

African women's presence in religious and educational matters in South Africa

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Abstract

This paper presents anecdotal evidence and views of other authors, on how African Muslim women have played a role in religious and educational matters in the African context. It further unpacks how education and its role in society are perceived, implemented, and impacted in the same context using an Appreciative Inquiry method. The focus is then narrowed to one pioneer local emerging Muslim woman who has not been profiled before. A review of related literature and ethnographic approaches were employed to make this paper possible. The individual historical narratives are connected in a collage of interconnected ideas which expand the possibilities for new insights regarding the question of Muslim women and the perceptions of their influence in society. The results reveal that there is an authentic and positive presence of Muslim women in history and other contexts, perceived presence in other African countries, and absolute absence in South Africa. It also recommends different ways in which women can learn how to develop their communities through learning from history and hearing about those that are from their environment. The paper also asserts that countries should be intentional about ushering opportunities for women to share an empowering narrative through their experiences.

Keywords: Appreciative Inquiry, Religion, Education, Muslim Woman, Influence

Background to Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa comprises 40 different countries according to the World Regional Geography.

Within these countries, Miller (2013) stated that:

From monotheism to polytheism, Africans practice a wide variety of religions. Many of the religions have common characteristics, and some religions are combined with external religions by outsiders. Religion has a bearing on millions of Africans' day-to-day activities that impact their views of life, death, and the family; religion has therefore always been an extremely important area for most Africans. (p.5)

Islam entered Africa in the 7th century CE. The spread of Islam in North Africa is linked to an empire-building process, taking Islam to Morocco and Spain in the far west and India in the east, while its spread has taken a different path in other parts of Africa. The African dimension is from 615 CE when there was the first Islamic migration to Abyssinia, now named Ethiopia. (The Religion Encyclopedia). Further, the task of spreading Islam to other countries was left in the hands of the successors of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him).

The history of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa mainly comes from the works of Arab geographers and historians such as al-Bakr, al-Zuhri, Ibn Batuta, and others. Historical research of important trade centres such as the Sudanese cities of Kumbi Saleh, Awdagust, Jenne, and Kilwa allows for historical reconstruction. (Abdin, Levtzion, Nehemia and Chande, 2017). Given to A. Rahman Par, Islam spread

into the sub-Saharan region of West Africa, and its inhabitants came to be adherents of One God. Islamic beliefs were introduced by the Dya'ogo dynasty of the Kingdom of Tekur as early as 850 C.E. They are the first people of African descent to embrace Islam. Trade and commerce are one cause of the appearance of new types of material culture and play a role in the development of literacy (Rahman, 2006).

Trade and commerce paved the way for introducing new elements of material culture and resulted in the intellectual development which naturally followed, and for which parts of Sudan were to become famous for centuries to come (Rahmam, 2006). In the Kingdom of Tekrur, Islam was accepted by the Dya'ogo dynasty as early as 850 C.E. This group was the first to accept Islam in Africa. The explanation given states that therefore Muslim Arab historians referred to Bilad al-Tekrur as 'The Land of the Black Muslims.'. During the reign of war-jabi (the first ruler of Tekrur), Islam was firmly established in Tekrur and Sharia was enforced. This created a unified religious law for the community. By 1042 C.E, the Almoravid forces began the assault on Tekrur, an area that already practiced a version of Islam. Certain noteworthy empires gained prominence when sharia law was fully implemented. The empires of Ghana, Mali, Songhay, and the Kanem Empire. Finally, Islam has impacted the lives, languages, culture, religion and so many other sectors of Hausa land. This work has changed the belief of people and given them a more universal belief. The rise of Islam brought along with it the rise of literacy and literature; this allowed the Hausa people to continue to read and write. This Islamic knowledge helped the people in recording their

history and other people's histories. (Sab'u Ibrahim Fago & Bala Usman, 2014). During this time, women played an important role in the spread of Islam and they continue to do so.

