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## **Women in Leadership and Musical Authority in the Celestial Church of Christ**

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### **Abstract**

Gender study is a multi-disciplinary phenomenon just as gender imbalance and inequality cut across all facets of human life. The academic searchlight has beamed on gender studies in many aspects of human endeavours but with little or no attention on musical and administrative authority in the Christendom. Socio-culturally, Nigeria is male-dominated and this situation plays itself out even in Christianity. The study looked closely at the activities of women in Celestial Church of Christ (An African indigenous church), with a view to determining their involvement in music and music making leadership in the church. Data for the study is were collected through oral interview and participant observation. Key informants, drawn from selected church leaders, male and female choristers were interviewed. The findings revealed that the role of women in African culture as supporters of men rather than leaders also reflect in the activities of the Celestial Church of Christ. Only in exceptional cases are women (who demonstrate noticeable talent in singing) are allowed to lead praise songs. Men are always in charge of musical activities such as playing of musical instruments, choir and song leadership etc. It was noted that the cultural background and orientation of the churches and their leadership go a long way in determining the balance between culture and religion.

**Keywords:** Women, Leadership, Musical authority, Independent church, CCC

### **Introduction**

Christianity, was introduced to Africa by the early Missionaries

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who also (as the founding fathers of the new religion), determined the mode of operation (including the music associated with the churches) at inception. With Christianity taking deep root in Africa, African worshippers felt the need to make Christianity more relevant to the culture of the land. This led to various doctrinal changes and variations in the way worshippers understand and worship God. While some churches are of the opinion that white garment should be worn before you can come before the Lord, some others feel different and express the opinion that one can wear anything convenient to the church, as God is only concerned with the mind. Some insist that women must always cover their head within the premises of the church while others think different and insist that head covering for women is a non-issue. Some churches forbid women from entering the church premises during their menstrual cycle and insist that women cannot conduct services in the church. Some churches simply discard all these and query the justification advanced by the churches who observe them.

Historical and oral sources point to the vibrancy of music as an integral part of both traditional and orthodox religions in Africa. The functions of music include routine ritual as well as social function in traditional religion. It has been noted that much as the holy bible in Galatians 3:28, makes us believe that there is no discrimination in heaven and that both men and women will account for the role they play on earth in order to determine where they will spend eternity, there are disparities in the roles assigned to men and women in different culture areas of the World. In the Celestial Church of Christ, which is the main focus of this study, it has been discovered that women operate in the background because the church holds on to the portion of the bible, which arrogates leadership in all situations to men. This position tallies with the orientation and the African root of the church where leadership is traditionally reserved for the men and women are kept out of leadership roles where men are available. But as hinted earlier, there are pockets of instances exceptionally gifted ladies are allowed to lead singing when desired.

### **Gender Inequality Issues: The Yoruba Perspective**

The issue of gender and gender inequality is very sensitive among the Yoruba in western Nigeria in general and the handling of musical instruments in particular. Yoruba people believe that the woman is the vehicle through who we came to the world and that, care be taken in the way the woman and matters related to her are handled. This reflects in the various ways in which the concept of *Iya* (mother) is interpreted within the context of music and musical instruments in the daily living of the Yoruba people. The concept of *abiyamoorun*, who will never leave her offspring to suffer, is widely held on to by the people. There are also goddesses that are believed to be very strong and are worshipped too. The meaning given to the word, *iya*, among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria goes a long way in demonstrating that the concept is associated with respectable or fearful matters and can mean different things at different times, depending on the context or circumstance. Take for instance: *Iya* (mother), *Iya* (witch) and *Iya* (my protector).

In music, the mother drum (*Iyailu*) is revered as the most prominent instrument in ensemble groups. The Dundun, Bata and other traditional ensemble groups are led by the *Iyailu* as it plays the leading role, communicating and coordinating other drums and instruments in a bid to produce melodious and spectacular harmony. *Iyailu*, therefore, disseminates this spirit of unity and infuses it into the listening pleasure of all the hearers. *Iyailu* is a traditional lead-talking drum played uniquely by the Yoruba of West Africa. *Iyailu*, literally means a mother drum (a leader) in a talking drum ensemble. *Iyailu* is used to lead, instruct, encourage and support other drums in delivering and facilitating fun-filled and enriching cultural entertainment.

