

GENDER DYNAMICS IN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EL-SHADDAI AND ÌYÁ MI ÀBÈNÍ OLÓMÚ ORÙ

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Abstract

This study uses a comparative hermeneutic analysis to examine feminine representations of divinity, El Shaddai and Ìyá mi Àbèní Olómú Orù, in the Old Testament and Yoruba religious thought. While both traditions are still preserved, they are often marginalised or suppressed in patriarchal interpretations in a way that privileges masculine conceptions of God and sacred authority. The study made use of a theoretical framework which adopts David Tuesday Adamo's African Cultural Hermeneutics and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's Feminist Hermeneutics of Suspicion, in alignment with a conceptual framework guided by David Biale's reading of El-Shaddai in the Hebrew tradition and Oyeronke Olajubu's interpretation of Ìyá mi Àbèní Olómú Orù in Yoruba religious thought, to read the texts from a contextual, critical and culturally gender-aware approach. Methodologically, it utilises a comparative hermeneutic analysis and semi-structured telephone interviews with selected religious practitioners and scholars; the study explores how feminine divine power is preserved, obscured, and reinterpreted across the two traditions. The findings show that both El Shaddai and Ìyá mi Àbèní Olómú Orù have inherent feminine traits indicating the feminine face of divinity, authority, and power balance. The study concludes that recovering these dimensions offers a more nuanced understanding of gender, divinity, and women's roles in biblical and Yoruba religious discourse.

Keywords: Divinity, femininity, Comparative, El Shaddai, Ìyá mi Àbèní Olómú Orù

Introduction

This study examines the representation of feminine power in religious narratives and considers how gendered imagery has shaped conceptions of divinity in ancient traditions, which, according to Breyfogle, contributed to the patriarchal exclusion of women from sacred spaces in ancient Israel (405–19). Similarly, within the Yoruba cosmogony, Orunmila, the deity of wisdom, knowledge, divination, and fate, warns otherwise in the Ifa corpus that removing divine feminine energy would render life unsustainable, thereby emphasising the necessity of gendered balance in creation (Fagbemi-oke and Jones-Brown 12–13).

The scope of the study covers primarily two sources, the Old Testament and Yoruba panegyrics from the Ifa corpus, and includes a semi-structured phone interview to gather supplementary data from professionals and scholars.

Previous literature shows that although both traditions preserve language and imagery suggestive of

feminine dimensions of the divine, such elements have frequently been subordinated to privileged masculine representations, which Johnson described as female images of God, necessary for the full expression of the mystery of God and should be restored in theological narrative (500). Traditional scholars often put aside the language symbols pointing to divine femininity in these sacred traditions while emphasising the male factors. The present study in contrast to the aforementioned, investigates the relationship between the Old Testament concept of El Shaddai and the Yoruba panegyric *Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù*. It argues that both expressions retain traces of divine feminine power that have been obscured by patriarchal modes of interpretation and must be reconfigured and emphasised in contemporary religious and cultural discourse.

The study uses a comparative hermeneutic approach, which is guided by David Tuesday Adamo's *African Cultural Hermeneutics* and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *Feminist Hermeneutics of Suspicion*. These frameworks enable a contextual reading of the texts while also providing a critical lens through which patriarchal assumptions in their interpretation may be interrogated.

In biblical scholarship, scholars such as Friedrich Delitzsch (1886) and William F. Albright (1935) laid the groundwork for this discourse. The former suggested that El Shaddai means God of the mountain; the latter refined the notion and linked it with God with breasts. The former appeared to subsume the latter, but in modern biblical scholarship, there is a growing demand for feminist interpretations that challenge traditional biases (Krogevoll 180-193; Biale 240–241). Biale's work (1982) posits a feminist perspective in which “El Shaddai,” often translated as “God Almighty” in Abrahamic religions, could be understood as a “God with Breasts” (240-256).

