



Visibility and Leadership Opportunities for Muslim Women in Zimbabwe

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INTRODUCTION

Gender inequity continues to feature prominently in discussions on governance, human rights, education, economy and development issues globally. Nowhere is the inequity more pronounced than in Africa where proponents of the unequal status quo advance reasons based on biological determinism or culture to perpetuate the existing structures. Decision-making in the private and public domains is still skewed in favour of one gender and power, consequently, resides with those who hold it, namely the men. Scholarship on women and gender issues in Africa has moved from ‘footnotes’ to exploring gender as a veritable area of research. The question of women’s place in society remains a subject matter of debates across human societies and cultures, and at different historical epochs.

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Although there has been a significant rise in women leadership in the political, economic and social spheres in Zimbabwe, Islam still experiences vast gender disparities in its leadership positions. This chapter seeks to interrogate the exclusion of Muslim women from their faith community's leadership structures at a national level. In line with the country's national goals on attaining gender equality in all sectors of life as enshrined in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 targeting gender equality and women's empowerment, the chapter concludes by advocating for gender parity in Islam's leadership structures in Zimbabwe.

FEMINISM AND GENDER DISCOURSE

Gender can be defined as 'the societal beliefs, customs and practices that define 'masculine' and 'feminine' attributes of behaviour (Dube, 2003). It is not a naturally ascribed attribute nor is it divinely sanctioned. Rather, it is a culture specific construct that can be reconstructed and transformed by society. Gender overlaps all other social departments be they economic, cultural and political, because people are always socially constructed as men and women in politics, governments, schools, churches, villages, cities, homes, work places, conversations and even in their sexuality' (Dube, 2003: 86). From this definition, it can be construed that gender refers to the economic, socio-cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female. The way males and females relate in the family, in religious organizations, public places and other social institutions and gatherings reflects society's understanding of men's and women's appropriate behaviours and characteristics. Society, therefore, defines how men and women should behave and this means that gender is a social construction and not determined by one's biological makeup.

This status quo was rejected by some scholars, most of them feminists. Feminism, a modern movement and an ideology, questions the notion of the superiority of men over women. Its aim is the emancipation of women from their unfair domination by men. What feminists fight for or stand for is the equality of men and women in society (Kendall, 2001: 359). It is an effort by men and women critical of sexism to dismantle the cultural hegemony of males over females, as well as masculinity over femininity in both male and female identities (Russell, 1996: 257). Feminism, thus,

questions and seeks to correct injustices brought about by the hierarchies in the sexes, assuming that men are at the top and women at the bottom.

Agitations by the feminists further generated interest in issues on women as the question of women's rights took centre stage in public discourses and social thoughts. Increasingly, women activists demanded for women's rights and inclusion. Accordingly, Ruth Sheila (1980) noted that:

Feminism seeks to overthrow class/caste system in existence, the class system based on sex- a system consolidated over thousands of years, lending archetypal male and female roles an undeserved legitimacy and seeming permanence. (Sheilla, 1980: 23)

The feminists, claiming to speak for women across cultures and societies, demanded for the liberation of women from the constricting socio-cultural space, a view which also gained currency in feminist writings. From the standpoint of feminist movements, the world has not been fair to the female gender. History has been written by the men from men's point of view, and the woman, 'the Other,' excluded. Feminism, therefore, propounds for a re-writing of history.

Feminism, however, was viewed with suspicion in some quarters. Some African-American and African women criticized white feminists' attempt to generalize on women's subordinate condition. According to Oyewunmi (1997), the rejection of Western-oriented feminism is informed by its inseparable connection, to biology, or what she terms 'biologic.' Torn apart by identity crisis, it was not long before feminism began to suffer both implosion and explosion, leading to different strands and schools of thought in the feminist theorizing, such as radical feminism and liberal feminism *inter alia*.

For the African-feminist scholars, feminism as a school of thought lacks both the epistemological and ideological frameworks that capture the experiences of the African woman which are anchored on the African realities. Concepts such as 'womanism,' 'afro-centricism,' among others, became options for the African feminists. More importantly also, many African women activists and researchers are conscious of the fact that most structural imbalances that undermine women's space and visibility in contemporary African society are products of colonial incursion

into the continent. Employing Western-oriented theoretical and epistemological instruments to investigate the diverse socio-cultural, political and economic underpinnings unfavourable to the African woman's survival challenges certainly cannot adequately capture their marginality (Chinyere, 2016: 3). Besides, gender issues, being products of culture, are bound by time and space, and as products of culture, they change with time. As culture is dynamic, so are gender issues.

