

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Effect of Gendered Roles in the Bible on the Participation of Women in Church Leadership: A Case Study of Ruchu Catholic Parish in Kenya

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to investigate the effects of gendered communication styles in the Bible on women's participation in church leadership. One of the specific objectives was to examine the effect of gendered roles in the Bible and their effect on women's participation in church leadership. The study examined the gendered roles as they appear in four sampled books in the New Testament of The New International Version of the Bible. The New Testament was chosen since it lays the basis for church governments as we have them today. The study was carried out in Ruchu Parish in Murang'a Catholic Diocese in Kenya. The choice of the Catholic Church was informed by the fact that the church has definite and elaborate leadership hierarchy, from the global level to the units in the church. It is also one of the first churches to be established after the death of Christ. Ruchu Parish was selected because it has a long history of the presence of the church since it was established by European missionaries in 1901. Descriptive research design was employed for the study with the use of content analysis and the questionnaire to collect data. Content analysis was used to systematically analyse the gendered communication, which in this case were the gendered roles in the Bible. The questionnaire was used to collect data on the effects of gendered roles in the church on women's participation in church leadership. The results were then analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). It was then presented in form of charts and tables for discussion.

Keywords: *Gendered communication, Gendered roles, Women, Church, Leadership.*

Introduction

Participation of women in leadership has been a major concern for governments and policy makers globally especially after the 1995 the forth United Nations Conference on Women that was held in Beijing, China. Among other deliberations, the conference came up with what came to be commonly known as The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In this document, the governments present committed themselves to the advancement of the rights of women for the welfare of humanity [15]. Governments came up with policies to ensure the empowerment of women in all areas, including leadership. An example can be seen in Kenya where the people voted in a new constitution in 2010. Section 27(3) of the document states that both men and women are entitled to equal treatment in all spheres. It also puts in place the one third gender rule which is meant to ensure that elective and appointment positions are not dominated by members of one gender. It also sets aside special seats for women in the National Assembly, Senate and county

assemblies in sections 47 and 63 (6). However, despite the efforts put in place by various organisations, the participation of women in leadership in the church is low. This study posits that the low participation of women in leadership in the church can be attributed to the gendered roles as we have them in the Bible. This is because as a holy book for Christians, it has an effect on how men and women are treated in the church. The treatment arises out of the fact that faithful are careful not to contravene what it stipulates, both within and outside the church. The book is also an authority on various life issues, leadership included. It then follows that the narratives that the Bible presents about the roles of men and women are treated as the ideal models and thus adopted and enacted within the church. Gendered roles as used in the Bible have been singled out as one of the key factors that contribute to the low participation of women in church leadership. This is on the basis of the studies by various scholars who cite the social

construction of roles in terms of gender as a key factor contributing to the oppression of women within the church and beyond. One of the areas in which the gender roles are clearly defined is at home. This is because the home is seen as the basic institution which forms the basic building blocks for the church and the entire society. Consequently, its leadership structure is clearly defined in the Bible. One of the key authorities on this is Apostle Paul. In his address to Ephesians, he places the husband as the head of the wife and to an extension the whole family, just in the same way that Christ is the head of the church [9]. This then means that there can be no democratic family where the wife and the husband are equal partners at home. This model of leadership is criticised by [16] who sees the relationship between husbands and wives as the basis of oppression. This is because it violates the principles of individual freedom. What makes the roles at home have a bearing on the broader leadership of women in the church is the conditioning process. Conditioning here means that men are used to lead in their respective homes and the same is expected in the church. It is in line with the observations by Millet (1995 as quoted by [4] which make her conclude that patriarchy is maintained by a process of conditioning which starts with childhood socialisation within the family and is later reinforced by institutions such as the family, the school and the church. In fact, Apostle Paul emphasises to Timothy that men to be appointed deacons in the church should be able to rule over their families [9]. Women on the other hand are not used to lead in their homes since the husbands are the heads. Consequently, they are not expected to do the same even in the church. This is shown from the instructions that Paul gives to his son Timothy. He directs that the son should not allow women to have authority over men. They should in fact listen in silence. This kind of instructions confirm that [16] is justified to assert that the way that women are excluded from the public sphere is grounded on the domestic sphere which is as a result of patriarchal beliefs and practices.

