

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Gender Struggles and Female Leadership in the Old Testament and African Instituted Churches (AICs) in Nigeria

Dr. Abiola Ayodeji Olaniyi

Senior Lecturer, Department of Religious Studies,
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Abstract:

The concept of bringing honour to the family used in valuing women in ancient Israel and African traditions has led to women being painted with belittling remarks in comparison to men. Yet, women admirably subsist in both cultures and are treated with esteem in social climbing (mobility) of economic status and ascendancy of positions of power. This paper employs a socio-historical, socio-literary, and comparative cultural interpretation of gender roles between the Israelites and selected African Instituted Churches (AICs) at Ile-Ife, Nigeria. It considers equality of both sexes in the creation theology and Israelite patriarchal patrimony. Ten female church founders among the AICs are purposively selected for this study. The study finds gender independence and equality depend on economic dominance of the system of kinship and household interdependence in both cultures. The Old Testament creation theology elevates roles of the female gender as people capable of economic and commercial independence in spite of being placed under the household care where male leaders are saddled with provision of welfare and protection to their clans. The female founders of the AICs commend equality of gender roles in their churches where disapproval remarks that the book of Judges and Prophetic literature pass on women (depicting Yahweh as the faithful (male) husband against Israel as the unfaithful (female) wife) continue to pose hermeneutical threat to theological interpretation of female ascendancy into AICs leadership in Nigeria.

Keywords: Gender, Israelite, Household, Yoruba, Women

1. Introduction

The Old Testament as a compilation of thoughts, excerpts, perspectives and records culled from several different sources reflects a time span of many centuries, numerous and different perspectives and a corpus probably written over the span of a millennium. It contains several dynamic ideas that have been subjected to changes at different periods over the vast span of time. Its records household management, patriarchy, gender roles, hierarchy, bureaucracy, social mobility, abuse of power and struggle for power. The family or household is the prime establisher of authorized categorization and responsibility of women in the Old Testament since the Israelites use an administrative system of elders and household leaders in Numbers 1:1-8:26; Deuteronomy 1:1-31. Every alliance or sexual relationship entered into by women in the Old Testament is weighed upon its marital implications to the family or household. Relationships of women are labelled 'strange' or 'foreign' when they are not in the interest of the household in the Old Testament. So, marriage is made the principal establisher of officially permitted position and duty of women in the Old Testament. The social status of a woman is thus based on whether her actions and how she conducts herself bring honour or respect to the husbandman of her household in Numbers 30:3-14. The understanding from the abovementioned informs the Old Testament metaphor of gender difference and prophetic motif of harlotry.

1.1. Current Research Progress on Valuing Women

Warren C. Trenchard opines that "references to woman as prostitute" exist as a discourse in the Old Testament. Such references include "texts that mention the strange woman, a female musician, and the prostitute herself." Thus "in Proverbs the 'strange woman' is married, but acts like a prostitute" as depicted in Proverbs 6 and 7. In addition, "a prostitute may be a married woman, or a married woman may, for one reason or another, play the role of a prostitute. This is reflected in Prov 7." Consequently, "the material on prostitutes that we have considered echoes the traditional antipathy to prostitution contained in the wisdom literature, particularly in Proverbs" [1].

Moreover, Michael L. Satlow addresses "a linguistic control of female sexuality" in their natal home from biblical authority against *znh* or *znt* (a harlot) as established in rabbinic sources. He asserts the term *zonah* from *znh* includes in its semantic field the meaning "prostitute", harlot or whore. Thus, harlotry is forbidden for priests who engage in religious activities and a priest is not to share marital sex with a harlot in Leviticus 21:7, 9 & 14. Consequently, "the Bible frequently uses harlotry, *znut*, as a metaphor for Israel's behaviour vis a vis the Almighty. Unsurprisingly, this metaphor is picked up in rabbinic writings, which often associate idolatry, the ultimate act of Israel's rejection of God, and *znut*." In this light, the Israelites play harlotry with Baal in Judges 8:33 [2]. Bernadette J. Brooten adds, "the son of a priest, however, who marries a woman forbidden to him, such as a prostitute or a divorced woman (see Lev 21:7), loses his priestly rights only for the

period during which he is married to her [3].

According to Meir Bar-Ilan, “numerous verses voice vehement opposition to prostitution and the prophets employ it frequently as a figurative representation of moral-religious transgressions.” Suffice to say “for the prophets, prostitution became a literary image for women’s faithlessness.” Thus, contempt against harlotry by Yahweh is depicted when Prophet Hosea is instructed to get a wife of harlotry (whoredom) and raise children of prostitution in Hosea 1:2. A harlot as a social outcast from the Israelite households is also referred to in the judgment of Yahweh against Israel who is metaphorically described as a harlot meant for exile in Amos 7:17 (Israelites as women taken as prisoners and forced into prostitution). Prophet Ezekiel complements the metaphorical description of ancient Israel as a harlot in Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia in Ezekiel 23:1-49 [4]. Meir Bar-Ilan also explains Yahweh’s contempt against Nineveh (Assyria) as a harlot in the prophetic motif of harlotry in Nahum 3:4. Harlotry practiced on the borders or suburbs of a city is thus compared to witchcraft in “a similar connection between licentiousness and sorcery” from “the invocation of the Prophet Nahum of an image of a whore for the city Nineveh: ‘because of the countless harlotries of the harlot, the winsome mistress of sorceries’ (Nahum 3:4).” In the light of the prophetic metaphor of harlotry, “it seems that it was commonplace to link licentiousness with witchcraft, both being skills or professions practiced on the fringes of society, catering to the base needs of men.” Moreover, the casting of spells to cause a miscarriage and prostitution are known to coexist as prostitutes are frequently mentioned together with casting of spell for miscarriage in their career [5].

1.2. The Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to highlight the implication of valuing women based on the honour they bring on their family. It examines how certain acts get labeled as “strange” or “foreign” in any relationship of women with anyone whose existence does not respect the social status of the household. It studies the role of achievement-based system of leadership in female respect. It also seeks to interrogate the derogatory motifs in female leadership in the Old Testament and African Instituted Churches (Aics) in Nigeria.

2. Methodology

Gatti and Ossom-Batsa categorize African biblical hermeneutics as the domain of integrated approaches to contextualizing the Bible (as the theoretical framework for biblical analysis) in a dynamic dialogue with the diversity of cultures that typify the African continent [6]. Thus, this paper engages: first, historical critical view of taking the historical dimensions of the Bible seriously by focusing attention on the world behind biblical texts to compare biblical accounts with non-biblical evidences in reconstructing Israelite history and culture [7]. Second, literary method deals with the final form of biblical texts today analyzing biblical texts as literature. This foregrounds the Bible in the form in which it is stabilized canonically to focus on its textual surface and follow the logic of its narrative [8]. Third, social anthropological (comparative sociology) technique examines circumstances that inform social roles, how certain phenomena function in Israelite society and the social organization of structures and groups in ancient Israel. It examines the way ancient Israelite society develops as an integration of interrelated and interacting social units in forming a system of social relations as a structure [9]. The institutionalization of the religious groups culminates in the establishment of social orders of perpetuating the religious community (certain codes, structures and status dimensions as bases of recruiting and socializing new members and creating a sense of identity and belonging). It has set norms of achieving the common goals of the group that are converted to roles which members carry out [10]. Fourth, comparative cultural approach lays emphasis on the cultural context, studying biblical concepts and traditional theories together with the view of each throwing more light on the other. It relates the Bible to beliefs of other religions as a dialogue partner (promoting inter-religious dialogue) in the quest for mutual enlightenment in a religious pluralistic setting [11].

3. Gender Struggles in Ancient Traditions

Marten Stol avers that women in extant ancient traditions are painted with “derogatory remarks” in comparison to men. Women are highlighted as witches practicing sorcery, speaking evil or making slanderous and false accusations against their husbands (lords). They are depicted as unveiling secrets (could not be trusted with classified information) as gossips owing to “jealousy, stupidity, stealing and vitriolic argument” in malevolent chatter. Even beyond the borders of Mesopotamia, people believe women are inclined to spread rumours. Moreover, women are described as having extra-marital affairs (opening their thighs to men who are not their husbands) in dishonouring their husbands. So, “men were associated with the right side and women with the left, corresponding to the generally accepted principle that ‘right = male = favourable’ as opposed to ‘left = female = unfavourable’.” It will not come as a surprise that there was a preference for male offspring when children were born.”

