GLOBAL POLITICS, WOMEN EMANCIPATION AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE: A CHALLENGE TO A MUSLIM WOMAN IN SUB-SAHARA AFRICA?

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Introduction

In contemporary global politics there appears to be a growing belief that Islam and Sharia law are anti national and global agenda for gender mainstreaming and women emancipation. This belief is mainly based on the perception that Islam and Sharia law provide women with limited social, political and economic participation within a state. In addition, its legal acceptance of the institution of polygamy is regarded as being antithesis to human rights. This perception has been enhanced by the extremist Muslims who oppose contemporary gender mainstreaming policies. These Muslims regard these policies and women emancipation as part of the USA and Western civilization efforts to dominate the international system. It is argued that these perceptions were intensified after the September 11th, 2001 attack on World Trade Center in USA and contemporary global war on ‘terrorism’ and the negative consequences in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestinian land and Lebanon.

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We contend that Islam and Shari'a law are neither oppressive to women nor are they anti women emancipation. There is substantive evidence both in the theory and practice which show that Islam and Sharia law are gender sensitive. For example

Islam and Shari'a law give women the right to freedom of association, participation and property ownership. The contradictions appear to be linked to the different interpretations and practice of Islam and Shari'a law in different historical, social, political, cultural and economic settings.

It is our thesis that for the Muslim women in Sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere to succeed towards emancipation and gender mainstreaming they must have a clear understanding of gender and their rights in Islam and Shari'a law, in the context of different social, political and economic situations obtaining in different states and circumstances. This will enable them and the international community to distinguish between women's rights and obligations as provided for in the Qur'an and Shari'a law from some of the contemporary wrong beliefs over gender mainstreaming and emancipation in Islam.

This paper is divided into three parts. The first part examines the theory of gender mainstreaming and women's rights derived from the Qur'an and Shari'a law. The second part discusses the historical, politics and
governance, different interpretations of the Qur’an and Shari a Law, global politics and economic crises in sub-Sahara Africa. It also attempts to bring out their linkages with gender mainstreaming and women emancipation. The last part is a conclusion.

A theory of Gender mainstreaming, Women emancipation and Human Rights: An interpretation from the Qur’an and Shari a law.

Gender mainstreaming and Sharia Law in Islam

There is a danger to day of assuming that gender mainstreaming is to be found only in theoretical schools and concepts generated by USA and Western Schools of Thoughts. However issues of gender and women emancipation have also preoccupied Islam and other civilizations. ¹ This was long before they became part of the global agenda for good governance.

Gender issues and women emancipation principles were recognized and provided for some 1400 years ago by Islam and Sharia law in the management of societies. They, for example have been variously referred to in the Qur’an and Sunnah.² According to the Qur’an, God says:

¹ Although traditional African societies have generally often been referred to as being hostile to women, some African cultural traditions suggest otherwise. For example, among the Baganda, in Uganda, it is well established that, “ Omukazi takubwa, atesa buteesa”, s literally translated as, “ No to wife beating in a home, but consultations among equal heads of a family ”.

² The Sunnah is the practice of Prophet Muhammad which is both an independent source of law and practical application of the principles contained in the Qur’an. There are two other sources of law, namely, the consensus of qualified jurists of a particular time (ijma), and the inference of principles from the primary sources and their application.

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O mankind, we created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into peoples (nations) and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily, the most honored of you before God is the most righteous of you.3

From this verse, we can discern a number of issues in relation to gender and women emancipation. First, the word ‘Peoples’ no doubt refers to both the female and male. It is therefore expressly implied here that in Islam, there is equality between a woman and a man. Secondly, the verse abhors any action or practice that may undermine the equality of a woman or a man, thus leading to a degrading status of the former. Thirdly in Islam, the most worthy and exemplary being is not a woman or man, but one that excels in doing well. It also underscores the reality that a righteous woman is preferred to a male devil. Indeed at the practical level, according to the Sunnah women are the twin halves of men. They, thus, have equality with men in rights, obligations, aim of existence and moral-spiritual excellence.

The Qur’an and Sunnah provisions regarding gender equality rise pertinent questions that require answers and explanations in the context of practical realities in Muslim countries and overall perceptions of women in Islam. For example, if indeed there is gender equality in Islam, why is it that in ‘Islamic’ and Muslim states and among Muslim

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3 The Qur’an, 49:13.
minority, the reality is a contrary one. We attempt to respond to this question in the subsequent sections of this paper.

