

Women's Involvement in the Labour Market & Christian-Muslim Relationship Nurture in Uganda

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Abstract

The paper examines the feminine roles that, when women are empowered and unleashed, the characters can be manipulated to nurture productive Christian-Muslim relationships in Uganda. To resolve the thesis puzzle, the literary interpretation and historical-critical methodologies have been relied on. Research findings indicate that the challenge of low levels of education has persisted among the Muslim community in Uganda. Due to limited education exposure, most Muslims in Uganda are incapacitated to support their households to attain quality standards of living. Economic hardships have been taken by Muslims as yardsticks to project their hostilities towards Christians. Muslim youth are instigated by militia groups to confront the government and Christians to fight for their identity. The anti-Christian feelings of Muslims about being discriminated against and marginalized in the government employment sector are promoted by the Alliance Defence Force rebel group. As a result, the Muslim community in Uganda is viewed by the Christians with fearful suspicion. Despite Muslims comprising a minority population in Uganda, militant Islamists kill Christian evangelists and Muslims who convert to Christianity. To minimize the ugliness of Christian-Muslim hostilities, a dialogue engagement process has been constructed that, when well manipulated, can influence Christian-Muslim women to nurture interfaith relationships in Uganda. Women bear the majority of responsibility for upholding society's cultural traditions. Several biblical women are recorded to have moulded the masculine outlook of their sons and husbands. In Islamic culture, mothers are accorded a high social status. Mothers take on the divine obligation of shaping the paradise destiny of their children. Whereas African women are nurturers of boys and girls. At their laps, social traditions are passed down through songs, proverbs, poems, totems, and taboos. It is such feminine gold mines; if they are strategically manipulated, then Ugandan women can be champions at nurturing Christian-

Muslim relationships.

Keywords

Women, Christian, Muslim, Relationships, Dialogue

1. Introduction

Globally, even when women make up more than half of the male population, only 47 percent of working-age women are active in the labour market, compared to 74 percent of men. To make matters worse, 1.1 billion women are unable to access financial services from microfinance institutions to boost their contributions to society through their labour (United Nations, 2020; Girma, 2024). In Sub-Saharan Africa, most women are involved in unpaid domestic labour that disconnects them from wider social networks. As such, their contributions to Africa's socio-economic growth decreased from 18 percent to 11 percent between 2000 and 2022 (United Nations, 2020; Yusufu, 2024). In Uganda, although 10 million women were recorded in the community work age bracket in 2017, the unemployment rate in the commercial market was 14.4 percent, compared to men's 6.2 percent. In reality, occupational segregation in the formal and private employment sectors is high in Uganda. Women are involved in the informal and domestic employment sector, which is socially and intellectually less engaging (Ntale, 2019).

Women bear most of the responsibility for upholding society's cultural traditions and meeting the basic needs of households. Nonetheless, in most cases, they are systematically denied the resources, information, and freedom of action they need to fulfil their feminine nurturing responsibilities (United Nations Development Program, 2021). Certainly, if women are supported, empowered, and unleashed, then incidences of Christian-Muslim hostilities in Uganda can be minimal. Therefore, relying on literary interpretation (Greenstein, 2020: pp. 86-87) and historical-critical methodology (Yilmaz, 2012), Christian-Muslim engagements from precolonial Uganda through 2024 were reviewed, and women's involvement in biblical and Islamic Arabia was examined. The Christian Bible and the Qur'an were the primary texts that were examined.

Generally, literary-critical tools were applied to highlight the manifestations of Christian-Muslim hostilities in Uganda, display women's involvement in Christianity and Islam, portray the social relationships that nurture women's roles, and examine the dialogue engagement process that can be manipulated to influence Christian-Muslim women to nurture interfaith relationships in Uganda.

Indeed, desk research approach was much preferred because of the regional variations in Uganda that would have made it costly for the researcher to collect information from the primary respondents. However, reliance on secondary sources is without limitations. As such, outdated sources may have been included, and the researcher may have omitted important information (Walker, 2023). Therefore, a

well-programmed field-based research needs to be carried out to figure out how best Christian-Muslim women's relationships can be utilised to scale down inter-faith conflicts in Uganda. Finally, the AI Grammar checker was employed to help in linguistic alignment.

2. Manifestations of Christian-Muslim Conflicts in Uganda

Christian-Muslim rivalries in Uganda are traceable from the time the two faiths came into confrontational contact with each other at Kabaka's court in Buganda. The two religions had their dark history of Islamic jihad and Christian crusader religious-political aggressions that they offloaded on Ugandan soil. At the first interface of Arab Muslims and European Christians in Uganda, Muslim jihadists and Christian missionaries engaged in unhealthy competition. Their religious teachings sparked suspicion and mistrust, leading to military conflicts. Churches and mosques were destroyed, sacred books were burnt, people were killed, homes were burnt to ashes, gardens and livestock were destroyed, and many people fled from their homes (Kiyonga, 2021). Christian-Muslim religious wars that took place between the 1880s and the 1890s created interreligious bitterness that persisted through the colonial period (Wamai, 2015).

All through the colonial period, the aftereffects of religious wars led to discrimination in the provision of social services. In the Christian missionary schools, young people were recruited to acquire a Western education that equipped them with skills to engage in productive enterprises; however, Muslims, for fear of their children being converted to Christianity, distanced themselves from enterprising missionary programmes and instead sent their children to madrasa schools to learn the basics of the Islamic religion which were not integrated with secular education. Since then, the literacy and education levels of Muslims have remained low as compared to those of Christians, a condition that is fuelling Christian-Muslim hostilities in Uganda (Life & Peace Institute, 2020: pp. 4-6).

