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Women between Modernity and Indigenous Culture in Lagos: A Socio-Biblical Study of Mary, Lydia, and Priscilla

Bitrus Nuhu[1]
Department of Christian Religious Studies
Adeleke University, Ede
Osun State Nigeria

Ngozi Emah Willies[2]
Department of Christian Religious Studies
Adeleke University, Ede
Osun State Nigeria

Abstract

The increasing pace of modernization in Lagos Metropolis has significantly reshaped the social, economic, and cultural experiences of women. Access to education, urbanization, technological advancement, and global cultural influences have expanded opportunities for female empowerment and public participation. However, these developments have also contributed to the weakening of certain indigenous cultural values and traditional forms of female socialization that historically promoted communal responsibility, family cohesion, respect for elders, and cultural continuity. This article explores the tension between modernity and indigenous culture among women in Lagos through a socio-biblical analysis of three prominent New Testament women: Mary, Lydia, and Priscilla. Employing a qualitative and interpretive approach, the study examines how these women navigated their social contexts while embodying virtues such as faithfulness, leadership, hospitality, entrepreneurship, and community service. The article argues that their experiences provide a constructive framework for understanding how contemporary women can embrace the benefits of modernization without abandoning valuable cultural traditions. By integrating socio-cultural realities in Lagos with biblical models of womanhood, the study advocates a balanced approach that promotes female advancement while preserving essential indigenous values. Such an approach contributes to ongoing discussions on gender, culture, and religion in contemporary African societies.

Keywords: Women, Modernity, Indigenous Culture, Lagos Metropolis, Female Identity, Mary, Lydia, Priscilla, New Testament, Cultural Preservation, Socio-Biblical Studies.

Introduction

The city of Lagos represents one of Africa's most rapidly modernizing urban centers, where globalization, education, technology, and economic advancement

[1] gentleh2h@gmail.com
[2] ngoziwillies@gmail.com

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continue to reshape social identities and cultural practices. Among the most affected groups are women, whose traditional roles and cultural orientations have undergone significant transformation. While modernization has expanded opportunities for female participation in public life, concerns remain regarding the erosion of indigenous cultural values that historically guided female socialization and communal responsibility. This article examines these tensions through a socio-biblical reading of Mary, Lydia, and Priscilla, arguing that their lives offer important insights for balancing cultural preservation and contemporary development.

Women, Modernity, and Indigenous Cultural Transformation in Lagos
a. Understanding Modernity and Female Social Change

Modernity refers to the social, economic, political, and cultural transformations associated with industrialization, urbanization, technological advancement, and the expansion of global networks. Anthony Giddens describes modernity as a dynamic process characterized by the reorganization of social life across time and space, resulting in profound changes in individual identities and social institutions.[3] In contemporary societies, modernization has altered traditional structures of authority, family relations, and gender expectations, creating new opportunities as well as new challenges.

Within the African context, modernity has often been experienced through the combined influences of colonialism, globalization, formal education, urbanization, and technological development. Consequently, social identities are increasingly shaped by interactions between indigenous traditions and global cultural forces. Arjun Appadurai argues that global cultural flows facilitate the movement of ideas, values, and lifestyles across national boundaries, thereby transforming local cultures and social practices.[4]

For women in Lagos, modernity has significantly expanded access to education, professional careers, entrepreneurship, political participation, and leadership opportunities. The emergence of women in public life reflects broader social transformations occurring throughout Nigeria and other African societies.[5] Recent studies indicate that Yoruba women continue to play increasingly visible roles in politics, governance, education, and economic development, challenging earlier assumptions that confined women primarily to domestic spheres.[6] Nevertheless, modernization has also generated tensions between traditional expectations and contemporary aspirations. As women assume new social roles, questions arise concerning the preservation of cultural values, communal obligations, and indigenous forms of identity formation. Rather than viewing modernity and tradition as mutually exclusive, scholars increasingly advocate a

[3] Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 1–16.
[4] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 27–47.
[5] Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 213–229.
[6] Samuel Wycliff, "Yoruba Women in Nigerian Public Sphere: The Nexus and Changing Dynamics," *African Identities* (2025): 1–16.

