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Jalabi Practice: A Critical Appraisal of a Socio-Religious Phenomenon in Yorubaland, Nigeria

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Abstract

Jalabi is an extant historical phenomenon with strong socio-religious impacts in Yorubaland, south-western part of Nigeria. It is among the preparatory Dawah strategies devised by the Yoruba Ulama following the general mainstream Africa to condition the minds of the indigenous people for the acceptance of Islam. This strategy is reflected in certain socio-religious services rendered to the clients, which include, but not limited to, spiritual consultation and healing, such as petitionary Dua (prayer), divination through sand-cutting, rosary selection, charm-making, and an act of officiating at various religious functions. In view of its historicity, the framework of this research paper revolves around three stages identified to have been aligned with the evolution of Jalabi, viz. Dawah, which marked its initial stage, livelihood into which it had evolved over the course of time, and which, in turn, had predisposed it to the third stage, namely syncretism. Triangulation method will be adopted for qualitative data collection, such as interviews, personal observation, and classified manuscript collections, and will be interpretively and critically analyzed to enhance the veracity of the research findings. The orality of the Yoruba culture has greatly influenced the researcher's decision to seek data beyond the written words in order to give this long-standing phenomenon its due of study and to help understand the

many dimensions it has assumed over time, as well as its both positive and adverse effects on the socio-religious live of the Yoruba people of Nigeria.

Keywords: Jalabi, healing, Islam, *Dawah*, syncretism

Introduction

Jalabi in the Yoruba-Nigerian ¹context designates certain socio-religious services rendered by the Yoruba *ŃUlamÉ'* to their clientele, which include, but not limited to, religio-social consultation, charm-making, spiritual healing and an act of officiating at various religious functions. Mustapha Bello defines it as "a system whereby a scholar prepares charms, which are believed to possess supernatural powers for protection against evil and for bringing good fortunes to traders, enhancement of luck...etc. in return for monetary compensation."² Mustapha's definition is not thorough and comprehensive, as it tends to restrict its focus only on one tiny aspect of *Jalabi*, i.e. charm making, and therefore could not rightly put the phenomenon in its proper context.

This paper sets about to inquire into the origin of the phenomenon of *Jalabi*, how it came about and the issues surrounding its inception. The bulk of the discussion therein is tailored towards appraising the phenomenon through its stages of development and certain socio-religious impacts it has got, not only on the Yoruba society but also on their religious belief.

Etymology

Jalabi is a domesticated Arabic word stemming from the triconsonantal Arabic root of *j-l-b*, which has got various meanings and connotations. According to the classic Arabic lexicographers³, *al-jalb* is synonymous with *al-Jazb*, meaning to draw or

¹ Yoruba is one of the major ethnic groups, and second most populous, in Nigeria. The people occupy the south-western part of the country, stretching from the upland area to the hinterland of the Lagoon. They speak Yoruba and constitute over 35 million people in total, the majority of whom is from Nigeria, while others spread across West Africa including Togo, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. For more details on Yoruba, see: Samuel Johnson. (1921). *The History of the Yorubas from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*. U.S.A: Cambridge Press., T.G.O. Gbadamosi. (1978). *The Growth of Islam Among The Yoruba 1841-1908*. Lagos: Longman Press., Saburi Oladeni Biobaku. (1973) *Sources of Yoruba History*. Clarendon Press.

² Bello, A. Mustapha. (2011). Between jalb practitioners and traditional healers of South West Nigeria: A synthesis of method and approaches. *Anyigba Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, V (1), p. 66.

³ Al-JawharÉ, IsmaÉl bin ×ammÉd, *al-ØiÉÉ' TÉj al-Lughah wa ØiÉÉ' al-ŃArabiyyah*, (DÉr al-Ńilm li al-MalÉyÉn, 1990), Al-Mut-ÍarizÉ, NÉsir bin ŃAbdul al-Seyyid, *al-Mughrib fÉ TartÉb al-MuŃrib*, (×alab: Maktabah UsÉmah bin Zaid, 1979), Al-zabÉdÉ, MuÍammad bin MuÍammad bin ŃAbdul RazÉq, *Taj al-ŃÓrÉs min JawÉir al-QamÉs*, (Kuwait: DÉr al-HidÉyah, 2008), Al-FarÉhidÉ, al-KhalÉl bin AÍmad, *KitÉb al-ŃAin Murattaban ŃalÉ ×urÉfal-MuŃjam*, (DÉr al-Kutub al-ŃIlmiyyah, 2003), Ibn ManÐhÉr, MuÍammad bin Mukrim, *LisÉn al-ŃArab*, (Beirut: DÉr ØÉdir), Abu al-×usein AÍmad bin FÉris, *MaqÉyÉs al-Lughah* (IttiÉd al-KuttÉb al-ŃArab, 2002), Al-ÚÉliqÉnÉ, IsmaÉl bin AbbÉd bin al-ŃAbbÉs, *Al-MuÍÉi fÉ al-lughah*, (Beirut: ŃÓlam al-Kutub, 1994).

attract. It could also mean to drag something from one place to another if one considers its grammatical inflexion and transitivity as in *jalabahu*, *yajlibuhu* or *yajlubuhu jalaban* or *jalban*. Likewise, it is synonymous with *al-Kasb*, meaning to earn a living or to obtain something as in *jalaba li nafsihi*, or to bring about benefit, good luck or fortune as in *jalaba naf'an*. These meanings are particularly relevant, as they not only depict the material end of some *Ulama's* activities, but also the type of spiritual assistance commonly rendered to their clientele to repel evil and bring about fortune. With regard to this meaning, the general statement: *jalb al-manfaah wa daf'u al-madarrah* (bringing about the benefit and warding off the evil) is very well applicable.

