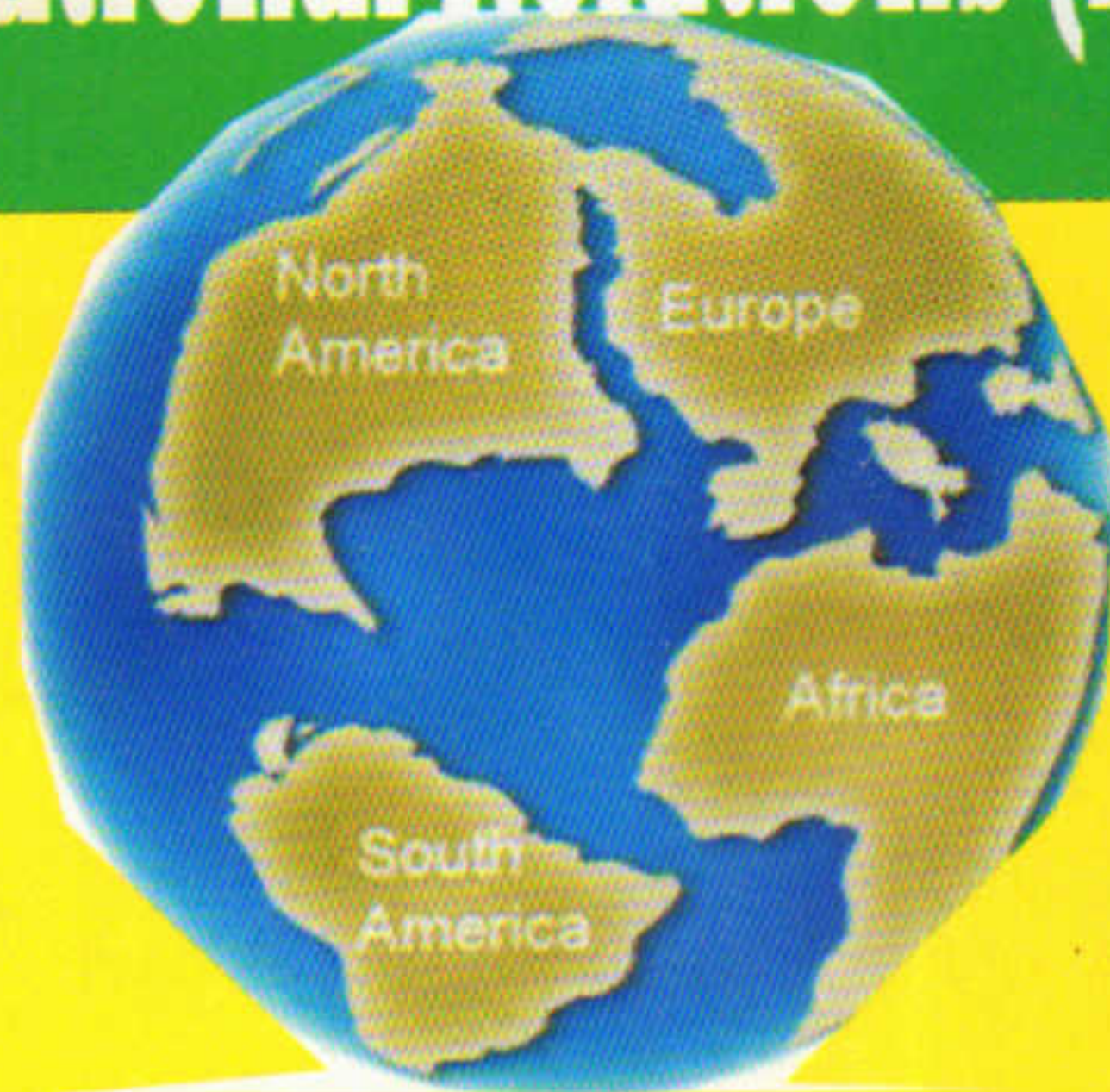




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MUSLIM WOMEN IN PARTISAN POLITICS IN NIGERIA: THE REACTIONS OF THE TRADITIONAL 'ULAMĀ'

Adebayo, Rafiu Ibrahim, PhD

Department of Religions,

University of Ilorin,

Ilorin, Nigeria.

adrafhope@yahoo.com; rafiu@unilorin.edu.ng

+23470 354 672

Abstract

Going through the political history of Islam, women had played significant political roles in the affairs of the Muslim states. This however has not been the situation in Nigeria where Muslim women are sceptical about their involvement in politics leaving it as an exclusive business for men. This has been so probably because of the voice of Muslim 'ulamā' against women participation in the nation's politicking or the general belief that politics is a dirty game which is not meant for womenfolk. The big question then is why is it that Nigerian 'ulamā' go against Muslim women's involvement in politics? Some other questions are: would Muslims not stand the risk of losing their political potentiality should they remain indifferent to political participation? What also would be the feeling of female Muslim elites who have flair for politics and how will their political interest not affect their spiritual or religious interest in the long run? This paper therefore seeks answers to these questions. To do justice to these questions, attempt was made to explore the Islamic political history for the purpose of digging out the extent of Muslim women's involvement in politics, and the reasons for non-involvement of Muslim women in the nation's politics in the views of the traditional 'ulamā' in the country. The major instrument used for this research exercise was questionnaire which was administered to elicit response from the traditional 'ulamā'. It concludes that there is need for active involvement of Muslim women in the nation's political posts, particularly to serve as attraction for Muslim women who are not ready to sacrifice their religious teachings for politics.

