

Review Article

Negative Effects of *Takfir* on the Socio-Economic Life of the Muslims in Nigeria

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Abstract: This paper deals with the issue or act of condemning Muslims as unbelievers and its negative effects on the socio-economic life of the Muslims in Nigeria. The Prophet [SAW] has condemned the act of *Takfir* in strongest term. It was found that the usage of the word *kafir* in the Qur'an and Hadith sometimes does not mean an unbeliever, as there is *kufr* of lesser degree which does not take a Muslim out of Islam if he commits it. The paper also found that Muslims sects share differences on the issue of *Takfir*. It was also found that there was *Takfir* in Nigeria long before the period of the *Jihad* leaders and also during their period. The study also found that there are many causes for the *Takfir* in Nigeria. These include secularism, partisans of politics, role of some scholars, among others.

Keywords: Negative Effects, *Takfir*, Socio-Economic Life, Muslims in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

In Islamic law, *Takfir* or takfeer (Arabic *takfīr*) refers to the practice of excommunication, one Muslim declaring another Muslim as *kafir* (non-believer). The act which precipitates *Takfir* is termed the mukaffir. An ill-founded *Takfir* accusation is a major forbidden act [i].

Orthodox Islamic law normally requires stringent evidence for such accusations. In many cases an Islamic court or a religious leader, an Alim must pronounce a fatwa (legal judgement) of *Takfir* against an individual or group [ii].

There are disputes among different schools of religious thought as to what constitutes sufficient justification for declaring *Takfir*.

Sunni Ash'ari

The orthodox Sunni position is that sins generally do not prove that someone is not a Muslim, but denials of fundamental religious principles do. Thus a murderer, for instance, may still be a Muslim, but someone who denies that murder is a sin is a *kafir* if he is aware that murder is considered a sin in Islam [iii].

Wahhabi

The Wahhabis (followers of Ibn Abdul Wahhab Najdi) hold that anyone outside of their sect are polytheists and unbeliever [iv].

Murjites

The Murjites argued that anyone who called themselves Muslim should be considered Muslim [v]

Mu'tazilites

The Mu'tazilites (followed by the Zaidiyyahs) advocated what they saw as a middle way, whereby grave sinners were categorized neither as believers nor as *kafirs* [vi].

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Khawarij

Some of the early medieval Kharijites concluded that any Muslim who sinned ceased to be a Muslim, while others concluded that only major sin could cause that [vii].

These are some of the opinion of Islamic sects concerning the *Takfir*

History of *Takfir*

Some Muslims (such as Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, founder of Wahhabism) believe that one of the earliest examples of *Takfir* was alleged to have been practiced by the first Caliph, Abu Bakr. In response to the refusal of certain Arab tribes to pay the alms-tax (zakat), he is reported to have said: "By God, I will fight anyone who differentiates between the prayer and the zakat. ... Revelation has been discontinued, the Shari'ah has been completed: will the religion be curtailed while I am alive. ... I will fight these tribes even if they refuse to give a halter. Poor-due (zakat) is a levy on wealth and, by God, I will fight him who differentiates between the prayer and poor- due [viii]".

Other scholars opined that the first time difference was occurred among the Muslims was after the demise of the prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) on the issue of his succession. Muslims further witnessed another differences during the Caliphate of 'Uthman b. Affan when people recited the *Qur'an* differently according to the style or dialect of their teachers. It was the quick intervention of Caliph 'Uthman b. Affan (R.A), when the matter was reported to him by Hudhayfah bn Yaman, who ordered for the compilation of the *Qur'an* that saved the situation from getting out of hand [ix]. However, the circumstances which led to the assassination of Caliph Uthman b. Affan (R.A) and the impatience of those who demanded for the immediate identification and execution of his assassins made the Muslims and Islam to witness crises in which some Muslims used the word *kafir* on one another. *Takfir* had since continued to have serious effects on Islam and the Muslims.

Causes of *Takfir* in Nigeria

The following are some of the factors that led to the emergence of *Takfir among the Muslim ummah in Nigeria*.

Secular System

The word secular according to dictionary means something that has no connection with any religion [x]. The word secular according to this dictionary also derived from the Latin word *secularist*, from *speculum* generation, age used in Christian Latin to mean the world(as opposed to the church)secular(early 19th century) from Latin *secularist* relating to age or period [xi]. While secularism is a belief system that rejects religion or the belief that religion should not be part of affairs of the state or part of public education. This system is being operated in many Muslim countries, Nigeria inclusive. This made some Muslims, with little knowledge, to consider any Muslim who joins this system as *kafir* using verses of the Quran.

