

THE YORÙBÁ MUSLIMS' CULTURAL IDENTITY QUESTION

Muhib O. Opeloye
Department of Religious Studies,
Obafemi Awolowo University,
Ife-Ife, Nigeria.
mopeloye@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study seeks to examine what way of life distinctively defines who a Yoruba Muslim is. Is he one whose practice of Islam separates him from Yoruba cultural practices, or one whose Islam accommodates elements of indigenous tradition? Taking cognizance of the attitude of Islam to non-Islamic culture, this study aims at examining the role of indigenous culture in the formation of the Yoruba Muslim identity. Apart from the introductory section, the study is divided into four parts. The first examines cultural compatibility and harmony of identity traditions focusing on the institution of marriage. The second section deals with syncretic practices and the dilemma of the Yoruba Muslim in cultural identity formation. The third part examines inculturation of Islam among the Yorubas while the fourth part treats Islamic identity signifiers and Yoruba Muslim. The study concludes by stressing the need for correlates between the Islamic identity maker and the Yoruba Muslim behavioural pattern.

Introduction

The Yorùbá estimated to be about 28 million people according to the 2006 census unquestionably constitute one of the major Nigerian ethnic nationalities among whom Islam receives wide acceptance.¹ They live in the country's southwest states of Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo as well as the north central states of Kogi and Kwara. Outside Nigeria, the Yorùbá are found in Benin and Togo Republics. All these areas formed what was known as Yoruba country before the European partition of Africa and consequently, its rule European. Beyond these areas, pockets of Yorùbá population are found across the Atlantic as far as the Caribbean and South America, particularly Cuba and Brazil.² The Yorùbá had their earliest contact with Islam through the itinerant Arab

Muslim scholars who visited the Yorùbá country in the 15th century. However, dominant Islamic influence was not recorded until the Hausa-Fulani penetrated the region from the second half of the 18th century.³

The adoption of Islam, for some Yorùbá as early as 14th century, constituted the acquisition of an additional way of life, while for others it was an alternative religion. With the advent of Christianity in the early 19th century, Western education was introduced to the Yorùbá. The association of Christianity with this education caused it to be viewed with a lot of suspicion. The Muslims who eventually imbibed Western education imbibed with it the western culture. As such, a typical Yorùbá Western educated Muslim has multiple identities by being traditional Yorùbá, Islamic and Western. This is related to what Professor Ali Mazrui refers to as the Triple Heritage in his famous television documentary on “The Africans”. The multiple identities are bound to result in the problem of cultural identity. The problem which this study seeks to address therefore is how to determine the Yorùbá Muslim cultural identity. Is the Yorùbá Muslim one whose practice of Islam separates him from Yorùbá cultural practices, or is he one whose Islam accommodates elements of indigenous tradition? In other words, what way of life distinctively defines a Yorùbá Muslim?

The attitude of Islam to non-Islamic culture is that of accommodation and rejection. Islam accommodates a local culture if the culture is compatible with the Islamic tenets. It rejects the indigenous culture if it undermines the belief system of Islam. This position of Islam notwithstanding, there is a school of thought which is of the view that acceptance of Islam should not cause a break with the past; rather it should be an addition to the former religion.⁴ According to this view, it would not matter if a Yoruba Muslim shows interest in religio-cultural festivals by joining the crowd at least and by partaking in the rituals at best. This view is not plausible as it amounts to giving tacit approval to syncretism which has no basis in Islam. On the other extreme, there is the view that reduces Islam to a fixed culture which does not give room to local cultural norms.⁵ This view fails to realise that the strength of Islam has been its ability to fuse with the cultural values of its converts.

Even though neither of these views represents the true teaching of Islam, the religion as practised by different age grades in the present day

Yorùbá society reflects these diametrically opposed views in different degrees. This study therefore intends to examine the Yorùbá Muslims' attitude to indigenous culture and the role of that culture in the formation of the Yorùbá-Muslim identity.

