

THE ROLE OF SELECTED MUSLIM RELIGIOUS ASSOCIATIONS TOWARDS MOBILIZATION AND RE-AWAKENING OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY NORTHERN NIGERIA SINCE 1970s

By

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Abstract

One of the agents of social change in contemporary northern Nigerian society has been the new religious/faith-based movements and associations operating just like other civic associations. Civic society is one of the arenas where manifold social organizations from all social classes attempt to express themselves and advance their various interests under collective arrangements. Equally, civic societies are generally established to meet certain needs of their members and in some cases, address some specific social needs of the general society. Those with religious orientations significantly carry out such socio-religious activities and form solidarity among their members in similar way as the non-faith-based groups in Nigeria. From the 1970s, some faith-based associations emerged with predisposition on the womenfolk and have been very instrumental in the mobilization, re-awakening and empowerment of the Muslim women profoundly. Some of them are nationally networked, addressing the issues generally relating to Muslim women in the country. Examples of such associations are the Muslim Sisters Organization, a sister branch of the Muslims' Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN) and the Federation of the Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN). This paper therefore, examines the emergence and assesses the role which such associations played in the mobilization, re-awakening and empowerment of the Muslim women in contemporary northern Nigeria. The main emphasis is on the Muslim Sisters Organization (MSO), the Izala Movement and the Federation of the Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN). The methodology used in this paper is mainly historical.

Introduction

Issues regarding women, particularly their position and rights in the society as well as their relations with their male counterparts have been subjects of discussion for long, not only in northern Nigeria society, particularly, but from the moment gender studies developed.¹ The changing nature of the northern Nigerian society with its fast leaning towards globalized world began to address the issues around the womenfolk just in the same way as

the issues of the youth are being addressed especially from the period of the 1970. This is linked to the numerous social challenges that cropped into the society ranging from illiteracy, poverty, lack of women participation in western education and general underdevelopment. What also aided this was the emergence of Gender and Feminists Organizations whose activities created more challenges to the women and Muslims at large and as well, the growth of



female literary movement. In particular, there were non-Muslim gender advocates as well as, ill-informed Muslim activists who came up with obsessed ideas and misconceptions about Islam with regard to women's rights and status in the culture of the people, especially the existence of patriarchy.²

In response to these challenges, the Nigerian state witnessed an upsurge in religious movements and associations from the second half of the twentieth century as agents and advocates of social change and reform. They are also social organizations made up of members from all social classes struggling to express themselves and advance their various religious and social interests under a collective arrangement.³ Such civic societies are generally established to meet certain needs of their members and to address some specific social needs of the general society.⁴ Those under the canopy of religion or faith-based movements and associations in northern Nigeria came up with different modes of operation and activities purposely to help in addressing the trials of the womenfolk to enable them understand their social positions, reclaim their status and to become more useful and represented in the social strata of the society.

The new religious associations were acting as agents and advocates of social change in the society, just like other nationally and regionally-based civic organizations and initiatives with different motives and modes of mobilization. They are equally operating akin to Islamic non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs)

as obtained in some Muslim societies.⁵ The Islamic NGOs are usually operating based on Islamic injunction which says; *and cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and transgression.*⁶ Their field of actions had gone beyond religious arena as agents of intellectual and religious change, where they act as religious actors but as political and socio-economic activists, grappling with challenges facing the Muslim community in these respects and as pressure groups engaging the state to respond to the societal needs with urgency. These types of initiatives have equally motivated the upsurge of gender and women studies in Nigeria.

This paper therefore, focuses on the role the Islamic associations have been playing as well as examining their *modus operandi* in mobilization and re-awakening the Muslim women in northern Nigeria. Three important religious associations are chosen for discussion in this paper. They are The Izala Movement, The Muslim Sister Organization (MSO) and the Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN).

Factors in the Emergence of Religious Associations in Northern Nigeria

Religious associationism has been a recent development in northern Nigeria. This is because it was not in existence prior to the middle of the twentieth century. Therefore, they are considered in this paper as an impact of encroachment of modernity in the society and an instance at which Muslims embrace and promote religious modernization in the

country. This is because the phenomenon of religious associationism is an area of Islamic engagement with modernity which many people in the traditional society initially detested and criticized. This modern trend of religious grouping or unionism is called in Hausa; *Kungiyanci*.⁷

Besides, Islamic associations in Nigeria have since independence carried out range of activities. They have been in the vanguards for the reclamation and re-assertion of Islamic religious identity, Muslims' right and the promotion of the legitimate interests of the Muslims in the country. This is in addition to their efforts aimed at religious reformism after years of religious decline as the result of colonial rule in the society. They equally acted as special agents of intellectual renaissance which characterized the contemporary Muslim society; giving out guidance to people on various socio-religious issues as well as promoting aspects of religious modernity. They have been very instrumental in the promotion and modernization of Islamic education system as well as its integration with western education system in the country. In this way, they have been making tremendous efforts in addressing the Muslim's intellectual crisis, by not only establishing modern Islamic school system,⁸ but ensuring its incorporation in state-owned institutions in the country. As well, they occasionally acted as pressure groups engaging the state on various policies and issues such as religious freedom and citizens' rights and privileges, etc. Likewise, they engage in advocating

against social conditions arising from political and economic crises in the society that were more or less legacies of colonialism and bad governance, especially from the late 1970s onwards.⁹ More so, they have been playing an ever-increasing role in everyday life of the people in terms of social provisioning as well as mobilization and awareness creation in respect to Muslim participation in western education, politics and women empowerment.¹⁰

