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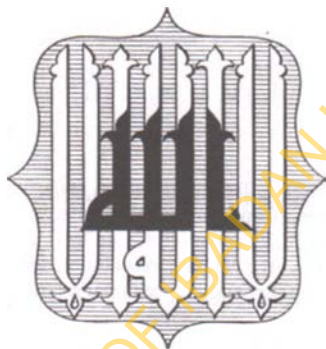
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There is no deity but Allah

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Crescent Visibility and the Challenge to Muslim Unity in Nigeria

Mubarak Ademola Noibi*

Abstract

The unity of Muslims is imperative under the Sharī'ah but the sighting of the crescent remains a daunting challenge, sometimes inhibiting this unity. Nigeria is not left out of this challenge as it is confronted with the ideological conflict amongst Islamic scholars in some sections of the country. Whilst studies have been carried out on the disagreement among Islamic scholars on the issue of single or multiple horizon and exclusive reliance or not on astronomy, little seems to have been done about the reconciliatory steps aimed at unity among Islamic scholars in Nigeria with particular reference to disunity about the dates of Islamic rituals. This paper fills the gap through reliance on both primary and secondary sources. Key interviews were conducted with some Islamic scholars. The paper, among other things, suggests the sustenance of the current bridge-building efforts by the Nigerian Muslim community leadership and the synchronisation of science and technology, together with physical effort to determine the actual dates of Islamic festivals.

Introduction

The perennial controversy often associated with the commencement and the end of the ninth month of the Islamic calendar when Muslims fast Ramaḍān should be of great concern to Muslims across the world; and it is! It could also be embarrassing; and it often is! Disunity within the 'ummah makes the matter even worse in that it contravenes the clear instructions in the Qur'ān and Sunnah that Muslims should remain united. The required unity must be demonstrated first and foremost in the matters of faith (*īmān*) and acts of worship (*'ibādāt*). As an 'ummah, Muslims are bound to accept and abide by the instructions contained in the texts of our two sources of guidance, the Qur'ān and Sunnah.

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Disagreements can only arise concerning the interpretation of relevant texts. If the embarrassing nature of the controversy and disharmony arising from such disagreements is recognised, the challenge can be tackled in unison and with seriousness and promptness. The desired solution would apply not just to the commencement and conclusion of fasting, but also to the less recurrent but more embarrassing disharmony in respect of the celebration of 'Īd al-'Aḏḥā.

It is significant that the expression of dissatisfaction and even worry about the divergent dates of commencing the Ramaḏān fast and celebrating the 'Īds are both perennial and universal amongst Muslims. Some people sarcastically wonder if there is more than one moon associated with our planet so that people in different parts of the world would sight the crescents of the moons related to their respective sectors at different times! The peculiar case of Nigeria, where people often commence and end the Ramaḏān fast at variance with the practice in most other parts of the world, is of special concern not only to the 'umma in Nigeria, but the world at large.

According to Olayiwola (2007), research has shown that groups within the same locality or town in Nigeria often start fasting on different days and, consequently, observe 'Īd al-Fiṭr on different days as well. He reported that some local imams misled their communities and celebrated the 'Īd on days other than the one previously declared by the President General of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) at the time and subsequently pleaded guilty and apologised¹. Yet another dimension of the disharmony is that leaders in the southwest of Nigeria routinely fix the dates of the Ramaḏān fast and 'Īd al-Fiṭr well before the end of Sha'bān, basing their judgment purely on astronomical calculation. All of these factors go a long way to portray the Nigerian Muslim community as disunited and disorganised.

This is more so in view of the fact that for decades many Muslims in the northern part of the country had, until recently, consistently fasted for only twenty-nine days every year. The celebration of 'Īd al-'Aḏḥā on 'Arafah day² seemed to be "the last straw that broke the camel's back". Some have identified the divergent dates of marking Islamic festivals in the country as one of the factors of disunity and mutual distrust amongst Nigerian Muslims. These issues must be seen as posing real challenges to the

leadership of the Nigerian Muslim community and viewed with the seriousness they deserve.

Researchers have concentrated on textual issues about crescent visibility with little attention to the disunity that difference of interpretation has engendered in Nigeria. For example, whilst Abdu-Raheem (2012) argued that astronomical calculations could conveniently substitute physical sighting of the crescent³, Badmus (2012) advocated physical sighting only⁴. Furthermore, Hassan (2012) examined the views of Islamic scholars on astronomical calculation⁵. This paper examines the disunity in the starting and ending of Ramaḍān and efforts to reconcile Islamic scholars and other Muslims in the country on the matter. To that end, interviews were conducted with some leading Islamic scholars in the southwest of Nigeria. This paper is divided into six parts. The first part introduces the work, whilst the next comments on the Sharī'ah provisions with regard to the commencement and termination of the Ramaḍān fast. This is followed by the views of Islamic jurists on the question of single and multiple horizons. The fifth part gives an overview of science and astronomy in accurately determining the appearance of the crescent. The paper examines the various attempts made to foster unity amongst Muslims in the country, followed by a conclusion.

