

Published in the Journal of the West African Association of
Theological Institutions, 2010. WAATI Papers, No 6 (pp. 282-296),

WOMEN AND ISLAM IN AFRICA: TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVIST THEOLOGY OF LEADERSHIP

BY

MUSTAPHA ABDUL-HAMID

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION AND HUMAN VALUES

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

CAPE COAST, GHANA

WEST-AFRICA

E-MAIL: tafahamid@yahoo.co.uk

Tel: +233204252522

Abstract

Islam is one of the dominant faiths in Africa. Africa has a population of one billion and fifty-one million (1,051,000,000) (www.prb.org/publications/datasheets/2011). Muslims in Africa number five hundred and sixty-four million, four hundred and thirteen thousand (564,413,000). (www.pewforum.org/religion). Thus Muslims constitute fifty-four percent (54%) of the population in Africa. Thus harnessing all the potentials of leadership within Muslim communities in Africa will constitute a great contribution to filling the vacuum of leadership in Africa. Unfortunately, a great percentage of the Muslim population, (its women) have been left out of the leadership sphere within Muslim communities in Africa. The Qur'an states that good Muslims should aspire to leadership within the community of the righteous (Q: 25:74). Unfortunately the guardians of Islamic lore have determined that women can neither aspire to leadership, nor can they lead. In other words, leadership in Muslim communities is the exclusive preserve of men. They derive their authority from an alleged saying of the Prophet Muhammad, that people who are ruled by a woman will never be successful. This paper argues that it is not against the grain of Islam for women to play leadership roles. It argues for a re-thinking of the Islamic theories of leadership and a reformulation of a theology of leadership in African Islam that will include women.

Key words: women, leadership, Islam, Africa.

Introduction

The motivation for this paper was borne out of two incidents. The first was in August 1999 in Tamale, the capital of the Northern region of Ghana. During a casual conversation with a *Muallim* (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. "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. Coming from a *Muallim*, I thought that the *Muallim* must have been influenced by his understanding of Islam's attitude towards women. This paper is an attempt to understand the Islamic underpinnings of the *Muallim's* statement.

The second incident was in 2008. During the 2008 electioneering process in Ghana, I was the Spokesperson for the Presidential Candidate of the New Patriotic Party (NPP). At that time, the Presidential Candidate of the NPP, Nana Akufo-Addo had signalled 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. This researcher received a letter signed by one Mohammed Tahiru from Tamale, (the administrative capital of the Northern Region) 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 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 Association (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). I therefore thought that it is imperative to investigate the

Islamic basis of the claim that women are barred from leadership. What theological imperatives justify the exclusion of women, from leadership in Muslim communities?

Leadership is critical for the advancement of any society. According to Joyner (1994:7), 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.

Leadership has many definitions. For the purpose of this paper however, I 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 paper 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 fore front or does not occupy a designated position of leadership. According to Northouse (2004:5) "people are leaders because of their formal position within an organization 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 I shall discuss women's leadership in relation to both the assigned and the emergent forms of leadership.

According to the Prophet Muhammad, 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 1: 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 *Hadith* 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 that "such as ruled by a woman will never be successful" (Bukhari 9: 170-171). It is against this background that this paper is important to the discourse on leadership in Africa. The bane of Africa today can largely be attributed to the lack of efficient leadership in the management of its affairs. Africa has a population of one billion and fifty-one million (1,051,000,000). (www.prb.org/publications/datasheets/2011). Muslims in Africa number five hundred and sixty-four million, four hundred and thirteen thousand (564,413,000). (www.pewforum.org/religion). Thus Muslims constitute fifty-four percent (54%) of the population in Africa. Thus if the women folk within fifty-four percent (54%) of the population in Africa are to be left out of the sphere of leadership, then it leaves a huge leadership gap or deficit as far as the management of the continent is concerned.

This paper seeks to question the credibility of the alleged saying of the Prophet that "such as ruled by a woman will never be successful." Rather this paper 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 Africa. To do this, this paper shall trace the historical involvement or non-involvement of women in the affairs of the Islamic community from the time of the Prophet to date. Concepts of leadership in Islam shall also be analysed with a view to dismissing the notion that women cannot lead. Indeed examples will be given of women leaders in Islam even in the time of the Prophet.

Women in the life of the Prophet

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 his wife 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 was being commissioned as a Prophet when that reality had not dawned on Muhammad himself.

