

## TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY AND NATION BUILDING: THE ROLE OF MUSLIM WOMEN

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### ABSTRACT

*An 'ideal democracy' will positively influence nation building. But no nation develops outside the growth of good moral character of its citizenry. It is the development of these virtues that develops the network of the social system. It is on this basis that the paper looked at the role of Muslim women as the executive chairpersons of the family, in training of the younger generation, which will translate into a sustainable democracy and nation building. It examines the family as the major instrument for creating the democratic potentials necessary for the societal growth and development. It therefore points out the Qur'anic guidance on the supposed role of Muslim woman if only the question of moral training will be given high premium in our bid to attaining a sustainable "ideal democracy" and nation building devoid of rancor and politics of bitterness.*

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the main national goals of Nigeria, which have been endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education is the building of “a free and democratic society”. It is accordingly stipulated that the quality of instruction at all levels of education has to be oriented towards, among others inculcating moral and spiritual principle in interpersonal and human relation (F.G.N. National Policy on Education, 1998, p. 16).

The above is a realization of the worth and strength of moral training in the revival of a nation from the abyss of all backwardness and crimes. But how ready are Nigerians to attain this wholesome aim in view? Parents are charged with obligations to their children. These are rights of children over their parents. Mothers in particular share the greatest responsibility of educating, grooming and refining the young generation, who will be imbued with ideals of an ideal democracy and a viable nation building in all ramifications.

Islam lays emphasis on the promotion of an individual’s moral qualities and considers its reformation to be of vital importance. It is more concerned with the development of good moral character of an individual for developing the network of social system, which will culminate in the attainment of an “ideal” sustainable democracy and nation building (Abdur-Rashid, 1995, p. 26). If adequate attention is not paid to the reformation of this aspect of life (good moral character), human life comes under dark forces and will be ruled by corruption (Al-Ghazli, 1983, vol. III, P. P.72). And the corruption of an individual’s morality will cause the destruction of the system of the whole nation manifesting in all sorts of evils, which will impede smooth transition into a sustainable democracy and Nation building.

The development of this critical factor in Islam, that is, education is best posited, handy, and propelled by mothers. Hence a woman’s role in the training of young ones alongside religious and moral education means training for a sustainable democracy and nation building. And for any nation to lack this ingredient will amount to a system of government engraved in usurpation, denial, marginalization and instability, yet it will be claimed it is practicing democracy and be called a democratic system. Even then, how sustainable is this process?

The education of women should strictly be appraised from the point of building a healthy, ideal and worthwhile family along with other variables that interplay in the socialization process. This cannot be achieved until its products are well refined to appreciate the laws and norms of the land. Here they will imbibe moral principles and ready to sacrifice for a sustainable nation building. Without any reservation therefore, the utmost human refinery is the home under its executive minister, the mother.

However, even with this background, some mothers have failed in their responsibilities as the moral regenerators of our younger generation who are future nation builders. This is responsible for the situation in which we find ourselves today. It is along these problems that this paper tries to reposition and spell out the supposed roles of women with an Islamic outlook proffering solutions to our erring problems.

#### **WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY?**

Democracy is defined as the control of the apparatuses of the state via the use of franchise and representative law making body. (Thomson, 1965, p. 5). This definition was based on French revolution ideology. However, Chambers Encyclopedia defined democracy as:

a society in which all members are equal and free, none is excluded from taking part in governing it, and all accept the decisions within limits of a majority gained at a poll fairly conducted.

Yet, the New Standard Encyclopedia defined democracy as:

an ideal or way of life that stresses equality, liberty, individual's right, tolerance, freedom of discussion and compromise.

Again, democracy could be viewed as a constituted authority where members of the community genuinely govern themselves, in which the governed participate in making the directive decision, which affects them all, (the New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1987). It is a rule of law whereby freedom is exercised by the people and for the people. Under this theory, there is a privileged class and that individuals may influentially rise to position of power.

From these definitions one can deduce that freedom and equality are implicit of democratic theory. In so far as democracy is concerned with the issue of rule or control or decision making, categories such as the insane; children below a given age and criminals are very widely excluded. (Keith,1986, p.17).