During the post-colonial Uganda, Christian persecution and brutal murders are recorded to have taken place in the 1970s during the political reign of Idi Amin. While in political office, over 400,000 Christians were killed by Amin's government and many others fled the country. The heartbreaking incident that has taken decades to be erased from the psyche of Ugandans was that of the killing of Janani Luwum, the Anglican Archbishop. To deoxygenate the Christian religious leader who criticised the merciless killings of political opponents, Amin realised a bullet in his mouth (World Watch Research, 2024: p. 10).

However, Amin's killing of the Archbishop seems to have been due to a political inferiority complex. President Amin might have feared that the Archbishop would use his influential position to instigate the public and Ugandan elites to resist his political leadership. Scholarly sources infer that Amin admired the organisational financial integrity undertakings of Christians. A historical case is when the president was disappointed by the mismanagement of finances at the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council (UMSC) Secretariat.

In 1974, President Idi Amin declared his intentions to terminate the whole UMSC Secretariat and threatened to appoint Catholics, Protestants, or even Orthodox to manage the affairs of the council because they weren't corrupt and the Muslim officials by then had failed to fulfil their obligations. "Christians and Orthodox have a clean heart and offer services to God; they will replace Muslims," President Amin said (Caroline, 2024).

The statement uttered by a Muslim president was energizing on the side of Christians, but to the Muslim community, it should have dehumanized them. In essence, given that Muslims were less educated than their well-educated Christian counterparts, financial management ethics might have been challenging (Musisi, 2024: pp. 2-9).

The Muslim community in Uganda is held in endless cycles of economic poverty due to low levels of education. Muslims attribute their low rates of education to being marginalized by the government. However, scholarly reports indicate that most Muslims hold negative views towards secular education because of the political-religious clashes between European and Arabic civilizations. For that reason, young Muslims are encouraged to avoid secular education but instead pursue theological education, which is considered in Islamic tradition to be a noble intellectual path. After graduating from college, young people are unable to utilize the acquired theological skills to innovate life-sustaining business projects, and, to make matters worse, they hardly get employed in the Ugandan formal sector, which is dominated by 82 percent Christians (Musisi, 2024: pp. 2-9).

While many Ugandans are struggling to unshackle themselves from economic poverty and ill-health challenges brought about as a result of low levels of educational attainment, the Muslim community in Uganda has a long way to go. In the effort to access the basic necessities of life, many young Muslims have become prey to being recruited in armed rebellions (Musisi, 2024: pp. 2-9).

The challenge of low levels of education has persisted among the Muslim community in Uganda. Due to limited education exposure, most Muslims in Uganda are incapacitated to support their households to attain quality standards of living. Economic hardships have been taken by Muslims as yardsticks to project their hostilities towards the government and Christians (Bweyale, 2018: p. 407). The Ugandan government, which is secular in all undertakings, is viewed by the Muslim community as a Christian state. Muslim youth are instigated by militia groups to confront the government and Christians to fight for their identity (Mugyenzi, 2000: p. 41).

In an effort to convert people to Islam and to take over political space, a Muslim extremist rebel group in Uganda, Alliance of Democratic Forces (ADF), since the 1990s, has been kidnapping and killing Christians (Someone's Kids, 2022). In June 2023, 40 defenceless Christian students of Mpondwe-Lhubiriha were killed by the notorious rebel group. In October 2023, ADF, using machine guns, shot three Christian tourists. In December 2023, the rebel group planted bombs in churches in Kampala. The barbaric massacre incidents have inflicted a lot of pain on the

Christian community in Uganda ([World Watch Research, 2024: pp. 3-10](#)).

Even when there are International and National initiatives being undertaken to combat the lethal activities of ADF, the rebel group has kept 'expanding territorially, ideologically, operationally, and organizationally.' The rebel group indoctrinates young Muslims and recruits them to engage in violent extremism and terrorism. As a result, ADF killed 400 civilians in 2019, 782 were killed in 2020, and 1,275 were massacred in 2021. The violent killings that involve village raids, suicide bombings, and attacks on government social institutions have led to the displacement of millions of people ([Wario, 2023: pp. 3-6](#)).

According to the ADF rebel group, politics and religion are inseparable. A secular state is an enemy to the advancement of Islamic teachings. Muslims in Uganda regard themselves as political minorities in a country dominated by Christians. Contrastingly, Christians in Uganda treat religion and state as distinct entities that work in partnership to influence social transformation. The different religious approaches to politics have made Christians to view Muslims with suspicion, postulating that their Islamised programmes are coloured with intentions to make Uganda an Islamic state. Remarkably, for the Muslim fundamentalists, a non-Muslim president must be overthrown and replaced with a Muslim leader who can guide the nation in accordance with Sharia law ([Mugyenzi, 2000: pp. 41-43](#)).

Sharia law enforcement is a driving force of Muslim fundamentalists. Subsequently, the anti-Christian feelings of Muslims of being discriminated and marginalized in the government employment sector are being promoted by ADF ([Onyulo, 2018](#)).

To the Muslim fundamentalists, programmes promoted by the government, such as gender equality and Muslim Mothers Associations, whose aim is to set free women from patriarchal prisons, are vigorously opposed by Muslim religious leaders who charge that such arrangements impose Christian principles on Muslim communities. Furthermore, Christians and Muslims are involved in open attacks over sacred teachings, which they are ignorant of their religious meanings. Islamic law, though not legislated in Uganda, is taken as a divine mandate when it comes to: a Muslim girl marrying a Christian, blasphemy of the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, and conversion of Muslims to Christianity. Any community pop-ups of religious frictions, Muslim extremists tilt to the usage of lethal means to kill infidels, fight apostasy, and defend the sanctity of Islam; a condition that has caused animosity between the adherents of the two Abrahamic religions ([Mugyenzi, 2000: p. 43](#)).

As a result of ADF operations, the Muslim community in Uganda is viewed by the Christians and the government with suspicion. In the process of investigating the atrocities committed by the rebel groups in 2022, innocent Muslims were arrested on suspicion of engaging in terrorism. They were subjected to physical abuse and detained for a long period in prison without trial ([U.S. Department of State, 2023](#)).

