Contents

Section Two The Context: Northern Nigeria

Section Three Women in Interreligious Dialogue

To my parents
Joe and Annie

Abbreviations

AAS	*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*
ABU	Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria
ACMMRN	Association of Christian and Muslim Mutual Relations in Nigeria, initiated by the LCCN in 1993
AG	*Ad Gentes Divinitus*
AIC	African Instituted (Independent) Churches
BAOBAB	A women's human rights NGO founded in Nigeria in 1996 having evolved from a WLUML research project on Women and Law carried out in Nigeria
BFA	Beijing Platform for Action, introduced after the 4th World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995
BLP	Better Life Programme for Rural Women, a first-lady programme introduced in Nigeria by Maryam Babangida in 1987 to further the self-development of rural women
BUK	Bayero University Kano, Nigeria
CAN	Christian Association of Nigeria, an ecumenical body formed in 1976
CBCN	Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. An international human rights treaty adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 and entered into force in September 1981. Ratified by Nigeria in 1985
CILS	Centre for Islamic Legal Studies, ABU, Zaria
CMS	Church Missionary Society

COCIN	Church of Christ in Nigeria – the largest of the churches originating from the SUM mission in Nigeria
CSID	Centre for the Study of Islam and Democracy
CSN	Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria
CWO	Catholic Women's Organization, founded in the eastern and western provinces of Nigeria between 1962 and 1964
CWSI	Centre for Women's Studies and Intervention, NGO founded in 1999 by the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus to empower and uplift the status of women in society
DFID	Department for International Development, British Council, Nigeria
DP	*Dialogue and Proclamation*
EA	*Ecclesia in Africa*
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
ECWA	Evangelical Church of West Africa – born from the SIM mission. The name ECWA was formulated in 1954
EFU	Egyptian Feminist Union, founded in 1923
EN	*Evangelii Nuntiandi*
ES	*Ecclesiam Suam*
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FOMWAN	Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria, founded in 1985
FSP	Family Support Programme, a first-lady programme introduced in Nigeria by Maryam Abacha in 1994 to empower women in society
IAW	International Alliance of Women
IFMC	Inter-faith Mediation Centre, Kaduna, Nigeria (also known as the MCDF)
JMA	*Jam'iyyar Matan Arewa* (Association of Northern Women), formed in 1963
JNI	Jama'atu Nasril Islam (Society for the Victory of Islam), founded by Ahmadu Bello in 1962

JNI/AID/WW	Women's wing of the Aid department of the JNI (the only women's wing in the JNI)
LCCN	Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria
MBPP	Middle Belt People's Party, a Christian political party formed in the mid-1950s
MCDF	Muslim Christian Dialogue Forum, Kaduna, Nigeria (also known as the IFMC)
MD	*Mulieris Dignitatem*
MSO	Muslim Sister's Organization, Nigeria, founded in Kano in 1976/77
MSS	Muslim Students' Society, founded in southern Nigeria in 1954
MU	Mothers' Union, Anglican Communion, founded in England in 1876
MULAC	Muslim League for Accountability, founded in Kaduna, Nigeria in 1999 to fight corruption and promote transparency, accountability and good governance in member Islamic organizations.
MZL	Middle Zone League, a political party led by Christians in the Middle Belt of Nigeria, formed in 1951
NA	*Nostra Aetate*
NCA	Northern Christian Association, formed in 1964
NCCWO	National Council of Catholic Women's Organization, founded in Nigeria in 1975 (commonly called CWO)
NCWR	National Council of Women Religious, Nigeria
NCWS	National Council of Women's Societies, Nigeria, founded in 1958, evolved from the FNWS
NDHS	Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey
NEPU	Northern Element Progressive Union, formed in 1950, led by Aminu Kano
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIREC	Nigerian Interreligious Council established with the support of the Federal Government in 1999

NPC	Northern People's Congress (*Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa*) formed in 1949, led by Ahmadu Bello
NPN	National Party of Nigeria, political party which evolved from the NPC in preparation for the 1979 general elections. Led by Shehu Shagari
NPW	National Policy on Women, adopted in Nigeria in 2000
NSCIA	Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (also referred to as SCIA)
OIC	Organization of Islamic Conference
OLA	Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles – partners with the SMA Fathers; first female Catholic Religious in Northern Nigeria. Founded in France in 1876
PROCMURA	Project of Christian Muslim Relations in Africa, evolved from the Islam in Africa Project of the Anglican Communion
PRP	People's Redemption Party, political party which evolved in Nigeria from the NEPU in preparation for the 1979 general elections.
PT	*Pacem in Terris*
RMi	*Redemptoris Missio*
SAA	Situation Assessment and Analysis, a UN programme of research on development
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme – the International Monetary Fund and World Bank inspired economic programme introduced in Nigeria in 1986. It was introduced in approx. thirty African countries around this same period.
SCIA	Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, founded in Nigeria in 1977 (also known as NSCIA)
SCSN	Supreme Council on *Shari 'a* in Nigeria
SIM	Sudan Interior Mission – first came to Northern Nigeria in 1902
SMA	Society of African Missions – the opening of their first mission in Shendam, Plateau State in 1907, marks the beginning of the Catholic Church in Northern Nigeria. Founded in France in 1856
SUM	Sudan United Mission, formed in England in 1904 by Dr. Karl Kumm, present in Northern Nigeria since 1904
TEKAN	*Tarayyar Ekklesiyoyyin Kristi a Nigeria* (Fellowship of the Churches of Christ in Nigeria) – fellowship of twelve churches which claim their origins to the SUM mission in Northern Nigeria
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948
UMBC	United Middle Belt Congress, a Northern Christian's political party formed in 1955, uniting the MZL and the MBPP
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDS	United Nations Development System
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education scheme launched by the Nigerian Government in 1976
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VVF	Vesico-vaginal fistula
WACOL	Women's Aid Collective, an NGO founded in Nigeria in 1997 to protect women's rights
WARDC	Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre, Lagos
WF	Women's Fellowship – found in most Christian churches in Nigeria
WG	Women's Guild, Anglican Communion, founded in Nigeria in 1921
WIN	Women in Nigeria, a feminist NGO founded in 1983
WLUML	Women Living Under Muslim Laws, an international NGO founded in 1984 to protect the rights of Muslim women under the *shari 'a*

WMU	Women's Missionary Union, Baptist Church, Nigeria, founded in 1919
WOCON	Women's Consortium of Nigeria, a group of research NGOs in Nigeria concerned with the promotion and protection of women's rights
WOLF	Women Opinion Leaders Forum, founded in Kaduna in 1998
WOMID	Women's Issues and Development Initiatives, Lagos
WOTCLEF	Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation, an NGO founded in 1999 in Nigeria by Titi Atiku Abubakar, wife of the nation's vice-President to raise awareness about and seek to eradicate the problems of women trafficking and child labour
WOWICAN	Women's Wing of CAN
WRAPA	Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative, an NGO founded in Nigeria by the first lady, Justice Fati Abubakar, in 1998 to promote and protect women's rights
WWCC	Wafdist Women's Central Committee, Egypt
ZM	*Zumuntar Mata* (Women's Association or Fellowship) – organized in most Christian churches in Northern Nigeria
ZMK	*Zumuntar Mata Katolika* (Catholic Women's Association or Fellowship) founded in Northern Nigeria in 1968

Introduction

While this book represents an academic piece of work, it did not begin as such. Rather it grew out of personal convictions and questions which I, as a female Catholic missionary, committed through the charism of my congregation to mission ad gentes with a particular attention to women, had from the outset. In considering today's missionary challenges, I saw two areas which stood out quite starkly and which I felt were of primary concern: the ruptured and often violently destructive relations between peoples in the name of religion, and the fact that religion and culture are often identified as the greatest obstacles to the social and human development of women.

Today women of all faiths enter into feminist religious discourse, globally as well as in Northern Nigeria, the locus of this study. Motivated by and rooted in their faith, but aware that their religion has been used to justify the oppression and exclusion of women, they seek to develop its unifying and liberating potential, convinced of its relevance for human well-being, justice and transformed human relations. Due to the great diversity of social, political, cultural and religious perspectives and realities, not all women share one understanding of human dignity, not all experience oppression and injustice in the same way, and not all seek to overcome oppression or establish justice by the same criteria. Thus, although universal, feminist religious discourse is rooted in particular socio-cultural contexts and addresses those contexts.

Theologians and philosophers have reflected on ways in which people of faith can maintain their cherished truth claims and live peacefully, as well as build a better world, with those who disagree. The quest for improved interreligious relations is an urgent issue, not only because of the theological implications religious pluralism presents but also because of the prejudice, intolerance, and violence that so mark and mar the

relationships between people of different religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds today.

By and large, feminist writers have not questioned the existence of diverse religions. Since diversity has always formed part of feminist discourse, they have not seen the existence of many religions as a problem; rather difference has been seen as a promise to which humanity, from within its religions, has failed to respond adequately in terms of a recognition that humanity exists in difference, male and female.

The lack of previous reflection on how feminist discourse might open itself to a more adequate response to the existence of many diverse religions, and the lack of previous consideration given to gender in theologies of religious pluralism and in the praxis and theology of interreligious dialogue, motivated the study and research which led to this book. Since through feminist discourse women are struggling with the question of gender difference from within their religious traditions, and theologians are struggling with the question of religious difference, it would seem that these two disciplines could shed some light on each other. Thus, my question was: what implications does women's religious discourse have for interreligious dialogue in terms of theology and praxis?

The necessity for greater Muslim-Christian understanding and coexistence in Northern Nigeria, as well as the urgent need for the liberation of women in the region, provided my study with an apt locus for examining the implications of women's discourse in interreligious relations. It grounded feminist discourse and theologies of religious pluralism in a concrete context and removed the possibility, or rather temptation, to be solely conceptual and idealistic. In fact, my immersion in the reality during my two years of research in the region, made the study extremely and at times overwhelmingly realistic.

For many reasons, the term 'feminist' evokes negative connotations in the minds of many people and tends to be associated with western, middle-class women. However, feminist awareness and the critique of gender inequality is universal, while simultaneously it is a grass roots movement which crosses class, race, religious and cultural boundaries. Many women do not label their struggles to promote the dignity of women as feminist. This is evident in Nigeria where only a very small sector of women activists

would identify with this label. Aware that I may be labelling 'feminist' things which women themselves do not consider under this category, I use the term throughout this book to refer to women's awareness of unjust gender inequalities experienced in their society, and their struggles to promote women's rights, interests and issues within their diverse social, cultural, religious and class contexts.

The study is divided into three main sections: the first section deals with Muslim and Christian feminist discourse on a global scale; the second section provides a detailed discussion of the context of the research, Northern Nigeria, and includes a detailed presentation of the data I collected during my two years there related most especially with women's discourse; the third section focuses on the area of interreligious dialogue.

The concluding chapter, chapter eight, serves to bring together the data collected and analyzed throughout the previous chapters in an attempt to answer more specifically the initial research question. Women's recognition of an epistemological crisis within their own tradition provides a much-needed bridge for a fruitful dialogical process towards peace and social well-being. Drawing from my empirical findings as well as some feminist insights as seen in the first section of the book, I suggest that there is a need to move beyond the various exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist theological conceptualizations of the diversity of religions. An approach to other religions, grounded in people's lived experience and a shared commitment to justice, peace and transformed human relations, would seem to be more adequate.

I suggest a feminist-ethical approach to religious pluralism which would allow the followers of other religions parity of esteem while not rejecting the fundamental tenets of each one's faith. This would include, among other feminist insights which I mention in chapter eight, fashioning a women's programme of liberation from the resources of the two traditions. This programme would be based on a concern for those values which women, inspired by their religious tradition, feel are not being realized. I suggest some central issues which women would need to clarify as they dialogue, brought together by their desire to confront their common concerns. Through their mutual solidarity participants would be enriched in their faith. The justice sought will be created in

the dialogue; as such, it is a sense of justice born from the lived religious experience of women in their concrete contexts, clarified through their dialogical conversation, and confronted through their shared praxis. The practicality and feasibility of such an approach is shown as I elaborate on its possible application in the concrete context of Northern Nigeria.

Some of the material collected during my research, which I consider of great value for anyone wishing to come to a better understanding of women's religious discourse and of interreligious relations in Nigeria, is included in appendices.

This book does not pretend to provide conclusive answers to the situation experienced today in Northern Nigeria. Nor does it pretend to provide conclusive and universal answers to the theological questions presented by religious pluralism. However, I believe the suggestions made for a women's liberative interreligious dialogue are rooted in the reality, and so are practicable and would be a positive step towards greater interreligious understanding and fruitful co-existence in the region.

The challenge and indeed imperative remains for all people of faith, Christians and Muslims, men and women, to continue to open to one another as gifts within and through which the mystery of God and of humanity is continuously revealed. In doing so, our relationships will be salvific in themselves. From a Christian perspective, it will help all of us to reflect more visibly and more authentically the Trinitarian God of Communion made known to us in Christ.

SECTION ONE

Islamic and Christian Feminism

CHAPTER 1

Muslim Women's Movement

As a group, Muslim women are today subjected to all kinds of speculation, generalization and stereotyping. Yet, since they represent various cultures, societies, classes, ethnicities and perspectives, they no more form a homogenous group than do Christian women or women of any other religion. The great variations in the cultures and societies where Muslim communities live, and the variations between the lives of Muslim women of different classes, make any single statement about Muslim women false and misleading. These differences also influence the great variety of Muslim women's religiously associated activities and discourse which generally represent the different gender struggles women in their region are undergoing.

What underlies many of these gender struggles is their concern to eliminate injustices experienced by women due to social customs or to religious/positive law, as well as to overcome the particular socio-economic difficulties women in their region are undergoing. They also defend themselves against the stereotypes which already see them as a homogenous group. Many Muslim women speak of the conflict they experience today both within their own faith community where they struggle with patriarchal structures and traditions and are accused of being western; and with the western world's growing criticism of Islam where they struggle to defend their faith and their culture. Their struggle often results in their having to choose between fighting racism (from the West) and sexism (within their own faith community). Thus, Muslim women of different backgrounds, contexts and perspectives are often in solidarity and at other times in conflict with one another just as they are often in solidarity and at times in conflict with feminists who are not Muslims.

The majority of contemporary Muslim women involved in the feminist or women's movement are unwilling to break away from their religious orientation. They hold Islam as a significant component of their ethical, cultural or national identity. They believe that a degradation of the legal tradition of Islam and a distortion of the sacred texts has taken place, resulting in the current patriarchal structure and sexist laws of many Islamic countries. They claim that Islam contains important elements of liberation, and they call for the recovery of those elements as a framework for the emancipation of Muslim women. They do not accept that westernization is the only way to achieve liberation for Muslim women or the only way to modernize society today. Some openly reject the models of progress and modernity which the UN-based universal framework of rights and responsibilities proposes.

The contemporary Muslim women's movement began in Middle Eastern countries in the mid-nineteenth century but has exploded during the last three decades. It is no longer limited to Middle Eastern countries but has developed in post-colonial African and Asian societies as well as in socialist contexts of Eastern Europe and among emigrant Muslims in Europe, USA, Canada and Australia.

Until the 1980s approximately, Muslim women's discourse presented itself as either secular feminist or Islamist discourse. From the 1990s, a third form of discourse, Islamic feminism, began to develop.[1]

1 The First International Congress on Islamic Feminism was held in Barcelona in October 2005, at which the work of various associations in the field of women's rights in the Islamic World was presented. The third such conference is to be held in Barcelona in October 2008. (Reports available at www.feminismeislamic.org/eng).

Rise and Development of Muslim Feminism until the 1970s

In many ways Egypt heralded and mirrored global developments in the discourse about and by Muslim women until the late-twentieth century.[2] Differences of opinion about women's social roles and rights emerged as part of nationalist ideology debates looking to end British colonial occupation. Secular male progressivists and nationalists called for women to participate with men in new societal roles as part of national development. Conservative male nationalists extolled women's domestic roles and their seclusion from the public space as part of women's defence of an Islamic cultural authenticity. Muslim scholars got involved in the debate. The writings of male modernist reformers such as Rifa'ah Rafi' al-Tahtawi, Muhammad 'Abdu and Qasim Amin were crucial. They called for the education of women and spoke of new social, economic and political roles for women, advocating a return of all Muslims to the practice of *ijtihad* (independent inquiry of the scriptural sources of Islam) to look for fresh interpretations on how to apply Islam anew in their fast changing lives.

Secular Muslim Feminism

Secular feminist discourse began as upper and middle class women connected the nationalism of their countries with the need for Muslim women to advance as women were advancing in western countries. Their discourse was framed in secular and democratic terms while it was anchored in the discourse of Islamic reform.

Huda Sharawi and some other upper and middle class women who were active members of the Wafd nationalist party founded the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) in 1923. This was just after Sharawi, Saiza Nabarawi

2 Developments of Muslim feminism in Egypt are well documented by numerous historians. Cf. M. Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt,* Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1995; L. Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1992.

and Nabawiya Musa made a public feminist declaration by removing their face-veils at Cairo railway station after returning from an international feminist conference that they had attended in Rome.[3] When Egypt became an independent state and the Wafd came to power in 1924, despite the fact that women's help was sought and they had actively collaborated in the nationalist effort, women were refused the right to vote or be voted for. Sharawi resigned as president of the WWCC (Wafdist Women's Central Committee) and committed herself to work for women's promotion which she saw as necessary to the nationalist programme.

With the discourse of Islamic modernism proposed by 'Abdu, Amin and others, the EFU came to see that domestic cloistering of women and the imposition of the veil were not based on Qur'anic prescriptions. They also discovered that other practices ordained by Islam such as obtaining a woman's consent in marriage were ignored while men also abused their rights to divorce and polygamy. They campaigned with their politically empowered male compatriots to reform the Muslim Personal Status Code such as controls on men's ease in getting a divorce, a minimum age for marriage and an end to polygamy.[4] They believed wholeheartedly that

3 Unveiling did not mean removing their hair covering but only the face veil, which was used in Egypt by upper and middle class women of that time. The fact of using or not using a head veil was not a major issue in itself for these feminist women in Egypt who decided for themselves if and when to unveil, unlike in Turkey and in Iran where the state took measures to impose unveiling. Cf. M. Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation*, 22–24. Nabawiya Musa published her nationalist-feminist manifesto, *al-Marah wa al-Amal* (The Woman and Work), in 1920. She was a middle-class economically independent woman and thus was able to refuse to marry so as to concentrate on her education and her work. For an account of her struggles to obtain an education and then receive an equal wage with men for their work as teachers, see F. Shaheed – A. Lee-Shaheed, *Great Ancestors*, 127–131.

4 Even until today, very few changes have been made in the Personal Status Laws in Egypt, other than a minimum age for marriage set in 1923 at sixteen for girls and eighteen for boys, and the abolishment in 1967 of the House of Obedience Law (Bayt al-Ta'ah) by which a man can forcibly oblige his wife to return to their marital home if she left it without his permission.

with the feminist movement, women were seeking to recuperate those rights that Islam had accorded to them.[5]

The public unveiling and the feminist movement of the EFU set an example for Muslim women in other countries: Turkish women went unveiled to a reception honouring President Mustafa Kamil in 1925.[6] Habibah Manshari appeared unveiled in Tunis in 1929 to give a public lecture 'For or Against the Veil'. In Lebanon, Nazirah Zayn al-Din gave a series of lectures on the subject which she put into a book 'Unveiling and Veiling: On the Liberation of the Woman and Social Renewal in the Islamic World', published in Arabic in 1928. Among the first feminist conscious women in Iran was Tahereh Qurrat-ol 'Ayne.[7] An Iranian woman, Sattereh Farman Farmaian, has written of the traumatic effects that Reza Shah Pahlavi's ban on veiling during 1935 to 1941 had on older lower-class women in Iran.[8]

In 1930 Syrian women hosted an international congress for Eastern women and in 1932 Iranian women were host to a second such congress. Both congresses issued demands for equal rights for women in the family,

5 This can be seen in many of their speeches and writings as for example in this extract from a speech given by Huda Sharawi at the Arab Feminist Conference in Cairo in December 1944: 'The Arab woman, who is equal to the man in duties and obligations, will not accept in the twentieth century distinctions between the sexes that advanced countries have discarded ... In her loudest voice, the woman demands to regain her political rights, which have been granted to her by the *shari 'a*'. Quoted in M. Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation*, 24.

6 For studies on the feminist movement in Turkey see D. Kandiyoti, 'End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey'.

7 For studies on the early women's movements in Iran see J. Afary, 'On the Origins of Feminism in Early Twentieth-Century Iran' in *Journal of Women's History*, vols 1, n. 2, 1989, 65–87; E. Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini*, Praeger Publishers, London 1983.

8 S.F. Farmaian, *Daughter of Persia: A Woman's Journey from her Father's Harem Through the Islamic Revolution,* Anchor Books, Doubleday 1993: The impression given here is that, at least initially, it was only some upper-class women and men who were in favour of a break, especially such a coercive break, with traditional understandings of women's dress and the male-female relationship.

the abolition of polygamy, compulsory elementary education, the franchise for women and equal pay for equal work, the same rights that women in many Islamic societies continue to struggle for today.

Today's secular feminists believe that women's rights and human rights are best promoted and protected in an environment of secular thought and secular institutions, including a state that defends the rights of all its citizens. Mahnaz Afkhami, who was president of the Iran Women's Organization before the revolution, explains quite clearly the position of secular feminists: 'Our difference with Islamic feminists is that we don't try to fit feminism in the Qur'an. We say that women have certain inalienable rights ... I call myself a Muslim and a feminist. I'm not an Islamic feminist – that's a contradiction in terms.'[9]

Islamist Feminist/Women's Discourse

Alongside such feminist nationalist discourse in Egypt as throughout the Middle East, there was also a form of Islamist revivalist nationalist discourse. Supported by Islamic scholars, this sector exalted women's domestic roles and considered the claims made by feminists to be western in their orientation and threatening to their Islamic religion, culture, family and society.[10] In 1935, a splinter party of the Wafd, the Muslim Brethren, was founded by Hasan al-Banna with the aim of leading the Egyptian people back to a purified Islam which would inform every aspect of personal and national life and free the nation from western domination.

Zainab al-Ghazali joined the EFU in 1935 but left it a year later because of what she considered was the implicit valorisation of the western over the Arabic culture in Sharawi's feminism. She formed the Muslim Women's Association in 1936 to campaign for women and the nation in

9 Quoted in V. Moghadam, 'Islamic Feminism', 1152, from an interview she conducted in 1999.

10 Badran mentions Muslim men such as Tal'at Harb and Muhammad Farid Wajdi who refutted the modernist reformers and wrote about the centrality of women's family roles and reminded women that their place was in the home. *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 61–65.

Islamist terms.[11] She was invited by al-Banna to incorporate her movement into the Muslim Brethren but refused to do so.[12] However, their beliefs were quite similar.[13] The Muslim Women's Association carried out welfare activities for women and also established facilities for women to study Islam.

Al-Ghazali believed it was a grave error to speak of the liberation of women in an Islamic society because Islam already provided women with their rights even though these rights weren't manifest in Islamic societies. She believed the way to bring freedom and rights to women was also the way to revive the Islamic nation, that is, to follow the religion as prescribed by the Qur'an and Sunna and live in accordance with its laws. Al-Ghazali did not spell out whether their rights would be restored to women automatically when society lived by the religious injunctions or whether a new Islamic law would be drafted to ensure them. Woman's primary role, al-Ghazali claimed, was in the family as a mother and as a wife although she was entitled, if time allowed, to a professional life and to full participation in political life. Al-Ghazali did not involve herself in asking who would decide when a woman was sufficiently fulfilling her domestic duties so that she could then participate in professional and political life. Neither did she ask whether a woman would have the authority herself to decide whether she intended to fulfil her mission as a mother and wife.

11 Ahmed in *Women and Gender* uses two names for the association founded by al-Ghazali: The Muslim Women's Association (197–198) and the Islamic Women's Association (185). Badran in *Feminists, Islam and Nation* calls it the Muslim Women's Society (163, 229, 239). No doubt, the different names are simply different translations from Arabic. However, both authors are careful not to translate the name using the word 'feminist'.

12 Some Islamist writers claim Al-Ghazali did eventually, in 1948, formally join the Brotherhood and that after al-Banna's assassination in 1949 she played a major role in its reorganization. Cf. R. al-Disūqī, *The Resurgent Voice of Muslim Women*, 92.

13 Under Nasser's regime, Al-Ghazali was imprisoned from 1965 to 1972 because of her support of the Brethren cause. The Islamic Women's Association and the Muslim Brethren were dissolved by the government in 1965.

Despite these limitations, the Islamist groups spread in the universities where many women joined them. In these groups, women from rural areas as well as those who were the first generation of women in their families to venture into a non-segregated society, found a sense of community and continuity. Many adopted Islamic dress since it gave them a sense of upholding traditional social customs as regards mixing with the opposite sex and it also, they claimed, protected them from sexual harassment.[14]

United in Arab Feminism

A Pan-Arab Women's Congress for the Defence of Palestine was held in Cairo in 1938, at which women from Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Iran participated. The question of women's political participation and of global solidarity between Muslim men and women for the Palestinian cause united nationalist women who were of a feminist or of an Islamist orientation, so that women from the Muslim Women's Association of al-Ghazali, as well as women of the EFU and other feminist organizations, all participated. The Islamic authorities who were also concerned for Muslim solidarity on the Palestinian issue applauded women's activism and some of them participated, by invitation, at the women's congress.[15]

In 1944, a second Arab Feminist Congress was held in Cairo, again with feminist and Islamist participants. During this Congress, it was obvious that the new societal roles that women foresaw were quite different to what some of the men imagined. In her speech, Sharawi spoke of the equal rights and duties of men and women to participate in the social, economic and political life of the Islamic community. By comparison, the male Minister of Education who was the official representative of the Egyptian state spoke about woman's exalted maternal role and her 'special'

14 Ahmed claims that the veil served as a uniform of transition. *Women and Gender,* 217–225 However, it would also seem to be a uniform of reaction to the growing western focus on the veil as a sign of Islamic backwardness.

15 M. Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation*, 230.

social and cultural roles as the producer of the next generation. When, in 1945, the League of Arab States was formed, no woman was invited as a delegate. Sharawi called it 'a League of half the Arab people'!

In 1956, the EFU and all other feminist organizations were closed down by the Egyptian state. Similarly, in the Arab East after independence, feminist movements were very much controlled by the state regimes. Women's associations had to register with the Ministries of Social Affairs which gave them annual stipends and closely monitored their activities, denying visas for foreign travel to feminist conferences and deciding which women's organizations would represent women abroad. The General Arab Feminist Union became the General Arab Women's Union and was harnessed by the states to serve their purposes.

However, as Badran points out, women had already become accustomed to organizing themselves and opposing what they did not agree with; thus, the legacy of the feminist movement and the feminist consciousness it had helped to spread could not and did not simply disappear.[16]

Early Muslim Feminism in Africa

The pace of social and economic change in other parts of Africa was much slower than had been the case in Egypt and it was more directly introduced through colonialism. Thus a movement that had a specifically Muslim character in terms of debate about the Islamic correctness of women's social, economic and political participation was also slower in developing.

Early nationalist groups of the French that controlled Algeria (1830–1962), Tunisia (1818–1956), and Morocco (1912–1956), had favoured secular reform as did the British in Nigeria (1903–1960). However, little effort was put into the education of women largely due to the little support this received from the local Muslim communities. In all colonized states, the Personal Status Laws were left separate from any positive law system that was introduced. Thus, a feminist consciousness per se and an

16 M. Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation,* 250.

organized feminist movement did not appear in most African countries until after the 1960s and remained only among the few elite educated women before becoming more widespread in the 1970s and '80s.

However, among African Muslim and non-Muslim women even before colonialism there were those who struggled against injustices they perceived. Evidence of such activism and self-assertion is to be found in the legal and colonial records of many of these countries.[17]

Nana Asma'u is often named as an example of a woman in nineteenth century Northern Nigeria who struggled to elevate the status of women.[18] She was a daughter of d'an Fodiyo, the jihadist who created a Caliphate in the region at approximately the same time as those Arab nations that had indigenous empires found themselves under colonial rule (1804–1903). She was part of the jihad and is acclaimed as having been a key player in the affairs of the Caliphate.[19] Along with her father, she insisted on women's right to pursue an education and she launched a movement for women's education, called the *Yan Taru*. As the writers of *Great Ancestors* admit, there is little or no record of the impact her teaching had on the lives of women but it might be presumed that the knowledge she imparted about Islamic teachings and laws have helped some women assert their rights in their everyday lives.[20] What is recorded is that seclusion of wives became a practice among the elite Muslim rulers,

17 For example, many of the accounts of women who challenged practices of divorce, polygamy, forced marriage, underage marriage, etc., given in the book *Great Ancestors* have been gleaned from colonial records and from the legal records of *shari 'a* and customary courts from numerous parts of the world.

18 F. Shaheed – A. Lee-Shaheed, *Great Ancestors*, 51–54.

19 Jean Boyd, an English woman who spent time in Nigeria is a researcher who has recovered, translated and published many of Nana Asma'u's writings and has also published her biography. She writes that Nana Asma'u asked her father, when he was appointing men to official positions, 'What about us, the women', to which he replied 'You will be over all the women. The women of the Caliphate belong to the women and the men belong to the men'. J. Boyd, *The Caliph's Sister: Nana Asma'u, 1793–1865: Teacher, Poet and Islamic Leader*, Frank Cass, London 1989, 46.

20 F. Shaheed – A. Lee-Shaheed, *Great Ancestors*, 53.

a practice that Nana Asma'u and her father recommended. This increased during colonial years. Hence, how positive her contribution was to the lives of Muslim women and to the awareness of women's Islamic rights, is truly a matter of debate. No other significant Muslim women's movement was formed in Nigeria until the 1970s although some women were active in the 1950s before the turn of independence.

Malika El-Fassi (born 1920) is accredited with starting the Moroccan Women's Movement. From 1937 she became actively engaged in the nationalist political movement and combined her nationalist politics with women's rights. She focused particularly on female education and buttressed her arguments by referring to Islam, claiming that women could not be expected to carry out their duties if they were ignorant. At this time, most Moroccan girls did not even receive a primary school education and were usually secluded after reaching puberty. In 1944, she and her husband, Mohammad El-Fassi, formed a group of nationalists, the Istiqlal (Independence) Party, to work for reform and independence. Shortly afterwards, a women's department of the Istiqlal Party was formed, headed by Malika. After the King went into exile in 1953, Malika became more visible in nationalist politics, and adopted the veil as 'a pragmatic gesture'. Morocco joined the Arab League in 1958 thus, according to Fatima Mernissi, choosing to develop an Arab and Muslim identity rather than a Berber or a French one.[21] A commission was established to develop the Muslim Personal Status Code based on the Maliki school of Islamic law and thus legalized various forms of gender inequality.

Algeria became independent in 1962 after eight years of war in which nearly eleven thousand women participated, many of whom were killed or jailed. Algerian women were granted the vote on independence. However the state was undemocratic, built on a one-party system, and civil movements were virtually non-effective even if existent until the early 1980s.

In Tunisia, which gained independence in 1956 and which granted women the right to vote in 1957, the 1956 Personal Status Code provided

21 F. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1987 (revised edition – first published by Schenkman Publishing Company, Cambridge 1975), 12–19.

greater rights for women and reduced the authority of men. The bride's physical presence and her verbal consent were required to make a valid marriage and women were entitled to initiate divorce. Polygyny, repudiation, forced marriage and the requirement of a male tutor to act on behalf of women, were banned.

In Sudan, women's struggles emerged with the national movement and struggle for independence. The first women's feminist organization, the Sudanese Women's Movement, was formed in 1947, and was committed to seeking social, economic and political justice for women. In 1954, women in Sudan were given the right to vote and to stand for election. Already in 1964 there was division in the Sudanese Women's Movement as two leading members left it accusing it of making unIslamic demands. In 1969, the May Regime dissolved the Movement and replaced it with the Sudan Women's Union which was affiliated with the Sudan Social Union and was directly under government control.

Islamist Popularity and Islamic Feminism from the 1980/90s

Margot Badran defines Islamic feminism as a discourse of gender equality and social justice that derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an.[22] According to Ziba Mir-Hosseini, an Iranian feminist living in London, Islamic feminism is an indigenous, locally produced feminist consciousness that rose as a result of the Iranian Republic's failure, after the clerical government of Khomeini was established, to deliver on its promise to honour and protect women.[23] Thus, Islamic feminism was largely motivated by a feminist concern to safeguard women's rights in an Islamic Republic. However, Islamic feminism is by no means limited to Iran but is seen globally today in the diverse forms of activity and discourse

22 M. Badran, 'Islamic Feminism: What's in a Name'.

23 Z. Mir-Hosseini, 'The Quest for Gender-Justice: Emerging Feminist Voices in Islam', in WLUML *Dossier* n.26, 2004.

that Muslim women are using to promote and justify changes in gender relations within their communities. Much Islamic feminism also results from Muslim women living in the West, who struggle to defend their religion against stereotypical attacks while at the same time struggling to reconcile their Muslim identity with their western one.[24]

The Khomeini Revolution in Iran in 1979 that overthrew the Shah's monarchy, as well as the Islamization of Pakistan under General Zia ul-Haq who seized power in 1977, and the Afghan mujahedin's struggle against communism around this time were all influential in the increased global popularity of Islamist trends. An unpredicted outcome of this phenomenon has been to raise a popular feminist, or at least gender-consciousness, in all Muslim communities. All that concerns women, from what they should wear and what they should study to whether and where they should work, are issues that have been openly debated. This has, in a paradoxical way, served to empower women from all classes of Muslim societies, largely because the Islamist project of a return to the *shari'a* created a space within which Muslim women could reconcile their faith and their identity with their struggle for gender equality.

Once the clerical government was in place in Iran, as is well known, a reversal of trends toward gender equality began and a set of gender relations characterized by profound inequality was created. There was a massive ideological campaign to celebrate Islamic values and denigrate the West: women's family roles were extolled and hijab was seen as central to the rejuvenation of Islamic society; women could no longer be judges, were dismissed from government positions and excluded from many fields of study; many were compelled to flee the country. However, some factors allowed for a re-emergence of the quest for women's rights. Women who had supported the revolution and were leaders of the movement had positions in parliament or in other key areas of society. These women as

24 For some literature on Islamic communities in the West and women's struggles within them, see Y. Yazbeck Haddad – I. Quromaz, 'Muslims in the West: a select bibliography' in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 11, n. 1, 2000, 5–49; A.S. Roald, *Women in Islam: The Western Experience*, Routledge, London/New York 2001.

well as women civil servants and activists continued to make demands on the government for equality and greater opportunity.[25] A great number of women in the country were educated and were in an economically viable position. The women's press was already established. The awareness of women's rights which had developed before the revolution, and had grown even among Islamist women, could not simply disappear. The UN at that time ensured a form of state-sponsored feminism appeared in all countries.[26] These factors all favoured the discourse of women in Iran just as they did worldwide.

Women, especially from the 1990s, began to develop a form of Islamic feminism, aware that any further advances in women's rights could only be won if their discourse was Islamic as opposed to secular.[27] They recognized that it was the Islamist voice that finds political, financial and popular support. Thus, instead of opposing it, they found that they can achieve basically the same aims by supporting it but by gradually opening it to

25 Zahra Rahnavard was particularly prominent. She was an Islamist political activist, who somewhat like Zainab al-Ghazali in Egypt, extolled women's primary domestic roles but was herself always traveling, publishing, preaching and involved in politics. However, she believed strongly in women's rights and sought a society of social justice. In the early 1990s she seemed to embrace some feminist concerns, and by 1997 she was asking for laws to punish sexual abuse, rape, domestic violence, and to allow women custody of their children. In 1999, she was President of Al-Zahra Women's University. Cf. J. Afary, 'Portraits of Two Islamist Women: Escape from Freedom or from Tradition' in *WLUML Dossier*, n. 25, October 2003.

26 The UN Decade for Women (1975–1985) and other specific UN meetings such as Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995 required all governments to send official delegates and at least, rhetorically, to address the issues of women's rights.

27 For studies in Muslim women's movements in post-revolutionary Iran see: N. Keddie, Women in Iran Since 1979, *WLUML Dossier*, 23/24, July 2001; A. Mahnaz – E. Friedl, ed., *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse 1994; H. Afshar, *Islam and Feminisms: An Iranian Case-Study*, St. Martin's Press, New York 1998; F. Azari, ed., *Women of Iran: The Conflict with Fundamentalist Islam*, Ithaca Press, London 1983; Z. Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1999; V. Moghadam, ed., *Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*, Zed Books, London 1994.

new interpretations of Islamic teachings and challenging laws and policies that are based on orthodox, literalist, or misogynist interpretations. The woman's press, particularly *Zanan*, a magazine founded by Shahla Sherkat in 1992, provided them with a public forum for discussion. The death of Khomeini and the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani followed by Mohammad Khatami facilitated a social movement for reform and a reversal of some of the Republic's policies on women sought by Islamic feminists and others.[28]

Many reforms and policy shifts in favour of women took place in Iran in the 1990s. Seeing this, many expatriate writers as well as non-Muslim feminists, who in the 1980s had written about the unrelenting oppression of women within an Islamic Republic, changed in the '90s to an appreciation of resistance, empowerment and change, working for reform within rather than the abolishment of the Islamic state. Thus the number of Islamic feminists, whose discourse was no longer in opposition to those Islamist women who worked within established Islam in Iran to promote the status of women, has greatly increased.[29]

Many reforms and policy shifts in favour of women were also realized in other Islamic countries. In most countries, the changes for which the early feminists led by Huda Sharawi in Egypt had struggled have today been introduced in a spirit of Islamization: women's access to education, to the formal labour force, to political participation.[30] Other changes, referring to marriage and divorce, have been much more difficult.[31]

28 *Zanan* was closed down by the government in 2008.

29 This explains why today many do not differentiate between Islamic and Islamist feminists.

30 This is not the case everywhere however. Muslim women activists in Nigeria are still struggling to convince the larger population that women have a right to leave their homes to receive an education. Since they have to deal with such basic issues, questions of alternative interpretations to Qur'anic texts and *fiqh* have remained somewhat secondary.

31 The impetus of reform in Islamic legal thought has varied from one country to another depending on the path of reform taken in different countries as they encountered western colonial powers: abandoning *fiqh* in all spheres of law and replacing it with western-inspired codes (only Turkey chose this path); retaining

Islamist and Islamic Revivalism in Africa from the 1980s

The increase in feminist consciousness among African women, including Muslim women, since the 1980s, was largely due to their increased level of education and participation in the formal labour market. It coincided with the increased poverty which followed the adoption during these years of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) in thirty African states. With SAP, the seclusion of Muslim women decreased in many African countries as men alone were no longer able to sustain their families. Few African countries experienced uninterrupted civilian democratic government in these early decades of independence.

The increased feminist consciousness, changes in the social and economic lives of men and women, and the political instability, also coincided with religious revivalism throughout the continent as Muslims and Christians turned to their religious communities for material help and to their religion for spiritual support and moral orientation. Islamist opposition movements surfaced in various countries, particularly in Algeria[32] and Sudan[33]. Great Islamic revivalism also began in Nigeria, although a strong Islamist oppositional movement directly comparable with the other two countries cannot be said to have surfaced.[34] There was much opposition from women who were concerned about the violation of women's rights by these Islamist groups.[35]

The Islamic National Front (INF), Hassan Turabi's military regime in Sudan, brought in a process of Islamization of the Sudanese state and boasted many women members. Indeed Turabi promised the full political participation of women and included two women in the 1986 parliament.[36] In the mid '90s, the FIS in Algeria guaranteed equal status to men and women and took some measures to include women in its decision-making council.[37]

Islamist revivalist groups are growing daily in popularity among Muslim women and men in many African countries, including Nigeria. These provide an opening in Muslim communities for increased gender awareness, which is currently developing alongside, and at times in conflict with, increased gender awareness at secular level.

and codifying *fiqh* with respect to Personal Status Law while abandoning it in other areas of law (a large majority of post-colonial countries chose this path); preserving *fiqh* as the fundamental law and attempting to apply it in all spheres of law (the Gulf countries chose this path). Thus, reforms in the laws depend on the status of Islamic law in the country. The process is well explained by Ziba Mir-Hosseini: 'The Construction of Gender in Islamic Legal Thought and Strategies for Reform' in *HAWWA, Journal of Women in the Middle East and the Islamic World,* vol. 1, n. 1, 2003, (1–28).

32 See A. Samiuddin – R. Khanam, ed., *Muslim Feminism*, 25–118 for various articles describing women's activism against government and FIS (the Islamic Salvation Front) policies and recounting quite horrific testimonies of the abuses girls and women have undergone in Algeria since 1989.

33 See A. Samiuddin – R. Khanam, ed., *Muslim Feminism*, 661–672 and 701–709 for articles presenting testimonies of the harassment women experienced from Islamist groups following the military government of Lt. Gen. Omar al-Bashir whose regime is described as a patriarchal conservative Muslim Brothers' government.

34 See chapter three for a deeper analysis of the form of Islamism that has grown and spread in Nigeria since the 1970s/80s.

35 Numerous feminist organizations were established in the 1990s to defend women against such violations, including the Algerian Women's Organization (RAFD), the Independent Association for the Triumph of Women's Rights (AIDTF), the Association for Women's Emancipation, the Association for the Equality of Men and Women before the Law, the Association for the Development and the Defence of Women's Rights and The Voice of Women Association. Those established in Nigeria are discussed in chapter four.

36 For a very positive account by an Islamist author of the gender friendly policies of the INF, see Z. Kausar, *Political Participation of Women: Contemporary Perspectives of Gender Feminists and Islamic Revivalists*, A.S. Noordeen, Kuala Lumpur 1997, 24–27.

37 Cf. N. Ghadbian, 'Islamists and Women in the Arab World: From Reaction to Reform' in *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, vol. 12, n. 1, Spring 1995, 29–30.

The Contributions of Contemporary Islamic Feminist Scholars

The contribution of Islamic feminist scholars since the 1990s has greatly aided the discourse and activities of Muslim women activists in their communities. It has provided them with well-informed alternative interpretations of the Qur'an, Sunna and Islamic law. These scholars focus on the egalitarian texts in the Qur'an and on *ahadith* that support such texts. They offer alternative readings of texts which have traditionally been interpreted as sanctioning male authority and female subjection, especially Q 4:34. They point to the cultural factors which throughout Islamic history have influenced to the detriment of women the dominant interpretations of Islamic teachings, and they question the validity of *ahadith* and of Islamic jurisprudence which have been used to support and impose such interpretations and practices. In general, their claim is that the truly egalitarian and ethical spirit of Islam is to be found in the Qur'an but that this has been curtailed over the ages by the patriarchal and misogynist cultures of Muslim communities, and was particularly silenced by the legal voice of Islam which was defined by the juridical schools in the tenth century. They make known the ways in which, throughout the history of Islam, women have been active in all spheres of activity. Their studies are selectively drawn on by Islamist as well as by secular Muslim feminists. Below I present the main arguments proposed by some of the most renowned Islamic feminist scholars.

Moroccan Fatima Mernissi was the first Muslim feminist scholar to look critically at misogynist interpretations of Islamic teachings. In *The Veil and the Male Elite*, published in French in 1987 and banned in Morocco, she gives a thorough re-interpretation of Qur'anic texts and *ahadith* related to women, premised on placing them in their political and historical context.[38] She shows some *ahadith* to lack credibility, claiming they were misogynist fabrications attributed to Muhammad to suit the patriarchal Meccan elite. Mernissi has also questioned what is often presented as the incompatibility of Islam with democracy and human rights. She argues that Sunni Islam in particular has never recognized an intermediary between the individual and God; hence, individual Muslims can, in principle, interpret the law and render it current by political and other secular interventions.[39] If they don't do so, she claims, it is because of a fear of breaking down their protective boundaries/hijab of acclaimed distinctiveness.

Amina Wadud, a South African born in the USA who converted to Islam, offered what is considered the first pro-faith attempt to do a comprehensive, female inclusive reading of the Qur'an. She believes that the Qur'an affirms women's equality and constitutes legitimate grounds for contesting the unequal treatment that women have experienced historically and continue to experience in Muslim communities.[40] She argues that the Qur'an does not prescribe one timeless and unchanging social structure for men and women and affirms that it holds greater possibilities for guiding human society to a more fulfilling and productive mutual collaboration between men and women than as yet attained by any other religious tradition.

Wadud differentiates between two textual levels in the Qur'an, the historically and culturally contextualized 'prior text' and the wider 'megatext' of essential or culturally universal relevance. The megatext of the Qur'an emphasises gender equality but she sees that the gender distinctions based on early Arabian precedents have superseded this megatext. The 'prior text' depends on a reader's own perspective, circumstances and background. There can, thus, be many prior texts, but mere relativism is

38 F. Mernissi, *The Veil and The Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam,* Perseus Books Publishing, L.L.C. 1991 (Translated by Mary Jo Lakeland; first published in French as *Le Harem Politique*, Editions Albin Michel, S.A. 1987).

39 F. Mernissi, 'Arab Women's Rights and the Muslim State in the Twenty-first Century: Reflections on Islam as Religion and State' in M. Afkhami, ed., *Faith and Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World*, Syracuse University Press, New York 1995, 33–50; F. Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*, Perseus Publishing 1992 (second edition 2002).

40 A. Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, Oxford University Press, New York 1999.

prevented by the permanence and continuity of the Qur'anic text itself. No interpretation can ever be considered final or universal. Wadud is critical of traditionalist interpretations, mainly done by men, which lack recognition of the Qur'an's thematic unity. She is also critical of reactionary interpretations done by feminists or people motivated by other ideologies who have vindicated the position of women on grounds that are incongruous with the Qur'an. She proposes a holistic interpretation which considers the context of a Qur'anic revelation, the grammar used, the composition of the text and the overall Qur'anic worldview.

Wadud gives detailed attention to the controversial verse Q 4:34 and considers past interpretations that have been given to it to justify male authority. She takes the verse word for word and considers their use in the Qur'an in general. Referring to *faddala* which she translates as 'to prefer', the only Qur'anic reference which specifies that God has determined for men a portion greater than for women is in reference to inheritance in Q 4:7. Therefore if 4:34 was referring to a preference in inheritance, which it might do since it is connected in the verse with the word *qawwāmuna* (maintainers), such a materialistic preference is not absolute. It expresses the man's functional responsibility to maintain woman, not any other superiority. If the man's inheritance is less than that of his wife, the condition of maintenance doesn't stand. The verse 4:34, translated by Wadud, reads that 'some of them', not 'they' as in all of them (men), are preferred over 'others', not 'them' (as in all women). Thus, it cannot be understood that all men excel over all women in all matters in society, or that men are *qawwāmuna* over all women in the family, or even that all men are *qawwāmuna* over their wives. The two verbs are dependent on the conditions they express.[41]

Wadud considers this verse as referring to functional responsibilities in relation to the collective good concerning the relationship of men

41 A. Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 69–71; Aziza al-Hibri also analyzes traditional interpretations given to this surah and proposes a more feminist inclusive and egalitarian translation. See A. al-Hibri 'A Story of Islamic Herstory: Or How did We ever get into this Mess', in *Women and Islam: Women's Studies International Forum Magazine*, n. 5, 1982, 193–206.

and women in society at large, particularly concerning the responsibility of women to bear children. Within a family, each member has certain responsibilities. For obvious biological reasons a primary responsibility of the woman is child-bearing on which human existence depends. Men and society at large must also participate in this responsibly, by ensuring the woman has all she needs to fulfil this duty. Since all women's situations differ, including the fact that some are barren, this text, she concludes, must not be viewed narrowly as one man to one woman, but rather in the context of the wider society and the responsibility to establish equitable and mutually dependent relationships and a balanced and shared society.[42] She also sees that the term *qawwām* cannot refer to any other sense of superiority of men over women and cannot refer to all men and all women, since some women are barren and some men simply cannot maintain their wives. She believes the verse cannot be viewed narrowly but 'must eternally be reviewed with regard to human exchange and mutual responsibility between males and females'.[43]

Wadud caused some uproar among Muslim communities worldwide when she led Friday prayers for men and women in New York in March 2005.[44] Her act has given rise to a series of debates on whether a woman can or cannot be imam and lead men in prayer.

Asma Barlas, who also concentrates on analyzing the interpretation of the Qur'an over the ages, is convinced that women can struggle for equality from within the framework of the Qur'an's teachings, arguing that since the Qur'an was revealed in/to an existing patriarchy and has been interpreted by adherents of patriarchies ever since, women today must challenge

42 A. Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 70–74; Riffat Hassan and others also give this interpretation to the text, Cf. R. Hassan, 'Are Human Rights Compatible with Islam? The Issue of the Rights of Women in Muslim Communities' in D.C. Maguire, ed., *Human Rights in China and Islam, The Religious Consultation on Population, Reproductive Health and Ethics*, Washington D.C., 1995, 25–38.

43 A. Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 73.

44 In response to her act, Yusuf Qaradawi issued a fatwa pronouncing that a woman leading men in prayer is unheard of in Islamic history, and is contrary to Islamic teachings since the female body incites sexual thoughts in men and thus a woman cannot possibly sit in front of them and lead them in the gestures of prayer.

this patriarchal exegesis. She shows that the Qur'an is not a patriarchal or misogynist text and that it can be a source for women's liberation.[45]

Leila Ahmed, an Egyptian, traces the developments in Islamic discourses on women and gender from the beginnings until the present day. She critiques the ideology of gender which is usually favoured by the Islamic authorities as being one that justifies their subversion of women and serves the male economic, religious and governing elites. She critiques especially juridical Islam which she refers to as the prime silencer of the ethical or true Islam, since juridical Islam, established in the tenth century and consecrated as representing the ultimate and infallible articulation of the Islamic notion of justice, is one of the main sources for the strictly demarcated gender roles in Muslim societies and the basis for women's unequal inheritance, lack of divorce rights, unjust witness rules, and so on. She feels that it is only within the politically powerful version of Islam that women's position is immutably fixed as subordinate.[46]

Ahmed distinguishes two distinct voices within Islam and two competing understandings of gender. The ethical and spiritual voice is egalitarian with respect to the sexes and constitutes the core message that the religion came into existence to articulate.[47] This egalitarian ethical voice spoke of absolute spiritual and moral equality (Q 33:35), equal worth of men and women's labour (Q 3:195), and equal rights of men and women (Q 2:229). At the same time, this ethical egalitarian voice in respect to the sexes was in tension with the sexual hierarchical structure of marriage and the regulations for society which were instituted in the first Islamic community.[48] This hierarchical structure of society became elaborated into the body of political and legal thought and became the technical understanding of the Islamic heritage and the dominant legal and doctrinal voice of established Islam. Ahmed maintains that Muhammad sanctioned sexual hierarchy in social structures to accommodate the needs of the society

45 A. Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, University of Texas Press, Austin 2002.
46 L. Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 239.
47 L. Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 63.
48 L. Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 64.

of the time. She says that these structures were much more favourable to women than what the pre-Islamic Arabian society allowed and certainly more favourable than the later Abbasid society and subsequent Islamic societies were to be. The decision to regard such androcentric practices of marriage as binding on all time was itself an interpretative decision and reflected the interests of those in power as well as the mores and attitudes of society.[49] Thus, for Ahmed, Muslims are called to return to the ethical, egalitarian voice of Islam rather than the legal and doctrinal voice which reflects the interpretations of androcentric cultures.

Riffat Hassan from Pakistan has examined the influence that *hadith* literature has had on Muslim ideas about women and gender relations. She sees three theological assumptions on which is based the belief that woman is secondary and subordinate to man: that God's primary creation is man, not woman, since woman is believed to have been created from Adam's rib and hence is derivative and secondary ontologically; that woman was the primary agent of the Fall, and hence all daughters of Eve are to be regarded with suspicion; and that woman was created not only from man but also for man, which makes her existence instrumental rather than fundamental.[50] She sees that these teachings are not Qur'anic, but they entered the Muslim world through the *ahadith* attributed to Muhammad as well as the misogynist doctrines of many early Islamic scholars. Hassan, like other Islamic feminists and Islamist writers, refers to the influence of the anti-feminist, misogynist biases that are found in the Greek-Hellenistic traditions, the Jewish and Christian traditions, and the pagan Arab cultural biases against women, all which were inherited in the Islamic tradition as it developed in societies over the ages.[51]

49 L. Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 87.
50 R. Hassan, 'Religious Conservatism: Feminist Theology as a means of combating injustice toward women in Muslim communities' (internet article; see bibliography). According to Hassan, Wadud and others, the creation story in the Qur'an is gender neutral as to who was created first.
51 WLUML (Women Living Under Muslim Laws), *Riffat Hassan: Selected Articles*, 1989. This publication consists of five papers presented by Hassan on various occasions.

Hassan considers the Qur'an as a Magna Carta of human rights; for her, the overriding ethical values of the Qur'an stress that human beings, men and women, are designated to be God's *khalifa* (vicegerents) on earth to establish a social order characterized by justice and compassion.[52] However, she believes that through the ages the Qur'an has been interpreted through the lens of *hadith* literature and thus its essential egalitarian message has been distorted. While most Muslims agree that they must reject any *hadith* that contradicts the Qur'an, nevertheless, the *ahadith* invoked to justify women's secondary status are not only retained but they are among the most well known among Muslims in general.[53] Hassan portrays Islam not as an embodiment of beliefs and rituals but as a way forward for an equitable and just society. Due to the patriarchal interpretations of the past, a new interpretation is warranted today, based on individual Muslims assuming their duty of *ijtihad*. The Qur'an sets the striving for justice and compassion as a responsibility; hence Muslims are called to assume this ethic of responsibility for their lives, for nature, and for the elimination of all inequities and injustices in society.[54] Thus, she sees the challenge for Muslims today to analyze and refute those time-honoured understandings of Qur'anic verses and *ahadith* used against women; to reinterpret these texts in the light of the cardinal Islamic belief that God is just and that God's word must reflect God's justice.[55]

Hassan sees the lack of religious education among Muslim women as the greatest obstacle to be overcome, since if they are unaware of the religious ideas and attitudes which constitute the matrix in which their

52 R. Hassan, 'Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam' in P. Cooey – W. Eakin – J. McDaniel, ed., *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions*, Orbis 1991, 39–69.

53 The issue is controversial since not all Muslims agree on what actually constitutes contradiction.

54 R. Hassan, 'Members, One of Another: Gender Equality and Justice in Islam' (internet article: see bibliography).

55 R. Hassan, 'Members, One of Another'.

lives are rooted, it will not be possible to usher in a new era in which the Qur'anic vision of gender-justice and equity becomes a reality.[56]

While Islamic feminists have concentrated on a rereading of the Qur'an and a recuperation of what they see as its essential vision of equality and justice, few have been concerned with directly confronting the body of Islamic *fiqh*. For most of these writers, the schools of law belong to the medieval age in which they were elaborated by men who were greatly influenced by their patriarchal culture and historical moment. Therefore, instead of being revised, Muslims should move away from legal Islam which, they claim is contrary to the spirit of Islam, and return to the practice of individual *tafsir* and *ijtihad*. They insist that the Qur'an is not a legal book but rather a book of guidance and that no one interpretation of the Qur'an and *hadith* can be final and assumed to be legally binding on all Muslims in all ages and all cultures. Those who defend the implementation of a codified *shari'a* system as is happening today in Nigeria[57] and in Indonesia, according to Asma Barlas, tend to move from the Qur'an to the *hadith* to *ijma'* (public reason or consensus). When their arguments based on the Qur'an are challenged, they turn to *ahadith*. When the validity of the *ahadith* is challenged, they claim the voice of *ijma'* forgetting that this is itself a social construct.[58] It is therefore the gradual change in the minds of Muslim men and women, and hence a growth in community consensus, that will bring about gradual and continuous reform in the implementation of *fiqh*.

Ziba Mir-Hosseini, an Iranian scholar, identifies three attitudes towards Islam with which Islamic feminism is struggling today: Muslim

56 R. Hassan, 'From Re-Active to Po-Active: The Challenge for Muslim Women on the road from Cairo to Beijing', paper presented at the IPPF Workshop on 'Women in Islam: Human Rights and Family Planning', Tunis, July 1995 (internet article: see bibliography).

57 Where Personal Status Law is not yet codified but Muslim women are asking that it should be as they see this as preferable to leaving interpretations to individual Islamic judges.

58 A. Barlas, 'Women Should Escape from the Circle of Oppression', interview 25th July 2005 (internet article: see bibliography).

Traditionalists, who insist that *shari'a* is unchanging in eternally valid ways; Islamic Fundamentalists (Islamists) who seek to change current practices in Muslim societies by returning to an earlier, purer version of the *shari'a*; and Secular Fundamentalists who deny that any *shari'a*-based law or social practice can be just or equal.[59] She considers all three of these stances to have an essentialist and non-historical understanding of Islamic law and gender and they fail to recognize or accept that assumptions and laws about gender in Islam, as in any religion, are socially constructed and are thus open to negotiation and change. However, as already seen above, some changes have been introduced, and Islamic feminists, including Mir-Hosseini herself, seem to hope that with the help of modernist *fiqh* scholars as well as their own contributions, progress is possible. Her suggestion is that, instead of a search for an Islamic genealogy for feminism or human rights, there is need to place emphasis on understandings of religion and how religious knowledge is produced. Whether this will ever happen, she adds, depends on the balance of power between traditionalists and reformists in each Muslim country and on women's ability to organize and participate in the political process, and to engage with the advocates of each discourse.[60]

The Muslim Women's Debate

There are three important questions which are a subject of debate among Muslim women and in the international feminist arena. The first concerns the refusal of most Muslim women activists to be labelled feminist; the second concerns the growing tendency towards an Islamically framed feminism; the third concerns the concept of feminism itself and whether

59 Z. Mir-Hosseini, 'The Quest for Gender-Justice'.

60 Z. Mir-Hosseini, 'The Construction of Gender in Islamic Legal Thought': 'Such an approach to religious texts can in time open the way for radical and positive changes in Islamic law to accommodate concepts such as gender equality and human rights' (23–24).

a discourse which relies almost solely on religious interpretation, is not in opposition to the goals of feminism.

Why is the label Feminism rejected?

In reality, few Muslim women writers and activists, except secular feminists, will themselves choose the label feminist, mainly because of its association with the West. Some also feel that, since Islam already grants all her rights to a woman, there is no need for any label that implies one is anything other than an authentic Muslim. Islamists express the view that Western feminists have only liberated women to the extent that women have become sex objects and market their sexuality to benefit patriarchal capitalism.

Haideh Moghissi feels the rejection of the label feminist is due to the anti-Orientalist bias that is to be found in much Islamic literature particularly since the 1970s and '80s.[61] It may also be, however, that the emphasis some feminist circles have put since the 1990s on sexual rights and liberty has driven not only Muslim women but women of other faiths away.

Another reason may be that the global feminist movement has since the 1960s been quite opposed to all forms of institutionalized religion, considering it the anti-thesis of the feminist goals of self-determination. Some feminists today recognize that the feminist concept of freedom needs to be reconceptualized so as to include the possibility of a person defining and developing him/herself ethically and spiritually within a religious context, which is part of a community and its meaningful traditions, while opposing any form of domination within these traditions.[62] In other words, there is need to form an alliance between feminist thought and religious thought, and overcome the dichotomy or opposition that often exists between the two. This idea is one that is expressed by quite a

61 H. Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism*, 133–135.

62 K. Vintges, 'Some Hypes and Some Hope: Women and Islam in the Western Media' in *Concilium*, n. 5, 2005, 41–48.

number of feminist thinkers today, not only Muslim women but women of diverse faiths.

Asma Barlas quite clearly stated that she refuses to call herself a feminist because this is a concept that today requires a great deal of clarification. However, she admits to being indebted to feminists and to feminist thought.[63] Amina Wadud initially adamantly objected to being labelled an Islamic feminist. In the preface to the 1999 Oxford University Press publication of her book she admits to having had names hurled at her, Feminist and Western, both usually reduced to mean anti-Islam. She is no longer too concerned how people identify her; she considers herself inspired by the feminist belief in the 'seemingly radical notion' that women are human beings, and hence sees no need for a title but would like people to understand her work.[64]

Secular Muslim feminists object to the Islamic part of the label. Although they may collaborate with Islamic feminists, they believe that there are limits to religious interpretation and feel that although religious reform is salutary and necessary, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. They do not believe that it is possible to be a feminist if one must use religious discourse to define that feminism.

Why must Muslim women's activism be Islamic?

The importance of proposing islamically framed rather than secularly framed arguments to promote the status of women in Muslim communities seems to reflect a form of acceptance by Muslim women activists that, in a world where Islamism seems inevitable, the only terrain in which effective discourse can be developed is within a strictly Islamic framework. Women activists thus seem to be obliged to engage rather than reject Islamic values and teachings. This for Moghissi is a matter of concern. She is particularly sceptical of the enthusiasm for Islamic feminism when this is treated not as a necessary resistance strategy for women living in

63 A. Barlas, 'Women Should Escape from'.

64 A. Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, xviii.

Islamist states but as the only appropriate model of feminist consciousness for women in Muslim nations in general.[65]

Riffat Hassan believes that feminism as a form of activism for promoting women's rights cannot be separate from religion, not only because of the use of religious arguments in political and social discussion but also because she recognizes that religious language is that which most Muslim women understand.[66]

Inspired and motivated by feminist concerns Islamist and Islamic women activists in subtle ways present their demands as being authentic Islamic teaching. It may be that some are more motivated by their feminist concerns than by any great religious or spiritual conviction, but that is a matter that remains part of each one's own conscience. These women subtly circumvent the dictated rules. They reappropriate the veil as a means to facilitate social presence rather than seclusion, or they minimize and diversify the compulsory *hijab* and dress code into fashionable styles. They engage in a feminist ijtihad, emphasizing the egalitarian ethics of Islam, reinterpreting the Qur'an, and deconstructing *Shari'a*-related rules in a women-friendly egalitarian fashion, in terms of birth control, personal status law, and family code.[67] Hence they achieve many of the aims that feminists worldwide are looking for.

65 H. Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism*.

66 R. Hassan, 'Religious Conservatism': 'In my judgment, the average Muslim woman in the world has three characteristics: she is poor, she is illiterate and she lives in a rural environment. If I, as a human rights activist, wanted to 'liberate' this average Muslim woman living anywhere from Ankara to Jakarta, I could not do so by talking to her about the U.N. Declaration on Human Rights, 1948, because this means nothing to her. But it is possible for me to reach this woman's heart and mind and soul by reminding her that God is just and merciful and that, as a creature of this just and merciful God, she is entitled to justice and protection from every kind of oppression and inequity. I make this statement because I have seen the eyes of many Muslim women who have lived in hopelessness and helplessness, light up when they realize what immense possibilities for development exist for them within the framework of the belief-system which defines their world.'

67 This is also the opinion of N. Tohidi, 'The Issues at Hand', 283–85.

Should Islamist Women and Islamic Feminism be supported?

Whether the activities and discourse of Islamist women and Islamic feminists should be considered a form of feminism is a question of much debate among women. The debate concerns what it means to be feminist and what should be considered liberating for women. If the reform sought by Muslim women is not in full accordance with the gender understanding of non-Muslim, Western feminists, does it mean it is not a valid form of feminism and should not be supported?

Ziba Mir-Hosseini considers all activities that seek to promote women within an Islamic framework as a form of feminism, although she recognizes that within this there are differing degrees of understanding on gender equality and gender roles. She believes that by diverting the focus of *fiqh* away from women as sexual beings and focusing on women as social beings, the diverse forms of Muslim women's gender activism have given a new lease of life to the question of women in Islam. By asking suppressed questions they have brought about a shift in the whole debate on women's role in the home and in society.[68]

Valentine Moghadam, an Iranian expatriate also sees great possibilities in Muslim women's diverse forms of activism. She believes that to question gender practices in other cultures is to impose western views and hence is a modern-day form of colonialism which does not allow for cultural, social and religious subjectivity.[69] Dunya Maumoon also suggests that Islamist women represent new kinds of feminist consciousness in a world that is struggling to respect cultural and religious subjectivity.[70]

68 Z. Mir-Hosseini, 'Stretching the Limits: A Feminist Reading of the *Shari'a* in Post-Khomeini Iran: Divorce, Veiling and Emergent Feminist Voices' in *WLUML Dossier,* n. 17, June 1997, 31–61, (60–61).

69 V. Moghadam, 'Islamic Feminism and its Discontents: Towards a Resolution of the Debate' in *Signs*, *Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* vol. 27, n. 4, 2002, (1135–1171).

70 D. Maumoon, 'Islamism and Gender Activism: Muslim Women's Quest for Autonomy' in *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Oct. 1999, vol. 19, n. 2, 269–283.

This presents the conflicting debate about cultural relativism. Is each culture to be allowed to determine its own value system? Is one value-system as good as another? If the global community refuses to support Islamist women and instead supports those governments and government policies which impose what are considered universal values, is this to be understood as a modern-day form of colonialism? Must the world remain silent when a dominant group imposes its values and social systems on a minority group in the name of cultural subjectivity? Since many areas of culture and tradition concern private, family affairs, where women are most vulnerable and where they experience many violations, should they be left by the universal community as untouchable?[71] This debate is ongoing today.[72]

Many women activists have formed groups which operate at a national level.[73] They need the support of the male religious and political leaders

71 The areas of social life which are singled out as privileged sites of cultural distinctiveness and identity, based on unchangeable religious ordinances, are the family, gender relations and women's status. This was the policy of colonial governments which introduced positive law systems and democratic style constitutions but left religious and customary Personal Status Codes intact. Yet, as many feminist activists in these post-colonial countries point out, cultural or religious traditions are adapted unquestioningly when they suit the economic and political ends of the objectors. Cf. D. Kandiyoti, 'Reflections on the Politics of Gender in Muslim Societies: From Nairobi to Beijing' in M. Afkhami, ed., *Faith and Freedom*, 19–32.

72 Cf. For some criticisms of multiculturalism and its limitations see S. Moller Okin, 'Feminism, Human Rights and Cultural Differences' in *Hypatia*, 13/2, 1989 (32–35); J. Cohen – M. Howard – M.C. Nussbaum, ed., *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey 1999. In recent years quite a number of those who have criticized the policies of Islamist governments as being oppressive of women, have been assassinated or threatened with assassination.

73 For example the Society of Muslim Sisters of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt; Zahra, a Muslim women's Islamist group in Syria and Egypt; the women members of the Islamic National Front in Sudan; FOMWAN, the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria. This latter group, which is looked at in great detail in chapter six, is not associated with any Islamist group as such but is supported by the Muslim political and religious leaders who seek to Islamize Nigerian Muslim communities. Its understanding of women's rights and responsibilities is

and thus are often limited in the extent to which they can confront patriarchal interpretations of Qur'anic texts or the gender inequalities in the Islamic personal and criminal codes. To avoid opposition and to ensure support, they extol women's domestic roles and wifely submission but seek greater social and political participation so that women can better fulfil these primary roles. The women's Islamist groups strive to promote women according to traditional interpretations of pre-established, strictly-defined and complementary gender roles. To what extent, therefore, should such activities be considered as truly liberating of Muslim women and deserving of unequivocal support?

Some people feel that Islamist women should not be supported as they lend too much false credibility to an Islamic Republic and as legitimizing Islamic rule.[74]

Some scholars are critical of Islamic feminists and their intent to deny that Islam is sexist by trying to find in the Qur'an an inherent egalitarian spirit. Critics claim that by distinguishing between the historical formation of Islam that led to discriminatory practices, and the ethical teachings, abstract vision and concepts of Islam, they are simply trying to legitimize Islam in modernity and are attributing contemporary political meanings to antecedents far removed in time.[75] Egalitarianism, gender equality, and freedom of the individual are concepts which today have been derived from secular ideologies in response to demands made by a capitalist market economy and a modern state. While there might be equivalents for these concepts in earlier times, some consider it exaggerated to imagine that they had a similar meaning in far off events in Islamic history.

inspired by many Islamist scholars and leaders, including Hassan Turabi. It includes women who have a more traditionalist view of gender as well as those who are more modernist.

74 See for example M. Kia, 'The Limits of Islamic Feminism' in *Iran Bulletin*, n. 8, Jan. – Mar. 1994, 20–21.

75 Cf. R. Afshari, 'Egalitarian Islam and Misogynist Islamic Tradition: A Critique of the Feminist Reinterpretation of Islamic History and Heritage', in *Critique: Journal of Critical Studies of Iran and the Middle East*, n. 4, 1994, 13–33.

Critics claim that some of today's Islamic feminists changed from being iconoclastic-feminists in the 1970s and early 1980s to becoming Islamic reformers in the 1990s.[76] Reza Afshari compares some of the earlier writings of Fatima Mernissi and Leila Ahmed and believes that they have curbed their tongue in their more recent publications. As he rightly says, initially they were quite critical of the Qur'an, claiming that Muhammad was patriarchal and was very much influenced by the pre-Islamic Arab culture. In their earlier writings, these authors identified some aspects in pre-Islamic cultures that were more favourable to women than that which was introduced by Islam. Mernissi, in particular, admits that Islam introduced a patriarchal and polygamous system of marriage that gave male authority a stamp of holy approval, and banished all existent practices in which the sexual self-determination of women was asserted. They also expressed reservations about the efforts of Islamic reformists. In the publications I have reviewed above they claim the text is quite wholly egalitarian and must simply be interpreted with the right criteria.[77] This might suggest a development in their knowledge of Islamic history, or it might also indicate awareness on their part that nothing will be achieved

76 Cf. H. Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism*, 40: 'Some among them seem to have suddenly discovered the Islamic path to women's emancipation as the only viable, home-grown and culturally appropriate alternative to feminism, Marxism and the liberal humanist project. An increasing number of them are secular women who have turned to the Islamic framework as an indigenous, culturally accessible alternative to the West's feminist doctrine and practice.'

77 For their earlier publications, see L. Ahmed, 'Women and the Advent of Islam' in *Signs*, Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 11 (4), 1986, 665–691; F. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil.* In a later publication, Mernissi also claims that Islam is a patriarchal and misogynist religion that 'professes models of hierarchical relationships and sexual inequality and puts a sacred stamp (onto) female subservience.' in F. Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory*, Zed Books, London 1996, 13–14. Mernissi is considered by many Muslim scholars, including Islamic feminists, as a secular Muslim feminist rather than as an Islamic feminist. Although she can find egalitarian principles in the Qur'an and although her study of the *ahadith* literature has been valuable, she does not try to convince her readers that Islam or the Qur'an can ever be totally freed from human, cultural and historical influences.

by a confrontational approach to the foundational text of Islam which orientates the lives of so many millions of men and women.

Most Islamic feminists write today as though Islam were the only authentic path for women's emancipation and they see cultural misinterpretations as the only or primary cause of women's subordination. Thus, it is a form of essentialist Islamic determinism and seems to disregard the complexities of social, political and economic transformations. Leila Ahmed, for example, suggests that had the ethical voice of Islam been heard, it would have significantly tempered the extreme androcentric bias of the law and today there would exist a far more humane and egalitarian law regarding women.[78] Such a suggestion seems to imply, somewhat unrealistically, that Islam, or any other religion, could develop without reference to political, social, cultural and economic influences. The question to be asked is how significant is Islam as an overarching category in the discussion of modern Muslim societies. Is Islam really to blame and can Islam alone really offer a solution? To put all the blame for women's secondary status in society on religion, as critics of Islam do, seems just as essentialist and unrealistic as the claim that all solutions to overcoming the obstacles women encounter within their societies and cultures can be found by freeing religious teachings of historically biased interpretations.

Valentine Moghadam, who although favourable towards Islamic feminism, fears that the strategy of Islamic and Islamist feminists could undermine secular alternatives of society. However, she feels this is unlikely to happen because these feminists usually combine their religious interpretations with recognition of universal standards such as CEDAW.[79] This in itself, however, seems to suggest the limitations and inconsistencies of Islamic feminism: despite egalitarian interpretations and an insistence on an Islamic framework as opposed to a universal one, they need to depend on the support of universal treaties if progress in women's status is to be made.

78 L. Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 88.

79 V. Moghadam, 'Islamic Feminism', 1158.

Haideh Moghissi sees the sympathy and enthusiasm shown today for the reformist activities of Islamist and Islamic women as being problematic largely because it obscures the fact that in a country like Iran, Islam is not a matter of personal spiritual choice but rather a legal and political system. She sees Islam in political rule as being incompatible with cultural pluralism that is the prerequisite of the right to individual choice.[80] The same criteria may be applied to any country or state that insists on being governed by the Qur'an and a codified *shari'a* legal system.

The Islamist groups in Iran and elsewhere have shown that change is a gradual process that seems possible when an adequate number of women and men have reached a certain degree of Islamic as well as western education and are economically well positioned; thus are able to gradually bring a gender awareness to the larger community, acquire enough public consensus to support their interpretations and demands, and bring about reform in their communities. How much time should such a process be allowed and how many people left to suffer before there is some outside intervention? Legal changes can be brought about only when Islamic leaders are enlightened to gender justice by feminists, Islamic or Islamist, and the clerical state or religious and political leaders agree to try to accommodate the demands of activist women. But this is a slow process and one cannot be sure of success.

80 H. Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism*, 42–43.

CHAPTER 2

Christian Feminist Theology in Comparison with Islamic Feminism

While Islamic feminism as it exists today can be traced to the discourse of the secular feminism of the early twentieth century, which was an amalgam of Islamic modernist, secular, nationalist, and feminist discourses, Christian feminist theology has its roots in the secular discourse and movement of American and European women in the nineteenth century. In both cases, women had to struggle with a conflict between social changes and the dominant teachings and interpretations of their religious leaders.

Muslim women claim that feminist activism existed since the religion came into existence. So too, Christian women recall those who struggled and overcame what they perceived as injustice to women in church and in society since the early days of Christianity. However, feminist discourse is a phenomenon of the last two centuries while feminist theology per se has been developing only since the 1960s. The roots of the term Christian feminist theology are uncertain. However, it is largely a result of women's increased access to theological education just as Islamic feminism resulted from women's increased access to the study of their religious sources, reducing in both cases the authority of religious leaders as the sole interpreters of their religious truth.

Secular Christian Feminism

Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, which she published in 1792, as a parallel to the Declaration of the Rights of Man produced by the French Revolution, applied the emerging language

of political rights to the domestic and social situation of women. The American women who met in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 based their resulting 'Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions' on the earlier American Declaration of Independence. Thus, the early feminist movement reflected the egalitarian impulse of the period which legitimised rebellion on the basis of rights.

At the same time, these early feminists understood their project as being inspired by their Christian faith. Prominent among the leaders of this first wave of feminism, as it is called today, were the Grimké Sisters, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. As they worked for social reform, primarily for the abolition of slavery, they came to realize that many limitations were put on them because of their sex and, as a result, they began to express more openly the need for equality of the sexes which they saw as essential to the Christian message. The vision of a society where all human beings are valued equally was rooted in their faith. As a result of their writings and speeches to this effect, many of these women, primarily the Grimké sisters, were expelled from their church communities.

The women's movement continued to emphasise the abolition of slavery as its goal until slavery was eventually abolished in 1865 with the Thirteenth Amendment. They then committed themselves to the suffrage movement. Already at this early stage, feminist activity began to distance itself from the Christian churches. There was public perception of the women's movement as something dangerous to public life and morality. The Women's Christian Temperance Union only included women's suffrage as one of its goals in 1883.

Critical feminist Biblical interpretation claims its origin in the work of Elizabeth Cady Stanton who was very much aware that the Bible could be used to uphold different positions about women.[1] She gathered some

1 African and Asian feminist theologians today as well as Afro-American women and women from other contexts, recover the history of other women in the nineteenth century, and even before then in various parts of the world, who spoke out against the use of the Bible to justify slavery or the silence of women. They acknowledge the important contribution of the American women but do not accept that they were actually the pioneers of women's critical Biblical interpretation. For references to some of these studies, see K. Pui-Lan, 'Racism and Ethnocentrism in Feminist Biblical Interpretation' in E. Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction,* Crossroad Herder Publishers, New York 2001, 101–116.

companions and set to study the Bible more closely. She concluded that the Bible as a whole was androcentric, written from a male perspective and interpreted from this perspective for centuries so that it was essentially a man-made book rather than God's Word. Thus, she published the *Woman's Bible*[2], concentrating on the texts that spoke specifically about women to prove that although Jesus had promised equality, Christianity had not elevated the status of women but had instead plunged them into slavery. She claimed, moreover, that the Bible was a political weapon wielded against women's struggle for liberation and advocated that a feminist interpretation of the Bible was politically necessary.[3]

The National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA), founded in 1890, passed a resolution in 1896 where it distanced itself from Elizabeth Stanton's *Woman's Bible*. This was in an effort to ensure that the struggle for suffrage would not fail in its objective because of anti-church sentiments to Stanton's criticisms of the Bible. Christianity could be the motivation behind the quest for moral reform and for abolition but how it could inspire a struggle for women's political emancipation was a delicate issue. Eventually, this was done by referring to women's moral superiority and their important role in defending the family and traditional morality in line with dominant church teachings of that time.[4]

2 *The Woman's Bible* was published in two parts, in 1895 and 1898.

3 Cf. C. de Swarte Gifford, 'Politicizing the Sacred Texts: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Woman's Bible' in E. Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures*, 52–63.

4 In traditional understandings about family, the Catholic teaching saw hierarchy in the male-female relationship as indispensable and as being in accordance with God's plan. See *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* (Leo XIII, 1880), n. 11; *Rerum Novarum* (Leo XIII, 1891), n. 42.

The efforts of the women's suffrage movement eventually bore fruit.[5] After winning the right to vote, the women's movement in the Western world became divided in different strands. Most, until the 1960s, were motivated by their church teachings on moral reform and female superiority in this domain. Supported by their churches, they emphasized the distinctive maternal role of women and sought legislation to protect the rights of women and children through social welfare programmes.[6]

In the women's movement initially, it was the experience of white women that was considered. Sojourner Truth, an ex-slave and feminist activist, had protested about this as early as 1850 at the First Women's Rights Convention when she pointed out that, while white women sought to overcome stereotypes about femininity and a woman's domestic role, black women slaves were not considered feminine in the same way and

5 For example, In 1902 Australia granted women the right to vote; in Britain women over the age of 30 were allowed to vote from 1918 (age lowered to 21 in 1928); Germany, Poland and Sweden granted female suffrage in 1919; America did so in 1920; France in 1944; Italy in 1945; Yugoslavia in 1946; Greece in 1952; Kenya and Iran in 1963; Kuwait in 2005. In Nigeria, women in the south and east voted at Independence in 1960 but Northern women were denied the vote, because it was supposedly not allowed in Islam and would upset the male Muslim population. They eventually voted in 1979.

6 Pope Pius XI (1922–1939) wrote in *Casti Connubii* (1930) that one of the modern errors that need to be corrected is the challenge to 'the honorable and trusting obedience which the woman owes to the man. Many of them [feminists] even go further and assert that such a subjugation of one party to the other is unworthy of human dignity, that the rights of husband and wife are equal' (n. 74). In *Quadregesimo Anno* (1931), Pius XI called for a just family wage so that women and children should not be abused. He expressed concern at women asserting control over their own lives, bodies and marriages but called on Catholic women to be involved in Catholic lay apostolates (n.71). In 1941, Pope Pius XII in his *Address to newlyweds,* speaking on authority in the family, spoke of how God had created women to be mothers; the husband's role is to provide sustenance for the family while the wife is to bear all the children God sends her and is to create a family atmosphere in the home. In 1945, in his address to women of the Catholic Women's Associations, *Questa Grande Vostra Adunata*, he said 'Restore woman as soon as possible to her place of honour in the home as housewife and mother! This is the universal cry!'

were overburdened with heavy work both inside and outside the domestic sphere. Basically, the term woman was not applied to white and black women in society in the same way and thus, the obstacles they had to overcome were not one and the same.[7] However, the women's movement continued to develop without much consideration for the experiences of non-white women or how the system that they sought participation in contributed to other forms of discrimination such as colonialism and imperialism.

