# Jahiliyyah Between Leadership and Followership in Nigeria: Implications on National Development

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### **Abstract**

The cases of corruption in Nigeria are attributed to a number of factors. Between those who attribute the cause to leadership and those who are of the opinion that the followers are as culpable as the leadership, there is a need to interrogate this dichotomy. The challenge of leadership and followership has engendered a dilemma that have remained unresolved in spite of a countless ideology. With the aid of secondary source of information, the study examines the attitude of Nigerian citizens to leadership and followership challenge. The paper found out that, aside from other factors which promote corruption, there is a gap between the injunctions of Islam and Muslims practices, particularly as it relates to leadership and followership challenge in the polity. The paper offered some prophetic suggestions on how the problem may be ameliorated.

Keywords: Jahiliyyah, Leadership, Followership, Corruption, National Development.

### 1. Introduction

Jahilliyyah from the preventative of the Qur'an means a lifestyle that follows a line contrary to the line of Islam in nature and aim. The cases of corruption in Nigeria are attributed to a number of factors. Between those who attribute the cause to leadership and those who are of the opinion that the followers are as culpable as the leadership, there is a need to interrogate this dichotomy. The challenge of leadership and followership has engendered a dilemma that has remained unresolved in spite of a countless ideology. Hence, the study tends to examine the attitude of Nigerian citizens to leadership and followership challenge. Is leadership the cause of corruption? If this is so, what precipitate the status quo? What panacea does Islam offer for such? Is followership the instigator for corruption?" If this is a fact, what instigate such scenario? What recipe does Islam proffer to address such challenge? Is corruption a legacy bequeathed to Nigerian leaders by the colonial Master? The paper attempts to respond to these and other questions. To start with, however, we must give a conceptual clarification to some terms for more understanding of our study.

### 2. Conceptual Analysis

Jahilliyyah in the Encyclopedia of Arabic literature is a designation for the pre-Islamic period. As a religious term occurring four times in the Qur'an, it denotes a time span during which the belief in God has fallen into oblivion and which is ended<sup>i</sup> by the rise of a new Prophet R.A. Nicholson opine that Jahiliyyah denotes the barbarous practices, savage temper by which Arabia heathendom is distinguished from Islam<sup>ii</sup>. The term Jahiliyyah is derived from the word Jahila which denotes He is ignorant.<sup>iii</sup> K. Hitti cited the four places where the term Jahiliyyah can be found in the Qur'an. Q3:154, Q5:50, Q33:33, Q48:26.<sup>iv</sup>

This term was portrayed by Jafar *Ibn* Abi Talib the spokesman of the emigrant when the King of Abyssinia consulted the Muslim thus:

Jahiliyah people were we, worshipping idols, feeding on dead, animals, practicing immorality, deserting our families and violating the covenant terms of mutual protection with the strong among us devouring the weak."

The above assertion encapsulates the intended meaning of this paper relating to leadership and followership. It is in line with the submission of Sayyid Qutub that Jahiliyyah means the state of domination of human over human as embodied in Q5:50.

### 2.1 Leadership

In social discourse, there is no universal definition for leadership. Leadership is defined in different ways by several scholars. According to Otive Igbuzor, the most popular definition is that leadership is influence. That is, it is the process of providing guidance to followers. The importance of leadership cannot be over-emphasized and this made some scholars to submit that everything rises and falls with leadership. Vi This paper will succumb to the definition of Olagboye who stated that:

Leadership is a collective responsibility, in which the followership is also liable for its failure and commendable for its success. It is also a personal responsibility because it is a trust which must be returned and accounted for. vii

The above definition indicates that personal traits of a leader and the qualities of followership, when combined gives any group, the where-withal to develop its potentials, actualize its objectives, fulfils its aspirations and solve its problems. This concurs with the prophetic tradition thus:

"As you are, so are the leaders appointed (by God) over you". viii

The above Hadith is confirmations of the fact that, those who are our leaders are usually chosen among us and they are bound to reflect our cultures.