Contemporary good governance and politics emphasize human rights and freedoms as embodied in the Universal Declarations and International instruments. Similarly, according to the Qur'an, Muslims must uphold and enforce justice at every moment and in any human relationship or transaction in the following verses:

O believer: uphold justice continually and steadfastly\(^4\)

God orders you to enforce justice\(^5\)

We must point out that this provision and the demand for enforcement of human rights under Islam are all-embracing and provide a comprehensive concept of justice which is absolute. For that matter human rights in Islam are extremely broad. They cover all domains and facets of earthly existence. They are not merely limited to domestic relations, political, economic and social rights specified in International Instruments and Covenants. They go further and wide. They for example, encompass the protection of the environment, plants and vegetables, and other creatures and animals. These rights have only been recently recognized by the international community.

According to Sunnah, the Prophet Muhammad once stated:

\(^4\) The Qur'an, 4:135.
\(^5\) The Qur'an, 16:90.
Show mercy and compassion to every thing on earth and God will show mercy to you.

We can also note the reality that Islam does not stop at guaranteeing human rights to life and property; it upholds the rights of non Muslim and all minorities in Muslim states. For example according to the Prophet Muhammad, during his last sermon before his death, he said:

I shall myself be the complainant, on the day of resurrection, against those who wrongs non Muslims or gives them responsibilities greater than they can bear or deprives them of any thing that belongs to them.

Consequently, any Muslim who violates the rights of a non Muslim commits a great offence.

On another occasion the Prophet reminded the Muslim about the human rights of non Muslims in an Islamic state:

Any Muslim who kills a non Muslim has not the slightest chance of catching even the faintest smell of Heaven. Protect them, they are my people.

6 The Qur’an.18:31
7 See the collections of Prophet Muhammad saying by Sahih Bukhari, Kitab al-Diyat
8 Sahih Bukhari, ibid.
In view of these well established principles and doctrines in Sunnah, one is tempted to ask why, Islam is perceived as anti human rights? Is it the Islamic practice or lack of knowledge among the people? We return to these questions in subsequent sub-section.

In an effort to operate Sharia law administration, contemporary Muslim states have drafted and enacted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Islam* based on the Qur’an, Sunnah and *Ijma*. According to Article 1(a) Human beings shall be equal and non shall enjoy a privilege or suffer a disadvantage or discrimination by reason of race, color, sex, origin or language. Several Muslim states have to date rectified this instrument with approval and support from United Nations.

In the current global gender debates, there are views that regard Shari'a law on polygamy as being an infringement on women rights. Many women right activists contend that polygamy does not provide women with the equal rights at marriage and during marriage as men. Some argue that it is only the men and not the women with the option to have more than one legally recognized spouse. However, according to the Qur’an, Muslims are enjoined to:

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\text{Marry such women as seen good..., two, three, four, but if you}
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fear that you will not be equitable, 
then only one\textsuperscript{11}

This verse underscores the intricacies over polygamy even within Islam and Sharia law. Some scholars have argued that by implications, a Muslim is commanded to marry one wife since equal and just treatment of several, as provided for by the Qur’an is beyond the ability of any human being. They, thus attribute the historical and current popularity of polygamy especially among the Muslim minorities in Sub Saharan Africa to misinterpretation of the Qur’an and the popularity of polygamous African tradition among Muslims.\textsuperscript{12} This perhaps explains the low rate of polygamous families in Muslim states. It is therefore erroneous to associate polygamous families to Islamic values. Indeed, there are also economic reasons for polygamy especially among peasant minority Muslims in sub Saharan Africa, which we examine in the next section.

\textbf{Governance in Islam and Sharia Law}

Goran Hyden defines governance as the management of rules and norms that set the framework for the conduct of politics by the state.\textsuperscript{13} In contemporary times, governance debates have dominated local and global politics with diverse understandings, interpretations and applications (Harrison, 2005; Hout, 2004; and UNESCAP,

\textsuperscript{11} The Qur’an, 54:98.

\textsuperscript{12} S.S.Kayunga, Islamic Fundamentalism in Uganda, CBR publications, No.37, Kampala, Uganda, P.58.