Khadija had a cousin called Waraqah bin Nawfal, who was an Arab Christian. Khadija then sent her husband Muhammad 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 that he was being called to Prophet hood (Haykal 1976:77). That assurance was critical in preparing Muhammad for future encounters with the *ruh* (spirit of revelation/angel Gabriel).

Thus it was Khadija's show of leadership and courage, which enabled Muhammad 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 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 the initial confidence to kick start his prophetic life, Khadija's wealth proved decisive in giving Muhammad the peace and contentment of mind that he needed to carry on with his prophetic duties. Allah himself so recognized the role of Khadija in advancing Muhammad's prophetic career, that it was the subject of a revelation to the Prophet. In reminding Muhammad 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 (1988:1917) states:

The holy prophet inherited not much wealth and was poor. The true, pure and sincere love of Khadija, 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 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 married Khadija when he was 25 years old, while Khadija was 40. So perhaps Muhammad deferred to Khadija because of her age and experience. Indeed Muhammad 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 1976:97). This 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 2003:31).

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 is said to have been wounded several times in battle and eventually lost an arm (Wiebke 2006: 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. Early historians of Islam mention in particular Umm Waraqah Bint Abdallah, who acted as a prayer leader for a community in mixed congregation. Muhammad himself is said to have instructed her to serve as prayer leader. 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 2006:111).

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 the Africa that gave sanctuary to the early women of Islam to exhibit their leadership qualities, 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 caliphate (*khulafa*) was to endure until the 1258 when Hulagu and his hordes laid waste to Baghdad and brought an end to the caliphate (*khulafa*). 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 1993:14). 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 qualification for leadership in Islam which is knowledge (*ilm*), faith (*Iman*), justice (*adl*), 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. In fact in Islam, the voice of a woman is supposed to be part of her *awra* (parts of her body prone to attract the opposite sex). Thus the exclusion of women from leadership as far as the ritual prayer is concerned has more to do with circumstance rather than canon.

That is why some leading jurists permit women leading the ritual prayer. Quoting Ibn Rushd, Fatima Mernissi(1993:33) states that Shafi'i (founder of one of the schools of law in Islam) accepts a woman to lead the ritual prayer only for her fellow women while Abu Tawr and Tabari (leading Qur'anic exegetes) permit it even for mixed congregations. In some African communities, women are

even discouraged from going to the mosques at all. In the town of Tamale in Northern Ghana where Muslims are in the majority, 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.

Amina Wadud attracted world attention when she led a Friday prayer session of mixed congregation at a public square in New York on 18 March 2005. Wadud (2006:175) that gender separation is not a matter of faith. Indeed Wadud argues that gender segregation is not a principle of Islamic dogma and creed. Instead, she posits that the Qur'an "recommends ways for women and men to observe modest limits while in each other's presence." She questions why the strict separation of men and women is not observed during *hajj* (the pilgrimage to Makkah) rites.

As for the argument that a woman's voice is her *awra* and therefore she should not read or recite the Qur'an aloud during prayer, it has no basis in the Qur'an. Rather the Qur'an urges Muslims, both male and female to neither raise their voices too high in prayer nor be inaudible in prayer. Rather they are encouraged to recite the Qur'an in moderate tones (Q: 17:110).

Another concept that connotes leadership in Islam is *Amir*. Its feminine gender is *Amira*. Thus 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, there were a number of women who played leadership roles, some being relations of Muhammad himself. Worthy of mention in this regard is Sayyida Nafisa, a granddaughter of Muhammad, 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 2003:32).

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*.

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 1993:13). 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 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 *Sunna* (way of life) 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 1998:1099). 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.

Thus 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 Ghana 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 socialized to believe that they do not possess the competence to do so.

Indeed the stories of women leaders in Asian countries should spur us and encourage the participation of women in leadership. If even Pakistan, which is generally a very conservative Islamic country, could accept the leadership of Benazir Bhutto, then Muslim communities in Africa can and must accept the leadership of women. Tansu Ciller ruled Turkey as Prime Minister from 1993-1996. Megawati Sukarnoputri was President of Indonesia from 2001-2004. Khaleda Zia was Prime Minister of Bangladesh from 2001-2006. Sheikh Hasina is the current Prime Minister of Bangladesh. She previously held the same position from 1996-2001. On April 7 2011, Atifete Jahjaga was elected President of Muslim Kosovo. Africa ought to catch the tide of the twenty-first century and move with the flow. That flow recognizes and encourages the leadership of both men and women.

