

Ihafa: A Journal of African Studies 8: 1  
June 2016, 176-198

## **Alms-Begging and Human Rights in Yorùbá Land**

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### **Abstract**

Existing studies claimed that begging activities in South-western Nigeria are encouraged largely by cultural influences and uneven distribution of the nation's resources. They further claim that the cultural activities are traceable to the Yorùbá system which encourages mothers of twins to sing and dance for money. This paper investigates the claims by drawing insights from the Bible, Qur'an, Ifá Literary Corpus, and relevant Yorùbá proverbs. Findings show, among other things, that the claim about cultural influence, non-provision of free education, and failure of the Nigerian government to break the cycle of poverty as the causes of alms-begging are mere excuses. The practice of polygamy with its attendant indiscriminate procreation among Nigerians is the major cause of alms-begging in the nation. It argues that any suggestion to improve the economy of Nigeria as well as economically empower individuals in the country will be a mirage

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or an exercise in futility if the problem caused by polygamy and indiscriminate procreation is not addressed.

**Keywords:** Alms-begging; Religion; Culture; Education; Entertainment.

## **1. Introduction**

Although street begging is a common phenomenon in some countries of the world, the social, cultural and religious factors that are responsible for it are different. This is the conclusion that can be drawn from studies conducted by some researchers and national dailies on street begging (see *Nigerian Statesman* of December 10, 1985; *Daily Sketch* of February 14, 1986; Browley 1987; Bamn and Burnes 1993; Snow and Anderson 1993; Liebow 1993; Osagbemi and Adepetu 1999; Ogini 2000; Omoṣoṣo 2001; Mustapha 2002; Mustapha and Balogun 2006; Quadri 2006; Adejùmò 2007; *The Punch* of January 29, 2013; *The Guardian* of June 9, 2014 and *Leadership Newspaper* of January 25, 2015). But, in Nigeria, information from studies conducted on street begging shows that culture, religion, religious misconceptions, laziness, idleness, greed and inability of the Nigerian government to cater for the needy have been identified as causes of street begging (see Osagbemi and Adepetu 1999; Ogini 2000; Omoṣoṣo 2001; Mustapha 2002; Mustapha and Balogun 2006; Quadri 2006; Adejùmò 2007).

However, in this paper, we are interested in alms-begging and some of the causes that have been identified by the previous researchers. Although some of the previous researchers claim that Yorùba' culture, non-provision of free education at the primary and secondary school levels and lack of job opportunities are causes of alms-begging in Southwest Nigeria, in this paper, we do not seem to share these views that are

expressed by the previous researchers. Instead, we argue that the greatest offenders of alms-begging activities are, in most cases, Christians and Muslims and, in some cases, the Yorùbá traditionalists and that any attempt to make reference to Yorùbá culture, non-provision of free education and government as causes or reasons for alms-begging will amount to a fallacy of equivocation. We argue also that there is nothing wrong with begging but what we are not comfortable with is the abuse that characterizes alms-begging on Nigerian streets daily. The information used in this paper is drawn from the Holy Bible, the Holy Qur'an, the Ifá Literary Corpus, Yorùbá proverbs and participant observation. The paper, which is a review of previous studies on alms-begging, is divided into three sections namely begging and culture, begging and education and begging and religion.

## **2. Begging and Culture**

The argument that begging is culturally influenced is very popular among some researchers (see Ogini 2000; Omotosho 2001; Mustapha and Balogun 2006). For example, Omotosho (2001:71) says:

Begging activities in Nigeria are encouraged largely by cultural influences as well as due to imbalanced distribution of the nation's resources, the failure of which leads to frustration, desperation and eventually begging.

Omotosho (2001: 67) had earlier claimed that:

Among the Yorùbá speaking society, there is the issue of *ìya' ìbejì* (mother of twins) who

usually claim that they had vision that their twins will survive only if they take them out on begging.

Some deductions can be drawn from Ọmọtọshọ's claims above. One of such deductions has to do with begging. According to the *Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 'Begging is an act of asking somebody for something especially in an anxious way because one wants or needs it very much' (Turnbull 2010:119). In our opinion, begging in this sense cannot be said to be bad. This is because, in some cases, this type of begging can be evidence of love and good neighbourliness between the beggar and the giver. For example, when a woman says *bá mi gbayọ wá lódò iyá Şadé kí n fi sòbè tí mò ñ sè, mo gbàgbé kí n rà lójà* 'help me collect some salt from Şadé's mother for the soup I am cooking because I forgot to buy at the market', such begging demonstrates love, friendliness and good neighbourliness existing between the beggar and the giver.

