

# MUSLIM WOMEN OF NIGERIA

and the Feminist Discourse of Shaykh Al-Albānī



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# Muslim Women of Nigeria *and the Feminist Discourse of Shaykh al-Albānī*

**Ibrahim Olatunde Uthman**



INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

PUSTAKA PERDANA



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## Preface

This book is about Muslim women who are playing leading roles in the religious, administrative, educational, economic and political spheres in contemporary society. It also discusses the relevance of al-Albānī's *Jilbāb al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fī al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah* to the feminist issues raised in the activism of these Muslim women. It examines the concept and epistemology of gender feminism as well as the new trends in feminism referred to as Islamic feminism. It provides a critical analysis of this feminism and the factors contributing to its emergence. Central to the analysis of Islamic feminism in this study is the discussion of the complex phenomenon of the ongoing reaffirmation by Muslim women of their identity on the basis of Islamic beliefs, with reference to the Shaykh al-Albānī's work. This work makes a comparative analysis of his book and the conditions of Muslim women in contemporary times. Wherever necessary, this study investigates the factors that inhibit the active participation of Muslim women in their society and al-Albānī's submission with regard to those factors. It cites quotations from both classical and modern sources to either reinforce a particular point or reject it. By so doing, it will demonstrate to what extent al-Albānī's work has responded to feminist aspirations articulated in the views of Muslim as well as non-Muslim feminists in their study of Muslim women. This critical comparative analysis reveals at the concluding stage the actual contributions of the Shaykh's book to Islamic feminism and its growth as viewed through the activities of Muslim organizations in Muslim society. Finally, it draws the line between the ideal Islamic teachings and the prevailing anti-

woman practices of Muslims that act as a barrier to the growing participation of Muslim women in every facet of society and establishes that emancipation of women is intrinsically embedded in Islam. The study further reveals that the brand of Islamic feminism covered in this book does not position itself against what is regarded as patriarchal Islam. These Islamic feminists are in fact working in partnership with many committed Muslim men.

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## INTRODUCTION

This is a study of the feminist implications of the contemporary conditions of Muslim women. It seeks to be part of that category of feminist discourse that focuses on Muslim women. It examines a new brand of Islamic feminist discourse in the context of the socio-religious reforms enunciated by the Shaykh Muhammad Nāsir al-Dīn al-Albānī in his *Jilbāb al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fi al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah*.

This book incorporates various studies on Muslim women conducted by feminist scholars and a work of a traditional Muslim scholar in order that it may clarify contemporary conflicting paradigms on Muslim women. The study is therefore an inquiry into how socio-cultural practices by Muslims affect Muslim women and how much al-Albānī's book has contributed to the contemporary understanding of the socio-religious status of Muslim women. By juxtaposing the Islamic discourse enunciated in the book in support of the veiling of women and their participation in public life—two seemingly contradictory obligations—with the secular and Western feminist discourse, this study also hopes to reveal to what extent Islam has engendered socio-religious reforms with regard to the status of women. It also seeks to demonstrate that Islam is completely opposed to any discrimination against women. Though it is true that Muslim women suffer discrimination with regard to attire, education, marriage and divorce, participation in public life and other activities, Islamic teachings do not support this gender discrimination. With al-Albānī's work as a guide, this book replies to the Western feminist writers

who claim that the Qur'ān treats the issue of women and their affairs with utter disregard and utter scorn. As Tariq Ramadan has observed, the movement that affirms the liberation of Muslim women within and through Islam itself is inspiring, maintaining complete faithfulness to the principles of Islam.

This study is in the feminist genre, since feminism posits that there is an urgent need to re-define religious attitudes toward gender, which are mostly responsible for the adverse social and cultural conditions of women. This book hopes to show that the supposedly objective feminist analysis of Muslim societies is socio-culturally conditioned in Western and secular matrices. The study therefore examines the feminist secular discourse within the context of the socio-religious conditions of Muslim women using, as a case study, some areas in Yoruba land, Nigeria.

