

ISLAM, CUSTOM, CULTURE AND TRADITION: THE DILEMMA OF THE NIGERIAN MUSLIM

A. O. Omotosho¹

ABSTRAK

Kebanyakan dari orang-orang bukan Afrika berpendapat bahawa bagaimana sekalipun ketaatan orang-orang Afrika kepada agama masing-masing, sama ada Islam atau Kristian, mereka tetap berpegang teguh kepada tradisi dan budaya. Orang-orang Afrika ini dikatakan sangat kuat memegang kepada tradisi mereka sehingga ke tahap sanggup untuk mengorbankan kepercayaan agama mereka sendiri. Artikel ini akan menganalisa sejauhmana kebenaran pandangan tersebut.

General introduction on the attitude of Islam towards custom, culture and tradition

It can be said without hesitation that Islam is not opposed to any culture, custom or tradition as long as no element of the culture contradicts the teaching of Islam. The decision of Islam not to stipulate any specific dress for its adherents, even those saddled with responsibility such as Imam, Qadis, etc, illustrates this. All that Islam does is to lay down rules and guidelines along side its teaching. Any culture, custom or tradition that fall within the framework provided in these basic guidelines can be conveniently described as Islamic, while anything outside that may be viewed as un-Islamic.

¹ He is currently an Associate Professor at the Department of Religious Studies, University of Jos, Nigeria.

The issue of dressing provides us with a good example. Islam opposes transparent or tight clothes that expose the shape of one's body, whether male or female. Men are expected to wear comfortable clothes that covers his shoulders and reaches at least to his knees.² As for women, Islam believes that every part of her body is that is attractive or sensitive to men be covered, with the exception of her face and palm, according to Imam Malik. Imam Abu Hanifah added feet as well.³ Women, therefore, are expected to wear clothes that cover most of their bodies. If their clothes meet these basic guidelines, then they can be described as Islamic, whether or not they are worn by an African, Asian or European.

Festivals and dancing also pre-date Islam. There were various festivals among Arabs which they had long observed before Islam, most of which were connected to their religious beliefs. For example, when the Prophet (SAW) came to Medina he found that the people of Medina had two days that they regarded as festival days. He told Muslims that Allah had replaced these two festivals with *'Idul-Adha* and *'Idul-al-Fir*.⁴ These festivals have eliminated all excess, waste and other ungodly practices such as nude dancing that characterized them before the advent of Islam. Similarly, it has been a human tradition to mark the arrival of a new baby, a marriage, etc., with feasting and dancing. Islam does not object to them. In fact, Islam strongly encourages a feast for both naming and marriage, provided that any un-Islamic element is not introduced. Islam regards them as signs of gratitude to Allah. Some scholars, like Imam As-Shafi'i and the Zahrites, regard it as an obligation to slaughter a goat to mark a marriage on the ground that the Prophet had instructed Abd. al-Rahman b. Awf to mark his marriage with a goat.⁵

As for dancing, there is controversy, as some scholars frown on it. However, the majority opinion is that it is allowed, provided that men and women are not dancing together or are not in the same hall. In fact, some Muslim religious groups have adopted dancing as part of their mode of worship.⁶ Islam forbids nude dancing, even if the person is with other of their own sex. Today, however, an exception must be made because of the way music and dancing have been commercialized.

² Abu Zaid al-Qairawāni, *Ar-Risālah*, published together with a Hausa translation (Kano, n.d.) 12.

³ Muhammad B. Aḥmad b. Rushid al-Qurtubi, *Bidāyatul Mujtahid Wa Nihāyatul Muqtasad*, 3rd ed. Vol. 2 (Egypt 1960) 3.

⁴ Abū Bakr Jabir Al-Jazāiri, *Minhajul Muslim*, 3rd ed. (Morocco: Dārul baidā', , n.d.)263.

⁵ Muhammad b. Ismail al-Ka'alani As-sana'ani, *Subul As-salām*, 4th ed., vol. 3 (Beirut, 1960) 154.

⁶ The Sufis with their various denominations have unique songs and dances through which they move to ecstasy. The most popular one among them is turning dance which was developed by Jalal al-Din Rumi (about nine centuries ago).

No Muslim scholar who accepts dancing will condone how it has been seriously corrupted.

The influence of culture and tradition on the day-to-day practice of Islam in Nigeria

Experience has shown that day-to-day practice of Islam comes under influence of local practices in the areas of belief, known as *tawhid*, festivals, marriage and matrimonial administration, naming ceremony, bereavement, greetings and similar customs. So it is not surprising that major reforms of all religions particularly Islam concentrates on these areas. Our discussion in this paper will therefore focus on belief in Islam, medication, marriage and matrimonial administration and acculturation.

