



4 | RABIATU DEINYO AMMAH ON ISLAM AND GENDER ISSUES

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Abstract

Gender injustice exists in many religious faiths including Islam. Women in Islam face subjugation, gender injustice, and dehumanization. Often, these gender-humiliating issues were derived from a certain interpretation of Qur'anic passages that relate to women. It hinders the development of the potential of women and affects them economically. This has led to protests by women in contemporary times for gender justice in Islam. Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah added that it is not only misinterpretation of Qur'anic passages but also these misinterpretations that dehumanize women and have support from gender issues in socio-cultural norms of some Arab and African societies. This study critically reviews some works of Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah concerning gender issues among women in Islam and how to tackle the problem. It is recommended that interpreters of the Qur'an on gender issues ought to adopt appropriate methods and approaches that are blurs or makes nebulous some traditional perception concerning women. The concept of the *zakat* should be upheld for the sustainable development of women in Muslim communities.

Keywords: Islam, women, Qur'an, interpretation, Africa, gender, dehumanize, development, *zakat*

A Brief Biography of Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah

Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah, PhD is a senior lecturer at the Department for the Study of Religions at the University of Ghana. She is also a senior research fellow at the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations Selly-Oak Colleges. She studied for her Diploma, Master, and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees at the University of Birmingham between 1982 and 1989. Dr. Ammah received the best teacher award for the 1999-2000 academic year and is a member of the *Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology* editorial board. One of the most populous works of

Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah is “Islam and Poverty Reduction Strategies in the Ghanaian Muslim Community,” *Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 2 (2007):3-20. She is known for her multi-faith approach to gender studies. Dr. Ammah is a member of the Federation of Muslim Woman Associations Ghana (FOMWAG), and a founding member of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.

Introduction

Appropriate methods and approaches to scripture interpretation is critical in the observance of religious teachings to avoid misrepresentation and abuse. Gender issues are a serious matter in many religious organizations. In Islam, issues of dehumanizing and abusive phenomena against women have been observed. Often, these gender injustice issues are considered by non-Muslims as the teaching of the Qur’an. Women were perceived as inferior to men, therefore, can be beaten by their husbands; given into marriages against their wishes by parents or family members; and neglected in burgher marriages. It is also contended that Muslim communities are not developmental in their approach to daily activities, particularly women. Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah has responded to the issues of gender and Islam that have been critically reviewed in this study.

Review of the Works of Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah

The Islamic Understanding of Creation: The Place of Women

The position of women in the creation narrative in the Qur’an was analyzed. Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah argued that women in Islam are concerned with gender issues relating to their position in relation to men and the profession of women. The work started with an epithet from Shariati, an Iranian Muslim woman: “Who am I? Am I a mother? A wife? A biologist? A chemist? A doctor, nurse, midwife, labourer, writer, human being? Who am I?” (Ammah, 1997:26). These questions mainly portray the dilemma of the Muslim woman concerning identity. The questions were rhetorically arranged to emphasize Muslim women’s distinctiveness such that it started with the question of identity, supply some responses relating to the family, sciences, and the arts, and then ended

with the question concerning identity. It demonstrates how concerned the Muslim woman is concerned about gender identity and construction. Ammah puts it thus “these questions and related issues touch the heart and minds of the Muslim woman, who for centuries have been relegated to the background, pushed to the wall and excluded from active participation in public affairs” (Ammah, 1997:26). She reasoned that this gender stereotyping image of women is due to centuries of misinterpretation of some Qur’anic passages to keep Muslim women subjugated and subservient to men (Ammah, 1997:26).