The second wave of feminism, often expressed as the women's liberation movement, began in the 1960s, influenced by the writings of Simone de Beauvoir[8] and Betty Freidan[9] as well as by the student and civil rights movements of these years. This second wave almost immediately took various paths: one which focused primarily on issues of sex and gender and which founded the National Organization for Women (NOW), the other which was informed by diverse forms of oppressions and injustices and became more involved in the civil rights, antiwar, and Black Power movements.

The first and dominant strand of feminism, represented by NOW, did not critique social structure itself or the oppressive effect such a structure had on the rest of humanity, but it sought a place for women within the existent structure and saw patriarchy as that system which upheld male prerogatives, defined women, and deprived them of equal access on all spheres. Thus it simply assumed the structures of domination and violence

7 Sojourner Truth, an escaped slave born in 1779, was very vocal and active both for the abolition of slavery and women's rights from the year 1843 until her death in 1883. She was a spiritual woman and considered her mission as one given her by the Lord. Even her name, Sojourner Truth, was revealed to her in prayer, replacing the name she had been given at birth, Isabella Hardenbergh, which was derived from her slave-master's surname.

8 In France, Simone de Beauvoir published her book *The Second Sex* in 1949. She saw maleness as the human norm. Hence, women should shake off what was considered feminine or female so as to be fully human.

9 In the United States, Freidan published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. She revolted against the strong emphasis that was put on women's roles and on motherhood during the 1940s and '50s.

which it had considered unjust. The biological aspects of maternity were seen as inhibiting women's liberation. Thus, the agenda of groups that became identified as radical feminists included activism for women's right to control over their own bodies through birth control and abortion and so on. Many feminists began to disassociate themselves from this line of feminist discourse.[10] In the 1980s, some Afro-American women claimed the women's movement was inherently racist and began to develop a Womanist as opposed to Feminist discourse.[11]

The second wave of feminism, the women's liberation movement, was largely a secular political movement, somewhat removed from the renewing, transformative power of the spirit that led the pioneers a century earlier in the first wave. With the upheaval of the 1960s, an increasingly hostile questioning was directed at traditional institutions such as the church and traditional patterns of thought such as Christianity. A significant number of women and men felt that Christianity like other traditional institutional religions were irredeemably sexist, were themselves the columns on which patriarchal society stood and hence could not possibly be of benefit in an era of Enlightenment and of equal rights consciousness. However, there were also those who advocated a reformulating of the religious tradition and who were active in the liberation movement because they were inspired by their faith.

10 Betty Freidan, who was largely the instigator of the liberation movement and certainly wrote as a white American middle-class housewife who knew little or nothing about the problems of Black and other emigrant communities or poorer classes in her midst, disassociated from the more radical feminists when these began to focus on questions of sexual rights and denied any natural difference between the sexes, gender considered by them as a social construct that any individual can choose for him/herself. She was also distant from socialist feminism. Cf. B. Freidan, *The Second Stage*, Summit Books, New York 1981.

11 Particularly important were the writings of Alice Walker, Audre Lorde and bell hooks.

Christian Feminist Theology

After the 1960s, in the second wave of feminism, theological enquiry by women increased. This began in the USA and Europe, among both Christian and Jewish women and was followed over the years by academic developments in other countries and religions around the world.[12]

An article published by Valeria Saiving in 1960, 'The Human Situation: A Feminine View', was very influential in the shape feminist theology took at the beginning.[13] She claimed religious studies had previously considered only male experience as representative of human experience in its entirety and appealed for the consideration of distinctively female experiences. Principle among the writings that then emerged was Mary Daly's works *The Church and the Second Sex* and *Beyond God the Father*.[14]

Daly's work was highly critical of Christianity and the Church and inspired women in diverse ways. Some developed a similar form of radical feminist theology that rejected Christianity and all institutionalized religion as entirely patriarchal and misogynist and they sought to discover or create alternatives.[15] Others sought to transform Christianity from within, seeking to unite traditional Christian faith with contemporary

12 As seen in chapter 1, a form of feminist thought in Islam had already been developing since the early twentieth century, supported by modernist Islamic scholars who sought to make religious teachings compatible with social changes which introduced women's greater participation in the public space. Women began to contribute to these scholarly debates from the 1970s, and even more so from the 1990s, when education, economic empowerment, and paradoxically, the rise of political Islam, enabled them to be in a position to do so.

13 In *Journal of Religion*, n. 40, 1960, 100–112; also printed in C. Christ – J. Plaskow, ed., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, Harper Collins Publishers, New York 1992 (first published 1979), 25–42.

14 M. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, Beacon Press, Boston 1968; M. Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, Beacon Press, Boston 1973.

15 For some representative works see Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*, Harper and Row, San Francisco 1979; C. Christ – J. Plaskow, ed., *Womanspirit Rising*, 193–286 (assorted articles on 'Creating New Traditions').

insights on the equality of women and show to themselves and to others that Christianity and feminism are not at all incompatible. Some theologians sought to retell the past by introducing the lives of forgotten or silent women in Biblical and Church history.[16] Others sought to develop a more meaningful and inclusive Christology.[17] Others sought new ways to express the Trinitarian significance.[18] Others proposed new forms of discipleship and of ecclesial practice.[19] Most of these feminist theologians were educated, elite, middle-class white women in the USA and Europe.

From Feminist Theology to Feminist Theologies

As happened in the secular feminist movement, gradually Afro-American women theologians began to make the connection between racism and sexism and pointed out that to legitimize one's own struggle for liberation in church and society without regard to how this system or ideology within which one was seeking for inclusion was oppressive of others, is a form of oppression in itself. Alongside an already growing Black

16 For some representative works see R. Radford Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, Simon and Schuster, New York 1974; E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, Crossroad Publishing Company, New York 1983; A. Carr, 'Is Christian Feminist Theology Possible?' in *Theological Studies* 43, 1982, 279–297.

17 For some representative works see C. Heyward, *The Redemption of God, A Theology of Mutual Relation*, University Press of America, Lanham, MD 1982; R. Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, Crossroad Publishing Company, New York 1983.

18 For some representative works see C. Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, Harper, San Francisco 1991; E. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, Crossroad Publishing Company, New York 1993.

19 For some representative works see R. Radford Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities*, Harper and Row, San Francisco 1985; L. Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church*, John Knox Press, Westminster 1993.

theology, which these women found to be sexist and male dominated, they began to develop a Womanist theology. They sought to bring the submerged African American cultural traditions about women to the surface and bring together the questions of blackness, spirituality, survival and freedom.[20]

Hispanic women, aware of the poverty and ethnic prejudice suffered by the Latina community in America and of the differences between their concerns and background and that of the white women in feminist theological circles, related their work for justice for women in the church with the struggle for justice for women in society. Thus, mujerista theology was born as a liberative praxis based on the role religion plays and the way it is understood in the daily struggles of Latina women.[21]

With a greater awareness of difference, now expressed by women in diverse contexts, feminist theology as a whole saw that there was need to analyze not only sexism in Biblical and theological interpretations and concepts. They also needed to consider racism, property-class relationships, and all other forms of exploitation and domination as basic structures of women's oppressions.

Theologians in Latin America, Africa and Asia assumed the task of developing a feminist theology from their own cultural complexities and realities, having begun their theological reflections in the context of liberation theologies that were then emerging. Similar to feminist thought in other circles, they found that their male colleagues did not always support them, claiming that feminism belonged to white women of the First World. Thus, the Women's Commission of EATWOT (Ecumenical

20 As recounted by Dolores Williams in A. Braude, ed., *Transforming the Faiths of Our Fathers*, 115–133. For some representative works see K. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, Scholars Press, Atlanta 1988; J. Grant, *White Women's Christ, Black Women's Jesus: White Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*, Scholar's Press, Atlanta 1989; D.S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, Orbis Books, New York 1993.

21 For some representative works see A.M. Isasi-Diaz – Yolanda Tarango, *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church*, Harper and Row, San Francisco 1988; A.M. Isasi-Diaz, *En La Lucha – In the Struggle: A Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1993.

Association of Third World Theologians) was established in 1983 'to decide for ourselves what feminist theology means for us. It is not for First World women to tell us how to do it, nor is it for Third World men to tell us feminism is not our issue.'[22] The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians was founded in 1985. The Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology was founded around the same time. Thus, the voices, experiences, questions, methods and intellectual reflections of women who had been ignored, abused, exploited, colonized and oppressed was projected into Christian theological reflection.[23]

22 Quoted by Radford Ruether as having been said at the founding meeting of EATWOT women's Commission in Geneva in 1983, in A. Braude, ed., *Transforming the Faiths of Our Fathers*, 83.

23 For some representative works of third-world feminist theologies, see M.A. Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*, Orbis Books, New York 1986; M.A. Oduyoye – M.R. Kanyoro, ed., *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa*, Orbis Books, New York 1992; M.A. Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*, Orbis Books, New York, 1995; I. A. Phiri – D.B. Govinden – S. Nadar, ed., *Her-Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa,* Cluster Publications, South Africa 2002; P. Mwaura – L. Chirairo, ed., *Theology in the Context of Globalization: African Women's Responses*, EATWOT, Nairobi 2005; H. Chung Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology*, Orbis Books, New York 1991; V. Fabella – S.A. Lee Park, ed., *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women*, EATWOT Women's Commission in Asia, Philippines 1989; L. Russell, ed., *Inheriting Our Mothers' Gardens: Feminist Theology in Third World Perspective*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1988; V. Fabella – M.A. Oduyoye, ed., *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, Orbis Books, New York 1989; E. Tamez, ed., *Through Her Eyes: Women's Theology from Latin America*, Orbis Books, New York 1989.

Comparison of Christian and Islamic Feminism

Motivation and Aim

The driving force of both Islamic and Christian feminism is resistance to patriarchal domination as experienced by women in their societies and religious communities. Both seek to demarcate what their religion has traditionally been understood to teach about gender relations and women's status and what they believe their religion does in fact teach in the light of contemporary social changes and scientific understandings. It is not simply an adaptation of the religious heritage to justify modern changes but rather is recognition that the particular revelation involves on-going reflection so as to be understood more adequately and thus illuminate more truly human and social progress and development.

The different ways Islam and Christianity function in society determine to some extent the aims and methods of feminist thinkers in both faiths. Islam is considered not only as a spiritual and ethical source of guidance and inspiration but as inseparable from the secular, legal and political realm. Christianity is understood as offering moral guidance in all aspects of life, including secular legal discourse, while remaining autonomous from the state. In effect, however, both religions, directly or indirectly, greatly influence all aspects of human and social relations and are particularly influential in questions of gender, sexuality and family.

Islamic and Christian feminists recognize the effects of patriarchal culture and mindset on religion just as they recognize the way religious interpretations and teachings can condone and sanction unjust and oppressive practices towards women in society. They recognize that the system of patriarchy and the sin of sexism have been integral in the development of the formative texts, symbols, rituals, language, ethics, doctrines/laws and the structures of Christianity and Islam.

Christian feminist theology has been defined as 'a reflection of the meaning of God's self-revelation in our lives from the perspective of advocacy for the full humanity of women of all races, classes, sexual

orientations, abilities, and nationalities.'[24] Islamic feminism, as defined by Margot Badran, is a discourse of gender equality and social justice that derives its understanding from the Qur'an and seeks the practice of rights and justice for all human beings in the totality of their existence.[25] The aims of both are therefore similar: basically, out of a sense of justice and in faithfulness to the truth as they understand it, they seek to overcome traditional oppressive definitions of women's status in society and within their religious community, by re-reading, reconstructing, reappropriating and reformulating aspects of their traditions that have legitimated and encouraged oppression.

Problem with the label feminist

As the term feminist is problematic for Islamic feminists, so too it is for Christian feminists in their different contexts. No doubt this is, as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza says, because the term is often understood in essentialist rather than historical, cross-cultural terms.[26] To abandon the term feminist would be to imply that it actually is only a white, First-world, women's project. It would ignore the fact that women in different contexts, although they specify their project as womanist or mujerista or African/Asian/Latin-American or Islamist or Islamic, all seek to overcome those interlocking relationships of dominations in our societies and cultures which cause gender and other forms of inequality. They each represent a feminist practice in a particular key; they are shaping and defining feminism and articulating it differently, rather than evolving a completely new project.

24 L.M. Russell – J. Shannon Clarkson, ed., *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, xiii.
25 M. Badran, 'What's in a Name?'.
26 E. Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Transforming the Legacy of *The Woman's Bible*' in E. Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures*, (1–24), 16.

Methods of re-reading Religious Texts

The different ways Scripture functions in Islam and in the diverse Christian denominations determines the approaches used by feminist scholars and theologians. Women in both faiths have sought to remain loyal to their Scriptures, taking a revisionist approach rather than a rejectionist one, rejecting not the religion and its Scripture but rather the common interpretations of it as found in church doctrines and theological concepts or in the Islamic legal tradition as well as in the common practices of Muslim communities.[27] Many Muslim women have seen that only by remaining loyal to their Scripture can they hope to be heard by their political and religious leaders. However, many Muslim and Christian women remain loyal and take a revisionist approach because they recognize the positive and liberative influence as well as the spiritual value their Scriptures have for them and for other women in their communities.[28] They also take a liberationist approach to their Scriptures, finding in them texts that justify a transformation of the social order and women's struggle against all forms of domination.[29]

27 Some women have taken the rejectionist approach, such as Mary Daly, Nawal el-Saadawi, Carol Christ and others. I do not consider these as either Christian or Islamic feminists since they themselves do not claim to be so.
28 Particularly important in Feminist Biblical Scholarship is the work of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.
29 Third world feminist readings of the Bible, which take into consideration the multiple oppression of women in terms of class, gender and race, often focus on historical Biblical accounts in a way in which differs from the dominant reading. For example, the person of Hagar has taken on quite a bit of importance as a positive model for women while traditionally it was Deborah, Esther, Sarah and Mary that were dwelt on as female Biblical models. For examples of diverse readings of Hagar, see M. Kanyoro, 'Interpreting Old Testament Polygamy through African Eyes' in M.A. Oduyoye – M.R. Kanyoro, *The Will to Arise*, 87–100; A. Nasimiyu-Wasike, 'Polygamy: A Feminist Critique' in M.A. Oduyoye – M.R. Kanyoro, *The Will to Arise*, 101–118. Muslim women also look to Hagar as a historical model. See H. Abugideiri, 'Hagar: A Historical Model for 'Gender Jihad' in Y. Yazbeck Haddad – J.L. Esposito, ed., *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, University Press of Florida, Gainsville 2001, 81–107.

In her study of the Qur'an, Amina Wadud has distinguished between the wider 'megatext' of essential or culturally universal relevance which emphasizes gender equality, and the historically and culturally contextualized 'prior text' which introduced gender distinctions based on early Arabian precedents.[30] Thus she distinguishes between the overall egalitarian ethical vision of the text and those texts that introduced gender inequality, the latter to be considered as particularities which do not have universal relevance for all time. Taking a very similar approach, Teresa Okure, a Nigerian biblical scholar, distinguishes timeless truth in the Bible from its cultural underpinnings. She believes that rereading the Bible demands that sustained efforts be made to discern between the divine and the human elements in it: 'For while the former embodies timeless truth for our salvation, the latter inculcates practices that are socioculturally conditioned, hence inapplicable universally.'[31]

Biblical scholars also critique the process of the formation of the canon since this process of selecting which texts were to be included also reflects the patriarchal control of that period of early Christianity. Feminist theologians therefore have developed a critical reading of both canonical and non-canonical texts. This is a step which Islamic scholars obviously cannot take but they do take a critical eye to *ahadith* literature, which has often provided a distorting lens of gender to Qur'anic interpretation. They have distinguished many misogynist *ahadith* of questionable origin which have been used to justify patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an.[32] Their study of the Qur'an also brings them to study what is not actually written, that is the silences of the text, why this is so and how these silences can be filled in by every succeeding generation of Muslims in their particular context. Amina Wadud's approach, for example, is largely by focusing not only on studying what the Qur'an says, but also

30 A. Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 1–10.

31 T. Okure, 'Women in the Bible' in V. Fabella – M.A. Oduyoye, ed., *With Passion and Compassion*, (47–59), 56.

32 The work of Fatima Mernissi has been particularly important in this area: Cf. *The Veil and The Male Elite*.

how it says it, what is said about the Qur'an, who is doing the saying, and also what has been left unsaid.[33]

Thus, in different ways, Christian and Islamic feminists search in the texts for clues and allusions that might indicate a reality about which the texts are silent so as to come to a fuller understanding of what the text means today. As Schüssler Fiorenza points out, the past is not a continuum of given facts that can be rediscovered by mere objective observation, but rather it discloses itself only as we put specific questions to it.[34] Both Christian and Islamic feminists see that this disclosure of the revelation in the text can only be done by asking new questions.

From the perspective of women's experience and praxis

Central to any Christian feminist understanding of a theology of revelation is that God is to be discovered in human experience and that, in the past, theology has tended to consider male experience as the normative human experience. Women's experience does not constitute theological reflection; however, it informs it and operates as a criterion for evaluation. Feminist theology based on this category of women's experience is not homogenous since women's experience is obviously not homogenous. Focus is put on the negative experiences arising from patriarchy as well as on the positive experiences of the women's movement, the celebration and affirmation of the female body and typical female experiences such as menstruation, childbirth and motherhood. The critical principle upon which theologians examine and evaluate Biblical texts and theological concepts is whether they illuminate or debilitate women's experience and praxis in their particular contexts.[35]

This same critical principle is used by Islamic feminists as they reinterpret the Qur'an and the Islamic traditions. For Christians, God has been fully revealed in Christ, while for Muslims, the Qur'an is the

33 A. Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, xiii.

34 E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 102–108.

35 Cf. L. Hogan, *From Women's Experience to Feminist Theology*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1995/1997.

eternal revealed Word of God. However, human beings perceive and respond to this revelation in faith only in and through human categories which include concrete, tangible, social, embodied, historical experience. Revelation is not subjective; however, it occurs, is interpreted and is responded to within human experience and consciousness. God's revelation in history has to be interpreted in faith by a believing community so as to be recognized and responded to as an action of the divine. This interpretation and response is an ongoing process and must always be expressed anew in every age and culture.

Women of both faiths note that race, class, gender and many other factors affect the symbolic imagination through which experience of God is filtered. Thus, women's perspectives, based on their own experience, of whether an interpretation is liberative or oppressive of women is the criterion which orientates the method used by Christian and Islamic feminists as they approach their Scriptures and traditions.

An earlier pristine Christian Community and Islamic Society?

Schüssler Fiorenza believes that it is possible to identify in the New Testament what she calls a tension between a kyriarchal ethos of the Greco-Roman society, and the inclusive, egalitarian ethos that determine early Christian discourses.[36] She admits in the Preface to the second edition of her book, *In Memory of Her*, that reviewers of her work have accused her of seeing in the early missionary movement in the Greco-Roman cities a pristine, egalitarian form of Christianity. She denies this since she admits that there is no historical facticity for this early period any more than for any other period of Christian history. She does not identify the perfect community as having once existed but rather that in the early stages there was a tension between the two ethoses; in adapting its ethos of co-equal discipleship where men and women were called to live in a community of equality, and in assuming the hierarchical-patriarchal

36 She uses kyriarchy instead of patriarchy to mean a socio-political system of domination and subordination that is based on the power and rule of the lord/master/father. E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xix.

structures of the Greco-Roman society, the early church allowed the gospel to be robbed of its transforming power in history.[37]

Muslim women claim that although the Qur'an revealed the guidelines for right human relations in a just and egalitarian society, this society did not exist; rather, the Qur'anic message has always been in tension with the societies and cultures in which it has been interpreted. They note that the egalitarian conception of gender in the ethical vision of the Qur'an exists in tension with the hierarchical relation between the sexes encoded into the marriage structure which Islam instituted.[38] However, by recovering the notion that gender equality is a consistent element of the Qur'an, they explain the verses which introduce the hierarchical relation by placing them in their historical, social and cultural context. They claim that patriarchal thought, institutions, and behaviours largely remained resistant over time to the revolutionary Qur'anic notion of gender equality to the extent that the hierarchical institution determined gender relations in all aspects of life and thus, the equation of patriarchy and Islam became axiomatic.

Reading interpretations into the text?

Schüssler Fiorenza admits that her work and that of other feminist theologians read an interpretation into the text rather than deriving an interpretation from the text, but she believes all scholarship faces this epistemological problem as she claims that no value-neutral, positivistic ethos of historical scholarship is possible.[39] She also believes that all New Testament scholarship must deal with this material from the past in terms of one's present day grasp of reality so that the results of the research will flow into the current body of knowledge from which the continual modification of our understanding of reality emerges.[40] Thus, from a present day feminist perspective, one can and must reread Biblical history

37 E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone*, 79–91.
38 L. Ahmed, *Women and Gender*, 64.
39 E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her,* xxv.
40 E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xlvii.

to find how women as well as men were active in the initial stages of the church and to understand various texts in their context. As seen in the previous chapter, Muslim feminists are also accused of reading modern day understandings of equality into the Qur'an, attributing contemporary political meanings to antecedents far removed in time.[41]

Although egalitarianism, gender equality, and freedom of the individual are concepts which today have been derived from secular ideologies, the concept that all knowledge is conditioned by our present understandings and contexts and by the questions we ask, seems to validate the effort of Islamic feminists, just as it does that of Christian feminists.

Recovering women's religious heritage

Islamic feminists reclaim an egalitarian past on the basis that before Islam became closely associated with state and political power and with its legal framework, women held positions of leadership. By recovering the history of these women, as well as influential women in Muslim communities throughout the ages, they actually prove that women once had a more equal status within their communities than they are assigned today, women played a role beyond that of obedient and passive wife and mother, and women exemplified virtues other than those which the dominat religious teachings associate with Woman.

Christian feminists also recover women's religious heritages; a great many studies have been done of women who are mentioned in the Bible but were given little attention, women who were not mentioned but who are alluded to, and of the different roles Christian women have played throughout Church history in various contexts.[42] Thus, they explore new conceptual frameworks that allow woman to be placed at the centre of human social relations and political as well as religious institutions, rather than at the margin of it all.

41 Cf. R. Afshari, 'Egalitarian Islam and Misogynist Islamic Tradition'.

42 For some representative work see E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*; R. Radford Ruether – E. McLaughlin, ed., *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions,* Simon and Schuster, New York 1979.

By exploring women's historical participation in social-public development and their efforts to comprehend and transform the social structures and the religious community in which they lived, as well as the contribution they made to the religious community, they show how throughout the ages women participated in social transformation and human development. By making women visible in the past, they encourage women in the present to be equally visible and active.

Women as social, not only sexual, beings

Seldom do religions refer to women without referring to their sexuality; the same is not true of men. Women are thus first understood as sexual beings and only from this is their contribution as social beings considered. In both Islam and Christianity, the liberating potential for women has been traditionally identified in women's special vocation as wives and mothers, or as virgins in Christianity, an identification which women have found to be too narrow and which they believe has been used to justify their subjugation to men in the family, in the religious community and in the larger society. Much traditional theology and Islamic tradition considered sin or disorder in terms of sexuality with which the female body was very much associated.

The consideration of women as sexual beings, thus more associated with sensuality, bodiliness and nature than with rationality and objectivity, has been analyzed and critiqued by many feminist theologians. Rosemary Radford Ruether is perhaps the most vocal of Christian feminists on dualism in traditional theology and on the relationship between women and nature.[43] The idealization of rationality over nature, she believes, led

43 R. Radford Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, Seabury Press, New York 1975 (republished with a new preface in 1995, Beacon Press, Boston); R. Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*; R. Radford Ruether, 'Motherearth and the Megamachine: A Theology of Liberation in a Feminine Somatic and Ecological Perspective' in C. Christ and J. Plaskow, ed., *Womanspirit Rising*, 43–52; R. Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, SCM Press, London 1992.

to an understanding of nature as something to be manipulated and controlled. There is need, Ruether feels, to reject the dualistic transcendent consciousness of our world-view if we are to ensure the survival of the earth. There is also need for women to reclaim those qualities denied her, that is her capabilities for rationality, intellectual activity and objectivity while not denying the qualities associated with nature and bodiliness. She also sees the need to transform the identification of women with nature to one that makes women spokespersons for the reconciliation of body and spirit, for the liberation of nature from technological control and for a transformation of all human relationships and social structures.[44]

Islamic feminists also critique the association of women with sexuality, especially as this is seen in the legal structure of Islam. Islamic feminism has shown that women have been primarily defined as sexual beings and that this definition was done in accordance with social circumstances rather than expressing divine will. The focus on women's sexuality justified the restrictions put on them within the family and in all areas of the larger society. By diverting the focus of *fiqh* (islamic jurisprudence) away from women as sexual beings and focusing on women as social beings, Islamic feminists have given a new lease of life to the question of women in Islam.[45]

Transformation of religious practice

The transformation of religious practice includes the adoption of gender-inclusive language in religious readings and prayers, and institutional changes which give women access to official religious positions, such as admission to the priesthood or to decision making bodies in many Christian churches around the world. For Muslim women it involves questions about Islamic dress codes for women, their exclusion from the mosque, the emphasis on segregated space, and the exclusion of women from the position of Imam.

44 R. Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 72–92.
45 Z. Mir-Hosseini, 'Stretching the Limits', 60–61.

Christian feminists propose new forms of discipleship and new egalitarian models of Christian communities, either claiming that the ethos of the first Christian community, as reflected in Gal. 3: 28, was one of equal discipleship or that, in view of contemporary understandings of human relations, such a community would be more appropriate to the essential message of the Gospel. They recognize that the structures of church communities transmit the message of Christianity and that these structures often transmit a message of inequality.[46] For Catholic women, the model of Church as the Bride of Christ is seen as problematic since it reinforces the supposition of a wife's submission to her husband. Thus, the model of Church as the People of God, walking together in mutual sharing and empowerment, is seen to be much more appropriate.

In both religions, women through the ages were not excluded from religious activities. Muslim women have always been expected to carry out their own religious duties such as prayer and fasting and had an important role in raising their children in the faith. Christian women were also expected to participate in the spiritual and liturgical life of the church and indeed have always been the most faithful in this respect, and also had the important role of raising their children in the faith. However, the formation of religious traditions was largely done by men until recent decades just as leadership in moments of community worship was reserved for men. While many Christian denominations have now admitted women to ordained ministry, Catholicism has not. Muslim women also continue to struggle to be allowed lead men in prayer and preach to groups of men as well as women in the mosque.

The Eucharistic celebration is central to the life of a Christian community of faith. Some feminist theologians see that an androcentric worldview and patriarchal control are perpetuated in the exclusion of women from officiating at Eucharistic celebrations as well as the male language used in such celebrations. Thus they have felt it necessary to form alternative communities of worship that are more inclusive of women

46 Cf. E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: A Feminist Ecclesiology of Liberation*, Crossroad, New York 1992.

and women's experiences.[47] Other feminists do not agree that separation from the traditional celebration of the Eucharist is necessary. They call for women not to abandon the Eucharist but to develop contemplative and liturgical prayer that expresses the inner word of divine mystery which is trying to find a voice through them.[48]

Reinterpreting Tradition

The Sunna functions as an authoritative lens through which the Qur'an is to be understood just as Tradition, the body of Church doctrine as developed through the ages, functions as an authoritative lens through which theological reflection on God's revelation in Jesus and in the Bible is understood. For some Qur'anic scholars such as Amina Wadud, the Sunna must be secondary to the Qur'an because of historical contradictions in the *hadith* literature. In so far as any part of the Sunna contradicts the equality between men and women in the Qur'an, she chooses in favour of the Qur'an.[49]

For Christian feminists, the awareness that women's voices were absent through the centuries of tradition and their recognition that women were often envisaged theologically as naturally inferior and a source of sin and pollution or as paragons of virtue, led them to a critique of Tradition and to attempt a theological reformulation of some doctrinal themes. Few themes have not been touched on by Christian feminist scholars.[50]

47 The whole movement of Women Church, as well as other women's forms of prayer, worship and women's forms of ministry, has developed and spread in recent years. This was possibly initiated by the observations made by Rosemary Radford Ruether in, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice*, and by the influence of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza who has increasingly written and spoken about the need for a church (ekklesia) which is not hierarchical or clerical but is rather an inclusive, democratic discipleship of equals whereby all members, moved by the Spirit of Sophia-Wisdom, carry out various ministries in a service of justice, mutual empowerment and community sharing: Cf. E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom's Ways*.

48 M. Collins, *Women at Prayer*, Paulist Press, New York 1987; M. Collins, 'Is the Eucharist Still a Source of Meaning for Women' in *Origins* 21, Sept. 12th 1991, 225–229.

49 A. Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, xviii.

Islamic feminists are more concerned with Islamic practice based on Qur'anic interpretation than with theological concepts per se. The discussions on the role of the *shari 'a* in a Muslim community and whether the *shari 'a* can or cannot be codified is a form of theological discussion proper to the Muslim community. The question of who has the authority to interpret the *shari 'a* is comparable to Christian women's difficulties with accepting that church authorities can propose a definitive doctrinal interpretation. Otherwise, very little has been written by Islamic feminists that is comparable with Christian feminists' critique of tradition.

Many Muslims will say that male imagery of God is not a problem for them since Muslims are agreed that God is neither male nor female; the names given to God include characteristics which could be understood as both feminine and masculine. The Qur'an as the revealed Word of God does not introduce the same problem Christian feminists have had with the fact that God's fullest revelation is Jesus, who was male: the problem of a male Saviour for women when 'what is not assumed is not redeemed'; or the association of Jesus' maleness with the exclusion of women from ordained ministry and leadership roles in the Church. The Christian claim to the uniqueness and universality of Christ is comparable to the Muslim claim to the same in respect of the Qur'an. However, again this is an area to which Islamic feminists have given little attention just as it has not been given much consideration by Christian feminists. The latter have had to struggle with their own inclusion as women in the Christian theology and history of salvation. Having recognised that to be included in the Christian doctrines of redemption and salvation demands recognizing and overcoming the limitations of traditional theological concepts and opening to diversity, Christian women approach other religions with the same attitude of openness.

50 For a good overview of some theological themes discussed from a feminist perspective, see C. Mowry LaCugna, ed., *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, Harper Collins Publishers, San Francisco 1993.

Tension between Feminist theology and Secular feminism

The secular women's movement has not embraced women in theological disciplines, assuming that feminism and Christianity are mutually exclusive with regards to the freedom and rights of women, just as it asks whether Islam and feminism are not incompatible. Although many women in theological scholarship share the same ideals as their contemporaries in secular activist movements, they are often dismissed by secular feminists because of their Christian witness.[51]

LaKelly Hunt, like other feminists today, sees that there is a need to bridge the gulf that exists between secular and faith-based feminism so as to move away from severe secularism and find again the transformative power in religion and the spiritual guidance this offers to any human endeavour.[52] Indeed, more and more people are becoming aware that human rights cannot be considered without some ethical and moral basis. Feminist theology and Islamic feminism must be seen as attempts at bridging that gulf between secular and religious-based discourse to improve the status of women while upholding the ethical and spiritual guidance which religion provides.

Islamic feminists today refuse to sever the religious from the secular. As we have seen, this may be partly because they have realized that it is only thus that they can hope to achieve their aims in Muslim communities or nations. However it is also because they see their faith as that which inspires them to seek greater and more faithful adherence to their religion, believing that the divine will revealed through the Qur'an envisions just and egalitarian human relations. Christian feminist theologians are also inspired by what they believe is God's will, revealed in Jesus, for a just and egalitarian human society. Their efforts have shown that faith

51 As Helen LaKelly Hunt has noted, if a feminist happens to refer to her spiritual life in what she calls mixed company, she is likely to meet with an embarrassed silence, whereas if she spoke exclusively from a secular perspective, she was using the lingua franca of the movement and nobody would raise and eyebrow: *Faith and Feminism*, 2.

52 H. LaKelly Hunt, *Faith and Feminism*, 1–16, 116–142.

and feminism are not incompatible. While Islamic feminism has entered into political and secular discourse, Christian theological feminism has not although undoubtedly their efforts have influenced secular policies just as they have influenced church teachings.

Tension between Feminist theology and the Church

Feminist theology, because of its relationship to secular feminism, is criticized by some as endangering full communion with the Church. Although many Christian feminists have sought to remain faithful to their churches and certainly make many valid contributions to Biblical scholarship as well as to a rethinking of theological concepts, the label feminist causes any effort to be viewed as a somewhat dubious and academically suspect enterprise. While feminist theology is usually included in theological schools in the USA and in Britain, it is rarely found in Italy or in France and is only gradually being introduced in some faculties in African and Latin American universities.

A 2004 document from the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith indicates some of the views commonly held in the church about feminism. It sees feminism as emphasizing subordination in order to give rise to antagonism; it sees it as representing women as adversaries of men; it sees it as a reaction of women, when faced with the abuse of power, to seek power themselves; it sees it as having led to opposition between men and women which has its most immediate and lethal effects in the structure of the family; and it sees it as an attempt to erase gender differences; it sees it as having called into question the family in its natural two-parent structure of mother and father, and make homosexuality and heterosexuality virtually equivalent, in a new model of polymorphous sexuality.[53]

53 Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, 'Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and the World', July 31st 2004.

As was pointed out by many people who commented on that letter, who recognized the many valid issues it raised as well as its limitations, such an attitude seems to consider all feminism as that which is represented by radical feminists and by many other radical groups today. It ignores the fact that there are a great many strands of feminism, and that most feminist theologians and many other women who seek justice and empowerment for men and women do not deny that there are sexual differences, certainly do not see themselves in a quest for power or as antagonists of men, and are motivated in their work by a concern for right relations in the family and in the larger society.[54]

Many improvements have been made over the last forty years in church teaching about the roles of men and women in family and in society.[55] Although Pope John Paul II initially returned to the more traditional teaching of women's primary vocation being within the home and to the concept of man as head of the family[56], in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* in 1995 he called on Catholic women to develop a new feminism that was less radical than that proposed by secular feminists. It was a feminism which would acknowledge and affirm what he called the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society, and would help to overcome

54 So many reactions to this letter were posted on the internet; suffice to do a check on Google to get some references.

55 Pope John XXIII in 1963 wrote *Pacem in Terris*, and identified the participation of women in the public and social life as one of the signs of the times. He affirmed the equality of men and women and argued that the modern world cannot tolerate women being treated as inferior or minor but they should be encouraged to reach their full potential for the benefit of all society (n.41). Vatican II endorsed and promoted a new era of thinking about women's role and status in the Church and in the world. (See *Gaudium et Spes* nn. 8, 9, 29, 60; *Perfectae Caritatis*; The Council's Message to Women, nn. 13–14). Subsequent church teachings continued to endorse this as seen in Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* (1967) where he stressed the right and duty of all persons, men and women, to develop their qualities and talents to the fullest degree possible and in *Octogesima adveniens* (1971) where he reaffirmed the equality of men and women even though he specified that this did not mean a false equality which denied the distinction of women's proper role at the heart of the family as well as within society (nn.13, 16).

56 See *Laborem Exercens* (1981), n. 19 and *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) n. 23.

all discrimination, violence and exploitation.[57] In his 1995 World Day of Peace Message, referring to women's struggles to give full expression to their dignity, he observed that 'the journey has been a difficult and complicated one and, at times, not without its share of mistakes. But it has been substantially a positive one, even if it is still unfinished'.[58] In his Letter to Women in view of the Beijing Conference to be held in 1995, he expressed admiration for those women who had fought to defend women's basic social, economic and political rights, when this was considered inappropriate, the sign of a lack of femininity, a manifestation of exhibitionism, and even a sin.[59]

The philosophical and theological principles that support John Paul's new feminism were laid out in 1988 in his Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* and are quite contrary to pre-Vatican II teachings in the church on the relationship between men and women. This letter responded to many of the concerns raised by both secular feminists and feminist theologians about women's status in society.[60]

Some of the egalitarian principles sought by feminists have thus been accepted in the teaching of the church. Over the last forty years women have been assumed as extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, lectors, heads of chanceries, seminary professors, and altar servers. Lay and religious women have been appointed by bishops and popes to pontifical councils and academies. With the focus on the participation of the laity in the church since Vatican II, many lay movements were established in which women are particularly active.

However, many Christian feminists feel that the support the Church gives to human dignity, rights and democracy in all spheres of society are contradicted by its own undemocratic practice. While the church accepted and endorsed women's participations in all sectors of society and condemned the prohibition of women from any state of life, it was

57 *Evangelium Vitae*, n. 99.

58 'Women: Teachers of Peace', World Day of Peace Message 1995, n. 4.

59 *Letter of John Paul II to Women*, 1995, n. 6.

60 Particularly significant are nn. 6–10

slow to allow women greater participation in the liturgy.[61] The Church has consistently refused to admit women to the ordained priesthood.[62] Women who in the 1970s raised their voices to seek the admission of women to the priesthood now believe that instead of seeking to enter into a system which they see as hierarchical and hence contrary to the Gospel vision of inclusiveness and egalitarian justice, it is the image and structure of the church itself which must be changed. They see the need to move from a hierarchical, clerical church towards a community of equal disciples who seek justice and right relations in all areas of life.[63]

Feminist theologians also contest the insistence in the church to define woman in traditional essentialised terms, often presenting her as having a special vocation that makes her somehow religiously superior to man.[64] Some women consider this view of the feminine as romantic and unrealistic and feel they would prefer to be considered equal rather than quite so idealized.[65] According to church teaching, it is in self-giving love, as virgin-mother-spouse, that the mystery and vocation of woman is discovered and lived.[66] Women feel limited by such feminine socialization and role determination which the church insists on when it develops its theory of the complementarity of the sexes. They express that they cannot identify with it, that it is removed from their lived reality, and that it does not satisfactorily empower them to overcome the

61 In 1972, Paul VI in *Ministeria quaedam* said that the laity was to participate in the liturgical life of the church but women were not to be admitted to the offices of reader or acolyte (n. 7).

62 See especially *Inter Insigniores* (The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1978) and *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (John Paul II, 1994).

63 See Women's Ordination Conference, Women Ordination Worldwide, Women-Church Convergence at www.womensordination.org and www.women-church-convergence.org.

64 John Paul II's describes the secret for women of living femininity in *Redemptoris Mater* n. 46.

65 Cf. E. Johnson, ed., *The Church Women Want: Catholic Women in Dialogue,* Herder and Herder, Crossroad Publishing Company, New York 2002, 54.

66 *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n. 30: 'Woman can only find herself by giving love to others.'

cultural and social injustices they experience, since it furthers stereotypes that are oppressive. Many women who are involved in peace-building processes in their communities find that such stereotypes lead to their not being considered suitable as leaders and mediators and hence their contribution is somewhat hampered. They also find that such stereotypes inhibit women from putting themselves forward for positions of leadership within their communities, be this in the political field or in other areas. They believe it is necessary to avoid a unisex model of humanity on the one hand, but also to eliminate an exaggerated focus on gender difference on the other.

Christian feminists are also disappointed at the continued practice of the church in using exclusive language both in reference to God and to humanity, in Scripture, lectionaries and in Church statements which they feel simply furthers the identification of the divinity as male and with maleness as normative for humanity.

It must be noted that the progress in Church teachings about male-female relations in the family and in society are not everywhere practiced. Just as the influence of Islamic feminism depends on consensus in Muslim communities, so Church teachings are subject to cultural restraint. This has indeed been pointed out by women as well as by Church authorities on numerous occasions.[67] As a result, while feminist theologians in some parts of the world either contest or elaborate on official church teachings, others are struggling to introduce those post-Vatican II teachings which endorse an egalitarian vision of male-female relations within their societies.[68]

67 Cf. *Instrumentum Laboris, African Synod*, n.121; *Final Message of the Synod*, n. 65; *Ecclesia in Africa*, nn. 82, 121; M.A. Oduyoye, in 'Three Cardinal Issues of Mission in Africa' in R. Schreiter, ed., *Mission in the Third Millennium*, Orbis, New York 2001, (40–52), 46.

68 Cf. V. Fabella – M.A. Oduyoye, ed., *With Passion and Compassion*, viii.

Conclusion

Introducing his letter to the Bishops in 2004, Pope Benedict XVI, then Cardinal Ratzinger, said it was a starting point for further examination in the Church, as well as an impetus for dialogue.[69] This invitation to reflect on the relationship of men and women in today's world can be extended not only to Bishops with women in their churches, but also to women of all Christian denominations and of all religions. It can be understood as an invitation to dialogue on the form of feminism which is needed today to overcome systems of domination not only between men and women in their various cultural and religious contexts, but also between religious groups as they struggle with the issues of social change and nation-building.

I believe that the efforts of Muslim and Christian women of faith to subject their religious texts to a feminist rereading are to be supported. This is a legitimate and historically necessary strategy to improve the status of women and to modernize religious thought. In a world where religion and religious values are every day playing a more important role in public policy debates and many of these debates relate to the question of family and women's role in society, religious feminism is more important than ever. It represents the voice of women themselves as they struggle with these questions and it presents a much needed bridge between secular and religious thought on women and on society. It is important that their voices and perspectives be considered as the world searches for more holistic social change and peaceful interreligious coexistence.

69 Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, 'Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and the World', July 31st 2004, n. 1.

SECTION TWO

The Context: Northern Nigeria

CHAPTER 3

Development of Islam and Christianity in Northern Nigeria

Development of Islam in Northern Nigeria until 1960

The first area of what is now Nigeria to have contact with Islam is Borno, North-eastern Nigeria, where it is on record that Islam was present as early as 666 AD. Islam did not reach Hausaland, in the Northwest, until the arrival of the Wangarawa who were merchants and clerics of the Mande-Dyula tribe of Mali, West Africa. The *Kano Chronicle*[1] situates this event in the reign of Sarki Yaji[2] (1349–1385), ruler of what was the Hausa state of Kano. Another account states that the Wangarawa came to Hausaland at the time of Sarkin Kano Runfā (1463–1499).[3]

1 The *Kano Chronicle* is an account of Kano history, compiled during the reign of the Emir of Kano Muhammad Bello (1882–1893). It was written in Arabic letters and as yet it is unedited. It is conserved in the palace of the Emir of Kano. An English version of the chronicle is H.R. Palmer, *The Kano Chronicle*, Frank Cass, London 1967.

2 *Sarki* is the Hausa term for Chief or King. Hausa is the lingua franca in much of Northern Nigeria. Before 1804 and the jihad conducted by the Fulani people, the northwestern region was ruled by the Hausa Kings. Under the rule of the Sokoto Caliphate, established after the jihad, the two groups fused and intermarried to become virtually one indistinct ethnic group and today tend to be spoken of as the Hausa-Fulani.

3 S.A. Balogun, 'History of Islam up to 1800', in O. Ikime, ed., *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Heinemann Educational Books, Ibadan 1981, 187–209. John Hunwick cites historic sources to show that there was already a firm Islamic presence in Kano before the reign of Runfā. He suggests that Runfā's reign was significant in terms of the implantation of Arabic literacy and Islamic ideas and that it marked Kano's final integration into the trans-Saharan trading networks, so that

During these early centuries the Kano kings as well as kings in Katsina, Borno, Gobir, Nupe and Zazzau where the Islamic tradition took its strongest root, continued to oscillate between Islam and the traditional religions, particularly the Bori-cult, apparently according to which brought them most success in battles.

The Jihad of Uthman d'an Fodiyo

Believing that the mixing of Islam with heathen practices as well as the oppressive rule of the Hausa dynasties had led to the corruption of true Islam, Sheikh Uthmân d'an Fodiyo (1754–1817) launched a jihad in the year 1803 against all the Hausa states in the region.[4]

D'an Fodiyo belonged to the Toronkawa clan of the Fulani tribe, a tribe composed of many different clans who spoke the same language, Fulfulde, had a common origin in Senegal and were nomadic pastoralists. The Fulani had migrated from Senegal to the kingdom of Gobir, a part of Hausaland in what is now Zamfara state, Nigeria, probably at the end of the fourteenth century. The Toronkawa was a scholarly clan, rather than nomadic, and 'was to the Fulani as the Quraysh were to the Arabs.'[5] Folklore holds that d'an Fodiyo's birth was prophesied and

thereafter Hausaland remained in touch with the wider world of Mediterranean commerce and Islam. Cf. J.O. Hunwick, 'Not yet *The* Kano Chronicle: King-lists with and without narrative elaboration from nineteenth-century Kano' in *Sudanic Africa*, iv, 1993, 95–130.

4 Cf. M. Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, Longmans, London 1967; Mervyn Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth: The Life and Times of Usman d'an Fodiyo*, Oxford University Press, New York 1973.

5 J. Boyd – S. Shagari, *The Life and Legacy of Shehu Uthman d'an Fodiyo*, Macmillan Publishers, Malaysia 2003, 11. This book, which expresses quite a lot of popular folklore about d'an Fodiyo and the jihad, was launched in Abuja in July 2004 during celebrations for the 200th anniversary of the Sokoto Caliphate. Shehu Shagari, one of the co-authors, was President of the Republic of Nigeria from 1979–1983. Jean Boyd is a British woman who lived for many years in Sokoto but now resides in England. Boyd has written extensively on Nana Asma'u.

that so much of his life and teachings can be paralleled to the life of the Prophet Muhammad.

By the time he was twenty, the Shehu[6] had begun to preach among the Fulani people calling them to a more faithful living of the Qur'an and Sunna. Gender relations formed an important part of the reform he sought to bring about. He told the Fulani men:

> Most of our educated men leave their wives, their daughters and their captives morally abandoned, like beasts, without teaching them what God prescribes should be taught to them and without instructing them in the articles of the law which concern them. Thus they leave them ignorant of the rules regarding ablution, prayer, fasting, business dealings and others which God commands they should be taught. Men treat these things like household implements which become broken after long use and which are then thrown out on the dung heap. This is an abominable crime! Alas, how can they shut up their wives, their daughters, and their captives in the darkness of ignorance, while daily they impart knowledge to their students? In truth, they act out of egoism, and if they devote themselves to their pupils that is nothing but hypocrisy and vain ostentation on their part.[7]

To the women he said:

> A woman should protect her honour and stay at home ... and show a pleasant and gracious manner to her husband ... giving him due respect ... A wife who goes out (without good reason) loses her right to her dowry and cannot claim food and clothing from her husband ... Womenfolk, take heed! Do not do communal farm work and do not assist in herding ... cover yourselves up and spin the thread you need to clothe yourself with ... the best thing is to let the men-folk go to the market, but if circumstances compel you to go you must dress in a restrained manner, covering yourself up from head to toe ... there is no reason why a wife should not

6 Shehu is the popular name given to d'an Fodiyo, meaning Sheikh; Fodiyo means scholar son of a scholar.

7 From his poem *Nur al-Abab*. Translated by A. Ogunbiyi, 'The Position of Muslim Women as stated by Uthmân B. Fudi', in *Journal of West African Studies,* Ife University, Nigeria 1969.

(because of custom) utter the name of her husband or be considered ill-mannered for doing so, nor should she avoid taking her meals from him.[8]

He began addressing the Hausa people in their own language and condemned certain Hausa customs which he believed did not conform to the Sunna and which he considered *takhlit*, the mixing of Islam with elements of traditional religion.[9] He spoke out against the mingling of the sexes in public as well as women's failure to adopt the long Muslim robe and veil.

In 1803, he and his followers armed themselves and began their jihad which lasted until the end of the nineteenth century. He sent letters to all the Hausa kings to say that he was reviving the Sunna and rejecting everything that was contrary to the *shari`a*. Those who refused to collaborate with him were attacked and annihilated. In a few short years his followers overcame the Hausa kingdoms and established authority over them by way of emirates. In July 1808, led by d'an Fodiyo's son Muhammad Bello, they overtook the capital of Gobir, Alkalawa.[10] In 1809 Muhammad Bello,

8 Quoted in J. Boyd, *The Caliph's Sister*, 5–6. Boyd writes that most of d'an Fodiyo's Fulfulde verse has not yet been translated and published. However, the Waziri of Sokoto, Dr. Junaidu, a descendent of d'an Fodiyo, has the collection of the originals to which he allowed her access. She selected the poems on matrimonial issues and had them translated into Hausa. The English translation is therefore her own. (Cf. *The Caliph's Sister*, 102).

9 Examples of the practices among the Hausa Muslims which d'an Fodiyo considered *takhlit* are: chanting the Qur'an to drum accompaniment, writing God's names or verses from the Qur'an with blood or on bones, combining bits of snakeskin with water washed over slates on which God's names or verses from the Qur'an were written.

10 Oral tradition holds that d'an Fodiyo's daughter, Asma'u, had an important part to play in this particular battle, and although there are different versions to the story the gist of it is summed up as follows: 'Bello and the Chief of Gobir were locked in conflict at Alkalawa. The battle raged, then the Shehu went to Wurno and said to his daughter, "You see how Bello is struggling at Alkalawa". At that point Asma'u took a burning brand and pointed, saying "Burn Alkalawa". Then the fire consumed the city.' Cf. J. Boyd, *The Caliph's Sister*, 25, with reference to what Boyd was told in interviews she conducted in Sokoto during her research.

using the captives to do the work, began building a new city at Sokoto which became the centre of the Caliphate. In 1817 d'an Fodiyo died in Sokoto and was buried in the room of his wife, Hauwa, the mother of Muhammad Bello who succeeded him as Caliph.[11]

According to Jean Boyd, women played as active a part in the jihad as did the men. When preparing to attack, the women prepared foodstuffs while men made bows, sacks for the food, saddles and tools. During the battles the women attended wounds, washed weapons and comforted the widows and orphans.[12] Women of the people who were overcome by the jihadists were often taken as wives or concubines.[13] As well as the pain this must have caused the captured women themselves, it also presented challenges to d'an Fodiyo's women followers who had to welcome them to share their conjugal rights, educate them in Islam, and help them leave behind their Bori practices so that the new generation would be 'a uniform breed.'[14]

After the death of d'an Fodiyo, Muhammad Bello decided to collect together all the writings of his father as well as all his many manuscripts. He appointed the task to Waziri Usman Gidado who was married to Asma'u, d'an Fodiyo's daughter. Nana also copied and translated many of her brother, Muhammad Bello's work as well as their father's works from Arabic into both Hausa and Fulfulde, often adding bits of her own. Asma'u's own first known work is dated 1820. During her lifetime she composed fifty-five original works of her own, some poems, some prose, writing in Fulfulde, Arabic and Hausa.[15]

11 This action represents a further aspect of d'an Fodiyo's being modeled on the Prophet Muhammad, who was buried where he died, in the room of his wife `Â'isha.

12 J. Boyd, *The Caliph's Sister*, 11–17.

13 For example, after the battle for Alkalawa, the wife of Yunfa, the Chief of Gobir who was killed, was taken captive and was given as a concubine to Muhammad Bello, her husband's vanquisher. Cf. J. Boyd, *The Caliph's Sister*, 25.

14 J. Boyd, *The Caliph's Sister*, 14–15.

15 A dated list of her works and those of other famous members of the jihad is given in J. Boyd, *The Caliph's Sister*, 159–164.

Under the caliphate of her brother Bello, Asma'u was appointed as leader of the women. Her main work was in the education of women. The educational system that she put in place was known as the *Yan-taru*, a method through which she brought women to her from the rural villages to be taught in the true practice of Islam. Each woman leader, called *jaji*, gathered women in the villages and, after obtaining permission from their husbands or fathers, they would go to see Asma'u in Sokoto where they stayed for a few days and were taught poetry on Islamic teaching which they committed to memory. The women who came to Asma'u as students were young unmarried girls under the age of 14 and older women above the age of 44; thus the system allowed the young married women of child-bearing age to stay at home to look after their families. The *jaji* also brought to Asma'u the problems of the women in the villages who could not come and Asma'u taught them how they should apply the law and make common-sense assessments. The group would then depart home, to teach what they had learnt to the women in their own households and villages.[16]

Nana Asma'u is remembered and recalled today by many Muslims in Nigeria, men and women. Women, in particular, see her as a model of a truly liberated and pious Muslim woman leader. The stories of her education and social involvement, the respect she was shown and the influence she had, all validate their efforts to better the lives of Muslim women in an authentic Islamic practice in Nigeria today.[17]

Although Asma'u and the other members of her household were educated and commanded respect among other women, they are not to be taken as examples of how all women were treated in the Caliphate. Commander Hugh Clapperton commented after a visit to the house of Gidado in Sokoto in 1824, 'They (the women) are allowed more liberty

16 J. Boyd, *The Caliph's Sister*, 49–53.

17 The influence she actually had on the lives of women is questionable since it was she, along with her father and brother, who demanded that women be secluded. However, by speaking for the education and correct treatment of women, and by advising women in times of difficulty, as well as by providing a model of leadership for Muslim women today, her influence can be seen to be positive.

than the generality of Mohammedan women'.[18] D'an Fodiyo taught that it was better that women remain at home and only go out when necessary, being properly clad.

During the hundred years of the Caliphate, restricted seclusion for women existed, particularly among the urban aristocratic and wealthy. As the Caliphate expanded so too did the economy and urban settlements, and with that came a greater specialization in the division of labour. Much of the labour taken up by women could be done from the seclusion of their homes, such as craft making, spinning, pottery making and the sale of prepared foods. Seclusion was also considered a symbol of high status, a sign that a man was so well off he had no need for his wives to work.[19] Thus, seclusion increased during the years of the Caliphate but was not common to all.

Many Muslims today recall the jihad of d'an Fodiyo as having been inspired by his religious ideology, his commitment to true Islam and to its revival and spread in Hausaland. However, it is difficult to be convinced that it was only religion and a desire to follow faithfully God's will that inspired d'an Fodiyo's followers and jihadists. Economic and political power seems to have been an important factor. As one historian reports, the jihadists often seemed more preoccupied with slavery, economic and political expansionism than the spread of the faith and, when it suited them for economic reasons, they formed alliances with non-Muslims without insisting on conversion to Islam.[20] Trimingham observes that it was not always in the slave raiders interest to conquer conversions although the 'Fulani of Northern Nigeria regarded conquered territory, whether the inhabitants were Muslims or pagans, as a reservoir of slaves'.[21] However, conversions were also a part of the jihad and many Hausa Kings

18 Quoted in J. Boyd, *The Caliph's Sister*, 49.

19 A. Imam, 'The Development of Women's Seclusion', 6–8.

20 T. Makar, 'The relationship between the Sokoto Caliphate and the non-Muslim Peoples of the Middle Benue Region', in B. Usman, ed., *Studies in the History of the Sokoto Caliphate*, Third International Press, New York 1979, 454.

21 J.S. Trimingham, *Islam in West Africa,* Clarendon Press, Oxford 1959, 29.

and others seem to have embraced Islam because of the advantages of being united with the ruling class.

Complete unity among the Muslims did not however exist. There was a great deal of dissatisfaction among the *Talakawa* (the ruled) with the Hausa-Fulani elites whose ideals, in accordance with d'an Fodiyo, were embodied in the Qadiriyya movement. As a result of the jihad, the Qadiriyya Movement had become prominent in Northern Nigeria. A rival Islamic movement, the Tijaniyya, also a Sufi Brotherhood, founded by Sheikh Ahmad al-Tijani, an Algerian, arrived on the northern scene at the dawn of colonial rule through al Hajj 'Umar Futi, a Malian.[22] Although Muhammad Bello is reported to have joined the Tijaniyya, membership appealed particularly to those who were excluded from the inner circle of Fulani leadership in the Sokoto Caliphate as an alternative form of superiority[23]. Both the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya *darikas* continue to be widespread in Northern Nigeria.

The Colonial period

After attempts at diplomacy and peaceful negotiations with the caliphates of Borno and of Sokoto, a formal administration was inaugurated by the British on January 1st 1900 under the leadership of Frederick Lugard, with the intent of conquering the northern region.[24] They advanced on Sokoto on the 15th March 1903, having already conquered Adamawa in 1901, Bauchi in 1902 and Kano in 1903.

When the *waziri* of Sokoto called on his people to do business with the British after the fall of the Caliphate, he enjoined them to 'show regard for them with the tongue and have intercourse with them in the affairs

22 Cf. P. Ryan, 'The Mystical Theology of Tijani Sufism and its Social Significance in West Africa', in *The Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 30, n. 2, 2000, 208–224.

23 P. Ryan, 'The Mystical Theology of Tijani Sufism', 218.

24 R. Adeleye, *Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria: The Sokoto Caliphate and its Enemies,* Longmanns, London 1971, 13–14.

of the world, but never love them in our hearts or adopt their religion'.[25] To the British, the *waziri* communicated the willingness of Sokoto to surrender and cooperate but he expressed the one fear he had in his heart, which was that his people might be forced to become Christian. Lugard assured him that the practice of Islam would be preserved.

The federal structure of the northern states was retained by the colonial policy of Indirect Rule introduced by Lord Lugard. Through the system of Indirect Rule the Muslim Emirs were given a firm grasp of areas they had previously only raided for slaves or related with as tributaries. This obviously conferred an advantage on Islam and thus it is sometimes concluded, particularly by non-Muslims and non-Hausa-Fulani minority groups, that the Emirate system and the spread of Islam benefited tremendously under British rule. According to Rev. Yusuf Turaki, the introduction of Indirect Rule institutionalized the inferiority status for the non-Muslim peoples in the southern extreme of the northern region, what is today called the Middle-Belt.[26]

The cultural resistance to the white colonizers (who were identified with Christianity)[27] and to their increased taxes, the establishment of *shari 'a* courts in the Northern Protectorate, the expansion of the Islamic literate (Mallamai) as clerks for the colonial administration, and the lack of a policy for secular education, were all factors which strengthened Islam in Northern Nigeria.

The tax system was based on the number of heads, male or female, involved in the particular money-making occupations of the area. Since it was unislamic for strange men to enter into a compound, it was an advantage to be able to say one was Muslim and thus claim the right to

25 R. Adeleye, 'The Dilemma of the Wazir: The Place of the 'Risalat al-Wazir'ila ahl al-'ilm wa-'l-tadablur' in the history of the conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate' in *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, vol. IV, n. 2, June 1968, (285–311), 300.

26 Y. Turaki, *Socio-Political Role and Status of Non-Muslim Groups of Northern Nigeria: Analysis of a Colonial Legacy*, PhD Thesis, University of Boston, Boston 1982.

27 The British were often referred to as *Nasara* which means Christians. They themselves discouraged this and favored the term *Turawa* which means white people or Europeans.

prevent the census-taking officer enter and count heads. Taxation rates for Muslims were therefore lower than for non-Muslim families.[28]

The *shari 'a*, the Islamic Criminal Code according to the Maliki school, had been an essential element of the legal system in Northern Nigeria particularly since the time of d'an Fodiyo.[29] When the British occupied the region they allowed this system of law to continue giving it recognition under the Native Courts Proclamation of 1900. The only interference with its application was on those points which the British considered repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscience;

28 During the British colonial period, women in the south and east gathered and took to the streets to protest the taxations imposed on them. During the Aba Women's Riots of 1929, market women in Aba (Eastern Nigeria) protested the proposed taxation of women and other oppressive policies by the colonial officers which resulted in a clash which left several women dead or injured. These women formed together under Mrs Margaret Ekpo who organized them to stand up for their rights. Cf. P.K. Uchendu, *Education and the Changing Economic Role of Nigerian Women*, Fourth Dimension Publishing, Enugu 1995, 16; An Egba Women's Union was founded in Abeokuta to fight indiscriminate taxation on women, especially market women, by the British administrators. The Union, which spread to other parts of Yorubaland, also organized literacy classes for women and fought against sanitary inspectors who were known to have overstepped the boundaries of their duties. From these struggles emerged the National Women's Union (NWU) which was founded in 1947 by Fumilayo Ransome-Kuti. Cf. N. Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria 1900–1965*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1982, 166; S. Ojewusi, *Speaking for Nigerian Women: A History of the NCWS*, All State Publishing Company, Abuja 1996, 6–7. I have found no records of a similar protest-movement in the North against the taxes that were imposed on women.

29 The *Shari 'a* Criminal Code deals with Qur'anic offences and their punishments, laws of homicide and hurt, and other crimes punishable at the discretion of the judge (*ta'zîr, siyâsa*). The Qur'anic offences, for which there are fixed penalties (*hudûd*) are unlawful sexual intercourse (*zina*), theft (*sariqa*), robbery (*hirâba*), drinking of alcohol (*shrub al-khamr*) and false accusation of unlawful sexual intercourse (*qadhf*). If these are formally proven, the judge has no latitude in the choice of punishment, which includes amputations, death by crucifixion or stoning, and caning or flogging. Normally circumstantial evidence is not allowed to prove a *hudûd* offence and the application of such punishments is difficult.

hence the *hudud* punishments of amputations and stoning to death were changed to imprisonments or fines. All customary courts in Northern Nigeria ruled according to *shari 'a*; thus, Islam had precedence and authority even where there were substantial non-Muslim populations. These non-Muslims found themselves obliged to submit to two imposed and foreign legal systems, the British and the Islamic, whereas before the coming of the British, the non-Muslim Hausas settled their disputes through the authority of the Sarkin Arna/Sarkin Maguzawa (Chief of the Pagans). The Native Courts Ordinance replaced the Native Courts Proclamation in 1933. This introduced a hierarchy of courts and a system of appeal within the native courts system and beyond this to the Nigerian High (later, Supreme) Court of Appeal. Criminal proceedings were still allowed to be carried out in native courts under Islamic law 'provided it does not involve mutilation or torture, and is not repugnant to natural justice and humanity'[30].

The Mallamai who were employed and sent far into the Protectorate as clerks, interpreters, judges, enumerators and buying agents were able to use this opportunity to preach Islam. As representatives of the administrators, they could also coerce people into conversion.

The lack of British enthusiasm for secular schools and the small number of Christian missionaries present in the region to provide schools, meant that for many, the only education available was that offered by Muslims, members of the Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya reformed Movements, who carried out mass evangelical campaigns during these years and who had a monopoly on the provision of mass Islamic education, which they undertook as a means of increasing the membership of their movements.

Although the Emirate benefited from colonial administration through Indirect Rule, there was also a cost. The leaders themselves were now subject to the British overlords: the sultan[31] and emirs were placed under the supervision of a District Officer while it was the British High

30 Native Court Ordinance, 1933, S.10 (2).

31 The Caliph was renamed Sultan by the British.

Commissioner who had control over the whole jurisdiction. As we have seen, the Islamic courts were allowed but they were regulated to comply with British humanitarian standards. The Arabic script, in which the emirate had conducted its affairs throughout the Northern provinces, was replaced with the Roman alphabet.

Islamic Mallamai (teachers) were employed as clerks in the British administrative system but few northerners were educated enough to work in administrative posts as junior partners with the British or to take over administration from the British on independence.[32] The British therefore established some primary schools in the Muslim areas designed particularly for the sons of the emirs, chiefs and Mallams. The syllabus in these schools was to be completely secular, consisting of reading and writing in English and Hausa. In these schools, the books were prepared by the British and were, according to some Muslims today, a means of feeding wrong and distorted information to the schoolchildren about their history as well as about worldviews.[33]

A Training College was opened in Katsina in October 1921 to produce teachers to staff the provincial primary schools. Northern men, both Muslim and non-Muslim, passed through this school including Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (Prime Minister of Nigeria 1957–66), Sir Ahmadu Bello (Premier of Northern Nigeria 1954–66), General Yakubu Gowon (Military Head of State 1966–75), General Murtala Muhammad (Military Head of State 1975–76) and Alhaji Shehu Shagari (President of Nigeria 1977–83).

The number of literate Muslims was however very small. Many administrative posts were filled by non-Muslims who were educated in Christian missionary schools which existed mainly in the south and east of the country or in the non-Muslim provinces in the Middle-Belt.

32 The introduction of western education was slow in the Northern provinces mainly because it was mostly missionaries who provided these in other parts of the country while they were limited in the Northern provinces because of the commitment of religious non-interference which Lugard had made to the Muslim rulers.

33 Cf. J. Boyd – S. Shagari, *The Life and Legacy*, 85–86.

The first political association to be created among the Muslims in the North was *Jamiyar Mutanen Arewa* in 1949 which in 1951 became the Northern People's Congress (NPC). Its leaders were drawn from the nobility and its ideology was that of the Sokoto Caliphate. In 1954, Sir Ahmadu Bello was elected President General of the NPC and in 1956 became Premier of the Northern Region. This was a conservative party in so far as women's issues were concerned, as is further discussed below.

An opposition party to the NPC was formed in 1950 called the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), led by Aminu Kano. NEPU was also dominated by the Hausa and Fulani but was more in line with the Tijaniyya tradition and was made up not of the ruling elite but of 'commoners'. NEPU was not against the existence of emirate rule but spoke out against its oppression of the common people and of women.

a) Muslim women during the colonial period

As Islam increased during the colonial period, so too did the practice of wife-seclusion. Historians are not agreed about when this trend became more obvious or even what percentage of women really was secluded. Ayesha Imam suggests that the practice of mass seclusion began in the late 1930s or early 1940s. Polly Hill dates the increase in seclusion from after the 1939–1945 World War whereas Michael Watts states that mention of an increase in seclusion can be found in the colonial records of the 1930s.[34] All agree, however, that the practice increased during the colonial period.

Colonial agricultural policy favoured women's seclusion with its almost exclusive focus on cotton and groundnut production and export. From within their own compounds women could process these products (spinning cotton yarn or processing groundnut into oil and making *kulli-*

34 A. Imam, 'The Development of Women's Seclusion', 10; P. Hill, *Population, Prosperity and Poverty: Rural Kano 1900 and 1970*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1977; M. Watts, *Silent Violence: Food, Famine and the Peasantry in Northern Nigeria*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1983.

kulli[35] for sale in the market) and hence could earn money independently for themselves (*sana'oi*) and for their households, rather than working on their husband's farm or gathering wood and water.[36]

It benefited men to have the women secluded. It meant having to pay less taxes (heads could not be counted and women were not taxed on *sana'oi* but only if they worked on the land). It was also a sign of wealth and status if one could keep one's wives in seclusion. It was also considered a symbol of Islamic piety.

The increased withdrawal of women from the public space and into seclusion was, therefore, partly a response to the economic situation brought about by colonialism. It was also due to increased Islamization, particularly in its resistance to colonialism and the need to establish a Muslim identity. However, it was not strict seclusion that developed but what is called *tsari*, whereby women can go out of their compounds for specific purposes and still be regarded islamically as secluded. Particularly among the lower class who were small-scale cultivators, women's help to harvest cotton and groundnut during harvest time was important. Since the harvesting of these crops had increased there was more work and hence it would have been difficult to remain totally in seclusion. '*Tsari* seems to have developed apologetically as due to the necessity in the rigors of rural life.'[37] It was the women of the *masu sarauta*, particularly those living in the urban areas, who would have practiced the more restricted form of *kulle*.

Few Muslim women were educated. A small number benefited from the Christian missionary schools after the 1930s. Sheikh Ibrahim Niasse who brought reform to the Tijaniyya in the 1930s called for women's education and encouraged men to teach women at home.[38] Girls usu-

35 Groundnut cakes made from the residue of the groundnuts pressed for oil.

36 M. Smith, *Baba of Karo: A Woman of the Muslim Hausa*, Faber, Yale 1981 (first published in 1954). This was the first published book in which Hausa women were the specific focus of enquiry.

37 A. Imam, 'The Development of Women's Seclusion', 12.

38 Interview with Sheikh Muhammadu Nasiru Adamu at Sheikh Ahmed Tijani Juma'at Mosque, Kano, May 2005.

ally attended Quranic School until they were married at an early age. Women were then expected to be given some further Islamic education by their fathers or husbands but while some men may have assumed this responsibility, most did not. Many men were not themselves well enough educated to be able to do so even had they wanted to. Some few women did become Islamic scholars and teachers (Mallama).[39] These few women, however, are not typical of most Muslim women in Northern Nigeria during the colonial period, the majority having received very little Islamic and no secular education.

Women also had some religious leadership roles. Both the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya Movements have leadership roles for women, usually

39 On the 27th April 2005, I interviewed Mallama Hassana Sufi, known as *Umma Makaranta* (Mother of the School). Mallama Sufi ran an Islamic school for women in Kano from the 1950s until recent years. Her school operated for two hours every morning except on Thursdays and Fridays. Women and girls were given Qur'anic and Islamic education and were also taught how to read and write in English as well as how to sew, knit and make zobo (a soft drink made of herbs). She also had her own school in the Emir's palace in Kano. It was Mallama Sufi who taught the present Emir and many others to read, memorize and understand the Qur'an. She belongs to the Tijaniyya movement which, she claims, places less emphasis on seclusion than does the Qadiriyya and is more open to the possibility of women as scholars and teachers. She claims that many other Muslim women ran schools for women in Kano during the colonial years. Mallama Sufi has also written in Hausa on many topics. *Wak~ar Ya-Kamata* (The Necessary Song – this is a tribute to her mother, describing her multiplicity of attributes, roles, relationships, Islamic studies, professions and travels), *Wak~ar Ta'aziyar Isa Wali* (Eulogy Song for Isa Wali – a Kano politician who spoke out for Muslim women's rights in the 1950s), *Wak~ar Murnar Maulidi* (A Song of Joy for the Prophet's Birthday) and *Wak~ar Barka ga Mutanen Kano* (Song of Congratulations to the People of Kano – written in 1980 after a Maitatsine riot was suppressed in Kano) are among her writings. See also A. Hutson, 'Mothers and Patrons: Female Members of the Tijaniyya and their male advocates' (Alaine Hutson, of the History and Culture Bureau of Indiana University, has done some extensive studies on women scholars and writers in the Tijaniyya Movement in Northern Nigeria. This reference is to an unpublished paper given to me by her research assistant in Kano, Mallam Ibrahim Tijani); and B. Sule – P.E. Starratt, 'Islamic Leadership Positions for Women in Contemporary Kano Society' in C. Coles – B. Mack, ed., *Hausa Women*, 29–49.

related to the initiation and training of women members into the movements. The highest ranking Qadiriyya woman leader is known as the *Darwisha* and her assistant is known as the *Nahiba*. These are helped by a number of other women leaders called *Shahusha*. The highest ranking female leader in the Tijaniyya is known as the *Mukaddamma*.[40] Such a leadership position for women was only granted after Sheikh Niasse called for it and some of his followers, particularly Sheikh Atiku, insisted on it.[41] In both the Tijaniyya and the Qadiriyya, these women leaders initiate new female members; they teach them to use the prayer beads to say the darika's special prayers and they ensure that the women know how to do their five daily ablutions and prayers correctly. They also clean the women's mosque and attend the Friday communal prayers. These women leaders are older women who are no longer in purdah and who have past the child-bearing age. While the Qadiriyya wear a uniform, the Tijaniyya do not.[42] In the Tijaniyya there is no external sign to differentiate between leaders and followers as there is in the Qadiriyya.

40 Mallama Hassana Sufi is a Tijaniyya Mukaddama. Her mother, Hajiya Iya Maimuna (1891–1987), also a learned woman and teacher who went on hajj, was the first female Mukaddama in Kano, granted this position in 1934.

41 Sheikh Atiku wrote *Munjiyatu al-niswan wa al-wildan* (The Saving of Women and Children) in 1942. It is a poem directed at women and children. It is written in Hausa with only the title and subtitles in Arabic. In 1940, Sheikh Atiku wrote *Ifadat al-murid* (Notification of the disciple). This was published in Kano in 1956. It is an essay written in Arabic on the general duties of a member of the Tijaniyya. Chapter three of the essay is devoted to arguing against the resistance to women being initiated into the Movement and inducted as mukaddamas. He argues, using Qur'anic verses, that men and women are given the same rights and duties in Islam; thus the same qualifications for men should be used when initiating women into the Tijaniyya and the role of mukaddama (initiator) is not prohibited to women. He also quotes from biographies of important Sheikhs who mentioned exemplary women in North Africa and the Middle East who qualified and had served as mukaddamas. Cf. A. Huston, 'Mothers and Patrons'.

42 In May 2005, I met the female leaders of the Qadiriyya Movement in the Kabara Quarter in the old city of Kano. They each wear the white cloth and colored belt associated with their status in the movement. They invited me to join them for the monthly communal praise of the Prophet Muhammad held at the Kabara mosque. Only the elderly women and some small girls were present in the women's part of the mosque, above the central area where the young boys and men of the movement, all dressed in a white robe and a colored leather belt, carried out the ritual chants and gestures, led and directed by the head of the Qadiriyya in Kano, Halifa (Caliph) Nasiru Kabara.

Development of Christianity in Northern Nigeria until 1960

Some Roman Catholic missionaries from Italy and Belgium undertook a project of evangelization in Kano, Katsina and Borno, roughly between the 18th and 19th centuries, but these missions were not successful.

The British agreement with the caliphate that Islam would be preserved in the region and the policy of Indirect Rule which gave the Muslim leaders control over the whole region, meant that there were no Christian missionary activities in Muslim territories in the Northern Region for the first thirty years of colonial rule. The only exceptions to this were those areas where the missionaries predated the British, such as the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Zaria, or where the Emirs allowed the missionaries on their own volition. The British administrators had no objection to permitting the missionaries entry into the non-Muslim strongholds of the minority groups.

Missionaries, however, were zealous to convert the Hausa-Fulani and strategies for the evangelization of the region dominated their agenda. Many missionaries held Islam in low esteem and saw it as a 'fatalistic religion full of superstitious ideas, bereft of any real spirituality, and socially backward to a degree that was totally obstructive to development and civilization.'[43] Many missionaries also saw themselves as liberators of the common Hausa people from the Hausa-Fulani hegemony.

The CMS was the pioneer missionary organization in Northern Nigeria. In 1864, an African, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, was appointed as bishop of the Niger to oversee missionary activities in the areas to the north of the Niger River. Ajayi Crowther had played a prominent role in

43 Cf. L. Rasmussen, *Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa*, British Academic Press, London and New York 1993, 27.

CMS evangelism in southern Nigeria, among the Yoruba (from 1845) and the Igbos (having arrived in Onitsha in 1857). He established a mission in Lokoja in 1866. Although he was on friendly terms with a number of emirs throughout the North and was invited by them to open stations with mission schools in their lands, he did not win many converts.

The failure of Crowther to win converts motivated the establishment of the Sudan Party[44] consisting of a new group of evangelical CMS missionaries with Graham Wilmot Brooke as their leader. His strategy of *cultural surrender*, using the local clothes, language and food, was not very successful and he died of black-water fever in 1892. Much more successful was the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) which opened its first mission station on the Niger in 1902. From the SIM, which consisted of American evangelical missionaries from Baptist, Methodist and other denominations developed the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA).[45]

The Society of African Missions (SMA) opened a Catholic mission at Lokoja in 1884, using the Anglican Church as the place of worship until land was made available for a Catholic church. In 1907, they opened a mission in Shendam (now Plateau State). This particular mission marks the beginning of the Catholic Church in Northern Nigeria and was the headquarters of the first Catholic Prefecture North of the River Benue which was established with permission from Rome in 1911. A mission station was established in the Sabon Gari area of Kano in 1922.[46] In 1934, the headquarters of the Prefecture was moved to Kaduna which was then the civil administrative capital of the North and the Prefecture of Jos was created as well as the Prefecture of Kaduna. From these centres, with the help of other male and female missionary congregations that came to the region in the 1930s and 40s, the Catholic Church grew and spread in many areas of the North, particularly among the indigenous followers

44 Sudan was used to refer to the vast region extending from the Niger River to the Nile.

45 The name ECWA was only formalized after a meeting in Kagoro (Kaduna state) in 1954.

46 *Sabon Gari* literally means New Town and was the area in which non-indigenes that came to work in the city lived.

of traditional religions. However, a great number of the Catholics in the north during these early years were immigrants from the southern and eastern provinces who had come to work in the British administration or in businesses and industries in the expanding cities.

The Sudan United Mission (SUM)[47] was formed in 1904 in England by Dr. Karl Kumm and his wife Lucy. This was a united missionary effort of volunteer missionaries from different countries and of different denominations.[48] In October 1904, Kumm and his party arrived in Wase, a small Muslim emirate in what is now Plateau State. Here they built their first mission which was burnt down in 1907 by the Muslim population.[49] Gradually SUM missionaries spread out all over Plateau State and into many other parts of Northern Nigeria. Mission area was divided between the various branches so that the influence of missionaries was restricted to their branch's sphere and each branch was responsible for organizing the church in its own designated area. Thus many different evangelical denominations developed.

In 1928 the government set up a Teacher's School for Pagans in Toro. As a Government school set up by the British Administration for non-Muslims this was the only exception to the colonial neglect of education in non-Muslim areas. Christian missionaries filled this lagoon. The Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles (OLA), who came to Kaduna in 1939, were the first Catholic missionary women to come to the north. Later the congregation of the Sisters of St. Louis (SSL) came and joined in opening schools and hospitals and in giving special attention to the needs of women and girls.

47 Originally conceived in Britain in 1902 as the Sudan Pioneer Mission.

48 M. Hopkins – M. Gaiya, ed., *Churches in Fellowship: The Story of TEKAN*, African Christian Textbooks (ACTS), Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN), Plateau State, Nigeria 2005, 18.

49 This is the account given by most reliable historians. However, in a book recounting the history of TEKAN, the story given is that the mission station was gutted in 1907 by a fire owed to the carelessness of a cook. The burnt houses were re-roofed with corrugated iron sheets but these were carried away by tornado winds in 1909. This, combined with the little response with which the Gospel met in Wase, made the missionaries finally abandon Wase in 1909. Cf. M. Hopkins – M. Gaiya, ed., *Churches in Fellowship*, 72.

The presence of the OLA and the SSL was felt particularly in Kaduna, Kano, and Plateau states. In the far north, Zamfara and Sokoto states, it was the American Dominican sisters who took special interest in the education of the local women. Many of the influential women in northern Nigeria in the 1950s and '60s, both Christians and Muslims, were graduates of the Sisters' schools and training centres.

Non-Muslim Women in Northern Nigeria during this period

Pre-colonial non-Hausa societies in the north were mainly small self-independent, farming communities. Women constituted the bulk of the farmers as men were divided between artisan activities, farming and hunting. It is claimed that in traditional Nigerian societies, the spheres of economic activities of men and women were complementary rather than hierarchical, and equal worth was assigned to gender labour.[50]

Some feminist social and cultural analysts today criticize the colonizers and the missionaries for having introduced notions of gender which treated men as the main provider and thus were detrimental to women. They claim Christian missionaries, who through the educational system prepared the population for the system of labour that was introduced, perhaps unwittingly, transmitted female inferiority and sexual discrimination. Women's prospects, feminist analysts claim, were curtailed by restricting them from more prestigious careers with higher earning potentials and limiting them to teaching, nursing, secretarial work, catering and domestic work, occupations which were then considered more compatible with women's presumed primary roles in life as wife and mother.[51] The colonial authorities introduced some agricultural policies for which

50 M. Omonubi-McDonnell, *Gender Inequality in Nigeria*, Spectrum Books Ltd., Ibadan 2003, 11.

51 Cf. R.N. Uchem, *Overcoming Women's Subordination: An Igbo African and Christian Perspective: Envisioning an Inclusive Theology with reference to African Women*, Snaap Press Ltd., Enugu 2001, 46–48 (PhD thesis, Graduate Theological Foundation Indiana, 2000); P.K. Uchendu, *Education and the Changing Economic Role*, 14–25.

training programmes were established. Only men were given access to these programmes. Thus the spheres of economic activities of men and women were no longer complementary, but instead became unequal to the advantage of men.

One cannot pretend that there existed total equality between the sexes even in pre-colonial days. In many areas of life, the subordination of women was clearly evident. Land passed from one generation to the next through the male bloodline; thus women did not own land. In the area of decision-making, women were to defer to men although women usually had their own organizations according to age groups or as village wives' groups. In some cases there were chieftaincy institutions for women, usually representing the voice of women to the higher authority of the male chiefs and elders. Women's deference to men was however strengthened through both the colonial economic system and through Christianity's teaching on relationships within the family and within the church communities.

Difficulties encountered by Christianity during Colonialism

Christianity was slow to spread in the North for many reasons. Primary among these was the lack of support from the British colonizers. The vastness of the region, the proliferation of denominations and their doctrinal differences were also major factors. Despite some cooperation such as that shown by Samuel Crowther in Lokoja, the Christians in the North were divided among themselves.[52] Thus, they had no central political, social, economic or cultural base to call their own.