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 1983:144-148). 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

In Islam, the *hadith* (sayings of the prophet Muhammad) constitute the second most important source of law. In most cases, it is the *hadith* that gives 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 *hadith*. Thus Islamic scholarship has categorised *hadith* into *Sahih* (excellent), *Hassan* (good) and *Daiif* (weak).

Generally, the categorization 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 found in Bukhari is deemed authentic and therefore attributable to Muhammad. It is in *Sahih Bukhari* that one finds the alleged saying of Muhammad, that "such people as ruled by a woman will never be successful (Bukhari 9:170-171). 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 2010:37). Mohammad Hashim Kamali (2005:75) 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.” Thus for *ulama* of Africa 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, the second caliph of Islam is reported to have rejected a *hadith* from Abu Musah Al-Ashari, until he had brought Said Al-Khudri as his witness (Khan 2005:29). Secondly, this *hadith* was uttered by Abu Bakra 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 2005:28).

Abu Bakra uttered this *hadith* for the first time after the Battle of Camel when Aisha and her forces had been routed by Ali b. Abi Talib (the fourth caliph of Islam) and his 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. Abi 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 (1991:57) 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 1991:57). 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 will 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 2005:29). 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 (the second caliph) and was flogged (Mernissi 1991:61).

African Islam must rethink its theology of leadership

Thus, based on this singular *hadith*, which as has been argued above, is of dubious authenticity, *ulama* in Africa have proceeded to exclude women from all aspects of leadership in Muslim communities. The result is that for about fifty-four percent of the African population, women are excluded from participating in the process of change and development. If we are to consider the definitions of leadership that emphasise leadership as a process of influencing people and society, then it means that fifty-four percent of the African population is denied the influence of women in its quest for development.

Africa cannot therefore wish to develop if African Islam does not reconsider its theology of leadership to include the capacity of its womenfolk to be part of the decision making and the processes that influence and drive the goals and aspirations of our societies. Brown (1998:63) argues that “without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women’s perspectives in all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved.”

Northouse (2004:269) in quoting Barney’s resource-based theory of competitive advantage and strategy analysis argues that an organization’s primary source of competitive advantage is the capacity to optimise and use its internal resources in uncertain and dynamic contexts. Key among these internal resources is people’s capabilities, including varying perspectives on problem solving. Thus one way in which Africa can fill its leadership vacuum is by hiring, developing and promoting women into leadership positions, especially in a globalised and increasingly uncertain world.

Male dominance is a world-wide phenomenon. That is also the case for Africa. However, in the case of Africa, there is some ambivalence as far as the role and participation of women in the African public is concerned. In *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century* edited by Catherine Coles and Beverly Mack, Deborah Pellow compares the situation of Hausa women in their original homeland of Kano and their migrant environment in the Muslim community of Nima in Accra, Ghana. She notices the glaring difference between the lives of Hausa women in 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 (pp.50-68).

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 and secular state in which Islamic law cannot be enforced as state 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 (p.54). Thus while Muslim women in Ghana are more prominent in the public space and in leadership, their counterparts in Kano are less so.

Even so, Muslim men in Ghana are wary of allowing their women to become too powerful. Muslim women in Ghana are mostly dominant in the informal sector. Those who will dare to aspire to more powerful political positions will be opposed with all the force that Muslim men can muster, including invoking Islamic edict. This was palpably at play when Akufo-Addo sought to select Alima Mahama as his vice presidential candidate in the 2008 presidential election.

If Africa is to make substantial progress in her development effort, Muslim women would have to be integrated fully into the political and social space. Indeed there are signs of some progress in this direction, even though it is quite slow. In the Muslim dominated town of Tamale in Northern Ghana, some women are beginning to open institutes of Islamic learning and now openly bear the title of *Afa*. Afa Maryam is one such woman. The title *Afa* is used in Dagbon (the Dagomba kingdom of northern Ghana) to refer to a Muslim teacher, preacher or leader. Hitherto, it was a title reserved for men.

