

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES OF
WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND SCHOLARSHIP**

SITE: NIGERIA

**Transcript of Hajiya Binta Abdulhamid
Interviewer: Elisha Renne**

Location: Kano, Nigeria

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Hajiya Binta Abdulhamid was born on March 20, 1965, in Kano, the capital of Kano State, in northern Nigeria. She attended primary school and girls' secondary school in Kano and Kaduna State. Thereafter she attended classes at Bayero University in Kano, where she received a degree in Islamic Studies. While she initially wanted to be a journalist, in 1983 she was encouraged to take education courses at the tertiary level in order to serve as a principal in girls' secondary schools in Kano State. While other women had served in this position, there has been no women from Kano State who had done so. She has subsequently worked under the Kano State Ministry of Education, serving as school principal in several girls' secondary schools in Kano State. Her experiences as a principal and teacher in these schools has enabled her to support girl child education in the state and she has encouraged women students to complete their secondary school education and to continue on to postgraduate education. She sees herself as a woman-activist in her advocacy of women's education and has been gratified to see many of her former students working as medical doctors, lawyers, and politicians.

Elisha P. Renne is Professor Emerita in the Departments of Anthropology and of Afroamerican and African Studies, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. She has conducted ethnographic research in Nigeria, Ghana, and the US. Her interests include African ethnology and infectious disease; gender and reproductive health; and religion and the anthropology of textiles. She is the author of *Cloth That Does Not Die* (1995); *Population and Progress in a Yoruba Town* (2003); *The Politics of Polio in Northern Nigeria* (2010); and *Veils, Turbans, and Islamic Reform in Northern Nigeria* (2018). She has also edited the volume, *Veiling in Africa* (2013), has co-edited the volume, *Textile Ascendancies: Aesthetics, Production, and Trade in Northern Nigeria* (2020) and has published in the journals *Africa*, *American Anthropologist*, *CSSH*, *Islamic Africa*, *JRAI*, *RES*, and *Textile History*. Her recent study, *Death and the Textile Industry in Nigeria*, of the consequences of textile mill closures in Kaduna, Northern Nigeria, included interviews with 105 widows and will be published in November 2020.

Elisha Renne: This is interview number 4. It is the 31st of January, 2020. We are in Kano. So, we have an interview today for the Global Feminisms Project. So, we're interested in your knowledge about women's issues, and your experiences as part of this project. How would you like me to address you? What's your full title?

Hajiya Binta Abdulhamid: My names are Hajiya Binta Abdulhamid.

ER: And what would you like me to call you? Hajiya?

HBA: Yes, you can call me that.

ER: Hajiya, my name is Elisha Renne. I'm a professor at the University of Michigan and the person helping me is Hasanna Yusuf. She's from Zaria. So, if you could just begin; I know you were saying some things about experience with teaching and education. If you could just start from the beginning, though. What's your date of birth? And where were you born?

HBA: I was born on the 20th of March, 1965. I was born here in Kano. I did my primary and secondary school education in Kano and Kaduna states, former Kaduna State. I did my university education at Bayero University¹. I read BA in Islamic Studies.

ER: Okay. That's what we were wondering.

HBA: After my service year, I have been working with the ministry of education in Kano. From the year 1988 till date. I served in various female secondary schools in Kano state as a classroom teacher, as a vice principal and also as a school principal in many day and boarding institutions in Kano. That is why I thought I could contribute to whatever discussion is, pertaining the life of a woman, of a girl child, of an adolescent woman and a mature woman.

ER: That's excellent. Could you just say something about your own childhood? What did you want to be when you grew up?

HBA: While I was a child? First, my passion was not in teaching. I had wanted to become a journalist but along the way, when we were admitted at Bayero University, I was at the School of Journalist Studies then. And the director of Journalist Studies, Dr. Usman, I could recall, decided to have an interactive session with females that came from Kano State origin only. We did not know what his reasons were then, only that we were told that we should go to the office of the director, that he wants to have an audience with females that are of Kano State origin. So we went in one after another. When he finished with a particular lady, another would go into the office. When I went in, he questioned me thus, what my name is, I told him, from where in Kano, I told him. He said, "Do you know the reason why I decided to invite females from Kano State?" I said no. He asked me, "Why did you decide to further your education?" I told him. And just like what you have said, what were my passions? What did I want to become? I told him that I had wanted to become a journalist. He said, "Why not

¹ Bayero University is a university in Kano city, Kano State, Nigeria. ("Bayero University Kano." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayero_University_Kano. Accessed on September 14, 2020)

being a teacher?" I told him that the school I had graduated from, my secondary school, was a girls' secondary school. During our time, there were WTCs, Women's Teacher Colleges; then there were government girls' secondary schools. I said, "sir, I did not graduate from a Women's Teacher College, I was not trained as a teacher. I came from a government secondary school." He said, "That notwithstanding, you could just as well take on education and study it here. Do you know my reason why I want to entice you female students of Kano State to read education?" I said no. He said, "At present..." And that was the year 1983. He said there was no single school principal of a female secondary school in Kano that was from Kano State. Any principal then, comes from another state, not Kano. So, I could clearly see it was him that changed my decision. And I decided to study education at a tertiary level.

ER: That's a great story because it explains a lot about the situation when you were in school. You began as a teacher?

HBA: I did. As I said, I decided to take on education at the university. And I majored in Islamic Studies. But my faculty is the Faculty of Education. My teaching subject is Islamic Studies.