Commencement and ending of fasting

There is no disagreement amongst scholars about the authenticity of those traditions of the Prophet that state when Muslims should commence the Ramaḍān fast or end it. In a ḥadīth narrated by Abū Hurayrah, the Messenger of Allah is reported to have said:

صوموا لرؤيته وافطروا لرؤيته فإن غم عليكم فأكملوا عدة شعبان ثلاثين يوماً.

Fast when you sight it (the new crescent) and stop fasting when you sight it; if it is beclouded from you, then complete it (Ramaḍān) as thirty days⁶.

In another ḥadīth, he narrated that, while the Prophet was talking about the crescent, he said:

إذا رأيتموه فصموا، وإذا رأيتموه فأفطروا فإن غمى عليكم فعدّوا ثلاثين.

Observe fast when you see it (crescent of Ramaḍān) and terminate fast when you see it (crescent of Shawwal), but when it is obscured from you, complete it as thirty days⁷.

In yet another ḥadīth, Ibn 'Umar narrated that he sighted the crescent of Ramaḍān and informed the Prophet, who not only fasted on the following day, but also instructed people to do the same⁸. There is also the tradition in which Ibn 'Umar narrated that a bedouin went to the Prophet and said he had sighted the crescent of Ramaḍān. When the man had confirmed his faith in Allah and the apostleship of the Prophet, he (the Prophet) gave orders that Muslims should fast the following day⁹. Saaba (2012) identifies fifteen narrations on the sighting of the crescent for starting and ending Ramadan¹⁰.

The various schools of fiqh lay down criteria for accepting the evidence of anyone who may claim to have sighted the crescent at the end of the month of Sha'bān or Ramaḍān, as the case may be. Such a person must be Muslim, reliable and of good character. He must also have attained the age of maturity. Most of the scholars insist that there should be at least two such witnesses, particularly in the case of ending the fast. The witnesses would inform the authority of the Muslim state or community that they have sighted the crescent. When the authority is satisfied with the evidence, instruction is given for the commencement or ending of Ramaḍān and it becomes obligatory on every eligible person to abide by the instruction¹¹.

Single and multiple horizons

This question is about whether or not the global Muslim community in general and that of Nigeria in particular is bound by the evidence of the sighting of the crescent in any part of the world. Difference of opinion on this issue is often responsible for the global disunity regarding the commencement or ending of fasting. The majority of the schools of fiqh (Ḥanafī, Mālikī, most Hanbalīs and some Shāf'īs) hold that once the crescent has been sighted in a part of the world and the information is disseminated, Muslims in other parts are also obliged to comply¹². The main argument of the proponents of this view is that the traditions quoted above are instructions directed at the totality of the Muslim community across the world and that the moon is one for all the people. Moreover,

they hold that this stand is more in consonance with the divine command that Muslims must be united and remain so and not be divided. Specifically, Allah says:

وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ
قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِّنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُم مِّنْهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ
لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا وَاخْتَلَفُوا مِن بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ
وَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

And hold fast, all together, by the rope that Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided amongst yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favour on you; for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love so that, by His grace, you became brethren. You were on the brink of the pit of fire and He saved you from it. Thus does Allah make His signs clear to you: that you may be guided. And be not like those who were divided amongst themselves and fell into disputations after reciting clear signs. For them is a dreadful penalty (Q3:103-105)¹³.

Given the advanced stage of communication technology in the world today, it should not be difficult to achieve the desired unity amongst the Muslims across the world on this matter. This can be done through a communication network connecting Muslim countries and communities. With such a network operating around the year, Muslims in different parts of the world would remain familiar with the pattern of the appearance of the crescent at the beginning of every lunar month. That, in turn, would go a long way in effectively solving the perennial problem encountered at the beginning and at the end of Ramaḍān.

On the other hand, some scholars hold that only the people of a country are bound by the evidence of the sighting of the crescent in that country owing to differences in geographic zones (*Ikhtilāf al-Maṭālī*). This opinion is based on the interpretation of relevant passages from the Qur'ān and the ḥadīth about Ramaḍān fasting. This group of scholars backs up its arguments with the āyah of the Qur'ān that states:

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَىٰ وَالْفُرْقَانِ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ وَمَن كَانَ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ وَلِتُكْمِلُوا الْعِدَّةَ وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَاكُمُ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

Ramaḍān is the (month) in which was sent down the Qur'ān as a guide to mankind, also clear (signs) for guidance and judgment (between right and wrong). So every one of you who is present (at his home) during the month should spend it in fasting but, if anyone is ill or on a journey, the prescribed period (should be made up) by days later. Allah intends every facility for you; (He wants you) to complete the prescribed period and to glorify Him in that He has guided you; and perchance you shall be grateful (Q2: 185).