In *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century*, Balaraba B.M Sule and Priscilla E. Starrat record the case of Hajiya Maria Mai Tafhiri, who organises *tafsir* sessions in her home and which is in turn broadcast and televised by local radio and television stations (p.38). *Tafsir* are the public Qur'anic interpretation sessions that are held in Muslim communities around the world, mostly but not exclusively during the month of Ramadan. Thus Hajiya Maria, even within a Muslim community where a woman's voice is considered as her *awra*, has succeeded in overcoming that barrier. That is an important pointer to the fact that Muslim communities ought to begin making compromises that will allow for the fuller participation of women in the public space.

If enough progress is to be made in this direction, it requires the full co-operation and participation of men. I agree with Kwabong (2009:154-155) when she states that "indications for gender equality cannot be achieved without the full involvement of males...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."

It is men who hold power in our communities and unless they let women in, women on their own would find it difficult to break the barriers of male dominance. It is even more so in Muslim communities where men are the interpreters and guardians of Islamic law. Isolated voices like those of Hajiya Maria Mai Tafsiri in Kano and Hajia Maryam Alolo in Tamale are not enough to ensure a meaningful participation of Muslim women in the political space. Apart from not wanting their space to be invaded by women, the *ulama* are mostly unlettered, at least in the secular or western sense. The majority of them are therefore deeply conservative and are unable to differentiate what is divinely instituted and what is as a result of patriarchy. They are therefore unable to appreciate the modern trends on issues of women and their participation in the public space. Already traditional African societies are heavily patriarchal and that compounds the problem for women. Governments in Africa would have to adopt affirmative action, in order that Muslim communities can also get their women to participate in the political process for a start. After a few years, they should be able to gain the desired confidence to compete on their own for participation in the political space.

Revisiting Amina Wadud

For reformist minded Muslims around the world, Amina Wadud represents the new face of Islam. Indeed she could be the painful reminder to us of the glorious days of womanhood when Ummu Salama the outspoken wife of Muhammad could dare to question the Prophet about the alleged bias of Allah against women. It is this questioning that led to the revelation of Q: 33:35 which assures that sex shall not be a criterion for judging the permissibility or otherwise of one's actions (Ibn Kathir 7:685). How this egalitarian intent of the Qur'an has been twisted to present a theology that excludes women from the sphere of leadership in Islam is unfathomable.

The case of Ummu Salama is not an isolated one. There is also the case of Khawla Bint Thalaba who was maltreated by her husband which became a subject of dispute between her and the Prophet (Ibn Kathir 7:509). Khawla's husband had sought to divorce her unilaterally. She challenged both his right and capacity to do so. When her husband was adamant, she went to the Prophet to seek his intervention and to state her abhorrence for the situation where men have the right to unilaterally

divorce their wives. Allah himself came to her defence to assert her rights and restore her dignity within the marital home (Q: 58:1-4). The examples of Ummu Salama and Khawla point to the fact that women in the days of the prophet were very much present within the social and political arena and influenced not just the decisions of the Prophet, but also helped to clarify Allah's position on gender issues.

In Africa and in many parts of the Islamic world, Amina Wadud is generally believed by the *ulama* to be a perverter of Islamic values and an agent of the West for the destruction of Islamic values. Indeed for the *ulama* of Africa, Wadud's singular defiant act of leading a mixed congregation in ritual prayer removes her from the pale of Islam. She earned for herself the title of *kafir* (unbeliever). This researcher once dared to quote Wadud on an Islamic television programme and became the subject of attacks from both lay Muslims and clergy who all argued that Wadud should not be quoted by any decent minded Muslim.

But it is Wadud who has given Islamic scholarship a new hermeneutic paradigm for assessing the position of women in Islam. Abugideiri (2001) calls this paradigm the "Wadudian Hermeneutics" (p.23). In her seminal work, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, Wadud argues 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" (p.1).

Since all the traditional giants of Qur'anic exegesis handed to us from generations are men from patriarchal societies, we cannot expect anything but a reading of the sacred text from a man's perspective. Indeed a woman's voice is her *awra* and she is therefore forbidden from speaking openly about the Qur'an. The men therefore continue to be the guardians of Islamic lore in Africa.

Conclusion

It is an irony of history, that African Islam should so exclude women from the sphere of leadership. It is to Africa (Abyssinia or modern day Ethiopia) that the first group of women to embrace Islam, fired by the leadership qualities of courage, zeal and tenacity turned for refuge, when Arabia was still a society where women were treated as second rate citizens. This first migration in the history of Islam marked the first ever contacts of Islam with Africa. The fact that women just like men were part of this historical event should provide the impetus for African *ulama* to rethink the stifling of women's freedoms in Africa.

