

**THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ISLAM, TRADITION AND MODERNITY:  
A REFLECTION ON NORTHERN NIGERIAN CRISIS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES  
ON GIRL CHILD EDUCATION**

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***ABSTRACT:** Islam is an ideology per excellence and as a universal revolutionary movement, is all out to topple and replace local and international tradition which are obnoxious, retrogressive, anti-humanity and are opposed to its development. However, only local or international tradition which does not contrast the Shariah as enshrined in Qur'an and hadith is tolerated but also welcomed and sanctioned. Similarly no matter how conservative and reactionary, a tradition may be considered once it found to be in conformity with the teaching of Islam, it will not only be tolerated by Islam, but it will be seriously defended and supported. Islam is not as many people have wrongly conceived it to be. It is not anti-science and technology. Islam is not opposed to the pursuit of knowledge from whatever quarter it may be, what Islam is seriously against and will never compromise on that, is the pollution of faith and even out right de-islamization, associated with the Western (Boko) system of education, if evidence found beyond any reasonable doubt then such knowledge will be rejected. Islam and the Muslim respect science and technology and any field of knowledge which is beneficial to mankind. The historical truth of the matter is that Islam and Muslim owned science and technology and were the first to make some positive and fundamental contribution to science and technology which formed the basis of development in such areas like Algebra by Jabeer in mathematics, Ibn Khaltum the master of politics and Abisina of Botany in Medicine and many field of human endeavours etc.*

**Keywords:** Islam, Conflict, Modernity, Tradition, Girl Child Education.

### **Introduction**

Islam and the Muslim do not oppose to Western System of education per-se, what they are opposed to are the de-Islamizing element associated with the Boko system of education, more especially, cultural imperialism, mis-orientation, de-womanization of women and the womanization of men, as well as mental slavery and ideological confusion. The point must be clearly made that if modernity means westernization, Europeanization or even Americanization and "taghoot – ismania". Then there will continue to be perpetual conflict between Islamically sanctioned tradition and modernity. But if modernity refers to the development of a healthy, positive oriented educational development in science and technology, then Islam welcomes such modernity.

The chief characteristic of Islam is that it makes no distinction between the spiritual and the secular in life. Its aim is to shape both individual lives as well as society as a whole in ways that it will ensure that the kingdom of God may really be established on earth and that peace, contentment and wellbeing may fill the world.

### **The Intellectual State of the Muslims**

The place of knowledge and its role in the development of our modern society cannot be overemphasized. The current inferiority complex to Muslim globally is due to its scientific, technological, economic and military backwardness as a result of total neglect to intellectual and academic pursuits by the Muslims. This decline began during the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, when the Muslim world was attacked and devastated by Mongol Invasion from the east and the Christian crusaders from the west.

This intellectual stagnation brought about a situation whereby different habit of the Muslim world adhere to a given school of thought and the major source of Islamic thought and creativity – ijihad – was closed and life bordering to rituals was seen as perfect (Shafiq 1994).

During the intervening centuries, the west made remarkable and rigid development due to scientific and technological advancement, while Muslim world continue to retrogress and becoming more backward. The west, now superior in almost every sphere of life, it was quiet easy for them to conquer and colonize the Muslims in response to this calamity, Muslim nationalist tried to westernized the Muslims with the hope of becoming viable from every angle.

Such an attempt failed and the Muslim world ended up becoming even more dependent upon the west. The most degrading effect to the Muslims is the secular form of education introduced according to Gwong – Wad (2000) “through this form of education, there is a clear dichotomy between Islamic form of education and secular disciplines. The former was deliberately relegated to the background and the latter fully encouraged. The result is the mass production and turning out of secularist elites who tend to defend secular world views”.

According to Idris (1987:202-) “what we call knowledge today is knowledge within the framework of the western philosophy now prevailing in the west”. This influences our concept of truth, of evidence, of facts and even our choice of priorities and field of research.