Additionally, a poem which was said to have been written by an anonymous author after the colonial occupation of Nigeria and said to have published by Hiskett in 1973 attests to the fact that secularism as well as westernization of the country led to a situation whereby some Muslims see other Muslims who participate in such system as *kuffar*. The poem goes thus today unbelief is established, and also innovation, well, as for us, we have no use for this in our time, this is that I am about to say, there is no jesting in it, now I am going to warn you, O people, whoever heeds it, he will be happy, whatever article of their clothing, if you wear it, I tell you that you may understand you pray a thousand times you will not be vindicated, and the same applies to the maker of hurricane lamp globes, your short trousers together with your tight fitting trousers, whoever puts them on, his unbelief is wide, whoever wears suits with buttons, he has apostatized, he has no religion at all... [xii].

This poem indicates that some Muslims, particularly in North-West Nigeria, see that copying the western ways of life is like going out of Islam. This may not be unconnected with the understanding of the *Boko Haram* group about western education and anything that is associated with it.

Couple with the above is the attitude of the general public towards the laws of Allah. Many Muslims today, in all strata of the society and sectors of life, conduct themselves in an unIslamic manner, which gives those with little knowledge chance to see them as having gone out of Islam. If many of them have lived their lives according to the rules of Allah, it wouldn't have given them that opportunity [xiii]. It was reported that the *Khawarij*, since the time of their emergence, continued to declare the Muslim leaders in particular as *kuffar* until the period of Umar bn Abdul 'Aziz, when they saw his steadfastness and justice, and then said: "We are not going to fight this man" [xiv].

Roles of Some Scholars

Scholars are held in high esteem, they command respect from their followers or students. Generally, scholars are the prime movers of peace, tranquility and social order in any society. It is evident that some of the scholars who people listen to their preaching or read their books are not qualified to handle preaching sessions as they incite the members of their sects or their audience against other Muslims. For example, Abu Qatadah, *Shaykh* 'Adnan of Algeria, who was said to have regarded the present Muslim community as non-Muslim community but that of the *Jahiliyyah*. Because, according to him, the Muslim Community agree to live under the rulers

who do not rule according to the *Shari'ah* of Islam [xv]. This is capable of inciting his audience particularly, youths with little knowledge, against other Muslims and to regard them as unbelievers.

Partisan Politics

The attitudes of some Muslim politicians, particularly in North-West of Nigeria have contributed to the *Takfir* in Nigeria. They are seriously working to use the scholars to declare Muslims non-believers just for their selfish end in order to realize their political ambitions [xvi]. All these and some other factors constitute what led to *Takfir* of the Muslims in Nigeria.

Consequently, the *Takfir* having emerged in Nigeria has led to a number of religious, socio-economic and political problems among the Muslims. This forms the major issues to be discussed in this research paper.

Creation of Hatred and Enmity among Muslims

Islam places great importance on love, affection and social cohesion among the believers. That was why the first social engagement of the prophet (S.A.W) when he arrived Madinah was to unite the major warring tribes of Madinah (*Aws* and *Khazraj*), who were hitherto enemies of each other, and established brotherhood between the Makkans and Madinites. This act of the Prophet was to rid the *Ummah* of any disagreement which can disturb peace and harmony in Muslim relationship and ruin the brotherhood of the believers [xvii].

Today, feeling of love and affection to fellow Muslims is determined by the organization to which one belongs. Instead of each organization to support one another, they are always at each other's throat by levelling various accusations of unbelief, blasphemy and harmful innovations indiscriminately against each other. The fact is that when individuals in the cause of their activities collide with one another, each becomes an obstacle for the other, thereby creating hatred and enmity among themselves. This is the condition of the Muslims in Nigeria today and indeed elsewhere where sects and groupings found prominence. The major Islamic organizations in Nigeria such as *Izala* and *Tariqah* are always at each other's throat. The situation has led to hatred, enmity and some times, killings.

For instance, in 1960s, the Tijjaniyya and Qadiriyya orders were at the neck of each other over how to position hands in prayer; *Qabd* and *Sadl*. *Qabd* refers to the folding of hands in Salat by putting the right on the left and keeping them on the chest, while *Sadl* is to leave the hands at the sides. This had led to a number of confrontations between the two groups. An example of such was the clash at Toranka village of Sokoto Emirate in 1964 in which twelve (12) policemen were killed [xviii].

