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Women and the Exclusionary Practices of the Christ Apostolic Church Prayer Mountains in Selected Yoruba Cities of Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract: We argue that Christ Apostolic Church leaders used doctrines and rituals to exclude women from full participation in prayer mountain experience in the Yorùbá cities of southwestern Nigeria. We examine the underlying doctrinal reasons behind this practice. We analyze how ritual performance alters the status of participants on the prayer mountain. Finally, we address the question of any antecedent in the Christ Apostolic Church's doctrine regarding the exclusion of women on the prayer mountain rituals. The field works that form the basis of this study took place between October 2011 and January 2015. We used participant-observation and oral interview methods on selected mountains in Southwestern Nigeria. We conclude that the leadership of Christ Apostolic Church must reexamine their doctrines to eliminate practices that exclude women from full and active participation in religious experience.

Keywords: doctrine; ritual of exclusion; women; Christ Apostolic Church; prayer mountains; Yoruba



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1. Introduction

Ritual has played a significant role in human life from the earliest times and is as universal to human societies as language. It has been rightly observed that “ritual is a primary mode of religious expression, which unites words and gestures to form a sacred performance” (Schmidt 1980, p. 162). Religious organizations, whether primitive or modern, have some conception of ritual and its importance to religious practice, their ways of thinking, and belonging in the world. According to Schmidt, “ritual is one of the principal vehicles that bind people together in a community of shared interest and tradition” (Schmidt 1980, p. 162).

Ritual and ritualized spaces are essential elements in Yorùbá life and spirituality. We recognize the private and public dichotomies of holy rites, wherein private ritual is personal and exclusive and the public is formal and collective. We shall, nevertheless, focus our discussion on the social and collective pattern of ritual, which is dialogical. No doubt, scholarly engagements with mountain religiosity have been recorded in Africa generally and Nigeria in particular. However, there has been little or no in-depth study of the practice of excluding women on the prayer mountain among the Yorùbá of southwestern Nigeria. In this paper, we attempt to fill this void. Our position is that some practices that are dependent on doctrines and ideologies of Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) in Yorubaland of Nigeria are restrictive, exclusive, and limiting for women participants on the prayer mountain.

We are aware that, “in religious groups with strong sense of community, ritual practice even more than belief provides cohesiveness and sets group members apart from others who do not share their customs” (Schmidt 1980, p. 163). We, however, notice during mountain visitations, that women are not allowed to enter certain spaces because of the exclusionary doctrinal and ritual practices of male church authorities. We therefore raise questions about the CAC's practice of restricting women from certain areas on the prayer

mountain where the experience of ritual spaces is to be mutually shared and fully enjoyed by all participants.

Both authors of this paper have separately engaged in field works as participants and observers that spanned more than three years on some selected CAC prayer mountains in Èfòn-Alaàyè, Ìkéré, and Èrìò in Èkítì State and Ilé-Ifè, Ìkírè, Modákéké, and Ede in Òsun State, respectively. Our fieldwork experiences have shown that women were not given free access to approach, and talk less of entering certain “so-called designated sacred” spaces on the prayer mountains thus hindering them from enjoying full benefits of collective prayer mountain experience.

During our field research, we also took time to attend few church services in some CAC assemblies where we noticed similar patterns of behaviours by the CAC leaders who were obviously men using their church doctrines to exclude women from certain ritual spaces like the altar area. We also observe that, on those prayer mountains just like in churches, more women than men were at hand for prayer rituals, a clear demonstration of women’s spirituality and religiosity.

This paper is divided into four sections. In the first section, we discuss briefly the history of CAC. The second section focuses on the mountain as a space for spirituality and why the Yorùbá people and the CAC attach great importance to it. In the third section we critically examine gender and gender roles in the CAC doctrinal and ritual practices. In the fourth section, we focus attention on exclusionary practices affecting women on the CAC prayer mountain. We conclude with some reflections on ritual and its application to social, spiritual, ecological, and psychological spheres of human existence. We shall use initials instead of the fullnames of interviewee throughout because the women and men we interviewed were promised that their real names would not be disclosed when reporting our field research.

2. Christ Apostolic Church (CAC): A Brief Historical Appraisal

The CAC is one of the indigenous African churches founded between 1918 and 1940. The origin of the church could be traced to the founding of a prayer group by Joseph Shadare, a diocesan and a founding member of Our Saviour’s Anglican Church, Ìjèbú-Òde, in 1918 (Ositelu 2007, p. 28). The founding of this prayer group was the result of the 1918 pandemic influenza epidemic, which claimed the lives of as many as 50 million people worldwide according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website.¹ Few people from Our Saviour’s Anglican Church who felt they needed prayers joined the prayer group. Other prominent members that joined the prayer group who later played key roles in the eventual founding of what became CAC were Mr. David O. Odùbánjo and Oba I.B. Akínyelé (the traditional ruler of Ibadan town). A woman, Miss Sophia Odúnlámì (later Mrs. Ajayi), joined them later and became very prominent as a result of many miracles and signs that were wrought by her through the power of the Holy Spirit (Ayeboyin and Ishola 2013, p. 59). She received the revelation that rainwater and fervent prayer was the solution to the influenza pandemic. People who heeded her instruction were said to be healed (Ayeboyin and Ishola 2013, p. 59). In 1920, the name of the prayer group was changed to ‘Precious Stone’ or the ‘Diamond Society.’ This new name of the group was revealed to Joseph Shadare in a vision when he was in a trance (Ositelu 2007, p. 29).