In addition, “whatever fate awaited the man it is likely to have been more agreeable than the woman’s lot. In curse formulas a man is threatened to be changed into a woman...” In estimating value of employable people “slave-girls cost less than male slaves” since “women did not enjoy the same rights as men.” As if that is not enough, “in a case of adultery the death penalty was prescribed for a woman but not for her lover.” Her adulterous involvement fetches the remark “she had brought dishonour on her family” by engaging with an outsider. Furthermore, “such behaviour directly compromised her important function of producing the next generation.” An attempt at making a balanced judgment of this ascription leads to “the conclusion that in ancient society women fared much worse than men.” So, in “the generally wise laws of Hammurabi women were more severely punished than men” [12].

However, Hennie J. Marsman draws a long list of social positions of women, how women honourably live in and how they are treated with respect and care in the Old Testament. He highlights how their socio-economic status

appreciates with provision of dowry from fathers to daughters. The use of rights of widows in improving the conditions of living of women is also portrayed.

In Genesis 16:2-3, Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant is considered as a part of dowry of Sarah married to Abraham. In Genesis 24:59-61, dowry of Rebekah includes her nurse and the maids who accompany her when leaving her natal home. In 1 Samuel 25:42, Abigail, the widow has a dowry of slave women. There are five maids accompanying her at her marriage. Furthermore, in Joshua 15:16-19 and Judges 1:13-15, Achsah, the daughter of Caleb, given in marriage to Othniel, asks her father for a blessing and she receives a field with springs. The blessing that she asks for as a gift is also viewed as her dowry and as her share of her inheritance in her natal home.

Social positions of women are also promoted in the performance of tasks of animal husbandry and agriculture in the Old Testament. Rachel is a shepherdess tending the flock of her father in Genesis 29:7-9. Mother of Samson works outside the home in the field when she encounters the angel of God in Judges 13:9. Ruth gleanes barley in the field behind the reapers and joins them for their meal in Ruth 2. The girl in the Song of Songs has acquired a deep tan by working in the vineyard in Song 1:5-6 and acts as the shepherdess in Song 1:8. The oldest servant of Abraham meets Rebekah at the spring where she draws water for his camels in Genesis 24. Similarly, Moses meets the seven daughters of the priest of Midian at a well in Exodus 2:15b-17. Girls who come out of the town to draw water meet Saul and his servant-boy in 1 Samuel 9:11 looking for Samuel, the seer. Another example of a woman who's acting and role surpasses the household is the industrious woman of Proverbs 31:10-31. She provides for the home in verse 12, owns the means to buy a field in verse 16 and knows how to make her merchandise profitable. With the profit, the 'fruit of her hands', she plants a vineyard on the land she has purchased in verses 18 & 24. She is not confined to her home, but goes out to seek wool and flax in verse 13 and to bring food in from a distant land in verse 14. In Nehemiah 3:12, daughters of Shallum, son of Hallohesh are among those who help in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. As daughters of the ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, these women belong to a prominent family, but the status apparently does not prohibit them from partaking in this important work in the book of Nehemiah.

Taking a cue from Numbers 36, inheritance of land plays a major role in socio-economic status of an Israelite (with a preference for endogamous marriages and kinship). This is due to close ties that exist between the practice of kinship ('house of the father') and the care of the family land (*nahala*). Priestly law of inheritance in Numbers 27:1-11 and 36:1-9 reveals that the daughters of Zelophehad have the right to inherit the land. The roles of female Israelites are complementary to roles of male Israelites in this setting of inheritance of land, around which the ancient Israelite society is portrayed. The land in such a setting is regarded as an economic asset, a representation of the family, and the place where the ancestors are buried, connecting the ancestors with their progeny and objectifying the complex bonds of kinship and descent. So, the inheritance of land or purchase of land is an important issue to every Israelite family in the Old Testament.

In the social ethics of the *Torah* (Hebrew Bible) documented in Exodus 22:21-22; Deuteronomy 15:12 and 24:17, women, widows and orphans are to be cared for and protected. Daughters, widows and female servants are also legally required as every male Israelite is saddled to attend the Feasts of Weeks and Tabernacles and worship at the place where the LORD God has chosen as a dwelling for his name (Deuteronomy 16:11-15). These social ethics highlight that the norm, custom and laws of making provisions for widows and orphans were one of the most important of ancient Israelite society.

Hennie J. Marsman also describes how the socio-economic status of women changes as they get married in ancient Israel. In Numbers 30:3-16 and 2 Samuel 14:5, women live under the protection and authority of their father or husband in demarcated Israelite clans. But widows are considered independent, responsible for their own deeds and entitled to make commitments that are binding like vows in Numbers 30:9. Yet, a widow who is not under any male authority (by remarriage or by living under the protection of an adult son and her father-in-law) is regarded as being without any male protection (which opens her to possibility of falling victim to abuse). The duties of the king in 2 Samuel 14 and Psalm 72:12 include the protection of the rights of widows and those who have no helper or protector. In addition, Yahweh legislates that all Israelites are to bring a tithe of their income to the temple in order that widows might be fed from it in Deuteronomy 14:28-29 and 26:12.

In another instance in the book of Ruth, when and where special provisions are made, a woman continues the possession and management of the property of her father or her husband after his death. In this context, Israelite widows inherit from their deceased husbands as a right. Naomi, the widow of Elimelech sells the parcel of land that belongs to Elimelech her husband. She sells the "usufructuary" rights to the land in this way since her husband and her sons have died. She is expected and entitled to manage the land that belongs to her husband in the Israelite clan. In this light, an Israelite widow holds the "usufructuary" rights to the land and household of her deceased husband. However, the right of inheritance for a widow is conditional and it is to prevent that property from being removed from the clan when she remarries. If she has children, they will inherit the land once they have come of age. If she has no children, she will hold the "usufructuary" rights until she remarries or until she dies. Thereafter the land will be redistributed within the *mišpahâ* of the clan as done in Ruth 4.

Certain women in ancient Israel employed the custom of levirate marriage to demonstrate their creativity among wisdom, being cunning, discernment and astuteness. The command in Deuteronomy 25:7-10 states that if a brother of a husband is unwilling to perform the duty of levirate marriage, the surviving widow has a right to bring her case to court at the town gate. The primary purpose of the levirate marriage in this context is to provide the deceased husband with a son or a successor to his estate. In such a case, it is the deceased husband who primarily benefits from the marriage, since it is his name that is perpetuated by the levirate marriage. So, the Torah presents the purpose of levirate marriage as a right of the widow. Her brother-in-law is to marry her and provide her with offspring. In this instance, remarriage could give a widow the security that she wishes to have in a patriarchal society such as Israel. However, when the *levir* publicly

denounces his right, she (a surviving widow) is free to marry whomever she wishes. This right of a widow is creatively utilized in Genesis 38. Tamar, a young but childless widow employs her sexual attractiveness in achieving her goals. She deceives her father-in-law into performing the duty of the *levir* (who is saddled with building up the family line of his brother). The book of Ruth chapter 3 is another instance of a creative engagement of the right of a widow. Ruth, a widow is instructed by Naomi, her widowed mother-in-law to approach Boaz when he lies down to sleep in order that he might marry Ruth.

The prophetic literature also shows that the advocates of exclusive devotion to Yahweh protested when caring for poor women and members of the family as a norm was severely violated in ancient Israel. For instance, Prophet Isaiah rebukes in Isaiah 1:21-23 Jerusalem, "the faithful city": 'Your rulers are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves bribes and runs after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the orphan and the cause of the widow does not come before them.' Prophet Jeremiah reprimands in Jeremiah 5:20-28 the descendants of Jacob living in Judah and called "my people": 'Their evil deeds have no limit since they do not inquire about justice. They do not promote the cause of the orphans and the just cause of the poor is not defended'.

At another socio-economic status, Abigail, the wife of Nabal in 1 Samuel 25:1-38 has her own servants working for her outside the list of male servants of her husband. Bathsheba as a queen and mother of a prince in 1 Kings 1 and 2:19-25 acts as kingmaker for her son Solomon. In 1 Kings 9:24, the women of the palace probably have their own separate quarters as the Egyptian princess who is married to Solomon has her own house. Jezebel as a queen of Ahab has and demonstrates the power to decide life or death in 1 Kings 19:2 and 21:10. Queen Jezebel also writes letters in the name of King Ahab and seals them with the seal of her husband in 1 Kings 21:8. Queen Vashti organizes a royal banquet for the women of the Persian palace in Esther 1:9. The Hebrew Bible relates only one case of adoption for legal and social protection of the orphan in the case of Esther by her uncle Mordecai in Esther. 2:7. Queen Esther also organizes a royal banquet in Esther 5:4-12 and 7:1-10. Esther as a biblical queen at the Persian court influences and convinces the king, playing the role of an intercessor to save the lives of the Jews and to kill their enemies in Esther 7-9 [13].