Interchangeably, *Ise Alfa* (vocation of the clerics) is common in use among the Yoruba Muslims to designate the practitioner of *Jalabi*. This terminology needs further clarification to avoid any confusion that may arise thereafter. *Ise Alfa* has a generic connotation in its literal form. Anyone who is versed with the traditional Islamic education would normally be referred to as *Alfa*, thus his practice be described as *ise Alfa*. The nature of this *ise Alfa* is noticeably diverse, for there are *Alfa* who have committed themselves to teaching, while others are known as preachers. In most cases, one *Alfa* may combine two or more *ise Alfa*. At this junction, reference should be made to Sheikh Adam al-Ilori, who, in his *Nas'Em al-Øaba' f'Ê Akhb'Er al-Isl'Em wa ÑUlam'É' Bil'Ed Yoruba*, arranged them into four categories;

- a. *Al-WuÑ'ÉD* (the preachers) both settled and itinerants.
- b. *Al-MuÑ'allim'En* (the teachers), who teach Qur'Én at their homes, shops, and mosques free of charge, as they possess other source of income, such as tailoring, weaving and farming, etc.
- c. *Al-ÑUbb'Ed* and *al-Zuhh'Ed* (devout worshippers and ascetics)
- d. The physical and spiritual healers, who are further divided into three sub-categories: conversant with the prophetic medicine, experts in traditional herbs and their use to cure ailments, and the well versed in *Khatt al-Raml* (sand cutting) and *al-Takahhun* (divination).¹

The above classification seems to narrow the scope of the phenomenon to involve only the last sub-category. This, on the one hand, is contrary to the general stand maintained by those interviewed among the *ÑUlam'É'*, who proudly consider *Jalabi* as their profession. On the other hand, it does not put the phenomenon into its proper historical context either. Although, the acts of sand-cutting and divination prevail over the practice of *Jalabi* nowadays, it, nevertheless, does not embody what *Jalabi* is all about.

¹ Ilori, Adam Abdullah, *Nas'Em al-Øab'É' f'Ê Akhb'Er al-Isl'Em wa ÑUlam'É' Bil'Ed Yoruba*, (Cairo: al-Maib'Nah al-Nam'Edhajiyyah, 1987) p. 43.

Whereas, in a more technical manner, *ise Alfa* distinguishes the *Alfa*, who practices *Jalabi* from those who do not, as it implies, first and foremost, the type of practices that are typical of the healers. The Yoruba *ŃUlamÉ'* engaged in the practice of *Jalabi* could be divided into the following categories:

- a. Those who are consulted by people for special prayer using, among others, the Quran, *DalÉ'l al-KhayrÉt*,¹ and other supplications carefully documented and transmitted from one generation to other. This category may best be designated as Quran-oriented *ŃUlamÉ'*, as they do not mix this practice with other method of healing, whether traditional or prophetic.
- b. Those who combine the traditional method of healing with the Islamic, and perform different types of divinations, such as *Khat al-Raml* (sand-cutting), Jin companionship, etc.
- c. Those who have received special training in traditional but not Islamic healing method are referred to as *onisegun* (herbalist). There usually is no difference between this category and the traditional herbalists.
- d. The *gbajue* type (fraudsters), who lead their lives on deceptions and lies. This category is replete with youth and emerging *Alfas*, who are desperate to become wealthy overnight and do not have the mastery of the *ise Alfa per se*.

Of these entire categories, only those that fall in the category 'C' may be excluded from the general reference to the *Jalabi* practitioners. Nevertheless, it was later realized that this category is also consulted for Islamic spiritual healing even though some of them may not want *Jalabi* be associated with them.²

¹ The full title is *DalÉ'l al-KhayrÉt Wa ShawÉriq al- AnwÉr fÉ dhikr al- ØolÉt ala al- Nabi al- MukhtÉr* (rendered in English as the Waymarks of Benefits and the Brilliant Burst of Sunshine in the Remembrance of Blessings on the Chosen Prophet). It is a famous collection of prayers for the Prophet Muhammad, which was written by the Moroccan Sufi and Islamic scholar Muhammad al-Jazuli (died 1465). It is popular in many parts of the Islamic world, most especially West Africa, and is divided into sections for daily recitation. The *Dala'il al-Khayrat* is one of the most popular and universally acclaimed collection of *SalawÉt*. Among some Sunni religious orders, most notably the Shadhili-Jazuli order, its recitation is a daily practice. In others, however, its recitation is a purely voluntary daily practice. The work begins with the ninety nine names of God, and then a collection of over one hundred names of Muhammad.

There are five ways to read *DalÉ'l al-KhayrÉt*: 1- all together in one sitting, 2- in two halves divided over two days, 3- in three third over three days, 4- in four quarters over four days, 5- in eight sections (called *hizb*) over one week. It is traditional to begin the recitation of *DalÉ'l al-KhayrÉt* with the *AsmÉ' al-xusnÉ* and the name of the Prophet (S.A.W). See: al-JazÉlÉ, Muġammad b. SulaymÉn, *DalÉ'l al-KhayrÉt Wa ShawÉriq al- AnwÉr fÉ dhikr al- ØolÉt Ala al- Nabi al- MukhtÉr*, edited by Sheikh Abdul Kerim al-Kibrisi. Trans. S. Ahmad Darwish. p. 18. www.naksibendi.org (retrieved 20 January, 2014).

² Interview conducted with Mr. Muhalli Abdul Aziz, a Muslim herbalist in Iyana ilogbo ogun state, Nigeria, on 12 June, 2013.

All in all, the phenomenon of *Jalabi*, as previously defined, seems to have been widely practiced across Africa under different names, the most common of which is *Mganga* or *Mwalimu*, the terms used to designate a person who practices a healing job in East Africa.¹ *Mganga* is a Swahili word derived from the root *ganga*, which means 'to bind up', or mend what is broken. By extension, *ganga* has become a generic term for healing.² While *Mganga* is used for both Muslim and unlettered traditional medicine men, *Mwalimu* is a reserved term for a Muslim, who had studied and learned his skills, and does not treat his client without following procedures described in a written text.³

Origin of Jalabi

The origin of Jalabi has been associated with the coming of Islam into Yorubaland, but since one cannot say in precision when the infiltration of Islam actually began in this part of the world, we may not equally know with exactitude the beginning of Jalabi practice in Yorubaland. Given the fact that Jalabi, from a broader perspective, was among the strategies devised by the Yoruba ÑULamÉ' to win over the animists to Islam, it may well be classified as part of a general mainstream DaÑwah strategy in West Africa.

