

## A STUDY OF MISUSE OF SELECTED CHAPTERS OF THE QUR'ĀN AMONG THE YORUBA MUSLIMS

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### Abstract

The Qur'an, as the revealed word of Allah and the foundation of Islamic belief and practice, serves as a comprehensive guide for both spiritual and worldly affairs. Because any alteration to it directly threatens the integrity of Islam, its preservation has always been regarded as a sacred responsibility. From the Prophet's era to the present day, Muslims have consistently devoted themselves to safeguarding the Qur'an from corruption or distortion, and this collective vigilance explains why the text remains unchanged. Building on this legacy of protection, the paper investigates certain practices among Yoruba Muslims that may unintentionally distort the Qur'an and, therefore, constitute a form of abuse and misuse. Focusing on three chapters—*Al-Mulk*, *Al-Waqi'ah*, and *Al-Kahf*—the study examines unconventional methods of writing and reciting the Qur'an introduced by some Yoruba *Mallams*. The findings show that these practices are unfamiliar to mainstream Islamic scholarship and pose risks to the accurate transmission of the Qur'anic text. If such practices continue, they may eventually influence how future generations understand the Qur'an. The study identifies *Jalabi* practitioners and certain Sufi groups as the major contributors to these distortions and urges Muslims to avoid any actions that may compromise the purity and authenticity of the Qur'an.

**Keyword:** Qur'an; *Jalabi*; Sufi; Distortion; Yoruba.

### Introduction

The Glorious Qur'ān is a vital document that defines and designs Islam. Its perfection emanates from the perfection of Islam and whatever that tampers with it, will automatically have direct bearing on Islam. This is why Allah makes it a duty upon Himself to safeguard and protect it against any form of interpolations, distortions or dovetailing of whatever sort. Allah states His commitment to protecting the Qur'ān in many places. In one of those places, He says:

لَا يَأْتِيهِ الْبَاطِلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَلَا مِنْ خَلْفِهِ تَنْزِيلٌ مِنْ حَكِيمٍ حَمِيدٍ

No falsehood can approach it from before or behind it: It is sent down by One Full of Wisdom, Worthy of all Praise.  
(Q.41:42)

In another place where the protection of Qur'an against any form of interference is guaranteed is Q.15:9 where Allah makes protection of the Qur'an a duty upon Himself.

Explaining the verse above, Nasir bin Ali submits that the protection of the Qur'an against intrusions and disruptions that may occur from any direction, be it internal or external, is assured through the divine involvement. He writes:

وفي هذه الآية بين الله تعالى أن القرآن "محفوظ من أن ينقص منه  
فيأتيه الباطل من بين يديه، أو يزداد فيه فيأتيه الباطل من خلفه، دل  
على هذا المعنى قوله تعالى: {وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ} فالذي يعتقد أن  
القرآن يدخله التغيير والزيادة، والنقص، فهو مكذب لله رب  
العالمين

From this verse, Allah, the most exalted, makes it abundantly clear that, indeed, the Qur'an is protected against subtraction, else it becomes defective from the front, or addition, else it brings about defectiveness from behind. This points to the meaning of (We shall be the protectors of it). Whoever believes that the Qur'an has been shortchanged by addition or subtraction has lied against Allah, the Lord of the universe (Ali, 2000).

Also, in Q.20:114 and 75:17, Allah cautions the Prophet from being hasty about the Qur'ān. The verses assured him that the compilation and manifestation of the meaning of Qur'ān are divine responsibilities. Allah makes it a duty to protect the Qur'an and to prevent it against what befell other revealed books from the hands of men. None of those books exists in its original form as revealed today, some have even gone into the dustbin of history (As-Shinqiti, 1999).

Despite the divine assurances that the Qur'an has been protected from human interferences, there had been attempts that are geared towards disregarding this reverence. People have struggled and tried to violate this divine affirmation at different times as recorded from the annals of history. But each was met with intense rejection from the scholars. It is therefore imperative for Muslims at all time to protect the Qur'an at all cost.