Faith

In Islam, it is important not only to be a Muslim but also to have the right kind of Islam in your heart. Faith forms the heart of Islam, because it is how and what you believe that makes your faith perfect. If your faith is not strong or is based on the wrong premises, then you are not a strong Muslim. Perhaps that explains why Islam distinguished between Muslims and the *Mumin* (faithful). When some desert Arabs came to the Prophet and said they were faithful (*mumin*), the Qur'an replies: 'Ye have no faith but ye (only) say, we have submitted our wills to God.'⁷ The importance of sound faith can also be seen from the fact that the first twelve or thirteen years of Islamic revelation, known as Meccan period, was devoted to faith itself, with little attention given to other areas, such as legal and social issues.

From an Islamic point of view, one's belief in Allah is not complete until one also believes that one's utterances and actions can undermine one's faith. For example, it can be affected by swearing by other things other than Allah. Similarly, if one seeks from a human being or other creatures what he is expected to seek only from Allah, such as protection and security, he commits a grievous sin. A good Muslim is expected to believe that Allah is the creator, protector and sustainer, and must not swear in the name of anything other than that of Allah or, what by implication represents the name of Allah, such as the Qur'an, the Ka'aba, etc., even if in doing so one has to attach Allah's name in some way or other. For example, one can only say I swear by the God of Ka'aba or by the book of Allah.'⁸ The wisdom behind this is to unite Muslims in one single faith and prevent them from anything that

⁷ Qur'an 49:14.

⁸ Abû Ja'afar Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Salāmah At-Tahawî, *Sharḥ 'Aqīdah at Tahāwî*, 4th ed. (Beirut: Maktabah al-Talāmi, 1392 A.H.) 261.

might create the impression that there is any other God besides Allah or an intermediary between him and his creatures.

The influence of old customs and traditions has made it difficult, however, for many Muslims in Nigeria to observe in the totality of these teachings. Among the Yoruba speaking Muslims, for example, it is common to see Muslim swearing in the name of their ancestors. Similarly, Yoruba Muslims prefers to plead with you in the name of their mother, father or great ancestors.

Closely related to this is the belief that one's intelligence occupies an important position in one's life and it represents one's destiny in life. So whatever happens to individuals is seen as an indication of the kind of intelligence they are given by God. Therefore, what happens to people is measured in terms of the kind of 'head' they possess. The Yoruba expression, *Ori eni lawure eni* (one's head determines one's luck), explains this better. The closest Islamic concept to this belief is that of *Qadar*. It is symbolized by the 'head.' To say one's 'head' as chosen for one is to say 'that is one's *Qadar*'. But there is a fundamental difference between the two. While *Qadar* emanates from Allah, the Yoruba lacks that quality. This belief is part of Yoruba traditional religious belief and, in spite of popularity of Islam among them, it has not been eradicated, particularly among illiterate Muslims.

Moreover, Islam teaches its adherents to believe that nothing can happen without the knowledge of Allah and his permission and he sustains everyone. While Islam does not deny the existence of evil spirits and forces, it encourages its adherents to ignore them and to pray against the influence of their power.⁹ Thus it is a serious spiritual offence (*shirk*) to believe that somebody can change your destiny, cause you to become sick without using poisoning, or harm you without any physical effort. The obvious aim of Islam is to free men from the domination of their fellow human beings so they can concentrate on the purpose for which they are created: total submission to Allah and total service to him. It also enables them live a peaceful life free of fear. In spite of this, the old belief in the unquestionable power of witchcraft and black magic was not seriously influenced by the arrival of Islam among the Eggon, Nupe and Yorubas, because these communities believe that nothing negative occurs without the use of witchcraft, black magic or juju. As a result, everything ranging from minor sickness, accident of any kind, fire disaster and any other problem that is due to the carelessness of the victim are blamed on evil forces, particularly witchcraft.¹⁰ The implication of this belief is that a large number of Muslims, who are supposed to live freely, have been taken hostage by

⁹ See Qur'an 113:1-5.

¹⁰ Interview with Tijani Dahiru and Mariam Talatu Umar of the Eggon and Nupe tribes, respectively on December 9, 2005.

various kinds of soothsayers. Many of them cannot embark on a journey of twenty kilometers without consulting a soothsayer. The poor among them have compounded their financial difficulties by giving a better part of their income to *jujumen* in search of security. Many ventures that would have made their fortunes better are often condemned by soothsayers on the ground that it is against the luck of the person or because his ancestors may not be pleased with it. Surprisingly, most of the *jujumen* or mallams who engage in the act of soothsaying and other kinds of spiritual healing are not only Muslims but learned scholars who now the Islamic position on such things.

Islam and medicine

The attitude of Islam towards medicine is well-known. Muslims are not only allowed to use medicine but is also encouraged to seek medication when they are sick, provided that it does not involve incantation or invoking names of anything other than that of Allah. Above all, they must believe that without Allah's permission it may not be effective. The position of Islam is illustrated by the saying of the Prophet, 'Indeed Allah did not create disease without cure so seek medication.'¹¹ In another version, the Prophet says: 'For every disease there is a cure with the exception of old age and death'.¹² These *hadith* illustrate the stand of Islam on the issue of medication. The Prophet himself was reported to have used medicine and recommended things as medicine. Islam does not differentiate between the so-called modern and traditional medicine; after-all, modern medicine and traditional medicine have the same origin.