In Uganda, Christian-Muslim conflicts are reported in schools. In 2006, five

students of Itula secondary school in Moyo district were killed by police in the scuffle of calming religious tensions that erupted between Muslim students and Christian students. Tensions erupted as a result of each group discrediting the religious beliefs of each other. Hearteningly, in Ugandan schools, Christian and Muslim progressive religious nurture curricula do not promote respect, understanding, and appreciation of the traditions, practices, values, and beliefs of the religious others. Instead, each group is indoctrinated to discredit the other, to air out religious hate statements, and to avoid contact with the indifferent religious neighbour (Mwesigwa, 2007).

Even when the activities of the Interreligious Council of Uganda (IRCU) are in force (Kitakule, 2022a, 2022b), the social relationships of Christians and Muslims in Uganda are not healthy. Muslim extremists have factored in marginalization as a tool for the recruitment of jobless Muslims into armed rebellion (Titeca & Vlasenroot, 2012). Prominent government officials and Muslims who side with Christians have been killed, others are on the wanted list (Onyulo, 2018), and suicide bombers have hit government institutions (Mahtani, 2021). Muslims suspected of engaging in terrorism have been killed by the government (Candland et al., 2021: pp. 35-37). Those who are scorched by economic poverty have resorted to thuggery and robberies (Onyulo, 2020), and many young Muslims are involved in anti-social lifestyles (Sengendo, 2016: p. 400).

The after-effects of interfaith frictions have created a state of acidic relationships in the Christian-Muslim neighbourhoods. People of the same ancestry walk side by side and not face to face, a condition that has caused instability in the country. Arab merchants and European missionaries had their own historical religious baggage that they offloaded and indoctrinated African converts. The religious bitterness and discrimination imported and imparted by the pioneers of Islam and Christianity in Uganda are gravely affecting indigenous people (Bweyale, 2018: p. 408).

Relationships between Christians and Muslims in Uganda are unhealthy. Despite Muslims comprising a minority population in Uganda, militant Islamists kill Christian evangelists and Muslims who convert to Christianity. Christian preachers are ever accused of mocking God by equating Him to divinities; teaching that Jesus is the son of God; despising Islamic teachings; and blaspheming the teachings of Prophet Muhammad during open-air crusades, interfaith public debates (Onyulo, 2018), and radio talk shows (Evangelical Focus, 2023). In the crossfire process, Church buildings are demolished, household property of church leaders destroyed, and evangelists who refuse to renounce Christianity are drowned in rivers (Voice of the Martyrs, 2022).

3. Women's Involvement in Christianity and Islam

Every culture has defined norms, lifestyles, expressions, identities, rewards, and roles that govern the everyday living of boys, girls, men, and women (Canadian Institute of Health Research, 2020). In biblical history, men dominate in commer-

cial labour market as judges, kings, prophets, military commanders, and apostles. The roles of women are characterized by doctrinal conflicts. Pauline scriptures are used by some men to stigmatize women and hinder them from taking up religious leadership roles.

For instance, the narratives in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 restrict women from speaking in the church, asking church leaders questions, teaching, and exercising domineering authority over men in church affairs. Married women are advised to direct their innovative concerns to their husbands. This then leaves one wondering to whom the unmarried women can turn for clarity on church-driven business programmes they do not understand. This then means that women in Greek-Roman society seem to have been consumers of masculine-dominated religious business programmes rather than innovative knowledge co-contributors.

In affirmation of biblical scriptures that exclude women from church businesses, women in certain Christian denominations in Africa are regarded as weak, inferior, and of low status. To make matters worse, widows, divorcees, and single mothers are not accorded Christian business leadership space. Nonetheless, women are custodians of social traditions in African society.

African women nurture boys and girls. At their laps, social traditions are passed down through songs, proverbs, poems, totems, and taboos. Certainly, if such gold mines are strategically manipulated, then African women can be champions at cementing Christian-Muslim relationships. Astonishingly, in the African cultural setting, 'the patriarchal domination of women occurs both in the public and the private spheres' (Kadaga, 2003: p. 5).

Silencing women to contribute their constructive ideas to boost church business programmes, then, it could have been a Greek-Roman cultural monopoly that cherished 'patriarchy and the superior role of men in the social, legal, and political structures' (Azuike, 2019), thus underscoring women's societal business management acumen.

Concerning marital engagements, biblical storylines do not condemn polygamous lifestyles. Polygamy is observed among biblical patriarchs, but women are not mentioned as having adventured in polygyny. In the New Testament, Marital bonds are meant to be permanent, and divorce is allowed to be initiated by men on condition of a wife's infidelity (Mathew 5:32, 19:9; Luke 16:18). Similarly, monogamy is restricted to men who have accepted the call to serve God in the ordained ministry (1Timothy 3:1-12, Titus 1:6).

In contrast to Christianity, gender social norms in Islamic tradition are governed by Sharia law. Marriage is on a contract basis, and financially stable men are gifted to marry at most four women concurrently (Q. 4:3), but the space for polygyny is invisible. Muslim men are free to marry from Christian families, but Muslim women are prohibited (Khatab, 2013: p. 176).

In reality, polygamy is one of the contentious issues that causes irritation between Christians and Muslims. Christianity promotes monogamy while Islam

promotes polygamy. Although polygamy is of great advantage to some people, to others, it is a source of family rivalries that jeopardizes the whole interaction amongst the wives, children, step-mothers, and step-children, causing the living environment in the home to be less comfortable (Okorie, 2002). It is on the basis of the dark side of polygamy that women are denied church business leadership responsibilities in some Christian communities. For instance:

In 1951, the Lutheran Church in Liberia, West Africa, agreed that polygamists and their wives could be admitted to baptism and Holy Communion... They nevertheless made it clear that those in polygamous situations could not hold church offices (Muthengi, 1995: p. 69).