ER: Where was your first assignment? Where were you teaching first?

HBA: You mean the teaching practice? The first place that I was sent was to GGC Dala then. Government Girls College, Dala. I had my first experience as a teacher in that school. A teaching practice teacher.²

ER: So when you were a teaching practice teacher, what was something that happened that you remember from that time?

HBA: My experience in the class? Or my experience with the teachers and students? The only thing I always used to remember and tell my students is the fact that my age when I went into the university is a tender age. I went in at the age of 20. So, there was a day in the course of teaching, during my teaching practice days, the students were out for break and they were asked to go back to their classes. I was on duty. As a duty teacher, you know, when you are in secondary school, there are always days for a particular teacher that is assigned, that this was his or her day. Unfortunately, the school principal was going round - the late Hajiya Fatima. She served before her death as a permanent secretary here. She was going round and I just heard a lash, a beating from behind, because they were sending students away from the dining halls, from the playground so they could go back to the classes for lessons. It was during break. I just heard a lash. She thought I was a student. Yes, because I was that young. Then she said, "Oh malama,³ I'm very sorry!" I used to tell my children this story.

² A teaching practice teacher is a student teacher who is given the chance to practice teaching in the real world to gain experience. ("Teaching practice: a make or break phase for student teachers." SciELO South Africa. http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0256-01002009000300004. Accessed on September 14, 2020)

³ Malama is a name of African origin which means "one who has compassion." Based on this context, it may be used colloquially in Nigeria. ("Malama." Names.org. <https://www.names.org/n/malama/about>. Accessed on September 14, 2020)

ER: That's really great. So, after you finished your practice teaching, you went on another assignment?

HBA: No. While we were undergoing training in education in the university, I think we went out about two times for teaching practice. Then we had our NYSC.⁴ And during the NYSC, I was sent to the former ATC ABU, present Federal College of Education, here in Kano. I served at that institution as a lecturer during my NYSC days. National Youth Service days. So when I completed the one year sojourn there, then the Kano State government employed me through the ministry of education to serve as a teacher. My first place of assignment was WATC,⁵ Government Girls Arabic Secondary School, Goron Dutse.⁶ And I was there for five years before being transferred to another school.

ER: And the other school was also in Kano?

HBA: All the schools I've served in are here. But along the way, when I was transferred from Government Girls Secondary School, Goron Dutse, I was taken to a boys' school - Government Secondary School, Gwale.⁷ I spent, I think, about a year or two there. Then my first assignment as an administrator came. I was assigned to Government Girls Arabic Secondary School, Sumaila. It is a town, a local government out of Kano State. To serve as a vice principal.

ER: But it's not far from Kano? Sumaila?

HBA: It's a little bit far. It should be around 30 - 40km. I had to relocate completely.

ER: Okay, I was going to ask you. So, your family relocated with you?

HBA: Yes.

ER: And your children came as well?

HBA: Yes, I think the first year. Then there is the problem of placing them in proper schools. I had to bring them back to Kano.

ER: I understand. So after Sumaila, where did you end up?

⁴ The NYSC stands for the National Youth Service Corps, a program by the Nigerian government that encourages Nigerian graduates to get involved in the development of the country. ("National Youth Service Corps." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Youth_Service_Corps. Accessed on September 14, 2020)

⁵ WATC stands for Women's Arabic Teachers' College, founded in 1978 in Kano. This was one of the first colleges in Nigeria where Muslim women were allowed to teach. (Lapidus, I. (2002). *A History of Islamic Societies* (2nd ed., p. 753). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.)

⁶ Goron Dutse is a hill in Kano, Nigeria. ("Goron Dutse Hill." Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Goron-Dutse-Hill>. Accessed on September 15, 2020)

⁷ Gwale is a Local Government Area in the Greater Kano city area in Kano State, Nigeria. Nigeria has many different Local Government Areas that help divide the country into smaller areas to make maintenance easier. ("Gwale." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gwale>. Accessed on September 15, 2020)

HBA: To Wudil.⁸ To a day secondary school for girls, as well. As a school principal. I spent four and a half years in Wudil. And still, Wudil is a local government out of Kano State.

ER: I know where Wudil is because we were interested in dinkin hannu hand-weaving.⁹

HBA: Then from Wudil, I got transferred back into Kano. To a school here in Nasarawa local government.¹⁰ I spent four years there then they took me to the zonal office as an administrator. I spent a few years there, then they brought me back into the school system as a school principal to a school at Gedi-Gedi. Government Girls, Fatima Muhammad.¹¹ Then from Fatima Muhammad, I was transferred back to the other school that I held till, I think, from 1999 to 2003; I went back to [inaudible]; I spent another four years there. On and off, two schools. Always dealing with girls and their parents.

ER: What were some of the challenges of working with girl students? What were some of the things that you wanted to impart to them?

HBA: If I should consider it an achievement, it is the fact that personally in my life, I have gone through several trials. I was in a polygamous home, I was not the only wife. I had several challenges. Had it been I had not acquired the education that I had--the exposure that I had through being enlightened, my challenges would have worsened. They would have been in the most horrible state. So, I took it upon myself to see that whenever I'm given that chance of going through them, even as a classroom teacher, then subsequently as an administrator, I always used to instill upon the students to be independent. And they could only acquire independence by learning.

ER: By completing their education.

HBA: Yes, by education.

