

ALMAJIRI ISLAMIC PRACTICES AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NIGERIA: MATTERS ARISING

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Abstract

There has been an age long struggle between the rich and the poor in any given society. Many intellectuals and critics have taken some swipes at this phenomenon. Karl Marx in his criticism of religion opines that the rich created religion so as to opiate the poor and by extension subjugate them. This study objectively seeks to analyze the history of Islam, its impacts and Almajiri Islamic practices in Nigeria. Apart from the historical developments, the study tries to survey the detailed, overt and covert planned manipulations of this practice for some paranoid aims. Moreso, it also analyses the inhuman treatments meted out to them because of the dreaded coronavirus pandemic popularly referred to as covid-19.

Keywords: Almajiri, COVID-19, Pandemic, Nigeria, Africa

Introduction

Religion is a dicey issue in any given pluralistic society and Nigeria is not an exception. The dicey nature of religion in a developing and pluralistic society manifests in its unusual sentiments and strong emotions. The rightness and wrongness of these emotions are cases for future studies, researches and investigations. Religion seems to play greater role in determining where the pendulums of public interests and policies usually swing in Nigeria. In view of this magnificent power and influence of religion, majority of the adherents often hide under its influence to dubiously commit irrational and other reprehensible actions. Thus, majority of the adherents especially in Nigeria have been unable to account for many responsibilities reposed in them. In this study, effort shall be critically made to analyze the history of Islam and almajiri practices in Nigeria and the treatments meted out to these vulnerable persons because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Clarification of Some Terms

Almajiri– Umar (2020) defines Almajiri as a system of Islamic education practiced in northern Nigeria. He also sees it as the name for a young boy who is taught within this system. The Hausa Almajiri is derived from the Arabic word “Al-Muhajirun” which refers to a person who migrated from his home in search of Islamic knowledge. The word Almajiri is closely related to Islam and Al-Amin (2019) asserts that it is derived from the Arabic word *Almuhajir* meaning an “emigrant”. From this derivation, Almajiri can simply be

described as a person who migrates from his home in search of Quranic Knowledge.

The Islamic Practice: Summarily, this is the culture and activities of the followers of Muhammad, the founder of Islam.

COVID-19 Pandemic: This is the combination of two terms- “covid-19 and pandemic”. Covid-19 is acronym of the newest form of coronavirus that erupted in Wuhan China in 2019. The World Health Organization described “Pandemic” as a form of outbreak that has gone beyond a particular environment which requires enormous collaborations to contend

Matters Arising: This is a very technical phrase and in this study, it implies the lists of things, developments and issues to be discussed or analyzed. Thus, it throws up the opportunity for problems or questions to be analyzed. Matters arising simply imply the results that erupted or followed up as a result of one’s actions or inactions.

Contextually, the Almajiri Islamic practices and the covid-19 pandemic: matters arising means the implications, resultant effects and the future meaning of the treatments meted out to the Islamic almajiri children by various state governments because of the eruption of coronavirus in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The Bentham's and Blackstorian theories are adopted in this study. For instance, Bentham theory is consistent with the Bentham's utility principle which according to Mautner (2017) entails the attainment of right or at least ensures that no wrong is done to an individual in a given environment. Simply put, it is the attainment of the greatest happiness (p.4). Blackstorian theory is viewed by Schorr (2009) as the bogeyman of any community-oriented property law that must at least deny an individual either exclusive (sole) or the absolute (despotic) aspect of property (p.23). Both of these theories make uncompromising advocacy for the fundamental rights of human person which are considered the essential features of a Constitution. They aim at redressing the balance between the powers of an individual and the state on ensuring correlative respect for their rights. This theory is used because it implies that conflict is generated by the quests to protect one’s identity and maximize one’s interest. Arguably, the concept of equality, fairness, equity, justice and non-discrimination constitute the heart of Human Right and the focal point of any responsible government. The theories are employed to highlight the dangers of using religious tenets in achieving dubious political and other personal ends in a multi religious and cultural society like Nigerian state.

The History and Coming of Islam in Nigeria

To be precise with the exact date when Islam came into Nigeria can summarily be matters of academic and historical debates and to an extent uncertain. However, many authors and historians such as Adeleye (1971) and Kenny (1996) posit that Islam was introduced into Hausa land about the 14th century by foreign Mallams and merchants such as the Wangara Arabs and the Fulanis. Abubakre (1993) acknowledges that Islam came to Africa in its first decade of establishment. It came through Jafar ibn AbiTalib-a cousin of Prophet Mohammed who led other Islamic adherents to escape a sustained persecution from the Quraysh of Makah in 616CE. They migrated and got refuge under a just Christian ruler. Prior to Islam, though, Arabs were familiar with the North Africa because of trade that covered Egypt, Yemen and Syria (pp.177-182).

