

Islam, Nigerian Muslims and Jihad Against Corruption: A Re-Examination

Professor Zakariyau I. OSENI

Centre for Ilorin Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper is a re-consideration of Islam as a faith and way of life, the Nigerian Muslims and the struggle or war against corruption in Nigeria. It is against the backdrop of the pervasion of corrupt practices all over Nigeria as reported in the mass media within the country and beyond. The need for the study is hinged on highlighting and correcting some of the many wrong assumptions on Islam in Nigeria, a faith that has been adopted as a way of life in varying degrees for about 12 centuries. The methodology adopted for the study is historical cum analytical and is library-based with emphasis on the Glorious Qur'an, the Hadith of the Prophet as well as Nigerian history. As a scholar of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria of over four decades' experience, this writer is an observer – participant. The paper discusses Islam and Nigerian Muslims as the two are not always necessarily the same. It also looks into the term "Jihad" against corrupt practices especially in Nigeria in all their ramifications and thereby practise Islam in the right way with a view to transforming Nigeria into a more civilized, humane, benevolent, focused, stronger and fairer nation while tolerating individual and group differences within reasonable limits. That is the only viable way the huge population of Muslims in Nigeria would count positively as a strong, righteous and tolerant community that shames the devil, the champion of corruption, and carries out God's will which encapsulates faith, good deeds and shunning corrupt practices.

1.0. Introduction

The paper begins by defining the key terms in the title of the paper. As the caption indicates, the paper is a discussion of part of Islam-the quintessential part for that matter. Stating from a terrain familiar to most people, Islam is the verbal noun (*maṣḍar*) of *aslama* to surrender or submit oneself to Allah (*lillāh*), the Lord of the Universe. *Aslama* is the fourth form from *salima* (to be safe or be at peace). The root of the term is *Salām* and *Salāmah* (peace, safety...).

Technically, the word *Islam* is a state of mind, action and way of life based on total submission or surrender of oneself to Allah, the Universal God of all. It is not merely a set of rituals and practices. Rather, it is a way of life, a commitment to obey Allah in all His injunctions and prohibitions. Hence, it is not merely a religion but a way of life. So when

Muslims say “Islamic Studies” rather than “Islamic Religious Studies”, the reader will understand better henceforth.

“Nigerian Muslims” mean Nigerian citizens who practise Islam whether they are at home (within Nigeria) or abroad. It may also refer to non-Nigerians resident in Nigeria and practising Islam along with their Nigerian counterparts. This is so because Islam is plain and has no secrets. Nigeria is a well-known country of multi-cultures, multi-religions and multi-ethnicities. And yet Nigerians make progress in all facets of life-sports, academics, literature, journalism, visual arts, theatre arts, science, spiritual spheres and economic attainments, etc. all over the world-in spite of daunting challenges. In spite of economic problems, corruption in many realms, ethnic rivalry and religious strifes, something called the “Nigerian Spirit” has evolved within a century of amalgamation (1914-2014). Nigerians see themselves as the giant of Africa and they try to behave true to type, moving up aggressively, resiliently and forcefully in competition with the advanced countries of the globalized world.

Nigerian Muslims constitute 50% of the entire population-according to the CIA Fact book even though Muslims believe strongly that they are more than that.

Jihad is a word which the West and non-Muslims in general do not want to hear. Yet it simply means “a struggle in self-defence, a struggle to resist oppression, transgression and rebellion”. It also means a struggle to establish a regime of truth, progress and general welfare. (IbnManzur, n.d., 520-521, Glasse, 2005, 240-241). To some extent, it is the equivalent of the Christian Crusade and Socialist Aluta Continua (the struggle continues). It must be stressed that in fact some Muslim extremists for certain questionable reasons, have abused the term “Jihad” terribly.