The empirical data for this research was collected in 16 Nigerian cosmopolitan towns. These are located mainly within the Yoruba-- speaking western part of Nigeria, namely, Lagos state, Abeokuta, Ijebu Ode, Ago Iwoye, Ibadan, Ede, Osogbo, Ife, Ilesha, Ila, Ire, Esa Oke, Akure, Ikere Ekiti, Ado Ekiti and Ilorin. Respondents and participants were selected mainly from Muslim civic groups and from among religious leaders, political leaders, academics, professionals and students in higher institutions of learning in the listed area. They are attached to various Islamic organizations in Nigeria, such as the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN); Federation of Muslim Women in Nigeria (FOMWAN); Da'wah Front of Nigeria; MSSN Ummuhāt Forum; Da'wah Front Mother's Forum; Al-Mu'mināt, the female wing of the Muslim Congress; Qudratullah Society of Nigeria, Obafemi Awolowo Chapter; and NASFA`T Society of Nigeria. The qualitative research tradition was applied to critically analyze the data and a comparison was made between the

findings and their practical implications based on the contents of al-Albāni's book. Qualitative research generally involves on-the-spot investigations using unstructured and in-depth interviewing. This entails the continuous immersion of the researcher among the population under study and this was made possible by the time span of this study. Besides this, there is the fact that the researcher was born, bred and schooled in the research area and lived and worked there. He also participated in the activities of the Islamic organizations in the research area for about three and a half decades.

The research data were collected in three stages. The field research was embarked upon in 1998 and the first stage of data collection involved Muslim men, women, workers and students. The participants were interviewed to gather oral data from a cross section of the Muslim community in the areas of study. They were interviewed in the second stage in 2003 for their personal views on certain issues. The questions were distributed to them in advance. However, the focus of the second stage was working Muslim women alone. Data for this part of the research were thus generated through unstructured in-depth interviewing, personal involvement and contact with the respondents in the area of the study. The interview period varied from 30 minutes to two hours, depending on the willingness of the participant. In the third stage, interview questions were e-mailed to a majority of those who participated in the first two stages. However, some new contacts were made due to complications in soliciting the responses of some of those who participated in the first two stages. The last stage also embraced both men and women. The entire research spanned between January 1998 and May 2003, but follow-up contacts were made in 2004 with some of the very early respondents and with the e-mail correspondents to confirm previous findings. Cross checking the responses proved to be a difficult task, with the

researcher having to tour several vast areas. The process proved extra difficult after May 2003 because of time constraints and the long distances. It is strongly believed, however, that the data analysis and the subsequent findings to a very large extent reflect the views and aspirations of Muslim women in the area of study. Though those who participated in the field work can be described as representing the cream and elite of the Muslim community in Yoruba land, the result is far from elitist. Most of the organizations where the research was conducted are composed of both educated and uneducated members. For instance, the MSSN has a branch in every major town to cater to working members, men, women, artisans, technicians, laborers, teachers and civil servants, among others. Similarly, FOMWAN, the umbrella body of all Muslim women organizations in Nigeria, comprises both urban, educated and elitist Muslim women and rural women from remote parts of the country.

Yet, this should not be understood to imply that the issues raised in this book are limited to the area of study or even to Yoruba land. As a matter of fact, it addresses larger issues in feminism from a comparative perspective—Western and Islamic—and provides a balanced viewpoint based on Islamic tradition. This study is therefore an inquiry into what can be termed Islamic feminism as it affects Muslim women. It recounts the advent of Islam in Nigeria, the contributions of the Sokoto Caliphate to the Islamization process in the country and the status of women under the caliphate. The choice of examining the status of Muslim women in Nigeria as a case study can be understood only from within the context of a global society, where Muslim women are currently confronting what can be described as *hijābphobia*. A study of Nigeria is a study of the most populous African country with a large Muslim population, a Muslim population bigger than that of any of the Arab countries and most Asian countries.