The dark side of polygamy appears to overshadow women's competencies. Christian religious leaders assume that if women in polygamous marital relationships take on leadership roles, they are most likely to portray a bad picture to others striving to adhere to acceptable and commendable monogamous marital standards. Dismally, the extent to which monogamy is aligned with women's leadership potential is a serious and inquisitive dilemma. The need of the hour for the Christian leadership in Uganda is to cement Christian-Muslim relationships. It is not certain whether women in monogamous marital relationships, if given leadership spaces, can have all it takes to extend professional innovativeness.

Even when some Christian denominations have "decided to admit polygamists under certain circumstances" (Allen Jr., 2014), they are denied opportunities to exploit their leadership potentials in the church until they accept monogamy (BBC News Africa, 2008). Under such circumstances, the leadership potential of women as custodians of social traditions cannot be realised in the process of building Christian-Muslim relationships. In the recent decade,

The church's policy on converted polygamists has led to serious missiological, pastoral, and theological problems. Converted polygamists are viewed as 'second-class' Christians with fewer rights and privileges (Owusu, 2007).

Nevertheless, scanning through the pages of the Bible, one comes to realize that women played significant roles in influencing societal transformation. It is recorded that male and female genders were infused with creative attributes on equal footing to nurture God's creatures (Genesis 1:27, Genesis 5:2, Mathew 19:4, Mark 10:6).

Equally, during the Mosaic-Exodus departure, articles of silver, gold, and clothing were plundered, and this responsibility was not assigned to men only. At God's instruction, through their leader Moses, women participated fully in the plundering ministry (Exodus 11:2, Exodus 3:22).

In addition, recorded Old Testament narratives show that women played significant leadership roles in transforming the political, spiritual, and social environment of the nation of Israel. Their faces are observable in several arenas, thus: a) Miriam, Aaron's sister, was a prophetess who composed therapeutic music and many women were influenced, for they followed her with tambourines and great

rejoicing (Exodus 15:20). Since then, women participated in music galas that left powerful impact on the moral lives of the ancient people of Israel (1Samule 18:6; 2 Samuel 6:19, 22; 2 Chronicles 35:25; Psalm 68:25; Song of songs 2:7, 3:11; Nehemiah 7:67; Ezra 2:65); b) Deborah, in the company of her general, Baraka, led a military expedition and defeated the Canaanite army at River Kishon. The Israelites, under the political leadership of Deborah, enjoyed prosperous political environment for 40 years (Judges 4:1-5:31); c) Prophetess Huldah lived in Jerusalem and prominent men, Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Acbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to her to seek pastoral guidance (2 Kings 22:14, 2 Chronicles 34:22); d) Esther is recorded as having played queenly roles and through her leadership, the Jewish community was granted military defensive authority against their enemies (Esther 8:11); e) women engaged in mercantile business enterprises (Proverbs 31); and f) women were employed in the labour market (Exodus 35:25; Ruth 2:7; 1 Samuel 8:13).

Tilting to the New Testament narratives, it is noticeable that during the public ministry of Jesus Christ, women used their incomes to support His ministry (Mathew 27:55, Mark 15:41, Luke 8:3). Dressed in a garment of communalism, women joined Jesus' mother and brothers and prayed fervently (Acts 1:14). Notably, when the Christian church was given birth, Peter publicly proclaimed the fulfilment of the prophecy spoken through Joel (2:28-29). He clarified that the long awaited Holy Spirit had been poured on both men and women to energize them to engage in divine Kingdom leadership development programmes (Acts 2:8). Riding on Joel's prophetic strands, Paul listed the various Holy Spirit energized leadership responsibilities (1Corinthians 12:8-11, Ephesians 4:11) that are not confined to the Jews nor Greeks, slaves nor the free, male nor female (Galatians 3:28).

Accordingly, women worked hard during Pauline ministry to extend God's Kingdom (Romans 16:12). Thus, Dorcas offered faithful, lovely services (Acts 9:36-39), and Lydia was hospitable (Acts 16:1-15), and she offered pastoral leadership to the Christian community of Cenchreae (Romans 16:10).

In the long history of Christianity, we find many examples of women who inspired by the Gospel, made tremendous contribution to church and society and remain worthy challenges to imitate. There have been women martyrs who have witnessed Christ with extraordinary courage to the point of shedding their blood for Him. There have been women teachers and doctors of the church who have taught Christianity, written books on faith, developed theology and spirituality, thus greatly enriching the church. There have been women fundraisers of Religious and Lay Congregations for service and evangelization. There have been, and still are, thousands of good Christian mothers who have played and continue to play their active part as teachers of faith to their family, the domestic church, making it a living encounter with Jesus Christ and a school of Christian upbringing (Uganda Episcopal Conference, 1996).

The roles women have played in biblical and Christian history are tremendous. This means that if women are provided with the tools and accorded space to nurture society at the household, community, and national levels, then, in the long run, Ugandan society can experience minimal incidences of Christian-Muslim hostilities.

According to Islamic traditions, men are the overall breadwinners and custodians of family rules. Women are permitted by their male relatives to move out of their family settings. Women's facial and vocal exposure in public is restricted. A strict dress code is prescribed for women. Their intellectual public expressions and voicing of their sexual rights are prohibited (International Crisis Group, 2016: pp. 2-3). In instances of premarital sex, girls are severely flogged as compared to boys (Zenn & Pearson, 2014: p. 51).