Be that as it may, cross-cultural studies on women demonstrate that power asymmetry remains a major issue that women, across cultures and societies, grapple with, though at varying degrees. Thus, the actual treatment of women and their relative power and contribution vary enormously from culture to culture, and over different periods in the history of particular traditions (Ortner, 1974: 65). While the universality of female subordination is, therefore, not in doubt, its manifestations and degree vary across cultures and societies.

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter employs liberal feminism to investigate the visibility and leadership opportunities for Muslim women in Zimbabwe. It also utilizes Ortner's three-tiered theory on how to evaluate gender and leadership criteria. Ortner identified three major considerations as indications that women are undervalued in any society. According to her, these are (1) 'elements of cultural ideology and informants' statements that explicitly devalue women, according to their roles, their tasks, their products and their social milieux less prestigious than are accorded men and the male correlates; (2) symbolic devices, such as the attribution of defilement, which may be interpreted as implicitly making a statement of inferior valuation; and (3) social-structural arrangements that exclude women from participation in or contact with some realm in which the highest powers of the society are felt to reside (Ortner, 1974: 69). In other words, for Ortner, to determine if women are subordinated in a particular culture, the researcher should look out for first, 'explicit cultural ideology devaluing women- tasks, roles, products *etcetera*, second, symbolic indications such as defilement, and third, female exclusion from the most sacred rite or highest political council' (Ortner, 1974: 65).

This chapter refers to Ortner's three indicators and proffers the argument that in terms of visibility and critical leadership opportunities, Muslim women in Zimbabwe are relegated to the realm of insignificance,

except in cases where they lead other women such as the Fatima Zahra Women's Organisation or children. But, when it comes to leadership at the mosque and in other major Islamic Organisations such as the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, the umbrella body which oversees Islamic affairs in Zimbabwe, women are conspicuously absent. Apart from that, women cannot become Sheikhs or Imams, as these positions are strictly reserved for men.

The chapter, however, further argues that despite the seemingly oppressive elements of Islam towards women, gender issues are not always bad news to Muslim women. The chapter, therefore, rejects the general categorization of all Islamic practices and teachings as denying Muslim women in Zimbabwe visibility and leadership opportunities. There are some liberating and affirmative aspects which are found within the Islamic religion and culture. The onus is on Muslim women to tap into these rich resources and liberate themselves from the oppressive shackles of patriarchy whenever opportunities avail themselves and whenever possible. It has to be made clear that the vast differences among Muslim societies make most generalizations too simplistic. There is a wide spectrum of attitudes towards women in the Muslim world today. These attitudes differ from one society to another and within each individual society. For example, the way Islam is practised in countries like Iran (which is an Islamic republic with 99% Muslim population) is different from the way it is practised in countries like Zimbabwe (which is a secular country where Islam is a foreign minority religion constituting 3% of the total population).

By looking at visibility and leadership opportunities for Muslim women in Zimbabwe, this chapter argues that Muslim women in the country have defied all odds and are claiming their rights in both the private and public arenas. The women have capitalized on three factors to their advantage. First are the affirmative aspects of Islam. Second is Zimbabwe's liberal stance which advocates for freedom of religious affiliation and worship in addition to Zimbabwe being a signatory to the United Nations Charter on Human Rights. Third is the social context of the Muslims in Zimbabwe where they find their Christian and traditional sisters visible and in leadership positions, including even the highest levels in the political, religious, economic and social sectors of the country. For instance, Dr Joice Mujuru, the ex-Vice President of Zimbabwe, Prophetess Memory Matimbire, visionary and founder of Daughters of Virtue (DOV), a flourishing Pentecostal Interdenominational movement in Zimbabwe, Jane

Mutasa, founder of Women in Business (WIB), Professor Hope Sadza, founder and visionary leader of the Women's University in Africa (WUA), and Tsitsi Masiwa, a philanthropist and founder of Higher Life Foundation (a non-governmental organization which offers educational assistance to orphans, vulnerable and underprivileged children in Zimbabwe from primary to tertiary levels).

