



**ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF THE PHENOMENON OF  
JALABI AND ITS SOCIO-RELIGIOUS IMPACTS IN  
YORUABALAND NIGERIA**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

Jalabi is an extant historical phenomenon with strong socio-religious impacts in the Yorubaland, south-western part of Nigeria. It was among the preparatory D'awah strategies devised by the Yoruba 'Ulamā' following the general mainstream Africa to condition the minds of the indigenous people for the acceptance of Islam. This strategy is reflected in certain socio-religious services rendered to the clients, which include, but not limited to, spiritual consultation and healing, such as petitionary du'ā' (prayer), divination through sand-cutting, rosary selection, charm-making, and an act of officiating at various religious functions. In view of its historicity, the framework of the thesis revolves around three stages identified to have been aligned with the evolution of Jalabi, viz. Da'wah, which marked its initial stage, livelihood into which it had evolved over the course of time, and which, in turn, had predisposed it to the third stage, namely syncretism. Triangulation method was adopted for qualitative data collection, such as interviews, personal observation, and classified manuscript collections, and then was interpretively and critically analyzed to enhance the veracity of the thesis findings. The orality of the Yoruba culture has greatly influenced the researcher's decision to seek data beyond the written words in order to give this long-standing phenomenon its due of study and to help understand the many dimensions it has assumed over time, as well as its both positive and adverse effects on the socio-religious live of the Yoruba people of Nigeria.

## خلاصة البحث

الجلب ظاهرة تاريخية راسخة ذات آثار اجتماعية ودينية قوية في بلاد اليوروبا في جنوب غرب نيجيريا، وكانت من بين الاستراتيجيات التمهيدية الدعوية التي طبقها علماء اليوروبا على غرار الاتجاه السائد بين علماء الأفارقة لتكييف عقول الناس على قبول الدعوة الإسلامية. تنعكس هذه الاستراتيجية في بعض الخدمات الاجتماعية والدينية المقدمة للناس، والتي تشمل - على سبيل المثال لا الحصر - الاستشارة الروحية والعلاج، مثل التماس الدعاء، والتكهن عن طريق الخط في الرمل والاستخارة بالسبحة، والشعوذة. ونظرا للعمق التاريخي لظاهرة الجلب يدور إطار هذه الأطروحة حول ثلاث مراحل التي مرت عليها الظاهرة: المرحلة الدعوية التي تمثل المرحلة الأولى، ثم مرحلة التكسب المادي أو الارتزاق التي تطورت بمرور الزمن وعرضتها بدورها للشرك بالله في آخر مراحلها. اعتمدت هذه الدراسة على طريقة البيانات النوعية مثل: المقابلات، والملاحظات الشخصية، ومجموعة مخطوطات الأسرار النادرة التي تم تفسيرها تفسيراً نقدياً لتعزيز صحة نتائج البحث. على أن رواج الرواية الشفهية في ثقافة اليوروبا قد حث الباحث على الاعتماد خاصة على البيانات الشفهية من أجل إعطاء هذه الظاهرة حقها في الدراسة، والمساعدة على فهم العديد من الأبعاد التي اتخذتها على مر الزمن وانعكاساتها الإيجابية والسلبية على حياة الناس الاجتماعية والدينية في بلاد اليوروبا .

## **APPROVAL PAGE**

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

*Jalabi* in the Yoruba-Nigerian<sup>1</sup> Muslim context designates certain socio-religious services rendered by the Yoruba ‘*Ulamā* to their clients, which include, but not limited to, religious consultation, spiritual healing and an act of officiating at various religious functions, etc. Mustapha Bello defines it as “a system whereby a scholar prepares charms, which are believed to possess supernatural powers for protection against evil and for bringing good fortunes to traders, enhancement of luck...etc. in return for monetary compensation.”<sup>2</sup>

Mustapha’s definition is not thorough and comprehensive, as it tends to focus only on the mainstream *Jalabi* and therefore could not rightly put the phenomenon in its proper historical context. On the contrary, it was among the preparatory strategies devised by the Yoruba ‘*Ulamā* in the past following the general pattern of the West African ‘*Ulamā* to condition the people for the acceptance of Islam. From this perspective, it could summarily be described as a means whereby the ‘*Ulamā* win over the hearts of the native people to Islam. This means included, besides the previously

