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Erasmus

What Does it Mean to be a Good Christian/Muslim Woman? Gen-Z Women Navigating Religion and Feminism in Nigeria

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List of Acronyms

CAN	Christian Association of Nigeria
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GEN-Z	Generation Zed
GOAT	Greatest of All Time
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RP	Research Paper
UN	United Nations

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This research seeks to understand the relationship between feminism and religion in Nigeria, by analysing various ways in which Gen-Z Nigerian women navigate their feminist and religious identities. Through conversations with 12 Gen-Z Nigerian women and engagement with literature, I examine the life experiences of these women in their quest to determine their identities in the Nigerian context. I focus largely on social media as the most dominant platform of expression for the Generation-Z, as *digital natives*. I make use of self-reflection for the most part of this study, as the research question was birth out of personal life experiences and questions. Narrative analysis and feminist methodologies are used, particularly to ensure that authentic stories/experiences of participants are properly utilized and to ensure matters of intersectionality and relativity were taken into consideration. With this study, I hope to elucidate the various debates around feminist and religious discourses. Also, I aim to shed light on the struggles of young women and encourage them to persist in their search for answers to the diverse unanswered questions they may have.

Relevance to Development Studies

In a Country like Nigeria, where patriarchy has been infused in parts of culture and religion in manners that dictate how people live their lives, this research aims to amplify the voices of Gen-Z Nigerian women as a marginalized group, to show how they adapt and challenge these patriarchal norms. Focusing on Gen-Zs allows for the proper representation of an age-group that is often neglected in crucial matters, on the grounds of being *too young*. The focus on religious ideologies in relation to feminism, broadens feminist discourses and perspectives in understanding the struggles of Nigerian women, in their fight against patriarchy. Thus, this research contributes to other studies in the development field, aimed at promoting equality and inclusivity.

Keywords

Religion, Islam, Christianity, Feminism, Patriarchy, Identity, Pentecostalism, Sunnism, Gen-Z, Social- Media, Gen-Z

Chapter 1: Introduction

WOMAN BE STILL!

Am I a pillar?
Am I a wall?
Am I a beam that is holding your house so that it would not fall?

You are pounding me in the mortal of subjugation.
With the pestle of patriarchy
Breaking my honour and dignity
Stealing the knowledge of my identity

You have made religion.
A gun pointing at my chest,
A tormenting spirit that haunts
And rids guts and zest.
Troubling the bowels with fear
Taking away from my soul its rest

So that I become the caliber of prey
That you want me to be.
Perpetually small minded
And dangerously attached to yours truly

You confined the women that came before me.
My mothers and theirs
You held them in tight bondage.
Making them block their ears.
To the cries and wails of their own children
When we challenged the lies and tails
That you have told them.

Wild and raging now we are.
A Generation Zed
Questioning what you said
Questioning your culture and norms
Because we know that for years we have been misled

We sought a response.
When we asked you why we would be the exception -
In the distribution of wealth,
Of property
To stay out late & earn money.
There was none.

And if we are given the same opportunity as men
What is the possibility then?
That we would not trample them?
Is that what you fear?
That we would point your gun to your head?
And release your own bullets instead?
Because the same poison that we were fed
Became the spirit that made us drunk enough to fire the lead

Poem by Nanya Hashim (2024)

1.1   Positionality Statement

The relationship between religion and feminism in Nigeria is important to understand when assessing the challenges in women's social and cultural lives in Nigeria today. The experiences of 'Gen-Z' Nigerian women (born 1995-2012) and their everyday battles with family and society reflect how they engage with religion and feminism as part of their identity. Using self-reflection and in conversation with other young women, I explore the dilemmas Gen Z women face as a member of that generation, and as a committed Christian who wishes to engage in feminism.

As many young Gen Z women in Nigeria, I have found it an emotional roller coaster to understand how to be a Christian and a feminist. I have had to confront the popular conception in Nigeria that every woman who identifies with feminism is in competition with men and is against a woman being a good wife and mother. On the other hand, Christianity teaches that women have to be submissive caregivers to their families. It seemed that if you are a feminist, you cannot be Christian and vice versa. Hence, in my teens, it felt like I had to drop one identity for the other. I dropped feminism because I believed that feminists were against God and His commands. However, my time at the ISS has been eye-opening. My personal beliefs have shifted, and now I would like to embrace a feminist identity, while retaining my Christian beliefs. The materials I have read show there are many views to consider: some sources posit that feminism and Christianity need each other; others see them as opposing each other. My RP is an attempt to look at whether for young Gen- Z women, Christian and Islam as the two dominant religions in Nigeria are compatible with feminism. My decision to focus on Gen- Z Nigerian women was largely influenced by Harding (1992), who explains the importance of socially situated knowledge. In her book, *Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is "Strong Objectivity"?* she explains that research conducted to understand the lives marginalized groups, must seek to direct its questions to members of those groups, and not to individuals like policy makers, who hold more societal power and have less contextualized understanding of the subjects of the research study (p.443). She says this to explain how research centred on the issues of women, should include the voices of these women in gathering information, to provide more concrete and valid data. In the same manner, since this study's focus is on Gen- Z Nigerian women, the exact group of individuals were recruited.

I include Islam, because it is the major religion along with Christianity and is seen by many, as a catalyst of women's oppression. My focus is on Pentecostal Christianity as this is a dominant form of Christianity for urban middle class Nigerians (which I also belong to), and Sunni Islam, which is the most dominant Islamic sect in the world. These denominations will be explained further in latter parts of this study. I invited other middle class Nigerian Gen-Z women to engage with me in this quest, reflecting with them about our shared dilemmas. I chose to focus on people like me-Gen Z, middle class female participants, because this best helped my own deep self-reflection on the question.

1.2 Contextual Background

1.2.1 Religion and Feminism in Nigeria

In this research, I am interested in how Generation- Z women follow the dominant monotheistic religions of Christianity and Islam introduced by colonialism in Nigeria. I define these religions as an 'organised system of beliefs and practices, involving the worship of a supreme God or creator' (Chukwuemeka, 2022, p.73).

The main religions in Nigeria are Islam, Christianity, and African Traditional Religions, which are also referred to as indigenous religious practices. These religious practices still exist today but have been superseded by modern-day monotheistic religious practices introduced by colonialism (Awolalu, 1976). I do not focus on African traditional religion, which while shaping Christianity and Islam in Nigeria, does not directly influence the young women in my study. Islam and Christianity are the most dominant religions in Nigeria, which represent 46.2% and 46.3% of the Nigerian Population respectively (Mckinnon, 2020, p.304). According to Vaghuan (2016, p.13), the formation of modern Nigeria was based on the combination of these two religions. The Islamic reformist movement began and started the Sokoto caliphate in Northern Nigeria, and the Christian missionary movements impacted the transformation of culture in Southwest Nigeria, before spreading to other regions (p.13). The two religions continue to influence Nigerian culture and society. Almost everything people do is intertwined with their religious beliefs, as culture and religion have become interwoven. Muslims and Christians have their distinct fundamental doctrines, but a common feature is that they are patriarchal in nature, having cultural and social rules that place men at the top and women in positions of less importance.

In the modern Nigerian context, feminism emerged in the struggle to improve the legal, political, social, and economic status of women and eradicate factors that prevent them from enjoying their rights as human beings (Dibia, 2021). Prominent Nigerian feminists such as Chimamanda Adichie (2013), see feminism as a movement led by women and men that aim to transform problematic gender structures which were introduced by colonisation (Timothy, 2022, p.93).

1.2.2 Religion and Women in Pre-colonial Nigeria

Before colonialism, different Nigerian tribes, had different religious practices. The Yoruba tribe, had a religious system centred on one major supreme being, known as *Olodumare*, however, they also had sub gods, known as *Orishas*. Amongst them was the *Oshun* goddess, who was in charge of fertility and love. Another was the *Ara Ara,* which was in charge of the weather. Other *orishas* were present, and they all served different purposes in aspects of life (Ojo, 2009, p. 34-35). The Igbo tribe on the other hand, according to Kanu (2018), were quite similar to the Yorubas, in the sense that they reverenced a particular god, which they referred to as *Chukwu,* and also had minor gods, like the *Ala* known as the goddess of the earth (pp 119-120). Lastly, the Hausa had a religion which was connected to nature. They also had one supreme god known as *Ubangiji (Aluko, p.298).* Other tribes like the Ijaw tribe, the Edo tribe, amongst others, had their own supreme gods and deities.

Studies of pre-colonial Nigerian system reveal that Nigerian women played crucial roles in the economic, political, and social spheres of the nation. According to Amaechi et al (2019), in the pre-colonial Igbo society, men and women, worked side by side in decision making processes on development issues and conflict resolution, to enhance social cohesion in their communities (p.102). Ifi Amadiume (1987) in her book, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, reveals that the hierarchical classification of men and women in Nigeria was introduced by colonialism. She does this by giving a detailed explanation about how gender relations functioned in pre-colonial times. According to her, agriculture amongst the Igbo people, specifically the *Nri* and *Nnobi* people, was mainly controlled by women, and some gifts, known as the *Ite Uba* (Pot for Prosperity) were given to women as presents. The female goddess, *Idemili*, was regarded as the source of these gifts. Legends say that she protected the *Nnobi* people from soldiers, during the Biafran war in 1967 (Ijeoma, 2019).

Raji et al (2013) also state that the pre-colonial Northern Nigerian economy relied heavily on collaboration between men and women. They revealed that Northern women (particularly in Ilorin) were actively involved in the economy, engaged in agriculture, weaving industry, beading and jewellery making, food processing, trading, craft works, etc. Similarly, Wycliff (2023) supports the claim that the pre-colonial Northern Nigeria, facilitated the representation of women in political and economic issues (p.2). Amongst these women include Queen Amina of Zazzau, who was an outstanding architect and *warrior queen* in Kaduna, north-west Nigeria. Queen Amina overtook the throne of Zazzau kingdom after the death of her brother and was responsible for commanding an army of 20,000 men (African Feminist Forum, 2016). Other female warriors have also been recorded in other parts of the country, for example, in the Kiriji war of Ekiti, southwestern Nigeria. Authors like Funmilayo (2019), stress that women played important economic, social and political roles in the pre-colonial period and their status was diminished by colonialism (p.33).

1.2.3. Religion shaping gender in colonial period.

Dogo (2014, p. 12), argues that the introduction of religion by the colonialists changed the seemingly egalitarian roles played by men and women in Nigeria. With the colonial classification of women's roles as strictly reproductive and domestic, the realities of Nigerian women were reshaped. These gendered classifications, according to Dogo (2014), were introduced through missionaries. In her work on African sexualities, Tamale (2014), argues that the doctrines of Christianity and Islam, introduced through colonisation in African countries, including Nigeria, 'effectively domesticated' women (p.154). Politics, religion, and law were so closely intertwined, it is difficult to untangle them. Combined, they led to forms of subordination for women (p.162). Oyewumi Oyeronke (2008), states that there was no gender subordination in the Yoruba traditional society, but it was introduced by the west as a tool of domination as it imposed gender as hierarchical categories between males and females.

