

**Yorùbá Witchcraft Beliefs and their Impact on the
Stability of Muslim Marriages in Yorubaland**

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Abstract

The history of Yorùbá belief in witchcraft is as old as the existence of the Yorùbá race itself. By naming the witch *Ìyáàmi-Ajé* (my mother witch), the Yoruba betray their biased attribution of witchcraft to the feminine personality. Only women are witches. They are responsible for misfortunes, illness, poverty, untimely death, and inability to gain promotion at work, childlessness in women, impotence in men and many other evils in human societies. However, some witches are said to be *Ajé-Funfun* (white witches) who use their power for the betterment of their families. This belief is held not only by non-adherents of Islam in Yorùbá. Many Muslims also share this belief, which seems to impact negatively on their lives, most importantly on the stability of their marriages. Little wonder then that there are incessant cases of marital disputes caused by accusations and counter accusations by members of Muslim families of one bewitching the other. Often, these accusations occur between mothers and daughters-in-law or stepmothers and step daughters. The study, therefore, examines the impact of the belief in witchcraft on the stability of Muslim marriages in Yorubaland with the aim of proffering solutions from the Islamic point of view.

Keywords:

Witchcraft, Muslim Marriages, Yorubaland.

Introduction

The fear of witchcraft which many African societies have been baffling with from time immemorial has been a serious threat to the family system and to societal peace. Various scholars define witchcraft according to their perceptions of it. Jayeola-Omoyemi¹ cites Mbiti as defining witchcraft to be “a manifestation of mystical forces which were inborn in a person, inherited or acquired in various ways”. Jayeola-Omoyemi, in his view describes witchcraft as “the supernatural interference in the natural community lifestyle and behaviour”² Adedeji describes a witch as “someone who possesses a strange power with which he or she ostensibly deserves, whose aspirations and desires are judged excessive and illegitimate.”³ The common thing in all these definitions or perceptions of a witch or witchcraft is that they all attest to the fact that the power possessed by a witch is mystical, metaphysical and mysterious.

Belief in the existence and powers of witches has a long and diverse history that cuts across cultures and traditions. Yoruba people from the outset are emotionally attached to traditional phenomena; every life experience of a Yoruba person is attached to one mystical power or another and this has a serious impact on their sense of religiosity⁴. The Yoruba believe that man’s sojourn on earth is characterised by all sorts of mystical powers which are purposely meant to trouble man by delaying, remaking, and possibly destroying man’s destiny for certain reasons. While the Yoruba people believe in the existence of *Olodumare* (The Supreme Being) and other divinities in heaven, they also believe in the

¹ Jayeola-Omoyemi, M.S, Oyetade, E.M, Omoyemi, J.O Witchcraft in the 20th and 21st Centuries in Nigeria: An Analysis in *European Scientific Journal* 11, (28) 361-373, 2015, p. 364 Retrieved from pdf file 6396-1807-1

² Jayeola-Omoyemi, . Witchcraft in the 20th and 21st Centuries in Nigeria, 2015...p. 364

³ Adedeji, O.I “A Philosophical Analysis of the Attitude of Selected Pentecostal Churches to Witchcraft in Contemporary Yoruba Society” A PhD Thesis submitted in the Department of Religious Studies, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria, 2017, p.20

⁴ Adedeji, “A Philosophical Analysis of the Attitude of Selected Pentecostal Churches to Witchcraft...”

existence of evil forces on earth among whom are the witches who are capable of truncating human fortunes and, as a result, are referred to as re-creators (*Atúnidá*) in Yoruba lexicography⁵. Such beliefs often result in persecution, social rejection, discrimination and violence towards those who are accused of being witches or those who confess to engaging in witchcraft practices⁶.

