



## An Appraisal of the Practice of Sufism and *Jalabi* among Yoruba Muslims in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*Jalabi* and Sufism are two abiding practices among Yoruba Muslims. Both have been instrumental to the consolidation and propagation of Islam across the Yorubaland. Many early Yoruba Muslims, especially Islamic scholars, were *Jalabi* practitioners and Sufi adherents. Still, both have been condemned recently by Salafiyyah scholars, who considered innovations (*bid'ah*). They even regard the two practices as synonymous. Conversely, the practitioners disagree with them and claim the legitimacy of the two practices in Islam. This study examines the two phenomena to the veracity of the two claims. Historical and exegetical methods are adopted. The former enables the assessment of historical facts connected to *Jalabi* and Sufism in Yorubaland. Also, the latter allows the interpretation of relevant works, especially the primary sources of Islam, to determine the legitimacy of the two variables. Findings revealed that both have credence in Islam and that early Muslim scholars devised *Jalabi* as a *da'wah* strategy to propagate Islam. It also revealed that both exist independently, though combined by some scholars. The work concluded that neither can be displaced in Islam and that Salafiyyah scholars address each according to its peculiarities.

**Keywords:** *Jalabi*, Sufism, Salafiyyah, Yorubaland, *Da'wah*

### INTRODUCTION

One of the trending misconceptions propelled by Salafiyyah scholars among Yoruba Muslims is the representation of Sufis as *Jalabi* practitioners and vice-versa. They see little or no difference between the two due to assumed correlations. They claimed both have no legitimacy in Islam and should be displaced entirely. Muslims are, therefore, directed to be wary of them. Many Salafiyyah scholars have delivered lectures on different platforms, claiming that both *Jalabi* and Sufi practitioners are perpetrating evils under the guise of Islam. They regarded Sufis as misguided Muslims with wrong tenets, while the *Jalabi* practitioners are said to be corrupt Muslims who commercialized Islam. The nomenclatures: "ALFA ELEBO" (polytheist scholar) and "ALFA OLOOGUN" (scholar of magic) are designated names for both Sufis and *Jalabi* practitioners in Yorubaland. The calls became more intense recently when many *Jalabi* practitioners have been alleged to have used unlawful (haram), including human body parts, to achieve their aims. Other allegations are divinations, fetishes, syncretism, polytheism, and magic. It is indisputable that many of the *Jalabi* personalities are Sufis. Some Muslims also practice both without understanding Islam's basic or rudiment knowledge, let alone what they claim to practice. It, therefore, becomes difficult for an ordinary mind to identify or differentiate between Sufism, *Jalabi*, or Islam, hence the amplified condemnation of both by the Salafiyyūn.

The accusations and allegations above are not without fierce reactions from both the Sufis and *Jalabi* practitioners who stood to explain and defend their practices with all within their reach. They acknowledged some infiltrations but argued that babies should not be thrown away with the bathwater. They claimed that *Jalabi* is Islamic and provided the frameworks and justifications for it



from the primary sources of Islam. [Solagberu \(2021\)](#) argued that *Jalabi* was instrumental in the propagation of Islam in Yorubaland. This view is in tandem with the submission of [Afiz and Hassan \(2015a\)](#) in whose opinion, *Jalabi* is a *da'wah* strategy devised by Mallams to keep Muslims within the fold of Islam and to attract people from other religions. This paper is, therefore, an effort to examine the nitty-gritty of the two variables to determine their legitimacy in Islam, identify the meeting points between them and the areas of differences, and select the veracity of *Salafiyyah's* claims. This will go a long way in correcting the misconceptions that saturate society and are primarily responsible for misunderstanding, which has caused divisions among Muslims, especially in South Nigeria.

### Islam and Practice of Sufism in Yorubaland

Yoruba is one of the major ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. They occupy the expanse of land that constitutes the country's southwestern part, covering six states. These are Oyo, Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti states. They also have an inalienable link with Edo and many Delta communities in South Southern. Yoruba also have their brethren in the neighboring North Central states like Kogi, Kwara, and Niger. Different authors, including [Jadesola \(2021\)](#), observed that the race has indigenous people across West African countries like the Republics of Benin, Togo, and Ghana ([Jadesola, 2021](#)). This work will, however, limit itself to the Yoruba in Nigeria as its focus. Yoruba are traditionally African Traditional Religionists (ATR), but many have accepted Islam as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century when they had contact with Arab traders, Muslim Jihadists, and preachers ([Doi, 1984](#)). The Islam they practiced was syncretic due to the level of knowledge at that time ([Bello, 2022](#)). Therefore, this seriously affected their faith and understanding of the religion. Part of the problems faced then was addressing some attendant challenges; hence, they devised various means as a baby of necessity.

