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TURBANING OF AMINA YUSUF GARBA AS TAMBARAR BINJI: A GENDER NARRATIVE IN NIGERIA

Godwin Onuh Odeh,¹ Arshad Munir²

Abstract: The paper examines the epic turbaning of Amina Yusuf Garba as Tambarar Binji and the promises it holds for women folks in the Muslim north and non-Muslim women in Nigeria. It notes that the event which took place on the 26th of February 2022 was the first of its kind in the recent history of northern Nigeria and the Sokoto caliphate in particular. Generally and traditionally, women even before the Jihad of 1804 are perceived to be held to utmost seclusion which is to have a very serious effect on the ambitious few. However, Amina's experience in recognition of her contributions to girls' education and the general development of her people appears to draw a new curtain that society now appreciates and recognizes outstanding personalities irrespective of religion and sex. The paper, therefore, concludes by charging women in the north and beyond to explore and grab the opportunities brought about by the event in the struggle for the changing plight of females.

Keywords: *Turbaning, Amina Yusuf Garba, Tambarar Binji, Nigeria, Gender Studies.*

PRELUDE

Hausa communities before the Jihad of 1804 were largely independent of one another but wedded together by the jihad. This is not to say the religion of Islam was unknown till the coming of the religious reformer, Shaykh Usman Danfodiyo. The religion was known and was in operations; principles and practice, just that his emergence raised its puritanical status of it. Islam since its revivalism in 1804, dictate the affairs of men and women in the Muslim north, in which Sokoto State is the headquarters. In short, the

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Sultan of Sokoto who is the direct descendant of Usman Danfodiyo is the father of Muslims in Nigeria. In the north particularly among Muslims, women occupied special space in the scheme of things based on the idea of *purdah* (seclusion). The coming of western education and the so-called civilization had not changed the status of women and even the ways of life of traditional Hausa and Fulani men. Thus, few naturally ambitious women have a lot to contend within the areas of social and political leadership and recognition. However, there appears to be a beacon of hope and light to ambitious women as society is progressively and gradually giving recognition to achievements irrespective of gender and religion.

It is against this background Sokoto State and its environs became agog when the news of conferring an honorific title and turbaning a woman, the first of its kind in recorded or recent history was broken. This made feminists, gender scholars, and analysts probe the *raison d'être* of the development. Without much ado, the paper is structured into six sections. One is the brief introduction, two, conceptual issues, three, considers the personality, four; focuses on the historical evolution of the title (*Tambara*), five; views the implications the episode would have on the womenfolk and the society at large, and six, which is the last, is the conclusion.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Concepts considered here are turbaning and gender and respectively. Turban is Arabic, *imamah*, and Persian *dulban*; all meaning a headdress made of a long scarf wound around the head or mini underlying hat.¹ The headdress differs in shape and colours, some 50 yards and more, or less. Historically, the turban is of Eastern origin and is often worn by Muslim men; however, after the 19th century, it was longer obligatory for Muslims. It may be interesting to note that American Indian people also wore a turban and so also European men in the 14th century. Before the world wars, Paul Poiret, a designer introduced it to the French.² The point of interest is that the turban is of the Muslim world, essentially meant for men, though women are not left out. Ceremonially,

¹ Turban headdress, <https://www.britannica.com>.

² Turban headdress, <https://www.britannica.com>.

it is done by conferring honorific titles to men as women are not so much known for holding titles. Thus, the experience of Amina Yusuf Garba becomes significant.

Gender is not about the female sex one alone; as a broad phenomenon, it touches men and women. The phenomenon draws closely related concepts such as gender role and sex role, the first which denotes biological and anatomical characteristics that contradistinguish male from the female gender.¹ Though biological differences cannot be overemphasized, in a practical sense the ideas of gender roles are socially and culturally constructed. In short, gender differences are fundamentally rooted in the belief and practices associated with masculinity and femininity. The argument in essence is that the phenomenon is largely a socio-cultural development and not biological traits that define what males and females are, what they do or do not do, and that robust reciprocal relations should exist between sexes.²

Secondly and closely related are gender roles, which are nothing but functions, attributes, and performs given to one's status in society. However, roles within the gender matrix are culturally determined.³ What this means is that roles are creations of the society for regulating social relations and how societies are culturally designed. Issues such as how a male or female behaves, profession or career choice, and businesses, among others, are culturally determined. Gender role as it is is different from sex roles such as carrying the pregnancy and breastfeeding a baby, which females are biologically configured to do so.

