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# Religion, gender and civil society: the role of a Muslim Women's Association in the evolution of Nigerian society

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Dissertation

**RELIGION, GENDER AND CIVIL SOCIETY:  
THE ROLE OF A MUSLIM WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION  
IN THE EVOLUTION OF NIGERIAN SOCIETY**

by

**MUSTAPHA HASHIM KURFI**

B.Sc., Bayero University, 2003  
M.Sc., Bayero University, 2008  
M.A., Ohio University, 2010

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

2018

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Approved by

First Reader

---

Nancy T. Ammerman, Ph.D.  
Associate Dean of the Faculty for the Social Sciences  
Professor of Sociology of Religion

Second Reader

---

Emily Barman, Ph.D.  
Associate Dean of Graduate Studies  
Professor of Sociology

Third Reader

---

Fallou Ngom, Ph.D.  
Director African Studies Center  
Professor of Anthropology

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to all the women who founded FOMWAN, especially Laura Na’iya Sada, who died on her way to the meeting for its founding (12<sup>th</sup> October, 1985); Hajiya Bilkisu Yusuf, a founding member who died in the Hajj stampede at Mecca (24<sup>th</sup> September, 2015); and all those who lost their lives in the struggle.

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IN THE EVOLUTION OF NIGERIAN SOCIETY  
MUSTAPHA HASHIM KURFI**

Boston University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2018

Major Professor: Nancy T. Ammerman, Associate Dean of the Faculty for the Social Sciences, Professor of Sociology

**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation examines how the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) utilizes effective organizational and networking structures, along with a dynamic religious culture to produce empowering opportunities for women to engage in education, social services, and civic life. Most of the theorizing about civil society has taken Europe and North America as its primary focus, assuming a secular public sphere and leaving open questions about the nature of civil society where those assumptions do not hold. Questions about civil society in nonwestern contexts, in turn, have focused especially on the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and very little of that literature addresses the role of religion. Research elsewhere suggests, however, that religious NGOs may be critical players in the construction of civil society. This dissertation shows how FOMWAN creates trust and fosters agency among Muslim women in Nigeria, enabling them to improve the wellbeing of their communities and create networks across multiple religious and secular lines.

To address the role of religious organizations, and FOMWAN specifically, in the construction of civil society, my research uses a triangulated qualitative research design,

rooted in grounded theory. I conducted interviews with leaders of FOMWAN and its partners; fostered discussions with members of FOMWAN and some service recipients; conducted a content analysis of records (archival research); and conducted participant observation at FOMWAN events. The qualitative data were analyzed using the technique of grounded theory. Each component of the research sought to uncover how FOMWAN builds trust, agency, opportunities, and participation in decision-making for Muslim women in Nigeria.

I find that FOMWAN follows in a line of historic Muslim women's associations and was created in reaction to Nigeria's weak and fragile state. I demonstrate the role of the organization's religious culture and networks in creating a plural civil society. I argue that understanding Nigerian civil society requires understanding that religious ideas and cultures are a powerful force that shape a people's worldviews and identities and have the potential for influencing human actions. My dissertation thus provides a critical intervention into broader debates about the role of Muslim women's religious culture in development discourse and in the global South's public life.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

ABC	Abstinence, Being faithful, and Condoms [approach]
BoT	Board of Trustees [Board]
CAN	Christian Association of Nigeria
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
FOMWAN	Federation of Muslim Women’s Associations in Nigeria
GCE	Girl Child Education
I-banking	Islamic Banking
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IWPM	Interfaith Women Peace Movement
JNI	Jama’atu Nasril Islam
LGAs	Local Government Areas [counties]
MSO	Muslim Sisters’ Organization
MSSN	Muslim Students’ Society of Nigeria
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NEC	National Executive Council
NES	National Education Summit
WID	Women in Da’wah



## CHAPTER ONE:

### RELIGION, GENDER AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN NIGERIA'S PLURAL STATE

This dissertation examines the role of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) in the formation of Nigerian civil society. In so doing, it also addresses the larger question of the role of religious organizations in the formation of civil society in the global south. If civil society requires social capital and trust, how does FOMWAN, as a faith-based association of Muslim women, contribute? Lin (2001) defined social capital as the "resources embedded in a social structure that are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions" (p.21). Similarly, Coleman (1988) identified those essential resources as obligations and expectations, information channels, and social norms. He further asserts that it comes about through "changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action" (p.100).

Most importantly, Putnam (2000a) asserts that "trustworthiness lubricates social life" (p. 21) and that, stocks of social capital, trust, norms, and networks tend to be self-reinforcing and cumulative. Virtuous circles of cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civic engagement, and collective well-being reinforce each other. Conversely, the absence of these traits in the *uncivic* community is also self-reinforcing. Defection, distrust, shirking, exploitation, isolation, disorder, and stagnation intensify one another in a vicious cycle that is suffocating to the growth of a civil society (1995, p.177). If civil society begins with social capital and trust, how, then, does FOMWAN structure itself to facilitate trust-building, agency, participation, and ways of acting? How does it create and raise awareness and organize debates? How does it give voice and create opportunities for

empowerment? And what particular role do the religious cultures and networks of this Muslim organization play in a plural “secular” society like Nigeria?

The Federation (FOMWAN) is a Nigerian organization, but also an Islamic one – a pious Muslim association, but also a modern and exclusively women’s organization. FOMWAN has a very complex organizational identity. Considering its nature and complexity, including historical and contextual factors, trying to categorizing FOMWAN by identifying it as only one type of organization (i.e., only Nigerian or only Muslim), would not do it justice. Several factors have contributed to FOMWAN’s complexity and each deserves close examination. For instance, members must have learned enough about Western culture to be able to effectively interface with Western secular donor agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and Mac Arthur Foundation. All the founding members of FOMWAN are educated, and some received their graduate training in the West. The first person that I interviewed for this research, who eventually introduced me to the executive members at one of the association’s national conventions, was the late Hajiya Bilkisu Yusuf, a founding member, a past national *Amīra* (president), and a renowned Nigerian female journalist. Yusuf obtained a Master’s degree in Journalism from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and received additional graduate training from Moscow State Institute of Journalism and International Relations.

FOMWAN members were pioneers when they established a separate women’s organization. Prior to the founding of the association in 1985, the major national Muslim

associations such as the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) as well as the Muslim Students' Society (MSS, now MSSN) had no women's wings. There had been women's wings only in organizations such as the Nasrullah-al Fathi (NASFAT), Ansar-ad-Deen, and Nawa'irud Deen societies of Nigeria. But even the MSS, the incubator organization that nurtured many Muslim women's organization such as the MSO and FOMWAN, had no women's wing. Drawing on several existing foundations from all parts of Nigeria, members exerted agency by establishing FOMWAN – an umbrella association to all Muslim women's organizations in the country. It serves as a reservoir of pooled collective obligations and as a reference point for trust and confidence that the people earned, which are central to African societies (Swidler, 2010).

Secular educational influence is a necessary factor in understanding this organization, but it cannot explain the success of FOMWAN. I will argue that what has been most crucial to FOMWAN's success has been their internal mechanisms of trust-building, establishing networks of exceedingly productive partnerships, and members' ability to collectively create a unique religious culture within the constraints of the Islamic tradition. The findings of this dissertation reveal many surprising results, “soft puzzles,” or “oddities” (Mears, 2017, p. 139). One such soft puzzle in this dissertation is that in spite of the fact that FOMWAN is an exclusively Muslim female organization in a male-dominated society, it has nevertheless had both individual and communal impact across educational, political, and economic spheres of Nigerian society.

### **Understanding the Role of Religion in Civil Society**

Questions about collective action and its effects have been present in sociology since the field began. One of the recurring themes has been an emphasis on how group life and mobilization, civic engagement, and collective action can influence change and serve as an antidote to normlessness and self-destruction. Many contemporary scholars have built on Tocqueville's (1961) notion of civil society, building on his observation that Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. Beyond commercial and manufacturing companies, Americans have created myriad associations - religious, moral, serious, futile, extensive or restricted, enormous or diminutive – for various functions. Some of these associations are “to give entertainments, to found establishments for education, to build inns, to construct churches, to foster some feeling by the encouragement of great example, they form society” (p.111).

Portes (1998) argues that it has become a staple notion in sociology that involvement and participation in groups can have positive results for the individual and the community. Similarly, Putnam (2000a) argues religious involvement is a crucial dimension of civic engagement. These ideas about civil society and association are important to understanding how women's participation (especially Muslim women's participation) in civil society provides the spiritual capital for trust-building, improved human well-being, unity, and harmony in Nigeria's plural society. Human well-being here means overall betterment in the state of comfort, happiness, and improvement in human conditions – in health, education and economic, social, spiritual, and temporal

conditions.

Several studies have shown that social capital is important to the efficient functioning of modern economies, and is the *sine qua non* of stable liberal democracy. It constitutes the cultural component of modern societies, which, since the Enlightenment, had otherwise been organized on the basis of formal institutions, the rule of law and rationality.<sup>1</sup> Another set of studies revealed that faith communities are widely instrumental in creating community and fostering social capital (Ammerman, 1997; Foley et al., 2001). Additionally, faith communities serve as sources of material assistance, instrumental guidance, community, and spiritual support for families. A related body of work shows that congregations provide resources not only to members affiliated with the congregation, but also to nonmembers (Edin & Lein, 1997; Cnaan et al, 1999; Cnaan, 2002). These studies have been conducted in the West, and among Christian congregations, but they offer important insights into the potential of faith communities to be sources of social capital to create relationships, trust, and networks that can be used to navigate social upheavals and effect change for the general public.

Existing research provides helpful starting points, but there are significant gaps. Most of the theorizing about civil society has taken Europe and North America as its primary focus, assuming a secular public sphere and leaving gaps in understanding of the nature of civil society in places where those assumptions do not hold. Questions about civil society in nonwestern contexts, in turn, have focused especially on the role of

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<sup>1</sup> For more on these arguments, see Arrow, 1972; Coleman, 1988; Ostrom, 1990; Putnam, 1995, 2000a; and Newton, 2001.

nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and very little of that literature addresses the role of religion, even though research elsewhere suggests that religious organizations may be critical players.<sup>2</sup> Finally, scholars who have studied religion in non-Western societies, particularly in Africa and Nigeria, tend to focus on Christianity, politics, and spirituality, with less attention to Islam or to women's religious culture, identities, and worldviews.<sup>3</sup> When Islam is studied, much of the effort has focused on Islamic sectarianism and politics (Anwar 1992; Umar 2003; Kane 1994; Loimeier 1997). Other scholars focus on Muslim-Christian relations, traditional education systems, and the re-introduction of *Shari'a* (Islamic legal systems) in some northern states of Nigeria.<sup>4</sup> Muslim women's religious NGOs have largely been ignored.

Research has not addressed important sociological questions on how Islam is shaping women's identities, their worldviews, and collective actions in Nigeria's plural society. Questions around women's religious identities are sociologically relevant because "the construction of religious identities is a multilayered exercise that takes place in specialized religious settings, but also in every other institutional context" (Ammerman, 2003, p. 222). This study examines how gendered religious identities are produced in Nigeria's plural setting, how they are enacted in the activities FOMWAN

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of literature on NGOs include Nwosu (1977); Joseph (1984); Mamdani, Mkandawire and Wamba (1988); Chazzan (1988); Bratton (1992); Mamdani (1995); Makumbe (1998); Mohammed (2010); Kukah (1999); Falola (2008); Diamond (1997); Domanski (2012); Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2006); Bratton (1989); Aiyede (2003); Azarya (1992); and Adedayo (2004). For religion as a critical player, see for example, Smith, 1996; Casanova, 1994; Levine and Mainwaring, 1986; Epstein, 1991; Morris, 1984; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> On religion in Africa, see Falola 1998; Stephen and ter Haar 2004; Johannes 2008; ter Haar 2009; and Marshall 2009.

<sup>4</sup> See Oseni 1996; Umar 1999; Boyan 1979; Laitin 1982; Clarke and Linden 1984; Brenner 1993; Mack and Boyd 2000; Kukah 2001; Hunwick 2006; Vincent 2004; Johannes 2008; and Paden 2008.

undertakes, and how that work is shaped by the political and legal environment in which it takes place. By asking how Muslim women are making meaning in their lives, we can see how religion may or may not be a form of empowerment. It reveals how members confront various challenges, including illiteracy, suppression, exploitation, and domination. Questions on how women's religious thoughts, identities, and worldviews influence their collective actions, participation, empowerment, and wellbeing are sociologically important and relevant in discourses on civil society, development, and the sociology of religion.

This focus on a faith-based organization in civil society builds on scattered existing research from a variety of settings. Findings of Wineburg et al. (1999) confirm that faith-based organizations are ideal social service providers as programs envisioned to work at two levels: Reforming individuals into successful worker citizens through spiritual and psychic renewal; and building communities or collective social capital. Similarly, Marshall and Van Saanen (2007) argue that faith institutions, leaders, and networks have "special expertise in values and integrity" which allow them to offer "a powerful potential force in raising governance standards in the work of development" (p.231). Conversely, there is evidence to suggest that the failure of development projects in the global south may often be due to the absence of attention to religion in the projects. Clarke (2007) found that projects frequently ignored the role of religious NGOs (RNGOs), had no coherent corporate position on faith and development, discouraged faith literacy among staff, and engaged only with faith-based organizations (FBOs) within mainstream Christian churches. Corroborating this view, Deneulin and Rakodi

(2011) argue that the role of religious organizations as civil society actors has to be reckoned with, not only in the delivery of social services, but also in advocacy. As if invoking Deneulin and Rakodi on that, Clarke concludes, “put simply, in development contexts, *faith matters*” (2006, p. 846, emphasis in original). This dissertation contributes to that literature and expands it to include Islam among the faiths that play a role in the development of civil society.

RNGOs bring together religious beliefs and sociopolitical activism at all levels of society. Kim’s (2003) findings demonstrate that religious organizations contribute to the wellbeing of the public through the provision of welfare services, socioeconomic activities, health care, education, and democratic participation. Clarke (2007) argues that RNGOs seek to fulfill explicitly public missions, usually pushing for change from both liberal and conservative platforms. This suggests: a) RNGOs’ services are not specifically for members of a particular faith; b) though RNGOs are not political organizations, they nevertheless play a vital role in political participation; and c) RNGOs’ missions and services are manifold and public-oriented. In line with the above, Berger (2003) asserts that RNGOs constitute a new breed of religious actors shaping global policy. Examining how such RNGOs operate, especially in Nigeria, will provide a nuanced understanding of how they can contribute to improving human development.

Focusing on women’s agency in civil society will mean attention to the wellbeing of a broad range of the population, including women. A central question that global development scholars ask with reference to the global south is, “what kind of development?” (Tyndale, 2006, p. 17). In conditions of continuous and accelerating



change, the question is how to put people first, and poor people first of all, and how to enable sustainable well-being for all (Chambers, 1997). Development means getting rid not only of poverty, but of injustice in all areas of society, the family included, with a bottom-up rather than a top-down model (Mohammed, 2006). This implies that the people define what their needs are, what their priorities are, and how they want the needs to be prioritized and addressed. In other words, meaning-making by actors is paramount. Religious worldviews and religious organizations cannot be ignored. Religion has always had, and continues to have, profound implications for social organization and change in all regions—over the past half-century, sub-Saharan Africa has been transformed in fundamental ways by religious change (Marshall, 201, p. 32). In the Nigerian context, Muslim women are among the agents of that change.

The existing research on development in Africa suggests that understanding Nigerian civil society requires understanding that religious ideas and cultures are a powerful force that shape a people's worldviews and identities and have the potential for influencing human actions. In studying religious culture, this research builds on theoretical ideas from Durkheim (1995), Weber (1963), and Geertz (1973). Durkheim clearly conveys that religion is an eminently collective thing, thereby clarifying how social solidarity is formed and how it creates social facts.<sup>5</sup> This research also builds on the ideas of Weber (1963), who paid attention to the “meanings” of religious behavior and the way subjective experiences and modes of action are connected to an "ethos" (p.

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<sup>5</sup> He defined religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them” (p. 44).

1). This clarifies how subjects make meaning from their behaviors and how they justify their actions. Both of these ideas are helpful in understanding the religious behavior and culture of my subjects. However, these theories, while compelling, do not thoroughly explain the experiences of what religion means in non-Western societies, especially to Nigerian Muslim women. To address this inadequacy, the ideas of Geertz (1973) on religious culture and their interpretation are used to complement Durkheim and Weber's work.<sup>6</sup> We therefore need an expanded definition of religion that captures the realities of the subjects under study.

I argue that religion should not be considered only as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, but should also include actions that may be considered secular from the Western perspective. The sacred/secular binary that many scholars use repeatedly does not reflect the lived experiences of many Africans, especially Muslims. The sacred and the secular realms overlap in important ways and the line separating the two is blurry; in African Muslim culture, every secular act is considered intertwined with the sacred. In Islam, every act of a Muslim is expected to be guided by Islamic dictates. From the reality of Nigerian Muslim women (especially my subjects, FOMWAN members), both the sacred and the secular are intertwined. I argue that it would be reductionist to consider religion in my context as only related to the sacred. My own work, thus, treats religion as a set of beliefs, practices, symbols and

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<sup>6</sup> Geertz (1973) defines religion as (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (p. 90).

cultural patterns rooted in the existence of both a visible world and a distinct, but not separate, invisible one.

Graveling (2010) identifies the difficulty among Westerners to comprehend how, in African cultures, a continuum exists between visible and invisible worlds. It is also a surprise to some Westerners that religion reaches all sectors of public life, and religious ideas have a bearing on the way political power is actually perceived and exercised. Studying aspects of religion in Africa, therefore, requires the researcher to appreciate the relationship between the sacred and the secular. As Western scholars have begun to try to comprehend this relationship, a literature on religion and development has emerged. However, the existing literature still fails to take religious ideas, especially those of Muslim women, *seriously* (ter Haar, 2011). There is recognition that religion is a growing force in public life in Africa, as in many other parts of the world, but development schemes are still designed without due reference to local religion and local culture and then run into difficulty or even fail (ter Haar, 2010). This dissertation will show that knowledge of local religious cultures can illuminate the social mechanisms through which economic, educational, and civic institutions are strengthened.

Across the globe, religion has an important influence on national and local politics, policy-making, and public discourse, but the diversity and complexity of religious expressions are often overlooked. Scholars increasingly recognize that the focus of Western religions on beliefs and doctrine can mislead us about most of the rest of the world. This is a point made by Edgell (2012) in her critique of recent scholarship on religion that neglects non-Western Catholic, and non-Christian religious practices and

institutions. Also, Edgell (2012) notes that religious identity and belief have been taken for granted as strong and unitary influences on social action, neglecting the more fragmentary and situational aspects of religious practice. In line with the above, this dissertation adopts the cultural approach to the study of religion, with emphasis on institutional fields, lived experiences, and religious cultural tools. It asks how the religious culture of FOMWAN creates trust, agency, ways of acting, and opportunities for empowerment and explores the roles that religious cultures and networks play in Nigeria's plural society. Although religion could be viewed as a powerful social force that can be used either to foster unity or create disunity, the research reported in this dissertation finds in the religious practices of FOMWAN a powerful instrument, channeled through a civil society association.

FOMWAN is, in every way, a religious organization and must be studied as such. Members believe that, in Islam, sacred practices and ritual performances constitute the faith's ways of expressing conviction and growing devotion. Members frequently quote verses of the Qur'ān to support their positions, arguing that an increase in ritual performances increases *Imān* – faith – and conversely, a decrease in ritual performance decreases faith.<sup>7</sup> That is, by increasingly engaging in Islamic ritual performances, their faith increases. Many rituals in Islam are performed in the community, thereby confirming the centrality of collective action. It is this community – a sense of Muslim sisterhood coupled with social and religious capital – that provides FOMWAN immense capacity to act and to effect changes in the lives of members and nonmembers. This

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<sup>7</sup> See for example Qur'ān, 48: 4; and 9: 124.

dissertation focuses on organizational ritual action, following Turner (2015) in seeing ritual as essential to human existence, enabling us to learn shared ways of living with each other.

Beyond paying attention to ritual, this dissertation will give attention to other ways by which FOMWAN members create a unique religious culture. FOMWAN members emphasize acquiring and utilizing knowledge of the scripture as a rhetorical resource to justify actions. Equally, members create and occupy religious space to perform many functions – both sacred and secular – that enable empowerment, trust-building, and peaceful coexistence or interfaith in Nigeria’s plural society. The strategic selection of words that create love speech instead of hate speech is also part of FOMWAN’s religious culture. We shall see how FOMWAN utilizes such religious culture to foster unity, advance women’s progress, and exercise agency. This also points to the Muslim women’s varied agency and experiences. To say that FOMWAN is religious or even that it is Muslim is not to say that we know all that we need to know. Religious cultures are highly variable and highly malleable.

This case also provides us with an alternative theory to modern social theories of universal agency that define women, non-Westerners, and minorities in social analysis “often inadvertently as irrational, anomalous, or deviant from modern social action” (Somers, 1994, p. 633). To know the rationale for the women’s actions, we need to understand their worldviews about what is sacred, secular, and how the two interact. The subjects’ worldview from their perspective is very important in understanding the nature of civil society in Nigeria.

### **Religion and Secularization Debate**

To focus on the role of religious culture in civil society is to add to the evidence that “secularization” is not a universal aspect of modernization. Secularization has been a recurring theme in the sociology of religion, but there is no single or widely accepted definition. There is, first of all, disagreement about its locus. Some definitions emphasize individual beliefs and practices, others the influence of religious norms and elites, and still others the differentiation of religious and nonreligious spheres or institutions (Gorski & Altinordu, 2008). James Beckford (2003) provides a detailed analysis of clusters of ideas about secularization. These are differentiation, rationalization, modernization, metamorphoses, continuing vitality, and universality of religion. Peter Berger, in *The Sacred Canopy* (1967), defines secularization as, “the process by which sectors of the society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols.” Additionally, he sees secularization as of great importance in “modern Western history” (1967, p. 107). He argues (2001) that modernization is a process in which religion diminishes in importance both in society and in the consciousness of individuals. He contends that secularization operates in dialectical tension with pluralism. The plausibility of all religious systems is undermined when they encounter competing belief systems, consequently producing a “crisis of legitimation” for organized religion. Along with this crisis is competition among religious groups with “the same legal status” and with “non-religious rivals in the business of defining the world” (1967, p. 137).

The idea that modernity is incompatible with religion has a long history. Classical thinkers of the nineteenth century – Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, Weber, Marx, and Freud

– all believed that religion would gradually fade in importance and cease to be significant with the advance of society (Aldridge, 2000; Bruce, 1992). All built on ideas from the Age of Enlightenment, postulating that theological superstitions, sacred practices, and symbolic liturgical rituals are products of the past that the modern era would outgrow. More recently, Wilson (1982) has argued that industrialization and its concomitant processes, such as commercialization of agriculture, urbanization, and the development of science, have undermined the importance of religion – both in terms of its relation to non-religious institutions (familial, educational, economic, etc.) and within the religious realm, where the church's hold over the laity's beliefs and practices has diminished in dramatic fashion. C. Wright Mills (1959) describes the ideas that dominated social theory as follows:

Once the world was filled with the sacred – in thought, practice, and institutional form. After the Reformation and the Renaissance, the forces of modernization swept across the globe and secularization, a corollary historical process, loosened the dominance of the sacred. In due course, the sacred shall disappear altogether except, possibly, in the private realm (p. 32-33).

But secularization ideas were challenged by many scholars, including one of their modern proponents – Peter Berger himself. In *The Desecularization of the World* (1999), Berger identified mistakes in his theory and refuted his claims that “modern” society would become increasingly secularized. “My point is that the assumption that we live in a secularized world is false,” he declared. The world today, he further argues, “is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever” (1999, p. 2). On the decline of religious beliefs, Berger (1999) surveyed the contemporary world scene and found little evidence of religious decline, except on some American university

campuses and perhaps in Western Europe. Again, it was apparent to him that modernization has had some secularizing effects – more in some places than others – but it has also provoked powerful movements of “counter-secularization” (1999, p. 3). In fact, societal-level secularization is not necessarily linked to secularization on the level of individual consciousness.

Stark (1997) goes even further, asserting that secularization never happened and urging that the term be expunged from the sociological lexicon. He based his arguments both on the past and the present. A number of recent events have disproved the secularization apologists’ claims, including the Iranian Revolution, the rapid spread of Pentecostalism in the global South, communal violence in Southern Asia, the collapse of communism qua secular religion, and more. In addition, the “religious past” from which there has presumably been decline was not, he claims, nearly so religious. “After nearly three centuries of utterly failed prophecies and misrepresentations of both present and past, it seems time to carry the secularization doctrine to the graveyard of failed theories, and there to whisper ‘requiescat in peace’” (Stark & Finke, 2000, p. 79).

Casanova (1994) questioned the assumption that religion would become irrelevant to public life, utilizing empirical data within the United States and on other continents, including Africa. He concludes that we are witnessing the “deprivatization” of religion in the modern world. He cites examples of social movements that have appeared either religious in nature or have challenged, in the name of religion, the primarily secular spheres of the state and the market economy. As Casanova (1994) notes, “religious institutions and organizations refused to restrict themselves to the pastoral care of



individual souls” and continue to raise questions about the interconnections of private and public morality and “to challenge the claims of the subsystems, particularly states and markets, to be exempt from extraneous normative considerations” (p. 5).

The fundamental problem with classical understanding of secularization stems, according to Warner (1993), from the idea’s roots in a European social reality. Social and institutional conditions in the U.S.A., by contrast, made its religious scene distinctively different from Europe’s. Thus, secularization theories based on the European canon are not particularly useful for understanding *all religions everywhere*. What Warner observed about the distinctive religious trajectory of the U.S.A. is even truer in Africa. This point further amplifies Berger’s (2001) reflection that he was wrong when he thought that modernization necessarily meant secularization. The context in which secularization applies really matters and scholars of religion need to pay attention to that. “Arguments that predicted universal decline of religiosity have turned out to be inadequate, applying mainly to Western Europe, but not to the United States or much of the rest of the world” (Swidler, 2010, p. 1670).

As Casanova (1994) asserts, there are two take-home messages: Religion has come to stay, thus putting to rest one of the cherished dreams of the Enlightenment. Second, religion shall continue to play important public roles in the ongoing construction of the modern world. Evidence comes from across continents, including the role of religious parties in the Muslim world. Modernity does not necessarily lead to secularization, but pluralism. Nevertheless, assumptions about secularization remain an important theme in development discourses in Africa. Focusing on religion and how it

actually plays out in secular development deserves attention by scholars (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Schneider, 2006; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

The secularization paradigm, based on European history and the modernist model of the progressive exclusion of religion from the public sphere, has seen religion as an obstacle to progress, to be sidestepped, ignored, or eliminated (Bompani & Frahm-Arp, 2010, p. 1). From the outset, modern ideas about development generally overlooked the role of religion in Africa or assumed that it would be relegated to a matter of private belief as secular states gained strength and confidence. Schutz (2010) observes that development in the twentieth-century Western European model was seen as progress from a deeply religious, irrational, and non-bureaucratic world, to a modern space where material advancement was achieved and secularization ensued.

### **Civil Society in the Global South and in Nigeria**

Each society has its own history, peculiar challenges, and internal dynamics, as well as a distinctive civil society that operates, and Nigeria is no exception. Scholarship on civil society, like scholarship on development, originated from an American and democratic model. Could it apply and function effectively when applied to non-Western, African societies, especially religiously-plural societies like Nigeria? The United States has a long, diverse history of local groups of volunteers coming together to address social, cultural, educational, and human needs (Ritvo & Holland, 2012). Civil society in Africa and elsewhere is differently conceived and interpreted by various scholars. For example, scholars like Keane (1988), Bratton (1989), and Makumbe (1998) argue that civil society in Africa is a composite of counter-hegemony, a pressure on the state, and a

social base for pressure on the state institutions. Civil society is, therefore, a force for societal resistance to the state's excesses and the focal point of social movements and protests for reform and change. Bratton (1992) argues that civil society exists only insofar as there is self-consciousness of its opposition to the state.

Similarly, Azarya (1992) conceives African civil society in terms of the organization of citizens for the sake of moderating bourgeois and state hegemony. In the same line of thought, Callaghy (1978), Joseph (1984), Chazan (1988), Nyang'oro and Shaw (1989), and Mamdani (1995) all assert that antagonistic relations with the state are certainly typical in postcolonial states in Africa, especially with their authoritarian, absolutist, personalistic, corporatist, and hegemonic patrimonial characteristics. Ake (1996) concurs, arguing that the African state is prone to abuse, lawlessness, predation, and a tendency to appropriate and exploit on behalf of office holders, clients, sectional, and ethnic constituents. Consequently, any political, social, and economic space for autonomous action is very constructive. These conceptions of African civil society are important, but they miss the situations where conflict is minimal and negotiable. That is what we shall see with FOMWAN – minimal or no confrontation with the state, but interaction of members' religious culture with institutions and organizations outside the broad sphere of civil society for the society's well-being (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003).

Civil society discussions about Africa, and Nigeria in particular, have also been related to the democratization project of the post-colonial state (Gyimah-Boadi, 1996; Jega, 2010; Tar, 2009). Ikelegbe (2001) observes that civil society has been associated with the transformation of sub-Saharan nations toward democratic, transparent, and

accountable governance. As Diamond (1997) notes, the activities of an active civil society in the democratization and anti-statist project are numerous and include, among others, building a culture of civic engagement, enhancing state responsiveness to societal interests and needs, and building constituency for socioeconomic and political reform. In the same line of thought, Mamdani (1995) considers the democratization process in Africa as synonymous with the coming to life of civil society, in that democratization facilitates protection of values of pluralism, accountability, responsibility, and participation.

In an exploration of the dynamics of civil society and democratization in Nigeria, Aiyede (2003) broadly classified civil society into two groups. The first group comprises pro-democracy civic associations such as civil rights organizations and political reform movements that emerged in opposition to the authoritarianism and arbitrariness of the military junta. The second group includes interest groups, labor unions, students, women, and professional associations as well as NGOs that advance their particular interests and values. This classification is helpful in understanding the varieties and roles of civil society groups in Nigeria, especially the acknowledgment of the role of women in the democratization process.

FOMWAN fits these descriptions in some ways, but not in others. In large measure, existing discussions of civil society ignore the role of religious organizations and women of faith – especially Muslim women; they are simply not in the picture. But like other civil society organizations, FOMWAN emerged at a time when the Nigerian state was weak and fragile, facing serious political, economic, and social crises, including

prolonged military rule, corruption, illiteracy, poverty, widespread diseases, infant mortality, ethnic and communal clashes, and many social ills. It was in response to that fragility that many NGOs, including faith-related ones, emerged. Other religious organizations came along, as well, such as the Muslim Students Society (MSS, later MSSN), Jama'atu Nasril Islam, and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), each making efforts to address some of the factors that led to the weakness and fragility of Nigeria. These religious responses follow Monga's (1994) argument that African people have, for many decades, been utilizing indigenous forms of activism to challenge authoritarianism among other social problems. More so, such patterns of behavior are grassroots-oriented and may not be captured by the classical tools for measuring political culture developed by the global North.

Against this backdrop, this dissertation operationalizes Nigerian civil society the same way Makumbe (1998) did, as, "an aggregate of institutions whose members are engaged primarily in a complex of non-state activities – economic and cultural production, voluntary associations, and household life – and who, in this way, preserve and transform their identity by exercising all sorts of pressures or controls upon state institutions" (p. 305). This approach captures the nuances of Nigeria's uniqueness and avoids the use of an irrelevant instrument to measure where they do not fit. Again, it provides the opportunity for understanding and contextualizing the various ways in which the FOMWAN's religious culture and patterns of activities are organized, as well as how they contribute to civil society.

Just as religion is a central element in Nigeria's economic development,

understanding civil society in Nigeria requires attention to religion, as well. Findings of previous research show that, in Nigeria, religion occupies a central position in the ever-changing world of the people in politics, economy, development issues, and in shaping citizens' worldviews. For instance, across some 65 societies included in the World Values Surveys, Nigerians rank at the very top in terms of religious affiliation (Moaddel & Azadarmaki, 2002). Also, existing literature suggests that religious organizations, especially in Nigeria, are key players in promoting human well-being and bringing social change.<sup>8</sup> Yet, such studies often ignore the specific role of Islam in Nigeria and fail to recognize the historic role of women in building Nigerian civil society from the beginning.<sup>9</sup> Nigerian women of faith have historically come together to address their contemporary challenges and those of the society at large.

From the existing literature, we are aware that religion is an important player in the development of civil society and central to Nigerian life. However, much of the literature still ironically assumes a secular paradigm. Some recent research has already suggested that faith-based associations are important factors in Nigeria's social, political, economic, and educational development (Odumosu, Chete, & Alonge, 2011). Also, Gwarzo's findings (2003) revealed that Islamic civil society actors are social agents that provide meaning for the new and difficult conditions in towns. They create new forms of

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Falola; 1998; Johannes 2008; Olupona and Falola 1991; ter Haar 2009; Marshall 2009; Anwar 1992; Umar 2003; Kane 1994; Loimeier 1997; Oseni 1996; Umar 1999; Boyan 1979; Laitin 1982; Clarke and Linden 1984; Brenner 1993; Mack and Boyd 2000; Kukah 2001; Hunwick 2006; Vincent 2004; Johannes 2008; and Paden 2008.

<sup>9</sup> On this history, see John and Kirk-Greene, 1966; Kamene, 1983; Mack, 2006; Falola and Amponsah, 2012.

bonding and new social networks to supply comfort and emergency relief to those in distress. This means that there may be a strong link between FBOs, civil society, and development. Put differently, there is a chain that hooks development discourses, civil society, and FBOs, particularly in Nigeria.

In the Nigerian context, then, attention to a RNGO is an appropriate window on questions about civil society. What is also suggested by previous research is that an organization of and for women is a critical site for understanding civil society. Previous research on development has found that civil society participation is facilitated by the education and empowerment of women. Burns, Schlozman and Verba (2001) argue that women's education and empowerment have important consequences for political participation, gender equality, a robust civil society, and development. Similarly, Williams (2003) argues that religious organizations have been intimately involved with social movements throughout American history. Citing examples such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and the Civil Rights Movement, Williams argues that women's education contributed to building a robust civil society, social change, and development.

The history of Nigerian nation-building, then, cannot be complete without reference to religion and especially the role of women's religious organizations. Callaway and Creevey (1994) examine how Muslim women in Northern Nigeria and Senegal fare in the economy, both in the labor force and in the informal sector. They also investigate whether or not the women act as a political group and how they become involved in politics, identifying ways in which their activism differs from the political participation

of their animist, Christian, and West African women counterparts. Falola and Amponsab (2012) utilized secondary data to provide a chronology of various women's leadership positions in pre-colonial Nigeria. Mack and Boyd (2000) traced the contributions of Nana Asma'u's *Yan-taru* (The Associates) – the backbone of an educational movement during the reign of her brother Sultan Muhammad Bello in 19<sup>th</sup> century pre-Independent Nigeria.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Kew (2016) identifies three generations of civil society in Nigeria, starting with religious and traditional institutions and ethnic and community associations; trade unions, students, professionals, business associations, and the media; and lastly, the secular NGOs. His analysis pointed to how male-dominated religious institutions play important roles in setting the phase for political independence and conflict resolution. Still lacking, however, is comprehensive data on how an exclusively Muslim women's organization produces a religious culture that allows mobilized religious agents to impact the society in 21<sup>st</sup> century plural Nigeria.

This oversight has many negative consequences, including an increase in misconceptions, stereotypes, and prejudices against Islam, Nigerian women, and their agency. It equally has negative impacts on the policy formulation and implementation levels, thereby retarding sustainable development. This dissertation contributes to addressing such gaps in the literature.

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<sup>10</sup> For details about the association see Boyd (1990); Boyd and Mack (1997); and Mack and Boyd, (2000).



### **Islam, Civil Society, and Democracy**

Most social science literature assumes that religion, particularly Islam, is not compatible with democracy. Prominent scholars have stressed supposed areas of irreconcilability, suggesting that Islam is a hindrance to democratic ideals, values, and forms of governance (Fukuyama, 1992; Huntington, 1984; and Lipset, 1994). Another group of scholars, however, argues that Islam and democracy should not be considered mutually exclusive (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996; Kramer, 1993; Salame, 1994). They have been supported by recent studies that demonstrate that Islam is not the obstacle to democratization that some scholars allege it to be (Hofmann, 2004; Norris & Inglehart; Tessler, 2002; and March, 2011). In fact, Islam seems to dominate electoral politics in the countries of the so-called Arab Spring, particularly in Egypt, where the Islamists (Muslim Brotherhood) win democratic elections (Masoud, 2014).

A more nuanced understanding of the relationship between religions, especially Islam, and democracy, begins with the premise that religion is neither inherently pro- nor anti-democratic; neither left nor right; nor even for religious freedom or against it. Each situation must be examined on its own terms. Equally, careful scrutiny is necessary to consider not only country-level and individual values, but to move beyond the religion-democracy dichotomy by examining the role of religious groups in facilitating or inhibiting the evolution of democratic political orders (Davie & Ammerman, In Press). Rather than regarding the Islamic and the secular perspectives as binary oppositions, it is important to see them as complementary (Roald, 2016). Doing so requires researchers to carefully listen to the voices, narratives, stories, experiences, and perspectives of the

subjects – in this case, women of faith.

Just as the relationship between religion and democracy requires a nuanced perspective, so too does the relationship between religion and gender. Most social science literature assumes that Islam constitutes a barrier to female empowerment and that traditional education and welfare activities reinforce women's subservient roles. A few recent studies of Muslim women counter this dominant view, providing alternatives to the existing framework. Mahmood's (2011) work on pious Egyptian women is among the most prominent examples, but Mack's (2004) study of Hausa Muslim women singers is equally important.<sup>11</sup> Recent extant scholarship on the subject suggests that Muslim women play critical roles at the interface of public and private spheres.

Indeed, the longstanding assumption that religion is disempowering for women has been widely undercut. Many women in different faith traditions, including Islam, do not see their religion as the root of their oppression. On the contrary, Muslim women view Islam as an arena in which they can find freedom (Aulette et al., 2009). Recent studies have confirmed this position about Muslim women in various parts of the world.<sup>12</sup> Against this background, my research adds a new examination of how an Islamic civil society organization provides an arena for support, expression, and empowerment. This study explores how the women who participate in FOMWAN experience empowerment, whether there is a unique religious culture that these women create and utilize through

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<sup>11</sup> Other examples of this literature include Deeb, 2006; Torab, 2006; and White, 2010. On Muslim women's public roles, see Last and Boyd, 1985; Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996; Boserup, 2007; Thapar-Bjorkert and Sangheta, 2010; Falola and Amponsah, 2012; Alidou, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Badawi, 1995; Shaheed, 1998; Mernissi, 1992; Ahmed, 2012; Mahmood, 2005; and Boyd and Mack, 2013.

their work with FOMWAN, and whether the empowerment they experience is the result of the version of Islam they believe in and practice or the organization itself. By examining both the organizational and cultural dynamics of this Muslim women's organization, this study will contribute to greater understanding of the nexus of gender, religion, and power.

Debates about gender, agency, and subjectivity in Islam have been especially critical in international development discourses. Like discourse about democratization, public discourse on Muslims and development is increasingly framed around the alleged incompatibility of Islam and with a generalized notion of Western values (Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2009). At the center of the public debates, especially in the media, is a focus on women (Ryan, 2011), even though the voices of Muslim women themselves are frequently absent from these public debates. There has been far less research on Muslim women's agency, and more work is needed to explore the diversity of attitudes and experiences among Muslim women (Diehl et al, 2009). The underrepresentation of Muslim women's voices tends to reinforce the view that they are passive or disengaged (Bilge, 2010).

Some of the most exciting literature on Muslim women's agency in sub-Saharan Africa suggests that Muslim women benefit and contribute to the society when they are actively involved in creative activities such as appropriating traditional literacies and performing songs and oral poetry that reflect their contemporary social and cultural concerns (Dobronravin, 2009). These songs and poems address women's roles in society, politics, economy, history, hygiene, disease prevention, child care, and more. Part of this

creativity is gendered knowledge and other creations are told as folk stories, songs, elegies, poems, and plays. These are available in written, oral, audio, and visual forms (Hassane, 2008). This dissertation examines how FOMWAN utilizes and exercises cultural agency through art and literacy, among other techniques, for women's empowerment, civic engagement, and general human wellbeing.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2013) characterize a conceptual framework as an arrangement of concepts that are woven together as a visual map for the study that, “explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied - the key factors, variables, or constructs -- and the presumed interrelationships among them” (p. 20). Instead of a theoretical framework that generates concepts that already exist in the literature, this research utilizes a conceptual framework based on grounded theory analysis where new concepts, a model, or a theory can be developed from emergent data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell, 2014; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). It is generally agreed that the framework for grounded theory analysis is generated from data and analyzed to form and support new concepts. The theoretical framework, “evolves during the research itself” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 49). This qualitative study seeks to examine the phenomenon of how religious culture is created and how it effects change in Nigeria's plural state. From the generated data and utilizing grounded theory, I offer a new sociologically-driven conceptualization of the religious ideas and activities of FOMWAN members in Nigeria's plural society.

Among the concepts to emerge from this research is one with roots in the study of Islam. Historically, the study of Islam largely ignored sub-Saharan Africa and African sources, despite the fact that the continent has been a big part of the Islamic world. Nevertheless, as we settle into the 21st century, the study of Islam has expanded to include Ajami sources from the African continent (Kane, 2016). The scholarship on sub-Saharan Africa has suffered from prejudice for a very long time, ignoring local sources of scholarship (Ajami literature), and treating the Islamization of sub-Saharan Africa as superficial. But these Ajami sources have proven to be very important means for understanding Islamization of Africa (Ngom, 2016). Evidence shows that the Ajami materials have been a powerful tool for the spread of not only Islam, but also Christianity in Nigeria and beyond.<sup>13</sup> We shall see how FOMWAN members, in a similar manner, appropriate local sources of information, inspiration, and motivation, modernizing them and making them available in oral, audio, and visual forms. My research has acknowledged and utilized such sources in generating and analyzing data about these Muslim women's religious culture.

Hassane (2008) argues that a major challenge to exploring the various sources of data in many traditional sub-Saharan Muslim societies is that many of them were written in Ajami. 'Ajami, or A'jami, hereafter Ajami) is an Arabic word which means an "other"

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<sup>13</sup> Chapter Two has demonstrated how conversionary Protestants utilized Ajami for the spread of Christianity. Also, see for example M. Mumin and K. Versteegh Eds. (2014). *The Arabic Script in Africa: Studies in the Use of a Writing System*, especially "Introduction" pp. 1- 22; N. Dobronravin (2014). "West African Ajami in the New World: Hausa, Fulfulde and Mande Languages), pp. 159-172; E. Humery, "Fula and the Ajami Writing System in the Haalpulaar Society of Futa Tooro (Senegal and Mauritania): A Specific 'Restricted Literacy,'" pp. 173-198; and A. Vianello and B. Banafunzi "Chimi: Ni in Arabic Script: Examples from Bravo Poetry" (Somali) pp. 293-309.

(non-Arab). It originally denoted obscure or incomprehensible speech, unclear or improper Arabic, or alien, foreign, or unclear language. The term and its adjective “Ajami” were also used to refer to Persians and connoted cultural inferiority. The meaning of the word evolved to refer to the practice of writing non-Arabic languages using a modified Arabic script.<sup>14</sup> But over time, the term Ajami has witnessed changes in semantics and content (i.e., from pejorative to more neutral and subsequently positive meanings). In the current modern usage, it is a loaded term that has undergone tangible and subtle enrichments (Ngom & Kurfi, 2017).

The domains of Ajami are numerous, including sacred and secular, and it is used in many sub-Saharan African languages, including Swahili, Wolof, Hausa, Fulfulde, Yoruba, and Kanuri. It is tied to the spread of Islam in Nigeria and beyond, and has played an important role in the politics, education, and other aspects of Nigerian life. Reviewing literature on Islam in sub-Saharan Africa and Muslim women’s experiences informed how vital Ajami materials are as a source of local knowledge. Ignoring it as an information source, a basis for identity formation, worldview shaper, and instrument of agency would be a major oversight. Concepts from the literature on civil society in Africa, social capital among faith communities, and the relationship between Islam, Western liberal democracy, and women’s empowerment would be incomplete without this conceptualization of local religious knowledge.

Perhaps the most significant idea to grow out of this study is what Sered (1992) calls, “the domestication of religion” (p. 10). Sered’s use of domestication implies a

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<sup>14</sup> See Ngom and Zito, (2012). “Sub-Saharan African Literature, Ajami,” in: *Encyclopedia of Islam*.

process in which people who profess their allegiance to a wider religious tradition personalize the rituals, institutions, symbols, and theology of that wider system in order to safeguard the health, happiness, and security of particular people with whom they are linked in relationships of caring and interdependence. It is in a similar fashion that I use the concept ‘Ajamīzation (also written Ajamīzation, hereafter Ajamization) to describe the domestication or localization of Islamic religious culture by FOMWAN members for empowerment, agency, and well-being of members and the general public.

I conceptualize FOMWAN’s religious culture and its effects as part of “‘Ajamīzation of Islam” – the multiple tangible and subtle enrichments of Islamic traditions that result from their dynamic interplay with local traditions in the Muslim world (Fallou & Kurfi, 2017, p.3). It implies that I examined the numerous complex, tangible, intangible, visible, and inconspicuous unique cultural representations that members have created to address modern challenges and advance human well-being. There are multiple dimensions of the Ajamization of Islam. While some are reflected in writing (the orthographic enrichment of the Arabic script (Ajami)), others are reflected in the arts (calligraphic), literary production (educational), income generation (economic), interaction (social relations), and in day-to-day activities (social), as well as in leadership (political) aspects, as we shall see in this dissertation. Having acquired Islamic knowledge, subsumed Western culture, and appropriated local traditions, members of FOMWAN produced a distinctive culture that enable them to navigate their challenges. By so doing, FOMWAN has improvised, improved, modified, and enriched their religious culture, capturing the nuances of their immediate environment, and making it

meaningful to the communities.

Ajamization is conceptualized to refer to the various enrichment processes of Islamic practices that result from the co-articulation between the faith and local traditions.<sup>15</sup> The concept highlights the ingenuity of West African Muslims within the larger global Islamic culture. The case refutes the widely held view that West African Islam is peripheral to the centers of Islamic culture in North Africa and Arabia (the Arab world). The existing corpus of Arabic and Ajami texts and the diversity of Muslim practices that has developed since the early days of Islam bear testimony to the multiple dimensions of Ajamization, the various ways in which the Arabic script and other Islamic traditions have been appropriated, enriched, and effectively localized in different communities.<sup>16</sup>

It is within this frame of Ajamization of Islam that I examined FOMWAN's visible and inconspicuous aspects to demonstrate how an interplay between the members' local traditions and their Islamic religious culture results in agency, empowerment, and human well-being. As a Nigerian Muslim women's association that responds to the challenges posed by the 21<sup>st</sup> century, FOMWAN's case shows how the various dimensions of the enrichment process of Islamic traditions happens. At a broader level,

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<sup>15</sup> For more on the concept of Ajamization, see Abdalla Uba Adamu, "Ajamization of Knowledge as a Universal Basic Education Process for Makarantar Allo Pupils in Northern Nigeria," in *Kano Journal of Education*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2000a), pp. 318–330; "Ajamization of Knowledge: Challenges and Prospects of an Educational Strategy," *Al-Ijtihad: The Journal of Islamization of Knowledge and Contemporary Issues*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (2000b), pp. 1–24; and Fallou Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World: the Odyssey of 'Ajami and the Muridiyya*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 19–20.

<sup>16</sup> For details about Ajamization of Islam in Africa, its origin, dimensions and scope see Ngom, F, and Kurfi, M. H. (2017). "Introduction to Ajamization of Islam in Africa" in *Islamic Africa*, Special Edition, eds. Ngom, F, and Kurfi, M. H., Vol. 8, No.1, pp.1-12.



Ajamization can be extended to various other faiths and traditions. For instance, the Christian faith and traditions have been received in Africa and elsewhere, enriched and effectively Ajamized (localized) to fit the needs of the host communities. Similar kinds of localization are also found in other global faiths such as Christianity whose vibrant growth is found in the non-Western world. In studies of Christianity, this process is usually referred to as indigenization.<sup>17</sup> Contextualization is central to understanding a particular faith and tradition, in addition to knowing the historical processes that brought it to the present. Doing justice to FOMWAN's religious culture requires knowing the origins of the struggles that members have gone through, the atmosphere where they operate, and the meanings the actors attach to their actions vis-à-vis their relationship to the faith at large.

### **Research Methods**

Previous studies on Muslim women's organizations in sub-Saharan Africa and especially Nigeria (Abdul-Hamid & Sanusi, 2016; Adamu, 1999; Callaway, 1998; Katja, 2002; Renne, 2012) have addressed important themes, adopting interesting research designs, but they have not triangulated methods that would capture the important complexities of Muslim women's rituals, agency, worldviews, actions, and rationale for social actions. Triangulation procedures address internal validity and help to capture different dimensions of the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Methodological triangulation involves using more than one method to

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Sanneh, L. (2003). *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.

gather data and answer the research questions. Through methodological triangulation, I gathered data from various methods including interviews, group discussions, participant observation, and archival research.

Triangulation can also occur across multiple data sources within the same method (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002; Saldaña, 2016). For example, comparing participants with different viewpoints through interviews is one kind of data source triangulation that was used in this study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Creswell, 2013; Denzin, 1978; Patton, 2002; Saldaña & Omasta, 2017). I gathered interview data from FOMWAN leaders along with additional participants, including leaders of partner associations, to discover multiple perspectives. The inclusion of interviews with various stakeholders in the sample enriches the context of the study by offering additional insight into the phenomenon under inquiry. In the interview transcripts, I have searched for common statements and themes among various participants, thereby adding validity to the study.

In addition to interviews, field research allowed interaction with the subjects in the natural course of their lives, which created opportunities for understanding of the subjects' social world, from their own perspectives. A positivist approach to understanding social reality is methodologically inadequate and in some instances irrelevant in terms of providing valid and reliable data that explain lived experiences. Neuman (2003) argues that field researchers can directly observe and interact with members in natural settings to get inside their perspective, embracing an activist or social constructionist perspective on social life. "Thus, they replace the positivist emphasis on 'objective facts' with a focus on the everyday, face-to-face social processes of

negotiation, discussion, and bargaining to construct social meaning” (p. 366). Again, since the goal of qualitative research is to identify how people make meaning of the social world, it is well suited to examining how FOMWAN and its members exercise cultural agency. Qualitative research, in general, emphasizes the temporal and spatial specificity of the research context (Creswell, 1998). More importantly, it is a good way to bring out the silenced voices of the women. It allows for the existence of multiple and conflicting perspectives, including marginalized perspectives (Morrow et al. 2001).

There were four components of my research, each seeking to discover how FOMWAN creates trust, agency, and ways of acting; how it gives voice and creates opportunities for empowerment; how it encourages participation; and how it effects changes in Nigeria. These components include interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and archival research. My interviews included sixteen leaders of FOMWAN, including founding members, members of the national executive council, zonal coordinators, and state and local chapter leaders from the top, middle, and lower levels of the association’s management. Due to Nigeria’s complexity, history, cultural variations, and politics, the country is divided into six geopolitical zones and FOMWAN’s structure parallels this. FOMWAN has branches in all 36 Nigerian states and Abuja, with zonal coordinators. I chose one state chapter from each zone. These are Kwara state (North-Central), Bauchi state (North-East), Kano state (North-West), Imo (South-East), Edo state (South-South), and Oyo state (South-West). This enabled me to learn how the organizational hierarchy operates at different levels, paying special attention to how decision processes take place, how participatory it is, and whether action

reflects a bottom-up or top-down approach. Examining the organizational dynamics within these state chapters in the various zones also allows for comparative analysis of FOMWAN's construction of religious culture and its application in Nigeria's plural society. We shall see throughout the dissertation that each state chapter organizes its activities in conformity with the national template, but each chapter applies different cultural strategies by building a somewhat different cultural base. Each state chapter embodies different cultural tools that it uses to address its peculiar challenges (Wood, 1999).

