

Disciplining the Female Voice: A Foucauldian Analysis of the Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Church's (LIKBK) Gender Dynamics

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Abstract

This study interrogates the Church's professed commitment to human rights and gender equality, with a specific focus on its treatment of women and women theologians, using the LIKBK Church as a case study. Despite women's significant contributions to the Church's sustenance and growth, their voices and participation remain marginalized. Employing Michel Foucault's theoretical framework, this research critically analyzes the LIKBK Church's role in perpetuating gender inequality, highlighting the ways in which its power structures and discourses silence and exclude women. By examining the contradictions between the Church's rhetoric and practices, this paper reveals the institution's complicity in sidelining women's agency and perpetuating gender-based oppression. The case study of LIKBK Church provides a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play and offers insights into the ways in which religious institutions can perpetuate gender inequality.

Keywords: Gender and Religion, Women's rights, LIKBK Church, Foucault, Power Dynamics

INTRODUCTION

The Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Church (LIKBK), founded on November 27, 1999, in the Lawngtlai District of Mizoram, located at the northeastern corner of India, stands as a distinctive ethnic-based institution established by the Lai tribe, who form the predominant populace of the area. Boasting a membership tally of 36,049 individuals, among whom 17,704 are women (LIKBK, 2022a), the church operates under a carefully delineated constitution, demarcating a comprehensive organizational framework encompassing several fellowships. These include the Pastoral wing, Women's Fellowship, Youth Fellowship, Elders' Group, Deacons' Group, and Children's Fellowship (LIKBK, 2020b). Conducted between October 4, 2022, and December 15, 2023, the following fieldwork endeavors to delve into the church's organizational architecture, as well as the distinct contributions of each fellowship subgroup. Within this exploration, a notable trend emerges, indicating a systemic marginalization and sidelining of women, particularly within the general women subgroup and among women theologians. Despite their substantial roles in sustaining the Church's financial health – often serving as the primary contributors to its coffers – women find themselves relegated to the sidelines. This sidelining is especially stark considering the significant qualifications held by seven women theologians, who possess degrees ranging from Bachelor of Theology to Master of Theology and Bachelor in Divinity, akin to their male counterparts. This introductory overview lays the groundwork for a critical examination of the gender dynamics within the LIKBK Church, shedding light on the pervasive marginalization of women's voices and participation within its fold.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study embarks on a comprehensive investigation aimed at dissecting and advocating against the church's policy that has systematically marginalized female members. Drawing upon the theoretical underpinnings of Michel Foucault, renowned for his incisive analysis of power dynamics and societal structures, this examination seeks to unravel the intricacies of the church's approach towards gender roles and participation. Foucault's framework provides a nuanced lens through which to scrutinize the mechanisms of power and control operating within institutional settings, offering invaluable insights into the ways in which norms and regulations are established, reinforced, and perpetuated. Through an expansive exploration informed by Foucauldian perspectives, this study endeavors to illuminate the underlying mechanisms that have led to the marginalization of women within the Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Church (LIKBK). By delving into Foucault's concepts such as

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“disciplinary power” (1979), “biopower” (1990), and the “panopticon” (2008), we aim to uncover the subtle yet pervasive ways in which gender biases are ingrained within the church's policies and practices. Furthermore, Foucault's notions of “discourse and normalization” (1972) will be instrumental in elucidating how dominant narratives surrounding gender roles are constructed and maintained within the church community. By weaving together Foucault's theoretical framework with empirical evidence gathered from the fieldwork conducted within the LIKBK Church, this study seeks to construct a compelling argument against the systemic marginalization of women. Through a critical analysis informed by Foucauldian insights, the study endeavors to challenge the existing power structures and advocate for the recognition and empowerment of women within the church. This interdisciplinary approach, bridging sociological inquiry with philosophical analysis, promises to offer a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play and pave the way towards fostering greater inclusivity and equity within religious institutions.