ER: You know, we interviewed somebody in Abuja¹² and one of things she wants to do is to see that all the girls in Nigeria have secondary school education.

HBA: My own, I have always put it to them, that they should go above that level. I am happy anytime... Madam, the first of girls I taught as a classroom teacher are now medical doctors,

⁸ Wudil, like Gwale, is a Local Government Area in Kano State. ("Wudil." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wudil>. Accessed on September 15, 2020)

⁹ *Dinkin Hannu* translates to hand-weaving in English from almost all of the languages spoken in Nigeria (Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo). It is a form of hand embroidery well-known in Northern Nigeria. ("The Queen Amina embroiders from Nigeria." Textile Research Centre. <https://www.trc-leiden.nl/trc/index.php/en/blog/786-the-queen-amina-embroideries-from-nigeria>. Accessed on September 15, 2020)

¹⁰ Nasarawa, or Nassarawa is another Local Government Area in Kano State, Nigeria. This is different from the Nasarawa state in central Nigeria. ("Nasarawa, Kano State." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nasarawa,_Kano_State. Accessed on September 15, 2020)

¹¹ The interviewee is likely referring to a Government Girls school in Gyadi-Gyadi, a ward in the Local Government Area Tarauni in Kano State, Nigeria. ("Tarauni." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarauni>. Accessed on September 15, 2020)

¹² Abuja is the capital city of Nigeria, which lies in the Federal Capital Territory in the central area of the country. ("Abuja." Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Abuja-national-capital-Nigeria>. Accessed on September 15, 2020)

lawyers, politicians. One of them just became a special advisor to the governor recently, during his first term. And anytime their own children were graduating from the university, they would send it to me through WhatsApp, saying, “Mummy, look. Look what is happening.” When they are marrying off their kids, they will say, “Mummy, look what is happening.” But already, they have undergone schooling. So, I always used to take pride and thank God that this has happened. I’ll go into the market, I’ll be at the shopping malls, I will see my former students, they’ll come in and hug. Their children, their husbands, will all be kneeling down to greet. And the first thing after greeting would be, “Mummy, I have become this.” It is within their consciousness that they must aspire to rise up. That was what I had been instilling and Alhamdulillah,¹³ Allah has given me life to see the fulfillment.

ER: That’s wonderful, honestly. I know you mentioned polygamy, but are there other problems for young women, sometimes, arranged marriages? I don’t know if that’s been an issue for some of the students that you’ve worked with. And is there some way of addressing that issue?

HBA: There are. I have had an encounter with that. I can recall it wasn’t even the biological father of the girl concerned. It was his senior brother, but being here in the north, we give importance to extended family structure. I could recall that girl was a very brilliant girl. It was a policy in the ministry of education of Kano State that all girls that are already in their husbands’ homes as wives shouldn’t be mixed with girls that are coming from their parents’ house; so special institutions were set aside for married women to continue their secondary education there. If there’s even a break up... probably, a parent withdrew the child from Standard 2 or 3, got her married, and probably there was a divorce or whatever, then the parents decided to return her back, she would be in that institution. While here in a normal setting of a school, that girl was in SS2;¹⁴ she only had one year to complete. Then her biological father came--she was in a science class, I can recall. She had already memorized the Holy Quran. She was a very brilliant girl. That was the day I saw a man being weak because he was crying when he was telling me that “Hajiya, I’m going to withdraw Asiya.” I said why? He said, “I have to because my senior brother in our home is the person that takes the last decision and he has decided to marry two of his children that are the same age of two of my children in my house and he is going to join them together to get them married. So we have to withdraw her.” To withdraw Asiya from the school at that stage? How promising that girl was! I kept quiet and I was thinking, how do I contain this? How do I help him because it is clear he doesn’t want to, but he can do nothing. Because he told me their own parents, his own mother, is alive and in Islam, it is an abomination, sort of. He cannot dare. When that senior brother says, it has to be done. I said, do I go and visit the mother, that is the grandmother of the girl? He said no, I would be adding more fuel to the fire. I said, do I go to the district head? Because as a principal, I have the right to protect her. Yes, that right is given in law. I said, okay, I will talk to the district head so it will be from the uppermost structure that they are called and advised. Let them give her that one year, at least for her, let them postpone the wedding. He said okay. So I went to visit the traditional ruler. “*Ya ce wane gida*

¹³ *Alhamdulillah* is an Arabic phrase meaning ‘praise be to God’ in English. (“Alhamdulillah.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alhamdulillah>. Accessed on September 15, 2020)

¹⁴ In Nigeria, SS2 is equivalent to the 11th grade, and stands for Senior Secondary 2. (“Education in Nigeria.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Nigeria. Accessed on September 16, 2020)

ne?”¹⁵ he asked me, “which of the family?” I told him the family. He called the senior brother that is to tie that knot of marriage. Then later on, he sent to the school and asked me to come, when I came, he said, “Hajjiya?” I said, “Sir?” He said, “Please exercise patience, you know there are some people that are very strong-minded, no matter what you show them, they will not do. I have tried my best but he has insisted that the girl must be married off.” In the course of my duty in life, anyone that knows me will tell you that whatever policy is being set, I follow the policy to its logical conclusion. That was the first time in my career as a school principal to break a rule because I knew if I shoulder that marriage happen and she should get to that man’s house, then her being transferred to a married women’s institute, they wouldn’t even let her go. So I decided she stay with me, even though she’s married.

ER: Wow. So she was married?