### **Reflection on Northern Nigerian Crisis**

The Muslims in the northern region however consolidated the remains of the Jihad of Shehu Uthman Danfodio. The institution of the emirate council put in place by Danfodio was still in force even after the killing of the 13<sup>th</sup> successor of the Shehu, Sultan Attahiru

Ahmadu by the colonialist at Burma in 1903 even before the Jihad of Shehu Uthman there wasn't anything like disunity amongst the Muslims in the Bilad as Sudan despite the presence of the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyyah Sufi orders. Though there were some minor differences, this did not degeneration into disunity amongst the groups.

It should be remembered that the dominant jurisprudences in the west Africa region is Maliki school of thought which was the reference point in the Kanom-Bornu empire over 1000 years ago which Shehu Uthman the Mujadadi, revived before his death in 1817 C.E. it should be observed that, despite the existence of diplomatic correspondence of say fawa "Mais" of Borno empire with Egypt, Turkey and Morocco, influence of "external" Madhab was greatly suppressed. It is very gratifying to note the resistance of Uthman Ibn Idris, Shehu of Borno, to some Arabs who invaded his empire around 794AH (1391 CE) in a letter to Barquq, the Mamluk and Sultan of Egypt, Shehu of Borno made the following observations:-

"Some Arabs, indeed, spread corruption in our land and are good for nothing. They are ignorant of the book of God and Sunnah of the Prophet and they regard wickedness an attractive occupation".

Diplomatic ties, especially after the independent in 1960 with the Arab worlds through the effort of the premier of the Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello opened a new ground for cross fertilization of ideas and opinions of various schools of thought. The Nigerian Muslim, more especially the northern Muslims from that time had a wider contact with many Muslims countries especially, Saudi Arabia where the Hambali fiqh was the dominating school of thought.

Students were sponsored to the Hijaz and neighboring states to read Islamic Studies. At the local level some students and clerics came to contact with various Islamic literatures and what should have been treated as a more academics exercise, as they were led to emergence of various groups. Each group claims the absolute knowledge of being on the right path, regarding others as Shirk, Bid'ah and Kufr as the case may be. Which many belief to be one of the genesis of religion crisis such as "Mai ta tsine", "Boko Haram", and allied that engulf northern Nigeria today. Parvez Monzoor in his agenda column in the Afkar magazine observed that **"our unity is not only a sentiment of values; it is also our blueprint of the future"**.

There is no gain saying in the fact that the Muslim today is the very antithesis of the Islamic unity. It is divided into a number of petty-states and even pettier non-states. The Hijazi and other Gulf state consider themselves as Arabs before any other consideration pan Arabians and not Islamic universal brotherhood, is the operative Slogan in most of the bureaucratic conferences attended by the oil rich Sheikhs and their Western

counterparts, yet the issue of Palestine remain unsolved. Each Arabs state is ever ready to fight it fellow Arab state and Islamic terrorist on the other hand. It is tantamount to stating the obvious that Muslims scholars contributed to the epidemic of disunity that enveloped the nation of Islam. The individualistic ambition of many scholars can be easily noted in their various submissions during their tafsir session, especially during the month of Ramadan. It can be easily concluded that personal interest, ego, flamboyance, materialism and above all Riya and Takabur were the canker worm eating the collective interest of the Muslims folk.

### **The Girl Child Education and Its Consequences in Northern Nigeria**

On 27<sup>th</sup> May, 2008 Nigeria recognizes education as a fundamental human right and is signatory to the major conventions for the protection of the right of children (girls and boys) and women, in 2004, the country enacted the Universal Basic Education (UBE) law to fast track attainment of EFA Goals. The enabling legislation, the compulsory, free Universal Basic Education Act provides for nine (9) years continuous education (comprising 6 years primary and 3 years junior secondary) known as basic education. All states have now passed UBE laws.

The 2005 National School Census (NSC) revealed a Net Primary Enrolment Ratio (NER) of 83.71% (male = 87.01% female = 81.39%) suggesting that a substantial proportion (16%) of the primary school age population (6-11 years) was not enrolled in primary schools. This may look encouraging but there are large geographical and gender disparities between the south and north regions of Nigeria, partly due to underlying socio-cultural factors.