The executive function of *iyailu*, apart from leading and prompting other drums in a performance, is its ability to communicate with the dancers, audience and the fellow drummers. The *iyailu* in any performance (through the player) often prompts and dictates the type of song to sing, dancing steps to take, tone and mood to display and actions to carry out in any given drumming performance. *Iyailu* (mother drum) is the instrument that serves the purposes of improvisation and overall coordination

of musical performances for different occasions, both ritual and social.

### **Gender and Gender Inequality**

The issue of gender inequality in every facet of the African society still remains a thorn in the flesh. Culturally, women are meant to operate in the background, supporting the male folk. Researchers and academics as noted in Bode Omojola (2009) *“Songs of the King’s Wives: Women, Power and Performance in the Yoruba Public Sphere”* have viewed the issue of gender discrimination from different directions and expressed their varied views on the need to offer women equal opportunity as their male counterpart. There is a common saying among the Yoruba that *bi obinrinbafo jubaoro, oro a gbe* (the day a woman sees the oro cult, is the day she meets her Waterloo). There are some traditional rites and masquerades that are not to be experienced or seen by any women. The ‘*Oloolu*’ masquerade in Ibadan, for instance, is notorious for the number of deaths recorded annually from issue of whether all women must go off the street or not during the yearly event. *Oro* festival is another cult that is associated with complete banishment of women from public appearance during cult outings. The woman is seen as the weaker sex and that she must not be exposed to danger.

### **The Bible, Gender Equality and Women in Music**

The holy bible confirms the superiority of men over women. In a response to the issue of gender equality in the Christendom, Adetiran (2013), in an oral interview, opined that *“The man was created by God while the woman was manufactured by man.”* In the epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (II Corinthians, 11), Paul wrote: *“But I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of every woman, and God is the head of Christ.”* Much as the bible is silent on the position of women in music and music leadership in the church, there were references to a few instances where women were involved in musical activities in the church. One of such instances was the activity of Miriam (the sister of Moses) who functioned as somewhat worship leader (Exodus, 15: 20-21).

Male Levites were the ones who led services in the temple in the Old Testament (Numbers 8: 45-26; Chronicles 9: 33). Both Ecclesiastes 2:8 and 2 Chronicles 35:25 made reference to singing men and women. David appointed men who were skilled singers and used brass cymbals, harps, trumpets, and other instruments to accompany the singing from among the Levites (1 Chronicles 15: 16-24). The Levites who led the music at the dedication of Solomon's temple were all men (1 Chronicles 5:12-13). When the temple was being rebuilt, the sons of the Levites were appointed to lead the music in the temple service (Ezra 3: 10; Nehemiah 12:24). The documentation in the Old Testament shows that women were participating in, but not leading, the worship except for the single instance of the activity of Miriam mentioned earlier.

The New Testament is silent on how women should function musically in worship. It does not document positive or negative record regarding female music ministers or worship leaders. Some people erroneously allude to the fact that a woman is not to teach or take authority over a man (1 Timothy 2:12) as a prohibition against women leading men in worship. This text is better understood as focusing on the pastoral role of shepherding/teaching and not on other forms of leadership. Further, it is questionable whether leading worship involves any "authority" that would violate what is contained in 1 Timothy 2:12. In what sense does a worship leader have authority over the worshippers? Could a woman lead with an instrument, but just not with her voice? Does not a woman playing piano/organ in some sense result in her "leading" the worship?

On a generally note, it would seem that with the consistent pattern of male leadership in the church, it would be best for men to serve in the role of worship leader or music minister. In actual fact, there is no biblical injunction that forbids women from serving in the role. Many women are undeniably very gifted / skilled in worship, whether by voice or instrument. These gifts most definitely should not be ignored or neglected.

#### **Women in African Musical Tradition**

The question posed by Drewal (1992) in Omojola (2009) is very relevant and would serve as a good guide at this juncture.

According to the documentation, in order to move beyond a social Darwinist perspective on gender, it is necessary to ask whether the construction of gender in African performances are always in fact asymmetrical and whether power always resides in the male half of that structure.

