UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

ISLAM AND GENDER IN DAGBON

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2017

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BY

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Thesis submitted to the Department of Religion and Human Values of the Faculty of Arts in the College of Humanities and Legal Studies, University of Cape Coast, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Religion and Human Values

JULY 2017

DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Name: …….

Signature …….

Supervisor's Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Principal Supervisor

Name……..

Signature……. Date…….

Co-Supervisor

Name…….

Signature……... Date……

ABSTRACT

Gender has become a central issue in world discourse. It is more so in Islam because there is a general perception that the theology of Islam is built on gender injustice. The Dagomba people of Ghana converted to Islam in droves after the conversion of their King, Naa Zangina in about 1700. Since then, Islam has become the state religion of the Dagomba people and all their customs and traditions have become underpinned by Islam, including the negotiation of gender. There is a palpable gender imbalance in Dagomba life and thought. But what factor(s) account for this gender imbalance? This study therefore sought to investigate and to find out the extent to which Islam is or is not responsible for the male-female dynamics in Dagbon. In doing this, a qualitative method of data collection was employed. Questionnaires were administered, in-depth interviews were conducted and focus group discussions were held. The descriptive research design was also used to interpret the primary data that was collected. It was found out that gender relations in Dagbon are heavily biased in favour of men. The Afanema, who are the guardians of Islamic lore, teach a theology of Islam that purports to subjugate women. This theology has become accepted norm. However, a few women are beginning to find their voices and to challenge male dominance. This research recommends that more women take up the role of *mufassirs* (interpreters of the Qur'an) in order to balance the male centered interpretations that pervade the society. Education is also a leveler and tends to give people a voice. If more girls would be educated, it would

contribute to a greater awareness of the fact that more feminine voices can only contribute to the development of the society rather than retard it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My foremost gratitude goes to the two supervisors of this project: Dr. Rabiatu Ammah and Dr. Simon Appiah. I am privileged to have benefited from their repertoire of knowledge. They exercised a lot of patience and understanding, which contributed greatly to the completion of this work. I am also indebted to Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia, the Vice President of Ghana, for paying the first set of fees that enabled me to begin the course. My gratitude also goes to the President, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo for his encouragement and financial support that kept me on the programme.

Prof. Edoh Torgah was the "tormentor-in-chief" who ensured that I never gave up. I am grateful to all my colleagues in the Department of Religion and Human Values at the University of Cape Coast for their support, especially those that served as Heads of Department in the period of my study: Dr. Yaw Sarkodie Agyeman, Prof. Eric N. B. Anum and Prof. Samuel Awuah-Nyamekye. My students, Shaykh Muhammad Abubakar Abdul-Moomin, George Anderson Jnr. and Hackman Alex Aidoo played various roles in the course of writing this thesis. Dr. Collins Ayine of the Faculty of Forest Resources Technology, KNUST served as my data analyst and I am grateful. Nana Attobrah Quaicoe is the young man who has always believed in me. I am grateful to him for the confidence. Dr. Abena Animwaa Yeboah-Banin tutored me on how to set the table of contents. No knowledge gained is small. And I appreciate Prof. De-Valera Botchwey of the History Department who has been a huge pillar of support. Dr. Roger Asempasa and Dr. Emmanuel Saboro, both of

the English Department of the University of Cape Coast gave me useful material that helped in my understanding of theories. I thank them. My former student, Iddrisu Dawuda administered the questionnaires, while my protégé and political mentee, Akbar Khomeini, conducted the research on Dagbon culture and the political leadership of women. I am indebted to them as well.

My thanks go to my family, for their sacrifices in the period of conducting this research. I cannot thank the University of Cape Coast enough for the opportunity it gave me to both teach and pursue this study.

DEDICATION

To Prof. Audrey Gadzekpo for introducing me to gender studies.

To my daughters, that they may find their voices and speak up.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Research Context

Dagbon refers to the geographical area occupied by the Dagomba ethnic group in the Volta Basin in Ghana's administrative region called the Northern Region. Dagbon lies between latitudes nine and ten and has an area of 9,611 square miles. The Dagomba belong to the Mole-Dagbani ethnic group of people. The Mole-Dagbani ethnic group comprises the Moshi, Mamprusi, Nanumba and Dagomba. They (the Dagomba) are the most populous of the Mole-Dagbani group. According to the 2010 Population & Housing Census of Ghana, (Statistical Service, 2010) the Mole-Dagbani number 1,607,444. The Dagombas alone are, 1,051,123, constituting 65.3% of the Mole-Dagbani population. The ruling classes of the Dagomba, who conquered and imposed themselves as rulers in Dagbon, are believed to have descended from Na Gbewaa. Na Gbewaa's progenitor was the legendary *Toha-Zie* or Red-Hunter believed to have migrated from Tunga (supposedly east of Lake Chad) to Zamfara in northern Nigeria, and then through Mali and then to Gurma in modern day Burkina Faso (Wilks, 1964, p.29).

Islam, since its introduction into Dagbon in 1700s through the conversion of Naa Zangina, (Levtzion, 1968) has exerted great influence on the Dagomba people. The conversion of Naa Zangina to Islam is said to have heralded the "incorporation of the Muslim estate into the overall socio-political system of Dagomba" (Wilks, 1964, p.32). Dagomba

customs and traditions show considerable Islamic influences. Even the most important festival of the Dagomba people, Damba, is celebrated to commemorate or coincide with Prophet Muhammad's birthday. As far back as 1820, Joseph Dupuis, the British Consul to Kumasi, on the testimony of Yendi traders, classified Dagbon among "governments which are either purely Moslem (sic) or countries where the Koranic (sic) law had been received and serves for the civil code of the believer and infidel" (Dupuis, 1824, p.93). Dagomba customs and traditions are inextricably interwoven with Islamic ones. Naming, marriage and funeral ceremonies all bear considerable Islamic influences. Tait refers to the Dagomba people as the "Muslimised Dagomba" (Tait, 1960, p.78).

Indeed, to this day Dagombas themselves, hardly refer to one of their own as *chefira*, a corruption of the Arabic word, *kafir*, which means unbeliever. The Dagomba distinguish three levels of commitment to Islam. First, *Afanema*, that is, those who have literacy in Islam and Arabic and therefore preside over birth, marriage and funeral ceremonies. Secondly, there are those who say the Muslim ritual prayer, called *jing puhriba*, meaning "those who pray." Lastly, *Dagbang dabba,* that is, those who are nominal Muslims and who also actively participate in traditional rituals. The 2010 Population and Housing Census of Ghana also put the Muslim population of Dagbon at 95.04%. Out of the 1,051,123 Dagomba that there are, 999,026 said that they are adherents of Islam. For people who adhere to a religious tradition, it is difficult to isolate their religion from other aspects of their life. Any objective analysis of the lives of the Dagomba and the Dagbon situation therefore, cannot be done without their religion.

That religion is Islam. Indeed, the process of inculturation in Dagbon is complete and Islamic traditions and Dagomba customs and traditions have become fused over centuries of interaction and influence.

Background to the Study

The issue of gender has become an important part of intellectual discourse around the world today. In this study, gender has been defined as the learned behaviour or roles that society assigns to people by virtue of them being either male or female (Cornelia et al, 1985, p. 6). Gender has therefore been discussed as a social rather than biological construct. This study looks at the relationship between male Muslims and female Muslims in Dagbon in terms of the roles that the society assigns to them by virtue of their biological make up.

Islam has often been portrayed as a religion whose ethos promotes the subjugation of women (Spencer, 2002, pp. 73-92). Qur'anic verses that declare that men have authority over women because they are the maintainers of women (Q: 4:34) and inheritance laws that assign twice as much inheritable property to men than it does to women have further deepened the belief that Islam subjugates women and prevents their full participation in both sacred and secular space. In many Muslim dominated societies, the participation of women in public space is contingent upon being accompanied by a male relative, known as *mahram* (one with whom they cannot have conjugal ties). In this regard, some people consider Islam as a religion that does not encourage the full participation of women in sacred and secular spaces. The relationship between men and women in Islam is therefore seen as favourable to men and unfavorable to women.

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, the revered medieval scholar of Islam, accentuates this belief when he labels marriage as a type of slavery in which the wife is obliged to obey all of her husband's orders except that which explicitly violates a commandment of God (Rispler-Chaim, 1992, p.318).

Perhaps in Africa the situation is exacerbated because most African societies are already heavily patriarchal. The mixture of Islam and traditional customs and norms has further deepened the belief that Islam inhibits women from fully participating in society. This thesis is essentially about both men and women. The study focuses on the structures in Dagbon that limit the interaction between males and females or limits women from being active participants in society. This has been done with Islamic laws on women as the basis. I therefore sought to find out if indeed women in Dagbon are really inhibited in any way. Islamic laws on gender have been discussed as well as traditional Dagomba practices that were in place before the influence of Islam.

This study looked at power relations as they affect men and women and the roles that they play in society. The aim also was to examine issues of gender empowerment and the issues of challenging existing norms and values that essentially portray women as subservient to men. For example, the Qur'an states that on the issue of inheritance, the woman shall have half that of a man (Q: 4:11) and regarding testimonies and witnessing, it is said that the testimony and witness of one man is needed in a transaction, whiles that of two women is needed in the absence of a man (Q: 2:282). The thesis examined how these Qur'anic stipulations and their

interpretations in Dagbon have influenced and continue to influence gender relations in Dagbon.

However, the real motivation for this research was borne out of three incidents. The first was in August 1999 in Tamale, the capital of the Northern Region of Ghana. During a casual conversation with a friend who is a *Muallim* or *Mallam*, (one who teaches Islam) he asserted that, there was no value in being at home with his wife because a woman would not add any value to a discourse or conversation. He argued that Islam does not place much value on a woman's thoughts. The resulting conversation between us virtually triggered my desire to study Islamic laws on gender. My aim has been to find out if indeed it is the sources of Islamic law that dictate the station of women in Dagbon society or whether it is an interpretation of these laws by the predominantly male class of Muslim guardians of Islamic lore.

The second incident was in 2008. During the 2008 electioneering process in Ghana, the Presidential Candidate of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), now President Akufo-Addo had signaled his preference for one Hajia Alima Mahama as his Vice Presidential Candidate for the election. Hajia Alima Mahama was then Ghana's Minister for Women and Children's Affairs and now Minister for Local Government and Rural Development. I received a letter signed by one Mohammed Tahiru from Tamale, who claimed to have been writing on behalf of the Association of Muslim Teachers in Tamale. The crux of his submission was that, they as *Ulama* (Muslim clergy) were against the choice of Alima Mahama as Vice Presidential Candidate of the NPP. According to him, "Islam is against the

leadership of women" and if Akufo-Addo went ahead to select Alima Mahama as his Vice Presidential Candidate, they (the Ulama) were going to ensure that all Muslims voted against him. In the end, other factors also conspired to deny Alima Mahama the chance to be Akufo-Addo's Vice Presidential Candidate. Is Islam really against the leadership of women? This study sought to find an answer to this question.

The third incident occurred on Friday 13th March 2009, when I appeared on a women's programme on Ghana Television hosted by Gifty Anti. This programme is called *The Stand Point*. The topic for that night was "Women Empowerment: Are Muslim Women Involved?" Among other issues, we discussed the issue of veiling in Islam. After the programme, I received a lot of hate mail and text messages. The head of the Wahabiyya or Ahl Sunna fraternity in Tamale Shaykh Saeed Zakaria went on radio in Tamale to literally label me a *kafir* (unbeliever). My crime was that I had said that the veil is not a symbol of piety and that veiling existed long before the inception of Islam. I was baffled because the basis of my argument is in Q: 7:26, which states that garments are for covering our shame and for adornment; but the garment of *taqwa* (fear of Allah) is the best garment. All of these incidents however increased my resolve to do research on the issue of women in Islam.

As has been stated above, the 2010 Ghana Population and Housing Census puts the number of Dagomba at 1,051,123. Out of this number, 526,723 are women while 524,400 are men. This means that 49.88% of Dagomba are men while 50.11% of them are women. If 50.11% of a population is not fully integrated and is not fully participating in the

development process of that society, then it will be difficult for that society to make any meaningful progress. Development is the goal of every human society, even though states would differ from one another in terms of the ingredients and benchmarks of development.

In fact, Naa Zangina converted to Islam, because he perceived Muslim clerics as having the capacity to induce development for the Dagbon state. According to Ivor Wilks, the cleric who converted Naa Zangina to Islam made Dagbon prosperous with the aid of the Qur'an. Naa Zangina is reported to have uttered the following prayer at his conversion: "I pray to God to build my kingdom as compact as clay…I pray to God to allow travelers in this area to have safe journeys to their destinations' (Wilks, 1964, p.474). Wilks writes that following this prayer which was performed in the nature of the Muslim ritual prayer of *Salat*, 'the roads opened and many traveled by them" (Wilks, 1985, p.474).

In discussing the role of religion in people's lives, Scott Appleby states that;

> Indeed, literally millions of people structure their daily routines around the spiritual practices enjoined by a religious tradition, and they often do so quite 'publicly'. Dress, eating habits, gender relations, negotiations of time, space, and social calendar-all unfold beneath a sacred canopy. Around much of the world, politics and civil society are suffused with religion (Appleby, 2000, p.3).

We cannot therefore discuss the progress and development of Dagbon without discussing the religious tradition that shapes their worldview. That religious tradition is Islam.

Statement of the Problem

The Qur'an, which is the fundamental law of Islam, postulates that human beings are created equal (Q: 49:13). It further asserts that human beings were created as deputies (*khulafau*) of God. From these two stipulations, it would have been expected that a society where Islamic culture is pervasive, would be a society of egalitarian principles, where men and women would negotiate and participate in the society on the basis of equality, equity and mutual respect and co-operation. This however, is not the case with Dagbon, a society as I have already stated whose culture is predominantly Islamic. There is a palpable and pervasive sense of gender injustice in Dagbon. And this gender injustice is actively promoted as Islamic norm through the teachings of the male guardians of Islamic lore. In the background to the study, I have pointed out some sayings by some Ulama of Dagbon to the effect that women are inferior and subservient to men. There is therefore a clear disconnect or gap between the stipulations of the Qur'an and the teachings of the Ulama regarding male-female dynamics. This study has therefore investigated the factor(s) that are responsible for this disconnect in order to contribute to an understanding of the male-female dynamics in Dagbon.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

This study was carried out to among other things;

1. Find out how men and women are coping with a culture where most aspects of life are justified by Islam
2. Examine how the educated and the non-educated negotiate gender in Dagbon
3. Analyse the historical and sociological factors that have shaped gender discourse and relations in Dagbon
4. Investigate the various responses to the issue of gender in Dagbon and how Islamic doctrine accounts for such responses
5. Assess the egalitarian intent of the Qur'an as the foremost document on which Muslims order their lives.

Methodology

Research Design

This study is qualitative. A qualitative researcher aims at gathering in-depth information with the aim of understanding human behaviour and the reasons behind such behaviour. Qualitative research investigates the how and why of human behaviour (Silverman, 2000). According to Creswell (2003) there are five designs to a qualitative research: ethnographies, grounded theory, case studies, phenomenological research and narrative research. This thesis is a combination of phenomenology and case study. The phenomenology of religion deals with the experiential dimension of religion. It studies, describes and presents religion in terms that are consistent with the beliefs and orientation of the practitioners of the faith. This study is about the people of Dagbon and how their understanding of Islam shapes how men and women deal with each other

on a day-to-day basis. It is case study because it deals with the phenomenon of gender relations amongst a particular people.

Study Area

The study area is Dagbon. Dagbon is too wide an area to cover in a research like this. So this study has been restricted to three districts of Dagbon: Yendi, Tamale and Savelugu. This does not affect or diminish the conclusions of this research, because it is possible to study a small section of a population and still attain a high level of clarity because of its homogeneity in language and culture. Dagbon is a typical example of this. Yendi is the traditional capital of the Dagomba people and the seat of its paramountcy. It embodies the culture and tradition of the people and also has a palpable Islamic presence. Indeed, it was in Yendi that Naa Zangina converted to Islam, from where Islam then spread to the rest of Dagbon. Tamale is the administrative capital of the Northern Region, majority of whose inhabitants are Dagomba. As the Regional Capital, it is also home to many people of diverse ethnicities. However, in spite of its metropolitan nature, it is still a haven of Dagomba culture and tradition. It is home to the earth priest of the Dagomba (Dakpema) and has strong Islamic presence. Savelugu is another citadel of Islamic learning in Dagbon. Conclusions that have been arrived at are therefore of general applicability and representative of the situation in Dagbon.

Population

The entire population of Dagbon is 1,051,123. Out of this number 999,026 are Muslims, according to the 2010 Population Census of Ghana

(Statistical Service, 2010). The male-female ratio in Dagbon is almost evenly divided: 49.88% for men and 50.11% for women. Only 45% of the population has had a taste of formal education. So the sample was chosen to reflect the demographic character of the population.

Sampling Procedure

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is not interested in numbers as such. "In quantitative research, the issue is how many cases are needed to secure statistically significant findings or more broadly to secure assurance that an observed pattern is not mere happenstance" (Ragin, 1992, p.10). Qualitative researchers in conducting their research may find that the evidence is so repetitive that there will be no need to continue. Even so, some scholars of research methodology have given indications of what may be considered as ideal samples in a qualitative research. Adler and Adler (1987) advise graduate students to sample between twelve and sixty, with thirty being the mean. For Ragin (1992) it is twenty for an M.A thesis and fifty for a Ph.D. dissertation. Ragin and Becker add the important advice that "you should stop adding cases when you are no longer learning anything new" (1992, p.15).

In writing this thesis, we interviewed both Afanema and lay Muslims in rural and urban settings. We also interviewed educated and non-educated persons within the population. For the Afanema, 5 male Afanema were interviewed in Yendi and Savelugu Districts, while 10 were interviewed in Tamale. This is because Tamale is basically the "Islamic Capital" of Dagbon. Many of the Afanema who preach and teach Islam in the other districts are graduates of the main Islamic Institutes in Tamale,

such as Ambariyya, Nuriyya and Nuri-Islam. In addition to the male clerics, we interviewed Hajia Maryam Alolo and about seven of her female Afanema. This is because the phenomenon of women Afanema is not as prominent in the other districts as it is in Tamale. The class of Afanema is an exclusively male class, except for the curious case of Afa Maryam Alolo who has defied convention and is making waves in Dagbon as a female Afa with about sixty other apprentice female Afanema under her. Her story is told in full in chapter four. With regard to lay Muslims, the educated ones were given questionnaires to fill out. We distributed sixty questionnaires for men and sixty questionnaires for women. Fifty-two men returned their questionnaires, while fifty-seven women returned theirs. However, for the purposes of analysis, we analysed twenty-five questionnaires for males, and twenty-five questionnaires for females. In the rural settings, we interviewed fifteen women and fifteen men; five in each of the study areas. Five households in each of the study areas were also interviewed. In total, we interviewed fifty people and analysed fifty questionnaires.

For the Afanema, the purposive sampling method was adopted because we needed to be deliberate with regard to their doctrinal orientations. We needed to adopt this sampling method in order to measure how the various sects view gender in order for us to determine the influence of doctrine on the beliefs of the people on gender. For the educated class, we adopted the convenience sampling method. Research assistants went to offices and politely asked those who were interested in filling the questionnaires to do so. We managed to collect 87% of

questionnaires that were given to men and 95% of those given to women. For the laymen and women in the rural settings, we randomly chose households in which we sought permission to interview men and women who were interested in taking part in the research. We adopted a quota sampling method, by which we interviwed an equal number of men as women. This was done in order to reflect the the population dynamic in Dagbon, where there is an almost equal number of men as there are women.

This study also employed the focus group discussion. The focus group is a good way to gather people together from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest. I served as the moderator for these discussions. We held separate discussions for the men and the women. Participants were chosen from those who had filled the questionnaires. The focus group discussions were therefore a way of either validating or invalidating the responses that were provided in the questionnaires.

The strength of a focus group discussion lies in its ability to allow the participants to agree or disagree with one another so that it provides an insight into how a group thinks about an issue, about the range of opinions and ideas, and the inconsistencies and variations that exist in a particular community in terms of beliefs and their experiences and practices.

Data Collection Instruments

Two main data collection instruments were employed in this study. They were questionnaires and an interview guide. The questionnaires were administered to the educated members of the sample, while the question

guide aided in the interviews that we conducted with the non-literate members of the sample. I also used archival material. For archival material, the NRG series at the Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD) in Tamale served as a rich source of information on the history of Dagbon and its social, economic and political formation and constitution.

Secondary sources also formed a large part of this research. For secondary sources, books, periodicals, archival material, journal articles and reports were consulted.

Data Collection Procedures

Field research and data collection for this study began in June 2014. We interviewed the Afanema between June and August 2014. From September to November 2014, my field assistants deployed the questionnaires for the collection of data amongst the educated population. After the initial drafts of most of the chapters were read by the supervisors, there was the need to go back to the field to conduct further interviews on Dagbon culture among the rural population. Therefore, in November and December 2015, we went back to the field to conduct further interviews. All interviews were conducted in the day time between the hours of ten in the morning and five in the evening. It was during the dry season in the north when many rural people are home. Therefore, there was no difficulty as such in getting interviewees and as a person who speaks the Dagbani language fluently (I am not an ethnic Dagomba) there was no difficulty in communicating.

Data Processing and Analysis

I adopted the Interpretative Phenomenological Ansalysis (IPA) approach to data analysis. This analysis is suitable for studies related to phenomenology and hermeneutics. I combined the *In Vivo Coding* and *Values Coding* methods in IPA. In *In Vivo Coding*, codes, terms, phrases and sentences used by the participants themselves are highlighted and used as the points of analysis. In *Values Coding*, codes, inferred values, attitudes and beliefs of participnats are noted and used as the basis for drawing conclusions on the values that the people live by. The combined effect of this is that, participants are given a voice in the research whiles at the same time, their values, attitudes and beliefs are highlighted.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This work is premised on gender and feminist theories. Feminism is used as a general term to cover a range of ideologies and theories that pay special attention to women's rights and women's position in culture and society. The term tends to be used for the women's movement, which began in the late eighteenth century and continues to campaign for complete political, social and economic equality between women and men.

The basic idea of feminism is that women's position in society is unequal to that of men and that society is structured in such a way as to benefit men. These political, social and economic structures are detrimental to women. However, feminists have used different theories to explain these inequalities, and there are marked geographic and historical variations in the nature of feminism.

Historically, feminist thought and activity can be divided into two waves. The first wave began in about late eighteenth century and lasted until the 1930s. This wave was largely concerned with gaining equal rights between both sexes. The second wave which began in the late 1960s has continued to fight for equality for women but has also developed a range of theories and approaches that stress the difference between women and men and which draw attention to the specific needs of women.

Gender theories on the other hand, are theories that seek to explain the relationship between men and women in society, how these relationships are constructed and internalised by both sexes and how they determine the behaviour of men and women in society.

There are many gender and feminist theories. For the purposes of this thesis however, we have used those gender and feminist theories that mirror the concerns of African feminists and the particularities of the African-woman condition. We have also chosen theories that relate to the concerns of our study. The following theories have therefore been chosen, reviewed and related to this study: Islamic feminism, existential feminism and African\Black feminism.

Islamic Feminism

Islamic feminism is the feminism that seeks to assert the rights of women in Islam, based on the primary sources of Islamic law. Islamic feminism takes the view that Islam is premised on justice, including gender justice. It therefore rejects the androcentric interpretations that the male elite gives to issues of marriage, divorce and inheritance. Asma Barlas book, *Unreading the Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* and

Amina Wadud's book, *The Qur'an and Woman*: *Re-reading of the Qur'an from a woman's Perspective*, are basically, the blue prints of what Islamic feminism is. In these books, they make the argument that, because men are the interpreters of the Qur'an, they tend to read it (the Qur'an) with male lenses. Islamic feminism therefore makes the argument that, if we will read the Qur'an with gender neutral lenses, or even feminine lenses, we would come to different conclusions about the place of woman in the scheme of things.

In the view of Islamic feminism, conceptions of gender rights in Islamic law are neither unified nor coherent, but competing and contradictory. Islamic feminism takes the view that gender rights as constructed in Islamic jurisprudence, do not only neglect the basic objectives of sharia but are unsuitable for implementation in a secular society. To Islamic feminists, sharia should not be confused with fiqh (jurisprudence). Jurisprudence is a legal science which has evolved over centuries and which fundamentally is based on a consensus of the scholars who in turn have been influenced by the patriarchal underpinnings of the societies in which they operated. Ismaic feminists therefore start from the premise that gender rights are neither fixed, given nor absolute. They are on the contrary, cultural and legal constructs, which are asserted, negotiated and subject to change. They are produced in response to lived realities, in response to power relations in the family and society and by those who want either to retain or to change the present situation.

The overall goal of Islamic feminism is to expose the inherent gender bias of *fiqh* rules and their inherent contradictions, while at the

same time, upholding the justice of the sharia as embodied in the primary sources of law for both men, women and for the societies in which they live.

Existentialist Feminism

According to the basic notion of existentialism, human beings exist only as amorphous, living organisms until they create separate identities for themselves through conscious action.

Existentialism makes a distinction between the observer and the observed by dividing being into two parts: being-for-itself and being-in-itself. Being-in-itself means the constant, material existence that humans share with animals, vegetables and other things whereas being-for-itself refers to the conscious existence that humans share only with other humans (Sartre, 1956a). This distinction is useful in an analysis of the human person. Being-in-itself is associated with the body and is the constant and objective being which can be perceived. In contrast, being-for-itself – the perceiver – is not itself a perceptible object but still has a certain kind of being. One's consciousness of mind (being-for-itself) separates it from one's body (being-in-itself). There is also a third being: being-for-others, which essentially is a communal being-with (Sartre, 1956b). The social relations constituted by the action of consciousness within a society are inherently in conflict because each being-for-itself establishes itself as a self, precisely by defining other beings as objects, as others (Sartre, 1956a). Each self describes all other beings as others and prescribes roles for the other to conform to.

Of all these categories, being-for-others is probably the most suited for a feminist analysis. Existentialist feminism claims that from the beginning man has named himself the "Self" and women the "Other" (De Beauvoir, 1974). If the other is a threat to the self, then woman is a threat to man; and if man wishes to remain free he must subordinate woman to him. Therefore, woman has always been subordinate to man and they have "internalized the alien point of view that man is the essential, woman the inessential" (McCall, 1979). Existentialist feminism provides an analysis of how woman became the "Other", not only different and separate from man but also inferior to him. It is argued that society interprets biology in a way that suits its ends. Basic biological difference is interpreted as rooted in the reproductive roles of males and females. Although biological and physiological facts about women may be real enough, how much value we attach to these facts is up to us as social beings (De Beauvoir, 1974). In other words, woman is more than her body. She is not to be reduced to being-in-itself because she is also being-for-itself. Thus, biology and physiology do not suggest why woman has been selected by society to play the secondary role. Existentialism does not accept the Marxist explanation that oppression is rooted in the social organization through which one class exploits the labour of the other class. Rather, existentialism believes that the relations between men and women will not automatically change even if society moves from capitalism to socialism. Women are just as likely to remain the "Other." The oppression of women is a necessary consequence of the institution of private property (De Beauvoir, 1974).

Unsatisfied with explanations of women's oppression presented by biologists, psychologists and Marxists, an eminent existentialist offered an ontological explanation based on women's being. The ontological approach looks at woman as a "self" that man has defined as the "other" (Beauvoir, 1974). Freed from the burdens of reproduction, men had the time to invent and to shape the future. Perceiving themselves as objects capable of risking their lives in combat, for instance, men perceived women as objects, capable only of giving life (De Beauvoir, 1974). Because of this alleged difference, men then proceeded to relegate women.

Social roles are the primary mechanism to control the "other". The feminine "mystery" continues from generation to generation through the painful socialisation of women into passive, or feminine, roles. From the beginning girls recognise that their bodies are different from those of boys. With puberty rites, girls are forced to accept and internalise the myth that they are inferior, which is then solidified in the institution of marriage and motherhood. The role of wife blocks women's freedom. Marriage enslaves women. Women pay for their "happiness" with their freedom. This price is too high (De Beauvoir, 1974).

The role of mother is taxing and limiting women's self-development even more than the role of wife (Simons, 1979). Even though the bearing and nurturing of children is considered as a natural function, there are many ways through which pregnancy alienates a woman from herself. The supposed joys of pregnancy are questionable. The mother-child relationship is easily distorted. As time goes on, the child becomes an adult and sees mother as a machine for cooking, cleaning, caring, giving,

and especially sacrificing. Reduced to an object, the mother begins to view and to use her child as an object.

Wifely and motherly roles block woman's bid for freedom. For escape, the role of the career, or professional, woman is suggested. However, a career woman can no more escape the cage of femininity than a wife and mother can. In some ways the career woman has it worse than the stay-at-home wife and mother because she also faces the expectations of people to be and act like a woman (De Beauvoir, 1974). The wife, the mother, the career woman, the prostitute, the narcissist, and the mystic: the basic tragedy of these roles is that they are not fundamentally of women's own making. Woman is not herself a maker. Man has constructed her. Woman can be a subject. She can engage in positive action in society, and can redefine or abolish her roles as wife, mother, career woman, prostitute, narcissist and mystic. Because there is no eternal essence of femininity, woman can create her own self. Society – a patriarchy – is the stumbling block to the self-creation of woman (De Beauvoir, 1974).

Of course, there are no easy ways for woman to escape from the limits, definitions and roles that society, propriety, and men have imposed on her. Nevertheless, if woman wants to stop being the second sex, then she must overcome the forces of circumstance. She must have her say and her way as much as man does.

Existentialist feminism is criticized on three major accounts. The first is that the philosophy is not easily understandable to the majority of women. Ideas like "immanence" and "transcendence," "essence" and "existence," "being-for-itself" and "being-in-itself" used in existentialism

do not arise directly out of women's lived experiences. These ideas are mere abstractions that arise from the philosopher's armchair speculations (Elshtain, 1981). Secondly, the female is treated in a negative way: unfortunate, insignificant, dirty, shameful, burdensome, and inherently alienating (Elshtain, 1981). It is the negative portrayal of the female body that has led existentialism to attack the institutions of marriage and motherhood as thoroughly oppressive ways of existe nce, which women must reject. Thirdly, existentialism largely accepts and celebrates male norms. All complaints about women's body and character translate into valorisation of man's body and character: active, virile, dominant and transcendent. The denigration of woman's body arises from the elevation of the ideal of man's body. The existentialist prescription for women's oppression is that women must strive to achieve freedom through the ways men have traditionally achieved theirs. The existentialist's diagnosis of women's condition and prescription for its cure has been severely criticised as untenable. After all, women cannot give up their female identities; the call on them to do so is not only impossible, but also, irresponsible.

Existential feminism has a relation to Islam in the sense that, Islam establishes a clear distinction between the male and the female (Q: 3:36). This Qur'anic stipulation basically provides a classificatory mechanism that allows for Muslim communities to establish a clear difference between men and women. In the case of Islam, the men are the guardians of Islamic lore. This allows them to define themselves and also define women. Men are therefore the 'self' and women are the 'other.'

African/Black Feminism

Race is also a defining factor in gender relations. We have already argued that biology is a major reason for the subjugation of women. Race is a component of biology and therefore people use race as an indicator of the inferiority and superiority of races. There is a myth that states that White dominance and especially colonialism, brought civilisation to Africa. On the contrary, colonialism was precisely about the subjugation of the African/Black. Within the Black-White divide was also the woman-man issue. The colonial enterprise had a political and economic complement to support it. The Bible was the foundational document. The Bible decrees that the man shall be the head of the house, just as Christ is the head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23).

The Bible therefore laid a foundation for male-female relation that was inherently biased against women. This colonial legacy has endured to this day. Those who succeeded the colonial master as rulers of Africa have further perpetuated this subjugation of women, not only in the name of the Bible and Jesus Christ, but also of African culture and in the case of Dagbon, of Islam.

African/Black feminism therefore seeks to overthrow the male patriarchal order that subjugates women and makes them second-rate citizens. Dagbon is an African society, where the combination of Dagbon culture and Islam conspires to ensure that women remain at the periphery of society, where they continue to play second fiddle to men.

Literature Review

There is a dearth of literature on issues of Islam and gender. The issue of Islam and gender has also become prominent in Islamic scholarship around the world with many renowned Islamic scholars dedicating their scholarship to that field. Their works have been reviewed and a link made to the topic of this study. We have done a thematic review of the literature for this study under the following headings or categories:

1. Theoretical underpinnings of gender relations
2. Authority, exegesis and gender in Islam
3. Historical evolution of gender in Islam
4. Gender in Africa

Theoretical underpinnings of gender in Islam

Paulo Freire, in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) considers "the fundamental theme of our epoch to be that of domination" (p.84). He believes that if humankind is to achieve its goal of development and happiness for all, then it must eliminate "dehumanizing oppression" (p.84). The central theme of Freire's argument is that, it is only through education that oppressed people or groups can redeem themselves. Madan Sarup, quoting Michel Foucault states; "knowledge is power over others, the power to define others" (Sarup, 1988, p.67). The reverse of this argument is that a lack of knowledge allows others to define you.

It is the contention of this study that, men define women in Dagbon because the men possess knowledge or at least define what the knowledge of Islam is, while women do not. Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second caliph of Islam, was known to complain about the fact that the Quraysh/ Makkans

used to dominate their women until they migrated to Madina where Qurayshi women began to acquire the habits of the Ansari (Madinan) women which was one of freedom and domination of their men (Al-Bukhari, Vol 3, p.387). The reason why Ansari women dominated their men was because they possessed knowledge. Aisha bint Abubakr, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, is reported to have said: "How excellent the women of the Ansar are! They do not let modesty prevent them from the pursuit of learning sound religious knowledge" (Sahih Muslim, Book 003, No: 0649). Unless the women of Dagbon learn the religious sciences themselves, they will continue to be defined by their male counterparts.

Freire also states that both the oppressing group and the oppressed group must co-operate and dialogue to bring about progress and happiness to society. "Dialogue does not impose, does not manipulate, does not domesticate…" (p.149). To Freire, dialogue cannot exist in a situation of domination. Thus "dialogue is an existential necessity" (p.77) if we are to truly build a society of equal opportunities. Freire suggests that education for emancipation can be achieved through empowering disempowered people and allowing them to participate as equal partners in society.

The reason why Freire's work is fundamental to this study and fits well with our research is that this study postulates that in Dagbon society, women are dominated, while men dominate. The men dominate by monopolising and interpreting God's word, which interpretation is male centered. Women are defined, rather than defining themselves. This study seeks to argue that if women would be allowed to co-operate with men and if women would educate themselves about God's word, they would find

God's purpose for their lives. This work takes the position that, every believer, male or female has the right to learn the religious texts for himself or herself. This fundamental change in the relationship structure in Dagbon will alter the imbalance in the male-female dynamics in Dagbon.

Critical Theory of Religion: A Feminist Analysis, by Marsha Aileen Hewitt (1995) is of direct relevance to this study. According to her "…critical theory harbours an ethical vision that is clearly partisan; it takes sides with the vanquished, voiceless victims of history and the marginalised, oppressed, with the others who have long been relegated to the refuse heap of civilisation by their conquerors" (p. x). The purpose of her book according to her "arises out of the conviction that religion, with the aid of critical social theory may once again emerge as an emancipatory force within history…" (p. ix). Clearly, this is the crux of this study. This study takes a critical look at the imbalance in male-female dynamics in Dagbon and argues for a balance in the power dynamics in order to allow for a better participation of the female population of Dagbon in the development process of Dagbon. It takes the position that Islam can be an emancipatory force for women in Dagbon rather than an oppressive force and suggests that Dagbon can experience a transformed future if it can re-order the fundamental structures that regulate gender relations.

Hewitt states that "one of the major but unfinished achievements of critical theory in general lies in its capacity to remain loyal to the possibility of a transformed future while resisting the temptation to spell out what that future must be" (p. xii). While this study takes the view that there is the possibility of a transformed future for Dagbon, this study

diverges with Hewitt's work in the sense that she resists "the temptation to spell out what that future must be," and this study makes bold to prescribe what a transformed future for Dagbon must be.

Barbara R. Bergmann's (1986) *The Economic Emergence of Women* argues for the need for women to be economically independent. She argues that women's sole responsibility was the care of children and house work, while men were given sole responsibility for earning money and exempted from taking a share in 'women's work. Indeed, in much of Dagbon, women are still consigned to housework while men are supposed to be the sole breadwinners. But Bergmann avers that, "as the revolution in sex roles proceeds, it becomes more and more obvious that many of the policies, institutions, attitudes and habits that belong to the old system are out of place in the new. Whatever purpose they formerly served, under the current conditions, they create difficulties and injustices" (p.299). Bergmann's argument is central to this study: that the old attitudes and habits of subjugating and suppressing the voice of women must be relegated to the dust bin of history, if Dagbon is to make any progress at all. This study takes the view that this position (subjugation and domination of women) is not in consonance with the goal of Islamic ethics: justice.

Elsewhere Heidi Hartmann (1979) has argued that women have been subordinated to men in all aspects of life because they have lacked direct access to economic resources on the same basis as men. This study seeks to argue that the participation of women in Dagbon society will have a direct impact on the wealth that Dagbon creates.

Gender and Development by Gloria Nikoi (1993) is the Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Lecture that she delivered at the University of Cape Coast. In it, she argues that "the process of development should at least create a conducive environment for people individually and collectively to develop their full potential and to have a reasonable chance of leading productive and creative lives in accord with their needs and interests" (p.9). She further argues that "if human skills and enterprise make the critical difference in development, then it is essential to look beyond the quantitative aggregates of conventional development planning to the demographic components or break down of these aggregates and how each component will be enabled to participate in and benefit from the development process" (p.9). She gives statistics that paint a grim picture of the status of women. "Women constitute 50% of the world's population and 1/3 of the world's workforce. They work 2/3 of the world's working hours, earn 1/10 of the world's income and own 1/100 of the world's property" (p.9).

Gender: Evolving Roles and Perceptions (2004), is a collection of articles from proceedings of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences' conference on gender. The issue of education features prominently in these articles. Quoting the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS 4), this work asserts that 44.1% of women as opposed to 21.1% of men have no formal education. Given that formal sector employment now requires secondary or higher levels of education, it follows that only 5.7% of women compared to 15.8% of men can work in this sector. Average enrolment rates at the basic school for males are 66.2% and 5.4% for females. These

statistics corroborate the grim picture about the disadvantaged position of the female in gender relations in Dagbon that we have already painted at the beginning of this chapter. The difference is that, while this compilation looks at the problem of gender imbalance from the political and economic angles, this study looks at the issue from the religious angle.

This study also seeks to measure the aggregate contribution of the males and females to the development and growth of Dagbon with a view to determining if indeed both genders are contributing equally and meaningfully to the progress of Dagbon society.

New Gender Studies: From Cameroon and the Caribbean edited by Joyce Endeley, Shirley Ardener, Richard Goodridge and Nalova Lyonga (2004) justifies the thesis that the structure of society is such that women are disadvantaged. And this disadvantage inhibits their ability to acquire property and create wealth.

Those authors argue that religion has a lot to do with the quest for the elimination of poverty. “Religious institutions have a special role to play in poverty alleviation” (p.12) it states. The crux of this book is that “there is need to foster stronger spiritual empowerment through the work of the various denominations by building a philosophy of faith, trust, collective spirit and mutual assistance which collectively can constitute supportive mechanisms for fighting poverty” (p.13). The main thrust of our argument in this thesis is that Dagbon can make better progress as far as the quality of life of its citizens is concerned if Islam, which is the religious tradition by which the people live, can be re-interpreted to include the fuller participation of women.

In *Male Support for Gender Equality*, Olivia A.T.F Kwapong (2009) argues that the search for women's liberation will remain an illusion unless men, who are the dominating class, agree to enter into a dialogue with women. Men ought to accept that women have voices that are worth listening to. As a gender study, this work also assesses the role that the men, who are the guardians of Islamic lore in Dagbon, can play in ensuring the liberation of women. Kwapong states, "Indicators for gender equality cannot be achieved without the full involvement of males and boys. For instance, structures for the participation of women in decision making cannot be meaningful and significant unless men who dominate in existing decision-making structures provide access and appreciate the input and ideas put forward by women" (p.154-155).

Riane Eisler (2001) in her book titled, *The Chalice and the Blade* postulates that the "war of the sexes" is neither divinely nor biologically ordained. Taking us through historical evolution, she argues that from archaeological findings from the earliest civilisations, "God was a woman" (p.12). According to her society is organised according to two models: the dominator model and the partnership model. She argues that the dominator model is anachronistic and proposes that we adopt the partnership model for organising our society. We found this book relevant to our study because, our study also sought to prove that, the gender inequalities that exist in Dagbon, rather than being God's will, are the will of the men who have arrogated to themselves the right to interpret God's word.

Authority, exegesis and gender in Islam

Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope, by David Tracy (1987) is at the heart of our work. David Tracy's main thesis is that in times of crisis, a society must re-look at the way it has interpreted its scriptures, cultures and values in the past. It must do a re-interpretation of what has been interpreted in the past. If such a society must move forward, it must distance itself from the way it interpreted its culture in the past. "We also know that sometimes it is important to distance ourselves from the past, even forget, in order to go on at all" (p.37). He adds; "interpretation is a lifelong project for any individual in any culture. But only in times of cultural crisis does the question on interpretation itself become central" (p.8). For Tracy, "…interpretation seems a minor matter, but it is not. Every time we act, deliberate, judge, understand or even experience, we are interpreting" (p.9). David Tracy advocates for interpretation that is conversationalist. When we think that our interpretation is the best and final, it accentuates the problem.

This is the problem with Islam in Dagbon today. The Ulama have taken entrenched positions regarding their various understandings of what is believed to be Allah's word, which are basically regurgitations of thirteenth and fourteenth century interpretations embodied in the works of scholars like Al-Tabari, Al-Zamakhshari and Al-Razi. In Dagbon, if the re-interpretation envisaged by Tracy is to be successful, then "hearing voices that have been ignored or silenced enables the community to question its own assumptions and thus to have a greater likelihood of encountering the God who seeks to encounter us" (Sakenfield, 1985, p.166). Clearly, the

voices of women have both been ignored and silenced for a long time and Dagbon cannot do a re-interpretation of its values if it will not hear the voices of women.

Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women by Khaled Abou El Fadl (2001) seeks to question the basis on which Islamic laws on women have evolved and how they are applied today. El Fadl avers that whereas in the beginning of the formation of Islamic law, there was flexibility, Islamic law has grown increasingly authoritarian and intolerant. He states that, "I think that one of the most poignant manifestations of this unfortunate reality is the spread of a trenchant authoritarianism in contemporary Islamic legal determinations".

If we are to eliminate the phenomenon of the dominator and the dominated in Islamic communities around the world like Dagbon, we must seek to dismantle authoritarianism in Islamic legal practice, where only certain people purport to arrogate to themselves the right to interpret God's word. El Fadl's work would be important in helping us to understand the evolution of Islamic law and how it came to be oppressive of women.

