

EXORCISM IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND ISLAM: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

Hosea Nakina Martins

Department of Christian Religious Studies,
Taraba State University Jalingo
hoseanakinamartins81@gmail.com

&

Salisu Ishaq Jibril, PhD

Department of Islamic Studies,
Taraba State University, Jalingo
salisu.ishaq125@gmail.com

&

Auwal, Abdullahi

Department of Islamic Studies
Taraba State University, Jalingo
abdullahi@tsuniversity.edu.ng
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Abstract

The Universe as created by God has man and other spirits residing in it. Spirits are believed to be possessing and tormenting people and they can only be exorcised by the exorcists. The rate at which exorcists blossom in carrying out their activities clearly posed a big challenge to doubt the genuine of sources of their power. Thus, the paper is concerned with unraveling a comparative analysis for a reflective rediscovery of genuine sources of power for exorcism in Africa Traditional Religion and Islam. The research made use of comparative, prescriptive and analytic methods. Data were collected from the field through selected interviews and consultation of relevant books. The paper discovered that, exorcists exaggerate their roles and exploit their clients in order to acquire quick material and social firm. They also worsen people's health due to erroneous examination of non possession elements to means spiritual attacks. There is doubt been cast in most exorcists due to concealment of un- known sources of power, which some of them are fake and cannot be authenticated. There is a problem of the possessed and even exorcists from separating those in good health from those possessed due to nature of different religious interpretation which posed danger in the two faiths. The paper recommends authentic exorcism devoid of exorcists sourcing power from occultic organizations. They should be their brother's keeper by charging less fee on their patients.

There should be collaboration among exorcists exorcising those possessed by evil spirit devoid of religious affiliations.

Keywords: Exorcism, African Traditional Religion, Islam, God

Introduction

Of all the forms of human action, the most elementary and fundamental, and the one which at the same emerges as the most complex and rich is with context is life (Mondin 25). Exorcism is one of the major functions of the exorcists. Nothing happens in the cosmic world, isolation or by chance. Hence, sicknesses, misfortunes, death among other evils are believed to be caused by evil spirits themselves, which are daily reoccurring cases (Ikeobi 1990, 57).

Exorcists are in-charge of exorcising those who are possessed by evil spirits, and methods of exorcising differ among exorcists in the two religions; African Traditional Religion and Islam. Madness, mental obsession, sickness, strange exhibition of some deviant signs or behaviours is attributed to the attacks by evil spirits which exorcists cannot skip from acknowledging them. Hence, unraveling the relevance of comparative analysis of exorcism in the two religions, it is worth doing with the view of exhuming a genuine collaboration in the fight against evil spirits, which is been instigated by yearning factors and turned to a lucratic business today. Evil spirits are considered enemies of life. Thus, rise in spiritual attacks by evil spirit is an old phenomenon which is been battled by exorcists till date. Hence, the rise of quack exorcists in the two religions is indeed worrisome because of quest for material and social firm, which exorcists today venture into the ministry by aggravating people's health condition with wrong interpretations of physical illness to be spiritual. People are also exploited by exorcists just to make both ends meet, which are lamentable.

Cases of evil spirits tormenting lives and property of people are undeniable based on experiences where there are signs of mental obsession and strange behaviours being exhibited among those possessed and exorcised. Thus, the existence of evil spirits in the experiences of African Traditional Religion and Islam covered and recognizes the universe was created by God with many living agents in it. These evil spirits are indeed responsible for attacking and causing mental illness in people, and they inhabit water, tree, roads and forest or streams. Their attacks have been also reported on daily basis to be real by those who experienced and exorcised them. Hence, the feelings of possession by evil Spirits tend to go beyond feeling of passively being under the control of others and not of being one self (Crown et al 168). Exorcists in African Traditional Religion and Islam exorcised those possessed by evil spirit using prayer, essence, herbs, Holy

water and counseling. Despite different profession of faith, exorcism is held at high esteem in the two religions. Thus, man is at the centre of the universe as a prime and rational creature (Martins and Jellason 129). The paper work shall examine origin of demons or evil Spirits, exorcism in Africa Traditional Religion and Islam, symptoms of demonic possession, requirements for exorcism in Africa Traditional Religion and Islam, and a comparative analysis of exorcism in African Traditional Religion and Islam. The paper shall also discuss obstacles hindering effective exorcism in the two religions and some recommendations proffered.