Marriage

Marriage is one of the ancient traditions that Islam inherited. It affirms marriage as one of the basic needs of man, but it rejects some primitive and ungodly practices that used to characterize it in the past: for example, marriage without the consent of the woman, marriage to so many wives that one cannot care for them properly, forced marriage, inheriting one's step mother, etc. Islam has made extensive reforms in the area of matrimony with the sole aim of eliminating many terrible situations that have made marriage more of a burden than a pleasure for many women. The objective of Islam is to ensure that both marriage partners derive the maximum benefit from their association.

One of the major obstacles that impedes the progress of humanity towards freedom and peace is bondage to tribal customs and traditions that consistently ignore the

¹¹ . Al-Jazairi 269.

¹² *Ibid* 270.

basic human rights of others. Qur'an 2:170 spells it out clearly: 'When it is said to them 'follow what God hath revealed'; they say 'nay! We shall follow the way of our fathers'. What! Even though their fathers were void of wisdom and guidance'. This explains why Islam devotes much effort to family law.

Islamic reforms, however, make it possible for both men and women to become free from such obnoxious traditions and customs, although the ability of individuals and communities to escape local customs and traditions varies widely. Even in Arab countries, one still finds the remnant influence of old customs, though most of what you find there may not all be that objectionable. In Nigeria, however, the ancient tradition and customs that Islam found not to be in the interest of humanity still prevail, and sometimes even take precedence over Islamic teachings.

In the area of marriage, there is hardly any community or tribe without its own share of unacceptable custom and traditions. Traditionally, in Yoruba speaking areas, the dowry or *sadaqah* belongs to the father or the parents of the bride. This practice has not been completely eliminated by the arrival of Islam, except among educated people. Also, in some parts of Kwara and other northern States *sadaqah* marriage (*Iyawo Sara*), in which a woman will be bundled into a house of a man who neither sought a wife nor is prepared for one, continues in the name of Islam.¹³

The practice of *naganni ina so*, which is wide spread among Muslims in the North, is more of a local custom than Islamic teaching. The practice allows a woman who has attained the age of marriage to keep on accepting presents from many men who are seeking her hand in marriage only for her to return these gifts after she decides whom she wants to marry. The practice runs contrary to the teaching of Islam, as it can prevent the woman from marrying the best person, as Islam requires. At the end of the exercise, it is very likely that the woman will settle for the highest bidder, who may not necessarily possess the qualities that Islam encourages.

The details of this practice are that the first man will come with a present, which is usually a bag or bags filled with clothes and other materials. Next, others bring similar presents and she continues to accept them for a long time, possibly years, before she finally decides on whom to marry. The presents are usually kept to be returned to unsuccessful suitors. That is the interpretation of it in most northern states. However, it appears that the term *naganni ina so* means different things to the Muslims of Kano and Zaria. According to them, *naganni ina so* is simply a present that a man who is interested in a woman is expected to send to her parents to signify his desire to marry their daughter. It usually involves simple feminine things, such as underwear. In the place of *naganni ina so* they also have what they

¹³ I witnessed a Sadaqah marriage in Ilorin on 3 January 1997.

call *tochi*. The two are local Hausa customs, which pre-date the arrival of Islam in the area, and contain some un-Islamic elements. The danger inherent in the practice is that the quality and quantity of a candidate's presents may influence the woman to pick a man for this reason, instead of for the religiosity and uprightness that Islam advises people to look for in marriage.¹⁴

In addition, the Prophet's advice that 'none of you should approach a woman already being chased by his Muslim brother,'¹⁵ which is intended to prevent hatred and ill-feeling between two Muslim brothers seems to have been ignored. Even though the interpretation of the *hadith* varies from one school to another, they do agree that the woman should be left to dispose of the first application before another man comes in, particularly if the first candidate has not proved to be unreliable.

There are other marriage practices in the area that are also difficult to square with Islam. These include *kawanche* and *sa-lalle*. Under these customs the bride to be goes in the company of her friends to the house of the bride-groom two or three days before the wedding day to demand money, which must be provided. This is called *kudin chin kasuwa*. As part of *kawanche*, she will spend the remaining three days in rough living and talking nonsense to everybody in town.¹⁶

Furthermore, the Eggon people of Nasarawa State and the Tera of Bauchi State present another unique example of the influence of customs and traditions on what is supposed to be an Islamic marriage. Generally, Eggon Muslim marriage is conducted the same way as in other parts of the North, but before the marriage, one still finds some old customs that are not in keeping with Islamic teaching. For example, both the father and mother collect a specific sum of money, in addition to the dowry that is payable to the bride. In addition, the bridegroom is expected to visit all known relations of the bride with gifts, preferably money. It is the brother of the bride's father, either senior or junior, who controls the affairs of the bride. It is he who gives permission to marry the woman.¹⁷ The Yorubas of Oyo, Osun and Ondo States still do this, though they restrict it to the senior brother of the father and grandfather of the bride.¹⁸ On the wedding day, the Eggon people and the Lindri of Wamba in Nasarawa State still conclude the marriage ceremony with what

¹⁴ As-Sana'ani. 111-112.