Along with FOMWAN leaders, my team (of three research assistants) and I interviewed representatives of partner organizations within FOMWAN's network. These were two male Muslim organizations, two female Muslim organizations, two Christian female organizations, and two male-dominated Christian organizations, totaling eight interviews with partner association leaders. By interviewing leaders of partner organizations, I was able to understand how FOMWAN collaborates with others to achieve its objectives and how partners understand what it means for FOMWAN to be a Muslim women's organization.

The second component of my research involved conducting focus group discussions with selected beneficiaries of FOMWAN activities. These include widows, women trained in vocational skills, patients with Vesicovaginal fistula (VVF) condition, and some recipients of FOMWAN educational programs. I conducted five sessions of group discussions with a total of thirty-two participants. Each session comprised between five and ten participants (six persons per session, on average) and was about one hour

long. Some of the discussions were conducted in English, others in Hausa. They were recorded with the consent of participants, transcribed, and (where necessary) translated into English. From discussions with the service recipients, I learned how FOMWAN creates a unique culture and uses it to create ways of acting. We shall see in the dissertation how FOMWAN, through its activities, mobilizes, informs, gives voice, and empowers Nigerian women and effects change in their lives. These focus groups helped me understand the ways in which FOMWAN builds trust and how that facilitates the extension of the reach of its services into the host communities. We shall especially see how such interventions provide Nigerian women with tools for negotiating with the patriarchal structures of marriage and society.

The third component of my research employed participant observations of key sites and events. This allowed me to witness practices, symbols, rituals, and religious acts, including speeches and words. Serving as a volunteer at FOMWAN's sites, participating in and observing the participants' behaviors, helped me understand how members negotiate what it means to call their organization Islamic and how its public presence shapes the meaning of Islam and gender in Nigeria. At the sites, I observed and asked questions about participants' bodily practices, distinctive pedagogic styles, performative engagements, and various processes of rationalization. The informal interviews at the sites as well as the follow up questions that I asked participants have clarified and shed light on grey areas. The observation method has allowed me to see the participants' actions and how they create religious culture, networks, skills, and relationships. I could then analyze how these patterned activities create trust, how they

reflect collective interests, how the participants justify their use of symbols and institutionalize their usage, and whether these patterned activities are elements of a civil society or not.

Lastly, I conducted archival research to trace FOMWAN's information generation, utilization, and dissemination. I reviewed current and historical documents generated by the association, including campaigns, debates, publicity materials, enrolment records, and planning documents.<sup>18</sup> I also paid attention to the way Muslim women in Nigeria are actively involved in creative activities, appropriating traditional literacies, and performing songs and oral poetry that reflect their contemporary social and cultural concerns. Through conducting content analysis of these sources of information, I have learned how FOMWAN utilizes and exercises cultural agency through literacy, among other strategies. It also taught me how the organizational structure and functions change over time and how FOMWAN copes with the challenges of modernity. I also reviewed various documents about FOMWAN activities, including books of proceedings, brochures, pamphlets, reports, and related course materials. These documents helped my analysis by providing a holistic overview of the association's culture, structure, service dimension, and how they have changed over time.

Throughout the analysis phase, I conducted member checks, also referred to as participant checking, to verify my data. At each participant's discretion, I followed up on questions that arose during interviews and observation for clarification and to confirm information in transcripts (Creswell, 2013; Hycner, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985;

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<sup>18</sup> All of these documents are in English - being the official language of the Federation.

Saldaña & Omasta, 2017). Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocate member checks as one method to seek participants' perspectives and ensure validity. I have applied member checks through phone calls, text message, WhatsApp, Facebook messenger, and e-mails to seek participants' feedback on the data and to ensure the accuracy of findings. While I found the member checks very useful in allowing the participants to confirm that their positions were accurately illustrated and reported, it also provided me the opportunity to gain additional data, such as images. Applying these techniques for validation and credibility ensured that my study was well grounded.

This wide range of methods (triangulation) makes possible the examination of the religious culture that FOMWAN has created, describing how it changes the existing religious landscape in a male-centered plural society. Beginning from the association members' concern about the weak and fragile state of Nigeria – leading to the founding of FOMWAN – to members' narratives, activities, use of scripture, rituals, and creedal statements, and their utilization of space, provided valuable means for understanding lived religion as well as its manifestations on the lives of participants and the general public. Methodologically, the approach that I have adopted has provided the advantage of catching multiple religious narratives in diverse social settings through fishing with multiple nets (Ammerman & Williams, 2012). This dissertation is unique in its approach – comprehensive enough to capture the subjects' complex and often delicate culture.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

I analyzed the data gathered using the technique of grounded theory – “a systematic yet flexible method of data collection and analyzing qualitative data to

construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves” (Charmaz, 2011, p. 2). Grounded theory involves identifying themes by examining each interview one at a time, through multiple readings, noting emerging patterns. This permits theoretical implications to emerge through the ongoing analysis of findings during the process of data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I analyzed the interviews and focus group data using thematic analyses, employing a holistic-content approach (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber 1998). I followed several steps in the analysis process, including familiarization with the data through transcription, careful reading of the data and taking notes of initial ideas, and searching for emerging themes. I adopted three phases of coding: Line-by-line coding for patterns and commonalities, determining the adequacy of the initial coding by going through the data using the most significant earlier codes, and grouping major themes into larger categories. The categories that emerged were: 1) FOMWAN’s religious culture, 2) patterns of organized activity, and 3) resources and constraints. Lastly, I constructed a clustered matrix with the text of the coded interviews to examine patterns in the themes. The goal of this step was to identify how FOMWAN uses religious culture and organized networks and where it is constrained by larger political and legal structures.

I interpreted each component in conjunction with the others in order to make sense of how FOMWAN’s patterns of organized activities facilitate trust building, empowerment, and effecting change. I considered FOMWAN leaders’ and members’ accounts of how they make meaning in their lives, including how they are engaged in various activities, how they are encouraged to participate, and how that improves well-



being. I also considered how religious culture, including but not limited to symbols, values, rituals, gestures, slogans, and speeches, is present in communication, how it is used, and how it addresses wider political, social, legal, and economic issues.

Throughout my data collection and analysis, I employed four methods of maximizing the validity of my research. First, as noted above, I triangulated my data collection, and each method complemented the others (Bogdan & Biklen 2006). By interviewing FOMWAN leaders, I learned about the organization's history, patterns of activities, use of Islamic culture to improve human well-being, and how it is constrained by larger social structures. By conducting discussion sessions with members of FOMWAN and other associations, I gained information about membership, rationale, participation, empowerment, and benefits. Also, by reviewing FOMWAN's documents and existing literature in audio and print media, I learned how it uses religious capital and networks to effect change.

My second strategy draws on the tradition of grounded theory (Glaser, 2005). While I collected data, I analyzed my findings and revised my research questions as needed, in order to reflect their relevance to my case study and to the field at large. The sequence of my fieldwork is conducive to this process: While I conducted interviews with FOMWAN leaders and members, I gained information and access to partner organizations. Simultaneously, I served as a volunteer in some instances and served as a participant observer, taking field notes, writing memos and asking questions about symbols, rituals, practices, and speeches; how they are used; how they influence human actions; and how they facilitate in meaning-making. Having recruited and trained three

research assistants (RAs) – one male and two females – facilitated accessing sites and events, improved trust, and expanded my capacity for network and meeting leaders and members of partners within the network.<sup>19</sup>

My third strategy is also rooted in grounded theory. I used my data to create thick descriptions of FOMWAN's religious culture, showing how it enhances trust and agency in Nigeria's plural society (Geertz, 1973). My final strategy to maximize validity was researcher reflexivity. Throughout the research process, I was mindful of my own standpoint as a male, Muslim, and a Nigerian graduate student at an American university. I was aware of how that position affected my access to respondents and my interpretation of data. To maximize researcher reflexivity, I recruited and trained female research assistants, which helped to reduce researcher bias. What is more, I drafted a memo (summary) after interviews detailing my perceptions of and reactions to the meeting. As I conducted participant observation, I asked follow-up questions through informal interviews and incorporated my reflections into my research notes.

### **Scholarly Contributions**

My examination of FOMWAN in the evolution of Nigerian civil society contributes to current scholarship in the following major ways. First, religion continues to play a critical role in the political, economic, educational, and other social experiences of Nigerians. Given this key role that religion plays, FOMWAN's religious culture plays a

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<sup>19</sup> I trained the RAs what my research questions, objectives and methods were. In addition, like me, they have undergone the computer-based human subjects training that IRB organized, and were awarded certificates to ensure the protection of the subjects' rights and conformity to the set standards.

critical role in its contribution to civil society. This analysis contributes to the sociology of religion literature providing an alternative theory on the role of religion in the global south (Edgell, 2012; Palmié, 2013; Spickard, 2017).

This analysis follows the line of thinking of scholars who are engaged in moving beyond male-dominated organizations as the only contributors to civil society (Alidou, 2013; Apawo Phiri et al. 2002; Bompani & Frahm-Arp, 2010; Karam, 2000). It brings women's experiences to the study of democracy and development and it provides new insight into the relationship between Islam and civic life. By paying attention to a Muslim women's organization, this research adds to existing literature on how RNGOs contribute to the development of civil society in the global south. It offers both theoretical and methodological groundwork for further inquiry into the compatibilities of Islam and female agency in sub-Saharan Africa.

Secondly, I bring to the sociology of religion a different and more holistic approach to the understanding and conceptualization of how religious culture contributes to civil society. I show that FOMWAN's religious culture not only provides bonding social capital, but also bridging capital (linking capital). FOMWAN members gathered as pious Muslim women, but also as women who were disenchanted with Nigeria's weak and fragile state – the negative consequences of which were enormous for women. FOMWAN members had the conviction that addressing such problems was possible through both faith and action. I show how members' religious action produced a religious culture that enlarged the imagination and judgment of the people that are part of it in ways that allow them to transform social structures.

Thirdly, this dissertation is valuable as a contribution to knowledge about a specific society – Nigeria. It contributes to the emerging interdisciplinary study of Islam in Africa as a specialized area of research using a multi-method cultural approach that shows how the actors in that particular context draw on habits that are already in place, imaginations about what is possible, and moral judgments about what members should do (Edgell, 2012; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Somers, 1994). The results help to correct misconceptions about actors and their social agency. FOMWAN’s case challenges the assumption that Muslim women are oppressed and subordinated in a religion perceived as patriarchal. My dissertation demonstrates from the actors’ perspective that, far from being solely a tool of women’s oppression, Islam can be a fundamental aspect of the struggle for human emancipation and for women’s rights and empowerment.<sup>20</sup>

Fourthly, this research also amends ideas that religion, particularly Islam, is a monolithic, uniform, and unyielding force that is detrimental to the development of democracy (Fukuyama, 1992; Huntington, 1996a, 1996b). Instead, my work supports the view that Islam varies considerably from country to country depending on its position in relation to society, the state, and the broader political environment. More critically, Islam is a pluralistic religion which can be compatible with democracy (Ayoob, 2007; Bayat, 2007; Mandaville, 2014; Sedgwick, 2006). Nigeria’s case is an important one to consider because of its significance in Africa (as a large economy) and its huge population of Muslims (over 90 million). Further, attention to the role of women amends incorrect

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<sup>20</sup> For similar arguments, see Abu-Lughod, 2015; Esposito, 1997; Bodman and Tohidi, 1998; Ask and Tjomsland, 1998; Doorn-Harder, 2006; Mahmood, 2011; Karam, 2013; and Rinaldo, 2013.

notions about religion and democracy. This dissertation contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how gender and religion shape democracy, civil society, and sustainable development.

Likewise, this dissertation can be used as a basis for comparison. Studies of similar nature might be undertaken in different contexts within the Islamic faith (such as among Muslim women in Francophone countries, North African countries, Muslim majority countries, and the Arab world). More so, it can be a reference point for comparison with Muslim women's social agency in Muslim minority countries. There are also interesting comparisons to be made with women's religious activities in other faiths. On the whole, my research contributes to the literature on Islam and Muslim politics in Africa, and thereby provides the basis for a comparative perspective.

Finally, this dissertation contributes to the research on international development. Studies elsewhere (Swart, 2006) confirm that faith-based organizations and worship places are important to the stock of social capital and have an important strategic significance for social capital formation agenda. Western official donors have traditionally been ambivalent about the relationship between faith and development and the activities of FBOs, feeling that religion is counter to development (Clarke, 2007). This dissertation serves as a useful resource for policymakers interested in advancing human progress. Secular development experts could utilize findings of this research to better understand Muslim women's organizations and facilitate knowledge about how secular donor agencies can partner with women of faith and how that partnership can promote social development outcomes. By and large, this study adds value to the

literature on the role of religion in development discourse and in public life.

Beyond that, the research provides insights into strategies for building trust, peace, and harmony in conflict-ridden areas. Where tension, hatred, and crises, including religious ones – are common, conflict resolution centers, national governments, and intergovernmental agencies (including the United Nations' Peacebuilding Committee) can learn from this dissertation. Here, too, collaboration with women in faith organizations may mitigate insurgency. Recent studies show that American efforts in the fight against radical Islam prove to be inadequate in large measure because of the failure to account for the many nuances, in time and space, of the social and religious environment (White, 2017). To address this gap, grassroots religious organizations like FOMWAN are critical players for mitigating and providing alternatives to radical religious ideologies and insurgency.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation addresses existing gaps in the literature and theory about the role of Muslim women in creating a religious culture and its exercise for empowerment and general human well-being in Nigeria. This first chapter has laid the background to the study, identifying the research problem and asking the research questions. It has reviewed debates on religion, secularization, civil society, and the relationship between Islam and Western liberal democracy with reference to Nigeria. It then presented the conceptual framework used in the research, justifying its suitability for the study. The chapter has also presented detailed information about the research methods used, data analysis and interpretation that lead to conclusions, and the scholarly contributions of the

study.

The birth of FOMWAN came at a particular time in Nigeria's history. As described in Chapter Two, Nigeria had been a weak and fragile state, bedeviled with many social ills, including poverty, illiteracy, political, economic, health, and social crises. Most of these problems had more profound negative impacts on women and FOMWAN was formed in response to this fragility and weakness. Chapter two also describes the setting of the country, showing the role of religion in the various aspects of the lives of Nigerians and how that impacted the peoples' worldviews. Findings of previous research show that in Nigeria, religion occupies a central position in the politics, economy, and development issues that impact peoples' lives and in shaping citizens' worldviews. This literature also suggests that religious organizations, especially in Nigeria, are key players in promoting human well-being and bringing social change.

Chapter Three examines FOMWAN's organizational structure, its activities, and its methods of operation, highlighting the degree to which it is shaped by its distinctive faith-based beliefs and practices. We shall see how this organization incorporates religious criteria into a distinctly modern organizational structure.

Chapter Four examines the unique religious culture that FOMWAN has created, which helps members navigate their modern-day challenges and effect change in the lives of nonmembers and the general public. We shall see how members create and use symbols, religious space, and ritual performance to make sense of what they do, and how such culture effects change. Through the religious culture that FOMWAN has created, we will see how members strategize and use those strategies of action to navigate social

problems, including poverty, illiteracy, hate, conflict, and violence. It creates empowerment for women and especially for the less fortunate members of the society; and it fosters unity in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation that had been characterized as a catalog of ethnoreligious conflicts (Salawu, 2010). But FOMWAN, with its pluralistic understanding of Islam, has created a unique religious culture that has been able to address some of those problems. It is a Muslim civic culture with a favorable orientation to the authorities, the community, social change, and conflict resolution.

One of the striking aspects about FOMWAN is the degree to which its religious capital is expanded beyond the organization itself. Members have gained the capacity to serve their communities and to engage with secular groups and other religious communities in addition to empowering themselves. An examination of FOMWAN's public profile and impact is what Chapter Five undertakes. The chapter highlights what the association is, who its members are, and what their identity represents. We shall see how members' individual religious piety overlaps with the social and the public implications of these private practices. FOMWAN's mission is *a world where women are properly educated and equipped for an equitable and peaceful society*. In order to achieve this mission and attain their ideal society -- *a world where women are totally empowered to be role models in making impacts in religious and secular matters*, members adopted various strategies of action. These strategies allow members to interpret projects in Islamic terms that are trusted by the local communities. This use of religious terms gives FOMWAN the flexibility to achieve success with programs that might otherwise fail. We shall see how FOMWAN members consistently emphasize that



they need to engage in every act according to Islamic tenets, as well as in conformity with Nigeria's constitution. Essentially, the women want an ideal society in which religion regulates their behaviors and Islam defines their worldview, including their relations with the state.

The final chapter, chapter six, summarizes the major findings of this study. It engages the existing literature vis-à-vis the collected data to arrive at conclusions. The chapter also discusses the policy implications of the findings. The study's limitations are highlighted and future research areas are identified.

## **CHAPTER TWO:**

### **THE NIGERIAN SETTING: HISTORY, POLITICS, AND THE ROLE OF RELIGION**

The questions being addressed in this dissertation are examined in the particular context of Nigeria, and this chapter describes that Nigerian setting – the diverse people and cultures. It briefly examines some of the history of Nigeria, which underlies its complex and plural nature. It also discusses the inherent tensions among the various regions and how religion plays out in the various aspects of peoples' lives. The second section examines the country's economy, highlighting some of the problems in it and how interest groups react to these problems. The chapter then describes the nature of Nigeria's politics and how they intertwine with religion, secularism, and Nigeria's plural nature. Throughout the chapter, the role of religion in the lives of Nigerians, including in education, health, and other aspects of social life will be discussed.

#### **Brief History of Nigeria: Peoples and Culture**

The country called Nigeria did not begin as one nation, but was a child of necessity – a mosaic of various empires, people, and civilizations that the British amalgamated during the colonial era. Nigeria as a modern political entity was created in 1914 by the British, as part of the European partition of Africa that began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. However, its peoples have a long history, with human habitation in some places dating back to before 500 B.C. (Falola, 1999). The Federal Republic of Nigeria today covers an area of 909,890 square kilometer (351,310 square miles) on the shores of the Gulf of Guinea, with the Republic of Benin to the west, Niger Republic to the north, Chad to the northeast, and Cameroon to the east and southeast

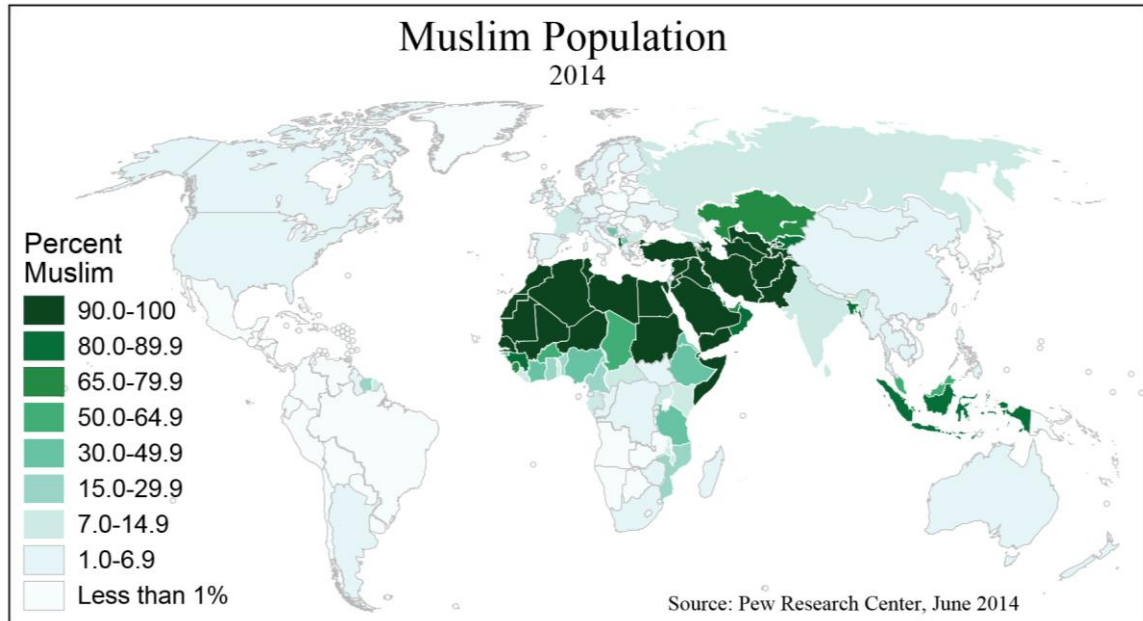
(Mabogunje, 2017). Nigeria covers an area twice the size of California and three times the size of the United Kingdom (Gordon, 2003; Falola, 1999). The March 2006 census estimated the population to be 140,431,790, with an average density of 154.3 persons per square kilometer. The population was estimated by the United Nations (UN) to have risen to 186,987,563 by mid-2016 (205.5 persons per square kilometer).<sup>21</sup> The population is extremely diverse with more than 500 spoken languages and well over 250 ethnic groups (Mabogunje, 2017). The three largest groups are Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo (also written as Ibo).

The ‘middle belt’ of Nigeria, which is sandwiched between the north and south, is home to hundreds of different ethnic groups practicing Christianity, Islam, and animist religions. The Hausa, who are mainly Muslim, live in the north of the country; the Igbo, who are mainly Christians, live in the southeast; and the Yoruba, who live in southwestern Nigeria, are split roughly equally between Muslims and Christians. The fact that Muslims live predominantly in the north and Christians predominantly in the south has, historically, attached a geographic polarization to religious controversies. The history and politics of Nigeria have been deeply influenced by multiple fault lines regarding ethnicity, geography, and religion (Siollun, 2017).

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<sup>21</sup> The population of the country makes it the largest Black nation on earth and the 7<sup>th</sup> most densely populated in the world (The World Fact book, 2016).

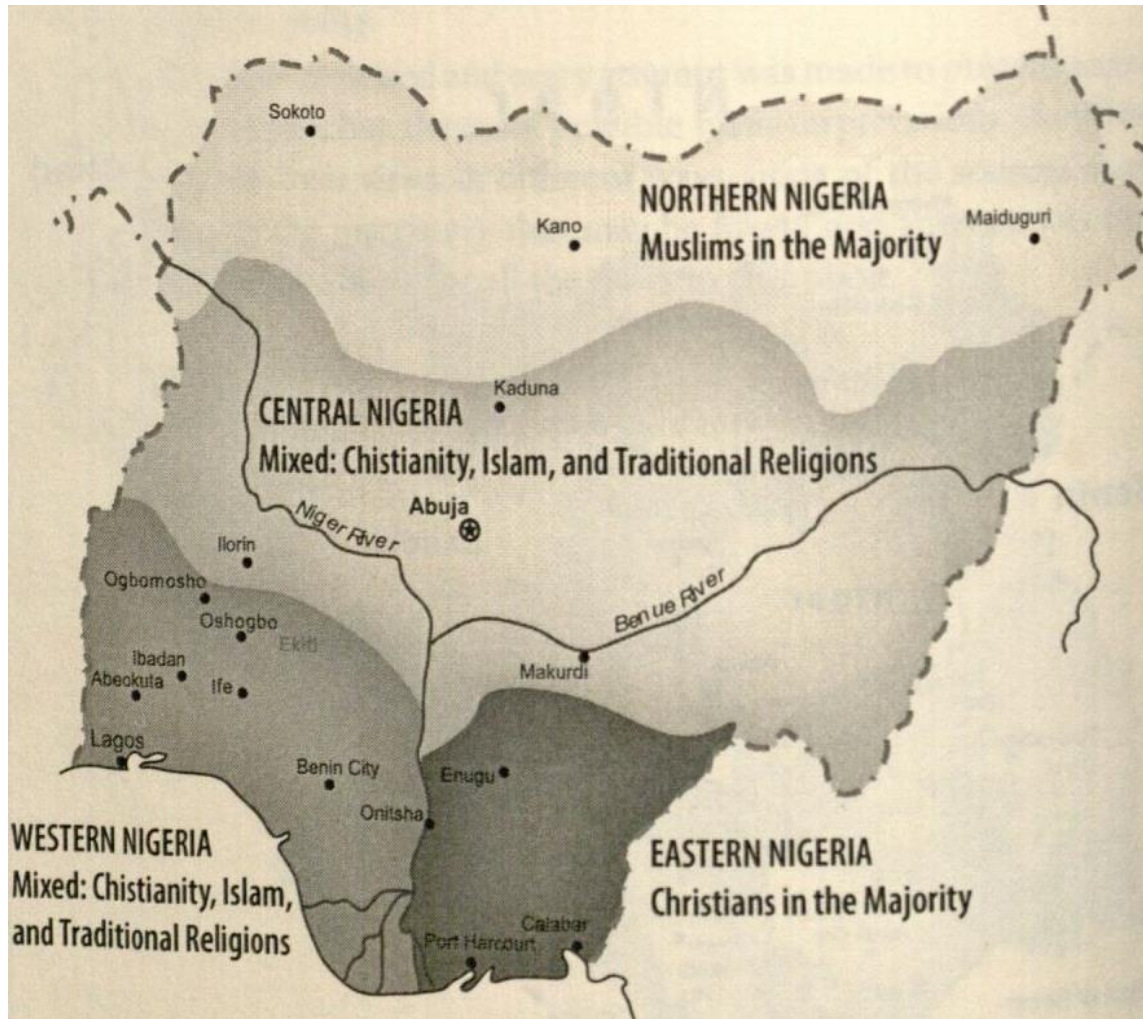
**Figure 1. World Map Depicting Muslim Majority Countries**



Source: Pew Research Center, 2014.

As a multicultural, multilingual, and diverse country, Nigeria is rich in human and natural resources, especially oil – the country’s major source of revenue. This resource serves as a both a blessing and a curse.

**Figure 2. Map of Nigeria showing Religious Groupings**



Source: Adekunle, 2009, p. xvi.

Although Nigeria is ethnically and religiously diverse, Islam has an important role there. Together, the predominantly Muslim Hausa and the Yoruba constitute over 50 percent of the country's population, making Nigeria a "Muslim majority" country. Nigeria also has the largest Muslim population in West Africa, estimated at nearly 97 million (and 5.1% of the world's Muslim population, according to Pew's (2011) 2020 estimates).

### **The Nigerian Economy**

Blessed with immense natural wealth, Nigeria is arguably Africa's biggest economy.<sup>22</sup> In addition to crude oil and gas, there is gold, coal, tin, and columbite. The nation's mineral resources are varied, although considerable exploration remains to be carried out. Tin and columbite are found in alluvial deposits on Jos plateau. Extensive reserves of medium-graded iron ore exist, and iron and steel production are being developed. There is also arable land for agricultural products – cash and food crops, rubber products, wood, hides, and skins – as well as manufacturing strength in textiles, cement and other construction materials, footwear, chemicals, printing, ceramics, steel, and other resources (Areola, 1991). The country's primary wealth, however, lies in the oil fields of the Niger Delta areas near its southern coastline. Paden (2008) notes that Nigeria is probably the least well known of the world's pivotal states. Its significance as a major world oil producer and its experience with democratic rule give Nigeria a role as the dominant African state. Its status as Africa's largest democracy, its abundance of natural resources, and its strategic location along the West African coast, have made it one of the United States Government's key strategic partners on the continent (Carson, 2013).

Agriculture is an important branch of Nigeria's economy, as well. It is a major employment source for a teeming population, especially the rural dwellers. The country has been known for its agrarian economy both before and in the period soon after independence. During the pre- and post-independent years, agriculture was the major

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<sup>22</sup> South Africa is always Nigeria's economic competitor. For details on the subject matter, see: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/10/nigeria-remains-africas-biggest-economy-imf/>

source of the nation's foreign exchange earnings through the exportation of cash crops such as groundnuts, cotton, hide, and skin produced by the northern region; rubber from the southern region; palm oil and kernels from the eastern region; and cocoa and coffee from the western region. Although neglected after the discovery of oil, more recently, Nigeria's agricultural sector is being transformed by the commercialization of small, medium, and large-scale enterprises (Okotie, 2017).

There have been several efforts by various administrations to boost the agricultural sector and return Nigeria to self-sufficiency in agriculture. These include: Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), the Green Revolution Program (GRP), and the Green Alternative: Agriculture Promotion Policy 2016-2020. All of these Agricultural Transformation Agendas aim to ensure self-sufficiency in food production, introducing modern technology and high yielding varieties of seeds, fertilizers, and equipment, such as tractors (Okeke, 2001). Some of these policies and programs have succeeded to an extent, although, unfortunately, as with many sectors, agriculture in Nigeria has experienced corruption. One instance of corruption involved sand being mixed by contractors with fertilizers and sold to the government, payments made for fertilizer while contractors not supplied, and subsidized fertilizers were resold back to the government, with much more sold off to neighboring countries. In short, Nigeria's government was not subsidizing farmers, it was subsidizing corruption (Adesina, 2013).

Soon after the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantities in 1956 in a village called Oloibiri in the present Bayelsa State (in the Niger Delta area), the oil sector overshadowed agriculture. Since the late 1960s Nigeria's economy has been based

primarily on the petroleum industry. A series of world oil price increases after 1973 produced rapid economic growth in transportation, construction, manufacturing, and government services. Because this led to a great influx of rural people into the larger urban centers, agricultural production stagnated to such an extent that cash crops such as palm oil, peanuts, cocoa, rubber, timber, and cotton were no longer significant export commodities.

But the fall in world oil prices in the 1980s left Nigeria's economy in a precarious position and soon a crippling national debt mounted. Attempts to create confidence among international creditors coupled with International Monetary Fund (IMF) pressure, led to an effective devaluation of the country's currency (Naira) against the American Dollar by some 700 percent and the removal of internal subsidies (notably on petroleum products), which in turn fueled inflation (Hunwick, 1992). The Nigerian economic crisis was the direct outcome of the dependency of the accumulation process that dominated its political economy.

The discovery of crude oil in Nigeria is a mixed blessing: it came with economic growth and infrastructural development, but many projects were abandoned and the funds for those projects embezzled. More importantly, the discovery of crude oil led to neglect of the agricultural sector in favor of the oil sector and the destruction of the environment, especially the aquatic environment, because of careless and destructive oil industry practices (Okotie, 2017). This shift away from an agricultural economy, coupled with mismanagement of the resources affected fishing, which is the primary source of livelihood of the indigenous population. Overall, there is a lack of basic human services



in the areas dominated by oil (Jane's Intelligence Weekly, 2014a), which creates fertile ground for the indigenous people to establish militia groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). Such militia groups engage in oil theft, sabotage, guerilla warfare, and demanding ransoms from relatives and employers of kidnapped people. Such militia groups allege that they have been neglected and suffered an unprecedented degradation of their natural environment as a result of pollution that international oil companies like Mobil, Chevron, and Shell produce (Schultze-Kraft, 2017). This situation negatively affects the exploration and exportation of oil, threatening the country's economy and the peaceful coexistence among its citizens (Jane's Intelligence Weekly, 2014b; Olusola, 2013; Tukur and Othman, 2017).

The place of women in this economic story is often overlooked. From precolonial times to the early 21st century, the role and status of women in Nigeria have continuously evolved. Women were central to agriculture as well as trade. Among the Yoruba, they were the major figures in long-distance trade, with enormous opportunities for accumulating wealth and acquiring titles. The most successful among them rose to the prestigious chieftaincy title of *Iyalode* – a position of great privilege and power. Nevertheless, the image of a helpless, oppressed, and marginalized group has undermined their proper study, and little recognition has been granted to the various integral functions that Nigerian women have performed throughout history (Kirk-Greene et al., 2017), including in politics and governance.

### **Nigerian Politics and Governance**

The most populous country in Africa and the largest in area of the West African states, Nigeria was an early twentieth century colony that became an independent nation in 1960. The European slave trade that occurred in Africa as early as the late fifteenth century and that crested between the 1650s and the 1850s had a significant impact on Nigeria, with Nigerian ports serving as active points of departure for slave ships. When Britain declared the slave trade illegal in 1807, the British navy arrived in West African waters to enforce the ban. Britain's action led ultimately to British intervention in Nigeria, first as a crown colony and then a protectorate. Nigeria gained its political independence from Great Britain on October 1, 1960, and the First Republic is generally held to have begun then, although the nation actually became a republic on October 1, 1963 (Metz, 1992).

The Nigerian local identity landscape is greatly shaped by ethnic solidarity. This can be linked to the historic nature of the regional politics that characterized the distinctive Northern, Eastern, and Southwestern regions that colonialism brought together. Political scientist Cedric Jourde (2017) describes the complicated range of factors at play in the Sahelian political field, including political parties, armed groups, religious movements, socio-professional associations, gender, social status, and, importantly, ethnicity. Certainly, ethnicity is a major factor in Nigerian politics and it overlaps with religion as a core identity marker. It would be an empirical and analytical mistake by researchers to ignore the complex social roots, identity categories, and

practices that influence actors' actions in these contexts.<sup>23</sup>

Ethnicity is entrenched not only in Nigeria's body politic, but equally in the religious landscape. The link between ethnicity and religion is certainly not unique to Nigeria; race plays out in church establishment and attendance among African-Americans in the U.S. (Dougherty, 2003; Emerson & Smith, 2000; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998). In the Nigerian context, religion is often ethnicized when a particular ethnic group claims that its members are better fit for the faith than other ethnic groups. This is what Verkaaik (2004) calls "ethnicizing Islam" (p.3) in the case of Islam and ethnicizing Christianity in the case of Christianity. The Kanuri, the Hausa, and the Fulani, for instance, were the first Islamized ethnic groups and sometimes place themselves as spiritually superior to those who converted to the faith more recently.<sup>24</sup> Ethnicizing religion extends to certain worship places that are often considered exclusive for specific ethnic groups (Mazrui, 2001). These kinds of divisions were among the issues that FOMWAN was trying to overcome and its members had to strategize ways to achieve that.

When the politics stemming from ethnic identity mix with religious affiliation, it tends to produce volatile consequences (Aaron, 2015; Nolte, 2007). Often, Nigerians play ethnic, regional, and religious cards in the country's politics. Various governments have come up with different strategies to strike a balance among the numerous contending

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<sup>23</sup> For important related reference on the relationship between ethnicity and politics in Africa, see Mamdani, Mahmood (1996)'s *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>24</sup> This is called the myth of primo-conversion to a global faith. For details see Cédric Jourde (2017). "How Islam Intersects Ethnicity and Social Status in the Sahel." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 35, Issue 4, pp. 432-450.

parties and to foster harmony and peace, including the establishment of parastatals. In 1973, for example, after the Nigerian Civil war (also called the Biafra war) General Gowon established the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). NYSC is a one-year term of service in which every Nigerian who finishes college before the age of 30 must enroll. NYSC mainly entails teaching or other development projects in communities, aimed at encouraging the development of common ties among Nigerian youth and the promotion of national unity (Raimi & Alao, 2011).<sup>25</sup> With similar goals as the NYSC, the Federal Character Commission (FCC) was established in 1995 by the late General Abacha. The FCC is charged with ensuring the sharing of political powers, redressing the marginalization of disadvantaged groups, and distribution of economic wealth.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to the above efforts that aim to foster peaceful coexistence and unity within diversity, strategic positions at various levels (e.g., ministerial, permanent secretaries, directorships, ambassadorial nominations) have to reflect ethnic, regional, and religious representations. Although not a legal requirement, whenever there is a Muslim president (perhaps Hausa-Fulani), the vice president must be a Christian (either from the South or West), and vice versa. Similar ‘balances’ are often applicable even within the Nigerian military system and no political party can succeed without taking these identity markers into consideration. Despite these efforts at addressing marginalization and domination, Nigerians are not devoid of complaints rooted in their

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<sup>25</sup> Both Muslim and Christian Corpsers have religious-based associations on all the camps, and have leaderships at various levels – national, zonal, states, and local levels. They are the Muslim Corpsers Association of Nigeria (MCAN) and the Nigeria Christian Corpsers' Fellowship (NCCF).

<sup>26</sup> See: <https://aboutus.com/FederalCharacter.Gov.ng>

complex religious, ethnic, and regional identities. Every leader grapples with balancing these interests. Such politics of identity are reflected in all aspects of social life, including admitting students into institutions of higher learning, employment, and in political parties.

The 2015 election provided a textbook example of successful religio-ethnic political balancing. For the first time in the history of Nigerian politics, an opposition party took over leadership from a ruling party. President Muhammadu Buhari, a Hausa-Fulani Muslim from the North, applied a tactful strategy of picking as his running mate Yemi Osibanjo, a Yoruba Christian from the Southwest as well as a Pentecostal pastor and leader of the Redeemed Christian Church of God at Ikoyi, Lagos, a professor of Law, and a politician. Together, Buhari and Osibanjo served as flagbearers of their party – the All Progressives Congress (APC). During the campaigns, there were heated debates about ethnic, regional, class, and religious factors, mainly whether there was a political agenda to Christianize Nigeria under Pastor Osibanjo or to Islamize Nigeria under Muhammadu Buhari. These criticisms and mistrust linger among Nigerians even after the election.

Some scholars argue that the most persistent phenomenon that generates controversy, fear, and threats is the re-introduction of Islamic criminal law (the *Shari‘a*) in some parts of Northern Nigeria.<sup>27</sup> This development coincided with the country’s return to a civilian system of governance, after long years of military rule. Soon after the

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<sup>27</sup> They include Richardson and Williams, 1963; Frieder, 2008; Bolaji, 2010; Quraishi, 2011; Kendhammer, 2013; and Eltantawi, 2017.

re-introduction of *Sharī'a*, the media began to report amputations of hands and the imposition of sentences by stoning (Weimann, 2010). Only a few of those convicted were sentenced to these punishments, but they have not been executed because the governors of the states in which these verdicts were handed down refused to approve them (Decker & Ostein, 2009; Weimann, 2010). The governors refused to endorse these capital punishments, in part, due to pressure from the international community. However, Nigerian Christians objected, as well, alleging that the re-introduction of *Sharī'a* and implementation of *Sharī'a* law was tantamount to a violation of the constitution and was a threat to the lives of the many non-Muslims in the Northern states, notably the Christians (Bunting, 2011).

In addition to the *Sharī'a* debate, there are other religious issues that generate controversy among Nigerians, including Nigeria's membership and perhaps leadership in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (Hunwick, 1992).<sup>28</sup> The OIC is an international organization founded in 1969 with the aim of safeguarding and protecting the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony. OIC consists of 57 member states, with a collective population of over 1.6 billion as of 2008. In January, 1986, Nigeria became a member, having previously only held an observer status. The country's membership attracted mixed reactions – while some said it was okay and constitutional, others condemned the act. Archbishop Okogie of Lagos was the first to condemn the membership, arguing that it would promote Islam

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<sup>28</sup> The organization has changed its name from Organization of Islamic Conference to Organization of Islamic Cooperation yet retains its acronym "OIC" (The Pakistan Observer, 2011).

because all of OIC's activities, including economic aid, banking, and efforts to eliminate racial segregation, discrimination, and colonialism, regardless of their secular nature, would be treated as religious (Kenny, 1996).

Islam has also played a distinctive role in Nigeria's economy. The crystallization of the Islamic capital markets (ICM) in the last decade has led to an increased acceptance of Islamic financial products in the global market (Oseni & Hassan, 2015). The Central Bank of Nigeria's approval of aspects of Islamic banking (I-banking), especially the *ṣukūk*, as part of the country's banking system has not, however, been without controversy and debate (Oladunjoye, 2014; Sampson, 2013). *Ṣukūk* is an Arabic term that means investment certificates or notes of equal value that serve as evidence of interest/ownership of tangible assets, services, or investment using *Sharī'a* principles and concepts and approved by the Securities and Exchange Commission. The *Ṣukūk* is part of an Islamic banking and finance system that avoids conventional forms of interest and is permitted under Islamic law.<sup>29</sup> It is not only an alternative source of investment (as opposed to those used by conventional banks, such as the World Bank and the IMF), but also a tool for infrastructure development in Nigeria (The Islamic Finance Monitor Worldwide, 2017). In September 2017, the federal government handed over N100 billion in proceeds to the Minister of Power, Works, and Housing to reconstruct 25 federal roads. This has generated controversy, especially among some Christians, who argue that

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<sup>29</sup> For details on *Ṣukūk* market, its operational principles, liquidity, securitization, financial and operational risks, see Muhammad, A. M. (2011). *Global Sukūk and Islamic Securitization: Market Financial Engineering and Product Innovation*. Brill's Arab and Islamic Laws Series, Vol. 6. Boston: Brill Academic Publishers.

the introduction of the *ṣukūk* by the federal government is a violation of Nigeria's constitution and IMF rules and that it would lead to Islamicizing Nigeria (The Cable Newspaper, 2017).

The major contenders who claim to speak on behalf of the two dominant religions (Islam and Christianity) on such matters, and who are mostly at the forefront of critiquing religion-related affairs, are the *Jama'atu Nasril Islam* (JNI) and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). The JNI is Nigeria's main umbrella group representing Muslim organizations.<sup>30</sup> Established in 1962 after the return of then Premier of northern Nigeria, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello (the Sardauna of Sokoto) from a pilgrimage in Makkah (Mecca), JNI aims to project a good image of Islam and defend the legitimate rights and interests of Muslims throughout Nigeria. Headed by the country's Muslim spiritual leader, the Sultan of Sokoto, JNI often speaks out to protect the interests of Muslims, regardless of their denominational attachment. Still, the JNI is not seen as speaking for all Muslims in Nigeria, and the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) was founded in 1973, retaining the Sultan as the automatic president, but with four representatives from each state. The NSCIA aims to represent the interests of Islam throughout the country, serving as a point of contact on Islamic affairs between Nigerian Muslims and the state (Kenny, 1996).

As with the JNI, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) is an umbrella organization of numerous Christian denominations in Nigeria. Established in 1976, it started only with the Catholic Church and mainstream Protestant groups, but was later

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<sup>30</sup> The English translation is "Society for the Support of Islam."



expanded to include Pentecostal churches (The CAN, 2017). CAN is made up of the following blocs: The Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), the Christian Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (CPFN), Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), The Fellowship of the Churches of Christ in Nigeria (TEKAN), and the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) Fellowship. The CAN aims to meet regularly and take joint action on vital matters affecting the Christian faith and the welfare of all Nigerians.<sup>31</sup> The current president of CAN is Dr. Olasupo Ayokunle, a pastor, teacher, and sociologist who assumed leadership in June 2016.<sup>32</sup> Worth noting is that each of these dominant organizations has women's wings that have been active in contributing to their respective associations, despite challenges.

There are numerous religious denominations and associations that often disagree with these leading dominant religious organizations on certain issues. This speaks to the dynamic nature of inter- and intra-religious tensions in Nigeria, and to the plural, complex, and delicate nature of religious matters in the country (Mustapha & Bunza, 2014; Soares & Otayek, 2007; Suberu, 2001). Most striking is how the contending religious associations come together and collaborate to address issues of national interest, leaving aside religious sentiments. For instance, in 2014, there was a clash between the Nigerian army (NA) and the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN) – the Shī‘a movement – that claimed the lives of hundreds of the movement's members. The Sultan, under the

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<sup>31</sup> The Christian Association of Nigeria <http://canng.org/>

<sup>32</sup> The Premium Times, 2016.

auspices of the JNI, accused the country's military of carrying out summary executions of followers of Islam in the name of counter-terrorism (Jane's Intelligence Weekly, 2014a). Following the JNI's call were civil liberty organizations, including Christian associations, and the international community, who condemned the military's atrocities and called on the Nigerian government to investigate the matter and hold perpetrators accountable. As a result, the Kaduna state government set up a judicial commission of inquiry to investigate the matter. On June 12, 2016, the commission completed its investigation and submitted its report, which indicted both the movement for the attack and the Nigerian army for unjustifiable massive killings of the movement's members (The Human Rights Watch Report, 2017). Similarly, because the Nigerian army is a federal establishment and answerable to it, the federal government was pressured to bring a stop to the military's alleged violation of civil rights and war crimes. In 2017, the President then set up an independent judicial commission of inquiry and charged it with investigating and presenting a report on the allegations of human rights violations and war crimes brought against the Nigerian army, under international law (Amnesty International, 2017).

It is not only for the protection of human rights that we have witnessed leaders of the dominant religions coming together to address a national problem. Such collaboration is also seen in turning against repressive regimes (Adebanwi, 2010), efforts to combat child trafficking (Alkali et al., 2015), the fight against HIV/AIDS and other diseases (ActionAid Nigeria Report, 2008; Aguwa, 2010; ARHAP Report, 2008), the war against immorality and indiscipline (Para-Mallam, 2007), and in dealing with sectarian and other forms of violence (McGarvey, 2009). In chapters three, four and five, additional instances

of inter-religious collaboration and networking, especially between FOMWAN and Christian women associations, and how they effect change in Nigeria's plural society will be discussed. Despite numerous challenges, Nigerian women of faith strive to transform challenges into opportunities, thereby empowering women and improving their quality of life.

Mistrust, complaints of domination, segregation, and exclusion, especially along ethnic and religious lines, persist in Nigeria. Such conditions have led to calls for succession or unseating reigning regimes by the military or the international community - mainly the United Nations (Adebanwi, 2012; Jega, 2000; Olayiwola, 2003; Siollun, 2009). These divisions based on ethnic, regional, class, and chiefly religious differences, often have led to military interventions in governance and interference in politics, thereby weakening Nigeria's institutions and negatively affecting development (Kalu, 1996).

### **The Nigerian Government and Secularism**

*The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria did not use the expression "secular" to qualify the Nigerian state. The word cannot also be found in any section of the Constitution. Section 10 of the Constitution which prohibits both the Federal and State Government from adopting any religion as state religion is somewhat ambivalent. This ambivalence is accentuated by the Constitutional provision for a Sharia Court of Appeal and the Constitutional obligation on states to provide facilities for religious life (Ogbu, 2014, p. 22).*

Since the country's political independence in 1960, Nigeria has struggled unsuccessfully in clearly articulating the state-religion relationship. As Sampson (2014) argues, whereas the British colonialists, "seemingly bequeathed to the new nation-state a secular regime at independence, the internal contradictions, which, paradoxically were

propagated by the colonial authority, incubated to pose a challenge to the new state soon thereafter.” On the one hand, there was the Muslim north, “groomed under the English indirect rule, which accommodated the Islamic *Sharī‘a* legal order; on the other hand, there was the Christian/Animist south, mentored under the British-secular regime” (p. 311).

Although, the Nigerian government is considered “secular,” there are many aspects that sometimes seem at odds with secularism, thereby creating contradictions. These contradictions include allowing a direct relationship between the secular state and the sacred, embodied in the *Sharī‘a* legal system and the recognition and involvement of traditional authorities in some aspects of governance with financial implications on the budget, as is the case with the Emirates across the Northern states (Hogben & Kirk-Greene, 1966). More so, the government recognizes and observes several religious holidays as national public holidays. These include the Muslims’ *‘Īd* holidays -- *Īd-al-Fitr* and *‘Īd-al-Aḍha, Maulud* (the Prophet’s birthday), as well as the Islamic calendar – *Hijra*, and the Christians’ Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter Monday. These are in addition to non-religious holidays such as Boxing Day (December 26), New Year’s day, Independence Day (October 1), Workers’ Day (May 1), Children’s Day (May 27), and Democracy Day (May 29). Therewith, no single secular program of government begins without observing opening and closing ritual prayers seeking God’s intervention and guidance. Factors responsible for the inherent contradictions of the sacred-secular dynamic in Nigeria are numerous, but include the history, the cultures, the peoples’ worldviews, philosophies, and complexity (Adekunle, 2009).

Kane (2017) argues that West African states both Anglophone and Francophone are now rethinking their orientation toward religion and secularism, in favor of religion. In Nigeria, there are ministries of religious affairs at the central and state levels. More so, there are parastatals such as the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) for Muslims and the National Christian Pilgrim Commission for their Christian counterparts traveling to Jerusalem. Both of these commissions are established and charged with coordinating, supervising, licensing, regulating, and overseeing the affairs of pilgrims nationwide.<sup>33</sup>

Governments at the federal and state levels allocate large sums of money into the Ministry of Religious Affairs and parastatals, especially on pilgrimage matters. As with many aspects of social life in Nigeria, government intervention in providing welfare to pilgrims is often criticized and subject to political interpretation with accusations of favoritism of one religion over another (Bianchi, 2004). There was a decline in the state's allocation of resources to pilgrims in the last season (Omipidan, 2017), but this does not suggest any secularization of the state. Instead, it points to the new administration's policy of checkmating corrupt practices and more closely regulating religious matters. The Nigerian government continues to recognize the role of religion in all aspects of society, including in health (Aguwa, 2010).

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.lawnigeria.com/LawsoftheFederation/Nigeria-Christian-Pilgrim-Commission-Act,-2007.html>; <http://www.nigeriahajjcom.gov.ng/>

### **The Role of Religion in Health**

One of the numerous challenges facing the Nigerian state and its citizens is lack of access to reliable modern medical facilities.<sup>34</sup> In 2017 alone, Nigeria experienced the outbreak of several diseases, including malaria, cholera, acute hepatitis E, and Lassa fever. This is in addition to many diseases that have been claiming the lives of hundreds of thousands of Nigerians over time. Health, healthcare, and general living conditions in Nigeria are poor, especially for children and women. Mortality rates of infants and children under-five are high. The weakened Public Health Care (PHC) system with low coverage of key interventions has resulted in the persistence of high disease burden. The country has also been undergoing explosive population growth and has one of the highest growth and fertility rates in the world. By UN estimates, Nigeria will be one of the countries responsible for most of the world's total population increase by 2050 (The UNICEF Report, 2017). This is in addition to other health challenges – tropical and communicable diseases, infectious diseases, urban health, nutrition, lack of access to potable water, and environmental deterioration (The World Health Organization, 2017).

Scholars have divergent views on the causes of the deterioration of Nigeria's health sector. Some focus their analyses on macro factors such as colonization, world inequality, globalization, patriarchy, poverty, and prolonged military incursions, and explore how these factors lead to weak formal institutions, lack of sustained policies, corruption, and nepotism.<sup>35</sup> Others point to micro factors within the society such as

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<sup>34</sup> See Akhtar, 1991; Ronald, 1993; Fapohunda, 2012; and Kurfi and Abba, 2015.

<sup>35</sup> For macro analyses, see Birmingham, 1995; Call, 2008; Gordon, 1996; Peil and Oyeneye, 1998; Jansen, 2000; Subbaro, et al., 2001; Derefaka, 2004; Oguonu, 2005; and Fapohunda, 2012.

illiteracy, attitudes, behaviors, and the cultural practices of the people.<sup>36</sup> Close examination of the situation reveals that a combination of several intertwined factors is a better explanation for the condition (Kurfi & Abba, 2015).

Like all other aspects of the people's lives, religion plays a very crucial role in the health of Nigerians and the health sector. This was the case during the pre-Islamic and the pre-Christian eras and continues to the present. Traditional healing, which represents a very important source of medicine due to its accessibility and affordability, is present in every existing Nigerian community, especially the rural areas. Equally, traditional healers occupy special positions due to their perceived contributions to the general wellbeing of their clients, and Nigerian society at large (Horton, 1967). In the global south, interest in alternatives to conventional Western-type health care has intensified. The majority of people in developing nations, especially those in Nigerian rural areas cannot afford the standard Western models of healthcare delivery because of their severe financial and manpower constraints; as a result, they resort to traditional medicine (Abdullahi & Tukur, 2013; Good, 1977). Traditional healers include many women who specialize in various aspects of healing, especially pregnancy-related illnesses (Stock, 1981).