Faith Tabernacle in Philadelphia, USA produced a magazine *The Sword of the Spirit* to which David Odubanjo had subscribed (Parrinder 1976, p. 152). From this magazine he read a fascinating article titled *The Seven Principles of Prayer*, and recommended it to his praying group (Ayeboyin and Ishola 2013, p. 60). According to Ayeboyin and Ishola, the Diamond Society made contact with the Faith Tabernacle in 1923 and applied to be affiliated with the congregation (Ayeboyin and Ishola 2013, p. 60). The application was approved but the affiliation was short-lived because of doctrinal differences. One such doctrine advocated by the Diamond Society in Nigeria insisted on only prayer and faith healing without the use of chemically compounded medicine (Ositelu 2007, p. 32).

The relationship between the group and the Anglican Church soon became strained. This was largely due to the group's belief in divine healing and uncompromising faith in God's all-sufficiency, and their opposition to practices such as, in particular, infant baptism. Ayegboyin and Ishola opined that the praying group believed that due to infant baptism many children were dying, which made Shadare and his praying group seize the opportunity to condemn the practice of infant baptism of the Anglican Church (Ayegboyin and Ishola 2013, p. 60). This accusation leveled against Anglican Church by the members of the praying group led to its being banished from the Anglican Church. The prayer group pulled out from the Anglican Church to form their own new denomination. The name of the denomination was The Faith Tabernacle Church. The group held its first service as a church in 1922 (Ayegboyin and Ishola 2013, p. 60).

Available scholarly writings (Oshun 1983, pp. 105–14; Oshun 1986, pp. 195–218; Ayegboyin and Ishola 2013; Olayiwola 1995, pp. 138–49) on the history of CAC agree that the event that led to the formation of the church was the great revival of 1930 at Òkè Oòyè, Ilésà. The revival was held by a young man named Joseph Ayo Babalola. The revival recorded manifestations of healings, miracles, signs and wonders, and deliverances of the people from Satanic and occult bondages, reminiscent of the similar occurrences in the Bible. Òkè Oòyè revival began with the raising to life of a boy who had been dead for four days (Olayiwola 1987, p. 142). As a result of the need to get members well-established in faith by settling them in a well-organized denomination, the Faith Tabernacle in Nigeria reached out through Mr. D. O. Odùbánjo to the Apostolic Church in Bradford, England for cooperation. Thus, on 23 September 1931, three English missionaries, namely Pastors D. P. Williams, W. J. Williams, and A. Turnbull,² visited the group in Nigeria.

The visiting missionaries later ordained the first set of pastors of the Church (who had earlier been ordained by proxy by Pastor A. Clark in America). The new pastors included J. B. Sádáre, D. O. Odùbánjo and I. B. Akínyelé, who later became the King of Ibadan. Contrary to expectations, the partnership between the Apostolic Brothers and the Faith Tabernacle suddenly terminated. This was a result of a sharp disagreement in 1940 between the two groups over the practice of the doctrine of divine healing, particularly in relation to the use of medicine. The Nigerian group, led by Pastor D. O. Odùbánjo and Pastor (Oba) I. B. Akínyelé, were opposed to the use of medicine, while the pro-European group, led by Pastor S. G. Adégbóyèga, saw nothing wrong with it. Eventually, the leaders of the Church decided to chart their own course. According to John Peel, by 1968, the CAC denomination had a population of over one hundred thousand people (Peel 1968). The church has since then spread to other parts of the globe.

Part of the doctrine of the CAC is that “As a Pentecostal denomination, the Church, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is administered by the orders of Apostle, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and teachers. Ultimate power rest with the Authority of the Church; but it involves elders/deacons, women leaders (deaconesses) and leaders of recognized organizations as found appropriate in the process of administration (Eph. 4:11–13)”.³ Ironically, inclusion of women leaders in the hierarchy of the church doesn't preclude their exclusion from prayer mountain rituals.

3. Mountain Spirituality among the Yorùbá

The centrality and significance of mountains in African traditional thought, which make them a major subject of African religions and experience, has been identified (Gbadesin 2019, p. 137). For the Yoruba, mountains are very significant for their cultural, ecological, sacred and most importantly, ritual properties. This is because many Yorùbá cities and villages are surrounded by mountains and hills. But indigenous Yorùbá people never saw mountains and hills as mere natural or geographical space for flora and fauna; they are also held to have spiritual and religious uses. Mountains and hills are believed to be inhabited by spirits. According to Awólàlú, “solid elevated rocks and highlands are regarded as the abode of some spirits” (Awólàlú 2001, p. 45). This attitude is not peculiar to the Yorùbá cultural or religious imagination alone; cross-culturally, people have the same

attitude to the natural world. In the introductory section to their edited book, Bamhill and Gottlieb observe that “awe, reverence, love, and affection (along with fear, frustration, and grudging respect) have long marked human beings’ attitude toward the natural world. In recent years the ethical and religious attitude of valuing nature for its own sake and seeing it as divine or spiritually vital has been called “deep ecology” (Bamhill and Gottlieb 2001).