52 The rivalry and lack of cooperation between the early missionaries is well documented in M. Man-oso Ndagoso, *Christian Unity in the Quest for a Relevant and Credible Evangelization in Nigeria in the Light of Pertinent Church Documents especially Ecclesia in Africa*, PhD thesis, Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, Rome 1998, 11–17.

Ecumenical Efforts – mainly for political purposes

The lack of political power, which was still almost exclusively in the hands of the Hausa-Fulani ruling class, was the principle motivating factor for ecumenical efforts in Northern Nigeria in the mid-twentieth century. These initial efforts were concentrated mainly in the Middle Belt which was home to many minority indigenous groups who had embraced Christianity. Since missionaries had offered an education to the minority tribes among whom they lived and worked, members of these groups now had the ability and the audacity to express their resentment of the domination of the Hausa-Fulani over them.

Many denominations gathered together at Bukuru (on the outskirts of Jos, Plateau state) in 1948 for a meeting. Here it was decided to nominate officers who would look for ways to diffuse political ideals on the need to make the people of the Middle Belt one united 'Christian Tribe'.[53] It had to be a 'tribe' that was formed, since the government recognized only tribal associations for political contest. To achieve the aim was difficult for many reasons mainly the rivalries between the various missionary groups as well as the ethnic differences.

In 1955, six of the evangelical churches that claimed their origin to Karl Kumm and the SUM came together to form an ecumenical body called TEKAN.[54] Gradually, six other churches of the same origin joined the fellowship.[55]

53 P. Bauna Tanko, *The Christian Association of Nigeria and the Challenge of the Ecumenical Imperative*, (PhD Thesis, Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, Rome 1991), Fab Anieh Nigeria Ltd. Jos 1993, 117.

54 TEKAN is an abbreviation of *Tarayyar Ekklesiyoyyin Kristi A Nigeria* meaning Fellowship of the Churches of Christ in Nigeria.

55 The initial six are the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN), the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC), the United Methodist Church in Nigeria (UMCN), the Christian Reformed Church in Nigeria (CRCN), the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN) and the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria (EYN). The six who have since joined are the Church of Christ in the Sudan among the Tiv (NKST), the United Church of Christ in Nigeria (HEKAN), the Mabila Baptist Convention of Nigeria (MBCN), the Nigerian Reformed Church (NRC), the Evangelical Church of Christ in Nigeria (ECCN), and the Reformed Church of Christ in Nigeria (RCCN). For a history of the formation of TEKAN see M. Hopkins – M. Gaiya, ed., *Churches in Fellowship*.

In the Middle Belt, Christian political parties were formed. The Northern Nigeria non-Muslim League was formed in 1949 and changed its name to the Middle Zone League (MZL) in 1951. The MZL was led by a SUM pastor, Rev. David Lot. The Middle Belt People's Party (MBPP) was also formed around the same period. These parties then fused in 1955 to become the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) to support the interests of Northern Christians and to oppose the identification of the Northern political parties, particularly the NPC, with Islam. The leaders of the UMBC were typically members of Christian mission denominations.[56]

Political Developments from Independence to date (1960–2005)

At the dawn of Independence

Very few women were publicly involved in politics in Northern Nigeria during colonial rule before the 1950s. As early as 1951, Gambo Sawaba, a Muslim woman from Zaria, gave lectures at NEPU rallies. Few women could attend rallies since most were in seclusion; therefore female members of NEPU visited women in their homes around Zaria and Kano. NEPU opened a women's wing in Kano in 1953. According to Hajiya Amina Isyraku Kiru, a prominent politician and Tijaniyya member, she and other women of NEPU visited all the traditional, political and religious leaders to convince them that by granting women the right to vote, the women would help get Muslims into government.[57]

56 For more on this see I.U. Chibuzo Nwanaju, *Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria: A Historical-Theological Reflection upon the Mutual Co-existence of Christians and Muslims*, PhD Thesis, Catholic University of Nijmegen, 2004, 145–147.

57 Interview with Hajiya Amina Isyrak Kiru, Kano, 26th April 2005.

The NPC also opened a women's wing which was formed mainly of the wives and relatives of NPC leaders, rarely met, and did not take an active part in rallies. Shugaba Jallo Baturiya, who was president of the NPC women's wing, remembers that they were given five Nigerian pounds to entertain party members out of which two shillings were put into a fund to help women party members in times of need.[58]

Women who participated in politics were viewed as prostitutes (*karuwai*) simply because they were seen to be active outside the socially constructed bounds of respectability. This applied both to Muslim and Christian women. Since Native Authorities generally supported the NPC, anti-prostitution raids on women in Kano who were NEPU supporters, in the name of restoring morality and stopping anti-Islamic activities, were frequent.[59]

Gambo Sawaba and forty other women were arrested during the first meeting of the NEPU women's wing in Kano and were imprisoned for one month.[60] Her life and those of the other women in NEPU was threatened and her biography reports several instances of beatings and assaults.[61]

In 1956 and early 1957 the question of women's political rights and roles was very much debated in the Northern region. Carried out in terms of Islamic teachings, it expanded to involve questions about women's wider social roles and their status within society. The debate began in 1956 when Isa Wali, a NEPU supporter, wrote an eight-part editorial for the Hausa newspaper, *Gaskiya* (Truth), on the position of women in

58 L.S. Adamu, *Hafsatu Ahmadu Bello*, 55: with reference to an interview the author conducted with Shugaba Jallo Baturiya, Kaduna, February 1995.

59 Articles in the NEPU bulletin *Daily Comet* attest to this where they questioned why only NEPU supporters were arrested in the anti-prostitution campaigns. Cf. 'Any Politics in Raid of Kano Prostitutes?' in *Daily Comet*, July 16th 1959 and 'Native Authority Police and Prostitutes' in *Daily Comet*, July 17th 1959.

60 Reported by Hajiya Gambo Sawaba in *Nigerian Citizen* newspaper, Mar. 5th 1958.

61 R. Shawulu, *Gambo Sawaba*, Jos, Nigeria 1990, 80, 94, 99.

Islam and dealt with all aspects of women's political and social rights.[62] He claimed that in Islam women and men have equal political, social and educational rights and that these were denied women in Northern Nigeria because of the conservatism of local culture. He spoke of the role ` Â'isha had played in leading the rebellion against the fourth Caliph Ali, and cited examples of other Muslim countries where women could vote and hold office.[63] He wrote that the practices of seclusion, polygamy and the taking of concubines were unIslamic.[64] He claimed that women and men should receive equal education.[65] Every issue of *Gaskiya* for the next four months featured replies either rebutting or supporting his writings.[66] Rebuttals of his arguments quoted *ahadith* supporting the NPC stand that Islam's restrictions on women's social rights and roles necessitated women's exclusion from the political realm.[67] To argue otherwise was

62 *Gaskiya* newspaper, from September to October 1956. His articles were also published in the *Nigerian Citizen* newspaper from July 18th–August 4th 1956.

63 *Gaskiya* newspaper, Sept. 11th 1956 and October 19th 1956.

64 *Gaskiya* newspaper, October 9th 1956.

65 *Gaskiya* newspaper, September 18th 1956.

66 *Gaskiya* newspaper, September to December 1956.

67 'People will rarely triumph if a women is assigned as a leader' in *Gaskiya* September 18th 1956; 'There are simply duties and functions which Islam clearly forbids to women from pursuing. Things such as political leadership, judging court, leading prayers and others. Any society that gives such functions to women is not an Islamic society' in *Gaskiya* October 30th 1956; 'A woman is allowed out of her matrimonial home on two occasions – when she is being taken to that house and when she dies' in *Gaskiya* December 7th 1956; Despite the fact that most Muslim men in the North were illiterate, a writer wrote: 'it must not be forgotten that the population in the region exceeds that of men and about 99% of the women are not only illiterate but are uninformed and uneducated in every way. Women's franchise at this stage and under such appalling conditions merely means putting the destiny of the country into the hands of an illiterate, uninformed and uneducated public – you can imagine how disastrous that would be. That would be democracy indeed!' in *Nigerian Citizen*, July 20th 1957; While some agreed that women could leave their homes for education, they were clear about what that education should include, for example, 'Getting education is compulsory for both male and female in the Islamic religion. However, the sort of education is that which would allow

to follow western culture.[68] Only men participated in the debate; even the Women's Page in *Gaskiya* during these months did not refer at all to the question.

Since the debate was carried out in Islamic terms, the British, whose policy was to remain neutral on religious matters, did not intervene.[69] Other parties in the North, including the Action Group, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, and the United Middle-Belt Congress, got involved in the debate, asking that non-Muslim women be allowed to vote.[70] When interviewed by the BBC about the question, Ahmadu Bello simply said that the NPC resisted women's suffrage because it was unIslamic.[71] Finally, no woman, Muslim or non-Muslim, was allowed to vote in the Northern region until the Second Republic.

In preparation for independence, a new Penal Code Law for the Northern Region was fashioned which came into effect in 1960. This, essentially an English Code with provisions based on *Shari'a* Criminal Code, was drawn up and accepted by Muslim scholars and leaders, including the premier of Northern Nigeria, Ahmadu Bello. The Penal Code was fashioned in accordance with Sudanese, Pakistani and Libyan Penal Codes and incorporated most aspects of Islamic Civil law, making some things an offence in the north which were not an offence in the south of the country, for example, section 55 of the Penal Code allowed 'reasonable chastisement' of a wife by her husband, and section 403 made it a punishable crime for a Muslim to drink alcohol.[72]

The NPC was concerned with building up a power base in the north by stressing differences in culture and religion between the north and south (by this time the south was largely Christian). Ayesha Imam claims that the emphasis the NPC put on seclusion and other questions of women's status and roles as Islamic was a way of distinguishing the Islamic north from the Christian south.[73]

However, Muslims were keen to maintain a united North since only thus could they win elections at national level come independence. Hence, Ahmadu Bello made religious tolerance central to his pre-independence speeches.[74] Although there were many non-Muslims in the north, the slogan of the NPC was *'One North, One People'*. When Independence was granted in October 1960, the NPC formed the government at national level.[75]

women to perform domestic duties properly – cooking, cleaning, child-raising, etc. Education for other duties is, I fear, unIslamic.' in *Gaskiya* November 13th 1956.

68 'I wish to draw the attention of Malam Isa Wali to the fact that we do not want our government to copy what is done in Persia, Tunisia or Egypt. They are following the example of Western culture. We are Muslims. Our culture is Islamic.' written in *Gaskiya* November 20th 1956.

69 When interviewed regarding the British stance on women's suffrage in Northern Nigeria, Alan Lennox-Boyd, Secretary of State for the Colonies replied: 'This is clearly a matter for the Northern Region themselves' in *Nigerian Citizen* newspaper, May 20th 1959. During this time in Britain, women were prohibited from entry into the House of Lords.

70 See for example *Nigerian Citizen* newspaper, August 3rd 1957.

71 Reported in the *Nigerian Citizen* newspaper, June 22nd 1957.

72 Section 55 (1) (d) of the Penal Code stipulates, 'Nothing is an offence, which does not amount to the infliction of grievous harm upon any person and which is done by a husband for the purpose of correcting his wife. Such husband and wife being subject to any natural law or custom in which such correction is recognized as lawful.'

73 A. Imam, 'The Development of Women's Seclusion', 13.

74 Ahmadu Bello's Christmas message of 1959: 'Our diversity may be great, but the things that unite us are stronger than the things that divide us... Let us forget the differences in our religions and, remembering the common brotherhood before God, dedicate ourselves afresh to the great tasks which lie before us' in *Nigerian Citizen* newspaper, 30th Dec. 1959.

75 In the 1959 Federal elections, leading to Independence on October 1st 1960, the NPC won the majority of seats but not the majority of votes. Thus they formed a coalition government with the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) led by Nnamdi Azikiwe from the east. The Action Group from the West, led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, formed the opposition. In the new government, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (NPC) was the Prime Minister and Nnamdi Azikiwe (NCNC) was President of the Senate and Governor-General. When Nigeria was declared a Federal Republic in 1963, Nnamdi Azikiwe became its first President.

Nigeria's First Republic 1960–1966

As already stated, women in Northern Nigeria did not have a vote in these first national elections. By comparison in the rest of the country, not only did women have a vote but in the 1961 regional elections, three women were elected to the Eastern House of Assembly.[76] According to Ayesha Imam, during the time the NPC was in power, to speak of women's rights or argue against seclusion would have been characterized as being anti-North, anti-Hausa and anti-Islam.[77] Ahmadu Bello stated in his autobiography:

> We are often taken to task about votes for women. The Eastern and Western Regions have given their women the vote, and during the Cameroon's plebiscite, the United Nations insisted on them registering and voting. I agree that no particular harm has been done, though I must claim that no outstanding good has come out of it. I dare say that we shall introduce it in the end here, but – and this is important – it is so contrary to the customs and feelings of the great part of the men of this Region ... It would of course greatly strengthen our position as a party for all the women would vote in the same direction as their menfolk and thus our support would be more than doubled at the stroke of a pen.[78]

It is interesting to note that while the North was not prepared to give women the vote before or during the First Republic, it included women in its census. Hence, because it had the greatest population, it also had the largest number of seats in the federal legislature.[79]

The National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS), which was set up in 1958 and consisted mainly of women's organizations in the East and West of the country, was rejected in the North although there were active members in Kaduna as well as in the Middle-Belt. These met with

76 Cf. H. Abdu, *Women and Politics in Nigeria: Agenda for Political Participation*, WIN (Women in Nigeria) Kaduna Chapter, Kaduna 2001, 14.

77 A. Imam, 'The Development of Women's Seclusion', 13.

78 A. Bello, *My Life: The Autobiography of Sir Ahmadu Bello,* Cambridge University Press 1962, 232–233.

79 H. Abdu, *Women and Politics*, 14: The North had 174 members; the East 73, the West 62; Lagos 3

insinuations that women's organizations, represented by the NCWS, were of Christian institutions and were a ruse to turn the heart of Muslim women from their faith.[80]

However, fifteen educated women of Northern origin, representing different tribes, ideas and religions, met in May 1963 and decided to form the *Jam'iyyar Matan Arewa* (JMA, Association of Northern Women), a non-political, non-religious, social organization that would cater to the needs of northern women.[81] The JMA was more involved in charitable works than in political questions. They claim to have refused invitations to affiliate with a political party and become its women's wing, because they wanted an independent all-woman organization.[82] The JMA only affiliated with the NCWS after women in the North were granted suffrage in 1976.

Islamic Revivalism of Ahmadu Bello (1954–1966)

After Independence, Ahmadu Bello, who was also by then the Vice-President of the World Islamic Congress, conducted a vigorous campaign of religious tours throughout the North, on behalf of Islam. The ecumenical spirit he had shown before independence disappeared and he

80 Women who sought new political and social roles for women also encountered difficulties in other parts of the country where, although they had the vote, they had much discrimination to overcome. cf. S. Ojewusi, *Speaking for Nigerian Women*, 10–11.

81 According to the organization's handbook, Ahmadu Bello threw his weight behind the initiative to found the JMA, donated a building to serve as the group's headquarters and gave a donation of 500 pounds. cf. Handbook of *Jam'iyyar Matan Arewa: The Struggle of Women before and after Beijing: The Way Forward*, 1999. However, a contrary reaction is expressed by one of the founding women who writes that the Premier didn't give his blessing for a long time since he feared, as he had with the NCWS, that they were going to ask for the franchise. cf. L. Adamu, *Hafsatu Ahmadu Bello,* 70, with reference to an interview the author conducted with Astajam Akilu, a founding member of JMA.

82 L. Adamu, *Hafsatu Ahmadu Bello*, 70.

saw himself destined to revive the empire that his ancestors had founded through the jihad and had lost to British occupation.

There was, at this time, not only division between Muslims and Christians but also wrangling among the Sufi Brotherhoods, the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya. Hence, Ahmadu Bello put great efforts into reviving interest and knowledge of the teachings of d'an Fodiyo. At his initiative, a full edition of d'an Fodiyo's major work, *Ihya al-Sunna*, was published in Cairo in 1957 and made widely available in Nigeria. He had the Hubbare (tombs of d'an Fodiyo, Asma'u and some other prominent jihadist leaders) restored. Under the Northern Region Ministry of Education he established a Committee for the Publication of Jihad Manuscripts in July 1962.[83] To unite the northern Muslims, Bello founded, in 1962, the *Jama'atu Nasril Islam* (JNI, Society for the Victory of Islam) to encourage Islamic literature in Nigerian vernacular languages, build mosques, and encourage Islamic centres of learning. Membership was open to all Muslims.[84] He undertook conversion campaigns throughout the North and by 1965 had even resolved to take this campaign to national level.[85]

Historians report that he used bribery, coercion and harassment as methods and that many non-Muslim influential Northerners, especially those with traditional chieftaincy titles, converted and superimposed Islamic names over their traditional ones to secure their positions.[86] In a speech to the World Muslim League in 1964 he spoke of how he had sacrificed his life to the cause of Islam, mentioned his success during his conversion campaigns, and added that 'this is only the beginning … I hope that when we clean Nigeria we will go further afield in Africa.'[87]

Such an assimilation of a religious campaign into politics was offensive to Christians and caused tension in the North. Faced with what they

83 Cf. J. Paden, *Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto*, Hudahuda Publishing Company, Zaria 1986, 551–552.
84 J. Paden, *Ahmadu Bello*, 549.
85 J. Paden, *Ahmadu Bello*, 566–569.
86 Cf. M. Hiskett, *The Course*, 120.
87 Text of his full speech given in J. Paden, *Ahmadu Bello*, 539–541.

perceived as a common danger, in 1964 Catholics and Protestants came together to form the Northern Christian Association (NCA). However, this association was formed within the framework of the NPC and even had the blessing of Ahmadu Bello at its foundation. Hence, the goal of checking the political and religious drive of the Muslim ruling class, represented by the NPC and its leader Ahmadu Bello, was very obviously a dead issue. The NCA moved its headquarters from Jos (a Christian centre) to Kaduna, the power base of the NPC. Many people felt that the Christian movement had been hijacked.[88]

On the 15th January 1966, the Sardauna and his senior wife, Hafsatu, were assassinated in a military coup and the military came into power. The Prime Minister, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, was also killed in Lagos a few days earlier. The President, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, an Igbo Christian, was out of the country at the time.[89] The first military Head of State, Major General Thomas Aguyi Ironsi, was killed by military in Abeokuta in July 1966 after only six months as leader of the country. General Yakubu Gowon, a Christian from the Middle Belt, took his place.[90]

88 M.H. Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power*, 50–54.
89 The coup of January 1966 was led by an Igbo Christian. The coup was aborted but the military still came to power. Major-General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi (an Igbo) who was Commander-in-Chief of the army took control. Various reasons for the coup are given. One is that the southern politicians realized that they could not achieve political power by the ballot and hence resorted to the bullet. The composition of the armed forces was instrumental in the coup. Most of the quota of personnel recruited from the North was from the Middle Belt and they were opposed to the NPC and the Hausa-Fulani rule. Most officers in the army were Igbos from the eastern region. In January 1966, it was mainly Igbo junior officers that overthrew the government and killed the Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa and Ahmadu Bello, Premier of the Northern region. Cf. I.U. Chibuzo Nwanaju, *Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria*, 152–155.
90 The July 1966 coup could be seen as an expression of the pent up feelings of northern officers within the military who were miffed by what they saw as General Ironsi's insensitivity to their losses suffered during the January coup. The north felt power slipping away and the ruling class urged the northern officers to do something about it. Thus, the Middle Belt non-commissioned officers and soldiers killed Major-General Ironsi and put Gowon in power as Head of State after this coup.

Islamic and Christian 'ecumenical' efforts during Military rule 1966–1979

The civil war broke out in the eastern states in 1967 and lasted until 1970.[91] In 1967, the military Head of State, Yakubu Gowon, a Northern Christian from the Middle Belt, fragmented the various regions into states so as to correct the imbalance in power that was the complaint of the minority groups in the country. The Northern Region was divided into six states.

The fragmentation of the Northern Region as well as the instability of the country caused largely by a quest for power and for what is popularly called the 'national cake' which by the early 1970s had greatly grown due to the finding of oil, had a great impact on Muslim politics. There was a shift from a regional to a national perspective, and national Muslim organizations began to replace regional structures in significance. The Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (SCIA) was set up in 1977 as an umbrella for the unity of all Muslim groups in Nigeria. However, according to Kukah, it was very much controlled by the Northern ruling class and the Sultan of Sokoto was in control of both the JNI and the SCIA.[92] A more successful effort at Muslim unity in the North was to be established in 1986 under the Council of *'Ulama'*.

Women in the north did not form part of either the JNI or the SCIA but in the southern parts of the country the women's wing of the JNI actively promoted Islamic behaviour.

Power was again in the North but it was in the hands of the *talakawa*, the ruled, rather than the rulers. Cf. M.H. Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power*, 39–41; I.U. Chibuzo Nwanaju, *Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria*, 152–155.

91 Many factors were in play in the civil war in Nigeria and the event has been well documented. O. Nnoli lists some of the reasons for the war: the insecurity of the Igbo ethnic group throughout the socio-economic and political competition with other ethnic groups; the politicization of the army and the militarization of politics; threats by various ethnic groups to secede; the increased importance of oil production. Cf. O. Nnoli, *Ethnicity and Development in Nigeria*, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., Aldershot, England 1995, 121.

92 M.H. Kukah, *Religion, Power and Politics*, 48.

The division into states as well as the policies of the Gowon regime in terms of takeover of mission schools, the expulsion of missionaries and the lack of visas to missionaries, also had a great impact on what might be called Christian politics at a national level. The perception of Islam as a common enemy was increasing among Christians nationwide.[93] By this time, the Northern Christian Association (NCA) had died.[94]

Already in the south there existed a Protestant ecumenical body called the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), which consisted principally of the mainstream churches (Baptists, Anglicans, Methodists, and Presbyterians). In 1976, the CCN together with the Catholic Church and some evangelical churches came together in the Catholic Secretariat in Lagos and decided to form one central body for all Christians mainly to safeguard the interests of Christians in dealing with the government. After a series of meetings, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) was formed.[95]

93 Cf. R. Hickey, 'Ecumenism Beneath the Cross in Africa', in *AFER*, n. 26/3, 1984, (156–170), 160

94 Kukah believes that the NCA died with the death of Ahmadu Bello in 1966, an indication for Kukah that the NCA was hijacked by the NPC and did not have Christian concerns as a priority. For others the NCA died simply because, with the creation of new states by the Gowon military administration in 1967 and the preoccupation with the civil war, many of the leaders and prominent members of the NCA went back to their states of origin. Cf. M.H. Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power*, 54; M. Man-oso Ndagoso, *Christian Unity in the Quest for Evangelization in Nigeria*, 62.

95 The objectives of CAN were: to serve as a vehicle for Christian unity; to promote understanding, peace and unity among the various peoples and strata of society in Nigeria through the propagation of the Gospel; to act as a liaison committee by means of which its member-churches can consult together and when necessary make common statements and take common actions; to be a watch-dog of the spiritual and moral welfare of the nation. cf. *Constitution of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)*, V OBJECTIVES, effective date 22nd November 1991 (revised version).

The Gowon regime was overthrown on the 29th July 1975 by another Northerner, this time a Muslim, General Muhammad Murtala.[96] The setting up of the Constitution Drafting Committee in 1976 was part of the efforts of the Murtala regime to pursue the programme of the return to civilian rule. This committee consisted of fifty men; no woman was included.

Murtala was killed in a coup six months later and the country was headed by General Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba Christian, from February 1976 until October 1979. Under Obasanjo, a Constitution Review Committee was appointed, consisting of approximately two hundred and fifty members, five of whom were women.

It was as the Constitutions were being reviewed in 1976 in preparation for return to civilian rule that the status of *shari 'a* in the Constitutions and the 1960 Penal Code instead of the full *shari 'a* implementation were first challenged. The argument put forward by Muslims was basically why should the *shari 'a* be subject to the supremacy of the Constitutions through a hierarchical legal system which has as its source a western and Christian influence and why should Muslims continue to accept a Penal Code which adjudicated *shari 'a* criminal code according to western values.

In 1978, the pro-*shari 'a* group demanded a federal *Shari 'a* Court of Appeal as an intermediate court between the State *Shari 'a* Courts and the Supreme Court of Nigeria as well as a *Shari 'a* Court of Appeal in each state of the federation that desired it. The compromise that was reached was that three judges learned in Islamic Law would sit in the Federal Court of Appeal on appeals coming from the State *Shari 'a* Courts of Appeal. Provision was made for any state that wanted it to establish *Shari 'a* Courts after passing the necessary motion in the legislature.

96 According to Kukah, under Gowon, some of the leaders in the new states created in the north had consolidated their position and were a threat to the Muslim ruling class. Thus, the ruling class turned to the Islamic faith and to the media, banking and educational institutions established by Ahmadu Bello to retain their claims as defenders of Islam and the North. By 1975, according to Kukah, the idea of one north was dead. Cf. M.H. Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power*, 39–42, chap. 3.

These *Shari 'a* Courts as also the Area or Native courts were subject to the supremacy of the constitution.

Nigeria's Second Republic 1979–1983

As the country prepared for a return to civilian rule in 1979, after thirteen years of military rule, it was for the northern ruling class, according to Kukah, a time to seek the preservation of the primacy of the North and its values.[97] It therefore became important to grant women the right to vote. Sheikh Abubakar Mahmud Gumi[98], who had previously said that women shouldn't vote or be voted for as politics was not a suitable activity for women, now mobilized women to vote for Shehu Shagari of the NPN (National Party of Nigeria, which evolved from the NPC) saying it was part of their jihad duty to do so. Thus, in 1976, under Obasanjo's military rule, women in northern Nigeria were enfranchised and were able to vote for the first time in the 1979 elections. In many places, separate voting booths were arranged for the women so that the sexes did not have to intermingle.

The NPN came to power nationally with Alhaji Shehu Shagari as Executive President. Three women were appointed into ministerial offices at federal level, three women formed part of the four hundred and seventy (470) member House of Representatives, and one woman was a member of the ninety-six member senate.

However, in Kano state, the People's Redemption Party (PRP), which evolved from NEPU, won an overwhelming majority, and it is widely believed that this was thanks to the women's vote, women voting for PRP because they believed this was the party that most supported them. While in the '50s and '60s Aminu Kano and Isa Wali were quite alone as politicians in advocating for women, 'by the late 1970s and 80s the subject

97 M.H. Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power*, 146.

98 Gumi, a devout Muslim scholar and Islamic teacher, had been appointed as Grand Khadi in the Northern Region in 1962 and had worked closely with Ahmadu Bello during the years of the First Republic and before. After Bello's death, Gumi was to create, unintentionally, a deep division among the *Umma*.

had become part of the party platform of the PRP and was advocated by a wide spectrum of its members.'[99] The PRP was only four years in office due to a military coup in 1983, and hence their time was too short to truly allow qualified women emerge to fulfil public roles effectively.

Military Rule 1983–1999

Nigeria moved from the civilian Second Republic (1979–1983) to yet another era of military government, first under General Mohammadu Buhari (Dec. 1983–Aug. 1985), then under General Ibrahim Babangida (Aug. 1985–Aug. 1993), then a short interim civilian government under Ernest Shonekan, then military rule under General Sani Abacha (Nov. 1993–June 1998), and again under General Abdulsalam Abubakar (June 1998–May 1999) before returning to civilian rule which has lasted until the present day. Each of these military heads of state was a Northern Muslim.

During the years of military rule, religion increasingly became a platform for socio-political articulation across the country. During all the military regimes, women were excluded from the top levels of government since the Supreme Military Council and the Armed Forces Ruling Councils had no women representatives.

The Buhari-Idiagbon military administration (1983–1985) instituted a War Against Indiscipline (WAI) to wipe out the twin evils of corruption and the lack of discipline in the civilian population, which they saw as the prime causes of the Nigerian economic and political crises.[100]

Babangida overthrew Buhari in 1985. With the drop in the price of oil on the international market in the early 1980s Nigeria entered a deep recession from which it has still not recovered. There was also a rise in inflation, huge price increases and the beginning of the debt-repayment

99 B. Callaway, 'The Role of Women', 148.

100 For an overview of how women were targeted during this period, see H.J. Abdullah, 'Religious Revivalism, Human Rights Activism and the Struggle for Women's Rights in Nigeria' in A.A. An-Na'im, ed., *Cultural Transformation and Human Rights in Africa*, Zed Books Ltd., 2002, (151–191), 173.

crisis which many Third World countries, including Nigeria, suffered. To stem the tide of economic decline and the social decay that went with it, Babangida accepted a loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and in 1986 he instituted the International Monetary Fund and World Bank-inspired structural adjustment programme (SAP). Among the many negative social effects of SAP were increased unemployment and reductions in already inadequate health, education and other social services. As is usually the case in times of crisis, women, in all socioeconomic strata except for the very rich, disproportionately bore both the social and economic costs of SAP.

An important factor in Muslim-Christian relations in the country which sparked off a lot of controversy and tension during the Babangida regime relates to the membership of Nigeria in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Nigeria was a member of the OIC since 1971, but only with observer status. In 1985 it came into the open through an article in the Guardian Newspaper that Nigeria had upgraded its status to full membership.[101] Babangida explained that Nigeria's membership guaranteed the country interest-free loans. Christians expressed reservations about this saying such loans would tie the country to the purse strings of Islamic countries. The JNI argued that calling for the withdrawal of Nigeria as a full member was part of the 'insensitivity of Christians towards matters that concern Muslims ... if Nigeria withdraws from the OIC, it will have to withdraw diplomatic relations with the Vatican'.[102]

Babangida annulled the results of the June 1993 elections in which Alhaji Moshood Abiola, a Yoruba Muslim from the south, had won, and instead handed over to an unelected civilian president, Ernest Shonekan, a Yoruba Christian, two months later. Shonekan was overthrown in November 1993 by General Sani Abacha whose regime differed little from that of Babangida as regards his political and economic programmes. If anything, he was more brutal and repressive. Abacha died under suspicious circumstances in 1998. He was replaced by General Abdulsalami

101 *The Guardian* newspaper, 4th February 1985.

102 Press Statement of JNI, 'The Position of Muslims with regard to OIC', *New Nigerian* newspaper, 20th March 1986.

Abubakar, the then Minister of Defence, who in 1999 handed over to a civilian government, headed after general election by Olusegun Obasanjo, who was re-elected for a second mandate in 2003.

Civilian Government of Olusegun Obasanjo (from May 1999)

Shortly after the transition to civil rule in 1999, instead of allowing the *shari 'a* question to continue as a national debate, twelve Northern State Governors, beginning with Ahmed Sani Yerima, the Governor of Zamfara State, simply announced the adoption of the *Shari 'a* legal system.[103] Thus, they expanded the jurisdiction of the *Shari 'a* Court of Appeal Law from the family and personal status laws to other areas, including criminal laws.[104] In the northern states where Muslims are in the majority, the adoption of the legal system was well received, although initially there was a greatly exaggerated fervour to implement it in ways that fuelled criticism at both national and international level. Focus in the, so-called, *shari 'a* states, was put on the poor and vulnerable, including women, and on the administration of *hudud* punishments.

For Christians, the mere mention of *shari 'a* conjured up images of the creeping Islamization of Nigeria and they recalled times before Independence beginning with the jihad of d'an Fodiyo when non-Muslims

103 Governor Ahmed Sani Yerima made his announcement on the 27th October 1999. *Shari 'a* Law officially took effect in Zamfara (27th Jan. 2000); Niger (May 2000), Bauchi (June 2001), Jigawa (during 2000), Kano (November 2000), Kebbi (December 2000), Sokoto (January 2001), Yobe (April 2001), shortly followed by Borno, Katsina and Gombe.

104 After 2000, the area courts in these northern states disappeared and in their place were put *Shari 'a* courts and customary courts, with Upper *Shari 'a* Courts and Higher *Shari 'a* courts. These are to adjudicate according to the *Shari 'a*. Since the Constitution states that criminal law must be codified, the *Shari 'a* Court laws of most of the new *shari 'a* states contain a provision that the state legislator shall enact a criminal code and a code of criminal procedure. The new *Shari 'a* Courts have jurisdiction in all civil litigations if both parties are Muslim and in criminal proceedings if the accused is a Muslim. Non-Muslims are free to choose *shari 'a* jurisdiction in a proceeding. Cf. R. Peters, *Islamic Criminal Law*, 16–17.

were subject to the rule and tyranny of the Muslim rulers in the Northern region. Thus, in those states where there is a strong Christian presence, such as in Kaduna, there were demonstrations both anti and pro-*shari 'a*, followed by violent confrontations.[105]

The fact that there were ethnic crises in so many other parts of the country around the same time shows the overall instability in the country after the long and oppressive reign of the military.[106] The *shari 'a* crisis is just one among many crises but in Northern Nigeria all crises tend to be given a religious colouring. The *shari 'a* must be seen within the context of people's yearning for a more egalitarian and just society. Many ordinary Muslims, men and women, literate as well as illiterate, believe that *Shari 'a* is the only way to ensure social justice and solve their current problems.

Religious Revivalism since Independence in 1960

Various Strands of Islamic Revivalism

Islamic revivalist movements began to enter national consciousness from the mid-1970s. Hussaina Abdullah identifies three strands that characterize the Islamic movement in Nigeria: political, moderate and radical.[107]

105 When Kaduna brought the matter to the State House of Assembly it resulted in massive riots in Feb. and May 2000. Hence the government adopted a triple legal system that made provision for full *Shari 'a* law, Customary Law and English Common Law. Basically northern Kaduna is under *shari 'a* law, while the southern part which is predominantly Christian is not *shari 'a* territory. This has resulted in a ghettoization of the city of Kaduna, Muslims and Christians going so far as to exchange houses so as to be in 'their own part' of the city.

106 When Obasanjo's civilian administration came into power in 1999, it was greeted with the Amuleri-Aguleri crisis in the South-East; the Ijaw crisis in the South-South; the Tiv-Jukun crisis in the Northeast; the OPC-Hausa and the Ife-Modakeke crises in the South-West; the *Shari'a* crisis in the North-North and the Kaje-Ikulu crisis in the North-South. The military were invited to maintain order in over seven states of the federation.

107 H.J. Abdullah, 'Religious Revivalism', 157–161.

a) Political Islam

Political Islam is represented in the JNI and the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (SCIA). The objective of this strand of Islam was the political control of the state and its apparatuses, but to do this they often whipped up religious sentiments and thus won the support of many of the more radical or moderate Islamic strands. A particular point on which they had the support of the different strands of Islam was on the *shari'a* issue. The need for mass support led them to embrace a strong position in the 1978 and 1988 Constituent Assembly debates over the application of *shari'a* in the country and the call for a Federal *Shari'a* Court of Appeal. Even more so, the increased implementation of the *shari'a* legal system in twelve northern states after 1999 was a move of political Islam.

Abdullah considers the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), founded in 1985, as representative of political Islam.[108] This is, however, a matter of debate. The objective of FOMWAN leaders is not the political control of the state but rather a use of their relationship with Muslim politicians and of the teachings of the moderate strand of Islam to achieve greater respect for the rights of women. This is discussed in more detail in chapter five.

b) Moderate Islam

The moderate strand Abdullah identifies as represented by the Yan 'Izala Movement and its patron, Sheikh Abubakar Mahmud Gumi who spoke in the mosque and on radio against the Sufi Brotherhoods and said they were inimical to Islam. He also criticized many of the abuses of the Emirs and the Darika leaders as well as the teachings of many popular scholars. In 1970, he wrote a series of articles in the weekly Hausa newspaper, *Gaskiya ta fi Kwabo*, explaining the correct Islamic perspective on various issues and he spoke against social habits which were contrary to Islam but popular among the people. Among these habits were the improper behaviour of women, in terms of dress and mixing with the opposite sex as well as the

108 H.J. Abdullah, 'Religious Revivalism', 157.

improper treatment of women in terms of easy divorce, forced marriage and lack of education. He wrote a book in Arabic which was published in 1972, *Al-aqidat al-sahiha bi muwafaqat al-shari'ah* (The Right Belief Based on the *Shari'a*), and which caused, in his own words, 'tremendous controversy and uproar'.[109]

Gumi himself claims that he did not found, or even intend to found, a rival Islamic movement. However, his teachings and anti-Sufism inspired some of his followers, especially Isma'ila Idris, to found at Jos in 1978, a rigorist and militant movement, fully committed to Wahhabi ideology, called *Jama'at Izalat al-Bid'a wa Iqamat al-Sunna* (The Society for the Elimination of Innovations and the Establishment of the Sunna), more commonly known as Yan Izala. Isma'ila Idris called for the return to orthodox Islam, based on the true teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah. He also condemned the traditional rulers for their corruption. Since the Yan Izala was opposed to the Sufi Brotherhoods and the Muslim Establishment, many of its members came from the urban poor, a social category that swelled in the 1980s and '90s as the economic crisis took its toll in Nigeria.

The Council of *'Ulama'* represents the body of what might be called moderate Islam in Northern Nigeria today. This was founded in 1986. After a 2-day meeting of leaders of the various Islamic factions in the North, the *Council of 'Ulama'* emerged to liaise with the government on the position of Muslims.[110] No woman is a member of the Council of *'Ulama'*.

109 A. Gumi – I.A. Tsiga, *Where I Stand*, 140–141.

110 Present at the meeting which was held in ABU Zaria were Dahiru Bauchi (leader of the Tijaniyya and one of the most bitter critics of Gumi and the Yan Izala), Nasiru Kabara (leader of the Qadiriyya), Abubakar Gumi, leaders of the Yan Izala and representatives of the traditional ruling class. The Islamic Movement, seen below as a form of radical Islam, was not invited to the meeting. Cf. M.H. Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power*, 221.

c) Radical Islam

The more radical strand of Islam which grew during this period is inspired by the Iranian model of government. The most prominent members of this group are drawn from the Islamic Movement, which is popularly known as the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in April 1980 by Mallam Ibrahim El-Zakzaky.[111]

The Islamic Movement does not have a separate women's section; men and women meet to learn about Islam together, women sitting to one side or behind the men. According to El-Zakzaky and his wife Zeenah, the Movement was criticized at the beginning, as was d'an Fodiyo, for bringing women and men together.[112] The women who are members of the Islamic Movement cover their feet with stockings and they use a long chador of any colour. They do not cover their face since 'Allah said to expose only the face and hands.'[113] The Movement looks to Iran as exemplary of women's rights being respected. In the words of Hajiya Zeenah El-Zakzaky: 'Iran is an example. Women are better there than anywhere! In Iran it is men who must claim their rights!'[114]

111 El-Zakzaky's Movement has a website at www.islamicmovement.org. Many of the early members of the Islamic Movement were university students as in the early '80s the movement existed only in university campuses. These members continued after graduation. By the '90s the movement existed in towns and villages. In the 2000s it has greatly expanded, e.g. there is a poet's forum, films are produced, publications are numerous, the website makes its ideas known, etc. The Movement also has about 200 primary schools and 3 secondary schools.

112 Interview I conducted with Mallam Ibrahim and Hajiya Zeenah El-Zakzaky, 17th May 2005, Zaria. Zeenah is El-Zakzaky's only wife. They have been married since 1984.

113 Hajiya Zeenah El-Zakzaky, interview, 17th May 2005, Zaria.

114 Hajiya Zeenah El-Zakzaky, interview, 17th May 2005, Zaria; She studied in Iran from 1982–1984.

Various Strands of Christian Revivalism

A loss of faith in secular authorities in the face of economic decline and military dictatorship also gave rise to Christian revivalism seen particularly in the growth of Pentecostal, Evangelical and African Instituted Churches (AICs) as well as in the charismatic and born-again movements within the mainline churches.[115]

Pentecostal churches, already existing in Nigeria since the 1920s, flourished after the '60s and even more so after the '80s. The more recent movements such as the Deeper Life Bible Church, established in the '70s, and the Church of God Mission usually refer to themselves as new Pentecostal or charismatic churches. They preach a theology of prosperity and draw many young, university educated people who place a high premium on material success. Generally they place particular emphasis on the inerrancy of the Bible and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. They emphasize miracles, faith healings, speaking in tongues, and prosperity of all kinds. The American Pentecostal movement has a great influence not only on the growth of these churches but also on their mode of evangelism. Preachers are invited from the USA and televangelism is rampant.

Many African Instituted (or Independent) Churches (AIC) were established in the eastern and western parts of the country by Nigerians who separated from the mainline churches in an attempt to express Christianity in a form that was free from western influence. A puritan and fundamentalist expression of Christianity would sometimes occur within the boundaries of mainline denominations challenging the regnant affirmations and seeking to enlarge the role of the Holy Spirit within their faith and practices. These became an African form of Pentecostal or Evangelical churches. In general, these churches draw their membership from the poorer, less educated sectors of society. Membership in these churches has greatly increased since the '80s just as their presence in Northern Nigeria

115 For an overview of the charismatic movements in the Catholic and other mainline churches, see M.A. Ojo, 'The Contextual Significance of the Charismatic Movements in Independent Nigeria' in *Africa*, Journal of the International African Institute, vol. 58, n. 2, 1988, 175–192.

also greatly increased since this time. These churches include, among others, the Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S), Church of the Lord (Aladura) and the Christ Apostolic Church. These are Spiritual/Prophet-Healing churches, and are generally identified by the use of white garments with coloured sashes signifying different degrees of ordination within the church.[116]

Muslim-Christian Conflict in Nigeria

Identification with a religious community has intensified since the 1980s together with an intensified awareness of membership of and identification with an ethnic community. As identification with a religious or ethnic community has increased, so too has conflict between the various communities or groups. Thus, ethnic as well as religious conflicts, the latter particularly between Christians and Muslims, increased in Nigeria during the '80s with outbursts of violence occurring for what are often seemingly insignificant reasons at any time and in any place even until today.[117]

Most studies and reports have suggested multidimensional remote causes, as opposed to the immediate sparks, for the conflicts experienced

116 A good overview of the African Instituted Churches is given in O.U. Kalu, ed., *African Christianity: An African Story,* Dept. of Church History, University of Pretoria, Pretoria 2005, especially chapters 10, 11, 12, 15. See also A.H. Anderson, 'Types and Butterflies. African Initiated Churches and European Typologies' in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 25, n. 3, 2001, 107–113.

117 For a list of some of the inter-religious, intra-religious and ethnic-religious conflicts which have occurred in Northern Nigeria since the 1980s, see Appendix n.1. For further details on the riots and their immediate causes as well as their consequences, see J. Walsh, 'Religious Riots'; F. Okoye, ed., *Victims – Impact of Religious and Ethnic Conflicts on Women and Children in Northern Nigeria*, Human Rights Monitor, Kaduna 2000; E. Alemika – F. Okoye, ed., *Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Democracy*; J.H. Boer, *Nigeria's Decades of Blood*: *Studies in Christian and Muslim Relations*, Stream Christian Publishers, Plateau State, Nigeria 2003; T.K. Toure, *Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Kaduna State*, Human Rights Monitor, Kaduna 2003.

in Northern Nigeria, primarily that the conflicts are generated as a consequence of the intermingling of political, ethnic and socio-economic factors. However, while attention must be given to these non-religious factors, attention must also be paid to the religious factors.

Non-Religious Factors

a) Political and Historical Factors

Many people are convinced that the conflicts are more political than religious. Essentially, be it for the benefit of Christian politicians or of Muslim politicians, there is a political manipulation of religion since it is the best card politicians can use to get the support of the masses. Christians see the conflicts as strategies by the traditional Hausa-Fulani Muslim ruling class to distract people from the corrupt practices of the politicians. Muslims in their turn see Christians as the aggressors and claim that the politicization of CAN ushered in violence in Northern Nigeria.

The British colonial activities in the north are a contributing factor in today's ethnic and religious crisis. The British allowed the northern ruling class control even over non-Muslim ethnic groups who had until then been independent groups. The colonial administration restricted Christian missionary activities to the minority tribes who thus gained access to education and employment, identified themselves with Christianity, and began to assert their right to political power, hence threatening the Muslim domination of the region. Colonialism introduced a Western system of government, legislation and civilization which many Muslims claim is at odds with the social and cultural norms of Islam. The identification of the many minority tribes with Christianity led to their being identified by many Muslims as Westerners and thus as their enemies.

The thorny issue of membership of Nigeria in the OIC, brought to light during the Babangida administration, continues to be a cause of conflict. Muslims insist that Nigeria has to belong to the OIC while Christians insist that Nigeria is not an Islamic state. The government's seeming official support for Islam is perceived by Christians as operating

to advance the political and bureaucratic interest of the Hausa/Fulani elites.

b) Socio-Economic Factors

The conflicts are also rooted in the structural injustice and socio-economic poverty prevalent in Northern Nigeria. Both the Muslim and Christian elites are seen to engineer the conflicts by taking advantage of the economic deprivation of their people. When people are asked what they are fighting about, they inevitably turn to questions of one group having been given a chieftaincy title or some other privilege while their own group was not. Such positions imply access to government resources.

In Kano, for example, there is competition over who monopolizes the trade. After the civil war, Igbo traders returned to their states of origin and the Hausa-Fulani established themselves in providing services originally controlled by the Igbos. When the Igbos returned, they gradually began to monopolize once again the trade in stationery, books, pharmaceuticals, motor spare parts, and also began to venture into the textile trade, ousting the Hausa-Fulani. Thus animosity grew between the two groups.[118] In Jos, Plateau State, the so-called settlers, – the Igbos, Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani – control the transport system and the trade industry, and are seen by the indigenes as displacing them from their land and fashioning ways to create and expand their political frontiers for consolidating economic power. Again, it is a case of competition over access to socio-economic resources.[119]

118 For a report on the 2004 crisis in Kano see: *Civil Society Community Newsletter*, n. 26 'Kano Genocide' and n. 27 'Genocide ... More tales of woes: Kano still tense with fear', June and July 2004, Kano; 'Forty-eight hours of Murder', in *Insider Weekly* magazine, n. 21, May 24th 2004, 28–30.

119 For an overview of the Jos Crises see U. dan Fulani – S. Fwatshak, 'Briefing: The September 2001 Events in Jos, Nigeria' in *African Affairs* (2002), n. 101, 243–255; See also: *Ethnic and Religious Rights* magazine, Human Rights Monitor, Kaduna, Nov. 2001, vol. 2, n. 7; 'Death Toll as Jos Rises', *Daily Champion* newspaper, 10th September 2001; 'Jos Carnage – How and why it began: Battle for political and economic control', *Weekly Trust* newspaper, 14thSeptember 2001; 'Mayhem in the Home of Peace', *Pinnacle* magazine, Jos, 31st September 2001, 1–17; 'Blood Bath on the Plateau', *Tell* magazine, n. 39, 24th September 2001; 'Nigeria, Jos: A city Torn Apart', *Human Rights Watch* magazine, vol. 13, n. 9, 1–25.

The high rate of unemployment is also seen as a factor which contributes to the violence. Most of those who engage directly in the rioting are unemployed and illiterate youths. The urchins who participate in rioting may not know its initial cause but many of them benefit through carting away the belongings of those who flee for their lives. The impression that is being created in them, with every passing conflict, is that it is an opportunity for unhampered looting.

The ignorance of the masses, which also results from the poverty in the region, is taken full advantage of by those who are looking for control, by playing on their religious sentiments. The socio-economic poverty as well as years of government instability and corruption has led the people to become detached from the political process in favour of an alternative platform which religion provides. The apathy of people to politics and their preference for religious activism somewhat forces politicians to play the religious card to win support.

c) Ethnicity

Others see ethnicity as the major problem. Ethnicity as a source of conflict results from long and persistent periods of domination and unfair treatment by the politically dominant ethnic groups. The quest for domination and/or liberation from such domination is usually based on the distribution of and access to scarce resources. Religion only provides the required platform for the ethnic groups.

In Northern Nigeria, ethnicity is always tied to religion. The majority of the non-Muslim ethnic groups in the North are Christians, whereas the Muslims are usually Hausa-Fulani. When there is any quarrel between a non-Hausa and a Hausa, both look to their religion for support. Thus, what begins as a tribal misunderstanding ends up with a religious colouring. People are not fighting each other because they differ in language,

culture or religious belief but because people are trying to safeguard the scarce resources for their own group.

Where politicians seek to mobilize people's support the resort to ethnicity is very attractive; the political platform becomes focused around ethnic groups using assumed and actual ethnic grievances as their manifestos. The ethnic question is very often expressed in terms of indigene-settler status and rights. In Plateau State, Christians will claim that most Muslims are settlers and must therefore respect the culture and practice of the indigenes, mostly Christian.[120] In Kano, Muslims will claim that they are the indigenes and the Christian population is settler, hence the latter must respect the culture and practice of the indigene. In southern Kaduna, the indigene population has known and is no longer prepared to accept the domination of the indigene population of the northern part of the state, the Hausa-Fulani.

Religious Factors

a) The Extension of the *Shari 'a* Legal System

Religious factors certainly exist in these conflicts, but it is always difficult to ascertain where religion begins and where other factors take over, or where other factors end and religion takes over.

The arguments over the implementation of the *shari 'a* reveal the complexity involved in recent conflicts.[121] While some people, mostly Christians, dismiss the *shari 'a* as a political tool that Muslims engage to

120 See the Report of the Plateau Peace Conference (Jos) held in October 2004 in *Ethnic and Religious Rights* magazine, Nov. 2004, vol. 3, n. 17.

121 In February and May 2000, the crises which resulted from the introduction of the *shari 'a* as a legislative penal code affected a great many towns and villages of Kaduna. Cf. Report of James Wuye, Interfaith Mediation Centre in *National Concord* magazine, 26th May 2000; *Ethnic and Religious Rights* magazine, Sept. 2001, vol. 2, n. 6, 20–25; J.H. Boer, *Nigeria's Decades of Blood* ..., 63–79; Other riots directly related to the implementation of the *shari 'a* were in Bauchi 2001, when a bus driver insisted on segregated male-female transport in a bus: Cf. *Ethnic and Religious Rights* magazine, vol. 3, n. 9, April 2002, 21.

negotiate their domination, the majority of Muslims do not see it that way. For the common Muslim man or woman in Northern Nigeria, the extended and full application of the *shari 'a* legal system is their duty as Muslims, their right as Nigerian citizens, and most importantly, it is the focus of all their hopes for an escape from the socio-economic poverty they endure. The Christian opposition to it is primarily based on the fear of being dominated once again by the Muslim population and being suppressed or even annihilated as minority ethnic groups and as Christians. Thus, it is a fear of being denied not only the right to practice the Christian religion freely, but also to have access to the economic and social benefits of the state. Hence, if one is analyzing a crisis that has to do with *Shari 'a*, one cannot for certain maintain whether it is purely religious or political.

Other crises in the North since 2000 may not necessarily be linked to the *shari 'a* issue, but the emotions this issue has evoked have certainly contributed to the ferocity of the conflicts.[122]

b) Religious Fundamentalism

Some Muslim and Christian religious leaders have contributed to the conflicts by preaching in a derogatory and inflammatory way about the other religion. People, whose ability to have their own opinion is not well developed, believe that what their preachers say defines the situation. The practice of blocking off roads on Fridays or on Sundays and of mounting

122 Conflicts since the extended implementation of the *shari 'a* in 2000, not directly related to the *shari 'a* but which were Muslim versus Christian in character, and in which the *shari 'a* issue is somehow inserted, include: the sporadic violence in Bauchi State from 2001 to 2006, in Jos city and Plateau State from 2001 to 2004; in Kano in October 2001 following the September 11th bombing of the World Trade Centre, and again in May 2004 when Muslims staged a protest, with permission from the Governor, against the Yelwa-Shendam, Plateau, killings and took their revenge on Christians in the city; in Kaduna in 2002 as a reaction to a journalist's derogatory remarks against Muhammad during the Miss World contest being hosted in Abuja. Cf. 'The Miss World Riots – Continued Impunity for Killings in Kaduna', *Human Rights Watch* magazine, July 2003, vol. 15, n. 13.

loudspeakers outside mosques and churches to make provocative statements and antagonize the other religious community is now a common phenomenon. Thus, religious bigotry, fundamentalism and spiritual arrogance increase. Ignorance combined with believing the other religion is a threat gives rise to a conflict for supremacy.

c) Global Influence of Islamic Revivalism

Some believe that Islamist and fundamentalist attitudes towards religion in Nigeria began after the Iranian revolution and have developed in concordance with the global strengthening of Islamist trends. Such trends entered the universities in the 1980s where it became common to see 'Islam Only' banners. Diplomatic relationships with Muslim majority states such as Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Libya increased as did the supply of funds to build mosques and Islamic centres.

Women's participation in the conflicts

In some of the riots, women's actions contributed to or were used as the immediate causes of the violence.[123] It must be admitted that women in

123 The immediate cause of the Kafanchan riot in 1987 was the call to attack made by a female Muslim student, Aisha Umaru. In Kano 1991, women of the evangelical churches were very much involved in indirectly provoking Muslims through the distribution of pamphlets announcing a crusade by a Christian preacher, Reinhard Bonnke, the immediate cause of the riots. In 1994 some of the rumors which were circulating were that the wife of Akaluka, an Igbo man who was beheaded in prison and whose head was paraded around the city of Kano before Muslims began to attack Christians, used pages of the Qur'an as toilet paper. The immediate cause of the riots in Kano in 1999 was the killing of an innocent Muslim woman in Oyo state who, already housebound by purdah, was doubly bound by the Oro festival which women are forbidden to witness. Because she went out in the evening and was seen by those celebrating the festival, she and other Muslims were killed and when their bodies were taken to Kano, the Christians there suffered a revenge attack. The immediate cause of the riot in Tafawa Balewa, Bauchi, in 1994 was the peace protest organized by the Sayawa (Christian) women in opposition to the imposition of a Fulani (Muslim) man to a government position in representation of a Sayawa locality. The immediate cause of the Jos 2001 riot was a woman disturbing Muslim men at prayer. The tension preceding the *shari 'a* riot in Kaduna in 2000 was intensified by the pro-*shari 'a* march in which Muslim women were very much represented. Women also participated in great numbers in the CAN anti-*shari 'a* march from which the riot actually began. The riots in Kaduna and Abuja in 2002 which resulted from the *This Day* newspaper report were somehow related to the sexuality of women in the context of the Miss World contest. The anti-*shari 'a* views of many Christians after the announcement of its extended implementation in Zamfara and other northern states were fuelled by the media coverage given to the victimization of the Muslim women accused of adultery and sentenced to stoning in the new *shari 'a* implementing states of Zamfara, Katsina and Sokoto.

Northern Nigeria, be they Muslim or Christian, identify with their religious and ethnic community and feel justified in asserting their beliefs and rights. They felt as strongly as the men about whatever immediate issue was at stake, be that the injustice of a government position given to someone from a minority tribe,[124] their opposition to or support of the extended *shari 'a* implementation,[125] their sensitivity to their religious book[126], their hunger for spiritual nourishment and their sense that they have a right to have this satisfied[127].

124 The Sayawa women of Tafawa Balewa protested because they were opposed to the idea of a party being organized for a Hausa commissioner they had not chosen and did not want, and which the Local Government Council (LGC) was taxing their husbands to fund. Women claim that neither they nor their husbands had been consulted on the decision made by the LGC Cf. Testimony of a woman in Tafawa Balewa who took part in the protest march and whose son was killed during the riot in F. Okoye, ed., *Victims*, 47.

125 The women who took part in the anti and pro-*shari 'a* protests in Kaduna felt as strongly as their male counterparts about the issue. Interview I conducted with Khadijah Tukur (Kaduna State Amirah of FOMWAN), 28th April 2004

126 The female Muslim student in Kafanchan was quite obviously as sensitive as any male Muslim to the Qur'an being misinterpreted or the Prophet being insulted.

127 Women from the Women's Fellowship of the evangelical churches printed pamphlets in English, Hausa and even in Arabic, and distributed them in the market and elsewhere throughout the city and state. Interview I conducted with Patricia Bagudu who had participated in the distribution of these pamphlets, 18th Sept 2004, Jos.

Unfortunately, women were also involved in the fighting itself in various ways. Some women report having taken a machete or other arm and killed their attackers in order to protect themselves, their children and their homes.[128] Others admit that they gathered stones to be thrown by the men or brought water and other refreshments to the men while they fought defending their area.[129]

There are reports of gallant roles played by women during the various crises. In Kano 1991, the Muslim woman politician and activist Hajiya Gambo Sawaba is reported to have protected a church building from being burnt by gathering some Muslim women to lie around the church and protect it from the Muslim arsonists.[130] Many women recount how they were saved from death by a neighbouring woman of the other religion who gave her and her children refuge in her house, offered her a Muslim hijab to conceal her religion as a form of protection, or prevented those on the rampage from destroying their neighbour's house or killing the occupants.

In all of the conflicts women suffered in one way or another, particularly the less educated women of the poorer classes in the high density areas of the cities.[131] Riots are not usually a case of groups of armed soldiers attacking each other. Rather it is a case of homes, businesses and

128 Women interviewed by Rebecca Dali: Cf. R. Dali, *Christian Muslim Conflict in Northern Nigeria and its effects on women: Case Study of Jos 2001 Conflict,* MA Thesis, Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN), Bukuru, Jos 2004, 92.

129 Interview I conducted with Rahila Lamgyang (staff member of the Baptist Seminary) Kaduna, 21st March 2005.

130 Geogory Nwakunor, 'Endsong for the matriarch: Sawaba political activist died at 72' in *The week* newspaper, Lagos, 29th October 2001, 7.

131 Cf. H. Abdu, 'Ethno-Religious Crisis in Kaduna: Impact on Women and Children' in F. Okoye – E.O. Alemika, ed., *Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Democracy*, 117–142; F. Okoye, ed., *Victims*; 'The Impact of Ethno-Religious Crisis on Nigerian Women', in *WRAPA* newsletter, Oct.–Dec. 2001, vol. 2, n. 4, 6–10; 'Revisiting Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Women Still Greatest Victims', in *WRAPA* newsletter, April – June 2004, vol. 5, n. 2, 3–7; 'Violent Conflicts and Women in Nigeria' in *Violence Watch*, January – March 2002, vol. 4, issue 1, 1–4.

religious houses being attacked. Hence, the whole population in that area, particularly those people found inside their homes, is vulnerable. Generally these are the women and children. Many women also trade in the markets where rioting is often highest. Whether more men or women lost their lives in the various crises in Northern Nigeria is unknown as so many of the dead were buried in mass graves and no statistics are available giving the number of dead according to gender.

Many women and children were imprisoned indiscriminately by police and soldiers after the riots and were subjected to various forms of brutality.[132] A great many women lost husbands and children and were left as the sole breadwinner.[133] The psychological trauma suffered by women who witnessed the slaughtering of their husbands can only be imagined.[134] In the refugee camps, displaced women and children make up the greatest part of the populations.[135]

The poverty following destructive riots is well known to women and has serious consequences on health and education. Farming, which is many rural women's major occupation and source of survival, is disrupted. Domestic animals, on which families depend for meat, eggs, milk as well as for sale, are killed. Crops on which many women depend for trading in the markets are destroyed. Mothers find themselves with

132 Testimonies of women who, sometimes together with their children, were imprisoned and maltreated by the police, simply because their husbands or male relatives who were suspected for their involvement in the riots were not to be found are given in F. Okoye, ed., *Victims*, 33–35.

133 The survey carried out by Human Rights Monitor after the 1994 riots in Tafawa Balewa, Bauchi State, showed that 85% of the women in the area lost between one and three family members and 70% of them lost between one and three children. 25% of the women who responded to the survey questionnaire had lost their homes while 50% reported partial destruction. Over 42% of the women reported that they were now solely responsible for the care of their family. F. Okoye, ed., *Victims*, 45–59.

134 Testimonies can be found in F. Okoye – E.O. Alemika, ed., *Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Democracy*, 140–142; *Tell* magazine, n. 11, March 15th 2004, 22–24.

135 Surveys on refugee camps show that women and children generally constitute about 75% of the population. See for example, H. Abdu, 'Ethno-Religious Crisis in Kaduna', 126.

insufficient food to give to their children. Many people, including women and children, are severely injured and remain physically handicapped thus becoming even more economically dependent with little option other than to resort to begging.

Conclusion

The conflicts today, as throughout Northern Nigerian history, are largely over access to political control and economic resources and are brought about by the efforts of one ethnic group to gain advantage over another. Politicians manipulate the religious factor to score political and socio-economic points. The common people are convinced that the solution to their socio-economic ills lies in their religion; this is particularly the case with Muslims who see the *shari'a* as not only their religious right and duty but also as their only hope for a better tomorrow. Women as well as men are concerned about the socio-economic poverty in the region and are equally concerned about finding a way to overcome such poverty. Throughout Nigerian history, religion has been an important factor in the access, or lack thereof, of women to political participation as well as to economic empowerment. Today, religion continues to have a determining influence on these questions for women.

CHAPTER 4

Development of a Secular Women's Movement in Nigeria with an Overview of Women's Primary Concerns

Development of the Women's Movement

In 1953 the National Women's Union, founded in 1947 by Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, the main organizer of the Egba women's protest, became the Federation of Nigerian Women's Societies (FNWS). This had the primary aim of bringing Nigerian women together to protect their rights under colonial rule and raise the general status of women to win equal opportunities with men. Most women's groups that affiliated with the FNWS were in the western and eastern parts of the country.

The FNWS became the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) in 1958, with the objectives of coordinating the activities of women's organizations in the country, creating unity among women and assisting women 'in their important roles as homemakers and nation's mothers.'[1] Initially the organization had little success in the North, even though the North was seen as a top priority when the organization was formed in 1958.

The NCWS is today recognised by the Federal Government as the umbrella NGO representing women's interests. It is organized at national and state level. All women's groups that want to be given valid recognition are expected to affiliate with the NCWS. The wife of the head of state is automatically patron of the NCWS.[2] As well as needing to maintain good relationships with whatever political party is in power, the NCWS

1 S. Ojewusi, *Speaking for Nigerian Women*, 20.
2 This in itself supposes that the Head of State will be male.

has been criticized because of its gender ideology which seems to reinforce patriarchy, a male establishment and traditional family patterns.

However, some challenges to family structures were made by the NCWS which led to Muslim women considering it a Christian-inspired movement which could not deal adequately with Muslim women's concerns. In 1985, the national NCWS Council challenged the constitutional law with respect to the dissolution of customary marriages. A man whose marriage was terminated could claim the marriage price back and thus leave the wife with nothing despite her contribution to the household for many years. She could only claim some money back on the basis of the number of children she had given birth to for the man. The Council proposed to the National Law Reform Commission that changes should be made allowing the divorced wife who had been married for ten years half of the man's property.[3] The Muslim women of the Muslim Sisters Organization (MSO) objected on the grounds that a man may have up to four wives.[4] A few months later, Muslim women's groups formed their own federation called FOMWAN (Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria), a separate umbrella-body which was not to register with the NCWS.

While FOMWAN refused to affiliate with the NCWS, many Muslim women are actively involved in it and many Muslim women's groups affiliate with both the NCWS and with FOMWAN. Christian women's faith-based groups are almost all affiliated with the NCWS.

3 Proposal published in *Newswatch* magazine, June 10th 1985.

4 B. Yusuf, 'Hausa-Fulani Women', 99–100: 'Perhaps the most offensive to Muslim women was the assumption that a man had only one wife: the proposal did not allow for a situation of his having up to four wives, most of whom had lived with him for ten or more years. If half a Muslim man's assets were awarded to one divorced wife (assuming the woman would ever receive the amount), it would result in adverse effects for the children and wives who remained in the family.'

State Feminism

In 1985, Nigeria, under military rule, ratified the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which had been formally proposed by the UN in 1979. Nigeria also ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR).

This required that appropriate government machinery to monitor and improve the status of women be established. Hence, from 1987 many women's programs and groups were founded and funded by the state. These were led by the wife of the Head of State or of some other high-ranking official.[5] It is to such organizations that people refer when they speak of state femocracy or state pseudofeminism which in Africa is very much linked to the First-Lady phenomenon.

In 1987, two years after the 3rd World Conference on Women held at Nairobi and one year after General Babangida had introduced the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) to overcome economic decline, his wife, Maryam Babangida, introduced the Better Life Programme for Rural Women (BLP). Mrs Babangida was the national coordinator while the wives of state governors headed the organization in their husband's area of jurisdiction; thus the prevailing societal image of women as appendages to male power was reinforced. The BLP helped to put women's issues on the national agenda and to increase awareness of women's issues nationwide but there was no significant improvement in women's standard of living. Although it was established to help rural women, it was the elite and educated women who most benefited from it.

Maryam Abacha launched her First Lady-headed women's initiative, the Family Support Program (FSP) in 1994. The objectives of the FSP included inculcating 'respect for womanhood without recourse to idiosyncrasies which may be alien to our established norms and traditions'.[6]

5 Abdullah refers to this as a form of Wifeism which served to reinforce patriarchy. cf. H.J. Abdullah, 'Wifeism and Activism', 209–225.

6 H.J. Abdullah, 'Religious Revivalism', 173–174.

Similar to the BLP, the elite-governed FSP had little concrete impact on the lives of rural and poor women.

In 1995, the year following the inauguration of the FSP, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare was established by the Federal Government.

In June 1998, Justice Fati Abubakar, wife of the Head of State Abdulsalami Abubakar, founded an NGO called WRAPA – Women's Rights Advancement & Protection Alternative. This NGO is today one of those most actively involved in defending women's rights within the *shari 'a* courts, and is also involved in a great many other women's rights issues.

The Nigerian Constitution requires legislative domestication of international conventions before they can be legally enforced.[7] Nigeria has not yet domesticated CEDAW; thus, observance of its provisions is hindered.

In the year 2000 the government adopted the National Policy on Women (NPW) which 'articulates into a coherent whole all Gender and Development (GAD) policies and programmes and also formulates new policies that will actualize the provisions of the Constitution'[8]. However, this policy, along with many others adopted by the government in recent years, only has persuasive effect. It does not have statutory force behind it and therefore there can be no sanctions imposed if the policies outlined are violated, be it by the federal or state government or by individuals.

A Coalition was formed in 2001 of various women's NGOs and other Human Rights organizations to pass a bill on Violence Against Women (VAW) which aimed at complementing the effectiveness of CEDAW.[9] This Bill has not yet been passed.

7 *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, 1999, Sect. 12, (1): 'No treaty between the Federation and any other country shall have the force of law except to the extent to which any such treaty has been enacted into law by the National Assembly.'

8 *National Policy on Women*, WACOL publication, Enugu, Nigeria, 2000, 2.

9 Legislative Advocacy Coalition on Violence Against Women (LACVAW).

Non State-Funded Feminist Groups

Women in Nigeria (WIN), a feminist and activist group refused since its foundation in 1983 to be affiliated with the NCWS. At that time, Nigeria was suffering the post-oil boom crisis and was under a military regime. WIN recognised that both women and men were exploited and oppressed in Nigeria, but that women were also subordinated as a specific group. They saw that issues relating to both gender and class needed to be tackled, not just one or the other, as the liberation of women in Nigeria could not be done outside the context of the liberation of the oppressed and poor majority of the people. During the military years, WIN worked in alliance, not with the NCWS or other state-funded women's programmes, but with groups which protested against the imposition of SAP and the oppressive methods of the military regimes.

WIN was distinguished from other organizations in the women's movement in Nigeria because of its 'radicalism, uncompromising objectives, fearlessness in the face of the dreaded feminist tag, identification with rural and illiterate women and a socialist perspective.'[10] It was also distinct from other women's groups because it not set up by the state, was not a women's wing of a male-dominated political or other organization and it was not a national branch of an international organization. It was a secular, multi-ethnic, multi-religious association and, while it focused on women's rights, it was open to male as well as female members. Although still existent in many states and still active in terms of collaboration with other NGOs in hosting conferences and lobbying to pass Bills in parliament, WIN has greatly weakened since the mid-1990s.

Non-State-Funded Women's Groups

COWAN (Country Women Association of Nigeria) was established in 1982 in Ogun State by Chief Mrs Bisi Ogunleye, as a non-governmental organization of poor women. 'Its main goal is the systematic and measurable empowerment of women, using African Traditional norms and

10 A. Imam, 'The Dynamics of WINning, 280.

practices, to work their way out of poverty.'[11] This group was not based on any quest for change in gender patterns. It was primarily concerned about the poverty of women and their economic hardships, from which stemmed many of the other hardships women endured.

COWAN is managed by rural women themselves, as opposed to any direct government interference, and hence its programmes are in tune with the actual needs of the women members. Through COWAN, women in rural areas who have little opportunities to earn an income are given training in various skills such as weaving and cloth production. With the help of rural banking and small credit facilities, they are enabled to put these skills to use, earn some money, save some and yet increase their earnings. More than other groups, it deserves special mention because of the positive effect it actually did have, and continues to have, on the lives of many rural women.

Women's Human Rights NGOs

Since the late '90s, spurred on by the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995, countless NGOs have been established to empower women and promote their rights. The proliferation of NGOs in Nigeria is partly due to the increasing unemployment throughout the country and the availability of international donor agencies that are more than willing to offer sponsorship to research or activism in this particular area. Some NGOs are authentic in their commitment and overall their accumulated efforts have had a positive effect in raising people's awareness about areas of concern.

In November 1997 WACOL (Women's Aid Collective) was founded in Enugu by Joy Ngozi Ezeilo. WACOL is comprised of a team of lawyers and has organized many workshops in various parts of Northern Nigeria on women's rights within the *shari 'a* system. Muslim women who participate in the workshops inform other women in their own communities

11 COWAN, *Rural Responsive Banking: An Anti-Clock Race in Poverty Track*, Booklet 2002.

of their rights within the *shari 'a*. They are requested to report any violation of these rights to the WACOL office so that appropriate advice can be given to the victim concerned and action can be taken to remedy the situation. WACOL is also actively engaged in raising awareness about the abuse of widows particularly in questions of inheritance, and on the issue of domestic violence. The many conferences which WACOL has organized on women's rights and which the NGO has had published in a series of books help to make the work of this particular NGO more effective.

BAOBAB, a women's human rights organization was set up in 1996 by Ayesha Imam, a Muslim woman activist. Imam was at that time the coordinator for the Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) West-African office and had also been an active member of WIN.[12] BAOBAB focuses on women's legal rights issues under customary, statutory and religious laws in Nigeria. The NGO evolved from a three-year research project on Women and Laws, coordinated by WLUML. The result of the data collected showed that there were many violations of women's human rights in different spheres of Nigerian society and that women are often denied access to their rights in Muslim laws because they are ignorant about them and how they might actualize them. Consequently, BAOBAB was established to continue research and to make this knowledge available. The primary focus is on research about constraints existing in laws and their implementation in social practice, and disseminating this knowledge among Nigerian men and women through workshops, seminars and publications. The NGO collaborated with the Oputa Panel[13] in

12 WLUML is a network of women whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws, both written and unwritten, drawn from interpretations of the Qur'an tied up with the local traditions. It was formed by an international group of Muslim women activists in response to various situations of abuse against Muslim women in different parts of the world which required attention during the years 1984/85. The organization is best known through its bi-annual publication, *WLUML Dossier*. Cf. A. Hèlie, *Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes*, WLUML 2000.

13 The Oputa Panel was a Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission set up by the Obasanjo government in 1999 supposedly in an effort to combat injustice and to ascertain the causes, nature and extent of all human rights violations

carrying out research on women's human rights violations in Nigeria from 1966–1999.[14]

Religious Groups

Many feminist analysts and activists in Nigeria are convinced that both Islam and Christianity have been and are used as an instrument of women's oppression.[15] They believe that patriarchal norms and systems of inequality already existed in the various Nigerian communities and that these were magnified with the advent of Christianity and Islam. They believe that women accept and support religious and cultural beliefs and practices which reinforce patriarchal control and hinder the realization of their rights because they have been so socialized.

Some women's groups have therefore made attempts to use the idiom of religion to press the case for reforms. This is particularly true of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN). Christian religious discourse is not used to the same extent in pressing for reform although Christian women form the bulk of those who are actively engaged in the struggle. However, the extremely well organized women's organizations (or fellowships), which exist in every Christian denomination, contribute in no small way to motivating and facilitating women's participation in the struggle for reform in society.[16]

in Nigeria. The panel was headed by Rtd. Justice Chukwudifu Oputa; hence the name by which it is commonly known.

14 BAOBAB, *Women's Human Rights Violations in Nigeria – January 15, 1966–May 29, 1999*, Research Report submitted to the Human Rights Violation Investigation Commission (OPUTA Panel), Nigeria, BAOBAB, Lagos 2003.

15 See for example S. Afonja – B. Aina, ed., *Nigerian Women in Social Change*, Obafemi Wolowo University Press, Ile-Ife, Nigeria 1995, 1–46; A.O. Okunade, ed., *Promotion of Women's Rights Consciousness*, WOMID, Vantage Publishers, Ibadan, April 1998, 19; B. Olateru-Olagbegi – B.A. Afolabi, *Actual Women Situation in Nigeria*, WARDC, Lagos 2004.

16 Muslim and Christian women's faith-based groups are looked at in detail in the next two chapters.

Areas of Concern to women

Women and Law

The tripartite legal system which entails the use of the Statutory/Common law system, the Customary law system, and the *Shari'a* legal system, compounds the legal status of women in Nigeria. Indeed, the tripartite legal system brings conflicts of laws at many levels.

First there is a conflict between territorial systems of law arising from the co-existence of federal and state laws. There are separate State High Courts, State *Shari'a* Courts of Appeal, and State Customary Courts of Appeal. Appeals from these courts go to the Federal Court of Appeal and from there to the Supreme Court.[17]

There is also conflict between the Common Law of the Nigerian Statutes, largely derived from English Law, and the Customary and *Shari'a* Laws. Courts are empowered to administer rules of customary or *shari'a* law provided they are not repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscience.[18] The 1999 Nigerian Constitution is supreme and its provisions have binding force on all authorities and persons throughout the Federal Republic. If any law, including a law enacted by a State House of Assembly, is inconsistent with the provision of the Constitution or with a law made by the National Assembly, the Constitution and National Assembly prevails and the other law is void.[19]

The ethnically diverse groups that constitute Nigeria each have their own system of Customary Law. Customary law is influential in what is considered the private sphere, regulating relations within the family such as marriage, divorce, child custody, inheritance, property

17 See sections 232–235; 260–269 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

18 See section 34(i) High Court Law (N.N. Laws 1963) Cap. 49 This is particularly relevant to the impediments put in the Constitutions to the application of the *Shari'a* criminal system.

19 See sections 1(1), 1(3) and 4(5) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

ownership and domestic violence. The *Shari 'a* courts were according to the Constitutions, only to administer Personal Law of Muslims which regulates all of these areas of the private sphere.[20] These are areas which have an immense impact on the status and welfare of women. Despite the gender equality enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution[21] and in some Statutes and International Instruments, discriminatory aspects of the Customary laws and *Shari 'a* laws which adversely affect the status and position of women in the society are often applied.

Customary law, which concerns non-Muslim women, is not codified and therefore is difficult to review. As a renowned legal scholar has pointed out, the increasing number of educated people in Nigeria and the breakdown of ethnic cohesion, means that people have a new awareness of rights. Instead of restating or modifying the customary laws, people simple take recourse in the common law.[22] However, many people, including a great many illiterate and poor women, may not have the knowledge, the economic resources or the courage to take recourse in the higher levels of jurisdiction. Even though some women may be helped take recourse in the courts, customary law is regarded as having the most effective jurisdiction and is still held in highest regard by most people. To go against customary law is to go against the tradition and custom of one's own people and may result only in being ostracized.

The *Shari 'a* law is applicable as a distinct system of law in some of the Northern states, whereas in the rest of the country it is applied as a variant of Customary Law. [23] Unlike Muslim-majority countries in

20 See sections 262 and 277 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

21 See section 15(2) and 42 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

22 M.T. Ladan, 'Legal Pluralism and the Development of the Rule of Law in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges in the Development and Application of the *Shari 'a*' in J. Ibrahim, ed., *Shari 'a Penal and Family Laws in Nigeria and in the Muslim World: Rights Based Approach*, ABU Press, Zaria 2004, (57–113), 59.

23 There is an active debate over whether or not *shari 'a* law should be considered a form of customary law, given that it based upon written sources, is the revealed will of God, and is therefore fixed and immutable. In contrast, customary law is meant to reflect the living traditions of those who follow it, and is therefore amenable to change at a very local level. For a more complete review of these issues, refer to J. Abun-Nasr, 'The Recognition of Islamic Law in Nigeria as Customary Law: Its Justification and Consequences' in J. Abun-Nasr, – *al.*, ed., *Law Society and National Identity in Africa*, Helmut Buske Verlag, Hamburg 1990, 31–45.

North Africa and the east Mediterranean, Muslim Personal Status Laws in Nigeria remain un-codified. Personal status cases (marriage, divorce, maintenance, custody, inheritance) are heard by a *qadi* (religious judge) who renders verdicts based on his interpretation of *fiqh* in accordance with the Maliki School of jurisprudence. Since the extended implementation of *shari 'a* in 2000, the only area of Islamic law to have been codified is criminal law. Muslim women are aware of the need to codify the Personal Status Law with a contemporary egalitarian interpretation of *fiqh* and thus avoid violations of women's rights. Some women leaders and activists are also collaborating with Islamic scholars to review the *shari 'a* criminal codes introduced after the year 2000 in the northern states.

Women legal scholars in Sub-Saharan Africa recognize that women in many post-colonial African countries deal with similar difficulties caused by the interplay between customary law and statutory law.[24] They recognize that although aspects within customary law systems which are inconsistent with constitutionally assured rights are supposedly null and void, these laws and practices are protected by references to cultural values in relation to the family setting.[25]

In 2004, after carrying out extensive research, a group of NGOs committed to the promotion of women in Nigeria concluded that 'existing impediments in socio-cultural, economic, political, and religious spheres still constitute stumbling blocks to the promotion and protection of women's right'[26]. This was also pointed out in a recent analysis made

24 Cf. C. Grant Bowman –A. Kuenyehia, *Women and Law in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Sedco Publishing Ltd., Accra 2003.

25 A.V. Atsenuwa, ed., *Women's Rights as Human Rights,* 26.

26 *CEDAW Shadow report*, 10: Each government is obliged to file a regular report to the UN Committee on CEDAW charged with supervising and monitoring the implementation of the Convention standards. Recognizing that Nigeria, like many other governments, rarely summit a report that represents the true picture

by leading Nigerian women activists who see that cultural and religious beliefs have been practiced for so long that they are embedded in the societal perception almost as legal norm 'such that the laws of the land and international instruments which protect the rights of women, are flagrantly infringed in the guise of these age-long beliefs.'[27]

Women and Poverty

In spite of Nigeria's abundant natural prosperity and oil wealth, it is estimated that 70% of the population is living below the poverty line in both the rural and urban areas.[28] Evidence abounds that poverty makes women vulnerable to various forms of human rights abuses such as domestic violence, withdrawal from school, early marriage, forced labour, human trafficking and other forms of gender based violence.

A major cause of women's poverty is their limited access to ownership of land, despite the fact that Nigerian women make up more than 60% of the agricultural labour force and do up to 80% of food production. Most customary law systems deny women this right. Muslim women are entitled to inherit but are very often denied their inheritance by their brothers when it refers to landed property.[29] Lack of land or other collateral makes

of the situation of human and women's rights, this shadow report was prepared by numerous NGOs in the country. It critically assesses the government's report (1994–2002) and raises important issues for dialogue between the Committee on CEDAW and the Nigerian government and also for consideration by religious groups.

27 See Kaduna Gender and Development Forum (KGF), *'For the health of women, for the health of the world'*, 2005, available at www.leads.org.

28 A. Hodges, ed., *Children's and Women's Rights in Nigeria: A Wake-up Call*, Situation Assessment and Analysis 2001, National Planning Commission and UNICEF Nigeria, 2001, 19–21 (in future referred to as SAA 2001).

