

The Yoruba Concept Of Spirit Husband And The Islamic Belief In Intermarriage Between *Jinn* and Man: A Comparative Discourse

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Abstract--Inability to find male suitors and barrenness are among the major challenges women are faced with world-wide. Research has identified varying factors that give rise to the challenges as well as corresponding possible solutions. The Yoruba people of South-West Nigeria, viewing the challenges through spiritual lens, however, sometimes attribute the challenges to the handiwork of spirit husband—a belief somewhat similar to the Muslims' belief in marital relationship between man and *jinn*. This study therefore examines and compares the two concepts. Given the relatively unexplored and complex nature of the phenomena, qualitative methodology which allows for in-depth interviews for women believed to be victims of spirit husband as well as Muslim and Yoruba exorcists is adopted. The result shows the reality of the phenomena. It also shows some relatedness between the two concepts even when they differ considerably. The result also shows possibility of partial or total deliverance of victims.

Keywords----Exorcists, *jinn*, *oko-orun*, spirit.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE menace of spirit husband is one serious problem confronting some Yoruba women in South-West Nigeria.

Such women lead life of frustration. The enormity of the problem is such that it appears insurmountable. Efforts of Yoruba priests to deliver women who fall victim of spirit husband, most of the time, prove abortive. Spirit husband also at times referred to as heavenly husband is a belief in the possibility of a woman being married in the supernatural world before being born in the physical world. The terminology commonly used by the Yoruba people of South-West Nigeria for spirit husband is *oko-orun*. Just as the Yoruba people speak of *oko-orun*, they also believe that there is *aya-orun* (heavenly or spirit wife) except that the *aya-orun* phenomenon is not as common as that of *oko-orun*. Two major problems that women who have spirit husband are mostly faced with are inability to get human suitors and barrenness. A somewhat similar belief

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in Islam is marriage between human being and *jinn* (spirits). There is the belief among some Muslim theologians that it is possible for love affair to exist between man and *jinn*. The love affair may however be illicit or based on proper conduct of marriage between them. In either case, some women (not all) who are involved in such affair face similar problems faced by those believed to have spirit husband in the Yoruba traditional belief.

Since *oko-orun* are believed to be spirits, the paper looks at the Yoruba traditional belief in spirits before dwelling on the Yoruba concept of spirit husband and its manifestations. The paper also discusses the benefits that victims of spirit husband claim to derive and the problems they encounter. Drawing comparison between the Yoruba concept of spirit husband and the Islamic belief in intermarriage between *jinn* and man, the paper gives information about *jinn* and dwells on the various expositions of Muslim theologians on intermarriage between *jinn* and man. The study also examines and compares the methods adopted by the Yoruba priests and the Muslim exorcists in delivering women who fall victim of spirit husband.

II. SPIRIT IN THE YORUBA TRADITIONAL BELIEF

The Yoruba people are majorly found in the South-Western part of Nigeria. Being Africans, they have elaborate concept of spirits which they often generally refer to as *emi airi* (invisible spirits) because they are simply not visible to the naked eyes. Testimonies for this belief are found in both their oral and written literature. Many stories they tell confirm the existence of these supernatural beings. Old literature five of which were written by Fagunwa vividly depict the various beliefs of the Yoruba on the existence of spirits. According to these oral and written sources, spirits are known with various names. There is the *iwini* simply classified under spirits associated with nature, living in trees; there is also the *egbere* often described as dwarfs and weeping about with mat in its hand. The Yoruba equally believe that some spirits live inside water. There are

also certain spirits that take hills and mountains as abode. The Yoruba refer to them as *oro*. There are yet spirits that roam the forests and prowl human habitations. As most times, a particular spirit can have double character and functions, the Yoruba traditional belief has it that the *egbere* doubles as spirit associated with nature as well as spirits of *abiku* (born-to-die children). The belief among the Yoruba traditional people is that *abiku* spirits have the power to enter into the womb of pregnant women only to die shortly after birth thereby causing suffering in the life of such women [1].