Within the Yoruba cosmogony, it is observed in the study that similar patterns appear, where “*Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù*” is not just a poetic expression but also indicates a function of divine femininity. Yet, it remains marginalised in public discourse, often reserved for private or cultic use. Debbie Turkilsen (2014) and Oyeronke Olajubu (2003) noted that women in religious narratives were significantly overlooked in understanding women's roles and their contributions to religious development and propagation (Turkilsen 1-5; Olajubu 113-125).

The objective of this study is to compare these two traditions to demonstrate how feminine representations of divinity are preserved, interpreted, and, at times, marginalised. In particular, the study seeks to answer the following research questions: How is El Shaddai interpreted within biblical tradition? In what ways does *Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù* express sacred feminine authority in Yoruba cosmogony? And what points of convergence and divergence emerge when the two traditions are read comparatively? The justification for this study is in that fact that it contributes to the current scholarly campaign to restore discussions on gender, feminine divinity and interpretation, and feminine divine imagery, which patriarchal scholarship usually overlooked. By placing Hebrew and Yoruba religious traditions in dialogue, the paper seeks to deepen understanding of women's roles in religious thought, ritual practice, and cultural world.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a particular reference to the use of comparative hermeneutic analysis, which Pye noted is especially relevant in religious studies and Christian theology for revealing shared interpretive patterns and explaining religious relationships. It is defined as comparing how different religious traditions interpret related meanings (Pye 1980). The approach is appropriate because the research seeks to interpret meanings embedded in religious texts and traditions rather than measure variables

statistically. The study focuses on the Old Testament concept of El Shaddai and the Yoruba panegyric Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù, both of which are examined as religious expressions that may preserve traces of feminine divine imagery.

The primary data in the study are selected biblical passages, which are associated with El Shaddai, and the Yoruba panegyric expressions relating to Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù within the Ifa corpus, and relevant scholarly literature on the interpretation of both traditions. The biblical materials were analysed through exegetical and contextual reading, with attention to historical, linguistic, and theological debates surrounding the meaning of El Shaddai. The Yoruba materials were examined through interpretive and contextual analysis, with particular attention to their religious, poetic, and cosmological significance within Yoruba thought.

The study also draws on semi-structured telephone interviews with three selected religious practitioners and scholars. These interviews were used to obtain or clarify sacred and culturally contextual information that is not within the public domain and to explore the proper understanding of the meanings of divine femininity and the role of feminine sacred language in religious interpretation. The interview data were treated as supplementary qualitative material and analysed to expound the textual sources.

The study analysed data following a thematic and comparative procedure. Recurring motifs and interpretive patterns relating to femininity, divine authority, nurture, power, and patriarchal representation were identified across the biblical, Yoruba, and semi-structured telephone interview materials. These themes were then compared in order to identify and explain the areas where both traditions agree or disagree. The analytical process was guided by the study's theoretical framework, particularly African Cultural Hermeneutics and Feminist Hermeneutics of Suspicion, which enabled a contextual and critically gender-aware interpretation of the data.

The study is therefore descriptively qualitative, combining textual analysis, contextual reading, and thematic comparison together for a feminist reading. The methodology allows for a proper critiquing of masculine interpretations to pave the way for feminine dimensions, obscured and recovered within Hebrew and Yoruba religious discourse.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary interpretive theories, David Tuesday Adamo's African Cultural Hermeneutics and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's Feminist Hermeneutics of Suspicion; when used together, these frameworks provide the methodological and interpretive basis for analysing biblical and Yoruba religious materials within a comparative study of divine femininity.

African Cultural Hermeneutics is defined as reading sacred texts through African cultural, historical, and religious experiences, rather than relying solely on external interpretive traditions in pursuance of African interest in the texts. This approach insists that meaning must also be sought within the conceptual world of African communities. In this study, Adamo's framework makes it possible to interpret the Hebrew Bible alongside Yoruba religio-cultural thought in a way that respects local symbolic systems, religious memory, and modes of divine representation.

Feminist Hermeneutics of Suspicion is a critical tool which examines how patriarchal assumptions are conjured in religious interpretation. Schüssler Fiorenza's approach encourages readers to question inherited readings that privilege masculine authority while marginalising feminine imagery, women's experiences, and gendered forms of sacred language. In this study, the framework is used to interrogate the dominant

interpretations of El Shaddai and to recover possible feminine dimensions that have often been suppressed or overlooked.