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<sup>1</sup> Yoruba is one of the major ethnic groups, and second most populous, in Nigeria. The people occupy the south-western part of the country, stretching from the upland area to the hinterland of the Lagoon. They speak Yoruba and constitute over 35 million people in total, the majority of whom is from Nigeria, while others spread across West Africa including Togo, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. For more details on Yoruba, see: Suzanne Preston Blier. (2015). *Art and Risk in Ancient Yoruba: Ife History, Power and Identity, c. 1300*. U.S.A: Cambridge University Press., Stephen A. Akintoye. (2010). *A History of the Yoruba People*. Dakar Senegal: Amalion Publishing., T.G.O. Gbadamosi. (1978). *The Growth of Islam Among The Yoruba 1841-1908*. Lagos: Longman Press., Saburi Oladeni Biobaku. (1973) *Sources of Yoruba History*. Clarendon Press., Samuel Johnson. (1921). *The History of the Yorubas from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*. U.S.A: Cambridge Press.

<sup>2</sup> Bello Mustapha A., “Between Jalb Practitioners and Traditional Healers of South West Nigeria: A Synthesis of Method and Approaches”, *Anyigba Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*. Vol. 5, no.1 (2011): 66.

mentioned, petitionary *Du‘ā‘*, divination through sand cutting, or rosary selection, *Hantu*,<sup>3</sup>*Turare*,<sup>4</sup> *Tira*,<sup>5</sup>and *Gbere*.<sup>6</sup> Although, this strategy does not necessarily guarantee a break from the old traditional religion, it nevertheless prepared the minds for the assimilation of significant elements of Islamic cultures.

Etymologically, *Jalabi* is a domesticated Arabic word with its root stemming from the triconsonantal *j-l-b*, which has got various meanings and connotations. According to the classic Arabic lexicographers<sup>7</sup>, *al-jalb* means to drag something from one place to another, considering its grammatical inflexion and transitivity as in *jalabahū*, *Yajlibuhū* or *yajlubuhū jalaban* or *jalban*. It could also denote earning a living as in *jalaba li nafsihī*, or to bring about benefit, good luck or fortune as in *jalaba naf’an*. Since the phenomenon of *Jalabi* is widely spread across West Africa under different names, only the Yoruba context will be considered in the present research. Nevertheless, it may not be properly understood until one is familiar with its historical background.

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<sup>3</sup> *Hantu* in the Yoruba language refers to the act of writing chapters, verses of the Quran or other coded prayers (usually in Arabic) with the ink prepared either from herbs or a burnt sugar on a wooden or iron slate or plain sheets of paper. This writings are usually washed off with water for the purpose of drinking by a client with or without any other herbal concoctions, but in some rare cases they are not washed if the writings are not prepared for the purpose of drinking.

<sup>4</sup> *Turare* is aromatic incense produced from various herbs and roots that releases fragrant (usually unpleasant) smoke when burnt. Although, the material burnt may be somewhat different, incense is not the monopoly of the Yoruba ‘Ulamā’, as it has been, and will continue to be used by various people for various reasons. It is mainly used in the Yoruba context for spirituality.

<sup>5</sup> *Tira* is used for an amulet made of verses of the Quran, names of Allah, or those of the Jinns or made of talismanic formula extracted from different sources to be worn around the neck or arm or to be tied to one’s cap or pocket to protect its possessor from any danger or evil of any kind mainly spiritual, or to bring about luck.

