

The Spiritual Consultancy (*Jalbu/Jalabi*) in the Religious Culture of Yoruba Muslims, Nigeria

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Abstract: *Spiritual consultancy (Jalbu, locally referred to as Jalabi) has been the major vocation of traditional Muslim scholars in Yoruba land, Nigeria, apart from teaching and preaching. This is accentuated by the religious culture of permissiveness which allows cross-religious interaction and sharing amongst the adherents of the three religious traditions competing for patronage in this part of the country, thereby corrupting the pristine values of Islam. Understanding this conundrum, this ethnographic work, which employs both qualitative and quantitative methods, seeks to interrogate the practice of Jalabi, its methods and approaches, and its sociological impact on Islam and the religious culture of Yoruba Muslims of Nigeria. While the majority of this research interlocutors recognize Jalabi as, among others, unacceptable before the Islamic law, damaging the image of Islam, promoting reliance on fetish rather than Allah, destroying Muslim's belief, only a few support Jalabi in a positive tone, such as making Islam relevant in solving socio-economic, political, and spiritual problems.*

Keywords: *jalabi; metaphysical afflictions; religious culture; spiritual consultancy; Yoruba.*

Introduction

Jalbu etymologically means 'acquiring'¹ but contextually, it has come to be associated with the acquisition and utilization of the skills to influence or manipulate the natural course of things positively or negatively. *Jalbu*, which in Yoruba local parlance is called *jalabi* has been the major vocation of traditional Muslim scholars² and has conferred societal relevance over the years. It is also seen as the vocation whereby a scholar prepares charms, which are believed to possess supernatural power for protection against evil and for bringing good fortunes to traders, enhancement of luck, etc. In return for monetary gratification.³ Simply put, *jalbu* can be aptly described as spiritual consultancy and the practitioners as spiritual consultants. The activities of these individuals also referred as "spiritual counselors"⁴ have not been captured locally by extant works. Although they are examined as a local phenomenon in this work but reference to their infiltration into work and public places of modern societies is mentioned not only in Tarot Readings by flying horses but by Tim Smith under the heading "Spirituality as a Service".⁵

The application of this vocation by the traditional Muslim scholars in meeting the socio-economic and spiritual needs of the Muslims and other clients who throng their "consulting rooms" in an increasingly volatile society has continued to impact the image of Islam. This is as a result of the similarities between some of the extraneous methods and approaches adopted by the practitioners and those of traditional medicine men of Traditional African Religions. This sociological impact, particularly as it affects the religious culture of the Muslims of Yorubas of South West Nigeria is the objective of this work.

Religious Culture of the Yorubas

The main Yorubaland is situated in the South-West geo-political zone of Nigeria, comprising six states Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti and Ondo. However, as a people, the Yorubas can be found as indigenous communities in states outside the zone, such as Kwara, Kogi and Edo. The Yorubas can also be seen as immigrants in the West African states of Benin Republic, Togo and Cote D'voire, Brazil, and Portugal. The Yorubas are known worldwide for their highly developed art, especially the Ife bronze and wood carvings. They are a dynamic people who trace their origin to the city of Ile-Ife, which according to E. Bolaji Idowu, is the "ancestral home; the place from where the day dawns" (*Ife o daye, ibi ojumo tin mo*) "the enchanted holy city; the home of divinities and mysterious spirit." Islam was birthed in this culturally homogenous region of Nigeria in the 15th century through trade interface with Malian itinerant traders and scholars and has remained one of the major religious traditions of the region. This region is known for its religious, cultural permissiveness and amiability amongst the three dominant religious traditions of Christianity, Islam, and Traditional African Religion. This trend stems from the historical

¹ J. M. (ed.) Cowan, *Arabic- English Dictionary* (India: Modern Language Services, 1990).

² I. A. (ed.) Ogunbiyi, "The Introduction and Development of Arabic and Islamic Learning in Lagos State" (Lagos State University, Ojo, 1990).

³ Mustapha. A. Bello, "Shaykh Abdul-Hamid Olohunbemi and His Dawah Activities in Ado Odo, Ogun State, and Its Environs: 1982-2002" (Lagos State University, Ojo, 2004).

⁴ Arthur Edward Waite, *The Key to the Tarot: The Official Companion to the World Famous Original Rider Waite Tarot Deck* (Random House, 2020).

⁵ Tim Smith, "'Spirituality as a Service' — the Rise of Spiritual Consultants | Sifted," Sifted, April 2021, <https://sifted.eu/articles/spirituality-at-work/>.

evolution of the religion in the region as it was in many other parts of Africa. This was succinctly put by Edward Blyden, particularly on the entrance of Islam into the religious mix.⁶

Local institutions were not destroyed when Arab (Islamic) influences were introduced (in Africa). They only assumed new forms and adapted themselves to the new teachings. In all thriving Mohammedan communities in West and Central Africa, it may be noticed that the Arabs (Islamic) superstructure has been superimposed on a permanent indigenous substructure; so that what really took place when the Arab met the Negro in his own home was a healthy amalgamation, not absorption or undue repression.