One significant thing about these modern religious movements and associations is their role in mobilizing public opinion against the evil forces of globalization and other westernizing forces and influences on the Muslim society despite being agents of religious modernity. One of the basic features of the new religious associations in Nigeria is that, they engage in a new form of *da'awa* along a particular focus or program with a precise target which each and respective society was identified with. For instance, some associations were concerned with women education in addition to Islamic propagation just like the Da'awa Group in Kano founded by Sheikh Aminuddeen in 1985 and the FOMWAN. Others were concerned with blending of Islamic education with western education system in order to attain intellectual rebirth just like the Islamic Education Trust (IET) does. In the case of the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN), it bags much wider goals in its activities than others.¹¹

As pointed above, the prevalence of the new religious movements and organizations in northern Nigeria was



a post-1950s development. Prior to this date, religious grouping was only dominated by the two Sufi brotherhoods; the Qadiriyya and Tijjaniyya.¹² The activities of these Sufi orders were carried out in the traditional manner until in recent years, unlike the modern religious movements and associations that were founded and operated based on modern patterns.¹³

Colonial rule was responsible in preventing the rise of religious associations in northern Nigeria through the British restrictive policies which were guided by the fear of the spread of religious dissidents in the colony. Accordingly, any link with external religious organizations was not permitted and therefore blocked.¹⁴ The British equally tried to change the religious identity which described the Muslim people since when Islam made its momentum in the society and formed its force and influence into the linguistic identity of the people. In this, the superiority of the native language over religion was indirectly enforced among the populace through the newly introduced western educational system. Accordingly, the colonialists popularized and promoted Hausa language as identity in northern Nigeria.¹⁵

On the other hand, the Sufi brotherhoods were encouraged by the colonial state, for Sufism did not appear hostile to colonialism everywhere. For instance, the Qadiriyya was officially recognized as the order of the ruling establishment in Sokoto.¹⁶ This and other factors had helped the order to widen its appeal and recruit more followers in

Nigeria.¹⁷ Equally, the Tijjaniya was promoted by the royal support of the Emir of Kano from 1930s without any hindrance from the colonial authority.¹⁸ These Sufi orders were allowed to carry out their activities as soon as the British realized that, they were never hostile to the colonial administration, though the members of NEPU who were also followers of the Tijjaniya had faced the anger of colonial regime during the 1950s.¹⁹

Besides, all overt hostile intellectual activities were subdued by the British and their local compradors. Equally, the traditional intellectuals' approach as Dahiru Yahya posited, was one of cautions made necessary by strategy, fear of colonial repression and intimidation, where the *mallams* resorted to a private religion for which mysticism or marabotism provided a convenient climate.²⁰ It was these factors among other things that promoted the increasing upsurge of Sufism from 1930s onward in northern Nigeria.²¹

The proliferation of the new religious movements and associations in contemporary Nigerian society was equally not out of vacuum. One thing is that, the new religious associations were established and led by western educated elites who came to challenge colonial legacies through advocacies which started from the era of decolonization and were in themselves, responses and reactions to the legacies of colonialism.²² Equally, the rise of such associations was within the context of the modern Islamic resurgence which was galvanizing the contemporary Islamic world in general and the Nigerian

society in particular which also developed during decolonization era.²³ Specifically, in the Nigerian case, the country from the 1960s down to the late 1970s began to experience the massive rise in activities of Islamic religious movements and associations which contributed to the intellectual renaissance in the society.²⁴ In the October 1968 editorial of *Haske*, the Magazine of the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), it is stated that:

There is general reawakening and renaissance among the Muslims in the present era, evidenced by religious organizations, building of schools in which minor and major tenets of Islam are taught....Through such organizations, the Muslims rediscovered their own selves and the true position of their religion (sic).²⁵

Toyin Falola sees the Nigerian context during the late 1970s in the light of the activities of the religious movements and associations in the following words:

Nigeria was undergoing an Islamic resurgence. More and more Muslims were demanding their rights and privileges in the educational and public matters....and the promotion of non-western culture. Whether they are fundamentalists or modernists, many Muslims turn to their religion to advocate an alternative path of development for the country, which they considered as moving on the wrong direction (sic).²⁶

In the opinion of Sobhi, the Nigerian internal socio-economic conditions during the 1970s and 1980s were significant in stimulating the development of more religious groups and organizations.²⁷ Kane's view suggests that, the generalization of formal education was very significant in the spread of new Islamic religious

groups in contemporary Nigeria. As part of the result of the spread of modern schooling system for instance, students began to form or join voluntary religious associations. The Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN) has been the earliest religious society with a nationwide following.²⁸ Murray Last argues that the spill-over from the surplus wealth of the Middle Eastern countries had also influenced the growth and activities of many religious groups and societies in northern Nigeria. These monies, he argues, were meant to finance Islamic projects such as construction of mosques and schools (Islamiyya) in the country.²⁹