This study becomes relevant when we realize that Yorùbá indigenous cultural values continue to be eroded fast especially among the youths. This is largely traceable to Euro-Christian influence. The White people who brought Christianity to Yorùbáland introduced more of the Western cultural values to the people than Christian values. They contemptuously looked down upon the indigenous cultural values which they regarded as incompatible with the Christian values. The result is that the Yorùbá (Christians and Muslims alike) became more European than African.⁶ In an era of growing awareness for cultural revival, a study of Yorùbá Muslim identity becomes important as the study can show how Islamic cultural values can help to revive the indigenous values in view of their close affinity.

Operational Definitions

Having stated the objective of this study, it is pertinent to give the operational definitions of the key words in the subject matter; namely 'culture' and 'identity'. Culture, according to its dictionary definition, is the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behaviour that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. It is also the customary beliefs, social norms and material traits of a racial, religious or social group.⁷ According to Patric Edewor, culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law morals, customs and all other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.⁸

Ralph Linton sees the culture of a society as the way of life of its members, the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation.⁹ Ralph Linton's definition is considered apposite for this study because it sees culture as covering different spheres of human life, including the political, economic, social and religious systems of a society including its language and even technology as culture is seen as a way of life.. Identity on the other hand

has been defined as sameness of essential or generic character in different instances; sameness in all that constitutes the objective reality of a thing; the distinguishing character or personality of an individual.¹⁰ Michel Wieviorka asserts that the social production of identities is not confined to working class, but also occurs among socially diversified categories.¹¹ He cites the example of identities of origin being asserted and reasserted by people or groups who come from successful immigrations and for whom a certain amount of ethnicity is a source of pride and gives meaning to their lives. It is also recognized that national, religious or ethnic identity may be advanced to justify other considerations. In the light of this, Eliezer Ben-Rafael sees identity markers as including tradition, ethnicity and kinship.¹² In view of the foregoing and for the purpose of this study, it would be appropriate to see identity as signifying characters, attitudes and beliefs which distinguish a people from others giving rise to a sense of national or cultural identity.

This study is predicated on Michel Wieviorka's theory that culture develops and changes in the process in which individual subjects assert and construct themselves in collective definitions which bear the mark of their subjectivity and which are the ways in which their subjectivity is implemented. Tasié corroborates the view when he asserts that culture is dynamic and can be {and indeed has been} subjected to change and adaptation resulting from age factor and other influences like environment and external relationships.¹³ The contact of the Yorùbá with Islam and its impact on their culture has contributed in no small measure to the growth of the culture.

Inculturation: Marriage in Islam and Yoruba Culture

Here we intend to examine the compatibility between the Yorùbá and Islamic traditions associated with the institution of marriage. Marriage has been defined as the state of being united to a person of the opposite sex as husband and wife in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law. It is the union of male and female who have undertaken the marriage vow to live together as husband and wife.¹⁴ Among the Yorùbá, the desire to have offspring, as well as the need for a helpmate in the household and family economy have been responsible for the fact that virtually every individual male of the customary age of

marriage got married.¹⁵ Apart from this primary purpose of marriage, other reasons include the desire to:

- i) exhibit wealth and affluence,
- ii) establish and consolidate friendship with a particular family,
- iii) fulfill a vow or promise made to give a daughter in marriage to a particular person,
- iv) settle a dispute for whatsoever reasons between two or more individuals, families or villages.

In like manner in Islamic tradition, the institution of marriage is established primarily for the purpose of legalisation of intercourse, procreation, and to bring about peace of mind and loving companionship between the couple. To show the compatibility between Yorùbá and Islamic marriage systems, it would be pertinent to discuss the important features of both.

The Imperative of Marriage

Marriage in the context of Yorùbá tradition is a cultural imperative as well as a social demand on every member of the community. In the Yorùbá traditional setting, no person remains unmarried by choice. Men get married even when they are impotent in order to save either their faces or the faces of their relations as well as to get someone to look after their domestic establishment. Since marriage carries with it responsibilities, Islam makes it mandatory to marry only when a man has the wherewithal to sustain the marriage (Qur'an 24:32-33). The importance attached to marriage derives from the prophetic tradition which says: "marriage is my way; anyone who disdains my will is not of me."¹⁶ However in Islam, impotence is a disqualification for marriage because marriage of an impotent man cannot achieve the primary purpose of the union.