The Foucault Debate: Exploring the Limitations and Relevance on Gender Studies

Foucault's work has been highly influential in gender studies, particularly his analysis of power dynamics and how they shape societal norms and behaviors. However, there are both strengths and criticisms of his approach in this field. Some critics argue that Foucault's focus on discourse and power relations neglects the material conditions that shape individuals' experiences of gender, such as economic inequality, access to resources, and bodily experiences. This criticism suggests that Foucault's approach may overlook the material realities of gender oppression. Butler (1990), particularly criticizes Foucault for overlooking the materiality of bodies and the ways in which material conditions intersect with discursive constructions of gender. Butler argues that Foucault's emphasis on the performative nature of gender identities neglects the lived experiences of individuals within social and material contexts. Fraser's (1981) critique of Foucault focuses on his neglect of economic and social inequalities in his analysis of power relations. Fraser argues that Foucault's concept of power-knowledge fails to account for the material conditions that shape individuals' opportunities and constraints, particularly in relation to gender and class. Harding (1986), from a feminist standpoint theory critiques Foucault for his Eurocentrism and neglect of diverse experiences of gender oppression. Harding argues that Foucault's analysis of power relations often overlooks the specific historical and cultural contexts in which gender operates, particularly in non-Western societies. Hooks (1981), from an intersectional feminist perspective critiques Foucault for his limited analysis of race, class, and other intersecting axes of oppression in his work on gender. Hooks argues that Foucault's focus on power relations fails to fully account for the ways in which various systems of oppression intersect and compound each other in shaping individuals' experiences. Some scholars have criticized Foucault for his Eurocentrism, arguing that his analyses often neglect non-Western perspectives and experiences of gender and power. This criticism suggests that Foucault's theories may not be universally applicable and may fail to capture the complexities of gender dynamics in diverse cultural contexts. (Harding, 1986; Spivak, 1988).

Nevertheless, proponents argue that Foucault's theory provides valuable insights into the construction and regulation of gender through power dynamics. This concept of “Power-Knowledge” highlights how power operates not only through overt coercion but also through the production and dissemination of knowledge. This is especially relevant to gender studies, as it helps to understand how gender norms are constructed and maintained through various institutions such as medicine, education, and media. Foucault (1978, 2003) introduced and developed the concept of power. At this juncture, it may be pertinent to mention that the above critiques mentioned though argued the limitations of Foucault theory, they were actively engaging in enriching Foucauldian analyses of power. For instance, Butler (1990) engages with Foucault's concept of “power-knowledge” where she explores how power operates through discursive formations to regulate gender norms and identities. Rose (1999) further develops the concept of power by drawing on Foucault's ideas to analyze the interplay between power, knowledge, and subjectivity in contemporary society. Ahmed (2006) applies Foucault's concept of “power-knowledge” to her analysis of feminist and queer, examining how power shapes the production of knowledge and the perception of bodies and identities. These scholars have contributed to the elaboration and application of Foucault's concept of power-knowledge across various fields, enriching our understanding of the intricate relationship between power, knowledge, and social practices.

Supporters highlight the relevance of Foucault's concept of 'power-knowledge' in understanding how gender norms are established and maintained within various societal institutions. This method of 'discourse analyses' has been valuable for gender scholars in deconstructing the ways in which language and discourse shape our understanding of gender. By examining the historical and cultural contexts in which certain discourses emerge, gender scholars can better understand how gender identities and hierarchies are constructed and contested. Foucault (2002, 1977) introduced the idea of "discourse" as a system of power-knowledge that shapes social reality. Foucault's approach focuses on how discourses construct truth and regulate behavior, with particular attention to how knowledge is produced and circulated within institutions. Butler (1990) utilizes "discourse analysis" in her work on gender and sexuality, where she examines how discourses of gender produce and constrain subjectivities, challenging binary understandings of sex and gender through performative theory. Goffman (1956), is foundational to discourse analysis. He explores how individuals use language and performative acts to construct social identities and manage impressions in everyday interactions, contributing to our understanding of the role of discourse in social life. Fairclough (1989) and Van Dijk (2008) are known for the "Critical Discourse Analysis" (CDA), who combined linguistic analysis with social theory to examine the role of discourse in power relations.

Foucault's "critique of essentialism" (1966, 1969) has been instrumental in challenging fixed notions of gender identity. By emphasizing the historical and contingent nature of gender categories, Foucault's work has paved the way for more fluid and intersectional understandings of gender that take into account the complexities of identity. Michel Foucault critiques essentialism by highlighting the historical contingency and constructed nature of knowledge, including knowledge about human nature. He challenges essentialist notions by demonstrating how knowledge is produced within specific historical and cultural contexts, rather than reflecting inherent truths. Followingly, scholars like (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988; Butler, 1990) are the chief exponents who have contributed to the critique of essentialism by challenging fixed and a historical notion of identity and knowledge, highlighting the ways in which essentialist thinking can perpetuate power imbalances and social injustices. Although not explicitly developed by Foucault himself, his work on "intersectionality" has contributed to intersectional analyses in gender studies by highlighting the interconnectedness of various power structures such as gender, race, class, and sexuality. This has enriched discussions within gender studies by acknowledging the multiple axes of oppression that individuals may experience. Intersectionality, as a concept, has been developed and applied by several scholars, particularly within feminist and critical race theory. (Hooks, 1981; Lorde, 1984; Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1990).