On the other hand, Sufism is defined by [Shaidah \(2014\)](#) as a process of soul purification from the basement of vices to the attainment of virtues. Hence, it practicalises the concept of *Tazkiyyah* (soul purification) that the Qur'an 91:7-10 commands, among others. It is also the process of attaining the *Ihsān* (kindness), which the *ḥadīth* of Jibril describes as the topmost level of Islam, as submitted by Ibn Rajab and [Ibn Abdul-Wahhab \(1986\)](#), among others. Sufism is a path to be followed by individuals who are determined to be liberated from vices and weaknesses that can prevent the attainment of the pleasure of Allah ([Gulen, 2021](#)). Sufis, therefore, live by the requirements of God's knowledge and love because it is an experience of spiritual delight. Practical Sufism enhances moral improvements and the attainment of perpetual bliss in outer and inner lives. Sufism entails discipleship, initiation, spiritual training, exercises and practices, observation of psychological progress, and sociological changes in one ([Gulen, 2021](#)). The significant practices in Sufism that made it identical to *Jalabi* include *Khalwah* (Seclusion), *Awrd* (recitation of litanies), and *Zuhd* (Asceticism), among others.

As stated above, Islam came to Yorubaland along with Sufism because there is no difference between the arrival date of Islam and Sufism ([Kamorudeen, 2020](#); [Gbadamosi, 1978](#)). Also, it should be noted that many of those personalities who brought Islam down to West African countries, including Nigeria and Yorubaland, belonged to one Sufi Order or the other ([Solagberu, 2021](#)). [Olayiwola \(2007\)](#) explains this better when he observes that:

*"Sufism came to Nigeria, not through any special effort. It penetrated the country along with Islam. Arabs and North African tribes who had accepted Islam and later subscribed to Sufism spread it among the people together with Islam. This assisted the quick spread of the various brotherhoods as most*

*Nigerians, excluding only the highly scholarly individuals, accepted the brotherhood's turuq simultaneously with Islam without the ability to discern the two as separate entities."* (Olayiwola, 2007)

It should be noted that how Islam goes to what is known as Nigeria today is the same. In other words, one narrative stands for the other. The position of Olayiwola, as quoted above, can be strengthened with various narrations about the *Jihad* of Uthmān Ibn Fūdī (d.1817) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was responsible for the spread of Islam to different parts of the country (Olayiwola, 2007). What makes the *Jihād* relevant to this discussion is that it was planned, staged, and carried out by Sufis. It would be recalled that both Uthmān Ibn Fūdī and his disciples, as well as lieutenants in the *Jihād*, belonged to the *Qādiriyyah* Sufi Order. In one of his declarations, while preparing for *Jihād*, he was reported to have said that he saw Shaykh Abdul-Qādiri, who handed him a copy of the Qur'an, a sword, and a green flag (Doi, 1984). So, the type of Islam that was introduced to and spread across the Yorubaland was the one that was not different from the Sufi version of Islam. Three things were the significant features of Islam in Nigeria, ditto for Yorubaland. These are *Mālikiyyah*, *As-Shā'irah* and *Sūfiyyah*. The first indicates the prevalent school of thought, the second is related to *aqīdah* (creed), and the third is related to the practice of Islam. Therefore, Nigerian Muslims are followers of the Maliki School in one of the countries in West Africa. Hence, it is the recognized official Islam in the country (Olayiwola, 2007). The majority of early Muslims belonged to either *Qādiriyyah* or *Tijāniyyah* Sufi Orders. Thus, they handed it over to the generations that came after them. Suberu (2022) acknowledges how widely Islam practiced along with Sufism in the country, including the Yorubaland, before the advent of British imperialists truncated it.