3.1. The Complexity of Managing Gender Roles in the Old Testament

Gender complementarities between males and females in a family or household refer to socio-economic interdependency and exchange of power that exist in the domestic sphere. The complexity of day-to-day shared living informs gender complementarities of males and females in the home. This phenomenon is better perceived in the home, the local domains or the household in its agrarian context. It exists in the family setting necessarily to uphold kinship and the socio-economic interdependency of the members as a primary unit of subsistence. Thus, Francesca Stavrakopoulou avers that the key elements of human condition and constructions of family, gender, religion, economics, power and culture are most sharply exhibited and perceived in the domestic sphere. More so, family rituals and other activities performed in or around the home and especially in the agrarian settlements in which most people live and work reveal that certain males and females, actions and objects come together to create a familiar locality called a home: the continuously changing or dynamic space. Thus, gender complementarities of males and females in the home indicate the complexity of day-to-day shared living [14].

Inequality, hierarchy, bureaucracy and patriarchy appear to be predominant in the Old Testament. Yet, the marital responsibility of being a helper or providing help that adds new qualities to another in a way that improves the spouses in family as the basic unit of the society is invaluable. Louis Jacobs opines that Genesis 2 presents the interdependence and complementarities that exist between a male and a female in the family (as the basic unit of the society). He argues that the expressions: "It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him a help meet for him" (Genesis 2:18) and "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24) expose a necessity in marriage relationship. The husband and the wife have to surrender some of their individualities to the union if the marriage is to work. Thus "a help meet for him" in the above statement refers to a shared purpose and mutuality, yielding the thought that both husband and wife are of "help" in spite of their differences. The coming together of the two different sexes forms a useful combination of skills. The phrase *`ezer kenegdô* in Genesis 2:18 and 20 severally translated "a help as opposite of him", "a help as opposed to him" or better still, "a help as his opposite" at a first reading shows the individuality, personality, uniqueness, distinctiveness and by implication the independence of the woman (wife) from the man (husband). A critical observation of *kenegdô* discerns that it is enmeshed and entangled with the responsibility involved in the being of *`ezer* that is, "help" to one another. Thus, complementarity or interdependence "... applies to all family relationships. It is the variety of attitudes among the members of even the closest-knit family, the very conflict among persons of strong individuality that cements the family bonds and enriches family life." [15].

In the light of the above, the Old Testament presents a concern for permanency of shared sense of communal unity and collectivism that the Israelites expected in the social interconnection of households and clans. It analyses the gender interdependence practiced within differing Israelite household settings as based on social but hierarchical mobility (a communally acceptable structure of interrelation of roles between males and females). Christopher Wright avers that moral implications of individual efforts of every Israelite and marks of approving their personal achievements are also assessed using Israelite communal principles of equal provision of landed property. Thus, impartial justice and compassionate tolerance of people accommodated (as male and female Israelites as well as servants and slaves) under any family or household of their birth for socio-economic activities are also required [16].

3.2. Elevated Gender Roles in the Old Testament

The Old Testament describes the Israelites as nomadic Arameans or Syrians (Genesis 14:13; 25:20; 28:5;

31:20&24; Deuteronomy 26:5-9). It contains records of influential matriarchy as daughters, wives and mothers within Israelite (Aramean or Syrian) patriarchy. However, Israelite daughters had moral rights to be cared and provided for within the landed property of their fathers. They also shared equal rights with males in inheriting material properties of their father within Israelite laws of natal household (Numbers 27:1-11; 36:1-36).

The high status of women as wives and mothers with equal right to ownership of material and human properties was pictured in the equal partnership that Sarah shared with Abraham. Sarah as a wife delegated authority to Abraham to sexually cohabit with Hagar, her slave according to their custom (Genesis 16:1-6). Later, Sarah as a mother mandated Abraham to expel by divorce (*garas*) Hagar, who was initially given to Abraham as a wife (Genesis 16:6; 21:8-21). Hagar as a mother became a matriarch of twelve clans with an acknowledgment from the angel of the LORD and she gave a name to God as El-Roi (as men did in the land). Hagar as a mother also chose a wife for Ismael, her son (Genesis 16:6-16; 21:14-21).

Rebekah as a daughter exercised several rights within her household. She used her right to arrange hospitality for whoever she introduced to her natal home (Genesis 24:23 against 24:28-32). She utilized her freedom to change her residential care in her natal household for another status of becoming a wife (Genesis 24:8&57-61). Rebekah as a mother also inquired from the LORD by personal divination regarding the fate and future of her sons as Isaac did (Genesis 25:22-26).

Leah and Rachel as Aramean daughters challenged Laban, their father of withholding their inheritance as daughters in their natal home and misappropriating their dowry for his personal whims (Genesis 31:14-16). Leah and Rachel as Syrian wives delegated authority of sexual cohabitation with their maids to Jacob, their husband (Genesis 30:3-13), determined whose turn to have sexual relations with Jacob (Genesis 30:14-16) and chose names for their children as men did in the land (Genesis 29:31-30:24). Rachel explored the initial right of a wife in introducing the household gods of her natal home into her marital household though, this practice was later prohibited on the account of absorption of elements of other deities over cultic objects of Yahweh worship (Genesis 31:34-37; Deuteronomy 17:17; 1 Kings 11:1-13).

Tamar, the wife and widow of Er and Onan, the first two sons of Judah innovatively explored her right of widowhood care in the levirate law. She regained her status (in her marital home) that was abused by Judah, her father-in-law who returned her to her natal home using the levirate right (Genesis 38:6-30). More so, Israelite casuistic law (Exodus 21:10&11) authorized even a slave woman (turned by her master to become his wife) to divorce her master that failed to provide the basic necessities of life like food, clothing and shelter to her [17].

3.3. Israelite Revolutionary Tradition as a Religious Movement

Former Arameans or Syrians who had household gods later became an unconventionally religious movement known as the Israelites. They institutionalized innovative ideology and theology of Yahweh with their avant-garde perspective (Deuteronomy 4:19&20). They laid emphasis on dramatic encounters (revelation) with Yahweh in the salvation theology crafted from Egyptian enslavement. The socio-moral values of their unconventional emphasis also formed their essence of living (Israelite core purpose or educational principle) and basis of interrelationship among the peoples of the ancient Near East (Exodus 6:1-8). The moral implications of their unconventional highlighting resulted in their identity as a revolutionary movement [18].

The revolutionary tradition is included in the formation and codification of myth of origin in Genesis chapters one and two. The mutuality of gender relations which the myth of origin expounds as equality of sexes without hierarchy begins the sacred story. Equal pairing of both male and female humans is established with the generic expression *ha' adam* for humankind in reflecting the image of God in Genesis 1:27. Thus the use of *ha' adam* for both genders is intended at exposing that no gender is designed to claim power over the other; neither should the female gender be excluded from leadership and exercise of authority. Both humans are presented equal for blessing in the responsibility of procreation and in subduing the earth with co-managerial dominion over nonhuman creatures. The expression of equality of spiritual and moral worth of both sexes is in this way a negation of the hierarchy presumed to be coined from fallacy of prior creation of the male gender before the female gender. In other words, the equal pairing in Genesis 1:27 is designed at describing the trend of the creation of humankind as a progression (i) from incompleteness to completeness (wholeness), (ii) from loneliness to ecstasy of delight in companionship, (iii) with the female as the super ordinate ally in front of the male and as his counterpart corresponding to him in Genesis 2:18&20 and (iv) with its culmination and climax of equality in Genesis 2:23 [19].

3.4. Social Development through Spiritual Matrimony

According to Victor Armenteros, the idea of equality of male and female genders later develops into an imagery of husband and wife in covenant relationship. God is portrayed as cutting a covenant with the Israelites in husband and wife interaction [20]. The concept of spiritual matrimony between Yahweh and the Israelites (wife of Yahweh) involves exchange of covenant vows in the Decalogue and in the family identity in the sanctuary [21]. So, Pentateuch assumes in Aramaic term that Yahweh loves or makes love (*habab*) with Israel in Deuteronomy 33:3 [22]. Prophetic accounts in Isaiah 54:5; 62:4-5; Jeremiah 2:2-3; 11:15; 12:7; Ezekiel 16:8 also refer to Yahweh as the husband of Israel.