<sup>6</sup> *Gbere* is a Medicinal incision through which certain prepared powder substance (made of various herbs and some other materials) are transferred into the blood stream of the patient to effect prevention or cure of metaphysical affliction. Bello Mustopha, Bello Mustapha.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Jawharī, Ismāil bin Ḥammād, *al-Ṣiḥā’ Tāj al-Lughah wa Ṣiḥāḥ al-‘Arabiyyah*, (Dār al-‘ilm li al-Malāyīn, 1990), Al-Mut-ṭarizī, Nāsir bin ‘Abdul al-Seyyid, *al-Mughrib fī Tartīb al-Mu‘rib*, (Ḥalab: Maktabah Usāmah bin Zaid, 1979), Al-Zabīdī, Muḥammad bin Muḥammad bin ‘Abdul Razāq, *Taj al-‘Ārūs min Jawāhir al-Qamūs*, (Kuwait: Dār al-Hidāyah, 2008), Al-Farāhidī, al-Khalīl bin Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-‘Ain Murattaban ‘alā Hurūf al-Mu‘jam*, (Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2003), Ibn Manẓhūr, Muḥammad bin Mukrim, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir), Abu al-Ḥusein Aḥmad bin Fāris, *Maqāyīs al-Lughah* (Ittiḥād al-Kuttāb al-‘Arab, 2002), Al-Ṭāliqānī, Ismāil bin ‘Abbād bin al-‘Abbās, *Al-Muḥīṭ fī al-Lughah*, (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1994).

## 1.2 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Although it has become a widely accepted phenomenon among the Yorubas, particularly the ‘*Ulamā*,<sup>8</sup> there is no knowing when this concept came to being. Perhaps it could be traced back to the advent of Islam in the Yorubaland,<sup>9</sup> and the general pattern of its establishment, which, if well discerned, is invariably one of the characteristics of Islam in West Africa. Whatever the first Muslims may have been like in this region, and whatever might have been responsible for their being there, all that could be emphasized is the fact that wherever they find themselves, there is always a tendency to spread their religion and attract other Muslims. Once the population grew larger it began to attract Muslim scholars and clerics. This was the case of Fulani<sup>10</sup>herdsmen from the

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<sup>8</sup>Caution must be exercised when using this term. The word ‘*Ulamā*’ is a plural form of ‘*Ālim*’ which may loosely be translated as *Alfa* in the Yoruba language. However, this word in the Yoruba context is used to designate both the scholar and their students in the same manner in which the term sheikh is used to address both teachers and students of Islamic sciences in some parts of the Islamic world. To this usage, Abu Marwān al-Tabānī pointed in his poem as quoted by Abu Ḥayyān of Andalus (d. 1344 C.E) in his *al-Bahr a-Muḥīṭ*:

*Yā ahla andalusin mā ‘indakum adabun*  
*Filmashriqil adab al-naḥḥū biṭ-ṭibi*  
*Yud‘ā shabābu shuyūkhān fī majālisihim*  
*Was-sheikhu ‘indakumū yud‘a bi talqībi*

O’ the people of Andalus (Spain), you have no manner

For there is glaringly a manner accustomed to by the people of the Orient

Their young ones are addressed as Shuyūkh (plural. Sheikh) in their gatherings

Whereas it is recognized as a title in your own culture.

So, to address someone as *Alfa* in the Yorubaland does not necessarily imply that the person is well rounded or conversant with Islamic sciences. On the contrary, many of Alfa nowadays may not even know how to recite the Qur’ān properly due to their lack of minimal knowledge of Arabic except for some verses committed to memory, which are not usually accurate. Some may demonstrate literacy in Arabic, as a result of concentrated study of Arabic language and its literatures, but that will not do more than helping them compose verses of poem on any occasions of their interest. This being said, the word ‘*Ulamā*’ in this thesis, unless when otherwise stated, is strictly used in the Yoruba context.

<sup>9</sup>There is no consensus of opinion among historians as to the exact date Islām entered the region, but it is largely confirmed that as early as 18th century Islām had become widespread in all the Yoruba towns. See for instance, the works of T.G.O. Gbadamosi, *The Growth of Islām Among The Yoruba 1841-1908*, (Lagos: Longman Press, 1978), 4-5; A.R.I. Doi, *Islām in Nigeria*, (Zaria: Gaskiya Corporation, 1984), 107-108; al-Ilori, Adam Abdullah, *Nasīm aṣ –Sabāh fī Akhbār al-Islām wa ‘Ulamā’ Bilād Yoruba*, (Cairo: al-Maṭb‘ah al-Namūdhajiyah, 1991), 129-130; P.B. Clarke, *West Africa and Islām: A Study of Religious Development of Islām in West Africa from the 8th to the 20th Century*, (London: Longman, 1982), 17-18; H. Meryvn, *The Development of Islām in West African History*, (London: Longman, 1984), 21; P.J. Ryan, S.J. *Imale: Yoruba Participation in the Muslim Tradition*, (Harvard: Harvard Theological Review, Harvard Dissertations in Religion, 1978), 118-119.