Among the Hausa women that specialize in traditional medicines are the *Maguzawa*. *Maguzanci* is the Hausa indigenous religion whose rituals and *bori* rites were closely intertwined with pre-Islamic Hausa society and are still practiced by some in Northern Nigeria today (Abdalla, 1991). The *bori* religion entails worship of spirits (*jinn*, *iskoki*, *aljanu*) believed to possess powers that can give or withhold health, wealth,

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<sup>36</sup> They include Oluwatoyin, 1998; King and Hill, 1998; and Adekanle and Isawumi, 2008.

security, and all forms of fortune and power. Conversely, the spirits are believed to possess powers to unleash anger and wrath, in the form of epidemics, on their adherents and people that offend them. As a result, several rituals are performed to prevent the spirits' anger, and to seek their acceptance and blessings (Danfulani, 1999). The practice of bori rituals is mainly to cure ailments, but is also seen as preventive therapy for crises and has an entertainment side. Ritual initiations are performed publicly in ceremonies such as weddings, naming, coronations, and harvests. Those practicing the religion are clearly identified by their unique clothing, which is based on their respective specializations within the *bori* spirit possession. Each "clan" of *bori* performers have distinctive praises, songs, and music associated with the spirit that is "assigned" to them during initiation.

The majority of people initiated into *bori* and practicing it are women, and there is a preponderance of women over men in ritual healing (Last, 1976). There is strong evidence to suggest that in the pre-Islamic Hausa society, Hausa women played a much more prominent role in healing than their descendants do in the post-Islamic era. From extant Hausa proverbs, songs, stories, or *bori* liturgy, one can conclude that women *bori* mediums had a central role in the therapeutic practices of the people in early times (Lewis et al., 1999). There existed a strong bond between *bori* women and the rich, the aristocrats, and the nobles in the pre-Islamic society. In short, women dominated the pre-Islamic realm of religion and maintained positions of power, thereby making them primary figures in the pre-Islamic Hausa states. No single important state function was performed without the endorsement of the *bori* women (Callaway, 1987). With the



coming of Islam, this important role drastically changed, negatively affecting the social status of women (Smith, 1959). However, some people still patronize the *bori* women, especially for ailments they see as needing traditional medicine.

In addition to traditional medicine, there is a spiritual dimension to health, which equally immensely contributes to Nigeria's health system and improves the people's general wellbeing. It is important to note that, while Islamic medicine and the traditional medicines of the Hausa and Yoruba Muslims (who constitute the majority of Muslims in Nigeria) have interacted over time and share many commonalities, they are separate entities with distinct theoretical and conceptual frameworks. These two traditions operate from essentially different understandings of the causes of disease and misfortune and of the appropriate methods to be employed to restore health or alleviate pain and suffering (Abdalla, 1981).

In recent times, there has been a tremendous increase in the proliferation of "Islamic chemists" in Nigeria. The Islamic chemists are stores where medicines that were identified and prescribed by either the Prophet himself or by Muslim doctors are sold. But in contemporary Northern Nigeria, the practice has expanded in numerous interrelated and sometimes overlapping directions. Of these, the most ubiquitous have been the thousands of storefront Islamic chemists (pharmacies) that have opened for business over the last decades (see Figure 3). Islamic chemists offer on-the-spot consultations and provide prescription of natural products indicated in classical Islamic medical exegesis, such as honey, holy water from the Well of Zamzam in Mecca, *habbat-as-sauda* (black seeds), dates, and garlic (Tocco, 2013).

In these chemists, one finds a combination of Islamic medicines that are enriched and supplemented by traditional and sometimes orthodox medicines. Here, we can see some form of medicinal dimension of Ajamization. The owners of the Islamic chemists are not necessarily trained in pharmacy and thereby may not have certificates to operate, although the state ministry of health requires them to register. These chemists are widespread in Nigeria, especially in communities with a Muslim majority. Recent studies reveal that Nigerians depend on spiritual healing in addressing some of their health challenges, including mental health (Bhatia, 2017). In addition, many HIV and AIDS patients patronize Islamic chemists, as the service providers balance antiretroviral therapy (ART) with Islamic tenets and obligations. By so doing, they engage in the “Islamification of ART through reconciling HIV treatment and Islamic medical exegesis” (Tocco, 2017, p. 75).

**Figure 3. Sample of a Billboard/Signboard posted in Front of an “Islamic Chemist” in Kano – Northern Nigeria**



Source: Sama'ila Adamu, December 2017.

An important aspect of spiritual healing, which is common among Nigerian Muslims, is *ruqya* or *ruqiyya* (a form of incantation or invocation). *Ruqya* is an Islamic prayer modality that uses verses of the Qur'ān or supplications of Prophet Mohammed for healing (York, 2011). Many Islamic chemists offer *ruqya* services, but a substantial number of clerics/*malams*/Sheikhs offer the services without opening up shops or “Islamic chemists.” Instead, clients meet clerics at the clerics’ homes, or the clerics visit the clients for the services (mobile services). Although Muslim women in Nigeria constitute part of the cadre that provide spiritual healing, the majority of them offer such

services at their homes.<sup>37</sup>

Evidence shows that clerics perform *ruqya* not only on Muslims, but on every client that seeks it, regardless the patient's faith (York, 2011). There has been a dramatic rise in the practice of *ruqya* and its popularity, not only among Nigerian Muslims, but in the diaspora, including in Europe and other parts of the world. The practice has also been subject to "hybridization" of key themes drawn from "Islam" and from "science." It joins other spiritual healing practices that have become attractive especially for a younger generation of Muslims (Eneborg, 2013, p. 1080).

A parallel pattern of spiritual healing applies to the Christian faith in Nigeria. Since its establishment in 1925, the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) Church as well as its offshoot, the Church of Aladura (founded in 1930), have been known for providing faith healing for various categories of sick people. Leaders of these churches organize special prayer sessions, engage in recitation of passages from the Holy Bible that correspond with the congregant's (or the client's) situation, use water believed to have healing power and consecrated oil, engage in , and use candles, among other objects, to convey healing (Glazier, 2001). Spiritual healing is also practiced among other Christian denominations,

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<sup>37</sup> In Kano state, the most prominent Muslim female scholar that offers such services is Hajiya Tasalla Nabilisi Bako (MFR). She specializes in spiritual healing and especially women-related illnesses. She has a consultation unit in her house located in Soron-dinki, Municipal local government, exclusively for women clients with specified visiting days and hours. As for the male clients, she trains some males who attend to fellow male clients at "Malama Tasalla Islamic Center, Sheshe." Hajiya Tasalla Nabilisi is a proprietress of an Islamic school in Kano, where she teaches. During the fasting month of Ramaḍān, she organizes the annual *tafsīr* – translational meaning and commentary of the Qur'ān, which is exclusively women's. In Chapter Four, we shall see how FOMWAN as an organization, coordinates these kinds of sessions in the various state chapters. More so, Malama preaches and offers lessons on spiritual healing on radio and television. Her immense contributions to the society, she is a recipient of the National Honors Award, titled "Member of the Order of the Federal Republic" (MFR).

most especially Pentecostals. They use texts and other audiovisual materials in the mediation of divine power, presence, and intervention in members' lives (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2010). Not only are such practices popular and common among Nigerian Christians, but Nigerians (among other Africans) have carried these practices to the diaspora communities (Adogame, & Shankar, 2013; Wariboko, 2014).

Discussion of the role of the clergy or religion, generally, in health in Nigeria cannot be complete without reference to women. In almost all the cases mentioned, women have been very active in providing spiritual healing and thereby contributing to the health sector and Nigerian society as a whole. Olajubu (2003) identified three major divisions of churches in Nigeria: The Orthodox/Mission churches that the White missionaries introduced to Nigeria, the African Independent/Indigenous churches that were founded by Africans with attention to an African cultural paradigm, and the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. Importantly, women are featured in all three classes of churches and have utilized culture as a potent tool of negotiation to attain important positions and make changes in their status in the church. Through the appropriation of various strategies of action, the Nigerian women of faith have been creating alternative spaces of empowerment for themselves. An exceptional example is the founding of a ministry of women, by women, for women called, "the Daughters of Deborah International Ministry (DODIM) – a Pentecostal church at Ilorin, Kwara state, Nigeria" (Olademo, 2012, p. 63).

Beyond Nigeria, in sub-Saharan Africa, there has been an upsurge in female religious leadership, especially in the African Instituted Churches (AICs) of both the

classical and Neo-Pentecostal types. In such churches, women are experiencing a measure of Christian ministerial freedom and equality hitherto denied in the mainstream churches. They are now more visible in ecclesial leadership as church founders, pastors, bishops, and evangelists. Additionally, more than ever, women function as “prophetesses, prayer leaders, and as heads of church organizations and departments” (Mwaura, 2002, p. 202). Women of faith promote inculturation of Christianity by interpreting the Gospel message from a new perspective that liberates and empowers especially female congregants.

Women from various faith traditions have been very instrumental in attending to the health needs of their communities, as exemplified by FOMWAN’s case. This is also true in the formal health sector. Numerous studies have proven FBOs’ efficacy in social service provision, social justice, and importantly, healthcare delivery.<sup>38</sup> This points to the role of religion in the health of Nigerians, as well as in addressing other problems that Nigerians face in society. More broadly, religion may be an asset in the lifeworld of healing – a system of thought in which health is understood and healing is undertaken differently from the biomedical model that development workers usually proffer. We therefore “need to leverage those norms and values internal to religious identities that are inclusive, extensive and transformative” (Cochrane, 2010, p. 190).

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<sup>38</sup> On religious NGOs and healthcare, see Graber, et al, 2001; Andrew, 2003; Gwarzo, 2003; DeHaven et al., 2004; Wuthnow et al., 2004; Haynes, 2007; Aguwa, 2010; Mallya, 2010; Olarinmoye, 2012; and Zakari, 2014.

### **The Role of Religion in Mass Literacy and Education**

Religion has played very crucial roles in Nigeria especially in mass literacy, knowledge production, and education. Both Muslim and Christian initiatives have catalyzed the spread of their respective faiths and promoted language development and the dissemination of mass education. One of the ways that religion contributes to mass literacy is by fostering Ajami literacy. Abdulmumin (2010) conceives Ajami as basically a creative innovation by the early Muslim scholars in their efforts to express their indigenous language in a written form, for the purpose of education and communication. Hunwick (1997) traces the introduction of Hausa Ajami in the Northern part of Nigeria to the efforts of North African merchants who were also Muslim preachers to introduce Arabic manuscripts. The Hausa language has given rise to one of the largest and broadest bodies of Ajami works of literature in Africa. The Hausa Ajami literature spans several centuries and covers a geographic area far beyond the Hausa society of Nigeria (Zito, 2012). There are several Hausa learning texts for English speakers that have recognized the prevalence of Ajami literacy in Hausa, and, accordingly, incorporated it in different ways. Charles Robinson's *Specimens of Hausa Literature* (1896) is perhaps the first of these texts.<sup>39</sup>

Christianity has contributed to knowledge production, distribution, and dissemination, as well. In many African countries, Christian missionaries, especially

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<sup>39</sup> For extensive discussion about Hausa Ajami Traditions and its various roles, see Zito, A. M. (2012). *Prosperity and Purpose, Today and Tomorrow: Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba and Discourses of Work and Salvation in the Muridiyya Sufi Order of Senegal*. Being a Ph.D. Dissertation submitted to the College of Arts and Sciences, Boston University, especially pp. 26-47.

conversionary Protestants (CPs) typically translated texts into and educated in the vernacular so that everyone could read the Bible and interpret it competently (Woodberry, 2012). There are many Bibles, newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets that have been published in Nigerian languages such as Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo. Most of these publications were in Latin script, but some were transliterated into Ajami, using the modified Arabic script. Evidence shows that Christian missionaries utilized Ajami, especially Hausa and Fulfulde Ajami, for proselytizing (Injiiru & Decker, 2012).<sup>40</sup> In the Islamic religious domain, many books have been transliterated into Ajami.<sup>41</sup> In addition to contributing to the expansion of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa, Ajami also played crucial role in the spread of other religions and to many domains of knowledge and social life, such as marriage, birth, burial, and inheritance.

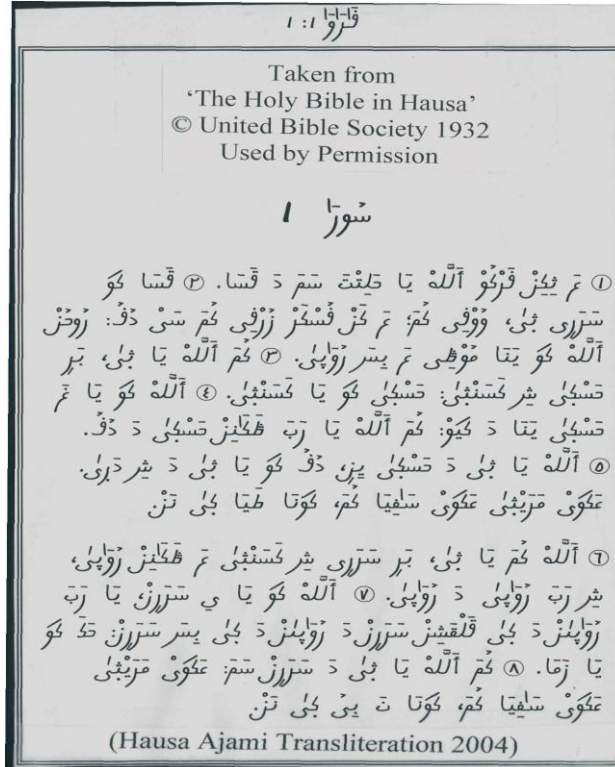
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<sup>40</sup> Also, see *Deftere Futtorde* (The Book of Genesis in Fulfulde Ajami, n.d.). Hosted at Yale Ajami Collection; and *Littaafin Farawa* (The Book of Genesis in Hausa Ajami) at the African Ajami Library at Boston University: <http://dcommon.bu.edu/handle/2144/11727>.

<sup>41</sup> These include the Qur'ān, the ḥadīth, *fiqh* (such as *Akhdarī*, *Ashmawiy*, *Risāla*, and *'Iziyya*), the *Ishrīniya*, the *al-Burda*, epilogues, and so on.



Figure 4. Sample of Holy Bible in Hausa Ajami *Littafin Farawa* (The Book of Genesis)



Source: Boston University Libraries Open Access available online through: <https://open.bu.edu/handle/2144/11725>.<sup>42</sup>

The use of Ajami in the political domain is also very evident in the writings of Sheikh Usman dan Fodiyo (also written Fodiye and Fodio) of Nigeria and the poets who followed Sheikh Ahmad Bamba of Senegal, who wrote many poems, and verses that helped in mobilizing and organizing revolutions (Cruise, 1971; Last, 1967; Mack & Boyd, 2000; Ngom, 2016). During the tenure of former Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi, his Green Book was transliterated into Hausa Ajami “Koren Littaaafi.” In the book, he expressed and propagated his political and social philosophy, which rejects

<sup>42</sup> The complete copy of the book in Hausa Ajami is available at the Boston University Libraries.

capitalism and modern liberal democracy.<sup>43</sup> The pharmacological use of Ajami is yet another very important domain. Many of the instructions for the preparation of traditional and Islamic medicines (recipes) are written in Ajami. In short, Ajami was used in almost *all* human endeavors, both religious and secular, including occult science, biology, international relations and diplomacy, and information dissemination. While religion is credited with the facilitation and popularity of Ajami in Nigeria and with increasing literacy among the people, its uses transcend the sacred to include secular domains and every other aspect of Nigerians' lives. This even includes daily monetary transactions, as some of the country's banknotes carry Ajami inscriptions.<sup>44</sup>

**Figure 5. Sample of Nigeria's Banknote with Hausa Ajami Inscription of the Currency Value -- the highest (N1, 000, \$3 ish)**



Source: Picture taken in 2016 by Mustapha Kurfi.

<sup>43</sup> The complete copy of this book in Hausa Ajami is available at the Boston University Libraries Open Access, available online through: <https://open.bu.edu/handle/2144/11725>.

<sup>44</sup> For details about how Ajami has been suppressed in Nigeria, see Murray (1935); Graham (1966); Robinson (1982); Camara (1997); Mack (2004); Sa'id (2010); Ngom (2016); and Kane (2017).

Modern education is another area where religion plays a paramount role in literacy in Nigeria. As with many countries, Christian missionaries in Nigeria spread mass education and used it as a mechanism to disperse power to the commoners. Woodberry (2012) argues that the conversionary Protestants catalyzed the rise of mass education all around the world (p. 251). Western education came to Africa as a result of European imperialism during the nineteenth century. The Christian missionaries, merchants, and diplomats from Europe found it necessary to institute their educational system to enable the colonial regime to succeed. In Nigeria, Western education was planted in 1842, paving the way for the spread of Christianity and the provision of low and middle manpower for the colonial system (Ayandele, 1966; Fafunwa, 1974; Taiwo, 1981).<sup>45</sup> Christian evangelization began, mainly through the village schools, especially in Southwestern Nigeria.

Education in the period between 1842 and 1882 has been considered an exclusively Christian missionary enterprise, since numerous missionary organizations provided their respective educational philosophies, available manpower, material and financial resources. However, in other parts of Nigeria, particularly Calabar (current Rivers State of Southeastern Nigeria), Western education predates the coming of the missionaries among the Efik people; their leaders invited missionaries in 1842 who began providing education, especially in Calabar. Soon afterwards, not impressed by the missionaries' education provision, the colonial government stigmatized it as inadequate

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<sup>45</sup> It was the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society that introduced formal education in Nigeria, establishing the first elementary school in September, 1842 (Fafunwa, 1974).

in meeting the demands of the modern society and intervened to provide infrastructure and regulatory functions (Imbua, 2016).

While Western education had already been introduced in the Western and Southern parts of Nigeria in the early 1840's, it was not introduced in the Northern part until the early 1900s. The North had long maintained an Islamic social, religious, and political culture that shaped its educational system. Islam made inroads by about 1250 through trans-Saharan trade routes with North Africa. In Kano, Islam became a state policy in 1380 when a group of Wangarawa (Mali) merchant-clerics arrived in the territory and converted the then chief to Islam. Thereafter, the chief declared the territory Islamic. The arrival of more Arab traders and Fulani clerics from 1450 further consolidated the city-state as an Islamic polity and as important center for learning (Adamu, 2004a). Further, the Borno Empire, particularly in the seventeenth century, became a center of Islamic scholarly excellence and a model for the Hausa people. The Borno people (Kanuri/Barebari) were famous for their well-organized *Tsangaya* system – centers of learning specializing in Qur'ānic education – a system that persists in Hausaland and beyond. El-Miskin (1989) posits that the reputation of learnedness among Borno scholars attracted large numbers of students and provided a stable basis for the conduct of educational activities during the Saifawa reign and beyond (1470–1808). In addition, the Kanuri people were the pioneers in the Ajamization of the Arabic alphabet in Nigeria (Dmitry, 2014; El-Miskin, 1989).

In 1804, there was an Islamic reform, struggle, holy war, or simply jihād led by a scholar Sheikh Usman dān Fodiyo (1754-1807) which transformed the Hausa states into

what became the Sokoto Caliphate, then the largest Islamic polity in West Africa. But on January 1, 1900, the British proclaimed most of the territories of this Islamic polity to be the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, with Colonel Frederick Lugard (Lord Lugard) as the High Commissioner. Lord Lugard wrote to the then Sultan of Sokoto, Abdurrahman Atiku, to explain the British intention, but the Sultan rejected the presence of the British in the territories. What followed was the battle of Burmi that led to the defeat of the Sokoto forces in 1903, and British control of the territories of the Sokoto Caliphate (Umar, 2006). The Muslim leaders' resistance to British colonialism would lay the foundation for some Muslims from the North to detest Western education (Boko) and develop a skeptical attitude toward the West and Western ideologies.<sup>46</sup>

Although, in the decades to come, colonial schools were established, those schools were exclusively for boys. It was not until the 1930s that girls' schools were established. Sarki Muhammad Dikko (the Emir of Katsina, 1865-1944) was the first to establish a female school in his compound, and, "was among the advocates of the girl-child education" (Maikudi, 2013, p. 41). Sarki Dikko's advocacy for girls' education can be seen as an extension of Sheikh Usman dan Fodiyo's legacy of encouragement and support for female education. Because of Sheikh's work, "female education among the Muslims in Northern Nigeria became a matter of pride" (Fafunwa, 1974, p. 35).

Although neither the Sheikh nor his daughter Nana Asma'u (1793-1864) lived to witness the colonial invasion and the introduction of Western education, it is worth

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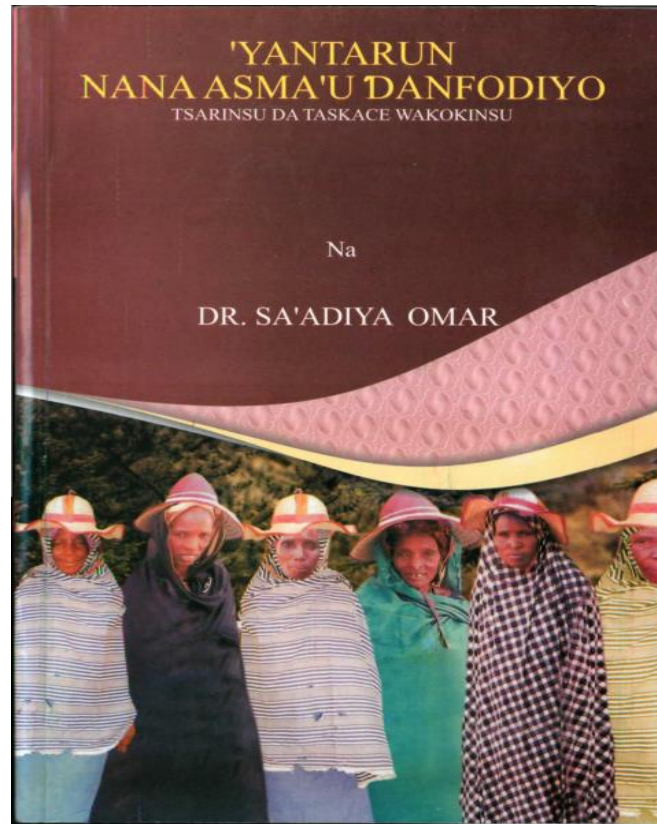
<sup>46</sup> For extensive discussion on the Northern Nigerian Muslim intellectual reactions to colonialism, see Umar's (2006) *Islam and Colonialism: Intellectual Responses of Muslims of Northern Nigeria to British Colonial Rule*. Boston: Brill Publishers.

noting that Nana Asma’u is an important figure in the history of women’s education in Nigeria. She produced a huge amount of literature, notably in Ajami, which was utilized to reach a very wide audience for both religious and secular purposes.<sup>47</sup> Asma’u was central to the jihād of her father, and her writings immensely contributed to the actualization of the caliphate that followed. She mobilized many women by teaching them and establishing educational centers for literacy. Nana Asma’u founded the Yan-taru, an enduring educational and welfare network that provides knowledge and inspiration that enriches the lives of the needy, particularly rural women. Her major goal was to advocate for Muslim women by promoting education, social justice, and peaceful coexistence. Through the Yan-taru, she mobilized and empowered women by establishing a comprehensive system that included social welfare, centers of learning, and spiritual devotion. When the British eliminated the Caliphate, this system was neglected in favor of Western modes of education that focused on boys (Boyd & Mack, 2013).

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<sup>47</sup> Her elegies were examples of such, though, difficult to create a clear-cut dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. For details, see Boyd, J. (1990). *The Caliph’s Sister: Nana Asma’u 1793-1865: Teacher, Poet and Islamic Leader*. New York: Routledge; Boyd, J. and Mack, B. B. (1997). *The Collected Works of Nana Asma’u, daughter of Usman dan Fodiyo 1793–1864*. East Lansing, Michigan: State University Press; Dangana, M. (1999). “The Intellectual Contribution of Nana Asma’u to Women’s Education in Nineteenth-century Nigeria.” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 285-290; Mack, B. B., and Boyd, J. (2000). *One Woman’s Jihad: Nana Asma’u, Scholar, and Scribe* Indiana: University Press; Mack, B. (2011). Nana Asma’u’s Instruction and Poetry for Present-day American Muslimahs.” In *History in Africa*, Vol. 38, pp. 153-168; & Mazella, L. (2012). “Examining the Writings of Nana Asma’u: An Investigation of Pastoral Connections among Contemporary Sūfī Women.” An Unpublished Master’s Thesis submitted to the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Georgetown University. Order No. 1509203. Ann Arbor: *ProQuest*.

**Figure 6. Cover page of a Book on Nana Asma’u’s Yan-taru, depicting *Jajis***



Source: The book author -- Current Yan-taru president, and a past national *Amīra* of FOMWAN. Sa’adiya Omar (2014). “The Yan-taru of Nana Asma’u: Their Structure and Preservation of their Poems.” Kaduna: Zeetma Press.

Besides the Yan-taru, the *Zumra-al-Mu’minīna (Makondoro)* was yet another Islamic organization that spread mass literacy using Yoruba Ajami, also known as Anjemi. The Ajami script was developed in Ilorin as a product of Islam in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Makondoro.<sup>48</sup> Founded by Sheikh (Alfa) Aḥmad Yusuf Abu Bakr, born about the year 1885 C.E. in Ilorin, the Makondoro was a group of scholars involved in

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<sup>48</sup> For a history of transmission of learning and Islamic education in Ilorin see Aliyu (2015). Specifically on the Makondoro, its strategies and spread, see Raji (1990); Agetunmobi (1991); and Jawondo (2010).

teaching Islamic education and composing poems that contained both sacred and secular messages, using Yoruba Ajami (Raji, 1990). Ilorin has been a center for Arabic and Islamic learning for the states of Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, and Ondo – parts of the Yorubaland (Raji, 1990). Another process that popularized and developed the Ajami literacy in Ilorin was the entrance of a Fulani scholar- Sheikh Alimi; it has been used by Muslim scholars for personal letters, poems, and traditional medicine, by commoners in their daily activities, for business and socioeconomic purposes. The emergence of Ajami in Ilorin was different from other traditions because, there, it was the commoners that started practicing Islam first, with the elites following later (bottom-up). Conversely, among the Hausa people, the elites first accepted the religion and the commoners began practicing Islam later (top-down). It is unique in Ilorin that the Makondoro scholars favored Yoruba Ajami over *Nahwu* (Arabic grammar) - an ideology and strategy that facilitated knowledge production, mass literacy, printing, and the popularization of Ajami in Ilorin and its spread to other parts of the Yorubaland.

The educational distinctions between the Northern and the Southern regions continued even after post-independence years (see Figure 6), with adverse effects, especially on females.<sup>49</sup> Many factors hampered female Western education, especially among the Muslims in the region.<sup>50</sup> We shall see in Chapter Four that this educational

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<sup>49</sup> This is not unique to Nigeria because previous studies revealed that Christians (especially Protestants) are disproportionately educated and have higher educational expectations for their children than non-Christians. See Woodberry (2012, p.252).

<sup>50</sup> They include colonial policy that marginalized female education in the country, post-colonial governments' neglect of the education sector as a whole and females' education in particular, lack of adequate infrastructure, inconsistency and discontinuity in education policies, and the people's



backwardness has become a primary focus of FOMWAN members' collective efforts on behalf of Nigerian women, especially Muslims.

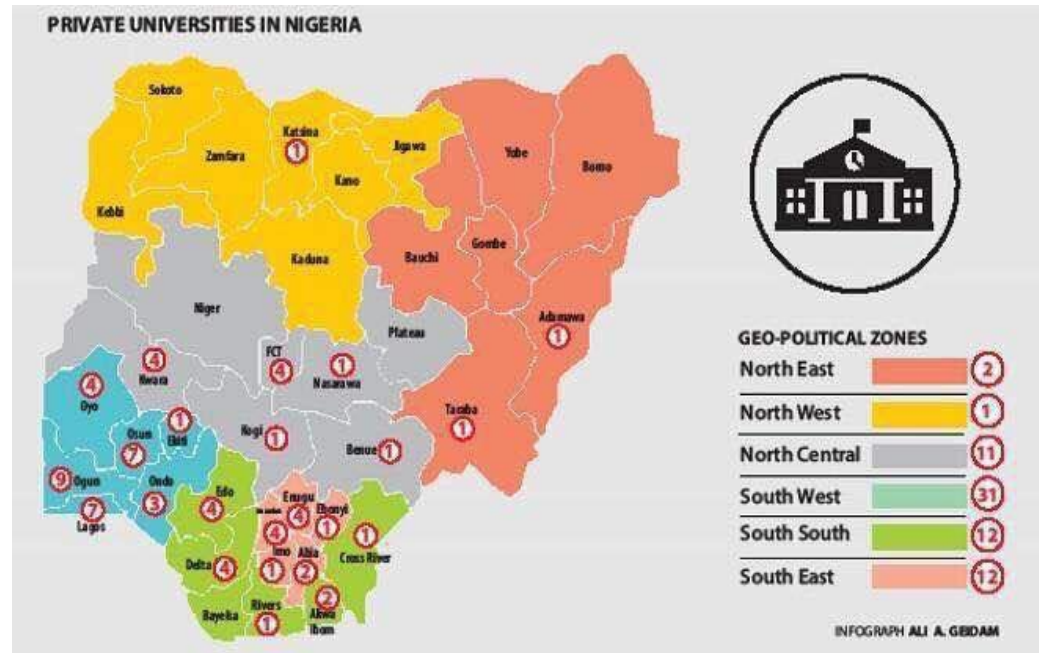
Several government policies affected the ownership, funding, and regulation of Western schools in Nigeria. During the 1970s, the Nigerian government took ownership of the mission schools (although this was originally optional for mission schools in what was then the Western Region). By 1975, it became compulsory for missionaries to hand the schools over to the government, but, between 1990 and 2009, some of the schools were returned to Christian missions and private owners (Nwosu & Adesegun, 2012).

There is also a mix of religious and secular factors in Nigeria's higher education sector. Today, there are a total of 152 universities in Nigeria approved by the National Universities Commission (NUC) – 84 public (40 federal and 44 state-owned) and 68 privately-owned. This is in addition to some Accredited Distance Learning Centers, Affiliates, Open Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Education (<http://nuc.edu.ng/>). The proliferation of private universities began in 1999 to complement government efforts in addressing the educational problems in Nigeria. Such effort is championed in large part by religious organizations, which have established religiously-based private universities. Al-Hikma University, Ilorin, Kwara State; Al-Qalam University, Katsina; Fountain University, Oshogbo, Osun State; and Crescent University, Abeokuta, Ogun State, are examples of such faith-based tertiary schools.

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misconceptions about Islamic provisions on women's education (Fafunwa, 1974; Baba, 2011; Maikudi, 2013).

**Figure 7. Distribution of Private Universities in Nigeria**



Source: Daily Trust Newspapers, December 2017.

Considering Nigeria's dense population, the number of universities remains inadequate to address the educational needs of the citizens. The presence of private universities, especially religiously-based ones, reduces the huge demands of the Nigerian population for higher education. It has also been suggested that religious universities are an essential tool for promoting peace and justice, as well as for producing future leaders and educators (Bature, 2012). In addition to religiously-based universities in Nigeria, there is also a pool of young Muslims trained abroad, having studied in different fields of Islamic knowledge in Arab countries, notably Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, and most recently, Malaysia and Indonesia. When they return to Nigeria, some of these students have established madrasas – Islamic schools that provide an integrated Islamic and

Western education. Others have joined Nigerian universities to teach and contribute to the educational development of the nation.<sup>51</sup>

Religion in general, then, and Islam in particular, play a very significant role in the production and development of education in Nigeria. It laid the foundation for the spread of literacy through Ajami – a powerful multi-purpose vehicle for both sacred and secular purposes, including mobilizing and organizing revolutions. The Islamized region has built on its heritage of well-organized Islamic learning centers, specialized in Qur'ānic and Islamic education found in especially Bornu, Kano, Katsina, and parts of the Yoruba land, especially Ilorin. Some of these centers/schools have been transformed into the modern education curriculum.<sup>52</sup> The North was late in establishing Western schools, thereby leaving a majority of the Muslims in that region, especially the females, in a disadvantaged position; however, their Southwestern Muslim counterparts had established an association, the MSS, to face such challenges. After the spread of the association to the various parts of the country, it later became a breeding ground for the various Western-educated Muslims and their respective professional organizations, including FOMWAN.

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<sup>51</sup> For details about how Arabic and Islamic studies scholars are trained and how the intellectual tradition gained vitality in post-colonial Africa, extending the Islamic space of meaning in the post-colonial period, see Kane (2016), especially “Modern Islamic Institutions of Higher Learning,” pp. 140-159.

<sup>52</sup> Chapter Four provides details on the various kinds of schools and the types of graduates they produce.

### **Religion and Social Life**

The role of religion in every aspect of the lives of Nigerians is evident, including in the entertainment industry, and movies in particular. Olayiwola (2011) argues that the history of the Nigerian movie industry is shrouded in conflicting views and contentions. While some credit the Igbo film production, others argue in favor of the Yoruba filmmakers as the pioneers. Still another group argues that the Hausa film industry is to be credited with the highest production, popularization, and patronage of the burgeoning film industry in Nigeria.<sup>53</sup> The Nigerian film industry, also known as “Nollywood,” produces about 50 movies per week, and is second only to India’s Bollywood and far ahead of Hollywood.<sup>54</sup> Omatsola (1999) traces the origin of the first film in Nigeria to August 1903 and Indian-Lebanese merchants whose main motivation was economic and not cultural (Okome, 1991).

Like much of the rest of Nigerian life, Nigerian cinema is divided along ethnic and religious lines. The North, which is predominantly Muslim, has Kannywood (named after Kano, the home to the Hausa movie industry). In the Southwest, mainly located in Lagos state, there is the Yoruba film industry – dominated by a combination of Muslims, Christians, and some traditional African religions. In the Igboland, a region that is predominantly Christian, there is the Igbo movie industry (located in Aba, Abia state) that portrays the culture of the Igbo people. All of these ethnically-based movie industries

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<sup>53</sup> For important references on the Nigerian movie industries and its roles in the lives of Nigerians see Soyinka (1979); Adesanya (1998); James (2007); Larkin (2008); Saul and Austen (2010); Okome and Krings (2013); Ewing (2016); and Françoise and Tsaaior (2017).

<sup>54</sup> Eric, O. (2014). “Nigeria’s Film Industry: Nollywood Looks to Expand Globally.” In The United States International Trade Commission (USITC) Executive Briefings on Trade, October 2014.

showcase the rich cultural heritage of each people and are a reflection of the role of religion in the everyday lives of Nigerians.

Johnson (2004) argues that, in Nigeria, more and more attention is being paid to the role of media in shaping views of women and women's issues. Film is an opinion-shaper and character-molding medium, and its increasing sphere of coverage far outweighs all other media. In Nigerian movies, women are often objectified and, in many instances, deliberately manipulated for the male gaze. This is attributed to the male-dominated nature of the Nigerian film industry. But in recent times, there have been changes to such portrayals, as women are becoming more engaged in film production processes (Fagge, 2004; Mohammed, 2004). Government intervention through censorship boards in some states has also played a role in regulating the affairs of the film industry, especially in the Northern region.

Women play a key role in the literary work that becomes film. The Hausa women who form the majority of Nigerian Muslim women produce more plays and novels than their male counterparts (Adamu, 2004b). It is these novels and plays that some movie producers and directors transform into scripts for movies. The women use this medium to express their feelings on various subjects, legitimate women's roles, distract themselves from domestic problems, and speak to power. They write novels and script movies for persuasion, mobilization, and bringing in and maintaining certain kinds of public audiences (Fagge, 2004). Nigerian women, through the entertainment industry and especially film, have created what Monga (1994) views as African civil society: "new spaces for communication and discussion over which the state has no control" (p. 4).

While ordinary women in patriarchal societies – musicians, peasants, and others – are commonly assumed to be passive and manipulated by corrupt elites or governments, these artistic expressions by the subalterns are powerful and have been producing positive outcomes in such societies.<sup>55</sup>

Nollywood provides a national and international showcase for the rich cultural heritage of the people. Religion plays out in all the movies regardless of the region it comes from, thereby reiterating the role of religion in peoples' lives. Importantly, Nollywood has been an integral aspect of civil society in Nigeria by critiquing governments, especially in matters that affect human rights. On the whole, Nigerian movies are deeply rooted in cultural traditions and social contexts that focus on Nigerian community life. Crafted with traditional African idioms, proverbs, costumes, artifacts, and imagery, the movie industry brings issues to life through common genres such as love and romance, comedy, melodrama, epic, and, importantly, religion (Onuzulike, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined Nigeria's setting, describing its multicultural, multi-religious, and complex nature. Blessed with abundant natural and human resources, including crude oil, population density, and arable land for agriculture, the country also faces many challenges of a modern post-colonial state. This chapter highlighted the role of religion in all aspects of the peoples' lives. It specifically focused on the role of Islam in responding to some of the problems affecting the peoples' lives – whether they are

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<sup>55</sup> Such powerful behaviors and coordinated acts constitute Certeau's (1984) dilettantism.

political, economic, health-related, educational, or social. Islam has been and remains a very strong force in the Muslim's everyday life (Bature, 2012; Loimeier, 2009).

Historically, in all the major religions in Nigeria – Traditional, Christianity, and particularly Islam – women of faith have been very active in contributing to Nigeria's civil society. As we will see, civil society remains the only vibrant arena for assuring government accountability and public debate – shifting politics away from personal and ethnic appeals and toward a focus on issues or programs that include diverse social groups – and safeguarding the legitimacy of new institutions. It also provides a bridge between the government and the public, between state and society, and fosters dialogue and accommodation among different communities (Lewis et al., 1998). The Nigerian civil society is composed of an array of interest groups, including women of faith, such as FOMWAN. The following chapters will show how FOMWAN contributes to civil society in the plural state of Nigeria through careful examination of the context from which it was formed, how they organize their activities, and the nature of their worldviews. The task of Chapter Three is to examine how FOMWAN was established, its organizational structure, its service dimensions, and rationale for their collective actions.

**CHAPTER THREE:**  
**HISTORY OF FOMWAN, ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE,  
ACTIVITIES AND RATIONALE**

This chapter examines the historical context out of which FOMWAN arose, identifying the internal organizational history. The first section examines the nature of Nigeria's state, describing the conditions of the state before and during the time when the Federation was established, paying attention to women's groups and development. FOMWAN emerged at a time when the Nigerian state was weak and fragile, facing serious political, economic, and social crises – including prolonged military rule, corruption, illiteracy, poverty, widespread diseases, infant mortality, ethnic and communal clashes, and many social ills. It was in response to that fragility that many NGOs, including faith-related ones, emerged, and FOMWAN was one of them. The second section traces how FOMWAN was founded, identifying the various processes it underwent, and how the founding members moved from followership to leadership. The third section describes FOMWAN's organizational structure, which is isomorphic to the federal character of the state. It also describes how FOMWAN uses committees and establishes partnerships and networks with other affiliates. The last section highlights FOMWAN's organizational activities, which include *Da'wa* – implying “to invite” or simply to preach, education, health, interfaith dialogue, and a host of social service programs. It examines how members prioritize their services based on needs.



### **Nigeria's Fragile State, Women's Religious Groups, and Development**

Nigeria is fairly well-endowed with human and natural resources, as discussed in Chapter Two. Despite the potential of these resources, the state has had a series of political, economic, and social upheavals, including a civil war and insurgency that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives.<sup>56</sup> Akinterinwa (2001) describes the country's situation as a "contradiction between Nigeria's potential wealth and rich human resources, on the one hand, and the abject poverty that has come to characterize the life of most Nigerians, on the other" (p. 848). This condition characterizes Nigeria as a fragile state.

Buttressing the above, Hill (2012) asserts that Nigeria has long been stalked by failure. From the moment it achieved independence, its demise was predicted. Since political independence from Great Britain in 1960, Nigeria's weakness has been evident in many ways, notably ineffectual governing bodies, a dysfunction in institutions, a plague in corruption, and a weak rule of law. Khodeli (2009) asserts that although Nigeria is a resource-rich country, it is classified by the World Bank as a heavily indebted poor country (HIPC), with some of the world's worst human development indicators. Falola (1998) asserts that Nigeria has been a major African theatre of violence and aggression. Importantly, "as development actors have long recognized, it is not coincidental that violence and poverty are both products of weak governance" (Kaplan, 2015, p. 418).

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<sup>56</sup> Salawu (2010) argues that Nigeria provides one of the best case studies of conflicts. With over 400 ethnic groups, distributed among the two major religions (Christianity and Islam), Nigeria since independence, has produced a catalogue of ethno religious conflicts that resulted in an estimated loss of over three million lives and unquantifiable psychological and material damages (p.345).

The weakness in governance was most pronounced during the post-independence state. As Achebe (1958) opined, Nigeria had lived in peace for a year shortly after independence, before things fell apart. It was a wonderful, fascinating year, and the people would have loved to go back. But we never dared to. Similarly, Osaghae (1998) contends that soon after the independence years, there were tribal and religious animosities, particularly between the Muslim North (Hausa, Fulani, etc.) and the mainly Christian South (Ibo, Itsekiri, etc.) exacerbated by a rapidly increasing population. This resulted in the war of the Biafran secession. A long string of inept, corrupt civilian governments, coups, and equally inept, corrupt military governments followed. Government was viewed as a source of wealth, to be sucked dry for the benefit of individuals, their relatives, and their ethnic groups. The Nigerian people as a whole derived very little benefit from the enormous wealth being generated by oil in the Niger Delta, while the people living in the Delta suffered grievous environmental damage.

Such poverty and violence disproportionately affects the women of Nigeria. Gender disparities cause the society as a whole to suffer from the marginalization of half of its population, functioning only on half steam (Maikudi, 2010). It is nevertheless assumed that countries that have raised the status of their women educationally, socially, politically, and economically generally enjoy a higher standard of living. On the other hand, weak and fragile states, where women remain largely illiterate and confined to the home, have a low standard of living. This is why the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2005 decided to include gender inequality in its measurement of development in countries (usually expressed as Human Development Index (HDI)). The

two indices used for gender were the: 1) Gender-Related Development Index (GDI) and 2) Gender-Empowerment (GEM). Unfortunately, Nigeria ranks very low in all the above indices, making the country among the poorest of the poor across all measures. This further confirms the fragility and weakness of the Nigerian state, and the Muslim women who found FOMWAN are conscious of this. As part of the nonprofit sector, FOMWAN needed to act in response to the fragility by proffering solutions to these problems.

FOMWAN, among other faith-related agencies, emerged to address the gap in people's needs that market and government failures created. Some scholars (Bhasin, 1994; Birmingham, 1995; Grusky & Szelenyi, 2007; Makumbe, 1998; Mamdani, 1995; Mishra, 1981) point to colonization, social injustice, patriarchy, corruption, military incursion, and mismanagement of resources as the causes of these gaps. Nevertheless, the government policies played a role, and the founders of FOMWAN felt the need for Muslim women to engage in the formulation of government policies to bring change. This, FOMWAN believes, can only be achieved through education, advocacy, empowerment, and other forms of civic engagement that would contribute to peace, unity, progress, nation-building, and sustainable national development.

Supporting the above, Lewis (1998) argues that Nigeria and indeed most sub-Saharan African countries since independence, have faced three central dilemmas of development. The first has been the challenge of state-building. In the wake of colonial rule, governments have encountered the problems of establishing legitimate authority and constructing state capacity. A second dilemma has been that of nation-building and state-society relations. African nations have confronted the difficulties of managing ethnic

diversity, forging national identities, and negotiating relations between citizens and rulers. The third challenge encompasses problems of economic development as the region has grappled with a legacy of poverty, slow growth, and external dependence. In recent times, the greatest threat to Nigeria's existence as one nation-state is insurgency. From the Northeast, the threat is the deadly Islamic terrorist *Boko Haram* and from the south-south it is the Niger Delta militant groups.<sup>57</sup>

Additionally, there is serious poverty, insecurity, unemployment, falling standards of education, ethnic and communal crises, high infant mortality, corruption and a prolonged military regime across the country. The prolonged military regimes in Nigeria have been marked with gross human rights violations, mismanagement of resources, bribery and corruption, nepotism, a widening gap between the rich and the poor, and abject poverty (Nzarga, 2014; Nzeribe, 1986). As in most other places in the world, the, "feminization of poverty" (Aulette, Wittner, & Blakely 2009, p. 156) means that women are more likely to be poor than men.<sup>58</sup>

Despite disagreement among scholars and practitioners as to what differentiates between a failed state, a weak state, and a fragile state, there are certain common features that these states share. They are states that are unable to administer their territories

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<sup>57</sup> For details about the deadly Islamic insurgent sect see Smith Mike's *Boko Haram: Inside Nigeria's Unholy War* (2015). London: I.B. Tauris Press and about the agitations of the Niger Delta militants see Campbell, John (2013). *Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

<sup>58</sup> Worthy to note is that race/ethnicity also plays an important role in determining one's chances of being poor. "For every racial ethnic group in the United States poverty rates are higher for women than they are for men" (Aulette et al. 2009: 157). This case is not different in Nigeria. Across all the ethnic groups poverty rates are higher for women than they are for men.

effectively. The state is so incapacitated that it cannot provide many essential services. The lack of standard definition means that the line separating countries from conflict countries has often blurred. In recent years, the term, “fragile and conflict states” (FCAS) has gained currency as a result. Kaplan (2015) asserts that the best way to assess fragility is to examine the two most important factors determining a country’s ability to navigate difficulties: The capacity of its population to cooperate (social cohesion) and the ability of its institutions (formal and informal) to channel this cooperation to meet national challenges. These two factors shape how a government interacts with its citizens, how officials, politicians, military officers, and business people behave, and how effective foreign efforts to upgrade governance will be. They determine both a society’s capacity to overcome a shock or longstanding inadequacy that threatens its most basic institutions and its capacity to promote development over the long term. Unfortunately, Nigeria was unable to overcome those inadequacies that characterized its fragility, and thereby created a gap that faith-related agencies, including FOMWAN, would address.

A major precondition for the emergence of faith-based organizations (FBOs) was the rise of civil society as the preeminent political construct shaping the discourses, institutions, and practices through which relationships and interactions between Northern donors and African recipients would be structured. Beginning in the 1980s, civil society came to prominence as neo-liberal development policy and resource transfers were increasingly driven by the objectives of reducing the role of the state and enhancing the involvement of non-state actors (Ferguson, 2006, p. 38). FOMWAN was established around that time, when religion reemerged as a major issue on global public

agendas. Given that religion is an integral part of the lives of billions of people, it can be considered a human resource of significant importance. Since it is widely accepted in policy circles that development, if it is to be effective and lasting, should build on people's own resources, "it makes sense to include their religious or spiritual resources and not material and intellectual ones only" (ter Haar, 2011, p. 8).

### **The Formation of FOMWAN: From Followership to Leadership**

The Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) is a religious non-profit organization formed and registered in 1985. It is a civil society umbrella body for Muslim women's associations in Nigeria. The formation of FOMWAN was a reaction to the weakness of the Nigerian state at various regional and national levels. It drew on several existing foundations. From the Northern part of Nigeria where the Sokoto Jihād took place (1804-1809), there had existed an all-Muslim women's organization (The Yan-taru) whose activities were reinvented and reintroduced with some modifications to fit new realities.<sup>59</sup>

Additionally, various Muslim women's associations across the Yorubaland known as *Assalatu* groups also had existed. The *Assalatu* groups are *Da'wa* associations that pay attention to *Tarbiyyah* (moral and spiritual training based on Islamic teachings), fund-raising activities, *adhkār* sometimes written *azkār* (remembrance of God especially through recitation and chanting Allah's names and meditation), *halaqa* (study circles), and other activities both sacred and secular. By their nature, these groups are influential

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<sup>59</sup> These are estimated years of the jihād but the Caliphate lasted for nearly a century, when the British colonial government defeated it and made the territory under the Northern Nigeria Protectorate in 1903.

and have the capacity to mobilize and shape their communities (Uthman, 2009, p. 159).

The Assalatu groups are exclusively mixed sex with tremendous membership and contributions by women and are found across Yorubaland. Also, around the time of independence in 1960, new civil society groups formed that followed patterns of Western associations. Among the earliest were the Muslim Students' Societies (MSS, later Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria - MSSN), which were often training grounds for women who later formed FOMWAN.

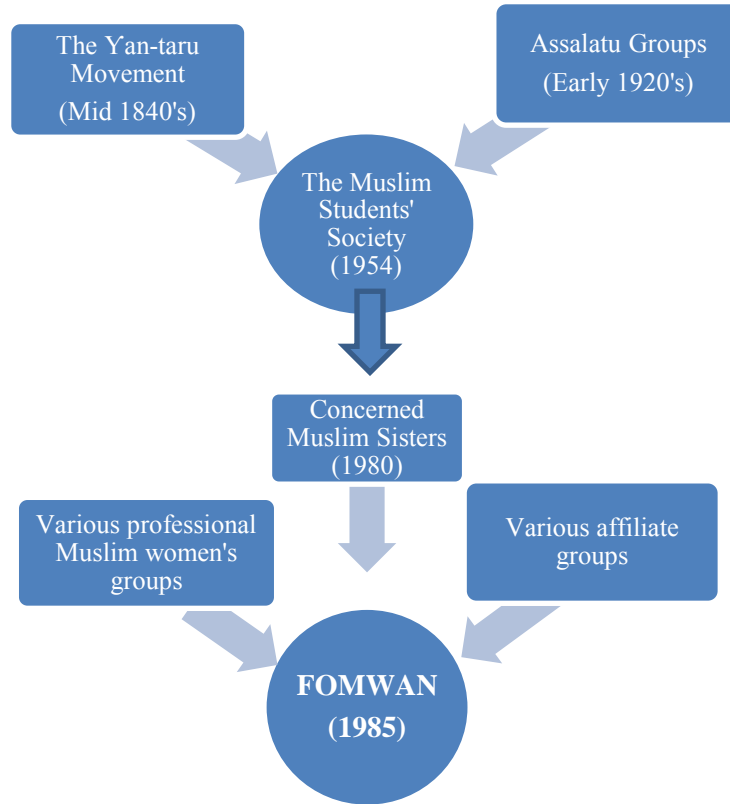
**Table 1: A Genealogy of FOMWAN**

Organization	Founders	Year	Formation Place	Gender	Region	Domain
The Yan-taru Movement	Nana Asma'u bnt Usman dan Fodiyo	1842	Sokoto	Females	Northern Nigeria	Communities /homes
Assalatu Groups	Group of concerned Muslims	1921	Lagos	Mixed Sex	South-western Nigeria	Mosques, communities, & homes
Muslim Students' Society (MSS)	The Triumvirate <sup>60</sup>	1954	Lagos	Mixed Sex	South-western Nigeria	High schools & Colleges
Various Muslim Women's Organizations	Concerned Sisters from MSS	1980	Kano	Females	Northern Nigeria	Universities/ Colleges & Professional Bodies
FOMWAN	Concerned Sisters from Various Groups	1985	Minna, Niger State	Females	Northern Nigeria	Professional Associations & Communities

Source: Mustapha Kurfi

<sup>60</sup> The struggles that led to the establishment of MSS in Nigeria are traced to the efforts of three people. They are: Tajudeen Adisa Aromoshodu, Sumola Akin Luguda & Abdurrahman Alade Sahid – collectively considered as the Triumvirate. The term Triumvirate is also used to describe the three men that led the Sokoto jihād -- Sheikh Usman dan Fodiyo (the leader of the reform), his brother Sheikh Abdullahi dan Fodiyo popularly known as Abdullahin-Gwandu (the Emir of Gwandu), and Sultan Muhammad Bello (the Pioneer Sultan of the Caliphate, a son of Sheikh Usman dan Fodiyo and a nephew of Sheikh Abdullahin Gwandu).