South West Nigeria, with a combined population of over 27.4 million people⁷ offers an interesting research area for scholars of different intellectual orientations. It is not just because of the much-publicized religious permissibility of the people but by the emerging trends of the interface between culture and religion. Though religious identity has never been a demographical indicator in Nigeria's census exercise, making it difficult to know people on a religious basis, it is not difficult to assume Christians and Muslims are of equal proportion with others making some considerable presence. The six states of Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti, and Ondo⁸ which form the region, present different variations of cultural fusion which seem like "a little of everything" or "everything in a little." Though the three major religious traditions - Christianity, Islam, and Traditional African Religion (TAR) - appear to dominate the religious market space, the sprouting New Religious Movements (NRM) of both westernized⁹ and indigenous¹⁰ colorations are bringing new dimensions into how the Yorubas view and practice religion. While adherents of Christianity and Islam are seriously engaged in competition for patronage and dominance in the public space through aggressive evangelization and *da'wah*, practitioners of TAR and NRM are usually waiting in the wings to harvest fringe members of the two competing traditions who are either disenchanted or seeking a new religious experience.

Lagos, the cosmopolitan and commercial capital of Nigeria, is a city with so much religiosity in a secular environment. There is perhaps no street or corner without a church, mosque, synagogue, or worship center of different religions accentuated by Pentecostalism and *Asalatu* prayer groups. As Nigeria's former administrative capital, which had had an influx of people from other regions, coupled with its sea harbors, the religious mix in operation is so

⁶ J. Omosade & P. Adelumo Dopamu Awolalu, *West African Traditional Religion* (Onibonjo Press & Book Industries Nig. Ltd, 1979); Charles E. Ekpo and Ekwutosi E. Offiong, "NIGERIA: THE PARADOX OF A SECULAR STATE," *Politics and Religion Journal* 14, no. 1 (March 30, 2020): 149–72, <https://doi.org/10.54561/PRJ1401149E>.

⁷ Abdurrahman Doi, "Islam in Nigeria," *Gaskiya Publication Limited, Zaria*, 1984, 97; C. P. Emenike et al., "Accessing Safe Drinking Water in Sub-Saharan Africa: Issues and Challenges in South-West Nigeria," *Sustainable Cities and Society* 30 (April 1, 2017): 263–72, <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.SCS.2017.01.005>.

⁸ Blyden Edward, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (Edinburgh, 1971); MUJAHID HAMZA SHITU, "INTERACTION BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS IN NIGERIA AND ITS ROLE IN SHAPING THE PRACTICE OF RELIGION," accessed September 23, 2022, https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/64637682/INTERACTION_BETWEEN_MUSLIMS_AND_CHRITSIAN_S_IN_NIGERIA_AN_IT_ROLE_IN_SHAPING_THE_PRACTICE_RELIGION_-libre.pdf.

⁹ One of the significant fallout of the Constitutional Conference of 1994-1995 of General Sanni Abacha was the delineation of Nigeria into six geo-political zone of North West, North Central, North East, South West, South East and South South. The arrangement has since been adopted as a model representing the federal character of the country in spite of the vilification of the report of the conference.

¹⁰ New Religious Movements is the term used in describing religious experiences and organisations outside the mainstream of Christianity, Islam and TAR. Though some of these new groups are sprouting on the periphery but their growth have elicited investigation and research in recent times.

interwoven that many of its inhabitants have multiple identities. Religious shopping as a culture has taken root as a result of the easiness through which people move from one religious orientation to another without any societal opprobrium or public rejection. There is also a religious fluidity that allows people to combine elements of different religious traditions, particularly in worship and socials, without necessarily jettisoning their original religions. This fluidity manifests itself clearly in the operations of the new religious movement (NRM), Chrislam. For instance, members of both Oketude and Ifeoluwa movements operating in the peripheral religious space of Lagos do not see themselves as lesser Christians or Muslims despite the free mixing of liturgies. The same perception is held by members of the Eckankar and Grail movements, who see themselves as better Christians because of their exposure to a new understanding of spirituality as provided in the NRM.¹¹

This fluidity, commonly referred to as syncretism,¹² is seen as contentious by some scholars who view it as a derogatory perception to denote an unacceptable form of religiosity by theologians and consequently prefer a milder term like assemblage to describe the phenomenon. Beyond these contextual subtleties, this religious mixing in the opinion of Christian and Muslim practitioners and religious leaders is nothing but the bastardization of pristine rituals of their faith and, as such, not accommodative in any way. Besides, they queried the adoption and subsequent adaptation of liturgies of older creeds they often criticized when they could invent their own for identity and originality. This licentious religious scenario in Lagos is equally present in Ogun state because of its geographical proximity and socio-cultural affinities of the peoples of the two states. Besides, towns on the borders of the two states which fall into Ogun serve as a buffer zone, accommodating the sprawling movement of people out of Lagos due to urban congestion.