¹⁵ Muslim b. Hajaj b. Muslim, *Sahih al-Muslim*, vol. 2, English trans. Abdul Hamid Siddiqi (Bierut: Dar al Arabia, n.d.) 712.

¹⁶ Interview with some indigenes of Kano, Zaria, and Kaduna, including Mallam Hassan Fagge of the Ministry of Education, Kano on January 22, 2006.

¹⁷ Interview with Tijani Dahiru, *op.cit.*

¹⁸ Interview with Alhaja Amina Ayoka, an indigene of Ogbomoso, Oyo State on January 5, 2006.

is known as *wanka-amariya* (marriage bath), in which the bride is bathed naked in public, particularly in front of women and children.¹⁹

Moreover, one finds that some customs and traditions of Yorubas in respect to matrimony take precedence over Islamic teachings. For example, the term *Iyale* and *Iyawo* go beyond ordinary nick-names. They have various implications. *Iyale* is the first or senior wife, while *Iyawo* means junior or new wife. Under Yoruba custom, the junior wife alone is responsible for cleaning the whole house, washing the clothes of the senior wife and those of her husband. In addition, she is responsible for cooking for the whole house and she has no authority to serve herself part of the food that she cooked. It is the senior wife who is supposed to serve her, including the soup that she cooked. Similarly, a junior wife is not allowed to call by name any children of her husband who were born before her marriage to the man, no matter how young they may be. The same is true for the children of the relations of her husband. In fact, there is a limit to what she can ask them to do for her without raising eye brows. While one can understand that about children who may be older than her, but what about younger ones?²⁰ These traditions are still practiced today among Yoruba Muslims.

From an Islamic point of view, the two wives are equal and should be treated equally regardless of their age, educational background and status in society. The only time that Islam has discriminated between senior and junior wives, and it was in favour of junior wife. When one marries a virgin wife, he is expected to spend seven nights with her after which everything should be shared equally between them. If they live in the same house they are jointly responsible for everything on equal terms.²¹ This does not in any way suggest that Islam has no respect for age. After all, the Prophet (SAW) was reported as saying: 'He is not among us who does not care for our young ones or does not respect old.'²² The essence of this tradition is that it is a mandatory on the old to care for the young ones, and on the young to respect the older ones. What Islam is opposed to is exploitation in the name of age, seniority, or custom; anything that leads to cheating in one way or another is un-Islamic.

However, the Islamic teaching of mutual respect and non-exploitation seems to favor women, but, surprisingly, one finds that most Yoruba women still prefer the traditional system. It appears that those who suffered under that system do not want

¹⁹ Interview with Tijani Dahiru, *op.cit.*

²⁰ Interview with Alhaja Ayoka, *op.cit.*

²¹ Al-Jazairi 439.

²² Abu Zakariya Yahya b. As-Sharaf an-Nawwāwi, *Riyād As Sālihīn*, eds. Abdul Aziz b. Ribah and Ahmad b. Yusuf Ad.-Daqāq (Damascus: Dar al-Ma'mun, n.d.) 173.

it to be eradicated, so that they can now take revenge on the next generation. Anybody who speaks against the system is regarded as a follower of alien ideas. So it continues, except that contemporary women, particularly educated ones, use their educational advantage to liberate themselves. First, by making sure that they do not continue to live in the family home and, secondly, by insisting that they do not reside with any senior wives, whenever possible.

It is a custom of the Tera people of Bauchi State that a newly married woman must deliver her first child in her parent's house. The wisdom behind this is to provide the inexperienced young mother with badly needed assistance and to help her cope with the demands of taking care of a new baby. However, this noble idea has taken a different dimension. Apart from certain beliefs that have become attached to the practice (e.g., if the woman fails to deliver the first child in her parent's house the next pregnancy may not be successful), many other evils are now associated with the practice, as some parents use the opportunity to make new demands of their sons-in-laws. On top of that, the husband is barred from visiting his wife or talking to her for as long as she remains with her parents. The time that she returns to her husband is at the discretion of the parents and also depends on how quickly he is able to supply the new list of things that may be given to him.²³ The danger inherent in this custom is not only whether or not it is Islamic but it has also led to a long separation or, in some cases, to divorce. Thus, it is un-Islamic because it contains elements of cheating and other forms of inconvenience.

The handling and distribution of the *Id al-Adha* sacrifice and *aqiqah* meat does not escape the influence of local custom and tradition, in spite of the fact that Islam has given a full explanation of how to share them. Among the Yorubas and Hausa Muslims, there is a wide-spread belief that *adha* meat should not be shared on the first day. Instead, it should be hung until the next day.²⁴ Furthermore, the Yoruba way of sharing the *adha* and *aqiqah* meat is particularly remarkable. There is the belief that certain parts of the meat belong to specific people. The neck belongs to the person who slaughtered it while other parts must be reserved for the father-in-law, the grandfather and the grandmother.²⁵ The northern practice that the entire *aqiqah* meat belongs to the mother of the child²⁶ has no basis in Islamic law either. In fact, it goes contrary to the dictates of Islam on how to share the '*aqiqah*' meat.