balanced approach that recognizes the dynamic interaction between cultural continuity and social change.[7]

b. Indigenous Cultural Training among Women in Lagos Society

Before the expansion of colonial education and contemporary urban culture, female socialization within Yoruba society was deeply rooted in indigenous systems of cultural training. Such training extended beyond domestic instruction and encompassed moral education, communal responsibility, respect for elders, family loyalty, and participation in social and religious life. The Yoruba concept of *Omolúàbí* emphasized integrity, discipline, humility, hard work, and commitment to communal well-being.[8]

Women occupied significant positions within these traditional structures. As mothers, wives, traders, and community leaders, they served as custodians of cultural values and transmitters of social knowledge. Indigenous training often occurred through family networks, age-grade associations, apprenticeship systems, storytelling traditions, and participation in communal ceremonies. Through these mechanisms, young women learned not only practical skills but also the ethical principles that governed social relationships and collective identity.[9]

Oyěwùmí's work on Yoruba society challenges simplistic interpretations of African gender systems by demonstrating that indigenous social organization often operated according to principles different from Western gender categories. Her analysis reveals the complexity of female identity within Yoruba culture and highlights the importance of motherhood, seniority, kinship, and social responsibility as organizing principles of social life.[10] In Lagos, however, rapid urban growth and changing lifestyles have altered many of these traditional channels of cultural transmission. Extended family structures have weakened in some contexts, while formal education and digital communication increasingly shape the socialization of younger generations. As a result, many aspects of indigenous cultural training that were once transmitted through direct communal interaction face growing challenges in contemporary urban environments.[11]

c. The Impact of Urbanization, Education, and Globalization on Female Identity

Urbanization has played a central role in reshaping female identity in Lagos. As one of Africa's largest cities, Lagos attracts individuals from diverse ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds. This urban environment creates opportunities for social mobility, economic participation, and cultural exchange.

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[7] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 70–108.
[8] Toyin Falola, *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 325–342.
[9] Bolanle Awe, *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective* (Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2020), 54–73.
[10] OyèrónkéOyěwùmí, *What Gender Is Motherhood? Changing Yorùbá Ideals of Power, Procreation, and Identity in the Age of Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1–25.
[11] ibn

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Women have particularly benefited from expanded educational opportunities, increased workforce participation, and greater access to entrepreneurial activities.[12]

Education has emerged as one of the most significant instruments of female empowerment. Through formal education, women acquire knowledge, professional skills, and access to broader social networks. Educational attainment has contributed to increased economic independence and greater participation in public decision-making processes. Consequently, contemporary women increasingly negotiate identities that combine professional achievement with family and community responsibilities.[13] Globalization further intensifies these transformations by exposing women to diverse cultural models through media, technology, migration, and international communication networks. Digital platforms facilitate the circulation of global ideas concerning gender, family life, fashion, religion, and personal autonomy. While such exposure can broaden opportunities and encourage innovation, it may also contribute to the marginalization of indigenous cultural practices and local systems of value transmission.[14]

Recent scholarship on Yoruba women suggests that female identities in contemporary Nigeria are increasingly characterized by negotiation rather than replacement. Rather than abandoning tradition entirely, many women selectively adapt indigenous values to modern realities, creating hybrid forms of identity that reflect both cultural heritage and contemporary aspirations.[15]This process illustrates that modernization does not necessarily eliminate indigenous culture; rather, it often transforms the ways in which culture is interpreted, practiced, and transmitted across generations. The experience of women in Lagos therefore reflects a broader African struggle to balance cultural preservation with social advancement. Understanding this tension provides an important foundation for examining the lives of Mary, Lydia, and Priscilla, whose experiences in the New Testament similarly demonstrate how women can engage changing social realities while remaining rooted in enduring moral and communal values.

Mary as a Model of Faith, Family Responsibility, and Cultural Continuity

1. Mary's Social Context in First-Century Judaism

Mary, the mother of Jesus, occupies a significant place within the New Testament narrative and early Christian tradition. Her life was situated within the socio-cultural environment of first-century Judaism, a society characterized by strong family structures, religious observance, communal responsibility, and adherence to ancestral traditions. Women were generally expected to contribute to the stability of the household, nurture children, preserve family

[12] Mohammed S. Audu and Hasiyah A. Sule, "Women and Urbanisation in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria," *ABUAD Journal of Social and Management Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2024): 149–165.
[13] Amina Mama, *Women's Studies and Studies of Women in Africa during the 2020s* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2022), 33–49.
[14] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 48–65,
[15] Samuel Wycliff, "Yoruba Women in Nigerian Public Sphere," 8–14.

