

'Lady No Be So': The Image of Women in Contemporary Church Posters in Nigeria

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There is no doubt at all that churches are proliferating in Nigerian cities. From the basic Catholic, Protestant and Africanist church varieties of the pre-1960s, the late 60s ushered-in a flood of breakaway clergy men, who began to establish their own churches in which they were 'founders' and 'general overseers'. While church-going has become a popular culture, the vast collection of practices built around the Nigerian church world tends to highlight the opiate in religion. Mostly male, pastors are sacrosanct and unaccountable, members transfer ownerships of properties to pastors; pastors' living standards far outweigh the average; church funds are unaudited; and members keep flooding-in. In their domination of the contemporary church space in Nigeria, male pastors reproduce and use popular but subjective social images of women to apprehend female pastors. To reach out to their various publics, printed posters are the most prolific media churches employ in publicity strategies. Yet, on these same posters, male pastors differentiate themselves and subordinate female pastors by using graphic principles of layout and visual proxemy, in terms of how they place women's pictures vis-à-vis theirs in the poster. That the church space is male-dominated is clearly not in question. What might be fruitfully interrogated is how this domination is played-out and what roles women are playing in re-representing themselves in the dominated church spaces. Using data from fieldwork, this paper analyses the image of women in Nigerian church posters, the vast collection of practices built around religious domination and the roles female pastors are playing in re-representing women in the Nigerian religious space.