The underlined sentence in the above quoted āyah (emphasis is mine) is interpreted by these scholars to mean “Whoever sights it (at his place) should fast”. In other words, if it is not sighted in a particular town or country, then Sha'bān should be deemed to comprise thirty days¹⁴. They base their view on the event that took place between Ibn Abbās and Kurayb. Ibn Abbās, who was resident in Madīnah, refused to follow the evidence provided by Kurayb regarding the earlier sighting of the crescent of Ramaḍān in Damascus and insisted on relying on its later sighting in Madīnah. The ḥadīth states:

عَنْ كُرَيْبٍ أَنَّ أُمَّ الْقُضَيْلِ بِنْتَ الْخَارِثِ بَعَثَتْهُ إِلَىٰ مُعَاوِيَةَ بِالشَّامِ. قَالَ فَقَدِمْتُ الشَّامَ فَقَضَيْتُ حَاجَتَهَا وَاسْتَهَلَّ عَلَيَّ رَمَضَانٌ وَأَنَا بِالشَّامِ، فَرَأَيْتُ الْهِلَالَ لَيْلَةَ الْجُمُعَةِ ثُمَّ قَدِمْتُ الْمَدِينَةَ فِي آخِرِ الشَّهْرِ فَسَأَلَنِي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ عَبَّاسٍ - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا - ثُمَّ ذَكَرَ الْهِلَالَ فَقَالَ مَتَى رَأَيْتُمُ الْهِلَالَ؟ فَقُلْتُ رَأَيْتَاهُ لَيْلَةَ الْجُمُعَةِ. فَقَالَ أَنْتَ رَأَيْتَهُ؟ فَقُلْتُ نَعَمْ وَرَأَى النَّاسُ وَصَامُوا وَصَامَ مُعَاوِيَةُ. فَقَالَ لَكِنَّا رَأَيْتَاهُ لَيْلَةَ السَّبْتِ فَلَا نَزَالَ نَصُومُ حَتَّىٰ نُكْمِلَ ثَلَاثِينَ أَوْ نَرَاهُ. فَقُلْتُ أَوْلَا تَكْتَفِي بِرُؤْيَةِ مُعَاوِيَةَ وَصِيَامِهِ؟ فَقَالَ لَا. هَكَذَا أَمَرَنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ.

Kurayb narrated that 'Umm Fadl bint al-Hārith sent him to Mu'āwiyah in Syria. He said: “I arrived in Syria, and fulfilled her need. While I was in Syria, the month of Ramaḍān commenced. I sighted the crescent of Ramaḍān on Friday night (night preceding Friday). I then came back to al-Madinah at the end of the month.

'Abdullah bin 'Abbās asked me about the new moon of

Ramaḍān. I said that we sighted it on Friday night. He asked if I had sighted it myself and I said, 'Yes, and [other] people also sighted it', so they observed fast and Mu'āwiyah also observed it. Thereupon he said, 'But we sighted it on Saturday night (the night preceding Saturday) and so we would continue to observe the fast until we complete thirty days or we sight it (the crescent of Shawwāl).' I said: 'Are you not content with the sighting and fasting of Mu'āwiyah?' He said 'No, this is how the Messenger of Allah commanded us.'"¹⁵

These scholars interpret the last part of Ibn 'Abbās' statement to mean that his stand on the matter was fully in line with the instruction of the Prophet: "...this is how the Messenger of Allah commanded us." The proponents of this opinion argue further that distance and geographical differences from one country to another justify the concept of 'different horizons' in the matter of sighting the crescent¹⁶. Other scholars point out to the contrary that the reference in the statement of Ibn 'Abbas was to the instruction of the Prophet that Muslims should fast only when they sight the crescent of Ramaḍān. As explained already, however, that instruction was meant to be applied universally and not in its restricted sense. Time and geographical differences do not in any way alter the universality of the Prophet's instruction, which is upheld by the majority. Summarising the case for the majority opinion, az-Zuhaylī states:

وهذا الرأي (رأي الجمهور) هو الراجح لدي توحيداً للعبادة بين المسلمين، ومنعاً من الاختلاف غير المقبول في عصرنا، ولأن إيجاب الصوم معلق بالرؤية، دون تفرقة بين الأقطار.

This majority opinion is for me the preferable one, as it unites the Muslims in the matter of ibādah (worship) and prevents a disharmony that is unacceptable in this age of ours and because the obligation to fast is associated with the sighting (of the crescent), which does not recognise any difference among the various countries (of the world)¹⁷.

There is a third opinion that seems to be a compromise between those two. Whilst recognising the concept of 'multiple horizons', this compromise requires countries in the same geographic zone to follow the same sighting, so that when the crescent is sighted at any location in the zone, other places within that zone should comply. This is the opinion of the Shāfi'ī's School.

This school went further to define towns and countries within the same geographic zone as towns and countries within a 133,056 meter radius to the town or country of sighting¹⁸.

None of the three options stated above justifies the recurrent phenomenon of starting the Ramaḍān fast or celebrating the 'īd on different days in Nigeria. Similarly, none of them justifies the starting and the ending of Ramaḍān fasts on different dates in countries within the same geographic zone and which, by implication, share the same horizon. Whilst Muslims in northern Nigeria, who until recently fasted consistently for twenty-nine days every year and sometimes claimed to rely on actual sighting of the crescent, those in the southwest often relied on astronomical calculation. The stand of the latter is not unconnected to the distrust of their brethren in the north who, according to Abubakr (2013), are always perceived to be in a hurry to end Ramaḍān and celebrate 'Id al-Fitr. That allegation does not, however, explain the early commencement of fasting in the north. Moreover, he added that they often defy all forms of correction, although he did not give instances of such corrections or defiance¹⁹. He apparently does not consider the recent change that has taken centre stage in the northern part of Nigeria, where Muslims now record thirty days of fasting as do their brethren in the south.