METHODOLOGY

A purposive random sample of 7 women theologians and 200 leaders belonging to various wings from the church- Pastor, church-elder, deacon, the president and secretaries of women wing, youth wing, and men wing were selected from the total LIKBK population of 36,049 using a random sampling technique, as it offers wider advantages for the research to specifically select participants with expertise or experience in the specific area of interest like the women theologians, the president and secretaries of women wing, ensuring rich and informed data (Tongo, 2007; Thomas, 2022; Olibor, 2023). Following (Barriball, 1994; Aung et al., 2021), semi-structured questionnaires were purposefully designed to align with the study's tripartite objectives, namely: "to conduct a policy analysis of the LIKBK's Gender Policy with a focus on equal decision-making in church affairs", "to examine the LIKBK's stance and policies regarding women's ordination", and "to explore the experiences and perspectives of LIKBK women theologians." In order to uncover their unheard voices, dreams, and hardships encountered, thereby enabling an empathetic understanding of their lived realities, in-depth interviews were conducted using a pre-tested, semi-structured interview schedule (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Milena et al., 2008). A signed-informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews, and the researcher's established rapport with the participants, facilitated by 16 years of service as a government servant in the district and proficiency in the local language, enabled a smooth data collection process without any issues. This sampling strategy and data collection approach enabled the researcher to gather rich, qualitative data from key informants within the women's wing of the church. In line with (Guendouzi & Müller, 2005; Seifart, 2006; D'Arcy, 2017), who argued that "orthographic transcription" captures the exact words, phrases,

and sentences spoken by the interviewees, including pauses, emphasis, tone which involves transcribing the interview audio or video recordings into written text, the interviews, accordingly were transcribed using orthographic transcription, capturing the exact words, phrases, and sentences spoken by the participants. The transcriptions were then analyzed using “Thematic Analysis”, which involves identifying initial codes, codebook development, theme identification and theme interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2007; Kiger & Varpio, 2020) The themes were refined and defined, and relationships between them were identified. The use of Orthographic Transcription and Thematic Analysis allowed for a verbatim account and nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives, revealing patterns and themes that may have been missed using other methods. The coding and analysis process was iterative, with the researcher moving back and forth between stages to ensure a rigorous and systematic approach. This method allowed for a rich and in-depth exploration of the data, thereby revealing five Foucauldian themes each for the first two objectives, and one theme for the third objective (See Table 1). In order to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of study participants, pseudonyms are used consistently throughout the text when quoting respondents, thereby ensuring the anonymity of individuals who contributed their insights and experiences to the research.

Table 1. Tabular Representation of Objective-Theme Summary

Objectives	Foucauldian Themes
1 The LIKKB's Gender Policy in Regard to Equal Decision Making in the Church Affairs	Discourse and Power relations Power- Knowledge Disciplinary Power Institutional Practices Resistance and Subversion
2 The LIKKB's Stance and Policies Regarding Women's Ordination	Power Dynamics Power-knowledge Subjectification Biopower Panopticon as metaphor
3 Unveiling the Unheard Voices of the LIKKB Women Theologians	Forms of Resistance and Subversion

Source: Author's Fieldwork

ANALYSING THE LIKKB'S GENDER POLICY IN REGARD TO EQUAL DECISION MAKING IN THE CHURCH AFFAIRS

The LIKKB's gender policy, particularly concerning equal opportunity in decision-making processes, reveals concerning disparities that resonate with Foucault's theories. Certain quotes highlighted by the researcher during fieldwork offer a lens through which to analyze these issues using Foucault's framework. Analyzing these quotes using Foucault's theories can provide insights into the power dynamics and discursive formations surrounding gender roles and hierarchies within the context of the Church. Here is an analysis based on Foucault's concepts:

Discourse and Power Relations

Foucault argues that discourses not only reflect power relations but also produce and shape them, as was rightly asserted by Sanga (55), a Pastor respondent:

“In the discourse on power relations, I disagree with the notion of granting women equal responsibilities as men, let me cite the biblical passage from Timothy 2:12 that clearly states: ‘But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.’”

