

THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF DELIVERING SERMON IN LOCAL LANGUAGES: AN EXPERIENCE OF THE NIGERIAN MILITARY BARRACKS MOSQUES

By

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Abstract:

This study is to highlight some of the negative effects of delivering Friday and Eid *khutbah* (sermons) in vernacular, instead of Arabic language. In almost all the military barrack mosques nationwide there are mosques in all the formations and units of the military where personnel of Islamic faith pray five daily prayers, weekly Friday prayer and imams are recruited and commissioned for manning these mosques. Unfortunately, some of these imams recruited by the military to take charge of these mosques cannot speak, read and write in Arabic Language. The researcher enumerates some of the inefficiencies of the imams, poor quotations and interpretation of the Qur'an and hadith, non-compliance with the rules of sermon among others. The methodology used for the paper is qualitative where both the primary and secondary sources of data were applied. Among the recommendations of the paper, includes making Arabic Language as criteria for recruitment or commissioning personnel that can be imam in the force. And for those that have the basic Knowledge of Arabic should be encourage to go for further training and re-training courses.

Key words: Effects, Sermon, Languages, Military Barracks Mosques.

Introduction

Friday prayer is offered in congregation during the time of *Zuhur salat* each week on Fridays. Muslims are required to take bath, dress in their best clean clothes and assemble in the mosque for the prayer. The glorious Qur'an and the hadith speak highly of the blessings of Friday prayer. If a Muslim spends Friday in remembrance of the Almighty Allah, and supplication, he is abundantly rewarded by Allah (SWT). Friday prayer is an occasion for the assembly of the entire Muslims in a city or town. In a large city, Friday prayers can be offered in more than one place for convenience of the Muslim community. It gives them an opportunity to meet together to discuss and solve their individual as well as community problems. Getting together once a week develops unity, co-operation and cohesiveness among Muslims.

Friday prayer is also a demonstration of Islamic equality. It gives the *imam* a chance to admonish Muslims and at the same time addresses matters relating to the Muslim Ummah. The Imam's sermon serves as a guidance and medium of communicating the Islamic teachings to the congregation. Friday prayer is an obligatory prayer for every adult male Muslim. However, those that are sick, blind or disabled those on a journey and women are exempted from the obligation of attending the prayer. They can join in the prayer or they have to offer *zuhur* prayer instead. (Abdulrasir) There are two *Ahdans* for Friday prayer. The first Ahdan is when the sun begins to

decline (*zawwal*) and the second is called just before the Imam stand up before the congregation to deliver sermon (*Matn Al-Ishmawy*).

Friday prayer sermon consists of two parts. In the first part the *Imam* advises the gathering to act upon the commandments of Allah (SWT) and also about duties they have to perform to become good Muslims. The sermon can also deal with any other matter of importance. After delivering the first part of the sermon, the *Imam* sits down for a short while then stand up again to deliver the second sermon. Followers are required to listen to the sermon attentively, any type of conversation during the sermon is prohibited. Abu Hurayrah reported from the messenger of Allah (SAW) that if you tell your friend that is talking be quiet while *Imam* is delivering his sermon on Friday definitely you have joke (*Laghauta*). (*Muwadda*). After the *Iqamah*, the imam leads the congregation two-unit *raka'ats* of the prayer (*Matn Al-Ishmawy*).

The noble Prophet, Muhammad (SAW) did not approve of a person telling others to refrain from conversation while the *Imam* is delivering sermon. In case of unavoidable circumstances, a sign by hand or with a finger can be made to draw the attention of someone to stop talking. (Ibn Jazzy) In case the Imam ask something when the sermon is going on, then he should be replied. It is preferable that the person who delivers the sermon should lead the prayer (Ibn Jazzy) and the Imam should recite Surah al Fatiha and some verses of the glorious Qur'an in a loud voice during the prayer. One is expected to briefly offer *nafileh* (voluntary) prayers before the Friday congregational payer and also after observing the Friday prayer. A person who comes to the mosque during the sermon should not steer his way to the front by jumping over the shoulders of the people already sitting. As the sermon has already begun, he can, if he wishes, offer two unit *raka'ats Sunnah* prayer quickly during the sermon, and if a person is late for the prayer and join the congregation for the second *raka'at* he should complete his prayer individually after the imam has finished leading the prayer. But if a person missed the two *raka'ats*, such a person should offer *zuhur* prayer instead (*Matn Al-Ishmawy*).