²³ Interview with Baba Ado Ali; a Tera by tribe and an Imam, who serves in the Nigerian Navy on January 15, 2006.

²⁴ Interview with cross section of Muslims from various parts of Nigeria, including Alhaji Shittu Alaga, an elderly man from Ibadan on March 7, 2006.

²⁵ Interview with a cross section of Yoruba Muslims from Oyo, Osun and Ogun States on March 9, 2006.

²⁶ Interview with Sani Umar, an indigene of Kano State on January 22, 2006.

The Nupe give the backbone of 'aqiqah' meat to a mother of the child.²⁷ According to Abu Zaid al-Qairawani whose work 'ar-Risallah' constitutes the main book of Islamic Law in West Africa, both *adha* and *aqiqah* meat should be divided into three – one of which should be used by the family, while the remaining two should be given to relations or friends and the poor, respectively.²⁸ Islam also gives part to relations, including the mother-in-law, but no specific belief should be attached to it.

Furthermore, *Adha* sacrifice itself is basically *sunnah mu'akkadah* (emphatic recommendation of the prophet) which is expected to be observed only on the financial ability to afford it. The fact that one was able to offer one in the previous year does not make it compulsory in the subsequent year in the absence of ability.²⁹ However, the Yoruba traditional sense of shame has forced an average Yoruba Muslim to see the sacrifice as obligatory, particularly once one has started it. The common prayer 'enu obe koni sele' (your knife will not miss neck of animal) which usually accompanies the distribution of the meat is a clear indication of a social stigma attached to the inability to offer any as the person who was able to afford it last year would not like his people to know that he could afford it last year, but this year he cannot. This has eventually led many Muslims who are in serious financial difficulties to compound that either by borrowing money to buy a ram or taking one on credit, contrary to Islamic teaching on the exercise.

In Kano area, when a woman gives birth for the first time, the mother of the woman will come to the house of her daughter 3 days after delivery, if the baby is a girl, or 4 days, if the baby is a boy. Her mission is to ask for a certain amount of money that must be provided, since failure is usually seen as a lack of respect and love for the mother of the child. In fact, it may lead to incitement against the husband. This is called *kawuri* and it is one of the old customs that pre-date the advent of Islam.³⁰ It has refused to give way to Islamic teaching, even though it causes some inconvenience to others. A related issue is the practice of showering money in public occasions, such as marriage and naming ceremonies. It is part of African cultures that cut across many tribes: Yoruba, Ibo and others. But Islam frowns at it for many reasons (a) it leads to pride, (b) it is a form of showing-off that Islam hates, (c) it leads to tensions between the rich and the poor; and (d) above all, anything that is given in the name of Allah is expected to be in private and remain secret.

²⁷ Interview with Mariam Talatu Umar an indigene of Bida, Niger State on January 9, 2006.

²⁸ Al-Qairawani *op.cit.*, 81-82.

²⁹ Al-Jazairi *op.cit.*, 342.

³⁰ Interview with Sani Umar an indigene of Kano State on January 22, 2006.

In spite of this, the practice continues among Muslims. Even occasions such as Quranic recitation graduation, known as *Walimah*, and Islamic naming and wedding ceremonies are not spared. That is interesting, because such occasions are usually presided over by learned Muslim scholars, who are supposed to be in the forefront of the war against un-Islamic practices. The Qur'anic recitation graduation, in particular, is an occasion that is supposed to be spiritual in nature and, therefore, be devoid of such practices.

Feasting during bereavement

In Islam, if a family is bereaved, their relations and neighbours are expected to support them by providing food for them at least for two days. When Ja'afar, a companion of the Prophet, lost his wife or a very close relation, the Prophet instructed his neighbours to provide food for his household. In his word 'what will keep them busy has befallen them.'³¹ While Islam does not forbid the bereaved family from preparing food for themselves, if they can do it or if there is nobody to provide it, it forbids them from serving others. Even when they have visitors that have to be fed, their neighbours and close relations are expected to do that. The wisdom behind this is to ensure that their loss is not compounded and also to enable them reflect properly on what has happened to them.

In the Yoruba tradition, however, the death of an elderly person is greeted with an elaborate and extravagant feast and ceremony. The arrival of Islam seems to have made little impact on them. In recent time, there are some movements, such as the Lanase Movement of Ibadan, *Egbe Aku Mahabi* (movement against feasting in bereavement) of Iwo, and individual scholars like Alhaji Murtada Abdul Salami also of Ibadan, have launched vigorous campaigns against it. But their efforts do not appear to have made any significant impact, particularly outside their own followers. Instead, the practice is being Islamized by giving it a different name that makes it look like an acceptable practice. It is now called '*sara*' or '*saddaqah*'. Islam is not opposed to doing *saddaqah* in the name of a dead person; in fact, it is encouraged. When the mother of Sa'ad b. 'Ubâdah died, he asked the Prophet whether or not he could do *saddaqah* on her behalf. The answer of the Prophet was in the affirmative.³² By any interpretation, however, *saddaqah* performed in the name of a dead person cannot mean organizing feast, slaughtering of animal and dancing.