Approach and methodology

The research method is based on ethnography and qualitative research. Employing the qualitative method allowed the researcher to investigate her personal experiences (Silverman, 2013). Through the analysis of historical and current perspectives on the influence of Muslim women, the paper holds an exploration through appreciative inquiry (AI). The paper reflects on the different contexts of juxtaposed AI of such historical roles of Muslim women to provide multiple understandings and re-conceptualize their positions and perception in society (Norris, Sawyer & Lund, 2012).

AI and ethnography are concerned with unearthing ways people appreciate and negotiate their present realities (Reed, 2007), this paper embarked on a journey to explore, stimulate, provoke and reformulate existing beliefs about Muslim women's influence in society through appreciative inquiry. The ethnography was used to show how Muslim women from Islamic history and different backgrounds and experiences are appreciated differently. According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), ethnography is a dialogue of reflection. The voices are clearly expressed and an individual story has a disjunctive framework in their mind, and that causes new insights into the perceptions.

Muslim women's presence and influence in historical Islam

Islam emerged as guidance for all humanity and it allows women

to live an honourable life. Feminism, previously unheard of and/or completely unknown, was now being protected as a women's right. From being bought and sold in markets, women were elevated to an object of respect. The Companions saw the Prophet (SAW) while with his daughters and his warm behaviour with them and were stunned at the fact that it was even possible to show females such affection (Abdelgelil, Abd Wahid, and Yusof, et al., 2018). The Prophet (SAW) taught them that there was no difference in their worth based on gender. Both teachers and students have responsibilities to learn and teach Islam and other knowledge systems. Both men and women have the same duty to restrain themselves and encourage others to do good. Islam placed Paradise under their feet when they became mothers; they became the reason why fathers would enter paradise, and also such an integral part of a husband's faith that without honouring his wife, it remained incomplete. It was with this recently acquired role that women climbed high and made their distinguishing mark on the world, to not be left behind when the pioneers of Islam were mentioned (Al-Bagwi, 1997).

Muslim women have contributed to the legacy of Islam from being scholars, jurists, rulers, benefactresses, warriors, and businesswomen. The Prophet's household was a source of emulation for all his Companions. His wife, Khadija (ra), who was more than his confidante and companion, a prosperous businesswoman and trader, assisted him personally and financially when he had been granted prophethood; Aisha bint Abu Bakr (ra), conveyed expanses of knowledge from him, became a great jurist and scholar; Umm Salama (ra) counsel's was embraced by the Prophet himself, at the

time of the treaty of Hudaibiyah; Hafsa (ra), daughter of Umar ibn Al-Khattab was the first person to be entrusted with the written Qur'an after the death of her father (Abdelgelil, Abd Wahid and Yusof, et al., 2018).

Women's role in preserving authentic hadith has been noteworthy indeed. According to the research, most of the major compilers of a hadith from the early period of Islam received many of them from women. Ibn Hajar studied from 53 female teachers, As-Sakhawi had ijazas from 68 female teachers, and As-Suyuti studied from 33 female teachers, a quarter of his shuyukh. While many people may be familiar with the historic accomplishments of Muslim women (whether the head of state, scholars, or activists), that women also played a pivotal role in the pre-modern Muslim world is under-discovered. By sharing a handful of biographies of a few of these personalities from Islamic history, this paper intends to help dispel certain problematic stereotypes (among both Muslims & non-Muslims) about the historical role of women in Islamic societies and spark further interest and inquiry into women's history in the medieval and early modern Islamic world (and in pre-modern history as shared by Al-Bagwi (1997).

Khadija b Khuwwalid (d. 620). Before her marriage to the Prophet Muhammad, Khadija was one of the most affluent women of Mecca, being a successful merchant and wealthy businesswoman. She is known for having been the most prominent supporter of Islam and for being the first Muslim. As Muhammad (SAW) himself was reported to have said in a hadith preserved in Sahih Muslim: "Only Allah granted me a better wife than her." She accepted me when

others rejected me; she believed in me when others doubted me; she shared her wealth with me when others deprived me; it was God who granted me offspring only through her. Indeed, another of the most important women of early Islam is Fāṭima al-Zahrā' who is the daughter of the Prophet by Khadīja, connecting the line of the Prophet Muhammad through his children al-Hasan and al-Husayn. These historical facts make Fāṭima and her mother Khadīja the most revered among Islamic female personages.