Spirits, in the belief of the Yoruba, move about human world freely except that they lack physical form. But their choicest roaming time is at noon and in the midnight. Whereas some of them are benevolent, some others are malevolent going about purposely to harm human beings since they are invisible. Of the malevolent spirits accorded recognition by the Yoruba traditional people are the spirits of witchcraft and wizardry. Witchcraft according to Idowu is the belief that "the spirits of living beings can be sent out of the body on errands of doing havoc to other persons in body, mind, or state" [2].

III. THE YORUBA CONCEPT OF SPIRIT HUSBAND

The Yoruba people have their indigenous cultural practices as well as traditional beliefs. The "spirit husband" or "heavenly husband" phenomenon which is the main focus of this paper is a belief shared by most traditional Yoruba people. It is a belief in the possibility of a woman being married to a spirit husband while in the spirit world ever before coming to the physical world. The belief of the Yoruba is that both the spirit husband and the woman victim are spirits and that they both belong to the same spiritual cult in the spiritual world. Not only that, they had also, while in the spiritual world, entered into wed-lock witnessed by other members of the spiritual cult. But with the permission of the leader of the cult and especially that of the spirit husband, the woman was allowed, upon her plea, to come to the human world on certain conditions which may include that the spirit husband would be free to visit her and make love to her at will; that she would not have human husband and or bear children. The belief also has it that as a result of the regular love making by the spirit husband, the woman can become pregnant and bear children spiritually but not physically. In some rare instances, the conditions are relaxed for her such that she would be allowed to have human husband and even bear children for him. The children will however be from the spiritual cult, meaning that they are also spirits like the parents [3].

It is also possible, according to the Yoruba Traditional belief, for the male and female spirits in question to be born into the physical world as human beings. In such a rare situation, they would get married to continue the spiritual

nuptial tie that already existed between them. In that case, such woman would not experience the many problems that confront other women who have spirit husbands except that all their children would be spirits from the spiritual cult.

Thus, the implication of the above Yoruba traditional beliefs is that any woman that has spirit husband is herself a spirit belonging to a spiritual cult in the spiritual realm. The woman, having been born into the physical world now exists as a mere human being.

Spirit husband mostly manifests itself to the woman at night in her sleep. This explains the reason why the Yoruba also refer to it as midnight husband (*oko-oru*). This does not mean that it cannot manifest itself at any other time. The woman might see it in her sleep during the day while taking a nap. While the woman mostly sees the spirit husband in trance, it is also possible to dream of it. On some rare instances, spirit husband transforms and appears to the victims physically in wakeful state. In all appearances, it is the same figure that the woman sees always.

Another experience that confirms the reality and manifestation of spirit husband is the sexual encounter that transpires between it and its victim. The encounter is usually so real that the woman not only enjoys it but also experiences ejaculation. When she wakes up, she sees virginal discharge which confirms the fact that her experience is not an illusion [4]. In consequence of the frequent sex in sleep, another manifestation is that the woman might see herself pregnant in her dream; while at the same time she begins to notice physical changes in her body anatomy which confirms the reality of her dream. Such changes include fullness of the breast, nausea and in some cases, temporary seizure of her menses, breastfeeding in dream etc. Though throughout this period, she may not be physically pregnant for all to see, however the Yoruba traditional belief is that such women give birth to spiritual children for the spirit husband. The consequence of this is that her chances of having children in the physical become highly remote [5].

Yoruba women who have spirit husbands believe that there are certain benefits and privileges that they enjoy from spirit husbands such as lavishing them with gifts of varying kinds and magnitude. When they physically lack or are in need of anything, the spirit husband appears to them in dream with the promise to fulfill their needs. This usually manifests physically after short period of time. The benefits they enjoy extend to all forms of assistance; thus the spirit husband makes the woman happy such that she, at that moment, feels no need for any human husband. The contentment she derives from the relationship and the fear of losing such makes her see no use in having human husband [6].