Another thing which begging does is that, in some cases, it can help to remove poverty when what is requested is granted. For example, when a farmer tells another farmer: *Şé mà á rí ilàgbè márùn-ún kí n fi dọgbìn lódún yì?* 'Can I get five yam seedlings to start the new farming season?', and the request is granted, the beggar may no longer live in want when it is harvest period. It must be observed that the use of the word 'five' in this case is idiomatic because the word 'five' may mean one hundred (100) or more. In fact, the two instances we have given above, and several others that we have not mentioned, can help to confirm the validity of the Yorùbá adage that says *Ọlá níun tán kii níwo ẹsin* 'However rich a person may be, he/she cannot possess the horn of a horse'. This means that no one is self-sufficient in this world. In other words, at one time or the other, one will have a reason to beg for something.

However, what we feel should be condemned about begging are the excesses of begging and the abuse that is being witnessed today. In our opinion, there is no religious group that can be exonerated from the abuse of begging. Among some Christians, instances of begging excesses or abuse are endless. For example, Pentecostal Preachers popularly called 'Prosperity Gospellers' have devised a moral blackmail under the guise of pledges, vows or 'sowing' to compel members to 'cough up' money at all costs. For example, if a pastor needs a car in his church, the church spokesman, with a characteristic elocution, will walk up the altar and say to the congregation, thus: We need a car for our pastor. I need just ten people to give one - million naira each. Not more than ten, the Lord said. He does not need more than ten people, because He is to bless them in a special way. Now let the ten people that God has touched stand up. Ok now, come forward to the altar. Every other person, please close your eyes. If you don't close your eyes, the Lord will deal with you. The ten that God has specially blessed should come forward. Please ushers, make sure they are not more than ten. That is what the Lord has told me ....

Another evidence of abuse by the so-called 'Prosperity Preachers' is also evident in the following expression: 'Brethren, dip your hands into your pockets and whatever that you find there, bring it out and raise it up. And as we pray, drop it inside the collection tray, and God will bless you mightily. Say a thunderous 'amen' to that. I say in Jesus' name, God will bless you mightily'. The two inferences presented above are just some of the several examples of how some church founders extort money from their members all in the guise of sacrificial giving. However, some preachers may make reference to the concept of 'vow' in the Old Testament of the Bible and that of 'give and you shall be given' to further obtain money from their church members (Num. 30:2; Luke 6:38). In our opinion, there is a

difference between the concept of 'vow' in the Old Testament and that of the contemporary 'Prosperity Preachers'. In the Old Testament, a vow was a request from God and consequent upon the granting of the request, the petitioner would give something either in cash or kind in return. But, among the contemporary 'Prosperity Preachers', it is 'give before vow'. We want to stress at this juncture that while giving, Christian preachers and their listeners ought to be guided by what the Bible teaches in 2Corinthians 16, p.2. The message is that: 'Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly, or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver'. Therefore, we submit that if Christian Preachers' position on asking for money is at variance with the messages in Num. 30, p.2 and 2Corinthians 16, p.2, then asking will be tantamount to abuse.

Still on abuse, Omoṣoṣo, Ogini, Mustapha and Balogun may have observed that, apart from the issue of *ìyá'ìbejì* (mother of twins), some who claim to be *Şàngó* priests/priestesses and 'Yèye' *Òşun* or 'Ìyá' *Òşun* (*Òşun* priestesses) do go about with gongs and rattling gourds called *sèkèrè* in their hands and offering prayers to those they come across for alms. In Yorùbá tradition, what we know is that the activities of the *Òşun* priests or priestesses and those of *Şàngó* priests are mostly restricted to their shrines. However, during their festivals, the priests with *Şàngó* and *Òşun* worshippers always dance round their immediate communities and those who fall in love with their performances do give them money, just in appreciation. Those who wish to consult the priests for spiritual solutions to their problems will visit the priests at their shrines for such activities. Traditionally too, we are not aware of any *Şàngó* or *Òşun* priests collecting alms either at their shrines or outside their shrines. What we are aware of is that the consultants may pay for divination especially if such clients are not regular customers. However, we now witness begging abuse among those who call

themselves Şàngó priests and Ọşun priests or priestesses who collect alms at parks or other places.