### **An Overview of *Jalabi***

Aliyu (2015) defines *Jalabi* as the local nomenclature for clerical services, such as spiritual consultancy, rendered by an *Alfa* to his client who approached him for spiritual assistance in solving a problem or achieving a desired goal. Etymologically, it comes from the Arabic language *Jalaba*, which means "to bring about" or "caused to happen." In its technical usage, *Jalabi* as a name is taken from the charges paid in return for a spiritual service rendered by a Mallam to the client whose problem is solved (Afiz & Hassan, 2015a). It is also defined as spiritual services rendered by an *Alfa* with the prevailing objective of achieving the desired benefit (*jalbu' l-Manfa'ah*) or preventing evils (*Daf'u' l-Madarrah*), either to an individual or the society at large (Afiz & Hassan, 2015a). The services include spiritual consultations for healing, prosperity, and counseling. Oloruntele (2009) explains further when he submits that:

*"The clerics organize congregational supplications for their clients, reciting or repeating some chapters or verses of the Qur'an or prophetic prayers in various forms to liberate the client from evil forces. At times, the killing of domestic animals may follow the supplications. Part of the meat may be distributed to children and beggars or used to prepare food and taken to the mosque for general consumption by the poor. In addition, sadaqah, almsgiving, in cash or kind, may be recommended"* (Oloruntele, 2009).

The above excerpt explains the methods or processes through which a *Jalabi* Mallam discharges his duty to his client. Also, the prescriptions are made for a client who approached the *Jalabi* practitioners to solve their problem.

*Jalabi* is not a substitute for medical practice involving Islamic medical prescriptions, especially prophetic medicines, but a combination of Islamic, spiritual, and local herbs for healing. As diseases varied, so did their treatments. Some require only medication, while others may call for spiritual methods that require prayers and *Ṣadaqah* (almsgiving). *Jalabi* practitioners merge these variables to engender a new method that is somewhat unique. That is why a *Jalabi* man is an Islamic scholar, spiritual consultant, and a local herbalist. He combines both Islamic and local methods to solve a given problem. At times, he attempts to Islamise the local methods but often being betrayed by the level of his Islamic scholarship.

Various reports depict how the Prophet and his companions rendered different services to people, which the *Jalabi* practitioners premise their practice on. In *Ṣaḥīḥ' l-Bukhāri*, this report is taken:

*"Narrated Abu Sa'īd, may Allah be pleased with him, said: Some of the Prophet's companions, may Allah's peace and blessing be upon him, went on a journey and reached some of the 'Arab tribes (at night). They asked for hospitality, but they refused. The chief of the tribe was then bitten by a snake (or stung by a scorpion), and they tried their best to cure him but in vain. Some of them said (to the others), 'Nothing has benefited him. Will you go to the people who reside here at night? It may be that some of them might possess something (as treatment),' They went to the group of the companions (of the Prophet) and said, 'Our chief has been bitten by a snake (or stung by a scorpion), and we have tried everything but to no avail. Have you got anything (useful)?' One of them replied, 'Yes, by Allah! I can recite a Ruqya, but as you have refused to accept us as your guests, I will not recite the Ruqya for you unless you fix for us some wages in return.' They agree to pay them a flock of sheep. One of them then went and recited (Suratul-Fatiha): 'All the praises are for the Lord of the worlds' and puffed over the chief who became well as if he was released from a chain, and got up and started walking, showing no signs of sickness. They paid them what they agreed upon. Some of them (i.e., the companions) then suggested sharing their earnings among themselves, but the one who performed the recitation said, 'Do not share them till we go to the Prophet and narrate the whole story to him, and wait for his order.' So, they went to Allah's Apostle, may the peace and blessing of Allah be upon him, and narrated the story. Allah's Apostle asked, 'How did you know that Surat' l-Fatiha was recited as Ruqya?' Then he said, 'You have done the right thing. Share (what you have earned) and assign a share for me.' The Prophet, may the peace and blessing of Allah be upon him, smiled thereupon" (No.2276 & 5749).*

This *hadith* has attracted diverse comments from scholars like Imam Shāfi'i and Ibn Bital. This is because many fundamental issues connected to *Jalabi* are contained therein. Consequently, each scholar approaches it according to the perspective of his interest. For instance, it has necessitated discussions vis-à-vis the legitimacy of rendering *ruqyah* for non-Muslims, accepting money for *ruqyah*, and using the verses of Al-Qur'an for healing, among others. It should be noted that each of these issues, as could be inferred from this *hadith*, forms an integral part of what *Jalabi* practice is all about.