It is in response to this essential responsibility that this paper aims at examining the noticeable use and misuse of the Glorious Book among the Yoruba Muslims with particular reference to the following chapters, viz *Al-Mulik* (Q.67), *Al-Wāqī'ah* (Q.56) and *Al-Kahf* (Q.18). This (misuse) may constitute means of distorting the Qur'an. The Yoruba are noted for the practice of printing selected chapters (these three inclusive) and verses of the Qur'ān for free distributions at occasions. Attention shall be given to writing and recitation of these prominent chapters among the Yoruba Muslims. Studies like this are indispensable because there is the need to properly and academically examine how Yoruba Muslims relate with Qur'an to guard and guide against acts that can constitute a potential way of alteration, interpolation and misrepresentation of the Qur'ān among the Yoruba Muslims in particular and the generality of Muslims.

### Concept of Misuse of the Qur'an

The misuse of the Qur'an refers to any act, interpretation, or handling of the Qur'an in a manner that contradicts its intended purpose, method of preservation or established Islamic scholarship. Classical Muslim scholars emphasize that the Qur'an was revealed as divine guidance and must be read, transmitted, and interpreted according to strict principles to prevent distortion (Al-Suyuti, 1996). Misuse occurs when individuals manipulate Qur'anic verses for superstitious practices, commercial gain, cultural innovations or personal interests rather than for legitimate devotional or scholarly purposes.

Such actions may include altering the modes of recitation, inventing unauthorized methods of writing verses or assigning meanings not supported by sound exegesis (Ibn Kathir, 2003). Contemporary researchers warn that these practices threaten the accurate transmission of the Qur'an to future generations and undermine the integrity of Islamic teachings (AbdulRaheem, 2015). Consequently, Muslim scholars advocate adherence to authentic Qur'anic sciences such as *tajwīd*, *qirā'āt*, and *tafsīr* as protection against distortion and as essential measures for preserving the sanctity of the Qur'an.

### **Yoruba Muslims and Misuse of the Selected Chapters**

Yoruba are the people that occupied the expanse of land in the southwestern Nigeria with about six states including Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ondo, Lagos and Ekiti. The tribe is also found in simple minority in some North central states like Kogi, Kwara and Niger. There are also Yoruba speaking people in the neighborhood country to Nigeria like Republic of Benin (Jadesola (2022). This Fiery Man. Retrieved from <http://www.researchgate.net>). They are typical and originally idol worshipers but vast majority of them have accepted Islam today. As it stands, Ekiti and Ondo are the two states that Muslims are not in majority out of the six main states in Nigeria. The Yoruba in Nigeria are majorly Muslims with reputable Islamic scholars who are recognized across the Muslim world. The likes of Shaykh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilori (d.1992), Shaykh Muhammad Kamaldeen Habibullahi Al-Adabi (d.2005) and Shaykh Murtada Abdulsalam among others are scholars of all time in Yorubaland. They established *Madāris* where army of graduates who can compete with their peers favourably anywhere in the world are churned out on yearly basis. The efforts of these individuals have yielded many positive results as they gave good image and recognition to Yoruba Muslims across the globe.

Two practices thrive among Yoruba Muslims which are largely responsible for the misuse of Qur'anic verses. The first is *Jalabi* otherwise known as *Ise Alfa* (clerical services) (Aliyu, 2015). It is a clerical consultancy service that people approach the Mallam for spiritual assistance to solve various problems. The attempts to proffer solutions to those problem coupled with limited knowledge of Islam and the desires to get rich bring about different forms of manipulation of Quranic verses, believing that as long as Qur'ān is maneuvered, they are within the purview of Islam. This therefore spurred them to design different means of using the Qur'ān. This is further strengthened with the availability of different works, such as *As-Shamsu 'l-Ma'rifi 'l-Kuburā* by Shaykh Ahmad Ali Al-Banūnī (d.1225CE) and the likes, from Arab world wherein various strange descriptions on the uses of Qur'ān are contained.

The second practice is Sufism. This is the practice of soul purification from vices to virtue and from spiritual filths to spiritual purity (Shaidah, 2014). This is premised on various verses of the Qur'ān and *ahadith* of the Prophet. For instance, Qur'ān in *Suratu 's-Shams* verses 9-10 mentions *Tazkiyyah*, while the Prophet mentions *Ihsan* which has been explained to mean awareness of the status of soul. Sufism is practiced in Yorubaland under two major orders, viz: Qadiriyyah and Tijaniyyah. There are also some other groups, but not as prominent as the two orders across not only the Yorubaland, but also the country as a whole.