Role of science and astronomy

Astronomy is the science dealing with the origin, evolution, composition, distance and motion of all bodies and scattered matter in the universe. It is the most ancient field of science that came into existence in the wake of codified civilization²⁰. Information provided by experts is helpful in identifying errors often committed by those who, in the past, claimed to have sighted the crescent of Ramaḍān or Shawwāl. The experts show the phases of the moon in the course of its revolution around the earth. The phases include its birth or conjunction (*mulḥaq*) which immediately precedes the appearance of the crescent of the new lunar month. The conjunction is the phase during which the moon lies between the sun and the earth in the same line. In that state, it is absolutely impossible for anyone on earth to sight the moon because the moon does not have a light of its own, but only reflects the light beamed on it by the sun. Such beaming is not possible when the three objects are on the same plane.

When conjunction is complete, it takes at least seventeen hours for the naked eye to catch a glimpse of the crescent. With the use of binoculars, it takes fifteen hours, whilst the use of a telescope enables us to sight it after a period of twelve hours. In the light of these facts, Aziz, an expert, was convinced that many of those who claimed sighting the crescent of Ramaḍān or Shawwal in the past did so on days of the conjunction of the moon²¹, whereas sighting on such days was impossible. The regular occurrence of such claims must have worsened the situation of distrust and hence the resultant disunity within the Nigerian 'ummah on the matter. This may have strengthened the resolve of the 'ulamā' (Islamic scholars) in some sections of the country to justify their reliance on astronomical calculation alone and neglecting reports of crescent sighting coming from other parts of the country.

Whilst science and astronomical calculations can determine the time and duration of conjunction with some level of accuracy, they cannot predict precisely when the crescent will be observable. Based on this assertion, Maghrāūrī (2007) claimed that no single classical Islamic scholar supported the use of astronomical calculations as a substitute for sighting the crescent with the naked eye²². Although Usman (2012) is of the opinion that this was so because those scholars were naive about the science of astronomy and its associated calculations, as they confused it with astrology leading to its condemnation²⁰, convincing arguments have been advanced to the effect that those classical scholars were not only able to differentiate between astronomy and astrology but also had a good command of astronomy²⁴. Summarising the position of the Malikī School on this issue, az-Zuhaylī states:

ولا يثبت الهلال بقول منجم أي حاسب يحسب سر القمر، لا في حق نفسه ولا غيره،
لأن الشارع أناط الصوم والقطر والحج برؤية الهلال، لا بوجوده إن فرض صحة قوله،
فالعامل بالمراصد الفلكية وإن كانت صحيحة لا يجوز، ولا يطلب شرعا

The occurrence of the crescent cannot be established through the pronouncement of an astronomer, who calculates the movement of the moon, be it for his own personal purposes or for others to rely on. That is because the Law Maker (Allah) has based the obligations of fasting, breaking the fast and Hajj on the (actual) sighting of the crescent, not on the occurrence of it even if it is assumed the pronouncement made by the

astronomer to be correct. Using (purely) astronomical observatories (for the purpose of fixing dates of religious rituals) is not permissible even if they are accurate. That is because doing so is not required according to the Shari'ah²⁵.

He reports a similar conclusion from the Ḥambalī School, saying:

ولا يجب الصوم - كما تقدم - بالحساب والنجوم ولو كثرت إصابتها، لعدم استاده لما يعول عليه شرعاً.

Fasting does not become obligatory (merely) through calculation (of the position) of the stars even if they had been found to be correct many times. That is because the use of this means is not based on any legal authority²⁶.

The Ḥanafī School also states:

لا يعتمد على ما يخبر به أهل المقات والحساب والتنجيم لمخالفته شريعة نبينا عليه أفضل الصلاة والتسليم، لأنه وإن صح الحساب والرصد فلستنا مكلفين شرعاً إلا بالرؤية العادية.

The pronouncements of astronomers and astrologers cannot be relied upon under the Islamic law brought by our Prophet. This is because, even if the calculations and observations are right, we are not required under the Shari'ah to act on anything but the normal sighting (of the crescent)²⁷.

A few of the Islamic scholars who support astronomical calculation in determining the start of the lunar month subject the validity of such scientific calculation to confirmation through actual sighting. Hassan (2012) noted that Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah, Shaykh Ibn Baz and Shaykh al-'Uthaymin were opposed to relying entirely on astronomy against sighting²⁸. Ibn Taymiyah approved the use of astronomical calculation in determining conjunction (*mulḥaq*) with a view to predicting the later sighting of the crescent. Al-Muti'i opined that any claim of sighting the crescent that contradicts sound and correct astronomical calculations must be rejected²⁹. To that end, Shaykh Tantāwī Jawhārī opined that learning astronomy is farḍ kifāyah (collective duty of Muslims in the community). In view of that, some Muslims need to be proficient in this ancient and useful science³⁰.

What all of these mean is that, though astronomical calculation is crucial to the sighting of the crescent, it should not be the sole basis for fixing the start of Ramaḍān fasts or the 'Īd days as practised or advocated by some modern scholars. Therefore, the task before the leadership of the Nigerian Muslim community in this regard is to find an effective means of using astronomical calculation in determining when and where to look for the crescents of Ramaḍān, Shawwāl and Dhul-Ḥijjah. Hudu (2008) has told of a computer programme that could, using International Lunar Data Line (ILD), calculate the movement of the moon and also indicate where the crescent is likely to be sighted first³¹. This is a commendable advancement in the field of science and technology. This computer programme could also assist in sighting the crescent not only in Nigeria, but also other parts of the world at the right time.