Conceptual Clarifications

i. Exorcism

This is referring to an act of expelling evil spirits from those they possessed. Lehman and Myers they posit that “it is the driving away of evil spirit by ritual (412). Ansha qtd. Manus 6) to have captured thus “the word exorcism is derived from the Greek word “Exorkizein which means to “adjure” and bind with an oath (2). Duncan et al also defined exorcism as the use of spiritual power e.g. through appeal or adjuration to expel the spirit. It is a special case of spiritual healing (q.v.) (167).

ii. African Traditional Religion

It is the indigenous religion that is aboriginal and handed to Africans by their ancestors. It has also been defined as an Africa institutionalized system of symbols, beliefs, values, practices which are focused on questions of ultimate meaning to different African societies (Gaiya2). African Religion is called ‘African due to certain reasons: first it is called ‘African’ because it is indigenous, aboriginal, and foundational or handed down from generation to generation (Adasu15). Shishima posits also that “it is a religion that has no founder and it arisen from oral traditional which are founded on by word of mouth from one generation to the other” (3). In another definition, Anyacho defines African Traditional Religion “as a religion that was founded by the forebears of Africans” (242).

iii. Islam

Etymologically, the root” *slm*” in Arabia means to be in peace; to be an integral whole. Thus, from this root comes Islam, meaning to surrender to God’ law and thus to be an integral whole (Eliade 308). Islam is also seen as a religion of clear dogma and simple worship, but with deep vigour of expression, which was

founded by Prophet Muhammed the son of Abdullah and Amina of the country of Arabia in the year 610AD(Omoregbe53).

Origin of Demons / Spirit

Spirits are part of the occupants of nation. They were created by God (*Kpanti-Laa, Aondo, Chuckwu* or *Allah*) as part of the ontological existing reality in the universe, which men must guard themselves against their perilous attacks. Both African Traditional Religion and Islam believed that spirits have been created by God to inhabit nature which is undeniable (Magesa 75 - 76). *Jinn* as known in Islamic religion were rational beings created by Allah (Dmitriy 1). In African Traditional Religion and Islam, spirits are believed to be occupying nature. Hence, man is dependent on nature, he is at the centre of the world with spirits living their lives (Asante 290).

Thus, African Religion and Islam vehemently upheld that evil spirits are integrated in their thought as created by the Supernatural Being (Iyorayiah 2). Demons originated from nature, no doubt also they inhabit nature too (Adamu, Oral Interview) and some were created by men from natural manipulation of forces of nature (Kani, Oral interview).

It is worth ascertaining also that man is dependent upon nature. But nature is also dependent upon the African. As the center of the world, man gives meaning, order and unity to nature he is at the centre of the world, with spirits living their lives too (Asante 290). Hence, everything that man thinks about and feels has to be the image of a living force interacting with other living force (Anyanwu 90).

Exorcism in Africa Traditional Religion

An African is concerned primarily with living a pleasant, happy, full life and dying at a very old age (ripe age). Hence, the aim of every African is to live in harmony with nature. African world views see noting in isolation between the physical and spiritual realities, hence all abnormalities especially sickness headache, epilepsies, stomach upset, are caused by forces, evil spirits, witchcraft, angry divinities, machinations of enemies in the form of sorcery (Ikeobi 1992, 192). When sickness befalls men, the next remedy to be sought is the medicine man. Africa Traditional Religion and Islam are vital religions whose contribution in the area of exorcism remained very significant in people's lives. Thus, exorcists are rare saddled with the task of handling spirit possession on those attacked. They are highly respected because they are the intermediaries between the possessed and the spirits.

Spirit possessed are highly believed to possessed people, and are blamed for all forms of illness like madness, epilepsy and blindness (Mbiti 81). African world is African cosmology - how the Africans understand and relate to the universe both visible and invisible (Gaiya 49). Thus, most people consider health as the most important quality in their life, any who helps that is held in high esteem (Ikeobi 1990, 49). Removing believe in the existence of spirits cannot be annihilated because, the African world view is hinged on these spirits who are integrated in their thought as natural or supernatural (Iyorayih 2). Exorcism also varies among Africans, but the most vital thing is that, exorcising is aimed at freeing those attacked by demons (Auwal, Oral Interview).

