



*The Role of Nigerian Women in Interfaith
Community and Dialogue:
Exposing Shame and Restoring Honour*

Abstract

The purpose of exploring shame in the context of Nigeria with emphasis on the North and Middle Belt will show how interfaith community is an avenue to restore women's honour. Examining how shame manifests in Nigeria's history and social structure explains the embeddedness of shame in the experience of Muslim and Christian women amidst religious division. An interfaith community centre in the Middle Belt exemplifies how honour occurs through relationships and the significant need to openly address shame. A theological and cultural anthropological perspective provides ways for engaging in mission and the valuable role of women in interfaith community.

Background and history

Nigeria is the sixth most populous country in the world, booming in cultural diversity and expected to reach a population of over 392 million by 2050.³¹ The rapid growth has contributed to the long history of tension between the two most prominent religions, Christianity and Islam. Nigeria is one of the few countries with a population balance of Christians who primarily reside in the South (49.3%) and Muslims in the North (48.8%).³² This demographic divergence continues to create religious tension today especially among minority Christians in the North. A transition zone, known as the Middle Belt, stretches across central Nigeria and straddles both populations.

Complex influences, including the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in the North during the 19th Century, the slave trade, British colonial rule in the 20th Century, and the presence of Boko Haram, have all contributed to the reinforcement of a traditional hierarchical society, the marginalization and disenfranchising of women, and continued religious violence. These in turn have impacted upon both Muslim and Christian women's experiences of shame and have led to the need for interfaith dialogue and community as a way of restoring honour.

The implementation of sharia law in twelve northern Nigeria states between 2000–2001 drastically increased the growth of Islam, contributing to increased religious tension with minority Christians.³³ Each state enforces different laws that

³¹ "Nigeria," World Fact Book Central Intelligence Agency, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>.

³² Marcin Stonawski et al., "The Changing Religious Composition of Nigeria: Causes and Implications of Demographic Divergence," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 54, no. 3 (2016): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X16000409>.

³³ Yushau Sodiq, "Can Muslims and Christians Live Together Peacefully in Nigeria?" *The Muslim World* 99, no. 4 (2009): 663, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2009.01292.x>.

impact the spiritual freedom of Christians. Sharia law reinforces unity among Muslims strengthening their religious identity while neglecting minority Christian women. This amplifies the need for interfaith initiatives that apply to the twelve sharia states and the Middle Belt where religious communities collide.

Further, many Nigerian Christians fear the misapplication of sharia law that extends beyond legal reform.³⁴ Fear brews among Christian women preventing them from expressing their faith. Sarah and Esther, both Christians originally from Borno State in northern Nigeria, explained that they once hated Muslims, and did not wish to associate with them, and Esther expressed fear of being targeted as a Christian, eventually leading her to flee to the Middle Belt.³⁵ Fear prevents the disenfranchised from flourishing and neglects their spiritual freedom. Women must emerge from their experience of fear that contributes to social shame in order to form positive views of themselves and humanity.

Interfaith Community Centre in the Middle Belt

The interfaith community centre in the Middle Belt was established by American missionaries Toby and Alycia, the late Joseph, a Nigerian Christian, and Sadiq, a Nigerian Muslim. They recognized the tensions between Muslims and Christians during ethnic clashes in the Middle Belt in 2010. Alycia said they asked, “what would [it] look like if Christians chose to show love to their neighbors rather than hate?”³⁶ The centre opened in January 2011 and is intentionally located two blocks from the central

³⁴ Frieder Ludwig, “Christian—Muslim Relations in Northern Nigeria since the Introduction of Shari’ah in 1999,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 3 (2008): 608, 612, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfm058>.

³⁵ Interview with Sarah October 19, 2017; Interview with Esther November 12, 2017.