The debates have led to the evolution of two forms of governance: the good and the bad governance. Good governance is generally assumed to include the following variables:

- A strong and vibrant civil society
- A leadership which is accountable and transparent
- An efficient and effective bureaucracy
- Rule of law and human rights
- A leadership that is responsive to people’s needs
- Participatory
- Consensus oriented
- Zero sum corruption
- Consideration of minority views and interests
- Voices of most vulnerable are heard in decision-making
- Responsiveness to present and future needs of society

However, these scholars didn’t specifically indicate whether a political system with the variables of good governance should be a monarchy, a republican, federal or unitary, Islamic, Muslim, circular or military. In practice, however, there are monarchies with variables of good governance. Some monarchies have been responsible for efficient and effective bureaucracy, rule of law and human rights. The pertinent questions however, are, where do we

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14 The Saudi Monarchy for example has enjoyed unprecedented efficiency and effectiveness in bureaucratic terms. This has lead to some degree of social, political and economic stability. The world has not heard of state corruption common in most of the African states.
place Islamic or Muslim states in the context of good governance? Can Islamic governance theory and practice guarantee good governance within a context of assumed global variables?

Governance in Islam and Shari'a law emphasize consultation, participation, transparency and accountability of leaders and the governed. Above all public policy in an Islamic state must be responsive to the needs and demands of the people or else the government loses political legitimacy to rule not only from people's perspective but most importantly, from God (Allah). According to the Qur'an, God commands the leaders to:

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\text{Consult them (people) in affairs of governance, then when you have taken a decision (government), put your trust in Allah, for Allah loves those who put their trust in Him}^{15}
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Similarly on another occasion Allah, commanded Prophet Muhammad to consult his companions so that the practice would become a tradition for the community, whenever they are faced with any matter of public interest and importance.\(^{16}\)

These principles which guide governance in Islam can be compared to what takes place in Presidential and Parliamentary systems in a functioning western democracy. Arguably where, public policy decisions are taken with consultation and approval of a democratically elected

\(^{15}\) The Qur'an, 43:38.
parliament, representing the people. The major difference in our view lay in the qualification, form and nature. The political consultation in Islam is done between authority, scholars, expert on the issue being debated, representatives of the people (after civic education), opinion leaders and the whole community (through a referendum). It is our contention that this is an improvement on western democracy.¹⁷ Thus, the Islamic system of governance embodies key elements of good governance. To that extent, under this context, one may ask, why the views which associate Islam with bad governance? The answer to this question partly lay in governance practices in Muslim states which we examine in the next sub-section.

Challenges to Muslim Women in Sub Sahara Africa

The History of Islam

Islam in Sub Sahara Africa was introduced by Arab traders. This was mainly along the Trans Africa Trade routes. The Arab traders were not organized and prepared in that mission. They therefore lacked the expertise and resources for the systematic development of Islam as a religion with a strong social political and economic base, in particular in the education sector. This had implications to the Muslim woman. For example, there were no Muslim schools and those available were established and managed by Catholics and Protestants Missionaries. When Muslims

¹⁷ A Commissioner on the on going constitutional review exercise in Uganda, pointed out that one of their greatest obstacle is the lack of knowledge and awareness in the community about constitutional matters. Some one can propose for the reduction of Presidential powers when she/he is not even aware of the Presidential powers provided for in the current constitution. This certainly underscores the importance of consulting the experts and civic education.
later on built Qur’an schools, these admitted mainly young Muslims boys. The Muslim girl child was left at home to play and learn domestic work in preparation for marriage. Therefore apart from the scanty knowledge obtained from the husband about Islam, the Muslim woman in Sub Sahara Africa did not get the opportunity to access circular and Islamic knowledge. This reality means that because of history, a Muslim woman, for example lack even the basic knowledge about her rights in Islam. Such rights like political participation and the right to be elected to a political office are known by a few Muslim women. Since the majority cannot read the Qur’an on their own, they rely on men’s interpretations, often distorted towards their interests. Thus, men’s interpretations of the Qur’an and Sharia law in most cases emphasize their superiority over women. This has been the state of affairs over the years. For this reason, the precarious situation of a Muslim woman requires special attention in a state where there is affirmative action in political and educational arenas to enable her catch up with the rest of the women. For example, in Uganda, female candidates are awarded 1.5 entry points to state universities above their male counterparts. Although several studies have shown an increase in women enrolment in universities, the policy has not had the same impact on Muslim female candidates due to historical reasons. Therefore if the objective of the policy is women emancipation in totality, then a Muslim

girl candidate should be awarded extra points above for historical reasons.

Similarly, according to the national objectives and directive principles enshrined in the 1995 Republican Constitution of Uganda, No.6, it is expressly stated that the state of Uganda, shall ensure gender balance and fair representation of marginalized groups on all constitutional and other bodies.\textsuperscript{19} Indeed the Uganda National Resistance Movement (NRM) government has since 1986 initiated deliberate policies aimed at fair representation of marginalized groups like women. For example at each level of local government administration, there are posts reserved for women. Because of history, very few Muslim women have found their way into these political positions. We are, therefore, suggesting for special considerations for this group in order to increase the gains of women emancipation.

