

Heterogenous beliefs and practices amongst muslims in Nigeria: A case study of Yoruba speaking people of Ilorin

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Abstract: This research discusses the history of *Islām* in Yoruba land which started in the early 18th century. However, the impact of religious heterogeneity has not been systematically studied. Therefore, this thesis examines the extent of the involvement of Yoruba Muslims in heterogeneous beliefs and practices in Nigeria using the Kwara State as a case study, with a view to bringing out the impact of *Tawhīd* on them. This study notes that there is a prevalence of religious heterogeneity among many Yoruba Muslims, but it principally argues that its impact affects many of them negatively. If continuous awareness campaign could be carried out, the phenomenon of incompatible foreign elements on Muslims in Yoruba can be reduced. A triangulated method was used to carry out this study. The findings of this thesis indicated reappraisal of the problem associated with many Yoruba Muslims' persistence in heterogeneity and its implications on their faith (*īman*). While this study appreciates the attempts of some scholars to address the problem of spiritual corruption, it reveals that is not yet inculcated into many Yoruba Muslims within the Yoruba religio-cultural context. Therefore, a concerted effort is necessary in ensuring the *Tawhīdic* integrity remains intact.

Keywords: Heterogeneous beliefs, Superstitions, Witchcraft, Deviners.

1. INTRODUCTION

Heterogeneous beliefs and practices are manifested in different ways and forms among the Yoruba Muslims in Kwara State. And this has caused conflicts among various Muslim scholars of the state. Some Yoruba Muslim scholars are deadly against various heterodox Islamic religious practices among Muslims scholars in Ilorin, especially those traditional practices concerning their belief in magical and medicinal powers, consultation of diviners and herbalists, use of amulets and various forms of medicinal concoctions, believe in the life after death, ancestor worship and efficacy of local medicine and charms, divided attention to Allah and various dimensions of associating partners with Allah which has resulted to misunderstanding among the Yoruba Muslims scholars due to their different background.

Islām does not condemn indigenous cults and customs. In fact, rather than discredit them; the Muslim *Ulamā'* modified them and shared in religious ceremonies such as fertility rites and other ceremonies. Therefore, understanding the role of the un-Islamic trend among the Muslims in Ilorin, Kwara state is crucial and reviewing the traditional practices among the Islamic preachers. Thus, the researcher aims to analyse the history of some traditional practices that have been embraced by Muslim scholars of then highlight the circumstances behind these practices as well as to suggest possible solutions to reconcile among Muslim scholars in the Nigerian society. Consequently, the study answers the following questions

- What are the traditional beliefs and practices in Ilorin Kwara State prior to *Islām*?
- What are the reasons for heterogeneity persisting among some Yoruba speaking Muslims of (Ilorin) Kwara state?
- Are these beliefs and practices Islamic?
- What are the solutions to this problem of un-Islamic creeds and practices?

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this study is qualitative. The researcher basically focuses on the primary and secondary sources to gather information for answering the research questions and objectives of this study. Such review consisted the related journals, the printed and un-printed books. The researcher will use the descriptive and analytical methods to analyze the research questions posed in this study. The descriptive method will be used to describe the reasons of heterogeneity persisting among some Yoruba speaking Muslims of (Ilorin) Kwara state and the solutions to this problem of un-Islamic creeds and practices.

3. FINDINGS

Yoruba Traditional Beliefs and Practices in Ilorin before Islam

The Pre-Islamic Yoruba Religion

In Yoruba cosmogony, it is believed that God is Supreme, Immanent, Creator, Unique etc., but He is too great to be approached directly. So, they take to divinities that they see as intermediaries, off spring and ministers of God in the 'theocratic government of the world'.¹ (a) Primordial (a); these, they believe, lived in the heaven since the creation of the heaven, (b) Deified ancestors- these were human beings that lived extraordinary and mysterious lives on earth, when they died, they were 'canonised' or deified as gods. For instance, *Sango*, god of Thunder (*Jakuta*) in Yoruba land is a pointer to this fact. (c) The personification of natural forces and phenomena- it includes myriad of spirits that are associated with trees, rivers, lakes, mountains, etc. The *Olumo* rock in Abeokuta and *Oke-Ibadan* at Ibadan are classical examples. These divinities in Yoruba land are said to be 1700, and they include: *Orinsa-nla*, *Orunmila*, *Ogun*, *Esu*, *sango Sanpona*, *Osun*, *Oya* and *Ayelala* and they have their different portfolios and functions.

All these divinities are worshipped so that man will be in good relation with them by liturgy; which includes: libation, invocation, offering, prayer, songs, posture and attitude at worship, and various forms of sacrifice with various things which are determined by taste and the occasion. It can be in form of sheep, goat, egg, yam and other food items. The sacrifice may be used for preventive, foundation, votive, meal and drink, propitiation and substitutionary offering or sacrifice.² It should be noted that pouring out of liquid or some spirits on the ground for the invisible spirits to sanction the blessing, is very common among all the elements of the liturgy. They have both objects and places of worship. The priests serve as official servants of divinity; they are the mediators between god or divinity and man. There is also a significant role played by the medicine men, magicians and herbalists.³ Their belief in god can also be termed as 'Henotheism' which is adherence to one particular god out of several gods and goddesses.