Also, *Jalabi* advocates premised their arguments to prove their Islam practice's legitimacy on this *hadith*. They hold that for the companions to have negotiated their wages and for the Prophet to have endorsed it and shared from the earning, it is instructive for anyone skilled to make it a profession and earn a living. In his explanation of this *hadith*, scholars like [Ibn Bital \(2003\)](#) listed Imam Shāfi'i and Ahmad among those who permitted such practice. Many practices characterize the existence of *Jalabi*. The under-listed are some of them.

### Consultation

By practice, an *Alfa* sits at a designated place in his home to attend to people who come to him to access his services to solve their bothering issues of either adversity or prosperity. It may be spiritual or physical, and both at times combined. Ordinarily, consultancy service is one of the cardinal responsibilities of being a scholar of Islam. They are teachers, opinion molders, religious leaders, spiritual consultants, and legal experts (Aliyu, 2015). People approach them for different purposes to seek religious knowledge, ask questions on obscure matters, seek explanations for clarification issues, and, by extension, seek ways of solving their problems, especially spiritual ones. It is believed by default that *Alfas* are men of God for being the repository of religious knowledge and their high level of dedication of their lives and time to the service of Allah by embarking on different rigorous acts of worship like seclusion (*Khalwah*), prayers, fasting and teaching religious sciences. It is, therefore, believed that they must be closer to Him than ordinary individuals in society. Their steps are believed to be divinely guided. Thus, their advice is taken as righteous and divine messages. People, therefore, consult them to make their lives better.

The consultancy services are predicated on the practice of the Prophet, as elucidated by Al-Qurṭubī (1964) while explaining the content of Chapter 58, verses 12 and 13, which depict how Companions, the Jews, and Christians, among others, used to consult the Prophet on their private matters. It was so general that Allah instructed the offering of *Ṣadaqah* (almsgiving) before consulting the Prophet. Ibn Kathīr (1999) explains that this practice was to increase the pious deeds of individuals and reduce the influx of people, but when it became clear that many could not cope with the condition, Allah relaxed it. Shaybah (1980) reports how Ali, after the revelation of the above portion of Al-Qur'an, used to give *Ṣadaqah* with ten (10) *dirham* before meeting the Prophet for private matters and that no one has ever done that before him. An instance of consultation for clarification of obscure situations was recorded in the early days of Islam when the Prophet experienced the novel visitation of an Angel. Khadijah, his wife, was reported to have consulted Waraqah ibn Nawfal to unravel the strange events that beclouded the thoughts of her husband (Al-Bukhari, No.3). So, consultation of scholars has formidable credence in Islam.

### Hantu and Tira

*Hantu* and *tira* are two main features of *Jalabi* practice. They connote the art of writing Quranic, Prophetic, or Arabic inscriptions with a specially prepared ink called *Tadaa* and pen called *Qalam* on a black slate called *Wala* or paper or other objects for different purposes, including drinking, rubbing, bathing, or hanging among others (Oloruntele, 2009). It is *hantu* if written on slates for drinking, bathing, or rubbing the body, and *tira* if it is meant for hanging on the body or any place for protective or healing purposes (Balogun, 2011). References are often made to the case of Prophet Ayūb and Maryam, the mother of Prophet Isā. The former was recorded in the Qur'an to have undergone strange sickness to the extent that he was deserted by people, including his close relatives. When he prayed to Allah for healing and recovery, he was directed to strike his leg on the floor and told that he should drink and bath with the water that would gush out from that place for healing (QS. 38:42). The case of Maryam was also similar when she was in labor. Allah directed her to drink water and eat date palms for a safe and easy delivery (QS. 19:25-26). The *Jalabi* practitioners predicate their offering of *hantu* to their clients on these grounds, claiming that if Allah did not want to teach a lesson there, He would have cured them with His words (*Kun Fa yakun*). Shaybah (1980) also reported that Ibn' Abbās used to write specific portions of the Qur'an for pregnant women to drink, especially for easy delivery when labor becomes difficult.