Family Involvement in Marriage Contract

In the traditional Yorùbá society, marriage is normally regarded as an intermarriage of two families rather than of the two principal parties. Consequently, active participation and approval of the couple's parents are of paramount importance. The interest of the families is to ensure that the

union is free from such problems that could impede the realisation of the marriage objective. For instance, it is the duty of the kin to see that a man or a woman does not involve in a relationship that would bring disgrace to the family or bring to it hereditary disease.¹⁷ In Islamic tradition, the family involvement is indeed a legal requirement. The tradition invalidates a marriage contracted without the consent of the guardian.¹⁸ It is the guardian's responsibility to ensure that the choice of the spouse conforms to all Islamic requirements including consideration for nobility of birth, character, beauty, and Islamic faith. His role which he performs on behalf of the family is to ensure that the bride is properly guided so that problems that could put the union in jeopardy are prevented. Sometimes, in the process of playing the guardian's role, the overzealous type prevents the bride from having a say in the choice of her partner. This happens among the Yorùbá when a guardian (father) tries to fulfill a vow made to give a daughter in marriage to a particular person or family. The practice which is fast fading out in the Yorùbá tradition is known as *ijbar* in Islamic tradition. It must be stated that even though Hambali School of thought discourages *ijbar*, the concept is entrenched in the traditions of the other schools viz: those of: Imams Malik, Shafi^c and Hanafi.¹⁹

Bridal Gift

It is customary in Yorùbá and Islamic traditions for a man to give his wife and her family bridal gift. In Yorùbá tradition, it takes different forms including periodic gifts during courtship, gifts of goods and services on special occasions and fixed obligations (like manual labour) according to agreed terms. However, more importantly, every man, during his courtship days, has at least one important payment to make in cash and kind between *ìjohùn* i.e. ceremony of engagement and wedding day. The payment which is known as *ìdána* is the equivalent of Islamic *sadaq* or *mahar*. In most parts of Yorùbáland, apart from cash, the gifts include: assorted clothing, household utensils, cola nut, yams, goat, wine etc. It is important to note that Islamic *sadaq* accommodates these traditional items except those which may conflict with Islamic principles, e.g alcohol. The accommodation is an element of inculturation in the Yorùbá practice of Islam.

Assignment of Conjugal Duties

The Yorùbá and Islamic traditions are in perfect harmony in the nature of responsibilities assigned the husband and wife in matrimony. In the traditional setting, the husband has the responsibility of feeding, housing and clothing. Given the superior nature of the husband's role, the typical Yorùbá woman does not challenge the husband's authority. This is the norm also in Islamic tradition. The woman on the other hand has the responsibilities for children upbringing, domestic duties as well as household hygiene. Above all, she enjoys the right to engage in economic enterprise independent of the husband's. As rightly observed by David Laitin, women have accumulated vast wealth as traders and have used their wealth with discretion.²⁰ This goes to show that the Yorùbá woman is never a liability. It is important to note that Islam does not only approve of the duties assigned the wife in the traditional culture, it also endorses her right for economic independence as evident in Qur'an 4:32. This is an aspect of Islam which continues to suffer abuse among some Islamic Movements in Yorùbáland especially the *Bámidélé* and the *Lánasè* groups who maintain the tradition of keeping their women in confinement.

Polygamy

Polygamy (or more appropriately polygyny) is the practice of marrying more than one wife. It is a form of marriage customary with the Yorùbá. It is also well entrenched in the Islamic tradition as it derives from Qur'an 4:3. Indeed the Islamic endorsement of polygamy is generally believed to be a major factor which made Islam attractive to the Yorùbá. The motive for polygamous marriage among the Yorùbá derives from their marriage philosophy which recognises as part of marriage objectives the need to get more hands to help the husband in the family economy and to show the extent of his wealth.