Women who have spirit husband also claim to enjoy maximum protection from them. The spirit husbands guard them jealously and attack their perceived enemies even if it needs soliciting the supports of other members of their spiritual cult. They all rise in support of the spirit husband and in defense of their member (the woman) by attacking the adversary and causing disruptions in his or her affairs. Sexual intercourse is another enjoyment that such women derive from the spirit husbands. They claim that the spirit husband makes love to them in their sleep in the most satisfying manner such that they feel no urge for physical sex for days or even weeks. This is another occasion when women who have spirit husbands do not see the need for human husband [7].

Despite the above stated benefits enjoyed from the relationship, there are several problems that the woman would have to cope with for life. The degree of disturbance and havoc is dependent however on the level of covenant between the woman and the spirit husband. If the woman swore total commitment to the spirit husband, then it becomes impossible for her to have any earthly marriage. All her efforts to get a human suitor will be frustrated by the spirit husband. Such women, though beautiful and charming would hardly see men coming to woo them or seek their hands in marriage. But, if the covenant is not a strong one and the woman makes appeasement to the spirit husband from time to time, she may be allowed to enter into love relationship, such affair would however not last long to end in wedlock- all courtesy of the spirit husband who spiritually sows seeds of discord and hatred among them. And, if par-adventure the woman gets married, the union in most cases would end in divorce. The woman, for no cogent reasons, might decide to part with the man, saying she is fed up with the affair. It may also be the man who will call it quit for no just cause. The woman would thus end up moving from one man's house to the other, not enjoying settled marital life [8].

Related closely to the problem of inability to get a suitor is barrenness. The Yoruba believe that one of the factors responsible for barrenness among women is the problem of spirit husband. Women who have spirit husbands are usually without issues. The explanation they offer for this is that since the spirit husband is a spirit with supernatural powers, it is easy for it to wreck havoc by preventing the man's sperm from reaching the woman's womb therefore ruling out the possibility of fertilization and conception. And in rare cases where she gets pregnant, it is possible that she has miscarriage. This usually leads to frustration and psychological depression for the couple especially the woman. Indeed, the spirit husband would do everything possible to prevent the woman from having an issue for any man she is married to in the physical world.

IV. INTERMARRIAGE BETWEEN *JINN* AND MAN: THE ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Derived from the Arabic verb '*janna*' which literally means 'to hide' or 'to cover' the noun *jinn* refers to some invisible creatures called spirits in English [9]. When in their natural states, the *jinn* are not simply visible to man's naked eyes. *Jinn* live on earth, in a world parallel to that of man- in forests, graveyards, hills, watersides, open desert or open fields, valleys, deserted houses, camel pens and dark places. They also take as abode, holes and cracks while they are also scattered about in market places [10]. Some of them also like to frequent dirty places such as garbage bins or grounds and toilets [11].

Muslim scholars have discussed *jinn*'s interaction with man at the level of love affair and intermarriage and they all agree on its possibility. They find basis for its possibility in verse 64 of chapter 17 of the Qur'an where God addresses the devil, father of the *jinn* race thus: "...and mutually share with them wealth and children". To establish its possibility, they also cite a report from Ibn 'Abass which refers to the effete ones as children of the *jinn*. Ibn Taymiyyah also submitted that intermarriage and procreation between *jinn* and man is not only a possibility and a reality, but a common phenomenon [12].

Love affair between man and *jinn* takes two forms. On the one hand, the involvement of one of the parties especially the human being may be by coercion. For instance, a *jinn* might take possession of a human being and force him or her into love relationship. Another instance is when a particular *jinn* appears repeatedly to a woman in her sleep and makes love to her; or proposes her when in a wakeful state and threatens her should she refuse to comply with its wish. When this second instance is viewed critically, it would be realized that it is similar with the *oko-orun* phenomenon in the Yoruba traditional belief discussed above [13].

On the other hand, it is possible that love affair in the form of intermarriage between *jinn* and man is with the consent of the two parties involved. An apt example is the personal experience narrated by Jalalu 'd-Din ar-Razi's father on how a female *jinn* was offered to him in marriage. He mentioned how the marriage solemnization took place and how, for his distaste for the bride who though, was beautiful but had one eye fixed open, the marriage was dissolved on the fourth day of its solemnization [14].