There are also the general roles assigned to women in the society. The biblical woman was expected to provide food for the family. [1] notes that the industrious woman was highly glorified in the Old Testament. This study does not view this as a glorification of women but an assignment of subordinate roles to enable the men take the more the roles that the society in the biblical times regarded as more noble and divine. In fact, [1] notes that the Bible presents a patriarchal

society where the woman is confined at home where she has no formal authority. This idea is also replicated in the church where it is agreed that the place of women is at home where she should take care of her husband and children and leave the realms of public leadership to men. There is also an examination of the spiritual roles both in the old and new testaments. The Old Testament shows that most of the prophets, judges and priests were men. In fact, none of the Major Prophets was a woman. The same is continued in the New Testament where the twelve disciples of Jesus, who later became apostles, were all men. Authorities in the Catholic Church trace the church government to the twelve apostles. An example is [2] who writes that though Jesus had many women, including his own mother who he could have appointed as disciples, he never did so. It is from the apostles that the Catholic Church got its first pope who was Apostle Peter. From here, the church derives its priestly offices, from the global level where there is a pope to the local church. From the arguments fronted by authorities within the church and amplified by [2] it is clear that the church is not ready to ordain women as priests. This translates to low participation of women within the church hierarchy since the model of a male dominated leadership has already been presented.

The fact that there has been a male dominated leadership in the church does not mean that all people in the church are comfortable with the status quo. Voices of disquiet have emerged especially from feminist theologians. They see no reason for the presentation of male dominated narratives and images which elevate men over women and deny the latter the opportunities to lead. An example is Ruethler (1983 as quoted by [10] who argues:

“Whatever denies or diminishes or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore appraised not to be redemptive. Theologically speaking, whatever diminishes or denies the full humanity of women must be presumed not reflect the authentic nature of things, or to be the message or work of an authentic redeemer or a community of redemption.” Ruethler, 1983 as quoted by [10]. Ruethler’s position is supported by Bridges [3] in her observation that women within the church are allowed to serve but they are not allowed to lead. Even when they are allowed to lead, they cannot hold executive positions. Indeed, this study notes that there is no scientific basis for excluding women from leadership within the church and beyond. It is the gender roles which are a part of social constructions that are used to justify male

dominance in the church. The study thus seeks to investigate these roles and their effect on the participation of women in church leadership. This is done with the aim of opening a room for discussion within the academic circles and the church on how the adverse effects of the roles on the participation of women in church leadership can be reversed.

Theoretical Framework: The Social Construction Theory

This study employed the Social construction theory. This is a perspective which holds that a great deal of human life exists as it does due to social and interpersonal influences Gergen, 1985 as quoted by [15]. The social constructionists do not deny the role of biological attributes such as genes in determining people's behaviour. However, to them, the world around an individual plays a greater role in the individual's behaviour. [15] explains that since social constructionists view an individual an integral part of the cultural, political and historical evolutions, then, all aspects of humanity, save for the developmental ones, are created, maintained and destroyed by the society. In agreement with this, [13] explores how the society forms social constructs, which are meanings that go beyond the physical environment. She rejects the notion that gender and sex are related. To her, gender is a social construct which results from what she refers to as "building blocks". The blocks in this case are stratus which many societies classify as masculine and feminine genders. A part of the social constructions is gender since it defines what the society expects of men and women. This includes the roles where women are expected to perform feminine roles while the men take up the masculine ones. The gendered practices of everyday life reproduce a society's view of how women and men should act. Gendered social arrangements are justified by religion and cultural productions and backed by law, but the most powerful means of sustaining the moral hegemony of the dominant gender ideology is that the process is made invisible; any possible alternatives are virtually unthinkable (Foucault 1972; Gramsci 1971: 10 as quoted by [13]). This theory applies to the issue under study because the church in this context is regarded as an institution which has a certain form of culture. This society has defined how men and women should behave in the church, society and home. This is detailed in the books of Ephesians 5 and I Corinthians 7. Looking at these scriptures, women are expected to be submissive while men are meant to be assertive in leadership. This affects how women are viewed in the church since

a socially constructed society tries as much as possible not to break the social rules. What makes the Bible portrayals powerful and effective are two factors. Firstly, the Christians believe that there are consequences (punishments) for disobeying God's law as stipulated in the Bible. Secondly, Just as [10] observes, the portrayals in the Bible are consistent with the African cultures, which puts women at a disadvantaged position. For instance, [7] note that the Kikuyu and Christian examples form a part of patrilineal descent. These are good bases of excluding women from leadership in the church. This observation by [7] is very important since the area under study is predominantly inhabited by the kikuy us the largest ethnic group in Kenya according to the 2009 National Population and Housing Census.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive research design. The use of the design was appropriate for the study since it has been found to yield accurate results since the variables are observed in their natural setting. This contrasts to experiments which though they give analysable data, adversely influence the behaviour of the variables [12].