Another deduction from Ọmotoshọ's paper is that begging among the Yorùbá people started with some Yorùbá women who gave birth to twins (see also Oğini 2000:230, Mustapha and Balogun 2006:23). But, we are constrained to accept that begging among the Yorùbá people started with some Yorùbá women who gave birth to twins. It is important to examine the content of the Ifá verse called 'Ogbè'<sup>1</sup> that instructs some Yorùbá women who are mothers of twins to sing and dance before we come to this indicting conclusion. The verse reads:

Ogbè wẹ̀yìn bí ire bá n' bọ lẹ̀yìn  
A difá fún ọlómọ akẹ̀bejì gbọ́lá'  
Wọ̀n ní kọ́kara kí ilẹ̀  
Kọ́jare ẹ̀bọ ni kọ́ ẹ̀  
Kò pawo lekèé kò pèsù ọ̀dàrà lolè  
Ọ̀rúnmilà wá ní ẹ̀dun bẹ́ bọ́ o ẹ̀ n' bẹ́  
Ẹ̀dun jòọ́ bá n bẹ́ bọ́ o ẹ̀ sọmọ rẹ̀  
Èrò ọ̀kun èrò ọ̀sà  
Ẹ̀ wá bámi kẹ̀bejì gbọ́lá'.

Ogbè, look back to confirm the  
presence of fortune  
Being Ifá divination performed for  
the mother of twins who entertained  
her twins for riches  
She was told to pay homage  
She was instructed to make a  
sacrifice

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<sup>1</sup> Taýé Paramọ̀lẹ̀, an Ifá priest, from Ile-Ogbo in Ọşun State and Chief Awófẹmi Àgbànífá of Ìlúpéjú Èkìtì explained the content of this Ifá verse.

She did not doubt the diviner  
Neither did she call Èsù Ọ̀dàrà a  
thief,  
Ọ̀rúnmilà told the monkey to jump as  
it usually does  
The monkey was appealed to, to  
teach its offspring to jump as it jumps  
People from far and near  
Join me in entertaining the twins for  
riches.

The interpretation of this Ifá verse by the Ifá priests and the activities of these mothers of twin babies show that the twins' mothers were not beggars but entertainers who could be appreciated with money by their spectators because of their entertaining performances. We also recall that before modern civilisation, it was not the twins' mothers alone who were called beggars. The local musicians as well were branded as beggars (see also Ladele et al 1986:246-265). The Yorùbá perception of those who drum, sing and dance as a means of living as indolent in the past made them to conclude that drummers, singers, dancers and actors were beggars *alágbe*. However, today, drumming, singing, dancing and acting are professions that are very popular in the whole world and these professions attract a lot of money to the performers or the professionals. They are also professions that are taught in some universities in the world and some of the lecturers are now renowned professors. For example, some Nigerian Universities that offer courses in music, dancing, drumming and drama include Universities of Ìbàdàn, Ifè, Ìlòrín, Lagos and Ọ̀yè to mention but a few. Similarly, Professor Rasaki Bakare of the Federal University, Ọ̀yè is a Professor of Dance while Professor Túnjí Vidal of Ọ̀báfẹ̀mi Awólówò University, Ilé-Ifè is a Professor of Music. In fact, the



nickname which Professor Rasaki Bakare has adopted for himself is 'Dance Rasaki'. However, there are some blind beggars who drum and sing for alms. We strongly feel that it is not unlikely that such beggars take to this practice essentially to draw the attention of passers-by to themselves since they do not have anyone who can help them while soliciting alms.