Sufis approach the Qur'ān from the esoteric perspectives. This is otherwise known as *Ilmu 'l-Bātin* as opposed to *Ilmu 'z-Zāhir* (the exotericism), which is said to be the knowledge of Sharī'ah. They are opposite to each other. One is apparent, while the other one is hidden. The latter is taken from the former. Sufis through the knowledge of esotericism bring meaning to verses of Qur'ān that are far from the apparent meaning or direct interpretations. This is often premised on the story of Prophet Musa and Khidr as contained in *Suratu 'l-Kahf*. The Yoruba Sufis have however gone beyond the ordinary application of this to indulge in what is primarily alien to *Sharī'ah* and Islam. An instance is *dhikr* as contained in Qur'ān 29:45 is understood as jettisoning the compulsoriness of *Salat*. It is on this basis that some Sufis forsake *Salat*, believing that *dhikr* is more important than it. Other instances to come in the appropriate place.

This paper does not seek to dwell into the questions of legitimacy of both groups in Islam which have been generating hot debates over time, but to discourse their practices vis-à-vis the abuse of Qur'ān, because they form major groupings among the Yoruba Muslims today. Also, it is pertinent to state that both groups will be discussed together in relation to misuse of the Qur'ān. This is because the reality has shown that both of them only have different names, they are one and indivisible entity. Most Jalabi practitioners are Sufis across Yorubaland. It is in area of specific that, emphasis may be placed on one of the two to better the discussions. The practice of Jalabi in Yorubaland has featured different ways of manipulating the Qur'ān which run contrary to the provision of the primary sources of Islam. They premised the practice on the established uses as highlighted above vis-à-vis those chapters, but went further to invent various other means both in reading, writing and usage of the Qur'ān or its verses.

### (i) Reading or Recitation

Ordinarily, the reading of the Qur'ān should follow the pattern of its arrangements, compilation and standardization by both the Prophet and the early Muslims. But the Qur'ān is read in different ways that are devised by the local Mallams. They re-arrange or re-group some verses and chapters of the Qur'ān. They have different selection of the verses and chapters under different heading such as *ayatu 'l-hirz* (verses of protection), *ayatu 'l-Rizq* (verses of blessing), selection of forty (40) *Rabana*, 29 *Muqatta'at* chapters are selected, regrouped according the letter that starts each of them. There are some other forms of re-groupings. They also assigned different number of rounds or times for their recitations. To some, there are specific times they can and cannot be recited. There are also those with certain conditions for their recitations and the modes, states among others are equally stipulated. Sometimes, verses or chapters of Qur'ān are reduced to *Opa* (stick) which is chanted instead of reading the verses or chapters directly. Also, in an attempt to Islamise their *kufi* heritage, there are those who read verses of Qur'an as a replacement for incantations. What is also commonly attributed to these chapters is sacrifice of cow, ram, sheep or goat as may be convenient for one. At times, *Sara* (*Sadaqah*) is prescribed to go with each of them.

Specifically, *Suratu 'l-Mulk* is often read for dominion, victory, success and the likes, where someone is seeking for a leadership position at any place or to lord over people. There are different ways of using it. They counted the number of times الرَّحْمَنُ appears in the *Surah* and discovered it is four (4) times. Different acts are performed when one reads to each of the spots where it is mentioned. Some of them include changing directions, starting over again to the next one, before starting again, stopping to continue from there to another spot the next day, which makes the completion of the *Surah* to last for four days. Reciting with other verses, chapters and repetition of certain prayer at each spot and so on. Some are recited while standing, sitting, walking, facing or backing the *Qiblah* and many more.

*Suratul-Waqi'ah* is popularly known as *Isawaka*, *isaw'owo*. It is read or recited for money magic, especially on Thursday to Friday night. There are portions that will be repeated in a number of times. Like verse 26, may be repeated a thousand time (1000), during or after reading the whole verse. The verse between 28 and 35 which described paradise are also used for ease and better life. Verse 89 is also recited for a deceased person. They also use the *Surah* for some other purposes such as protection, gaining affection, tackling enemies, winning litigation among other usages. They also developed *Khutbah* (prefixed supplication that needs to be recited after the *Surah*) for this chapter which must be read after the completion of the chapter or the stipulated number of rounds to be recited.