Corruption simply means “the process of corrupting or condition of being corrupt, dishonesty, impurity” (Robinson and Davidson 2004, 306). It is prevalent in varying degrees all over the world and numerous countries tend to water down corruption in their countries or even sweep it under the carpet. But in Nigeria, corruption is found in different realms but we do not cover it up. When some self-righteous nations refer to the enormity of corruption in Nigeria, they often forget that it is Nigerians themselves who often expose it through the mass media. They also forget that they practice it with Nigerians. After all, it takes two to tangle.

Muslims form a majority of the Nigerian population. Consequently, if Nigeria is righteous, benevolent and transparent, Muslims must have the lion share of the glory in view of what Islam teaches them. On the other hand, if Nigeria is terribly corrupt, it means that Nigerian Muslims are only paying lip-service to Islam while behaving most of the time like someone who had never had contact with the Qur'ān. The re-examination carried out in this study presupposes that many studies have been done in the past on the subject-matter.

2.0. Islam and its Philosophy

Having defined Islam in the preceding section, it should be borne in mind that Islam is much more than the declaration that Allah is one Universal God, Lord and Creator of all creatures and that Muhammad is His special servant and messenger sent by Him to guide humanity and *jinn* aright. Profession of Islam is exclusive and does not give room to imitating other ideologies that run counter to its philosophy.

One may now ask what that philosophy is. Islam stands for unwavering faith in Allah as the only God of all, the Omniscient, the Omnipotent, and the Omnibenevolent. Every Muslim must believe in the Articles of Faith in Islam and digest their implications for his or her life on earth and the Hereafter. The great implication of belief in the Day of Resurrection and Judgment, for instance, is accountability. A Muslim must remember every moment that he or she is accountable in this world and more importantly, in the Hereafter. (Oseni, 2008: 108-121).

3.0 Nigerian Muslims and their Characteristics

Nigeria is a very large country in West Africa and its population is currently about 177, 155, 754 (July, 2014 estimate). (CIA Factbook/ Nigeria).

Out of this, the Muslims constitute 50%, Christians 40% and others 10%. (Wikipedia, Nigeria). But Muslims believe that they are far more than 50% if we bear in mind that it is Muslims who practise polygamy and frequently marry two, three or four wives even if they do not have adequate means to cater for them and their children. This is not to hail Nigerian Muslims' polygamy which is sometimes practised irresponsibly; but the reality must be stated candidly.

Islam got to Nigeria over 12 centuries ago through the Trans-Saharan trade with North Africa (including the Nile Valley). It got to Borno and then gradually infiltrated into Hausaland, Nupeland, Borgu, Yoruba, Edo, Ebira and Igala areas. Oseni, (?) However, the first known traditional ruler to declare Islam as the state religion of his domain was Mai HulmeJilmi of Borno (1085): He granted special honours and privileges to his teacher, Shaykh Muhammad Mani and his descendants in perpetuity. The Shaykh was also the teacher of Mai Jilmi's three predecessors.

Two other major factors in the spread of Islam in Nigeria were the visits of Mandinka Islamic scholars to Hausaland, notably Katsina and Kano in the 15th century.

The second one is the reformist revolution of ShaykhUthmānibnFodiyo which changed the face of royal administration in most parts of Northern Nigeria and beyond. (Balogun, 1975, and Adeleye, 1971)

British Colonial Administration reduced many aspects of Islamic Law widely practised in Muslim areas and imposed British Law. After political independence, Nigerian government maintained the colonial stand of not allowing full implementation of Islamic law in Muslim areas until 1999 when some Northern states began to address the challenge squarely.

Islam is quite visible in all facets of life in Nigeria; so also are Christianity and Traditional Religion. Below are the major characteristics of Islam in Nigeria.

3.1. Prayerfulness

Nigerians are very prayerful and Muslims are in the forefront. The five canonical prayers (*Salat*) are glaring with the Muezzin's call to prayer, water ablution, the glorification of Allah (*Allah Akbar*), the Ramadan fast, pilgrimage to Makkah, etc.

Muslim prayers are efficacious. This is testified to on daily basis even by non-Muslims of various cadres. I am aware of the numerous special prayers used by Islamic scholars for the benefit of individuals, local communities and the nation at large. (Oseni, 2004 and Oseni, 2014 (a).