Nusayba b. Ka'b al-Anṣārīyya (d. 634) also referred to as Umm 'Ammara, was an early convert to Islam in the city of Medina. As companions of Prophet Muhammad, they were known for their care, compassion, patience, and respect. Due to her participation in the Battle of Uhud, she is most remembered for having fought against the Meccans. She helped the Prophet Muhammad during the Battle of Uhud, and as a result, she sustained several spear wounds and arrows while shielding him. It is reported that after she sustained her twelfth wound, she fell unconscious and the first thing she asked (when she woke up) was "did the Prophet survive?" This illustrates her loyalty and dedication to Islam.

Aisha Ibn Abi Bakr (d. 678) is a figure that requires no introduction, 'Ā'isha was the wife of the Prophet Muhammad who served as a role model for the many women who would follow. She was a central figure in the opposition to the third and fourth caliphs, even leading an army against the fourth caliph, 'Alī ibn Abī ṭālib. After loosing her election; however, she remained deeply involved in the transmission of Islamic teachings. She is among the greatest narrators of Sunnah in the traditional Sunni school. In many ways, she is among the

most interesting (and controversial) figures in early Islam, especially since the implications of her actions for women's participation in scholarship, political life, and the public sphere clashed with later conservative conceptions of the role of women. For more information about 'Ā'isha and her legacy, the book by Denise Spellberg entitled *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of 'Ā'isha bint Abī Bakr* (1996) is highly recommended.

Zaynabb. 'Alī (d. 681) was the descendant of the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali (d. 661). She was a major member of the Family of the Prophet in the late seventh century and participated in the Battle of Karbala, where her brother Husayn and 72 of her sons were brutally killed by the Umayyads. At a time, she was the most influential member of her brother's family and most closely associated with the cause of her brother. At Karbala, she defended her nephew—Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn—who was under the control of the governor of Kufa. When presented to the Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiyā at Damascus, she gave an impassioned and forceful speech in the royal court that convinced him to release her nephew and the prisoners taken at Karbala. Her invaluable strength, patience, and deep wisdom contributed to the progress of early Islam. Her tomb remains a popular travel site for both Sunnis and Shi'is, underlining the universality of her legacy among Muslims.

The above are selected perspectives of the historical roles and influence of Muslim women and any current views of African Muslim influence are a simple reflection of Islamic history.

Women's presence and influence on the Islamic religion and education in Africa

Following the conquest of North Africa by Muslim Arab conquerors in the 7th century CE, Islam spread throughout West Africa via merchants, traders, scholars, and missionaries primarily through peaceful means, whereby African rulers either tolerated the religion or converted to it themselves. So, Islam spread throughout and encompassed the Sahara Desert. Islam also arrived in East Africa from the Arabs, crossing the Red Sea from the Arabian Peninsula and eventually expanding along the Swahili Coast. Military campaigns have occurred throughout history, but also in the 18th century, a holy war was waged against Muslim Fulani and the Lake Chad region. There was also occasionally violent resistance from traditional African beliefs such as animism and fetishism (Levtzion, Nehemia, Chande & Abdin, 2005). On the conquest of North Africa by Muslim Arabs in the 7th century CE, Islam spread throughout West Africa via merchants, traders, scholars, and missionaries, taking place mostly through peaceful means. By virtue of Islam's spread, Islam grew on all sides of the Sahara Desert. Islam moved to East Africa through trade from Arabs who crossed the Red Sea and later from Arabs who settled along the Swahili Coast. Over the centuries, military campaigns were launched against the Christian kingdoms of Nubia, and in the 18th century, the Muslim Fulani launched a holy war in the Lake Chad region. There was both violent and nonviolent resistance from traditional African beliefs against Christianization and colonialism (Sounaye, 2014).