Rabiatu identified three modes of interpretation as the contributing factors for the misinterpretation of the Qur’an leading to the subjugation of Muslim women. **(i)** Some contemporary scholars consider the poor and handicap of women in society to shape their interpretation of gender related passages; **(ii)** lack of linking and drawing systematic understanding of related ideas, themes, and principles together; **(iii)** most of the interpretation were done by men, therefore, failed to take along women experiences in the interpretative process. Women’s issues were excluded or marginalized during the interpretation of the Qur’an (Ammah, 1997:27). The first group of interpreters do not allow the text of the Qur’an to dictate the meaning of the passage concerning women. Probably, they are protective of the male dominance over females thereby making the Qur’an appear as anti-women, which is not the case. The second group of interpreters do isolated proof-texting, which begs the question of whether those secluded texts humiliate women. The third group is the patriarchal approach to the interpretation of the Qur’an, which is biased towards men. All three groups of misinterpretation of the Qur’an are heavily hinged on patriarchy. Ammah set forth to investigate whether the creation narrative and the lessons it teaches present women as inferior and subservient.

Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah referred to the creation narrative in the Qur’an chapter 4:1 “O mankind reverence your guardian – Lord who created you for a single person. Created, of like nature, His mate and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women.” She commented that often, the preposition *min* (from – extraction) in Arabic as used in the interpretation of the verse is disastrous for women because it connotes the idea that the woman was created from the man. “This mode

of interpretation came to mean that the first created being was a man perfect, superior, and complete. The second was not his equal. This made the latter inferior and contingent on the former” (Ammah, 1997:31). Ammah (1997:33) argued that *min* has an alternative function to be understood as “of the same nature as” but this alternative usage is neglected in order to agree with the Judeo-Christian concept of the creation of man and woman. The Qur’an places man and woman on the same pedestal because “the woman is given responsibilities which are not different from those of man.” She buttressed this statement with the duties assigned to Mary in the Qur’an 66:12 being the same as to men. “And Mary the daughter of Imran, who guarded Her chastity; and we breathed into her body of our spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of his revelations, and was one of the devout servants.” Ammah concluded that from the perspective of the Qur’an creation narrative and the role of Mary, there is no primordial distinction between a man and a woman that make the man superior and the woman inferior.

The analysis of the creation narrative by Ammah was heavily focused on the alternative meaning of *min* “of the same nature as” instead of the commonly and popularly “from”. It gives a clue for the interpreters of the creation narrative in the Qur’an to critically consider gender equality perspective of the text. The religious duties of Mary as an icon of “purity, perfection, spirituality, and perfection” (Ammah, 1997:35), point to the fact that women can be empowered and instructed by God to perform roles that were popular with men. The work suggests a serious study of the various syntaxes and morphologies of the Arabic language in the interpretation of the Qur’an that does not create class superiority among the genders. However, it can be queried that the empowerment of Mary to be assigned duties equal to men may be premised on the fact that she would be the mother of Jesus (Ammah, 1997:35).

Perspectives on the Qur’an Verse on Wife Beating in the Ghanaian Muslim Community

Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah continued with her objective of raising attention and correcting issues relating to Qur’an passages that have been interpreted to subjugate women and make them appear inferior to men. In this publication, Ammah (2013:333-373) deliberated on the critical issue

of wife beating in Muslim communities in Ghana and how it may constitute domestic violence against women. The work began with a philosophical quote “tap, beat, beat but with a handkerchief or tapping to beat; the value is the same.” The question demonstrates the quandary concerning wife beating in Muslim communities in Ghana and the quest to know the Qur’an stipulation about the beating of married women by their husbands. Qur’an 4:34 states that:

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devotedly obedient, and guard in (the husband’s) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next) refuse to share their beds, and (last) beat them (slightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance; for Allah is Most High, Great (above you all).

Ammah (2013:338-350) referred to varied interpretations of the text by exegetes to mean that **(i)** husbands can beat their wives who are disobedient; and **(ii)** husbands have the right to punish their wives, not necessarily beating them. She referred to these interpretations as proof-texting that has been blindly accepted by many Muslim communities. Fieldwork in Nima to interview some respondents concerning wife beating was undertaken. Most of them confirmed that wife beating is rampant among community members, and often reference is made to Qur’an 4:34. Many of the respondents who were victims of wife beating do not see the need to report the incident to the Domestic Violence Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) because they do not consider it in that category but rather report it to the *Imam* (Islamic religious leader). In one of the responses of the *Iman* to the victim (wife) he

...advised her that her husband is her guardian, and God had decreed that a beating is not in this case a transgression. If she is seeking divorce, this is not a sufficient a cause because an opportunity to perfect humility is hardly a loss. If you have a disobeyed, the *Imam* said, then you are a deviant. A *nashiz* in the book of God is an arrogant woman who does not see her husband as her boss (Ammah, 2013:365).