In *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, Abdullah Saeed (2006), affirms the point that there is no objective interpretation anywhere. Every exegete comes to the text with his or her own subjectivities. He, therefore, calls for a multi-purpose approach to interpreting the Qur'an. Abdullah Saeed concedes that the traditional Ulama have lost their right of monopoly over God's word, and that the "interpretation of the Qur'an has been subjected to interrogation and

evaluation from several perspectives. One is that of Muslim feminism which is bringing cultural politics into exegetical scholarship" (p.22-23).

This is what this study seeks to accentuate: that there are multiple layers of understanding God's word, especially on the subject of women; and that each of these layers is as valid as the other. With respect to Dagbon, this will help the people and especially the Ulama to appreciate the fact that the Qur'an is a living reality and that it speaks to multiple realities of different people with different aspirations.

Amina Wadud (1999), in her book, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, she does an interpretation of the creation verse in the Qur'an (Q: 4:1-4). In this book, Wadud presents a new hermeneutical perspective to reading and interpreting the Qur'an, which is female inclusive.

In this Qur'anic story of creation, there is no mention of Adam and Eve (Hawwa). However, exegetes, in interpreting these verses have imposed the biblical story of the creation of Adam and Eve on this Qur'anic narration supposedly on the authority of Muhammad (Al-Bukhari, Vol 4, p.346).

Together with other Muslim feminists like Asma Barlas and Sa'diyya Shaikh, Wadud has firmly entrenched feminist hermeneutics into *tafsir* methodology. Islamic feminism approaches traditional Qur'anic interpretation with what Ricoer calls "a hermeneutic of suspicion" (West, 1991, pp.76-77). To be hermeneutically suspicious is to be wary of the biases and subjectivities of the interpreter, in this case, "both explicit and implicit patriarchal biases" (Shaikh, 1997, pp.14-15). To show the

pioneering role of Wadud in Islamic feminist hermeneutics, Abugideiri labels this type of hermeneutics "Wadudian Hermeneutics" (Abugideiri, 2001, p.3). Since interpretation is at the heart of gender relations, Wadud's has been instructive.

Mohammed Arkoun's (2006) *Islam: To Reform or to Subvert?* Makes a strong case for reform in Islamic legal practice. We believe such reform is pertinent when it comes to the issue of women. Because of the element of certainty in Islam, reform has become a word that is dreaded in most Muslim communities around the world. He states:

> A number of ideas, values, explanations, horizons of meaning, artistic creations, initiatives, institutions and ways of life are thereby discarded, rejected, ignored or doomed to failure by the long-term historical evolution called tradition or 'living tradition' according to dogmatic theological definitions. Voices are silenced, creative talents are neglected, marginalized or obliged to reproduce orthodox frameworks of expression when social, economic and political conditions change and new possibilities for creative thought and action open up. A struggle begins between the defenders of the living sacred and sacralising tradition and the supporters of reformist or revolutionary change. This dialectic tension is at work, with differing intensity, in all societies, from

> the most conservative and traditional to our democratic, dynamic, 'free' societies.

In Dagbon, tensions arising out of the zealous defense of what some perceive as the true values of Islam, is all too common. Perhaps this study will contribute to the search for understanding and co-operation when it comes to the divergent viewpoints on the theology of Islam.

Asma Barlas' (2002), *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* raises fundamental questions, which this study also seeks to raise concerning Dagbon society. According to her, her work reflects her ongoing "engagement with two questions that have both theoretical significance and real-life consequences for Muslims, especially women: first, does Islam's scripture, the Qur'an teach or condone sexual inequality or oppression? Is it as critics allege a patriarchal and even sexist and misogynistic text? Intimately related to that question is the second: does the Qur'an permit and encourage liberation for women?" (p.1). She argues that, "all texts, including the Qur'an can be read in multiple modes, including egalitarian ones" (p.4).

The relationship of her work with ours is because in this study, we critique the methods by which the Ulama in Dagbon generate patriarchal readings of the Qur'an. Our purpose is also to recover the egalitarian aspects of Qur'anic epistemology.

Fatima Mernissi (1992), in *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, does a comprehensive and brilliant critique of the androcentric *hadiths*, which have shaped and continue to shape gender discourses in Islam. Using the basic criterion of

hadith criticism, Mernissi points to the falsity or perhaps weaknesses of these ahadith and questions how they can determine the position of women in Muslim societies. She argues that the male elite has been largely responsible for the gender-biased theology that has become standard Islamic law. One of the aims of this study has been to glean how the male elite of Dagbon has transformed their own worldview of how women should be treated in society into God's view.

Sa'diyya Shaikh is a South African scholar of Indian descent. She currently teaches at the University of Cape Town. She is one of the leading scholars in Africa on Islam and gender. She has numerous articles published by various journals on the issues of Islam and gender. We shall now review a few of those articles.

"A Tafsir of Praxis: Gender, Marital Violence and Resistance in a South African Muslim Community" in *Violence against Women in Contemporary World Religions: Roots and Cures* edited by Daniel C. Maguire and Sa'diyya Shaikh.

In this article, she makes the point that the goal of Islamic ethics is justice. The theological edifice of Islam is built on justice and that is why one of the ninety-nine names of Allah is *Al-Adl* (the Just). Shaikh argues that if this is the case, then "the quest for gender justice must be part of this" (the search for justice generally) (p.66). Shaikh reiterates the point that "Islam is often construed as a handmaiden of patriarchy" (p.66). To her, certain verses of the Qur'an give room for this assumption. She dwells extensively on Q: 4:34, which allegedly allows a man to beat his wife. She argues that a lot of this has to do with the interpretation that the male elite,

who are the guardians of Islamic lore, have put on these Qur'anic verses. This according to her has given rise to a situation where "a lot of the normative religious legacy that passes as objective religious knowledge in fact represents the historical product of male subjectivities…" (p.68). She argues further, that, these are primarily "the perspectives of elite scholarly men living in societies pervaded by patriarchal assumptions" (p.68). She accuses the male scholars of taking the descriptive aspects of these texts that only seek to mirror the realities of seventh century Arabia and making them into eternal divine edicts.

Shaikh proposes a Qur'anic hermeneutics that "consciously reflects on the real life experiences of Muslim women when understanding gender ethics" (p.69). In this regard, she interviews Muslim women in the Cape Town area who are victims of domestic abuse, which has allegedly been grounded in Islam. Most of the women lamented the fact that throughout their ordeal in the hands of their abusive husbands they did not receive support from their families, community or religious leaders. Rather, there was tacit approval for these acts of violence, by especially the Ulama, except for a few lone voices. This to her suggests that, there is still the potential for egalitarian vices to emerge from traditional authorities.

It is important to note that, some of these women, out of the frustration they suffered in the hands of their abusive husbands, formulated their own theology of liberation, which to all intents and purposes, is justifiable. For example, Fatima, one of her interviewees, said she stopped allowing her husband to lead her in prayer because she could not relate a violent and unsympathetic attitude to spiritual and moral uprightness. Even

though she grounded her belief in common sense, in effect it has theological grounding. The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said, "The most hated person in the sight of Allah is the most quarrelsome person" (Al-Bukhari, Book 43, Hadith 637). The Prophet is also reported to have said, "Treat women nicely, for a woman is created from a rib, the most curved portion of the rib (is its upper portion). So if you should try to straighten it, it will break…so treat women nicely" (Al-Bukhari: Vol 4, No 548).

In this study, we get to read similar stories of discrimination leveled against the *Ulama* of Dagbon by women who believe that the mix of Islam and Dagbon culture is suffocating.

"Veiling, Secularism and Islamism: Gender Constructions in France and Iran," in *Journal for the Study of Religion*. In this article, Sa'diyya Shaikh (2007) explores the ambivalent meanings that the veil holds for people around the world, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. In most parts of the western world, the veil is viewed as a symbol of oppression. Others view it as an extension of fundamentalist Islam. During the debate in France about the banning of religious symbols in public schools, the speaker of the French parliament, Jean-Louis Debre, argued that a public school "is a place for learning and not for militant activity or proselytisation" (p.113).

In the case of Iran, the women of Iran themselves, after the establishment of the Iranian revolution, donned the veil as a protest against the permissiveness that had engulfed the Iranian society during the Pahlavi regime. The women of Iran saw the donning of the veil as reasserting their

identity and their religiosity. It had nothing to do with fundamentalism or coercion. However, the fact that the revolutionary regime also made veiling compulsory and unveiling punishable added to the ambivalence of the veil. The debate about the veil is very much alive in Dagbon today and is explored as part of this work.

"Exegetical Violence: Nushuz in Qur'anic Gender Ideology," in *Journal for Islamic Studies*. In this article, Sa'diyya Shaikh (1997) focuses on an interpretation of Q: 4:34, which is the verse that allegedly grounds the brutalisation of women in canon. She refutes such interpretation. Rather, she calls for a model of reading the text, which the Biblical scholar, Gerald West calls "reading behind the text," which means focusing on sociological and historical reconstructions of the society behind the text. Dagbon history and culture have both helped in shaping Islam and therefore this article has a direct relevance for this study.

"Knowledge, Women and Gender in the Hadith: A Feminist Interpretation," in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol 15, No1, January. In this article, Shaikh (2004) underlines the importance of knowledge in empowering women to understand themselves and their religion and also their role in shaping society and their destiny. In this study, it is proven that the way educated Dagomba women negotiate gender is different from the way that the uneducated Dagomba women negotiate gender.

"Transforming Feminisms: Islam, Women and Gender Justice" in *Progressive Muslims: On Gender, Justice & Pluralism* edited by O. Safi (2003). This article explores the many types of Muslims that the

ambivalent attitudes towards gender justice have thrown up. She looks at "Muslim leaders who hold forth endlessly about the fact that Islam accords women high status and liberation, while simultaneously promoting hierarchical and discriminatory power relationships between men and women" (p.148). She also looks at "Muslim women who have internalized the patriarchal dimension of their heritage and become its proponents, while at the other end of the continuum, there are those who have exited the religious tradition as a response to experiences of patriarchal realities" (p.148). All of these dynamics have been explored in this study and therefore her article has a bearing on understanding the Dagomba responses to these issues.

In *Islam and the Secular State*, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im (2008), argues against the adoption of religious law as state law. He states that the authority of the state "cannot and should not extend to determining what is or is not sharia" (p.293). Abdullahi An-Na'im argues further that sharia "should be known and experienced as a source of liberation and self-realisation, not a heavy burden of oppressive, restriction and harsh punishments" (p.290). How Islam preaches liberation and yet provides the frame work for suffocating the aspirations of women in Dagbon has also been explored in this study.

Historical evolution of gender in Islam

In *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, Fatima Mernissi (1993) gives a biographical account of fifteen queens who ruled the Islamic world between 622 CE and 1988. This is contrary to the belief that until Benazir Bhutto became Pakistani Prime Minister in 1988, no woman had ever

governed a Muslim nation. Perhaps, it is this belief that led the Muslim Teachers of Tamale to argue that it was unIslamic for Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo to choose a Muslim woman as his Vice Presidential Candidate for the 2008 general elections. According to Mernissi, these forgotten queens of Islam were as competent, ruthless and brave as any male ruler had been either before them or after them.

> Some received the reigns of power by inheritance; others had to kill the heirs in order to take power. Many themselves led battles, inflicted defeats and concluded armistices. Some had confidence in competent viziers, while others counted only on themselves. Each had her own way of treating people, of rendering justice and of administering taxes. Some managed to stay a long time on the throne, while others scarcely had time to settle down. Many died in the manner of the caliphs (either orthodox, Umayyad or Abbasid) - that is, poisoned or stabbed. Rare were those who died peacefully in their beds.

There are important lessons for the Ulama of Dagbon to learn as far as granting women leadership rights are concerned.

In *Women and Gender in Islam,* Leila Ahmed (1992) argues that "the practices sanctioned by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) within the first Muslim society were enunciated in the context of far more positive attitudes toward women than the later Abbasid society was to have, a

context that consequently tempered the androcentric tendencies of Islamic practices" (p.67). In this book, Leila Ahmed is arguing that the Islamic society of the Prophet Muhammad's era, was both egalitarian and sympathetic to the rights of women. According to her, when Islam spread outside the Arabian Peninsula, and especially when Iraq and Iran became the nerve centres of Islam, this originally egalitarian principle of Islam got eroded and corrupted. This study also sought to isolate and point out how Dagomba culture has influenced Islamic practices and dictated gender relations in Dagbon.

Infidel by Ayaan Hirsi Ali (2007) is an autobiography, which goes to the heart of this research. Ayaan is a Somali-Dutch, who now lives in the USA. She fled from Somalia to avoid genital mutilation and a forced marriage. As the title of the book suggests, she attributes her woes to Islam and becomes an apostate: in other words, an infidel. In the Netherlands where she first fled, she produced a film with the same title: *Infidel*. According to her the film "was about defiance- about Muslim women who shift from total submission to God, to a dialogue with their deity. They pray, but instead of casting down their eyes, these women look up at Allah, with the words of the Qur'an tattooed on their skin; they tell him honestly that if submission to him brings them so much misery and he remains silent, they may stop submitting" (p. xxi). In fact, she stopped submitting (*Muslimat)* and became a kafir (infidel).

Ayaan witnesses the injustice of what is termed Islamic law in Somalia. This horrifies her. She recounts the experiences of many women in Somalia in the following words.

> There is the woman who is flogged for committing adultery; another who is given in marriage to a man she loathes; another who is beaten by her husband on a regular basis; another who is shunned by her father when he learns that his brother raped her. Each abuse is justified by the perpetrators in the name of God, citing the Qur'an verses now written on the bodies of the women. These women stand for hundreds of thousands of Muslim women around the world.

The Islamic legal code, the second source of authority in Islam, the hadith, idolises women. In one of such ahadith, the Prophet is reported to have said that paradise lies at the feet of our mothers. Ayaan (2007) scorns at this alleged saying of the Prophet. She dismisses it as a myth. "When we looked down at our mother's bare feet, they were cracked from washing the floor every day and our father's were clad in expensive Italian leather shoes. We burst out laughing every time, because in every sense of the word, paradise was not at her feet but at his" (p.50). This study exposes the difference between the status of women in Islam's statutes and the reality of their condition in Dagbon.

Women in Islam: From Medieval to Modern Times by Walther Wiebke (2006) traces the development of feminist theology from the inception of Islam to modern times. It argues that right from the time of the Prophet, women had played a prominent role in Islamic societies. It attributes the erosion of women's rights in Islam to the rise of

fundamentalism and also to the fact that Islam got planted in cultures that were inherently misogynistic.

Wiebke also shows how accidents of history are presented as *salafi* (standard) behaviour that ought to be emulated. She gives the example of June 11, 1952, when a Commission of Scholars of the Islamic Al-Azhar University in Cairo issued a *fatwa* (a formal legal opinion) in which it rejected the right of women to vote and be elected, arguing that the sharia gave only men the right to exercise public functions, and that at the election of the first caliph Abubakr, the electoral body had consisted exclusively of men. In this study, the difference between sharia and *fiqh* (jurisprudence) is also exposed. Fiqh, as constituted by the legal opinions of Ulama, in the view of this study is markedly different from the fundamental rules of Islam as enunciated by the Qur'an and the authentic ahadith.

Amina Wadud's (2006) *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* as the title suggests, wages a struggle whose purpose is to challenge notions of womanhood that inhibit a woman's ability to worship God and relate to Him in the same way as her male counterpart. This study also seeks to suggest that women of Dagbon can experience the liberating intent of Islam and live their lives as fully human as their male counterparts.

Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis, by Haideh Moghissi (1999) believes that what most people refer to as Islam is mostly a distorted picture of the reality. "In a heroic effort to rescue 'Islam' from its bad reputation in the treatment of women,

discussions have blurred distinctions between Islam as faith and Islam as an ideology of a movement in opposition and Islam as a ruling system, that is, Islamic fundamentalism" (p.vii). Moghissi argues that a theocratic state preaches "what it takes to be a singular truth" (pp. 147-148). This belief in a singular truth is what makes dialogue between the oppressor and the oppressed difficult. In Dagbon, the Ulama believe their understanding of Islam to be the only understanding. It is this belief that this study questions and puts forth the thesis that, a liberating theology for women is as Islamic as the male chauvinistic understanding of it.

Margaret Smith's (1994) *Muslim Women Mystics*, discusses the life of the famous Muslim female saint, Rabia al-Adawiyya. Rabia is famed across the Muslim world and is credited with what arguably is the most selfless prayer of all time. "Oh Allah, if I worship you for the fear of hell, burn me therein; if I worship you for the love of paradise, deny me; but if I worship you because you are worthy of worship, then do not deny me your eternal beauty." The *kaba* is reported to have physically gone to her to make obeisance rather than she going there. This book also discusses the lives of many women who have been elevated to sainthood in Islamic spirituality. Amongst them are Mary, the mother of Jesus, Fatima the daughter of the Prophet, Amina the mother of Prophet Muhammad and Umm Haram. There was also Rabia of Syria.

This book is related to our study in the sense that, our study aims to make the point that Muslim women can aspire to the highest point in Islamic spirituality just like men can and that with appropriate education

and dialogue, Muslim women of Dagbon can attain to high spiritual levels in Islam.

Great Women of Islam by Mahmood Ghadanfar (2001) relates the biographies of twenty-seven women who were given the promise of paradise by the Prophet Muhammad. Some of these women include Khadija, Aisha and Umm Salama. Again, the relation of this book to our work is to prove how women, even in the days of the Prophet Muhammad, had attained spiritual elevation.

Annemarie Schimmel's (2003) *My Soul is a Woman* traces the position of women from the time of the Prophet Muhammad to date. She argues that the Prophet held women in high esteem, proclaiming that "paradise lies under the feet of our mothers." She claims that Allah has both feminine and masculine qualities. One of the most esteemed names of Allah is *Rahman*- the beneficent. Schimmel, states that *Rahman* is from the feminine noun *Rahm*. *Rahm* is the Arabic word for womb. Allah therefore has both feminine and masculine qualities. Indeed, the whole point about our thesis is to show that women living lives of subordination and oppression is inconsistent with the spirit of Islam.

Bent Rib: A Journey through Women's Issues in Islam, by Huda Khattab (2010) discusses major issues on which Islam often stands accused of oppressing women. These issues include marriage, divorce, polygyny, domestic violence, purdah, female circumcision and education. Khattab tries to show what she believes is the true position of Islam regarding these issues. She states: "from domestic violence to feminine woes…there are several issues that are 'favourites' of our opponents who

use them against us at every opportunity. Even worse, the behaviour of Muslims may all too often only serve to reinforce the stereotypes. With the intention of putting our own house in order, it is time we examined exactly what Islam says about these matters. Then we can correct ourselves and also have the confidence that we are equipped with the information with which to dispel the stereotypes" (p.18).

In Dagbon, the picture that Khattab tries to paint is very palpable. There is the need to correct the impression that on these matters, Islam sanctions the oppression and subordination of women.

African/Black Feminism

Oyeronke Oyewumi's (1997) *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* challenges the theoretical bases upon which we study gender. She argues that "clearly, all concepts come with their own cultural and philosophical baggage, much of which becomes alien distortion when applied to cultures other than those from which they derive" (p.xi). This book is of relevance to our work because Islam and Dagbon have their own belief systems, which dictate how gender is negotiated. Oyewumi's work provides a model that allows us to study gender in African societies without imbibing and imposing on African societies, western notions of gender discourse hook, line and sinker.

For example, polygyny is often interpreted in the west as a sign of male privilege and female subordination. This however, is completely different from the notions that Islamic culture and Dagbon culture hold of polygyny. As Oyewumi puts it, "like all marriage forms, polygamy as a

social institution is not inherently good or bad. There are good marriages and there are bad marriages, polygamous or monogamous" (p.61). This study therefore avoids value judgment and presents the people's worldview as much as possible.

Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society by Ifi Amadiume (1987) takes a look at the issue of gender outside of the western frame for the study of gender. She argues that, in Igbo society, gender is more than biology. She avers that in Igbo society a "man" can be "woman" and vice versa. In other words, gender in Igbo society is more socially constructed than it is biologically constructed. It just depends on the role that one is called upon to perform at any given time. "Maleness" and "femaleness" are therefore not strict biological categories that necessarily fit them fixed social categories.

This book, like Oyewumi's is relevant to our study because, while Ifi studies Igbo society, our study uses Dagbon society as its case study.

Christina Hoff Sommers' (1994) *Who Stole Feminism* argues that gender inequality is "an exaggeration, over simplification and obfuscation." To her gender inequality is a myth. According to her, it is just a deliberate effort by some people to perpetuate a war from which only they are the beneficiaries. On the issue of religion, she denigrates the feminists who purport to want to wake women up from their slumber. She describes these gender activists as "condescending." She alludes to Gloria Steinem's statement that the appeal of religious fundamentalism for women is "the promises of safety in return for obedience, respectability in return for self-respect and freedom- a sad bargain" (p.260). According to Sommers, this

is “a harsh judgment to make about millions of American women.” She adds that Steinem “is of course free to disagree with conventionally religious women on any number of issues, but she is not morally free to cast aspersions on their autonomy and self-respect” (p.26).

This work has direct relations with our study because in our study, the voice of Dagomba women is prominent as they express their views about how Islam either inhibits or promotes their full participation in Dagbon society.

Rebecca M. Jordan-Young’s (2010) *Brainstorm: The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences*, as its title suggests, seeks to question the biological proposition that men and women are not the same by virtue of their biological make-ups. She argues that “the science of sex differences” is a myth and that there is no marked difference between the male and the female.

The Qur’an proclaims that “the male is not like the female.” Many Muslim scholars justify a different treatment for Muslim women based on this Qur’anic proclamation.

Significance of the Study

1. As the largest ethnic group in northern Ghana, a study of the religion and profile of the Dagomba people is important for helping to construct a general history of northern Ghana. Even though a lot of literature exists on the history of the Dagomba people, it is not focused on the gender aspects of Dagomba life and thought. This thesis would therefore fill the gap in this respect and help in the construction of Dagomba history.

2. The issue of gender and also of Islam and gender has become an important part of modern scholarship. Most of the literature that exists on Islam and gender however dwell on two aspects of the subject: the hermeneutical dimension of the subject and also on gender in the Arab world. There is hardly any literature on how a predominantly Muslim dominated ethnic group in Africa negotiates gender on the basis of Islam. This thesis makes a contribution in this respect and perhaps would trigger similar research among other ethnic groups in Africa.
3. From a practical point of view, the findings of this thesis will help make a link between theory and practice, in determining how dogma can influence the lives of people in a concrete and verifiable way.
4. An important contribution that this study makes to existing studies on Dagbon is the postulation that, rather than culture or Islam per se, what is at the heart of the subjugation of women in Dagbon is the latent struggle of the sexes for control and dominance. This theory is fleshed out in chapter six.
5. Lastly, this study hopes to serve as a reference document for governments and Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) who work in the area of gender equity in order that they will understand the Islamic framework of gender relations. It will help equip them to better deal with these issues as they arise in their everyday work. Lately, some Muslim Ulama in Ghana have sought to question the intent of the domestic violence law for example, which some of

them see as inhibiting them from exercising authority over their women, which to them is a divinely bestowed right. Thus this study will give people who work with Muslim communities the opportunity to understand the Islamic framework for gender relations, so that their interventions can be tailored to meet the aspirations and speak to the beliefs of Muslims.

Organisation of the Study

This study has been divided into six chapters as follows:

Chapter one, which is the introduction, comprises the research context, background to the study, statement of the problem, aims and objectives of the study, methodology, theoretical and conceptual framework, literature review, significance of the study, and organisation of the study.

Chapter two, which is titled, "'The Male is not like the Female:' Gender Dynamics in Islam," examines Islamic laws on gender as they pertain in the primary laws and in Islamic Jurisprudence. The chapter is sub-divided as follows: 'Sources of law in Islam,' 'Law and gender in Islam,' 'Conflicting interpretations of juridical sources regarding gender issues,' 'Conflicting interpretations: processes of religious inculturation,' 'Negotiation of gender in sacred space,' 'Negotiation of gender in profane space,' 'the era of women's restriction' and a conclusion.

Chapter three is titled: '*Do Loow*': Constructions of masculinity and Feminity in Dagbon.' **'**Do Loow' is the term in Dagbon that is used to describe a man who is perceived to be under the slightest control of his wife or for that matter a woman. Dagbon society is heavily gendered and

men and women are supposed to behave according to their assigned roles in the society. More importantly, masculinity is revered. Women who also behave according to norms of feminine behaviour are rewarded. This chapter traces the history of the founding of Dagbon, including its social, economic and political organisations, with an emphasis on the masculine and feminine constructions of these institutions before the advent of Islam. Such background knowledge is essential if one is to properly understand the context in which the people negotiate gender and the extent to which Islam is responsible for gender relations in Dagbon today.

'Muted voices or a murmur of protest,' is the title of chapter four. This chapter is a qualitative investigation of Islam, gender role belief and culture in the lives of the people of Dagbon. In Dagbon today, a woman's voice is her *awra* (parts of her body that must not be visible), especially within sacred space. A woman can therefore only murmur her prayer, not voice it aloud. Curiously, the borders of this supposedly divine edict has been extended to the profane realm as well. But there are women who are questioning whether indeed the command to them to mute their voices is a divine command or the ploy of the men who wish to see them cloistered. But the men can hardly hear these murmurs of protest. To borrow an analogy from Ali Mazrui (1990), it is as if the women have switched on their amplifiers and loudspeakers towards the men, while the men have switched off their own hearing aid and turned a deaf ear to the women. They cannot hear the women's protest or will they hear eventually? It is against this background that this chapter examines gender in Dagbon today. In other words, chapter four presents data that has been collected

from the field regarding how gender is negotiated in Dagbon today. The chapter is sub-divided as follows: 'The *Afa* as Determiner of Islamic practice in Dagbon,' 'The *Afa* and Gender in Sacred Space,' 'The *Afa* and Gender in Domestic Space,' 'The *Afa* and Gender in Public Space,' and an analysis and interpretation of the data on the Afa. The chapter also discusses 'Islam and Gender in Dagbon's Sacred Space,' 'Islam and Gender in Dagbon's Domestic Space: Urban Setting,' 'Islam and Gender in Dagbon's Public Space: Urban Setting,' 'Islam and Gender in Dagbon's Domestic Space: Rural Setting,' 'Islam and Gender in Dagbon's Public Space: Rural Setting,' and a conclusion of the chapter.

The title of chapter five, 'Making sense of it all' deals with the theoretical appraisal of the data collected and presented in chapter four. Here, the theories that arise and are discernible from the data are discussed and clarified. Chapter five also examines the extent to which gender relations in Dagbon today either vindicate or negate both the theoretical assumptions that underpin this study and other general theories of gender.

Chapter six is the conclusion. It is titled, 'We Are the People Too.' It summarises the thesis, states the position of the researcher on the subject of Islam and gender in Dagbon and proposes a hermeneutic model that will make the Dagbon society a more inclusive one and create a paradigm of male-female relationships that are based on partnership rather than on a model of dominator and dominated. In this chapter we proffer our own theory as to why the male guardians of Islamic lore in Dagbon interpret the Qur'an in a male-centered fashion.

CHAPTER TWO

'THE MALE IS NOT LIKE THE FEMALE:' GENDER DYNAMICS IN ISLAM

Introduction

Islam is a heavily gendered religion. The Qur'anic statement that "the male is not like the female" (Q: 3:36) is basically the blueprint for gender in Islam. This chapter discusses gender dynamics in Islam. The primary sources for this discussion are the Qur'an and the Hadith. The chapter also discusses gender dynamics from the perspective of *fiqh* (jurisprudence). This is because, the schools of legal thought (*madhaahib*) mostly dictate the rules of gender in Islam. How Muslim men and women order their lives differs from one society to another. The societal structure, culture norms, economic and political conditions all play a crucial part in determining what rights society assigns to the Muslim woman or woman in a part of the Muslim world and not necessarily the text of the Qur'an or what its canonical intent is. Historically however, Islam has demonstrated considerable flexibility in adapting diverse cultures and norms. Gilscan (1982) asserts that this is part of the reason why Islam remains the fastest growing religion in the world. This chapter therefore examines the evolution of Islamic law as a product of inculturation.

The social status of women anywhere is associated with religious as well as cultural factors. As a result of this interplay of religion and culture, there are variations in the way that people live their lives in the name of Islam. Therefore, the way that gender is negotiated will vary from

one Muslim community to another. Pellow (1991, pp.50-68) compares the situation of Hausa women in their original homeland of Kano and their migrant environment in the Muslim community of Nima and those in Kano. In Nima, women are freer, own businesses and are more present in the public space than their counterparts in Kano. Even though the two communities are predominantly Muslim, Islamic rules including those on women's participation in the public space are more strictly enforced in Kano than in Nima. This is because Ghana is a unitary state and secular as well in which Islamic law cannot be enforced either as regional or national law. Pellow interviews a woman who was previously resident in Nima with her husband but who had since relocated to their homeland of Kano. She clearly expresses her discontent with the environment in Kano, which she finds restrictive. While Muslim women in Ghana are more prominent in the public space and in leadership, their counterparts in Kano are less so.

There are therefore variations on how various Muslim societies negotiate gender. Indeed, *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), which generally sets out these rules on gender, is itself a cultural product. The *madhaahib* (schools of law) evolved out of the practices of certain Islamic centers. Coulson (1969, p.21) states that,

> the two oldest schools are the Hanafis and Malikis, and both came into existence as the representatives of the legal tradition of a particular geographical locality- the former being the disciples of Abu Hanifa (d.767) in the Iraqi center of Kufa, and the

latter the followers of Malik b. Anas (d.796) in the Arabian center of Madina

The evolution of the schools of law is itself a product of culture. Therefore, in this chapter, distinctions will be made between the presentations of gender as it pertains in the Qur'an and the Sunnah and the presentation of gender in *fiqh* literature. This will help us appreciate what aspects of gender negotiation are sharia (Qur'an and Hadith) based and those that are as a result of *fiqh*, which is a derivative of interpretation. And as Amina Wadud notes, "no method of Qur'anic exegesis is fully objective. Each exegete makes some subjective choices. Some details of their interpretations reflect their subjective choices and not necessarily the intent of the text" (p.1).

Sources of Law in Islam

The Qur'an

The Qur'an is the fundamental law of Islam. Muslims believe it to be the word of God dictated verbatim to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) through the angel Gabriel over a period of 22 years (610-632 CE). To stress the sanctity of Qur'anic and Prophetic decisions, Q: 33:36 states that "it is not fitting for a believer, man or woman, that when a matter has been decided by Allah and His Messenger, to have any option about their decision…" Thus any other law(s) that is inconsistent with the Qur'an and also the *Sunnah* is to the extent of such inconsistency, null and void.

The Sunnah

The Sunnah is the second most important source of law in Islam. The Sunnah comprises the doings and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The Qur'an asserts that Muslims have in the prophet an excellent model (Q: 33:21). The Qur'an purports to establish an even ground for both males and females to worship God and be true "deputies" of God (Q: 2:30). The Prophet Muhammad is the model of divine justice, because Allah is *Adl* (justice) and his purpose for creation is justice (Q: 3:18). Therefore, the sayings and acts of the Prophet constitute law. These comprise his *qaul*, (sayings), *fi'l,* his actions and *taqrir*, his tacit or silent approval of the actions of his disciples.

Ijma

Beyond the Qur'an and the Hadith, there is *ijtihad*, which is the law derived from the exertion of a scholar to come to a conclusion about a matter which is not so evident in the Qur'an and the Hadith. Ijma is the consensus of a number of scholars concerning a certain matter about which the Qur'an is not so clear. This consensus is often a product of geography and culture. As we have stated already, what are now called the schools of Islamic jurisprudence developed through the consensus of the scholars who resided within a certain geographical area, whose opinion was led by the most prominent and respected scholar of the place. What is today called the Maliki School of law for example, was crystallised based on the consensus and practices of the people of Madina.

Qiyas

Qiyas refers to laws derived as a result of reasoning on the part of a scholar by way of analogy. With qiyas, we are dealing with a source of law, which is para-textual. Qiyas is translated as 'analogy." Analogy, unlike *ijtihad*, is not something that the *mujtahid* creates. It exists in spite of him. The task of the mujtahid as far as qiyas is concerned, is to discover it rather than invent it. The mujtahid discovers it by pondering the texts. The texts and only the texts can engender qiyas. That is why qiyas is also translated as analogical deduction.

These four sources of Islamic law, are what collectively, Muslims refer to as sharia. Two of these sources, namely the Qur'an and Sunnah, are primary, while Ijma and Qiyas are secondary. Qur'anic commentators generally agree that Q: 4:49 is the verse that legitimizes these sources as the sources of law in Islam. The verse states that, "Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority amongst you; if after that you differ in anything, refer it to Allah and His Messenger"- Obey Allah (Qur'an) and His Messenger (Sunnah) and those in authority (Ijma) and refer to Allah and His Messenger (Qiyas).

Sharia then refers to the entire gamut of fiqh or jurisprudential material that has been formulated from the fundamental postulations of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. There is no agreement in Islamic scholarship as to what strictly speaking, will constitute sharia. Some assert that the unimpeachable sources of law are the Qur'an and the Sunnah and therefore they, by strict interpretation should constitute sharia. Those who argue this way assert that since fiqh is a product of human interpretation and since no

interpretation can be fully objective, there should be a separation between sharia strictly speaking and fiqh.

In the course of this chapter, we shall be stating the Qur'an and Sunnah positions on issues of gender in Islam and how fiqh has interpreted and applied them to the actual negotiation of gender in Islamic societies and Dagbon in particular.

Law & Gender in Islam

The Qur'an & the Status of Women at Creation

Before the creation of man and woman, Allah is reported to have informed the angels of the creation of beings who shall be his deputies (Q: 2:30). Thus Allah had in mind the capacity of both males and females to play the role of deputies of Allah. This is how the Qur'an relates the story of creation as contained in chapter Q: 4:1-4.

> O mankind! Fear your guardian lord, who created you from a single soul and created out of it, its *zawj*, (her) mate, and from them twain scattered countless men and women and fear Allah, through whom you demand your mutual rights and be heedful of the wombs that bore you. Verily Allah watches over you.

From the Qur'anic story of creation as quoted above, men and women were created from a single essence. It does not present the creation of woman as an afterthought or as even coming after the creation of man.

Wadud (1999) argues that *zawj* as used in the verse does not mean woman nor does it mean wife as male exegetes have made it into. She cites other instances in the Qur'an of the use of the word *zawj* to buttress her point.

Wa halqnaakum azwaja (And we have created you in pairs- Q: 78:8).

Subhana lazee halaqal azwaja (Holy is He who created all things in pairs- Q: 36:36).

Wa anaa halaqal zawjaini zakara wal unsaa (And that He creates the pairs, male and female- Q: 53:45).

Wa minkuli shai'in halaqnaa zawjaini la'alakum tazakarun (And of everything have we created pairs, that you may reflect- Q: 51:49).

To her therefore, the Qur'anic narrative of creation is a gender neutral one. There is merit in Wadud's argument because indeed the Arabic word for 'woman' is *imra'a* not zawj while the word for 'women' is nisa. Wife in Arabic is *zawjat* while at the same time, husband is zawj . Thus both husband and wife come from the same root zawj. Wadud's interpretation is even more compelling under the rules of Qur'anic exegesis. Under the rules of Qur'anic exegesis, the first explainer of the Qur'an is the Qur'an itself. Indeed, one of the names by which the Qur'an is known is *Al-Bayan* (the Explanation). Asma Barlas (2002, p.134) has argued extensively that "male and female thus are not only inseparable in the Qur'an but they also are ontologically the same, hence equal." That is why in the Qur'anic story about the expulsion of Adam and Eve (Hawwa) from the Garden of Eden, they are held jointly responsible for the sin of disobedience (Q: 7:20-22).

Indeed, the understanding and interpretation that has been given to this verse is partly responsible for the positioning of women in Islam. This is what we call the establishment verse; the verse that established the existence of man and woman on earth. And since this verse is understood to have established man and woman, not on an equal footing, but on a pedestal of inequality, it follows that the inequality of man and woman is divine sanction and to translate that sanction into social norm will tantamount to acting according to the divine will.

Rifat Hassan (1997), writing for *Women Living under Muslim Laws* has attributed the status of women in Muslim societies to what she calls the "foundational myths" that were created by the interpretation of this verse. She argues that what has happened to this verse is isogesis (reading things back into the text which are not there) rather than exegesis (bringing out the implications of what is in the text). To illustrate the point that the *Women Living under Muslim Laws* seek to make, it is important that we render the verse in transliteration. It states;

"*Yaa ayyuhan naasu-taquu rabbakumullazee khalaqa-kum min nafsin waahida-wa khalaqa minhaa zawjahaa….*" *"Wa khalaqa minhaa zawjahaa"* has been translated by many of the translators as "and created of like nature, his mate." A few, including the famous Abdallah Yussif Ali have translated it as "and created of like nature, its mate." Meantime *haa* in Arabic is her, not his or its. So the *Women Living under Muslim Laws* (1997) insists that the correct and proper translation of this verse should be "and created of like nature, her mate." Arabic is a much-gendered language and every word is either masculine or feminine. *Nafs*

(soul/person) to which *zawja* (mate) refers is feminine. So the pronoun that logically should go with it should be her, not either his or its. *Women Living under Muslim Laws* (1997) therefore argues that the translation that has laid the foundational myth, that man was created before woman, has been motivated by sexual politics. This is sexual politics in the sense that, if the translators translate the verse correctly, in which case, "and created of like nature, her mate", it will mean that indeed woman was created before man and not the other way round.

It is also important to state that the Qur'an does not talk about the process of creating Eve as the Bible has done. So the story about God creating Eve from Adam's rib is not in the Qur'an. However, it is in the ahadith. The ahadith are supposedly the sayings of the Prophet. The ahadith have been categorised into four- *sahih* (excellent), *hassan* (good), *daif* (weak) and *maudu* (fabricated). Ahadith are analysed and categorised based on their *matn* (content) and *isnad* (chain of narrators). An important marker of a sound ahadith is the integrity of the narrator. The two narrators that have conveyed to us the alleged words of the Prophet regarding the creation of Eve from Adam's rib are Abu Hurairah and Maithera. Abu Hurairah is reputed to be the one with the greatest number of ahadith collections. Many Muslims have problems with the honesty and integrity of Abu Hurairah. In many ahadith, Aisha, the wife of the Prophet from whom we are told to learn half of the religion, has had to berate Abu Hurairah for his lack of attention and his penchant for embellishing the things that he heard (or even did not hear) from the Prophet. In many

instances, Aisha had to openly contradict Abu Hurairah (Al-Musawi, 2002).

Strangely, even the ahadith that Aisha denied were uttered by the Prophet have found their way into Bukhari and Muslim, as for example, the ahadith in which Abu Hurairah said that he heard the Prophet saying that three things annul prayer- a dog, a donkey and a woman (Al-Bukhari, Book 9, Hadith 490). Aisha subsequently refuted Abu Hurairah's claim and asserted that she lay across the bed from the Prophet, even while he performed the *salat* (Al-Bukhari, Book 9, Hadith 490). Besides, many scholars have a problem with the fact the Abu Hurairah knew and stayed close to the Prophet for about three years only (Al-Musawi, 2002, p.45). How in those short years he was able to record over 5,374 sayings from the Prophet beats the imagination of many. The four rightly caliphs, who were companions of the Prophet from the beginning of his mission till his death, do not have ahadith a quarter of the quantity narrated by Abu Hurairah. Abu Bakr has 142 traditions to his name. This was the first male adult to accept Islam. Umar has 537 ahadith to his credit. Uthman has 147 traditions to his credit and Ali has 586 ahadith (Al-Musawi, 2002, pp.45-46). Ali was also the first minor to accept Islam. Abu Hanifa, founder of the Hanafi School of Law is reported to have made it a point never to accept a hadith from Abu Hurairah. The Shias also reject all of Abu Hurairah's ahadith in their entirety. Maithera is also known to have been a less truthful person (*Women Living under Muslim Law*, 1997, p.54). Therefore, many scholars believe that Abu Hurairah and Maithera were motivated to tell the stories about the creation of Eve from their encounters

with Christians rather than from the Prophet. Whatever it is, the point has to be made, that the Qur'an makes no mention of the process by which Eve was created. Therefore, it is a story that has been read into the text of the Qur'an (isogesis) rather than from it (exegesis).

The *Women Living under Muslim Laws* (1997) argue further that, the word "Adam" has been used 25 times in the Qur'an. Only on two occasions has it been used to refer to a person. In all the other instances it has been used to refer generally to human beings. For example, Q: 3:59 states that "God created Adam (humans) from the earth." Indeed, the word "Adam" does not appear in the creation verse as captured in Q: 4:1. *The Women Living under Muslim Laws* (1997) further argue that, "the word "Adam" does not appear in the creation passages of the Qur'an. It does not say anywhere in the Qur'an that Adam was the first man or that Adam was a Prophet or anything like that" (p.50).

To eliminate all doubts about the capacity or incapacity of women to ascend to divine favour, Q: 33:35 and Q: 9:67-72 emphasise that gender shall not be the basis for the struggle to please Allah or obtain divine favour. Q: 33:35 states that

> For Muslim men and women- for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their

> chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise, for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward.

Sometime after the inauguration of Muhammad's prophet hood, maleness had been the measure and norm of humanness. It took the courage and wit of one of the Prophet's wives, Ummu Salama to challenge this assumption. Ummu Salama asked the Prophet to explain why Allah had assumed that all believers were male. This resulted a short time later, in the revelation of Q: 33:35 (Ibn Kathir (trans), 2002, p.685).

The Qur'anic verse on creation therefore is not the source of the belief in Islam, that God created man first and then created woman from man's rib. It is the rib story that gave birth to the myth of woman's crookedness and which then gives man the license to straighten her. From Q: 4:1, Allah presents the process of creating humans as a gender neutral one, where he proclaims both man and woman as vicegerents on earth.

Conflicting Interpretations of Juridical Sources Regarding Gender Issues

Abou El-Fadl (2001, p.118) argues that interpretation of the Qur'an is basically concerned with "the implications and significance of the original meaning" of the text. According to him, this interpretive process "took place primarily in the field of jurisprudence. The jurisprudential inquiry did not focus on the original intent in order to service the text, but in order to service the socio-political reality through the use of the text." Therefore, a lot of the misogynistic interpretations of the Qur'an are as a

result of the socio-political realities of the time when the schools of Islamic law crystallised.

Abdullah Saeed (2006, p.117) buttresses this point when he states that;

> The socio-historical context of the Qur'an in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods should not be ignored. Understanding this context of the Qur'an requires a detailed knowledge of the Prophet's life, both in Mecca and Medina, the spiritual, social, economic, political and legal climate, and the associated norms, laws, customs, manners, institutions and values of the region, in particular Hijaz. These also include housing, clothing and food, and social relations, such as family structure, social hierarchy, taboos and rites of passage.

The socio-historical context within which a people lived, therefore determined to a great extent, the meaning that they placed on a text. An example is Q: 4:34, which is considered perhaps the most famous of the allegedly misogynistic verses of the Qur'an. It states;

> Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more strength than the other and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient and guard in the husband's absence what Allah

> would have them guard. As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty and ill conduct, admonish them, refuse to share their beds and **beat/strike (*idribuhunna*-اضربوهن)** them; but if they return to obedience seek not against them means of annoyance: for Allah is most high, great.