Mountain spirituality plays an influential role in the religious imagination and experience of the Yorùbá people. Therefore, contrary to Emile Durkheim’s dichotomy between the sacred and profane spaces⁴, the Yorùbá regard many unique locations as the abode of the spirits; hence, they are deemed sacred. Yorùbá people have developed a rich spiritual tradition based on an intimate and close relationship with nature (Abimbólá 2006, p. 195; Awólàlú 2001, p. 45). Olúpònà claims that indigenous religious worshippers of Ògún, Sàngó, Òsun, Obàtálá, and others often believe that myriad spirits, which are said to populate the world of the Yorùbá, are associated with hills, mountains, rivers, rocks, caves, trees, brooks, and thick forests (Olupona 2006, p. 267). Those mountains are held in awe and are often placated because they are believed to offer them protection from various dangers.⁵

4. Christ Apostolic Church’s Conception of Mountain

To CAC members, the practice of visiting sacred mountains is a religious experience, which could be contemplative or mystical. The mystical dimension follows Rudolf Otto’s *Mysterium Tremendum et fascinans* (The transcendent appears as a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*—that is, a mystery before which humanity both trembles and is fascinated, is both repelled and attracted. Thus, God can appear both as wrathful and awe-inspiring, on the one hand, and as gracious and lovable, on the other) (Otto 1958, pp. 12–40). The Aladura churches, especially the CAC and the Cherubim and Seraphim church (C&S), have developed a preference for the use of what they term *Ilè Mímó* (Sacred grounds) or *Orí Òkè Mímó* (sacred mountains tops). They also believe that visiting these mountains produces confidence, calm and less distraction because of their serene nature (Adeyemi-Adejolu 2015, p. 44). The mountains they visit for prayer are sacred not only because of their geographical uniqueness, which makes them suitable for spiritual activities, but also because it was believed that Joseph Ayò Babalolá, a revivalist possessing charismatic and spiritual qualities was directed by God to some of these mountains, especially in Èkìtì, where he encountered the divine being (Adeyemi-Adejolu 2015, p. 46). According to the legend, Babalolá prayed at different locations on the mountains and experienced divine touch. The unique experience he had led to the creation of sacred spaces on the mountains (For more details see Alokun 2010, p. 325). Following Babalolá’s experience, CAC leaders and followers made mountain prayers a church ritual.

There is a close connection between the Yorùbá worldview and the CAC in the treatment of certain mountains as sacred places imbued with the power of God. Hence, the CAC holds prayer meetings on rocky or hilly terrain and mountain tops popularly referred to as *Orí-Òkè Àdúrà* (Prayer Mountain) (Adeyemi-Adejolu 2015, p. 48). It is thought that such places are not only serene, but also symbolic of similar prayer locations described in the Scripture. The mountains are recognized as the meeting points between God and his servants. These places are far from the hustle and bustle of cities and urban settlements. This regard for hilly and mountainous areas as sacred prayer grounds is probably the reason for CAC leaders using appellations to describe their various churches, such as *Òkè Ìgbàlà* (Mount of Salvation), *Òkè Ayò* (Mount of Joy) and so on, even when the churches so named are not located on mountain tops.

In CAC parlance, the word ‘mountain’ may metaphorically denote a problem (*Òkè Ìsòro*). For example, a mountain in front (*Òkè Níwájú*) connotes problems or challenges while a mountain at one’s back (*Òkè léhìn*) connotes divine support or backing. Thus, expressions like *Olórun, Òkè léhìn Onígbàgbó* (God, the supporter of Believers), *Òkè Ìsòro Níwájú mi* (Mountain of problem in front of me) are common among the CAC members. Members believe that the arduous task of climbing the physical prayer mountains is enough

to remove the spiritual challenges (i.e., *Òkè Ìsòro Níwájú*). *Òkè* could also mean “up”. So people talk of *Òkè Gíga* (High Mountain). Yorùbá also name some people *Òkè* either because those people were asked from and given by the spirit of the mountain or were born on or beside the mountain.

No doubt, CAC’s conception of mountain as a meeting point of God and his servants has its basis in the Bible. CAC members often refer to some verses in the Bible to justify the practice of visiting Prayer Mountains. Bible verses that make reference to praying on the mountains include 1 Kings 18: 20–42, Psalm 68:6, 2 Samuel 15:32, Matthew 17:1–13 and others, where Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, visited mountain for prayers of intercession or periodical meditation. As an indigenous church, CAC might have also been influenced by the Yorùbá traditional worldview. In Yorùbáland, the belief in spirits, gods and goddesses and the importance of acquiring spiritual power through them were key components of their traditional belief systems. They incorporated as a key aspect of their ethos, the practice of seeking power from the spirit beings by undertaking quests to areas within their landscapes believed to be strong in power or believed to be abodes of the spirit beings, among which are mountains, rivers, wilderness and thick forests. Indigenous Yorùbá believe that with the powers of the spirit beings, one could influence people and things and events either positively or negatively. This is also an influence on CAC.

While Evangelical Christians may have discouraged a number of people who still seek spiritual power from indigenous traditional sacred shrines, the practice of visiting prayer mountains may be a proof that people’s orientations have not significantly detached their spiritual connection from their traditional spiritual landscapes. What does this mean? Indigenous people are well-connected to the ecological landscapes that constitute sacred spaces. Thus, mountains, especially the ones believed to have been consecrated by Babalolá, are held sacred by CAC members. They strongly believe in the efficacy of prayers and fasting conducted on these mountains. They believe that the mountain top is where one could fellowship with God with less distraction to receive power and divinely renew one’s strength.