Also, the practice of preparing *tira* to be hung on either the body or place is said to have been credited to the reported practice of Abdullahi Ibn Amr, a companion who used to teach members of his household certain supplications to be recited before going to bed at night. The report states that younger individuals could not read, so the father Abdullahi used to write and hang it on their necks (At-Tirmidhi, No.3528 & Abu Dawud, No. 3893). There are, however, authentic *aḥādith* prohibiting amulets and talismans, among others. These *aḥādith* do not contradict the practice of Abdullahi because there is a clear difference between the two practices. Of Abdullahi refers to verses of the Qur'an and other *Mathūrāt*, while the other refers to what constitutes *shirk* (polytheism). The majority of scholars across ages, especially of the *Salafiyyah* enclave, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, and Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalānī, among others, as compiled by [Balogun \(2011\)](#), approved the practice of writing verses of the glorious Qur'an for medication and protective purposes, especially where one cannot read.

### **Divination and Prescriptions**

One of the essential practices of *Jalabi* is divination, which leads to prescriptions of different sorts and, subsequently, offering of Sacrifice. Divination is questioning the cause of occurrence or desirous of unraveling future mysteries using diverse methods, many of which were said to be prohibited in Islam. Some of those methods include sand cutting (*Khatt Ramli*), oracle, palm reading, rosary reading, horoscope, and geomancy. It is generally confirmed that the Prophet acknowledged the need for men to seek divine guidance in matters, especially when confused; hence, he recommends *Istikhārah* (Al-Bukhari, No.6382 & 7390) as the best method. The *Jalabi* practitioners have, however, gone beyond the mere *Istikhārah* to engage in different means to achieve their aims. Sand cutting is the most common practice. It is believed to have legitimacy from the celebrated *hadith* of Mu'awiyyah Ibn Al-Hakam As-Sulami as contained in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (No. 537). It was reported that he asked several questions from the Prophet, bordering on *Jāhiliyyah* practices, to which the Prophet provided negative answers except the one on sand cutting. The Prophet declared it a practice of one of the earlier Prophets, and whoever knows it can practice it. The scholars identified the actual Prophet as Idrīs (Al-Qurtubi). This particular report has generated many comments from scholars, boiling down to the fact that nobody knows how it was precisely practiced by that Prophet ([An-Nawawwi, 1992](#)). Therefore, the practice remains unlawful. *Jalabi* practitioners did not take to this but built on the *hadith* to engage in sand cutting and make it one of the cardinal practices of *Jalabi*.

### **Special Prayer Session and Sacrifice**

Another essential or prominent practice among the *Jalabi* practitioners is an organization of special prayers, especially in the congregation, to solve a problem or to achieve prosperity. They are often commissioned for this purpose, while the client takes responsibility for financial implications, which may be negotiated and agreed upon. This practice has made them attach significant status to some verses or chapters of the glorious Qur'an. Like *Sūratu Yāsin*, which is used for multiple purposes, *Sūratu' l- Wāqī'ah* as a source of prosperity, *Mu'awwidhatayn* for protection, *Mulk* for dominance, and *Fatih* for victory, among others. *Al-Kahf*, for instance, is recited like *Suratul Yāsin* for multiple reasons. Its 99<sup>th</sup> verse is repeated many times to gain high patronage in businesses because they are believed to have tendencies for crowds and mass gatherings. At the same time, *Sūratu' l-Masad* is recited for improved sales in the market. The practice has become a household thing among the Yoruba to the extent that they produced some materials with these chapters selected and compiled for distribution at ceremonies.

After the prayer sessions, a prescription of specific items to be offered as Sacrifice to appease Allah follows. This is locally called *Saraa*, a concept taken from *Ṣadaqah* or *Qurban*. The story of Hābīl and Qābīl (QS. 5:27), the two children of Adam as reported in the Qur'an, further lends credence to this practice. The word *Qurbān* (Sacrifice to appease God), as contained in that verse, has become a household name among the *Jalabi* practitioners. This used to be accompanied by the slaughtering of animals, which will be shared among the participants and in the neighborhoods. It follows the pattern of distribution as detailed in QS. 22:36. *Jalabi* practitioners also premise the practice of slaughtering and distribution of meat on the report about the Prophet, who used to slaughter and distribute animals to people in memory of Khadijah (Al-Bukhari, No. 3816 & 6004).