Islam seemed to have reached the Sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria as early as 9th century through Muslim traders and other expeditions during the reign of Arab Conquerors. Kenny (1996) avers that Islamic presence in Nigeria can conveniently be dated by its orientation first to the Sahara and North Africa. The second was the Atlantic and third became its ubiquitous orientation in the period of independence. The raids into the central Sahara by Uqba ibn-Nafi in 667 as told by Ibn-Abdalhakam opened the route to Kanem and Bornu. In any kingdom he raided, Uqba imposed a tribute of about three hundred and sixty (360) slaves. From that time until the end of the 19th century, the central African trade route specialized in slaves taken from the vicinity of Bornu. Later, Uqba's grandson, Ubaydallah ibn al-Habhab made a raid across the Western Sahara and discovered gold. The demand for gold led to the emergence of the Ghana Empire and the predominance of gold in the western trans-Saharan trade up to the 11th century. He maintains that Islam came to Hausa land through **the military** expeditions across the Savanna. This was the result of the Murabit often known as the Almoravid movement among the Sanhaja Berbers, a religious-military movement which resulted in an empire stretching from Senegal to Spain (pp.5-7).

Nwanaju (2008) corroborates the idea that Islam came to the Northern Nigeria-Kanem-Bornu in the 9th century and was introduced in Hausa land in 14th century. It came to Kanem Empire during the reign of 'Humme Jilmi' but the credit of its solidity goes to Mai Idris Alooma who made it a state religion, introduced Islamic courts, erected mosques and set up a hostel in Mecca for the Islamic pilgrims (p.201). Like in the Hausa state, Amitabh (2013) argues that Islam came to Yoruba land during the reign of Mansa Musa's Mali Empire and that is why they colloquially referred to Islam as "Esin-Mali"

which means “religion from Mali”. Islam had spread to the countryside and towards the middle belt uplands in the 16th century (p.66). Akpeninor (2014) affirms that in Yoruba land, Islam experienced setbacks in the first half of the nineteenth century but in the second half, two factors combined to widen and consolidate the Islamic presence among the Yoruba people. One was the contributions of Muslims who were among the liberated slaves that returned from Europe via Sierra Leone popularly known as Muslim “Akus”. The second was the contributions of itinerant scholars together with the flag bearers from the Sokoto caliphate through the Emirates of Ilorin and Nupe land. All of them contributed to solidify Islamic presence in Yoruba land (p.551).

However, Balogun (1993) identifies three main stages of Islamic manifestations in Nigeria from its early advent to 1800. First, Islam came to Nigeria and began as a religion of the aliens and then become popular and accepted by the masses, it later turned out to be the religion of an influential elites’ group and finally became a militant religion (p. 220). Among the Igbo group, Nwanaju (2008) maintains that there was a realignment of ethnicity and religion-a change that occurred as a result of the gruesome Nigerian civil war. The post war Igbo society witnessed an inspired penetration of Islam into the Christian dominated southeast. Today there are some notable Igbo indigenes who are Muslims and mosques are found in some cities across Igbo land (p.85).

Factors Responsible for the Spread of Islam in Nigeria

For any event in life, there must be a cause. Hence there are factors that led to the spread of Islam in Nigeria. Clarke (1982) asserts that trade, returning of slaves, jihad, Almoravids movements and itinerant Muslims preachers are the major factors that spread Islam in Nigeria (p.28). The Muslim preachers earlier tolerated though temporarily, a king who accepted Islam and at the same time continued to practice the traditional religion. Some kings saw Islam as a convenient support to their royal authority, since it was a unifying ideology bridging the gap between many tribes and presenting them with a wider brotherhood, citizenship and nationality. This produced the phenomenon of “state Islam”, whereby Islam was controlled and used to promote the interests of the rulers. Accepting Islam would also give the king legal immunity from attack by other Muslims. Raids by desert nomads upon the settled farmers were very frequent and raids by Muslims upon unbelievers were encouraged by the religion. Earlier Abubakre (1993) adds that the spread of Islam in Nigeria, especially Yoruba land was occasioned by the dynamism of Islam to the appreciation of African culture like the permission of polygamy which Christianity abhors (p.177).