\textit{Politics and Governance}

It is now widely accepted that politics and governance influence the development process of any state. This is particularly the case because development strategies adopted by the state are outcomes of how politics is conceived, practiced and transformed. Put differently, the ways in which political rules, norms, methods and modes of interaction are established, maintained and changed would determine the possibilities as well as priorities for

development in the country. One of the implication is that gender balance and women emancipation as a development strategy cannot be realized in a state where there is political and governance crises. Where do we place the “Islamic”, Muslim and the majority of Sub-Saharan states in the context of good governance, political norms and practices? Do they present an exemplary model for gender balance and women emancipation?

Before we examine politics and governance in “Islamic” and Muslim states, it is important to differentiate between Islamic and Muslim states. A Muslim state is any state where the rulers are Muslims, irrespective of the form of governance or constitutional arrangement. For that matter, it can be ruled by a constitutional or an absolute monarchy. It can also be ruled by an Executive President or a Prime minister. There is also the tendency of such a state to fuse Islamic and western governance norms and practices. On the other hand an Islamic state is one where governance is strictly based on Islam, Shari a law and Sunnah.

We have already noted that governance in Islam is by consultation, participation and responsive to peoples needs. We also noted that Islam is compatible with gender balance and women emancipation. Indeed an ideal Islamic state conforms to what Hobbs refers to a government, where individuals enjoy peace, comfort and security of persons and property.\(^2\)


Unfortunately, however, there appears to be few practicing Islamic states in contemporary times. Where for example, women are free to work following the legacy of the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad, Khadija who was a hard working business woman and a very rich and wealthy lady. Indeed women then in Arabia moved freely and undertook all sorts of jobs up to the medieval ages. The situation however changed after the conservative juristic interpretation of the divine sources of Islamic law.\textsuperscript{22} That is possibly why Mazrui argues, that apart from places like Uganda, the most likely laboratories of gender planning may turn out to be the Muslim countries. The Muslim countries like Pakistan and Egypt have already experimented with special seats for women. Algeria, another Muslim state seems to have lead the way in the employment of women in the national air force.\textsuperscript{23} These Muslim states are not reinventing gender balance, but rather following the roots of Islamic governance.

Similarly, in Iran, another Muslim state, a transformation has been taking place in gender mainstreaming albeit in a dilute form.\textsuperscript{24} For example, since the advent of the Iranian Revolution, a significant number of women have been employed in the public arena. Indeed, it is not uncommon for a woman police officer, to be

\textsuperscript{23} A.Mazrui, "Constitutional Change and Cultural Engineering: Africa's Search for New Directions", in J.Oloka-Onyango, op.cit., p.18.
\textsuperscript{24} S.S.Kayunga, ibid., p.5.
promoted to a Police Commissioner’s post in the Iranian police force.

One may at this point, ask for an explanation for these contradictions. The answer arguably lay among others in the fact that Islam has not succeeded to change and influence indigenous cultures in totality to the extent that Zen Buddhism has done in Japan. Zen is central to the whole existence of the Japanese people.  

Another explanation can be found in the fact that after the death of Prophet Muhammad, in 632 A.D, Islam was embraced by peoples who had their long established cultures and traditions in their governance systems. In the process, Islam inadvertently absorbed and adopted some of these new cultures and traditions, mainly through new converts. Thus, Islam became diluted in many of the societies that embraced it.

Previously these social, political and economic systems had remained intact due to their geo-political positions. They were by nature in a sort of an island surrounded by water and sand that made it very difficult to be penetrated by external invading forces. These ensured their un-interrupted existence over centuries. Indeed, there is no known invader who succeeded in penetrating these sandy barriers and establishing a permanent foot holds before the advent of Islamic civilization in these regions.  

What do all these developments mean to a Muslim woman in Sub Saharan Africa? A great deal. But the most

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fundamental implication is that a Muslim woman has no perfect model of an Islamic state to act as a reference point for her in the area of gender balance and women emancipation and governance in Islam. What appear to be representatives of Islamic governance systems are fused with other values and behavior some of which contradict Islamic principles.

In Sub Saharan Africa, the reality that most of the state systems here are facing politics and governance crises has been well documented. In fact some of the states in this region have virtually collapsed. Regime changes and public policy engineering, through often undemocratic means is a common phenomena. Thus, each regime that capture state power institutes new sets of rules for politics and governance basically intended to alienate others from the governance process. This scenario is a great challenge to a Muslim woman. She is required, now and then, to adapt to these unstable and endless institutional and public policy changes, some of which may be in conflict with Islamic values.