Moreover, CAC members believe that climbing or ascending the mountains, the participation in the ritual obligations and the religious practices of the mountains, and visiting the sacred spaces which are associated with religiously significant events that occurred during the lifetime of Ayòdélé Babalolá on the mountains, could bring the re-occurrence of the past, no matter how far back it might have happened. This has been convincingly argued by scholars such as Eliade. For example, ritual has been said to be repetitive; it is considered as an action that is definite, structured, and repeatable rather than spontaneous and unique. The repetitive character of ritual is necessary because gestures communicate best when they are familiar, and because rites are linked to the past (Schmidt 1980, p. 156). Mircea Eliade puts it thus: “Every ritual has a divine model, an archetype. The past time of ritual serves as a model for authentic human existence” (Eliade 1959, p. 21). This way of linking ritual to the past is a good reason why CAC adherents often make reference to *Olórun Májèmú Orí Òkè* (God who has made covenant with his servant on the mountain). Reference is also made in prayers to *Olórun Ayò Babalolá* (God of Ayò Babalolá) who revealed himself to Babalolá on the mountains when he visited the places (Adeyemi-Adejolu 2015, p. 156).

For CAC members, visiting the sacred spaces which are associated with religiously significant events leads to a personal spiritual change. They believe that taking one’s problem(s) to the mountain would aid in receiving a quick answer to prayers or one’s attitude to prayers may likely change dramatically.⁶ Apart from visiting different locations on the mountains which are considered sacred, there is a belief that other religious practices and rituals could make adherents and visitors feel spiritually fulfilled. Climbing the mountains and visiting the sacred spaces can be regarded as what Arnold van Gennep called religious rites of passage (van Gennep 1960) for each member of CAC who participates in Prayer Mountain. By climbing the mountains, it means leaving behind one’s camp, what Gennep calls separation; one journeys to the mountains, which Gennep calls transition,

through which situations and all problems are brought to a place where they could be solved while seeking communion with God. This is an interstitial space, which Victor Turner calls liminal space, a space in between (Turner 1974). When one has concluded the prayer with or without fasting on the mountain, one comes back home to join family and relatives, which Gennep calls incorporation.

Ascending sacred mountains for days or weeks has also been identified as one of the factors that could lead to conversion and a form of religious experience used by Aladura churches, especially the CAC, to complement the power of and authority of prayer. For instance, Oláyiwolá in his submission identified several factors that aided the “Aladura churches” in their mission and conversion methods to include power and authority of prayer, (*ágbára àti àse Adúrà*). He describes the general atmosphere on the mountain as that which gives psychological relief to the worried souls. The prophets and apostles according to him are regarded as people endowed with great power and authority who could pray over water and oil brought to the mountain by visitors to make them efficacious (Olayiwola 1987). For him, pilgrimage to sacred mountains is recognized as one of the most effective strategies that have been used over the years to get converts by the Aladura churches. The CAC has become so obsessed with this practice that one has the impression that members have concluded that sacred mountains are the only sites where God could answer prayers. As a good example of this, one of the CAC pastors who is also a professor of music⁷ has a program that he holds on a mountain at Èrìò-Èkìtì every month. Even though he founded a church, which he presides over in the city of Ile-Ife, these prayer mountain programs could be said to yield better attendance results than those that are held at his church in the city.

5. Problems Connected with Ritual

As said earlier, ritual, especially religious ritual, has played an important role in the life of religious people across the world. Ritual is a part of the way a particular religious group organizes itself and orients itself to the people outside its group. Religious ritual helps to direct an individual to an ultimate value, which is primary, absolute, and unconditioned, in contrast to values that are secondary, relative, and instrumental. Through religious ritual, “sacred things are treated reverently, even fearfully, for they are the loci through which divine power is mediated” (Schmidt 1980, p. 73). Muslims all over the world are instructed through the Holy Qur’an to perform a ritual of pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime, if they can afford it. Religious people never doubt the efficacy of ritual if it is performed in the name of a particular deity whom they hold dear.

But the problem connected with ritual is that religious authority could use it to manipulate, exclude, restrict, oppress, marginalize, ostracize, inflict pain, and limit certain groups of people within their religious organization. What is usually the case is that those that function as religious authority are often men who always act on behalf of women and children. For example, a woman whose initials are C. A., (aged 48) who was interviewed in 14 July 2014 at Mountain of Mercy at Erio, Ekiti, blamed women’s inferior position on Apostle Ayo Babalola, “Babalolá kò fi ààyè púpò gba obìnrin nínú isé iránsé rẹ̀” (Babalola did not encourage much participation of women in his ministry). Perhaps this is because the image of God as a male figure which is well represented in many religions has continued to condition how religious leaders are viewed and projected. Sex is an important social component affecting both religious doctrines and ritual practices. In patriarchal societies, a majority of women generally occupy positions of inferior status and power. Their roles are restricted, and their legal rights are limited.

According to Schmidt, in patriarchal societies, “women are usually precluded from performing sacred rites and denied leadership position” (Schmidt 1980, p. 168). There is no doubt that in some Yorùbá traditional religions, women are as active as men in the performance of rituals at certain cults, such as Òsun, Yemoja, Sàngó, Oya, and Òrìsà-nlá, whereas in some others such as Orò, Agemo, and especially Egúngún, which originally belonged to women before they were tricked (Olájugbù 2003, p. 68), they are excluded. The reason often given why women are excluded from those cults is that women, because of

their biological nature, are regarded as unclean and, hence, constitute a danger to the sacred spaces due to their monthly menstrual flows, as we soon see in Crumbley's experience below.

It may be an unspoken word; could it be that the leadership of CAC is still being influenced by the indigenous patriarchal Yorùbá culture within which the church was founded? Otherwise, what could have been responsible for excluding women from certain spaces if not for the same fear that women, as a result of their biological nature, could pollute those sacred spaces? For example, Mrs. A. E. (aged 38), who was already playing the role of an Assistant Pastor in one of the parishes of Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) before she got married to a CAC Pastor, told one of the authors of this paper on 12 December 2012 that she could never imagine that she would not be allowed to sit at the altar area in the church her husband is pastoring. Worse still, she stated further, "I could not even enter into a sacred space at the prayer mountain. I found it difficult to adjust initially, but I have no choice other than to abide with the rules and regulations guiding my husband's denomination".

