



SCIREA Journal of Sociology

ISSN: 2994-9343

<http://www.scirea.org/journal/Sociology>

January 16, 2024

Volume 8, Issue 1, February 2024

<https://doi.org/10.54647/sociology841237>

Xenophobic Othering in a Pluralistic State: On Hijab Crises in Nigeria

Habibat Oladosu-Uthman

Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Email: hibbiy@yahoo.com, uh.oladosu.ui.edu.ng

Abstract

Despite the fact that Nigeria is a plural state with multi-ethnic and multi-religious entities by diverse cultures and languages, it is worrisome to witness incidences of side-lining and denial of human rights to some segments of the society. In other words, human right issues are treated with levity within the Nigerian society. The issue of hijab-wearing by female Nigerian Muslims is not an exception in this case. From Firdaws Amasa at Nigerian Law School in Abuja to Lagos, Oyo, Osun and Kwara states where incidences of hijab crises have taken place over the years, the use of hijab in public secondary schools and work places is still experiencing xenophobic tendencies from non-Muslims within the Nigerian public space. This paper, therefore, examines the constitutional provisions on the rights of individual to exert his/her humanity in a plural society such as Nigeria and situate same to the recurrent attacks on female Muslim students in public secondary schools on the use of hijab. The paper makes use of the works of scholars like Amina Wadud, Asma' Barlas, among others, as its theoretical foundation as well as unstructured interviews to elicit data from both the wearers and the admirers or otherwise of hijab. It asks: what is hijab to a Muslim lady/woman? Exactly what is the constitutional relevance of hijab within the Nigerian public space? What

are the factors responsible for xenophobic tendencies from the non-Muslims? The paper concludes that, until our common humanity is given a prominent and important attention it deserves, the issue of marginalization/lack of justice towards one segment by ‘Others’ will continue to impinge on harmonious relationship in the Nigeria public sphere.

Keywords: Xenophobia, Muslims, Hijab, Constitution, Human rights.

Introduction

What type of an entity is Nigeria? A secular, a multi-religious or a plural state? What defines a secular or a religious state? How do we understand what we are? Why the conflict between secularity and religiosity? Why are there confluences between ethnic and religious crises in Nigeria? Answers to these questions are not far-fetched, they are easily sourced from the way the Nigeria state interact with religions. In other words, Nigeria, in my view, is better described as a multi-religious/ multi-ethnic state with diverse cultures and languages. The coinage of Nigeria as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious entity is not an happenstance but purposive in nature. This is as a result of the natural inclination (*fiṭrah*) on which humankind is created. Diversities, therefore, are to serve as a means towards strengthening human understanding of the power of the almighty. This is the reason Islam emphasizes that colour, race, and ethnicity are not the yardstick for ranking the position of authority/superiority of one over another. The mark of honour and authority in the reckoning of the almighty in the language of the Qur’an and the Prophetic sayings only lies in the extent to which a servant exalts or is conscious of the existence of the almighty. The Qur’an and the Prophetic tradition allude to this as follows:

Oh mankind! We have created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily, the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). (Qur’an 49:13).

...All mankind is from Adam and Eve; an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab. Also, a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over a white except by piety and actions. Learn that Muslim is a brother to every other Muslim and that Muslims constitute one brotherhood. Nothing shall be legitimate to a Muslim which belongs to a fellow Muslim unless it has been given freely and willingly. Do not, therefore, do injustice to one another... (Extract from the Prophet’s last sermon by Mohammad Omar Farooq, 2018)

The above ayah of the Qur'an is addressed not only to the Muslim brotherhood but to all humankind regardless of whatever you profess as faith. This is as a result of the monogenist stance that we all descended from Adam and Hawa and, therefore, share a single ancestry. Corroborating this, Yusuf Ali distills a portion of the Qur'an and asserts that, "their tribes, races, and nations are convenient labels by which they may know certain differing characteristics. Before Allah, they are all one, and he is most honoured who is most righteous" (Yusuf Ali on Qur'an 49:13, Note 4933). In other words, differences in nature or creation point to avenues for learning, relearning and understanding. Despite the fact that humankind is made to know the importance of the diversities in nature, it is however disturbing to witness on a daily basis the wilful lack of tolerance to accommodate the diversities inherent in human nature for the purpose of awareness and education. Hence, human societies are riddled with chaos, corruption and disorder.