Majority of the victims of witchcraft accusation usually belong to vulnerable groups. They are mostly women, children and the elderly. Yoruba belief in existence of witchcraft practices manifests in cases in which spouses accuse each other of involving in acts of witchcraft. Couples and in-laws accuse one another of witchcraft. When there is delay in child bearing, the wife suspects her mother-in-law or her stepmother instantly. Such cases usually result in marital instability among Muslims in Yorubaland. Wives are unjustifiably divorced on the basis of such accusations and mothers-in-law are forced out of their sons' homes, because of the belief that they are instrumental to the problems of childlessness, infant mortality, joblessness, misfortune, poverty, and family alienation experienced by the couples. It is on this premise that this study examines the impact of Yoruba belief in witchcraft on the stability of Muslim marriages with the aim of establishing the Islamic point of view regarding this phenomenon and proffering ways by which its negative effects on Muslim families in Yorubaland can be reduced.

Witchcraft Practices among Yoruba People

Yoruba people occupy the South Western part of Nigeria which comprises Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti and Lagos State.⁷ It also includes south-eastern part of the Republic of Benin.⁸ In times past, it was a tradition of most communities to use "supernatural" groups like witches to inquire about or atone phenomena that surpassed the communities' explanations. Such phenomena related

⁵ Adedeji, "A Philosophical Analysis of the Attitude of Selected Pentecostal Churches to Witchcraft..."

⁶ Secker, E *Witchcraft Stigmatization in Nigeria: Challenges and success in the Implementation Social Work (isw)* UK: Sage Publication, 2012, accessed via pdf file pp.

⁷ Atanda, J.A. "The Yoruba People: their Origin, Culture and Civilization" in O.O. Olatunde (ed) *The Yoruba: history, culture and language* pp.1-17, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1996.

⁸ Imoagene, O. *The Yoruba of South-Western Nigeria Know Your County Series Handbooks of Nigeria's Major Culture Areas* vol 2, Ibadan: New Era Publishers, 1993

to health, economy, war, and politics.⁹ The word for witchcraft in Yoruba is *àjé*. The Yoruba believe that witches and witchcraft exist as ordained by the Supreme Being (*Olódùmare*) and that they possess their power to protect or inflict punishment on their victims.¹⁰

The purpose for which witches were created is to make the Yoruba have their unreserved loyalty to the Supreme Being, to make them trust in Him and worship Him. In other words, the Yoruba people would not have any reason to worship the Supreme Deity but for the existence of witches, and the challenges they pose to human race.¹¹ This is based on the Yoruba belief that witches are the architects of misfortunes, illness, poverty and death that happen to humankind. Awolalu describes the nefarious attitudes of witches when he submits:

In the mental and social attitudes of the Yoruba, and of the Africans in general, there is no belief more profoundly ingrained than that of the existence of witches (*àje*). All strange diseases, accidents, untimely death, inability to gain promotion in office, failure in examinations and barrenness in women, impotence in men, failure of crops and a thousand other evils are attributed to witchcraft.¹²

It is important to note that although the Yoruba believe that witches are responsible for man's misfortunes in the world, not all witches are involved in evil machinations. There are some witches who use their witchcraft practices for the protection of their children and husbands and for the betterment of other relations. Adedeji's categorisation of witches into three types is apposite here. He, in accordance with Yoruba beliefs, identifies three types of witches. These are "black witches" (*Àjé dúdú*), "red witches" (*Àjé Pupa*) and "white witches" (*Àjé funfun*). He explains that (*Àjé dúdú*) are the general, common and deadliest type in Yorubaland. They further divide into two sub-groups: the first being internal witch (*Àjé Ilé*),

⁹ Jayeola-Omoyemi, *Witchcraft in the 20th and 21st Centuries in Nigeria...*

¹⁰ Ogungbemi, S. "A Philosophical View on Witchcraft in Africa" in *Journal of Humanities*, vol 6, 1992, pdf file accessed via 152993-400742-1

¹¹ Ogungbemi, "A Philosophical View on Witchcraft in Africa" ...

¹² Awolalu, J.O *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial rites* London: Longman, 1979 p.81

which depicts intra-nucleus or extended family occurrence of witchcraft, and the second is the witch external to one's family or even village (*Ajé'Òde*). "External" witches are believed to collaborate with witches inside family enclaves.¹³ At this juncture, it is noteworthy to explain that it is the internal witch that will first initiate her nefarious act on the victim who is her family member and then hand him or her over to the external forces to complete the assignment. This is what informed the Yoruba axiom that says: *bí ikú ilé kò bá pani, ti òde kò lè pani* (external evil cannot overcome one without the influence of the internal).