**Figure 8. A Chart Illustrating how FOMWAN was formed**



Source: Chart created by Mustapha Kurfi, 2017

Historically, there have been purely Muslim women's associations since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Table 1). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, they became gender-mixed, and by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, exclusive women's groups were formed. Figure 8 illustrates the association's historical roots, and adds details about the key organizations. The MSS itself has its roots in the various Islamic associations based in Lagos. The history of MSS can be traced to the educational and social contributions of Islamic organizations such as the Ahmadiyya Islamic Movement in Nigeria, the Ansar-Ud-Deen Society of Nigeria (AUD), the Nawa'irud-Deen Society of Nigeria, the Ansarul-Islam Society of Nigeria, the Isabatuddeen Society of Nigeria, and many more. It is worth noting that Women's



wings or units of these associations had long been established and their contributions were always evident.

The MSS was formed at Lagos in the western part of Nigeria and the then country's federal capital. The idea of setting up the MSS was born out of Muslims' desires to safeguard their religious fundamentals, culture, and identity from the twin effects of forceful evangelization and alluring Christian activities. The Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) was formed in 1954 primarily to respond to the aggressive Christian missionary activities that accompanied the colonial project in Nigeria. The association was soon found across all the secondary schools and universities in Nigeria. It is striking that it was a unifier to all Muslims – males and females, but the female members felt it was not sufficient to meet all their needs. Female members were also looking beyond graduation – when they ceased to be students. Over and above, they felt disenchanted with what was happening in terms of forceful conversion of some Muslims into Christianity especially in the southwestern part of the country and by other circumstances all over the country. Hajiya Salamatu Ibrahim is an active member of MSS and a founding member of both MSO and FOMWAN, who sheds more light that helps us understand this formation process. She says:

Some sisters that had been in MSS, when they were in colleges deemed it fit that they should think of where to go after graduation. The zeal and enthusiasm they had made them to ask themselves how to continue with the *Da'wa* after graduation. So, the idea started rearing around 1979 but did not materialize until 1980 when we established MSO...

The above reflects three major points: First, the women's ability to realize the need for education as a vehicle for emancipation. This was especially the case in the

northern region, which was the hardest hit in terms of illiteracy, poverty, infant mortality, widespread of diseases, ethnic crises, and, most recently, insecurity due to insurgency (Salawu, 2010). Second, the women had foresight – they believed that they had what they needed to display their agency. Lastly, and essentially, the women had long identified their challenges and wanted an opportunity to actualize and fulfill their hopes and aspirations. They felt that the formation of an exclusively women’s association would lead them to success. That was why there were associations such as the MSO, whose mission was to ensure the participation of Muslim sisters in the affairs of their community so that they would have a vibrant group of sisters impacting their own communities, especially in the northern region.

In the late 1950s prior to the establishment of both MSO and FOMWAN, Nigerian women had begun active, coordinated participation in social and community endeavors at the national and regional levels.<sup>61</sup> Some women’s organizations were established toward the end of the colonial period. For instance, the National Council of Women’s Societies of Nigeria (NCWS), which was established in Ibadan in southwestern Nigeria in 1958, reflected in large part the service orientation of women’s groups in the West during the same period. It aimed at promoting the welfare, economic and social progress of women, laying special emphasis on education and training. In the northern part of Nigeria, the *Jam’iyyar Matan Arewa* (Northern Women’s Community Work Group) was established in Kaduna in 1963. It organized women for health care, nutrition,

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<sup>61</sup> See Akande, J. D. (1990). *The Contributions of Women to National Development in Nigeria*, Lagos: Nigerian Association of University Women.

and hands-on mutual aid. From the faith-related agencies, there was the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), which provided economic empowerment for women and promoted Christian ethics.

Many of the above organizations proved unsatisfactory because they were male-dominated and secular. More importantly, they did not honor Muslim practices, especially Muslim ideas about women. For instance, secular women organizations would be struggling for women's rights based on Western perception that Islam was a barrier to women's empowerment. As a result, the (Muslim) women needed to be emancipated through fighting for their equality. Contrary to that position, the concerned Muslim women felt they were contented with being Muslims and comfortable with Islamic provisions. More so, they did not need any emancipation and were interested only in equity and *not* equality. This conflict with secular associations was one of the factors that led to the founding of exclusively Muslim professional groups. Accordingly, the founding members of FOMWAN had lost hope in the government, were disenchanted with the efforts of secular organizations, and became gloomy or weary with the MSS's endeavors to address social upheavals, especially Muslim women's. They were especially concerned about the forced conversion of some Muslims, economic downturn, regional crises, high rates of corruption and illiteracy, feminization of abject poverty, widespread of diseases, and a gross violation of human rights that worried Nigeria's fragile state.

Alongside these local concerns was a changing international landscape. There was growing international development assistance, often with a focus on women. At the global level, the third world conference on women was held in Nairobi, Kenya's capital,

in 1985. The meeting resulted in an improved understanding between Western and African women, particularly of each other's political viewpoints and agendas. The conference gave visibility to the plight and struggles of African women through more aggressive funding for education and development programs. It also facilitated the establishment of secular NGOs, religious charities, and institutions of civil society (Ebrahim, 2016). The founding members emphasized that the motive for founding FOMWAN was not for funding, as Ebrahim identified with similar bodies, it was nevertheless happening at the same time when many such organizations were formed.

FOMWAN's formation also coincided with some important religious transformations. It was a time when religious organizations were becoming involved in development and humanitarian projects in Africa to an unprecedented extent. Various governments, international organizations, and donor agencies invited religious bodies to become, "partners in development" leading to the reemergence of religion as a major issue on public agendas on a global level (Burchardt, 2013, p. 30).<sup>62</sup> Instead of withering, religion experienced a resurgence, amazed at the vibrancy and dynamism of today's religious scene. As Bayes and Tohidi (2001) posit, this resurgence of religion in recent decades has had a marked impact on women's rights globally, and this is something that the international development community is attuned to, especially in international aid.

By implication, FOMWAN is the daughter of the MSS and a granddaughter of many organizations, including the Yan-taru Movement and various Assalatu groups. The

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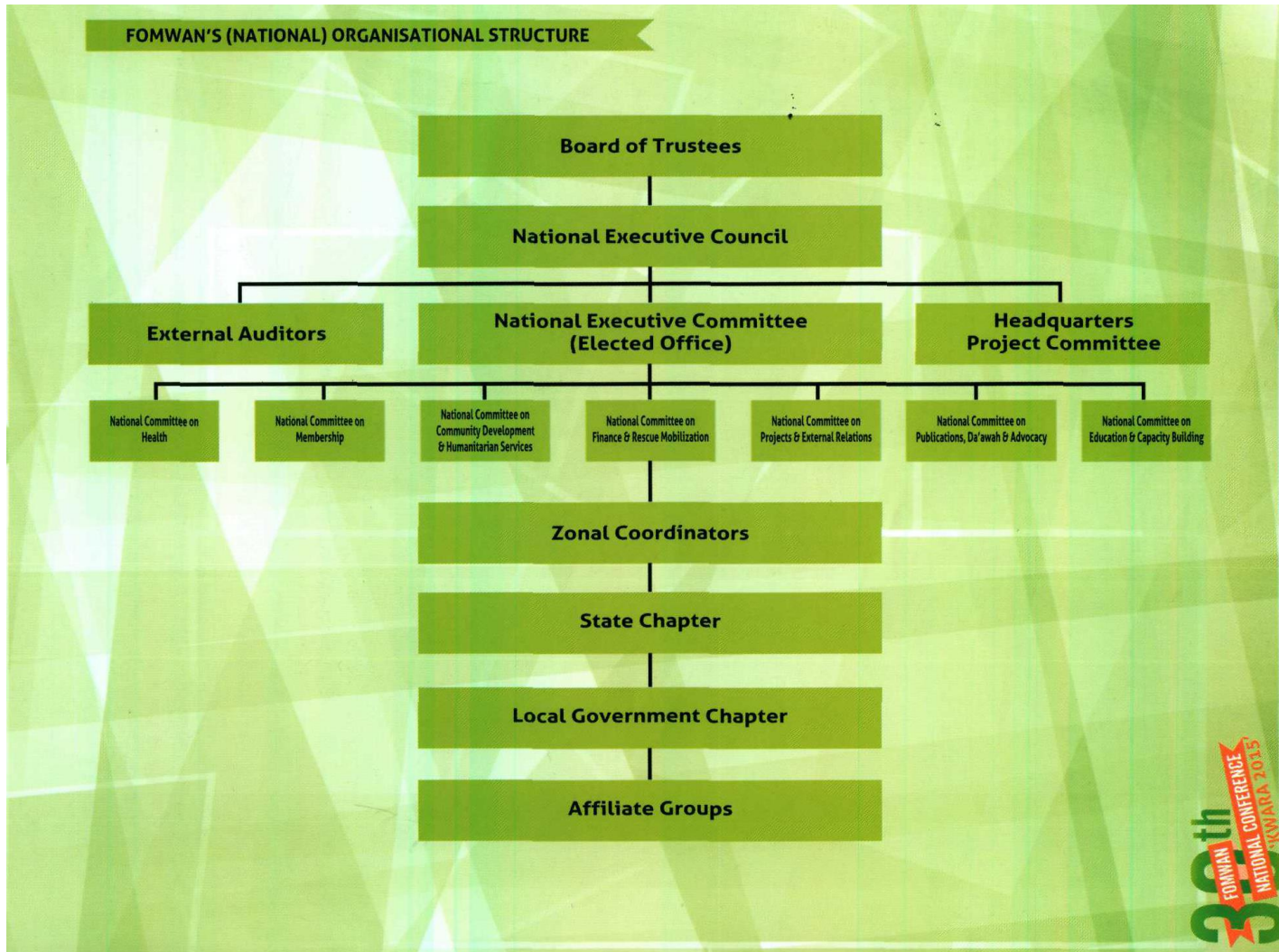
<sup>62</sup> For a list of major global initiatives that brought together development actors, faith groups and academics see Tomalin Emma's (Ed) "Introduction" *The Routledge Handbook of Religions and Global Development*, 2015, New York: Routledge, p.2.

Nigerian Muslim women, who were members of the MSS in high schools and colleges, had responded to some of the problems that characterized Nigeria's fragile state. Around 1980, there were female graduates of both Western and Islamic schools whose enthusiasm and activism led to the establishment of many women's organizations in the country. Among these were community-based groups, occupational groups, welfare and charity associations, and FBOs such as the MSS. But the MSS was a male-dominated organization, and some Muslim sisters felt the need for another organization that would serve the same purpose for Muslim women. Accordingly, the idea of forming FOMWAN was nurtured by its founding members that attended an MSO Conference at Kano in 1980. The Federation was officially commissioned in 1985. Like Nana Asma'u, the Muslim women who established the FOMWAN were concerned about the low level of education among women, particularly Muslims.

### **The Organizational Structure of FOMWAN**

FOMWAN's organizational structure follows the federal pattern of the Nigerian government – the president at the central (federal), the governors at the middle (state), and local governments (LGs or counties) with various affiliate groups at the grassroots levels. To better understand how the organizational structure operates, this section is organized into three relevant themes: Isomorphism, the use of local committees, and engagement in building networks. First, here's FOMWAN's national chart:

**Figure 9. FOMWAN Organogram**



Source: FOMWAN Bulletin, Special Edition, 30th Anniversary 1985-2015, p. 9 (2015).

The above organogram (Figure 9) illustrates FOMWAN's national organizational chart. As can be seen, the association has a board of trustees (Board), which, along with the national executive council, is the highest governing body at the national level. It comprises the founding members and past national executives (elders) who determine the fate of the association. It is worth noting that having trustees is a very "modern" organizational form, but filling it with "elders" reflects traditional authority. The board meets at least twice a year as well as when there is an urgent need. Next to the board on the chart is the national executive council (NEC). The NEC or the council comprises the board, all the zonal coordinators, chairpersons of the various committees and all state chapter executives. Board members are in attendance at most of the council's meetings.

There are external auditors who check the association's financial transactions and then report to the board. They also investigate and express opinions on the fair presentation of the association's financial statements in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP). This is a relatively independent body that is headed by professionals in accountancy. Audit is paramount to FOMWAN and in the running of its programs as I observed in all its annual general meetings. For instance, during each national (as well as state and local government) meeting, each chapter has to provide and present reports. No single report is complete without financial reports that have been certified by that chapter's auditors. Accountability and prudence are high priorities in running the affairs of the association.

In addition to external auditors, there is a headquarters' project committee which focuses on overseeing the construction of the national secretariat complex in Abuja. The

headquarters committee was established after the boards realized the necessity of completing the various national projects, including offices, a central mosque, hostel complex, and theatre halls. All the recent national programs are hosted in the headquarters, thereby saving members the cost of paying rent in hotels. This also fosters unity and solidarity among members from various parts of the country. I observed these behaviors on many different occasions – the 2014 national education summit, the 2015 NEC meeting; the association’s 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2015, and the 2016 national *Hijāb* [Muslim female headscarf or veil] Day– which took place in FOMWAN’s national secretariat complex, Abuja. Chapter Five provides details about how the association creates religious space, and how it utilizes that space to achieve its goals.

Establishing FOMWAN’s secretariat in Abuja also follows the federal government of Nigeria’s pattern of relocating its federal capital from Lagos to Abuja. Again, the FOMWAN organizational structure with the board and the NEC is a replica structure of Nigeria’s national executive council, which comprises the president, the ministers, and other key members of the cabinet (such as the secretary to the federation, as well as all the state governors). By implication, there is institutional isomorphism in the way FOMWAN’s structure is framed.

### *Isomorphism*

Nigeria is a mosaic of many different cultures and traditions. As a result, a federal system (federalism) was adopted to accommodate these cultural traditions. Commonly, the federalist system allows for a centralized political organization in which the governmental power is divided between a central hub and territorial subdivisions. As



Paden (2005) asserts, Nigeria's political evolution from pre-colonial status to post-independence civilian regimes has been greatly influenced by a legacy of north-south regionalism and associated geo-cultural zones. The political structure that has emerged represents an attempt to accommodate diversity and facilitate conflict resolution.

Substantiating the above assertion, Hill (2012) believes three main forces are strengthening the state, fortifying and rehabilitating its institutions, helping to build the nation, and promoting the ideas of nationhood: Federalism, crude oil, and the armed forces that are resisting Nigeria's failure. It is against this backdrop that FOMWAN is isomorphic to the state's federal structure, embracing an approach that ensures representation at all levels. Furthermore, FOMWAN's approach paves the way for each organizational unit to effectively address its particular problems. Since because there are many problems besetting Muslim women in various parts of Nigeria, this isomorphic structure enables each chapter to identify its specific, immediate local problems and promptly offer appropriate solutions.

FOMWAN has 36 chapters – one in each of the 36 states in the nation. In state chapters there are *Amīras* who serve as administrative heads. Each state chapter has its state executive council (SEC) which is a replica of the national body. Akin to the national body, state chapters have key officers such as *Nā'iba-al-Amīra* – vice president, secretary general, treasurer, public relations officer (PRO), among others, that form the executive council. Like the national body, the state chapters operate through committees, but with some modifications to reflect their immediate circumstances.

Additionally, reflecting regional divisions in the nation, annual national meetings

are rotated between the north and the southwest, although some NEC meetings are held at the national headquarters complex in Abuja. Subsequent meeting venues and times are determined at the end of the present meeting, to enable the host chapters to begin preparations. During council meetings, chapters lobby strongly for the opportunity to host, demonstrating the excitement among chapters. Asked why the preference for some chapters to host and not others, the majority of the respondents indicated that proximity to the venue was the major factor in their choice. Other reasons included benefits or privileges that the hosting states/chapters gain predominantly from the national body.

A similar rotation between the north and the south is applied to the post of the national Amīra (president). If the current Amīra is from the north, then the next would emerge from the southwest. Again, when a president is from the north, the vice president – *Nā'iba-al-Amīra* is from the southwest, and vice versa. This remains a tradition and a safe-landing technique that fosters unity and harmony among members. As a result, for 30 years, FOMWAN has never had any leadership problems or splits over ethnic or regional differences. This keeps the organization focused, fosters unity among members, encourages leadership stability, and allows for flexibility in the running of the organization. In addition, this strategy allows the organization to adopt some modern organizational principles while avoiding the rigidity of bureaucracy, which can stamper creativity, slow decision-making, and retard initiatives (Weber, 2015).

In addition to the board, the NEC, and the various committees, there are zonal coordinators at the national level who are responsible for overseeing the affairs of usually four or five state chapters. There are six zones that reflect Nigeria's geo-political zones –

the northwest, the north central, the northeast, the southwest, the south-south, and the southeast. In states where there is high-population density, such as northwest, there are two zonal coordinators – zones I and II. Here is what one of the coordinators has to say on this:

I am the zonal coordinator of Northwest II – that is Kano, Jigawa, Katsina and Kaduna. The other Northwest zone II comprises Sokoto, Zamfara and Kebbi states. The rationale for making it so is for easy accessibility and management (KII with Hajiya Aisha Ahmad Hassan, the zonal coordinator Northwest II and NEC member).

Each of these zonal coordinators has a deputy to cater for Nigeria’s diversity and dense population. Zonal coordination and division of labor enables effective coordination of organizational responsibilities. It allows delegation of responsibilities, efficiency, and result-orientation and provides a grooming ground for future zonal coordinators. This strategy contributes to organizational success, fosters mutual understanding among the executives, unity at leadership level, and reinforcement of a sense of commitment to the organization. Above all, it is an effective means of balancing regional interests in Nigeria’s plural, yet fragile state.

From conception, the founding members of FOMWAN were mindful of the fragility of the Nigerian state, including ethnic and regional tensions. In an attempt to balance these differences and to ensure representation of interests, the formation of FOMWAN was neither in Sokoto, Kano or Katsina (the north) nor in Lagos, Ekiti or Oyo (the southwest). Instead, it occurred in Minna, Niger state – the middle belt of Nigeria. One of the founding members and the association’s past national president elaborated on this strategy:

We consciously found FOMWAN at Minna for many reasons. First, Minna is geographically located at the center of Nigeria. It would be a lot easier for all of us to travel from every part and arrive in Minna. Again, we wanted to set a precedence which would lay a viable foundation for the association... (KII with a founding member, Hajiya Khairat Siddique - August, 2015).

Choosing Minna, Niger state as the birth place of FOMWAN symbolized neutrality and unity. If, for example, Sokoto (center of the caliphate) was chosen to be the birthplace of FOMWAN, it would appear as a Hausa-Fulani and a northern-Muslim women's affair. If Lagos (then Nigeria's federal capital) was chosen, it would appear as a southwestern Yoruba Muslim women's affair. Minna, as geographically neutral, was a good alternative for the formation of the association. Again, this is similar to the federal government's location of its capital in the middle belt. FOMWAN's overall aim in founding the association at the middle belt was to accommodate Nigerian Muslim women's diversity.

A close look at FOMWAN's organizational structure reveals that it is responsive to its international development partners' technical requirements -- an illustration of their normative isomorphism. Distinct from efficiency and competitive motivations for organizations' adaptation to their environment, institutional isomorphism assumes that organizations seek legitimacy by conforming to a socially constructed environment. Interviews and other data that this research show that FOMWAN adheres to the professional standards expected in their networks and among their development partners (such as the UNDP, UNICEF, and USAID). The major factor that organizations must take into account are other organizations. Organizations compete not just for resources and customers, but for political power, institutional legitimacy, social and economic

fitness (DiMaggio & Powell, 1988, p. 150), and political and institutional legitimacy (Aldrich, 1979, p. 219).

My take from FOMWAN's isomorphic nature is that although it appears to conform to donors' standards in partnership or project implementation, it nevertheless insists on ITS commitment to act according to Islamic teachings. The donors or partners do not insist that FOMWAN strictly abide by their standards – thereby alleviating the possible tension between the donors and the association. Instead, this tension is resolved through two interlocking processes, which Burchardt (2012) calls, “institutional isomorphism” and “local actors' deployment of strategies of extraversion” (p. 30). FOMWAN's institutional isomorphism allows the association to professionally develop and favorably compete with others. Its strategies of extraversion allow it to interpret projects in Islamic terms that are trusted by the local communities. This interpretation of spiritual terms gives it flexibility, which leads to the success of health and humanitarian projects.<sup>63</sup>

As Burchardt (2013) observes, in the last two decades, religious organizations have become involved in development and humanitarian projects in Africa to an unprecedented extent. He further argues that the emergence of these FBOs as powerful actors in humanitarian assistance reflects one of the exemplary institutionalizations of encounters between the religious and the secular in the contemporary era. FOMWAN's considerable involvement in humanitarian services is an example of a religious group's

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<sup>63</sup> There are many examples where FOMWAN has deployed some strategies in family health, infant mortality, polio eradication, and in the fight against some deadly diseases. For details on the various strategies that FOMWAN deploys to achieve its goals, see Chapter Five.

ability to negotiate with secular international donor agencies. It stands to immensely benefit from its partnership and networking with other organizations, whether religious or secular, predominantly male, female, or mixed, and international or local. As a lead partner with many international donor agencies, especially in areas such as health and education, this bridging of secular organizational expectations and religious values results in improved lives, as the data gathered show.<sup>64</sup>

FOMWAN's isomorphic organizational structure also extends to the local level. Parallel to the organization of federal programs, FOMWAN has 774 local government (LGs) chapters in the 36 states of Nigeria. These LGs, or units, are like counties in each state in America. The rationale for having various local chapters is that they are believed to be close to the people. This gives the association the impetus to be a grassroots-oriented organization and to develop leadership from the ground up. It is through the various local government chapters that many of the national executive members are elected to serve in their respective state chapters and subsequently, the national body. An overwhelming majority of the interviewed members and leaders joined FOMWAN as representatives of their local affiliate organizations. This relates to the second theme that elucidates FOMWAN's organizational structure: The formation and utilization of various local committees.

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<sup>64</sup> For the data on the improved results see next chapter.

*The Use of Local Committees*

FOMWAN operates throughout many different committees to carry out various organizational activities.<sup>65</sup> Initially, in response to illiteracy and poverty, the association focused on education. Soon after, it added health and subsequently expanded to include other services. By nature, the association is designed to effectively address problems as they arise. In other words, the committees serve as response mechanisms to the fragile state. A state chapter president explains the various committees in the following way:

FOMWAN has the following committees: 1) *Da 'wa*, publications and advocacy 2) health 3) membership 4) community development and humanitarian services 5) finance and resource mobilization 6) projects and external relations 7) education and capacity building. But *Da 'wa* is the most important because it consists of everything... (Interview with Hajiya Munkailu Adamu, Imo state Amīra).

The above committees are assigned various roles and thereby capture the numerous services that the association provides. Establishing a committee is dependent upon circumstances and could be temporary or permanent. Changes in the association's service dimensions and expansion of committees based on needs indicate that FOMWAN is a dynamic association that employs effective problem-solving to prioritize service demands in a complex organization such as FOMWAN with a collection of programs. It also further demonstrates that it prioritizes service demands.

In all the states where I conducted fieldwork, I saw local levels reflecting patterns from the national and state levels. However, there are opportunities for each chapter to create special committees. As a result, all the local chapters have common grounds – for example, they all have *Da 'wa*, education, health, finance, disciplinary and *Shurah*

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<sup>65</sup> Details about the kinds of activities that FOMWAN engages in are provided in the next section.

committees. Nevertheless, it is at each chapter's discretion to constitute additional committees based on needs. For instance, while in Bauchi state they have a Hajj committee responsible for coordinating the group's pilgrimage affairs, in Edo state, they have a "special duties" committee, which is responsible for organizing youth camp and enlightenment campaigns on human trafficking and prostitution, notably the dangers of young ladies traveling to Europe for prostitution. Special duties committees may be contingent upon arising matters or issues that a state chapter deems "special," or outside the scope of existing committees. This leeway provided by the national body allows states and local chapters to address the unique needs and challenges of their communities.

FOMWAN's collective actions and organizational records support this claim. For example, during the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the association in 2015, the Kwara State Health Committee hosted a lecture at the auditorium of University of Ilorin – the venue for the anniversary – on "Stroke: Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment." A professor from the Medical School of the university gave the talk, accompanied by discussion and a question and answer session.

Other activities on the day included a press conference headed by the National Publicity and the Publications Committees. Later in the evening, there was a courtesy call on Her Excellency, Mrs. Omolewa Ahmed, the wife of the Kwara state governor. In the evening from 8.00pm to midnight, members engaged in a "Spiritual Night and Qur'anic Recitation Competition." The *Da'wa* Committee was the organizer and convener of these activities. FOMWAN's committee structure made all of this possible, and the activities of the day demonstrated the wide range of health, education, political, and spiritual



emphases of the organization. As a testimony to its remarkable achievements, the Sultan of Sokoto, who is the spiritual leader of Nigerian Muslims said the following:

FOMWAN is the most successful Muslim association in Nigeria. Since its inception 30years ago, it remains one strong, unified association that has touched many lives through education, health, and several aspects of human endeavors... (The Sultan of Sokoto His Eminence Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar, during FOMWAN's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, at the University of Ilorin Auditorium, Kwara state).

It is also interesting to see how FOMWAN differs from other Muslim organizations. These comparisons show that FOMWAN's committees make it a lot easier to quickly respond to new issues without going through protocols that would lead to unnecessary delays. This is evident when FOMWAN is compared to *Jama'atu Nasril Islam* (JNI), the government-established organization responsible for overseeing the affairs of Nigerian Muslims. The JNI responds slowly, if at all, to burning issues that especially affect Muslim women. It is a male-dominated organization characterized by bureaucratic protocols, and headed by traditional leaders. It takes a long time before the leaders call for meetings to respond to urgent matters.

More importantly, FOMWAN's committees are headed by experts and experienced persons. For example, the education committee is chaired by Professor Durosinmi - a university vice president, and a past national *Amīra*, and the health committee is chaired by Dr. Hauwa Mandara, a medical doctor, a member of the NEC, and Nigeria's country director of one of the American-based international donor agencies. Alhaja Bilkisu Oladimeji, an executive member of the Nigerian Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ) is the public relations officer of FOMWAN. Illustrative of the professionalization of the group, at the end of each important organizational event

FOMWAN has a tradition of issuing a communiqué (an official statement, announcement, or press release), highlighting priorities and accomplishments. Also, it holds a press conference to announce its positions on any issues that attract national interest. This is one area where FOMWAN has been very proactive in responding quickly to national issues, exerting its influence over many current events and issues in the country, notably on those issues that affect Muslim women's lives and Nigeria's unity. This also points to the association members' use of bureaucratic means to achieve their goals.

Empowered female experts such as these provide FOMWAN with an effective means of problem-solving based on rationality and experience. It equally points to how the association adopts the modern form of bureaucratic principles of decentralization, strategic management, human resources management, and the formulation of the organization's vision and mission. At the same time, it avoids policies of a strict tenure system that has fixed years of active service followed by disengagement (retirement).

One of the things that FOMWAN's founding members emphasize is that "members never retire." This suggests the organization is not based on the modern conception of retirement upon the "expiration" of one's tenure or needs of services. Instead, the experience of former members are always needed. The association's retention and utilization of elders conforms to the African traditional gerontocracy, which attributes old age to wisdom. Elders are believed to have been endowed with wisdom, foresight, and experience. As a result, they are revered and their advice adhered to – thereby blending two systems that I consider bureaucratic Ajamization. This is one of the

reasons most domestic disputes, including marriages, are settled by elders. In many African societies, elders have the final say on matters affecting families and communities.<sup>66</sup>

FOMWAN's committee structure allows for having common functions while also flexibly meeting various interests. This contingency approach to the organizational leadership proves to be an effective leadership style in modern organizations (Morgan, 2006). In interviews with FOMWAN executives, respondents believed that the association's division of labor, based on expertise and channeled through committees, has led to effectiveness and efficiency in implementing projects and achieving desired organizational goals.

#### *Engagement in Building Networks*

FOMWAN engages in partnership and building networks, which gives members enormous ground to facilitate successful implementation of projects. They network with stakeholders, including faith-related agencies within and outside the Islamic faith, and with secular organizations. The data that this research gathered demonstrate that in many FOMWAN activities, networks and partnerships are employed. Castells (2001) postulates that a social network is a social structure made of individuals or organizations called 'nodes' that are tied (connected) by one or more specific types of interdependence, such as common interest, friendship, kinship, financial exchange, or knowledge. Networking is a major component that takes place in organizations, including faith-related agencies.

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<sup>66</sup> For an extensive discussion about the subject matter, see Toyin Falola (Ed.) In *Praise of Greatness: The Substance and Poetics of African Adulation*, especially "Introduction" and "Conclusion: Enlargement of Greatness," Forthcoming.

Thus, FOMWAN uses networking to extend its reach. One of the advantages of such networking is the acceptability of projects by the host communities.

A known organization can lend its credibility to a new organization when they work in partnership. Worth noting here is that religious/secular partnerships can be exceedingly productive. One such partnership is with the USAID in a program called the Nigeria Education Crisis Response Program (NECRP). This program is a three-year initiative launched in October 2014 that aims to expand access to quality, protective, and relevant informal and alternative education opportunities for children and youth ages 6 to 17 in the Northeastern states (notably Borno and Yobe states) who have been displaced by the deadly Boko Haram insurgency. FOMWAN partners with the USAID in this program, thereby offering educational and psychosocial support to the recipients.

Kadushin (2012) describes three kinds of networks that social scientists have investigated: Ego-centric, socio-centric, and open-system networks. Ego-centric networks are those networks that are connected with a single node or individual. Socio-centric networks are networks in a 'box.' Connections among children in a classroom or between executives or workers in an organization are closed system networks and the ones most often studied in terms of fine points of network structure. Open system networks are networks in which the boundaries are not necessarily clear, for they are not in a box. The kinds of networks that FOMWAN establishes and maintains can be described as open-system networks, especially when viewed from the various connections it establishes with other organizations: Sacred (intra and interfaith), secular, and governmental.

FOMWAN networks with over 500 member organizations across the nation through formal relationships and informal consulting. Often these relationships are mutual. For instance, FOMWAN provides resources to some affiliate organizations to support their fundraising and receives human resources such as volunteers and trainers from associations such as the MSS, MSO, and MCAN. Beyond Islamic organizations, as we shall see in chapters four and five, FOMWAN partners with Christian organizations (especially in interfaith dialogue), as well with Western secular donor agencies such as USAID. In some instances, the partnership has project-specific arrangements, but in most cases, relationships are relatively long-term and persist even after projects periods end. Building networks is present across the national, state, and local levels and are, in many instances, FOMWAN partners and collaborators. A founding member and a past national Amīra comments:

We are at the grassroots and everywhere. We network with secular associations, legislators, traditional and various religious leaders to raise awareness in communities... Increasingly, we have been invited to take up positions in government committees and have input into policies because the government recognizes the work we are doing through education, health, and in addressing development issues (Interview with a past national Amīra of FOMWAN, Bilkisu Yusuf, 2015).

Both FOMWAN's broad-based grassroots structure and its network of partners make possible the diversity of its services and the depth of its reach into the community. This has a unique effect on development work in Nigeria. As Marshall and Van Saanen (2007) argue, faith institutions, leaders, and networks have "special expertise in values and integrity," which allows them to offer "a powerful potential force in raising governance standards in the work of development" (p. 231). As Miller (1998) asserts,

religion has more potential to contribute to social capital than any other institution. Similarly, Putnam (2006) asserts that, “faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital...” (p. 66). Several studies (Alidou, 2013; Clarke, 2007; Deneulin & Rakodi, 2011; Stark, 2007; Wineburg et al., 1999) argue that religious NGOs are critical players and ideal social service providers for programs envisioned to work at two levels: Reforming individuals into successful worker-citizens through spiritual and psychic renewal and building communities or collective social capital.

Religious associations such as FOMWAN provide important services and resources to “their members and others in the community by providing physical care, social support, and social networks” (Smidt, 2003, p. 2). Through its committee structure, partnership, and engagement in building networks, FOMWAN has earned the trust and confidence of local communities, donor agencies, governments, and other stakeholders. Due to the religious capital that FOMWAN members invested in various communities through services such as *Da'wa*, building schools, hospitals, interfaith dialogue, civic engagement, humanitarian, and social services, among others, the association has legitimacy when it presents a project, program, or activity to communities. This trust has played out in the association’s ability to effectively provide most of its activities and implement many projects with its partners, particularly development agencies.

Through its organizational structure isomorphic to Nigeria’s national government, FOMWAN balances regional interests and unifies its members. Its extensive use of local committees provides the association with the opportunity to have common functions,

while also flexibly meeting changing needs. As a result, FOMWAN has become a *household name*. This is partly because of its viable structure, outreach, omnipresence, and the multidimensional nature of its services in the various host communities of the nation. These activities are meant for members, nonmembers, and the general public, thereby contributing to Nigeria's civil society. The following section highlights the focal points of these activities.

### **FOMWAN's Organizational Activities**

The activities that FOMWAN engages in are manifold, but its founding purpose sheds light on what gives focus to its activities. Women's disadvantaged status, oppression, exploitation, and lack of agency were top on the list of factors that led to FOMWAN's founding. Carefully studying the group's records and listening to the voices of the women, it is evident that when they started in 1985, their mission statement was not as multifaceted as it is now. When they started, the women focused on *Da'wa*, which was seen as foundational to bettering women's lives.

Pursuing FOMWAN's basic mission invariably involves many different forms of education, both religious and secular. The founding members viewed education in three forms: Islamic education, which they believe is paramount, western education, and an amalgamation of both Islamic and western education - a modern integrated *Madrassa* system. The last aspect that integrates Islamic and Western school is an example of educational dimension of *Ajamization* -- reflecting enrichment of Western with Islamic traditions, to address local realities. A founding member describes how their activities started:

Our activities started with *Da'wa* which means calling to do good deeds and to refrain from doing bad deeds. To worship Allah, you have to know Him. Seeking knowledge is therefore a necessity. *Da'wa* encompasses all our activities. For somebody to listen to you s/he has to be fed, healthy and clothed. That is where the combination of all these things comes in (KII with Hajiya Khairat Siddique, founding member and a past national Amīra).

A focus on *Da'wa* naturally led to FOMWAN's focus on education as its primary preoccupation. Preaching and teaching started among the members in small groups and later expanded to include non-members and eventually was opened to the general public. Some of the founding members recalled how they started with learning circles or study groups. Sometimes, they would invite a male cleric to lead the groups and sometimes the most knowledgeable among them would be the tutor. Most of the classes focused on learning to memorize and recite the Qur'ān, learning the *Hadith* (traditions of the Prophet) reading books on Islamic jurisprudence, and studying Arabic language.<sup>67</sup> It is important to note that members of FOMWAN belong to various other Islamic associations in which such educational programs are not new. Members found it easy to access educational resources, including teachers, from among Islamic groups such as the MSS, Women in Da'wah (WID), and the MSO.<sup>68</sup>

Educational and empowerment needs of Muslim women, the major motive for establishing FOMWAN, shaped its central preoccupation with *Da'wa*, namely

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<sup>67</sup> The ḥadith is a collection of traditions containing sayings of the Prophet Muhammad that, with accounts of his daily practices (the Sunna). It constitutes the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the Qur'ān.

<sup>68</sup> It is interesting to observe that in later years, FOMWAN no longer needed male clerics to come and teach them or deliver lectures on certain subjects because they themselves have come of age. We witnessed at their various events how members organized Qur'ānic memorization competitions without any male cleric as a judge or moderator. It is purely women, and exclusively FOMWAN members.



educational and economic improvement. Some of their educational programs include forming adult literacy classes and study groups, which are mostly held in the target language that the communities understand. The Federation also establishes nursery, primary, and secondary schools. Most of these circles focus on Arabic and Islamic education, combining Eastern and Western forms of education, which makes the schools appealing to many Muslims. This form of educational dimension of Ajamization is appealing to the communities and therefore providing substantial grounds for trust-building. FOMWAN also organizes open lectures, symposia and sponsors talk shows on radio and television stations.

Reviewing the association's publications and listening to some of its talks, the major themes can be broadly categorized as: 1) Emphasis on knowledge;

2) Personal virtues, such as truthfulness, moral etiquettes, obedience to parents, and self-control;

3) Virtues of social life, such as kindness towards neighbors, relatives, the needy, and one's fellow beings, generally; and

4) Political messages, such as civic morality.

Almost every program that FOMWAN organizes conveys a messages on the indispensability of seeking knowledge. This is not unrelated to the association's vision and mission. Again, all of the association's messages are contingent with the major issue at hand that is topical and relevant. A particular topic is chosen while speakers come and deliver lectures on the topic. At one of its annual conferences in 2015, a key note speech was delivered by Dr. Abdul-Ra'uf Bolanle Babalakin. The theme was, "Religious and

Ethnic Plurality: Implications for National Integration in Nigeria.” Considering the fact that Nigeria had just finished its general elections, the results of which were largely anticipated to lead to the state’s disintegration due to regional, ethnic, and religious differences, FOMWAN’s choice of theme addressing plurality, harmony, and national integration was timely.<sup>69</sup>

Similarly, FOMWAN participates in debates on topics of Muslim women’s interests and of national interests. A good example is its active involvement in debate on dress codes - about whether Muslim girls should be allowed to wear what Muslim women consider modest dress in accordance with the Islamic faith. This debate was one place where FOMWAN demonstrated its organizational strength and influence by pooling various resources to champion that course. Using their social capital, notably connections with their significant others, coupled with knowledge and expertise of members, the association coordinated efforts to ensure that Muslim girls were allowed to wear school uniforms compatible with Islamic teachings.

FOMWAN engaged in a process of organizing a conference on the subject matter, gathering momentum from experts on Islamic jurisprudence, law, and other related matters, and consulting with legal experts. Validating their actions and ensuring conformity to Nigeria’s Constitutional provision and the International Human Rights that allow for the practice of any religion gave the association members the impetus to carry on with the struggle. But before heading to the court, the association had engaged in

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<sup>69</sup> Equally, the recently concluded 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual National Conference of the Federation that was held at Kano from November 16-18, 2017 was entitled “The Nigerian Economy in Recession: The Islamic Perspective.” This title came at the right time as the country’s economy was dwindling.

advocacy and sensitization campaigns and publicity through publications, billboards, handbills, newspapers, press conferences, and its public relations committees.

FOMWAN, in partnership with others, solicited for grassroots support, advocating for some bills to be passed into law allowing for a suitable dressing code for Muslim girls. The end result is that FOMWAN won – Muslim girls in high schools were allowed to wear modest clothes/uniforms in compliance with the school authorities' endorsement.<sup>70</sup> This speaks to how FOMWAN adopts a contingency approach as a problem-solving mechanism. Equally, it speaks to how much importance it attaches to education, especially to girl-child education.

Besides organizing lectures, symposia and talk shows, participating in debates, and engaging in lobbying and advocacy campaigns, FOMWAN also produces fliers, pamphlets, leaflets, billboards, stickers, and badges that advertise specific issues, such as education, health, harmony, peace, and unity. At times, these messages target a specific audience, whereas other times they address a much wider audience – politicians, bureaucrats, government officials, and the general public. A typical example is the one that says, “Let’s fight Indiscipline, Bribery & Corruption,” and it carries the FOMWAN logo as the sponsor. Another one says, “The Search for Knowledge is a necessity upon Every Muslim, regardless of one’s gender” – (The Prophet’s saying), Courtesy FOMWAN.”

Beyond these public slogans, the association has been instrumental in providing

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<sup>70</sup> The endorsement was usually following an agreement between parents-teachers association (PTAs) meetings at various schools, and in various states.

scholarships to children, especially underprivileged members of the community, notably orphans and vulnerable children. Additionally, FOMWAN implements educational programs for students at all levels. The federation establishes nursery, primary, and secondary schools that provide free education. In chapters where the association does not establish schools, members pay the fees for the recipients. They also provide scholarships for girls at the top of their high school class, which cover the complete costs of a degree program, as well as some money for upkeep. Funds for this purpose are raised through the association's Education Committee and through individual volunteer members. The local chapters identify suitable candidates and communicate to the national body through their respective chapters.

Further, since 2000, the association, under the leadership of its national committee on education, has organized an annual National Education Summit (NES), which rotates between the north and south. The essence of the NES is to encourage people, especially Muslim women, to pay more attention to education in an effort to combat low education levels among the population. All the state chapters, as well as the national body, attend and engage in a series of educational programs, ranging from an annual lecture on matters of national interest, to a national Qur'ānic recitation competition among the various state chapters, to visitation to some local hospitals, paying homage to some religious and community leaders, and launching some new FOMWAN projects, such as mosques and schools. FOMWAN's national Education Summit has been one of its major programs. It started in 2000 and has consistently been held every year. The first theme was on Capacity Building and every year, the Summit focuses on a different theme.

In the year 2015, I was a participant observer at the 15<sup>th</sup> summit, which took place at Akure - the capital of Ekiti state. It was a three-day annual event with many programs, and the year's theme was, "The Challenges of Education among the Muslim Ummah." The opening ceremony hosted the state governor, who delivered a speech on the role of religious leaders in peace-building. It was followed by FOMWAN's national Amīra's speech, which centered on the need for the authorities and philanthropists to invest in education, especially for girls, arguing that it is the bedrock of a viable society and an indication for a better tomorrow. Equally, the chairperson of the education committee delivered a speech highlighting some of FOMWAN's educational achievements since its inception in 1985. She then identified the cordial relationship with the government as a major factor that helped the association's successes and sought further support for the implementation of more viable projects. She concluded by requesting that multinational corporations support educational projects in a spirit of giving back to the communities where they operate. Later in the day, FOMWAN launched its new ultra-modern *Jumu'ah* (Friday congregational prayer) mosque and an integrated primary school complex.

Reflecting on the transformations in the educational programs of the association, the association's chairperson on education said:

So many things have changed. The last conference focused on improvement of the quality of education. We really focused on our schools. We have increasingly established and improved on FOMWAN's infrastructure. When we come to the summit we receive state reports on education. We share lived experiences and how each state shapes its programs. We ask about equipment in the science laboratory and advise on what to do. We also get information from the students as input to examine the quality of what they receive. We have increase in the enrolment rates, increase in schools establishment, and increase in the educational status of our schools. We also ask about increase in the educational qualification of our members (Prof. Lateefah Durosinmi, founding member and Education committee chair).

FOMWAN emphasizes education as an empowerment tool through focusing on a variety of levels: Nationwide through giving input within the organization, by improving on FOMWAN schools, and improving members' educational qualifications.

As with all its programs, the association releases a communique at the end of each summit and announces the venue of the next one. Also, it tracks the various lead papers presented by invited guests and compiles them in an edited book. This is done after every decade. In 2010, the compiled and edited book on all the Education Summits for 10 years (2000 – 2010) was titled, "A Decade of FOMWAN." The next edited volume is expected in 2020, which will mark the second decade of the Summit, covering from 2011 to 2020. The Summit has been the backbone of the Federation's educational programs and an avenue for members to meet, learn, engage in spiritual devotion, share the spirit of sisterhood (we-feelings), encourage and motivate members to advance their education (both sacred and secular), and above all, reflect on the past and plan for the future. The Summit is an important program that members believe serves as a think-tank for accomplishing the organizational mission.

Apart from education, another area where FOMWAN's presence is felt throughout the country is in social service delivery. This entails a wide range of activities, including generating funds to support communities after they have experienced a natural disaster, such as flood or fire, or disease epidemic, such as cholera. FOMWAN members also visit and donate to special 'populations' such as the sick in hospitals, prison inmates, orphanages, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Recently, the humanitarian service that the association engaged in is its contributions to the IDPs in the identified victims

(widows, orphans and other vulnerable persons) of the *Boko Haram* insurgency in the northeast and assisted them by hosting them in FOMWAN members' homes. The group also organized a fundraising campaign where it generated resources – money, clothes, blankets, food, and other basic necessities – for the insurgency victims. This is in addition to messages and slogans such as *Boko Halal* (as a counter to Boko Haram) that the Federation uses and publicizes through speeches, stickers, and other publication outlets.

As a participant observer, I witnessed how the Humanitarian and Social Services Committee, through a state chapter in the southwest, distributed some support materials to 70 widows. This social service was made possible both by FOMWAN's organizational system and by its partnerships. The national committee, under the chairpersonship of Alhaja Khairat Siddique, a past national president and a member of the board of trustees, provides overall direction, but local committees provide essential contacts and knowledge. It was the Kwara state committee, working with the local government unit committees, which generated the list of the widows – a sampling frame from which beneficiaries were selected. There are 14 local governments in the state, and each provided 5 widows, totaling 70 widows. The items that were distributed included refrigerator sets, grains blending machines, and power generator sets. These items are considered a take-off or capital for empowerment. They would serve as relief for the widows, but also allow them to start some small-scale businesses in order to be self-reliant.

FOMWAN equally significantly extends the reach of health services, especially translating health interventions into Islamic terms that are trusted by the local

communities. FOMWAN is particularly committed to reproductive and maternal health. It delivers health services through standard hospitals and clinics in states across the country, providing in-patient, and out-patient, antenatal and postnatal, surgical, laboratory, radiology, VVF repairs, and other services to their community. The Federation embarks on awareness campaigns for the prevention and treatment of deadly and communicable diseases like HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and others. Equally, the association emphasizes creating awareness in communities on reproductive health. FOMWAN extensively collaborates with agencies, organizations, governments, and other stakeholders to ensure availability of medical services, especially in rural communities.

In many fragile states like Nigeria, Islamic organizations have such legitimacy and constituency, that it would be hard to effect substantial change without their participation (Kaplan, 2015). This is because governments may barely exist outside a few cities. In such situations, close-knit religious groups and some traditional social groupings that have a strong religious component, provide the most reliable form of security, justice, and support, especially to the poor. Religious organizations are often the local groups working among the destitute, filling in for the state where it is too feeble to provide even basic schooling and healthcare. As a result, various studies have concluded that there is enormous potential in more purposeful efforts to partner development issues, practices, and organizations with Muslim traditions and actors (The Berkley Center and Center for International and Regional Studies, 2007).

Being an all-female Islamic organization FOMWAN is deeply enmeshed in communities across Nigeria, thereby earning the confidence of the local communities and



gaining the capacity to considerably extend the reach of health services to them. For example, the state chapter in Kano, trains traditional birth attendants (TBAs) to conform to international health minimum standards. It equipped the TBAs with the skills and logistics needed to provide effective services in their respective communities, thus, reflecting the local needs of clients.

A particular concrete example of FOMWAN's religious dimension and its role in improving the health sector is in its fight against polio. The northern region was particularly impacted by polio because of ignorance and cultural prejudices, alleging that the polio vaccines were deliberately contaminated in an attempt to reduce the population of Muslims in Nigeria (Yahaya, 2007). But with FOMWAN's active aggressive door-to-door campaigns, extensively embarking on sensitization and mobilization programs, and rigorously seeking the cooperation and active participation of the traditional authorities, success was recorded. This led to the World Health Organization (WHO)'s removal of Nigeria from the list of Polio Endemic Nations in the world.<sup>71</sup> The success of that exercise is undoubtedly attributed to the active participation of faith-related agencies such as FOMWAN. The role of religion in development therefore cannot be overlooked, especially in sub-Saharan Africa where many development projects fail due to proposed innovations' clash with local people's ideas, values, beliefs, and social norms.

The above supports ter Haar's (2011) claim that it is in the health sector where the importance of the religious dimension is the most visible. All the world's main religions

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<sup>71</sup> See WHO website for details: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2015/nigeria-polio/en/>

have health and healing as central tenets of their faith. This leads inevitably to religious communities being engaged in “health-related activities, and in many cases, formal provision of healthcare as an expression of that faith” (Olivier, 2015, p. 346). Recently, international development partners have realized the necessity to re-engage faith agencies in various health development projects. This follows a concern about the broader relationship between healthcare and society, which is reflected in discussions about the decline of popular trust in health systems (Birungi, 1998; Davies, 1999; Mechanic, 2001; Tandler & Freedheim, 1994). Thiede (2005) posits that trust assumes a key position in health information, communication, and exchange between the health system and individuals.<sup>72</sup> Mistrust becomes especially obvious in post-colonial contexts such as Nigeria, where health systems that had predominantly been offered by religious bodies were reconfigured after independence, and replaced by modern secular healthcare systems.

Thus, the success of the polio eradication program championed by FOMWAN is not a surprise – religion is a potentially important factor in individual health-related decision making. Again, this points to the fact that religious institutions such as FOMWAN hold untapped resources and assets in addressing many social issues – health included. Suffice it to say that the success in the fight against polio in Nigeria is attributed to the community’s trust in FOMWAN as a facilitator of patient-provider

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<sup>72</sup>Gilson (2003) argues that at the heart of healthcare provision is the patient/provider interaction. The effective delivery of healthcare requires not only the supply of care but also the acceptance and use of services by the patient. A trusting patient/provider relationship is rooted in specific expectations and personal behavior (p.1459).

interaction. Apart from trust, other factors that played out include effective organizational structure, partnership, networking, grassroots-orientation, and members' acceptance in almost every community where they operate.<sup>73</sup>

Another area of FOMWAN's social engagement is an attempt to bridge ethno-religious divides through interfaith dialogue. Despite its abundant resources, Nigeria is infamous for ethno-religious crises (Usman, 1987). Lamenting this reality, Salawu (2010) argues that Nigeria provides one of the best case studies of ethno-religious conflicts. With over 400 ethnic groups distributed between the two major religions (Christianity and Islam), Nigeria since independence, has produced, "a catalogue of ethno-religious conflicts that resulted in an estimated loss of over three million lives and unquantifiable psychological and material damages" (p. 345). Falola (1998) describes the situation:

Nigeria has been a major African theatre of religious violence and aggression... The imperfect distribution of adherents to Islam and Christianity is complicated by ethnic differences: the north is predominantly Muslim, and the southeast is predominantly Christian. It is only southwestern Nigeria where both religions are equally represented. The institutionalization of religious violence and the aggressive competition for dominance by Islam and Christianity continue to have a negative impact on the Nigerian nation (p.1).

Falola (1998) notes here that these conflicts are long-standing. Several studies have confirmed that there had long been sectarian crises in Nigeria in all the various regions and across all religions – traditional, Islam, and Christianity.<sup>74</sup> The early 1980's witnessed one of the deadliest religious and ethnic crises.<sup>75</sup> Central to our discussion is

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<sup>73</sup> For details about such strategies that the association adopts to achieve success, see the next chapter (Chapter Four).

<sup>74</sup> See (Paden, 1973; Usman, 1987; Anwar 1992; Hunwick, 1992; Kane, 1994; Loimeier 1997; Umar 2003; Kane 2003; Soares and Otayek, 2007; and Paden, 2008).

<sup>75</sup> The Maitatsine crisis in Kano is an outstanding example. Muhammadu Marwa Maitatsine who

the inter-religious clashes between Muslims and Christians, which claim thousands of innocent lives, lead to loss of properties, render thousands homeless, and force many families into becoming internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Strikingly, FOMWAN came and played a vital role in engaging both the major religions in interfaith dialogue. One of the founding members of such interfaith dialogue explains:

We the women of faith (Christians and Muslim) observed that we are always the victims of ethno-religious crises and post-election violence. We are left as widows with orphans and without support from the politicians who use us and dump us. We then decided to say no to all these threat. How? Through consultations and forming an Interfaith Women Peace Movement (IWPM) which led to peaceful conduct of the 2015 general elections and a sustainable peaceful coexistence among all of us (Interview with Mrs. Layatu Joseph, the President Women's Wing of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Bauchi State Chapter, July, 2015).

The interfaith dialogue that FOMWAN began, in partnership with the CAN Women's Wing, was accompanied by a series of networking programs, which promoted mutual understanding and increased trust-building among members of the different faiths and backgrounds. The interfaith dialogue has immensely contributed to Nigeria's civil society by bridging ethno-religious divides, reducing religious and ethnic clashes, and minimizing post-election violence.