Nwanaju (2008) maintains that there are many figures that played strong roles in the rapid and forceful spread of Islam in Nigeria. They are Idris Alooma, Mohammed Korau (Emir of Katsina), Mohammad Rabo (Emir of Zazau) and Mohammed Rumfa (Emir of Kano) Usman dan Fodio, Mohammad Marwa-Cameroonian, known as Maitatsine, Ahmadu-Bello, Sheiks El-Zakzaky, Abubakar Gumi among numerous others. He maintains that there are various organizations that have been established in the country which have worked and continues to propagate Islam in Nigeria and they include: Jam'atu Nasril Islam often known as the society for the support of Islam. It was founded in 1961 by the then premier of the Northern Region Ahmadu Bello immediately after Nigeria attained her independence. It serves as both missionary and educational organ of the *umma*. The Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs that was founded in 1973 has almost the same thing in connection with the Jam'at Nasril Islam. The Muslim Student Society (MSS)-comprised youthful organizations within Nigeria's campuses and colleges, is believed to be primarily concerned with the mission of carrying out sharia and jihad in Nigeria. The *Ja'ma'atu Izalatul bid'a Waikamatus Sunnah* also known as *Yan Izala* that was established in 1979 by Mallam Idris Samila with its headquarters at Jos Plateau state has been credited with series of militancy in its Islamic propagation agenda in Nigeria (pp.248-.250).

Abiodun (2009) concurs that there are other movements, such as the Anwar-ul Islam Movement of Nigeria which is formerly known as the *Ahmadiyya* and it was founded in 1916, Nasrul-Lahi-L-Fatih Society of Nigeria, (NASFAT), ISLAHUDEEN, ANSARUDDEN, NUWAIRUDDEN and so on. Concisely, the spread of Islam in Nigeria is dependent on two major factors and they are jihad and trade.

Some Strands in the Nigerian Islamic Religion

The earliest known sects in Islam are perhaps the Sunni and the Shi'a (Shiites). Ergun (2002) traces the strands in Islam to the war between Uthman and Ali. Uthman, a Persian slave, murdered Umar and as the third successor of Prophet Muhammad, he was seen as a selfish ruler concerned only with his kinsmen. By the end of Uthman's reign, the followers of Islam were badly divided. Uthman was killed in his own home by rivals while he was reading the Quran and his body was left without burial for some days which is a grievous sin in Islam. But he was finally buried in his blood stained cloth signifying his martyrdom. At his death, his son-in-law, Ali bin Abu Taleb, Prophet Mohammad's cousin took over the office of caliph. Aisha the widow of the prophet Mohammad fought bitterly against Ali and his tribesmen. Muslims fought against Muslims in two major battles that ended without any victor. In 661 AD, Ali was assassinated and since that time, Islam has been

divided between those who follow Ali known as the Shiites and traditional Muslims known as the Sunnis (pp.70-71).

Khuri (1990) observes that whereas the Sunni believe in integrating religion and society by adopting a form of religion that takes to the state structures, the Shiites believe in what can be called a religious Puritanism. Secondly, there is also a controversy over the origin of the group. Whereas the Sunni have designated family roots that would always produce the caliphs or imams, the Shiites believe that the position of imam can even be earned by commoners who have excelled in religious teachings and traditions. Since the Sunni adopted religion to social structures, they also have accepted and respected political authority. Sunni leaders can function both as religious and political leaders hence the Emirate systems of administration is actually derived from the Sunni tradition (p.72).

Apart from the aforementioned, there are other Nigerian Islamic strands which include the Muhammadiyya, Izala, Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya. Abner (1969) avers that customarily the Islamic practice in Nigeria especially in the northeastern Nigeria is dominated by the Sunni group. However, as in other parts of Northern Nigeria, Tijaniyya dominated Qadiriyya as the region's major Sunni sufi strands of Islam. Tijaniya Order was founded in South Africa towards the end of the eighteenth century and advanced into the century to many African countries including Hausa Fulani in 1950s where they were in constant rivalry to the traditional dominant quadiriya in Sokoto and kano states (pp.151-152). The Tijanis in the view of Olupona (1991) believe that *Salatul Fathi* is a crucial supplication offered by Sheikh Ahmad Tijani and they often see its repeated recitation as an act of devotion. It easily distinguishes them from other Muslims. Scholars among them do not wear turban no matter the level of their status but a scarf may be worn around the neck (p.39). Abiodun (2009) notes that this group engages in regular *dhikr* sometimes by dancing thus attracting attention, emphasizes visitation to important Sheikhs, eulogizes Prophet Muhammad more often using the microphone, celebrates his birthday (maulud) as an important ritual and maintains regular contacts with Senegal, the birth place of Sheikh Ibrahim Nyass whom it reveres as *Qutb* (pp.6-7).