The study brings these two theories together in order to establish a framework that is both culturally sound and critically relevant to gender context. African Cultural Hermeneutics supports the contextual reading of the texts, while Feminist Hermeneutics of Suspicion provides the critical lens through which patriarchal interpretations can be examined and challenged. This combined framework is particularly suited to a comparative analysis of Hebrew and Yoruba traditions because it allows the study to move beyond description toward interpretation, critique, and recovery of feminine divine imagery.

Conceptual Framework

This study adopted a conceptual framework, which is anchored in David Biale's reading of El-Shaddai in the Hebrew tradition and Oyeronke Olajubu's interpretation of *Ìyá mi Àbèní Olómú Orù* in Yoruba religious thought in order to put them in contrast. It examines how both expressions function as sacred symbols of divine power, feminine imagery, and the balance of masculine and feminine forces in creation.

Considering this framework, the study viewed El-Shaddai as having both masculine and feminine faces of divinity. The first theologically refers to the strength to protect, which is a factor, yet the second also points to the maternal, nurturing, and generative aspects of divinity, a feminine factor. Likewise, *Ìyá mi Àbèní Olómú Orù* is treated as a Yoruba sacred expression that reflects women's spiritual significance and their role in maintaining cosmic and social balance. Together, these concepts provide the basis for comparing how Hebrew and Yoruba traditions preserve feminine dimensions within their understanding of divinity. Though both materials refer to narratives about divinity, they are also about how people perceive their societies within theological and cultural contexts.

This framework assumes that, though the data involved here are strictly religious language, they also carry socio-cultural meanings about gender, authority, nurture, and power. It provides the scholarly basis for showing that feminine divine imagery is present in both traditions, even where patriarchal interpretations have often minimised it. The study therefore reads both terms as symbols that reveal how divine power may be expressed in ways that include, rather than exclude, feminine significance.

Literature Review on El Shaddai: A Thematic and Comparative Argument

This literature review examines past and current debates about El Shaddai over the actual meanings of the divine title. Comparing the various arguments shows how scholarly discourse on themes and meanings ranged from power and later transcended to fertility and maternal imagery, thereby providing the scholarly basis for a comparative and gender-conscious argument.

Name and Meanings

There was broad scholarly discourse, which centres on those who agree that El Shaddai denotes a divine name, and the use is limited to the Israelite alone and thus portrays a traditional androcentric meaning as Almighty, and those who disagree sharply and best understood ancient Near Eastern context and aligned with its feminine face, favouring meanings such as fertility or maternal imagery. Berkhof understood the word to mean "God Almighty" or "the All-Sufficient One," noting that the term within Abrahamic Christian tradition stresses divine exaltation and benevolent condescension toward humanity (20). Hardinge similarly connects the title to the Abraham-and-Sarah narrative, where it functions as a name of divine sufficiency and

providential sustenance (53). Biale also treats the term as a designation of omnipotence in the biblical and rabbinic traditions, but he stresses that the phrase may have been reinterpreted through later translation and exegetical traditions rather than preserving a single original sense (240–241). Childs affirms its early use among the patriarchs, and adds that the original meaning may have been obscured over time, especially after Yahweh became the dominant revealed name in Mosaic tradition (240–241).

The Mountain Tradition

Some scholars linked Shaddai to mountains; this became a major line of debate. Wenham argues that El Shaddai is the most frequent El title in Genesis and that the common explanation derives it from the Akkadian *šadû* (“mountain”), fitting the ancient image of El as a deity dwelling on a high mountain and presiding over the divine council (19–32). Biale notes related proposals by Lloyd Bail, Jean Ouellette, and E. L. Abel, who connect the term to the Amorite lunar god Si Amurru or Bel Shade, understood as both a storm-war deity and a mountain god. Weippert, as cited by Biale, however, rejected the Akkadian meaning and line of thought. But he argued that the late Bronze Age Canaanite “shadd” better suits the topography and linguistic setting of Canaan; Speiser similarly describes El-Shaddai as a “god of the mountain” (Biale 241–242). The agreement here is that the title is ancient and location-linked; the disagreement concerns whether its background is Akkadian, Canaanite, or Amorite.