### 2.2 Followership

'According to the Word Book Dictionary' the term followership means the ability to follow or to be a follower. ix In the opinion of Sulaiman, where leadership is collective, with leadership and followership become relative terms because it is believed that it is the responsibility of all and sundry. x

### 2.3 National Development

The concept of development is also a concept that is devoid of a universally accepted definition as it is often conceived differently by different scholars. This view as corroborated by Richard cited by Salaudeen thus:

Some see it as basically economic growth, some see it as use of new technologies in political relations, it was seen as growth of rationally working bureaucracy and at cultural level, it is about the spread of literacy<sup>xi</sup> and progress of scientific research.

However, it will be enormous to opine that only economic development encapsulates the totality of development as development cannot be confined to a particular aspect of life. According to I.A. Seriki and A.A. Idowu, a survey of literatures dealing with the concept of development in Islam shows that the concept of development is rooted in the value pattern embodied in the Qur'an and Sunnah. By National Development, we mean, the plan, usually initiated by the government for the economic, cultural, educational and political development of a nation.

All these terminologies were clarified here to bring home our message in clarified terms, levels, medium grade and high grade levels. Factors responsible for preponderance of corruption in our society were enumerated by Amujir thus! Quest for flamboyant lifestyle, functionalist conception, political

instability, misplacement of our value system and bad leadership.\*\* Thus view was corroborated by Shishina when he submits that decadent leadership would produce a bankrupt followership and this is antithetical to development in our society.\*\* Eze quoted Achebe views that, the trouble with Nigeria is, simply and squelchy, a failure of leadership and there is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character, land and climate.\*\* Other scholars such as Shishina, who contends that the followership could be more, corrupt than the leadership because sometimes, the followership pushes leaders to corruption by introducing ways of corruption to leaders. He attributed this phenomenon as a common practice among the staff of Local Government Council in Nigeria.\*\* This view was buttressed by A.S. Sulayman when he asserted thus:

"If followership is good the leadership is bound to be good".xix

It behooves us to interrogate the dichotomy between the schools of thought who attribute the cause of corruption to leadership and those who opine that the followers are as culpable as the leadership. What are cogent reasons why leadership is the major causes? Why the dichotomy? Is leadership a contagious disease? Is followership blindfolded or brainwashed? Does that mean followership has no contribution to national development? Or followership is not accountable? All these questions and the likes are centered around the interpretation given to leadership and followership.

### 3. Causes of Corruption in Nigeria

There is no gainsaying in the fact that corruption is a cankerworm that has eaten deeply, into the fabric of the polity. To cure any disease, it is paramount to first of all diagnose and identify the nature and the causes of such disease. Corruption is a multidimensional concept whose nature cannot be limited to one aspect of life. This why Eze submitted that corruptions are in three levels namely low grade.

### 3.1 Leadership and *Jahiliyyah* among Muslims in Nigeria.

In this regard we shall examine the attitude of Muslims to leadership challenge in order to shed more light on the gap between the injunction of Islam and Muslims practices in the polity.

Islam is a religion of guidance which cater to provide guidance at all level for her adherent both leadership and followership in order to attain success. Leadership as far as Islam is concerned is all about service. This fact is embodied in the prophetic tradition thus:

The leader of a people is their servant. xx

One is therefore, a leader to the extent that one is able to serve and share one's own ideas with others and make them realize it. This suggests that leadership requires love and selfless service. We shall examine the list of leaders who have allegedly stolen public money in Nigeria as cited by I.L Akintola but released by the World Bank in 2005.

Start from pg 11

S/N	NAME	Amount Allegedly Stolen
1	Gen. Ibrahim Babangida (rtd)	5.25 bn British ponds. 7.41bn Swiss dollar
2	General Abubakar (rtd)	1.31bn British ponds. 2.33 Swiss dollars, 800m US dollars
3	Ismaila Gwarzo	1.03bn British pounds, 2.33 Swiss dollars. 1.3bn US dollars.
4	Umar Dikko	4.5bn British ponds 1.4bn Swiss dollars 700m US dollars
5	General Sanni Abacha	9.1bn British ponds. 4.09bn Swiss Dollars. 800m US dollars.
6	Mohammed Abacha	800m British Pounds 1.2b Swiss Dollars. 150.m US dollars
7	Abdul Kadir Abacha	700m British Ponds. 1.2bn Swiss Dollars, 900m US Dollars.
8	Alhaji Wada Nas	600m British Pounds
		1.32bn Swiss dollars