Q: 4:34 seems to be in direct contradiction to Q: 30:21, which states that;

> Among His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves in order to have tranquility and contentment with each other. He places in your heart love and care towards your spouses. In this, there are signs for people who think.

Indeed, translators and interpreters of the Qur'an seem themselves embarrassed by the fact that Allah will ask that men beat/strike their wives. To mitigate the effect of the word 'beat/strike' therefore, Yussif Ali whose translation of the Qur'an is considered the most standard in orthodox academic circles adds 'lightly' in brackets after the word beat: "beat them (lightly)." This ostensibly is to mitigate the effect of the word. But does ***idribuhunna* (اضربوهن)** from the root, ***daraba* (ضرب)** really mean to beat/strike? Or has this translation and understanding been determined by the cultural circumstances of Arabia at the time? Pre-Islamic Arabia is known as the *jahiliyya* period, translated as the period of ignorance and barbarism. In this period, there was little dignity for women. Women were

considered the property of their husbands. They had no right to inheritance and female infanticide was the norm. The Qur'an alludes to this when it states that on the Day of Judgment the girl-child shall be asked for which crime she was buried alive (Q: 81:8). Divorce was the preserve of the husband and a husband did not have to have a good basis for it. Women had limited rights. And Islam is said to have restored the dignity of the Arab woman and women generally.

Could '*daraba'* being (mis) understood as 'to beat/strike' have to do with the social praxis of the time? Abdullah Saeed (2006, p.122) asserts that indeed the socio-cultural context of Arabia influenced the understanding and interpretation of Islam.

> In dealing with ethico-legal matters, the cultural context of Hijaz was a point of departure for both the Qur'an and the Prophet. The Prophet never claimed that he came to eradicate all the cultural elements from Hijaz. His main task was to teach new ideas primarily related to God, God's relationship to people and His creation, moral values and life after death. By and large, the way of life of the people of Hijaz and their worldview were retained. The innovations introduced by the Prophet were primarily theological, spiritual and ethical areas. Hijaz also provided the

> worldview of the first recipients of the Qur'an- the companions.

Since the beating of wives was allowed before the advent of Islam, this could have clouded their understanding of the word *daraba*. But the word *daraba* has several meanings. According to Edip Yuksel et al (2007, p.19),

> if you look at any Arabic dictionary, you will find a long list of meanings ascribed to this word (*daraba*). In fact, you will find that, that list is one of the longest lists in your Arabic dictionary. It can be said that *daraba* is the number-one multiple-meaning word in Arabic.

Indeed, in the Qur'an, there are several meanings that have been ascribed to the word *daraba* **(ضرب)**. 'To travel out': Q: 3:156; 4:101; 38:44; 73:20; 2:273. 'To strike': 2:60,73; 7:160; 8:12; 20:77; 24:31; 26:63; 37:93; 47:4. 'To beat': 8:50; 47:27. 'To set up': 43:58; 57:13. 'To give (examples)': 14:24,45; 16:75,76,112; 18:32,45; 24:35; 30:28,58; 36:78; 39:27,29; 43:17; 59:21; 66:10,11. 'To take away, to ignore': 43:5. 'To condemn': 2:61. 'To seal, to draw over': 18:11. 'To cover': 24:31. 'To explain': 13:17.

In Q: 13:17 for example, the word *daraba* is used as follows: *kazaalika yadribul-***(يضرب)** *laahul haqqa wal baatil* (that is how Allah shows/explains truth and falsehood). Imagine how ridiculous this will sound if *yadribu* (*daraba-*ضرب) was translated as 'beat/strike.' Then we will get something like "this is how Allah beats/strikes truth and

falsehood." Just like the use of *zawj* in Q: 4:1, we ought to understand a word in the context in which it is used in other places in the Qur'an as well. Thus we could still understand *daraba* to mean 'strike' and still not beat our wives. For example, we 'go on strike,' we 'strike gold,' we 'strike deals' and we 'strike others.' Edip Yuksel et al (2007, p.20) therefore argue that

> When we read Q: 4:34, we should not understand idribuhunna **(اضربوهن)** as "beat/strike those women." We should instead remember that this word has multiple meanings. God gives us three ways of dealing with marital disloyalty on the part of a wife. In the beginning stage of such misbehavior, the husband should begin to address the problem by giving advice. If this does not work, he should stop sleeping in the same bed and see if this produces a change in behaviour. And if there is still no improvement in the situation, the husband has the right to compel a separation.

'To strike' somebody (out) means to separate from such a person. It does not mean to 'beat/strike' the fellow. Q: 4:128 gives women an analogous right to deal with disloyalty from husbands, which does not include beating/striking/scourging. It will therefore be against the grain of justice if men were allowed to beat/strike women as a result of disloyalty.

This is because Q: 2:228 states that "women have rights similar to those of men." There would hardly be similar rights if men were allowed to beat/strike women and women were not allowed a similar right.

Apart from the socio-cultural and historical factors that influence the conflicting interpretations of juridical sources regarding gender issues, there is also the nature of Islamic law itself. There is a story that states that when the Prophet appointed Muaz ibn Jabal as Governor of Yemen, he asked him how he was going to rule the people. To this Muaz replied that he would rule according to the dictates of the Qur'an. The Prophet then asked him; "what if you do not find an answer in the Qur'an?" To this Jabal replied that he would refer to the Sunnah (practices of the Prophet). Again the Prophet asked him; "what if you do not find it in the Sunnah?" To this Jabal replied that he would rely on his *ra'y* (reasoning) (Sunan Abu Dawud, Book 24, Hadith 3,585). The Prophet is reported to have endorsed Jabal's position. The things that are explicitly stated in the Sunnah may not be the subjects of too much controversy. However, to resort to ra'y can engender huge differences. Thus for the most issues on gender in Islam, *ra'y* is what gives rise to the conflicting interpretations of what the position of women should be, vis-a vis that of men. For example, many Islamic scholars assert that women should play second fiddle to men because women have a genetically induced mental deficiency. And they base their conclusion on a reasoning that they impose on Q: 2:282, which states that;

> O you who believe! When you deal with each other in transactions involving future

> obligations in a fixed period of time, reduce them to writing. Let a scribe write down faithfully as between the parties: let not the scribe refuse to write as Allah has taught him, so let him write. Let him who incurs the liability dictate, but let him fear His lord Allah, and not diminish anything of what he owes. If the party liable is mentally deficient or weak, or unable himself to dictate, let his guardian dictate. Let his guardian dictate faithfully and get two witnesses out of your own men and **if there are not two men, then a man and two women** such as you choose for witnesses, **so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her**…

This verse has generally been interpreted to mean that women are mentally deficient even though that is not explicitly stated in the text of the verse. Indeed, there is a hadith that purportedly supports this view. Narrated Abu Said Al-Khudri: The Prophet said, 'isn't the witness of a woman equal to half of that of a man?' The women said, "Yes." He (the Prophet) said "this is because of the deficiency of a woman's mind" (Al-Bukhari, Book 47, Hadith 740).

There is merit in the argument that this verse is not a verse about the mental state of women. It is about financial transactions and how to make them transparent. There are about five verses in the Qur'an that deal

with witnesses. Only one of them, in this case, 2:282 states that two female witnesses are equal to one male witness. The other, for example, Q: 5:106 talks about finding witnesses if death approaches us and we seek to make a bequest. It however, does not state whether they should be men or women nor does it state their number and proportion. Four witnesses are also required in case of a charge against chaste women (Q: 24:4). In this case too, it does not state the gender of these witnesses and in what proportion.

Many people have proffered views as to why in the case of the verse on transaction two women are required in lieu of one man. The general argument is that men are more proficient in figures and matters that have to do with financial transactions. Edip Yuksel et al (2007, p.74) posit that this requirement may be because women suffer a "statistical disadvantage" regarding "familiarity with the terminology of business contracts." This claim is difficult to verify. Husayn At-Tabatabai (1982, p.56) on the other hand argues that

> Man's life is dominated by intellect while that of woman is run by emotions and sentiments. It is much better and more proper to leave financial affairs in the hand of a thinking and contemplating person than to an emotional and sentimental being.

Both Yuksel et al and At-Tabatabai are engaging in ra'y (the use of reasoning) to decipher why Allah requires that in the specific case of financial transactions, two women should stand for one man. This is because the text of the Qur'an does not provide any such reason. Since we

cannot, as human beings understand phenomenon in the same way, there is bound to be differences of opinion regarding matters that are not explicit. Indeed, it is such differences of opinion that gave birth to the five schools of Islamic law in the first place. To further legitimise the use of ra'y, a saying has been ascribed to the Prophet to the effect that differences of opinion are a blessing for the Ummah (community).

Even so, the postulations of Yuksel and his friends and that of At-Tabatabai cannot stand scientific scrutiny. For example, Psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen (2003) attempted in his *The Essential Difference: The Truth about the Male and Female Brain* to link sex to certain professions. But his claims have since been disputed. There has been an exponential growth in the number of women in the accounting profession, which will refute the claim that women do not make good accountants or financial analysts. Quoting Wootton and Kemmerer (2000), Jordan-Young (2010, p.284) states that "women constituted 10 percent of accountants in 1930 and more than 51 percent in 1990, with 53 percent of new accounting degrees awarded to women in 1990." So the theory that women have a genetic handicap when it comes to financial matters is of weak foundation. As to whether women suffer a mental deficiency or not, one can only point to the Prophet's admonition to Muslims to "learn half of their religion from Aisha." This admonition is unlikely to come from a Prophet who believes that women have a mental deficiency.

Since the Prophet himself legitimised the use of ra'y (reasoning) in deciphering the divine will, it opens up the divine word for interpretation from various perspectives. Thus Muslim feminists have recently asserted

their right to interpret the Qur'an from their own perspective. Abdullah Saeed (2006, p.23) refers to the feminist interpretation of the Qur'an as "bringing cultural politics into exegetical scholarship." This has resulted in Muslim women feminists writing books with titles such as *The Veil & the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (1987), by Fatima Mernissi; *Qur'an & Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (1999) by Amina Wadud and *Believing Women: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (2002), by Asma Barlas.

Asma Barlas (2002, p.19) aptly captures the intent of these feminist scholars when she states that;

> I read the Qur'an as a "believing woman," to borrow a term from the Qur'an itself. This means that I do not question its ontological status as divine speech or the claim that God speaks, both of which Muslims hold to be true. I do, however, question the legitimacy of its patriarchal readings, and I do this on the basis of a distinction in Muslim theology between what God says and what we understand God to be saying. In the latter context, I am especially interested in querying the claim, implicit in confusing the Qur'an with its patriarchal exegesis that only males, and conservative males at that, know what God really means.

So depending on whether one is a conservative male cleric or a Muslim woman feminist, there is bound to be conflicting interpretations of juridical sources regarding gender issues. This is exactly what Amina Wadud (1999, p.1) means when she states that "no method of Qur'anic exegesis is fully objective. Each exegete makes some subjective choices. Some details of their interpretations reflect their subjective choices and not necessarily the intent of the text."

Sometimes, it is not the difference in interpreting the juridical sources that is at issue. In some cases, the use of ra'y is for rationalising a divine edict that appears on the face of it as unjust. An example is, Q: 4:11-14, which talks about inheritances and part of which states that "the male shall have the equal of the portion of two females…" Critiques of Islam say that this is an injustice to women. "The male shall have the equal of the portion of two females" according to Husayn At-Tabatabai (1982, p.5)

> Was chosen to point to the nullification of the system prevalent in the era of ignorance whereby women were not given any share in inheritance. This expression takes the female's share as granted and confirmed and based the male's share on it- that it is double of it. Or let us say that the female's share is treated as the yardstick of legislation and the male's share is fixed with its help.

Islamic scholars generally assert that the reason men take twice that of women is because women are independent and absolute owners of what belongs to them; they are not put under any guardianship, be it permanent or temporary; and it is no concern of the men what the women do about themselves in a lawful and proper manner. Men also bear the burden of earning the livelihood and maintaining the wife, the children and the parents. However, it is not in all cases that a man takes a share of inheritance more than a woman. The same verse stipulates that "…For parents, a sixth share of the inheritance to each, if the deceased left children; if no children and the parents are the only heirs, the mother has a third…" In this case, a mother takes a share equal to that of a father if the deceased left children. A mother however, takes more than the father (one-third) if the deceased left no children. This is probably because in the eyes of Islam, a mother is more strongly attached to her child and she undergoes a lot of troubles and hardships during pregnancy and delivery as well as in looking after the child and bringing the child up. Q: 46:15 states: "We have enjoined on man doing of good to his parents; with trouble did his mother bear him and with trouble did she bring him forth; and the bearing of him and the weaning of him was thirty months." Indeed, there is a hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said that "paradise lies under the feet of the mothers."

It will seem that this verse speaks both to the socio-cultural context of Arabia at that time and also the foundational basis of Islamic marriage laws. Islam requires that people, who are capable of marrying, do so. And under Islamic rules of marriage, it is the responsibility of the man to

maintain the wife. That being the case, the Qur'an envisages a situation where the women get to keep their share of the inheritance, while the men share it by taking care of the women under their care. That being the case, the use to which the inheritance is put, evens out the equation, and hence negates the implicit injustice in the 2:1 formula.

By the very nature of Islamic law, there is bound to be differences of interpreting, deciphering and understanding the divine law. To the extent that the Qur'an was revealed in seventh century Arabia and to the extent that it will serve its adherents till eternity, there are bound to arise situations to which Qur'anic law ought to be applied which did not arise in the seventh century. Secondly, men and women have different aspirations and subjectivities. These aspirations and subjectivities will necessarily give rise to different understandings and interpretations of the divine word. These differences in interpreting and understanding the juridical sources should help illuminate and enrich the Islamic discourse on gender.

Conflicting Interpretations: Processes of Religious Inculturation

Eugene Laponte (1986, p.6) defines inculturation as "a process through which the gospel penetrates the culture of the evangelized people, becomes one with it and eventually provokes a new cultural synthesis." Crollius (1986, p.16) also defines it as "the integration of the Christian experience of a local church into the culture of its people, in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question but also as enrichment of the church universal."

When religious cultures are transplanted from their original environments into new environments, there is a tendency for the impinging culture to influence the host culture in such a way as to give a new meaning and outlook to the new culture. Simon Appiah (2000, p.117) states that acculturation, which is a process of inculturation is the cultural change that occurs from the direct contact of two different cultural groups.

Islam as we have stated, has been open to differing interpretations because of its very nature. We have also argued that some of the different interpretations that have arisen in Islam with regard to gender have been because the socio-cultural context within which the Qur'an was revealed influences the understanding that people give to the text. This means that the cultural context within which the Islamic message is transmitted influences the Islamic message. Inculturation is therefore part of the determinants of the interpretation and understanding of gender.

For example, the various Islamic countries are known to apply Islamic laws on marriage differently from one another. While the texts at issue are the same, the interpretations that arise from the texts and their application are different. Tunisia, in 1957, abolished polygyny on the basis that it is practically impossible to uphold the equal treatment of co-wives in a polygynous marriage. And since the Qur'an sanctions polygyny under the caveat that there ought to be the equal treatment of co-wives, and since present day circumstances makes the equal treatment of co-wives nigh impossible, then the basis for polygyny fails (Coulson, 1969, p.94). But this is Tunisia, which even though the majority of its citizens are Muslim, holds itself out as a secular state. A secular state is not a theocratic state

and hence theocratic laws are made subservient and conditional upon their compatibility with modern trends in law.

The reverse is the case in Saudi Arabia, which holds itself out as a theocratic state where religious law is the state law. In Saudi Arabia they hold that, what God has made lawful, humans cannot declare unlawful. Secondly, Saudi society is still a closed society where the infiltration of foreign cultures is viewed with suspicion and as an aberration. So while both Tunisian and Saudi societies are heavily Islamic, the extent to which they are inculturated gives rise to different understandings of the same phenomenon.

Wiebke (2006, p.144) discusses how even in Muslim Spain, gender practices in the West were different from those of the East. "The women of Islamic Spain where a variety of ethnic and cultural elements had successfully synthesised, enjoyed a greater measure of freedom than women in the East of the Islamic empire" (p.144).

Dagbon is heavily inculturated as a result of its contact with Islam. Today, there is no uniquely Dagomba traditional rite anymore. Dagomba traditions and culture show heavy Islamic influences. From birth through marriage to funeral ceremonies, the influence of Islam on Dagomba life and thought is glaringly apparent. This is more so when it comes to gender relations. In chapter four, we shall discuss gender practices that occur in Dagbon today, which as we shall show, is largely as a result of the influence of Islam. Indeed, Dagbon culture has also impinged on Islam and has influenced the negotiation of gender in Dagbon. For example, in Dagbon, during the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet, there is free

mixing of the sexes amidst dancing, singing and drumming. This practice would be deemed outrageous in Saudi Arabia, where the sight of women singing and dancing in the midst of men cannot even be contemplated.

Negotiations of gender and the different interpretations in Islamic communities regarding gender, is therefore also largely as a result of the interplay of Islam and the host cultures.

Negotiation of Gender in Sacred Space

In most religious traditions, objects and places are divided into the sacred and profane (secular). Mircea Eliade (1961:11) defines the sacred as "the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our 'profane' world." The process by which the sacred comes to inhabit secular space varies from one religious tradition to the other. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said that "the whole world is a mosque" (Ibn Hajar: 1988:24).

The import of Muhammad's (SAW) statement is that, the sacred can be experienced anywhere. Therefore, even though a Muslim may say his or her prayer anywhere, the faithful must first set the place of prayer apart in order to distinguish it from profane space. Thus one may sweep the place, place a prayer rug or mat or, indeed, any object at the place, and, above all, one may be required to take off one's sandals or shoes before stepping into that space, in order to distinguish it from profane space. Moses had to take off his shoes in order to signify that he was before the presence of the Lord and therefore, that he had come into sacred space (Q: 20:12). In Islam, actions are according to intentions and humans are judged

based on what they intend (Bukhari Vol I: 1). Thus as soon as one makes an intention to pray and takes off his or her shoes, the ground on which one steps with his or her bare foot becomes sacred ground and the presence of the Ultimate Reality is automatically assumed.

This work therefore distinguishes sacred space from profane space by whether or not ritual activity takes place within that space. To this extent, all activity connected with ritual worship is considered as sacred activity and any place that this activity takes place as sacred space. Chief among sacred spaces in Islam is the mosque. The first edifice that the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) built when he first established the Islamic community in Madina was a mosque (Haykal: 1976:172). The mosque has since remained the hub of sacred activity in Islam.

All other space shall be considered profane. Profane space is thus the space within which humans go about their daily business or activities, not necessarily being conscious of divine presence. The word profane is derived from the Latin, *profanus,* which means outside the temple. Indeed, according to Eliade "the first possible definition of the sacred is that it is the opposite of the profane" (Eliade: 10). This work therefore discusses gender relations in Islam as it is negotiated in sacred space as opposed to how it is negotiated in profane space.

Prayer Leadership as Man's Space

In all aspects of Muslim ritual prayer today, men's leadership is uncontested: they call the faithful to prayer, they give the sermons and they lead the prayer. Women are discouraged from going to the mosques even against the explicit advice of the Prophet to men to allow women to

patronize the mosques (Bukhari, Vol 2, p.30). The debate about the capacity or incapacity of women to lead the ritual prayer took on an international dimension and ignited world debate about the issue when on March 8th 2005 Amina Wadud made headline news by leading a mixed gender Friday congregational prayer in New York City in the United States of America. In their article titled "I am One of the People": A Survey and Analysis of Legal Arguments on Woman-led Prayer in Islam," Ahmed Elewa and Laury Silvers (2010-2011) have detailed all the arguments by the various scholars about the permissibility or non-permissibility of Wadud's act, some of which I shall cite in defence of our positions.

According to the Qur'an, Allah created humans and *jinn* so that they may worship him (Q: 51:56). Muhammad is reported to have said that the major distinguisher between a Muslim and a non-Muslim is the ritual prayer. He (Muhammad) is also reported to have said that on the Day of Judgment, he or she whose prayer record is deemed good would enter paradise regardless of other minuses. This thesis therefore restricts the discussion on women's participation in sacred space to the area of the ritual of worship.

Regarding the permissibility or non-permissibility of women leading the ritual prayer, the Qur'an is silent on the matter. The Qur'an is also silent on the matter of qualification for leading the ritual prayer generally. That is why Islam does not have 'priesthood' as such. It therefore fell on Muhammad (SAW) to define the criteria for leadership in the ritual prayer. The Prophet is reported on the authority of Ibn Mas'ud, to have said:

> The one of you who is most versed in Allah's most High book (Qur'an) should act as *Imam* for the people in prayer; but if they are equally versed in reciting it, then the one who has the most knowledge regarding the *Sunnah*; if they are equal regarding the *Sunnah,* then the earliest of them to emigrate; if they emigrated at the same time, then the oldest of them...

Even from the above stipulation, the Imam's sex is not a criterion. So we have to turn to the Prophet's practice and attitude towards women's leadership of the ritual prayer to determine its permissibility or otherwise. In this regard the various sources and authorities are not unanimous on this matter. Sources mention a certain Umm Waraqat bint Abdallah, described as "learned, scholarly, pious and modest" (Al-Mubarakpuri, 2001, p.259). The fact of the Prophet commissioning Umm Waraqat bint Abdallah as a prayer leader is not in dispute. What has been in dispute among scholars has been the type of congregation that she led.

Elewa and Silvers (2010-11) therefore aver that "the legal and historical record shows that women have led prayers since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in restricted circumstances." Various scholars have stipulated what in their views, constituted "restricted circumstances." Some say that women could lead mixed congregations in cases of supererogatory prayers, others assert that women could lead prayers within their households, even if the congregations were mixed; others also assert

that women can lead only an all-female congregation or a congregation of women and children (Elewa and Silvers, 2010-11).

Leila Ahmed (1992) and Walther Wiebke (2006) quoting Ibn Sa'd say that Umm Waraqat was a prayer leader of a mixed congregation within her household. According to this account, the congregation was so large that it required a *muezzin* (one who calls the faithful to prayer). Ghandafar and Al-Mubarakpuri (2001, p.259) state that the Prophet commissioned her as an Imam, exclusively for a female congregation within her household. According this account, the courtyard of her house was converted into a mosque with a regular *muezzin.*

It is thus clear from the above, that the total ban on women leading the ritual prayer even for fellow women was a later imposition by the chauvinist male leaders of the Muslim community. The congregation that Umm Waraqat led, could not have been a congregation exclusively made up of members of her household. The fact that the congregation was large enough to warrant a regular *muezzin* could not have been a congregation of members of a single household much less an exclusively female congregation. The *adhan* (the Muslim call to prayer) is considered a *mandub* act in Islam. Mandub means that it is only recommended but not compulsory. Therefore, it is the exigencies of the times and places that determine whether an *adhan* is called or not. So if Ummu Waraqat was supposed to lead a small congregation of only women within her household, the adhan would hardly have been necessary.

Besides, if indeed the Prophet particularly commissioned Umm Waraqat as a prayer leader, it could not have been for members of a closed

unit like a household. Millions of Muslims lead their families in prayer every day without requiring to be commissioned to do so. To be the *Imam* of a large community of people with mixed backgrounds however, one would certainly require either the consent of the entire community or the warrant of a duly constituted authority. In this case, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was that authority. Besides, the mosque since the inception of Islam has always been a community affair. The mosque that Umm Waraqat led could not have been the exception.

Opponents of woman-led prayer as articulated by Ibn Rushd however assert that there is no evidence that the early community practiced it. Secondly, that it will be a contradiction to allow a woman at the head, when all other women will be at the back. This second argument has no strong intellectual or legal basis. This is because as would be pointed out shortly, male-female segregation in ritual worship does not necessarily mean that women should be at the back. In certain parts of the world, women are to the side of men while in other places and mosques women are at the top of men in a story-like architectural structure. They also argue that a woman leading men in prayer compromises female modesty. A woman's body, even if veiled, stirs desire, they argue. Another reason why opponents of woman-led prayer oppose the practice is that, they argue that men and women have spiritual equality, but men have ritual and social superiority. This argument is also difficult to sustain. Ritual worship is a key ingredient of spirituality. Therefore, to argue that men and women have spiritual equality but do not have ritual equality is difficult to fathom.

On the other hand, supporters of woman-led prayer have asserted that a woman who has knowledge of the sources of Islam, as enumerated by the Prophet qualifies to lead. It is the reason that Khaled Abou El-Fadl avers that a woman can lead other men in prayer if she possesses superior knowledge. A former Grand Mufti of Marseilles, Sohaib ben Cheikh, actually got the Muslim feminist, Pamela Taylor to lead him in a public prayer in Toronto in 2006. The Secretary General of the Islamic Commission of Spain, Mansur Escudero, posits that "there are no ordained *a'ima* in Islam. The Imam, the person leading the prayer, comes up as the choice of the group being led in prayer. And if the group chooses a woman, there is nothing in the Qur'an that would negate that choice" (Elewa & Silvers: 2010-2011).

Following from all the divergent arguments, Elewa and Silvers conclude that "there is no gender-specific command to lead the prayer in the Qur'an nor does the Prophet himself explicitly state that only men may lead the prayer. Thus the default state must be considered inclusion and women's unrestricted prayer leadership must be permitted" (p.167).

Men are Audible, Women Murmur

The standard practice around the Muslim world today is that women cannot recite the Qur'an audibly either as an act of devotion in itself, or as part of the ritual of the daily prayers. According to the male guardians of Islamic lore, a woman's voice is her *awra* (parts of her body that should not be exposed). They derive their authority from Q: 33:29-35, which states that "O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any other

women: if you do fear Allah, be not complaisant of speech, lest one in whose heart is a disease should feel tempted; and speak a decent speech."

In other words, the wives of the Prophet who were also called "mothers of the faithful" were required to speak in ways that would not attract or perhaps arouse libidinal passions in men. This is because the sweet voice of a woman can be alluring. The male guardians of Islamic lore have since extended the ambit of this verse not just to all other women and their dealings with other men but also to include even making their voices heard in the ritual prayer.

This is not only disingenuous, but also a needless and totally unjustified extension of the borders of an edict that was specifically addressed to the Prophet's wives. Ibn Kathir (2003, pp.680-681), quoting At-Tabari, says that this verse was revealed solely concerning the wives of the Prophet. Ibn Abi Hatim records a *hadith* on the authority of Ibn Abbas confirming that this verse was indeed revealed solely for the wives of the Prophet.

On the contrary, the Qur'an, which is the fundamental law of Islam, stipulates the tone with which males and females should conduct the ritual prayer. "…neither speak thy prayer aloud, nor speak it in a low tone, but seek a middle course between" (Q: 17:110). Thus both men and women are required to recite the Qur'an in moderate tones. There is therefore no basis for which the male elite has determined that women's voices are their *awra* and hence they should remain silent in prayer.

The Curtain or Veil in the Mosque

Today across much of the world, the women's part of the mosque is partitioned from the men's part, with the women mostly worshipping behind the men. In many mosques, especially in Ghana, the partition is of brick, such that the women cannot even see the Imam but only hear his voice. The Ulama say that this is to allow for absolute concentration, especially by the men, since women worshipping in front of men could serve as a source of distraction for the men. Was this always the case from the Prophet's era, or was this arrangement a later imposition by the Ulama?

Special mention is made in the history books about the apartment of Aisha in particular. The Prophet is said to have built it with direct access to the mosque. It is said that the mosque and Aisha's room were so close together that sometimes for the purification ritual the Prophet had Aisha wash his hair without his having to leave the mosque. Mernissi (1991, p.107) states that "the arrangement of space was such that the mosque and apartments of the Prophet and his intimates and companions formed a single unit." The Qur'an makes an allusion to this arrangement when it admonished the believers not to shout out to the Prophet from the mosque when he was still in the apartments but to be patient till he comes out (Q: 49:4-5). It will therefore seem that the Prophet's mosque did not envisage a strict veil/curtain that completely segregated the sexes.

Akel Ismail Kahera (2008, p.135) states that "spatial conditions that existed in the Prophet's mosque allowed persons of opposite genders to worship in the edifice without any physical or legal restriction." Tutin

Aryanti in his article titled “The Center Versus the Periphery in Central Javanese Mosque Architecture” states that in the coastal areas of Java, the women’s area is to the right of the men’s area, while in in-land Java, it is to the back. He also notes that most mosques do not use any screens (veils/curtains) to divide male and female portions of the mosque. He adds that women occupy smaller spaces in the mosques based on the assumption that attendance to mosque is not mandatory for women.

It is our contention that while male-female segregation in sacred space has merit, the full and complete covering/veiling of the women’s portion of the mosque has no canonical basis. There is a sense in which sight and sound have a correlation. Therefore, it is important that the women see the Imam as he delivers his sermon in the Friday prayer for example. The gesturing and facial expression of a speaker adds to the ability of the person listening to imbibe the message in ways that the speaker wants it to be understood. To deny women the opportunity to relate the message that they hear to the way that it was presented, is a huge minus in the ability of women to fully comprehend the sermons that they hear in the mosques.

Negotiation of Gender in Profane Space

The veil as curtain

Hardly is any discussion on gender in Islam held without the subject of the veil. This is because in Islam, the veil has become arguably, the most visible symbol of feminity. For Muslim women, it is that which defines their identity. It is also that which signals a Muslim woman's inviolability.

Veil, generally refers to a covering, or something that conceals or is meant to conceal. Indeed, this is the sense in which most dictionaries explain the term. In Islam however, it is more than a covering. As has already been explained in this chapter, the concepts of the sacred and the profane are important concepts in Islam. Sacred space in Islam is inviolable space. Thus the veil serves as a demarcation between profane space and sacred space. El Guindi (1999) states that the veil has four dimensions to it: the material, the spatial, the communicative and the religious. In Islam all these four dimensions have significance for faith practice. The material dimension of the veil may simply refer to the physical material that demarcates the space that may not be violated. The spatial dimension of it is what perhaps makes it a gendered concept. In Islam, the mixing of the sexes is generally frowned upon. Thus it is the veil that also differentiates male space from female space, as for example the veil that differentiates the male portion of a mosque from the female portion of it. The veil also determines the limits or communicative borders that must exist between males and females; and all of these have significance for the practice of one's faith.

There are three verses in the Qur'an which state the institution of the veil. The first of these verses to be revealed is Q: 33:54 which admonished the Muslim community not to linger for too long in the household of the Prophet in order that he may be allowed privacy with his wives. "…when ye have taken your meal, disperse, without seeking familiar talk. Such behavior annoys the Prophet and he is shy to dismiss you, but Allah is not shy to tell you the truth. And when ye ask the wives of the Prophet for anything, ask them from behind a hijab veil. That makes for greater purity for your hearts and for theirs. Nor is it right for you that ye should annoy Allah's Messenger…"

This verse was revealed on the night of the Prophet's marriage to Zaynab bint Jahsh. After the wedding feast, a number of the guests continued to linger in the household of the Prophet, chatting aimlessly. The Prophet wanted to retire to his new bride but was shy to excuse himself. After a long while, the last of two visitors left and Anas bin Malik went to inform the Prophet that the last of two visitors had left. At that point the Prophet was entering the room. Anas made as if to follow him, but the Prophet drew the curtain (veil) between them whereupon, this verse was revealed (Ibn Kathir: Vol 8:25).

The encyclopedia of Islam identifies over one hundred terms for dress parts, many of which are used for "veiling." Some of these and related Arabic terms are *burqa*, *abayah*, *tarhah*, *burnus*, *jilbab*, *jellabah*, *hayik*, *milayah*, *gallabiyah*, *dishdasha*, *gargush*, *gina*, *mungub*, *lithma*, *yashmik*, *habarah*, and *izar*. Some of these are used as face cover only.

These are gina, burqa, *niqab* and *lithma* (Encyclopedia of Islam, 1986, pp.745-6).

The veil therefore has wide ramifications in Islam. For Muslim women it is that which defines their identity. It is also that which signals a Muslim woman's inviolability. The Qur'an specifically requires the Muslim woman to veil, because "…that is most convenient, and that they should be known as such and not molested…" (Q: 33:59). The veil is that which defines a Muslim woman's *harim* (prohibited/sacred space). The living quarters for women within a household is called the harim. Harim comes from the word *haram*, which means forbidden. The female space is forbidden space and therefore sacred. That is why the *Kaba* is also known as *haram*.

The tradition of veiling was already prevalent among Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula and also in places like Syria and Palestine long before the advent of Islam. (Ahmed, 1992, p.55). However, it was a status symbol and was thus restricted to the wives of people in the upper echelons of Arabian society just as was the case among Greeks, Romans, Jews and Assyrians "all of whom practiced veiling to some degree" (p.55). Thus in the beginning, veiling was incumbent only on the wives of the Prophet. So if it was said of a lady that "she had taken the veil", it meant that she had become the wife of the Prophet. (Ahmed, 1992, p.60). Later on, the Prophet was commanded to tell his wives and daughters and all believing women to veil, so that they should be known as such and not molested (Q: 33:59).

Prior to the revelation of this verse, Umar bin Al-Khattab, who later became the second caliph of Islam, had been admonishing the Prophet to request his wives to veil in order to distinguish them from other women so that the infidels do not insult them, pretending that they did not recognise them (Al-Bukhari, Vol 8, p.170). After the revelation of the *hijab* verse, Umar boasted that this was one of three matters about which Allah had listened to his wisdom (Al-Bukhari, Vol 1, p.239).

Besides the case of the Prophet's wives, the rest of believing women were admonished to veil in order to avoid molestation. Q: 24:30-31 re-iterates this point when it instructs the Prophet to "say to the believing men that they restrain their eyes and guard their private parts…and say to the believing women that they restrain their eyes and guard their private parts, and that they disclose not their natural and artificial beauty except that which is apparent thereof and that they draw their head-coverings over their bosoms…"

The veil was not therefore intended to be a symbol of piety as the male elite have made it seem. The institution of the veil was an answer to two social questions. Firstly, it was meant to distinguish the wives of the Prophet from other women, so that they could be accorded the respect that was due them as "mothers of the faithful." Secondly it was meant to prevent lewdness and other forms of sexual solicitation.

So even after the revelation of the verse on veiling, the Prophet did not enforce it for women in all profane space. On one occasion, Umar ibn al-Khattab spotted one of the Prophet's wives Sauda when she had gone to answer the call of nature unveiled. Umar told her not to ever go out

unveiled. Sauda took offence and went to report to the Prophet. The Prophet asked her to ignore Umar since “you (women) have been allowed to go out for your needs” (Al-Bukhari, Vol 6, p.300).

On another occasion, the Prophet was sitting with a group of women in the mosque, who were not veiled, whereupon Umar was making an entrance, ostensibly to see the Prophet. As soon as the women saw Umar entering they scampered for their veils in order to cover themselves. At this the Prophet started smiling, whereupon Umar entered and said “O Allah's Apostle! May Allah always keep you smiling." The Prophet said, "These women who have been here, roused my wonder, for as soon as they heard your voice, they quickly put on their veils.

> Umar said, "O Allah's Apostle! You have more right to be feared by them than I." Then 'Umar addressed the women saying, "O enemies of yourselves! You fear me more than you do Allah's Apostle?" They said, "Yes, for you are harsher and sterner than Allah's Apostle (Al-Bukhari, Vol 5, p.23-24).

Besides, the veil was not and has never been intended to be a symbol of piety. “O ye children of Adam! We have bestowed garments upon you to cover your shame, as well as to be an adornment to you, but the garment of righteousness is the best…” (Q: 7:26)

The question of the veil has been a battleground between reformists and conservatives in Muslim countries around the world. In Iran, Reza Shah Pahlavi made the wearing of the hijab in public a punishable offence.

After the Islamic revolution, the opposite became the case: appearing in public without the veil was made a punishable offence (Mir-Hosseini, 2007, p.1). Besides, the veil has been given multiple meanings and interpretations by Muslims. In one vein, a woman's body is a source of shame and must be covered. According to this view, woman's presence in public is a source of *fitna* (chaos) and a threat to the social order. There is a hadith in which the Prophet is reported to have said that he has not left "any affliction more harmful to men than women" (Bukhari, Volume 7, p.35). In another breath, some Islamic scholars aver that the true rationale and purpose of the *hijab* is not to exclude women from participation in society, but to facilitate it. According to this understanding of the rationale of the veil, it acts as a safeguard and protects women from being treated as sex objects. In our estimation, this understanding of the veil is more plausible. It is the reason why the Qur'an commanded the Prophet to ask his wives and all faithful women to veil, in order to be recognized as such and not molested, where molestation means to be made into or seen as sex objects.

Profane Space as Man's Space

The widely accepted view is that profane space is man's space. Therefore, women cannot be present in that space except either with the permission of a man or when accompanied by a man. A male member of her family must always accompany a woman anytime she goes out. This male member of her family is called a *mahrim*. From its etymological derivation, a mahrim is one who makes the presence of woman lawful in profane space. It is however my contention that, the view that a Muslim

woman cannot go out to freely participate in secular activity except when she is accompanied by a male (*mahrim*) has no canonical basis. The Qur'an admonishes men and women, that when they have finished the ritual prayer, they should disperse in the land (profane space) in search of livelihood (Q: 62:9-10).

The notion that profane space is man's space, is perhaps what has reinforced the Arab notion that a woman is *sitt al-bayt*, "the lady of the house," a term which according to El Guindi (1999, p.83) "stresses an autonomous managerial role, not domesticity." Therefore, since a woman is a "lady of the house" all other space outside the home is not hers and she must literally not be 'present' in that space. Public space is men's space and domestic space is women's space. Women are free to expose themselves in the domestic space. But to participate in the public space they must be veiled. Thus it is the veil, which gives a woman the license to participate in public space. According to Fatima Mernissi (1975, p.143), "the veil means that the woman is present in the men's world, but invisible; she has no right to be in the street."

Mernissi (1975, p.145) further tells of an anecdote in which a Lebanese female soldier was standing guard at a military outpost with her machine gun on her shoulder. A man approaches her and makes advances at her whom she rejects with indignant words and gestures. The man got angry and said: 'How do you want me to believe that a woman standing in the street the whole night has any honour?' The woman is said to have turned her gun towards her suitor and told him, 'I am here in the street soiling my honour to defend yours because you are unable to do it

yourself'. Thus the woman shares the belief with the man that being alone in the street is dishonourable. Her reaction was to justify her presence in the street, not to claim her right to be there.

The notion that women cannot be in profane space without either the express permission of men or accompanied by men is not explicitly stated in either the Qur'an or the ahadith. We have already cited the example of Sauda, the Prophet's wife, to who the Prophet said that "you women have been given permission to go out for your needs." Contrary to this admonishment by the Prophet, so called *sharia* countries insist that women cannot move about freely as is the case in Saudi Arabia and other so called Islamic countries. According to Mullah Abdul-Salam Zaeef (2010), a founding member of the Taliban government of Afghanistan and its ambassador to Pakistan at the time of its overthrow in 2001, "the Taliban had also started to implement *sharia* law: women were no longer working in government departments…" (p.84). Many Islamic states therefore understand the fundamental underpinning of sharia to be the banning of women from profane space.

Gender and Leadership in Islam

One of the gender issues that remain contentious in Dagbon is the issue of women's leadership and it is important therefore to examine the issue as a theological one in Islam before relating it to the current situation in Dagbon.

In a casual conversation with a Muallim in August 1999 in Tamale, he asserted that, there was no value in being at home with his wife because a woman would not add any value to a discourse or conversation. "What

ideas do women have?" he asked. In the view of the Muallim who is a guardian of the Muslim flock, women are by their very nature, not capable of any ideas at all.

Then in 2008 during the electioneering process in Ghana, there was a huge debate within the New Patriotic Party (NPP) regarding the suitability or otherwise of one Alima Mahama to serve as Vice Presidential Candidate to the party's standard bearer, Nana Akufo-Addo, now president of Ghana. Alima Mahama was then Ghana's Minister for Women and Children's Affairs and now Minister for Local Government and Rural Development. This researcher received a letter signed by one Mohammed Tahiru from Tamale, who claimed to have been writing on behalf of the Association of Muslim Teachers. The crux of his submission was that, they as *ulama* (Muslim clergy) were against the choice of Alima Mahama as Vice Presidential Candidate of the NPP. According to him, "Islam is against the leadership of women" and if Akufo-Addo went ahead to select Alima Mahama as his Vice Presidential Candidate, they (the *ulama*) were going to ensure that all Muslims in Ghana voted against him. In the end, other factors also conspired to deny Alima Mahama the chance to be Akufo-Addo's Vice Presidential Candidate.

In the run-up to the Presidential elections in Nigeria in 2011, a prominent Muslim movement in Nigeria, Muslim Rights Concern (MURIC), led by an Islamic scholar and academic, Prof. Is-haq Akintola, issued a statement warning the political parties against fielding women as either presidential candidates or governors. They warned that any party

that ignored their advice "stood the risk of losing the votes of Muslims" (www.nairaland.com, accessed 14th May, 2014).

Leadership is critical for the advancement of any society. According to Joyner (1994 p.7), leadership is one of the most important forces on earth. More importantly, it is vital for every society to marshal all its leadership potentials in order to ensure a proper development of that society. Thus any society that neglects to use the leadership abilities of the bulk of its population is doomed to failure and retrogression. How women are viewed in terms of their leadership potential is critical for ensuring either a structural balance or imbalance in male-female relations in any society.

Leadership has many definitions. For the purpose of this thesis however**,** we shall define leadership as the ability to influence or direct the affairs of any given group of people. Thus leadership in the purview of this thesis shall include a person or group's ability to influence another person or group with his or her ideas even if the person influencing is not directly in the forefront or does not occupy a designated position of leadership. According to Northouse (2004, p.5) "people are leaders because of their formal position within an organisation whereas others are leaders because of the way other group members respond to them." This, Northouse states are called assigned leadership and emergent leadership. Thus we shall discuss women's leadership in relation to both the assigned and the emergent forms of leadership.

According to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), leadership is very critical for the Muslim community. He admonished the Muslim

community to follow and obey its leader even if that leader is a slave (Bukhari, Vol 1, p.376). Thus, for the Prophet, leadership is such a critical aspect of society, such that the form and appearance of the leader is inconsequential, provided that the leader is leading according to the dictates of the Qur'an and standard practices of the Prophet. Besides, the Qur'an admonishes all good Muslims to aspire to leadership within the community of the righteous (Q: 25:74).

In Muslim societies in Africa, (just like in many cultures and societies) women are mostly excluded from the sphere of leadership. This is based on both Qur'anic and *ahadith* stipulations. The Qur'an states that "men are the caretakers of women. This is because of the status Allah has raised them to; one over the other and for what they have spent of their wealth. Therefore, the righteous women are devotive and guarding of the unseen…" (Q: 4:34). There is also an alleged saying of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) that "such as ruled by a woman will never be successful" (Bukhari Vol 9, pp.170-171). Many Islamic scholars use this ahadith as a basis for questioning the leadership competence of women, especially in societies that are predominantly Muslim such as the Dagbon society.