The holy Qur'an stresses the resulting effect of perpetrating corruption on earth and has held humanity responsible for their actions. These actions or choices resulting from the endowment of freewill, have often led to tragedy (Qur'an 30:41). Humanity, in line with Mahfuz, is of "tragedy, lives in tragedy and is destined for tragedy" (Oladosu, 2009: 97). Reference to tragedy here implies that humanity will continually move from one difficulty to another. Therefore, the ability on the part of humanity to surmount the hurdles and return all affairs to God is what makes him a higher being over all other beings. The exercise of authority in surmounting the urge to perpetrate evil that can result into tragedy and violence is only possible within space and time. To put it differently, man is destined to operate within space and time and, by implication, has to serve as agent of the Supreme Being within the created space and time to fulfil the teleological nature of his creation. The creation of man into nations and races is not an happenstance but intentioned and purposeful. The instinct to recognize and appreciate the differences in nature, to work towards its sustainability is a task given to man to uphold. On his part, man has made a promise to uphold this task and witnessed thereto in the primordial time. This is particularly true when attention is drawn to how humanity has defaulted and is continuously spreading corruption (*fasād*) and inequity on the land he had initially promised to uphold. The Qur'an alludes to this thus:

When thy Lord drew forth from the children of Adam- from their loins- their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): Am I not your Lord? They said: Yea! We do testify! (This), lest you should say on the Day of judgement: of this we were never mindful (Qur'an 7:172)

The above quotation from the Qur'an implies a sense of duty through a covenant towards the almighty by humanity. This is because humanity has been endowed with certain power and

faculties which in turn demand a sense of spiritual obligation towards the Creator. This obligation is in form of a covenant to which humanity has already consented to and any failure thereto amounts to disobedience and a breach of covenant whose consequences may result in disorder.

Having said this, it is also important to engage the issue of human rights within human societies. The case in point is that of the extent and limitations of rights in the Nigerian Constitution. The human right issues in the Nigerian Constitution deserve a critical engagement and enlightenment too. There is urgent need to re-examine the common humanity and situate it to the current dispensation in a pluralistic state such as Nigeria. This paper, therefore, proposes to engage the following: in section one, effort is made to give a brief history of the entrance of Islam into Nigeria, section two examines the place of hijab within the Nigerian Constitution, sections three and four contextualize xenophobia and probe into the identity issues within the Nigeria's public sphere, and in section five, the paper discusses few cases of hijab crises in the recent times in Nigeria and concludes that until human right issues are well understood and treated with respect, the desired harmonious society may be a mirage in Nigeria.

A Brief History of Islam in Nigeria

Islam came to the sub-Sahara Africa through the itinerant merchants and scholars. Prior to the advent of Islam in Nigeria, there existed trans-Saharan-trade routes linking North Africa and Nigeria (Olayiwola, 2007:10). Notable among these routes were Tripoli through Fezzan, Kaware to Bornu, Tunis to Kano, Morocco through Sijilimasa, Taghaza and Timbuktu, or Tuat through Audaghast and Timbuktu all linking to Kano. At the entrance of Islam into Africa, these routes became readily available passages for the spread of Islam. Indeed, they served as a major factor in the rapid spread of Islam in Africa and to Nigeria. It must be stated here that, wherever Muslims go, they go with their Islamic cultural beliefs and identities. According to Olayiwola (2007:10), North African tribes who were earlier converts of Islam were the ones who brought Islam into Bornu and other parts of Nigeria, some of them were trained *Du'āt* (preachers), others were Muslim traders who practised their faith wherever they went. People were particularly attracted to Islam because of the culture of prayers and learning. Another important factor in the rapid spread of Islam in Africa is its integrating mechanism that was put in place by the Prophet (pbuh) in Makkah and in Madinah and has been henceforth

deployed by the preachers after him. All these were taking place within the range of seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth centuries through the various incursions and phases of Islam in Africa. Perhaps, it is also important to mention that, before the end of the eighth century C.E., Islam or some of its influences found its way into Bornu through the Tripoli-Fezzan-Kawar-Kanem routes. Therefore, the spread of Islam into Nigeria and its continuous expansion within the country, in line with Olayiwola (2007), were peaceful. Before the Jihad of the 19th century fought by Shaykh Uthman bn. Fudi, there was neither military involvement nor state intervention in the spread and expansion of Islam in Nigeria. In other words, there was no record of its imposition on any tribe, clan or group of people. Islam spread on the merit of its own attractive elements and virtues – those who were convinced about it embraced it and those who were not continued in their pagan beliefs.

