

Multiple Roles of African Women Leaders and Their Challenges: The Case of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana

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Abstract

In the Ghanaian communities women turn to play multiple roles in whatever situations they find themselves. In combining the traditional and contemporary roles, many women find themselves playing the roles as wives, mothers, reverend ministers, ministers in politics, Chief justices at the supreme court, speakers of parliament, doctors, lawyers, farmers, traders, judges, secretaries, nurses, architects, engineers, lecturers among others. It is not uncommon to find a woman playing multiple roles, a woman being a mother, wife, a commissioned and an ordained minister (roles mentioned above) at the same time. The study examines the theory of gender discourse as a theoretical frame using historical analysis method. The existing structures within both the church and society are patriarchal and the structures turn to focus more on men than on women in the various sectors of life. After 1976 women have been congregational leaders embarking on developmental projects in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana(PCG) and generally, participating fully in almost all aspects of the church's activities. Though women leaders in the church are performing multiple roles; there are some socio-cultural perceptions that prevent their recognition. Women leaders in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana do not have access to the decision making positions. The researcher found out that though the women leaders in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, for example, are effectively performing multiple roles in the church and in the other sectors of life, they are neither recognised.

Keywords: Presbyterian, Women, Multiple Roles, Contemporary roles, Gender

1. Introduction

Since 1976 PCG women have been congregational leaders embarking on developmental projects in the church, and generally, participating fully in almost all aspects of the church's activities. They seem to be playing multiple roles because they are combing church roles with the traditional roles as African women both in the church and in the home. Many church women find themselves playing the roles as wives, mothers, congregational leaders, doctors, lawyers, farmers, teachers, nurses, lecturers among others.

This implies that women leaders in the church including the ordained women ministers in the PCG like their counterparts in the other sectors of life, do not neglect their predominant female duties using their leadership roles as an excuse despite the demands each of these peculiar roles places on the women.

Women leaders in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG), for example, had to struggle before being ordained as congregational leaders. There were several debates on whether women should be ordained in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) or not. However, the church eventually ordained women into the clergy and assigned them roles as district ministers, administrators, presbytery clerks, presbytery chairpersons, chaplains and they have been congregational leaders. In performing their various roles as leaders, women are entangled with multiple roles amidst socio-cultural setbacks. This research investigates the multiple roles that women leaders play in the PCG to contribute to sustainable development.

1. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study examines the theory of gender discourse as a theoretical frame using historical analysis. The existing structures within both the church and society are patriarchal and the structures turn to focus more on men than on women in the various sectors of life.

Mercy Amba-Oduyoye (1986, p. 121) argues that gender discourse 'has become the shorthand for the proclamation that women's experience should become an integral part of what goes into the definition of being human.' She further explains that gender is not the word for the female but as a part of the whole movement geared toward liberating the human community from entrenched attitudes and structures that can only operate if dichotomies and hierarchies are maintained (Oduyoye, 1986, p. 121). By this she argues that both men and women should be given equal opportunity to work together as partners in order to contribute to development.

Gender based segregation is largely evident in the socio-economic and religious activities, patterns and roles set for women and men in traditional African societies. Thus, women were not only prevented from occupying certain societal and ecclesiastical positions in the church because of their sex but also assign different roles that centre on the home. Thus Oduyoye argues that 'in Africa, women make pots which are sold cheaply; men make ritual objects and carvings that are highly regarded (Oduyoye, 1986, p. 123).

3. Women and Role Performance

The Presbyterian Church of Ghana has a mission which all her members aspire to achieve. It is the overall perception of the church in which women are seen to be part. What the mission statement of the PCG seeks to do is that women, who are more than men, contribute directly or indirectly to the development of the church. Some scholars argue that within the African socio-cultural context patriarchal system is men centred thus, Labeodan (2007, p. 113) argues that;

The patriarchal system is held in high esteem in most African Societies. As a result of this, women... are to be seen and not heard... there is so much suppression and oppression of women by men who are supported by the cultures and religions. They used certain facts about the physiology of man and woman as the basis for constituting a set of identities that work to empower men and disempower women.

She explains that the roles assigned to women are very much related to the cultural and historical traditions that try to place women in the domestic domain that they are suppose to be home makers and nurturers of the family including husband and children

Grace Adeoti (1998, p. 107), like Labeodan, also holds a similar view that

In many societies be it Africa or elsewhere, a woman is seen as the burden bearer with no rights whatsoever to equality with man. She is even seen as an irrational being not capable of reasoning; therefore, she is to be seen and not to be head... The ancient world was predominantly a man's world.

