, 244-245.
440 Auto-ethnographic observation of a sermon by Margaret Idahosa titled “Grace for Dominion” at the Balm of Gilead on June 5th 2016.
fire of his legacy burning and has even built more upon them. CGMi is waxing stronger and expanding in all frontiers. It is a blessing that in her lifetime, the ministry is producing large fruits.”

The number of local branch churches has been increasing exponentially through the continuous commitment to evangelization. A new dimension in evangelization, the community-development approach, was introduced. This approach is expanding the church’s mission and, encouraged by the example of Margaret, many people have surrendered to serve God. This increase in numbers of members and churches has rubbed off on other facets of the ministry in several ways, including in the 1998 construction of the Faith Medical Center, which is the hospital arm of the ministry. By the time of this research, the hospital ministry had expanded so greatly that there are now four different hospitals in four different geographical locations in Nigeria. In this and many other ways, Margaret Idahosa has confronted “storm and change” and made the CGMi and maybe the NPT stronger, specifically more integrated administratively and in governance. She advances concepts that enable members of the church community to thrive socially and economically.

Responding to the struggles, change, and progress that CGMi has had to deal with since Benson’s transition, Bishop Harry Westcott said: “The work, witness, and outreach of CGMi are in great shape and apparently growing at a consistent rate. When Archbishop Benson died in March 1998, CGM had one hospital; it now has four! It had

---

one Bible school; it now has six! It had ninety-eight (98) primary and secondary schools; it now has over one hundred!”

Also, in January 2002 the Benson Idahoa University formally obtained approval from the Nigerian Federal Government to become a full degree-awarding institution. Interestingly, as an educator, Margaret is presently the first female to be appointed the chancellor of a university (Benson Idahoa University) in Africa and the Executive President for the All Nations for Christ Bible Institute International (ANFCBI). In addition, under Margaret’s administration, the Benson Idahoa University acquired one hundred hectares of land (named the “Balm of Gilead”) along the Sapele road area of Benin. In the course of the author’s fieldwork, a crusade tagged “Benin City for Christ” was held at the site, as was the 2017 CWFI annual convention.

In a similar vein, the Word of Faith (WoF) group of schools is expanding as well, WoF like CWFI being Margaret’s brainchild. She was the first teacher here while Grace Ekperigin was the first “babysitter in the day-care.” She picked up this challenge after she had a vision in which God instructed her to raise an army of scholars that would be trained and built to continue spreading the Gospel. Having shared the concept with Rev. (Mrs.) Grace Ekperigin, WoF started as a daycare center in 1979. It was officially opened in January 1981; in 1983 the primary school section was added with an enrolment of twenty-three pupils, three teaching staff, and two helpers. By September 10, 1984, the secondary arm was opened with an entering class of eighty students and a staff of ten.

---

444 Auto-ethnographic observation at the Balm of Gilead premises on June 5, 2016.
These developmental strides are still ongoing, witness the fact that WoF schools have well over one hundred and eight (108) branch-schools across Nigeria. As the result of one woman’s vision, many people have boosted their economic status by enjoying employment opportunities that the government would ordinarily not provide. Local people credit the CGMi for the creation of jobs for members and non-members of the church. The church has contributed to education, healthcare, and delivery of welfare services in Nigeria. She has the foresight of granting Ministers’ compulsory annual leave/vacation. Most importantly, a leadership training Institution—the International Leadership Resources Institute (ILRI) — has been established to teach and address leadership ethics and pastoral principles that train folks to occupy leadership positions in and outside the church, including missionaries to parts of Nigeria and Africa.

Margaret had changed the response of the Benin tradition and mission-instituted churches toward women, and to their God-given ministerial calls. Indeed, Margaret seems to be changing the church politics so fundamentally that Pentecostal churches are now working out ways to embrace women in ministry. Thus, for example, palace functionary Chief Osaguona Edigin told me in an FGD that, “Mrs. Idahosa has changed the order of women’s involvement in Benin. Do you not see how male pastors now feature their wives side by side on their church’s billboard? Nobody and no church tried that practice before Mrs. Idahosa took over.” What Chief Edigin points out is that Margaret along with the CWFI has opened the door for women of other Pentecostal

446 Ighile and Ijeakhena, Redemption Faith Magazine. 24; Also see “Archbishop Margaret Benson-Idahosa” in International Communion of Charismatic Churches http://www.theiccc.info/Archbishop-Margaret-Idahosa (c. 2016-2017 ), accessed on September 8, 2017.  
448 Miscellaneous of Amended Constitution of CGMi, Benin City, (2014), Article XXII, B, P. 38.  
449 Osaguona Edigin (Chief) in an FGD in Benin City on April 18 2016
denominations to network and have strategy training meetings. Margaret Agbonifo confirmed Edigin’s stance when she told me that:

“Mama has brought glory to every gospel woman. As a result of her achievements, many men these days have confidence in the ability and capability of their wives. Most men now encourage their wives in the pursuit of their dreams and careers. If she had failed, millions of women would have also failed. So her success is the success of every woman, and I give God glory for her life. We are proud of her for being the first African woman to be called an archbishop. Those who prophesied doom that CGMi would fail because a woman has become its head today have been put to shame. I bless the day that Mama was born.”

Agbonifo’s position reflects how much Margaret has influenced contemporary Pentecostal practices and beliefs.

This exploration of Margaret’s struggles and achievements shows that her church ministry is thriving, and apparently so is she. Despite all the obstacles she has had to face, she remains confident:

“I do not have to look for people to accept me as I look up to God as the Author and Finisher of my faith. If I am committed and focused on my calling, others around me would have to accept me. They are called by God and have their anointing, and I have my anointing. Mine may not be as high as theirs or theirs as mine. However, know that we are all anointed by God and are serving [God]. Everybody aims to please God, and that is what I am doing. There is evidence of productivity in the ministry and to [God] be the glory [for that].”

Margaret humbly credits her success in ministry to God and the spirit of teamwork at CGMi. She is clear that, “I function because I work with a team of women and men who believe in the vision that God has given to us. We have different bishoprics [that] come together to rub minds [about] our strengths and weaknesses and how to improve and

---

450 P. I. with Margaret Agbonifo on July 5, 2016.
move to the next stage. I believe firmly in teamwork. Everything we have today is as a result of collaboration.\textsuperscript{452}

Building up the women and the women’s organ is part of Margaret’s achievements; however, as noted above, I shall focus on the CWFI and its concepts in chapter six as it serves as a tool for negotiating gender boundaries. Given her involvement and contributions to the advancement of the church, can it be said that Margaret is relevant to the progress of the Nigerian Pentecostalism? Her relevance to history is the focus of the next section.

5.5: Margaret’s Relevance to the History of the Pentecostal Tradition

Over time, progressive voices have claimed, and I agree, that God’s greatest desire is to establish a balanced church where everyone, irrespective of gender, can operate complementarily. Yet through the ages, the male members of the household of faith, with their ‘lording’ and dominating instinct, have monopolized this call, and thus relegated and denied the female members of the faith community their right to fulfill their religious calling. The norms, dogma, mores, and doctrines borrowed from the traditional setting that bars women from the public religious space undergirded this practice. Against such socio-cultural and institutional sanctions and odds, Margaret has proved to be a worthy ambassador of a countercultural discourse and practice. It takes a woman with guts, vision, and serious dedication to break the mold and emerge to pursue the vision of proclaiming the Gospel the world over, as her husband did. Following in his steps, from 2002 Archbishop Margaret was the chairperson of the caucus of the Nigerian Pentecostal Bishops that ordain ministers. She epitomizes gender inclusion in the church today, and

\textsuperscript{452} Ibid.
the fulfillment of God’s plan to reconcile women and men in the ministry. Her most significant motivation is to keep this vision alive.

Margaret displays industry, patience, usefulness, activity, diligence, and care. She is strong-minded and motivated, influencing others with her distinct personality. These features are examples of a woman who has proved herself worthy of her generation. Without a doubt, she is leaving her mark in history like Deborah in the biblical book of Judges, with remarkable and varied gifts for the deliverance of God’s people. She is identified as a pacesetter with the capacity to extend her hand of help and fellowship to other institutions to advance the quality of human life for all. Her achievements push the frontiers for others to assume their position in ministry alongside the male members of the Pentecostal church.

Interestingly, Margaret came to the fullness of her vocation through a man, her husband, Archbishop Benson Idahosa who, until his death was a man of standing in world Pentecostalism. Margaret’s testimony is inspiring, and like Deborah, she recalls, “Until that I … arose… a mother in Israel” (Judges 5:7). So Margaret came into ministry without initial realizing that she would be a channel to establish the female members of the Pentecostal tradition. She had imbibed all the conventional preaching against women in ministry and was content with following convention and being a wife and mother. Margaret says of herself: “When my husband was alive, I was with him, and the best I could do was to encourage him and pray for him. I was a great supporter of his vision. So when he died, I just wanted to remain in my cocoon. However, God had a different plan for me.”

---

Now she appreciates and says that all through Christ’s life he never subordinated women. She takes up the mantle of the women’s leadership, began and inaugurated the course of women in ministry through CWFI, and she continues to advance the course of the Pentecostal tradition in Nigeria. Today, in large part thanks to her, CWFI and CGMi are household names in Nigeria, with branches in several nations of the world. When discussing the involvement of Margaret Benson and CGMi in expanding the frontiers of gender injustice within the CGMi, sociologists, historians, and scholars of religion would be wise not to leave CWFI out of the conversation.

Margaret has birthed other women’s fellowships, where women are developed to be the best they can be within and without the Pentecostal orbit. Margaret has proved that the femaleness of God, without a doubt, is as essential as the maleness of God; and she has accomplished feats of faith comparable to that of Apostle Paul. If it was the Great Commission to make the Gospel available to the whole world that launched Christian history, it is legitimate to expect that we read all of Christian history in light of the original impulse. The terms of the Great Commission ought to furnish us with the means to understand and test the direction and the significant forces operating within any segment of Pentecostal history and how they impact both women and men.

Margaret has convinced herself that woman’s place has universal relevance and far-reaching import for the global church. She succeeds in playing an essential role in both Nigerian and world Pentecostalism. She lives a commendable life in and outside the Nigerian Pentecostal terrain, glorifying God for the gifts she receives in others and for the possibility of giving herself freely for the well being of her many spiritual children and

---

the faith community while remaining responsible and responsive to God.\(^{455}\) That Margaret has started a process of godly liberation and rehabilitation for women in the religious, social, and economic spheres confirms the fact that the femaleness of God so long neglected warrants a revival. History shows that since both natures of God have been brought to bear, humanity is on its way to being fulfilled.\(^{456}\)

### 5.6: Concluding Thoughts

This chapter makes a scholarly contribution to the experiences of Margaret Idahosa and her ongoing exploration and discourses on development within the Pentecostal terrain. Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro are right to have pointed out “that as long as men and foreign researchers remain the authorities on culture, rituals, and religion, African women will continue to be spoken of as if they were dead.”\(^{457}\) This was a key observation in launching one of the early publications of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. What this means is that until women’s views are listened to and their participation allowed and ensured, the truth will remain hidden, and the call to live the values of the “Reign of God” will be unheeded.\(^{458}\)

Therefore, building on the African women theologians’ stance, I reiterate that historicizing women narratives help to foreground the increasing ritual activity of transgressing and expanding the gender boundaries in Nigerian Pentecostalism. It foregrounds that in some respects the existential referents produced by the gender imbalance in favor of men have shifted significantly. Margaret’s consecration provided a

---

\(^{455}\) Anonymous, “Archbishop Margaret Benson-Idahosa” in \url{http://www.edoworld.net/Bishop_Margaret_Benson_Idahosa.html}, accessed on September 8, 2017; Also see Oduyoye, \textit{Hearing and Knowing}, 137.

\(^{456}\) Idumwonyi, 55-56.

\(^{457}\) Oduyoye & Kanyoro, \textit{The Will to Arise}, 1.

\(^{458}\) Ibid, 1.
basis on which to frame the ongoing challenges regarding the relationship between women and men in Nigerian Pentecostalism and within scholarship. Some have argued that the growing numbers of women within NP should be indicative of equality. That may be historically understandable, but it does not reflect the situation on the ground. This shift is worth acknowledging as it seems to suggest a functional rupture between men and their status as supposedly superior beings. It is my position that Margaret’s consecration does not equate to gender equality in the faith community.

It is clear that women, irrespective of the religious tradition, are constricted by the same stereotypes, stigmas, and barriers. More research is needed to understand how, despite such continuing stereotypes, women still support the Pentecostal revolution in Nigeria.