3.2. Spread of Islamic Terms

Through long interaction among Nigerians, certain Islamic terms are widespread and known to most people especially in Northern, South-Western and South-southern regions. Such terms include *Salat* (prayer, worship), *Zakat* (Alms giving), *hajj* (pilgrimage to Makkah), *Ad-du‘ā’* (prayer, supplication), *Yāsin* (Chapter 36 of the Qur’an used often in supplication), *Fātihah* (The Opening Chapter of the Qur’an), *Janāzah* (funeral prayer), *Ka‘abah* (the cube-shaped holy mosque in Makkah) and *Nikāh* (Wedding ceremony). Others are *barakah* or *al-barkah* (blessing), *as-salām‘alaykum* (Peace be upon you as a way of greeting), *Al-hamdulillah* (Praise be to Allah), *Ma‘asalam* (Go with peace or bye) and *Innālillah* (To Allah we belong-an exclamation on hearing of a calamity like death, fire outbreak etc). Such words have infiltrated into some of the local languages.

3.3. Magnificent Mosques

All over Nigeria, mosques are a major feature of the presence of Muslims. In point of fact, the size and elegance of a mosque in a community often indicates the size of the population of Muslims. One has to state that the various mosques of different sizes and beauty found all over Nigeria are the products of the local Muslim communities and their friends, including sometimes some non-Muslims.

3.4. Dressing

In Nigeria, Muslims often wear loose Kaftans and local trousers, *babanriga/agbada* or loose shirts (*buba*) and loose trousers often of the same material. Some youths wear T-shirts and trousers, suits which are not very common in mosques. Muslims often prefer white clothes all over the world and Nigeria is not much different. White clothes are more common in mosques and other Muslim gatherings than the use of other colours.

In Nigerian Muslim dressing, caps of various colours and designs are often worn. However, white caps are more common than others. Islamic scholars, chiefs (title-holders), and dignitaries often wear turbans to match their loose dresses. Some of them also wear colourful heavy gowns some of which look like academic gowns to match. This is common among traditional rulers and Chief Imams. It should be noted that non-Muslim traditional rulers, title-holders in Northern Nigeria often wear turbans and heavy loose gowns too.

3.5. Use of Rosaries

Nigerian Muslims glorify, magnify, thank and pray to Allah very often. They do this in thousands of times daily, using the popular Islamic rosary to count. Whenever they are less busy, they remember Allah, counting the numbers, using specific formulas and moving their lips or using their minds on end. Consequently, there are rosaries of various sizes all over Nigeria and Muslims buy them with relish.

3.6. Islamic Bookshops in Mosques

Literacy got to Nigeria over 12 centuries ago through Qur'anic and Islamic education. Up till today, there have always been bookshops of various sizes located in the frontages of mosques all over the country. Most of them are small but contain copies of the Qur'ān of various sizes and other elementary and advanced Islamic works. Some of the bookshops operate daily while most of them operate on Fridays only when large congregations attend the compulsory Friday Worship (*Salāt al-Jumu'ah*).

4.0. Jihad: Meanings, Types, Goals and Abuses

4.1: Meanings:

The word "Jihad" was briefly defined in 1.0. More details are given herein. As earlier stated, it simply means "a struggle" for a clearly defined goal. One may struggle to earn a living, to survive, to grab what does not belong to him, to oppress others, to cheat others and to pamper one's ego, to dominate others perpetually etc.

However, in Islam it means self-restraint, self-discipline, a struggle to uphold the truth, to support the less privileged and to suppress oppressors and other evil doers. On this, the Prophet Muhammad once said: "Whoever notices any odious thing should change it with his hand and if he cannot do so, he should use his tongue and if he cannot, he should use his heart and that is the weakest in faith". (Hadith No.34 Reported by Muslim and recorded in An-Nawani, n.d., 40-41).