The chapter, therefore, proffers that Muslim women in Zimbabwe should be motivated by the factors mentioned above and be spurred on to register their visibility and to assume leadership roles in all spheres of life. However, in order to appreciate this changing significance of women, the study notes that women generally suffered due to an oppressive background borne out of certain patriarchal and colonial attitudes within selected societies, which more often than not are stumbling blocks hindering women from assuming critical leadership roles in the public spheres such as developmental initiatives. Nevertheless, the study seeks to explore the liberating dimension of Islam that has catapulted selected Muslim women in Zimbabwe to positions of leadership and visibility.

In order to achieve this goal, the study adopts the Africana Womanism theory, which draws the attention of women to the importance of rejecting the status of victim and propels them to consider themselves as victors and sisters in charge of their own destiny. In doing this, their primary obligation will be to make progress in their cultural way of life through the stability of family and commitment to community (Hudson-Weems, 1993: 24). Utilizing this theory, the study contends that the patriarchal oppression of women when and where it occurs is not consistent with the values of Africana Womanism (Hudson-Weems, 2000). This is because Africana Womanism acknowledges and celebrates the key position of women in Africa within cultures, families and other institutions (Mapuranga, 2016: 154). As such, this study celebrates the life of one renowned Muslim woman in Zimbabwe. This woman has been a voice that exudes the significance and value of women in society. The next section examines the status of Muslim women in Zimbabwe. However, for an appreciation of the status of Muslim women in Zimbabwe, there is need to briefly trace the history from pre-Islamic times (*Jahiliyyah*), to the era of the Prophet Muhammad and to the contemporary period.

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE PRE-ISLAMIC PERIOD (*JAHILIYYAH*)

The period before the advent of Islam is referred to as the *Jahiliyyah*. According to some Muslim scholars, the *Jahiliyyah* period extends from the creation of Adam down to the mission of Muhammad. However, in this chapter, the *Jahiliyyah* period will be used to cover the century immediately preceding the rise of Islam. The term *Jahiliyyah*, usually rendered ‘time of ignorance’ or ‘barbarism’ in reality, means the period in which Arabia had no dispensation, no inspired prophet and no revealed book (Hitti, 1970: 87).

During the *Jahiliyyah* period, women had no rights at all. The extended family had one head or leader, the father or senior male, who controlled and guided the family unit. In other words, the tribe was the main unit of society and the system was patriarchal in nature. The family consisted of the father, his wife or wives, unmarried sons and daughters and married sons with their wives and children all of whom had specific roles within the family structure. It served as the basic social and economic unit of the tribe within a male-dominated (patriarchal) society.

In this set-up, a woman was regarded as little more than a possession, first of her father and her family and subsequently, of her husband and his family (Esposito, 1988: 96). Women’s lack of rights and the paramount position of males were reflected in family matters such as female infanticide, marriage, divorce, polygamy and inheritance.

FEMALE INFANTICIDE

There is no doubt that pre-Islamic Arabs committed female infanticide and young girls were usually victims of their dreadful practice (Hitti, 1970). Girl children were buried alive. The practice was prompted by fear of disgrace and fear of poverty which was associated with the frequent famines caused by lack of rain. The Arabians feared the poverty that would result from providing for girls who were viewed as less productive than boys. Consequently, fathers were afraid that they would have ‘useless’ mouths to feed.

Another reason for female infanticide was a perverted sense of pride on the part of the fathers who wanted to avoid shame and disgrace, should their daughters be captured by an enemy in war (Hitti, 1970). Female infanticide was also committed on the consideration that boys would pass

on the family name and were capable of generating more income. Thus, girls became dispensable. Boys were also valued because they would be fighters in times of war.

However, with the advent of Islam, the issue of women's rights was revised with much emphasis put on family law. The special status of family law reflects the Quranic concern for the rights of women. The Quran introduced substantial reforms affecting the rights of women by creating new regulations and modifying customary practice (Esposito, 1988). The next section, therefore, investigates the role of Islam in the restoration of women's rights. It examines whether Islam hinders women from registering their visibility and assuming leadership positions or whether it promotes them to do so.