9	Major Al-Mustapha	600m British Pounds
		1.001bn Swiss dollars
10	Bashir Dalhatu	2.3b British pounds
		1.001bn Swiss Dollars
		1.61m US dollars
11	Hassan Adamu	800m British pounds
		200m Swiss Dollars
		700m US dollars

Source: List released by the World Bank in 2005. The list was reportedly sent to the former President of Nigeria Olusegun Obasanjo

The above table displays the rate of *Jahiliyyah* perpetrated by some Muslim leaders in Nigeria which adherent of other religions are not exempted. According to Akintola, out of the twenty-one names of looters on the World Bank list, eleven were Muslims, while ten wee Christians.<sup>xxi</sup> Public officers embezzle public funds without prosecution. Political godfatherism has permeated our body polity which resulted into intimidation and sometimes assassination. Funds that are supposed to be used for national development are used for political campaigns and bribery. All these help the citizenry in forming a picture of the leadership. Whereas they are expected to serve the people in the polity.

The Qur'an warns Muslims against accumulation of wealth as part of Jahiliyyah practices:

Woe unto every scander – monger and backbiter who piles up wealth thinking that his wealth would make him last forever... (Q104:1-4).

In another verse, the Qur'an prohibit that Muslims should avert illegal and unjust consumption of wealth belonging to others thus:

Do not consume your property among yourself for vanity neither should you use such as a bait for the judges in order to wrongfully and knowingly eat up other people's property. (Q2:1898).

Qur'an four verse 29-30 also warn the believers not to consume properties wrongfully. These verses imply that this is a purifying process of the society from the remnant of *Jahiliyyah* (pre-Islamic ignorant practices). Consuming money unjustly comprises all methods of exchanging money among the people in the modern day such as fraud, bribery, gambling *riba*, etc.

The prophetic tradition condemns fraudulent practices in general. It goes thus:

Any servant whom Allah entrusts with certain responsibilities and dies while being fraudulent to those under him, Allah will forbid him from entering paradise. xxii

In another tradition, the Prophet warns thus:

"Beware of injustice, surely, injustice shall be symbolized by darkness on the Day of Resurrection..." "xxiii"

If we reflect over the above verses and prophetic traditions, it is crystal clear that there is a gap between the injunction of Islam and Muslim practices, particularly as it relates to how leadership was practiced. This gap is the embodiment of *Jahiliyyah*. On the other hand, we need to examine the Qur'anic. Passages and prophet traditions on the role of followership in national development.

The caliber of Muslims listed above does not suggest that all the Muslim in the arena of politics is corrupted. In the anatal history of Nigeria, there are record of righteous Muslims whom their achievement spannes nearly all facet of human endeavor. Such as Sir Ahmad Bello in the old Western Region under the leadership of the Region from 1955 to 1959. General Muritala Muhammed has often be cited as representing disciplined orderly and responsible leadership with a clear vision of how to re-oriented the Nigerian's attitude generally. The six-month dispensation lasted is still being remembered with nostalgia by many Nigeria. His assassination brought Nigeria to one of the major factors that militated against the evolution and consolidation of responsible leadership culture in Nigeria. \*xxiv\*

### 3.2 Jahiliyyah in Nigeria and Followership

Public sector corruption unarguably remains one of the most latent forms of corruption in Nigeria, xxv this is while our major focus is directed toward it. Achebe categorically asserts that "Nigerian are what they are only because their leaders are not what they should be." xxvi

The above assertions and other reports have shown that both leadership and followership are involved in corrupt practices in Nigeria. To this effect, Former Governor of Central Bank, Sanusi Lamido. Sanusi submitted that the problem with Nigerian leadership effort to groom successors. xxvii