Within Islamic culture regulations, women are wall-fenced from community business engagements but restricted to homemaking, reproduction, and offering of nurturing roles to children, the sick, strangers, and the elderly (Honarvar, 1998: pp. 378-379). A wife's involvement and participation in public offices must be consented to by the husband (Abusharaf, 2006: p. 720). Women are barred from mixing with knowledgeable men in public to conduct community business transactions. Business ventures and explorations are reserved for men; if women dare, they pay a heavy price for apostasy. Apostate penalties are severe in most Islamic states (Murphy, 2010) as compared to secular countries, where Muslim women transact public businesses with minimal strain (Tripp, 1994: pp. 109-114).

A women's failure to avoid public interactions, to respect the leadership voice of the husband and to adhere to homemaking responsibilities; the husband is divinely allowed to flog her (Q. 4:34). In the event of severe family misunderstandings, divorce initiated by a husband takes immediate effect but for the woman propelled one goes through lengthy legal battles (Ali, 2003). Although Mary, mother of Jesus, is well spoken of, she is not elevated in Islam as a prophetess whose lifestyle can be relied on as a point of reference for nurturing Christian-Muslim relations (Mufti of Federal Territory Office, 2023).

Muslim women in Uganda who have come out to express their boldness to challenge discriminatory divorce, domestic violence, and male chauvinism have been silenced by male-dominated Islamic teachings. Muslim men have taken to the podium to warn their wives and daughters from interacting with Christians. The Muslim community is not impressed with Christians who have failed to impose restrictions on women in matters of homemaking. To them, the absence of mothers at home to shape children's morals has led to the moral decadence of teenagers and to an increase in community social evils (Mufti of Federal Territory Office, 2023). To make matters worse, most women in Islamic communities have internalised the concept of male superiority (Onsongo, 2004: pp. 10-11; Murphy, 2010). This, then, makes it hard for Muslim women to engage in the market environment on matters of championing Christian-Muslim relationships.

Contrastingly, a walk through Christian and Islamic narratives reveals that

women have pioneered significant market-environment reforms. In biblical and Qur'anic mythological creation stories, we see Eve controlling the Garden of Eden. Using her prowess, without knowledge of her nakedness, she extended the serpent's instigated services to Adam. Adam comes on the scene to hide his inferiority complex because his masculine ego was questioned. Even when Adam apportioned blame to his wife, Eve championed a new chapter in human history that the Abrahamic religions swim into to influence societal transformation. In the creation episode, aside from marital romance and the naming of creatures, it's hard to spot a civilisation trend that Adam championed and that has an intriguing impact on society. It is Eve who stands out as the initiator of social change for good and for worse (Genesis 1-3; Q.7:19-20). This means that if women's leadership potential is tapped, the outcome can be the progressive strengthening of Christian-Muslim relationships.

Interestingly, several biblical women are recorded as having moulded their sons' masculine outlook. First, Rebecca is recorded to have inquired from God about the fate of babies that were jostling in her womb. She used the knowledge she gained to shape Jacob's leadership identity (Genesis 24-27). Secondly, Moses is recorded to have been nurtured by a princess into Egyptian leadership traditions (Exodus 2:1-22). Thirdly, Samuel was a product of his mother's fervent prayers (1 Samuel 1:9-28). Fourth, Solomon's ascendance to the throne was orchestrated by his mother (1 Kings 1:11-35). Fifth, Mary embraced Angelic massage and the prophetic words spoken about Jesus (Luke 1:26-38; 2:25-38). As time rolled on, Mary convinced her son to perform a miracle at Cana (John 2:1-11). Such biblical displays portray a picture that if women are brought on board in the business of building Christian-Muslim relationships, then profitable outcomes can be realised.

Similar to biblical women, Islamic traditions reveal that, during the early days of the Prophet Muhammad's ministry, Khadijah played a significant role. She supported her husband financially and encouraged him to seek spiritual mentorship, to engage in spiritual formation disciplines, and to carry out military expeditions against the pagans. Khadijah drew the structural plans for Islam, and she laid the foundation on which Muhammad stood to advance his prophetic mission (Rahman, 2022). Khadijah's gifted handwork in the spread of Islam demonstrates that when women are enlisted to champion Christian-Muslim relational development projects, their contributions can be impactful on society.

Islamic traditions do not draw clear lines on the recruitment of women in the armed combats, however, recorded literature reveals women who marched in battles: Umm Umara, also called Nusayba participated in Uhud battle of 627 AD; Safiya, paternal aunt to Prophet Muhammad fought in Khandaq battle of 627 AD; Aisha, Prophet's widow, led a troupe of 3000 fighters in the first religious civil battle of Camel; Zaynab was involved in the battle of Karbala; and Khawlah fought against the Byzantines. During the battles, women provided nursing care to wounded fighters, supplied food and water, and encouraged family members to

support the military efforts (Khalil, 2009: p. 5; Leede, 2018: p. 3).

In Islamic culture, mothers are accorded high social status. Prophet Mohamed decreed that 'Paradise lies at the feet of mothers.' Mothers take on the divine obligation of shaping the Paradise destiny of their children (Honarvar, 1998: p. 377). Both young and adult children are supposed to respectfully lower their wings in humility and put into action the wise teachings of their mothers (Q. 17:23-24).

It is a sacred duty for Muslims to accord special treatment and deep respect to their mothers. The place of mothers was described by the Prophet Muhammad (Azeem, 1995):

A man asked the Prophet: 'Whom should I honour most?' The Prophet replied: 'Your mother.' 'And who comes next?' asked the man. The Prophet replied: 'Your mother.' 'And who comes next?' asked the man. The Prophet replied: 'Your mother!' 'And who comes next?' asked the man. The Prophet replied: 'Your father.'

With respect to the above hadith, Muslims celebrate the impact their mothers have had on their upbringing. Being a mother earns respect for fulfilling one's feminine duty and influence over the next generation of Muslims. Mothers are highly respected because they are custodians, nurturers, carriers of lineage and tradition, and propagators of the next generation (Gruyter, 2021).