WOMEN'S VISIBILITY AND LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES IN ISLAM

Although not mentioned in the Quran, one hadith of the Prophet Muhammad is interpreted to justify the claim that he made women ineligible for the position of head of state. The hadith referred to is roughly translated, 'A people will not prosper if they let a woman be their leader.' This limitation, however, has nothing to do with the dignity of the woman or her rights. It is rather related to the natural differences in the biological and psychological makeup of men and women (Muttahari, 2016). Thus, any fair investigation of the teachings of Islam into the history of the Islamic civilization will surely find a clear evidence of women's equality with men in what we call today 'political rights.' This includes the right of election as well as the nomination to political offices. It also includes women's rights to participate in public affairs. Both in the Quran and in Islamic history, there are examples of women who participated in serious discussions and argued even with the Prophet himself (Surah 58:14; 60:10–12).

Besides granting women political rights, Muslim women are also free to assume leadership roles in the public arena. This is evidenced by the fact that since the inception of Islam, women have assumed such roles. For example, Aisha, Muhammad's wife, led the Muslim battle against Al Zubayr. Globally, in our own era, Benazir Bhutto, popularly known for her remarkable leadership qualities, served as the Prime Minister of Pakistan since 1988. Similarly, Tansu Ciller, a Muslim woman, was elected to head Turkey in 1993.

MUSLIM WOMEN'S VISIBILITY AND LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES IN ZIMBABWE

In Zimbabwe, Islam affords Muslim women the same leadership opportunities as their male counterparts, for example, in politics. However, in an interview with Mrs Dee,¹ she noted that women's assumption of leadership roles in such spheres is regulated by their role as homemakers. She argued that certain aspects of politics are not in keeping with a woman's psychological and physiological nature. Hence, they would not be willing to take up political careers even when given the chance (Mrs Dee, interview: 2019). In concurrence, Mrs X, a Muslim woman who preferred to remain anonymous, lamented the sad reality that politics in Zimbabwe is always a nightmare, riddled with all sorts of human rights violations such as gender-based violence, sexual abuse, rape, torture and murder, *inter alia* (Mrs X, interview: 2019). Munando echoes the same sentiments when she identifies some of the factors that continue to make women absent from the political process in Zimbabwe. These include 'violent political environments, sexual abuse and harassment, the media, reproductive health issues and HIV and AIDS' (Munando, 2010: 122–125).

Consequently, Muslim women shun politics especially at the level of visibility and leadership. However, they have registered their presence and visibility by assuming leadership roles in other palatable but critical development sectors such as the socio-religious and economic spheres. Clearly, they have done a commendable job in these sectors. The next section, therefore, explores visibility and leadership opportunities for Muslim women in Zimbabwe in the socio-religious and developmental sectors. Although there are many facets of women visibility and leadership opportunities, this chapter explores only two due to space constraints and these are women's status in the home and the Fatimah Zahra Women's Organisation.

¹ For confidentiality purposes, except when citing Hajar Makwinja who is the main focus of this study (she gave consent for her name to be revealed), the rest of the study participants are referred to using pseudonyms.

WOMAN AS THE QUEEN IN THE HOME

In Islam, the woman enjoys absolute equality as an equal member of the family unit. In certain ways, her position as wife and as mother is unique and of great honour and distinction. As a wife, she is the Queen and mistress of the household and the status of the husband is determined by the way he treats her (Esposito, 1988). This status of Muslim women is founded on one of the popular and oft-cited statements made by the Prophet Muhammad which states that, ‘The best among you is the one who is best to his wife and I am the best among you to my family.’ In the Muslim set-up, the woman is the focus of all family members. She enjoys profound esteem and respect from everyone. Her opinions and suggestions carry immense weight in all family matters. According to one Islamic tradition, ‘Even paradise lies beneath the feet of your mothers’ (Waines, 2003: 5).

The very special place of mothers in Islam is eloquently described in the following statement uttered by the Prophet Muhammad:

‘A man asked the Prophet: whom should I honour most?’ The Prophet replied: ‘Your mother.’ ‘And who comes next?’ asked the man. The Prophet replied: ‘Your mother.’ ‘And who comes next?’ asked the man. The Prophet replied: ‘Your mother!’ ‘And who comes next?’ asked the man. The Prophet replied: ‘Your father’.

(Bukhari and Muslim)

It, therefore, goes without saying that the woman reigns supreme in the home. They take over the roles of managers and homemakers (Azeem, 2012). Thus, with all his masculinist dissection of the anatomy of woman, Chinweizu (2005) recognizes the power of the woman as he believes that the man suffers a form of oppression at the hands of the woman. For him, the woman has exploited her biological superiority and has consolidated her power by taking over the role of mother, cook and nurse in the household. He also sees marriage as a source of man’s oppression. Of course, one knows his stance—men may rule the world, but women rule the men who rule the world (Chinweizu, 2005).