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honor, and participate in the religious life of the community.[16] Although Jewish society was largely patriarchal, women played indispensable roles in maintaining the moral and spiritual fabric of family and community life.[17] The Gospel accounts portray Mary as a young Jewish woman from Nazareth in Galilee who was deeply rooted in the religious traditions of her people (Luke 1:26–38). Her familiarity with Israel's Scriptures is reflected in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55), a hymn that echoes themes from the Hebrew Bible, particularly the song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1–10).[18] This suggests that Mary was not merely a passive participant in her culture but an active bearer of Israel's religious memory and covenantal identity.

Scholars observe that Mary's life reflects the intersection of faith, family, and cultural continuity within Second Temple Judaism. Her commitment to Jewish customs is evident in the presentation of Jesus at the Temple (Luke 2:22–24), participation in annual pilgrimage festivals (Luke 2:41–42), and observance of the Law.[19] Through these actions, Mary contributed to the transmission of religious and cultural values to the next generation. Her example demonstrates how women functioned as important agents of cultural preservation within Jewish society.

2. Obedience, Humility, and Family Commitment

One of the most striking characteristics of Mary in the New Testament is her obedience to God's will. When the angel Gabriel announced that she would conceive and give birth to the Messiah, Mary responded with remarkable faith despite the potential social consequences of such a pregnancy. Her declaration, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:38), reveals a posture of trust, submission, and spiritual courage.[20] Mary's obedience was accompanied by humility. Rather than seeking personal recognition, she acknowledged God's sovereignty and grace. In the Magnificat, she attributes her blessedness not to personal achievement but to God's favor and redemptive activity among the humble and marginalized (Luke 1:46–55).[21] Her humility reflects a theological vision centered on divine purpose rather than self-promotion.

Equally important was Mary's commitment to family responsibility. Throughout the Gospel narratives, she appears as a devoted mother who nurtured Jesus from infancy to adulthood. Luke repeatedly emphasizes that Mary treasured significant events in her heart and reflected upon them (Luke 2:19, 51), suggesting a deep sense of maternal care and spiritual attentiveness.[22] Even during the crucifixion, Mary remained present at the cross (John 19:25–27),

[16] Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 359–376.
[17] Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 75–98.
[18] Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 47–56.
[19] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 141–148.
[20] Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 114–119.
[21] Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2024), 185–188.
[22] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 150–152.

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demonstrating enduring loyalty and familial commitment in the face of suffering.

Modern scholarship increasingly recognizes that Mary's significance extends beyond biological motherhood. She embodies discipleship, faithfulness, perseverance, and participation in God's redemptive mission.[23] Her life illustrates how devotion to God can coexist with dedication to family and community responsibilities, offering a holistic model of womanhood that integrates spiritual commitment with social engagement.

3. Contemporary Relevance for Women in Lagos

Mary's example possesses significant relevance for women navigating the complexities of contemporary life in Lagos. As modernization, urbanization, and globalization reshape social expectations, many women find themselves balancing professional aspirations, family responsibilities, cultural identity, and religious commitments. In this context, Mary's life provides valuable insights for negotiating these multiple demands without sacrificing foundational values.

First, Mary's faithfulness demonstrates the importance of maintaining spiritual identity amid social change. Just as she remained grounded in her covenant relationship with God while responding to new circumstances, contemporary women can engage modern opportunities while preserving moral and spiritual convictions.[24] Faith need not be viewed as an obstacle to progress; rather, it can serve as a guiding framework for responsible participation in society.

Second, Mary's commitment to family underscores the continuing significance of nurturing relationships and intergenerational responsibility. Although contemporary economic realities often require women to participate actively in the workforce, Mary's example suggests that family care and community commitment remain essential dimensions of human flourishing.[25] This perspective challenges the tendency to frame professional success and family responsibility as mutually exclusive pursuits.

Third, Mary's role as a transmitter of religious and cultural values offers important lessons for cultural continuity in Lagos. As indigenous traditions face increasing pressure from global cultural influences, women continue to play crucial roles in preserving language, ethical values, social memory, and communal identity. Mary's life illustrates how cultural preservation can occur not through resistance to change but through the intentional transmission of meaningful values across generations.[26]

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[23] Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 121–138; Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary* (New York: Image Books, 2018), 25–48.
[24] Nijay K. Gupta, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023), 19–35.
[25] Lynn H. Cohick and Amy Brown Hughes, *Christian Women in the Patristic World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 35–49.
[26] Esther Mombo, "Women, Culture, and Christian Identity in Contemporary Africa," *Studies in World Christianity* 29, no. 2 (2023): 167–182.

