

Media Influences on the Perceptions of the Usage of *Hijab* in Nigeria's Public Institutions and Surrounding Controversy in the Lagos-Ibadan Axis

Fatima Abubakre

To cite this article: Fatima Abubakre (2018): Media Influences on the Perceptions of the Usage of *Hijab* in Nigeria's Public Institutions and Surrounding Controversy in the Lagos-Ibadan Axis, Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2018.1544737>



Published online: 15 Nov 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Media Influences on the Perceptions of the Usage of *Hijab* in Nigeria's Public Institutions and Surrounding Controversy in the Lagos-Ibadan Axis

FATIMA ABUBAKRE 

Abstract

The controversy surrounding women wearing head covers in public institutions in Nigeria has revealed much about the attitude of the Nigerian media, particularly in institutions located in the “Lagos-Ibadan” axis, when representing Islam and Muslims in the country. This research examines Nigeria’s newspaper reporting on the usage of hijab in public schools, particularly in south-west Nigeria, citing the incident in Osun State as a case study. The prevalent scenario in Osun State is also largely relevant in Lagos State, both of which have addressed the matter through litigation. Results from content analysis in four national dailies—The Nation, The Punch, The Guardian, and Vanguard—show that the hijab is predominantly reported on through the polarized lens of either judicial interpretation or Muslim–Christian strife. This paper also thematically examines how the editorial opinions published by Daily Trust, The Nation and The Punch have deliberated on this issue and findings also indicate that Nigeria’s media response to issues that affect Muslims receive less-than-favourable coverage within mainstream media. This ultimately has implications on how Islam and Muslims are construed within society. This study will argue Muslims must work to neutralize pejorative media narratives on Islam through increasing exposure in mass media and working towards eliminating biased representations of Islam and its values.

Keywords: Muslims; hijab; media coverage; Ibadan region; Nigeria

Introduction

Studies on the media coverage of the *hijab* controversy that exists within secularized societies and among Muslim minorities, especially in developed nations, are abundant in academia.¹ Yet studies on *hijab* trends in developing and Third World nations are few and far between. In multi-religious societies such as Nigeria, the mass media plays a critical role in the way in which social entities self-identify and the manner in which they are portrayed and seen by others. Although Nigeria is a secular country governed through democracy, it remains home to one of the largest Muslim populations in the world.²

Thus, the vital role played by Nigeria’s mass media in accurately portraying Christianity and Islam locally cannot be overstated. In south-west Nigeria, women wear the veil

Fatima Abubakre presently conducts research at the Department of Mass Communication, University of Ilorin, and is senior information officer at the University of Ilorin’s Directorate of Corporate Affairs. Previously she was a reporter with *The Guardian*, one of Nigeria’s elite newspapers. Her research interests include contemporary political communication and has published in peer-reviewed journals in Nigeria, Britain and Brazil. She is about to commence her doctoral degree program in journalism at the University of Kent, U.K.

more for modesty's sake rather than to conform to cultural norms, hence not all Muslim women wear head scarves in this part of the country, unlike what we see in the predominantly Muslim region north of the country. The symbolism of the *hijab* is also manifested in the religious practices of African religious traditionalists, who turn out colourfully dressed and covered with different items of clothing during traditional African festivals and masquerades. The ancestral royal crowns that belonged to traditional rulers, (or *ade isembaye*, which are worn on special occasions), especially those among the Yoruba ethnic group, including Ooni of Ife, Alaafin of Oyo, Deji of Akure, Olowo of Owo, Oluwo of Iwo, Oba of Lagos and Oba of Benin, among others, also include a face veil, the only difference being that it is comprised of beads.

Background to the Study

Unlike in the northern geopolitical zone of Nigeria, where the government take-over of missionary schools in the mid-1970s was followed by an immediate change in name of such institutions, most of the missionary schools located south of the country continue to bear the names under which they were founded long after their take-over by the government.

In 2012, the Osun State government, under the leadership of Rauf Adesoji Aregbesola, introduced common uniforms for students at public schools following the restructuring of basic education tenets and the reclassification of such schools, which formed part of the recommendations made by an education summit chaired by Nobel Laureate professor Wole Soyinka in February 2011 to improve education standards in the state. Thus, the schools were then delineated into elementary, middle and high schools. This meant that Muslim pupils who wore *hijab* with their uniforms would likely attend public schools (mostly at middle and high school level) with Christian missionary-bearing names.

This prompted Christian groups within the state to query the motive behind the reclassification of schools and allege that the action was borne out of a desire to impose Islam in the state, possibly because its governor was Muslim. For its part, the Muslim community had dragged the state government to court in order to obtain judicial affirmation of the rights of pupils to wear the *hijab* at public schools, which was the norm before the reclassification of schools, while the Christian groups joined in on the other side of the case as an interested party.

On June 3, 2016, the court ruled in favour of the Muslim groups, a judgment that did not go down well with the Christian groups, who alleged that the ruling was master-minded by Aregbesola in line with his "Islamization" agenda.³ The judgment was then appealed by the Christian groups. The controversy reached its hiatus when students at a public secondary school in Iwo town, Osun State, attended school in church robes in protest at the *hijab*. Examining the issue in a column, Akinnaso narrated an incident that occurred during campaigns in the run-up to the 2014 gubernatorial election held in the state. More than half of the 2,123 students that turned out were women, according to Akinnaso, who said:

... 261 female Muslim students wore *hijab*, while a total of 92 Christian students (male and female) wore various robes, including choir outfits, revealing their religious affiliations. The Baptist High School, Iwo, was the only school throughout the entire state, where such an incident occurred. Hijab-wearing continued, without any hoopla, in the rest of the state, including the other sec-

ondary schools in Iwo town. Yet, the press was ready to go to town with various stories and provocative headlines, such as “Osun schoolchildren in religious war”. Other headlines drew attention to “*hijab* crisis”, “uniform crisis”, or the like.⁴

Significance of the Study

In addressing long-term issues within society, including perceptions on wearing the *hijab* in public institutions, the media serves as a *veritable milieu* in investigating discourses and conceptualizations on the issue. Ciboh⁵ observed that the history of the Nigerian media, (in particular, the print media) is interwoven within the history of the Christian religion in the country. A British missionary, Reverend Henry Townsend, founded the first documented newspaper, *Iwe Iroyin fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba* (Newspaper for the Egbas and Yorubas), in Nigeria in November 1859.