Storm, War, and Divine Power

Cross's work indicated that El Shaddai should be distinguished from Yahweh. Noting that Yahweh is the divinity or deity of storm and war imagery, especially in exilic theology, while treating Shaddai as an older title associated with mountains and, by implication, an earlier stage in Israelite religion (225–259). Fleming develops the storm-God line further by showing how biblical portrayals of Yahweh draw on ancient Near Eastern storm imagery associated with Baal/Hadad and Athtar, even though later monotheistic theology sharply separated Yahweh from Baal (160–161). In this strand of scholarship, Shaddai and Yahweh are not identical in origin or function, even if later Israelite theology brought them into closer relation.

The God of the Fathers and Patriarchal Religion

Another cluster of scholars interprets El Shaddai as a patriarchal title rooted in ancestral religion. Biale presents the “God of the fathers” thesis as a pre-Canaanite tradition brought by the patriarchs from Mesopotamia (241). Pagolu similarly argues that patriarchal religion was distinctive and compatible with the Genesis lifestyle, and that it functioned as a precursor to Mosaic religion. Garr, however, complicates this by showing that El Shaddai appears in multiple biblical contexts with different meanings: six times in Genesis, once in Exodus 6:3, twice in Numbers 24, twice in Ruth, and repeatedly in Psalms, Isaiah, Joel, Ezekiel, and Job (Biale 241–242; 385–408). The implication is that the term is older than a single theological system and cannot be reduced to one meaning or one historical setting.

Dating, Etymology, and Theological Development

Krogevoll and Clements considered “Shaddai” as a riddle, which remains unresolved. Krogevoll surveys proposals ranging from “strong” and “mountain” to “breast” and “field,” concluding that the “god of the mountain” reading is still dominant but philologically uncertain (24–35). Clements, on the other hand, argues that Israelite worship absorbed the divine name from an older religious tradition, where a local deity was

identified with Yahweh and rendered in English as an attribute rather than a proper name (81–82). Cross's dating proposal, placing the term's theological stabilisation around the exilic period, adds to this developmental picture. Together, these scholars agree that El Shaddai is not a simple or fixed label; they disagree on how early it emerged and which semantic strand is primary.

Breast Imagery and Divine Femininity

This is a second major interpretative debate, which lingers into the contemporary time, reading Shaddai through maternal symbolism. Biale reports that Albright linked “shadu” to “breast,” deriving the term from Old Akkadian “shadwi”, with parallels in Ugaritic, Arabic, and Hebrew shad (Biale 240–241). Lutzky also debated “Shadday,” leaving out El, and described it as an epithet for a goddess in the ancient Near East; it can be linked etymologically to the Hebrew word for “breast” (15–36). Reed strengthens this reading by placing it within broader ancient Near Eastern divine maternal imagery, especially in relation to Asherah (15–36). These scholars converge on one point: El Shaddai need not be read only as a masculine title of sovereignty; it can also preserve maternal and nurturing dimensions of divinity.

Fertility and the Maternal Critique

Koch and Alt looked at this discourse from the angle of the function of the name rather than the discussion on etymology. Koch argues that in nearly all Genesis occurrences, El Shaddai is associated with fertility blessings, suggesting that Exodus 6:3 is a later editorial explanation of the transition to Yahweh (57–67). Alt similarly emphasises the clan's biological prosperity and argues that patriarchal religion centred on fertility and continuation of the family line (Biale 241). These readings support the claim that El Shaddai may have once been associated with life-giving, reproductive abundance rather than only abstract omnipotence. It is at this point of discourse that the feminist argument gained serious momentum, suggesting that fertility and nurture were common social concepts in ancient communities, and that consequently, the patriarchal theology may have muted the feminine dimensions embedded in the traditions.