The goal is to provide a basis for exploring the issue of the status of Muslim women by looking at the main dimensions of the question. It is hoped that this can be instrumental in stimulating the Muslim world, starting from Islamic organizations such as the Muslim students' society in Nigeria, to address the relevant issues in formulating policies regarding women and their concerns. This study actually began in 1997 as an attempt to explain some of the dimensions of the issue to members of the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN) and to challenge Islamic scholars to promote female education and the active participation of women in the revival and promotion of Islam. Al-Albānī's book came to be appreciated in the southwestern part of Yoruba land around this time, starting at a local Arabic school. It soon took a prominent place in the controversy raging in Yoruba land over the face veil. This story is told in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Since the issues that al-Albānī addresses include those covered in this study—such as the code of dressing and conduct of Muslim women—and since he wrote in Arabic, the analysis of his book in this study will make his views on Muslim women and public life accessible to people in both the Muslim world and in the West, where many don't read Arabic. By juxtaposing the Islamic discourse enunciated in his book in support of women's veiling and participation in public life against the hegemonic discourse of Western feminists, this study hopes to demonstrate the extent to which Islam preceded Western feminism in the struggle against women's oppression. It also seeks to demonstrate that going by al-Albānī's views and interpretations, the primary Islamic scriptural texts (the Qur'ān and Sunnah, the latter referring to the practice and sayings of the Prophet) are not discriminatory against women. Neither do they endorse the perpetration of oppression of women, as often mistakenly maintained in Western feminist writings. This book, using the responses of some



Muslim women and al-Albānī's work as references, also hopes to offer support for the argument that it is the extreme and slavish imitation of scholars and the traditions, customs and cultures of Muslim societies, and not the teachings of Islam, that has brought about the gross misconceptions about Muslim women.

Today, Muslim women—and their use of the veil in particular—still occupy a central place in feminist discourse and many Western feminists situate the oppression of women in many Muslim societies within the context of the Islamic code. They identify the veiling of Muslim women with suppression and conclude that the veil is a constraint to the emancipation of women. For instance, Valentine Moghadam, a contemporary feminist, sees a recent Islamist focus on the veil as a result of anxiety on the part of a petty cabal who fears a weakening of its patriarchal control by an increase in female educational and economic empowerment. Magida Salman, a socialist feminist, almost three decades ago gave a powerful voice to the assertion that Islam was used as a tool to uphold the dignity of women or their subordination at different times to serve political and national interests. Leila Ahmed elaborates on this theme, pointing out that the preoccupation of Islamic organizations with the code of conduct of women borders on issues of cultural identity, resistance against Western domination, class struggle and opposition to the empowerment of women that was effected by the teachings of Islam among the conservative Arabs. Ahmed argues that the Christian West tainted the feminist struggle in Muslim societies with their colonial and missionary assault against the veiling of women and other practices labeled as backward. According to her, opposition came from the Islamists, who focus on women's conduct as a form of resistance to the colonial crusade against the so-called backward position of women. To her, the Islamist adoption of the veil simply entrenches

the debate over identity. In short, Islamists say: if to be Western is to be unveiled, then to be veiled is to be Muslim.

Some of the feminists who champion the so-called theory of the backward position of women are in reality secular postmodern gender feminists who, according to Zeenath Kausar, promote a deconstruction of women, the family, society and even nature. These feminists argue that if nature stands in the way of eliminating heterosexuality and accepting all sexual orientations, then nature must be fought. In short, postmodern feminism has simply become a euphemism for licentiousness as most of its proponents aim at eliminating the differences between men and women only in sexual infidelity through the revolution that has taken place in the fields of modern technology. Christiana Sommers, in *Who Stole Feminism* explains how postmodern feminists aim at destroying socially accepted practices such as motherhood and all heterosexual relations; according to them, these practices sustain patriarchal control over women. Consequently, marriages are regarded as worth breaking, as confirmed by research in many American neighborhoods. Pagila Camille demonstrates in *Sexual Harassment* that men have become free to exploit women in their playboy games. According to Camille, “Western culture has a roving eye, male sex is hunting and scanning: boys hang on yelping from honking cars, acting like jerks over strolling girls, men lurching on girders go through the primitive book of wolf whistles and animal clucks. Everywhere the beautiful woman is scrutinized and harassed.” Rather than ending the “grand rape of women” by men, these feminists view women who still endure marriage as yet to be emancipated. They applaud the new dramatic changes in women’s sexual conduct brought by new technologies. They also demonstrate a staggering and stunning, but amoral, approval of liberal female sexual attitudes. This is the main goal of postmodern feminism.