Sex and gender-related issues are often critical to the conception and organization of African musical ensembles. The intersection of gender and power in African societies often manifests itself vividly in bounded, formal performances. Drewal has observed for example that there are more restrictions placed on women in performances organized by men than there seem to be in women's performances. Citing examples from Yoruba media art to further support this view, she explains that socially inscribed notions of gender are manifest both in the type of materials that men and women may work with as well as in the types of artistic formations those artists may create. For example, while women work in clay, men specialize in wood, metal and beads (Drewal, 1992).

Women in Africa are traditionally perceived as masters of the private domain, and are often associated with informal and non-professional performances. The position above has also been noted by Mack (2004) in her discussion of Hausa Muslim women's performances. She observed that although exceptionally gifted Hausa women in Kano may have the opportunity to perform in public spaces such as an emir's palace, the practice of wife seclusion and the need for women to fulfil their responsibilities as mothers and wives in a predominantly Islamic environment often dictate that they perform mainly in private spaces located in the harems of their husbands and inside family compounds.

When one examines a comparative, though different situation that exists among the women of the KwaZulu iBandla lama Nazaretha (Nazareth Baptist Church), where, as Muller (1999) explains, female performances, even within the context of a modern, syncretic religious organization, are restricted largely to the private homes of individuals and to meetings that are exclusive to women. There are tendencies and several examples that reflect a general tendency for African musical performances to be dominated by men at the professional and public sphere level. In many such situations women often complement male performances rather peripherally as creators of ululations and as cheerers.

Handling of musical instruments are usually reserved for the men in Africa (though there are isolated cases of either full women ensemble as Omojola noted above), or established cases of men playing the musical instruments to accompany the women as they sing and dance. Omojola drew specific attention to cases that clearly show that men often dominate instrumental ensembles as reflected in some scholarly works (Euba, 1990; Agbekor, 2005; Sabar, 2007; Baakisimba, 2005). Nannyonga-Tamusuza (2005) narrating her experience with reference to Baakisimba, for example, claims that roles ... were clearly distinguished; boys were restricted to drumming and girls controlled the dancing arena. Whenever I tried to beat the drums, my teachers outwardly told me women do not beat the drums, they are dancers. Reasoning along the same line as documented above, Ibekwe expresses that:

Women are the birth-givers, as a result, musical practices around childbirth; weaning and other related activities are the sole responsibilities of women. Similarly, there are roles, which embody information or knowledge that men wish to possess or make exclusive to them. In such a situation, musical performances associated with such roles have some restrictions on women, which even extend to the use of some musical instruments. For instance, ritual,

cultic and esoteric affairs usually have male dominance and women are restricted from intruding or interfering (2009).

Idamoyibo (2008) and Omojola (2009) identify some isolated cases of women getting involved in beating the drums, though they both agreed that it is an aspect that is normally reserved for the male folk. Omojola (2009) further claims that female drummers, whose roles include setting the tempo and sustaining a pervading element of dance, do not belong to the traditional Yoruba drumming families. Their statuses as drummers thus challenges and deviates from the more conventional Yoruba belief that drummers must belong to endogamous hereditary drumming families known as *ayan*.

In African tradition, the woman is also seen and treated as a weaker sex and she is given protection by her husband in every respect. There are restrictions in most African communities on the role women can play in musical ensemble. In as much as there are female performing groups led by women, men are in most cases given the responsibility of playing the musical instruments to accompany such performances. Idamoyibo in a study of musical activity of Okpe women of Nigeria observed that there are two Igoru female ensemble leaders. Idamoyibo (2008) confirmed that their ensembles comprise only female members (performers), but included male drummers for the reason that in Okpe women are not allowed to beat drums. The women in Okpe neither consider the restriction as a sort of evil, nor contend it, perhaps because they have deep understanding of its implications.

Okafor (2005) also noted that in Igbo culture, there could be some discrimination in the musical instruments that women play in tradition. In his view, certain musical instruments are favourites of women performing groups in the Igbo culture (Okafor, 2005). He remarks that women do not play the flute (*oja*) and xylophone (*ngedegwu*), concluding that favourite instruments for Igbo women are those easy to play ones. It is, therefore, not strange to find women playing simple instruments such as the maracas in traditional musical performances.