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Consequently, Mary emerges as a compelling socio-biblical model for contemporary women in Lagos. Her life demonstrates that faith, humility, family responsibility, and cultural continuity can coexist with active engagement in changing social realities. In an era marked by rapid transformation, her example provides a framework for balancing modern aspirations with enduring moral and cultural commitments.

Lydia as a Model of Economic Empowerment and Social Influence

a. Lydia's Entrepreneurial Identity

Lydia emerges in the New Testament as one of the most notable examples of female economic agency in the early Christian movement. She is introduced in Acts as "a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira" (Acts 16:14), indicating her involvement in a highly specialized and lucrative trade within the ancient Mediterranean economy.[27] Purple dye and purple-dyed fabrics were luxury commodities associated with wealth, elite status, and imperial patronage, suggesting that Lydia was likely a woman of considerable financial means and social standing.[28]

Her designation as a "worshipper of God" further situates her within the circle of Gentiles who were attracted to Jewish monotheism prior to fully converting to Christianity.[29] Lydia's presence at the riverside place of prayer in Philippi reflects both her religious openness and her engagement in communal spiritual practices outside the formal synagogue structure. Scholars note that her economic independence and religious participation challenge common assumptions about the marginality of women in the ancient world, revealing instead a more complex picture of female agency in commerce and religion.[30]

From a socio-historical perspective, Lydia represents a form of entrepreneurial identity that combines trade expertise, cross-regional commercial networks, and social influence. Her business activity in Philippi, far from her native Thyatira in Asia Minor, suggests involvement in trans-local trade systems characteristic of the Roman imperial economy.[31] In this sense, Lydia exemplifies the capacity of women to navigate economic structures, accumulate resources, and exercise social influence within their communities.

b. Wealth, Hospitality, and Community Development

Lydia's response to Paul's preaching demonstrates the integration of economic capacity with hospitality and communal responsibility. After her conversion, she and her household were baptized, and she immediately offered her home as a meeting place for the emerging Christian community (Acts 16:15). Her

[27] Acts 16:14 (NRSV).
[28] Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Vol. 3* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 2389–2394.
[29] Richard N. Longenecker, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 875–878.
[30] Loveday Alexander, *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context* (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 112–118.
[31] Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 476–481.

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invitation, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home"reflects both humility and generosity, as well as recognition of her resources as tools for communal service.[32]

Hospitality in the ancient Mediterranean world was not merely a private virtue but a significant social institution that enabled the formation of networks, movements, and communities. Lydia's home in Philippi likely became one of the earliest centers of Christian worship in Europe, demonstrating how private economic resources could be transformed into public religious and social capital.[33] Her willingness to host the early believers highlights the role of women as facilitators of community formation and institutional development within the early church.

Contemporary scholarship increasingly emphasizes the importance of women like Lydia in the expansion of early Christianity. Rather than being peripheral figures, women of means often provided the financial and logistical infrastructure necessary for missionary activity and community stability.[34] Lydia's example thus illustrates the intersection of wealth, faith, and social responsibility, where economic empowerment is directed toward collective flourishing rather than individual accumulation alone.

c. Lessons for Modern Women in Lagos

Lydia's narrative offers significant insights for understanding women's economic participation and social influence in contemporary Lagos. As one of Africa's largest commercial hubs, Lagos provides extensive opportunities for female entrepreneurship, trade, and professional advancement. Women are actively engaged in markets, corporate sectors, small and medium enterprises, and digital economies, reflecting patterns of economic empowerment similar, in principle, to Lydia's commercial engagement.[35]

First, Lydia demonstrates that economic success is not incompatible with spiritual commitment and moral responsibility. Her identity as both a businesswoman and a worshipper of God illustrates the possibility of integrating faith with economic activity. In the context of Lagos, this challenges the perception that religious devotion and professional ambition are mutually exclusive, instead suggesting a complementary relationship between vocation and values.[36]

Second, Lydia's hospitality highlights the importance of using economic resources for community development. In modern urban settings, where social fragmentation and economic inequality are common challenges, her example