29 Reported in I.N. Sada – *al*., ed., *'Shari 'a and the Rights of Muslim Women in Northern Nigeria'*, Report prepared for the special programme on women in the North, CILS and DFID, Abuja, June 2004, 46–47; See also H.J. Abdullah – I. Hamza, 'Women and Land in Northern Nigeria: The Need for Independent Ownership Rights' in M. Wanyeki, ed., *Women and Land in Africa: Culture,*

it particularly difficult for women to obtain loans which would enable them expand their produce or set up a small industry.[30]

In the 10 years since Beijing, Nigerian Governments have initiated many policies and programmes to address the poverty situation of the country such as the Poverty Eradication Programme introduced in 2004 and National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) introduced in 2005. However, the government programmes for the elimination of poverty have had minimal effects on women.[31] Women are rarely involved in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of government programmes geared towards addressing the economic situation. Few programmes have been specifically targeted towards women's needs, and many programmes have been badly managed due to a lack of transparency and accountability on the part of Government and those in charge of the projects. The lack of infrastructures such as roads, housing, potable water, and electricity mean that rural women's time and energies are put into overcoming these difficulties, such as by carrying water and firewood long distances.

Women and Education

While women's right to education is much talked about and improvements have been made since the introduction in 1976 of Universal Primary Education, women continue to constitute a larger proportion of the illiterate population. Statistics report that 41% of the adult female population at national level is literate and about 58% of adult males. In the North,

Religion and Realizing Women's Rights, Zed Books Ltd., New York 2003, (133–175), 158.

30 'Land rights are not conceptualized only as the rights to access and control land as a productive source, but as information about, decision-making around (for example to mortgage, lease, sell or bequeath land) and benefit from the land.' M. Wanyeki, 'Introduction' in M. Wanyeki, ed., *Women and Land in Africa*, 2.

31 *Nigeria NGO Report of the Decade of Review of the Implementation of Beijing Platform for Action (BFA+10)*. This report was prepared in August 2004 and presented to the UN by WOCON on the implementation of the BFA in Nigeria, ten years after its realization.

between 40 and 42% of the adult male population is literate with only 21–22% of adult females.[32]

The gender inequalities in respect of educational attainment are largely due to teenage pregnancies, early girl marriages, domestic responsibilities which weigh more on the girl than on the boy, and religious or cultural stereotypes that affect in one way or another the access of a girl to education. Among poor families where resources for the education of all the children are scarce, preference is given to the education of boys.[33]

Some NGOs and faith-based groups have contributed to Government efforts by providing facilities and programmes for literary education to women and girls.[34] In addition they have set up skills acquisition centres for women. The results of the programmes and policies of government coupled with NGO collaborative efforts have created a higher enrolment in schools for girls, even in the North, but there is still much room for improvement.[35]

Women and Health

In Nigeria, only about 40% of the population has access to health care. Research carried out in 2003 shows that half of the women in the North do not attend ante natal clinics.[36] Many women who observe purdah do

32 In these statistics, adult refers to people over fifteen years of age. See SAA 2001, 143.

33 CEDAW Shadow Report, 24–25.

34 The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in 2000 supposedly provided for free and compulsory Primary and Junior Secondary school. However, Government schools are overcrowded and have very inadequate facilities. Many schools lack in such basic materials as benches and tables. School buildings are not maintained in many areas. School teachers are poorly paid. Since school books have to be paid for, many children do not have any. Learning is therefore difficult, and a great many children who have completed their primary education and even some years of secondary education are still basically illiterate at the end of it.

35 CEDAW Shadow Report, 26.

36 National Population Commission (NPC), Nigeria – ORC Macro., *Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) 2003*, Calverton, Maryland, April 2004,

not attend ante-natal clinic and even when they do, such attendance is often delayed. Neither ante-natal nor post-natal care is free; taxes are to be paid on all health services, which many women cannot afford to pay even though they are quite low. The NDHS 2003 report also shows that about 82% and 89% of women in the Northeast and Northwest respectively had deliveries at home in the previous five years.

Maternal care continues to be very poor. According to UNICEF, Nigeria has a maternal mortality rate of about 704 deaths for every 100.000 live births. This is one of the highest mortality rates in the world.[37]

The highest fertility rate of women is in the North where the average woman has two more children than a woman in the south or centre of the country. Family planning is seen by many Muslims and Christians to be counter to God's natural means. The Billings method is not understood by many illiterate women and even when women do try to follow it they do not get the necessary collaboration from their husbands. Thus there is very little sense of family planning or child-spacing, which has obvious repercussions on women's health. As women's health suffers so also does the health of children. The North has the highest mortality rate among children.[38]

Many women suffer and die from unsafe abortions and HIV/AIDS. Recent statistics show that people in the Northern states have a lower level of awareness of HIV/AIDS and STDs. There is an increase in HIV/AIDS infection rates in the North West, although it is currently lower than in other parts of the country.[39] The particularly high rate of polyg-

115 (in future referred to as NDHS 2003); See also T. Akamadu, *Beasts of Burden: A study of Women's Legal Status and Reproductive Health Rights in Nigeria*, Women's Rights Projects, Civil Liberties Organization, Lagos1998.

37 SAA 2001, 46; See also NDHS 2003, 122*f*; BAOBAB, *Women's Human Rights Violations*, 55.

38 Calculated at 1,549 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in the North East and 1,025 in the North West compared with 286 in the South East and 165 in the South West. cf. NDHS 2003, 108*f*; SAA 2001, 17, 39.

39 NDHS 2003, 169–198; SAA 2001, 68–72.

amy, divorce and remarriage in the North are conducive to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is widespread among various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Over 57% of girls are circumcised before the age of one and over 68% by the age of five.[40] The form most commonly practiced in Nigeria is clitoridectomy; this entails the removal of the clitoris and sometimes also the labia majora. It takes place mostly at infancy. In some cases, the operation is performed on the adolescent at the onset of menstruation. Allegedly the reasons for FGM are to curb promiscuity and to reduce complications at childbirth. FGM has been outlawed in four states (Cross Rivers, Delta, Edo and Ogun). It is still widely practiced among many Christian people in Northern Nigeria. It is not so common among the Hausa-Fulani.

In spite of efforts made by the government as well as NGOs and faith-based groups to address the health needs of women, certain mitigating factors have reduced their impact.[41] Poverty makes the high costs of medical services unaffordable to many women. There is an inadequate provision of health facilities and drugs by Governments and there is an influx of cheaper fake drugs on the market. There is a lack of adequate qualified health personnel to provide quality health services as most of the highly qualified personnel in Nigeria have migrated to other countries where they receive better wages. Gender-relations where women and children occupy the lowest status in the family ladder, and hence are not given priority when sick, are an important factor. It is often men who decide whether and when women will attend health clinics. Many

40 NDHS 2003, 201–208; SAA 2001, 196–200.

41 The Nigerian government at Federal, State and Local government levels has put in place plans for the health sector reforms such as the National Action Committee on HIV/AIDS (NACA), the Roll Back Malaria Programme (RBM), the National Programme on Immunisation (NPI) and the Behavioural Change Communications Programmes (BCC). NGOs have also executed programmes such as awareness raising especially among the rural communities, the provision of mobile clinics in the rural areas, comprehensive sexuality education programmes, and advocacy for law and policy reforms in the health sector.

women are powerless in taking critical decisions that affect their health, including when and whether they should attend ante-natal clinic. For some women, the cost of healthcare delivery, the distance from the health facility and attitude of healthcare personnel serve as a disincentive to seeking medical attention.

Women in Power and Decision-Making

An area of concern which has been emphasized in recent years by almost all women's groups, secular, state and religious, is the poor representation of women in government. The lack of women's voices in politics is a major drawback in ensuring the implementation of policies in favour of women's development.

The successive military governments excluded women from the governance and decision making process in the public sector. The adoption of democratic rule in 1999 in Nigeria provided an opportunity for women's political participation. Many efforts were made and many NGOs were founded to promote political awareness among women and encourage them to put themselves forward for election.

In the 2003 General Elections there were two female contestants for Presidency and two for the vice presidential positions but neither of them was elected. Unlike the 1999 elections where only one female Deputy Governor emerged, the 2003 elections witnessed two female Deputy Governors. No woman was elected as governor of any state in the federation. In twelve out of the thirty-six states in the federation, not one woman was elected for any seat in the State House of Assembly. Of the 469 elected members of the National Assembly, only 25 were women.

Different reasons are adduced for the low level of involvement of women in politics. The primary reason given is that religions and cultures support the belief that women must not occupy leadership positions in the society; hence women are slow to attempt to contest such positions but are content to serve merely in campaigning and mobilizing support for their parties. Women encounter opposition from their male relatives and lack of support within the political parties themselves which are often

slow to nominate a woman to represent them at any level.[42] There have been many cases where women who aspired to run for parliament were harassed and intimidated.[43] It is also true that politics is often heavily monetized and women are usually economically disadvantaged.

Women and Abuse within Marriage

Section 18 of the Marriage Act defines a person under the age of twenty-one years as a minor but allows minors to marry with parental consent. Statistics indicate that over 35% of Nigerian girls are married before the age of fifteen years.[44] Child marriages are justified by parents on the ground that it prevents promiscuity which they claim a girl is prone to at puberty. In Northern Nigeria child marriage is a serious problem. In this instance, their consent is hardly sought.

Early sexual activity, marriage and childbearing militate against the education and career of the girls concerned and expose them to health risks such as obstructed labour. Delay in seeking quality obstetric care can lead to Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF), trauma and other complications.[45] There are approximately 200.000 cases of VVF in Nigeria, 70% of these from the northern region. Most of these cases are girls who were

42 WRAPA, *Nigeria 2003 Elections, The Experiences of Women Aspirants in Political Party Primaries*, 2003; N. Surma – H. Abdu, ed., *On the Margin: Women in the Nigerian Public Service*, WIN, Kaduna Chapter, 2003.

43 WRAPA, *Nigeria 2003 Elections*, 17–18.

44 SAA 2001, 200–201.

45 Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF) results from damage done by pregnancy in a young girl not physiologically mature whereby urine continuously leaks through the vagina, causing not only obvious discomfort but also a continuous bad smell and thus social ostracism. A. Sambo, ed., *Report on the National Task Force on Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF)*, 1991–1993, El-Rafiu Prints and Co., Kano; C.L. Ejembi, ed., *The Vesico-Vaginal Fistulae Scourge: A Preventable Social Tragedy*, Proceedings of the National Workshop on VVF, organized by the National Task Force on VVF, Zaria 1st–3rd June, 1995, ABU Press, Zaria 1995; See also the bi-annual publication of the Grassroots Health Organization of Nigeria (GHON), *Grassroots Health News*.

married between the ages of ten and fourteen, with little education and no source of income. VVF health centres for the repair of fistulae and rehabilitation of patients are sited in Sokoto, Kano, Katsina and Jos, all in the North.

Domestic violence is also a serious problem in Nigeria, often not spoken about too loudly. Controversies trailed the Violence Against Women Bill (VAW) introduced to parliament in 2001 which sought to outlaw every form of violence against women and other related offences. The law was rejected by the majority; some claimed that the law would give the impression that women were untouchables and unscoldables, and that it would therefore destroy the very base of family life.[46] Some women believe that wife battering is a way of showing love, the man who beats his wife is merely living out responsibly his call to be a leader and hence a disciplinarian![47] Battered women are not considered a priority by government; safe homes and other relevant services for these or other women who suffer from the various forms of cultural and domestic violence are provided only by NGOs. Marital rape is unrecognized by law in Nigeria on the basis that consent to marriage is tantamount to the foreclosure of consent to each particular sexual intercourse.[48]

Widowhood practices are a cause of great suffering. The concept of co-ownership is rare in Nigerian culture; the presumption is that all the properties belong to the man, even where the woman contributed financially and in kind to the acquisition of the property.[49] The plight of

46 Reported in *The Guardian* newspaper, 25th April 2002, 25.

47 R. Sako-John, *Violence Against Women*, Kaduna Gender and Development, 2004.

48 *CEDAW Shadow Report*, 9; See also SAA 2001, 238–239.

49 The Married Women's Property Act accords some recognition of a wife's inheritance rights. Widows are entitled to one third of the property left by the deceased husband, and children to two thirds. Where there is no progeny, the deceased man's father takes half whereas a man left widowed and childless receives the entire property left by his wife. (Matrimonial Causes Act, CAP. 220). Women married by customary law are not protected by the Property Act. Women married by secular law are not always granted their rightful inheritance and many have neither the knowledge of their rights nor the possibility to access the courts.

a widow is made worse by humiliating widowhood rites which include requesting that a woman drink from the water used in bathing the corpse of her husband to prove her innocence from any complicity in her husband's death. Widowhood practices are particularly common in the eastern part of Nigeria but are also adhered to by those, most of whom are Christians, who have moved to the North.

Conclusion

The secular women's movement in Nigeria is important for various reasons. The women who are involved in it are all either Muslims or Christians and many of the concerns which these women confront are experienced by women regardless of their religious affiliation. The majority of these women give a prominent place to religion in their lives. The secular movement for human and civil rights, including women's rights, actually grew in Nigeria alongside the religious revivalism, both which evolved during the military regimes.

Religious and cultural beliefs are particularly influential in the areas of women's empowerment and their social development. To find support within religious communities for the reforms women see to be necessary can demand delicate dynamics. Sometimes women's only option is to subtly manoeuvre the parameters which the dominant religious discourse places upon them.

CHAPTER 5

Muslim Women's Discourse in Northern Nigeria

According to an influential Muslim woman leader in Nigeria, the Muslim Students' Society (MSS), which by the 1970s was quite strong in the universities, 'provided the launching pad for the Islamic re-awakening in Nigeria witnessed in the last four decades.'[1]

The women's wing of the MSS, whose members were certainly influenced by the global feminist reawakening and the Nigerian women's secular movement, was particularly interested in women's issues. Through their membership in the MSS and their closer study of Qur'anic principles and the Islamic tradition, these women saw that Islam upholds women's dignity and rights. They saw that Muslim society in Nigeria, where most women were denied their basic rights, could progress and develop in contemporary times by being true to Islam. Here they found a way of allying their newly formed feminist consciousness with their faith in Islam.

Muslim Sisters Organization (MSO)

The Muslim Sisters Organization (MSO) was established in 1976, initially simply a continuation of the MSS by female university graduates in the North who wished to continue meeting as a group after having left the

1 L. Okunnu, 'Women, Secularism and Democracy: Women's Role in the Regeneration of Society', paper delivered at a Conference on *Shari 'a* held at the Commonwealth Centre, Commonwealth Institute, Kensington, London, 14–15th April, 2001, (available online: see bibliography). The author is a Yoruba Muslim who was second National Amirah (president) of FOMWAN (1989–1993). Her tenure as national Amirah coincided with her appointment as Deputy Governor of Lagos State.

university campus. The aims of the MSO were to propagate Islam among Muslim women, serve as a liaison body between Muslim women and the Government, and promote the educational and social development of Muslim women.[2] This was officially registered in 1983 with the Board of Social Welfare as a national, religious, voluntary, charitable and non-political organization based in Kano.[3]

By 1985, there were a number of women's Islamic organizations in the Southern states of Nigeria, many of these attached to mosques and engaged in various charitable and educational activities. However, in the Northern states where the practice of seclusion was widespread, apart from the MSO, women's Islamic organizations hardly existed.[4] The Yan Izala did not accept women as active members; women were Izala only through their husband's membership. Some few women were members of El-Zakzaky's Islamic Movement. Many of the Yoruba Muslim women were members of the women's wings of the Yoruba Muslim groups which were originally founded in the South but were established in the North

2 *MSO Constitutions*, n. 4. For the complete list of aims, see Appendix n.2.

3 *MSO Constitutions*, n.1. Today there are about sixteen MSO groups in the country, with approximately one hundred women in each group. Members are mainly women who joined the organization in secondary school or in the university. They organize conferences and seminars for other women on Islamic teaching about women's roles and rights and they make some effort to empower women through literacy or craft-making lessons. The MSO is particularly strong in some northern states such as Bauchi, Koggi and Kano. Interview with Jamila Ibrahim, ex-MSO National Amirah 12th July '04.

4 A.Lemu, 'FOMWAN History and Experience – A Case Study' in *The Muslim Woman*, n. 6, 1997, (23–27), 24. The author, B. Aisha Lemu, is a British woman brought up in the Church of England who converted to Islam while studying in London and married a Nigerian Muslim. In the 1960s the couple moved to Nigeria. Mrs. Lemu is one of the major mobilizers of Muslim women in the country, particularly in the North. She has written extensively on women in Islam and other related issues both for adults and for use in secondary schools. She became the first National Amirah of FOMWAN (1985–1989).

by those Muslims who migrated there for various reasons.[5] However, most women had no opportunity to meet and exchange ideas.[6]

A number of educated northern Muslim women, especially MSO members, felt that the problems faced by the majority of their sisters in the north could only be effectively tackled by the initiative of Muslim women in cooperation with their male counterparts, using Islamic solutions that would be acceptable to conscientious Muslims at all levels of society.[7] At a meeting in Kano in April 1985 they discussed a divorce proposal made by the NCWS to the government.[8] They rejected the proposal and instead 'urged the government to utilize provisions of *shari'a* on divorce and inheritance, making it abundantly clear that Muslims will reject any other law.'[9] They felt there was need for Muslim women's groups nationwide to join together 'under the banner of Islam to demand

5 In 1921, the Ansar-Ud-Deen Society (ADS) was formed, first as a party to champion the cause of Western education amongst the Muslim community, and later dedicated to the issue of concerted Muslim action in order to address common problems. In 1927, the Ijebu Muslim Friendly Society (IMFS) was formed, and in 1939, the Nawair-Ud-Deen Society (NUD). These Muslims are quite distinct in many ways from the Hausa Muslims, having their own mosques, communities and various diverse traditions.

6 As seen in chapter three, many of the rural, uneducated women belonged to the Tijaniyya or Qadiriyya movements. However, these did not provide opportunities for women to meet.

7 B. Yusuf, 'Hausa-Fulani women', 99. The author, Hajiya Bilkisu Yusuf, a Hausa woman from Kano, was fifth National Amirah of FOMWAN (2001–2005) and is presently the chairperson of FOMWAN's International Relations Board. Bilkisu was editor of the daily edition of *New Nigerian* newspaper from 1987, having previously been editor of the *Sunday Triumph* newspaper. She was also an active member of WIN before committing herself to FOMWAN; See also A. Lemu, 'FOMWAN History and Experience', 24.

8 The main issues involved in this particular debate have already been mentioned in chapter four. This issue can be compared to the Shah Banu case which drew international attention in India in the 1980s. Availing of difference in divorce provisions can be seen as simply an excuse by the Muslim community to distinguish itself, in a form of identity politics, from the non-Muslim Nigerian society.

9 B. Yusuf, 'Challenges for Muslim Women', Paper presented at the workshop organized by FOMWAN and FOMWASL (Sierra Leone) for submission to the NGO

their religious rights, influence national policy, and condemn state and federal decisions they felt to be detrimental to their well-being and progress'.[10] They decided to establish an independent platform, by way of a national Muslim women's body, from which they could express a specifically Islamic view of women's concerns.[11]

Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN)

A meeting to officially establish this body was held in Minna in October 1985.[12] Thus, the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) was born, an umbrella body for Muslim women's associations and organizations.[13] A simple constitution was drawn up, based on the already elaborated MSO constitution. The aims of FOMWAN are basically the same as those of its mother-association.[14] The motto chosen for the federation was 'Allah's Guidance is the Only True Guidance'.

From its inception it was clear that FOMWAN would not register with the NCWS. The leaders saw their new organization as an Islamic

Forum of the Fourth World Conference of Women, Beijing, August 1995, later published in *Weekly Trust* newspaper, April 12th 2002.

10 B. Yusuf, 'Hausa-Fulani Women', 99.

11 Cf. L. Okunnu, 'Women, Secularism and Democracy'.

12 Travelling to the meeting, the delegate from Zaria, Laura Naiya Sa'ada, and her driver were killed in an accident. The other thirty-six delegates decided that their companion had died as *'Shahid'*, a martyr for the Islamic cause, and hence they too should continue to serve Allah by working for this cause in a spirit of sacrifice. Cf. A. Lemu, 'FOMWAN History and Experience', 23; See also '20 Years of FOMWAN', in *FOMWAN 1985–2005* (20th Anniversary publication), (4–9), 4.

13 The MSO continues as an organization and is affiliated to FOMWAN. In the year 2001, FOMWAN invited the national Amirah of MSO, which it calls its key affiliate organization, to be an ex-officio member of its National Executive Council. Cf. *The Muslim Woman*, Magazine of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria, n. 8, 2003, 26 and *The Muslim Woman,* n. 9, 2005, 18.

14 See Article 6 and 7 of *FOMWAN Constitution* in Appendix n. 3.

religious association for women, not a women's association for women who happen to be Muslims. Their affiliation is to the Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), not to the NCWS which they consider a secular organization and thus of a different orientation to FOMWAN.

In a country where the Muslim political and religious leaders were intent on differentiating Muslim society from secular society, and where the vast majority of Muslims, men and women, were ever more reliant on their religion as a form of identity, Muslim women who had a feminist awareness of the oppression of their sisters and felt moved to change women's situation could most surely find success by using Islamic arguments. No doubt some were sincerely convinced of Islam; however, others may have simply seen the advantage of using Islamic rhetoric.

As of 2005, FOMWAN has branches in thirty-four states including the Federal Capital Territory; it has over three hundred Local Government chapters and over seven hundred affiliate groups.[15] The foundation stone of the national headquarters was officially laid in 1995 in Abuja but is still under construction, a multi-million-naira project which will supposedly include an administrative building, a hostel block, a conference hall and a mosque.[16]. However, there is a temporary national secretariat office in Abuja. There are Executive Committees and a Board of Trustees at National and State levels. Each State Amirah (state president) is a member of the National Executive Council in addition to the National Amirah (president), Naibatu'l Amirah (vice-president), Secretary General, Financial Secretary, *Da'wa*/Welfare officer, Legal Advisor and Public Relations Officer. The National Executive Council also includes the chairpersons of the Education, Health, Publications, Finance, Welfare & Discipline, and International Relations Boards. There is a coordinator for each geographical zone: North East, North West, North Central, South West and South East.

15 *The Muslim Woman*, n. 9, 2005, 2.

16 *The Muslim Woman*, n. 9, 2005, 6.

Unity of all Muslim Women?

Unity of Muslim women is one of the principle goals of FOMWAN.[17] In a country of much ethnic division, national unity is no small goal to set oneself. Yet it seems as though this has been achieved by the federation, with some exceptions.

Meeting with FOMWAN officials at national and state levels one finds both women who are very progressive and others much more conservative in their understanding of women's role in Islam.[18] Despite this diversity of opinion over issues which would seem to be fundamental to the promotion of women in society, they are prepared to come together, attend FOMWAN conferences and seminars and identify themselves with the various resulting communiqués. They are united in the struggle for the basic Islamic rights of education, inheritance, marriage consent, maintenance, and so on, which are denied the majority of Muslim women and girls in Nigeria. They are united in defending Islam from western criticism. They are also united in reforming Islam in Nigeria of cultural practices which they consider unislamic, particularly those practices which are the cause of woman's illiteracy and general disempowered state. There is diversity of opinion, however, on what that reform might entail, just as

17 While Nigerian Muslim women are often 'of different views, different backgrounds and different cultures', FOMWAN believes that 'our common faith in Islam has greater importance than our individual and cultural differences, and that we must build on what unites us. ... One cannot serve Islam by dividing Muslims. FOMWAN as a *Da 'wa* Organization must therefore do all in its power to foster goodwill and unity.' Cf. FOMWAN, Second Schedule: Code of Conduct for FOMWAN Officials at all Levels, n. 20 'Unity' in *FOMWAN Constitution*, (revised version, effective from 1st January 2000).

18 Bilkisu Yusuf: 'Various Muslim women's groups do not agree on the role of women. There is diversity in definition. Some groups believe that women should remain within their homes and should not participate in public life. Others believe that men and women are enjoined to work together, both enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong as the Qur'an expects of them.' Response to a questionnaire I had given her, Feb. 2004.

there is on whether it is cultural practice or cultural interpretation that is the problem to be overcome.

Women of the Islamic Movement of El-Zakzaky do not associate with FOMWAN, just as this movement does not associate with the JNI and the NSCIA. They see FOMWAN leaders as the wives of top government officials, believe FOMWAN is funded by these male officials and see FOMWAN as part of the political Muslim establishment.[19] Women in the Islamic Movement, although they do not have a women's wing since men and women are equally members of the organization, do have separate meetings from time to time which they call Sister's Forum.

The Jam'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) has an Aid branch and under this there is an active women's wing (JNI/AID/WW). According to the JNI/AID/WW, FOMWAN is not to be considered representative or even the most authoritative voice of all Muslim women.[20] Rather FOMWAN is an affiliated member of JNI as is the MSO and some of the Yoruba Muslim women's groups. However, since 2004, FOMWAN was invited to form part of JNI central council, a status which no other women's group has been given. One FOMWAN representative, the National Amirah, represents the Muslim women's population of Nigeria while all the other members, approximately 80, are male. According to Bilkisu, FOMWAN was invited because 'the men now realize they can no longer ignore the women.'[21]

Many influential Muslim women in fields such as education, journalism and politics do not belong to any Muslim group and do not see the need to use religious rhetoric to achieve their goals. These women are not interested in the politicization of Islam but are more concerned with development and democracy. Although religion holds a central place in

19 Mallam Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, interview, 17th May 2005; Zeenah, his wife, added: 'FOMWAN leaders are wives of politicians. At their conferences they always have wives of state authorities as their Guests of Honour. These politicians are stealing our economy and so how can they represent us?'

20 Interview with National Secretary JNI/AID/WW, 1st February 2005, JNI National Headquarters, Kaduna.

21 Bilkisu Yusuf, interview, Kaduna, Feb. 2004.

their lives, they prefer to live it as a private affair. Hajiya Laila Dogonyaro, who has been referred to as the 'Queen of modern Northern Politics'[22] is a concrete example. She has been involved in politics for many years and is not interested in religious rhetoric about whether a Muslim woman should or should not be involved in politics.[23] She sees no reason why focus should be on her religious affiliation. When asked how people react to her, a Muslim woman, in politics, she responded: 'What has religion to do with it! Why should the fact that I am a Muslim woman surprise anyone?'[24]

Just as not all Muslim women feel they have to find religious justification for their every move, so too not all Muslim women feel their religion calls them to be concerned for justice or rights. What is most important is religious practice in terms of dress, obedience to their husbands, the Islamic upbringing of their children, sexual morality and the spread of Islam. Typical of this approach is the Women in *Da 'wa* group founded and led by Amina Jega. This group preaches to women and is involved in the establishment and running of Islamiyya schools for women and girls. The members use stricter hijab, do not challenge seclusion and are quite content to see women concentrate solely on their role as wives and mothers without any direct political participation or authority. The Islamiyya schools lay emphasis on Qur'anic memorization and knowledge of *ahadith*, rather than on the relationship between Islam and the

22 L. Adamu, *Hafsatu Ahmadu Bello*, 132.

23 Laila Dogonyaro was a leading member of the JMA (the Northern Women's Association) which was founded in 1964 and was a keen activist for women's suffrage in the North. She founded the Women's Opinion Leaders Forum (WOLF) in 1998 to increase the number of women in elective and appointive office (Cf. *The Women Opinion Leaders Forum (WOLF): Aims, Objectives and Programmes*, Kaduna, 2000). She was National president of the NCWS from 1993–1995, the first northern woman to hold this position. She was president of the Kaduna NCWS Branch from 1985–1993, while simultaneously General Secretary of the JMA, during which time FOMWAN was established. In the WOLF (Women's Opinion Leaders Forum) brochure and in the JMA booklet, no mention is made of Islam giving or not giving women the right to participate in politics.

24 Interview with Hajiya Laila Dogonyaro, Kaduna, 31st January 2005.

challenges of contemporary society, although in recent years more of them have included English, mathematics and other subjects of western education as part of the curriculum.[25] Unless their Mallams or Imams are among those who criticize FOMWAN as being feminist and western, these women do not exclude themselves from FOMWAN projects since FOMWAN also emphasizes Islamic education and *da 'wa*. For these women, *shari 'a* is important primarily because it is the duty and right of Muslims to live according to it; not necessarily because the *shari 'a* defends women's rights.

Ayesha Imam represents a Nigerian female voice that advocates diversity in the understanding of women's roles according to Islamic *ijtihad* and the consequently diverse interpretations of Qur'anic texts and of Islamic tradition.[26] She criticizes the articulation of patriarchy in which social mores, laws and political power are presented to women and to the Muslim community as if this were the only way to be an authentic Muslim.[27] Although now living abroad, she is actively engaged, particularly through her publications and conferences, in the quest for a con-

25 One example, among many, of such Islamiyya schools for women established in recent years in Northern Nigeria is the Salamatu Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies in Kaduna. It was established in 1987 as an Islamic junior secondary school to offer Arabic and Islamic education to women and girls who had completed their primary Islamic certificate (this generally meaning some years of basic Qur'anic classes). Today it also includes a primary western education school. In a magazine produced by the Institute in 2001, the virtues of a good woman are described as including 'never set foot outside without her husband's permission; obey and respect her husband's wishes without going against the teachings of Islam; try to make her home and her husband happy at all times; take very good care of her husband's wealth.' Cf. *Publication of Graduands of Salamatu Institute for Arabic Studies*, U/Muazu, Byepass Kaduna, 2000/2001, 4. This sort of teaching is quite typical of many Islamic schools in the North.

26 After many years as a founding member of WIN, BAOBAB and WLUML in Nigeria, Imam has left Nigeria to work and further her research abroad, but continues to write about the situation in Nigeria and cooperate with the work of NGOs.

27 See bibliography for a list of some of Ayesha Imam's recent writings.

temporary, women-friendly codification of *shari'a*, both personal and criminal law, in Nigeria.

Some women's rights NGOs in Nigeria, consisting of Muslim and Christian women, loudly criticize the influence of religion in the oppression, poverty and exclusion of women.[28] In recent years, particularly since the implementation of the *shari'a* criminal code in the northern states, these NGOs have begun to challenge traditional *fiqh* interpretations, the insistence of adhering solely to the Maliki school of law, and the lack of openness among the *'Ulama'* in Nigeria to *ijtihad*. Since 2004, there is a closer and more visible cooperation between these NGOs and FOMWAN, as the latter gradually gains the courage to challenge traditional Islamic interpretations rather than only use traditional interpretations to challenge culturally influenced malpractices. This represents a new form of 'Islamic feminism', led by NGOs but towards which FOMWAN is gradually moving.

Convictions of FOMWAN leaders

The women who gathered in 1985 to give birth to FOMWAN were conscious of the poverty and ignorance which most northern Muslim women suffered. They saw the poverty in the North as the legacy of the policies of the colonial government and of Christian missionaries. They saw women's greater poverty as being due to unfaithful Islamic practice and they were convinced that the solution to women's poverty and vulnerability lay in faithful Islamic practice.

FOMWAN leaders claim that missionaries had used education as an instrument of evangelization in a colonial setting where access to administrative and other job opportunities which brought material progress depended on the acquisition of western based education.[29] The British had failed to ensure an alternative means of such education in the northern Muslim areas and had therefore left northern Muslims at a disadvantage.

28 Especially WRAPA, WACOL, WLUML, BAOBAB, already mentioned in chapter four.

29 L. Okunnu, 'Women, Secularism and Democracy'.

The FOMWAN founders were also conscious of the inadequacies of the education they themselves had received in Christian mission schools, that is, the lack of an Islamic orientation to the education offered, the absence of Islamic Religious Knowledge on the curriculum and the tendency to convert Muslims to Christianity.[30]

The situation of Muslim women in Northern Nigeria at the time FOMWAN was founded is well described by Aisha Lemu.[31] Although long, the picture it presents helps us get a clearer idea of the reality which the FOMWAN leaders blamed on unfaithful Islamic practice:

> When I came to Nigeria, 16 years ago, I found a pattern of women's life far removed from both the letter and spirit of Islam. As a College Principle in Sokoto I saw my schoolgirls pass from childhood through adolescence into womanhood and pitied some of them deeply for their situation. Since that time I have also seen and heard a lot about the lives of married women at various levels of society. What are the kinds of things I observed and heard about?
>
> 1. I saw intelligent girls of good family taken away from school by force or by strategy, thus depriving them of access to knowledge.
> 2. I saw other girls go through with schooling in the sense that they were physically present, but with a firm belief instilled into them that education was a bad thing. Naturally, their progress was almost nil. They would fail all subjects every year and draw hardly any useful knowledge from all their years in school.

30 FOMWAN pamphlet 'An introduction to the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria', 1985.

31 A. Lemu, *A Degree Above Them – Observations on the Condition of the Northern Nigerian Muslim Woman*, IET Publications Division, Minna, Niger State, Gaskiya Corporations Ltd. Zaria, Nigeria 1985. Although the description is of Sokoto in 1969/70, it was still applicable to the situation of the majority of Muslim women in Northern Nigeria in 1985 when she wrote this booklet: 'These examples I have quoted – are they not well-known to everybody in this country? They happened, and are still happening today, and is it any wonder that when women get a taste of the type of freedom and equality for women they think they see in the West, they go for it, and nothing will dissuade them from their mistaken belief that Islam is out of date, anti-woman, working against their happiness and relegating them to second class status. They are absolutely ignorant of their Islamic rights and of their true status as a Muslim woman.' in A. Lemu, *A Degree Above Them*, 4.

3. I saw a few very intelligent girls on completion of their secondary schooling married off against their will to uneducated or less educated men whose strong desire was to lock them up and prevent any further education from reaching them.
4. I saw some fathers who had no knowledge of or contact with their daughters. When any matter arose concerning their welfare or behaviour they would wash their hands of it, saying the girl was the mother's responsibility.
5. I saw girls who had been taught by some ignorant Mallams that they had no responsibility for their own conduct. They had been told that they would follow their husbands, whether to heaven or hell, and that therefore it did not matter whether they prayed or fasted, as long as they obeyed their husbands.
6. I met women who were so ignorant of their rights in Islam that they took it for granted that in the event of their being divorced, their dowry and the husband's presents would be taken back from them; that they could be kicked out of the house bag and baggage; and they believed that that was all in accordance with Islamic law. They were not aware that there could be any rights available to them in the courts, and even if they did go to court, the likelihood of the local Islamic judge being either ignorant of the *Shari 'a* or bribed by the man would often nullify their hopes.
7. I heard of girls being carried without warning to a man's house as a *sadaqa* bride, not even knowing to whose house she was being taken.
8. I heard of girls being beaten to force them to marry a rich or important man with whom the parents wanted to form a connection.
9. I saw a woman bruised and bleeding from the face where her husband had beaten her up. I have even heard of men who keep whips in their houses specifically for beating their wives.
10. I heard of a corrupt wealthy man whose custom was to keep a full balance of four wives, but after any gave birth to a child he would complain of her loss of shapeliness and divorce her to bring a new one. And he was never short of parents who would submit their daughters to this treatment in return for a share of his worldly goods.[32]

The women who founded FOMWAN were convinced that this sorry situation was due to the general ignorance of Islam among the population, and to the refusal of the majority of Islamic scholars and leaders to speak out about the true role and status of women in Islam. The FOMWAN

32 A. Lemu, *A Degree Above Them*, 2–3.

leaders were convinced that if women and men knew their Islamic rights and responsibilities and if women were empowered to demand that these rights be respected, Muslim society and women's lives in the north would be greatly improved. In cases of violation, if arbitration did not resolve the difficulty, women could take recourse to the *shari 'a* courts where justice should be ensured through the correct administration of Islamic Personal Law.

The establishment of FOMWAN as a separate national body to deal with Muslim women's issues was based on recognition that women's rights were best protected within an Islamic framework rather than by the NCWS. The women leaders were aware, however, that ignorance of their rights, poverty, the lack of economic opportunities available to women, and the patriarchal nature of the society, greatly limited women's access to justice even within *Shari 'a* courts. Virtually all authority figures and mediators in dispute resolution are male, from family heads to religious and legal authorities. Arbitration was therefore likely to be biased. If women did manage to access the courts with some knowledge of their rights, they often found that the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society affected the attitudes and biases of the judgments given, in favour of the man.[33]

Although there were limitations to the justice administered under Islamic Personal Law in the *shari 'a* courts, FOMWAN did not, as far as I have been able to ascertain, directly involve itself in challenging this. They sought instead to raise awareness in Muslim societies of Islamic teachings in reference to women's rights and to overcome the socio-

33 M.T. Ladan, 'Women's Rights, Access to and Administration of Justice under the *Shari 'a* in Nigeria' in J.N. Ezeilo – *al.*, ed., *Shari 'a Implementation in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges on Women's Rights and Access to Justice*, WACOL and WARDC, Abuja 2003, 19–43; A.A. Oba, 'Improving Women's Access to Justice and the Quality of Administration of Islamic Justice in Nigeria' in J.N. Ezeilo – *al.*, ed., *Shari 'a Implementation in Nigeria*, 44–73. Other authorities suggest that when women did manage to access a *shari 'a* court, these more often than not ruled in women's favour. Cf. I.N. Sada – *al.*, ed., *Shari 'a and the Rights of*, 56; A. Ahmad, *Resolution of Civil Disputes in Formal and Informal Forums in Jigawa State*, DFID, Abuja 2003.

economic poverty and the illiteracy of women which were identified as the major causes of their vulnerability. By doing this, they would also overcome the patriarchal biases in society that allowed for violations of Muslim women's rights.[34]

One could say that what FOMWAN and many other Islamic groups in the north sought was an Islamization of Muslim society.[35] The more Islamic a society is, they believed and still believe, the more conscious it is of those Qur'anic principles which, according to FOMWAN and many others, are clearly and unquestionably defined. Thus, in areas of dispute there will be more recourse to arbitration than to litigation, and the possibility that the arbiters will be respectful of women's rights as specifically laid out in the Qur'an will also be greater. FOMWAN saw no need to enter into debates about the need to redefine Islamic rights in contemporary times. They insisted, and still insist, that these rights are clearly outlined in the Qur'an, and often times they find *ahadith* to substantiate their insistence.

34 FOMWAN does not contradict men's authority over women. Patriarchy, understood as a hierarchical relationship in terms of male authority and female obedience, is not considered by them as unjust or in juxtaposition to equality. However, patriarchy in terms of favoring the privileges of the male to the detriment of the God-given dignity and rights of the female is considered to be unjust and wrong. Some anthropologists who have studied Muslim societies have referred to 'the bargain of patriarchy', a situation in which women voluntarily cede authority and leadership to the male members of their family in return for protection and material support. The Qur'an itself, particularly in Q 4: 34, is understood as implicitly recognizing some form of this bargain, linking the leadership role of men to their responsibility for the material welfare of women. This would seem to aptly define the view FOMWAN and most Muslim movements in Nigeria have of the authentic, divinely mandated, male-female relationship.

35 The term Islamization is a loaded one today. However, countless articles and papers are presented by Muslims today in Nigeria which speak of Islamic society as being superior to all others in terms of justice, social morality and good governance. This Islamic society can only be realized, they claim, through a full and authentic implementation of the *shari'a* legal system.

Difficulties encountered by FOMWAN

The birth and development of FOMWAN were not without difficulties. Initially, according to Aisha Lemu, many husbands and Mallams were opposed to the idea of women having an Islamic or any kind of Association and would forbid their going out to attend meetings.[36] She believes this was because men believed that women without men to lead them must be up to no good and because Mallams and other men feared that women would come to know their rights as Muslim women and would start asking for those rights, and thereby cause a nuisance.[37]

A series of newspaper articles, criticisms and rebounds, appeared between June and October 2000 on whether women were islamically permitted a public role in society. A certain Muhammad Lawal Is-Haq wrote a letter that was published in the *Weekly Trust* and *Daily Trust* newspapers where he expressed the view that women should not be involved in the media since a woman's voice is an *aur'ah*. Bilkisu Yusuf, then National Amirah of FOMWAN, responded by reminding the readers of the public role of Aisha who was to teach half of the Islamic faith to the *Umma*; of the woman who consulted with the Prophet as in Q 58:1; and of other *ahadith* that recount occasions where women verbalized their opinions or concerns. Thus, she concluded that if women's voice was an aur'ah, these events which involved verbal communication would not have taken place. The media, she wrote, constitutes an essential part of life and an important means of conducting *da'wa*, and women must use it to educate the society, just as unless society is to stagnate, women must take up professions such as journalism, medicine and law.[38]

In August 2001, a certain Isa Abdulkarim Tilde published an article in which he condemned women taking an active part in politics, giving arguments similar to those given in the 1950s.[39] Bilkisu responded with

36 A. Lemu, 'FOMWAN History and Experience', 24.

37 A. Lemu, 'FOMWAN History and Experience', 24.

38 'Is a Woman's Voice an Aur'ah?', Published in *Weekly Trust* newspaper, June 15th 2000.

39 Published in *Weekly Trust* newspaper, June 15th 2001. This debate has been discussed in chap. three.

another newspaper article in which she mentioned Islamic scholars such as Imam Abu Hanifa who ruled that a woman can be appointed a judge, and Al-Turabi who ruled that a woman can hold any position of leadership in society if she is competent. She also referred to some Nigerian Islamic scholars who, during the 1988 FOMWAN national conference, had spoken in favour of women's participation in politics.[40]

Her response was criticized a month later by a prominent Imam from Kaduna, Abubakar Ahmad Gada, who said women's role in leadership in Islam has always been to pay homage to the leaders, which today they do through voting; to claim otherwise is a new innovation which is unacceptable since Islam is an 'all-time religion'.[41] He criticized the Babangida regime for having allowed Muslim women hold the conference on women in politics in 1988 and said it was one of the atrocities of Islam since it instigated women against men. He claimed FOMWAN was formed under the guise of the Better Life Programme and was formed because the Muslim elite wanted to use it as an avenue to grasp posts, wealth and influence. 'To be frank' he wrote, 'FOMWAN is a congregation of women who are beyond the control of their husbands'.

In response to this article, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, a learned Islamic and Arabic scholar who is often critical of the politicization of Islam in Nigeria and of the conservative views which abound in attitudes towards women, wrote in defence of women's political participation quoting numerous *ahadith*.[42] He concluded that the assertion that a particular truth claim on this or any matter is the Islamic position is presumptuous and suspect.[43]

40 'Political relevance of women in Islam' published in *Weekly Trust* newspaper, August 3rd 2001; For an overview of papers discussed at the 1988 FOMWAN conference, see *The Muslim Woman*, n. 1, 1988.

41 'Political irrelevance of women in Islam' published in three sections in the *New Nigerian* newspaper, Sept. 21st, Sept. 28th and Oct. 5th 2001 and also in the *Weekly Trust* newspaper, Oct. 5th 2001.

42 Sanusi is a grandson of the Emir of Kano who was ousted during the Northern premiership of Ahmadu Bello.

43 'Women and political leadership in Muslim thought: A Critique' in *Weekly Trust*, Oct.19th 2001.

Aisha Lemu also responded to the Imam's article.[44] She reminded him that FOMWAN is affiliated to and recognized by the SCIA, the JNI, the Muslim World League, the Council of *'Ulama'* and many others. She named some respected Muslim scholars, including Abubakar Gumi, who gave FOMWAN their full support. She pointed out that FOMWAN was by no means an instrument to gain wealth or position and in fact existed on meagre resources, leaders often having to dip into their own pockets to support projects.

Another series of rebounds followed an article written in the *Weekly Trust* newspaper by a man called Abdullahi Doki who criticized FOMWAN's serializing of Hassan al-Turabi's book in this same newspaper.[45] Doki called the FOMWAN leaders western educated Muslim women elite while FOMWAN was a cover for feminism and western European concepts of women's rights. In a very strongly phrased rejoinder, Bilkisu Yusuf spoke of the fear Muslim men expressed every time they heard the term women's rights, as though the liberating injunctions of Islam were a threat to them; they label the Qur'anic rights of women as western European in origin and they stereotype people who mention these rights as western feminists recruited to undermine Islam or as women who are beyond their husband's control.[46] She went on to say that FOMWAN insists that Muslim women's rights discourse should be approached from an Islamic perspective: 'They [Muslim women's rights] should not be based on the whims and caprices of male chauvinists who seem to derive pleasure in oppressing women after jettisoning Islam and using culture as a facade.'[47]

44 'What men need to know about FOMWAN' in *Weekly Trust* newspaper, Oct. 19th 2001.

45 'The Veil and Feminism' in *Weekly Trust* newspaper, 1st July 2002 with reference to Hassan Turabi, *Women in Islam and Muslim Society*, Milestones Publications, London 1991 (republished by IET, Minna, Nigeria 1993).

46 'The Veil and Male Chauvinists'. in the *Weekly Trust* newspaper, 8th July 2002

47 'The Veil and Male Chauvinists'.

Activities of FOMWAN

Each affiliated group of FOMWAN is autonomous in its own particular aims and programmes. However, particularly in the northern states where there are few other Muslim women's organizations, some specific FOMWAN groups have been formed.

The national leadership team of FOMWAN coordinates the activities of the federation nationwide. Certain projects are proposed by the national office and are carried out by the affiliated member-groups either within their own organizations or as State FOMWAN activities. The national FOMWAN office facilitates some of these projects with funds received from international or national donor agencies.

Important among the activities of the national executive council is the annual national conference. This is attended by as many Muslim women as wish to attend. Its being held every year in a different part of the country allows for more women to participate in at least one such national event. The theme of the conference is repeated in a state conference organized by every state chapter.[48] National workshops are held from time to time for state leaders or delegates; themes are diverse, varying from HIV-AIDS awareness (Katsina, 1991), to priorities in the establishment of the *shari 'a* legal system (Gusau, 2001), to financial management and accounting (Abuja 2004). The national executive also publishes a magazine, *The Muslim Woman*. This is not a regular publication; so far there has only been one number every two or three years, nine issues in all including the first publication in 1988.

FOMWAN, at national as well as state level, collaborates with numerous national and international funding agencies concerned with the education of women, the provision of health services, the economic empowerment of women, the rehabilitation of street children, and many other development projects.[49] Most FOMWAN leaders are not only concerned

48 See Appendices nn. 4–8 for the final communiqués of some of the FOMWAN Annual National Conferences.

49 For example, the 2003 national report mentions a FOMWAN/PACKARD/PATHFINDER Health project in Kaduna state; health projects in Bauchi funded by CEDPA/USAID; the IFH/FOMWAN Integrated Health Project in Bauchi and Borno; a workshop organized with the International Women Communication Centre (IWCC) on AIDS in Kwara State; a FOMWAN/UNICEF project on AIDS awareness in schools in Bauchi; a workshop on AIDS funded by DFID (Dept. for International Development) in Ekiti; participation in activities of the State Action Committee on AIDS (SACA) in Ekiti; participation in USAID and Lagos State Education project Literacy Enhancement Assisted Project (LEAP); organization of reproductive health activities in Koggi State in collaboration with Futures Group International and Nigeria Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ); ... Cf. *The Muslim Woman*, nn. 6, 7 and 8 (1997, 2000, 2003).

with religious rhetoric about Muslim women's rights and responsibilities, but they are fully and actively immersed in the reality lived by women and are committed to improving the daily living conditions of their Muslim sisters. The propagation of Islam is grounded in their belief that Islam is a way of life that not only gives guidelines for personal, family and sexual ethics but for social, economic and political ethics as well.

a) Political Empowerment and Civic Responsibilities

As already seen, there are diverse positions of Muslim scholars and leaders on the issue of women's political participation. All positions cite supportive Islamic sources.[50] Opponents cite Q 4:34, interpreting it as implying that since Allah has asked men to look after the affairs of women, women are not needed in the political arena. Opponents also claim that woman's place is in the home. They cite the *hadith* that a nation that allows a woman to run its affairs can never prosper and they argue that during the lifetime of Muhammad no woman was ever appointed to lead the community. Supporters cite Q 3:104 and Q 9:71 to claim that the essence of politics in Islam is to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil in society, a responsibility which God has explicitly given to both men and women. They interpret Q 4:34 and the controversial word *qawwām* as referring to men's directing role only in the family and to matters con-

50 For an overview of the different views on this question in Nigeria and the arguments given, see I.N. Sada – *al.*, ed., *'Shari 'a and the Rights of*, 17–20.

cerning the husband and wife relationship.[51] They examine, as has done Fatima Mernissi, the *hadith* cited and the circumstance of its narration, claiming that the *hadith* goes against the story of the Qur'anic surah on Queen Bilqis and hence is to be rejected.[52] Those who support a restrictive role for women in politics feel she can be elected to any post other then executive or leadership posts, or that only a woman who has passed the childbearing age can run for a political position.[53]

In 1988, the first issue of *The Muslim Woman* was dedicated to the theme 'The Role of Muslim Women in Politics' which had been discussed at that year's national conference. The conference aimed at helping Muslim women acquire the education and skills required to become active participants in politics. Thus they would help to protect the interests of Islam and Muslims in the 1992 elections when Babangida was due to hand over to a civilian government. To enable them do this, emphasis had to be put on the education of women.[54] As mentioned above, there were many negative reactions to this conference.

In the year 2000 FOMWAN published a book entitled *Democracy and Governance: Focus on Moslem Women: Rights and Civic Responsibilities*.[55]

51 U. Bugaje, 'Muslim Women and the Question of Politics: Some Elucidation', paper presented at the FOMWAN annual conference, 1997 (unpublished).

52 U. Bugaje, 'Towards a Global Women's Islamic Movement', Keynote address at the formal opening of the FOMWAN tenth anniversary international conference, August 1995, in *The Muslim Woman*, n. 6, 1997, 8–14.

53 In a conference held in 1998 on 'Muslim Women in the Contemporary World', the participants, the majority of whom were men, vehemently attacked an Islamic scholar for suggesting that Islam does not forbid women from becoming a head of state. The conference was organized by the Dept. of Islamic Studies, Usman Dan Fodio University, Sokoto, in 1998. Reported in I.N. Sada – *al*., ed., *'Shari 'a and the Rights of*, 20.

54 'The Role of Muslim Women in Politics from 1992' in *The Muslim Woman*, n. 1, 1988. Considering that most Nigerian Heads of State have been northern Muslims, the oft repeated claim that Muslims are marginalized in politics has little foundation but it serves to help the Muslim population feel victimized and hence support their politicians who call for *shari 'a* as their religious right.

55 FOMWAN, *Democracy and Governance: Focus on Moslem Women: Rights and Civic Responsibilities,* Niger, 2000.

In this book, which holds both English and Hausa translation within the same cover, the rights of a Muslim woman are explained with Qur'anic texts and *ahadith* to support the arguments. Under the section on women's political rights, the rights to choose a good leader and to be consulted are outlined but no mention is made of a woman's right to stand for election.[56]

In 2003 FOMWAN members were given workshops by a team from the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) on civic responsibilities in a democratic state.[57] In collaboration with the Muslim League for Accountability (MULAC), FOMWAN members were trained and then sent to help monitor the 2003 elections in 15 Northern States.[58]

The 2004 annual national conference looked closely at the question of civic rights and responsibilities in a democratic state. The participants were reminded many times during the conference that if Muslim women continue to sit back and allow leaders do as they wish with the country's resources and with its citizens, they are failing in their duty as *khalifa* of the earth.[59]

b) Health

The national FOMWAN Health Board collaborates with the state chapters in holding workshops on reproductive health, maternal healthcare, HIV/AIDS control and prevention, and other health issues. They train Traditional Birth Attendants and have given a number of training workshops to Imams and Islamiyya school teachers.[60]

56 FOMWAN, *Democracy and Governance*, 20–21.

57 This was funded by Nigeria's Security, Justice and Growth Programme of the Department for International Development (DFID), implemented by the British Council.

58 Cf. 'FOMWAN National Projects' in *The Muslim Woman*, n. 8, 2003, 26–27; 'FOMWAN Election Monitoring Experience' in *The Muslim Woman*, n. 9, 22.

59 Cf. Appendix n. 8.

60 Cf. 'FOMWAN National Projects', 26–27 and 'FOMWAN Health Board' in *FOMWAN 20th Anniversary*, 2005, 16.

Two FOMWAN national conferences, the first in 1986 (Lagos) and the sixth in 1991 (Jos) looked at family-health issues including family planning, the scourge of VVF, and problems associated with child marriage. The communiqués produced at the end of these two conferences were republished in a book in 2004.[61] Preventive as well as curative measures were seen to be necessary to overcome the health problems faced by women. As a priority FOMWAN proposes that parents do not marry their daughters until they have finished their education and are fully matured.

Arguments have been presented by Islamic scholars to counter the still widely practiced tendency of forcing young girls to marry.[62] This is permitted in the *shari 'a* according to the interpretation of the Maliki school of law as understood in Nigeria.[63] Because of the Prophet's marriage to Â'isha when she was nine years or younger, it is unanimously agreed by all the jurists that there is no limit to the age a girl must reach before she

61 B. Yusuf, ed., *Islam, Health and Muslim Women: Proceedings of FOMWAN Conferences*, FOMWAN publication, Kaduna 2004.

62 According to I.N. Sada – *al*., ed., *'Shari 'a and the Rights of*, 26, the practice of early and forced marriage is declining but is still widely practiced in rural areas, especially of Sokoto state. A research carried out by WRAPA in 2001 showed that the age of first marriage was between ten and fifteen years for 49.2% of their respondents and 44.6% between ten and twenty years; thus 93.8% got married before they were twenty: Cf. *WRAPA newsletter*, vol. 2, n. 3, July –September 2001, 9, 13–15.

63 A father may give his previously unmarried daughter to marry a man he chooses for her, with or without her consent, under the right of *ijbar*, provided she is a virgin, under-aged, and is given to a suitable, socially equal husband. If it is feared that the girl will engage in illicit sexual behaviour, the father or even the leader of the community may force her to marry in order to protect her and the rest of the society from her corruption, since public morality and the individual's own integrity take priority over personal freedom when these come into conflict. Scholars point out, however, that even Maliki agreed that it is commendable to seek the consent of the girl because nowhere does the Qur'an or Muhammad speak with approval of such coercive authority and there are *ahadith* which suggest that the prophet did not agree with the practice. Cf. I.N. Sada – *al*., ed., *'Shari 'a and the Rights of*, 26–27.

is married. The marriage can take place anytime but consummation must wait until the girl is mentally and physically capable.[64]

Given these arguments, it is not possible for FOMWAN leaders to seek that early marriage be criminalized in the *shari 'a*. Instead they can and do insist that the practice is harmful to a girl's fulfilment of her duties and responsibilities as a mother and wife in today's world which only a good and complete education will qualify her for.[65] They also insist that marriage interrupts a girl's education and therefore goes against the obligation of all Muslims to acquire knowledge.[66] FOMWAN is also enabling girls know that they have the right known as *hijarul baluga*, the option of puberty, whereby an adolescent who was married as a child can either uphold the marriage or annul it provided it has not been consummated.[67]

Although, according to FOMWAN, the issue of family planning has often been a controversial one as to mention it at all left one open to being criticized and labelled as both a feminist and a westernized thinker, at their first national conference FOMWAN risked making a public statement on the matter. The conference communiqué expressed that family planning is permissible in Islam since the practice of *coitus interruptus* is accepted in all the schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Hence, FOMWAN concludes that contemporary methods which have the same principles are also permissible provided they are harmless to both spouses. Family planning should be geared towards spacing rather than limiting of child birth.[68]

64 According to I.N. Sada – *al*., ed., *'Shari 'a and the Rights of*, 27.

65 Cf. B. Yusuf, 'Vesico Vaginal Fistula: The Scourge of Mothers' in B. Yusuf, ed., *Islam, Health and*, 97–103; see also in the same book, F. Ibrahim, 'Child Marriage and its Consequences', 16–22.

66 See Communiqué FOMWAN first national conference 1986, Appendix n. 5.

67 According to D.O.S. Noibi (Head of Dept. of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan), 'Child-Marriage, Education and Social Responsibilities: The Islamic Point of View' in B. Yusuf, ed., *Islam, Health and*, (23–30), 28.

68 See Appendix n. 5.

Unfortunately, in Northern Nigeria, maternal and infant mortality, VVF, and child marriages continue to be among the highest in the world while HIV/AIDS is increasing. Women's lack of knowledge about issues relating to their reproductive health, their lack of access to such knowledge or to any form of contraception, their lack of choice about matters relating to family planning or safe sex, their dependence on their husbands for permission to leave their homes as well as for money to cover medical expenses, polygamous relations of husbands and lack of HIV/AIDS awareness, leaves Muslim women very vulnerable, and the whole area of health a huge one which FOMWAN is gradually trying, together with other NGOs, to address.

c) Education of women and children

'FOMWAN envisions a world where women are properly educated and equipped to work with men for an equitable and peaceful society.'[69] Over forty FOMWAN Nursery/Primary and Secondary Schools have been established across the country. More than fifty FOMWAN Women's Islamiyya Literacy schools and Vocational Centres have been established; in most of these, subjects like English and Mathematics are also taught.[70] Comparing the 2003 and 2005 FOMWAN State Reports with those of 2000, there is a notable increase in the introduction, even in rural areas, of Adult Literacy classes.[71]

Both illiteracy and the gender gap in education are exceptionally high in the northern states. Recent statistics in literacy rates show that there is a gender gap of 12% in favour of the male child in Nigeria; in Zamfara and Sokoto states, this gap is as wide as 48%. The northern states as a

69 'FOMWAN at a glance' Programme of 2003 FOMWAN Board of Education Conference, 2.

70 See 'FOMWAN Policy on Education', in *Al-Hadi* (The Guide), Newsletter of FOMWAN National Board of Education, vol. 4, August 2003, 2.

71 'FOMWAN Round-up' in *The Muslim Woman,* n. 7, 2000, 14–17; 'FOMWAN Projects and Activities around the States' in *The Muslim Woman,* n. 8, 2003, 27–28); 'Reports from State Chapters' in *FOMWAN 20th Anniversary*, 2005, 18–56.

whole are considered priority focus states where the gender disparities need to be overcome by increased commitment to the education of the girl child.[72]

The barriers to women's education and the causes of such high illiteracy and hence low public professional participation are many: the priority given by parents to the education of male children; the traditional attitude of seclusion which did not provide for effective education of girls and women at home; the fear parents/husbands have of sending their daughters or wives to co-educational schools in case of moral misbehaviour; the traditional but prevailing belief of parents that the education of a daughter is an economic waste since after education she will move to her husband's house and hence will be of no benefit to them; the traditional belief that a girl must not remain in her parent's house after her third menstrual cycle and thus even in cases where she is sent to school she is withdrawn before she finishes so as to be married and sent to a husband's house; the assumption that educated women are arrogant and indisciplined.[73]

To advocate for the retention of girls in schools, the provision of continued education for married women, and the integration of literacy, numeric and vocational training in Qur'anic schools, FOMWAN leaders refer to the value Islam attaches to knowledge (Q 35:28), Muhammad's command on all men and women to seek knowledge, *ahadith* which promote the education of women[74], and the need for girls to be properly

72 Strategy for the Acceleration of Girls' Education in Nigeria (SAGEN), Fed. Government of Nigeria/UNICEF, statistics of 2001, 7–9.

73 'Breaking the Literacy Barrier among Muslim Women in Nigeria, in *The Muslim Woman*, n. 6, 1997, (45–47), 46.

74 Reference is often made to a *hadith* whereby the Prophet likened the education of a woman to the education of a nation, for example in 'Women and Education' in *FOMWAN Al-Hadi* (The Guide), vol. 4, August 2003, 3. Reference is also made to the *hadith* whereby the Prophet said that anyone who brought up his daughters or sisters and gave them a broad education would be rewarded with Paradise, for example in A. Lemu, *A Degree Above Them*, 6. (Lemu wrote that the *hadith* was transmitted by Abu Daud and Tirmidhi but I have been unable to find any refer-

educated if they are to be wives and mothers: 'Ignorance is not a qualification for anything, not even for a housewife!'[75]

The education of children is also a priority in FOMWAN which corresponds not only to the future Islamization of the society but also to woman's responsibility of *tarbiyah* (proper upbringing of children). According to one FOMWAN leader, this is of particular urgency in a multi-religious country where 'moral decadence' is facing the nation.[76]

The efforts FOMWAN put into decreasing the level of illiteracy and promoting the education of the girl child correspond to a similar impetus at international and national levels. In recent times, there is heightened awareness worldwide that the causes of illiteracy and poverty include religious and cultural beliefs and thus that government or UN policies to combat such social problems will only be effective if done in collaboration with local civil society bodies.[77] Hence, FOMWAN is involved in many government policies related to reducing illiteracy and the gender gap and also collaborates with international agencies in implementing their aid policies. At its 15th annual conference in Bauchi in August 2000, FOMWAN launched a nationwide campaign to sensitize the Muslim population, particularly women and children, to appreciate education and embrace the government's Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme.[78] All of this recognition and collaboration implies government and international funding for FOMWAN's work in this sector.[79]

ence to this *hadith* in the *hadith* database provided online by the Muslim Students' Association).

75 *Al-Hadi*, vol. 4, August 2003, 3; Aisha, the Prophet's wife who engaged Muhammad in questioning about Islam and he in turn advised the people that they should learn half their religion from her, is often quoted as an example to emulate, for example in A. Lemu, *The Ideal Muslim Wife*, Islamic Education Trust, Minna 2001 (first published 1992), 30.

76 L. Okunno, 'Women, Secularism and Democracy'.

77 'Overview of the state of Nigerian Education' in J. Urwick – B. Aliyu, *Towards the re-dynamisation of Nigeria's education system*, Report of the Symposium organized by the Council for Education in the Commonwealth on the future of Nigerian Education, a joint Nigerian-British event held at the Lensbury Conference Centre, Teddington Lock, England, 17th–20th July 2003, (3–5), 4.

The nomadic population of the northern Muslim Fulani pastoralists numbers approximately 6.5 million. Their adult literacy rates are extremely low, they depend quite a bit on child labour, and they see formal education as irrelevant to their migrant life style. The Federal Ministry of Education has granted official recognition to FOMWAN as a stakeholder in its Nomadic Education programme.[80]

The traditional Almajirai system, a religiously-based traditional system of Qur'anic education in which young boys from the age of seven remain in the care of a travelling Mallam for several years, presents another serious problem in Northern Nigeria which can only be properly tackled by the Muslim community.[81] In recent years this has become 'a system of poverty, hunger, malnutrition and diseases for both the teachers and the students'.[82] The Qur'anic education these children receive is often a recital of the Qur'an without any idea of its meaning; otherwise they are entirely illiterate. The streets of northern Nigerian cities are full of these unwashed, malnourished and poorly dressed young beggars who are easy prey to politicians or others who want to use religion for material or political gain; with a very few Naira and maybe a Qur'anic verse or *hadith*, these boys are bought and sent to loot and cause riots.[83]FOMWAN and

78 *Al-Hadi*, vol. 4, August 2003, 3.

79 Cf. 'FOMWAN Education Programme' in *FOMWAN 20th Anniversary* edition, 2005, 10–16; *Al-Hadi*, vol. 4, August 2003, 3.

80 'Showcase Nigeria – The Nomadic education Programme' in J. Urwick – B. Aliyu, *Towards the re-dynamisation of*, 15–16; 'Strengthening Basic Education in Pastoral Communities Through Community Mobilization' in *CEF Nigeria News* (Commonwealth Education Fund), Special Edition, Oct. 2003, 11.

81 This has a religious origin in the *hadith* that enjoins Muslims to seek knowledge from as far as China. Many traditional Islamic scholars in Northern Nigeria, including Uthmân d'an Fodiyo, received their education through this system.

82 F.L. Adamu, Sokoto State FOMWAN, 'The Almajiranci System of Qur'anic Education: A Critical Overview' in *The Muslim Woman,* n. 6, 1997, 43.

83 F.L. Adamu, 'The Almajiranci System of', 44.

other Muslim organizations have recognised that it is their responsibility as Muslims to address this problem.

FOMWAN's Understanding of Woman's Rights

In *Democracy & Governance: Focus on Moslem Women, Rights & Civic Responsibilities,* the rights of Muslim women, as understood by FOMWAN, are explained. This book has been distributed to Muslim women at many national conferences since it was published in the year 2000. The Centre for Islamic Legal Studies in Zaria University (CILS) provides the authoritative voice for this liberating but yet traditional understanding of women's rights.[84]

Chapter one of FOMWAN's book describes the fundamental human rights which are common to both men and women. General rights include the right to life (Q 6:151; 25:68; 5:32; 4:29 4:30; 4:92; 17:31; 6:151), to human equality (Q 49:13), to intellectual development (Q 96:1–5; 20:114), to freedom of thought (Q 13:3–4), to peace and serenity (Q 4:75; 2:190; 22:40), to religious freedom (Q 6:108; 29:46), to privacy (Q 24:27; 24:58), and to freedom of expression (Q 4:59). Economic rights include the right to work (Q 67:15; 28:77), to have equal access to resources (Q 2:29), to receive a just and reasonable wage, to have access to the basic necessities of life (Q 51:19), to own private property (Q 4:32), to inherit (Q 4:33; 2:180; 4:7,11,12,176), and to have one's property protected (Q 2:188). Political rights include the right to nominate/elect a leader, to have access to a leader, to equality before the law, and to be consulted (for these political rights, only *ahadith* are cited).[85]

Chapter two looks more specifically at the Muslim woman's rights. She has the right to choose a husband, to make stipulations in her marriage contract[86], to have and to derive pleasure from sexual relations with her husband (Q 2:187), to seek divorce[87], to have custody of her children unless she remarries[88], to be reconciled after divorce (Q 2:228),

84 Cf. I.N. Sada – *al*., ed., *'Shari 'a and the Rights of Muslim Women in Northern Nigeria'*, Report prepared for the special programme on women in the North, CILS and DFID, Abuja, June 2004

85 FOMWAN, *Democracy and Governance*, 2–11.

86 Since the majority of women are both poor and illiterate, they know little about making stipulations in a marriage contract. Hence FOMWAN's primary insistence on education.

87 According to FOMWAN, a woman in an unpleasant marriage has a right to seek divorce (*khul*) after all efforts at reconciliation fail, either by asking her husband to terminate the contract or by going to court. If the husband is not at fault, she is obliged to return all or part of her dowry to him (based on Q 2:229). Cf. FOMWAN, *Democracy and Governance*, 15. A woman has a right to judicial divorce if she has sufficient proof of ill-treatment including physical and psychological torture, non-provision of maintenance, husband's impotence, desertion, incurable and communicable diseases, *li'an* whereby a husband accuses his wife of adultery but cannot prove it, *ila* whereby a husband does not have sexual intercourse with his wife for four months or more, and *zihar* whereby a husband humiliates his wife by comparing her constantly to his mother. In effect, *talaq* (unilateral repudiation of the marriage by the husband verbally pronouncing it) is the most prevalent form of divorce in Northern Nigeria. In *talaq* divorce, a man has the option of reclaiming his wife to the exclusion of all other men within the first three months. She is required to be in the matrimonial home during this period and the husband is required to provide maintenance for her, although no conjugal relationship is permitted. After the third *talaq,* a husband cannot remarry the wife until she has experienced another marriage with a different husband (based on Q 2:129). In Northern Nigeria, there is a common abuse of this prerogative given to men: men pronounce *talaq* at prohibited times, such as when a woman is menstruating or when pregnant or when he is drunk; men threaten women with *talaq* in frivolous ways, such as when a woman insists on correct maintenance; men pronounce the 1st, 2nd and 3rd *talaq* in one sitting, without leaving the necessary three months between each pronouncement, and hence force the wife to leave the marital home immediately he pronounces it; men deny women their post-*talaq* entitlements including the three-month maintenance and the maintenance for their children, as well as often denying her custody of the young children. Cf. I.N. Sada – *al*., ed., *'Shari 'a and the Rights of*, 39–43.

88 A divorced woman has a right to custody of her daughters until they marry and of her sons until they reach puberty. If she remarries, custody of her children passes to her relatives first and then to her husband's relatives. Cf. FOMWAN, *Democracy and Governance*, 15 In practice, however, wives are commonly denied custody of

and to retain her own identity after marriage. She also has the right to be consulted (Q 42:38), to express her own opinion (Q 58:1–2), to be protected against physical abuse and slander (Q 24:4–5), and to receive fair treatment in polygamy (Q 4:129)[89]. Her economic rights include the right to receive dower (*mahr)* (Q 4:24), to be maintained and protected in marriage (Q 4:34), to own and dispose of property, to enter into a business contract, to take up employment outside the home[90], to inherit (Q 4:7), to will out property (*wasiyyah*), and to engage in economic activity (Q 2:275). Her political rights give her the right to hold a political view, to elect a leader, and to contribute to state discourse.

Some rights of Muslim women in difficult circumstances are described such as the right to receive shelter as a divorcee (Q 65:1, 6), to receive a gift on divorce if the marriage had been consummated (Q 33: 49; 2:236), to be maintained as a divorcee (Q 2:241), to be supported in maternity as a divorcee (Q 2:233), to be maintained as a widow (Q 2:240), not to be inherited as property if widowed (Q 4:19), and to remarry if widowed (Q 2:234).[91]

The third and last chapter looks at the civic responsibilities of a Muslim woman. Her responsibilities to herself include personal and environmental hygiene, self-development, and maintaining her self respect and dignity by behaving and dressing in an appropriate manner for which hijab is recommended. Her responsibilities to the family include creating a conducive home environment, respecting and obeying her spouse

their children and they seldom pursue the issue for fear that the husband will not provide custody maintenance and thus cause suffering to the children. Cf. I.N. Sada – *al*., ed., *'Shari 'a and the Rights of*, 43–44.

89 More common, however, is the denial of equal treatment between co-wives in areas of provision and conjugal rights. Cf. I.N. Sada – *al*., ed., *'Shari 'a and the Rights of*, 31.

90 This is another particularly controversial point. Many husbands in Northern Nigeria still insist on total seclusion and prevent their wives from taking employment outside the home so as to protect their chastity and the husband's family name. Cf. I.N. Sada – *al*., ed., *'Shari 'a and the Rights of*, 45.

91 FOMWAN, *Democracy and Governance*, 12–24.

(Q 4:34)[92], giving her children a religious and moral upbringing (Q 66:6), establishing good relationships with relatives (Q 4:1), evolving Islamic culture in the home, managing family resources, giving direction to the children, advising her husband, cooperating with her husband (Q 33:35), protecting her husband's interests, building the characters of the young, and maintaining her chastity (Q 17:32). Her responsibilities to society are to enjoin good and forbid evil and offer community service.

By insisting that women's rights be respected by the *Umma*, the Islamic judges, and the Muslim leaders in government, and also by ensuring women know and are empowered to claim their rights and responsibilities, FOMWAN believes Muslim women's lives have a greater hope of improvement. This is the goal FOMWAN seeks. By using a religious framework and giving religious justification to their arguments, they can ensure they will be listened to and their discourse will be acceptable to leaders who, for whatever reasons, promote an Islamic society. They can justifiably state that women have been and are still oppressed in Muslim societies in Northern Nigeria, that this was done in the name of Islam, that this is wrong and must be remedied. To promote a true Islamic society which is structured socially and legally according to Islam (Qur'an, Sunnah, *Shari 'a*) as opposed to the existent so-called Muslim society which has been negatively influenced by cultural traditions is, in FOMWAN's understanding, to promote women.

a) Hijab

By way of Muslim dress, many women simply use a colourful silk scarf thrown loosely around their head and shoulders. Quite common too is the stricter, ready-made waist-length chador, slipped over the head and cut like a tight-fitting hood, used by many schools as part of the

92 FOMWAN stresses that there is a limit to which a woman must obey her husband, that is, if he asks something which is not in accordance with God's will: 'Obedience to the husband does not override obedience to God.' Hence, a woman is not obliged to obey her husband if he does not fulfill his God-given responsibilities or respect her God-given rights. FOMWAN, *Democracy and Governance*, 28–29.

girl's uniform. The women who belong to the Islamic Movement wear a plain coloured, full-length hijab and stockings as do the members of the Women in *Da 'wa* group. A small but growing number of women are to be seen in northern cities wearing a black full-length hijab with a veil over their faces and only their eyes exposed. These women do not belong to any group but, according to some FOMWAN officials, they acquired this custom after having seen women dressed this way when they were in Saudi Arabia on hajj.

Few women will speak of the hijab as being oppressive or imposed on them by any religious leader or politician. Rather, they say they themselves choose to adopt it in obedience to the Qur'anic injunction.[93] Some claim it allows them the freedom to move around unmolested in the public space.[94] Bilkisu Yusuf insists that too much attention is given to the issue of hijab when there are much more relevant issues to be concerned about.[95]

93 FOMWAN, *Democracy and Governance*, 27–28: 'When she goes outside her home, the hijab is recommended for her as a symbol of modesty and self-respect.'; In an article entitled 'Between dressing and moral decency' in *Sautin Nisa'i,* FOMWAN Kaduna State Branch magazine, vol. 1, n. 1, August 2001, 13–14, a young member refers to Q 33:59 as an islamic injunction applicable to all women. She quotes a *hadith* related by Abu Hurairah where the prophet Muhammad cursed any woman who wears men's clothes and any man who wears women's clothes. This latter can be quite confusing since the school uniform for many Muslim girls in Northern Nigeria consists of a waist-length hijab over a pair of trousers, while for Christians trousers are considered men's clothes, forbidden to women by the common interpretation of Deut. 22: 5!

94 For an example of a quite common understanding of hijab in Nigeria: 'Hijab is the covering of all necessary parts of the body that are likely to cause sexual arousal in the opposite sex ... Hijab is instituted to help curb sexual promiscuity. It helps to protect the dignity, respect, honour, and woman's beauty against societal abuse. Hijab is a symbol of identity, a symbol of righteousness and an icon of consciousness ... Hijab helps to stimulate learning as it does not allow the young male students to have room for distraction in the lecture rooms.' in 'Philosophy of Hijab' in Islamic Synopsis Section, *Vanguard* newspaper, 30th April 2003, 34.

95 Cf. 'The Role of the Media in Development in a *Shari 'a* Society', paper presented at the International Conference on Implementation of the *Shari 'a* in a Democracy: The Nigerian Experience, Abuja Sheraton Hotel, 7th–9th July, 2004, organized by the Centre for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID). A detailed report of the conference is available online (see bibliography).

In one edition of the FOMWAN magazine a male writer complained that their 10th anniversary publication had included a photo of women on the cover and so had disregarded the Qur'anic injunction that all parts of a woman's body should be covered.[96] In her reply, the editor pointed out that this particular quotation was not in the Qur'an, reminded him of Qur'anic verses which do refer to women's dress (Q 24:31; 33:59) and explained that these do not demand that the face and hands be covered. She also reminded him that how men respond to such photos where the women were modestly dressed depends on men's 'own iman' and that the Qur'an has commanded men as well as women not to gaze or stare at the opposite sex (Q 24:30).[97]

The issue of hijab has made national news from time to time. In February and in March 2003, members of the National Association of Muslim Youth Organization (NACOMYO) invaded schools in Ibadan and attempted to enforce the hijab on Muslim students; in other schools a number of girls arrived in school dressed in hijab and refused to remove it when asked to do so by the Principal. Rioting resulted and schools were closed for two weeks by the state government.[98] The national FOMWAN Public Relations Officer, who is based in Ibadan, issued a statement on behalf of the federation. It simply stated that in view of the increasing scourge of HIV/AIDS which was due to sexual permissiveness and the custom of so many young girls nowadays to parade the streets semi-nude, she found it unfortunate that people who pretend to care for the morality of young people should discourage girls from covering their bodies.[99]

96 The writer quoted 'Al-mara'atu Kulluhu al-aurat'. Cf. *The Muslim Woman*, n. 6, 1997, 7

97 *The Muslim Woman*, n. 6, 1997, 7.

98 'Moslem youths invade Ibadan schools over use of veil' in *The Guardian* newspaper, 18th March 2003; '39 Moslems on trial in Ibadan over veils' in *The Guardian* newspaper, 19th March 2003.

99 *Daily Trust* newspaper, 3rd March 2003.

At the same time, February 2003, in Abeokuta, three hundred members of the MSS protested against the Directorate of National Civic Registration (DNCR) whose officials insisted that Muslim women should remove their head covering so as to be photographed for registration. They also insisted that instead of allowing women to be photographed by men, female officials should perform this task. The MSS students appealed on the grounds that Nigeria 'is a multi-religious country. There is freedom of religion, conscience and thought.'[100]

b) Polygamy

Polygamy, or more correctly polygyny, one man having more than one wife, is widely practiced in Muslim societies in Northern Nigeria among the poor and wealthy, the educated and uneducated.

In a study of professional women in Sokoto State, Margaret Knipp contends that their attitude to polygyny is that of dislike coupled with resignation that it is something they cannot avoid and so they have to get used to it. As for the uneducated, traditional women, Knipp found that even if they don't like it, they don't question it.[101] I found the same attitude among the Muslim women I met during my time in Nigeria. While many women do not particularly like the practice of polygyny, having experienced deep hurt when their husband informed them after many years of marriage that he was taking a younger woman as a second wife, they believe they must accept it as a matter of faith since it is Qur'anically permitted that he take up to four. Hence very few are ready to speak out against it. Aisha Lemu, however, sees monogamy as the norm, basing her arguments on Q 4:3 and Q 4:129.[102]

100 'Students protest treatment of Muslim women' in *Daily Trust* newspaper, 27th February, 2003.

101 M.M. Knipp, *Women, Western Education and Change: A Case Study of the Hausa-Fulani of Northern Nigeria*, D.Phil. Dissertation, North Western University, Illinois, Evanston1987, 335.

102 A. Lemu, *A Degree Above Them*, 17.

Given the socio-economic poverty in the region, some women are quite happy to become a second or third wife. Certainly in cases of wealthy men who can afford to give the woman a place of her own, or in the case of a wealthy woman who has her own place, this can be attractive.[103] However, for the majority of Muslim women in Northern Nigeria, polygamous marriage means sharing an already overcrowded and poor home with her co-wives. In urban areas they may have to share the same rooms while in rural areas each wife usually has her own small hut while all the wives and children share the compound. The majority of Muslim men in Nigeria, according to Aisha Lemu, 'jump into polygamy as if the condition or the warning [ref. to Q 4:3, 129] had no relevance to them, and no importance, and proceed according to their whims, without approaching in any way the standard of justice required.'[104]

To preserve unity and ensure their voice is accepted by the *Umma*, FOMWAN does not enter into issues that could be too disruptive in terms of diverse scholarly interpretations. Hence, to take steps such as seeking to introduce a law that limits a man to only one wife, as has been done in other Muslim societies such as Morocco and Tunisia, is not something FOMWAN is ready to do.

The problem of 'feminism' as a label

FOMWAN leaders refuse to label themselves or their federation as feminist and they are careful to avoid giving any grounds to justify accusations of being anything other than strictly Islamic.[105]In the communiqué from the 1985 meeting at which it was decided to form a national federation of Muslim women's groups, they clearly stated their rejection of western ideas of women's liberation which have no relevance in Muslim communities because Islam grants Muslim women all the rights they need.[106]

103 It is generally unacceptable that an unmarried woman lives alone. Even if her male relatives permitted it, she would have difficulty in finding a place to rent.

104 A. Lemu, *A Degree Above Them*, 16.

105 Aisha Lemu, interview 1st April 2004, Minna.

106 See Appendix n. 4.

Bilkisu Yusuf explained that FOMWAN's rejection of feminism is because of the western perception it evokes.[107] FOMWAN leaders repeatedly claim that it is not any feminist project but rather the propagation of Islam in Nigeria which is their main concern, and that this will automatically entail improvement in women's lives.

Is FOMWAN Political?

All FOMWAN officials deny that the federation represents a political form of Islam. Aisha Lemu, the first national Amirah, claims that she has never heard a quarrel on politics at a FOMWAN meeting. She says that despite the diversity in their approach to and understanding of Islamic teachings, women are united in their concern for the promotion of women and are not disunited by particular political ideals.[108] From my own interaction with many of the leaders, I believe that while some members may be using the organization and the cause of women to win political power and access to economic control, this is not the primary interest of most.

FOMWAN's determination to secure the support of Islamic leaders in the country through inviting them to their events, remaining within the parameters of acceptable Islamic interpretations, and throwing their weight and support behind the extended implementation of the *shari 'a* legal system, seems to merit the organization being considered a form of political Islam.[109]

FOMWAN could also be considered an Islamist organization since it functions entirely within an Islamic framework. The leaders teach that all solutions to society's woes are to be found in Islam, just as all the problems women suffer are due to lack of adherence in society to Islam.

