

Writing on Marginal Muslim Figures: The Religious Career of a Community *Mu'adhdhin* in FESTAC-Town, Lagos, Nigeria

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Abstract

Despite its importance in Islam, the Mu'adhdhin's position has largely been perfunctory. This is often linked to the ambivalent and veiled understanding of their religious roles or duties, particularly among Yoruba Muslims in southwest Nigeria who view them as 'marginal' religious figures. This study, therefore, brings to light some of these 'marginal' Muslim figures whose works or activities play significant roles in the historical progression of Islam within a religious agency and locality. It similarly addresses the misconceptions among Muslims on the duties and roles of the Mu'adhdhin in a typical Yoruba Muslim community. The paper is based on a fieldwork conducted in FESTAC town in 2017, which draws primarily on evidence from oral sources and readings from secondary sources. Findings show that, beyond his core duty as 'caller' of the Muslim compulsory prayers, the Mu'adhdhin commands profound authority and also performs strategic and institutional roles in Islam. The paper concludes that there is a need to accord the Mu'adhdhin due recognition within Yoruba Muslim communities, as dictated by the Sharī'ah.

Keywords: *Yaqeen Olugbenro Atanda, Mu'adhdhin, Islam, Yoruba, FESTAC-Town*

Introduction

A handful of the founding members of the Festival Town Muslim Community (FTMC) located in the FESTAC-Town area of Lagos State, Nigeria, are deceased.¹ Alhaji Yaqeen remains one of the few

* I am grateful to Prof. Afis A. Oladosu (University of Ibadan), Dr. Mikhail Folorunso (Osun State University, Osogbo), and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on the draft of this manuscript.

extant sources for the reconstruction of Islam in that part of Lagos and, indeed, Lagos history. As one of the early founding members of the town's Muslim community – the FTMC – the life history of a towering religious figure like him, especially through his active service to humanity and selfless propagation of Islam, is worthy of documentation. Emerging as the first official *Mu'adhdhin* of the FTMC, a study on this religious figure, no doubt will provide deeper insights and understanding of the religious encounters and formations in the town in its formative years, and the functions and roles of the *Mu'adhdhin*, most importantly, within the Yoruba Muslim setting.

Indeed, a biographical sketch as this helps, in part, to navigate peculiar religious figures that generally could openly identify truths about society and culture.¹ To reasonably achieve a task such as this, we are obliged, according to Leon Edel, to understand the “work or ‘lifestyle’” of this individual in focus.² Alhaji Yaqeen is not known to have contributed any religious text throughout his 38 years in the service of Islam, assuming we take ‘work’ as used here by Edel to mean a published work. This may likely be attributed to the fact that the *Mu'adhdhin* is not viewed as a cleric and has no religious obligation to engage in such scholastic endeavours. Notwithstanding, a conclusion to be drawn here is that Alhaji Yaqeen's religious conduct is worth studying for the fact that a great deal could be learned, without overstating, from a figure who has repeatedly devoted virtually all his adult life to even the smallest acts of worship a good number of Muslims take for granted today.ⁱⁱ A

ⁱ Some of the deceased founding members include Alhaji Yusuf Bolaji Akewukewe, Alhaji L.A. Olusesi and Alhaji Ganiyu O. Olalekan; deceased Board of Trustee members: Alhaji Lateef O. Oloye, Alhaji Y.A. Bello and Alhaji Rasak Gbadamosi; deceased FTMC presidents: Alhaji Rafiu O. Okoya, Alhaji Z.A.A. Maiyegun; deceased Chief Imams: Alhaji Sulaiman A. Badmus and Alhaji Hamzat Yemi Idowu; Imams of area mosques: N.A. Osho and A.O. Olowookere; others are Alhaji Yusuf Akano Badmus, Alhaji S.A. Adunola, Alhaji Rilwan A. Ajagbe, Alhaji Ganiyu O. Sema and Alhaja Afusat Tinuola Ajenifujah.

ⁱⁱ In the middle of an interview with Alhaji Yaqeen, he pleaded with this author to accompany him to visit and pray for a sick member of the Muslim community. Despite its communal obligation on Muslims and the immense rewards attached to this practice, few Muslims observe it.

study of this nature, therefore, serves no other purpose than to bring to the fore some of these ‘marginal’ Muslim figures whose works or activities play significant roles in the historical progression of Islam in a specific locality or within a religious agency. It similarly addresses the misconceptions among Muslims on the duties and roles of the *Mu’adhdhin* in a typical Yoruba Muslim community or space. The paper interrogates the *Mu’adhdhin*’s position in Islam. It argues that beyond his primal duty as ‘callers’ of the daily or occasional ritual prayers, the *Mu’adhdhin* also commands profound authority and performs strategic and institutional roles in Islam within and outside the mosque set up – attributes rarely acknowledged across Yoruba Muslim communities.