<sup>10</sup>Fulani are among the famous ethnic group in Nigeria

Senegambia region across the savannah, even though many of them were not Muslims initially, the Wangara (Dyula),<sup>11</sup> the Kanuri<sup>12</sup> and the Hausa traders in southern Nigeria. The story of their migration and its great effect on the spread of Islam is fairly well known.<sup>13</sup>

It is very much appropriate to ascribe the genesis of the phenomenon of *Jalabi* to this humble beginning of Islam and to the efforts taken therefrom by the itinerant *Sufi* scholars, who are credited with mystic powers, preachers and traders to spread Islam across the region. These efforts began, Adebayo argues, “by the arrival of Muslim scholars, especially those credited with mystic power, who rendered their services in forms of humanitarian gestures and spiritual assistance to their new converts.”<sup>14</sup> The consultation of these scholars was also sought by the non-Muslim rulers to solve some pressing problems - to secure rainfall during a drought, to win wars and thereby enhance their prestige, and to offer special prayers for protection against witchcraft, or to nullify the evil effect of witchcraft if its spell had already been cast, and to help cure the people’s physical and spiritual maladies- having been recognized as the possessors of supernatural powers. This was the case of prince Oluaji, *inter alia*, who is said to have invited some Fulani Muslims to the town during the reign of Oba Alawusa (1739-1774).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Dyula are a Mande ethnic group inhabiting several West African countries, including Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau.

<sup>12</sup>The Kanuri people (Kanouri, Kanowri, also Yerwa and several subgroup names) are an African ethnic group living largely in the lands of the former Bornu Empire: Bornu state in northeastern Nigeria, southeast Niger, western Chad and northern Cameroon <sup>[5]</sup>. Those generally termed Kanuri include several subgroups and dialect groups, some of whom feel themselves distinct from the Kanuri. Most trace their origins to ruling lineages of the medieval Kanem-Bornu, its client states or provinces

<sup>13</sup>Balogun. S. A, “History of Islam Up to 1800” in *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, edited by Obaro Ikime, (Ibadan Nigeria: Heinemann Educational Books Plc, 1999),220.

<sup>14</sup> Adebayo, Ibrahim R., “The role of the traditional rules in the islamization of osun state Nigeria” *Journal for Islamic Studies*.Vol. 30, (2010).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.67.

While yielding to this plea, the *‘Ulamā* also placed a high premium on the possibility of the rulers converting to Islam, which will (not automatically though) facilitate the conversion of the ruled and therefore pave the way for the establishment of an Islamic society. In any situation where a ruler was eventually converted, the *‘Ulamā* gained momentum in that they were granted material comforts, assurances of personal safety<sup>16</sup> and many more privileges, such as the right to build their mosques, *madrasas*, and sometimes they were appointed to high ranking positions, as was the case of the early Muslim scholars in Oshogbo, who were appointed trade officers with the title of Parakoyi.<sup>17</sup> This royal patronage had caused many people to accept Islam, and, more importantly, triggered the influx of the *‘Ulamā* into the region.

Although, *Jalabi*, as illustrated above, seemed to have been espoused as a strategy to aid the spread of Islam, it could, however, arguably have also served as one of the salient internal factors that not only disappointingly thwarted any further advance of Islam in the region, but also promoted syncretistic and immoral practices among Muslims.

One of the contributing factors to this religious setback is the accommodating approach of the scholars vis-à-vis the traditional belief system, as they tended to be more liberal in their interpretation of what constitute the profession of Islam. Consequently, they became more tolerant of some non-Islamic practices, believing that these new converts can learn, with time, the perfect teaching of Islam, and, therefore, improve their practice of it.