The quote citing Timothy 2:12 from the Bible reflects a discourse that legitimizes the subordination of women within the Church by attributing it to divine authority. This discourse serves to maintain power structures where men hold authority over women, reinforcing traditional gender roles.

Power- Knowledge

In alignment with Foucault's theory, some respondents have also expressed on how power operates through knowledge production, whereby Mary (45), a women wing leader express:

“I am more than happy in our current status in the Church and the assigned role of women in the Church is quite satisfactory. After all, we ought to be under the guidance of men.”

This statement reflects the operation of power relations and disciplinary mechanisms within the Church. By expressing contentment with the current status quo and endorsing the assigned roles for women, the speaker reinforces the existing power structures where men hold authority over women. The belief that women should be under the guidance of men signifies the internalization of disciplinary norms that regulate gendered behavior within the Church. This acceptance of gendered hierarchies perpetuates the discursive formation that women are subordinate to men, thereby reinforcing the power dynamics that maintain gender inequalities.

Disciplinary Power

Unanticipatedly, the LIKBK women wing internalize the norm of remaining silent and deferring to men's opinions in meetings, reflecting the disciplinary mechanisms that regulate their behavior and limit their participation in decision-making processes. The quote from Tracy (40), a women wing leader saying that:

“I may say that women do not have equal opportunity with men as we usually wait for the men's opinion and approval in the meetings. Besides, we still bear in our mind that taking a stand before men in meeting is against the prevailing norm.”

This passage highlights how Foucault's disciplinary power operates within the Church, shaping individuals' behaviors and self-regulation. The statement highlights the unequal distribution of power and opportunities between men and women within the Church setting. The practice of waiting for men's opinions and approval in meetings demonstrates how power operates through discursive formations to regulate behavior and decision-making processes. The prevailing norm, which discourages women from taking a stand before men in meetings, exemplifies the disciplinary mechanisms that govern gendered conduct and limit women's agency within institutional settings. This analysis illustrates how Foucault's theory can elucidate the power dynamics that perpetuate gender inequalities and shape individuals' behaviors and perceptions within hierarchical structures.

Institutional Practices

In a surprising turn of events, the LIKBK church's policy against the ordination of women as pastors, church elders, or deacons is revealed through Jane (35), a women theologian asserted that:

“Since our Church does not have any women church elder nor deacon nor ordained Pastor, it has become almost impossible to have a say in the Assembly which is the highest decision-making authority.”

This statement reflects the operation of power relations and institutional practices within the Church, as analyzed through Foucault's theory. The exclusion of women from leadership positions demonstrates how power operates through discursive formations and institutional structures to maintain gender hierarchies and limit women's participation in decision-making processes. The absence of women in positions of authority reinforces the prevailing norm that positions men as the primary holders of power and authority within the Church. This analysis highlights how Foucault's theory can help elucidate the mechanisms through which power shapes and perpetuates gender inequalities within religious institutions.

Resistance and Subversion

It is reassuring to learn that certain LIKBK Churches are proactively addressing gender representation, as articulated by Susan (36), an active leader of the women's wing:

“In our locality, specifically the Electric Veng Youth Wing unit, we ensure gender parity by reserving two out of every six elected leadership positions for women. This ensures equal treatment of men and women within our Church.”

This statement reflects an attempt to challenge traditional power structures and promote gender equality within the Church, aligning with Foucault's theory on power relations. By implementing a policy of gender quotas, the

Church subverts existing power dynamics that privilege men over women. This represents a form of resistance against the prevailing norm and an effort to reconfigure power relations within the institution. The discourse surrounding equal representation serves to disrupt the dominant discourse that excludes women from positions of authority, thereby challenging and potentially transforming the existing power structures within the Church. The final quote presents an example of resistance to dominant gender norms within the Church. By implementing a policy of reserving seats for women in leadership positions, the Electric Veng Youth Wing unit challenges traditional gender hierarchies and seeks to promote gender equality within the Church, demonstrating the potential for resistance and subversion of power dynamics.

Overall, these quotes illustrate how power operates through discourses, knowledge production, institutional practices, and disciplinary mechanisms to maintain gender inequalities within the Church. Foucault's theories help elucidate the complex interplay of power and knowledge in shaping gender relations and highlight the potential for resistance and transformation within hierarchical structure.