³⁶ Personal communications with Alycia, April 22, 2020.

mosque that is a “no go” zone for Christians. The purpose of the community is to “Build Relationships in City Centre” and the acronym “BRiCC” was adopted as its name. The board and staff include Muslim and Christian Nigerians, men and women, who seek to develop programs from one to three months long, for students ranging from primary school age to older adults. Programs include basic education for men and women (math, English, computers, and health education for women only), as well as skill acquisition training for women (catering, makeup, decoration, and tie-dyeing cloth). From this foundation, intentional dialogue for women to express their personal experiences, such as shame associated with religious tension, can be instigated. Interfaith dialogue can vary from informal relationships to formal seminars, depending on the community’s needs. Staff collaborate with community members and peace organizations to meet the community’s growing needs, such as child abuse prevention, peacemaking, and trauma healing workshops, along with a community library and occasional health clinics. Sandra, a Nigerian Christian who is defying the traditional structure of male leadership and is the youngest staff member at BRiCC, stated that BRiCC’s “hope is that trust and community spirit that has been lost due to fighting and turmoil will be rekindled.”³⁷

BRiCC was one of the first interfaith initiatives in the Middle Belt. Students attend classes to build their skills, receive extra support, develop friendships, and advocate the centre’s goal to dismantle the religious divide. Students pay a small fee to enrol in programs. Interfaith community seeks to overcome the underpinnings of Nigeria’s history, including the marginalization of women and the enforcement of

³⁷ Personal communications with Sandra, April 22, 2020.

sharia law in the North. Sarah and Esther participated in the interfaith community centre, giving them the opportunity to learn about each other's stories. By addressing their fears and overcoming shame festering from religious stigma, they reconciled with Muslim women, receiving restorative honour through community. BRiCC is a beacon that allows Nigerians to rediscover their identity and experience belonging, though an underlying challenge is the significant need to discern appropriate ways to address the weight of shame women carry. Although BRiCC's educational programs include the peacemaking and trauma healing workshops, it is necessary to explicitly address shame through formal and elaborate discussions. This will enrich the community where women can thrive and develop future initiatives to serve the community holistically.

The Intensity of Shame for Being a Women

An in-depth analysis of honour and shame is critical to create effective ways of sharing the gospel. To deny women's experience of shame diminishes their humanity and the redemptive intervention of God's grace. Interfaith dialogue on honour and shame openly acknowledges women's sense of being human. Andrew Mbuvi, a Kenyan Christian, affirms honour and shame is key to the value system of African societies.³⁸ This emphasizes that open discussions with Nigerian Christians and Muslims must take place in order to highlight ways the gospel restores human dignity and honour.

³⁸ Andrew Mbuvi, "African Theology from the Perspective of Honor and Shame," in *The Urban Face of Mission: Ministering the Gospel in a Diverse and Changing World*, ed. Harvie M. Conn et al. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002), 291.

Understanding the psychological experiences of shame in the context of community is vital because community is highly valued in Nigerian culture and plays a strong influence in bearing honour. John Bradshaw elaborates on the psychological experiences of shame, including social constructs such as roles that can become a “refuge of hiding” and the source of one’s shame.³⁹ This applies to the role of Muslim and Christian women who are denied opportunities in community to become their authentic self, especially relating to expressions of faith and spiritual freedom. I have encountered Muslim Hausa women in the Middle Belt who often have limited education compared to men. The lack of reading and writing skills prevents women from learning sacred religious texts in order to encounter God and develop personal understandings of their faith. Similarly, minority Christian women in the North are exposed to religious and gender persecution, minimizing their opportunity to engage in faith without fear. Muslim and Christian women are highly vulnerable to experience fear and shame, feeling diminished and forced to hide in times of intense persecution without the opportunity to grow spiritually. Interfaith community supports women to navigate through challenges and pursue their faith by learning in community. BRiCC is attentive to women’s needs and provides equal opportunities for women to learn.

Stories give meaning to experiences of shame that women endure. Esther is a Christian who grew up in Borno State renting a home with her family from a Muslim man. She alluded to living in fear of conflict and insecurity because of their differences of faith.⁴⁰ Seeking interfaith relationships that are non-shaming allows women to

³⁹ John Bradshaw, *Healing the Shame that Binds You* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 1988), 115.

⁴⁰ Interview with Esther, November 12, 2017.

expose their true self and heal from experiences of shame, including feelings of insecurity and gender-based violence.⁴¹ Maintaining a holistic view of the person provides perspective to the effects of shame women experience and can lead to their honour being restored. I witnessed Muslim and Christian women grow through learning basic skills at BRiCC such as catering. For example, Esther now shows a sense of accomplishment, understands her self-worth, and feels included and seen in community. Similarly, Fatima, who is a Hausa Muslim, testifies to profound transformation in her view of others, growing in her sense of togetherness while gathering in the classroom with Christians, something she would not otherwise have done.⁴² Sharing common interests becomes a catalyst for fostering intentional dialogue in order to restore women's value in community. Exposing religious tension often leads women to recall their feelings of shame. Addressing this in interfaith community and being known in new interfaith relationships will redeem their humanity.

