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BETWEEN TEXT AND PRACTICE: AN ASSESSMENT OF AL-FIDĀ' AMONG THE YORUBA MUSLIMS OF SOUTH WEST NIGERIA

Mubarak Ademola NOIBI, Ph.D.

Abstract

Studies have been conducted in the area of death and funerary rites in Islam. However, there is a dearth of research in the area of organizing al-fidā' programs among the Yoruba Muslims of South West Nigeria. Therefore, this paper attempts to fill the gap. The paper examines the local practice of al-fidā' in Yorubaland as against the background of the universally accepted orthodox Islamic teachings and practices on post-funerary duties of Muslims to the dead. It also traces the areas of likely influence of the African Traditional Religion on some Yoruba Muslims in the area of post-funerary rituals. Key-informant interviews were conducted with purposively selected Yoruba Islamic scholars. The study discovered that some Yoruba Muslims who engage in al-fidā' "ceremonies" may have deviated from the pristine Islamic tradition and unconsciously imitate the adherents of African Traditional Religion in the land.

Introduction

The Yoruba constitute one of the principal Negro nations of West Africa.¹ Specifically, they are found mainly in Nigeria's southwestern

¹. International Learning Systems Corporation Limited, (1968), The New Universal Library, London: The Caxton Publishing Company, Vol. 14, p.456.

states of Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Lagos, Ekiti, Osun, Kwara and Kogi. To some extent, some of them are also found in Dahomey in the Republic of Benin. Although there was a massive spread of Islam among the Yoruba beginning from the second decade of the nineteenth century owing to the emergence of Ilorin (now capital of Kwara state) as a frontier city for the *jihad* of 'Uthmān Dan Fodio, records indicate that the religion had been introduced to them at an earlier date.²

Death is a natural phenomenon and its inevitability usually necessitates post-mortem arrangements that are often guided by religious instructions. Islam, a religion with a considerable population in the Yorubaland, has its own funerary rites and post-funerary obligations which are derived from the Qur'ān, *Sunnah* (traditions of Prophet Muhammad [S]) and '*Ijmā'*' (consensus of opinion of Islamic scholars). These three primary sources of the *Sharī'ah* (Islamic law) are adequately exemplified by the *Salaf* (the first three exemplary generations of Muslims). However, there are times when one observes lack of total compliance with the teachings of Islam on this matter, owing to cultural influence. It is probably because of this that Lane was tempted to divide Islamic religious beliefs into those he considered as truly Islamic and those he regarded as somewhat superstitious³.

There are no discrepancies in the teachings of Islam. Thus, its practice ought to comply with its teachings. However, due to human error, its adherents sometimes deviate from these teachings. That notwithstanding, pristine Islam teachings are universal while deviations from it are often particularistic. Bowen gives credence to this assertion when he postulated that religious texts (*nuṣūṣ*) and their accompanying rituals are not compartmentalized by space

² I.A Ogunbiyi, (2003), "The Search for a Yoruba Orthography Since the 1840s: Obstacles to the Choice of Arabic Script", *Sudanic Africa*, Vol.14, p.79-80.

³ E.W. Lane, (1860), *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, p.222-246 in R Lukens-Bull, (1999), "Between Text and Practice: Consideration in the Anthropological Study of Islam", *Marburg Journal of Religion*, Vol.4, No.2, p.2.

as they transcend all spatial confinements. In other words, the teachings of religion, in this case, Islam, and its accompanying pristine practices are universally known and accepted, while deviations from its true teachings are often confined to particular areas. Hence, texts and rituals in Islam take the conscious Muslims outside their individual localities to the larger world in the sense that their beliefs and practices in a particular area ought to tally with those of other areas.⁴

It is probably based on these polemics about true Islamic teachings, on the one hand, and erroneous beliefs and practices on the other hand that Redfield divided religious beliefs and practices, including that of Islam, into two: "Great tradition" and "Little tradition"⁵. According to Lukens-Bull, great tradition is also known as high, textual, universal, or philosophical traditions while little tradition can also be termed low, popular or local traditions.⁶ The great tradition is the orthodox Islam characterized by a few thoughtful individuals with Islamic educational institutions and the mosque serving as the platform for training the religious elite. On the contrary, little tradition is characterized by triviality and lack of expected improvement owing to the ineptitude of the ordinary majority to have a sound and guided rumination on their faith⁷.

Previous studies have concentrated on funerary rites and their cultural interpretations. These include Abu Lughod who analyzes how orthodox and heterodox interpretations of Islam are constantly juxtaposed in infusing the deceased with the interpretation of the living⁸. Also, Lukens-Bull compares some Muslim practices against the Islamic position on such practices using an anthropological platform⁹. Lastly, Johnson investigates

⁴ J. R. Bowen, (1993), "Discursive Monotheism", *American Ethnologist*, Vol, 20, No. 1, p.185.

⁵ R. Redfield, (1956), *Peasant Society and Culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.70.

⁶ Lukens-Bull, (1999), "Between Text and Practice...", p 4. -

⁷ Redfield, (1956), *Peasant Society...*, p.70.

⁸ L. Abu-Lughod, (1993), "Islam and the Gendered Discourses of Death", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 25, pp. 187-205.