EXPLORING THE GREAT DEBATE ON WOMEN IN PASTORAL MINISTRY: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND CONTEMPORARY DEBATES

The debate surrounding whether women theologians should be ordained as pastors is an ongoing and complex issue that requires a thorough examination of historical perspectives. Delving into the historical context is crucial as it provides insight into the evolution of attitudes towards women's roles in the church and informs contemporary discussions. By exploring historical perspectives, we can gain a deeper understanding of the factors that have shaped beliefs and practices surrounding women's ordination throughout different periods of church history. This approach allows for a nuanced analysis that takes into account the diverse theological, cultural, and social factors that have influenced views on women's participation in pastoral ministry over time. In the early Christian church, women played significant roles as leaders and evangelists. Figures like Mary Magdalene and Phoebe are mentioned in the New Testament as prominent disciples and supporters of the early Christian movement. Scholars such as (Fiorenza, 1986; Pagels, 1979; Torjesen, 1993; Michelle, 2000), have explored the historical evidence of women's leadership roles in early Christianity. These scholars have made significant contributions to our understanding of women's leadership roles in the early Christian church, challenging traditional interpretations and highlighting the diversity of Christian practice in antiquity.

During the Middle Ages, women's roles in the church became more restricted due to changes in ecclesiastical structures and theological interpretations. (Bynum, 1987; Ferrante, 1997; Power, 1997; Murray, 2001)

In the modern era, the debate over women's ordination intensified within various Christian denominations. The rise of feminism and movements for gender equality spurred discussions about women's roles in ministry. The ordination of women as pastors became increasingly accepted in some denominations, while others maintained traditional restrictions. In the modern era, there have been several thematic debates on women's positions in the church, addressing issues such as ordination (McBeth, 1981; Ferrara, 1994; Behr-Sigel, 1994; Jones & Wooton, 2008), leadership roles (Bridges, 1998; Jegede & Gbenga, 2012; Gichuhi, 2018) and denominational interpretations of gender (Omanson, 1986; Daniel, 2010; Linonge & Baloyi, 2023). These scholars have contributed to ongoing debates within the church about women's positions and roles, advocating for greater inclusivity, equality, and theological reevaluation of traditional gender norms.

Coming to a closer home of the study area, that is in the state of Mizoram, studies on the position of women in the church often reveal a lack of female ordination as pastors. This observation underscores the prevailing gender dynamics within the local church community, where women are typically not ordained into pastoral roles. This phenomenon reflects broader social and cultural norms that influence gender roles and expectations within Mizoram's religious institutions. Such studies shed light on the unique challenges faced by women seeking leadership positions within the church, highlighting the need for further exploration and advocacy for gender equality in pastoral ministry within the region. (Vanlalthanpuui, 2014, 2019; Hrangkhuma, 2002). Therefore, this current examination of gender issues within the LIKBK church holds great promise for advancing women's studies in the state of Mizoram.

AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF LIKBK'S STANCE AND POLICIES REGARDING WOMEN'S ORDINATION

In alignment with the earlier discussions on women's ordination, the researcher sought to investigate the views of LIKBK church members regarding the ordination of women theologians as pastors. Surprisingly, the study detects that women theologian are still not accepted for pastoral roles within the church. The responses gathered from the fieldwork regarding the contentious issue of whether women should be ordained as pastors can be thematically categorized, drawing upon Foucault's theoretical framework to illuminate the underlying power dynamics and discourses at play.

Power Dynamics

This theme is evident in the responses, where some individuals assert that women should not be ordained as pastors due to their perceived limitations, reinforcing the idea that power is exercised through social relationships, and certain groups (in this case, men) maintain control over others (women). As was mentioned by Paul, a Pastor respondent that:

“I don't agree that women should be ordained as pastor because if an ordained woman theologian Pastor gets married to non-LIKBK, she will definitely follow her husband's denomination and this will be a great loss for the Church.” perceived authority to limit women's opportunities and reinforce gender-based hierarchies within the church.