HBA: They did the marriage ceremony, they took her to the boy’s home. And unfortunately, the boy is a driver to one of the politicians. He himself doesn’t have the level of education. But I insisted. I was crying in front of her father and the uncle. I said, “Please, let her even have this certificate so she will hold it, probably in the course of her life, she may use it later on.” So the marriage took place and I allowed that she should be coming from the husband’s home to the school. The only thing that I noticed is... as I told you, she was very brilliant and very orderly -- whatever that you needed, she had it. She started coming very late because she had to contend with the household. Then she took in, being a nursing mother. But I still insisted that she pass through the process and she sat for her SSCE¹⁶ exams in the school.

ER: So she finished?

HBA: Yes.

ER: We thank God. Do you know what happened to her eventually?

HBA: I have not. Because that singular act that I did caused all sorts of animosity, dislike, between me and her family. They thought that I just made an intrusion which I’m not supposed to. So I didn’t follow up. I did not.

ER: It’s okay.

HBA: My only ambition then was for her to have that certificate because I know eventually whatever may come out of the marriage or her life, she’ll need that to further her education and other things in life.

¹⁵“Ya ce wane gida ne?” is Hausa for, “he said which house?” It can be inferred that this means “which of the family?” or “which members of the family?”, as the interviewee explains. (“Ya ce wane gida ne”. Google Translate.

https://translate.google.com/?safe=strict&client=safari&rls=en&sxsrf=ALeKk02ouR72ZZzn2jpnVmpt14P84Ked-Q:1601736319135&gs_lcp=CgZwc3ktYWIQAzoHCCMQrglQJzoFCCEQoAE6BQghEKsCOgcIIRAKEKABULIaWLUiYlgjaAFwAHgAgAFriAG0B5IBBDExLjGYAQCgAQGqAQdnd3Mtd2l6wAEB&uact=5&um=1&ie=UTF-8&hl=en&client=tw-ob#auto/en/Ya+ce+wane+gida+ne. Accessed October 3, 2020.)

¹⁶ The SSCE stands for the Senior School Certificate Examination, which is the certificate indicating they have graduated from secondary education. (“West African Senior School Certificate Examination.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_African_Senior_School_Certificate_Examination. Accessed on September 16, 2020)

ER: I'm changing the subject a bit. You know the project that we're working on is called Global Feminisms and it's about different women from different parts of the world -- China, Brazil -- what their thoughts are about feminism. So, I'm just wondering, as a northern Nigerian woman, what do you think about feminism? How do you define it?

HBA: I don't know. I have not really gone into it. Why? Because I don't know if I could call it a stigma, sort of. Some years back, this issue of being a feminist is defined -- not that a woman can do what a man can do, not that -- what people are saying is like a challenging, you are challenging men, you want to do above them. And in my upbringing, culturally and religiously, I was brought up to respect a man and I had that respect. So, for me to challenge when there is nothing to challenge, I will more consider myself as an activist. When there is anything, there is an injustice to it. I don't usually contain it. Even if you didn't invite me to go in, I would. Do you understand? But to belong to a feminist, like they are saying... Because like I said, I refuse to go in deep to understand. It is like, if what people are saying about feminism is true, that it is a collection of women that believes that they can do far more better than men, and there are because God created individual differences in intelligence and whatever, but to overrule whatever decision is like fighting; I don't like fighting like "I'm more than you, I'm more than that." No. If there is a cause for you to act, to make things easy for a woman... You saw that there was an injustice between her and her husband, or in their family, I'll go in. Even if it is uninvited.

ER: There are different definitions of feminism. So, in a way, what you're saying is that it's a form of women's rights activism?

HBA: Not so. If it is a right, madam, if women activism are rights, then there are already rights. Like in here in Northern Nigeria, majority of our lives are dictated by religion, and the major religion that we follow is Islam. And in Islam, rights of women are categorically stated even though people conceive and have negative understanding of it. But if you could recall, I told you that my vocation is education of Islamic studies. So, I know what is rightly written in the Holy Quran, I know what is rightly written in the Hadith,¹⁷ and I know what the law contains. There is not an iota of injustice in it. In fact, if there is any religion that has given liberty to a woman, it's Islam because her rights from her husband are stated; her rights from her father are stated; and in each of the statements, it is for protection and for provision. So, anywhere there is injustice, they are not following Islam. They are not following religion.

ER: So that's what I was thinking of. It's when there are problems, that you have to... It's like with that student.

HBA: There are problems. There are men refusing to share their responsibilities that they are supposed to. Like when I told you I have something to offer, it is like I have been in schools, I have seen women being divorced and being sent out of their husbands' houses with nothing, and children being possessed by the husband, but then, the husbands will refuse to take care of the children. It is still the women that will go and find ways of seeing to the