The Festival Town Muslim Community: a Brief Foundation History

The formation of the Muslim community in FESTAC-Town cannot be fully understood without an account of the establishment of the housing estate commonly referred to as FESTAC-Town. Situated along the Lagos-Badagry Expressway in Amuwo-Odofin Local Government Area, Lagos State, Nigeria, FESTAC-Town, an acronym derived from Festival of Arts and Culture, was conceived by the Nigerian Federal Government as a temporary residential area to accommodate about 16,000 participants and guests (which included artists, performers and writers from sixty different countries), attending the Second World Black and Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) held from 15 January to 12 February 1977, in Lagos. Proposed for completion within two years, several months into the Festival proper, a total of 5,088 residential units were constructed with an additional 5,687 units for completion by the end of 1977. At the time of the Festival, these residential units turned out to be useful spaces for routine rehearsals and interactions among thousands of accommodated participants.³

At the close of the Festival, the residential units became available for allocation. As a result, the Nigerian government decided to allocate each of the residential buildings to individuals who had successfully taken part in a ballot under the supervisory watch of the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) appointed as administrators of the town on behalf of the government. As a model residential

community, FESTAC-Town was meant ultimately “to serve a permanent population.”⁴ It incorporated virtually all the basic facilities and functions of a model town, which at its completion, was meant to occupy 120,000 residents in 24,000 housing units shared across seven distinct communities.⁵ Each community, as planned, was to absorb 15,000 to 20,000 residents. Spread over 1,770 hectares of land area, FESTAC-Town was constructed to serve both commercial and administrative needs. The first set of residents includes government employees or bureaucrats who planned the FESTAC event. A ballot system was adopted through the sale of forms that determined the allocation of houses on an owner-occupier basis and based on the occupier’s income at the time.

Soon after houses were allocated to interested parties, FESTAC-Town began to witness a slow but appreciable number of residents among who were the first sets of Muslims. As they settled in quickly, each took on the task of first identifying fellow Muslims within his neighbourhood and locating others scattered across the seven communities in the town. The central reasons for this are twofold – to agree on a common worship space for the weekly Friday *Jum’ah* prayers⁶ and to build, if not temporary, a befitting worship centre to cater for the religious obligations of Muslims as quickly as possible. As this objective was met, a small band of Muslim groups were likewise formed in different parts of the town but later congregated to form the core of what is today referred to as the Festival Town Muslim Community (FTMC).⁷

Identifying Muslims and establishing an organised Muslim group was not simply enough to consolidate Islam in the new town. There was also a strong desire to seek and secure permanent abodes of worship. Though religious edifices were not included as part of the public utilities in the town, public spaces were, nonetheless, reserved to accommodate indeterminate future projects. Muslim and Christian residents who were now part of the growing population in the town, without delay, took advantage of the availability of these public spaces by requesting their use through the FHA.⁸ Muslim groups speedily targeted specific worship public spaces to construct their respective *ratibi* (area) mosques. Request for the acquisition of land to construct a *Jum’ah* centre was forwarded to the FHA on 31 August 1977.⁹ While the registration process was still formalised, temporary

space was allocated to the Muslims on 12 May 1978, and in the following month, precisely on 2 June 1978; the first *Jum'ah* prayer was observed by a large turnout of Muslims. The prayer was led by Late Alhaji Abdul Ganiyu Olawale Olalekan who was later turbaned in 1987 as the first Chief Imam of the town.ⁱⁱⁱ Interestingly, five years after this first large gathering of Muslims occurred, the foundation stone of the FTMC Central Mosque was laid on 7 May 1983, by Alhaji I.A.S. Adewale.^{iv} This was after two other temporary relocations until March 1981, when the FHA finally allocated a site at 2nd Avenue, 22 Road, G Close, where the Central Mosque building was commissioned by a renowned religious philanthropist, Late Alhaji (Dr.) Wahab Iyanda Folawiyo, on 21 November 1987.¹⁰

Fig 1: A front view of the renovated FTMC Central Mosque, FESTAC-Town, Lagos



Source: Author

ⁱⁱⁱ The turban ceremony of that year was led by the Chief Imam of Lagos, Late Alhaji Liadi Ibrahim.