This strategy began the moment the Muslim clerics emerged from quarantine, as Ryan puts it,⁴ in the wake of the growth of Muslim communities in many part of West Africa. Initially, they performed variety of clerical functions for these budding communities to which they later added petitionary prayer, healing, divining, and the manufacture and sale of charms and amulets. It is to be added that the side of their activities that touched on magic and superstition constituted the major appeal of Islam in non-Muslim eyes and through this way they won respect and prestige among them.⁵

The earliest Jalabi-related practice was referenced by al-Bakri (1094 C.E) in his monumental work on the History of Africa. He mentioned a chiefdom of Malal, beyond the upper Senegal, that was going through an unending period of drought. Despite the efforts exerted by the priests, the situation even took a turn for the worse. Thereupon, the king appealed to his Muslim guest, who promised to help on condition that he accepted Islam. When the king agreed, the Muslim taught him some easy verses in the Quran and instructed him on fundamental religious obligations. On the following Jumuah night, after the king had purified himself, the two set out to a nearby hill. All that night the Muslim prayed and was emulated by the king. The dawn only started to

¹ Swantz Lloyd W., *The Medicine Man Among the Zaramo of Dar es Salam* (Sweden: Bohuslaningen, Uddevalla 1990) P. 11-14. Sperling David, *The Frontiers of Prophecy: Healing, the Cosmos, and Islam on the East African Coast in the Nineteenth Century*, In *Revealing Prophets: Prophecy in Eastern African History*, edited by David Anderson and Douglas L. Johnson, (London: James Currey Ltd, 1995) P. 89.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. 91.

⁴ P.J. Ryan, S.J. *Imale: Yoruba Participation in the Muslim Tradition*, (Harvard: Harvard Theological Review, Harvard Dissertations in Religion, 1978), p. 4.

⁵ El Fasi, p. 72.

break when Allah brought down abundant rain. The king then ordered the idols be broken, expelled the sorcerers and became Muslim together with his family and the nobility save the common people.¹

Jalabi as a Da'wah Strategy

The genesis of the phenomenon of *Jalabi*, as previously mentioned, is ascribed to the effort exerted by the itinerant scholars, who are seen as the possessors of spiritual power to solve many enigmatic problems and to offer special prayers for protection against witchcraft and help cure the people's physical and spiritual maladies. This, perhaps, accounts for the initiative of prince Oluaji, *inter alia*, who is said to have invited some Fulani Muslims to the town during the reign of Oba Alawusa (1739-1774).²

A similar but distant incident occurred in other places in Yorubaland, where an Alfa is expected to demonstrate his supernatural ability to make the impossible possible, thereby staking his reputation on his success in performing such miracle. Sheikh Adam al-Ilori reported one such incident in a Yoruba city where the ÑUlamÉ' were forced into a fierce competition with the sorcerers to see whether they would come out of it triumphant and thus establish the genuineness of their mission. ³

Almost all the Yoruba ÑUlamÉ' are thoroughly acquainted with different ways of preparing medicinal concoction, amulet, charm for whatever purpose. The effectiveness of such activity added to the people's respect and honour for them. This is not surprising given the fact that some of the indigenous Alfa then were either *Babalawo* (traditional herbalist) themselves before they embraced Islam, or had in the line of their ancestors who are renowned for their supernatural power, and its knowledge came to them by way of inheritance. Therefore, the acceptance of Islam, to them, does not mean a complete abandonment of their traditional legacy. In fact, it could be argued that their new religion is believed to have provided them with an additional power and strength.⁴ It is even asserted that many of the Yoruba traditionalists, who accepted Islam, did so, not out of absolute conviction but rather for the spiritual power inherent in Islam.⁵

¹ Al-BakrÊ, AbË ÑUbayd ÑAbdullah b. ÑAbdul ÑAzÊz, *al-MasÉlik wa al-MamÉlik* (Tunis: al-DËr al-ÑArabiyah li al-KitÉb,1992)875., Levtzion Nehemia, *Pattern of Islamization in West Africa* in Conversion to Islam, ed. N. Levtzion (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979)209-210.

² Adebayo, Ibrahim R. (2010). "The Role of the Traditional Rules in the Islamization of Osun State Nigeria". *Journal for Islamic Studies*.Vol. 30.

³ al-Ilori, p. 42.

⁴ This is based on the interviews conducted separately with the following ÑUlamÉ': Sheikh Alhaj Zakariya Yusuf, a retired soldier and founder of kulliyat al-ThaqÉfÉt al-Islamiyyah li al-DirÉsÉt al-ÑArabiyah wa al-InjilÉsiyyah, in an interview conducted on 15 June, 2013, Alhaj Imam Musa Adeyemi, chief Imam of Oke land and the proprietor of Guidance Academy Nursery and Primary school, on 15 June, 2013.

⁵ *Ibid.*

The Islamic teachings they were introduced to did not stress the Islamic law and theology any better than its spiritual aspects. So little did they have of the knowledge that may enable them to measure all that is un-Islamic, until the advent of Sheikh Alim Junta and the subsequent establishment of the Ilorin emirate, through which many cities in Yorubaland witnessed an unprecedented influx of the ÑUlamÉ’.

It is pertinent to add here that these scholars, with sincere and intense conviction preached Islam with the little knowledge they had and put their lives on the line to defend its cause. It is not recorded that they ever practiced Jalabi for a living or to preserve their interest, as many of them had what they could call career. On the contrary, Jalabi practice to them was more of humanitarian and preventive.