I also suggest that scholars of religion, culture, and gender could advance projects that are devoted to the historical narratives of women in the Pentecostal mission in ways that meet modern social-cultural and religious concerns. Scholars can execute the devotion to such a narrative through a heuristic lens that reinforces a necessary tool to structure social-cultural order, an order that is devoted to interpreting femaleness in ways that give more credit and room to women than the current order does. Failure to take the shifting functional utility of femaleness into account creates a history that is one-sided.
Chapter Six

Lived Religion: The Weight of Femaleness and Women Negotiating Gender Boundaries

[Hu]man [beings are] ... [socially] predestined to construct and to inhabit a world with others. This world becomes for them the dominant and definite reality.

[Nature sets its limits], but, once constructed, this world acts back upon nature...

In this same dialectic [hu]man [beings] produce reality and thereby produce [them]selves.

Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann

This chapter examines how women in NPC negotiate gender boundaries within the faith communities. I do this to build on and expand the historicization of women’s narratives to focusing on moments of action that captures both the idea of being and becoming as a necessary antidote for gender inclusion that should replace the practice of exclusion and inequality.

My theoretical approach is underscored by how women employ religious, doctrinal, and organizational tools to pursue their struggle for gender justice and advancement. I engage and apply insight from negotiation theory as presented by gender and sociologist of religion theorists. Particularly relevant to my study is the work of one of Nigeria’s leading feminists, Obioma Nneameka. Her theory of feminist engagement in Africa through what she calls nego-feminism or feminism of negotiation is relevant for my study. Nneameka’s hypothesis, which grounds the theoretical contours and


460 Nnaemeka, “Nego-Feminism, 357-385.

461 In my reflection, and contrary to what some persons think, feminism is not about putting women’s rights above the rights of others or making women superior or assuming women deserve the most attention at any time (See Ecklund, “Catholic Women negotiate feminism,” 518). For a detailed discussion of Nnaemeka’s position on what ‘true’ feminism should be, see Nnaemeka 1988a, 5). I agree with Nnaemeka that (nego-) feminism is the feminism of negotiation and not (“ego”) feminism. It is not an exclusivist strategy that shifts power and focus from the privileged to the subaltern. Instead, it should be an engagement in which privilege is diffused to allow for an interactive, multilateral flow of voices (from above and below
analysis of female experiences in male-dominated institutions and societies, is relevant to this study for various reasons.

First, Nego-feminism serves more than one purpose for Nnaemeka. While she employs the theory to navigate intersectionality in academic disciplines between the West and Africa, the theory also helps her to show how women invite men into their space to achieve particular goals. Although Nnaemeka does not say whether men in Africa also encourage and welcome women into their spaces as she claims women do of men, I still find her application of the negotiation theory useful for my inquiry. Second, the theory helps me to map how women in the NPC negotiate constraining gender boundaries in a setting of unequal social-cultural constructions and power relations to achieve particular goals.

I also find American sociologist of religion Elaine Howard Ecklund’s mapping of negotiation helpful for examining how women negotiate in male-founded and dominated congregations. Her study of, and findings in American Catholic churches corroborate my findings in Nigerian Pentecostal churches. Negotiation theory helps us to understand women’s processes for navigating gender boundaries and articulating women’s religious relevance. This approach is also useful in deconstructing and understanding females and males’ attitudes, assumptions, and values.

Reviewing the works of these scholars, among others, is essential for exploring and substantiating the experiences of women in prominent leadership positions, and how these women negotiate gender boundaries in male-founded religious institutions. These simultaneously). It is structured by a cultural imperative and modulated by ever-shifting exigencies. She is of the view that a monolithic feminism will be problematic in the face of African pluralism, and argues for an approach that captures the fluidity and dynamism of the different cultural imperatives… and local realities that constrain women’s activism in Africa…. She proposes a method that is engaging, complementary, and supportive… (Nego-Feminism, 360-361, 377).
theoretical moves grounded on negotiation foreground the conceptual and internal shift I envision for Pentecostal discourse and women’s identity. They specifically inform my drive to interpret gender dynamics through the life and ministry of Archbishop Mrs. Margaret Idahosa.

I also use the data I collected during my ethnographic fieldwork to illuminate how women within the CGMi (and NPT) negotiate gender boundaries in a male-founded church that invokes social-cultural tools to regulate and relegate women in ministry. I base this chapter on the empirical evidence from my research data that shows that the evolution of a woman as a spiritual leader in CGMi does not connote a shift in gender-related values, as the church still contests gender boundaries. I thus conclude by suggesting that the use of complementary approaches is a necessity to redress the current unacceptable situation in which women still bear the weight of their femaleness.

6.1: The Weight of Femaleness in Nigerian Pentecostal Congregations

Ecklund in her studies of Catholic churches argued that many religions have patriarchal rules and institutional policies that formally relegate the leadership of women even though women often outnumber men in rates of participation. Based on this finding, this section sets out to make sense of why one gender bears more weight than another.

The idea of superior male and inferior female continues to consume many groups’ beliefs, especially those of religious communities. This weight reproduces the structure of the historical human experience in a way that does not reflect reality in that it does not include women’s experiences. According to Peter Berger, human creations (in this case,

---

biased idea) have so far been the curse and continue to have a negative impact on reality. This practice is so only because humanity has perpetuated and prized men’s superiority to the exclusion of women.⁴⁶³ Along the same lines, Jeffrey C. Alexander explores why (not how) people go about their lives without really knowing why or challenging the status quo. Concerning collective identity, Alexander argues that people do not naturally do things; rather they are compelled (by some external force) to be who or what they are. He identifies the regulation of society as coming from the “unconscious cultural structures” that are profoundly constraining as well as enabling.⁴⁶⁴ He shows how the force of (collective) social structures is more powerful than individuals, and thus individuals become accomplices in perpetuating particular (and sometimes unjust) social structures.⁴⁶⁵ Here, I think particularly of perpetuating a social order that disadvantages women,⁴⁶⁶ such as we find in Pentecostal churches that claim to be egalitarian and yet advantage men.

This human creation of the “ideal,” of who is superior (males) or inferior (females) has continued to be the reason for the social realities of Benin religion and the NPT. This idea of superior and inferior, according to Cecilia Ridgeway ceaselessly informs the social-cultural realities of those in faith communities in my research location by invoking status difference.⁴⁶⁷ Is it possible to correct a biased idea without reproducing the bias?

⁴⁶³ Berger and Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality, 141; Berger, The Sacred Canopy, 9, 25-8; Berger, The Sacred Canopy, 9, 25-8; Berger, The Sacred Canopy, 9, 25-8;
⁴⁶⁵ Padavic and Reskin, 17-36.
⁴⁶⁶ Padavic and Reskin, 17-36.
⁴⁶⁷ Padavic and Reskin, 17-36.
As noted in chapter three, Nigerian Pentecostals consider themselves distinct from others and often engage in the rhetoric that as a particular breed of the Christian group, they are better than mainline denominations for many reasons, including paying at least some attention to women. They claim that the mainline churches do not empower women and that they disregard scriptural teachings. This new, but uncritical hermeneutical, theology is claimed to be egalitarian in that women are part of the “foot soldiers.” That is, they claim to be gender inclusive because women form part of the Sunday school, are Wednesday Bible teachers, children’s teachers, and ushers, make up the choir and are ordained as deaconess and pastors. However, it is also true that women are barely allowed to oversee even the least significant congregation of the denomination without a male’s supervision. Yet Solomon Ikhidero, as noted above insisted that:

“The Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria have a liberal attitude towards women. Women have equal rights as men, and they ordain them as deacons, evangelists, bishops, and archbishops. In Nigeria, there are many women Bishops …”

While some persons view female-founded Pentecostal churches as a way of thinking gender inclusion and equality, this study focuses on women in male-founded Pentecostal churches, their numerical strength, the number of women in authoritative leadership positions, and the secondary roles they play. What this means is that readers should not consider the categories of these narratives in a generalized way.

Studying the CGMi denomination revealed that there are distinctions in congregational culture about women’s occupation of leadership positions, with male leaders always acting as gatekeepers. For instance, the male pastor's interpretation of their roles and the kinds of conversation that come with women’s leadership, understanding,

---

469 P.I with Solomon Ikhidero on May 25 2015.
and orientation of the male discourse have an impact on the potential power and authority of female leaders. In practice, women and men leaders do not have same autonomy in directing the congregation’s program as men do. Consequently, women are not allowed to make decisions without the direction of the male leaders. Also, the church, particularly, the male leaders view of women as holding forth until a male adult is ready to take over gives women less power and influence. In this sense, my work joins with that of Ecklund and other sociologists of religion who argue that in practice local religious organizations are often disconnected from the mega denominations and doctrines in which they are embedded.

In my study, I found that women bear weights only because they are women in male-founded Pentecostal congregations, sometimes enormously. Paul Ojo thinks that “These burdens negatively impact the image of women who aspire to be in an authoritative leadership position.” What is responsible for such effects on women? Largely the construction of discriminations and injustices that are based on social-cultural, religious beliefs and injustice mostly promotes male superiority. We see such beliefs and attitudes in a range of matters from motherhood to not being head of the home, to cultural beliefs about menstruation. Jeffery Alexander captures these attitudes with binaries that organize meanings: sacred/profane, good/evil/, and holy/unholy dimensions, even while he shows his pain with these binaries.

Yet the question remains: “What assumptions about gender inclusivity are at work here? Practically speaking, the rationale is straightforward. It is a case of sideling and

---

470 Ecklund, Organizational Culture, 95.
473 Jeffrey C. Alexander, 226-228.
exclusion, albeit at times in concealed ways. Women, like men, prioritize the church and devote themselves to it, yet they are mostly sidelined to being followers rather than leaders. When questioned about such hierarchies, men often retort: “Who is the head of the home?” “Why did Jesus not choose a woman as his disciple?” They buttress their actions and their superiority by appealing to Scripture.

This practice may explain why at the time of my research, over 70 percent of my respondents, responsible for over 85 percent of the membership of the CGMi, reported that they do not identify with how the church represents women in leadership positions.

What makes women become founders of Pentecostal churches is entirely different from what draws them to become heads in male-founded churches. Their rise to and exercise of formal authority is dependent on a path that is not formal leadership. Jane Soothill in her study of Ghanaian Pentecostalism discovered that the core trajectory for women’s advancement to an authoritative leadership position is through connection to a male figure in leadership—usually a husband or a father. In addition, I think that because of higher men’s mortality rate, wives of these leaders who outlive their husbands (that ordinarily would not have assumed such exalted positions) remain at the helm of the congregation as a leader. Soothill also noted that before considering this elevated position, these wives were typically in the shadows and called by their husband’s titles. For instance, a wife could be called “Mrs. Pastor, Pastor’s wife,” and “women’s pastor.” By implication, the role of these women is mostly subordinate to that of the male leaders; these women mainly deal with women’s issues and women’s meetings. Margaret Idahosa’s case fits this path to ministerial leadership.

---

474 For details, see Soothill, Gender, Social Change and Spiritual Power, 137 -140.
475 Ibid, 141.
The Pentecostal tradition is not egalitarian. It still reproduces gender inequality among younger generations in ways that reinforce its historical patterns.\footnote{Berger and Luckmann, \textit{The Social Construction of Reality}, 28, 34-38, 155.} For example, an institutional policy experiment on gender-based-quotas revealed that high-profile positions are always the exclusive preserve of the male leaders. This gives the lie to the claim that women are visible, active, and their voices are heard.\footnote{David Laitin, \textit{Hegemony and Cultures: Politics and Religious Change among the Yoruba} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 71 cited in Gbadegesin, “Comparative Analysis of Gift Exchange,” 151.} For example, although it is mostly women who carry out the evangelistic activities that help to advance the course of the church, nonetheless men do not find them worthy enough to occupy any but the most modest leadership positions. They only enjoy this privilege if they are the wives or widows of founding pastors. Case in point: the 2015 annual international CGMi convention revealed the sustained practice of sidelining women when the church consecrated bishops; all seven were male.\footnote{For example, see Ighile and Ijeakhena, “The 43rd CGMi Convention” in \textit{Redemption Faith Magazine}, 34. This report covers the international annual convention that was held between November 4–8, 2015.} Were there no qualified women in the vineyard? Certainly it becomes difficult for women to be qualified for such positions if they are not allowed to rise through the leadership ranks.

Also responsible for the situation of women in the church is the current constitutional reform which stipulates that leaders retire at the age of seventy. Under this scheme, the highest position a CWFI woman has ever attained is the position of the Provincial Presbyter. Examples of women who have worked their way up to occupy such offices but certainly could not make it beyond this position because of the age limit have been discussed in chapter three. There may be others, but these names were mentioned in about 80 percent of my interviews. This implies that women have to work hard twice as
men to advance in ministry. It is illogical to think that women who contribute to church
growth cannot be ordained while in their prime. The excuse for this denial is that they are
supposed to focus on the family. I think this was what feminist theorists, Betty Friedan
and Nkiru Nzegwu observed when they posited at different times that family
responsibilities often squelch women’s rights and personal development.479 Invariably,
after investing in the family, age prevents their advancement to authoritative leadership
positions. This church policy not to ordain spiritually-gifted women because of their age
is in my view biased and unjust, particularly because men are never restrained in such
ways. The policy is a simple exercise of patriarchal power. In what seems to be a
justification of the church’s policy, Humphrey Areghan informed me that,
“Pentecostalism in Benin (Nigeria) has not been here long enough to have women in
positions of authority in male-founded churches as men do.”480 What he, like others, fails
to see or agree on is that as short as the history of Pentecostalism is, they cannot deny that
women have been key players in advancing its course in Nigeria. Socially constructed
subjectivity forms the will of the collective; it shapes the rules of organizations, defines
the moral substance of the law, and provides the meaning and motivation for society.481

What is left for me to investigate is how women in Nigerian Pentecostal churches
bear these constructed weights and at the same time negotiate gender boundaries.