Superstitions

According to *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, superstition is 'belief that some objects or actions are lucky and unlucky, or that they cause events to happen, based on old ideas of magic'.⁴ It is used in Latin to mean unreasonable or excessive belief in fear or magic; especially a foreign or fantastic idea, and it thus came to mean a 'cult' in the ancient Roman Empire.⁵ Superstition is a belief or notion, not based on reason or knowledge, '...this word is used pejoratively to mean the supposedly irrational beliefs of others'.⁶

Superstition is usually applied to beliefs and practices surrounding luck, prophecy and spiritual beings, most especially the 'irrational' belief that future events can be influenced or foretold by specific and unrelated behaviours or occurrences. instance, luck charms, talismans, etc.⁷ The Medieval scholars claim that this terminology could be applied to any beliefs which are outside of or in opposition to revealed religions, either Christianity or *Islām*. Contemporarily, the terminology

¹ Idowu, E. B. (1973). *African traditional religion: A definition*. Orbis Books.

² J.O. Awolalu and P.A. Dopamu (1985), *West African Religion and West African Traditional Religion*, 85-86

³ *ibid*; 1: J.O. Awolalu and P.A. Dopamu (1985), *West African Religion and West African Traditional Religion*, 85-86

⁴ *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, England: Pearson Education Limited (2005), 1666.

⁵ *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1982),.

⁶ *Ibid*, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1982),.

⁷ T. Robert (1996). *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, Oxford: England Blackwell 10-12.

is used for ‘...concepts without foundation in, or in contravention of, scientific and logical knowledge’.⁸ It is also seen as a part of a people’s culture.⁹ In western traditional custom, for instance, superstitions are associated with bad luck including Friday the 13th, walking under a ladder. Breaking a mirror is seen as causing seven years of bad luck.¹⁰ People, who do not believe in revealed religions, may regard them as superstition. Religious practices are most likely to be labelled ‘superstitious’ by outsiders when they include belief in extraordinary events such as: miracles, life after death, supernatural interventions, apparitions, the efficacy of prayer, charms, incantations, the meaningfulness of omens and prognostications.¹¹

The individual feels that by continuing doing this action, reinforcement or reward will occur. It could be such reinforcement has come to some individuals at certain times in the past as a result of this action, although not always and they believe each time may be one of these occasions.¹²

In Africa, superstitions are common and very widespread, they include claims and conceptions, designed by human beings in the past, and these forms of beliefs permeate all aspects of African thought and culture: family life, trading, politics and social life.¹³ In Yoruba culture for instance, there are many superstitious beliefs and practices which they apparently hold on to.¹⁴ Among the Yoruba, superstition is known as (*eewo*) which literally means taboos. However, critically looking at this term, it is not all superstitions that are taboos or forbidden. Some are merely senseless; others are harmful and contrary to religious beliefs and teachings. The English equivalence does not actually convey its real meaning and essence. The Yoruba in Ilorin and elsewhere adhered to some of these superstitious beliefs and practices long before their acceptance of revealed religions. Some of them up until now still hold on to some of these beliefs, thinking that their observation can bring them benefit and their non-observation can harm them. For instance, in Lagos, some Yoruba believe that to break a mirror will bring you seven years bad luck. Some Yoruba, it appears that despite their acceptance of the revealed religions still hold fast to these beliefs. This invariably influences their actions and inactions and they transmit it from one generation to another.

There is superstitious belief among Yoruba in Kwara State as regards *Abiku*.¹⁵ It is believed that there exists a band of children with supernatural or mystical powers, who have the ability to transfer their spirits into the wombs of expectant mothers whom they pitch upon to torture. After birth these children are supposed to be ‘visited’ by their colleagues, they attend ‘nocturnal meetings’, taking along with them such things they demand from their parents and they are insatiable.¹⁶ Some of these children are allowed to come into the world and die shortly after birth with or without any signs of ill-health and very often they ‘return’ when they are in the best of health. ‘*Abikus*’ are believed to cut short their parents’ joys.¹⁷

Believing the phenomenon of *Abiku* going and coming back, some people give them indelible marks calculated to disfigure them in the hope that, bearing these marks, they may be rejected by their ‘comrades’. Sacrifices in various shapes and kinds are made. They dictate their own sacrifices and eager parents normally comply, because they want to

⁸ P. Edward (2001), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The middle Ages*. (N.P) Continuum International Publishing Group, 10.

⁹ ‘Superstition’ ‘...is also used to denote any general culturally variable beliefs in a supernatural reality which is largely dependent on a given cultural belief set... while its superstitions may relate to things that are not fully understood or understood at all, such as: cemeteries, animals, demons, a devil, deceased ancestors, the weather, ripping one’s socks, death, luck etc.