It is important to note that the spread of Islam throughout Africa was influenced by more than just the passing on of religious ideas. As noted by UNESCO:

unlike many other religions and beliefs, Islam is not only a religion but a comprehensive way of life, catering for all aspects of human existence. Islam provides guidance in a broad range of areas from daily life to national and international affairs. (Vol. III, 20).

It is clearly understandable because they thought that the adoption of a foreign religion could secure their power and wealth. The Sharia requires that mankind should be concerned with society in all aspects of our life. During the Islamic era, women were able to practice as a physician and treat both men and women whenever needed. In the north of Africa, Aslamiyya bint Rufayda has been credited for being the first nurse among nurses (saws). She treated the wounded and the dying during the Battle of Badr on 13th March 624 CE. Sara learned what she knows about medicine from assisting her father, Dr. Sa'ad al-Aslami, who was a doctor (Panjwani, 2017).

Al Shifa was one of the wise women of their time. She has experience being a public servant and is well trained in medicine. Her name was Layla but she became well known as 'Al Shifa.' The women mentioned in this argument have made contributions to the nation's developments, both moral and religious. Nusayba, a Medina-born woman, took care of the wounded on the battlefield and gave first aid to them. Indeed, there was a family of women who ruled over Bhopal from 1819 to 1924, including the last Begum Kaikhursau Jahan. This family is famous for owning and improving various infrastructures in the community (Panjwani, 2017).

Muslim women have left an intellectual legacy. Sutayta al-Mahamili, a mathematician, lived during the second half of the tenth century. She excelled in many areas including Arabic literature, hadith, and

jurisprudence. Her work had significantly improved the efficacy of mathematicians' approach. She is well known among the historians such as Ibn al-Jawzi, Ibn al-Khatib Baghdadi, and Ibn Kathir. Amina was the Queen of Zazzua, a Nigerian kingdom in the sixteenth century. At sixteen, her mother named her as successor Amina learned military skills and emerged as the leader of the Zazzua cavalry. Under her reign of 34 years, she expanded the territory to its largest size ever. Gidda's primary goal was to prevent local leaders from restricting the traders. Because of her ideas of earthen wall fortifications, they became common in Hausa states. She ordered the building of defensive walls around each of her military camps. These walls formed later and soon cities were established (Frede & Hill, 2014).

According to "Unsung Women of Islamic History", Dr. Akram Nadwi, author of forty volumes on women scholars, discovered accounts of women scholars whose contributions are now forgotten. He claims that the focus on the submission of women in Islamic society should not be underestimated. According to Adamu (2014), in most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa Muslim women have been involved in women's movement activities to face global challenges and the backbone of their struggles is survival to make a living out of poverty, high level of establishment of women's organizations, and women's issues advocacy. Also, the movement brought about positive results. Adamu (2014) argues that since the pre-colonial and colonial period, women in most parts of Nigeria have been involved in women's movements to create women's awareness and to fight oppression at both national and community levels. The Yan'Taruh Movement of Nana Asma'u, the daughter of the Sokoto Caliphate's

founder, and the Aba Women's Resistance Movement in Southern Nigeria.

Notable Muslim women in Nigeria such as Balkisu Yusuf, Ayesha Imam, Amina Mama, Saudatu Mahdi, and many more scholars who are not at the helm of government affairs have demonstrated their activism through the establishment of women's organizations and the advocacy of women's issues (Adam 2014). Carly (2015) mentioned that Alidou described how African Muslim women would create an “alternative vision” of their reality that articulated the religious and secular aspects of their lives. Social media and other technologies have afforded Muslim women in that part of the world a voice that is louder than the controlling discourses. The developments are significant as they provide Muslim women with increasingly educated opportunities to become active, modern media producers, giant economic influences, and social influencers. They use the media, schools, and public places to redefine their lack of agency: media and schools are the ultimate outlets for human rights discourse. Alidou explained that they have been using various media to demand justice and reclaim their right (Carly, p.4).