6.2: Women Negotiating Gender Boundaries

The predominance of male values and dominance, the ascription of male status as
“superior” and the consequent undermining of females, the disregard for women’s

479 Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York: Dell, 1963); cited in Ecklund, “Catholic women
480 P. I with Humphrey Areghan on May 31, 2016.
481 J.C. Alexander, 4-5, 12.
numerical strength, women’s notable performance, and widespread gender and pay gaps in the church as a whole is telling. While data shows that some creative women continue to inform and shape the production of religious experiences, other women are ignoring and agitating against such organizational impositions. They negotiate gender boundaries and fight against masculine domination. These women challenge and cross the normative, imposed social-cultural and religious limits that prevent their assumption of authoritative leadership positions in the mainstream, in the church and elsewhere. These women demand inclusion, sometimes through going outside of the church, and at other times by navigating existing religious boundaries.

What this means is that whether the male is considered superior or not, these women strive to be relevant in a social-religious arrangement that makes little room for them. Additionally, rather than succumb to social-religious norms that only reinforce their inferiority, they creatively create and recreate themselves. They do this also to contribute to the development and expansion of Pentecostal tradition in Benin City, Nigeria. The rationale for their alternative creation is what marks the functional birth of femaleness. So, they respond in a variety of ways to the practices that place constraints on their leadership.

Obioma Nnaemeka reminds us that “people in need are complex beings like most other people… and, to strip them of their complexity is to deny them of their humanity.” My study shows that spiritual matters know no gender for women who believe they have a calling; such women do not allow the tradition to strip them of their “complex” femininity. Such women live out their calling and create an alternative route

---

483 Nnaemeka, Nego-Feminism, 375; Also see, Obioma Nnaemeka, “Development, Cultural Forces, and Women’s Achievement in Africa” in *Law and Policy* 18 (3-4): (1997), 251-79.
for expressing their spiritual energies. They chart new ways to remain in the tradition if not in the mainstream and to continue to contribute to church growth. Women intentionally communicate the social and spiritual values by which they come to make meaning out of life. Women make meaning of their lives within and despite the complex Pentecostal tradition.

While some remain part of the same church but make meaning by creating distinct and alternative spaces of negotiation, others leave the mainstream congregations. Such women deal with patriarchal hierarchy by expending their major energies outside of the group through involvement in efforts that will embrace and extol their femininity, not the tradition. My findings corroborate Eklund’s study and illuminate ways in which women in traditional faith communities embrace patriarchal religion and at the same time negotiate gender boundaries to find areas of power and relevance. 484

First, there are few individual women whose view about egalitarian gender roles is core in their lives. Because gender inequality will not serve the well-being of the broader community, they embrace their identity by separating the church from their work. They form alternative groups outside of faith communities as a path to expressing their spiritual energies while continuing to remain part of the traditional patriarchal institution. They challenge conventional forms, create changes by starting Faith-based Non-Governmental Organizations (FB/NGOs), and actively continue to support and advance the course of the local church. For example, Rev. (Dr. Mrs.) Nosa Aladeselu formed the African Women Empowerment Guild (AWEG) and Rev. (Mrs.) Josephine Kpere-Daibo

484 Eklund, “Catholic Women Negotiate Feminism, 516; Also see, Eklund. 2006. “Organizational Culture,” 81.
formed the medical missionary group called the Rural Health Initiative for Improved Living (RHIFIL).

In this case, their insight of having “lost control” over the polity both increases their number within the mainstream and makes room for those who feel isolated from the mainstream and changing society. Could this be what Christel Manning means when she showed that “some conservative religious women deal with patriarchal hierarchy by separating their religious lives from the rest of their lives”?485 She suggests that a woman who is part of a traditional church and has created a shift or alternative route has a different view of herself in the workplace than she has in church. The works of African women theologians are on point in offering critiques of patriarchal religion.486

The second category of women remain within the mainstream but employs the group tactics of negotiation to recreate and manage themselves through the women’s arm of the organization, as they do with the CWFI.487 Such women use spiritual rhetoric to break through the gender boundary. They draw on the group tactics to petition the church council regularly for a change in church doctrine. They devote their spiritual energy to the same local congregation. The church has a real place in their lives.

The third group usually leaves the conventional faith community to establish churches where they can fully expend their spiritual energy in their capacities as women. For example, Rev. (Mrs.) Margaret Agbonifo formed the women’s church called the

---


Family Intercessory Prayer Fellowship and Apostle (Mrs.) Eunice Gordon Osagiede founded another women’s church—the “Jesus Women (The church of women) Prayer Fellowship” which blossomed into the “Spirit and Life Bible Church, Worldwide.”

Likewise, Sister Ngozi Peters founded the “Jesus Deliverance Ministry.”

This practice of Pentecostal women resonates with Ecklund’s finding in her study of Catholic Churches where women who consider egalitarian gender roles to be influential in their lives often left mainstream traditional religion to form or become part of more progressive denominations and faith communities.\(^{488}\) Thus the consequence of the perceived male superiority that drives exclusion is the growth of women groups that are emerging more loudly and in more significant numbers than ever before. This development, in my view, is not unconnected to the weight of history; a clear example alluded to in chapter one on Benin cosmology. I do not suggest that these women’s groups are entirely able to shape the larger society in their ideological direction, particularly as it relates to the Benin society, but they find ways to navigate through their situation and flourish spiritually and as women leaders.

This growth may suggest to the readers that my argument for the inclusion of women into ministry is either wrong or misguided, as it showcases the increase of women in ministry. Parallel with this growth has been a growth in Pentecostalism and fundamentalism more broadly and women’s church (groups) outside the mainstream, as I observed in Benin City, Nigeria. Some have argued that this increase should be indicative of gender inclusion. However, the increase in forming an alternative “women’s church” is mostly connected to the indisposition of males to embrace females’ inclusivity and response to a spiritual calling. What many readers may initially read as an increase in

\(^{488}\) Ecklund, Catholic Women, 522.
gender-based inclusivity can be acknowledged as the loud cries of women who are not pleased with the admittedly few but crucial positive gender changes within the NPT. It is equally possible to articulate that this fundamentalism is a type of religious blowback to the functional import of maleness in the NPT. These women speak more loudly to issues of gender inequality than the males in faith communities do, even though they are not representative of the overall NPT adherents. In short, it is mostly women who challenge and negotiate gender borders and the notion that male spiritual ability is superior to female spiritual talent. Further research exploring instances of gender domination and gender negotiations will better inform us about women’s opportunities and their agency.

This negotiation strategy explicates how Alexander positions meaning at the center of a cultural form of public sociology. The creation of meaning-making, for him, is concerned with symbolic codes, social production, and their distribution through carrier groups and social movements. For example, the driving power of social structures has significant internal and external effects. These meanings are both structured and socially produced. Nnaemeka affirms Alexander’s proposition that social theory goes beyond simple explanation into probing the interpretive subjects that are at stake in the social questions of lived history and experiences.489

Lastly, women encourage one another to contest the social-religious norms that consider it acceptable to be an accomplice in the ritual of reference. What this means is that folks are beginning to question the status that male superiority used to enjoy now that it is no longer the final word in the faith community—even though females have yet to experience gender justice.

489 J. C. Alexander, 5-6; Nnaemeka, “Nego-Feminism,” 362-70.
The foregoing suggests that we require more research and critical thinking to appreciate all the factors that reproduce gender inequality and oppress women in Benin City, especially in the NPC. What little evidence I have on this subject suggests that whatever constraints women, they still work out ways to negotiate the gender boundaries and advance themselves and their organizations. With this negotiation comes the birth of counterculture, as I shall present in the next section. Before I address the subject of the counter-culture, I shall highlight perspectives from African Women’s theology, an intellectual movement that has shaped theological and ecclesial thought in Africa in the postcolonial era.

6.3: African Women’s Theology

The injustices that women experience have become the context of their theology. The doyen of African women theology, Mercy A. Oduyoye, has argued that God defies the gender category. Studies of some communities in Africa demonstrate that God is gender neutral because there are no gender-specific pronouns, making some people claim that God is supra-gender. God created both male and female, endowed them with the same spirit, and called both humans. What is central to our humanity, therefore, is that both female and male are akin to God, having received the same divine spirit. Gender does not define our worthiness since it is not present in God. For this reason, in the theological writings of African women the gender of God plays only a marginal role. God has both feminine and masculine attributes; however, Western Christianity’s portrayal of a patriarchal God influenced and corrupted the strong male and female

492 Ibid, 42.
imagery of the Source Being. This corruption is very disempowering for women. That, this is God’s world, God’s realm and sphere of influence have led women to affirm their equality before God and in the human community. All persons are of equal worth according to God, who makes us all human. Women theologians insist that it is idolatrous for them to obey men rather than God.

Before the work of African women theologians, other scholars were already decrying the limitations church practices seemed to place on the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. For example, Roland Allen posited a gender-neutral God through a robust critical analysis of Pauline theology of the Holy Spirit. Allen criticized the emphasis on structures and the limitations on the operation of the Holy Spirit. In the same vein, though years after Allen, when Kalu writes of the empowering role of charismatic Christianity, he stressed the “potency of feminine spirituality” and women’s access to power through the exercise of spiritual gifts. Kalu urges analysts of these new churches to pay close attention to the ability of the Spirit to empower female believers, and he called on African women theologians, in particular, to explore “the power of prayer [as] a tool for hope” for African women.

The Christology of African women defines the dignity and humanity of women. Writings of women theologians from Africa are replete with experiences that exemplify this. For example, in the Will to Arise, Teresia Hinga describes an experience of God in Christ that is very real to African women. Women affirm and confirm that these experiences of God empower all and recognize all as children of God. They express their

---

493 Ibid, 43.
494 Ibid, 45.
experience of God in asserting cultural beliefs and practices, while they feel called by God to denounce and deconstruct repressive ones. Even so, the times are changing the contours of belief as many women experience God differently and cannot let the cultural codes that mask the image of God to oppress them. What this means is that despite the fact that sexism makes it difficult for women to experience God, women have nevertheless experienced God in Christ. They reread the scripture and especially the stories of women to remind themselves of God’s presence with them. While women collectively have to combat institutional sexism and the ecclesiastical glass ceiling, women individually can vastly improve their religious and public achievements and spiritual prospects by being alert to self-defeating patterns of thoughts and behavior. It is clear in this period that the honeymoon period of Nigerian (African) Pentecostalism will be short-lived without the total involvement of its female members. I make this claim in line with Anderson’s observation that women’s participation is vital for the continued global growth of Pentecostalism, as the rise of Pentecostal churches elsewhere has been linked with women’s empowerment.497 One can hope that as the Pentecostal tradition continues to gain more sway in Africa, African Christianity will become more open to women’s leadership.

6.4: The Birth of a Counter-Culture in Nigerian Pentecostalism

Alternative (non-patriarchal) readings of the biblical text point to egalitarian relationships in the church and help women to confront their oppression and victimization by men and patriarchal society more broadly. Such non-patriarchal readings of Pauline texts, for example, remind us that women possess the wisdom and skills to resist and

subvert interpretations of biblical narratives that keep them down. Women’s appropriations of such counter-narratives demonstrate that women welcome such texts that open the door for them to understand how history is told (by men) and then retell their life stories from their perspective as people who are equal in the eyes of God. For example, Jane Okri said to me in an interview: “I love the Lord and love to be in service for the kingdom. Again, hearing how they preach and interpret the Pauline epistle over time resounds in my head that I too could be a pastor. So, I am confident, and do not miss the chance to be.”Jane says the re-evaluation of Galatians 3:28 shifts interpretive barriers that used to impact her life in negative ways. The critique of Jane’s personhood and creativity by the sermon Jane listens to enables her identity reformation, so much so that presently, she frees herself from the restraints that the faith community places on her status as a woman. Jane’s view shows how the frustrations that she and some women used to encounter in the religious space inform what it means to be female in NPT.

This counter-hegemonic strategy validates women’s experiences and offers wisdom for future generations of oppressed women to learn from their forebears and reorder social structures and realities. The scripture, in turn, conveys the concept that helps women gain a more productive self-consciousness, and promotes critical engagement with the church.