Oyo and Osun States present different religious cultures. Lagos's kind of religion-cultural diffusion is not present in these two states. Although the three religious traditions maintain their distinct identities and strong presence with less fluidity, the affirmative quest for the renewal of TAR amid the domineering influence of Christianity and Islam is a new vista worthy of consideration. Practitioners of TAR in the two states are demanding official recognition and public holiday. The case of Osun State is perhaps more enthralling. This is because, despite Ile-Ife, the ancestral home of the Yorubas with its permeating indigenous culture, and Osogbo, the home of the legendary groove from where the state source its name, the domineering presence of Christianity and Islam is so pervasive. Apart from mainstream Christianity and Islam, Pentecostalism, which has gained a strong foothold in the region, and *Salafiyyah*, which is sprouting with such a high prospect, compete fiercely for public presence and dominance. This proportional triangular interface perhaps informed the granting of two days of August 20 and 21 of every year as public holidays to celebrate the Osun Osogbo festival¹³, a facility which traditional worshippers in other states of the region are still struggling with to get. Ekiti and Ondo States, on the border of the North Central and South-South of Nigeria, is another nomenclature.

¹¹ Western oriented NRM include the Grail Movement and Eckankar Movement

¹² Marloes and Mustapha Bello Janson, *Chrislam: Forging Ties in Nigeria's Multi Religious Society* in *New Face of Islam in Eastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin (Essays in Honour of Simon Ottenberg)* (Aboki Publishers, Markudi, 2012); Ini Dele-Adedeji, "Crossing Religious Boundaries: Islam, Christian, and 'Yoruba Religion' in Lagos, Nigeria," *African Affairs* 120, no. 481 (October 26, 2021): 679–81, <https://doi.org/10.1093/AFRAF/ADAB026>.

¹³ Opinion expressed by Mr. Simon Akeju, a member of Eckankar in my interaction with him at the Eckankar Center along Lagos/Badagry Expressway, Ijanikin Lagos on Sunday 14th November, 2021

While the religious atmosphere there is not as permissive as in Lagos, it is also not evenly charged as the scenario painted in Osun. The reason for this is not farfetched. Unlike in the four other states of the region, where the population of Christians and Muslims is almost evenly distributed, many works from these two states suggest that there are more Christians than any other religious group.¹⁴

Despite this seeming culture of religious accommodation, which engenders peaceful coexistence, occasional fretfulness, particularly between Christians and Muslims, is accentuated by the mutual struggle for dominance and manipulation by political players to serve political ends. So, issues such as the Muslim's agitation for a free Friday, the use of the Hijab in public schools, and making operational the *Shariah* laws of personal status, which are often counterbalanced by Christians' opposition, present the fault lines of this mutually inclusive religious culture. In the same manner, the success of Christians in getting the government to establish Christian Pilgrims Welfare Boards and erect churches in the Government Secretariat to compete and rival similar establishments and provisions hitherto available to the Muslims is seen as contentious by observers of Christian/Muslim relations in this region.¹⁵

The healthy amalgamation alluded to above has resulted in syncretic practices of adherents of the different religious traditions in Yoruba land, as depicted by the easiness with which elements of these traditions are combined, particularly in the observance of ceremonial rites of birth, marriage, and death. The officiating ministers at these events are those referred to as traditional scholars not because of their attachment to Traditional African Religion but as a result of their willingness to accommodate cultural practices which may violate the new principles and practice of Islam but are tolerated once they serve the end of religious socialization, seeking relief and succor to many afflictions confronting their people. They are religious personnel often referred to as "Alfa" who have acquired their Islamic education from *Madaris* and *Ilmiyyah* Colleges to serve not just as officiating ministers at such ceremonies but as teachers impacting the knowledge of the Qur'an on both children and adults in the society. They are also preachers who engage in the propagation of the faith in open-air *da'wah* or *ta'lim* sessions in the mosques. Some of them, as mentioned earlier, are also forced to take to spiritual consultancy for economic survival because the system which produced them did not provide any means of gainful and sustainable employment for them. This tolerance of the fusion between religion and culture by traditional scholars is the basis of the constant reproach from the puritanical movements and discernible Muslims who see them as heretics and their acts as a bastardization of the pristine principles and practice of Islam.¹⁶

¹⁴ The adoption of syncretism to describe the mixing of religious elements in YorubaLand has been queried by anthropologists like Marloes Janson as not adequately portraying the dynamics involved in the mixing. She therefore suggests "religious assemblage" as a more appropriate term. (see Marloes Janson, "Unity Through Diversity: A Case Study of Chrislam in Lagos")

¹⁵ "Traditional Worshippers Seek Recognition, Public Holiday," *The Nation Newspaper*, November 2018.

¹⁶ J.D.Y. Peel, "Religious Change in Yorubaland," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 37, no. 3 (1967): 298; Dele-Adedeji, "Crossing Religious Boundaries: Islam, Christian, and 'Yoruba Religion' in Lagos, Nigeria."