Related to the above, FOMWAN also explicitly trains women for civic engagement. One of the results of the consultations during the interfaith dialogue was

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migrated from Cameroon, was the leader of the sect that was opposed by both the dominant Sūfi and the Wahhabi Muslim orders. The sect is associated with its leader, and as a result, both the sect and the crisis were named after its founder. Equally, there were other religious/ethnic crises in other parts of the country especially Kaduna state. They include in places such as Zaria, Kafanchan, Kajuru, and Zangon-Kataf.

formidable civic engagement. Adler and Goggin (2005) define civic engagement as “the ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community’s future” (p. 236). Civic engagement takes many forms, including individual voluntarism to organizational involvement, working with others in a community to solve a problem, or electoral participation. In essence, civically engaged citizens have the ability, agency, and opportunity to move comfortably among various types of civic acts. This means individuals or civil associations have the power to socialize participants into a norm of generalized reciprocity, communication, and trust that improves the quality of social integration, equality of opportunity, and subsequently breeds political and civic values. Donors, with support from academic research (Almond & Verba, 1963; Diamond, 1999; Putnam, 1993), became increasingly convinced that successful democratic consolidations required a strong and independent civil society that could mobilize an informed citizenry to advocate on behalf of its interests and hold elites accountable. Faith-related agencies are critical players in such mobilization, and FOMWAN is deeply involved.

FOMWAN’s activities include providing civic education to the populace. Through civic education, FOMWAN embarked on voter education, instruction about the social and political rights of citizens, and neighborhood problem solving. They also organized resistance against election violence, vote buying or selling, ballot box snatching, and aggressive behaviors against election staff. They even assisted in safeguarding the cast votes, ensuring people’s votes counted and promoting the peaceful resolution of political disputes. These efforts resulted to successful, free, fair, and

acceptable general election in Nigeria during the first time in the country's history that an opposition party took over from a ruling party in 2015.

Prior to the elections, tension was high and fears of the unknown (including the country's disintegration) were common. A huge number of voters in Nigeria and in many sub-Saharan African countries are women. Yet, the majority of these women are not informed about their civic rights.<sup>76</sup> Through civic education, FOMWAN has been able to facilitate the successful process of democratic transition in Nigeria. Notably, the efforts of these women of faith persist beyond the general election period. These activities that FOMWAN engages in form part of Nigeria's civic culture.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter speaks to larger sociological questions about the role of female religious organizations, especially Muslim ones, in the formation of civil society in the global south. It traces the origins of FOMWAN, describing how it was founded, and examines its organizational structure and activities. The chapter also examines the fragile nature of the Nigerian state, identifying some of the social issues that characterize it. There are serious political, economic, and social crises – including prolonged military rule and corruption. The population was beset by illiteracy, poverty, widespread disease, infant mortality, ethnic and communal clashes, and many other social ills. In response to that fragility, many non-governmental organizations emerged, including faith-related

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<sup>76</sup> See Boserup, E. (1970), *Women in Economic Development*. London: Allen and Unwin; Duverger, M. (1975). *The Political Role of Women*, Paris: UNESCO; and Agina-ude, A. (2003). "Strategies for Expanding Female Participation, in 2003 Election and beyond." *The Nigerian Social Scientist*, Vol.6, No.3, pp.21-23; and Ezilo, J. (2000) "The 1999 Constitution, the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Women Question", *The Nigerian Juridical Review*, Vol.8, pp.161-167.

agencies such as FOMWAN.

In the early 1980's, a group of concerned Western educated Muslim women came together from various groups to agree that there were a lot of problems affecting Nigerian Muslim women and a lack of one voice with which the women could speak. Although these women belonged to various Muslim groups, none of them could address the multifarious challenges of Muslim women. The group had a common interest, common goals, and a common value-orientation. Members unanimously voted for founding an association that would speak with one voice for all Muslim women in Nigeria. They found FOMWAN in 1985. The formation of modern-day federation came through the alumni of high schools and universities. As an umbrella organization, the association brings various professional Muslim women's associations together to achieve their objectives.<sup>77</sup>

In a variety of ways, FOMWAN's Islamic identity and its work for the common good have infused its organizational strategies and structures. The association provides a variety of activities such as education, *Da'wa* services, training in vocational skills, health, and humanitarian services, among others based on arising needs. FOMWAN provides these services by organizing committees headed by experts, extensively using networks, as well as taking advantage of partnerships with associations, notably international secular donors. The work happens through a structure that reflects the Nigerian administrative system: National, state, and local levels, with zonal coordinators

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<sup>77</sup> These associations include the Muslim Sisters' Organization, the National Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ), Muslim Women's Medical Association, Women's wing of Jama'atu Nasril Islam, and so on.

that are in charge of clustered states for easy operation, whose capacities are multiplied through hundreds of affiliates and partners nationwide and internationally. FOMWAN is present in almost every corner of the country, particularly in northern and western Nigeria where Muslims constitute the majority of the population.

FOMWAN was founded on the need for the emancipation of Muslim women from various forms of domination and oppression, notably lack of education, unemployment, and a denial of their agency. The sources of these problems were multiple and multilayered - mainly illiteracy, patriarchy, and cultural, social, and economic deprivation. From its inception in 1985, FOMWAN has engaged in activities aimed at overcoming those obstacles, as well as attempting to bridge ethno-religious divides through interfaith dialogue. In the process, it has created religious culture – symbols of solidarity and a space for amassing religious capital.<sup>78</sup>

There is much debate about the effects of a religious organizational culture on the women who participate in it across various religious traditions. Griffith's (1997) research on Women's Aglow Fellowship – an evangelical organization inspired by a Christian men's group, explores the complex role that women of faith play within the Pentecostal movement. Davidman's (1991) research focused on the motives of a group of young, secular Jewish women's religious resocialization into the Jewish orthodox tradition. Similarly, Sered (1992) studied the religious beliefs and rituals of a group of mainly illiterate elderly Jewish women from Yemen living in Jerusalem. Within the Islamic

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<sup>78</sup> Details about how the group created a religious culture and the ways by which that culture facilitates in bettering the lives of women, empowering them, and advancing human progress, are provided in Chapters Four and Five.



tradition, Mahmood's (2005) research examines a grassroots women's piety movement in the mosques of Cairo, Egypt and how its moral reform combines the ethical and the political to attain individual freedom and self-realization. In the West African sub-region, Alidou's (2013) work examines how Muslim women in Kenya using their religious and moral beliefs, are emerging as leaders, effecting change, and advancing reforms through activism. These studies point to how religious organizational culture empowers women who participate in it and the community. It gives them the agency and autonomy to struggle and survive within male-dominated systems despite challenges.

As Falola and Amponsab (2012) argue, religion may serve to determine gender-related behaviors, but it may also enable people to act independently of the stereotypes that define gender. Women in particular, have utilized Africa's religious movements to shape the perception of themselves, providing strategies for their relations with men and with the larger society. They and other authors argue that religious organizations can enhance women's ability to act and garner power and provide strategies for surviving social, economic, and political hardships. This is the case with FOMWAN, as it creates coping strategies and mechanisms to positively impact members and the general public. FOMWAN creates these possibilities for agency and empowerment through its combination of secular professionalization and religious capital. Its leaders are predominantly educated and professional women, most of whom are well-to-do. They have standing and connections in the economic and political world. Yet it is their religious faith that motivates them to remain committed to the work of FOMWAN by investing their time, energy, physical work, and other resources, including networking

and partnership with secular donors.

Partnership with religious agencies in development is a testimony that religion has always had, and continues to have, profound implications for social organization and change in all regions. As a case in point, sub-Saharan Africa has been “transformed in fundamental ways by religious changes over the past half-century, and faith institutions and ideas have had significant influence, direct or subtle, on thinking about development” (Marshall, 2011, p. 32). The Federation’s ability to deliver services through productive partnership with secular donor agencies demonstrates that it is an agent of transformation that effects change in the lives of the communities. In development contexts, therefore, “*faith matters*” (Clarke, 2007, p. 846, emphasis in original). It also points to how gender plays out in contributing to civil society, illustrating how Nigerian Muslim women navigate their challenges and make meaning in their everyday lives. It has equally demonstrated how the women utilize religious capital as their major coping mechanism and powerful means for achieving their organizational goals, thereby contributing to the nation’s fragile state. Details about what FOMWAN envisions, how it achieves its ideal society, and the implications of such in Nigeria’s plural state are the subject of Chapter Four.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **THE RELIGIOUS CULTURE CREATED BY FOMWAN**

This chapter examines the unique religious culture that FOMWAN has created, identifying how members create and use symbols, religious space, and ritual performance to make sense of what they do. It highlights how such culture effects change in the lives of members and nonmembers in their communities. The religious culture of FOMWAN, as described in this chapter, serves as a toolkit of habits, skills, and styles from which members construct their strategies of action. The Federation’s creation of religious culture and its agency can be viewed as part of “‘Ajamīzation of Islam” – the multiple tangible and subtle enrichments of Islamic traditions that result from their dynamic interplay with local customs in the Muslim world (Fallou & Kurfi, 2017, p.3). We shall see how members utilize religious symbols, space, knowledge, utterances, and rituals and creatively combine them with their local traditional wisdom to address their immediate challenges, empower themselves, effect positive change, and contribute to Nigeria’s plural society.

#### **Religious Symbols**

FOMWAN’s religious culture creates the capacity for members to pursue their religious values. One of the most important aspects of FOMWAN’s religious culture is its public use of visual symbols. Symbols, as used here, are material things that the Federation members revere and use, during ritual performance. This group has produced many material things that bear their identity and shape the identity of the group.

The goal of my study includes an examination of how Muslim women create a

unique Islamic culture, and how they use that culture to effect changes in members and the larger society. My research strategy here, participant observation (though also triangulating), was to immerse myself in the setting in which members' public actions occurred. These research methods would allow me to hear not only narrative experiences of members (Information I obtained through in-depth interviewing) but to experience the contexts, speeches/talk/words, ideas, and relationships that constitute the organization's unique religious culture (Davidman, 1991). Ritual requires the use of symbols, rich in cognitive and affective meaning (Turner, 2015).

I served as a volunteer during three of the organization's national programs – the National Executive Council Meeting at the national secretariat, Abuja in 2014; its 14<sup>th</sup> National Education Summit at Ado-Ekiti, Edo State in 2015; and its 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary at Ilorin, Kwara State in 2015 – which gave me ample opportunity to participate, observe, and understand the distinctive religious culture that members create. Wuthnow (2011) argues that field observation provides the opportunity to identify the importance of symbolism, ritual, and discourse in the construction of religious meaning making. Field researchers directly observe and interact with members in natural settings to get inside their perspective (Neuman, 2003).

At FOMWAN's National Convention in March, 2015, which took place at the organization's national headquarters in Abuja, some participants cooked and served meals for all attendees. As a volunteer observer, I too was served the same food that every participant ate. There is a schedule of activities that each state chapter is assigned and compliance is necessary and violation attracts a "fine." Inquisitive to learn about the

mechanism and rationale for the participants' action, members said that they engage in such rituals to ensure that there is a smooth running of activities. They also mentioned economic reasons such as, "it saves us money when we cook ourselves as against placing orders from hotels or restaurants," said Fauziyya. Other reasons include, "it is a time to reunion with members that we have not met in a very long time," according to Shafa'atu. Generally, on such occasions, one will unmistakably witness a sense of togetherness shared by participants.<sup>79</sup>

### *Organizational Paraphernalia*

Members represent each state chapter to display some of the initiatives, skills, and organizational products that they produce and sell at national events. During these meetings, each state chapter presents various products that it produces for sale to participants. Some brought clothes, hijābs, handbags, and shoes. Others brought household materials, such as antiseptics, detergent, perfume, soap, and the likes. Many of these products are labeled with the FOMWAN logo. It is a mini "market" – an avenue for members to display, buy, and sell the products that fellow state chapters produced from their various cottage/local manufacturing industries. It is also a medium through which the national body sells its publications (quarterly reports, bi-annual magazines, and other products, such as the one in the image displayed below (Figure 10), which are mandatory for each state chapter to purchase).

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<sup>79</sup> The fact that participants are deeply engaged in selfless service that they consider religious is captivating, corroborating Durkheim's (1969) postulate that what is done in the name of religion cannot be in vain, it is humanity that has reaped the fruits.

Respondents informed me that this market is a way of encouraging members to be creative, self-reliant (vis-à-vis outsourcing for funds), and to socialize. Each state chapter is encouraged to set up a cottage industry, train members and nonmembers in vocational skills, and provide training grounds for empowerment. Here, we see how the manifest (meeting for association's activities) and latent (sales, socialization, and income generation) functions of members' social action play out in creating a unique culture. Additionally, there were the typical associational logos and nametags, customized notepads, pens, and much more.

#### *Dress*

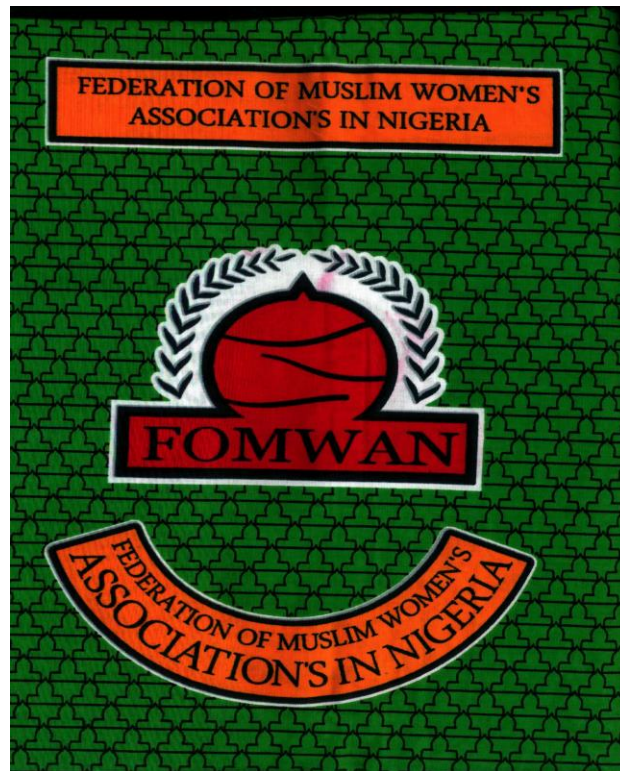
The use of FOMWAN's vestment and the ḥijāb symbolizes a distinct Islamic identity and creates a culture of solidarity among members. Religious dress, practices, and organizational affiliations serve as important identity markers that help promote individual self-awareness and preserve group cohesion (Peek, 2005).

At the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, every delegate wore the same kind of clothes. A customized kind of wrap printed in green, with orange color stripes, carried FOMWAN's logo inscribed in white – becoming an official religious dress, attire, or vestment for all members. On top of the vestment, members were all in white ḥijābs as an “after-dress.” It is worth noting that the kind of ḥijābs that members wear is the one that covers their heads and comes downward all the way to their knees or below (also called the *abāya*). Their faces are open, unlike the *niqāb* or *burqa* which cover the faces and perhaps leave

only the eyes visible.<sup>80</sup> A member described the multiple layers of symbolic meaning this clothing holds:

The national body came up with this *atamfa* vestment, and asked all chapter members to buy and wear on this occasion. Also, we are all in white *ḥijābs* because it is the Prophetic tradition (Sunna) to wear white clothes on Fridays... We are not here for a show off or participate in a fashion design or a pageant. As such, we humbly dress uniformly... (Interview with Hajiya Salamatu Ibrahim, a founding member).

**Figure 10. Sample of the Specially-made wrap that FOMWAN Members wore at Its National Convention which marked the Association's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

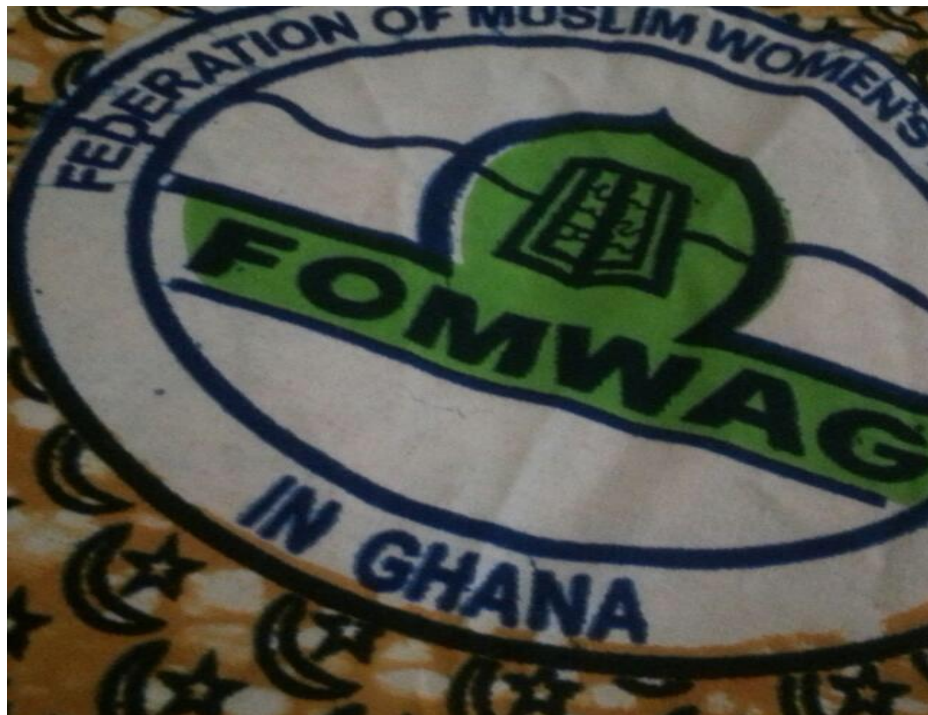


Source: Picture taken in 2015 by Mustapha Kurfi

<sup>80</sup> In *all* the activities and programs of FOMWAN that I participated in, I observed only *one* person wearing a *niqāb*. She is an executive member and has consistently used it. The short type, a piece of *ḥijāb* that covers the head and neck -- the one commonly used in the West is rarely seen among the Federation's members. This points to a unique religious material culture that the association has established which accommodates plural practice. Figures 16 and 18 show the type of *ḥijāb* that the group commonly uses.

Using religious dress or clothing is “a medium of non-verbal communication, by which religious identity and meaning is visually expressed and/or perceived and thus communicated” (Grigo, 2011, p. 210). It has become FOMWAN’s organizational ritual to make and wear special customized clothes during specific performances, programs, or events. This practice is not unique to national events, but also applies at the state chapter level. In fact, such rituals transcend Nigeria to other countries where FOMWAN has inspired and facilitated the establishment of similar organizations. These countries include as Ghana, Gambia, Senegal, Sierra-Leone, Mauritania, Mauritius, the United Kingdom, and most recently, Australia.

**Figure 11. The Specially-made wrap that Representatives from Ghana Sister Organization wore at FOMWAN’s National Convention and 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**



Source: Picture taken in 2015 by Mustapha Kurfi.



**Figure 12. A Banner of the Federation of Muslim Women’s Associations in the UK (FOMWA-UK) brought by Its Delegates at FOMWAN’s 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**



Source: Picture taken in 2015 by Mustapha Kurfi. Some of the men seen are guests and volunteers attending the event while the man in front of the banner is a deaf interpreter for the occasion.

FOMWAN members’ use of material culture such as their corporate vestment (attire), shared feelings at cooking, sharing and serving meals to one another, as well as using meeting space for other multiple purposes, explains the organizational action based on its identity and solidarity. Through such activities, members create a unique culture that is collectively shared – a religious culture with multiple dimensions, and with impact on the participants. One example is during the group’s 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in a session in which a documentary of the association formation was viewed. It featured the pictures of the founding members that established the association. During the trip, one of them was involved in an accident and died on the spot. She was Laura Na’iya Sada. It had been 30

years since her death, yet, by eulogizing her, most of the participants began to cry with the memories of the deceased and the tragic event. Showing that documentary and watching that scene brought the past to the present in members' minds and thus, revitalized the most essential element of the collective consciousness of the members.

As Somers (1994) argues, understanding human action requires a deeper analysis achieved through linking concepts of action and identity. Through narrative identity we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and constitute the social identities of actors. Narrativity demands that we discern the meaning of any single event only in temporal and spatial relationship to other parts. It provides the opportunity to engage with historically and empirically based research into social action and social agency that is at once temporal, relational, and cultural, as well as institutional, material, and macro-structural.

The ways in which people understand their own relationship to the past, future, and present *make a difference* to their actions; changing conceptions of agentic possibility in relation to structural contexts “profoundly influence how actors in different periods and places see their worlds as responsive to human imagination, purpose, and effort” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 973). The sacred remains a powerful social force in the modern world, and it is found and experienced collectively as participants experience some form of shared moral sentiment. The beliefs are at work only when they are shared. FOMWAN members share moral sentiments in various sites, sometimes physical spaces. I now turn to discuss such organizational space and examine how it plays out in creating a religious culture.

*Religious Space*

Essential to the religious culture FOMWAN has constructed are the physical spaces that it occupies. Members strive for, and insist on having their own space. They believe that having spaces such as mosques, the association headquarters, schools, and Islamic centers, helps to form and retain their identity. These spaces are the sites in which many of the organization's rituals are performed, and a unique religious culture is created. The spaces become settings that could allow me to do exactly what I wanted: To observe and participate intensively in the ongoing process of the religious creation and transmission of meanings.<sup>81</sup>

We have seen in Chapter Three, under FOMWAN's organizational structure and activities, that the pattern of activities that the national body embarks on is replicated at the state and local chapters, yet with some leverage for modifications pending the express approval of the national body. Similarly, the national body encourages every state and local chapter to have its own space for effective service delivery. As with many activities, where a chapter is unable to occupy a space, it solicits support from the national body, as a member explains:

We the Muslims in Imo State [South Eastern Nigeria] are a minority and although our Islamic school is promising but the major problem we are facing is occupying a land and erecting a space we can call ours because it is not easy... It is very expensive and we may not be sold one ... We need the national body to come to our rescue (Hajiya Rakiya Munka'il Mohammed, FOMWAN Amīra, Imo state, June 2015).

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<sup>81</sup> Davidman, L. (1991). *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism*. Angeles: University of California Press, p. 50.

**Figure 13. Main Entrance to FOMWAN National Headquarters, Abuja**



Source: Hajiya Amina Omoti, the National Amīra, September 2017.

In a follow up interview, a member sums up why having their own space is important as follows:

FOMWAN space allows for effective co-ordination and documentation of members' activities. The networking efforts of FOMWAN with other relevant organizations, including donor agencies call for official interaction... [It provides] a source of revenue by renting some of the apartments, conference rooms, and hostels out. It gives credence and means of identification for an umbrella organization of all Muslim women (Hajiya Bilkisu Oladimeji, FOMWAN National Executive member).

Another member describes what it means for them to have their own space, recounting what the situation was prior to the present:

Before we got our permanent secretariat and all the facilities on it, we were renting space which was very expensive and inefficient. This is Abuja -- a very expensive city... Whenever we had a national event, we used to pay so much money to stay in hotels and sometimes led us to arrive at the meeting venues late because of heavy traffic... But now, we come to our national headquarters directly, stay in our hostels instead of going to hotels or relatives' homes, and we have enough time to interact with one another, especially those we have not seen in a long time. Now, we no longer pay for conference room since we have ours. Now, we are adding a library to what we have... (Hajiya Surura Oyero, FOMWAN National Public Relations Officer).

The last point that Hajiya Surura mentions points to a different set of advantages that the association gains from having their own religious space – an expansion in service.

Without having a space of their own, members might not have had the opportunity to expand and include a library, among other services. This is further confirmed by another member who says:

At the National Secretariat, we have improved from what you witnessed during your last visits in [2015 and 2016]. We already had hostels and now apartment complexes which are up-to-standard -- fully furnished with Air conditioners, cable satellite, and hot water heaters. They are the hostels that we lodge in when we have events but we now rent them out and generate revenue... It therefore performs multiple functions. So, apart from the conference room, which we use, as well rent out, we have opened up a new FOMWAN Halal Kitchen/Restaurant. On the second floor, we are now constructing a library. All these are aside our administration block. As you enter through the main gate, you will see our mosque. Alhaji Aliko Dangote [the richest man in Africa] has taken over the project and completed finish it ... (Hajiya Amina Omoti, FOMWAN National Amīra, 2017).

**Figure 14. FOMWAN Central Mosque, National Secretariat, Abuja**



Source: Hajiya Maryam Othman, a past FOMWAN National President. The mosque was commissioned by His Eminence, The Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa’ad Abubakar III on January 26, 2018. The buses in front of the mosque are the association’s vehicles.

Members believe and frequently mention that FOMWAN is a “leveler” that brings all together, and that is further reinforced by their spaces, including the organization’s headquarters, mosques, conference halls, and hostels. When religious members define themselves, first and foremost, in religious terms, their ethnic variations and other identities become less problematic, and diverse communities are brought together through shared worship (Peek, 2005). In all the members’ interactions at these

sites or spaces, clearly there is some sense of selflessness, shared feeling, and community evident among members. At FOMWAN spaces, members form a “Communitas” state that allows the community to share a common experience and brings everyone to an equal level (Turner, 1974, p. 273).

**Figure 15. Front View of FOMWAN Hostels at Its National Headquarters, Abuja**



Source: Hajiya Amina Omoti, the National Amīra September 2017.

From members’ explanations of what it means to own a space of their own, two forms of social capital are obtained: Bonding (exclusive) and bridging (inclusive) social capital. Bonding social capital occurs among homogeneous populations, while bridging social capital occurs among heterogeneous populations (Putnam, 2000b). At FOMWAN’s national secretariat, where members lodge at the hostels, and other associational

activities, such as committee meetings, conferences, lectures, and training sessions are held, members are engaged in interaction with one another – having a sense of solidarity and we-feeling. Additionally, members utilize the space to engage in interaction with other non-members (heterogeneous) such as inter-religious groups and secular partners, thereby using a bridging capital for coordination, collaboration, and cooperation.

FOMWAN members believe that having a space of their own enables them to be more engaged in spiritual devotions, improves their networks, and opens more opportunities for empowerment, including serving as a training ground for community, legal, and legislative advocacy. This confirms the claim that bonding social capital is good for “getting by” but bridging social capital is essential for “getting ahead” (Putnam, 2000b, p. 23).

Attending mosques is not uncommon among the Yoruba Muslim women in Southwestern Nigeria, but it is not a common practice among Hausa Muslim women in the North, except among women belonging to Shī‘a community, who are often seen in meetings, demonstrations, and processions (Mustapha & Bunza, 2014). Nevertheless, through FOMWAN’s agency of occupying religious spaces and establishing various outlets to accommodate secular activities, such practice is common in the North and all over the country. As a result, the association is creating a religious symbol and culture that allow members to exert agency and make meaning in their daily lives and the lives of nonmembers. This finding supports Prickett’s (2014) study which reveals that African American Muslim women use the mosque as a physical space to enact public performances of religious identity in addition to expanding to include a project of



religious self-making that bonds American Muslim women together. Actors who feel blocked in encountering problematic situations can actually be pioneers in exploring and reconstructing contexts of action (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

On the whole, FOMWAN's efforts and ability to have its own religious space perform multiple functions that include providing more freedom for spiritual experience with the divine, an enhancement of connection with God due to being surrounded by others who share same beliefs, and enabling people to connect with one another and help to center individuals' lives with meaning and direction (Thiessen & McAlpine, 2013). The fact that FOMWAN considers and treats its space open to not only Islamic sacred services, but also to secular services speaks to how members are creating a culture of hospitality and a redefinition of what they mean by a religious space and what it means to be Muslim women in Nigeria's plural state. More so, by hosting interfaith dialogue among other meetings with secular organizations in its secretariat, FOMWAN demonstrates a culture of religious tolerance that it has created to achieve its corporate goals.

As Davidman (1991) asserts, religion acts as a mediator between the public and the private spheres. In modern society, we are often taught to seek a great deal of our satisfaction within the private sphere because the public realm has become too institutionalized and bureaucratic. "However, we are simultaneously surrounded by signs of trouble in the private sphere" (p. 199). FOMWAN members resorted to dealing with some of these challenges within the religious sphere by constructing a unique Islamic culture, and practicing at their sites or spaces. FOMWAN's construction of the culture of

occupying religious space and utilizing it to extend to diverse activities illustrates how the women exercise agency – constructing their religious selves through observance and conduct (Avishai, 2008). It demonstrates how they are capable of constructing modes of religious being that further their own interests (Read & Bartkowski, 2000).

### **Knowledge of the Scripture as a Rhetorical Resource**

Fundamental to spiritual practice in Islam is knowledge about every act. By implication, one is required to have knowledge about what to do, when, and how. Against this background, the search for knowledge has been the cornerstone of FOMWAN, as evidenced by their concerns with establishing schools, organizing lectures and symposia, and annual education summits, among other educational programs. Importantly, members have demonstrated mastery of knowledge of the scripture as we have consistently observed during interviews and all the sessions and programs of the association.

The submitting men, the submitting women, the believing men, the believing women, the obedient men, the obedient women, the truthful men, the truthful women, the steadfast men, the steadfast women, the reverent men, the reverent women, the charitable men, the charitable women, the fasting men, the fasting women, the chaste men, the chaste women, and the men who commemorate God frequently, and the commemorating women; God has prepared for them forgiveness and a great recompense (Q 33:35).

The above is one of the numerous Qur'ānic verses often cited by most of the subjects that I and my research team interviewed, indicating that men and women are equal in the eyes of God vis-à-vis Islamic piety. It demonstrates the members' knowledge of the Qur'ān – a major symbol of the faith. Members argue that Islam has a heritage of Muslim women working for *Da'wa* - Islamic proselytizing and community development. Additionally, members frequently cite the first chapter that was believed to be revealed to the Prophet,

which starts with the verse that translates “Read” (Q 96:1). As we have seen throughout this dissertation, FOMWAN members have demonstrated a mastery of Islamic texts, notably the Qur’ān, the ḥadīth, as well as *fiqh* – Islamic jurisprudence. This knowledge of Islam is both obvious and critical in performing rituals, amassing religious culture, and effecting change in the lives of members and the larger society.

A member provides a rationale for their emphasis on education, especially religious knowledge:

We believe once we have an educated society, both Islamic and Western, we will be able to propagate Islam and contribute to the society... Knowledge could take you to anywhere. That’s the legacy that anyone could be proud of... That was what our role models like Nana Asma’u did, and we are building on that... (Interview with Honorable Maimuna Momodu, Amīra Edo state).

The quest for education, which FOMWAN believes is a condition for achieving its organizational vision of *a world where women are properly educated and equipped for an equitable and peaceful society*, is rooted in Islamic history, and members often use this as a source of inspiration.<sup>82</sup> The stories of women in the early days of Islam are told by FOMWAN leaders and members, forming a narrative foundation for their own identities as Muslim women or what I call “*imitatio sābiqāt al-Mu’mināt*.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Details about FOMWAN’s vision and how it aims at attaining the ideal society that it envisions are provided in Chapter Five.

<sup>83</sup> This means a group of devoted women who have been following the paths of predecessor pious Muslim women and imitating them in spirituality. In coining this concept, I follow Faisal Fatehali Devji’s (2001) “Imitatio Muhammadi” -- a tradition of emulating the virtues of the Prophet (p. 363). Equally, I follow Fallou Ngom’s (2016) “Imitatio *Ṣaḥābī*” – a tradition of emulating the ethical qualities of the companions of the Prophet (p. 105). Similarly, FOMWAN members imitate dutiful women in Islam including but not limited to Nana Maryam, Nana Khadīja, Nana, and Nana Asma’u. These are forerunners that have laid the foundations and legacies that the association members build on. The concept *imitatio sābiqāt al-Mu’mināt* therefore encapsulates the social actions of the Federation members, inspired by early Muslim leaders. I did not use the term *salaf al-Ṣālihāt* because it is mostly used to describe the three generations who came after the Prophet – the *Ṣaḥāba*,

Among the most important was the Prophet's wife locally called Nana Khadīja who first believed in his mission, together with his first cousin, and later son-in-law, Ali bn Abi-.<sup>84</sup> More so, Nana Khadīja, being among the richest merchants in Mecca, was credited with being the Prophet's strongest supporter, risking her life to rejection of family and ethnic group (Ahmed, 1992). Nana Khadīja's contributions to Islam were enormous, providing inspiration and motivation to later generations, including FOMWAN.

After Nana Khadīja died, the Prophet married other women, and Nana 'A'isha bint Abubakar (also nicknamed the Mother of Believers). She was the youngest and the most outstanding of them. She was endowed with knowledge and is a major authority on ḥadith literature. She is reported to have narrated up to 2,210 ḥadiths – more than many other narrators, including some of the *Sahabah*, the companions of the Prophet (Zubayr, 1961). Nana 'A'isha is among the seven leading narrators of ḥadiths and the only female among them.<sup>85</sup> These ḥadiths teach many aspects of Islam, mainly ritual performances. Besides endowed knowledge, Nana 'A'isha took part in politics and became a role-model for Muslim women (Mernissi, 1993). Like Nana Khadīja, Nana 'A'isha is a heroine, a source of inspiration and motivation to FOMWAN members, as re-echoed in *all* their

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the Tābi'ūn, and the Tābi'-al-Tābi'ūn (Roel & Meijer, 2014). This classification then excludes generations before the Prophet such as Nana Maryam and generations that came after centuries, including Nana Asma'u's. But *sābiqāt al-Mu'mināt* best describes the case at hand. In addition, the term *salaf* in recent times has been used by some jihādist groups, whose philosophy contradicts FOMWAN members'.

<sup>84</sup> Stowasser, B. F. (1994). *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press, p.46.

<sup>85</sup> They are sequentially presented as follows: Abu Hurairah, Sa'ad bin Abu Waqqas, Jabir bin Abdullah, Anas bin Malik, Aisha bint Abubakar (Mother of the believers), Abdullahi bin Abbas, and Abdullahi bin Umar.

interviews, publications, and speeches.

Besides women around the Prophet, there were other prominent Muslim women whose inventiveness inspired and motivated FOMWAN members. The Virgin Mary, Nana Maryam (as she is called in Hausaland) is oftentimes cited by the members as a pious woman whose religious devotion inspires them. In recent times, Nana Asma'u is another such outstanding woman. As we have seen in chapters two and three, Nana Asma'u was the daughter of Usman dān Fodiyo, the founder of the Sokoto caliphate in Northern Nigeria. She was from a learned family that was responsible for the jihād that revived Islam in Northern Nigeria and helped in spreading it beyond the region. Nana Asma'u was a highly educated woman, who played an active role in the jihād that started in 1804, along with her father, her brother (Muhammad Bello), and her uncle (Abdullahi Gwandu). She was the secretary to her father and an advisor on administrative matters to her brother Muhammad Bello who later became the caliph. She wrote poems and elegies that facilitated the spread of literacy as part of the jihād. She was a prolific writer in Arabic, Fulfulde, Hausa, and Tamashek (Ajami). Her strategies of teaching, promoting scholarship, and social justice were very striking, especially in a traditional society. FOMWAN members emulate her and imitate her. In fact, the current president of the Yan-taru Movement that Nana Asma'u founded is Professor Sadiya Omar, a past national Amīra of FOMWAN and a serving member of the board.

Prior to the first revelation to the Prophet, women in the Arabian Peninsula were not respected. They had no right to inheritance and to maintain their own wealth. But Islam significantly enhanced the status of women, especially in later years, after the *hijra*

– migration from Mecca to Medina (Esposito, 1988). Similarly, before the Sokoto jihād, women were discriminated against, abused, and not respected by their Muslim spouses. Those, among others, were the reasons for the jihād, which aimed at emancipating the people, especially women, from tyranny, discrimination, and abuse. The result of the revolution brought remarkable improvement in women’s lives under the Sokoto Caliphate (Last, 1967). These stories of Nigeria’s Muslim heritage were told by FOMWAN members alongside the stories from the founding era. Together, these accounts of heroic educated women formed the historical narrative on which FOMWAN’s religious culture was built.

The Nigerian Muslim women activists had precedents and were following the footsteps of Nana Asma’u, the daughter of Sheikh Usman dān Fodiyo, the nineteenth-century Islamic reformer and founder of the Sokoto Caliphate. The Sheikh educated all his daughters and especially Nana Asma’u, who had a passion for learning – leading to establishing an education organization known as Yan-taru to impart education to women. She was a writer with fifty-five original works to her credit, a teacher, linguist, poet, diplomat, and administrator. Nana Asma’u played the role of her father’s ambassador, communicating with the Shehu of Borno, the leader of the first Islamic state in Nigeria, on issues of Islamic jurisprudence. Her views, grounded in knowledge, were well respected (Mack and Boyd, 2000). Nana Asma’u is one of the numerous examples of Muslim women’s spirituality in West African Islam. Her works are sources of inspiration and motivation to FOMWAN, influencing members’ worldviews, agency, and collective social action. Members of the association often tell their story to inspire each other’s

social action.

We have seen in Chapter Three how FOMWAN's organizational goals and activities are framed in religious terms. Again, focusing on education has provided members the opportunity to equip themselves with Islamic knowledge, which gives them enormous ground to amass religious culture. What recurred in all the interviews was members' skillfulness in Islamic knowledge. Almost every member authoritatively quotes Qur'ānic verses and the ḥadīth (traditions of the prophet). This is a testimony that they are educated in Islam, and thereby know exactly the religious provisions for their actions, organizationally and individually as wives, daughters, in-laws and so forth. The Islamic knowledge that they have acquired and authoritatively use, serves several functions outside of their relationship with their significant others. It places them in a higher place within the Muslim community, at various levels of operation with their partners, the government, and beyond. Their religious knowledge becomes an identity and symbol that makes FOMWAN members revered, recognized, and trusted. Members utilize such knowledge, especially of the scripture, as a rhetorical resource, to address many problems, including hostility, hatred, and mistrust between religious (inter and intra) and secular associations as we shall see in their talk, speech, or utterances.

### **Language, Speech, and the Culture of FOMWAN**

Talking plays an active role in subjects' lives. It is cultural work that people do to make sense of their lives and to orient their behavior. "It is a toolkit – culture in action with which to do work, but it is more than an after-the-fact justification" (Wuthnow, 2011, p. 9). Maintaining a cohesive religious culture requires paying careful attention to

language. As Geertz (1976) notes that words constitute an integral part of religious culture. For FOMWAN members, religious culture is also framed by love speech, that is, words that create unity, love, and peaceful coexistence. In the midst of existing tensions between Islam and Christianity (Marshall, 2009), among the many conflicting ideologies and positions within Islam (especially Sūfism, Wahhābism, and Shi'ism), as well as the challenges of secularism, members had to adopt a strategy that would navigate through these dilemmas. A member recounts how they created such culture:

When we founded FOMWAN, we knew that there were many challenges from within our religion and outside. We then decided not to encourage anything that would further compound our problems and disintegrate the country. We kept aside all our differences, and vowed to use mild, neutral language while avoiding the use of any language considered derogatory, harsh and discriminatory... We don't condemn anyone. In fact, we address the Christians as "our partners from a different faith," "our sisters," "our neighbors," "our fellow citizens," let alone Muslims from different sects... Remember, FOMWAN is an umbrella association of all Muslim women, so we have to be accommodative (Interview with Hajiya Bilkisu Yusuf, a founding member, and past national Amīra).

It is evident that when FOMWAN members engage in discussions, they are very careful to use language that avoids extremes. Such strategic use of ideologies and language is consistently manifest in official communication – in debates, speeches, preaching, lectures, symposia, and publications (such as handbills, posters, stickers, journals, magazines, and pamphlets). Again, this cuts across all the association's audiences, sacred and secular.

As a Muslim organization, FOMWAN must position itself carefully among the many orders and movements that have been influential in Nigerian society. For instance, during the founding of FOMWAN, Sūfism was dominant in Nigerian Islam. The old Sūfi orders' tradition focused on *Taṣawwuf* (Islamic mysticism) – the interiorization, and



intensification of Islamic faith and practice (Ling, 1983). It emphasizes individual devotion while staying away from politics and public affairs in order to avoid being corrupted. Sūfism is a critic of worldliness, meaning everything that causes forgetfulness of the divine reality (Burckhardt, 2009). This version of Islam does not encourage Muslim women's public visibility in traditional sub-Saharan African societies, especially Nigeria (Besmer, 1983; Callaway & Creevey, 1994; Paden, 1974). The founding members of FOMWAN were not comfortable with the Sūfī orders' traditional perspective and its implications for Nigerian Muslim women's place in contemporary society. As a result, members needed a successful bargaining strategy that would be appealing to these dominant orders.

At around the same time, there was the Wahhabi - a new reformist movement that was seemingly supportive to the women's aspirations of emancipation from illiteracy, discrimination, and domination.<sup>86</sup> Under the platform of the *Jama'atu Izālat al-bid'a wa Iqāmat as-Sunna* (Society for the Removal of Innovation and Re-establishment of the Sunna – also shortened JIBWIS or simply Izāla), the Islamic movement was officially launched in Jos, Plateau State (middle belt of Nigeria) in 1978. The movement aims at fighting *Bid'ah* innovation defined in terms of their reading of “original” Islam against which Sūfism is pitted, especially the Qādiriyya and the Tijjāniyya (Amara, 2011). The Izāla becomes the largest Islamic reformist society in Nigeria and beyond, including in

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<sup>86</sup> For an elaborate detail about Wahhābism in Nigeria - being the largest single Muslim fundamentalist organization in postcolonial sub-Saharan Africa, see Kane, Ousmane (1994). *Izala: The Rise of Muslim Reformism in Northern Nigeria.* In M. E. Martyr and R. S. Appleby's Eds. *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*. The Fundamentalism Project. Vol. 4. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 490-512.

neighboring countries, such as Niger and Benin Republics, Chad, Cameroon, and Ghana (Kane, 2003). The movement works closely with FOMWAN, especially in areas like expanding Islamic education through establishing classes for married women and building schools in the conservative northern region, in supporting theoretical debates concerning women's autonomy and authority within Islam, as well as increasing the women's agency (Renne, 2012).

FOMWAN benefited so much from the reformist Izāla movement, especially in the preaching corpus – equipping self with Islamic knowledge of the scripture, the ḥadith and other authorities, as well as in networking and collaboration. This is conspicuous in the frequent citation of such authorities and providing persuasive arguments on topics, and in debates. Strikingly, FOMWAN members strategically refuse to use Izāla movement's use of words that are considered bitter, harsh, or unpleasant. Chiefly, FOMWAN declined to use the jargon of *takfir/takfeer* – a Muslim accusing another with apostasy (or excommunication).<sup>87</sup>

Apart from the Sūfi orders and the reformist Izāla movement, there was also the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN), also called the Muslim Brotherhood, but popularly known as Shī'a - a religious and political organization headed by Sheikh Ibrahim Yakub El-Zakzaky, based in Zaria, Kaduna state (North central Nigeria). The Shī'a is a minority Islamic movement compared to Sunni Muslims, yet it has significant followers, particularly in Kaduna, Kano, and Sokoto states (The Pew Report, 2009). The movement

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<sup>87</sup> For details about the jargon and its classification, see Kepel (2002). *Jihad: the Trail of Political Islam*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2002.

started to gain support soon after the Iranian revolution in 1979 and after El-Zakzaky visited Iran. They advocate for the overthrow of Nigeria's secular government, (which the sect considers *ṭāġūt* – idolatry) and its replacement with an Islamic state, based on an Iranian version of Shī'a Islam and theocracy.

The religious and political landscape is anything but unified in today's Nigeria. However, FOMWAN strategically selected the practices from each of these movements, appropriating what they believed was more relevant, appealing, and effective for achieving its organizational vision of a world where women are properly educated and equipped for an equitable and peaceful society. Members avoid harsh words or phrases that would incite animosity, bitterness, hatred, or disunity among Nigerian Muslims. In practical terms, the teachings of Nana Asma'u provided a foundation. Although they accepted many of the Sūfī orders' values, ritual practices, and mysticism, they nonetheless deemphasize other aspects like intercession and disengagement from politics. Instead, the association encourages the Muslim women to be active participants in politics, believing that change cannot happen without active participation. Similarly, despite the enormous advantages in educational and doctrinal partnership with the reformist Izāla movement, FOMWAN tactfully decides which jargon to use and which not to. So it is with the organization's stance relative to the Shī'a movement. FOMWAN strongly disagrees with its political ideology and especially with condemning the secular government and using its buzzwords such as *ṭāġūt*.

Despite the fact that there are many competing versions of Islam, FOMWAN refuses to use language that would alienate one faction from another. Instead, members

strategically select what to say, where, when, and how, thereby becoming a vital resource and providing them the opportunity to navigate out of some challenges. This communication strategy is a cultural product that members have created, symbolizing how they relate with others and the kinds of relationships they want. As Swidler (1986) argues, the symbolic experiences, mythic lore, and ritual practices of a group or society create moods and motivations, ways of organizing experience and evaluating reality, modes of regulating conduct, and ways of forming social bonds, which provide resources for constructing strategies of action (p. 284).

Another way to understand how FOMWAN strategizes its action is in resource mobilization or precisely funding. Despite some state chapters' networking and collaboration with the Izāla movement, which is believed to be a Saudi-funded Wahhabi association, FOMWAN does not solicit or receive funding from the Saudi government or international Islamic donor agencies from Saudi or from the Arab world. In some follow up interviews, here are the responses that we gathered:

We do not have any relationship with Saudi Arabia at whatever level. We do not enjoy any material or financial aid from Saudi (Alhaja Surura Oyero, National Public Relations Officer).

Equally, another executive member elaborates on the matter:

No single funding comes from any government agency. We look inward and at times from very few philanthropists' donations (Hajiya Amina Omoti, National President, September 2017).

Further comments on their relationship with the Nigerian Islamic movements, particularly the Izāla is provided as follows:

As with all the Muslim movements, we have cordial relationship with the Izāla, despite that at the beginning (sometimes mid 80's), there were some attacks from

the Jos faction of the Izāla, calling us an extension of Christian choir groups. But with the Kaduna faction, we had no problem. Later, with advocacy, networking and other diplomatic means, we overcome the problem. Luckily, the two factions merged and the hostility greatly reduced. This is not new to us because even the remaining movements have their share of the ‘cake’ with us but we endure and work peacefully with them ... (Hajiya Fatima Batulu, FOMWAN executive member).

Carefully examining the activities of FOMWAN at the state and national levels, we understand that some state chapters are interested in getting funds from international donors, perhaps the Saudi-funded donors. But the central (national) body discourages this, in an effort to regulate the actions of the state chapters—an act that keeps the association focused. Here is what a member of the NEC and the Board says on the matter:

At state chapters’ level, we sometimes see them going too far. Then we caution them and regulate their affairs, especially during reporting period. We always tell them that ‘next time make sure that you carefully examine the terms of networking before you go into any partnership.’ We always mentor them and clear them (Professor Latifah Durosinmi, Chairperson of FOMWAN National Education Committee and former National President).

Another member buttresses the above point and provides more details:

Finance is a challenge. All along FOMWAN has been struggling, raising funds internally and with some external donations from friends and associations. We have stretched so much that we now need something that will generate some income internally. For instance we have a hostel completed in Abuja in our FOMWAN complex... Donor agencies come to us with their proposals. We sometimes do but with caution and in our own terms... You don’t just say you are a FOMWAN member and then relate with an outsider anyhow or take any project anyhow. You have to bring the project to the executive council to deliberate on it. We have to approve it before you execute it. So, even at the state level, we do not operate anyhow. There is a sort of control. It is like checks-and-balances (Alhaja Khairat Siddique, Chairperson Humanitarian and Social Services Committee and past National Amīra).

The above addresses a large political question: Whether FOMWAN is an extension of

Saudi Islamist movements. What is evident is that FOMWAN relies on internally-generated sources of revenue from membership dues, sales of publications, donations from friends, *Zakā* (alms), and more recently, money from renting out its hostels, conference room, and other spaces, but does not rely on funding from any government. Material resources, such as money, in-kind donations, and buildings are provided to religious organizations primarily by religious people or organizations (Jeavons, 1998). Despite the fact that the Federation heavily relies on internally-generated income to run its activities, it nevertheless collaborates and partners with other international donor agencies like USAID, the DFID, the COMPASS, Save Our Children, the Packard Foundation, and UNICEF, among others.

It is surprising that FOMWAN, an exclusively Muslim female organization, collaborates more with secular organizations from the West than with Islamic donor agencies, Muslim-majority countries, or the Arab world. Many factors could be responsible for that, including members' background in Western education, relevance to the needs of services that the Western secular donors provide (such as in health, education and humanitarian services), as well as the association's need to sustain its identity. Undoubtedly, FOMWAN's self-reliance, focus on organizational vision, strict adherence to rules, prudence, and accountability have led to its independence in ideology. Had the organization been funded by any government, there could have been a possible split on ideological grounds, as is the case with some male-dominated Muslim organizations.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Chapter Five highlights some of the factors that keep the association focused and indivisible.

Chapter Three highlighted how the association partners more with their Christian than their domestic secular counterparts on certain matters, to defend their corporate interests. This reiterates FOMWAN's efforts in consolidating its corporate goal, effecting agency and asserting a difference, and retaining independence, particularly in ideology. One major take-home is how the association uses ideas to create a religious culture that serves as a powerful resource for maneuvering out of their organizational challenges of the day. Unlike other major male-dominated Muslim movements - the Izāla which is Saudi-funded, the *Shī'a* which is Iran-funded, and the Sūfi movements: The Tijāniyyah and the Qādiriyya, whose roots are traced to Iraq (Middle East) and Morocco (North Africa) – FOMWAN is a grassroots Muslim women association that appropriates and creates a cultural tradition in its agency and collective social action. This aspect is one of the many illustrations of the enrichment processes that the concept of Ajamization entails. The concept highlights the ingenuity of West African Muslims within the larger global Islamic culture. The case refutes the widely held view that West African Islam is peripheral to the centers of Islamic culture in North Africa and Arabia (the Arab world). Such prejudice has led to the neglect of the African reception, interpretation, adaptation, and transformation of introduced elements (Salah, 1992).

In addition to the Federation's strategic selection of revenue sources, it also extends its intentional selection of language to Christian and secular associations, as well as to individual persons. Its members affirm the legal charters stipulating the freedom to practice one's religion. They not only seek to live in peace with their Christian counterparts, but they also network and partner with them in many aspects of life –

education, health programs, civic engagement, human rights activism, and peace-building. We have seen in chapter three how such extensive networking and partnerships resulted in valuable outcomes, including dialogue that led to the establishment of an Interfaith Women Peace Movement (IWPM). This is further validated by the cordial relationship that exists between FOMWAN and Christian organizations, as we can see in the words of a Christian leader:

FOMWAN invited me and my group to the mosque. That was during their National Hijāb Day. I was there and I made a speech which was aired on TV and radio. I talked about the need for women to dress decently. They invited me and my exco and we participated in their activities... (Mrs. Liyatu D. Joseph, the President of Christian Women, Bauchi state).

Also, another partner says:

FOMWAN is purely a Muslim women's organization that is doing similar work with us. We have the best relationship with its members that led to useful and fruitful partnership. We respect one another and address one another as "sisters," and that is what we are... (Interview with Sister Amarachi Ahizu, Executive member of the Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy –DMMM).

Another leading Christian partner organization adds:

For two decades, we have been partnering with FOMWAN in areas such as education, health, child protection, particularly on labor exploitation of the *Almajirai* [destitute student children], humanitarian services, and employment opportunities for young girls, security and peace-building... Our relationship is fruitful and gainful... The ultimate is the favorable treatment that we receive from FOMWAN. Members treat us with high respect and we do same in return... (Interview with Mr. Mark Asu-Obi, spokesperson of the Justice, Development, Peace JDPCA)/CARITAS, Kano Branch).