4. Women's Involvement in Social Relationship Nurturing

Christianity and Islamic narratives about women's societal nurturing potentials clearly display the notion that women played pioneering roles in laying the foundations of community transformations. Supposedly, it might be women who are trapped in masculine traits who feel tortured by the domineering market environment, waves of men. Similar magnetic waves in them seem to repel when they come closer in societal leadership engagements. Of course, there are men who abuse their masculinity community outputs at the expense of professional interdependence in the market environment. Brutal men tend to be driven by selfishness and an inferiority complex. Bestly domineering masculinity outputs that subject women to violence, stigmatisation, and denial of public goods ought to be condemned, but women seem to be naturally wired with feminine energy that engineers masculinity traits towards patriarchal African societal construction.

In African social structures, although the cultural environment is tainted by male chauvinism and tilted towards gender discrimination against women (Kasomo, 2010: p. 128), women, since time immemorial, have played their cultural roles as custodians of family traditions. Women shape the masculine identity of boys and the feminine outlook of girls on a large scale, as compared to the father figures. The African mother, as compared to the father, is available at every critical life transition stage of a child – language formation, child initiation rites, medical care, and school visitations. Life lessons imparted by a mother to a child are hard to erase in adulthood. A mother's influence is felt in controlling the marriage affairs

and vocational lives of their sons. An African mother without a biological son suffers psychological trauma, and a wife who dares to speak negatively about a husband's biological mother, faces the wrath of the spouse. Accordingly, mother-son emotional love is so strong that it is associated with nasty conflicts between the mother and the daughter-in-law (Ibok & Ogar, 2018: p. 46).

At the fingertips of an African woman, patriarchal acumens are engineered in their husbands and sons. An inability of a husband to provide a domineering role in protecting family resources shames a wife. Likewise, a fearful son who fears confronting community social evils and taking up leadership roles in society is a disgrace to the mother. Mothers model boys to play the roles of rulers, decision-makers, income earners, and breadwinners, as well as those who are supposed to be in charge of everything that goes on in a home setting. On the other hand, girls are modelled as nurturers and caretakers of family members. At the feet of mothers, social traditions are passed on to the next generation through music, proverbs, and storytelling. In essence, women are architects and builders of patriarchal social traditions, and men are enforcers of patriarchal social values in the marketplace (Ibok & Ogar, 2018: pp. 46-47).

Of course, due to prickly thorns of life, some mothers abandon their children, but even then, there are lovely mother figures who step in to fill the gap. Under certain circumstances, abandoned children tend to be subjected to torturous, beastly treatment at the hands of step-parents, extended family members, and child employers. Abandoned children miss out on the nurturing touches of their mothers during infancy. The unlucky ones spend their infancy days scavenging in rubbish pits and lodging on town streets. Such children, and in most instances, turn out to be messy in their public life and market outputs (Kaawa-Mafigiri & Walakira, 2017: pp. 69-90).

On the negative side, studies show that some women are associated with inferiority complex mentalities, for they lack self-esteem, and this affects their participation in societal matters of importance. Some women lack self-confidence; they fear success; they lack personal autonomy, professional goal-setting, and the fear of rejection and competition; they also lack aspiration (Gobena, 2014: p. 33). Such anomalies are at play among several women in Uganda.

Fear of being criticised is the number one enemy that makes women feel that they cannot handle management challenges. "Thus, they lack authoritative character, they cannot speak out, they are shy, and lack confidence" (Lunyolo et al., 2014) to challenge the masculine domineering tendencies. In reality, few women voices in Uganda oppose the male domineering tendencies. Women fear public rejection and to be regarded as disrespectful to men.

Next, the decision for the African woman to get involved in societal development programmes is "strongly informed by the norms, roles, values and perceptions embedded in the home and community" (Leste, 2004). "There is a belief that women are docile, submissive, patient, and tolerant of monotonous work and violence" (Hora, 2014: p. 103), and all these traits combined can make it hard for

religious communities to entrust women with management responsibilities.

A lack of interest in community development programmes is another trait observed among some women. The lack of interest is attributed to the timing of community development programs, domestic chore constraints, and low levels of education (Ali, 2014: p. 221). Seventy-five percent of rural-based women in Uganda are illiterate, and minimal numbers are semiliterate (Guloba et al., 2017: p. 1). Under such circumstances, probably not of their making but community constructed, it is hard for women to cultivate inner mental strength to take on leadership roles.

Another problem that makes women withdraw from community development programmes is fear of success, which jeopardizes their personal lives. Women tend to worry about the anticipation of negative consequences, social rejection, disapproval, not being liked, and loss of femininity when they perceive that they are most likely to work with high-profile men (Gobena, 2014: p. 34).

Shelving the challenges that affect women's community social engagements in the public market arena, several Ugandan women, driven by the African spirit of communal responsiveness, are involved in business transactions. They are in politics and the civil service, and they offer customary services as fetishists, herbalists, and witch-doctors. They occupy positions as community elders, and those who are in the afterlife domain are in communal fellowship with their ancestral communities (News Ghana, 2015).

The Ugandan economy is not governed by Sharia law and Arabian cultural values that restrict women from interacting with interfaith others and mingling with men in the open market. While in the labour market, African women participate in cultural communal activities and provide their services to everyone, irrespective of a customer's religious background (Musisi, 2024: pp. 14-15). It is against this backdrop that women play several unrestricted roles in African traditional societies and if their roles are well utilized, then Christian-Muslim interfaith business engagements can be nurtured towards lowering of interfaith violence in Uganda.

5. Christian-Muslim Women Dialogue Engagement Process

Sharia law that rings fences Muslim women as homemakers and forbids them from open market engagements is not enforced in Uganda. Uganda is a secular state that promotes freedom of religious expression; for that reason, Muslim women mingle freely with men and Christians to access common public social goods such as medical care, education, transport, and business transactions. The government dished out social services that are not tagged to religious affiliations. Both Christian and Muslim women are professionally trained to occupy positions as civil servants and political leaders (United States Department of State, 2017).