Bayo Afolabi buttresses this view as he interrogated thus:

...Is not the masses that encourage their rulers to steal public fund? Do we not regard our leaders as failures if they get to power and refuse to get wealthy quickly?<sup>xxviii</sup>

Osundary also substantiated the above interrogation when he asserted unequivocally:

It is followers that are used for rigging elections, when rulers steal money, it is they who go out to demonstrate for them. xxix

We can deduct from the above assertions that followership through their conducts and orientation has contributed to the leadership failure. According to Ajayi, this lends support to the saying that a people get the kind of leadership that it deserves.xxx

This popular saying had been espoused by our Noble Prophet Muhammed since 1443 years ago in the following prophetic tradition.

"As you are so are the people God enthrone on you".xxxi

This was in tandem with Alao's submission with posited that fellowship in Nigeria has been generally timid, compromising and easily susceptible to the bogey of sectional differences which had been used in the past to build up the myth of rivalry, animosity, hostility and suspicion against the Nigerian ethic groups. All such traits had been a contributing factors or catalyst for bad leadership. \*\*xxxii\*\*

Followership in Nigeria has not generated much debate. But there are resistance cases spearheaded by followers in the name of protest against poor governance. Blessing and Thom Otuya opined that Nigerian followers are very loyal and supportive to leadership in achieving national goals. It is poverty that led to their protein in order to checkmate the excesses of their leader. XXXIII We contend with such perspective and resistance as it is one of the *Jahiliyyah* practices which is against the teaching of Islam. Islam, as a complete way of life, has enjoined it adherent to exercise great patience when confronted with misdeed of leadership. While the followers should ask for the rights from their creator, the Prophet said:

On the authority of Abu Hurajra, the prophet said: One who defected from obedience of leadership and separated from the main body of the Muslims if he died in that State would die the death of Jahiliyyah (of one belonging to the days of Jahiliyyah). xxxiv

From the above prophetic tradition, we are not saying, that Islam does not grant every individual freedom of expression but it lays down ethics and etiquette of approach any abomination that emanate from any individual irrespective of his or her status. In another prophet tradition, the Prophet asserted: *Narrated by abu Said Al-Khudru* 

Whoever sees an abomination, he should correct it with his hand and if he can't, he should correct it with his tongue and if he can't he should correct it with his body language.

The above prophetic tradition enumerated three different methods of approach to correct a misdeed. These methods are designed for different levels of circumstance. It is crystal clear from the tradition that, the last method befit peoples who are above one's level that can't use hand neither tongue to correct them but through our feelings can observe our resistance.

A similitude trait of the *Jahiliyyah* trait that we are discussing is embodied in the end police brutality or EndSars event of October 20, 2020. The coordination of the protest is something that deserves the highest commendation with the unity of purpose displayed by Nigerian youths during the protests but it is disheartening as it didn't convey the broader demand of the protest which is about ending police brutality the *Jahiliyyah* trait from the follower hips include:

- (i) The decision of individuals who assumed leadership of the protests but they refuse to make themselves available for negation with the government even though there is trust deficiency in the part of the leadership.
- (ii) The followership protest had no exit strategy and this shows the protest leaders did not trust themselves.
- (iii) The lack of belief, trust and naiveté aborted all their protracted hardwork xxxvi.

The right to protest is a constitutional right within the purview of Section 38 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Due to the above *Jahiliyyah* traits, the protests were hijacked. Police champed down on the protesters. EndSars degenerated into organized attacks on the homes of politicians and the business interest of innocent persons.

In this regard, there are some salient questions anticipating quick response thus:

- (i) Where are Nigerian citizen a year later?
- (ii) Has anything changed?
- (iii) Has Government fulfilled her province of addressing the five demands?
- (iv) Have the police stop killing people indiscriminately? Or stop extorting the people?xxxvii

It is crystal clear that, after the EndSars protest, the *Jahiliyyah* trait of the police simply went a notch higher. Prophet Muhammad was reported to have warned the Ummah:

Narrated by Uzaifah Ibn Yaman: Do not be a people without a will of your own, saying if people treat us well, we will treat them well. And if they do wrong, we will do wrong: But accustom yourself to do good if people do good and do not behave unjustly if they do evil<sup>xxxviii</sup>.