3.4.1. Israelite Theology of Human Values

The Israelites expressed their belief in Yahweh in connection to Abraham, the Hebrew. Christopher Wright explains being a Hebrew as being the landless or the rootless in Canaanite community and being regarded as a "stateless substratum of society" [23]. Under such an identity, Yahweh promised Abraham, a man of great possessions a landed space between the river of Egypt and the river of Euphrates (Genesis 12:1-5; 13:1-3; 14:13-16; 15:12-21). Ascendancy of Moses

into leadership alluded to Abraham and the promised landed property (Exodus 6:2-8). Moses attempted to forge a confederacy of different ethnic peoples who became the Israelites (Exodus 12:29-41; 18:1-12; Deuteronomy 26:5-10). An expression of Israelite belief in Yahweh was established in a covenantal relationship at Sinai which culminated in the possession of the landed property in Canaan (Genesis 15:18-21; 24:3,10-27; 25:19-21; 28:5; 31:19-24; Exodus 12:33-42; 19:1-20:26; Joshua 9:3-27; Judges 1:16;4:11). So, former Arameans or Syrians who were rescued from Egyptian slavery assumed a new christening as the Israelites with an inventive socio-economic system among other nations of ancient Near East.

The Israelites practiced socio-economic structures that were relatively egalitarian. Every Israelite family had approximately equal access to goods and services through its extended family and inter-tribal community that monitored social security and patrimonial economy of the people. This innovative consciousness of the Israelites distinguished it as a nation from the rest of the ancient Near Eastern states (Numbers 23:9; Deuteronomy 4:32-40). Palestine and other neighbouring states of the Israelites practiced a social stratification of asymmetrical structural relationship. The social stratification had peasant workers producing the economy and elite administrators controlling the sharing of the surplus from the patrimonial land on the basis of power [24].

The unconventional system of the Israelites described its identity as a people in affinity, over a landed property of socio-economic relations and corporate responsibility. Ancient Near Eastern states, especially the Canaanites practiced a feudal socio-economic system with centralized power under the elite, prior to the settlement of the Israelites in Palestine. However, the Israelites operated a decentralized tribal system (a kinship of landowning households and clans) that controlled their religio-judicial affairs, their socio-economic structure and a militia security of the masses. Israelite kinship system therefore ensured the protection of a comparative equality of landowning families (an egalitarian society in its sociology of worship of Yahweh) through a decentralized political power. The kinship system comprised of three stages: the households, the clans and the tribes (Judges 6:15). Individual Israelites were directly connected to the households and clans for social and economic benefits and responsibilities. A team of households formed a clan. A group of clans made a tribe as the Israelites functioned under local clan or family elders (institutional, corporate, participatory and representative leadership) at gates of certain villages and towns that symbolized individual territories. The administration was forged around having a representative committee of male household leaders (plurality of household elders) congregating as trustees of landowning families and administrators of socio-economic power for the landless and the masses as widows, orphans and destitute (Deuteronomy 21:10-14; 23:24-25). The leaders were regarded as senior family elders of their clans (assembling together and mediating their own cases among themselves) within a system of social egalitarianism of families occupying an allotted space of land. Possession of landed property formed the base of the wealth of every Israelite clan. A dispossession of lands was a dispossession of powers (within a system of socially accorded respect and a status that was based on landowning families). Dispossession of landed properties made some Israelites to be debtors living on the margins of the society.

Authority to protect lives and properties was under the household leaders (household fathers) who presided over the welfare of a patriarchal (family) lineage. The protection of every household on an inherited family land (that was not subject to commercial transaction at Israelite settlement in Palestine) became the responsibility of each clan in a tribe (Numbers 26:52-56; Leviticus 25; Joshua 13-21; Judges 21:24). So, a clan could bear the name of its regional location or a patriarchal male identity. The local household leaders (as males) were saddled with the responsibilities of attending to the needs of members of their families or households and protecting the wellbeing of people who resided under their patrimonial domain (wives, sons and daughters of the nuclear family, extended family of married sons and their dependents). The authority of every household leader without recourse to external interference of the court of elders included (i) parental discipline (beyond childhood) that did not involve taking of human life, (ii) marital solemnization and formalization, (iii) divorce of erring partners and issuance of divorce certificate of protection to the divorced in the presence of household witnesses within a particular family estate, (iv) ratification and celebration of redeemable slaves into permanent membership of a household and (v) defence of landed inheritance of the family by levirate marriage, inheritance laws, redemption of people and family land, validation of Jubilee declaration and education of children and newly enrolled members of the family.

Vows, pledges or agreement by a household member to make certain commitments and services to anyone or to the worship of Yahweh were made to honour the authority and commands of the household leader. Contempt against the authority of the household leader who was saddled with the responsibility to provide food, clothing, shelter and security for every member of his household was shrewdly judged in ancient times (Numbers 30:3-16 cf. Esther 1:1-22). The court of local household elders represented and protected the interests of their households at the gates (clan-house of assembly) of their villages and towns [25].

3.4.2. Israelite Gender Challenges

Israelite emergent patriarchal patrimonies from the connection of the Israelites with Abraham the Aramean or Syrians targeted the provision of care to every member of any household especially women and children. The welfare of daughters, spinsters, wives, widows and female slaves was protected in the family laws of the Israelites. But the socio-economic status of women within landowning context (as wives, 'levirated' widows and slaves turned wives) was different from landless context (divorced women, concubines and 'unlevirated' widows). Women under landowning context continued to enjoy provisions from and were protected by the household leaders. Women under landless context sought and fended provisions by themselves and were not protected by the household family care. In these lights,

- Polygamy among household leaders was tolerated with special attention given to the welfare of the wives,

although monogamy was the ideal marital pattern. The social custom of polygamy forbade exploitation of wives (that were never regarded as concubines) or women who supplied the need of married men beyond their marital homes (Exodus 21:7-11; Deuteronomy 21:10-14).

- Divorce within the family system was tolerated to protect women (iia) against being discarded after premarital intercourse as a prostitute or destitute (Deuteronomy 22:28-29); (iib) against filial haunting and possibility of being forced back into the discomfiting home of the ex-husband; (iic) against being stigmatized (after a clan meeting where a man had divorced a woman only to turn around to accuse her) of adultery when a divorced woman found a new lover (Deuteronomy 24:1-4); and (iid) against being sold as slaves for financial transaction and monetary profit by an ex-military husband who became disinterested in her after the war or by hard heartedness of men (Deuteronomy 21:14).
- Slave women that were part of the socio-economic and institutional life of the Israelites were largely residential and domestic workers. There were aliens who became debtors as landless tenants working off their debt through pledged or oath-binding labour to their household leaders (creditors). Yet, the Israelite slaves were required to be released at Sabbath year in order to seek for a change of employment (Exodus 21:23; Deuteronomy 15). Their respect was recognized by being permitted to participate in Israelite religious celebrations and festivals (Exodus 12:44; 16:11-14; 20:10; 21:20-21, 26-27; 23:12). Above all, runaway slaves who managed to escape from the oppressive territories of their slave-owners were protected by Israelite law from being arrested (punishment) by their masters. The runaway slaves were permitted to seek any village of their choice for residence where they were to obtain evidence of freedom from slavery (Deuteronomy 23:15-16).

However, there was a shift from patriarchal patrimony and gender parity into a bureaucratic restructuring during monarchical rule in Israel. Subordination and mistreatment of masses and women became a recurring phenomenon. The control of socio-economic and political functions changed from regional or tribal egalitarian relations of Israelite kinship system into a federal mechanism with hierarchical economic structure and taxation [26].

3.4.3. Gender Imagery of Disapproval

Cheryl Exum and Carol Smith assume the imagery of disregard and disrespect against the female gender in ancient Israel should be considered as a description of the poor state of the nation of Israel. The denigration and abuse of women and the poor in Israel negated the patriarchal patrimony targeted at providing care, welfare and security. Book of Judges paints the status of wives as temptresses, traitors and harlots against equality of sexes that Yahweh instituted at the creation in Genesis. Case in point, a woman of Timnah who was married to Samson in a customary feast of bridegrooms (Judges 14:10) but given to a friend of Samson who attended to him at the wedding (Judges 14:20) was depicted as a defector from Samson. Delilah of Valley of Sorek (Judges 16:4-31) was presented as a betrayer of Samson her lover [27]. Consequently, the distortion of the divine pattern of ensuring the continuity of basic equality of the sexes became evident in concubinage, polygamy (against monogamy as the ideal form) and divorce [28]. In this light, Tamar, the surviving widow of Er and Onan was deprived of levirate ownership of properties of her husband within the clan of Judah by being sent back to her natal home to live as a widow. Though, she was no longer a stakeholder in her natal home by her marriage to the family of Judah, her ejection from the inheritance of her husband posed another deprivation. Tamar was compelled to resort to playing the role of a prostitute as a widow (that had the punishment of being burnt to death) due to the refusal of Judah to make Shelah available to her in order to assume the levirate provision and responsibility of the clan of Judah (Genesis 38:1-30). So, women experienced loss of freedom, of social status and of respect at the instances of concubinage, polygamy and divorce in the poor state of ancient Israel.