Girls NER in some state in the south are as high as 70% while some in the north are as low as 24%. The picture is worse in secondary schools with the National Female Enrolment ratio at 44%. The regional break down shows an alarming disparity with girls NER of 60% in the south-west while the north-west shows a dismal 10%.

Between 2002 and 2005, completion ratios have improved for boys by 3% (from 83.4% to 86.4%), while they decline from girls by 8% (from 83% to 75%). Gender participation (measured by gender ratio-G12) still favoured males with wide variations in gender gap in access to primary education across the states and zones.

The underlying causes include the low value accorded by parent to girls' education, early marriages, poverty, low-quality learning environment and low value accorded to girl's education, harmful practices, local beliefs, and norms that impact negatively on girls' education. Against this backdrop, the federal government is making efforts to ensure that children everywhere both boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary education, this is done in close partnership with development partners, civil society organization, private sector, philanthropic individual and organizations. UNICEF

Nigeria and other development partners have been undertaken including the current Girls Education Project (GEP) geared towards promoting and enhancing girls' participation in education. The GEP was inspired by an earlier initiatives, the African Girls Education Initiative (AGEI) delivered through UNICEF and its government partners and funded by the Norwegian government. This intervention recorded remarkable progress including a 28% increase in girls' (GER) and an 80% decrease in drop out ratios for girls in the intervention schools.

AGEI emanated from the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI) and led to the establishment of the Nigerian Girls Education Initiative (NGEI) whose main aim is to improve the quality of life of girls in Nigeria through a collaborative approach to their education, with strong network with CSOs and federal and state government.

Subsequent to GEI, UNICEF also supported the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) to develop the Strategy for the Acceleration of Girls' Education in Nigeria (SAGEN), after Nigeria's inclusion in the UNICEF supported '25 by 2005' global initiative in 2003. This national FME/UNICEF initiative then developed into SAGENT in early 2004, with support from other major international development partners.

The Girls Education Project (GEP) emerged from this broader strategic alliance as a tripartite undertaking by DFID, the government of Nigeria and UNICEF. It is also the largest DFID/UNICEF partnership in the world with the aim to boosting girls' participation in Northern Nigeria where it is being implemented in six northern states (Bauchi, Sokoto, Jigawa, Katsina, Borno and Niger).

The girls education initiative take an intersect oral approach, including intervention in the field of health, water and sanitation and income generation activities to support girls in school to accelerate progress toward MDGs 2 and 3, but also impact on the other six MDGs, especially health MDGs. The girl's education project has continued to record success in access to education for girls since its inception. Increases in enrolment and attendance ratio and decrease in gender gaps have been experienced during the project implementation phase. On average, in the project implementation focus communities girls' enrolment has increased by an average of 73% from 2005. This has resulted in an overall reduction of gender gaps in the GEP focus schools from 44% in 2005 to 31% in 2007. Attendance ratio have also improved, with an 11.9% enrolment in the GEP focus schools, with that of girls increasing by 39%. Much of the overall success is attributed to sustained political commitment at the federal and state level including increased funding to support girls education. Development of policies including the National Policy on gender in Basic Education, focusing on mainstreaming gender in educational planning and implementation, the establishment of School Based Management Committees (SBMCs) in all schools in Nigeria, the multi-sectoral policy for integrated early childhood care and development, the school health policy and the national education sector HIV/AIDS

strategic plan. These major outcomes exemplify the overall systematic impact on the girls' education interventions and the education sector as a whole.

Government efforts in addressing gender issues in education have been strong currently in close collaboration with DFID, UNESCO Paris and the MDG support team (UNDP New-York), UNICEF is supporting the Federal Ministry of Education, pushing for result, increased funding, improved facilities and evidenced based advocacy with traditional and religious leaders in favour of girls' participation in schools. Strong Network through the (NGEI), with partnership with NGO's that support girls education. NGEI ground patron is the first lady of the nation, while the wives of governors at the state land and the patrons of the static chapters.