^{iv} Alhaji Adewale at the material time was the Olori Giwa (head of Giwa) of Lagos State. This commissioned plaque immersed into the mosque building with specific bold inscriptions was seen during fieldwork by the author in the town on 18 August 2017.

A Difficult Beginning

Alhaji Yaqeen was born on 15 February 1946 in Igboho, Oyo Province, in the former Western Region, Nigeria, to Abdul Azeez Alabi and Princess Abdul Azeez Munirat Oladoyin nee Okunoye. His parents moved to the Gold Coast, present-day Ghana, in search of greener pasture barely a year he was born and spent the first six years of his life in the country. He returned to Nigeria almost immediately to enrol in elementary school but like many of his peers at the time, he was disqualified due to his height. Little Yaqeen then waited until the age of nine in 1955, a year which coincided with the introduction of the Free Universal Primary Education programme throughout the former Western Region by the Action Group political party. Alhaji Yaqeen initially began his primary school education at the Baptist Church but later enrolled at the missionary-run Baptist Elementary Primary School, Oke Igboho in the larger Igboho community, and later at Irepo Baptist Modern Secondary School in 1961. Irepo at the time comprised towns such as Shaki, Kishi and Igbetti, all in Oyo Town in the former Western Region. The Baptist School was the only secondary school in the area available to all primary school-leavers who desired a secondary education.

The young Yaqeen could not complete the three-year secondary school programme due to financial constraints and soon dropped out. His paternal grandmother who took responsibility for his upkeep could not raise the tuition of three pounds (£3) at this time.^v Sequel to dropping out of school, the young Yaqeen usually assisted his uncle in his farm business during the holidays. He later joined his uncle fully in the farm business after he could no longer afford to continue his secondary education. Here, Yaqeen spent a total of five years engaged in farming activities but fortune soon smiled on him when opportunities opened up to complete his secondary education in Ghana in 1964. This was made possible by another uncle who was not in full support of his farm engagements.

^v The Free Education Policy, according to Alhaji Yaqeen, was still by this time limited only to primary schools in the region, else he would have continued his secondary education through the policy had it been extended thereafter.

He did not commence class immediately in Ghana but would later complete his secondary school known at the time in Ghana as Middle School, in 1968. After his secondary education, little Yaqeen joined his uncle to assist him in his store. He later secured a sales job where he sold cigarettes on a bicycle to potential buyers. Yaqeen worked for a year until Ghana's Prime Minister Kofi A. Busia implemented the Aliens Quit Compliance Order in 1969, which led to the expulsion of about 2 million Nigerian migrants. A visibly distraught Yaqeen remembers the event with resounding nostalgia:

The closing period of the Quit Order fell on the early stages of the fasting period of Ramadan. I recall that thousands kept moving out of Ghana every day but I remained in the country for another 6 months because the tobacco company, in a sheer display of honesty and compassion, decided to pay us some money to keep body and soul together on arrival in Nigeria.¹¹

Naturally, young Yaqeen returned to his family home at Igboho and swiftly went in search of a job which he secured in Oyo Town. Similar to the cigarette job in Ghana, he disclosed that the business was not commercially viable in Oyo Town like in Ghana. According to him, one Mr. Oguniyi, who owned the cigarette business, employed higher degree holders to manage the shops while he and three others with lower degrees were given the option of street sales. Not fully satisfied with the job, he quit and went in search of a profitable job elsewhere.

With little savings from the monthly four pounds paid to him from the cigarette job, Yaqeen left Oyo Town to Lagos on 1 November 1970. His original intention to leave Oyo was to seek a job in the Nigerian Army or Navy but was informed in Lagos that vacancies were not available. Although disappointed, he decided to try his luck in the transport business. By dint of luck, he secured a job as Assistant Conductor with the now-defunct Lagos State Transport Corporation (LSTC) where he put in eight meritorious years between 1973 and 1981. He resigned thereafter to take up a conductor job facilitated through a friend who had just procured a bus. With strong dedication, he acquired the necessary driving skills which he put into

use as a driver for four years until both parties went their separate ways. Left with nothing, Alhaji Yaqeen decided to commit himself to the service of God, a course he had earlier tried to navigate albeit unenthusiastically during his years in Ghana.