The work *From Modernism to Postmodernism* depicts postmodernists as being divided on virtually everything except in finding the idea of the sacred unacceptable. They reject the idea of an eternal message revealed by God. They also remove religion from the sphere of serious cognition, reducing it to mere rituals and liturgies, according to Earnest Gellner, a professed secular humanist. Though he disagrees with the postmodern relativists, Gellner himself is an apostle of constitutional religion. He advocates in his *Postmodernism* a form of quasi-religion. Hence, postmodernists reject God as well as the sacred. This view is the cornerstone of postmodern relativism; it fails to acknowledge relativism in religious practices, including veiling in Muslim societies.

A major secular Muslim feminist is Fatima Mernissi, who in her autobiography *Dreams of Trespass* recalls events from her childhood in a Moroccan family harem. In it, she attempts to unveil the life of Muslim women living in a harem and record the experiences that confront them. She relates her personal experiences to depict the confusion confronting young girls in a harem. She talks about the many rules regulating the spaces within which she could move and says that most of the rules often exclude women from public space. In *The Veil and the Male Elite* and *Women and Islam*, Mernissi opines that the veiling of the wives of the Prophet as well as of other Muslim women is a vivid and dramatic example of failure of the Prophet's egalitarian teachings. According to her, the Prophet, though a visionary leader, succumbed to 'Umār (who later became the second Caliph), who desired that his wives be veiled. She submits that although it was desirable for the Prophet to protect the privacy of his wives from the many visitors he received in his living quarters, this does not warrant the practice of segregation of women from men and the public, as is prevalent today in most Muslim traditional societies. Another

well-known Muslim secular feminist, Nawal El- Sādawī, an Egyptian doctor, narrates in her books tales also relevant to this study. She appears very unhappy with the conditions of Arab and other Muslim women and bases her tales mostly on her childhood experiences in Egypt. In *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*, she tells how boys used to throw stones at her and cry out crude insults as she walked through some of the districts of Cairo. Such insults resulted in her developing a fear of going out in the streets. She concludes, like other Muslim feminists, especially Memissi, that Muslim men are rather afraid of women, including little girls. In a similar vein, Magida Salman writes that the woman in the Qur’ān is not a lover, but a wife, virgin girl and mother. To her, most Islamic legislations have given way to modern adaptations, except the norms regulating the lives of women. She argues that even the most Muslim ruling classes do not forswear the interest generated by their bank accounts, but forswear the modern perceptions of women. Deniz Kandiyoti agrees with her that the Islamists are like all the nationalist movements who granted women’s rights in society when they needed them, but later pushed them to the domestic realm. She argues that Islamic scholars, even as they accept modernization and technological changes, remain opposed to reforms to improve the condition of women. It appears to her that only men are free to adopt new styles of conduct; women can only be “modern but modest.” Another Muslim feminist relevant to this study is Amīnāh Wadūd, who denies the claim that Islam establishes a patriarchal society or female subordination. She grounds her views in Fazlur Rahmān’s hermeneutic approach to the Qur’ān and concludes that the Qur’ān teaches only non-authoritarian male responsibility. She submits that this balances the important contributions of women as mothers because one of the guiding Qur’ānic principles in gender relations is equality. Zeenath

Kausar agrees that the Islamic family and society cannot be regarded as patriarchal because Islam is not in support of male domination and subjugation of women as implied by the term. El Guindi in her work *Veil* provides a detailed analysis of the practice of veiling among Arabs. It is a rather revealing picture of Arab women taking the connotations of sacred private space into public. She calls on feminists to pose questions with regard to the different shades of meanings and objectives behind the different types of veiling in the Muslim world. Supporting the feminist concerns over veiling and gender relations in the Muslim world, Lisa Taraki focuses on the Society of the Muslim Brethren and concludes that the Islamist discourse is a psycho-political reaction to the entrance of women into the public workforce and educational system, a class-consciousness and fear among men of losing control over their women. Nimat Hafez Barazangi argues that the issue of women's matters in Muslim societies must be approached from within a religious context and a deeper knowledge of the Islamic primary sources beyond the ritualistic acts.