The Suppression of Feminine Sacred Power in Israelite Religion

Patai highlights the centrality of divine maternal imagery in ancient Near Eastern cosmology and its association with Asherah, the Canaanite fertility goddess. Asherah worship, widespread from the period of the Judges until the seventh century, was later curtailed under Deuteronomic reform, even though Yahwism had already moved against Baal worship in the early monarchy while Asherah's cult persisted, including within the Jerusalem temple (29–52).

Ruane further argues that the fertility symbolism of divine male-female union, associated with the generative mating of heaven and earth and imitated in worship, was redefined by Deuteronomic ideology as sexual impropriety and temple prostitution. In this reading, women's bodies and presence became marked as defiling within the reforming ideology of Yahwism (18–39).

Biale's work, however, at one point complicated this claim by pointing to archaeological evidence from Tel Beit Mirsim, which suggests that Israelite worship remained entangled with Canaanite religious symbols such as Anat and Asherah figurines. Ruane likewise concedes that Israelite religion was not isolated from Canaanite faith but developed in interaction with it (Biale 253; Ruane 18–39).

Women occupied visible and respected roles in temple administration, preparing offerings, maintaining ritual

purity, and serving as priestesses under royal and priestly authority according to Turkilsen's study of Hittite religion. It is a useful comparative analysis when the material is viewed within the Israelite narrative (1–7; 5–7). This comparison shows that women's participation in sacred space was not inherently disruptive; rather, its exclusion in Israel reflects a specific theological and ideological choice.

Taken together, these scholars suggest that the Deuteronomistic reforms did not simply remove corrupt practice; they also redefined older fertility traditions in ways that displaced women and erased feminine sacred agency. Josiah's temple reforms, the condemnation of the “Queen of Heaven” in Jeremiah 44, and the destruction of the space where women made garments for Asherah in 2 Kings 23:7 all point to a deliberate effort to marginalise female participation in religious life (Biale 250-256). The result was that women, though historically present in Israel's religious system, were increasingly scapegoated by patriarchy and excluded from the fertility rites that once formed part of their sacred world.

Critical Appraisal of Divine Femininity within the Yoruba Panegyric, “Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù”

“Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù” as a Yoruba panegyric holds a place of divine wisdom in Yoruba religious and literary thought because it preserves a complex vision of feminine power. Far from being a simple praise name, the expression evokes motherhood, sacred authority, and cosmic balance. So, femininity within Yoruba cosmogony is a spiritual and social principle through which life is nurtured, order is maintained, and communal well-being is secured. As Olajubu observes, “Iya mi” extends beyond ordinary motherhood to signify a collective feminine force embedded in Yoruba religious imagination (Olajubu 120–121).

In this context, the structuring of creation is conveyed as a primary function of feminine power in this tradition; thus, the panegyric becomes a language of authority, not passivity. The phrase “Iya mi” points to women as bearers of generative and protective energy, while “Olómú Orù” metaphorically evokes abundance, nurturance, and sufficient care. The imagery of breasts is a feminine narrative, which is taken as a positive description of power and authority. It points to maternal provision as the feminine capacity to sustain life and maintain continuity within the community. The role of Aje in the balance of power within the Yoruba cosmogony is also made positive, particularly when they are appeased. Thus, it does not refer to the Aje based on Western stereotypes of witchcraft, but points to the power of women to be able to spiritually influence creation. The feminine, therefore, is represented as both mysterious and authoritative, capable of preserving communal order and challenging disruption.

Olajubu gave a deeper understanding of feminine roles in Yoruba cosmogony through his work on the story of Osun, noted in the Ifa corpus. Osun, as the only female among the primordial divinities, is excluded from the deliberations of the other gods. Her response is not silence but collective action: she gathers women in “Isalaye” and forms the first congregation of Iya mi, whose intervention renders the divinities' plans ineffective until justice is restored. The narrative presents Osun as a liberating female divinity whose agency makes visible the political and spiritual significance of women in Yoruba cosmology. Feminine authority here emerges as a necessary force for correction, balance, and justice.