Spiritual Consultancy (*Jalb, Jalabi*): Its Methods and Approaches

From our observation, the traditional Muslim scholars involved in spiritual consultancy (Jalbu) fall into different categories. Some inherit these skills for spiritual diagnosis of problems, divination (through star reading, palmistry, and geomancy), and treatment of their clientele from their forebears and religious teachers. Belonging to the second category are those apprenticed to spiritual consultants either entirely or on a part-time basis to learn the skills appertaining to the vocation. In the third category are graduates of Arabic schools who are forced to take to spiritual consultancy for economic survival because the system that produced them did not provide any means of gainful employment. Others are just traditionalists who, after stumbling on some records of the use of herbs and esoteric knowledge, camouflage under the guise of Islam for public acceptability and patronage to warm themselves into the hearts of their clients. It is also important to note that these consultants often work hand in hand to exchange ideas and skills to solve some of the cases referred to them. In the past, it is easy to identify them in their different categories because of the untidy environment in which they operate and the crookedness of their methods which are sometimes exposed to their clientele and the public. However, the situation has changed these days as some now operate from cozy environments with posh cars and other accessories, giving a semblance of a dignifying profession. In the quest to attract patronage from the unsuspecting public, many acquire manipulative skills of recounting past events, probing into the future, and interpreting events, dreams, life riddles, and official/unofficial advertisements of their prowess to provide solutions to all problems.

In meeting the needs of their clients who consult them for various reasons ranging from seeking an explanation to mysteries surrounding sickness, misfortunes, and the likes to prying into the future and seeking resolution of metaphysical afflictions, these clerics adopt one or a combination of these methods:¹⁷

1. *Hantu*: verses of the Qur'an or coded prayer formula written with the ink specially prepared from herbs on a wooden slate and then washed off with water for the consumption of the afflicted or patient.¹⁸
2. *Turari*: incense or spice produced from various herbs, roots, and other sundry materials, which is believed to have the potency to drive away malevolent spirits and demons when burnt and inhaled by the bewitched and afflicted.
3. *Aseje*: medicinal concoctions whose recipe and process of preparation are not governed by any specific rules of hygiene and nutrition but by the whims and exceptional knowledge of the consultant involved and the nature of the ailment being treated. Some of the materials used, besides herbs and roots, include certain animals like chameleon, squirrel, snail, and different species of fish (both fresh and smoked), among other objects.
4. *Gbere*: medicinal incision through which prepared powered substances (made from some of the materials mentioned above) are transferred into the patient's bloodstream to prevent or cure metaphysical afflictions effectively.

¹⁷ Mustapha Adebayo Bello, *Meeting Heart Desires* (Crucial Press Lagos, 2007).

¹⁸ The writing on plain sheets of paper is a new style of 'hantu' now more popular with the *jalb* practitioners than writing on wooden slates. The 'hantu' paper is dipped into hot water thereby extracting the content through this process after which the paper is removed leaving out only the liquid for the use of the sufferer

5. *Tira*: this is the binding of extracts from the Qur'an, names, and attributes of Allah or specific prayer formulas extracted from different sources, in leather as charms/amulets to be carried about by the afflicted or patient. This is regarded as unspoken prayers, which may protect the wearer if he cannot say the actual words in times of crisis. As a corollary to this is the prevalent use of mystical rings and cords known in Yoruba Language parlance as *oruka*, *igbadi*, and *onde*, respectively.
6. *Soap*: In applying these methods, some of their clients are bathed in a flowing stream either in broad daylight or in the thick of the night using specially prepared soap and a specified number of sponges. In specific cases, when deliverance from spiritual bondage is being sought or breaking away from the yoke of poverty and misfortune, the afflicted is expected to rub their body with palm oil before undertaking the bath.

For *Gbere*, the incisional cut starting from three can be as high as twenty-one inflicted in different parts of the body. *Tira* is also put to other uses apart from being carried about as charms for protection. It is used as love enchantment, separation of two loved ones, or influencing other people's behavior for specific results. The such amulet is either buried near a flowing stream, under a hot place (cooking place), or thrown into the latrine to elicit a specific kind of reaction from the enchanted.¹⁹

To enhance the efficacy of all the methods, the afflicted or their next of kin are sometimes made to offer sacrifices to gods and malevolent spirits. Such sacrifices made of different species of animals such as squirrel, chameleon, lizards, snail, and fish (both fresh and smoked), etc., when well prepared and sprinkled with palm oil or other recommended liquid, are placed at such awkward places like the middle of the road, T. junction or walking path in the middle of the night²⁰.