The situation leaves wives with limited options concerning wife beating. It has made them become ‘punching bags’ for some husbands (Ammah, 2013:367). Ammah argued that the traditional views concerning the interpretation of Q4:34 are not in tandem with the spirit of the Qur’an and Islam. She stated that the wife’s “beating was part of the customary practices of the Arabs and though the Qur’an did not introduce the beating of women; it has to deal with it appropriately and pragmatically as it was ugly and in conflict with the beauty of Islam” (Ammah, 2013:344). There is growing evidence that *jahiliyyah* (pre-Islamic Arabia) cultural norms such as female infanticide, women not being given the right to inherit their fathers, wife beating, and exorbitant marriage dowry are prevalent in Muslim communities in Ghana, which are not Qur’anic (Saleh, 1997:80-87). It may suggest that wife beating was not original to Islam but the adoption of Arab cultural norms that received a wider acceptance by many Muslim communities. Whether it is tapping, beating with handkerchiefs or feathers it does not reflect Islam as a religion of peace. Ammah admonishes Muslim women to use the Domestic Violence Law in Ghana to address the wife beating phenomenon in Muslim communities (Ammah, 2013:368). It is significant for Ammah to examine the Muslim women in the communities and whether they would be willing to read the Domestic Violence Law, understand, and apply it in ways that do not make the woman exercise too much authority over the husband according to Islamic family unit. Not only the women but the men have to be educated or read the Domestic Violence Law for a happy Islamic family entity.

Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah offered to exegetes of the Qur’an to consider interpretations that easily resonate with the spirit of the Qur’an and Islam rather than literal readings of some verses of the Qur’an. In other words, whatever method or approach is used by an exegete must not conflict with the core objective of the Qur’an and Islam. When there is conflict, the spirit and objective of the Qur’an and Islam must prevail. It will be more insightful for Ammah to develop a method for Qur’anic exegesis rather than asking the exegete to consider the spirit and objective of the Qur’an and Islam because the method would consider the spirit and objective of the Qur’an in the process of designing the method.

Violence against Women in Ghanaian Muslim Communities

This publication seems to emphasize the views expressed in the above two works concerning the misinterpretation of gender passages in the Qur'an that dehumanizes and abuse women. In this publication, Rabiatu Ammah-Koney (2009:159-191) argued that the lifestyle of some Muslims in the communities is not reflective of the teaching of the Qur'an but of some cultural influences on Islam and misinterpretation of Qur'anic passages. She stated that "the Qur'an liberated women centuries ago and does not dehumanize them, or give them an inferior position" (Ammah-Koney, 2009:159). Ammah-Koney (2009:175) explained that Islam is the first religion to have liberated women and call for their honoured position in society. However, research in Alarba in the Ashanti Region, and Nima in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana show that Muslim women undergo various forms of dehumanizing and abusive treatment from their male counterparts.

The main cause of this phenomenon in Alarba and Nima is forced marriage which also exists in traditional societies in Ghana. It is usually young women of school going age that are forced into these marriages and thereby jeopardizing their future careers and becoming reliant on men (husbands) for sustenance. Ammah-Koney narrated the ordeal of a young respondent in Nima.

She had been in her first year at the West Africa Secondary School when her father died. She was asked to marry a rich man by her uncle, through whom a proposal had been made. She vehemently protested as she wanted to continue her education. However, after several beatings by family members, she was obliged to marry him, only to run away from the marital home. After several months of unsuccessful intensive searching, the marriage was annulled on account of her absence, at the request of the husband in consultation with the uncle (Ammah-Koney, 2009:177).