This thesis examines the validity of the alleged saying of the Prophet that "such as ruled by a woman will never be successful." Rather this work will argue for an inclusivist theology of leadership in Islam that will allow women to participate in the leadership sphere within Muslim communities and also in secular society in Dagbon.

The Prophet, Women and Gender in Islam

When the Prophet got his first prophetic experience in the Cave of Hira, with the command to "recite", (Q: 96:1-5) he was terribly shaken. He run home and asked his wife, Khadija to cover him up in order that he will escape the terror of that experience. That covering up was the subject of the next batch of divine revelation as contained in Qur'an chapter 74:1-3. Unsure of the implication of his experience, Muhammad consulted Khadija about the experience he had just gone through in Cave Hira. Khadija assured Muhammad, that the experience he had just gone through was the same that the Prophet Moses went through when he was being commissioned as a Prophet. It was Khadija who recognized that Muhammad (SAW) was being commissioned as a Prophet when that reality had not dawned on Muhammad (SAW) himself.

Khadija had a cousin called Waraqah bin Nawfal, who was an Arab Christian. Khadija then sent her husband Muhammad (SAW) to see Waraqah who as a result of reading the Jewish and Christian scriptures was conversant with this type of experience. It was Waraqah who indeed confirmed the words of Khadija and assured Muhammad (SAW) that he was being called to Prophethood (Haykal, 1976, p.77). That assurance was critical in preparing Muhammad (SAW) for future encounters with the *ruh* (spirit of revelation/angel Gabriel).

Thus, it was Khadija's show of leadership and courage, which enabled Muhammad (SAW) to develop the necessary tenacity to withstand and assimilate the latter experiences that for the next 22 years will characterise his prophetic life. For Muhammad (SAW) to have accepted

Khadija's leadership in the matter of his receipt of divine revelation cannot be a matter that can be trivialised.

Beyond giving Muhammad (SAW) the initial confidence to kick start his prophetic life, Khadija's wealth proved decisive in giving Muhammad (SAW) the peace and contentment of mind that he needed to carry on with his prophetic duties. Allah himself so recognised the role of Khadija in advancing Muhammad's (SAW) prophetic career, that it was the subject of a revelation to the Prophet. In reminding Muhammad (SAW) of His (Allah's) mercies to him, the Qur'an states, "did we not find you poor and enrich you?" (Q: 93:8). In commenting on this particular verse, Abdallah Yusuf Ali (1988, p.1917) states that the Prophet did not inherit much wealth and was poor. It was the true, pure and sincere love of Khadija, which not only raised him above want, but made him independent of worldly needs in his later life, enabling him to devote his whole time to the service of Allah.

It was therefore not for nothing that Muhammad (SAW) spent twenty-five years of his married life in monogamous union with Khadija. This must have been out of deep love and respect for Khadija's sense of discernment and wise counsel. The point must also be made, that Muhammad (SAW) married Khadija when he was 25 years old, while Khadija was 40. So perhaps Muhammad (SAW) deferred to Khadija because of her age and experience. Indeed, Muhammad (SAW) was subsequently to include age as a condition for leadership. If the Qur'anic statement that in the prophet we have an excellent model (Q: 33:21) is anything to go by, the *Muallim* who contends that women have no ideas

worthy of meaningful discourse, will have to rethink if not re-read the Prophet's life history.

In the early days of Islam, persecution by the Makkan aristocratic class made the propagation of Islam a difficult matter for the Prophet. The only reason why the Makkan leaders did not succeed in eliminating or stopping the Prophet's mission early on in his prophetic life was because his uncle Abu Talib refused to lift the clan's protection over him. However not every adherent of the new faith had such clan protection. For the other members of the Muslim community who did not have such protection, the Prophet encouraged them to migrate to Abyssinia, (modern day Ethiopia) where a Christian King ruled. The Qur'an reminds Muslims that their friends and allies are the Christians because "amongst them are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant" (Q: 5:82).

The first group of people to migrate to Abyssinia included eleven men and four women (Haykal, 1976, p.97). The courage to stand up for their conviction and their willingness to brave the persecutions that were being meted out to the early converts to Islam, was certainly an act of leadership on the part of these women, which the Prophet lauded highly. In the very early years of Muhammad's prophetic career, women played a central role in the consolidation and spread of Islam. Indeed, amongst the prophet's armies that fought battles for the consolidation of Islam were women. Two women for example stood out as far as the prophet's wars of conquest were concerned. Umm Atiya is said to have accompanied the

prophet to a number of battles and cared for the wounded (Schimmel, 2003, p.31).

Umm Amara on the other hand, is reported to have served as a wet nurse and also as a soldier in battles with the Prophet. She is said to have participated in battles with both her husband and son and is said to have fought boldly with her garments tied around her waist. She got wounded several times in battle and eventually lost an arm (Wiebke, 2006, p.111).

Women exhibited leadership in the time of the prophet, not only in secular matters such as public discourse but also in theological matters. In fact, the line between the sacred and the secular in Islam is blurred. we have already discussed the curious case of Umm Waraqah bint Abdallah. She exhibited such zeal for martyrdom that she requested of Muhammad to let her participate in the battle of Badr. The Prophet is said to have nicknamed her "the female martyr" (Wiebke, 2006, p.111).

Thus, the prophet recognized that women, like men are capable of leadership and therefore allowed those who were eager to exhibit those qualities to do so. It is therefore ironical that in many societies where Islam is the dominant religion, (including Dagbon) women are today barred from the sphere of leadership.

Concepts of Leadership in Islam

To understand the attitude of Islam towards the participation of women in leadership, it is prudent for us to examine the terminologies that express leadership in Islam. The key terminologies that express leadership in Islam are *Khalifa*, *Imam*, *Amir*, *Sultan* and *Malik*.

The term khalifa connotes deputy, vicegerent or representative. This term first occurred in Muslim terminology in the Qur'an (Q: 2:30) when Allah is reported to have told the angels that he was placing on earth, one who shall be his khalifa (deputy/vicegerent/representative). Here Allah was referring to the human race generally. Thus humans are Allah's deputies. In other words, the word *khalifa* is gender neutral and can be used to refer to both male and female. In Islamic history however, the term *khalifa* has been used exclusively to designate those who took up the leadership of the Muslim community after the death of the Prophet. The first caliph of Islam was Abubakr who took up the leadership of the Muslim community in 632 CE. The *khulafa* (caliphate) was to endure until the 1258 when Hulagu and his hordes laid waste to Baghdad and brought an end to the caliphate. In spite of the gender-neutral nature of the term khalifa however, no woman ascended the caliphate in the period that the caliphate lasted. This however, was both an accident of history and also as a result of the overly patriarchal nature of Arab society. It was an accident of history in the sense that the early prominent members of the Prophet's inner circle who succeeded him later as caliphs did not include women. It was also as a result of the patriarchal nature of Arab society because later on women became caliphs of some of the minor and sundry dynasties that flourished in the era of the Abbasids (Mernissi, 1993, p.14). However, the fact that they were mostly Turks tells volumes of the patriarchal nature of Arab society and the difficulty it had in accepting the caliphate or leadership of women. After all, the qualifications for leadership in Islam

which are *ilm*, (knowledge), *Iman*, (faith), adl, (justice) competence, and physical fitness are not exclusively masculine attributes.

Another word that connotes leadership in Islam is *Imam*. It is derived from the word *amma*, which means to be the first, at the head or to lead. Practically however, *Imam* refers to a prayer leader, who leads a congregation of Muslims in the ritual of worship. Women have generally been excluded from being leaders of ritual prayer. The general reason that has been given for this is the fact that a woman leading a mixed congregation could serve as a distraction to the male members of the congregation. The the exclusion of women from leadership as far as the ritual prayer is concerned has more to do with circumstance rather than canon.

In some African communities, women are even discouraged from going to the mosques at all. In the town of Tamale in Northern Ghana (which forms part of my research area) women who have not reached menopause are discouraged from going to the mosques to pray. This according to the *ulama* is because they are prone to menstruation and could thus get their menses while in the mosque and this could defile the sanctity of the mosque. Islam excludes women from the ritual prayer and other acts of worship such as fasting and touching the Qur'an when they are in their menses.

Another concept that connotes leadership in Islam is *Amir*. Its feminine gender is *Amira*. If the argument that, that which does not have a name does not exist is anything to go by, then the leadership of a woman is accepted. Thus, an *amira* is any Muslim woman who exercises leadership

over other Muslims, whether they are men or women. In the time of Muhammad, (SAW) there were a number of women who played leadership roles, some being relations of Muhammad (SAW) himself. Worthy of mention in this regard is Sayyida Nafisa, a granddaughter of Muhammad, (SAW) who led and influenced the spiritual lives of her followers to such an extent that when she died in 824 CE, a mausoleum was built in her memory which has remained a popular pilgrim's destination to this day (Schimmel, 2003, p.32).

Sultan and *Malik* are the other titles for leader in Islam. That is why Allah is referred to as "*Maliki yawmi deen."* (King of the Day of Judgment). Even though there is no record of a woman ever becoming caliph, there have however been many women who managed to become *sultana* and *malika*, which are the feminine forms of Sultan and Malik (Mernissi, 1993, p.13).

Muslim Women Leaders

Prominent among these leaders of Muslims was Shajarat al-Durr, who gained power in Egypt in 1250 CE purely through her ingenuity and superior military intelligence. It was Shajarat al-Durr who defeated the French army during the crusades and captured their King, Louis IX (Mernissi, 1993, p.13). Mernissi also cites the example of Sultana Radiyya who took power in India in 1236 CE in the area that centuries later became the mobilization ground for Benazir Bhutto. Indeed, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and the fountain of prophetic wisdom, Aisha, led a faction of Muslims to battle against Ali the fourth caliph in what has become known as the Battle of Camel which took place in 656C.E/36A.H.

Some male historians of Islam and defenders of patriarchy have said that Aisha later regretted the actions of the Battle of Camel. We have no means of verifying that claim. Aisha is undoubtedly the leading authority of the Prophet's life and thought and most of what has come to us today as the Prophet's Sunnah cite Aisha as the source. In fact, the Prophet is reported to have admonished Muslims to seek half the knowledge of Islam from Aisha. She could therefore not have been ignorant of the dos and don'ts of feminine behaviour.

Another woman whose leadership is held as a model in Islam is Bilqis (the Queen of Sheba). Her leadership is held in Islam as a model and she is generally lauded as a good ruler of her people, "gentle, prudent and able to tame the wider passions of her people" (Ali, 1998, p.1099). The story of Bilqis is elaborated in the 34th chapter of the Qur'an and in Q: 27:40. Her kingdom is said to have encompassed the areas around modern day Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Therefore, Muslim women can exercise and have indeed in the past exercised leadership over women and also over men. Therefore, the notion amongst some Muslim communities in Africa that women cannot exercise leadership except over other women is not supported both in history and in the Qur'an. In Dagbon for example, Muslims are amongst the least educated and occupy the bottom rungs of societal hierarchy. That is because the women (Muslim women) who are responsible for training generations of Muslims are themselves not equipped with the tools to be able to do so. Even within the religious field, the few women who have dared to break the limits of the voice as *awra* dare only to preach to their

fellow women. They do not preach about general religious questions. They have been socialised to believe that they do not possess the competence to do so.

Even in West Africa, there is evidence that women used to hold positions in certain Muslim dominated areas. The seven original states of Hausa land, namely Katsina, Daura, Kano, Gobir, Rano, Zazzau, Garun and Gabas cover an area of approximately 500 square miles and comprise the heart of Hausa land. In the sixteenth century, Queen Bakwa Turunku built the capital of Zazzau at Zaria, named after her younger daughter. Eventually, the entire state of Zazzau was renamed Zaria. However, it was her elder daughter, the legendary Amina who inherited her mother's warlike nature. She is said to have done great things as ruler of Zaria (Isichei, 1983, pp.144-148). Amina is credited as the architect who created the strong earthen walls around the city, which was the prototype for the fortifications used in all Hausa states. She built many of these fortifications, which became known as *ganuwar Amina* or Amina's walls, around various conquered cities. She is believed to have ruled from 1536 to 1573 CE.

Abu Bakra and the curse of women leaders

We have already shown that the ahadith constitute the second most important source of law in Islam. In most cases, it is the ahadith that give details to Qur'anic edicts. However, unlike the Qur'an, which claims to be a scripture without doubt, (Q: 2:2) same cannot be said of the ahadith. Therefore, Islamic scholarship has categorised ahadith into Sahih (excellent), Hassan (good) and Daif (weak) or even Maudu (fabricated).

Generally, the categorisation is done based on an analysis of the matn and isnad. The matn of a hadith refers to the content, while the isnad refers to its chain of narrators. Regarding the content of a hadith, the criterion is that the hadith must not be in conflict with any provision(s) of the Qur'an. Any alleged saying of the prophet, found to be inconsistent with any provision(s) of the Qur'an, is to the extent of such inconsistency, null and void. The hadith must also make sense. As far as the isnad is concerned, there must be proof that the people in the chain met each other and that the last in the chain actually met the Prophet. In addition, there are other criteria like the character and integrity of the narrator(s).

Among the Sahih collections of hadith, Bukhari's collection is considered the most authentic. Indeed, Bukhari's Sahih is considered the second most canonical work after the Qur'an. Thus, for most Muslims, any alleged saying of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) found in Bukhari is deemed authentic and therefore attributable to Muhammad (SAW). It is in Sahih Bukhari that one finds the alleged saying of Muhammad, (SAW) that "such people as ruled by a woman will never be successful (Bukhari Vol 9, pp.170-171). This is reported on the authority of Abu Bakra Nufay.

But the question still has to be asked: Did Muhammad really utter these words? Modern scholarship has exposed a great number of *ahadith* (plural of hadith) in Sahih Bukhari whose authenticity can no longer be guaranteed. Al-Daraqutni has specifically challenged the authenticity of seventy ahadith in Bukhari's collection (Khan, 2010, p.37). Mohammad Hashim Kamali (2005, p.75) contends that "hardly any area of Islamic learning, including the renowned histories by Ibn al-Athir, al-Tabari, al-

Mas'udi and works on theology and *kalam* as well as works in Arabic language and literature have escaped the cancerous spread of forgeries." Therefore, for *ulama* to base their exclusion of women from the sphere of leadership on account of this lone hadith from Abu Bakra Nufay begs the question.

This hadith that excludes women from leadership has only a sole reporter. In other words, no one else but Abu Bakra Nufay heard the prophet utter these words. Ahadith narrated by a single person are generally considered less authentic than those narrated by two or more people. Umar bin Al-Khattab, is reported to have rejected a *hadith* from Abu Musah Al-Ashari, until he had brought Said Al-Khudri as his witness (Khan, 2005, p.29). Secondly, Abu Bakra uttered this hadith at a time of great strife and turmoil, when people concocted all sorts of ahadith to justify their various positions in the turmoil that had engulfed the Muslim state (Kamali, 2005, p.28).

Abu Bakra uttered this hadith for the first time after the Battle of Camel when Ali b. Abu Talib and his forces had routed Aisha and her forces. Aisha and her collaborators, in preparation for the war, had gone to Basra to solicit the support of the inhabitants of that city against Ali b. Abu Talib. Both those who opposed Aisha and those who supported her had to justify their positions by grounding them in canon.

What better canon could there be than the Prophet himself? That day in the mosque in Basra a number of people rose up and spoke against the war. Fatima Mernissi (1991, p.57) states that, all those who opposed the war, including Abu Musah al-Ashari (the governor of Basra) opposed

the war on the ground that both the Qur'an and the prophet had urged Muslims to keep the peace and be keepers of one another.

Abu Bakra, at that time did not speak against the war. He did not support it either. However, after the war had ended in defeat for Aisha and her forces, Abu Bakra then found a reason for why he abstained from participating in the war in the first place. And this he did with the claim that he heard the prophet saying that "such people as ruled by a woman shall never be successful" (Mernissi, 1991, p.57). Secondly, Mernissi contends that Abu Bakra had a penchant for remembering opportune ahadith. According to her, it was Abu Bakra who remembered that the Prophet had said that his grandson Hassan would be a man of reconciliation (p.58). And he remembered this hadith after Hassan had been forced to give up the caliphate to Muawiyya to avert bloodshed. Again in this case, only Abu Bakra ever heard the Prophet utter these words.

Imam Malik is one of the famous collectors of hadith and his *Muwatta* is considered one of the leading works among important hadith collections, in some cases, placed above that of Bukhari in terms of canonical acceptability (Kamali, 2005, p.29). According to Imam Malik, he never accepted any hadith from a person who had ever been known to lie in his or her daily dealings with other people. Bukhari himself is reported to have rejected a hadith from a man because he met the man deceiving his horse by luring the horse with his two hands put together as if there was feed in it. Bukhari's argument was that if the man could be

deceptive even to animals, then he could not be trusted to be true to his words on the prophet.

It will therefore seem strange that the self-same Bukhari accepted to include in his Sahih this hadith from Abu Bakra on the incapability of women leading. This is because Abu Bakra was ever convicted of lying and bearing false witness during the reign of Umar bin Al-Khattab and was flogged (Mernissi, 1991, p.61).

The Era of Women's Restriction

Most of the restrictions that have been imposed on women regarding their participation in sacred and profane space came about during the caliphate of Umar bin Al-Khattab (Ahmed, p.60). In Islam, the caliph as representative of the Prophet had responsibility over all matters affecting the Muslim nation, be they political, juridical, military, theological or civil.

After the death of Muhammad in 632 C.E, the lot fell on his longtime aide and friend Abu-Bakr to be leader of the Muslim community. Unfortunately, the two years' reign of Abu-Bakr was spent in the struggle to keep the nascent Islamic state intact due to internal dissension.

The lot therefore fell on Umar who became the second caliph after Abu-Bakr to expand the frontiers of Islam, which he successfully did. Under him, Islam expanded to include Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Libya and into Asia Minor and Spain. Under Umar, the Islamic empire had become too vast to be administered by the simple Bedouin rules of brotherhood that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) had fashioned out under the so-called Madinan constitution. Umar therefore

had to re-order the whole Islamic society and review the old rules of engagement.

Umar is therefore credited with what Philip Hitti calls "the second theocracy of Islam" (Hitti, 1970, p.169). Umar carried out vast reforms in the administration of the new-look Islamic empire, which included reversing most of the ordinances that the Prophet put in place for administering the Islamic state. Umar decreed that no other religion could co-exist with Islam within the Peninsula in utter disregard for earlier stipulations by the Prophet (Hitti, p.169).

The way Umar went about re-ordering the society will be a classical example in the vindication of Parson's theory of "structural functionalism." Parson postulates that societies are stratified systems where human beings are positioned within a structure and with requirements for each position (Parson, 1964). This is exactly what Umar did. He structured the society into a functional hierarchy. At the head of this hierarchy were Arabian Muslims. Below the Arab Muslims were non-Arab Muslims. Underneath these two were the *dhimmis* (subject peoples of conquered territories). Dhimmis were not compelled to serve in the Muslim army but in lieu of that paid heavy fines in the form of taxes to the Muslim treasury (Hitti, p.170). These taxes were known as *jizya*. Women were bottom of the hierarchy.

In matters of religion, Umar made congregational, the supererogatory prayers of 10 *raka'ats* (units), called *tarawih*, which is said after the *Ishai* (night prayer) during the month of Ramadan. Umar also forbade women from going out unless they were accompanied by a male

mahram. He also appointed male a'ima for women and forbade women from reciting the Qur'an aloud during prayer, arguing that their voice is their *awra*.

The law on veiling was enforced more strictly as opposed to the Prophet's own liberal attitude towards veiling. Women's participation in sacred and profane space was thus constricted not necessarily as divine sanction, but as the male elite's way of ordering society and ensuring the ideal of masculine supremacy and of vindicating the position that "men have authority over women because Allah has made the one superior to the other…" (Q: 4:34) All of these then crystallised into canon after the evolution of Islamic jurisprudence and got consolidated in the four schools of Islamic law.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the issue of gender in Islam as it exists today. We have examined the major issues that constitute how gender is negotiated in Islam today both within sacred and profane space. We have also discussed how inculturation plays a part in ensuring that gender negotiation is not uniform across all Muslim societies. We have argued in chapter two, that the four schools of thought by which the Sunni world molds its theology arose largely as a result of inculturation. The practices of the various centers of Islamic civilisation like Egypt, Kufa, Basra, Makkah and Madina, were what crystallised into the Sunni schools of thought.

In the next chapter we shall examine the constructions of masculinity and feminity in Dagbon. This is to afford us the opportunity to

isolate elements of gender in Dagbon today, which are purely as a result of the influence of Islam from those that are a product of Dagbon culture. By and large, our conclusion is that, most of what is presented today as gender law in Islam, is a product of jurisprudence, which itself is influenced by cultural factors. The Qur'an and the standard behaviour and practice of the Prophet (Sunnah) show a much more egalitarian attitude than the chauvinistic and male dominated theology that is today presented as the standard theology of Islam.

CHAPTER THREE

'DO LOOW:' CONSTRUCTIONS OF MASCULINITY AND FEMINITY IN DAGBON

Introduction

This chapter discusses the construction of masculinity and feminity in Dagbon before the advent and influence of Islam. To be able to make a definitive conclusion about the extent of Islam's influence on gender relations in Dagomba life and thought, one ought to examine Dagomba cultural institutions before the advent of Islam. This will help us to understand how culture (in this case Dagbon culture) and religion (Islam) have combined to shape gender relations in Dagbon. By "before the advent and influence of Islam," we refer to the period from 1416 to 1700. The exact date for the founding of Dagbon is in dispute, but is generally believed to have been founded in the late 1300s. We choose 1416 because it was the beginning of the reign of Na Nyagse, who is believed to have consolidated the kingdom and allowed its institutions to flourish (Tamakloe 1931). Seven hundred is when Naa Zangina accepted Islam and began to incorporate its practices into Dagbon custom.

The way that we propose to do this is to examine the constructions of masculinity and feminity within the various institutions of the Dagomba; their social, political, economic and religious institutions. This is because it is within these institutions that the life and thought of the people is played out. And since gender is an everyday enactment, these

institutions give the clearest manifestation of what masculinity and feminity mean to the Dagomba people.

The Founding of Dagbon

The popular narrative about the founding of Dagbon is that it was founded by Sitobu, the second son of Naa Gbewaa, who is a descendant of the legendary Toha-Zie or Red Hunter, believed to have migrated from Tunga (supposedly east of Lake Chad) to Zamfara in Northern Nigeria, through Mali and then to Gurma in modern day Burkina Faso (Wilks, 1965; Staniland, 1975; Oppong, 1973). However, before Naa Gbewaa's descendants came to conquer and inhabit Dagbon, there were people living there. These were acephalous people, who were landowners or *Tendamba*. Some of these people included the Grumah, Vagla, Tampluma and Konkomba. The Konkomba in particular were called "Black Dagomba" (Maasole, 2006). This version of the movement and settlement of the Dagomba people tallies with Ibrahim Mahama's assertion that "the name Dagbamba which has been anglicised as Dagomba belongs to the commoners. The rulers adopted that name and established over them their sovereignty" (Mahama, 2004, p.1). The invading army of Naa Gbewaa's descendants conquered these people and imposed their rule over them. According to Ibrahim Mahama, before Naa Gbewaa's descendants conquered and inhabited the area, the indigenous people were matrilineal. The patrilineal system of inheritance that is practiced today was therefore the imposition of the descendants of Naa Gbewaa.

Through intermarriage the process of assimilation has become complete except for the political and social hierarchies, which will be

explained in the course of this chapter. The general postulation is that Islam was introduced in Dagbon around 1700 with the conversion of the Chief of Dagbon, Naa Zangina (Levtzion, 1968). There is however another view that states that, the Dagomba people came into their present location from Arabia and therefore must have brought Islam with them (Tamakloe, 1931, pp.1-2).

This account is however, of dubious because the original settlers of the Dagomba area did not have all the elements of the Islamic faith which today form part of Dagomba tradition and custom. Evidence suggests that these Islamic elements got infused into Dagomba culture and custom after the conversion of Naa Zangina to Islam. Besides, the original settlers of the area were matrilineal before the invading force of Naa Gbewaa's descendants imposed their patrilineal system of inheritance on them. Mahama however, agrees with Tamakloe because in his view, the existence of Arabic related words in Dagbani can only suggest that the Dagomba indeed descended from Ad in Saudi Arabia. He provides a table of about 23 words, which have a similarity with Arabic words. Our contention however is that 23 words are not enough sample size to conclude that indeed the Dagombas descended from Ad. Indeed, evidence suggests that most of the languages of people whose dominant religion is Islam also have such words in their language. For example, the Hausa influence on Islamic spirituality in Ghana is well documented. And most of the words that Mahama lists also occur in the same form in Hausa as they occur in Dagbani. We can therefore only infer that the infusion of these words into Dagbani vocabulary, were as a result of Hausa influences

rather than because the Dagombas descended from Ad. Furthermore, as has been argued above, the Konkomba who inhabited the Dagbon area before the arrival of the descendants of Naa Gbewaa were called "Black Dagomba." This implies that Naa Gbewaa's descendants did not introduce the word Dagbon into the area.

Masculinity and Feminity

Humans are either male or female. Being male or female is therefore essentially a biological category. Societies therefore expect that people who are born either male or female behave in ways that societies perceive to be in consonance with their biological make-up. Societies therefore have markers of what can be considered masculine and what can be considered feminine. And these markers are constructed in the course of the development of the society's institutions. Kimmel (1994, p.120), views masculinity "as a constantly changing collection of meanings that we construct through our relationships with ourselves, with each other and with our world." For example, Kimmel argues that in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, two models of masculinity emerged; man as the genteel patriarch, who derived his identity from landownership, "supervising his estate, he was refined, elegant and given to casual seriousness. He was a doting and devoted father, who spent much of his time supervising the estate and with his family" (p.123). Later on, through the accumulation of wealth, power and status, manhood became akin to the absentee man who is seldom at home, and whose business is the accumulation of wealth for the sake of the family's sustenance.

Feminity was therefore constructed as that which is directly opposite to masculinity. If masculinity is associated with strength and power, feminity becomes associated with weakness and powerlessness. Feminity and masculinity are therefore always constructed as the opposites of each other. According to Sean Nixon (1996, p.301), feminity and masculinity "are the products of the cultural meanings attached to certain attributes, capacities, dispositions and forms of conduct at given historical moments."

An examination of the constructions of masculinity and feminity in Dagbon before the advent and influence of Islam, will at the end of this work, help us to appreciate how masculinity and feminity have evolved over the many centuries that the cultural institutions of Dagbon have evolved, especially in tandem with Islam.

Social Life of the Dagomba

By social life of a people is meant the "enduring, culturally patterned relations between individuals or groups" (Winthrop, 1991, p.261). Social life stresses individuals in their relations with one another. Winthrop (p.261) states that social life "yields several broad topics: forms of relationship (such as marriage and exchange); forms of differentiation (hierarchy, authority, status); characteristics of groups (principles of recruitment and spheres of action); and the expression of these social patterns through symbolism, ritual and myth." A.R Radcliffe Brown (1952, p.11), on the other hand, defines social life as "an arrangement of persons in institutionally controlled or defined relationships." For Radcliffe Brown (p.191), social life entails not only a relationship between

groups, but also "all social relations of person to person….as between a father and son, or a mother's brother and sister's son." Indeed, this thesis highlights these relationships as they pertained in Dagomba society before the penetration of Islam, in order to show how masculinity and feminity were constructed in these relationships. Radcliffe Brown (p.191), avers further that social life has to do with "the differentiation of individuals and of classes by their social role", for example the distinct positions "of men and women, of chiefs and commoners." Indeed, as will be seen in the course of this work, the social roles that men and women played in Dagbon society determined what was masculine and what was feminine.

Family and Kinship

The basic unit of any social organisation is the family or household. In Dagbon, the household is called *yili*. Yili literally translates to house. However, the Dagomba sense of house is markedly different from our ordinary understanding of house. The Dagomba yili must of necessity comprise many people, who are bound or related to a common ancestor. Yili in Dagbon therefore does not refer to the physical structure, but to the inhabitants. In Dagbon, a household of just a husband, wife and perhaps children (in other words, a nuclear family) is not considered a *yili* in the proper sense of its designation. The head of the household must be a male who is called yili *yidana*. Yidana is literally translated as husband or head of family or clan. Here, the very definition of what constitutes a household in Dagbon, gives us a marker of what masculinity entails in Dagbon social life.

First of all, a man is the head of a household. Leadership of the household is the exclusive preserve of men. Secondly, it explains the importance of marriage in Dagbon and the status that it confers on those who are engaged in the institution of marriage. A man who is not married cannot serve as the head of his family, nor does he qualify to ascend the skin of his fathers if he belongs to a royal family. The yili yidana exercises authority on behalf of the ancestors and is responsible for maintaining the relationship between the living and dead members of the *yili*. Before the inception of Islam therefore, the man in Dagbon was the head of the household, a phenomenon which got entrenched with the coming of Islam into Dagbon. "…And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree over them…" (Q: 2:228).

By *yili*, the Dagomba mean an aggregation of round mud structures, which serve as rooms for the inhabitants of the household. A typical Dagomba *yili* could range from as few as five to fifteen round huts with a large compound called *dundong*. This large compound is "often the scene of animated activities such as weaving, mat-making, rope-twining, dancing, playing…" (Oppong, 1973, p.29). The entrance to a household has an unusually large hut, perhaps twice or three times as large as the other huts that serve as rooms for the inhabitants of the house. This large hut, which also serves as the entrance to a *yili* is called *Zong*. The Zong is used to receive visitors and also serves as the resting place for the yili yidana. For chiefs, they use the Zong for settling disputes among their subjects. In houses where there are many children and not enough rooms,

some of the children sleep in the *Zong*. According to Abdulai, "some category of visitors especially those on long journeys and not sufficiently close to the family of the landlord also sleep in the Zong" (Abdulai, 1997, p.46). In the pre-colonial days, and after the introduction of Islam, these visitors included itinerant Mualimun who instructed the children of the household in Islamic education for a few days or weeks and left.

The men's quarter is at the front of the compound, while the women's quarter is at the back. This is part of the construction of masculinity. Men are the ones who can fight in case the family is attacked. Therefore, they should live in the front part of the house as "protectors and maintainers" of women. Ifi Amadiume in her seminal work, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* talks about the same arrangement in a typical Ibo compound. She states:

> The women's section was, on the other hand, physically and ideologically linked to the backyard. The expression for going to the toilet was 'going to the back of the house.' Defecation was done in the gardens or bushes at the back of the compound and everyday rubbish was also thrown there. These were the gardens where women spent much of their time. Females were therefore physically and ideologically closer to areas associated with mess and dirt. Women's daily chores in their compound units were also quite messy (1987, p.92).

Dagbon already had a culture of male-female segregation before the introduction of Islam. Islam encourages a strict segregation of men and women. The living quarters of women in an Islamic household is called *harim*, from the word, *haram*, which means forbidden. The living quarters of women is forbidden, especially for males who are not members of the household.

The woman whose turn it is to sleep with her husband will go to her husband's room at night. Which woman's turn it is to sleep with her husband is determined by whose turn it is to cook for the husband or household. The number of days that a woman sleeps with and cooks for the husband varies from *yili* to *yili*. Generally, it ranges from three days to five days. This depends on the number of wives that the husband has. In Dagbon, polygyny is the norm, while monogamy is the exception. A man with one wife is considered as good as a bachelor. This is amplified by the saying that "*paga yino lan nyela dakoli*" meaning "a man with one wife is a bachelor." This is also an important marker of masculinity. A man is he who has multiple wives. A man with one wife is considered a weakling. Having more than one wife is considered a marker of power and strength.

Owusu and Bosiwah (2015), paint a similar picture of Ashanti life and thought. They illustrate this with the election in 1931 of Barima Kwame Kyeretwie as Asantehene with the stool name, Agyeman Prempeh II. They relate that some of the king makers argued against Kwame Kyeretwie because, in their view he had a belligerent disposition (*patapaa* in *Twi*). They also said that he was a womaniser. Curiously, these are the very attributes that got him elected by a majority of the kingmakers. To the

issue that he was patapaa or belligerent, the majority retorted that *berma ena odi akakabensem*, meaning it is a man who shows a warlike disposition. And to the accusation that he was a womaniser, the majority retorted that *barima na osi obaa pe*, meaning it is a man who courts a woman. Being warlike and having the taste for women are markers of masculinity in Dagbon and as Owusu and Bosiwah argue, in Ashanti.

Only women who are married and have children are entitled to their own rooms. Boys who are unmarried sleep in twos or threes. Otherwise girls are attached to the hut or room of a senior woman as co-wife, daughter, grandchild, younger sister, brother's daughter or child. Often times, girls are never attached to their biological mothers. Rather they live in the rooms of their stepmothers or aunties. The assumption is that mothers are unable to train their own children well, because they are hesitant to apply the rod where it should be applied.

The senior most wife is called *walgira* or *paanik* if she is the wife of a chief. She is virtually the protocol officer for all unofficial visitors to the household, especially those who will stay for a few days or weeks. This role of receiving visitors is reserved for women because the courtesies that would normally be extended to visitors are considered feminine roles; cooking for visitors, fetching water for them to bath and getting their dirty clothes washed. Feminity therefore entails the ability to play the perfect host. The *Wulana* (linguist) receives official visitors if the *yili yidana* is a chief before they are handed to the *paani*. She is also responsible for sharing foodstuffs to the other women and members of the household.

As has already been stated, Dagomba kinship is defined by a great number of people who trace their descent through males and females to a common grandparent or great grandparent. This unit of kinship is called *Dang*. The *Dang* is normally so large that it can transcend several villages and towns. Members of the same kin have a common head called *Do'ari kpema*. The Do'ari kpema exercises authority in respect of "ownership of property such as land, trees, cows, shrines and heirlooms held in common; possession of an inheritable trait, such as the power to divine or drum and in some cases of distinguishing facial marks" (Oppong, pp.31-32). Where a woman is by age the eldest in a *Dang*, she cannot act as *Do'ari kpema*. Rather, the next male to her in age becomes the Do'ari kpema. Since a *Dang* can transcend villages and towns, the *Dang* is represented in different places by the heads of those households as *yili yidan nima*. Thus some men are both yili yidana and Do'ari kpema at the same time. The responsibility of a Do'ari kpema includes "the supervision of family matters such as the arrangement and sanctioning of marriages, the sharing of inheritances between the heirs together with the eldest son of the deceased and in some cases the naming, training and fostering of junior members' children" (Oppong, pp.32-33).

Children generally belong to their father's kin. Dagbon is therefore a patrilineal society. Divorced women shall not take children away but must leave them with their father. Children who are less than two years old or are still being breast-fed, may be taken away by their mothers but must be returned to their fathers after two years. A child must therefore be born in his or her father's compound or the compound of a senior male relative

of the father. Dagombas have a strong belief in reincarnation and often, diviners are consulted to determine which paternal ancestor it is that has come back. The child is then named after this ancestor. After the birth of a child, the mother takes the child to go and live with her parents for up to two years. This is a sort of family planning measure to ensure that the woman does not get pregnant again before the child is two years old. This practice, even though it still exists, is not as widespread as it used to be. Many women who were interviewed argued that a long absence from the sight of their husbands could lead them losing the attention that they would normally get from their husbands. Some women also view it as an ancient practice, which as a result of modernity, they are not compelled to observe. The practice of polygyny is also responsible for this practice because in the absence of a wife who is nursing a baby, there are other wives who will still keep the household running.

The first-born son of a family holds great respect and privilege than the other siblings. Commenting on the position and status of a first-born son in Dagbon, Oppong (1973, p.41) states:

> A man's eldest son, *bikpema*, is distinguished by greater privileges, duties and restrictions than his other children. This is especially marked in chiefs' families in which the eldest child is likely to succeed his father. His privileges include his right to distribute as *Zuu*, his dead father's property, under the supervision of the family head, *Do'ari kpema*, and to inherit himself, his father's horse,

> drum, fiddle and so on should he possess such, as well as the trees and a greater proportion of the farm land than his younger brothers. In the case of a chief's eldest son, he acts as regent, *gbanglana*, after his father dies, till a successor is chosen and in the case of succession to the office the older sons have a strong claim than the younger ones

Respect and privilege is also accorded the first female of a family. She is called *Pakpang*. The pakpang has a special role to play at her parents' funeral. According to Fortes (1949, p.231) "cloth worn by the deceased is put upon her head three times in a calabash and then she leads her younger brothers and sisters round the house pulling grass from each roof each time they pass the hall. She also has considerable influence in the distribution of her mother's property."

Social Classes/Stratification

Dagbon society was organised according to classes. Mahama (2004, p.17) lists these classes as "*Nabihi* (persons of royal blood), *Kpamba* (the nobility), *Worizohanima* (the Equestrian Order), the elders who were formerly eunuchs, *Namogola*, *Kambonsi* or *Sapashinnima* (the Warrior Class), *Baansi* (the Eulogists and Drummers), *Wonzama* (the Barbers), *Tindamb*a (the Traditional priestly class*)*, *Tarimba* or *Dagbandabba* (the Commoners), *Nakohinema* (the Butchers) and *Machelnima* (the Blacksmiths"). Today however, through the influence of Islam, another class has been added to the hierarchy called *Afanema* (the Islamic/Muslim priestly class). Dagombas are born into these social

classes. They don't choose to belong to them. Within every social class is a hierarchy and one may rise to the very pinnacle of the social class into which one is born.

Nabihi refer to those in the royal class. These are children of chiefs. Children here refer to sons, daughters, grandsons and granddaughters of chiefs. Sons of chiefs and princes are referred to as *Doobihi* while sons of princesses are referred to as *Pa'abihi*. This is also a marker of masculinity and feminity. To be called a *pa'abiya* (singular of pa'abihi) immediately takes away certain privileges from the person who is so called. In other words, princes and princesses do not rank the same within the royal class. By virtue of being male, princes, hold a certain power and prestige which princesses do not hold. The Ya-Na is the head of the Nabihi class. Even though women cannot ascend to any nam or chiefship, some chiefships are reserved for sons of princesses. We shall elaborate on this when we discuss the political organisation of Dagbon.

The *Kpamba* class is a special class of Dagbon citizens who wield special privileges in the kingdom and as such are highly respected by all and sundry including the Ya-Na. Kpamba is the plural of the word *kpema*, which means elder. So literally, the Kpamba class of citizens is made up of elders of the state. The Kpamba class includes the royals of Kuga, Gushiegu, Yogu, Bagale, Depale and Gaa. Citizens who belong to the royal skins of Yelzole, Sunson, Nanton, Gulkpegu, Diyali and Gundowogiri are also in the Kpamba class. These are citizens who by some pronouncement or act of commission or omission by their ancestors, gave up their right to the chiefship of Yendi. Mahama (2004) states that it

was the Yelzolelana, Gurumanchegu and Sunson Na Timani who by their oaths denounced the claim of their skins to the Yendi skin when they lost their contest for the Yendi skin to their brother Naa Zangina. These chiefships are reserved exclusively for males. Kpema literally means elder or upper class. So the fact that women cannot belong to this class shows that men are elders by nature or belong to the upper class, while women belong to the underclass. Upper class status is therefore a marker of masculinity, while under class status is a marker of feminity.

The Worizohanima class was created for captains of the Dagbon army who showed singular bravery and leadership. The chiefships for this class of citizens are those of Zandua, Tolon, Kumbungu, Gbulon, Lungbunga, Kasuliyili, Singa, Dalung, Langa, Mogalaa, Langogo, Gbirimani, Woribogu, Kpendua, Nyankpala, Salunkpon, Worikpomo, Wali, Bomahigu, Tali, Gabga, Kinkansi, Yimahigu, Worizehi, Malizeri, Botinli and Guamchere. Occupiers of this class are also exclusively male, which also signifies that bravery and leadership are masculine traits.

The *Kambons*i class is the warrior class of Dagbon. *Kambonsi* in Dagbani literally means, Akans. *Kambonga* is Akan. History has it that the Asantes bequeathed to the Dagombas their military establishment, hence the adoption of that name. Indeed, all titles of the warrior class are either Akan names or words with Akan meaning. We shall discuss the details of this class in our discussion of the political organisation of Dagbon, since the military establishment is an important part of any political establishment. Indeed, the political head of any society is also the supreme commander of its armed forces.

The *Baansi* class refers to the class of tom-tom beaters, poets, trumpeters and violinists. A son of Ya-Na Nyagsi founded or started this class. He was called Bizung. He is said to have lost his mother at an early age and thus lost out on some of the privileges and even rights that were due to the son of a Ya-Na. Because his mother was not in the house, the other women would deny him food. He therefore adopted a method of using a small stick to beat a broken calabash anytime food was placed in front of his father in order to attract the attention of his father who would then call him to share in his meal. In time, he made a drum for that purpose. According to Mahama, "when he was old enough and could fend for himself, he looked upon the drum as the instrument that saved him from the pangs of hunger. He improved upon it and decided to use it to earn a living. The way he did it this time was not just to make noise to attract the attention of the Ya-Na, but sang his praises. This time, he got not just food, but money from both his father and people who were with him" (Mahama, 2004, p.35). When Bizung married and begot children, he taught them to drum and sing. After his death, tom-tom beating became not just a profession, but a cultural heritage of his descendants. Today, the tom-tom beaters all trace their ancestry to Bizung.

There are three classes of people in Dagbon society who are an important part of the Dagomba estate. These are *nakohinima* (butchers), *machelnima* (blacksmiths) and *wonzamnima* (barbers). In Dagbon, it is not just any citizen of a town, who can learn these trades. These trades are reserved for people whose ancestors it is believed begun the trade in days

of yore. In every Dagomba town or village, there are families who are known for engaging in these trades.

Tindamba or traditional priests are the oldest class of citizens of Dagbon. Indeed, the concept of chieftaincy was unknown to the original settlers of Dagbon before the descendants of Na Gbewaa invaded the area and imposed their rule on the people. Succession to the office of the tindana is hereditary. It is through matrilineal descent rather than through patrilineal descent. This is because ascendancy to chiefship is patrilineal and so this allows the matrilineal line to also be accorded some social status. There are therefore both men and women in the spiritual administration of Dagbon and their authority as representatives of the gods is equal. Some traditional priests even play a role in the enskinment of the Ya-Na. Tindana literally means landowner. The reason a Tindana can be a woman is because the earth is given a feminine quality in Dagbon because it is the source of birth and re-birth. Owusu and Bosiwah (2015) also discuss the concept of Asase Yaa because of its quality of birth and re-birth. The *Tindamba* may have lost their land to the *Nabihi*, but have continued to maintain their dignity and respect as caretakers of the land and spiritual guardians of the Dagbon state. Today however, because of the increased influence of Afanema, the role of the Tindamba is not as prominent as before. The class of Afanema has become an important part of the Dagbon social class. Ever since the conversion of Naa Zangina to Islam in 1700, Islam has become an integral part of the Dagbon social system. Those who are versed in Islamic knowledge are accorded a special status in Dagbon society and preside over all ceremonies from birth to

death, a role which before the inception of Islam was played by the *tindana*.