Many Muslims, especially the '*ulamā*', tend to dismiss feminist claims and deny that Islamic tenets on women are oppressive. They counterpose the indignity women are suffering in societies practicing other religions against the advancement of women that Islam promotes and conclude that in Islam lies their true liberation. The '*ulamā*' thus imply that the liberation brought to women by Islam is relative and subsists only when juxtaposed with the degradation they suffer in other religions. Thus, feminists view Islam in the same manner that they do all other world religions that affirm gender inequities, such as patriarchy and seclusion of women. By conceding that Islam does condone oppressive practices against women—although they do so in the context of claiming that Islam is more progressive than other religions because the latter are even more oppressive—the

‘ulamā’ display a unique conservatism and stand accused of remaining decades behind the societies they are supposed to guide. Quēreshi captures their conservatism vividly and attributes this to their being trained in a tradition that invokes the immutable authority of the past. This conservatism is, however, untenable because, the ‘ulamā’ are by training expected to function as a reforming instrument producing rulings that take the dynamics of society into account.

There is a need to reconcile this conservatism with the dynamics of Islamic jurisprudence on feminist issues. The oppression of women contradicts the political, economic, social, religious and intellectual revolutionary roles that Islam has provided them and which they played in the early days of Islam. It also defies the re-emerging contemporary tradition of Islamic feminism among Muslim women. As a matter of fact, this re-emergence is today championed by leading Muslim scholars, Islamists and Islamic revivalists. Indeed, these scholars and activists are in the forefront of the struggle to emancipate Muslim women, as demonstrated in the work of al-Albānī. A question that may well be posed, and which is germane to this research, is why a purely feminist issue has become associated with the work of a traditional Muslim scholar. One might also ask why gender issues that dominate the debate on women’s rights are closely linked to the use of the veil. This research attaches the scholarly work of a traditional Muslim to a purely feminist issue because the veil has become a prominent feature in contemporary feminist discourse. Feminists view the veil as a symbol of factors that reduce women to mere housewives and sex objects and deny them political and civil rights. Though Muslim women in many Muslim countries today participate more actively in public and civil life, as they do in African and Western countries, feminists believe that through the veil women are still being pressured to be modest. Muslim women, according to feminists, are still



restricted to a culturally conditioned feminine space and codes of dress and conduct. In short, Muslim women, going by feminist postulations, are still bound by gender norms shaped by men for the pleasure of men only. The feminist obsession with the veil is therefore due to the fact that the veil does not represent a religious obligation but rather a socio-political and cultural symbol to reduce women to being mere objects of men's pleasure. These feminists may differ in their approach in dealing with the issue of veiling, but they are all agreed that wearing the veil implies that women are oppressed in one form or another. Some may argue that Muslim women are not more oppressed than non-Muslim women. To some, the oppression of Muslim women is extrinsic to Islam, but others blame Islam for it. There is therefore a necessity for Muslim scholars to address the question of the status of women from socio-cultural perspectives in addition to their textual analysis of the canonical texts. It is true that there are many classical and modern works that deal with the issue of Muslim women, but they merely either reflect secular notions or give detailed juristic and conservative treatment of the matter. Most of the traditional Muslim scholars just focus on the juristic perspectives, leaving the empirical perspectives to feminist scholars. Whether or not these feminist scholars have Islamic backgrounds, many of them have risen from secular and Western matrices. Hence, their views are not well regarded within most Muslim societies. However, al-Albānī's approach is different. Though a traditionalist to the core, he examines the veiling of Muslim women and rules regarding their activities from a socio-religious and cultural approach. Contrary to popular feminist notions engendered first by orientalists and later by postmodern secular feminists, neither Islamic teachings nor most traditional Muslim scholars subscribe to the veiling or segregation of Muslim women. This faulty notion has been sustained by the practice

of veiling the face, which is prevalent in almost all traditional Muslim societies. A major image transmitted to orientalists and postmodern secular feminists by this practice is the impression that Muslim women are barred from public and outdoor activities or are at best required to cover the entire body if they must appear in public at all. This, they believe, is the position of most if not all traditional Muslim scholars, whom they often describe as fanatics, fundamentalists, extremists and, recently, terrorists. This notion is destroyed by the abundance of textual evidence to the contrary, as will be evident in this book. It is also contrary to the empirical facts in early Islamic history, including the Sokoto Caliphate in Nigeria, which supported the rich participation of Muslim women in the socio-religious, political, economic and other key activities of society.