The Private versus Public Space

Another major issue understanding honour and shame among Nigerian women involves the division between private and public spaces that is prominent in the North. Women are prevented from entering public spaces and engaging in interfaith community, denying them “genuine human dignity.”⁴³ In the Middle Belt, such as the area where BRiCC is located, restrictions for women are not as severe, as seen in the fact that

⁴¹ Bradshaw, *Healing the Shame that Binds You*, 154; Patrycja Koziel, “Gender-Based Violence in Northern Nigeria. The Context of Muslim and Christian Women’s Rights,” *Hemispheres Studies on Cultures and Societies*, no. 32 (2017): 53.

⁴² Interview with Fatima, May 23, 2018.

⁴³ Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Penguin Books, 1966), 101; Richard J. Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 134.

Sandra works in a position of leadership. Also, my experience working with Hausa Muslim women parallels to Robson Elsbeth's understanding of "Hausa wife seclusion." The seclusion of wives in domestic space can communicate social status, economic ability, reproductive capacity and sexuality.⁴⁴ For example, a Muslim woman's participation in a public space, such as trading in the market, could bring shame to her husband who cannot financially support the family. This may lead her to feel inadequate and unworthy because she no longer adheres to her husband's expectations of domestic responsibilities. This becomes a challenge for Muslim women when expected to conform to traditional practices such as wife seclusion, leading to apprehension when initially participating in interfaith community.

On the other hand, visiting Hausa women in their homes is the greatest honour, as it represents entering their sacred space. Also, I have experienced division of space to ensure women avoid sharing areas with men even within their own home. These experiences of shame emerging from practices such as wife seclusion can be difficult for Christian women to understand and respond to. However, interfaith community and dialogue brings light to these hidden experiences.

BRiCC is strategically located in a "no go" zone for Christians and is conscious of what space communicates. Interfaith community meets Muslim women halfway, in a space that respects their traditional cultural practices such as wife seclusion, developing skills that benefit their domestic responsibilities like cooking, while cautiously crossing religious barriers to engage with Christians. Muslim Hausa women

⁴⁴ Elsbeth Robson, "Wife Seclusion and the Spatial Praxis of Gender Ideology in Northern Nigerian Hausaland," *Gender, Place, and Culture* 7 no. 2 (2001): 180, 184.

bear a great burden seeking to maintain their reputations as a “good wife,” which can lead to internalised oppression.⁴⁵ This can manifest into social shame if Muslim women fail to meet high expectations to fulfill their role as wives. Focusing on the transformative role of Jesus in the lives of women will create interfaith community in public *and* private spaces. Muslim and Christian women will be able to dialogue about personal experiences of shame that emerge from different practices in a shared, sacred and safe space such as BRiCC.

Jesus Bestows Honour

Learning from Mbuvi’s perspective on the ways Jesus radically changes social constructs such as public versus private space is valuable. Mbuvi pleads, “the gospel must inform the African church with its inversion of honor and shame, redefining that which is honorable and showing how the honor of Christ removes all barriers (Galatians 3:28).”⁴⁶ I believe understanding honour and shame will profoundly impact the advancement of the Gospel in Nigeria. Christians will have richer access to understanding of how Christ transforms relationships and social boundaries through the lens of honour and shame in the biblical narrative. BRiCC does not currently utilize biblical stories to influence its community, but Nigerian churches can be equipped to teach Scripture from this perspective in order to influence congregants to participate in interfaith community. For example, two local pastors in the Middle Belt identify how the gospel is beginning to “germinate” by deeply changing their congregants’ views

⁴⁵ Robson, “Wife Seclusion,” 194.

⁴⁶ Mbuvi, “African Theology,” 333.

and receptiveness towards their Muslim neighbours.⁴⁷ This will prompt Christians to approach Muslim women, leading them to experience new ways of being their authentic self in relationship, including expressing their faith and spirituality in public spaces without fear, shame, or condemnation.