A student in the first year of Senior High School in Ghana would be between 15 and 17 years. The quest for her to marry a rich man may be due to the fact that the mother, if alive, did not have the economic sophistication to take care of the girl through secondary education. Hence, marriage to a rich person, but the marriage was not meant to help the lady

continue her education but to settle and procreate as a wife. The stigma of a married lady among other single girls in secondary school demonstrates the end of education for the girl. And it appears that some rich men cannot take care of girls to school without marrying or taking advantage of them sexually. The numerous instructions in the *Ahadith* for parents and guardians not to force their children into unwanted marriages have been ignored (Ammah-Koney, 2009:177).

The other problem identified by Ammah-Koney in some Muslim communities is the issue of burgher marriage. Although this type of marriage is not explicitly stated or inferred in the Qur'an, many Muslims encourage their daughters into such marriages for economic well-being and improved social status. This form of marriage is aided by the assumption that there are not enough men to marry or that the men living in Ghana are unable to perform the Islamic and traditional customary marriage rites that have become very expensive. Ladies in these burgher marriages hope to join their husbands abroad, which in some cases do not know them personally but through photographs or personally knew the man very little. The ladies move to live with the parents or extended family members of the man, which later creates problems such that the ladies later become as if they were domestic staff of the parents of the man (Ammah-Koney, 2009:179-181). Some respondents stated that "I am 23 and have been married for 2 years and saw him only twice before the marriage which was performed in his absence. I have lost weight, feel lonely and don't have any freedom because of my mother in-law and sister in-law.... I will not advise anybody to go into such a marriage as I face a lot of hunger, persistent sickness and lack of sexual satisfaction" (Ammah-Koney, 2009:181). Women have no instruction concerning how to deal with husbands who misbehave besides reporting the issue to the *Imams*. Men who marry young girls, and in burgher marriages do not take seriously the earlier portion of Qur'an 4:34 that states "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women...". In that regard, the Islamic Research (of the *Ahl ul Sunna Wa Jama'at*), The Federation of Muslim Women Association in Ghana (FOMWAG), and the office of the National Chief Imam have decided to take up the issues of women to improve their well-being in marriage and the community (Ammah-Koney, 2009:184-185).

Marriage counselling is an important activity for would-be Muslim couples. It will be very significant for Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah to indicate whether individuals in forced marriages and burgher marriages undergo pre-marital counselling. This is not to argue that the traditional system of pre-marital counselling which is conducted by the *Aluwanka* and a more contemporary system introduced by Hajia Memuna Maliki is without limitation or gives immunity to challenges in marriage (Ammah and Khamis, 2016:118-131). However, it is likely that persons who undergo any of these forms of pre-marital counselling would live above certain levels in a marital relationship not to dehumanize and abuse wives.

In the study, Ammah raised two critical issues seeking scholarly and religious attention to improve the lives of women in Muslim communities. Religion and cultural, and religion and economic well-being. These issues are driving men to dehumanize and abuse women. The influence of culture and economic choices seem to make non-Muslims accept or speculate that those lifestyles are sanctioned by the Qur'an which is false. It calls for a study of how the Qur'an, culture, and economic well-being should interface without making the teaching of the Qur'an nebulous. In fact, culture has been an element that can unconsciously drift into a religious practice easily. If it is not detected and dealt with, it is considered by outsiders as part of a religious group's teaching. Richard Niebuhr (1956) has argued that for the Christian faith, whatever culture is prevalent among the people the message of Jesus Christ must be presented to transform the culture in innovative and creative ways that do not relegate the message of the gospel or present the culture in a derogative manner. It is hinged on the critical issues of Christ against culture; the Christ of culture; Christ above culture; Christ and culture in paradox; Christ the transformer of culture. Ammah would have to consider the work of Niebuhr to determine how Islam and other cultures would interface or co-exist.