Power-Knowledge

In the context of LIKBK study, Foucault's power knowledge reveal how knowledge (e.g., religious texts, traditional gender roles) is used to justify and reinforce power structures, perpetuating gender-based oppression. In line with this argument, James (45), a church-elder argued that:

“I personally feel that women are not fit to be ordained as Pastors because even the Bible clearly tells us that women are unclean to perform a sacramental rite. A woman undergoing menstruation is perceived as unclean for seven days and whoever touches her shall be unclean until even and everything that she lieth upon in her separation shall be unclean: everything also that she sitteth upon shall be unclean.” (Leviticus 15:9-20)

Here, we also see discursive formations, showing how language and discourse (e.g., religious texts, traditional gender roles) shape and maintain power structures, limiting women's opportunities and reinforcing gender-based hierarchies.

Subjectification

Foucault's 'notion of 'subjectification' illustrates how individuals (women) are socialized to internalize and accept their subordinated roles, perpetuating power imbalances, which was rightly detected in the speech of one youth wing male leader, Phillip (45):

“God has ordained that only men are to serve in position of spiritual teaching authority in the Church. This does not imply men are better or that women are inferior or less intelligent. It is simply the way God designs the Church to function. Men are to set the example in spiritual leadership whereas women are to take a less authoritative role. Women are encouraged to teach other women as is mentioned in the Bible (Titus 2:3-5). The Bible also does not restrict women from teaching children. The only activity women are restricted from is teaching or having spiritual authority over men. This bars women from serving as Pastors but it gives them a ministry focus more in agreement with God's plan and gifts.”

This argument exemplifies how certain interpretations of religious texts, such as the Bible, can be used to perpetuate patriarchal power structures. By attributing these gender roles to divine authority, proponents of male supremacy can justify and naturalize the subordination of women within religious institutions. Here, we also find a trend of Foucault's internalization of not only gender roles but also gender expectation whereby the process of subjectification operates on multiple levels. First, it involves the dissemination of specific interpretations of religious texts that reinforce gender hierarchies. These interpretations are then internalized

by individuals within the community, shaping their beliefs, behaviors, and identities in accordance with dominant gender norms.

Biopower

In the context of the LIKBK, Foucault's 'biopower' may be demonstrated on how control over women's bodies and minds (e.g., limitations on ordination, gender roles) is exercised through disciplinary mechanisms, reinforcing dominant power structures. As such, Mark (50), a church -elder respondent highlights that:

“I do not support the notion of women being ordained as pastors. Just as there are separate dress codes for men and women, the inherent nature of women is not conducive to the role of a pastor.”

Additionally, biopower operates through techniques of normalization and discipline that seek to mold individuals and populations according to certain norms and standards. This involves the surveillance, categorization, and classification of bodies and behaviors, as well as the enforcement of social norms and values through various institutions and practices. As such, Don (35), a men-wing respondent avowed that:

“In a patriarchal set-up like us, the Lai society, I don't find women fit to be ordained as Pastor; co-Ordinator post is more than enough for them. When it comes to performing ceremonial rites in the Church, performance done by women will somehow feel strange and incomplete.”

Here, Foucault's notion of 'Gender norms as a Surveillance Mechanism' is detected whereby the societal norms regarding gender serve as forms of surveillance, regulating behavior and identities. Additionally, Foucault's 'pathologization' (1976) is also detected in the quote wherein dominant discourses and institutions work to normalize certain forms of gender and sexuality while pathologizing others. He examines how norms of gender and sexuality are enforced through disciplinary practices within institutions such as medicine, psychiatry, and the legal system.

Panopticon as a Metaphor

Foucault uses the panopticon as a metaphor to illustrate the operation of power and surveillance in modern society. Foucault analyzes how disciplinary mechanisms, such as those found in prisons, schools, hospitals, and other institutions, function similarly to the panopticon. The central idea is that power operates most effectively when it is internalized by individuals, leading them to regulate their own behavior in anticipation of surveillance, even when they are not directly being observed. The panopticon thus serves as a powerful metaphor for understanding the dynamics of surveillance, discipline, and control within contemporary social structures. In the case of the LIKBK institution, the Church's Constitution and Bye laws functions effectively as a disciplinary mechanism wherein women theologians are still not accepted as Pastor by the Constitution itself. In line with this statement, Lorraine (31), one educated youth wing member stated that:

“I personally find no reason why women should not be ordained as Pastor. However, since the LIKBK Assembly has not accepted it at this point, it is not yet possible.”