Red witches (*Ajépupa*) impoverish their family relations (parents, husbands, children, uncles, siblings, etc.) and keep them in that state for life if they are not divinely equipped to fight back. Hence, this category of witchcraft is referred to as witchcraft of rags (*emèrè alákiisa*). Apparently, the merit of this type of witchcraft lies in the fact that it can be used to protect family members from calamity, no matter its magnitude.¹⁴ The third category is white witches (*Ajéfunfun*), who bring joy, success and prosperity to family members.¹⁵ They are devoid of any evil act and are always ready to protect their loved ones from the evils of their counterparts, that is, the black and white witches (*Ajé Dúdu* and *Pupa*).¹⁶

In Yorubaland, old women are generally regarded as witches. However, courtesy demands that they are not addressed publicly as witches but euphemistically as our mothers (*àwọn Ìyá*), or the elders (*àgbalagba*) or people of the metaphysical world (*àwọn Aye*), or re-creators (*Atúnidá*). Discussing the mode of admitting people into witch-guilds, Awolalu and Dopamu submit:

Witches are mostly women but men can also be found, especially at the head of the guilds. Witches usually inherit nefarious art from their mothers. Some are born witches while others acquire witchcraft. But witchcraft can also be bought for a small amount. It can be passed on through food.¹⁷

¹³ Adedeji, "A Philosophical Analysis of the Attitude of Selected Pentecostal Churches to Witchcraft..."

¹⁴ Adedeji, "A Philosophical Analysis of the Attitude of Selected Pentecostal Churches to Witchcraft..." p.22

¹⁵ Ogungbemi, "A Philosophical View on Witchcraft in Africa" ...

¹⁶ Ogungbemi, "A Philosophical View on Witchcraft in Africa" ...

¹⁷ Awolalu, J.O and Dopamu. *West African Traditional Religion*, London: Sheldon Press, 1974,p.124

However, scholars have been confronting with difficulty, the distinction between witches (*Ajẹ́*) and wizard, sorcerer and magician (*Oṣo*) and their mode of operation. While some opine that they are different, some scholars do not deem it necessary to differentiate between them. Among those who create dichotomy between witches (*Ajẹ́*) and wizards, sorcerers and magicians (*Oṣo*) include Adedeji who opines that witches (*Ajẹ́*) in Yorubá concept, do not operate with rituals, spells, medicines, magical objects or palpable apparatuses but are controlled by the spirit in them, operating through their will with automatic obeisance.¹⁸ Ogungbemi also corroborates this view as he submits that:

Men who have power of witchcraft are different from those who belong to sorcery. The name given to sorcery in Yoruba is *Oso* and not *Aje*. In Yoruba thought, men who are sorcerers use charms, medicines and magic to harm or kill their victims. Witches do not use any of those things to harm their victims. Witchcraft is the activity of the soul and its preys are inflicted in a spiritual manner.¹⁹

Contrary to the above submission, Mbiti is of the view that there is no distinction between the two words (*Ajẹ́* and *Oṣo*) since the term 'witchcraft' is employed to connote the harmful employment of metaphysical power in all its different manifestations as the term 'pastor' is used to tag all forms of gospel ministers.²⁰ It is important to state here that the submission of Mbiti on 'witchcraft' being an umbrella term for *Oso* and *Aje* is in agreement with Islam's position on the matter. Details of the Islamic view on witchcraft form part of the focus of this study and will be given attention in subsequent sections.