Keywords: Traditional, 'ulamā', apprehension, women, politics, Nigeria

Introduction

The practical involvement of women in politics is receiving serious attention from those who strongly feel that they are being marginalized in the political realm and so could not compete favourably well with their male counterparts. The age-long dichotomy between male and female has been a

matter of concern for scholars, hence the development of Gender Studies as an academic programme among political scientists, philosophers and theologians.¹ In the contemporary period, the United Nations has come up with different steps to rescue women from the 'bondage' of men. Such include the promulgation of Political Right in 1947 and equality in work and education in 1948, among others.² This step led to the emergence of different Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) championing the cause of women empowerment through sensitisation programmes like seminars and conferences. For instance, the first United Nations Conference on the International Women's Year was held in Mexico in 1975. The second and third of its nature were held in Nairobi and Vienna respectively. Cairo also hosted the fourth World Conference on Women and Development in 1994, while similar of such a conference was held in 1995 in Beijing. The aims of the Conference among others were to annul those practices and values that discriminate against women; to strategise how to increase the number of women representation in legislative bodies around the world and to encourage women towards realising their abilities and utmost importance in the political and social development such that they will be significantly represented in the decision making bodies in every organization.³

In Nigeria, the 1989 National Seminar on Women and Children which was held at Owerri ushered in the Nigerians' serious agitation for the promotion of rights of women and this consequently led to the establishment of different NGOs like the National Council for Women Societies (NCWS) and the National Council for Women Politicians (NCWP) among others.⁴ In 1997, Nigeria hosted the African First Ladies Peace Mission Conference at Abuja. The numerous steps taken by the Nigerian women led to the establishment of numerous women commissions and agencies such as the Better Life for Rural Women, Family Support Programme, Family Economic Advancement Programme and the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development at both Federal and State levels.⁵ In line with the Beijing conference declaration which advocates for 35 percent affirmative action in appointments for political and public offices, there has been an increase in women's representation in Government from 10 percent in 2011 to over 33 percent in 2013. As at 2014, out of the forty-two federal ministers in Nigeria, thirteen are females representing 31 percent, while four out of the eighteen Special Advisers are females representing twenty-three percent.

From all indications, it cannot be refuted that womenfolk had been subjugated by numerous traditional myths, cultures, and religions. Indeed, their subordinate position is almost universal going by their plight across different civilizations, culture and religions. Opeloye submitted that women were held in very low esteem among the ancient civilizations such as the Byzantines and Persians, and so was the case in the primordial religions like Hinduism and Buddhism.⁶ This is equally the view of Qutb who studied the position of women in Europe prior to the history of the movement for women's emancipation there; before and during the periods of serfdom and feudalism and till the industrial revolution took place in Europe. To him, before the industrial revolution, women were looked upon as mere nonentities, and with the industrial revolution, their condition became worsen, because the family life was completely ruined, as women and children were forced to go and work in factories leaving the country-life for cities where morality was downplayed and no one cared for his neighbours.⁷ Discussing further on the plight of women consequent upon the revolution, Qutb submits:

But what did woman get as a result of this revolution? She was overlooked physically, had lost respect as well as her womanhood! She was denied even the natural pleasure of having a family, having children, living with them and of realizing her own true self by suffering for them and so have a true sense of well-being and magnanimity. She did, however, in place of these at last win the right to have equal wages with man, the only natural right offered her by Europe.⁸

The transformation which had occurred to womenfolk at the advent of Islam is unequal in human history when compared to other cultures and civilizations which preceded it. The religion succeeded in not only restoring to womenfolk her dignity and honour by putting her in almost the same pedestal with men, but also in protecting her rights as a daughter, a wife, a mother and even as a widow. However, it could not be denied that the rights accorded women in Islam had been trapped upon due to some socio-cultural influences which prominent Muslim reformers of the 19th century had seriously kicked against. In Nigeria for instance, the 1804 Jihad leader, Shaykh Uthman Danfodiyo was not happy with the way and manner women

were treated in the traditional Hausa society and even among the '*ulamā*' of the period. He condemned what he called impious practices of the '*ulamā*' who left their wives, daughters and slaves neglected like animals without giving them adequate education.⁹