As such, the Assembly's decision is akin to the watchful eye of the Panopticon, monitoring and regulating the behavior of women seeking ordination. The passage further implies that the LIKBK Assembly's decision is the norm, reinforcing existing power dynamics and making it difficult to challenge or change. In case, if any noncompliance or untoward behavior are found, the Church may excommunicate such person as per the clear written LIKBK Constitution and Bye Laws (2020: 214)

UNVEILING THE UNHEARD VOICES OF THE LIKBK WOMEN THEOLOGIANs: FORMS OF RESISTANCE AND SUBVERSION

As highlighted in the introduction, within the LIKBK church, there are currently seven women theologians serving in subordinate roles, notably as assistant coordinators and associate pastors. Recognizing the significance of this situation, the author conducted comprehensive interviews with these theologians to gain deeper insights. The outcomes of these interviews revealed a notable dissatisfaction among women theologians regarding their positions within the church. The noted quotes reflect various forms of resistance and subversion

within the context of gender roles and leadership positions within the LIKBK church, as analyzed through the lens of Foucault's theory of resistance and subversion.

One women theologian, Cindy's (35) statement, challenging the prevailing norms truly resonates Foucault's notion of resistance and subversion within the LIKBK church saying that:

“I feel that women, just like men, receive a similar divine calling to preach the gospel, regardless of their limited abilities compared to men.”

Additionally, this statement reverberates with Foucault's theory of microphysics of power. This theory examines how power can operate not only through centralized institutions but also at the level of everyday interactions and discourses. Foucault suggests that power is dispersed throughout society, shaping individuals' perceptions, behaviors, and identities in subtle and pervasive ways. In this context, Cindy's assertion that women, like men, receive a divine calling to preach the gospel highlights the ways in which individuals contest and challenge dominant discourses and norms surrounding gender roles and religious authority.

Additionally, another women theologian respondent, Mary (38) had similarly asserted that:

“There are numerous women Pastors in Burma and why not us? Even in our village (Bualpui NG), there is one women Burmese Pastor who fled to us as a refugee. She has been very helpful for the Church and for her fellow refugees.”

By questioning the gendered limitations placed on women's participation in preaching and leadership roles within the church, Mary challenges the micro-level power dynamics that perpetuate gender inequality and exclusion. Her statement reflects an awareness of the broader power relations at play within the church and asserts the equal worth and agency of women in fulfilling religious callings.

The statements from another three theologians, Anna (40), Louise (45) and Susan (36) had also reflected forms of resistance and subversion within the context of gender roles and leadership positions within the LIKBK church, as analyzed through the lens of Foucault's theory of counter-conduct.

Anna's (40) statement challenges the existing power dynamics within the church by questioning that:

“We pursue the study of courses like Bachelor of Divinity (BD) or Bachelor of Theology (BTh), all the courses studied by women are similar with men and therefore appointing them as a mere coordinator has made their acquired knowledge wasted.”

By asserting that their acquired knowledge is being wasted in these positions, Anna challenges the existing norms and calls for a reevaluation of women's roles within the church.

Similarly, Louise's (45) statement advocates for a change in the existing power relations within the church saying that:

“Given that women studied theology, often with huge expenses covered by the church or through personal means, it would be a prudent decision to ordain them as Pastors.”

By highlighting the investment made by women in their theological education and arguing for their ordination as pastors, Louise challenges the traditional gendered hierarchy within the church. Her assertion that it would be a prudent decision to ordain women as pastors reflects a desire to disrupt the existing power dynamics and create opportunities for women to occupy positions of leadership and authority.

Overall, these statements illustrate forms of ‘resistance and subversion’ within the LIKBK church as individuals challenge traditional norms and advocate for change in the allocation of leadership roles based on gender. Through their assertions, they engage in Foucault's discourse on ‘acts of counter-conduct’, seeking to transform existing power relations and create space for greater gender equality within the organization.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the research delves into LIKKB's policy regarding human rights, particularly focusing on gender studies. The gender analysis is structured around three key inquiries: firstly, it scrutinizes the equitable decision-making dynamics within the church between genders; secondly, it explores the contentious issue of women's eligibility for pastoral ordination within the church; and thirdly, it sheds light on the voices of women theologians. Through a meticulous examination of these three dimensions, the research draws upon Foucauldian perspectives to assert that women continue to experience subjugation and differentiation within the church. It underscores how gender policies still flagrantly violate fundamental human rights, underscoring the pervasive nature of these issues even within religious institutions. Furthermore, the study underscores how specific Christian Bible verses have been utilized to marginalize women's roles and engagement within the church, along with their positions in the family and broader society.

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