As earlier stated, membership of witchcraft guilds is mostly drawn from vulnerable groups such as women, children and the elderly as is the case in other countries around the world including

¹⁸ Adedeji, "A Philosophical Analysis of the Attitude of Selected Pentecostal Churches to Witchcraft... p.22

¹⁹ Ogungbemi, "A Philosophical View on Witchcraft in Africa" ...p.2

²⁰ Mbiti, J.S *African Religion and Philosophy*, Bedford Square, London: Heinemann Educational Books,1969

India, Ghana, Uganda, and Tanzania.²¹ But in recent times, children have also become prominent victims of witchcraft accusation in Nigeria, becoming a widespread phenomenon in the mid-1990s. Witches operate in different modes. Jayeola-Omoyemi, while describing witches' mode of operation, states that:

Witches were believed to engage in a cultic meeting at nights. The meeting could be regarded as metaphysical for it is mainly the activities of the souls because only the souls attended meetings. Witches were assumed to fly on the backs of birds, animals, or actually turn into birds and animals. Witches sucked the blood or ate the souls of their victims. Witches' food could be referred to as spiritual cannibalism. Close relatives were said to be donated as victims while new members initiated must bring a victim usually a child of her own family.²²

According to Ray as cited in Ogungbemi, "witches...act only at night, fly or walk on their hands or heads, dance naked, feast on corpses, exhibit insatiable and incestuous lust (despite sexual impotence), murder their relatives, live in the bush with wild, even predatory, animals or excrete and vomit in peoples' homestead".²³ In the opinion of Ogungbemi, witches operate in secrecy and have nocturnal meetings (i.e. Assembly) called *ajo*.²⁴ They have the power to transform into other creatures such as birds, animals like goats, dogs, cats etc. It is at these spiritual meetings they share the meat of their victims.²⁵ Witches have different ways of punishing their victims. They could turn their victims to animals and eat them in spiritual ways. This act is otherwise known as 'spiritual cannibalism'. In Yoruba thought, once a victim has been sacrificed, it is impossible to save his or her life. But If however, he or she has not been sacrificed by the witches, there is a possibility of saving

²¹ Secker, *Witchcraft Stigmatization in Nigeria...*

²² Jayeola-Omoyemi, *Witchcraft in the 20th and 21st Centuries in Nigeria...*p.365

²³ Ogungbemi, "A Philosophical View on Witchcraft in Africa" ...p.150

²⁴ Ogungbemi, "A Philosophical View on Witchcraft in Africa" ...

²⁵ Adegbite, J.O *Major Foundations in Yoruba Religion (Yorel), Culture and Cosmology*, Canada: Association of Yoruba Students in collaboration with Canada University Press, 2005

his or her life, as an appeal could be made to the guilds to spare him while a sacrifice with an animal would be required as a substitute and once that is done, no matter how ill the victim is, he would recover from the sickness.²⁶

In the Yoruba culture, witches only act on their relations and not on strangers.²⁷ Contrary to this, some Yoruba believe that strangers could also become their victim if such strangers offend them (the witches) in one way or another as there are incidences of neighbours, co-tenants, and even colleagues at work accusing one another of witchcraft. The Yoruba believe there is hierarchy in witchcraft. Among the criterion for witches' elevation or promotion is their ability to bring the most successful among their relations (husband, daughters, sons or in-laws etc.) as sacrifices for their guilds. Physical appearance is not enough to assess or determine a witch because a witch may appear physically wretched and dejected in the society but among her peers at nocturnal meetings, she is the most respected personality to be reckoned with. Adedayo and Sandra cite Hallen and Sodipo who observe that witches in Yorubaland come from the lower strata of the society in general, and from economically poor background in particular. Both scholars have also found out that people become witches for socio-economic reasons.²⁸ Other reasons that could be responsible for people becoming witches are domestic tension, jealousy, egotism etc.

Awolalu and Dopamu, while discussing the hierarchy in witchcraft, submit that only one woman has always been in the headship position among the witches while the second in hierarchy could be made up from senior witches in the group who must have mastered the art and mode of operation of the guild and are competent as to hold the leadership position. The third category is made up of witches drawn from the newly recruited members while those in the fourth order are those who are unconsciously initiated into the guild.²⁹

Jayeola-Omoyemi cites Bastian who observes that witches cannot be fought with openly unless they confess their possession of powers that kill or maim people. It is after their personal

²⁶ Ogungbemi, "A Philosophical View on Witchcraft in Africa" ...

²⁷ Ogungbemi, "A Philosophical View on Witchcraft in Africa" ...