The last in this social stratification of Dagbon is the *Tarimba*. *Tarimba* literally means commoners. They are also called *Dagbandabba*, which literally means Dagomba men, even though it is a term that encompasses both males and females. This refers to the mass of Dagomba citizens who cannot ascend to any chiefship or do not belong to specialised families such as those that have been discussed in this chapter.

Rites of Passage

Birth Rites

Traditional Dagomba perform elaborate religious rites on the occasion of a woman's first pregnancy. This stage is considered an anxious moment in the life of the woman because it marks a transition or mode of existence from one stage to the other. It is marked by a rite called *pirigibu*, which literally means undressing. This ceremony is the official declaration of a pregnancy. Before the performance of this ceremony no one is permitted to refer to the pregnancy of a woman.

In the third or fourth month of a woman's pregnancy, her husband informs his in-laws of their daughter's conception and a date is fixed for the ceremony. A sister of the husband is normally invited to officiate in the ceremony. In Dagbon, most customs reinforce the dominant position of men. Even ceremonies that are to be performed by women, must be performed by women who descend through a male line rather than a female line. This is the reason why it is the husband's sister who officiates

in the ceremony rather than the pregnant woman's sister. Where there is no sister, any female relative of the husband is eligible to perform the ceremony. She comes to the house with a calabash in her hand and opens the ceremony in the pregnant woman's room by giving her a knock on the head or shoulder saying "you were a child, but now you are an adult" (Oppong, p. 34). This knock is supposed to transform her from a girl into a brave woman ready to bear all the impending pains of puerperium (the period between childbirth and the return of the womb to its normal state). The cloth that is tied to her waist is then untied and she stands naked with the sign of pregnancy visible as a result of the protrusion of the belly. A special meal is then prepared with chicken presented by the officiating woman or under her supervision.

To round off the ceremony, a soothsayer is contacted to determine the ancestor after whom the child should be named when it is born and usually a fowl is slaughtered in memory of such an ancestor. From then on, the woman can be referred to as *pagapuulana* or pregnant woman.

At child birth there is always a traditional birth attendant, usually an elderly woman who is experienced in assisting young women to accomplish a safe delivery. The umbilical cord is cut and buried within the house or just outside it. The disposal of this cord shows that the child has died from the world of pregnancy and is alive in the new state of birth. Meanwhile the safe delivery of the child is heralded by loud ululation by the women present during the process. When it is a baby boy, the women ululate three times and if it is a girl, four times. It appears that there is no special reason for assigning the numbers three to boys and four to girls.

None of the people interviewed could say why, except to say that "it has always been the practice of our ancestors."

An elderly woman is usually assigned the responsibility of bathing the child twice a day preferably with warm water. Males are usually called *Sandow* and females *Sanpaga* until the seventh day when the naming ceremony is held and the child is given a name. These mean "male stranger" and "female stranger" respectively. On the seventh day, the child is named. A sheep is slaughtered and there is general merry making and feasting. The child's hair is shaved. Regarding birth rites, except for the naming of the child on the seventh day, all the other practices, rites and procedure that herald a woman's pregnancy until delivery no longer exist. In this area of Dagomba life therefore, the influence of Islam is total. The seventh day naming ceremony has survived, perhaps because that is the practice in Islam too. The influence of Islam in this sphere of Dagomba life is also seen in the giving of names. Nearly every Dagomba has an Islamic/Arab name irrespective of whether they are practicing Muslims or not. Even with the phenomenon of cultural revivalism in recent times, children are given both indigenous Dagomba names and Islamic/Arab names.

Marriage

Marriage as an institution has both social and religious dimensions. These are especially emphasised in Dagbon society. Marriage is not considered as just two people coming together as husband and wife. On the contrary, it is a union between two families rather than individuals, and more so an occasion for the coming together of the departed, the living and

the yet to be born. Therefore, to a large extent marriage is regarded as an important state of the life of man.

Any young man or woman who attains the age of maturity (twenty years for men and sixteen years for the women) and who does not marry is looked upon with some sort of contempt. By failing to get married, the individual is thwarting the growth of the society and by so doing prevents the incarnation of the ancestor. Since ancestral veneration forms the dominant theme of the traditional religion of the Dagomba, it will be considered an insult to the ancestors for one to completely stay away from marriage. For example, some departed great grandfather or grandmother might wish to return into the world through a particular marriage but if that marriage is not made possible, this ancestor cannot return and so his or her displeasure is incurred.

According to a popular belief, the ancestor can cause havoc not only to this individual but to his family and clan as well. That is why the institution of marriage in Dagbon is held high and that is also why parents do not hesitate to betroth their female children to men.

Marriage is what confers maturity on the Dagomba. It is the duty of parents to find spouses for their children. Female children are betrothed at birth. Parents who are interested in asking for the child's hand for their son, send gifts to the mother. From then on, the prospective in-laws will continue to send foodstuffs and firewood and farm for their prospective in-laws.

When the girl has attained marriageable age, the boy arranges one night to "kidnap" her and take her to his home. Thus when one night the

girl is not found, her parents understand that this may be the reason. The next day the boy's parents send gifts of money and cola nut called *sandaani* or apology to the girl's parents. It must however be noted that before marriage arrangements begin, both parents consult soothsayers to find out whether such a marriage will be a successful one or not and whether there will be benefits in the form of children. This act of kidnapping itself is part of the affirmation of the dominance of masculinity as opposed to weakness of feminity. Kidnapping is an act that is fraught with dangers; dangers of being caught or of being resisted by the one to be kidnapped. It could go wrong. Therefore the successful execution of such an adventure signifies that the man is a real man- has the capacity to face danger and conquer it.

When the young man is ready to get married, he sends a pot of pito, an empty gourd and a fowl to the girl's parents. Pito is a local alcoholic beverage made from fermented sorghum dough. This ceremony is a clear indicator that the woman will leave the family soon. Then the young man buys a *mukuru,* which is a kind of skirt made from smock material, which the woman wears when she is taken to the man's home.

As has been stated in this chapter, polygyny is the norm in Dagbon society. A man with one wife is considered a bachelor because after his wife delivers, she is required to go and stay with her parents for a period spanning about two years. Thus for the period that one's wife is away, one virtually reverts to bachelorhood and that is why Dagombas consider a person with one wife to be as good as a bachelor. More importantly, the more children one has, the wealthier one is believed to be.

Again, regarding the institution of marriage, only the practice of consulting soothsayers or diviners to determine the suitability of spouses still persists even against the protestations of the Ulama, especially those who belong to the Wahabiyya denomination of Islam. All the other practices associated with marriage have been eroded with the influence of Islam. Even though the permissibility or non-permissibility of divination continues to be a huge debate in Islam, especially between the Tijaniyya and Ahl-Sunna (Wahabiyya) groups, the majority of Dagombas still use divination as a means of probing the divine will, especially when it comes to choosing a spouse.

Death

Even though Dagombas accept death as a fact of life, yet they must consult a soothsayer to find out the cause of a person's death. People are then sent to relatives far and near to inform them of the death of a relation. When they announce the death of a person they say that 'we have been sent to come and tell you that so-so-and-so is absent." Women and men sit differently in the funeral home. The point has already been made, that, the segregation of males and females is still the norm, especially in public gatherings.

The *do'ari kpema* with the help of other relations do the bathing. Men bathe men and women bathe women. This also is still the case. In Dagbon, there are special people responsible for burying the dead called *kasigriba*. Before the introduction of weaving, teak leaves were used in burying the dead. It was called *kornamgbandi*. Today the *kornamgbandi* has been replaced by white calico as a result of the influence of Islam.

There is another public assembly on the third day after the death of the person. This day is called *boali logbu. Boali logbu* ends the period of mourning. Today, apart from the third day prayer service, the influence of Islam has added a seventh and fortieth day prayer services as well. Today, the *Afa* presides over all rites of passage including death ceremonies. An important point that has to be made regarding the construction of masculinity and feminity in Dagbon with regard to death ceremonies is the fact that women do not visit the cemeteries. Women are considered weak-hearted people who cannot stand the sorrow associated with losing loved ones. Their weeping and wailing according to Dagomba belief also disturbs the serenity and peace of the dead.

Festivals

Bugum

The *Bugum* festival was celebrated in Dagbon before the advent of Islam. Bugum means fire. The Bugum festival is otherwise known as the fire festival. It is celebrated at the beginning of every lunar year. The first month of the year for Dagombas is called Bugum. This festival is celebrated at night. Young and old, man and woman, boy and girl, all make preparations for the festival by gathering dry stalks. These stalks are put together and tied by a rope or twine. When night falls, all gather in front of the house of the local chief with their bound stalks. The chief then comes out to address them, wishing them a happy celebration. The stalks are then lit and the people, in a long procession, begin their march through

the town to the outskirts of the town. At the outskirts, the stalks with the fire still burning are thrown unto a tree designated for the purpose.

This festival is celebrated to commemorate the finding of a Dagomba king's son who went missing for several days. The search party that found the king's son, saw him sitting under a tree. They therefore torched the tree for habouring the king's son. During the Bugum festival, all idols, shrines and gods are cleansed. During this festival, the Dagomba make new resolutions and appeal to the ancestors to guard and guide them throughout the New Year. They cut bits and pieces of cooked food and place them on their *gooni* (walls). These pieces of food belong to the ancestors and they are supposed to come round and eat them. At least that was the narrative about the Bugum festival before the introduction of Islam.

As a result of the introduction of Islam, another narrative has ensued. It is said that the festival is celebrated to commemorate the day Noah's (Nuhu) ark hit dry land after the floods had subsided. It is related that after the ark had hit dry land, the place was so dark that the people had to light torches to find their way out of the dark. Besides, when the marchers have returned from torching the tree to the chief's house, a concoction of washed Qur'anic verses is sprinkled on them. Some of them bring along leaves from the tree that was torched, and these are dipped in the Qur'anic concoction and they go home to boil these leaves and bath before retiring to bed. It is believed that the Qur'anic verses contain *Baraka* (blessings). Unlike other ceremonies where the segregation of sexes is observed, in the case of the Bugum festival, no such segregation is

observed or enforced. The situation is akin to the Islamic situation, where there is emphasis on a strict segregation of sexes, except during the hajj rites when men and women mix freely, including even in the observance of the ritual prayer.

Damba

The *Damba* festival is celebrated in the third month of the lunar calendar. It is celebrated as a festival of thanks giving for asking the ancestors and the gods for a prosperous new year. There are two types of Damba. The first, which starts on the tenth day of the month, is known as *Somo Damba*. The second, which starts on the seventeenth of the same month is known as *Naa Damba.* The Somo Damba involves drumming and dancing at nights throughout the week but chiefs do not participate fully in it. The Naa Damba on the other hand is characterised by great pageantry in which colour and melody are displayed at their best, and it is during this celebration that chiefs take an active part.

Today, the Damba is supposedly celebrated to commemorate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The month in which Damba is celebrated coincides with Rabi-ul-Awwal on the Islamic lunar calendar, which incidentally is the birth month of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Damba is celebrated on two different days: the 12th and 19th of Rabi-ul-Awwal. The 12th is the day on which the Prophet was born and the 19th corresponds to the day on which he was named. The celebration on the 12th is known as Somo Damba (Damba for the masses) and the celebration of the 19th as Naa Damba (Chief's Damba).

In the celebration itself, two major events are observed; the ceremony of rice picking and the dancing around the Damba cow. At the ceremony of rice picking, rice is poured on a piece of cloth. Afanema then sit in a circle around the rice. As they pick the rice grain by grain, they sing praises to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) asking for God's blessings for him. They also ask the Prophet to intercede with God on behalf of the people of Dagbon. The significance of this rice picking is that, the rice actually represents all grains. Therefore, it is a way of thanking God for the year's harvest of grains: rice, maize and millet. As this is being done, the chiefs also form another circle around the Afanema and look on as the Afanema do the picking. Both the Afanema and the traditional chiefs of the Dagomba people do the dancing around the Damba cow. As they go round the cow, the Afanema sing the praises of the Prophet. The cow is an important marker of wealth in Dagbon and therefore, for most Dagomba rituals, the cow is used as the symbol.

An interviewee told me that originally, Damba was celebrated on the 2nd and 19th Rabi-ul-Awwal. According to him, it was after the infusion of Islam with Dagbon culture, that the 12th was chosen to replace the 2nd, in order to let it coincide with the birthday of the Prophet. The ceremonies of rice picking and the dancing around the cow were all originally part of the Damba celebration, but the part about the involvement of Afanema was added after the introduction of Islam into Dagbon. Just like the Bugum festival, this is also a festival where the segregation of sexes is not enforced. Women are responsible for the cooking and brewing of alcoholic

beverages with which attendees to the festival make merry. Women also join in the street festivals and carnivals.

Political Organisation

The anthropologist, Elman Service (1962) posited that there are four levels or types of political organisation: band, tribe, chiefdom and state. According to him, bands are small kin-based groups (all members of the group are related to each other by kinship or marriage ties). This type of political organisation is found mostly among foragers. Tribes, on the other hand, are associated with non-intensive food production (horticulture and pastoralism). They have villages and or descent groups, but they lack a formal government and social classes. In a tribe, there is no means of enforcing political decisions. The chiefdom according to Elman is a form of socio-political organisation that is intermediate between the tribe and the state. In chiefdoms, social relations are mainly based on kinship, marriage, descent, age, generation and gender. He argues that although chiefdoms are kin based, they feature differential access to resources (some people have more wealth, prestige and power than others do) and a permanent political structure. The state is a form of socio-political organisation based on a formal government structure and socio-economic stratification.

Many anthropologists have criticised Elman's typology as being too simple and that it condenses the myriads of complex political systems into just four categories. Nonetheless, we find his categorisation useful in delineating the type of political organisation that the Dagomba people have. The Dagbon kingdom is a chiefdom with the Ya-Naa at the apex.

The Ya-Naa is always a descendant of Naa Gbewaa, the progenitor of the Dagomba chiefdom. Presently, Dagbon is the largest of the political chiefdoms of northern Ghana, both in terms of population and land size. The Ya-Naa is called '*Gbu'nli*' (Lion) by the Dagomba people. Indeed, the symbol of the Dagbon kingdom is a lion. He is also referred to as '*tihi ni mori lana*' (owner of trees and grass). These praise names suggest the enormous power that the Ya-Naa wields. The capital of Dagbon is Yendi. The original capital of Dagbon was near Diyali, a place now called '*Yani Dabari'* meaning ruins of Yendi, signifying the fact that it has been abandoned. There are conflicting accounts of the movement of the Dagomba capital from *Yani Dabari*, near Diyali to present day Yendi. The original capital is said to have been abandoned after the defeat of the Dagomba by the Asante under the rule of Na Gariba.

Staniland (1975, p.5) however, states that "for Dagomba, an important consequence was the movement of the capital eastwards to Yendi (originally a Konkomba town called Chare). The movement seems to have taken place under Na Luro, the twelfth Ya Naa, though the oral (drum) history of Dagomba attributes it to his successor, Tutugri."

There are three important towns after Yendi. They are Mion, Savelugu and Karaga. After the death of a Ya Naa, his successor is usually chosen from any of these towns. Thus the chiefs of these towns by virtue of their chiefship become potential Ya Naa. Just like any modern state, the Dagomba chiefdom has an executive, legislature and judiciary. The Ya Naa heads all three organs of state even though their compositions are different. According to Mahama (2004), the executive is made up of the

paramount chiefs of Karaga, Savelugu, Mion, Korli, Demon, Chereponi, Gushie, Sunson, Yelzole, Nanton, Gulkpe, Tolon and Kumbungu. It also includes some elders of the Ya Naa such as Kuga Naa, Kpati Naa, Balo Naa, Kum Lana, Gagbindana, Malle, Bunga, Kpahagu and Gullana. The executive meets to consider matters affecting the state. In the past this included the declaration of war and the changing of a custom or tradition.

The legislature is made up of the divisional chiefs of Dagbon who are responsible for making the laws for the governing of the state. These divisional chiefs are Gushie Naa, Yelzole-Lana, Nanton Naa, Gulkpe Naa, Sunson Naa, Tolon Naa, Kumbung Naa, Karaga Naa, Savelugu Naa, Mion-Lana, Demon Naa and the chief of Chereponi. It was this legislative body that met in Yendi from the 21st to the 29th of November 1930, to draw up what is called the Constitution of the State of Dagbon, which is the constitution that continues to guide the governing of the Dagbon state (at least in theory). This is because over the years, major provisions of that constitution have been violated to the peril of the Dagbon state. For example, article 13 of the 1930 constitution states that "the holder of a chieftainship cannot be deprived of his office except by death." In 1972, Ya Naa Mahamadu Abdulai was forcibly removed as Ya Naa by the Acheampong government with the active instigation and support of the Andani family. This gross violation of the Dagbon constitution has set Dagbon on edge to this day.

Again, the Dagbon constitution states clearly how a Ya Naa should be selected and from which pool of candidates.

> The paramount chief of Yendi i.e Dagbon, is chosen from the holder of the chieftainship of Karaga, Mion, Savelugu… The Gushie Naa, Kuga Naa, the Tuguri Nam and the Gomli form the committee of selection. All these candidates present themselves for selection and recourse is made to the spirits of the dead chiefs, the cult of whom is controlled by the Gulkpe Naa, Baghali Naa and the Kuga Naa and from the results of a sacrifice, it is decided which of the candidates is the possessor of a 'good head', i.e, the man whom the spirits desire.

Yet these explicit provisions of the constitution have been violated with the result that, sometimes the Ya Naa has been determined through arbitration at the palace of the overlord of Mamprugu. Sometimes it has been decided through divination, sometimes through the English court system and sometimes, through forceful take over.

The judiciary or judicial council is made up of the Kuga Naa, Zohe Naa, Kumlana, Balo Naa, Malle, Bung-Lana, Gagbindana, Kpahagu and Gullana. They help the Ya Naa to arbitrate on matters that come before him. Therefore, in Dagbon, even though the three arms of government exist, there is not a strict compartmentalisation of them. As can be seen from the above discussion, many of the people belong to all three arms of government.

As has been stated already, Dagbon is patrilineal and the norm is for male succession. Rulership is a masculine trait and therefore all the organs of state are populated only by male members. The executive, legislative and judicial organs of Dagbon have an entirely male membership. Two women, namely, the Gundogu Naa and KpatuYa Naa are allowed to attend Dagbon state council meetings, but as ex-officio members with no voting rights. This clearly is to underscore the point that women have no real voice when it comes to matters of state. Women are considered emotional and hence incapable of taking the hard decisions that may sometimes have to be taken for the good of the state. Even though some chiefships are reserved for women. The impact of those chiefships on the running of the Dagbon state are at best minimal. Christine Oppong (1973, p.21) aptly captures it in the following words.

> Claims to succession to any political office held by royals are based upon legitimate agnatic descendant, but a sister's or daughter's son of an important chief or the king may make that uterine tie the basis of his claim to a minor chiefship and occasionally a sister's son may succeed his mother's brother.

Thus daughters and granddaughters of a Ya Naa are called *Nabipuginsi*. As stated above, people can make a claim to a chiefship through uterine succession. On the other hand, a daughter or granddaughter of a Ya Naa can also ascend to a chiefship. However, some specific chiefships have been reserved for such daughters and

granddaughters. These are the villages of Yiwogu, Warigbani, Fuyaa, Gundogu, Kpatuya, Kugologu, Shilung, Yimahagu, Saasegile, Didoge and Nakpanzoo. Gundogu is the topmost skin in the hierarchy of chiefships for women. It is followed by Kpatuya. The other chiefships may be occupied by any woman who is a descendant of a Ya Naa. The Gundogu skin is particularly important in the hierarchy of chiefships in Dagbon. This will be elaborated shortly.

Women who ascend to chiefships in Dagbon are normally women who have passed menopause even though menopause is not a specific requirement for becoming chief. This may be due to the fact that generally in Dagbon, people assume to chiefships when they are long past their prime. Indeed, preference is normally given to the oldest person when it comes to succession to a skin. In the case of the skins of Saasigile, Yimahagu, Fuyaa, Didoge and Nakpanzoo, they alternate between *Nabipuginsi* and *Nabihi* (princes). Thus when a woman occupies any of these skins and dies, then the next to occupy it is a male and vice versa. Even though women chiefs do not exact huge influence on the overall running of the Dagbon state, within the villages that they preside over, they wield as much power as any male chief would wield in his village.

Male grandchildren of Ya Naas who belong to the female line of succession are called *Pa'abihi*, literally translated as "children of woman." The fact that males who descend through a female line are given a specific name as a marker of their identity tells the extent of the dominance of masculinity in Dagbon. In other words, masculinity is the norm, while feminity is the exception. For these male descendants of princesses, too, a

number of chiefships are reserved for them. These are Zagbanga, Zakole, Yanshego, Bago, Nbatenga, Gbirimani, Didoge, Sakpiego, Vokpia, Jakunga, Kashebihe, Naane, Kubalem, Kukuo-kpana, Worbogo, Diyali, Demon, Sunson, Korli, Nyankpala, Zoya, Fuyaa, Yelzole, Gulkpegu, Worivi, Pishigu and Tijo. Gulkpegu, Sunson and Yelzole are the terminating points for *Pa'abihi*. In other words, a *pa'abiya* "child of a woman" cannot go beyond these three villages. They are thus the highest chiefships in the hierarchy of the chiefships for *Pa'abihi*.

Gundogu

As has been stated already, the Gundogu skin is the highest skin obtainable by a woman in Dagbon. Gundogu is a 20-minute ride by bicycle from Yendi and about five minutes by car. The Gundogu Na (Chief of Gundogu) is the only chief who can veto the Ya Naa's word. But his is only theoretical, since she does not belong to any of the three organs of state. And hence even before she hears of the decisions of state, they would have become law already and her so-called veto power is powerless to reverse state decisions that have become law. She is a sister of the Ya Naa in the sense that her father was also a Ya Naa.

Legend has it that, before the death of Naa Gbewaa, he wished to hand over the skin to his second son Kofogu, instead of the first son, Zirli as custom would demand. It is said that Zirli got to know about this and planned to stop it from happening. He therefore dug a hole and covered it and invited his brother Kofogu for a chat. When his brother came, he asked him to sit where he had dug the hole. When his brother sat, he fell into the hole and died. Apparently Zirli had poured boiling water into the hole.

According to drum historians, Naa Gbewaa was upset upon hearing the news of the murder of Kufogu, so much so that, he commanded the ground on which he was seated to open; and it opened. Seething with anger, Naa Gbewaa is said to have sunk into the depths of the earth, leaving his royal regalia behind and has not been seen to this day. Surprisingly, whiles elders took to their heels upon seeing the action of Naa Gbewaa, her daughter Kpachagu mustered courage and came for the royal regalia.

Her brothers and the elders came back later and couldn't find the regalia. They had information Kpachagu took custody of the royal regalia and they mounted a search for her and found her hiding under a Gundogu (kapok) tree, few kilometers away from Yendi and dressed in the royal regalia.

They were stunned upon seeing her dressed in the royal regalia because only Ya Naas could dress in the regalia but it will contravene Dagbon custom to have a woman as Ya Naa. Kuga Naa Subei (her brother) consulted with Gushiegu Naa (the two are key king makers in Dagbon) and Kpachagu was made the first chief of the newly established village of Gundogu (the village is named after the tree under which she was found with the regalia. Kpatuya, Kuglog and Shilin were all later created for princesses of the Ya Naa in addition to Gundogu. This was to underlie the importance of the Kpatuya skin. Every important chiefship must have a subordinate chiefship under it. These four skins are reserved for daughters of Ya Naas. Among women chiefs in Dagbon, only the Gundo-Naa and KpatuYa Naa are permitted to attend Dagbon State Council meetings. The

enskinment of the Gundo-Naa follows a similar pattern like that of the enskinment of a Ya-Na. She visits the *katinduu* (the sacred shrine) where Ya-Nas are buried. No other Dagbon chief enters the sacred shrine before their enskinment. This is by virtue of the fact that she is also a direct daughter of a Ya Naa.

Elements of this story are certainly apocryphal. For example, Naa Gbewaa was chief in Pusiga, not Yendi. Indeed, Yendi became capital of the Dagbon chiefdom, long after the establishment of the Dagbon state and when Naa Gbewaa's children (Sitobu, Tohigu and Ngmantambo) had split to found the separate chiefdoms of Mamprugu, Dagbon and Nanung. Therefore, the creation of the Gundogu skin could not have been at the time of Naa Gbewaa. The Gundogu and other female skins however tell the fact that Dagombas do not limit political authority to men only and the fact that there are female chiefs who can attend the state council is significant (even if nominal) in telling the value of women within the political hierarchy of Dagbon. After the institution of the Gundogu skin, she was instrumental in the enskinning of Ya Naas. Later that privilege was also stripped from her because Dagombas detested her selection of Naa Bimbegu as Ya Naa in 1728 (Interview with Gundogu Na Samata Abdulai, 3/12/2015 at Gundogu).

The only time when women wielded real political power in Dagbon was when they exercised that power outside the jurisdiction of Dagbon. In several instances women, mostly daughters of Ya Naas served as ambassadors and envoys of Dagbon to other rulers and neighbouring states. The Police Commandant of Eastern Dagomba when it was under

German rule (1889-1916), Heinrich Klose, discusses the power and authority of the Ya-Naa's ambassador to Kete Krachi in the following words:

> The Dagomba people were represented by their princess, a daughter of the mighty sultan of Yendi…She represents the political as well as the commercial interests of the Dagomba people. Since she is a representative of the Sultan, she is considered a chief in her own right and is honoured on all festive occasions…Since it was my plan to travel via Salaga to Yendi, I had to try and win the favour of the great lady…when she heard that I wanted to go to Yendi, she gave me a letter of recommendation to her distinguished father in which she told him of her friendship for me. She also sent my letter to the sultan through one of her messengers…" (Klose, 1964, p.89).

The situation is not the same today. In fact, because the nation state has virtually usurped the power and authority of chiefships, the concept of the Ya Naa having an ambassador in other jurisdictions no longer exists. Even though some skins as stated above are still occupied by women, they do not command any significant authority as we have already shown. These days, Ya Naas hardly send any of the women who occupy skins in Dagbon as envoys to another ruler nor do they appoint a woman as permanent ambassador to another state or chiefdom.

Military Organisation

Aristotle states that 'man is by nature, a political animal' (Aristotle (trans), 1984, p.37). In other words, humans must of necessity live within a polity. He argues further that, anybody who does not belong to a polity, 'is either a mean sort or superior to man; he is without clan, without law, without hearth' (p.37). The nature of polity and politics is such that people have to draw policies for the polity. Keegan (1983, p.3), quoting Clausewitz, states that 'war is the continuation of political discourse.' Aristotle states that it is necessary for polities to conduct their politics with 'a view to their neighbours and all foreigners' (p.69). He therefore concludes that it is necessary for a government or regime 'to be organised with a view to military strength' (p.69).

Like all other states therefore the Dagbon state or chiefdom has an elaborate military organisation with which it ensures the security of the state. Before 1830, the Dagombas fought with bows and arrows. They also had a cavalry, which contributed a lot to the rise of Dagomba power. The Dagomba chiefs "went to war on white horses and their mounted followers rode blacks and bays, all decked out, as they are today, with gay cloths and bells" (Tamale Archives, NRG 8/2/1). It was in about 1830, that guns were introduced into Dagbon and an elaborate and more professional fighting unit for the Dagbon state was formed. This fighting force was named and is still called *kambonse*. Kambonse means Akans. The Asantes bequeathed this fighting unit to the Dagombas during the reign of Kwaku Dua I. At this time, the Asantes went to war with the Dagomba and inflicted a heavy defeat on the Dagomba, taking the Ya Naa, Na Gariba as captive. Being a

weak and sickly old man, Na Gariba was later released but two of his trusted aides were taken to Kumasi, where they served in the court of the Asantehene for some time. Whiles in the service of the Asantehene, one of the captives, Demonkum, showed an interest in guns and gunpowder and carefully studied this new art of war in Kumasi. He it was, who on his return to Dagbon, fashioned out a professional army for the Dagomba. In gratitude to the Asantes, the Dagomba army has since been called *Kambonse* and the chief warrior called *kambonakpema* (head of kambonse). Dagomba warriors are also called *Sapashinima* (singular, sapashini). According to Mahama (2004, p.30), "*sapashini* is a corrupted version of the Akan word, *safo-hene*." All titles borne by the Dagomba military, are all either proper Akan names, or words with Akan meaning. For example, *Akyiri* who is second to the Kambon Na in the hierarchy of the military is certainly the Akan word for behind. Adu is the Akan name for the tenth child. Kyempon certainly stands for the Akan name Akyempon…the attire for the enskinment of the Dagomba military officer is a cloth not a gown. When they are being made chiefs, they sit not on skins but on stools (Mahama, 2004, pp.30-31).

The military structure of the Dagomba has no place for women. It is an entirely male affair. We have already shown, even by the construction of households in Dagbon, that militarism is a marker of masculinity. Only men fight. Unlike the case of the Asante where there is a legend of Yaa Asantewaa, reputed to have been a brave female warrior, Dagbon has no such antecedent and therefore militarism is entirely a male quality.

Dagbon is a well-organised chiefdom politically. Both men and women can ascend to chiefship. There are clearly designated chiefships that women can ascend to. The head of these chiefships is the Gundogu skin. Together with Kpatuya, they can sit in state with their male counterparts, even though their influence is minimal. In times past, women were appointed as envoys and ambassadors. Today however, a lot of this power has eroded and many women chiefs exercise power only within their areas of jurisdiction.

Economic Life

The economic life of Dagbon is modeled on its social structure. In discussing the social life of Dagbon, we stated that the society is structured according to classes. Some of the classes are actually economic in nature. In other words, the social class into which one is born also determines the mode by which one earns his or her livelihood. It is also significant to state that economic life in Dagbon is gendered. In other words, one's biological make up does determine the sort of trade one can engage in. For example, among the social classes in Dagbon are *wanzama* (barbers), *tindamba* (traditional priests), *nakohinima* (butchers) and *machelnima* (blacksmiths), *lunsi* (drummers) and *baansi* (fiddlers). All these social classes, which are in effect also economic classes, are the preserve of men.

Even though there are families that are renowned for engaging in these trades, others can also take their children to be trained in these trades. Children begin to learn these trades at about the age of seven. The learning process takes several years depending on either the ability of the trainee to grasp all the rudiments of the trade or the willingness of the master trades

man to 'graduate' the trainee. While under training, the trainee is given a daily stipend by the teacher or trainer and income accrued to the business (even if undertaken by the trainee) all belong to the trainer.

Each of these professions has a chief. Unlike political chiefships, which are restricted to royal families, any hardworking member of these professions can ascend to its headship. For example, the head of barbers in every Dagomba town or village is known as *Gunu*. In many cases, people who belong to the family of the chief barber add '*Gunu*' to their names.

Regarding butchers, Christine Oppong (1973, p.54) gives an elaborate training regime by which one becomes a butcher:

> A child should begin to learn to be a butcher at about eight years old, when he begins to watch how the animals are flayed and is taught to sell small pieces of roasted meat, legs, head, and intestines and to the use of money. Meanwhile he becomes accustomed to slaughtering by helping to hold the legs of small animals while they are being killed. By the time he is eleven years old, a boy should be capable of selling a cow's head cut into ten-pesewa pieces and put on a tray of one cedi worth…by the time he reaches his late teens, a boy can buy, slaughter, flay and cut up a cow and knows a fair price and can give a fair estimate of profit and loss…possession of his own set of

carving knives is one index that the learner has completed his training

The blacksmith was very important in the Dagomba scheme of things and assisted a great deal in establishing Dagbon as a territorial power. It was the blacksmith who manufactured weapons of war for the Dagomba army: spears, swords and arrows and with the introduction of guns into Dagbon, the manufacture of bullets and guns. The blacksmith was also, and continues to be the manufacturer of agricultural implements like hoes, cutlasses and bullock ploughs.

Lunsi (drummers) are a very visible part of Dagbon social life, while serving as a source of livelihood for the people who engage in it. No social gathering is complete without the presence of lunsi. According to Mahama (2004) this class of Dagombas has one Bizung as their progenitor. We have already related how Bizung came to be regarded as the progenitor of the lunsi class. After the death of Bizung, drum chant became a profession and today there are thousands of drummers in Dagbon. They sing the praises of people for money in social gatherings. Sometimes people hire them to liven up their occasions.

In Dagbon, it is the duty of the man to provide grain for the family. Thus maize, millet, rice and such other cereals as are used for food are provided by the man. In addition to the professions as outlined above, almost every Dagomba man farms and owns farmland. Even so, farms are tended by both the men and women. Women do mostly the sowing and the harvesting, while the men do the actual farming and tending of the crops until harvesting. Women however, do not own land. All lands are owned

by men. Harvests are sold to supplement what they earn from their professions. However, how the grain or cereal is turned into food, is entirely the business of the women of the household. Therefore, while the men engage in the above trades, women also must supplement what the men provide. Therefore, women also engage in their own businesses in order to earn a living to supplement what the men provide. Ownership is therefore a marker of masculinity in Dagbon. Since women are supposed to be looked after, they cannot own land. This is because ownership of land, signifies a certain independence and autonomy. Since men are always above women, women cannot be allowed to appropriate qualities that will suggest their autonomy and independence. So while feminity is to be owned, masculinity is to own.

Cotton spinning is perhaps the oldest of the trades that Dagomba women engage in. To this day, Dagbon is very fertile ground for cotton production and produces cotton that feeds the textile industry in Ghana. Dagomba women use the spindle to make the yarn. With the support of their thighs, the women give a whirling motion to the spindle. Thus, through this activity, the women produce yards of cloth, which they sell to smock weavers for making smocks. Cotton weaving seems the appropriate economic venture for Dagbon women because it is a 'sit-at-home' job that allows them to earn an income and take care of their households at the same time. To this day, most Dagomba women still engage in cotton weaving as a means of earning a livelihood and supporting their families. With the introduction of Islam, this business became particularly important

because, the woven material replaced the *kornamgbandi* as the shroud for burying the dead.

The other profession that Dagomba women engage in is pottery. In most Dagomba households, even to this day, pots made from clay are what are used for storing water and for cooking. The traditional pot is also used for other purposes like ritual bath and receptacles for human placentas before they are disposed of.

Apart from the above trades, most Dagomba women find something to sell in the market place. For every household in Dagbon there are two or more women who are traders in the market place. Thus trading is another mode by which Dagomba women supplement the family income and ensure that they put food on the 'table' for their husbands and children.

Economic activity in Dagbon is gendered. Women and men belong separately in the economic class. Women, in addition to making money to ensure that grain becomes food for the family. They are also responsible for taking care of the household in the absence of their husbands. Therefore, most of them are engaged in trades that allow them to stay close to the house, such as cotton weaving and pottery. They are also market women, who sell off what the household cannot consume of what their husbands get of the harvests. Both men and women are engaged in farming but play different roles in that respect. The women mostly do the sowing and harvesting, while the men take care of the farm in terms of weeding and nurturing until the harvest is due.

Religious Life

The religious life of the Dagomba people is not different from the way other African cultures order their religious lives. We shall therefore isolate elements of Dagomba religious life and thought that may be somewhat unique and discuss them.

The Supreme Being is called *Naawuni*. This is made up of two words, *naa* and *wuni*. *Naa* means chief as we have seen in this chapter already. *Wuni* means god. Thus *Naawuni* literally means chief god. Thus, God is the chief or head of the gods, who presides over the affairs of the lesser gods and men. He puts the lesser gods in charge of the daily affairs of the world, while he takes care of the bigger and more important issues. Every family has a god and members of the family are required to, once in a year, make sacrifices to the god of the family. The gods are neither male nor female. Even with the influence of Islam in Dagbon, most Dagomba Muslims still make sacrifices to the gods. Curiously, sometimes it is the Muslim diviners who tell a client that his or her problem is because s/he has not made sacrifices to his family god for some time. Indeed, many Dagomba Muslims are also active participants in the traditional religion. There is a palpable mixing of Islam and traditional Dagomba religion in the daily lives of even some very outwardly devout Dagomba Muslims. This phenomenon is what is largely responsible for the open confrontations between purist Islamic denominations like the *Ahl-Sunna* in Dagbon and the somewhat syncretic denominations like the Tijaniyya. Adherents of the *Ahl-Sunna* sect often accuse the Tijaniyya of mixing Islam with traditionalist modes of worship, which they label as *bid'a*,

meaning innovation. They quote a popular saying of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to the effect that Muslims should beware of innovation, for every innovation is going astray and going astray leads to the hell fire (An-Nawawi, 1976).

Regarding the qualification for ancestorship, the criteria are the same for most African cultures. In Dagbon, every household has a "tree" (*tia*), which represents the ancestors of the household. By tree, is meant a tree branch with a tripod shape, fixed to the ground and on which sits a clay pot. It is to this *tia* or tree that members of the family make sacrifices either of petition or thanks giving. Every Dagomba also has a personal *wuni*. The personal *wuni* is not a god, but akin to what the Akans call *sunsum* (spirit). More specifically the Dagomba *wuni* is a "spirit being." Thus Dagombas make sacrifices to their personal spirits, again either of petition or thanks giving. It is believed by the Dagombas that this personal spirit or *wuni* resides in a person's mother's house. In other words, it is mothers who bequeath the personal spirit. Thus in making a sacrifice to the personal spirit, one must visit his or her mother's house. So even though Dagombas are essentially patrilineal, a person's mother is as important as his or her father when it comes to matters of spirituality. We have already pointed out that because the earth is associated with birth and re-birth, it has a feminine quality. It is this feminity that translates into the ritual of sacrifice, because sacrifices, when they are made, the blood of the sacrificial animal is spilt onto the earth. Thus when it comes to spirituality, there is a certain sense in which both masculinity and feminity matter on an equal pedestal.

Soothsayers or *bagsi* are an important aspect of Dagomba religious life and thought. Rattray (1932, p.313) states this about the people of northern Ghana:

> If I were asked to name the most conspicuous… feature in northern territory religious practices, I would select the cult of the soothsayers with their consulting shrines. A religious, that is to say, spiritual influence lies behind almost every action in the life of the people. Their only means of interpreting it into action, beneficial, protective or merely negative- is by means of and through their soothsayers

In discussing the role of the *baga* (soothsayer) in the lives of the Dagomba people, Christine Oppong (1973, p.58) states that, "Diviners are consulted upon every conceivable occasion; in misfortune to find the cause and sacrificial remedy; at birth to find which ancestor is returning; at marriage; at death; after dreams; at succession to office or undertaking a new enterprise." In Dagbon soothsayers do not choose to become; they are. It is believed that it is the gods/ancestors who decide upon whom the mantle has fallen on, to take up a *baga kolgu* (the soothsayer's bag). Somebody on whom the mantle has fallen to become a *baga* may begin to experience bouts of illnesses or misfortunes. It is when the community or family has turned to a *baga* (soothsayer) to find the cause of these illnesses or misfortunes that they will be told that the mantle has fallen on him to take up the soothsayer's bag. At this point, the person has no choice but to

take up the tools of the profession and become a *baga*. It is the belief by the people, that, failure to do so will lead to death. Diviners are distinctly marked out for their possession of a baga kolgu (leather bag), *baga dangbee* or *baga dogu* or *doli* (divining stick) blood encrusted horns and a calabash containing beads, buttons and nails, which constitute the tools of the *baga's* profession. Even with the influence of Islam, *bagsi* (soothsayers) remain very popular in Dagbon and are widely consulted even by Muslims. Often times, a Dagomba Muslim will consult an *Afa Tibrigu* (Muslim diviner) and double check on his or her results with a *baga* or vice versa.

There are a special group of soothsayers who are called by another name: *jinwarba*. A *jinwara* (singular) is a female soothsayer. The word jinwarba is also a combination of jinn and *wara* (dancer). Thus it means she who dances by means of prompting of the jinns. By dance is meant the whirling of the *jinwara*. In Dagomba cosmology, jinns play an important role in human affairs, albeit mostly a destructive function. Incidentally, Islam's belief system includes the jinn. Allah is said to have created "men and jinn." The jinn he created out of "the fire of a scorching wind" (Q: 15:27). *Jinwarba* are therefore also fire dancers, meaning they dance over fire, mostly in the dead of night. Just like the human race, jinns are also said to be a race of good and bad. The bad ones inhabit human bodies and cause havoc by inflicting all sorts of illnesses. It is the belief that some of them marry humans spiritually. Sometimes men and women who have chains of failed relationships are said to have either jinn husbands or jinn wives. In that case, only a *jinwara* has the power to drive them away from

the body. Today *Afanema* also perform the role of driving away the jinn, which they argue, has a basis in prophetic practice. Qur'an chapter 114 is a prayer for protection against jinns. They are agents of the *jinwara* with who she performs all sorts of wonders and solves problems that are beyond the human capacity. It is believed that the jinn can travel with the speed of light and live unusually long lives. The cult of the *jinwara* is similar to that of the *bagsi*. In other words, it falls upon a person to become a *jinwara*, rather than a choice that one makes. The power of divination and healing is therefore both feminine and masculine.

Many scholars are of the view that Islam has been successful in Africa largely because it is "compatible with the traditional African cosmology" (Owusu-Ansah, 1987, p.145). I.M Lewis (1969, p.60) posits that:

> In the process of Islamisation of traditional beliefs, the most important aspect of the Muslim religious phenomenology which has facilitated its initial impact and appeal…is its true catholic recognition of the multiplicity of mystical powers…as long as God's lofty pre-eminence is not compromised. The Qur'an itself provides scriptural warrant for the existence of a host of subsidiary powers and spirits…consequently, as long as traditional beliefs can be adjusted in such a way that they fall into place within a Muslim schema in which the absoluteness of Allah remains unquestioned, Islam

> does not ask its new adherents to abandon confidence in all their mystical forces….

It will therefore seem that in this case, the Dagomba belief in the jinns squared perfectly with the Islamic belief in the jinns. The dimension of this belief that is of particular interest to this paper is the fact that only women are *jinwarb*a. As stated earlier, even though there are good and bad jinn, they are known in Dagbon more as malevolent rather than benevolent forces. The fact that it is women who have the power to counter the malevolence of the jinn, speaks volumes of the spiritual powers that women possess in Dagomba cosmology. A *baga* may tell the cause of a misfortune and not have the power to remedy its effect. A *jinwara* both tells the cause and has the power to remove the evil.

Dagbon cosmology accommodates a multiplicity of forces, just like other African cultures. *Naawuni* is the chief god, which equates to the Supreme Being and creator of the universe. He superintends over the universe but leaves the minute details of everyday issues to the lesser gods. Every family has a god to which it makes obeisance. Ancestors are represented symbolically by a *tia* (tree) and one must at least once a year sacrifice to the family tia (tree). One's personal wuni must not be forgotten as well, because it is the personal *wuni* which follows one everywhere and is thus one's guardian spirit. According to Islamic belief, we do not inhabit the world alone. We live with jinns, who are also God's creation. The Qur'an is replete with references to the existence of jinns. The jinns are believed to be both benevolent and malevolent but they are known more

for their malevolence than by their benevolence. However, the jinwara has the antidote to their malevolence.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to give the basis for the construction of masculinity and feminity in Dagbon. This has been done through an outline of the social, political, economic and religious institutions of the Dagomba. The object has been to expose the nature of male-female dynamics in Dagbon before the advent of Islam. Dagbon culture is heavily patriarchal. The masculine is dominant while the feminine is dominated. The Dagomba word for man is *doo*. Do Loow is used to refer to a man who is considered not man enough. Men who show the least subservience to women, especially their wives are Do Loow. And by subservience is meant men who believe in the capacity of women to be partners with men and proceed to act as such. No one wants to be called a Do Loow. In all the structures of society therefore, women are dominated. This has been the situation even before the advent of Islam.