⁹ Lukens-Bull, (1999), "Between Text and Practice...", p. 1-20.

the trans-nationalization of the debate between local cultures and Islam through examining death and funeral rites among Mandinga in Guinea-Bissau and Portugal¹⁰. However, little seems to have been done on the great tradition and little tradition in post-internment funerary rites among Yoruba Muslims. Therefore, this study is meant to fill the vacuum by examining the practice through the prism of Islamic jurisprudence.

This paper is divided into seven sections. While this section introduces the paper, the second discusses the Islamic teachings regarding the condition of a person in the interstate between death and resurrection. This is followed by a discussion of the concept of *al-fidā'*. The fourth section deals with the fixing of days for marking *al-fidā'* while the next two sections examine the controversial issue of offering meals to guests and that of the recitation of the Qur'ān on the occasion respectively. The seventh section concludes the paper.

The interstate position (*Barzakh*)

A general interpretation of the teachings of Islam reveals that there are five stages in the history of human beings. The first of these stages is the period of primordial existence. The second is the period of conception in their mother's womb. The third is the period of existence in life from birth until death. The fourth period is between death and resurrection (*barzakh*). Finally, there is the eternal period following resurrection on the Day of Judgment. Islam teaches that once the soul is removed from the body it transforms into another world where it experiences certain conditions which are beyond the intellectual capability of the living. Of importance to this study are the conditions of the deceased in the state of *barzakh*.

One of the fundamental requirements of a Muslim is the belief in the hereafter, which includes the belief in the existence of

¹⁰ M.C. Johnson, (2009), "Death and the Left Hand: Islam, Gender, and "Proper" Mandinga Funerary Custom in Guinea- Bissau and Portugal", *African Studies Review*, Vol. 52, No.2, p. 93-117.

bliss and punishment in the state of *barzakh*. This is heralded by the return of the soul to the body of the deceased soon after internment and the questioning of it by two angels called Munkar and Nakīr. The questions that the deceased is asked at this stage are about who their Lord is, which book of guidance they followed in their lifetime, and who their guiding prophet was. A pious Muslim would be able to answer the questions by saying that their Lord is Allah, their guiding book was the Qur'ān, and their guiding prophet was Muhammad (S)¹¹. The ability to give correct answers to these questions is attributed to the grace and assistance of Allah as stated in the Qur'ān as follows.

Allah will establish in strength those who believe with the word that stands firm in this world and in the hereafter. But Allah will leave to stray those who do wrong. Allah does what He wills (Q14:27).¹²

Shaykh Al-Fawzān opines that the establishment and strengthening mentioned in the above *āyah* of the Qur'an is a monotheistic word thrown into the heart of a true Muslim, thus leading them to bliss. However, a non-conscientious Muslim would not be able to answer the questions but rather be full of hesitation, leading to their punishment. Allah, in the Qur'ān, explains the reality of bliss for the righteous (Q3:169-170, 36:26-27) as well as punishment for wrongdoers (Q40:45-46, 52:45-47) while in the state of *barzakh*. The Prophet (S) informed his Companions (*Ṣaḥābah*) and the generality of the Muslim community ('*Ummah*) that the grave is either a garden in Paradise (*rawḍah min riyāḍ al-Jannah*) or a pit in Hell-Fire (*Ḥufrah min ḥufar al-nār*),¹³ indicating

¹¹. S. Al-Fawzan, (1999), *Sharh al-Aqīdah al-Wāsimiyyah*, Al-Riyadh: Maktabah li Nashr wa Tawzī', p.133.

¹². Y.A. Ali, (1999), *The Holy Qur'ān, Translation and Commentary*, Birmingham: IPCI: Islamic vision, p.1571. This paper adopts Y.A.Ali's translation of the Qur'ān with some amendments where necessary.

¹³. Al-Fawzān, (1999), *Sharh al-Aqīdah*...., p.135.

the fact that there is bliss as well as punishment in the grave.

Punishment in *barzakh* is of two types: the perpetual punishment and the temporary punishment. While the non-believers are subjected to perpetual punishment, a Muslim's punishment is temporary as it stops as a result of supplication (*du'ā'*) and the seeking forgiveness (*'istighfār*) on their behalf by the Muslims. Charity (*Ṣadaqah*) is also capable of leading to the cessation of punishment in the state of *barzakh* if accepted by Allah.¹⁴ This leads us to the question of actions of the living that are beneficial to the dead in the *barzakh* and beyond.

The Concept of *al-Fidā'*

There is a consensus of opinion among the '*Ulamā'* (Islamic scholars) that *Du'ā'* and certain virtuous deeds performed by the living on behalf of the dead benefit the latter. This is substantiated with passages of the Qur'an, the *Sunnah* as well as the '*Ijmā'*. An example is given in the Qur'ān of how later emigrants at Madinah among the *Ṣaḥābah* (*Muhājirūn*) prayed for their predecessors. This example, though referring specifically to the *Muhājirūn*, has general application to all Muslims. This prayer can also apply to the living as well as the dead. The *āyah* containing this example reads:

And those who came after them say: "Our Lord! Forgive us and our brethren who came before us into the faith, and leave not in our hearts rancour (or sense of injury) against those who have believed. O Lord! You are indeed full of kindness; Most Merciful (Q59:10).