¹⁰ B.A. Lemu (1989). *Islamic Studies for Senior Secondary Schools*, Lagos: IPB 117.

¹¹ Ibid1, B.A. Lemu (1989). *Islamic Studies for Senior Secondary Schools*, Lagos: IPB 117.

¹² <http://journals.royalsociety.org/content/v61648mh87863528>, retrieved 16/04/2018

¹³ <http://www.iheu.org/node/2856>, retrieved 16/04/2018

¹⁴ Okunola, R. A., & Ojo, M. O. D. (2016). Re-assessing the Relevance and Efficacy of Yoruba Gods as Agents of Punishment: A study of Sango and Ogun. *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology*, 7(4), 1057-1076.

¹⁵ Ellis, A. B. (1894). *The Yoruba-speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa: Their Religion, Manners, Customs, Laws, Language, Etc. With an Appendix Containing a Comparison of the Tshi, Gã, Ewe, and Yoruba Languages*. Chapman and Hall

¹⁶ : Balogun, M. A. (2011). *Syncretic beliefs and practices amongst Muslims in lagos state Nigeria; with special reference to the Yoruba speaking people of Epe* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham)

¹⁷ Ibid 3, B.A. Lemu (1989). *Islamic Studies for Senior Secondary Schools*, Lagos: IPB 117

stop him from 'going away' any more.¹⁸ They give them such names as 'Kokumo', 'he does not die any more'. 'Malomo' 'don't go any more', 'Kosoko' 'no hoes' (for digging graves). 'Duro-sinmi', 'tarry behind to bury me'. As a result of this, many superstitious rituals are carried out for the expectant mother in order to ward off this phenomenon and to serve as 'immunization' for her against the onslaught of *Abiku* spirits.¹⁹

There is also superstitious belief as regards the days of the week with some days classified as auspicious and some as ominous. These days determine when to hold an occasion and vice-versa. All these have their specific names as *Ojo Aiku*, (Sunday) *Ojo Aje* (Monday), *Ojo Isegun* (Tuesday), *Ojo Ojoru*, (Wednesday), *Ojo Ojobo* (Thursday), *Ojo Eti* (Friday), *Ojo Abameta* (Saturday). The names of these days connote various things and determine the activities of those days. Moreover, there is a superstitious belief as regards to a virgin, at whose first menstrual period a chicken has to be killed, symbolising sacrifice (*etutu*) for the blood she will be experiencing every month. A woman who is deflowered by her husband must give sacrifice and gifts will be sent to her parents.²⁰

Belief in Witchcraft

According to Russel, witchcraft is the employment of mysterious supernatural powers involving magic and sorcery to wreak evil on the people, the power is organic and hereditary.²¹ Withcraft is to belief that someone possesses somesupernatural powers by which harm can be effected.²² Witchcraft is also considered as the 'practice of magic, especially the use of spells and the invocation of evil spirits'.²³

Writing on witchcraft and the malevolent activities of witches and wizards, Reverend Evangelist J.O. Balogun of the God's miracle Evangelical Ministry, who himself admitted to have Witchcraft may be grouped into three sectional parts: the *agude*, *agude*, (in Yoruba accent) and the *agudegude*'. The *agudegude* are the most powerful ones called *Oshorong'a*'. They are hermaphrodites. They possess both male and female organs. They are the wicked. They transform themselves into black cats and birds. They change into any form of animal of their choice.

Indeed, the belief in witchcraft among the Africans, Yoruba inclusive, is ubiquitous and one cannot make a categorical statement about it and their activities unless one belongs to that secret society. Nevertheless, the activities of withces are well known in African communities and all evils are attributed to them.²⁴ Idowu claims that witchcraft is a reality in Africa.²⁵ Most of the Yoruba also share the same view regardless of their educational background, economic, social and religious status. There are many Muslim Clerics or *Imām* as witch doctors, who give people charms and amulets to counter or protect against the diabolical influence of witchcraft.²⁶

Many Scholars of African Traditional Religion explain that the main source of information concerning witchcraft is obtained from confessions made by witches themselves.²⁷ It is these confessions that make people believe that witches actually exist; although modern scientists and psychologists have debunked this claim saying that these so called confessions are made under pressure, duress and threat, or when they are delirious and not conscious of what they are saying. But such confessions according to a pre-scientific and naturalistic approach may be upheld; and the Yoruba anti-

¹⁸ Ibid 5: Balogun, M. A. (2011). *Syncretic beliefs and practices amongst Muslims in lagos state Nigeria; with special reference to the Yoruba speaking people of Epe* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham).