Methodology

The method used in generating data for the paper is qualitative. The researcher used library materials which serve as secondary source of data and also make use of primary source of data where he conducted interviews with some military *Imams* in some selected military Barracks of the Nigerian Army, Nigerian Navy and the Nigerian Airforce. The researcher visited some of these mosques in Lagos, Portercourt and Kaduna areas. Where sermons are mostly delivered in Yoruba, English and Hausa respectively and have firsthand observation.

Chaplain and Imam Departments in the Military

The department of chaplaincy was introduced in all arms of services in the Nigerian Armed Forces as a result of the religious influence. In his view, Air commodore Luqman Lawal said the Chaplain and Imam Corp in the military contributed immensely in making the relationship between the Muslims and Christian personnel cordial through their preaching and sermons. They avoid hate speeches and all that can divide the personnel on religious ground, preach religious tolerance, and avoid issues that will separate their followers along religious fault lines. In some cases they harmonize their sermons in their own (different) perspectives with a view to achieve one goal. For instance the position of Islam and Christianity on peaceful coexistence, cleanliness, religious tolerance, etc.

Currently there are only three places of worship existing in military barracks. These are Mosque for Muslim personnel and their families, Catholic and Protestants churches for the Christians. The personnel that are manning these worshipping centers comprise both the commission and non-commission officers depending on the size of the mosque or church. According to the former Nigerian Army Director of legal services, General Abdul Qadir Gumi rtd, chaplain and *Imam* officers are commissioned to provide the spiritual guidance to the military personnel and their families. For a candidate to be commissioned as a chaplain or *Imam*, he must have the basic requirement of his religious denomination. Chaplain or *Imam* shall, where necessary, be recommended by their denominations. In case of the *Imam*, where a candidate does not have a recommendation, members of the commissioning board shall include a representative of the Directorate of Islamic Affairs (DIA) to interview him. Successful Candidates shall be granted Direct Regular or Direct Short Service Commission. Those granted DSSC shall on application and approval by the Service Chief be eligible for conversion to the Direct Regular Commission (DRC) after three years of service. The service chaplain and *Imam* will maintain their relative seniorities on the role of their denominations. Religious heads have the right to withdraw any chaplain seconded to the services but the services reserve the right to reject such request especially when such a chaplain are still required. In any case, no Chaplain or *Imam* shall be withdrawn before completion of five years of service. (Gen. Gumi)

Responsibilities of Chaplain and *Imams* in the Military

Chaplain and Imams serves as moral, ethical and spiritual advisers to their commanders in the Nigerian Armed Forces. They ensure the free exercise of religion and oversee all religious activities and programs in all commands, units and establishments. Some of the work they do in one-on-one in terms of counselling with officers, men, civilians working with the military and their families (Ekeyi 2014).

They go where the troops go; they are in the barracks, offices, schools, detention quarters, hospitals, training areas, as well as combat zones ministering personnel of all faiths. They must be able to work in a pluralistic religious environment, respecting and accommodating members of all faiths without compromising their beliefs. Other specific duties includes:-

1. Operating in pluralistic environment and abiding by the code of military ethics approved by the Ministry of Defense (MOD)
2. Exemplifying to all people the best characteristics
3. Solemnization of Marriages and conducting memorial services and Funeral for personnel and their families.
4. Visiting Military Hospitals, Family Members in their homes, in their work places, in Detention Facilities, in Training Areas and during Combat Operations.
5. Conducting various religious seminars as retreats such as Marriages, Parenting, Spiritual Leadership Training, Anger Control etc.
6. Special classes for Personnel on Religious Tolerance and other areas that will build moral character in men and women.
7. Counseling Personnel.
8. Accompanying the military personnel to war zones. (AbdulRahman, A. (n.d.)

The two religious bodies (Islam and Christianity) were officially established and coordinated at the services headquarters (AHQ, NHQ and HQNAF). The three Directorates were in the same office at their various service headquarters. This will enable them work harmoniously and speak with one voice. They jointly sign a memoranda or a proposal of any project or any religious demand to the service Chief on any policy that affect the religions. For instance, if a particular programs is designated and will affect any religious programs or contradict the religious beliefs, the three leaders jointly draw the attention of their service chief on the effect of such policies or programs.