Most postmodern secular feminists, however, argue that the above interpretation of textual evidence and empirical facts of early Islamic history is only a result of the modernist and liberal attempt, such as by the likes of Nasr Hāmid Abū Zayd, to re-interpret the Islamic legacy by employing Christian-inspired hermeneutics freely in the exegesis of the Qur'ān. Recourse may also be made to Fazlur Rahmān, a self-declared modernist and liberalist. This is not just the view of Fazlur Rahmān's illustrious student, Tamara Sonn, who has not only boldly championed his theory of Islamic hermeneutics in his attempt to rethink Islam and prove the weakness of traditional exegeses of the Qur'ān, but has also disowned all other interpretations of Islam and reduced most Muslim revivalists to modernists. In fact, Fazlur Rahmān was bold in his description of many reforming and illustrious scholars and thinkers of Islam like Muhammad Iqbāl as modernists. He believed to the very end that exegeses of the Qur'ān had been stultified by alleged Prophetic traditions and he consequently called for new Islamic laws and institutions in areas where the original

intention of the Qur’ān, according to him, had been bypassed, especially with regard to Muslim women. Perhaps, in doing this, Fazlur Rahmān is second only to Muhammad Arkoun, who rejects all the views of the revivalists. Muhammad Iqbāl is certainly not the only Muslim reforming and illustrious scholar and thinker that has been described as a modernist. Muhammad Abduh and all his students, like Rashīd Ridā and Qāsim Amīn, and even contemporary Muslim reformers like Hasan al-Turābī and Madanī ‘Abbās have all been labeled modernists at various times. It therefore appears that any Muslim scholar in modern times who differs from the faulty notions held concerning Muslim women is viewed as a modernist and is consequently declared an apostate by traditional scholars. One Muslim scholar who belies this secularist, modernist and liberal claim was no doubt al-Albānī. No living scholar or lay-person, whether Islamic, secular, traditional or modernist, has denied that al-Albānī was a traditionalist to the core. Yet al-Albānī supported the full participation of Muslim women in public and outdoor activities. Furthermore, he was not the first traditional Muslim scholar to take a position popularly regarded as liberal. Even in early Islamic history, there were Muslim scholars who differed from the majority on many issues and that was before any contact was made with modernity and the modernist and liberal attempts to re-interpret the Islamic religious legacy. For instance, al-Ghazālī, though a traditionalist credited with victory over philosophers, argued in support of what can be termed *tafsīr bil istinbāt* (the facilities of deduction and personal opinion), which today is viewed as the prerogative of modernists. Al-Ghazālī upheld the deductive method because most of the sayings of ibn ‘Abbās and ibn Mas ‘ūd were based on *tafsīr bil istinbāt*, which made the two companions of the Prophet at times hold irreconcilable views in the interpretation of the Qur’an. Yet the Prophet prayed to Allāh to grant

both ibn ‘Abbās and ibn Mas ‘ūd a clear comprehension of His *Dīn* and knowledge of various methods of interpretation. He also acknowledged their interpretational abilities.