Aside from using this medium to exert some measure of influence on the traditional governmental institutions in Egba land, the paper was also used to “educate the people as a means of converting them into Christianity”.⁶ Most media proprietors in Nigeria are from the South-South geopolitical zone,⁷ in which Christianity is the predominant religion. Hence, the role played by the media in portraying how Christianity and Islam and followers are perceived within Nigerian society is vital because of the way they use information and events to construct news stories to support their positions, thereby influencing public debate.

John Borneman argues that “reducing the significance of the veil to a particular conjunction of religion and gender or to a conflict between religious and secular authorities betrays a rich history of veiling and the wide variation in its meaning”.⁸

Thus, the central aim of this paper is to show that the act of wearing a headscarf in Nigeria should be viewed from a broader perspective and should not be limited to a mere symbolism of faith pertaining to Muslim women. In other words, the *hijab* or veil should be seen as a symbol of ecumenism that transcends a particular religion if the ember of interfaith misconception is not to be fanned and the unnecessary seed of discord between Islam and Christianity is eliminated.

Literature Review

The Hijab

The headscarf is worn by Muslim women to conceal the hair and neck. It is a custom and it is even obligatory in some Muslim countries, such as Saudi Arabia or Iran, for women to conceal their bodies and to preserve their modesty, especially when outside the home. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the *hijab* as “the traditional covering for the hair and neck that is worn by Muslim women”. The *hijab*, or the veil, comes in different shapes and sizes. But for the purposes of this study, the words *hijab* or *veil* or *headscarf* will be used interchangeably when referring to this dress code.

The practice of veiling by women, which depicted a sign of social class and status, originated from among the “ancient Greco-Roman, pre-Islamic Iranian and Byzantine empires”.⁹ In the ancient Greco-Roman world, the act of women veiling was not a universal norm. Rather, “they were luxuries confined to the realm of the wealthy”.¹⁰ In other words, only respectable women in the upper strata were entitled to veiling. Tahmina Tariq notes that “slaves, peasants and others deemed inferior could not presume to

veil because their sexuality and honor was of little consequence”.¹¹ Tariq further submits that even before Islam, veiling also occupied “a crucial place in the main religious tradition of the Western world, Christianity”,¹² noting that it was also discussed as a means of preserving modesty in early Christendom.

However, in the Western media, the *hijab* is depicted as a tool of subjugation and oppression of women and an act of irrationality and fanaticism among Muslims.¹³ This is borne out of the conflicts anchored in the differences between Western and Middle-Eastern cultures, whereby negative propaganda is deployed to justify political actions. Furthermore, several studies by scholars across the world have argued that since the September 11, 2001 tragedy in the United States, the Western media had espoused and aggravated anti-Muslim sentiment, painting Islam as a religion of violence and Muslims “are fundamentalists, and therefore senseless terrorists who want to destroy everything non-Muslim”.¹⁴

As a consequence, Muslim women wearing the *hijab* have been confronted with increased discrimination, particularly in Muslim minority countries including Canada, The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and the USA.¹⁵ In 2004, the French government banned religious symbols, including the *hijab*, in public spaces. In spite of this discrimination, Muslim women in Canada, USA and Turkey who work in law enforcement agencies, particularly the police force, were recently given the choice of wearing the *hijab* as part of their uniform.¹⁶ Earlier, the World Football governing body, FIFA, also permitted its female Muslim players to wear *hijab* on grounds of religious conviction.¹⁷

While noting that the *hijab* was an urban phenomenon among Nigerian Muslim women, Madhi¹⁸ traced the history of the veil in Northern Nigeria to “the mid 1970s” when women in institutions of higher learning in the country began to cover their hair. The phenomenon spread among other urban classes, as well as those in rural areas. According to her, “... by the late 1990s, the *hijab* had begun to challenge official uniforms in the public service sectors, such as the nursing profession and secondary schools”.

Media Exhibitionism and Resistance to the Veil

Mainstream media hype, particularly in the digital world, is usually dominated by pictures of semi-clad or skimpily dressed women, whether on television, in newspapers or magazines, or in films, advertisements, billboards and paintings, among other outlets. However, there is now a growing trend in Nigeria in which even Muslim brides have shunned the *hijab* in favour of modern western clothing, uncovering their hair, dressing in tight attire during wedding ceremonies. What’s more, photos from these events have even become widely published in local magazines, entertainment columns and on television. They are also published on online blogs and on the Internet. Despite the sacredness of pregnancy, some Nigerian women and female entertainment celebrities have even gone a step further by posing nude during “baby bump” or “maternity” photoshoots. All such new phenomena point to the success of the mass media in furthering “liberal” objectification agendas, in turn triggering heated commentary from Muslims and non-Muslims alike on social media that the *hijab* it seem is for the poor, not the rich elite.

In her essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”,¹⁹ Mulvey noted that the presence of women in the film industry was solely for aesthetic purposes and not for narrative function thus reducing their role to one of erotic impact. Indeed, Mulvey argues that women are sexually objectified by male audiences thanks to the voyeuristic lure of the media, which encourages this trend, much to the ignorance of the women in the limelight. In other words, they advocate that women are objects that are meant to be seen or looked

at. This trend of objectification is becoming increasingly reflected in Nigerian music hip-pop videos, which frequently depict female dancers as adornments exacerbating the ego of the male artistes.