Indeed, Jesus is central to the mission of fostering interfaith community that restores honour to women, reclaiming their value. Jayson Georges and Mark Baker point out how a “common pattern in Jesus’ ministry of honoring the shamed [is] via public association,” such as the women who anointed Jesus’ feet (Luke 7:44-46).⁴⁸ Jesus ascribes honour to women in public, which shows women are worthy to hold positions and be highly esteemed. Interfaith dialogue can cover topics such as women’s experiences of public shame and marginalization, in order to expose ways community can help process their stories and restore honour to women in public spaces. This requires BRiCC and future initiatives to formally address views that communities hold of women and ways this affects their experience of honour and shame. Religious leaders are essential to this process as they engage with community outside their religious tradition to show honour to the human person above religious affiliation.

Contextualizing Interfaith Learning

Muslim women experience different forms of shame than Christians and interfaith community offers meaningful ways to restore honour to women through learning. For

⁴⁷ Interview with Pastor Paul, 2018.

⁴⁸ Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 126, Kindle edition.

example, women under sharia law can receive religious education that can correct misconceptions and change their lives, as each state implements different laws that must be contextualized.⁴⁹ This will allow women to respect local traditions and authorities, as the Middle Belt is different than communities in the North. For example, the rise of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in the Middle Belt emphasizes the need to understand the context of where women are fleeing from in order to appreciate their beliefs and practices, reduce religious stigma contributing to their shame, and help them integrate into community. Also, learning the perceptions Muslim and Christian women hold of each other will indicate specific areas for intentional dialogue. Women will develop empathy for one another by resolving misunderstandings of religious beliefs in order to honour the other's personhood and create harmony through learning.

Additionally, it is critical to offer support to Muslim and Christian women navigating uncharted territory to appropriately foster learning regarding religious traditions and practices. For example, the issue of early marriage for Muslim girls, as young as fourteen years old in some states in the North, increases girls' exposure to social shame from lack of basic life skills, and risk of reproductive health issues if they conceive, as bearing children is an expectation.⁵⁰ This limits the opportunity for Muslim girls to understand the influence of Islamic tradition on their futures, avoiding grievous experiences of social shame such as feeling incompetent and unworthy in their marriages. Muslim girls facing early marriage are less likely to pursue interfaith

⁴⁹Annie Bunting, "'Authentic Sharia' as Cause and Cure for Women's Human Rights Violations in Northern Nigeria," *Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* 9 (2011): 165, 170, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156920811X578485>.

⁵⁰ Bunting, "'Authentic Sharia,'" 156, 158.

community because they may fear Christians are prejudiced against them. Creating intentional dialogue will unveil underlying sensitive issues of shame Muslim women face that differ from Christian women. Community centres must invest time understanding what discussions are a priority, based on relevant cultural issues and misunderstandings, to facilitate conversations that will redeem women's honour.

Further, education for girls and women will allow them to receive basic skills and support as they wrestle with personal convictions. For example, Maryam, a Hausa Muslim, experienced the death of her husband two months after their wedding. She described her determination to further her education after going through the catering program at BRiCC.⁵¹ She received acceptance from Christian women as a new single mother rather than facing hardships alone, as well as improving her baking skills. Maryam is now studying physics in university, demonstrating strength and perseverance instead of succumbing to the pressure to remarry, losing status in community after her husband died and feeling ashamed to express herself. Maryam is fully convinced of her worth and capabilities after exposing her vulnerabilities, and then receiving honour through interfaith community support.

A proverb in northern Nigeria reveals the life and status of Muslim women: “[she] crosses the threshold of her husband's house twice: when she is brought in as a bride, and when she is carried out as a corpse.”⁵² This signifies how Muslim women are dependent on their husbands, and the obligations they are expected to fulfill to receive

⁵¹ Personal communications with Maryam, 2017-2018.

⁵² Katja Werthmann, "Matan Bariki, 'Women of the Barracks' Muslim Hausa Women in an Urban Neighbourhood in Northern Nigeria," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 72, no. 1 (2002): 112-130, <https://doi.org/10.3366/afr.2002.72.1.112>.

honour. The proverb reinforces the role of religion in determining a Muslim woman's status and prestige.⁵³ It is critical women have the opportunity to develop a sense of purpose and value, and to recognize their worth beyond the threshold of their husband's honour by participating in interfaith learning. The value of such interfaith relationships is seen in Maryam's experience of acquiring restorative honour and obtaining worth that extends beyond marital status.