Benin City now hums with women exploring the Pentecostal tradition. Many women have in recent decades acquired a high level of education and currently occupy some positions as administrative leaders, Youth leaders, Church, and school administrators. They contribute to the making of Pentecostalism and as such have won widespread attention. This growth means that women are learning to live in two distinct

---

498 P.I. with Jane Okri (Elder (Mrs.) on March 26, 2015.
worlds – the men-controlled world in which they have to survive every day, and the one they have carved out for themselves. Women have learned to create coded language, subjective meaning, and images that arm the church with human resources and organized resistance to injustice.  

Interestingly, CWFI works out ways that enable the women to transgress the gender boundaries. They are becoming connected with the mainstream CGMi in ways that afford them recognition, albeit slowly. The CWFI women consider themselves to be the pivot point of the changing faith tradition as their activities are now expanding to include women in public ministries. They do this in ways that do not reckon with the promoters of gender inequality in the group. In the following section, I will direct my attention to women employing group tactics through women’s networks such as CWFI to negotiate gender boundaries.

6.5: Women’s Networks: The Christian Women Fellowship International (CWFI)

In this section, I will use Womanist theology to conceptualize the tactics that women’s group employ to expand their narratives and look for ways to explore religious symbolism that allows NPC women to see their full humanity, mainly as part of the Christian heritage. These narratives will enable us to pay attention to women’s religious experiences, articulate their spirituality, their ideas of God, and express their creative genius. Through my fieldwork, I show women’s enterprises and activities and how women have strengthened, shaped, transformed, and sustained Pentecostal tradition. Invoking the words of sociologist Cheryl Gilkes, this means that *if it wasn’t for women,*

---

there wouldn’t be a church. Gilkes shows that churches that have formed and survived mainly through the effort of women’s departments, groups, ministries, and organizations within the church. Gilkes underscores how the creative cultural processes of women empower them to communicate a women’s liberation movement through their faith community work that goes beyond the household and workforce. Gilkes’ sociological approach to the study of cultural production draws attention to the collective impact of women within the faith community.

Gilkes’ work shows the major roles women’s departments, organizations, and groups have played and continue to play in the church. She explains how women contribute to the collectivism of women in black churches, and how they have used their women church/organizations to help women overcome gender oppression in the church and society. She points to the significant roles and pays critical attention to the many ways women have fostered social cohesion and spiritual growth in religious settings.

Gilkes and Oduyoye agree that women draw from cultural elements that are life-affirming for them whether traditional Christian teaching validates them or not. The key is for women to explore alternative ways of participating in the faith communities. Oduyoye is of the view that culture is a critical issue in women’s theology because cultural constructs establish the parameters of religion. The traditional way of life is bound up with religion and religious beliefs in mutual interdependent ways, and thus the social constructions impact gender relation—as my study has shown they do in Benin (Nigerian) PC. Oduyoye was right to argue that the moral duties that weigh so heavily on

---

500 Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, If It Wasn’t for Women: Black Women’s Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 54.
501 Ibid, 32-36.
women in Africa are connected with their beliefs. Women and men of faith need to interpret culture in ways that more often effect cultural transformation. It is in this circle that women develop creative ways of retelling biblical events.

Research shows that human society is never made in isolation; it is always in mutual interaction and interdependence with each other, and other non-living beings that it prospers and develops, and thus the diverse religious institutions construct different models of femininity and masculinity. For example, the CGMi, embodying the cultural practices of its location, has subtly created a setting for masculinity to be enacted and validated. Its members call into question the femininity of women who assume offices in male-founded religious institutions such as the CGMi. As a result, women in such positions tend to engage in various strategies to reassert their complex femininity. In short, there continues to exist a dialectic relationship between the profane and the sacred, the human and spirits, and any disconnection between these organizing principles can lead to severe anomie. When this disconnect occurs, people look for a way to reconnect themselves to those organizing tenets and that sacred power. When women are under constraints in competitive settings and have the drive to explore their “ministerial calling,” instead of underperforming, they tend to re-negotiate gender boundaries and create alternative spaces for themselves, as noted above. They chart new courses and patterns of doing ministry within an all-women constituency.

My research revealed that women are less likely to be nominated or elected for high-profile positions in the mainstream church. That is far less the case within women’s church organizations such as the CWFI. Respondents informed me in a focused group

---

503 Ibid, 25.
504 Ibid, 13.
discussion that women have a small amount of influence within the mainstream church. When this happens, women tend to carve out space where they can express their spirituality and power.

We know that Margaret Idahosa formed CWFI, the women’s church for the marginalized women, in order for women to maintain their gender identity and equality in a church that is male-oriented. The CWFI, which has become a significant arm of the mission, welcomes women across classes to be members of sub-groups. It is a group that provides a way for women to maintain their sanity, and it is proving to be a powerful weapon in resisting marginalization and gender injustice. When Margaret became increasingly troubled by her invisibility and that of women in the church, she founded the women’s arm of the church which grew into the CWFI. Now it appears the CWFI has become the springboard for Margaret’s most celebrated exploits in the ministry.

The CWFI or women’s arm of the CGMi is also called the Caring Mother and the Concerned Women Fellowship. It functions as an interdenominational body which helps women to experience secondary socialization through spiritual development, to enhance their leadership skills, as well as to serve in and support church life.\footnote{Auto-ethnographic observation at Restoration Center during the School of prayer that meets every Thursday; I attended their meetings in the course of my fieldwork bi-weekly from April to August 2016.} It is a safe space for women’s re-orientation. It allows them to respond to and transcend their everyday experiences in ways that help to re-define their self-identity, spiritual capabilities, and creative involvement in the ministry. With CWFI, self-identity gives women the drive to form and maintain their identity as God’s co-equal builders.

Nosa Aladeselu affirmed this position when she informed me in an interview that:

“CWFI was formed to instruct women on how to realize their real potentials and become useful tools for expanding God’s kingdom side by side male
members of the faith community. CWFI seek to understand and articulate its viewpoints for gender inclusivity as a group approach to addressing gender justice in ways that resonate with Scripture and the Pentecostal heritage. Through CWFI, women gain recognition and sometimes nomination for ordination into the mainstream church.”

Nosa Aladeselu’s statement that women gain recognition and nomination for ordination into the mainstream church through CWFI is telling because CWFI employs group tactics to negotiate women’s entrance into the mainstream. She further stated in a conversation with me that, “CWFI has continued to encourage women to have high self-esteem and self-confidence, to recognize their human value, and continue to advance the course of humanity.”

Activities at CWFI draw women to God through prayers and Bible studies. Those activities do not replace any formal or regular church services nor do they inhibit the activities of any CWFI members in their local church and fellowship. Rather, CWFI’s activities simply uphold the dignity of womanhood. They help women to reflect on the meaning of their calling in conversation with others and to impact others within the faith community. The CWFI accepts the oneness of all believers and its membership. It is open to all Bible-believing women without discrimination. Its members accept as true that the fellowship of the Spirit of God does not make distinctions between “home” and “foreign.” It preaches unity in diversity, which is necessary for the forging of new groupings and the national and international promotion and employment of women’s spiritual gifts.

---

507 P.I. with Rev. Nosa Aladeselu (Dr. Mrs.) on May 27 2016. She has a PhD degree holder, a founder of an NGO, ordained as a reverend minister (but not posted to head a church) married, a mother and grandmother.

508 Ibid.

The group’s weekly prayer meetings and annual conferences are venues to gain social and religious support. The group meets weekly on Thursdays, annually observes the mothers’ day of prayer in February and the mothers’ prayer summit in December, and holds its annual convention in August. At this August convocation, women showcase their potentials and talents in fellowship with male members within the mainstream. At these meetings, women not only socialize and support each other; they also celebrate the liturgy; they preach and teach everyone, including men, and it is not considered problematic. Here, they manage their affairs without being under the supervision of any male member of the congregation.

Women appreciate these gatherings of women as they not only help to awaken and rejuvenate the call of God upon their lives but also remind them of their meaningfulness within the community. The festive annual women’s convention has become an essential resource for capturing how women exchange visions of life while in fellowship—of themselves and their world. This conference is a place in which women explore the possibility of wholeness. It is usually at this gathering that women realize that they must bring forth more than is given to them and that even the church begins to make meaning out of the potentials of women. Isaac Okoh puts it succinctly:

“These women are in communion with something [more significant] than themselves and the church itself. They also gain a sense of rootedness with the Divine that drives them to feel supported in an environment where they are unwanted. They come with essential life experiences and understand the meaning of personal development and spiritual revolution.”

The CWFI is a tested training ground where women explore their religious calling. Here, women teach one another how to fulfill their capacities and to build the

---

vineyard. Panels are devoted to educating women about the Christian ministry and their place as women in the ministry, family, and society. In this shared space, women negotiate everyday gender-related issues and challenges as a group by coming together around the shared interest to advance the kingdom in a world that still marginalizes them. The celebratory annual convention encourages women to suspend their marginalization and adopt a stance of pride and strength that comes with being part of a community that is committed to building the kingdom and the nation. The CWFI has local, national, and international representation; presently Rev. Mrs. Helen Akaoyen is the National president, assisted by Rev. Dr. Mrs. Nosa Aladeselu.

Adelegan suggests that the way CWFI uses religious space could become a model for global Pentecostalism. For example, CWFI, like any Pentecostal church places great emphasis on praying, prophecy, spiritual leadership, evangelization, along with gifts of the Spirit such as the discernment of spirits and spiritual combat. The women engage in contemplative and intercessory prayers, praying in tongues and witnessing to the faith with courage, believing that God responds to prayer by healing people from diseases and physical ailments. In addition to prayers being a means for curing human bodies, many members believe that worship is significant for healing social-cultural ills. For example, Rev. (Prof. Mrs.) Nora Omorogie said: “prayer changes situations, and I do not fail to push women and men to get busy with praying to settle many socio-cultural and spiritual issues.” Another respondent at the CWFI School of Prayer that meets every Thursday told me, “I come to the Thursday School of Prayers because I enjoy praying with other women and spending the time to study the Word of God and also

511 Adelegan, 3.
512 Ibid, 3.
513 P. I. with Norah Omorogie (Rev. Mrs.) on June 25, 2016.
socialize with them. It gives me a sense of sisterhood and drives me to do something meaningful for the kingdom and the society.”

Such prayer practices have given the CWFI a strong spiritual reputation, and have drawn women of other denominations, including women of so-called mainline churches to the CWFI. Thus, the women’s organization has become a factor in the growth of CGMi and thus, Nigeria’s Pentecostalism. Victor Aladeselu noted for example that: “some Rev. Sisters of the Roman Catholic background were members of CWFI and were in attendance at the annual conventions in the early days of CWFI.”

Besides prayer, another factor responsible for CWFI’s growth, and by extension, that of the CGMi, is its appeal to the poorest of the poor. They do this through specific religious ministries such as the CWFI Choir, the Evangelistic team, the Outreach ministry, and vocational centers like the church but also various social service ministries, including:

- Education: CWFI founded and funded the WoF Group of schools, Christian education from pre- to post-primary school levels
- An emphasis on youth programs/human trafficking of girls
- Counseling and deliverance ministry
- Helpline/welfare ministry
- Hostel accommodation for young adult women and older women
- Skills acquisition for productive economic and social functioning
- An orphanage for home-care

---

514 P. I. with Comfort Omoigui (Deaconess Mrs.) on May 3, 2016.
Funding of the Restoration Center

The Restoration Center is an offshoot of the vision that brought the faith auditorium into being. It is a multi-purpose building, providing housing for orphans and old women, and rehabilitation for distressed, homeless, and battered young women. It is thus a location for a social change. The Restoration Center can seat about five thousand people and also serves as a conference center, office space, and skill acquisition center. Here women are trained to become a seamstress, hair stylists, produce hats and soap, engage in tie-dye, weaving, and other domestic duties that help them invest in themselves and family, thus empowering them.

Such human growth is significant because, within Benin City, women thus manage to achieve some control over their lives despite still being marginalized. Women are now establishing positive reputations and becoming regarded as humans rather than as dependent people. Many women who have benefited from the CWFI skill acquisition project are increasingly able to move away from the margins of society. When one is economically empowered, one is better able to negotiate gender boundaries. Now, these women are building a new urban culture that allows them to confront socio-economic challenges and create a new place for themselves in public life that impacts the development of urban communities in Benin City, albeit not within the open religious space.

My interaction with Elder Sunday Kpere-Daibo suggests that CWFI was integral to sustaining the growth of CGMi. According to him, “the location that presently houses

516 Auto-ethnographic observation at the Restoration Center from April to August, 2016.
the Faith Miracle Centre was initially purchased by the women’s arm—CWFI.” The Centre provides a means and reasons for women’s existence in the church. Through the Centre, women navigate from the margin of invisibility to the Centre of the congregation that is male-founded and oriented. Creating this space gives women the visibility that encourages them to persevere and make an impact on the church and society. This location provides them with a protected arena for personal and group development and expression and helps to purge the socio-cultural and religious forces of gender imbalance.