[32] Keener, *Acts*, 2395–2397.
[33] Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Social World of Luke-Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 203–210.
[34] Nijay K. Gupta, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023), 52–70.
[35] World Bank, *Nigeria Development Update: Women and Economic Participation* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2023), 41–55.
[36] Akinyemi Akinlabi, "Women Entrepreneurship and Faith Integration in Urban Nigeria," *Journal of African Business* 25, no. 2 (2024): 187–203.

encourages socially responsible entrepreneurship. Women's economic empowerment can extend beyond personal advancement to include mentorship, philanthropy, and the creation of supportive networks for others.[37] Third, Lydia's influence in the establishment of the Philippian church underscores the capacity of economically empowered women to shape institutions and communities. In Lagos, women continue to play significant roles in education, religious leadership, business associations, and civic organizations. Lydia's life thus provides a socio-biblical framework for understanding how women's economic agency can contribute to broader social transformation when guided by ethical and communal values.[38] Ultimately, Lydia represents a model of integrated identity in which economic empowerment, spiritual devotion, and social responsibility converge. Her example affirms that women can be active participants in economic systems while simultaneously serving as agents of community formation and cultural continuity.

Priscilla as a Model of Leadership, Education, and Partnership

a. Priscilla's Ministry and Intellectual Contribution

Priscilla (also referred to as Prisca) appears in the New Testament as one of the most intellectually and theologically significant female figures in the early Christian movement. Alongside her husband Aquila, she is consistently presented as a co-worker in ministry with the apostle Paul (Rom. 16:3–5). Notably, in several references her name precedes that of her husband, a detail that many scholars interpret as an indication of her prominence or leadership within the partnership.[39]

Priscilla's most explicit theological contribution is recorded in Acts 18:24–26, where she, together with Aquila, instructs Apollos in "the way of God more accurately." This episode reveals her role not merely as a supporter of ministry but as an active participant in theological education and doctrinal clarification.[40] Her involvement demonstrates that early Christian instruction was not restricted to formally designated male leaders, but included collaborative and intellectually engaged households.

Scholars of early Christianity have emphasized that Priscilla represents a model of educated female leadership within the Pauline mission. Her participation in teaching Apollos suggests both doctrinal competence and rhetorical skill, positioning her within the broader framework of early Christian intellectual life.[41] This reflects a form of leadership that is relational, collaborative, and grounded in shared ministry rather than hierarchical dominance.

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[37] Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi, *Speaking Above a Whisper: Notes from a Grassroots Activist* (Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2021), 99–114.
[38] Esther Mombo, "Women, Leadership and Church Growth in Africa," *Studies in World Christianity* 29, no. 2 (2023): 167–182.
[39] Richard N. Longenecker, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 883–886.
[40] Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Vol. 3* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 2560–2565.
[41] Nijay K. Gupta, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023), 81–98

b. Gender, Leadership, and Mentorship in the Early Church

The partnership between Priscilla and Aquila provides a significant example of gender cooperation in early Christian leadership structures. Their ministry is repeatedly described in household contexts, indicating that the early church often functioned within domestic spaces where women exercised substantial influence.[42]The household (*oikos*) served as a primary site for worship, teaching, and community formation, allowing women like Priscilla to participate meaningfully in leadership activities.

Priscilla's role in mentoring Apollos also highlights the importance of informal theological education in the early church. Rather than operating within institutional seminary structures, early Christian instruction often took place through interpersonal relationships, shared labor, and communal learning.[43] Within this framework, women could exercise authority through teaching, mentorship, and spiritual guidance.

Recent scholarship has increasingly reassessed the role of women in Pauline communities, arguing that figures such as Priscilla challenge later restrictive interpretations of women's leadership in the church.[44] Her example demonstrates that gender did not preclude theological contribution or leadership participation in early Christian communities. Instead, leadership was often defined by spiritual maturity, doctrinal understanding, and service-oriented engagement.

c. Implications for Women's Public Engagement in Contemporary Society

Priscilla's example carries significant implications for contemporary women navigating leadership, education, and public engagement in Lagos and other urban African contexts. In modern societies where debates about gender roles in religious and civic leadership remain ongoing, Priscilla offers a socio-biblical model of partnership-based leadership that integrates intellectual competence with collaborative ministry.