Recent studies also confirm that most beggars who pose a serious social problem to individuals and governments are especially Muslims with a few Christians and foreigners and not the Yorùbá women or Šàngó or Ọ̀ṣun priests and priestesses who sing and dance or those whom Muslims and Christians call pagans and atheists (see Osagbemi and Adepetu 1999:61-62). Our view is that the culture of man is at variance with the teachings of God as represented and clearly stated in the Holy Bible and the Holy Quran and since the teachings of God are superior to the culture of man, then, two things are wrong with the Muslims who beg. First, it is either that the Muslims who beg are not true Muslims or that they wish to disobey God's law with impunity. Excuses should not be sought for their disobedience or their wrong actions justified in any way. The Yorùbá people say *E jẹ́ ká jẹ́wọ́ ọ̀bùn kí wón lè dàṣọ rọ́ wa* (Let us admit our fault so that we can be pardoned for our misdeeds). Muslim scholars should endeavour to find out why alms-begging is still very common or rampant among Muslims and recommend ways for its eradication. Ọ̀mọ̀ṣhọ, Oginí, Mustapha and Balogun should not be concerned with any historical antecedent that is not Islamic. Second, it may also be true that the clerics who should 'lead them to God' are not performing the duties as expected of them. What is true of some Muslims is also true of some Christians. Therefore, we are of the view that culture should not be used as a valid reason for Muslims and Christians who beg for alms, especially among the Yorùbá people.

### **3. Alms-begging and Education**

Some researchers are of the view that alms-begging can be checked if children under school age are given free education and if the government can break the cycle of poverty in Nigeria (see Omoṣho 2001:67; Ogunkan 2011:131). More importantly, while Omoṣho (2001:67) suggests that ‘government should make education free at primary and secondary levels and make it obligatory for all the children under the school age’, Ogunkan (2011:131) recommends that ‘government should break the cycle of poverty through the restructuring of the economy in order to improve the economic situation of the country’. Contrary to Omoṣho’s claims, there are some educated Nigerians who are beggars. This claim can be supported with evidence from the *Leadership Newspaper* excerpt:

Please auntie, madam, can you help us with ₦100 so that we can eat. We trekked from Mararaba to here and we have not eaten since morning” (see *Leadership Newspaper* of January 25, 2015).

We want to observe also the little that has been done in the area of education between 1955 and 2015. For example between 1955 and 2015, tuition has been free at the primary education level and between 1979 and 2015 tuition at the secondary education level has been free as well, in Southwest Nigeria. We recall also that apart from the fact that undergraduate students were given bursary awards and loans which they did not pay back or refund, tuition was free not only in Federal Universities but also in Overseas universities especially between the 70s and 80s for Western State students, in this case the Yorùba’ undergraduate students. At present, while tuition is not free in

state-owned Universities, it is still free in Federal Universities. This does not mean that students in Federal Universities do not pay fees that are tagged Maintenance Fees. However, our position notwithstanding, especially now that public schools may be closed down for months because teachers' salaries are not paid and because some parents may not be able to afford the fees charged by private schools, we agree with Oṃoṣhṓ's suggestion that government should make education free at primary and secondary school levels and make it obligatory for all the children under the school age. Oṃoṣhṓ's suggestion is possible given the fact that the government has enough resources to implement it. We are also of the opinion that it is not impossible for the government to assist those who are willing to go to any of the tertiary institutions financially.

Similarly, we agree with Ogunkan that the government should also break the cycle of poverty through the restructuring of the economy in order to improve the economic situation of the country. But, some questions which Oṃoṣhṓ and Ogunkan did not address in their studies include:

1. Who are the people that make up the government in Nigeria?
2. Who are the people that have been ruling Nigeria since Independence?
3. Who are the ones that have been the policy-makers in Nigeria?
4. Who are the people that have been at the helms of affairs at the local, state and federal government levels and who will not make the good suggestions by Oṃoṣhṓ and Ogunkan work?
5. Who are the people that were responsible for the distressed banks where several youths, who were in the employ of the banks, were later sent back to the labour market?

6. Who are the bank workers who, despite the good remunerations, still defraud their employers?
7. Who is the chairman<sup>2</sup> of the Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) that has been accused of not remitting money recovered from the corrupt public officers to the government account?
8. Who are the people that have been arraigned by Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) for money laundering and for stealing public money and pensioners' funds?
9. Who are the lawyers who, in the course of finding their daily bread, defend the people that are made to appear in courts for stealing public money and pension's funds?

Certainly, they are Muslims and Christians and not members of the African traditional religion.