But CWFI does more. It also helps to fund the rural medical mobile clinic. This unit of the medical team goes to villages to provide free medical care for people in their communities as part of its missionary outreach. Today, CWFI has chapters in all the branches of CGMi and good representation across both Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal denominations. Indeed, CWFI has grown so big that the women have split into different units to facilitate the Gospel work.

In sum, the CWFI serves as a conduit of gender autonomy and consciousness, community building, and celebration of women’s potential. At these gatherings and through negotiation, women can heal themselves and nurture others. Together, they can envision new ways of being in the Pentecostal tradition in their day-to-day lived experiences. I will, therefore, suggest that when sociologists, historians, and scholars of religion discuss the involvement of CGMi in expanding the frontiers of gender injustice within the NPC, the record of CWFI will speak for itself as a champion of women’s rights.

P. I. with Sunday Kpere-Daibo (Elder) on June 1, 2016; he is a retired bank manager and an old-time member of the CGMi.
6.6: Concluding Thoughts

This chapter contributes to the existing body of literature on negotiating religious identities.\textsuperscript{518} Women remain committed to institutional religions like Pentecostalism while navigating between the confines of other ideologies, such as gender roles and gender egalitarianism. A socio-cultural account explains why this is a legitimate decision.\textsuperscript{519} There are different ways that women like Nosa and Josephine have lived out their identity within NP. They develop ideas of “becoming” within the confines of CGMi. The women’s network helps them employ “feminism that challenges the status quo through negotiation, accommodation, and compromise.”\textsuperscript{520} They focus on their agency and improve their connectedness in the mainstream. They continue to sustain a viable forum to enact their individual and collective agency. Furthermore, this women’s network enables them to reflect on their sisterhood and profound spiritual belief systems through social and religious activities.

I would reason that it is because of this development that Alexander rightly argues that “the quest for power, prestige, and ideological control sits at the core of cultural production.”\textsuperscript{521} These constructed weights shape the fate of people that are often definite in unconscious invisible but very often powerful and patterned ideational drives. I submit to Alexander’s theory that exclusion, domination, and degradation could be understood if the people recognize cultural structures in their full complexity and nuance.\textsuperscript{522}

\textsuperscript{518} Ecklund, Catholic Women, 523; C. Manning, \textit{God Gave us the Right}: cited in Ecklund, 523.
\textsuperscript{520} Nnaemeka, Nego-Feminism, 380.
\textsuperscript{521} Alexander, 20.
\textsuperscript{522} Ibid, 7.
Similarly, Womanist scholars have privileged narratives as the premier way in which to study women’s moral development and religious life in the community of faith. They show how the creation of women’s church/organizations creates solidarity within the church.

In this light, creative endeavors among women in CGMi serve as an impetus for promoting agency and the rich cultural world they help to shape in the church. This narrative by women helps to lay the foundation for the development of women organization with the Pentecostal tradition that shows the moving away from the gender identity that ultimately culminates in the church embracing gender justice and equality for women with the CGMi. The foregoing provides a window for scholars to gain a more robust understanding of the meanings that give expression to the sublime, which in turn enables them to theorize about what can hardly be understood and conceptualized.

Presupposing the superiority of male as real (even if socially or culturally constructed) happens when maleness becomes an expression of the absolute. I challenge male leaders to embrace this contradiction as a starting point for the ethics of accountability. Since the history of male superiority rests on material atrocities and the subjugation of females, male members of the community of faith should disrupt their biased ideas of supremacy and become fully human. For if the full humanity is to be realized, it will begin with these social-cultural compromises. The church cannot afford to ignore women’s contributions toward the expansion of NP in Benin City. Everyone in the faith community is valid and an equal recipient. This study is critical in the study of African Christianity, and I hope will help to establish Gender and Women’s studies as a legitimate discipline in African scholarship.
Chapter Seven:

Conclusion

Equality between the female and male is not a gender war. It is an avenue to let the male know he is not more important than the female, an avenue for the female to know she can achieve what the male can achieve. And the female believing in her potentials and be a voice of her own.

—Anonymous

7.1: Transcending Gender Inequality and Weaving Models for Change and Continuity

The concluding chapter has two tasks. First, it offers a summation of my argument, the methodological challenges, the research findings, the research implications for the study of Gender, Pentecostal, and Religious Studies, and its contributions and suggestions for future research. Second, I suggest how overcoming gender inequality through gender inclusivity could help to weave new models for change and continuity, a move that affects the representation of women and the relevance of gendered inclusion in Benin Religion and NPT.

In this dissertation, I have studied and analyzed gendered relations that exist in the Benin Religion and Pentecostal tradition. This research mainly focused on the CGMi in Benin City, Nigeria. I have argued that a Pentecostal pattern of redistribution will promote a common good that is devoid of religious and gender biases. I have also suggested that within this complex, the “collective effervescence” points to the notion that it is a society that constructs the concept of the superior male. In this case, that society is informed by a particular way of reading biblical texts that prioritize males and oppresses females. However, I have also suggested and shown that the community of faith can be a collection of individuals that come together to address and redress natural, social, and cultural evil and limitations, as the women, in particular, are doing.
I ground my position in dialogue with the NP’s popular claims to be empowering and embracing of gender equality among its adherents. Male leaders and church folks interpret the insignificant number of women in leadership positions as an intervention to increase in women’s representation so that it appears that the patriarchal system has lost its primacy. However, it is hard to affirm that women are gaining real acceptance within the power structures in a church that perpetuates patriarchy and misogyny. For example, the NPC that I studied has an ongoing struggle over the place of women in significant leadership positions. I used the CMGi as my lens for investigating the NPT because CGMi is a microcosm of modern-day NP. I discovered that the church’s claim to be gender egalitarian is superficial and that instead it remains solidly committed to the patriarchy and male hegemony that devalue women and women’s leadership. One example that I focused on in this study is the dramatic event that followed the consecration of Margaret Idahosa as the Presiding Bishop; another is the way the church has not promoted women’s leadership of churches and indeed actively prevented it, to the extent of rejecting even women on whose behalf Archbishop Margaret intervened.

This rejection means two things: (i) Gender equality is a false claim and practically non-existent in the denomination; it is because the church is not open to women the same way it is to men in assessing authoritative leadership positions. (ii) Although the church is guided by the same constitution yet, there are considerable differences in how branches under the same CGMi umbrella interpret and practice the church’s teachings that influence the role of women in leadership. So practically speaking, very few local branches of this church welcome a woman to fill a leadership position, and those who accept a woman do not value their leadership the same way they
do men’s. Given these concerns, this dissertation challenges the categorization of the Pentecostal tradition as egalitarian.

In mapping this chapter, I yet draw on Obioma Nnaemeka’s nego-feminism, a theory which articulates negotiation practice as an approach that argues for the inevitability of a complementary approach to gender disparities. Nnaemeka calls for a reciprocal creation of space that “brings about the feeling of ownership and opens the door to a participative and egalitarian process where they take every stakeholder’s imagination and values into account as well as mitigating stakeholder’s alienation.”523 I follow Nnaemeka’s position to adopt the “foundation of shared values in many African cultures to negotiate, give and take, compromise, and balance” a situation. She added that negotiation has the double meaning of “give and take/exchange” and cope with successfully/go around.”524 She lauds the African feminist method of negotiation and compromise that challenges the biased social structure dominated by male power. This method knows when, where, and how to detonate patriarchal landmines; it also knows when, where, and how to go around patriarchal landmines. Nnaemeka implies that women (as seen in CGMi) know when, where, and how to negotiate with or go around patriarchy in different contexts. For African women, as in NPC, they employ the act that “evokes the dynamism and shifts of a process as opposed to the stability and reification of a construct, a framework.525

To my mind, the most exciting and dynamic development in the study of religion in Africa comes from scholars like Mercy Oduyoye who focus on gender. Christian women theologians have turned their attention to the Church with a concern for its

523 Nnaemeka, Nego-Feminism, 377
524 Ibid, 377-78.
525 Ibid, 378.
redemption from the patriarchal captivity that undermines its Christlikeness.\textsuperscript{526} She pushes for what she calls ‘critical solidarity’ with African religious and cultural systems that focus on different, flexible, and complex narratives rather than engaging with a romantic endorsement of African culture. This lens enables me to investigate the complexity of the Benin culture to understand better the binary concept that fuels the gender inequality project. While Nnaemeka approached the questions as a literary critic and scholar of African women’s history, one could argue that she shared and responded to the same questions Oduyoye raises when she argues that folks should not dismiss culture as a negative or neutral factor in development. Instead, people should find ways that culture serves development well.\textsuperscript{527}

It is challenging to gain mutual support from men in the church even though they claim to be supportive. When I asked Norah Omorereg what could be responsible for the lack of women’s full acceptance into ministerial leadership positions, she answered:

“What I noticed is that men appropriate women’s brainchild in the church. It is true that there may be the difference in sexes, but there is no distinction in the work that God calls us to do in the vineyard. Men always assume that women need to be taught because they think women are unintelligent. However, this is not so. Creativity is a spiritual impulse. Women are inspired to create and be in ministry. We invite our brothers to transcend their bias and be open-minded.”\textsuperscript{528}

What this means is that men’s view of women constructed outside of God’s opinion of women is based on a socio-cultural norm that they ground on skewed biblical interpretations. This creates gaps and promotes tension between women and men in

\textsuperscript{526} Oduyoye, \textit{Introducing African Women’s Theology}, 32.  
\textsuperscript{527} Nnaemeka, Nego-Feminism, 375; Nnaemeka, “Development, Cultural Forces, 251-79.  
\textsuperscript{528} P.I. with Norah Omorereg on June 25, 2016.
Nosa Aladeselu agrees with Norah Omoregie. She informed me that, “The church fails to come to terms with the social and spiritual loss that it endures because of sidelining women. It is the church that suffers when women receive little attention in the mainstream congregation because our men consider women to be weaklings and unintelligent, so they [tend to] control women’s spiritual production.”

These women’s cogent reflections describe how the church has continued to ignore and underestimate spiritual potentials and currency that women possess. I agree with the views of Omoregie and Aladeselu that the church should embrace the exceptional spiritual currency that women endeavor to bring to the table as this will bridge the gender gap to a large extent. It is likely that men’s socialization into superior members of society tends to make them more controlling and to believe they must be the “master” that deputizes for God. The exaggerated claims male leaders make and the assumption they hold about themselves make them blind to their own limitations, but those premises along with the restrictions they impose on females are also effective in empowering them.

With an intense focus on the significance of power, I argue for a religious orientation that is all-embracing and inclusive and outlines some of the ways for such inclusive embrace. I have earlier in this study noted that I am influenced by theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye’s narrative theology. I use the tools of narrative theory to unpack the many dimensions of Christian theology to offer the start of an embrace that privileges inclusion.

529 Social-cultural constructs are embedded in complex webs of social arrangements that give force in ways that interpretations are socially invested with deep and widely accepted cultural meanings.
530 P.I. with Nosa Aladeselu on May 28, 2016.
531 Oduyoye, *Africa Women Theology*. 
So what are we to do? I suggest that male Pentecostal members and leaders should sit down with women to reflect on gender equality in the church. For such equality makes the church a more rewarding community for all its members and those whom they serve. I do not expect that gender injustice will be overcome anytime soon, though gender justice is long overdue. But I do hope that this study will help NPT work towards embracing all, including women. Likewise, I hope it will offer a model for gender inclusion in churches and beyond to scholars and to all those who pretend not to feel the impact of gender exclusion. For I believe that accepting others will free all of us from the margins and do much to further the NPT.

7.2: The Relevance of Gendered Inclusiveness

What then does gender inclusiveness mean? Gender inclusiveness is empowerment. Empowerment does not mean one gets to do whatever one wants; it means giving true authority to others. It means providing genuine autonomy, and responsibility. Building trust with talented leaders is vastly more important than the outcome of any single decision or a one-sided decision. With inclusivity, things get more exciting and productive, not less so. When gender inclusivity is in place, the male members are not selling out; instead, they are increasing the possibility and pace with which the church can reach its intended outcome by applying what Apostle Paul earnestly described in Galatians 3:28.

Gender inclusion is crucial to recognize that all human beings provide ultimate meaning and values to the community. I have shown the kinds and outcomes of gender relations that exist when male folks consider women as religious “others” especially when they fail to show full and unbiased support, understanding, and welcoming to
women. The Pentecostal but selective reading and understanding of the Pauline epistle that is detrimental to the way women access authoritative leadership position in CGMi is non-inclusive. Here, I theorize the Pentecost experience as captured in the Acts of the Apostles 2:1ff and argue that when the Holy Spirit came upon those that gathered in the Upper Room, the Holy Spirit was not selective on whom to descend. The Holy Spirit descended on all who were present. However, the NPT leaders fail to take the Pentecost experience seriously and wholly; rather, they hold onto the misguided reading of selected scripture to favor a single limited interpretation and application. A correct understanding, interpretation, and application of selected Pauline texts could serve as a means for solidarity that will enable the dismantling of cultural and social boundaries that tend to divide instead of “cementing” the community.