It seems positive responses are coming up from the reforming activities of Muslim reformers as history is recording Muslim women's active participation in politics and their attainment of high political offices in some countries. Turkey and Bangladesh had gone to the extent of electing Tansu Ciller and Khalida Zia both who were women as heads of state in their respective countries.¹⁰ In Nigeria, the story is different as Muslim women who engage in politics are being looked down upon, while some '*ulamā*' do kick against this practice believing it is against the spirit of Islam. It is relevant to cite here the case of Senator Gbemi Saraki who aspired to become the first female governor in Kwara State in 2011. This attempt was met with serious rejection and criticism from Muslim clerics and Muslim organizations who did not accept women leadership in the predominantly Muslim Kwara State. Her defection from the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) to the Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN) could not help the situation, as she lost gallantly at the poll.¹¹

Women-participation in the Nigerian Politics

From the pre-colonial days of Nigeria, the involvement of women in politics has not been encouraging. However, records have it that some women had excelled in politics and decision making in their respective areas. Among the Yoruba tribe, Moremi of Ile-Ife was noted to have liberated her people from invaders. Some women were said to have participated actively in politics in Oyo, namely Iyayun, Orompoto, Jomijomi and Jepojepo. In Akure, Eye-moi and Ayo-Ero were regent-monarchs between 1705-1735 and 1850-1851CE respectively.¹² In the northern part of the country, the personality of Queen Amina of Zaria would be remembered for driving invaders from Zaria, while the likes of Daura, Kofono, Gulfano, Yawano, Yakania, Walsam, Cadar and Agagri were queens in the pre-colonial Daura Emirate.¹³

Generally speaking, the participation of women in politics right from the inception of democracy in Nigeria has not been encouraging. That notwithstanding, some women have emerged in the political scene of the

country, though they are yet victorious in their political ambition. It suffices to mention some of these personalities here. In the April 2003 election, Mrs. Sarah Jibril emerged as Presidential candidate of the Peoples Action Congress (PAC), while Major Mojisola Adekunle Obasanjo appeared as the Presidential flag bearer of the Masses Movement of Nigeria. In the same vein, Hajiya Asmau and Hajia Mairo Baturiya Habib were vice-presidential candidates of the African Renaissance and Justice Party respectively. At gubernatorial level, some women also won ticket for governorship election. This was true of Mrs. Kofo Bucknor Akerele of the United Nigeria Peoples' Party in Lagos State and Mrs Teju Abiola as Deputy Governor candidate of the National Conscience Party in Lagos State. However, none of the parties and their women candidates sailed through, as their candidates hardly won at their wards' level.¹⁴

Despite the fact that women are coming on board in view of the increment in the number of women in appointive and elective posts, the struggle has not all that been fruitful when compared to successes of their male counterparts. The Secretary of the women section of Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM), Mrs Titi Salaam, looked at the political fate of women in the 2003 primaries of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and observed that women had hard nuts to crack in politics. According to her, none of the five women who contested the senatorial slots, and four who contested the gubernatorial tickets sailed through; while only one was able to secure ticket for the House of Representatives out of the seven who contested. At the Local Government level, none of the eight who contested was given the chance.¹⁵

In addition to the above, out of 978 seats in the 36 states' Houses of Assembly in 1999, only 12 seats were won by women, while the rest 966 seats were won by men. This was slightly improved in 2003 when women had 39 seats as against 951 seats won by men out of the total 990 seats. In the year 2007, women won 54 seats, while men had the balance of 936.¹⁶ Tables 1 & 2 clearly show the number of seats won by women at the Senate and the National House of Representative between 1999 and 2011.

Table 1: Women in the Senate (1999-2011)

Year	Total number of seats	Men	Percentage of men	Women	Percentage of women
1999	109	106	97.2%	3	2.8%
2003	109	105	96.3%	4	3.7%
2007	109	100	91.7%	9	8.3%
2011	109	102	93.6%	7	6.4%

Source: Ekundayo & Ama, (2014).

Table 2: Women in the National House of Representative (1999-2011)

Year	Total no. of seats	Men	Percentage of men	Women	Percentage of women
1999	360	348	96.7%	12	3.3%
2003	360	319	94.2%	21	5.8%
2007	360	335	93.1%	25	6.9%
2011	360	334	92.8%	26	7.2%

Source: Ngara & Ayabam, (2013).¹⁷

In the 2015 General election, out of the 109 Senators of the 8th National Assembly, only seven were women, while out of the 360 members of the House of Representatives, only nine were women. In the same vein, a reflection of the attitude of women to politics could be seen in the appointment into appointive and elective position in the Shari'ah implemented states in Nigeria. Table III shows the extent of women's appointment into Federal Senate, Federal House of Representative and Federal Ministers in the Shari'ah States in Nigeria.