The Making of a Muslim Community *Mu'adhdhin*

Alhaji Yaqeen's road to becoming a community *Mu'adhdhin* is, indeed, interesting despite his limited knowledge of Islam. Incidentally, his quest for Islamic knowledge and strong commitments to Islam dating back to his time in Ghana adequately prepared him to serve in this position years later. As he recalled, though his parents were Muslims, it appeared they did not express it with deep profundity, implying they were both 'nominal' Muslims. Alhaji Yaqeen, however, seemed less receptive to the above supposition and would not corroborate either. A good number of factors could be linked to this development. Firstly, Yaqeen had spent an appreciable number of years in Ghana under the tutelage of Christian family members. Secondly, despite the opportunity opened for him as a Muslim at the Ansar-ud-Deen Primary School, which was the only Muslim school in Igboho at the time, Yaqeen was first sent to the Baptist Church for preliminary studies and was later enrolled at the Baptist Elementary School for his primary education. Thirdly, no effort was made even by his parents to oblige family members under whom the young Yaqeen lived to enrol him in the local *Ile Kewu* (Arabic school). Two possibilities could better explain this. One, it is likely that Yaqeen's parents were more concerned with his moral and educational development than a focused religious upbringing, irrespective of where he received them. Two, it is possible that his parents were tolerant of the Christian faith and, therefore, showed less enthusiasm about their little son growing up around Christian families or attending Christian schools, a typical attitude of many modern Yoruba homes at the time. In any case, the quest for Arabic and Islamic knowledge had first struck little Yaqeen in Ghana as a cigarette sales boy which personally motivated him to enrol into an Arabic school in 1969, having witnessed similar effort made by his Muslim peers at the time. This dream was abruptly cut short in the aftermath of Busia's Quit Order the same year.

Alhaji Yaqeen was reluctant to speak about the reasons he suddenly drew closer to God wholeheartedly after his disengagement from the transport enterprise started by his friend. The author, however, provides a plausible explanation. From a deep assessment of his brief stay at Oyo-Town and in Lagos as a transporter, there is a reason to allude to the fact that the young Yaqeen faced unbearable life challenges. What this means is that despite all his efforts at work, he could barely achieve anything meaningful. In situations of this nature, a possible resolution was, no doubt, to draw closer to God. To sufficiently equip himself spiritually, he joined the *Tablighi Jamaat* (Society for spreading faith), taking an active part in the *Taleem* (educational) programme around his residence in Badia, Apapa-Iganmu Local Council Development Area, Lagos. The *Tablighi Jamaat* draws membership particularly from Nigerian Muslims of Yoruba ethnic stock who often accompanies one another on distant travels to several community mosques to preach and educate locals on Islam.¹²

Yaqeen's decision to hold on to the mantle of Islam eventually paid off. By a stroke of fate, his participation in the *Taleem* programme soon brought him to FESTAC-Town where the *Tablighi Jamaat* had set up a base in an open field close to the site of the FTMC central mosque. On this field at the time was a wooden structure built and maintained by the growing Muslim community for various religious purposes among which included the teaching of Arabic, Quranic reading and observance of the five daily prayers. This was also the site of the FTMC *ratibi* mosque, before the completion of the central mosque a few years after. According to Alhaji Yaqeen, some participants in the *Taleem* programme had moved to this site, following a split with the central *Tablighi Jamaat*. He joined the splinter group which moved to FESTAC-Town and then decided to reside in the area permanently. Part of the reasons which informed this decision could be linked to his work with the LSTC and issues dealing with his accommodation. As an official in the state transport ministry, the ballot for residential allocation in FESTAC-Town was automatically opened to him and his co-workers. Alhaji Yaqeen notes that he obtained the forms, in part, because he no longer felt welcome in his friend's home.

I thought as a bachelor, and since the ballot was affordable, I should pay for the form. Also, I was no longer comfortable living with my friend in Badia [Lagos] as it became apparent to me that my presence made him feel uncomfortable. I was not involved in the other registration process because I was occupied with the LSTC job but my friend followed it up on my behalf. The ballot was supervised by one Mr. S.P.O. Fortune Ebie who between 1976 and 1983 served as the first General Manager of the FHA and administrator of FESTAC-Town.¹³

He states further:

We all resumed our official duties that morning to the exciting news that my name had appeared in the *Evening Times* newspaper of the previous day. I recall that I had picked up the forms in 1976 and personally took them to my bosses at the LSTC to affirm that I was, indeed, a staff of the corporation. The news was a surprise to me because I had made several terrible alterations to the forms and concluded that my application would be discarded by the FHA for being untidy and incoherent.¹⁴