Furthermore, the story of crimes committed by highly privileged Nigerians who are in charge of public money against Nigeria and Nigerians is endless. The issue of governance in Nigeria since independence reminds us of a statement credited to a white man in Akinlolu Aje's 'Historical Excursions' that if Africa was granted independence, it was like giving a baby a razor blade. Is it not disheartening to see the realization of this white man's submission in Nigeria where everybody claims to be either a Muslim or a Christian who should be an embodiment of everything that is Godly considering the number of religious activities in the country where nearly every house is either a mosque or a church? In fact, one question which Sociologists should address is this: Is it not reasonable to suggest that all

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<sup>2</sup> One of the former Chairmen of the Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) is being referred to here

Mosques and Churches be closed down for some years and those in charge of public funds made to swear by the God of Iron and God of Thunder before assuming office? In Yorùbá culture, it is believed that the gods of iron and thunder can execute instant judgment on offenders, in this case, the Nigerian treasury looters. This is because the Yorùbá people have a saying that: *Mò n' bọ Oluíwa, kì í de' logún oduń* (If God says He is coming, it may take Him more than twenty years). In fact, in the case of Nigeria, 'the Lord' may not come in the next one hundred years.

In addition, the Bible says 'Because sentence against a bad work has not been executed speedily, that is why the heart of the sons of men has become fully set in them to do bad' (Ecclesiastes 8:11). It has, therefore, become necessary to seek the help of the two Yorùbá gods mentioned to maintain sanity and prevent people from looting the Nigerian treasury. Our submission is that unless we obey God's law which says 'thou shall not steal', any suggestion to improve the economy of Nigeria as well as the finances of several individuals in the country will be a mirage or an exercise in futility. Therefore, we are of the opinion that, with good governance and if treasury looters desist from doing so, some who tell stories of woes in order to draw sympathy from their unsuspecting listeners for financial assistance may cease to do so. Some of our youths, too, who die in the Mediterranean Sea or who are currently held in Libyan prisons in a bid to move to Europe will remain in the country and do something more reasonable to earn their living (see also *The Nation* of June 9, 2015, Aljazeera News of June 7, 2015). The high rate of unemployment in the country will also be drastically reduced. It may not be difficult for the government to make education free at primary and secondary school levels and make it obligatory for all the children under the school age. Some of the beggars who always claim to be stranded, in order

words, who always claim they do not have money to pay for their transport fares, may no longer be in the same situation, if truly that is the case. Indeed, it is not unlikely too that some other categories of alms-begging will be drastically reduced or will not be as rampant as it is at present.

#### **4. Alms-begging and Islam**

The relationship between religion and begging is another area of interest to our present study of alms-begging. Existing studies have also discussed Islam in relation to begging in Nigeria (see Osagbemi and Adepetu 1999; Ogini 2000; Omoṣoṣo 2001; Mustapha 2002; Mustapha and Balogun 2006; Quadri 2006; Adejùmò 2007; Ogunkan and Fawole 2009; Ogunkan and Jelili 2010; Fawole, Ogunkan and Omoruan 2011; and Ogunkan 2011). The studies carried out by some of the previous researchers show that most beggars in Nigeria are Muslims. For example, Osagbemi and Adepetu report that the beggars in Jos are (96.6%) Muslims, (2.3%) Christians, and (1.1%) members of African traditional religion. In Ogbomoso also, according to Ogunkan and Fawole, the beggars are (84.4%) Muslims and (15.6%) Christians. As a result of this statistical evidence, it is not impossible for some Nigerians to conclude that Islam encourages begging more than any other religion in Nigeria.

Furthermore, it is this conclusion by some Nigerian observers that Islam promotes begging that has attracted the attention of some researchers (see Omoṣoṣo 2001; Mustapha 2002; Mustapha and Balogun 2006; Quadri 2006). Some of the Qur'anic verses or references that have been cited by previous researchers in defence of Islam against begging are reproduced below:

- a. Allah hates three things in you:  
useless talk, wasting of wealth and

asking or begging frequently (see Karim 1939:245).