4.2: Types of Jihad

Jihad can be classified broadly into two types: Jihad against oneself and Jihad against wicked, oppressive and corrupt people. The one against oneself is self-control, self-restraint and self-cautioning. It means a great deal because you cannot give what you do not have; that type of

Jihad makes one a disciplined, upright and well-behaved Muslim. Someone who has conquered the evils within himself such as miserliness, arrogance, oppression, envy, etc. can go further and physical might to stop the evils and corruption in his society.

The other type is Jihad against oppressors and corrupt people. After doing one's best to purify oneself of the fifth of corruption and other evil, one should then carry out Jihad against evil-doers and enemies of peace. One may ask how can such be carried out in a multi-religious and multicultural setting like Nigeria? The answer is in the Hadith already quoted above on the jihad of the hand, mouth and heart. Societies in the modern world are well organized into nations, states or regions and towns. For one person or group to organize a combat Jihad in a country like Nigeria would create numerous problems. It can only be carried out reasonably by the state but we know that modern governments hardly do a thorough job to curb evil, indecency and corruption or encourage justice, fairness, kindness and generosity to one's relations as taught in the Qur'an 16:90. Consequently, the reasonable option left to us is the intellectual and spiritual Jihad as well as ethical Jihad by corrupt practices and vocal criticism of the same evils. In other words, The Jihad of the tongue and heart should be resorted to.

4.3: Goal of Jihad

The goals of Jihad are the purification of oneself ethical armament if the community by exhortation and wise counseling, creation of an egalitarian society and consolidation of the worship of ALLAH without associating partners with Him in any form. The result of all these would hopefully be rapid progress and development of a faithful God-conscious and humane society of which all reasonable citizens will be proud.

There are many verses in the Qur'an on Jihad, i.e. war and peace and they are very clear though often quoted both by Muslims and non-Muslims out of context. There are verses on patience and tolerance while there are others on confronting evil-doers, polytheists' and unbelievers. Each of such verses has its own context that should not be ignored. For instance, when ALLAH said; "There is no compulsion in religion in Qur'an 2: 256, that does not mean that Muslims should fold their arms and allow their children to be converted to other religions!

Below are selected verses on Jihad and the context in which each was revealed must be noted.

1. And those who struggle for our sake, we will guide them to our paths (Of truth, rectitude and light); ALLAH is indeed always with the righteous fellows. (Qur'an 29: 69).
2. Permission is given to those being attacked because they are being wronged; ALLAH is definitely capable of helping them. (Qur'an 22:39).
3. And fight in the course of ALLAH those who fight you but do not transgress for ALLAH does not love transgressors. Kill them wherever you meet them and drive them out wherever they drive you out. Calamity is worse than killing but do not fight them in the Sacrosanct Mosque until they fight you therein if they fight you, kill them and that is the reward of unbelievers. (Qur'an 2: 190-191).
4. O Prophet, fight the unbelievers and hypocrites and be tough with them for their abode is hell-fire and what an evil end. (Qur'an 9: 73 and 66:9).

4.4: Abuses of Jihad

The term ‘‘Jihad’’ is abused by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Some Muslims over time have abused the term out of lack of proper understanding of the term, sometimes thinking they are fighting for God while in actual fact doing what God abhors. Some abuse the term out of greed for material wealth while pretending to be raising the words of Allah while in fact, they are desecrating the word of Allah and creating hatred and rancour. Examples of this are found in the history of Islam.

The other abuse of the term ‘‘Jihad’’ is by non-Muslims whose notion of it is that Muslims are aggressive and fight everybody to spread Islam. Such people do not care to know that Jihad means a struggle for the truth, liberation, and for the cause of Allah. Such people do not care if the world is rotten and leading to perdition as long as they get their daily bread. When such non-Muslims use the term ‘‘Crusade’’ they do feel that it is all right without caring to note what Christian Crusaders did in Palestine and Syria in middle Ages over which Muslims are bitter till today.