Thirdly related is sex role, which connotes responsibilities or biological functions of a particular sex; male or female could engage as a result of possessing certain organs.⁴ As noted, for instance, pregnancy and breastfeeding are the exclusive roles of a female given their biological characteristics, but child training, cooking washing of clothes and

¹ O S. Omadjohwoefe, "Gender Role Differentiation and Social Mobility of Women in Nigeria" in *Journal of Social Science*, (27)1, 2011, p.67.

² G O.Odeh, "Isatou Drammeh and Female Gender Roles in The *Gambia*: A Challenge to Sokoto Women in the Twenty-First Century" in S M. Lawal and I Y.Ahmed, (eds), *Revisiting Sokoto Caliphate Legacy and New Frontiers: Gedenkschrift in Memory of Professor Sa' ad Abubakar*, Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2021, P.328.

³ A E. Idyorough, *Gender: Concepts and Issues in Nigeria*, Makurdi:Aboki Publishers, 2004, p.2.

⁴ A E. Idyorough, *Gender: Concepts and Issues in Nigeria*, pp.2,3.

dishware, governance, and political leadership, among others, are gender roles that it could be done by any. This understanding underpinned agitations that crystallized into a series of movements that were to lead to the idea of women's emancipation and gender equality.

Arising from women's suppression across cultures, the idea of a declaration of the International Women's Year was initiated at a conference in Mexico in 1975, which was followed by the Beijing Conference of 1995 which are considered fundamental milestones in the struggles for the repositioning of the status of women.¹ As matter of fact, the concern for the uplifting of the status of women brought gender issues to the mainstream academic circle beginning in the 1960s. Women studies that came focused on three thematic areas, namely;

1. The study of the way gender relations have operated in social life in the past and present;
2. The study of the representations of women's experiences in literature, language, and religion; and
3. The study of the concepts used to differentiate women and men and feminism and masculinity as well as the examination of theoretical perspective in above all those drawn from history.²

While the above captured the plight of women, the (b) above points to the significance of religion in our case Islam and how northern Nigerian women were religiously and culturally conceived. It is in the context of this that the turbaning of Amina Yusuf Garba, a phenomenon is known for the male gender becomes relevant. Before going into the episode and its implications of it, it is pertinent to look at the personality involved.

¹ L. I. Vajime, "The Role of Women Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Promoting Gender Equality and Sustainable Development" in *FASS : Journal of Faculty Arts Seminar Series*, BSU, Vol.2, 2004, p.213.

² L. I. Vajime, " The Role of Women Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). See also G O. Odeh, A A.Sifawa and M. Marafa, *Gendering Affairs of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences*, Sokoto State University, Sokoto-Nigeria. This is an aspect of University Based Research sponsored by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund, Sokoto State University, Sokoto.

THE PERSONALITY: AMINA YUSUF GARBA

The persona, Amina Yusuf Garba, *mni, MON* is a native of Binji Local Government Area of Sokoto State Nigeria. She was born into the family of Sheikh Haliru Binji. She did her primary and post-primary education at St. Paul's Primary School and Federal Government College Sokoto. She holds a Bachelor's and Master's of Arts degrees from the University of Sokoto(Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto) and Bayero University Kano respectively. She started her career at the Ministry of Information Sokoto during her national youth service year (NYSC).¹ She is a consummate and a distinguished administrator, educationist, policymaker, peace ambassador, and a role model who enjoys a career of well over 25 years of the active University administration. She is the pioneer Registrar of the Sokoto State University that kick-started during the administration of His Excellency, Distinguished Senator (Dr.) Alhaji Aliyu Magatarkada Wamakko. Upon satisfactory performance, her appointment was renewed in 2017 by His Excellency Rt. Hon. Aminu Waziri Tambuwal, again because of the expiration of tenure by May/June 2022, recently appointed her as the pioneer Registrar of the newly established, but upgraded Shehu Shagari College of Education to the Shehu Shagari University of Education, Sokoto (SSUOE). Before going too far, it suffices to state here that her appointment by the duo of Wamakko and Tambuwal, shows her distinctive quality of leadership and the gender sensitiveness on the part of the former governor and the present.²

Before the above engagement, Amina Yusuf Garba, *mni, MON* had served as Director-General, Directorate of Women and Children Affairs, Zamfara in the year 2000. Consequently, she was appointed Honorable Commissioner, heading the Ministries of Women Affairs, Water Resource, and Culture and Tourism in 2003, 2005, and 2006. She also later became the Permanent Commissioner Zamfara State Universal Basic Education Board in 2007 and 2012. Authoritatively, she remains the first female Commissioner in Zamfara State, the husband's home state since the return to democracy in 1999. In retrospect, in 1983 she was employed and rose through the ranks to the cherished

¹ See Curriculum Vitae of Amina Yusuf Garba, MON, *mni*, office o the Registrar, Sokoto State University, Sokoto.