The above explains in detail the determining factors that influenced Alhaji Yaqeen's decision to reside permanently in FESTAC-Town and why he joined the splinter group that moved to the new town. During his association with the *Tablighi Jamaat*, he met and developed a close friendship with one Alhaji Y.A. Bolaji (Baba Rofik), another founding member of the FTMC who served briefly as the Chief Imam of the Muslim community from 1990-1991, until he died in a plane crash while returning from the annual *hajj* in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in 1991. Alhaji Bolaji, incidentally, owned and operated a transportation business and based on their relationship, handed one of his buses to Yaqeen to operate. Much of the time, Yaqeen was worried by his inability to read the Qur'an and learn more about Islam and thus, approached his friend, Alhaji Bolaji, to teach him the basics of the Qur'an. Alhaji Bolaji appeared a bit sceptical about the idea because he thought Yaqeen may not be able

to combine the transport job with Qur'anic classes effectively but accepted although reluctantly. Yaqeen who had perhaps perceived that his principal was indifferent to his request thereafter approached one Mallam Abdur-Rofiu who he claimed was the first Arabic teacher appointed officially by the FTMC. Under his tutelage, Yaqeen completed his Qur'anic studies within six months.

Fig 2. Official turban of Alhaji Yaqeen as FTMC *Mu'adhdhin* on 6 April 2002



Source: Author

As a member of the *Taleem* group, Alhaji Yaqeen voluntarily called the *adhan* and *iqama* during prayer times at the *ratibi* mosque. At this time, the number of Muslims in the town had begun to increase significantly. A few Muslims who would shortly make up the administrative, executive and building committees of the respective Muslim communities scattered across the town, joined the FTMC.^{vi} Interestingly, it was observed that one Alhaji L.A. Olusesi had also voluntarily called the *adhan* and *iqama*.¹⁵ This was around 1979 when the FTMC was allocated a second temporary site where a

^{vi} Among these few in the early stages of the FTMC include the late Alhaji G.O. Olalekan; late Alhaji Y.A. Bolaji; and late Alhaji S.A. Badmus, all of whom served as Chief Imam of the FTMC from 1978-1989, 1990-1991 and 1991-1998, respectively; Alhaji Olugbode whom Alhaji Yaqeen spent few years with; late Baba Oyo; late Alhaji L.O. Olaoye, first FTMC President from 1978-1985; late Alhaji R.O. Okoya, second FTMC President from 1985-1991, among a host of others. Information recorded during field work in the town on 18 August 2017.

makeshift structure was erected to observe daily prayers. It would be recalled that the FTMC was allotted its first temporary site on May 12, 1978, where the first *Jum'ah* prayer was observed in June of the same year led by the late Chief Imam, Alhaji Olalekan. It was at this point that Alhaji Olusesi served as *Mu'adhdhin* of the FTMC. Although regarded as the first *Mu'adhdhin* of the FTMC,¹⁶ he was not appointed officially in that capacity. Soon after the FTMC moved to the open space near the central mosque, both men called the *adhan* and *iqama* interchangeably, although Alhaji Yaqeen was preferred to call both on *Jum'ah* days.

As the central mosque moved closer to full completion, the need to appoint a *Mu'adhdhin* officially emerged. An interview was prepared around 1986 and became a fruitful contest between Alhaji Yaqeen and one Baba Oyo who lived in very a distant part of the town but regularly came around to observe his prayers at the FTMC mosque. Through his meritorious service and devout commitments to the FTMC since 1978, Alhaji Yaqeen was selected to continue in that capacity as *Mu'adhdhin* and formally this time around by members of the interview panel.^{vii} Alhaji Yaqeen was known for cleaning and at the same time effectively taking care of the mosque, a character trait that endeared him to most members of the panel who had no reason to disapprove of his interest in the position of *Mu'adhdhin*. Baba Oyo, on the other hand, was found ineligible due to old age which the panel members believed may likely hinder him from carrying out the rigours demanded of such a position if chosen eventually.