Different approaches are also employed to pry into the hidden to ascertain the cause of either physical ailments or metaphysical afflictions. Even when the symptoms visible on their clients give a clear semblance of physical sickness, which may require herbs and therapeutic treatment only, efforts are still exerted by the spiritual consultants to unravel why their clients were the ones to be so afflicted. These approaches, just like the stethoscope used by medical doctors to listen to somebody's heart and breathing, are employed to reveal the hidden reasons behind every issue brought to them. However, much more than the stethoscope is used to seek esoteric understanding of multifarious issues requiring more than physical or medical attention. Some of these approaches are:

1. *Geomancy or Sand Cutting*: this is the use of sea sand spread on a tray for forecasting. The spiritual consultant, under a special skill, manipulates the sand by cutting and making lines which are then symbolically interpreted by his client as the revelation of past events and

¹⁹ For the purpose of this work, I sought for and obtained the approval of a spiritual consultant with whom I have close affinity with to observe his *Jalb* activities. From my embedded position within the precinct of his consulting space, I was able to closely observe him on different days over a period of one month on the manner of application of the aforementioned methods and approaches in meeting the needs of his clients

²⁰ Information obtained from the *Jalb* operations of Shaykh Zakariyau Adebayo Tijanni (aged 65) observed at his residence on Barhama Close, Ayetoro Village, Ogun State on 16th December, 2021

clues (signs) for the future. Through this approach, the appropriate methods for the mitigation, amelioration, or total resolution of the problem at hand are obtained.²¹

2. Rosary Selection: is a divination procedure whereby the *Jalb* practitioner folds the invocation rosary for his client to pick (select) one of its seeds which would then form the starting point of counting either forward or backward to reveal hidden information to the latter. Such interpretable counting is hinged on the esoteric understanding of numerology by the practitioner.²²
3. Palmistry: is the system whereby a practitioner tells what a person is like and what will happen to him in the future by looking at the lines on the palm of his hand.
4. Quranic Divination: this is extraneous use of the Qur'an for divination by tying a key to it. The key is then held to select probable options dictated by the practitioner as the Holy Book rolls or remains still.

These approaches resemble the *Ifa* system in both usage and operation. The *Ifa* system is a series of 256 figures' each with its own name, and these are worked out either by using sixteen palm nuts (*ikin*) or by casting a string or chain of eight half nuts or shells called *Opele*, using a piece of board sprinkled with divinatory powder (*iyerosun*). Sitting in front of this board, the diviner manipulates the nuts rapidly, marking the results in two columns on the board. This involves complications of numbers, combinations, names, and different interpretations, and the diviner's application finally gives to the inquirer.²³ Many of the practitioners also get their psychic skill enhanced through clairvoyance incision on the face or swallowing clairvoyance gourd (*ado oomo*) usually prepared by traditional medicine men believed to sharpen their ability to see events clearly in retrospect and have a pip into the future.²⁴

From the above, it is clear that the *Ifa* priest or diviner and other categories of African medicine men are still an essential source of help and advice even in the operations and practice of the vocation of *Jalb*. He now shares his clientele with spiritual consultants.²⁵ The dividing line between traditional and Muslim diviners is often difficult to draw. In fact, they are more often than not partners in progress in their quest to find metaphysical explanations to supernatural problems and challenges.

²¹ From my interaction with all the practitioners of *Jalb* observed during the course of the research, one of the basic requirements for confidence building in serving their clients is the ability to probe into the past and forecast into the future with a measure of accuracy hence the adoption of some of the approaches analyzed

²² *Misbaha* often called "Tasbih" or rosary is prayer beads fastened together in minimum of 99 beads separated into three equal parts to keep track of chanting of the glorifications of Allah and other prayer formular. The object is thus manipulated by *Jalb* practitioners as a divination tool.

²³ Information obtained from the *Jalb* operations of Shaykh Zakariyau Adebayo Tijanniy (aged 65) observed at his residence on Barhama Close, Ayetoro Village, Ogun State on 16th December, 2021.

²⁴ These are Muslims preachers who preach against syncretism. They are many of them especially in the south west of the country. Notably amongst them are Alfa Bisiriyu Apalara, Alfa Abdus-Salaam Bamidele, Alhaji Abdul-Azeez Ajagbemokeferi (all of blessed memory), Shaykh Abdul-Hamid Olohunbemi of the *ko se bo ko so'gun* (no fetish medication in Islam) fame and many Salafiyah scholars sprouting in the region. Such puritanical organizations include *Izalat-ul-bidi'a wa iqamat-us-sunnah* in Northern Nigeria and *Samsu-d-dini-l-Islamiyyah* in the south west.

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Assessing the Sociological Impact of *Jalb/Jalabi*

Spiritual Consultants amongst traditional Muslim scholars viewed knowledge in a utilitarian perspective aimed at reconciling man with his Creator – Allah, and opening for him the limitless opportunities of dominating his environment and other creatures for his own ultimate benefits. To them, the sociologist's rule of "the end justifies the means"²⁶ is elevated to the point of reference, justifying their extraneous methods of effecting medical relief and succour. If the objective of any medical/ metaphysical process is to prevent death, elongate life, mitigate suffering and guarantee good health and well-being of the people, any attempt to subject such to theological discourse (especially in determining its religious approval or not) becomes irrelevant once the result has been achieved, they asserted. According to them, nature has provided man with abundant opportunities to explore and exploit. As such, the extraneous methods mentioned above serve as complementary and not replacements to the recommended orthodox methods. After all, the Qur'an has constantly called the attention of man to this and relates the exploration and exploitation of the wonder of creation as a function of man's *Iman*:

Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of Night and Day—there are indeed Signs for men of understanding. Men who celebrate the Praises of God, standing, sitting, and lying down on their Sides and contemplate (the wonders of) creation in the heavens and the earth (with the thought)" Our Lord! Not for nothing has Thou created (all) this! Glory to Thee! Give us salvation from the penalty of fire (Qur'an 3:190-191)

Also, they situated the religious relevance of *Jalbu* within the services rendered by the practitioners in providing succour to the afflicted Muslims who would have sought such assistance elsewhere, especially in the ever-present "miracle centers" of the rival faith of Christianity. Therefore, through the process of *Jalbu*, a shield or sanctuary is provided for the troubled Muslims from the ferocious onslaught of the Christian evangelists whose activities are centered on exploiting such situations for the purpose of conversion to their faith. So, the deftness with which they operate is viewed by some as not only means of retaining the loyalty and patronage of their clientele but also as a way of strengthening the faith of the Muslims through confidence building and assurance that every problem or difficult situation can be solved or effectively managed within the fold of Islam. Non-Muslims are also systematically invited to Islam through the succour provided to their afflictions when any of the methods earlier analyzed is applied successfully.

Apart from this, the spiritual laziness of the majority of their clientele and their psyche, which placed emphasis and confidence on a physical representation of faith rather than innermost conviction, encourages them to adopt extraneous methods in meeting their heart desires. To such category of Muslims who find it difficult to observe compulsory daily prayers, superogatory supplication, and fasting, taking them through these routes, which require a high degree of patience and steadfastness, may be an effort in futility. Even though they profess faith in God and occasionally bring forth religious practices, they still believe that abnormal situations manifesting in metaphysical afflictions require more than the orthodox means to manage. Their usual refrain

²⁶ "Political Misquotes: The 10 Most Famous Things Never Actually Said" The Christian Science Monitor," n.d.

is "Olohun o ko aajo"²⁷ meaning "God disapproves not native prescription," and it will be indiscretion not to accommodate them by using the extraneous methods as symbols to elicit their confidence in the healing process.

However, despite the attempt to justify the practice of *Jalbu* as a vocation through the above and similar allusion, many discerning Muslims are not in any way impressed. Their opposition is hinged upon the unwholesome adoption of extraneous methods by the practitioners and their mixing of such objectionable methods with the approved orthodox ways of treating metaphysical afflictions. Different stories were also told about how some clerics defrauded their clients, sexual harass or forcefully married their female clients through enchantment, or taken them through extraneous routes rooted in outright idol worship in the quest for solutions to some of their afflictions.

While it might be difficult to confirm the veracity of those who claimed to have suffered one form of wrongdoing or the other from the *Jalb* practitioners, the mere involvement of these practitioners in these messy situations brings to the fore the question of morality and integrity as they relate to the vocation of *Jalb*. Perhaps it was for such situations that the Qur'an warned Muslims to be wary of unscrupulous people camouflaging under the guise of having esoteric knowledge to terrorize, defraud and oppress their victims:

O you who believe! Verily there are many of priests and monks who devour the wealth of men in falsehood, and hinder people from the way of Allah. And those who hoard up gold and silver and do not spend them in the way of Allah, announce to them a painful torment (Qur'an 9:34).

Virtually every afflicted person and their families interviewed and interacted with, in the course of this work, have different tales of woes to tell about the suffering they went through in the hands of traditional scholars (Alfa) who practice *Jalbu*. These and similar experiences shared are the basis of the 200 units of a questionnaire distributed in two States of Lagos and Osun in South West Nigeria to determine the veracity of the above narratives. 125 were administered in five divisions of Lagos State because of its population size, while 75 were given out randomly in Osun State. The opinions of the respondents are analyzed in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Assessing Respondent's Views on their Disposition to Spiritual Consultancy

S/N	Questions	Yes	No	Undecided
1	Have you ever benefitted from spiritual consultancy (<i>Jalabi</i>)?	10 (5%)	182 (91%)	8 (4%)
2	Have you ever been a victim of spiritual consultancy (<i>Jalabi</i>)?	15 (7.5%)	180 (90%)	5 (2.5%)
3	Has Spiritual Consultancy (<i>Jalabi</i>) enhanced the image of Islam in South West Nigeria?	10 (5%)	187 (93.5%)	3 (1.5%)
4	Has spiritual consultancy (<i>Jalabi</i>) damaged the image of Islam in South West Nigeria?	190 (95%)	10 (5%)	-

²⁷ *Olohun o ko aajo* could also mean "God did not disapprove human efforts in solving metaphysical problems" but "aajo" in the context mean traditional medication or native prescription outside orthodox (western) medicine and religious prescriptions

5	Is there any relevance for Spiritual Consultancy (<i>Jalabi</i>) despite many prayer outlets in South West Nigeria?	10 (5%)	190 (95%)	-
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In analyzing the questionnaire from which the above table is drawn, it is essential to state that while the majority of the respondents voluntarily expressed their opinions on various aspects of *Jalbu*, only a few were bold enough to own up to having consulted a spiritual consultant in the past. This reluctance could result from the religious opprobrium attached to *Jalbu* by discernible Muslims. In fact, one of the respondents, in a volte-face manner, confessed when further interviewed that "I cannot own up on the questionnaire (in black and white) of ever visiting or consulting *Jalb* practitioners because it is not something to be proud of as a Muslim."²⁸ Even those who affirmed having a consultancy relationship with them in their responses indicated that they did so occasionally instead of "often" or "very often" given as other options. It is this unwillingness to own up which informed the negative responses obtained for the second question in the table above. However, aside from this, other responses clearly affirm the early narratives of persons who have been victims of spiritual consultancy.