While interfaith community involves diverse educational opportunities and skills training, religious leaders' involvement is also crucial. Basic education programs such as catering tailor well to a woman's traditional role and equip her with community support. However, Christian theological institutions and Islamic schools must teach the sacredness and protection of all human life, showing honour to humanity and increasing interfaith dialogue.⁵⁴ Jonathan Abbas believes Christian theological education will reduce gender-based violence against Christian and Muslim women and seek to restore their humanity and value.⁵⁵ Formal interfaith discussions can include experiences relevant to women's roles as wives, mothers, daughters and aunties. It is important that BRiCC and future initiatives weigh the significance of understanding specific religious traditions while assessing the impact on community. For example, BRiCC's peacemaking workshop could devote more time to exploring the differences of Islamic and Christian views on topics such as family. Theological educators must encourage Christians to initiate conversations with Muslim neighbours and support

⁵³ Werthmann, "Matan Bariki," 121, 127.

⁵⁴ Jonathan A. Abbas, "The Role of Theological Institutions in Preventing Violence against Women in Nigeria," *BTSK Insight* 15, no. 2 (2018): 41, <http://ezproxy.eastern.edu:2108/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=bb3dae74-d672-4f7a-b829-65f9f82e7958%40sdc-v-sessmq01>.

⁵⁵ Abbas, "The Role of Theological Institutions," 41.

women's voices in discussions. Although I have witnessed Christian leaders and pastors welcome Muslim neighbours to discuss the person of Jesus, I have also heard testimonies of pastors expressing dislike towards Muslims. It is vital the church actively fosters space for interfaith dialogue that includes women demonstrating the importance of loving humanity created in God's image and leading to admiration for the Creator (Genesis 1:27). This will reshape women's views of their self-worth and humanity that will contagiously affect their neighbourhoods, decreasing the religious division.

Theological Reflections: The Samaritan Woman

Humera Khan expresses the benefits she experiences from engaging in interfaith dialogue as a woman. Khan describes the desire to “discover [her] own spiritual depths without having to constantly defend herself or be reactionary,” which should drive Muslim and Christian women to participate in interfaith relationships.⁵⁶ Mutual respect will remove misunderstandings and allow women to grow in their faith without having to defend their beliefs or practices. Christians have a great responsibility to reflect Jesus Christ by forming interfaith relationships. For example, Jesus crossed many barriers when encountering the Samaritan woman, and developed relationships with the marginalized (John 4:1-42).⁵⁷ Also, the Samaritan woman immediately makes ethnic distinctions about Jesus, a Jew, and the disciples were “surprised to find [Jesus]

⁵⁶ Humera Khan, “Exploring Women's Rights in Islam through Interfaith Dialogue,” *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* 17, (2009): 103, <https://doi.org/10.2143/ESWTR.17.0.2042661>.

⁵⁷ SimonMary Asele Ahiokhai, “Love one Another as I have Love You: The Place of Friendship in Interfaith Dialogue,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 48, no. 4 (2013): 501, <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.mtyndale.ca:2048/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=18cc6873-7270-4ef3-91d7-0d5e79d0a971%40sdc-v-sessmq01>.

talking with a woman” (John 4:9, 27). Jesus’ openness must shape the way Christians approach others, as He extends acceptance to others because of His unconditional love. It is critical that interfaith community leaders discern ways women can integrate smoothly into discussions, which requires religious leaders to exemplify humility in their engagements as well.

Remarkably, Jesus brings honour to the Samaritan woman and demonstrates love that is not constricted by boundaries such as ethnicity, gender or religion (John 4:1-42). Women in northern Nigeria endure similar experiences as the Samaritan woman because her body symbolizes boundaries, including ethnicity, religion, class, age, and marital status.⁵⁸ For example, Muslim women wear veil coverings to express their religious identity, but veils can also communicate social status and prestige.⁵⁹ Unfortunately Muslim women’s veils hinder some Christian women’s receptiveness to them. This restricts Muslims from pursuing interfaith community because they experience a lack of acceptance. Also, different veil coverings, which can indicate status, may impact the integration of some Muslim women of a lower social class into community because of the hostility they receive from women of a higher class. Interfaith community seeks to remove rigid boundaries and establish bridges not barricades. Rather than symbolic expressions of faith becoming a point of division, they can help women communicate their identity through fostering discussion. Muslim women will become comfortable to symbolically remove their veils, forming authentic

⁵⁸ Charmaine Pereira and Ibrahim Jibrin, “On the Bodies of Women: The Common Ground between Islam and Christianity in Nigeria,” *Third World Quarterly* 31, no. 6 (2010): 921, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2010.502725>.