Hence, some rites of exorcism are not divulged but concealed, only overt aspect of it lies seen. Dauda writes on exorcism among the Dong-Mumuye of Taraba State in the below excerpt:

Whenever a person is possessed was attack by evil spirits, people will take whole of him to a spot about ten yards away to the Kong (Tree) an exorcism site. If it is a woman, she will be covered with basket, being carried for some men. A man would be held by some men especially those that are friendly with him. The chief exorcist will invite the oracle to be around, and after some prayers and invocations, exorcism takes the place of shouting and commanding the evil spirit to depart the possessed. It is believed that the spirit will depart from the possessed when *sarpeng* (whistle) is blown. At the end of the prayers, singing and rituals of incensing, oral herbal administration and that a bathing are prescribed for the sick to use. After some days, the exorcists examined the possessed to ascertained that evil spirits are finally expelled from him or her. When these rites are done, the sick person is now a restored person and is discharged (6).

Exorcism in Islamic Religion

Islam is a religion of clear dogma. *Jinn* are spirits, one of the three categories of rational beings created by Allah. *Jinn* are noted for their dexterity, strength and cunning, and cannot be deceived. They live in places favoured by human, in rubbish jumps, in mud and in abandoned houses in Islam, *Jinn* are classified as female and female. They are invisible, but possession is often accompanied by visions that came to the sick person.

The Holy Quran plays a very significant role in exorcising *jinn* especially *Al-Kursi ayat* (Considered the most effective *ayat* against *jinn* in the "Bakara Surah") 70 times a day. A *Mullah* reads one of the *ayats* aloud, and if the patient begins to behave in-inappropriately, shouting, pushing the *Mullah* away, moaning,

crawling, fighting back or trying to flee are signs which indicate possession. According to Pandolfo, the expulsion of *jinn* and *rugya sharia* as a whole are portrayed by the Mullahs not as magical practices but universal Muslim Strategies that are supported by biomedicine (299). *Mullah* uses the name of Allah to heal, reading the Qur'an as the deposit of faith consecrated *cumin* (incense), olive oil is used to exorcise *Sheitan* (demon). As the Mullah calls on the name of Allah, the spirits depart the possessed, and administering of *cumin*, olive oil and Holy water (*zan-zam*) followed in restoring the possession. Mullah also advices the possessed to be pure abstained from pollutants, immorality and remained religious all the times (Kloos and Beekers 5). There are also narrations that Prophet Muhammed and his followers expelled evil spirit from the bodies of believers using verses of the Holy Qur'an 2:255,3:18-19 (Ansha 7).

It was also reported that, a woman went with her seven-year-old son to the Holy Prophet and told him he was suffering from a kind of epilepsy twice a day. The Holy Prophet put his hand on him and said, "O enemy of Allah, get out!" so, from this, some scholars understood that the boy was possessed by *Jinn* and the Holy Prophet drove out evil spirit from him by exorcism (Qur'an 2: 255, 285 and 286, 3: 18 - 19, 122, 113 and 114). These chapters and verses above are clear instances where the power exorcising featured in the Holy Qur'an. *Jinn*, as mentioned earlier, are either human being who is not visible. 72:2 of the Holy Qur'an affirmed that, "say is has been revealed to me that a company of the *Jinn* listened, and they say, truly we have heard a Qur'an that is wonderful". The *Mullah* is the exorcist in Islam, whose moral and religious life warrant him the yardstick to carry out exorcism on the possessed using the Holy Qur'an Chapters and verses as earlier indicated above (Umar, Oral Interview).

Exorcism in Islamic religion lies in the power of *Mullah*, who lived a religious life and uses the sacred Qur'an to carry out rites of exorcising the possessed. Thus, the vital place of the Qur'an being used by Mullah in exorcising the possessed cannot be over down claimed in Islamic religion. Hence evil spirits are part of nature, and they inhabit and destroy people. They can be counteracted using recitation of verses from the Holy Qur'an followed by the use of consecrated Holy water, herbs (*cummins*) and olive oil.