The earlier acceptance of Islam by the Mais (ruling title holders) of Bornu also enhanced the fast spread of Islam and, by early ninth century C.E., presence of a good population of Muslims from various tribes were reported in Kawar (Olayiwola, 2007:13). In addition, at about 1096 C.E., Islam became the religion of the court of Bornu when the then ruler Mai Hume Jilmi accepted Islam through Muhammad Ibn Mani. Henceforth, Islam continued to play a dominant role in the life of Bornu people and to a larger extent in every nooks and crannies of Nigeria.

Hijab in the Nigerian Constitution

The place of hijab is not different from other fundamental human rights issues in the Nigeria Constitution. The Nigerian Constitution is clear and definitive as far as the recognition of human dignity and fundamental rights are concerned. Nigeria, in my view, is recognized as a multi-religious and multi-ethnic state in the comity of nations. It is therefore, necessary to approach the issue of hijab from the point view of where Nigeria stands within the comity of nations. Having said this, the wearing of hijab remains a constitutional right of a Muslim girl or woman who chooses to wear it both in the private and public spheres in Nigeria. This is in accordance with the Constitutional declaration on the freedom of belief, religious affiliation/identity and association. The Nigerian Constitution (section 38) states in parts as follows:

Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others and in public or private) to manifest and propagate his

religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance. (The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Promulgation) Chapter 4, Section 38(1) of 1999.

Article 18 of UN's Human Rights Declaration Charter states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. (Article 18 of UN's Human Rights Declaration Charter, 1948).

Given the above provisions from the Constitution and coupled with the Muslims' understanding of the rulings concerning the use of hijab by female Muslims in the Qur'ān, it is arguable to say that hijab as an institution in Islam has come to stay in Nigeria. This is true in view of the fact that the totality of the lives of the Muslims is embedded in the *Shari'ah* (Islamic Law) without which Muslims may become ambivalent, clueless or operating in-between belief and disbelief. Thus, in line with Wadud (2006:176), hijab is considered a religious duty because it is a public declaration of identity and ideology, a double-edged aspect of public role and representation that figures strategically in the debates over Islam and gender. It is perhaps the reason Muslims are apodictically attached to its institution, the denial of which equals human right abuse by any system that may wish to undermine it (Oladosu-Uthman and Oladejo, 2021: 325).

Muslim Women and Identity Issues in Nigeria

Aside from the hatred that is deeply-rooted against the use of hijab in the Nigeria's public sphere by the non-Muslims, it is nevertheless the most common outfit among women in Nigeria. This is true because, before now, women's native dresses, particularly Yoruba dresses, were deemed incomplete without the covering of the head (headgear or *gele*)(Oladosu-Uthman 2016). Prior to the dawn of the so-called modernization, women in Yoruba land adopted decent and dignified form of dressing that usually covered the sensitive parts of their bodies including the head.

In many instances the veil/hijab has become a signifier of the Muslim identity in and around the world. It is a significantly diverse practice, and it has continued to be exercised in every nook and cranny of the world. Because of the focus of this paper, it is essential to outline the historical aspects of the practice. The practice of veiling predates Islam, and has in fact been linked to Judaism and Christianity. Christian doctrine, according to 1 Corinthians:11, requires that women, in the presence of God, must in fact cover their heads, and this practice has been

long followed within Roman Catholicism (Macdonald, 2006: 8). Accordingly, within Judaism, “Women in ancient Judea were required by their religion to wear a veil over their heads when praying to Jehovah”(Croucher, 2008:41).

Historically, the concept of hijab appeared within the framework of Islam around 627 C.E. (Anne Roberts, 2002:13), and it immediately became a direct instruction to the wives of the Prophet, his daughters and all other Muslim women (Q33:59). It is, therefore, a misconception to argue that the instruction on hijab from the Qur’an is vague and, therefore, not meant for the generality of the Muslim women. Katherine Bullock (2002) examines the historical aspects of the way the image of the veil has developed within Western discourse. Although Bullock is unable to pinpoint the origins, she highlights the narrative of British Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and her husband Edward Wortley Montagu who, on a trip to Turkey, examined and embraced the veiling practice. They had disputed the idea that the veil was oppressive and instead illustrated a sense of freedom for the woman to go unrecognized. By the nineteenth century, however, during the era of colonization of the Middle East, this narrative shifted. It became the symbol of oppression, as Westernization and modernization became more prominent (Bullock, 2002:1). Ultimately, the veil became a symbol for the degraded status of women, and the entire Middle East or “the Orient” became a symbol of “Othering”.