The philosophy underlying the practice of polygamy in Islam is quite different. First and foremost, it has to be established that, in Islam, monogamy is the rule while polygamy is an exception to the rule. In Islam, polygamy is justified by the following conditions:

- i) a man's ability to maintain and sustain more than one wife coupled with his readiness to uphold justice; (Q. 4:3; Q. 4:129-130)
- ii) the need to provide another chance for a man or woman whose earlier marriage was beset with intractable problems;
- iii) the need to create a home for widows who have not passed the age of marriage (this condition has antecedent in Islamic history).

It is crystal clear from the foregoing that polygamous marriage instead of being an outlet for the gratification of sexual passions as often mistakenly understood constitutes a sacrifice demanded for men and women alike – a sacrifice in which personal sentiments are required to be subordinated to the wider communal interest.²¹ However, it is interesting to note that many Yorùbá Muslims practice polygamy without due regard for the *Shari'ah* conditionalities attached to it. To them, Islam is synonymous with polygamy to the extent that they resort to it believing that it is mandatory without caring about the responsibilities attached.

Inculturation: Syncretic Practices Among Yoruba Muslims

Syncretism is the combination of different forms of belief or practice. People are said to be syncretic when they combine the tenets as well as partake in the worship of more than one religion concurrently. The concept therefore amounts to mixture of two or more religions. Among the Yorùbá, the practice takes different forms. For some, especially the earliest Yorùbá Muslims, the tendency was to simply add Islam to the indigenous religion thereby becoming loyalists to the two belief systems. Such people see nothing wrong in being *Sàngó* or *Ọya* worshippers and at the same time being practising Muslims. For others the commitment is to one religion with a partial inclination and participation in certain aspects of another. Yet another form is when one claims to be a Muslim but patronises the witch doctor or uses fetish, magic, charms and divination at the time of personal crisis. This attitude finds expression in the Yoruba saying “*bó ti wu ni làá sè mòle ẹni*”, meaning: ‘one practices one’s Islam as one likes’. The saying is corroborated by the song which reads:

A ó sorò iléwa ò a ó sorò iléwa ò,

*Ìmàle kòpé káwa má sorò,
A ó sorò iléwa ò*

Meaning:

We shall perform our traditional rites;
Islam does not debar us from
performing our traditional rites;
We shall perform our traditional rites.

In his study on religious interaction in Badagry, Asaju and Owanikin identify four factors responsible for syncretism among the *Ogu* Christians.²² These factors which are as relevant to the Yorùbá Muslims as they are to the *Ogu* include addiction to old culture, semblance of doctrines, religious pluralism and crisis situations. However a more important factor in the context of this study is lack of understanding of the language of Islamic liturgy. This factor aided syncretism as much as it encouraged later conversion of the Muslims to Christianity. The problem was only partially addressed with the translation of the Qur'an into Yorùbá, and more recently with the approach of *Nasrullahil Fatih* (NASFAT) to Islamic propagation.

The Yorùbá traditional rulers are the most involved in syncretism. On becoming the *Ọba* ('king'), a person is believed to be the father of all his subjects. Whether he is a Muslim or a Christian, as the incarnate of the community divinities, he must spearhead the observance of traditional taboos, religious rituals and celebration of festivals. He provides the objects of sacrifice and follows the priest to the groves where the rituals are performed. The *Ọbas* are seen as natural patrons of religions domiciled in their domain. It is therefore normal to find a Christian *Ọba* providing the *Iléyá* ram for the Chief Imam in his domain and hosting the Muslims in his palace when returning from the praying ground during *Idul-kabir* celebrations. Indeed some would even participate in the Muslim liturgy. In like manner, the Muslim *Ọba* shows similar gesture to the Christians. It must be emphasised that the *Ọba*, whether a Muslim or a Christian, has his primary allegiance to tradition. However, his degree of faith in Islam or Christianity regulates his involvement in the traditional religion.

As far as the syncretists are concerned, “all ways lead to God”. This philosophy by implication means one of two things: either that one religion is not enough for salvation, or that no religion has monopoly of salvation. Neither of these views is supported by the world monotheistic religions in view of the principle of exclusivism enshrined in them. The Judeo-Christian scriptures have no reservation in condemning syncretism as practised by the Israelites (IIKings17:32-39, Jer.25:5-11 and Lev.18:3). Rather than seeing syncretism as a laudable practical effort at enhancing religious interaction, tolerance, understanding and cooperation, it is more an act of indecision leading to confusion and conflict in cultural identity formation.