### **The Practice of *Jalabi* in Yorubaland**

It should be pointed out that *Jalabi*, one of Yorubaland's major Muslim practices, is also known as *Ise Alfa* (Afiz & Hassan, 2015b). It refers to those who can attend to the spiritual needs of the Muslims and consult them for spiritual enhancement. They are popularly called *Onise Alfa* (clerical scholar). Ordinarily, an *Alfa* is a general name for an Islamic scholar in Yorubaland who is expected to be potent enough to attend to various needs of the Muslims around him, such as teaching the knowledge of Islam through reading and digesting the texts of Islam preaching, and healing among others as identified by Adam (Afiz & Hassan, 2015b). It is not uncommon for an *Alfa* to combine all. At the same time, in some instances, an *Alfa* can be a specialist in one aspect to the absolute exclusion of others or emphasize one more.

The practice of *Jalabi* in Yorubaland has been characterized by many alien indulgences, making it challenging to identify what is Islamic or otherwise in what they do. For instance, it is common knowledge that the practice of *Jalabi* has been mixed with traditional medical practices, otherwise known as *isegun* or *awo* (herbalism or cultism). Hence, one finds little difference between an *Alfa*, *Onisegun*, or *Babalawo*. They have replaced, extended, and shortchanged each of the significant practices in *Jalabi* identified above with strange rules. For instance, the *tira* and *Hantu* have been taken by many *Jalabi* practitioners beyond the permitted limit in Islam to harbor practices like *Khatimi* (tabulating verses of the Qur'an), *gaari tira* (ingredients), magic and names of Jinn, and charms, among others, as listed by Balogun (2011) are frequently used. Other strange involvements include using animal blood for writing or writing verses of the Qur'an in a manner that contradicts how it was revealed, among others. *Nakali* or *Kundi* are other names that *Jalabi* has brought to bear. *Nakali* transfers mystical or magical prescriptions from one person to another, while the compilation of kept or preserved *Nakali* is called *kundi*. It (*kundi*) is an essential element in *Jalabi* practice.

Divination is another essential feature of *Jalabi* practice in Yorubaland. Doi (1984) writes on how many *Alfas* "Islamised" and adopted *Ifa* (oracle) for divination, among other methods condemned in Islam. As an effect of divination, the idea of making special prescriptions crept into the system. After the consultation, certain items are listed to be procured and offered as sacrifices to prescribed individuals, like Imam, *Mu'adhin*, and beggars, among other unique individuals in the society. Sometimes, specific days are chosen for Sacrifice, all in the bid to appease Allah and achieve their desires, while in some instances, particular places are also specified for *Saraa*. The practice also involves using *haram* items or unwholesome means to achieve a desired result. An example includes the art of divination and prescriptions that direct one to drop a sacrifice at a T-junction. This is not only strange to Islamic tenets but can also nullify one's faith. This is one of the essential features of the practice of *Jalabi*.

Many factors have contributed to the proliferation of *Jalabi* practitioners in Yorubaland,

both in early and modern times. One such factor is the need for knowledge of Islam and the scarcity of Islamic scholars in the early period of Islam in the land. It should be mentioned that Muslims of early communities in Yorubaland faced two significant challenges between defending their new faith and having the rudiment knowledge of Islam to measure their lives as Islam requires. These problems needed not only arbitrary profession of faith to address but also Islamic scholarship. Afiz and Hasan (2015b) observed that the knowledge of Islam that the early Muslims had access to did not go beyond the recitation of the Qur'an and basic understanding of some *Mālikī fiqh* books. There was no emphasis on *aqidah* (Islamic tenet), which could have appropriately guided them against stepping out of the bounds of Islam. A narrative holds that the whole of Ilorin before the arrival of Shaykh Alimi (d.1842) lacked access to complete *tafsīrul-Jalalayn*, but half of it. The Shaykh brought it and was the first to teach a complete *tafsīr* of the Qur'an (Aliyu, 2015). This testifies to the reality of the limited knowledge the people had access to. It should not be forgotten that Ilorin is regarded as the gateway of Islamic scholarship to the entire Yorubaland. Where such was the situation in Ilorin, one can imagine what the case would be in other Yoruba towns.

One of the ways early Muslim scholars and *Alfa* protected their faith. They won more people over to Islam by tackling various attendant problems that confronted the people daily, ranging from medical to spiritual, all of which called for urgent and immediate attention. The scholars presided over the religious affairs in the community just as it used to happen before the advent of Islam, where the chief priest in the community provided solutions to every problem and attended to all. It is imperative to bring out that since there were few or no erudite scholars who could expose the then Muslims to Islamic medicine or Prophetic medical prescriptions that could be used as templates to proffer solutions to those challenges, Alfes were left with the option of using their initiatives to arrest and bring the situation under control. Thus, what is known as *Jalabi*?