Instruments

Content Analysis Schedule

Content analysis was used to measure gendered roles in the Bible. The findings were recorded in a content analysis schedule. The use of this instrument is grounded on scholarly works by [18] who write that it helps in "studying mass communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring the variables." This is supported by [7] who advocate the use its use in media research since it is useful in examining how news and other media content reflect social and cultural issues. It applied in this study since the Bible is treated as a printed media in this study and the gendered roles it produces is a cultural issue.

Questionnaire

A survey research was carried out through the use of a questionnaire on 190 male and female respondents out of 4950 adult faithful of Ruchu Parish in Murang'a Catholic Diocese. The questionnaire was preferred since media studies have shown that it can be used to collect large volume of data at a relatively low cost [18]. It was also designed to have multiple choice responses where the respondents were expected to tick against one of them. The questionnaire was self-administered and the researcher and his

assistants collected and analysed all the 190 questionnaires. There was also a pace for “Any other” to capture those responses that had not been captured in the questionnaire.

Sampling Procedure

Content analysis was used to investigate gendered roles use in the Bible on every first book every category in the New Testament of the Bible. The categories of the books were borrowed from the classifications commonly used by Bible scholars and documented by [9] and [14]. These are: the gospels, acts of apostles, epistles and the apocalypse. The sampled books were therefore Matthew, Acts, Romans and Revelation, making a total sample of four books. The sample size for the questionnaire was arrived at by following the formula given by [5]. The authority recommends that for a population of 15, 000 people, a sample size of 577 respondents is required. The sample for a population of 4950 in Ruchu Catholic Parish was thus calculated as follows: $\text{Sample (S)} = (577 \times 4950) \div 15,000 = 190.1$ (rounded off to 190).

Data Collection Procedure

Data on the gendered roles in the Bible was obtained by use of content analysis which six categories used in table were followed. As for the data from the questionnaire, the researcher sought permission from the parish priest before proceeding to collect data from the faithful in the parish. The faithful who had been selected for the study were approached by the researcher and his assistants in their respective churches. The purpose of the study was explained to them. They were also guided on how to place their responses in the questionnaire. They were given a period of

two weeks after which the researcher and his assistants collected the questionnaires from each church in the parish.

Results and Discussion

The study sought to establish two things. The first one was whether there are gendered roles in the Bible. The second was whether the gendered roles as found in the Bible have an effect on the participation of women in church leadership. Further, if the gendered roles had an effect on the participation of women, there was a need to evaluate whether the effect was positive or negative.

Examination of Gendered Roles in the Bible

To examine the gendered roles in the Bible the researcher identified six categories of roles and how they are assigned to both men and women in the four books sampled for the study. The categories of roles are listed below in the order in which they appear in the table below.

- (a) Political leaders (A)
- (b) Spiritual leaders (B)
- (c) Homemakers (C)
- (d) Farmers (D)
- (e) Servants (Maids and caretakers) (E)
- (f) Supporters of spouses in leadership (F)

Table 1: Gendered roles in the Bible

Category of Gendered Roles	Book	Book Category	Frequency For men	Frequency for women	Total count	% for Men's Participation	% for Women's Participation	Total %
A	Matthew	Gospels	11	00	11	100	000	100
	Acts	Acts	14	00	14	100	000	100
	Romans	Epistles	01	00	01	100	000	100
	Revelation	Apocalypse	09	01	10	90.0	10.0	100
B	Matthew	Gospels	31	00	31	000	000	100
	Acts	Acts	35	00	35	000	000	100
	Romans	Epistles	10	00	10	000	000	100
	Revelation	Apocalypse	42	02	44	95.5	04.5	100
C	Matthew	Gospels	00	00	00	000	000	000
	Acts	Acts	00	00	00	000	000	000
	Romans	Epistles	00	00	00	000	000	000
	Revelation	Apocalypse	00	00	00	000	000	000
D	Matthew	Gospels	00	00	00	000	000	000
	Acts	Acts	00	00	00	000	000	000
	Romans	Epistles	00	00	00	000	000	000
	Revelation	Apocalypse	00	00	00	000	000	000
E	Matthew	Gospels	01	10	11	09.1	90.0	100
	Acts	Acts	01	03	04	25.1	75.0	100
	Romans	Epistles	00	00	00	00	000	000