¹⁷ In the faith of Islam, the Hadith is a record of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and is considered the second most important guidance after the Quran. ("Hadith." Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hadith>. Accessed on September 16, 2020)

education of the girl. I could recall when I was in Sumaila, there was a time that a particular girl was brought to us. Both me and the school principal during that time--and she's the present P.S.¹⁸ of Kano State. The principal then is now the permanent secretary of education in Kano State. We were virtually crying. The girl is just about eleven years and she was brought into the boarding institution. Not that there is a bad thing in doing that, but there is no provision from the father for her. While she used to see children eating biscuits before the meal from the school is given, she had nothing. In fact, when he brought her, he brought along with her: one bar soap for washing, one toilet soap, and nothing else. What fascinated us and drew our attention to her plight was the girl would run away from the hostels. She was always inside the bushy area of the school. Then, the school prefects noticed that. The head girl brought the girl to the school principal and we were in the office interviewing the student and it was when she was telling us her story that we just broke down and started crying. It was the principal then that asked her the address of the parent, of her mother's home... You know they have been separated. The school connected with the mother. And when she came, it was another crying galore from both the principal and me and the mother. But do you know what? Still, when the visiting day comes, when the father, comes, the first thing he asks was, "Was the mother here? Did she come?" He didn't give the girl anything. It was the school itself that raised the provision for her and the mother, we allow, any time she wants to come see her, even if it's not visiting day, she's supposed to. Even in day institutions, there are neglects from male parents, and there is injustice meted to the wife and the children.

ER: So, in a related way, are you giving girls the education to know their rights in the Quran? Is that part of it?

HBA: In schools, there are already syllabi, the curriculum is there, the syllabus is there, what they contain. So, as per the teaching of religion, there are subjects on divorce and marriage but then they are not expanded on in a way that they will fully know their rights, but it is briefly discussed. A discussion that between the age of an adolescent girl, she could understand. But it is the system that is not operated. I refuse to accept that it is the cultural norm, because during our own time when we were children, our fathers were not doing what the nowadays men are doing. They were following culture and they were following religion, what it dictates. So what is happening now, I consider it as deliberate injustice. You know, deliberate suppression and abuse.

ER: Do you think it's partly... maybe men feel threatened by women coming up? I mean, women are becoming politicians, they have positions in government.

HBA: It's not that. Because you rarely see that happening in a setting that the woman is highly educated and exposed. It rarely happens. In poverty-laden areas, in ghetto neighborhoods, such things happen. Even within the ranks of us that are a little bit enlightened, there are. Only there, the men feel threatened like you have said. So probably the option is to divorce the woman; "she's strong-headed, she's arrogant." But like I'm saying, I'm not trying to

¹⁸ The title P.S. means Permanent Secretary, which is the head of a ministry or civil service department in the Nigerian government. ("Federal Ministries of Nigeria." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Ministries_of_Nigeria. Accessed October 3, 2020.)

propagate any religion. I refuse that they hide under any religion. Religion didn't say so; it is explicitly explained.

ER: So you're saying the traditional culture... Sometimes people will be saying that the problem isn't the Quran or Islam, the problem is traditional cultural practice.

HBA: In more of that. Because in history, we have seen where women, even in the time of the holy prophet, served as nurses during the war, they served in different capacities. The holy prophet will allow a woman to speak out. In gatherings, you could raise up your hands and address the holy prophet. And during the four pious caliphs¹⁹ of Islam, the caliphs that followed him, any time decisions are made, a woman has the right to come in and ask that the caliph, "I want to see" and she would be allowed. So, it is not the religion, it isn't.

ER: No, it's not the religion. But I'm just thinking, for example, the issue of purdah.²⁰ Women staying in the house, and not being allowed to go out, to work. How are you dealing with that in your own work with secondary school girls?

HBA: The thing is, I think this idea of working or not is not... What I understand in that is, if there's a setting of marriage and the girl, like what is happening now, even amongst us that have gone through series of studying and experiences, we let our female children acquire university level education but before the marriage, we give liberty to the suitor – do you want her to work, or do you not want her to work? If you won't let her, then what kind of trading are you willing to let her have? Do you understand?

ER: So she can work in the house with some trade?

HBA: Because even now, there is a scarcity of civil service jobs. It's not like before. Before, we came out of the university and met the Youth Service, already work is waiting for us. But now, it's not. You have to train your child in vocation and skills. If the husband is ready to do what the religion tells him, the girl wouldn't need anything because among the primary duties is that he should feed her, clothe her, provide accommodation for her, health wise, and protect her against any impending danger. If he follows that, then she doesn't need to do anything. But then, she needs to be, to have her own finances, because she has relations and friends that she could cater, and she has likes which may not be similar to that of the husband. If she has money, she could do what she likes. She could promote the life of her children. So, what is happening now in modern northern Nigeria is that parents will ask the becoming husband, the suitor, "Are you going to let her because she has undergone all this?" And he says, "No, no, I don't want her work in an establishment." "What do you intend to do?" "We have already discussed with her, and during our discussions, she's going to become a tailor

¹⁹ The interviewee is referring to the first four caliphs of the Islamic empire: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali. A caliph is a chief Muslim ruler, and a caliphate is the area or period in which the caliph reigned. These four caliphs ruled the *Rashidun* Caliphate, which translates to "rightly guided", between 632-661 CE. ("Rashidun Caliphate." Ancient History Encyclopedia. https://www.ancient.eu/Rashidun_Caliphate/. Accessed on September 18, 2020)

("Caliphate." Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Caliphate>. Accessed on September 18, 2020)

²⁰ *Purdah* is a Muslim practice according to which the women are secluded from the eye of the public by wearing concealing clothing outdoors, and by using screens and curtains indoors. ("Purdah." Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/purdah>. Accessed on September 18, 2020)

at home, she's had that training, she's a photographer..." So many things are going on in Hausa²¹ society that was not happening before. And it is empowering the women.

ER: You said that the civil servant jobs are reduced now. What about teaching jobs? Are those also difficult to come by now?