*Suratu 'l-Kahf* is recited or read for protection and prosperity in an endeavor. There are different ways of reading it, depending on the purpose for which it is to be read. It is noted that the chapter contains one hundred and ten (110) verses. So, it is divided into eleven (ten each) in which at the end



of each portion, another chapter of Qur'ān, often *Suratu Yasin* or *Al-Fatihah* will be recited before moving to the next ten. Where someone wishes to retain something or courses others to forget what is with him, he recites مَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ أَبَدًا (verse 3) repeatedly to achieve that. Also, if the intention is to grow in business, high patronage or have mammoth crowd at a particular place, فَجَمَعْنَاهُمْ جَمْعًا (verse 99) is repeated severally as may be determined by presiding or recommending clerics.

## (ii) Writing

Another means of misusing Qur'ān among the people of the two groups is manners of writing the verses or the chapters. This comes in different ways among which is *Khatimi* (tabular inscription with codes from either Qur'anic verses or other things) (Balogun, 2013). Basically, *Khatimi* is a special formulae with which verses of Qur'ān or chapters are coded. It may be done in tabular, triangular or circular form, with numbers and names in and outside of it. There is a mathematical formulae which is used to reduce Arabic alphabets to numerals and from letters to words, then to generate codes. *Hantu* is also a frequent name among the Yoruba *Jalabi* practitioners. It is called when Quranic verse or chapter is written for different purposes, either on the slate or paper, with *Tada* (ink). Sometimes they are drank, hung or bath with. There are those who used blood of animals for writing purpose. There are those that wrote verses or chapters of Qur'ān as *oku* (dead), *afoju* (blind) and *aye* (living). The first one describes the writing of a portion of the Qur'an without dots and diacritical marks, the second without diacritical marks alone and the third one as revealed. The writing sometimes may be for *aseje* (concoction). This is where the Qur'an is written, either whole or part for the purpose of making special preparation for specific purposes, like healing or spiritual deliverance.

There is also *Gari-Tira*. This is where some substances are prepared and are added to what is written as a condition or ingredient that will make it as effective as expected. Different items can be used for this such as plants, leaves, root, and anything as may be prescribed by the first Shaykh to use it. They used to write verses or chapters of Qur'an to make *onde* or *paro* (amulet) and for magic purposes. It should be pointed out that there is no much difference between the writing and reading of those chapters. What was stated above with regards to each of the three chapters in terms of usages and the reasons thereof are similar. Writing in most cases is resulted to where a client cannot read Arabic. In a nutshell, all the three chapters for this discussion can be written as described for the same purposes.

## The Implications of Misusing the Selected Chapters

The brief descriptions above are the gist of how Yoruba Muslims have devised different means of using the Qur'an to achieve a desired goal. They are considered as misusing the Glorious Book because it was not in vogue in the days of the Prophet and they run contrary to the instruction of the Qur'an itself. Qur'an 6:115 and 18:27 direct that wordings of the Qur'an must remain as revealed at all time. One of them reads:

وَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّكَ صِدْقًا وَعَدْلًا لَا مُبَدِّلَ لِكَلِمَاتِهِ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

The word of thy Lord doth find its fulfilment in truth and in justice: None can change His words: for He is the one who heareth and knoweth all. (Q.6:115)

Having established the perfect nature of the words of Allah in this verse, the second one directs that it should be read as revealed. Ibn Kathir while explaining the verse submits that neither twisting nor strange interpretation should be applicable to Qur'an as they are capable of violating the rule of these verses (Ibn Kathir, 1991).

**(i) Ridiculing the Qur'ān**

The Glorious Qur'ān frowns at the act of taking its verses for mockery or cracking jokes. It also records the individuals like Al-Walid ibn Mughirah, who attempted such and the punishment that was meted on them. A reading through *Suratu 'l-Baqarah* reveals how Allah instructs and warns against such practice. It reads:

وَلَا تَتَّخِذُوا آيَاتِ اللَّهِ هُزُوًا

And do not take the verses of Allah in jest (Q.2:231)

The same instruction is repeated in many places in Qur'ān, such as Q.4:140 and 18:56 among others. Allah states and stipulates the consequences of indulging in such action. Qur'ān mentions heavy and humiliating punishment (Q.31:6 and 45:9).

قال علماءنا: والاقوال كلها داخلة في معنى الآية، لانه يقال لمن سخر من آيات الله: اتخذها هزوا. ويقال ذلك لمن كفر بها، ويقال ذلك لمن طرحها ولم يأخذ بها وعمل بغيرها، فعلى هذا تدخل هذه الاقوال في الآية.