Women in Hausaland, Northern Nigeria; a Snapshot of the Pre-1970s

Women had been the majority of the inhabitants of Hausaland and northern Nigeria for centuries. But their status has never been consistent through the centuries. It was a general believe that, male gender was better than the female in the region until in the nineteenth century, when Shehu Usman Danfodiyo emerged. It was the result of his teaching and preaching activities that brought some relief to the womenfolk, and their status began to be placed on its right position. This is albeit the criticisms his views towards women generated especially relating to their education. For clarification on his position, he wrote an epistle titled; *Tanbih al-Ikhwaan ala Jawaz Ittikhaz al-Majlis li Ajli Ta'alim an-Niswah Ilm al-Furud al-A'ayan min deen Allah Ta'ala ar-Rahman*.³⁰

Shehu Danfodiyo, during his time, gave the women time and opportunity to listen to his admonitions and take lessons from him and from other scholars. It was since then the right to women education was revived in areas under the Sokoto caliphate.³¹ The pre-jihad neglect of women in Hausaland was explained by Kaura as the result of the fact that, Islam was not firmly established or was weakened gradually in the society as the result of the failure of the venal ulama to vigorously pursue the rights of women in their communities and the failure of the parents and husbands to uphold Islamic rights of women in the society. Consequently, there was corruption of the womenfolk in all aspects of life.³²

In the process of corrupting the womenfolk, some bad beliefs and traditions evolved and promoted by the venal scholars in Hausaland, which brought further relegation of the status of women. Shehu in his *Kitab al-Farq* indicated what was obtained in Hausaland with regard to women, apart from their denial of acquiring education where he said:

One of the ways of their government is the devouring of the alms of women who are subject to their authority. One of the ways of their government is to place many women in their houses, until the number of women of some of them amounts to one thousand or more. One of the ways of their government is that a man puts the affairs of his women into the hands of the oldest one, and every one of the others is like a slave-woman under her.³³

In another instance, Shehu in his book, *Nur al-Bab*, described the real condition of the women in the pre-jihad era, where he said:

Most of our educated men leave their wives, their daughters and their captives morally abandoned, like beasts, without teaching them what God prescribes should be taught them, and without instructing them in the articles of the Law which concern them. Thus, they leave them ignorant of the rules regarding ablutions, prayer, fasting, business dealings, and other duties which they have to fulfill, and which God commands that they should be taught.

Men treat these beings like household implements which become broken after long use and which are then thrown out on the dung-heap. This is an abominable crime! Alas! How can they thus shut up their wives, their daughters and their captives, in the darkness of ignorance, while daily they impart knowledge to their students? In truth, they act out of egoism, and if they devote themselves to their pupils, that is nothing but hypocrisy and vain ostentation on their part.

Their conduct is blameworthy, for to instruct one's wives, daughters and captives is a positive duty, while to impart knowledge to students is only a work of supererogation, and there is no doubt but that the one takes precedence over the other...³⁴

Kaura, in the same line of argument, pointed out that, women were treated like slaves and that subservience to husbands was emphasized at the expense of obedience to Allah. In this

way, women were over-burdened with domestic responsibilities as in gathering of firewood, cooking, washing of clothes and other manual labours in the farms and left in total ignorance.³⁵ But the intellectual movement carried out by Shehu Usmanu addressed the issues relating to women in the society. As a result of that, they became enlightened, educated and emancipated from the shackles brought forth by the bad traditions and misdeeds of the venal scholars.³⁶

In most striking manner, colonialism marked the beginning of the end of the traditional society in northern Nigeria. Its impact greatly affected the womenfolk first by its exclusion of the women from all levels of administration. Their right to work was also affected by the social relations as the result of the collapse of the kinship support system. Equally, the newly introduced western education did not encourage girls' participation due to colonial isolation of the women.³⁷ Thus, education and political participation the most important areas where the rights of women are determined were discriminately denied to women.³⁸ Consequently, several conditions characterized the position of the women in northern Nigeria. They were dragged backward and more dominated by the patriarchal cultural system which colonial circumstances contributed to its promotion. In response to the general social conditions which characterized the society and in reaction to colonial legacies, religious movements and associations emerged and embarked

on advocacy of social and religious reforms in the region.

The Muslim Sisters Organization (MSO)

The Muslim Sisters Organization (MSO) was a brain child of the Muslim's Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN). The idea for its establishment was in 1976 when some sisters and old members of the MSSN deemed it necessary to continue with Islamic enlightenment activities among them even after graduation from their institutions of higher learning. The initiative succeeded in getting registered in Kano in 1983 as a non-governmental organization. It then organized a maiden international conference at Government Girls College Dala, Kano which was its major success. It was this conference that resulted into the formation of the FOMWAN in 1985 to which up till today, the MSO is affiliated. Through this platform, the Muslim women were mobilized, enlightened and educated to promote their religion through propagation, seminars, lectures and other counseling services regarding faith, health, poverty and empowerment.³⁹