The long journey to becoming the first official *Mu'adhdhin* of the Muslim community in FESTAC-Town although began in earnest but has since been arduous. Serving the FTMC for over three decades has not been an easy feat. According to him, his appointment beginning from 1986 came along with a quoted monthly pay in addition to a mini flat within the mosque premises. Though generous

^{vii} Members of this panel include Alhaji M.I. Lawal, a professional Estate Surveyor who at the end of 1981, was appointed Chairman of the FTMC Building Committee; late Alhaji A.A. Oloko who at the time was the FTMC General Secretary; late Alhaji Ogunfayo who was the Treasurer; late Alhaji A.R. Aina among others.

by the standards of the time, Alhaji Yaqeen considered the wage meagre after he began to raise a family. He, nevertheless, had many reasons to be grateful. According to him:

Unlike the Chief Imam who was paid a quoted salary possibly because it was thought that he was on a paid employment in a certain tertiary institution,^{viii} I was slightly paid higher even though I had no other job to supplement this salary. I was thankful altogether that God had led me to the light and set my path on a mission in His service and that of humanity. For me, these were enough, although *I endured painfully*.^{ix} [Emphasis mine]

As *Mu'adhdhin*, aside from the call to prayer, part of the duties assigned to him at the time includes various domestic engagements such as sweeping, cleaning and washing the ablution areas, toilets and bathrooms, securing the mosque among other odd duties. Commenting on his monthly wage further, Alhaji Yaqeen notes that although he was paid regularly and as at when due, this was the only financial commitment made to him by the FTMC without compensation for extra hours work carried out in the mosque. There are instances when on return from a social or religious event, he is handed next to little while others are often rewarded with substantial remuneration. Notwithstanding, occasional support are provided among worshippers and members of the FTMC but this assistance was not adequate. As his family expanded, the need to supplement his duties as *Mu'adhdhin* emerged. Alhaji Yaqeen informed the FTMC General Secretary of his plight but the decision was considered unacceptable. Steps were, therefore, taken for an upward wage review which was eventually pegged at a quoted figure. This

^{viii} While we may likely not know the reason for the disparity in wages, especially for the Chief Imam, it is possible that as a relatively comfortable man, and in adhering to the dictates in the Shari'ah, the position of Chief Imam to a growing Muslim population was more rewarding to Alhaji Olalekan, as an act of worship, than drawing another (second) salary from the FTMC.

^{ix} Alhaji Yaqeen emphasizes this in Yoruba thus: *a gbara duro ni*.

was later increased in February 2017 after several failed requests and frustrating attempts.

The *Mu'adhdhin*: Role and Importance in Islam

Who is a *Mu'adhdhin*? The *Mu'adhdhin* is usually a 'matured'^x male¹⁷ by a presiding authority to call the five canonical daily prayers among other specific prayers as dictated by the Shari'ah. While in most Yoruba Muslim communities or societies, the *Mu'adhdhin* is appointed by the administrative (or executive) arm of the mosque through the *Da'wah* Committee or Board, elsewhere, particularly in mainly Muslim countries, they are appointed by the State's Ministry of Religious Affairs. This 'presiding authority' is reminiscent of how the Prophet, as leader of the Medina Muslim *ummah* (community), appointed Bilal b. Rabah into this religious role with the task, among others, to lead the daily prayers and recite the Qur'an in the mosque.

Since the life of the *Mu'adhdhin* revolves around routine and punctuality, they are paid generous emoluments – often on a full-time basis – and assigned tasks contingent on their religious knowledge and skills. This is, however, not the case, noticeably in a handful of Muslim communities and particularly in India, where the *Mu'adhdhin* is poorly paid.¹⁸ Typically, the *Mu'adhdhin* is expected to have a sweet and melodious voice accompanied by the knowledge of melodic styles and diverse musical modes called *maqams*. As they are used to performing the *adhan*, each *maqam*, according to Saeed, comes with its own "vocal patterns, pitches and phrasing" all of which "gives scope for the *Mu'adhdhin* to improve vocally."¹⁹ The *adhan* customarily is called, applying seven different *maqams*, each associated with specific geographic regions of origination. For example, *maqam Ajami* and *maqam Hijaz* are traced to Saudi Arabia and Iran, respectively, the latter believed to be the most technically challenging among the *Mu'adhdhin* which Saeed acknowledges "requires supreme breath control due to shifting vocal dynamics."²⁰

^x Scholars are divided over whether a man or woman could be appointed *Mu'adhdhin* or call to the daily prayer. Majority consensus believes that a female *Mu'adhdhin* can be appointed within the ambit of a gathering of fellow women and can make the *adhan* among themselves.