107 Bilkisu Yusuf, in a written response to a questionnaire I presented her with, Feb. 2004 'Muslims believe they can advocate for their rights without labeling themselves feminists, a word that reminds them of bra-burning and anti-family stance of some western feminist movements.'

108 Aisha Lemu, interview 1st April 2004, Minna.

109 Cf. H.J. Abdullah, 'Religious Revivalism', 157.

As already mentioned and as is elaborated on below, FOMWAN has in recent years also begun to rely on what can be considered a form of Islamic feminism in Northern Nigeria.

Whether political, Islamist or Islamic feminist, there is no doubt that FOMWAN has brought the concerns of women to the forefront of debates among the Muslim community in Nigeria. They have also mobilized, conscientised and empowered women through their activities, availing fully of available funding as well as of the media. Thus, they challenge the public and the state to take issues of women's rights seriously and they are more effective, given the context in which they are working, than any secular feminist movement would be.

The *Shari 'a* Debate

Shortly after the formation of FOMWAN, the leaders requested that *shari 'a* courts be established in the south where they did not exist. At that time their focus was not on the extended legislation of *shari 'a* but only on courts to administer Personal Law as already existed in the northern states.[110] Such a request was most certainly related to the demands made by the Muslim pro-*shari 'a* group at the constituent assemblies of 1978 and 1988.[111]

110 B. Yusuf, 'Challenges for Muslim Women': 'Muslim women, under FOMWAN, sent a memorandum to the Constitution Review Committee appointed in 1987 to review Nigeria's 1979 Constitution. The memorandum called for the establishment of *Shari 'a* Courts in the Southern States where they do not exist.' Unfortunately, I was unable to access the memorandum referred to.

111 In 1978, the pro-*shari 'a* group demanded a federal *Shari 'a* Court of Appeal as an intermediate court between the State *Shari 'a* Courts and the Supreme Court of Nigeria as well as a *Shari 'a* Court of Appeal in each state of the federation that desired it. Muslim arguments in favor of this included: a transplanted English law should not be imposed as the common law in Nigeria; the laws of the country were a legacy of colonialism and biased in favour of Christianity; the present legal system was tyrannical and inimical to Muslims; to deny Muslims the right to live subject to the *shari 'a* was to deny them their freedom of religion. Eventually the compromise

Issues of *shari 'a* have been particularly pronounced since late 1999 when twelve northern state governors, beginning with Ahmed Sani, the Governor of Zamfara State, announced the extended implementation of *shari 'a* law as the legal and administrative system in their states. Condemnations of this move by Muslims and non-Muslims alike were rife throughout the country.[112] Even Ibrahim el-Zakzaky of the Islamic Movement opposed the move on the grounds that passing and implementing harsh *shari 'a* punishments without first ensuring just socioeconomic relations is not Islamic.[113]

Nonetheless, extending *Shari 'a* as a legal system had widespread support in Muslim communities nationwide. One reason for this was the election in 1999 of a Christian from the southwest as President. The poor saw the *shari 'a* as insurance that the much needed infrastructures and social services would be provided. Women saw it as ensuring that their legitimate Islamic rights would be protected. The introduction of *shari 'a* criminal law was widely expected to end a corrupt and slow judicial process. Because *zakat* (the charity tithe) is one of the five pillars of Islam, many people expected that a serious social welfare program would result in the States.

Since according to the Constitution criminal law must be codified in Nigeria, *Shari 'a* Criminal Codes were rapidly introduced in the twelve

was reached that three judges learned in Islamic Law would sit in the Federal Court of Appeal on appeals coming from the State *Shari 'a* Courts of Appeal. Although the whole Northern Muslim delegation, eighty-eight in number, staged a walkout to show their disapproval, this compromise was adopted in their absence. For an overview of the arguments made at the Constituent assembly both in favour of and in opposition to the pro-*shari 'a* demands, see M.H. Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power,* 118–124; see also H. Abdu, 'Religion, Democratization', 165–170.

112 Following the announcement of the Zamfara State Governor in October that he was going to extend the implementation of *shari 'a* in his state, women from many Muslim countries, gathered in Lagos at a WLUML workshop, published a communiqué where they loudly condemned the move. See Appendix n.10.

113 Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, 'It is not anybody who can implement *shari 'a*' in *Weekly Trust* newspaper, 8th Oct. 1999.

states.[114] Diverse NGOs[115] were alert to the potential of these new *shari 'a* codes to violate women's rights and to the possibility of an abuse of women's rights with the fervour of *shari 'a* implementation. Coalition groups were formed to defend women's rights under the *Shari 'a* Penal Codes. These include the Coalition for the Protection of Women's Rights in Secular, Customary and Religious Laws[116] and the *Shari 'a* Stakeholders Group.[117]

As these NGOs had expected, in the initial enthusiasm for *shari 'a*, there were rampant reports of infringement on the privacy of especially single women as well as restriction of their movement, and subsequent arrests or charges by *shari 'a* vigilantes. The first case to reach the attention of the NGOs was that of Bariya Magazu, a thirteen year old unmarried girl from Tsafe, a village in Zamfara state. Discovered to be pregnant, the case was brought to the *shari 'a* court in Tsafe where, on the evidence of pregnancy outside marriage, she was sentenced to one hundred lashes for the crime of *zina*[118] to be carried out forty days after the baby was born, and to another eighty lashes for the crime of *qadhf* (false accusation) since

114 These were basically an adaptation of the Northern Penal Code adding only references to the *hudud* and *qizas* (retaliation) crimes and punishments.

115 Particularly alert and active were WLUML (Women Living Under Muslim Laws), BAOBAB, WRAPA (Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative) and WACOL (Women's Aid Collective).

116 Formed of sixty different Nigerian human and women's rights NGOs.

117 Formed of eighteen NGOs and individuals.

118 The offence of *zina* (unlawful sexual intercourse) includes both adultery (in the case of a married person) which is punishable by stoning to death, and fornication (when the convict is unmarried) which is punishable by lashing. It is defined in the *Shari 'a* Penal Code Law, Sect. 129, as 'whoever being fully responsible has sexual intercourse through the genitals of a person over whom he has no sexual right and in circumstance in which no doubt exist as to the illegality of the act is guilty of offence of *zina*.' There is some controversy among Islamic scholars over the question of stoning to death (*rajm*) as a Qur'anic injunction. No mention of this actually exists in the Qur'an, although some scholars believe it was recited but was later abrogated by Muhammad. The Qur'an actually demands that adulterous women and men should marry each other, which would be impossible if they were dead (Q 24: 3).

there was insufficient evidence to identify any of three men she accused of having had sex with her. After persuasion, Bariya's family agreed to appeal the case with the help of BAOBAB. Using Islamic arguments they found that the court procedure and sentence were not in accordance with basic *shari 'a* law.[119] The judge then dropped the eighty lashes for *qadhf* and said the hundred lashes should be postponed until she had finished breast-feeding her child. Instead, however, to frustrate the appeal process the sentence was carried out thirty-two days after the baby was born.[120] The case received international attention.

There are numerous examples of violations of rights in *shari 'a* courts which the NGOs have appealed or are in the process of appealing.[121] Below I briefly recount two of the most well known cases because of the international attention they drew and the questions they gave rise to about the criminalization of sexual relations in Islamic law, the possibility or not of reconciling contemporary understandings of human rights with *shari 'a* law, and the possibility of achieving justice in *shari 'a* courts.

A thirty-eight year old divorcee, Safiya Yakubu Hussaini, was accused of adultery in December 2000 in a *Shari 'a* Court in Gwadabawa, Sokoto State. Her partner was released when he denied the charge, for lack of four male witnesses to give evidence. Safiya was sentenced to death by

119 Sect. 38 (c) of the *Shari 'a* Penal Code of Zamfara, states that a consent is not a consent if it is given by a person under eighteen years of age; Sect. 95 states that when an accused person is under eighteen years of age, the court may dispense a lesser sentence than that prescribed under the code; Sect. 128 (1) states that a man is said to commit rape when he has sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent, or when she is under fifteen years of age; Sect. 141 allows for the remittance of the offence of *qadhf* where the complainant pardons the accuser. In Bariya's case, the so-called crime had taken place before the *shari 'a* criminal code was introduced in Zamfara State, and on that ground alone the court and the sentence were undoubtedly unconstitutional.

120 Details of the case in BAOBAB, *BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights and Shari 'a Implementation in Nigeria: The Journey so far,* BAOBAB publication, Lagos 2003, 14–17.

121 Numerous examples are recounted in BAOBAB, *BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights*, 14–31; See also *WRAPA newsletter*, a quarterly publication where various cases are described in every issue.

stoning on the grounds of her pregnancy, her six month baby, her confessional statement that she had sex with the man in question and that she had previously observed her menstrual courses. With the help of Muslim barristers from WRAPA and other NGOs, the case was appealed at the *Shari 'a* Court of Appeal in Sokoto on the following grounds: the lower court had accepted Safiya's admission without giving her an opportunity to call witnesses or defend herself; the charge of *zina* had not been explained to her until after she had made her confession and at no time was the offence of *zina* explained; no witness had been called to the court to testify that she was a *Muhsinat*, that is, that her previous marriage had fulfilled islamic conditions in terms of contract and consummation[122]; she was not given the opportunity for a final address (*iizar*) before judgment was passed; and pregnancy of a divorced woman cannot be proof of *zina* since, under the Maliki school of law, a divorcee can carry a pregnancy by her former husband for a period of five years from the period of the divorce (known as the sleeping embryo) and therefore the pregnancy cannot be taken as proof of *zina*.[123] It was largely on this last point that she was acquitted in December 2001.[124]

122 Otherwise she could only be sentenced to lashing, since she could not be considered to have committed adultery but rather fornication.

123 Of the four Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence, only Maliki adherents consider extramarital pregnancy as evidence of *zina*, but even this is refutable: 'The position with us about a woman who is found to be pregnant and has no husband and she says 'I was forced'; or she says 'I was married' is that it is not accepted from her and the *hadd* is inflicted on her unless she has a clear proof of what she claims about the marriage or that she was forced or she comes bleeding, or she was virgin or she calls out for help so that someone comes to her and she is in a state, or what resembles it, of a situation in which the violation occurred; if she does not produce any of those the *hadd* is inflicted on her and what she claims is not accepted from her.' (From Muwatta, *Imam Malik*), quoted in A.M. Yawuri, 'Issues in Defending Safiyyatu Husseini and Amina Lawal' in J. Ibrahim, ed., *Shari 'a Penal and Family laws*, (183–204), 198 The author was a member of the Islamic legal team employed by WRAPA to file the appeal against the convictions and sentences of Safiya Husseini and Amina Lawal.

124 Details of the case in BAOBAB, *BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights*, 20–21; See also A.M. Yawuri, 'Issues in Defending', 184–187.

Just a month later, in January 2002 in Katsina State, in an almost similar case, a young pregnant divorcee, Amina Lawal, was convicted of adultery and sentenced to death by stoning.[125] The grounds for conviction were admission, pregnancy, and the evidence by existence of her nine-day old daughter who had been born outside of marriage.[126] The alleged father swore that he had not had sexual relations with her, although he admitted they 'courted'; he was released. The case was immediately adopted by the NGO coalitions and became the object of world media attention and protest campaigns.[127] Led by WRAPA, the case was appealed in the Upper *Shari 'a* Court of Funtua, Katsina State. The grounds for appeal were similar to those in the previous case. However, although the Sokoto Court had set aside the conviction of Safiya on these arguments, the Upper *Shari 'a* Court of Funtua affirmed the judgment of the lower court and upheld the sentence, arguing that the appellants had failed to adduce evidence that Amina was a *Muhsinat* – hence the sleeping embryo argument was not applicable. In September 2003, the case was appealed again in the Katsina State *Shari 'a* Court of Appeal; this time

125 This case was particularly well known internationally and thousands of petitions were made in many languages, aimed at defending Amina Lawal.

126 The baby was exhibited in court by the prosecutor as evidence of the offence.

127 The Nigerian NGOs supporting the accused viewed these petitions as unhelpful and issued open letters asking the petitioners to desist: 'Please Stop the International Amina Lawal Protest Letter Campaigns,' (online; see bibliography). Ayesha Imam has written: 'In the case of Ms. Lawal and several others, the NGOs supporting their appeals felt that huge (and often stereotypical) media coverage and international petitions would not be appropriate. It seems that very little notice of this was taken, however, given the plethora of protests, petitions, and campaigns, not a few issued by international human rights organisations. Although the concern expressed worldwide has been heartwarming, how it was expressed sometimes hindered the actual protection and defense of women's and human rights in Nigeria … The use of terms like inhumane and barbaric to describe 'Islamic law' without acknowledging the challenges of Muslims, may have led to soul searching among Muslims as well as shocked outrage among non-Muslims. But it also led many Muslims, including those concerned about the *zina* victims, to feel defensive about Islam and made it easier for the Muslim religious right to dismiss protests as biased against Islam.' Cf. A. Imam, 'Women's Reproductive and Sexual Rights'.

Amina was acquitted largely on the question of pregnancy not being proof of adultery.[128]

Although the appeals were argued in the *Shari 'a* court system, they also drew on the Nigerian constitutional law on the grounds that the *Shari 'a* Penal Codes and the *Shari 'a* courts themselves are governed by the Nigerian Constitution. The Nigerian Constitution states that a person charged with a criminal offence is 'entitled to defend himself in person or by legal practitioners of his own choice.'[129] It also states that s/he is entitled to 'be informed promptly in the language that he understands and in detail of the nature of the offence'[130] Art. 7 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, which was domesticated in Nigeria in 1990, states that a person 'has the right to have his case heard'. These rights were not respected in either of the two cases above. It also seemed as though Amina had to prove her innocence rather than the court prove her guilt, since it was only she who could prove she was a *Muhsinat*.[131] The fact that the act for which they were accused and for which pregnancy was taken as proof, had taken place before the *Shari 'a* Criminal Codes were in effect was also unconstitutional.[132] Using these as well as *fiqh* arguments, the appellants in *shari 'a* courts have been successful.[133]

128 Details of the case in BAOBAB, *BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights*, 21–23; See also A.M. Yawuri, 'Issues in Defending', 187–192.

129 Sect. 36 (6).c. Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

130 Sect. 36 (6).a. Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

131 Sect. 36 (5) Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria: 'Every person who is charged with a criminal offence shall be presumed to be innocent until he is proven guilty.'

132 Sect. 36 (8) Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria: 'No person shall be held guilty of a criminal offence on account of any act or omission that did not, at the time it took place, constitute such an offence, and no penalty shall be imposed for any criminal offence heavier than the penalty in force at the time the offence was committed.'

133 So far in Nigeria, no sentence of stoning has been upheld or carried out, and all have been appealed using *fiqh* arguments. However, a number of fornication cases have led to convictions, with sentences of lashing carried out, and some men imprisoned as well as whipped. People have also had limbs amputated for crimes of theft.

Islamic feminism

The strategy used in defending those convicted under the new *Shari 'a* Penal Codes can be seen as a deliberate and clear form of Islamic feminism. Muslim and non-Muslim lawyers and activists chose to appeal in the *Shari 'a* courts rather than going to courts of common law and depending on the constitutions and on human rights treaties. They realized that even if the constitutionality of the move made by the northern Governors as well as the *Shari 'a* Penal Codes themselves could have been successfully challenged in the common law courts, doing so would have alienated the majority of the Muslim community in Nigeria. They were convinced, and actually proved to be correct, that through appealing in *shari 'a* courts, the use of *fiqh* arguments would help to expose the deficiencies in the newly introduced *shari 'a* criminal codes and the bias against women in their implementation. They saw that it would also promote alternative juristic views to the conservative positions being insisted upon as the only authentic, legitimate position in Muslim laws.[134]

The concept that *shari 'a* law is not a static, divinely fixed code but is in fact constituted from socially constructed, diverse, very often patriarchally influenced interpretations of the Qur'an, Sunnah and *fiqh* schools, is new to the majority of the Muslim population in Northern Nigeria and indeed is a concept which even today most will not accept or understand.[135] This was very obvious at an international conference on the *shari 'a* held in the University of Jos in January 2004 when about three hundred Muslim participants walked out of the hall in a show of disapproval when Abdullahi An-Na'im, a progressive Muslim scholar from Sudan, said that the nature of the *shari 'a* as the divine and eternal law does not permit it to be enacted and enforced by the state as positive law and public policy. According to An-Na'im, *shari 'a* demands *ijtihad* from the individual believer and must always be interpreted in each different

134 A. Imam, 'Women's Reproductive and Sexual Rights'.

135 Cf. A. Imam, 'Working Within Nigeria's *Shari 'a* Courts' in *Human Rights Dialogue* magazine, vol. 2, n. 10, Fall 2003, 22–24.

circumstance just as the jurists who developed *fiqh* did so with regard to their particular circumstances.[136]

To further dialogue between scholars and human rights activists on the issue of *shari 'a* in Nigeria, NGOs have organized conferences, seminars and workshops.[137] On at least two occasions, they have called for the practice of *ijtihad* among Muslim religious scholars, imams and leaders so as to review their understanding of the *shari 'a* legal system.[138] They have also held numerous public discussions on radio and television, given public lectures, written articles and papers, and published pamphlets and books on various questions about the variety of ways in which Islamic laws and norms are to be understood.[139]

These NGOs have helped make the population aware that women and the poor have clearly been discriminated against in the implementation of the *shari 'a* in the Northern states. Making people aware of this has helped groups such as FOMWAN be less afraid to criticize the *shari 'a* and to demand for reform in the *Shari 'a* Penal Codes. It has also opened the door to allow FOMWAN and others demand for the codification of

136 A.A. An-Na'im, 'The Future of *Shari 'a*' in P. Ostien – *al.*, ed., *Comparative Perspectives on Shari 'a in Nigeria*, (Papers of the conference held in the University of Jos, 15th–17th Jan. 2004), Spectrum Books Ltd., Ibadan 2005, 327–357. The walk-out was a fitting grand finale to three days during which Muslim religious scholars, traditional leaders, *qadis* and judges loudly expressed their dissatisfaction with the whole conference. The conference included many international scholars and was the second on the question of *shari 'a* in Nigeria, the first having been held in Bayreuth in 2003. Both conferences were funded by the Volkswagen Foundation of Germany. The angry Muslim participants saw the whole project as a western ploy to undermine the Muslim population and the *shari 'a* in Nigeria.

137 See Appendix nn. 11–13 for the communiqués from some of these conferences.

138 See Appendix n. 11, recommendation n. 6, and Appendix n. 12, point 10.

139 WACOL and BAOBAB have been particularly effective, having published simple pamphlets in both Hausa and English on questions such as Islamic teaching on Women and Children's Rights; Women's Inheritance Rights; Child Abuse/Neglect; Women's Rights Under the *Shari 'a*; Custody of Children; Divorce (*Talaq*); Female Circumcision (*Khafd*); Inheritance and Will Making; Divorce and the Dissolution of Marriage; Child Custody and Guardianship, Violence against Women ... Cf. WACOL, *Legal Literacy Series* and BAOBAB, *Legal Literacy Series*.

the *shari 'a* personal status laws, instead of having to accept the conservative and retrograde versions of *fiqh* of the semi-illiterate *qadi*s who often oversaw personal status cases in *shari 'a* courts.[140]

Similar to Iran, Egypt and other Muslim countries, Muslim women in Nigeria who were active in secular human and women's rights organizations now use the Islamic framework and work within the *shari 'a* court system, thus developing a form of Islamic feminism. FOMWAN, which initially represented a form of political Islamist Muslim women's organization, has now begun to rely on gender-friendly *fiqh* interpretations and align itself much more closely with this new Islamic feminism, again similar to the process in these other Muslim countries.

FOMWAN's Criticism of the Shari 'a Implementation

Initially, FOMWAN refused to voice any criticism of *shari 'a* or the form in which it was being implemented. In fact, shortly after the announcement of its extended implementation FOMWAN organized a national conference in Zamfara State where they commended the governor for spearheading the implementation of *shari 'a* in Nigeria and urged other states to do the same, assuring them of FOMWAN's full support.[141] The FOMWAN Kaduna State leaders mobilized women to come out and march in the city of Kaduna in favour of *shari 'a* in 2000.[142] FOMWAN was practically silent during the moments of hottest and most international debate which dealt specifically with the violations of women's rights under the *Shari 'a* Penal Codes. Lateefah Okunno, the second national Amirah of FOMWAN, actually criticized the NGOs that were involved in these first cases, referring to them as 'an army of Muslim women waging war against the *Shari 'a* solely on account of their bitter experience of marriage and divorce'.[143]

Since at the time any criticism was seen as anti-Islamic, it is most probable that FOMWAN felt it was better to keep a low profile on the issue. FOMWAN was aware that the cases given international attention specifically addressed women's issues and had caused many around the world to see Islam as oppressive of women. As representative of all Nigerian Muslim women, FOMWAN's only contribution to the debate was that their religion was not oppressive.

It soon became clear that the improvements in society which the Muslim population had hoped to see were not being realized. The expansion of *shari 'a* has not included areas of economic and social development. Focus has been on punishing minor offences of theft, *zina* and alcohol consumption, predominantly of the poor and illiterate. No wealthy or powerful person has yet been charged. Women more than men are prosecuted for *zina* despite the obvious fact that they could not have committed the offence alone.[144] Thus, FOMWAN as well as other Muslim organizations and individuals began to loudly rebuke the state governments.

Addressing the Supreme Council on *Shari 'a* in Nigeria (SCSN) in October 2002, Bilkisu Yusuf, in her capacity as National Amirah of FOMWAN, described what she called the picture of despair in the northern states: *shari 'a* had been reduced to a body of laws in the hands of poorly trained and incompetent judges who abuse procedure; it had

140 The first call for a codification of *shari 'a* personal laws, from what I was able to discover during my research, was made in 2003 by the Conference on '*Shari 'a* Penal and Family Laws in Nigeria and in the Muslim World: A Rights Based Approach' 5th–7th August 2003, Abuja. See point 10 of the Communiqué of the Conference, Appendix n. 12.

141 See Communiqué of the conference in Appendix n. 7.

142 Reports say that country women were brought by bus into the city to march but the organizers themselves say it was only the women from Kaduna city itself who were involved. FOMWAN leaders did not consider this in any way a political manifestation and say they were surprised when this march, which was followed by an anti-*shari 'a* demonstration by Christians in which women were also numerous, led to religious riots in Kaduna where thousands of lives and much property were lost: Interview with Hajiya Hadizah Tukur, FOMWAN Kaduna State Amirah, March 2004.

143 L. Okunno, 'Women, Secularism and Democracy'.

144 M. Tabiu (Fac. of Law, Bayero Univ. Kano), Keynote Address at the two-day conference in Abuja on 'Women's Rights and Access to Justice under the *Shari 'a* in Northern Nigeria', published in J.N. Ezeilo – *al.*, ed., *Shari 'a Implementation in Nigeria*, (5–8), 5.

provided jobs for ill equipped supervisors whose only preoccupation was to fish out women who commit adultery; the flawed interpretation and motive of the authorities was underscored through their poor handling of court cases; the pervasive ignorance and lack of legal education among the hizbah members who are supposed to police *shari 'a* compliant communities was disturbing; only poor women and men seemed to be the convicts of the *shari 'a* courts; and the elite and the rich appeared to have some inbuilt immunity from *shari 'a* laws.[145] She did not mince her words.

The final communiqué of the 2004 annual national conference held in Maiduguri announced that FOMWAN supported the implementation of the *shari 'a* but frowned at the publicity given to the punitive aspects of the *shari 'a* law rather than the social justice which the law provides. It called on leaders to be conscious of their responsibilities and be responsive and attentive to the call of the citizens.[146]

Questions as to the constitutionality or not of the introduction of the *shari 'a* penal code by the northern states are not the major concerns of FOMWAN leadership. However, they have begun to speak about the need to reopen the doors of *ijtihad*. In its 2003 issue of *Muslim Woman,* which deals almost exclusively with the question of *shari 'a* implementation in Nigeria, an article by a male scholar is published where he stated that the erroneous belief that *ijtihad* was no longer open and obliging on Muslims has made the *shari 'a* seem outdated and incapable of solving complex contemporary issues. Muslims were called, he said, to analyze and review the various schools in order to choose a more cogent view of what these scholars said that would be more beneficial to the Muslim *Umma* in contemporary times.[147]

145 'Women and Empowerment in Nigeria' a paper presented at the 2nd National Conference of the Supreme Council on *Shari 'a* in Nigeria (SCSN) held at Damaturu Yobe State, Oct. 21st 2002, published in *Weekly Trust*, Fri. 13th Dec 2002.

146 See Appendix n. 8.

147 'Prospects for *Shari 'a* Implementation' in *The Muslim Woman*, n. 8, 2003, 23–24.

FOMWAN's Shari 'a Project

What might be considered one of FOMWAN's most important projects is what they refer to as the *shari 'a* project. This is carried out in close collaboration with women's rights NGOs, especially WRAPA, and with the Centre for Islamic Legal Studies in Zaria University (CILS). In fact, it is these other groups who lead the project, but FOMWAN is the channel through which the project is filtered to the grassroots.

By and large the *shari 'a* project refers to women's rights according to what is dealt with under the *shari 'a* personal status laws. As already noted these are not codified in Nigeria and instead depend on the *qadi* who renders a verdict based on his interpretation of the Maliki School of law. The *shari 'a* project is basically an attempt to raise awareness of the need for a codification of *shari 'a* personal law and to propose relevant strategies to religious and political leaders in the *shari 'a* states.

In July 2004, the project was launched at a workshop held in Abuja at which delegates from ten northern *shari 'a* implementing states participated as well as some prominent Islamic scholars, lawyers and human rights activists.[148] Delegates were requested to return to their states and organize a similar workshop for Muslim women.[149]

Codification is considered to be necessary because the form in which personal status laws are presently applied violates the letter and spirit of the *shari 'a*.[150] Reasons which were identified for this tendency stem from the patriarchal structure of Nigerian societies: virtually all authority figures from family heads to religious, political and judicial authorities, are male; Judges' attitudes, biases, and backgrounds affect the type of judgment they

148 FOMWAN/OSIWA National Workshop 'Women under *Shari 'a* in Nigeria', Gubabi Hotel, Wuse Zone 5, Abuja, 22nd–25th July 2004 (OSIWA – Open Society Initiative for West Africa, provides funding for FOMWAN's *shari 'a* project).

149 These were held in most states in the following months of September to November with funding from the national FOMWAN office.

150 Saudatu Mahdi, (Director of WRAPA), 'The need for codification of *shari 'a* personal law' and 'Proposal for the Codification of Islamic Personal Law under the *Shari 'a* Legal System in Nigeria'. Papers distributed at the FOMWAN/OSIWA workshop on 'Women under *Shari 'a* in Nigeria', Abuja, 2004 (unpublished).

render in courts; women's testimony is devalued as gossip; violence and discrimination against women are considered socially acceptable.[151]

Codification would provide greater understanding of rights and responsibilities and would ensure that women enjoy the rights guaranteed them under national and international law within a *shari'a* system. The law that would be implemented would be a truly Islamic law and not an 'arbitrary hybrid of principles derived from non-authoritative interpretations, traditions and customs, and the whims of individual judges.'[152] It would not depend on the Maliki School alone. Codification would provide an opportunity to reform personal status law in a manner consistent with the national secular law and Nigeria's international obligations and in adaptation to the social changes that come with the modernization of economies and political systems,[153] WRAPA is convinced that the *shari'a* can accommodate and effectively implement international human rights standards and that the principles upon which *shari'a* is based are entirely consistent with these standards.[154]

151 Similar reasons are given by others, including male Islamic scholars. See for example: M.T. Ladan, 'Women's Rights, Access to and Administration', 38; A.A. Oba, 'Improving Women's Access to Justice', 48.

152 S. Mahdi, 'The need for codification'.

153 S. Mahdi, 'The need for codification'.

154 S. Mahdi, 'The need for codification'. This is also the opinion of Bello Bukhari, the Executive Secretary of the National Human Rights Commission. He asserts that the notion of human rights is foreign to no culture and native to all nations and that Islamic law makes ample provisions for the protection of human rights and supports the binding authority of international treaties as a basis for relations between nations. However, he recognizes that while human rights are universal, the concept of international rights evolved in the West. Hence, the implementation strategies in societies must be sensitive to the immediate concerns of the people. He called on Muslim scholars to take a fresh and critical approach to their study of Islam, to appreciate the difference between the eternal norms and the situational-related pronouncements which are contained in both the Qur'an and *hadith*, and to admit that the interpretative measures of Islamic law have been responsible for some Islamic rules that are antithetical to some basic human rights. He also asked them to remember, just as critics of Islam must remember, that Islam alone cannot realistically be taken as the sole determinant in the behaviour of Muslims. Cf. B. Bukhari, 'Fundamental Human Rights in Islam', paper presented at the International Conference on the Implementation of the *Shari'a* in a Democracy: The Nigerian Experience, Abuja Sheraton Hotel, 7th–9th July 2004 (unpublished).

The communiqué which was issued at the end of the conference recommended that women be represented in all the Committees established in the *Shari'a*-implementing States, including the Hizbah and the Zakat Committees, and that avenues of dialogue should be established between the *Shari'a*-implementing States and human rights activists to facilitate the observance and respect of Islamic human rights values in the so-called *Shari'a* States.[155]

An important part of the *shari'a* project includes identifying the negative and positive practices related to the Islamic rights of Muslim women in the country and raising awareness of this among the Muslim community, particularly its leaders. A team of scholars in the Centre for Islamic legal Studies (CILS) put together the fruit of its research and evaluation of this area with proposals for improvements.[156] In March 2005, they presented a synthesis of their findings at a conference which was attended by almost all the important Muslim religious and political leaders from the Northern states, including Emirs, Governors, scholars, sheikhs, imams, judges, *qadis*, and women leaders.[157]

For two days, the participants deliberated on the interplay of Islamic theory and Muslim practice in Nigeria in reference to women's rights. All references to the *shari'a* were in terms of its social mission, not the *hudud* aspect. Women spoke of their experiences and men agreed that injustices were perpetrated against women in the name of Islam. The societal conditions in contemporary Nigeria were incorporated into all the discussions so that the conference was very much based on the concrete experience of women as well as men, rather than simply reiterations of Islamic teachings.

155 See Appendix n. 9.

156 The study and proposals have already been referred to, i.e. I.N. Sada – *al*., ed., *Shari'a and the Rights of*.

157 I.N. Sada – *al*., ed., *Promoting Women's Rights through Shari'a in Northern Nigeria, Background Report,* Presented at the Conference on Promoting Women's Rights through *Shari'a* in Northern Nigeria, Ahmadu Bello House, Kaduna, 29th–30th March 2005.

Strategies to overcome these injustices were discussed. Although women insisted that women's rights must be looked at separately, the majority of the men present felt that women's rights can only be considered in the context of the family. No direct mention was made of the codification of personal status laws but since this is a gradual process, and consensus is a determining factor in any religious community, especially in Islam, the fact that dialogue has begun is an important step.

Margot Badran, who participated in the conference as an observer just as I did myself, has commented that 'it looked to me as if the people were taking the implementation of the *shari'a* into their own hands; social justice, not *hudud* was at the centre.'[158] This is the aspect of *shari'a* on which Muslim women as well as the majority of the Muslim population in Northern Nigeria place their hopes.

Conclusion

Despite the twenty-year existence of FOMWAN and the intensity of its activities, a great many people have never heard of it. Many people, including missionaries who are working in Northern Nigeria and live among the Muslim population in rural areas, will insist that Muslim women have no voice, are barely seen, and are very much second or third class citizens in their communities. While such a picture does reflect the reality of many Muslim women in the region, there are in fact numerous Muslim women of faith who reflect a very different reality and are committed in various but dynamic ways to changing the situation of their sisters. Their critical reflections on the ways in which culture and other factors influence the interpretation and practice of religion in their societies are important for further dialogue with Christian women who are equally committed to establishing a society of justice, peace and social well-being for all.

158 M. Badran, 'Liberties of the Faithful' in *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, 19th–25th May 2005, issue n. 743 (internet article: see bibliography).

CHAPTER 6

Christian Women's Discourse in Northern Nigeria

Women's Fellowships in the Christian Churches

Practically all Christian denominations have a dynamic women's organization, usually called Fellowship, of which the majority of women are members, often by obligation. The commitment to women's empowerment seen in FOMWAN does not exist to the same extent in Christian women's church-based groups. Christian women who are actively committed to promoting women's rights in society tend to do so, not as a faith group, but as secular NGOs wherein they make little or no specific reference to Christianity. Indeed, there often seems to be a contradiction, if not a dichotomy, between Chrisitan women's insistence in their church organizations that a woman must submit to her husband's authority just as the Fellowship must submit to the male religious leaders, and their efforts in NGOs to free women from all systems of domination.[1]

There are many similarities among the various women's fellowships. In all the churches these fellowships give women a sense of belonging and of self-dignity and they serve to make women's presence felt and their voice heard at national and local levels. At their weekly or monthly fellowship meetings, the members pray, read the Bible, discuss internal

1 Belief in the divine revelation of Scripture and a literal and selective reading of the Bible is the most common approach of all women's church-based organizations in Nigeria, be they Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal or otherwise. Thus, biblical passages referring to a woman having been created from the man's rib for the sake of man, a woman having caused the Fall, a woman obeying her husband as she would her Lord, a woman covering her head during prayer, and so on, are taken literally to define woman's divinely allotted position and role at least within the ecclesial community.

matters such as uniform and levies, encourage one another to live more fully their responsibility as mothers and wives, support each other in times of need and of bereavement, and prepare for church gatherings where the women will provide food and will sing in church. Their apostolate is most often simply cleaning the church. Material help is given to women in need and special attention is given to widows, but literacy classes or formation in income-generating skills, while existent occasionally and in some places, are not very common.

Given the countless number of Christian denominations in Nigeria, I refer below to one or two examples from each of the five Church Groups as they are represented in the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).[2]

Roman Catholic Church

a) Catholic Women's Organization (CWO)

In 1955 women members of the Legion of Mary in Kafanchan (the southern part of Kaduna State) began to gather, educate and organize in small parish groups the farming and illiterate women who formed the majority of the female Catholic population. In 1968 this became the *Zumuntar Mata Katolika* (ZMK – Hausa for Catholic Women's Association) and rapidly spread throughout all the northern dioceses.

At the invitation of the Catholic Bishops' Conference, which was interested in getting the laity more involved in the Church, the Catholic Women's Organization (CWO) was established in the eastern and western provinces between the years 1962 and 1964.[3] The CWO also developed

2 *Constitution of the Christian Association of Nigeria,* (revised version, effective as of the 17th June 2004), Article 6 (b): 'To qualify for membership of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), a Church shall ... belong to one of the five Church Groups, namely: i. Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN); ii. Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN); iii. Christian Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (CPFN)/ Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN); iv. Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC); v. TEKAN and ECWA Fellowship.'

3 A.U. Makinde (first national president NCCWO), *CWO – In Memory of National Council of Catholic Women Organization in Nigeria*, Wings of Zion Ventures, New Oko-Oba, 2001, 1.

in the North, particularly among the non-indigenous Catholics who had emigrated there from other parts of the country. These were usually more educated and tended to have a greater leadership role in the northern church than the indigenous ZMK members.

In February 1975, the National Council of CWO (NCCWO) was inaugurated as the 'supreme body of Catholic women in Nigeria'.[4] This became the umbrella body for all Catholic women's associations, representing all Catholic lay women at the Bishops' Conference, the Laity Council and other national forums and events.[5] The ZMK officially belongs to the CWO although the two organizations co-exist independently and meet together for seminars and other events.[6]

b) Catholic Women Religious

Female missionary congregations have been working in education, health and other areas of social and ecclesial development in northern Nigeria since the 1930s. Most of the Religious sisters in the early years were expatriates. It wasn't until 1965 that an indigenous religious congregation for women was founded in the north.[7]

4 Words used by Bishop Ganaka at the mass of the first meeting of the NCCWO in Jos, March 1975 – Cf. A.U. Makinde, *CWO – In Memory of National Council*, 25; The National Council of Catholic Women's Organizations (NCCWO), defines itself in its constitutions as 'the governing body of all Catholic women of the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Nigeria.' (*Constitution of the National Council of Catholic Women's Organization: NCCWO*, revised edition, 2003, Art. 1, Sect. 1).

5 See Appendix n. 14.1 for Aims and Objectives of the NCCWO.

6 Efforts are being made towards the full integration of the two groups but this meets with great resistance. Besides the ZMK, few other Catholic women's groups exist, except tribal women's groups and the Christian Mothers which is by and large a pious group. Officially all come under the umbrella of the CWO and are thus CWO members.

7 The Sisters of Our Lady of Fatima (OLF), founded in Jos by Bishop Reddington, SMA.

Catholic Religious women are organized nationwide in the National Council of Women Religious (NCWR).[8] Through this body they have an influential position in church hierarchy and are often quite courageous in their condemnations of social and ecclesial injustice.[9] An important fruit of the intervention of the NCWR was the pastoral letter of the Catholic Bishops' Conference addressing the very serious problem of women trafficking.[10]

The need for greater collaboration between priests and Religious has been discussed on various occasions.[11] At a series of workshops held for Religious women in the various Ecclesiastical provinces of the country,

8 See Appendix n. 15 for the Mission Statement of the NCWR.

9 Cf. Communiqué expressing concern at the lack of recognition in the church for the talents and skills of Religious women, the exclusion of women from decision making, the inadequate wages they often receive for their work in the church, the inadequate contracts between religious superiors and local ordinaries and the random founding of religious congregations by incompetent priests, 25th–29th Jan. 1998; Communiqué on the need for Religious Life to be a more authentic sign of contradiction/sign of the cross in the world by calling on Religious to challenge customs such as the treatment of widows, the circumcision of young women, the general oppression of women, 25th–29th Jan. 1999; Communiqué expressing their concern about the adoption of the *shari 'a* criminal system in the northern states and calling on the church and state to become more creative in its attitudes towards meeting the needs of the people for justice and social security, 14th–19th January 2002; Communiqué condemning the trafficking of women and calling on the government to ratify the UN Protocol against Human Trafficking, 26th March–2nd April, 2004; Communiqué on the Church as Family of God pointing out that if such a model is to be developed it must recognize the injustice towards women practiced both in society and in the church and resist the temptation to further traumatize women who are already brutalized and subdued, 11th–17th Jan. 2004. Communiqués are available at the NCWR Secretariat, Enugu.

10 Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), *Restoring the Dignity of the Nigerian Woman*, Sovereign Ventures Publishing, Lagos 2002.

11 Cf. Communiqué of the NCWR on Collaborative Ministry calling for more involvement of Religious in diocesan pastoral planning and the need to incorporate courses on religious life in seminary training so that the prejudices against Religious among diocesan clergy would be reduced, 15th–19th Jan. 2001 (available at NCWR Secretariat, Enugu); See also J. Aniagwu, *Collaborative Ministry between the Laity, Religious and Clergy in the Church*, Gaudium et Spes Institute, Abuja 2001 (revised 2005).

participants from numerous congregations saw that issues affecting them as Church women are also human rights issues.[12] They saw themselves struggling to live and work in 'a world and a church that is masculine, with gender discrimination firmly embedded in all their structures, tradition and ideologies.'[13] The participants saw that much reform in Religious Life as lived in Nigeria is needed so that it visibly witnesses to the liberating message of the Gospel to women in a society where women are marginalized and oppressed.[14]

Christian Council of Nigeria

a) Anglican Communion

In the Anglican Church, the principle women's organizations are the Mothers' Union (MU)[15] and the Women's Guild (WG, called *Zumuntar Mata* in the North).[16] The MU is the umbrella body for both organiza-

12 The Centre for Women's Studies and Intervention (CWSI), founded and directed by the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus (HHCJ), and based in Abuja, organized these workshops between the years 2002 and 2005 in Calabar, Owerri, Jos, Lagos, and Benin Ecclesiastical Provinces. Reports of Workshops for Religious Women on Human Rights are available at the CWSI office, Abuja.

13 CWSI, Report of Workshops for Religious Women on Human Rights.

14 Cf. N. Uti, 'Nigerian Women Religious and the Challenges of Our Times', paper presented at the Workshop on Human Rights Education for Women Religious, Jos Ecclesiastical Province, 18th–21st April 2004 (unpublished paper available in CWSI office, Abuja).

15 This was founded in England in 1876 by Mary Elizabeth Sumner and was introduced to Nigeria by Mrs. Abigail Christiana Oluwole, wife of Bishop Isaac Oluwole, in October 1908. Cf. S. Akinola (WG/MU President), *Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), Preparatory Scheme for Women's Guild and Mother's Union*, no date, 1.

16 The Women's Guild was founded in 1921 by Frances Higgins, a CMS missionary who came to Nigeria in 1889, to offer an organization to those baptized women who did not qualify for membership to the MU, particularly those who were in a polygamous marriage. Frances Higgins was the wife of Canon Melville Jones, the

tions and also for the Girls Guild.[17] The president of the MU at national/diocesan level is automatically the wife of the Primate/Bishop.[18] The national vice-presidents are the wives of the Provincial arch-Bishops.[19] At parish level, the president of the MU is the parish priest's wife or, in the absence of one, a woman recommended by the parish priest and appointed by the MU.[20] The MU national executive, formed of Bishop's wives, meets during the Bishops' Conference, their husbands in one room, they in another, with moments of exchange and shared prayer.

b) Baptist Church

The women's organization in the Baptist Church, the Women's Missionary Union (WMU), exists since 1919.[21] For their weekly meetings the *WMU Yearbook* and an annual magazine *'Proclaim'* are used, which basically give the outline of the meetings to be held, the Biblical texts to be studied, and other dynamics to facilitate the meetings.

Pastors' wives function as Advisors or as Mothers of the WMU. The Baptist seminary in Kaduna has a Women's Dept which was founded to give literacy lessons to pastors' wives and to 'groom' them to help their husbands in ministry.[22]

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first diocesan Anglican bishop of Lagos in 1919. Cf. 'Brief History of the Women's Guild in Nigeria' in *The Handbook of the Women's Guild, SUPRA – Northern Dioceses*, 1.

17 See Aims and Objectives of the MU in Appendix n.14.2.

18 *The Constitution of The Mother's Union of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)*, amended 1998, n. 47. In some other African countries, such as Kenya, MU leaders are elected rather than being automatically given the role because of their marriage to clergy men.

19 *The Constitution of The Mother's Union*, nn. 17, 19.

20 The Anglican Diocese of Jos, Diocesan Mothers' Union Constitution, 1980, n. 5.

21 The WMU was founded by a missionary, Ms. N. C. Young. Cf. *Their Legacy, WMU of Nigeria,* publication of the Baptist Women's Missionary Union of Nigeria, vols 1–2, Ibadan 2002.

22 Interview with Rev. Mrs. Rahila Lyamgohn (Baptist representative on WOWICAN Kaduna State Chapter of which she is President), 16th June 2004.

Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria

In the neo-Pentecostal churches, which have mushroomed since the 1980s, there is a degree of gender equality in terms of leadership and ministry. These churches are particularly attractive to female university students. Banners inviting to a woman-only prayer crusade or convention have become a common sight in the major cities of the north, as throughout the country. Different from all other Christian churches in Nigeria, women in the neo-Pentecostal churches are not obliged to use a head covering during times of worship.

An example of the neo-Pentecostal women's movement is the Praise Women for All Nations (PWFAN), founded in 1992 by Rev. Mrs. Funbi Addo, co-founder with her husband Bishop Fred Addo of the Praise Chapel for All Nations Pentecostal Church.[23] PWFAN holds weekly fellowship meetings and also organizes activities in which women of many different Pentecostal Churches participate.[24] Zonal outreach campaigns are carried out wherein women go on the streets and from house to house inviting women to join them.

Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC)

The Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement (ESO), founded in southern Nigeria in 1925, is one example of the numerous African Instituted Churches. The only women's fellowship is what is called a Praying Band wherein the women members of the church meet from time to time to pray and read the Bible and one of them might preach to the others.

The church has strict and quite traditional views about women's purification or lack thereof. A woman is not allowed in church during her menstruation period. A woman who has given birth to a male child must not come to church until forty days have passed and in the case of a female child she must wait eighty days. Women are not allowed to

23 See Appendix n. 14.5 for Objectives of the PWFAN.

24 Cf. *The Woman Magazine*, publication of the PWFAN, 2005 edition

wear earrings or any form of make-up during prayer. All members, male and female remove their shoes when entering the church and all cover their heads with a long white veil during prayer. On important services, which are held on Thursdays and Sundays, all members wear a white garment, a white cap on their head and a sash corresponding to their level of ordination.[25] Men are not permitted to have a beard or moustache and they must keep their hair short. Because of her impurity, it is absolutely forbidden for a woman to enter the altar area which in each church is protected by a curtain that is only opened during official services. The last Sunday of August, Mother's Day, is the only occasion when women lead the prayer and the scripture readings.[26]

TEKAN/ECWA Fellowship

ECWA (Evangelical Church of West Africa), which evolved from the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), and TEKAN (Fellowship of the Churches of Christ in Nigeria), which is the umbrella body for the churches born from the Sudan United Mission, are the principal Evangelical Churches in Northern Nigeria.

a) TEKAN

In each TEKAN member church there is a well-organized Women's Fellowship (WF also called *Zumuntar Mata*) which is structured according to the same pattern as the church.[27] All women are expected to seek

25 The question of ordination marks different stages or levels and functions within the church. The stages differ for males and females. The higher levels of ordination which permit one to lead prayer services and have administrative or decision-making functions in the church are reserved for men.

26 Interview with Apostle Charles and Prophetess Francisca of the ESO, Kaduna, 18th May 2005.

27 All TEKAN member churches are structured as follows: Congregation, Local Church Council (LCC, formed of about 5 congregations); Regional Church Council (RCC, formed of 23–30 LCCs); Provincial Church Council (PCC, formed of 3–6 RCCs) and the General Church Council (GCC – formed of 9 PCCs). See Aims of the TEKAN WF in Appendix n.14.3.

membership in the WF and attend the monthly meetings. Most women also attend the weekly WF Bible study meetings.[28]

Women missionaries from a number of SUM churches formed an inter-church fellowship in 1946 when they gathered at what was the first Inter-mission Women's Fellowship meeting.[29] However, the TEKAN Women's Fellowship was not officially established until 1974.[30] Emphasis is put on evangelism, understood as women leaders from the different churches going together twice a year into remote areas to preach, visit homes and distribute food and clothing.[31] The Executive Committee organizes an annual three-day training course for leaders from all the member churches which usually takes the form of a workshop in handcrafts and income-generating skills of one kind or another. Delegates are then expected to offer the same workshop to their own church's WF. An annual four-day national convention is held in December.[32]

b) ECWA

The Women's Fellowship in the Sudan Interior Mission was formed in April 1943.[33] When ECWA was established in 1956 the Women's Fellowship officially changed its name to ECWA Women's Fellowship

28 The principle material used for Biblical study is a series produced by the Executive WF Committee entitled *Taimako Ga Zumunta Mata* (Guidelines for Women's Fellowship).

29 R.S. Dali, *Women in Ministry with Jesus, Where are They?*, INIBS Ventures, Jos 2000, 16.

30 M. Hopkins – M. Gaiya, ed., *Churches in Fellowship*, 144.

31 COCIN has begun to send missionaries abroad. However, since only ordained clergy are sent, it is only if one is wife to a clergyman that a woman can be sent on mission. Interview with Mrs. Naomi Manclick, President COCIN WF, Jos, 20th June 2004.

32 Interview with Mrs. Rose Bobzom, HEKAN WF, Kaduna (representative of Kaduna TEKAN WF), Kaduna, 1st May 2005.

33 Established by a SIM missionary, Miss E. Varley. Cf. ECWA, *Women's Fellowship Guide*, ECWA Christian Education Dept., Jos 1997, 4.

(ECWA WF – *Zumuntar Mata*).[34] Although ECWA is much more stringent than other churches, the aims of the fellowship are quite similar.[35] A married woman is only considered acceptable in the church if she has an ECWA WF membership card.[36] Members are expected to be buried in their ECWA WF uniform.[37] A book written in the USA in 1977 by a male author is used as the textbook for all weekly meetings.[38] The format for conducting meetings is very clearly outlined in the ECWA WF Guide.[39] Similar to other Women's Fellowships, conferences, workshops and seminars are held from time to time at all church levels.[40]

The pastor's wife is considered an advisor and must attend all weekly fellowship programmes. However, although she may be elected, she does not automatically have a leadership position in the fellowship.

Women's Wing of the Christian Association of Nigeria (WOWICAN)

In the CAN Constitutions, there is a special provision for a women's wing, abbreviated WOWICAN. WOWICAN has been established in most states but is not particularly active. However, only since 2004 has the National Executive Committee of CAN been required to establish a National WOWICAN.[41] A department of Education, Youth and Women

34 Cf. ECWA, *Women's Fellowship Guide*, 4.
35 See Aims and Objectives of ECWA WF in Appendix n.14.4.
36 Interview with Mrs. Doris Maya, ECWA Church Kaduna, ECWA WF representative on Kaduna state WOWICAN, 3rd April 2005.
37 ECWA, *Women's Fellowship Guide*, Sect. U 'Death', 26.
38 G.A. Getz, *The Measure of a Woman*, Regal Books, California 1977: This book has been translated into Hausa. The book develops thirteen characteristics which measure the maturity of a Christian woman, taken from 1Tim. 3: 11; Titus 2: 3–5; and 1 Pt. 3:1–4.
39 ECWA, *Women's Fellowship Guide*, 39–55.
40 The ECWA church is structured as follows: Local Church Branch (LCB), Local Church Council (LCC – a minimum of seven LCBs), District Church Council (DCC – a minimum of 7 LCCs in an area) and General Church Council (GCC – all the DCCS).
41 *Constitutions of CAN*, Art. 6, c. 2004 edition. This was not part of the 1991 constitutions and shows a greater awareness of the need to include women in CAN activities.

Development was established, also in 2004, within the national structures of CAN. The department is headed by a man since only ordained ministers of a certain status can form part of the Executive leadership team.[42]

Women's active involvement in CAN is better seen at local and zonal levels where women and men together form the CAN committee. The local committee's task is to put the decisions and programmes of the national or state CAN executive councils into action, for example by organizing, promoting and participating in ecumenical prayer services and in other peace intervention projects.

At a meeting in Jos in November 2004, Christian women leaders expressed their lack of conviction at the idea of being a wing within CAN. They said that women's voices and concerns are not really represented in CAN just as women of different Christian denominations are not really united in CAN. Hence, they felt there was a need to form a Federation of Christian Women's Associations of Nigeria, following the example of their Muslim counterparts.[43] Some Catholic women have also spoken of the need to form an ecumenical body of Christian women's groups, again referring to the example of FOMWAN, so as to better confront the problems women face in society.[44] However, at national level, this does not yet exist.

42 *Constitutions of CAN*, Art. 14, b–c.
43 See Communiqué of the meeting in Appendix n. 28.
44 'Unity among Christian Women in Nigeria: a Positive Ecumenical Approach against the Social-Political Ills of Our Society' in *Women Echo,* magazine of the NCCWO, 9th Edition, July 2003, 64–65: 'What should be uppermost in our minds right now is the formation of a strong national body of Christian women of Nigeria to enable us work out modalities for solving our societal problems. After all, our Moslem sisters have now formed themselves into a body they call the Federation of Moslem Women of Nigeria [sic.] ... Isn't this enough challenge for the Christian women of Nigeria? The decision now is ours to make.'

Christian-Based Women's NGOs

While many NGOs to promote women are founded and directed by Christian women, there exist very few NGOs that were founded to promote women from a specifically Biblical or Christian perspective.

One such NGO is the Total Woman Foundation (TOWOF) which was founded in 1998 by a COCIN church member, Mrs. Felicia Kaneng Gyang, in Jos, Plateau State. Her underlying conviction is that women have a unique and significant God-given role in the home, church and society and that there is need for their training and development to enable them fulfil this role. Hence, she founded TOWOF 'a non-governmental, interdenominational Christian organization, which inculcates Christian virtues in women'.[45] The objectives of this NGO are to teach 'womanhood' according to Biblical principles.[46] Christian women of all denominations are invited to affiliate with the NGO and participate in monthly Bible study groups. The organization is divided into ten departments, each one corresponding to the name of a female biblical character and her specific virtues and talents.[47] Every member joins the department she feels best represents her own talents and calling. Each department shares on how they can better contribute this talent to society and then carries out some corresponding activities.

45 TOWOF pamphlet.

46 See Appendix n. 14.6 for Aims and Objectives of TOWOF.

47 Deborah (leadership), Sarah (marriage and counseling), Hannah (prayer), Eunice (child up-bringing), Dorcas (helps), Elizabeth (pastors' wives), Miriam (music), Anna (women in ministry), Priscilla (missions/outreach), Lydia (business enterprise): Cf. TOWOF Pamphlet

Areas of Concern for Christian women

Patriarchy

From women's church fellowships often comes a condemnation of patriarchy as a cause of women's oppression and exploitation in Nigerian society.[48] Throughout history, according to a CWO leader, woman has been given the blame for all the wrongs in society, and in Nigerian society woman is 'still plagued by an intricate web of impenetrable social stereotypes and structures that scuttle all her attempts to stand up and be counted as the human being she is.'[49] The speaker suggested that CWO groups should seek that human rights and women's rights be taught in the family and in schools so as to help in the struggle against patriarchy and in the removal of prejudices against women.

Catholic bishops in Nigeria have encouraged women to struggle against all forms of discrimination, including patriarchy and male chauvinism, and reminded them that very often it is women themselves who inculcate these attitudes in their children and who impose discriminatory cultural practices and restrictions on other women.[50]

Simultaneously and somewhat bizarrely, almost all Women's Fellowships in Nigeria insist that the male is head of the family and that woman is called to submit.[51] This is the common and the accepted teach-

48 See for example 'The Woman: An Uncensored History of Exploitative Oppression' a paper given at the 2001 national seminar of the NCCWO, in *Women Echo*, 8th edition, July 2002, 55–57; 'Education and Communication to meet the Challenges of Poverty' a paper given at the 2004 national seminar of the NCCWO, in *Women Echo*, 2004 edition, 24–28.

49 'The Woman: An Uncensored History', 56.

50 Bishop Richard Burke, 'The Prophetic Mission of Women', Keynote address at Warri Diocesan CWO Seminar, in *Women Echo*, 8th edition, July 2002, 27–28.

51 Cf. S. Akinola, *Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), Preparatory Scheme*, 15–16; ECWA, *Women's Fellowship Guide*, 62; 'A Man is to Leave and Cleave', in *Virtuous Woman*, a publication of the MU/WG of the Diocese of Kaduna, 2003 edition, 9; E.A. Nwadinobi (CWO leader), *Bone of My Bones and Flesh of My Flesh*, Timex Press, Enugu 2003.

ing in all denominations.[52] Scripture texts which sanction this hierarchy within the family are well known and often cited.[53]

Patriarchal attitudes and practices are culturally embedded. Predominantly, the voice of authority is male, be it in the family, the extended family, the local community, the ecclesial community. Property is considered as belonging to the man; a woman goes to her 'husband's house', and this will always be considered her husband's house no matter how much she invests in it, just as her original home will always be her 'father's house'. Woman's responsibility for sexual morality in society is often stressed, her manner of dressing and behaviour often the theme of homilies and conferences as though it were the sole cause of men's seemingly uncontrollable sexual immorality. A woman is expected to marry before she reaches thirty, and if, after marriage, she is to further her career, she is considered successful only if she gives priority to her responsibilities as wife and mother. That a woman must participate in social, economic and political development is today stressed by all churches but little serious thought is given to how a couple might better face this challenge together considering the absence of social welfare programmes and the difficult socio-economic situation.

Women's role and participation in the Church

a) Representation of women in Church leadership

In the Catholic Church, CWO members have been included on the National Laity Council since its birth in 1972. In most parishes women form part of the parish council and some parish councils have had

52 It must be noted that this is not part of recent pastoral letters published by the Catholic Bishops' Conference. In my study of these pastoral letters, the only time it was taught that the husband is the head of the family and the wife must obey him was as far back as 1960: cf. Joint Pastoral Letter of the Nigeria Hierarchy, October 1st 1960 in P. Schineller, ed., *The Voice of the Voiceless*, 17. Yet, few Catholics, including priests and Religious, believe or even preach otherwise. The CWO, the ZMK and the Women's Fellowships of other churches stress that this is proper to the structure of a Christian family.

53 Often quoted are Eph. 5:21–33; Heb. 13:4; Rom. 7:2–3; and 1 Cor. 7:1–5.

women presidents. Thus, women's voice is present in most of the levels of the decision making bodies in the church. However, leadership of the Church is still very much in the hands of the Bishops and clergy who also have a controlling influence over the activities of the CWO itself.[54] Theoretically, women are admitted to most services and ministries in the church. However, the position of Catechist, which is particularly important in rural areas, is usually reserved for men and lay female Ministers of the Eucharist are uncommon.

Women are very poorly represented on the Executive Councils at all levels in ECWA. All officers, except that of treasurer, must be ordained or licensed; since only males can be ordained or licensed, women are necessarily excluded.[55] It is specified in the Bye-Laws that all officers 'must meet the Biblical requirements of a Christian leader as laid down in 1Tim. 3:1–7 and Titus 1:6–9.'[56] The fact that in these passages Paul refers to men is understood in ECWA as being intentional and not subject to interpretation of any kind. The voice of women is almost entirely limited to the Women's Fellowship, which itself is under the authority and responsibility of the Christian Education Department.[57] All church fellowship monies

54 For example, after the election of a new National Executive of the CWO, a three-year action plan is presented to the Catholic Bishops' Conference for their approval. It is specified in the Constitutions that the National Spiritual Director of the CWO be a priest, appointed by the Catholic Bishops' Conference. Cf. *Constitutions of the NCCWO*, Sect. 4.ii. The respective Bishop, usually at the request of the CWO executive officers, appoints a priest to be their provincial, diocesan and even deanery Spiritual Director. A female Religious is appointed as Spiritual Advisor at national and every other level.

55 ECWA, *The Constitution and Bye-Laws*, Art. IX, 3, c. ii. n. 5: 'ECWA shall not license or ordain women in conformity with 1Tim. 2:11–12'.

56 ECWA, *The Constitution and Bye-Laws*, Art. IV Officers, 1, a-q (The revised edition of the Constitution uses inclusive language; therefore, when only a man is eligible the pronoun *he* is used; when either a man or woman is eligible both pronouns, *he/she*, are used).

57 ECWA, *The Constitution and Bye-Laws*, Art. VIII, Fellowship Groups and Ministries. Thus, the activities and decisions of the ECWA WF executive committee are subject to the immediate authorization of the Head of the Christian Education Department. While the ECWA Constitutions do not specify that a

must be recorded, accounted for and banked in the ECWA church council account and any expenditure needs church authorization;[58] hence, the activities of women are also very much controlled. The constitutions specify that the ECWA Executive consist of men of sufficient age to guarantee the respect of the clergy.[59] At LCB level the chairman is the pastor and he is assisted by Elders. All of these are necessarily male.[60] A General Convention is held annually, to which every LCB is required to sponsor at least five delegates, three men and two women.[61]

On the TEKAN Executive Councils, made up at all levels of representatives of the member churches, a woman can be, and usually is, treasurer but otherwise the council consists of men. Each TEKAN church has its own rules about the formation of the church councils, some more inclusive of women than others, but all far from presenting gender balance. The two TEKAN member churches which ordain women, the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN) and the United Methodist Church in Nigeria (UMCN), also admit these ordained women to their Executive Councils. Women in the COCIN Church have requested greater participation in the Church's General Executive Council but as yet are entirely excluded.[62] The exclusion of women from leadership in some TEKAN churches is based on Paul's teaching that women should

Head of Department be ordained or be male, this has always been the practice. Because they are subject to his authority, he is a member of the Women's Fellowship General Council.

58 ECWA, *The Constitutions and Bye-Laws of the Evangelical Church of West Africa*, (revised edition), ECWA productions, Jos 2000: Bye-Laws, Art. VIII, 1.vi, 101. Women members have admitted that this often means that they cannot carry out activities which they feel are necessary, because the men who must authorize the expenditure do not consider it a priority. Interview with Mrs. Doris Maya, ECWA Church Kaduna, 3rd April 2005.

59 ECWA, *The Constitution and Bye-Laws*, Article VIII, 1, a-d.

60 ECWA, *The Constitution and Bye-Laws*, Art. IV, nn. 20–25.

61 ECWA, *The Constitution and Bye-Laws*, 'ECWA Bye-Laws', Art. 1, 7, d.

62 Interview with Mrs. Naomi Manclick, President COCIN WF, Jos, 20th June 2004.

not preach in the pulpit and it is assumed that it is men only who are called to Church leadership.[63]

b) Ordination of women

While in many countries the Anglican Communion has admitted women to the priesthood, Nigeria has not. The Bishops decided in 2003/4 to send a questionnaire to all the baptized members seeking their opinion on the matter.[64] The results showed that the majority did not agree, for entirely cultural reasons, with admitting women to ordained priesthood.[65] Ordained expatriate women who have come to work in Nigeria are not allowed to practice their ministry but are instead considered deacons. Nigerian women are not ordained as deacons.

The Baptist Church in the South of Nigeria ordains women, but it does not in the North. Women who have finished their theological training and work in their church are called pastors but they are not ordained. Some women are ordained as deacons and are called Reverend. Women in

63 Interview with Mrs. Terngu Kassar, WF NKTN Church, representative of TEKAN/ECWA Fellowship on WOWICAN Kaduna State, 29th April 2005.

64 The Executive Council of the MU, consisting of the Bishops' wives, congratulated the Primate for taking this step. Cf. Communiqué of the Mother's Union Executive Meeting of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), 15th–18th Sept. 2004, Cathedral Church of the Good Shepherd, Enugu, n. 12.

65 One of the reasons in opposition to ordination was that since it is a wife who must follow her husband, not vice versa, there would be difficulties when an ordained woman was given a transfer. Some suggested that if women were to be ordained, only women who have passed childbearing age should be admitted. Others felt that in Nigerian culture, it is not wise for a woman to be the head of a church while men are there since the cultural belief is that women cannot lead men. It was also felt that ordained ministry is a time-consuming task and to ask this of women would imply asking them to not fulfill their primary role as mother and wife responsibly. (Despite the fact that the same Church places great demands on the wives of clergymen.) Hence, it was concluded that Nigeria is not yet ready. Interview with Mrs. Susan Akinola, wife of the Anglican Primate of Nigeria, June 2005; by the time of the interview, the results of the questionnaire had not been compiled or published.

the North have requested admission to ordination but as yet this has not been granted.[66] An ordained male pastor from Kaduna believes that the difficulty in accepting women's ordination in the north represents cultural grudges and ignorance of the majority of the congregation.[67]

In the ECWA Church, the exclusion of women from ordination is clearly stated in the Constitutions: 'ECWA shall not license or ordain women in conformity with 1Tim 2:11–12'.[68]

The Executive Council of the COCIN WF has written several times to the Church Executive Council requesting admission to ordination but as yet this has not been granted.[69] Women over the age of forty are admitted to ordination in the United Methodist Church in Nigeria only since the year 2004. Both of these churches are members of TEKAN.

In most of the neo-Pentecostal churches women are admitted to the ordained ministry if they have completed some level of theological studies and are believed within the church to have been called to the gift of ministry. An ordained minister is one who preaches the Gospel and conducts naming ceremonies, marriages and funeral services. Some women and men are given the title Evangelists and are called upon to preach during Crusades. There is one female bishop in Nigeria, Bishop Margaret Idahosa, based in Benin City.[70]

66 Rev. Mrs. Rahila Lyamgohn, 'Baptist Churches in the North urged to ordain women' in *The Nigeria Konference, Baptist Christian Voice North of the Niger*, vol. 1, n. 1, First Quarter 2004, 24–25; People reacted to her article and sent in their reasons why women should not be ordained, including that the Bible has not authorized women to lead; women by nature cannot fulfill the oath of ordination; there is no record in the Bible of any woman being ordained. Cf. 'Women Ordination North Matters Arising' in *The Nigeria Konference, Baptist Christian Voice North of the Niger*, vol. 1, n. 2, Second Quarter 2004, 8.

67 'Re: Ordination of Women in the North of the NBC Church' in *The Nigeria Konference, Baptist Christian Voice North of the Niger*, vol. 1, n. 3, Third Quarter 2004, 7.

68 ECWA, *The Constitution and Bye-Laws*, Art. IX, 3, c. ii. n. 5.

69 Interview with Mrs. Naomi Manclick, President COCIN WF, Jos, 20th June 2004.

70 She inherited the church from her late husband, Archbishop Idahosa.

Marriage

a) Domestic Violence and Separation

The fact that divorce is not permissible in any Christian denomination in Nigeria is not a source of controversy but it is a source of suffering since a woman who undergoes various forms of domestic violence or humiliation is expected to remain within that marriage. To break up a marriage is very much frowned upon and blame will most often be put on the woman for her inability to keep the family together. A woman is also slow to leave her husband, despite his violence towards her, because it would mean leaving her children: she gave birth to them in his house, they belong to him and she must leave them when she leaves the house.

An Anglican women's conference in 2003 recognized that issues such as rape within marriage are not openly addressed in church circles just as there is great silence about violence against children and widows, and they requested that these issues be addressed in sermons and synod resolutions.[71] An article written by a CWO woman, and published in their national magazine, pointed out that women are often afraid to admit of such a thing happening to them, because of the shame attached to it. She said that as Christians we cannot advise a woman to leave her abusive husband but, she pointed out, the Bible does not oblige a battered woman to stay with a man who jeopardizes her health.[72]

However, all see separation as a last resort. Efforts are made by most Fellowships to offer counselling and mediation to the couple in question to help resolve their disputes. Above all, the Fellowships invite the woman to pray.[73] When separation is unavoidable and considered best by the larger community, the Fellowships try to help the woman financially.

71 *Virtuous Woman*, 2004 edition, 15.

72 'Violence in the Home: The Battered Woman' in *Women Echo*, 9th edition, July 2003, 59–61. She suggested 1Cor. 13:1–13; Eph. 4:29–31; 1Tim. 3:3; 1Cor. 7:10–16; Gal 5:19–21; and Mk 10:2–12 as helpful Biblical references.

73 'Abiding by the biblical injunction of submission, a woman married to a man who does not know how to love and respect his wife must pray for the Lord's help and

b) Polygamous Marriage

In all Christian denominations, emphasis is put on monogamy as the only acceptable form of Christian marriage.[74] Despite this, all Women's Fellowships in the various denominations address the issue of polygamy simply because, despite church teaching to the contrary, quite a number of Christian men still take second or third wives by customary law.[75] One major reason they do this is childlessness or the birth of only female children in the first marriage relationship, whereby the wife is presumed to be the one who is at fault. It is often women who insist their childless son take a second wife so as to give grandchildren to her and her husband. Other polygamous relationships arise from poverty, a family needing, and hence accepting, the bride price offered for their daughter by an already married man.

If a man who has a number of wives decides to 'put himself right in the sight of the Lord', he may often choose to do so, not with the woman he has lived with for most years and who is the mother of his children, but with a younger more attractive woman who will give him more children and who, previous to the Church marriage, he has married according to customary law.[76] Although the church recommends that he pro-

win her husband through her gentle and quiet spirit.' (1 Pt. 3:1–4). Interview with Mrs. Chide Yakubu, MU Worker, Kaduna.

74 Exceptions to this are some of the AICs. In the ESO monogamy is the normal practice, but since all doctrine and situations are subject to new revelations by the Holy Spirit, if a couple has no children and the elder prays and hears that the man can take another wife, then this is acceptable since nothing is impossible to God. However, a woman would not be granted permission to take a second husband, since this would not be considered a revelation. Interview with Apostle Charles and Prophetess Francisca of the ESO, Kaduna, May 2005.

75 In basically all their constitutions restrictions of one kind or another are put on women in polygamous marriages: either unacceptable as full members or unacceptable for a position of leadership in the organization.

76 The Marriage Act states that a person contracting a marriage under the Act, which includes in a Church, cannot marry any person other than the person with whom such marriage is proposed to be contracted. However, if a man has more than one wife under customary law, he can choose one of them to marry under the Marriage

vide a home for the other wives, this is not always done. Thus, although women agree that monogamy is more respectful of a woman's dignity, the Church teaching on the issue does not sufficiently cater for the needs of the abandoned wives whose consent that the husband marries in Church is not required.[77] Not only do these women lose a husband and possibly a home but they may also lose their children.

In the Fellowships, women are encouraged not to pressurize their sons into taking second wives, not to give their daughters away as second wives, and if they are in a polygamous marriage themselves, they are encouraged to leave this marriage. If the man gets married in church to another woman, they are encouraged to gladly leave their children to be reared by the church-recognized wife of the father of the children.[78]

c) Mixed and Interreligious Marriage

According to Catholic Church teaching, a marriage is to be blessed in the Catholic Church and the children are to be brought up in the Catholic faith.[79] In cases where there is difficulty in observing this canonical form of celebration, the bishop can dispense the Catholic party, and the marriage can be blessed by the priest in the recognized Christian church, providing the Catholic party has declared that s/he will continue to practice the Catholic faith and will try to rear their children as Catholics. In practice, however, most Nigerian cultures dictate that a woman must follow her husband's religion. Few men will agree to marry in a church other than their own and most will insist their children attend their church. If

Act. Cf. Marriage Act, n. 11.d and 33. Marriage under the Marriage Act does not invalidate previous marriages contracted under customary law. Cf. Marriage Act, n. 35.

77 The Catholic teaching is that if a man has more than one wife, he should choose the one he most loves and leave the others (Canon 1148, par. 1). Although the church recommends that a man marry the woman he has lived with for most years and who has given birth to his children, there is no law that obliges him to do this.

78 Interview with Elizabeth Hyat, President ZMK Kaduna Ecclesiastical Province, April 2005.

79 Canon 1124–1127.

the man in question is not adamant about this, his family often is. The practice in many Catholic dioceses is to punish those parents who show approval of such a marriage by their acceptance of the bride price and attendance at the marriage of their daughter to a non-Catholic when the canonical requirements have not been agreed upon.[80] Since a Catholic man is free to marry the woman of his choice, who will be expected to follow his religion, the choice of marriage partners for Catholic girls is therefore limited. The CWO and ZMK admit the injustice of the situation, but only advise women to ensure their daughters abide by Church teaching.[81]

Most denominations see difficulties in interreligious marriages and frown upon a Christian girl's marriage to a Muslim man.[82] Girls marrying Muslim men often enter into polygamous marriages and this too is certainly frowned upon. The wealth of some Muslim Alhajis in the north is believed to be what attracts girls to accept their marriage proposals; hence, girls are warned against the evils of being lured by material wealth.[83] It is a common belief among Christians that Muslim men purposely seek to convince Christian girls to marry them as a way of conquering the North. The only WF Guide that directly refers to interreligious marriage is that of ECWA which advises women not to marry 'unbelievers' and

80 Parents are removed from any leadership position they hold within the Church, such as in the CWO or ZMK, and are not allowed to receive Communion for a determined period. The daughter is equally punished although in most cases this is irrelevant since culturally she will go to her husband's church.

81 Interview with Elizabeth Hyat, President ZMK Kaduna Ecclesiastical Province, April 2005.

82 There is one renowned case in Kaduna state of the daughter of an ECWA pastor who married a Muslim. She had inherited some of the family land on which today a Mosque is built. Today this mosque is among the largest in Southern Kaduna, 'Christian territory', and is often pointed to as a warning of what can happen if a girl marries a Muslim.

83 Cf. The communiqué issued by the major Religious Superiors on *Shari'a* stated 'From a pure financial interest, we see a young Christian woman taking an offer of marriage from a Muslim man.' See Appendix n. 29.

forewarns them that a woman who marries a non-Christian will not be allowed any leadership position in the WF.[84]

d) Inheritance and Widowhood

At the first Anglican Bishops' Wives Conference held in Lagos in October 2004, the final communiqué stated: 'The Conference frowns upon and condemns the dehumanizing practices in the society against widows, which stigmatize, dispossess, harass and deny their basic rights.'[85]

While all denominations speak out strongly against such practices at a national or general level, as a body, church-based women's fellowships very rarely get directly involved or openly challenge the particular family who has denied a widow her property.[86] They see it as a cultural question, a family issue, and hence must be treated delicately. Individual members might refer the widow to an NGO or to a lawyer and the Fellowship might help the widow financially and morally.

e) Early Marriage

In all denominations, the education and empowerment of women is stressed. Hence, early marriage, before a girl has finished her secondary education, is frowned upon. However, it is quite a common practice that young couples, especially women, continue their university education after marriage. Women members in the Fellowships are encouraged to train and educate their children and not to allow them to marry before

84 ECWA, *Women's Fellowship Guide*, sect. T, p. 26.

85 Communiqué issued by the Bishops' wives at the 1st African Anglican Bishops' Conference, Bola Memorial Church, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria, 27th October 2004, n. 6.

86 Interview with Mrs. Elizabeth Hyat, President ZMK Kaduna Ecclesiastical Province, April 2005; Interview with Mrs. Doris Maya, ECWA Church Kaduna, ECWA WF representative on Kaduna state WOWICAN, 3rd April 2005.

they are educated.[87] The Church abides by the Marriage Act which does not allow a minor to marry without his/her guardian's written consent.[88] There is no minimum age at which consent can be given; thus youngsters can be and are married in Church.

Women's social and political role

Women's Fellowships constantly remind women of their indispensable contribution to society, taking examples of biblical women whom God called to service for the good of the community. Women are encouraged to participate in politics and the WF members are encouraged to support them with their votes and in any other way they can.[89]Greater political participation is seen to be necessary, not only in terms of women's rights but also because of the belief in women's greater moral authority, honesty and inherent democratic principles, which are seen to be needed to help Nigeria be freed from corrupt politics and injustice.

Anglican women leaders have reminded their members that the task of nation building is not for men alone, but is for every child of God by adoption in Christ Jesus.[90] The National CWO President called on

87 For example: 'The Conference also condemns sexual abuse against the girl child, genital mutilation, early marriages, and prostitution, human trafficking and abducting and using children as soldiers. ... The Conference therefore... calls on the Churches in Africa where such practices exist to speak out against these injustices against women, widows and children by giving clear instructions that these degrading, traumatizing and unchristian practices be stopped.' Communiqué issued by the Bishops' wives at the 1st African Anglican Bishops' Conference, Bola Memorial Church, Ikeja, Lagos, 27th October 2004, n. 6.

88 The minimum age for marriage is twenty-one years. If one of the parties to the marriage is under that age, the consent of his/her guardian must be given in writing and attached to the affidavit. Marriage Act n. 11.b and 18.

89 In 2003, the NCCWO promised that CWO women 'shall redouble efforts towards proper participation in active politics come the year 2007 in order to contribute meaningfully to the positive growth of democracy in Nigeria.': Cf. *Women Echo*, 10th edition, July 2004, 39.

90 'Women and Nation Building' in *The Church in Nigeria (Anglican Communion), Province III Women Magazine*, Millennium edition, vol. 2, n. 2, June 2002, 17.

women not to shy away from politics and allow men to dominate them but to contest viable positions, even the Presidency and Governorship.[91] In 2003, the president of the National Laity Council of Nigeria promised the CWO leaders that the Laity Council would give preferential support to any woman who indicated an intention of vying for a political post.[92]

However, women leaders recognize that women are still slow to stand for election 'because of name calling, lack of confidence, money politics, and marginalization by the men.'[93] Women's dependence on their husbands' permission has also been recognized as an obstacle since some men will not allow their wives to attend late meetings and endure the other sacrifices involved in being a politician.[94]

Despite the insistence on greater political participation, the primary contribution of women to nation building is believed to be in the formation of future generations. To build a better society, women must 'start from our homes ... and proceed to the society at large.'[95]

Poverty and Women's empowerment

Many Christian women in the North, like their Muslim counterparts, are illiterate. Many women are also greatly overworked and receive little dividends. They are involved in small trading, buying what little they can afford and preparing it to sell in the market or on the streets. Common is the sight of a woman carrying her heavy basket of wares, a load of firewood or a heavy bucket of water on her head, walking miles to her home, almost always with a baby on her back.

91 Hon. Mrs. Laurentia Mallam (National President of NCCWO), at the seminar of the NCCWO held in Owerri, Imo State, July 2002, in *Women Echo*, 8th edition, July 2002, 10–11.

92 Cf. *Women Echo*, 9th edition, July 2003, 66.

93 *Women Echo*, 9th Edition, July 2003, 65.

94 'Women and democracy', a paper delivered at the NCCWO annual seminar in Owerri, July 2002, in *Women Echo*, 9th edition, July 2003, 21–28.

95 'Challenges of a Christian Mother in the New Millennium' in *The Church in Nigeria (Anglican Communion), Province III Women Magazine*, Millennium edition, vol. 2, n. 2, June 2002, 25.

At a workshop on women's rights organized by the Centre for Women's Studies and Intervention (CWSI), a man asked why women need money. The response given by one of the Religious women who runs this NGO was very simply 'When women with money talk, their husbands and other men listen.'[96]She also pointed out that many men, even if not unemployed as many are, unofficially abdicate to their wives their responsibility as breadwinner while officially continuing to hold the title.[97]

Despite the awareness among all women's church-based groups that women need to be economically empowered, only a very minimal effort is put into organizing income-generating workshops or even literacy classes. It cannot be denied that mainline Christian churches are at the forefront of offering quality curative measures to the illiteracy, health problems and general poverty of women. This is not, however, at the initiative of women's fellowships but tends to be the task assumed by Religious women.

Health care

HIV/AIDS has become the concern of every Church in Nigeria. It is in this area that women's fellowships show their greatest social commitment, principally by organizing seminars to raise awareness of the issue.[98] Churches as well as NGOs avail of the numerous international funding agencies to establish awareness programmes, clinics and other

96 'The Challenges of Women Empowerment' in *CWSI Newsletter*, Nov. 2004, 11–12.

97 *CWSI Newsletter*, Nov. 2004, 11–12.

98 The 2003 annual seminar of the NCCWO was 'Strengthening the African Family, a way to Fight HIV/AIDS Pandemic' Cf. Papers and reflections published in *Women Echo,* 10th edition, July 2004; WOWICAN Kaduna hosted workshops on stigmatization of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in 2004 and 2005: Cf. Report in CAN State Chapter Secretariat, Kaduna; The Anglican Church, helped by funds from CMS London, sent some health workers overseas for orientation and formation programmes on how the Church in other countries have set up AIDS programmes. On their return, these helped to set up clinics in various

primary health units that offer care to the victims and their families and try to combat the scourge of AIDS.[99] The Catholic bishops in their 2004 national conference called for coordination in the work of those seeking to help HIV/AIDS victims.[100]

Faithfulness within marriage is stressed by all denominations as the most effective way of curbing the pandemic. Some WF groups have asked that their Churches should facilitate HIV testing, and encourage openness about HIV status as well as insisting on HIV testing before marriage. The protestant churches ask that pastors promote the use of condoms within marriage where one partner is already affected or is known to be promiscuous.

Women Theologians

Some Nigerian women theologians have attempted to offer alternatives to the dominant gender discourse of Christian churches and have called for a deeper inculturation of the inclusive and egalitarian ethos of the Gospel message. They have also proposed some concrete theological-based strategies for such an inculturation. Primary among these are Rose Uchem, Rosemary Edet, Teresa Okure and Dorcas Olu Akintunde; the first three are Catholic Religious from the eastern part of the country while Dorcas is a member of the Christ Apostolic Church based in Ibadan.[101]

These theologians propose less patriarchal interpretations of Biblical texts and a process of inculturation that addresses, from the root, those

parishes. Cf. *The Church in Nigeria (Anglican Communion), Province III Women Magazine*, Millennium Edition, vol. 2, n. 2, June 2002.