Bullock²⁰ argues that Europeans “attacked the veil ... tried to rip it off ... tried everything they could to see the women” out of frustration at their inability to objectify *hijab*-clad, Middle Eastern women. According to her:

The veiled women violated all the requirements of the world-as-exhibition: they could not be seen; they could not be seen, but were seeing; and they were not a picture that could be read. They were mysterious beings who refused to offer themselves up to the visitor ... this is a key aspect of the European campaign against the veil. Europeans arrived in the Middle East with the confident knowledge of being at the apex of civilization, but this conviction was destabilized upon arrival in the Middle East. How could one be superior, or establish authority over creatures who could not be known (because they could not be seen, grasped as a picture)? What could not be seen, grasped as a spectacle, could not be controlled. Moreover, Europeans felt uneasy about the veiled women: the Europeans knew they were being watched by women who were themselves unseen. That gave the women some power over the Europeans. That was a reversal of the expected relationship between superior and inferior- to see without being seen.²¹

Among Hasidic Jewish women, the veil was worn to show their commitment to the laws of the *Torah* and to demonstrate their resistance to the threat of a secular society. By wearing the veil (*sheyt* and *tikh*), which served as a protective shield, the Hasidic Jewish women reinforced their identity and guarded themselves against the secular new.²²

The veil and mode of dressing of Catholic nuns was also used to demonstrate significant resistance against the Hitler-led Nazi regime during the Holocaust. According to Kuhns,²³ Catholic nuns gave weapons to the Polish resistance from under their clothing in order not to arouse suspicion from the Nazi military. Jewish women also disguised themselves as nuns in order to save themselves from death camps. Thus, it can be established from the foregoing discourse that the concept of the use of the veil by women is well-entrenched in the three main monotheistic religions.

In *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil*,²⁴ Bullock further discussed extensively the reasons why Muslim women cover and how the *hijab* could have multiple meanings. Among reasons identified were revolutionary protests, wherein the *hijab* (*haik*) was perceived among independence-seeking Algerians as a national symbol of resistance against French colonialists.

Because colonialists and the native elite had targeted *hijab* for elimination ... the headscarf became a symbol of resistance during anti-colonial and revolutionary struggle. To don a headscarf was to demonstrate that one was against colonialism or against the Western sympathetic elite regime and all that it stood for.²⁵

Other reasons highlighted by the scholar included maintaining customs and traditions, having continued access to the public sphere, employment, gaining respect, combating male harassment and reasserting status within the social hierarchy.

Similarly, in one qualitative study, Droogsma asserted that some American Muslim women view the *hijab* as possessing multiple functions, which included “defining Muslim identity, acting as a behavior check, resisting sexual exploitation/objectification, preserving intimate relationships, and providing a source of freedom”.²⁶

Zuhur,²⁷ as cited by Bullock (2003) in her study among Cairene women of Egypt, reported an inverse correlation between wearing the *hijab* and age. She finds that younger women are more likely to cover than the older women. She also found a direct correlation between covering and social class. According to Zuhur, women in the lower strata are more likely to cover, using the *hijab* to “escape social and economic limitations in a hierarchical society through a visible leveling process and the wearing of a uniform, and by verbally emphasizing social equality²⁸”.

Thus, studies undertaken by different scholars on the issue over the last four decades have established that women have different motives for using the veil, which are not limited to disguising beauty, personal choice, economic limitations or political ideologies. Many committed Nigerian Muslim women do not only view the *hijab* as a sign of religious identity, but also perceive it as a tradition. Madhi²⁹ noted that Nigerian women wore the *hijab* “to protect themselves from verbal assaults from men who objected to their presence in public”. She identified the first set of *hijab*-wearers as followers of Sheikh Gumi, the leader of the Izala sect in northern Nigeria, which enabled Muslim women to enjoy access to services, such as healthcare and education, and in particular, to exercise their franchise in voting for a Muslim president.

The counterparts of the Izala group in south-west Nigeria included the Lanase and Bamidele followers in Ibadan; the Baqi followers in Iwo, as well as the Makondoro group in Ilorin, Offa and the rest of Yorubaland. The modern successors of all these is the Jamaatu Taawunil Muslimeen sect spread across Nigeria, with its headquarters at Iwo, Osun State. In spite of the sect’s total commitment to pursuing Western education (*paripasu*) alongside Arabic and Islamic studies in its schools, from nursery to tertiary level, they do make the *hijab* of topical interest and compliance to its members. This last group was central to the controversy on the existence of *hijab* in schools in Osun State, which this study sets out to examine.

Abdulumuni Oba³⁰ explained that some institutions of higher learning in Nigeria had attempted to deter Muslim students in higher educational institutions in the country from wearing the face veil through the introduction of dress codes. The guidelines of the dress code for students of the Obafemi University, Ile-Ife, read:

The identity of all students must, at all times, be visible, i.e. their faces must be fully visible. The form of dressing that obscures identification poses security problems.³¹

Nonetheless, in addition to approving school uniforms in those schools, the federal government-owned colleges and unity schools have over the years made allowances for female Muslim students wishing to cover their hair down to the chest. However, the use of *hijab* in Lagos and Osun States public schools in particular and the inclusion of *hijab* to the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) uniform during the orientation programmes have proved a contentious issue within both Christian and Muslim communities. Section 38(1) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) recognizes religious rights as fundamental rights:

Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion including freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance³²

Indeed, Oba described compliance with Muslim dress code as a “legitimate human right, a fundamental right and a constitutional right in Nigeria”,³³ noting that “to deny

Muslim women the right to any aspect of the *hijab* would be tantamount to denying the right to be Muslim”.

On the basis of the foregoing is part of the reasons why the present research study seeks to answer the central research question of how the Nigerian media have presented the issue of the use of hijab in public institutions. This line of research, thus, looks at the role played by Nigerian media in encouraging the abolishment of these rights.

Research Question

How is *hijab* worn in public institutions portrayed in the Nigerian media?

Research Method

The study focuses on the Nigerian press, specifically the “Lagos-Ibadan axis” south west of Nigeria, which has the highest number of influential media outlets in the country.

The study spans articles written between January 1 2016 to June 30 2017 (18 months). It examines how *The Nation*, *Punch*, *Guardian*, and the *Vanguard* newspapers covered the issue of *hijab* in public institutions. Only articles that contained the word “*hijab*” in their headlines were chosen for the study. Articles about *hijab* worn outside Nigeria were not included in the study. These essentially were international stories that originated from non-African media sources and included stories such as Muslims lending Christians *hijab* to escape ISIS attacks, to the sports brand, Nike, announcing its plans to launch *hijab* for Muslim athletes.