Also, the institution of hijab represents an identity issue within the Muslim circles. Wearing of hijab is a direct instruction by the almighty to the female servants, hence a religious duty without which a Muslim woman is deemed incomplete. In Islam, religious rulings are taken as fundamental (compulsory), whereas their neglect is considered as an aberration to the belief of a Muslim. The understanding of this, however, may vary among the Muslims based on the individual’s/group’s school of thought, which may include, but not limited to, fundamentalist/traditionalist and liberalist/modernist schools, but this does not garble the fact of its importance within the framework of the *Shari’ah*. This categorisation is necessary since it is not the case that all Muslims believe in or understand the concept of hijab to mean a religious duty. To some Muslims, the use of hijab is merely cultural rather than religious; hence, for this set of Muslims, it is not compulsory. The circumstance of Muslims in the contemporary times calls for this categorization in order to avoid unnecessary generalization. The import of the foregoing was clearly put into perspective in one of my discourses on what modernity has done to the Muslims in the following lines:

Among Muslim societies today, it is not difficult to identify the existence of different categories such as; those Muslims who are purely elements of Islamic traditional values, those who are trapped between traditionalism and Modernism, those who can be regarded as fundamentalists, and those who adopt in totality the modernist's ideology. These differences as it were, remain problematic because it is the faith of the Muslims which is being put into test; they are neither here nor there. They operate in-between the periphery and the centre. The centre remains genuine and formidable because of its link with the Divine while the periphery constantly changes due to its non- permanence and imperfect nature. The periphery also poses as if it is real in order to lure the modern man into its nest. (Oladosu-Uthman Habib, 2016: 212)

The above suggests why the categorization in this paper is very apt. This is because, the call on the non-Muslims in Nigeria to understand and appreciate the values attached to the institution of hijab by those Muslims who adopt it in order to showcase their Muslim identities is often met with hostility and rejection, not only by the non-Muslims but also by some Muslims. In the contemporary period, Muslim identity has seriously suffered misrepresentation and misjudgement by non-Muslims, particularly by the Western minds, following the attack of 9/11 in the United States of America.

Over the past two decades, the Muslim identity has been commonly associated with terrorism, radicalization, and political violence as well as gender oppression. Recently, researches have shown that each of the participants involved, who each identified as Muslim, narrated the ways in which they had become victimised, or discriminated in an institutional setting such as workplace, educational system, or the legal system in the years following 9/11 (Mythen et al., 2009:742). Currently, what is going on in Nigeria on the call for the use of hijab in public schools by the Muslims is arguably not different the world over and a number of racialised discourses have emerged with regards to the conflicts between the Muslims and non-Muslims over hijab in Nigeria. Hijab on its wearers has become a symbol of conflicts and an open display of hatred by the non-Muslims in Nigeria, particularly in the Southwest. Accordingly, Erika Halverson (2015:7) points out that:

veiling has been outlined and examined by Western scholars as a symbol of gender oppression within the Muslim culture. Muslim women who practice veiling, have often been discriminated from two ends of the spectrum, as many feminists, as well as non-feminists focus on the gender oppression these women face, while others have racialized against these women and arbitrated them as a threat.

The problematic nature of the discrimination that exists against Muslims can be reduced to the Orientalist discourse of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978:3) who describes Orientalism as:

as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient- dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient.

Nevertheless, in order to gain a lucid understanding of how the hijab has led to the notions of Islamophobia on the one hand in the West and what I term ‘xenophobic Othering’ in a pluralistic state such as Nigeria on the other, the subsequent sections of this paper are most instructive.

Contextualizing Xenophobia and Non-Muslims’ Views of Hijab

Hijab, to many circles, especially Western-oriented, is an emblem of subjugation of the female Muslims. It is conceived as a way of forcing the female Muslim to submit to the whims of patriarchy and men’s hegemony. For those who chose to engage in discourses about it, the often asked questions are: why should the female bodies become a means of seduction to male sexual gratification? Why is the male’s gaze so celebrated over that of female’s? Again, what is the moral justification for creating barrier between one gender and the other? Why is it always about women? Answers to these questions are not far-fetched. They have to do with, first, the wilful lack of understanding of the texts; second, they revolve around what can be termed as the culture of “we are here together but we do not belong together”, and, third, the conflict between identity and citizenship.