From the foregoing, marital metaphors used in describing the wives in Israelite culture posed a serious challenge to feminist concerns and public demand for gender balance in the twentieth century. The theological interpretation of the relationship between Yahweh and ancient Israelites (infidelity) became a negation of the ideal covenantal expectation of Yahweh from the Israelites. Though, Israelite custom was meant to include and imply an exclusive ethical devotion and loyalty to Yahweh who was the only God that rescued the Israelites from Egyptian slavery (a story of the beginning of the Israelites as an unconventional people beyond being formerly regarded as Arameans or Syrians). Yahweh was described as the faithful husband and partner saddled with the protection of the Israelites, his wife in the metaphoric marital relationship. But ancient Israel was labeled as the unfaithful and adulterous wife or spouse in the relationship. While Yahweh as the male gender and husband was portrayed as the faithful but jealous husband in marital relationship with Israel, the covenanted people of Yahweh called Israel was depicted as the female gender and wife who enmeshed herself in harlotry [29].

So, the Pentateuch was viewed as describing the spiritual harlotry (*znh*) of Israel against the jealous zeal (*qn'*) of Yahweh (Exodus 20:5; 34:14-16; Leviticus 17:7; 20:5-6; Numbers 25:1, 10-13; Deuteronomy 4:23-24; 5:9; 6:14-15; 31:16). The Historical Books, regarded as early prophets were taken as portraying the manipulation, misuse and mistreatment of women through an organized mishandling, misapplication and exploitation of patriarchy. The mistreatment became prominent at the emergence of monarchy and in a shift of power from patriarchy to state control of resources. Monarchy created a tough system of hierarchies and bureaucracies (in a pyramid of power distribution) in order to establish a virile military frontier and to enforce a redistribution of material resources taken from its centralized mechanism of controlling the landed inheritance of the Israelites. Although, previous locus of the egalitarian structure of power distribution where political functions took place in the family households and rural villages with its gender parity afforded women to rise to public prominence and positions of power. The social and political principles of equal and

complementary roles of men and women upon which ancient Israelite tribal society was established (under a decentralized system of power) were frozen out and roles of women were relegated to the private domain with the introduction of a centralized system of power distribution under male control of the public domain in the cities [30]. Wisdom literature, especially the book of Proverbs was referred with negative remarks as speaking against the wealthy urban women and rich wives of the city bureaucrats (living in leisure on the produce from the rural labourers, at the loss of the earlier parity with men) in the muddle, jumble and confusion of political bureaucracies and social hierarchies. The latter prophets were also taken as complaining against the inequalities that attended the radical political shift of power distribution. Richard Davidson averred Isaiah and Micah criticized the restructuring of power and the change of principles of trade and leadership (Isaiah 1:17&23; Micah 2:9). The initial system of leaders representing the wellbeing of members of a tribal household from every household in Israelite villages was changed to market economy that was monitored through taxation and indenture administered by federal corporations in the cities. Jeremiah was also perceived as venting the unfaithfulness and prostitution of Israel, the bride of Yahweh (Jeremiah 2 and 3). Ezekiel was presented as describing the harlotry of Israel, the wife of Yahweh (Ezekiel 23). The book of Hosea was explained as dramatizing the steadfast love of a suffering Yahweh for the promiscuous wife called Israel [31].

4. Gender Roles in Yoruba Households and Public Settings

The respect, status and worth of women in Yoruba households are celebrated in songs of praise. For example, the Yoruba women of Nigeria are praised and respected with matri-centric proverbs like "*Iya ni wura iyebiye, ti a ko le fi owo ra*" meaning "A mother is a precious gold beyond measure." There are also proverbial statements like "*Opomulero iya nii se alatileyin omo*" meaning "A mother as a sustaining pillar is a child support" as well as "*Ajogun ba ko ni iyalode, kirakita-ola ni ije a to fi ise-ogun ran*" meaning "Iyalode title (the political head of female welfare and economic success) is not by inheritance, exploit of wealth installs anyone on the position of a conqueror."

From the aforementioned, Onaiwu Ogbomo opines that oral traditions and documents on Pre-colonial Africa from ca. 1000 AD – 1600 AD refer to matriarchy of female rule, where related females dominated some localities or settlements. The oral traditions highlight a consciousness of pantheons of goddesses. They list a tracing of relationships through matriarchs and mother figures. This matriarchal period is known to be associated with agriculture and the pantheons of goddesses that are "concerned with human and soil fertility, the vagaries of the climate, the difficulties of birth, mysteries of death, and relationships between the genders." So, the Yoruba women of the Pre-colonial age were powerful factors possibly equaling males, since chieftaincy in most Yoruba communities was more consensual between females and males than autocratic in those days.

The interest of women was also a major issue, given some representations in the Yoruba political system. The Yoruba women had much independence and equality because of economic dominance of some professions that depended on the appointment of *Iyalode* in Yoruba land as an achievement-based system of leadership. The institution of *Iyalode* during the Pre-colonial era as a political position was saddled with the responsibility of articulating views of Yoruba women in governance. It was a chieftaincy that controlled a council of female chiefs adjudicating on female issues, on the whole gamut of economic policy, and on the administration of markets. The *Iyalode* was expected to be a woman of proven abilities, popularity, and an administrator of vast economic resources. Consequently, participation of women in governance during the Pre-colonial time took advantage of kinship relations, commercial prowess in clothing and textile trade, economic power of agriculture, the political system, class, marital links, effective women organizations, and ritual powers.

The Yoruba women also accumulated capital in gold jewellery used as collateral and inheritance passed on to daughters. Yoruba women were known to close down markets to protest against policies which they did not like in civil administration. Hence, "Yoruba women were probably among the most influential and wealthy, equal and independent in Africa because they concentrated on commerce." In other words, they "had as much independence and equality because of economic dominance." Wealth and economic independence were used as avenues of advancement since they guaranteed increased socio-political status during the Pre-colonial age. Female control of the economic structures and economic autonomy found expression in effective political participation. The exercise of political power and authority was based on the establishment of market guilds under the leadership of the *Iyalode*.

The existence of female organizations for building marketing and trading networks in Yoruba land provided the companionship and protection which certain women employed for female economic, political and religious endeavours. There was also the establishment of cooperative and thrift associations under the market women guilds known as *esusu* in raising business capital for women who could not access resources from their natal backgrounds and for those who were incapacitated by certain marital deprivations.

Therefore, Yoruba women were involved in managing business enterprises, civil defence, and politics. For example, in Ile-Ife, the city regarded as the cradle of the Yoruba, an early warrior queen, named Moremi organized military intelligence and strategy leading men to the war that liberated Ile-Ife from external invasion and aggression of the Igbo regiments during the Pre-colonial age. In another case, Madam Tinubu of Egbaland (born in Owu town) became a business success in salt and tobacco trading in Badagry, Nigeria in 1850s. She acted as a middle woman between native traders and Brazilian traders. Owing to her wealth, she sponsored and participated in several protests against foreign merchants whose monopoly of the trade was denying the local traders their rights. She was expelled from Lagos by Consul Campbell in 1856 and relocated to Abeokuta where she led another nationalist and political agitation. She employed her wealth and political leadership in buying weapons of war which were supplied to Egba native warriors to resist European intrusion into Abeokuta till 1864 when she was made the *Iyalode* of Abeokuta. In another instance, Madam Efunsetan Aniwole (born in Egbaland) became the *Iyalode* of Ibadanland owing to her success as a big-time farmer and trader. As a result of her

economic power, she had 2,000 workers among whom were slaves, war fighters and war lords in her farm and estate. She rose to prominence in Ibadan politics prior to her death in 1874 [32].

In addition, Morolake Omonubi-McDonnell avows that the Pre-colonial era in Yorubaland, Nigeria had a sexual division of labour that assigned even distribution of worth to gender labour. Economic activities like farming, weaving and trading were an all-inclusive teamwork for and by the genders and youngsters. Production was also primarily correlative rather than hierarchical. Women had administrative cabinets that addressed issues of concerns to women, of trade and craft guilds, of preservation of markets and of maintenance of wells and streams. Yoruba women were also recognized in the political climate of the Pre-colonial era for their networking competence, sensitivity and intuition, organizational skills, spiritual prowess and resistance on matters of taxation of trading and the markets. So, the institution of the position of *Iyalode* in Yorubaland was employed in demonstrating the influence of women in economic relations. For example, Madam Jojolola, the powerful woman and *Iyalode* of Abeokuta prior to her death in 1932 “used her position and influence to promote the interests of the traders and cloth dyers (*adire*) of Egbaland.”