In Nigeria, government policies that are anchored on women include the Better Life Programme for Rural Women, the Federal Government Technical Colleges for Women, and the 30% allocation of political office held by women in Nigeria at all levels as elected officials. Women's organizations, both professional and non-professional, have emerged. Some are responsible for addressing the immediately identifiable challenges for women within a restricted societal environment (Gary, 2015). Women's activism, in Sub-

Saharan Africa, affects a wide variety of fields including physicians, engineers, lawyers, chemists, housewives, broadcast journalists, professors, clerical workers, business women, schoolteachers, and religious scholars.

Despite the impact of Muslim Women's activism through their organization, there is the ultimate need of joining the voices of women to address the global challenges affecting their life directly or indirectly at both community and national levels e.g. More Islamic advocacy groups should be established in the areas of anti-corruption, girl child education, religious status, economics, law, politics, and social media.

Muslim Women in 1940s and Post-Apartheid South Africa and their influence

Understanding the role of South African women in religion and education has a historical connotation. It is therefore relevant to link this paper to the evolution of the religion of Islam in the southern tip of Africa within a historical context of the European conquest of the globe in pursuit of capital and the roles that different women played. It had a history of slavery, the history of the indenture system, and the history of capital accumulation in a land where ninety percent of the indigenous population were dispossessed of their political, social, and economic privileges. Some Muslims were recruited to serve capital accumulation, while most ended up in slavery to serve the economy. The first Muslims to arrive in South Africa were soldiers that were part of the "Mardykens", a Dutch East India Company regiment (Chidester, 2006). However, these Muslims were blocked

from practicing Islam openly and were never long-term there. The Muslim presence in South Africa was secured in the Cape with slaves from Southeast Asia and Africa at the behest of the Dutch East Indies (Chidester, 2006; Fataar, 2007).

After the abolition of slavery in 1833, Islam gained approximately 64,435 adherents and became a flourishing religion compared to the total population of the colony (Nadvi 2011). Learning and education grew with the increase in the community's size. Other factors such as conversion, adoption of slaves, intermarriage with free Muslims, and the purchase of slaves by free Muslims provided a crucial impetus for the spread of the Muslim faith.

A different stream of Muslims came into South Africa from the subcontinent of India and seized the opportunity exploited by British colonialists in the sugar cultivation and processing industry in the Natal colony through a system of indentured labor (Vahed,2000). Muslims originated in Kerala on the west coast of India, then moved south to Hyderabad. Soon after, a third group, the passenger group, followed the indentured laborers. They were primarily Zoroastrians from the cities of Surat and Memon. Their origins and history were unclear and varied from the indentured Muslims. Most of the Muslim passengers were from the merchant class and were referred to as "Arabs" because of their distinctive dress. The traders enjoyed certain benefits as British colonial citizens since they were free subjects of Britain. They were removed from the full scope of the Indian Immigration Law and consequently their socio-political status differed in unprecedented ways (Ad-da'wah 1983).

The Arab merchants of Durban, motivated by capitalist interests,

supplied goods to their relatives and village contacts in smaller towns to generate profit. They often penetrate remote areas of the country establishing business interests/interests (Ad-da'wah 1983). With the introduction of railway connections and the mining industry, a large number of Muslims of passenger origin moved to the Transvaal. Industrialists in Johannesburg and surrounding towns then began setting up small businesses including the town of Pietersburg, Nelspruit, Potgietersrus, and Volksrust (Nadvi 2011). Notwithstanding the varying socio-historical backgrounds of Muslims in South Africa, and their wide variety in language, religion, and culture, they have successfully established themselves as a distinct religious group.