Xenophobia seems like a disease of the mind. It is defined as the dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries. It can also be said to mean the fear of strangers or foreigners. The major discourse in this paper is on the attitude of the Nigerian non-Muslims towards the use of hijab in public places. The use of the word xenophobia is to draw inferences on how hateful the sight of hijab on the wearers can be to those who oppose its adoption in the public spheres in Nigeria. That does not preclude the fact that hijab wearers have been subjected to xenophobic treatments from their superiors or bosses who are non-Muslims on a daily basis. It has also in turn on many occasions serves as infringement on their human rights as citizens of Nigeria. The question that is pertinent here is: how public are the public spaces in Nigeria? And exactly what defines a public space? (Oladosu-Uthman, 2011:48). How do we begin to interrogate the concept of space in Nigeria? To put these questions into perspectives, the view of Michel Foucault, one of the earliest thinkers on space, is relevant here. Foucault proposed that space can be constructed as an emplacement, a relation of sites, as a utopia and heterotopia (Jerry Shin-Chieh Liang: 23). The most relevant of this Foucauldian itemisation to this paper is the conception of space as a relation of sites. Here, it is clear that our life is governed by series of oppositions that remain inviolable.

These oppositions that we always regard as simple givens, a right rather than privileges are those that are still being nurtured by hidden presence of sacred space. Foucault says further that: “We do not live inside a void that could be coloured with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another” (cf. Oladosu-Uthman Habibat, 2011: 48).

In practical life, spaces where human beings are involved in a set of relationship include: streets, trains, cafe, cinema, beach, offices, houses, bedrooms and a host of other entities. In these spaces, or sites, we all witness a conscious division and hierarchies of the social structure. It is whatever we make of these spaces, whether private or public, sacred or profane that determines its placement and importance (Oladosu-Uthman Habibat, 2011: 49).

Currently, Islam is considered as one of the fastest growing religions in the world, yet the Orientalist discourse towards Islam and the veiling practice have increased significantly within the past two decades. Over the last few decades, narratives on veiling have been connected to the “war on terror” as well as continuous racial discourses about “threats to (Western) culture” (Khiabany& Williamson, 2008:69). Veiling/hijab has ultimately led to a number of critiques on gender inequality, the refusal of Muslims to embrace modernity and the West, as well as the growing marginalization of Muslims, especially women who embrace the practice. A closer look at the xenophobic tendencies in Nigeria and the newly passed judgement on hijab by the Supreme Court of Nigeria, then it is arguable to say that the problem is not only with the non-Muslims but within the Muslim community as well.

Hijab Crises in Nigeria: A Critique

How might we account for incessant conflicts between the Muslims and non-Muslims over the wearing of hijab in public secondary schools in Nigeria? Many factors can be responsible for the occurrence of conflicts in the society. Scholars have given different perspectives on this. The most relevant to this essay is the one which says: “the causes of conflicts in society are many and may include intolerance, injustice, territorial conflicts, unequal distribution of resources, rigidity of the law, bad leadership or government, and communication gap” (online source at: <https://www.kofastudy.com>). The conflicts arising from the use of hijab in public secondary schools in Nigeria, particularly in the South West can be likened to intolerance and injustice. Of course, the level of intolerance being exhibited by non-Muslims in Nigeria towards the wearers of hijab cannot be over-emphasized. Prior to the hijab crisis involving

Aisha Zubair and Firdaus Amasa at the Nigerian Law School in Abuja in July, 2018, there have been unreported series of attacks (verbal and physical) on the wearers of hijab in various places in Nigeria including: the work places, schools, streets, public hospitals and at the immigration offices across the South West. One begins to question the basis for these attacks. Is it that the non-Muslims' attitude towards the wearers of hijab is supported by the Nigerian Constitution? Or can we say that the Constitution itself is problematic when it comes to the delivery of justice to the Nigerian masses? Why is it that other religious practitioners, like the Catholic nuns, are not stigmatized just as the hijab wearers are? If the answers to the above questions are in the negative, then it is arguable to say that it is just a self-determined attitude emanating from a lack of tolerance and appreciation of the values attached to the institution of hijab by the Muslims which, in turn, results in xenophobic othering within the shared spaces in the country.