¹⁹ Ibid 4; Ellis, A. B. (1894). *The Yoruba-speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa: Their Religion, Manners, Customs, Laws, Language, Etc. With an Appendix Containing a Comparison of the Tshi, Gã, Ewe, and Yoruba Languages*. Chapman and Hall

²⁰ Ibid, p.4; B.A. Lemu (1989). *Islamic Studies for Senior Secondary Schools*, Lagos: IPB 117

²¹ B. Russell, (1993). 'Withcraft' in A.C. Lehmann & J.E. Meyers (eds), *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion, An Anthropological Study of the Supernatural*, (3rd ed.), California: Mayfield Publishing 198,

²² T.N.O Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion*, 150-151; J.S.Eades, *Changing Culture: The Yoruba Today*, 124-125

²³ S. Soanes and A. Stevenson (1985), *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 1656; J.O. Ibid 2: Awolalu & P.A. Dopamu (1979), *West African Traditional Religion*, 197-200.

²⁴ Ibid, p.3; M.J. Field,(1999) *Religion and the Medicine of the Ga People*, 80-82.

²⁵ I.E. Bolaji (1970), 'The Challenge of Witchcraft', *Orita*, Vol. iv, No.1, June, , 16.

²⁶ A.R.I. (1992) Doi, *Islam in Nigeria*, 246-247.

²⁷ Ibid 3: E.E. Evans-Pritchard. (1937), *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 11-13

wickedness divinities (i.e. *Ayelala*) single out wicked witches for punishment.²⁸

Some scholars of African Traditional Religion have come up with distinctive features of witches which include: 'Witchcraft is intangible; it cannot be touched or handled, it is psychic; you cannot see it physically when it performs its action, it is shrouded in secrecy; a witch enjoys secrecy; whenever she goes about her 'service' or 'trade' she disguises herself using bird or familiar animal which she works constantly with, or flying to their assembly.'²⁹

In other words, man looks to the superior divine forces for help, protection and security against evil spirits and the forces of evil which can hamper his progress and expose him to danger. He, in the same vein, harnesses the lower spirits in nature like medicine, witchcraft, magic in order to fulfil and achieve his worldly goals which are varied and numerous without caring about the consequences of such means that he makes use of in order to amass his worldly desire. It may be difficult for some Yoruba Muslims in Kwara State to uncompromisingly believe in Allah according to the Prophet's teachings in so far as the Yoruba society is concerned.

Black magic; Charms and Amulets (Oogun)

'Black' magic is the magic that is believed to use the power of the devil or invocation of evil spirits for evil purposes as opposed to white magic which is used for good purposes.³⁰ 'Black' magic is also known as dark magic; it is a form of sorcery that draws on assumed malevolent powers. It may be used for dark purposes or malevolent acts that deliberately cause harm in some way, it is also known as the dark arts of magic and dark side of magic. It is one of the most disturbing elements in African life; the other two are sorcery and witchcraft.³¹ These terms, black and white do not have any racial prejudice.

In modern times, people use this term to describe magic that causes harm. Black magic will be invoked to kill, to steal, to injure, to cause misfortune for personal gain without regard to the harmful consequences to others. Some people believe that not everything that is called black magic truly has malevolent intentions behind it; some believe that it has beneficial and benevolent uses, such as killing off diseases or pests or rather its effect is malevolent by causing death to insects. Bailey claims that both black and white magic are forms of sorcery.³² A charm, technically, means an object, act or saying that is believed to have magic power or a very small object worn on a chain, necklace or bracelet.³³

Some Yoruba in kwara State usually use the Qur'ān in a talisman-like manner in grave situations, for instance, a bed-ridden and seriously ill person would have a holy book placed under part of the bed or cushion, or worn around the waist for protection, blessing and written to be washed and drunk. They usually call it *naqali*, *tira* or *hantu*.³⁴

Both magic and medicine have the following characteristics in common: they have the same name; *Oogun* or *Egbogi* or *Isegun*; they are controlled by the same divinity *Osanyin*; they are sometimes prescribed with certain instructions that must be followed in order to be efficacious; ritual is common among the two; they depend on spiritual belief; incantations are common to both; sacrifice is common to both; they have common root; man's sense of need, they are symbolic; their efficacy lies in the appropriate use of supernatural agencies; taboos are common to the two. They both have specialists dealing with the forces employed, it is sometimes difficult to say where prayer ends and magic begins.

Besides, magical-medicine as practiced by Muslim *Aafaa* (clerics) today is called *Tira* but experience has shown that this *Tira* as it is done today, its ingredients are not only Qur'anic verses written on paper, it also involves the use of animate and inanimate objects as practised in typical Yoruba magic.³⁵ Many Yoruba *Aafaa* also make use of magic, medicine and

²⁸ J.O. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, 83. A.B. Elias, *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa their Religion, Manners, Customs, Laws, Language. Etc.*, 116

²⁹ Ibid 4: Awolalu & P.A. Dopamu (1979), *West African Traditional Religion*, 197-200

³⁰ C. Soanes & A. Stevenson (1965), *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* 988

³¹ Mbiti, J. S. (1990). *African religions & philosophy*. Heinemann..