⁵⁹ Elisha Renne, *Veils, Turbans, and Islamic Reform in Northern Nigeria* (Bloomington, IN: Indian University Press, 2018), 99-100.

and non-shaming relationships with Christian women. They will receive acceptance and honour for their expressions of faith and ways they experience God. It is vital that BRiCC and future initiatives continually navigate the public versus private space pertaining to Muslim women's participation in faith practices based on the local interpretation of Islam. This is an important area that requires improvement to reduce religious stigma. This will help Christian women understand Muslim women's faith and appropriately cultivate discussions that honour traditions.

Another example of how BRiCC fosters restorative honour to women through dialogue includes a seminar on child abuse prevention offered to Muslim and Christian men and women. The goal was to teach the value of caring for children, and to prevent and identify forms of abuse that bury victims in shame. This avenue creates an allegiance among women apart from their religious tradition and while in the presence of men, acknowledging women's roles as wives, mothers, daughters and aunties in families and the community. BRiCC recognizes the pervasive issue of child abuse and extends care to the community while honouring differences of faith and cultural values. Muslim and Christian women receive honour from being included and recognized as irreplaceable members in families, removing stigma and creating a bridge between religious communities.

Above all, interfaith communities must address how paternal relations and family honour that strengthens community belonging must not trump an individual's relationship with God. Ahiokhai observes that communities who belong to a religious tradition "stop being [a] manifest source of relational encounter with the divine. The

divine ends up being replaced by the idol of the collective self.”⁶⁰ Strong kinship relations are central to Nigerian culture and must be a source of encouragement for seeking God, whether Muslim or Christian, rather than collective belonging being the source of one’s identity. For example, the practice of hospitality can consume the identity of Muslim and Christian women, as they fulfill their role to serve others and strengthen social relationships. Similarly, many Nigerian Christians spend time gaining status in community through faithfully attending church fellowships, while neglecting their intimacy with God. This dynamic must be tackled for interfaith community to flourish and fulfill its purpose—discussing individual’s experiences of God in multi-religious community to avoid the idolization of the collective self. Religious communities must look beyond themselves and be shaped first by their intimacy with God and His design for humanity.⁶¹ This will develop healthy interfaith community and instigate a faithful response from the Church. Women will have the liberty to experience God who reveals new meaning to their personhood and positively influences humanity’s reverence for the Creator.

Assessing Motives for Interfaith Engagement

It is especially important women cautiously reflect on their intentions for participating in interfaith community and dialogue. Building relationships must not be rooted in converting the other or developing strategies for evangelism.⁶² The desire to learn about the other out of love for one’s neighbour and acknowledge their humanity, aside

⁶⁰ Aihio Khai, “Love one Another,” 497.

⁶¹ Aihio Khai, “Love one Another,” 497-498.

⁶² Aihio Khai, “Love one Another,” 505.

from their religious tradition, must remain central to one's motive for interfaith relationships. Muslim and Christian communities must steer away from triumphalism and the duty to convert the other.⁶³ Unfortunately, the history of religious violence in Nigeria seems to partially stem from insensitive efforts by Christian leaders seeking to convert people to Christianity.⁶⁴ For example, I spoke with a Nigerian pastor who expressed pressure from his superior to convert people, and confesses to lying about the number of new converts.⁶⁵ Also, Western Christian missionaries have influenced some Nigerian pastors to “perform” and “win” unbelievers into the Kingdom, which can become a source of shame for pastors. This does not represent the meaning or purpose of the Christian faith that is anchored in Christ's love for humanity. Christ provocatively opposes societal norms to bring restorative justice to the marginalized, including Nigerian women, rather than advocating crusading efforts.

Turaki stresses that Nigerians must appreciate the other's faith and “[promote and protect their] common destiny as humans and Nigerians” while acknowledging their past. Women can birth new communities that nurture change for the next generation while religious leaders and scholars support their role in interfaith dialogue. The thoughts women bring to the table will provoke theological reflections that enrich our understanding of God.⁶⁶

⁶³ Ahiokhai, “Love one Another,” 506-507.