To Oyewumi, colonization for Nigerian women, combined 'racial inferiorization and gender subordination" (p.8). Nigerian women fought against subordination, leading to one of the first documented women's movements against inequality in Nigeria, the Aba women's riot, which took place in 1929 when Igbo market women planned and executed a protest

against unfair taxation laws. Pereira (2005), in her book '*Domesticating Women: Gender, Religion and the State in Nigeria Under Colonial and Military Rule*' explains how religious doctrines and state policies, functioned in collaboration, to 'domesticate' women, taking away the rights they formerly enjoyed. She emphasized that colonial officers achieved this goal, by reinforcing patriarchal norms, through Islam and Christianity, and added that colonial masters were actively involved in educating women, and the forms of education given to them were gendered in nature, and focused mainly on teaching them domestic roles, like cooking, housekeeping, child- keeping, etc. She stated that colonialism brought in a patriarchal ordering of society, which took women away from the economic and political roles they played in the pre- colonial times. Finally, she mentions that women made efforts to fight against these relegations with different movements, like the Abeokuta Women's Revolt, and the Aba Women's Riot of 1929. The women infused a 'sitting on a man' ridicule into their actions, showing a mockery of male dominance (Rex et al, 2021).

1.3 Contextualizing the Practice of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria

To paint a clearer picture of these religions, it is important to explain what they are, and state the various doctrines in which their adherents live by.

1.3.1 What is Christianity?

Christianity is defined as a monotheistic religion, with principles anchored on the tenets of Jesus Christ, who is believed to have died to save us from eternal damnation but was buried and also resurrected. The bible is the Holy book, which contains the message and commandments Christians are obligated to adhere to. Some major themes of the Christian faith are The Trinity, which signifies the believe that God has a tripartite identity. So, He is the father, who transcended to earth as Jesus, to die for our sins, and the Holy Spirit, who dwells in every Christian, to lead them through life. The second theme is Salvation, which is regarded as the inheritance of every Christian, and it connotes that believing in Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection. To Christians, these conviction saves everyone who believes, from eternal punishment after our reign on earth (Davies, 1994). Christians are guided by attributes like self-control, peace, joy, kindness, patience, amongst others. These are often referred to as fruits of the spirit (Keating, 2000, p.15).

Taiye (2012) explains that the oldest Christian denomination of Christianity in Nigeria is Roman Catholicism, however, denominationalism began in the 1840s, with the emergence of European and American missionaries, after the abolition of slave trade. The first successful mission was made by the Wesleyan Methodists, who were invited by the liberated slaves in Abeokuta and Badagry, in Lagos. Others included the American Baptist mission, introduced in Oyo state. Trained Nigerian missionaries emerged, and the quest for independence resulted in the rise of independent churches in the 19th century. He reveals that the 20th century witnessed the rise of a different denomination of churches, which were born out of the quest to remove western ideas from their Christian practice. The aftermath of the Nigerian civil war in the 1970s, brought along with it, the development of educational facilities like universities, more youth-led projects, as well as church activities. This period was also

characterised by a massive flood of American Christian literature by evangelists like Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagen, and others. Some of them paid visits to Nigeria, organising massive crusades, and gaining support from the Nigerian populace (p.7). This led to the development of separatist evangelical Christian groups, characterised by healings, baptism of the holy spirit, and other Pentecostal manifestations. These developments marked the inception of Pentecostalism in the country. Examples of Pentecostal churches which are still prominent in the present day, include The Redeem Christian Church of God, Deeper Life Bible Church, Dunamis International Gospel Centre, and many others. Although there are various denominations, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), serves as a uniting force for all churches in the Country. Sixty three percent of Nigerian Christians today, are Pentecostals (Richman, 2020).

One may ask why this distinction is important, since Pentecostalism is still Christianity. However, what many do not realise is, its doctrines are in many ways, different from Catholicism. Pentecostalism emphasizes personal relationship with God, through the Holy Spirit, and this one belief results in various manifestations. For example, while Catholics have to confess their sins to priests (who must be male), before they can receive forgiveness, Pentecostals go directly to God in prayer, believing that every Christian, can speak and hear from God. This, however, does not invalidate the authority of the priests. Individuals are still permitted to go to priests when they feel the need to. Another significant point to note about Pentecostalism, is that it is more liberal in terms of gender expectations in leadership. Hence, there are pastors, deacons, prophets, and church heads who are women (Morgan, 2024, p.29).

1.3.2 What Is Islam?

According to the University of Cambridge (2024), The word Islam is an Arabic word, translated to mean Submission to God. It is also a monotheistic religion, whose adherents believe in one God (Allah), who sent His message through different prophets, of which prophet Muhammed is the last and most significant of them all. The Qur'an is the Holy book, containing the instructions and doctrines that Muslims must obey. The Islamic religion is built primarily on five pillars. Some of them include: five daily prayers (Salat), giving charity (Zakat), fasting in the month of Ramadan, and other pillars.

Just as Christianity has different denominations, Islam also has its denominations and differing groups, like the Sunnis, the Sufis, the Ahmadiyyas and the Shias. Sunni Islam is the most dominant Muslim group in the world. They are Muslims who strictly follow the teachings and lifestyle of the Prophet Muhammed. This denomination, however, is not a unitary group, as other sub-groups have emerged under the Sunni umbrella. For example, the Sufis, who are similar to Pentecostals in the sense that they emphasize a personal relationship with Allah (God). Although, other groups like the Izala group, as well as members of the Boko-Haram have doctrines that are completely opposite from those of the Sufis, they still claim to be under the Sunni umbrella. Other denominations like the Ahmadiyyas, are quite different from the aforementioned groups, as they believe in a saviour or messiah, called Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. It is important to identify how these different Islamic sects emerged in Nigeria. Usman Dan Fodio, who established the Sokoto Caliphate, led a Jihadist movement

in the 20th century, against the perceived injustice against Northern Nigeria, which influenced the expansion of Islamic influence in the Country (Vaughan 2016, p.17).

Vaughan (2016), further posits that other movements emerged in the latter parts of the 1970s, bringing forth different sects of Islam, like the Izala movement and Darul Islam. Movements like the Boko-haram are more recent and forbid the education of women. Ahmadiyya Muslims on the other hand, began in British India, by Murza Ghulam Ahmad (1836-1906), as mentioned earlier. He was a reformer who claimed to be a prophet and the saviour of Muslims (mostly called *Mujaddid*, translated to mean The Renewer). The movement evolved into Nigeria in 1916, starting from Lagos state. It suffered a number of rejections from other Islamic sects. The Muslim participants in this study are Nigerian-Sunni Muslim Gen-Z women. This means that they are Muslims who rely majorly on lessons from the life of Prophet Muhammed.

1.4 Religion and Feminism in the Post-Colonial Era

The post-colonial era has experienced an outpouring of feminist organizations and individual feminist actions to fight for gender equality and social justice for women who challenge patriarchy and the dominant religions. Feminists are critical of patriarchy, racism, environmental injustice, and capitalism.

Nigeria, following UN and other governmental bodies, has a Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, founded in 1995, after the Beijing Conference on Women, to uphold the rights of women. There is funding and recognition for civil society organisations, as well as national and international non-profits with programmes for women's empowerment and gender equality. Through such institutions and actions, feminism in Nigeria, also challenges the unjust use of tradition to further marginalise women. Although the feminist movement has gained some level of support in the Nigerian political and social sphere, it has not been without challenges. Many Nigerian women refrain from labelling themselves as feminists, because feminists are stereotyped as a group of 'man- hating, unattractive, unlovable, and frustrated women' (Adichie, 2013). Women who ascribe to feminist identities can be literally spat on and ridiculed for going against God and His instructions. I now turn to look deeper into the antagonism between Nigerian feminism and religion. This research paper looks into the different ways women navigate their realities with these identities, however, the focus is on a specific generation, which has already been indicated. Before narrowing down to the Gen-Zs, it is paramount to first of all understand how different generations have evolved over the years.

1.5 Understanding Generations

Before engaging in this research paper, I've thought of who I am as a woman, and how that defines my reality, as well as who I am as an African, and more specifically, a Nigerian, especially since I moved to the Netherlands. However, I never thought of my generation as a theme to ponder on. So, it was very interesting for me, to find out who Nigerian Gen-Zs are, and by extension, who I am, as a Nigerian Gen-Z, as well as how that affects my research. Individuals in this category are born between 1997 and 2012. Different tags and classifications have been associated with this generation, based on the time we were born in, as well

as the behaviour traits we possess. Hence, the following sections will address how generations have evolved from the Baby boomers to the Gen-Zs.

The Baby Boomers, born between 1946-1964, witnessed the aftermath of the World War II, and their era was characterized by wars like the Cold war and the Vietnam War. They were a highly non-digital generation. Research sources describe baby boomers as typically conservative and hierarchical in nature. They paved the way for more advanced technology, developed by other generations (Slepian and Furman, 2024). The generation X (1965-1980) experienced the end of the cold war, the AIDS epidemic, and more women began to work, leading to increased rates of dual income families. They were also born in a period of technological advancement, following the lead of the baby boomers. The millennials, also known as Generation-Y, are people born between 1981-1996, who had their lives shaped by incidents such as the 9/11 attack, an increased rate of digital awareness in some parts of the world. And their Generation 'Y' tag is expected, since Y is what comes right after X is the alphabet order. Technological advancements at the time of the millennials were substantially advanced, compared to preceding generations. They are also described to be more right-winged in nature, compared to Gen-Zs, but less, compared to Baby boomers and Gen- Xs (Francis and Hoefel, 2018). Generation- Zs (1997-2012), were born in the era of rapid social media expansion, a season of climate change intensification, the COVID -19 outbreak and social media activism. We are a generation, highly dependent on technology and the internet. Francis and Hoefel (2018, p. 2), describe Gen- Zs as the "true digital natives", because we were born into a highly digital era, and exposed to social networks from the early stages of our lives. Finally, they also opine that a major feature of the Gen- Zs is our search for truth, and this search motivates their mobilisation to find answers to many questions that society presents us with. They note that we are also more willing to accept diversity and change (p.2). Furthermore, Brown (2024), also shows that this generation are not scared to callout systems or individuals who are in the wrong.

1.5.1 Generations in the Nigerian Context

It is important to note that while researching on the various resources about different generations, I realized that majority of them, focused on generations in global north countries (mostly America). So, I wondered if these realities are the same for Africans, and by extension, Nigerians. Considering a number of historical occurrences like colonialism, slave trade, etc, in African contexts, there'll certainly be differences in generational realities, compared to Global North countries. Hence, it is important to look at the different generations in Africa, but for the purpose of this study, Nigeria specifically.