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<sup>16</sup> Nasir Mohammed Baba, “Islamic Schools, the *‘Ulamā*, and the State in the Educational Development of Northern Nigeria”, *Bulletin de l'APAD* [En ligne], 33 | 2011, mis en ligne le 22 mars 2012, Consulté le 07 août 2012. URL: <http://apad.revues.org/4092>.

<sup>17</sup> Balogun, p. 220.

Nevertheless, while some continue to progress along the perfection line, others find it difficult to improve.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the fact that some of the ‘*Ulamā*’ were identified as diviners, charm and amulet makers as well as specialists in the Arab system of Geomancy<sup>19</sup> makes the traditionalists believe that the Islamic practices are similar to those of theirs, therefore, the acceptance of Islam does not necessitate a complete abandonment of all the non-Islamic practices associated with traditional religion. To highlight some of the areas of agreement alluded to, Abubakr writes:

A *babalawo*, *Ifa* priest, uses *iyereosun*, dust from *iroko* tree, or palm knots or a string of flat pebbles to divine which has a similarity with *Ifa*. This is known in the Muslim circle as *Khatt’r-raml*, sand cutting. A *babalawo* cites from *ese ifa*, verses of *Ifa*, to give interpretation for *Ifa* revelation, while an *alufaa* consults his Arabic books of divination. The second type of divination known as *hisāb*, arithmetic; has no convergence with the Yoruba divination as it is purely mathematical.<sup>20</sup>

Another factor that may have also accounted for this religious setback is the practice of Yoruba traditional medicine (*Ise isegun*), which was further reinforced by the advent of Islam. The former traditional medicine men, who became Muslims do not only know the usefulness of leaves and roots of trees but are also conversant with the manipulation of the Qur’anic texts in various ways.

Whatever the situation of the rare ‘*Ulamā*’ and the Muslims who are immune to this trend, for the vast majority, the temptation to participate in direct worship of a local cult seems to be inversely proportionate to their status as Muslims.<sup>21</sup> Although

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<sup>18</sup> Balogun, Op.cit., 220.

<sup>19</sup> The Arab system of geomancy is referred to as *Khat al-Raml* (sand-cutting divination), or ‘*Ilm al-Raml* (The science of sand). For more details see: Binsbergen, Wim van, “The Astrological Origin of Islamic Geomancy” a paper presented at the 15th Annual Conference: ‘Global and Multicultural Dimensions of Ancient and Medieval Philosophy and Social Thought: Africana, Christian, Greek, Islamic, Jewish, Indigenous and Asian Traditions’, Binghamton University, Department of Philosophy/ Center for Medieval and Renaissance studies (CEMERS), October 1996.

<sup>20</sup> R. D. Abubakre, “Islam and Yoruba Ethnic Consciousness”, in *Religion and Politics in Nigeria*, edited by Razaq D. Abubakre, R.A. Akanmidu & E. Olu Alana, (Nigeria: Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions, 1993), 178.

<sup>21</sup> Ryan, Patrick J. *Imale: Yoruba Participation in the Muslim Tradition- A Study of Clerical Piety*, (Harvard: Harvard Theological Review, Harvard Dissertations in Religion, 1978), 147.

there are no statistics of any kind to be referred to on this matter, as it would be impossible to say, in a precise manner, how many of the Yoruba Muslim could be described as syncretistic in their religious practice, it is nonetheless a truism that not many would controvert.

The Colonial period and its aftermath ushered in a new era coupled with a lot of challenges for the Muslims in Yorubaland, unlike the case in the neighboring Hausa region. Since the British colonial power represents one of the leading Christian nations in the world, the first schools that it organized were largely a means to convert Muslims and the traditionalists to Christianity.<sup>22</sup> During these periods, a ‘good’ citizen meant one who was African by blood, Christian by religion, and British in culture and intellect.<sup>23</sup>