WOMEN AS THE FIRST TEACHERS

The argument that men may rule the world, but women rule the men who rule the world stems from the idea of women as first teachers. A child is first taught by women in the form of a mother and whatever that child grows into would be a reflection of the mother as the first teacher. The

Shona proverb *musha mukadzi* which literally means a woman is the pillar of the home clearly demonstrates the leadership role of women among the indigenous Muslims. As Bourdillon (1987: 52) puts it, ‘Women have more influence in the homestead than men.’ Similarly, Taringa (2014: 402) restates that the understanding of the proverb *musha mukadzi* is that a home cannot be a home without a woman or a wife. Such an understanding gives women an influential and leadership role in society. This proverb is quite similar to *mukadzi mutsigo wemusha* which means that the woman is the anchor of the homestead/village (Gelfand, 1973: 170). Sekuru Phiri summed it up when he noted that:

‘Munbukadzi akakosha pamusha, kuti musha umire mukadzi, kuti pamusha paratidzike mukadzi. Kushayikwa kwemunbukadzi, musha unoparara. Naizvozvo varume vanofanira kuziva kukosha kwemunbukadzi’ (The woman is a critical figure in the home. For a home to be good and decent, it is because of a woman. The absence of a woman in the home brings disorder. For that reason, men ought to understand the importance of women). (Sekuru Phiri, interview: 2020)

The foregoing remarks from a man (a patriarch) clearly demonstrates the esteemed position of women in society. The English proverb which says, ‘behind every successful man is a woman,’ also corroborates the argument that mothers are the first teachers who mould children into what they would grow up to be. Thus, whatever a man will grow up to be, whether a Sheikh, Imam, President of state, Businessman, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), etc., all emanates from a woman. According to one hadith, ‘the whole world is valuable but the most valuable thing in the world is a good woman.’ And to crown it all, there is a well-known Arabic saying ‘al-ummu-madrasatun’ translated as ‘the mother is a school’ (Azumah, 2008). Islam, therefore, does not sanctify the oppression of women but reveres them. What this means is that in Islam, the woman is a subject and not an object. She does not occupy the periphery where she is acted upon.

It is from these arguments that this chapter maintains that Islam in Zimbabwe has always recognized the leadership potential of women in all spheres of life such as the religious, social and economic. In writing this chapter, I am cognizant of the fact that a significant number of Muslim women in Zimbabwe have made it to the top, having registered their visibility and demonstrated impeccable leadership qualities. However, for

the purpose of this chapter, I will focus on one indigenous Muslim woman in Zimbabwe who seems to have soared above the rest. She is non-other than Hajar Makwinja and the focus of the next section in this chapter is to explicate her life story.

HAJAR MAKWINJA AND FATIMA ZAHRA WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION

Hajar Makwinja is one of the most renowned Muslim women in Zimbabwe who has registered her visibility and demonstrated impeccable leadership skills in both the public and private arena. She is arguably the face of Islam in Zimbabwe. She is the visionary and founder of the Fatima Zahra Women's Organisation. Hajar Makwinja founded the organization in 1984 when she embraced Islam. She discovered that Muslim women in Zimbabwe lacked correct and sufficient Islamic teachings as compared to what she had learnt. She, therefore, became keen to share and to teach Muslim women the basic teachings of Islam which she had learnt. Initially, she engaged in congregational teachings in mosques in Harare. She tapped into her Christian background to teach Muslim women after discovering that they needed guidance. In her view, Muslim women are not different from women of other religions and societies. The problem she noted was that most Muslim women do not know their rights as embodied in Islam. Such a realization therefore motivated her to teach them their rights and expected practices. This eventually inspired her to establish the Fatima Zahra Women's Organisation in 1984. The main aims and objectives of the organization are:

- a. To conscientize Muslim women of their rights as embodied in Islam.
- b. To teach Muslim women in Zimbabwe to become practising women of Islam.
- c. To teach Muslim women the significance of the Muslim attire.
- d. To train Muslim women in Zimbabwe to become self-reliant.