Traditional mores of the Pre-colonial era in Yorubaland also encouraged group survival, communal ownership, cooperation, collectivism and sharing which assigned equal value to labour regardless of gender considerations. Female autonomy was given free space to thrive as “both sexes were recognized as having important roles to play.” The division of labour along gender lines which structured economic prowess of women to be complementary to the economic activities of men also facilitated reciprocity of ventures. The reproductive capabilities and roles of Yoruba women as healers were consulted for healing some male specific diseases. However, individualism and accretion were reprieved as differential compensation was never entertained [33].

However, certain complexity of the late 19th century caused a change in paradigm of the Pre-colonial era. There were intertribal wars; displacement and migration of people, slave trade, and exclusive promotion of male leadership with Islamic proselytization. Consequently, there have been male rulers over matrilineal and matrilineal populations where priestesses ministered to pantheons of goddesses exclusively under kings and queen mothers [34]. So, capitalism of colonialism altered the worth of labour of Yoruba women by separating the workplace setting from the family setting. Women were further marginalized in the labour market with the creation of new monetary configurations between the male and female genders. The Yoruba women were indoctrinated into a non-confrontational and subservient feminine way of responding to issues. They were encouraged to defer to their husbands in domestication of roles [35].

Subsequent to the challenges of the late 19th century, Dorcas Akintunde avers that gender theories and paradigms in Yoruba tradition and culture document that women have suffered strong prejudices and discrimination as gender roles stack certain odds against them. One of the prejudices is that the male gender is assumed and expected to be dominant, rough, independent, aggressive, talkative, blunt but not emotional in behaviour. Another prejudice assumes that humility, submissiveness, dependence, quietness, gentleness, tactfulness and being emotional are exclusively presumed to be feminine behaviour. Consequently, the female gender is exclusively socialized to conform to roles like cooking, house care, and child care among many other socially and culturally determined functions of the contemporary time.

In line with the change in the paradigm, Yoruba women cherish the role of being home-makers and the status of being a mother or potential mother. They seek to convince men that they can be productive in the home and outside the home. However, gender inequality against women in Yoruba communities thrives on economic dependency of women on male entrepreneurs. The economic dependency has continued to be a major factor for the social dependency of women on their husbands despite the resilience and dynamic drive of women in economic spheres. In many communities, Yoruba women require the consent of their husbands before they would be granted any loan from financial institutions or banks to create their innate resourcefulness and run trade or establish small or medium scale entrepreneurship. It is high time to create gender balance, gender equity and gender harmony in the relations between Yoruba men and women [36].

According to Oyeronke Olajubu, the contemporary advocacy for gender interdependence and mutuality has continued to yield some gainful results. Yoruba traditions in the contemporary age present a promotion of interdependence between males and females in the Yoruba establishment of fluidity of roles and entrenchment of social hierarchy and seniority. Ancestral identities or pedigrees and occupational mobility of roles between the two sexes that are continually engaging in interrelations are being classified based on principles of communal cohesion and continuity; socio-cultural functions; hierarchical social structuring of the political, economic and religious settings; and cultural adjudication of justice. So, the Yoruba delineate roles that are not rigid but are context bound for gender complementarity, advocacy of seniority and accomplished feats of individuals in the community [37].

4.1. Gender Roles in African Instituted Churches (AICs)

African Instituted Churches (AICs) are scholarly categorized under different terminologies. Harold Turner describes the AICs as “the African Independent Churches” also known as “the Nigerian Aladura movement”. Their “unorthodox features from the viewpoint of missions and the older churches” emerged as a group of Nigerian Christians formed “their own prayer healing group for protection”. The “independent initiative” was a religious response to “the 1918 world-wide influenza epidemic...when neither the white man’s medicine nor his churches were of any help”. They became institutionalized as “prayer healing” groups for “protection against the plague ---- and with some apparent success” grew into numerous movements [38]. David Olayiwola regards them as “the Aladura movement” whose origin is traceable “to the effective and wonder working prayers of some laity” [39]. David reports that the African Instituted Churches are known to always employ Old Testament stories in raising a following and building church members under their charge [40].

According to Lamin Sanneh, one of the “prayer healing” or “effective and wonder working” prayerful movements of the period gathered continually under “Moses Orimolade Tunolashe, who placed great emphasis on faith-healing. In June

1925, Orimolade was called to “the assistance of a fifteen-year old Anglican girl, Christiana Abiodun Akinsowon, who had gone into a prolonged trance after witnessing a procession in Lagos on the festival of Corpus Christi.” The news of her recovery from the trance through the “wonder working prayer” of Orimolade spread quickly to arouse an organisation of “a spiritual society” known as the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) Church. Christiana Abiodun began “employing special prayers and holy water for healing, which she claimed had been shown her during her trance” [41].

Moreover, Akinyele Omoyajowo hints “prayers were said for the inquisitive visitors and the prayer-meetings soon became regularized with Orimolade and Abiodun leading.” Orimolade prevented “the incessant calls” and “the inquisitive visitors” from waning out by getting them to belong to a formal society. He “organized the group into a society which became the nucleus of what is known today as the C&S.” Thus, the history of the emergence of the C&S makes female initiatives in leadership obvious that “Abiodun’s trance led to the founding of a significant movement such as the C&S” [42]. J.D.Y. Peel complements that “Moses Orimolade and his energetic assistant Captain Abiodun sat together in a go-cart under a canopy very similar to that used at Corpus Christi and inscribed with a motto celebrating the power of the Trinity” [43]. In this sense, contemporary female leaders in the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) Churches are models of women initiatives in the development of African Instituted Churches (AICs) [44].

4.2. Gender Struggles among the C&S, Ile-Ife

For this piece, ten female church founders among the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) Churches as African Instituted Churches (AICs) in Ile-Ife, Nigeria employ Old Testament stories in motivating and training church members under their charge. The female C&S church founders comprise Prophetess Taiwo Owojori; Senior Prophetess Durodola (Iya-Ijesa); Most Senior Mother in Israel Durotoye; Senior Reverend Mother and Prophetess Mary Olaniyan; Lady Captain F.A. Adejumo; Reverend Apostle Mother Akinloye Oyekemi; Senior Prophetess Victoria Mojirade Amoloja; Venerable E.O. Adebayo; Reverend Mother and Prophetess Cecilia Adediwura; and Queen Captain Eunice Adeoti.

The ten female church founders among the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) Churches function within Yoruba hierarchical structure of social relationship. The Yoruba system places female children, spinsters and married women under a context of household welfare and social protection. Young men and male elders at Ile-Ife have the traditional roles of watching over and guarding females and children in the various households that make up Ile-Ife.

However, success in production, commercialization and marketing of produce and goods by both genders has created changes in the socio-economic mobility of both men and women at Ile-Ife. A paradox of social structure has thus emerged as the male guardianship and control of households and nuclear families gets enmeshed in a tension between sacrificing personal status and resources in providing care for the females (as wives and daughters in the households) and risking personal status and resources in competing with exceptionally skilful and industrious career females (as colleagues, partners and opponents or rivals in business). The pull and tautness between relating with females as dependants on males for breadwinning and protection, and relating with females as contenders contesting for socio-economic mobility and socially accorded status have continued to pose a challenging milieu for the Old Testament view of women among the C&S. Yet, the female C&S church leaders gradually empower their female church members for economic self-reliance and spiritual maturity amidst this challenging social structure.

The hierarchical Yoruba culture also compels males to be older in age in the process of securing means of livelihood to cater for their wives and children prior to getting married. In this light, the idea of equality without hierarchy interpreted to be in the book of Genesis suffers a setback below the recognition of women as wives, as counterparts and as parallel assistants. Wives are no longer considered economically and socially equal in recognition, position and function to their husbands. Women as daughters and wives are limited by this phenomenon in demonstrating entrepreneurial skills, commercial creativities and economic mobility for leadership. Some wives are lucky to be authorized by their husbands to be salary earners, career women or vocational practitioners. Some wives are made full housewives and are unlucky to be permitted by their husbands to be salary earners, career women, vocational practitioners or petty traders. Yet, the men as husbands determine the number of children that their wives are to produce and the duration of years to spend in child bearing and nursing of babies for them. Male chauvinism has however been humbled with economic recession that confronts most men, turning them into bullies; abusers; stressors and non-resident husbands and fathers, abandoning their dependants having lost their pride which is their occupation.

Wives of some estranged husbands and some divorced women who are mothers of infants have been rallied by the female C&S church founders into care homes built within the premises of their C&S churches. Entrepreneurial training in bead making, embroidery on clothes, hat making, tailoring, soap and detergent making, petty trading and small-scale commercial activities is provided for them to empower them in the church care homes.