Table III: Women's appointment into Federal Senate, Federal House of Representative and Federal Ministers in the Shari'ah States

State	Federal Senate		Federal House of Assembly		Federal Minister	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Bauchi	3	0	12	0	1	0
Borno	3	0	10	0	1	0
Gombe	3	0	6	0	0	1
Jigawa	3	0	11	0	1	0
Kaduna	3	0	15	1	0	0
Kano	3	0	25	0	2	0
Katsina	3	0	15	0	1	0
Kebbi	3	0	7	1	0	1
Niger	2	1	10	0	1	0
Sokoto	3	0	11	0	1	0
Yobe	3	0	6	0	1	0
Zamfara	3	0	7	0	0	1
Total	35	01	135	2	9	3

Source: www.nassnig.org/senate/; www.nassnig.org/House/; www.guide2womenleaders.com accessed 2/11/2014.

At state level, none of the Shari'ah implementing states in Nigeria has produced any Governor or Deputy Governor, while only six seats have been contested and won by women out of the overall 360 seats in the states' Houses of Assembly.

To conclude this aspect, it behoves us to mention that the 1999 Nigerian constitution does not in any way discriminate on the basis of sex on issues relating to politics. Section 77 (2) of the constitution allows every Nigerian who has attained the age of eighteen years to register for the purpose of election, while section 40 allows every person the right to assemble freely and associate with other persons and belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of his interests.¹⁸

The Traditional 'ulamā' in the Nigerian context

Nasiru has classified the 'ulamā' into two in the Nigerian context, namely traditional and modern scholars. According to him, the traditional

scholars are well versed in the Qur'ān, the Hadīth, Arabic Grammar, Islamic jurisprudence and other branches of Arabic and Islamic studies. These are scholars who would not do what they thought the Prophet did not do and they preferred to do what he did like eating with their fingers instead of using spoon and other eating utensils; and sitting on the floor rather than on chairs. They hardly allow their women to go out even at night and when necessary, they go out fully veiled. They also leave their beards uncut and have formed the habit of always putting on their turban. They do not have interest in western type of education which they see as *kufur* education and learning in English which to them is *kufur* language.¹⁹ Describing further the characteristics of typical traditional scholars, Nasiru submits:

....they do not use any calendar even if it is prepared from the Arab world to calculate dates of the Islamic festivals. They have their own way of calculation. They do not dance or listen to non-Islamic music. They do not take pictures or use them to decorate their houses, because the Hadith says that angels would not enter houses on the walls of which are hung pictures of beings that live, eat or grow. They read out their sermons on Fridays in Arabic because that was how the Prophet used to address the people.²⁰

A good example of the traditional '*ulama*' in the South-western Nigeria is a group called the Bamidele Movement. Doi cited some of the practices of the group to have included growing of beard, shaving of the head, the arm pits and the private parts of the body. The movement believes that to leave these hairs unshaven for forty days would defile a person and his prayers. To the group, wearing of the turban is compulsory, while their women must be in purdah, and their daughters above the age of twelve must not go out of their parents' home without veiling themselves thereby making it difficult for men to see them and propose them for marriage. However, such a lady will have to inform her parent about the man she would like to marry. The man would then be invited by the leader of the movement. She could then unveil herself in a secluded place to the man for assessment. Such a man might or might not accept the proposal. Apart from this, the movement sees nothing good in Western education and so holds tenaciously to Qur'anic education.²¹

Conversely however, the modern '*ulama*' are virtually the opposite of the traditional ones, as they in addition to having fairly sound knowledge of the Qur'an, Hadith and Islamic sciences, have sound knowledge of the western type of education, speak English fluently and see nothing wrong in listening to music and using modern eating cutlery and electronic gadgets. They do take and hang pictures and photographs. They have neutral attitude to shaving the beard, wearing the turban and putting their wives in the purdah.²² Although, Nasiru identifies the third class of '*ulamā*' that leans a little towards strict tradition and a little towards modern science, he does not give a vivid description of this class. That notwithstanding, Wakili sees the modern '*ulamā*' as the product of the educational changes introduced by the British colonial authorities. As against the traditional '*ulamā*' who are mainly products of the old Qur'anic schools, the modern '*ulamā*' attended modern Arabic and Islamic schools, Higher Islamic schools, colleges and universities. To him, the introduction and implementation of Shari'ah was championed by products of these schools, while the traditional '*ulamā*' had no 'weapon' to do so.²³

It is important to note that the modern '*ulamā*' equally participate actively in politics right from the pre-colonial period of the nation. In the 19th century, the *jihad* of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodiyo of 1804 marked the active involvement of the '*ulamā*' in politics. Consequent upon the *jihad*, the Sokoto Caliphate came into existence, while Shari'ah was instituted throughout the nooks and crannies of the caliphate. This was however truncated with the advent of the British colonialists who initially allowed the status quo to remain, but later gradually marginalised and alienated the '*ulama*' from government and politics and Islam ceased to be a state religion during the colonial era. With the exit of the colonial masters in 1960, religion became an instrument of attaining political powers. A good example of this could be derived from the two major political parties in Northern Nigeria – the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the Northern Elements' Progressive Union (NEPU) were associated with the two dominant Islamic brotherhoods in the area, namely the Qadiriyyah and the Tijaniyyah respectively in the 1960s. In the nation's Second Republic (1979-1983), religion was equally manipulated in political realm then. With the re-introduction of Shari'ah in some northern states of the country since 2000, many of the '*ulama*' have been participating in politics directly or

indirectly.²⁴ Some of them are appointed as Commissioners, Advisers and Special Assistants to the state Governors, some oversee and manage institutions and agencies of Shari'ah implementation such as the Shari'ah Commission, Zakat and Hubsu Commission, Hisbah Board and the Shari'ah Implementation Committee.²⁵ In addition, those who are not involved in politics are being patronised by politicians for spiritual assistance because they are believed to have possessed religious knowledge and efficacious spiritual power.