Ikunle Abiyamo talks about the labour of mothers when giving birth to children, and Omu Iya refers to the dependence of babies on their mothers for nurture. They are common panegyrics used in the Yoruba community; their alignment in this study strengthens this same point. Kneeling as an act of reverence and the evocation of motherhood, which aligns with the idea of the mother's breast, refers to the indispensability of

women in creation and the unity that it brings as dependents gather around them for sustenance; both signal a relational ethics grounded in maternal authority. The panegyrics do not limit the role of women to creating bonds through the reasons of motherhood in the world, but gravitate towards a sacred symbol of mutual responsibility amongst masculine and feminine forces of creation, social cohesion, and the refusal of conflict that can destroy communal ties. In this way, feminine power is not isolated from public life but is central to Yoruba conceptions of harmony, kinship, and moral order.

Olómitùtù is a healing principle within religious tradition that shows that women have the capacity to heal people from various infertile issues of life. In this ritual culture, women are the predominant practitioners. Their healing work confirms that feminine authority in Yoruba thought is also medicinal, restorative, and life-giving. Women are not peripheral participants in sacred life; they are custodians of continuity, health, and renewal. The ritual use of water and the symbolism of nurturing care reinforce the maternal dimension of divine femininity in concrete communal practice. The researcher identified that the convergence of feminine theories culturally indicated here that feminine divinity is an integral part of theological discourse and not a peripheral theme.

Semi-Structured Interview Material on “Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù”

The interview data deepen this interpretation by showing how practitioners understand the panegyric as a language of female authority, balance, and spiritual power. According to Ifatosin Akifakan Ododo, “Abeni” refers to a girl-child whose birth was granted through petition to Olodumare. This narrative interpretively showed that the name “Abeni” has a sacred origin, which is framed as evidence of divine favour and spiritual destiny. The expression “Olómú,” meaning “owner of breasts,” was explained as a metaphor for nourishment and abundance, while “Orù” was associated with a large clay pot, symbolising the capacity to provide sufficient care for offspring. Together, these elements present the panegyric as a compressed theology of female sustenance and sacred motherhood.

According to Samuel Kayode Olaleye, women's role in the power balance in creation is indispensable, illustrating that “Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù” has a tie with Edan, a male and female figurine. These figurines are joined by a chain in Ògbóni symbolism, an elderly social pressure group in Yoruba land. The linkage between the figurines signifies that women and men are to share power equally as Olodumare ordained; thus, the peaceful running of the universe depends on balance rather than domination. He explained that Ògbóni assemblies cannot function without Edan, whose feminine dimension is essential to their identity and ritual coherence. In this reading, feminine power is not subordinate; it is structurally necessary.

The Yoruba social pressure group, also known as Ògbóni and Ògbóran circles, according to Olaleye, also used the panegyric as a greeting within, where members perform a ritual handshake and kiss the hand to express a common maternal bond. This gesture signifies that they have all “suckled from the same breast,” namely that of “Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù.” The symbolism places shared origin, mutual allegiance, and collective identity at the centre of the tradition. The panegyric therefore functions not only as praise but as a ritual reminder of solidarity under maternal authority.

Olaleye, in another development, mentioned that “Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù” has been linked with “Ìyá mi Aje” and “Ìyá mi Osoronga,” within a contextual foreground associated with the Osun, who is believed to be the first Aje, and the founder of heavenly and earthly members of the cosmic motherhood and the broader

mystery of feminine spiritual force, regardless of the nature of functionality. Noting that Edan is the physical expression of the invisible sacred power within the entire framework, while women's authority is expressed through the duality of heavenly and earthly realms, secrecy, and cosmic balance.

The study observed that Atage of Oke Ibadan is also praised as “Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù”; in view of the similarity of the panegyric, Olaleye disagreed with the notion, suggesting instead that such associations may function as poetic homage rather than strict identity. Even so, the discussion shows that female divine power in Yoruba thought is multi-layered: it appears in fertility, ritual leadership, symbolism, and communal memory.