⁶⁴ Ahiokhai, “Love one Another,” 506-507.

⁶⁵ Interview with Nigerian Pastor, 2018.

⁶⁶ Yusufu Turaki, *Tainted Legacy: Islam, Colonialism and Slavery in Northern Nigeria* (McLean, VA: Isaac Publishing, 2010), 167, 175.

Implications for Christian Mission

There is great risk in inviting the “other” into one’s private world, and women also face risk as they step into public spaces. For example, Muslim and Christian women could risk their reputation in community for engaging with someone outside of their religious tradition. Esther Meek describes “risky knowing” as the “disposing of our being, [and] a passionate commitment to trust things we cannot fully justify at the time of our effort,” which strengthens community focusing on the other through thoughtful dialogue.⁶⁷ This reflects Jesus who chose vulnerability over comfort and extended honour and dignity to women even in public spaces.

Nigerian Christians must extend unmerited grace to their Muslim neighbours to demonstrate the radical love of Christ. Mbuvi reflects on Philippians 2:6-7 describing how Jesus assumed “the lowest position in social hierarchy. He became like the scum of the earth so that he might save the scum of the earth [...] Forsaking his glory and honour [...] to be a slave with no honor.”⁶⁸ Jesus transforms shame for Christian and Muslim women who are disenfranchised and raises them with honour. Lindy Backues urges Christians to adopt Jesus’ example of self-emptying and humility as our approach to discipleship.⁶⁹ This will alter the way Nigerian Christians engage with Muslims because Jesus exemplifies risking comforts without hesitation to compassionately embrace the “dishonourable.” Modeling interfaith relationships

⁶⁷ Esther Lightcap Meek, *Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People* (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 59-60.

⁶⁸ Mbuvi, “African Theology,” 292.

⁶⁹ Lindy Backues, “Humility: A Christian impulse as fruitful motif for anthropological theory and practice,” in *On Knowing Humanity: Insights from Theology for Anthropology*, ed. Eloise Meneses and David Bronkema (New York: Routledge, 2017), 127, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315315324>.

beyond BRiCC into new neighbourhoods requires a faithful commitment. This involves disposing of one's self, as Meek describes above, rather than becoming paralysed by fear and religious stigma or threats because of their faith. In this way, women will embrace their neighbours, leading to restorative honour and justice by diminishing the religious divide. A deeper understanding of Jesus' humility will influence women to approach interfaith relationships because He is faithful to profoundly redeem women in community.

An integral part of acquiring honour in Nigerian culture involves community, because human presence is cherished in relationships. Jesus clearly defines who our neighbours in the narrative of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus commands Christians to respond to human need across barriers because "neighborliness is nonspatial; it is qualitative."⁷⁰ Interfaith community that practices neighborliness that will weaken the public versus private divide, transforming the way women receive honour, by reciprocating one another's needs. In turn, this will influence society to dispose of shameful public responses to women.

Gender-based violence against Muslim and Christian Nigerian girls and women opens up a significant opportunity for both religious communities to respond in a vulnerable and unified way, affectionately honouring the other and seeking justice together. Communities that respond to loss are often described as having less rigid boundaries defining family.⁷¹ Nigerian communities value social relationships beyond their immediate family, and the way they extend social ties to other members of the

⁷⁰ Howard Thurmon, *Jesus and the Dheresinherited*, Reprint ed (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 79.

⁷¹ Pauline Boss, *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 28, 30.

community is evident through the national mourning, expressed by both Muslim and Christian communities.⁷² Exploring how Muslims and Christians grieve and experience death is a valuable part of intentional dialogue which can improve trauma healing while being sensitive to cultural traditions and practices. It will take courage for Muslim and Christian women to cross the religious divide as they respond to the needs of others risking their comforts to bear honour and compassion even through grief.

Finally, BRiCC embraces women and supports them to overcome social and religious stigma that contributes to their shame. When women expose their vulnerabilities, they receive acceptance and their role in community becomes esteemed. Jesus empathizes with the disinherited through this process of unveiling their shame because he too stood with his “back against the wall.”⁷³ It is our duty as committed Christians to learn how honour and shame impacts the way the Gospel is introduced to neighbourhoods especially among the disinherited. Backues reminds us “the Gospel takes on the clothing of its proximate surroundings, honouring and esteeming local context. Like the Word become flesh, the Gospel “moves into the neighborhood,” configuring specific ways to honour women who have been shamed (John 1:14, *The Message*).⁷⁴ Thankfully Jesus redeems women’s experience of shame leading them to flourish and invites them to be their true self, which Jesus forms in His image.