Similarly, in the Qur'ān, Allah asked the Prophet (S) to seek forgiveness of Allah on behalf of himself and the believers. Though this divine instruction was addressed to the Prophet (S), it

¹⁴ Al-Fawzān, (1999), *Sharḥ al-Aqīdah*..., pp.135-6.

is of a general application because Muslims are expected to follow his examples. The *āyah* in question is as follows:

Know, therefore, that there is no god but Allah, and ask forgiveness for your fault and for the men and women who believe. For Allah knows how you move about and how you dwell in your homes (Q47:19).

Prophet Muhammad (S) encouraged his *Ṣaḥābah* and Muslims in general to sincerely do *Du'ā'* and *'Istighfār* for the deceased. Following the interment of a Muslim, the Prophet (S) told his *Ṣaḥābah* to seek forgiveness for the deceased and beseech Allah to strengthen them at the time of their questioning by the angels. Specifically, the Prophet (S) was reported to have said: "Do *'Istighfār* for your brother and ask for his steadfastness as he is now being interrogated."¹⁵

Apart from *'Istighfār* and *Du'ā'*, another action that benefits the dead is *Ṣadaqah*. This could be in form of a perpetual one undertaken by them while alive or one offered on their behalf. The legal backing on this can be traced to the case of some *Ṣaḥābah* who the Prophet (S) had advised to offer *Ṣadaqah* on behalf of their dead ones upon their enquiry about the legitimacy of it from him.¹⁶ In Yorubaland, *'Istighfār*, *Du'ā'*, and *Ṣadaqah* for the deceased are given a unique generic name of *al-fidā'*, which is the verbal noun of the Arabic verb *fadā*, meaning to ransom. *Al-Fidā'* therefore means ransom.¹⁷ Both *fadā* and *al-fidā'* occur once in the Qur'ān respectively, while their derivatives (*Tafādā*, *Iftadā* and *Fidyah*) occur eleven times.¹⁸ *Fadā* is used in the

¹⁵. M.S. Abādī, (2001), *'Awn al-Ma'būd Sharh Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Cairo: Dar al-Hadīth, Vol. 6, p.132.

¹⁶. A. Al-Jazāiri, (1993), *Minhaj al-Muslim*, Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, p.406-407.

¹⁷. A. M. Umar, (1989), *Al-Mu'jam al-Arabī al-Asāsī*, p.n:ALESCO, p.922, and J. M. Cowan, (1976), *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, New York: Spoken Language Services, Inc., p.700.

¹⁸. M. F. Abdul-Bāqī, (1989), *Al-Mu'jam al-Mufahris li 'Alfadh al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, Cairo: Wazr al-Harīn, p.513-514.

Qur'ān to describe how Allah ransomed Prophet Ismā'īl (AS) with a sheep when his father, Prophet Ibrahim (AS) was about to slaughter him in response to a divine commandment (Q37:107). Similarly, *al-fidā'* is used in the Scripture with regard to ransoming prisoners of war (Q47:4). A point to note is that the usage of the two words (*fadā* and *al-fidā'*) is restricted to the ransoming of the living as against the Yoruba conception of it.

A story narrated in support of *al-fidā'*, and perhaps the adoption of the word in Yorubaland, has to do with the case of a man from among the second generation of Muslims (*Tābi'ī*) who consulted Abū Hurayrah, one of the *Ṣaḥābah*, on the fear of a mishap he nursed over his son, Zayd, who was on a journey by sea. Abū Hurayrah then advised the man to go home and give *Ṣadaqah* with whatever he could afford. Following that, the *Tābi'ī* gave as *Ṣadaqah* a goat and loaves of bread, with the intention of doing that as *al-fidā'* for Zayd. Having returned from his journey, Zayd informed his father of how he and others were saved from drowning on the high seas. He narrated that the ship they had boarded was sinking when suddenly some strange white-faced men in white clothes were noticed lifting it to the water level and keeping it afloat until it berthed safely. In addition, the strange men were heard saying, "The *fidā'* has been accepted". On investigation, the *Tābi'ī* discovered that the time he offered *Ṣadaqah* coincided with the time the ship carrying his son and other passengers were rescued from sinking.¹⁹ It should also be noted that the narration about *al-fidā'* given above is, like its application in the Qur'ān, also limited to the living.

Al-Fidā' in Yorubaland entails Muslims congregating in the home of the deceased or any other designated place, with the intention of offering '*Istighfār*, *Du'ā'*, *Ṣadaqah*, and recitation of the Qur'ān on behalf of the deceased, so that they might be ransomed from the punishment of the grave and beyond. It also

¹⁹ An Oral interview with Shaykh Abdul Ganiy Abubakari Agbotomokekere. Age: 80 years, *al-Mufti al-Āmm* of Ibadanland at Okekoto, Ojaaba Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, on Sunday, 8 January, 2012.

provides the opportunity of giving admonition to all present. Friends and family members who for some reasons could not attend the burial usually seize this opportunity to condole the bereaved.