Similarly, in Argungu, it was reported that with the advent of *Izala* group, the number of divorce cases rapidly increased where one of the partners within a marriage happened to be a member of *Izala* group. Many cases of family litigations congested the area courts of Argungu at that time [xix].

In the same vain, in Zuru Local Government Area, on 23rd, April 1988, there was the report of clash between the *Sufis* and the *Izala* members over the claim by each of the two parties that it was its turn to use the Friday mosque of Zuru to conduct their *Ramadan Tafsir*. The duo had agreed upon a common utilization of the only Friday Mosque of Zuru in turn for the holding of their *Tafsir* meetings during Ramadan. Both sides had erroneously assumed that it was their own turn on that specific day. Three people were reportedly killed in the clash, one hundred wounded and fifty houses and a number of cars were reportedly burnt [xx].

The Maitatsine uprising both at Borno and Kano states had claimed about five hundred and four thousand [504,000] lives. About one hundred and seventy-seven (177) people wounded and the properties worth millions of Naira destroyed, all as a result of hatred and enmity among Muslims, caused mainly by the act of *Takfir* [xxi]. The Maitatsine movement was formed in the 1970s in Kano under the leadership of Malam Muhammad Marwa whose Hausa nickname was Maitatsine [the master of condemnation]. He introduced a number of heretical beliefs into Islam, such as reduction of the five daily prayers into three, rejection of Hadith as a source of *Shari'ah*, etc. He used to raise curses on Muslims who do not belong to his group during his preaching sessions and became violent on them, by killing many Muslims when his only son Kan'an was killed in Kano in 1980.

Another case of enmity among Muslims as a result of *Takfir* was Shi'ite/Sunni clash in Sokoto in May/June 2005, which led to the death of a Shi'ite leader, Alhaji Akilu Yahya and some other people as well as loss of properties worth millions of Naira [xxii]. The *Shi'ah* had come to Sokoto through Al-Zakzaki, who was said to have disguised as a member of *Ikhwan al-Muslimin* [Muslim Brotherhood]. Calling non-*Shi'ite* Muslim leaders *Tawaghit* by the *Shi'ites* and cursing and abusing the companions of the Prophet [SAW] were vehemently rejected by the *Sunnis* which have led to many crises.

Additionally, the assassination of *Shaykh* Ja'afar Mahmud Adam in Kano on Friday, 13th April, 2007 while leading Morning Prayer might not be unconnected with such enmity and hatred among the Muslims in Northern Nigeria. This is because of the comments and reactions of many people after the assassination of the *Shaykh*, some of which were pointing accusing fingers to his sour relationship with some rival Islamic sects when he was alive. Similarly, the killing of Mallam Umar Hamza Dan Maishiyya in Sokoto on Wednesday 18th July, 2007 after *Isha'i* prayer was also not unconnected with this. In fact, the killing of Mallam Dan

Maishiyya led to escalation of tension between the Shi'ites and Sunni members which led to the destruction of properties. A lot of business places belonging to suspected Shi'ite members were set ablaze [xxiii]. Mallam Dan Maishiyya, prior to his death, was one of the scholars who were critical of the Shi'ites and their activities, exposing the fallacies of their creed during his preaching sessions. No wonder the Shi'ites were considered the prime suspects of his death.

From the foregoing, it is clear that mutual accusation of *Kufr* or *Takfir* has implanted so much hatred in the minds of some Muslims towards others and led to enmity and intra-religious disharmony and consequently led to the destruction of lives and property of the Muslims in the Northern Nigeria. The situation could have been avoided if the Muslims love for their brothers what they love for themselves in accordance with the instruction of the Prophet (S.A.W) and abide by the golden rule of do unto others what you would love them to do unto you. This is by not regarding their fellow Muslims as infidels or wrong doers. The Prophet [SAW] has been reported to have said:

None amongst you believes till one likes for his brother or his neighbour that which he likes for himself [xxiv].