Several examples of the ÑUlamÉ’s tendency to promote Islam through their mystic and spiritual power have been collected from different sources, most of which are the first-hand experiences of those interviewed on the subject.

- In Ibadan, it was reported that the animosity between the traditionalists and the ÑUlamÉ’ reached its apex and the situation became so tense that the tiny Muslim community in Ibadan then were forbidden to make *adhan*, and anyone who attempted in defiance of the order would pay with his life. The situation was beginning to take a turn for the worse when sheikh Uthman Basunu performed some special prayers then instructed the Muadhin to resume his duty. Upon hearing the sound of Adhan, all the shrines immediately caught fire. This incident helped the Muslims gained more freedom, respect and caused many people to accept Islam.¹
- In Lagos, it was narrated that sheikh Abubakr bin Abdullah al-Sunni, a prominent preacher had an encounter with one of the leaders of idol worshippers in 1890 C.E., who threatened to put a hex on him if he does not abstain from insulting their gods. When the man wanted to cast a spell on the sheikh, the sheikh recited some verses of the Quran and blew it on the magician, who, instantaneously fell down in a swoon. Having observed this, the people hastily embraced Islam.

There are countless other isolated cases that could also add to the previously mentioned. They are the efforts made by some individual ÑUlamÉ’ who singlehandedly restored the wavering faith of many Muslim families that had almost deflected to Christianity or to the traditional cult in quest for salvation. The sufferings of these families are varied; while some are in dire need of a means of sustenance, some are dying to become parents. Under the guise of total salvation and the gospel of success, many ordinary Yoruba had been lured into Christianity. In a society where

¹ Interview with Alhaji Haruna suara Baosar, Chief imam of Ibadan oyo state on 1st June 2013 at his home residence.

the majority of the people are Muslim, it is a shame on the ÑUlamÉ' to see their followers and other fellow Muslims being taken away by their counterparts.

To counter this trend, the ÑUlamÉ' deployed all power at their disposal to see to the problems of the people and go at length to do anything that could possibly help them restore confidence back in the people's mind and convince them of the mighty power of Islam to solve any problem. Consequently, there is a sudden upsurge in the ÑUlamÉ's reliance on the traditional charm and amulet alongside the 'Islamic' healing rituals, divinations and other spiritual manipulations.

The above references illustrates how the early Yoruba ÑUlamÉ' practiced Jalabi as a strategy to propagate Islam among the traditional Yoruba. It could not be considered as something unprecedented, as the practice follows the mainstream African strategy in promoting Islam.

Jalabi Practice for a Living

Jalabi has been initially practised by the ÑUlamÉ in Yorubaland for humanitarian purposes without expecting any compensation whether in cash or kind, but later evolved into a means of livelihood when there were no other practical alternatives. Three factors are identified to have contributed to this new dimension, namely educational, economic and social factors.

Educational factor

The introduction of Islam in Yorubaland was an important turning point, as it marked the dawn of a new era when the advancement of unbelief was brought to an abrupt end. This is so because the introduction of Islam to this part of the world was coupled with the emergence and later the spread of scholarship. The warmest reception, commitment and passion accorded to this new religion by the early indigenous Muslims aided the transformation of Yorubaland from where "unbelief predominates"¹ to where considerable number of believers dwelled and thrived. This positive attitude travelled far afield to invite a horde of learned Muslim scholars, such as Sheikh Álmad Qifu of Katsina origin and Sheikh ÑUthmÉn bin AbÉ Bakr (a.k.a Basunu)² of old Borgu origin,³ and a host of others, to settle in Ibadan⁴ for the purpose of propagating the knowledge of Islam. Many of these scholars had first settled in

¹ This is an often quoted statement of the former Sanhanja scholar, Ahmad Baba al-Timbuktu, on the Yorubaland. Since Ahmad Baba died in the first half of the seventeenth century, we can safely assume that this part of the world was by then known to the Muslims. But, there is nothing that may suggest that the Yorubaland was not known even before that time.

² al-Ilori, Adam Abdullah, *NasÉm al-ØabÉ' fÉ AkhbÉr al-IslÉm wa ÑUlamÉ BilÉd Yoruba* (Cairo: al-MalbÑah al-NamÉdhajyyah, 1987)138.

³ Borgu is an inland region of western Africa, covering parts of what is now Benin and Nigeria and bounded northeast and east by the Niger River. "Borgu." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2012.

⁴ Ibadan is the capital city of Oyo State and the third largest metropolitan area, by population, in Nigeria, after Lagos and Kano

Ilorin,¹ the first centre of Islamic learning in Yorubaland, before they finally dispersed across other Yoruba cities in the south-west.

Students from every corner of Yorubaland where Islam had penetrated flocked to Ilorin or otherwise moved to Ibadan, which later became a reputable centre of learning, especially, under Sheikh HarĒn bin Sultan, a disciple of Sheikh Abubakr bin al-QĒsim (alaga).² This is how students gathered around these early scholars, and, after completion of their studies, they themselves became notable scholars in their hometowns where they established a similar system of learning. Hence, a system of *madrasah*, known in Yorubaland as *ile kewu*, eventually emerged.

The early form of *madrasah* was more or less a *katĒtĒb*-like situated in a scholar's residence (in his parlour, veranda or under the shade of a tree) with a number of pupils ranging from ten to forty or even more sitting in a semi-circle, holding their wooden slate and chanting repeatedly verses of the Quran written on their slates. This rote learning would eventually help the pupils not only to memorize the selected chapters in the Quran but also to acquire rudimentary skill of writing.³ The completion of this stage does not signify the end of Islamic learning at *madrasah*, but rather the end of what may be regarded as the primary level of the system, at the end of which a *Walimot* ceremony would come up.