### **Gender Issue in Musical Performance Discrimination**

Several reasons have been adduced for the possible gender discrimination against women in African culture. Idamoyibo (2008) identified protection of the women from risk and danger, etc., as some of the possible reasons why the role of women in general and participation in music in particular in most traditional African communities are limited. He specifically identified that: "In Okpe culture, all the dance genres such as *ijurhi*, *egboto* and *akamagwe* are feminine. They are described as dances of young ladies. The involvement of few male performers in such groups may be only in the area of beating the musical instruments, with only two to four male dancers."

When our forefathers restricted women from being close or from participating in some rituals and ritual music, or from playing some musical instruments, it is not for evil but for protection. It is for the fact that women are specially created with certain spiritual powers to procreate and to defy.

Thus, a woman's touch in any form is capable of defying the potency of certain traditional medicine, particularly when she is in her period. Most musical-rituals that men perform are intended to protect the family and the entire community from danger. From the information gathered during fieldwork, it is probably because of the fact above that the Celestial Church of Christ does not allow women who are undergoing their menstrual cycle into any activity within the church premises (including musical activities such as choir practices and performances). The sanctification process which precedes the re-admittance of female members into the church after their cycle takes place on the eighth day after she must have started the period. If the blood flows beyond seven days, three additional clear days must be given before she can come to the premises of the church for the sanctification process.

### **Women in Leadership and Musical Authority in the Celestial Church of Christ**

The introduction of Christianity to Nigeria in 1842 has been traced to the arrival of freed slaves who agitated for the introduction of

the new religion they had contact with while they were in slavery (Omojola, 1995). With time, Africans felt the need to establish independent African churches. Since that first contact of Africans with Christian religion, the mode and means of reaching God through music have witnessed dramatic changes of unquantifiable magnitudes. The number and size of churches have grown phenomenally over the years. The music heard in such churches has also shifted from its purely unaccompanied style at the inception of Christian religion to accompanied music. All kinds of innovations have over the years, been introduced to accommodate the culture of the worshippers with a view to making Christianity, relevant to their cultural orientation. We, therefore, find shades of differences in the mode of worship, musical orientation, mode of dressing, hours spent in services and other related matters and allowances given to different gender and even language of worship.

The Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), founded in 1947 is the main focus of this article. The choir of the church at the international and local levels have always been led by male members from inception except where no male member is available to lead the choir. As shown below, though there is no difference between the overall choir attire referred to as the *cape* worn by male and female members of the choir in the church. It is worthy of note that men are traditionally in charge of musical instrument playing and other leadership roles in the music and music making in the church.



**The Choristers in their Unisex Capes**

It must be noted, however, that traditionally, music making in the West African region where the church started is usually òmaleò businessò. It is also worthy of note that musicians are identified as beggars (*alagbe*) in the culture. Musical performances were, therefore, reserved for the less privileged. Since the music of the CCC draws more on traditional and popular musical practices as identified by Adetiran (1987) who, looking into the origin of the music of the CCC, hinted that òall the elements of music in both the indigenous and orthodox churches seem to provide the foundation on which the musical system of the Celestial Church of Christ is builtò. In his view, highlife music covers seventy-five percent of the CCC music. It is the opinion of Adetiran(1987) that òa large part of the music of the Celestial Church of Christ is rooted in highlife musicò ó a product of acculturation. According to Euba (1992), the Yoruba churches have become increasingly Africanized, giving birth to new denominations such as Cherubim and Seraphim, Christ Apostolic Church and Celestial Church of Christ. It is primarily among these new denominations that the definitive style of Yoruba church has been created.

Furthermore, we observed that women have never had any chance as music leaders from inception of the CCC. Its headquarters has been led by different individuals at different times; the late Pastor Bada was the first choirmaster in the history of the church. With the growth of the church and difficulty in Badaòs combination of the choir work with the daily running of the church in Nigeria, the leadership of the choir was transferred to M.O. Are in 1964. Olu Ogunsanya assisted Are as a composer while he (Are) functioned as the choirmaster. Ebun Omobuwajo joined the choir in 1965 and became the bandmaster. In the year 1966, Da Silva became the choirmaster and remained in charge, until the power tussle among the leading members of the choir erupted. The crisis led to the breaking of the choir into choirs I and II in 1975. Choir I was led by EbunOmobuwajo while choir II was led by Ogunname. The unhealthy rivalry continued until 1979, when senior evangelist Odeyemi took over the leadership of the choir. He combined his training, discipline and experience at the

Wesley College, Ibadan, with his exposure and training as a seasoned academic to revamp and reposition the choir.