The Pentecost experience was not only about poly-linguistic distribution; it was mostly about the allocation of spiritual resources. The Spirit did not rest solely on the males that were present; instead, the Holy Spirit rested on everyone, regardless of gender. The implication of this experience was to bring everyone in the community from the margin to the Centre. At the Centre, the reality is understood about one another, not in dominance and superiority to one another. This understanding implies that the NPT should be open-minded, all-embracing, and inclusive in its practices.

What has remained problematic is men’s unwillingness to implement this Pentecost reality. Of course, refusing to do so conveniently centre’s power among males. This lack of embrace for inclusivity has and will continue to extend to the frontiers of other aspects of governing the Pentecostal community. As part of the collective heritage that all Pentecostal adherents share, the Pentecost experience that emphasized that the
distribution of spiritual resources and not divisive tropes that other should be the starting point for gender relations.

The Pentecostal tradition should come to terms with God’s will to welcome and give gift to all equally. Adherents are indebted to God and one another because of the ‘Pentecostal Outpouring.’ Instead, the lack of tolerance for the gendered “other” is disrupting the NPT. Engaging in practices that change gender biases will advance social-spiritual solidarity and spread the Gospel. The faith community will only progress as its members stabilize their relationships by embracing and acknowledging one another as God’s gift for the community to enjoy. They should make conscious effort to undermine cultural and social ideologies that undercut the inclusion of womenfolk into the authoritative leadership positions.

I have noted throughout this study that NP is not as egalitarian as it claims to be. The nuances of gender relations abound in CGMi and by extension, the NPT. It is necessary for NP to understand that they could learn positive and moral virtue from one another. For no matter how talented the male folks are to the NPT, the women folk have contributed and continue to add to the religious and social-economic value of NP. Full inclusion will benefit both women and men within this terrain. The church should thus also include women in authoritative leadership positions and debates that affect the well-being of the community. Such inclusion seems to be at the heart of the intention of the Pentecost experience and heritage.

By contrast, women in NPC typically do not consider the male as the other but equal human. This consideration is certainly Filomina Chioma Steady’s assertion. Steady was on point when she argued that “each gender constitutes the critical half that makes
the human whole and neither sex is complete in itself. Each has and needs a complement, despite the possession of unique features of its own.”

My research shows that women in CGMi are more inclined to reach out and work with men in achieving set goals. I think that men in CGMi as well the NPC should also be open to collaborate, negotiate, and compromise as women do. My study of CGMi helps me to theorize that women will shape the future of NPT. This discovery makes a central contribution to research on the leadership of women in NPC by uncovering the social-cultural mechanisms for differences in NPC gender cultures. It is this collaboration and compromise that nurtures the hopefulness needed to build a harmonious church. Pentecostalism fails to live to its essence of spirituality and spiritualization when it rejects the holistic integration of women and men.

When religious expressions fail to address the existential needs of all adherents, then embrace of inclusivity offers the moment for a creative response. This treatise on gender inclusion must end with a warning. Assuming the embrace of inclusivity opens new possibilities, it is likely that some of those options could create new doors of expansion. I expect my readers will read this work and want to assign more responsibility to both women and men. The faster they do, the quicker the CGMi and the NPT will develop and fulfill their intentions. In an interview, Norah Omoregie echoed this view by inviting the church to return to its original foundation:

“We need a new Pentecost that would bring the church together. The real Pentecost enabled by the Holy Spirit as displayed in Acts 2 will provide a solution to the gendered injustices that do not speak in favor of women within the Pentecostal church. All those who possess the power of the

---


533 Nnaemeka, 380; Ecklund, “Catholic Women Negotiate Feminism,” 515–16.
Holy Spirit has the authority to fight all forms of evil, including gender disharmony that reflects in women’s relegation.”

What I think Omorogie means here is what this study suggests: that if adherents of Pentecostalism were to live according to the biblical precepts without introducing compromised perceptions to its texts, then they could begin to understand the underlying import an interpretation has on other members of the faith community. If this were to happen, I believe Pentecostal male members who genuinely receive the Christian gospel would be cured of gendered chauvinism and pay more attention to gender justice, inclusion, and equality within the NPT, and by it advance Pentecostal tradition in Nigeria, as seen through the lens of CGMi.

Much more work will be required to dismantle such ideas more entirely if such dismantling is possible at all. However, the dismantling begins in understanding that these ideological weapons are never isolated but work together in ever increasingly refined ways.

I close this section by making clear that I am not suggesting that feminine identity is more important or significant than another. Moreover, I am not particularly sure the culture of male superiority will disappear from Benin Religion and NP for many years to come, as I explained in chapters one and three. However, I remind my readers that I am offering NPT insights on how to make sense of the wealth associated with gendered inclusion, nothing more. For now, I reiterate some of my research findings.

7.3: Research Findings

Pentecostalism has historically embraced the notion that men and women are equals, but this is not the reality in the tradition that I studied. Both in history and in

---

practice, Pentecostalism in Benin City has been dominated and controlled by men. Women are not equal but are marginalized and relegated to the same kind of gendered roles as in the rest of the society. The findings presented here bring to this dialogue an explanation of mechanisms that possibly imbue women in leadership positions with different meanings that are dependent on specific social-religious contexts. Participant observations and one-on-one interviews help to reveal that the NPC introduce social-cultural constructions to infer significant transitions and explained it as if based on the Scriptures. Such developments involve changes in church rules, such as when a church nominates a woman for a leadership position. Although the CGMi has a woman as the spiritual head, respondents inform me that she is a “place-holder” until a man—in this case, the archbishop’s son— is ready to fill the exalted leadership position. Apparently, placing women in an important leadership position is not part of CGMi’s ideological commitment to gender justice. This reality indicates there remains room for further studies of women’s leadership in CGMi and potentially in NPC, for women are still pigeon-holed into secondary roles. Eghosa Efe informed me that “women mostly showcase their potentials during the women’s annual convention that [is held] in August and after that return to their secondary roles.”

Thus, the ethnographic research at the CGMi revealed that there is a gap in the gender relations in the church. Women express their yearning to lead in ministry when they create alternative groups from their everyday life.

Further, I discovered that cultural beliefs, social construction, and status difference are the main processes by which gender principles of inequality reproduce

---

535 P. I. with Eghosa Efe on April 21, 2016.
themselves in new forms of socio-cultural organizations. This discovery should provoke scholars of religion to rethink the meaning and implications of gender equality.

7.3.1 Attitude of Male Pastors to Women Leaders/Pastors

I discovered that the congregations that have female pastors used different discourse than those with male pastors. Although the church seems to emphasize female leadership, females were not as empowered as the male members. For example, although women assume they have the agency to preach, they do not have the agency to interpret church doctrines, and they usually have to consult with male leaders in the branch church before executing leadership responsibilities. A respondent pointedly informed me that Archbishop Margaret still has to seek the permission of male leaders in the bishops’ council to ratify nominations of leaders, particularly female members of the church. She was quoted to have remarked on a petition by CWFI leaders to consecrate a certain female that had been nominated for consecration as bishop: *iyan gha khue ra*? Or “Will they [the male leaders] agree?” It is a hard sell to interpret the doctrines of the NPC in ways that give women leaders’ autonomy. The male leaders do not share the same ethos of encouraging female leadership. For example, Rev. Mrs. Ese Edo told me that:

“The outright rejection of Rev. (Mrs.) Esther Adagbonyin in a certain branch of the church as head-pastor is telling. The irony of this dramatic event was that they did it under the watchful eyes of Archbishop Margaret. Obviously, the all-male-bishops’ council except for Archbishop Margaret’s presence guides the church doctrine and interpretation of Scriptures. The bishops’ council is the church gatekeeper whose decision largely influences the church’s structure. Archbishop Margaret finds it hard in the midst of all-male-council to use her office to advocate for women’s inclusion in a significant leadership position.”

These examples show that the male pastors use their positional authority to constrain women (to an extent also Archbishop Margaret). So, if women wish to create programs,

---

536 P.I. with Ese Edo (Rev. Mrs) (pseudonym) April 17, 2016.
they mostly do so outside the church’s mainstream. The male pastors/leaders were/are often the leading force in shaping the church’s culture. My finding corroborates Elaine Ecklund’s result, which expands this theory to religious groups.\footnote{Ecklund, “Organizational Culture,” 90.}

7.3.2: Marriage as Excuse for Non-Inclusion

Most women in the Pentecostal congregation I studied are married. Reflecting on this, many respondents mentioned the impact of marriage on the call of female members of the Pentecostal community. The church confronts the women with questions that can seem to be about choosing between marriage and their spiritual calling. Rev. Dickson Ogbahon is representative of this view. He told me that:

“I do not agree with women who advocate becoming pastors at the expense of their family. I am of the opinion that heading a church should not be foremost in a married woman’s mind; instead, minding the family should. After all, the family is part of the Church; a well-founded family helps to advance the course of the church. I would not have my wife head a branch while I am heading another chapter. She needs to manage the home front while I attend to the church.”\footnote{P. I. with Dickson Ogbahon (Rev.) on April 12, 2016}

Ogbahon’s admission confirmed the tension that married women have chosen between women’s spiritual goal and the collective goals of the family. It is clear that women who negotiate their marriage and spiritual calling were/are judged to “put personal right above family rights” and that this is not the way for the “Christian woman.” What this submission connotes is that family responsibilities often squelch women’s rights and personal development.\footnote{Ecklund, “Catholic Women Negotiate Feminism,” 519.} He thinks that upholding the family is an essential part of building the Church and community and that it is woman’s responsibility to tend to the family and that women’s emphasis on assuming important leadership position such as
heading a branch is opposed to and incompatible with the church’s idea of family tradition.

Some ordained women stress equality for all rather than an emphasis on women’s rights. For example, and in contradiction to Ogbahon’s comment, the wife of the Archbishop’s son heads a branch of the church. Is this an example of the church’s double standard? I have yet to get an answer to this question. Similarly, while the church has issues with ordaining unmarried females to be pastors, women who are married are not made head-pastors. It is widowed females that are mostly used to fill specific leadership positions. Nosa Aladeselu told me that: “there is no gender equality; it is not truly women-friendly.” She added towards the end of our interview that “gender equality and inclusion is crucial for church growth.” This statement is in opposition to Ogbahon’s comment that gender equality and inclusion is a “worldly construction.” Nosa Aladeselu held that:

“Gender equality and inclusion are spiritual constructs that are shaped by the Scriptures. It is troubling to me that women are disenfranchised even in the church. Pentecostalism claims to be gender egalitarian, but it is very man-based because men run the church. I am of the view that gender equality and inclusion will make everyone feel completely valid and an equal recipient. Everyone should get the same treatment and same opportunity, not different. I think that we are all here to work together, not men up there judging women down here.”

I quote Nosa in full because her comment reflects the kind of struggle experienced by many women in trying to negotiate the gender boundary. This finding also corroborates Ecklund’s conclusion that members of these congregations fail to see the value of women being in significant leadership positions in their own right rather than

541 Ibid.
filling a structural hole left by the death or lack of an adult male.\footnote{Ecklund, “Organizational Culture and Women’s Leadership, 90.} This account was evident in meetings, services, and discussions with individual members in the congregations. Here the only time married women were invited to fill key leadership positions that carried responsibility for determining the future of the church, such as serving on the pastoral or bishop council, was at the demise of their husbands. Mabel Egbon told me that “it is mostly the demise of the male founders that afford women the opportunities to assume important leadership positions.”\footnote{P.I. with Mabel Egbon on May 30, 2016.} This practice is hardly evidence of the church’s commitment to gender justice. Nosa Aladeselu told me that “the representation of married women in leadership positions is not because the church wanted it, rather it is the application of women’s agency in saying: ‘and the women too.’”\footnote{P.I. with Nosa Aladeselu on May 28, 2016.} While Nosa connects the representation of women in leadership positions to their agency, Mabel, like many of the other women and men in the congregation, saw women largely as holding forth until an adult male (who usually is a member of the founder’s family) is of age to assume the pastoral/leadership position. Victor Aladeselu thinks, “The matter is complicated as he thinks that the problem is societal as the tradition in which the church grew hardly recognizes women and has crept into the church. So the church merely creates an occasion for women. This attitude, for me, is gender injustice.”\footnote{P.I. with Victor Aladeselu on May 28, 2016.}

7.3.3: Women as Change Agents in CGMi

It is evident that CWFI women actively influence how the CGMi views the place of women in the church. The CWFI women help to make changes through their influence on other women and women’s leadership. They help to inspire other women to be
committed. They teach and preach the Gospel in ways that the church now understands women are capable of doing such. The CWFI helps to champion the involvement of women in all areas of ministry. Ecklund’s work shows how individual women negotiate identities and boundaries that enable them to remain loyal to the religious traditions that constrain them within larger traditions that officially limit their role.546 She reveals how women were and are critical players in sustaining broader organizational cultures that attribute definite meaning to women’s leadership.547 Similarly, CWFI’s administration is made up of members with a high overall level of education, and they strive to influence church discourse by actively responding to issues they perceive to affect women. CWFI’s presence is creating an environment for recognizing women in the mainstream as co-equals. My time at the church and CWFI’s meeting in Benin City confirmed the presence of CWFI with a membership of women who were/are active and vocal.