However, women held minimal power within Dagomba political arrangements, especially in cases where they served as envoys and ambassadors to Dagomba chiefs. Since the power of chiefdoms as independent entities have been eroded by the nation-state, this power of women as envoys has been taken away. Today, the only sphere in which women wield some power is in the religious sphere, where they serve as jinwarba, where they have the power to divine the ills of both society and individuals, and they also have the power to remove such ills. Alden (2011, p.89) aptly captures a similar situation in Zimbabwe. He contends

that in Zimbabwe, religion is the sphere where the normal order of male dominance "is inexplicably inverted, putting the man into a looking-glass world of witches conjured up by male terror at female power." In Dagbon, women are therefore consulted as much as their male counterparts, who have similar powers. In sacred space therefore, women as well as men can play their roles and act out their potentials to the full without any inhibitions.

In the next chapter, we shall present the gender situation in Dagbon today as evidenced by the data that we collected during the field interviews and observations. This would help us appreciate the extent of Islam's influence on gender in Dagbon.

CHAPTER FOUR

MUTED VOICES OR MURMURS OF PROTEST?

Introduction

This chapter presents the data that was collected from the field. It is a qualitative investigation of Islam, gender role belief and culture in the lives of the people of Dagbon

In presenting the data, we have employed Creswell's (2004) six-step procedure for qualitative data analysis. According to Creswell's (2004) method of data analysis, the raw data should be grouped according to themes that allow for an analysis according to the theoretical basis or grounding on which respondents answered the questions. For example, many respondents could agree with wife beating, but not all of them would have the same reasons for sanctioning wife beating. Some could sanction it because they believe Islam sanctions it. Others could also sanction it for cultural reasons. The data on wife beating for example is grouped according to the theoretical basis on which people sanction it. In this chapter, we present the raw data as distilled from the interviews conducted, and then do an analysis of the data chapter five.

In doing this, we distilled the data collected according to the negotiations of gender in sacred space and also in profane space, and also according to the negotiations of gender in urban settings and in rural settings.

We have done this because the sacred, domestic and public spaces are the theatres in which negotiations of gender are staged. Urban and rural

settings generally and in Dagbon in particular, have different characteristics that tend to influence the worldview of the people who live in these environments. Generally, people are the products of their environments and people who live by the same worldview have tended to exhibit different attitudes towards issues depending on their environments. Pargament (1997, p.192) argues that Islam takes different shapes across different environments. "…despite its all-embracing and rigorous character Islam is nevertheless always subjected to distinct and particularistic, locally produced interpretations, that lend a particular cast and character to its precepts, laws and pervasive doctrines." Demarcating Dagbon into urban and rural will therefore help to distill the particularities of gender negotiation in its various forms. Before we do this, we first present the phenomenon of the *Afa*. The Afa is the fulcrum around whom the participation of Dagomba in the Islamic tradition revolves, it is necessary to present the phenomenon of the Afa in Dagbon by discussing first, data from the Afanema and then, the ordinary Muslims.

The Afanema wield enormous authority in relation to determining what is legal and what is not in Islamic discourse and practice in Dagbon and their views have influenced and continue to influence gender in Dagbon. we interviewed more Afanema in the urban centers for two reasons; the urban centers, and also because more Afanema hold prominence and are held sacred in the urban centers. Most of the rural Afanema in Dagbon owe allegiance to an ideological master in either Tamale or Yendi.

The *Afanema* as determiners of Islamic practice in Dagbon

The Qur'an stipulates the hierarchy of authority in Islam in the following words: "O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you. If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if ye do believe in Allah and the Last Day: That is best and most suitable for final determination" (Q: 4:59). It is generally agreed in Islamic scholarship that "those charged with authority" here refers to the Afanema (clerical class), who are vested with the knowledge of the sources of Islam: The Qur'an and the Sunnah and whose duty therefore it is to transmit such knowledge to the Muslim Ummah.

The Afa is so powerful in defining the practice of Islam in Dagbon, to the extent that Dagomba Muslims accept his verdict on matters relating to Islam even against what may be considered obvious textual evidence. The *Afa* is the daily recipient of gifts of sugar, milk, rice and other commodities or even money from members of the Muslim community. The Afa is held in such deep respect and reverence that one repeatedly hears the phrase, "Afa yelya" which means "Afa says." This means the word of the Afa is almost sacred among the Dagomba Muslims. Responsibility for Islamic education in Dagbon has been exclusively entrusted into the hands of the Afa. Some of the Afanema earn their livelihood from teaching the Qur'an to children. As far back as 1877, when a boy had mastered his lessons, he was returned to his father, who had to make a payment of 40,000 cowries and a robe and turban (Johnson, n.d).

Since the introduction of Islam into Dagbon, the Afa's word has been sacrosanct, due to the circumstance under which Islam was introduced. Islam was introduced to Dagbon by the conversion of their chief, Naa Zangina in 1700. He was converted to Islam by a Wangara Muslim cleric called Sabali Yar-Naa (Wilks, 1965). Naa Zangina's conversion paved way for the Islamisation of Dagbon. According to Wilks (1965), the conversion of Naa Zangina to Islam made Dagbon prosperous, through the petitionary prayer of the Sabali Yar-Na. The *Afa* therefore wields enormous power as far as the daily life of the Dagomba is concerned. It is perhaps in gratitude to the *Afa* that the Dagomba have Islamised their entire ethos and traditions. Thus as far back as in 1820, Joseph Dupuis, the British envoy to Kumasi, noted on the testimony of Yendi traders in Kumasi, that Dagbon was among "governments which are either purely Moslem (sic) or countries where the Koranic (sic) law had been received and serves for the civil code of the believer and infidel" (Wilks, 1965).

According to Hiskett (1984), the Islam of the Yar-nas, was characterised by the mixing of Islamic practices with traditional rites and customs. Later however, the Hausa variant of Islam also entered Dagbon, mainly due to the expansion of trade between Dagbon and Hausaland and Borno. Hiskett (1984) avers that the Hausa were stricter in their interpretation of Islam than the Wangaras and were therefore less tolerant of mixing than the Wangaras. Even so, the Hausa variant of Islam, which was basically Qadiriyya, a Sufi (mystical) denomination of Islam, which emphasizes the inner dimensions of Islam was less austere. This is the

Islam of Shehu Osman Dan Fodio (1754-1817) famous for the Fulani *jihads*, which sought to purge Islam of syncretism, the mixing of the sexes and strict separation of men and women. Nonetheless, the Islam of Shehu Osman Dan Fodio advocated the education and empowerment of women. Kani (1988, p.69) quotes Dan Fodio on the rights of women as follows:

> O Muslim women, do not listen to the speech of this misguided group who misguide others and deceive you by making you obey your husbands without ordering you to obey Allah and His Messenger. They claim that the happiness of the woman is in obeying her husband. They do this in order to get their selfish desire out of you. They also ask you to do what Allah and His Prophet did not stipulate at all; like cooking and washing clothes and the like…At the same time they do not ask you about what Allah and His Messenger have ordained to you of obedience to Allah and His Messenger. Yes, it is incumbent upon the wife to obey her husband according to the consensus of scholar-jurist, in secret and in open even when the husband is very poor or a slave. It is not permissible for her to disobey Allah, in which case she should not obey him.

This Hausa brand of Islam, therefore advocated for the empowerment of women and the participation of women in especially the

public space. However, the Tijaniyya later supplanted the Qadiriyya. The Tijaniyya is another mystical denomination that was founded by an Algerian mystic by the name of Ahmad Al-Tijani (1737-1815). It has since spread across West Africa, and commands the allegiance of the majority of Muslims in the West Africa region. From the early part of the nineteenth century until the late 1940s, the Tijaniyya mystical brand of Islam was the Islamic ideology that was known by the people of Dagbon. Like the Qadiriyya, this version of Islam is also less austere in its orientation. A feature of the Tijaniyya doctrine is its celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad *(*called *maulid*) with pomp and pageantry. In the maulid celebrations, men and women mix freely and sing and dance to religious music.

The dominance of the Tijaniyya in Dagbon changed when Afa Yussif Ejura (d. 2000) repudiated the Tijaniyya ideology and established what is today known as the *Ahl-Sunnah wal Jama'a* (people of the traditions of the Prophet and community) (Abdulai, 1997). The *Ahl-Sunnah Wal Jama'a* otherwise known as the Wahabiyya is the austere form of Islam, which purports to rid Islam of all forms of syncretism and mixing. It rejects the intercession of humans, divination and the mixing of the sexes. According to Abdulai (1997) before Afa Ejura established the *Ahl-Sunna Wal Jama'a* he was a Tijaniyya and a member of the Central Mosque in Tamale which is the hub of Tijaniyya activity in Tamale. In the early 1930s, he left Tamale for Ejura in the Ashanti Region, probably in search of knowledge, and stayed there for close to ten years. In Islam, it is believed that traveling in search of knowledge is a spiritual exercise and is

meritorious in that regard. On his return from Ejura, he began to preach against the permissiveness of the Tijaniyya ideology and eventually broke away to establish his own mosque at Sakasaka on the Bolga Road (Afa Ahmed, Personal Communication, 23-08-16). Perhaps Afa Ejura came under the influence of a teacher of Wahhabi persuasion while he was at Ejura. According to Afa Ahmed, who was a student of his, Afa Ejura never told them the story of his sojourn in Ejura.

Afa Yussif Ejura began to attract the support of other Afanema, who listened to his version of Islam and bought into his ideas. He and his initial band of followers began to exchange invectives with the Tijaniyya. As the years went by, he attracted some significant following, especially amongst the male population. This was largely due to the chauvinistic ideology that he preached. He was against the participation of women in the public space. He confined his own wives to the house and urged his followers to do the same. He claimed that the Prophet said that he did not leave any source of evil for men greater than the evil of women. When multi-party political activity began in 1992, he said in one of his public preaching sessions, that if ever there will be a day when a woman will be President of Ghana, may he not live to see that day. He died in 2000.

His ideology attracted for him, the recognition and support of the religious authorities in Saudi Arabia, who helped him to build a *Makaranta* (Arabic/Islamic training school) in Tamale. From the 1970s to date, students from Afa Ajura's *Makaranta* are sponsored to study at the Islamic University in Madina from where they return to spread the Wahhabi ideology, which is the ruling religious ideology in Saudi Arabia

where to this day, the participation of women in the public space is heavily restricted. Afa Ajura's economic standing was to receive a boost due to the commission he received when in 1957, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah chose him to be the principal agent for the pilgrimage to Makkah. Today, the Wahhabi ideology is heavily represented in all the nooks and crannies of Dagbon. As the ideology of Afa Ajura took roots, so did it erode the freedoms of women and help to establish a culture of male dominance.

Part of the culture of male dominance today is the fact that Islam in Dagbon is largely defined and directed by the Afanema, an exclusive class of men. However, in Tamale, one woman, Mariam Alhassan Alolo, who is discussed in detail in this chapter, has taken on the title of Afa because she has established an institute for the instruction of girls in Islamic tenets. But whether a lone and feeble voice that echoes in the ears of an all-female audience is enough to bring down the walls that keep women cloistered remains to be seen.

Letherby (2003, p.28) argues that "culture is created and manufactured by men in positions of dominance whose perspective is built on the silence of …others." The position of the Afa in Dagbon is a dominant one as far as Islam is concerned. It is the dominant voice of the Afa that dictates the practice of Islam in Dagbon. And as has been pointed out, in Dagbon the dominance of the Wahhabi ideology is palpable and that to a great extent influences the negotiation of gender in Dagbon.

The *Afa* and Gender in Sacred Space

With regard to sacred space, all the Afanema interviewed, (both rural and urban) except one, said that women were supposed to pray

behind men including even if a man was praying with his wife alone. In their view, there is no circumstance in which a woman may stand shoulder-to-shoulder with a man in prayer even if that woman was one's wife. Alhaji Sulemana Nyohini makes this point when he says that "even if she is your wife, she will stand behind you." To them therefore the issue of a woman leading prayer does not arise. Afa Issah makes this argument when he asks in a rhetorical question; "if a woman cannot stand shoulder-to-shoulder even with her husband to pray, how do you even envisage a situation where a woman leads the prayer?" All of them were unanimous on the fact that because women are supposed to stand behind men in prayer, they cannot therefore lead men in prayer. They were also all unanimous on the fact that if the congregation is all female, then the one who serves as prayer leader stands in the middle of the first row with the other women.

According to the Afanema of Dagbon, women cannot pray in an audible voice. They must murmur their prayers. A woman can only pray in an audible voice if she is in the company of other women. Afa Ahmed asserts that "she can only pray to the hearing of herself or her female colleagues." Afa Abu-Bakr Mohammed however adds that a woman can also pray in an audible voice if she is praying in the presence of her husband. This is so because, in the words of Abdul-Wadood Yussif Ajura, "their voices are likened to nakedness." 'A woman's voice is her nudity" and "their voices are so charming and melodic and there are some men who easily fall for charming and melodic voices" are other ways in which some of the *Afanema* put it. Ustarz Hafiz argues that

> Women are men's target (men lust after women) and so when they hear their voices, it has the tendency to draw their attention towards the women or wanting to know who is such a woman and that is not advisable. We have initially allowed our women to be on the streets, so everything of hers is seen in public, but in the case of an Arabian country, it is not possible. But if we were able to control their movements, they would have been more respectable as Islam placed them.

Afa Mika-eel of the Anbariyya Institute in Tamale even adds that women should not be allowed to go to the mosques for the purposes of prayer. According to him, the Prophet advised women to pray at home. "That is best for them because if they leave home for the mosque, who will take care of the children?" Only Imam Husain Rashid said that a woman could pray in an audible voice. Imam Husain Rashid argued that "Qur'anic precepts are for both men and women; and the Qur'an stipulates the tone in which both men and women should pray; therefore, the ruling that women cannot pray aloud is an imposition by the *ulama* (clergy)." According to him Q: 17:110 stipulates the tone of prayer for both men and women: "…neither speak thy prayer aloud, nor speak it in a low tone, but seek a middle course between."

On the question of a woman leading the prayer, all of them without exception said that a woman couldn't lead prayers. They all said that there is no precedent in the Prophetic tradition of a woman ever leading the

prayer and since it was not done in the Prophetic era, it cannot be done today". A woman cannot lead the prayer" Shaykh Ilyas intimated. "We are required to follow the Prophetic example in all that we do. And since the prophet did not sanction a woman leading the prayer, we cannot sanction it today" Afa Mohammed Saani argued. Thus the basis on which they all prohibit women leading the prayer is the fact that there is no Prophetic precedent to that effect. They all said that the woman who was allegedly commissioned as an Imam by the Prophet, Ummu Waraqat bint Abdallah, (Ghandafar & Al-Mubarakpuri, 2001) was so commissioned to lead an all-female congregation within her household. To the Afanema of Dagbon therefore, a woman can only lead her fellow women in prayer, but never a mixed congregation. Even so, they say that the rule is that she must not stand at the head of her fellow women, but must stand within the first row of the prayer line.

The *Afa* and Gender in Domestic Space

Marriage is encouraged in Islam, while celibacy is discouraged. The Prophet is reported to have said; "Young men, those of you who can support a wife should marry, for it keeps you from looking at women and preserves your chastity" (Al-Bukhari, Vol 3, p.85) Indeed some scholars argue that by this statement the Prophet meant marriage to be compulsory. Al-Qardawi (1984, p.173) therefore states that "it is not fitting that a Muslim should refrain from marriage out of fear of poverty or of not being able to meet his obligations." The Qur'an states that "And marry those among you who are single and the virtuous ones among your slaves, male or female. If they are in poverty, Allah will enrich them out of His

bounty…" (Q: 24:33). The establishment of a family should therefore be the goal of every Muslim. The family is the smallest unit of society and a microcosm of the larger society. The family unit is therefore one of the theatres in which male-female dynamics are played out. We therefore sought to find out from Afanema what their views are on how male-female dynamics should play out within the Muslim family structure.

Under gender relations within the domestic sphere, we categorised responses according to the following broad themes: the issue of polygyny in Islam, the nature of decision-making in homes, the question of strict roles for men and women, (segregation), joint ownership of resources, the issue of wife-beating and equality of the sexes.

All the Afanema interviewed without exception were in polygynous marriages and according to Hussain Zakariya, "it is the law of God. God knows us better than ourselves. Therefore, it is not in our capacity to negate what God has affirmed." They all have between two to three wives. They re-echoed the historical arguments that have been put forth by Muslim scholars regarding the basis for polygyny in Islam: that there are more women than men and if every man was to be entitled to only one wife, there would be many women who would not have husbands and that will perpetuate lewdness and sexual permissiveness in society. They re-iterated the need for a man to endeavour to do justice between his wives and said; that is what they strive to achieve in their marital lives.

On the nature of decision-making in homes, we sought to find out if there was consultation or whether husbands dictated to their wives totally or if husbands adopted a mix of dictatorship and consultation. We

adopted this approach in line with Herbst (1954) and Eisler's (1987) designations of decision-making in households. According to Herbst (1954) marital relationships are either syncratic; where decision-making is characterised by consultation or autonomic; and where the husband dominates in decision making to the exclusion of the wife. Eisler (1987) on the other hand describes marital relationships as models. These models she designates as either dominator model or a partnership model. The dominator model is one in which one partner dominates over the other while the partnership model is "based on the principle of linking rather than ranking" (p. xvii). Out of the 15 Afanema interviewed, nine, representing 60% said that they consult their wives on the decisions that they take within the household. They all argued that the Prophet used to consult his wife before taking decisions and therefore they lived according to the prophet's Sunnah (Prophetic practice). Afa Shawki gave a specific example of an incident that happened during the treaty of Al-Hudaybiya where the Prophet consulted his wife Umm Salama on a matter that threatened to undermine his authority amongst the Ummah. At the treaty of Al-Hudaybiya when the Prophet came to an understanding with the Quraysh of Makkah not to enter Makkah for the umra (lesser pilgrimage) but to return the following year to perform the umra, the Prophet and his followers had to get out of their *ihram* (pilgrimage state). So the prophet advised his followers to remove the ihram dress and shave their heads. But they were too crestfallen and sad to do so and therefore ignored him. He felt sad and went back to his tent to consult his wife Umm Salama. Umm Salama told him to take the lead in removing his ihram dress and shave.

When the Prophet heeded her advice and did so, all the followers followed suit in doing so. Afa Shawki's argument therefore is that, wives ought to be consulted in decision making as the Prophet used to do.

Aminu Bamba on the other hand said that men are the ones who are supposed to be giving instructions as to the correct way to run a household. He however, says that he consults his wives, not necessarily because it is Islamic to do so, but because of the demands of the modern world. "Once you are the man, you are the one to give instructions towards a better life, but for modern day life, you listen to their views as well," he said.

Regarding gender segregation, 10 out of the 15, representing 67% of Afanema interviewed said that they believe in gender segregation because it is the normative behaviour in Islam. "Islam teaches that any time men mix with women, you sit separately," Afa Tanko said. "Islam sanctions gender segregation in order to prevent *zina* (illicit sexual intercourse)" Afa Issah Soronji of Yendi said. Twenty-seven percent of Afanema however said that the answer regarding whether or not there should be gender segregation is not a straightforward one. According to them, it is not a simple yes or no answer and that, we ought to adopt segregation depending on the exigencies of place and time. "Positive cultural values are allowed in Islam," said Hussain Zakariya. Hussain Zakariya further argued that the nature of the society today is such that it will be impossible to ensure strict gender segregation and therefore we ought to permit it but exercise circumspection and decorum in the way that we allow men and women to mix, so that we can still safeguard the moral integrity of the society.

There was one lone voice, Zakaria Abdul-Rahman, who said that he did not believe in gender segregation. According to him, the argument that the Prophet enforced strict gender segregation in Madina is over stretched and exaggerated. He said that examples abound in which the Prophet was always in the midst of women as he gave them instruction in the religion. According to Afa Zakaria Abdul-Rahman, "when we the Afanema talk about gender segregation, we make women look like they are a plague. Women are not a plague and positive interaction with them should yield rewards for the society." Afa Zakaria also believes that the overemphasis on gender segregation presents all men as morally depraved and who must therefore be protected from their own libidinal destructive urge. Afa Zakaria is very well traveled both in the Arab world and in Europe. He belongs to the Tijaniyya denomination. He thinks that as Afanema they should distinguish between what is Arab culture and what is Islamic culture. He argues that the way Arabs treat their women has become synonymous with Islam, which Afanema in Dagbon blindly copy and present as the ideal way to treat women. This to him is not right. Indeed, Alhaji Sulemana Nyohini said that "you would hardly see women work in the Arab world." And because of that he (Alhaji Sulemana) presents it as the ideal, which is what Afa Zakaria opposes.

The issue of joint ownership of resources is one of the indicators of gender relations within a household. We therefore sought to find out from Afanema the Islamic position on husbands and wives owning resources jointly. All the Afanema interviewed, representing 100% said that they did not own any resources jointly with their wives. Asked if they would

recommend to their congregations and the Dagbon society at large for couples to own resources jointly they were unanimous in answering in the negative. Afa Mohammed Saani was emphatic that "it is unIslamic" for couples to own resources jointly. By "unIslamic" he meant that he has no evidence that the Prophet ever owned any resources jointly with his wives. The Prophet's property became a subject of dispute after his death, when his only surviving child, Fatima sought to inherit them. Abubakr and some leaders of the Muslim community denied her the opportunity, arguing that the Prophet had said that "the Prophets do not leave inheritances except knowledge." "I want her to have absolute control over her resources; it may also result in avoidable misunderstanding" Afa Sulemana said. Afa Wadood Ejura son of Afa Yussif Ejura, said that it is his responsibility to provide everything for his wives, "even sponge and soap." To him, to the extent that it is the responsibility of a man to provide for his wives, it is unnecessary for them to own resources jointly. Afa Tanko said that he does not support the idea of joint ownership of resources because "it is *bid'a*, new phenomenon) that people want to introduce into Islam; and we don't accept innovations, since the Prophet warned us against innovations." The issue of *bid'a* (innovations), which I shall interrogate later, is one of the controversial issues in Islam and which some of the clergy of Islam use as a basis for opposing reform in the religion. Afa Mika-eel is opposed to the idea of joint ownership of resources because he has three wives and it will be difficult for him to own resources jointly with all of them. The dominant view amongst Afanema therefore is that couples should not own resources jointly.

The issue of wife beating is one of the controversial issues in Islam and because Qur'an 4:34 remains an eyebrow raiser in Islam, we therefore sought to find out from Afanema what the Islamic position is on wife beating. Out of the number of Afanema interviewed, 13 said that wife beating is permitted in Islam. Two said that Islam does not permit wife beating. All those who said that Islam permits wife beating added a caveat; "one should not beat his wife to the extent of wounding her." Ustarz Hafiz said that before one beats his wife he should "wrap a rag around the cane in order not to wound her." Afa Issah said that one can beat his wife only when she has committed the sin of adultery. He added that after that, one was at liberty to divorce her. He said that the punishment for adultery in Islam is stoning to death, but since in Ghana sharia is not the applicable law, he thought that the beating and divorce should suffice. This researcher disagrees with the position that the punishment for adultery in Islam is stoning to death. The explicit words of the Qur'an are that those who engage in adultery must be given 100 lashes of the whip. However, some scholars attribute the edict on stoning to Umar b. Al-Khattab, who they quote as saying that the verse sanctioning stoning for adultery was revealed but was later expunged from the Qur'an. This position is problematic in the sense that it negates the belief that nothing can be taken from or added to the Qur'an.

For the Afanema who said that Islam does not sanction wife beating, they also sought refuge in prophetic practice. They say that they do not have evidence that the prophet ever beat his wives. "It may be in the Qur'an that we can beat our wives, but once the Prophet, who is the first

implementer of the precepts of the Qur'an did not do it we too should refrain from doing it," argued Afa Shawki.

The Afa and Gender in Public Space

Hannah Arendt states that the public sphere is "the common world that gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other" (Arendt: 1958). Habermas (1989) lists what he describes as the conditions of the public sphere. They are;

1. The formation of public opinion
2. All citizens have access
3. Conference in unrestricted fashion (this refers to freedoms such as assembly, association, expression and the publication of opinions)
4. The debate over the general rules governing relations

The public space is therefore an important theatre for playing out gender roles, for the way that men and women live their lives in the open in any society is an indicator of the gender philosophy of that society. We have already cited the example of the Taliban of Afghanistan, who believed that implementing sharia meant that women should be banned from the public space. We therefore sought to find out from the Afanema, what in their view constitutes the Islamic position on men and women's participation in public space. In doing this, we asked three basic questions: Would you attend public gatherings with your wife? Should women be active in the public space? Can women play leadership roles in society? Out of the 15 interviewed six, representing 40% of the sample, said that they would neither attend public gatherings with their wives, nor will they encourage their wives to be active in the public space because Islam

prohibits the participation of women in the public space. Another six, representing a further 40% said that they would attend public gatherings with their wives and also encourage their wives to be active in the public space because Islam does not prohibit it. Three said that they would attend gatherings with their wives and encourage their participation in public space, depending on the circumstances. They mentioned circumstances such as funerals, weddings and outdooring ceremonies of close relatives. Even so, they said that the women would normally congregate in one place, separate from the men.

On the issue of women's leadership, 11 Afanema said that women cannot be leaders. "I object to women's leadership because God Himself said that if women assume leadership roles, it is unIslamic. Again from history, it is clear that all the messengers God sent, there was never a woman amongst them" Afa Mohammed Saani said. "The Prophet cursed a nation with a woman as its President; look at the condition of Ghana today; it is because President Mahama has appointed many women as ministers" Afa Wadood Ajura said. The interview was conducted in early 2016, when President Mahama was President of Ghana. This response from Afa Wadood is significant. He is the son of Afa Yussif Ajura, the founder of the Ahl-Sunna/Wahabiyya denomination who prayed that God should take his life before the day when a woman shall be President of Ghana. Afa Wadood studied in Saudi Arabia where Wahhabism is the dominant religious ideology. Others gave reasons such as "women should not be leaders because it will prevent them from playing their natural roles, especially child birth; how does a woman perform her functions as

president if she is pregnant or delivers?" asked Afa Issah. When questioned about post-birth, Afa Issah said that it is inconsequential, because the period of pregnancy and birth would have hindered her in the performance of her duties and would have cost the nation irreparable damage.

"God created men and women and chose the men to lead the women" said Afa Abu-Bakr Mohammed. Apart from arguing that Islam prohibits the leadership of women, other Afanema used biology as the reason why they are against the leadership of women. "Women are ruled by emotion, rather than reason" was the way Shaykh Ilyas put it. "When a woman assumes a leadership role, she belittles everybody, including her husband" is the way Afa Mika-eel put it.

On the other hand, the 23% who said that it is Islamically correct for women to participate in public space and also lead, cited the examples of several women in Islamic history who played leadership roles in the time of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). They mentioned the names of the Prophet's wife Aisha, the famous Umm Atiya and Umm Amara whose leadership qualities were lauded by the Prophet.

There is no unanimity amongst *Afanema* as to the roles of men and women. However, as can be gleaned from the data presented, the overwhelming majority of them hold views that suggest that Islam is a religion whose fundamental philosophy about gender is that the relationship between men and women ought to be one of dominator and dominated. And the minority, who dare to proffer alternative views are often hounded. For example, Imam Husain Rashid, has in the past two

years moved his *tafsir* (Qur'an interpretation sessions) from Tamale to Accra because his interpretation of the Qur'an always generates negative responses from the conservative Afanema who sometimes instigate some of their supporters to threaten to attack him. Indeed, he is the only Afa who believes and espouses the view that the concept of the woman's voice being her *awra* (nakedness) is a gross misunderstanding of an admonition that was meant specifically for the Prophet's wives and an admonition that had nothing to do with prayer. The loudest in opposing him in his supposedly liberal stance on women have been the Afanema with Wahhabi persuasion.

Analysis & Interpretation

What was obvious to us from the interviews was the often divergent views of the Tijaniyya Afanema and those of the Wahabiyya group. As we have stated above, two prominent Afanema stood out as far as their views on women's participation in public space and the position of women in sacred space is concerned: Afa Zakaria Abdul-Rahman and Imam Husain Rashid. Both of them are of the Tijaniyya denomination. They are against women's segregation and Imam Rashid disagrees with the preponderant view that because a woman's voice is her *awra* she should not voice it aloud. The Tijaniyya denomination as we have already stated is more tolerant of women's participation in public space. Majority of Afanema do not attempt at independent reasoning beyond what has already been stipulated by the traditional schools of Sunni Islamic thought: Maliki, Hanbali, Hanafi and Shafi'i. They do not just engage in "authoritarian hermeneutics" as expounded by Abou El-Fadl, but they

engage in "jurisprudential hermeneutics." Jurisprudential hermeneutics is that hermeneutics that seeks only to affirm what already exists in the corpus of Islamic jurisprudence as put forth by the four schools of Sunni Islamic thought. We agree with Robert Lacey (2009) when he states that, students go to Universities in Saudi Arabia in particular, "to imbibe the canon of received knowledge without question, not to learn how to think, critically or otherwise, and certainly not how to reorder the world" (p.54).

What makes it even difficult for some Afanema to think "outside the box" is the issue of bid'a (innovation). A popular saying attributed to the Prophet, in which he is reported to have said that, innovations shall not be accepted in the religion and that every innovation is a going astray and every going astray is in the hell fire. There are purist interpretations of Islam that therefore do not accept any practice that was neither engaged in by the Prophet nor received his tacit approval. Afanema of Dagbon believe that anything that the Prophet did not do is off limits. According to them, the Prophet did not commission women to lead men in prayer; the Prophet did not own resources jointly with his wives; the Prophet did not sanction the participation or presence of women in the public space. For them it is not their wish that women remain cloistered, but that it is the divine wish as accentuated by Prophetic practice.

Because Afanema are the source of the Dagomba Muslim's spirituality, they have impacted heavily on lay Muslims on the themes that I have presented above. We shall therefore examine the views of lay Muslims on the themes that the Afanema have already espoused their views on.

In examining this aspect of gender in Dagbon, no distinction is made between urban and rural setting. This is because from the answers that were elicited, both the urban and rural dwellers have the same attitude towards women. Sacred space is God's space and therefore the relationship between men and women within that space is dictated by what both the urban and rural dwellers consider as God's law. The attitude of the Afanema towards women in sacred space is what has determined the gender relations in sacred space. Fifty-two literate men who filled a questionnaire all said that women could only pray behind men. They all said that even if they prayed with their wives, their wives stood behind them. Regarding the ability of women to pray aloud, both the literate and the illiterate class and urban and rural dwellers all said that women could not pray in an audible voice. One of the literate men who gave his profession as "Accountant" said that "even though I do not prevent her from praying in an audible voice, I am yet to see a woman praying that way." This means that even though he does not object to his wife praying in an audible voice, it is not because he knows that it is okay to do that, it is because he is indifferent. Indeed, he has never seen any woman pray in an audible voice. For him therefore a woman praying in an audible voice is the exception rather than the rule. The verdict of the Afanema that women have melodious voices echoes among the reasons why men in Dagbon do not allow their wives to pray in an audible voice. One of the interviewees told us that his wife can pray in an audible voice "if she is alone and her melodious voice will not disturb anybody." That is what another

interviewee meant by "she can pray aloud where necessary." "Where necessary" means where her voice will not become a distraction for men.

The women of Dagbon have accepted the fact that sacred space is a man's space and are neither supposed to be seen nor heard within sacred space. One woman (a teacher) told us that even though she has no evidence to the contrary she does not believe that a God of justice will discriminate amongst His servants as to who can pray to him in an audible voice and who cannot. She therefore prays aloud when her husband is not at home and according to her she does not believe that her prayer is any deficient by that. The fact that she acts her belief only when her husband is not at home tells of the extent of male domination in Dagomba society. She says that she is unable to espouse her belief to her husband because, in "this society, women are not supposed to be heard; and so he would not listen and if he was to tell the Imams, they would encourage him to divorce me." Two other educated women told us that they pray aloud. One of them is Ahmadi. Generally Sunni Muslims accuse Ahmadi Muslims of being unorthodox and sometimes they even label them as *kufar* (disbelievers). However, it is not a general rule amongst Ahmadis that their women should pray aloud. They, like other Muslim sects all endorse the fact women's voices must not be heard during prayer. The other lady is a 24-year-old Senior Secondary School graduate. She is married to a 31-year-old man whose highest educational qualification is a first degree. And she said that she prays in a loud voice because, "there are options between loud and silent; and I choose loud." According to her, though she has no textual basis for her practice, she does not believe that God will restrict

people of a certain gender to pray in a particular way. According to her, her husband understands her viewpoint and does not quarrel with her when she prays. She however, conforms to the societal norm when she goes out because she does not want to be labelled as a rebel, which according to her can bring her husband a lot of trouble.

In all mosques that we visited in Dagbon, the women's side of the mosque is completely covered up so they do not even see the men during prayer services. Even the Salawatiyya mosque at Gumani in Tamale has the women's side of the mosque covered up even though Imam Hussain Rashid does not believe that they ought to be covered up. In his mosque in Ashongman in Accra, the women's side is not covered up. He tells us that the people of Tamale think that he is too liberal when it comes to women's issues, so sometimes he conforms to the practices of the people of Tamale, even though he knows that their position is not correct.

The issue of a woman being an Imam is a taboo subject in Dagbon. In our interviews, we tried to bring it up with Afanema who we consider enlightened and even they are not prepared to entertain the idea that a woman can lead prayers. Many of them told us that the issue of women leading prayers is an evil idea that has been sponsored by the West to destroy Islam.

In Dagbon, sacred space is men's space. Women when they come into sacred space can neither be seen nor heard. They are not only supposed to stand behind men in prayer, but their side of the mosque is supposed to be completely covered up so that they can neither be seen nor heard. The women have accepted that, that is the divine verdict on how

they should interface with God. The few women who neither believe it nor accept it, dare not openly voice their disagreement. According to one of the men "that is an Islamic ruling and nothing can be done about that." This means that there is no room for negotiating women's participation in sacred space in Dagbon. Those that attempt to challenge the status quo are labelled as *kufar* (disbelievers). Imam Husain Rashid for example, has been given such label and hounded out of Tamale.

Islam & Gender in Dagbon's Domestic Space: Urban Setting

The following data was collected in Yendi, Tamale and Savelugu, which are the urban areas. Questionnaires were administered exclusively to educated Dagomba Muslims

We administered 60 questionnaires to men, out of which 52 returned them. 40 were in polygynous marriages. This represents 77% of them. During the data validation process, a focus group discussion was conducted for eight of these 52 men. Out of the eight that participated in the focus group discussion, four were in polygynous marriages and the other four said they would marry other women in the near future. This shows that in Dagbon, polygyny is the norm, while monogamy is the exception. Even though the men cite Islam's permissibility of polygyny as why they are into polygynous marriages, Dagbon culture itself, gives them a further grounding for their preference for polygyny. They all subscribe and agree with the Dagomba saying that "*pa'a yino lan nyela dakoli*" which means "a man with one wife is a bachelor." Dagombas also believe that a man who has all his children born of one woman basically has one child. In other words, even 10 children born of one woman count as one

child. The issue of polygyny in Dagbon is therefore attributable to both Islam and Dagbon culture.

Because Afanema preach polygyny as the norm, most Dagomba Muslim men have imbibed that learning and opt for polygynous lifestyles. During the data collection process, we attended a marriage ceremony, between one Suraiya and Abdul-Ganiyu, which was officiated by Afa Hamdu in a mosque adjacent to the Tamale Teaching Hospital on the 13th December 2015. Abdul-Ganiyu was marrying Suraiya as his second wife. During the preaching after joining the couple in marriage, Afa Hamdu justified the polygynous position that Abdul-Ganiyu had taken by intimating that "polygyny is the norm in Islam." He said that Allah states in the Qur'an, that "marry women of your choice, two or three or four…" (Q: 4:3). He added that Allah did not start the count from one but from two and therefore two was the ideal. This is a common refrain in the preaching of Afanema who officiate in marriages in which the man is marrying a second, third or fourth wife.

The men give reasons for which they engage in multiple marriages as "my family encourages me," "it offers me the opportunity to have a variety of tastes," "society dictates that we marry more women" and "competition amongst the women brings out the best in them." One discussant at the focus group, quoted the Prophet as saying that "evil omen is in three things: the horse, the woman and the house" (Bukhari: Book 52, Hadith No, 110). To this end, he narrated a story in which a man of poor circumstances went to see the Prophet and the Prophet advised him to marry, even though he already had a wife. He went and married a second

wife. After sometime his circumstances were not changing, so he went back to see the Prophet. The Prophet asked him to take another wife. This went on until he married his fourth wife. And then his circumstances changed and he became wealthy. His argument therefore is that, one cannot tell which woman holds good and therefore multiple marriages can afford a man the opportunity to find the woman for whom his luck blossoms.

On the other hand, out of 57 women who filled and returned questionnaires, 39 were in polygynous marriages, representing 68% of the sample. Seven of them were selected for the focus group discussion. Out of the seven, four were in polygynous marriages, while three were in monogamous marriages. They gave virtually the same reasons that the men gave for the preponderance of polygyny in Dagbon. One of them related a story of how a few days after her marriage to her husband, they went to greet her husband's uncle and her husband's uncle, right in her presence, advised his nephew to try and take a second wife as soon as possible, because the longer he kept in taking a second, wife the more difficult it will become for him to do so.

As far as the issue of polygyny in Dagbon is concerned therefore, the mix of Islam and culture, has given birth to a society in which polygyny is the norm rather than the exception. Even though the women said that it is not a situation that they like, there is nothing that they can do to change that situation and therefore they try to adjust and cope with it.

The nature of the relationship between spouses is largely dependent on the relationship model that is practiced within the household. As such,

we sought to find out the type of relationship that exists in the household. Fifty-two males responded to questionnaires that were sent out. Of this number, 28 said that they adopted what most of them referred to as a "participatory" model of running their households. Twenty said that they adopted a mix of consultation and dictatorship. Only four said that they were the sole decision makers in the household to the exclusion of their wives and any other members of the household.

The men who adopt a participatory approach to running their homes, all added that it is in the spirit of Islam to consult. A number of them however adopt the consultative approach because it is the only way that they can buy their peace from their wives. However, those who adopt a mixture of consultation and authoritarianism do this because they do not believe that women have the full capacity for comprehension, so to consult them all the time will spell disaster for the family. According to one respondent, "My approach is sometimes participatory and sometimes authoritative; I think women have a lot to contribute to ideas but it is my view that their knowledge on issues is limited; I impose it appropriately." Another respondent said that "minor decisions are consultative; major decisions are dictated." In his view, minor decisions are restricted to meals and arrangements in the living and bedrooms. Major decisions include which school and *Makaranta* the children should attend, what social gatherings the wife and children should attend and what property they should acquire and where.

According to some 39 women, decision-making in their homes is by consultation. Fifteen experience a mix of consultation and dictatorship.

Four stated that it is by the total authoritarian discretion of their husbands. Of those who said that the man is the total dictator in the home, one said that "the man sees it as his moral responsibility to make decisions for the family without due consultation." "The man's words are always final" is how another put it.

There is the ingrained belief in Dagbon that "the male is not like the female." The implication being that, men and women have different roles to play in families and in societies. According to Afa Issah of the Islamic Education Unit in Tamale, we should not attempt to advocate for equality between men and women, "because it is practically impossible and religiously unacceptable." It is therefore the accepted belief by both men and women that there ought to be a strict separation of roles and gender segregation both within the family and in society. Eighty-one percent of men interviewed stated that they believe in gender segregation while 19% said that they do not believe in the segregation of men and women. On the other hand, 72% of women said that they believe in gender segregation, while 28% said that they do not believe in gender segregation.

To test for the practical manifestation of this belief in gender and role segregation, we sought to find out who assists children with their homework. It was revealed that only seven out of 52 men solely assist their children with their homework; 23 said that they do it jointly with their wives; 11 wives do it solely, while another 11 affirmed that others such as house helps do it. This shows that many men in urban Dagbon believe that assisting children to do their homework is the duty of wives. During the focus group discussion, all eight women were unanimous on the fact that,

beyond paying the children's school fees, the men do not care about the progress of the children in school. The women are responsible for taking the children to and from school. One of the women in the focus group discussion intimated that her husband rarely even pays the fees.

While 40 women averred that they are the ones who solely assist their children in doing their homework, another 17 said that they do it jointly with their husbands. Indeed, none of the women indicated that their husbands do it as a sole responsibility. This was also corroborated during the focus group discussion with the men who all admitted to not assisting their children with their homework.

As a result of the pervasive belief in gender segregation, the majority of urban dwellers in Dagbon do not believe in the joint ownership of resources by spouses. Of the 52 men who filled and returned questionnaires, none of them jointly owned any resources with their wives. Similarly, 41 out of 57 women, do not own any resources jointly with their husbands which represents 82% of the sample. Only 16 said that they own resources jointly with their husbands, which represents 18% of the sample.

Various reasons were given by the men to justify their position. The paramount reason was that of bid'a (innovation), which is basically a mimicking of what the Afanema have been trumpeting. The other reason given was that in Islam, men are supposed to be the "maintainers of women" (Q: 4:34) and therefore it is inconsequential whether or not they own resources jointly. Polygyny was also cited as the reason why it will be difficult for spouses to own resources jointly, because according to Afa Mika-eel, it is not possible to own resources jointly with more than one

wife. “I have two wives, I cannot own resources jointly with them”, he said. Another respondent, an Auditor by profession, said that “I do not own any resources jointly with my wife because of the potential for conflict when I decide to marry another wife.” There are two possibilities for a man who owns joint resources with his wife and wants to marry another woman. The first possibility is that his first wife will not give him any part of their joint resources for purposes of taking another wife. The second and perhaps the more dreaded prospect is that the wife will keep whatever she owns jointly with the husband as her compensation for marrying another woman.

“Confusion may arise in case divorce sets in” was the way another respondent put it. Respondents gave two other reasons as to why they do not own resources jointly with their wives. “I want them to have absolute control over their resources; it (owning resources jointly) may also result in avoidable misunderstanding” is the reason Afa Issah gave for why he does not own resources jointly with his wives. This is part of the reason that Afa Issah does not want to own resources jointly with his wives. However, others had no reason except to say that it is not a concept that appeals to them. “It is not necessary” is the way a teacher put it. “I personally do not encourage it but I have no Islamic basis” is an auditor’s reason for not owning resources jointly with his wife. “I do not see the need for it” and “I personally do not like that in my life” are the other reasons that other men gave for not owning resources with their wives.