Inculturation of Islam among the Yorùbá

Inculturation (or enculturation) has been defined as the gradual acquisition of the characteristics and norms of a culture or group by a person of another culture or group.²³ With reference to the context of this study it means gradual (partial) acquisition of the characteristics and norms of Yorùbá culture by Islam. In other words, it means the indigenisation of Islam and this translates to the practice of Islam as an African (Yorùbá) religion.

As earlier noted, Islam has no problem accommodating elements of indigenous culture especially if it does not compromise the principle of Islamic monotheism (*tawhid*). The religion has this advantage over Christianity.

Earlier in this paper, we have seen inculturation coming into play in the Islamic institution of marriage. Inculturation of Islam as it affects traditional healing deserves close examination in view of the controversy that surrounds it. To understand the Yorùbá approach to medicine and healing one has to understand the etiology which has to do largely with the people's worldview. The people's worldview places human beings right in the centre of innumerable forces of evil. People believe that their misfortunes are caused by their enemies known and unknown. The enemies could be internal (i.e., from members of their family) or external (i.e., comprising spirits, witches sorcerers). For example, diseases like small pox, chicken pox and ailments which defy diagnosis are believed to be inflicted by the enemies. So also are mysterious experiences such as

food poison in dreams, compulsive profligacy (*àgbààná*) and sale-repelling stigma (*òkùtà*).

According to Babalola, ailments among the Yorùbá are classified into three, viz:

- i) Natural ailments: Examples in the category include headache, stomach ache, gonorrhoea, etc. They are easily treated with the use of herbs.
- ii) Natural-turned-mystical-ailments: When natural ailments defy all treatments, they become mystical. Witches and sorcerers are believed to be responsible.
- iii) Mystical ailments belong to the realm of the spiritual, hence witches, sorcerers, spirits, divinities are held responsible. Examples include prolonged pregnancy, infant mortality, sterility, barrenness, etc.²⁴

In the traditional Yorùbá setting when an ailment is diagnosed to be mystical, divination is the principal method used to get at the root of the problem. Divination is the art or practice that seeks to foresee or foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge usually by the interpretation of the omens or by the aid of supernatural power. A diviner is one who supposedly has the power to receive information from the spirit world for the benefit of clients. Divination is, for instance, used to:

- i) discover the person who supposedly caused somebody's sickness, problems or death.
- ii) get advice or to make decisions on who to marry, when to plant, when to travel, etc.
- iii) find out which ritual or sacrifice will solve a problem.
- iv) know how the ancestors have been offended and how to remedy the situation.

The methods used vary from society to society. Generally, in Yorùbáland, it may be by shaking gourds, or observing patterns of pieces of pottery thrown on the ground, or swinging a stick over certain code objects and examining the lines on the palm of the hand. Treatment of an ailment is not complete without application of prepared herbs, since the diviner is also an herbalist.

In view of the fact that Islam shares the Yorùbá belief in the evil powers of the witches and sorcerers as enshrined in Chapters 113 and 114

of the Muslim scriptures, it was easy for the Muslim clerics who functioned as healers [doctors] and sometimes as diviners to adopt some of the Yorùbá practices in dealing with their clients. Their method as rightly observed by Quadri differs slightly from the traditionalist's.²⁵ It involves pressing certain signs on sands (believed to be imported from Makkah), poured in a tray, with recitation of some Qur'anic verses, and then proffering solution to the problem. Instead of asking their clients to make an animal sacrifice to be placed at a road junction as is done by the traditional diviner, they ask them to offer *sadaqah* (which may also involve sacrificial animal) to the poor, the blind and the wretched. Scholars who are ignorant of Islamic teaching on this subject see the practice as compatible with Islam. This is wrong because it has to be admitted that the act of divination arrogates to the ordinary mortal that power which exclusively belongs to God as evident in Qur'an 31:34 .. It is a way of getting knowledge and advice about a situation without depending on God. The position of Islam corroborates the Biblical view which traces the diviner's knowledge to the demon (Deu.18:10 and Acts16:15-19). In the same way herbal healing is unIslamic when the Muslim healer invokes spirits in the herbal practice.