The above prophetic tradition is in tandem to the popular saying:

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"Two wrongs never make a right"

### 4. Islamic Panacea to Leadership and Followership Problem in Nigeria

In Islam, leadership is quite sacrosanct that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) never relented in warning all leaders and aspirants to leadership about the delicate nature of ruling the people. In his farewell sermon in 631C.E, he reminded the Muslim Ummah that leadership is a great responsibility entrusted to an individual by the society as ordained by Allah. He also admonished the people on their responsibility to both the State and leadership as embodied in the following verses:

Oh you, who believe, Obey Allah, the Messenger (of Allah) and those charged with authority among you... 04:59

The above verse also State clearly that obedience to those charged with authority is conditioned by their own obedience to God in their deeds as well as the rule of law that governs them. It is our submission here that thinking of leadership in terms of those who are priviledged to govern the country alone can never solve the problem of bad leadership in Nigeria. Leadership does not start from the top. It is rather a matter of good home management and excellent upbringing of children. Femi Abbas likened leadership to a pyramid which has a base and apex. Whoever wants to assess leadership in a society must start from the base rather than the apex. This is why the following Yoruba adage is apt here:

"Amuku eru e wo

Oni oke le now

Ewo Isale".

### Meaning:

"A lame person was accused of his wrong arrangement of his load and he responds that, people focus on the top rather than the base".

This means that, it will be unreasonable to start sighting major fault at the wolf of a house when the foundation of the same house is evidently faulty. The fact that leadership in Islam is considered a trust and responsibility shows that leaders are required to meet their obligations to Allah as well as to discharge their duties toward their followers.

Failure in any of the aspects will be a total leadership and followership failure and both the leader as well as the followers will be held responsible. Meeting these duties will not only earn one the blessing of God but will also fulfill his duty toward his fellow beings be the leaders and followers.

To meet the leadership challenge both to one's Creator as well as to fellow human beings the flying, color, there are certain parameters which must be followed: The following qualities are being taught by Islam for the leaders to imbibe thus: These qualities were enumerated by M. Sanusi in his work titled sustaining democracy in Nigeria through Islam:

- (i) Faith and believe lay the foundation of greatness and success.
- (ii) To be righteous so as to act as good examples for their subjects.
- (iii) To have courage and determination in tackling problems.
- (iv) Justice and compassion in all their dealings.
- (v) Be lenient in governing followers.
- (vi) Accountable and Responsive.
- (vii) Engage stakeholders through dialogue.

(viii) Select qualified retinue. A ruler, no matter how well-qualified he is, cannot dispense with supporters who help how do his duties properly.

(ix) Provide social happiness. On the other hand, duties of the ruled include: obedience, support, advising the leaders, praying for them with guidance.

The following prophetic tradition is apt here as a recommendation for both *Jahiliyyah* trait among leadership and followership trends on Nigeria.

Narrated by An-Nu'man Ibn Bashry, the prophetic said: The example of the person abiding by Allah's orders and limit in comparison to the one who do wrong and violate Allah's limit and orders is like the example of people drawing lots for seats in a boat. Some of them got seats in the upper part while the others in the lower part, those in the lower part, have to pass by those in the upper one to get water, and that troubled the latter. One of them in the lower part took an axe and started making a hole in the bottom of the boat. The people of the upper part come and asked him, saying: What is wrong with you? He replied: You have been troubled much by my (coming up to you) and I have to get water. Now if they prevent him from doing that, they will destroy him and themselves.\*

The above prophetic traditions capture the trait of *Jahiliyyah* between leadership and followership challenge in Nigeria.

Develop and growth is mined rapid in society where citizen participant is encouraged. This is because citizen participant helps in scrutinizing government activities citizen have the opportunity to debate on policies before they are adopted into law.