The women also gave various reasons why they would not want to own resources jointly with their husbands. “My husband controls

everything anyway" is the way a secretary at the Lands Department in Yendi put it. "My husband does not believe in sharing things with women" is the way a teacher at the Zogbeli Primary School in Tamale put it. Others said, "because he wants it that way" and because "he will control me" which is akin to some of the answers that the men gave, such as "it is not necessary," "I personally do not encourage it," and "I do not see the need for it."

Women's resources are perhaps the only things that women hold and control within the marriage bond. To put their resources under the control of their husbands will therefore be to surrender the last and only power that they hold.

The issue of wife beating is a vexed question in Islam. The overwhelming position in Dagbon is that Islam endorses wife beating with the caveat that one should not seek to cause bodily harm to her. Out of 50 men who responded to the question of whether they beat their wives or not, 22 (42%) responded positively while 30 (58%) said no. On the issue of whether they believe that Islam sanctions wife beating, it was a statistical dead heat: they were equally divided. Opponents of wife beating argued that Allah has given wives for love and comfort and in their view, beating them will negate this fundamental principle of marriage. Proponents of wife beating on the other hand, used Q: 4:34 as their basis. Some explained that though "Islam has a prescribed way of hitting wives," "hitting one's wife is Islamic, provided that one follows the laid down procedure of hitting wives," "it is one of the methods of correction" were some of the reasons that respondents adduced for beating their wives. As

we stated in chapter two, various translations of the Qur'an put the word, "lightly" in brackets, after a translation of the word beat in order to mitigate the effect of the word, "to beat." It is this "lightly" that *Afanema* in Dagbon have explained to mean wrapping a rug or cloth around the whip in order that one does not injure his wife. This way of interpreting what is apparently a Qur'anic sanction for men to beat their wives, has come down from the traditional interpreters of the Qur'an which the men of Dagbon are merely regurgitating. This method of interpreting the verse on beating wives is part of the large corpus of jurisprudential material that forms a part of the literature on the four schools of Sunni law.

Strangely, there was a huge disparity between the percentage of men who admitted to beating their wives and who believe that it is Islamic to do so and the percentage of women who admitted to being beaten by their husbands. One of two factors must have accounted for this; either wives are shy to admit that their husbands beat them or the methodology of not interviewing couples together must have caused it. We abandoned the idea of interviewing couples together when during the first of such interviews, the woman was virtually silent throughout the interview. This same woman, when we arranged to talk to her alone later, she was very loquacious. The women are generally in awe of their husbands. Forty-two of men said that they beat their wives, as opposed to 26% of women who said that their husbands beat them.

During the data validation process, at the focus group discussion, five out of the seven women admitted to their husbands beating them. This is an indication that many of those who filled the questionnaire were not

truthful in their responses. In the focus group discussion with the men, six out of eight admitted to beating their wives. It is therefore obvious that a huge percentage of men beat their wives in Dagbon.

Again there was a huge disparity between the percentages of men who said it is Islamic to beat one's wife as against the percentage of women who said that it is Islamic for a husband to beat his wife. While 50% of men interviewed said that it is Islamic to beat one's wife, only 12% of women said that it is Islamic for a husband to beat his wife. Again this disparity is explainable in the sense that women are at the ones that suffer the effect of this belief. So certainly they will hate to believe that it has divine sanction.

From the above presentation and analysis, the domestic scene in urban Dagbon is a man's domain. It will seem that El Guindi's (1999: 83) assertion that the woman is *sitt al-bayt*, "the lady of the house," a term which according to him "stresses an autonomous managerial role, not domesticity" does not hold true for Dagbon. From the above analysis perhaps the only power that the woman has within the household in urban Dagbon, is the one that she wields over her earned resources. She cherishes this power and is not willing to enter into joint ownership of resources with her husband for fear that it might erode the last bastion of her independence.

Islam and Gender in Dagbon's Public Space: Urban Setting

To the extent that Dagbon is part of Ghana and Ghana is a secular country, women are certainly in the public space and participate in activities that take place within the public space. Women in Dagbon work

both within the formal and informal sectors of the economy without restriction. The overwhelming majority of women in Dagbon are either traders or farmers or both. Those in the urban centers tend to be traders, people in private employment or in white-collar jobs.

The obvious and most palpable aspect of the participation of the sexes in the public space is the glaring segregation that one observes in gatherings such as weddings, outdoorings and funerals. It is part of the socialisation of boys and girls as they grow, to appreciate the fact, mixing of the sexes is unacceptable in Islam. This orientation starts from the *Makaranta* schools, where almost every child growing up in Dagbon attends. This consciousness is pervasive in the Dagomba social milieu. Even in homes, especially in large compounds there is segregation in how children eat. So while there is the acceptance that both men and women can participate in the public space, this participation is underlined by a strict separation of the sexes.

Many men however, are wary of the degree of involvement of their wives in public activities. All the men interviewed said that except for very important purposes, they discourage their wives from being too much in the public sphere. Islam admonishes women not to leave their homes except with the approval of their husbands. The husbands contend that they grant permission for their wives to go out only when the activity for which they want to go out is necessary, such as the outdooring, wedding and funerals ceremonies of close friends and relatives. Even so, there is the general contention that women should not be seen outside after dusk. Women who are found walking alone after dusk are often tagged as

prostitutes. In the early to late 1970s, Dagbon had vigilante groups, with the mandate from the *Afanema* and chiefs to arrest and whip any woman who was found 'loitering' after dusk. With modernisation and democratic governance that practice no longer exists, except that such women are stigmatized as prostitutes.

Perhaps the only contentious issue with regard to women's participation in public space is the issue of leadership, because many men tend to view leadership as their exclusive right. Dagbon custom as has been observed in chapter three, reserves certain classes of leadership to women. In the days before the advent of Islam in Dagbon, women served as emissaries and ambassadors for Dagomba chiefs. Today, even within the traditional Dagomba arrangements, except for the chief of Gundogu, who is a woman most of the powerful roles that women used to play within the Dagomba traditional socio-political arrangements have been eroded. In Dagbon, the emphatic verdict of the Afanema is that women cannot lead.

Thus the class of Afanema who serve as leaders of the Dagbon society remains an exclusively male class. This is because, to lead, one needs a voice. Since a woman's voice is her awra, she cannot lead. However, Hajia Maryam Alolo is silently and slowly breaking the barrier to women's leadership in Dagbon.

Hajia Maryam Alolo attended her father's Qur'an school in Tamale, where she learnt the memorization of the Qur'an and the Arabic and Islamic classics. Her father was the late Alhaji Mahambil Kumbung, a Qur'anic scholar of repute in Tamale between the 1960s and 1980s. In

Dagbon one mostly assumes the title of Afa when one has studied a few Arabic and Islamic classics such as *Hidayatul Muta'abid Asalik*, by Shaykh Abdul-Rahman Al-Akhdari, *Dural Al-Bahiya*, by Shaykh Abdul-Bari Al-Ashmawi Al-Rufai and *Muqadimatul Izziya Lil Jama'a Al-Azhariya*, by Abil Hassan Ali Al-Maliki Al-Shadhilia and are popularly known as *Akhdari, Ashmawi* and *Izziya* respectively within the Muslim fraternity in Ghana. These are books on Islamic jurisprudence and treat topics that have to do with humankind's relationship with God such as ritual purity, the correct method of saying the *salat* and the proper observance of the five pillars of Islam. *Izziya* however goes beyond humankind's relationship with God to discuss topics that have to do with humankind's relationship with other humans and discusses topics on inheritance, family law and trade. Even though in the past, many girls and women had been to *Makaranta* and studied these classics, they never assumed the title of *Afa*.

The belief was that women learnt religion, not necessarily to teach it, but to enable proper worship of God, and that the best worship for a woman is the reverence of her husband. So in spite of the valuable knowledge of Islam that she acquired under the tutelage of her father, Maryam Alolo never ventured into teaching or the propagation of Islam in any form. Around age 25, Maryam was married off to Alhaji Alhassan Alolo, who encouraged her to acquire further knowledge in the religion and in Arabic. Heeding the advice of her husband, she applied to an institute for the study of Islam and Arabic in Qatar where she studied for about a year and returned to Tamale, to her trade at the Tamale market. It

was at the Tamale market that she began to teach her fellow traders the rudiments of the *salat* correctly. Subsequently, many women came to her shop to be taught. Realising that many women had need for the knowledge of the religion, she decided with the support of her husband, to start a school for girls and women in her house at Sabonjida.

Soon her fame began to spread as a teacher of women and many women trooped to her house to learn the religion. She was therefore compelled to quit trading in order to concentrate fully on the teaching of Islam to girls and women. Today she has over 1,000 students under her tutelage. Women who are above the age of 40 study on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. And those below 40 study on Mondays, Tuesdays, Saturdays and Sundays. Over time, she has gotten other women who have graduated under her to become part of her teaching staff. She has over 60 women who have all acquired the title of Afa under her.

Hajia Mariam Alolo recalls the struggles that she has been through to reach this stage of her proselytisation effort. When she started, she was attacked on the airwaves, booed wherever she went and when she dared to propagate and teach Islam on radio, she was sometimes physically prevented from doing so. The Afanema of Tamale said that her voice was *awra* and therefore it was *haram* (forbidden) for her to be heard. Consequently, some men warned their wives not to patronise her activities, which they said were unacceptable in the eyes of Allah.

In our interaction with her, Hajia Maryam Alolo told us that the male elite are concerned about guarding their leadership and therefore felt threatened by her. She argued that the hadith on the prohibition of

women's leadership is without canonical basis and that when the Prophet said that "the best of you are those who learn the Qur'an and teach it to others," he did not specify gender and therefore she will not succumb to male conspiracy to give up her calling. Today she goes around the villages in Dagbon and beyond, teaching Islam, though in some Dagbon villages, she is sometimes prevented from teaching. Her biggest opponents are the Afanema of the Wahabiyya group who according to her, maintain that her activities are against Islamic canon. She again maintained that their machinations against her and her emerging class of women Afanema is that, they are witches. But she remains undeterred.

She has built a mosque in a village in the Upper East Region, near Bolgatanga called Karimenga, through the benevolence of her daughter Namawu Alolo, who works with the African Development Bank in Tunisia. She believes that if the people of Dagbon realise what they are losing by denying her the opportunity to exercise her right to leadership, the citizens themselves will rise against the dictatorship of the male elite, whose only interest according to her is to protect their right to leadership.

Islam and Gender in Dagbon's Domestic Space: Rural Setting

The Dagomba rural setting is more patriarchal than the urban setting. On all the indices that this thesis measured in respect of gender in the domestic setting, it pointed to a situation where the man is the monarch of all that he surveys. Rural households are made of men who are related by blood and who descend from the same father or grandfather. Therefore, the head of the household holds consultation with other male members of the household rather than his wives. When a male son comes of age, he

then becomes the point of consultation. A husband may on occasion hold a 'consultative' session with his first wife, basically to hear her out on the problems that she faces running the household. Beyond this, whatever remedies have to be proffered to cure such difficulties are entirely up to the man.

Men are generally discouraged from engaging in long conversations with their wives, due to the belief that engagement in a long conversation end up revealing family secrets. Therefore, conversations with one's wives should be restricted to a few minutes.

The few monogamous households are those of young men who have just been married for less than three years. After the third year of marriage, taking on other wives becomes automatic. In rural Dagbon it is important that men have children from different women to be truly called men. So polygyny is non-negotiable. In rural Dagbon, women attend mainly wedding and outdooring ceremonies, while funeral ceremonies are exclusively men's domain. Therefore, women who attend funerals in rural Dagbon are those who have a close affinity to the dead and even so, they attend mainly to help the bereaved family to fetch water and to cook for the guests who shall attend the funeral. Gender segregation is very palpable on entering any Dagomba village, where one finds men sitting separately from women under trees.

Even though the people profess Islam in rural Dagbon, they pride in their "Dagombaness" more than their Islam. In the focus group discussion with both men and women in rural Dagbon, they all said that Dagbon culture rather than Islam is what dictates their everyday living.

Mba Dawuni of Adaboo however added that "Islam is very accommodating of our customs and traditions." In some cases, the precepts of Islam are even violated on account of Dagomba customs and traditions. For example, the overwhelming majority of Dagomba chiefs profess Islam and say the *salat*. But they all have more than four wives even though Islam restricts the number of wives that one can take to four.

Islam and Gender in Dagbon's Public Space: Rural Setting

In rural Dagbon, the woman is hardly visible. As a rule, boys and men are responsible for what pertains outside the home, while girls and women are responsible for what pertains inside the home. In other words, women do household chores, while men do duties outside the home such as farming and taking care of animals.

In rural Dagbon, if the woman is barely visible in the domestic sphere, in the public sphere she barely exists at all. She is not one of the people. She is an appendage to the people.

Conclusion

From the above analysis, it can be seen that the majority of husbands in the urban centers of Dagbon adopt a consultative approach to running their households though some believe that women ought to be dictated to sometimes. This may be due to the idea in Dagbon that women are deficient in knowledge and ought to be guided by men to order their lives in accordance with accepted Islamic standards. However, many men still believe that women ought to be dictated to sometimes. Indeed, there is a preponderant exegetical idea that is dominant in Dagbon to the effect that

women are deficient in knowledge and ought to be guided by men if they are to order their lives properly and according to accepted Islamic standards.

As has already been discussed in chapter two, this subject is still a matter of huge debate in Islamic exegetical discourse. In our interviews with Afanema, they were always quick to make statements such as "there are many hadiths in which the Prophet himself alludes to the intellectual deficiency of women."

It is generally said that "knowledge is power." The reverse is also the case: a lack of knowledge is powerlessness. Bukhari reports a hadith in which Umar bin Al-Khattab used to complain that they (the Quraysh) used to dominate their women until they migrated to Madina, where the women of Quraysh acquired the habits of the women of Madina, which was one of domination over their men because they were knowledgeable. It will therefore seem that men in Dagbon perpetuate the notion that women are deficient in knowledge in order to have legitimate grounds to be the ones in control. When one of the respondents said that "... I see or observe that their (women's) knowledge on issues is limited..." it gives him a license to decide to either consult his wife or not to consult her. When he consults her, her suggestions could either be taken or not taken because they are presumed to be deficient from the start. Men therefore see it as their "moral responsibility to make decisions for the family without due consultation." Even though from the statistics presented, a great number of men in urban Dagbon adopt the consultative approach to running their homes, they do not believe that consultation is an imperative.

Women are normally the ones that are disadvantaged in societies where there is strict gender segregation. Women are normally uncomfortable with the idea of gender segregation and would normally protest against gender segregation. Even in Saudi Arabia, arguably the most segregated society on earth, women do protest their isolation sometimes. It is these women's protest against segregation that brought the world's attention to the most famous protesting duo of Dr. Aisha Al-Mana and Fawzia Al-Bakr, both western educated women who obtained their PhDs in America before returning to Saudi Arabia and who are always in and out of jail for organising women of Saudi Arabia to protest their segregation (Lacey, 2009). No doubt their fight against segregation is influenced by what they had imbibed of western culture. We found in our interviews with women in Dagbon, that more educated women protested the treatment of women than their uneducated counterparts.

In Dagbon too, there are murmurs of protest, as for instance the 24-year-old Zaynab, a Senior Hugh School graduate who told us that in praying she does not murmur her prayer, because there are "alternatives between loud and silent" and she chooses loud. She does not believe that Allah will discriminate against people on the basis of their gender especially in respect of how they should communicate with him. Today Hajia Maryam Alolo has defied the verdict of the Afanema that has declared her voice as *awra*, and is going about her Islamic propagation and teaching activities. At the moment she may seem like an isolated case. The fact that she has up to 60 women under her tutelage is significant. It may not be long when the myth about a woman's voice being her *awra* will be

broken.

Many Dagomba women however, continue to acquiesce to the male belief that they ought to remain silent and segregated. They do not just accept it as a male imposition, but believe it is a divine sanction. Dagomba women have come to accept this as the norm, not necessarily because they believe in it but because they have consented to a dominant view that has assumed legitimacy. The refrain is always as one of the male respondents put it, "that is the Islamic ruling and nothing can be done about it." One of the ways in which this view has become dominant is through the emasculation of alternative views. Those who oppose the dominant view are labelled as kufar (disbelievers). Dissenting views are usually marginalised, vilified or at best ignored. Imam Hussain Rashid, who holds liberal views on the status of women in Islam has been hounded out of Tamale. Noam Chomsky (1998) talks about "the manufacture of consent," by which he means a situation in which people consent to a view, not necessarily because it is the right view, but because the people who wield power in the society have through both persuasive and coercive power, imposed the view, which comes to be accepted as true and valid. If ever there is manufactured consent, it is the view that a woman's voice is her *awra*.

This chapter has presented the situation in Dagbon as far as the negotiation of gender is concerned. But why do the men and women of Dagbon negotiate gender the way that they do? The next chapter makes sense of it all.

CHAPTER FIVE

MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL: A THEORETICAL APPRAISAL

Introduction

This chapter examines the extent to which gender relations in Dagbon today either vindicate or negate both the theoretical assumptions that underpin this study and other general theories of gender. It also appraises the data that has been collected and presented in chapter four by teasing out the theories that arise and are discernible from the data. Theories are used as broad explanations for the behaviour and attitudes of people. Theories are also used as lenses or perspectives from which studies are conducted. To that extent, I set off to undertake this study from certain theoretical perspectives and seeking to understand gender behaviour in Dagbon from those perspectives. This chapter therefore explains the basis of what was found in the light of the theories that underpinned the study.

Gender Justice

Allah is *Al-Adl* (the Just) and requires us to deal justly with one another. Thus the Qur'an asserts that Allah created us as males and females so that we may know one another, and we are not better than one another except on the basis of faith (Q: 49:13). Furthermore, Q: 33:35 establishes a basis for gender equality in the eyes of God;

> For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who

> humble themselves, for men and women who give charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's remembrance, for them Allah has prepared a great reward.

According to Syed Nawab Haider Naqvi (1981), a requirement of justice in Islam is to render to other humans, what is due them by dealing equitably with them in transactions, exchanges or honours. Gender justice is therefore an imperative in Islam. The Islamic norm is therefore that there should be a transactional equity between men and women in their daily dealings with one another, whether in the sacred or profane realm. Indeed, Q: 33:35 was revealed when the Prophet's wife, Ummu-Salama questioned him as to why his God had assumed that all humans were male. Hitherto, the language of the Qur'an was basically masculine in character. This verse was therefore revealed as a response to Ummu-Salama's question (Ibn Kathir, Vol 7, p.2003).

According to John Rawls (1971), justice is to ensure that no one is advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of principles by the outcome of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances. Since all are similarly situated and no one is able to design principles to favour his particular condition, the principles of justice are the result of fair agreement or bargain. John Rawls further asserts that for justice to be attained, the parties must be fairly situated and treated equally as moral

persons. Wadud (2006: X) re-echoes this Rawlsian position when she states:

> a person who makes the commitment to surrender to God accepts a covenant of conscientious moral and autonomous agency. The divine covenant offered by God to human beings entails an unwavering commitment to justice, integrity, truthfulness and resistance to all forms of dominance and oppression. Injustice as well as all forms of dominance and oppression undermine and at times completely obliterate a human being's moral agency- they rob people of their autonomy- of their ability to be responsible before God for their own moral judgments and actions.

It will however seem that the Qur'anic statement that "the male is not like the female" (Q: 3:36) has become a basis for male Muslim clerics, who are interpreters of the Qur'an to assert that Allah did not intend for men and women to be equal. In their view therefore, the principle of justice as stipulated by Rawls and Wadud will not apply when it comes to gender in Islam. Hussein Zakariya of Tamale argues that "equity is what Islam seeks, not equality." Whatever Muslim clerics mean when they talk about "equality" and "equity" is often not clear. But what is at the heart of the gender debate is actually equity not equality. After all, there is no disputing the fact that the male is not like the female and the terms "equality" and "equity" are often two sides of the same coin. The

Chambers Encyclopedic English Dictionary (1994, p.426) defines equality as "the same in size, amount, value etc. Evenly balanced; displaying no advantage or bias. Having the same status; having or entitled to the same rights." It then defines equity as "fair or just conditions or treatment" (p.427). So when the advocates of gender justice in Islam talk about equality, they do not mean that women can become men and vice versa. What they mean is that the conditions and rules of societal engagement should be such that men and women can participate in society on an equal footing and realise their full potentials without let or hindrance, especially so when that let or hindrance is premised on biological make up or sex. This is also what equity seeks to achieve. It will therefore seem that the struggle to distinguish between "equality" and "equity" is an unnecessary philosophical debate that does not touch the core of the argument on gender: the dislocation in social conditions that stifles the participation and growth of women in society. Indeed, the Qur'anic statement about the man not being like the woman refers to biological construct rather than social construct. That is why the Qur'an emphasises that no one is better than another except on the basis of faith. This means that in Islam sex or biology should not be a basis for which others get a better share of social goods.

In Dagbon however, there is an inherent assumption that, because "the male is not like the female" and because "men authority over women" (Q:4:34), gender justice cannot and should not be a part of the Islamic ideal of establishing justice in society. As stated in chapter four above, some women are beginning to protest gender injustice in Dagbon.

However, these voices of protest are few and far between. Rather, there is manufactured consent, which says that gender injustice is what Allah intended and any jihad (striving) to establish a regime of gender justice is *nushuz* (rebellion) and *nushuz* (rebellion) is to be punished.

Dagbon culture and tradition perhaps only exacerbates the gender injustice that is prevalent in Dagbon. In chapter three above, we gave a physical description of a typical Dagbon compound to be one in which there is a strict segregation of the men's quarter and the women's quarter. The men's quarter is at the front of the compound, while the women's quarter is at the back. This is part of the construction of masculinity. Men are the ones who can fight in case the family is attacked. Therefore, they should live in the front part of the house as "protectors and maintainers" of women. Ifi Amadiume (1987) in her seminal work, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* talks about the same arrangement in a typical Ibo compound.

Dagbon culture also has the ingrained belief that "the male is not like the female." In Dagbon, the talk of gender justice is perhaps blasphemous. A good woman is she who obeys her husband without question. According to Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore (1945) as quoted in George Ritzer (2008), stratification in society is a functional necessity. According to them society determines the place of people and classes within a structure. Society then motivates people to behave according to their position within the structure. The system has to assign appropriate rewards that will motivate those in the structure to behave according to the demands of their position within the structure. In Islam

and in Dagbon, the myth of 77 virgins is often recited with pious zeal, where men are told that if they behave properly on earth, they will be rewarded with 77 virgins in heaven whose skin is like shiny glass. Imam Hussain Rashid of Tamale says that the husband would be able to see his reflection in the skins of his wives and thus could use them as dressing mirror.

Women would have the opportunity to re-marry their earthly husbands as reward for their good behaviour. While men have a variety of 77 women to savour, women as reward are stuck with their earthly husbands irrespective of whether their earthly husbands were good or bad. This is hardly rewarding and this is hardly justice. But that is in heaven. On earth, women who behave properly and submit to the authority of men will be blessed with prosperous offspring, according to popular legend.

As part of Tijaniyya mythology in West Africa, the story is told of the circumstance surrounding the birth of Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse, the founder and patron saint of the reformed Tijaniyya Sufi movement, *Jama'at Faydat Al-Tijaniyya* (the community of Grace). In most West African cities his picture is emblazoned at the back of commercial vehicles and on the breast pockets of his adherents.

The story has it that his mother stood in torrential rain throughout the night waiting for his father to come for water he had asked her to fetch. She thus exhibited total submission to the authority of her husband. As her reward for acceding to male authority and supremacy, Allah gave her the iconic Ibrahim Niasse for a son. It is said that anytime Niasse's father was asked how come his son had become such a huge figure, he responded that

"because his mother was beaten by the rain" which is to say, his mother submitted totally to male authority. This may be apocryphal, but it vindicates Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore's theory that to maintain the system, society creates appropriate rewards, good enough to motivate its members to behave 'properly.'

In Dagbon therefore, gender justice is not a striving to achieve a model of "linking" rather than "ranking." Rather gender justice is when people behave according to the standards set for them by virtue of the position that they occupy within the societal structure.

"Can the Subaltern Speak?"

This sub-heading is the title of Gayatri Spivak's seminal paper. We have appropriated it for this work, because it speaks to the gender relations in Dagbon today. The term subaltern means a "subordinate." This far, we have shown that the gender model in Dagbon is that of dominator model rather than partnership model. There is a clear sense in which "men have authority over women" (Q: 4:34). Thus men dominate, while women are dominated. So woman is subaltern. A subaltern group according to Antonio Gramsci (2000, p.210) is the group "which has not yet gained consciousness of its strength, its possibilities, of how it is to develop, and which therefore does not know how to escape from the primitivist phase." From chapter four, we see that the men of Dagbon, have determined that women cannot even speak their prayer aloud. Woman as subaltern cannot speak. we use the word speak in a much broader sense than mere uttering of speech. To speak is to be heard. To speak is to have a voice. To speak is to be a participant. Speech is what gives vent to our identity. When we

have the power to speak, then we can project our identity. David H. Richter (1994: 70) quoting Giroux (1988) states that "voice draws attention to the ideological and cultural dynamics which enable people to define themselves and speak as part of a wider social and cultural formation." Once we are silenced, then others speak for us. And when they speak for us, they define us; they give us our identity. We then live in the shadow of those that speak for us. Richter (1994) adds that,

> to speak of voice is to address the wider issue of how people become either subjects who are agents in the process of making history or how they function as subjects oppressed and exploited within the various discursive and institutional boundaries that produce dominant and subordinate cultures in any given society

Those that speak for us are our representatives. Spivak asserts that those who represent others "must appear simultaneously as their master, as an authority over them, as unrestricted governmental power that protects them from other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above" (pp. 276-277). This is exactly the situation of woman as subaltern in Dagbon. Men, as representatives of women are the masters of women and see themselves as having the responsibility to "protect" women. Spivak again makes that point when she states that "both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production,

the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (p. 287).

But can men serve as true representatives of women? Spivak argues that it is a difficult proposition. She asserts that, rather than representing, the representatives rather re-present the subaltern in ways and in terms that do not mirror exactly who they are. So rather than representing women, the men of Dagbon rather re-present women in ways that do not mirror the original intent of God for their lives as *khulafau* (caliphs/deputies of God). In political parlance, there is a maxim that states that, "power delegated cannot be sub-delegated." And indeed gender relations are also power relations. That is why Spivak states that the original or initial title of her work was "Power, Desire, and Interest." When Allah said to the angels that He was placing humans on earth as His *khulafau* (deputies/caliphs), (Q: 2:30) He meant for humans, both males and females to discharge their respective roles as such. According to Rabiatu Ammah (2014, 193) "the implication of this *khalifaship* of human beings, including women, is that they are *de facto* leaders with a divine mandate to prosecute goodness and wholeness of life as intended by God for the attainment of good in this world and the hereafter."

Women therefore could not have sub-delegated their roles as deputies to men to exercise on their behalf. The social arrangement that makes men the representatives of women is an arrangement that is contrary to divine plan. This re-presentation of woman as subservient is premised on the role that men have arrogated to themselves as guardians of Islamic lore. It is basically the hegemony of male elite. Gramsci (2000, p. 211)

makes that point when he states that "the independence and autonomy of the subaltern group is…in fact sacrificed to the intellectual hegemony of the ruling class." The hegemony of the ruling class, in this case the hegemony of men is linked to the alleged intellectual power that men possess, which women allegedly do not have.

Education, Intellect and Gender

Islam is supposedly the religion of learning. The first verses of the Qur'an to be revealed commanded humankind to "read." The Prophet admonishes Muslims to "seek for knowledge" even if they might "travel to China." Subsequently, travelling in search of knowledge was to be made a virtue that attracts divine favour. "One knowledgeable Muslim is harder on the devil than a thousand ignorant ones" is another saying attributed to the Prophet. Allah is said to have asked the angels to prostrate before Adam because he possessed a knowledge of creation which they did not have (Q: 7:11). Therefore, in Islam, to be knowledgeable is to be in a position to worship God in truth and according to divine standards. The reverse of it is that, a lack of knowledge makes it difficult for one to please God no matter how hard one may try.

Umar bin al-Khattab, used to complain after the Muslims migrated from Makkah to Madina, that the Qurayshi women had acquired the habits of the Ansari women, which was one of domination over their men. He said that before the migration to Madina, Qurayshi women were subservient to their men but were no longer that subservient after the migration because they began to copy the lifestyle of the Ansari women. Ansari women were known to be more dominant and assertive (Bukhari:

Vol 3, p.387). But why were Ansari women more dominant and assertive? Aisha bint Abubakr, the wife of the Prophet provides the answer. According to her, the women of Madina were excellent because, "they did not let shyness intercede in the pursuit of learning sound religious knowledge" (Bukhari, Vol 3, p.97).

If Ansari women were assertive and excellent because of their pursuit of religious knowledge, then one way of taking away or blunting the assertiveness of women is to deprive them of religious knowledge or to belittle the extent of their knowledge. Thus depriving women of knowledge is one way of depriving them of their voice. And the men of Dagbon have enough canonical justification for asserting that women are naturally deficient in knowledge. One of the ahadith that is constantly on the lips of Afanema is one narrated by Abdallah bin Anas in which the Prophet is reported to have said that part of the signs of the end time is that, 1) religious knowledge will be taken away with the death of learned men; 2) there will be a prevalence of ignorance; 3) there will be an increase in the number of women and 4) there will be sexual permissiveness (Bukhari Vol 3, p.68).

The prevalence of ignorance is associated directly with the increase in the population of women and more importantly, the death of learned men. Also, with the increase in the number of women, will also come the increase in sexual licentiousness. So when Afa Ahmed of Tishigu in Tamale asks the rhetorical question, "what ideas do women have?" he has a basis in the ahadith. "Women are ruled by emotion rather than reason" asserts Shaykh Ilyas of Tamale. Because "women are deficient of

knowledge," Afa Abu-Bakr Mohammed can state with certainty, that "God created men and women and chose men to lead the women." To people like Afa Abu-Bakr Mohammed, men are meant to dominate, while women are meant to be dominated.

It is for this reason that Paulo Freire (1970) considers "the fundamental theme of our epoch to be that of domination" (p.84). He believes that if humankind is to achieve its goal of development and happiness for all, then it must eliminate "dehumanizing oppression" (p.84). Freire then promulgates the central thesis of his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to be education. Freire argues that it is only through education that oppressed people or groups can redeem themselves. Sarup, quoting Michel Foucault, states that "knowledge is power over others, the power to define others" (Sarup, 1988, p.67). Freire believes that co-operation and dialogue are necessary if a society is to achieve progress and happiness. This dialogue must be between the dominator group and the dominated group. And this dialogue must be unrestrictive. "Dialogue does not impose, does not manipulate, does not domesticate…" (p.149). For the dominated group to participate in the dialogue, they must have a voice. Kwapong (2009) argues that the search for women's liberation will remain an illusion unless men, who are the dominating class, agree to enter into a dialogue with women. Men ought to accept that women have voices that are worth listening to. In Dagbon, women are excluded from this dialogue. Their voice is their awra. And since they cannot speak and therefore cannot engage in dialogue with men, they cannot be participants in the development process in Dagbon society.

The reverse of this argument is that a lack of knowledge allows others to define you. So when the men of Dagbon deny women like Hajia Mariam Alolo the opportunity to display the learning that they have acquired from the same universities in Arab lands from where the men also acquired their knowledge, it is a way of finding justification to define women rather than allow women to define themselves. Hajia Mariam Alolo rightly asserts that the attempts at gagging her are only a way by which the men hope to preserve their leadership positions. Freire makes the same argument, when he states that, dominators, by silencing the dominated, "want to save their riches, their power, their way of life; the things that enable them to subjugate others" (p. 127). Women like Hajia Mariam Alolo are able to assert their right to do what they are doing because they have acquired religious knowledge. As Abdullahi An-Naim (2008) has argued, every Muslim (male or female) has the right to learn the religious sciences for themselves and to relate to God in the way that they understand best. In Dagbon, the traditional monopoly of the knowledge of the religious sciences remains a huge barrier in the way of women. In all the *Makaranta* schools, after *Sanawi*, (Senior High School) the women simply fade off or marry men, while scholarships are obtained for the men to go to Arab lands to further their religious education. This way, there is hardly any opportunity for women to enter into dialogue with men for the advancement of the society. For women to be able to enter into meaningful dialogue with men, women must of necessity be educated. It is for this reason that Rabiatu Ammah (1992) argues that

> the Koranic (sic) emphasis on education and seeking knowledge is much more essential for the Muslim woman. As one who nurtures the children in the family, which is the basic unit of society, she herself has to be very educated, be it formally or informally (p. 80).

And there is plenty of evidence in Islamic history to suggest that women have been learned in the religious sciences and reached the highest points of spirituality. The story of the famous Rabia Adawiya comes to mind. Rabia Adawiya is arguably the most famous woman Sufi saint of Islam if not the most famous Sufi saint. The famous Hassan Al-Basri, who some credit with being the patron saint par excellence of Sufism, is reported to have said of Rabia Adawiya, that "when I looked at her (Rabia) I saw myself as bankrupt and Rabia as truly sincere" (Helminsky, 2003 p.23). There is also a popular story of how a woman corrected Umar bin Al-Khattab on a theological matter, to which Umar admitted, "a woman is right and Umar is wrong." It is significant to state that Umar bin Al-Khattab is responsible for many of Sunni Islam's theological practices and beliefs today. Umar is therefore credited with what Philip Hitti (1970) calls "the second theocracy of Islam" (p.169). For somebody like Umar to admit a woman's rightness and his wrongness shows that when women are educated in the religious sciences, they can enter into meaningful dialogue with men. Fatima bint Muhammad, the daughter of the Prophet was politically active immediately after the death of the Prophet because she possessed knowledge that made her worthy of engaging in political and

religious debate. Fatima fought for the right of her husband Ali to be caliph even long after Abubakr's election had virtually become fait accompli. Fatima would go every day to the *Ansar* (Helpers) and try to convince them about the wrongness of Abubakr's election as caliph. This is how Ali Shariati (1980, p.210) captures it;

> Through her influential spirit, with her great human personality, her political awareness, with the accurate knowledge she had of Islam, its spirit and goals and finally with the power of logic and reasoning, she proves the rightfulness of Ali and the wrongfulness of the election.

Aisha bint Abubakr, the woman to who the Prophet says we should go to learn half of the religion, was very active in the political arena, eventually leading a Muslim army to battle against Ali bin Abu Talib in what has become known in Islamic history as the battle of Camel. There is a lot of evidence in Islamic history to support the public involvement of women in the affairs of the Islamic community on the basis of knowledge and not of ignorance. The assertion by Afanema of Dagbon, that women do not have ideas and are deficient of knowledge is at best of weak canonical basis. There is a large body of scholarship that has questioned all the body of misogynistic ahadith that designate women as people of inferior knowledge. The famous Abu Bakra for example, who reported the hadith that says that "any people who are led by a woman shall never be successful" has been reported to have borne false witness and was convicted of the crime of *kadhif* and punished. Thereafter the caliph Umar

bin Al-Khattab declared him unworthy of ever serving as witness in any case (El-Fadl, 2001). It will seem that the pervasive patriarchy of the Qurayshi culture influenced a lot of the ahadith that were peddled about women in the aftermath of the death of the Prophet.

According to the Qur'an, the Prophet was sent as a mercy to humankind. That mercy encompasses both males and females. And throughout the life of the Prophet, he made sure to allow the full participation of women both within and outside the sacred space. There are incidents in the Qur'an where the voices of women standing up for their rights has elicited divine intervention. There is the famous example of Khawla bint Thalaba, whose husband divorced her by *zihar*. Zihar is to equate one's wife to one's mother and to swear never to touch her on account of that. After that, Khawla's husband changed his mind and wanted to sleep with her again. She refused. And when he persisted, she went to the Prophet to complain. The Prophet initially told her to forgive her husband and resume sexual intercourse with him. But she disputed the Prophet's stance. Thereupon Allah intervened to vindicate her position. Q: 58:1-3 was revealed to institute a ransom of freeing a slave on the husband and any man who will divorce his wife by *zihar* before he can go back to her.

Indeed, the first human being to embrace Islam was a woman: Khadija. It was Khadija's show of leadership and courage, which enabled Muhammad (SAW) to develop the necessary tenacity to withstand and assimilate the later experiences that for the next 22 years will characterise his prophetic life. Aisha bint Abubakr and Ummu Salama were two

brilliant wives of the Prophet whose contribution to Islamic theology has been phenomenal. So in the time of the Prophet, the woman was hardly subaltern. The woman was as present as the man in both sacred and profane space. Women began to lose many of their rights and privileges, which they enjoyed under the Prophet during the caliphate of Umar bin Al-Khattab. Dagbon can reclaim the egalitarian principles of the Prophetic era if the women study the sacred scriptures themselves and assert their rights as full humans and as *khulafau* of God. This can happen if the men also realise that none is better in the sight of Allah than another, except on the basis of *iman* (faith). In that case, gender justice will not be a utopian ideal, but part of God's plan for making humans his *khulafau* on earth. But at the center of the gender debate is the question of hermeneutics. What is God's plan for both men and women? Who is responsible for deciphering this plan? It is to this subject that we must now turn.

Hermeneutics

The word hermeneutics comes from the Greek, *hermeneuein*, which means "to interpret" or "to translate" (Stanley & Robinson, 2011). It is derived from the name of the Greek god of messaging called, Hermes. Hermes was the son of the Greek god, Zeus, and was responsible for transmitting messages from the Greek gods to the citizenry. His business was not merely to regurgitate what the gods had told him, but more importantly to decode the messages and make them understandable to the recipients, who unlike the gods, were mere mortals.

> Hermes had to interpret the meaning of the messages on behalf of his listeners and in doing so,

> had to go far beyond merely repeating the intended truth. He had to re-create or re-produce the meaning that would connect to his audience's history, culture and concepts in order to make sense of things (Stanley & Robinson, p.3).

In the case of the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was its recipient and interpreter. He was responsible for transmitting the divine message to his followers. Indeed, the Qur'an states that one of the responsibilities of the Prophet was to explain the Qur'an (Q: 16:44). After the death of the Prophet his closest companions assumed the role of interpreters of the divine word. Some of them became famous for their abilities in this respect. These included the first four caliphs, Abu-Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali. Others included Abdallah b. Mas'ud who settled in Iraq, Ubay b. Ka'b in Madina, Abdallah b. Abbas in Makkah and Zayd b. Thabit in Madina (Saeed, 2006). Their interpretations of the divine word, became standard reference for what constituted the meaning of the Qur'an. We have already stated in chapter two of this study, that in Islam, the hierarchy of authority after Allah and the Prophet is the "*ulul amr*" (those in authority).

Those who inherited the authority of the Prophet in this regard were a predominantly male class. Aisha was one of few women who wielded authority on matters of religious knowledge. Aisha was one of the wives of the Prophet, and the only one that he married as a virgin. He is reported to have spent more time with Aisha than he did with his other wives, which allowed her to become a storehouse of the standard practices

of the Prophet. Aisha has many ahadith credited to her. Even so, Aisha is hardly mentioned when a list of famous interpreters of the Qur'an is drawn. Indeed, rather than Aisha, Abu Hurairah is the one who has bequeathed to us the largest collection of Prophetic sayings.

The activity of striving to understand the divine word is called *ijtihad*. About two centuries after the death of the Prophet, various efforts at distilling the essence of the divine message had yielded a corpus of material, which has come to be classified as *fiqh* (jurisprudence). Fiqh, together with the Qur'an and the large collection of the sayings of the Prophet, constitute what the majority of Muslims classify as sharia. The standard practices of the leading Islamic centers in the first two centuries after the death of the Prophet crystallised into what has become known as the schools of Islamic jurisprudence.

> Basically these schools were formed through the personal allegiance of groups of jurists to a founder-scholar from whom they derived their names of Hanafis, Malikis, Shafi'is and Hanbalis. The two oldest schools are the Hanafis and Malikis and both came into existence as the representatives of the legal tradition of a particular geographical locality- the former being the disciples of Abu Hanifa (d. 767) in the Iraqi centre of Kufa, the latter the followers of Malik b. Anas (d. 796) in the Arabian centre of Madina (Coulson: 1969, p.21).

The ideologues of Islamic jurisprudence are therefore all male and down to the twentieth century, all the famous jurists and interpreters of the divine word have been male. All Islamic norms of behaviour supposedly gleaned from the Qur'an, including how females should participate in sacred spaces have been handed down to us by exclusively male interpreters: from Tabari in the 10th century to Mustapha Mahmud in the 20th century. The authority of these male interpreters, has been clothed in a sacred garb, which basically makes their word, law; not ordinary law, but law whose violation attracts divine wrath. A famous disciple of Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal (the founder and ideologue of the Hanbali school of thought), Ahmad Ghulam Khalil (d. 888) makes this point forcefully when he states;

> whoever fails to follow them, errs and commits innovation (*bid'a*)…He is an innovator, he goes and leads astray…to discourse, polemicise, dispute or argue is an innovation that raises doubt in the heart, even if one hits upon the truth and the *sunna* in this fashion (Arkoun, 2006, p.209).

We have already pointed out in chapter four of this study that the issue of *bid'a* in Islam is a huge instrument in the arsenal of Afanema in Dagbon, with which they ward off any challenge to their authority and with which they resist change. In "A Tafsir of Praxis: Gender, Marital Violence and Resistance in a South African Muslim Community" Sa'diyya Shaikh argues that Islam is often construed as a handmaiden of patriarchy" (p.66) because "a lot of the normative religious legacy that passes as

objective religious knowledge in fact represents the historical product of male subjectivities. These are primarily the perspectives of elite scholarly men living in societies pervaded by patriarchal assumptions" (p.8). And in these sufferings, the clergy, the custodians of Islamic lore, provide no solace. They (the Muslim clergy) virtually support their husbands in abusing them because according to their interpretation of the Qur'an, it is okay for husbands to beat their wives. We have shown in chapter four, that a similar situation prevails in Dagbon, where the Afanema's interpretations of the Qur'an provide the ideological cover for the muffling of female voices.

Abou El Fadl (2001) suggests that interpreters of the Qur'an must consider five important factors in their theological formulations: honesty, diligence, comprehensiveness, reasonableness and self-restraint. He suggests that those who purport to speak on behalf of Muslims, must take into consideration what he calls "communities of meaning." He asserts that the interpreter must "think about whether a particular construction will make sense to one's relevant community" (p.55). In other words, it is important that the male interpreters of the Qur'an guard against the arbitrariness which often characterises their interpretation of the Qur'an. Sometimes such arbitrariness can be fatal. The fatality of arbitrary interpretation is manifest in the Hindu rite of *suti* also called *suttee*. *Suttee* is the practice among some Hindu communities, where widows are made to commit suicide by burning on their dead husbands' funeral pyre. Spivak (1988) argues that the text from the Hindu scripture, the Veda, with which *suttee* is justified, is an unnecessary and unjustified misreading of a text

which has nothing to do with either a dead man or fire. In chapter two of this study, we showed that the edict by the male elite of Islam, that women cannot speak their prayer aloud is a needless and totally unjustified extension of the borders of an edict that was specifically addressed to the Prophet's wives. Even so, the verse (Q: 33: 29-35) was an admonishment to the Prophet's wife about their interaction with other men in profane space. Ibn Kathir, quoting Al-Tabari, states that this verse was revealed solely concerning the wives of the Prophet. Ibn Abi Hatim records a hadith on the authority of Ibn Abbas confirming that this verse was indeed revealed solely for the wives of the Prophet (Ibn Kathir: 2003). How that has become an edict for female conduct in sacred space is unfathomable. Thus both in Dagbon and in India the people (in this case, the male elite) who are the guardians of religious lore, have by their interpretation of scripture, subjected women to an agonising silence in the case of Dagbon and to death in the case of India.