Throughout our research, we observed positive and accommodative use of words referring to Christians. Listening to their speeches, and reviewing their records, we observe that the association members have always avoided using derogatory statements with reference to non-Muslims. Instead, they use kind and friendly words such as, "our



neighbors,” “our brothers,” “our sisters,” “our fellow citizens,” “our partners from a different faith,” and so on. The use of such words contributes to mutual understanding, trust-building, and above all, symbolizes unity in diversity. Here, again, we have seen the significant role of the unique culture that FOMWAN has created – a strategy that provides the association with great opportunity to navigate out of problems that include hate, conflict, and possible violence. In essence, FOMWAN’s case demonstrates that talking is an important way in which humans act, interact, and organize themselves (Wuthnow, 2011).

In addition, secular organizations have experienced similar pleasant treatment from FOMWAN. This is unmistakably evident in FOMWAN’s health intervention programs. We have seen in chapter three how the Northern part of Nigeria was very conservative and some states rejected government efforts in administering polio vaccines, alleging that it was an effort to reduce the Muslim population. Through trust-building, FOMWAN members were able to convince the people to embrace the vaccine program and make it a success story. One of the executives explains how the association deals with similar dilemmas during their encounters with secular organizations. She says:

Yes, there are situations when the secular donor agencies confront us with issues that are uncompromised. For instance, during sensitization programs on HIV/AIDS, donors sometimes talk about using condoms, using the formula: abstinence, being faithful, and condom use (ABC). From the outset, we categorically tell them our stance that we can only intervene by preaching for abstinence and being faithful and *not* the use of condoms... (Interview with Hajiya Binta, a FOMWAN Founding member).

Another member recounts how FOMWAN intervened in a partnership with a secular donor agency:

I remember an instance when we went into a partnership with an American Embassy program on *Almajiri* -- destitute student child. When they invited us, they had their theme which we thought was derogatory and would, therefore, be rejected by the community. They invited 'Ulamā' - Islamic clerics from different states and NGOs. It was FOMWAN that suggested a title *Mufarka!* (Let's wake up!). It was endorsed and became successful. Again, recently the European Union (EU) invited us to partner on a health program. Citing verses of the Qur'ān and many other authorities like the ḥadith to support what we were doing, we changed the title from what they presented "Family Planning" to "Healthy Timing of Pregnancy" and it was successful... (Interview with Hajiya Sa'adatu, Kano chapter Amīra).

Translating religious motives into nonreligious language and content are important (Wuthnow, 2011). Members' local knowledge of their audience (service recipients), their mindset, and the strategic selection of words from a pool of resources, demonstrates how culture influences the actors' action shaping a repertoire of habits, skills, and styles from which they construct strategies of action (Swidler, 1986).

The selective (diplomatic) use of discourse provides FOMWAN the ability to bring together women from diverse backgrounds on the same platform and to unify members into a single moral community. It also makes the organization appealing and acceptable to the government, sacred and secular partners, as well as donor agencies. By FOMWAN's selective use of appropriate, pleasant, and favorable words in speeches, and in its cordial relationship with others, we see how members are strategically acting by deploying discursive techniques that help them in achieving their organizational goals. Talk, as FOMWAN utilizes it, hereby serves as the means through which values and beliefs acquire sufficient meaning to guide members' behavior and to provide a template for self-understanding (Wuthnow, 2011). The culture here is a repertoire of capacities from which varying strategies of action are constructed (Swidler, 1986). Participants' public actions and use of words provide us with a window to understand how they

employ the rich store of Islamic symbols and practices to make sense of their lives, navigate out of some challenges that bedevil the weak and fragile state, and thereby contribute to Nigeria's civil society.

### **Ritual as Means of Empowerment**

Rappaport (1999) defines rituals as “the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers and encompasses much more than religious behavior” (p. 24). Analyzing FOMWAN's rituals requires reference to the members' performances, formality, inclusion of both acts and utterances, as well as encoding by others. Ritual action is essential to human existence, by enabling us to learn shared ways of living with each other (Turner, 2015).

FOMWAN members believe that in Islam, sacred practices and ritual performances constitute the faith's ways of expressing conviction and growing devotion. Members frequently quote verses of the Qur'ān to support their position, arguing that an increase in ritual performances increases *Imān* (faith) and conversely, a decrease in ritual performance decreases faith.<sup>89</sup> Members believe that by increasingly engaging in Islamic ritual performances, their faith increases. Many rituals in Islam are performed in the community, thereby confirming the necessity for collective action. It is this community, a sense of sisterhood coupled with social and religious capital that provides FOMWAN immense capacity to act and effect change in the lives of members and nonmembers.

The performance of rituals in Islam is demonstrated daily (such as in the five

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<sup>89</sup> They cite Qur'ān, 48: 4; and 9: 124.

daily prayers), weekly (such as attending Friday congregational prayers, and the desirable *adhkār* – devotional remembrances), monthly (such as the purification ritual that women are required to perform after experiencing their menstruation cycles), and annually (such as the mandatory Ramaḍān fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca, and alms-giving).<sup>90</sup> These rituals can be grouped into mandatory and desirable. They can also be found in the 5 pillars of Islam, each of which is a crucial practice in the faith. We shall see how FOMWAN’s ritual practices create agency, empowerment, and touch the lives of people.

Islam itself is built around its five pillars, and those pillars also shape the culture of FOMWAN. They find their way into the activities of the group and they are given special meaning by their practice within this community of women. As Rappaport (1999) asserts, ritual form may be universal, but all human rituals include signs specific to the society or congregation in which they are performed. Also, the arrangement of sign elements into liturgical orders is in some degrees socially and culturally specific. Similarly, FOMWAN members have produced a unique culture through performing these rituals, as can be seen by examining the five pillars of Islam.

### 1. Profession of Faith – The *Shahāda*

Profession of faith, testimony, or witness (*Shahāda*) is the first of the Five Pillars of Islam that FOMWAN utilizes to create a culture. *Shahāda* literally means the Muslim profession of faith that expresses two essential beliefs that make one a Muslim: 1) *La ilāha illa Allah* - there is no deity/god worthy of worship except Allah (also called *tahlīl*),

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<sup>90</sup> “Purification is half of faith.” *Forty Ḥadith an-Nawawi* (Chicago: Kazi Publications), p.52. Ezzeddin’s translation of Sahih Muslim, Book 2, Number 0432.

and 2) *Muhammad Rasul Allah* – Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. A truthful conviction of the above confession of faith is the absolute prerequisite to join Islam and the Muslim community (Fahim, 2013). FOMWAN members usually describe the Shahāda as symbolizing two things: Total submission to Allah in whatever He commands, and abstinence from what He forbids. In other words, it signifies belief and acceptance of Muhammad as Allah’s servant, prophet, and messenger. This means every ritual act must be performed according to the teachings of the Prophet, codified in ḥadīths (the traditions of the Prophet).

The Profession of faith is a daily ritual prayer that is repeated several times a day, either during the *Ṣalā* (the five daily prayers), or at other times such as at morning, afternoon, and evening *adhkār* – devotional prayers. It is also recited in the *muezzin*’s call to prayers, as well as at the beginning of each *Ṣalā* (prayer). One of the rituals performed as soon as a child is born is to whisper “the Profession” (in the form of *azān*) in their ears. As the child grows, it is also required that parents encourage them to keep chanting it (Ondigo, 2014). Similarly, the Profession is required to be recited to a dying person. FOMWAN members strive to know the meaning of the testimony through seeking knowledge and through proclaiming it with sincerity, devotion, and acting in accordance with its requirements. This is manifested in their collective actions, always contained in their talks, discourses, and speeches, and visibly seen in their modes of dress, performances, routine activities, ceremonies, and throughout their experiences.

Rappaport (1999) describes the Shahāda Profession of faith of Islam, like the Shema of Judaism, as the most fundamental premise of a society – its “Ultimate Sacred

Postulate.” It is differentiated from other understandings in the society by its non-empirical, beyond the reach of logical refutation, and unquestionable nature. The postulate performs a crucial social function of defining the Muslim community and thereby serving as a kind of “core around which the community can transform and adapt to circumstances” while preserving its essential identity (p. 277). Certainly, FOMWAN members take the Shahāda to be their ultimate sacred postulate as evidenced in their performances, as well as in their constant reference to a verse nearly everyone quotes. It translates, “Say: Truly, my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death, are (all) for Allah, the Cherisher of the Worlds.”<sup>91</sup> Although, Durkheim (1969) views religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, members of FOMWAN would not view religion from that perspective. Instead, they would consider religion to be their guiding principle in sacred and secular spheres.

We have seen in Chapter Two and we shall see in Chapter Five that FOMWAN’s worldview does not see a clear-cut separation between the sacred and the secular. During the course of this research, my team and I observed how FOMWAN members integrate the Shahāda into every program that the association organizes. Members begin and end with some opening and closing doxologies that contain the Shahāda, and *takbīr* – the expression “Allah is the greatest” (*Allahu Akbar*). In the middle of their programs, these phrases or rituals are usually expressed and performed collectively, as we witnessed in all FOMWAN events. This includes at *walīmah* (a get-together/reception/“party”), weddings, at birth, baby shower or naming ceremonies, at funerals, meetings, lectures,

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<sup>91</sup> Qur’ān, 6: 162.

debates, symposia, workshops, among other events. Worthy of note is how members perform the rituals collectively, chanting various devotional songs, poems, eulogies, and prayers. These are mostly in local languages, especially Hausa and Yoruba but sometimes in Arabic.<sup>92</sup> The collective effervescence that excites the participants unifies the group (Durkheim, 1969) and could be visibly seen while members demonstrate spiritual devotion and express some form of euphoria and sisterhood. A founding member recounts how this religious culture had been created since establishment of FOMWAN in 1985. She says:

To train your *nafs* (the soul) to increase in your spirituality, you need some abstinence [from this world]... We used to have what we called “*ijtima*” – (a gathering or forum) at the beginning of FOMWAN. It entailed converging in a sister’s house and then we would spend some nights there. I remember when I was in Zaria [as an undergraduate] we used to hold it in Professor Bugaje’s house with his wife Dr. Hadiza Nuhu. During those days we would do “night vigil.” We would wake up do *Tahajjud* (night prayers), and in the morning times, we would organize lectures for ourselves, cook, eat and then continue with some devotions. All the time was spent on trying to uplift one another’s spirit... We retained it, but reduced it to a whole day stay not spending nights anymore. So we still hold it but in a different fashion. You know time has changed now... (Interview with Hajiya Salamatu Ibrahim, a founding member).

Over time, such *Ijtima* or night vigils that Hajiya Salamatu described became impossible, due to members’ various commitments, as well as changes in their statuses – from students to wives, mothers, in-laws, and professionals. Instead, members now utilize the various national events to engage in those kinds of devotional acts. These include the annual general conventions, the national education summit, and other ceremonies. At its

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<sup>92</sup> Even those chanted in local languages are accompanied with opening and closing doxologies, often in Arabic such as the *Shahādah*, *takbīr*, *tahlīl*, and the likes. Many of these songs, especially the ones composed by Nana Asma’u, were originally written in Hausa Ajami, Fulfulde Ajami, and at times Arabic, and later translated into English.

annual national executive council (NEC) meeting held in Ilorin, Kwara state in 2014, I observed how members began the meeting with opening prayers, followed by recitation of the 114 chapters of the entire Qur'ān. Members performed this ritual in less than an hour by distributing pages of the Qur'ān to congregants for recitation. Those who could recite at a faster speed and had finished earlier would collect the remaining copies from those who did not, for completion. Within a short time, the recitation ritual was completed. Worthy to note here is the literacy rates of these women in this part of the world, which, in many instances, are not acknowledged because of the bias in treating Western-form of literacy only as basis for census.

Next, participants were requested and strongly encouraged to generously present *Ṣadaqa* (voluntary charity), which we saw members donating. Dr. Rafi'a Sanni, the chairperson of the national Da'wa committee, was the convener of the Qur'ānic recitation session. While calling members to donate, she was quoting some Qur'ānic verses in Arabic and translating them into English. The verses require the faithful to give out charity.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, she was leading members in chanting the Shahāda in the form of poems and eulogies, some of which were in Yoruba. I asked an informant who said it is the two testimonies Shahāda chanted in Arabic and translated in Yoruba, and is a commonly sung poem among Yoruba Muslim communities at nearly every event. FOMWAN has created the culture of chanting it, which made it easier for all members to learn and chant collectively. This points to the multiple literacies of the women – Islamic/Arabic, English/Western, and Ajami/Traditional African. It also speaks to the

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<sup>93</sup> See Qur'ān, 2:43; 2:110; and 2:270.



value and utilization of what Ngom (2016) calls the “music-derived literacy” among Muslim communities -- a primary channel of acquisition of literacy through recitation and chanting of poems (p. 33). This is common among the disciples of Sheikh Bamba.<sup>94</sup>

The ritual of collecting charity from members at the end of the recitation is important. Thus, I followed up to learn more about it. Members informed me that they give out charity to thank Allah for the blessings He gave them. It is also an “offering” and a “sacrifice” to appease Allah so that He would guide and bless them in their programs, activities, and journey to their destinations, in their association, and in life generally. They also believe that Islam is not only a religion of words without action. One of the ways they demonstrate their belief is by reciting the Qur’ān (words) and giving out charity (action). Although, I was not aware of exactly how much members generated from that charity ritual, the amount was obviously large based on what selected members were seen collecting. Members said that the money mobilized from that charity is used for *Da‘wa* activities.

At this point, *khatmah* (special supplications after completing the recitation of the Qur’ān) were offered. Investigating the rationale behind the above ritual performance, members informed me that it is to open the national program with prayers, thereby committing the ‘journey’ – the program -- to Allah’s Hands, seeking His guidance, protection, and blessings. We heard members singing various poems, including one of the ones that Nana Asma’u composed, titled, “The Qur’ān.” Members were chanting it in

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<sup>94</sup> For details about “music-derived literacy” and how it operates among the Murīds, see especially pages 32-34, 249, and 258.

Arabic, although, Nana Asma’u composed it in Arabic, Hausa Ajamī and Fulfulde Ajamī, and it was later translated into English. “The Qur’ān” poem is a mnemonic device for teaching beginners all the 114 chapters of the Qur’ān. “Its usefulness can be seen in the author’s [Nana Asma’u] ability to write it in three major languages, making it easier to reach out to wider audiences” (Boyd & Mack, 1997, p. 38). This further buttresses the importance of “music-derived literacy” among Muslim communities of West Africa. It equally debunks the view that many of those people are illiterates on the account that they lack Western-form of education.

The collective recitation of the Qur’ān at FOMWAN’s events serves many functions. It creates a sense of effervescence, exuberance, or cheerfulness among members and encourages and motivates members to be more devoted and engaged. The social act of collective recitation of the Qur’ān may enhance the reciters’ performance, creating an audience effect or social facilitation (Mead, 1939).<sup>95</sup> It also instills a certain amount of zeal among members and a courage to continue pursuing knowledge, especially Qur’ānic knowledge with *tajweed* – guiding principles on recitation. Again, it points to how FOMWAN emphasizes Islamic knowledge and proves how mastery of the holy book and related authorities provides symbolic significance with monumental grounds to amass religious culture. We shall see in Chapter Five how the national headquarters of FOMWAN encourages and supports members to become knowledgeable in Qur’ānic studies through organizing Qur’ānic recitation competition and awarding

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<sup>95</sup> There is the tendency for people to perform differently when in the presence of others than when alone. Compared to their performance when alone, when in the presence of others, they tend to perform better.

trophies to winning chapters. One of the participants provides a theological justification of the ritual of charity. She recites the Qur'ānic verse that says:

Whoever desires honor, then to Allah belongs all honor. To Him ascends good speech, and righteous work [such as charity] raises it... [Qur'ān 35:10].

She goes on to make a case for the need to perform some rituals (such as recitation of the Qur'ān and charity presentation) as the basis for seeking Allah's pleasure, trust, and blessings. As we have seen throughout the research, members have steadily cited religious authorities, primarily verses of the Qur'ān, the ḥadīth, and Islamic jurisprudence as justification for their actions. Such frequent references reveal the symbolic significance of Islamic authoritative texts to members. Mastery of the Qur'ān and persistent reference to it through recitation of verses are some ways in which members express their piety. It also makes their speeches appealing to the audience, thereby building trust and creating a unique FOMWAN culture. Statements, ideas, and positions are likely to be considered absolute transcendental truth and unquestionable, if supported by the Qur'ān or ḥadīth of the Prophet. Experiencing the above-described collective rituals of recitation of the Qur'ān, charity giving, and the chanting of one of the pillars of Islam are indicative of FOMWAN members' engagement in a process of generating a religious culture. It also points to members' assertiveness of their claim that Islam is not exclusively a religion of words but also of actions.

FOMWAN has created a religious culture that members believe is grounded on the right teachings of Islam as contained in Shahāda -- the Profession of faith, testimony, or witness. In so doing, they reinforce and inspire each other's social action, thereby buttressing that religion must be an eminently collective practice. Collective thought is

possible only through the coming together of individuals; hence it presupposes the individuals, and they in turn presuppose it, because they cannot sustain themselves except by coming together (Durkheim, 1969).

## 2. Prayer performance - *Ṣalā*

Prayer performance - *Ṣalā* in Islam is the second pillar of Islam. It is a full-body activity that exercises the mind, body, and the spiritual development of participants. It consists of the repetition of a unit called a *rak'ah* which consists of prescribed actions and words, beginning with standing, then bowing, prostrating, and concluding while sitting on the ground. The units are from two to four, depending on the time of the day or situation. *Ṣalā* is performed five times a day and it is obligatory upon each and every Muslim, except those who are prepubescent, those who are in their menstruation period, or experiencing bleeding in the days after childbirth (Umar, 2011). It is also a ritual that brings not only the body, but also that body's social and cultural identity to the encounter with the transcendental realm (Douglas, 1996). Prayer performance ties the worshipper with the worshipped and forms a religious identity and a community of believers. The *Ṣalā* is performed congregationally by men; women are required to pray in their homes, but they may also attend mosques and observe the ritual congregationally.<sup>96</sup> As we will see, performing *Ṣalā* is another way FOMWAN women establish a shared religious culture.

The ritual prayer is preceded by a ritual cleansing that is experienced as an effort to seek physical, psychological, and spiritual purity. This ritual of purification – *wuḍu'* –

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<sup>96</sup> *Sahih Muslim* (2000). Ḥadith No. 881, Houston, TX: Dar-us-Salam Publications.

is ablution or washing of some parts of the body (such as the face, hands, and feet) as the Qur'ān prescribes.<sup>97</sup> In the absence of water to perform the ritual practice of ablution, sand could be used instead.<sup>98</sup> Once purified, the Muslim prays facing the direction (*qibla*) of the Ka'bah – a prescribed direction at Mecca.

There are rules and regulations governing the conduct of each and every ritual and, without knowledge, such rituals will not be performed as required (Bakar, 1998). The search for knowledge is paramount to performing Islamic rituals, making FOMWAN to take it *very seriously*. One of the ways through which members constantly remind themselves about the need to seek more knowledge and the significance of ritual is by having on their agenda sessions that practically demonstrate how certain rituals are performed.

Teaching the practice of various rituals has been a focal point for FOMWAN at schools, meetings, and programs at various levels – local, state and national. The association created special sessions for practical ritual teaching, usually performed on “Spiritual Night” – a night exclusively reserved for teaching members various rituals in practice. A founding member recounts how they came about it:

In the past, we used to have “social night” in which we would gather, sing, dance, and tell personal stories which might *not* necessarily be beneficial. With an increase in knowledge, we realized that there was the need to refocus. We then changed the name from social night to spiritual night. During such night, we devote the night to learning important lessons about sacred and sometimes secular matters that directly affect our lives and our society... we are better off now than those years... (Interview with Hajiya Samira Mohammed Rabi'u, a founding member).

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<sup>97</sup> See Qur'ān 4: 43; and 5:6.

<sup>98</sup> For details on Muslim sensibilities regarding purity and the individual's cleansing before prayers, see Reinhart, A. K. (1990). “Impurity/No Danger” in *History of Religions*, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp. 1–24.

In one such practical session that we witnessed, some members served as tutors, teaching participants how to perform the ritual of washing a dead body. The session took over an hour, using a complete human body model (plastic cadaver) for demonstration purposes.

**Figure 16. A Cross Section of Participants at a Practical Session (Spiritual Night)**



Source: Picture taken in 2015 by Mustapha Kurfi at Ilorin, Kwara State.

One of the tutors further explains:

This is one of the things we teach at our meetings – local, state or national. Islam is a religion of both beliefs and practice. Purity in Islam is a condition for every ritual, including an ablution before performing the Ṣalā, bathing for the *janāba* – being ritually impure (example to cleanse oneself after sexual intercourse or seminal discharge), and bathing a deceased person before putting him or her into the grave... Washing a dead person's body, as you have seen during the session has its rules and regulations. For instance, those performing the ritual on the deceased are not expected to talk during the ritual, and more importantly, they should not reveal to anyone the privacy/secrets of the deceased which they observed/encountered

during the bathing ritual. Again, every step of the bathing process has its etiquettes and specified devotional prayer... (Interview with Hajiya Khairiyya Mohammed, FOMWAN member).

Another member provides details about the training sessions that the association organizes:

The sessions that we organize to teach how rituals are performed in Islam during our meetings are not only sessions but they are training grounds. Each attendant is a representative of her chapter and when she goes back to her state chapter, she provides a step-down training to other members, so she would train others who would also go back to their local chapters to train others. That way, we spread the knowledge... (Interview with Hajiya Oladimeji, FOMWAN Executive, Kwara state chapter).

Intentionally teaching practical knowledge of ritual provides a common Islamic culture that FOMWAN women can take with them into their communities and daily lives.

I observed that the major language of instruction was English, but there were two interpreters/translators in Hausa and Yoruba languages –the dominant languages that a majority of the attendants understand better. Utilizing the native languages that a majority of the Federation’s members use as a medium of teaching and training members about Islamic knowledge has been an old tradition of the association. Localizing knowledge and skills during practical demos is an important strategy that enables members to have a complete understanding of the intended messages. Again, during their meetings, members chant various poems, elegies, and songs in local languages, mainly Hausa and Yoruba. In fact, many sessions begin and end with such poems, elegies, and songs. This has proved to be an effective technique in reaching out to members and the public, as one of the discussants explains:

Honestly, listening to, and chanting poems is a lot easier and a convenient way of learning so much about Islam... It is also a perfect means to train children and even adults... It is educative as well as entertaining. I have memorized many things

through poems and songs – which ordinarily, would have been very difficult to learn... (Discussant Bara’atu Musa, FOMWAN member).

Employing multiple local languages for religious teaching has been observed by other scholars. Findings of Ngom (2016) reveal that Ajamī literacy is primarily acquired as a by-product of acquiring literacy in Arabic script in Qur’ānic schools in Africa.

Nevertheless, it is also acquired in Sufī communities, both through literacy instruction and through chanting. In some instances, such as among the Murīd scholars, materials were produced to teach Ajamī and Arabic literacy, while others use Ajamī as a vehicle to teach other subjects, including Qur’ānic lessons, as was the case with Nana Asma’u. The majority of her poems – used widely by FOMWAN – were originally in Ajamī and addressed both public events and ritual matters.<sup>99</sup> Among the most revered is her valedictory poem titled, “The Way of the Pious” – *Tanbih al-Ghāfilīn*, originally written in Arabic in the year 1820 but later translated into Hausa and other languages.<sup>100</sup>

FOMWAN members utilize these traditional literacies to educate members and the community. Furthermore, such poems have been enhanced and recorded in studios, using modern instruments, and made available on audio, CDs, DVDs, MP3s, and other sources. FOMWAN members are often seen listening to these poems on their devices – computers, iPads, iPods, and cellphones. During trips on their organization buses, members can be seen playing, listening to, and chanting such songs. Some of such buses are equipped with amplifiers for public audiences, as well.<sup>101</sup> These sights, sounds and

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<sup>99</sup> See Boyd, J. and Mack, B. M. (1997). *The Collected Works of Nana Asma’u, Daughter of Usman dan Fodiyo 1793–1864*. East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State.

<sup>100</sup> See Mack and Boyd (1997), pp. 21-27.

<sup>101</sup> For images of such buses, see Figure 14.



actions vividly symbolize a declared identity of the members (Dillon, 1999). Formation of religious identity is always a dynamic and ongoing process, actively constructed by individuals and groups in their social world (Peek, 2005). Here we see poetry and technology, language and ritual, being deployed as declarations of FOMWAN identity and elements of members' religious culture. Prayer is a powerful medium of expression, alliance and desire that invites self-reflection and demands wakefulness. It quickens hope, rouses individual and collective memory, and implores understanding from all witnesses, seen and unseen (Griffith, 1997).

### 3. Alms-giving - *Zakā*

Alms-giving - *Zakā* - constitutes the third pillar of Islam and another important element of FOMWAN's religious culture. Like pilgrimage, but unlike the Profession of faith, alms-giving is not mandatory for every Muslim, but only for the wealthy ones. The literal meaning of *Zakā* is purification, growth, and blessing. It is a form of sacrifice which purifies worldly goods from their worldly and sometimes impure means of acquisition, and which, according to God's wish, must be channeled towards the community.<sup>102</sup> FOMWAN members, like all mainstream Muslims, believe that offering *Zakā* is a religious obligation for Muslims, and it symbolizes a reminder that the rich should remain appreciative of Allah's blessings for bestowing wealth upon them, and that they need to empower the needy members of the society. There are rules and regulations governing who qualifies for distributing the alms, how much is to be given, the categories

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<sup>102</sup> See Benda-Beckmann, Franz von (2007). *Social Security between Past and Future: Ambonese Networks of Care and Support*, LIT Verlag, Münster, p. 167.

of beneficiaries, and the specifics of how it is to be disbursed.<sup>103</sup> Zakā can take many forms, including money (raw cash) and other materials (such as supplying staple foods to the community) – *Zakā-al-Fitr*.

What is important about Zakā collection and disbursement in Islamicate societies, specifically Nigeria, is how it constitutes an extension of protection services to the excluded members of the society, beyond formal social security. In some state chapters, members form Zakā committees that state governments authorize. As we have seen in the previous chapters, FOMWAN members are educated professionals who hold elite positions in society. Members utilize their social capital and provide the Federation substantial grounds for amassing religious capital.<sup>104</sup>

Through its Humanitarian Services and Da‘wa Committees, FOMWAN generates resources through Zakā and extends them through its wide range of social welfare services to people in need. These include people affected by flood, drought, fire disaster, people infected or affected by HIV/AIDS, malaria, and “special populations.” These special populations are mostly women, including those in institutions, such as leprosarium, hospitals, prisons, and rehabilitation homes, and women affected by Vesicovaginal Fistula (VVF). For instance, Edo state was one of the 24 states affected by a flood in 2012. Thousands of families were affected, which led to internally displaced

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<sup>103</sup> See Qur’ān, 9:6.

<sup>104</sup> Dr. Usman Bugaje is a one-time member of the Nigerian national assembly, and the husband to Dr. Hauwa Mandara, the current FOMWAN national chairperson committee on health. He had rented out a 3-bedroom flat to FOMWAN national body as its temporary national secretariat in Abuja. Also, he has been very supportive to his wife and above all, the association right from inception. This, and many more of such kinds of social capital that members gain have reoccur in almost all the interviews.

persons camps (IDPs). In response to that, FOMWAN was in the forefront of organizing relief funds to support affected victims. During such national appeals, each state chapter is required to present donations through its Humanitarian and *Da'wa* Committees. This is only one of many examples, including interventions that FOMWAN provides to victims of the Boko haram insurgency in the Northeast.

In Kano, where there is a VVF hospital in Dambatta, women affected by the problem are housed, treated, and rehabilitated. FOMWAN has been among the contributors to the patients, a friend to the hospital management, and importantly, has been empowering the patients through provision of psycho-social support, trainings for vocational skills, delivering lectures on self-esteem, and providing them with capital to start businesses after they are discharged. During a visit to the VVF hospital in July of 2016, I witnessed how FOMWAN distributed relief materials, delivered lectures on the need to have faith and remain pious, on how to adjust, respond to stigma, and how to gain self-esteem. It was also remarkable how members traced the spouses of some of the VVF patients and worked to reconcile them in areas where there were disputes. The act of visiting hospitals, orphanages, and other institutions is itself a ritual that includes religious teaching as well as material assistance.

Practices of almsgiving allow FOMWAN to create an extensive network of service provision in Nigeria. It is also a practice that connects them to Muslim women throughout the world. They have been able to support humanitarian services for people affected by disaster in other parts of the world. For instance, as part of its efforts to fulfill international obligations, FOMWAN donated to Bosnia money worth N110,000.00 (\$800

ish as at the time) to support fellow Muslims who were subjected to brutal and humiliating ethnic cleansing (The FOMWAN 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Magazine, 2005). A member explains how far they have gone in providing such humanitarian services:

We recently received a commendation's letter from the Human Rights and Good Governance Committee of the National Assembly as a result of our services... (Interview with Alhaja Latifah Okunnu, past national president of FOMWAN).

This follows the association's commitment to empowering the less privileged members of society, notably women, including those in other parts of the world. FOMWAN's rituals of almsgiving take place in the context of events around the world, and connects them to Muslims worldwide. This finding corroborates Kane's (2016) position that Africa's Muslim heritage represents a major thread in Islam's larger tapestry and that this has been a longstanding tradition. We have noted these connections already in Nana Asma'u's conversation with scholars in other parts of the world, where she had been writing in Arabic, Hausa-Ajami, Fulfulde Ajami, and Tamashek Ajami (Boyd and Mack, 1997). A religious culture that includes almsgiving has widespread consequences for the religious identity of FOMWAN members.

#### 4. Fasting during the Month of Ramaḍān - *Ṣawm*

Fasting the month of Ramaḍān is fourth pillar of Islam. Ramaḍān is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and lasts for 30 or 29 days, depending on the lunar cycle. Fasting commemorates the revelation of the Qur'ān to humanity as the Qur'ān describes and is mandatory upon every adult Muslim – the exceptions being women during menstruation, the sick, the elderly, and travelers.<sup>105</sup> Muslims believe that in the month of

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<sup>105</sup> See Qur'ān, 2:185; also 96: 1-5.

Ramaḍān, Allah multiplies the reward of every good act.<sup>106</sup> It is the anticipated reward that often makes Muslims engage in a variety of good deeds, including night prayers (*tahajjud*), performing lesser Ḥajj (*umrah*), distributing food and clothes, and in some instances, distributing annual alms (*Zakā*) among the poor during the month of the fasting ritual.

FOMWAN organizes various programs throughout the fasting period. As seen in chapter three, FOMWAN gives leverage to state chapters to identify their specific social needs and use appropriate solutions, in accordance with the association’s code of conduct and in consultation with the national headquarters. Some Ramaḍān programs are provided in almost every chapter, while others are specific. For instance, in Edo state, the state chapter constituted a Ṣadaqa committee, which is charged with the responsibility of collecting and distributing money and food items during Ramaḍān. Through the coordinated efforts of FOMWAN, the proceeds are disbursed to the less privileged members of the community. Also, the Edo FOMWAN distributes new clothes to beneficiaries while marking the end of the fasting period (‘Īd-al-Fitr). The chapter also utilizes the season to raise funds for ongoing projects. This has been a routinized ritual to the chapter since 2004.

Similarly, the Kano state chapter of FOMWAN organizes a feeding program during the fasting period mainly targeting “special populations” in addition to the poor and the less fortunate members of the community. Since 1990, the Kano chapter has

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<sup>106</sup> “The night of *Al-Qadr* (Decree) is better than a thousand months” [Qur’ān, 97:3]. Muslims believe that worship on the night, which is found in the last odd ten days of Ramaḍān, is better than worshipping for a thousand months.

made it part of its Ramaḍān activities to feed, clothe, and provide psycho-social and spiritual support to inmates in various institutions. Every year, members visit women prisoners in the Kano central prisons at Kurmawa and Goron Dutse. They bail out deserving ones among them, offer legal services, and distribute food, clothes, toiletries, bedding, and other basic needs. Members also visit women VVF patients at the Dambatta General Hospital and at the Murtala Muhammad Special Hospital. During such visits, members pay courtesy calls to the heads of such facilities, exchange pleasantries, and present medicine and other hospital equipment to the management as gifts. Such visitations and programs during Ramaḍān are extended to inmates of the Torrey Home for people with mental disabilities, and the Dawanau Rehabilitation Centers. The association assists in satisfying the basic needs of some of these special populations in institutions, which the government has not been able to deliver. For instance, in 2001, members observed the deteriorating condition of the women's toilets at the Psychiatric Unit of the Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital (AKTH). FOMWAN took up the renovation of the toilets and fixed them.

Like the Kano chapter, the Oyo state chapter provides an array of programs to mark the holy month of Ramaḍān. Members organize a community breakfast (feeding) program throughout the month – *Iftaar*. Members focus collectively on the needy, especially orphans. The breakfast used to be held at the FOMWAN Motherless Babies Home at Orita-Basorun founded in 1987. But with time, due to an increase in the numbers of orphans, as well as increased demands from other needy groups (such as the widows, the physically challenged, the homeless, the sick, people living with HIV/AIDS,

the prisoners, the unemployed, the too old, and the divorcees), the program expanded to cater for additional categories of people in need. The Oyo state chapter began to network with other affiliates to ensure outreach and assistance to the less-fortunate populations.

**Figure 17. FOMWAN Charity Home, Ibadan- Oyo State**



Source: Faridat Ayobami Ilupeju, August 2017.

A member explains:

I am a member of many associations in addition to FOMWAN, and so are other members. They are many, including *Jama'atus Swahilaat wal Hasanat*, the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), *Nasrullahil Fathi*, *Jama'atu Nasril Islam*, Muslim Students' Society, and Muslim Corpers' Association of Nigeria (MCAN).<sup>107</sup> We would then collaborate to organize programs such as community breakfast, visitations of hospitals, prisons, and schools and to deliver Annual Ramaḍān lectures which we sponsor and air on television and radio stations. With that, we are able to achieve so much with a lot of effects.... (Interview with Alhaja Fatima, Oyo chapter).

<sup>107</sup> For details about MCAN see Chapter One under the "Nigerian Politics and Governance."

Depending on availability of resources generated, the chapter even provides start off capital (cash or equipment) to indigent members of the community for empowerment.

Sherifat Damilola is a 46-year old widow, and one of the 70 beneficiaries of the Kwara state chapter of FOMWAN support program. She has this to say after receiving the package:

I am a mother of 7 (4 females, 3 males). My eldest daughter who is 19 has cancer and the third child, a male who is now 14 is epileptic. All the children were attending schools. But after the passing on of their father 3 years ago, life has become unbearable, to the extent some had to quit school... But FOMWAN came to rescue me by sponsoring all the children's education; assisting the sick ones with medication; and now a generator set that I will use to start making and selling soft drinks... This association is a life changer... May Almighty God grant FOMWAN members all their heart desires, and above all, may He make them heirs of Paradise... (Interview with Sherifat, a beneficiary of FOMWAN support program).

These special charitable activities are accompanied by spiritual and devotional activities, as well. In addition to broadcasting Ramaḍān programs, the Oyo chapter organizes special supplication nights during Ramaḍān, especially the last 10 days in which members intensify dedication to devotion. These last days of the fasting period are specially marked with activities, starting with *adhkār* – special devotional prayers, elegies, and recitation of the glorious Qur'ān, and *tahajjud* – night prayers. Equally, the state chapter organizes special sessions in which renowned clerics are invited to deliver lectures on important topics, dealing with the daily lives of the people: Peaceful coexistence, health, the necessity to seek knowledge, to be morally upright, marriage, family, divorce, among other topics.



**Figure 18. Support Materials Distributed to Some Widows by Kwara State Chapter**



Source: Picture taken in 2015 by Mustapha Kurfi at Ilorin, Kwara State.

Notably, among the special activities that FOMWAN organizes during the ritual fasting of Ramaḍān is a particular form of *tafsīr* – exegesis of the Qur’ān. In the early years, members had been individually listening to and attending *tafsīr* sessions. But with time, members realized the need to be more involved as a group. They started inviting male clerics to come deliver lectures on selected topics that mostly affect women’s lives. FOMWAN would invite male clerics to come deliver what was called “Annual Ramaḍān Lectures.” With the gradual increase in their own members’ Islamic knowledge, they expanded the programs and offered female leadership. Having mastered the art of recitation and interpretation of the Qur’ānic text, along with knowledge of ḥadīth, *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *Naḥwu* (grammar), and *Sīra* (Islamic history), some branches started

organizing an all-women *tafsīr* session, led by female Muslim clerics and addressing exclusively female audiences.

The Sokoto chapter of FOMWAN has been organizing the Ramaḍān *tafsīr* since 1994. It starts from day 1 of Ramaḍān and runs to the 27<sup>th</sup> of the month (2 or 3 days before 'Īd). It starts at 10am and ends at 12 pm daily. The last 30 minutes are reserved for summary, commentary, and answering questions on a wide range of issues concerning women, family, marriage, and general *Ibādā*, or acts of worship. Over time the programs have expanded from the three FOMWAN centers in Sokoto town to other towns throughout the state. They have also attracted women from different walks of life, young and old. Here too the increase in FOMWAN members' Islamic knowledge has made it possible for the association to rely *less* on inviting exclusively male clerics to deliver all the sessions. Some sessions are led by FOMWAN learned members and other female affiliates.

Moreover, in Borno state, the *tafsīr* sessions take place in all-female FOMWAN schools, where the teachers, who are mostly women, lead the study sessions. This is in addition to the regular classes. Teachers in these schools identify topical issues and deliver lectures on them, lectures that FOMWAN Borno chapter sponsors to air on television and radio stations. These lectures focus on reorienting the public perception, changing the narrative from the insurgents of *Boko Haram* to *Boko Halal* (lawful). This means that they are emphasizing the necessity for seeking Western-form of education alongside Islamic knowledge against what the Boko Haram insurgents preach that Western education is evil, sinful, and forbidden. As with other chapters and as part of

FOMWAN's tradition, the Borno state chapter considers its major burning issues and addresses them during such lectures, as one of the executive members explains:

The special *tafsīr* programs that we organize are mostly led by men but there are some of the sessions that are led by FOMWAN members who are highly knowledgeable in Islam (Hajiya Amina, Borno chapter executive member).

Throughout the interviews, members have expressed satisfaction with the shift in the scholarly engagement of their fellow sisters. In the words of a member in a focus group discussion:

At *tafsīr* and other study sessions that are female-led, we feel more comfortable to interact with the preachers/tutors. We also are very comfortable asking questions that are exclusively female-issues such as menstruation, sex-related matters, and so on ... (A discussant Hajiya Kafeelah, FOMWAN member).

Another member corroborates the above and sums the views of others. She says:

Honestly, by attending the *tafsīr during* Ramaḍān and all other FOMWAN programs throughout the year, our lives have changed for the better. We have increased knowledge that makes us empowered and in other matters – domestic and national... As a result, we now have cordial relationship with our husbands, families, neighbors, the community, and the society at large... In fact, our spouses respect and value us more... (A discussant Sister Ruqayyah Sulaiman, FOMWAN member).

Through performing these rituals, all FOMWAN chapters observe and respect the sacredness of the holy month of Ramaḍān. Rituals of gathering for education, prayer, and charity are intensified, making this a critical time each year for the strengthening of the women's Muslim culture and identity. This confirms Rappaport's (1999) argument that ritual is a ground where religion is made. Religion, which is constantly being made and remade through ritual, is the means we have of getting in touch with the wholeness of things.

### 5. Pilgrimage to Mecca - *Hajj*

The *Hajj* – Pilgrimage to Mecca, the sacred city of Islam, is fifth pillar of Islam – a ritual in which FOMWAN engages in and constructs a culture around it. Every Muslim, male or female, who is fit and has the resources, is expected to undertake this spiritual journey at least once in a lifetime. Pilgrimage is performed in the last month of the Islamic calendar (*Dhul-Hijjah*). Performing the ritual of pilgrimage to Mecca – the birthplace of Islam, is traced by Muslims to Adam and Eve. They believe that due to Adam's sin, God commanded him to build the Ka'bah and circumambulate it, remembering God, just as the angels circumambulate the throne of God (Wheeler, 2006). The sanctuary in Mecca became an earthly substitution and a reminder of the Garden of Eden. The acceptance of Adam's repentance includes his descendants returning to this earthly substitution – the Ka'bah and Mecca. According to some accounts, Prophet Abraham's Ka'bah was actually the second built on the site, the first having been built by Prophet Adam, who had gone to Mecca after being expelled from Paradise. This first structure, so the story goes, was washed away during the Flood (Harry, 1967). The Ka'bah is the central focus of the Muslim during the *Hajj*, a ritual that brings together and binds the Muslims of the world together in humility. The *Hajj* is a living tradition, shaped by stories of the past, but influenced by new conveniences and obstacles (Porter, 2012).

The *Hajj* symbolizes the lessons that the Prophet Muhammad taught when he stood on the plain of Arafat, proclaiming the completion of his mission and announcing the proclamation of God (Quran 5:3). FOMWAN members argue that this great annual convention of Islamic faith demonstrates the concept of equality of mankind, the most

profound message of Islam, which allows no superiority on the basis of race, gender, or social status. They justify their position by arguing that, the only preference in the eyes of Allah is piety as stated in the Qur'ān (49: 13). As with *all* acts of worship in Islam, the ritual ḥajj has its dos and don'ts, as well as its special devotional prayers. During the days of the Ḥajj, Muslims dress in the same simple way – white clothes – observe the same regulations, and say the same prayers, in the same manner, for the same end.

As mentioned earlier, the ritual of performing the Ḥajj, as with *all* acts of worship in Islam, requires knowledge. FOMWAN members have devoted considerable resources to learning and teaching about the Ḥajj ritual. Apart from establishing schools where such rituals are taught, members organize training sessions to teach potential pilgrims about the task ahead of them. One of the organizers of such tutorials explains:

We have a Ḥajj Committee charged with the responsibility of organizing a two-month training for intending pilgrims. We practically demonstrate to the trainees how the various acts of Ḥajj are performed... During the pilgrimage, we serve as Ḥajj welfare officers. We travel along with the pilgrims to the holy land, guiding them, reminding them of what to do, and facilitating the smooth running of their spiritual journey... (Interview with Hajiya Habiba Muhammed Damina, a FOMWAN founding member, and Chairperson Ḥajj Committee).

Another member elaborated on the experience of the Federation's members who served as volunteer welfare officers:

In the past, the state government used to give us two or three slots so that we would [travel to Mecca] go and assist women pilgrims. But now we don't know what will happen. Whenever FOMWAN members are given an opportunity, they take up the challenge. But we don't rely on the government to give us seats, among our members there are people who go whether with the government seats or not. When they go, they become ambassadors and do the same work. Once you work for FOMWAN, you are recognized for what you are doing (Interview with Hajiya Fatsuma Aminu Mohammed, *Amīra* President, Bauchi state chapter of FOMWAN).

In addition to establishing schools and organizing training sessions to practice and rehearse the mandatory Ḥajj ritual, FOMWAN members also invest in paying for travel to perform the pilgrimage and to provide volunteer services to pilgrims. Because of their experience of performing the Ḥajj more than once and their knowledge of Islam, they are preferred tutors and mentors for first-time Ḥajj performers. This service reduces expenditures from the government's National Ḥajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) and the various State Pilgrims Welfare Commissions.

The ritual duties of the Ḥajj employ the body, movement, and place to reinforce the experience of Muslim identity. Al-Uthaymin (2014) summarizes these duties as follows: 1) Starting the Ḥajj with acts of worship (*iḥrām*) that seek the state of ritual purification, which is necessary before entering Mecca. The *iḥrām* is a purification phase during which intending pilgrims are required to enter into before crossing the pilgrimage boundaries (*meeqat*). The ritual is performed by cleansing the body and wearing plain white attires, devoid of embroideries; 2) journeying to and standing at the mount 'Arafat on the 9<sup>th</sup> day, performing ritual prayers, and listening to the sermon; 3) spending the night at a place called *Al-Muzdalifa* on the night of *An-Nahr* (the night of the tenth day of *Thul-ḥijja*); 4) spending the nights of the Days of *Tashrīq* (anointed days) at Mina; 5) stoning the *Jamrat* (Stone of 'Aqaba) which must be performed on the Day of 'Īd and then stoning the three Jamrats (stones pillars) during the Days of *Tashrīq* 6) cutting/shortening the hair or shaving the head; 7) performing the farewell *tawāf* - circumambulation of the Ka'bah. Failure to perform any of the above obligatory rituals does not invalidate one's Ḥajj, but one must offer a sacrifice (a sheep, one-seventh of a

she-camel or a cow) to make up for it.<sup>108</sup> This sacrifice must be slaughtered in Mecca and distributed among the poor people of the holy mosque (Al-Masjid al-Haram).

Pilgrims are required to chant various devotional prayers, each at a designated place. The talbiya (a special devotional prayer) for example is repeated during the Hajj rituals. It is translated as follows:

Here I am, Oh God, at Your command. Here I am at Your command. You are without associate. Here I am at Your command. To You are all praises, grace and dominion. You are without associate (Shariati, 2007, p. 7).

Every year, Nigerian pilgrims constitute an important percent of African pilgrims performing Hajj worldwide. The General Authority for Statistics in Saudi Arabia said that the 2016 Hajj has seen a total of 1,862,909 pilgrims, of whom 1,325,372 pilgrims came from outside Saudi Arabia. Female pilgrims reached 780,681 persons, and Nigerian pilgrims numbered 61,536.<sup>109</sup> The high percent of Nigerians attending the annual ritual of Hajj is not a surprise, considering the population density of Muslims in the country and the long relationship between Nigerian Muslims and Saudi Arabia.<sup>110</sup> In addition, there is strength in the Nigerian economy (affirmed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as the biggest economy in Africa ahead of South Africa and Egypt).<sup>111</sup> As with other pillars, Hajj is central to the formation of Muslim identity. FOMWAN's teaching and ritual

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<sup>108</sup> On the days of *tashreeq*, see the Quran, 2: 203.

<sup>109</sup> See: Al Arabiya English, Middle East: <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/09/12/Saudi-Arabia-says-Hajj-2016-receives-1-8-million-pilgrims.html>; The Presidency, National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON), <http://nigeriahajjcom.gov.ng/content/flight-updates-20161437ah>

<sup>110</sup> For such links, see Kane (2016). *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa*. Cambridge: MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>111</sup> This Day Newspaper, "IMF Affirms Nigeria as Africa's Biggest Economy," <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2016/10/20/imf-affirms-nigeria-as-africas-biggest-economy-2/>

participation provide members with knowledge and resources to make it possible, as well as stories and memories that add to their own store of religious cultural capital.

Performing the basic rituals of Islam is the foundation around which FOMWAN has built its religious culture. The resulting symbols and practices both reinforce tradition and provide resources for challenging tradition. Being an exclusively women's religious organization, FOMWAN has found in Islam's holy texts a deep egalitarianism that upholds the validity of their (women's) spirituality alongside that of men. They have equipped themselves with knowledge of Islam, especially the Qur'ān, and they repeatedly quote verses and relevant authorities that say that faithful women and men are addressed in the same breath. As Ahmed (1992) argues, Islamic history has not had one monolithic message for women. Instead, there appear in early Islamic history to be two distinct voices and two competing understandings of gender, one expressed in pragmatic articulations for society, the other in the articulation of an ethical vision. Through their organization, FOMWAN members have created an Islamic culture that combines belief and practice, history and contemporary needs. They gain inspiration, motivation, and ideas from stories of pious women they see as role models, including Nana Maryam (The Virgin Mary) and wives of the Prophet, especially Nana 'A'isha, and importantly, Nana Asma'u. They use the available local traditional sources and languages to chant and sing songs and elegies, reminding them of their Islamic identity and the need to contribute to their community.

FOMWAN members also combine these traditional ideas with modern ones. We have seen in chapter three how members, being educated in Western modes, are



professionals in various walks of life and have rationally employed aspects of modern bureaucratic principles. Islam should therefore be visualized as a great pool or corpus of texts, of interpretations of texts, of prescriptions concerning the faith and/or everyday life, of shared rituals, norms and values, as well as teaching traditions that are based on a number of basic texts such as the Qur'ān, the Sunna of the Prophet, as well as other legal and theological texts (Loimeier, 2009). In FOMWAN, women draw on that great corpus of texts in ways that combine traditional wisdom with modern innovations (Ajamīzation) so as to effect change in their society. FOMWAN engages traditional rituals and symbols by establishing schools and organizing and sponsoring educational lectures to teach Islamic knowledge. But they also sponsor public debates and advocacy campaigns and publicize these programs through electronic, print, and most recently, social media outlets.

The Federation provides the cultural resources necessary to infuse every aspect of life with piety. Whilst “ritual can be used to describe elaborate events or particular episodes, it also operates in a more mundane, every day, and routinized modality” (Mitchell’s, 2015, p. 8). The women believe that performing Islamic rituals is part of the Islamic religious piety, but that every act a Muslim performs (whether sacred or secular) has reward or punishment. In essence, they believe the search for knowledge about Islamic rituals is paramount, requiring education and practical training. This ritual knowledge then informs all of life, both major life events like the Ḥajj and the daily prayers, and the rituals of purification that mark days, months, and years.

The practice of almsgiving reinforces a sense of community that includes less

fortunate members – widows, orphans, divorcees, the sick, the wayfarers, the poor, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) at camps, families of insurgency victims, and prisoners. Financial support is supplemented by non-material goods such as psycho-social and medical support to special populations such as survivors of abduction and girls that were forced into marrying Boko Haram insurgents. Ramaḍān’s intensified focus on good deeds reinforces this extension of the FOMWAN community.

Effectively performing, teaching and extending Islamic ritual activities is only possible through coming together of FOMWAN members and having a sense of belonging. On the whole, the group’s rituals reaffirm members’ collective sentiments and permit members to reflect on their journey, subordinate their interests to that of the organization, and collectively provide their absolute support to achieve their corporate goals. Because FOMWAN members have come together and created many opportunities for gathering and interaction, they have been able to sustain a vibrant and flexible religious culture.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated how FOMWAN has created a unique religious culture and strategizes to navigate out of challenges and make meaning in the everyday lives of members and nonmembers. It shows how the association religious culture by engaging in various forms of spiritual devotion, occupying religious space, using symbols, and performing rituals to empower members of the community. The association members do so by conveying (overtly and implicitly) their identity as Muslim women, facilitating networks of skills and relationships, creating trust, and touching the lives of

members and of people beyond the community. They develop distinctive habits of profession of Islamic faith in many ways, including practicing the five daily prayers, fasting the month of Ramaḍān, performing pilgrimage to Mecca, and engaging in the collection and disbursement of alms to the needy. Members tell stories of role models such as Nana Khadīja, Nana ‘A’isha, and Nana Asma’u, to inspire action, thereby effecting change and contributing to civil society in Nigeria.

Likewise, FOMWAN uses traditional ways through music-derived literacy as a resource, to reach out to a wide audience that covers various categories of members of the community. Along with social capital and networks, members persuasively use their acquired Islamic knowledge and create a religious culture that builds trust, opens opportunities for empowerment, and encourages participation. They have created many visual symbols and practices that celebrate and reinforce members’ knowledge of Islam and Islamic identity. They declare their religious identity, displaying it in various ways, including in activities, dress, and speech. Love speech has become a group style and is evidently an important feature of the group’s identity – a distinct religious culture that members point to as a true belief. This is coupled with members’ versatility in Islamic knowledge, which they use as a rhetorical source. Although, both context and content are important in analyzing speech or talk, FOMWAN has constantly retained its unique religious culture in both context and content. Members illustrate this in all interviews, the association’s records, and corroborated in observation. The culture that members have created reaches into many parts of their lives. FOMWAN’s culture suggests a repertoire of

capacities from which varying strategies of action are constructed (Swidler, 1986).<sup>112</sup>

The space that FOMWAN occupies offers an organizational and social setting in which members (and sometimes nonmembers) can collectively learn, practice, and disseminate specific aspects of Islam and strategize how to navigate out of challenges. By implication, religious organizations, in this case FOMWAN, provide a safe environment for discussing and practicing beliefs and, ultimately constructing religious identities (Ammerman, 2003). We have seen through this chapter how FOMWAN's construction of religious culture through collective social action, constituted part of the Ajamīzation of Islam in Africa (Ngom & Kurfi, 2017) – the multiple tangible and subtle enrichments of Islamic traditions that result from their dynamic interplay with local traditions in the Muslim world. As Wadud (2006) argues, Muslim women have always collectively addressed the concerns of their communities. Women's civic contributions may have been overlooked as a presumed reflection of the feminine nature, but more accurately we can see their important contributions to this localization of Muslim culture and practice.