As stated above, the MSO is a brain child of the MSSN. The MSSN was the pioneer Muslims organization with nationwide followers and branches in post-primary institutions of learning across the nation. It was established in 1954 by some young Yoruba Muslims students in western Nigeria.⁴⁰ The idea behind setting up the association was born out of the desire of some Muslim youth to safeguard Muslims' religious fundamentals, culture and identity from the twin effects of forceful



evangelization and the tempting activities of the Christian missionaries which characterized public schools in southern Nigeria during colonial era. It needs to be recalled that the history of colonial education in Nigeria had a coincidental relationship with Christian evangelism. As such, Muslim students at the initial stage had to study under the tutelage of Christian missionary schools.⁴¹

These conditions necessitated Muslims to study under a very unfavorable environment. Some students were even said to have changed their religion in the western region in order to undergo western education. Others who were steadfast and willing to pursue their learning activities were forced by the circumstances to change their names. It was this atmosphere that led to the establishment of the society whose principal aim was to serve as a rallying point for the vulnerable young Muslims studying under western oriented schools. Gradually, the MSSN became a platform for organized and concerted Islamic propagation in the educational institutions and a source for religious fulfillment for Muslim students in various institutions of learning in Nigeria. By 1968, the MSSN got branches in many higher institutions of leaning nationwide, in most of the government and community secondary schools and even in some Christian schools where there were significant number of Muslims students. The acceptance of the society in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria, such as ABU Zaria and the University of Ibadan, was among the major factors which

strengthened its powers. This was because these universities were the hub of learning in the whole country.⁴²

By 1980s, it had formed its women wing known as the Muslim Sister Organization (MSO) which later influenced the formation of the Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN). The MSO epitomized women activism championed by the sisters' wing of the MSSN. It was meant to mobilize the sisters on campus devoid of mixing with their male counterparts. Through this, Muslim sisters were mobilized along the main aims and objectives of the mother society the MSSN in most of the institutions of higher learning in the country. Equally, the activities of the sisters were meant to be continued even after graduation just like the male members of the MSSN do.⁴³ The MSO organizes workshops, seminars, conferences and public lectures through which they mobilize, educate and enlighten the women in Nigeria. On 15th December, 2017, it organized a national conference held at Umar Ali Shinkafi Polytechnic Sokoto, in which the Sultan of Sokoto graced the occasion.

The MSO usually advocates for love for the sake of Allah among the Muslim sisters and promote good manners among them for the promotion of Islamic sisterhood. This is based on the Islamic recommendation which says *the believers are but brothers (and sisters), so make settlement between your brothers (and between sisters)*.⁴⁴ It equally enjoins decency among the Muslim sisters and avoidance of free-

mixing with men and wearing of Islamic recommended dress. Above all, it encourages learning and education among the Muslim sisters as well as being self-reliant in order to avoid evil temptations of the Satan. All these are under the mission of the MSO which are propagating, imparting and establishing true Islamic faith among Muslim sisters through education of Muslim women in particular and the society in general.

The Izala Movement

Similarly, women were left behind in the pursuit of Islamic knowledge and were the most ignorant in the society. They did not know how to perform valid rituals such as ablution, bathing and prayers. Consequently, schools and classes for girls and married women were opened to help the female get educated. The leaders of the movement believed that if women were trained, they will train all the society since they are mothers. The main argument of the Izala movement in respect of the women education was that Islam instructs Muslims (both men and women) to seek for knowledge. This is a counter view of the traditional scholars who neglected the women and denied them knowledge both Islamic and western. The movement insisted on educating women despite the strenuous opposition of the traditional ulama, who criticized the act based on mixing of sexes in school which they argued to have contravened Islamic teaching. To the Izala, the mixing of the sexes is a lesser evil than leaving Muslim women ignorant of Islam.⁴⁵

The moment women classes were opened, the Izala leaders faced tough reactions from the traditional circles. However, both the teachers and students endured until the significance of the innovation became widely recognized. In later years, it was imitated even by some of the opponents of the movement.⁴⁶ The women classes began to emerge in the early 1980s and were known as Schools for Married Women (*Islamiyyun Matan Aure*). In such schools, the women learn the science of the recitation of the Qur'an, *hadith*, *fiqh*, *tauhid*, *tajweed*, *Sira* and *Arabiyya*. They also learn how to raise their children according to Islamic tenets. Indeed, attending the Izala schools brought about changes to the lives of the northern Nigerian women. The major implication of this development has been enlightenment of the womenfolk. Not only that, it equally promoted the idea of women freedom and the formation of women associations such as Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN).⁴⁷

The development of Izala had immensely influenced new thinking about Islam, education and women in the society. The general society came to realize the value of women education. Hence, more Islamic organizations embarked on running Islamic adult education programs for females. One of such organizations is the FOMWAN which is discussed subsequently. The education of the women contributed enormously in molding the womenfolk into better Muslims and better housewives. It also created more awareness about the right of women in Islam and had



further generated support for the Izala. The attitudes and knowledge of married women concerning the religion and the society were greatly affected.⁴⁸ Renne still observes that:

These classes may have also provided women with the moral authority to challenge domestic strictures associated with seclusion, as well as the literacy that potentially enables alternative reading of the Qur'an.... thus, women who attended the Schools for Married Women, came to have their own views about the position of women in the society and sought to address this situation on their own terms.⁴⁹