Although many Muslims practice *al-fidā'* ceremony in Yorubaland, some others are averse to it. The latter group generally include those who adhere strictly to the prophetic tradition and the practice of the orthodox (*'Ahl Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*) on the one hand and the "Lanase" group, which is a minority group of traditional Yoruba *'Ulamā'* (Islamic scholars) on the other hand. While the *'Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* is in the forefront of condemning this practice as illegal, the Lanase group is unconditionally opposed to it. The group has gone beyond the *'Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* by claiming that neither *'Istighfār*, *Du'ā'*, *Ṣadaqah* nor recitation of the Qur'ān done on such occasions or any other time can benefit the dead. It is of the opinion that only the *Du'ā'* of the children of the deceased will benefit them. The group also holds that the reward on the virtuous deeds of the deceased's children will benefit them. On *Ṣadaqah*, the group holds that only the perpetual *Ṣadaqah* given by the deceased while alive would reach them. A challenge which the Lanase threw at their counterparts who support the idea of organizing *al-fidā'* ceremonies for the dead is that, if the practice is acceptable in Islam, why not organize same for the Prophet (S) just as his birth (*mawlid al-nabī*) is celebrated by many?²⁰

Periods of Marking *al-Fidā'* Ceremonies

Al-Fidā' ceremonies are usually marked on designated days. These include the third, eight or fortieth day after death had occurred. Although *'Istighfār*, *Du'ā'*, and *Ṣadaqah* for the deceased are permitted in Islam, classical and modern orthodox Islamic scholars have condemned the staging of funeral

²⁰ An Oral interview with Imam Qasim Atowuronola. Age: 60, khalifah, Lanase Movement, at Lanase house, Aremo Lanase, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, on Wednesday 11 January, 2012.

ceremonies (*ma'tam*) such as *al-fidā'* practiced in Yorubaland. Commenting on the non-permissibility of such a congregation, al-Tartūshī (d.1127) said:

Funeral ceremonies are forbidden by the consensus of opinion of scholars. Funeral ceremonies entailing gathering owing to a misfortune is a detestable innovation in religion having no (prophetic) narration in support of it. This also applies to the gatherings on the second, third, fourth, seventh, month or year (following death).²¹

The traditional '*Ulamā'* in Yorubaland have expressed different opinions on why *al-fidā'* ceremonies are done on the afore-mentioned days. All respondents opined that *al-fidā'* ceremonies can be done on any day. Meanwhile, a view was expressed that the dead visit their homes on Friday nights (between the dusk of Thursdays and the dawn of Fridays) in order to gather their own share of the leftover meals in the house.²² I have, on several occasions, heard some people say that they have to cook generously as the soul of deceased comes for its own share at the stated period. There is also the view that Muslim souls come around to pick the *Ṣadaqah* given on their behalf. This is responsible for the extant practice of serving worshippers who gather at the mosque for *Ṣalah al-Ṣubḥ* (dawn prayer) on Friday some light refreshments.²³

On the fixing of *al-fidā'* ceremony for the third day, three different views were expressed by the traditional '*Ulamā'*. The first opinion is that mourning for all categories of people ends on the third day except for the wife who mourns for four months and ten

²¹. A. Al-Bassām, (n.d), *Tawḍīḥ al-'Aḥkām min Bulūgh al-Maḥrām*, p.n: Maktabah al-Mustafah, Vol.3, p.198.

²². An Oral interview with Shaykh Busari Shuarau. Age: 86 years, Chief Imam of Ibadanland at the Ojaaba Central Mosque, Ojaaba, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, on Wednesday, 11 January, 2012.

²³. Oral interviews with Shaykh Shuarau,...

days in line with the dictates of Allah (Q2:234). Hence, the holding of the *al-fidā'* ceremony on the third day marks the end of mourning for the generality of the people.²⁴ The second view on this is that the deceased is usually inflated on the third day. Thus, the marking of that condition with the organization of *al-fidā'* becomes necessary.²⁵ The last view is that, according to some scholars, the questioning of the deceased in the grave stops on that day as it prepares to either receive bliss or punishment. Therefore, the third day is timely in ransoming the deceased from punishment. The Bamideles, a large group of traditional '*Ulamā'* and students apathetic to modernization and western civilization, have a tradition of holding their *al-fidā'* on the third day only.²⁶

Similarly, a cross-section of the Yoruba African Traditional Religion (ATR) worshipers celebrates the death of their beloved ones on the third day. During this occasion, a ritual of sacrificing a goat is done for the deceased while the living is treated to a grand reception.²⁷ Idowu (1973) has added that their failure to comply with funerary rites in ATR excludes the spirit of the deceased from the ancestral world.²⁸ Sangokunbi, a priest, suggests that the Yoruba Muslims may have in the process of carrying out *al-fidā'* ceremonies borrowed certain elements from the rituals of the Yoruba ATR.²⁹

24. Oral interviews with Shaykh Shuarau, ... and Asimiyu Abdul Azeez. Age: 47, Oyo State. Imam, National Council of Muslim Youth Organizations (NACOMYO), at Sunnah Mosque, Sanyo, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, on Saturday, 7 January, 2012.

25. An Oral interview with Shaykh Tirmidhi. Age: 48, Chief Imam, Ikolaba Central Mosque, at Ikolaba Central Mosque, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, on Friday, 13 January, 2012.