The establishment of SBMC<sup>s</sup> is a policy requirement in all schools in Nigeria. The SBMC is a structure representing all key stakeholders of the community working with the school to improve the management and ensure improved teaching and learning for the children. They represent the participation of the community in school administration and the potential to transform, sustain education, and promote school governance at the grassroots level. The SBMC innovation, the head teacher, teacher representatives, pupil representatives (when appropriate), representatives of the P.T.A. and other stakeholders from the community, including religions and traditional leaders. SBMCs have been rallying point for collaborative actions; the communities through the SBMCs have been empowered have a voice in the running and management of the school as well as providing support to girls' education. Women participation includes involvement in mobilization and sensitization of other women folk on the need for the education of girl-child, and ensuring gender mainstreaming in school management.

The involvement and support of stakeholders at the community level has been a key to the success and the sustainability of the efforts in reducing the gender gap and moving toward equality in education.

### **Conclusion**

Going by what is happening in the north Nigeria as a result of the activities of the newly born sect. which is advocating for total ban and rejection of western education known as (Boko) to them the knowledge is been associated or polluted with element of polytheism or shirk which is not lawful to be acquired by Muslim these advocacy brings a lots of damages to western education in northern Nigeria more especially the girl-child education. The recent instances is that of burning of primary schools in Yobe, Borno and Kano and also killing of primary school teachers in the above states another example is the recent report by the UNICEF which said in the world over more than 50 million children are either not in schools or are drop-out with the largest share in Africa and Nigeria has the highest figure of 10 million pupils in Africa and world at large, coming to Nigeria, northern Nigeria is leading. All these are happening as a result of the crisis in the

northern Nigeria which not only affect the girl-child education but also affect the socio economic activities of the north with issues like; Poverty, ignorance of the parent, cultural belief, religions policies does a serious damage to girl-child education in northern Nigeria.

### **Suggestions**

The high level of advocacy include; meeting with state governors and leading Islamic figures such as the most reared Sultan of Sokoto, Ulamas etc. the sultan who provides leadership to the traditional rulers for and targeted communication strategy that has contributed to affective advocacy toward girl-child education use of and consistent reinforcing of key messages such as the call that educating all children is a religious duty, drawing an evidence from Qur'an and other religious text, what is going on the polio vaccination, this has influence many parents to take their children, particularly girls to school. It has been experienced that when properly informed, community leaders plays a crucial role in tackling issues of low priority for girls education, child labour, early marriage, wrong perception of western education as being incompatible with traditional/religious/cultural beliefs and toward the benefits and outcomes of educating girls.

The provision of quality education services at the school level, and ensuring that the minimum standard of a child friendly school environment are met leads to increased confidence of community members on education and increased enrolment and improved attendance, especially that of girls, water and sanitation facilities in the communities and in schools in particular have contributed to improved life of not only school pupils but parents as well and greatly contributed to increased enrolment and retention of children in school, particularly girls. Young girls have reported that having clean toilet available at school has really changed their attitudes to attending school.

### **Recommendation**

- Establishment of child – friendly school principles as minimum benchmark for effective school linked to community empowerment and developments.
- Building institutional capacity for promoting girls education and the capacity of stakeholders on gender sensitivity and sexuality.
- Collaborating with government and other stakeholders in reviewing existing curricular and teaching material for gender sensitivity, promoting the employment of more female teachers to serve as role model and mentoring out of school girls.
- Monitoring and evaluating of girl-child education programmes, mobilizing and strengthening inspectorate for effective service delivery.
- Increasing funding to education should be consistent.

- MDG fund should be diverted to girl-child education for proper funding.
- Girl child should have monthly allowance.
- Uniform and textbooks should be given free to them.
- Lunch should be given during school time.
- PTA levy should also be abolished because its discourage parents to send their wards to school more especially the girl child etc.

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