First, her example affirms the legitimacy of women's participation in intellectual and theological discourse. In contemporary academic, ecclesial, and professional environments, women increasingly occupy teaching, leadership, and decision-making roles. Priscilla's ministry suggests that such participation is consistent with early Christian practice and theological tradition when grounded in service and competence.[45]

Second, Priscilla demonstrates that leadership need not be individualized or hierarchical to be effective. Her partnership with Aquila reflects a model of

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[42] Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 45–67.
[43] Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *When in Romans: An Invitation to Linger with the Gospel according to Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 132–140.
[44] Lynn H. Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 165–182.
[45] Nijay K. Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 99–115.

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shared authority and mutual contribution. This is particularly relevant in contemporary Lagos, where collaborative leadership models are increasingly necessary for addressing complex social, educational, and religious challenges.[46] Third, her mentorship of Apollos highlights the importance of women in shaping intellectual and spiritual formation across generations. In modern contexts, women continue to serve as educators, mentors, and role models in families, churches, and institutions. Priscilla's example encourages the recognition of these often-underappreciated contributions as central to community development and knowledge transmission.[47]

Ultimately, Priscilla represents a vision of empowered female leadership that is relational, intellectually engaged, and community-oriented. Her life challenges reductive understandings of gender roles and provides a constructive framework for integrating women's leadership into contemporary social, educational, and religious structures.

Negotiating Modernity and Indigenous Culture: Socio-Biblical Reflections

1. Positive Contributions of Modernization

Modernization, despite its complexities, has contributed significantly to the reconfiguration of female identity in Lagos and other urban African contexts. The expansion of formal education, access to digital technologies, improved healthcare systems, and increased participation in economic and political life have collectively enhanced women's social mobility and visibility in public spaces.[48] These developments have enabled women to pursue careers in law, medicine, academia, business, and governance, thereby challenging earlier structural limitations on female agency.

From a sociological perspective, modernization has also fostered individual autonomy and broadened the scope of personal choice in matters relating to marriage, education, and vocation. Anthony Giddens argues that modernity is closely associated with the emergence of reflexive identity formation, where individuals actively construct their social roles rather than passively inheriting them.[49] In Lagos, this has translated into a generation of women who increasingly define success through both professional achievement and personal fulfilment. In addition, globalization has facilitated cross-cultural exchange, exposing women to diverse models of leadership, entrepreneurship, and gender relations. While such exposure is not without tension, it has also contributed to innovation, creativity, and expanded opportunities for women's participation in global economic systems.[50]

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[46] Esther Mombo, "Women, Leadership and Church Growth in Africa," *Studies in World Christianity* 29, no. 2 (2023): 167–182.
[47] World Bank, *Nigeria Development Update: Women and Economic Participation* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2023), 41–60.
[48]Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 32–54.
[49]Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 27–47.
[50]Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 220–235.

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2. Challenges to Indigenous Cultural Values

Alongside these positive developments, modernization has introduced significant challenges to indigenous cultural values that traditionally structured female socialization in Yoruba society. One of the most notable concerns is the weakening of extended family systems, which historically served as primary institutions for moral instruction, cultural transmission, and communal support.[51]

Urbanization and economic pressures have contributed to the fragmentation of communal living arrangements, thereby reducing the influence of elders and traditional custodians of cultural knowledge. As Oyeronke Oyěwùmí observes, indigenous Yoruba social organization was deeply relational and seniority-based, emphasizing communal identity over individual autonomy.[52] The erosion of such structures has implications for the transmission of values such as respect for elders, communal responsibility, and intergenerational solidarity.Furthermore, the pervasive influence of global media and digital culture has introduced new value systems that often prioritize individualism, consumerism, and personal expression over collective cultural norms. Recent studies on urban Nigerian women indicate that while these influences provide empowerment opportunities, they may also contribute to identity fragmentation and cultural discontinuity when not critically engaged.[53]

3. Reclaiming Indigenous Virtues through Biblical Models

In response to these tensions, socio-biblical reflection offers constructive frameworks for cultural and ethical renewal. The New Testament women examined in this studyMary, Lydia, and Priscillaprovide complementary models for integrating faith, responsibility, and cultural continuity within changing social contexts.