Disunity among Muslims

Probably, the most obvious effect of branding fellow Muslim as *Kafir* is disunity among the *Ummah*, since one does not expect the one he curses or about whom he makes nasty and provocative statement to still cooperate with him. *Takfir* is therefore the major cause of disunity among the Muslims in general and in Northern part of Nigeria in particular. The disunity caused by *Takfir* has manifested itself in so many ways and times among the Muslims in the area. For instance, the lack of unity among the Muslims in Northern Nigeria has attracted national attention. This led to what was tagged by the media as *kufr* debate in 1979, for which a committee was set up by the Federal Government of Nigeria [xxv]. The committee was set up in the late 1978 under the Chairmanship of Brigadier General Shehu Musa Yar'adua to discuss ways of solving the conflict which was said to have arose as a result of a book written by Shaykh Abubakar Gumi; *al-Aqeedah al-Sahihah bima Wafaqah al-Shari'ah*, which was claimed that it condemns Sufism and regards it as unislamic [xxvi]. The committee included some notable Islamic scholars in northern Nigeria, such as Shaykh Nasiru Kabara Kano, Shaykh Sharif Ibrahim Salih of Maiduguri, Khalifa Isma'il Ibrahim and Shaykh Abubakar Gumi for the conflicting parties, S.A.S Galadanchi and M.S. Zaharadeen as the neutral intermediaries, as well as Hamidu Alkali as Chairman, while Brigadier Shehu Musa Yar'adua (then Chief of staff, Supreme Headquarters and Alhaji M.D Yusuf (then Chief Police Superintendent) served as the Federal Government representatives. At the end of this intervention by the Federal Government, an agreement was reached in early 1979, which became known as the *Kufr* agreement that each of the conflicting groups should stop using the language of *Kufr* against each other and thus ensure unity of the Muslims. However, after a while the mutual accusation of *Takfir*, particularly between the *Izala* and *Tariqah* groups continued [xxvii].

Furthermore, the election of December 1987 in Nigeria showed how *Takfir* has disunited the Muslims in northern Nigeria which made Christian candidates to win many seats in the Muslim dominated areas [xxviii]. In Kaduna Local Government, for instance, the victory of one John Aboki was possible because the followers of Tijjaniyyah order voted for against Sule Bako, who was a member of *Izala* group. This was as a result of the statements made by the leader of Tijjaniyyah group, Shaykh Dahiru Uthman Bauchi, prior to the election day on the radio that:

As far as what he (Gumi) said that one should vote only good Muslim not for Christian, it has to be said that according to his (Gumi's) opinion, a good Muslim is a follower of the *Izala* group. According to our own opinion and in the faith of all Muslims in this country, we should, when we come together to vote, not vote for one of Gumi's men, because he would be a member of *Izala* group. If in one place there are three candidates, one Muslim, one Christian and one *Izala*, then one can make one's choice among them, but one should not vote for the candidate of *Izala* [xxix].

Therefore, because the candidate who belongs to Tijjaniyyah had poor chance to win the local election, they voted a Christian candidate in order to prevent the victory of the *Izala* member.

This was not limited to Kaduna. The same scenario was reported in the Middle Belt Areas. Thus in Numan Local Government of defunct Gongola State, Christian candidates won nine out of eleven wards elections. In Zing local government and even in Yola Local Government, similar cases were recorded. Shaykh Sharif Ibrahim Salih commented on the lesson of this election of 1987 with following words:

What happened in Kaduna during the local government elections is enough lessons to us and unless something is done to achieve unity in the *Ummah*, something worse may happen in the rest of the elections [xxx].

All these incidences of disunity among Muslims especially between *Izala* and *Tariqah* groups occur largely due to *Izala* group branding *Tariqah* followers as unbelievers during its preaching sessions and vice versa. Consequently, social cohesion, which leads to peace and unity, could not be achieved.

Proliferation of Mosques

One of the effects of *Takfir* which is being felt by every Muslim every day is the issue of too many secretariat mosques in our communities. This is simply because once someone is condemned as *Kafir* it means his prayer is not accepted, for the first condition for prayer is Islam. Therefore, a Muslim will refuse to pray behind his fellow Muslim because he has considered him as *Kafir*. This automatically leads to either shifting to another mosque or forming or establishing another where prayer will be said with the ones he considers as Muslims. The example of this is obvious between the *Izala* and the *Tariqah* groups. A typical *Izala* member will never pray behind a *Tariqah* Imam and vice versa. The same thing applies to many other Islamic groups such as Ahmadiyyah, Kala Kato e.t.c. It is on record that one Malam Sani, the chief Imam of Sabo Sagamu Friday mosque, Ogun state was expelled from the mosque for his cordial relationship with the Tijjaniyyah members and was replaced by a new *Imam* who did not have such relationship with any *Sufi* order. The followers of Tijjaniyyah, under the leadership of Malam Sani there upon opted for another mosque [xxxi].