The Impacts of Islam in Nigeria

Abiola (1984) argues that Islamic religion has greatly affected generally the lives of the people of the states. In the first place, he argues that Islam replaced the traditional religion as well as its attendant practices. After the Hausa people have embraced Islam, they stopped offering sacrifices to lifeless objects such as trees, rivers and rocks. Islam ushered into the land both the eastern

education and civilization. Most of the kings after their conversion made visits to the holy land where they did not only offer prayers but also engaged in Arabic education, the people's ways of life and mode of administration. On getting back to their various kingdoms, these kings began to introduce those things they learnt in their various kingdoms (pp.34-35).

Balogun (1993) affirms that they built mosques and schools where quranic education was taught to their children. In the administrative section, the learned Islamic scholars were employed to replace the traditional chiefs. In the judicial aspect of their various kingdoms, these kings made the Islamic laws to replace the traditional laws and customs which were formerly in vogue in the land. The resultant effect is that what used to be Hausa land has today become a Muslim state and the best buildings in the land are either mosques or quranic schools (pp.105-135). Iwe (2000) also agrees that Islam has made impact on the socio-political life of the people through education, travelling to the developed parts of the world, through pilgrimages and the formation of brotherhoods (p.221). Abdullah (2003) succinctly outlines some of the specific contributions of Islamic Sharia to human society. These include the eradication of poverty and creation of conditions for full employment. High rate of economic growth through proper planning, building necessary physical and social infrastructures, the promotion of stability and the inculcation of real value of life as well as the maintenance of law and order. It also comprises ensuring social security and economic justice, fostering equitable distribution of income and wealth (p.6).

The Almajiri Phenomenon in Nigeria

The background history of Almajiri system can be traced further than the pre-colonial Nigerian era. Jonson (2019) avers that the Almajiri system of education is an Islamic form of education with a longstanding tradition in northern Nigeria which dates back to the 11th century. Al-Amin (2019) submits that the Almajiri System which was originally called Tsangaya was established under the Kanem-Borno Empire. The Bornu Empire was one of the oldest ruling empires in the world extending from the frontiers of Northern Nigeria across the Chadian region up to the borders of Libya. Almajiri practice was established as an organized and comprehensive system of education for learning Islamic principles, values, jurisprudence and ultimately the recitation and memorization of the Quran. The Children begin their Quranic lessons usually from ages of three and twelve in Nigeria. There are other pupils who operate from their parents' houses to the school on daily basis. Most of them can range between nine and eighteen years of age. Iwuchukwu (2010) concurs that many parents handed their children to local

Islamic teachers to bring their children up in the way of the Islamic practice (p.52).

Al-Amin (2019) maintains that initially, the system was funded from the state treasury under the control of the Emirs being the traditional government system that existed before the coming of the British. He argues that since Islamic religion encourages charity and welfare to students of Islamic religion, the community readily supported these Almajiris who mostly came from faraway places. In return, the Almajiris offered services such as laundry, cobbling, gardening, weaving among others, as charity to the community that contributed to their well-being. The students were at liberty to acquire vocational and occupational skills in between their Islamic lessons and were involved in farming, fishing, well construction, masonry, production, trade, tailoring and other small businesses. Thus, they formed the largest percentage of the economy of the society before the introduction of white collar jobs. After colonization, they were recruited by the British as workers and tin miners in Jos city which was then under Bauchi before the creation of Plateau State. Many of them were the farmers of the Nigerian cotton and groundnut pyramids and they formed majority of the traders in the commercial cities like Kano. Some Almajiris later became judges in Sharia Legal System, teachers and so on.

Johnson (2019) observes that the Uthman dan Fodio's jihad solidified the Almajiri system under the Sokoto Caliphate with the establishment of an inspectorate division. The inspectors and teachers reported directly to the Emir of their province. Initially, the almajiri pupils lived with their parents and guardians for moral upbringing and all the schools were located within the immediate environment from where the pupils came from. Al-Amin (2019) and Johnson (2019) remarked that British rulers deliberately dismantled the Almajiri system by abolishing the state funding of the system. The Emirs who resisted it were either killed or deposed while those who were subjugated lost their territories and accepted their new roles as mere traditional rulers used only for the Indirect Rule. When the pupils and their Mallams could have no financial support, they resorted to begging for survival then animosity and antagonism grew. These Islamic teachers do not receive a salary but depend financially on the alms of the community and the work of the almajirai. Iwuchukwu (2010) affirms that these religious teachers usually use them to solicit for alms from the *jamaa*-the people. Therefore, these boys depend on charity for their sustenance (p.52).