The periods witnessed a widespread of Muslim antipathy to western education, as they realized that the fear about their children being converted when sent to school became true both in theory and in practice. They therefore put more emphasis on the Quranic schools and became more committed to them as never before. Consequently, Muslim education was developmentally challenged, and despite the many attempts later made by the successive state and federal governments to redress this issue, the fear still remains among the Muslims. No wonder, these circumstances eventually created a wide educational imbalance between the Muslims and their Christian counterparts. Those who received western training could easily get jobs under the government, while the graduates of the Quranic schools have no future.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Fafunwa, A. Babs, *History of Education in Nigeria*, (Ibadan: NPS Educational Publishers Limited, 2002), 67.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67-68.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

In response to this economic challenge, the Quranic schools graduates have full recourse to *Jalabi* as an indispensable means of livelihood. Hence, *Jalabi* evolved into a new phase and became more materialistic in its outlook. The platforms through which *Da'wah* is usually dispensed, such as *Waasi* (preaching), *ikomo* (naming ceremony), *Jināza* (funeral ceremony), *yigi* (wedding ceremony), *Ishile* (house-warming), *walīmat al-Qur'an* (marking the successful completion of the learning of the recitation of the Qur'an) and other socio-religious get-togethers have turned out to be their lifelines. Consequently, the *Da'wah* element in *Jalabi* has, unfortunately, just withered away.

Worse still, in the process of securing a living, *Jalabi* becomes synonymous with *gbajue* (fraud), sorcery and other morally reprehensible practices. This phenomenon has posed a great challenge on the institution of *Ulamaship* in Yorubaland and has got a deleterious effect on the development of Islam itself, an alarming development that calls for urgent actions to arrest the sinister effect of an imminent danger that may result from the practice of *Jalabi*.

The present research is a foundation work, as no similar attempt has arguably ever been made in Yorubaland to address this critical issue as a whole. The impetus to undertake this research arises from the fear that if *Jalabi* continues to progress along the current pattern as stated above, it may cause the true Islamic healing practice to plummet and eventually vanish. Thus the researcher hopes that this work will, *insha Allah*, open the eyes of the Muslims in Yorubaland to the impending danger that lies beneath the new form that *Jalabi* has assumed, the one that not only threatens the very foundation of their belief but may eventually send it into oblivion if care and caution are not strictly observed.

### 1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The most important aspect of a research is the formulation of a research problem, or, in other words, a hypothesis. It is like identification of a destination before undertaking a journey. According to Kerlinger, “if one wants to solve a problem, one must generally know what the problem is. It can be said that a large part of the problem lies in knowing what one is trying to do.”<sup>25</sup> With regard to the present research, the problems identified are of two types, one relates to the genesis of *Jalabi* which has hitherto remained shrouded in mystery, as nothing much is known about it, and how it came to be associated with the spread of Islam in the past. The other type is a pressing need to galvanize the ‘*Ulamā*’ into collective action to reform their institutions in order to tackle their economic plight, which has predisposed them to regard *Jalabi* as their lifeline.

Yoruba makes up 21% of the Nigerian population<sup>26</sup> constituting over 37 million people in total, of which Muslims constitute a significant proportion. Since there are no statistics that could predict a precise population of the Yoruba Muslims, it is probably reasonable to assume that of every five persons, three consider themselves as Muslims. But a great percentage among them is, until now, living on the periphery. This percentage represents those people with traditional Islamic training, who are designated as *Alfa* (‘*Ulamā*’).

That this great proportion does not hope to be employed neither by the government nor by any private firm caused them to have recourse to *Jalabi* as a means of livelihood. If they do not earn their living by the socio-religious services that they render to the community, there are no other practical alternatives, as the state does not

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<sup>25</sup>Cited in Kumar, Ranjit, *Research Methodology: A Step by Step Guide for Beginners*, (London: Sage Publication, 2005), 41.

<sup>26</sup> This conclusion relies on the most updated statistics as at the time of this research provided by the CIA word-factbook in 2015. For more details, see: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html>. (Retrieved 1 May 2015).

allocate any particular fund for them. The percentage of the *Alfa* is certainly on the rise, and there is a sufficient evidence to assume that they may constitute the poorest section of the society.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, they remain the most influential among the Yorubas, a development that sets alarm bells ringing on the pressing necessity for their reform. There is nothing abominable islamically to earn an income through one's knowledge or a skill that one has acquired, but it should be within the parameter of *Sharīah*, lest one should be corrupt. On the contrary, *Sharīah* arguably does not seem to serve as a principle guiding the practices of many 'Ulamā in Yorubaland, as an urge to lead a life full of wealth and enjoyment was that which plunged them into the practice of *Jalabi*.