Nevertheless, there are other methods of healing used by the Muslim clerics which are not averse to Islam. These consist mainly in the use of the Qur'an. Sometimes it is by writing specific portions of the scripture relevant to particular problems on a black wooden slate to be washed and drunk by the client (*hàntú*). It could even be rubbed on the body. It could even be by writing a Qur'anic passage on a piece of paper to be folded, woven round with thread (*tírà*) and placed at specific places. In most cases, herbs are added as complements to these treatments. It must be stressed that offering prayers is a concomitant part of the healing process to ensure its efficacy.

It is interesting to note that Quadri sees this as a talismanic practice and as such unIslamic.²⁶ I will disagree with such a view. Using the Qur'an in the manner described above, in our view, is in recognition of the healing power of the scripture as indicated in Q.17:82. The power of the scripture is further revealed in Q13:31 as it reads:

And if there had been a Qur'an with which mountains
could be moved, or the earth could be cloven asunder,

or the dead could be made to speak (it would not have been other than this Qur'an).

With regard to God's instruction to prophet Ayyub (Biblical Job) on what to do to be cured of his sickness, we read in Q38:42:

And remember our servant Ayyub (Biblical Job) when he invoked his Lord (saying) "verily Satan has touched me with distress (by ruining my health) and torment (by ruining my wealth) (Allah said to him): "strike the ground with your foot: this is (a spring of) water to wash in, cool and a refreshing drink.

To me, passages such as these provide sound basis for different healing methods (involving bathing, drinking, rubbing, etc.) employed by the Muslim clerics as long as names other than God's are not invoked. That is to say Muslim healers should not seek the help of spirits in the attempt to find solution to whatever problem brought to them. In our considered opinion, to endorse this method is to recognise the African factor in the Yorùbá practice of Islam which becomes Yorùbá Muslim culture and consequently a signifier of the Yorùbá Muslim cultural identity. As rightly observed by Tasie,²⁷ despite today's advancement of orthodox medicine it is no longer strange to find a Nigerian Christian admitted to a hospital being also secretly administered with "holy water" or "holy oil" medication or having the sick bed adorned with the crucifix and other religious materials such as placing the Bible under the sick person's pillow. In like manner, you find Muslims being treated with orthodox medicine in the hospital also being secretly attended to by the Muslim clerics offering them concoctions prepared with *hàntú*. It does happen sometimes that religious medications prove more efficacious than the orthodox medicine for the patient, and sometimes the orthodox medication is a complete failure.

Islamic Identity Signifiers and Yoruba Muslims

Islam like any other religion or culture has its identity markers. The Sikhs are known by their turban, the Jews by their skull cap, and the

Christians by their cross. In like manner the Muslim women are known by their *hijab* and their men by their turbans and beard. Let us first examine the *hijab* phenomenon. *Hijab* has been variously defined as screen, covering or veil.²⁸ In the technical Islamic usage, it signifies the Islamic dress code for women. The concept is derived from two principal passages of the Qur'an. The first is Q. 24:30-31 which reads:

Say to the believing men that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions....And say to the believing women that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions and do not display their adornment except what appears thereof. And let them wear their head coverings over their bosoms...

In this passage, four instructions are issued to women as against two issued to men. Two of the instructions are common to both, i.e., the instruction to lower their gaze and the instruction to restrain their sexual passions. The two peculiar to the women which are important to this discussion are the instructions to avoid display of their ornaments and the instruction to draw their veils over their bosoms.