Historically, the study of Islam has almost totally ignored Africa and African sources, despite the fact that the continent has been an important part of the Islamic world. In fact, Islam came to Africa first before it spread to many parts of the Arab world. In addition, the first *hijra* – migration of the early Muslims was to Africa – Abyssinia, Ḥabasha, or present Ethiopia.<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, as we settle into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the study

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<sup>112</sup>“Even if people do not carefully consider the impact or dictates of culture, it still provides the rituals and traditions that regulate ordinary patterns of authority, cooperation, and interaction” (Swidler 1986, p. 284).

<sup>113</sup> See William Montgomery Watt's (1961) *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, Oxford University Press.

of Islam has now expanded to include Ajamī sources from the continent (Kane, 2017). The scholarship on sub-Saharan Africa has suffered from prejudice for a very long time, ignoring local sources of knowledge (Ajamī literatures), and treating the Islamization of sub-Saharan Africa as superficial. But Ajamī sources have proven to better understand the Islamization of Africa (Ngom, 2016). Evidence shows that the Ajamī materials have served as powerful tool for the spread of not only Islam but also Christianity in Africa.<sup>114</sup>

We have seen how FOMWAN members appropriated such local sources of inspiration and motivation, to advance their organizational interests, and effect positive changes in the lives of many Nigerians. This corroborates Paden's (2005) argument that there has been a "new breed of Muslim civic culture with an orientation favorable to the authorities, the community, social change, and conflict resolution." This is attributed to the shift from Arabic to indigenous language sources [Ajamī] (and more recently, English-language sources), which serve as "the basis for legitimation of a wide variety of authority structures. These developments might have started with the Sokoto reformers in the early nineteenth-century" (p. 131). The discursive creation of religious knowledge is an intricate process that is intellectual, but not limited to written sources or the Arabic language. "It is dialogical – informed by the core texts but locally produced – and situational – deployed as a response to local spiritual and social contexts" (Reese, 2014, p. 23).

The findings of this research support recent studies that show that disempowerment leads to many problems in women's lives, including poor health,

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<sup>114</sup> Chapter Two has provided details about the role of Ajami in Nigeria's Culture and Politics.

dissatisfaction in marriage, and poor quality of life. In contrast, having positive and strong role models is linked to women's empowerment and improvement of their quality of life (Latu, et al., 2013). As a social agent, FOMWAN not only provides historical and contemporary role models, but tactically develops and adapts strategies to meet the needs of the social world that members and nonmembers inhabit. It utilizes and exercises cultural agency through many ways, including but not limited to music-derived literacy and ritual knowledge. Its reliance on internal sources of resources speaks to the nature of members' agency.

FOMWAN's religious culture provides opportunities for women's empowerment through a rich cultural and discursive environment that skillfully draws on language and symbols from diverse communities. Members' knowledge of the scripture as a rhetorical resource, religious space, talks, and ritual performances, are important because as Wuthnow (2011) notes, humans themselves, their actions, and the meanings of their actions are shaped and renegotiated in every experience. FOMWAN's watchful choice of using favorable speeches, talks, and words prove to be an effective strategy for the association in forming discourses and addressing some of the challenges. Occupying religious space as well as utilizing it for both sacred and other secular and social functions, point to the members' pluralistic understanding of Islam (Mustapha & Bunza 2014) and of Muslim women's varied agency and experiences. It also provides an alternative theorizing to modern social theories of universal agency that define women, non-Westerners, and minorities in social analysis, "often inadvertently as irrational, anomalous, or deviant from modern social action" (Somers, 1994, p. 633).

Human agency, as Emirbayer and Mische (1998) note, is “the temporally constructed engagement of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgement, both produces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations” (p. 970). The notion of agency is therefore context-specific and not universal. Equally, and more importantly, religion is a part of that agency and to understand how it works, we need to pay attention to how actors act in a particular context, by drawing on 1) habits that are already in place 2) imaginations about what is possible & 3) judgements about what the actors should do. Also, that action in those contexts, produces and transforms. We have seen in this chapter ways in which FOMWAN’s particular religious action produces a religious culture that enables the imaginations and judgements of the members who are part of it in ways that allows them to transform the structures. The Federations case calls for recasting our understanding of the role of Muslim women’s religious culture in our ever-changing world in the global South.

Religion continues to have influence on people’s lives at various levels. As Edgell (2012) argues, across the globe, “religion has an important influence on national and local politics, policy making, social movement mobilization and framing, and public discourse” (p. 248). FOMWAN’s case enhances our understanding of both the micro and macro processes involved in the construction of social life (Wuthnow, 2011). Worthy to note is that, religion cannot be an important influence if there are no mobilized religious agents. If a people have not been formed in a religious culture that helps them to see the

possibility of having an impact, then religious agency is not functional. We shall see in the next chapter (Chapter Five) how religion continues to play a very important role at all aspects of human lives in Nigeria. The chapter will assess FOMWAN's public profile, examine the kind of society the association envisions, the ways the members go about trying to create it, and how its activities constitute a civic culture in the country's plural state.



**CHAPTER FIVE:**  
**THE PUBLIC PROFILE OF FOMWAN, ITS IDEAL SOCIETY, AND CIVIC  
CULTURE**

This chapter is divided into three broad parts: The first part assesses FOMWAN's public profile, highlighting what the association is, who its members are, describing their identity, and what they represent. We shall see how FOMWAN members' individual religious piety overlaps with the social and the ways through which such practices have public implications. The second part examines the kind of society that the Federation members desire, their mission and vision, and how members go about trying to create the kind of ideal society they envision. The third part of the chapter analyzes how FOMWAN's activities constitute a civic culture and how that civic culture contributes to Nigeria's plural state. Utilizing the gathered data, the chapter examines the ideal society FOMWAN members attempt to create, examining the various kinds of activities and strategies of action that the members employ to achieve their objectives. The last section of the chapter assesses the association's activities and how it forms part of civic culture.

**The Public Profile of FOMWAN**

Both FOMWAN's widespread presence and its breadth of functions give the association high public visibility. Consequently, it has become a household name, affirming its public presence through its service provision to members and nonmembers alike, thereby contributing to Nigeria's plural society. We have seen in chapter three that the Federation is an officially registered non-profit, non-governmental organization. It is a civil society umbrella body for Muslim women's associations with branches in all the

states, including the federal capital Abuja where its national headquarters relocated. This is isomorphic to the federal system of Nigeria, which has 36 states. It also has branches in the local government areas (LGAs) across the nation, which gives it the impetus and the means to be a grassroots-oriented organization. Additionally, the association engages in partnership and networking with religious, as well as secular associations, which greatly extends its impact.

The founders of FOMWAN had come to share a common understanding of their challenges, as well as their identity – who the members were, what their conditions and challenges were, what their reality (social world) was and what that meant. FOMWAN founding members had pushed differences (regional, ethnic, economic, and social) to the background, and then built a common ground through identifying challenges and problem-solving. They had socially constructed a new social reality, as Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue. Common factors in that social reality were the practices of striving towards strengthening the Muslim Ummah community educationally, economically, spiritually, and politically. They were disenchanted with the society in which they lived and wanted to allow religion to play a role in their lives and as enshrined in Nigeria's constitution. FOMWAN's public role cannot be separated from its identity and goals as a religious organization.

As pointed out in chapter three, FOMWAN was established in response to the numerous social upheavals that characterized Nigeria's weak and fragile state, some of which manifested in the political, economic, social, and educational sectors. Military incursions, for instance, were accompanied by repression, high levels of bribery, gross

human rights abuses, indiscipline, and many forms of social injustice, including corruption.<sup>115</sup> FOMWAN founding members believed that many of the social injustices that prevent people from attaining a better life were largely due to illiteracy, including religious misunderstanding and misinterpretation. All of these, this group believed, led to women's marginalization and subsequently a weak, unfair, and unjust society. Again, the unjust society was facing several rampant harmful traditional practices, many of which the members believed were wrongfully attributed to religion. These included various forms of violence against women, which in some instances caused psychological, social, and physical harm. Also, there were various forms of violence against children, especially girls.<sup>116</sup> The founding members of FOMWAN felt the need to change these above conditions through collectively being pragmatic public actions.

Since its inception in 1985, FOMWAN has focused on *Da'wa*, which mostly concerned with education and other activities that they felt would increase spirituality. As we have seen in chapter three, members utilize various means to convey Islamic messages and deliberate on national issues affecting women. These include one-on-one interaction at schools, organizing summits, talk shows, conferences, and participating in debates. They also use print media to publish relevant articles, pamphlets, fliers, and magazines, as well make billboards that send messages that promote Islamic values, morality, and preach peace. From the outset, members have been at the forefront in

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<sup>115</sup> See for example: The Nigeria Corruption Index Reports (2016) and The Transparency Corruption Perception Index (2016): <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/corruption-index>; [http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption\\_perceptions\\_index\\_2016](http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016).

<sup>116</sup> These include therapeutic violence, nutritional violence, marital violence, occupational and cultural violence (Child Rights International Network, 2006).

attending debates and conferences that have direct bearing on promoting women's empowerment. At conferences level, they always present papers and state their organizational stance, which further illustrates not only how FOMWAN speaks with one voice but also how it expresses its public profile, and in effect, exercises agency.

When there is any national issue that affects women, FOMWAN would be the first or among the first to meet, deliberate, and take action. Pragmatically, they could be involved by providing material support. For instance, Dr. Umaima, the association's secretary general, recounts how they supported families of internally displaced persons (IDPs). She said that through the humanitarian committee, the Federation organized an appeal fund where it raised money and materials such as clothes, blankets, shoes, and mattresses to support women and children affected by the Boko haram insurgency in the Northeast. Additionally, they may respond to national issues through contributing to the discourse by calling for press conference and issuing communiqué – an official statement on the subject matter. A recent example is FOMWAN's Position Paper on, "A bill for an act to incorporate and enforce certain provisions of discrimination against women." In a communiqué, the association indicates that in August 2016, a distinguished Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Senator Biodun Christine Olujimi) proposed a bill for an act to incorporate and enforce certain provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Right on the Rights of Women in Africa. They posit that the Bill is seeking *equal* share for male and female children in sharing of inheritance among other provisions for widows.

FOMWAN's position on the above subject is that women and girls have a right to inheritance in Islam. On the equal share of the estate of the deceased husband, father, child, or anyone to be inherited, Islamic law of inheritance has made adequate provisions for each as the Qur'ān stipulates and is reflected in the Nigerian Constitution. They add, "The share of a woman or girl is not necessarily equal to that of their male counterparts who are also partaking in the inheritance. In fact, there are situations that a woman takes more share than a man."<sup>117</sup> They conclude that Muslim women are contented with Islamic provisions, and as codified in the Nigerian constitution, and do not require any redefinition or revision. The communiqué was signed by Hajiya Amina Omoti, and Dr. Umaima Momoh, the association's national president and secretary general respectively, and dated January 12, 2017.

FOMWAN always speaks out to make its position very clear on matters that affect women's lives, thereby asserting agency as well as exerting visible presence. This kind of effort demonstrates FOMWAN's effective utilization of the organized form of official religion to make sense of their everyday realities, in which the women tactically use religion for agency, empowerment, and effecting positive change in the society (Ammerman, 2007; McGuire, 2008; Woodhead, 2014).<sup>118</sup> What we can also learn from this is that a top-down approach by failure to integrate religious (especially Muslim)

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<sup>117</sup> See Qur'ān 4:11–12.

<sup>118</sup> There are various stances and orientations that religious communities and people especially women utilize to pragmatically compromise issues surrounding gender relations in male-dominated world religions. They include: "consolidating," "tactical," "questioning," and "counter-cultural." For details, see Woodhead, L. (2007). "Gender Differences in Religious Practice and Significance," in (Eds.) Beckford, J. and Demerath, N. J. *The Sage Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

women's organizations in passing bills and policy formulation is a stumbling block to attaining sustainable, meaningful development. This finding corroborates previous studies that human rights models that detach Muslim women from their own cultures, among other structural factors, worsen women's suffering rather than solving them. If the women's agency is acknowledged and their everyday narratives carefully listened to, then the women's faith-related agencies could be the source of progressive change (Abu-Lughod, 2015; Mahmood, 2006).

In addition to making their voice heard through issuing position papers at press conferences, FOMWAN engages in *Da'wa* through electronic media such as television, radio, and most recently social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Evidently, as we have seen in chapter four, members have equipped themselves with knowledge, especially of Islam, engaged in various charitable activities that demonstrated their organizational pious practices, and extended them to the public. A member explains one of such channels through which they spread *Da'wa* activities:

We utilize the media, notably television and radio. We produce many programs, including sponsoring jingles to convey messages... (Interview with Hajiya Binta Mohammed Yan-Leman, *Nā'iba-al-Amīra* - the Vice President FOMWAN, Jigawa state).

The channels of diffusing FOMWAN's activities provide a solid, evident public presence of the association in Nigerian society.<sup>119</sup>

Later, FOMWAN expanded to engage in an array of activities, including health,

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<sup>119</sup> For discussion about the role of televangelism in Nigeria, see Hackett, R. I. (1998) "Charismatic/Pentecostal Appropriation of Media Technologies in Nigeria and Ghana." In *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 28, Fasc. 3, 258 – 277.

peace-building, community development, humanitarian services, capacity building, and civic engagement. As we have seen, these activities are usually delivered by members through committees, which the board of directors creates based on needs. Executive members who are experts in particular areas emerge as heads of various committees. The structure of FOMWAN is designed in such a way that it provides leverage for each state and local chapter to identify its particular problems and address them based on the people's needs. With chapters in each state, it is visible in religious and social matters. Through its committee structure, partnerships, and networks, it has earned the trust and confidence of the local communities, donor agencies, and governments, thereby establishing visible public presence.

Alongside its charitable presence, FOMWAN's public profile builds on and seeks to strengthen members' Islamic identity. A discussion about the association members' identity cannot be comprehensive without understanding how the sacred and the secular relate in the society. As described in the Introduction and Chapter Two, it is difficult to clearly separate the sacred and secular in African. The sacred and the secular binary that many scholars have been emphasizing does not fit in many African societies, and especially Islamic Africa, including Nigeria (Ngom, 2016). Ter Haar (2009) notes that religion generally in Africa is, "a belief in the existence of an invisible world, distinct but not separate from the visible one, which is home to spiritual beings with effective powers over the material world" (2009, p. 34). This is in contrast to Durkheim's (1905) definition, which divides sacred from secular in a binary manner. In the African context, there is often no clear compartmentality between religion and other institutions, like

politics or family. In other words, religion is neither privatized nor reduced to the private realm. In fact, the realms of religion and politics have an impact on one another.<sup>120</sup>

Similarly, Olupona (2014) argues that in the West, with Christianity, religion and politics have been separated with the Enlightenment into separate spheres – the personal, the secular and public. But indigenous African religions tend *not* to make this sharp distinction between the religious and the secular. Additionally, Christianity and Islam, which have come to be predominant in Africa, view religion in Universalist terms while indigenous African religions tend to be local and particular. Thus, religious worldviews, often unique to different ethnic groups, reflect people's identities and lie at the heart of how they relate to one another, to other people, and to the world at large.<sup>121</sup> African religions tend to be practice-oriented rather than oriented to doctrine and belief. The presence of Islam in Africa has affected African indigenous religions, and the African religious practices have in turn also affected Islamic practices, including in viewing political agency and ethical agency as intertwined. Most traditional African societies, Olupona argues, employ two classes of morals: Those pertaining to individual conduct and those governing social and community relations.

Mindful of religious culture, particularly African Islamic culture, FOMWAN members always blend religious with secular legitimations in their collective actions as a

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<sup>120</sup> For discussion about how Africans, notably Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa comprehend the sacred and the secular and how that informs their worldviews, see Falola Toyin and Amponsab Nana Akua, *Women's Roles in Sub-Saharan Africa*, (2012), Greenwood, Santa Barbara California, especially pp. 67-95.

<sup>121</sup> Chapter Two has provided a detailed discussion about African traditional religion, its philosophy, and worldview and its interplay with World religions, especially Islam in Nigeria.



member notes:

We engage in various activities – *Da'wa*, humanitarian services, health, education, and so on. But more importantly, everything we do is an act of *Ibādā* -- worship and we expect Allah to reward us... (Interview with Barrister Jade Mohammed, FOMWAN Assistant National Legal Advisor).

We have seen in chapter two that prior to the years leading to the formation of FOMWAN, there was evidently public exclusion of Nigerian Muslim women from the public sphere, especially in the north, which is predominantly a conservative Muslim region. The conservative nature of the Nigerian '*Ulamā*' -- Islamic clerics, was one of the factors responsible for women's public embargo (Callaway & Creevey, 1994; Cooper, 2010; Paden, 1974; Yusuf, 1993).

There were several factors that made the conservative '*Ulamā*' view women's public visibility with contempt. They include the impression that male leadership is the dispensation of nature from the dawn of creation and that men are expected to control women in both the physical and the moral domains. In turn, women are to concede to men in all sectors of their lives (Sifawa, 1999). Other factors with regard to the political arena include incessant riots, chaos, and crises that characterized Nigerian politics, women's indecent dressing, midnight meetings, and intermingling with the opposite sex, which contradicts Islamic teachings (Ibrahim, 2014). More so, the high rate of illiteracy, especially Islamic religious literacy, among the women added skepticism about their public visibility (Boyd & Mack, 2013; Ibrahim, 2005; Kane, 1999; Khalid, 1999; Mack, 2004; Umar, 2001). But with FOMWAN's increased participation in educational reproduction and the use of religious piety, along with its extension to the public arena,

members have transformed the religious realm and repositioned religious teachings and norms. As a result, FOMWAN promoted agency and empowerment, especially among Nigerian Muslim women. We have seen in chapter four how members construct civic identity and manifest it through rituals, symbols, and religious space. That also resulted in an incredible engagement and visibility of the women in public sphere, including involvement in politics. One of the association members sheds more light on this:

Among us here is the first female deputy governor in Nigeria. She is Alhaja Latifah Okunnu, the former deputy governor of Lagos state, a FOMWAN founding member and a past National Amīra (Interview with Professor Durosinmi, Chairperson of FOMWAN National Education Committee and past national president).

Along with the association's progressive stand on political participation of Muslim women and its public presence in the political, social, and other spheres, FOMWAN members have been instrumental in the revival of the use of ḥijāb among Muslim women in Nigeria. The literal meaning of ḥijāb is "protection," "shield," or "cover." It refers to the modest dress that a Muslim woman wears. By virtue of their knowledge of the country's constitutional right that allows each citizen to dress according to the requirement of his or her religion, FOMWAN members pursued this right in ways. First, as members' individual spirituality increased, they demonstrated their Islamic identity through modest dressing, including using the ḥijāb in all sacred and secular functions. To members, the ḥijāb is an emblem of piety, but it also creates a sense of "we-feeling," belonging, identity, and solidarity among women who wear it.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> I observed that in all FOMWAN activities members not only wear the ḥijāb, but they uniformly wear a special customized one with the association's logo. This further strengthens their ritual

At the professional level, FOMWAN's action has extended advocacy for the use of ḥijāb to workplaces, thereby enabling Muslim women the opportunity to practice their religion at various professional sites. This facilitates public visibility, enabling members to exercise and express piety: Individual/organizational religious piety overlapping with the social – a practice with public implications. One such public implication could be seen in FOMWAN's engagement in advocacy for rules at the professional level:

The conditions in some professions had not been suitable for a Muslim woman to go out and work especially where she was needed - like in the nursing profession, where she was forced to wear short gown with a hat on her head no ḥijāb ... We first worked very hard to ensure that the Muslim women in such professions were allowed to dress modestly, using their ḥijābs, and we succeeded... (Interview with Dr. Latifah Durosinmi, FOMWAN past national Amīra and a trustee).

From the above, we can understand the centrality of ḥijāb to the Muslim women and particularly to FOMWAN. Being able to dress modestly in their workplaces opened up new opportunities. What an individual woman might not have accomplished in seeking this right became possible through the association. Through collaboration with its affiliates and knowledge of the law, FOMWAN is able to strategically pursue its religious goals within the country's public sphere.

A similar effort has been undertaken in the high schools. The third focus of FOMWAN members in public advocacy involved pursuing the need for high schools to allow Muslim female students to use the ḥijāb. The effort started in a few states where Muslims were the majority and later became applicable in many parts of Nigeria.<sup>123</sup>

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solidarity during national events such as national executive council meetings, national conventions, national education summits, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and so on.

<sup>123</sup> For details about how FOMWAN succeeded in doing this, see Chapter Three (Organizational Activities).

Lastly, FOMWAN joins other Muslims in the world to celebrate the Ḥijāb Day. Muslims worldwide have marked every February 1<sup>st</sup> as the Ḥijāb Day. On that day, FOMWAN engages in various activities that enlighten the public on the value of *ḥijāb* and how that contributes to moral virtues in the society. It organizes lectures on the importance of wearing the ḥijāb and distributes thousands of them to participants. FOMWAN's participation in the celebration of the World's Ḥijāb Day reinforces that West African Muslims have never been isolated. To the contrary, their connection with Muslims worldwide is robust and longstanding (Adogame & Shankar, 2013; Kane, 2017).

FOMWAN utilizes the ḥijāb and advocates for its use to transform the secular landscape of Nigeria. By its public use of the ḥijāb in *all* the association's programs and every gathering they attend (both sacred and secular), they are creating an Islamic culture in Nigeria - a powerful symbol. The following can be understood from the religious culture of using the ḥijāb, which the association has created: 1) it represents obeying Allah's command stipulated in the Qur'ān, as all the interviewed persons often quoted; 2) members symbolize their submission to their Creator and their connection with the Islamic faith; 3) members demonstrate a mark of transcending beyond piety and other people's interpretation of them. In other words, while some see the ḥijāb as an oppressive practice, the users say the contrary. They see it as a protection to its users from abuse (including sexual abuse) and harassment. They also take it to be a shield from exposing their beauty to obtain recognition from people around. Instead, they see the ḥijāb as symbolizing piety, modesty, humility, and liberation from vanity and unnecessary competition.

The series of activities that FOMWAN engages in revolving around the use of ḥijāb at different levels, together affirm a display of the association's public profile. From inauguration, the association focused on *Da'wa*, mainly concerned with providing education and other activities that increased spirituality such as seeking for knowledge, increase in devotion, and use of ḥijāb. As Mahmood (2005) argues, despite their inclusionary intentions, existing feminist accounts of the agency of religiously defined women may obfuscate rather than clarify our understanding of these gendered subjects. Mahmood (2005) contends that relying on secular discursive frameworks built upon ideas such as resistance, self-fulfillment, and autonomy to explain the agency of Muslim women, including Islamic feminists, reinstates the secular subject of feminist thought in ways that erase the religious subjectivity and agency of Islamic women. Agency may be thought of not necessarily in secular terms of self-fulfillment and self-empowerment, but also in religious terms of virtue, fear, and hope. For the association members, individual faith and community action such as the use of ḥijāb should be viewed and interpreted as integral to each other. As we have seen, like other social activities, the ḥijāb serves as a moral reform tool to the Muslim women.

FOMWAN's extensive presence and its breadth of functions give the organization giant public visibility. Through organizational engagement and religious piety, especially the use and advocacy for the use of ḥijāb, FOMWAN has demonstrated how its members utilize an individual pious decision, which has public and political implications, to provide a visible symbol of solidarity among members. It is equally a clear demonstration of how it propels the women into public advocacy. In the same manner, FOMWAN

members have significantly extended the reach of their humanitarian and health services, especially interpreting health interventions in Islamic terms that are trusted by the local communities. Despite the fact that FOMWAN is a non-political, non-partisan, and nonprofit religious organization, it views and encourages Muslim women to actively engage in politics without compromising their religious teachings. This is premised on their belief that only through education and active participation in religious and nonreligious matters can they achieve the ideal society that the organization envisioned.

Largely, FOMWAN's religious piety (with its extension to the social domain) and morality enunciate how members exert agency and respond to some previously held notions about religious women's agency. Rather than viewing the women of faith as doormats, who are supportive of religious groups that seem designed to perpetuate their subordination, this case shows that the members are not passive targets of religious discourse (doormats). Instead, FOMWAN members strategize and appropriate religion to further extra-religious ends, including improving educational, health, social, economic, and domestic relations. Agency is located in the strategic use and navigation of religious traditions and practices to meet the demands of contemporary life. Religion is hereby a cultural repertoire – a dynamic tool kit (Swidler, 1986) that does not prescribe action, but creates a set of schemas and possibilities for action (Sewell, 1992) in addition to serving as a cultural production mechanism for effecting change.

### **FOMWAN's Envisioned Ideal Society**

A major question at this juncture is what kind of society FOMWAN envisions. Conscious of the fact that there were so many challenges that Nigeria's fragile state was

facing, many of which affected Muslim women the most, the group who founded FOMWAN nevertheless believed that a just, fair, and equitable society was needed and possible. One of the founding members explains:

Our association envisions seeing the participation of Muslim sisters in the affairs of their community. Seeing to their education, their *Tarbiyyah* moral character and education of the youth so that we have a vibrant group of sisters participating in the affairs of their own communities... At the same time, it was a reaction to this association: Women in Nigeria (WIN) – a group of secularists, campaigning for so-called women’s liberation (Hajiya Salamatu Ibrahim, FOMWAN Founding member, and President, MSA).

The social transformation FOMWAN was seeking was not in total conformity with many secular women’s organizations and their stance on certain issues. The founding members sought an ideal society based on their understanding of Islamic terms. They exercised their agency in spelling out their identity to avoid stereotype or prejudice. They also emphasized that their Islam-based goals would happen in conformity with the constitutional provision of Nigeria’s plural state. In effect, the women wanted an ideal society in which religion regulates their behaviors and establishes a common universe of meaning (Berger, 1967, 134), at the same time as FOMWAN functions as a faith-based organization that constitutes part of the civil society.

As an actor in civil society, FOMWAN joined other faith-related agencies to address the gap in people’s needs that the government and the market have created or could not adequately address (Bhasin, 1994; Birmingham, 1995; Grusky & Szelenyi, 2007; Makumbe, 1998; Mamdani, 1995; Mishra, 1981). In the face of a history of colonization, social injustice, patriarchy, corruption, military incursions, mismanagement of resources and other social problems, the needs were vast and government policies had

not filled the void. Thus, FOMWAN members realized that there was the need for Muslim women to engage in the formulation of government policies to bring about positive change in the society.

On that basis, the first FOMWAN vision statement named the women's role in both religious and secular matters. They envisioned:

A world where women are totally empowered to be role models in making impacts in religious and secular matters (FOMWAN Constitution, Revised Edition 2007, p. 1).

All the sources of data gathered for this dissertation affirm that FOMWAN's vision was to provide women with overall empowerment in various aspects of life – psychological, emotional, physical, educational, political, social, and economic. They wanted women's empowerment to be functional to the extent that it would transform them to become role models in both sacred and secular activities. FOMWAN's vision speaks to women's susceptibility and vulnerability (hence the need for empowerment) and also to a measurement for that empowerment (being role models). Importantly, the women's impactful participation would be in both religious and secular matters. This reflects the founding members' aspiration to encourage, assist and ensure women's all-round empowerment. It also demonstrates how FOMWAN, as a Muslim women's faith-based association does not draw a line between sacred and secular affairs.

The association's vision of women's emancipation in the affairs of both this world and the hereafter reflects the founders' conviction that women had been suppressed in spiritual as well as in temporal matters. In effect, from the outset, the Association was concerned with emancipating women from various forms of tyrannies, religious no less



than nonreligious. Unlike some of the Islamic extremist sects such as the deadly *Boko Haram*, FOMWAN neither condemns western forms of education nor revolts against the state. Instead, it embraces and promotes both. There has not been any report that the terrorists ever targeted or attacked FOMWAN members, perhaps due to the reverence and trust that the Federation members have built in the communities. The members have the conviction that it is through broad-based knowledge that they can maintain Islamic identity and advocate for progressive values in an ever-changing world.

Education remained central in the revised vision that was adopted in 2014 by the national executive council (NEC), the apex body to formulate and approve the association's vision. As part of the organization's strategic plan, it will be reviewed after 4 years, in 2018. It is worthy to note here that, as with many of the association's activities, the NEC allows some leverage to the state chapters to tailor their activities to reflect their respective circumstances. Similarly, the state chapters are allowed to rephrase their vision to capture and address their appropriate challenges. In a follow-up interview one of the members said:

Initially, we had a vision that suited the whole federation, and later it was allowed for each state chapter to carve out what suits it best or what actually is acceptable to them. Ways of doing for instance *Da'wa* in Lagos or Anambra may not be the same to that of the North... (Hajiya Fatima Dahuwa, Chairperson Education Committee, Bauchi state chapter).

The revised vision of FOMWAN reads:

Envisions a world where women are properly educated and equipped to work with men for an equitable and peaceful society (FOMWAN Magazine, Special Edition, 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1985-2015, p. 2).

A proper education is a central vehicle for women's emancipation. By *proper education*,

FOMWAN refers to qualitative Islamic and Western forms of education. As we have seen in the previous chapters, especially chapters two and three, there were many social problems worrying Nigeria's fragile state - falling standards of education is one of them. The government's neglect of the education sector was evident in its budgetary allocations (Odekunle & Unaeze, 2013). Faced with rather grim prospects for their children's education, parents (Muslims or non-Muslims) began to seek alternative ways of educating their children (Baba, 2011). This led to the prevalence of private schools and an increase in their patronage by substantial sections of Nigerian society from the mid-1980s onwards (Boyle & Pier, 2006; Uzochukwu, 2016; Umar, 2001, 2003). In countries where the state is failing to provide good quality schools for all, faith-based schools will continue to, "play a vital role for many years to come" (Baba, 2011, p. 219). In addition to parents' concerns over quality of education, there were concerns over religious factors. Muslim parents were pessimistic about sending their children to low quality Western, secular schools whose origin, ideology, and orientation were considered more Christian than secular.<sup>124</sup>

In response to the above deterioration of educational conditions and skepticism, FOMWAN was born, and members believed that they could contribute to the revival and reform of the education sector. Evidence of the association's prioritization of this aim is reflected in its vision statement whose focal point is properly educating and equipping women. The activities of FOMWAN have demonstrated the actualization of this vision

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<sup>124</sup> Chapter Two has laid out the political history of Nigeria, showing how Western education arrived in the country and its various manifestations in the social, economic, and political lives of Nigerians from the various geo-political regions.

statement through its organizational engagement and religious piety, engaging in national education policy development with the government (as will be seen in the later section of this chapter), actively participating in national discourses, including on education, health, peaceful coexistence, and mainly establishing schools that provide both Islamic and Western forms of education. The gradual collapse of Nigeria's education system made it easy for FOMWAN and its educational programs to provide alternatives to the failed policies of the state, gaining more relevance, credibility, and public presence.

At this phase, it is important to identify various forms of schools – the Western secular and the Islamic (with its further classifications) in Nigeria, situating FOMWAN within.<sup>125</sup> The first form of Islamic school is the traditional Qur'ānic school (TQS) or the *Makarantun allo*. TQS begins from early childhood, thereby forming the primary level in traditional Islamic education. It focuses on memorizing the Qur'ān and some literacy (Oseni, 1996). Many graduates from these schools resist change, do not favor Western education, and are susceptible to recruitment into deadly radical Islamic sects such as the *Maitatsine* and *Boko haram*, especially in Nigeria.

Umar (2003) argues that by the late 1980s, a time when concerns over the quality of public schools became widespread, and the penetration of the '*Ulamā*', including FOMWAN in the delivery mechanisms of public education had produced two tracks of Islamic schools that became popular, particularly among urban Muslims in Northern Nigeria. Both of the Islamic schools emphasize Arabic and Islamic studies in their

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<sup>125</sup> Details about Western form of education, how it arrived Nigeria, and its interplay with Islamic education and Nigerian political history are provided in Chapter Two.

curricula, which shapes their Islamic character and distinguishes them from public schools (Hassan, 1992). The two types that emerged were those operating *Islamiyya/Madrassa* curriculum and those providing the modified national curricula of public schools.<sup>126</sup> Both of these incorporate elements of Western education in their programs and adopted modern organizational and management styles of public schools. A major form of departure is that both the *Madrassas* and the modified national curricula differ from the secular public schools in their conscious projection of distinct Islamic cultural identity and orientation in the schools' dress and discipline (Baba, 2011). FOMWAN favors the modified curricula of public schools, although there are chapters and branches that establish the latter – *Madrassas*.

Being educated in the Western form, the founding members of FOMWAN as well as graduates of its schools have created a new breed of conscious, liberal, self-identified Muslim women 'Ulamā' or elites. This group of elites actively creates new interpretations that reflect their own circumstances and not only as passive receptors of learning. As Barazangi (2006) notes that the self-identified Muslim is one who recaptures the meaning and practice of being a Muslim by choice; who intimately accesses, consciously understands, and rationally interprets the Qur'ānic texts using their own rules. Through organizational engagement and religious piety, FOMWAN has become a stakeholder in the formulation of national education policy. It advocates and lobbies for educational reforms that allow for the exercise of citizen rights. By being part of the

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<sup>126</sup> In Nigeria, these are called *Islamiyya* schools but in East Africa they are called *Madrassa* connoting modern Islamic schools.

discourse on national policies on education, the association has further exerted its powerful, discernible public presence. This demonstrates the way in which FOMWAN contributes to Nigeria through ensuring the provision of quality education, serving as a functional equivalent to that of the weak and fragile government (Debiel & Lambach, 2010). In essence, the association uses this avenue to achieve its envisioned ideal society.

The addition of a reference to women working with men in FOMWAN's vision may be a tacit acknowledgment of the patriarchal society, structures, and systems in which the women exist. As we have seen in chapter two, Nigeria is a patriarchal society, but women generally, and Muslim women especially, have historically been active in the evolution of the state. Unfortunately, such contributions by women of faith have long been silenced due to certain structural factors (including cultural practices, historians' bias, neglect of women of faith's agency, and the assumption that Islam has been counter-productive to democracy). Most times, the women's voices are unheard in the historical narrative and sometimes, their actions are categorized as "sacred" and therefore "private." As Ammerman (1996) notes, we would miss important dimensions in everyday action if we assumed religion's absence whenever we see secular strategies at work. Across both public and private domains, we would do well to ask both whether and how religious action may be present.

At both public and private domains, FOMWAN adopts two kinds of negotiations: The first is negotiation of meaning and the second is practical negotiation of action. At the negotiation of meaning, FOMWAN is self-identified as a Muslim women's association that adheres to the teachings of Islam. One of the members elaborates:

We are not feminists as many think. Feminists fight for women's equality while we fight for women's *equity*. We believe that Islam, as a complete way of life, has made adequate, fair and just provisions for both men and women. We are contented with our portion and that is precisely what we want (Alhaja Okunnu, a founding member, and a past national president).

The organization is resolute on its identity and does not compromise, as is evident in its individual members' piety and organizational identity. We have seen how FOMWAN engages in a wide range of networking with Islamic, Christian, and secular organizations, as well as collaborating with the secular government and intergovernmental donor agencies. Nevertheless, they consistently retain their Islamic personality. It is striking to see how on many occasions, the association agrees with its Christian counterparts against some secular ones, while each of the faiths retains its religious identity. FOMWAN maintains its declared identity to differentiate itself from what it is not (others), such as feminism. This negotiation of meaning gives the association members the power to understand what they do and makes the world understand who they are and what they do. It also facilitates interpreting their programs within Islamic concepts that are trusted by the communities.

On the other hand, at the level of practical negotiation of action, members focus on strategizing ways to accomplish their organizational goals. They formed FOMWAN, came up with a specific, relevant, attainable, and dynamic vision and mission, and remained committed to the association. A member points out how the association deals with some of the challenges that they encountered, including patriarchy:

We adopt many strategies to deal with patriarchy. First, we learn about Islamic injunctions. If you are knowledgeable, you easily win. But if you are ignorant of religious principles, then you are already a loser. Second, we are obedient to our husbands. That makes them 'flexible' and favorable in responding to our

needs. Third, we engage our husbands in FOMWAN's activities. This creates trust and facilitates our success... (Hajiya Sa'adatu Hashim, Kano state Amīra).

Another respondent elaborates on an effective strategy that they employed:

Many of us married Muslim brothers from the same circle of Islamic organizations such as the AUD, AD, MSS, among other Assalatu groups. So, women's engagement in *Da'wa* activities was not a new phenomenon [to our spouses] and was not contradictory to our husbands' values. We then encouraged new unmarried members to enter into agreement with their suitors that the women would in the future be engaged in *Da'wa* (Salamatu Ibrahim, foundation member).

Strengthening the above, another member explains:

Many people thought we are more powerful than our husbands and that we are in constant disagreement with them. That is stereotypical. On the contrary, our husbands are solidly behind us from the outset. Many of them were the brains behind most of our achievements. We are partners in promoting Islam... (Hajiya Amina Omoti, FOMWAN National president).

Beyond relationships with spouses and family, at a more complex level, another respondent explains how members go about addressing some of their challenges, especially patriarchy:

We work with legislators who hold the purse strings of government. We also closely work with traditional and religious leaders so that they will raise awareness in their communities, for instance on the need to use modern health facilities. There are people who still don't want to go to hospitals, even when the facilities are there, and so we work with religious and community leaders to try to get household heads to allow their women to go to hospitals (Interview with Hajiya Bilkisu Yusuf, founding member and chairperson publications committee).

The above responses point to some important issues. One major takeaway is negotiation. FOMWAN members always negotiate patriarchy among other structural challenges by utilizing their religious identities and social capital. They use religious identities to make sense of their social reality and through that they negotiate. Negotiation is perhaps the

dominant sociological metaphor for describing these coping mechanisms. As Ammerman (2006) notes:

Modern social actors use religious identities and symbols to make sense of everything from migration to family life to politics. In no case are other social realities absent. Economic pressures, legal requirements, political resources, even individual skills, are shaping action, but so are religious prescriptions and narratives. To say that meanings and strategies of action are being negotiated is to recognize that there are multiple and overlapping layers, including religious ones, in the modern social world (p. 223).

It is worth noting here that FOMWAN members' selection of like-minded people as life partners, agreement on future expectations, and engagement of their husbands in spiritual activities serve several functions, including minimizing misunderstanding with spouses and conflict while enhancing conflict resolution and management. Overall, this means: 1) FOMWAN members demonstrate how they use their religious knowledge that they acquired; 2) they practically negotiate their actions by making their husbands part and parcel of their activities; 3) they smartly navigate out of difficulties emanating from ignorance, misconception, misunderstanding, domination, exploitation, suspicion, enmity, and so on by collaborating with stakeholders; 4) the association perfects avenues for gaining so much from their husbands and extensive networking with stakeholders by utilizing social and religious capital to build trust and earn confidence. Coleman (1988) asserts that social capital comes about through, "changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action" (p. 100). Following the same line of thought, Putnam (2000b) indicates that "trustworthiness lubricates social life" (p. 21) and that, stocks of social capital, trust, norms, and networks tend to be self-reinforcing and cumulative. FOMWAN members' coping strategies not only facilitate achieving the organizational goals but also



reinforce trust among their spouses, partners, the target communities, and government.

Kandiyoti (1998) defines those forms of strategies that women undertake when living within concrete constraints as “patriarchal bargains.” These are the set rules and scripts regulating gender relations, to which both genders acquiesce (p. 275). Such strategizing varies over time, class, and ethnicity. Most importantly, these patriarchal bargains exert a powerful shaping influence on women's gendered subjectivity and determine the nature of gender ideology in different contexts. Under the constraint of patriarchal oppression, women may adopt strategies of active resistance, such as forming nongovernmental organizations as is the case with FOMWAN. Through organizational engagement as well as religious piety, members tactfully resist patriarchy. Although, the association’s vision implicitly recognizes Nigeria’s patriarchal structures and systems, the members’ diplomatic employment of strategies prove very effective as evident in the cordial relationship that they established with their spouses.<sup>127</sup>

Throughout its evolution, FOMWAN has envisioned a society in which women are educated, emancipated, and empowered. In other words, the kind of society that FOMWAN members aim to create is a just, fair, and equitable society. Although membership in the association is exclusively for Muslim women, its services and aspirations are not limited to Muslim women. This is what the members echoed in all the interviews, and is reflected in all the association’s publications. It is equally evident in the

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<sup>127</sup> During all the programs that my team and I attended, we observed that some of the members actually attended the venues in their husbands’ company. This is a clear indication that the women had strong backing and full support of their spouses. It is evidence that the husbands are partners and not antagonists to the women and their course, as some would assume

association's humanitarian services, crusades for social justice, and civic engagement.

They seek to make a distinctly Muslim, distinctly female contribution to Nigeria's plural society.

A point of paramount significance in FOMWAN's vision is consistent endeavors to attain an equitable and *peaceful society*. This resonates with the conflicts, crises, and clashes that affected the Nigerian state and characterize its weakness and fragility. As we shall see later in the various ways through which the association aims at achieving a peaceful society, members have adopted numerous activities that demonstrate their contributions towards peace-building. Essentially, to have as part of its vision a peaceful society is a recognition of the existence of hostilities, with a view to address them in order to attain the peaceful society that the association envisions.

Additionally, FOMWAN's vision signals that their impact will extend beyond Nigeria. Programs, activities, events and their outcomes may transcend geography. This can best be seen within the context of the regionalization of FOMWAN. For instance, FOMWAN has been a catalyst for the formation of similar sister organizations in the following West African countries: Ghana (FOMWAG), Liberia (FOMWAL), Gambia (FOMWAGA), Senegal (FOMWASEN), and Sierra Leone (FOMWASL). There is has also established strong networks with Muslim women in the Republic of Niger. Beyond that, FOMWAN facilitated the establishment of a sister organization in Mauritius (FOMWAMS) and Mauritania (FOMWAM). Recently, at the intercontinental level, FOMWAN has influenced the formation of a similar organization in the United Kingdom (FOMWA-UK) and Australia. The formation of FOMWAN beyond Nigeria and its

internationalization are a clear indication of the association members' view that injustice in one place could be injustice everywhere. A "world where women are properly educated and equipped to work with men for an equitable and peaceful society" is not a world limited by national boundaries. The current mission statement echoes the organization's vision:

To propagate Islam, educate Muslim women and ensure that they live according to the tenets of Islam and make positive impact on national matters, both religious and secular (FOMWAN Magazine, Special Edition, 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1985-2015, p.2).

Again, the focus is on education and women's liberation within Islamic precepts - liberation that is expected to have a public impact beyond the Muslim world itself. It is a demonstration that the women are active, not passive participants, and agents not only recipients of positive change or development. Equally, the mission statement captures the members' attempt to utilize religious ideas in negotiating, interpreting, and re-interpreting reality, thereby making meaning of their actions. By so doing, they allow religion to regulate their behaviors and actions, while staying within the state's legal provisions.

FOMWAN women's vision of society combines religious legitimations with secular ones. They engage in various devotional acts of piety (for God), for the constitution, for human rights, and for development in general. This amalgam provides the women with the basis for interpreting various interventions (such as in education, economic, health, and humanitarian services) in Islamic terms that are trusted by the host communities. Furthermore, the women utilize these legitimations in reconciling mass democratic aspirations and concerted popular efforts to preserve Islamic values in government and law. Specifically, they frame discourses that describe a positive

relationship between Islam and democracy. This follows a generation-long debate among Islamic and Western intellectuals and policy makers as to whether religion generally, and Islam in particular, is compatible with democratic government.

As discussed in Chapter One, there have been scholarly debates on the relationship between Islam and democratic forms of governance. The first group argues that Islam and democracy should not be considered mutually exclusive (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996; Kramer, 1993; Salame, 1994). Others stressed supposed areas of irreconcilability, suggesting that Islam is a hindrance to democratic ideals, values, and forms of governance (Fukuyama, 1992; Huntington, 1984; Lipset, 1994). But recent studies prove that Islam is not the obstacle to democratization that some scholars allege it to be (Hofmann, 2004; Norris & Inglehart; Tessler, 2002). To have a nuanced understanding of the relationship between religion (especially Islam) and democracy, it is crucial for scholars to appreciate religion's neutrality – i.e. neither being inherently pro- nor anti-democratic. Furthermore, there is the need for careful examination of the roles of religious groups in promoting or impeding the evolution of democracy and political orders (Davie & Ammerman, In Press).

The Federation's case in Nigeria is important considering the country's significance in Africa (as the largest economy), its huge population of Muslims, the rise in struggles with radical Islamists, especially Boko Haram, and the recent separatist or secessionist calls for the country's disintegration.<sup>128</sup> FOMWAN's collective actions and

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<sup>128</sup> For details on the agitations of the Niger Delta militants see Campbell, John (2013). *Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

influence beyond Nigeria point to the role of Muslim women in effecting change in plural societies. Members' religiosity brings about important transformations in critical domains of society while also reclaiming their citizenship rights through activism within their communities of faith. As Alidou (2013) argues, this is typical of modern Muslim women's organizations and movements within secular postcolonial nation-states. Members are both spiritually devoted and civically engaged, demonstrating how Islam could actually work vis-à-vis democratic values in a plural society like Nigeria.

Previous studies confirm that the communal aspects of religious social behavior increase political interest and trust in institutions, which, in turn, typically lead to more support for democracy (Bloom & Arikan, 2012). Other recent studies on Nigerian Muslims and democracy reveal that the people's everyday experiences prove how democracy might work alongside the legal recognition of Islamic values (Brandon, 2010). FOMWAN has practically illustrated that it envisions an ideal society in which women's lives are positively affected in both religious and secular domains.

### **Ways through which FOMWAN goes about Creating Its Ideal Society**

The founding members of FOMWAN believed that they could only succeed in addressing their problems and, by extension, the problems of Nigeria's weak and fragile state by establishing an association. They thought that it would serve as a medium for them to speak with one voice. As Jeavons (1988) argues, faith organizations usually choose a name that ties them explicitly to specific religious traditions, and that is certainly the case for FOMWAN. Their name defines who belongs, but more than that, FOMWAN members told our research team that their choice of name constantly reminds

them of their motive. We have seen how those motives shape both the religious culture they have formed and the services that the association provides, especially in education and health sectors. Here we turn toward the way their work also produces public advocacy and civic engagement.

The association's aims and objectives already make clear that public engagement is a goal. They aim: 1) to promote unity, cooperation and common action among the Muslim women's groups in Nigeria; 2) to encourage and coordinate development of Islamic education and awareness among women; and 3) to enable Muslim women to express their views on national issues.<sup>129</sup> That same Anniversary magazine summarized how they would pursue those goals:

- a. Education and capacity building
- b. Provision of health services, especially in reproductive health
- c. Intellectual and economic empowerment of women through capacity building workshops, seminars, etc.
- d. Care of early school leavers (i.e. Drop-out of school age children not enrolled)
- e. Rehabilitation of street children, abandoned children, orphans and refugee children
- f. Provision of girl-child Education and adult literacy for women both in English and Arabic through establishment of schools: Nursery/Primary, Secondary, Women's Islamiyya literacy schools and vocational centers.
- g. Youth development through youth programs for girls, etc. (p. 2).

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<sup>129</sup> FOMWAN Magazine, Special Edition, 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1985-2015, p. 7.

These FOMWAN objectives elaborate what we have seen throughout this dissertation. FOMWAN members' deep concern about improving the conditions of Nigerian Muslim women extends to the general public and builds on education before any other aspect. To achieve these objectives, members started organizing quarterly meetings and annual national conferences to network and share best practices. It is a mark of the commitment of the founders of FOMWAN that since its establishment in 1985, these quarterly meetings and annual conferences have never failed. Their organizational structure has served them well.

FOMWAN's national body does more than hold meetings, however. It encourages the establishment of schools and learning centers at all the chapters across the nation. Through its education committee, it supports any branch that has made some efforts to establish such educational centers. During every national executive council meeting, states are required to submit reports of their activities (as we have seen in chapter three). During this session, states are called alphabetically, and each chapter has to present its financial statements, as well as comprehensive reports on progress, prospects, and problems. No reports are accepted without financial statements – evidence of prudence and transparency. The members of the national executive council (NEC) will ask several questions and the state representatives (usually the state Amīra or her vice, or secretary) will respond to the questions and defend their submissions. Where a state has made some bold efforts to establish schools, but is incapacitated either by financial, legal, or other structural constraints, the national body could come in with support. But the situation has to be justified and convincing enough to deserve such interventions. In such cases, the

NEC may take over the project and complete it, vote some money to support, organize a fund raising activity, or mobilize resources through various other means such as reaching out to wealthy individuals who are spouses, friends, or philanthropists.<sup>130</sup> This central administration's support to various chapters is yet another factor that contributes to FOMWAN's proliferation and establishment of schools and learning centers across the country.

In almost all the interviews with the members, they indicated that education was a priority to FOMWAN. Members recounted how they started as students and later became teachers and owners of various schools – Islamic, modern, but mostly modernized integrated *Madrasas* (mixed Islamic and secular schools). As a result, the organization has succeeded in establishing schools in all the states and in the federal capital of Abuja. The schools range from day care centers, nursery/primary schools, secondary/post-primary schools, and other educational programs. The “other educational programs” include establishing skills and acquisition centers, adult literacy classes, computer literacy classes, home management classes, basic communication skills programs (all exclusively for women), advocacy visits on girls child education, inclusive education (for the physically challenged), provision of education support materials to schools and the needy, and scholarships, among others.

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<sup>130</sup> In an interview with Hajiya Bilkisu Yusuf, a one-time national Amīrah, she narrated to me how she reached out to a politician who was a class mate of hers, who sponsored the complexion of their national secretariat hostel complex, in Abuja. Equally, the Bauchi state Amīrah informed me how her husband donated to the Bauchi state chapter of FOMWAN a guest house which the chapter was using as its state secretariat. This is an indication of how members utilize religious and social capital to achieve their organizational goals.



FOMWAN institutions include Islamiyya schools, conventional Western schools, and the modern integrated schools that combine both Islamic and Western forms of education. To this end, 32 years after its establishment (1985-2018), FOMWAN has built over 200 schools in various parts of the country, focused especially on teaching women and children.<sup>131</sup> But the schools for children are mostly modern integrated schools.

As we have seen, FOMWAN's public engagement is effectively organized, but it begins with personal piety (Jihād of the soul). Personal virtues such as individual honesty, respectability, kindness, decency, prudence, integrity, dignity, honor, moral rectitude, and a sense of doing good to others (family, neighbors, strangers, wayfarers, and the community at large) are intertwined with public morality. In the African moral philosophies and worldviews actions are right insofar as they are a matter of doing goodness to others and living harmoniously with others and honoring communal relationships (Mbiti, 1969; Metz & Gaie, 2010; Motlhabi and Mnyaka, 2010; Olupona, 2014; Paris, 1994; Verhoef & Michel, 1997). Among the Hausa people in Northern Nigeria – which is predominantly Muslim -- the concept of community or people (*jama'a*) is similar to the concept of Muslim community (*ummah*), but the idea of peoplehood (*jama'a*) may refer to people of any community and may be used in a religious or non-religious sense (Paden, 2005, p. 77). Their piety assumes peaceful coexistence and a re-evaluation of Muslim lives in contemporary society. It equally reflects sanctified suffering, *Ṣabr*, or “perseverance in the face of suffering” (Ngom, 2016, p. 208) - one of the subtle dimensions of Ajamīzation – blending Islamic and local

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<sup>131</sup> Interview with the National Amīrah, Hajiya Amina Omoti, January 2017.

traditions.<sup>132</sup>

Members support their spiritual goals by citing references to the contributions of many Muslim women who helped to the spread of Islam and whose lives were devoted to ensuring social justice. Notably, the members cite Nana ‘A’isha, the wife of Prophet Mohammed, and most recently, Nana Asma’u, the daughter of Sheikh Usman dān Fodiyo. Each of these women immensely contributed to Islam through their knowledge and community services. As a result, FOMWAN takes these two Muslim women to be their role models. They argue that it is through the acquisition of knowledge, the exhibition of virtues through everyday practice of Islamic teachings, spiritualities, devotion, and exemplary leadership that these women have been exalted. Theirs was not the jihād using sword.