The concept which is alien to the above expositions of democracy and which is relevant to this discussion is “sustainability” of democracy. Sustainable democracy could be coined as that system of rule or control which ensures participation in decision making but which has a high (Perpetual Existence), and that it has a low level of actual violence (Lijphart, 1977, p.67). In contrast, the western democracy as practiced in Nigeria is characterized by immodesty, alienation, impoverishment, and breach of trust and promise, disloyalty, self centeredness, falsehood, deceit and under development (Hassan, 2001, p.7). It is a kind of democracy that is loose and guarantees people to step upon other people’s right because of the assumed unlimited freedom inherent in the so-called western democracy. Individuals are so free to enact laws for themselves and for which suit them without any spiritual guidance. A very recent instance is the anti-gay (same sex marriage) Law which was consented to and endorsed by the Nigerian government. Quite a number of western nations including Europe and America condemned the position of Nigeria, making unfounded references to democracy without recourse to peoples’ faith.

In Islam, Allah is the Lawgiver. He regulated our transactions and in His wisdom has ordained a pattern for our well being. This is the reason why the democracy one would advocate or envisage for Nigeria is the “ideal” or “real” one, which exists in Islam. This is Autocratic Democracy rule. This is type of democracy that derives its laws from *Shari’ah*. Impliedly, it is not a system of law where by anything good or bad can be determined solely by the changing views of the population. It is what Allah in His wisdom has ordained for the well-being of mankind. We are given senses with which Allah urges us to reflect. Whatever happens to us is our own handwork (Qur’an 17:13). Therefore, we have to be cautious in exercising our free will. Our free will is not absolute; it must be exercised within the limit set by Allah.

## WHAT IS NATION BUILDING?

Absence of structures requires fresh ones by way of building, while dilapidated ones need restructuring. Nation building is either founding fresh bases for development or reinvigorating the existing structures. Whichever is applicable in Nigeria's quest for developing its political and economic tentacles, the attitudinal change on the part of the general public is very paramount. Key leaders, opinion molders and kingmakers in Tukur's view (2004) must change and develop a democratic and public-spirited mindset. There can never be real democracy and sustainable nation building in a society characterized by domestic indiscipline, violence and instability, sexual laxity, increased pornographic materials in the hands of teenagers, distaste for things spiritual, liberalism imported from decadent foreign cultures, worship of money, scandalously diverting public funds into private coffers and inflating government contracts, armed robbery, assassination and ritual killings, lack of sense of duty and above all ethnic and religious crises. (Ejiogu, 2001, p.116).

It should be noted that the necessary ingredients of nation building includes; societal integration, health and prosperous economy; well fed population, individual freedom and liberty, devolution of powers to fewer viable federal units, stable polity, security of life and property, food security, viable employment opportunity, equitable and balance provision of various types of infrastructures, decentralization of functions of government to allow community have control of their legal system and certainly equal access to functional qualitative moral educational system. (Tukur, 2004, p.14; Ejiogu, 2001, p.117).

In an analytic reflection, this supposed trend of affairs is far on the advance. When penciled down to the nucleus of the problems, it is the moral degeneration, which robbed the society of all that could guarantee sustainable democracy and nation building. The moral training and all that it takes to satisfy our national interest is at least to be pioneered in our homes under the nurturing of our mothers, and in this case the Muslim women. They abide by and work with the rules of Islam as it affects them as women.

## WHO ARE THE MUSLIM WOMEN?

Muslim women are that percentage of the total population among the women folk, who profess Islam and in all their dealings they are guided by its deeply felt ethical values. They are the moral regenerators and the builders of individuals along Islamic spirited principles. They abide by and work with the rules of Islam as it affects them as women.

## MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE PAST

From historical context, Muslim women have been instrumental in the developmental process of the community. They join soldiers in the battle field, to perform a number of duties such as carrying of provision, taking care of the sick and the wounded, removing the slain from the battle field or taking part in actual fighting when situation calls for it. They also helped their husbands in the labor of the fields. (Nejeebabadi, 2000, p.97).

It is on record that the mother of the faithful, Khadijah, the first wife of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) spent all her wealth in the service of Islam. She stood tenaciously by the Prophet (S.A.W). (*Sahih Muslim*, 1971, H. 89).

Also, personalities in history require attention here. People like *Imam* Bukhari. *Imam* Muslim, Umar bn Abdul-Aziz and Harun al-Rashid to mention just a few, were great and history is unreservedly counting their contributions in nation building throughout the Islamic world. Their successes are certainly the nurturing, orientation and management of their mothers. (Maududi, 1981, P.23).

*Shaykh* Uthman bn Foduye, the 19<sup>th</sup> century revivalist of Islam in Nigeria trained his daughters Asmau and Maryam who both became prolific writers based on Islamic virtues. Asmau's for instance, composed many poems in both Fulfulde and Arabic languages, the intent of which was for the propagation of Islam and a wholesale reformation of attitudinal pattern of the community, solely dedicated to the service of Islam. Not to be too personal, these women's mothers were very instrumental in molding and orienting their children for a sustainable nation building via Islam. (Paladir, 1995, P.62).