Starting from the Baby Boomers (1946-1964), this group is quite distinct from other groups in the sense that they experienced years of colonial rule by the British. They witnessed events such as the introduction of English language as the major language in the Country, the introduction of religion, a season of tribal and zonal divisions, a period of urbanization, as well as Nigeria's independence. Due to these contexts, Nigerian baby boomers are resilient and patriotic. They are religious centred, politically aware, attached to traditions and are highly conservational in nature (Roy, 2024). Members of Generation- X (1965-1980) were born within contexts of the Nigerian civil war and the rule of military generals, increased rate

of education. An important factor to note is that technological advancements were not introduced in Nigeria, as early as they were in global north countries. Hence, this generation and the baby boomers had little to no access to facilities like computers, mobile phones, or the internet. The millennials (1981-1996) generation were born in the period of Nigeria's transition from military rule to a democratic government. Technological innovations were also incepted in this period, although accessible to only the elites of these times (Uchendu, 2020). Similar to previous generations, this generation is also committed to education. I can attest to this, as my parents who are Nigerian millennials, ensured that my siblings and I attained educational milestones all the way to masters' level. Perhaps without my parents, I wouldn't be a 20-year-old masters' degree student, striving to complete a research thesis in the International Institute of Social Studies. Also, my cousin who expressed to his parents, his unwillingness to obtain a masters' degree has been given an ultimatum to pick a course and a school to attend before 2025. So, in most Nigerian households, education is mandatory, except one is ready to be disowned. This generation are also regarded to have played major roles in the growth of Nigeria's entertainment industry. Majority of musicians celebrated today, like Davido, Wizkid, Tiwa Savage, Dunsin Oyekan, Nathaniel Bassey, etc., belong to the millennial group.

Nigerian Gen- Zs (born between 1997-2012), were born in the era of advanced technology, globalisation, and modernity. In terms of the use of the internet and social media, Nigerian Gen- Zs also fall into the category of digital natives as mentioned earlier. I remember coming back home in grade 7 and using the internet on my orange-coloured Nokia Lumia 530 android phone, to research on answers to school assignments. In less than an hour, I would complete my assignments and be ready to fling my books away, to watch *Icarly* (my favourite TV show at that time). My dad, who is a millennial would tell me how lucky I was to be able to freely utilise the internet for school tasks, as assignments were much harder tasks to complete when he was younger, because there was limited access to the internet, talk less of android phones. So, he often had to go to libraries and search for answers in printed books and materials. With this reality, The Gen- Zs are known for their prominent use of social media, for different purposes, ranging from, promoting businesses, to making jokes about political issues, as well as, fighting for people's rights and amplifying their voices.

As Yusuf *et al* (2019) reiterate, another thing Gen- Zs are known for is our seeming dissatisfaction for simple words. We make slangs for almost everything. For example, the word succeed is too boring for the typical Gen- Z. We use words like *slay* or *eat*. For context, my friend would say *'I slayed my job interview today'*, to express that she did really good and is positive about the outcome of the interview. Another word we seem to have tossed aside is information, which has been replaced with the word *Tea*. In situations where I'm aching to get some information from my friends, I would say *'spill the tea'*. We have also surprisingly made the word *goat*, sound cool, by making it an abbreviation. Now, when people say, *'he's a goat'*, one has to clarify whether they mean he's an animal (which will then probably lead to a huge fight), or they mean he's the *Greatest of All Time* (GOAT). It's amazing how these words are formulated by one person at some point, and in few years, almost everyone in the world is using them. Indeed, that's why we're called the digital natives. With social media, the whole world, as big as it is, has become a tightly knit web of interconnectivity (Gottfried, 2012).

Another notable factor for Nigerian Gen- Zs is their value for vocational skill. A typical Gen- Z, asides from being employed in a regular 9-5 job, is a fashion designer or a hairdresser, barber, professional chef, etc. And of course, the online space is the best way they advertise these skills and businesses (Olaitan, 2023). Just as Francis and Hoefel (2018) emphasize Gen- Zs' never-ending search for truth, Nigerian Gen- Zs are not exempted from this trait. While growing up, I frequently heard my mother tell my brother '*You ask too many questions',* and to a lot of these questions, she had no answers to. For example, a few years ago, my brother asked a neighbour, who always came to clean up his shoes at our house before going to work, why he could afford the car he drives, but not a shoe polish to clean up his shoes. In situations like this, my mother would scold him and reprimand him for asking such questions, but these cautions did not stop him. He would always boldly ask his questions and would not stop until he got answers. As I reflect on this memory, I smile from chin to chin, because not only is this a memory everyone in my family still laughs about, but I also realise that I see in my brother, a quality that so many other Nigerian Gen- Zs have.

The major difference is social media is the place where all these questions are dumped and reiterated until answers are provided. Not only have Gen- Zs taken over the internet with their questions and opinions, but they have also dragged other generations into the debates and posts. Notwithstanding the similarities in internet usage present amongst Gen-Zs in the world, it is important to note that the nature of questions and matters discussed by Nigerians differ, due to the context in which they grew up in. Some of these questions are tied to topics like colonialism, feminism, slave trade, religion, decoloniality, patriarchy, security, etc. With all these being said, the two main themes of the study are religion and feminism, specifically in relation to Gen-Z women, as the required category. The debates, concerns, and conversations around these two factors, amongst Gen-Z Nigerian women, is what the next two segments plans to cover.

1.6 Nigerian Gen-Z women and Feminism

Feminism as a term emanated from the west, as commonly known. However, before the emergence of feminism in the Nigerian context, feminist actions had already begun by a number of renowned female figures in society. An example is Funmilayo Ransom-Kuti, who, in collaboration with other women, established the Nigerian Women's Union and also mobilised female traders in her time, to fight against the unjust task collection these women were exposed to (Ada, 2011, p.51). Feminism in Nigeria, according to Ada (2011), started gaining its popularity in the latter parts of the 20th century when western feminist ideologies began to gain recognition (p.50). Nigerian feminists addressed issues like gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, denied educational rights of female children, female enlightenment on sanitary care, etc. However, just like almost every other social term, not everybody supports the feminist movement, on the basis of various arguments. While some posit that it was from the west and should remain in the west, some others state that feminism is against our Muslim and Christian religion and is also against the Nigerian culture. Feminists have had to cope with these challenges and oppositions. They have resorted to contextualizing feminist thought to suit the Nigerian context, and enlightening people on the actual goals of

the movement, while some women, due to the controversy, have decided to disassociate themselves from the term, emphasizing that it has caused more harm than good.

Gen-Z Nigerian feminists have found ways to amplify their voices through online spaces, like twitter (now known as X), Instagram, Reddit, as well as online blogs and articles. Some twitter debates concerning feminism are seen below.

Figure 1: A Gen-Z Nigerian, expressing her feminist views on X (Thehookprincess, 2024)

Figure 2: A Gen-Z Nigerian feminist, expressing her feminist views on X (a_nickabugu, 2024)

In the images above, two Gen- Zs lend their voices to feminism. The first lady, through the pictures on her page, is identified to own a knitting business, where she sells beautiful, knitted fashion accessories. Although nothing indicates her feminist identity in the biography section of her page, one can determine her support for the movement, through her posts.

By her post, she expresses the opinion that most women who do not associate with feminism only do so in pretence, in a bid to escape the sadness that comes with acknowledging that they have lived their lives under subjugation and controlled choices. Although she does not cite any scholarly work to back up her point, her opinion reminds me of the subverted agency theory of Chib *et al* (2022). In the paper, subverted agency is used to describe contexts where seemingly empowering tools like digital technology, also serve to oppress others through the reinforcement of unequal norms (p.558). In this particular context, the lady's comment reflects that the choices of these women are not entirely theirs, in the sense that their choice to be disconnected from feminism is influenced by the need to be accepted by society. Hence, the fear of marginalization, affects their agency. Figure 2 is a generation Z lawyer, who boldly portrays her feminist identity on her profile. She expresses her disapproval for those who say that feminists are taking things too far, by stating that the prejudice women face is on the increase. Therefore, implying that feminist actions and interventions must also be intensified.

While digital spaces like twitter have provided an avenue for Nigerian Gen-z feminists to express themselves, these spaces are also filled with others who do not necessarily agree with them, and are sometimes, very vocal about their disapproval. Figure 3, below, is an example.

Figure 3: A young Nigerian lady expressing her disapproval of Gen-Z Nigerian feminism on X (Uzodaniel1, 2024)

She blatantly rejects the Nigerian Gen-z idea of feminism, and even likened these individuals to misandrists, explaining that the only thing these feminists are known for is 'demonising men'.

In one of the most renowned online sites, focused on amplifying the voices of African youths, called *Zikoko,* Ayomikun (2022), narrates her life experience as a Gen-Z Nigerian feminist. In her narration, she states that any Gen-z Nigerian woman who claims the feminist identity, must be ready to be the topic of discussion in every family meeting. She explains that the feminist identity scares a lot of people, because the society has always been scared of women who speak up. She also explains how her brother insisted that she dropped the

feminist tag, for something more acceptable, like a 'gender rights advocate', so people do not hate her, and more importantly, so she'll be able to find a husband. She ends the article by emphasizing that these experiences have not deterred her from her feminist aspirations, as people would expect, but they have been motivating factors to push her towards intensifying her fight against misogyny in the Nigerian society. The writer affirms her determination to ensure that the society does not make her silent, just like they did, her mother and other Nigerian women.

An important part of this article is where the author speaks about her experience in the church, where she was rebuked for stating that she would not be doing all the domestic chores when she gets married, because she would be a wife and not a slave. A particular man in the congregation, boldly tagged her and women like her, to be the problem of society. This, therefore, leads me to the next segment on the different debates of Nigerian Gen-Z feminists in relation to religion (specifically Islam and Christianity), as well as how they navigate religious and feminist identities in a Country like Nigeria.

1.7 Nigerian Gen-Z Women Navigating Feminism and Religion

Many young Nigerian women have had experiences similar to Ayomikun. Although, these experiences differ, based on various factors, they nevertheless, move these women towards seeking for answers to their feminist and religious questions. Sanusi (2020), in her article, *'Between Feminism and Islam: My Personal Journey from Muslim Feminist to Muslimah'*, explains the different shifts in identities she experienced as a young woman. She starts by revealing how she had always been puzzled about the doctrines in Islamic practice, which seemed to perpetuate inequality against Muslim women in Nigeria. In her bid to find answers, she encounters the feminist movement and adopts a Muslim feminist identity. However, the journey of self- discovery did not end there, as she eventually resulted to identifying as a *'Muslimah'*[1], taking away the feminist title. She expressed that further inquiry into Islam and its doctrines, revealed that Islam as a religion, anchored principles of equity and fairness, but the doctrines are only portrayed otherwise, due to the misogynistic interpretations that have gained popularity. She therefore concludes that anyone who truly follows Islamic principles, will support the fight for women's equality without necessarily being a feminist.