²⁸ Adedayo, A.K and Sanda, A. Y. L (2011). *Mystical Powers of Witchcraft among the Gbagyisin Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies (IJOURELS)* 1, 2011, 77-92 accessed via pdf file 209-152-1-PB.

²⁹ Awolalu, and Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion* ...

confession of witchcraft practices that the community can react, and such reactions could come in the form of beating, banishment, tying up or stoning the witch to death by irate people whose family must have been bewitched.³⁰

Islam's Viewpoint on Witchcraft

The words 'magic', 'witchcraft', 'sorcery' etc. are represented by one comprehensive word in the Holy Quran-*Sahar*. As used in the Qur'an, *Sahar* is a tool in the hands of the unbelievers to oppose the prophets by alleging that they (the prophets) were magicians.³¹ The Quran narrative of magic, witchcraft or sorcery practices handed over by devils during the reign of Prophet Sulayman is contained in the Holy Quran as Almighty Allah emphatically condemns this act and assures the believers of His protections from the evils of witchcraft, magical spells and sorcery. Allah says: "...And from those (angels) people learn that by which they cause separation between man and his wife, but they could not thus harm anyone except by Allah's leave..."³²

For better understanding of the message in the above Quranic verse, there is a need to cite some of its *Asbāb-n Nuzūl* (reasons for its revelation) as presented in the works of some *Mufasssirūn* (Quranic Exegetes). Among them is Maudūdī who links the reason for its revelation to the slavery and captivity of the Israelite nation in Babylon. Then, God sent two angels (*Al-Malakaen*), Harut and Marut, in human form with different magical practices in order to test if the Jews would rely on God or believe in magic, talismans and sorcery. However, despite the warnings from the angels to them not to learn magic, they continued to devote most of their time to the talismans and sorcery they were taught.³³ Al-Wahidi in his *Asbāb n- Nuzūl* gives different reasons for the revelation of the Quranic verse (Q2 :102), one of which is that during the time of Prophet Sulayman (A.S), people learnt magic and devoted their time to teaching it to others. However, Prophet Sulayman not only warned them against the practices, but also collected all written documents on it from them and buried them underneath his

³⁰ Jayeola-Omoyemi, *Witchcraft in the 20th and 21st Centuries in Nigeria...*

³¹ Ahmed, H. *A New Approach to the Study of the Quran*, New- Delhi: Goodword Books, 2008.

³² See Qur'an 2: 102

³³ Mawdūdī, S. A. *Towards Understanding the Quran*, Nairobi Kenya: The Islamic Foundation, 2006

throne. Unfortunately, after his demise, a devil incarnate gathered a group of children of the Israelites and promised to show them an inestimable treasure and they all agreed. He then took them to the throne of prophet Sulayman (A.S) and asked them to dig underneath the throne where they found the documents on magic. He convinced them that it was by those magical practices that prophet Sulayman controlled the Jinns, human beings, devils and birds. This is the reason for the widespread practice of magic, sorcery and the use of talismans among the Jews.³⁴

Another Quranic word or terminology for witchcraft is *Ṭayr*. This word was used by the Almighty Allah in Holy Quran 7: 131 when the followers of Prophet Musa (peace be unto him) accepted that all fortunes come from the Almighty Allah while their misfortunes were assumed to have happened as an indication of an evil omen from their Prophet, Musa (peace be unto him) and his cabinet (*Yaṭṭayyarũ bĩ Mũsã wa mon mãau*).³⁵ Then, the Almighty Allah clarified this assumption as He said their fortunes and misfortunes lie with Him (Allah) but most of them lacked the understanding.

Another word or terminology for witchcraft in Islam is *aeynu* (evil omen). A perusal of prophetic traditions reveals that witchcraft practices are real. The Holy Prophet (peace be unto him) used the word *Aeynu* meaning 'eye' to describe witches. At times he qualifies it with negative qualifiers such as *Aeynu Ḥāsīdin* (eye of jealousy) or *Aeynu Sūin* (evil eye).