It, therefore, suggests that the *Mu'adhdhin* must pronounce the *adhan* properly and not in a hasty manner to avoid untoward consequences. This position is supported by a Hadith: 'Umar bin 'Abdul 'Aziz said (to his *Mu'adhdhin* that is call-maker), "Pronounce the *adhan* clearly and... straightforward[ly], otherwise, we will dismiss you."²¹

The *Mu'adhdhin* occupies a crucial religious role in Islam. This is because his call serves as a test of Muslims' faith and obligation to God's commandments, particularly in response to the hastening of His remembrance at all times as indicated in Surah Jum'ah (62:9) of the Qur'an.²² Similarly, the *adhan* and *iqama* are so important that a Hadith submits that *As-Shaytan* scampers to safety, passing wind with noise during the *adhan* and *iqama* to avoid hearing both, returning intermittently to whisper into the heart of the praying person.²³

During the time of the Prophet, very few close followers were given the assurance of a place in the hereafter except by way of their actions, attitudes or reactions towards important religious obligations. The *Mu'adhdhin* is of a different category. Some narrations call to mind a special status for the *Mu'adhdhin* which no Muslim is likely to attain in the hereafter. For instance, Mu'aawiyah reported the Prophet as saying that the *Mu'adhdhin* will have the longest necks of the people on the Day of Resurrection.²⁴ According to Imam An-Nawawi in his commentary on Saheeh Muslim, this Hadith illustrates that the *Mu'adhdhin* is assured of the highest expectations of God's Mercy because he who expects a thing is certain to extend his neck to see what is being expected. It refers to the rewards the *Mu'adhdhin* is expected to benefit from. While various interpretations may likely be given here, it is fitting to suggest first, that it highlights the rank of distinction of the *Mu'adhdhin* among Muslims and second, this group will have an honourable position on the Last Day.

The Mosque is representative of Islam's identity.²⁵ A look at the mosque hierarchy suggests that the Imam lies at the apex of all Muslims and serves as the face of Islam in the community.²⁶ In the early period of Islam's consolidation in Yorubaland, for instance, the Chief Imam worked alongside a religious network that was hierarchical in form. Part of this hierarchy is the *Onitafusiru* (community lecturer) and *Ajanosi* (lay reader), both of whom were

expected to be equipped with appreciable knowledge of Islam and other applicable religious and non-religious studies. For the other chain of hierarchy such as that of the *Mu'adhdhin*, Gbadamosi notes that "there was less regard for scholarship" as they were commonly chosen based on "age, status, piety, and devotion to the welfare of the Muslim community."²⁷ Although the mosque is also made up of other hierarchies, they are often overshadowed by the Imam's position as a religious leader²⁸ while little attention is given to similarly important religious figures within the same set up.

The status of the *Mu'adhdhin* in Islam cannot be overemphasized. Their powerful vocal expressivity illustrates their special status and explains the reason for being carefully chosen²⁹ and given basic training in some countries to effectively perform this religious duty.³⁰ Bilal, despite his background, was made the mace bearer and steward by the Prophet his on virtually all the latter's military campaigns.³¹ Such was Bilal's closeness to the Prophet that he was assigned to protect the Prophet's household, charged with the care of the entire treasury of the Muslims and assigned to head the distribution of funds to the wayfarers, widows, and orphans.³² An account, indeed, suggests that he made the grieving call to prayer after the Prophet's death and before his *Janazah*.³³ He was also highly regarded for his collection and transmission of prophetic traditions which many acknowledged without further questioning.³⁴

On the *Mu'adhdhin's* role in Islam, the Hadith makes it explicit that they were to strictly call people to prayers. According to the literature, they were also to declare the specific glorification formulae, recite praises on the Prophet nights before *Jum'ah* and declare the times when the Ramadan fast would commence.³⁵ The *Mu'adhdhin* is expected to 'sing' or state the *adhan* in proper Arabic without adding a letter or elongating a vowel. Doing otherwise, according to King, is not only disliked but such addition that eclipses or changes the meaning of the call is strictly forbidden.³⁶ Also, calling the prayer in jest attracts severe punishment.³⁷ In the past, a *Mu'adhdhin* was selected based on his "knowledge of timekeeping" and grasp of "the lunar mansions and the formations of the stars."³⁸ This is to enable him to uncover the time of night and daybreak. To achieve this, the *Mu'adhdhin* must be highly calculative.³⁹