26. An Oral interview with Shaykh Ahmad Abdul-Salam. Age: 55, Khalifah, Bamidele Movement, at Bamidele House, Amunigun, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, on Wednesday, 11 January, 2012.

27. An Oral interview with Priest Sangokunbi. Age: 44, Priest of the Sango Deity and the *Onomogba Onisango* of Ibadanland at Akuru House, Agbeni, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, on Wednesday, 11 January, 2012.

28. E. B. Idowu, (1973), *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, n.p: Fountain Publication, p.55.

29. An Oral interview with Priest Sangokunbi...

The traditional Yoruba '*Ulamā*' are also divided into three groups in their beliefs concerning the significance of the eighth day in the celebration of *al-fidā'*. One opinion is that what applies to childbirth applies to death. This school of thought refers to the *aqīqah* (naming ceremony) that usually takes place on the eighth day owing to their interpretation of the prophetic saying on it. Therefore, the school deems it fit to celebrate the eighth day of transition by organizing *al-fidā'* ceremonies just as the eighth day of birth is celebrated in form of *al-aqīqah*.³⁰ Another opinion is that by the eighth day, the deceased would start discharging fluid due its putrefaction. Hence, the day is marked through organizing *al-fidā'* ceremony.³¹ The last of the opinions is that the questioning of the dead ends on the seventh day, necessitating the intervention of fellow Muslims to intercede on their behalf so that they would not be punished.³²

The adherents of ATR celebrate the transition of a fellow on the seventh day with generous offer of meals and drinks for the entertainment of guests.³³ In addition, some of them carve a statue representing the deceased and also dress it with their attire. While the wife of the deceased is kept in-doors, if the deceased was a male, relatives and friends dance round the village chanting songs believed to keep the soul of the deceased away from disturbing family members and friends. This is done in the midst of assorted meals generously prepared for guests to relish. The procession ends at the grave of the deceased, where the cloths and other belongings of the deceased are dumped.³⁴ As an alternative, one of the children of the deceased with semblance with them is made to put on the cloth of the deceased instead of

30. Oral interviews with Shaykh Shuarau...

31. An Oral interview with Shaykh Tirmidhi...

32. An Oral interview with Shaykh Abdul Salam...

33. An Oral interview with Priest Sangokunbi...

34. An Oral interviews with Shaykh Tirmidhi Oyetola, Age: 50, Chief Imam, Alegongo Central Mosque, at Alegongo Central Mosque, Akala-way, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria, on Friday, 20 January, 2012.

wearing it on the statue. This human surrogate is thereafter paraded round the town, after which the statue is interred.³⁵

The last of the days commonly fixed for *al-fidā'* is the fortieth day after the occurrence of death. Two views are prominent on this among the traditional Yoruba '*Ulamā*'. The first view is that on the fortieth day, the already inflated body of the deceased bursts, thus marking the incident with *al-fidā'* ceremony is commendable³⁶. The second view is related to child birth. This view has it that following the birth of a child, an invisible grave is dug for the mother in anticipation that she may die in the aftermath of the childbirth. If she eventually lives for forty days after the childbirth, the invisible grave will be covered, thereby ensuring the chances of her living. Therefore, just as the fortieth day is significant to the mother after childbirth, the same number of days is imagined to be significant to the dead, necessitating the organization of *al-fidā'* ceremony.³⁷ According to Idowu, the adherents of the ATR believe that the dead partakes in the fortieth day feast at the funeral ceremony. It is after being satisfied with the delicacies provided that the deceased gets fully prepared for their stressful final journey. This journey entails crossing a river with the assistance of a ferry man whom they would have to pay, climbing a mountain and later having a gate opened for them.³⁸

Offering of Meals to Guests at *al-fidā'* Ceremonies

Muslims have responsibilities towards their neighbours, friends and relatives. The scope of this relationship covers the care of the family of a deceased person. This care includes offering condolences as well as meals to them. This practice is in line with the spirit of Islam that urges Muslims to help one another at the time of need. It all started when the Prophet (S) paid a condolence

³⁵. B. Lawal, (1977), *The Living Dead: Art and Immortality among the Yoruba of Nigeria*, *Africa Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol.47, No. 1, p.52.

³⁶. An Oral interview with Shaykh Tirmidhi...

³⁷. An Oral interview with Shaykh Shurau ...

³⁸. E.B. Idowu, (1962) *Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief*, Ikeja: Longmans Nigeria Limited, p.211.

visit to the family of his cousin, Ja'far bin Abī Tālib, who had fallen in the Battle of Mu'tah while in active service of the Islamic state. The aftermath of the condolence was the Prophet's (S) instruction that the bereaved family be provided with meals as they were grieved and preoccupied with the shock of losing their loved one and bread winner. As usual, this instruction was carried out by the *Sahābah*.³⁹ Specifically, the Prophet's (S) order was: "Prepare meal for Ja'far's households, verily something has occurred to them which disturbs them"⁴⁰.