What is important to note is that both set of scholars look at women's participation in politics with contempt. This may largely be as a result of the political atmosphere in Nigeria which is characterised by all sorts of vices; crises and acrimony which they feel are dangerous for Muslim men not to talk of women. However, the 'modern' *'ulamā'* believe that the sanitisation of politics in the country is an antidote to Muslim women's participation in politics, as this is not against the spirit of Islam, as against the traditional *'ulamā'* who see it *harām* for women. They are also divided on the issue of attainment of political leadership position by women. Those who argue in favour of their participation of women in politics see nothing wrong in their attainment of political leadership, while the traditional *'ulamā'* do not favour such position.

Why the Apprehension?

The traditional *'ulama's* apprehension of Muslim women's participation is basically premised on two major factors, namely the political climate of the country and the assumed position of Muslim women in Islam which to them does not allow them to fully participate in politics. These shall be considered in the next sub-headings.

The Political Environment in Nigeria

The political scene in Nigeria has not been rosy at all, as it is characterized with incessant riots, chaos and crises. The first offensive odour of political pandemonium was smelt right from the First Republic which culminated in the truncation of the political independence given to Nigeria just two years later. The Action Group crisis of 1962 which consequently led to the declaration of state of emergence was said to have recorded gross vandalisation of state owned and private owned property worth millions of

naira as well as loss of lives. Not this alone, the *operation wet e*²⁶ of 1965 elections in the Nigerian Western Regions left behind unforgettable casualties in the history of politics in Nigeria. The October 1963 election therefore was characterized with disappearance of ballot boxes, paper, unfair counting and thuggery. This consequently led to the staging of the first military bloody coup led by Major Patrick Chukwuma Nzeogwu to check the hitherto unabated lawlessness that characterized the political scene of the country. Notable political moguls like the Prime Minister, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola, Ahmadu Bello and many others were the sacrificial lambs that lost their lives in the process.²⁷ The 1983 election was not also free of electoral malpractices, as it was claimed that ballot boxes were thrown into seas and lagoons in Ondo and Lagos States.²⁸ Protests which followed the announcement of the elections culminated in the loss of over 300 lives and houses not less than a hundred as well as other inestimable property were destroyed.²⁹ Such has been the picture of politics in Nigeria ever since independence.

It is disheartening to observe that during electioneering campaigns, voting and collation of election results, thugs and hooligans were seen around terrorizing the masses who wanted to observe their civic rights. It got to the extent that many candidates were assassinated even before the election. Or what can one say about the assassination of prominent politicians like Chief Bola Ige, Dr. Harry Marshall, Chief A.K. Dikibo and some others. The assassination of Dr. Ayodeji Daramola and Funsho Williams both gubernatorial candidates of the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) for Ekiti and Lagos States respectively also speaks volumes about the dangerous political situation in the country. The situation was so worse that thugs and hooligans brandished their weapons openly at political gatherings to the full glare of security operatives who watched them helplessly as if that had been legalized in the country. The election period has therefore been seen as a busy period for thugs who become useful instrument in the hands of politicians who supply them with "Indian hemp, *ogogoro*, locally-made and pocketable fire arms and of course, good cash."³⁰ Luka cited the political plight of a female aspirant, Dorathy Nyone who narrated her ordeal thus:

A ward chairman was shot dead; all the women and most of the men fled the scene. My husband rushed there and took me home. I was scared; men who were fully prepared for the violence were

the only ones who remained behind to hand pick the various winners.³¹

The big question then is that should women be actively involved in such a political atmosphere which tends to confirm the alleged dirtiness of the game? Little wonder then that scholars of Islam kick vehemently against women's participation in politics, while those who participate are seen as not being upright. The situation was so bad to the extent that some '*ulama*' who gave political lectures were attacked. Sheikh Jafar Mahmud Adam was said to have given an eloquent lecture at a mosque in Gadon Kaya in Kano where "he outlined the qualities Muslim voters should look for in any candidate aspiring to govern the Muslim community, either in a secular or Islamic state"³² a day before the Governorship election. The second day (Friday April 13, 2007), he was shot and killed by unidentified gunmen when he was leading the dawn prayers.³³ This perhaps is the main reason why some scholars prominent among who is a Shi'ite leader, Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, publicly preached against Muslims' participation in what he referred to as 'secular' politics and so called on Muslims to unite to have a system that will have respect for Islamic values.³⁴