The cases in point that have really generated tensions and crises in the recent times are that of Aisha Zubair and Firdaus Amasa at the Nigerian Law School (2018), a secondary school girl in Lagos (2020/2021), the case of intimidation at the International School University of Ibadan (2018), and the incident at the Baptist Secondary School in Ilorin (2021/2022). All the cited cases were taken to the court. Both Firdaus's and the secondary school girl in Lagos have been delivered in favour of hijab wearers while the incident in Ilorin and that of the International School are still awaiting the final judgement. Aside from these, the apex court of law in the land has ruled in favour of the wearers of hijab. On the 16th June, 2022, the Supreme Court of Nigeria delivered a judgement that gave approval to the use of hijab by female Muslim students in both primary and secondary schools in Lagos State. The implication of this judgement, as far as the law of the land is concerned, is that whether the cases in Ilorin or that of the International School University of Ibadan or any other places as the case may be in the country are delivered or not, the judgement at the apex court has overruled all other judgements. In other words, the verdict of the Supreme Court of Nigeria on hijab is that any female Muslim, a girl or a woman, in all public educational institutions including offices in Nigeria has an unfettered right to the use of hijab if she so wishes without fear or intimidation.

Despite the rule of the Supreme Court, there is the persistence of the needless provocation that constantly features in the relationship towards the wearers of hijab by non-Muslims. The constant provocation, arguably, is a product of definitive prejudice against Islam as a religion. Why is it that women of other religions, particularly the Catholic nuns whose appearance

resembles that of the Muslim women, are not met with same hostility as that of the Muslims? The answer to this question perhaps resonates the words of Lazreg (1988: 81-82) that “what is at work here is not merely a plausible rationalist bias against religion as an impediment to the progress and freedom of the mind but an acceptance of the idea that there is a hierarchy of religions, with some being more susceptible...than others.”

Thus, the inferential usage of the word xenophobia in this paper is very apt given the fact that those who constantly exhibit xenophobic tendencies towards the use of hijab have no other reason than deep-rooted prejudice against Islam and the Muslims regardless of the provision of the Constitution on the right of the female Muslims to use hijab in the public square. The untoward exhibition of this tendency may not be surprising to the Muslims, perhaps, because they have been intimated in the Qur’an about the expected attitudes from the people who have been given the scriptures that came before the Qur’an. In other words, every Muslim who is versed in the teachings of the Qur’an will not be surprised about the non-Muslims’ attitudes that reek of hatred, bigotry, prejudice, intolerance, as well as ‘xenophobic’ tendencies, towards the Muslims in Nigeria. After all, the Qur’an alludes to this as follows:

Never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with thee unless thou follow their form of religion. Say: the guidance of Allah-that is the (only) guidance. Wert thou to follow their desires after the knowledge which hath reached thee, then wouldst thou find neither protector nor helper against Allah (Qur’an 2: 120)

Given the above *ayah*, it is evident that non-Muslims in Nigeria would not want to enter into intellectual public engagement with the Muslims. In line with Amoloye (2022:2), this posture encourages the citizenry to employ persuasive sentimentalism and orchestrated sensationalism without logical basis to score points against each other on issues with polarised views. This seems to be the Nigerian style regardless of religious affiliation that issues of national significance are always treated with sentiments. But a quick retrospection is that the case of the right to use hijab in the public spaces by female Muslims was taken to the court out of the desire by the Muslims to protect the rights to observe their religious right which is also tenable in any court of law. As such, it cannot be regarded as a case of Islam versus other religions in the country; it simply has to do with identity issues. Even at the instance of the judgement, any Muslim girl that decides not to use hijab in the public cannot be compelled to do so, not to talk of non-Muslims. Again, the willing female Muslims should not also be denied the right to showcase their religious identity if they so choose.