Gender and Sustainable Development in Muslim Communities in Ghana

Islam and Poverty Reduction Strategies Attempts at dealing with Poverty in the Ghanaian Muslim Community

The object of the study is to consider the resources provided by the Qur'an for poverty reduction in Muslim communities in Ghana. The work examined the concept of *zakat* and *sadaqah* to fight poverty. According to Ammah (2007:3-20), humans are multi-dimensional beings and have basic needs, hence, the fundamental concern of Islam is the basic welfare of all humans that establishes peace and harmony on the earth. "The Qur'an sees humanity to be one community (*ummah*). This *ummah* is the best created by Allah and enjoined social responsibility to call people to what is good and forbid indecency" (Ammah, 2007:3). The *ummah* is composed of both the rich and the poor. The Qur'an does not give justification for poverty, which may be caused by power concentration, attitude, ideology etc. Poverty in Muslim communities is caused by power concentration and ideological factors. The Northern parts of Ghana where Muslims dominate the population are rural communities that lack among others educational infrastructure. Many Muslims consider attending missionary colonial schools as proselyting so they refused to attend school. Hence, poverty in Muslim communities is mainly caused by a lack of education (Ammah, 2007:12-13). Whatever form of poverty may show up the Qur'an made provisions through *zakat* and *sadaqah* (a voluntary and involuntary mechanism) to assuage it. It speaks to the conscience of Muslims concerning their social responsibility to the poor in society. Some poor and physically challenged persons have taken advantage of this stipulation to be present at many Mosques and vantage streets to beg for alms usually referred to as *fisahbilillah* – in the name of Allah (Ammah, 2007:10-11).

The *zakat* is aimed at wealth redistribution and avoid wealth concentration at selected persons and location(s) in society. It improves the material well-being of the poor by the wealthy through targeted giving. In other words, the poor even though may not be active participants in the wealth creation of the rich, they are participants in the expending/disbursement of the wealth of the rich. *Sadaqah* is a voluntary giving to the

poor (Ammah, 2007:11-12). Ammah finds the *zakat* and *sadaqah* inadequate for poverty alleviation. The Islamic Council for Development and Humanitarian Services (ICODEHS) ways of promoting economic development were through building Mosques in communities, which Ammah thinks is inappropriate, she advised them to establish factories and other businesses which will employ people in the Muslim communities which they did and take care of the orphans in Muslim communities, which is a form of *zakat* (Ammah, 2007:6-20; Weiss, 2020:272-303).

The study draws attention to religion and secular education, and religion and development. Ammah identified the importance of education for economic development probably because *zakat* and *sadaqah* though have a role in wealth redistribution, it is not prudent for the poor to totally rely on them for their sustenance. Hence, the need for education by all to be gainfully employed. The appeal to ICODEHS by Ammah was timely and effective towards poverty alleviation. Religious NGOs must critically consider the issue of responding to urgent matters of concern among the community rather than being limited to the provision of religious infrastructure. *Zakat* and *sadaqah* are not enough for poverty alleviation among women in Muslim communities. Education is critical to poverty alleviation among women in Muslim communities which would eventually lead to development. The Qur'an 96:1-5; 20:114; 39:9 encourage the acquisition of knowledge as means of dealing with issues in the *ummah* including poverty. This makes education of any form (Islamic and secular) the prerequisite for development and poverty alleviation. In addition, the concept of the *zakat* calls for more Muslims to get involved in NGO activities to lessen the burden on women in Muslim communities in Ghana (Sulemanu, 2018:243-258).

Ghanaian Muslims on “Becoming Muslims” for Sustainable Development

Muslims are beginning to apply the Qur'anic teachings concerning models of development that aid material and spiritual growth. The inability of “Muslims to live the Qur'an presents Islam as anti-development” (Ammah, 2018:227). Ammah (2018) argued that Islam is not anti-development and many individuals and NGOs of Islamic origin and nature

are deeply involved in sustainable development programmes in Muslim communities in Ghana, and women are benefiting from these programmes/projects. She posited that humans are the centre of development in Islam where development is not limited to only tangible but also includes the intangibles for holistic and sustainable growth. She identified the work of Muslims from petty trading to working in established entities as a contribution of Muslim communities for sustainable development in Ghana. The National Chief *Imam* Sheikh Dr. Usman Nuhu Sharbutu was acknowledged for establishing a school at New Fadama and his intention to establish a university under the ambit of the Federation of Muslim Women's Association in Ghana (FOMWAG). The Ghana Muslim Mission (The Mission) was praised for its developmental projects and activities in Muslim communities in Ghana (Ammah, 2018:233-235).