This group of devoted Muslim women is therefore committed to utilizing spiritual and social capital in achieving larger goals for their society. By acquiring knowledge, especially equipping themselves with Islamic knowledge, and disseminating it to society FOMWAN members are empowered role models in society, addressing many problems, and making sense in their daily lives. As sociologists have long known, a “religious ethic” – a religiously-inspired way of life – has both direct and indirect consequences. Just as Calvinist virtues made good capitalists (Weber 1905), so too can Islamic virtues make good citizens. Through its *Da’wa* programs, the association encourages and effects changes in the lives of members and others by becoming more spiritual and morally

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<sup>132</sup> See Fallou Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World: the Odyssey of Ajami and the Muridiyya*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, especially pp. 208-210.

upright. For example, one member mentioned how FOMWAN was part of a national campaign against indiscipline, titled War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC), arguing that these efforts are rooted in religious teachings. She showed us some of the stickers and fliers that FOMWAN produced as part of its contributions to such efforts. The implication of this is that an enlightened, educated, and just society will have citizens who are law-abiding (Georgi, Ulrich, and Wenzel, 2003) and thereby contributing to Nigeria's civic culture.

The data gathered from this study reveal that *all* the interviewed women have increased their knowledge of Islam, and have also gained a sense of belonging and sisterhood. As Durkheim (1905) claimed, their religious activities serve as social cement that binds believers together. This new religious community allows for improved knowledge about oneself, the immediate community, and the society at large. The boundaries of the community are enlarged by the fact that FOMWAN attempts to balance regional and other differences by rotating its leadership and meeting venues. Members gain the opportunity to know other places, people, and cultures considered "other," thus, fostering mutual understanding and unity.

More importantly, the work of FOMWAN is contributing to Nigerian public life by creating generations of more spiritually devoted Muslims, who are civically engaged and accommodative to Nigeria's multi-ethnic and plural society. FOMWAN's peaceful strategy provides a model of harmony and supporting Nigeria as one unified nation. It stands in contrast to radical Muslim groups in Nigeria such as Boko Haram that have succeeded in indoctrinating their members and potential prospective members through

preaching violence and extremist ideas. Boko Haram advocates for picking up arms and engaging in violence for forceful conversion (unjustifiable jihād of the sword). FOMWAN's peaceful preaching strategy and engagement with the state provisions, has provided an alternative way of theorizing about Islam's role in democracy. Many scholars, especially in the contemporary global North, ask: how can Muslims be both good citizens of a liberal democracy and concurrently good Muslims? This follows the generally held view that Muslims have no tradition of separation of church and state and cannot participate in a secular, pluralist society. FOMWAN members' philosophy espouses nonviolence as the best investment for people and humanity, as the case of the Murīds of Senegal (Ngom, 2016).

The mirror image of this view is the radical ideology that presupposes that Muslim believers should resist Western forms of government and instead impose the *Shari'a* Islamic law. Instead of rejecting Western forms of knowledge and governance as the Boko Haram sect does, FOMWAN accepts them, while simultaneously building an engagement with the world that begins with Islamic knowledge and piety. This has proved appealing to many Nigerians and means that FOMWAN demonstrates a West African movement that is both consistent with orthodox Sunni Islam and compatible with modern liberal democracy.<sup>133</sup>

Besides the association's contributions to Nigeria's education sector, there is engagement with the health sector – an area where women and children are the worst hit,

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<sup>133</sup> As we have seen, this is consistent with March's (2011) findings that prove a middle way between the two poles.

particularly in maternal mortality. Pregnancy and childbirth-related complications are among the leading causes of maternal mortality in many developing nations (Palaniappa, 1995). In Nigeria, there are numerous diseases that have long been claiming the lives of people, especially poor women and children living in rural areas. These include malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, measles, respiratory tract infection (pneumonia), diarrhea, cerebrovascular disease/accident (stroke), and perinatal conditions among pregnant women (The WHO, 2017). The care received by pregnant women is uneven, at best. Subjects' characteristics such as age (Zhang & Savitz, 1996), level of education (Evenson et al. 2009; Szirmai, 2005), and experience in infant and maternal issues (Whitford, Alder, & Jones, 2007) significantly influence knowledge, attitude, and perceptions of mothers towards antenatal care. And the findings of Kurfi and Abba (2015) show that a combination of factors, such as lack of knowledge about antenatal care (ANC), inaccessibility to place of delivery, and ANC commencement time all affect care seeking behavior during pregnancy among Nigerian women.

Although government at the state and federal levels through the ministry of health has been making efforts to address these problems, the efforts are inadequate. They are further crippled by government officials' corrupt practices (The Report of the Transparency International, 2015). Furthermore, there has not been an existing health policy plan or law to regulate the terms and delivery of services, especially in maternal health services. In response to these challenges, the Kano state branch of the Federation drafted a "Maternal Health Bill" as one of their leaders recounted:

We are all women, and almost all of us are mothers. We understand better pregnancy-related issues than anyone else who doesn't experience it [males]. We are equally professionals in various aspects and thereby know that the major obstacle in healthcare access and service delivery was lack in a comprehensive health care policy that would address those problems, principal among them was maternal and child care. In consultation with others, we, therefore, drafted a maternal health bill to help ensure that obstacles depriving most women of equal access to state maternal health services are remedied. It was successful and many chapters copied us... (Interview with Hajiya Sa'adatu, the Kano state Amīra, 2016).

FOMWAN's established trust in the communities, its efficient and flexible organizational structure, the utilization of its wide grassroots network, and its own professional affiliations provided the association with the opportunity to integrate concerns from grassroots women that are often excluded from regional and national policy debates.

By proposing the Maternal Health Bill, FOMWAN has created a space for women in NGOs and CBOs to devise legislation that mainstreamed elite and grassroots women's priorities through consensus. Their concerns included issues related to transportation costs and other hidden fees, level of comfort communicating their needs to the staff, food security, and more (Wallace, 2015). For FOMWAN this is another form of *Da'wa*. Health-related concerns are addressed as an expression of Islamic faith (Olivier, 2015). They empower women with knowledge about their religion, as well as knowledge about their health, and what happens around them. Previous findings suggest that as women's knowledge towards antenatal services increases, it transforms, empowers, and increases the attendants' self-esteem (Alidou, 2013; Boyd and Mack, 2013; Fapohunda, 2012; Zweigenhaft & William 1998). FOMWAN contributes directly by increasing women's health knowledge, but extends the impact by assisting the government with community-oriented strategies that reduce maternal and infant mortality rates.

This is an example of what Cochrane (2011) calls, “religious health assets,” which are located in or held by a religious entity but can be leveraged for greater health. Assets carry intrinsic value that has “potential for action.” There are tangible assets, which could include buildings and materials, personnel, care and support groups, educational organization, and financial assistance. On the other hand, there are also intangible assets that include the provision of counseling services, providing resilience, comfort, rituals, and support. Cochrane argues that assets in themselves, however, defined and whether fully uncovered or not, do not do anything. They are, so to speak, always “at rest unless and until someone acts on them. In effect, an understanding of agency, that is capacity for action, both latent and actual, is also crucial” (p. 244).

By actively engaging in matters that affect women’s lives, such as maternal health and childcare, FOMWAN is turning a latent health asset into an active one. By interpreting health interventions in Islamic terms that are trusted by the local communities, they make those interventions more accessible. More than any other (especially male-dominated) religious group, members are able to extend their health outreach to communities. Their effects on Muslim women are not, however, the only benefit. So far, FOMWAN has established its own certified inpatient and outpatient hospitals, clinics, and centers, among other services in different communities in Nigeria. The health services that FOMWAN offers are not exclusive for members or Muslim women; instead, they are for the general public. Success in extension of the reach of health services that FOMWAN makes can also be attributed to its collaboration with

international donor agencies such as UNICEF, USAID, and UNDP.<sup>134</sup> A subtle function of the association's ties with the donor agencies is that it enables development groups to have access to women from remote areas that they would not be able to reach independently. A bottom-up approach to development is used, courtesy of FOMWAN's utilization of religious and cultural assets, channeled through collective actions.

FOMWAN's public impact extends to the special needs of people in conflict-ridden areas. Borno state – the birthplace of Boko Haram and the state most affected by the insurgent attacks – is one of such places. In all the interviews, members emphasize peace and the need to have a peaceful society for meaningful, sustainable development to happen. For instance, Hajiya Saratu says, “Islam is a religion of peace. In fact, the name Islam means peace...” Similarly, Karimatu, another member says “Islam is a total way of life which teaches peace, love, unity, and social justice.” We have seen in chapter four the various ways through which the association touches the lives of the public, notably those affected by the Boko Haram insurgency.

FOMWAN is involved in a series of activities and programs that range from advocacy, to education and humanitarian services across the state. Members contribute for peace-building at comfort and conflict zones through various means, including advocacy for peaceful coexistence, a door-to-door peace campaign, and engaging community leaders. They also maintain collaboration with other agencies and organizations in educational, health, and other humanitarian services. Here is what one of

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<sup>134</sup> We have seen in Chapter Four how the association strategically and somewhat selectively engages in collaboration with donor agencies.



the executive members has to say on their intervention at Borno - the worst hit state by the Boko Haram insurgency:

FOMWAN at the national level is a member of the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Program (NSRP)'s National Advisory Committee. Also, at the state level our association is a member of the state advisory committee and a Principal Partner in the implementation committee. The NSRP is a peace-building program that is funded by the DFID but managed by the British Council. Its main aim is to assist Nigerian stakeholders manage their own conflicts so that the impact of this violence on the most vulnerable is reduced. So, we work on security and governance; on addressing the drivers of conflict; and we increase participation of women in peace-building initiatives in research, advocacy, media and workshops (Interview with Hamsat Al-Amin, the Northeast Zonal Coordinator).

The above captures some of the ways FOMWAN engages in peace-building, especially in conflict areas such as Borno. Essentially, its participation in and networking with stakeholders like government and international donor agencies, as well as membership in important committees speaks volumes to the association's powerful public presence, its role in conflict-mitigation and peace-building actions, and its desire to achieve its goal through identifying and empowering the vulnerable members of the society, notably women and children affected by the insurgency. We have seen in chapter three how FOMWAN extensively used network forms to extend its reach, as well as how religious/secular partnerships have been exceedingly productive. We have also seen how women of faith (FOMWAN and CAN-Women's Wing) formed an Interfaith Women Peace Movement (IWPM) and the positive impact that had as a peace-building action. Through these initiatives, FOMWAN exercises agency, asserts difference, and impacts on many people, especially disempowered persons.<sup>135</sup> These strategies of action that

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<sup>135</sup> See Chapter Three (Activities of FOMWAN) for details about some of the association's programs for internally displaced persons (IDPs), widows, orphans, and other vulnerable persons.

FOMWAN adopts are well built and effective. They are undoubtedly paths to actualizing the association's vision of a world where women are properly educated and equipped to work with men for an equitable and peaceful society.

### **FOMWAN and Civic Culture**

This section of the chapter analyzes how FOMWAN's activities constitute a civic culture and how that civic culture contributes to Nigeria's plural state. A civic political culture implies a political culture that is characterized by acceptance of the authority of the state and a belief in participation in civic duties (Almond & Verba, 1963). As Barber (1969) argues, political participation includes all the lively and varied ways citizens act their political parts. Voting is the baseline, but talking, writing, petitioning, demonstrating, and a wide range of other organized and individual activities are significant forms of participation. We have seen how FOMWAN's efforts in education, health care, and community-building have given the organization a public profile and brought it into engagement with policy formation and governmental agencies. But as a non-political organization, in what ways does FOMWAN nevertheless contribute to political and civil society in Nigeria?

Since its inception in 1985, FOMWAN has engaged in policy development through partnership with the government, thereby earning it an official stakeholder status in the federal government's Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, the National Nomadic Education Program, and at the Joint Consultative Committee on Education (JCCE). The organization is also involved in the federal government of Nigeria

(FGN)/UNICEF Qur'ānic Education program.<sup>136</sup> At the international level, FOMWAN has a consultative status with the United Nations. FOMWAN has, therefore, been involved in policy formulation at various levels of governance. It is also a member of the Civil Society Coalition on Education for All (CSACEFA), an initiative that was initially funded by Action Aid. The national and various state branches network and collaborate with other non-governmental organizations in education, health, peace-building, community and humanitarian services.

We have seen how these collaborative efforts have enabled FOMWAN to implement many projects. They also make possible and visible the association's civic engagement activities, providing a platform for participating in policy debates, discourse, formulation, and implementation. As previous studies have shown (Clarke, 2011; Marshall & Van Saanen, 2007), FBOs are now seeking involvement and influence in policy debates and seeking support to scale up a range of social justice initiatives. A good example is FOMWAN's opposition to a bill on "women's equality" in inheritance, among others.

In addition, the secular education that FOMWAN provides empowers the recipients to know better about themselves and their immediate environments. It models acceptance of the authority of the state and one's civic duties. Civic education is part of its curriculum and programs, beginning with literacy. FOMWAN's annual education

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<sup>136</sup> This UNICEF sponsored program was a survey of Qur'ānic Schools in four Nigerian states in 1999. The idea was to obtain a descriptive profile of Quranic schools, the children, the owners, and the teachers. See The Evaluation Report (1999) Nigeria: Baseline Survey of Qur'ānic Schools in Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara States. Also available online via: [https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index\\_14164.html](https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_14164.html). (Accessed March 14, 2017).

summit includes a focus on the organization's attempt to eradicate illiteracy, and empowering women and children with knowledge both sacred and secular. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2013) views civic education as processes that affect people's beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members or prospective members of communities. Civic education can be latent – institutions and communities transmit values and norms without meaning to. And the outcomes may not be beneficial: sometimes people are civically educated in ways that disempower them or impart harmful values and goals. It is certainly not limited to schooling and the education of children and youth. Instead, families, governments, religions, and mass media are some of the institutions involved in civic education.

FOMWAN's choice of themes for their annual summit gives evidence of the association's quest to create an informed class of citizens. They address specific contemporary national issues such as education, health, economy, politics, and peaceful coexistence. Theirs is a stance of cooperation with the state rather than rebellion. The following statement by the education committee chair captures what the annual summit is all about. She says:

The essence of the Education Summit is to sensitize the populace, especially Muslim women to pay more attention to education. The Muslims are very backward in the education. It is to awaken them. Then in 2000, we had this State Universal Basic Education program, which is an educational opportunity for our children. So we became partners... We also realized that poverty shouldn't be a barrier from pursuing basic education... Equally, we have a magazine that is periodically reviewed, featuring education, early child education (ECC), addressing issues and challenges (Interview with Dr. Lateefah Durosinmi, a past national Amīra and the chair of the education committee).

FOMWAN seeks to work cooperatively toward the attainment by the state of common

policy goals, which are critical to national unity (Baba, 2011). With FOMWAN's deep engagement with the state at various levels, notably provision of education, the association effectively increases its public presence and relevance in Nigeria. These qualities provide the association with the capacity and ability to effect changes in the society, and by that, achieve its organizational vision of an ideal society where women are empowered to be role models in impacting religious and secular matters.

Although FOMWAN is a religious and not a political organization, it nevertheless also actively participates in the election process. One of the members recounts,

We have always participated in election exercises. We are partners to the Election Monitoring Group (EMG) at the national level (Interview with Hajiya Munkailu Adamu, Amīra Imo state).

Efforts by FOMWAN, such as active participation in election monitoring, educating voters about their civic rights and actively engaging in the historic 2015 electoral revolution in Nigeria, which led to the conduct of a peaceful and credible national election, are certainly part of civic culture. Finke (2014) notes that civic education activities are designed to promote political knowledge, engagement, and support for democratic norms and values among ordinary citizens. As Almond and Verba (1963) argue that mere membership in political associations is associated with civic cooperation and trust. As we have seen, the internal diversity of FOMWAN builds a community of trust, and its structure parallels national political structures, which facilitates public engagement. FOMWAN is doing both implicit and explicit civic education.

However, religious differences can be challenging for civil society in developing nations. Nigeria's failed and fragile state has been challenged by corruption and crises in

politics. It has been characterized by citizens' lack of knowledge about their civic rights, abject poverty leading to the electorates selling their votes, violent campaigns, election rigging, indiscipline by some electoral commission officials, politicians' manipulation of religion for their selfish interests, and their instigation of some youth to engage in election violence. Such political crisis usually claims the lives of innocent people, jeopardizes democratization processes, and considerably increases proneness to civil conflict (Collier & Rohner, 2008; Falola, 1998; Salawu, 2010; Paul & Pedro, 2014). We have equally seen how women of faith, particularly FOMWAN and Christian Association of Nigeria Women's Wing (CAN-WW) championed the founding of an interfaith dialogue forum called the Interfaith Women Peace Movement (IWPM), an effort that contributed to the peaceful conduct of the 2015 general elections. It educated the electorates, minimized election violence, and gave impetus to credible elections. Beyond the elections, it provided a platform for sustainable peaceful coexistence by promoting mutual understanding and increasing trust-building among members of different faiths and backgrounds. The interfaith dialogue has contributed immensely to Nigeria's civil society by bridging ethno-religious divides, reducing religious and ethnic clashes, and serving as another of FOMWAN's contributions to the country's civil society.

FOMWAN's involvement in various forms of civic engagement demonstrates the ways in which the members are trying to create their ideal society. In everything the association does, religious cultural symbols and practices are intertwined with activities in the "secular" world. They advocate for the use of *hijāb* and they provide an array of services (tangible and intangible, including material, moral and psychological) as well as

modes of civic engagement. FOMWAN members are women acting powerfully in the world and demonstrating that they do not see their religion as the root of their oppression. Quite the opposite, they view Islam as an arena in which they can find freedom (Aulette et al., 2009). This corroborates the findings of previous studies about Muslim women in various parts of the world, including in some Islamicate societies (Ahmed, 2012; Badawi, 1995; Boyd and Mack, 2013; Mahmood, 2005; Mernissi, 1992; Shaheed, 1998). Across religious traditions, many women who are involved in their religious communities find their religions places of support and expression (Neitz, 1998) as well places of activism.

### **Conclusion**

FOMWAN members are self-conscious that there were many challenges that Muslim women were facing in Nigeria's weak and fragile state. Major among them were illiteracy, abject poverty, ethnic, regional and religious crises, widespread disease, increased infant mortality rates, and corruption. The founding members believed that a weak and fragile state was not what they wanted, but instead, they envisioned a just, fair, and harmonious society. They had a belief that such an ideal society was necessary and possible through education, advocacy, policy involvement, women's empowerment and other forms of civic engagement. FOMWAN became an umbrella association for Muslim women with a vision of a world where women are properly educated and equipped to work with men for an equitable and peaceful society. Its package of activities clearly demonstrates the continuous role of religion in people's lives, both privately and publicly. This finding corroborates several studies that religious piety and engagement of religious organizations are used by women to transform the religious realm from within, by

interpreting and repositioning religious teachings and norms to enable and promote women's agency and empowerment (Avishai, 2008; Bartkowski & Read, 2003; Chong, 2008; Dodson, 2002; Gonzalez, 2013; Khurshid, 2015; Mahmood, 2005; Prickett, 2015; Rinaldo, 2013; Van Doorn-Harder, 2006).

The association believes that the religion of Islam in itself is not a barrier to Muslim women's education, emancipation, and development. Indeed religious education and growth in piety are the very foundations for their public engagement. The members believe that men and women are equal when it comes to the worship of Allah. They believe that the male-dominated practices of several centuries derive not from divine revelation, but from human misconceptions and misinterpretations. This self-identification corroborates Barazangi's (2004) postulate that a self-identified Muslim is one who, "recaptures the meaning and practice of being a Muslim by choice; who intimately accesses, consciously understands, and rationally interprets the Qur'anic texts using its own rules" (p. 24). This claiming of identity, its public declaration, and mastery of texts and practices provide the spiritual legitimacy for all that the members do. FOMWAN's dynamic vision that aims to create a world where women are totally empowered to be role models and impact religious and secular matters, confirm the presence of, and degree to which, religion and spirituality are present in everyday lives (Ammerman, 2017). Members' ability to effect change and their influence beyond Nigeria point to the role of African Muslim women's agency in Nigeria's plural society in particular and how it extends beyond state borders (internationalization or transnational effects).



To achieve its organizational goal, FOMWAN members adopt and apply strategies of action that avoid directly challenging male normative religious discourses at the individual and, typically, organizational levels. At the individual level, members apply strategies of action through the Jihād of the soul, by equipping one's self with knowledge (both sacred and secular), and increasing spirituality and morality. At the organizational level, the association strategizes by establishing trust and confidence among spouses, leaders, and communities. This happens both through exhibiting character, living a good life by example, and by providing educational, health, humanitarian, and other social services. These organizational activities and strategies facilitated the creation of more empowered, healthy, morally informed, and civically engaged women. It provided a substantial ground for a peaceful, harmonious, and healthy society – features of the ideal society that the association envisions. FOMWAN's strategies of action, which are culturally appropriate build from the bottom up. As Dalton and Welzel (2015) suggest, today's citizens are more ready to confront elites with demands from below. Despite the fact that the majority of FOMWAN members are educated, professionals, and self-acclaimed religious people, they nevertheless are rooted in the grassroots by constructing schools and providing health care and social services. That gave them the stimulus to build trust and gain popular support from the local communities.

Taken together, FOMWAN's organizational strategies have made possible a liberal Muslim worldview that cultivates Nigerians who accept the demands of citizenship in a liberal democracy without compromising their faith. Strategically,

through exhibiting virtuous qualities and providing numerous services, the association members bring a quiet and peaceful moral reform. They also produce a set of Nigerian Muslims who conform to the country's unity, progress, and plurality. This set of faithful Muslims believes that such practices are the pathways to an ideal society that is peaceful, just, fair, and harmonious. Importantly, the association believes that their actions are justified in Islam not only in contemporary times but in the medieval works of Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>137</sup>

FOMWAN's collective actions prove that its spiritual seriousness leads to a sense of obligation to the community and Nigeria's plural society. In a broader sense, the moral vision of FOMWAN (as reflected in their vision statement and translated into their organizational action), focuses on addressing the larger structural milieu of the Nigerian society - social injustice, inequality, corruption, illiteracy, ethnic and religious crises, and other social problems. The members, being spiritually serious and religiously active, have demonstrated that they are morally concerned and morally active by applying their moral vision to members, family, community, and importantly, including a sense of obligation to the larger society. This is consistent with recent findings that show a *strong link* between religious participation and moral action. Religious participants have a fuller vocabulary of moral concerns and a more active engagement in pursuing those concerns, as compared to non-participants (Ammerman, 2017).

FOMWAN members utilized various channels to convey Islamic messages and

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<sup>137</sup> For details about the subject matter, see March, A. F. (2011). *Islam and Liberal Citizenship: The Search for an Overlapping Consensus*. Oxford: University Press.

make clear their position on sacred and secular matters. Such channels include organizing an annual education summit, publishing pamphlets, magazines, fliers, and attending public lectures, debates, and conferences. Also, the association utilizes electronic media to convey messages and exert more presence in the Nigerian society. Similar to other religious movements, such as the Pentecostals and the Murīdiyya Sūfi order, FOMWAN increasingly favors electronic media as appropriate sites for the transmission of its teachings, perfect avenues for the affirmation and display of the organization's public profile. Unlike its counterparts in other countries, such as Burkina Faso (Frédéric, 2016), FOMWAN members have established themselves as authoritative leaders who contribute to Nigeria's development. This kind of development results in the transformation of the religious landscape in two ways: First, it facilitates transnational and homogenizes cultural flows. Second, it takes the connections between these organizations and the networks they create to new, global levels (Hackett, 1998). We have seen in Chapter Three that FOMWAN has taken its activities to various parts of Africa, facilitating the establishment of sister organizations on the continent (in countries such as Ghana, Senegal, Gambia, Mauritania), and beyond such as in the United Kingdom and Australia. This paves the way for reorienting the way in which we regard religious practice and the account of moral agency among women in non-Western societies, and especially beyond the Arab world with reference to the Islamic faith.

Finally, this chapter speaks to the larger question of the role of female religious organizations in the formation of civil society and how they use religious capital to empower women, encourage participation, and improve human wellbeing of the populace

in the global south, particularly Nigeria. It demonstrates that Muslim women in Nigeria, through their collective efforts, have become increasingly more engaged in development work in Islamic Africa. They achieve their mission by equipping themselves with knowledge (especially Islamic) and disseminating it to the society. They also actively participate in, not only sacred, but secular matters by interpreting various interventions in education, economic, health, humanitarian services, and peace-building in Islamic terms that are trusted by the host communities. Importantly, the women utilize these legitimations in reconciling mass democratic aspirations and concerted popular efforts to preserve Islamic values in government. By implication, they frame discourses that describe a positive relationship between Islam and democracy. By solidarity, we-feelings, and a collective sense of responsibility to people, especially those in need, FOMWAN effects change among communities and cultivates successful strategies that address varied problems characterizing the weak and fragile Nigerian society.

Members' utilization of spiritual capital has given the association a widespread presence, and its breadth of functions has given it high public visibility in Nigeria. This suggests an alternative way of theorizing about Muslim women's subjectivity and agency in Nigeria's plural state, in particular and of Islamic practices beyond the Arab world. FOMWAN's vision and ways of attaining its ideal society point to the enrichment of Islam through Africanization. Ajamization appears to be a more useful concept to capture such enrichment processes that entail the various localizations of Islam among Muslims who live beyond the geographical boundaries of Arabia (Ngom, 2016).

**CHAPTER SIX:****SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This dissertation has addressed the question of the role of Muslim women's organizations in the formation of civil society in the global south and especially in Nigeria. The final chapter summarizes the evidence gathered through the qualitative investigation undertaken for this dissertation, arguing that the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) has played, and continues to play, a very important role in the formation of civil society. In addition, it identifies some of its policy implications, as well as the limitations of the study, followed by suggestions for further research.

**Summary**

Chapter one of this dissertation began by positing that existing literature suggests that religious organizations, especially in Nigeria, are key players in promoting human well-being and bringing social change. It argued that questions around religious collective action and its effects have been important since the beginning of sociology, with previous studies often theorizing based on the secular nature of civil society. But there are gaps in the literature and theories. For instance, most of the theories have taken Europe and North America as their primary focus, assuming a secular public sphere and leaving open questions about the role of civil society in non-Western contexts. In addition, very little of the existing literature focuses on the role of religion, and even less on the specific role of Islam, which is often assumed to be inimical to democracy. Research elsewhere suggests that religious NGOs may be critical players, however.

Equally, the existing research on development suggests that understanding Nigerian civil society requires understanding that religious ideas and cultures are powerful forces that shape a people's worldviews and identities and have the potential to influence human actions. Scientific study of a Muslim women's NGO provides a critical test of the role of religious organizing. This dissertation, therefore, set out to examine how the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) utilizes and exercises cultural agency for women's empowerment, participation, and human well-being. It posed the following research questions: 1) How does FOMWAN create trust building, agency, and ways of acting? 2) How does it create opportunities for empowerment? 3) What roles do religious cultures and networks play in Nigeria's plural society?

To answer to these research questions, I adopted a triangulated method that sought to capture the important complexities of the subjects' rituals, agency, worldviews, actions, and rationale for social actions. The study utilized a qualitative research design, rooted in grounded theory, which involved conducting interviews with leaders of FOMWAN and other partners, discussions with members of FOMWAN and some service recipients, a content analysis of records and relevant sources, and participant observation of sites, interactions, practices, symbols, and words. The qualitative data were analyzed using the technique of grounded theory. Each component of the research sought to uncover how the Federation creates trust building, agency, opportunities, and participation in decision-making. By examining the Federation's patterns of organized activities and how members are making meaning in their lives, I assessed how religion is a form of empowerment, how religious culture effects change, and how the association contributes to civil society in

Nigeria's plural state.

Chapter two of the dissertation addressed the particular context of the Nigerian setting. It presented the diversity of the people and culture, highlighting the inherent tensions among the various peoples and regions and how religion plays important roles in those differences. The chapter also discussed the nature of the country's politics, describing how they are intertwined with religion. Tracing the country's history, we have seen how religion has been part and parcel of the people's lives, and how the people's worldviews are shaped by their religious orientations. It was demonstrated that religion is present in all aspects of the people's lives – be it educational, health, political, economic, social, constitutional, or the entertainment industry. In contrast to arguments that the country is a secular democracy, I concluded that Nigeria is actually a multi-religious and plural society. More importantly, Nigerian Muslim women have been present in all aspects of society, including the struggles in the country's civil society.

Chapter three traced the historical antecedents that led to the formation of FOMWAN. It was born in the midst of the social upheavals that characterized Nigeria's weak and fragile state, including illiteracy, abject poverty, widespread diseases, civil unrest, ethnic, religious, and sectarian crises, corruption, gross violations of human rights, and high rates of crimes. A group of concerned and devoted Muslim women, with shared feelings and common interest, observed that these challenges were disproportionately affecting women. In essence, women and children were the worst hit in terms of bearing the burdens of poverty, infant mortality, illiteracy, and cultural practices that limit and harm women. As a response to these social problems, some women decided to found an

association that would be able to address their challenges and those of the general public. Many were students, belonging to various associations, and they traveled from various parts of Nigeria to Minna, in the middle belt of Nigeria, to found FOMWAN. Marked by tragedy even at that moment – a car carrying attendees had an accident, and one of them, Laura Na’iya Sada, died on the spot – those who made it to the meeting cried for their loss, prayed for her, reiterated their commitment, and went on to found the Federation in August, 1985.

They set out with an ambitious mission: *A world where women are properly educated and equipped for an equitable and peaceful society.* The members’ ideal society is a *world where women are totally empowered to be role models in making impacts in religious and secular matters.* To achieve its organizational goals, members had to have a well-designed structure. What they created was informed by their hybridized Western education, Islamic knowledge, and traditional ingenuity. The association uses modern bureaucratic principles, operating on committees headed by experts, and engaging in building networks with both sacred and secular associations, but it also retains traditional practices, such as utilizing elder wisdom that provides credibility in the community. The structure they created follows the federal pattern of the Nigerian government with central, state, and local units, which enables coordination and flexibility across local committees, as well as expansion of the group’s reach. It is an effective strategy that fosters mutual understanding among members, promotes unity, and above all, helps in balancing regional interests in Nigeria’s plural yet a fragile state. This substantiates my initial hypothesis that faith institutions, leaders and networks have special expertise with



powerful potentials in development work, a finding that confirms previous studies (Marshall & Van Saanen, 2007; Miller, 1998; Putnam, 2006).

The search for knowledge has been the cornerstone of the Federation. Members first equipped themselves with knowledge, especially of Islam, and then began to establish schools, organize lectures, symposia, and annual education summits, among other educational programs. Knowledge about reproductive and maternal health was a logical extension. With time, members significantly extended the reach of health services, especially interpreting health interventions in Islamic terms that are trusted by the local communities. They also delivered health services through standard hospitals and clinics, providing in-patient, and out-patient, surgical, laboratory, and other services to the community. It embarked on awareness campaigns to prevent and treat deadly and communicable diseases, as well as training traditional birth attendants to ensure minimum health standards in the communities. Extensive collaboration with secular agencies and the government, along with the trust they have built, have been central to FOMWAN's ability to deliver, especially in health services. This collaboration included the eradication of the deadly infectious polio virus in 2015.

FOMWAN's involvement in the health sector adds to the growing visibility of religious contributions to health. Most of the world's religions have health and healing as central tenets of their faith, so the presence of religious communities in health-related activities should not be surprising (Olivier, 2015; ter Haar, 2011). In many fragile states, it is religious organizations like FOMWAN that have the legitimacy and constituency, due to the trust that they have built within communities, to effect substantial change by

participating in healthcare delivery (Kaplan, 2015). This further points to the critical role that religious NGOs play as social service providers, and adds to the existing literature on that subject (Alidou, 2013; Clarke, 2007; Deneulin & Rakodi, 2011; Stark, 2007; Wineburg et al., 1999).

Chapter four of the dissertation examined the unique religious culture that FOMWAN has created and described how this culture effects change in the lives of members and nonmembers in their communities. Both material objects and ritual performance help to form this culture. The members use dress – a customized FOMWAN vestment and the *ḥijāb* – to symbolize a distinct Islamic identity and create a culture of solidarity among members. They also offer organizational paraphernalia such as headscarves, handbags, shoes, antiseptic, detergent, perfume, soap, and many other products. These products are labeled with the FOMWAN logo and provide tangible links to the identity of the group. Additionally, the Federation has constructed and utilized physical spaces such as mosques, the organization’s secretariats, schools, Islamic centers, and many more for effective and efficient service delivery. But beyond mere utility, such spaces facilitate the forming and retaining of the group’s identity, promoting self-awareness, and preserving group cohesion (Peek, 2005).

FOMWAN’s religious culture is also saturated with Islamic texts, notably the Qur’ān, the *ḥadīth*, and *fiqh*. Members have demonstrated proficiency in their knowledge of the scripture and persistently referred to it by reciting related verses in conversations. It makes their speeches appealing to the audience, thereby building trust among the communities. Such Qur’ānic knowledge is striking for women as it has traditionally been

known only among male Muslim clerics. This knowledge of Islam is both obvious and critical in performing rituals. It is a symbolic center of their religious culture, and its mastery represents an empowering change in the lives of members. Members' knowledge of the scripture is acquired, disseminated, and reproduced through establishing schools, organizing lectures, talk shows, and especially *tafsīr* during the month of Ramaḍān. In some chapters, there are all-female *tafsīr* sessions that members organize and deliver.

FOMWAN also engages in Islamic rituals, such as learning to recite the faith's texts, fasting, and Zakā (alms giving), in addition to participation in Ḥajj welfare services. They also engage in collectively chanting of *adhkār*, elegies, and *tahajjud* – congregational prayer sessions at night. During national meetings, members have intentionally taught practical knowledge of these and other rituals, and participants take that knowledge to various chapters through step-down training sessions. It therefore provides a common Islamic culture that the Federation women can take with them into their communities and daily lives. Such culture establishes a sense of sisterhood, coupled with social and religious capital that provide immense capacity to act and effect changes in the lives of members and nonmembers.

On the whole, this picture of FOMWAN women contradicts the argument that religion (Islam) hindered Muslim women in Nigeria from becoming Western educated or empowered (Lawson, 1995) or that Muslim women were oppressed, subordinated, and doormats to their oppressors in a religion perceived as patriarchal. FOMWAN's case challenges that assumption, demonstrating that, far from being solely a tool of women's oppression, Islam has been a fundamental aspect of the struggle for human emancipation.

These findings confirm my original hypothesis and corroborate similar findings that Muslim women can utilize Islam as a vehicle for women's rights and empowerment (Abu-Lughod, 2015; Ask and Tjomsland, 1998; Bodman and Tohidi, 1998; Doorn-Harder, 2006; Esposito, 1997; Karam, 2013; Mahmood, 2011; Rinaldo, 2013).

Another important component to the religious culture that FOMWAN has created is members' narratives, especially the stories of the heroines of the faith. Members constantly prove their knowledge of history by citing their role models such as Nana Maryam, Nana 'A'isha, Nana Fatima, other women around the Prophet, and most recently, Nana Asma'u. These stories allow members to talk about the character of these heroines and how important they are to them. Everybody can refer to these stories and use them to talk about how they should be acting in the world. The stories are both formative of who they are and formative in the sense that they are a touchstone for action. Having positive and strong role models is associated with women's empowerment and improvement of their quality of life (Latu, et al., 2013).

Equally important in FOMWAN's religious culture is its particular way of using language and words that are framed as "love speech." The aim is to create unity, love, and peaceful coexistence among the multiple interest groups among its constituency. Paying careful attention to language leads to maintaining a cohesive religious culture (Geertz, 1976). Such religious culture is not only an important strategy for organizational survival and cohesion, but also a means for addressing tensions among the various competing groups in the country. It establishes bridges between Islam and Christianity, among the many conflicting ideologies and positions within Islam (such as Sūfism,

Wahhābism, and Shi'ism), and serves as a means for meeting the challenges of secularism (Mustapha & Bunza, 2014).

The dissertation uses the new concept of Ajamīzation to describe the domestication or localization of Islamic religious culture by FOMWAN members. Ajamīzation of Islam in Africa challenges the lingering misconception and assumption that African Islam is an imperfect a mimicry and syncretic version of the Islam practiced in the birthplace of the Abrahamic faith (Kane, 2016; Ngom & Kurfi, 2017). Rather, my research argues that Ajamīzation is an enrichment of Islam through an interplay between the faith and the peoples' traditions. I demonstrated how my subjects created a unique religious culture that emanated from the members' knowledge of the scripture (Qur'ān and ḥadith) and was shaped by their Western education, inspired by the stories of the heroines of the faith as their role models, and conducted within the legal provision, as enshrined by the Nigerian constitution.

The religious culture created by FOMWAN is therefore also a civic space. Contributions of Muslim women's civic culture are important, and they can *only* be understood by scientifically examining the localization of the religious culture and practice from the subjects' perspective. FOMWAN's case has demonstrated that Muslim women have always collectively addressed the concerns of their communities (Wadud, 2006). This confirms my hypothesis that women who engage in religious piety and religious organizations can transform their personal and social lives by interpreting and repositioning religious teachings and norms that promote their agency and empowerment. Here again, the Nigerian Muslim case corroborates similar previous findings (Avishai,

2008; Bartkowski & Read, 2003; Chong, 2008; Dodson, 2002; Gonzalez, 2013; Khurshid, 2015; Mahmood, 2005; Prickett, 2015; Rinaldo, 2013; Van Doorn-Harder, 2006).

Chapter five of this dissertation assessed the public profile of FOMWAN and examined more closely how members' individual religious piety overlaps with social and public implications. Both FOMWAN's widespread presence and its breadth of functions give the association high public visibility. Its public presence is especially evident in service provision to members and nonmembers alike. But FOMWAN has also had direct political impact. The founding members of FOMWAN, who had been in various associations, notably the Muslim Students Society, were part of Nigeria's Constitutional draft committees during pre- and post-Independence years. Soon after the Federation was formed, its members continued to participate in the Constitutional Review Committees. Religious and secular aims and legitimations combine as they participate in constitution writing, human rights campaigns, and development efforts in general. This amalgam provides the women of faith with the basis for interpreting various interventions (such as in education, economic, health, and humanitarian services) in Islamic terms that are trusted by the host communities.

This amalgamation was apparent in reconciling mass democratic aspirations with concerted popular efforts to preserve Islamic values in government and law. Advocacy for the use of *ḥijāb* was one such effort, which transformed the secular landscape of Nigeria. The public use of the *ḥijāb* in *all* the association's programs and every gathering they attend asserts a public, civic, Islamic culture in Nigeria. Equally, members have

been at the forefront of attending debates and conferences that have direct bearing on promoting women's empowerment. During disasters and emergency situations, the association was among the first to organize relief funds and provide support to the affected victims. In addition, as part of FOMWAN's efforts to address the major social problems in the society, it participated in civic engagement. In that regard, members work with other stakeholders to socialize the populace, especially women, about civic rights, such as the need to participate in peaceful, fair, and credible elections that would lead to successful democratic transition. Each of these public efforts contributed to women's empowerment, as well as to peace, unity, and sustainable national development.

By participating in the drafting of the country's constitution and its review committees, engagement in the political dispensation processes, and being actively involved in debates about national issues, FOMWAN's case contradicts what some scholars have argued about Islam being a presumed hindrance to democracy (Fukuyama, 1992; Huntington, 1984; Lipset, 1994). The findings of this research prove the opposite – that Islam is compatible with democracy and supports democratic ideals, values, and forms of governance. This corroborates the position of some scholars that Islam and democracy should not be considered mutually exclusive (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996; Kramer, 1993; Salame, 1994). Islam is not the obstacle to democratization that some scholars allege it to be (Hofmann, 2004; Masoud, 2014; Norris and Inglehart; Tessler, 2002). I argue in this dissertation that, to have a nuanced understanding of the relationship between Islam and democracy, it is crucial for scholars to appreciate the fact that religion is neutral – neither inherently pro- nor anti-democratic. Rather, each

situation must be examined on its own terms, paying attention to the specific roles of religious groups in facilitating or inhibiting the evolution of democratic political orders (Davie & Ammerman, In Press).

An important way of understanding how FOMWAN strategizes its action and exercises its agency, is in resource mobilization. Contrary to what I had hypothesized, the Federation does not rely on funding from Saudi Arabian government, international Islamic donor agencies from Saudi or the Arab world, or any Islamic agency such as the Islamic Development Bank, Islamic Relief Organization, or Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Instead, the Federation relies on internally generated revenue, which members raise through various initiatives, including taxing themselves, proceeds from the sale of the association's products, incomes from rented spaces (such as the national hostels and other accommodation, conference rooms, and *halal* kitchen), and donations from spouses and significant others. Rather than soliciting funds from Muslim countries or Islamic organizations, it collaborates more with secular organizations from the West. This presents an interesting puzzle as to the autonomy of FOMWAN and the ways in which it is or is not influenced by outside groups.

Within Nigeria, FOMWAN is sometimes accused of being untouchable, elitist and urban-based, but this research argues that FOMWAN remains a voice for Nigerian Muslim women, including the subalterns – most of whom are rural dwellers. This is evident in the Federation's wide presence, organizational structure (which is isomorphic to the federal system), as well as in the sequence of services that it provides across communities. I have shown that, in addition to the members' Western education and



mastery of the scripture, FOMWAN's internal mechanisms of trust-building, establishing networks of exceedingly productive partnerships, and members' ability to collectively create a unique religious culture within the constraints of the great tradition, are the most important ingredients that spread the Federation's services, making them publicly visible and their effects felt by members of the society (Burchardt, 2013; Cochrane, 2011).

Many Muslim male organizations, such as the Tijaniyya, the Qādiriyya, the Izāla, and the *Shī'a* (Amara, 2011; Kane, 2003; Mustapha & Bunza, 2014; The Pew Report, 2009), have split at some point in their recent history. FOMWAN, in contrast, has remained one indivisible association. Members' sense of sisterhood through shared worship (Peek, 2005) is augmented by the association's stipulation of strict rules and adherence to them, increasing their commitment (Iannaccone, 1994). Their sense of solidarity and respect for one another increase their available social capital (Putnam, 2000a), and that keeps the association focused on benefits both to members' lives and the communities they serve.

They are not without internal tension, however. The Federation's strength vis-à-vis its social capital seems to be one of its weaknesses, as some chapters accuse other (more powerful) states of using their influence at the expense of weaker states. My observation reveals that there are a few states that have more founding members and more active national executives, and therefore have more influence in decision-making. Such states are considered "too influential" compared to others with no or fewer representatives at the national body. Some state chapters say that such influential chapters turn out to be "untouchables."

Critics especially worry about the direction these influential states are giving the organization. They sometimes breach due process by *not* strictly adhering to the laid down protocols for networking and partnership, especially with international secular agencies. They go ahead prior to the national body's deliberation and endorsement. Such acts, the critics argue, will not only weaken the organization, but will equally lead to the loss of its original vision, mission, and ideals to totally different, perhaps opposite ones. Some of these stakeholders expressed fear and lamented that, until and unless the excesses of such, "powerful states" are checked, the Federation might end up operating on the secular donor agencies' terms. This points not only to the positive, but equally the negative consequences that social capital and social networks can produce, including suspicion and hostility when the empowerment of some comes at the expense of exclusion of others (Walker, 2004).

Overall, there are a number of takeaways from the dissertation. First, it moves beyond analysis of male-dominated organizations as the only contributors to civil society. By providing detailed explanation about FOMWAN's religious culture, members' worldviews, and how they are making meaning in their lives, it speaks to how religion remains important in the lives of the people. By revealing how women of faith allow religion to regulate their behaviors and actions within the constitutional provision, this case provides a clear understanding of how members navigate many modern challenges. It contributes to debates about gender, agency, and subjectivity in Islam, which are critical in international development discourses. Rather than looking at the women's actions as irrational, this dissertation sheds light on the compatibilities of Islam and

female agency, from the subjects' perspective. FOMWAN's case challenges the assumption that Muslim women are oppressed, subordinated, or doormats to their oppressors in a religion perceived as patriarchal. Contradicting those assumptions, my dissertation demonstrates that, far from being solely a tool of women's oppression, Islam can be a fundamental aspect of the struggle for human emancipation and for women's rights and empowerment.

My research also amends ideas that Islam is a monolithic, uniform, and unyielding force that is detrimental to the development of democracy. Instead, it demonstrates that Islam, as a pluralistic religion, varies significantly from society to society and can be compatible with democracy. Again, this dissertation has provided an alternative to the tradition of centre-periphery while analyzing religious culture. Such tradition views Arabs and especially Saudi Arabia, being the birthplace of Islam as the center, while it views any other place (especially Africa) as peripheral. FOMWAN's case reinforces *the polycentric nature of Islam* - the view that there are multiple centers of Islam. It also demonstrates that the religious culture that Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa produce is far from an imitation, mimicry, or syncretic version of the Islam practiced in the "centre." It reflects the ingenuity and enrichment that emerged from an interplay between Islam and local African preoccupations and traditions, which the concept of *Ajamīzation* emphasizes.

At a practical level, this study is a useful resource for policymakers interested in advancing human progress. The Nigerian government, secular development experts such as the UNDP, UNICEF, as well as the Security Council of the United Nations, could

utilize findings of this dissertation to better understand women's religious organizations in Nigerian Muslim settings, but also in Muslim settings globally. It is a policy document that facilitates knowledge about fostering unity, promoting social development, and improving public life. Considering the numerous crises in Nigeria, this research provides insights into strategies for conflict resolution, trust building, and peaceful coexistence, especially in conflict-ridden areas. Female grassroots religious organizations like FOMWAN are critical players for mitigating ethnic and religious crises, insurgency, and radical religious ideologies propagated by terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram, the Movement for Unity and Jihād in West Africa (MUJAO), and the Islamic State (IS).

### **Study Limitations**

FOMWAN is an excellent case for study, but it is not the only Muslim women's organization in Nigeria or beyond. Extending these findings calls for both historical and comparative research. While tracing the origins of FOMWAN, this study identified exclusively Muslim women's organizations as early as the 1840s (the Yan-taru) in the North and in the 1920s (the Assalatu groups) in the Southwest. It is worth noting that there were other Muslim women's associations in other parts of the country. For instance, Muslim women organizations existed in Kanem Bornu, where Islam had been established long before the Sokoto Jihād (1804). Similar organizations also existed among the Nupe Muslims in Niger state, among the Yoruba Muslims in Ilorin, Kwara state, and among the Igbira and Igala Muslims especially in Kogi state. The Yan-taru and the Assalatu groups were examined here as historically part of the Federation's formation, but there are many other examples that could be studied.

As I have made clear throughout the dissertation, the Federation's scope of service is enormous. Limited resources, including time, made it impossible to provide a detailed impact assessment of the association's services. There are 36 state chapters and the national headquarters in Abuja. This study is limited to some of the national programs and events, as well as some selected state chapters (a state in each of the 6 geo-political zones in Nigeria). This provides a good representative sample and importantly, a taste of what FOMWAN's religious culture and agency are and how they effect change in the immediate experiences of those studied, but it does not provide a systematic analysis of impact at the community level.

I have argued here that Ajamīzation, localization, or indigenization of religious tradition is central to our understanding of FOMWAN. I have also argued that this process is not peculiar to Islam and Africa, but that contextualization is common in other world religions, such as Christianity (Sanneh, 2003). The findings of this research cannot, however, be generalized for the experiences of Islamized African women. There are obviously variations in other societies, including among Muslim women in Niger Republic, Senegal, Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, Sudan, as well as in North Africa. Only further research and comparison between cases can lead to conclusions about similarities and differences in Muslim women's religious cultures and their effects. This study is limited to FOMWAN in Nigeria's plural society. Further, the dissertation does not argue about what true Islam is, but examines the subjects' conviction of what they define as true Islam.

Lastly, I have largely relied on interviews with leaders, especially with FOMWAN founding or executive members, and a more thorough assessment of impact would call for broader data gathering, beyond the scope of this study, to gain a grassroots understanding of the women of faith's life experiences, religious inspirations, motivations, and agency. This dissertation has been limited to the organization itself, focusing primarily on its formation, unique religious culture, and the resources it provides to members and the general public.

### **Future Research**

FOMWAN itself will change over the years, providing an opportune case study of an NGO evolution. This dissertation has indicated that FOMWAN has inspired and facilitated the establishment of sister organizations in other countries, especially in the West African sub-region, but also in parts of Europe. As Adeboye (2013) argues that the transnational activities of the Federation demonstrate that the agenda of global sisterhood is being pursued within the context of religious expansionism, despite some underlying tensions. An important next step for understanding the reproductive and transformative effects of organizational action (and by implication seemingly marginalized Muslim women's groups) would be to focus on how such processes, networks, and influence work.

We have seen that the Federation emerged in response to the challenges affecting the women, their immediate environment, as well as emerging global impacts. Over time, and as generations shift, will new responses be called for? Most of the members that founded the association still remain active, despite their age, family, work, and other

responsibilities. During all the meetings that my team and I attended, it was observed that there were many more older members than young ones. A majority of the respondents said that there were many initiatives to bring in the younger generation, since they would be the ones to take over. One such initiative is establishing FOMWAN Schools Alumni. Also, at two of the national events, I saw some young executives, one of whom was nicknamed “The Baby Amīra,” as she was in her late twenties. A close examination into how the association recruits new members (especially younger ones) and how the new generation relates, copes, and works with the older generation in this complex association would be needed.

The unit of analysis of this dissertation is organizational – FOMWAN. Nevertheless, the individual leadership experiences of the founding members would provide an additional dimension to understanding issues of gender, religion, and NGO formation. Writing the biographies of these living pioneers could help in uncovering the experiences that facilitated forming the organization.

FOMWAN members, like most people of faith, perceive no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. On the contrary, they see their religion as an inseparable dimension of the world around them and embedded in everything they do (ter Haar, 2011). While this is true throughout the world, it may be especially illuminated by a case study such as this that is rooted in an African context. Examination of how the Federation members frame religious discourses in nonreligious settings suggest that this is a theoretically and practically fruitful avenue of inquiry. Such discourse examination can provide a nuanced understanding of how partnerships between Muslim women’s groups

and secular organizations, especially Western donor agencies, are formed and could be enhanced. But beyond that, it will continue to address the bimodal world assumption that looks at organizations as exclusively one thing (sacred) or another (secular).

Finally, it will be important to compare FOMWAN's ways of acting with those of other Muslim women's groups in different economic, cultural, and political settings – Francophone African countries, North African states, or in Muslim majority countries in the Arab world and in Indonesia. In so doing, we will have a deeper understanding of the complexity and plurality of Islam (Mustapha & Bunza 2014) and of Muslim women's varied agency and experiences. The narratives that form religious and gender identities are always part of the larger public narratives in which they exist (Somers, 1994). The dissertation has confirmed the above statement in one organization – FOMWAN – in one very important setting – Nigeria – but many more narratives have yet to be told.



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