It is also possible that a *jinn* appears in the form of a human being since they have the supernatural power to take the forms of other creatures. The lover (man or woman), not knowing it is a *jinn*, enters into marriage contract with it either as husband or wife; and possibly bear children for each other. This is a very common experience especially when it involves

reincarnation popularly referred to as *aku-da-ya* in Yoruba religious belief [15].

On the legality or otherwise of intermarriage between *jinn* and man, majority of Muslim scholars are of the view that it is illegal. While some see it as only detestable, some others yet see it as permissible. Those who opine that such marriage is illegal cite a statement of Prophet Muhammad that prohibits such marriage. They further argue that a thorough study of Qur'anic verses such as 30: 21; 4:1 and 3; 7:189 and 16:72 etc reveals that Allah wants man to choose marriage mates only from among human race.

Those who permit intermarriage between *jinn* and man, however, argue that there is neither any categorical statement in the Qur'an nor any authentic statement of the Prophet that prohibits it. Hence to them, it is permissible and not forbidden. They argue that the Qur'anic verses cited above that man should choose mate from among human beings should not be seen as prohibitive barring man from choosing marriage mate from among other race such as the *jinn*. Al-'A'mash and Zayd Abu 'l-Hiwari are some of the scholars who hold this view [16].

'Imam Malik and a host of other scholars however posit that though intermarriage between *jinn* and man is permissible, it is equally detestable. The implication of this is that it is not forbidden unto man to choose a wife from among the *jinn* and *vice-versa* but for some reasons, such a union should not be encouraged. 'Imam Malik has given widespread of mischief as one reason why he detested such marriage when his view was sought on the issue [17].

V. DELIVERANCE METHODS

It should be mentioned at the outset that total deliverance of women from spirit husbands is usually a difficult task. The reason is because in the Yoruba Traditional belief, the spirit husband is considered the rightful husband of the woman while the woman, for not keeping to the covenant she willingly entered into before being allowed to come to the physical world, is considered a traitor. As such, the spirit husband and other members of the spiritual cult see the woman's total deliverance as amounting to losing her completely. On the part of the spirit husband, total deliverance of the woman would mean termination of the love affair and the nuptial tie that had existed for ages between it and the woman. Thus it becomes a loser.

The Yoruba exorcists commonly called *onisegun* or *babalawo*, adopting varying methods, attempt to deliver women from their spirit husband. Their methods in most cases involve appeasement through offerings called *eru egbe* (lit. cultic load). In this method, some items which are believed to be pleasing to the spirit husband and other members of the

spiritual cult are loaded and presented to them in the form of offering. This is evidently described in *Ogbe Oso* verse of *Ifa* geometry [18]. If the offering is accepted, the frequency of disturbance from the spirit husband will reduce. It might however choose not to accept, in which case, the problems persist. Some of the items included in the *eru egbe* are clothes, comb, powder, earrings, necklace, waistband used in backing babies called *oja omo*, fruits, biscuits, sweets and doll baby—all are gathered in calabash and taken to a particular stream at exactly 11.30 at night. The woman will stay by the bank of the stream and watch the calabash being taken away by the water signifying acceptance. But if otherwise, that means the offering is not accepted. It should however be reiterated that the fact the offering is accepted does not signify total deliverance. The woman might experience relief for some time only for the spirit husband to stage a come-back because her total deliverance would amount to losing her completely as earlier mentioned. That is why it becomes imperative that the woman would have to make such offerings from time to time [19].

Muslim exorcists, on the issue of spirit husband and the deliverance of its victims, belong to two categories. A section that use '*Ilmu 'l-Hisab* (the use of Arabic alphabet, according to their numerical value to determine human affair) and '*Ilmu 'l-Falak* (knowledge of the position of the stars and of the movements of the planets in the belief that they influence human affairs) categorizes human beings into four basic origins namely fire (*nari*), sand (*turabi*), wind (*hawa'i*) and water (*ma'i*). They posit that any woman that is of the last two origins naturally belongs to a spiritual cult and will definitely have spirit husband and face the challenges that women who have spirit husbands face. They conclude that for such women, there is no deliverance. The disturbances can only be minimized by the means of prayers and written exorcism that she has to drink with some ingredients from time to time [20]. This postulation, if viewed critically, is similar in every respect with that of the Yoruba tradition. As for women who are of the first two origins, they are not spiritual cultists and would naturally not have spirit husbands. The Muslim exorcists argue that it is only by the means of some spiritual forces that a woman in this category can have the problem of spirit husband. They however submit that such women, in their own case, can experience total deliverance also by the means of prayers, written and bathing exorcisms [21].