However, this sad trend is not limited to inter-organisation or inter-sectarian groups, but is also found within the same group. Once there is misunderstanding and some members of the group see other's action as incorrect, the next thing is to establish another mosque. Sometimes, the mosques, particularly those of daily prayers, are so close to each other that even common sense tells one that it is unnecessary. The examples given by Salisu Adamu on the proliferation of mosques in North West of Nigeria can best be used to explain this development. He said:

Until 1970, there was only one Juma'at mosque in Kano for both 'Birni and Waje'. But between 1980 and 1990, about ten (10) Juma'at mosques were built in metropolitan Kano. In Sokoto metropolis alone, there are twenty one (21) Juma'at mosques [xxxii].

He further explained:

Mosques for five daily prayers are worse affected by proliferation of Muslim organizations and intolerance. For instance, in Minanata area of Sokoto metropolis, there are fifty (50) mosques for regular prayers [xxxiii].

Although, the increase in number of mosques for prayers can be a positive development, for it provides accessibility to the Muslims to observe prayers, yet it is harmful to the *Ummah* if the purpose for it is intolerance among the Muslims which is caused many times by mutual accusation of *Kufr*.

Denial of Inheritance

One of the measures taken by Islam as religion and a way of life to ensure wide circulation of wealth and economic well-being of its adherents is by institutionalizing the law of inheritance and making it compulsory for every Muslim to be given a certain share from the properties of his close relations after the latter's death. Allah [SWT] says in the Qur'an:

There is a share for men and a share for women from what is left by parents and those nearest related, whether the property be small or large, a legal share [xxxiv].

However, a Muslim stands the risk of losing his right to inheritance if he is declared *kafir*, as *kafir* is a major impediment to inheritance. The *Shari'ah* has made it forbidden for a Muslim to inherit non-Muslim even if it is his father or child and vice versa. *Takfir* is therefore, one of the major factors that affect the economic well-being of a Muslim.

So far in this paper, it has been shown how *Takfir* affects the social as well as the economic lives of Muslims in the society. The discussion shows how it led to sour relationship, hatred and enmity and subsequently led to their divisions and lack of coming together to pray as Allah commands them. This eventually led to their weakness to the advantage of their enemies. It is an adage that united we stand, divided we fall. Therefore, *Takfir* is one of the major factors of all the social problems among the Muslims.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strict adherence to the Qur'an and *Sunnah*: it has been explained that the Prophet did not use the word *kafir* for any Muslim during his life time. He was so careful in dealing with the matters of *Takfir* that even the unbelievers who said *Kalimatush-shahadah* in the face of death or for the fear of sword were still considered as Muslims by him (S.A.W). So, Muslims should adhere strictly to his *Sunnah* by not rushing to regard any Muslim as *Kafir* except with the evidence which is as clear as the broad day light.
- Combination of the texts: it is clear that one of the factors which lead to *Takfir* is to base one's Judgement on only one verse of the Qur'an or *hadith* without searching for other similar verses on the same matter before arriving at the conclusion. Since the whole verses of the Qur'an are from Allah alone and the authentic traditions of the Prophet (S.A.W) have divine guidance, Islamic Scholars are expected to know the meanings of all the verses and *Ahadith* which are related to any matter they deal with before they can pass judgement on the particular issue.
- Avoidance of extremism: Muslims have been warned in many *Ahadith* of the Prophet [SAW] and verses of the Qur'an to shun extremism in their affairs, as doing so can ruin the *Ummah*. One of the major characteristics of the Muslims is *Wasatiyyah* (Moderation), a Muslim should be moderate in his religious as well as mundane matters so as to live according

to the way Allah intends him to live i.e. to be moderate servant. Extremism makes a Muslim lose his common sense of thinking and thereby denying others their rights which Islam gives to them. It also leads a person to go beyond his position as human being and assume the position of the Creator and the Judge by giving himself the power to take or fix people in and out of Islam at will.

- A Muslim is expected to be full of fear of Allah and to always try to correct his own shortcomings first before correcting others. Anyone who is always concerned with his own faults hardly gets time to be busy with other peoples' faults and he will be very careful not to speak evil about others because he will be afraid of taking from his good deeds to settle those he might have, in one way or the other, wronged through his mouth on the Day of Judgment.

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