Other scholars have carefully noted that even in the so-called progressive Pentecostal movements in Nigeria:

The relief that women derive from church attendance is described as temporal and does not lead in the long-term to higher social status. Most Pentecostal groups read the Bible literally and use it to reinforce male dominance; the roles that women play are carefully selected to reflect the traditional gender roles of mothering and nurturing. (Pereira and Ibrahim 2010, pp. 921–37)

Sundkler and Steed have observed the ambivalent role the church has played in being a catalyst for women's liberation and her complicity in their subordination. The church, they note, had opened up new opportunities for women through education for girls and through roles of leadership. On the other hand "there operated in and through the churches, discriminating practices upheld by divine authority" (Mwaura 2007, p. 412). As a good example of this, Pastor S.O. (aged 55), the pastor-in-charge of Mountain of Miracle Ido-Ile, Ekiti, was interviewed by one of the authors on 15 September 2014. He was asked why women were prevented from entering the so-called sacred spaces on the mountain. The pastor replied that that was the laid-down rules and regulations they received from the authority at the top.

Empirical evidence abounded during our fieldworks. Approaching the majority of mountains already annexed for spiritual purposes by the CAC, there were usually big boards with a long list of accepted and prohibited practices written on them. One of the rules that easily catches attention is that women are not permitted to approach consecrated areas on the mountain. Women are also not permitted to fetch water by themselves at the consecrated river beneath the mountain; they can only be helped to get water by teenage boys already assigned for the purpose. One experience shows this clearly. A woman whose initials are M.K. (aged 45), who came as a visitor to Mountain Oke-Ayo in Efon Alaaye, told one of the authors on 27 August 2014 that she could not imagine how women were being treated on that mountain. She said that she could not fetch water that she was going to use by herself and that she also had to pay for it.

Any woman who comes with her husband is not permitted to sleep together with him at night during rest time. A good example is what happened at Baba Abiye's Mountain in Ede, Osun State. A woman with the initials O. A. (aged 35) told one of the authors of this paper on 23 March 2012 that she argued with the mountain authority about why she should not sleep by the side of her husband with whom she came to the mountain. She said she was told that that is the mountain policy in Baba Abiye, Ede. All those rules, we contend, are meant to keep women from having or enjoying a full spiritual experience they purposely go to the prayer mountains for. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why "the more politically active and ideologically minded condemned as coercive and repressive those rituals that reinforced traditional values" (Schmidt 1980, p. 168).

On the contrary, however, a woman whose initials are O. A. (aged 56) was interviewed on 22 March 2013 on mountain Alakowe in Ile-Ife about whether women were being marginalized by being prevented to enter sacred spaces on the mountain or not. She replied that she did not see any marginalization since that is what the doctrine of the church says based on the interpretation of the Bible by the authority of the church. For this woman, what one of the authors of this paper is doing is wrong; it is like undermining the authority of the CAC mission.

This last response of Mrs. O.A. shows how church doctrine or certain traditional practices can become problematic and could be interpreted in either a positive or negative way depending on who is interpreting it. Are we then saying that ritual is no longer necessary because of this attitude of CAC leaders (men) towards women? No, ritual is efficacious and should be encouraged as long as it does not serve to repress, alienate and exclude certain categories of people from collective religious experience, but serves to unite and encourage the equal participation of all genders.

We should also report what may be a silver lining to this. As in the case of Mrs. O.A. reported above, two of our interviewees shared good experiences with their prayer mountains in the sense that they got their prayers answered despite the exclusionary practices that are the focus of this study.

For example, a woman whose initials are D. A. (aged 46) was interviewed at mountain Alakowe in 12 November 2011. According to her, anytime she visited the mountain, all her prayer concerns were often answered faster than when she prayed at home. Another woman who said she was an evangelist (Evangelist I. O. aged 52), was also interviewed in 12 November 2011. She claimed that all women she normally invited to mountain Alakowe in Ile-Ife got their deliverance from every form of spiritual attacks and always testified to the goodness of the Lord.

These two testimonies are relevant because the women concerned were satisfied with their prayer (religious) experience. Nonetheless, our point is that the power of ritual that creates the structural arrangement of men's space versus women's space contradicts the anti-structural, which Turner calls the 'communitas' that ought to make all participants look and feel exactly the same while performing a pilgrimage ritual.

6. Women's Roles in the CAC

Women in the CAC, just like any Christian organization, are greater in number than men, and they play active roles as choristers, members of prayer bands, cleaners in the church, ushers, praise worship leaders, and so on, but not as pastors or elders. From our research, it appears that E.O. Babalolá overrated the roles of women in CAC as pastors, founders and heads of parishes as far back as the early 1990s (Babalola 1992) when he wrote. At that time, only one woman in the CAC was a founder but she was not recognized as a pastor. If Babalolá had said this with respect to other African Indigenous Churches such as Cherubim and Seraphim and the Celestial Church of Christ, it would make sense. Latter scholars such as Oyèrónké Olájùgbù (Olájùgbù 2003, p. 57) and Bólájí Bátéye (Bateye 2008, pp. 113–25) have argued correctly that Christian religious women have been taking their rightful positions by establishing or founding churches. Olájùgbù shows that in quite a number of African Independent Churches (AICs), such as in Cherubim and the Seraphim Church and Celestial Church of Christ, women have been playing significant spiritual roles such as Mother Superintendent, Mother in Israel, and Mother in Jerusalem, prophetess rather than play the second fiddle in established male-dominated churches. She, however, goes further by dividing CAC into mainline and the second wave CAC as type 2 or CAC2. In her argument, CAC2 seems to be progressive in the way the church is being organized, whereas mainline CAC has not been allowing women to function effectively in liturgical and ritual practices within the church.