Odeyemi was in charge of the choir until 1984. It was during his tenure as the choirmaster that the national headquarters choir waxed the record entitled *A bi Jesu siibujeeran*, which was fully sponsored by Odeyemi and Justice Sogbetun. Only one thousand copies of the music produced were completely sold out. The glaring prudence in the management of the sales and the proceeds resulted in the utilization of the fund to buy a complete set of musical equipment and a bus for the choir. There has been no further reproduction of the record since then (in spite of the high demand for it and others that were waxed before it). Pirates have capitalized on this weakness to illegally reproduce and sell tapes of the record to the public.

Before 1993, many of the instrumentalists that made up the Makoko national headquarters band enviable left for other churches in search of greener pastures. Instrumentalists were, therefore, hired for unbelievable fees before another record was waxed in 1993. A popular lyric from the record is *Sio* (to you). While the church was contemplating on who could take over the leadership of the choir from senior evangelist Odeyemi, Papa Odelola, the erstwhile choirmaster of Yemetu parish, Ibadan, who was the choirmaster/composer and organist of the parish since 1965, moved over to Lagos to start a full time church work. He was made the choirmaster in 1984 and remained in charge until 1989 when he left.

In 1990, the chairman of the parochial committee ó Akinbobola - made senior evangelist Detrain the choirmaster. The choir members were not happy with the manner in which Detrain was brought in. They saw his appointment as an imposition. Therefore, though the capability of Detrain to effectively run the choir was not in doubt, the choristers refused to co-operate with him. He therefore left, after operating for about eight unsuccessful months.



**Mr Adetiran – One Time Choir Master of Makoko Choir as well as The Director of Music CCC Central Choir in Action**

Taiwo Ogunyemi led the choir from 1990 to 1993. Arogundade led them from 1993 to 1995, Sunny Dedji from 1995 to 1997, Michael Sanni 1998 to 2000. Steven Omopelemo (Bro-Bro) was brought back to lead the choir from 2000 to 2003 while Peter Olasunkanmi has been in charge from 2004 till the date of collecting data for this research in 2005. Kehinde Ogunyemi Took charge from 2005 till 2008, PelemoBrobro was in charge from 2008 till 2015; Kehinde Ogunyemi has since been in charge again from 2015 till 2017. The organist (*organimos*) of the church from 1962 to 1974 was Karibi-Whyte. Kehinde Ogunyemi took over the organ playing in the church from Karibi-Whyte in 1974 and has steadfastly remained in charge till 2005.

#### **Further Discussion/Conclusion**

From the chronological description of leaders of music at the CCC above, it is clear that women have never been given any chance to lead the choir at the from inception till date. Looking at the lopsidedness in the role assigned to the male/female members in the church, attempt was made to determine the view of the women

to the situation. A questionnaire designed to evaluate the reaction of women to the second fiddle role they play in leadership position in the church and her activities revealed that:

- a. a very high percentage of the women in the church are of Yoruba descent;
- b. all the women interviewed agreed with, and see nothing strange in the secondary roles assigned to them in the church and its musical activities. The traditional view that women must submit to men captured in the popular saying, *okonioloriaya* (the man is the head of the family) is generally acceptable to the women;
- c. male domination, being the culturally approved practice in the area where the church is most deeply rooted is not seen as anything strange by the interviewees;
- d. leadership position for matters that concern women generally is automatically ceded to the most senior person in order of approved ranking in the church (determined by length of years of membership) ; and
- e. the men play both traditional and western musical instruments. An isolated case of a female saxophone player forming part of the ensemble was found at the Celestial Church of Christ, Lagos Central Parish, Osapa London, in Eti Osa local government area of Lagos State. The parish is an English speaking parish dominated by the elite.

The culture and popular belief of a people determine whether a practice conforms to the norm of a people or not. What is seen as regular and approved practice in a community could be a sacrilege in another. This study has clearly revealed the dominance of African culture in some practices in the Celestial Church of Christ.

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