The views of al-Albānī on the participation of Muslim women in public and outdoor activities appear incredible because it is the opinion of a classical and traditional Muslim scholar. In fact, a number of contemporary scholars disagree with many of his conservative views. He therefore destroys the myth that only Western-trained or liberal scholars call for a redefinition of the status of women. He looks at the issues from juristic perspectives, but he also takes into account the socio-cultural realities that Muslim women encounter in the Hanafī, Shāfi‘ī and Hanbalī schools of *fiqh* (jurisprudence). His position can therefore be appreciated as coming from an Islamic feminist perspective and is therefore relevant to this research. His work is pertinent due not only to its discussion of feminist issues in a non-traditional approach, but also to his position in respect of all the schools of *fiqh*. His work is applicable to all the schools, including the Mālikī school, which holds sway in the geographical area of this study. Although al-Albānī grew up and studied under the Hanafi school, he also lived as a Shāfi‘ī and taught the Shāfi‘ī *fiqh*, a school founded by a student of Imam Mālik. Hence, it would be inappropriate to regard him as a pure Hanbalī simply because he taught the Hanbalī *fiqh* briefly in Saudi Arabia and was known as a Hanbalī and Wahhābī scholar. In the *Jilbāb al-Mar’ah al-Muslimah* he traces the problematic politicization of women’s conduct in recent times to the overwhelming influence of the Hanafi and Hanbalī schools due to *taqlid*. This is also the position of the Shaykh al-Qaradāwī. Al-Qaradāwī affirms that among the scholars located in the Hanbalī institution where al-Albānī conducted training in Saudi Arabia, only a few contend that since every part of a woman’s body is considered ‘*awrah*— which means

it must be clothed—she must be veiled from head to toe. This depiction of the Islamic laws on women’s conduct, especially their mode of dressing, contradicts the revolutionary role that Islam has granted women in the educational, religious, social, economic, legal and political spheres. Islam has provided far more for women’s emancipation and equity than is usually acknowledged and as will be revealed in this research. It is not correct to claim that women are excluded from the workforce or productive class in all Muslim societies. The same can be said with regard to Muslim women in Nigeria from the time of the advent of Islam. The current interest in imposing restrictions on Muslim women by some Islamic organizations, especially the Muslim Students’ Society of Nigeria, can be reduced to sentiment and seen as a reaction against the real and cogent evils of postmodern society. Therefore, to evaluate Islam either by secularized and Western standards or from the often sentimental attitude of some Muslim will not only undermine the feminist movement but also permanently obscure any rational endeavor to address the gender issue. It is only proper at this stage to deplore the truly harmful and deplorable conditions under which some Muslim women and men live and to pay attention to the intellectual response of Muslim women who sincerely believe in Islamic teachings. It is essential to hear and listen to the voices of these women in order to understand their brand of feminist discourse as it rejects the secularized and Western perceptions of them.

One of the aims of this book is to show the intricacies and complexities of the issue at hand by revealing the true face of what is now known as *Islamic feminism* in some Muslim quarters. Islamic feminists are Muslim women who hold tenaciously to Islamic teachings and work within Islamic matrices in their struggle for change that would benefit all, especially women, and Islamic feminism refers to

their struggle against injustice in all forms, including gender injustice and oppression. *Muslim feminists*, however, are those who work within secular matrices. Among them are found Muslim as well as non-Muslim activists. The term Muslim feminism is used to refer to their struggle within Muslim traditions and societies, but for which secular matrices are applied.

This book proposes to answer the following questions: What is the basis of postmodern feminism and how much impact has the Western secular perspective of women had on postmodern feminism in the Muslim world? In what manner does the Western secular brand of feminism differ from what is defined as Islamic feminism in this book and what is the true spirit of this Islamic feminism? What are the real aspirations of Muslim women in the area of study? Can these aspirations be realized within the legal and juristic framework of Islam as enunciated by al-Albānī? This book refers mostly to Muslim women in finding answers to these questions and finding out their views on other issues related to women's rights. As already established by Katherine Bullock, mainstream feminism, as presented by leading feminists, cannot afford to exclude the voices of Muslim women from the debate as there have been challenging academic representations about these women and their role in society as captured by "malestream" discourse, which has failed to consider women's feelings, experiences and perspectives. This book, in line with the necessity to capture the "feelings, experiences and perspectives" of Muslim women who hold tenaciously to the Islamic creed and its tenets but have usually been excluded from the feminist discourse about Muslim women, seeks to bring into the open the views of some Muslim women in the geographical area of study, although the views of a few male participants were also collected. This is so merely to demonstrate to what extent Muslim men share the views of Muslim women. This