One of the theories that has shaped modern discourse on social ethics and justice is Habermas' theory of the public sphere. Habermas contends that;

> The public sphere is the realm or arena in which citizens organise themselves, express opinions and desires, and argue different points of view. Along with his concern for the legitimacy of the public sphere, Habermas continually returns to two other themes, namely, discourse and as we have seen, critical-rationality. These three interrelated issues

> are present in all his major philosophical and sociological endeavours (Stanley E. Porter & Jason C. Robinson: 2011: 137).

We have argued in this work that gender relations are played out in the public sphere. When a female soldier is told by a man that a woman standing outside in the cold the whole night has no honour, he is talking gender as a public matter; that in the public sphere, a woman should not be seen (Mernissi, 2003, p.143). The dialogue that takes place between the man and the female soldier vindicates Habermas' assertion that "the public sphere is the realm or arena in which citizens organise themselves, express opinions and desires, and argue different points of view" (p.137). In this case, what may look like a dialogue is in fact not. The man's mind about a woman's participation in the public sphere is made up; he does not believe that a woman should be in the public space. So the woman's defense that she is in the cold so that the man might sleep soundly, is not a convincing argument for the man. To him, a woman in the street all night is a whore and it does not matter what her mission on the street is. According to Mernissi (2003) there is a sense in which Moroccans hold the belief that "respectable women are not seen on the street" (p.143) and that "only prostitutes and insane women wandered freely in the streets" (p. 143).

In the late 1970s to early 1980s there was a phenomenon in Dagbon called *ja'milti febbu*. *Ja'milti febbu* literally translates as "whipping prostitutes." In this practice, which was sanctioned by both traditional rulers and Afanema, scores of young men were unleashed onto the streets at night after 10:00pm and any woman who was found roaming

the streets at that time was to be considered a prostitute and whipped. Initially there were officially sanctioned vigilante groups who were "licensed" to engage in *ja'milti febbu*. Later on, any young man who felt inspired by the desire to "protect public morality" joined in the frenzy of whipping women on the streets at night. This is akin to the moral police, who operate in Saudi Arabia, the nerve centre of Islamic spirituality under the Department for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. It is significant to state that it was in the late 1970s and early 1980s that the zeal and passion for the promotion of the Saudi inspired *salafist* brand of Islam was at its peak with Afa Yussif Ajura as the ideologue. Afa Yussif Ajura felt so emboldened to "protect public morality" that he even banished the late Tijaniyya God-father of Ghana, Shaykh Abdallah Maikano from ever setting foot in Tamale. In his opinion, Abdallah Maikano and everything he represented had a corrupting influence on Islam. When Shaykh Abdallah Maikano got audacious enough to violate the banishment order and went to Tamale, Afa Ajura ordered his supporters to attack him. One person died in that confrontation and many others wounded. *Ja'milti febbu* was a phenomenon that existed only in Tamale and not in the entire Dagbon and so it cannot be attributed to Dagbon culture. Afa Ajura's influence was most pronounced in Tamale and *ja'milti febbu* was as a direct result of that influence. His interpretation of the Qur'an and the standard practices of the Prophet only sought to accentuate the saying of the Prophet that "I leave no greater discord for you than women." For Afa Ajura the male guardians of Islamic lore, woman in the public space is a source of moral discord. The only remedy

is to keep women off the streets. Afa Ajura himself practiced what is known in Muslim communities as *amaryan kulle* (marriage of seclusion), where a man does not permit his wives stepping outside the home and where they live secluded from other male visitors to their home, with who they speak from "behind a veil."

Today the practice of "whipping prostitutes" has all but stopped, except for two episodes in 2014, which were episodes that basically jolted the entire Dagbon to the realisation that public morality was at perhaps, its lowest. In the first incident, various video clips of a young man known as Kamil went viral on social media. In these video clips, Kamil had carefully recorded episodes of his sexual escapades with scores of young ladies from Tamale, apparently for his viewing pleasure. In interviews he later granted with Ghanaian media from his base in Canada, he explained that his pen drive on which he stored these videos was stolen just before he emplaned for Canada. Traditional rulers, chief amongst them being the *Dakpema* (Chief of Tamale) were outraged. With the tacit approval of the parents of these ladies, a number of them were taken to the chief's palace and whipped. Kamil is now domiciled in Canada. It therefore remains to be seen if he will be whipped too if he ever sets foot in Tamale.

In the second incident, two young ladies, called Hairiyya and Hamida, were seen in videos that went viral, smoking what appears to many as Indian hemp and boasting of how good they are at sexual intercourse. They recorded this video to taunt two young men who had allegedly insulted them as "cheap" girls who they (the boys) had slept with. They boasted in this video about how they sleep with "better" men.

Young ladies in the conservative Islamic town of Tamale openly proclaiming their sexual expertise was scandalous to both the Dagomba and Islamic sense of morality. Again with the approval of their parents, these ladies were searched out and taken to the Tamale chief's palace, where they were whipped. Even so, some people spoke against it, arguing that it was against their human rights. Especially so because the boys, whose earlier video about how they had slept with these girls inspired their (the girls') response were never sought after and were never "punished." That to me, was significant; sex is a theatre for the construction of masculinity. In the public sphere, men can talk openly about sex. Women cannot. Edo Torgah (2010, p.1) reflects a similar situation amongst the Ewe, when he states that,

> amongst the Ewes, there is a tacit linguistic monopoly in certain spheres of everyday language use…there are linguistic no-go areas depending on the gender of the speaker. Whereas there seems to be total linguistic freedom as far as male speakers are concerned, women on the other hand cannot avail themselves of the idioms and expressions that male speakers use ad libidum without being accused of social impropriety.

Even though Habermas' theory of the public sphere was not gender specific, he is interested in

> fostering public opinion that is free of dominating ideologies and monopolizing interests or

> prejudices. Habermas desires a democratic public sphere in which members may freely, without any form of compulsion, enter into rational discourse so as to debate the legitimacy of given assertions, laws and policies (Stanley E. Porter & Jason C. Robinson: 2011: 137).

The notion of textual authority can therefore be used to silence a group of people by denying them their voices. It can also be used to encourage discourse and encourage marginalised groups to speak up and tell their stories. This is what Habermas refers to as the "democratic public space." According to Carby as quoted in Richter, (1994:72), debates about a hermeneutic of inclusion, is fundamentally about "addressing ways in which our society is structured in dominance." We have stated in chapter four, that the gender structure in Dagbon is one of dominator rather than partnership. That is fundamentally because men determine the structure of gender relations through their "right" as interpreters of God's word. It is their domain and they fight to guard it, especially from intrusion by women. That is why Hajia Mariam Alolo's attempt to intrude into this exclusively men's club is being fiercely resisted. Abdullahi An-Naim (2008, p.9) subscribes to Habermas' "democratic public space" when he questions the exclusive right of the *ulama* to interpret God's word. According to him, "all Muslim men and women have the religious obligation to learn enough to decide for themselves and to express their views on matters of public concern." An-Naim adds that "traditional interpretations of those sources are gradually being questioned by ordinary

Muslims" (p.19). As we have stated in chapter four, some women are beginning to murmur their protest. Perhaps in the near future, these murmurs of protest will burst out into open defiance that may significantly alter the structure of gender relations in Dagbon.

Today ordinary Muslims are beginning to interpret the Qur'an for their own understanding of God and His demands on their religiosity. Abdullah Saeed (2006:21) calls it the "democratisation of understanding." Sa'diyya Shaikh calls it the "tafsir of praxis." In the "tafsir of praxis" people relate to and understand the Qur'an based on their lived experiences. Shaikh interviews abused Muslim women in the Cape Town area of South Africa, who have constructed their own "community of meaning" and are living it. She may not have a text of the Qur'an or hadith that states that violent people cannot lead the prayer, but her interpretation of what constitutes Imamship has a basis in Islamic law. The Prophet is referred to as "an excellent exemplar." Those who purport to represent him (those in authority) must be examples as well. Violence and cruelty towards women is hardly an example worthy of emulation. To be an Imam is to be at the head, to lead, to be followed. Therefore, this woman is right in refusing to follow a person whose example is a bad one.

The questioning by ordinary Muslims of the monopoly of the interpretation of the Qur'an by the *ulama* has given birth to new hermeneutic fields of scholarship. One of such new fields of hermeneutic scholarship is feminist hermeneutics. Wadud's *Qur'an & Woman* and Asma Barlas' *Believing Women* are classic examples of "bringing cultural politics into exegetical scholarship" (Saeed, p.23). In this hermeneutic

paradigm, the Hermeses of our time are being questioned about the accuracy of their interpretation. Fortunately, the modern Hermeses do not have the type of exclusive right that the Greek Hermes had to Zeus. The Qur'an, which is the original source of God's word is available and people who are in doubt about the accuracy of what our Hermeses are telling us can verify for themselves. In fact, the fact that the Qur'an is available in multiple languages is a vindication of the principle of "democratisation of understanding." Hajia Mariam Alolo and her emerging club of women Afanema are questioning the traditional interpretations that have been handed down from generations. They are formulating their own "tafsir of praxis." The woman who told me that there are alternatives between praying silently and loudly and that she chooses loud is engaging in a "tafsir of praxis." And she is right. Indeed, the Qur'an admonishes Muslims to neither raise their voices too loud nor murmur their prayer; but that they should seek a middle course between (Q: 17:110). The Qur'an does not state that this commandment applies only to men.

Existentialist Feminism and the Concept of the 'Other.'

Existentialist feminism claims that from the beginning man has named himself the "Self" and women the "Other" (Beauvoir, 1974). If the other is a threat to the self, then woman is a threat to man; and if man wishes to remain free he must subordinate woman to him. Therefore, woman has always been subordinate to man and they have "internalized the alien point of view that man is the essential, woman the inessential" (McCall, 1979). Existentialist feminism provides an analysis of how woman became the "Other", not only different and separate from man but

also inferior to him. It is argued that society interprets biology in a way that suits its ends. Basic biological difference is rooted in the reproductive roles of males and females. Although biological and physiological facts about women may be real enough, how much value we attach to these facts is up to us as social beings (De Beauvoir, 1974).

The concept of the 'other' has been an important part of post-colonial studies and discourse. We appropriate it for this work because of its concept of the binary opposites. Stuart Hall (1997) argues that people are frequently exposed to binary forms of representation. "They seem to be represented through sharply opposed, polarised, binary extremes-good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive, repelling…" (p.229). In religious traditions, just as in Islam, the world is presented as a division between good and evil and in the case of the hereafter, as heaven and hell. The concept of binary opposites is an ingrained part of religious traditions and in Islam, this binary concept is often at the heart of dogma and belief. When it comes to the question of gender, women are often the representation of evil and men are the representation of good. Levi-Strauss as quoted by John Sturrock (1979) avers that humans impose meaning or make meaning out of their social environments by ordering and organising things into classificatory systems. According to Levi-Strauss binary oppositions are crucial for all classification because one must establish a clear difference between things in order to classify them.

When the Qur'an states that "the male is not like the female," (Q: 3:36) it is a classificatory mechanism that allows for Muslim communities to establish a clear difference between men and women. So when Afa

Issah of the Islamic Education Unit in Tamale says that we should not attempt to advocate for equality between men and women, "because it is practically impossible and religiously unacceptable" he is merely establishing this binary opposite between men and women. This binary of opposites is present in virtually every classificatory category in Islam. The blind is not like the seeing. (Q: 6:50; Q: 35:19). Those who sit at home and those who engage in *jihad* are not alike. (Q: 4:95). The slave and the free person are not alike. (Q: 16:75). The believers are not like the unbelievers. (Q: 32:18). The knowledgeable and the ignorant are not alike. (Q: 39: 9).

It is significant to note how Afa Issah puts the difference between men and women: he says that to try to equate the man and the woman is "practically impossible and religiously unacceptable." It is both practically impossible and religiously unacceptable because the differences are rooted in nature. The naturalization of difference between men and women is important for Afanema because rooting difference in nature makes it impossible for reversal or in Islamic terminology it makes it *haram* (forbidden) for people, especially women to advocate for a blurring of the difference. And therefore any woman or women who attempt to challenge such difference will be committing nushuz (rebellion) and rebellion can constitute a ground for divorce. One of the respondents who prays in a loud voice in the absence of her husband does not want people to know that she does that, because, in "this society, women are not supposed to be heard; and so he would not listen and if he was to tell the Imams, they would encourage him to divorce me." The woman's voice is her awra and that is natural. To subvert the natural order is *nushuz.*

Stuart Hall (1997) puts it this way;

> The logic behind naturalisation is simple. If the differences between black and white people are 'cultural' then they are open to modification and change. But if they are 'natural'- as the slave-holders believed- then they are beyond history, permanent and fixed. 'Naturalisation' is therefore a representational strategy designed to fix 'difference' and thus secure it forever. It is an attempt to halt the inevitable 'slide' of meaning, to secure discursive or ideological 'closure.'

In the case of women, their biology is their destiny. By their biology they are consigned to play second fiddle to men. It is not men's fault that women are subaltern. Women are subaltern by nature. Fatima Mernissi (1987:1) relates a story in the opening chapter of her book titled, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* which we shall quote verbatim to illustrate our point.

> Can a woman be a leader of Muslims? I asked my grocer, who like most grocers in Morocco is a true 'barometer' of public opinion. "I take refuge in Allah"! he exclaimed, shocked, despite the friendly relations between us. Aghast at the idea, he almost dropped the half-dozen eggs I had come to buy. "May God protect us from the catastrophes of the time"! mumbled a customer who was

> buying olives as he made as if to spit…A second customer, a school teacher whom I vaguely knew from the newsstand, stood slowly caressing his wet mint leaves and then hit me with a hadith that I knew would be fatal: 'those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity.' Silence fell on the scene. There was nothing I could say.

This story is a practical demonstration of the mindset of many Muslim communities around the world about the naturalness of the female condition. In Dagbon, Afa Ajura prayed to Allah to take his life, if ever a woman would become President of Ghana. The fact that "men have authority over women" (Q: 4:34) is natural. Men therefore define women (the 'other') in terms of their nature: they are subaltern; they are a source of *fitna* (chaos) and are constantly in need of the guidance of men.

Another feature of the concept of 'otherness' is what Stuart Hall (1997) calls disavowal.

> Disavowal is the strategy by means of which a powerful fascination or desire is both indulged and at the same time denied. It is where what has been tabooed nevertheless manages to find a displaced form of knowledge that allows for the possibility of simultaneously embracing two contradictory beliefs, one official and one secret, one archaic and one progressive, one that allows the myth of

> origins, the other that articulates difference and division.

Islam purportedly came to liberate women. Women in pre-Islamic Arabia did not have a right of inheritance. Islam restored their right to inherit. Women were the property of their husbands. Women under Islam were full beings in their own right, who owned property. Women could not divorce; they were divorced. Islam gave women the right to divorce under *khul'u*. Women were even killed in the practice of female infanticide. Islam abolished it. So Islam was supposedly the religion that championed the liberation of women. The Prophet even said that "paradise is under the feet of the mothers." Yet the reality of women's situation in Dagbon does not suggest that paradise is at their feet. Ayaan Hirsi Ali (2007, p.56) in her autobiography, *Infidel* presents this paradox clearly when she states that

> We told our father we didn't want to be girls. It wasn't fair that we weren't allowed to go out with him and do all the things that Mahad could. Abeh will always protest and quote the Koran (sic): 'paradise is at the feet of your mother.' But when we looked down at them, our mother's bare feet were cracked from washing the floor every day and Abeh's were clad in expensive Italian leather shoes. We burst out laughing all the time, because in every sense of the word, paradise was not at her feet but his. He was important, he was saving

> Somalia, he had lovely clothes, he went outside when he wanted to. And we and she were not allowed to do as we wished.

Women as represented by our mothers are our vehicles to paradise. At the same time, women as represented by Zuleikha, the wife of the Pharaoh are our vehicles to perdition. In reprimanding Zuleikha for attempting to seduce Joseph, the Pharaoh generalises her behaviour for all women when he states that "surely this is the guile of you women. Your guile is mighty indeed." (Q: 12:29). This is the concept of disavowal, which accounts for a lot of the ambiguities that characterise the interpretation of gender issues in Islam. It is this ambiguity that accounts for why the men of Dagbon consult their wives while holding the belief that they are of inferior intellect.

Thus in Dagbon, defining women as the 'other' allows them to be labelled as people of inferior intellect. Women as 'other' are the cause of *fitna* in the society and therefore their involvement in and movement in society must be curtailed in order to curtail the spread of disorder in the society. The emphasis is therefore not on men controlling their libidinal passions, but of preventing women from arousing men's passions in the first place. But there are compelling arguments for why in today's world this concept of binary opposites can still be maintained, not as an instrument for gagging and oppressing the 'other' but for fostering dialogue and partnership. These are the proposals of liberal feminism to which we now turn.

Islamic Feminism

Islamic feminism shares in the vision of radical feminism in many ways. Islamic feminism holds the view that the roles that Islamic societies have assigned to men and women have nothing to do with the divine. Islamic feminism holds that before the creation of man and woman, Allah informed the angels of the creation of beings who shall be his deputies (Q: 2:30). Thus Allah had in mind the capacity of both males and females to play the role of deputies of God. This is how the Qur'an relates the story of creation as contained in chapter Q: 4:1-4.

> O mankind! Fear your guardian lord, who created you from a single soul and created out of it, its mate, (*zawj*) and from them twain scattered countless men and women and fear Allah, through whom you demand your mutual rights and be heedful of the wombs that bore you. Verily Allah watches over you.

From the Qur'anic story quoted above, men and women were created from a single essence. It does not present the creation of woman as an afterthought. To eliminate all doubts about the capacity or incapacity of women to ascend to divine favour, Q: 33:35 and Q: 9:67-72 emphasise that gender shall not be the basis for the struggle to please Allah or obtain divine favour.

Amina Wadud (1999), in her much acclaimed work, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* questions the basis for such imposition. Wadud argues that the word *zawj* does not

mean woman nor does it mean wife as male exegetes have made it into. She cites other instances in the Qur'an of the use of the word *zawj* to buttress her point. *Wa halaqnaakum* ***azwaja*** (And we have created you in pairs -Q: 78:8) *Subhana lazee halaqal* ***azwaja*** (Holy is he who created all things in pairs -Q: 36:36) *Wa anaa halaqa'l* ***zawjaini*** *zakara wal unsaa* (And that he creates the pairs, male and female -Q: 53:45) *Wa minkuli shai'in halaqanaa* ***zawjaini*** *la'alakum tazakarun* (And of everything have we created pairs, that you may reflect -Q: 51:49).

Wadud therefore avers that "…and created out of it, its zawj (mate)…" does not refer to woman. To her therefore the Qur'anic narrative of creation is a gender neutral one. Indeed, the Arabic word for woman is *imra'a,* women is *nisa*. Wife is *zawjat*, while at the same time, husband is *zawj*. Thus both husband and wife come from the same root zawj. Wadud's interpretation is even the more compelling under the rules of Qur'anic exegesis. Under the rules of Qur'anic exegesis, the first explainer of the Qur'an is the Qur'an itself.

That is why in the Qur'anic story about the expulsion of Adam and Eve (Hawwa) from the Garden of Eden, they are held jointly responsible for the sin of disobedience. "Then began Satan to whisper suggestions to them…so by deceit he brought about their fall when they tasted of the tree. Their shame became manifest to them…" (Q: 7:20-22). To eliminate all doubts about the capacity or incapacity of women to ascend to divine favour, Q: 33:35 and Q: 9:67-72 emphasise that gender shall not the basis for the struggle to please Allah or obtain divine favour.

This method of Qur'anic exegesis is itself a radical departure from the traditional exegesis, which has drawn from the hadith and other sources to justify the subjugation of women. One of such ahadith reports the Prophet as saying that we should

> treat women nicely, for a woman is created from a rib, and the most curved portion of the rib is its upper portion, so if you should try to straighten it, it will break, but if you leave it as it is, it will remain crooked. So treat women nicely (Bukhari, Vol 4, p.346).

From the Qur'anic story of creation as contained in Q: 4:1 there is no mention of woman being created from a man's rib. This may therefore have found its way into Islamic canonical literature from Christian sources. Nonetheless, it is invoked by the men of Dagbon to justify why they must "straighten" women. "Straightening" a woman includes beating her. Women are crooked by nature. The men however say that they ought to "straighten" women with care. That is why some of them say that one should tie the end of a stick with a rug before one beats a woman with it. We have already pointed to the Qur'anic verse that states that "women shall have rights similar to rights against them according to what is equitable…" (Q: 2 228). The rights that men have over women includes the right to beat them. But the "similar" rights that women have over men does not include a right to beat men. So Islamic feminism like radical feminism, envisages an androgynous future, where women shall have rights that are truly similar to those of men.

African/Black Feminist Thinking and Gender in Dagbon

There are ways in which race is a defining factor in gender relations. Edward Said (1979) posits that "a central aspect of racial exploitation centers on defining people of colour as 'the other.'" We have already discussed at length the concept of 'otherness' and its role in the construction of gender. Oyeronke Oyewumi (1997) states that

> The idea that biology is destiny- or, better still, destiny is biology – has been a staple of western thought for centuries…consequently those in positions of power find it imperative to establish the superior biology as a way of affirming their privilege and dominance over 'others.' Those who are different are seen as genetically inferior, and this in turn, is used to account for their disadvantaged social positions (p. 1)

People of colour, and especially black people are often stereotyped and classified as 'the other' by dominant white ideologies. So to be a woman and to be black, further exacerbates one's 'otherness.' Molara Ogundipe (1993) presents the African woman's situation in the gender equation in terms of what she calls "mountains." Ogundipe uses the symbolism of the mountain to evoke an imagery of gargantuaness in terms of the hurdles that confront African women when it comes to the issue of gender in African societies. She wrote;

> One might say that the African woman has six mountains on her back: one is oppression from

> outside (colonialism and (neo-colonialism?); the second is from traditional structures, feudal, slave-based, communal, etc; the third is her backwardness (neo-colonialism?); the fourth is man; the fifth is her colour, her race; and the sixth is herself (p. 107).

Contrary to the belief that African encounters with white dominance brought civilisation to Africa, white civilisation sometimes worsened the plight of the African. White dominance over Africa started as evangelising missions, meant to civilise and Christianise the African. This civilising mission came with the Christian ideology that presents women as subservient to men. Part of women's religiosity is that they serve men. It is a condition for their participation in the saving grace of God. The Bible decrees that the man shall be the head of the house, just as Christ is the head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23). "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says" (1 Corinthians 14:34). Christianity accentuates women's 'otherness.' Discussing the work of Rosemary Ruether, Teresa Hinga (1992) highlights the sexism of no less a church philosopher as Thomas Aquinas, who highlights the 'otherness' of women by describing women as "malformed males" who "constitute the abnormal half of the human species."

> With his own peculiar logic, he went on to argue that this is the reason why the incarnation of God could only be in a male, Jesus. The 'maleness' of

> Jesus is, therefore, for Aquinas, not incidental but arises out of (ontological) necessity (p. 186).

This is the exact same understanding that Afanema have of women as expressed in the hadith of the Prophet which describes women as "crooked." I already argued that, the idea that woman was created out of man's rib is not stated in the Qur'anic narration on creation as captured in Q: 4:1. Rather it might have seeped into Islamic narratives from Islam's contact with Christianity. Therefore, colonialism came to Africa with an inherent notion of woman as subservient. Together with traditional African culture and Islam therefore, women had no chance of being presented as beings in-themselves.

Ogundipe (1993) lists tradition as the second "mountain" on the backs of women in Africa. This is also the case in Dagbon. As I have stated in chapter four, in Dagbon, women are not even considered part of 'the people.' As non-persons, they hardly matter when it comes to deliberating about the welfare of the society. Ogundipe (1993) aptly captures the traditional situation of women in Africa when she states;

> The second mountain on the African woman's back is built of structures and attitudes inherited from indigenous history and sociological realities…In most African societies, whether patrilineal or matrilineal, gender hierarchy or male supremacy or sex asymmetry (or whatever term we choose to use) was known and taken for granted (p. 112).

In most of Africa, women are socialised to understand that they are by nature supposed to play second fiddle to men. In the Buganda Kingdom of Uganda for example, women were not allowed to eat products derived from animals and birds that they reared themselves such as eggs, chicken, mutton and pork. Women were also not allowed to own land. Even women who are in the top echelons of the decision-making process, such as Queen mothers and Princesses are not addressed as women as such. They are addressed as *ssebo*, which translates as 'sir' and not *nyabo* (madam) (Kyazike, 2006). In Dagbon, there is a saying that *doo nnye kpema* (a man is the elder). Therefore, women in Africa have a mountain on their back as far as tradition is concerned.

Ogundipe (1993) also postulates that men constitute another mountain for women. Throughout this research, we have pointed out that men constitute perhaps the biggest barrier to gender equity in Dagbon. Curiously however, women are sometimes a mountain unto themselves. We have already pointed out that women have become complicit in their own subjugation, even though a lot of that complicity is manufactured consent. Many of the harmful rites and rituals in Africa done to and against women such as widowhood rites and genital mutilation are carried out by women. Traditional societies have an elaborate education system that socialises women to believe that what they do to other women is right and for their own good. Kyazike (2006) states that the Buganda for example, have an elaborate education system where traditional wisdom is passed from generation to generation through legends, norms, taboos and observation. George Laar (2003) discusses a similar phenomenon among

the Bimoba of Northern Ghana where young men and women go through a well organised moral training school called *Kont*. It is at the *Kont* that the virtues of feminity and masculinity are constructed and imparted to young members of the Bimoba ethnic group. Even though all Bimoba boys and girls are required to go through the moral training school, the teachers who do the actual teaching at the training school are all men. The women are merely responsible for "milling corn, millet, cooking for and feeding the initiand like a baby" (p. 43).

Tradition is therefore a huge mountain on the backs of women in Africa. That is why the women in Dagbon tell us that when it suits their husbands, they seek refuge in tradition. And when it suits them, they seek refuge in Islam. Islam and tradition have become the twin codes with which the men of Dagbon emasculate the women.

Conclusion

The sacred can be ambivalent. It can be both liberating and suffocating. It is suffocating when men, who are the guardians of the sacred lore, make maleness the measure and norm of humanness. It is suffocating when it allegedly forbids women even from carrying their concerns to God in an audible voice. Their loudest cry to the lord can only be a murmur.

In this chapter, we have shown that most of what pertains in Dagbon in terms of Islam and gender, is attributable to male hegemony, rather than divine command. When the divine edicts are stripped of their male interpretations, they can serve as an illuminating source for women who seek to connect to their lord as the khulafau that He intended them to

be. The Qur'an states that "the believers, men and women, are guardians of one another: they enjoin good and forbid evil; they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity and obey Allah and his messenger. On them, God will pour his mercy; surely Allah is mighty, Wise." (Q: 9:67-68)

However, through hermeneutics, men have stripped women of their *khalifaship*. But exegesis is a subjective exercise. We agree with Wadud (1999, p.1) when she asserts that "no method of Qur'anic exegesis is fully objective. Each exegete makes some subjective choices. Some details of their interpretations reflect their subjective choices, and not necessarily the intent of the text." All Islamic norms of behaviour supposedly gleaned from the Qur'an, including how females should participate in sacred and secular spaces have been heavily tainted with male bias.

If we would re-read the Qur'an and the *hadith* with gender neutral lenses, we can make them reflect their original canonical intentions. Ummu Salama asked the Prophet why his God assumed that all humans were male. That question got God to institute a gender sensitive regime there on. In the conduct of women like Ummu Salama and Khawla bint Thalaba, Dagbon can fashion out a hermeneutics of dialogue that allows female input into Islamic religious practice.

CHAPTER SIX

WE ARE THE PEOPLE TOO

This thesis has been about people; men and women. The aim as has been captured in chapter one, was to find out how gender (the roles that society assigns to men and women) is negotiated in Dagbon on the basis of Islam. This is because Islam is the dominant religion of the Dagomba people. Religion plays an important role in the lives of adherents. According to C. R Gaba, "religion is a twenty-four-hour-a-day affair" (Gaba, 1975, pp.9-10). And according to Mbiti, "there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion…" (Mbiti, 1971, p.1). Scott Appleby also has this to say about the role of religion in people's lives.

> Indeed, literally millions of people structure their daily routines around the spiritual practices enjoined by a religious tradition and they often do so quite 'publicly.' Dress, eating habits, gender relations and negotiations of time, space and social calendar- all unfold beneath a sacred canopy. Around much of the world, politics and civil society are suffused with religion

In the case of the Dagomba people, they virtually have no indigenous religion or culture any more. Islam permeates every aspect of Dagomba life and thought. Islam, as has been shown in chapter four governs the negotiation of gender in Dagomba society. Tensions,

contradictions and concerns are very frequent as far as gender issues are concerned. This is because gender involves human relationships, deep-seated representation, and relationship logic, which beyond Islam and religion, have to do with age-old cultural and social heritages that remain deeply ingrained and highly sensitive.

Because of the sensitive nature of gender issues, it is important that any conversation about gender is approached from an unbiased position. In this thesis, the voices of the main actors (in this case, the men and women of Dagbon) have been played out in full. Men and women of Dagbon have spoken out about their beliefs and how they negotiate with the opposite sex in the family, in the work place and on the streets. Ulama have expressed what they consider as their understanding of the Islam's sacred text with regard to gender and how men and women should live their lives.

The Dagomba people were already a people whose culture considered women as second rate. The Islamisation of their society further eroded the fortunes of women and relegated them to the periphery of society. Even so, it was the consolidation of the fortunes of the Ahl-Sunna denomination that virtually nailed the coffin on the freedoms and liberties of women in Dagbon. The phenomenon of ja'milti febbu, which we recounted in chapter five, where women who were found on the streets after 10:00pm were considered as prostitutes and whipped, was a direct result of the influence of the salafist inspired Ahl-Sunna group. As has been shown in the body of the thesis, the Ahl-Sunna is the most vociferous, when it comes to edicts about restricting the rights and liberties of women.

Hermeneutics is at the heart of gender dynamics in most, if not all Muslim societies. It is no different in Dagbon. The guardians of Islamic lore in Dagbon are all male. Therefore, the readings of the Qur'anic text are all male biased. When the male guardians of Islamic lore, talk about 'Islam,' what they actually refer to are jurisprudential texts, most of which are the articulations of 10th and 11th century expositions of the Qur'an and the hadith. Whether edicts of the 10th and 11th centuries can hold valid for today's world is a subject of academic disagreement.

According to David Tracy (1987), sometimes, we may find that "to understand, we need to interpret the very process of understanding-as-interpretation" (p.7). In other words, at some points in the development of societies, our understanding of what has guided us through the ages, must itself be subject to interpretation. This means that there are times in history when we must re-interpret what has been interpreted to us for ages. For centuries, the male guardians of Islamic lore have interpreted Q: 4:1 to mean that man was the original creation and woman the afterthought. Today, unreading the patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an affords us the opportunity to understand this verse in another light. Feminist hermeneutics questions how *nafs*, which is feminine gender, could be referred to as 'he' or 'it' and not her. We know that this is sexual politics, pure and simple. The male interpreters of the Qur'an were certainly mindful of the fact that if they translated the verse properly, it would mean that the original creation was woman and not man.

Tracy further argues that, in times of cultural crisis, the question of re-interpretation becomes central. In Dagbon, ordinary Muslims are

beginning to question the age-long interpretations of the Qur'an that have been handed to them. Many of the women that we interviewed, are protesting silently about what they believe are mis-representations of God's word. At this point, it is important that the male guardians of Islamic lore, begin to re-look at the representations that they have made to the people over the years, in order to re-interpret God's word to meet the aspirations of the modern times. The Qur'an may be eternal, but the understanding of it cannot be. Unless the Ulama themselves initiate this re-interpretation process, there would arise "street theologies," by which the people would themselves re-construct their understanding of the sacred text in ways that make meaning to them. As Abdullahi An-Naim (2008) asserts, ordinary people are beginning to question the right of the Ulama to a monopoly of the understanding of God's word. David Tracy (1987, p.102) argues that;

> It makes little sense to claim that only a scholarly elite can interpret the religious classics. To suggest that only those who know the latest historical critical or literary critical methods or the most recent debates in hermeneutical theory can properly interpret the scriptures, is like saying that only classical scholars can understand Homer, only Elizabethan specialists can interpret Shakespeare…

In Dagbon, it is not just about the male elite dominating the understanding of the sacred text, it is also about them resisting any

attempts at re-interpretation. In chapter five, we discussed the case of Imam Husain Rashid, who was hounded out of Tamale because his interpretation of the Qur'an is radically different from what has been presented to the people for generations.

The family is the smallest unit of society. For any society to make progress, families must be happy and prosperous. In other words, happy and prosperous families make for a happy and prosperous society. It is perhaps in recognition of this fact, that the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said that those who marry fulfill half of their religious obligations. In Islam, the family is therefore considered a religious unit. According to this Prophetic saying, the family must be an avenue for fulfilling all of one's spiritual and ethical obligations. This is because the religion of Islam is more than spirituality as has already been shown in this thesis. Fulfilling one's religion cannot be reduced to defensive, formalist discourse that is heard today about the meaning of marriage in Islam: that marriage is a union between a man and a woman, with corresponding rights and responsibilities. Even so, the male guardians of Islamic lore in Dagbon do not insist on the responsibilities of men as they insist on the responsibilities of women in a marital union. As one of the interviewees told us, she is afraid to assert her rights within her marital home, because if her husband tells it to the Ulama, they would encourage him to divorce her.

Rights and responsibilities of husbands and wives in a marital union are purely normative teachings and advice, which fail to answer the needs of the women and men who wish to start a family or avoid a break-

up. Speaking of marriage certainly implies speaking of a common aspiration beyond oneself. Starting a family is the beginning of a journey towards self-accomplishment; it is a theatre for either fulfilling dreams or shattering them. A lasting, loving marriage cannot be achieved through prescriptive religious reminders, *fatawa*, or lists of duties and rights. Unfortunately, in Dagbon, discourse on Islamic marriage mainly amounts to reminders to women about how submission to their husbands has enormous rewards for them, both on earth and in the hereafter.

Sometimes, even men who never pay attention to any of Islam's spiritual teachings insist, when crisis comes, on their Islamic rights as husbands, relying on a tradition that they know is favourable to them and which they can bend to their wishes. Such formalism, which relies on a religious and cultural tradition to justify its commands, results in a vicious circle that maintains suffering and nurtures hypocrisy. Indeed, many of the women, especially during the focus group discussions, were very clear in their minds, that their husbands were hypocrites, who used Islam as an excuse to keep them cloistered.

A re-interpretation of Islam and its teachings in Dagbon must focus among other things, on the teachings about marriage. Women and men, scholars, psychologists, social workers and the society at large must engage in this together on the basis of everyday life and in the light of scriptural sources. Couples must be thought that marriage is not a euphemism for a slave relationship, where the husband as lord and owner does as he pleases with his wife. The Ulama must begin to teach that, marriage is a relationship based on mutual love, which must be nurtured,

maintained and deepened through thoughtfulness, dialogue and the personal fulfillment of each of the partners.

In Dagbon as in other parts of the world, one can observe the emergence of a new feminine conscience or, more broadly speaking, of an understanding of the issues linked to the question of women. Women and men have taken full measure of the problems facing contemporary Muslim societies and have decided to address the issue directly, by stating first of all, that there was clearly a problem in the way texts about women were approached and consequently in the general Islamic discourse and the concrete implementation of its teachings. The fact that some Ulama are able to speak out for women and how they are treated in Dagbon society is a significant development in the quest for the re-interpretation that is necessary to correct the imbalance in the male-female dynamics of Dagbon society.

After the Beijing Conference, it was hoped that participating countries would make greater efforts at ensuring that the imbalances in the male-female dynamics in their societies is corrected. The equal participation of men and women in decision-making processes is a prerequisite for effective and efficient functioning of democracy. Religious and cultural norms that promote female segregation and male-dominated structures do not accept the validity of even marginal political participation of women. Since the inception of multi-party democracy in Ghana in 1992, only one Dagomba woman, Rita Tani Iddi, has been to parliament or held a political office of significance. Curiously, she is Christian. She was voted to represent the Gushegu Constituency between 2000-2008. Part of the

reason she won was that the Gushegu Constituency, even though it is a Dagbon Constituency, has a significant Konkomba population, who are mostly Christians and Traditional Believers.

This shows the huge 'mountain' that women have to climb in Dagbon, if they are to make any significant impact in the Dagbon society. Low literacy rates in Dagbon also contribute to the significant gap between women and men. Because of the low literacy rates, issues of women empowerment are rebuffed and those who seek greater participation for women in society are labeled as *kufar* (unbelievers). According to the 2010 Ghana Population and Housing Census, 50.8% of people in the Tamale Metropolitan area have never been to school. 73.7% of people in the Yendi District have no formal education and 74.5% of those in the Savelugu District are similarly uneducated. Certainly, the worst affected in these dire educational statistics are women. In chapter two, we recounted a hadith in which Aisha bint Abubakar said that the women of Madina were more assertive than their Qurayshi counterparts, because the women of Madina were knowledgeable. So the lack of political participation by Dagomba women must have something to do with the low literacy rates.

On the religious front, Hajia Maryam Alolo is trying to break the male monopoly over the title of 'Afa.' She has trained over 60 other women who are now all called 'Afanema.' Her story has been told in chapter four. But her story tells the extent of female marginalization in Dagbon and the effort that it would take to break the stranglehold of men on Dagbon society. Even though Hajia Maryam Alolo has all the competences that are required to preach Islam, no radio station would

allow her access to preach Islam, contrary to the situation that exists as far as men are concerned. The concept of a woman's voice being her awra is still very prevalent. So even though Hajia Maryam Alolo has made significant progress in breaking this barrier, there is still a long way to go before the concept of the woman's voice, as her awra would be broken.

This thesis sought to find out how men and women are coping with a culture where Islam justifies everything; how the educated and the non-educated negotiate gender in Dagbon; how historical and sociological factors have shaped gender discourse in Dagbon; the various responses to the issue of gender in Dagbon and how doctrine accounts for such responses and finally, to examine the egalitarian intent of the Qur'an as the foremost document on which Muslims order their lives.

The focus group discussions exposed the fact that women of Dagbon feel suffocated by both Islam and tradition. According to the women, when it suits the men, they claim to be Dagombas and therefore justify their treatment of women by Dagbon culture. At other times, they seek refuge in Islam in the way that they treat women. So whichever way we look at it, the situation of men in Dagbon is better by far, than that of women. Women murmur, men speak out.

Islam was meant to be a liberating factor rather than a suffocating factor. "We did not send this revelation down to you, so that after that you would be in distress," so states the Qur'an. If women of Dagbon claim that they are in distress, largely on account of 'Islam' or what is perceived to be Islam, then there is a problem. This far, I have shown that, the problem is largely due to the interpretation that the guardians of Islamic lore have put

on God's word. When Naa Zangina accepted Islam, he did so because he thought that Islam would liberate his people and lead to the rapid development of Dagbon (Wilks, 1985). That hope is virtually shattered. Islam has become a weapon for the subjugation of a section of the population- women.

However, our own theoretical postulation from this study is that, in Dagbon, there is a class struggle that is being presented as religion. The interpretations that the Ulama give to Qur'anic scripture to justify the subjugation of women has nothing to do with Islam. It has everything to do with the desire by the male elite to dominate over the women. In 2008, this researcher attended a tafsir session presided over by Imam Husain Rashid. Interpreting Qur'an 4:1, he asserted that "it is not written anywhere that it is the woman who has to fetch water for her husband or cook for the family." There was open protest by the audience, which was entirely male. They said that the Imam should never say this to the hearing of their wives, otherwise they would have insurrections in their homes. Secondly, when we enquired from Ulama of the Ambariyya Research Institute why women are not given scholarships to pursue further studies in Saudi Arabia as the men do, they did not have a genuine answer. They said that they just think that it is better if the men do so rather than the women. Our own interpretation is that, it is simply aimed at stopping women from learning more about their religion, so they don't protest the domination that is foistered on them in the name of Islam.

Many studies on gender and have rooted gender inequalities in economics. In his PhD Thesis titled, *Language and Gender: The*

Construction and Reproduction of Gender in Dagbanli, Salifu Nantogma Alhassan states that "because of men's access to economic resources and power, they tend to adopt strategies to dominate and control women" (Alhassan, 2012, p.253). Alhassan's conclusion is not borne out of the research. However, because of the dominance of economic theories of inequality, he panders and roots his conclusion in economics. In Dagbon, the theory that those who wield economic power tend to dominate those who do not wield economic power does not have total validity. In Dagbon, even women who wield economic power, still pander to male superiority. In Dagbon, what is at the heart of inequality is the rooting of male-female differences in nature, which makes a woman subservient to a man, irrespective of her economic standing.

To realize the dream that led Naa Zangina to Islam, two things ought to happen; a re-interpretation of the Qur'an, which in the words of Asma Barlas, should involve an "unreading of the patriarchal interpretations" that the male guardians of Islamic lore have put on the sacred script. Secondly, there ought to be dialogue between the dominated and the dominator; in this case, men and women. Women ought to find their voices and assert themselves as full human beings, and as *khulafau* (deputies) of God. Through the efforts of Hajia Maryam Alolo, that dialogue can be forced. Now men are listening to her and nodding in appreciation. This researcher attended the closing ceremony of her 2016 Ramadan *tafsir* and many of the prominent Ulama of Tamale were in attendance. As she interpreted the Qur'an, many of them nodded in approval. That a woman was presiding over Qur'an interpretation with

male Afanema in attendance would have been unfathomable several years back. Now they are nodding in approval. They have denied her access to radio stations to proffer her views on Islam. It is worth noting when she holds her Qur'an interpretation sessions, the radio stations record and play back to the public. So people are listening to her willy, nilly. Soon they would be forced to enter a dialogue with her and the space would open to true dialogue, which would allow for both men and women to assume their proper roles as deputies of God.

The issue of gender and gender inequality is a subject that bothers societies worldwide. This has been an attempt to investigate the subject among the Dagomba people of Norther Ghana. This work cannot therefore be generalised for all Muslim communities in Ghana. There is therefore the possibility of replication in other predominantly Muslim societies, such as the Wala of the Upper West Region and also Zongo Communities around the country. It is also recommended that gender activists and social workers engage more with Afanemato get their buy-in on gender empowerment programmes.

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