	Revelation	Apocalypse	01	00	01	100	000	100
F	Matthew	Gospels	00	00	00	000	000	000
	Acts	Acts	00	01	01	000	100	100
	Romans	Epistles	00	13	13	000	100	100
	Revelation	Apocalypse	08	01	10	01.1	08.9	100
	Toatal	4	87	25	115	75.7	24.3	100

The table above shows gendered roles in the Bible. Categories A and B are associated with the highest levels of leadership: political and spiritual leadership. In these categories, men have 153 out of the total 156 incidents recorded, accounting for 98.1%. Women on the other hand have 3 incidents in the same categories, accounting for 1.9% in the same categories. No incidents are recorded for men and women in categories C and D. Categories, E and F, are associated with low cadres of leadership. In these categories, men have 11 out of 39 incidents, accounting for 28.2%. Women on their part have 28 incidents in the same categories, accounting for 71.2%.

The Effect of Gendered Roles in the Bible on the Participation of women in the Church

The next step was to investigate whether the gendered roles have an effect of women in church leadership. This was done by asking the respondents whether they thought the gendered roles in the Bible had an effect on the participation of women in church leadership. The summary of the responses is given in the fig 1 below.

Fig 1 summarises the responses of the audience to the question: “Do the roles that you have specified

have an effect on women’s access to leadership in your church?”

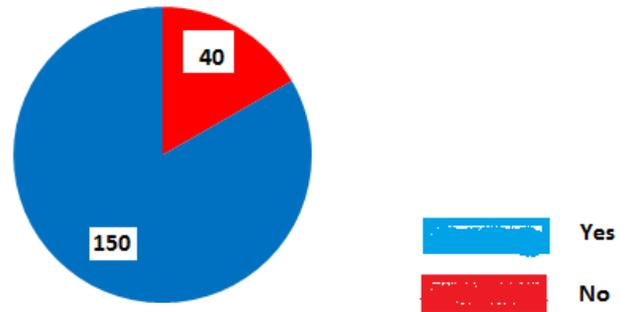


Fig 1: Responses to the question: Do the gendered roles practised in your church have an effect on the participation of women in church leadership?

Out of the 190 respondents, 40 of them (21.1%) reported that they did not while the rest 150 (79.1) reported in the affirmative. After establishing that the gendered roles affect the participation of women in church leadership, the study sought to investigate their specific effect of the gendered roles. The respondents were asked to tick against some given suggestions and the summary is given in the table below.

Table 2: Summary of responses on the effects of gendered roles on the participation of women in church leadership

Suggestion	Frequency for “Yes”	Frequency for “No”	Total frequency	% for Yes	% for No	Total %
Aids their accession to church leadership	10	140	150	6.7	93.3	100
Hampers their accession to church leadership	140	10	150	93.3	6.7	100
Increases their opportunities in the church n leadership	7	143	150	4.7	95.3	100
Reduces their opportunities in the church leadership	140	10	150	93.3	4.7	100

The table above summarises the responses on the effects of gendered roles on the participation of women in church leadership. 17 responses out of the total 600 responses (28.3%) reported that the gendered roles aids women’s accession to church leadership and increases their opportunities in church leadership. On the other hand, 280 responses out 600 reported that the same attitudes hampers women’s accession to church leadership and reduces their opportunities in the same.

Implications of the Study

The findings of the study have implications both in the church leadership, the mass media and media scholars. Firstly, it exposes that the exclusion of women from church leadership as we have it in the church is not justified and the church has to take deliberate measures to encourage more participation of women in the top hierarchy of the church. Secondly, the study has an implication to mass media, especially those that produce Christian literature. They have a

duty to produce literature that counters the stereotypes roles that are presented in the Bible and the church. These should be products that paint women as effective leaders both within the church and beyond. The study in fact suggests that the products should be fashioned in such a way that women play the central roles alongside men. Thirdly, the study of gendered roles and other forms of gendered communication is of great interest to communication scholars since it shows the results of such communication on any section of a society even beyond the church. This is important since understanding how the gendered roles and other forms of gendered communication are constructed is essential in learning how they can be deconstructed.

Conclusion

The study sought to investigate the effect of gendered roles in the Bible on the participation of women in church leadership. These gendered roles are a part of gendered communication styles that are employed both in the Bible and the church. The study indeed established that there are gendered roles in the Bible. Content analysis of the sampled books showed that the duties allocated to women were the ones that denied them political and spiritual leadership. Instead, the roles confined them to their homes so that men would have the convenience of taking leadership at higher positions. It further revealed

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