Olájùgbù notes that "within the mainline CAC, women's roles are subordinate and secondary to those of men. Biblical injunctions are regularly cited in sermons to support this situation, including Genesis 3:16, I Corinthians 14:34–35; and I Timothy 2:12. Women

in these churches are excluded from leadership roles and the space of authority” (Olájùgbù 2003, p. 57). This same experience is noted in Deidre Helen Crumbley’s research work among the Aladura group of churches in the Yorùbá society. She opens her article by showing how the Aladura churches in Yorùbá society have continued to view women:

What is there about being female that elicits behavioural monitoring through religious ritual? More specifically, what part does menstrual flow play in ritualized management strategies and why do they vary from religious group to another? These queries began to haunt me while studying the Aladura movement in Nigeria, where, depending on the denomination, *women were prohibited from certain activities and spaces* both during and between their menses. As a woman, participating in the services of three Aladura denominations and being subject to these rituals, it was impossible to avoid issues of gender, rank and inequality, (emphasis our own not in the original). (Crumbley 1992, p. 505)

Crumbley saw a sharp contrast in the way gender roles were played out during her ethnographic field research that took her to Church of the Lord, Aladura in Ogere in Ogun state, Celestial Church of Christ, and Christ Apostolic Church. What she focused her research on was the issue of impurity, that is, women’s monthly menstrual flow, which was being used in some of these churches to exclude women from religious rituals and liturgical practices. This shows that the sexuality of women is being viewed differently than that of the men due to their biological make up.

Crumbley equally observed that CAC’s organization combines two principles: ‘Presbyterian’ government by local elders and their pastor, and ‘Episcopalian’ government under the rule of a bishop and his hierarchically organised assistants. She also noticed that the categories of Church workers in Christ Apostolic are two: ‘professionals’ and ‘non-professionals’. Professionals include pastors, prophets, prophetesses, evangelists and catechists, all of whom are ordained, except the prophetesses. Non-professionals include the sexton, elders, midwives, *Ìyá Àdúrà* (‘mother of prayer’), ward maids, organist, gardener, watchmen, cleaners, secretaries and clerks. Women are not ordained in Christ Apostolic either; however, they can be, and are, pioneers of new assemblies, and some are renowned missionaries (Crumbley 1992, p. 512). To buttress her point, she cited the example of a woman named Mrs. Adélékè, who had a very respected and successful ministry in Lagos, which includes television broadcasting. It is her husband, however, ordained after her ministry began to flourish, who is the president of the ministry (Crumbley 1992, p. 512).

Available literature and CAC’s constitution do not specifically show that women are not to enter certain areas designated as Sacred spaces or altars. This exclusionary practice however, clearly demonstrate that. One of the authors of this paper’s personal experience as a woman has shown that during a visitation to a church that is expected to be regarded as an elitist CAC, an element of the exclusion of women still persisted in this church. Even though women were ordained as deaconesses, they could function only as far as the church pastor permits. In many CAC in Ilé-Ifè, Modákéké, Ede, and Ìkìrè in Osun state and in Ado-Ekiti, Ikere, Erio, and Efon-Alaaye in Èkìtì state, women were prevented from approaching both local churches’ designated altars and sacred spaces on the mountain. A woman whose initials are M.O (aged 54), a deaconess in one of the CAC in Ado-Ekiti, who was interviewed on 24 July 2014 on Mountain of Mercy, Erio Ekiti, lamented that despite her being a deaconess she was not permitted to enter the altar area in her local church and sacred spaces on the mountain. If at the local church levels women were being restricted to function rituals effectively, one would expect that such a restriction would be extended by the church authority charged with formulating doctrines for the church at large to the mountain rituals as well. Crumbley’s experience in a CAC church reveals this clearly:

... Your eyes drift to where the deacons sit together in the front and to the side of the chancel where the pastors and guests seated. Of course, no women sit in the chancel area. ‘It’s just After about half an hour of opening songs and prayers, Sister pastor’s wife, stands at the front of the church near the altar announcements

regarding the meetings of the various Egbé or Church Associations, including your own Egbe Obirin Rere (Good Women Society). (Crumbley 1992, p. 508)

Even a pastor's wife could neither sit nor enter into the altar area, but just near it. This, of course, is a common feature at the few churches (CAC) the authors of this paper also visited. As an example of this, Mrs. Odejobi, the wife of the current General Superintendent of CAC worldwide, was at a burial service of a CAC pastor in Ile-Ife on 23 December 2021. In spite of the fact that she was publicly recognized as "our mother" and the wife of the General Superintendent, she was not allowed to sit on the altar place but rather had to sit among the congregation; a place a little farther from the altar where the wife of the deceased pastor also sat.⁸