This development caused factionalism in the circle of the 'Ulamā', and ended up splitting them into two camps: the camp of the 'Ulamā' of Sunnah and that of the 'Ulamā' of *Jalabi*.<sup>28</sup> While the former cannot totally boast of not making ends meet with the help of *Jalabi* (in its broadest sense) as their majority does not possess sufficient means for their living, the latter has further divided into various forms ranging from moderate to ultra-ambitious *Jalabist*. Given this, the role played by *Jalabi* has been tremendously aggravating. It serves as the basis to justify some 'Ulamās' covetousness and unorthodox behaviors to preserve their material interest.

In a society where the 'Ulamā have occupied such an important position and are held by the people in a high esteem as a result of their leading role and piety, moral responsibilities should ideally bind them to the course of action that will address the woeful socio-religious plights of the society. However, their inability to arrest

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<sup>27</sup> This is self-evident considering the fact that many of them are unemployed. They only subsist on the sporadic donations from their clients, pupil's parents and the meager school fees imposed on their students. Nowadays however, many of the 'Ulamā' have taken to establish modern private schools registered under the Ministry of Education. This dynamic approach has actually helped transform their lives, as it has increased their exposure. Apart from the income benefit of those schools, it has also increased their confidence in western education.

<sup>28</sup> They are also labeled by the former as 'Ulamā' *al-Bid'ah*.

corruption noticeably rampant in their circle renders them incapacitated to effectively address such issue as moral degeneration in the society. *Gbajue* (fraud), debauchery, sorcery, and syncretistic practices, which have swept throughout the society, had also become synonymous with *Jalabi*. In this regard, Professor Oseni observed that:

Excessive materialism which plagues the Nigerian society has an adverse effect on the practices of some Afenmai<sup>29</sup> Mallams.<sup>30</sup> There are a few of them who may do something that would harm their client's enemies for material gains. When someone comes to such people, instead of guiding and counseling him to exercise patience and pray for good, they go ahead to help him to harm his enemy, who may turn out to be innocent.<sup>31</sup>

Although his case study was the Afenmai Mallams, the situation that Professor Oseni grieved for is invariably the same in all Yorubaland. It is therefore necessary to shed lights on the origin of *Jalabi* and the stages through which it has passed in order to be acquainted with the impacts it has left on the socio-religious life of the Yorubas. The researcher strongly believes that any attempt at socio-religious reform in Yorubaland would be futile if the economic predicament of the '*Ulamā*' is not addressed. Also, that will equally be a forlorn attempt if their institutions are not reformed.

#### 1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

A study of the *Jalabi* phenomenon is important for several reasons. First, understanding its origin and the forms into which it has evolved over the course of a long history of Islam in Yorubaland will help one realize how deeply the phenomenon is entrenched in the Yoruba Muslim culture. Second, an acquaintance with this subject matter will reveal

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<sup>29</sup> Afenmai or Afemai is an ethnic language of the group of people living in the northern part of Edo State south geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

<sup>30</sup> *Mallam* is a term used in Hausa language to designate a religious scholar, in the same manner the term *Alfa* is used in Yorubaland.

<sup>31</sup> Oseni, Z. I., "Islamic Scholars as Spiritual Healers in a Nigerian Community: An Examination of the Activities of Mallam in Afenmai Area of Bendel State." in *The Place of Religion in the Development of Nigeria*, edited by I.A. B, et al, (Ilorin: University of Ilorin, 1988), 247.

the degree of a symbiotic relationship between the rulers and the ‘*Ulamā* in the past, and how it had underpinned the development of Islam in Yorubaland. Third, *Jalabi* has taken many dimensions under various circumstances, shifting its focus from a *Da‘wah*-based activity towards one of a material-end. How does this development backlash against the Yoruba Muslims socially and religiously, and how to counteract its effects is of paramount importance.