In her research, Alaka (2002) interviews a 23-year-old Nigerian woman, who revealed that feminism influenced her decision to be Atheist. The participant is anonymous, however, for the sake of assimilation when I read literary works, I give anonymous characters pseudo names that I find suitable. So, I imagined her name to be Brenda. Brenda is a sociologist, and she tells the researcher that in her studies of sociology, she learned that every human being is a product of the society they were raised in; the school they attended, the families they were born into, the religion, etc. She further reveals that her decision to be atheist was born out of her constant reading and search into religion. After reading the book *'The thing Around Your Neck'* by Adichie (1977), about colonialism, she questioned why God did not help Africans when they were treated badly by British colonial masters. She also learned that the bible versions that are most accessible to Christians were shortened by King James, a British

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[1] Muslimah is a term used to refer to Muslim women.

king. She concludes by stating that her sociologist background helps her recognize that no book published in our world is void of subjectivities, including the bible, which she tags as an instrument used to promote political agenda. Finally, she states that her final decisions to stay away from Christianity and religion in total, were made in seasons where she went through difficulties, and prayed to God for help, but did not get any help. Brenda's account of Christianity and religion had me in a loop of thoughts for a few days. There are times where I had prayed, just like Brenda and the opposite of what I prayed for happened, however, other times, I have prayed, and received exactly what I prayed for, and even more. Her account of the changes made in the bible by the British king is also a topic worthy of looking into.

These issues raised by Ayomikun, Sanusi and Brenda, mark the debates and matters raised by Gen- Z Nigerian women, trying to find destinations in their journey to self-identification, particularly regarding feminist and religious identities. However, while some go into research, and writing articles, others go into social media spaces, to ask their questions, and give their opinions on these matters. Some questions and opinions shared, include:

Figure 4: A Nigerian asking questions on feminism and religion

(Benin Based Photographer, 2023)

Figure 5: A young Nigerian Christian, sharing her opinion on religion and feminism on X (Bisola-badejo, 2024)

Figure 6: A young Muslim Nigerian lady, sharing her opinion on feminism and religion, on X (Maryam_Jidayi, 2023)

The images above, are samples of online debates on issues of feminism and religion in Nigeria. While the first lady lies in a state of confusion as to whether one can be Christian and feminist, the second presents an argument as to how feminism in its original sense is not the culprit, but modern feminism is. In her bid to explain to fellow women why Christianity is not against women, she cites examples of women in the bible who took up key roles of leadership. She goes ahead to explain the context of patriarchy was already present, even before the times recorded in the bible. The last image contains two comments; the first is a

question seeking to know whether feminism is haram[2]. The second is a response, affirming that feminism in Islam is indeed a sin, and cites a qur'anic verse to prove her points.[3]

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[2] Haram is an Arabic word, translated as 'sin' or 'forbidden' in English.
[3] The debates and opinions used here are not in any way to show support or disapproval for the comments made but were only used to elucidate the discussions around these issues, to further prove the necessity of this research study.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framing

2.1 African Feminist theory

The African feminist theory is a concept derived from a range of African researchers and feminists, anchoring on developing forms of feminism that amplify the voices, experiences, and contexts of African women. The main argument of African feminists is that feminism, as it is now, was developed by the west, and does not suite the ideologies and experience of the African woman. Literatures on this theory, centre on themes like decoloniality, intersectionality, relativity, embodiment, as well as African Traditional practices. For example, Ipadeola (2023), in her book *Feminist African Philosophy: Women and the Politics of Difference,* critiques western forms of knowledge and their dominance in the feminist movement/theory. She discusses the challenges faced by African feminists, who are caught between aligning to the hegemonic western narratives of feminism or stating clear peculiarities in African feminism. To her, these feminists are confronted with the challenge of 'difference, similarity and diversity- the question of identity' (p.52). Furthermore, she suggests a feminist approach that takes into consideration, the intersectionality present in the identities of women, such as race, ethnicity, class, religion, and historical backgrounds. The author argues that we, as Africans must break out from colonial structures that ensure the sustenance of patriarchy and injustice. She further goes on to emphasize the need for Africans to re-claim some pre-colonial practices and customs, like *Ubuntu*, which anchors on the importance of community and going beyond self-gratification, by caring for the people around us. Ipadeola challenges African feminists to take up the task of revealing areas in feminist philosophy, where the challenges and experiences of African women are not taken into recognition. Other scholars like Oyeronke Oyewumi, Chimamanda Adichie, Catherine Acholonu, have used the African feminist theory in their works, and it is utilized in this paper as well.

This theory is essential to my study, first, because of its focus on African women and their experiences. Also, its emphasis on intersectionality helps me identify the overlapping identities that participants possess. In as much as elements like religion have been used to reinforce patriarchy, it's also been used as a means for empowerment and meaningful identification. Feminism on the other hand has been a useful tool in liberating women, but also seems to be a theme of contention in the Nigerian community. Hence, by using this theory as a guide, I was able to see how Gen-Z Nigerian women navigate their lives in relation to religious realities and feminist identities.

The use of feminist methodologies also influenced my theoretical considerations, as elements of the feminist theory, proved to be extremely useful. I was able to recognize my insider-outsider status in this study. This is a term described by Summerville *et al* as a situation where researchers have similar characteristics with participants, but also some other characteristics that disqualify their connection and relativity to participants (p. 481). In my situation, participants in the study are Gen-Z Nigerian women, who live in Nigeria, while I am a Gen-Z Nigerian woman who lives in the Netherlands. Although, the only differing factor here is geographical location, it still serves an important role. Being in the Netherlands, puts me in a more comfortable position to express my feminist identity, as the Netherlands is more

supportive of feminist principles and ideologies, compared to Nigeria. Hence, realizing that this factor might hamper my level of relativity with the participants, conscious efforts were taken to continually remind myself of this reality. Furthermore, the renowned feminist theory scholar, Sandra Ahmed (2004), through her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotions,* helped me consider emotions expressed by participants in this study, as she revealed that individual emotions are beyond personal occurrences, but are influenced by external societal factors. This provided for an in-depth understanding of emotions expressed by participants, in relation to religion and feminism.

2.2 Self -Reflection

I also make use of self-reflection for various reasons. First, because this research is to answer a personal question, which is also a question other womenn like me are seeking answers to. Hence, self-reflection is used, not only as a guiding mechanism in gathering my participants, but also in my reflexivity, to ensure that I do not impose my opinions on the participants. In the course of this study, there are instances where I stepped away from the data, to reflect on my own experiences and knowledge, based on my findings. To put this in a simpler way, I would say I did not just see myself as a researcher, but also somewhat, as a participant. This, therefore, helped to connect better with participants of the study, and further improved my ethical consciousness (Mortari, p.1). Finally, constantly engaging in self-reflection, helped me shift ideologies in necessary situations, as it was an interesting learning experience, to see how my fellow Gen-z Nigerian women understand the world that they live in.

2.2.1 Research Objective

To explore the relationship between feminism and religion in the lives of middle-class Gen-Z Nigerian women.

2.2.2 Research Question

In what ways do middle-class Gen-Z Nigerian women see religion and feminism being able to co-exist (or not) in their lives?

2.2.3 Sub questions:

1. How do young middle-class Gen-Z Nigerian women understand feminism?
2. How do young middle-class Gen-Z Nigerian women understand being a Christian/Muslim woman?
3. How do they navigate religious and feminist identities in the Nigerian context?

Chapter 3 Methodology and Methods

This study employs feminist methodologies, to gather and analyse data, using semi-structured conversations with Gen Z Nigerians, who identify as religious and cis-gender women. As a gen-z, cis-gender feminist, who is Christian and Nigerian, the goal in gathering participants was to ensure that they are as close to my identity as possible.

3.1 Study Design

I use narrative research design as a qualitative research paradigm and it enabled me to shift away from positivist knowledge, and use situated knowledge (Wolgemuth, Agosto, 2019). The two central themes of this study: feminism and religion, are often understood differently. Narrative inquiries, therefore, help to gather and analyse stories of how the participants understood religion and gender. Data for this study, was gathered through semi- structured interviews, and then transcribed and coded, to generate themes for analysis.

3.2 Research Method

Table 1: Table of Interviewees

Pseudo-nym	Pronouns	Religion	Age	Feminist Identity	Location	Status
Aisha	She/her	Muslim	23	Non-feminist	Abuja, Nigeria	Working
Amarachi	She/her	Christian	22	Feminist	Abuja, Nigeria	Working
Arinola	She/her	Christian	26	Feminist/Non-feminist	Abuja, Nigeria	Working
Daisy	She/her	Christian	21	Feminist	Abuja, Nigeria	Masters' degree student
Diana	She/her	Christian	21	Feminist	Abuja, Nigeria	Working
Fatima	She/her	Muslim	22	Non- Feminist	Abuja, Nigeria	Working
Mary	She/her	Christian	22	Not sure	Abuja, Nigeria	Working
Nafeesat	She/her	Muslim	21	Non- feminist	Abuja, Nigeria	Working
Rhodiat	She/her	Muslim	23	Feminist	Abuja, Nigeria	Working

Saffiyah	She/her	Muslim	23	Feminist	Abuja, Nigeria	Working
Francisca	She/her	Christian	21	Non- feminist	Abuja, Nigeria	Working
Zara	she/her	Christian	21	Not sure	Abuja, Nigeria	Working

The research sample was made up of 12 participants in total, having two categories. Interviews held between 14th of August, to 10th of September, using a snowball sampling technique. A few of them were amongst my close circle of friends, who then referred me to other individuals on the basis of their gender, religion, age, and pronouns. For their feminist identities, inductive information was not derived before the research, but determined in the course of the interviews. The study was made up of Pentecostal Christians and Sunni Muslim women, with some of them being feminists, non- feminists, and others, who were not certain of their identities. Since all respondents were based in Nigeria, all interviews were conducted online, on google meet[4] and zoom[5]. In addition to these interviews, a few personal experiences of the researcher, proved useful to the study and were infused into the findings, and analysed accordingly, by connecting them to findings derived from participants, to identify areas of correlation or distinction. The interviews were semi- structured in nature, lasting between 35 – 60 minutes.