Yet, English-Speaking Muslims do not mind using ‘‘Crusade’’ to mean a struggle for what is good. But are Nigerian Christians ready to reciprocate by using ‘‘Jihad’’ for the same goal?

It is my candid opinion that Muslims and Christians toe the line of sanity and be more liberal towards one another without compromising their religious doctrines. They should bear in mind always that Islam and Christianity as well as other religions like Judaism, Hinduism, Taoism and Buddhism have come to stay whether one likes them or not. Let each group practice its faith with commitment while having some consideration for others.

5.0 Fighting Corruption in Nigeria by Muslims

Corruption is widespread in all communities of the world in varying degrees. But in Nigeria, the level of corruption is high as evidenced in the mass media reports within Nigeria and beyond (Oseni, 2011). One vital point has to be made, and that is- Nigerians are always ready to expose corruption wherever found while many communities the world over cover up theirs to a large extent.

In January 2011, major challenges confronting Nigeria on her march to self-realisation, progress and development were identified. These include hedonism, corruption, religion and ethnic crisis, insecurity, youth restiveness, amnesia and thoughtlessness, poor leadership and healthcare, and breaking laws. (Oseni, 2011:15-23)

Hedonism is the doctrine of placing priority on the pursuit of pleasure and merriment as the sole goal of life. It is closely related to corruption. This is because someone who believes only in enjoying life can do anything to make money and would not see anything bad in corrupt practices. Unfortunately, the philosophy of excessive merriment is embedded in African culture, and Nigerians are no exception. When you see Nigerians and other Africans during, winning and engaging in illicit amorous interaction, you would think that they do not have problems in life. Any occasion for merriment is exploited to the full and the people often behave as if there is no future to work for!

Corruption connotes immortality, dishonesty and lack of transparency in handling matters, especially by people in authority. It is widespread in Nigeria irrespective of ethnic group, social status, and religion. Sometimes when one sees a ‘religious’ person whether Muslims or Christians acting in corrupt manner, one begins to wonder whether the person had ever read digested any portion of the Quran or Bible! However this is not to say that all Nigerians are corrupt. Nigeria is a very large country and contains the good, the decent, the bad and the ugly. There are numerous unions of God-fearing, pious Muslims and Christians in Nigeria.

They are the many stay of the continuous existence, progress and advancement in the country. The problem is that the bad citizens of Nigeria whatever be their numbers perpetrate so much corruption that the world now wrongly feels that every Nigerian is corrupt.

While not in any way defending corruption I make hold to say that Nigerian professionals are making their positive mark in Europe, America, Asia, Oceania and within Africa itself. It is unfortunate to state that when Nigerians do well, the press would not spread the news the way it would if some Nigerian criminals misbehave. That is unfair.

From the Islamic viewpoint, Muslims should not be caught napping. Islam wants them to be above board always and show the way in faith in Allah and in decent human relations. (Qur'an 3:110). They should, therefore, apply Islamic principle of Jihad to conquer themselves and submit totally to Allah and make sure they are Muslims in every second and minute of their lives. Jihad is useless if it does not come from oneself.

Part of the application of Jihad in one's daily life is to practice the Golden Rule always. The rule means wishing for others what you wish for yourself. It is a universal philosophy of human interaction among Jews, Christians, Muslims and African Traditionalists. Unfortunately, a large section of humanity fails to apply the rule to their lives. (Oseni, 2003:184-194).

In the tradition of the Prophet, there is a popular saying reported by Bukhari & Muslim that one cannot be a faithful Muslim if he does not love for others what he loves for himself. (An-Nawawi, N.D., pp. 20-21). For more aspects of Islamic morality which is an integral part of laws, see Oseni, 1988, 6-11).

Muslims all over the world today do practice cultures that are anathema to Islam in imitation to others and this has moved them far away from the illumined part of Islam which is pleasant to Allah and beneficial to humanity. This is because Islam does not uphold the principle of "personal interest". Rather it is the path of Justice, benevolence and goodwill that must be followed by every Muslim. For instance, Qur'an instructs us as follows:

O you who believe, be upright for God, bearers of witness with justice. Let not the hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably. Act equitably for that is nearer to piety, and be careful of your duty to God, for God is aware of all that you do. (Qur'an 5:8).