In view of the antagonism, Tanko (2003) posits that there was the belief and conclusion by the Mallams that the western education (Boko) was of the Christian-European origin and therefore anti-Islamic. It bred the fear that a

child with western belief will eventually lose his Islamic identity and embrace vices that negate the values and principles of Islam such as alcoholism, fornication, semi naked dressing, partying, abandoning the sallats, fasting among others. Kukha (2010) affirms that when the western education came to the north, the mallams and the elites derogatorily referred it to as *ilimim Boko*, meaning (Western education). It was worsened by the belief that the western education was of Christian-European origin and therefore anti-Islamic (p.11). Contrastingly, most of these elites exposed their children to the best of western education across the world.

Umar (2020) argues that colloquially, the term- *Almajiri* has expanded to refer to any person who begs on the streets. It does not only refer to the young boys who are sent by their parents to seek for Quranic education but also people with disability that go to the streets to beg for alms. Many Muslims give 'Sadaka' to *almajirai* on daily basis because they believe in receiving reward and protection from Allah. *Almajirai* are children, usually from poor rural backgrounds.

Almajiri system in Nigeria has subtly changed from the original intention of the Arabic era and intentions. The only Islamic practice that can only be compared to it is the type of education modeled after *madrasahs* in some other parts of the Muslim world. Tibawi (1962) avers that as an institution of learning, the *madrasa* is centuries old. One of the first established *madrasahs* called the *Nizamiyah*, was built in Baghdad during the eleventh century A.D. It offered food, lodging and a free education to pupils and it spread rapidly throughout the Muslim world even though their curricula varied from place to place. It was always religious in character because these schools ultimately were intended to prepare future Islamic religious scholars. In emphasizing classical traditions in Arabic linguistics, teachers lectured and students learned through rote memorization. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the era of Western colonial rule, secular institutions came to supersede religious schools in importance throughout the Islamic world.

Anzar (2003) maintains that the *Madrasahs* have a different mission from the government schools. The goal of primary-level *madrasahs* is to enable children to read and recite the Quran. This is a task that can generally be accomplished between three and four years. While these children may attain literacy through their studies, this type of education is not generally intended to prepare them to become doctors, lawyers and government officials. Adrian and Scholz (2014) state that the *madrasahs* have been of increasing interest to analysts and to officials involved in formulating U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East, Central Asia and Southeast Asia since the terrorist attacks on

September 11, 2001. They drew added attention when it became known that several Taliban leaders and Al Qaeda members had developed radical political views at madrasas in Pakistan, some of which allegedly were built and partially financed by donors in the Persian Gulf states.

Unfortunately, the present day Almajiris are made up of children seen on daily basis roaming about the streets in tattered clothes, bare footed, extremely dirty, looking malnourished with dry lips and dry faces, rashes all over their body, moving from house to house and street to street begging for existence. It should have been nauseating and gory sight for the responsible to see these boys hungry in market places, car parks, restaurants, supermarkets and sometimes around some mosques and churches begging for food. Sadly, the writer having grown in an environment where they are seen every minute of the day recalled how they consume all kinds of food, fresh or stale. These children are victims of neglects and exploitations. They often take up menial jobs such as pushing wheelbarrows, street touting and so on.

Disturbingly, Iwuchukwu (2010) argues that the Almajiri institution has consistently bred vast population of unemployed youths who have come quite handy for these sects in the army of loyalists who are willing to do the bidding of their masters (p.52). Collaborating with this fact, Johnson (2019) said Nwabufo (2020) affirms that Babagana Monguno, the national security adviser stated that Federal Government was considering proscribing the Almajiri system of education in order to tackle insecurity. He said Almajiris were becoming a prodigious problem to society and that many of them end up becoming “criminals, drug addicts and willing tools in the hands of those who have very dangerous intentions” (p.12). Before then, Murtala (2018) has noted that reports by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) reveal that the North-West region has the highest number of drug-related arrests with two thousand two hundred and five (2,205) arrests in 2015 alone. Over three million bottles of codeine were reportedly consumed by drug abusers daily in Kano and Jigawa. The same way, Prof. Mojisola Adeyeye, director-general of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) revealed that seventy percent of the youth mostly the younger boys engage in illicit drugs in Kano.