HBA: Even though the schools need more teachers, because of the stagnation in the civil service, the governments are complaining that they don't have money to employ. Even though there are needs for these teachers, since there is no money to pay, there is no job.

ER: I see. That's the problem. What about nursing? Is that also...?

HBA: It's the same. You'll go to hospitals, you'll see nurses... In fact, you know there is this thing among teachers and nurses: one telling the other that they work harder than the other. They will tell you that nowadays, they stay in the hospital; it's not like before when they had shifts and there was availability for their colleagues to take over. It's a stagnated system, in every sphere.

ER: In some ways, maybe there's a safety net for women. They can stay at home and do vocational...

HBA: And they are doing it. You'll see places now, in Kano, event centers, women performing catering services, and other social... And the husbands are allowing. Several types of vocations.

ER: It seems to me that some of the things you've been doing in your teaching career and your administrative career have contributed to that situation. You're a model for them.

HBA: Yes. In fact, I told you. They make it a duty to call me whenever there is an advancement in any sphere. They call, "Mummy, see."

ER: So, do you belong to any organization that's involved with Muslim girls or Muslim women? Any kind of women's organization in Nigeria?

HBA: Presently, I'm involved in three associations, sort of. But it's only one that's totally feminine. Like I told you before the onstart of the interview, I consider myself more of an activist. Anywhere that I see collections of people trying to rectify an injustice, I jump. If it is my voice I'll give, I'll give; if it is a work that will be carried out, I'll be among them.

ER: So what do the three organizations do?

²¹ The Hausa are a group of people from northwestern Nigeria and southern Niger. They speak the Hausa language. ("Hausa." Britannica." <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hausa>. Accessed on September 18, 2020)

HBA: The Arewa²² [inaudible] is predominantly a northern woman association. Like I was telling the chairman yesterday, I don't know, she may ask me if I belong to a feminist group, a feminine gender related association, and I do but I don't participate fully, but I'm a member.

ER: What are the other two? You said there were three.

HBA: Recently, there is a Kano Leads²³ and I take pride to say the president of Kano Leads is a woman. She was a former permanent secretary in the civil service of Nigeria. She's a lawyer by profession and she's been exposed to both international and national angle. The motivating factor for her to create that organization is what she viewed as several kinds of injustice going on. She wants to start with Kano. So, Leads is totally for Kano State indigenes that have like-minds, men and women.

ER: What does Leads stand for?

HBA: It is an advocacy group, voices out.

ER: Is it an NGO? And is it based in Kano or Abuja?

HBA: It is an NGO and it is based in Kano.

ER: You said they've had some activities, some injustices they've addressed? Could you please tell us some of those?

HBA: You mean areas of intervention? They not only intervene in governmental decisions. If Leads saw that a decision is taken on behalf of the people of Kano and a certain amount of money is going to be put. To the government's own eye, it thought it would benefit. But you know we are in a political setting, sometimes money will be geared toward a self-centered venture; it will be for the people but then if you look at the project itself, it is not that. I know that Leads intervenes in such. There was a case whereby billions of dollars was going to be spent on a railway project or so, they overshot, and eventually, the state government had to lay off. They put pressure on that. And then, even common problems, like this issue of the stealing of our children... You know the abduction to Western...

ER: The south-east mostly.

HBA: Leads made a presentation at court. We were there. I was one of the people that they sent. We were at the court to see to the proceedings and the people and the Leads stance being given to the committee set up by the Kano government.

²² Arewa is a Hausa word which means "north". ("Arewa." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arewa>. Accessed on September 18, 2020)

²³ As the interviewee goes on to explain, KANO LEADS is a non-governmental organization which stands for Kano Leadership Enlightenment and Advocacy for Development Initiative. The convener of the organization is Hajiya Aishati Dan-Kani. ("NGO advocates re-engagement of retired health workers to contain COVID-19 in Kano." Radio Nigeria. <https://www.radionigeria.gov.ng/2020/05/04/ngo-advocates-re-engagement-of-retired-health-workers-to-contain-covid-19-in-kano/>. Accessed on September 18, 2020)

ER: I was reading about that, it's shocking. So, that's been reduced somehow because of Leads' work?

HBA: Yes. And it is still pursuing the matter to see how it will eventually end because we consider the government's quick intervention to set up a committee as a defining factor. Because had it been they let civil organizations to rise up, it would have been better; things would have been done. But always, they will say, let's wait for the white people to come. But all the same, Leads took a stand on that.

ER: That's great. So, what was it, Leads and this Arewa [inaudible]

HBA: [inaudible] It's like [inaudible] arewa party. It was established since the time of the [inaudible]. That [inaudible] arewa has been in existence since the time of my birth.

ER: So you said three organizations, what's the third one?

HBA: Three in the sense that we are working together with that one, Leads. Our own goals are the same. Kano State Concerned Citizens Forum.²⁴

ER: Those Kano State Concerned Citizens activities, are they identical with Leads or somehow they are different?

HBA: They are identical. Only that while Leads is advocating, they execute.

ER: What's something they've executed? Some project?

HBA: I cannot say precisely, because my own mentor, our own president, is a part and parcel of the executive members of the other one. We just have briefs from her. I cannot say.

ER: That's fine. Do you work with anyone in other parts of Nigeria or are you focused mainly on northern Nigeria?

HBA: I had wanted to become a member of...

ER: Is it FOMWAN?