Furthermore, it is not out of place, as further observed by Afiz and Hassan (2015b), that many early Muslims, especially scholars, were traditional healers before accepting Islam. Coupled with large-scale ignorance of the ethics and tenets of the *din*, they saw no evil or danger in adopting methods from their former religions to defend and consolidate their new faith. Thus, some of those methods were thought to be Islamised. Adding to this is that many of the Hausa Mallam who brought Islam to Yorubaland doubled as teachers and engaged in some practices that could be described as *Jalabi*. They attend to various problems apart from teaching the new converts the basics of Islam. They are also renowned healers and therapists of different sorts. They made other prescriptions, many of which are local to their environment. Records hold how different Hausa Mallams would be invited to a Yoruba town to solve one spiritual problem or another. Such is the widely reported case of Prince Oluaji, who is recorded to have asked some Fulani Muslims to his town during the reign of Oba Alawusa (1739-1774) for assistance (Afiz & Hassan, 2015b). Many scholars were invited from Ilorin to different parts of Yorubaland for such purposes.

In modern times, while the earlier challenges identified above are fizzling out, joblessness arose, cutting across various social strata, especially among the youth. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), in its 2021 release, put the unemployment rate in the country at 33.3 percent. The release, as reported by Adegboyega (2021), shows Nigeria at the 41<sup>st</sup> position regarding the unemployment rate globally. Unemployment, which is mainly responsible for the ravaging poverty in the land, affects every part of society. People are left with the option of finding alternatives to meet their demands.

One of the alternatives, especially for those trained in Islamic scholarship in Yoruba land, is *Jalabi*. This has enabled the proliferation of its practitioners on the ground. Different *Madrasahs*, every year, turned out an army of "graduates" without vocations or skills to serve as a source of



livelihood (Balogun, 2011). So, many of them rely on *Jalabi*, among other works, to fend for themselves. The belief that the Jalabists have Islamic-driven spiritual powers to tackle different problems makes them record high patronage. This, in turn, makes some of them economically buoyant, as many of them were known to be very rich through *Jalabi* practice. Aliyu (2015) rightly observes:

*“A Jalabi scholar is the most materially comfortable in his calling compared to all the other options open to a scholar. The greater the power of intercession a scholar possesses, the greater the material benefits from his work. .... People seek him for all sorts of problems that are believed cannot be solved by man’s effort alone except with some supernatural assistance. The young scholars are seen to be in a hurry to possess the material wealth that this option offers and, therefore, ready to go into syncretism as a shortcut rather than the long and arduous ascetic path the traditional scholars are believed to have passed through to attain such power” (Aliyu, 2015).*

*Jalabi* is, therefore, seen as a means through which both spiritual and financial problems can be tackled, especially for those practicing it. These, among others, make it not to be seen as an alternative to unemployment or joblessness again but has become the main job that people got institutionalized and lived on as a profession and a means of livelihood, thus making it prominent among the Yoruba Muslims.

One of the foremost critics of *Jalabi* practice and a *Salafiyyah* scholar, Professor Ahmad Al-Imam Kakuri (2021, telegram), in one of his lectures in recent times on *Jalabi*, put up criticism against young people who take to *Jalabi* after they graduate from *Madrasah*. He called for legislation at the state and national levels to sanitize and get society rid of the evils of *Jalabi*. He identified hopelessness and impatience as the main drivers of the youth to *Jalabi*. He acknowledges the practice and the necessity for *Jalabi* in the early days. Still, he argues that materiality and abandoning the clerical frugality and asceticism had characterized the process, thereby making the practitioner overstep the boundary. They jettisoned the styles of the early scholars who spent years in ascetic devotional Sacrifice to achieve the *Baraka* that sometimes brings material wealth (Imam Kakuri).

### **Misconception between *Jalabi* and Sufism**

It can be understood from the discussions above that both *Jalabi* and Sufism are embedded in Islam, though some adherents may abuse both. The *Salafiyyah* scholars are, however, bent on identifying both the Sufis and *Jalabi* scholars as one. This is mainly because it could be inferred from the above analysis that the practitioners of *Jalabi* and Sufi scholars broadly shared the same doctrinal belief systems. It is indisputable that most Muslims in Nigeria before's coming of *Salafiyyah* shared the same *aqidah*, *Madhhab*, and were mostly Sufis of either of the two major orders in the land. These are fundamentals before other affinities. Since *Salafiyyah* is all out to displace each association regarded as *bid'ah* (innovation), which leads to misguidance, they tar both with the same brush.