Regrettably, just as the Madrasas have attracted serious security attentions from the United States of America, that is how the almajiris have been receiving security attentions from the Nigerian government though the Nigerian approach seems beclouded with some sense of ethnic and religious sentiments. Overtly or covertly, because they have been left unattended to, they have become easy armies of the religious radical groups and politicians

who brainwash and recruit them for violent, destructive and anti-social activities.



Pix showing almjiri children in the street with their begging rubber plates.

The “Novel” Coronavirus-COVID-19

Lindsay (2020) posits that coronaviruses are common human and animal viruses. They were first discovered in domestic poultry in the 1930s. Coronavirus is in the class of other SARS viruses with the first virus in the class of covid known as the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV) in 2002, Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) in 2012 and the current novel coronavirus known as Covid-19 pandemic (SARS-CoV2). Vergnaud (2020) describes coronavirus as an acute respiratory disease caused by a novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). A cluster of its cases initially appeared in Wuhan, a city in the Hubei Province of China. From Wuhan, it spread and received worldwide attention. Lindsay (2020) states that in animals, the viruses can cause a range of respiratory, gastrointestinal, liver and neurologic diseases but in the human, these three coronaviruses cause much more serious lung infections. The current pandemic known as Covid-19 is a “novel” coronavirus. It is called a novel because it is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. “Covid-19” is an acronym for the virus because it erupted in 2019. This means that it is different from coronaviruses that caused the common cold and SARS in 2002 as well as MERS in 2012.

Meanwhile, the source of coronavirus has been a subject of controversies with the United States of America president, Donald Trump and others accusing China of inventing the virus from their laboratory. Specifically, Huileng (2020) disclosed that Missouri in the United State of America filed a lawsuit against the Chinese government because of the virus. Also a group of Nigerian lawyers sued China for \$200 billion in damages for the adverse effects of the

coronavirus outbreak on the country and its citizens. The source of the new coronavirus is believed to be an animal. Hence several independent research groups have identified that SARS-CoV-2 belongs to β -coronavirus, with highly identical genome to bat coronavirus. With that, they are pointing to bat as the natural host. Covid-19 is said to be spreading through respiratory secretions when infected people cough or sneeze and when an infected object is touched. Those who come in contact with infected persons or travelled to infected environments are encouraged to isolate themselves for fourteen days before their symptoms began and as well conduct tests on them. Currently, there are few specific antiviral strategies but several potent candidates of antivirals and repurposed drugs are under urgent investigation. There are no vaccines available for now.

Common symptoms of Covid-19 are fever, tiredness, dry cough and difficulty in breathing. Less common symptoms experienced include aches and pains, a runny nose and diarrhea. Some people infected with Covid-19, however, do not show symptoms or feel sick at all. World Health Organization (WHO) described it as “pandemic” due to the rapid increase in the number of cases outside China and its deadly effect on a growing number of other countries of the world. As of 16th May 2020, Nigeria has reported a total of five thousand, nine hundred and fifty-nine (5,959) confirmed cases, with one thousand five hundred and ninety-four (1,594) people recovered and one hundred and eighty two (182) deaths. Nigeria has not tested up to one percent of its citizens yet the number is increasing exponentially. Globally, Collier (2020) reports that there over four million, eight hundred and sixty four thousand, seven hundred and sixty nine (4,864,769) cases with over three hundred and eighteen thousand eight hundred and twenty eight deaths (318,828) while one million, eight hundred and eighty-eight thousand and nine eight (1,889,098.) people have recovered.

Some of the approaches adopted by various governments across the world in containing the spread of Covid-19 include partial or total lockdown of states, enlightenments on social distancing- a term for measures such as avoiding mass gatherings and reducing close contact between people. In addition to the aforementioned, the governments have adopted the practice of quarantining and isolating people with emphasis on personal and corporate protective measures by the health professionals. This is a single virus that has kept the mighty in check. It has quieted the war tensions brewing up between nations of the world. All the world leading economies have crumbled. With the near global lockdown, the countries of the world are at loss of what could be next.