The specific roles that women leaders especially women ministers play are the chaplaincy, congregational leadership, administration of lay centres and management of schools. Other roles are women ministers as presbytery chairperson and clerks and finally women ministers as missionaries. In these areas, we see the ordained women ministers actively involved in activities such as proclamation and preaching of the gospel, healing ministry, youth ministry, evangelization, organization of seminars and workshops that equip members of the church especially women for acquiring skills that are needed for economic, social, spiritual and political activities.

4. Multiple Roles of the PCG Women Leaders: Challenges

Culturally or traditionally, many Ghanaian wives are expected to relocate to wherever their husbands find themselves, irrespective of the type of jobs they do before or after marriage or the type of schools their kids attend. Let's take this scenario for example; Mary a teacher is married to Paul who is a bank manager. They live with their kids in Accra where the children have good access to educational facilities. The husband Paul is promoted to the position of a branch manager and he is being transferred to another region in the country. The cultural and societal expectation from their context demands that Mary leaves her job and pack bags and baggage and move with the kids to join the husband Paul in his new region, regardless of whether Mary will get a suitable job and the kids will get good educational facilities or not. On the other hand, if Mary's employees transfer her to another school in another town or region the husband according to culture and custom is not expected to relocate with Mary.

The ordained women ministers face Mary's plight if they are wives. In other words one of the problems facing the ordained women ministers is this cultural and societal demand that every wife, irrespective of who they are, are to relocate to wherever their husbands are transferred to. It is believed that the issue of relocation has greatly influenced some of the PCG men's attitude to married ordained women ministers.

Another problem facing the PCG women leaders who are wives is the ability to efficiently perform their roles of being wives which demand cooking, washing, nurturing, making sure food is ready and cleaning the house. With the role of a woman minister which includes preparing sermons, preaching, visiting congregations, counselling, literally being on duty for 24 hours as a commissioned and an ordained minister.

In the Ghanaian society, it is a challenge when women still combine old traditional roles with new roles. This affects married ordained women in the PCG because in certain societies, roles are differential and most women would not agree that men are the heads in their homes. In response to the question whether respondents think the Ghanaian expectations of women affect ordained women ministers? Some claim it is difficult for ordained married women ministers to balance their lives carefully to be able to perform their roles as wives, mothers and ministers. A female minister in an interview remarked 'her husband is very supportive and he does not leave her alone to go about the house chores and he eats whatever is available' (Interviewed 18 June 2008). Dolphyne (1991, p. 5) writes on 'who does what in the home,' and to Dolphyne;

Every African woman grows up knowing that it is the woman who cooks the meals and generally sees to it that the house is clean and well kept, and that everything is in its proper place. Whatever her level of education or professional status she does not normally expect her husband to share the household chores.

In her view 'if the husband enjoys cooking and chooses to cook breakfast or dinner one day, she appreciates the

fact that he is being helpful, but she does not expect him to do so as a matter of compulsion', (Dolphyne, 1991, p. 5). She continues further that husbands who have lived in Europe before used to help their wives in the house chores but when they are in Ghana they do not help their wives. Professional women in Ghana like the ordained female ministers claim they employ house helps and pay their salary, thinking the house helps do their jobs for them. Sarpong, also affirms Dolphyne's point that 'a good wife is obedient to her husband, faithful, hardworking, and helpful and she sees to it that all that he wants is forthcoming without him having to ask first, as for example, clean clothes, hot water for baths and food.' (Sarpong, 1974, p. 69). Motherhood requires a woman to provide by way of preparation of adequate food and shelter for her own children, others and strangers.

Majority of the married women ministers were of the view that they perform their ministerial duties perfectly and they think they are doing the same as other women in other leadership and challenging positions like teachers, lecturers, bankers, lawyers, judges, police, soldiers, doctors, engineers, architects among others. As to how the male ministers combine their ministerial, fatherly and husbandly duties, they said that they plan with their wives to allocate time and days to the religious activities as well as to the family. According to Nii Noi Odonkor, it is not easy being a minister, husband and a father but it takes discipline, determination and dedication. (Odonkor, Interview, 10 August 2011, Accra). He claims they apportion their time and see to it that none of their roles suffers by ensuring that they spend their leisure times with their family. He remarked that they share their time between the ministry and family life.