Mary exemplifies faithfulness, humility, and intergenerational responsibility; Lydia demonstrates economic empowerment combined with hospitality and community support; and Priscilla represents intellectual leadership and collaborative mentorship. Together, these figures illustrate that cultural engagement and social transformation are not mutually exclusive but can be harmonized within a value-oriented framework.[54] Their narratives suggest that biblical traditions can serve as interpretive resources for re-evaluating contemporary cultural shifts. Rather than rejecting modernity outright, these models encourage discernment in preserving virtues that sustain family cohesion, moral integrity, and communal identity. In this sense, biblical anthropology provides a mediating framework through which indigenous values and modern opportunities may be critically integrated.

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[51]OyèrónkéOyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 85–104.
[52]Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi, *Speaking Above a Whisper: Notes from a Grassroots Activist* (Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2021), 101–118.
[53]Nijay K. Gupta, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023), 19–45.
[54]Amina Mama, "Gender, Modernity and African Cultural Identity," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 34, no. 1 (2022): 15–29.

4. Toward a Balanced Framework for Female Identity in Lagos

A sustainable approach to female identity in Lagos requires a balanced framework that acknowledges both the gains of modernization and the enduring significance of indigenous cultural values. Such a framework resists binary oppositions between tradition and modernity, instead emphasizing continuity, adaptation, and selective integration.

First, women's empowerment initiatives should be grounded in cultural sensitivity, ensuring that development does not inadvertently undermine valuable indigenous systems of social support and moral instruction.[55] Second, religious and educational institutions should play an active role in fostering ethical formation that integrates biblical principles with cultural wisdom. Third, policy and community structures should promote intergenerational dialogue, allowing older and younger women to collaborate in transmitting knowledge and values. Ultimately, a socio-biblical approach suggests that female identity in Lagos can be both modern and culturally rooted. The examples of Mary, Lydia, and Priscilla demonstrate that women can participate fully in social transformation while maintaining commitment to faith, family, and community. This integrative vision offers a constructive pathway for addressing the tensions between modernization and cultural preservation in contemporary African society.

Conclusion

This study has examined the complex relationship between modernity and indigenous cultural formation among women in Lagos Metropolis through a socio-biblical reading of Mary, Lydia, and Priscilla. The discussion has demonstrated that contemporary social transformation, shaped by urbanization, education, globalization, and technological advancement, has significantly expanded women's opportunities for economic participation, intellectual engagement, and public leadership. At the same time, it has raised legitimate concerns regarding the gradual weakening of indigenous cultural frameworks that historically sustained moral instruction, communal identity, and intergenerational continuity.[56]

The analysis of Mary, Lydia, and Priscilla within their New Testament contexts reveals that women have long occupied meaningful roles in the negotiation of faith, culture, and social responsibility. Mary embodies faithfulness, humility, and continuity of family and religious tradition; Lydia represents economic empowerment combined with hospitality and community formation; while Priscilla illustrates intellectual leadership, mentorship, and collaborative ministry. Taken together, these figures demonstrate that active participation in

[55] Esther Mombo, "Women, Leadership and Church Growth in Africa," *Studies in World Christianity* 29, no. 2 (2023): 167–182.
[56] Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 220–235; World Bank, *Nigeria Development Update: Women and Economic Participation* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2023), 41–60.

social transformation is not inherently opposed to the preservation of moral and cultural values.[57]

In the context of Lagos, these biblical narratives offer a constructive interpretive framework for engaging the tensions between modernity and indigenous cultural heritage. Rather than advocating a return to static tradition or an uncritical embrace of modernity, the study supports a balanced synthesis in which cultural values are critically preserved, adapted, and transmitted in ways that remain meaningful within contemporary realities. Such an approach recognizes that cultural identity is dynamic, yet anchored in enduring ethical and communal principles.[58]

The article therefore concludes that sustainable female development in Lagos requires an integrative model that affirms both empowerment and cultural continuity. By drawing on socio-biblical insights, particularly the lived examples of Mary, Lydia, and Priscilla, women's advancement can be understood not as a departure from cultural heritage but as a reconfiguration of it within changing historical conditions. This synthesis provides a pathway for fostering resilient identities that are both globally engaged and locally rooted, thereby contributing to the broader project of social cohesion and cultural sustainability in contemporary African society.

[57] Nijay K. Gupta, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023), 19–45; Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Vol. 3* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 2389–2405.
[58] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 32–54; Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 27–47; Amina Mama, "Gender, Modernity and African Cultural Identity," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 34, no. 1 (2022): 15–29.

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