Furthermore, it is part of Yoruba age long custom to mark forty day after someone has died. In fact, after forty day all known relatives of the dead person will have

³¹ See Al-Jazairu *op.cit.*, 283.

³² Al-Jazairu. *op. cit.*, 283.

been informed, and everybody is expected to prepare themselves financially for a big feast in which every family that is related to the deceased will prepare food, drinks and organize entertainment. Today, forty day has been Islamized too, not only among the Yoruba but also across the nation. It is now called *forty day fidâ*. In some cases, part or the whole of the Qur'an will be recited together with special prayers for the dead person. In some others, it involves a combination of a recitation of the Qur'an and elaborate feasting. There is no reference either in the Qur'an or any hadith to these forty day. While offering prayer for deceased person, which is now known as *fidâû*, is encouraged, there is no time specified for it.

The Yoruba still believe that when you go to offer condolences to somebody in his house, such a person should not escort you out because that might lead to another death. All these are part of old customs or superstitions that Islam has been trying to eradicate.³³ Islam teaches that everybody has his own time appointed by Allah and nothing can bring it forward or backward.

Greetings

Greeting is a universal custom that has been in existence long before Islam. Islam does not only approve of it but it also introduced a number of reforms in line with Islamic teachings. The way and manner a greeting is offered varies from one tribe to another. In Yoruba land, for example, the junior is traditionally expected to lie flat in front of an elder and utter some expressions that are normally used as greetings. The elder, in turn, prays for him. If one is greeting an important person like a king, one must remove one's cap and shoes before lying flat in his face, praying for him.³⁴ I do not know the mode of greeting among Hausas and other tribes in the far North, but it appears that the situation was similar in all of black Africa before the arrival of Islam.

While Islam encourages a greeting, it restricts it to a verbal expression and the shaking of hands. It has also unified its adherents by introducing a common expression and that is the extension of peace to one another – '*as-salam alaikum wa rahmatullah wa bara katuhu*'.³⁵ Although Islam prefers this to any other form of greeting, it does not completely condemn other expressions such as 'how are you,' 'Good morning,' and their equivalents in various languages, as long as they do not

³³ See Muslim, *op.cit*, vol.4, 400-1.

³⁴ Interview with Alhaji S.A. Balogun, an indigene of Oyo town, Oyo State on March 7, 2006.

³⁵ See Qur'an 4:86, Q.24:27 and 61. Also see Abu al-Fida'Ismail b. Kathir, (1981) *Mukhtasar Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Muhammad Ali As-Sâbûni, (ed.) vol. 1 Beirut: Dar al-Qur'an, 417 – 419.

contain unacceptable expressions. The response of Muslims across the world to this reform also varies from greatly. While Arabs and Asian Muslims have succeeded in taking Islamic reforms almost totally, Africans and most especially Nigerians have not gone beyond half measures such as the following: Hausa and Fulani Muslims raise their fist to the shoulder or head level, while Yoruba, Nupe, Ebira and other smaller tribes living among them generally kneel down. In Yoruba speaking areas, only the junior or younger person kneels, but in Nupe areas both are expected to kneel. It is not unusual to see somebody on a donkey or horse back come down to engage in a greeting that may last about three or more minutes. This practice continues even today.³⁶ It is note worthy that the use of Islamic expression 'as-salam alaikum' is not common among these tribes, with the exception of the Hausa. Only a few individuals who are religiously inclined extend it among themselves.

We also find that the arrival of Islam among the Fulani has not eliminated all local customs and culture that are not in keeping with Islamic teachings. The custom of *kunya* and the tradition of *chadi* or *sharo* continue. despite the fact that the two contradict Islamic teaching. In the case of the former, a woman is customarily forbidden from calling her first child by its name or anyone who shares the name with the child. The *kunya* practice also leads to a sense of shame. A man who sustains an injury will continue to hide it out of shame so that nobody will see it.

As for *chadi* or *sharo*, it is a biannual festival in which all young men who have attained the age of marriage will assemble and be stripped of their clothes and be beaten mercilessly. While the festival lasts, any woman present is free whether or not she is married. She can be invited or forced to bed by any man around even with the knowledge of her husband. The husband is equally free to invite other women to bed without raising an eye brow from his wife. All this is still being done in the name of culture, yet in an Islamic environment. Besides, many prohibited things such as drinking of alcohol, talking nonsense, etc., usually characterize the festival.³⁷

Inheritance is another area where local customs and traditions have influenced Islamic teachings. In fact, it appears that the teachings of Islam have been almost completely ignored in favour of customs and traditions. The belief that a female child and women, in general, are less useful than male children and are, therefore, not entitled to as many of the family things is an age-old problem. Islam rejects this belief, and a considerable number of verses of the Qur'an are devoted to the issue of inheritance. Chief among them is Qu'ran 4:7: "From what is left by parents and

³⁶ Interview with Mariam Talatu Umar, *op.cit.*

³⁷ Interview with Ahmad D. Gero, a Fulani of Nasarawa State on January 14, 2006.

those nearest related there is a share for men and a share for women, whether the property is large or small—a determinate share.”