Generally speaking, in the Ghanaian societies a lot is expected of married women. Dolphyne says women are supposed to be solely in charge of the kitchen, the children, marketing and the general running of the home. Hired helps in most homes, however, ease the amount of actual work they would have to do. However, some men insist that their wives personally do certain chores, for instance, preparing their food. According to Dolphyne (1991, p. 1), some aspects of African culture have a particular bearing on issues of women's emancipation. She thinks, like E. Martey, M. A. Oduyoye and B. Sackey that these customs, traditions and beliefs have, over the years, helped to keep women under subjugation and make them feel generally inferior to men and incapable of operating at the same level as men in society. Marriage is one of such institutions (Sackey, 2006, p. 49). Sackey has also refuted a review of the theory of inequality that revealed that 'evolutionary anthropologists used the concept of adaptation and division of labour to propose that the size and strength of men made them adapted for different jobs while the biological make up of women kept them at home as only careers of husbands and children', (Sackey, 2006, p. 49).

For Sackey, Marxist anthropologists attribute this subordination of women to the domestic and public dichotomy and sexual division of labour, arguing that women's subsequent relegation to reproductive labour is the main cause of inequality (Sackey, 2006, p. 49). Her observation is true of the African woman because her biological make-up has been traditionally and culturally used as a hindrance to her potentials. She is barred from undertaking/combining certain duties (wife, mother, minister) and as such women like these ordained women who go beyond their 'gender specified' roles as B. Sackey puts it are usually challenged (Sackey, 2006, p. 50).

The ordained female ministers of the PCG have managed to make a breakthrough in the church in spite of the problem created by gender in the society and Sackey thinks it is a reclaim. Mercy Amba Oduyoye also comments on one generalization that, African society expects childbearing and homemaking of its women. She says it is more or less a truism that it has usually been accepted by African women. In the view of Oduyoye such statements are not just outrageous, but they are dangerous because they are sometimes used to form discriminating laws against women (Oduyoye, 1996, p. 5).

M. A. Oduyoye (2000, p. 122), again says 'women's experience of being persons primarily in relation to others, as mother or as wife predominates in Africa and a woman's social status depends on these relationships and not on any qualities or achievements of her own. The traditional norm within which women are expected to earn an income and to provide for at least part of their own as well as their children's needs is perpetuated (Oduyoye, 2000, p. 122). So is the norm that makes housework the exclusive responsibility of women and the modernization of women's work is viewed with suspicion that African women still grind and pound the hours away. We think the wider society is not yet ready to see any change in the present domestic arrangements.

The most common response was that the transition to minister had resulted in lack of time for themselves, their husbands, and their families. The women identified two primary reasons for the time constraints. One is the nature of ministers' work and the unavoidable reality that much of what they are required to do is unpredictable. Many women referred to the ministry as both intensely rewarding and incredibly stressful. Several women shared stories of assisting families through times of illness and death. Having the ability to function with people on such a close level was seen not only as rewarding, but also as difficult because such events were unexpected and untimely. The enormous demands of ministers' work coupled with the lack of practical assistance from spouses were distressing. As expected, these women did not have the support of 'clergy wives' and this presented a problem since most of the women believed that their congregations expected them to perform both the role of clergy and clergy's spouse (Cody-Rydzewski, [Accessed 24/09/2011]). They felt subjected to a double standard in which they were expected to do both clergy and clergy wife's duties, such as cooking, caring

for children, and teaching at Sunday school. In most cases, the women described their husbands as helpful, but acknowledged that their support was limited by the normative expectations of the masculine role.

Following the conversation about ministry being a two-person career, it became apparent that there was considerable discrepancy between conventional expectations placed on ministers and their spouses and the manner in which clergy women and their husbands actually fulfilled these expectations. More specifically, most women felt that entering ministry increased their workload considerably, as they continued to perform both paid and unpaid work obligations. Comparatively, their husbands' lives changed very little. One woman emphatically disagreed with the definition of ministry as a two-person career, arguing that clergy women's husbands do not participate to any great extent in their wives' ministries.

Most of the women stated that they and their husbands underwent a significant period of transition and tension in the marriage following ordination. They felt that husbands were initially supportive of their decision to enter ministry, but had trouble adjusting to both the increased demands upon their wives' time as well as their wives' newly founded prestige and source of fulfilment. Husbands had to adjust a little to people calling and asking for wives or the impromptu emergencies and the board meetings. It is different for husbands to see wives that way, as more of an equal than just a wife. When wives talked about going to seminary some of the men were supportive but after their wives were ordained they became jealous. Many of the women believed that their ordination strained but also strengthened their marriage because it altered the way they and their husbands viewed one another. Some husbands seemed more appreciative of their wives and they reconsider their wives' value as individuals that they are not just wives but now they have some formal knowledge.

More than one respondent described their husbands as 'unsettled', 'uncomfortable' or 'anxious' about having a wife who was ordained. From the foregoing, it seemed that husbands were less disturbed by their wives' ordination than they were with their own 'demotion' from the breadwinner or status holder. Some women reported that their husbands' identities were shaken as wives gained the prestige and legitimacy of ordained clergy. Often, women reported that their husbands were uncomfortable with the role of clergy spouse in particular because, for men, that role is not well-defined or understood.