² Personal observation of the authors.

position of Deputy Registrar at the Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto in 1996. As a strategic planner and thinker, she was nominated in 2020 by the National Universities Commission for the Senior Executive Course, in which she meritoriously excelled at the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) SEC 42, 2020 and bagged the coveted prestigious *mni*. She is a recipient of the National Honour of the *Member of the Order of Niger* (MON).¹

Apart from and before NIPSS, in her career years, she attended many professional courses and conferences, some of which are as follows; Higher Education Management at the Universities of Warwick and Oxford, United Kingdom 1999, International Leadership on family health at the San Francisco Public Health Institute USA, 2003, Beijing +10, New York 2005, Good Governance at the Africana Leadership Institute, University of Kansas, USA, 2009; Professional Development at the Institute for Capacity-Building in Leadership for Development and the Public Good, Kansas State University 2010; Regional Conference on Global Peace at Atlanta, USA 2012 and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 2013; Educational Administrative Planning, Efficacy Development and Intelligence at the University of Michigan, Dubai and Nigeria/American Higher Education Administrators at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, USA 2014. She equally participated in the International Conference on Education at the University of Toronto, Canada 2018, and Social Sciences at the University Lahore, Pakistan 2016. She has gone on study trips at the University of Turku, Finland, 2019, and the University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China 2018.²

The iron lady, as she is fondly called in the University community, is widely travelled and a recipient of numerous awards too many to mention. She is an all-time woman and girl child advocate, a bridge-builder, and a grassroots mobilizer whose utmost delight, passion, and watchwords are justice, equity, fairness, and welfare of the people. Thus, upon persistent pressure from her people, she was compelled to show face on the political landscape and contested for the position of the House of Representatives in 2011, which in the eyes of several pundits and analysts appears smaller than her caliber,

¹ Citations / Profile of Amina Yusuf Garba, MON, *mni*.

² Citations / Profile of Amina Yusuf Garba, MON, *mni*.

though the appearance was described as a momentous outing in the modern history of the caliphate and Northern Nigeria.¹

GLIMPSES AT THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE TITLE, TAMBARA

Having seen the brief on the personality, it is pertinent to take a cursory look at the title in terms of evolution and significance. The history of the title *Tambara* has its origins in pre-colonial Senegal, afterward the Azbin and Kwanni (Birnin-Konni) in the present Republic of Niger, a very close neighbor to Nigeria, where Sokoto State shares boundary.² The title, *Tambara* symbolizes an individual who works and labours selflessly and tirelessly towards developing and uplifting her people to a level of a contented human being capable of taking care of themselves and others. In short, the turbaning with the honorific title is part and mark of recognition and encouragement to privileged hardworking few. The first to be turbaned in the Republic of Niger was Hajiya Rabi'atu, the *Tambara* of Kwanni; a legislative member in the Republic of Niger.³ It was conferred on her by His Royal Highness, the Emir of Kwanni in recognition of her selfless efforts toward the development of education particularly, the girl-child. While the title is famous in the Senegambia region where it originates, it is relatively rare in the Republic of Niger. In Sokoto State and Northern Nigeria at large, it appears Amina Yusuf Garba, *MON, mni* is the first female to be turbaned in recorded history (on Saturday, 25th February 2022). The conferment and turbaning come in appreciation and recognition of her tremendous contributions towards the development of education and the multifaceted need of her people.⁴

¹ Opinion poll on the persona, Amina Yusuf Garba.

² Programme of events for the Turbaning Ceremony of Amina Yusuf Garba, *MON, mni* as *Tambarar Binji* at Palace of the Sarkin Yakin Binji, HRH Alh. Kabiru Usman Abdulwahab, Binji Town, Sokoto State, Saturday 26th February, 2022.

³ Programme of events for the Turbaning Ceremony of Amina Yusuf Garba.

⁴ Interview with the honoree; the information is also contained in the Programme of events for the Turbaning Ceremony of Amina Yusuf Garba.

IMPLICATIONS OF AMINA YUSUF GARBA'S TURBANING

The gender narrative to her turbaning as *Tambarar Binji* by His Royal Highness, Sarkin Yakin Binji, Alhaji Kabiru Usman Abdulwahab has two handles. First, is the civilizational processes it has undergone. In other words, the title is now conferred on women of priceless virtues and generosity who have distinct charisma in forming Civil Society Organizations, which are targeted at the development of Islamic and western education, as well as solving other needs of the people. Such Islamic education and Civil Society Organizations were not in existence in traditional society. The second handle is the changing nature of the status of women in Northern Nigeria; in the sense that, in the area, Amina Yusuf Garba was born, bred, and worked, the seat of the caliphate and environs, is a place where women appear to be held with utmost seclusion.¹ This was the situation even before the popular Jihad of 1804 in Hausa land. In short, opinions are divided on whether a northern Nigeria Muslim woman had achieved such a feat before, with some arguing that the Queen Amina of Zazzau episode is shrouded in myth and that there was no queen like that capable of ruling or leading gallant men,² while others argue that if there “was Amina of Zazzau, we have Amina of the Caliphate”. Whether there was a Queen Amina of Zazzau or not, historical evidence points to her existence. Probably, the father of the Amina of the caliphate might have named her after the famous