Students at the secondary level of the system receive much broader knowledge; they would start by learning the *TafsĒr* (Quran exegesis) of the memorized chapters. Besides that, they are also introduced to subjects like Hadith, Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence), *al-NaĒw* and *al-Ēarf*, (Arabic syntax and grammatical inflexion), *al-BalĒghah* (rhetoric) etc. At the successful completion of this stage, students would have acquired some proficiency in the Arabic language and are able to read, understand and interpret many of the works of earlier scholars and be ready to be awarded a licence empowering them to practice as teachers and imams.⁴

The system outlined above portrays the *madrasah* in its primordial form, but as time went by many reforms had been introduced into the system that considerably improved it. As a result, there emerged new forms of modern Islamic *madrasah* with a clear goal and unique system of learning. Prominent among which are *Markaziyyah*⁵

¹ Ilorin is one of the largest cities in Nigeria and is the capital of Kwara State.

² Fafunwa A. Babs, *History of Education in Nigeria* (Ibadan: NPS Educational Publisher Limited, 2002), 52.

³ The students acquire writing skill by copying whatever their teacher wrote on the board several times on their wooden slate, washed it and start over again. It is so slow and painstaking but very effective, especially for the Quran memorization. Any *Ēfiz* trained in such manner would hardly have problem recollecting what he had memorized of the Quran.

⁴ Fafunwa, p.55-57.

⁵ *Markaziyyah* refers to the first modern *Madrasah* system emerged as a result of reformation introduced to the Islamic learning system. It was founded by Sheikh Adam Abdullah al-Ilori in 1952 under the name *Markaz al-TaĒĒm al-ĒArabi al-IslĒmĒ* (Center for Arabic and Islamic studies) and located at Agege, a suburb and local government area in Ikeja Division of Lagos state, Nigeria.

and *Mãahadiyyah*¹ systems. They all employed the tripartite *IbtidÉ'iyah-IãidÉdiyyah-ThÉnawiyah* system but without any established standard curriculum. Certificates are awarded to successful students at the completion of each stage of learning, and the total years of study, with variation, would be eleven to twelve years.

Interestingly, in principle, the proprietors of the reformed *modrasah* are not hostile to western education; rather they encourage their student to pursue it to complement their religious training since the fear they used to have of the possibility of their pupils being evangelized is no longer a reality. Yet, unfortunately, there are many challenges in this new educational policy facing students previously trained at the *madrasah*, the major of which lies with the certificate that would qualify them for the higher learning, since the government does not recognize any certificate awarded by these *madrasahs*.

To respond to this challenge, some proprietors have their *Madrasahs* affiliated to Ahmad Bello University (ABU) in Zaria, and, as a result, modified their curriculum or initiated a new Diploma program along the ABU accredited curriculum. Any graduate of this new program would gain a direct entry into Ahmad Bello University. This step really proves effective, but many proprietors seemed not to be ready to follow suit.

Alternatively, by virtue of a keen interest that many governments of Arabic speaking countries, both in Middle East and North Africa, showed in the affairs of Nigerian Muslims, the graduates of these *Madrasahs* are offered scholarships to further their studies at Saudi Arabian, Egyptian, Sudan and Libyan universities, etc.

Conversely, a particular quarter among the ÑUlamÉ', known nationwide as *Zumratul Mu'minÉn* (a.k.a *Mokondoro*), have stubbornly refused to budge and resisted any reform of any kind that will change their orientation. They are always scornful of those that have had their systems reformed and labelled it unworthy type of Islamic education. They do not allow their children be sent to any *madrasah* except those established by their graduates. They also forsake western education, except until recently, and adopted a policy of isolation to insulate their children from being proselytized. Consequently, this attitude was to their own disadvantage. Hence, while there are many opportunities for the students graduating from the modern *modrasahs*, graduates of the *mokondoros*' are stuck in dead ends. They could neither make it to a higher institution nor affiliate their schools to either a local or an international institution. Instead their graduates prefer to start up their own *madrasahs* and search for students everywhere in their community.

It is never difficult to fill these newly established *madrasahs* with pupils, as the Muslim parents would readily enrol their kids, especially when they realize that they are always free of charge. These budding *Alfas* are not only expected to teach, but also to play the role of custodian for their pupils. In some cases, the *Alfa* would take the responsibility of feeding and clothing the pupils, who are left with them at the request

¹ This system was introduced through the founding of *al-Mãnahad al-NaijÉrÉ* by sheikh Alhaj Murtadah Abdul Salam in Ibadan in 1957.

of their parents. Some parents may not even bother to pay a visit to their children in a year round, leaving their fate at the hand of their teachers. While this addresses the religious needs of the community, it leaves the question on the survival of the *Alfas* unanswered. Whether they impose a meagre fee on the pupils (usually in modern *modrasahs*) or not (as it is the case in *mokondoros*'), whatever they eked out is barely enough to live on.

Thus, since all the effort to improve their living through their establishments had proved futile, these religious teachers are left with no option except to have recourse to *Jalabi*.

Economic factor

The economic factor that contributed to the rise of the Yoruba ÑUlamÉ in *Jalabi* practice is not unconnected with the embarrassing failure of the Nigerian government in administering fair and even distribution of the nation's wealth among all its people. However, in the context of the present study, it is an offshoot of the educational factor. When the graduates of the *Madrakah* system, are not equipped with any other skills that may serve as an alternative source of income and the certificate awarded to them are not recognized by the government, they would therefore devise a means for their survival.

Additionally, the time spent at *Ile kewu*, which is quite longer than the one spent by those who attend government schools, could not afford them the opportunity to try out other profitable vocations. Where they are intent to do so, they would definitely forsake being apprenticed to their age group. In order to survive and at the same time discharge their religious duties, they are compelled to take to teaching. Frankly speaking, this type of teaching job does not have any stake for them, as it could only provide them the opportunity to subsist on the donation, either from the community or from the parents of their pupils.