Our scholars explained: The meaning of this verse captured every utterance. This is because it is often said to whoever mocks any of the verses of Allah: Are you mocking the verse! This is also said to whoever rejects or sets it aside by applying other laws. Each of these comes under the meaning of this verse (Al-Qurtubi, nd).

This explains how disrespect it is to Allah to mock or ridicule His words. The honour and dignity of the Qur'ān is therefore preserved by keeping away from deeds and utterances that can lead to such.

**(ii) Distortion and Interpolation of the Qur'ān**

The sacredness and authenticity of the Glorious Qur'ān would automatically be affected when the Qur'ān is misused. This is because the meanings which translate to the messages would have been distorted when Qur'ān is wrongly read or written. It would be recalled that various sciences including Arabic grammar, science of recitation (*Tajwid*), science of *Tafsir* and the likes evolved to protect and preserve the ways of writing, and reading to enable one understand and explain the Qur'ān better, but various instances as given above show how the application of these sciences are jettisoned. In effect, it will water-down the efforts of the previous generations who developed those tools to protect the Qur'ān from any form of interferences.

**(iii) Corruption of Islam as a religion**

This explains the effect of distortion of the Qur'ān because it will have direct effect on its messages. No doubt, what is understood as the message automatically translates to what one applies. Misuse of Qur'ān engendered confusions among the Muslims and unnecessary arguments and debates among the scholars. Such confusions and debates can be seen in the history of sectarianism in Islam. Each of the sects reference the Qur'ān to support their stand point, whereas all cannot be correct at the same time.

**(iv) Misguidance of the Ummah**

It is bound that people will be misguided where the meaning of the Qur'ān is tampered with. Through it, what is forbidden would have been made lawful and vice versa, while new things without proofs (*bid'ah*) would have been introduced into the religion. Many of the instances of misuse of Qur'ān

cited above are based on logic and analogy through the use of reasoning, forgetting that there is limit to what man can apply those means to. It is a potential source of misguidance to rely on logical deductions and inference why writing, reading or applying the messages of the Qur'ān.

#### (v) **Disparities and Non-universality of the Qur'ān**

One of the divine proofs of the Qur'ān is absence of disparities and universal coherence and absence of textual contradiction. Efforts of the previous generations to safeguard the Qur'ān makes it exists today as the only document that existed for over a thousand and four hundred years without contradiction of any sort. However, with human interference as brought to bear by misuses as sampled above, the universality and textual coherence will be thwarted. It is one of the effects of translation of the Qur'ān that, till this time, there is no universally acceptable translation of any language. This is because there is no translation without lacuna. If Qur'ān is therefore read or written in a manner other than how it was revealed, compiled and standardized by the people of early communities, there is possibility of disparities. If this sort of misuse is allowed unchecked, it will bring about a Yoruba version of Qur'ān in terms of writing, reading, explanations and applications of it messages.

#### **Conclusion**

This paper has discussed the efforts of the early communities of Muslims right from the time of the Prophet, Companions and those that followed them to protect the Qur'an against various forms of interference that can bring about distortion, interpolation, dovetailing and misrepresentation of its messages. This is imperative considering the importance and centrality of the Qur'an to Islam, apart from being the words of Allah, the Creator of man. It has been taken as a responsibility by scholars of various times and localities to defend the integrity of the Qur'an, hence for the years of its existence, nothing has tampered with it and it has been successfully transferred from generation to generation with exact form as revealed to the Prophet till the present time.

The Yoruba Muslims are noted for different acts which are tantamount to abusing and misusing the Qur'an which this paper has examined selected chapters (*Al-Mulk*, *Waqi'ah* and *Kahf*) as some of the most used chapters of the Qur'an among Yoruba Muslims, in order to prevent acts that can tarnish the image of the Qur'an. There is no doubt, Qur'an is meant to be used for whatever purpose that a Muslim feel, but it has to be within the purview of *Shari'ah*. Different forms of writing and reading have evolved among the Yoruba Muslims which are strange and lack credence, hence they are categorized as misuse of the Qur'an which need to be checkmated, otherwise they can engendered confusions and distortion of the Qur'an, not only among the Yoruba, but also the Muslims throughout the world. *Jalabi* practitioner and Sufis are therefore needed to be cautioned as they are the two set of Muslims that are guilty of this act.

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