It was remarkable that, the Izala women schools usually did not start in formal school buildings. Rather, they were initially started in *Zaure* (the entrance room) or garages of private houses whose owners permitted the teachers to use as classes. Thus, the majority of such Izala schools grew out of informal school buildings.⁵⁰ The attendants were initially the wives of the teachers due to the opposition of the society to the innovation. However, when the opposition gradually waned, many people reconsidered their position on women education. Hence, a change in people's intellectual perceptions and ideas became clearly reflected. Another significant change was that some women graduates of the Islamiyya schools continued their education in some formal schools or Higher Islamic Schools which the government founded in major cities and towns, such as Arabic Teachers Colleges.⁵¹ Others had founded their own schools as proprietors and teachers.⁵²

The Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN)

The Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN) is a national network and forum with the main thrust of mobilizing as well as raising the awareness and consciousness of Muslim women in Nigeria. It's a non-governmental civic society with a framework for national cooperation and unity among Islamic women associations in the country. It educates Muslim women about Islam, and encourages them to establish circles for educational purposes. It was founded in October, 1985 in Minna, the state capital of Niger State with branches in most of the states of the federation. The person to have aided most in the establishment of this association was Hajia Aisha Ahmad Lemo, who invited and hosted all the existing women associations in Nigeria to Minna for the purpose of forming the society. The branches have been demonstrating vibrant commitments to the realization of the society's objectives, especially the Kano branch, which has been one of the most active in Nigeria.⁵³ The organization was duly registered with Corporate Affairs Commission subsequently in order to have constitutional backing in its operations in the country.

The circumstances which led to the formation of FOMWAN were many. It was founded amidst an unprecedented Islamic and intellectual resurgence in Nigeria and in the wider Muslim world. This resurgence was accompanied by new intellectual ideas such as freedom and education of the womenfolk.⁵⁴ It gave a fresh rise of women activism championed by the

women wing of the MSSN called the Muslim Sisters Organization (MSO) in the 1980s. Equally, its emergence coincided with the era in which the historical achievements of the defunct Sokoto Caliphate were heavily celebrated at various institutions of higher learning in northern Nigeria and by intellectuals and religious associations such as the MSSN and the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI).

The MSO as a sub-organization of the MSSN was initiated as a platform through which Muslim sisters could continue their religious activism even after graduation from schools. At one occasion in 1985, the MSO had convened its first international conference for Muslim women in Kano in which the social activities of Nana Asma'u, (1789-1863) daughter of Shehu Usman Danfodiyo were strongly exemplified by the guest speaker, who happened to be Mallam Ibrahim Sulaiman.⁵⁵ Therefore, a decision was taken to immediately establish a national forum for Muslim women in imitation of the *Yantaru* System founded by Nana Asma'u in the nineteenth century.

The *Yantaru* system was a women education and enlightenment movement started by Nana Asma'u through formation of gatherings and circles by the womenfolk.⁵⁶ Apart from education, it was equally a welfare circle among women through which they assist themselves and learn local craft to be self-reliant. The major significance of the circle was tackling illiteracy and ignorance among rural women. Nana Asma'u organized classes for the women according to their groups, villages and hamlets. At

first, she used to identify a town or village in need of educational help, make enquiries about reputable mature old women with background in Islamic education and high integrity. These women were given the title of *jaji* (leader of a caravan), and would be leading other women from their villages or hamlets to Sokoto city on specified dates assigned for them by their teacher, Nana Asma'u.⁵⁷

The students used to bring gifts in form of grains, honey, dried vegetables, cotton-thread and clothes for their teacher, Nana Asma'u to distribute to the needy and the destitutes on their behalf. According to Jean Boyd,

The system and the teacher (Nana Asma'u) had given women a sense of belonging to a wider Muslim world and being part of long and honored tradition of Muslim women activism.⁵⁸

Nana Asma'u similarly taught her students to link their intelligence and intellectualism for good of the population. She mobilized and reformed them together, making them better members of the society and promoted among them the sense of sisterhood. The system persists till date in Sokoto under the maintenance of the descendants of Nana Asma'u.⁵⁹

It was in imitation of the Nana Asma'u's women activism that the FOMWAN was formed. Muslim women were networked under the FOMWAN to share and coordinate their educational and enlightenment activities by themselves under this national platform.⁶⁰ By 1988, the association had branches not only in



the North, but almost in all states of the Nigerian federation and had succeeded in mobilizing and uniting groups of not only the western educated women, but among those who did not have higher certificates about its objectives. Strong support and encouragement for FOMWAN came from modern scholars as well as Islamic associations such as Sheikh Abubakar Gumi, the leaders of the Izala movement, the *Rabitat* (the World Muslim League), the Islamic Foundation in Kano, the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), and the Islamic Education Trust (IET). For instance, the JNI, in collaboration with the IET and the *Rabitat*, had financed the "First International Training Seminar for Women in Da'wa and Social Development" as part of the activities of this women association which took place in Lagos in September 1988.⁶¹

Like other modern Muslim associations, FOMWAN had played a significant role in the transformation of Islamic education and enlightenment in northern Nigeria specifically among the women. The mission of the society has been to propagate Islam, through educational institutions and other outreaches and to improve the status of women, youth and children through training, education, health and humanitarian services, enterprises and advocacy.⁶² It equally educates Muslim women and ensures that they live in accordance with the tenets of Islam at this contemporary age. The society has promoted women education, both Islamic and western, through its *da'wa* activities, in order to cope with the challenges of the modern time. The society equally enlightened