Symptoms of Demonic Possession

Demons possessed people and leave various symptoms like the ones examined below: Physical changes: In this scenario, there is convulsion, falling on the

ground, clouding of consciousness, anesthesia to pain and change in voice by shouting and screaming. The possessed also manifest signs of alteration of strange voice of being belligerent (Martins 135) which is noticed from their experiences (Brockhause 9).

I. Mental Changes

People who are possessed speak in strange languages and they are engulfed in psychic and occult manifestation of being possessed by extra- dexterity and powers (Danladi, Oral Interview).

II. Spiritual Changes

Many of those possessed exhibit reactions and fear as the name of God is pronounced during exorcising. Hence, the name of the Supreme Being makes them uncomfortable and so there is reaction when such holy name is mentioned (Adamu, Oral Interview).

III. Change of Personality: The personality of persons possessed by evil spirits is often noticed especially by his or her character and appearance (Ansha 3).

In a nut shell, some symptoms of the possessed include height of spirit in the individual which affect him or her thereby losing his or own personality and acts in the context of the 'personality' of the spirit possessed in him or her. The possessed person becomes restless, may fail a sleep properly, and if his possession lasts a long period it results in damages to health (Mbiti 82). Hence, when a person is under control of spirit behaviour may dramatically change (Iyorayiah 9). In another instance also, among the Tiv of North central Nigeria, *Adzov* (spirit) sometimes punishes their victims who often them, and they visit them with application (Akiga 266-267). These aforementioned symptoms are dreadful, as they damage or even end the lives of those possessed by demons.

Requirements for Exorcism in African Traditional Religion and Islam

There are basic requirements needed in exorcism in African Traditional Religions and Islam, and some of them are examined below:

- i. Examining nature of demonic attacked on the persons in order to ascertain the kind of exorcism or rites to be carried on him or her (Yusuf, Oral Interview).
- ii. Prayer which remains an essential aspect of healing in African Traditional Religion and Islam, where God is prayed to take absolute control in exorcising evil spirits from those they possessed (*World Among Us* 9).
- iii. There is invocation and command of the spirit to depart the possessed after administering essence, drinking and bathing herbs to please leave the victims

- iv. There is also the use of items like yam, drinks, kola nut, fowl to be sacrificed in order to placate the demons to leave the possessed (Dakoro, Oral Interview).
- v. Victims are discharged with instructions to desist from certain things and places after spending some days in the exorcist's custody (Shuabu, Oral Interview).
- vi. There is also check up at periodic interval by the exorcist, who keeps ascertaining the level of healing the possessed until satisfied. (Napu, Oral, Interview).

A Comparative Analysis

This segment of research intends to make comparative analysis of exorcism in the two religions here:

- I. Africa Traditional Religion and Islam believed that spirits were created by God (*Kpanti-Laa, Aondo* or Allah in Islam) as part of nature, which man must guard against their perilous attacks. And prayer is very significant in the healing exercise.
- II. Both exorcist also exhibit religiosity by abstaining from pollutants, immoral things. Fasting is also given special emphasis in order to deal with evil spirits who are believed to be occupants of nature.
- III. Evil spirits torment people, and they are exorcised in the two religions by *nee gbal zala zang gang* in Dong and Pugong sub Mumuye dialects) and *Mullah* in Islam.
- IV. Ritual sacrifices are part of religious obligation in dispelling evil spirits from their habitations and those they possessed. Hence, the exorcist uses pre-requisites of authentic exorcism via ritual formula to exorcised those possessed.
- V. Exorcists are sometimes called, some learnt the profession and others inherit it as gift from their fore parents in the two religions. Hence, exorcists also charged for services rendered while others relied on the donors' charity.
- VI. The use of herbs, incense, holy water, oil and other items are of paramount help in carrying out exorcism in the two religions among those possessed by evil spirits.

Obstacles to Effective Exorcism in Africa Traditional Religion and Islam

Exorcism in Africa Traditional Religion and Islam is facing related challenges which are going to be examined:

- i. The rise of fake exorcists today is really affecting the trust, confidence and efficacy of exorcism ministry in the two religions, where many exorcists are not

licensed by the Government, but operate in free and illegal manner constituting dangers to the psychological and physical wellbeing of the people.