The Domestic Relations Bill (DRB) in Uganda puts the dilemma of a Muslim woman in much more focus. There is no doubt that the Movement government which came to power in Uganda in 1986, carried out far reaching reforms in the gender balance and women emancipation in recent times. Uganda was at one time,

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[27] For example, it is difficult to imagine that there was once a state called Somalia. For details, see M.Kuhumba, "Ethnic Conflict and Movement Politics in Uganda", a paper presented to The Annual Symposium of International Learning Center, Mombassa, Kenya, 17th-18th June, 2002.

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regarded as one of the most gender sensitive state in the world. This was in the context, that else where, for example in Poland, after the ‘peaceful’ revolution which overthrew the communist government, the social status of women in society and in the family, became worse than before. The DRB sought to address and redress human rights at the family level. The objective of the bill was to consolidate all family related laws over marriage, divorce, separation and property rights into one statute. Basically, when enacted, the law would regulate relations in marriage and family and determine the legal status of women and men.

The most contentious section of the bill for a Muslim woman and the community in general was its provision regarding polygamy. The section by implication outlawed polygamous families. Yet, polygamy, as we noted is provided for by the Qur’an and Sunnah. Indeed, the Prophet Mohammad, who is a reference point for the implementation of Sharia law, married more than one wife. Therefore the Bill was seen by many Muslims as a violation of their rights under Islam and private family affairs. The Muslims, contended that for them, ‘in any matter regarding marriage, family and succession, they are guided by the Qur’an and Sunnah’. This is their unquestionable position, whether they are in a state where they are a minority.

The views by Muslims and others opposed to the Bill appear to conform to Mazrui's assertion that constitutionalism ought to include measures to limit state power in the lives of private individuals. For him an African should defend the Kraal (home) as much as an English man defends the castle against the state intrusion. Put differently, for the majority of Muslims in Uganda, Islam was their Kraal which they vowed to defend at all costs.

What is the way forward for a Muslim woman and the community in the context of the state intruding too far into their private life? Is there a mechanism to mitigate against these tendencies that may appear to be undemocratic? The answer partly laid in the formation of strong Muslim women interest groups. Interest groups are now widely accepted to be part of the civil society and an important variable for good governance and politics in a state. They play an important intermediary role standing between the private sphere and the state. Where the interest groups are active, they can check the undemocratic tendency of the state. This is in consonant with Othman Yasin's observation in the case of Arab-Muslims in USA. He attributes the negative US policies towards the Arab-Muslims to the weak Muslim based interest groups, in a situation where national policy is shaped and guided by organized groups. He argues that, while some wide spread

31 A. Mazrui, ibid.
prejudices exist against Arabs and Muslims; they can be overcome by Muslim interest groups, since the prejudices are basically as a result of lack or insufficient information and knowledge about Islam. The same approach can be used in South Africa. The South African state like most non Muslim states does not recognize Islamic Personal law (IPL). In fact South Africa follows the Dutch law which is diametrically opposed in origin, principles, aims and application to Islam and Sharia law.

To overcome such dilemma there are scholars who have advanced the view that Muslims in non Muslim states should start Islamic political parties as a measure to articulate their interests. Although we have argued elsewhere, that it is not wrong for individuals or groups to start a political party within a religious constituency, it is not plausible in the case of minority Muslims in Sub Sahara Africa. The experience has shown that it is difficult for such a party to capture state power. For example, although the Islamic Front in Algeria (FIS), had obtained enough votes required for taking over state power, the then incumbent regime called off the second round of elections to pre-empt such an eventuality. The regime in Algeria no doubt had strong support from USA and Western powers.

In 1992, when Kenya restored multiparty system, the Muslims started the Islamic Party in Kenya (IPK) to

35 M.Kulumba, Interest Groups in the Democratization Process of Uganda”, ibid., p.5.
articulate their interests. However, it did not take off, beyond Mombassa where, there is a high concentration of Muslims. Similarly, in Uganda, in 1954, the Catholics started the Democratic Party (D.P) to fight for their historical marginalization in a colonial state administration which was dominated by Protestants. Although D.P is still in existence, its performance at the national level has been to a great extent a failure. It is therefore difficult for such a party to attract people outside its traditional constituency. These people will always be suspicious of such a party. This, thus, deprives such a party the opportunity to assume national leadership. The best alternative, we believe lay in strengthening and forming strong interest groups and civil society in general as opposed to political parties. This however calls for the empowerment of affected groups especially through education.