The organization is located in Hatfield, Harare, and is involved in various activities for which it had a lot of achievements. Since its establishment, Muslim women have increased numerically and they have improved their identity through wearing the proper Islamic dress. The Islamic dress

code instils in the women a sense of belonging. Other Muslim organizations, for example, in Mbare and Epworth, were established as a result of being inspired by the accomplishments of the Fatima Zahra Women's Organization. The organization has helped Muslim women to start income-generating projects such as poultry, peanut butter making, tailoring and candle making, to mention a few. Some of the women are given equipment such as candle making and sewing machines. The organization also sponsors some underprivileged children who cannot afford to pay for their school fees. Sponsorship runs from pre-school to tertiary level. The organization is mainly self-funded; they fundraise through their internal activities, especially from the operations of a pre-school that was opened in 2001. Some of the funds may, however, be sourced from embassies like the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Presently, the organization has some students on scholarship in countries like Tanzania and Iran. It also helps its members on occasions such as funerals, illnesses and weddings.

Membership of the organization is national. Any Muslim woman is free to join the organization. However, there is no specific number of members who have joined because more members continue to join. Membership is specifically for women, and if there is need for helping non-Muslims, the organization is always ready to help. For instance, it has previously accommodated the University of Zimbabwe students who were evicted from their halls of residence following some disturbances on the campus. The accommodation was offered at Fatima Zahra Centre in June 2008. At first, only Muslim students were accommodated, but the organization eventually extended its hand to non-Muslims. The issue was brought to the attention of the founder and leader of the organization, Hajar Makwinja, by the University of Zimbabwe Muslim Students Association. The Fatima Zahra Women's Organization has branches throughout the country, for example in Kadoma, Gweru, Kwekwe, Masvingo, Bulawayo, Mutare, Marondera, Harare and Shurugwi, among others. Hajar Makwinja often features on Zimbabwe's television programmes and book fairs and she also collaborates with other non-Muslim organizations like the Women in Business (WIB).

Fatima Zahra Women's Organization is neither a Shiite nor Sunni (the main Muslim groups) organization. Nevertheless, basing on the fact that its leader and founder is Shiite, some people prefer to refer to it as a Shiite organization. Otherwise, it is just a Muslim Women's Organization open to both Sunnis and Shias. However, Hajar Makwinja, the leader of the

organization, pointed out that the majority of their members are Sunnis. The organization helps in the growth of Islam by giving help even to non-Muslims who then appreciate and embrace Islam. There are smooth relations between Fatima Zahra Women's Organization and Islamic countries such as the Islamic Republic of Iran. Moreover, the establishment of the organization was inspired by the Islamic revolution of Iran. This is evidenced by the fact that Hajar Makwinja, the founder and leader of the organization, was inspired by the teachings she got from Iranian women. She noted that Iranian women were the ones who practically encouraged and inspired her on how to dress properly as a Muslim woman, though she knew about it from the Quran. The Islamic revolution taught the Iranian Muslim women to wear the proper Islamic attire, and in turn, they inspired other Muslim women elsewhere, including in Zimbabwe (Hajar Makwinja, interview: 2019).

Hajar Makwinja disputes the fact that some people perceive the *hijab* worn by Muslim women as an expression of the oppression they are subjected to. Instead, she argues that Muslim women are free. She reiterated that the *hijab* is simply a way of dressing recommended by the scriptures. It is also an expression of respect for their bodies and dignity as religious women. She also restated that Muslim women are respected and loved by their husbands because of the dignity expressed by their dressing. As a way to encourage moral uprightness and Islamic principles for girls between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, the organization accommodates three or four girls at its premises, teaching them the Islamic way of life expected of them. This continues for six months before another group is enrolled (Hajar Makwinja, interview: 2019). Mrs Makwinja also trains women in different skills such as cutting and designing, hair dressing, candle and peanut butter making *inter alia*. She emphasized that her aim was to empower women and to make them economically independent and self-reliant.

FATIMA ZAHRA COLLEGE

The information on this institution was received in an interview with Hajar Makwinja as well as Sheikh Abdullah Makwinja, who is the director of the college, in January 2017. The college was the initiative of the Fatima Zahra Women's Organization which has been discussed in the preceding section and it is situated at the premises of the Organization in Hatfield. It was founded in February 2009. The founder and visionary

of the college, Hajar Makwinja, assigned her husband Sheikh Abdullah Makwinja to head it.