The total of 162 articles were used in the study (44 from *The Nation*, 35 from *Punch*, 31 from the *Guardian* and 52 from *Vanguard*). *Hijab* was most heavily reported on between June 3, 2016 and July 22, 2016, when Osun State high court judge Justice Jide Falola ruled that Muslim students were free to wear *hijab* in secondary schools. According to media reports, the police had deployed heavily armed policemen in the court premises as early as 7 am in anticipation of unrest, which did not break out. The case was filed by Osun State's Muslim community against the state government. The judge upheld the verdict declaring *hijab* a fundamental rights of Muslim' female pupils.³⁴

Results

Table 1 and Figure 1 show media coverage patterns with regards the *hijab* in the Nigerian media. The findings suggest that the *hijab* is portrayed as a conflict of interest. The figure illustrates that the *Punch*, *Vanguard* and the *Guardian* used such language significantly in

Table 1. Pattern of coverage of the usage of hijab in public institutions in *The Nation*, *Punch*, *Guardian* and *Vanguard*.

Media	Pro-hijab Outlet	Anti-hijab themes (%)	Hijab Usage themes (%)	Undefined (%) as Conflict (%)
<i>The Nation</i> (N = 44)	38.6	20.4	27.2	13.6
<i>Punch</i> (N = 35)	8.5	28.5	51.4	11.4
<i>Guardian</i> (N = 31)	16.1	19.3	35.4	29.0
<i>Vanguard</i> (N = 52)	21.1	25.0	40.3	13.4

Source: Researcher's computation of data from content analysis of *The Nation*, *Punch*, *Guardian* and *Vanguard*, 2017.

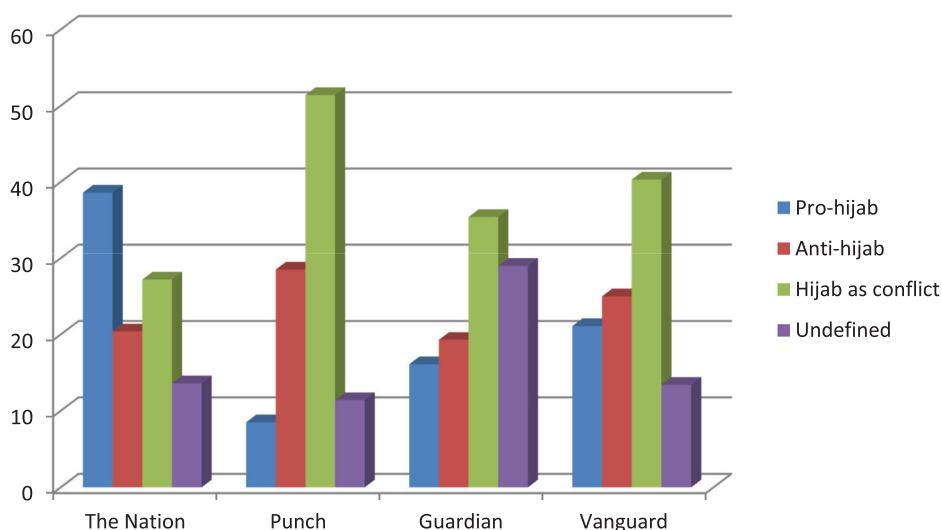


Figure 1. Pattern of coverage of the hijab issue in public institutions in *The Nation*, *Punch*, *Guardian* and *Vanguard*.

Source: Researcher's computation of data from content analysis of *The Nation*, *Punch*, *Guardian* and *Vanguard*, 2017.

its coverage of the issue. However, the *Punch* newspaper used it more (51.4%) than the other newspapers. The paper also espoused more anti-hijab themes than the other dailies. On the other hand, *The Nation* and the *Vanguard* newspaper espoused a more pro-hijab narrative (38.6% and 21.1% respectively) in its reporting.

An anti-hijab tone in any of these four newspapers is characterized by an absence of objective critique on the hijab or the logistical issues that arise as a result of wearing it.

Also, where the hijab is reported as being used to perpetuate nefarious activities, including robbery or acts of terrorism, such reporting falls under the anti-hijab criteria. On the other hand, articles that fall under the pro-hijab criteria actively promote or advocate women's choice to wear it. Stories that neither favour nor repudiate the veil are considered to be under the undefined category. There were more anti-hijab than pro-hijab articles in the newspapers during this period, while the number of neutral articles was inferior.

Discussion

Judicial Interpretation Versus Muslim–Christian Strife

Where hijab is portrayed as a conflict of interest, it is almost always framed as a matter of either judicial interpretation or Muslim–Christian contention.

From a judicial perspective, *hijab* is seen as an Islamic ruling and an act of worship. Barring it at schools therefore constitutes a breach of rights.

In February 2017, nevertheless, media sources reported that the Lagos State appealed to the Supreme Court to challenge the judgment of the Court of Appeal of July 21, 2016³⁵ reinstating the right of pupils in Lagos public primary and secondary schools wearing the head cover.

Spearheading the opposition at both national and at the state levels was the Christian Association of Nigeria.

One key point of contention, which varied in intensity within the media over time, was why Christians wouldn't allow Muslims to wear the *hijab*. One of the simplest explanations is the fear of "Islamization". The association pledged that it would ask Christian pupils to wear church-related garments to school if Osun State governor Rauf Aregbesola decided to implement the court verdict. They stated that Aregbesola masterminded the Osun State high court judgment as part of his efforts to Islamise the state. However, Muslim leaders in the state were quoted as saying that "the Muslims did not take the laws to their own hands when their children were denied the rights to wear hijab" adding that, "they approached the court and waited for three -and-a-half years before the court ruled in their favour".

Although the Christian Association of Nigeria filed a stay of execution against the judgment and an appeal, it stressed that Christian pupils would continue to wear church garments to schools if Muslim students did not stop wearing hijab.³⁶

In order to further understand Nigeria's media perception of hijab in public institutions, this study also conducted a thematic analysis of opinion editorials published in the *Daily Trust*, *The Nation* and *The Punch*.