**Different interpretations of the Qur’an and Shari’a Law**

The Qur’an and Shari’a a law like the Bible, have unfortunately been subjected to different interpretations by different groups within various socio-political and economic settings over the years. Some times various interpretations have come from individuals, state actors with vested interest and in other situations, superimposed from outside sources. This has resulted in a serious dilemma for a Muslim woman for the identification of a correct interpretation, conceptualization and practices of gender mainstreaming and women emancipation in Islam.

Scholars have noted that the interpretation of the Qur’an and Shari’a a law have been used by some male dominated Muslim leadership as a ground for refusing
Muslim women their rights as individuals, including the right to participate equally in politics and in the public arena. Among others, it is noted that there are gymnastics used with Arab grammar, the official language of the Qur'an in order to mistranslate some key words. For example, when a masculine gender word is used for an injunction that it is felt a woman must obey, it is interpreted to denote the common gender imbalance. But when the same pronoun is used for something that a male wants to preserve for himself, and then it is interpreted to mean masculine gender.

In the same vein, liberal Muslims place the blame for the inferior status of women in Muslim countries, on the distorted juristic interpretations of the original sources, augmented by the social practices of many diverse cultural traditions. Accordingly, these traditions must be distinguished from Islam whose original message was to improve the status of women and to preach equality of the sexes as we noted in this paper. Indeed, the fact that the status of women was much better in the period of early Islam in comparison to their status in contemporary Muslim world must be a constant reference point. Thus, when properly understood, Islam actually supports equal rights for both sexes.

The consequence of different interpretations of the Qur'an and Sharia law has led to various practices in

Muslim states. In Tunisia, for example, which is widely regarded as one of the most progressive Muslim state in Africa, the family law treats polygamy as a crime punished by imprisonment.

Similarly, in Iraq, besides the undemocratic nature of governance during Saddam Hussein regime, the percentage of working women was not only high in relation to other Muslim states, but working women had extensive access to employment benefits. This included, free child care and the right to retire with full pension after fifteen years of service. In addition, maternity leave with full pay was substantially longer than in the USA and many other Western states. In other words, Iraq, a Muslim state had incorporated key elements of gender mainstreaming and gender balance principles from the Qur'an and Sharia law. It was, therefore not by accident.

In view of these developments, the way forward for the Muslim women in Sub Saharan Africa is to struggle for gender mainstreaming and women emancipation as provided for in the Qur'an and Sharia law.

Global politics and Media

The contemporary phenomena of global politics have brought about many facets and dimensions. It, among other things, assumes that the worldly society is being or has been transformed into a global village where there is inter linkages and inter dependencies in all aspects of human endeavors. It also means that the inhabitants of this village

are expected to conform to certain universally accepted social, cultural, political, economic norms and behavior. This is intended to ensure among others, peaceful co-existence and stability in the global village. However, it has now emerged that within the global village there are major actors, periphery observers and a lot of injustices. The major actors own and control most of the global resources including the media. They also dominate most of the policy formulations and outcomes in the global village. The Muslim and Sub Sahara African states unfortunately fall within the domain of the periphery observers and consumers of global policies and outcomes. What is the implication of all these to a Muslim woman in Sub Sahara Africa? The implications are many. However we will, on our part focus on the global media.

The global media for example, communicate information on a daily basis which portray Islam and Shari’a law as systems which are violent and against gender balance and women emancipation. We examine the widely reported adultery case of Safiya in Nigeria to illustrate. When an Islamic court in Northern Nigeria convicts Safiya Hussein for committing adultery and sentences her to death by stoning, the court ruling is widely communicated in the global media. The action equally receives international condemnation and outrage against Islam and Shari’a law as being violators of women rights.\textsuperscript{39} However when Safya appeals to a higher Islamic court and is cleared of all the charges, during the proceedings, the ruling does not receive the same attention from the global media. This means, that

\textsuperscript{39} The Monitor News paper, July 15\textsuperscript{th} 2002, p.29.
a Muslim woman receives only the perceived ‘negativity’ of Sharia law through the global media. It is indeed observed that the positive developments from that part of the village, associated with the adoption of Sharia law, for example, the falling rates in crime, HIV/AIDS and moral decadents are not communicated. This is a challenge to a Muslim woman in Sub-Sahara Africa, who as we noted, has limited knowledge of Islam. Thus, making it difficult for her to discern truth from falsehood in the global media.