### Islamic Anti-Corruption Strategies to Curb Corruption Practices and administration abuse of

- (1) Citizen participant on policy design and implemental
- (2) Making the adverse impact of corruption more visible.
- (3) Encouraging Transparency in Allocation and Spending.
- (4) Removal of impurity and punishment against corruption leaders.
- (5) Preventive measures future.

Example of Good leadership like Awolowo, Nnamidi, Mutual: The leadership, followership, and socio-political develop in post independent.

### 4.1 Leadership of Professor Isiak Olovede: A Case study

Oloyede and Jamb leadership is a metaphor for possible Nigeria. The Registrar of the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) made a "standing ovation" in praises within three years of his appointment as he distinguished himself in public service with a display of an exceptional leadership capacity, integrity and competence Professor Oloyde is an Islamic scholar was derided by some Nigerian as being unsuitable to JAMB, a critical examination body to attaining high education in Nigeria. Yet he debunks those who criticized his appointment and their erroneous view.

On the budget defence, he discloses a rare stride in Nigeria, when he remitted 3 billion Naira to federation account apart from another 2 billion naira, which the Federal Government has approved for their capital projects, all from their internally generated revenues of 2019 only. Furthermore, following his new appointment in October, 2016, he conducted, 2017 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) with a great shock, when he released in an unprecedented record of conducting the exams within few days with a declaration of surplus money in excess of 5.1 billion Naira from just an examination. That was 10,000% increase over what the same JAMB declared for previous seven years (2010 to 2016) the following year; he was reported to have remitted 7.1billion Naira to the federations account after conducting the 2017 UTME. His style of leadership has introduced varieties of innovations to curb and combat the menace of

cheating during exams. He faced system with sincerity. The aftermath of this meritorious contribution was met with reappointment from 1st August, 2021 for a second tenure of five years. He stands to be an embodiment of truth.

### 5.1 Findings

We can deduct from the foregoing that both leadership and followership are culpable of retrogression of any nation.

- There is a gap between Allah's injunction and Muslim's leaders' practices.
- We also found that leadership in Islam centered amount trust and Justice.
- It is an act of *Jahiliyyah* traits to reciprocate evil with evil in Islam.
- The trait of *Jahiliyyah* between leadership and followership had become the order of the day.
- We also discover that, positive change in national development lies between leadership and followership.

### 5.2 Recommendations

It is an enormous view to think that leadership start from the top. Rather, it begins from good home management and excellent upbringing of children. According to Femi Abbas, leadership is like a pyramid which has a base and an apex. Whoever wants to assess leadership in a society, must start from the base rather than the apex. He concluded by saying, it will be unreasonable to start sighting major faults at the root of a house while the foundation of the same house is evidently faulty. We therefore recommend thus:

- i. Nigerian's leaders should imbibe the spirit of leadership as a privilege rather than anybody's right.
- ii. They should handle it as a public trust which should not be betrayed at any circumstances.
- iii. They should approach it as responsibility to be carried out.
- iv. They should acknowledge the fact that, leadership is a covenant between God and rulers on one hand and rulers and the ruled on the other hand.
- v. Finally, leadership is about piety, conscience and discipline.

### 6. Conclusion

It is crystal clear from the foregoing that leadership and followership are very essential factors for national development. While it is also a major challenge to Nigeria as a nation. *Jahilliyyah* traits between leadership and followership in Nigeria had been highlighted in order to bring into lime light the gap between the injunction of Islam and Muslim *Jahiliyyah* practices. We have succeeded in interrogating the dichotomy between the views that attributed the cases of corruption in Nigeria to leadership or followership. The paper concluded that while leadership is a collective responsibility, but followership is also liable for its failure and commendable for its success.

It is a clear-cut fact what followership gives birth to leadership as embodied in the prophetic tradition:

As you are, so are the leaders appointed (by God) over you.<sup>xl</sup>

The paper recommends that every home should be refurbish and value system should be re-assessed for the Qur'an asserts thus:

Allah does not change a people lot unless they change the evil act in their hearts. (Q.)

The Qur'an and Hadith established the fact that both leadership and followership will be accountable for their conducts:

We shall question your leaders and you the followers. (Q7:3)

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