- ii. Patients are exploited by un scrupulous and mundane exorcists in the two religions with the view of acquiring fast wealth and maintaining fame and fortune in contemporary time (Shimawua 149).
- iii. There is problem of those possessed and exorcists find it very difficult to separate well from evil due to distortion of genuine intention and quest to liberate the possessed. Hence, there is possibility of mysterious death as the case may be because the possessed and the exorcists cannot know the remote cause of some illness complicated (Chuckwuma 23&39).
- iv. There is also loss of control over personal issue because the possessed is often confronted with a lot of complex realities ranging from emotional and physical disabilities, stress, trauma, high blood pressure and diabetic conditions, which are sometimes confused and termed demonic possession without proper consultation of medical experts to ascertain the remote cause of such abnormal behaviours in patients. Many exorcists also exaggerate their interpretation of the possessed conditions, which later worsened their health conditions.
- v. Faith of people in most exorcists today is chattered because of irregularities, suspicion and criticisms been levied by the people and exorcists against their fellow exorcists on sources and genuineness of their healing powers.

Recommendations

Amidst some of the challenges affecting effective exorcism in African Traditional Religion and Islam, the paper makes the following recommendations:

- i. Exorcists in the two religions should genuinely ascertain demonic possession from mere physiological abnormalities from patients brought to them.
- ii. There should be collaborative effort in exorcising those possessed by evil spirit from two religions and, this will go along way in bridging the gap in the search for genuine exorcists who can battle demonic catastrophes (Joseph, Oral Interview).
- iii. Exorcist should charge less fees on those they exorcise evil spirit with the view of restoring the possessed; bearing in mind they are humans and need to be treated with sympathy.
- iv. The belief in the existence of evil spirit is real in the two religions, and should not be debated or debunked. Rather, better and appropriate measures should be sought in explaining the interactions between man and other spiritual realities in the Universe (Ikeobi 1990,44).

- v. Exorcists in the two religions need to be prayerful, undergo fasting in order to have spirit filled capacity to deal with evil spirits. Hence, people should also learn to be prayerful and seek for genuine exorcism from experts (Martins 139).
- vi. Government should find way of sifting quack exorcists from fake one with the view of safeguarding the standard of exorcism from been ridiculed.

Conclusion

The existence and attacks by spirits in the cosmic universe is real and undeniable. Those who are charged with the task of expelling these evil spirits are the exorcists (*shon ganang / zang ganang / nee gbal zala* or *Mullah*). We cannot doubt nor run away from the realities of spiritual agents existing in the universe, and cogent factors pushed the rise of people creeping into exorcism ministry in the two religions, for means of survival. Hence, caution must be taken by people in not to fall victims of mental and physiological damages due to quack exorcism. People must guard against contacting fake exorcists when there are demonic attacks, and exorcists should exhibit high sense of spiritual and fraternal concern, devoid of obtaining fake powers from occultism sources. They should also learn to practice genuine exorcism in the spirit and fear of God and service to humanity. Exorcists with genuine roles in the two religions should be encouraged to collaborate in order to free people possessed by evil spirits, and not turn the profession as a mere money making venture rather than service to humanity in the restoration of health. Evil spirits are part and parcel of nature, and there is need to safeguard oneself from their dreadful attacks.

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List of informants

S/N	Name	Age	Occupation	Place	Date
1	Adamu, Kefas	38	Exorcist	Mayo-Balawa	28/1/2022
2	Auwal, Umar	39	Civil Servant	Jalingo	26/1/2022
3	Kani, Ronald	65	Exorcist	Iware	21/1/2022
4	Dakoro, Idi	83	Herbalist	Jereng	2/12/2022
5	Danladi, Mary	46	Patient	Shavon	3/2/2022
6	Joseph, Patience	33	Patient	Mika	2/10/2022
7	Napu, Avonapu	92	Exorcist	Dong 'A'	22/1/2022
8	Shu'abu, Mairo	68	Diviner	Iware	2/2/2022
9	Umar, Aisha	18	Patient	Jimlari	2/3/2022
10	Kawu, Sakinatu	21	Hawker	Zing	21/1/2022
11	Yusuf, Dankong	80	Herbalist	Pupule	2/3/2022