Lawal looked at Edan as a primordial elder, who has both attributes of a man and a woman. Noting that Edan is seen to possess the traits of a male and female intertwined reality, reflective of the inseparability of masculine and feminine forces of creation in the maintenance of cosmic order. In this sense, the panegyric points beyond a single goddess figure to a broader cosmological principle: female authority is indispensable to equilibrium in the world. Feminine power, therefore, is not simply symbolic but ontological. It belongs to the very structure of reality in Yoruba cosmogony.

The study submits that the overall appraisal of “Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù” within the semi-structured interview narrative data showed that the practitioners and scholars we spoke with see the Yoruba panegyric as a sacred expression of female potency, maternal care, and cosmic authority. It is a panegyric of balance; it is not one that excludes anyone. It advocates shared power, not domination of any other. It sees feminine presence as a constitutive force in Yoruba religious life.

Comparative Analysis of El Shaddai and Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù

Comparing the relationship that correlates both traditions of El Shaddai and “Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù” in this study, it is observed that the traces of feminine sacred power in both traditions had been repressed and clouded. Within their respective traditions, each expression reveals an understanding of divinity that is not exhausted by masculine sovereignty but extends to nurture, protection, fertility, and cosmic balance. The juxtaposition of these two categories therefore does more than identify parallels; it exposes the interpretive mechanisms by which female-coded sacred symbolism has been marginalised within both biblical and Yoruba religious discourse.

The scholarly debate on the origin of El Shaddai within biblical scholarship is still ongoing, but there exists a substantial body of literature that associates it with fertility and maternal imagery. One important piece of information that is clear is that the emerging interpretations, which ranged from “God Almighty” to “the God of the mountain” or “the One of the breasts”, suggest an intertwined identity of both male and female faces of the same being; thus, the use of the term has never been theologically neutral. It points to a possible process of reworking of the semantic history to fit in into Yahwistic frameworks. In this regard, scholars such as Biale, Koch, Alt, and Lutzky collectively indicate that the title may preserve archaic associations with fertility, nourishment, and divine provision. These associations are particularly refreshing in scholarship and religious endeavours because they reveal how the process of religious development became dominated by the masculine face of God, leading to exclusively masculine readings of Israel's God, which has been challenged by feminist interpretations in the contemporary context, opening a way for the interpretation of “God with breasts”, an indication of the restoration of the feminine roles in religious culture.

Again, there exist related patterns of comparison while contrasting the Yoruba material with the aforesaid

argument. *Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù* is not merely a poetic expression of motherhood; it functions as a solid religious designation through which feminine authority, sacred nurture, and spiritual potency are articulated. The title points to fertility, which is about shared prosperity, ritual authority, and cosmic mediation, especially in relation to the links and wider discourse of *Ìyá mi*, *Aje*, and *Edan*. The Yoruba worldview recognises the inherent female power and does not push it aside as a marginal discourse but advocates its proper restoration for a power balance in creation. Olajubu, Lawal, Olaiya, and Fatunmise reinforced the aforementioned view that feminine sacred power is embedded in Yoruba cosmology as a necessary principle of order, continuity, and balance.

What emerges from this comparative exercise is that the identification of the two traditions indicated a shared hermeneutical problem: in both cases, later interpretive traditions have tended to privilege male-centred theological constructions while relativising feminine dimensions of the divine. It signifies that the essence and strength of the present study lies precisely in its refusal to treat these feminine elements as incidental. Instead, it argues that they are structurally important to the religious imagination of both traditions. Therefore, the appropriate interpretation of *El Shaddai* and *Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù* is to recognise that divine authority in both biblical and Yoruba thought is not constituted by masculine power alone, but by a more complex symbolic field in which femininity remains integral to life, fertility, mediation, and sacred order.

This comparative discussion above establishes the conceptual link between *El Shaddai* and *Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù*; the next section presents the specific findings that emerged from this analysis:

Findings

There are three major findings that emerged from the analysis of the biblical and Yoruba materials:

Firstly, the study found that both *El Shaddai* and *Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù* retain strong associations with feminine divine imagery. In the biblical tradition, *El Shaddai* has been interpreted not only as a title of divine power, but also as one that may preserve maternal or nurturing connotations. In the Yoruba tradition, *Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù* explicitly evokes motherhood, abundance, and sacred female authority. In both cases, the feminine aspect of divinity appears as a meaningful theological category rather than a marginal metaphor.