Although the article written by George O. Folarin and Stephen O. Afolabi on public speaking focused on Christ Apostolic Women in dialogue with I Corinthians 14:34–36, an element of male biases in looking at women's roles within the CAC was clearly shown (Folarin and Afolabi 2012). Both authors tried as much as possible to defend the church liturgy and used only a few examples of women who are functioning at the periphery in the church to prove that CAC has neither marginalized the roles of women nor ritually excluded them. Interestingly, they argued that as far as calling into the ministry is concerned, women also could be called into the ministry because classical Pentecostal theology, to which the CAC subscribes, advocates the divine calling of both men and women into the ministry. Unfortunately, there is no empirical evidence to show this. They showed how Margaret Bola Odeleke and Dorcas Siyanbola Olaniyi illustrated this. With respect to Margaret Bola Odeleke, for instance, they argue that:

Margaret Bola Odeleke who later pulled out of the Christ Apostolic Church to found Power Pentecostal Church *claimed* to receive a divine calling in 1974 (History of Bishop Bolanle Odeleke n.d.) whilst Dorcas Siyanbola Olaniyi who also left the Christ Apostolic Church to start Agbala Daniel Church *claimed* to receive divine call into the ministry in 1979 (italics our emphasis). (Folarin and Afolabi 2012)

We wonder if people that left the CAC for other churches or to found their own ministries were men, the word "claimed" would still be retained, as we only suspect that the word "claimed" that they used is representative of male chauvinism, a kind of contention against a woman's sexuality. Again, what they failed to substantiate in their article is that the two women they cited as examples were not ordained in the CAC, but were ordained by ministers other than CAC ministers. Besides, they used Fatokun (Fatokun 2006, p. 7, who happens to be a male scholar) to disagree with Dorcas Akintunde, by contending that:

Akintunde (Akintunde 2001, p. 98) most likely misinterpreted the cause of the split of these women from the Christ Apostolic Church to be the failure of the denomination to ordain them because some other assemblies and ministries led by men also split and left the denomination around the same time, whilst some others led by men and women remained with the denomination. (Folarin and Afolabi 2012)

Interestingly, Folarin and Afolabi could not go further than that but said that "This is not the forum to investigate that issue". Immediately after that, they cited an example of one woman that began her ministry and concluded it within the CAC to be Joana Omolola Ogunranti (1924–2007) who planted the first CAC Bethel in the University of Ibadan in 1966. This may be true, but what has happened to the women in CAC Bethel as far as ascending the leadership ladder after the woman founder had died was never discussed. We contend that their argument needs more current evidence of female leadership in CAC Bethel. And if there was women leadership at all, what proportion of women leaders could be compared to that of men in CAC Bethel today? And which "some other assemblies and ministries led by men" were the authors referring to? That section in their story looks ambiguous. We doubt that CAC is their point of reference.

Furthermore, we must pay attention to the stories of both Bishop Margaret Bolanle Odeleke and Dorcas Siyanbola Olaniyi. The problem involved in men speaking for women is that it sidelines women's own side of the stories that intimately concern them. As we have mentioned earlier, Crumbley showed in her book that Joanah Omolola Ogunranti, despite being the founder of CAC Bethel, was never ordained by the Supreme Council of CAC (Crumbley 2010, p. 106). And it is clear from Crumbley's contention that practices in AICs (CAC inclusive) include the prohibition of the ordination of women, the expectation that women avoid holy objects and sites during menstruation, and the congregational seating arrangements that construct asymmetrical relations of power. Crumbley was of the opinion that:

Were CAC women ordained, as are men, they could effect change directly on policy-making committees. As ordination is a criterion for sitting on virtually all CAC governing bodies above the local assembly level, the prohibition against female ordination *excludes* (our emphasis) CAC women not only from the pulpit but also from the executive level of regional, national, and international governance.

One question about the polity of the CAC that still begs for an answer is why a church, founded through the joint efforts of men and women (especially Miss Sophia Odúnlámi, who was prominent because of the signs and wonders wrought through her), should continue to exclude women from ordination and certain ritual practices? We are, however, not necessarily dismissing Folarin's and Afolabi's argument, which intentionally focused on women speaking publicly in CAC. They have, however, shown in their paper that the CAC Seminary in Opa, Ile-Ife is reviewing its policy to accommodate women as teachers. (Folarin and Afolabi 2012)

7. Christian Doctrines, Gender and Ritual

In many Christian churches in Nigeria, certain passages of the Bible are being used by the male leaders of those churches to relegate women to subordinate roles. At best, those churches only allow women to be ushers, members of the choir, cleaners, or lay readers, etc. In those churches, women are not permitted to lead as pastors, apostles, reverends, bishops or evangelists because of their leaders' understanding of the reading of the Bible. Where this happens, certain portions of Pauline writings are being used as church doctrine to justify this act of subordinating women by those church leaders. For example, the leaders often refer to 1 Timothy 2:12, which says, "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent," written by Apostle Paul to teach women in the Early Church to play subordinate roles.