Muslim women in South Africa and their influence on education

The political involvement of sections of the Muslim community in the anti-Apartheid struggle had a significant impact on how they viewed a range of issues from employment, human rights, politics, and education. The 1980s saw the growth of strong women's organizations like the United Women's Organization, the Natal Organization of Women, and the Federation of Transvaal Women (Suraju, 2013). This will always be attributed to the roles played by key Muslim women such as Fatima Seedat, Feroza Adams, Rahima Moos, Zainab Asvat, Fatima Meer, Amina Cachalia, and Zuleika Mayat just to mention. The increased role of women as political actors generated new political debates about the transformation of political organizations so that they might consider women's interests and facilitate women's participation, but also paving the way to education and rights of faith.

In terms of influence on education, the impact of Feroza Adams, Rahima Moosa, and Zainab Asvat will forever be remembered and cannot go without mention. For example, referring to Feroza Adams, born on 16 August 1961 in Johannesburg, got involved in the political and cultural life of the city in 1976 while she was a student at Nirvana High School. She became engaged in student politics while she was studying at the University of Witwatersrand. During this time, she played an active part in community foundations and organizations of the Indian Congress. She is a member of the Afro-Asian Students' Organization. After being awarded a post-graduate diploma in education, Feroza worked as a classroom teacher for five years. She laid the foundation for women's tertiary education through her political activism (Ask & Tjomsland, 1998).

In South Africa today, a majority of Muslim women are positive about going to university. They also believe that women should no longer be relegated to certain professions such as teaching, medicine, nursing, and engineering, but should be given the same opportunities as men to pursue fields like economics, politics, and engineering. More Muslim women are employed at South Africa's tertiary institutions than previously (Tayob, 2011). They also make up most education workers at the over seventy Muslim private schools that have been established in the last decade, and at the madrasah (religious schools that most Muslim children attend in the afternoons). It is becoming more common to find Muslim women who hold advanced graduate degrees, such as engineering, accountancy, political commentary, law, or psychology. Several Muslim women have been offered executive positions by financial institutions and have established their

successful practices. Notwithstanding, working women attempting to combine their professional careers with family obligations succeed more often than not (Tayob, 2011).

Traditionalist women remain within the home and this opposes the role women are expected to play, i.e., as obedient wives and caring mothers. Employment would prevent them from fulfilling their noble role of serving others. However, they do not object to women teaching in Muslim private schools and are also neutral about female physicians working at home. Although the number of educated women has increased, they have gained a good place in scientific and practical life and have achieved some material independence, but they continue to be subjected to inferior social status within the family (Reetz, 2011). This is because the misinterpretations of Islamic verses concerning the rights of women and their duties, which have been applied to traditional social practices, have produced a woman, a mother, who, as a mother, exhibits submission and surrender.

It may be quite common to note that the Muslim girl is more attached to religious teachings than the Muslim boy, but this is only the case at the surface, given the stress of her childhood to adhere to the prevalent traditional ideas because of being closer to the house and family (Reetz, 2011). There were very few girls that found that there was a significant difference between their upbringing and that of males. Consequently, we often find a loss of this girl, to the extent we can say that there is so much of the Muslim girl, who could get out of one of those two currents to change qualitatively. Then, we often find that there are two very authoritative currents with a double standard. The second concept is that men are built on women, and

therefore, to change the discrimination in inheritance, not to exclude men from exercising bullying and exploitation. This degree is the only one for women and men alike. It states that each individual has equal status. In common belief, these two concepts are among the misconceptions that have been associated with the Islamic religion and have distorted the Quranic verses.

Muslim women in South Africa and their influence on Islamic religion

Muslim women's status in contemporary society was a result of a historical legacy greatly burdened with traditional social systems and the remnants of a slave society as a result of obeying leaders. It is also represented by the power or sovereignty held by one group at the expense of another group. The fact is that Muslim women are between two different types of Islamists: one that is far from Islam's essence, that is separated from obsolete traditions and arrogance in religion. And the second that is alien to the other is that he switches between Islamic and Western values. These models are present in our contemporary society, which has shaken the concept of the supposed example of representing religious awareness, and this value duplicity is manifested by some of those who call themselves enlightened and who demand the need to reinterpret Islamic history and sacred texts in a new modern way, including the need to reconsider the issue of the veil, for example, and on another occasion, they explicitly acknowledge that the savoir-faire of women is a sin to Allah. All the Muslim women were supposed to wear the Hijab.