Although each of the three denominations represented by the religious directorate have their own mode of beliefs and worship, these differences have not separated them as there are occasions that are jointly conducted in one place at the same time. For example the Annual Armed Forces Remembrance Day Celebration on every 15th January Special Parade where Chaplains and Imams gathered and offered prayers for the repose of the souls of the fallen heroes. The major concern of the military has been always togetherness and uniformity in its activities including the religious activities. The uniformity in religious affairs of the Nigerian Armed Forces traces its origin from the Second World War, where the Chaplains and Civilian Imams were recruited to accompany the Armed Forces to the War Fronts. Their Primary Assignment then was to pray for the success of their soldiers, encouraging them to work hard and perform Funeral Service to the deceased (Ekeyi 2014).

Roles of Mosques and Churches in the Barracks

The Military is regimental organization that sees discipline and obedience of orders as priority. In most cases, the superiors always have their ways over their juniors, this led to communication gap between the officers and the men in the military. The Mosques and Churches serve as the only places for Muslims and Christians soldiers to meet and remain equal before the Creator. This is because, according to Olayede (Ekeyi, 2014) “Religion does not discriminate on the basis of colour or rank”. In (Ekeyi, 2014) A demonstration of this is felt in the Mosques and Churches, as every worshipper stands or sits down with one another no difference between the senior and the junior officers. Within the Mosques and Churches, every soldier find himself in an atmosphere of equality and love.

The Mosques and Churches in the barracks also serve as the center of learning for both the Muslims and Christians personnel and their families. Through this teaching, Muslim and Christian personnel in the barracks patronize the Mosques and Churches not only to observe their regular prayers but also to acquire knowledge of their religion for better understanding. Officers and men do retire to Mosques and Churches after working hours within their barracks to acquire knowledge and get clarifications on religious matters that is not clear to them. Mosques and Churches are also used as accommodation centers where those soldiers that are newly posted are temporarily accommodated, before they would be properly allocated a permanent shelter. The worship centers are also used as a reconciliation places, receiving condolences and for collection of religious taxes and giving offerings (AbdulRahman, A. (n.d.)).

Friday Sermons

Friday sermons are divided into two segments; the first segment comprises the obligatory requirements (*Ruknun*) of the sermons, while the second segment is non-Obligatory

requirements (*Mashhur*). The *khatib* (sermon deliverer) should distinguish between the two with a short sitting. And the sermon must be done after (*Zawwal*) i.e the time of *Zuhur salat*. And the sermon must be delivered before the prayers, and must also be join up with the prayers immediately without any delay. The sermon must be delivered in Arabic Language. Purification and ablution are recommended while delivering the two sermons. Al-faishy, MMA. (2017) **Requirements of a Friday *Khutbah* (Sermon)**.

According to the Al-faishy, a commentary of Al-Ishmawy standard Friday sermon must comprise eight conditions which are:

1. Must contain warning and glad tidings (*Tahzeer & Tabsheer*)
2. Must be in Arabic Language
3. Must be read loudly
4. Must be before the *salat* but after *Zawwal*
5. Must be arranged Chronologically
6. Must be joined with the *salat* immediately
7. Must be delivered to the people, worshippers must be present.
8. Must be delivered in the mosque (Sifty)

Effects of Delivering Friday Sermon in Local Languages

Delivering sermon in local languages emanated from the initiative of some contemporary Muslim scholars. These scholars are of the view that all languages are equal before Allah (SWT) and the essence of sermon is for the congregation to listen, understand and benefit from its message pioneers. (Directors of Islamic Affairs of the Nigerian Armed Forces) According to them, majority of the congregation don't understand Arabic and therefore, the sermon can be delivered in vernacular of the congregation so that they can fully comprehend the message which the sermons seeks to deliver. In this case Arabic language is equated with their languages.

As Arabic Language is not given priority over other languages as far as delivering sermon is concerned, this leads to the recruitment of *Imams* in the military that cannot speak, understand, read and write Arabic language. *Imams* are recruited or commissioned based on the qualification of educational certificates of either General Certificate of Education five credits passes including English and mathematics and B.A Hons Islamic Studies. These *Imams* that lacks Arabic Language end up delivering ineffective sermons, wrong quotation and interpretation of Qur'anic verses and hadith. This made some of their *khutbah* to be like an ordinary preaching.