Apart from being in a state of cleanliness and free from major or minor impurities, the *Mu'adhdhin* is required to make the *adhan* for Allah's sake and not for wages. This view, however, remains highly contentious. This is because, in the formative years of Islam, it was largely objectionable to accept or receive payments for a religious service since this was offset from the public treasury.⁴⁰ Evidence for this could be found in a Hadith narration: "Uthman b. Abu al-'Aas asked the Messenger to appoint him as the Imam of his people. He replied: you are their Imam. Be careful about the weak amongst them, and appoint a caller to prayer who does not accept wages for his *adhan*."⁴¹ Due to depleting resources, later fatwa gave way for such.⁴² Also, there is ample evidence that points to Caliph Umar bin al-Khattab as the first Muslim leader to provide pensions for Bilal (and other non-Arab Muslims), Imams and the *Mu'adhdhin* from the state treasury due to their past work for Islam and moral quality.⁴³ It is also likely that wages and pensions were meant to foster support, motivate and sustain the religion.

Within the context of the *Mu'adhdhin*'s importance in Islam, a key point to put into consideration is the deft alliance between the Imam and *Mu'adhdhin* which illustrates the central position often held by the latter in key decision-making processes. This was common in the early life of Islam as seen between Abdullah b. Umm Maktum and the Prophet, both of whom had a special bond that transcends any filial association. Interestingly, Umm Maktum was the first cousin of the Prophet's first wife, Khadija bin Khuwailid. Despite his blindness, he was highly regarded by the Prophet who, like Bilal, appointed him first as *Mu'adhdhin* and, later, as Imam in Medina. He constantly led the prayers in the Prophet's absence.

The *Mu'adhdhin* was viewed as part of the everyday decision-making process and administrative running of the *ummah* in Medina. An account indicates that before the *Hijra*, Umm Maktum and Mus'ab b. Umair (a *sahab* and first Muslim ambassador) were regarded as the first set of emigrants sent by the Prophet to Medina to teach the Ansar (helpers) the Qur'an.⁴⁴ That the Prophet left the leadership (Imamship) of Medina in the custody of a physically challenged figure illustrates the importance of the *Mu'adhdhin* and as well the trust reposed on a blind man's judgment to effectively administer the Muslim state in his absence. This, nevertheless, would

have involved several strategic meetings both in public and private to keep the *ummah* flourishing. Remarkably, as the Prophet left Medina on several occasions to take part in battles, it is possible that most, if not all, *Sahaba*, and which is likely to include Umm Maktum, were involved in their little way in the effective planning and coordination of all war efforts. All battles, hence, could not have been successfully won without inputs from key figures around the Prophet. Maktum's importance was also felt in what was described as one of the most brutal battles in the history of the Muslim conquest. Under the Caliphate of Umar, Maktum requested to serve as a standard-bearer of the Muslim troops which was granted. For a battle as fierce as that, it would not be erroneous to state that Maktum took part, like his fellow soldiers, in several key decisions and it was likely that he engaged in both the physical and mental exercises that a war of such nature demanded. It is for his sincere devotion to Islam, firmness in faith and uncommon determination to struggle for the triumph of Islam that both Surah *An Nisā* (4:95) and Surah *Abasa* (80:1-16) in the Qur'an were revealed, with the latter exclusively devoted to him.⁴⁵

Conclusion

This paper has presented a biographical sketch on Alhaji Yaqeen Olugbenro Atanda, whose religious career spans roughly 38 years in the service of Islam, first, as a founding member of one of the early post-independence Muslim communities in FESTAC-Town, Lagos, and second, as its first official *Mu'adhdhin*. At 74 years of age, and since 1982, he has consistently and relentlessly called all compulsory Muslim daily prayers in this Lagos community. He has both served and prayed behind no fewer than five Chief Imams and three *ratibi* (area) mosque Imams since 1979 and has also participated in virtually all religious activities within and outside the Muslim community.

Additionally, the paper has unearthed veiled or 'marginal' religious figures who alongside their more 'apparent' counterparts contributed immensely to the expansion and consolidation of Islam from its early stages to its present state. Although no amount of monetary compensation is enough, the duty of the *Mu'adhdhin*, in the words of Alhaji Yaqeen, should be separated from the odd jobs which they are often required to carry out as part of their primary

religious obligations. He contended that the *Mu'adhdhin* in the time of the Prophet, announced special religious meetings to concerned Muslims, called for emergencies in the preparation of expeditions and wars or when a practice alien to Islam becomes rife within the *ummah*. While some of these conditions may not be applicable today, as 'modernity' continues to submerge traditional or classical modes of religiosity in several Muslim communities and the administration of Mosque institutions, the *Mu'adhdhin* is still expected to be accorded some level of importance within such communities.

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