This was all the more appropriate given the role played by the media in championing government policies. Of the three, *The Punch* and *The Nation* enjoy the widest readership base in the south-west geopolitical zone, where they are published, while the *Daily Trust* enjoys widespread readership in Nigeria's capital, Abuja, and in the northern geopolitical zone, which is characterized by a large Muslim population and within which it is published.

Including these editorials in the research methodology was both significant and strategic because newspaper editorials more often than not reflect the position espoused by newspapers, which seek to galvanize, persuade and influence public opinion by bringing the facts behind a burning issue to the fore. According to Lauterer, "Nothing in the newspaper makes people madder than something on the editorial page with which they disagree".³⁷ Communications scholar Duyile also notes that editorials reflect their opinions, enabling readers to take decisive stances on the issues being discussed. He further stated that such opinion could be an "argument exhibiting the logical reasoning of the newspaper using the thoughts of the proprietor for the purpose of persuading the readers (audience) to kick against an idea, policy or an action based on facts available".³⁸

Although many Nigerian Muslims have contributed significantly to the socio-economic development of the country at many levels, Tella³⁹ contended that "it was the Christian religion that opened the gates to mass media" with the establishment of the *Iwe Iroyin* in 1859. Tella further argued that:

... the media has since then remained perpetually controlled and dominated by Christians. Many contemporary investors in the media industry are also Christians except the defunct Concord group of newspapers founded by the late M.K.O. Abiola, the Monitor by Arisekola Alao, The Reporter by the late Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, The Democrat by Ismaila Isa, the Covenant by a group of Muslims and the Daily Trust. All the other newspapers above except the Daily Trust are dead. The People's Daily owned by a group of Northern Muslims is a new entrant into the market. It is also important to point out that despite the tremendous growth of the media in Nigeria today, less than 15 percent of the practicing journalists are Muslims.⁴⁰

Since the Nigerian mass media is controlled and dominated by Christians,⁴¹ media representation of Islam, Muslims and the veil has been characterized by hostility and controversy.

The Punch

In an editorial entitled “Osun and the Aregbesola legacy” on June 24, 2016, *The Punch* had described the court decision sanctioning *hijab* in public secondary schools in Osun state as “quirky”.⁴² It had argued that “neither *hijab* nor any robe of any faith has a place in public schools”. The paper was also swift in blaming the Muslim Students Society as “threats to peace”,⁴³ while glossing over the apparent mischief perpetrated by the Osun State branch of CAN in inciting and urging Christian students of a public school to defy the authorities.

The editorial failed to warn on the implications and consequences of such a development, thus exacerbating the conflict. During the same period, other negative, hostile headlines against the existence of *hijab* at schools published in *The Punch* included: “Hijab: Mortgaging Osun pupils’ future with religious animosity”,⁴⁴ “CAN is waiting for Aregbesola to expel Christian pupils for wearing religious uniforms”,⁴⁵ “I didn’t order use of hijab in schools-Aregbesola”,⁴⁶ and “Our children will stop wearing choir robes to school when Aregbesola reverses *hijab* wearing”.⁴⁷

These reports contradict reality because female Muslim students, particularly in the northern geopolitical zone and in the south-west geopolitical zones, have been wearing the *hijab* in primary and secondary schools over the years. Similarly, other articles questioning the *hijab* in public schools appeared against the backdrop of lone wolf suicide bombings north east of the country, in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States.

Rather than portraying the *hijab* as an act of faith and a sign of virtue and modesty, the media framed the issue as a crisis and a barrier impeding students’ learning and education.⁴⁸ In this light, the media amplified and exacerbated hate speech and anti-*hijab* comments under the guise of information and analysis, thereby influencing how the narrative of the issue is perceived among public opinion. The headline “They steal Christian girls, rape them, give them *hijab*, then marry them - CAN Secretary”⁴⁹ is one such example. Wolfsfeld argues that reports like this fan the flames of conflict. He points out that:

This emphasis on strife and discord has a number of negative consequences for peace building. First, presenting conflict between the two sides in dramatic terms serves to inflame the political atmosphere. Such presentations, especially when they are amplified and reinforced by the different media, have the potential of becoming self-fulfilling prophecies. Headlines that focus on threats, accusations, and confrontations generate anger on both sides and demands for retaliation quickly follow. Minor glitches become major problems, disagreements are turned into crises. Enemies become more frightening, opponents more vicious. The inevitable result is that the news media are more likely to escalate a conflict than to pacify it.⁵⁰

The Nation

During the 2015 Nigeria general elections, *The Nation* was greatly used to promote the political interests of its founder an influential Muslim politician, Chief Bola Ahmed Tinubu, and his political party, the All Progressives Congress (APC). Ironically, in an

editorial published on June 16, 2016, *The Nation* not only faulted the ruling sanctioning *hijab* at schools in Osun State by stated that the ruling defied the entire purpose of school uniforms, but also stated that terror attacks and medical examination malpractice were likely to increase if “the person behind the veil is unknown”.⁵¹

As critiques of the literature suggest, the veil is often a measure of respectability, modesty and chastity, making south-west opposition to hijab among students all the more baffling. Admittedly, Boko Haram female members, like many others around them, wear hijab. They also utilize the hijab to conceal bombs.⁵² This will seem a flash in the pan considering the distance of the Boko Haram war zone to the area under study. It is totally misleading to equate the harmless hijab custom in the south-west to those in the domain of war. Parallels can be drawn between what happened in north-east Nigeria and local wars in continental Europe, as well as World War II.