On the other hand, it is considered a taboo from the *Mokondoro* point of view that its graduate be employed under the government or elsewhere. They do not look out for jobs, as they have been considered, upon their graduation, as ÑUlamÉ qualified to set up their learning centers, give social and religious consultation, engage in healing practice and preside over any religious gathering. They never take any salary or collect any fees from their students; instead they spend on them having complete reliance on Allah.¹ This principle features in their popular poem which runs thus:

Eba wa beluwa eyin baba

Kewu wa tiake ni wajuu yin

¹ An interview conducted at Ojoo, Ibadan Oyo state with Alhaj Muhamad Olore, the khalifah of the late famous Olore and one of the prominent leaders of Mokondoro, who revealed that a Mokondoro graduate should not work but cater for social and religious need of his community by teaching the children.

Kama mosi kasi remi gigun lo

Kama fi lawani serusin Ijoba

Translation

Pray for us o' you our teachers

That our study under you

Should make us prosper and elongate our lives and

keep us away from being government servants.

The above poem shows how detestable is the idea of being employed by the government to any member of the *Mokondoros*, to the point that they have to make special supplication in that regard.¹ In an occasion where one of the members built a house, or bought a car, etc. they demonstrate the sufficiency of their *kewu* (Islamic education), and the fact that it is Allah that provides for them, in the following poem:

Omo ko lagbe fi sose

Omo ko lagbe fi sose

Kewu ti ake losi ogbodota

Omo ko lagbe fi sose

Translation

We do not use the kids for money ritual

On the contrary, it is our *kewu* that defies poverty

It will become apparent that *Jalabi*, to these *Alfa*, should not only be practiced for humanitarian purpose, but also as a means for their survival.

Social factor

In Yorubaland the clerical work means more than what has been mentioned so far. The *ÑUlamÉ'* are believed to possess super natural power and have knowledge by which they can allegedly see into the future. They could cause the rain to fall during a drought, make the rulers win their wars, offer special prayer for protection against witchcraft, etc.² On this basis, people from different walks of life and diverse religious backgrounds patronize them for spiritual consultation. They come to them for issues ranging from health to a more complex and rather personal, and are entertained with

¹ It was also further justified by a belief that if a scholar receives a salary from the government or elsewhere, it would affect his spiritual power that enables him to have his prayer accepted whenever he did.

² Balogun S.A. "History of Islam up to 1800" in *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, edited by Edited by Obaro Ikime (Nigeria: Historical Society of Nigeia, 2004), 221.

prayers (wherever it is appropriate), charms, amulet, sand-cutting, and so on. From this perspective, their job looks so similar to that of *bablawo*.

In the practice of *Jalabi*, the ÑUlamÉ' do virtually everything that the *babalawo* does, to such an extent that one may hardly find any difference between the un-Islamic local tradition and Islam. However, to them, this is justified, as they see it as a means to not only gain the confidence and patronage of their clientele, but a way to prove to the Muslims that every problem can be managed within the fold of Islam.

If at all the the ÑUlamÉ' forsake practising *Jalabi*, it would create a vacuum that might be filled with *babalawo* and evangelists of salvation. In Yorubaland today there is hardly a Muslim who has never experienced *Jalabi* in one way or the other, which demonstrates its steady growing influence. It has become a popular industry offering services which people from every walk of life are willing to pay for. This suffices to endear *Jalabi* practice to many ÑUlamÉ', who do not have sufficient and regular income. Regrettably, due to its alluring prospect, many unprofessional and amateur young *Alfas* (and even sometimes non-*Alfa*), having stumbled on some records detailing the use of herbs with verses of the Quran, greedily forced themselves into the system.¹ While the elderly among the ÑUlamÉ' still live below poverty line, these set of people, with their unorthodox method of operation, lead a luxurious and flamboyant lifestyle.

Jalabi as Syncretism

The term syncretism, or otherwise known as eclecticism, whose equivalence in Arabic is *al-Takhlîl*, denotes the merger, combination or the alliance of different, often seemingly opposing, religious or philosophical beliefs, thereby creating a linkage between orientations that are intrinsically disparate.² Syncretism hinges on the assumption that the people practicing it have inappropriately and chaotically mixed what are essentially alien to each other. While the term is occasionally used to delineate the mixing of sectarian positions, like the fusion of different theology within the same religion, as is the case with Shiite and Sunni theologies, it is more often than not associated with inter-religious encounters, such as Catholicism and Voodoo in New Orleans,³ Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism in the Mughal empire at the time of its emperor, Akbar (1506 C.E).

As far as *Jalabi* is concerned, there is no gainsaying the fact that it has been practiced in different ways employing different approaches, some of which are claimed to be

¹ The researcher has lived in the same community with such people, and was able to observe them during his field research in south-western Nigeria.

² Stewart Tony K. and Ernst Carl W. "Syncretism" in *South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Peter J. Claus and Margaret A. Mills. <http://www.unc.edu/~cernst/pdf/Syncretism.pdf> (accessed 29 March, 2014).

³ Maranise Anthony M. J. (2012) "Investigating the syncretism of Catholicism and Voodoo in New Orleans" *Journal of Religion and Society*, Vol. 14. Pg. 1.

Islamic while others are typical of Yoruba tradition. On this basis, the method employed could be classified into two categories: Jalabi with Divine method, Jalabi with a mixed method.

Divine Method

Unlike what is accustomed to by the early generation of Islam, Yoruba ÑUlamÉ applied the Divine method in a wider and diverse manner. Perhaps what gives this diverse application its basis is the flexible and open-ended nature of this category, which is grounded in both the Quran and the Sunnah. In the Quran Allah says:

*Indeed We send down of the Quran that which is healing and mercy for the believers...*¹

In his *al-LubÉb fÉ ÑUIÉm al-KitÉb*, al-NuÑmÉnÉ stresses that the Quran in its entirety is a cure for those who believe in it. It cures spiritual diseases (both of bad ideology and morally condemnable acts) and physical diseases if one seeks the blessing of Allah through its recitation.² This interpretation is agreed upon by all Quranic exegetes without any difference of opinion as to whether the *shifÉ'* (cure) mentioned in the above verse is used in its real sense or figuratively.³ In another verse, Allah says:

*And if there was any Quran by which the mountains would be removed or the earth would be broken apart or the dead would be made to speak, (it would be this Quran), but to Allah belongs the affair entirely...*⁴

The above verse is a conditional sentence (*al-Jumlah al-Sharíyyah*) which consists of two clauses; a conditional clause specifying a hypothesis and a consequence clause indicating what follows from that condition. However, in this verse, a conditional clause is stated while the consequence clause is omitted. According to the Quran exegetes, the omission of the latter occurs for different reasons, but in the current context it emphasizes how mighty is the power inherent in the recitation of the Quran, the extent of which is left to our unending imagination. The presumed consequence clause could therefore be *lakÉna hÉzÉ Qur'Én* (it would be this Quran).⁵

¹ Sura al-Israa, verse 82.