A direct citation from Prophetic traditions would be necessary at this juncture to drive home the discussion. Aisha (wife of Allah's Apostle) said:

When Allah's Messenger (peace be unto him) fell ill, Gabriel used to recite these verses In the name of Allah. He will cure you from all kind of illness and safeguard you from the evil of a jealous one when he feels jealous and from the influence of evil eye.³⁶

³⁴ Al-Wahidi, A.A. *Asbāb al- Nuzūl* , Amman Jordan: Royal Ahl al -Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008

³⁵ See Qur'an 7: 131

³⁶ Siddiqi A.H. *Sahih Muslim (Arabic-English)* vol 7, Beirut-Lebanon: Dar-al Arabia, 2007,p.29

Similarly, Abu Saï'd reported that Gabriel came to Allah's Messenger (peace be unto him) and said:

Muhammad! Have you fallen ill? Thereupon he said: Yes. He (Gabriel) said In the name of Allah I excuse you from everything and safeguard you from every evil that may harm you and from the eye of a jealous one. Allah would cure you and I invoke the name of Allah for you.³⁷

In another Apostolic tradition, the Holy Prophet (peace be unto him) categorically confirmed the existence of witchcraft. Ibn Abbās reported Allah's Messenger saying:

The influence of an evil eye is a fact (real); if anything would precede the destiny, it would be the influence of an evil eye, and when you are asked to take bath (as a cure) from the influence of an evil eye, you should take bath.³⁸

Also, from the Islamic perspectives, the existence of witches and wizards and the evils associated with them is confirmed in the Glorious Qur'an, Chapters 113 and 114. These chapters are called *mu'awwidhatāni* meaning chapters for seeking divine protection. The Holy Prophet (peace be unto him) was reportedly bewitched as a result of which he fell sick and felt pains all over his body. The Almighty Allah then revealed the two chapters to him as cure for the sickness and prevention from all forms of evils. Quadri attests to the existence of witchcraft when he comments:

The eternal sources of man's problem could be anybody, Jinn, darkness, witches and wizards who recite incantations or prepare other devilish things against one or simply the envier who could go to any extent to harm one.³⁹

³⁷ Siddiqi, *Sahih Muslim (Arabic-English)*...pp.29-30

³⁸ Siddiqi, *Sahih Muslim (Arabic-English)*...p. 30

³⁹ Quadri, Y.A. *The Sayings of the Prophet (SAW) Annotated Translation from Arabic into English*, Ijebu - Ode, Nigeria:Shebiotimo Publications, 1995, p.29

It is important to discuss further what occasioned the revelation (*Sabab -n- Nuzūl*) of the two Quranic chapters for proper understanding of the messages and lessons there in. Al-Wāhidi narrates the causes of the revelation of *Sūratul-Falaq* and *Sūratu-n-Nās* when he submits that the Messenger of Allah (S.A.W.) was bewitched by a Jew called Labid Ibn al-A'sam who cast a spell of black magic on him using some fallen hair of the Holy Prophet (SAW) as well as some few teeth from his comb which he got from his servant boy who was also a Jew. The effect of this magic rendered Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) ill for a period of six months during which the hair of his head fell off and he was withering away. Then the Almighty Allah sent two angels to Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) in his dream during which the source of his illness, the place where the black magic spell was kept, and the person behind his predicament were all revealed to him. When Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) woke from his sleep, he sent Ali Ibn Abī Tālib, al-Zubayr Ibn al-Awwām and Ammār IbnYāsir to go and drain the water of the well of *Dharwa* in which the magic was kept. Therein, they found some of the hair as well as a few teeth from the comb of the Messenger of Allah (S.A.W). They also found a string with eleven knots knitted with needles. Then Allah revealed the two Quranic chapters and each verse he read, one knot was untied until all were untied and he regained his health. With this incident, some companions (*Ashābah*) of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) sought his approval to kill the culprit but he refused saying the Almighty Allah had cured him and he did not need to take any revenge as he handed everything to Him. This shows the spirit of forbearance of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W).⁴⁰ However, in Shariah, according to Ibn Abī Zayd in his *Risālah*, a sorcerer should be killed if he is caught before he repents. But if he had repented before he was exposed, then his repentance would be accepted.⁴¹

Furthermore, it is important to state that despite the confirmation of the existence of witchcraft by the Quran, Islam enjoins Muslims not to be scared or feel threatened about the evils of witchcraft. Muslims are enjoined to have firm faith in their Creator, Allah Whose power surpasses all forms of evils. Allah says in Qur'an:

⁴⁰ Al-Wahidi, A.A. *Asbab al- Nuzūl* , Amman Jordan: Royal Ahl al -Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008

⁴¹ IbnAbīZayd, Q. *Ar-Risālah* (n.d) accessed via pdf on 5th January, 2019.