Unarguably, coronavirus is the most talked about issue around the world today. It has affected many rich and wealthy people across the world. It has

claimed the lives of many influential and top people in the world. In Nigeria, the top claim of the virus was Mallam Abba Kyari who was the chief of staff to president Muhammadu Buhari died on 17th April, 2020. Nevertheless, the issue surrounding the virus has been a subject of intriguing developments. Many Nigerians for many reasons have believed that the virus does not exist. They believed that the political elites conspired to syphon the public money with it while many others believed many things about the virus.

Almajiri Islamic Practices in Nigeria and Covid-19 Pandemic: Matters Arising

This study may not be embroiled with the myriad opinions and views on the coronavirus pandemic. To some people, it is real and dreadful, to others it is a conspiracy and others maintain other views. Regardless of the views, the arrival of the pandemic has exposed many weaknesses in the society especially the quality of leadership of the country. For instance, the 1999 Constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria stipulates that the motto of the country shall be Unity, Faith, Peace and Progress. To achieve these noble objectives the constitution provides among others that “the state shall secure full residence rights for every citizen in all parts of the federation”. But in sheer flagrant abuse to this provision, Akhaine, Adewale, Danjuma, Idris and Sobechi (2020) disclose that Governors under the aegis of the Northern Governors’ Forum (NGF) decided to repatriate the Almajiri children to their parents or states of origin. Alabira (2020) avers that the Kano state government swung into action with mass deportation of these children to Jigawa, Katsina, Kaduna, Bauchi and other states.

But in swift responses Alabelewe (2020) asserts that governors of Kaduna State and his Bauchi counterpart lamented that the repatriated Almajiri children from Kano State account for majority of the active Covid-19 cases in their states. Just as these states countered the Kano state government, other states started to stigmatize the Almajiri children. For example, Ugbor (2020) stresses that there was anxiety in Abia state as security agents intercepted truckload of Almajiris from Northern Nigeria. In Akwa Ibom State another truck was intercepted en-route Akwaibom from Abia. Taraba state government rejected almajiris transferred from Nasarawa. Taraba state government made the issue most embarrassing as Dan Fulani (2020) avers that the children were kept stranded at the entrance of Taraba SSGs office and had to pass a night there before being repatriated. Similarly, the Southern and Middle Belt leaders raised alarm over invasion by Almajirai. Dayo, Jimitota, Ahon, Yakubu and Ajayi (2020) quote the leaders of the Southern and Middle Belt Forum (SMBF) as having urged Nigerians of Southern and Middle Belt

extractions to be vigilant and avert what they called possible spread of Coronavirus in the areas by Northern elements through the almajiris.

Ondo state did not spare the children neither did Lagos, Osun, Delta and virtually all the states have either rejected or evacuated these children. Where is the efficacy of the Child Rights Act (CRA) adopted in 2003 across Nigeria? Can there be a deportation within a country? The discrimination of these children left much to be desired. The constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria as amended 1999 in section 41 sub-sections 1-2 warns that,

Every citizen of Nigeria is entitled to move freely throughout Nigeria and to reside in any part thereof, and no citizen of Nigeria shall be expelled from Nigeria or refused entry thereby or exit therefrom. (2) Nothing in subsection (1) of this section shall invalidate any law that is reasonably justifiable in a democratic society- (a) imposing restrictions on the residence or movement of any person who has committed or is reasonably suspected to have committed a criminal offence in order to prevent him from leaving Nigeria; or... citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person:-

What is the value or import of this constitution if it cannot be obeyed or enforced? Why do men enact a law they know they will abuse? No doubt this inhuman treatment runs contrary or in abeyance to the letter and spirit of the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria. Probably, social scientists will educate the world on the appropriate term to be used for a country whose rulers flagrantly break her laws. One of the serious matters arising from these evacuations and rejections is that Nigeria cannot be regarded as one country where tongues and tribes are not different.

The danger of this inhuman treatments and humiliation to these boys is that these children are exposed and licensed to be stigmatized as hewers and carriers of the virus. It sets them up as security threats. The rejection of these boys across the country is a time bomb that when it explodes, everybody will pay for it. Nigerian politicians hardly learn from history. They have forgotten that coronavirus seems to have done one noble thing. The virus has tactfully erupted from their supposed comfort zones where they thought that their children and other valuables are secured.

These boys may be forced to congregate in bushes and other solitary environments and from there, form a destructive force against the society. They will destroy the society because they feel they have no stake therein and that is what the society thinks about them. It is a direct message to them that they are on their own. It is deadly to allow them grow with that mindset.