Midnight Meetings and Intermingling with Opposite Sex

It is interesting to note that politicians are good at organizing meetings. Most of the meetings are held at night to strategize their action plan and other logistics for them to win elections. Ekundayo and Ama buttress this view by citing a Muslim female political activist to have confessed:

Our culture and religion strongly abhor mixing between the two sexes which is viewed as indication of lewdness, we are seen largely as loose women because we are politicians who by nature of politics stay out late at night attending political meetings and rallies and sometimes sleep in hotels far away from our home.³⁵

This implies that for a woman to be active participant in politics and for her to have a say in the decisions of her party, she has to be a regular attendant of meetings wherever they are held. Her husband will have to excuse her almost every time she goes to meeting. The children too will feel

the absence of the mother from home when she attends night meetings. For whatever reason, Islam does not support a woman to go out alone in the night without being accompanied by her husband. The excuse of going for meeting may also be a license for her to go out for immoral relationships outside the matrimonial home. The husband may also become suspicious of the wife and this may generate lack of trust in the family.

As an addendum to the above, the involvement of a woman in active politics implies her intermingling of men and this can develop to immoral relationships among them. Islam wants decent relationship among the opposite sex, hence the cold attitude of traditional '*ulama*' to women participation in politics.

At this juncture, it needs to be mentioned that *ikhtilāt* (mixing of sexes) has generated a lot of debates among scholars worldwide. Suffices to cite the Saudi Arabia law which takes gender segregation so serious that it enforces the separation of men and women in public places such that there are separate schools, universities, hospitals, restaurants and government offices for women.³⁶ However, the enforcement of the law seems relaxed in the last couple of years, as in 2002, women were allowed to apply for an ID card and they were seen at exhibitions and book fairs.³⁷ This development does not go well with some scholars like 'Abd al-Rahman bin Nasir al-Barrak who warned against promotion of *ikhtilāt* believing that such could lead to "words that are *harām*, gazes that are *harām*, and *khalwa* (when a man meets a woman alone) that is *harām*." He therefore declared those who permit *ikhtilāt* unbelievers and apostates who could be killed if they did not repent.³⁸

In line with this debate of *ikhtilāt*, a Professor in the Department of Shari'a at the Imam Muhammad ibn Sa'ud Islamic University, Riyadh, Shaykh Yusuf al-Ahmad also condemned the establishment of the King Abdallah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) on the basis that the University is gender-friendly and allows *ikhtilāt*, hence not based on Islamic principles. He also called for the expansion of the Haram mosque in Makkah so as to accommodate millions of worshippers and prevent mixing of sexes during *tawwāf*.³⁹ If the issue of *ikhtilāt* is taken thus far, one wonders what will be the feeling of such scholars on women's participation in politics that encourages free mingling of opposite sex indiscriminately.

Problem of Godfatherism

One of the commonest features of politics in Nigeria is the phenomenon of godfathersim. It is regarded as a crude and desperate struggle for state power by all means and at all costs using a superior patron for the purpose of advancing his political mercenary or partisan endeavours. Chukwuma and Otegwu defines a godfather as "a man of influence and affluence who supplies patronage access, protection or openings to a subordinate (godchild) who for his/her part pays back by supplying mercenary services in form of economic, sexual, or psychological gratification."⁴⁰

Some of the characteristic features of godfatherism as discussed by Chukwuma and Otegwu as manifested in the Nigerian political scene are very relevant to our discussion here. One of the characteristics is that the practice involves the bringing together of two unequal entities, the godfather and the godson with the former occupying a super-ordinate position and the latter subordinate. In this context, a female candidate becomes exclusively dependent on a godfather who imposes his lordship over the goddaughter. Not this alone, the system involves a reciprocal relationship where both actors are involved in a sort of give-and-take relationship. It is observed that this reciprocal relationship does not in any way mean equality between the two parties involved, but that the godfather assumes a superior party who determines the fate the subordinate. This adds more to the fear of Muslim scholars who feel that such a relationship could lead to committing adultery if the godfather should demand for this from the goddaughter. What then happens where the goddaughter refuses to honour the initial agreement made with her godfather after being vested with the reins of power? In most cases, the state is made ungovernable for her through incessant tension and crises. She may either be abducted and sacked as it happened in Anambra State between 1999 and 2007, or be impeached like that of Oyo State governor in January 2006.⁴¹

From all indications, the Islamic rule on *khulwah* could hardly be observed in a godfather-goddaughter relationship and this could generate wrong thoughts and sexual feelings which could lead to lack of trust in one or both of them. Such an intimacy could hardly allow lowering of gazes on the part of the two as enjoined by the Qur'an 24: 30.