The women's group of the Mission which was formed in 1967 has contributed to the development of women in Muslim communities. The women raised funds to organize human capital development programmes for Muslim women. Some of the women have organized themselves into a traditional music (*bibidwom*) group as means of raising financial resources to aid the course of Muslim women to be entrepreneurial. The financial resources realized are used to educate Muslim women to move away from the traditional parenting for the girl-child to the Islamic mode of parenting that does not make the girl-child inferior (Ammah, 2018:240-241). In other words, the women mainly engage the concept of *zakat* and music to raise funds for women's welfare in Islamic communities. The women have now formed co-operatives to provide capital for Muslim women to be productive and support themselves through business ventures. The co-operatives are providing either interest free loans or minimal interest loans for women, thereby avoiding loans with high interest in the capital market (Ammah, 2018:241-242). This may partly reflect some Islamic patterns of financing such as *riba* (usury) Qur'an 2:275 which is forbidden among Muslims; *mudarabah* (partnership financing); and *musharakah* (multiple financing) (Abdul-Hamid, 2017).

Discussion

The works of Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah concentrated on the appropriate interpretation of the Qur'an that does not dehumanize and abuse women, and sustainable development in Muslim communities to foster economic empowerment of women in Ghana. This session seeks to engage these two issues with what other scholars in the field have pro-pounded.

Scripture Interpretation

Ammah's assertion that Qur'anic exegetes interpret the Qur'an in ways that do not resonate with the core objective of the Qur'an but reflect cultural norms that subjugate women demonstrates the need for a revision of Islamic education in Ghana. It is common knowledge that children of Muslim origins undergo almost compulsory Islamic education up till a minimum of their teenage years. This is often combined with secular education in Ghana. Secular education takes Monday to Friday while Islamic education takes Saturday and Sunday in many Islamic communities in Ghana. Islamic education is referred to as *makaranta* (purely religious schooling). The concept of the *makaranta* was to keep Muslims in their faith through teaching because secular education was initially misunderstood as Christian education. Subsequently, Islamic education was added to secular education for schools in Muslim communities and is attended from Monday to Friday. This shows that the child of an Islamic parent is occupied with a lot of studies in their formative years (Owusu, 2017). Misinterpretation of the Qur'an to favour cultural dictates and masculinity prompts the review of the *makaranta* curriculum that is mainly focused on the recitation of the Qur'an to include basic exegetical principles that do not dehumanize and abuse women. Although public interpretation of the Qur'an is often undertaken by men (Ammah, 1997:31), there is no gender limitation on the attendance of *makaranta*. Both males and females attend *makaranta*. The revision of the curriculum would prepare females to understand the position of women in Islam as taught by the Qur'an. Even though the *makaranta* system had undergone some revisions to include secular education, there is the need to revise to include basic gender balanced exegetical principles.

Islamic feminism proceeds on the premise that Allah is just. Hence, an androcentric interpretation of the Qur'an is not acceptable. It is to expose and correct gender biased issues and seemingly contradictory matters among Muslims (Abdul-Hamid, 2017). This has been reflected in many works of feminist theologians concerning Black people, decolonialization etc. (Dube, 2000, 2012:1-25, 1996:37-59; Fiorenza, 1993). Although some men are involved in this exercise, as *khalifas* of God Muslim women of the FORWAG ought to consider the creation of a wing that would concentrate on the exegesis of the Qur'an to fast-track the liberation of Muslim women through appropriate interpretation of the Qur'an (Ammah, 2014:184-202). This is expected to lead to the proposition of liberation hermeneutics for Muslim women in Ghana (West, 2014:341-382).