In Islam, both male and female children are entitled to an inheritance.³⁸ In fact, out of four positions that a woman has in relation to an inheritance, she compares favorably with men. In some cases like a father, husband vs daughter or husband, brother vs daughter(s) or sister v. father and husband, a woman takes the lion share. Only when she competes with her own brother or compete as wife or mother that she may take less.³⁹ One cannot be the winner all the time. In the African set up like other races before Islam, women are not allowed to inherit. With the arrival of Islam, the Nigerian Muslim community accepts the reform but their practice varies. The Hausa/Fulani are said to be fair in this regard while Eggon Muslims still do not allow women to inherit.⁴⁰ Ebira Muslims allow a woman to inherit, if she is the only heir.⁴¹ In the case of Yorubas, it all depends on individuals and levels of influence of Islam in the home. In some Yoruba Muslim homes, they do not observe Islamic teaching on inheritance, while in others they do observe it.⁴² Even when they do, there is a shortage of experts who have a good understanding of how to share it. The Nupe allow woman to inherit movable property, but deny her immovable property.

Acculturation

There are many practices that are neither of Islamic origin nor derive from any Nigerian tribes, but some of them have become part of day to day experience. This is what I term acculturation. One of these is where a Muslim scholar refuses to engage in work that will make him independent of his followers or the general public. This attitude is neither of Islamic nor African origin, because prominent companions of the Prophet, who were supposed to remain idle by virtue of their position in society, were actively engaged in various businesses. For example, it was reported that Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, was about to embark on his business the second day after his appointment as successor to the Prophet when the Muslim *umma* insisted that as head of state he should not do anything other than administer the *umma*.⁴³ But the rest of his colleagues were not prevented from engaging in

³⁸ See Q.4:11-12.

³⁹ Sheikh Ibrahim b. Abd. Allah b. Ibrahim al fardi, (1974), *Al-Adhb al fard fi Sharh Umdatul fard*, Beirut, Dar al-Fikr, Vol.1, p.42-45.

⁴⁰ Interview with Tijani Dahiru, *op.cit*.

⁴¹ Interview with M.S. Audu, an Ebira Muslim and Professor of Mathematics, who is very familiar with the customs and tradition of the Ebira on March 2, 2006.

⁴² *Ibid*.

⁴³ Muhammad al-Khudari Bik. (1964), *Itmâm al-wafâ' fi Syrah al-khulafâ'*, Cairo, p.18.

their businesses. Moreover, history has it that even in the African traditional set up the scholar or *babalawos*⁴⁴ used to do farming along with spiritual consultation. Therefore, they were not entirely dependent on consultation for their livelihood.

Contemporary experience, however, shows that there are many learned Muslims (with the exception of some western-oriented scholars) who are usually not engaged in any genuine occupation other than spiritual consultation, healing, teaching pupils who do not pay any tuition fee, and participating in naming and wedding ceremonies. But none of these can provide regular income. This attitude has led to a variety of practices, some of which are contrary to the teachings of Islam. For example, in the process of consultation they are compelled to tell lies to their clients on imminence of calamity, simply in order to pressure them to bring money. In social gatherings, such as naming or wedding ceremonies, they also tell lies, exaggerate and shower undue praises on people, in order to attract money. This attitude has exposed many learned Muslims to sexual temptations through unlawful private audiences with certain categories of women. Other vices that result from this culture are soothsaying, which Islam categorically condemns, the exploitation of Qur'anic verses for personal end, and so on.

In Islam it is not acceptable for anyone to tell lies using the name of Allah or Islam. When a learned man tells the audience that 'I have a special prayer, but you have to pay before I can recite it' or 'There is a special book of prayer in Mecca, but only if you can donate generously so that I will be able to bring the book,' this is contrary to the teaching of Islam and not part of Islamic culture. One often sees a learned Muslim telling an audience or an individual, 'If you can bring money, I will tell God to do this and that for you,' or he may say, 'We will tell God and he must do it.'

These practices are not only un-Islamic but also contrary to the Islamic faith. The Prophet was reported as saying, 'a faithful (*mumin*) can not tell lies and still retain his claim to be a Muslim.'⁴⁵ He also says, 'He who lies to me deliberately will find his abode in the Hell-fire on the day of judgment.'⁴⁶ Beside that, there is nothing that is a matter of must for Allah. He does whatever he pleases. The Qur'an says 'Lord of the Throne of Glory. Doer (without let) of all that he intends' Q.85:15-16.

The authentic Islamic position and tradition is that a learned person should try as much as possible to be self-supporting, in order not to be dependent on people, most especially those in power and the rich, so as to be objective and just in his dealing

⁴⁴ The Yoruba traditional soothsayer, healer and community leader, all in one.

⁴⁵ At-Tahawi 134.