3.3 Scope and Limitations of Research

In the process of gathering data for this study, majority of the participants called to postpone already scheduled interviews, for reasons beyond their control. Some participants had to be replaced in the process of collecting data. Some interviews were disrupted by poor connectivity a few times. Despite my efforts, Christians in the study outnumbered the Muslims. It was also part of the goals to get at least one atheist participant, who dropped religion due to feminism, as this would have given a new perspective to the findings. However, due to the sampling technique and the restriction of time, I did not find such a participant. Another limitation was my inability to cite most biblical and qur'anic scriptures referenced by participants. The sensitivity of religious matters had to be considered. In gathering data, participants mentioned biblical and qur'anic verses to back up their points, but in analysis, these had to be censored, to ensure that negative emotions are not steered up by those who read this paper.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Appropriate measures to ensure this study followed ethical requirements were taken. One of the most important factors, was getting approved consent from all the participants. Consent forms were sent to their email addresses before interviews were scheduled, the forms had

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[4] Google meet is a visual and audio service for communication, developed by google.
[5] Zoom is also a visual and audio service for communication.

been signed and sent back for record purposes. Additionally, the terms and conditions were repeated during the interviews to re- confirm approval before conversations began. In the consent form, a brief summary was given about the details of the research. Included, was a confirmation of confidentiality, as well as pseudonymity to protect their identities (Kothari, 2004). Respondents were fully informed that participation in the study was completely voluntary, and they had the liberty to skip any question that they did not feel comfortable answering, during the interview. Information on how important participants' contributions were to the study, was clearly stated, as well as details on how the study would benefit them. This was necessary to motivate their participation and to let them know that they also held power in this study. They were also fully informed that conversations with them were recorded and transcribed. In the consent forms, participants were assured access to the completed version of this research, based on their request. Findings of this study were used only for the purposes of this research and will not be accessible to any third party.

Also, researchers do not speak enough about the struggle of avoiding debates, on opinions given by participants, which one does not exactly agree with. I constantly had to remind myself that the conversations were not merely discussions but were interviews for my research paper. So, in a lot of cases, where I was smiling on the outside while having these conversations, a mind battle was occurring on the inside, with me struggling to stay professional, and not spit out all my thoughts and opinions, as discussions around religion can be sensitive, depending on what exactly is being discussed. Nonetheless, while this was challenging, it was also a learning experience, as I learned to let participants feel comfortable enough to air their views.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 What does Feminism mean to Gen Z Nigerian women?

All of the participants had different perceptions of feminism. A common element of all their definition was the term 'equality' amongst genders. Out of twelve participants, five of them were in full support of the feminist movement in Nigeria, even though some of them admitted that they were, at some point in their lives, against the movement, because they thought feminists were misandrists. *Rhodiat* said '*I used to think that the word feminism was that men should just be pushed to the side*'. She and other participants, who formerly had this notion, revealed that they had to make conscious efforts to read about feminism before they could adjust their views about it. Three of the participants were neutral, and four did not support feminism, because of their religion.

When asked why they supported feminism, different reasons were given, but the most dominant reason the women gave was based on the belief that the majority of the rights women in the world, and by extension, women in Nigeria enjoy today; like their rights to vote, right to earn a living, amongst others, had to be fought for. Although they stated, this was achieved not only by feminists, but by other women who aimed to achieve equality as well. Others opined that women are, first of all, human beings before they are women and, therefore, deserve the right to make their own choices as much as men do. Those who were not really sure about their feminist identities expressed that they hadn't really felt the need to inquire further about it. Some others supported the movement but did not feel like they had done enough feminist activism to be worthy of being called feminists.

When asked for reasons why they believed feminism was such a controversial topic in Nigeria, a common response was based on the notion that it was a threat to men, considering the fact that they have been regarded as the dominant gender for a very long time, and women have been permanently placed as homemakers or nurturers. *Safiyah,* a Muslim participant, said, *'Men and even women as well, are afraid of the idea of women actually doing what they want to do'*. By including women, she indicates that it is not just men who are against feminism, but women too. Other participants also alluded to the opinion that a lot of Nigerian women accept injustice, and it becomes harder to fight for equality, due to the lack of unity among women. They noted that Nigerian women have been raised to think that their worth lies in the husbands that they marry, and the things their husbands do for them. So, they choose to stay in abusive marriages because of the stigma associated with being a divorced or unmarried woman. A particular participant likened the situation to the Stockholm syndrome, where women know that they're exposed to harsh conditions, but will rather remain there than be set free. *Amarachi* added that *'there's a stigma attached to women being independent'*, adding that even when women are independent, people assume that there must be some male supporter in their lives. *Arinola* said that feminism in Nigeria is not receiving enough support as it should because it is seen by a lot of people, as a personal issue. She adds that citizens need to realize that *'the personal is political and to tackle political problems, political agendas need to be set'*.

Another recurring opinion about the controversy of the feminist movement in the country, was that some women have taken the movement too far and have become extreme. One

participant went further by comparing these feminists to the Boko-Haram insurgency group since they are also regarded by many as extremist Muslims, who justify their use of terrorism to impose an Islamic order in the secular Nigerian state.

4.2 What does it mean to be a good Christian/Muslim Woman?

While answering this question, all participants began with neutral religious practices. For the Christian participants, going to church regularly, paying tithes, doing good unto others, putting in the best in whatever they do, and believing in the finished work of Jesus[6] were their major areas of duty. For the Muslims, praying five times daily, giving *zakat* (charity), fasting, *Hajj* (pilgrimage)[7], and praying Tahajjud (Night prayer) were the obligations mentioned.

I asked the participants about religious doctrines that were particular to women alone. For Christian women, some of the obligations involved women taking care of their homes, being submissive to their husbands, and covering their hair in times of prayer. For Muslim women, the roles mentioned involved wearing the hijab, respecting their husbands, cooking, and caring for the home and kids. While mentioning these roles, *Mary* mentioned some religious beliefs that she had always questioned in her head. One of them had to do with women being mandated to cover their hair in church and dress modestly. Although, she agreed that women must dress modestly, what she questioned was the meaning of modesty itself. In addition to *Mary's* question, a complaint of almost all the participants was that culture is now closely linked with religion and is what makes religion problematic because it enhances patriarchy.

When asked why they thought the Nigerian culture was patriarchal, the women commonly associated the reason with colonialism. They added that the colonisers, like the United Kingdom, have somehow also evolved from being patriarchal, and many of them now embrace principles of equality, both in their workplaces and in their societies. As one participant stated, '*Since we as blacks like copying whatever these colonisers do, we have also advanced in uplifting women, but it's not enough',* indicating that some progress has been made in achieving equality for women, but more effort needs to be put in. Participants also added that religion is subject to multiple interpretations and understandings by different people, and so, because people have multiple understandings, multiple versions of particular doctrines exist. A lot of people have their views on Christianity and their beliefs on how God should be served.

4.3 Navigating Religion and Feminism

In exploring how women navigated their religious and feminist identities, it was first of all important to identify what they thought about the possibilities of retaining both identities. Hence, to provide clarity, this section will be divided into three main categories: Those who

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[6] The Pentecostal Church understands the finished work of Jesus Christ is that Jesus sacrificed his life for humanity by dying on the cross

[7] Hajj (pilgrimage) refers to a journey, which every Muslim is expected to take at least once in their lifetime, to Mecca, in order to visit the Kabba (House of Allah).

agree that women can be both feminist and Christian/Muslim, those who are not sure, and finally, those who believe both identities cannot co-exist.

4.3.1 'A woman can be Feminist and Christian/Muslim at the same time'.

Participants in this category had very strong opinions regarding their ideologies. They believed beyond doubt that their religion did not stop them from being feminists.

> *'Even being a female pastor in church is feminist'- Daisy (A Christian-feminist participant).*

The comment above represents the opinion of Christian-feminist participants. They believed that feminists were not going against the will of God, but Nigerian men, who have always had power, do not want to lose the power they have held for so long, so they find ways to alter religious laws in a way that translates to women not being able to hold positions of authority in the church, and by extension, in institutions in the Nigerian society. Therefore, to a lot of them, women who have found ways to be pastors or preachers in the church are feminists (whether they realise it or not). Even though they may not associate themselves with the term, they nullify strict church doctrines that maintain that women cannot be pastors or leaders of the church.

For Muslims on the other hand, the Nigerian society has explicitly restricted their leadership roles to groups containing only their fellow women. Furthermore, in some sub-Nigerian societies, women have been restricted from being educated. According to the participants, these principles have been introduced by extremist Muslims, who only see women as 'breeding machines', as stated by *Rhodiat*. However, they mention that social media has been used as a tool that amplifies the voices of Muslim women, who are professors, teachers, and even medical practitioners, and whether they're feminist or not, they inspire feminist Muslims, like the participants in this study, to keep fighting for the rights of women in the Nigerian Islamic environment.

> *'Being a mother does not stop me from being ambitious, and I think men who think women shouldn't work, because they wouldn't be good mothers and wives, haven't really seen this happen in real life. So, it's just irrational fear'. - Saffiyah (a Muslim feminist)*

All the interviewed feminists noted that feminism was not out to stop women from being good mothers or wives. However, what feminism aims to do, according to them, is to make sure the motherly and wifely roles they play, do not hamper them from achieving their career goals and ambitions. When asked who inspires them the most to uphold their religious and feminist identities at the same time, the most common response given was '*my mom*'. *Amarachi* specifically, revealed that she was raised in a broken home, and her parents did not live together. She stated that she and her siblings lived with her mother, who played both the homemaker and breadwinner roles at the same time. To her, her mom is a great example of a feminist in the Nigerian context. *Arinola* as well, stated that her mom has no idea of what the term feminism is, but she definitely possesses certain feminist characteristics. She notes that while her mom raised her and her siblings, she did not assign chores to them based on gender, and the boys also had to cook for themselves, which is rare to see in a typical Nigerian

household. In addition, her mother also built her career despite the responsibilities she had as a mother and a wife.

To these women, according to the doctrines of the Qur'an, women naturally have more benefits than men, in the sense that these women are expected to be taken care of, especially those who are married. They are expected to receive allowance from their husbands at intervals and are even entitled to inheritance, However, *Nafeesat* said, *'In Nigeria, the opposite is the case, and these Nigerian men just see women as people that must be under them'*.

These participants, therefore, noted that, by being feminists, they're not going against the will of Allah, but they are rather fighting to ensure that Allah's doctrines are followed and not adjusted to suite *androcentric* agendas of Muslim men. So, to them, being feminist is not a sin. Even though the majority of the participants couldn't remember at that time, any role model that inspired their Islamic-feminist identities, Malala Yousafzai, a renowned education activist who fought for the rights to education of Taliban women, was mentioned as a role model to one of the participants. When asked what they thought could be done to rally more support for the feminist movement, they focused on the opinion that Nigerians need to be enlightened about the movement's goals and objectives. They also stated that more men need to be involved. One of the participants noted that in order to get some power, we need to form an alliance with those who already have the power. They also noted that, when educating religious women about feminism, feminists should include Bible and Qur'anic verses that show the need for feminism, just like the few ones they mentioned.