Appropriate interpretation of scripture for varied audiences has been an issue of concern in many religious groups. Christianity in Africa has faced this problem leading to the propositions of various methods and approaches for biblical interpretation such as mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics, intercultural biblical interpretation, and African biblical hermeneutics (Ekem, 2010:34-37; Kuwornu-Adjaotor, 2012:575-579; Loba-Mkole, 2008:1347-1364; Manus, 2003; Quarshie, 2002:4-14; Aryeh, 2016:140-160; Aryeh, 2017:182-210). The works of Ammah contribute to appropriate modes of scripture interpretation but it is tweaked towards the interpretation of gender related passages in the Qur'an. While the Christian phenomenon of appropriate interpretation of scripture is characterized by foreign interpretations that do not uphold African life and cultural norms that are not anti-biblical, the works of Ammah posit modes of interpretations that are characterized by gender justice and reflect the overall objective of Islam as a religion of peace. Ammah's works seek to confront both foreign and indigenous interpreters of the Qur'an on patriarchal cultural norms that dehumanize and abuse women. Her approach to appropriate modes of Qur'anic interpretation was gender specific.

Gender and Development

Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah's works on Islam and the development of women in the communities were defensive. It attempted to chronicle what Islamic religious leaders and NGOs have done for the economic

development of women and the community of Muslims. This is in fulfilment of the instructions of the Qur'an concerning *zakat* and *sadaqah*. The claim of Ammah is in consonance with the perspective of Rebecca Ganusah that often Christianity is seen as a religion that retards human progress and development. She catalogued the works that the Christian missionaries did for human development in Ghana to the period of the Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches. Ganusah (2014:203-218) argued that the establishment of trading centres, markets, building and establishment of educational infrastructure from pre-school to tertiary level, training and provision of human resources in various government and non-governmental agencies among others is a contribution of the Christian faith for development in Ghana. The difference between the proposition of Ammah and Ganusah is gender. The sustainable development issues raised by Ammah were heavily concentrated on how *zakat* has contributed to the plight of Muslim women while Ganusah's assertion was not limited to a specific gender or religion but to all Ghanaians.

Obviously, the discussion of sustainable development in Ghana cannot negate the contribution of religious groups. In many parts of Africa, religion is central to almost every activity by humans. Religion is expected to put food on the table, ensure spiritual tranquility, democracy, peace, birth-growing up-adulthood-and the afterlife is saturated in/with religious candour. Issues presented through the optics of religion are likely to receive wide acceptance. Therefore, religion is power for life and the inner tenacity to perform a task (Butselaar, 2014:219-231), including sustainable development. If the argument of Butselaar is correct then more development is expected in Africa, particularly Ghana because over 90% of the population of Ghanaians profess one faith or the other since independence (Sasu, 2023). However, the problem has to do with the over-concentration of the provision of infrastructures and the establishment of businesses by religious faiths. There is the need to move beyond these to advocacy for social re-organization and re-orientation of social systems to prepare the bases for sustainable development (Stephen, 1997:118-127). When the *ummah* is transformed to effectively appropriate the sustainable development agenda of women in Muslim communities, then many of the *zakat* activities would have a lasting effect on women including the education of girls.

CONCLUSION

Appropriate modes of scripture interpretation are key to religious observance. They serve the critical factor of keeping faith with the meaning of ancient religious documents. These methods and approaches guard against the infiltration of foreign teachings into the core values and objectives of religious faith. Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah identified misinterpretation of gender related passages in the Qur'an and demanded gender sensitive interpretation that reflects the spirit and core objective of the Qur'an. The misinterpretation has led to the dehumanization and abuse of women which reflects the pre-Islamic cultural phenomenon of some Arabs and traditional Ghanaian societies, which is ant-Qur'an and anti-Islamic. The inferior and subservient roles assigned to women have caused intense poverty among Muslim women in their communities. Although many Muslims are involved in *zakat* activities to reduce the poverty levels among women in Muslim communities, education and re-organization of the social system to appropriate sustainable development of Muslim women. Ammah called for the perceived tension between religion and development that is not substantive. Although religion is considered to be aligned with ancient philosophies and sustainable development is the implementation of contemporary ideas, religion in Africa is the power for sustainable development and growth. What might be attractive to the ink and space, and audiences of Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah is gender and leadership in Islamic communities in Ghana: the perspective of the Qur'an.

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