There is also the growing tendency for the global media to distort information regarding Islam and Sharia law. This tendency increased after the tragic attack on the World Trade Center on September, 11th 2001 which was linked to Islamic extremism (terrorism). Since then the global media has accused Islamic values, systems and education as global promoters of terrorism. This has had great negative implications to the Muslim community. For example, in Germany, before the attack, the Muslim minority enjoyed great human rights and freedoms. They used quite often to meet freely in their Islamic centers and mosques without any fear from the state. However, under the Germany new provisions of general system, introduced as a measure to fight international terrorism, a Germany interior Ministry official can enter any time such centers and interrogates the members at will. Thus, the contemporary daily life of a Muslim, especially in Europe and USA global villages is one of constant fear and despair. Indeed, although global politics assumes that one is free to travel and live anywhere of one's choice, it is

becoming very difficult for one with a Muslim name to get entry visa to either USA or Europe. These contradictions in the global politics put a Muslim woman from Sub Sahara Africa in a dilemma in several ways. For example, whether to abandon Islamic values in order to be accepted in some parts of the global village.

Muslim Scholars have attempted to define terrorism within the context of *Ijma*. For them, terrorism is an aggression, committed by individuals or groups of states unjustly against a human being, whether be it on the basis of his or her religion, life, intellect, wealth or honor. It also includes all acts of intimidation, causing harm, threatening, killing without due right, and all acts involving armed robbery, and attacking travelers as well as committing any violent action. Threatening an individual in the process of implementation of collective criminal project, which aims at, inciting fear in order to extract vital information, thus exposing one to great risks. Terrorism also includes causing harm to environment or to a private or public facility or exposing natural or national resources to danger.41 All these acts come under mischief on earth which Allah prohibits Muslims from committing. The Qur’an states:

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\text{And seek not (occasions for) mischief in the land: for Allah loves not those who do mischief.}^42
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This verse enjoins on all the Muslims to desist from any activity likely to lead to any sort of disaster in the

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42 The Qur’an, 28:77).
global village. Therefore, in a situation where Muslims have been involved in acts of terrorism, they do so as individuals. It is therefore wrong to point an accusing finger on universal Islamic values or other systems in the global village. For Islam, even the action of a major actor, refusing to sign for example, the Tokyo Protocol on global environment is deemed an act of terrorism. The same is true for supporting international trade policies that result in unfavorable balance of trade leading to absolute poverty among sections of the global community. These to a great extent, show how far and deeper terrorism is regarded in Islam beyond the conventional understanding and interpretations.

The challenge for a Muslim woman is to struggle for knowledge and skills to enable her to differentiate between the distorted forms of terrorism associated to Muslims by the global media.

We must also point out that Islam was at the forefront in the establishment of a global village with peaceful coexistence and without any form of terrorism. We learn from history that under the Muslim empire, the Arabs, Indians, Africans, Spaniards, women and men of different races and colors worked together, each contributing equally their best to the development and prosperity of a global village. This enriched the Islamic civilization. The resultant relationship was unique in nature, universality and comprehensiveness. It had no major actors and periphery observers. For this reasons, the Islamic global village was more accommodative and stable, socially, economically and politically than the contemporary global village.
Economic Crises

The economic crises in Sub Sahara Africa have been of great concern by scholars and the international community. For example, the current debt burden of African nations is currently estimated to be over $235 billions. This is higher than the total income of all the countries in Sub Sahara Africa which is $230 billions. This scenario is illustrated in the table below:

The Debt burden of Sub Sahara African States

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Debt in $,000</th>
<th>GNP per Capita</th>
<th>Debt Service % of GNP</th>
<th>Balance of payments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>12,173</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>1,119</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>-103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo DRC</td>
<td>12,929</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>-658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>5,119</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>-252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>10,352</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>-520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>1,226</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>-143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>1,243</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>131</td>
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<td>Sudan</td>
<td>16,843</td>
<td>.290</td>
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<td>-1.99</td>
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<td>Uganda</td>
<td>3,935</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>-706</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>4,716</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


43 W.M.Mande, "War and the Debt Burden in the Great Lakes Region" a paper presented at conference organized by the Department of Political Science, Makerere University, Kampaala, 2000, p.5.
The statistics in the table show, the extent of economic crises in the Sub Sahara Africa. These states are indebted, mostly to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Governments of the west and the World Bank. The economic situation is likely to worsen since the states continue to borrow for debt servicing and development programs. In the case of Uganda, recent economic statistics show that the number of Ugandans living below poverty line has increased. It is estimated that about 7.7 million Ugandans out of a total population of 22 millions live in abject poverty.\textsuperscript{44} What does this grave economic situation mean to a Muslim woman in Sub Sahara Africa?