Nothing shall ever happen to us except what Allah has ordained for us. For we are under His control and decree He is our Master and Protector and in Allah, let the believers put their trust".⁴²

In another chapter, Allah makes reference to the victory recorded by the early Muslims as a result of their unshakable faith in Him. He says:

Those to whom people said, verily, the people have gathered against you, therefore, fear them. But it (only) increases them in faith, and they said: Allah is sufficient for us, and He is the Best Disposer of affairs). So they return with grace and bounty from Allah. No harm touched them; and they followed the pleasure of Allah, And Allah is the Owner of great bounty.⁴³

Impact of Yoruba Beliefs in the Existence of Witches on the Stability of Yoruba Muslim Marriages

It is an axiomatic truth that many Yoruba Muslims strongly believe in the existence of witchcraft and the evils involved in its practices. This belief has been causing serious instability in so many Muslim Marriages in the region. Marriage, which in Islamic term is called *An-Nikāh* or *Az-Zawāj* is one of the signs of Allah which aims at providing peace, tranquillity, love and mercy not only between the couple but also in individual families and in the society at large.⁴⁴ This is so because marriage is the process to family formation while the latter is the stratum of every society. Doi while discussing marriage, cites Abda'Ati who observed, marriage in Islam stands to serve the following purposes; "a means of emotional and sexual gratification, a mechanism of tension reduction, social placement, an approach to inter-family alliance

⁴² See Qur'an 9: 51

⁴³ See Qur'an 3:173-174

⁴⁴ See Qur'an 30: 21

and group solidarity, an act of piety (*taqwa*), a form of *Ibādah*, i.e., worship of Allah and a mark of obedience of His Messenger".⁴⁵

However, a critical examination of the marital lives of many Muslims in Yorubaland reveals that peace, love, tranquillity and mercy are totally absent in many unions and in the families involved as a result of their beliefs in and fear of witchcraft. The impact of witchcraft on the stability of Muslim marriages manifests in various ways. There are cases of daughters-in-law accusing their mothers-in-law of witchcraft practices and vice versa. Victims of witchcraft accusation are at times asked to undergo some Yoruba traditional ritual practices which are totally against the teachings of Islam. Such traditions include asking victims to drink concoctions such as sasswood peelings (*èpo òbò*) just in an attempt to make them confess their witchcraft practices.

Witchcraft accusation and counter accusation is even bitter and tougher in polygynous marriages. On several occasions co-wives accuse each another of belonging to witchcraft guilds while acts of misfortunes such as childlessness of daughter or daughter-in-law, failure of a child to pass examination or get a job, death of a promising child in the family and other misfortunes are often attributed to nefarious acts of women, wives and girls they believe to be witches in the family. The consequential effects of these beliefs on Yoruba Muslim marriages include but are not limited to the following: divorce, inter-family disputes (i.e dispute between groom's and bride's families), domestic violence (wife battering for witchcraft suspicions), fear of and hatred towards the victim in the family, abandoning close family members or parents, most especially the mother because of witchcraft accusation, subjecting suspected witches to oath swearing in an un-Islamic way, or even murdering of the victim (one who is believed to be witch) etc.