Islamic jurists have suggested that the preparation of food for the family of the deceased should be for only three (3) days. However, the practice of the deceased family offering meals to guests is not traceable to any authentic prophetic tradition and the practices of the *Salaf*. Besides, the practice does not only look unprecedented in Islamic tradition, but it may also be seen as squandering of resources. Furthermore, the practice places burden on the heirs of the deceased who provide the required resources for the ceremony, thus constituting oppression, especially if there are weak and young ones among them⁴¹. Some scholars opine that an exception to this general rule is the offering of meals to visitors who have come from distant places to condole the family and would necessarily pass the night with them⁴².

However, a Malikī scholar, Al-Kashāwī, while expressing his opinion on the issue, postulates that meals prepared by the relatives, friends and neighbours of the deceased can be served to those who converge to either offer *Du'ā'* or read the Qur'ān for the benefit of the deceased. In addition, he states that if the deceased had willed a certain amount of money for carrying out the task, it would be necessary for the heirs to execute such a will⁴³. Good as this argument may seem, it is rather a conjecture

³⁹. W. Al-Zuhaylī, (1997), *Al-Fiqh al-Islamī wa 'Adillatuh*, Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, vol.2, p.1578 and Al-Bassām, (n.d), *Tawḍīḥ al-'Aḥkām...*, Vol.3, p.198.

⁴⁰. MAI-Qazwīnī, (1995), Sunan Ibn Mājah, Vol.1, p. 503.

⁴¹. Al-Bassam, (n.d), *Tawḍīḥ al-'Aḥkām...*, Vol.3, p.198.

⁴². Albn Quddāmah, (1999), Al-Mughnī, Riyadh: Dar 'Ālam al-kutub, vol.3, p.497.

⁴³. A. Al-Kashāwī, (2005), *Ashal al-Madārik: Sharḥ Irshād al-Sālik fī Fiqh 'Imām'Aimma*, Beirut: Dar al Fikr, Vol.1, p.364.

and personal opinion devoid of basic textual evidences. It may therefore be set aside in the face of comparatively sound arguments to the contrary.

The practice of entertaining those who converge at the residence of the dead had been in the vogue prior to the mission of the Prophet (S). Islam warns against preparing meals for visitors who converge at the deceased's residence as it is considered under the broad concept of wailing (*al-Niyāḥah*). For instance, 'Umar bin Khaṭṭāb, the second *Khalīfah* (successor of the Prophet [S]) once visited Jarīr bin 'Abdullah al-Bajalī during which he asked the latter whether his people wailed over the death of the deceased. On getting a negative response, he further inquired whether the people were in the habit of gathering at the home of the deceased. This time 'Umar got an affirmative answer, after which he referred to the habit as *al-Niyāḥah*.⁴⁴ Al-Bajalī later commented that the practice of gathering together at the residence of the deceased and feasting there was a practice of the *Jahiliyyah* (period of ignorance), which is categorized in Islam as *al-Niyāḥah*.⁴⁵

The Prophet (S) has cursed one who wails and one who listens to it or encourages it. The prophetic tradition that expresses the Prophet's (S) disapproval and curse states that: "The Messenger of Allah (S) cursed the wailer and the listener (to it)"⁴⁶. The tone of the Prophet (S) in this prohibition suggests that wailing over the death of a person is a grievous sin. It is also considered detrimental to the deceased as they may be punished for it since another tradition of the Prophet (S) states that: "The deceased is punished in their grave due to the wailing over it"⁴⁷.

The Companions of the Prophet (S) and other scholars were sharply divided on the interpretation of the above-stated tradition.

⁴⁴ Ibn Quddāmah, (1999), *Al-Mughnī*,..., Vol.3, p.497.

⁴⁵ Al-Bassām, (n.d), *Tawḍīḥ al-'Aḥkām*..., Vol.3, p.198.

⁴⁶ Ābādī, (2001), *'Awn al-Ma'būd Sharḥ Sunan*..., Vol.6, p.37.

⁴⁷ M. Al-Bukhārī, (2001), *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, n.p: Dār al-Manār, Vol. 1, p.298 and M Al-Qashayrī, (n.d), *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Muslim*, Cairo: Maktabah al-'Imān bi al-Manṣūrah, p. 421.

While some were of the view that this normally elicits punishment, others were of the opinion that the punishment would only apply if the deceased had made a will or at least foretold that such unacceptable post-funerary ceremonies be organized for them after their demise. However, the deceased are prone to punishment for dereliction of duty in terms of failing to educate their family members against organizing such post-funerary ceremonies⁴⁸. An overwhelming majority of the leading scholars of Islam are of the view that offering of meal to guests by family of the deceased is a detestable act⁴⁹.

The celebrated scholar of Islam, Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah (d.1328), has described the practice of gathering together in the name of benefitting the deceased in any way necessitating the serving of meals to guests by the bereaved family as unfounded in Islam. He stated that the practice is not in line with that of the *Salaf* who have been described by the Prophet (S) as the best generation of Muslims and from whom later generations of Muslims learnt about their religion. He stated further that a good number of the '*Ulamā'* have advanced various arguments against the practice as it is regarded as a form of *al-Niyāḥah*. This highly revered scholar said:

The gathering of people around the bereaved to feast on their meal and recite (the Qur'ān or other litanies) on their (the deceased) behalf was not known to the *Salaf*. A cross-section of the Islamic scholars, through different means, expressed its displeasure over it just as the *Salaf* consider it as an act of *al-Niyāḥah*⁵⁰.