Moreover, the deportation presents Nigerian politicians as people that eat, debase, exploit and abuse their young men who ought to have been their future. It is appalling that these governors did not realize that they have aided the escalation of the coronavirus yet they will order for the harassments and intimidations of the people who are looking for what they will eat in the guise of lockdown. If Nigeria is a country that is serious with reliable statistics, it will be observed that deporting these children have defeated the fight against the pandemic. These governors could have had understanding on how they will bear the cost of isolation and treatment of these children before taking that dastard acts. These children are fundamentally human beings before becoming indigenes of those states and they should be treated as human persons. The arrivals of these children in some states across the country especially in the southern parts through tarpaulin trailers meant to carry cements and cows have been vehemently rejected as some people have described them as “unwanted covid-19 palliatives”.

Unmasking the Heinous use of the Almajri System in Nigeria

Nigeria for a very long time has been engulfed with the best or acceptable method of sharing and allocation of the “national cake”. The dilemma includes land mass, resources derivation, population and so on. Nonetheless, population seems to have become the principle of sharing the national cake. This is because president Muhammad Buhari has propounded his 97% versus 5% votes theory. According to Nwachukwu (2019), the president in an interview with Caroline Baker of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) on 22nd July 2015, said, “I hope you have a copy of the election results. The constituents, for example, that gave me 97% [of the vote] cannot in all honesty be treated on some issues with constituencies that gave me 5% (sic).” Meanwhile, at the exit of former president of Nigeria, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, Tijani (2015) notes that Rabiun Kwankwaso, one of the strongest politicians and Islamic leaders in the northern Nigeria, boasted that they have used the Almajiris and their votes to kick former president Goodluck Jonathan out of the presidential villa in Abuja. Then, Mansur (2018) asserts that there are over five million almajiris in kano. The implication of the boast carried out by Alhaji Rabiun Kwankwaso is that the almajiris were used to garner over 1.9 million votes which INEC declared that brought president Buhari and the APC into Aso Rock.

Therefore, it is a crude cruelty to use these boys as force to capture Aso Rock and abandon them because of a problem they are not its architect. It has exposed the wickedness, paranoiac and selfish nature of Nigerian rulers who only see the people as the instrument of achieving their rapacious economic and political ambitions. Does it mean that these Almajiris are needful only for

the removable of former president Goodluck (who built laudable schools for them) from the government house and their misfortunes could not be catered for by those who they have enthroned in the government houses? If the almajiris who were the instruments for recapturing almighty political power in Nigeria will be treated with such cruelty and disdain, what will be the fate of others who contributed the so-called "5% votes"? The almajiri children are innocent ones socialized into a culture and system they did not create. They can just be termed unlucky to be born in an unfortunate part of the world. They did not create their circumstances rather they were forced into it. They live but are not given a life. They are programmed to achieve some rapacious ends.

Conclusion

The almajiri phenomenon is an Islamic system created with the aim of deepening Islamic cultures and values among the upcoming generations. But considering the evolutionary power of reason, there is need for critical reassessment of almajiri practices. The type of treatments meted out to them can be said to be neither Islamic nor anywhere closer to any other religion. The arrival of this coronavirus pandemic to Nigeria has exposed the heinous mindsets of the rulers. Virtually, all the Nigerian Islamic scholars and politicians seem to be blaming the Europeans for the decay in the almajiri system but then, it has taken close to sixty years they handed over to us and also left the helm of affairs and asked us to right the wrong we claim they have done against us. According to Umar (2020), an Islamic cleric, Mallam Auwal Umar, made an insightful statement when he argues

These almajirai have rights to life as well as care as the concept of almajirai does not permit parents to send out their children on the ground of not being able to cater for them. He stated that every child is from Allah who mercifully gives as He wills and every parent must have to give account for the children they brought to the world and if that had been borne in mind by all parents, the number of almajirai we have on the streets would not have been as large as we now have them.

Therefore, since Nigerian state has failed absolutely to provide social security for human existence, no man under any circumstance has the right to bring to life any child he cannot cater for. It is callous, wicked, senseless and irresponsible for a man to bring to life the number of children he could not cater for. If possible let a law be enacted in this regard so that parents should be very responsible for their children upbringing. The crux of the thesis is that the Almajiris who are forceful instruments for booting former president Goodluck Jonathan from office and enthroning those politicians from their supposed region and religion should not be abandoned to the deadly

coronavirus pandemic which they never created. The “novel covid-19” pandemic has exposed the quality of leadership in Nigeria. Unarguably, an irresponsible and poor leadership is worse than covid-19 pandemic.

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