Non-compliance with the rules of delivering sermon is the order of the day by both the *Imams* and the congregations. So long the sermon is been delivered in local languages, it becomes difficult to the *Imam* to abide by the requirements of the sermon. So also the congregation might not know if they are late or whether the *Imam* is delivering sermon or is conducting *Nasiha*. This make the audience to be discussing issues which is a direct violation of the rules of Friday sermon when the *Imam* is on the pulpit delivering the sermon. This also give room for coming late by the congregation as compared to those whose sermon is been delivered in Arabic Language. (Personal Observation)

Another issue of concern is embarrassment on the side of such *Imams* from the foreigners that come to pray at that Mosque or seeking for any other assistance. These foreigners can be Africans or non-Africans, and their assumptions is that all *Imams* can speak Arabic Language but, unfortunately. Such foreigners would speak in Arabic language to the *Imam* or they may want to speak to the congregation while the Imam translate it to them in their local language, but only to discover that the *Imam* himself cannot make a basic communication in Arabic language. Thus, it becomes a big shame to the Imam and the followers. (Personal Observation)

Department of Islamic Affairs in the Nigerian Armed Forces or *Imam* corps as it popularly known in the Army has for long suffered by having incapable *Imams* been recruited or commissioned as officers to Man the central Mosques in their respective Barracks. This is because Arabic Language is neither a criteria for recruiting a soldier nor it is a requirement for commissioning officer *Imam*. Most of these opportunistic *Imams* in the military rely on the literatures that are not written in Arabic or sometimes they use transliteration to deliver a substandard Friday sermon which carries a lot of grammatical errors and subsequently changes the entire meaning of the message meant to be delivered. As a result of not considering Arabic Language as criteria for the recruitment of the Imams, a lot of soldiers were recruited in the Islamic Affairs department as *Imams*, there after change to other departments of their choices mainly due to inability to communicate in Arabic language. (Lawal)

Conclusion

The military combines people that represent all ethnic groups and belongs to different faiths, Islam, Christianity and African traditional religions. The military comprises the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Navy and the Nigerian Air force. Although the military recognized officially only two religions, Islam and Christianity, but if an officer opts to be a pagan to follow any religions other than the two recognized by the military, he or she will not be denied his right to follow a religion of his choice. However, the only accepted places of worship to be built in all the military barracks are Mosques for Muslims, Catholic and Protestant Churches for Christian personnel.

The military have central Mosques in all their bases and commands sometimes even at units and establishment. Friday's prayer sermons are mostly delivered in those Mosques in either English language or the local language of that locality. Arabic language is no longer used for the sermons. Their main reason for abandoning it is because they are of the view that the main aim of the sermon is for people to understand the preaching and take it home and it can only be understood in the language that they are familiar with. This study has identified some of the effects of delivering sermons in local languages which includes, equalizing Arabic language with other languages, recruiting incapable *Imams* with less knowledge of Islamic education, especially the Arabic language. Such Imams often quoted Qur'an and hadith wrongly and faces embarrassment from Arabic speaking foreigners amongst others. This issue of using vernacular came up during the celebration of the Nigerian Arm forces Remembrance Day in 1985 where the Pioneers in the Imam Directorates took a decision to Yoruba, Hausa and English Languages in both Friday and Eid Sermons depending on where the Barracks is located.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the military should:

- a. Make Arabic language proficiency a criteria of recruiting *Imams* (soldiers) and *Imams* officers
- b. Maintain Arabic language as a lingua franca for the Friday and Eid sermons in the Barracks
- c. Train and retrain the military *Imams* in both the Arabic language and other aspects of Islamic studies.
- d. Organize Arabic language competition among the Imams in the barracks from time to time.

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List of interviewees

S/N	NAMES	AGE	ADDRESS	DATE
1	Lt Cdr II Muhammad	38	Armed Force Command and Staff Collage Jaji	15/4/23
2	Captain Harande	35	JTF Mosque Yenagoa	23/6/23
3	Sqn Ldr Hannafi	37	NAF Base Imam Kano	29/6/23
4	Dr. Abdulnasir	49	NAF Base Kaduna	12/7/23
5	Capt. (NN) AM Sajo	55	Central Naval Command Yenagoa	27/7/23
6	Air Cdre Lukman Lawal	54	NAF HQ Abuja	15/4/23
7	Brig-Gen, AbdulQadir Gumi RTD	64	Army Resource Centre Abuja	16/4/23