Regarding the opinion of traditional Yoruba '*Ulamā'* on this issue, a view is that the meals served to the guests by the relatives

48. K. Sālim, (n.d), *Ṣaḥīḥ Fiqh Sunnah wa 'Adillah fī Tawḍīḥu Madhab 'Aimmah*, p.n: Maktabah al-Tawfīqah, Vol.1, p.615.

49. Ibn Quddāmāh, (1999), *Al-Mughnī*..., Vol.3, p.497.

50. Al-Bassām, (n.d), *Tawḍīḥ al-'Aḥkām*..., Vol.3, p.198-199.

of the deceased during *al-fidā'* ceremonies can be regarded as *Ṣadaqah* for the deceased⁵¹. Moreover, the funds utilized in preparing this feast must be taken from the estate of the deceased⁵². Conversely, an opinion is that such meals should ordinarily not be consumed by Muslims but an exemption can be made of travelers who would depart for their various destinations after the ceremony⁵³. However, there is a remark that the first generation of '*Ulamā'* in Yorubaland had the opportunity of stopping the endemic practice but did not do so, thus making it difficult or almost impossible now to eradicate in Yorubaland⁵⁴. To further justify the offering of delicacies at *al-fidā'* ceremonies, some of the respondents claimed that the instruction given by the Prophet (S) in the case of Ja'far could be because he died at a tender age⁵⁵ or because he was related to the Prophet (S) considering the fact that similar instructions were not passed by him in respect of other fallen heroes⁵⁶.

Moreover, a view was expressed that the instruction to prepare meals for Ja'far's family was in the context of grief they felt, which was capable of interfering with the daily routines of life. Therefore, if grief does not interfere with the daily routines of life and the heirs can afford to entertain guests, then there is nothing wrong in doing so.⁵⁷ I have explained earlier that the adherents of ATR in Yorubaland are given to generous funeral ceremonies. The generous offering of meals to guests is embedded in their funerary rituals. Sangokunle has suggested that this practice of feasting during funeral ceremonies in ATR may have influenced Muslims in Yorubaland as both groups share certain elements in common in that respect⁵⁸.

51. Oral interviews with Shaykh Oyetola, Shaykh Shuarau, Shaykh Tirmidhi and Shaykh Oyetola...

52. An Oral interview with Shaykh Shuarau...

53. An Oral interview with Shaykh AbdulAzeez...

54. An Oral interview with Shaykh Tirmidhi...

55. An Oral interview with Shaykh Oyetola...

56. Oral interviews with Shaykh Shuarau and Shaykh Tirmidhi...

57. An Oral interview with Shaykh Abd Salam...

58. An Oral interview with priest Sangokunle...

Recitation of the Qur'ān at *al-Fidā'* Ceremonies

As stated earlier, one of the features of *al-fidā'* ceremony in Yorubaland is congregational recitation of the Qur'ān, believed to be to the benefit of the deceased. Whereas scholars are agreed that some actions can benefit the dead, as discussed earlier, they disagree on whether certain devotional activities not expressly sanctioned by the Prophet (S) can benefit the deceased. In the category of these devotional activities in contention falls the recitation of the Qur'ān. The antagonists of the view that the rewards for the recitation of the Qur'ān reach the dead include the early Shāfi' and Malikī scholars⁵⁹. They support their claim with the *āyah* of the Qur'ān that states: "No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another, and no person can have anything except what they strive for" (Q53:39).

Thus, while commenting on the above *āyāt*, Ibn Kathīr (d.1373) explains that no one would be made to shoulder the burden of another person's sins, and that no benefit due to some persons for their deeds would be credited to the accounts of others. It was from this that Imām Shāfi' deduced the conclusion that the recitation of the Qur'ān by the living does not benefit the dead. Imām Shāfi' argues further that the Prophet (S) never mentioned the recitation of the Qur'ān as benefiting the dead.⁶⁰ He corroborates his position on the issue by making reference to the following saying of the Prophet (S):

When a person dies, no further reward is recorded for their actions, except in three areas: perpetual *Ṣadaqah*, beneficial knowledge and the supplication of their righteous children⁶¹.

Shaykh Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d.1350) and Shaykh Muhammad Naṣruddīn al-Bānī (d.1999) consider the recitation of the Qur'ān either at home and in any form on behalf of the

⁵⁹. Al-Zuhaylī, (1997), *Al-Fiqh al-Islamī...*, Vol.2, p.1580-1581.

⁶⁰. Ibn Kathīr, (1997), *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, Vol.1, p. 284.