7.4: Methodological Challenges Considered

My theoretical perspective and method suggest a practical approach to mining the religious import of Benin women as they interrogate the social-cultural replication of gender inequality. The challenge to this type of study is skills required to engage with ethnographic research which includes the following: gaining access to women and men members and leaders, one-on-one interview, focused group discussion, and the insider dilemma of ethnography.

It is always difficult to know how to make sense of these qualitative judgments, as social scientists cannot control these judgments in the same way that scientists control experiments because these differences are purely social. Case in point, given that

547 Ibid, 94.
Pentecostal tradition in its beginning days in Nigeria believed in the move of the Holy Spirit, they hardly engaged in the historical documentation of the events of the days. It was difficult for those I interviewed to point me to the real picture of how it was at the beginning of the CGMi. Other than the founding pastor’s memoir and biography, there is hardly any source material that gives a clear historical description of the CGMi. It was hard and impractical to identify all of the CGMi persons who participated in the formation of the CGMi. It was also difficult to figure out which members the church ordained in the early days of the church, and where women were included in those first ordinations. Several senior CGMi women and men (members and leaders) that I interviewed joined the church down the road, and the church annals or local newspapers have yet to document their contributions.

Although the international headquarter of CGMi sits in Benin City, the church has expanded beyond the confines of this geographical region so that many members that have “come out” of CGMi now live in different parts of the country. I was able to interview one of such—Bishop Joseph Ojo—whose contributions had not been documented. Information drawn from the founding pastor’s autobiographical memoir, *Fire in His Bones*, forms the record of the Church online website. So in an oral interview, it is challenging to know to what extent information has not been exaggerated or padded to appeal to the researcher. Thus, although my research methods enabled me to indicate ways that gender dynamics have played out in CGMi, I have not denoted the contributions of both women and men to the gender justice project. Furthermore, while I

---

have photographs of some events, many of the locations, names, and identities of the persons who granted me interview are anonymous.

Besides not being able to locate every member who started the CGMi with the founding pastor, I acknowledge that some members joined the church a couple of years after its formation and that I was unable to interview them. Many persons who entered the mission have since passed on. Bishop J. B.S. Coker and Elder Imosili passed away some years back before the founding pastor died.

My membership of the CGMi offered me an “insider” perspective to develop a rapport with some members and leaders of the church. Many of these members prayed for me following our conversation; they were also very hospitable and offered me drinks and gifts. Although many of the members I interviewed appeared to be comfortable discussing their experiences, they were cautious in explaining the events that surrounded the consecration of the Presiding Bishop, now archbishop. Some members were hesitant to share their narratives or perspective because they were uncertain as to how I would represent their views. My major challenge during this research was my inability to interview the Archbishop herself. She canceled several appointments, and she eventually referred me to senior ministers who, according to her, “know her and her works very well.”\(^{549}\) The Director or Administration was also busy; we canceled planned meetings, and I never managed to get an interview.

Despite these challenges, I explored the use of oral interview, recorded sermons, personal observation of services, numerous visits to the “women’s church-CWFI Restoration Centre at Ogba in Benin City. I was able to meet my objective of exploring and examining the gender dynamics and politics in CGMi. Furthermore, my research

\(^{549}\) Personal conversation with Archbishop Margaret Benson-Idahosa on June 1 2016.
methods enabled me to document CGMi leaders and member’s unique perspectives towards gender dynamics as it is happening.

7.5: Research Implications and Contributions

In indicating ways that gender dynamics manifest in the CGMi, I am careful not to exaggerate the roles that CGMi male leaders play in advancing and striving to institutionalize gender injustice. Many CWFI members and leaders continue to criticize the mainstream church for not pragmatically supporting women’s inclusion in authoritative leadership positions in the church. While many women leaders play critical roles in the advancement of the women’s course, several Pentecostal denominational leaders do not, and have yet to affirm the inclusion of women as a strategy for social change. The male leaders insisted that women should focus on tending the family and shepherding the home-front rather than engaging in full-time ministry. Within the CGMi, leaders acknowledged that: “women were not involved in public ministerial duties, at least at the beginning of the ministry.”

Sadly, some male CGMi leaders have yet to support the women’s course in public ministry and thus continue to hinder their inclusion in full-time ministry. To act on their spirituality, the women created alternative ways through the women’s church. People now reckon with CWFI at the local, national, and international levels because women across class and denominations join the CWFI. Ecklund’s study, of how “Catholic Women Negotiate Feminism” clarifies the findings of my dissertation as Ecklund highlights the crucial ways the creation of varying routes by women in institutional

communities aided the advancement of their expression, in a different context, and this mirrors Nnaemeka’s nego-feminism.\(^\text{551}\)

This dissertation contributes to African women’s religious history and the trajectory of gender dynamics within the Pentecostal tradition, which alleges it is egalitarian. It highlights ways the CWFI members and leaders have helped to bolster the CGMi and by extension the NPC. Connecting with a broad discussion of Margaret’s contribution to Pentecostal advancement, I have demonstrated that CGMi women contribute space, time, and money to the CGMi and NPC development in Nigeria. The CGMi now has an extensive network of churches across Nigeria and beyond; it partners with other Pentecostal denominations that borrow a leaf from Margaret Idahosa’ CGMi, as captured in chapter four.

Additionally, through showing that some CWFI members were actively engaged in the struggle for gender inclusion, my research findings challenge the double standard that scholars of Pentecostalism have used to categorize Pentecostal women as if they are not helping to advance themselves. The study indicates that some CGMi members who were deeply committed to evangelism and spiritual experience are still actively involved in the women’s church. By giving more attention to the drama that shrouded Margaret’s Idahosa’s consecration as Presiding Bishop, I have shown that elements of CGMi inhibited women’s participation and inclusion into authoritative leadership positions and only increased Margaret’s doggedness. Some CWFI members suggested that they joined CWFI because they find Margaret’s rhetoric to be consistent with Pentecostal beliefs and

practices. The CWFI has continued to maintain her commitment to spiritual practices and empowerment through the divine intervention of prayer.

This dissertation has given attention to the exclusionary threads with the CGMi’s ‘unwritten’ theology. Besides challenging the academic taxonomy scholars have employed to compare the political postures of Pentecostals, I have also documented members’ self-understanding of their perspectives and postures towards gender dynamics and gender inclusion. Lastly, through engaging the voices and perspectives of CGMi members and leaders, this dissertation encourages religious scholars to rethink the importance of spiritual beliefs and practice for Pentecostals women’s struggle for full participation in public ministry.

*Gender Dynamics* adds to the terrain of recognized methodologies and sociological approaches in African religion, Gender, and Pentecostal studies. The interrogation of *Gender Dynamics* is thus a site of intersection for multiple disciplinary tools within sociology, gender, religious studies, and African religion. In summation, this research opens a new vista for inquiring into the gender dynamics of Nigerian women in the Pentecostal tradition. The inclusion of gender dynamics in the study of African religion and Pentecostal study extends the examination of the social-cultural construction to include women within authoritative positions in the church. This inclusion is noteworthy as it compels scholars and readers of African religion, Gender, and Pentecostal studies to explore more deeply the lived experiences of Nigerian Pentecostal women. It also interrogates how they knit together the various strands that form their spirituality in ways that push for more life options for women and men. The interpretation of gender dynamics sparks critique that broadens what they consider in the
tradition and exposes the broader much more complicated issue of gender inclusivity in practical terms.

Researching the Benin (African) past is in itself quite challenging. Literature in Benin studies suggests that scholars have been more interested in the arts of Benin than any other aspect of its heritage and history. Ben-Amos in *The Art of Benin* (1995) argues that the Benin royal arts and its myths largely reflect the dynasty’s history. A. F. C Ryder (1969) supports Ben-Amos when he holds that the historical quest for knowledge of Benin’s past remains fascinating because of its royal arts. While the fascination with arts is understandable in light of the abundant artistic tradition that goes back hundreds of years, the implication of this is that the literature on women (gender relation) is scant. Because works on gender relations have evidently been done largely by art historians and social scientists, while drawing from that rich scholarship, my dissertation adds perspectives from the humanities as I explore historical narratives and religious interpretations the myths to understand the dynamics of religion and gender. Such an interdisciplinary approach will provide broad perspectives from which to study not only the religious belief and rituals but far more expansive grounds on which to assess gender relations in Benin. Additionally, this dissertation invokes sociological and gender theories to argue that self-reflexivity and determination are tools that help women negotiate lived-experiences of gender bias, rethink ways for inclusivity and equitable relationships, and develop a heuristic that constructively moves the margins. Finally, this research affirms the indispensability of equal relations and learning for a world in which interdependence is imperative for survival. Women’s networks, exemplified in the CWFI, offer
significant contributions to the growth and expansion of Pentecostal Movement in Nigeria, giving spatial, financial, cultural, and religious resources to NP.

**7.6: Directions for Future Research**

Given this narrative, I will conclude this dissertation with a summary that makes it clear that the NPT has yet to rid itself of gender-based discrimination, particularly as it relates to leadership by women. To what extent are the charismatic level and/or gender status, and cultural beliefs of members predictive of whether a Pentecostal church will adopt a culture of women’s leadership? Additional research to investigate the parallel presence of these factors could expand the findings and arguments established in this dissertation. Further study could provide insight into the extent to which these elements, nature, and out-workings of gender dynamics, gender imbalance, and gender injustice are prevalent within the NPT more broadly, beyond the one church I studied. Members of the Pentecostal church I studied have a range of class and educational background. Readers should then not assume that the factors I found in this one church always occur in this way or are what promote or hinder a culture of women in leadership.

Though women participate in the struggle for gender inclusion and empowerment, as women, they lack the prominence of men engaged in parallel issues. Among the persons actively involved in participating in CWFI and CGMi in Benin City are Rev. (Mrs.) Grace U. Ekperigin, Rev. (Mrs.) Josephine Kpere-Daibo, Rev. (Dr.) Nosa Aladeselu, and Rev. (Prof. Mrs.) Norah Omorogie. There is room for more focused analysis of the CGMi and other Pentecostal congregations in different cities. Many women have gripping narratives on the matter of women in leadership in these churches that they are willing to share.
Additionally, this work might prompt studies on other influential figures in contemporary Pentecostal traditions. Pentecostal historians have not done much research on early Pentecostal pioneers in Nigeria, and they have largely undermined the contributions of women in pioneering Nigerian Pentecostalism. This study has given attention to the significant drama that unveiled itself in the course of Margaret Idahosa’s consecration as a way to throw light on the gender politics that are playing out in the Pentecostal tradition. There are many people with useful information on this subject that has not yet been analyzed. There is ample room for Pentecostal scholars to focus on other bishops, women church leaders, women church founders, women missionaries, and women evangelists within the CGMi and in different Pentecostal denominations in Nigeria that are striving to make gender inclusion and gender balance feasible and common in public ministry.

The failure of scholars and church leaders/members to interrogate the gender dynamics at play has created an academic blind spot and has perpetuated such inequalities and has harmed not only women but the church at large.

Consequently, some questions beg to be answered, such as: What aspects of women’s religiosity are scholars missing by not paying attention to women’s spiritual gifts? How does the Pentecostal church reproduce, reinforce, and sustain systems of religious and cultural beliefs in faith communities? How might Christian people reinforce gender equality within the NPT? I am confident that providing answers to these questions would help to strengthen our understanding of the wholeness of women within the faith community. It could also serve as a framework for conceptualizing and teaching African women’s history and experiences, with particular reference to women in the Benin
Religion and the Pentecostal tradition. To this end, I urge scholars of Gender and Pentecostal Studies to pay attention to the gender dynamics in the Pentecostal tradition so that women’s historical experiences are understood.

In the light of my study, I assert that qualitative research study is the prized research model that enables insight into how gender dynamics compel women within the Pentecostal tradition to navigate gender boundaries to accomplish their potential within the NPT. Therefore, I also suggest that more workshop/training should be organized to support students conducting ethnographic research and be abreast of the challenges in the field.