⁷² Koziel, “Gender-Based Violence,” 47.

⁷³ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 98.

⁷⁴ Backues, “Humility,” 123.

References

- Abbas, Jonathan A. "The Role of Theological Institutions in Preventing Violence against Women in Nigeria." *BTSK Insight* 15, no. 2 (2018): 39-53.
<http://ezproxy.eastern.edu:2108/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=bb3dae74-d672-4f7a-b829-65f9f82e7958%40sdc-v-sessmq01>.
- Ahiokhai, SimonMary Asese. "'Love one Another as I have Loved You:' The Place of Friendship in Interfaith Dialogue." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 48, no. 4 (2013): 491-508.
<http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.mytyndale.ca:2048/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=18cc6873-7270-4ef3-91d7-0d5e79d0a971%40sdc-v-sessmq01>.
- Backues, Lindy. "Humility: A Christian impulse as fruitful motif for anthropological theory and Practice." In *On Knowing Humanity: Insights from Theology for Anthropology*, edited by Eloise Meneses and David Bronkema, 101-136. New York: Routledge, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315315324>.
- Berger, Peter, and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Penguin Books, 1966.
- Boss, Pauline. *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Bradshaw, John. *Healing the Shame that Binds You*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 1988.
- Bunting, Annie. "'Authentic Sharia' as Cause and Cure for Women's Human Rights Violations in Northern Nigeria." *Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* 9 (2011): 152-170. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156920811X578485>.
- Georges, Jayson and Mark D. Baker. *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016. Kindle.
- Khan, Humera. "Exploring Women's Rights in Islam through Interfaith Dialogue." *Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research* 17, (2009): 99–104. <https://doi.org/10.2143/ESWTR.17.0.2042661>.
- Koziel, Patrycja. "Gender-Based Violence in Northern Nigeria. The Context of Muslim and Christian Women's Rights." *Hemispheres Studies on Cultures and Societies* 32 (2017): 41-53.
- Ludwig, Frieder. "Christian—Muslim Relations in Northern Nigeria since the Introduction of Shari'ah in 1999." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 3 (2008): 602-637. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lf058>.
- Mbuvi, Andrew. "African Theology from the Perspective of Honor and Shame." In *The Urban Face of Mission: Ministering the Gospel in a Diverse and Changing World*, edited by Harvie M. Conn et al., 279-295. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002.
- Meek, Esther Lightcap. *Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People*. Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2004.
- Middleton, J. Richard, and Brian J. Walsh. *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995.
- Pereira, Charmaine, and Jibrin Ibrahim. "On the Bodies of Women: The Common Ground between Islam and Christianity in Nigeria" *Third World Quarterly* 31, no. 6 (2010): 921- 937. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2010.502725>.
- Renne, Elisha P. *Veils, Turbans, and Islamic Reform in Northern Nigeria*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2018.

Robson, Elsbeth. "Wife Seclusion and the Spatial Praxis of Gender Ideology in Nigerian Hausaland," *Gender, Place, and Culture* 7, no. 2 (2000): 179-199.

Sodiq, Yushau. "Can Muslims and Christians Live Together Peacefully in Nigeria?" *The Muslim World* 99, no. 4 (2009): 646-688. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2009.01292.x>.

Stonawski, Marcin, Michaela Potančová, Matthew Cantele and Vegard Skirbekk. "The Changing Religious Composition of Nigeria: Causes and Implications of Demographic Divergence." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 54, no. 3 (2016): 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X16000409>.

Thurmon, Howard. *Jesus and the Diheresinherited*. Reprint Edition. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996.

Turaki, Yusufu. *Tainted Legacy: Islam, Colonialism and Slavery in Northern Nigeria*. McLean, VA: Isaac Publishing, 2010.

Werthmann, Katja. "Matan Bariki, 'Women of the Barracks' Muslim Hausa Women in an Urban Neighbourhood in Northern Nigeria." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 72, no. 1 (2002): 112-130. <https://doi.org/10.3366/afr.2002.72.1.112>.