The ten female C&S church founders agreed to the following discoveries and challenges in empowering women and assisting female ascendancy into leadership in Ile-Ife:

- That the old testament in its sense of gender equality, interdependence and complementarities supports giving socially accorded high respect and status to female entrepreneurs and religious leaders. This canonical attestation to female ability has assisted female church members in exercising their spiritual gifts to receive revelation and to encounter god through dreams, visions, and trance. The phenomenon of spirit possession has improved the social and leadership recognition that the women enjoy as members of yoruba households and in the celebration of women as people capable of being possessed by the spirit of god for christian ministries.
- That gender interdependence among their members is practicable due to socio-economic mobility that interrelation of roles between males and females enjoy in yoruba land that celebrates age grade and hierarchical social structure. For instance, influential matriarchy is practiced in homes of the members of the c&s churches

who are daughters, wives and mothers with socio-economic mobility. High status is also accorded industrious women as supportive wives to their husbands and supportive mothers to their wards due to their achievements in commercial activities. Their communal corporate services have also reinforced their right to ownership of material properties and employment of human resources.

- That the old testament provides a principle centred basis of moral evaluation of efforts of members of the c&s churches. For instance, impartial justice is practiced during conflict management and in according commendation and approval of personal contributions of every member beyond any gender bias. Compassionate tolerance of both male and female members is also emphasized in their churches that serve as a family and a household for some of their members who need spiritual consecration and social care.
- That the concern of the old testament for permanency of a shared (mutual) sense of communal unity and collectivism has continued to influence social interconnection among residential households of the c&s members and among natal clans of their descent.

However, all the ten female C&S church founders complain of derogatory remarks that the book of Judges and Prophetic literature use for women. The pejorative comments depict Yahweh as the faithful husband and male figure against Israel as the unfaithful wife and female figure. Women are then disparaged as lacking the will power, the entrepreneurial doggedness, and the perseverance to engage in money making business and raising funds to manage their homes or care for their children. Female children as teenage daughters are not given required motivation that could spur them to become educated and economically self-reliant. Ladies are belittled as people destined for house chores and bed-warming of men who could hire them or marry them for the same purposes. The estranged husbands of the women who are accommodated in the care homes of the C&S churches engage in blackmailing the care homes as hostels of prostitution. The female church leaders are falsely called pimps and madams of wayward women by the men who have lost the power to control the women who are catered for in the church care homes. The ex-husbands of the divorced women who attend the entrepreneurial training in the church care homes cite certain passages of the Old Testament castigating women, in resorting to character assassination of the female church founders as kingpins of slothful and whoring women, nicknaming them erroneously as godmothers of child labour where the children of the trainees are kept. So, theological interpretation of the Old Testament about female status among the female founded and led C&S churches poses a hermeneutical threat to respect of females, feminine values and female ascendancy into leadership at Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

5. Conclusion

The article sets out to expose gender struggles and female leadership in the Old Testament and African Instituted Churches (AICs) in Nigeria. In its findings, the concept of bringing honour to the family used in valuing women in ancient Israel and African traditions has led to women being painted with belittling remarks in comparison to men. So, Israelite patriarchal patrimonies place women under landowning context in order to enjoy provisions from and be protected by male household leaders. Women under landless context (widows without levirate ties, concubines, and divorcees) seek and fend provisions by themselves and are not protected by the household family care. Vows made by a household member to offer certain services to anyone or to Yahweh are expected to be made to honour the authority and commands of the male household leader. The emergence of monarchy and a shift of power from patriarchy to state control of resources also create a tough system of hierarchies and bureaucracies (in a pyramid of power distribution) for Israelite women. Female roles are relegated to the private domain with the centralized system of power distribution under male control of the public domain in the cities. The new system introduces a theology of authority of Yahweh as the Israelite household leader and faithful husband. A spiritual matrimony regards the Israelites as Yahweh' wife in a metaphoric marital relationship. But ancient Israel is labeled as the unfaithful and adulterous wife or spouse in the relationship.

In the same view, respect, status and worth of women in Yoruba households witnessed a change of paradigm during the complexity of the late 19th century. Intertribal wars caused displacement and migration of people, slave trade, and exclusive promotion of male leadership. Emergent Islamic proselytization also emphasized male leadership. Consequently, male rulers controlled former matrilineal populations where priestesses ministered to pantheon of goddesses. Gender inequality against women in Yoruba communities began to thrive on economic dependency of women on male entrepreneurs. The Yoruba women were required to obtain consent of their husbands before they were granted any loan from financial institutions or banks to create their innate resourcefulness, run trade, or establish any small or medium scale entrepreneurship. British colonial system multiplied the complicated intertribal war ridden Pre-colonial Yoruba system by separating the workplace setting from the family setting. Yoruba women were further marginalized in the labour market with the creation of new monetary configurations between the male and female genders. Consequently, the Yoruba women were indoctrinated into a theology of non-confrontational but subservient lifestyle as a feminine way of responding to social issues and relationship.

Economic recession confronting most men in contemporary Yorubaland has also turned them into bullies, abusers, stressors, and non-resident husbands and fathers who abandon their dependants having lost their pride which is their businesses and occupations. The estranged husbands of the women who are accommodated in the care homes of the C&S churches engage in blackmailing the care homes as hostels of prostitution. The ex-husbands of the divorced women who attend the entrepreneurial training in the church care homes cite the book of Judges and Prophetic literature in castigating the divorced women as whores and in character assassination of the female church founders as kingpins of slothful women. The religious space is thus exposed to problems of hermeneutical discord posing a threat to the theological interpretation of respect of females, of feminine values, and of female ascendancy into leadership at Ile-Ife, Nigeria. The relationship between the concept of bringing honour to the family used in valuing women and the economic dominance of

kinship and household system further drives this paper to aver that gender independence and equality revolves around the economic dominance of any setting and its system.

6. References

- i. Warren C. Trenchard, "Woman as Adulteress and Prostitute: A Literary Analysis" in *Ben Sira's View of Women*, Brown Judaic Studies, 2020: 101,113-114,116,118-128.
- ii. Michael L. Satlow, "Non-Marital Sex" of "Rabbinic Rhetorics of Sexuality" in *Tasting the Dish*, Brown Judaic Studies, 2020: 126,131-132,137,144-145,156,171,228. See Susan Weingarten, "Food, Sex, and Redemption in Megillat Yehudit (the "Scroll of Judith")" in Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti and Henrike Lähnemann (eds.) *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines*, Open Book Publishers, 2020: 102 & 105.
- iii. Bernadette J. Brooten, "Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues" in *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, Brown Judaic Studies, 2020: 78-79, 81.
- iv. Meir Bar-Ilan, "Prostitutes" in *Some Jewish Women in Antiquity*, Brown Judaic Studies, 2020: 132-133,136,145,154.
- v. Meir Bar-Ilan, "Sorceresses" in *Some Jewish Women in Antiquity*, Brown Judaic Studies, 2020: 116.
- vi. Gatti, N. and Ossom-Batsa, G., *Journeying with the Old Testament*, Oxford: Peter Lang International Academic, 2011:167-180.
- vii. Tull P. K., "Methods of Interpretation" in Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson (eds.), *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005:684; see Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch, *Studying the Old Testament*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007:20.
- viii. Tull P. K., "Methods of Interpretation" in Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson (eds.), *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005:688-689; see Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch, *Studying the Old Testament*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007:21)
- ix. Wilson, R. R. *Sociological Approaches to the Old Testament*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984: vii-viii & 19-20.
- x. Kessler, G.E. *Studying Religion: An Introduction Through Cases*, Third Edition, New York: McGraw-HillHigher Education, 2008:240-241.
- xi. Gatti, N. and Ossom-Batsa, G., *Journeying with the Old Testament*, Oxford: Peter Lang International Academic, 2011:170-171.
- xii. Marten Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter Inc., 2016:685-691.
- xiii. Marsman, H.J. *Women in Ugarit and Israel: their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill nv, 2003:61-344.
- xiv. Stavrakopoulou, F. "Religion at Home: The Materiality of Practice" in Susan Niditch (ed.) *TheWiley Blackwell Companion to Ancient Israel*, First Edition, West Sussex, UK: JohnWiley & Sons Ltd, 2016:347-350.
- xv. Jacobs, L. *Religion and the Individual: A Jewish Perspective*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992:24.
- xvi. Wright, C.J.H. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004:363-367.
- xvii. Davidson, R.M. *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007:226-235 & 192-193.
- xviii. Ulrich Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism: Drawn from Biblical History, Designed for Political Action, 2nd Edition*, Michigan: International Books, 1995:142.
- xix. Davidson, R.M. *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007:15-35.
- xx. Armenteros, V. "YHWH, el Amante: Modelos de Relacion Derivados de la Simbologia Matrimonial Vetero testamentaria" in *Davar Logos* 3, 2004: 139-166.
- xxi. Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers. NIV Application Commentary* 3, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004:321.
- xxii. Satlow, M.L. *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001:234-235.
- xxiii. Wright, C.J.H. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004:335-336.
- xxiv. Coote, R.B. *Elijah and Elisha in Socioliterary Perspective*, Atlanta, Georgia: The Society of Biblical Literature, 1994:3-4.
- xxv. Wright, C.J.H. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004:52-57, 199-200, 293-294, 301-303, 327-348.
- xxvi. Davidson, R.M. *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007:292.
- xxvii. Exum, C.J. "Samson's Women", *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub) Versions of Biblical Narratives in Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series* 163, Sheffield: JSOT, 1993:61-93; see Smith, C. "Samson and Delilah: A Parable of Power?" in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, No. 76, 1997:45-57; Smith, C. "Delilah: A Suitable Case for (Feminist) Treatment in Judges", Athalya Brenner, (ed.), *Feminist Companion to the Bible: Second Series* 4, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999:93-116.
- xxviii. Tribble, P. "Women in the Old Testament" in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume*, Keith Krim (ed.), Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976.
- xxix. Winfred, M. "Berith-Covenant versus Obligation" in *Biblica* 56, 1975, 120-128.
- xxx. Mayes, A.D.H. *Judges*, Old Testament Guides 8, Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1985:90; see Meyers, C. *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988:189-196; see LaCocque, A. *The Feminine Unconventional: Four Subversive Figures in Israel's Tradition, Overtures to Biblical Theology*, Minneapolis:

- Fortress, 1990:4.
- xxxi. Davidson, R.M. *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007:114-117,292.
- xxxii. Ogbomo, O.W. "Women, Power and Society in Pre-colonial Africa" in S. Ademola Ajayi (ed.), *African Culture and Civilization*, Ibadan, Nigeria: Atlantis Books, 2005:354-380.
- xxxiii. Omonubi-McDonnell, M. *Gender Inequality in Nigeria*, Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books Limited, 2003:10-15.
- xxxiv. Ogbomo, O.W. "Women, Power and Society in Pre-colonial Africa" in S. Ademola Ajayi (ed.), *African Culture and Civilization*, Ibadan, Nigeria: Atlantis Books, 2005:380.
- xxxv. Omonubi-McDonnell, M. *Gender Inequality in Nigeria*, Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books Limited, 2003:15.
- xxxvi. Akintunde, D.O. "The Question of Gender in African Culture" in S. Ademola Ajayi (ed.), *African Culture and Civilization*, Ibadan, Nigeria: Atlantis Books, 2005:345-353.
- xxxvii. Olajubu, O. *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2003:21-42.
- xxxviii. Turner Harold, *Religious Innovation in Africa*, Boston, USA: G.K. Hall, 1979:4.
- xxxix. Olayiwola David, "The Aladura: Its Strategies for Mission and Conversion in Yorubaland, Nigeria" in *ORITA: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, 1987:40-41.
- xl. Dada, A.O. "Vestiges of Israelites' Cultic Practices in the Activities of Some Nigerian Indigenous Churches" in Egbe Ife (Ed.), *Papers in honour of Tekena N. Tamuno, Professor Emeritus at 70*, Ibadan: Oputoru Books, 2002:56.
- xli. Sanneh, L. *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact*, New York: Orbis Books, 1992:190.
- xl.ii. Omoyajowo, J.A. *Cherubim and Seraphim: The History of an African Independent Church*, New York: NOK Publishers, 1982:8.
- xl.iii. Peel, J.D.Y. *Aladura: A Religious Movement among the Yoruba*, London: Oxford University Press, 1968:75.
- xl.ii. Omoyajowo, J. A. *Cherubim and Seraphim: The History of an African Independent Church*, New York: NOK Publishers, 1982, xiii-255. See Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact*, New York: Orbis Books, 1992, 190-194. See G.A. Oshitelu, *History of the Aladura (Independent) Churches 1918-1940: an Interpretation*, Ibadan, Nigeria: Hope Publications, 2007, 45-60. See D.I. Ayegboyin and S.A. Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches: an Historical Perspective*, Bukuru, Plateau State: ACTS Bookshop, 2013, 75-84.
- xl.v. Prophetess Taiwo Owojori, Founder and Minister in Charge of Oke-Ayo C&S Church, Onpetu Street, Moore, Ile-Ife, interviewed on 17/04/2011.
- xl.vi. Senior Prophetess Durodola (Iya-Ijesa), Founder and Minister in Charge of The Sacred C&S Church, Fajuyi, Ile-Ife, interviewed on 08/05/2011.
- xl.vii. Most Senior Mother in Israel Durotoye, General Women Leader of Holy Order of C&S Movement, Ayo Ni O, Saw Mill Area, Olasehinde Street, Oluorogbo, Ile-Ife, interviewed on 12/06/2011.
- xl.viii. Senior Reverend Mother and Prophetess Mary Olaniyan, Founder and Minister in Charge of The Kingdom of Light Gospel C&S Church Aladura, Itedo-Jesu, Road 7 lane, Ifewara, Ile-Ife, interviewed on 04/11/2011.
- xl.ix. Lady Captain F.A. Adejumo, Founder and Minister in Charge of Saint Mary C&S Church, Eri-Alayo Worldwide, Odi-Eredumi, Unity Area, Oke-Atan, Ile-Ife, interviewed on 12/05/2013.
- l. Reverend Apostle Mother Akinloye Oyekemi, Founder and Minister in Charge of Oke-Ayo Oluwa-ndabira C&S Church, Akile, along Ife-Osogbo Express Way, Old Ede-Road, Ile-Ife, interviewed on 19/05/2013.
- li. Senior Prophetess Victoria Mojirade Amoloja, Founder and Minister in Charge of Holy Michael C&S Church, Eri-Jesu Towo, Ileri-Oluwa-Se, Otutu, Ile-Ife, interviewed on 26/05/2013.
- lii. Venerable E.O. Adebayo, Founder and Minister in Charge of Salvation Church of Christ C&S, Itedo-Israel, Ile-Ife, interviewed on 26/05/2013.
- liii. Reverend Mother and Prophetess Cecilia Adediwura, Founder and Minister in Charge of New Jordan Ona-Iwa-Mimo C&S Church, Laakaye, Ogbon-Oya, Ehin-Idi, Ile-Ife, interviewed on 23/06/2013.
- liv. Queen Captain Eunice Adeoti, Founder and Minister in Charge of Christ Church C&S Oke-Aanu Ajegunle, Line 5, Igboya, Ile-Ife, interviewed on 09/12/2014.

Appendix

S/N	Interviewees	Ranks & Locations	Dates
1.	Prophetess Taiwo Owojori	Founder and Minister in Charge of Oke-Ayo C&S Church, Onpetu Street, Moore, Ile-Ife	17/04/2011
2.	Senior Prophetess Durodola (Iya-Ijesa)	Founder and Minister in Charge of The Sacred C&S Church, Fajuyi, Ile-Ife	08/05/2011
3.	Most Senior Mother in Israel Durotoye	General Women Leader of Holy Order of C&S Movement, Ayo Ni O, Saw Mill Area, Olasehinde Street, Oluorogbo, Ile-Ife	12/06/2011
4.	Senior Reverend Mother and Prophetess Mary Olaniyan	Founder and Minister in Charge of The Kingdom of Light Gospel C&S Church Aladura, Itedo-Jesu, Road 7 lane, Ifewara, Ile-Ife	04/11/2011
5.	Lady Captain F.A. Adejumo	Founder and Minister in Charge of Saint Mary C&S Church, Eri-Alayo Worldwide, Odi-Eredumi, Unity Area, Oke-Atan, Ile-Ife	12/05/2013
6.	Reverend Apostle Mother Akinloye Oyekemi	Founder and Minister in Charge of Oke-Ayo Oluwa-ndabira C&S Church, Akile, along Ife-Osogbo Express Way, Old Ede-Road, Ile-Ife	19/05/2013
7.	Senior Prophetess Victoria Mojirade Amoloja	Founder and Minister in Charge of Holy Michael C&S Church, Eri-Jesu Towo, Ileri-Oluwa-Se, Otutu, Ile-Ife	26/05/2013
8.	Venerable E.O. Adebayo	Founder and Minister in Charge of Salvation Church of Christ C&S, Itedo-Israel, Ile-Ife	26/05/2013
9.	Reverend Mother and Prophetess Cecilia Adediwura	Founder and Minister in Charge of New Jordan Ona-Iwa-Mimo C&S Church, Laakaye, Ogbon-Oya, Ehin-Idi, Ile-Ife	23/06/2013
10.	Queen Captain Eunice Adeoti	Founder and Minister in Charge of Christ Church C&S Oke-Aanu Ajegunle, Line 5, Igboya, Ile-Ife	09/12/2014

Table 1

Primary Sources: List and Particulars of Interviewees