Before we examine the implications from the economic crises dimension, it is important to note that the Muslim women group is not homogenous. There are the urban and elite and rural women. Each one has had different impact and intervention to the economic crises. Even within the urban and the elite Muslim women, there are the educated and semi-illiterate. The latter are in the majority. The economic crises have forced the majority of urban Muslim women into the informal sector. Many women have found the informal sector very attractive because they are able to perform their domestic responsibilities as well.\textsuperscript{45}

Much as the informal sector has provided the alternative exit from the wide spread poverty, there are

\textsuperscript{44} See. The Background to the Budget,2002/2003, p.5.
constraints. For example, lack of capital and credit facilities, inadequate education and skills, time demand made on women by household chores and lack of appropriate technology and relevant information.\textsuperscript{46}

There are however specific limitations to a Muslim women. First, motherhood is highly regarded and valued in Islam. Some traditions cite the Prophet Muhammad emphasizing motherhood and breast feeding. Indeed, the rewards are many for those who engage in the act.\textsuperscript{47} In the case of a working Muslim woman, it is desirable to take leave off her work, moreover without formal maternity leave benefits. This affects the performance of a Muslim woman in her venture.

Secondly, under Islamic law, men are obliged to maintain their wives. This provision some times makes the Muslim woman to put in fewer efforts in her informal business.

Thirdly, the different interpretations of the Qur’an and other sources of Islamic law as we noted affect Muslim women access and performance in their work outside the home. As a result, many Muslim women are made to believe that they are not allowed to engage in such activities outside their homes.

The situation is worse not only for Ugandan rural Muslim woman but also to all rural women in Sub Sahara Africa. The majority of Sub Sahara African economies

\textsuperscript{46} V.M.Mwaka, ibid., p.503.
\textsuperscript{47} Qur’an 2:233; 31:14
depend on agriculture and the peasants contribute about 90% of this agricultural production. The rural woman provides more than 80% of free labor to the agricultural peasant production. Scholars have pointed out problems faced by the rural women. Many women still depend on cash brought into the home by the husband spouse. For our part, we have argued else where that agriculture is a complex venture that cannot uplift the peasant standard of living beyond subsistence. Currently most of the Sub Saharan African states are faced with environmental disaster due to land degradation by the peasants. Arguably, such land can be used more profitably by commercial farmers who have the capacity to withstand the vagalaries of weather and the constantly changing market prices. To that extent, mechanisms should be devised for viable and large scale farming. These will provide employment to the peasants, thus improving the standards of living of rural women beyond poverty lines.

In general, the low level of households incomes have meant that a Muslim woman, whether in urban or rural areas cannot meet some of the Islamic obligations that require financial resources. For example Islam prescribes a mode of dressing for Muslim women. However the cost of an Islamic dress is beyond the means of most Muslim women in sub-Saharan Africa. The majority can only afford second hand clothing USA and Europe where Islamic code of dressing is rare. Therefore, what is available on the open market are un Islamic short dresses and skirts. In extreme cases some of the young Muslim

48 V.M.Mwaka, ibid., p.501.
women in urban areas have found their way in prostitution despite the danger of HIV/AIDS.

**Conclusion**

We have attempted to demonstrate in this paper that despite national and global efforts, the reality is that a Muslim woman in Sub-Saharan Africa has registered fewer gains and faces more challenges towards gender mainstreaming and women emancipation. The reasons for this partly lay in the fact that the whole process has been dominated by the local state and global politics. The input from a Muslim woman has largely been absent. For that matter it is important for a Muslim woman to be provided with opportunities to participate in these actions and programs. For this to be realized, we need to invest more in education and skill building programs for a Muslim girl child in Sub Sahara Africa.

In the case of some Muslim states, this is an opportune moment for them to move away from the rhetoric’s of assuming to be Islamic and to practice Islamic good governance. This we believe will reduce the wrong perception within the global village of equating Islam with acts of violence, imbalance, oppression of women, bad governance and all forms of human rights violations and injustices. This process however must be gradual and not sudden, internally generated and not externally imposed. The latter will certainly be resisted and opposed. It is also desirable for the global community to define and conceptualize the phenomenon of globalization and global village in terms of justice for all. The current form of global politics, incurred in a ‘single power’ international
system, no doubt puts the Muslim world and a Muslim woman in Sub Sahara Africa in a dilemma in the context of absence of a neutral arbiter, global injustices and unfair contemporary global forces. It is therefore a challenge for Muslim scholars in Africa to assist in the development of a countervailing force, capable of checking the injustices in the contemporary global village.
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