The other category of Muslim exorcists is the one that tends towards orthodoxy. The various expositions made earlier about *jinn* and intermarriage between them and man represents the positions of the Muslim exorcists in this category. To them, the spirit husband phenomenon in the Yoruba tradition is somewhat similar to intermarriage between *jinn* and man which any woman is prone to. These Muslim exorcists do not subscribe to the idea of human beings being created from fire,

sand, wind and water origins and that women who belong to the last two are spiritual cultists who must necessarily have spirit husbands [22]. To them, male spirits can fall in love with female human beings, appear and make love to them in sleep. Such women by the means of the *rafd* and *ruqyah* methods discussed underneath can be delivered totally. The only situation, according to them, when total deliverance from spirit husband cannot be guaranteed is where the woman herself is a spirit in human form. Orthodox Muslim exorcists express belief in the possibility of spirits appearing in human form. They therefore posit that if a woman suspected to be a victim of spirit husband is herself a spirit in human form, deliverance in such a situation is not, at all, possible as the exorcists are faced with two challenges- one from the side of the invading demon and the other from the woman herself. If they succeed in chasing away the invading spirit, they cannot possibly change the original nature of the woman who herself is a spirit in human form [23].

Regarding deliverance, orthodox Muslim exorcists, in all cases, adopt two different methods of deliverance or a combination of the two. There is a method they call *rafd* which literally means dismissal and rejection. In this method, the woman is encouraged to personally confront the spirit whenever it appears to her either in her sleep or when in wakeful state and tell it off; threatening to deal with it mercilessly should it continue to appear to her. This method is advocated by Maghawiri [24]. The belief is that with such threat, the spirit might stop disturbing her. The other orthodox method which they also at times combine with the one discussed above is deliverance by the means of *ruqyah* (exorcism). This involves recitation of certain Qur'an Chapters and verses into the right ear of the woman. The woman is thus fortified by such recitation and the spirit is therefore hence prevented from approaching her. It is also possible that the spirit presents itself for interrogation during the operation and it is told that the woman is not interested in such affair and should therefore not disturb her again with any advances. The exorcist also threatens the spirit and warns it of severe punishment that awaits it should it be recalcitrant. Findings however reveal that this second method is more efficacious than the first largely because of the involvement of exorcists who are able to directly confront the spirit on the one hand and on the other hand, because of the Qur'an, the recitation of which Muslims believe have effects on spirits.

VI. COMPARATIVE DISCOURSE

It is instructive to note first and foremost that the two belief systems (i.e., Islam and Yoruba) see *oko-orun* as spirit (*jinn*).

The Islamic belief that it is possible for *jinn* (spirit) to appear repeatedly to a woman in her sleep and make love to her or seek her hand in marriage when in a wakeful state is somewhat similar with the spirit husband phenomenon in the Yoruba traditional belief.

One major difference between the two belief systems however is that while the Yoruba traditional belief has it that both the *oko-orun* and the woman are spirits belonging to the same spiritual cult (*egbe amutorunwa*) and that the woman is therefore a spiritual cultist (*elegbe*), a position shared by a section of Muslim exorcists, the position of orthodox Muslim exorcists is that not all women that have problem of spirit husband are spirits or spiritual cultists. While it is acknowledged that the spirit husband is actually a spirit, the woman might be and might not. Therefore the question of spirit husbands and the women being members of a spiritual cult is not, according to orthodox Muslim theologians, wholly correct. They argue that the fact some women who have problem of spirit husband are delivered by the means of *ruqyah* (Qur'anic recitation exorcism) in the same way other cases of *jinn*'s assaults are treated shows that spirit husbands are demons and that such women are instead mere human victims of the spirit husband; they are not spirits like the spirit husbands because if they are spirits, then they cannot be delivered even by the means of *Ruqyah* since their spiritual nature cannot be changed.