Attempts at fostering unity in Nigeria

Following the successful mission of Shaykh Uthman Dan Fodio in the northern part of what is now known as Nigeria, the amīrs, also known as Emirs, have been in charge of both temporal and spiritual matters. According to Adegbite (1999), this facilitated the setting up of the Jamat Nasr al-Islam (JNI), an Islamic umbrella organisation cutting across the northern part of Nigeria. The southwest of Nigeria was not fortunate enough to be that organised because religion is separated from the political life of Muslims in that area. Mosques and private Muslim organisations were in exclusive charge of Islamic affairs. The widely-scattered mosques and the numerous Islamic organisations that sprang up were not unified under any umbrella organisation, although attempts were made by some bodies at unifying the southwest Muslims. These organisations include the Western State Joint Muslim Organisation (WESTJOMO), which later transformed into the National Joint Muslim Organisation (NAJOMO), and the Nigerian Muslim Council (NMC). These bodies not only attempted to unify the Muslim organisations in the southwest of Nigeria but NAJOMO, together with JNI, was instrumental in the establishment of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) in 1973³².

Leadership at the mosque level was controlled by the League of Imams and Alfas (Islamic scholars). This organisation is composed of mosque Imams and prominent Islamic scholars in the southwest of Nigeria, comprising Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Lagos, Ondo and Ekiti states. The WESTJOMO, NAJOMO and NMC played leading roles in those states with regard to the

declaration of the sighting of the crescent heralding the commencement and the end of Ramaḍān fasting through the mass media. This was irrespective of whether the crescent was sighted in Nigeria or any other place on the globe. Notwithstanding these announcements, the various towns and cities in the southwest of Nigeria were noted for starting and ending Ramaḍān on different dates. There were occasions when communities commenced or ended fasting on three different days³³.

This unpleasant situation attracted the interest of the prominent Islamic scholar, preacher, teacher and proprietor of Markaz al-Ta'lim al-'Arabī al-Islāmī, Agege, Lagos, Shaykh 'Ādam al-Ilūrī. Although Shaykh al-Ilūrī hailed from Ilorin, he was first in Abeokuta and latter in Lagos. Poised to put an end to the disparity, Shaykh 'Ādam al-Ilūrī consulted widely with different prominent scholars of his time. These scholars included Shaykh Baasunu, Shaykh Eleshin-Meta and Shaykh Sanusi Alaka, who were all based in Ibadan. The scholars unanimously agreed that Shaykh 'Ādam al-Ilūrī should coordinate a team of four Islamic clerics with a view to finding a pragmatic solution to the embarrassing situation. The other clerics included Muhalli Aroworeki from Iwo town (now in Osun State), Salmān Alawaye from Oyo Town in Oyo State and Sanusi Alaka from Ibadan, also in Oyo State³⁴.

Although these scholars initially differed amongst themselves on the means of correctly determining the commencement and ending of Ramaḍān fasting, they finally reached a compromise on the issue. Some of them held the view that it could be achieved through a form of counting. Shaykh Baasunu, for example, gathered 355 stones and counted one every day until it reached two 236. Consequent upon that, he ordered the commencement of Tarāwih and his subjects complied. Others thought it could be done through calculated recitation of the Qur'ān. On the other hand, the physical sighting of the crescent was one of the options proposed.

It was, however, discovered that these different techniques adopted by the notable scholars were neither potent enough as a means of determining the start or the end of Ramaḍān fasts nor capable of unifying the 'ummah because different communities continued to use different means of determining the beginning and end of Ramaḍān. Following this development, 'Ādam al-Ilūrī suggested that astronomical calculation be resorted to, arguing that it was more accurate than any of the other tools used by various scholars at the time. Although there was an initial

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opposition to this stand, it was later accepted owing to the skilful and sound argument of Shaykh 'Ādam al-Ilūrī who, by all standards, was considered to be more knowledgeable than the other scholars on his committee. This marked the beginning of the era of the use of astronomical calculation in determining the beginning and end of Islamic lunar months, Ramaḍān included³⁵.

Even though the majority followed the orders of the League of Imams and Alfas, many autonomous organisations in southwest Nigeria, such as the Ahmadiyyah and the Ansarudeen, adhered to information on the physical sighting of the crescent. This development may be linked to their unification under the aegis of NAJOMO, WESTJOMO and NMC. Furthermore, during the late 1970s to early 1990s, the University of Ibadan Muslim Community had its own system of determining dates for beginning and ending Ramaḍān. The leadership of the community consulted the metrological centre about when it was likely for the crescent to be sighted and where such sighting was most likely to take place. It was based on this that the claim of sighting the crescent in any part of Nigeria and, by extension, the world was authenticated.

The University of Ibadan Muslim Community also tried to convince the League of Imams and Alfas to abandon the idea of basing the commencement and the ending of Ramaḍān on astronomical calculations only but this effort proved futile in that the League had always based its decisions regarding Ramaḍān on them³⁶. The University of Ibadan Muslim Community has since started going along with the guidance of the League of Imams and Alfas, perhaps for the sake of uniformity and the unity of the ummah.