The conditions of Muslim women just as many other women in Africa leaves much to be desired. Women are restricted from participating in the public space and therefore influencing our societies. Recently in Sudan a lady, Lubna Hussein, a journalist and Public Information Officer at the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) was sentenced to flogging for wearing jeans trousers. These actions do not encourage the participation of women in the public space. Even conservative African scholars like Uthman Dan Fodio were known to encourage women to seek for knowledge and participate in the public space even against the opposition of other conservative *ulama* of his time.

Dan Fodio is said to have educated his own daughters to become major poets in their own right (Kani 1998:69) effectively demystifying the theory that a woman's voice is her *awra* and should be guarded. For what is the use of being a poet if one cannot recite poetry? Indeed Dan Fodio admonished the women of his time to disregard the *ulama al-su'i* (venal mallams) whose shallow knowledge of the religion makes them misrepresent the teachings of the religion. Dan Fodio addressed Muslim women in the following words:

Muslim women! Do not listen to the speech of those who are misguided, and who sow the seed of error in the heart of another. They are deceiving you when they stress obedience to your husbands without telling you about the obedience to God and his messenger (Kani 69).

But whether or not African Islam will reformulate a theology of leadership that will include women, depends to a large extent on Muslim women themselves. Educated Muslim women must gather the courage to confront the conservative and patriarchal *ulama*. Muslim women must formulate their own methodologies for reading the Qur'an. Indeed they ought to read the Qur'an from their own perspective. "Wadudian Hermeneutics" provides a basis for starting this dialogue in Africa. African Muslim women, like Ummu Salama and Khawla must make their voices heard. Only then will there be the 'revelation' of a theology of leadership that includes them.

References

- Brown, Wendy. 1988. *Manhood and Politics*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Coles, Catherine and Berverly, Mack. 1991. (ed). *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Haykal, Husayn Muhammad. 1976. Trans., *The Life of Muhammad*. Indiana: North American Trust Publications.
- Hibba, Abugideiri. 2001. "The Renewed Woman of American Islam: Shifting Lenses Towards Gender Jihad." *The Muslim World Spring* Vol IX: 1-18.
- Ibn Kathir. *Tafsir Ibn Kathir. Vol. 7*. 2003. Trans & Abridged. Al-Mubarakpuri. Makkah: Maktaba Darussalam.
- Isichei, Elizabeth. 1983. *A History of Nigeria*. Essex: Longman Group Limited.
- Joyner, Rick. 1994. *Leadership, Management and the Five Essentials of Success*. Charlotte, North Carolina: Morning Star Publications.
- Kamali, Mohammad Hashim. 2005. *A Text Book of Hadith Studies: Authenticity, Compilation, Classification and Criticism of Hadith*. Leicestershire, UK: The Islamic Foundation,
- Kani, Ahmed Mohammed. 1988. *The Intellectual Origin of Islamic Jihad in Nigeria*. London: Al-Huda Publications.
- Khan, Israr Ahmad. 2010. *Authentication of Hadith: Redefining the Criteria*. London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought.
- Kwapong, A.T.F Olivia. 2009. *Male Support for Gender Equality*. Accra: Ghana Universities Press.
- Muhammad, Ibn Ismail, Al-Bukhari. n.d. Sahih Al-Bukhari Vols 1 & 9. Trans. Muhsin Khan. Beirut: Dar-al-Arabia.
- Mernissi, Fatima. 1991. *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. Trans. Mary Jo Lakeland. New York: Basic Books.
- Mernissi, Fatima. 1993. *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*. Trans. Mary Jo Lakeland: University of Minnesota Press.
- Northouse, Peter G. 2004. *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Schimmel, Annemarie. 2003. *My Soul is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.
- Wadud, Amina. 1999. *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. Oxford, U.S.A: Oxford University Press.

Wadud, Amina. 2006. *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*. Oxford, UK: One World Publications,

Wiebke, Walther. 2006. *Women in Islam: From Medieval to Modern Times*. Trans. C.S.V Salt. New Jersey: Markus Wiener.

(www.prb.org/publications/datasheets/2011). Retrieved, June 21, 2011.

(www.pewforum.org/religion). Retrieved, June 21, 2011.