Muslim women against the evil and dangerous forces of modernism and westernization and had shaped the cause of women movement in Nigeria in small measure. Accordingly, the women society developed the trend of textual study of Islam among women, particularly within the socially and economically affluent and professional women in some major cities like Kano, Kaduna and Katsina. Consequently, there emerged women preachers and those who deliver *tafsir* programs.⁶³ It founded numerous schools in almost all the states of the federation with different categories of classes and academic sessions to address various educational and intellectual needs of the Muslim women.⁶⁴

This national women society has been an example of an active Islamic Non-governmental Organization (INGO) with an extensive networking at grassroots level that engaged in house to house counseling on various social issues. It has so far carried out strong advocacy function in the country, promoting women participation in public service since 1985 and preparing them as partners for progress. Not only that, the FOMWAN has contributed in the eradication of numerous discriminatory social norms in the Muslim society which hinder women empowerment and which bring about women marginalization. It mobilized women against neglecting their responsibilities as Muslim wives and mothers. Specifically, it encouraged them in proper child-upbringing and making an ideal Islamic home.

FOMWAN has been committed to the cause of Muslim women in order to uplift their social status. In this case, it has been fighting to ensure that the right of women to dress in accordance with Islamic tenets in public services. Besides, the association has achieved some breakthroughs in the area of creating awareness about the social identity of Muslim women, education through training, and encouraging women preachers and teachers to become acquainted with more Islamic knowledge and modern sciences. From the foregoing, FOMWAN has undoubtedly complimented the efforts of organizations as the JIN and the Izala which were earlier said to have committed to women enlightenment and the promotion of modern Islamic schools.

The society had the belief that, the reconstruction of the Muslim society must begin with the re-assessment of the role of the Muslim women. Thus, the status of the women needs to be raised. Not only that, the Muslim women must be made free from the chains of negative customs and traditions invented by the men for their own gratification which hindered the development of the womenfolk.⁶⁵ Consequent upon the activities of FOMWAN, northern Nigeria witnessed modern articulation of gender development along Islamic perspective. Therefore, the women association has been significant in the changing nature of Islamic scholarship in northwestern Nigeria.

Conclusion

So far, this paper has examined the role of some Islamic based organizations and associations in the

mobilization, education, enlightenment and empowerment of the womenfolk in northern Nigeria. These associations, as the paper established, were operating in similar fashion to other non-faith-based civic organizations in the country which developed during the 1970s onward. The rise of these associations was at the instance of the activities of modern Muslim intellectuals in response to colonial legacies which led to the stagnation of Islamic institutions in Nigeria. They were equally part of the wave of Islamic resurgence that was sweeping the contemporary Islamic world which brought about intellectual change in Muslim societies. One significant thing about these faith-based association was that, they were strongly engaged in promoting and protecting legitimate interests of the Muslims, social provisioning and had influenced the cause of good governance through socio-religious activism. These were in addition to being agents of mobilization, education and enlightenment of the Muslim women, a cause which contributed in changing the status and rights of the womenfolk in northern Nigeria.

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¹ See R.A. Rufai, “Gender Transformation in Northern Nigeria: An Overview” in A.M. Yakubu, et. al. (eds.) *Northern Nigeria: A Century of Transformation*, Kaduna, Arewa House, Ahmadu Bello University, 2005, p. 507; A.B. Bawa, “Silent Voices in Hausaland: Placing Hausa Women in History” in A.I. Yandaki, et.al., (eds.) *Mahdi Adamu in the practice of History, Hausaland and Beyond*, Zaria, Ahmadu Bello University Press Limited, 2018, pp. 417-421; P. Koziel, “Hausa Women’s Right and the Changing Perception of Gender in Northern Nigeria” culled from *academia*, early June 2019. S.B. Aliyu, “Constraints to Womanhood in Northern Nigeria: A Feminist Reading of Hilary Rouse-Amadi’s Amina” in A. Yerima and S. Aliyu, (eds.) *Gender Politics: Women’s Writings and Film in Northern Nigeria*, Ibadan, Kraft Books Limited, 2012, p. 60-69.; F. Abdullahi, “Women as Victimizers: A Deconstructive Reading of Mariama Ba’s So Long a Letter” in *KAJOLLS: Katsina Journal of Linguistic and Literary Studies*, Vol. 5, September, 2018; I.A. Tsiga, “Defying the Coaxers, Coercers and Coaches: Women and Life Writing in Northern Nigeria” in A. Yerima and S. Aliyu, (eds.) *Gender Politics: Women’s Writings...*op. cit., pp. 69-85, and A.B. Bawa and Y. Abubakar, (eds.) *Women and History in Northern Nigeria*, Makurdi, Aboki Publishers, 2020, etc.

² See P. Koziel, “Hausa Women’s Right and the Changing Perception of Gender in Northern Nigeria”...