¹ G O.Odeh, “It all Begins Here”: Historicizing the Motto of the Sokoto State University, Sokoto-Nigeria in *Journal of Research and Contemporary Issues*, Volume 9, No. &2, 2014, Makurdi: Aboki Publishers. A. Munir and G O.Odeh, *The Establishment of the Nigerian Sokoto Caliphate: An Inquest into the Background History of the 1804 Jihad in Hausa Land, 210 years After in Al-qalam. A Journal of the Department of Islamic Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore. M.H. Lakhvi (ed), Vol. 19 No. 02, Institute of Islamic Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore, 2014. A. Munir, B. Bhutto, G O.Odeh, “The Social and Moral Teachings of Christianity, Islam and Buddhism in the Context of Global Peace” in *Al-Adwa*. At: <http://journals.pu.edu.pk/pu/images/journal/szic/PDF/English/2%20Arshad%20Munir%20The%20Social%20and%20moral%20teachings%20of%20the%20Religion%20paper24-5-15.pdf>. For related issues and argument see, G O. Odeh, “Religious Tolerance in The Gambia, 1965-2016: Lessons for Nigeria” in *Islamic University Multidisciplinary Journal (IUM), Uganda*, 3(1), 2020. At: <https://iuiu.ac.ug>. Online ISSN: 26176513; Print ISSN: 24090263. (70-82). I Atagher, “The Sokoto Jihad Revisited: A Contribution to Revolutionary Framework” in *Benue Valley Journal of Humanities*, (6), 1, 2004, 78.*

² Anonymous, c.55 years, SSU Staff; interviewed on 20th of February, 2022.

queen of Zazzau. Above all, the conferment and turbaning of the “iron-lady” remain an unprecedented event in the history of Muslim women's achievements in modern Nigeria. In short, there are cases of marriage move thwarted and divorces recorded on the ground of women's insatiable quest for higher education and perceived possibility of wayward life and infidelity.¹ It is documented that the possibility of Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto getting married to Rakiya Atta, the daughter of Atta of Igbirra, caused a flurry of speculation during the Christmas season of 1956-1957. Emir Sanusi, on getting the news of this felt the reality of Ahmadu Bello's marriage ambition might cause a revolution in the north and as a result, Rakiya was transferred to Mubi to thwart the marriage plan, because she was considered sophisticated and not been in *pardah*² Giving this reclusive conditions of female folks, it opens up a new vista of achievement opportunities for ambitious Muslim and non-Muslim women to explore as humility, honesty, hard work and dedication to service are rewarded by society irrespective of religion and gender. The episode signals that “gone are the day's women are believed to be held in utmost seclusion” (*kulle* or *pardah*). Congratulations to the “iron-lady”, Amina Yusuf Garba, *mni*, *MON*, and other women the episode would serve as a beacon of light.

CONCLUSION

The recent epic turbaning of Amina Yusuf Garba as *Tambarar* Binji has come along in the development of knowledge. The event as noted in the paper promises a great deal to women folks not only among Muslim women but the entire women community in Nigeria. It notes that the event marked a watershed in the historical development of the changing status of women in our modern society as it was the first of its kind in the recent history of northern Nigeria and the Sokoto caliphate in particular. The recreation of the new perception of women and the phenomenon engendered added yet another episode to the conceptualization of women's status even before the Jihad of 1804. It does

¹ Anonymous, c.55 years, civil servant; interviewed at Sokoto State University, Sokoto on 20th February, 2022. Opinion of several men and women sampled go against women exposure, which account for several broken marriages among Sokoto Muslims.

² J N. Paden, Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto: Values and leadership in Nigeria, Zaria: Hudahuda Publishing Company, 1986, 388.

appears some unnecessary barriers of women seclusion not only among Muslim but non-Muslims to be gradually breaking down. In short, ambitious women like Amina could now be recognized. In other words, it is gradually dawning on societies to appreciate and recognizes outstanding achievers irrespective of religion and sex. The paper concludes by charging women folks in the north and beyond to explore and grab the opportunities thrown up by the event as they navigate the bumpy road of gender inequality in the twenty-first century.

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