Women and Islamic Injunction on Nakedness

It needs to be mentioned that the traditional '*ulama*' refers to Qur'an 33: 59 as the justification for women to completely be in purdah. This may be difficult to accomplish in the present situation of politicking in the country. A confirmation of this is an experience in Zamfara State, the state which initiated the re-appearance of Shari'ah in the northern part of Nigeria. It was reported that in 2001 when the then Nigeria President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was to pay official visit to Zamfara State, the Governor of the State, Ahmad Sani Yerima ruled that no woman would be allowed to greet or talk to the President to prevent inter-mingling of men and women, and that the interest of women would be taken care of during the visit. However, this rule was defied, as they saw the banning as an infringement on the fundamental human rights of the women. Unfortunately, Governor Ahmed Sani Yerima was also accused of inaugurating the Women's Wing of his 2007 Presidential Campaign Organization on 14th January 2006 during which "the Governor's wife, wives and children of State commissioners, legislators, permanent secretaries, special advisers, local council chairmen and traditional rulers present, lost all decorum and danced until they forgot to say their Zuhr prayer on time."⁴² At that occasion, the First Lady was said to have joined in the public merry-making, spraying the musicians with the top denominations of the naira.⁴³ This allegation was however refuted by Governor Sani who claimed to have cleared the issues with his Council of '*ulamā*'.

In Islam, the woman's whole body is *awrah* (naked) which must not be exposed. Even her voice is considered by some scholars as *awrah*, and so she must not be found talking in public. In that wise, the assignment and work of women are strictly restricted to their home and under no circumstance should they go out canvassing for vote or declaring publicly their preference for a candidate. To these scholars therefore, the attitude of some women singing and dancing during political campaigns is grossly against the spirit of Islam. The point made by one of these '*ulamā*' is that there is a hadīth which prohibits women from going to mosques to pray, and if this is so, then, it therefore becomes forbidden for them to go out of their homes campaigning and dancing.⁴⁴ The hadīth reads:

Once the wife of Abu Hamis Sa'adi pleaded with the Prophet to be allowed to attend his mosque (the Prophet's mosque in

Madina) as she was very fond of offering prayers behind him. He told her, "What you say is right, but it is better for you to offer prayer in a closed room than in a courtyard. Your prayer in a courtyard is better than on a veranda, and your offering prayer in the mosque of your own locality is better than coming to our mosque for it."⁴⁵

The fact that women are not expected to go to mosque for worship is an indication that their sanctity is preserved even while performing their religious duty, not to talk of participating in party politics which allows them to freely mingle with men. However, such scholars do not consider some other *ahādith* of the Prophet which permitted women to attend mosque⁴⁶ and the modern development where women are now working in offices and factories to earn their living. A scholar however warned against blind imitation of the Christian women by Muslim women, as to him, the Christian women in politics have deliberately violated the biblical injunctions on public outing.⁴⁷

Islamic Etiquettes and Political Practices

It has been observed by some scholars that hardly could Islamic etiquettes be maintained in the political atmosphere of the country. An apt description of this is given by Abubakar and Ahmad who write:

Historically the political scene is associated with women of loose morals who are deemed irresponsible. A great percentage of women are uncomfortable with such issues as hugging, handshakes, being raised shoulder high by youth who are high on drugs, use of foul language. As a result, women hardly will compromise their values for the sake of political participation and contribution to nation building.⁴⁸

In addition to the above, it is the belief of the traditional '*ulama*' that women's participation in politics involves travelling out of their homes to attend political meetings and functions, and this could encourage corrupt people to prey on them. Their condemnation based on this practice is premised under a hadith of the Prophet which says: "no woman who believes in Allah and the Last Day should travel a distance of three days' journey or

more, unless her father, son, husband, brother or other *mahram* is with her."⁴⁹ Such scholars also look with contempt, the social custom of shaking hands of women with men who are not their *mahram*. The gravity of this simple act is buttressed with the saying of the Prophet that "if one of you were to be stabbed in the head with an iron needle, it would be better for him than touching a woman whom he is not permitted to touch."⁵⁰ This experience in the political situation of the country makes it difficult for Muslim women to participate fully in it. Karwai therefore puts some challenges to Muslim women who are desirous of involving themselves in the politics in Nigeria when he writes:

Muslim women who are desirous of participating fully in the **Nigeria Jaga-Jaga** politics should get satisfactory answers to the following daunting questions: can they afford to attend nocturnal meetings which normally commence at 12:30am? Can they recruit first class assassins to eliminate a political opponent or his innocent wife? Can they stand the vagaries of hostage politics? Can they engage the services of political thugs/*yan Daba*, who will lift them up in political rallies and chant, *say mai Kallabi*? Do they have any exemplary female politician who is morally upright? Do any of them want their bosom mother to be like one of the popular female politicians in Nigeria?⁵¹