² Al-NuÑmÉnÉ, AbÉ xafí SirÉj al-DÉn ÑUmar bin ÑAlÉ, *al-LubÉb fÉ ÑUIÉm al-KitÉb*, vol.12 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1998) 369.

³ For more detail see: al-SaÑdÉ, ÑAbdul RaÍmÉn bin NÉÍr, *TaysÉr al-KarÉm al-RaÍmÉn fÉ TafsÉr KalÉm al-MannÉn* (Mu'ssasatul RisÉlah,2000)465., al-TafsÉr al-WasÉÍ li al-Qur'Én al-KarÉm authored by a group of scholars under the auspices of al-Azhar Center for Islamic Research. Vol.5 (Cairo: al-Hayhah al-ÑÓmmah li al-Shu'Én al-MaÍÉbi' al-AmÉriyyah,1973) 795., al-ShinqÉÍÉ MuÍammad al-AmÉn bin MuÍammad al-MukhtÉr, *AdwÉ'u al-BayÉn fÉ TafsÉr al-Qur'Én bi al-Qur'Én*, vol.3 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr li al-ÙibÉÑah wa al-Nashr, 1995), 181.

⁴ Sura al-RaÑd, verse 31.

⁵ Ibn ÑÓshÉr MuÍammad al-ÙÉhir bin MuÍammad al-ÙÉhir, *al-TaÍrÉr wa al-TanwÉr*, vol.2 (Tunisia: al-DÉr al-TÉnisíyyah li al-Nashr, 1984), 94., al-BiqÉÑÉ IbrÉhÉm bin ÑUmar, *Nadh'm al-Durar fi TanÉsub al-Óyat wa al-Suwar*, vol. 10 (Cairo: DÉr al-KitÉb al-IslÉmÉ),266., al-BaydÉwÉ NÉÍr al-DÉn ÑAbdullah bin ÑUmar, *AnwÉr al-TanzÉl wa AsrÉr al-Ta'wÉl*, vol.3 (Beirut: DÉr ÍÍyÉ al-TurÉth, 1418), 188.

The Yoruba ÑUlamÉ' find strength in this verse and the presumed consequence clause to embark on healing practices using verses of Quran in different ways that have never occurred to the early generations of Islam. They believe that if the recitation of the Quran is so powerful that it could be used to remove a mighty mountain or break the earth apart, could not it then be used against black magic or for healing from irremediable diseases?¹

Moreover, there is a prophetic tradition narrated by Imam AÍmad on the authority of ÑAbdullah bin MasÑEd that the Prophet said while teaching them *al-Tashahhud*: "... then let everyone chooses the supplication that interests him and supplicates Allah with it". This Sunnah has given a complete freedom and authority to Muslims to choose whichever *DuÑÉ* they like to supplicate Allah with.² While *al-ma'thÈrÈt* (supplications from Quran and sunnah) remains the best option,³ it is sunnatic that a Muslim chooses for himself a *DuÑÉ* that is good as long as it does not involve any *shirk*.

On this basis, healing with divine method has been practiced in different ways, some of which are truly divine while others are not but a travesty of divine. Common Jalabi practices with divine method are: the recitation of the whole Quran or certain selected suras or verses, writing of the whole Quran or some selected verses on a slate, mirror, cloth, paper or other clean objects, the recitation and writing of Allah's names (both known and unknown), and those of the Angels, and Jinns, the codification of all the above mentioned in a talismanic way known as *Khatim* (katimi) to complement the above methods in order to give an effective result.

Various ways of using the Quran in this category had been found in some personal collections consulted during the fieldwork in Lagos, Oyo, kwara, Osun and Ogun states. Documents in forms of manuscript in Arabic, Ajami and Yoruba formats retrieved from these personal collections are so large in quantity but not organized. Many of them are not dated neither do they bear the names of their authors, perhaps due to the oral method of its transmission from one person to another. Where a name is mentioned,, it would not be that of the author, but rather of the one from whom the *nakali* was obtained. This appears to be just a sign of acknowledgement.

Interestingly, there is sufficient evidence to assume that many of these manuscripts could have been written about a century ago or even earlier. The frequent mentioning of the words sultan, horse and slave in these documents⁴ suggests that they had been

¹Al-Ilori Ódam ÑAbdullah, *NasÈm al-ØabÉ fi AkhbÈr al-IslÈm wa ÑUlamÉ' BilÈd Yoruba* (Cairo: MaÍbaÑah al-NamÈdhajiyah,1986),41.

² AÍmad bin ×ambal, *Musnad al-Imam AÍmad bin ×ambal*, vol. 4 (Cairo: DÈr al-×adÈth, 1995),143., al-BayhaqÈ AÍmad bin ×useyn, *al-DaÑwÈt al-KabÈr*, vol.1 (Kuwait: GarrÈs li al-Nashr wa al-TawzÈÑ,2009),179.

³ See for more detail: al-Imam JalÈl al-DÈn al-SuyÈtÈ. (1994) *DÈÑÈ al-FalÈÍ fÈ AdhkÈr al-MasÈi'wa al-ØabÈ'i*. Cairo: al-DÈr al-MaÍriyyah al-LubnÈniyyah.