4.3.2 'I'm not sure'

In as much as there were numerous responses that showed participants' assertiveness about feminism and their religious identities being able to co-exist, there were also a few who were uncertain about this reality. The most- prominent reason was that feminism has now become highly controversial in Nigeria, and they're not sure what exactly feminists want anymore. To expand further, *Arinola* says:

> *'We don't even know who a woman is anymore. There are men who have transitioned to women or men who cross-dress and choose to identify as women, so it has now become confusing, and the focus has been taken away from the original reason of feminism in Nigeria in the first place'.*

These women are not convinced God is pleased with transgender women, homosexuals or cross- dressers, and as such, they worry that supporting feminist actions that include these groups of individuals would mean sinning against God/Allah. For both Christian and Muslim participants, verses to back up their uncertainty were found both in the Bible and the Qur'an. In the Bible, Paul, in the book of Romans, explains to Christians that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were punished by God because the men had sexual relationships with other men, and women did the same with their fellow women (Yarbrough, 2020). Qur'an 7, verses 81-82, states that men who look at other men with lust instead of women, go 'beyond the limits' (Normani, 2023). To them, these groups of people have taken attention away from those who suffer from dire circumstances like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), child marriage, educational restrictions, Gender Based Violence (GBV), amongst other unfair circumstances. They also stated that the negative reputation feminism already has, makes it stressful

to constantly have to explain to people what *'their own kind of feminism means'*. Hence, sometimes, they wonder if it's better to just be quiet in matters of feminism; however, they are also burdened by the struggles of marginalised women in Nigeria. At the end of their interviews, the women specifically asked that I let them know about the findings of my research, in their desire to also have their own questions answered.

4.3.3 'You cannot be Christian/Muslim and Feminist at the same time'

Just as participants who support feminism were assertive about their support, these groups of participants were also as assertive (if not more) about the reservations they hold for the feminist movement in Nigeria. Majority of the women in this category were Muslim. The major reason for their lack of support for feminism was based on the notion that Islam in itself is already a religion that supports women's rights, so there's really no need for feminism. *Aisha* stated that *'being a feminist these days is basically shooting yourself in the foot, because you expose yourself to a lot of backlashes.* For another participant, *Fatima,* Islam is a religion of equity and not equality, so a lot of things are done based on the peculiar needs of people. An example she gave was in the area of inheritance. She notes that women are given less proportions in inheritance because their wealth is to be used for personal needs, but men on the other hand, are mandated by Allah, to provide for their wives, children, parents, and even extended family, so by default, they need more money, compared to women, and as such, get larger shares of inheritances.

Arinola, a Christian participant who also belonged to the group that supports feminism, stated that she is strongly against modern-day feminism because, in a lot of cases, they are trying to save women from what they do not need to be saved from. For example, she states that some women actually choose to submit to their husbands and are fine with being housewives. To her, that should be the main focus of feminism (i.e., women being able to freely make choices about their lives). However, Nigerian feminists make it seem like women who take these decisions are backward-thinking and need to work. Hence, she opines that a lot of feminists *'play saviour when no saving is needed'*. To further buttress her point*, Aisha* mentions that a lot of feminists think that women who wear the hijab are being oppressed. While she notes that this may be a reality for women in some other places, she maintains that most Nigerian women do not wear the hijab because they are forced to, and that real oppression lies in the actions of Nigerian feminists who try to fight for policies that anchor for the prohibition of hijabs.

Another reason the women gave for their anti- feminist identities is that a lot of people who claim to be feminists do not do their research about the movement, and hence, do not have a solid foundation in terms of their knowledge of the term. So, these groups of people spread the wrong narratives, creating generations of Nigerian women who lack proper understanding of what feminism actually means. They also note that the typical understanding of who a feminist is in the country, centres around hatred of men, and claiming feminist identities might scare away potential husbands/partners for these women. In a bid to identify what these women think the solution is to the problem, a number of them said, the feminist term itself has become problematic, and they introduced ideas of finding an alternative term

to feminism, which would perfectly suit the context and experiences of the Nigerian populace, since feminism does not seem to be doing that.

Finally, in the course of this research, some personal experiences stood out for me, which I think would be very useful in reinforcing the opinions of these women. On my LinkedIn profile, the description *'feminist theology'* was boldly stated in my biography, and a former boss who I worked with while I was in Nigeria, reached out to me, and advised that I remove the feminist term from my profile so that I do not get misunderstood by fellow Nigerians since the term has become very controversial in the country. I understood where she was coming from, as she has always given me good counsel. However, beyond her intentions, her comment, and the opinions of the participants of this study reveal that feminism in Nigeria, as Chimamanda Adichie says, *'holds so much baggage'* (2013).

To give another example, when I told a friend about my research, he said to me: *'of course, feminism is bad. Saying otherwise, is like saying alcoholism is not bad.'* Although, this is a male contribution, his opinion reflects the perception of feminism in Nigeria. Despite his obvious disapproval of the movement, the conversation ended with him wanting to know the findings of my research after completion.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Curiosity

 A pattern I was glad to identify amongst the participants was their interest in the outcome of my research. Even a male friend who I referenced in the findings, wished to know the outcome of the study. This point further emphasizes the claim by Francis and Hoefel (2018), which states that Gen-Zs are constantly searching for truth, and answers to matters of concern. While I'm glad that participants have proved this point to be true, it also leaves me wondering if social media is the right place to find answers to these questions on feminist and religious identities, as Hilary and Okonofua (2021) acknowledge that internet platforms have become breeding grounds for misinformation. Taking myself as an example, one of the primary reasons I have been able to reconnect with my feminist identity is because I was exposed to teachings and scholarly literature from courses like *Feminist Perspectives*. However, not all Nigerian women have the opportunity to study these discourses in academic institutions.

Hence, in this situation, while curiosity may serve as a source of empowerment, as it leads these participants to find answers, it's also a risk, depending on the validity of these answers. This proves that, as young women, we need to be guided in our search for truth. Getting educated and enlightened from the right sources cannot be over-emphasized. However, in a setting like Nigeria, where other issues like poverty, unemployment, inflation, etc, are eminent, matters like feminism are often tossed aside. Although Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have made notable contributions towards educating and enlightening women, from my personal experience in the NGO field, the fact that these organisations are most times sponsored by foreign donors with diverse agendas, hampers possibilities of having contextualized interventions that address root problems (Roy, 2018, p.201). For example, my working experience with one of these organisations revealed that young women who are helped by these NGOs to become income earners, by teaching them various vocational skills are often susceptible to domestic violence. This is because of the deeply entrenched patriarchal principles Nigerians live by.

A typical Nigerian husband, who is the primary breadwinner of his family, is threatened when his wife starts earning money, out of the fear that her independence may render him useless in the household. By extension, as participants noted, a typical Nigerian man is threatened when women speak about feminism, because the movement threatens the male-centred power dynamics that exist in the nation. This also emphasizes the need to not just educate women about the movement, but also include men in the enlightening processes. As participants noted, men are the one who hold the power, and to efficiently achieve the goal of equality in Nigeria, we as women, certainly need some power holders on our side. Johnson (2005) reiterates this point, as he explains how patriarchal norms promote expectations of masculinity from men, ripping men away from their freedom of expressing showing emotion, and pressure to be independent. With this, he seeks to show how men are also victims of the patriarchal world we live in. He insists that issues like racism, climate injustice, and classism are all linked to patriarchy, and therefore, men and women need to identify the roles they

play in enforcing patriarchy and take conscious efforts to deconstruct this menace (pp. 76-77). However, for this to be achieved, a proper understanding of patriarchal dynamics in Nigeria is needed by individuals or groups that are interested in dismantling them. So, for Gen- Z Nigerian women, contextualizing feminism according to the realities that surround them is important, as this will help them properly navigate their feminist identities in relation to different factors prevalent in the country, like religion and culture.

5.2 Contextualizing Feminism

While every participant in the study acknowledged their understanding of feminism as a fight for equality for all women, an important recurring pattern in the findings is the uncertainty of their support for '*modern-day feminism'*. Even those who ascribe to the feminist identity, express significant levels of disapproval for what feminism has evolved into. For example, the disapproval of feminist approaches that fight for the rights of queer individuals is based on the belief that Islamic and Christian doctrines do not support actions of LGBTQ+ identities. Others state that feminists in Nigeria have begun to take things too far by attacking women on social media spaces, who choose to do domestic roles for their husbands. With participants stating that modern-day feminism may never be accepted in a place like Nigeria, due to its already acquired bad reputation, I wondered if a more contextualized version could be developed to suit the beliefs and ideologies of Nigerian women, just like the participants suggested, and in my quest to determine the feasibility of this possibility, I realized that a number of other African alternatives had already been developed, like Stiwanism, Motherism, Motherhood feminism, etc., by Nigerian feminists and scholars like Molara Ogundipe, and Catherine Acholonu. All these forms of feminism emphasize the nurturing, caring nature of women, and align with the idea of who Christian and Muslim women are expected to be.

While it is inspiring to see how significant these alternatives have emerged, I wonder if there can really be a one size-fits-all alternative to feminism for these women, considering the diverse identities they hold. One thing the participants in this study have done with feminism is embrace the parts of the movement's principles that align with their beliefs and drop other principles that do not. This is not a bad idea; however, I worry that the lack of unity in the understanding of what feminism in Nigeria is meant to be, may contribute to the ultimate frustration of the movement's overarching goal of achieving equality. Giddens' (2003) emphasizes the importance of shared beliefs for individuals who intend to alter oppressive social structures. With the diverse understandings of what feminism is meant to be, are young Nigerian women united enough in their beliefs*,* to fight this battle for equality?

It is also important to consider that participants who were unsure about their stance and support for feminism had as one of their reasons, the fear of becoming vulnerable to society's attacks. While pondering on this, I recalled Sarah Ahmed's (2014) explanation of an '*unconscious comfort'* that is placed in the position of normativity (p.39). This also explains why the typical Gen-Z Nigerian lady has amongst her major goals, to be married, have children, and take care of the home. While these could actually be the real desires of women, another argument could be picked from Foucault's description of knowledge as power, where he

explains that one of the reasons why people are naturally drawn to certain inclinations is because those are the only forms of truth that they know (p.5).