The story of Safiyyah, a woman from the noble Hashimite family, the family from where hailed the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) is very relevant. Her husband, Al-Awwan bn Khuwaylid died leaving her and little Al-Zubayr. She wanted her son to be matured, courageous and famously heroic. Therefore, she treated him with a firmness that exposed her to criticism, even from men. In response to one of such criticisms she said:

I only hit him to be smart and witty, to be ardent, to be generous and never to hide his money, and not to eat all the dates and still be hungry! ("Sister to sister", P.17).

The above is a reflection of what mothers should hope for their wards through rigorous training as to make erudite, generous, and unselfish individuals who will imbibe sustainable democratic culture that will usher in a fruitful nation building.

Abubakar Gidado El-Nafati, a renowned historian affirms that his mother was unflinching in building him to what he became in life. This was through conversation he usually had with her. She will read to him books written by *Shaykh* Uthman bn Foduye and Abdullahi bn Foduye in Fulfude language. Stories of the righteous and great men in history were also narrated to him on constant basis (El-Nafati, 1971, P.13).

It is worth noting from the foregoing that women are leaders and managers of the household and they participate actively in the upbringing of the children who will actively participate in sustainable democratization of the nation and of course, its building. In fact, a *Hadith* of the Prophet (S.A.W) describes the role of a woman as that of a shepherd who shall be questioned on how she managed the affairs of her home including the upbringing of her children.

Verily, each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is responsible of his flock...a woman is placed over the family of her husband and his children and she is responsible for them... (*Sahih Muslim*, 1978, H. 487).

Unfortunately, today the West have campaigned for woman's rights and liberation. Being carried away by the passions and prejudices of materialism and failure to properly understand Islamic teachings, our sisters, mothers in this case, imitate the west whose morality

never go down well for our nation. The nominal ones go as far as parading the streets like flies pursue sweet objects. The Islamic codes are debased and fashion parade became the order of the day as envisaged in the *Confessions of a British Spy* (P.59). Undoubtedly, all propaganda and interpretations by modernists are carried out to instigate Muslim women against the limits set by Allah, while their supposed roles and the purpose of creation defeated. Her utmost role is that of building a healthy family, capable of building a nation full of all opportunities to be explored via moral and religious education in order to ensure an ideal sustainable democracy and nation building.

### THE ROLE OF MUSLIM WOMEN

The place of family as a socialization agent in national development cannot be over emphasized. It is a strong institution from which all public life takes off because man's political attitude is an aspect of total life, which commences and takes shape from home. The mother is the strongest stimulus which shapes the child's attitude early in life. In a tradition of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W), it is explained that the feeling of being a mother is one of the gifts that Allah bestowed on human beings (*Sahih Muslim*, transl. 1971, H. 48). This is no other than the opportunity given her by Allah to play a role in building actors for a sustainable democracy and nation building.

The child's experience in the family, anchored by the mother, helps the child to move away slowly from his natural egocentric life, to live together with others democratically. To become a member of the community, a child shares the common values for a sustainable nation building. In other words, the basic values and behaviors needed to shape the life style of the citizens of any nation that will guarantee sustainable democracy resulting in healthy and fruitful nation building are strongly the effort of the two parents, but paramount of the two is the mother, from Islamic perspective. Her role as a Muslim mother will make the children morally knowledgeable and decent in all spheres. (Parladir, 1995, P.70) Islam offers, through the family, the positive social matrix for mutual love and relationship to operate and to nurture abilities in human beings. It is the Muslim mother that is saddled with this task of nurturing. This is perhaps why the Prophet (S.A.W) commented that the family plays an important role in

peoples gaining either a right or a wrong view of life and life style. (*Sahih Muslim*, transl, 1971, H. 65). The kind of life style of individuals that made up the society directly influences their process of sustainable democratization as well as a healthy nation building.

The democratic potentiality and its sustainability are created in children if the mother succeeded in building her home such virtues as reliability, a sense of adventure and self reliance. Here, children are expected to share common life with their parents through eating together, holding conversation on family and other affairs from time to time, assessing the position of the family among other families in communal matters and taking stock of external achievements. (Ejiofor, 1981, p.27) A Muslim mother should persuade her children to abide by the teaching of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* of the Prophet (S.A.W) and avoid dirty films as well as listening to vulgar songs. This is one of the forces against morality. When she lives by example through dressing, talking and all manners it is automatic for the children to emulate.