99 The National Action Committee against Aids (NACA) cooperates with many churches in their HIV/AIDS programmes. While at state level there are SACA (State Action Committee against Aids) programmes, in parishes of all the mainline Christian denominations there are active PACA (Parish Action Committee against Aids) programmes which offer counseling and care services to people living with the virus.

100 Communiqué of the CBCN 2004 held in Maiduguri.

101 For reference to some of their publications see bibliography.

cultural beliefs and practices which subordinate, manipulate, exclude, essentialise and oppress women. They see this as being necessary if development programmes to alleviate the plight of women are to be in any way fruitful. Their position as lecturers in Catholic seminaries, theological schools and national universities has certainly brought an awareness of gender issues to these establishments and to their students, many of whom study for the priesthood.

Another prominent and outspoken Catholic Religious, Veronica Openibo, has given a number of workshops to Religious and to priests on issues of sexuality and has brought to them an awareness of the abuses women suffer due to traditions which view woman as subservient to man.[102] She has also spoken to CWO leaders on cultural forms of discrimination.[103] Attempts have been made since 2004 to establish a Northern Chapter of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, extending membership to women who have no theological training but who are interested in religion and concerned for women's plight.[104]

TEKAN runs the Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN) which is based in Jos and which prepares pastors for many of the evangelical churches in the North. A number of women are on the staff as theology professors. Attempts were made in 1997/8 to form a Women Theologians Association but they were not successful. According to one

102 V. Openibo, 'Sexuality and celibacy in the Nigeria Church' in *The Voyage*, a publication of the Nigerian Conference of Women Religious, Inaugural Issue, Jan. 2004, 28–56.

103 Leadership Workshop given by Sr. Veronica Openibo at the Executive meeting of the NCCWO, Port Harcourt, 26th June 2004 (unpublished). Women leaders from every diocese were invited to identify those obstacles they encountered in the family, church and larger society which prevented them from fulfilling their leadership role.

104 The introductory meeting was held in the Catholic Gaudium et Spes Institute in Abuja in Sept. 2004. Twenty-five women participated. Since then the Circle has met approximately three times a year. The papers presented by the participants at these meetings have not been published but are available in the secretariat of the Gaudium et Spes Institute, Abuja.

woman theologian, who is on the TCNN staff, the lack of success was because most of the women were afraid of being labelled feminists.[105]

Thus, a form of feminist theological reflection which analyses cultural factors that are 'innovations in the form in which Christianity is interpreted and practiced' (to paraphrase the words of FOMWAN in reference to Islam), is gradually entering Nigerian Christian circles. However, while Muslim women are truly committed to analyzing and overcoming wrongful practices, supported by many of their religious and political leaders, such analysis is still marginal in Christian churches. That it is necessary is only recognized by a few.

Christian Women and the Inculturation of the Gospel

An important point which is little considered by Christian women's fellowships is that the democratic process, including secular legislation (common law) and national or international treaties, is limited in its effect at local level where culture, tradition and local forms of authority are the ultimate determining voice.

In so far as Muslim women can frame their arguments for the promotion of women in an Islamic framework, there is greater possibility that these arguments will be acceptable at the local level. Similarly, government legislation and treaties to promote women will only be effective at grassroots level in Christian communities if they are supported by a Christian framework. Christianity does not define laws as does Islam, but by the values and principles it upholds it does influence the acceptable norms of human relationships in the believing community. A closer examination of the evils in society which women activists say are partly due to religious beliefs is needed. In the words of Rose Uchem, there is need for 'a deeper level of inculturation which is attentive to social and gender justice; in other words, inculturation coupled with liberation.'[106]

105 Interview with Rebecca Dali, lecturer in TCNN.

106 R. Uchem, *Beyond Veiling*, 57.

Given the numerical strength of women's church-based fellowships, an inculturated liberation theology and inculturated liberation praxis, similar to what Muslim women are developing in their communities, could be very effectively developed by them in collaboration with Nigeria's women theologians. For example, training workshops could be given by the theologians at national and zonal levels just as FOMWAN organizes training workshops for women throughout the country on *shari'a* and Islamic rights. What is necessary is a greater awareness among women's church-based groups of the need for such a process.

Conclusion

Christian women's commitment to their church fellowships and to their faith communities in Northern Nigeria is commendable. However, they work within traditional interpretations of religious teachings and Biblical texts which in effect are oppressive and which reflect more of cultural interpretations than Gospel truths. It is my belief that Christian women's fellowships in Nigeria, if they are to be true to the Gospel which they claim to preach, need to begin to negotiate in greater depth the challenges of modernization, secularization and post-colonialism with the Christian faith.

To recognize that long-held religious truths are no more than historically and culturally conditioned prejudices which in fact are contrary to the deeper religious truth is not an easy task. Is it one to which sincere interreligious dialogue of Muslim and Christian women can contribute?

SECTION THREE

Women in Interreligious Dialogue

CHAPTER 7

Interreligious Dialogue in Northern Nigeria

Informal dialogue between Muslims and Christians takes place daily in Northern Nigeria as people of different faiths interact in the market places, schools, hospitals, places of work, and so on. However, this 'dialogue of life' is rather limited because of the ethnic nature of the two faiths in the region and the largely separate lives of the two faith communities. In recent times, due to the violent conflicts, it has become even more limited.

Government bodies, academic institutions, faith bodies, and NGOs, have all organized formal encounters between members of the two faiths. Although only a small percentage of the population has participated in these encounters, they are often influential people, religious or political leaders and leaders of civil society bodies and of non-governmental organizations. Women have usually been included. Unfortunately, women's faith-based groups, FOMWAN and Christian women's church fellowships, have not yet made a determined decision to consider interreligious dialogue as a path towards the promotion of women in the region or even as a path of evangelization or da`wa, and they have made little effort to initiate such a process.[1]

1 Hajiya Aisha Lemu, as National Amirah of FOMWAN invited the CWO to a meeting in 1986 but the meeting did not take place. Mrs. Katherine Hoomkwap, as National President of the CWO, invited FOMWAN to meetings in 1990. Some meetings were held in 1990 during which they discussed issues related to child rearing. Due to the tension between Muslims and Christians in the country around that time, the meetings did not continue. No written reports of the meetings were available but that the invitations were extended and some meetings were held was verified by Mrs. Katherine Hoomkwap (interview 28th Jan. 2004, Abuja),

This chapter provides a brief overview of the various attempts made in recent years in Northern Nigeria at constructive interreligious dialogue forums and gives particular attention to what has been said and done by or about women.

Dialogue in community/Dialogue of life

In much of the North, the British colonial administration ensured the non-integration of Muslims and non-Muslims through the creation of *Sabon Gari* (New Town) for the latter in the old Northern Nigerian towns such as Kano and Sokoto. In Kaduna and Jos, cities which were built-up during colonial days, Muslims and non-Muslims lived side by side. Incessant clashes between the two communities now ensure that there is a remarkable voluntary segregation, further highlighting the paralleling of Islam and Christianity in the region. The environment of mutual mistrust that segregated ghetto existence nurtures does not facilitate even a dialogue of life and the prevailing attitude is that one religious community should not interfere in the life of the other.

Although Muslims and Christians go back to their enclaves when darkness falls, a certain level of interaction and cross-fertilization in common places of day-to-day experiences does exist. Unfortunately, in such daily interaction many people prefer to exclude religion from popular discourse because it is a highly volatile subject area.

However, the influence of religion in women's lives is not something that is easily removed from conversation; it affects their way of dress, their access to public places, their everyday difficulties. Thus, when they meet as women do, for example in primary health clinics with their sick children or in other such moments of common and meaningful life experiences, women share on religion to one degree or another. From these daily or occasional encounters, friendships develop, some of which withstand the distrust and tension resulting from the conflicts.

Hajiya Aisha Lemu (interview 1st April 2004, Minna) and Mrs. Laurentia Mallam (national CWO president 2002–2005, interview 23rd May 2005, Kaduna).

Spiritual dialogue

So many crises have been sparked in Northern Nigeria by an accusation of someone having misquoted or shown disrespect for a religious text. People are therefore more defensive of their own religious texts and are wary of referring to that of the other. They are also slow to allow people of the other faith to enter their churches or mosques, given the destruction and desecration that has been done to these in recent times. Hence, dialogue of religious experience, or spiritual dialogue, is difficult. However, there are forms of spiritual dialogue lived by women which deserve to be recognised.

Women invoke very often the help and protection of God, finding in God their greatest if not only recourse and succour. The reality lived by women, which is primarily their concern for concrete everyday existence, permits that during shared moments of common difficulty they expose to each other their faith and religious practice; they meet each other in the cave of the heart, as it were. It is their need for divine assistance and their belief in God's goodness that unites them. They are together in their faith, despite the different expressions that faith is given in their religious traditions.

The home is where most women spend most of their time. The majority of Muslim women do not attend the mosque, especially younger women who are still of child-bearing age; they carry out their ablutions and pray at home. Women of all faiths tend to be attentive to their children's daily religious practice when at home. Thus, although of different faiths, their being friends, their lesser attachment to the mosque, and the fact that most often the home is their place of encounter, allows women to be present with one another as they worship God and practice their faith.

Parliamentary dialogue

Parliamentary dialogue can be seen in various government sponsored dialogue forums which have been established at national or state levels.

Nigerian Interreligious Council (NIREC)

The Nigerian Interreligious Council (NIREC) was established by Muslim and Christian leaders at the initiative of the Federal Government in September 1999. Its functions are to promote an understanding of the 'true teachings' of Islam and Christianity among the adherents of the two religions and to create a sustainable channel of communication between the two communities. NIREC consists of twenty-five Muslim and twenty-five Christian members, appointed by CAN and the Nigerian Supreme Council on Islamic Affairs (NSCIA). The Christian representation includes two women. In 2004, FOMWAN was invited to form part of the Muslim representation which until then was entirely male. For various reasons, primarily because of its close ties to the Government, NIREC has not been particularly effective in its objectives.

Its one important contribution was the organizing in June 2000 of a seminar on *Shari'a*.[2] Some strongly worded papers were presented by male Muslim and Christian leaders. The Christians reiterated their commitment to collaborate with Muslims towards greater social justice for all people in Nigeria and their non-acceptance of the full implementation of the *shari'a* because of its negative effect on Christians and because it was contrary to the Constitution. The Muslim speakers insisted that non-Muslims would not be affected but Mgr. John Onaiyekan, president of the CBCN, pointed out: 'the foot that wears the shoe knows best where it pinches'.[3]

2 NIREC, *Seminar papers presented on Shari'a*, 21st–22nd June, 2000 (unpublished but available at the NIREC Secretariat, Abuja).

3 J. Onaiyekan, 'The *Shari'a* in Nigeria: Issues and Perspectives' in NIREC, *Seminar papers*, (1–17), 14.

The Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) organized a conference on *shari'a* in February 2000, just a few months before that of NIREC. Similar arguments were put forth by similar people.[4] One paper was presented by a woman who expressed her conviction that Islam has granted women undeniable rights which protect their dignity and equality with men within well defined and complementary gender roles.[5]

Government Initiatives in Kaduna State

In Kaduna a Bureau for Religious Affairs was established by the State Government in 2000. The Bureau works closely with JNI and CAN and consists of two departments, one for Muslim and another for Christian Matters. Part of its mandate is to promote religious understanding and harmony and to coordinate and regulate religious institutions. Some women are employed in both departments although the positions of leadership are given to male religious leaders. The Bureau was very much involved in the signing of the Kaduna Peace Declaration in August 2002.[6]

In 2004 the Christian Matters department of the Bureau for Religious Affairs established a State Standing-Committee of intra-religious leaders to bring Christian denominations together in a way that was not quite as politically inclined as CAN. Among other functions, the Committee was to advise the government on wholistic programmes for the economic empowerment of women and youth and suggest how the government could better collaborate with NGOs.[7]

4 JNI, *Understanding Shari'a in Nigeria*, Proceedings of the National Seminar on *Shari'a*, Spectrum Books Ltd., Ibadan 2001.

5 F. Khalil, 'Women's Rights Under *Shari'a*' in JNI, *Understanding Shari'a*, 68–77.

6 See Appendix n. 16.

7 Cf. Minutes of inaugural meeting of the standing committee of intra-religious harmony, 3rd Nov. 2004, General Hassan Katsina House, Kaduna (available at the Bureau for Religious Affairs, Kaduna).

Government Initiatives in Plateau State

The Governor of Plateau state constituted a Peace Summit in August 2002 to which no woman was invited. The Governor's wife, however, Mrs. Valentine Dariye, invited some Christian and Muslim women to form a peace-building group, which continues to exist. Their main activity is to produce some songs together on the theme of peace and reconciliation and to speak about peaceful co-existence on the radio and television.

Following the declaration by President Obasanjo in May 2004 of a state of emergency in Plateau State, a Peace Assembly was held in October of that year in which two representatives of each major ethnic group in the state participated. The participation was thus along ethnic rather than religious lines. Although a woman was chairperson of the Assembly, women were virtually absent in the delegations. Therefore, the NCWS, FOMWAN and CAN were invited to send two representatives each. 'Women Issues' was one of the themes for discussion at the Assembly, because it had been noted that although women have an important role in peace building, they are discriminated against in diverse ways, enjoy little access to resources, and thus are limited in their contribution to peace building and development.[8] Recommendations were made and presented in the final document of the Peace Assembly to resolve some of the issues which militate against women's empowerment in the state.[9]

8 Plateau Peace Conference, final document, published fully in *Ethnic and Religious Rights*, vol. 3, n. 17, November 2004, 6–25.

9 See Appendix n. 17 for recommendations of the Plateau Peace Assembly on 'Women Issues'.

Initiatives of Faith-based bodies

Association of Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations in Nigeria (ACMMRN)

The Association for Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations in Nigeria (ACMMRN) was initiated in 1993 by the Lutheran Church of Christ (LCCN).[10] Every two years since its foundation, ACMMRN hosts an interreligious conference.[11] These conferences are well attended by professors from universities and theological schools as well as prominent religious leaders and activists from across the nation. Here theological dialogue is more evident than in most other interreligious encounters held in Northern Nigeria.[12] The resulting communiqués highlight the openness to other faiths and the values of forgiveness, peace and respect inherent in both religious traditions and suggests recommendations to governments and religious leaders on how to foster peaceful co-existence.[13] The 1995 conference concluded that emphasis on doctrinal issues does not foster a spirit of interreligious dialogue but that attention should be given to evolving joint projects for mutual benefit.[14]

In 1997, a Muslim and a Christian woman gave papers on the Position and Rights of Women in the Society according to their religious traditions. The Muslim woman's paper presented only the Islamic ideal, that liberation which Islam supposedly brought to women in Arabian societies, and

10 Cf. 'Constitution of the Association of Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations in Nigeria (ACMMRN)', approved August 1999, in *Report and Papers of 1999 ACMMRN International Conference,* 78–88.

11 All conference reports are compiled and are available at the ACMMRN Secretariat, Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN), Dogon-Dutse, Jos, Nigeria.

12 Themes such as forgiveness and mercy in Islam and Christianity, the theology of God's Word from the Qur'anic and Biblical perspectives, the Muslim and the Christian view of moral conscience, the Muslim and the Christian response to materialism and immorality in society have been discussed and related to the concrete situation in Nigeria.

13 See Appendices nn.18–23 for Communiqués of all ACMMRN conferences.

14 See Appendix n.19.

concluded that women did not need to go to Beijing or anywhere else but should concentrate on living Islam faithfully.[15] The Christian presenter was a little more pragmatic. She compared the attitude of Jesus to women with the situation of Christian women in their churches in Nigeria and challenged all Christian churches to begin to take the vision of inclusive communion seriously.[16] The final communiqué of this conference stated that 'both Christian and Muslim institutions should truthfully teach and ensure the full realization of the rights of women as enshrined in their respective Scriptures.'[17] Of the five conferences held between 1993 and 2002 no other paper was presented by a woman except one by an American in 2002.[18]

In 1999, a paper was presented on traditional practices which are harmful to women and are often contrary to religious teachings.[19] In the discussion that followed it was seen that women allow many injustices to be perpetrated against them and do not want to change these customs because they have been socialized into believing that this is the way things must be done.[20]

In 2002, women were again discussed in the context of the Ms. World Beauty Pageant which was to be held two months later in Abuja. As it happened, it was this Beauty Pageant that sparked violent religious riots in Kaduna and Abuja. In the conference communiqué, the participants

15 K. Abdullahi Umar, 'The Position and Rights of Women in the Society: The Muslim View' in *Report and Papers of ACMMRN 1997 International Conference*, 118–123.

16 Mrs Michal R. Bongi, 'The Position and Rights of Women in the Society: Christian View' in *Report and Papers of ACMMRN 1997 International Conference,* 124–130.

17 See Appendix n. 20.

18 Nelly van Doorn-Harder (University of Valparaiso, USA), 'Peaceful Co-existence as a Catalyst for Societal Development: The Christian Approach' in *Report and Papers of ACMMRN 2002 International Conference*, 51–59.

19 Cf. P.H. Daru, 'Vesico-Vaginal Fistulae (VVF) and Female Circumcision' in *Report and Papers of ACMMRN 1999 International Conference*, 51–54.

20 'Report' in *Report and Papers of ACMMRN 2002 International Conference*, 14.

expressed their objection to the pageant which they saw as dehumanizing womanhood.[21]

The 2005 conference was dedicated to a study of the *shari'a* in a pluri-religious nation. While it was the LCNN, through funds received from America, that had funded the previous five conferences, the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs through the Governor of Zamfara hosted this one. One of the four sub-themes was 'Mobilizing Women for Peace and Development in Society'. The communiqué stated that women's rights and justice are inherent in both Islam and Christianity but are not implemented as they must be if peace is to reign.[22]

Programme of Christian Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA)

As far back as 1959, the Anglican and Methodist denominations in Nigeria formed the Islam in Africa Project (IAP) to motivate the churches to better understand Islam and Muslims. The project is known nowadays as PROCMURA (Project of Christian Muslim Relations in Africa).[23] PROCMURA is a Pan-African organization and is today based in Nairobi with three offices in Nigeria, one of which is in the North. The Anglican Bishop of Kaduna, Rt. Rev. Josiah Idowu-Fearon, is the president of the northern area committee. PROCMURA is best known for its conferences and seminars to help the Christian churches to improve their knowledge of Islam and of the Muslims in their region so as to be faithful witnesses for Christ. In his church in Kaduna, Bishop Fearon gives weekly classes to Christians on Islam. Muslims are invited to participate in PROCMURA programmes but are not formally associated members. PROCMURA has a women's wing, established in Jos in 1989, but this is not particularly active.

21 See Appendix n. 22, point 5.

22 See Appendix n. 23, Observations and Recommendations n. 4.

23 For a brief but concise history of the development of IAP and the adoption in 1985 of the new name PROCMURA, see I.U. Chibuzo Nwanaju, *Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria*, 237–241.

Initiatives of the Catholic Church

a) Department of Mission and Dialogue

While there was certainly dialogue between Muslims and Catholics in Nigeria before 2000, it was only then that the Catholic Bishops' Conference founded the Department of Mission and Dialogue. In 2002, to help organize Catholics to engage in a serious ecumenical dialogue with their Muslim brothers and sisters, this Department invited each northern diocese to send two representatives to a one-day workshop in Abuja, specifically requesting that one of the two be a woman, preferably an official of the CWO.[24] At this meeting much emphasis was put on the need for an interreligious dialogue of civilization in Nigeria, whereby members of both faiths work together to build a democratic and just civil society where human rights and dignity are promoted and defended. The final communiqué recommended, among other things, that Christian women's organizations should reach out to counterpart Muslim organizations and work out common grounds of dialogue.

The Catholic Church in Nigeria is organized according to diocese and ecclesiastical province, the latter being formed of approximately eight dioceses under the authority of the provincial archbishop. In June 2004 each ecclesiastical province was invited by the Dept. of Mission and Dialogue to establish a provincial interreligious dialogue commission.[25] So as to view the encounters and their fruits in chronological order, I present the diocesan initiatives that were realized before those of the more recently established commissions in the ecclesiastical provinces.

24 Cf. Report of the Workshop on Christian-Muslim Collaboration in the Building of Civil Society, JPII Centre, Abuja, 6th June 2002 (available at the Dept. of Mission and Dialogue, CSN offices, Abuja).

25 Cf. Minutes of the National Encounter of Diocesan Directors of Interreligious Dialogue, 27th–29th Sept. 2004, on the occasion of the visit of Mgr. Michael Fitzgerald, President of the Pontifical Council of Interreligious Dialogue, (available at the Dept. of Mission and Dialogue, CSN offices, Abuja).

b) Archdiocese of Kaduna

As a result of the recommendation made in Abuja in June 2002, the Women's Affairs branch of the Justice, Development and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Kaduna held a workshop for women religious leaders the following 12th September. Twenty-two women participated representing various Muslim women's groups (particularly FOMWAN), various Christian churches and CAN.[26] Women's unique responsibility as mothers to protect the lives, freedoms and security of their children as well as their duty to promote national stability, security and development were stressed.[27] The participants identified the common problems which interreligious conflict brings to women. These problems include widowhood, loss of property, homelessness, death of young children and other family members, death of a husband and the family's principal breadwinner, lack of food, loss of friends and colleagues, various abuses ranging from rape to robbery, hostility from in-laws and from the larger society, isolation, insecurity and fear.[28] Recognizing that their common problems brought them together, in their communiqué they said people should emphasize what unites them rather than their differences.[29]

A second meeting was held a month later on the 10th October. It was decided at this meeting to formalize the forum with the name 'Christian-Muslim Women, Peace-Building in Action'. Many objectives and activities were planned. Women of both faiths would together promote human dignity as well as moral and religious standards in society. They would work together for the economic development of women and children in the society and promote the obligation of both Christians and Muslims to practice faithfully their religion. They would provide assistance and

26 Report of the Workshop on Christian-Muslim Women Collaboration: Dialogue in Action, Kaduna, 12th Sept. 2002 (available at JDPC Secretariat, Archdiocese of Kaduna).

27 Cf. Welcome Address, Report of the Workshop on Christian-Muslim Women Collaboration: Dialogue in Action, Kaduna.

28 'Group Reports', Report of Workshop on Christian-Muslim Women Collaboration: Dialogue in Action, Kaduna.

29 See Appendix n. 24.

counselling to those who suffered the consequences of violence. They would give family lectures on the rights and responsibilities of man and woman in marriage.[30] However, a third meeting scheduled for the 20th November 2002 never took place because of a fresh outbreak of violence in Kaduna at that time. Since then, the forum has not attempted to resume activities and hence, the laudable objectives and activities planned remain a dream.

c) Diocese of Kano

A Centre for Comparative Religion was established in Kano in 1996. The membership constituted Catholics, Protestants (CAN) and Muslims, both men and women. Between 1996 and 1997 three conferences were held on the injunction for peace in the Bible and Qur'an. During the third, in 1997, which was held in the State House of Assembly, angry words were exchanged between some Pentecostal Christians and some Islamic fundamentalists who were in attendance and almost led to a violent riot. Until 2004 there was no further attempt at interreligious dialogue due to this negative experience and also to local and global events which increased people's mistrust of the other faith community. In 2004, the Centre for Comparative Religion was revived but was renamed the Centre for Religious Coexistence. Membership is open only to Muslims and Catholics.

In 2004, the diocese (which includes the states of Jigawa and Kano) constituted an Interreligious Dialogue Commission with representatives from all the parishes in the diocese. This commission participates actively in the Centre for Religious Coexistence.[31]

On the 28th May 2005 Muslims and Catholics gathered to discuss the implications of the adoption of the Islamic legal system in Kano state for the religious and civil life of Christians. This was principally organized

30 Cf. Report of meeting available at JDPC Secretariat, Archdiocese of Kaduna.

31 Cf. Kano Catholic Diocesan Interreligious Commission, 2005 Report of Activities of Interreligious Dialogue in Kano State (available at the Dept. of Dialogue and Mission, CSN offices, Abuja).

by the Catholic commission but the Centre for Religious Coexistence fully collaborated. Women were present in the audience but only men were invited as speakers. Muslims insisted that *shari 'a* does not affect Christians while Catholic participants recounted their various experiences of discrimination in accessing employment and educational establishments. Christians also expressed their fears of living in an Islamic state and spoke of their dissatisfaction that they had not been consulted on the *shari 'a* issue. The major outcome of the day's sharing was that Catholics felt they had at least been granted a forum to express their views.[32]

d) Kaduna Ecclesiastical Province

From the 8th to the 11th June 2005, the newly established Kaduna Ecclesiastical Province Interreligious Commission held a seminar on the implications of the *shari 'a* in Northern Nigeria for Christians.[33] The Kaduna Ecclesiastical Province consists of the eight dioceses in the North West of Nigeria which are all to be found in *shari 'a* implementing states.[34] The seminar was attended by male and female delegates from all eight dioceses as well as three men and one woman representing the national JNI headquarters. Christians spoke of their experiences of injustice and oppression in the northern states, and their fear at the mention of *shari 'a*. The Muslim speaker, Hajiya Bilkisu Yusuf, as national Amirah of FOMWAN, assured the participants that the expansion of the *shari 'a* criminal code in the northern states was not equal to establishing a *shari 'a* state. She emphasized the social mission of the *shari 'a* and spoke of its

32 Cf. Report of the Interreligious Encounter on the Implications of the *Shari 'a* for Christians living in Kano State, 28th May 2005, Secretariat Kano Catholic Diocese Interreligious Dialogue Commission.

33 The report of the seminar, including presentations and communiqué has been published: J. Salihu, ed., *Interreligious Dialogue and the Shari 'a Question*, Jaleyemi Group, Kano 2005.

34 Kaduna Archdiocese (the Kaduna metropolis), Kafanchan (southern Kaduna state), Zaria (northern Kaduna state), Kano (Kano and Jigawa states), Sokoto (Zamfara, Sokoto and Kebbi states), Minna (Niger state), Ilorin (Kwara state) and Kontagora Vicariate (Niger and Kebbi states).

necessity in a region where bad governance is the practice.[35] However, in drafting the communiqué of the seminar there was more hot debate in respect of the implications of the *shari 'a* for Christians. The Muslim participants insisted it has no implications for Christians, while the Christians expressed the contrary quite vehemently. Eventually, similar to the conclusion reached during the May workshop in Kano, it was agreed that further discussion was needed between Christians and Muslims to hear each other's views, allay certain fears and clarify misconceptions.[36]

e) Jos Ecclesiastical Province

The Pastoral Centre in Bukuru, Jos, was between the late 1980s and mid-1990s, a place where many friendships developed between Catholics and Muslims in the region. This was largely due to the work of Fr. Jarlath Walsh, an Irish missionary, who established there the Secretariat for Christian-Muslim Relations and carried out extensive research on the development of Islam in Nigeria.[37] Otherwise, interreligious efforts in the Jos Ecclesiastical Province are still very much in the infant stage, this partly due to the absence of serious interreligious conflicts in the area before 1994.

Shortly after the 2001 conflicts, the Justice, Development and Peace Commission of the archdiocese of Jos organized a reconciliation workshop in the Diocesan Renewal Centre in which Muslims and Christians, male and female, participated.[38]

35 B. Yusuf, 'Implications of *shari 'a* for Christians in Northern Nigeria from a Muslim perspective' in J. Salihu, ed., *Interreligious Dialogue and the Shari 'a Question*, Jaleyemi Group, Kano 2005, 57–68.

36 See Communiqué Appendix n. 25.

37 The major fruit of his work was: Fr. Jarlath Walsh, sma, *Dossier: Information on Islamic Groups and Organizations in Nigeria*, Jos 1995 (for private circulation only). This consists of a list of one hundred and ninety-two Islamic organizations and groups in the country with some information about each one, compiled so as to enable Christians appreciate the diversity among the Islamic community which Christians tended to consider as a huge monolithic block.

In February 2005 the newly formed Jos Ecclesiastical Province Interreligious Commission organized a workshop to train some Catholic delegates from the dioceses of Jos, Maiduguri and Yola on how to begin dialogue with Muslims. Although there were eight delegates from Jos, four from Maiduguri and seven from Yola, it was only Jos that included a woman. Most of the participants felt dialogue was a risky venture because both Christians and Muslims react aggressively to constructive criticism. They also expressed their distrust of Muslims whom they saw as being largely insincere. However, they felt that to overcome distrust and grow in understanding and tolerance so as to bring about peace and progress, Muslims and Christians should come together in a dialogue of action to 'overcome social ills before dogmatic or theological dialogue.'[39] Each diocese committed itself to forming an interreligious commission and to holding interreligious seminars.

Dialogue of action/Dialogue in praxis

Dialogue of Action is therefore seen by many participants in interreligious encounters as the most feasible in Northern Nigeria.[40] Since most people in the region suffer poverty and want, they desire justice, peace

38 Interview with Fr. John Go'ar, Diocesan Director of Interreligious Dialogue, Jos, 29th June 2005. Unfortunately, no written material was available on this workshop.

39 Cf. Comprehensive Report on the Jos Provincial Interreligious Dialogue Workshop, held at the Centre for Renewal, Jos, Plateau State, February 2005 (available at the Secretariat of the Provincial Commission on Interreligious Dialogue, Institute for Pastoral Affairs, Jos).

40 This comment was also made at the ACMMRN 1995 International Conference, already mentioned above, and at the Interfaith Workshop on Conflict Management and Resolution for the Religious Leaders who signed the 2002 Kaduna Peace Agreement, 4th–7th April 2005, Zaria Hotel, Zaria (report of workshop available at IFMC/MCDF Secretariat).

and social security. Hence they will come together in joint community projects. Various initiatives organized by NGOs, which are themselves made up of Christians and Muslims, are interreligious in their participation, presentations and final communiqués and are a concrete form of dialogue in action.

Interfaith initiatives to combat HIV/AIDS

The Balm in Gilead is a US based organization dedicated to empowering faith communities in the struggle against the devastation of HIV/AIDS in Africa and among the African diaspora. In November 2002, following meetings with the SCIA and CAN leaders, the Interfaith HIV/AIDS Coalition of Nigeria was officially endorsed.[41] The primary mission of the coalition is to mobilize and engage churches and mosques to effectively and appropriately address this problem. A board of trustees consists of five Muslims and five Christians representing the central religious authorities; all ten are male. However, the working advisory council of sixteen members includes some women from both faith communities.[42] The coalition has verified that women are more vulnerable to the virus because of biological, social and economic factors and that women are laden with the extra burden of caring for and supporting those of their relatives who suffer from the virus. The coalition has held zonal HIV/AIDS coordinators training workshops, including one in Kaduna in July 2004 for the northern zone.

The African Forum of faith-based organizations in Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS (FORUM) was established by the International

41 Rev. Kaine Nwashili, 'The Beginning: Presentation on Interfaith HIV/AIDS Coalition of Nigeria and The Balm in Gilead INC (Africa HIV/AIDS Faith Initiative), presented at the Zonal HIV/AIDS Coordinators Training, 19th–23rd July 2004, Luchia Hotels, Kaduna (Papers of these workshops/seminars are available at the Interfaith HIV/AIDS Coalition/Balm in Gilead office in Lagos).

42 FOMWAN is represented on the 16 member committee, but no specific Christian women's religious organization is although individual women are on the committee.

Family Health (IFH) movement in 1999. The organizations from Nigeria who are partners in FORUM are FOMWAN, ECWA and CHAN (Christian Health Association of Nigeria). Thus, women from each of these faith-based groups come together to strategize and discuss the spread of the disease among illiterate or poor women in particular and make their message known through the FORUM bi-annual newsletters, *The Forum News*, and *Forum Focus*.[43]

These interfaith coalitions on health issues are a positive and unthreatening form of interreligious dialogue in action. They have brought Muslims and Christians involved in health care together in their concern for a common cause of suffering. These are also interfaith coalitions in which women of both faiths, representing their faith communities, are particularly involved.

Conflict Resolution Stakeholders Network (CRESNET)

From the early 1990s, as religious conflicts became more frequent in Northern Nigeria, numerous NGOs were established to promote peace, reconciliation and religious tolerance. A number of these joined together and formed the Conflict Resolution Stakeholders Network (CRESNET). This organized a series of training workshops on conflict resolution leading to a peace summit held in Kaduna from the 4th to the 6th February 2002. The project coordinator was a Muslim woman, Zainab Bayero. The summit, with representation from the government, the media, the traditional leaders, women's groups, the judiciary, student/youth bodies and NGOs, resulted in a Community Based Peace Document.[44] Here it

43 Bi-annual publications of African Forum of Faith-Based Organizations in Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS, West African Chapter. They are published in Kaduna.

44 Community Based Peace Document, Submitted by Conflict Resolution Stakeholders Network (CRESNET) of the North West Zone (Kaduna State Chapter) to Stakeholders in Conflict Mitigation and Peace Building in Kaduna State, February 2002 (available at the Strategic Empowerment Mediation Centre (SEMA) office, Kaduna).

was observed that NGOs contribute actively and positively to the work for peace but because most of their funding comes from foreign donors they are not as effective as they might be. As well as being suspected as western-agents, the lack of local commitment constitutes a difficulty.[45]

Interfaith Mediation Centre (IFMC/MCDF)

The Interfaith Mediation Centre (IFMC), also known as the Muslim-Christian Dialogue Forum (MCDF), organizes conflict management and capacity building workshops for Muslims and Christians. IFMC was founded and is led by an imam and a pastor; it is based in Kaduna. Most of their energies are orientated towards religious and traditional leaders but they also organize events for women or for youth. The women's wing of the IFMC is led by a Muslim and a Christian woman.

In May 2001, the women's wing organized a five day workshop for women leaders of Kaduna State with the aim of training them in trauma healing and enabling them to build bridges of reconciliation.[46] One of the guest speakers, Mrs. Sarah N. Jibril, reminded the participants that women are 'the conscience of every nation and the world and they are the people to teach the conscience.'[47] During the workshop, the participants spoke about the marginalization of women in policy-making bodies in the country. They agreed that unless women are included by the governments and religious leaders in policy formations and implementation strategies, it is difficult to see how women's values and women's sense of justice will be integrated into political life or how women will be able to offer their potential to create an environment of peace and justice in the

45 Cf. Community Based Peace Document, 6–7.

46 Inter-Faith Mediation Centre (Muslim-Christian Dialogue Forum), Kaduna, Nigeria, *Training Manual on Inter-Faith Trauma Counseling and Reconciliation*, ii (available at the IFMC/MCDF office, Kaduna).

47 Sarah Jibril, 'Panacea to Trauma Condition: Christian Perspective', paper presented at the Inter-Faith Trauma Counseling and Reconciliation Workshop for Religious Women Leaders of Kaduna State, Kaduna, May 2001 (Full report of workshop, including presentations, available at the IFMC/MCDF office, Kaduna).

larger society.[48] The only follow-up to this workshop was a consultative meeting of women religious leaders held on the 11th February 2002 in the Peace Hall of the IFMC offices. According to women officials of the IFMC, the initiative did not go any further due to a lack of funds.[49]

It was the IFMC that was largely responsible for organizing the Kaduna Interfaith Peace Commission which signed the Kaduna Peace Agreement in August 2002.[50] The all-male Commission consisted of eleven Muslim leaders and eleven Christian leaders.[51] A follow-up workshop for the religious leaders who signed that Peace Agreement was held in April 2005.[52] No Muslim woman was present and the only Christian woman was from the IFMC office in Jos.[53]The workshop was conducted by Andrew Rigby, a Professor from the Centre for Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Coventry, and his team which consisted of a man from Uganda and a man from Sierra Leone. Prof. Rigby later explained that he had been specifically asked by the IFMC to come with an all-male team. When he objected, he was told that if there was a woman she must be over forty years of age. The Centre in Coventry had thus doubted whether they should collaborate in this workshop but eventually felt that it might do some good despite the attitude towards women.[54]

48 Report of the Inter-Faith Trauma Counseling and Reconciliation Workshop for Religious Women Leaders, May 2001.

49 Interview with Mrs. Abisi Mallam and Hajiya Fatima Suleiman, coordinators of the women's wing of the Interfaith Mediation Centre (IFMC/MCDF), Kaduna, 25th April 2004.

50 See Appendix n. 16.

51 As is discussed below, an interfaith women's peace declaration was drawn up by women religious leaders under the auspices of another NGO around the same time.

52 Report of the Interfaith Workshop on Conflict Management and Resolution for the Religious Leaders who signed the 2002 Kaduna Peace Agreement, 4th–7th April 2005, Zaria Hotel, Zaria (available at the IFMC/MCDF office, Kaduna).

53 I was present as an observer. On the last days of the meeting the wife of Imam Ashafa, co-founder of the IFMC, and the wife of the CAN Kaduna State Chapter Secretary also joined but they sat at the back and did not contribute to the discussions.

54 Interview with Andrew Rigby, Zaria, 7th April 2005.

West African Network for Peace (WANEP)

Women of another NGO, West African Network for Peace Building (WANEP) under the Women in Peace Network (WIPNET) held an interfaith encounter in Kaduna and drew up a Peace Agreement, signed on the 31st October 2002.[55] According to the chief organizer, the women wanted to publish this Peace Agreement but, because male religious leaders had drawn one up under the Interfaith Mediation Centre just a few months beforehand, women were advised to consider themselves included under that one rather than publish another of their own.[56]

This was certainly a worthwhile initiative but like many such activities it has remained basically under the lamp-stand partly due to the outburst of crisis the following November and again partly due to a lack of funds (and possibly commitment). Such a Women's Peace Agreement would undoubtedly be much more effective if it resulted from interreligious meetings organized by women's faith-based groups rather than by NGOs.

Inter-Gender

Women of both faiths are very much included in all the activities of Inter-Gender, an NGO founded in Jos in 2003 for the management and resolution of ethno-religious conflicts in Jos and Kaduna. While IFMC targets religious and political leaders, Inter-Gender focuses on the grassroots. Emphasis is put on the development of interpersonal, inter-religious and inter-communal relationships among the citizens and the empowerment of the community members to manage and resolve their differences in non-violent ways. Project Implementation and Advisory Committees have been established in both Kaduna and Jos comprising an equal number of men and women.

55 See Appendix n. 26.

56 Interview with Hajiya Amina Musa, Director Kaduna office of WANEP, Kaduna, 15th July 2004.

In October 2004, a one day seminar was held in Jos for Christian women religious leaders and the following week a similar day was held for Muslim women leaders. The theme was 'The role of Muslim/Christian women in peace-building'. Both groups concluded basically the same thing: women must not remain as passive on-lookers but must rise up and solve problems in conflict situations not only in the home but also in their communities. They saw that women have remained passive partly due to the absence of an appropriate platform from which they could speak and partly because they are not used to being consulted on questions relating to issues affecting the larger community. The salient message from both days was that women must rise up and assume their responsibility. There was also the recognition that the poverty in the North is a huge factor in the conflict and that to establish peace they must address together the cultural, social, economic and political factors that contribute to poverty and to the increasing feminization of poverty.[57]

A one-day seminar on women and peace building was held in Kaduna on the 2nd November 2004 at which Muslim and Christian women from different parts of the state participated. These concluded that women's voices, rights and interests have continuously been ignored in peace building efforts. They called on women to 'search their holy books so as to know the truth for themselves.'[58]

BAOBAB: Bridge-Building

An interreligious project of women religious leaders was initiated by BAOBAB which did not have a specific aim of peace-building. Instead it sought to bring women of both faiths together to share in an honest analysis of their religious traditions. The objectives of the Bridge-Building project are: to open up discussion on the rights of women and religion; to

57 See Appendix n. 28. Some of the presentations given at these meetings are published in D. Ityavyar – Z. Gundu, ed., *Muslim-Christian Dialogue on Peace in Jos*, Inter-Gender Monograph Series, Jos 2004. Reports are to be found in *Inter Gender Peace Bulletin*, vol. 1, issue 3, Nov. 2004.

58 See Appendix n. 27.

develop, protect and promote the rights of women in religion; to develop a resource centre for further advocacy; to mobilize local efforts for the protection of women's human rights; to bridge the gap of understanding on women's human rights across diverse religious backgrounds; and to strategize on intervening in individual cases of violations of women's human rights under religious laws.[59]

The project consists of two stages. The first stage is a workshop for Christian and Muslim women, separately, where they analyze and critique their own community's norms and practices. A number of these workshops have been held.[60] The second stage brings the two groups together to share on their findings and to apply the same analysis to the other community's dominant versions of their respective traditions. According to Ayesha Imam, who is involved in the Bridge-Building project: 'This process builds an informed understanding of women's rights in diverse communities and helps to establish trust so that women of both faiths can work together empathetically in practical solidarity.'[61]

Unfortunately, only one workshop of the second stage has yet been held. Most Muslim and Christian women are afraid of the word feminism because of the many negative connotations attached to it and many would consider BAOBAB to be a feminist organization. This has probably contributed to the little fruits as yet of the Bridge-Building Project, the only interreligious project I have found which seeks to truly look at

59 M.F. Dasola, 'Introduction to BAOBAB', paper presented at the First International Congress on Islamic Feminism, Barcelona, 28th Oct. 2005 (unpublished, available at the BAOBAB office, Lagos and at www.feminismeislamic.org/eng).

60 According to the BAOBAB reports, ten of such meetings have been held at the national level, five for the Muslim group and five for the Christian group. At State level, similar meetings have been conducted in Kwara and Plateau. Meetings have also been held beyond Nigeria: a regional meeting for Muslim women from different West African countries held in Banjul, The Gambia, in October 2003, and one for Christian women held in Accra, Ghana, in June 2005. Reports of 'Bridge-Building Meetings on Rights of Women in Religious Statutory and Customary Laws' are available at the BAOBAB office, Lagos.

61 A. Imam, 'Women's Reproductive and Sexual Rights'.

ways in which both Christianity and Islam in Nigeria can together be more liberating for women.

Conclusion

While interreligious dialogue in Nigeria has not yet integrated feminist discourse, it has served to show the limitations of traditional religious discourse in both faith traditions in terms of its salvific or liberative value for women in the region. Hence, it has also served to show the limitations of such traditional discourse as a liberating and transforming force in society, since it has acknowledged that positive social progress cannot be made if women are prevented from contributing fully to its development. This acknowledgement alone presents a great challenge to further interreligious dialogue initiatives if these sincerely aim at contributing towards social justice and sustainable peace.

The conflicts, although negative and destructive in themselves, already have had the positive fruit of bringing Muslims and Christians together in dialogue. There is hope that they will also move sincere people of faith to leave behind religious rhetoric that can be divisive not only of the two faith communities but also of men and women within each community, and move together towards a deeper inculturation in contemporary society of the liberative and transforming power of their respective religious values and truths.

CHAPTER 8

Towards a Women's Liberative Interreligious Dialogue

The relevance of Theology to Interreligious Dialogue

Muslims and Christians in Nigeria distrust one another, destroy one another's property and kill each other! As we have seen, so too do peoples of differing ethnic groups in other parts of the country where religion is not such a striking identity factor. Hence, is the problem that of competing religious truths or is it that of competition for access to political power and economic resources? Certainly the question of religion and religious identity cannot be ignored, but we must ask whether theology enters the equation at all. Is it necessary to discuss theological questions in the search for coexistence, peace and social wellbeing? Must theology be a part of interreligious dialogue in the region? And in so far as it must, is it questions about God and how these relate to the central truths of the other religion that must be discussed? Is it concern for the universality or particularity of these central truths that will bring people to dialogue with one another? Is the question of how both the truth of Christ and the truth of the Qur'an can be retained and respected a relevant question? Is the quest for a theology of religions to which so many theologians consecrate their lives and energies today of any relevance whatsoever in this concrete situation of suffering? As Kenneth Cragg once asked: 'Does it matter? This question of Christology outside theology or within it? ... Is it not all conceptual? A debate which insistent questions of life and society today must roundly ignore as irrelevant to the pressing claims of the real world?'[1]

1 K. Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, Oneworld Publications, Oxford 1999, 69.

Questions about the centrality and uniqueness of different religious truths truly seem to have little relevance today in Northern Nigeria where Muslims and Christians struggle to coexist amidst poverty, unemployment, corruption and social instability. Certainly, the uniqueness and universality of Jesus as saviour for all humanity does not seem to be a question that Muslims or even Christians are particularly worried about. Christians would not want this belief questioned, and they feel quite sure that Jesus is their saviour, but they are usually more concerned about their right to build Christian churches and to have equal access to political power and economic resources than about Jesus being the saviour of Muslims. However, Muslims are adamant that the *shari 'a* is untouchable, that it is absolutely necessary to their life as Muslims and to overcoming the socio-economic hardships they face daily.

Throughout the history of Nigeria, as seen in chapter three, religion has been quite fully involved in the daily, social, economic and political lives of the people. Part of the ongoing tension is the secularisation of the state, its identification with a particular religion, or it's being moulded by values which are influenced by religious teachings. By their insistence on the *shari 'a*, Muslims have made the separation of religion, politics and social issues quite *explicitly* impossible. Therefore, theology somehow does enter the equation. Whether or not religion's involvement in politics is due to a manipulation of religion is irrelevant: religion is undoubtedly a factor in the conflicts experienced in the region and must therefore be a factor in resolving the situation. The approach to the other religion and the respect which should be given to particular truth claims, such as the *shari 'a*, must also be a factor.

Looking more closely at women's concerns, we are also made very aware of the involvement of theology, or at least of religious rhetoric, in the pressing claims of their real world in this particular region. The fact is that, while people kill each other in the name of religion, so too people oppress each other in the name of religion, this other not being of a different religion but of another category of difference, gender. We have seen that religious discourse is central to the struggles of Muslim women globally, just as Christian theology, while not so obvious, has very much determined, and continues to influence, the lives of women in western

and in post-colonial Christian societies and cultures. The theological questions raised by women in this local and global discourse might not necessarily be about unchangeable, absolute, universal truth claims of their traditions. However, as we have seen, the struggle women undergo to challenge these truth claims or the interpretation and expression given to these within their communities often involves no less tension and gives rise to questions about difference, otherness, knowledge, identity, meaning, interpretation, particularism, and so on, questions which theologians of religious pluralism are also grappling with today.

Hence the questions posed by those seeking to develop an adequate theology of religions are of relevance, not only to Northern Nigeria but also to the global feminist movement.

Theological responses to Religious Pluralism and their relevance

The existence and dynamism of many religions which differ from one another and contradict each other on some central issues is the concern which preoccupies those who seek to develop a Christian theology of religious pluralism. For reasons of clarity, which I believe is necessary for practicality, I deliberately choose to simplify the various theological approaches to religions that have been developed. I risk an attitude of triteness while I simultaneously try to appreciate the value each approach might offer as a response to people's concrete lived experience today in a pluri-religious society such as Northern Nigeria.

Exclusivist Theological Approaches

An extreme exclusivist approach to other religions holds that salvation is only possible through, not only Christ, but also Christianity. It is only in Christ that God's revelation is made known to humanity and only through the Bible are Christ and his message made known. Since faith in Christ is necessary for salvation, so too is Christianity necessary since

only through Christianity is faith in Christ possible. There is, therefore, no need to dialogue with people of other religions; there is need only to teach them in a one-way sense so that they who follow a false truth will see the light and leave their present darkness and ignorance. Christianity is, therefore, understood by those who hold this position as being meant by God to replace the other religions.

A less extreme exclusivist approach holds that God does speak to people from within other religions, opening their hearts to questions and offering them orientation in life. God's revelation, therefore, can be found in other religions, which thus serve as a preparation for Christ and his Gospel. However, faith in Christ is necessary for salvation. Dialogue is necessary to discuss the differences about the conflicting positions and truth claims of religions. Through this dialogue non-Christians will see that the questions they ask and the guidance and salvation they seek through their religions is only truly answered in Christ and in the Christian message.

Inclusivist Theological Approaches

The inclusivist approach to other religions, based on a fulfilment model, has been the dominant one in the Catholic Church and in most other mainline churches since the mid-1960s. This admits that although Christianity has the full truth, other religions have been used by God throughout the ages. Thus, the secret presence of God, elements of truth and grace (AG 9), as well as seeds of the Word (AG 11, 15) are to be found in other religions. God's Spirit is present and active in all peoples, religions and cultures (RMi 28), seeking to bear fruit in all peoples (RH 11). Through the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions people respond positively to God's invitation and receive salvation (DP 29). Thus, the religions of the world play a providential role in the divine economy of salvation (DP 17). However, Christ is the fulfilment of the yearning of all the world's religions, and as such, he is their sole and definitive completion (NA 2; RMi 6).

Interreligious dialogue is to be considered part of the mission of the church so as to see and recognize the bountiful things God has done among the nations and illuminate these with the light of the Gospel (AG 10). Dialogue is a method and a means of mutual knowledge and enrichment (RMi 55; DP 9). Both Christians and the other partners in dialogue must be ready to be questioned and purified (DP 32, 49; RMi 56); both must be prepared to be changed and transformed (DP 47); and both must be open to the possibility of conversion not only towards God but even to another religious tradition (DP 41). However, proclamation of the Gospel must always have priority and even dialogue is ultimately to be seen as oriented towards proclamation (DP 77). Dialogue is to be conducted with the conviction that the Church alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation (RMi 55; DP 19, 22, 58). Interreligious dialogue is a commitment which also stems from the mission of the Church in the world to be at the service of the Kingdom (RMi 20; DP 35, 59; RMi 18). The Kingdom, although not to be identified with the Church, cannot be separated from Christ or from the Church (RMi 18).

This inclusivist approach basically means, in the eyes of those who are critical of it, that non-Christians are subordinated to the particularity of Christianity: what is good in the other religion is a confirmation and possibly further illumination of what Christianity teaches; the understanding of salvation includes all others whether this is what they thought they were moving towards or not; the Kingdom values of Christianity present the justice to be lived by all; and so on. To be in solidarity with the other through dialogue is to see how best both the Christian and the non-Christian can move along the Christian path or how both the Christian and the non-Christian can best be helped follow each one's own path according to the criteria that Christians see as being divinely revealed.

Exclusivist Approach in Northern Nigeria

An exclusivist approach to one's own and to another's religion can be very much identified in Northern Nigeria among both Christians and Muslims.

Here, the tendency among Christians is to view Islam as almost entirely political and cultural, with little or no element of God's revelation inherent in it. Muslims see Christians as having wrongly understood

the divine revelation. Hence, there is difficultly in admitting that the other presents a religion at all. The other is simply a cultural expression or a political instrument. What would be called for by such an attitude is a dialogue of one religious group with another that represents simply a culture or a political system: thus a dialogue of cultures. This cannot be considered a life-giving approach in the region since the people are quite sure that theirs is a religion in every sense.

The impulse to go out to other religions so as to replace them is not paramount although this was the case with the initial Christian missionary impulse in the early 1900s and may also be seen both in the jihad of d'an Fodiyo and in the Islamization policies of Ahmadu Bello. Christians today perceive the Islamization policies of Muslims as an attempt to curtail Christian activity and influence in the region; thus, a form of replacement of one religion by another. Muslims, however, insist, despite the complaints of Christians to the contrary, that that is not at all their intention but that Christians and Muslims are given equal freedom of worship and that Christians are not affected under the extended *shari 'a* legal system. Proselytism by some Christians and Muslims takes place but for the most part, Christian proselytism is directed towards other Christians, drawing them from one denomination or church to another, while Muslim proselytism is directed towards other Muslims whom they consider to be lax in the practice of the faith. Overall there is little respect for African Traditional Religions. Those Muslims and Christians who evangelize among the adherents of these religions generally seek to replace them rather than dialogue with them.

As we have seen, the clarion call from people of both faith communities is for religious tolerance and non-interference. Each religious community must simply allow the other to live as his or her faith dictates, each one left to their own exclusive salvation. It is therefore an exclusivism that wants pluralism and its particularities to be respected; it does not emphasize the universality of its message for all people but only for the adherents of the religion.

The attitude of exclusivism is also seen in the tendency towards what might be called an idolatry of the religion itself, rather than on what the religion is pointing towards. It is a case of Allahu Akbar (often Islamu Akbar) or Jesus Saves. It has often been remarked that Muslims in Nigeria today speak of following Islam rather than following God; Christians too place much more emphasis on their Church membership than on membership in and responsibility to God's Kingdom.

An exclusivist tendency is also seen in the attitude of both Muslims and Christians towards their own sources of revelation. The primary source for God's revelation and guidance is the one, only and absolute source: the Qur'an, and hence the *shari 'a*, for Muslims, the Bible for many Christians. There is the attitude that these sources are intact and complete in themselves. This is clearly to be seen in the insistence by Muslims that they must return to pure Islam and be allowed live their religion without any interference from a non-islamic source. It is also the attitude of some of the more radical or fundamentalist Evangelical churches, particularly ECWA. There is absolutely nothing to learn from the other religion or from any secular source. There is no need for further interpretation of any religious teaching since it is all clearly written in the sacred texts, which must only be faithfully adhered to.

Inclusivist Approach in Northern Nigeria

With the growth in recent years of an exclusivist attitude towards one's own religion and faith community, it is difficult to see the inclusivist approach to other religions actually being practised in Northern Nigeria. This is not to say, however, that attempts are not being made, or that exclusivism is the attitude of all people. The efforts at interreligious dialogue looked at in chapter seven are in themselves an indication that people recognize that both religions have something positive to offer for the good of the country. That Muslims and Christians believe in one, true, just and loving God, creator of all, who calls people to live in peace with one another, has been reiterated on many occasions. They do not dispute that both believe in the same God. That both religions have liberative elements for male-female relationships has also been stressed. If Muslims and Christians were to live according to the teachings of their religions, people believe that the country would see great transformation, be it at the level of religious co-existence or at the level of male-female relationships.

Thus, there is mutual belief in the inherent value of each religion, if these were to be sincerely practised.

On various occasions the Catholic bishops have called on their people to make every effort to promote dialogue and collaboration, in the spirit of truth and mutual respect, so as to establish peace and justice.[2] Although 'the path of goodness and love is the way of Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life, ... God does not fail to make Himself known to all who seek Him with a sincere heart.'[3] Christians should work in solidarity 'to witness in word and deed to the love of God in Christ through the Spirit; a love that excludes no one, and meets the needy whoever they are and wherever they are'.[4] Witness to this love of God which has no boundaries is the 'special contribution of the Christian community to our society.'[5]On many occasions the bishops have called on religious leaders to a critical self-examination on their roles as leaders who promote peace, unity and godliness and have reminded them that it is they who must lead their people to pray for the nation.[6] They have said that a solid respect for the law of God which is written in the heart of everyone (Rom. 2: 15) would allow Nigeria to revive and survive.[7] Thus, the recognition that the prayer of all is heard by God, that God's law is written on the hearts of all people, that each religion teaches many positive values, that God loves all people, that the uniqueness of the Christian message is its witness of God's all-embracing love, that the freedom of worship of all people must be respected ... these attitudes and beliefs that are basic to the Church's inclusivist approach to other faiths have been appealed to by the Catholic

2 References to communiqués from the CBCN are taken from P. Schineller, ed., *The Voice of the Voiceless, Pastoral Letters and Communiqués of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria 1960–2002*, Ibadan 2002. In future I will indicate the date of the relevant communiqué or pastoral message and the page in which it is to be found in this book.

3 Feb. 14–18, 1989, 'Peace through Justice and Love' in P. Schineller, ed., 225.

4 Feb. 14–18, 1989, 'Peace through Justice and Love' in P. Schineller, ed., 226.

5 Feb. 14–18, 1989, 'Peace through Justice and Love' in P. Schineller, ed., 226.

6 Sept. 9–11, 1992, 'The Truth Shall Make us Free' in P. Schineller, ed., 280.

7 Sept. 10–13, 1991, 'Save the Nation' in P. Schineller, ed., 250.

leaders.[8] During the various formal interreligious initiatives that have taken place, it is quite usual to hear other Christians as well as Muslims speak of the common values in Christianity and Islam, their allegiance to one God, and the contribution both religions can make to bring about justice, peace and social progress.

The Christian self-understanding as a sacrament of God's Kingdom to all people can be seen in the fact that no distinction is made between peoples of different faiths in Christian schools and hospitals.[9] Until recently, these services could be offered without any particular distinction being made, one of the other, in terms of uniform, curriculum or medical treatment.

The opportunity these services provide, particularly the health services, for people in need to share their concerns as well as their faith in a providential and caring God, has already been mentioned in the last chapter. This meeting of hearts in very concrete moments of human suffering is both inclusive and pluralist: inclusive in that people recognize that it is the same God who cares for them and calls them to care for one

8 See also: The Jubilee and National Reconciliation, March 2000: 'Authentic democracy entails a culture of dialogue. For us Christians, Jesus the Son of God established the eternal dialogue between God and man and united himself in some sense with every human being.' (Cf. P. Schineller, ed., 413); Pastoral Message Towards the Year 2000, 'Identifying the challenges to the Nigerian Church', 1996: 'Dialogue: The incarnation represents the culminating point in the dialogue between God and humanity begun since the very dawn of creation. All believers must be open to this dialogue because 'Openness to dialogue is the Christian's attitude inside the community as well as with other believers and with men and women of goodwill' (EA 65). How can we further improve our relations with other Christians, with Moslems and where they still exist, with adherents of our traditional religions? These are pressing concerns for us.' (Cf. P. Schineller, ed., 352). In 1998, the Secretary General of the SCIA was invited to address the CBCN.

9 It must be added however, that the curriculum in Christian schools did not and still does not allow for any Qur'anic or Islamic religious education and non-Christians are generally expected to participate in Christian moments of worship. Hence, although the openness to peoples of other religions is a positive sign of an inclusivist attitude, the lack of openness to the value this other religion might have to contribute is preoccupying.

another, pluralist in that people speak of God and call on God in their different cultural and religious expressions.

In many areas, Muslim and Christian friends and neighbours celebrate one another's religious feasts. These friendships and gestures might not signify that people believe or even question whether the other is celebrating a feast that might be valid, a feast that signifies a particular moment of God's presence among humanity. However, the majority of people, who generally are not so concerned about the theological implications of feasts and rituals, recognize the importance of these moments for their friends; hence they join with them in their joy. This is humane rather than theological as such. As a form of dialogue of life it draws people closer both to one another and to God: they recognize their shared human vulnerability and their shared dependence on and understanding of God. Unfortunately, as violence and distrust increases, even these friendships are being torn apart.

The limitations, or perhaps more correctly, difficulties, of the inclusivist approach are somehow easier to see. To admit all believe in one God does not do away with the difficulty that people believe they have heard God speak in different ways. Thus, the freedom of worship and the freedom to live according to the dictates of each one's religion is problematic, particularly when the *shari'a* issue is presented as a must by Muslims. The Catholic bishops have been quite adamant that the secular nature of the state, understood as the non-adoption of any religion as a state religion or giving preferential treatment to one religion, promotes the principle of the equality of all religions before the law.[10] They maintain

10 The Catholic bishops over the years have issued a number of statements dealing specifically with the shari'a issue or they have referred to it in communiqués and pastoral letters as a major problem of injustice, violence and division in the country: 'Public Statement We Cannot be Silent' 1987, in P. Schineller, ed., 199–202; 'Let there be Peace! A Statement of the CBCN on the Disturbances caused by the Shari'a Controversy' Feb. 2000, in P. Schineller, ed., 407–408; 'The Jubilee and National Reconciliation' Mar. 2000, in P. Schineller, ed., 411–412; 'Let us live and work together in peace and harmony' Sept. 2000, in P. Schineller, ed., 415–419; 'Healing the Wounds of the Nation', Feb. 2002, in P. Schineller, ed., 434; 'Memo for the CBCN to President Olusegun Obasanjo', Feb. 22, 2002, in P. Schineller, ed., 439–440.

that the introduction and extension of the *shari'a* law into the domain of criminal law 'gives rise to the trampling of the rights of innocent and law-abiding citizens,'[11] and that the 'adoption of the *shari'a* as state law and the extension of its scope are a flagrant violation of human rights of non-Muslims in a multireligious society and a secular state like Nigeria.'[12] Asserting that both Christians and Muslims subscribe to living according to God's will in their private lives, and that this should be reflected in the public laws, the Bishops said these laws should facilitate that everyone of whatever religion could follow their consciences in searching out God's will in their lives.[13] The Muslim belief or claim that public law must not only reflect but stipulate God's law, and the Christian belief or claim that the state must simply facilitate people's freedom to follow God's will, thus comes into conflict in this pluri-religious nation. The problem remains then on how the beliefs of both can be respected without these infringing on the beliefs or limiting the rights of the other.

Both Muslims and Christians in Nigeria are very much aware of how they have been excluded and dominated by the attitudes of the other religious body. Both religions have been presented at various times as offering a superior form of civilization. Today, people no longer want any domination. They do not want to be 'included'; they want to co-exist as equals but different, not as one uniform people.

The understanding of salvation held by Christians and by Muslims in Nigeria is also quite different when one views salvation in its most integral sense, beginning on this earthly life. For Muslims today, salvation, fullness of life is understood in terms of the *shari'a*. It is by being faithful to the *shari'a* that the solutions to social woes are to be found. This, for

11 Memo from the CBCN to President Olusegun Obasanjo, Feb. 22, 2002, in P. Schineller, ed., 439–440.

12 CBCN, 'Towards a Just and Peaceful Society', Sept. 10–14, 2001, in P. Schineller, ed., 428.

13 CBCN 'Let us live and work together in peace and harmony', Kaduna Sept. 2000, in P. Schineller, ed., 416–417.

Christians, is not salvific at all, or so they believe. The Catholic bishops quite openly said that the extension of the *shari 'a* law is a counter sign of God's Kingdom.[14] Such a final statement, without any dialogue, cannot hope to foster peaceful co-existence. The salvation each religion offers is not in the least attractive to the other religious body: hence there is no desire for inclusion. Muslims simply do not want to be saved in Christ and the Christian understanding of Kingdom; Christians simply do not want to be saved by the Qur'an and its law. Thus, the question of what is salvific must be discussed in a spirit of dialogue.

A great difficulty each one has with seeing the other religion as salvific is the form in which they experience the religion as practised. Islamic doctrines might teach peace, equality and forgiveness, but Christians have not experienced this. Christianity might teach love, humility, gentleness and honesty, but Muslims have not seen this to any great extent. If they have experienced such attitudes in one another, people tend to forget this when they form their generalized opinion of the larger religious body. Hence, what might be the greatest obstacle to a concrete living of inclusivist ideals is the lack of adequate witness to both religions as guidance for social existence and growth. If such values inherent in the teachings of each religion were actually reflected on more deeply and lived more authentically, people might be more willing, and indeed more able, to be included in each other's salvific paths and find fulfilment with and through one another.

Women in both religions are aware of having been excluded, because of their otherness, both within their religious traditions and within the political and economical development of the country. Today, they seek greater inclusion. We have seen that seeking to be included in social systems that were developed without due consideration of equality of men and women has its limitations. Secular feminists as well as women of faith find themselves constantly struggling with the traditional patriarchal parameters of society. They are recognizing that to be included involves

14 'Building God's Kingdom of Justice and Peace' Mar. 2001 in P. Schineller, ed., 421.

examining ever more deeply the sources of their tradition, culture and social practices. Muslim women today in Nigeria are gradually coming to recognize that the more they seek to have women included, the further they must involve themselves in the examination and reinterpretation of tradition from its beginnings: the schools of jurisprudence, the interpretation and even the redaction of the Qur'an. Christian women in Nigeria, like Christian feminist theologians globally, are also recognizing the limitations of simply seeking to be more included in Church structures and scriptural or doctrinal interpretations that were developed before there was an awareness of gender equality. Similarly, an inclusivist approach to other religions that will facilitate pluri-religious co-existence demands a sincere examination of the sources of present day beliefs and practices.

The difficulties with the inclusivist approach indicate that there is need to develop together an approach that is more appreciative of different needs, visions, aspirations and beliefs, so that a pluri-religious society can be established in which both Christians and Muslims, men and women, co-exist as equals and different. This approach will either be a pluralist approach or an approach wherein what is positive in the inclusivist approach can be lived more authentically and in a way that is more promising and life-giving. It is therefore necessary to look at what pluralist approaches provide.

Pluralist Theological Approaches

Pluralist approaches are almost as numerous as the religions themselves. Theologians struggle to develop them in order to overcome any sense of superiority in terms of possession of religious truth so that people can meet in dialogue on what is often called a level playing ground. By and large, these theologians tend to employ strategies of either seeking sameness or defending differences between and within religions. In most cases, the positions of 'sameness' and 'difference' both function to distance otherness and thus, while the ground is level since all are either basically the same or completely different, there is no room or need for dialogue. Either there is no Other to dialogue with, or else the Other is so much Other that dialogue is impossible. Neither approach can serve

as the foundation for real encounter between persons shaped by distinct religious visions.

a) Hick's Universal Phenomenalist Pluralism

John Hick's universalist theology of religions sees all religions as having one common religious object, the Real, and one common religious end, salvation. This one religious phenomenon is experienced and responded to through diverse historical and cultural expressions. The fact that it is the same common Reality at the centre of all religions is seen, for Hick, in the fact that they all urge humans to turn away from themselves (shift from being self-centred) and turn towards this something greater, the Real, which some call God (move to being Reality or Other centred) and to live accordingly. Thus, all respond to and follow this Real as they have perceived themselves called to do; all can reach that one universal Real by following their particular identified paths. For Hick, the Real is beyond the grasp of human knowledge and thus transcends all the different human perceptions of it; thus no religion has grasped the full Truth but all are varied expressions of the same Truth. In dialogue, adherents of the different religions can explore more deeply the richness of the Ultimate Reality.[15] Thus, instead of preserving the plurality of religions, Hick essentially makes all religions equal and he ignores the particularity of each religion.

In Northern Nigeria, apart from the fact that people do not consider their religion as simply a cultural expression, they do not dispute that they all experience, are looking at and responding to the same Real.

15 J. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1989: The uniqueness of Jesus is, for Hick, an expression of the dynamic reality of God's love loving in the world. He is the only Saviour, only Son of God, but only for those who experienced him and continue to experience him through the Gospels and the Christian religion. Hick sees this as a form of symbolic, metaphorical, poetic language expressing how people feel the Reality speaking to them, touching them and inspiring them through Jesus who embodied God's Spirit of love; it is not to be taken as absolute or theological language.

What is at issue is their difficulty in living together according to what they perceive as the dictates of this one Real. If, as Hick suggests, religions are to be lived with each community believing that theirs is an equally valid way of responding to the divine Other, then the religions can quite happily claim their exclusive attitude to one another; and no one has the right to interfere.

Living together, turned towards the Other on different paths, can make people ignore the fact that their paths do cross and that their different 'ways' can be conflictual. People need to turn towards each other. It is not only what they see that they must talk about, but also their different ways of seeing. These must be brought into some form of agreement. It is not enough for two people to look at something before them; they must also look at each other and see how they obstruct or clarify one another's view of that Other they focus on. The validity of the different religions would then be seen, as Hick suggests, in the extent to which they promote a self-sacrificing concern for others[16]; that is, how much they allow the adherents of the religion to be flexible in their doctrines and beliefs so as to accommodate the common good.

b) Panikkar's Particular Phenomenalist Pluralism

Raimond Panikkar suggests that the religions are best understood not through their doctrines but through the mystical experience of that 'one religious fact', which gave rise to the different doctrinal expressions. The Mystery is 'cosmotheandric' (interrelationship and interdependence of the world-divine-human). In this mystical experience human beings of all religions discover that they are truly human when they are in relationship with the divine, the created world, and with other human beings. The Mystery or the transcendent cannot be conceived of as one Real since it only exists in relationship; thus in itself it is diverse. So too, human beings in their various historical, cultural and religious diversities, living their true ontological existence in interrelationships in a harmony of

16 J. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 325.

difference, find their fulfilment.[17] Interrelationship, including intrareligious dialogue, is therefore necessary to know the divine Mystery and to become what humans are called to become. In recognising this, through such intrareligious dialogue, peoples of different faiths will seek to bring the world to an awareness of relationship and to harmony: thus they can be commonly committed to action just as they can also dialogue on their doctrines and texts, but always under their mystical rather than rational lamps. Again, while Panikkar's theory could be developed from the perspective of people's common and shared experience of the divine when they are in need, as we have seen often happens among women, it has little to contribute to the actual problems of how to live in greater harmony with discordant notes.

c) Heim's Particularist Pluralism

S. Mark Heim has developed a particularist theology of religions claiming that there can be a variety of actual but different religious fulfilments or salvations.[18] He suggests that to see all religions as different expressions of the same Real, rising from the same source and leading towards the same goal, is basically to deny any difference between them. He feels religions should be respected entirely in their difference and that this difference is not to be cancelled out at one final meeting point: thus there is no one final meeting point, no one final fulfilment or salvation. Each one has a different source, follows a different path, and will reach its own different goal. In effect, therefore, there is no need to dialogue but, as in Hick's

17 R. Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, Paulist Press, New Jersey 1999 (revised edition): Panikkar sees Christ as the particular Christian way of speaking about the divine Mystery, the unity between the divine, the world and human beings. Whenever people sense this uniting Mystery, they experience what Christians call Christ. Thus, for Panikkar, to say Jesus is the Christ does not necessarily mean that the Christ is Jesus.

18 S.M. Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*, Orbis Books, New York 1995; S.M. Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: a Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2001.

universalist theory, there is need to respect and live with the particularity of each path.

Similar to Hick, Heim sees religion as an unchanging body of truths and he places little emphasis on the social implications of religion. He has been accused of reducing the issue of pluralism to the theoretical and intellectual question of the pluralism of perspectives and truths, and remaining 'indifferent to the problem of the social, practical context and consequences (justice) of conflicting orientations or perspectives.'[19] Heim's approach is also limited in that it presumes that each religion is responsible for its own path without any sense of relatedness with or responsibility to peoples who follow other paths; thus it does not allow for a sense of global responsibility. His approach seems therefore to offer little by way of solution to the actual problems experienced by pluri-religious coexistence or to those experienced by women within their own religions.

d) Soteriocentric-Ethical Pluralism

Other pluralist theologians are less concerned with the ultimate truth of each religion than with the religion as it affects everyday life. They have identified the danger of relativism that can result from the pluralist approaches of both Hick and Heim and suggest instead an ethical or soteriocentric approach to the plurality of religions. Thus, for these theologians, primary among them Paul Knitter, it is justice that is to be seen as the measure of all religions; their social implications reflect the truth they possess and their validity or otherwise.[20] It is a concern for social issues

19 A. Kyongsuk Min, 'Dialectical Pluralism and Solidarity of Others – Towards a New Paradigm' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religions (JAAR)*, vol. 65, 1997, (587–604), 602.

20 P. Knitter, 'Towards a Liberation Theology of Religions' in J. Hick – P. Knitter, ed., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, Orbis Books, New York 1987, 178–200; P. Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility*, Orbis Books, New York 1995. Important also is the ethcial approach to interreligious dialogue of Hans Küng, *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View*, Doubleday, New York 1988.

common to all people such as suffering, poverty, patriarchal oppression, that will draw persons of different religions to dialogue in a shared sense of global responsibility. Facing the sufferings in the world, people assess both themselves and others by their fruits – how a religious truth claim is affecting, negatively or positively, the situation they are facing. This approach presumes that there is a sense of justice which is common to all religions and bases itself on both finding what is common and on establishing a global ethics which all religions, everywhere, should promote. This global ethic would embody a consensus among the different religions about the dignity of the individual, the sense of shared human community and responsibility, and the need for justice and compassion.

As the debate between the international feminist movement and Islamic feminism makes clear, just as does the fact that Muslim women in Nigeria felt they had to separate from the NCWS so as to promote women according to Muslim rather than national values, the concept of a global ethics presents its difficulties. Although people are concerned about what they perceive as unjust or as painful and are concerned that justice and wellbeing be brought about to remedy the situation, it is not to be presumed that they perceive the injustice in the same way or that they perceive what might be just in the same way. Thus, the ethical approach to religious pluralism, similar to the approaches overviewed above, does not sufficiently address the particularities of religions, cultures and persons. It has therefore been accused of being imperialist, imposing one vision of justice and human dignity on all people and judging religious responses according to this one universal model.

Knitter suggests that when people come together to act in response to their common concerns, they will develop friendships, understanding and trust and will then move to share on their doctrinal issues to come to one understanding of them, based on what is common and presumed to be most life-giving for the whole human community.[21] Persons of different religious traditions can then enter into a shared liberative praxis

21 P. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, Orbis Books, New York 2002, 139–142.

of the poor and suffering, as well as a shared reflection on how the praxis relates to their religious beliefs. Praxis and commitment could in turn lead to doctrinal examination and clarification.[22] It is true that people might respond to the call made by a common concern from within their own spiritual resources. It is also true that people will realize that not only their own religion but also that of the other can provide something of inspiration, prophecy, challenge, and hope that are necessary in the struggle to transform their situation of injustice or instability.[23] However, it is not necessarily true that praxis for justice will lead to doctrinal clarification. In some cases it might not even be possible to work together for justice without some prior doctrinal clarification.

Proponents of this ethical approach to religious pluralism suggest that this dialogue must necessarily be between equal and complementary partners where speaking and listening, giving and taking, are wholly possible.[24] To approach one another with this attitude presumes that the partners come to the dialogue prepared to admit that they might be wrong, or might not be in possession of the full truth, that they need to learn from others and may need to make some changes in their truth claims. I believe such rules cannot be made beforehand, as Knitter and others suggest. If they were, it is unlikely under the circumstances that anyone would respond to the invitation.[25] If the dialogue is to be suc-

22 P. Knitter, 'Preface' in J. Hick – P. Knitter, ed., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, (vii–xii), xii.

23 Cf. P. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 139.

24 Cf. P. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 158–162.

25 To ask Christians to renounce their claims that Jesus is the only Saviour simply so that they can enter into dialogue is to ask them to come to the dialogue without any religious identity. To ask Muslims to renounce their claims that Islam provides all the guidelines to their way of life is to do the same. It is only in the dialogue that people can see how these claims might be better understood so as to really provide what they claim to provide. So it is also only in the process of dialogue that people themselves will see what are the rules for dialogue: must everyone recognize that there is more to learn, must they all be more flexible about their exclusive claims, must they all put the human rights of all people before individual human rights or vice versa, must they see that right action is more important than

cessful, these rules will be made by the participants and each one will see how much he or she considers the other an equal, how much he or she must give or take, hear or say. The only necessary rule is that people be concerned about the difficulty they are facing and wish to do something about it.

Need for a new paradigm in response to religious pluralism

In synthesis, an exclusivist approach to religious pluralism replaces or excludes the other, the inclusivist approaches seek to absorb the other, and the pluralist approaches in effect eliminate otherness in the quest to appreciate difference. Thus, it would seem that 'the contemporary theological discussion on religious pluralism stands at an impasse of sameness or difference.'[26] Given the limitations of these three categories of theological conceptualizations of religious pluralism it may well be that there is need to move beyond them.

Some insights from feminist theological discourses, which also struggle with the issues of sameness, difference and otherness, and do so in very concrete situations and diverse contexts, can have something to offer towards the elaboration of such a positive and life-giving approach, be this on a global level or in the very real context of Northern Nigeria.

Insights of Feminist Theologies for Theologies of Religions

Preoccupied with opening their religious traditions to the recognition of difference within their own communities, particularly that between men and women which they feel was not adequately developed, few feminist

right belief ...? These rules cannot be made beforehand since these are questions that are influenced by each one's own beliefs. It is only in seeing how the practice of these beliefs contributes to the concern they want to overcome that they will see what change or concession is necessary.

26 J. Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation?: A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism*, Continuum, New York 2005, 77.

theologians have seen it necessary to account theologically for the fact of humanity's religious diversity. Instead their focus has largely been on such questions as: since humanity is created in different races and genders, how does God want us to live in equality and in justice? Their work is largely grounded in a shared concern for women around the world who differ among themselves but who have all experienced their being 'other' within their own religious traditions. Thus, feminist theologians have included diversity as central to their questioning; not asking why there is difference, but seeking that that difference be recognized and that the recognition presume equality but not sameness.[27] As a result, they have given little attention to asking why there are different religions.

Similarities between Feminist Theologies and Theologies of Religious Pluralism

In the following brief comparison of feminist theologies and theologies of religions, I deal with all three categories of theological approaches to religious pluralism, be they exclusivist, inclusivist or pluralist. All three respond in diverse ways to the existence of different religions. It is true that proponents of an inclusivist or a pluralist approach to other religions seem to be more open to self-examination and development in a respect for difference than are those who espouse an exclusivist approach. However, even those who espouse an exclusivist theology of religions believe that they are responding to the challenge of religious pluralism in the only way that is compatible with their beliefs. As has been shown above, many pluralist approaches are ultimately no less exclusivist than those who openly claim to be exclusivist.

27 Feminists recognize that equality cannot be equated with sameness: men and women are equal in dignity but they are not the same, at least not biologically, just as the world's women are not the same although they have similar biological make-ups.

a) To bridge secular and religious thought

As we have seen in previous chapters, both Christian and Islamic feminists are aware of the need to bridge secular feminism and faith in their societies. Religious identity is becoming a factor ever more present in the political and economical divisions fracturing the world. The role of religion in these debates, even though many people feel religion is being manipulated, cannot be negated or even underestimated. Religion is a factor which cannot be ignored if peace and progress are to reign in our world. There is need to bridge the gap between the secular sphere and the religious sphere. Theologies of religious pluralism are confronting the questions posed by pluri-religious co-existence in societies, seeking to find ways to bridge more adequately the different religious spheres and the pluri-religious secular sphere.

b) Others were essentialised in their absence

Islamic and Christian feminists recognize that women's voices and perspectives have been virtually absent through the centuries of Tradition. Women were thus essentialised and defined, often envisioned theologically as naturally inferior, as a source of sin and pollution, or on the contrary, as paragons of virtue. Their difference from the male was seen as one of inequality which sanctioned domination, protection, patriarchalism. Thus feminist theologians see that a theological reformulation of some doctrinal themes is necessary. Theologians of religious pluralism recognize that other religions and their adherents were also envisioned in a way that essentialised them: as inferior and of less consequence or none, as mistaken, as having little or nothing to offer to that religion's own understanding of truth. Thus, some theologians of religious pluralism recognize that there is need to listen more attentively and respectfully to the voices and perspectives of peoples of other faiths so as to better understand and possibly reformulate some doctrinal issues.

c) Rejection of domination and superiority

The driving force of Christian and Islamic feminism is resistance to patriarchal domination as experienced by women in their societies and religious communities. They are driven by a sense of justice and a desire to be faithful to the truth as they understand it. Christian theologies of religious pluralism can be said to be driven by resistance to the tendency of their own tradition to dominate peoples of other religions. Out of a sense of justice and a desire to be faithful to the truth, they seek ways either to find justification for (in the case of exclusivists) or to overcome (in the case of inclusivists and pluralists) such domination. While feminists work out of a sense of having been oppressed, theologians of religious pluralism work out of a sense of having been oppressive. Both are motivated by a sense of justice. As a result, both feminist theologians and some theologians of religious pluralism seek religious interpretations that are more inclusive and egalitarian rather than stereotyping, polarizing and dogmatic.

It must also be remembered that as feminist theologians resist domination, they become aware of how they too have contributed to the domination of others. Already Christian feminist theologians have been challenged by Jewish feminists to become aware of the anti-Judaic rhetoric which had been appropriated into Christian feminist theologies.[28] Non-western Christian feminists have pointed out the western biases in much feminist theology and have shown that there are many categories of difference. Islamic feminists are today making other feminists aware that there is more than one way in which the concepts of equality, self-determination and justice are to be understood. This awareness of the close relationship between being oppressed and being oppressive challenges all feminist theologians as well as all theologians of religious pluralism to look more closely at their approach to otherness and to difference.

28 Cf. J. Plaskow, 'Feminist Anti-Judaism and the Christian God' in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion (JFSR)*, vol. 7, n. 2, 1991, 99–108.

d) Limitations of one as normative for all humanity

Christian and Islamic feminists recognize that there is need to avoid a unisex model of humanity wherein one sex is considered normative. Both sexes must be recognized just as other categories of difference must be recognized if humanity is to be understood. Theologians of religious pluralism grapple with the possibility and/or limitations of considering one religion or one path as normative for humanity.