Table 2. Respondent's View on the Positive Impact of *Jalabi*

S/N	Questions	Yes	No	Undecided
1	Strengthening the Muslim's faith in the responsiveness of Islam to solving all problems	25 (12.5%)	167 (83.5%)	8 (4%)
2	Conversion of non-Muslims into Islam through solving problems	38 (19%)	153 (76.5%)	9 (4.5%)
3	Presenting Islam as having the capacity to solve all problems	39 (19.5%)	150 (75%)	11 (5.5%)
4	Stemming (reducing) Muslim's conversion to other religions as a result of searching for solutions to problems	39 (19.5%)	150 (75%)	11 (5.5%)
5	Making Islam relevant in solving socio-economic, political, and spiritual problems	39 (19.5%)	150 (75%)	11 (5.5%)

The above table 2 is to gauge the opinion of those who positively view the practice of *Jalbu* and its practitioners. The five questions posed are some of the sentiments responsible for the continued thriving of the vocation despite the opprobrium against it. From the table, it is clear that each positive sentiment elicited negative responses ranging from 70% to 83%, even though the degree of negativity is lower than what is obtainable in table 1. The explanation for this marginal acceptability of the relevance of *Jalbu* as volunteered by an interviewee is that "despite the aversion a lot of people showed towards the vocation, some are appreciative of the gap it is filling. In fact, the aversion is not really towards the vocation but the procedures adopted which

²⁸ This assertion was made by a respondent in a focused group discussion involving 12 participants on some of the items of the questionnaire. This focused group discussion was held at the Asalatu ground of Jama'atu Ahli Llahi Society (JAMAHLIY) at MITV praying ground at Alausa, Ikeja Lagos State on Sunday 19th December, 2021.

are quite extraneous and controversial".²⁹ The increase in the margin of undecided respondents from the first table is complementary to the fact that there may be a need for spiritual consultancy if properly done.

Table 3. Respondent's View on the Negative Impact of *Jalabi*

S/N	Questions	Yes	No	Undecided
1	It promotes reliance on fetish rather than Allah	186 (93%)	12 (6%)	2 (1%)
2	It presents Islam as a priestly-ridden and superstitious religion	186 (93%)	12 (6%)	2 (1%)
3	It destroys Muslim's belief in <i>Qadar</i> (Destiny)	175 (87.5%)	19 (9.5%)	4 (2%)
4	It discourages personal spiritual development efforts	190 (95%)	10 (5%)	
5	It confuses Islam with Traditional African Religion because of the similarities between their methods and those of the TAR medicine men	175 (87.5%)	19 (9.5%)	4 (2%)

From the Table 3, it is clear that contrary to the assertion of the practitioners, many of our interviewees and interlocutors asserted that *Jalbu* has succeeded in destroying *Iman* (faith), encouraging reliance on fetish and denial of *Qadar* (destiny) because every misfortune is attributable to the machinations of the evil people. Appeasement of such evil powers is elevated over and above critical self-examination and assessment, which may assist the afflicted in not only relating to the present affliction but reflect on measures to be taken to prevent reoccurrence. They further stated that many of the antics as well as the disposition of the practitioners have greatly alienated many Muslims (especially those weak in faith) from the path of Islam and accounted for the conversion of some of them to other faiths as depicted by the earlier illustrations recorded from the submissions of their victims and their relations.

Also, from the assessment of the questionnaire responses and the interview sessions, it is discovered that those who regularly throng the consulting rooms of the *Jalbu* practitioners are not just poverty stricken but the metaphysically afflicted Muslims but also the rich and the powerful. While the poor and the downtrodden often approach them for the enhancement of their fortunes and lifting/mitigation of their afflictions, the rich and powerful patronizes them for various reasons ranging from promotion/elevation at work, the perpetuation of their economic grip on society, electoral victory and insulation from the fear of insecurity, death, and other negative eventualities. In the words of a practitioner, while corroborating this fact, "where do you think many of us get the resources to buy posh cars, build our own personal residences and mosques and maintain high profile public appearances if not from the generosity of our very important rich patrons? Definitely, it cannot be from our poor clients".³⁰

²⁹ This assertion was made by a respondent in a focused group discussion involving 12 participants on some of the items of the questionnaire. This focused group discussion was held at the Asalatu ground of Jama'atu Ahli Llahi Society (JAMAHLIY) at MITV praying ground at Alausa, Ikeja Lagos State on Sunday 19th December, 2021.