Secondly, the study identified that the persistent patriarchal structure and literary interpretations of the religious texts affected the delivery and reception of both traditions. In biblical scholarship, masculine theological frameworks have often dominated the interpretation of *El Shaddai*, limiting attention to its possible maternal or fertile dimensions. Likewise, in Yoruba religious discourse, the expression *Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù* has often been confined to cultic or secretive contexts, which has reduced its wider theological and cultural significance. This shows that interpretive traditions can obscure as much as they reveal.

Thirdly, the study identifies divine femininity in both traditions, functioning as a principle of balance, nurture, and order. In the biblical material, this is seen in the ways *El Shaddai* is associated with provision, fertility, and sustaining power. In the Yoruba material, this appears in the roles of *Osun*, the *Iya mi*, *Aje*, *Edan*, and related feminine symbols of continuity and cosmic mediation. The shared implication is that male and female symbolism should not be placed in opposition, but understood as mutually necessary within the divine order.

Summarily, these findings show that a comparative reading of *El Shaddai* and *Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù* indicates a deep understanding of divinity, one that recovers the theological importance of feminine power in both biblical and Yoruba religious thought.

Conclusion

This study examines feminine faces of divinity in the Old Testament and Yoruba religious thought through a comparative hermeneutic analysis of El Shaddai and Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù; thus, the findings show that both traditions still possess traces of feminine sacred power, even though these traces have often been diminished by patriarchal interpretation. The comparison has shown that divine femininity in both contexts is connected to nurture, fertility, protection, authority, and cosmic balance.

The study therefore concludes that the feminine aspect of divinity is a valid scholarly argument; it is not a historical coincidence, and it is also an essential part of their theological and cosmological imagination. Recovering this dimension makes it possible to read sacred texts and traditions more holistically, while also challenging narrow interpretations that privilege masculine symbolism alone. In both biblical and Yoruba contexts, the restoration of feminine divine imagery contributes to a more balanced understanding of God, women, power, and religious life.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered for religious interpreters, teachers, scholars, and faith leaders within Abrahamic and Yoruba traditions.

Greater attention should be given to feminine imagery and maternal symbolism in sacred texts by religious interpreters and teachers, especially in discussions of El Shaddai and Ìyá mi Àbẹ̀nì Olómú Orù.

Such attention will deepen theological interpretation and recover dimensions of divine femininity that patriarchal readings have often minimised.

African Universities and Theological institutions should include more substantial material on women's roles in biblical and Yoruba religious traditions in their educational curricula. This should be pursued through classroom instruction, seminars, and workshops that present women's contributions as central rather than peripheral to religious and cultural history.

Churches, regardless of denominational lines, should create more space for women's voices to share their theological views on how they understand the texts. Traditional communities should allow women to contribute their opinions to leadership issues in cultural and religious environments. Women should be encouraged to contribute meaningfully to worship, teaching, interpretation, administration, and other forms of communal service.

Community leaders, who are predominantly male, should encourage dialogue on gender, power, and interpretation issues within African religious contexts. Such dialogue can help to redefine patriarchal assumptions while promoting mutual understanding, cooperation, and a more balanced view of religious authority.

Scholars should not cease to continue to develop comparative frameworks that enable biblical and Yoruba traditions to be read in dialogue without erasing their cultural distinctiveness. Further research should also examine how divine femininity shapes notions of nurture, authority, continuity, and communal order across traditions.

While the patriarchal model remains a social perspective, both biblical and Yoruba studies should move beyond exclusively patriarchal models of interpretation and recover the theological significance of feminine sacred symbolism. Doing so will support a more balanced understanding of divinity, gender, and religious life.

Taken together, these recommendations point toward a more inclusive interpretive and communal vision in which feminine sacred imagery is recognised as a meaningful theological resource.

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Semi-Structured Interview (Phone Conversation)

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