### **1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The intent of this study is to explore the origin of the phenomenon of *Jalabi* and the stages through which it has evolved, coupled with an analysis of its socio-religious impacts on the Yoruba Muslims in South-Western Nigeria.

Also, it sets about to inquire into the efficacy of *Jalabi* as a strategy of propagating Islam in the past, which had been proven feasible throughout the history of Islam in West Africa. Admittedly, it has been hijacked and utterly abused by certain quarters among the ‘*Ulamā* out of covetousness and greediness, which has eventually plunged the practice into syncretism, an act that is outrightly condemned in Islam as being in direct conflict with its fundamentals. Nevertheless, this does not by any means render its essence un-Islamic. It is therefore a matter of necessity to sift the practice from what has been associated with it based on strict Islamic principles.

In the light of the aforementioned rationale, an all-out reform that will, first and foremost, target the institution of *Ulamaship* is deemed necessary. Not until this reform is considered, would the predicaments of *Jalabi* be addressed. However, in the absence of a model, any reform attempt will be futile.

## 1.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

*Jalabi* is a historical phenomenon that has not ceased to exist until recent times. Its inception is surrounded with controversies resulting from different opinions about the advent of Islam in Yorubaland. Its socio-religious effect in the Yoruba society far exceeds what could simply be overlooked. In the past, the '*Ulamā*', were able to mobilize the people to engage in course of action that would promote the cause of Islam through *Jalabi*. Regardless of its weaknesses, this phenomenon had facilitated the spread of Islam to a greater extent, making it reach the far-flung corners of Yorubaland. Whereas, *Jalabi*, has evolved, in the recent times, into different forms, given economic circumstances, which had begun with the advent of colonialism and reached its height in 1960, when the country obtained its independence. The declaration of independence, which marked the end of the colonial era, ushered in a new dawn that was coupled with new challenges, as the new state was proclaimed to be secular free from any religious influences.<sup>32</sup>

Unlike their Christian counterparts, the Yoruba Muslims do not have a leader or an umbrella organization that may effectively administer their affairs or represent their various interests in government circles. The absence of these uniting bodies is the dilemma that has caused the Muslims to spiral out of control. While its effect was felt by all, the '*Ulamā*' remain the prime victims, as their contributions to the society are only recognized but not formally appreciated. Consequently, a full recourse to *Jalabi* for survival has become necessary. Over the course of time, however, other elements

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<sup>32</sup> There have been a lot of controversies surrounding the secularity of Nigeria due to many factors; one is the fact that the 1999 constitution of the federation did not expressly proclaim Nigeria to be such, second is that there are provisions for religious life and the establishment of Shariah Court of Appeal though with jurisdiction restricted to questions of Islamic personal law, and lastly, it also provides for the taking of oath of office which undoubtedly has a religious undertone. For more details, see: Osita Nnamani Ogbu, "Is Nigeria a Secular State? Law, Human Right and Religion in Context", *The Transnational Human Right Review*, vol. 1 (2014): 1.

were involved in this practice, which eventually stripped it completely of its value and essence.

In view of this historical background, three stages have been identified to have been aligned with the evolution of the phenomenon of *Jalabi*: first, Da'wah, which marked its initial stage, second, a means of livelihood into which it had evolved over the course of time, and which, in turn, had predisposed it to the third stage, namely syncretism. These three stages will serve as a framework within which the phenomenon will be examined.

## **1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The present thesis inquires into an extant historical phenomenon widely referred to as *Jalabi* in Yorubaland. It adopts a qualitative research methodology in order to help the researcher understand the people, their social and cultural contexts within which they live and where the research activities took place.

### **1.7.1 Data Collection**

Multiple methods, which are also known as triangulation, are adopted for data collection in this thesis. This is not only to enhance the credibility or corroborate the findings of the thesis and test its validity, but also to ensure that the data collected are rich, robust and comprehensive.

The present research could be regarded as a kind of historical anthropology, which combines historical methods and the anthropological approach involving participant-observation and cross-cultural comparisons. Thus, data collected were in