⁶¹. M. Al-Qushayrī, n.d. *Sahih Muslim*. Maktabah al-'Imān bi al-Mansūrah, p.814.

deceased as practicing a detestable act and an innovation in religion⁶². However, the Hanābilah, Hanafiyyah and later Shāfi's Schools consider the rewards for the recitation of the Qur'ān beneficial to the deceased. This they claim is so since a Companion of the Prophet (S) had cured a scorpion bite with the recitation of *Surah al-Fātiḥah* (opening chapter of the Qur'ān) without being pre-informed by the Prophet (S) of it being a cure. They assert that if this was beneficial to the living, it is also beneficial to the dead. Besides, Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal, the founder of the Hanābilah School, was of the opinion that every wholesome deed dedicated to the dead reaches them. He supported this view with the argument that the practice of Muslims gathering in different places and dedicating their recitation of the Qur'ān to the dead ones has become an *'Ijmā'* and so is acceptable under the *Shar'ah*. Hence, some scholars see the congregational recitation of the Qur'ān on behalf of the deceased as commendable⁶³.

Nevertheless, Shaykh al-Jazāirī (1993) is of the view that individuals, and not in congregation, could read the Qur'ān at their various homes or at mosques after which they seek the forgiveness and mercy of Allah on the deceased. Here, recitation of the Qur'ān is used as a means of seeking the nearness and the pleasure of Allah (*tawassul*)⁶⁴. Moreover, a condition stipulated for the acceptance of such a recitation is that participants must not receive any pecuniary reward for their efforts as some scholars consider receiving payments for reciting the Qur'ān for the benefit of the dead as *ḥarām* (forbidden).⁶⁵ Shaykh al-Jazāirī (1993) considers reciting the Qur'ān in congregation and receiving rewards of any kind for doing so as *al-bid'ah al-munkarah* (abominable innovation) respectively⁶⁶.

⁶² Al-Albani (1986), *Aḥkām al-Janāiz wa Bidā'uha*, Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islamī, p.191, and Al-Jawziyyah, (1998) *Zād al-Mi'ād*, p.n: Dar al-Manār, Vol.1, p. 221.

⁶³ Al-Zuhaylī, (1997), *Al-Fiqh al-Islamī*..., Vol.3, p.1581.

⁶⁴ Al-Jazairi, (2001), *Minhaj*..., p.407.

⁶⁵ S. Sabiq, (1995), *Fiqh as-Sunnah*, Beirut: Dar-al-Fikr, Vol.1, p. 418.

⁶⁶ Al-Jazairi, (2001), *Minhaj*..., p.407.

All the traditional Yoruba '*Ulamā*' interviewed were of the opinion that the reading of the Qur'ān on behalf of the deceased benefits them. They also agree that *al-fidā'* ceremonies should entail recitation of portions or the whole of the Qur'ān in congregation with active participants receiving some monetary rewards for their efforts. A majority of the Muslim respondents are of the opinion that the fees paid to the active participants in the recitation of the Qur'ān serve as *Ṣadaqah* to the benefit of the dead. However, a minority opinion is that the fees paid to them for reciting the Qur'ān cannot be regarded as *Ṣadaqah* but a fee for service rendered⁶⁷. It is known that most participants in the recitation of the Qur'ān at *al-fidā'* ceremonies receive monetary reward and free meal for their service. There are instances when some of the active participants in the recitation of the Qur'ān solicit for their monetary rewards without a sense of decorum. This may be due to poverty or lack of a proper understanding of the implication of such actions. These rewards seem to be in contrast to the advice of the Prophet (S) encouraging Muslims to be sincere in their *Du'ā'* for the deceased⁶⁸. The question may then be asked as to where lies sincerity if pecuniary gains are the focus when the '*Ulamā*' offer *Du'ā'* for the deceased.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the relationship between textual instructions and the actual practice of Yoruba Muslims regarding group devotional ceremonies for the ransom of the deceased otherwise called *al-fidā'*. Although the word *al-fidā'* appears in the Qur'ān, its application is to the living and not to the dead. The application of *al-fidā'* to the dead is therefore a unique interpretation of the Yoruba '*Ulamā*'. The practice of *al-fidā'* ceremony entails congregating at the home of the deceased on a designated day, usually the third, eight or the fortieth day, to seek

⁶⁷. An Oral interview with Shaykh AbdulAzeez...

⁶⁸. Ābādī, (2001), '*Awn al-Ma'būd Sharḥ Sunan...*, Vol.6, p.96

Allah's forgiveness and mercy for the dead. The programme usually features the dedication of the rewards for the recitation of the Qur'ān to the dead and generous entertainment of guests. All these happen at the expense of the close relatives of the deceased. A careful study of textual instructions shows clearly that these actions are a deviation from the *Sunnah*.

Accordingly, several classical scholars and notable modern scholars have condemned congregating at the home of the deceased or at any other place for the purpose of benefiting the dead with supplications and some other acts. There is also the issue of feasting at *al-fidā'* programmes. This was condemned by the Prophet (S) and the *Salaf* as belonging to the *Jahiliyyah*. Some adherents of the ATR in Yorubaland also view it as a culture borrowed from them by the Yoruba Muslims. Classical scholars are divided on the recitation of the Qur'ān on behalf of the dead and to their benefit. However, even those who endorse the practice are strongly opposed to the active participants in it receiving any form of reward for their efforts. The '*Ulamā'* who partake in the recitation of the Qur'ān on such occasions often collect cash rewards as an appreciation of their participation at the programme. These practices show the gap between textual instructions and actual practice among the Yoruba Muslims of South West Nigeria on the issue of post-funerary rites.