⁴⁶ See Mana'al-Qatani. *Mabahith fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*. Fourth Edition, Beirut, 1976, p.352.

with everyone. A situation where a learned man depends on the people he is supposed to be guiding will not only compromise his objectivity but will also weaken his ability to be just.

The Prophet did not live on charity or depend on the good will of his followers for his survival. In fact, nowhere did he say that a learned scholar should not engage in gainful employment simply because he is educated. Nor did he say that we should give our charity to the learned men but to the poor and needy who are learned people. On the contrary, he praised those who give out and discredited those who depend on others either through begging or other method when he says: 'The upper hand is better than the lower one.'⁴⁷ In a more clear term, he was quoted as saying 'the best food that one ever eats is the one that he produced out of his own hand'⁴⁸ (out of his own sweat). In another hadith he says: 'For anyone of you to go and fetch firewood (and sell it) is better for him than to ask people whether or not they will give him.'⁴⁹ Abu Hurayrah also reported the Prophet as saying: 'Prophet Daud does not eat except from his own sweat and that Prophet Zakariyah was a carpenter.'⁵⁰

These are clear messages that the best way of life for a Muslim is to be self-supporting and not dependent, especially leaders and men of knowledge. This is the best way to be sure of what one consumes is pure.

CONCLUSION

This article is a graphic account of how local customs and traditions have interfered in the day to day practice of Islam in Nigeria. But it must be pointed out that there are many Muslims across the country belonging to all the communities mentioned who are orthodox and try to practice Islam in the way it was prescribed by Allah and his Prophet. But the fact remains that there are still many Muslims who find it difficult to escape what Allah himself describes as 'burden and yokes' and that leaves us without any options but to continue criticizing ourselves until Allah makes it possible for us to get rid of these remnant of a dark age. Allah says: '*O ye who believe enter into Islam whole heartedly and follow not footstep of the evil ones...*' Q.2:208. He did not mean gambling or consumption of alcohol alone but he has in mind some customs and traditions that lead to cheating, oppression or allows what is forbidden because they follow in the footsteps of Shaitan. That is why Allah

⁴⁷ An Nawwawi 260.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 257.

challenges people and says ‘...is it only a part of the book (Qur’an) you believe in and reject the rest...’ Q.2:55.

In conclusion, it is not far fetched to say that the practice of Islam among all Nigerian Muslims, of whatever ethnic group, is influenced extensively by local customs and traditions. But there are still two questions left: first, what can Islam or any other religion do to escape the influence of such customs and traditions? The answer is ‘no’, because exchange of influence is a natural phenomenon that no creature or institution can avoid. Even water that is said to be the most powerful creation of Allah comes under the influence of other things that co-exist along with it, such as: fire and sunshine. So, if that be the case, the exchange of influence is unavoidably a reality of life. But it must be pointed out that the extent that an influence should go in anything must be limited otherwise the term ‘influence’ may not be the appropriate word to use and the affected thing may lost its identity.

According to Qur’an 2:157 the main reason for revealing Islam is to emancipate man from the state of darkness into the state of light: “Allah is the protector of those who have faith: from the depths of darkness He will lead them forth into light.” Q.7:157 provides details: “Those who follow the Apostle, the unlettered Prophet whom they find mentioned in their own (scripture), in the law and gospel, for he commands them what is just and forbids them what is evil; he allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them from what is bad (and impure); he releases them from their heavy burdens and from yokes that are upon them...” Similarly, in *Surah Al-Imran*, verse 110, Allah describes the Muslims as the best of the people evolved for mankind, solely because they enjoin what is right and keep away or discourage what is bad which include all customary and traditional practices that are not decent.

If all these noble objectives for which Islam is revealed are influenced to the extent that dancing naked or half naked in the name of tradition and culture are not eradicated or equality between two wives preached by Islam is replaced by exploitation of one wife by another under the cover of custom, then that influence has gone beyond acceptable level.

If the Yoruba practice of celebrating death or Fulani’s *sharo* or denial of female inheritance practiced by all, should continue in the Islamic environment in whatever name, then the Islamic reform has been defeated.

The second question is, can African and indeed Nigerian Muslims prune down the influence of local customs and tradition to a reasonable proportion that will make the reform to human life-styles intended by Islam realizable? The answer is yes. Because other races outside Africa, such as Arabs and Asians who have embraced

Islam, used to have similar obnoxious customs and traditions but the sacrificed them in order to accept the noble characters that Muhammad son of Abdullah was sent to perfect.

There is no half measure in Islam. If you want to embrace it you do it whole heartedly, otherwise you cannot describe yourself as faithful. That explains why Islam touches on every aspect of human life, many of which other divine religions before it were silent about.

The Yoruba, one of the ethnic groups guilty of adulterating Islam with local customs and tradition, are known with the following proverb which is capable of guiding them and others about what should be the quality of a Muslim. The proverb can be translated as follows: 'If you want to be *osakala* remain *osakala*. If you want to be *osokolo* remain *osokolo*. You cannot be *osakala* and *osokolo* at the same time'.