- b. No one of you should stay away from seeking livelihood and say: 'O God: Give me sustenance', for the sky will not rain gold and silver (see Ahmad and Ansari (eds.) 1979:200).
- c. These beggars beg nothing of men but burning coals of Hell-fire. They will come on the Resurrection Day with permanent scratches upon their faces (see Karim 1939:245).
- d. That one of you takes his rope and then comes with a load of wood upon his back and sells it is better than to beg of men whether they give him or reject him (see Quadri 1995:36-38).

We agree with the previous researchers that Islam does not encourage begging. This is because we do not need any experts to interpret the unambiguous message of the cited verses that Islam frowns at begging. As the Yorùbá people would say *alágẹmọ ti bímọ rẹ tán, àìmọ jọ kù sọwọ ọmọ alágẹmọ* 'The chameleon has given birth to its children; if the offspring do not know how to dance, it is not the fault of the chameleon but that of its offspring'. This means that even if Nigerian beggars are (99.99%) Muslims, Islam cannot be blamed for this phenomenon but those who claim to be the adherents and who refuse to follow the Islamic injunctions.

Similarly, the givers of alms are also expected to be guided by the cited verses to assist the beggars to obey the law of God by not giving them alms. But, since *zakat* and *sadaqah* are crucial in Islam, we want to suggest again and expand the scope of Quadri's (2006:422) recommendation that a Board like the Pilgrims Welfare Board (Muslim Wing) be set up, but this time, at the Mosque or community level to monitor the collection of these two religious obligations and then disburse whatever is realised to the needy. The Board should also learn how to moderate alms-begging and alms-giving alongside the way things are done in real Islamic countries. These arrangements, if carefully followed, will help the beggars as well as the givers not to violate the law of God. The Christians too are reminded to obey the biblical injunction that is written in the Acts of Apostles 4:34-35 which says:

In fact, there was not one in need among them, for all those who were possessors of fields or houses would sell them and bring the values of the things sold and they would deposit them at the feet of the apostles. In turn distribution would be made to each one just as he would have the need.

See also Acts 6:1-3; 1 Timothy 5:3-5. We can say, from the above, that it is the Church that should take up the responsibility of the needy through donations, gifts and offerings from other church members. Complete adherence to the above Biblical injunction will equally validate the injunction in Romans 15:1 that says, 'We, though, who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those not strong ...'.

Furthermore, though Omotosho (2001) advocates equal distribution of the nation's wealth and resources as a solution to



the problem of poverty or begging in Nigeria, we do not share this view with him because he does not explain how the nation's resources can be shared among the people where a large number of the men marry more than one wife and produce many children, while each of the few remaining marries a wife and has two or three children. In fact, some of the beggars too are guilty of marrying more than one wife and giving birth to many children in spite of their claim to a harsh economic condition as stated in the *Leadership Newspaper* of January 25, 2015. Here again is the information in the *Leadership Newspaper*:

A resident of Utako noted that it was difficult for the FCT administration to control the activities of the beggars because they were increasing daily in their numbers as some of them at their Karanmajiji colony marry two or more wives despite their harsh situation.

Although male Muslims claim that Islam allows them to marry as many as four wives, the question is: how many of them give credence to the requirements that are prescribed by the Qur'an? (see Qur'an 65:7, Quadri 2006:420). The fact that one is wealthy today does not mean that one will be wealthy all the time. This is because man's life is characterised by vicissitudes of life. This position can be better understood with reference to a story published in the *Leadership Newspaper* of January 25, 2015:

Narrating their ordeal to LEADERSHIP Sunday, the women, Hannatu and Hafusatu Mohammed who claimed to have been ejected from their rented one room apartment in Masaka said that their husband died during one of the raids by insurgents in Baga Area of

Borno State. According to them, “Our husband is a strong farmer and we hardly lacked what to eat until the night Boko Haram attacked our village last year. We managed to escape through the bushes with children but unfortunately, our husband was hit by stray bullet and died instantly.” They said due to the attacks that they were compelled to relocate to Masaka with their six children who also beg for alms within their locality stressing that they feed from hand to mouth to survive.