Feminists also feel there is need to eliminate an exaggerated focus on sexual difference. Feminist thought, emerging from women's experience, suggests that each individual has multiple and mutually informing aspects of identity. The traditional focus on women in only one aspect of their identity justified patriarchy and misogyny. Often theologians of religious pluralism, as we have seen above, have based their theologies on only one category of difference, such as a static body of different truths. However, some now recognize that this is not sufficient to understand the many facets involved in religion or in religious difference. – Women may all be female but this does not make all women equal. Muslims may all follow Islam but this does not make one homogenous body of all Muslims. – Just as women cannot be seen only as sexual beings but must also be considered as social beings, with all the diversity this involves, so too religions cannot be seen only as bodies of static truths expressed in different cultures.

e) Limitations of all universal or particular definitions

In the debate on Islamic feminism presented in chapter one, we have asked whether life-giving answers for a seemingly disintegrating humanity can be found in religions: is a religiously framed discourse that relies almost solely on religious interpretation in opposition to the goals of feminism? In the same way, we must ask whether a religiously framed discourse might not be in opposition to the goals of interreligious dialogue: can there ever be an adequate theology of religions that will prepare the level ground which is necessary for true and authentic respectful dialogue? Is it possible or even necessary to discover a concept of divine or of human

relations that is universal to all religions and their adherents? Similarly, is it possible or even necessary to develop a universal theology of religious pluralism that is applicable not only to all religions but also to all historical, social and cultural contexts?

Islamist women are today seen by many as representing new kinds of feminist consciousness in a world that is struggling to respect cultural and religious diversity and subjectivity. However, while many solutions to overcoming the obstacles women face within their societies and cultures can be found by freeing their religious teachings of historically biased interpretations, this alone does not suffice. Political, social and economic issues must also be confronted in the diverse contexts within which women are struggling. This is quite clear in the case of Muslim and Christian women in Nigeria, as we have seen. There are, therefore, limitations to religious discourse no matter how it is interpreted. Thus too it would seem that there will always be limitations to theologies of religious pluralism.

f) Timeless truths or historically conditioned prejudices

Both feminist theologians and some theologians of religious pluralism question whether their religious heritage can be interpreted and defined in a way that is universal and ahistorical. They admit that there are in each faith tradition some timeless and ahistorical truths, but that this truth has not yet been understood and that it is a never-ending human project to discover that truth from the basis of their own religion and experiences, helped by the questions posed by those of different views, religious and otherwise. They also recognize that there are notions which are presumed to be truths but which are very much socio-culturally and historically conditioned and which represent little more than prejudices masquerading as truths.

Christian and Islamic feminists insist that they are not reading interpretations into their sacred texts but that by reading any material from the past from our present grasp of reality, our understanding of reality (truth) is continuously deepened and modified. All knowledge is conditioned by our present understanding and contexts and by the questions we ask.

Inclusivist and pluralist theologians of religious pluralism are also aware that we must ask new questions so as to grow in knowledge of the truth and that by asking questions posed by peoples of other religions as well as questions we pose ourselves in a quest to understand and respect other religions, our knowledge of truth is deepened.

g) Human Experience as criteria for theological reflection

Christian and Islamic feminists are aware that women's experience does not of itself necessarily constitute theological reflection. However, it informs it and operates as a criterion for evaluation and further reflection. The diversity of human experience cannot be absent in theological reflection. Feminist theologians recognize that human beings respond to revelation in faith through human categories which include concrete social, historical, and cultural experiences. Similarly, inclusivist and pluralist Christian theologies of religions are largely based on the awareness that the spiritual and cultural experiences of peoples of other religions must constitute theological reflection for a deeper understanding of Christianity.

Christian and Islamic feminism is very much centred on and rooted in women's everyday existence. It is not a conceptual theological discourse but is concerned with the influence of such discourse on women's lived reality. Theologies of religious pluralism are similarly challenged to be rooted in, if not developed from, the concrete lived reality of religious adherents.

Feminist Reflections on Religious Pluralism

Very little attention is given in feminist theology to the question of religious pluralism as a theological issue. Feminist theology has always included an awareness of diversity, since from the early days it included women of different faith traditions as well as women who sought to develop alternative spiritualities. Diversity was present but not as a problem; rather women were united in their condemnation of patriarchy as experienced in their diverse religious traditions. It was even proclaimed

that 'the diversity within feminist theology and spirituality is its strength.'[29] Diversity became even more apparent when the notion of women's experience as a basis for theologizing evolved and women's theology was developed from different contexts, even specifying their differences by labels such as Womanist, Mujerista, African, and so on. Religious diversity therefore has not been seen as a problem or as a mistake but rather as part of reality that must be recognized and included.[30]

a) Pluralist or Inclusivist?

Rita Gross, a Buddhist who converted from Christianity, has suggested that if Christian feminists were to develop a theology of religions, this would probably have to be a pluralist one.[31] The pluralist model, which holds that no religion is either the only valid or the most valid among religions, is, according to Gross, the only one that recognizes the validity of all and the superiority of none and thus responds to the feminist appreciation of diversity and inclusion. This is however open to contestation. Since feminists seek adequately to appreciate diversity and inclusion rather than sameness or exclusion, it would seem that feminist theologies and an inclusivist approach to religious pluralism have much more in common.

The difficulty Gross has with the inclusivist approach is the idea of one religion being completely adequate and the other waiting to be fulfilled by it.[32] This echoes that which feminists reject, wherein discourse largely developed by men determined women's roles and their fulfilment according to predetermined essentialised notions of woman as a category. The notion that one religion is normative for all humanity also

29 C. Christ – J, Plaskow, ed., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion, Harper San Francisco*, 1992 (first published 1979), 15.

30 Cf. R. Gross, 'Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions' in S.F. Parsons, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, (60–78), 64.

31 R. Gross, 'Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions', 65.

32 R. Gross, 'Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions', 65.

echoes the notion of one sex as normative, as has been discussed above. However, to reject predetermined notions of woman and of humanity is not equivalent to rejecting belief in the fullness of God's revelation. This is not what feminist theologians do.

Feminist theologians have known the pain of being excluded from their own religion, and have struggled to do the theological work required to have their perspectives and experiences included. It would therefore be inconceivable that they would then claim that every religion is equally as valid as their own.[33] If every religion were equally valid, it would make more sense for a feminist theologian to simply found a religion herself according to her own views and perspectives.

Feminist theologians do not struggle to be included in their religious tradition only because the purification of their religious teachings of patriarchal and misogynist thought is necessary so that women can live with greater dignity in their community. Rather they are convinced of the truth and validity of their own religion and they believe that their religion is not simply a social construct. If they viewed their religion as nothing more than a social construct, equally valid with all other religions, their theological efforts would be no more than simply an attempt to read their claims to equality into their tradition, as indeed Islamic feminists have been accused of doing. Their efforts, rather, are to clarify those truths primarily by examining them and rejecting the socio-culturally conditioned prejudices which have expressed God's revelation and truth in ways feminists see to be limited. As such, most feminist theologians cannot be presumed to be pluralist in their approach to their own, and hence also to other, religions.

Feminists do not believe that one opinion or belief is necessarily as good and as valid as another, as some pluralist theologians such as Hick and others would suggest in reference to the religions. They do not believe

33 This is the opposite to what Gross suggests when she says that it would be inconceivable that a feminist theologian, having gone through the pain of exclusion and the effort to be included, would then make exclusive or inclusive claims about the religion that excluded her. Cf. R. Gross, 'Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions', 65.

that the opinion that women must necessarily be under male authority is as good as the opinion that both men and women must share authority equally. As such, it would be incoherent for feminist theologians to say that one religion, opinion or belief is automatically as good as another. In this sense the assertion that a feminist theology of religions would necessarily have to be a pluralist one seems quite contradictory.

It would seem that a feminist approach to religious pluralism would lie, neither in denying unique claims to truth as pluralist approaches suggest, nor in seeing all religions as equally valid simply because they claim to be a religion, but rather in purifying these truths of historical presumptions. This corresponds to what an inclusivist approach to religious pluralism recognizes as the gift of interreligious dialogue, through which adherents of different religions grow in mutual knowledge, are questioned, purified, enriched and transformed (DP 32, 47, 49; RMi 55, 56).

b) Based on a Shared Criterion of Justice which is created not simply affirmed

Feminist thought has not proposed that people should take a relativist approach to the issue of human dignity and women's rights, although, as we have seen, feminism did tend to presume that equality is to be universally understood and practised. Islamic feminists, as well as some women in post-colonial countries, ask that their particular nuances of how equality is to be understood and achieved should be respected. They insist that they should be allowed define for themselves how dignity, rights and development are to be understood and practised: hence they request a certain sense of respect for difference from international bodies or from others who do not form part of their religious or ethnic group. Thus, how to combine the questions of particularity and of global responsibility and ethics remains problematic.

Feminist interreligious encounters, wherein they challenge patriarchy and its oppressive effects on women, on ecology, on minorities or on other groups, have shown a standard and a criterion of justice. Their main argument would be that no religion has a monopoly on either truth or falsity, or on harmful teachings and practices, but that most religions

have some of each. Rita Gross believes that in evaluating religious phenomena, ethical behaviour is more important than theological doctrines; thus the only possible basis for ranking one religion as of greater or lesser value than another would be the ethical consequences of its theological ideas.[34] When a theological doctrine by itself harms people who try to believe in it, or when it translates directly into oppressive social practices, then it could be negatively evaluated.

As seen in the first two chapters of this book, both Islamic and Christian feminists find that many doctrines of their religious traditions translate into oppressive practices. The negativity of a doctrine can be clearly enough seen in the case of some marginal religious movements – for example the one that leads its adherents to suicide in order that they might return to the alien space ship from which the human race is understood to have been originally planted on the earth. However, doctrines which might not be so visibly harmful can also be negative. Many feminists have claimed that the exclusion of women from ordained ministry or from leadership in their religious communities is negative because of its indirect effect on women's self-image, as well as on oppressive social and cultural practices. Does this make these religions as a whole negative and of less value, or does it not rather suggest that the religious usage that women cannot be ordained or that women cannot lead men in prayer is in need of examination? This gives rise to the question of who can judge the lesser or greater ethical consequences of a religious doctrine or of one religion over another, and thus leads back to the issue of universal or particular concepts of justice. It also presents the difficulties posed by consequentialism. It is difficult if not impossible to foresee the consequences of any doctrine or action and thus to measure different concepts of good against each other. It is also difficult if not impossible to define justice in a universal way.

Similarly to Gross, Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki believes that a feminist perspective suggests that one must radically affirm religious pluralism.[35] However, she recognises that one mode of humanity cannot be made a norm for others. She sees justice as the fundamental criterion of value and the focus of dialogue and action but recognizes that dialogue is needed among religious believers and in every local context to determine the notion of justice that is most acceptable and applicable. Justice will therefore not only be affirmed but will also be created.[36]

From my reflection on the common struggles of Muslim and Christian women in Nigeria, I suggest that, when women share a common concern because they perceive that a value they hold has been violated, then it is possible to evaluate together whether a doctrine or an action is just or is not just, whether it gives rise to primarily positive or negative consequences. At the local level, in their common context, in a quest for solidarity in wellbeing, and in an honest sharing of truths, experiences and hopes, concepts of justice are somehow easier to identify. Thus, while it is not easy to elaborate universal concepts of values such as justice or of equality, it is much more possible to elaborate a shared concept in a local context. This is done by the people (victims) themselves who identify the injustice from their own religiously influenced concept of justice and their perception that this is not being met in their own lived experience.

c) Dialogue is between People not between Religions

Jeannine Hill Fletcher, who recently published a book which looks at a theology of religions from a feminist perspective, bases her thesis on a very simple fact: it is people who are the subjects of dialogue, reflection and listening; not religions.[37] Therefore, she approaches the question of religious pluralism by focusing not on the religion as such, but on

34 R. Gross, 'Feminist Theology as a Theology of Religions', 66.

35 M. Hewitt Suchocki, 'In Search of Justice: Religious Pluralism from a Feminist Perspective' in J. Hick – P. Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, (149–161): This short article is an attempt at developing a feminist theory of religious pluralism, basically a soteriocentric approach.

36 M. Hewitt Suchocki, 'In Search of Justice', 160.

37 J. Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation?: A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism*, Continuum, New York 2005.

its adherents. Within each religious tradition there are great distinctions among groups and individuals. Not all Christians follow the path of Christianity in the same way just as not all Muslims follow the path of Islam in the same way. Such variety in religious communities is not accounted for under the construction of theologies built around the idea of specific difference.

Just as there is diversity within religions themselves, so too there is diversity among religious adherents and this diversity is not reducible only to the difference of the religion they profess. Although they may belong to one religious tradition or to one denomination of that tradition, people have many diverse ways of experiencing and understanding their religion and its vision of reality, according to the many other factors which comprise their identity: social class, geographical and political context, culture, profession, family, and so on. Thus, a person's religious identity is not isolatable as 'Christian' but one's 'Christianness' and the experience of 'being Christian' is informed by a myriad of fundamentally defining features.[38] The first two chapters of this book have already shown that Muslim women are not a homogeneous group sharing one identity, just as Christian women are not homogenous with one specific identity.

Fletcher sees that the fact that identification within a category is never complete offers the potential for Christians to forge solidarities outside the Christian community.[39] Concrete examples of this solidarity across religious differences, forged as a result of a common identity, are the meetings of feminist theologians of different religious traditions. These women do not come together because they assume a sameness across their diverse traditions, nor do they insist that there is an incommensurable difference between them. Rather, they form what Fletcher calls a 'hybrid religious identity'[40] wherein each one is simultaneously a member of a religious tradition and a feminist. They identify patterns of feminist spirituality that cross the boundaries of religious traditions while yet each one's spirituality remains rooted in her own tradition. Their

38 J. Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation*, 88.
39 J. Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation*, 90.
40 J. Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation*, 92.

exchange of methodologies and their shared struggle for gender equality encourage solidarity among them. Thus, their religious differences are not dissolved, nor are they distanced as a result of particularity. Rather solidarity is forged in particularity. The association with other feminists of diverse traditions informs each individual's own understanding of her own religious community. Their sharing in solidarity enriches each one as she learns of epistemological tools that enables her to see practical and religious 'alternatives that [she] would be unlikely to imagine on [her] own.'[41] Thus, in such a network of solidarity, not only are the elements of overlapping identity valued but also it is the elements of difference within the religious communities themselves that can offer new ways of understanding a common task.

d) Our Identity is shaped by Others

Following on Fletcher's reflection on hybrid identities within religions is the awareness that neither a person's identity nor the identity of a religion is ever static. Feminists, who have continuously struggled to overcome essentialised and static definitions of woman, woman's roles, the 'feminine genius', or woman's special vocation, are very much aware that each person is continuously growing and becoming in their self-identity as they move through life, meet new people, and face new circumstances. Although each person is born with an irreducible self and with certain characteristics of their personality, identity is not established at birth; nor can it be defined eternally by any religious teaching. Each person's identity is constructed and negotiated in varied circumstances and in varied relationships with other selves in their family, community, culture and society, often including people of other religious traditions. Thinking of the self and of one's religious identity as dynamic and continuously in process affords new possibilities for openness in contact with religious difference.

Although it can be argued that each religion has an 'irreducible self' determined by the initial spiritual experience or revelation from which the

41 R. Gross, 'Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions', 68.

religion stemmed, religious identity is not static and cannot be presumed to be so in theologies of religious pluralism. Just as a person's identity is formed in relationship so too the Christian or Muslim identity is formed in relationship with others. This has been the case in the history of both Christianity and Islam and it continues to be so today.

Anselm K. Min looks at this question of how identities are formed as the basis for a new paradigm of theology of religious pluralism which he calls a dialectical confessional pluralism in solidarity with others.[42] He reflects on how the interaction of plural religions has contributed to their self-meaning and how this meaning or identity changes in accordance with continuous interaction through history. Although he does not underestimate either the truth claims or the particularity of the religions, he shows how such particularity is something that continuously develops in relationship with others. People constantly redefine themselves, and thus also their religions, in an effort to reconcile themselves with the changing world around them. It is a challenge to admit this, just as it is a challenge to redefine oneself in relationship to others in a way that is actually reconciliatory rather than conflictual. In light of today's social necessity for religions to live together in, and despite, their diversity, Min suggests that the approach to other religions should aim at this dialectical pluralism: each religion redefining itself in a relationship of 'solidarity of others'.[43] Min is adamant that it is not a question of solidarity 'with' others but rather 'of others'. This implies that no group is a privileged centre looking to be in solidarity with others, but rather all are 'other' to each other. As others to one another, Min suggests that people of different religions can work together in solidarity and create common conditions of dignity as they grow in their identity through the moment of history they share.

42 A. Kyongsuk Min, 'Dialectical Pluralism'.

43 A. Kyongsuk Min, 'Dialectical Pluralism', 589.

A Feminist–Ethical Response to Religious Pluralism

There is need for a response to religious pluralism that includes others in their difference, that does not diminish the truth of Christianity, that allows for sincere esteem of other believers, that responds adequately to the social demands of religious differences, and that gives rise to attitudes and praxis which promote sincere and authentic solidarity. Such a response might be possible if it stems from an ethical approach to religious diversity combined with feminist insights on the concrete human experience of suffering and oppression, individual and group identity, the continuous and never-ending human search for knowledge, and on the creation rather than the affirmation of justice.

The initial and primary focus of such a response will not be on religious truths but on the many complexities of concrete human existence. Thus, it will move not from theology to praxis but from praxis to theology. This praxis will not be action per se. Rather, giving primary consideration to the marginalized voices within a particular social context, the 'praxis' will involve a shared examination of the lived reality and of how religious doctrines contribute to this reality. The marginalized voices will include those of both religions. As such, this examination will be neither conceptualized nor universalized. This will move to 'theology', that is, to a reformulation of the doctrines if necessary. The reformulation will not be universal either. Rather, the adherents of the different religions, considering what they have heard from the marginalized voices of their pluri-religious society, will reformulate their own doctrines and practices in faithfulness to what they see as being most consistent with their beliefs and their concept of justice.[44] The ideal will be when the marginalized

44 In this way, preconceived ideas of justice, equality, peace, would not be imposed. Instead the concept of justice, equality and peace would be created in the dialogue. Each partner would share on her concept of this value, on what inspires this concept from within her own religious experience, and on the reasons why this value is not being met in her lived experience. As such, speaking from her lived experience and her spiritual experience all will be challenged to a deepening of their own religious truths, to an examination of how these are being practised, and to an evaluation of

themselves contribute to this reformulation of their own tradition. In the case of women, this is often possible.

Such an approach to religious pluralism will not necessarily entail that adherents of religions renounce their truth claims. Nor will it necessarily entail taking a relativist view whereby all other religions are automatically considered equal simply because they are called a religion. It will however enable the adherents of different religions to re-examine their truth claims and grow in their meaning. As such this response can still be very much inclusivist; the adherents of each religion will seek to include the other and be responsible for the other, but will not impose on the other; rather they will seek to grow in their own truth together with and in solidarity with the other in a sense of global responsibility as well as a shared search for truth and justice.

An ethical approach offers greater possibility for people of different faiths who live in tension and distrust of one another actually to feel obliged to overcome their fears and seek to relate with each other more wholesomely. It is the ethical approach that seems to pose and confront the most relevant question, that question which is uppermost in the minds of the majority of believers: how can we live together in peace and build together a world where the wellbeing of all is respected and promoted? I believe that this question is much more pressing to the majority of people in our world today, believers and non-believers, than whether one religion has a greater possession of religious truth or offers greater assurance of eternal salvation than any other. In confronting this most pressing of questions, people of faith will also look into the relevance and value of their truth claims and their religious practices.

how this practice affects her own life and the lives of others. In this sense it will not be imperialist as has been suggested by critics of the ethical approach to religious pluralism. Cf. P. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions,* 157–162.

Application of a feminist–ethical approach to religious pluralism in Nigeria

Below I suggest how such a feminist-ethical approach to religious pluralism could be developed by women in Nigeria through interreligious dialogue.

Why interreligious dialogue of women is necessary in Northern Nigeria

I identify three reasons why the interreligious dialogue of women is an imperative in Northern Nigeria: firstly, their many common concerns; secondly, the importance given to discourse about women in the form of divisive identity politics and power-play which has developed in the region; and thirdly the important role women have in peace-building and in the construction of society.

a) Common concerns

The sufferings and concerns of women in their shared social, political, cultural and economic context in Northern Nigeria are very often quite similar. These have already been elaborated on in the previous chapters and include issues that affect the whole population such as poverty, unemployment, bad governance and civil unrest. Also included are issues that affect women alone, such as abuses within marriage, disinheritance and lack of access to resources, reduced decision-making power, and greater responsibility for sexual morality in society. These issues are intensified due to diverse forms of cultural and religious discrimination which women of both faiths experience, just as the poverty in the region is intensified by the conflicts.

As we have already seen, the actions of women within their faith-based groups to counter the discriminations which intensify their poverty and limited decision-making power in their communities, can in fact further division between Muslims and Christians in the region. By drawing from the ideals of their respective religious traditions without consulting

the ideals and aspirations of the other religious community, conflict and its consequential social and economic instability are increased rather than lessened. Therefore, women will more effectively face their concerns when drawing from the highest ideals of their respective religions, they work together to find adequate solutions.

b) Discourse about Women in divisive identity-politics

Throughout Northern Nigerian history, religious discourse has been an organizing and mobilising force used to establish distinct identities as a means of gaining access to power. Christianity united the many minority tribes in the region just as Islam served to fortify and justify the quest of the Hausa-Fulani elite to maintain power and control in the region.

Oftentimes, particularly among the Muslim leaders, the symbol and visible affirmation of a distinct, superior, pious Islamic identity has been women – seclusion, hijab, segregated public space, refusal of suffrage, controlled sexual behaviour. The superiority of Islam is emphasised as a religion that gives women great rights and upholds sexual morality, as opposed to the promiscuous West, which supposedly treats women as sex-objects and belittles the position of family in social structures. Only in recent years have women, now educated and with a feminist awareness of oppression and of rights, organized themselves to contribute to and redefine the Islamic discourses on women, doing so in a way that maintains legitimacy with the religious and political authorities. They are not opposing the view that Islamic society is superior, but they are insisting that that superiority be lived rather than only claimed.

Christianity has not used religious discourse about women to gain political power in the region. However, it has been and still is used to define distinct identities of men and women, which justify patriarchal power in the family, the church and in the larger society. Christian women are today seeking to redefine their identity, and they too do so in a way that maintains legitimacy with their religious and community leaders.

It is important that women dialogue together on how they experience their traditionally defined identities in response to the demands of contemporary society and in view of the conflict in the region. Here they

will see, as Anselm Min suggests, how their identity has been influenced by social changes just as it has been determined in many ways by the interaction of the two religious communities wherein many restrictions were put on women in the name of religious difference. They need to share on how they identify themselves, based on their faith, their recognition of their own capacities and their newfound feminist awareness, so that women will not be objects of division and competition but instead active protagonists of communion.

c) Important role of women in peace-building

Most people will agree that society will not function as a mature society unless all people, male and female, contribute fully. Yet, the meaning of women's full participation in and contribution to the public space is a matter of controversy and debate. There is particular recognition today, both in Nigeria and globally, of the importance of the family, and hence there is a certain conflict between women's domestic responsibilities and their participation in the wider society.

The insistence in both faith communities on women's primary responsibility as mothers is not one to which women in Nigeria have any objection. Although I do not like to generalize, I believe the majority of women globally find greatest fulfilment in their maternal role and struggle to live it as best they can within their diverse socio-economic and cultural situations. However, when emphasis on women's role as mothers is used to limit their participation in the larger society, or when it is used to burden women with a double workload and a sense of guilt, it can be extremely negative.

Catholic Church teaching has spoken of woman's vocation to motherhood in terms of her concern for life and her capacity to give herself wholly for others. While I have difficulty in accepting such essentialising of women or of any category of human beings, I believe this capacity for nurturing life is one which women are called to share with men so that together they promote a culture of life in Northern Nigeria. I believe it will be life-giving for women of both faiths to share on how they understand their role as mothers, and on the limitations they experience in

living that role, so that they can better assume their responsibility to be mothers of a nation of peace and wellbeing.

Talking before acting is necessary

Looking at the very concrete situation in Northern Nigeria, where violent conflict is a common concern and where peace is a common desire, efforts to establish peace must necessarily look first at doctrinal issues; it is not enough to act first and then talk. The only possible action that can be taken before a discussion of doctrinal issues is to try to bring people together across the divide of tension and distrust. That this is possible is seen by the fact that Muslims and Christians in Nigeria have come together to organize events such as joint moments of recreation wherein the sense of mutual distrust is somehow lessened and people see each other as human beings rather than as religious enemies. However, while such actions are important and necessary, they do not immediately confront the deeper issues which actually are at the root of the conflicts. The organizers and participants of these events, although they might become friends, might not be prepared to discuss these deeper issues. As such, these actions only serve to dissolve the tension momentarily; they do not resolve it.

Although many of the reasons for the conflicts, as discussed in chapter three, are not at all religious, the religious factors cannot be ignored. Thus, although poverty has been identified as the major cause of the conflicts, this cannot be confronted as though it were entirely isolated from the religious causes. In the case of women, it is clear that religious factors play an even greater role in contributing to their poverty. Any praxis to respond effectively to these concerns will necessarily take these religious questions into consideration. Thus, talking before acting will be necessary.

I believe that the notion that praxis for human progress and development can be conceived of and programmed without consideration of religion is very much western inspired, grounded in the enlightenment theories where faith and secular issues were seen as separate, even irreconcilable domains. As seen in chapter one, Islamic feminists are very much aware of that today. They see that any progress they want to bring about in

women's lives must be grounded in religious discourse. Chapter two made it clear that Christian feminists are also very much aware of the need for a bridge between faith and feminist thought. African feminists recognize that progress for African women must take a close look at culture, which in itself demands taking a close look at religion as the meaning-defining agency behind much of culture. Chapter four of this book has served to show the limitations of secular discourse in effectively responding to women's concerns in Nigeria. Thus, any constructive attempt at acting together to build a better world, as people of different faiths and world visions, must begin with talking and this conversation will include religion. This might be contested by saying that religion does not come into everything. However, I firmly believe that virtually all religions have something to say about human relations and this must be considered, particularly in situations where religious discourse is becoming more and more explicitly a part of social and political questions. I also believe that most African people, of whatever religion, feel that religion is indeed an essential part of life.

Fashioning together a Programme of Liberation

Finding adequate solutions to the development problems in Nigeria involves fashioning a programme of liberation on which all agree. Some believe that it is not possible to fashion a programme of reform within the context of Northern Nigeria, since people understand and live their religion in a very exclusive manner.[45] However, the social and economic consequences of the conflicts and the quest for peace already constitute a common ground which has brought people of the two faiths together.

45 In a PhD thesis written by a Nigerian Catholic priest in 2004, the author concluded that given the polarized lives and beliefs of Muslims and Christians in Northern Nigeria and the refusal to admit of any epistemological crisis in either tradition, it is impossible to fashion any common liberation programme. Cf. J. Salihu, *Investigating the Liberation Method of Interreligious Dialogue as a Common Ground for Muslim-Christian Relations in Northern Nigeria*, Trinity College, Dublin 2004 (unpublished).

So too can the many concerns common to women of both faiths in the region.

The recognition that many of women's concerns stem from the misinterpretation or abuse of religious texts and traditions opens avenues for sincere and humble dialogue. When adherents of any religious tradition are convinced that their religion alone is adequate to meet the demands of life, they are unlikely to see any need to participate in dialogue. It is when they recognize that they actually have more to learn that sincere dialogue can take place. It cannot be said that FOMWAN has recognized that Islam is not adequate or that they have more to learn. As seen in chapter five, FOMWAN's attitude tends to be that a more faithful adherence to Islam as defined by traditional scholars suffices to overcome the injustices experienced by women. What Muslim women and men have to learn, then, is the Qur'an. Gradually some women, through WLUML and other NGOs, are showing the limitations of traditional interpretations and the possible diversity of interpretations of the Qur'an and Islamic traditions. Thus, gradually what can be considered a form of an epistemological crisis, or to put it less dramatically, a need to grow in knowledge, is being recognized. The same applies to Christian women who are gradually being introduced to the thoughts of feminist theologians. Thus they too are opening to the challenge of growing in the truth.

It was with the recognition by Christians that the exclusivist attitude towards other religions was inadequate that many theologians as well as the Magisterium opened to an articulation of interreligious dialogue. 'But Christians too must allow themselves to be questioned. Notwithstanding the fullness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, the way Christians sometimes understand their religion and practice it may be in need of purification' (DP 32). This opened the way for recognition that Christian knowledge was not complete, but needed others so as to deepen continuously in the truth which it announced. In Muslim and Christian women's recognition of an epistemological crisis, as it were, in the traditional understanding and practice of their own tradition lies my hope that it is possible to fashion a programme of liberation for women on which those of both faiths agree. This programme will be fashioned by and rooted in their respective religious traditions. It will be united in

so far as the values the women seek to respect are upheld. The form in which they take the action will be shaped by the religious community in which they find themselves and whose vision inspires their values and principles.

As an example one could cite the common context where widows are often disinherited and left penniless. The common action will be aimed at assuring that this does not happen. The ground varies as Muslim women can take recourse to the *shari 'a*, while Christian women can take recourse to the good will of their community and to the Christian message of charity and justice, which can also be used to enlighten the judgement made in a customary court of law if the case is dealt with here. If the case is dealt with under common law, the constitution will uphold what has been determined by a legal testimony. The goal varies as Muslim women will not demand that the widow be given the entire property, but will instead seek that she be given her share as stipulated in the Qur'an. Christian women, on the other hand, may seek the entire property or a non-specified portion of it. Muslim women will carry out this particular action by taking steps to see that women are aware of their inheritance rights as stipulated in the Qur'an, that they know how to have recourse to *shari 'a* courts if these rights are violated, and by taking action to ensure this right is respected in the *shari 'a* courts themselves. Christian women will carry out this specific action by appealing to their pastors and church leaders to preach repeatedly about the Christian duty to care for widows, by appealing to couples to make a will that specifies what will become of the family property in the case of widowhood, by facilitating women's access to the common law courts and by loudly condemning in their church community any case where a member is disinherited.

A second example of a common context is the illiteracy among women in the North which in diverse ways greatly increases their vulnerability. A common action will seek to overcome this, both by offering literacy classes to adult women and overcoming the existing problems in the education of the girl child. Muslim women will have recourse to the Qur'an, which stresses the importance for both men and women of seeking knowledge, both Islamic and secular. Christian women will again have recourse to the good will of the community to recognize that

education is beneficial to all. Women of both faiths will recognize that a reason for illiteracy is the lack of money to send children to school, and that those families that can afford to send only one or two children still give preference to the male child. They will also recognize that the quality of instruction offered in public schools is poor. Common action may be taken to put pressure on governments to improve the public school system in the North. Common action will also involve seeking to overcome the preference for the male child. Action will also involve looking at ways to overcome the lack of resources for sending children to school and the necessity of some families to have their girl children free to look after younger children or to hawk in the market. Difference of action will surely be seen in that Muslim women may not necessarily suggest that women work outside the home, while Christian women will do so. The Christian women might provide day-care centres to facilitate this, while Muslim women will have to overcome the fact that many women are in purdah and can only earn the money needed for education by sending their daughters to sell whatever they prepare at home. Each faith-group will have to see what action is most appropriate for their particular situation.

A third common context is the exclusion of women from decision-making in their homes, their faith communities and in the wider society. A common action will involve ensuring women do have an authoritative voice. Common action may include speaking out together about the limitations this poses on women's role in peace-building as in other matters. By uniting their voices in condemnation of this exclusion, they will most likely have greater effect, just as by uniting their voices to speak out against violence and injustices they will already have overcome some of their imposed silence. Muslim women will have to deal with the provisions concerning male authority in the Qur'an, while Christian women will have to analyze the implications of those Biblical texts which exhort male headship and female submission. Together they can discuss the effects of such texts and can consider how they need be interpreted and put into practice. Muslim women will most likely speak of the need for consultation (*shûra*, cf. Q 42:38) when exercising authority, while Christian women might speak of other texts wherein women did take authoritative

action and held leadership roles. In analysing together their exclusion from leadership in their faith communities, Muslim women might seek to be allowed greater participation in the mosques and in local or national Islamic leadership boards, while Christian women might seek ordination or they may insist, as some are already doing, on being more included in the central authoritative bodies of their churches, referring to statements made by church leaders on the importance of including women in authoritative roles in the church. Again, the form their action takes will be determined by their religious communities or traditions, but in itself the action will be common, responding to a common context and arising from a common agenda.

Although the above would seem to suggest that Muslim women can take care of their own concerns and Christian women can do likewise, I believe it is necessary that they do so together. A Christian community cannot allow itself only to be concerned for its own; in so far as it is, it is not true to its missionary nature which calls it continuously to reach out to others. Nor does it live its purpose in the world as a sign and an instrument of the Kingdom for all people. However, from a much more practical perspective, self-centeredness and such exclusion of others is part of the problem behind communal tensions in many places worldwide, including in Nigeria. If the solution to Muslim women's poverty and exclusion is dependent on the *shari 'a*, how this is to be understood and implemented must take into consideration the perspectives and concerns of the Christian population. Otherwise, the religious conflicts will continue. In so far as the conflict continues, so too does the socio-economic poverty of all people.

a) Doctrinal clarification and revision

Some Muslim and Christian women have already taken the first step: united in their concern for building peace, they have in interreligious encounters identified other common concerns which are an impediment to that peace. The next step, according to Knitter and other proponents of the soteriocentric pluralist model, would be common action, or a shared liberative praxis of women in their respective communities,

followed by further sharing on how this praxis relates to their religious beliefs. This would lead them to some doctrinal clarification or revision of these beliefs.

As we have seen, the liberative praxis opted for by Muslim women is entirely dependent on an Islamic framework and hence also on faithful and complete adherence to the *shari 'a*. Thus, dialogue on how and why such praxis relates to the religious beliefs of not only Muslim women but also Christians in the region will open the way for greater understanding and clarification and is necessary before any action can be carried out. Muslim women will explain why the *shari 'a* is so important to them; Christian women explain how its implementation, and its content with reference to Christians as protected rather than as full and equal citizens, infringes on their religious freedom. Muslim women also are beginning to voice reservations about the form in which *shari 'a* is presently understood and implemented, and are insisting that *shari 'a* is flexible and adaptable to contemporary times and diverse socio-economic and cultural situations. Thus a shared reflection on their liberative praxis, which itself stemmed from a common concern and common agenda, can hope to cater for the reservations and concerns of women of both faith communities. They will dialogue on how the *shari 'a* in Northern Nigeria can be more favourable to Muslim women and to non-Christians in the region. The insistence by Muslim women on a codification of Muslim Personal Law and on a revision of the criminal code could also include their insistence that the rights of Christians in the *shari 'a* states be codified and respected.

How their religious traditions contribute to oppression and injustice will be analysed by the women in a sincere hermeneutics of suspicion. This is proposed by Knitter in terms of finding a basis for pluralistic, non-relativistic dialogue.[46] It is also the method proposed by feminist theologians, both Christian and Muslim, in the reinterpretation of their religious texts and traditions.[47] The need for such revisioning was proposed to Muslim and Christian women in Nigeria during the BAOBAB workshops mentioned in the previous chapter.[48]

46 P. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions', 181–183.

47 Particularly proposed by E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, and by A. Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*.

Such theological revisioning will not be easy for women since the majority is not theologically prepared and hence depends on interpretations proposed by their pastors and imams. The contribution of Christian and Muslim feminist scholars will therefore be important. The different approaches to scripture of Muslims and Christians and of Protestants and Catholics will also be clarified, one which, as I have already said in this book, is greatly in need of clarification, since the general tendency is to take a literal and often selective reading and accept it as an absolute teaching.

Efforts have been made in dialogical encounters in Nigeria to highlight what is common to both religions so as to foster an attitude of mutual respect and acceptance. A book was co-authored by a Muslim imam and Christian pastor, founders of the Interfaith Mediation Centre, who are among the most influential and respected in terms of hosting interreligious encounters in Northern Nigeria.[49] In this book they identify what is common between Islam and Christianity and what are the points of discord. Two common points are of particular interest. Under the section on family relationships they found that Islam and Christianity agree that the man is head of the family, quoting Eph. 5:22–25 and Q 4:34. They also see that both religions teach that women must wear modest dress, quoting Deut. 22:5; 1Tim. 2:9–12; and Q 24:31.[50] It is important that women discuss these teachings and see whether they really are common to both faiths, and if so, in what way they are to be understood.

In examining the reasons for their common concerns, women will not put acceptance of, tolerance for, and non-interference with the other religious tradition or even with their own religious tradition as priorities. This, according to Knitter, is what many who today engage

48 Cf. Unpublished report of Bridge-Building meeting, Abuja, 15th–19th April 2001, BAOBAB Secretariat.

49 U.M Ashafa – J.M. Wuye, *The Pastor and the Imam: Responding to Conflict*, Ibrash Publications, Lagos 1999.

50 U.M Ashafa – J.M. Wuye, *The Pastor and the Imam*, 60, 63–64.

in interreligious dialogue tend to do.[51] Tolerance and non-interference is called for by Muslims and Christians in Northern Nigeria out of a respect for the exclusivity and particularity of their religions. However, sincere dialogue on their common concerns will bring women to realize and admit that there are limits to how tolerant women should be with the dominant interpretations and practices of their respective religious traditions both in respect of their own concerns and those of the other religious community.

Women in dialogue on their different visions and their common concerns, united in their preferential option for women as the poor and marginalized, will learn to respect the genuine difference and validity of certain elements of the other religious tradition. However, they will not see all teachings and practices as relative or of concern only to those within that tradition. Rather, they will together judge the tradition in terms of the basic values and principles of equality and dignity. Their judgement will not be of the entire religious tradition, and even less so of all its members, as is often the case in Northern Nigeria. Rather it will be a shared judgement of the particular teaching, interpretation or practice of it that is oppressive. It is not a judgement which aims at grading one religion as superior or inferior to the other, as more or less true and valid than the other, but rather a judgement of the faithfulness of each tradition to its own teaching and understanding of the values of equality, justice and human dignity.

Necessary Attitudes for Liberative Interreligious Dialogue

Already I have said that rules cannot be made before dialogue, but must instead be a fruit of the dialogue itself. The attitudes which I suggest are necessary for fruitful dialogue of women are not imposed because of the dialogue with the other religious community. Rather they spring from their attitude to their own religion.

51 P. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions', 180.

a) Recognition of the need for change in one's own tradition

The gradual growth in awareness of what could be called an epistemological crisis among Muslim and Christian women in Nigeria is, I believe, the first fundamentally necessary attitude for liberative dialogue. The importance of this has already been discussed above.

b) Not to solve the problems of the other

A second necessary attitude would be that women in dialogue do not seek to solve the problem of the other but rather seek to solve their common problems together. Maura O'Neill, one of the first to attempt to write on women in interreligious dialogue, has pointed out the possibility of conflict arising when women offer solutions from within the perspective of their own tradition to women who suffer oppression within another religious tradition.[52] She rightly says that we cannot presume to know the answers to other people's problems.

Christian women cannot answer the problems faced by Muslim women within their religious tradition. Muslim women themselves are adamant about this. I have already stated that the problems of conflict and its consequent socio-economic poverty will continue if solutions are not found together. However, one must ask what real advantage there can be in women sharing on their difficulties, if they cannot solve them for one another.

As has been pointed out at interreligious encounters in Nigeria, women are often unaware that certain customs or practices are unjust and they are unwilling to challenge them, since they believe this is just the way things are done.[53] Sharing on their perceptions of justice and injustice may enlighten women to identify as unjust in their own experience what previously they had not questioned, since they had been unchallenged to do so by a different worldview.

52 M. O'Neill, *Women Speaking, Women Listening*, Orbis Books, New York 1990.
53 Minutes of 1999 ACMMRN conference, 14.

Muslim women recognize that much harm is done them in the name of religion. This they see as being due to cultural innovations which led to a lack of adherence to Islam. Although I have identified the limitations of this approach which is based on a static and universal notion of Islam, the reflection on culture as an issue which determines how religious teachings are interpreted and practised is important for Christian women. Here, the approach of Muslim women could motivate Christian women to analyse, without fear of cultural upheaval, the many cultural interpretations which most continue to give to the Gospel message. As we have seen, the issue of culture is one to which African Christian feminist theologians give great attention. I have suggested in chapter six how this feminist theological reflection on culture could be integrated into Christian women's church-based groups. The Catholic Church in Nigeria has, on various occasions, spoken of the need for a greater inculturation of the Gospel.[54] Women's sharing on this, motivated by their Muslim sisters, could be an important step in the right direction.

c) Dialogue within one's own religious community

A third necessary attitude to fruitful dialogue among women would be their readiness to enter into sincere dialogue with their own religious communities prior to as well as after the dialogue with the women of the other tradition.

Interreligious dialogue as an instrument of peace demands an active struggle against all forms of oppression and evil; it involves a readiness to examine self-critically the relationship of religious traditions to those social, economic and political structures which are agents of violence and injustice.[55] Interreligious dialogue must take into account the lives and

54 Cf. 'The Nigerian Church: Evangelization through Inculturation', Pastoral letter 1991, in P. Schineller, ed., 253–270; 'Pastoral Message towards the Jubilee Year 2000: Challenges before the Nigerian Church' 1996, in P. Schineller, ed., 351.

55 Pontifical Council of Interreligious Dialogue, *Spiritual Resources of the Religions for Peace: Exploring the sacred texts in promotion of peace,* Vatican City 2003, 12.

sufferings of the peoples who live by the religions under discussion.[56] To do otherwise is simply to share on ideological concepts without relating these concretely to their effect in the world. Concern for a theological understanding of the relationship of other religions and their adherents to the Kingdom of God inaugurated in Christ, while valid in itself, cannot dispense from the primary call to be a sign and instrument of the Kingdom. As Thomas Michel has noted, too often in interreligious gatherings, the daily concerns of the poor are ignored, as if they were non-existent, or else they are mentioned and passed over as though the indignities and injustices the poor experience daily were irrelevant or even an embarrassment in the context of the lofty religious concepts and ideals expressed.[57] How the religions themselves contribute to systems of injustice and inequality is not discussed. Thus, dialogue is prevented from becoming an effective means of social transformation.

The Church has recognized that, just as dialogue with people of other religions is necessary, so too greater dialogue is necessary to promote more authentic and liberating communion between men and women both in the Church and in society.[58] Humility, openness and attentive listening are essential to all dialogue (ES 87, DP 47–50). Thus, essential too is openness in the Church to the voices and perspectives of women who express concern about the limitations of Christian proclamation, witness

56 E. Chia, 'Interreligious Symposium' in E. Chia, ed., *Resource Manual for Catholics in Asia: Dialogue*, Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference, Bangkok 2001, 180.

57 T. Michel, 'Towards a Dialogue of Liberation with Muslims' in *Sedos Bulletin*, vol. 34, no. 11/12, Nov.-Dec. 2002, 285–291; A similar criticism of interreligious dialogue as a purely mystical pursuit or interesting pastime for First World scholars, which he calls dialogue of inauthentic religions, is made by Knitter in P. Knitter, 'Towards a Liberation Theology of Religions', 180.

58 Council for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the collaboration of men and women in the Church and in the world*, 31st July 2004, n. 1: 'These reflections are meant as a starting point for further examination in the Church, as well as an impetus for dialogue with all men and women of good will, in a sincere search for the truth and in a common commitment to the development of ever more authentic relationships.'

and practice in allowing them to know in their concrete everyday lives the liberating and transforming power of God's Kingdom inaugurated in Christ (RMi 58–59; EN 30–36).[59]

The Church has on numerous occasions spoken of the priority which must be given today to a more authentic proclamation of Gospel values to women. It has also reiterated the importance of women themselves as agents of this mission to women, just as it reiterates the importance of women's increased participation in all areas of the church's mission.[60] The mission to women is a mission to all women, regardless of their religious affiliation, since the mission of the church is universal and embraces all people. The mission of women is also one of all women, since the Church recognizes that God is active in mysterious ways through each human being and through each culture and religion (RMi 28). Thus, mission involves enabling all women, of whatever faith or culture, to realize more effectively their mission in the world as unique and diverse images of God through whom God and God's Kingdom are present and active.[61] Such a means can only be found through respectful and sincere dialogue:

59 As many liberation theologians remind us, a religion that does not address, as a primary concern, the poverty and oppression that infest the world is not an authentic religion. This resonates with the Catholic Church's social teaching as it has developed from *Rerum Novarum* until today.

60 For example: *Pacem in Terris* 22; *Mulieris Dignitatem* 1, 30; *Vita Consecrata* 57, 102; *Christifideles Laici* 49; *Redemptoris Missio* 37; *Ecclesia in Africa* 82, 121. Numerous other citations could be mentioned. The Church, particularly since Vatican II, does not fail to call for women's greater participation in mission and for increased efforts to promote women in church and society. Some early and specific statements on this were Paul VI, 'Recognize and promote the role of women in the mission of evangelization and the life of the Christian Community' in *Omnis Terra*, 73: 3, January 1976, 116 and 130; Pastoral Commission of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *The Role of Women in Evangelization,* in *Omnis Terra*, 75: 3, March 1976, 202–208.

61 'It is not enough to say that the Christians and the 'others' foster and promote the Reign of God so far as they exemplify the Gospel values in their life and action. It must be added that they are called to do so together.': J. Dupuis, 'Evangelization and Kingdom Values: The Church and the 'Others'' in *Indian Missiological Review*, June 1992, (4–22), 18.

dialogue within the global and local church between men and women, as well as dialogue with men and women of other religions, and indeed with those who profess no religion.

Religious communities are called to develop this spirit of dialogue not only with other religious communities but within themselves. Dialogue implies a respectful listening and honest sharing from both partners; thus women who feel called to challenge sexism within their own communities have a right to be heard just as they must be prepared to listen to the opinions and feelings of the community they are in dialogue with.

The community with which to dialogue includes those men as well as women who feel it is unnecessary to look at their tradition through the lens of sexism. It will also involve dialogue with religious leaders. Given that the leadership structure of most religious communities is male-dominated this dialogue may not be of equal partners. Oftentimes, in such situations of dialogue with authorities, women have used the numerical strength of their associations and groups to ensure their voice is somehow equal to that of the authority with whom they desire to initiate dialogue.

Such intra-religious dialogue will also move Christian women to be involved in ecumenical dialogue. One of the greatest criticisms of Christianity in Nigeria is the lack of unity among Christians of different denominations. There is need for an ecumenical body which is concerned with issues of doctrine and Christian practice. Concerned Christian women of faith may be able to initiate this, as has indeed been suggested by Christian women leaders on various occasions.[62]

Questions to be discussed in dialogue

a) An alliance between faith and feminist consciousness

The discourse of Muslim women in Nigeria corresponds to what many Islamic feminists, particularly Islamist women, are saying globally. The alliance between faith and feminism is very much a part of this. Feminist

62 See Appendix n. 28.

awareness of women's oppression shapes the discourse as Muslim women read contemporary egalitarian principles into the Islamic tradition. This alliance is not made evident, in the sense that Muslim women claim feminism is a western concept of which they have no need, since the egalitarian principles which feminists in the western world have sought are already contained in Islam. The divide between secular feminism and Muslim women in Nigeria was based on the polygamous family structure of Islam which was not recognized in the NCWS proposal for alimony in cases of divorce. However, the secular ideas of equality, dignity and rights greatly influence their discourse.

Christian women have not pronounced a separation from secular feminist proposals, and it is mostly Christian women who are involved in the secular discourse. Despite this, the discourse of Christian women's church organizations in Nigeria is at times at odds with secular discourse. Their insistence on male headship and a woman's submission to her husband's authority fortifies those cultural practices which are at the root of so much of women's suffering. There is little critical awareness among Christian women's church groups in Northern Nigeria of a cultural misinterpretation of the Christian message, or of the influence of the Christian message on unequal social relationships and opportunities. They see little relationship between Christianity and the oppression, poverty and exclusion of women. In most Christian churches in Nigeria the bridge between faith and secular feminism has not been crossed.

The separation of FOMWAN from the NCWS seems to indicate the parallel lives of Muslims and non-Muslims in the country. This needs to be discussed by women from their faith perspective. In dialogue, Muslim and Christian women might share on how they understand feminism, can discuss whether there is or there is not a bridge between faith and secular feminist consciousness and how they can bridge this divide together in their local context better and in faithfulness to their religious traditions.

b) Modernity and its Influences

Seyyed Hossein Nasr refers to the differing attitudes which Muslims and Christians have to modernism as an obstacle which must be overcome through interreligious dialogue.[63] Thomas Michel also believes that Muslims and Christians today need to dialogue on issues of modernity and sees the Muslim critique of modern secularism as a challenge to Christians.[64]

Christians in Nigeria tend to be critical that Islam does not modernize but remains in the past, and they evaluate contemporary Islam accordingly. Likewise, Muslims are critical of Christianity, and claim that Christians in Nigeria have absorbed western vices as well as western values without any critical discernment. The consequences of such opinions and criticisms must be taken into serious consideration if there is to be any dialogue in depth beyond platitudes and diplomatic gestures.

Muslim understandings of western values and western vices and Christian understandings of Islamic backwardness often refer to women's comportment. This has already been identified in the first chapter in reference to Orientalist and anti-Orientalist literature and again in our discussion of the criticisms FOMWAN has encountered from within the Muslim community in Nigeria.

Both Christians and Muslims struggle with modernity of which feminist consciousness as well as religious revivalism is a part. Both want to preserve the positive steps which have been achieved for women as a result of the influence of modernity. The question central to the Muslim women's struggle is how to uphold women's rights and ensure the equal dignity of the sexes in a progressive Islamic community where religious discourse now defines women's every move. The question central to the Christian women's experience is how to acquire equal opportunities in

63 S. Hossein Nasr, 'Islamic-Christian Dialogue: problems and obstacles to be pondered and overcome' in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 11, n. 2, July 2000, 213–227.

64 T. Michel, 'The Roots of Muslim Anger and its Challenge for Christians', (internet article: see bibliography).

the social, economical and political realm in a way that is supported by their Christian communities.

As Muslim women dialogue with their community and among themselves and Christian women do likewise, it is crucial that they also come to dialogue together since it is a single pluri-religious, progressive nation that is sought.

c) Patriarchy in Religion

Katherine Young asks what is meant by the term 'patriarchal religions'. After a brief analysis of the development of the major world religions, she concludes that, in so far as the world religions have continued throughout the centuries to give religious justification to male dominance in social structures, they can justifiably be termed patriarchal religions.[65] Islamic and Christian feminists insist that, although in both Islam and Christianity women and men were equally active in all spheres of activity in the initial phase, as the traditions developed they reverted to the male dominance characteristic of the surrounding culture and were divided on the question of female power and leadership.[66] Scripture texts were interpreted in such a way as to strengthen patriarchal structures in the religious community and in society. The feminist movements within both Islam and Christianity today, as also in other major religions, criticize male dominance in the religious and social sphere as being in need of revision and reformation. Recognizing the similarity in their criticism of patriarchy within their tradition is an important step in interreligious dialogue.

Nigerian Muslim women support the traditional patriarchal understanding of family relations and suggest ways this can function which do not limit women's sphere to the home and do not allow her to be wholly dependent on her husband and vulnerable to his demands. Christian

65 K.K. Young, 'Introduction' in A. Sharma, ed., *Women in World Religions*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1987, (1–36), 5–6.

66 These arguments have been well developed in the first two chapters of this thesis; refer to these chapters for references to Islamic and Christian feminist scholars.

women have condemned patriarchy on various occasions but they continue to claim that male headship is divinely ordained and must be respected. Dialogue between the two groups is necessary to truly look at the negative and positive effects of patriarchy and see how best to deal with these in contemporary society.

The discussion on patriarchy will also have to look at the patriarchal structures of religious communities. Many feminist theologians propose that structures in faith communities need to be transformed if they are to witness to the egalitarian principles of the religion itself. In Nigeria the question of women's ordination has been discussed in the Anglican and Methodist churches as well as in COCIN and other evangelical churches. Muslim women have spoken about the need for greater access to the mosques. Women have also seen the limitations imposed on them by their lack of inclusion in leadership bodies in all faith communities.

Discussion of patriarchy will necessarily involve reflecting on those scriptural texts which sanction patriarchal structures in the faith communities and in the family. Patriarchal or exclusive male language about God will also necessarily be discussed so as to see what influence this has on women. Women may also find themselves moved to discover together in their religious histories female models who challenged unjust patriarchal structures or assumptions.

d) Human Rights and Women's Rights

Closely related to the critique of patriarchy is the issue of women's rights as human rights. Today many recognize the limits of rights language. For some people the idea of universal rights is a western concept.[67] However,

67 The notion has little evidence to stand on. It is true that in 1948 large parts of Africa and a number of Asian countries remained under colonial rule. However, among the fifty-eight nations present at the 1948 conference, many religions and cultures were represented: twenty-one member states were Latin-American; six were Asian (China, India, Pakistan, Burma, the Philippines, and Siam); Islamic culture was predominant in nine nations (Afghanistan, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, Yemen); three countries had large Buddhist populations

most people agree today that the notion of rights is not the exclusive claim of any religion or culture. As has been discussed in the first section of this book, some rights proposed by western feminists have been unacceptable to non-western feminists who see this as an imposition of western standards on non-western cultures and hence a modern day form of colonialism. They also see it as repeating the sin of which feminists accuse patriarchal societies of having committed, that is, the lack of consideration and respect for difference. People involved in proposing a universal understanding of rights are thus wary of furthering neo-colonial trappings. Many prefer to take a cultural-relativist approach to the whole concept of rights.[68] Taking such a relativist approach out of respect for difference and thus leaving rights to be determined by religious or community leaders, means that marginalized groups are left vulnerable to the interpretations of those in power. Concepts such as religion and culture can be used to deny human rights of women or of other vulnerable or minority groups.

The major difficulty women encounter when claiming their rights is when these are in conflict with the traditional family unit. Particularly problematic is the claim that women's sexual and reproductive rights must also be considered human rights. Feminists claim that to deny these as

(Burma, China, Siam). The 18-member Human Rights Commission that actually prepared the Declaration over a two-year period was chosen with a view toward cultural and ideological variety. Most of the countries that were not represented in the U.N. in 1948 have since adopted bills of rights resembling the Universal Declaration. Most of them have ratified the two 1966 U.N. Covenants that were designed to give effect to the Declaration's principles. Most of them approved the 1993 Vienna Human Rights Declaration that incorporated and reaffirmed the Universal Declaration. Cf. M.A. Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Random House, New York 2001; For an overview of the concept of rights in the world religions see J. Runzo – *al.*, ed., *Human Rights and Responsibilities in the World Religions*, Oneworld, Oxford 2003.

68 cf A good overview of the problems associated with universal rights language from a feminist perspective is given by I. Barker – J. Kaur Puar, 'Feminist Problematization of Rights Language and Universal Conceptualizations of Human Rights', in *Concilium*, 2002, n. 5, 64–76.

individual rights puts certain limitations on other basic rights such as the freedom to work. At the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, Catholic and Muslim religious leaders united in their opposition to individualistic rights language when this was in conflict with religious teachings on human dignity and community responsibility.[69] Therefore, to understand and justify women's rights as human rights necessarily means looking at the institutions of family, religion and culture in light of the changes that have taken place in society's understanding of women's/human rights.[70]

In Nigeria today, the conflict of women's rights is evident in the discourse and activities of Muslim and Christian women's groups just as in the secular women's movement. This conflict of rights is also very much evident in the *shari 'a* debate where Muslims claim the implementation of *shari 'a* as their right to freedom of religion and Christians believe that it infringes on their right to freedom of religion.

Religious bodies have to study the question of rights from the perspective of their own faith, so that women find support rather than contradiction from this source. It is necessary that the religious communities dialogue with each other on their understanding of rights, so that the various differences surrounding the questions of religious freedom can

69 See 'Holy See's Final Statement at Women's Conference in Beijing' presented by Mary Ann Glendon in *Origins*, vol. 25, n. 13, 14th Sept. 1995, 203–206. For a criticism of this Alliance as a conservative religious stance against abortion and notions of gender, seen as opposition to women's rights to control of their bodies, see V. Moghadam, 'On the Muslim-Catholic Coalition and Other Conference Highlights' in *AMEWS*, n. 10, 3rd November 1995; N. Tohidi, 'Fundamentalist Backlash and Muslim Women in the Beijing Conference: New Challenges for International Women's Movements' in *Canadian Women's Studies*, vol. 16, n. 3, Summer 1996, 30–34; J.H. Bayes – N. Tohidi, ed., *Globalization, Gender, and Religion: The Politics of Women's Rights in Catholic and Muslim Contexts*, Palgrave, New York 2001.

70 Cf. S. Moller Okin, 'Feminism, Women's Human Rights, and Cultural Differences' in *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, vol. 13, n. 2, 30–45; E.A. Kirkley, 'The Rights of Women and Human Rights: Achievements and Contradictions' in *Concilium*, 2002, n. 5, 9–17.

be resolved peacefully. In terms of women's rights, it is important that it should be women rather than religious leaders alone who study these proposals from the perspective of their faith.

e) Female Sexuality

Feminists recognize today that the female ability to bear children was a fundamental reason for the control of women's sexuality in many societies. Since women are central to the preservation of ethnic identity, their religious significance was based on their role as mothers and they were under strict male control to ensure the purity of the bloodline. Thus, feminists believe that much religious teaching on women is more biologically than culturally determined. Reflections on female sexuality and its power are also considered to have given rise to some of the misogyny that is to be found in the history of the patriarchal religions.

From the need to control women's sexuality arose the restriction of women's roles and their exclusion for many generations from education, cultural creativity and action outside the home. Since women gave priority to the children they bore, they deferred to male domination, because a male-led society ensured that they and their children were protected and their needs provided for. Hence, many religions contained a form of reciprocity and complementarity between the sexes, based on a relationship of domination and submission.

The form of complementarity of the sexes based on male domination is no longer acceptable to many women and men in the modern world. The sociologies such models endorse are often in conflict with the changes which have taken place in societies, including the concepts of equality that inform political consciousness, women's growing participation in traditionally male arenas, as well as the awareness of the negative dimensions of patriarchy. Since the changes which have taken place in society are incompatible with the sociological models endorsed by traditional religion, they are often opposed by traditionalists or conservatives. The negative impact of these traditional models on both women and men and on the family unit must therefore be closely examined.

To examine how Islam and Christianity can today adapt to the changes taking place in Nigerian society in respect of a sociology that acknowledges and facilitates the equal dignity of men and women and protects the stability of the family and of society in general, is a task to be carried out through interreligious dialogue. The understandings of female and male sexuality must be analysed. This will involve questioning why such emphasis is put on modest dress or hijab for women while little reference is made to men's clothing. Are women more responsible for sexual morality in society? Is female sexuality in need of greater control than men's and if so, why? It will also lead to a discussion on polygyny which, as seen in chapter six and perhaps contrary to expectation, is an issue for Christian women in Nigeria just as it is for Muslim women.

f) Is Sexism a relevant issue?

When faced with poverty and unemployment, and when concerned for the health care of children or, in a conflict situation such as Nigeria, faced with violence, death and destruction, many people will see sexism as irrelevant, a petty issue in comparison to the many serious issues confronting the community. However, it is essential to recognize the role sexism plays in the poverty experienced by women if the overall situation is to be confronted. In order for religious communities to be effective instruments of interreligious understanding and peaceful co-existence as well as to improve the living conditions of women in Northern Nigeria, they must honestly confront the problem of sexism in the cultures and in the religious teachings and practices.

g) Family Structure

In addressing sexism, many western feminists have disregarded the real concerns of the larger community, such as the family and women's responsibility in procreation. However, concern for the family cannot be used as an excuse to deny the equality of women.

Many pro-family movements, in calling for the protection of the life of the unborn child and the stability of the family, a call to which I

join my own voice, unfortunately often ignore the harsh reality of many family units today. Many women have no choice but to work outside the home, either because they are the sole breadwinners or because it is impossible to meet the costs of living with only their partner's wage. In juggling both workloads, women are restricted to lower wage cadres. The break-up of many families and the delinquency of many youths are then blamed on women's not assuming their domestic responsibilities. The pro-family movements are often a platform used to call for a return to patriarchal family structures within which women find their voice constrained and many of their rights violated. Dialogue is, therefore, necessary to find ways to promote both the equality of women and the protection of the family.[71]

h) Motherhood – Empowering the Community to Nurture Life

Islam and Christianity continue to teach that woman's primary vocation is to be understood in terms of motherhood. Unfortunately, this is very often understood solely in terms of a woman's willingness to bear children within marriage and of her love for and responsibilities towards the children that she gives birth to.

Feminism, which is marked by a profound understanding of the interconnectedness of life, adds a much wider dimension to the concept of motherhood. It sees a vocation to motherhood as a vocation to promote, defend and affirm life against all that threatens it such as hunger, poverty, unemployment, ignorance, and violent conflict. The vocation to motherhood is to promote an alternative vision of human relations based on recognition and appreciation of the equal value of every living being and of all life. Women, as mothers of life, are called to seek ways to overcome all that denies or destroys life, all that negates the interconnectedness of all life and every human life.

71 Cf. R. Radford Ruether, 'The Call of Women in the Church Today' in V.R. Mollenkott, ed., *Women of Faith in Dialogue*, Crossroad, New York 1987, (77–88), 86.

Thus feminism and peace-activism, or motherhood and peace-activism, cannot be seen as separate from one another. Women's faith-based organizations in Nigeria insist on women's primary call to motherhood, and they mobilize great talent, energy, compassion and funds within their own faith communities to better enable women fulfil this role. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World's Religions proposes seeing the entire world as constituting an extended family.[72] Women's faith-based groups would have so much to offer if they moved their members to recognize and assume their responsibility as mothers for the extended human family in today's Nigeria.

As well as being more actively engaged in peace-building themselves, they could use their organizations to encourage their religious communities to be committed to peaceful and progressive religious and ethnic co-existence rather than furthering those conditions which continuously destroy life in the region.

i) Private-Public Divide

A prevalent private-public divide in Nigerian society relegates women's rights in the domestic realm to the private sector. Hence they are accorded privacy and respect by the state, leaving decisions about women's status in the family to the determination of the individual homes or the communities in which the women live. This division has made the situation of the Nigerian women more critical as their rights within the domestic realm are very often unprotected.[73] I have already discussed the impor-

72 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World Religions', Art. 16, n. 7: 'Everyone shall promote the outlook that the entire world constitutes a single extended family.' in J. Runzo – *al.*, ed., *Human Rights and Responsibilities*, 141–147. This Declaration was prepared in 1998, on the 50th anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights by the Faculty of Religious Studies of McGill University, Montreal, and was discussed and revised in other world conferences of religions. It was an attempt at a global ethics based on the world religions as is proposed by theologians of a soteriocentric religious pluralism.

73 H.J. Abdullah, 'Religious Revivalism', 167–172.

tance Muslim women therefore place on faithful Islamic practice, on the codification of Muslim Personal Law and on the *shari'a* as a means of protecting women's domestic rights and of ensuring that family matters are a matter of public debate. They deny the possibility of any dichotomy between public and private or between state and religious discourse. I have also spoken about the need for Christian women's groups to play a greater role in influencing customary laws and practices so that the elders in their communities have an awareness of women's equality and their rights, and the international treaties and Nigerian positive law might be respected.

The separation of public and private realms gives rise to another set of theological questions that causes division in Nigeria and needs to be a subject of dialogue because of its political and social implications in a democratic nation. This concerns sacred law. Historically the Christian churches have easily accepted the difference between God's laws, which are moral and spiritual, and secular laws which govern the everyday life of people and which must be reviewed regularly in accordance with the times. The Islamic view of the divine law or *shari'a* is quite different. It is the *shari'a*, the divine law, that moulds society and not society the divine law. Few Christians sympathize with Muslims who wish to enshrine in legislation the laws of their religion. Yet, both Christians and Muslims in their faith-based groups call for a return to the religious law in terms of social morality. All believe religious law must be followed, but while Christians feel this is a private affair, or at least one that must not be confused with the political stage, Muslims do not see that it is possible to separate the two.

Thus, a major obstacle to Muslim-Christian understanding is the concept of divine law versus secular law, which also involves the whole idea of a religious as distinct from a civil society, as well as religious and secular political authority. Without the development of mutual respect in the understanding of divine law in relation to secular law, genuine respect for each other's perspective and the reaching of accord on certain basic issues will not be possible. This question is, of course, also historical, since many Muslims claim that the separation of Christianity from politics in the West is only outward, and that the secular or common

law in Nigeria is actually a Christian law. Dialogue on these questions is therefore necessary.

j) Missionary Activity

Missionary activity is very much a part of women's faith-based groups. Many Christian churches look to these groups as their strongest evangelizing force, while Muslim women's groups emphasize the importance of *da'wa*.

Muslims believe Christian missionary activity is often combined with cultural and political domination by western forces and that the spread of Christianity among many northern tribes was due to Christians having offered education and the material attractions of western civilization. It was also due to the fact, Muslims claim, that the colonizers themselves were Christians and thus they helped to establish a nation where Christianity, its structures and its values dominated, while Islam, its practices, laws and even language were undermined and curtailed.

Christians, on the contrary, claim the Muslim political domination in the north has and does curtail their missionary activity in the region. The questions resulting from the earlier close association between missionary activity, colonialism and what some have called cultural imperialism, as well as the autonomy and freedom given to the Muslim rulers through the policy of Indirect Rule continue today to be a cause of conflict.

Given the distrust between the two religious communities, it seems important that women in dialogue share on their motives for missionary work and seek to overcome some of the existing distrust. This sharing will also be an opportunity to discuss whether one should see mission in terms of expansion or in terms of authentic living of religious truths and values. Already Muslim women, as part of the Islamization process in the country, see authentic living of Islam as the main aim of their mission (or *da'wa*). Christian women, however, see it largely in terms of expansion, going to rural areas to preach to those who practice Traditional African Religions or seeking to draw Christians from other denominations to their church. This sharing with Muslim women would enable them deepen their sense of the church's mission as sign and instrument of the Kingdom, as called

to promote Gospel values in society. Furthermore, it could help to bring about a transformation in their communities in terms of how the religion is practised. Muslim women also, through their sharing and dialogue, would see the importance of introducing a less exclusivist approach into the Muslim community.

Beyond the Nigerian case-study – Some added reflections

Women and official Interreligious Dialogue Encounters

It is largely recognized that male religious leaders can no longer legitimately voice the concerns of women, nor speak on their behalf as though women could not speak for themselves. The Vatican as well as other bodies of religious leadership are usually careful today to appoint a woman to speak publicly on women's issues. Yet, when interreligious encounters are held at an official level, women continue to be notable by their absence. This is primarily due to the fact that women are rarely admitted to leadership of religious bodies and to women's previous lack of access to theological studies in most religions.

The well-known phrase, referred to by Pope John Paul in *Redemptoris Missio*, 'the people of today listen more to the witnesses than to the masters and if they listen to the masters it is because they are witnesses' (RMi 42, EN 41) highlights the importance of witness as a primary path through which the Gospel message is proclaimed. The lack of women in Church representations during interreligious encounters, and similarly the lack of women representatives of other religions, speaks more to the world of the gender awareness of that religious tradition than any amount of words will do. This applies to interreligious encounters of religious leaders in Nigeria as also at other national or international levels.

I believe this is an important point that needs to be taken into consideration when encounters of religious leaders are organized. Since women are, as yet, rarely leaders of faith communities, leaders of women's faith-based groups should also be invited to participate. It would be hoped

that in the not too distant future, women could participate as leaders of both men and women.

Gender Issues and Interreligious Dialogue

Not only are women themselves visibly absent at interreligious encounters of religious leaders, but gender issues have been given little treatment in theological interreligious discussions.[74] Most focus has been on the contribution of religious thought to the suppression or oppression of the Other, defining that otherness in terms of religious adherence; little attention has been given to how within religious thought woman has also been viewed as Other. Participants in such theological dialogue are challenged by feminist thought to address the insights raised by today's gender debates, particularly that relating to religious symbols, rituals, teachings and structures and to look at how these contribute to women's oppression.[75] Addressing this question should not be a rejection of the religion or even of its symbols and rituals but rather a constructive criticism that looks at what can be done today about those aspects that have affected women or any other group in a negative way.

Salvific dialogue begins from the lived reality of the poor

Rita Gross, who is very sceptical about the theological conversations which take place in the name of interreligious encounters and which struggle with the question of the diversity of religions, suggests that learning to live together is more important than learning to think alike religiously.[76]

74 As was pointed out in the 'Critical moment in interreligious dialogue' conference organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva, 7–9th June 2005.

75 U. King, 'Feminism: The Missing Dimension in the Dialogue of Religions' in J. D'Arcy May, ed., *Pluralism and the Religions: The Theological and Political Dimensions*, Cassell, London 1998, 40–55.

76 R. Gross, 'Excuse Me, but What's the Question?' in P. Knitter, ed., *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration,* Orbis Books, New York 2005, (75–87), 82.

Religious scholars can talk forever about finding unity in their diverse theological concepts of truth and salvation, but if they do not reflect on how their proposed salvific paths might actually be contributing to injustice and suffering, how salvific can either their teaching or their dialogue be? The understanding of salvation cannot remain in the conceptual language of the afterlife. Rather it must be based on and begin from the experience of this life, how each religion contributes on earth to salvation/liberation, as understood within its own tradition, and how each religion contributes to salvation/liberation on earth in the understanding of the other religion. Beginning with a concern for the poor and oppressed we can enter into a deeper understanding of God, humanity, and human relations. To discuss how religions as practised and as taught contribute to the fullness of life, the human dignity of all people including women, will lead to much fuller and more beneficial discussions on how salvation is to be understood and how the Gospel, the Islamic message, or any other, is truly universal and salvific for humanity. Such discussions will also lead the way to renewal and transformation of the religions themselves.

The readiness to enter into sincere dialogue about the limitations of religious teaching and practice when facing as equal partners those whom this teaching has previously excluded and oppressed involves a humble recognition that the path towards truth has not been completed but has yet to be continued. It involves not only seeking the truth but also admitting the truth, being truthful in a spirit of charity and love. Thus, it is salvific in itself no matter what the outcome of the dialogue will be, since it already realizes that union of truth, charity and understanding that dialogue aims to achieve (ES 82). However, it cannot stop here since, while it is a salvific experience, it also anticipates that salvation which is yet to be fully realized and towards which the world is moving: God's justice which we are committed to making visible in the world. Thus although salvific, it moves to praxis for justice, for the Kingdom of communion and right relations. It cannot simply be a salvific experience of admitting its sins. Rather it must actually move to salvific praxis which involves seeking in practice to overcome the sin and living the truth as it is newly understood.

If this dialogue is to be sincere and salvific in itself, it involves humility and meekness from all concerned, including women, who although recognizing the sins traditional religious interpretations have committed against them, do not approach the dialogue table with anger and bitterness, seeking only to offend (ES 83). Rather they come to the dialogue table to share and to listen, to be transformed and to construct.

Interreligious dialogue of feminist theologians

Interreligious dialogue of feminist theologians has discussed gender issues and the question of rights in a more experiential and critical sense. There are many studies today on religions from a gender perspective and many books have been edited with papers given during women's interreligious conferences by women theologians from different traditions.[77]

The universal quest for women's equality inherent in these gender debates does not seek an accord of all religious traditions on women's rights or on family and social structures. Interreligious dialogue by feminists on gender issues does not aim at establishing a universal declaration of women's rights based on religious teachings. What it does seek is that, as a result of the dialogue, religious teachings become instruments of greater gender equality in the world.

The fact that today women in most religions are struggling with issues of gender is itself a challenge to the whole concept of religion. As

77 For example: P. Cooey – *al.*, ed., *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations*; J. Holme – J. Bowker, ed., *Women in Religion*, Continuum, London and New York 1994; U. King, ed., *Religion & Gender*, Basil Blackwell Ltd., Oxford 1995; J.H. Bayes – N. Tohidi, ed., *Globalization, Gender and Religion: The Politics of Women's Rights in Catholic and Muslim Contexts*, Palgrave, New York 2001; E. Castelli, ed., *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader*, Palgrave, New York 2001; Y. Yazbeck Haddad – J.L. Esposito, ed., *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity and Islam,* University Press of Florida, 2001; D.M. Juschka, ed., *Feminism in the Study of Religion: A Reader*, Continuum, London/New York 2001; R. Radford Ruether, ed., *Gender, Ethnicity & Religion: Views from the Other Side*, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis 2002; U. King – T. Beattie, ed., *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, Continuum, London/New York 2004.

we have seen, some women have abandoned institutionalised religion altogether. However, there are also women in most of the world religions who challenge traditional gender thought patterns from within their own traditions, convinced that it is possible to remain faithful to that tradition and at the same time move towards gender equality. This warrants the belief that it is not at all unrealistic to hope that the core teachings of most religions are flexible enough to absorb the basic principles of gender equality. Women are convinced that transformation of their religious tradition is possible because they have already experienced the sustaining power of that tradition, having lived it from within. Thus they believe that their religion itself is not the problem; rather the religions are called to growth by being examined with a new approach to gender, based on gender equality on the ethical, spiritual and social levels: respecting each one's identity and difference while also respecting fully this fundamental principle (with its diverse nuances) on which, if we are to listen to the feminist theologians who write from within them, most religions agree.

Feminist theology on the margin

Feminist theological responses to other religions have not entered mainstream interreligious circles simply because as I have stated, feminist theologians show little interest in the debates of religious pluralism and have not developed a theological response to this issue.[78] The challenge remains, I believe, for these feminist theologians to bring their issues and perspective into mainstream interreligious dialogue forums rather than to solely feminist interreligious forums. Only then can we hope that their contributions will be more assimilated into the larger theological reflection.

Rita Gross has also expressed concern about the lack of interest that feminist theologians show in a theology of religions. She sees this as

78 Jeannine Hill Fletcher's recent contribution is the only serious attempt as yet to do this and being a recent publication it remains to be seen what effect it will have on stimulating other feminist responses. (*Monopoly on Salvation*).

contrary to the feminist idea of being open to difference in all its forms, and she also sees it as marginalizing feminist theology in the academy and in the world: 'If we want to change the world, we can hardly do so by retreating to our feminist enclaves and never seriously encountering the rest of the religious world.'[79] In effect, such an attitude by feminist theologians could be interpreted as being exclusivist in itself. However, it must also be remembered that feminist discourse is not largely welcomed in pontifical or other religious universities; thus, it is also mainline discourse that oftentimes chooses to marginalize feminist discourse.

Does Feminist Theology offer something new?

According to John Cobb, what is most valuable and interesting in religions is not what they have in common but what they can offer to each other as new.[80] The question that can be asked is: what does feminist discourse have to offer to traditional discourse within the religious traditions; what is so new in women's perspectives and experiences that has not been considered?

Personally, I do not like this rather condescending question but I choose to finish this reflection with it since it seems to sum up rather well the reason we have such difficulties with developing an adequate approach to other religions and to otherness in general. The tendency is to try to define that otherness so that we can clearly see what benefit we might derive from it. We ask those who challenge us to define themselves, to clarify what it is they object to in our approach to them, and to propose an adequate alternative. Or we seek to elaborate a definition of them that we feel might be more adequate considering the challenge they have made us aware of. It has been suggested that by developing traditional theological concepts women develop a theology of Woman that defines woman in a way that women find more acceptable. Similarly we seek clear definitions of other religions so that we can see how we can benefit from

79 R. Gross, 'Feminist Theology as a Theology of Religions', 76.

80 J. Cobb, *Transforming Christianity and the World,* Orbis Books, New York 1999, 105.

them and how they fit into our own understanding of truth. We look for universal definitions according to clearly established categories rather than allowing human beings to develop in authentic relationships with each one's hybrid identity. I believe that it is only in allowing relationships to develop, with the other as a person rather than as an identified category, can we find what is new and life-giving for both of us.

In the case of religions, I believe it is not beneficial to seek one adequate theology of religions that will be applicable to all religions and to all people. Rather, this theology must be allowed to develop between religious people in their own local contexts, just as individual men and women must be allowed to define themselves as a unique gift as they grow together in their ever-changing and ever-becoming identity.

As a Christian I would see this as responding much more adequately to the commandment to love one's neighbour as oneself. It would respond to the commandment to love God with all one's heart; God who is Trinity and exists always in a continuous communion of equal and complementary relationship, in whose image humanity is created and is called to become. It is through witnessing to such relationships and through promoting such relationships that Christians can fulfil their mission to grow in knowledge of the love of God which is beyond all knowledge (Eph. 3:15–21), to make visible the saving presence and reign of God 'on earth as it is in heaven', and to bring all creation to completion in Christ, the unique and universal revelation of God as gentle, vulnerable, self-giving love.

Conclusion

Interreligious dialogue often remains in the realms of academia, removed from concrete contexts and from the lived reality of the adherents of the religions under discussion. This chapter presents a concrete example of how dialogue might be developed so as to become a transforming and liberative force in the actual lives of a fractured and suffering community. I have suggested how this dialogue can be entered into and lived not just by an elite few but by the numerous women in Northern Nigeria who are organized in their faith-based groups. I have identified those questions

they might discuss so that, despite their lack of theological preparation, they can move towards a deeper analysis and transformation of the cultural, social and political dynamics which shape the dominant religious discourse.

Feminist discourse on a global scale, with its awareness of the limitations within religious traditions as well as its insights on and difficulties with the questions of difference, sameness and otherness, can help to situate interreligious dialogue and the theology of religious pluralism in the concrete lives of religious adherents. As this chapter has shown, conclusive, universal answers are difficult if not impossible to find. The struggle of authentic and life-giving human relationships continues. It may be time for us to accept that and to recognize that all relationships, of individuals and of religions, can only be understood and developed on a local, personalized level, in the concrete lived experience of human beings, where God speaks and human beings respond, through and with one another. That these relationships will be life-giving for those concerned and will contribute to the common good, can only be understood, from a Christian perspective, in the light of the difficult but basic commandment to love.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria in recent years[1]

Date	Location	State	Principle Source
Oct. 1977	ABU Zaria	Kaduna	Muslim/Christian students
May 1978	Kaduna, Zaria	Kaduna	'I found it' (Jesus Salvation) Christian Students' Demonstration
May 1978	Kaduna, Zaria	Kaduna	'Islam Only' Muslim Students' Demonstration
1980	Kano City	Kano	Maitatsine Riots
Oct. 1982	Maiduguri	Borno	Bulumkutu Riots
Oct. 1982	Rigasa	Kaduna	Maitatsine Riots
Nov. 1984	Gombe	Bauchi	Maitatsine Riots
1986	Ilorin	Kwara	Palm Sunday Conflicts
Mar. 1987	Kafanchan	Kaduna	College of Education
Mar. 1987	Zaria, Ikara	Kaduna	Spill over from Kafanchan
Mar. 1987	Funtua, Kaduna	Kaduna	Spill over from Kafanchan
Mar. 1987	Kankia, Makarfi	Kaduna	Spill over from Kafanchan
June 1990	Bauchi	Bauchi	Muslim/Christian students
Oct. 1991	Kano	Kano	Bonnke Crusade Uprising
1991	Katsina	Katsina	Gov. Madaki v. Muslim Students
Apr. 1991	Tafawa Balewa	Bauchi	Christian v. Muslim community
Apr. 1991	Bauchi town	Bauchi	Tafawa Balewa spill over

1 Taken from U.M. Ashafa – J.M. Wuye, *The Pastor and the Imam*, Ibrash Publications Centre Ltd., Lagos 1999 (87–88), and from J.H. Boer, *Nigeria's decades of Blood: Studies in Christian and Muslim Relations*, Stream Christian Publishers, Jos 2003, with recent updates added by myself.