Another point of misconception is spiritual consultation. One of the essential practices that is prevalent in both *Jalabi* and Sufism is consultation for spiritual purposes. Sufis are believed to have spiritual powers and *Ismu' l-Azami* (the most excellent name of Allah) that are efficacious and can turn things around in one's favor. Many of those who desired this consult the Sufis for that purpose. While some Sufis attend to them through supplications, some used to ignore them. Quadri (1985) identifies consultations and approaches for spiritual assistance as one of the factors that

wielded more followers for Shaykh Ibrahim Niass Al-Kawlakhi each time he visited Nigeria (Quadri, 1985). Also, approaching a Sufi Shaykh for spiritual assistance is one factor in establishing Sufi orders in Islam. This is because those clients would later become the disciple of a particular Shaykh, patronize, and even invite people to join them.

Like the Sufi, *Jalabi* practitioners are also consulted for different purposes, as mentioned in the previous sections of this paper. The significant difference between them is that the Sufis, in most cases, do not prepare anything, be it *Hantu* or *tira*, to give out to a client, apart from prayer, before the purpose of consultation is achieved. The core *Jalabi* practitioners give out different items and prescriptions that can assist in achieving the goal of consultation. In some instances, they stepped out of the Islamic prescriptions in tackling the challenges at hand, using local methods to solve a problem, and in some cases, these methods may not be Islamic. Also, the *Jalabi* practitioners charge money for the services rendered because it is their primary business and means of livelihood. In contrast, the Sufis hardly charge, and where they do, it is minor compared to the *Jalabi* charges.

However, some scholars combine the two. They are Sufis and as well *Jalabi* men. Different factors have been identified for this. Some of them need more skills to earn a living, which makes them jobless. Aliyu (2015) and Doi (1984) recapped how different *Madrasahs* in Yorubaland, especially the Markaz in Agege, Lagos, turn out graduates regularly without essential skills acquired during their studies to assist them in earning their means of livelihood after graduation. What most of them are best at doing is Mallam at either *Madrasah*, which may be established by them or hired by another Mallam. Some of them engaged in other small jobs like teaching in government primary schools, preaching, and writing. One basic fact is that what they earn or realize from all these jobs cannot foot their essential bills. So, *Jalabi* is the potential job they can add to augment their income. So, for effectiveness and popularity and to gain more clients, they purposely add Sufism to their routine to improve patronage.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the existence of *Jalabi* and its relationship with Sufism in Yorubaland. Undoubtedly, Islam to Yorubaland with Sufism, and both existed as a single indivisible entity until the late seventies (70s) with the emergence of *Salafiyyah*, when people began to see the difference between Islam and Sufism. The individuals who brought Islam were majorly Sufis, and it is the process of consolidation of Islam that engendered *Jalabi* as a *da'wah* (preaching) strategy to win more reverts, affirm and re-affirm the faith of Muslims and to showcase Islam as having a solution to every problem. Despite the advocacy of *Salafiyyah* scholars against *Jalabi* and Sufism, there are robust premises to predicate the two on from the primary sources of Islam. As mentioned in the work, the various cases of abuse by the practitioners, especially the *Jalabi*, should not lead to throwing the baby away with the bathwater. Still, critics should gear their activities towards effecting the necessary changes in the grey areas. Sameness in *Madhhab* and *aqidah*, among others, informed the conclusion of many *Salafiyyah* scholars that the absence of a parallel between the practitioners of *Jalabi* and Sufis could not hold water. This is because it is demonstrated from various discussions above that each exists separately, though a scholar who uses one to strengthen the other may combine it. This, however, does not mean they are one and inseparable entities. To adequately address the menace of *Jalabi* practice, a new curriculum or syllabus should be designed for *Madāris* to produce Islamically oriented artisans and skilled professionals. There will also be the need to compel mosque officials to be experienced and professionally engaged and be paid a salary. Also, every Muslim, especially the well-meaning ones in society, should be made to finance the mosque officials who take care of the mosque and teach their children the Qur'an, among others.

These will drastically reduce the problems coming from *Jalabi* practice if not eradicated.

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