The indiscriminate practice of polygamy with indiscriminate procreation among some Nigerians reminds us of the reported uncontrollable population increase in Nigeria between 1960 when the country got her independence and the year 2015. For example, in 1960, the Nigerian population was 42.21 million while that of the United Kingdom (UK) was 52.54 million. However, in 2015, the UK population was 63.89<sup>3</sup> million whereas that of Nigeria has gone up astronomically and outrageously to 183.06<sup>4</sup> million. We cannot mock God. It is either we embrace God’s injunctions as clearly stated in the Qur’an and prosper, or we shun His commandments and face the consequences of our actions. Therefore, to preach for equal distribution of the nation’s resources among Nigerians, it is important that we do not allow ourselves to be driven by sheer lust or we do not marry and procreate indiscriminately.

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<sup>3</sup> Population of United Kingdom (2016 and Historical) [www.worldmeters.info/world-population/uk-population](http://www.worldmeters.info/world-population/uk-population)

<sup>4</sup> Population of Nigeria (2016 and Historical) [www.worldmeters.info/world-population/nigeria-population](http://www.worldmeters.info/world-population/nigeria-population)

However, some critics may raise concern on the content of the order given by Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) in his message:

Surely begging is not lawful except for one of these three reasons - a man who becomes surety for a debt; it then becomes lawful for him to beg till he gets it, after which he shall withhold; a man having met with a misfortune which has ruined his property - it is lawful for him to beg till it enables him to get means of livelihood and a man who meets with dire necessity - what is besides in begging is unlawful and its owner eats unlawful things (*haram*).

Critics or readers of the studies carried out by Osagbemi and Adepetu (1999) and Ogunkan and Fawole (2009) that most beggars, in the areas covered by them, are Muslims, may argue that the content of this message shows that Muslims can ask for alms under three conditions. The three conditions are: surety for a debt, misfortune and dire necessity. Based on these three conditions, namely surety for a debt, misfortune and dire necessity, critics or readers may say that Islam encourages begging. Again, we are still not convinced that begging should be as rampant as it is in Muslim-dominated areas of Nigeria as we have at present. After all, this message does not say, 'Once a beggar should always be a beggar'. To the best of our knowledge, the content of the above-cited verse shows Allah's benevolence towards the needy and it is a known fact that the needy are in every nation whether developed or developing and this wonderful consideration from above should not be misunderstood or abused as it is the case today in Nigeria where

‘once a beggar is always a beggar’. In fact, one question that may bother the minds of well-meaning Nigerians is: How can we explain a situation where beggars now have an association or a union in Nigeria especially in Muslim-dominated areas and some of the members are now philanthropists?<sup>5</sup> We are of the view that any importunate requests for alms in the name of Allah should be defiantly turned down. This will serve as a ploy to discourage the practice of alms-begging in our society.

### **5. Conclusion**

We have examined alms-begging and culture, alms-begging and education and alms-begging and religion in this paper. Although previous studies claim that Yorùbá culture, non-provision of free education at the primary and secondary school levels and skewed distribution of the nation’s resources are some of the causes of alms-begging in Southwest Nigeria, we have shown that we do not share completely the views of the previous researchers. Instead, we argue, based on the results of the studies conducted by the previous researchers that the greatest offenders of alms-begging are, in most cases, Muslims and, in some cases, Christians and not the Yorùbá traditionalists. Any attempt to make reference to Yorùbá culture, the non-provision of free education and government as causes or reasons for alms-begging will amount to a fallacy of equivocation, since the indiscriminate practice of polygamy with indiscriminate procreation among Nigerians is the major cause of alms-begging. Consequently, any suggestion to improve the economy of Nigeria as well as the empowerment of individuals in the country will remain a mirage or an exercise in futility except the

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on beggars’ association or union in Nigeria, read Ogini (2000:233).

problems caused by the practice of polygamy and indiscriminate procreation are addressed.

Similarly, we have argued that the Muslim givers of alms are also expected to be guided by some Qur'anic verses that frown at alms-begging to assist the beggars in an effort to obey the law of God by not giving alms. We have shown also that since *zakat* and *sadaqah* are crucial in Islam, we have suggested again and expanded the scope of Quadri's (2006:422) recommendation that a Board like the Pilgrims Welfare Board (Muslim Wing) be set up to moderate alms-begging and alms-giving alongside the way things are done in real Islamic countries. We argued further that if this arrangement is carefully followed, it will help the beggars and the givers to act in tandem with Islamic injunction and that once this arrangement is implemented, any request for alms in the name of Allah or God should be turned down by potential alms-givers.

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