In fact, many Yoruba Muslim couples fear witches more than they believe in and fear the Almighty Allah. Instead of them seeking help from the Almighty Allah over evils of witches and wizards, they resort to un-Islamic solutions such as putting on amulets, drinking concoctions from herbalists and involving in traditional sacrifices to appeal to witches and wizards. This practice of putting on amulets and getting involved in the practices of sorcery, using talisman, and magic is categorised in Islam among the crimes punishable by death. According to Ibn Abī Zayd, (n.d) in his *Ar-Risālah*, a sorcerer "is killed without being asked to repent once he has been exposed. If he comes in repentance before he is

⁴⁵ Doi, I.A. *Shari'ah the Islamic Law* London: Taha Publishers, 1994, p.117

exposed, his repentance is acceptable”⁴⁶. This un-Islamic practice makes many Yoruba Muslims become heretics. In fact, many Muslim clerics also get involved in the act. They mislead many Muslim adherents as they problematise evils associated with witchcraft. Many Muslim clerics also extort money from their clients on the promise that they possess supernatural power to combat witches and wizards. Some Muslim clerics even go to the extent of calling themselves *Ọkọ Oṣó* and *Ọkọ Àjé* (husbands of witches and wives of wizards). Unfortunately, many gullible Yoruba Muslims fall into the hands of this category of Muslim clerics whose system of spirituality is not in any way different from those of the *Ifa* priests. For instance, how could one differentiate between *Ifa* priests and a so-called Muslim cleric who freely chants Yoruba traditional incantation (*ofo*) and also asks another person’s wife or daughter to come for spiritual bath in his house or at the bank of a river either in the day or at night all in the name of helping her to overcome the power of witches and wizards that is disturbing her fortunes. Many Muslim couples are breaking up as a result of the nefarious acts of these categories of fake Muslim clerics. Some of these so-called Muslim clerics do engage in extra marital affairs with their clients.

In addition to that is the attitude of many Yoruba Muslims attributing medical challenges such as barrenness, increase in infant and maternal mortality, chronic fever, heart failure, hypertension, diabetes, sickle cell anaemia, and genetic incompatibility among couples to evils of witchcraft. Whereas these are ailments which could be subjected to a thorough medical diagnosis and cured by means of orthodox or herbal medicines but because they have so much ingrained in their minds, the evils of witchcraft, they do not believe in the efficacy of orthodox or herbal medicine.

Many Muslim parents are lazy spiritually. Many of them find it difficult to observe the five daily prayers, not to talk of observing vigil (*tahajjud*). Since it is natural that one cannot give what one does not have, children born or nurtured in such homes also grow lazy spiritually, except for the few who have the opportunity of mingling with enlightened Muslims either individually or as an Islamic society, organisation or group that have better understanding of Islam and good methodology of imparting Islamic morals to others.

⁴⁶IbnAbiZayd, Q. (n.d). *Ar-Risalah* ... p.955

Conclusion

Although Islam acknowledges the existence of witches and wizards with the evils associated with them, it does not problematise their evils as the Yoruba culture wants us to believe. Rather, Islam emphasises superiority of Allah's power and His Majesty over all powers and evils. Instead of Yoruba Muslims seeking help from the Almighty Allah over evils of witches and wizards, many resorts to un-Islamic solutions such as putting on amulets, drinking concoctions from herbalists, and involving in traditional sacrifices to appeal to witches and wizards. As a result, many Yoruba Muslims have become syncretic in their Islamic practices. In fact, many Muslim clerics are in this category.

In the light of the above, the study recommends that Muslims should put their trust in Allah and remain steadfast in Him as enjoined in Quran 3:173-174. Also, Yoruba Muslims should take prayer as their weapon against all evils, be it of witches, wizards, magic, or sorcery rather than seeking solution to their problems in un-Islamic ways. Similarly, they should take proper care of their health because reports of many medical investigations in this contemporary time have shown that it is not all cases of illness, death, barrenness, infant mortality, maternal mortality that are associated with evils of witches. Rather, most of them are due to improper medical attention by the victims or their guardians. Furthermore, Muslim clerics should stop problematising the evils associated with witchcraft as this scares many Yoruba Muslims such that many of them end up as heretics. They (Muslim clerics) should intensify efforts in educating Muslims on sound *Imān* (faith), *Ruqyah* (Islamic incantation) and *Al-Ma'thurāt* (prayers for Allah's protection against evils). They are also to employ Quranic chapters 113 and 114 and similar ones to deal with all forms of manifestations of witchcraft and sorcery.

Finally, Muslim parents should be acquainted with Qur'anic and prophetic prayers and make their recitations a daily ritual with their families.