work also investigates to what extent al-Albānī touches on the genuine aspirations of these Muslim women and explains the contribution of his work to the Islamic feminist discourse, as it provides further understanding on the Islamic injunctions on gender relations. This book is able to demonstrate that, according to al-Albānī, Islam and feminism are not incompatible if the primary aim and objective of feminism is the eradication of oppression of women in any given Muslim society. It would then not be contrary to Islamic tenets of equity, equality, and justice for all races, groups and sexes. This study also supports the recent labeling of the struggle by Muslim women against slavish socio-cultural and religious practices as *Islamic feminism* and agrees with Miriam Cooke that Islamic feminism does exist and is real though not necessarily in the exact form she has conceived it.

Katherine Bullock has identified three brands of feminism—the mainstream pop culture, the sophisticated school of feminism and the contextual school of feminism. She considers herself an exponent of the last brand. This study, however, argues that she is actually an Islamic feminist, as Islamic movements are today raising fundamental questions about the visibility and vitality of Muslim women and their ability to play social, economics, religious and political roles. Muslim women seek these roles not as a response to modern and postmodernist postulations, but in spite of them. It is true that some Muslim women reject the term feminism. Others refuse to recognize the term. Only a few may not reject the level although they do not refer to themselves as such. The reality is that most Muslim women are today not contented with their socio-religious and political status in their societies. They are therefore preoccupied with Islamic activism, which they sincerely believe in and through which they are determined to reshape their social, economic, religious, matrimonial and political

roles and responsibilities. Bullock's works clearly represent the best advocacy of the phenomenon of Islamic feminism as defined in this book though she does not even acknowledge the term.

This book will also investigate the concern over the effect on women's health of working outside the home. This is an important issue to Muslim communities because they do need women in some kinds of public work, including female education and missionary activities. *Time* magazine once reported that Muslim women were denied rights to freedom of movement and education in Afghanistan. The Taliban government defended their restriction on socio-political premises, arguing that the dismal conditions of women at the time were due to the security situation in the country. Contrary to what would have been expected by feminists, Taliban officials did not object to female education and their participation in public life on religious grounds.

This study examines only the socio-religious conditions of women. It does not go deeply into the theological and juristic controversies surrounding the socio-religious status of Muslim women as part of the fiqh praxis. A fiqh perspective is beyond the scope of both Islamic thought and comparative religion, which are the specific areas of interest of this author, and this in addition to the broad nature and complexity of the fiqh corpus on the subject of this study. It is against this backdrop that it is of utmost importance to examine the socio-religious conditions of women within Muslim societies from the empirical perspective of socio-cultural practices in these societies and establish to what extent Anne Sofie Roald is right in saying that the issue of Muslim women has hardly ever been treated as a religious matter. It has, according to her, usually been perceived in socio-political terms. This study is therefore primarily concerned with these socio-political terms as actually perceived by Muslim women themselves in



# MUSLIM WOMEN OF NIGERIA AND THE FEMINIST DISCOURSE OF SHAYKH AL-ALBĀNĪ

This book is unique in many respects. It is a critique of the stereotypical images of Muslim women portrayed by both traditional Muslim scholars and secular feminists. It also studies what can truly be regarded as Islamic feminism in the history of Islam during the prophetic era. The study offers an in-depth study of how this Islamic feminism can be completely grounded in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, two primary sources of Islam. Shaykh al-Albānī has in his book given a strong impetus to the Islamic feminist struggle, hence the need for a book that engages in a sociological study of the conditions of Muslim women in contemporary society in the light of the Shaykh magnum opus. The work also examines the position of Muslim women and their reaction to the re-introduction of the criminal aspects of Shari'ah law in Nigeria in 1999. It also deals with historical experiences in Yoruba land and suggests that it must have been a correct understanding of jihad and of the prophetic teachings on the need to protect non-combatants that guided the Yoruba in their encounter with Christianity. It also sheds light on the political status of Muslim women and the implications of the contents of *Jilbāb al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fī al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah* on women's active participation in public life.



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