Indeed, the hostile propaganda against hijab in Yorubaland in south-west Nigeria may be due to European imperialism impinging on Nigerian cultural values over the years, painting hijab as incompatible with Western values that are accepted hook, line and sinker in post-independence Nigerian society, especially in the southern geopolitical zone. Following independence in 1960, Nigerian media has increasingly espoused secular norms along Western parameters, hence the emphasis on aesthetics. An example of this is the *Daily Sun's* page 3, which has routinely read: “Do you consider yourself stunning enough to grace our page?” over the past decade. This corroborates Mulvey's assertion that women are objectified.⁵³

Suicide bombings, often perpetrated by girls in the north-east, have fallen into the hands of the media, which paints hijab against this backdrop of fundamentalism and terrorism.⁵⁴ This is covered in the analysis of anti-hijab coverage. There is no doubt that Boko Haram terror must be deplored for hurting Muslim interests in Nigeria. While Muslim groups, such as the Federation of Muslim Women in Nigeria (FOMWAN), had cautioned against banning the hijab, it equally maintained that banning the hijab was not the solution to insecurity in the north-east.⁵⁵ This is why Tichenor, Donohue and Olien, submits that the:

... resolution of social problems is related to inputs of information. Accordingly, if a system is sufficiently saturated with information, a general understanding of the topic will develop within the system. Once understanding is at hand, resolution is assumed to be at hand.⁵⁶

Changing negative media narratives about Islam and Muslims requires persistent effort at educating non-Muslims and clarifying misconceptions, especially against the backdrop of an increasingly polarized country. This is because the media, particularly the south-west press, is highly suspicious of any policy (no matter how well-intentioned) instituted by any arm of government, especially those led by Muslim adherents, even if such policy is implemented for universal benefit.

Daily Trust

While newspapers within the south-west Lagos-Ibadan axis were swift in expressing their disapproval of wearing *hijab* at schools, the *Daily Trust*, a highly influential paper in the northern geopolitical zone, which has a large Muslim population, called on CAN to exercise tolerance and understanding in its June 20, 2016 editorial.⁵⁷ The paper, which noted that the hijab issue was not new in the country, had further argued that, “it was not proper

for the leadership of CAN to have directed children still growing up as pupils and students to defy authorities and wear church gowns to school”.⁵⁸

This study finds pro-*hijab* womens’ groups, such as the Al-Muminat, the Criterion, Muslim Students’ Society of Nigeria, Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria and Guild of Muslim Professionals, amongst others,⁵⁹ engaged in advocacy and calling for greater understanding of the veil.

While upholding *hijab* as a basic tenet of the Quran, Muslim women lamented discrimination when forced to unveil before sitting for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination or getting Bank Verification Numbers (BVN). A spokesperson for one of such advocacy groups, Orolu-Balogun, was quoted as saying: “Imagine being asked to take off your shirt or your trousers because you wanted to get your driver’s license, or being told that you would not be able to vote in the next elections because you wouldn’t bare your shoulders or show your cleavage in the picture on your voters’ card, or that you wouldn’t have access to the funds in your bank account because you refused to show your bare back in order to register for your BVN. These, and worse, are what a Muslim woman who wears the *hijab* feels when she is asked to take off her *hijab* or expose her ears before she could be allowed her constitutional rights”.⁶⁰

Research has also revealed that the way in which journalists frame issues can affect how people make judgment about it and the *hijab* controversy is no exception. The Nigerian media, in particular that of the Lagos-Ibadan axis, frames *hijab* as a fundamental difference between two religions rather than an ecumenism phenomenon, thereby nurturing intolerance and de-emphasizing mutual understanding and dialogue. Their headlines make big proclamations, from “Fresh crisis brews in Osun Schools over *hijab*” to “Muslims storm schools as Aregbesola disclaims *hijab* order”. Tahmina Tariq describes such forms of reportage as “sensationalized media reports which accomplish little else than instilling the fear of the ‘Other’ ... ”⁶¹

However, as demonstrated by the editorial published in the *Daily Trust*, the media can play a constructive role in fostering religious understanding and harmony in a multi-religious polity such as Nigeria. Conversely, it can also play a destructive role in aggravating interreligious strife by offering biased interpretations on issues such as *hijab* and thus negatively influencing the very public opinion they are supposed to help, not hinder.

Given the ability of the media to shape public perception, it is evident from this study that, issues which affect the interests of Islam and Muslims will receive less than a favourable coverage in media discourse as captured on the use of the *hijab* in public institutions. Thus this study posits that the Nigerian media has failed to fully contextualize the *hijab* by focusing on the negative connotations associated with the *hijab* instead of championing the values of piety, respect and dignity that the veil is meant to foster among male peers.

The influential south-west media organizations refused to acknowledge *hijab* in that region was nothing new, particularly prior to the reclassification of public schools by the Osun State government. They also failed to recognize that the *hijab*, particularly in the northern geopolitical zone, had enabled women to gain access to the public sphere, become educated and involved in advocacy, participate in public discourse and make political contributions for the development of society.

Aside from religious obligations, the media must understand that the veil allows women to feel they have jurisdiction over their own bodies and reinforces the idea that physique play no role in social interactions. Bullock puts it this way:

It is a request that Muslim women who enjoy wearing the *hijab* be treated with respect, be listened to gracefully, and disputed with in the spirit of goodwill. We

may agree to disagree over certain issues, although at the very least, we should be able to disagree and still remain partners in the global village.⁶²

Conclusion

This study sought to explore Nigeria's media perception of *hijab* usage in public institutions. It examined how four major national dailies covered the issue of the hijab at public institutions. Furthermore, it analysed thematically, how the editorial opinions published by three national dailies—*Daily Trust*, *The Nation* and *The Punch* deliberated the issue, finding that, news coverage about the use of hijab in public institutions is rather hostile, particularly from the influential Southern-based media.

It also examined the broader scope of modesty in the three monotheistic religions, thereby reinforcing the fact that hijab is not limited to Islam. Indeed, we have discovered that body-covering practices exist in African tradition for various purposes, none of which resulted in human denigration. Centrally, when the *hijab* is applied universally irrespective of religious belief, it is, across cultures, meant to guard modesty and chastity and ensure the dignifying treatment of women, especially among students as they approach puberty.

Even though globalism has ensured the spread of mass destruction and terrorism, which caused the *hijab* to become stereotyped, particularly over the past ten years, the Nigerian media can do well by promoting religious tolerance among the people of Nigeria by telling the full story to the public instead of engaging in negative propaganda, which could pitch one religion against another simply because they want to attract new readership in a competitive newspaper market. This study recommends that the Nigerian media should refrain from exploring fault-lines that seek to promote divisive, us-versus-them language in headlines and features. Rather, it should emphasize the values and uniqueness of each religion in order to engender tolerance, peace and harmony in the society.