The northern 'ulamā', under a national body called the Council of 'Ulamā, tried to bring the leadership of the League of Imams and Alfas into their midst, although this move was not directly related to the issue of crescent visibility or unity in the celebration of īds. This council, which had its base in Kaduna, a northern state, consisted of many well-known scholars in the country. Prominent among them were Justice Ahmad Lemu (former Grand Qadi of Niger State), the late Justice Gwarzo (former Grand Qadi of Kano), the late Justice Sambo (former Grand Qadi for Abuja), the former Grand Qadi of Sokoto, Group Captain Usman Jibrin, Dr Umar Bello (Council Secretary) Prof. Galadanchi, Shaykh Abu (now Baba Adiini of Lagos), Dr

Dawud O.S. Noibi (later a Professor at the University of Ibadan), Justice Orire (former Grand Qadi of Kwara State) and Dr A.J. Oyekan³⁷.

In 1986 these members paid a visit to Shaykh 'Ādam al-Ilūrī at his school, Markaz al-Ta'līmī al-'Arabī al-Islāmī, Agege, Lagos State after some efforts at inviting him to become a member of their council had failed. He was joined in welcoming this high-powered delegation by the Chairman of Markaz Muslim Community and some tutors of the school. This visit led to the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aimed at fostering unity amongst the 'ulamā' in the northern and the southern parts of Nigeria. All present signed this MoU before the delegation departed³⁸.

Similarly, the then Sultan of Sokoto and President-General of the NSCIA in Nigeria, Sultan Ibrahim Dasuki, spent four days in Lagos with Shaykh 'Ādam al-Alūrī during the latter's fortieth anniversary celebration of Markaz al-Ta'līmī al-'Arabī al-Islāmī. Shaykh 'Ādam al-Ilūrī in turn sent a delegation to Sokoto in appreciation of the visit of His Eminence³⁹. The present Sultan of Sokoto and President-General of the NSCIA, His Eminence, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar III, has, since his coronation, done much to bridge the gap between Muslims in the northern and the southern parts of the country. He is widely recognised as the Sultan who has consistently honoured invitations from southern Muslims to various Islamic events. He attended on three occasions the annual Islamic Vacation Courses (IVCs) organised by the B (southern) zone of the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN). In addition to his moral support for those programmes is his generous financial support.

Furthermore, the Sultan was present at Oshogbo, Osun State, as a Guest of Honour at the installation of the President-General of the League of Imams and Alfas. Similarly, he was the Guest of Honour at the inauguration of the Muslim 'Ummah of South West Nigeria (MUSWEN), on which occasion, he undertook to award scholarships to three deserving female medical students of southwest origin. He has fulfilled this promise and is currently offering the scholarship to another group of students through the MUSWEN.

Although there were, in the past, attempts at unifying the Muslim 'ummah in the southwest, such as NAJOMO (formerly WESTJOMO) and NMC, these efforts were not as successful as envisaged, hence the efforts leading to the inauguration of MUSWEN on 10 August, 2008, following wide
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consultations that lasted four years. This umbrella body, comprising all Muslim organisations and institutions operating in the southwest, including State Councils/Communities in Oyo, Ogun, Lagos, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti States, is meant to play a role akin to that of the JNI in northern Nigeria. This organisation enjoys the support of almost all the Islamic organisations operating in the southwest, as well as that of the leadership of the NSCIA but it has yet to be fully supported by the League of Imams and Alfas even though they recognise it. This position is similar to that of NAJOMO. The Muslim 'Ummah of South West Nigeria has worked assiduously and consistently in collaboration with the NSCIA to ensure accuracy and uniformity in starting and ending Ramaḍān fasts⁴⁰. Meanwhile, the League of Imams and Alfas continues to fix these dates through astronomical calculation.

At the beginning of Ramaḍān in the year 2013 (1434 AH), the League was constrained to change its stand. As usual, the League had earlier fixed the date for starting Ramaḍān. Subsequently, a young Ibadan-based scholar, Mikail Abdur-Raheem popularly called Abu Rahimah, succeeded in persuading the Chief Imam of Ibadanland about the possibility of sighting the new crescent of Ramaḍān and that of other months in the city of Ibadan, contrary to the widespread belief that it was not possible in the southwest. He had actually done so at the hilltop of Oke Aare on previous occasions⁴¹. Although this young scholar had little confidence in the sighting of the crescent in the north, he claimed to have coincidentally sighted the new crescent on the same day as the northerners sighted it.

This incident was groundbreaking for the Chief Imam of Ibadan, who unilaterally instructed that Ramaḍān fast be observed the following day in line with the sighting despite the previous decision of the League on the matter. Given the influence of the imam within the League, his decision had considerable effect. It can be inferred that, had the crescent not been sighted anywhere in the southwest, the pre-determined date for beginning the Ramaḍān fast would automatically have applied.