The Qur'anic and Prophetic sayings on Women Leadership

Most of the traditional '*ulamā*' strongly uphold the interpretation of the word *qawwamūn* in the context of Qur'an 4: 34 which partly reads: "Men are *qawwamūn* of women, because Allah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means...." as perceived by some *Mufasssirūn*. The word *qawwamūn* is interpreted by Ibn Kathir to mean that men are the protectors and maintainers of women, and by implication, "the man is responsible for the woman, and he is her maintainer, caretaker and leader who disciplines her if she deviates." While expatiating further on this, Ibn Kathir submits that men excel over women and they are better than them for certain task and this explains why prophethood and other important positions of leadership are exclusively meant for men. He also makes reference to a hadith recorded by Bukhari which says that a nation which appoints a woman to be their leader will never achieve success.⁵² This

view is also shared by Mawdudi who translates the word *qawwamun* to mean that men are the managers of the affairs of women, and so they (men) are to be in positions of authority politically.⁵³ These interpretations are bought by traditional '*ulamā*' in Nigeria, hence they strongly oppose women assuming political posts and leadership. They equally rely on the content of the *hadīth* cited by Ibn Kathir to strongly oppose women participation in politics and their involvement in administration. The *hadīth* reads inter alia "when Allah's Apostle was informed that the Persians had crowned the daughter of Khosran as their ruler, he said, such people, as ruled by a lady will never be successful."⁵⁴ Although some scholars have faulted the authenticity of this *hadīth* on the basis of the character of its narrator and for being narrated in Basra after the battle of Siffin where Aisha's forces were defeated by that of Ali, the traditional '*ulamā*' still uphold it. The argument that the Qur'anic Balqis, the Queen of Sheba negates the acclaimed Prophetic tradition on women leadership seems not tenable to the traditional '*ulamā*' on the basis that she was not a Muslim and she did not rule over a Muslim state.

Life-Style of Women Politicians

The life-style of women who participate in politics after being elected into an office is also of great concern for traditional '*ulama*'. As soon as they assume office, they move to the Government House or their official residence under tight security, leaving their husband's house. Where the husband packs with them, it becomes extremely difficult for members of the husband's family to have access to their relative, as they become scared of the long protocol before they are being allowed in. Some even see it a wrong step for the husband to pack to a building being secured at the instance of a wife. They believe that hardly can a woman like Khadijah, the Prophet's wife, be found in the contemporary period. Khadijah, though older and wealthier than her husband, surrendered herself and her property for her husband. In the contemporary time, they believe women in politics are pompous and so cannot be obedient enough to their husband, most especially in an era where women liberation is the order of the day and women equality with men is seriously in vogue.

Conclusion

The political atmosphere in Nigeria is characterised by violence, assassination, injustice and hooliganism which makes it dangerous for Muslims to participate in generally, talk-less of women. Other negative characteristics of politics and its non-conformity with the teaching of Islam make the traditional Muslim scholars look at it with contempt. In addition, such scholars hold tenaciously to what they believe the correct interpretation of the Qur'anic verses and *ahadith* of the Prophet relevant to women leadership. They believe that derailing from these primary sources because of the frivolity of politicians and their material achievements will not only be dangerous to attaining peace in this world, but will as well lead to eternal doom in the hereafter.

The apprehension of traditional Muslim scholars on women's involvement in politics is mainly on the extent to which they could combine their traditional primary assignment with politics which is secondary, as well as how their involvement in politics would not jeopardise their religious tenets in view of the rough and insane nature of politics in the country. It is therefore the stand of these scholars that it is better for women to forgo their participation in it as it prevents them from performing their obligatory primary assignments and it affects the honour and dignity accorded womenfolk in Islam. However, it is our considered opinion that decorum should be introduced into politics in Nigeria, because Muslims could not afford but to participate in politics or else non-Muslims would be ruling them with impunity. In the same vein, non-participation of Muslim women in politics could be dangerous to the *Ummah*, as women of other religions would dominate the political scene and leave Muslim women as mere subjects who would only follow the dictates of non-Muslim leaders.

For credible Muslim women to be active in the Nation's politics therefore, we suggest that special consideration should be given women in terms of night meetings, involvement in public campaigns, public singing and dancing, and indiscriminate intermingling with men who are not their husbands or relatives. For such women to be integrated into politics, their husbands too should be encouraged to participate fully in it to ensure mutual cooperation and harmonious family and society. Where a husband objects to his wife's participation in politics, such a woman should, as a matter of fact, oblige to her husband's wish. Also, there is serious need for Muslim scholars to organise forums for Muslim women in politics on the need to operate

within the limits of Islam for them to win Allah's pleasure which is the ultimate goal for all. Muslim women cannot afford to maximise their achievements in this mundane world at the expense of the hereafter which is eternal. Finally, rather than condemning Muslim women's participation in politics, the traditional '*ulamā*' are expected to be emphasising that Muslims should adhere strictly to the teaching of their religion when carrying out their political activities and as well preach the means of sanitising politics. This is because Islam has recorded some Muslim women who had taken part in the political activities of the *Ummah* during the prophetic time and that of the companions and *tabi'ūn* when politics was played with Allah's consciousness.

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