However, the greatest challenge on the ground is the exclusivist mentality exhibited by Christian and Muslim religious camps in the execution of religious

business transactions. Community development programmes are mission-driven to build the spiritual lives of the religious adherents and to convert non-believers. Religious programmes can only be accessed by the indifferent religious others on condition that such individuals convert. Certainly, interreligious conflicts are occurring in Uganda because well-positioned Christians are progressing economically while the minority Muslims are languishing in object poverty (Onyulo, 2020). Therefore, to calm interfaith tensions in Uganda, women-focused Christian-Muslim programmes, dialogue, engagement, and nurturing are paramount.

Interreligious dialogue engagements were pioneered by the Catholic Church. The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) outlined strategies that have been relied upon to promote religious tolerance and respectful mutual coexistence (Kamau, 2018: p. 61). Interreligious dialogue means people of different faith, in spite of their religious differences; cooperate with each other in a spirit of tolerance, humility, truthfulness, sincerity, love, respect, and good will (Andrabi, 2020: p. 265) to address divisions and nurture solidarity for peace and justice towards mutual understanding, trust, and social-economic empowerment (Gupta, n.d.: p. 1).

Interreligious dialogue follows a four-fold model, that is, dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange, and dialogue of religious experience. The approach does not aim to brush away differences and convert others. "In dialogue each party remains true to their own faith. It is not a space for arguing, attacking or disproving the beliefs of the other" (Gupta, n.d.: p. 1).

Focused on the four-fold model, interreligious parties meet to plan, resource, implement, monitor, and evaluate programmes that steer them towards peaceful coexistence (Society of African Missions, 2013). Peaceful coexistence can be measured by improved physical health, strong social relationships within communities, household economic prosperity, and levels of religious tolerance (Jatin Verma's IAS Academy, 2020).

Dialogue approach to interfaith relations is important in that: a) it strengthens friendships; b) important shared values, principles, practices, and traditions are discovered; c) it inspires free spiritual expression; d) an environment is created for people to contribute their ideas and skills freely; and e) people synergize their resources and this brings about community transformation (Gupta, n.d.: pp. 1-2).

However, the model has been found to be weak in several ways: a) lack of clear objectives affect interfaith negotiations, b) key discussants who are not knowledgeable on religious traditions cause confusion, c) attempts to convert others affect the relationships, d) unresolved differences between the interreligious leaders affect the process, e) religious arrogance of thinking that one's religion is superior repel people, f) internalised patriarchal sentiments that demean women potentials affect dialogue, and g) unbalanced representation in terms of age, religious affiliation, and professionalism make it hard to resolve complex issues (Gupta, n.d.: pp. 1-2).

Shockingly, the dialogue approach does not spell out progressive strategies to minimise weaknesses. In essence, given the fact that Christianity and Islam are

foreign religions hosted by the Ugandan indigenous society, in order for Christian-Muslim relations to yield results, clear localised strategies need to be constructed, stage-managed, and tested.

The Great Commission instructs intellectually empowered Christian leaders to: go and encounter cultures; make disciples; baptize cultural expressions in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and teach people to take on Christ-like virtues. Signs, wonders, and miracles are divine packages that accompany the Holy Spirit-anointed religious leaders (Mathew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-18). Accordingly, a clear, Holy Spirit-empowered strategy to contextualise Christian-Muslim women's engagement programmes within African cultural expressions can yield positive results.

The best strategist and cross-religious worker recorded on the pages of the Bible is Apostle Paul. Standing in the midst of Areopagus, in the religious environment of Athens, Paul proclaimed that the unknown God whom people were visualizing did not dwell in lifeless human-made objects. He told the audience that God, who inhabits the whole Earth and the Heavens, prescribed human beings and placed them in diverse cultures so that His Name is glorified (Acts 17:16-34). Paul presented God's message in line with the Athenians' worldviews, indicating that a clear understanding of other people's religious expressions must be central to engagement approaches for cementing Christian-Muslim interfaith relationships.

Paul intellectually dressed himself with dynamic cross-cultural identities. He identified himself with the Jews, the Romans, and the Christians (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Paul developed professional skills and assimilated Roman and Christian traditions, positioning him to provide quality services as a cross-cultural worker. In the same line, Qur'anic texts implore Muslims to engage in respectful cross-cultural dialogues with Jews, Christians, and Serbians (Q. 2:62; 5:69, 82; 3:54 and 29:46). Even when attainment of cross cultural knowledge is costly in monetary terms, it is indicative that knowledgeable religious women ought to invest a great deal of resources in acquiring intellectual tools that can position them to influence interfaith relationships.

Viewed from the biblical and Qur'anic mandate of cross-cultural relationship engagements, intellectual understanding of people's cultural universe enables religious workers to: a) make wise and constructive moral and ethical decisions; b) solve challenges they encounter in the engagement process; c) measure their moral development as far as respecting other people's religious expressions are concerned; d) avoid pit falls that might be destructive to their health and social relationships, e) offer acceptable and quality services to the community, f) work towards attaining respect from religious communities; g) adjust their lifestyles to fit into complex cross-religious situations; h) live peacefully alongside others with divergent views on matters of religious beliefs and political inclinations; i) make decisions that shape their ministry growth and financial sustainability; j) pursue goals that influence Christian-Muslim social coexistence traditions; and k) formulate clear Christian-Muslim growth relational engagement programmes (Burnett,

1992: pp. 26-33).