Conclusion

There must be an end to the disharmony and the disunity that the Nigerian Muslim 'ummah has long experienced in relation to the dates of starting the Ramaḍān fasts and observing the 'Īds. There must be an end to the ridicule to which the situation exposes the 'ummah, particularly in the eyes of the young generation of Muslims in our time and in the eyes of non-Muslim compatriots. When it becomes known that some Nigerians often started fasting on the last day of Sha'bān or celebrated 'Īd on the last day of Ramaḍān and 'Īd al-'Aḍḥā on 'Arafah day, the ridicule of fellow Muslims in other parts of the world could be much greater. More important, however, is the need to ensure fulfilment of religious duties at the appropriate times.

Notwithstanding the hand of fellowship stretched out by the northern 'ulamā' with the aim of fostering unity amongst the Nigerian 'ummah, that much-desired unity continues to elude the 'ummah. Whilst the north relies on actual sighting of the crescent, which has recently been facilitated by the use of technology, the League of Imams and Alfas remain committed to astronomical calculation as the means of determining the beginning and end of Ramaḍān. There seems little chance of compromise between the northern segment of the 'ummah and its south-western counterpart through their respective 'ulamā'. Through the activities of the MUSWEN, however, the situation is gradually but steadily changing for the better as Muslims are getting more enlightened about the requirements of their religion and the bridge-building efforts of the Sultan of Sokoto and the President-General of NSCIA. Although there has been appreciable progress towards finding a lasting solution to this disunity in dates of observing Ramaḍān fasts, there is need for the leadership of the 'ummah in Nigeria to support the efforts of putting to an end this ridiculous disunity in observing crucial religious duties. In this regard, this paper strongly recommends the following:

1. The leadership of the Nigeria Muslim 'ummah should encourage mass education of Muslims in the country about the need to adhere strictly to the rules regarding the sighting of the crescent for the purpose of Ramaḍān fasting and the 'Īds.

2. There is need for the Muslims in the country to support the bridge-building efforts of Sultan Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar III.
3. The NSCIA should restore and invigorate the moon-sighting committees for each of the zones in the country and furnish them with necessary financial and logistical support to make them more functional and reliable.
4. Monitoring of the crescent needs to be carried out every month of the year to familiarise those concerned with the pattern of the appearance of the crescent well ahead of Ramaḍān and Dhu al-Ḥijjah.
5. The Muslim 'Ummah of the South West Nigeria (MUSWEN) should intensify and sustain its well-acknowledged efforts in building the bridge of understanding and co-operation between the southwest and the north with regard to uniformity in the dates for beginning and ending Ramaḍān fasting.
6. Discussions must be held with the leadership of the League of Imams and Alfas of South West, Edo and Delta States with a view to achieving uniformity in observing Muslim festivals across the length and breadth of Nigeria. Where necessary, persuasion should be employed to ensure that the league of Imams and Alfas shifts its long-standing ground.
7. The Nigerian Muslim 'ummah should adopt the majority opinion of Muslim scholars regarding the sighting of the crescent for the purpose of starting the Ramaḍān fasting and observing the Islamic festivals so that, wherever the crescent is sighted in the world, all Muslims comply spontaneously.
8. The leadership of the 'ummah in this country should initiate the idea of a communication network among Muslim countries and communities across the world to facilitate efficient and effective transfer of moon-sighting information.
9. Astronomical calculations should be carried out regularly to identify the actual time of conjunction in order to project the possible time when the crescent could be sighted.

10. The leadership of the 'umamah should acquire such state of the art technology as binoculars, telescopes and all other instruments capable of facilitating the sighting of the crescent. These items should be placed in sensitive areas where sighting the crescent is most likely.

11. The country should identify areas where the crescent is likely to be sighted through the use of computer-based International Lunar Data Line.

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Notes

1. A Olayiwola, *Islam in Nigeria: One Crescent Many Focuses*, (p.n: Sakirabe Publisher, 2007), p. 248-250.
2. ʿArafāt day is the 9th day of the 12th month of the Islamic lunar calendar, Dhu al-Hijjah. On this day, Muslims on pilgrimage (hajj) assemble on the Plain of ʿArafāt for the remembrance of Allah and supplications, while Muslims the world over are encouraged to fast.
3. A. Y. Usman, "Basis for Using Astronomical Calculations in Sighting the Crescent in Ramadan", In M.A. Abdu-Raheem (ed), *Challenges of Moon Sighting and Preservation of Arabic Manuscripts in Nigeria*, (Ijebu-Ode: Shebotimo Publications, 2012), p. 7-17.
4. K. S. Badmus, Moon Sighting in Nigeria and the Unity Among Muslims, In M.A. Abdu-Raheem (ed), *Challenges of Moon Sighting and Preservation...*, p. 1-6.
5. A. K. Hassan, Astronomical Devices of the Moon Sighting on the views of Muslim Scholars, In M.A. Abdu-Raheem (ed), *Challenges of Moon Sighting and Preservation...*, p. 29-38.
6. M.F Abdul-Bāqī, *Al-Lu'lu' wa al-Marjān fī mā ttafaqa 'alayhi ash-Shaykhānī*, (Bakīn: Al-Jam' iyyah Al-Islamiyyah Al-Šīniyyah, n.d), p. 240.
7. Z.A Al-Mundhūrī, *The Translation of the Meaning of Summarised Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, (n.p: p.n, n.d), p. 317.
8. A.A. Al-Bassām, *Tawḍīḥ al-'Aḥkām min Bulūgh al-Maḥrām*, (n.p: Maktabah al- Mastafā, 1410AH), Vol.3 p. 341.
9. Al-Bassām, *Tawḍīḥ al-'Aḥkām min...*, vol.3, p. 342.
10. S.A Saaba, "Reliability of Moon Sighting over Astronomical Calculation: A Critical Analysis", In M.A. Abdu-Raheem (ed), *Challenges of Moon Sighting and Preservation...*, p.25.
11. W. Zuhaylī, *Al-Fiqh al-Islamī wa 'Adillatuh*, (Damascus: Dar al-Fiqr al-Ma'ārif, 1997), vol.3, pp.1601-1656.