Feb./ Mar. 1992	Zangon Kataf town	Kaduna	Christian v. Muslim community – crisis ref. market site plus Sayawa chiefdom
1992	Jalingo	Taraba	Muslim/Christian students
1993	Katsina, Kaduna	Katsina, Kaduna	*Fun Times* newspaper article – riots
1994	Jos	Plateau	Indigenes v. settlers
Dec. 1994	Kano	Kano	Gideon Akaluka saga
1994	Tafawa Balewa	Bauchi	Christian v. Muslim conflicts – ref. Sayawa Chiefdom
May 1995	Sabon Gari Market, Kano	Kano	Igbo and Hausa (Christian and Muslim) traders crisis
1996	Ilorin	Kwara	Islamic religious knowledge teaching in Govt. approved Mission Schools
June 1996	Kaduna	Kaduna	Kaduna Polytechnic students riots
1996	Kafanchan	Kaduna	Muslim v. Christian community conflict
1996	Kaduna/Zaria	Kaduna	Kafanchan spill over
May 1997	Jos	Plateau	Birom v. Hausa – Christian v. Muslim community conflict
1997	Kafanchan	Kaduna	Christian v. Muslim community conflict
Dec. 1998	Maiduguri	Borno	Muslims against Government decision to allow the teaching of Christian religious knowledge in public schools
July 1999	Kano	Kano	Reprisal attack on Yoruba Christians for killing of Muslims during Oro Festival in Sagamu, Ogun State
Feb./May 2000	Kaduna	Kaduna	*Shari 'a* Crisis
Sept 2001	Jos	Plateau	Appointment of Muslim as state coordinator of National Poverty Eradication Programme/Christian woman passing Muslims at prayer
Oct 2001	Kano	Kano	Reprisal attack on Christians for Afghanistan bombing
Oct. 2001	Tafawa Balewa	Bauchi	Continuation of Community conflict

May 2002	Jos city; Langtang-Wase-Pensham localities	Plateau	Indigenes v. Settlers (Christians v. Muslims) community crisis
Sept. 2002	Federal College of Education, Zaria	Kaduna	Student Union elections
Nov. 2002	Kaduna	Kaduna	*This Day* newspaper Report in reference to Ms. World Contest
Feb./May 2004	Yelwa-Shendam localities	Plateau	Fulani v. Tarok farmers (Muslims v. Christians; indigenes v. settlers)
May 2004	Kano	Kano	Reprisal attack for killing of Muslims in Plateau
Nov. 2004	Makarfi	Kaduna	Christian hotelier accused of desecrating Qur'an
2006	Maiduguri, Kontagora, Bauchi, Katsina	Borno, Niger, Bauchi, Katsina	Reaction to Danish cartoons ref. Muhammad/ Reaction to President Obasanjo's announcement that he would stand for election in 2007/ In Bauchi, a teacher accused of desecrating the Qur'an

Appendix 2

Aims and Objectives of the Muslim Sisters' Organization (MSo)[2]

1. Encouraging and Propagating Islam

- To assist Muslim sisters to live according to the tenets of Islam as found in the original sources of the *Shari 'a* (that is the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah)
- To raise the level of consciousness of Muslim sisters in order to combat undesirable influences (e.g. in fashion, literature, etc)
- To find ways and means of mobilizing Muslim sisters to play their own part in the establishment of Islam in this country
- To make positive impact on national matters, both religious and secular, with a view to safe-guarding the interest of Islam.

2 *MSO Constitutions*, n. 4.

2. Unity
- To unite Muslim sisters in Nigeria so as to enable them to speak with one voice by acting and making decisions together
- To serve as a liaison body between Muslim sisters and the Government (Federal, State and Local Government)
- To do away with sects, ethnic and other divisive factors which sometimes keep Muslims apart, and encourage close ties between Muslim sisters in all parts of the country
- To represent Nigerian Muslim sisters at international levels

3. Educational and Social Development
- To encourage the establishment of classes and institutions for sisters' Islamic education and literacy
- To provide a forum where social problems of Muslim sisters can be discussed
- To assist Muslim sisters in achieving self-fulfillment according to the tenets of Islam
- To enlighten and educate Muslim sisters in the country on both national and international issues affecting them in particular and the Muslim *Umma* in general
- To develop Tarbiyyah (child upbringing) of Muslim children in the country
- To encourage charitable activities in compliance with the tenets of Islam

Appendix 3

Aims and Objectives of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN)

Fundamental Objective[3]

Recognizing its position as the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria, the organization affirms its loyalty to the Islamic Faith and its ardent committal to the progress of Islam. It commends to its members, as worthy Muslim objectives, the upholding of the basic principles of Islam, namely the Unity of God and the brotherhood of mankind, as taught by all the Prophets and preserved in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

Aims and Objectives[4]

a) To create an awareness among Muslim women of the true teachings of Islam in the Qur'an and Sunnah, and to encourage women to live in accordance with those teachings.
b) To promote and propagate the cause of Islam in Nigeria and beyond.
c) To educate Muslim women in their duties and rights.
d) To make positive impact on national matters both religious and secular with a view of safeguarding the interest of Islam.
e) To unite Muslim women's organizations in Nigeria so as to enable them to speak with one voice by acting and making decisions together.
f) To serve as a liaison body between Muslim women and the Government (Federal and State) of Nigeria.

3 Article 6, *FOMWAN Constitution*, revised version, effective from 1st January 2000.
4 Article 7, *FOMWAN Constitution*, revised version, effective from 1st January 2000.

g) To do away with sectarianism, ethnic and other divisive factors which sometimes keep Muslims apart, and encourage close ties between Muslim women in all parts of the country.
h) To represent Nigerian Muslim women at international levels.
i) To encourage the establishment of classes and institutions for women's and children's Islamic education and literacy.
j) To provide a forum where social problems of Muslim women can be discussed.
k) To enlighten and educate Muslim women in the country on both National and International issues affecting them in particular and the Muslim *Umma* in general.
l) To initiate and cooperate with Government and non-Governmental Organizations on programmes, which are not repulsive to Islam, designed to improve the health of women and children from infancy.
m) To establish and encourage female education, including literacy classes, general education, Islamic education and vocational classes.
n) To encourage the proper upbringing (Tarbiyyah) of Muslim children and youth in accordance with the tenets of Islam.
o) To initiate the involvement of Muslim women in income-generating activities while at the same time maintaining and upholding the ideals, principles and virtues of Islam.
p) To carry out fundraising activities for the FOMWAN projects and activities at home and abroad.
q) To associate or affiliate with other National and International Islamic Associations or Organizations which would be of mutual benefit to all parties.
r) To cooperate with any other National and International Islamic Associations or Organizations in all legitimate Islamic activities at home and abroad.
s) To assist in coordinating the activities of affiliate member Muslim women's Associations or Organizations or groups in pursuance of the aims and objectives of this Federation.
t) To establish a permanent National Secretariat of this Federation in Abuja, the Federal Capital of Nigeria.

u) To carry out any other activities and/or functions which will be reasonably incidental to any of its other aims and objectives.
v) To abstain and restrain itself from participating directly or indirectly in any political activities at home or abroad. As a friendly and religious Federation, it is therefore politically non-partisan.çw) To encourage and foster the founding of Associations of Muslim women within the Islamic community of Nigeria.

Appendix 4

Communication of the MSO International Islamic Conference on Women, Kano, April 1985[5]

At the International Islamic Conference on Women, organized by the Muslim Sisters' Organization of Nigeria, held at the Government Girls' College, Dala, Kano, from 4th–8th April 1985, we, the members, participants, and organizers of the conference, hereby issue this communiqué:

We are grateful to Allah the Most High for making it possible for the conference to be convened and for helping it to its conclusive end.

We have observed with grave concern the inadequate education of Muslim women which explains the deplorable conditions they face today. In view of the fact that the Qur'an and Sunna of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, Peace of God be upon him, have expressly made the search for knowledge incumbent on every Muslim, man or woman. We are therefore calling on all Muslims, parents and husbands alike, and Muslim women in particular, to mount a serious extensive education campaign to efface this cancerous worm that inhibits the true understanding of Islam and its principles and, by extension, an inhibition to the Islamic process.

We condemn in its entirety the attitudes of some parents whereby marriage, even in Muslim communities, has been made a commercial enterprise, thereby making it very difficult for honest young men and

5 Published in C. Coles – B. Mack, ed., *Hausa Women*, 105–106.

women to get married and thus paving the way for corruption and prostitution. We also condemn tribal considerations in Muslim marriages, believing that any marriage contracted on considerations other than Islam is doomed to fail.

Without any reservation, we condemn in totality the flirtation of the Nigerian Ulama (Muslim religious leaders) with every successive regime that comes to power in this country. This attitude has therefore deprived them of the role of the custodians of the religion of Islam, thus making them part of the oppressors who wickedly exploit the deprived masses of this country. We therefore call upon them to take up their responsibility to protect the oppressed by forbidding what is wrong and enjoining what is right. They should speak against any form of injustice no matter who is concerned.

We have noted that women's liberation movements, with their history traced to Western countries, have no relevance in Muslim communities, as Allah has granted Muslim women all the rights they need, be they political, legal, economic, or social. However, we are not happy over the attitudes of Muslim men who ignore Islamic injunctions with respect to women's rights. We therefore call on both Muslim men and women to join hands together to allow women to exercise the rights Islam has granted them, as contained in the Qur'an and Sunna, in order to save the society from looking elsewhere for salvation.

Appendix 5

Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), International Seminar on Family and Society, 24th–27th July, 1986, (17th –20th Dhul Qida 1406), held at Queen's College, Yaba, Lagos

Communiqué[6]

1. The aim of family planning which is permissible in Islam should be geared towards spacing rather than the limiting of child birth and should only be practiced with the full consent of the spouses. All the schools of Islamic jurisprudence recognize the practice of *coitus interruptus* as a permissible contraceptive method. Therefore, contemporary methods which have the same principles are also permissible, provided they are harmless to either of the spouses. The methods that are permissible are the safe period, the condom or male sheath, and the diaphragm. However, methods such as oral contraceptives, inter-uterine devices (IUD), injectables e.g. depo-provera, castration, sterilization and abortion, are not permissible.
2. We condemn the indiscriminate advertising of contraceptive devices. We believe that failure on the part of the government to control the indiscriminate adverts and application of these devices poses both medical and moral problems for the society.
3. We have observed with concern the absence of clear-cut values that prompted government to advocate population control. The government should enlighten the public on the optimum population for a country with Nigeria's land mass, especially where accurate census figures are not available. We believe that the country's problem is not that emanating from overpopulation, but that of re-distribution. Provision of basic amenities and job opportunities in the rural areas would encourage population re-distribution.
4. We view with concern the grave consequences arising from child marriages in some parts of the country. We wish to remind Muslims

6 Published in B. Yusuf, ed., *Islam, Health and*, 49–51.

that acquisition of knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim, male or female. We therefore call on the Islamic scholars to educate the generality of our people about the undesirability of child marriage, especially as it turns out to be against the interest of minors.

5. We abhor the practice whereby Muslim students are being forced to observe Christian devotional prayers in the educational institutions in some parts of the country. We, therefore, call on the government to put an immediate stop to this practice, in line with section 35 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which allows freedom of worship. We urge the government to make provision for the teaching of Islamic religious knowledge in institutions where such facilities do not exist.
6. We are aware that in some parts of the country, Muslims are deprived of the opportunity to observe the obligatory Friday prayers. We, therefore, call on the government to ensure that institutions of learning are closed at 12 noon, while offices should close at 1 o'clock to enable Muslims fulfil this religious obligation.
7. The Conference noted with regret the recurrent unrest in our institutions of higher learning. We view it as a manifestation of the moral decadence in our society. While we hope the University authorities will approach such problems with maturity, we urge all parties involved to give the measures undertaken by the government a chance to work.

   We welcome the positive move by the Muslim students of various Institutions to halt the plan by a few dissident members to trigger fresh crisis. We recommend such bold efforts at enjoining what is good and forbidding what is wrong.
8. We wish to draw the attention of the government to another crisis presently brewing in the University of Ibadan over the presence of a cross in front of a mosque. We believe that a timely intervention by the government will forestall a major religious upheaval.
9. We note with concern the deplorable state of the nation's economy. We observe that this is due not to lack of resources of all kinds, but to our moral problem of materialism and dishonesty. We therefore urge the Government to tackle this problem at its roots in the following ways:
   a) To make the study of moral teachings in the context of Religious Studies a compulsory subject, not only at Primary and Junior Secondary levels, but also at Senior Secondary level – the age at which students are forming their moral attitudes.
   b) To do away with usury as the basis of the economy, starting with the permission for the establishment of Islamic (interest-free) banks.
   c) To study and implement other features of the Islamic economic system so as to ensure honest trading and business through supervision and workable penalties and abuses.
   d) To ensure that the rich are adequately taxed for the benefit of the poor.

Appendix 6

Sixth Annual Conference of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), held at Jos between 13th–16th Jumada Thani 1412 A.H (19th–22nd November 1991)

Communiqué[7]

In the name of Allah, the Beneficient, the Merciful.
Muslim women from all affiliate organizations of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) met in Jos from November 19th–22nd 1991 for the Federation's annual conference, the theme of which was 'Health in the Family: The Islamic Approach'. Many papers were presented by eminent scholars and experts in the health sector. The participants resolve as follows:

7 Published in B. Yusuf, ed., *Islam, Health and*, 107–109.

Health Care

1. We note with concern the pervasive ignorance of basic health knowledge among the population, especially women. This has increased the cases of preventable diseases thereby escalating the cost of healthcare since more resources are channelled into the more expensive curative medicine. In addition, many lives that could have been saved are lost due to ignorance of first aid and other emergency measures. We believe that health for all by the year 2000 can only be achieved by adopting the following measures:
   a) Health Education must be taught as a core subject in all institutions of learning.
   b) The National Commission for Adult Literacy, Non-formal and Nomadic Education should include the teaching of health education in its curriculum.
   c) The Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should also include health education in their programme to complement government's efforts.
2. Participants note the endemic poverty, diseases and ignorance among the Muslim population. These could be alleviated through proper collection and distribution of *zakat* and channelling it into provision of social services. We urge wealthy Muslim organizations and *'Ulama'* to pursue this with the urgency and vigour it requires. We also call on Muslim philanthropists to establish hospitals to promote healthcare as an instrument of *da 'wa*.

Sexual Harassment

3. We are disturbed by the several cases of sexual harassment of women reported at work and in institutions of learning. We urge government to treat such cases as criminal offences, and bring all culprits to book. We observe with regret the increasing rate of teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases which are manifestations of the moral bankruptcy of our society. The remedy for these must include teaching of religious studies as a compulsory subject in all institutions. We note with concern that some women who adopt the modest dress – hijab are ridiculed and intimidated at school and at work. This in our view contradicts the government's desire to promote decency and stem the scourge of AIDS.

Sectarian Crises

4. We note with concern the increasing wave of sectarian crises in the country. Participants believe that the country needs a peaceful setting particularly in this critical era of transition to civil rule. We therefore call on Muslims to exercise restraint in reacting to provocation so as not to provide a cover for hooligans who are out to kill, loot and destroy property.
5. We call on Christian leaders to desist from making provocative statements that could lead to a breakdown of law and order.
6. We condemn in its totality the role being played by some media organizations that distort news and falsify facts when reporting sectarian crises. We appeal to them to uphold the tenets of their profession which emphasizes objectivity in news reporting.

Mission Schools

7. The participants consider as unacceptable the threat by some Governors-elect to return schools to missionaries. We view this as an attempt to evangelize education after governments of various states have invested public funds in these institutions.

Appendix 7

National Conference on Priorities in the Establishment of Shari`a *System held at Government Girls' Arabic Secondary School, Gusau, Zamfara State by the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) from 11th–14th Muharram 1422 A.H. (5th–8th April, 2001)*

Communiqué[8]

The Conference was attended by delegates from twenty states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Prominent scholars presented papers. At the end of the conference the following observations and recommendations were made:

1. We recommend the efforts of Zamfara State Government for spearheading the implementation of *Shari'a* in Nigeria and those states that followed suit. We also urge other states to do the same while assuring them of our full support.
2. That *Shari'a*, a divine and comprehensive set of rules, is a fundamental right of every Muslim that regulates every aspect of his or her life.
3. That *Shari'a* goes beyond criminal offences and punishment but encompasses other social benefits which affect all aspects of life.
4. FOMWAN notes with dismay the negative and mischievous media reports on *Shari'a* which are capable of causing disaffection. We, therefore, call for fair and objective reporting from the media for peaceful co-existence.
5. That successful implementation of *Shari'a* depends on a fully enlightened, educated, socio-economically enhanced society with exemplary leadership. We call on all states to pay attention to the basic needs of their people as a necessary pre-requisite for implementation of *Shari'a*.

8 Published in *The Muslim Woman*, issue n. 8, 2003, 25

6. We reaffirm that *Shari'a* is not oppressive to women; on the contrary, women are better protected and elevated under it than under any other system. We, therefore, note with dismay the various attempts made by some women organizations to speak on behalf of Nigerian Muslim women on the issue of *Shari'a*. We reaffirm that FOMWAN as the umbrella organization for all Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria is the recognized voice for Muslim women.

Appendix 8

19th Annual National Conference of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), held at Federal Government College, Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria, from 26th–29th August, 2004

Communiqué[9]

Preamble

The Federation of Muslim Woman's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) held its 19th Annual National Conference at the Federal Government College, Maiduguri, Borno State from 26th August to 29th August, 2004. The keynote address focused on the theme of the conference which was 'Citizens and Governance: The Islamic Perspective'. Other papers presented were on Human Rights, Promoting Accountability and Transparency and the Role of Three Arms of Government in Promoting Good Governance, among others.

About two thousand delegates from 34 states of the federation, including the federal capital territory Abuja, participated at the conference.

At the end of the deliberations, the following observations and recommendations were made:

9 Distributed during the Conference.

1. FOMWAN is disturbed by the high level of moral decadence in the society which has led to corruption and violation of human rights.
2. FOMWAN supports the implementation of *Shari'a* in Nigeria but frowns at the publicity given to the punitive aspects of the *Shari'a* law rather than the social justice the law provides.
3. FOMWAN notes with dismay the authoritative approach and lack of consultation in decision making expected in a democratic system.
4. FOMWAN observes with great concern the incessant religious, political and communal crises in various parts of the country.

Recommendations

1. FOMWAN calls on our leaders to be conscious of their responsibilities, transparent, and accountable.
2. FOMWAN pleads with our leaders and citizens to be tolerant and fair on the *Shari'a* issue.
3. FOMWAN urges government to be attentive and responsive to the call of the citizens.
4. FOMWAN calls on government to intensify efforts on peace building process for peaceful co-existence among the populace.
5. That government should make the democratic system in the country a participatory one.
6. That government should take the education of the citizens with all seriousness by funding education at all levels.

Appendix 9

National Workshop on Women Under Shari`a *in Nigeria organized by the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) in association with the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), held in the Gubabi Royal Hotel, Abuja, the 22nd–25th July, 2004*

Communiqué[10]

The Workshop was attended by participants from ten (10) *Shari'a*-implementing States and Abuja. Prominent scholars and human rights activists presented papers and at its conclusion, the following observations and recommendations were made:

1. That *Shari'a* is a divine, comprehensive path to righteousness for all Muslims and provides for rights, duties and obligations of the individual, the society and the State;
2. That the rights provided under the primary sources of Islamic Law, being the Qur'an and the *Hadith*, entrench and secure fundamental and universal human rights norms for Muslims the world over;
3. That in the development of Islamic Law, variations in interpretations and cultural practices have had a significant impact in our communities, that have adversely affected the rights of Muslim women;
4. That *Shari'a* is not oppressive to women but on the contrary, women are best protected under its provisions than under any other legal system;
5. That the perspective of Muslim women has not been brought to bear in the implementation of the *Shari'a* in the States, which is curiously in direct contrast with the manner in which the active participation of women in matters of State was valued and encouraged from the early days in the time of the Prophet (SAW);

10 Distributed during Conference.

6. That the *Shari 'a* extends beyond criminal offences and sanctions, but also includes the provision of social benefits and services, public welfare and substantive justice for all its citizens;
7. That the high prevalence of ignorance of Islamic rights, duties and obligations afforded under the *Shari 'a* is responsible for the gaps in the implementation of the *Shari 'a* in Nigeria;
8. That the procedure and Institutions adopted in Nigeria for the implementation of the *Shari 'a* have inadvertently contributed to the poor realization of the benefits of the *Shari 'a* legal system for all its citizens; especially women;
9. That the leadership and the structures established in the *Shari 'a*-implementing States have a duty to discharge their responsibilities with the fear of Allah and to ensure that the rights of women, as divinely ordained, are secured and protected in the true spirit of the *Shari 'a*.

ACCORDINGLY, The National Workshop recommends the following:

1. That concerted efforts should be made for the massive enlightenment and awareness, of men and women, of the rights entrenched under the *Shari 'a* in our communities, especially those rights that secure adequate protection for women;
2. That women, especially, should seek for knowledge in order to enhance their capacity to devise effective strategies and actively participate in the processes that will secure the enjoyment of their divine rights under the *Shari 'a*;
3. That there should be adequate representation of women in all the Committees established in the *Shari 'a*-implementing States, including the Hisbah and the Zakat Committees, where they exist;
4. That avenues of dialogue should be established between the *Shari 'a*-implementing States and human rights activists, to facilitate the observance and respect of Islamic human rights values in the *Shari 'a* States;
5. That Muslim scholars and experts in Islamic Law should lead the process of ensuring the realization of the benefits of *Shari 'a* by adopting the mechanisms provided under the *Shari 'a* (such as the Doctrine of Maslahah), thereby guaranteeing that *Shari 'a* remains true to its heritage of universality, dynamism and relevance for all time;
6. That all stakeholders, including members of civil society, non-governmental organizations, the legislature, the executive, the judiciary, Muslim scholars and intellectuals and human rights activists, should be mobilized for contributions towards the protection of divinely ordained women's rights and the noble objectives of the enhancement of human dignity and service to Islam.

Appendix 10

Feminism in the Muslim World Leadership Institute, held in Lagos, Nov. 1999. Women from Muslim Countries and Communities Speak on 'Islamization' of Zamfara State[11]

We, women from Muslim countries and communities across the world (including Afghanistan, Algeria, the Arab community in Israel, Bangladesh, Cameroon, the Caribbean, the Gambia, India, Iran, Kenya, Malaysia, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Senegal, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Sudan) gathered here in Nigeria, are worried at the potential consequences of measures that purport to be *Shari 'a* or Muslim laws in Zamfara state, in northern Nigeria. We are deeply concerned at the apparent disregard of due process of law, and women's rights as enshrined in the constitution. We would like to point out that prohibiting women and men from travelling in the same public conveyance will deny women's rights to movement and mobility, particularly poor women in rural and urban areas. Will this measure mean that wives will not be allowed to travel with their husbands, or mothers with their sons? It will certainly prevent women from getting to their jobs every day. Thus the proposed measure will therefore make it even harder for women to feed and care for their families.

11 Published in A. Hélie, *Feminism in the Muslim World*, 86–88.

We fear that the proposed policy in Zamfara state may be the first step towards abusing women's human and constitutional rights. We have already seen this happen in Afghanistan, where in the name of Islam and segregation of the sexes, women and girls no longer have access to education, health care services, jobs and other means of gaining an economic livelihood, or the right to freedom of movement. Similarly, those who claim to be the flag-bearers have attacked girls' right to education and women's rights to mobility in Algeria, Bangladesh and elsewhere. We are alarmed that these abuses are being implemented under the guise of Islam. Sani, the governor of Zamfara State correctly said (as reported in *The Vanguard,* October 28, 1999, page 2), 'there is no compulsion in religion.' Why then is segregation in transport compulsorily introduced? When women and men are expected to fulfil the 5th Islamic principle of pilgrimage together and without segregation, how is it Islamic for women to be removed from the public sphere? It is even more worrying that in so many of our countries and communities the very mention of the word *Shari 'a*, silences all comment or criticism about even so grave a denial of rights. We believe that focusing attention on issues such as segregation of the sexes diverts attention from the real issues – for example, combating poverty and ignorance, providing basic amenities such as water, electricity, health care, education and sewage disposal. Clearly, the compulsory introduction of the so-called *Shari 'a*, whilst failing to discharge the above duties, would not address the social vices that Governor Sani mentions (*Post Express,* October 28, 1999, page 1). The problems of prostitution, gambling, theft, drug addiction and armed robbery cannot be solved by removing women from the public sphere. Denying women their freedom of mobility is an abuse of women's human rights as human beings.

In view of the seriousness of the situation, we urge the government of Nigeria to immediately protect the rights of women in Zamfara and in every other state of the country, as guaranteed under the constitution without delay. Finally, we call upon all our governments, including the Nigerian government, to fulfil their state obligation to ensure the well-being, security and full rights of all their citizens.

Appendix 11

Conference on Women's Rights and Access to Justice under the Shari`a *in Northern Nigeria, organized by WACOL, Enugu and WARDC, Lagos in collaboration with ABU Zaria, held at Rockview Hotel, Abuja, 25th–28th Feb. 2003*

Communiqué[12]

Preamble

Against the background of an earlier strategic conference on the Islamic Legal System and Women's Rights held in October 2002, this conference assessed and evaluated the implementation of *Shari 'a* penal laws and justice system in Northern Nigeria, and its impact on women's human rights, with the aim of determining issues, challenges and prospects in the protection of women's rights, and guaranteeing access to justice under the *Shari 'a*. Furthermore, the Conference's specific objectives were:

- To make concrete suggestions and outline strategies on how to promote, protect and ensure women's rights under the *Shari 'a* justice system.
- To strengthen networking for social and legislative advocacy for the promotion of women's rights in Islamic societies.
- To improve women's access to justice through exchange of information.

The Conference was attended by Muslim women groups, Islamic jurists and other intellectuals from Nigeria and abroad, as well as judges, NGO's and private legal practitioners. Keynote addresses were delivered by Professor Muhammed Tabi'u and Honourable Justice Ibrahim M. Tanko of the Court of Appeal, Abuja. Scholarly papers of high academic standards were also presented at the Conference.

12 Published in J.N. Ezeilo – *al.*, ed., *Shari 'a Implementation in Nigeria,* 271–273

The Conference observed as follows

1. Equal access and opportunity to justice machinery for all without distinction is of paramount importance to any viable justice system.
2. *Shari 'a* legal system recognizes and safeguards women's rights and access to justice as human beings.
3. Islam has a very early history of women activism as embodied in Umm Salama, the wife of the Holy Prophet, on gender equality.
4. Ignorance about Islamic law by women is the biggest threat to their rights and their access to justice under the *Shari 'a*.
5. Codification of the *Shari 'a* penal system in the *Shari 'a* implementing states was made within the framework of the 1999 Constitution.
6. Implementation of *Shari 'a* penal law by lower courts is marred by lack of compliance by Alkali judges with provisions of *Shari 'a* Criminal Procedure Codes.
7. Education and enlightenment of the populace and of those that implement *Shari 'a* is important for a proper implementation of Islamic legal system.
8. Under Islamic legal system, there is no deliberate policy of bias against women. However, with regard to protecting rights and securing access to justice for women, it is necessary to prevent biases borne out of cultural, personal, or selfish reasons, or even ignorance.
9. Human rights organizations and other civil society groups need full support, participation and cooperation of Muslim women groups and Islamic jurists, for effective protection and improvement of women's rights under *Shari 'a* in Nigeria.
10. The organizers are commended for securing the attendance of Muslim jurists, judges, and women groups in pursuit of the protection of women's rights.

The Conference recommends the following

1. For women to get better access to justice under *Shari 'a*, the following steps are to be taken:
   a) Improvement of women education and enlightenment about their rights as enshrined in *Shari 'a*;
   b) Stimulating cross-cultural dialogues,
   c) Establishing effective mechanisms for communicating women's interests and concerns.
   d) Establishing institutions that will further enable women to access justice, such as legal aid services and access to counsel without any distinctions,
2. *Shari 'a* implementing states should intensify efforts in continuous training of Alkalis or judges in matters of *Shari 'a*, especially on procedure and evidence, in institutions of higher learning, for effective performance of their duties, including adequate funding.
3. Constitutional contradictions with regard to implementation of *Shari 'a* should be reviewed and amended. We also encourage that *Shari 'a* education should not be restricted to Northern institutions, in order to encourage informed dialogue.
4. *Shari 'a* implementing states should take positive steps toward implementing the socio-economic components of *Shari 'a*. The Conference specifically recommends the establishment of the powerful Islamic 'Mazalim' institution to tackle complaints against official misdeeds, including corruption and official breach of trust.
5. Media establishments should take equal interest in the positive aspects of *Shari 'a* implementation as they do in other areas.
6. In view of daily challenges, Nigerian Muslim jurists should embark on improvement of implementation of *Shari 'a* through the process of '*ijtihad*' (independent reasoning).
7. *Shari 'a* court judges of lower courts should be learned in Islamic law and should possess a minimum qualification of L.L.B. degree with specialisation in Islamic law.

WE THEREFORE call on the Government to desist from using *Shari 'a* implementation to gain political advantage. We further call on Nigerians to imbibe religious tolerance among diverse groups.

Appendix 12

International Conference on Shari 'a Penal and Family Laws in Nigeria and in the Muslim World: A Rights Based Approach, organized by the International Human Rights Law Group, Abuja with support from the German Embassy, 5th–7th August, 2003, at the Rockview Hotel, Abuja

Communiqué[13]

After three day thought provoking sessions and due deliberations on all the thirteen papers presented by distinguished scholars, human rights activists and gender specialists, the conference observed that:

1. The Qur'an and human rights, especially women's rights, are compatible with each other. The Qur'an repeatedly asserts four words representing Qur'anic values – 'adl (justice), ihsan (benevolence), rahmah (compassion) and hikmah (wisdom).
2. These values are very close to, and in fact, are the essence of human rights. One cannot think of human rights in the modern world without these values. Justice is very fundamental to human rights, just as benevolence, compassion and wisdom are. One cannot have a humane society without it being a just society.
3. The concept and respect for human rights therefore is quite integral to the teachings of the Qur'an. It is thus the duty of all Muslim nations to promote and protect these individual/group rights.
4. The conference recognized that Islam has been a source of human rights protection from its beginnings, and the Qur'an and Sunnah have remained for Muslims the framework within which to articulate

13 Published in J. Ibrahim, ed., *Shari 'a Penal and*, 233–235.

and actualize a vision of effective human rights protection. The conference therefore agreed that it is time for Muslims to take ownership of the discourse of human rights and further develop it within the context of the Qur'an and Sunna.

5. The conference discussed the wide variety and diversity of interpretations of Islamic law and jurisprudence world-wide and in history. It was noted that Islamic Law has recognized and supported women's rights – to independent ownership of property, to inheritance (including of land), to divorce, to education, to child custody, to vote, to free consent in marriage and against forced marriage, and to full legal capacity. However, the conference agreed on the need to improve on women's access to justice in Nigeria, including the necessity to provide legal and financial aid.
6. The conference noted that the emphasis in the earlier phase of the *Shari 'a* reforms in Nigeria, which sought to establish the *Shari 'a* penal system in many of the Muslim States in Northern Nigeria, has been pursued outside the context of wider issues of social and economic justice which have always been the foundation of *Shari 'a* in Muslim communities.
7. With regards to the administration of the criminal law, the conference agreed on the need to respect the due process of law, and improve the knowledge of the Judges in order to enhance their performance in adjudication, especially in the administration of *Shari 'a* Penal and Family Laws and Justice.
8. The conference calls on all the Shari's implementing states to take as a matter of priority, the training and re-training of the judges and other personnel that run the *Shari 'a* Courts. The selection of the Judges should be based on the definite well-known *Shari 'a* criteria, which emphasized knowledge, piety, maturity and personal integrity. The content of the training should contain comparative human rights law and practice and the Nigeria Legal System within which the *Shari 'a* is being implemented.
9. The conference noted and commended the efforts of various NGOs, activists, lawyers and individuals in the defence of accused persons, particularly women, in the *Shari 'a* Court for various offences. This

has helped in the protection of the rights of the affected women and also helped in the clarification of various issues and principles in the implementation of Penal aspects of the *Shari 'a*.

10. The conference recognized that Islamic law is dynamic and has the capacity through *ijtihad* to develop and meet the contextual demands of contemporary society. In furtherance of this, it was agreed that a programme of gradual codification of Islamic personal laws needs to be undertaken with the full participation of all Muslims.
11. The conference also noted that there is a degree of compatibility between *Shari 'a* human rights law and the international human rights law in terms of intent, purpose, target groups and the overall peace and development of humankind.
12. Finally, the conference decided that wider fora in which tolerant dialogue takes place be organized from time to time.

Appendix 13

Conference on Human Rights Protection in the Administration of Shari 'a Criminal Justice in Nigeria organized by Women Aid Collective (WACOL) in collaboration with ABU Zaria held at Hamdala Hotel, Kaduna, 30th November–2nd December 2003

Communiqué[14]

Preamble

Consequent upon a series of initiatives toward a broader transformation of the justice system in the entire country to ensure access to justice to the poor and the vulnerable in the society, this conference specifically targeted justice administrators, lawyers and all those operating the *Shari 'a* criminal justice system with a view to evaluating the protection of human

14 Published in J.N. Ezeilo, ed., *Human Rights Protection in Administration of Shari 'a Justice System*, WACOL publication, Enugu 2005, 240–243.

rights in the course of administering the *Shari 'a* criminal justice system in Nigeria. The Conference's specific objectives included:

- To contribute to the dissemination of knowledge about the *Shari 'a* criminal justice system and how best to manage or resolve the possible areas of conflict between the *Shari 'a* system and human rights provisions of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
- To provide strategies in improving ways of dealing with offenders or suspects/accused persons with a view to providing fairness to them not just in theory but in the administration of *Shari 'a* criminal law and justice.
- To enhance and raise awareness of *Shari 'a* Court judges and lawyers on domestic application of international human rights standards.
- To strengthen mechanisms for the enforcement and monitoring of human rights and access to justice, especially for women and other vulnerable groups.

The Conference was attended by Muslim groups, Islamic jurists, other intellectuals, judges, qadis, and officers from Ministries of Justice, NGOs and private legal practitioners. The Keynote addresses were delivered by the Honourable Justice Zainab Bulkachuwa of the Court of Appeal, Abuja and Honourable Attorney-General of Katsina State, Abdullahi Garba, ESQ.

The Conference observed as follows

1. An effective administration of Islamic criminal justice is one of the best guarantees to an orderly society and for the protection of human rights of citizens.
2. *Shari 'a* operating states should do more in enlightening and sensitizing Muslims for whom the law is being implemented.
3. Human rights protection as a concept is recognized by the *Shari 'a* and every Muslim is obliged to ensure constant achievement of the concept. However, it is in designing specific mechanisms and elaborating

on the content of human rights norms in a multi-religious society that the *Shari 'a* implementing States have to live up to expectation.

4. Most of the problems manifested by the application of *Shari 'a* criminal system are linked to law enforcement officers (both Police and Hisbah groups), lack of observation of procedural rules by lower *Shari 'a* Courts, as well as lack of effective mechanisms to articulate and achieve Islamic and international human rights norms.
5. Legal aid for the underprivileged, especially women and children, is a concomitant requirement of access to justice.
6. In homicide cases where the death penalty is an option there are enough mechanisms under the *Shari 'a*, such as option of complete pardon or compensation exercisable by the victim's relatives, to make unnecessary and unwarranted the current debate on the punishment.
7. While under Islamic human rights norms, the death penalty punishment is reserved for specific offences, and while the propensity of *Shari 'a* is not toward the application of the punishment, nonetheless, the *Shari 'a* judicial system cannot be denied the right to reserve the punishment in appropriate cases to reflect the tripartite rights of Allah, those of the accused person, and the victim or their relatives.
8. In some *Shari 'a* complying states *Shari 'a* criminal procedure codes are not in existence as procedural safeguards or guarantees in favour of the accused person and guidelines for the judges in the administration of criminal justice.

The Conference recommends the following

1. For the *Shari 'a* criminal system to be more efficient, the *Shari 'a* operating states must adequately fund the judiciary and the Ministries of Justice.
2. The states must provide adequate legal aid to all indigent persons accused of committing an offence under a *Shari 'a* Penal Code.

3. In applying *Shari 'a* penal code, due regard must be given to issues such as fair hearing, equality before the law, freedom of religion, and other human rights standards.
4. Mechanisms should be put in place by the judiciary for *Shari 'a* Court judges to ensure that proper procedure, principles and standards are followed.
5. *Shari 'a* implementing states should take positive steps toward implementing the social-economic components of *Shari 'a*.
6. *Shari 'a* implementing states should improve avenues for women's education and enlightenment as well as facilitate access to justice as enshrined in the *Shari 'a*.
7. In states where there are Hisbah corps, efforts should be made to ensure their continuous training and education in the proper role of the Hisbah corps under the *Shari 'a*; for states that do not have these corps, they are strongly encouraged to establish one.

Appendix 14

14.1 Aims and objectives of the National Council of Catholic Women Organizations (NCCWO)[15]

1. To unite all Catholic Women Organizations (CWOs) of Nigeria, and direct them for the purposes of the Light, Unity, Love and Peace of Christianity.
2. To encourage Catholic Women's understanding of and participation in the Liturgy and status of Christians in today's world.
3. To serve as the medium through which the Catholic women of Nigeria, as a body, may speak and act in contribution to matters of public interest.
4. To coordinate, enhance, facilitate and direct the religious, educational, literary, developmental, moral, social and charitable services of the CWOs in Nigeria.

15 *Constitution of the NCCWO,* Revised Edition 2003, article 2, section 1.

5. To encourage, establish and maintain interreligious and intrareligious relationships with other religious organizations sharing similar or complimentary aims and objectives as these, in Nigeria or abroad.
6. To act as an affiliate of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations (WUCWO).
7. To maintain its independence and autonomy, notwithstanding its interreligious and intrareligious relationships and affiliation.

14.2 Aims and objectives of the Mothers' Union (Anglican Communion)[16]

Purpose: To be specifically concerned with all that strengthens and preserves marriage and Christian family life.
Aim: The aim of the Society is the advancement of the Christian religion in the sphere of marriage and family life, and in furtherance of the said aim (but not otherwise) to carry out all or any of the following objectives, that is to say:

- To uphold Christ's teaching on the nature of marriage and to promote its wider understanding
- To encourage parents to bring up their children in the faith and life of the church
- To maintain a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer, worship and service
- To promote conditions in society favorable to stable family life and the protection of children
- To help those whose family life has met with diversity

16 *The Constitution of The Mother's Union of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion),* Amended 1998, Chap. 1, 3.

14.3 Aims of the TEKAN Women's Fellowship[17]

Aim: To unite Christian women for the extension of God's Kingdom, through loving and serving one another' (Gal. 5:13).

- It is required of every woman to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- The Women's Fellowship should always visit the sick, disabled, blind and the needy to exhort them.
- Every woman has a responsibility to lead other women to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.
- The Fellowship should endeavor to teach the illiterate among them how to read, do handcrafts, and how to take care of babies.
- It is required of every woman in this Fellowship to take care of her family spiritually through prayer and teaching her children how to pray and memorize verses from the Bible and Bible stories.
- It is required of every woman to forsake heathenism, sacrifices to idols, alcoholism, adultery and any other thing that contradicts the word of God.
- It is required of every woman to have faith in Jesus Christ and to believe in him as Saviour and Lord.

14.4 Aims and Objectives of ECWA Women's Fellowship[18]

ECWA WF has the aim of bringing women in ECWA together in fellowship so that they might have one mind, one hope, one goal and the same discipline, for the growth of each individual woman and the Kingdom of Christ. The objectives are:

FELLOWSHIP: To unite women of the church so that they will be of one mind, one heart, one desire and one purpose.

17 *TEKAN Women's Fellowship*, 'Laws'.
18 *ECWA Women's Fellowship Guide*, 1997 Edition, 10–11.

growth: To strengthen women in the Lord through studying the Bible together.
WITNESSING: To encourage women to be faithful witnesses by showing obedience, respect and love in their home life, in the work of the church and in their everyday living.
HELP: To unite women in mind and effort to help those who are in real need such as the helpless, the elderly, the widows, and other needy people.

14.5 Objectives of the Praise Women for All Nations (PWFAN) of the Praise Chapel for All Nations Pentecostal Church[19]

- To evangelize women within and outside the church
- To follow up and train the women for the assurance of their salvation
- To commit this vision and the Gospel to faithful women who will teach others
- To build a sound godly character in women
- To encourage and assist women discover and utilize their God-given talents
- To prepare young ladies for marriage, motherhood and ministry
- To meet the needs of the woman in her totality, i.e. spirit, soul and body.

14.6 Aims and Objectives of the Total Woman Foundation (TOWOF)[20]

The objectives of this NGO are to teach 'womanhood' according to Biblical principles:

- Knowing and understanding the fear of God
- Relating to her husband in love and total submission

19 *The Women Magazine*, PWFAN magazine, 16.
20 TOWOF Pamphlet.

- Inculcating the virtues of good home management and eschewing idleness
- Learning to be industrious and enterprising in order to support the family
- Learning the blessed virtues of hospitality and generosity
- Teaching Biblical reconciliation in broken and troubled homes
- Teaching women to identify their gifts/calling and how to use them to build the body of Christ
- Teaching the art of modest dressing and selection of materials

Appendix 15

Mission Statement of the Nigeria Conference of Women Religious (NCWR)

The Nigeria Conference of Women Religious (NCWR) is a body of Catholic Women Religious leaders of Congregations that have diverse charisms and witness to the core values of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We appreciate and acknowledge that energy and shared wisdom that exists within the group and cherish our identity as women.

We dedicate ourselves to a deep prayer life and strive to promote justice and peace, openness, simplicity of life style, transparency and accountability in all our activities that 'all may have life and have it to the full' (John 10:10)

We commit ourselves to:

- Working together and with our male counterparts in a spirit of unity, collaboration, and interdependence for greater effectiveness in mission and in the ministry in the church and in our world today.
- Evaluating, discerning, making decisions and recommending new strategies for concerted action
- Reading, interpreting and responding to the signs of the times in today's world

- Showing respect and love for all God's people especially the deprived and vulnerable
- Working in collaboration with other groups who share our vision
- Seeking to empower all God's children to reach their full potential through enlightenment, education and holistic care
- Challenging ourselves to promote the care of the earth
- Being vehicles and channels of good communication within the church

In order to achieve our mission:

We affirm the importance of an integrated and inculturated formation that leads to authenticity of religious life and we commit ourselves to developing and participating in quality programmes at national and congregational levels.

Our motto: unity for love and service

Ado-Ekiti, 17th of January 2003

Appendix 16

Kaduna Peace Declaration of Religious Leaders[21]

IN THE NAME OF GOD, who is Almighty, Merciful and Compassionate, we who have gathered as Muslim and Christian religious leaders from Kaduna State to pray for peace in our State and declare our commitment to ending the violence and bloodshed, which has marred our recent history.

ACCORDING TO OUR FAITHS killing innocent lives in the name of God is a desecration of His Holy Name, and defames religions in the world.

21 Signed by eleven Muslim and eleven Christian male religious leaders from Kaduna State and the State Governor, Alhaji Ahmed Mohammed Makarfi, 22nd August 2002.

The violence that has occurred in Kaduna State is an evil that must be opposed by all people of good faith. We seek to live together as neighbours, respecting the integrity of each other's historical and religious heritage. We call upon all to oppose incitement, hatred and the misrepresentation of one another.

1. MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS of all tribes must respect the divinely ordained purposes of the Creator, by whose grace we live together in Kaduna State, such ordained purposes include freedom of worship, access to and sanctity of places of worship and justice among others.
2. AS RELIGIOUS LEADERS, we seek to work with all sections of the community for a lasting and just peace according to the teachings of our religions.
3. WE CONDEMN all forms of violence and seek to create an atmosphere where present and future generations will co-exist with mutual respect and trust in one another. We call upon all to refrain from incitement and demonization, and pledge to educate our young people accordingly.
4. THROUGH THE CREATION of a peaceful State, we seek to explore how together we can aid spiritual regeneration, economic development and inward investment.
5. WE ACKNOWLEDGE the efforts that have been made within this State for a judicial reform and pledge to do all in our power to promote greater understanding of the reform, so that it can provide a true and respected justice in each of our communities.
6. WE PLEDGE to work with the security forces in peace keeping and implementation of this declaration in the State.
7. WE ANNOUNCE the establishment of a permanent joint committee to implement the recommendations of this declaration and encourage dialogue between the two faiths, for we believe that dialogue will result in the restoration of the image of each in the eyes of the other.

This declaration is binding on all people in the State, from this day of 22nd August 2002 and we agree that any individual or group found breaching the peace must be punished in accordance to the due process of the law.

Appendix 17

Plateau Peace Conference, October 2004.
Final Document: extract on Women Issues[22]

Given the important role women play in peace making, the conference noted that there the need to give special attention to issues affecting them in the state. The reason is that their peculiar situations demand special consideration, as they do not enjoy the same access to resources despite their productive potentials. The delegates recognized that in spite of the crucial roles played by women in the State's development, they are discriminated upon. The delegates resolved that the gender imbalance in the division of labour and access to productive resources originate from the inequalities of rights and responsibilities between sexes. The conference therefore resolved that issues militating against women's empowerment should be looked into with a view of finding a solution to them.

The conference recommended that:

Education

a) Families should give equal educational opportunities to their children without discriminating against girls.
b) Government should make a policy to give special scholarships to female students.
c) Girl-child education should be encouraged made compulsory and free from primary to secondary levels.

22 Published in *Ethnic and Religious Rights*, vol. 3, n. 17, Nov. 2004, 18–19.

d) Parents should sponsor their daughters in school rather than giving them out as nannies or getting them married at an early age, and should engage children without discrimination in domestic activities.
e) Female children should be encouraged to pursue science and technology courses.
f) Government should equip and standardize government girls' secondary school, Shendam, which is the only female science secondary school in the state.

Health

Women have peculiar medical needs because of their very nature as women; therefore, health care delivery by government was considered imperative. The conference consequently resolved that:

a) Free medical services should be provided for pregnant women, particularly the indigent ones.
b) Facilities for treating Vesico Virginal Fistulae (WF) should be established in government hospitals and the awareness of their existence should be publicized.
c) Maternity health services should be extended to rural communities to be managed by qualified staff, while mobile clinics should communities on market days to attend to women.
d) Governments, Religious bodies Individuals and Non Governmental Organisations should intensify efforts by creating awareness on the dangers of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.
e) Science teachers should encourage the practical aspect of the sciences for better understanding of these courses.

Employment

The Conference resolved on this issue that:

a) The provision of section 42 of the Constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex should be enforced; while women's rights to equal opportunities of employment should be upheld.
b) Men should be encouraged to allow their wives to work.
c) Resolution on the Beijing Conference on women's rights should be implemented and enforced by government in the State.

Agriculture

a) Rural women should be encouraged to form cooperative societies and government should give them soft loans for improved productivity.
b) Discrimination against women on land matters should be discouraged; while women should be encouraged to take agriculture as a profession.

Legal reforms and legislative protection

a) The State Government should ensure the domestication of the Child Rights Acts.
b) Laws that debase women should be reversed e.g. provisions of the Penal Code.
c) A law should be enacted to protect the inheritance rights of widows and orphans.
d) Writing wills should be encouraged and registered to ensure their implementation.
e) Women should be assisted, through the Legal Aid Council whenever necessary.
f) Existing laws should be reviewed to ensure gender sensitivity.

Gender Policy guidelines – Gender and Development policy (GAD)

The Conference discussed and resolved that policies on women should be enacted while those already in existence should be enforced. Some of the resolutions of the delegates are that:

a) Gender policies should be enacted by the State government to facilitate holistic development of women.
b) All general policies of Government should be gender sensitive.
c) All senior public officials in Plateau State should be exposed to gender sensitization and gender main-streaming training.
d) In the filling of public vacancies, a gender affirmative clause should be included such as 'women are particularly encouraged to apply'.

Appendix 18

First International Conference on Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations organized by the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria and sponsored by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, held in Miango, Plateau State, 2nd–6th Nov. 1993

Communiqué[23]

Preamble

At an International Conference on Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations held in Miango, Plateau State, Nigeria 2nd–6th November 1993, initiated by the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN) and supported by other local and international organizations and Churches, eminent scholars and participants from both Christian and Muslim communities

23 Published in *Report and Papers of the First International Conference on Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations*, LCCN, Jos, Plateau State 1993, 88–89.

gathered for presentations and discussions on various topics related to the theme of the Conference: Christian–Muslim Mutual Relations.

The aim and objective of the Conference among others are to create a forum for mutual interaction and exchange of ideas to enhance understanding and peaceful existence in Nigeria.

The Governor of Plateau State, His Excellency Mr. Fidelis N. Tap. un (KSM), represented by the Director-General, the Ministry of Health, Dr. Mrs. Altine C. Zwandor addressed the Conference.

Observations

The Conference noted that

1. The two religions are in many respects similar in their teachings;
2. In recent years deterioration has taken place in the relatively peaceful relationship between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria evidenced by growing violence, extremism and militancy;
3. Crises in Nigeria are due to multiple causes, including economic, political as well as religious;
4. Some Christians and Muslims have not put into practice the teachings of the Bible and Qur'an, especially on use of force;
5. Mutual respect is generally lacking in Christian-Muslim relations;
6. The use of provocative language during preaching is a strong factor contributing to tension and bitterness;
7. Discrimination in different forms has become a problem in social, educational and political aspects of the society;
8. There is a growing tendency towards commercialization of religion.

Recommendations

In the light of these observations the Conference recommends that

1. The common foundation be used to build a new understanding for the need of peaceful co-existence through education;
2. Religious leaders should

   a) provide leadership by example,
   b) encourage taking initiative in arranging conferences and developing curriculum etc. that enhance peaceful co-existence,
   c) develop the spirit of respect;
3. Provocative language be avoided in preaching and teaching as well as in the use of cassettes and publications;
4. Any form of discrimination in employment, promotion of employees and sharing of resources should be discouraged by reviving moral and ethical standards in the society;
5. The commercialization of religion should be discouraged as much as possible;
6. Governments should support efforts of reputable religious organizations to promote Christian-Muslim dialogue at all levels;
7. The government should make moral and religious instruction compulsory at all levels and encourage the learning of each other's religion;
8. An Interfaith Dialogue Centre which will promote the realization of these recommendations should be established.

In conclusion this Conference recommends that efforts should be made to co-ordinate its work with that of other organizations that have similar projects in the area of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Appendix 19

Second International Conference on Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations, organized by the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria and sponsored by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, held in Miango, Plateau State, 11th–16th September 1995

Communiqué[24]

Preamble

At the Second International Conference on Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations held in Miango, Plateau State, Nigeria 11–16 September 1995, initiated by the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN) and supported by J.N.I. Plateau State Branch and other local and international organizations and Churches, eminent scholars and participants from both Christian and Muslim communities gathered for presentations and discussions on various topics related to the theme of the Conference: THE WAY TO MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING.

The aim and objective of the Conference among others are to create a forum for mutual interaction and exchange of ideas to enhance understanding and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria.

Observations

The Conference noted that

1. Although the majority of Nigerians are peace-loving, the behaviour of many Nigerians, whether Christians or Muslims, contradicts the tenets of their religions. Hence the prevalence of moral degeneration in the country.

24 Published in *Report and Papers Second International Conference on Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations*, LCCN, Jos, Plateau State 1995, 137–138.

2. Secularism is not compatible with the background, upbringing and life style of Nigerians, because religion permeates all facets of Nigerian life.
3. Nigeria is a society bedeviled by the social injustice manifested in an inequitable distribution of wealth, leading to lack of peace.
4. Christians and Muslims of Nigeria at times engage in unnecessary rivalry in their religious demands from the Government without considering the essential requirements of their religion and the national interest.
5. Efforts of the Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations organizations are unable to get to the grassroots. Hence the occasional religious riots in the different parts of the country.
6. Misunderstanding, bitter prejudice and ignorance are contributing factors towards poor relationship between Christians and Muslims.
7. Christians and Muslims accept the fact that though understanding may differ there is only one God worthy of worship.
8. Christians, Muslims and other Nigerians are confronted with bewildering problems in comparison to our human limitations and inadequacies.
9. Emphasis on the discussion of doctrinal issues may not promote the spirit of interreligious dialogue.

Observations

In the light of these observations the Conference recommends that

1. The Government makes religious and moral education compulsory at all levels of our educational structure and efforts should be made to ensure implementation of this policy through qualitative teaching.
2. The Government should officially recognize the country as a multi-religious rather than a secular state, where no religion should be favoured at the expense of others.
3. The Government should as a matter of urgency intensify its efforts to create employment opportunities and narrow the gap in the income of the nation's work force both in the private and public sectors.

4. The Government should consider every religious request from the Christians and Muslims on its own merit without favour, putting the national interest into consideration.
5. The Government should show interest in the promotion of Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations through sponsoring dialogue projects to facilitate peaceful co-existence.
6. Religious leaders should properly educate and enlighten their followers on the need for religious understanding and peaceful co-existence.
7. Religious leaders and teachers should highlight common grounds in the two religions to encourage mutual respect.
8. Christians, Muslims and other Nigerians should commit these problems to fervent prayer constantly for the desired solutions.
9. Interreligious organizations should direct attention to evolving joint projects for mutual benefit.

Appendix 20

Third International Conference on Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations, organized by the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria and sponsored by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, held in Miango, Plateau State, 18th–23rd August, 1997

Communiqué[25]

The Christian and Muslim participants at the Third International Conference on Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations, held in Miango, Plateau State, Nigeria 18–23 August 1997, in pursuance of the Conference's objectives deliberated extensively on the role religion can play in the promotion of peaceful and harmonious co-existence, do hereby resolve that:

25 Published in *Report and Papers Third International Conference on Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations*, LCCN, Jos, Plateau State 1997, 147.

1. Christian and Muslim spiritual leaders should inculcate in their followers, particularly the youth who are future leaders, the spirit of love, friendship, patriotism, understanding, tolerance, mutual respect and cooperation for the benefit of all;
2. God fearing and competent people in our nation should be identified and be given leadership responsibility in order to salvage the country and restore the good image projected by its founding fathers;
3. The press, being an essential vehicle for the promotion of better understanding and unity in any nation, should ensure that its news and comments are truthful, honest, fair and do not jeopardize peace and harmony or raise religious disquiet in the country;
4. Both Christian and Muslim institutions should truthfully teach and ensure the full realization of the rights of women as enshrined in their respective Scriptures;
5. The Government should enact a law, making the teaching and learning of Christian and Islamic religious education compulsory at all levels of our educational system as an antidote against cultism and other societal vices;
6. The people of this country, both Christians and Muslims, should return to God as a solution to the societal ills;
7. The Government should as a matter of urgency set up a commission for religious affairs at the Federal level whose duties should be, among others, to promote peaceful co-existence and help resolve religious conflicts.

Appendix 21

Fourth International Conference on Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations, organized by the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria and sponsored by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, held in Dogon-Dutse, Jos, Plateau State, 23rd–28th August 1999

Communiqué[26]

At the Fourth International Conference On Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations held in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, from 23–28 August 1999, attended by eminent scholars and religious leaders from both Christian and Muslim communities in and outside Nigeria, various issues concerning Christian/Muslim Mutual Relations were discussed.

The aim and objectives of the Conference among others are to take practical steps to enhance mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria.

Participants do hereby resolve that:

1. All acts of provocation from either of the two religions stand condemned and followers are urged to desist from such acts that could lead to disharmony;
2. The Government at all levels should ensure fairness, equity and justice in carrying out its programmes, appointments and employments for the benefit of all Nigerians, and guarantee their human rights;
3. With the re-introduction of the Universal Primary Education (U.P.E.), the government should enact a law, making the teaching and learning of Christian and Islamic religious studies compulsory at all levels of our educational system;
4. The Government at all levels should meaningfully address the welfare of all Nigerians, especially the destitute, through concrete and functional poverty alleviation programmes;

26 Published in *Report and Papers Fourth International Conference on Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations*, LCCN, Jos, Plateau State 1999, 89.

5. The Government at all levels should ensure adequate protection of the lives and properties of all citizens;
6. All Christians and Muslims should join hands in eliminating moral decadence, social vices, occultism, cultism, corruption, and harmful traditional practices;
7. Christian and Muslim religious leaders should, through exemplary leadership, inculcate in their followers, particularly the youth who are future leaders, the spirit of love, friendship, patriotism, understanding, tolerance, mutual respect and cooperation for the benefit of all;
8. Both Christians and Muslims in Nigeria should follow the tenets and practice the ethics of their religion with all sincerity;
9. Christian and Muslim bodies or organizations should actively support the enhancement of Christian/Muslim Mutual Relations;
10. The formation of a body known as the Nigerian Association of Christian/Muslim Mutual Relations (NACMMR) is a practical demonstration of the interest of the two major religions in enhancing peace and stability in the country.

Appendix 22

Fifth International Conference on Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations, organized by the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria and sponsored by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, held in Dogon-Dutse, Jos, Plateau State, 23rd–28th September 2002

Communiqué[27]

The Association of Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations at its 5th International Conference held in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, from September 23rd to 28th, 2002 drew up a 12 point communiqué as follows:

27 Published in *Report and Papers Fifth International Conference on Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations*, ACMMRN/LCCN, Jos, Plateau State 2002, 121–122.

1. The participants re-affirm their faith in God and state that honest dialogue which entails 'talking with the other' rather that 'talking about the other' amongst Christians and Muslims is necessary to foster peaceful co-existence and eradicate suspicions, mistrust, fears, ignorance and prejudices of the other religion/faith.
2. The participants strongly recommend the establishment of the Ministry of Religious Affairs with 2 senior ministers representing the two religions to be appointed in consultation with the two supreme governing bodies of the religions.
3. The conference urges the Government in particular and Nigerians in general to work towards conflict prevention which is cheaper than conflict mediation.
4. Participants lamented on the scourge and spread of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria and resolved that both Christian and Muslim leaders have to put heads together to fight it and proffer means for caring for people living with HIV/AIDS. In the same vein they condemn in strong terms paid adverts of condoms, alcohol and cigarettes and the use of condoms as a means of preventing HIV/AIDS and opt for total abstinence from immoral sex, i.e. conduct rather than condom.
5. The participants unanimously object to the organization of Miss World Pageant or any other beauty contests taking place in Nigeria. This is because such competitions involve dehumanization of womanhood and the likelihood of enhancing the spread of HIV/AIDS at various stages of the programme in the society.
6. The issue of sex education in secondary schools being a sensitive topic should be taken at family and religious levels rather than in the school curriculum.
7. The participants noted that there is a high increase in moral decadence in the society. Consequently, the participants call on the Government to, as a matter of policy, make compulsory the teachings of Christian and Islamic religions from primary school up to secondary level, and to also censor the importation into the country of all literary and audio-visual materials such as pornographic and violent films.
8. It is however noted that past politicians of the 1st Republic like Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe made positive actions that fostered peace amongst members of the two religions, i.e. Christianity and Islam. The participants therefore enjoin the present-day politicians to emulate them and be God-fearing so as to earn the confidence of Nigerians and promote peaceful co-existence.
9. The conference reaffirms that Christianity and Islam preach love and peace and living according to the dictates of the holy books (the Bible and the Qur'an) is the only way to true peace. Consequently participants urge Nigerians to pursue religious conversions through persuasion and not by bullets, guns, swords, machetes and use of provocative language.
10. The Nigerian Christians and Muslims are called upon to embrace understanding, respect and true tolerance which will promote patience enriched with goodwill and peaceful co-existence.
11. Violent conflicts in Nigeria can be traced to the globalization of the 1980s which came with the attendant problems of devaluation of the currency; inflation; unemployment and poverty. Therefore the participants advocate 'good governance' in Nigeria at all levels of Government.
12. The conference strongly advocates non-violence as a means of settling all conflicts. Consequent to that, the conference strongly condemn the exaggerated and biased reports in Nigeria's media with respect to inter-faith and ethnic crises, thereby fuelling the crises rather than encouraging peace. The conference urges the media to actively pursue truth, honesty and integrity in its reporting of events. Furthermore, the conference urges all NGOs such as women and youth organizations to work actively towards averting conflicts and violence.

Appendix 23

Sixth International Conference on Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations, organized by the Associaiton of Christian Musim Mutual Relations in Nigeria (ACMMRN) in conjuction with the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) and the Zamfara State Government, held in Gusau Hotel, Gusau, Zamfara State, 1st–5th March 2005

Communiqué[28]

Association of Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations in Nigeria (ACMMRN) held its 6th International Conference on the Christian-Muslim Relations, organized in conjunction with the Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) and the Zamfara State Government in Gusau, Zamfara State from 1st to 5th March, 2005. The theme of the Conference was '*Shari'a* and Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations in Nigeria: The Way Forward.'

Participants came from different parts of the Federation as well as Brazil, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland and the United States of America.

The opening ceremony held at the multipurpose hall of the J.B. Yakubu Secretariat, Gusau was attended by dignitaries among whom were: His Excellency, The Acting Executive Governor of Zamfara State, Alhaji Mahmuda Aliyu Shinkafi (Dallatun Zamfara), former head of State, General Dr. Yakubu Gowan (Rtd) who was also the Chairman of the occasion, His Eminence, the Sultan of Sokoto and President General, Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) Alhaji Muhammad Maccido represented by group Captain Usman Jibril (Rtd), the National Treasurer of the NSCIA and member Board of Trustees of ACMMRN, and the Founder of the Association and the Chairman Board of Trustees, Most Reverend (Dr.) David L. Windibiriziri. Others were the Right Reverend Kevin Aje, the Catholic Bishop of Sokoto Diocese,

28 Published in *Report and Papers Sixth International Conference on Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations*, ACMMRN, Jos, Plateau State 2005, 112–114.

and Chairman CAN, Sokoto Chapter and member Board of Trustees of ACMMRN, the Emir of Gusau, Alhaji Muhammad Kabir Danbaba, the Chief Judge of Zamfara State, Justice Kulu Aliyu and the Grand Kadi Zamfara State Alhaji Balarabe Anka.

Papers were presented and discussed on the following topics:

1. Impediments to Christian-Muslim Mutual Relations in Nigeria: *Shari'a* as a case study.
2. Implementation of *Shari'a* in Nigeria: Balancing Christian-Muslim concerns and aspirations.
3. Mobilizing women for peace and development in the society.
4. The role of the media in a multi-religious society.

After extensive deliberations by participants at the conference the following observations and recommendations were made:

Observations and Recommendations

1. The practice of *Shari'a* has been in existence, at least in some parts of Nigeria before the colonial period. But recent developments on the issue have generated unprecedented fears, suspicion and distrust. The conference, therefore recommends that there is need for both Christians and Muslims to understand the *Shari'a* system more fully in order to reduce tension and suspicion.
2. The problem of Christians and Muslims in the country is not that of theory because both religions preach peace and love following the teachings of the Holy Bible and the Glorious Qur'an. The conference, therefore calls upon preachers of both religions to avoid inflammatory language and negative portrayal of other religions.
3. There is a general concern that both adherents of Christianity and Islam do not have equitable airtime in the media for preaching depending on which religion dominates a particular State. Therefore, broadcast and print media houses should ensure fair and equitable allocation of airtime and space to each of the religions, and avoid

the total exclusion of any group, while guarding against insensitive language and circulation of misinformation in both preaching and reporting.

4. Many Christian and Muslim men and women are not aware of the rights and justice for women, which both religions endorse and there is a lack of implementation of rights and justice for women. Therefore, these rights and justice should be implemented in the interest of peace and harmony.
5. The group identifies corruption as one of the causes of alienation, affecting both Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. Muslims and Christians should, therefore intensify efforts to confront the problems of corruption in the country.
6. The unequal provision of resources for different religious groups is a source of unease and therefore, call on the government at all levels to ameliorate the situation.

Appendix 24

Workshop on Christian-Muslim Collaboration, Dialogue in Action, organized by the Women Affairs Branch of the Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC), Archdiocese of Kaduna, on the theme 'Peaceful Co-existence', held in Catholic Resource Centre, Kaduna, 12th Sept. 2002

Aim

To unite the women of Kaduna towards a common objective irrespective of tribe and religions.

Objectives

To promote peace and understanding among the people of Kaduna.
To encourage dialogue and to follow up such dialogue with actions.

Communiqué[29]

1. Given the opportunity we can interact peacefully amongst ourselves.
2. We also discovered that during peace and crises times we suffer the same anxiety. Therefore, coming together will help solve our common problems.
3. The elites tend to emphasize the so-called 'differences' amongst us. As mothers we should try to de-emphasize such.
4. Our traditional and religious leaders may be seen to be manipulated by the Government in power. So they should publicly emphasize those things that will unite us.
5. De-emphasize ethnic groupings, state of origin and emphasize nationalism.

Appendix 25

Seminar/Workshop on the Implications of the Implementation of the Shari`a *in Northern Nigeria for Christians, organized by the Kaduna Provincial Interreligious Dialogue Committee of the Catholic Church, held in Catholic Social Centre, Kaduna, 8th–11th June 2005*

Communiqué[30]

We, the participants at the seminar/workshop organized by the Inter-religious Dialogue Committee of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria in conjunction with the Kaduna Provincial Inter-religious Dialogue Committee of the Catholic Church on the theme *The Implications of the Implementation of the Shari`a in Northern Nigeria for Christians* held at the Catholic Social Centre, Kaduna from 8th to 11th June 2005 and attended also by the representatives Jama'atu Nasril Islam National

29 Available at JPDC, Kaduna Archdiocesan Secretariat.
30 Published in J. Salihu, ed., *Interreligious Dialogue and*, 86–87.

Headquarters, Kaduna discussed, deliberated and hereby resolved as follows:

- The importance of Dialogue in our multi religious society cannot be over emphasized. There should be continuous dialogue between both Christians and Muslims for a better understanding of *Shari'a* in Islam.
- Mutual respect and appreciation for each other's religion should be encouraged at all levels.
- Dialogue is an act of charity that should be carried out in a spirit of sincerity.
- Both Islam and Christianity preach peace and we believe that without peace, there can be no sustainable development.
- The manipulation of religion for selfish ends is strongly condemned.
- Adherents of both religions should show solidarity in the fight against social vices that cut across religions. Such issues as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, poverty, unemployment, abortion, immorality, corruption etc and work toward the elimination of these social evils.
- Members of both religions should be encouraged to know more about the teachings of the other religion.
- Justice should prevail in all spheres of life such as admissions and employment based on merits rather than on religious and/or ethnic affiliations.
- Without a process of feedbacks to the various constituencies of our religions, interreligious dialogue will yield little or no dividends.

Appendix 26

Inter-Faith Women Peace Declaration, Kaduna, Nigeria[31]

We as Peace Builders and Joint Interfaith Women Organizations, who believe in God, the beneficent, the merciful, the creator, the sustainer and the sole guide of mankind, think that women by their natural traits are non-aggressive and are peace stakeholders which makes them perfect instruments to be used to influence our men to stop violent conflict.

According to our faiths: – Womanhood demands high esteem, respect, care and assistance on the part of family and the public organs of the community. We seek to speak with one voice against gender specific discriminations, perpetrated by society and enjoin all women to utilize their natural skills as peace builders towards having a common good and to remove the divisive tendencies and sentiments that have polarized our society. In our obligation to establish an enabling environment for all, i.e. to promote the culture of peace at all levels so that there will be justice, equity and harmony in our society, we hereby

1. *Condemn all forms of violent* conflict and war at any level. Speak against 'discrimination against women' and advocate for adherence of high moral values by all.
2. *Parents to educate their wards* on social and peace education and pledge to embark on a public enlightenment campaign, on the use of meaningful literature and religious books to replace some of the social ill practices that youth engage in, and the involvement of media in peace propaganda.
3. *We advocate for formation* of strong solidarity/pressure groups towards adhering a common goal and objective.
4. *We encourage women to willingly change* our conservative and archaic ideas through seeking for knowledge.

31 Result of a seminar organized by WIPNET (Women in Peace Network), Kaduna, Oct. 2002: available at WIPNET/KANEWA office, Kaduna.

5. *We acknowledge the effort of NGOs and government* in promoting the culture of peace and stability in the state and pledge women's participation. We will encourage vocational skill training for all at the grassroots level as a means of reducing poverty and malnutrition.
6. *We announce* the establishment of WIPNET in Kaduna State, to implement the recommendation in this declaration as part of its commitment to building relationships in the peace process in the West African Region.

This declaration of Women Peace Builders of Joint Inter-Faith will give a powerful impetus to all women to stand firm and defend resolutely and courageously the rights conferred on them by God. *We do hereby jointly declare this* 31st October 2002 to offer our commitment to uphold the aforesaid as guidance and recommendations for lasting peace in Kaduna State, Nigeria.

Appendix 27

Seminar on Women and Peace-Building in Kaduna, organized by the Kaduna Inter-Gender Peace Committee, the 2nd November 2004

Communiqué[32]

Women at a one day advocacy seminar on peace building and conflict management organized by the Kaduna Inter-Gender conflict resolution committee under the auspices of the International Centre for Gender and Social Research (INTER-GENDER) Jos issued the following communiqué. Participants at the seminar were drawn from Muslim and Christian women groups within Kaduna metropolis and environs.

Participants noting that several documents exist internationally, regionally and nationally which state that the full participation of women in all spheres of society, including participation in decision-making

32 Available at Inter-Gender office, Jos.

processes, is fundamental for the achievement of equality, development, and peace.

Reemphasizing that though women are generally non-combatants in conflicts they are severely affected by conflicts through displacement as displaced people saddled with the responsibility of catering for children and the elderly in make-shift camps.

Women at the grassroots level have been involved in maintaining peace and stability within their families and communities;

Recognizing that women's voices, rights and interest have continued to be ignored in peace building efforts and other governance processes in their communities;

Acknowledging the fact that communities which include more women in their governance processes have recorded more progress as stated by the World Bank report 2004 as well as the fact that contributions of women to the economy and the potential of women as agents of economic and social change must be given appropriate consideration in peace building and reconstruction efforts;

Recognizing the fact that women are vital in keeping and building peace in neighborhoods and communities

Participants observed that women need to:

- Search their holy books so as to know the truth for themselves and teach their children and fellow sisters what religion says about peace and peaceful co-existence and live by example.
- Both religions emphasize the love for one's neighbours. In Islam because of the emphasis of the holy prophet his companions thought they could inherit their neighbours' property while in Christianity the parable of the good Samaritan teaches love for one another devoid of discrimination.
- Women should be politically and socially conscious and know what is happening in their community, state and country so they can educate their children properly to avoid situations where people act on rumors.
- Peace building is about recognizing and respecting each other's rights and respecting them.

- Peace building is about shifting positions.
- Women must become actively involved in the process of governance and affect policy.
- Government should be more alive to its responsibilities to citizens and respond immediately to potentially volatile situations.
- Government should show more political will in the creation of jobs for the youth as well as make education at all levels cheaper and school sessions more regular especially at the tertiary level.
- The media should ensure that religious preachers do not instigate violence in their preaching.

Participants resolved that:

- Women in Kaduna metropolis and environs must take proactive steps to be part of the peace building efforts in their localities and communities.
- Women need to be more involved in the governance processes of their communities.
- Women should form neighborhood peace monitoring committees which should work with ward-heads, councilors, local government councils, House of Assembly and National Assembly representatives and the Kaduna Inter-Gender committee on peace and all well-meaning groups and individuals as the case may be to build peace in their localities.

Appendix 28

Peace Building Seminar for Christian Women organized by Inter-Gender, held in Nyako Youth Centre, Jos, Plateau State, 14th October 2004

Communiqué[33]

- Women are the most affected during crises and so must have a primary role to play in the peace building process.
- Christian women in Jos strongly believe that the ethno-religious conflicts that have taken a toll on the city have political and social origins.
- Christian women have been passive in contributing to peace building in their communities. This may be due to the absence of an appropriate platform.
- Government seems to be failing the citizens because of the distance between it and the common man. It is as if people in government do not have ears to listen to the cries of people.
- The history of ethno-religious conflicts could be traced to the emergence of the military in politics.
- There is absence of good governance, accountability and integrity from key players in government in Nigeria.
- The military should remain in the barracks to play their traditional role of defending the nation from external aggression.
- Politicians play unpleasant roles in facilitating conflicts in Nigeria and especially the one in Jos.
- The government is not proactive and delays response to issues that threaten lives and property.

33 Available at Inter-Gender Office, Jos.

Recommendations

- An umbrella body comprising all Christian women in Jos, irrespective of denominational affiliation should be formed immediately. This body will form the platform for articulating the views of Christian women on sensitive issues that affect them and their families. It will also afford Christian women an opportunity to open dialogue with Government and their Muslim counterparts from time to time to avert misunderstandings, distrust and appreciate each other's views and perspectives on issues. This kind of platform has become necessary because the women wing of CAN is inadequate in mobilizing women for such collective negotiations, interactions and endeavors.
- Christians should foster peace amongst themselves and with their Muslim neighbours, practice forgiveness, respect, love, modesty and tolerance in line with the injunctions of the Lord Jesus Christ as contained in the Holy Bible.
- Muslims should review the Almajiri system of education with the aim of integrating them (almajiris) with the rest of society.
- Christians and Muslims should avoid provocative language and any acts capable of generating conflicts such as the blocking of roads and streets during worship hours.
- Government should be seen to apply equity and justice in her relations especially in the distribution of resources and political patronage.
- Government should alleviate the sufferings of the masses through employment, short and long term economic interventions and review certain aspects of the reform programme especially the high prices of petroleum products.
- For harmony and peace building in our society, Christians and Muslims should learn to live with one another, tolerate and seek to understand the different perspectives of each religion.
- Henceforth, women should be taken into confidence as agents of peace and given greater roles in leadership positions to promote dialogue that is necessary for a conflict free society.
- Plateau State Christian Women commend the organizers of the seminar INTER-GENDER, for providing a common platform for the expression of views and concerns peculiar to women especially in the peace building process.

Appendix 29

Joint Conference of the Men and Women Major Religious Superiors, General Meeting held in the Pastoral Center, Owerri, 14th–19th January 2000

Communiqué on the Pastoral Implications of *Shari 'a*[34]

Introduction

Our nation lurches from one crisis to another with the attendant fears, violence and bloodshed. We continue to pray for 'Nigeria in Distress' even as we strive to understand the many evils that confront our country. The adoption of *shari 'a*, the Islamic law code, in some states of our country threatens the very foundation of our nationhood. Given that all people have certain prejudices against another religious culture we must not allow these prejudices to becloud our judgment. We want to explore the pastoral implications of imposing a religious legal code on a pluralistic society such as ours and the discriminatory attitude that such legal code engenders politically, socially and religiously. Our Christian commitment to citizenship and social justice in a united Nigeria urges us to understand what the issues are in the present debate over the *Shari 'a*, educate our Christian community on its implication in the federated state of Nigeria so as to adopt proactive response.

Implications

Most Christians from the South do not posses enough information about the *Shari 'a* legal system. For this reason a certain amount of indifference

34 Available at the NCWR Secat, Enugu.

is exhibited which leads to insufficient solidarity with our brothers and sisters in *Shari 'a* states. Also our legal system is unable to offer prompt and efficient justice that is being sought for by the ordinary people. Thus our Muslim brothers and sisters take advantage of this limitation to offer an alternative way, which they consider better. From a pure financial interest, we see a young Christian woman taking an offer of marriage from a Muslim man. Similarly a young Christian job seeker quickly gives up his faith in exchange for a promising job, a politician forsaking his Christian ethics in order to win votes, and Christian families support these moves because of financial interest accruing them.

Besides, *Shari 'a* has negative influence on citizenship in the country and impinges on human rights, for example people who lose a hand or a leg or any part of the body or are stoned to death suffer injustice from the point of view of the international law; the case of Madam Safiyat is still fresh in our minds. *Shari 'a* limits movement and creates fear, worries and tension in the minds of the people, suspicion and a sense of insecurity. It also encourages segregation, discrimination and disunity. Nigeria had an international obligation to safeguard its citizens from cruel and unusual punishments in accordance with the United Nations' law which we have signed.

However, *Shari 'a* has challenged Christians to work in cooperation with one another, it enables us to reexamine our value system and the needs of the society. Also it makes us a little more aware of our responsibilities to one another in the family, community and nation as a whole, as well as challenge good and honest Christians to move into politics in order to sanitize it.

Conclusions

Our Catholic Church in Nigeria should become more creative in its attitude towards meeting the various challenges from the state, political parties and other religions. We have to wake up from our slumber and begin to catch up with lost time. In this regard the following are proposed:

1. Improvement in the communication system in the church: A lot of ignorance about many things including *Shari 'a* issue exists in the church. It will be good if electronic network can be looked into by the Communication Department of the Catholic Secretariat to ensure quick and efficient exchange of information between the dioceses and Congregational headquarters.
2. More proactive actions are encouraged: Example of more of the actions we would like to see are the positive use of silent protest matches against any evil of our day, educating Christians about *Shari 'a*, encouraging Christian politicians to adhere firmly to Christian principles. In this wise, the strengthening of Peace and Justice Department in each diocese is called for. The Department is to be equipped to organize protest matches, which will involve all of us able-bodied people of each diocese. Other areas where the Justice and Peace Department can initiate actions include such evils as: bribery and corruption; children and women abuse; women and children trafficking; instant jungle justice against thieves; use of double standards; delayed justice; and excessive materialism. Also more use is to be made of prayer and fasting and creation of awareness with regard to the issue of the day.
3. Each diocesan headquarters is challenged to initiate a programme of action, which will enable youth and members of the NYSC to deepen their faith and imbibe culture, and to discourage tribal groupings and their attendant evils.
4. Each parish or each diocese is encouraged to create job opportunities thereby minimizing poverty and allowing for creative usefulness on the part of youth.

Finally, all of us Church leaders need to undergo an examination of conscience leading to a conversion from certain erosion of values. We need to be challenged anew by the ever-living word of Christ to be 'salt of the earth and light of the world'. It is only that then that the mission we proclaim will be meaningful and effective leading to the creation of a new, peaceful and just society we all yearn for.

Glossary of Arabic and Hausa Terms

Ahadith	Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad; plural of *hadith*
'Alim	Learned person, often with reference to theologians and jurisprudential experts; singular form of *'Ulama'*
Amir	Ruler, commander, chief or nobleman
Burqa	Veil; stitched outer garment covering the whole body and head
Da'wa	Mission
Darika	Hausa term used to refer to the Brotherhood or movement; from the Arabic term *Tariqa*
Emir	See *Amir*
Fiqh	Muslim jurisprudence
Fitna	Inner strife
Hadith	See *ahadith*
Hijab	Veil; the concept of veiling
'Ibadat	Laws on religious duties
Ijma'	Public reasoning or consensus
Ijtihad	Independent inquiry
Imam	Religious leader
Jihad	Spiritual war to submit to God's will
Khalifa	Trusteeship, vicegerent
Kulle	Seclusion of women in their marital home
Mahr	The money or property the husband must pay to his wife on marriage
Mallami	Islamic learned scholars (pl. of Mallam; derived from Arabic term *Mu'allim*)
Masu Sarauta	Hausa term for office-holding aristocracy
Mu'amalat	Laws for social transactions
Mufti	Expert in Muslim jurisprudence whose religious opinion or fatwa is considered binding on the community

Purdah	Literally 'curtain'; the practice of secluding and segregating women; sometimes used for the veil (also spelt as parda)
Qadi	Magistrate or judge in a Muslim judicial system
Qadiriyya	Islamic Sufi Movement founded by Abdul al-Jilani in Iraq in the 13th century
Shaikh (Sheikh)	A venerable and learned person (also spelt as *Shaykh*)
Shari`a	Literally 'the way'; Muslim laws, usually codified, based on the Qur'an and sunna
Sunna	Customary law based on the example of the Prophet Muhammad
Tafsir	Qur'anic commentary
Talakawa	Hausa term for the common people; the ruled
Talaq	Unilateral divorce by a Muslim man
Tariqa	Path. See Darika
Tijaniyya	Islamic Sufi Movement founded by Ahmad al-Tijani, an Algerian, in the 18th century
`Ulama'	Plural of *`alim*
Umma	A people; the Muslim population at large
Yan-Taru	Female education system founded by Nana Asma'u in Northern Nigeria
Zina	Sexual intercourse outside marriage

Index