Hajar Makwinja noted that the college was opened in response to the problems encountered during the humanitarian crisis years in Zimbabwe. Many parents could not send their children to school due to financial constraints. In response to this crisis, the college enrolled quite a number of students from disadvantaged families and catered for their welfare. She also recalled that during the height of the crisis years (2007–2008) in Zimbabwe, the college assisted fifteen University of Zimbabwe students who were homeless and could not continue with their studies since they could not afford to pay fees. The college paid for their tuition fees and provided them with accommodation. The students graduated in 2010 and some were now ‘paying back’ by assisting the college in various ways. There are both Muslim and non-Muslim students and staff members at the college.

At the time of writing this chapter, the college had eighty students and fifty of them did not pay fees, the rest just paid a token fee. The reason for charging very low fees as compared to other colleges, according to Sheikh Makwinja, was that they wanted to accommodate almost every child. He also explained that the college was there to assist the community and not to do business. Besides offering academic education (Form One to Six), the college also teaches Religious Education, specifically Islamic Studies. The college is an approved centre for the Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council (ZIMSEC).

Sheikh Makwinja further noted that the college was sponsoring a number of students who were studying at universities in and out of the country. For example, two of the students were studying at the Chinhoyi University of Technology and both were studying Business Administration. Some students were at the University of Zimbabwe and they were studying different disciplines such as Economics, Urban and Rural Planning (RUP) and Business Administration, among others. Others completed their undergraduate studies at the University of Zimbabwe and they were now pursuing their doctoral studies in South Africa. Sheikh Makwinja further stated that they were planning to send four students who successfully completed their ‘A Level’ studies at the college for further studies at the universities in Ghana, Iran and Lebanon.

FATIMA ZAHRA WOMEN'S ORGANISATION ORPHANAGE

Muslims in Zimbabwe have been involved in supporting orphans and vulnerable children. Islam emphasizes the importance of taking care of orphans. In Islam, it is the right of every child, orphaned or with parents, to be protected, taken care of physically, psychologically and emotionally. The Prophet Muhammad himself was an orphan. Thus, the Quran and Sunnah emphasize the importance of treating orphans with love and compassionate care. This attitude is guided by the Prophet Muhammad's statement that, 'whoever caresses the head of an orphan (in affection), solely for the sake of Allah, a good deed will be written to his account for every hair over which he passed his hand.' Like in other religious traditions in the world, Muslims believe that there is a great reward for those who take care of orphans. This is substantiated by the words of Prophet Muhammad who is reported to have said, 'I and the person who looks after an orphan and provides for him, will be in paradise' (Abdalati, 1998).

In response to the need for addressing the plight of orphans, Hajar Makwinja also established the Fatima Zahra Women's Organisation Orphanage. It is situated at their premises in Hatfield. This children's home was established in the 1990s, and at the time that this study was conducted, it catered for about sixty orphans who were drawn from all over the country. They enrolled the children who were still be in primary school, and upon completion, they were transferred to the secondary school, that is, the Fatima Zahra College.

It should be noted that the Islamic teaching does not encourage the institutionalization of orphans. Rather, they advocate that whenever possible, orphans should be taken care of in their respective extended families. However, because of the economic challenges in Zimbabwe, some extended families could not afford to take care of orphans. Hence, Muslims came up with the idea of children's homes and Fatima Zahra Orphanage was one of them. Hajar Makwinja explained that if a child was referred to them for consideration, they would first track down the nearest of kin to get in touch with them. While they could provide the educational, moral and physical needs of the child, they believe that they could not fully play the role that the family plays. In order to maintain the family bond, they encouraged the next of kin to fetch the child during school holidays so that they could spend part of the holiday with them.

Fatima Zahra Orphanage and other Muslim orphanages in Zimbabwe provide alternatives to foster care or adoption by giving the orphans

community-based settings in which they can live and learn. Some of the orphans are individually sponsored and this assistance provided the much needed support to the children. This helped them to concentrate on their schooling without having to roam the streets where they would be vulnerable to the more sinister members of the public. Alongside supporting orphans, Hajar Makwinja's leadership is also seen in her efforts to counter the effects of climate change. The chapter turns to this theme in the next section.