Ever since the beginning of the Renaissance, intellectuals have criticized the backwardness and weakness of Arab culture and their

degree of fault for the lack of Islam. It is perceived that the status of Muslim women today results from the accumulation of ideas and concepts produced by human beings for hundreds of years that have turned what is disputed and hard-working into sanctity and stability, turning changing values into taboos that are forbidden to discuss or think about (Reetz, 2011). This can be traced back to answering the fundamental ethical saying "freedom", the need for self-examination, and the serious jurisprudence asked of all human beings by the Qur'an. Religion regulates human existence rather than being created. Humanity must abide by laws and principles established by God. In Islam, we should care about Muslims first before caring about humankind. The role of religious awareness in the Arab World is to bring in a new, more forward-thinking mindset. The problem is how to adapt Islamic heritage in practice. It is appealing and meaningful to imitate the model of Temple free religion of families of traditions in Jerusalem. Women and the role they play in establishing religious awareness is one of the most critical topics that need to be addressed (Rafudeen, 2005).

One would refer to the historical past when most mosques in South Africa did not allow women to fulfil their Islamic worship (Salat/prayer). It took a woman to donate land for the first mosque to be built at the Cape in 1794. The Cape has a much more liberal tradition, with Muslim women visiting the cemetery and joining the prayers in the mosque. Some women are campaigning to have female attendants in mosques and other places of worship. With the support of male champions of women's rights, the family congregation is yet another measure they have implemented to curb men from

objectifying women. The theological councils are only composed of men and women are questioning some of their decisions as unfair towards the men. Another recent development to highlight is that several women counsellors have been used by theological councils to advise families on marital problems. Women also demanded and were finally successful in being able to have input in the drafting of the Muslim Marriage Bill (Rafudeen, 2005).

Islam did not keep women off the road for fear of men being too easily swayed by her charm and femininity. The Muslims have been forced to adopt a policy of specialization because they lacked legitimacy in the country of origin before the revelation. While traditional Islam is still strong in South Africa, Muslim women have gained rights that they have never had previously. They are making their way to embrace new opportunities afforded to women under the umbrella of social redress.

The case of Marhoomah Zainab Nkumane

Marhoomah Zainab (nee Maelekane) was born and bred in Louis Trichardt a village in a province now called Limpopo in South Africa. As a former Anglican Church missionary volunteer, she was sent to accumulate nursing skills, study comparative religion, and spread the gospel of Christianity. By the Mercy of Allah, she embraced Islam in the early 1970s as she was studying nursing at the Baragwanath Hospital (now called Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital). Marhoomah Zainab had a wonderful character of being kind and steady which made it possible for people to approach her. Her kindness could not be mistaken for a weakness as she would quickly correct a deed that she perceived to be contravening the rules of Allah (SWA). Zainab

was a mother, teacher, nurturer, and therapist to many.

When the Soweto uprisings began in 1975, Mama Zainab had to flee Johannesburg with her husband Baba Dawud Nkumane and seek refuge in the then Bophuthatswana homeland. As they sought protection in Mabopane, as a qualified nurse she sought employment in the local hospitals. Unfortunately, she was refused by all hospitals with her hijab being cited as the major hindrance. After failing to get a nursing job, she used her skills to address the religious and educational gaps in her community. She saw the high levels of illiteracy and lack of exposure to Islam. Just before 1980, she then started offering extra classes under a tree in her home. She would provide the children a meal when they got back from school, assist them with homework, and give them Islamic knowledge before they went home.