³ See F. Yakan, *Islamic Movement: Problems and Perspectives*, translated by Maneh al-Johani, Second Edition, London, Armed Forces Printing Press, 1970. Also J.N. Paden, *Faith and Politics in Nigeria: Nigeria as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World*, Washington DC, United States Institute of Peace, 2008, p. 28. Pat Williams, “Religious Groups and the Politics of National Development in Nigeria” in *Research Review*, New Series, Vol. 7, Nos. 1 &2, 1991, pp. 32-33, T.H. Gwarzo, “Activities of Islamic Civic Associations in the Northwest of Nigeria: with Particular Reference to Kano State” in *Africa Spectrum*, Vol. 38, No. 3, 2003, p. 298.

⁴ N. Aliyu, “The Changing Nature of Islamic Scholarship in Northwestern Nigeria, c. 1945-

1990" *PhD History Thesis*, Cairo University, 2017, pp. 247-258.

⁵ See S. Sadiouni, "Political Engagements of Islamic NGOs in the South African Public Sphere" in *ARIA: Annual Review of Islam in Africa*, Issue No. 11, 2012, pp. 45-48.

⁶ An extract from Chapter 5, verse 2 of the Holy Qur'an.

⁷ This concept is common in the speeches of many traditional mallams from the late 1960s like Late Mallam Qalarawi, a prominent public preacher in Kano City. He used to say "*Ni ba dan kungiya ba ne*" meaning I do not belong to any religious union. Some scholars criticized their opponents with being members of religious movements or organizations and used to call them *yan addinin kungiyanci*, meaning members of religious unionism.

⁸ M.S. Umar, "Mass Islamic Education and Emergence of Female 'Ulama' in Northern Nigeria: Background, Trends and Consequences" in Scott S. Reese, (ed.) *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa*, Netherland, Brill, 2004, pp. 99-120; S. Shehu, "Islamizing the Educational System: Toward an Alternative Education Theory and Agenda for the Muslim Ummah in Nigeria" a paper presented at the Two-day National Workshop on Islamization of Knowledge jointly organized by IIIT Nigeria Office and Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto between 15th-16th May, 2000, at Congregation Hall, City Campus, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, p. 4.

⁹ M.U. Bunza, "Development and Challenges of Islamic Institutions in Nigeria" in A.S. Mika'ilu, et. al. (eds.) *Islam and the Fundamental of Peaceful Co-existence in Nigeria: Proceedings of the International Conference on Islam and the Fundamentals of Peaceful Co-Existence in Nigeria* organized by Sokoto State Government in conjunction with the Muslim World League, Held in Sokoto 28th-30th March, 2013, Sokoto, Amal Printing Press, 2014, p. 29.

¹⁰ Gwarzo, pp. 289-295. See also J.N. Paden, *Faith and Politics in Nigeria: Nigeria as a Pivotal State in the Muslims World*, Washington DC, United State Institute of Peace, 2008, p. 27. T. Falola, *Culture and Customs of Nigeria*, Westport, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 44.

¹¹ See N. Aliyu, and M. Tukur, "Contextualizing the Proliferation of Modern Religious Associations in Nigeria with Emphasis on the revivalist Trend of the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) and the Islamic Education Trust (IET)" in *Taguwa: Multi-Disciplinary Journal of Humanities*, Umaru MusaYar'adua University, Katsina, Nigeria, Vol. 10, No. 1, July 2019, pp. 84-94.

¹² A.A. Ibrahim, "Atturuq Assufiyya Fiy Afriqiyya wa Dauruha Fiy Nashr al-Islam Fiy Afriqiyya" *Nadwa: al-Islam Fiy Afriqiyya*, Cairo University, July, 18-19, 1998, pp. 21-47.

¹³ O. Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria: A Study of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition*, Leiden, Brill, 2003, p. 70.

¹⁴ See M. Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa*, London, Longman, 1984, pp. 283-285.

¹⁵ N. Aliyu, "Colonialism and Islamic Book Culture in Northern Nigeria" in *Rima International Journal of Historical Studies (RIJHIS)*, Sokoto State University, Sokoto State, Nigeria, Vol. 1, No. 1, January, 2018, p. 60.

¹⁶ See J.N. Paden, *Faith and Politics in Nigeria: Nigeria as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World*, Washington DC, United State Institute of Peace Press, 2008, pp. 15-25.

¹⁷ See M. Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa*, op. cit. p. 285.

¹⁸ J.N. Paden, *Religion and Political Culture in Kano*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1973, pp. 65-80.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 288.

²⁰ D. Yahya, "Kano Intellectual History: Mapping Out the Intellectual Landscape" in B.M. Barkindo, (ed.) *Kano and Some of Its Neighbors*, Zaria, Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1989, p. 22.

²¹ See A. Anwar, "Struggle for Influence and Identity: The Ulama in Kano" *M.A. History Dissertation*, University of Maiduguri, 1989, pp. 23-26.

²² T. Falola and M.M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, London, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 292-293.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 298. See also M.S. Umar, "Education and Islamic Trends in Northern Nigeria: 1970s-1990s" in *Africa Today*, Vol. 48, No. 2, (Summer 2001) pp. 127-150.

²⁵ *Haske*, Magazine of the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), Kaduna, Nigeria, No. 2, October 1968, p. 4.

²⁶ Falola, *Culture and Customs of Nigeria*, p. 44.

²⁷ S. Qonsooh, "Al-Muslimun wa-al-Mushkilaat al-Adeedah al-Deeniyya fiy Nijeriya" *Nadwa: al-Islam fiy Afriqiyya*, Cairo University, Egypt, July, 1998, p. 395

²⁸ Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria*...op. cit. p. 73.