The two instructions addressed exclusively to women are to ensure in their modesty (in dress and in conduct) and to prescribe a dress code which should cover not only the head, neck and bosom but also the body. It must be emphasised that the face is exempted. The reason is quite clear from the passage quoted where both the believing men and women are enjoined to lower their gaze. Such an injunction only makes sense in a situation where interaction between sexes is envisaged. This is the norm in the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is likely, in view of the recent reform in Saudi Arabia where women are now allowed to drive, that the tradition of veiling the face will have to be discarded. The second passage, Q.33:59, also reads:

O prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and women of the believers to let down upon them their over-garments. This is more proper, so that they may be known and not be given trouble...

In this passage, two reasons are given for the prescription of the Islamic dress code: i) for Muslim women to be identified as Muslims and

ii) as a measure of protection against harassment and molestation. It is important to note that the Qur'anic prescriptions on *hijab* allow for a wide range of interpretations which account for variety of styles dictated by local customs, hence we have:

- i) the Saudi *Abaya* (usually black and large with *niqab* – veil),
- ii) Afghanistan *Burka*,
- iii) Iran *Chador*,
- iv) headscarf (usually a cloth wrapped around the hair and neck) used popularly in Malaysia, Urban Iran and parts of Europe.

I make bold to say that since the underlying principle for the concept of *hijab* is the need to cover essential parts of the body, the traditional Yorùbá dress (consisting of *bùbá*, *iró*, *gèlè*, *ìbòrí*) satisfies the requirement and, indeed, is a concrete reflector of the female Yorùbá Muslim's multiple identity.

It is worthy of note that Muslim men do not have a prescribed dress. Even in Islamic liturgy, the minimum required of them is that which covers between the navel and knees. In other words, Islam accommodates varieties of men's traditional dresses including English suit. All the same, the multiple identity of the male Yorùbá Muslim is best seen in the wearing of the traditional Yorùbá *gòbì* cap over the Islamic *jalabiya*.

There are two important identity makers recognisable in Muslim men which should also be examined. These are the turban with cap and the beard. *Hadith* literature is replete with teachings encouraging Muslims to use turban on cap especially on Fridays during the *Jumu'ah* prayer. It is reckoned to be an identity marker distinguishing the Muslims from the polytheists.²⁹ It is important to note that since the use of turban on cap is encouraged in the *hadith* and Islamic jurisprudential literatures and not in the Qur'an, the act can only be supererogatory rather than obligatory. From the evidence in the Judeo-Christian scriptures as we read in Zachariah 3:4-5 it is evident that turban is not peculiar to Islam.

Keeping a beard like the use of turban is a supererogatory act encouraged by the *hadith*. Some *hadith* consider it meritorious for a

Muslim to keep a beard no matter how little.³⁰ The only reference to beard in the Qur'an is in Q. 20:94 where Musa (biblical Moses) in annoyance held Harun (biblical Aaron) by the beard rebuking him for allowing the children of Israel to go back to their idols. This shows that beard keeping is an age long universal culture traceable to the primordial times. Among the Yorùbá, men keep a beard to enhance their masculinity. There is however an identity marker common to the male and the female and this is the forehead prostration mark recognised by the Qur'an as evident in Chapter 48:16.

Conclusion

With globalisation and multiculturalism, there is an increasing need to emphasise the reality of cultural diversities and identities as a way to promote mutual engagement, understanding, harmony and tolerance. The interest in this study is generated from this reality. The Yorùbá Muslims, on whom this study focuses derive their identity, essentially from the inculturation of Islam. The possibility of inculturation is not only due to the compatibilities in the two cultures, but also the accommodating spirit of Islam and the Yorùbá .

The Muslim identity discussed in the study relates not only to the Muslims' outward appearance, it also has to do with behavior and traditions. Consequently, Islamic identity is of no essence if it has no bearing with the Muslims' behavioral pattern. In other words, being a Muslim goes beyond putting on Muslim appearance, the action and behavior have to justify it. It is significant to note that many of the Islamic values which Muslims should imbibe to depict them as good Muslims are invariably the very values that would make one a cultured Yorùbá. Such values include pre-marriage virginity, respect for elders, honesty and truthfulness, being your brother's keeper and extended family system. It is however unfortunate that most of these values are declining in the Yorùbá society especially among the youth due to Western influence. Nevertheless, Islam can be of tremendous help in reviving these cherished Yorùbá values.

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