⁴ "Seeking fine cloth, horse and money", (no date). (Ar.). Personal collection, no. 102. (Retrieved 12 April, 2014).

written as early as the era of Islamic emirates in this part of the world. The nearest one that comes to mind is non-other than the Sokoto and Ilorin emirates, where the title 'sultan' is used solely to address the supreme leaders of these Islamic states. The contexts in which the term sultan appeared typified the time when Sultans became indispensable, at whose mercy were all the subjects. In this kind of situation, what people would ever hope for is how to get closer to the court of the Sultan by all means, a fact which explains the proliferation of magical practices and fetishism. This assumption is supported by the many attempts to win the affection of the Sultan or to gain his favor through different kinds of supplications and talismanic applications recurred in those documents.

It is noteworthy to add here that the recurrent themes of all the manuscripts at hand, having been thoroughly scrutinized, falls mainly into three categories; wealth and prosperity (*jalb al-Rizq*), love (*Jalb al-Ma'abbah*) and protection (*jalb al-xifḌ*). But this does not mean that the manuscripts deal exclusively with these three themes. Quite on the contrary, there are tens of problems addressed therein ranging from a mild issue of 'memory boosting' to a complex issue of killing one's adversary.

Traditional and Mixed Methods

Regarding the traditional and mixed methods, there are ample evidences to argue that many of them do not fall within the parameter of the SharĒÑah. There is nothing wrong in the pure traditional method, as it is equivalent to the natural method practiced and approved by the Prophet. The traditional medicine may also be referred to as folk, complementary or indigenous medicine. All these terms are often used interchangeably, but sometimes due to certain overtone that one may want to highlight one particular term would be preferred.

According to the definition of the World Health Organization, this medicine is " the sum total of the knowledge and skills and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health, as well as in the prevention, diagnoses, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness. ¹ The above definition highlights the general nature and development over generations of the traditional medicine and its diverse practices across human cultures.

In many places in the developing world, particularly in Africa, an overwhelming majority of the people still relies on traditional medicine for their health needs. The traditional medicine that is peculiar to the Africans involves, but not limited to, charm, amulets, ritualistic incantations or the use of animal (or human) part, minerals and crude plant materials, such as leaves, fruits, roots, seeds, stems, bark or other plant parts, which may be ground up to small particles or powder and subsequently steamed or steeped, or entirely burned to black substances. The common herbal

¹ Zang Xiaorui, *General Guidelines for Methodologies on Research and Evaluation of Traditional Medicine* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2000) 1.

preparation with animal or human organ involves grinding and mixing with other herbs, or roasting or burning to black substance, which may later be mixed with palm oil or the Yoruba traditional corn starch porridge (*ogi/eko*).

The general principle guiding the use of the traditional medicine in Islam is not based on the practice of one particular culture or nation, as wrongly perceived by some Yoruba Muslims, who stubbornly preach against the use of the Yoruba traditional medicine in favour of the Arabs folk's medicine. It is important to point out that the use of herbs to treat any kind of diseases is a common phenomenon among the people of different races, and that both its documentation and usage form central part of their medical scholarship. In the case of the Arabs, for example, Ibn Khaldun, in his famous *Muqaddimah*, observes that the pre-Islamic Arabs used herbs and plants for medical purposes, mainly based on individual experiences as handed down by the *shaykhs* and old women of the tribe.¹ He also mentioned one famous Arab medical expert, called al-*Érith* ibn Kalada, and his sojourn in Jundishapur near Ahwaz in Iran to seek more knowledge of herbal medicine in the pre-Islamic period.²

Apart from herbs, the traditional medicine also involves the use of charm, talisman, amulets and spells, as the people believe in supernatural forces, such as evil spirit, witchcraft and so on. Thus, they seek traditional medicine to repel evils and shield themselves against any imminent danger of supernatural origin.

Islam deplores all such rituals of seeking refuge from evil spirit and considers it as a sort of polytheism, which Allah will not pardon until one repudiates all his polytheistic acts and return to the true faith.³

In the Yorubaland today, the majority of the *ŃUlamÉ'* believe in these two types of healing methods and practice them on daily basis. They do not seem to see them as contravening with the principle of Islam; instead they adamantly defend them, and would be ready to fight to their last breath with anyone who criticizes them. These idolatry practices, no wonder, have defiled the pristine Islamic teachings and principles, and have created confusion in the mind of the generality of the Yoruba Muslims. People do not seem to know what constitute Islam anymore, because of the accommodating method of the *ŃUlamÉ'* to all the un-Islamic practices in the society.

Conclusion

It has been deliberated upon throughout the foregoing pages that *Jalabi* is an extant historical phenomenon with a strong connection to the coming of Islam. It was used as a mechanism to condition the mind of the Yoruba animists to accept Islam and thereafter consolidate their faith after they have embraced Islam. Its origin remains

¹ Ibn KhaldĒn, *The Muqaddimah* (trans.) Franz Rosenthal (U.S.: Bolingen series Princeton, 1969), 935.

² *ibid.*

³ al-MilĒ, MubÉrak bin MuĀammad, *RisÉlah al-Shirk wa MaĐÉhiruhĒ* (Saudi Arabia: Dar al-RayÉÍ li al-Nashr wa al-TawzĒĒ, 2001)213-239.

shrouded with mystery, as no specific date could be assigned to its inception. All we may say, based on the available resources, is not more than its companionship with Islam during the latter's infiltration into Yorubaland. Its impacts on the lives of the Yoruba are immeasurable, as the phenomenon has become an important fabric of their society that could neither be abolished nor possibly forsaken. Admittedly, it has been hijacked and utterly abused by certain quarters among the Ulama out of covetousness and greediness, which has eventually plunged the practice of Jalabi into syncretism, an act that is outrightly condemned in Islam as being in direct conflict with its fundamentals. Nevertheless, this does not by any means render its essence un-Islamic. It is therefore a matter of necessity to sift the practice from what has been associated with it based on strict Islamic principles.

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