²⁹ AH/MSS/1/12/135: Murray Last, "The Traditional Muslim Intellectual in Hausaland: The Background", p. 24.

³⁰ Ibrahim Sulaiman has provided an instance where Shehu engaged in open debate on women with one scholar from Daura around 1786 and 7. See his *A Revolution in History: the Jihad of Usman Dan fodio*, with a Forward by Shehu Usman M. Bugaje, London, Mansell Publishing Limited, 1986, pp. 84-90.

³¹ J.M. Kaura, "Emancipation of the Women in the Sokoto Caliphate" in A.M. Kani and K.A. Gandi, (eds.) *State and Society in the Sokoto Caliphate*,



Sokoto, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, 1990, p. 77.

³² Ibid, pp. 78-79.

³³ T. Hogkin, *Nigerian Perspectives: an Historical Anthology*, London, Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 251.

³⁴ Ibid, pp. 254-255.

³⁵ J.M. Kaura, "Emancipation of the Women in the Sokoto Caliphate"...op. cit. p. 79.

³⁶ See, J. Boyd, "The Role of Educated Women in the Sokoto Caliphate: Nana Asma'u, 1793-1865" in H. Bobboyi and A.M. Yakubu, (eds.) *The Sokoto Caliphate: History and Legacies, 1804-2004*, 2005, pp. 124-133.; and J.M. Kaura, "Emancipation of the Women in the Sokoto Caliphate"...op. cit.

³⁷ R.A. Rufai, "Gender Transformation in Northern Nigeria" op. cit. p. 509

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Muslim Sisters Organization Facebook platform, culled on 21/12/2020.

⁴⁰ Kane, p. 73.

⁴¹ See. A. Babs Fafunwa, *A History of Education in Nigeria*, Ibadan, NPS Educational Publishers Limited, 1974.

⁴² S.B. Abdulkarim, "The Transformation of Northern Nigeria (1903-2003): the Role of the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria" a Paper presented at the *International Conference on the Transformation of Northern Nigeria 1903-2003*, organized by and held at Arewa House, Kaduna, on 27th-29th March, 2003, p. 3.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Qur'an: Chapter 49, verse 10.

⁴⁵ Bunza, "Muslims and the Modern States in Nigeria..." op. cit. p. 59.

⁴⁶ E.P. Renne, "Educating Women and the Izala Movement in Zaria City, Nigeria" *Islamic Africa*, Vol. 3, No. 1, (Spring 2012), p. 56.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 60-63.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 59.

⁵⁰ A.Y. Muhammad, "Contemporary Islamic Learning in Katsina: the Contributions of Riyadhul Qur'an Islamiyya School" in A.I. Tsiga and A.U. Adamu, (eds.) *Islam and the History of Learning in Katsina*, Ibadan, SBL, 1997, p. 192.

⁵¹ In such public schools, students with certificates of prominent Islamiyya schools especially the women were admitted to enable them continue their education.

⁵² See N. Aliyu, "Agents of Social and Intellectual Change in Contemporary Northern Nigeria: The Case of the *Jama'atu Izalatil Bidi'a Wa Iqamat as-Sunnah* (JIBWIS aka the Izala Movement), in *Lapai Journal of Humanities*, Niger State, Nigeria, Vol. 11, No. 4, 2020, pp. 1-16.

⁵³ Gwarzo, "Activities of Islamic Civic Associations..." p. 310.

⁵⁴ Bunza, "Muslims and the Modern States in Nigeria..." op. cit. p. 49.

⁵⁵ Mal. Ibrahim Sulaiman was a former MSSN activist and the author of two important books on the Sokoto Caliphate, viz: *A Revolution in History: The Jihad of Uthman Danfodiyo*, London, Mansell, 1986, and *the Islamic State and the Challenge of History: Ideals, Policies and Operations of the Sokoto Caliphate*, London, Mansell, 1987.

⁵⁶ S. Omar, *Yantarun Nana Asma'u Danfodiyo: Tsarinsu Da Taskace Wakokinsu*, Zeetma Investment Limited, 2014, p. 1.

⁵⁷ J. Boyd, and B.B. Mack, *The Collected Works of Nana Asma'u, Daughter of Usman DanFodiyo (1793-1864)*, Ibadan, 2000, pp. 8-10.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ M.U. Bunza, "Islamic Education in Nigeria: A Brief History of Stability and Transformation" a draft paper for publication, p. 12

⁶¹ R. Leimeier, *Islamic Reform and Political Change in Nigeria*, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press. 1997. p. 170.

⁶² www.fomwan.org/.

⁶³ See, M.S. Umar, "Mass Islamic Education and Emergence of Female 'Ulama' in Northern Nigeria: Background, Trends and Consequences", op. cit.; M. Bana, "Emergence of Female Preachers and Shaping of Islamic Authority: Case of Institutional Change or Persistence?" a draft conference paper.

⁶⁴ Bunza, "Islamic Education in Nigeria: A Brief History of..." op. cit. p. 13.

⁶⁵ Gwarzo, "Activities of Islamic Civic Associations..." op. cit. p. 312.