6.0. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1. Conclusion

In the foregoing expose, the paper has drawn the attention of scholars to the essence and philosophy of Islam as a way of life meant to better the lots of individuals and communities. Islam does not believe in the widely popularized saying that religion is a personal affair which is the concern of a person about spirituality. As a way of life, Islam regulates the relationship between a Muslim and his Lord and Lord of the universe.

Secondly, Islam also regulates the relationship between a Muslim and his fellow human beings as well as the environment. Islam curbs human arrogance which makes man think that he has absolute freewill to do whatever he likes on earth without any notion of accountability to God and man.

On examining the characteristics of a large section of Nigerian Muslims, one notices that there is a heavy dose of Islamic paraphernalia in the society without internalization of the spirit of Islam. This is not peculiar to Nigeria alone. Rather, it is a worldwide phenomenon. But that does not make it correct. In other words, there is a wide gulf between Islam and a large section of Muslims in Nigeria.

It has to be emphasized that for Islam to have a great positive impact on Nigeria, Muslims have to practise Islam fully with unmitigated commitment. Part of that commitment is to be tolerant of other religions without compromising their Islamic practices, without allowing others to cheat them and without cheating others.

In the Glorious Qur'ān there are verses on war and peace, verses on religious tolerance and verses on waging war on those who challenge the existence of Islam and Muslims but with a proviso that Muslims must never transgress or oppress. Consequently, anyone who thinks Muslims would sit and allow themselves to be intimidated, harassed or cheated in Nigeria or elsewhere is kidding.

In the same vein, Muslims are not allowed by Islam to harass, intimidate or cheat others. Islam stands for justice, fair play, benevolence and moderation.

6.2. Recommendations

Based on the submission in the main body of this paper, the following recommendations are made for the digest of all stakeholders.

1. Nigerian Muslims should intensify their commitment to Islam as a faith and way of life.
2. Nigerian Muslims should intensify the study of Islam so as not to practise Islam in ignorance and imitate local and Christian cultures out of amnesia, laziness and lack of confidence.
3. Islamic symbols such as beard, turban, hijab for female Muslims and regular, canonical prayers (Salāt) should be maintained without disturbing others in any way.
4. On no account should Muslims in Nigeria succumb to blackmail, abuse or intimidation when practising Islam peacefully. However, in resisting others' intolerance, they should not take the law into their hand; but they should not be brow-beaten.
5. Since Jihad in Islam begins with self-control, self-restraint, Muslims should strive hard, regardless of whatever status they have, to shun corruption and encourage others to be upright too.
6. Muslims in Nigeria should reflect on the essence and philosophy of Islam and take what Islam accepts from their local cultures and reject others if they are really Muslims. This is because Islam does not accept syncretism in religious practices. It is either one is a Muslim or one is not.
7. Nigerian Muslims should bear in mind always that ours is a multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-linguistic society. They should, therefore, try to understand these features and respect others and tolerate areas where there are divergent views. This is because it is Allah Who would judge us all in the end.
8. Nigerian Muslims should uphold the Golden Rule and abide by it even if others refuse to do so out of insolence and haughtiness.
9. Nigerian Muslims should confidently allow the word of Allah on their being the best community ever raised to manifest in their public and private lives. Such superiority is based on their strong faith in Allah's oneness, maintenance of ethical decency in their daily lives and shunning evil, corruption and iniquity.
10. Wealthy Muslims should learn to pay Zakat regularly, offer Sadaqah to the poor and establish Endowment Funds (Awqāf) to reduce poverty in Nigeria and create wealth.

They should note that spending one's wealth (which must be clean) on the poor is imperative in Islam and Muslims who neglect it will be held accountable by Allah when they die and when their miserable souls will have no savior or intercessor.

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