As young girls, we're raised primarily to be good wives and good mothers, even in the schools we attend. When I was younger, boys took subjects like Agriculture or Data Processing, while girls were encouraged to take other courses like Food and Nutrition or Catering. We learned how to make different snacks like marble cakes, ice cream, and smoothies. Boys did the technical stuff with the wires and computers. These gender divisions were presented as normal to us, and none of us really questioned these things at that time. So, it's not out of place that young Nigerian women, like some of the participants in this study, do not value feminism. Even though more young women are now accepting the movement and acknowledging that they could be so many other things, including and beyond being good wives, learning new forms of truth takes time. We need to first be willing to learn and unlearn, as I am also just unlearning a lot of things that I thought were normal, until I recently realized they were acts of *gender performativity* (Butler, 2009). Butler defines the concept of *gender performativity* as a constructed system involving practices that have been influenced by culture, repeated over time, and unconsciously internalised and regarded as natural to individuals (ibid.). This explains why participants say women are naturally nurturers or caregivers, and as such, meant to take care of their children, husbands, and other family members.

As one participant stated, personal issues are most times not merely personal, and they stem from political spheres. Hanisch (1969) reiterates this point and states that, 'personal problems are political problems' (p.114), and they require political solutions. If gender inequality can be taken more seriously by the Nigerian government, perhaps, individuals would begin to see the importance of feminism. As mentioned earlier, Non- Governmental Organisations also have meaningful roles to play, especially in addressing the issue of feminism as a Nigerian issue, taking into consideration, in their interventions, the peculiarities of the Nigerian setting. For example, through my research in this study, and the brief experience I have had, working with the Right to Quality Education Team for the Centre for African Justice, Peace, and Human Rights, I've discovered that young girls in Nigeria are denied access to education on different grounds, and religious doctrines is one of them, especially in grassroot communities in the Country. This, I believe is a critical issue, as women who are not educated, are limited in their capacity to fight against acts of oppression and join the feminist struggle for equality. Perhaps these organisations can look into addressing these issues. However, the top-bottom approach usually taken, hampers the success of projects. Giving concerned beneficiaries the opportunities to identify their own problems, and work together with these organisations in tackling them, will make room for more holistic and efficient outcomes (Kamali, 2024)[8].

Again, if the Nigerian government would look into the dilemmas their citizens face on a daily basis, there will be less need for support from external bodies. Beyond non- governmental organisations, I believe research is an important tool used to shed light on important issues. Perhaps, future research can look into strategic ways to address the issue of women's access to education, and other related matters of gender inequality. Another reason actions

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[8] This cited work was part of an assignment I submitted for ISS 4226 (Feminist Perspectives, Gender and Development) Course

by NGOs and even government officials may not yield desired results is that fact that individuals who work for these bodies are also Nigerian, and have therefore, most likely internalized elements of patriarchy, like hierarchical gender roles. Hence, they might have been too familiarized with the problem that they do not even recognize it as a problem (Summerville, 2021). To tackle this, Scheeper *at al* (2020), in their work, reveal that Non- governmental Organisations, especially feminist organisations, may be reproducing the same oppressive elements that they aim to tackle in society, within their organisations. They therefore urge these organisations to be reflective in their operations, to avoid a disconnect from their internal working structures and their external interventions.

Factors like cultural and religious interpretations are responsible for these internalized patriarchal norms that are prevalent in both individuals and organisations. However, for this study, how participants' interpretations of religious doctrines, affect their support/rejection of feminism needs to be analysed.

5.3 Interpretations as Truths

Christianity and Islam have doctrines that have been inscribed in the Bible and Qur'an, respectively. However, one major factor that complicates the reality of abiding by these doctrines is the diverse interpretations of people with different ideologies, and life experiences as reflected among the participants. Participants could cite biblical and Qur'anic verses to support their pro-feminist claims, and other participants could cite scriptures from the same bible and Qur'an, to back their anti-feminist positions. For example, participants who stated that women are naturally and primarily meant to play domestic roles as wives, while the men work, quoted bible verses and Qur'anic scriptures to validate their opinions. On the other hand, participants who maintained that women could work and earn livings as wives, also had scriptures from the two doctrinal books to back up their point.

This reality, however, could lead to different things for feminism. With some participants lending their voices to support feminism, by learning about religion, and seeking to see how it aligns with feminist principles, egalitarian narratives could be birthed, and hopefully strengthen the voices of other people who hold similar opinions. Otherwise, with opposing voices being louder, patriarchy may continue under the guise of loyalty to religious beliefs. I say this based on my reflection on the structuration theory, developed by the renowned sociologist, Giddens. He explains the importance of power with others, and posits that individuals as social beings, have within us, the capacity to enhance dominating structures, or challenge them through our collective agency. Through this theory, he explains how minority groups with similar beliefs, can actually altar these power structures when they mobilise themselves to resist against them (Gaventa, 2003).

Applying this to the study, perhaps a solution to individuals who support feminism in relation to their religious beliefs, like the young women amongst my participants, would be to come together to resist against these powerful walls of ideologies that have been stamped as the truth. Resistance does not always have to include violence or deviant behaviour. It could also be frictional, which means more silent and structural actions (Rubin, 2015). Participants cite this form of resistance amongst their mothers. A good number of them

mentioned how their mothers, even while being restricted to gender roles, like cooking, and taking care of children, still found ways to break free from these limitations, by starting up businesses, furthering their education, and training their male sons to know how to cook. Although they mention that their mothers were not feminists, their actions were sometimes pro- feminist, and served as motivating factors to the participants, in upholding feminism. Sandra Ahmed (2021) also revealed that complaints could serve as efficient resistance tools. The author states that persistent complaints can help re-structure discriminatory systems and structures in which institutions, like religion are built on. Acts of resistance also occur through the diverse complaints posted on social media by young Nigerian feminists.

However, different groups of people exist on social media. So, while the pro-feminist Christian and Muslim women advocate for their views, the anti-feminist Christian/Muslim views are also shared. The social media space has thus become an unending battlefield of opposing voices. At the moment it is impossible to tell what ideology would eventually win, and an issue of concern is the increasing rates of social media bullying that takes place on these platforms. I, for example have repeatedly deleted comments and withheld opinions I intended to post, out of fear of being attacked, and participants also show their relativity to this dilemma when they stated that they do not publicly support feminism, to avoid backlash. This further emphasizes the fact that resources like digital spaces can be both empowering and disempowering at the same time (Chib *et al*, 2022). Nonetheless, beyond the battle, an essential benefit of the social media space is the fact these women are able to recognize other women who hold similar views as them. With this, they're motivated to keep speaking their minds, and like a domino effect, they motivate other women as well.

Chapter 6 Reflections and Conclusion

While researching various debates of young Nigerian women on social media as well as other platforms, I was thrilled to realize the number of young Nigerian women who actually had questions regarding their feminist and religious identities. I encountered an old friend who shared a poem she had on this topic. I have inserted this poem at the beginning of the RP as a way of acknowledging that feminism and religion are emotive and affective concerns for young women. In the first stanza, Nanya presents three questions, to represent a Nigerian woman questioning her identity and importance in society. The second stanza elucidates the daily challenges of a typical Nigerian woman, living in the reality of subjugation, patriarchy, and an uncertain identity. The third stanza introduces a second party, who has made religion 'a gun pointing at the woman's chest'. The second party here, represents three major characters - colonial masters, Nigerian men, and religious leaders. The latter parts of the poem, highlight how these parties have supressed women to an extent that they are no longer asking questions. This acceptance has led to the frustration of Gen- Z women, who are asking questions, in their journeys to self-identification and their fight for freedom from these acts of oppression. She ends the poem, asking if women were subjugated because society feared the power that lies in the resilient nature of women. The poem shows us how Nigerian women, regardless of the generation we were born in, face similar struggles and challenges. However, where the difference lies, is how we respond to these dilemmas.

It makes me wonder if these older women were also vocal about their struggles when they were younger and only grew silent because they could not find answers. I certainly hope that will not be the reality of Gen- Zs. We need to take the example of those women who have battled against oppression and subjugation, such as Margaret Ekpo, who was born in 1924 and lived during the colonial period of Nigeria. She mobilised women to fight against economic and political injustice, and was elected to political roles, after the colonial era (Sandner, 2021). Other women like Funmilayo Ransom Kuti and Chimamanda Adichie, also did not remain silent, and stood against oppression from religion, culture in Nigerian society.

Reverting back to the questions of this study and analysing them in relation to the findings is a necessity. Starting from the first sub-question, which seeks to determine how young middle-class Gen- Z Nigerian women understand feminism, it was interesting to find out that these women actually understand the ultimate meaning and goal of feminism, which is to obtain equality and freedom for women. However, they hold different opinions to what counts as equality, as well as what approaches should be taken to achieve this goal. A major influencer of their dispositions towards the movement is the interpretations they give to religious doctrines, which they endeavour to abide by in their daily lives. This then leads to the next sub-question, focused on identifying how these women understand being good Muslims/Christians. Due to the diverse interpretations, data from participants suggest that there is no single way to being a good Christian or Muslim. Although there are some doctrines that are universal and apply the same way to Muslims and Christians across the world, other doctrines are questioned, or rejected, based on individual/ group convictions. For the last sub-question on how they navigate their feminist and religious identities in the Nigerian context, some of these women hide their true beliefs, especially regarding their support for

feminism, to avoid backlash from society, while some others boldly acclaim these identities. Reflecting on this, I realize that I am indeed very similar to these women, considering the fact that I had to be silent about my support for feminism while I was Nigeria, firstly, because I also was unsure about the real tenets of the movement, and secondly, because of the bad reputation it holds in the country. Moving to the Netherlands and realizing the degree of support that the movement has in this part of the world was both pleasing, because I did not feel the need to hide a part of my identity anymore, and troubling because I wondered if this would ever be a reality for Nigeria. For the overarching research question that seeks to determine what ways these women see religion and feminism being able to co-exist (or not) in their lives, the answers show that, like a pack of candy with different flavours, Gen- Z Nigerian women hold different opinions regarding feminism and religion, with some opinions similar to others, and some very different. However, their responses also show that these identities are continually evolving and changing as they grow older, depending on the answers they derive from the many questions birthed from their curiosity. For me, this study has opened my eyes to different realities.

In addition to realizing that the feminist movement in Nigeria, needs more support not just from women, but from men, NGOs and government agencies, this research study has also revealed that Nigeria is a large Country, filled with different people, with different experiences that have shaped their ideologies and opinions. So, I certainly cannot expect everyone to support a particular stance towards feminism and religion, however, what I have come to learn is that feminism, as a movement, is a good cause. Fighting for the rights of women would never be wrong. So, I would definitely be retaining my feminist identity. I have realized that with matters of religion and feminism, perhaps the question should be based on the kind of feminism being anchored, and not feminism as a whole, as the movement has taken different forms, like Eco Feminism, Black Feminism, Queer Feminism, Liberal Feminism, Postmodern Feminism, amongst others. At the moment, I find myself tending towards African feminism, which is under the umbrella of black feminism (Wane, 2004). I choose to retain my Christian identity as well, and also keep an open mind as I search for more answers, to further determine my identities.