Although the emphasis of my dissertation is on gender dynamics in Pentecostal churches, it will be helpful if there is future research on masculinity and its implications for the Pentecostal tradition in Nigeria. I suggest that more analysis should be carried out on Benin religion and its impact on NP. I hope that this dissertation will prompt scholars and readers to further investigate gender dynamics as a branch of scholarly research within the fields of African religion, Gender, and Pentecostal studies.

Lastly, I anticipate that this dissertation can serve as a resource for scholars interested in exploring the Pentecostal terrain. I noted in this study that CGMi is at the vanguard of other modern Pentecostal denominations. The CGMi is an umbrella body of NP; it is so influential because many Pentecostal denominations borrow their doctrines and support from CGMi. Therefore, scholars and the church community should pay critical attention to two issues: (i) factors that enable CGMi to be at the vanguard of modern NP; and (ii) women’s contributions to the development and sustenance of Pentecostal tradition in Nigeria. Finally, because it would be good to spell out the
principles of nego-feminism and its effectiveness in mitigating gender discrimination in the Pentecostal tradition, I spend a few pages on this topic.

7.6.1: Applying the Principle of Nego-Feminism as a Way Forward

This dissertation connects theory and practical outcomes. I identify with the messiness of the weight of femaleness that women deal with on a daily basis. I find Acts 2:1ff, Nnaemeka’s methods of feminist engagement in Africa, and Ecklund's negotiation theories helpful in providing roadmaps for the future. These approaches are especially instructive and pertinent to the trajectory that I map out here.\textsuperscript{552} The NPC as an institution embraces change slowly, and a critical negotiation that recognizes African cultural values in the manner that Nnaemeka suggests is a useful way to move forward. Along the same lines, Ecklund’s study is very instructive in offering insights into how negotiations need to be honest, frank, but polite. I believe the time has come for NPT to exorcise gender discrimination by building on the Pentecost Experience and creating a space for engagement. When such engaging negotiations call them to take a radical stand because the Holy Spirit also comes with a disruptive power and presence, NP adherents, particularly the women, should not shy away from such strict negotiations.

This engagement showcased in the Pentecost Experience provides the shared values that the NP can use as organizing principles, a principle that binds all persons together in a space that is not the either/or location of stability, but a space for the “both,” a borderless space that embraces the free movement.\textsuperscript{553} Nego-feminism unfolds in a space that embraces coexistence, interconnection, and interaction of thought, dialogue,

\textsuperscript{552} For details of the Pentecost Experience, see Acts of the Apostles 2:1–4; 17–18.
\textsuperscript{553} Nnaemeka, Ibid, 359-60.
planning, and action in an environment of unequal power relations where discriminating socio-cultural constructions prevails.\textsuperscript{554}

This dissertation raises crucial questions not only about being but also about becoming, not just gender justice as a construct but also as a construction, and not just as a product but also as a process. Embodying gender equality as a process is crucial to wholesome humanity that is best maximized not in the margins but Centre stage and by embracing the Pentecost experience. Evidently, we cannot advocate change and at the same time resist change; we cannot dismiss the constructive force that accompanies the Pentecost experience if embodied. The Pentecost experience is a disruptive experience that is not manipulated by humans. Following this trajectory will help to usher the NPT to the gates of inclusivity and shut the gates to gender injustice and discrimination.\textsuperscript{555}

In my view, women and their works have proved to be important keys for opening new developmental vistas, and it is only natural that the worth of developmental tools should be decided in principal and every respect by women’s effectiveness as co-heirs of the Kingdom. Harnessing these devices in the church is a way to map the course of what lies beyond the now. The NPT should do well to regard and include women in critical leadership positions even though women, according to Ecklund, themselves use various means of identity negotiation to continue to be relevant in the faith community.\textsuperscript{556}

Adopting and implementing the doctrine of inclusivity will create a situation where all human potential is harnessed and realized to the full. Nnaemeka’s ideals of humanity and responsibility inform my choice of the real partnership at the heart of the Pentecost

\textsuperscript{554} Ibid, 360.
\textsuperscript{555} Ibid, 363.
\textsuperscript{556} Ecklund, “Catholic Women Negotiate Feminism,” 515-16.
experience. Those models help to even out rough edges of the cultural beliefs and social constructions that exalt binaries to the detriment of enacting spiritual calling.\textsuperscript{557}

In mapping the principle of nego-feminism, Ecklund rightly asserts that “women have diverse ways of considering negotiation between two identities.”\textsuperscript{558} Nnaemeka invokes African maxims that state “I am because you are and you are because I am,” and “the sky is vast enough for all the birds, women and men, to fly without colliding\textsuperscript{559} to show how the proactive nature of nego-feminism unfolds for women in NPT.\textsuperscript{560} Women in this domain challenge established boundaries through negotiations and compromise. They know when, where, and how to detonate and avoid such patriarchal landmines in different contexts. Specifically, these women evoke the dynamism and shifts of a process as opposed to the stability and reification of a construct.\textsuperscript{561}

Ecklund is right in her observation that many religions still have patriarchal rules and institutional policies that formally limit leadership by women.\textsuperscript{562} However, women’s use of both individual understanding and group tactics within the context of the mainstream to negotiation with the religious tradition remain part of the institution with which they disagree is indicative of their willingness to reach out and work with men in achieving set goals on the day-to-day practices.\textsuperscript{563} When they do this, they “bring ideologies to the mainstream church.”\textsuperscript{564} Therefore, NPT and its male leaders should

\textsuperscript{557} Nnaemeka, “Nego-feminism,” 375.
\textsuperscript{558} Ecklund, “Catholic Women Negotiate Feminism,” 516.
\textsuperscript{559} Nnaemeka, 376.
\textsuperscript{560} \textit{Ibid}, 376.
\textsuperscript{561} Ibid, 378.
\textsuperscript{562} See how women respond to doctrines that officially limit their participation in Ecklund, “Organizational Culture and Women’s Leadership,”81.
\textsuperscript{563} Ecklund, 516.
\textsuperscript{564} Ibid, 516.
realize that they cannot advance unless the Pentecostal tradition that claims to be Pentecostal embodies the *Pentecost Experience* of empowerment for all.\footnote{Nnaemeka, “Nego Feminism,” 379.}
Bibliography

**Book Sources**


Journal Articles/Chapters in Books


Newspapers and Magazine


**Lectures presented/ Theses and Dissertation**


Miscellaneous of Amended Constitution of Church of God Mission Int’l, Benin City. 2014. Article II, Fig. A.


Osadolor, Osarhieme B. “Traditional institutions and authorities: a case study of the Oba of Benin in present-day Nigeria,” paper presented at a workshop on Tradition, Traditional Institutions and Traditional Authorities in Africa Today, held at the University of Hamburg, February 5-6.


**Personal Interviews**

Achebe Solomon (Rev.) (pseudonym) in Benin on June 8, 2016.

Agbonifo Margaret on July 5, 2016.

Aize Menah (pseudonym) on April 23, 2016.

Akioya Joseph (Elder) on June 12, 2016.

Aladeselu Nosa (Rev. (Dr. Mrs.) on May 27, 2016.

Aladeselu Victor (Deacon, Prof.) on May 27, 2016.

Areghan Humphrey on May 31, 2016.

Ayere Esohe on August 2, 2016.

Ayodeji Enoch, in Benin City on June 2, 2015.

Ayomide Vincent (Deacon, Prof.) (pseudonym) on April 18, 2016.

Benson-Idahosa Margaret (Archbishop) on June 1, 2016.

Bidemi Paul in Benin City on June 1, 2016.

Edozien Chika on May 27, 2015.


Eghafona Kokunre on April 7, 2016.

Eghosa Efe on April 21, 2016.


Ekeh Joseph (Elder) (pseudonym) on July 13, 2016.
Ekperigin Grace (Rev. (Mrs.) (Mama Koko) on May 8, 2016.

Ese Edo (Rev. Mrs) (pseudonym) April 17, 2016.

Eze Merry on May 28, 2016.

Ezomo Alero (pseudonym) – June 10, 2016


Igunbor Eghosa (Rev.) on April 21, 2016.

Ikhidero Solomon on April 24, 2016.

Ikhidero Solomon on May 25, 2015

Imafidon J.O.S. Bishop on July 24, 2016.

Kpere-Daibo Josephine (Rev. (Mrs.) on June 1, 2016.

Kpere-Daibo Sunday (Elder) on June 1, 2016.

Mowete Isaac (Rev.) on May 5, 2016.

Ogbahon Dickson (Rev) on April 21, 2016.

Ogbahon Dickson (Rev) on April 12, 2016.

Ogbe Ephraim on May 18, 2016.

Ogbe Matthew (pseudonym) on April 26, 2016.

Ogbemudia Imasuen on June 25, 2016.

Ojo Atiti (Madam) on April 12, 2016.

Ojo Joseph (Bishop) in Lagos on July 13, 2016.

Okhuoya John (Rev. Prof.) on June 13, 2016.

Okogie Nelly (pseudonym) on June 23, 2016.

Okoh Isaac on May 5, 2016.

Okpe Samuel (Bishop) (pseudonym) on June 18, 2016.
Okri Jane (Elder (Mrs.)) on March 26, 2015.


Omoregie Norah (Rev. Mrs.) on June 25, 2016.

Omoregicova Maria Rev. (Barr. Mrs.) on June 24, 2016.

Omoruyi Aigbe (pseudonym), a palace functionary in his house in Benin City on April 6, 2016.

Onsanye Patrick on June 23, 2016.

Osaguna Edigin (Chief) in an FGD on April 18, 2016

Osemwengie Ebohon on July 17, 2016.


Oshomah Mary (Rev. Dr. (Mrs.)) (pseudonym) on May 25, 2016

Internet Sources


http://www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/idahosa_bensona.html


Anonymous, [http://www.raceandhistory.com/cgi-bin/forum/webbbs_config.pl?md=read;id=2315](http://www.raceandhistory.com/cgi-bin/forum/webbbs_config.pl?md=read;id=2315)


Posted Monday, May 20


Benson-Idahosa, Margaret E. [http://cgmolObalconvention.com/](http://cgmolObalconvention.com/)


Huskins, David. “Archbishop Margaret Benson-Idahosa” in *International Communion of Charismatic Churches* [http://www.theiccc.info/Archbishop-Margaret-Idahosa](http://www.theiccc.info/Archbishop-Margaret-Idahosa)

Idubor, Nosa. “Edo, One of the World’s greatest Ancient Civilization” in Race and History: News and Views in http://www.raceandhistory.com/cgi-bin/forum/webbbs_config.pl?md=read;id=2315


Latona, Olayinka. “I am Amazed by What Pastor Adeboye, Bishop Oyedepo, others are doing – Benny Hinn” in Vanguard Newspaper (November 19, 2016)

Mumba, Greg Chibwe responded to a Facebook post made by Lewis Akpogena, a Christian Devotional Writer/Minister, Educationist and Consultant to a confession/propaganda of a certain Benedict Chukuemaka on January 5, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/PeoplesCommunityDevelopmentInitiativesPcodi/posts/123933324434141


Osawaru, Osaze responded to a Facebook post made by Lewis Akpogena, a Christian Devotional Writer/Minister, Educationist and Consultant to a confession/propaganda of a certain Benedict Chukuemaka on January 5, 2016, cited in https://www.facebook.com/PeoplesCommunityDevelopmentInitiativesPcodi/posts/123933324434141


Uwaifo, Omorodion. “In the Beginning: The Benin Cosmological Account of the Universe” in http://edoworld.net/IN_THE_BEGINNING.html


**Emails**

Usuanlele, Uyilawa on September 28, 2017.

Ikhidero, Solomon on May 25, 2015
Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

I asked my research participants these questions during our informal interview; subsequent issues came up as the conversation progressed. I designed these questions to strategically study how much the members knew about the church’s ordination process.

1) What is your understanding of the ordination process? As a follow-up, I asked how many people had been ordained in the last ten years.
2) What is the church’s criteria for ordination?
3) In your experience, what is the process for women to be ordained?
4) Is there a difference in the process for ordaining men and women pastors?
5) Can you speak to why there are fewer women in this office than men?
6) What, in your view (or experience), seems to be the principal barrier to women’s ordination to the pastoral office?
7) What is the position of the church in ordaining single women?
8) Do you know any “single” woman who has been ordained?

Question designed for women

What, in your view (or experience), do you think constitutes a major barrier to women’s ordination into the pastoral office?

Questions designed for men

Is your wife in ministry? When did she join the ministry? Was it before or after she got married to you?

Is she a pastor in her capacity as a woman or a pastor because of being your wife?

Life Histories

- What would you say a typical day is like for you?
- Can you reconstruct the journey from your day as a young Christian woman till the present as a pastor in the Pentecostal church?
- What was your motive for choosing this career path?
  - Was it by your conviction?
  - Did you feel called by God?
  - Was it because you married a pastor?
- What would you consider as a significant reason for this progress?
- Is there anything you think of as a barrier in your path as a pastor’s wife?
- What is the society’s/church’s perception of you as a pastor?