³⁰ This assertion was made by Shaykh Zakariyau Adebayo Tijaniyy (aged 65) at his residence on Barhama Close, Ayetoro Village, Ogun State on 16th December, 2021

In further analysis of the questionnaires and interviews conducted, the following are the observable sociological implications of spiritual consultancy in Yoruba land:

1. The demand for spiritual assistance grows higher in poverty-stricken society of Africa, where diseases, fear of demonic powers, lack of opportunities, and the struggle for survival in the midst of the endemic socio-economic and political situations have been the lot of virtually everyone.
2. The encouragement given to Muslims to seek solutions to their problems and achieve a better understanding of Islam from those possessing religious knowledge is an impetus to the continued thriving of *Jalbu* as a vocation despite the criticism attending some of their excesses.³¹ The more society is not insulated from poverty and want through the guarantee of the good life by the government, the more it would be difficult to wish away the relevance of *Jalbu* despite its many aberrations.
3. These scholars' syncretic activities have negatively affected the image of Islam amongst the Yorubas. This has led some observers and writers to assume that there is a strong agreement between Islam and traditional concepts and practices in matters of divination and magic.
4. Some of the practitioners placed monetary consideration above rendering services and spreading kindness. This professional disposition has attracted unfavorable disposition of people towards the vocation and watered down its relevance in alleviating spiritual problems. An overwhelming majority of the respondents amongst the spiritual consultants themselves agreed that their relevance is waning gradually, and they are losing the loyalty and patronage of their clientele due to this phenomenon. This is attributed to the emergence of puritan individuals and societies, which espoused free-of-charge counseling and spiritual consultancy. Besides, the proliferation of *Asalatu* prayer groups such as *Nasrul-lahi-l-Fatih* Society (NASFAT)³² and the successes recorded by them in meeting the spiritual needs of its teeming members has further strengthened the believers' faith in the efficacy of prayers and increased their aversion to the use of charms and talisman. In fact, to stem the tide of the defection of their clientele to these organizations and groups, some practitioners of *Jalbu* have equally embraced and established prayer sessions to take care of the spiritual needs of those who may be averse to the extraneous methods. Some of them have also moderated the consultancy process, and the fees charge in consonance with the financial status of each client and the nature of afflictions. Their comportment at public outings such as naming and burial ceremonies has greatly been influenced positively by the new attitude to respond to the negative dispositions towards their vocation *Jalbu*.
5. In response to the gap being filled by traditional scholars through objectionable extraneous means, particularly in treating metaphysical afflictions, many Islamic prophetic medicine centers for exorcism are increasingly opened where permissible methods of combating them without resorting to extraneous practices of other faiths. The Prophet provided elaborate guidance on the theory, principles, and practice of medicine and prescribed medical and spiritual remedies for treating ailments such ailments as high fever, epilepsy, measles, and the like. Even in the case of demonic possession or satanic-induced madness, a well-

³¹ Sentiments expressed by some *Jalbu* practitioners and their many sympathizers met on the field.

³² *Nasru-l-lahi-l-Fatih* Society is a pacesetter Muslim organization on March 15, 1995 which popularized the weekly (Sunday) *Asalatu* session particularly in South West Nigeria

elaborated method of exorcism (*Ruqya*) has been codified by different authors, such as Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips, who compiled *Ibn Taymiyyah's Essay on the Jinn* (1989)³³ and Shaykh Luqman Jimoh who wrote *Demonic Possession- an Islamic Antidote* (1985)³⁴ from the various Prophetic traditions on the subject matter. If these prescriptions and regulations are adopted and painstakingly followed, there may be no need to make resources to any extraneous means whose religious permissibility is shrouded in ambiguity.

6. Another fallout of the unwholesome practice of the *Jalbu* scholars is the growing concern of conscientious Muslims that Islam, a religion of free thought that once seemed to have banished priestly superstition and enslavement of men by other men of privileged status, has become priest-ridden. This has led to the emergence of more puritans and puritanical individuals calling for the return of Muslims to pristine Islam.

Conclusion

In Yorubaland, some traditional Muslim scholars involved in spiritual consultancy (*Jalbu*) to meet the needs of those consulting them for various backgrounds and reasons. Not only the virtually poor people, the rich and powerful ones also often patronize them. Ranging from seeking an explanation to mysteries surrounding sickness, misfortunes, and the likes to prying into the future and seeking resolution of metaphysical afflictions, the scholars practice a set of *Jalbu* methods. Through this study, found that *Jalabi* has been popular among the Yorubas, even though it is still regarded as a controversial practice. While the majority of this research interlocutors recognize *Jalabi* as, among others, unacceptable before the Islamic law, damaging the image of Islam, promoting reliance on fetish rather than Allah, destroying Muslim's belief, only a few support *Jalabi* in a positive tone, such as making Islam relevant in solving socio-economic, political, and spiritual problems. Therefore, further research on this topic would be helpful to let us understand the phenomenon.

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³³ Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips, *Ibn Taymiyyah's Essay On the Jinn* (Sharjah United Arab Emirate, 1989).

³⁴ Shaykh. L. Jimoh, *Demonic Possession – An Islamic Antidote* (Lagos: Ameen Printer, 1995).

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