HBA: Not FOMWAN?²⁵ I was a member of FOMWAN sometimes ago, but then I stopped being a member. Women (something) of Nigeria? Men Nigeria's own form of association, but it was my husband that refused me ten years ago to join.

²⁴ The Kano State Concerned Citizens Forum is a product of the organization Kano Concerned Citizens Initiative (KCCI), a means for Kano citizens to bring their concerns to the government for intervention. ("The Kano Initiative." Daily Trust. <https://dailytrust.com/the-kano-initiative>. Accessed on September 26, 2020)

²⁵ FOMWAN stands for the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria. It is an organization established in 1985 that works to promote the welfare and the health, literacy and social development of Muslim girls. ("The Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria." Development Aid. <https://www.developmentaid.org/#!/organizations/view/62287/the-federation-of-muslim-womens-associations-in-nigeria-fomwan>. Accessed on September 26, 2020)

ER: Why was that? Because it was in another part of--?

HBA: No. That is not in another part. Muslim Women's Association.

ER: So why did your husband not want you to join?

HBA: That is where that issue of feminism comes. Because different women from different parts of Nigeria were coming and I could recall the time of Mariam Babangida,²⁶ it was during that time, they were given prominence because the government accepted them. He thought I would be strong-headed. [speaks in Hausa]

ER: And is that organization still functioning?

HBA: Yes. It has been long. And it is still existing. And it has branches all over Nigeria. It is for the Nigerian women. [Hausa] That was his stance, but now I'm old, probably it's because I was young then, behaving radically, he thought...

ER: You would really change? So, you could join now?

HBA: I could.

ER: We've been talking about feminism, do you have some associations with it where women are being too forceful or saying they should be better than men? Do you see that associated with western women as well, or is that a separate issue?

HBA: No. Because I happen to be somebody that likes reading a lot. To an extent I can't say all western women are feminist. I don't accept that. Because I used to go into places to read and I used to see the family life of an average European woman. It's a normal life. It's just like in here; when there are differences, there are divorces even at that level. When it is home taking, they took care of the home; I saw it normal. So I can't associate feminist radicalism the way that I was briefed on it with it being associated with western women alone. Because even now in Nigeria, there are women that share that same view of radicalism like I've told you. Should I categorically state what it really is that I'm hiding? They said feminists are same-sex, you know?

ER: Ah, I got it.

HBA: Subsequently, they are hiding under that gap of being a feminist when they are lesbians. In fact, that is the reason. When you say you are a feminist, subsequently...

ER: People will be assuming. Okay. I think it's true for some, but not for all. For some feminists, the idea is that women should have equal rights. For everything. Not just one thing or another. I think maybe that could be difficult sometimes.

²⁶ Maryam Babangida was the First Lady of Nigeria. Her husband, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, was Nigeria's head of state from 1985 to 1993. She was involved with a lot of positive work for Nigerian women, including founding organizations like the Better Life Programme for Rural Women. ("Maryam Babangida." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maryam_Babangida. Accessed on September 26, 2020)

HBA: See, I consider people, like I said at the starting of the interview, that everybody is created differently, taught at different, tests are different, so you can't say because you are a woman and you want women to be protected, then you go to the extreme of marrying a woman. That is why I said I don't consider myself that, I consider myself more of an activist. Where there is injustice, I don't like it and I participate in bringing it to the end.

ER: I don't think it's common here, but around the Lokoja area, you know they used to have—before the British came—they had women-women marriage in that area. But it was if a man was married to a woman and maybe she didn't have children with him, she could find another woman and she would be married to that woman and he would have sex with her and they would have children. The funny part to me was always... some of the western people are saying – oh, Nigeria, a lot of African countries, they don't like same-sex marriage, but actually, it was the British who outlawed it. The British were opposed to it at that time.

HBA: But what I'm saying... I'm not trying to protect the British or the Nigerians. Even then, it is a cultural thing, not that physically, the woman and the other woman that got married would be like that physically.

ER: No, it was not like that. But the British opposed it. They really opposed it. I mean, they wanted to get rid of it.

HBA: So I think if you talk of feminism here, one's thoughts completely goes to that aspect that eventually, this is what it would lead to. That's why even when there was a trial some years back whereby they tried to introduce sex education into the curriculum—I can recall that—and we had to refuse to because the content, some view it—those that saw it—as trying to, in some way, introduce same-sex relationships and we refuse to accept it here, and eventually it died down. Do you understand? So more of an activist for social injustices, and that's it.

ER: That's important. You're helping women and that's really the main thing. I had another question. Is there some way these early early marriages can be reduced? Especially in villages.

HBA: It is helping now. There are enlightenments, various human groups are enlightening and there is a reduction. Especially if you happen to interview school principals of female education, they will tell you. I started being a school principal from 1995. I could tell you that from 1992 and '93 when I was posted to Sumaila to serve as a vice principal till now, presently, there is a drastic change in the way early girl child marriages are taking place. During those years in the 90s, it was more rampant. You would hardly see a class of sixty students starting at JS1²⁷ in a female secondary school, before they get to SS3²⁸ where they

²⁷ JS1 or JSS1 in Nigeria is the first year of Junior Secondary School and is equivalent to the 7th grade. ("Education in Nigeria." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Nigeria. Accessed on September 26, 2020)

²⁸ SS3 in Nigeria is the third year of Senior Secondary School and is equivalent to the 12th grade. ("Education in Nigeria." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Nigeria. Accessed on September 26, 2020)

will graduate, there will be only 30-something left. Along the way, they would have been taken out and gotten married. But now, it's not the case.