³² Lucis Publishers (1970),3-6;<http://www.thelemapedia.org/index.php/magical/Formulae>; visit also,http://www-islamawareness.net/BlackMagic_fatwa003.html, accessed, 10/05/2018

³³ *Longman English Dictionary*, 248,

³⁴ Ibid 7: Balogun, M. A. (2011). *Syncretic beliefs and practices amongst Muslims in lagos state Nigeria; with special reference to the Yoruba speaking people of Epe* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham)

³⁵ Ibid 8: Balogun, M. A. (2011). *Syncretic beliefs and practices amongst Muslims in lagos state Nigeria; with special*

incantation in their *Tira* magical–medicine. In fact, this practice by most Yoruba *Aafaa* is an overlay of the practice of Yoruba magic and medicine.³⁶ This practice is retained by *Aafaa* which they believe is a means of attracting people to *Islām* because it conforms to the superstitious beliefs of the people. The Yoruba believe and fear the spirit world; hence they make extensive use of amulets, charms, magic-medicine in their daily life. They are found at the entrance of the houses to drive away enemies, shops to attract customers, on cars and buses for safe driving, by babies to prevent infant mortality, buried in the ground on which the foundation of a house is laid.³⁷

Oracles /Diviners

An oracle in Ancient Greece was believed to be someone who could communicate with the gods; give advice to the people and tell them what would happen. Oracle is from the Latin word *oraculum*, taken from *orare*, to speak; it is also seen as a priest or priestess acting as a medium for divine advice or prophecy in a classical antiquity or an infallible authority.³⁸

The diviner seeks to interpret and unveil the mysteries of human life; to also convey the messages of the gods; to give guidance in daily affairs and settle disputes; to uncover the past and to look into the future; he may not be a priest. Generally, a diviner is also an expert in medicines and herbs, in addition to his work as a seer.³⁹ The Yoruba see the oracle god as the elder brother to *Osanyin*, the doctor's god, being thousands of years older than *Osanyin* and so the diviner knows all the herbalist's remedies. It is believed that the diviner amasses a vast store of secret knowledge; and has a deep acquaintance with human nature, he is seen as a wise man of the village, is also regarded as a friend of the communities. He plays the role of a counsellor, judge, comforter, supplier of assurance and confidence during people's crises etc; the profession is honourable and highly respected.⁴⁰

The Yoruba divination system, known as the *Ifa* system, is one of the most highly developed in West Africa.⁴¹ The *Ifa* system is associated with the cult of *Orunmila* among the Yoruba and is based on sixteen basic and derivative figures called *Odu*. These figures are obtained by the manipulation of sixteen palm nuts called *Ikin* or by the cast or toss of a chain or string of eight half pods. This string or chain is called *Opele*.⁴²

Some practitioners inherit this from their fathers. Training involves learning the names and signs of divination figures, the proverbs and stories connected with them and the practice, rites and cult of divination. There is usually a final ceremony attended by other diviners in the area, when the new diviner is authorised to practise, the initiation being brought to a climax by the new diviner taking 'flames from a lamp into his hands, without his skin being burnt'. After that, he prays alone daily to *Orunmila*, and once a month together with his family, for whom he then prays.⁴³

Among the Muslims in Yoruba land, some religious leaders or Muslim clerics (*Aafaa*) also practise divination and many clients from all walks of life patronise them daily. They consider it as a lucrative business, in addition to their provision of charms and amulets.⁴⁴ The Yoruba believe that they originated from the Middle-East, and some scholars have conjectured that the *Ifa* oracle of the Yoruba might have been derived from the Arabic term *al-Fīl*, also the name of the deity *Orunmila* is thought to be the corruption of *al-Raml* (the divination) as a short form of *Ḍarb al-Raml* meaning 'divination by sand'.⁴⁵ The Yoruba Muslim or Yoruba Muslim *Aafaa* diviners also have a similar type of oracle to the *Ifa*, but the only difference is that the sand especially brought from Makkah replaces the traditional *Iroko* dust used by *Babalawo*.

reference to the Yoruba speaking people of Epe (Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham)

³⁶ P.A.Dopamu & A.S.Agbetola (1990-1992). 'The Influence of Traditional Magic and Medicine on Tira Magical-Medicine in Yoruba land and their Contemporary Relevance', *Senate Research*, , 8.

³⁷ Ibid 1; Doi, A. R. I. (1968). The Political Role of Islam in West Africa. *Islamic Quarterly*, 12(4),

³⁸ *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, 1158.

³⁹ Ibid 3, Mbiti, J. S. (1990). *African religions & philosophy*. Heinemann.

⁴⁰ Ibid 4, Mbiti, J. S. (1990). *African religions & philosophy*. Heinemann.

⁴¹ This is the method of divination common among the Yoruba whether Muslim or Non-Muslim.

⁴² J.O. Omosade & P.A. Dopamu,(1979). *West African Traditional Religion*, 44

⁴³ Ibid : Balogun, M. A. (2011). *Syncretic beliefs and practices amongst Muslims in lagos state Nigeria; with special reference to the Yoruba speaking people of Epe* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham)

⁴⁴ Ibid: Balogun, M. A. (2011). *Syncretic beliefs and practices amongst Muslims in lagos state Nigeria; with special reference to the Yoruba speaking people of Epe* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham)

⁴⁵ G. Parrinder, (1985)*Religion in an African City*, 81.

4. CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF RELIGIOUS HETEROGENEITY AMONGST YORUBA MUSLIMS IN ILORIN KWARA STATE

Religious heterogeneity in superstitions

Looking critically at these various superstitious beliefs and practices that were enumerated in the previous chapter, one will glean that many of them connote heterogeneity as irrational belief in things that do not have any effect except in psychological or traditional culture.⁴⁶ The issue of 'Abiku' for instance, which literally means 'child predestined to death' or the birth of the 'twins' is another major superstitious belief among many Yoruba Muslims.⁴⁷ In the former, they believe that there are some children that have mystical powers who have the ability to transfer their spirits into the wombs of the expectant mothers and they torture them, and after birth these children are visited by their colleagues and they attend nocturnal meetings taking their complaints to these 'nocturnal meetings' which their parents are yet to fulfil for them and they die shortly after birth and return to their mothers as they will. Based on this phenomenon, some Yoruba give them indelible marks in order to disfigure them, for example, burning their toes, and various sacrifices are performed in order to stop them from 'going away'.⁴⁸

Islamic Ruling on Superstition

Islām is a religion of knowledge, enlighten and conviction. It does not condone any practice or belief that is based on slavish adherence or follower ship. The Qur'ān states: 'when it is said to them: 'Follow what Allah has revealed, they say: 'Nay! We shall follow the ways of our fathers.'" "What! Even though their fathers were void of wisdom and guidance'.⁴⁹ Ibn Kathīr is of the opinion that this verse was revealed to reprimand the Pre-Islamic Arabs of Makkah to stop emulating the bad practice of their fore fathers.⁵⁰ But Qurtubī asserts that the verse was revealed in condemnation of all forms of ignorant emulation (*taqlīd*).⁵¹ In several places in the Qur'ān, Allah emphasizes the sacrosanct role of knowledge and the acquisition of education. The first revelation itself centres on education and literacy where Allah states: 'Read in the name of Your Lord that created. He created mankind from clot. Read'⁵² these verses and several others from the Qur'ān really recapitulate the place of education and enlighten in Islam.⁵³ In other words, *Islām* from the outset has made it abundantly and crystal clear that it is a religion of enlightens and knowledge.⁵⁴ *Islām* was the first educational movement known to the Arabian Peninsula.⁵⁵ The primary goal of such a movement was to instill accurate understanding of the religion of *Islām*, and the avoidance of superstition.⁵⁶ A plethora of the sayings and actions of the Prophet also emphasized the importance of acquisition of knowledge and made it compulsory. The acquisition of knowledge is highly rewardable and it is a form of striving.⁵⁷ The inference here is that in *Islām*, knowledge and education is inextricably and symbiotically interwoven; one without the other cannot function. The thrust of Islamic religion is that the essence of the creation of humankind is to serve Allah, but such servitude to Allah is practically impossible without our knowledge of how, or the modus operandi of serving Him. That is why submission to Allah is largely dependent on conviction based on knowledge. This assertion was demonstrated by Prophet Ibrahim (AS) with his people, when he destroyed their idols and queried the

⁴⁶ Ibid: Balogun, M. A. (2011). *Syncretic beliefs and practices amongst Muslims in lagos state Nigeria; with special reference to the Yoruba speaking people of Epe* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham)

⁴⁷ A.B. Ellis, *Yoruba –Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa; thei Religion, Manners, Customs, Laws, Language, etc.*, 111-112

⁴⁸ Ibid 1; D oi, A. R. I. (1971). The Yoruba Mahdī. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 119-136.

⁴⁹ A.Y. Ali (1998). *Modern English Translation of the Holy Qur'ān, Meanings and Commentary*, Kansas City USA: Manar International Q2; 171, 64; Q5; 104, 92.

⁵⁰ Ibn Kathir, Ismael, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, vol 1, Riyadh: Maktabat Riyadh al-Hadithat (nd), 205

⁵¹ Daar- al-Kitab al-Arabiyy (1997), Al- Qurtubī, Muhammad ibn Ahmad, *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, 1st ed. Bayrut, Lebanon 206

⁵² Qur'ān, 96;1-5

⁵³ Qur'ān, 3; 19, 20; 114, 39; 9, 58; 11.

⁵⁴ M.A. Balogun, et al., (2009). *Islamic Antidote to the Problem of corruption in Tertiary Institutions*. A paper presented at International conference on Corruption in Academia and State of Education in Africa at Ijanikin, Lagos 8.

⁵⁵ A.M. Munir, (1981). *Tarikh-al-Tarbiyyah al-Islamiyyah*, Cairo: Maktab al-Turath 93.

⁵⁶ A.R. Saheed(1991). 'Teaching and Learning in Early Islam: A Discourse on an Intellectual Tradition' in *Correlates of Islam*, 191.