Another text often cited as evidence that women should not be in leadership positions in churches is 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, "Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church". One of the respected Pastors of the CAC in Ekiti State once said that 1 Cor. 14:34–35 is the guiding biblical text on which the CAC doctrine is based, with respect to women's roles in the church of God.⁹

Some biblical scholars, however, have argued that instead of taking the above cited two pieces of scripture at their face value, they should be understood in the context of their historical contexts. For example, New Testament scholar Ben Witherington III argues that the passages in 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians quoted above were intended to correct particular problems in the specific churches they were addressed to, and should not be regarded as a ban on women speaking in churches for all time (see Witherington 1988, p. 183). Philip J. Abbott uses divergent arguments to show that either the controversial texts were being inserted by Pauline interpreters in the second and third centuries, or that Paul was the original writer but addressing particular problems in their various historical/cultural contexts (Abbott 2015). Rosemary R. Ruether even contends that:

Exegetical criticism of received theological and Scriptural traditions can bring forth new interpretations that speak to new experiences She thinks "a more

radical break takes place when the institutional structures that transmit tradition are perceived to have become corrupt. They are perceived not as teaching truth but as teaching falsehood dictated by their own self-interest and will to power. (Ruether 1993, p. 16)

As carefully noted by Ruether, religious rituals have often been used in negative ways. The custodians of religious rituals do this by ensuring that received tradition remains unchanged. Ritual, however, has been found to be dynamic, and not static, as the holder of the received tradition would want people to believe. Gender has always played a very key role in the ways ritual is conceived from the medieval period to the twenty-first century; it is not a recent phenomenon. In spite of the contradictions that characterized Christian doctrines and practices such as marginalizing women, both men and women have been found to play crucial roles in the formation of Christianity. Unfortunately, as Linda Woodhead observes, there is, “The tendency to render male practice normative in understandings of what counts as religious is evident in deep sociological assumptions about what counts as sacred, as ritual, as scripture, as belief, as religious practice, as a religious professional, a religious organisation, and so on” (Woodhead 2012, pp. 33–54).

In most cases, monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam are fond of making women feel inferior in ritual ordering in their polities. In Christianity in particular, certain denominations, and here one can talk about the CAC, have been found to be guilty of this practice of consigning the role of women to the periphery as far as their liturgy, doctrine and ritual practice are concerned. Woodhead has shed light on this:

Thus, for example, within a single Christian congregation or denomination the religious activities of some members may ‘consolidate’ the existing gender order (those who do not question the ‘sanctified’ version of masculine domination which is presented in official church teachings, institutional arrangements and liturgical practice, for example.)” (Woodhead 2012, p. v)

Perhaps the reason why the members of the CAC have permitted the current conditions is because they have both internalized and continued to externalize the existing gender order.

8. Conclusions

In this paper, we have shown that ritual plays a significant role in the doctrines and liturgies of the CAC. We have argued that some doctrinal practices of CAC prayer mountains excluded women. We contend that women in the CAC, just like any Christian organization, are greater in number than men and could play active leadership roles similar to the men in their various churches. They are not allowed to have the full benefits of participating in their organizations because of the restrictions the church placed on them. We insist that Yorùbá culture has continued to have a strong influence in the way the CAC organizes its religious organization. We propose that the CAC leadership needs to change certain doctrines to accommodate the full participation of women in the church.

To this end, we offer the following suggestions: First, formal changes in law, organization and processes are necessary foundations for women to have decision-making power. They are often the most visible outcomes of gender struggles and changes in norms (O’Neil and Domingo 2016, p. 20).

Second, we must know that “in an age of rapid social change, the survival of traditional ritual forms or even of a sense of history” (Schmidt 1980, p. 170), as it is found in CAC doctrines, will always be problematic. Hence, there is a need for the leadership of CAC to rethink how their doctrines and rituals could be made to factor gender into their performances. Third, it has been observed that “rituals of exclusion reaffirm social order by eliminating persons classified as less than human from that society. Rather than reincorporation, disincorporation is the rule of ritual” (Chidester 1988, p. 697). We suggest that by allowing for the full inclusion of women in CAC polity, the CAC authority will grant women their agency instead of denying it. Lastly, if the CAC believes in the empowerment of all genders by the power of the Holy Spirit, according to the argument of Folarin and

Afolabi above, then the priority of the gifts of the Holy Spirit should continue to provide a foundation for gender justice within the church. Therefore, with a view to gender equity in ritual practices, it should be a priority of the church to include women on the list of its General Executives worldwide.¹⁰

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Notes

¹ See the history of 1918 Pandemic (H1N1 virus) at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-pandemic-h1n1.html> accessed on 3 January 2022.

² <https://cachqtrsonline.org/about-us/> accessed on 4 January 2022.

³ https://cacpenn.com/cac_worldwide.htm downloaded accessed on 4 July 2020.

⁴ See (Durkheim 1965); His definition of religion shows this very clearly; he seems to assume that the differentiation between the sacred and the profane is the basis for the development of religion.

⁵ A city is even called Oke-iho (correctly pronounced Okeho), which was named after many important hills and mountains surrounding the city, which were believed to have served as protective spaces during internecine intertribal war in the ancient Yorùbá land. One of the authors is from Okeho.

⁶ Many Christ Apostolic members always hold this view; in actual fact, many pastors often lay emphasis on the importance of visiting mountains for prayers.

⁷ Revd. (Professor) Olufemi Adedeji who teaches Musicology at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, is the presiding pastor of The Truth of the Gospel Ministries (CAC brand), Aladanla, Ile-Ife in Osun State Nigeria. His monthly mountain program is tagged *Oriòkè Àwon Omo Wòòlì* (The Mountain of the sons of the prophets).

⁸ One of the authors of this paper was at the burial service of Pastor Isaac Ademola Ojo, the CAC Pastor on 23 December 2021 in Ile-Ife.

⁹ Pastor Dr. A.A. Ayodele claimed that CAC doctrine is being guided by what 1 Co. 14: 34–35 teaches. To him, women can teach but cannot occupy leadership position. He even said that besides what the bible prescribes, Holy Spirit also led the founders. He referred to page 10 of CAC constitution and doctrine.

¹⁰ This could be seen on the Updated CAC website; <https://cachqtrsonline.org/about-us/> accessed on 4 January 2022.

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