It is on the basis of the knowledge of the worldviews of the religious others that localised programmes can be implemented to build strong bonds between Christians and Muslims. However, successful Christian-Muslim relationship-building is a strategic, linear development trend that can be anchored in the biblical agricultural process model (Whitesel, 2010). In view of Apostle Paul's agricultural model – 'I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow' (1 Corinthians 3:6, NLT) and what John highlights (4:37), successful Christian-Muslim engagements can be likened to an agricultural process, thus: land preparation, seed planting, plant care, harvesting of crops, and preservation of the harvest. In this sense, God is the owner of religious expression gardens; land preparation is handled by the natives and partially by knowledgeable religious workers; seed broadcasting, plant care, harvest, and preservation are responsibilities of religious workers; and plant growth and multiplication is the work of the Holy Spirit, who convicts, sanctifies, and regenerates.

Each of the agricultural relationship propagation stages involves different engagement tools and expertise. During the Land Preparation Stage, Christian and Muslim communities have their own cultural and religious regulations enforced. People at this stage are defined by ideologies, unaware that some of their lifestyles expose them to hostilities and chronic economic poverty.

The duty of the interreligious worker at this stage is to take time to: build relationships with the most influential Christian and Muslim religious leaders; share the passion with religious leaders, explaining why it is necessary for Christians and Muslims to work together to minimise interfaith conflicts; and bring the top-most interreligious leaders to a dialogue table to discuss their concerns and fears. Next, the interreligious worker needs to make a deliberate effort to learn Christian and Muslim religious expressions and to assimilate them into the systems. Identifying with the religious community's language and traditions is a gesture that can position an interreligious worker to earn the trust and confidence of religious communities. Equipped with a clear understanding of the religious uniqueness of Christian and Muslim communities, interreligious conflicting lifestyles are catalogued, an interfaith relationship building programme is crafted, and then a contextualized vision, mission, core values, close-ended goals, and action steps to be followed to achieve each goal of the crafted programme are developed.

For instance, in Uganda, there exist women's informal savings groups that are not discriminatory on account of ethnicity, gender, or religious affiliation. Informal self-help groups are mandated by the government to operate (Uganda Microfinance Regulatory Authority, 2022). In these groups, people save, borrow, and trade their money. Countrywide, "there are almost sixty-six thousand (66,000) active groups, made up of almost 1.8 million members. More women than men are members of savings groups (around 72%)." Beyond informal financial transactions, group members provide social support to one another when confronted with death, illness, and other abrupt life events (Grameen Foundation, 2022: pp.

3-6). Certainly, the informal savings group approach is one of the rich grounds for building Christian-Muslim women's relationships in Uganda.

Therefore, in the friendly company of influential Christian-Muslim religious leaders, contextualized development goals are implemented at the Seed Planting Stage. Christian and Muslim women are invited to participate in formal and non-formal contextualised empowerment programmes. At this stage, Christian and Muslim women, the first beneficiaries of the contextualised programmes, are facilitated to front and broadcast awareness programmes to raise awareness about what can be done to build productive interfaith relationships.

Invitations are channelled through social media, public social institutions, and using all possible local communication channels, disseminating awareness on the negative effects of interreligious violence. Accordingly, Christian-Muslim interreligious engagement programmes are instituted at this stage, giving rise to innovative insights.

Sprouted ideas are then the focus of concern at the Plant Care Stage. At this stage, Christian and Muslim women who have heeded the call are recruited to participate in the contextualised interreligious development programmes. It is at this stage that skilled religious leaders offer support to meet the intellectual and human survival basic necessities of the Christian-Muslim interreligious community. Ideas attained by the interreligious community are supported through extension services. People are mentored and encouraged to drop hostile lifestyles and adopt innovative ones. They are empowered with skills to relate to religious others peacefully. Exposure to successful interreligious communities to attain hands-on skills and knowledge is part of the process. Interfaith leadership development programmes are implemented to promote self-governance, financial independence, and sustainability, and contextualised Christian-Muslim programmes nurture multiplications.

At the Harvest Stage, Christians and Muslims have adopted new lifestyles. It is a stage of graduation. People who have successfully met all the requirements of the Christian-Muslim relationship-building curriculum are commissioned to take over management of their community affairs. Their abilities to influence religious shift from hostile practices and uphold Christian-Muslim peaceful coexistence practices are now mature and ripe for public consumption.

Praise-worthy skills harvested are preserved. The fruits of acquired skills are manifested in people's commitments to Christian-Muslim social groups. People's talents are in action, benefiting everyone in society. It is at the Preservation Stage that the Christian-Muslim community is ushered towards self-governance, self-support, self-propagation, and self-theologizing. The enlightened have the capacity to generate finances locally. They can theologize biblical and Qur'anic teachings to address cultural expressions of their heritage. They are fully integrated into the contextualised management systems. Role models become trainers for others. The multiplication effect grows as new insights are modernised to inform the present and radiate bright lights of hope for the community, helping secure a peace-

ful, better tomorrow.

To compound it, the Christian-Muslim relationship-building process is a call for knowledgeable religious women to step into the shoes of people affected by interreligious conflicts to exercise transposition. However, immersing self in others religious traditions to trace their hostile historicity and attain clearer understanding of their religious manifestations may: be time consuming, expose one to health hazards, lead to misunderstandings of the dynamics of a religious community, result in a misapplication of eternal norms, and be financially constraining (Ballano, 2020), but it is a profound strategy, if patiently well exploited by knowledgeable religious women, it can be relied on to build meaningful Christian-Muslim peaceful coexistences in Uganda.

6. Conclusion

The foregoing presentation clearly spells out that the relationships between Christians and Muslims in Uganda are unhealthy. Competition for economic gains and the defence of religious values in the open market are the root causes of the miseries being inflicted on society. People of a common Black Culture lineage are divided by European Christianity and Arabian Islamic beliefs, some of which are detached from African social traditions. To overcome the interreligious conflicts, it is important to bring Christian women and Muslim women to a dialogue table to reflect on their roles in society. Women are nurturers of African social traditions, and if their gifted feminine energies are put to proper use, then incidences of Christian-Muslim rivalries in Uganda can be minimised.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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