⁵⁷ A A. Nawawi, *Riyād aṣ- sāliḥīn*, 198.

rationale behind its worship which they could not defend.⁵⁸ Prophet Yūsuf put the same rhetorical question to his companions in the prison.⁵⁹ *Islām* is a religion of logic.⁶⁰ Superstition is devoid of knowledge and logical reasoning.

The Qur'ān does not leave anybody in doubt that one of the characteristics of the human being is his ability to think and reason. This unique characteristic sets us above other creatures and constantly in this Book; *Islām* calls our attention to think right and reason in the right direction. Allah commands us to 'think',⁶¹ 'reason',⁶² and 'reflect'.⁶³ Muslims believe that whatever we do, we should ask ourselves logically, why are we doing this?

Heterogeneity involved in the Belief and Practice of Witchcraft

Witchcraft, in some of its different meanings and connotations, are reminiscence of heterogeneity. Witchcraft involves the use of supernatural power for harmful and evil ends. It also involves the practice of magic, the use of spells and the invocation of evil spirits.⁶⁴ The practice of this magic is not possible without the active participation of the *Jinn* (evil spirit). This practice is tantamount to heterogeneity; because it involves the use of magic and those that practise it quite often have their requests granted. This is due largely to their close association with the *Shayāṭīn* (plural, Satans, evil *Jinn* or devils).⁶⁵ Witchcraft is destructive.⁶⁶ Looking at this critically, one will see that the belief and practice of witchcraft connotes heterogeneity in Islam, because it involves alliance or forming a league with the devils which ultimately results in the destruction of good things. Idolaters and magicians use magic, talismans and chant formulas containing glorification and worship of the *Jinn* and most incantations in use among the Yoruba Muslims contain association of partners with Allah (*Shirk*) by way of the *Jinn*. They are subservient to the *Jinn* in order to satisfy their diabolical request by so doing. They mix their worship of absolute monotheism (*Lā ilah illā lahu*) with the worship and subservience or obeisance to the devils, and this constitutes heterogeneity.

Another area of heterogeneity that is inherent in this nefarious society is that it makes use of charms, incantations, spells and magic and it involves premeditation. All the things used by a sorcerer connote heterogeneity.⁶⁷ All these acts cannot be possible without the active participation of evil *Jinn* and their involvement in the diabolical act. Critically looking at the constituents and components used by the sorcerer, one will certainly see that it contains features of heterogeneity, because all these are usually employed by idolaters who are using devilish and mysterious powers to have their desires fulfilled, which are mostly destructive like inducing love and the use of curses to make someone becomes mad. Muslims belief is that they normally please the *Jinn* by doing its biddings in many of their materials, such as: incantations, spells, etc. They used connote calling on others beside Allah who has power over everything, and that engenders heterogeneity.

Islamic Ruling on the Belief and Practice of Witchcraft

Islām recognises the existence of evil power and practice of magic and its efficacy which may affect people psychologically and physically. But its effects are largely dependent on Allah's will.⁶⁸ In Surah 113, Allah specifically refers to the practice of witchcraft, when He states:

Say: I seek refuge with (Allah), the Lord of the daybreak from the evil of what He has created. And from the evil of the darkening (night) as it comes with its darkness; (or the moon as it sets or goes away). And from the evil of those who practise witchcraft when they blow in the knots. And from the evil of the envier when he envies.⁶⁹

⁵⁸ Qur'ān 21: 65-67.

⁵⁹ Qur'ān 12: 40.

⁶⁰ A.O. Adefuye, (2005). *Lecture Modules on Philosophy and Logic*, Ijanikin: Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education Press 3-4.

⁶¹ Qur'ān 3:191

⁶² Qur'ān 2:44

⁶³ Qur'ān 16:67 & 69

⁶⁴ S. Soanes & A. Stevenson (1656), *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*,.

⁶⁵ Qur'ān, 2:102.

⁶⁶ Ibid 2, I.A. Ogunbiyi (1975). *Nūrul al-Bāb-The Litmus Test of Pure Islam as Interpreted by Shaykh Uthman bin.Fodio*, 24-25

⁶⁷ Ibid 3: Awolalu & P.A. Dopamu (1979), *West African Traditional Religion*, 197-200.

⁶⁸ Qur'ān 2:102, 10:77, 81-82, 20:69-67, 72:6.

⁶⁹ M.T. Hilal & M.M. Khan,(1985) *Translation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'ān in the English Language*, 855,

In other words, these particular verses of the Qur'ān and others rightly establish the fact that sorcery really exists. Most of the exegetes of the glorious Qur'ān emphasize that this particular verse '...and from the evil of those who practise witchcraft when they blow in the knot. This verse refers to activities of the Witchcraft.⁷⁰ The Prophet in this regard identifies tying and blowing on knots (i.e. witchcraft) as another form of *Sihr* (sorcery or magic)⁷¹. This verse is referring to the evil of the witches who blow on strings and then tie them in knots and cast spells on them.⁷²

Yusuf Ali comments that it is women that blow on knots, because it was a favorite form of witchcraft practised by perverted women and he sees such secret arts as causing a psychological terror.⁷³ By implication, the verse includes all types of witchcraft; those who tie a number of knots in string and blow on them while reciting magic spells. There is no doubt that there are some people who claim to harm others through magic. They achieve their feat by means of *shirk* and drawing close to the evil *Jinn* (*Shayāṭīn*) and associating others with Allah. The witches call on unseen beings, devils, to inflict harm on other people through magic, secret use of poison, or hidden tricks of various kinds, ensuring that they get the results of their diabolical machinations.