So, to the Gen Z Nigerian woman reading this paper, if you're at a point in life, where you cannot decipher whether it is okay to be feminist and also be Christian/Muslim at the same time, you are not alone in your struggles. Remember that it is okay to continue asking these questions. Also, in your journey to find answers, remember that you're still young, and we must learn to not dread this journey of self-identification, but embrace it. The whole world cannot agree with our beliefs, and just as Chimamanda Adichie says, striving for like-ability is '*bullshit*' (Thompson, 2024).

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Consent Form[9]

<u>**Information and consent form**</u>

What Does it Mean to be a Good Christian/Muslim Woman? Gen-Z Women Navigating Religion and Feminism in Nigeria

Introduction
Dear participant,
I am Olatunde-kamali Oluwatamilore, and I am conducting this study for Erasmus University Rotterdam. I am conducting research on 'Gen-Z Women Navigating Religion and Feminism in Nigeria.'. I am conducting this research independently. I will explain the study below. If you have any questions, please ask me. While reading, you can mark parts of the text that are unclear to you.

If you want to participate in the study, you can indicate this at the end of this form.

What is the research about?
The objective of this study is to understand the relationship between feminism and religion in Nigeria, and how this relationship affects Gen-Z Nigerian women. The research question is "In what ways do young middleclass Nigerian women see religion and feminism being able to co-exist (or not) in their lives?". This question was birthed from the desire to help bring clarity and direction to young Nigerian women who desire to fight for the rights of women as feminists but are confused as to whether that can be done while they retain their religious identities in a setting like Nigeria.

Why am I asking you to participate?
As a Gen- Z Nigerian woman, who's educated and interested in contemporary issues and discourses, like feminism and religion, you are extremely useful for this study, as your input will contribute largely to the success of this study.

What can you expect?
Questions will be majorly based on personal experiences and observations in your daily life, relating to the two themes of the study (feminism and religion). Please note that it is a voluntary process. All responses given will be used confidentially and no risk of any sort is attached to you as a respondent. All information derived from respondents will be discarded after analysis is completed. The research has no direct benefits for the respondents, but participation in this will serve as a contribution to the fight for equality amongst Nigerian women in the long run.

If you participate in this study, you will take part in:

<u>**An interview:**</u>
After receiving consent from you, further emails will be sent to scehedule the time and day for an interview, which is more like a conversation, where you can freely express your views. The conversation will be online, and you get to choose which online platform is most suitable for you. Discussions with you should take about 30-45 minutes.. If you do not want to answer a question during the interview, you are not required to do so.I will make an audio recording of the conversation.

What data will I ask you to provide?
During the interview, I will ask you about the following personal data: Name, age, gender,audio or visual recordings, occupation, cultural background, ethnic background, opinions about religion and feminism, and personal experiences relating to the title

Who can see your data? / What will happen to my data?

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[9] This consent form is adapted from the International Institute of Social Studies, Research Paper Preparation Course (ISS-3105) https://canvas.eur.nl/courses/43087/files/folder/Important%20documents?preview=96653889

- I store all your data securely.
- Only persons involved in the research can see the data.
- Recordings are transcribed. Your name is replaced with a number/made-up name.
- Data such as your name, address, and recordings, will be stored separately from the transcription.
- The results and finished product of this study will be accessed by anyone, as it may be published.

How long will your personal data be stored?

Your data will be retained for 10 years after completion of the research. I retain the data so that other researchers have the opportunity to verify that the research was conducted correctly. Your name and contact details will be deleted within one year.

Using your data for new research

I will make anonymised data publicly available so that any interested person can use it, but I will ensure that the data cannot be traced back to you.

What happens with the results of the study?

You may indicate if you would like to receive the results, and they will be sent immediately after completion of the study.

Do you have questions about the study?

If you have any questions about the study or your privacy rights, such as accessing, changing, deleting, or updating your data, please contact me.

Name: Olatunde-kamali Oluwatamilore
Phone number: +31617836180
Email: jamilahhkamali@gmail.com

Do you have a complaint or concerns about your privacy? Please email the Data Protection Officer (fg@eur.nl) or visit www.autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl. (T: 088 - 1805250)

Do you regret your participation?

During or after the study, you may regret your participation. Please indicate this by contacting me. I will then delete your data. I may need to keep some of your data so that, for example, the integrity of the study can be checked.

<u>Ethics approval</u>

This research has been reviewed and approved by an internal review committee of Erasmus University Rotterdam (approval number: ETHXXXX-XXXX). This committee ensures that research participants are protected. If you would like to know more about this RERC/IRB, please contact me.

<u>Declaration of Consent</u>

I have read the information letter. I understand what the study is about and what data will be collected from me. I was able to ask questions as well. My questions were adequately answered.

By signing this form, I:
1. consent to participate in this research.
2. consent to the use of my personal data
3. confirm that I am at least 18 years old.

Check the boxes below if you consent to this.

Data

I consent to the collection, use and retention of the data I provide in the interview

Audio recording
I consent to the interview being audio recorded.

Visual recording
I consent to [the interview] being filmed.

My answers in the article
I give permission for my answers to be used in papers, such as an article in a journal or book. My name will not be included.

Use for educational purposes and further research.
I hereby consent to having my personal data, relating to the purpose and fulfillment.
of this study, stored and used for educational purposes and for future research, also.
in other areas of research than this research.

New research
I give permission to be contacted again for new research.

Name of participant:

Participant's signature: **Date:**

You will receive a copy of the complete information and consent form.

Appendix 2: Samples of Approved Consent

I have read through the form and I consent to this study.

Date : 15/8/2024

Re: REQUEST FOR CONSENT

I have read through the form and I consent to this study, I would prefer to use Zoom for the interview, and I also wanted to ask if I get to see some of the questions before the interview. I'll be free tomorrow morning, in sha Allah.

On Wed, 14 Aug 2024 at 12:07, Olatunde-Kamali Oluwatamilore

Appendix 3: Ethics Form

ISS Research Ethics Review Form
for RP research carried out by MA students[1]

Aim:
This Form aims to help you identify research ethics issues which may come up in the design and delivery of your Research Paper (RP). It builds on the session on Research Ethics session in course 3105 and subsequent discussions with your peers and RP supervisor/reader. We hope the form encourages you to reflect on the ethics issues which may arise.

The process:
The Ethics Review process consists of answering questions in the following two checklists: B1-Low-sensitivity and B2-High-sensitivity. Depending on the answer to these questions you might need to fill section **C-Statement of Research Ethics** too.

The background document "ISS Research Ethics Guidelines for MA Students" provides advice and detailed information on how to complete this form.

Step 1 - Fill checklists B1 and B2
Step 2 - After answering checklists B1 and B2, the process proceeds as follows:

- **If you answer 'yes' to one or more low-sensitivity questions (checklist B1):** please discuss the issues raised with your supervisor and include an overview of the risks, and actions you can take to mitigate them, in the final design of your RP. You can refer to the ISS Research Ethics Guidelines for MA Students for help with this.

- **If you answer 'yes' to one or more high-sensitivity questions (checklist B2)**, please complete section 'C' of the form below describing the risks you have identified and how you plan to mitigate against them. Discuss the material with your supervisor, in most cases the supervisor will provide approval for you to go ahead with your research and attach this form to the RP design when you upload it in canvas. If, after consultation with your supervisor, it is felt that additional reflection is needed, please submit this form (sections B1, B2, and C) to the Research Ethics Committee (REC) for review as follows:

  When submitting your form to the REC, please send the following to researchethics@iss.nl:
  1) the completed checklists B1 and B2 (or equivalent if dealing with an external ethics requirement)
  2) the completed form C 'Statement of Research Ethics'
  3) a copy of the RP design
  4) any accompanying documentation, for example, consent forms, Data Management Plans (DMP), ethics clearances from other institutions.

  Your application will be reviewed by a reviewer who is not part of your supervisory team. The REC aims to respond to ethics approval requests within a period of 15 working days.

Step 3 - Integrating the Ethics Review process into the RP:

- This Ethics Review Form needs to be added as an annex in your final RP Design document to be uploaded in the Canvas page for course 3105.

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[1] This checklist and statement is adapted from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Research Ethics Committee and informed by the checklists of two Ethics Review Boards at EUR (ESHCC and ERIM) and the EU H2020 Guidance – How to complete your ethics self-assessment.

Appendix 4: Interview Guide

Research question: In what ways do young middle class Nigerian women see religion and feminism being able to co-exist (or not) in their lives?
1. **Icebreaker**
- (educational background, religion, family situation, Dynamics growing up as females in their homes)
2. **Participants' perception of women's role in the society?**
    - How important do you think women are to the Nigerian society?
    - Do you think women play different roles compared to men in society? If yes, what are some of those roles?
    - What are some common stereotypes the society has of women that you know (Do you think these are true?)
    - Would you say women have equal access to opportunities as men do? (Probe for elaboration)

Research Sub questions:
3. **How do young middle-class Nigerian women understand feminism?**
- What do you understand by the term feminism?
- When and how did you first become aware of feminism as an idea or a movement?
- Do you identify as a feminist? (Why or why not?)
- **If Yes:** (How does that identification affect your life?)
4. **How do young middle-class Nigerian women understand what it means to be a good Christian/Muslim woman?**
- How would you describe your religious beliefs and practices as an individual?
- Are there any religious beliefs and practices that are particular to women? (Probe for: participants' thoughts on these teachings i.e., if they empower or disempower women)
- Can you describe what the typical life of a good Christian/Muslim woman would be like?
- Would you say in terms of your practices, you fit into that description?
5. **How do they navigate these identities in the Nigerian context?**
- How do you perceive the relationship between feminism and religion?

    - ○ ***For those who are questioning both identities:*** What are some of the questions you have regarding religion and feminism?
    - ○ ***For those who do not support feminism, because of their religious identity:*** *Would* you say there can be an alternative movement that will make you feel more comfortable to fight for the rights of women and still uphold your religious principles?

- Do you believe it is possible to be both feminist and Christian/muslim? Why or why not?
- Can you give any example or experience where you felt some form of harmony or a disconnection between feminism and religion?
- What's the typical understandings of feminism amongst the people in your religious community?
- Can you describe your daily life, in terms of how you navigate your feminist values and religious beliefs in a place like Nigeria?

    For those who retain both identities
- Would you say you receive more support or backlash from your religious community due to your feminist orientation?
- What about family and friends? What's the typical response you get from them concerning your religious and feminist identity?
- What are some of your personal challenges that come from balancing both your feminist and religious identities?
    - ○ How do you handle these challenges? (If there are any)
- Is there any individual you consider as a role model, who has helped you with your journey and also upholds their religious and feminist identities?
    - ○ How have they impacted your journey?
    Conclusion
- Would you like to share anything else that you think might be useful for this study?
- Do you have any question?