The mother should start Islamic education for her children at the earliest age. They should be used to the statement of Islamic creed "*Lailaha illallah Muhammad Rasul Allah* i.e. "there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah". Also, such expressions to be taught include; *Bismillah*-In the name of Allah-in everything he/she wants to start doing; *Alhamdu lillah* at the end, meaning thanks be to Allah, *Allahu Akbar*-Allah is great, *In sha'Allah* – Allah willing, *Masha' Allah* -it (this) is Allah's will, and encourage them to imitate her in all deeds. The Muslim mother should entertain her young children with the thrilling deeds of the great Muslim past and present and try to inspire them with the desire to emulate those virtues learnt from the life of those heroes. She should control their watching of Television, V.C.D, satellite programmes, and what they listen to and read from audio and paper media respectively. They should be restricted to listening to *Tilawah*- recitation of the glorious Qur'an, news bulletin, good poetry and healthy educational programmes. Under no circumstance should she allow "pop music". She should supplement all materialistic education with instruction on Arabic, Qur'an and *Hadith* at home and sending them to *Islamiyyah* schools in addition to Islamic training she herself can give.

The concept of neighborhood in Islam is very relevant in this discussion. Islam urges us to be good and show respect to our neighbors and harm them not. The Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) was reported to have said:

By Allah, he does not (truly believe in Allah, he does not (truly) believe! By Allah, he does not (truly) believe” someone asked: “who, Oh! Allah Messenger?” he said: “He whose neighbor is not safe from his mischief. (*Sahih Muslim*, H. 553).

Also, the radius within which the Prophet (S.A.W.) considers as part of your neighbors is 40 houses. Then, *Imam Zuhri* explains that it means 40 house to the right, the same to the left, same to the front and forty houses behind. (Abubakar n.d.) It should be noted that the forty houses to the four cardinal directions is not restricted to Muslim alone. If the next house to you is a non-Muslim home, he is entitled to the rights of neighborhood as well. If the Muslim mother inculcates these virtues in the young ones, they will grow to love and respect others and learn to live with people irrespective of their faith or tribe. By so doing a sustainable democracy and nation building will not be difficult to achieve.

Since the society and of course, the nation is a reflection of the home and the family, the Muslim woman should make her home an attractive place within the means of the family. This includes general cleanliness and orderliness and avoidance of ostentations. Artistic calligraphy from Qur'an and *Hadith* could be hanged on walls of her room and sitting room to serve purposes of decoration, protection and a reminder that this is an Islamic (Muslim) home. She could also influence other families by teaching her female wards the rudiments of hygiene, first aid and good nutrition with instruction on how to prepare tasty, palatable and *Halal* (lawful) meals. The understanding here is that when she eventually goes to marriage even her husband, not only her own children, shall be carried on in the vanguard for a sustainable democracy and nation building through her matrimonial contribution.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This paper examines the role of Muslim mother as the minister of the home in creating the democratic ingredients necessary for the ideal societal growth and development. But it is the contention of this writer that there can hardly be an “ideal” sustainable democracy and

nation building in a society that is characterized by anarchy and general moral degeneration, and an imported democracy that is spiritually bankrupt. Therefore, the government on one hand and the Muslim on the other should live up to the positions which *al-Qur'an* and the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) conferred on them. This is because we keep violating the crucial conditionality attached to the principles of healthy living as postulated by Islamic law. This ultimately hampered a smooth sustainable democracy and nation building. We must stop drawing up an integrated sustainable democracy and nation building programmes for the physical and material advancement of our land with little reference to divine Guidance. This is because neglect of divine guidance will culminate in the possibilities of having super high ways, exotic buildings, and general affluence amidst massive poverty and moral decay, manifested in crimes, from the most violent nature to the virulent theft of public fund in all guises, (Gimba, 2003, p.9).

As a community, a nation and one body, Allah confirmed in the Qur'an that we have, within our grasp and with the help of Allah, the ability to determine where we want to be. (Qur'an 17:13), i.e. to be sustainably democratic and develop to the optimum or otherwise. We must not lose sight of the fruits of obedience and the direct consequences of being heedless. Both the leaders and the led must take note. If Muslim women, who are the focus of this paper, discharge their responsibilities in accordance with the teaching of Islam as spelt out earlier, their place or role in entrenching a sustainable democracy and nation building will be an enviable and noble one. And the nation at large shall never grieve. (Qur'an 20:47). On the whole, democracy should evolve from within a unique political development based on African initiative, African culture, African historical background, and African orientation not the imported western mixed democracy which is not favorable to our living let alone sustaining it, (Mahd, A. et al, 1914, p.89).

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