She epitomized the Islamic call to 'love your neighbor, more than you love yourself' by ensuring that she visited every home, checking on their well-being and calling them to Islam. She adopted the gospel methods she learned from church and used them to invite people to Islam. The Nkumane household was the first indigenous Muslim home in the 70s in Winterveldt. Her children remember her as someone that was never alone, she always surrounded herself with fellow women. She played a mediator role when there were disagreements in the community. Whenever couples approached her for marital advice, she ensured to preserve the families and encourage them to let Allah's presence permeate their homes.

She used the teaching that divorce should be the last resort to resolve marital problems. So, it was through her community work

that families were preserved, women-led businesses were created to support communities and the concept of Hudud was practiced when there was a need to implement communal justice. Zainab did not acquire Islamic knowledge from any formal institution but her love for Allah made her learn through reading different books and implementing the little knowledge she had. She completely believed that one can practice Islam even if one knew one Surah of the Quran. She reminisces about how she would give the Tafseer of Surah Al-Fatiha in different ways and show how it influenced her actions and pursuit of Allah's favors. Through her vision for Islam to grow in her home area Winterveldt, her son Kulungile Raheem Nkumane has established the Umvelinqangi Islamic Centre which provides services to all community members regardless of religious belief. 'Umvelinqangi' is an isiZulu word meaning Allah, The Creator of All Creation. As a legacy of Zainab Nkumane, Umvelinqangi Islamic Centres are being built in different areas in South Africa to spread humanity to all and pray that Allah guides them to Islam. Though she did not have high Islamic qualifications but her love and submission to Allah, The Loving has contributed to the spread of Islam in her area and beyond, she taught the Quran to many and enabled them to study Islam further and also call others to Islam. May Allah forgive her transgressions, reward her for every step she took towards pleasing Him, and grant her the highest abode in paradise.

Conclusion

The paper adopted the appreciative model of moving beyond qualifications and stature but recognizing the great work African Muslim women have done to develop their communities religiously

and educationally. Notwithstanding, the status of women in premodern Islam was not identical to that of the Quranic ideals, but rather conformed to prevailing cultural norms. As a result, the status of women in modern, reformist Islam became a major issue.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, women have questioned the economic, legal, and social restrictions on them, particularly regarding education, seclusion, polygyny, slavery, and concubinage. Women have published works to support reforming, establishing schools for girls where they can study, and opposing involvement in student and nationalist movements. Nationalist movements and critics of new states during the post-World War II period believed women and gender issues were integral to social development. State policies allowed groups of women to enter previously male-dominated occupations and professions, but although these policies often caused a popular and religious backlash, it has been successfully done in South Africa due to the previous advocacy work of women of whom Marhoomah Zainab is part.

Implications of the paper

It is critical to reiterate that in Islam, men and women are equal in God's sight and do the same duties of worship, prayer, faith, charity, fasting, and Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. The position of women rose quite in modern Islam than in previous Arabic cultures.

Whereas there is been continuous debates on how females should be involved in the public sphere, Muslim women play a vital role in either preserving or reforming tradition because of their roles as the family, social and cultural guardians of society. The role of

women in society has influenced national identity. Although many countries have promoted education over the past several decades as a means of economic growth, the percentage of girls enrolled in schools in developing countries remains low. One critical lesson from Mama Zainab is that one does not need to have formal Islamic knowledge or qualifications to spread the message of Islam in their community. Attempts to concern men's jobs have added some incentive to conservative calls for women to adhere to traditional roles as housewives and mothers, though economic necessity has led women to undertake whatever work they can find. War and labour migration have caused an increase in female-headed households.

Regardless of the popular belief that the message of Islam can only be preached by males, a woman (within the expected boundaries) can call people to Islam, Women today are active participants in social service projects; relief efforts; charitable associations; and economic, educational, health, and political projects in South Africa and many other parts of the world.

There is wisdom and strength in integrating religion, education, and welfare to model the principles of Islam and our duty as Muslims is to share the message of Islam, but the acceptance and submission to Allah are through Allah's Mercy.

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