Conclusion

What I have tried to do in this paper is to inquire into the constructions of xenophobia, intolerance and prejudices in Nigeria and how they are narrativized. This is particularly relevant to the position of the Nigerian Constitution on the right to religious association and expression. It is also clear from the judgement of the supreme court of Nigeria on the choice of hijab by its wearers in both primary and secondary schools that resistances from the non-Muslims can no longer hold waters. The institution of hijab is religious, hence, a Constitutional right of the Muslims in Nigeria and beyond. The interrogations of the concept of xenophobia reveal an uncanny resemblance in the portrayal of the female Muslim wearers of hijab by non-Muslims in Nigeria even as they unpack such paradoxes with regard to Muslim women's identities as representing backwardness, the uncivilized as well as the oppressed. Thus, the portrayal of Islam through the institution of hijab/veil as an emblem of women's oppression is full of misconceptions about the actual worldview of Islam as far as women are concerned. This paper also stressed the need for understanding on the part of non-Muslims in Nigeria to always treat the case of hijab as the Constitutional right of the Muslims and an identity issue too. The conclusion becomes axiomatic that the development and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria nests, not on the promotion and exhibition of xenophobic othering, hatred and prejudices towards one another within the public shared spaces but in its coming together to foster unity, respect for the rule of law, accommodation, tolerance as well as other positive indices for the development of Nigeria as a multi-religious and multi-cultural entity.

References

- [1] Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1999). *The Holy Qur'an, Translation and Commentary*. UK:IPCI Islamic Vission.
- [2] Amina Wadud (2006). *Inside the Gender Jihad, Women's Reform in Islam*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.
- [3] Amoloye-Adebayo, A.O. (2022). "The Supreme Court, the Hijab Decision, and the Secular State Theory". The American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), ACLS Research University Consortium, available on <https://www.acls.org/news/acls-fellows-publish-timel-op-eds/>

- [4] Article 18 of UN's Human Rights Declaration Charter, 1948.
- [5] Bullock, K. (2002). *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical & Modern Stereotypes*. UK: The International Institute of Islamic Thought.
- [6] Croucher, S. M. (2008). "French Muslims and the Hijab: An Analysis of Identity and the Islamic Veil in France". In *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 37 (3), 199-213.
- [7] Erika Halverson (2015). "It's Not You It's Me": A Critical Examination of Muslim Veiling Practice and the Problem with the West". McMaster University POLI SCI 757, available at: <https://www.academia.edu> accessed on 22/12/2022.
- [8] Jerry Shin-Chieh Liang (1986), (sum). Michel Foucault. "Text/Context of Other Space". In *Diacritics* 16.1, 23.
- [9] Khiabany, G., & Williamson, M. (2008). "Veiled Bodies- Naked Racism: Culture, Politics, and Race in the Sun". In *Race and Class*, vol. 50 (2), 69-88.
- [10] Khiabany, G., & Williamson, M. (2010). "UK: The Veil and the Politics of Racism". In *Race and Class*, vol. 52 (2), 85-96.
- [11] Marnia Lazreg (1988). "Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria". In *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, No. 1, 81-107.
- [12] Macdonald, M. (2006). "Muslim Women and the Veil: Problems of Image and Voice in the Media". In *Feminist Media Studies*, 6 (1), 7-23.
- [13] Mohammad Omar Farooq (2018), "The Farewell Sermon of Prophet Muhammad: An Analytical Review", in *Islam and Civilizational Renewal*, vol. 9, No. 3, 322-342.
- [14] Mythen, G., Walklate, S., & Khan, F. (2009). "I'm Muslim, but I'm Not a Terrorist': Victimization, Risky Identities and the Performance of Safety". In *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 49, 736-754.
- [15] Oladosu Afis Ayinde (2009). "The Sphere In-between: Najib Mahfuz on Power, Status and Authority in Africa's Public Sphere", in *Africa Development*, vol. xxxiv, No. 2, 81-99.
- [16] Oladosu-Uthman Habibat & Oladejo Mutiat (2021). "Veiling and Muslim Women in African History Since the Ottoman Empire". In *Islam and Civilizational Renewal*, vol. 12 (2), 314-330.

- [17] Oladosu-Uthman Habibat (2016). "Muslim Women of South-Western Nigeria: On Islam, Tradition and Modernity". In *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies*, vol. 26, No. 2, 211-222.
- [18] Oladosu-Uthman Habibat (2011). *Muslim Women and the Politics of Emplacement: Reraeding Space, Sex and Gender*. Germany: LAP Lambert Publications, 221pp.
- [19] Olayiwola Abdulfattah A.O (2007). *Islam in Nigeria*. Nigeria: Sakirable Publishers, 343pp.
- [20] Online material from KOFASTUDY available at: <https://www.kofastudy.com>, accessed on 23/4/2023.
- [21] Roberts, A. (2011). *Veiled Politics: Legitimizing the Burqa Ban in the French Press*. Atlanta: Georgia State University.
- [22] Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- [23] The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Promulgation) Chapter 4, Section 38(1) of 1999.