ER: I think things are changing.

HBA: They are. They are changing.

ER: It's good for women. So, is there anything you wanted to add? Some other experience or interesting story that helps to explain women's situations in northern Nigeria?

HBA: I think while the interview is going on, I have already stated those. I could clearly see and I don't know where this interview will reach, but I'm telling you, if our women in Northern Nigeria are given the chance to participate in politics the way the women in the south-west Nigeria are given, definitely, we would make a difference more than what is happening in the work force. I know this.

ER: Okay. That's an interesting point. Because if you have political power...

HBA: If you have political power, you make decisions, you shape people's lives. Women generally think more of the home, of the children, but the men think more of the world, of what they would possess. It is like you are waging war, you want to possess, you will establish, buy cars, marry women, make girlfriends, you know? And you don't give a damn about anything. The woman's thoughts are not like that. And any time I saw a deputy governor from Lagos being a woman, and I saw a deputy governor from Ondo²⁹ being a woman, I said, "Oh, how I wish Allah would prolong my life to see it happening in the north." Then, just recently, El-Rufai³⁰ started.

ER: I was just gonna say, cos Kaduna State!

HBA: Yes. We are hoping that it will spread now to the northern Nigeria. Anytime a woman politician comes out, all forces will be on her to suppress her, she wouldn't even become a House of Representatives member, neither a senator. All of them that you at the National Assembly, if there are women there, they are the wives of the governors. Like in the case of Yobe, something Hadiza,³¹ they are wives of governors. If eventually you saw them, they are wives of the governors or the daughters of the chairmen of the party. So, there is a connection. Not that a woman that is aspiring, a hard working... no. They wouldn't let that happen. My prayer is that one day, we will see a situation whereby what is happening in

²⁹ Ondo is a state in Nigeria. ("Ondo." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ondo_State. Accessed on September 26, 2020)

³⁰ Nasir Ahmad el-Rufai is a Nigerian politician who has been the Governor of Kaduna State in Nigeria since 2015. ("Nasir Ahmad el-Rufai." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nasir_Ahmad_el-Rufai. Accessed on September 26, 2020)

³¹ The interviewee is likely referring to Khadija Bukar Abba Ibrahim, who is a Nigerian politician and is a representative of the 9th Nigerian National Assembly. She is the wife of Bukar Abba Ibrahim, who was the governor of Yobe State in Nigeria. ("Nigerian National Assembly delegation from Yobe." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigerian_National_Assembly_delegation_from_Yobe. Accessed on September 26, 2020) ("Khadija Bukar Abba Ibrahim." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khadija_Bukar_Abba_Ibrahim. Accessed on September 26, 2020) ("Bukar Ibrahim." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bukar_Ibrahim. Accessed on September 26, 2020)

Lagos and other places is happening here. We will move away from politics of “See, there will be light or there won’t be light. There is going to be water and...” Lagos has gone beyond that thought. I was telling a friend from Lagos, Mrs. Taiwo, that, “See, Mrs. Taiwo, you are creating a country within a country.” She said, “Ah, why would you say that?” I said, Lagos has become a country of its own, in different aspects of life. A friend from Kano State, a Hausa Fulani³² woman residing in Kano, her husband is an industrialist, she was telling me that, “Binta,³³ every time we travel abroad, the only city I have peace of mind when eventually our flight lands is in the city of Lagos. Wallahi,³⁴ this is what she told me. And they are residing in the city of Lagos but both she and her husband have their origins here in Kano. I said, “Why did you say so?” She said, “Kai,³⁵ didn’t you notice what is happening there? Everything there is being done—how do I say it—in a right manner; being done in the right sense. So she was attesting to the security levels, the social amenities and whatever you get there. Even this aspect of charity and helping, see our people begging everywhere. She said in Lagos there are charity homes and you could apply that you wanted to have a home whereby you could take care of people that have no family. Their home is near one of those facilities. She said, “Binta do you know that you could see a bus taking their young adolescent inhabitants to the various universities.” They don’t have a home, but that is their home. They did primary school there. What I’m saying is that they have a society that is structured. Like an [inaudible] society; they are not thinking like northern Nigeria. I want a situation whereby northern Nigeria elites will come into harmony with the traditional rulers, the politicians so that we’ll bring about that change that is happening in other sectors of the country. And we’ll help them.

ER: I agree. And that’s a wonderful way to end this interview. Thank you very much. We thank you. The Global Feminisms Project really thanks you for taking the time and for your thoughtful comments.

³² Hausa-Fulani are an ethnic group from Sudan and are located primarily in the Northern region of Nigeria. (“Hausa-Fulani.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hausa%E2%80%93Fulani>. Accessed on September 26, 2020)

³³ The interviewee, Hajiya Binta Abdulhamid, is being referred to by her middle name here.

³⁴ *Wallahi* or *wallah* is an Arabic word which means “I swear to Allah.” (“Wallahi.” Collins Dictionary. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/submission/12779/wallahi#:~:text=wallahi-New%20Word%20Suggestion.Common%20in%20London%20slang>. Accessed on September 26, 2020)

³⁵ “Kai” is Nigerian slang used as an exclamation to show surprise. (“Kai.” AfroPigdin. <https://afropeedgin.wordpress.com/2016/10/05/kai/>. Accessed on October 3, 2020.)