Congregants sometimes expressed their discomfort about clergy husbands because some have been less supportive and less visible at church events. Having a wife who is a minister is fine, they often assert. It is being the husband of a minister that is hard, because it is a new thing for the congregation. Another woman stated that her husband refused to join the Men's Fellowship or teach a Sunday School class because some of these were activities like being Sunday school teachers were normally associated with minister's wives, and presumably, he was uncomfortable with this kind of role reversal. Their husbands feel they have a lot of pressure on them because the congregants want them to join church groups and be present for every event. But some are not very religious and they do not want to be cast into the preacher's wife role (Cody-Rydzewski, [Accessed 24/09/2011]). The churches have not had women ministers until recently and, therefore, are not sure what to do with ministers' husbands.

The lack of a precise role for clergy husbands appears to be a significant source of strain for husbands and their wives' transition to ministry upset the balance of power. Few of them openly express resentment or anger about the inequities of their household arrangements. Our findings and other similar studies speak not only of husbands' resistance to women's success in male-dominated occupations, but also to the resistance of the church. Like most other social institutions, the church has not altered its gendered expectations to accommodate the rising number of women and mothers entering ministry. Compared to other employed women, clergy women seem to face a prejudice of greater intensity, since the PCG model promote gender differentiation both as a matter of practice and policy.

The research examined the perceptions of clergywomen's views on how being a minister have influenced their marriages, specifically the negotiation and distribution of marital authority since their ordination. For instance, wives are often at a disadvantage in marriage simply because of the 'implicit hierarchy in worth' which assigns a greater value to men and masculinity's 'invisible power'. Feminists have often relied on Foucault's understanding of power to broaden traditional understandings (Foucault, 1977, p. 286). Rather than being held by persons, Foucault argued that power is reflected, reinforced, and executed through a complex set of processes. Power is articulated and exercised through the dominant discourse. Although a Foucaultian understanding separates power from any particular power holder, there remains the reality that power is not equally accessible or possessed. As with more tangible resources, power is unequally distributed. Feminists have argued that women often participate in the reproduction of power. Bordo, for example, suggests that girls and women 'voluntarily' disempowered themselves by engaging in oppressive and sexist practices, such as various forms of body or beauty enhancements (Cody-Rydzewski, [Accessed 24/09/2011]). It could also be argued that wives often participate in hegemonic representations of power by continuing to subjugate themselves to husbands in the areas of parenting, housework, and financial independence. Discourses of masculinity and patriarchy link femininity to a narrow range of life choices, (Cody-Rydzewski, [Accessed 24/09/2011]).

Socially, the issue of women's rights has been affirmed by secular society and women's ability to perform well

in a number of traditionally male occupations stands as a visible affirmation of these rights. At the same time, theological interpretations within the Christian tradition are often actively mobilized to support resistance to a female clergy. In addition to this, historical patterns within Christianity have been dominated by male imagery, which makes it difficult, on a cultural and cognitive level, for some laity to accept female ministers (Sintim-Adasi, 2013, pp. 115-117)

As the local church sorts through these issues, the female minister is often left in a vulnerable position. Another category had the subjection of married women to their husbands in mind. 'A woman cannot be a church leader because if she is married she is under the responsibility of her husband'. The Bible says she belongs to him and, therefore, cannot make an independent decision. It would therefore be difficult for congregations that are full of many men to consider her as a leader from who instruction can be taken. It could also be unfair to ordain single mothers (Cody-Rydzewski, [Accessed 24/09/2011]).

Some respondents accept the bible as authority behind women's subjugation. Thus every injunction against women is taken in its totality. In addition, the question of who is going to look after the home and the children? is the frequently asked question. When asked how women manage to work in the home and aside in secular employments, the response was that Church ministry cannot be compared with secular employment because sources of authority are different. God's work cannot be mixed with house work.

5. Conclusion

These male stereotypes about women are present in all cultures of the world. The point being made here is that culture decides what women's work is and what men's work is. As girls grow up they are taught at home what women's work is. Cultural demands are interpreted as God's will for women. The place of a woman is in the home and her major roles are child-bearing and child-rearing. Patriarchal culture which is concerned with preserving ruling power in the hands of men at all cost is called upon here against women sharing leadership roles in the church. There are also the assumptions that in culture, under no circumstance do women have power over men. Another assumption is that in culture, women are responsible for tempting men and not the other way round (Cody-Rydzewski, [Accessed 24/09/2011]).

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