12. Zuhaylī, *Al-Fiqh al-Islamī...*, vol. 3, pp.1658-1659 See also K. Salim, *Sahīḥ Fiqh al-Sunnah wa 'Adillatuhu wa Tawdīḥ Madhāhib al-'Aimmah*, (n.p: Al-Maktab Al-Tawfīqah, n.d), p. 95-96.
13. A.Y Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān: Translation and Commentary*, (Birmingham: IPCI Islamic Vision, 1999), p. 170.

This translation of the Qur'ān is adopted throughout this paper with a few adjustments where necessary

14. 14 Sālim, *Sahīḥ Fiqh as-Sunnah...* vol. 2, p. 96.
15. 15 Al-Mundhūrī, *The Translation of the Meaning...*, p.318-319.
16. M. Shawkānī, *Nayl al-Awtār*, (Cairo: Dar Al-Ḥadīth, n.d), vol.4, p.194.
17. Zuhaylī, *Al-Fiqh al-Islamī...*, vol. 3, p.1662.
18. Zuhaylī, *Al-Fiqh al-Islamī...*, vol. 3, p.1661.
19. An Oral interview with Shaykh Abdul Ganiy Abubakari Agbotomokekere. Age: 82 years, Mufti 'Āmm of Ibadanland at Okekoto, Ojaaba, Ibadan on Sunday, 17 March, 2013.

It is a convention that the views expressed by the Chief Imam of Ibadanland represents the voice of 'ulamā' of South West Nigeria. Furthermore, Shaykh Agbotomokekere is not only the leader of the 'ulamā' in Ibadanland, standing as one of the deputies to the Imam, but also his spokesman on religious matters.

20. P. B. Norton, *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed, (Chicago: Encyclopaedia foundation Inc, 1994), vol. I. p. 656.
21. U. Dukku, "The Problem of Moon Sighting in Nigeria: The Way Out", (Retrieved on January, 2013, from fridaydiscourseblogspot.com, 2010), para.18.
22. M. Maghrāūrī, "An Islamic legal Analysis of the Astronomical Determination of the Beginning of Ramaḍān", (Retrieved on 3 January, 2013 from www.zawiyah.net/paper.pdf) p. 18.

23. 23 Usman, "Basis for Using Astronomical Calculations..." p.11.
24. 24 Maghrāūrī, *An Islamic Legal Analysis...*, p. 17.
25. 25 Zuhaylī, *Al-Fiqh al-Islamī...*, vol. 3, p.1653.
26. 26 Zuhaylī, *Al-Fiqh al-Islamī...*, vol. 3, p. 1654.
27. 27 Zuhaylī, *Al-Fiqh al-Islamī...*, vol. 3, p.1652.
28. 28 Hassan, "Astronomical Devices of the Moon..."p. 34.
29. 29 E. Moosa, "Shaykh Ahmad Shākir and the Adoption of a Scientifically-Based Lunar Calendar", (*Islamic Law and Society*, 1998, vol. 5 No. 1), p. 63.
30. 30 Moosa, Shaykh Ahmad Shākir and the Adoption of..., p. 63.
31. 31 K. S. Badmus, "Moon Sighting in Nigeria and the Unity...", p.5.
32. 32 A. Adegbite, Unity of the Nigerian Ummah: An Imperative for The 21st Century, in M. O. Junaid (ed), *Islamic Perspectives on Contemporary Issues*, (Forum for Islamic Education and Welfare, 1999, Retrieved on 20 February, 2013 from http://islamicforumng.org/publications_FIEW.htm), p. 34.
33. 33 An Oral interview with Agbotomokekere...
34. 34 An Oral interview with Agbotomokekere...
35. 35 An Oral interview with Agbotomokekere...
36. 36 An Oral interview with Professor Dawud Olatokunbo Shittu Noibi. Age: 79, Executive Secretary, Muslim 'Ummah Of South West Nigeria (MUSWEN) and Former Lecturer and Chief Imam in the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, at 3, Dawud Noibi Drive, Bodija/Oluwo-Nla, Ibadan on Monday, 20 March, 2013.
37. 37 An Oral interview with Professor Noibi...
38. 38 An Oral interview with Professor Noibi...

39. 39 An Oral interview with Professor Noibi...
40. 40 An Oral interview with Professor Noibi...
41. 41 An Oral interview with Mikail Akoyeni Abdr-Raheem. Age: 43, Islamic religious Preacher, at N5/145, Bankole Street, Balogun Oke, Bashorun, Ibadan on Wednesday, 25 September, 2013.

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