INTERNATIONAL SUMMIT ON RELIGION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change presents an unprecedented threat to global socio-economic development in the twenty-first century. Developing countries have very different individual circumstances, and the specific impacts of climate change on a country depend not only on the climate itself, but also on the country's geographical, social cultural, economic and political situation. As a result of global warming, the climate in Africa is predicted to become more variable, and extreme weather events are expected to be more frequent and severe with increasing risks to health and life. Thus, globally, human societies experience direct and indirect as well as actual and potential challenges. Extreme weather events include severe floods, intense and prolonged droughts, and severe heat and cold waves and lead to declining agricultural productivity and food security, and severe water shortages and diseases. As Chitando and Conradie (2017: 311) put it: 'There is ample evidence that various regions of the African continent will be adversely and disproportionately affected by climate change.'

The threat of climate change and global warming, however, needs a multi-sectoral approach, religion included. Global debates on climate change often underestimate the role of religion in climate mitigation and adaptation. This is largely a result of the tendency to adopt technical terms that alienate non-experts (Chitando, 2017: 425). Alternatively, when there is a focus on religion and climate change, the role of African women tends to be overlooked. As is almost always the case, women are treated as an afterthought. Women are often projected as a footnote in discussing human history, issues and concerns. Yet, arguably, any discourse on religion and climate which excludes women is bound to yield incomplete results if not suffer total failure. To evoke Chitando:

Another narrative is required to try to map out how African religious leaders can work with women to address climate change. While women constitute the majority of adherents of religion in Africa, most leadership positions are occupied by men. There is growing pressure for women to access top leadership positions, although patriarchy continues to resist that. However, women in faith communities in Africa must play a leading role in the response to climate change. The discourse must shift from a focus on the vulnerability of African women facing climate change to a focus that appreciates their capabilities. (Chitando, 2017: 434)

In response to this call, Hajar Makwinja represented Muslims in Zimbabwe at the International Conference on Climate Change held in Benoni, South Africa, in November 2019. Commenting on the conference, she explained that:

'Kuconferenze kwakasangana nhume dzaimirira zvitendero zvakasiyana-siyana zvakaita sechiKristu, chiMusirimu, chivanhu, chiJudha, chiBhabai, Chirasita nezvimwe zvakawanda. Nhume dzakabva kunyika dzakasiyana dzepasi rose. Ini ndini ndoga ndakamirira chitendero cheIslam muZimbabwe. Takadzidza zvakawanda zvinosanganisira dzimwe nzira dzekubika uchisevenzesa kupisa kwezvupa panzvimbo yehuni' (The conference was attended by delegates representing different religions and Faith-Based Organisations such as Christianity, Islam, African Traditional Religion, Judaism, Bahai Faith, Rastafarianism, *interalia*. The delegates came from different parts of the world. I was the only one who represented Islam in Zimbabwe. We learnt different things such as cooking using the solar energy instead of using firewood). (Hajar Makwinja, interview: 2019)

Since her return from that conference, Hajar Makwinja has been travelling to different parts of the country, holding workshops and training women both urban and rural on this new method of cooking. This has gone a long way in terms of alleviating the plight of women when it comes to the burden they endure since they are mainly responsible for securing firewood for cooking. This has also helped to mitigate against the problem of deforestation in the country.

This and many other exploits, discussed earlier in this section, arguably demonstrate that Hajar Makwinja is a Muslim woman who has defied all odds to free herself from the shackles of patriarchy. She has assumed and demonstrated impeccable leadership qualities, in some contexts matching her male counterparts, while in others even surpassing them, in the private and public arena, locally and internationally.

CONCLUSION

As illustrated in this chapter, a considerable number of Muslim women in Zimbabwe have registered their visibility and assumed leadership roles in various sectors of the nation. Some Muslim women have refused to be cry-babies waiting to be given freedom by their male counterparts on a silver platter. While avoiding confrontation, they have capitalized on their biological and natural superiority as well as many other affirmative Islamic religio-cultural resources to free themselves from the oppressive shackles of patriarchy. It is critical, however, to note that the number of women who have made it to the top in terms of visibility and leadership is still low as compared to their male counterparts. The Islamic religious traditions and culture stand as some of the major reasons responsible for this status quo. On the one hand, religion and culture have, in a way, been blamed for relegating women to the periphery in terms of leadership. On the other, a more positive interpretation of the same religion and culture has availed opportunities for women to be visible and to take up leadership roles. More than forty years after Zimbabwe attained independence, there is still a pertinent need for the patriarchally dominated leadership in the Muslim religion to partner with women in ensuring that there are systems that are put in place to facilitate the inclusion of more Muslim women in leadership, not only within their faith community, but in all sectors of life.

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