Another difference between the Yoruba concept of spirit husband and the Islamic is on the issue of spiritual marriage. The position of orthodox Islam is that since not all women who have spirit husband problem are spirits as argued above, then it follows that the issue of spiritual marriage is not applicable to all women with spirit husband problem. While marriage is possible between spirit and human being, such only takes place here in the earthly life since man and *jinn* co-exist on earth.

The position of Yoruba traditional belief and Islamic theological belief on the issue of pregnancy and birth are somewhat similar. Where both the spirit husband and the woman are spirits, the woman may conceive spiritually and have children for the spirit husband spiritually only in the spirit world. But where they both have taken human forms or where the woman is a human being and not a spirit, physical pregnancy and birth is possible. Cases of reincarnation whereby spirits take human forms and marry human beings are apt references.

From the explanation given in the Yoruba traditional belief, it appears women who are single are mostly the victims of spirit husbands. That is why inability to get suitors and barrenness are seen as part of the problems the women are confronted with. In the opinion of orthodox Muslim exorcists, any woman -married or unmarried- can fall victim of *jinn*'s

assault in her sleep, especially if she is the type that damns the protective measures recommended to prevent such demonic assault. There are cases of married women who confess to seeing strange figures appearing to them, either attempting to or making love to them in their sleep.

A critical look at the Yoruba traditional method of deliverance as described earlier shows that the spirit husband is appeased and persuaded with gift items to bring about deliverance because its actions are considered justifiable since it is the 'rightful husband' of the woman in question. The Islamic method on the other hand sees the *jinn* as an intruder and oppressor that should be dealt with rather than treated with golf hand. By the means of *rafd* or *ruqyah*, the spirit is told off and given stern warning to desist henceforth from disturbing the woman; and in case it proves stubborn, certain other verses of the Qur'an believed to be efficacious in tormenting spirits and demons are rendered till it is forced to comply. It should, however, be reiterated that the Islamic method too is efficacious only in situations where the woman concerned is a human being that falls victim of spirit husband menace.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the Yoruba concept of *oko-orun* (spirit husband) in the Yoruba tradition and the Islamic concept of intermarriage between *jinn* and man highlighting some areas of similarities and differences between the two concepts. Despite the differences highlighted, it is safe to conclude that the two concepts are one and same though expressed differently. Both the Islamic and the Yoruba traditional beliefs consider *oko-orun* as spirits and this constitute a major area of similarity between the two belief systems. While the Yoruba belief limits the scope of spirit husband to marriage between spirits, Islam seems more comprehensive as it extends the scope to intermarriage between spirit and man.

Since Islam recognizes the fact that spirits are imbued with certain powers, it therefore acknowledges the possibility of a spirit being born into human world as human being. Also through the power of *Tashakkul* (transformation) given to the spirits, Islam equally acknowledges the possibility of a spirit taking human form and appearing to the woman. Thus Islam acknowledges the spirit husband phenomenon as postulated by the Yoruba traditional belief.

The study also shows that the Muslim theologians see the Yoruba belief in the existence of spiritual marriage between the spirit husband and the women victims as not wholly correct. To them, since not all women who have spirit husbands are themselves spirits, the issue of spiritual marriage will not be applicable to all. The study equally reveals that the methods of deliverance adopted by the Yoruba and the Muslim

exorcists are efficacious in ensuring deliverance but for only women who are human victims of spirit husband.

Finally, we wish to remark that outside of spiritual realm, it is inconceivable that a woman who in every sense exists and lives as human being in the physical world would be considered a spirit, married in the spirit world to a spirit husband. If only for this singular reason, we advocate that all women who have problem of spirit husband deserve sympathy and need exorcists' rescue operations wherever that is available.

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