The role of the media in connecting different elements of society is without a doubt vital. That is why Muslims in Nigeria must understand that the media is more than just a platform for disseminating periodic press releases or reactionary messages on issues pertaining to Islam. In order to communicate with non-Muslims about Islam and its pristine and precision-driven values, Muslims must play an active role by investing in human and financial capital within the media, which is a pillar for social construction, negotiation and social renegotiation.

Had they done so, they would have been able to build capacities to withstand and checkmate negative stereotypes associated with Muslim interests, refute misconceptions about Islam and generate mutual professional and industrial respect which will cumulate in dialogue for mutual understanding among ethno-religious groups in the country. This is attainable through informed and sustained feedback to all negative editorials against Islamic culture in those original sources of hostility, but more importantly through sustained efforts by Muslims to improve on the capacity building of human and material resources to withstand the perennial media hostility.

ORCID

Fatima Abubakre  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6765-2730>

NOTES

1. There has been extensive research on the use of the hijab in developed nations. See: Chouki El Hamel, "Muslim Diaspora in Western Europe: The Islamic Headscarf (Hijab), the Media and Muslims' Integration in France", *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2002, pp. 293–308; Emma Tarlo, "Hijab in London, Metamorphosis, Resonance and Effects", *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2007, pp. 131–156; Rachel Anderson Droogsma, "Redefining Hijab: American Muslim Women's Standpoints on Veiling" *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 2007, pp. 294–319; Michelle Byng, "Symbolically Muslim: Media, Hijab and the West", *Critical Sociology*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 2010, pp. 109–129; Jacqui Ewart, Mark Pearson and Guy Healy, "Journalists' and Educators' Perspectives on News Media Reporting of Islam and Muslim Communities in Australia and New Zealand", *Journal of Media and Religion*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2016, pp. 136–145; Sigtona Halrynjo and Merel Jonker, "Naming and Framing of Intersectionality in Hijab Cases-Does It Matter? An Analysis of Discrimination Cases in Scandinavia and the Netherlands", *Gender, Work and Organization*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 2016, pp. 278–295.
2. Nigeria has the fifth largest Muslim population in the world, and the largest Muslim population in Africa. See, *World Atlas*, "Countries with the Largest Muslim Population", Pew Research Centre, 2015 Pew Research Centre, 2015, <http://www.worldatlas.com/articles/countries-with-the-largest-muslim-populations.html> (accessed 20 January 2017).
3. *Information Nigeria*, "CAN threatens Showdown In Osun Over Judgment Permitting Hijab In Schools", <http://www.informationng.com/2016/06/can-threatens-showdown-in-osun-over-judgment-permitting-hijab-in-schools.html> (accessed 9 June 2016).
4. Niyi Akinnaso, "Osun 'hijab' Crisis with Statistics", *The Punch*, 5 July 2016. <http://www.punchng.com/osun-hijab-crisis-statistics/> (accessed 5 July 2016).
5. Rodney Ciboh, *Mass Media in Nigeria: Perspectives on Growth and Development*, Ibadan: Aboki Publishers, 2007.
6. Grade Imoh, "Mass Media and Democratic Consolidation in Africa: Problems, Challenges and Prospects", *New Media and Mass Communication*, Vol. 16, 2013, pp. 42–58.
7. I. Ibraheem, A. Ogwezzzy-Ndisika and A. Tejumaiye, *Beyond Influence: Media and the 2015 Presidential Election*, Conference Paper, 2015. <http://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Conference-Paper-by-Ismail-Adegboyega-and-Co.pdf> (accessed May 2017).
8. John Borneman, "Veiling and Women's Intelligibility", *Cardozo Law Review*, Vol. 30, No. 6, 2009, pp. 2745–2760.
9. Homa Hoodfar, "More than Clothing: Veiling as an Adaptive Strategy", in *The Muslim veil in North America: Issues and Debates*, eds. Sajida Alvi, Homa Hoodfar and Sheila McDonough, Toronto: Women's Press, 2003, pp. 3–40.
10. Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, *Aphrodite's Tortoise: The Veiled Women of Ancient Greece*, Swansea, Wales: The Classical Press of Wales, 2003; Tahmina Tariq, "Let Modesty Be Her Raiment: The Classical Context of Ancient-Christian Veiling", *Implicit Religion*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2013, pp. 493–506.
11. Tariq, "Let Modesty Be Her Raiment", *op. cit.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. Katherine Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes*, Herndon, VA: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2003.
14. Nahid Kabir, "Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian Media, 2001–2005", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 2006, pp. 313–326; Karim, 2006:117; Erik Bleich, Hasher Nisar and Rana Abdelhamid, "The Effect of Terrorist Events on Media Portrayals of Islam and Muslims: Evidence from New York Times Headlines, 1985–2013", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 7, 2015, pp. 1109–1127.
15. Sabah Ramath, Lori Chambers and Pamela Wakewich, "Asserting Citizenship: Muslim Women's Experiences with the Hijab in Canada", *Women Studies International Forum*, Vol. 58, 2015, pp. 34–40; T. Ramachandran, "No Woman Left Uncovered: Unveiling and the Politics of Liberation in Multi/Interculturalism", *Canadian Women Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2–3, 2009, pp. 33–38; Hoodfar "More than Clothing", *op. cit.*; Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women*, *op. cit.*
16. C. Tolan, "These are the American Cities Where Police Officers Can Wear Hijabs", *Fusion*, 30 August 2016, <http://fusion.net/story/341805/police-department-wear-hijab-policy/> (accessed September 2016); M. Picht and E. Daniels, "Muslim Policewomen in Turkey Can Now Wear Their Hijabs on Duty", *Denver7*, 27 August 2016. <http://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/muslim-policewomen-in-turkey-can-now-wear-their-hijabs-on-duty> (accessed September 2016); Press Association, "Hijab Approved as Uniform Option by Scotland Police", *The Telegraph*, 24 August 2016. <http://www>.

- telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/24/hijab-approved-as-uniform-option-by-scotland-police/ (accessed September 2016).
17. Al-Jazeera, "FIFA Lifts Ban on Head Covers", <http://aljazeera.com/sport/2014/03/fifa-allows-hijab-turban-players-20143113053667394.html> (accessed 1 March 2014).
18. H. Mahdi, "The Hijab in Nigeria, the Woman's Body and the Feminist Private/Public Discourse", *Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA) Working Paper Series*, The Roberta Buffett Centre for International and Comparative Studies, Northwestern University, 2009.
19. L. Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 1975, pp. 6–18.
20. Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Lynne Schreiber, *Introduction in Hide and Seek: Jewish Women and Hair Covering*, New York: Urim Publications, 2003; B. Schreier, *Becoming American Women: Clothing and the Jewish Immigrant Experience, 1880-1920*, Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1994.
23. E. Kuhns, *The Habit: A History of the Clothing of Catholic Nuns*, New York: Double Day Publishing, 2003.
24. Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women*, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Droogsmas, "Redefining Hijab", *op. cit.*, p. 311.
27. S. Zuhur, *Revealing Reveiling: Islamist Gender Ideology in Contemporary Egypt*, New York: State University of New York, 1992; Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women*, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
28. Zuhur, *Revealing Reveiling*, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
29. Mahdi, "The Hijab in Nigeria", *op. cit.*, p. 2.
30. Abdulmumini Oba, "The Hijab in Educational Institutions and Human Rights: Perspectives from Nigeria and Beyond", *Identity, Culture & Politics: An Afro-Asian Dialogue*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2009, pp. 51–74.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
32. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Lagos: Federal Government Press, 1999.
33. Oba, "The Hijab in Educational Institutions", *op. cit.*, p. 74.
34. F. Makinde, "Breaking: Osun Students Can Wear Hijab to School-Court" *Punch*, 3 June 2016. <http://www.punchng.com/osun-students-can-wear-hijab-school-court/> (accessed 3 June 2016).
35. Ramon Oladimeji, "Lagos Takes Hijab Case to Supreme Court", *Punch*, 7 February 2017. <http://www.punchng.com/lagos-takes-hijab-case-supreme-court/> (accessed 7 February 2017).
36. F. Makinde, 'Hijab: CAN Files Stay of Execution, Christian Leaders Meet', *Punch*, 23 June 2016. <http://www.punchng.com/hijab-can-files-stay-execution-christian-leaders-meet/> (accessed 23 June 2016).
37. J. Lauterer, *Community Journalism: Relentlessly Local*, 3rd edition, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
38. Dayo Duyile, *Writing For the Media – A Manual for African Journalist*, Lagos: Gong Communication, 2005.
39. Liad Tella, "Media and Religious Crisis in Nigeria: Any Consonance?", *Centrepont Journal*, Humanities Edition, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2014, pp. 145–166.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
42. Punch Editorial, "Osun and the Aregbesola Legacy", *Punch*, 24 June 2016. <http://www.punchng.com/osun-aregbesola-legacy/> (accessed 24 June 2016).
43. *Ibid.*
44. F. Makinde, "Hijab: Mortgaging Osun Pupils' Future with Religious Animosity", *Punch*, 25 June 2016. <http://www.punchng.com/hijab-mortgaging-osun-pupils-future-religious-animosity/> (accessed 25 June 2016).
45. Friday Olorok, "CAN is Waiting for Aregbesola to Expel Christian Pupils for Wearing Religious Uniforms – President-Elect" *Punch*, 19 June 2016. <http://www.punchng.com/can-waiting-aregbesola-expel-christian-pupils-wearing-religious-uniforms-president-elect/> (accessed 19 June 2016).
46. F. Makinde, "I Didn't Order Use of Hijab in Schools-Aregbesola", *Punch*, 20 June 2016. <http://www.punchng.com/didnt-order-use-hijab-schools-aregbesola/> (accessed 20 June 2016).
47. F. Makinde, "Our Children Will Stop Wearing Choir Robes to School when Aregbesola Reverses Hijab Wearing", *Punch*, 18 June 2016. <http://www.punchng.com/children-ll-stop-wearing-choir-robos-school-aregbesola-reverses-hijab-wearing/> (accessed 18 June 2016).

48. A. Adelakun, "Hijab and the War against Education", *Punch*, 23 June 2016. <http://www.punchng.com/hijab-war-education/> (accessed 23 June 2016).
49. D. Ajayi, "They Steal Christian Girls, Rape them, give them Hijab, then Marry them- CAN Secretary", *The Trent*, 6 March 2016.
50. Gadi Wolfsfeld, "Building Theory", in *Media and the Path to Peace*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 8–44.
51. *The Nation* Editorial, "That curious verdict", *The Nation*, 16 June 2016. <http://thenationonlineng.net/that-curious-verdict/> (Accessed 16 June 2016).
52. News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), "Madagali Blast: Adamawa Plans to Review Use of Hijab", *Punch*, 12 December 2016. <http://www.punchng.com/madagali-blast-adamawa-plans-review-use-hijab/> (accessed 12 December 2016).
53. Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *op. cit.*
54. NAN, "Madagali blast", *op. cit.*
55. A. Abdullah, "Insecurity: FOMWAN Cautions against Banning Hijab", *Vanguard*, 7 August 2015. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2015/08/insecurity-fomwan-cautions-against-banning-of-hijab/> (accessed 7 August 2015).
56. P. Tichenor, G. Donohue and C. Olien, *Community Conflict and the Press*, London: SAGE Publications, 1980.
57. *Daily Trust* Editorial, "Hijab in Osun Schools," *Daily Trust*, 20 June 2016. <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/editorial/hijab-in-osun-schools/151827.html> (accessed 20 June 2016).
58. *Ibid.*
59. S. Salau, "Muslim Women Lament Frequent Harassment over Use of Hijab", *Guardian*, 3 February 2017. <https://guardian.ng/features/friday-worship/muslim-women-lament-frequent-harassment-over-use-of-hijab/> (accessed 03 February 2017).
60. *Ibid.*
61. Tariq, "Let Modesty Be Her Raiment", *op. cit.*
62. Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women*, *op. cit.*, p. 229.