Islām as a religion does not condone or have anything to do with using supernatural power for harmful and evil ends. In the same vein, it considers the practice of magic and sorcery as devilish. Arrogation of power to harm and to benefit to other than Allah is *shirk* (association of partners with Allah). In fact, Muslims believe that it is the most egregious atrocity which Allah will not forgive except by sincere repentance.⁷⁴ Allah states: 'And invoke not besides Allah any such that will neither profit you nor harm you, but (in case) you did so, you shall certainly be one of the wrong-doers'⁷⁵

Religious Heterogeneity involved in the Belief and Practice of Oracles/Divination

Oracle and divining mean communicating with the gods and instructing people, telling them what will happen in future.⁷⁶ This smacks of syncretism. Consulting diviners is common among many Yoruba.⁷⁷

Another seeming reminiscence of traditionalism in Muslim clerics' divination is that they both sometimes deliver prophecies to their visitor in an ecstatic state;⁸²⁷ something the likes of which some Muslim diviners and some Sufi orders fall into.⁷⁸ Diviners read signs, events, or omens or through an alleged contact with a supernatural agency.⁷⁹

Islamic Ruling on Belief and Practice of Oracles and Divination

As analysed in detail above, oracle, which sometimes known as (*osanyin*) among the Yoruba means communicating with the gods and instructing people and telling them what will happen in future. Divination and consulting an oracle are similar in function, but performed through different means.⁸⁰

In the *Aafaa's* role as *onitira* (writer of amulets or *tira*) or *onisegun* (maker of *Oogun*, 'doctor'), the *Aafaa* utilizes techniques of control made available to him not only by his Arabic literacy, but by his familiarity with the pharmacopoeia stemming from Traditionalist Yoruba sources, especially the Ifa system. The Muslim *Aafaa* diviner does not precisely appropriate the divinational techniques of the *babalawo* (traditional magico-medicine man), preferring to rely on the mysteries of Arabic to enhance his reputation and his business. As *onitira-onisegun*, however, they do borrow Traditionalist techniques of control that are manipulative for good or bad; combining verses of the Qur'ān with *Ifa*

Qur'ān 113: 1-5.

⁷⁰ Ibn Kathir, Ismael, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, 66; Qurtubī, M.A., *Al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, 13; M.S. Kuwait: Ministry of Education (1988). Abdullah Al-Ashqar, *Al-Qur'ān al-Karīm wabil-Hāmish; Zubdat Tafsīr min Fath al-Qadīr*,

⁷¹ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, (1969),. Syria: Dar- al-Hadīth Hadīth no, 3905.

⁷² W.A. Bāli, (2006). *A-Ṣārim al-Battār fi-Taṣṣad lil-Saḥarat,al- Ashrār (The Cutting Edge: How to face Evil Sorcerers)*, translated by H. Kreidly, Beirut: Kitab Al-Alami Lil-Nasher..

⁷³ A.Y. Ali, (1991) *Modern English Translation of the Holy Qur'ān, Meanings and Commentary*, 1479.

⁷⁴ Qur'ān 4:48 & 116, 39:64-67, 3:64, 31; 13, 5:72.

⁷⁵ Qur'ān 10;106 & 107

⁷⁶ Longman *Dictionary of Contemporary English*, 1158.

⁷⁷ O. Odumuyiwa & P.A. Dopamu (1999), *Religion, Science and Culture*, 242.

⁷⁸ M.H. Ansari, (1986). *Sufism and Sharī'ah: A Study of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi's Effort to Reform Sufism*, Leicester: The Islamic Foundation 193.

⁷⁹ www.africaart.com accessed 12/05/18.

⁸⁰ Qur'ān 6:59 & Q. 27:65

originated herbal prescriptions. This quite literal mixing strikes such *Aafaa* as pragmatic and sensible, albeit this practice is an egregious impiety.

The Qur'ān has made it abundantly clear that the knowledge of the unknown belongs to Allah exclusively. Whatever means that is employed either through astrology, palm reading, cards, drawing in sand, casting arrows, reading numbers and reading patterns in animal's entrails. Allah says: 'He knows the unseen, and to none does He disclose anything of the mysteries of His own unfathomable knowledge'.⁸¹ In the Qur'ān, Allah (SWT) affirms, 'Say: none in the heavens or the earth knows the unseen except Allah'.⁸² 'He alone is the keys to the unseen and none knows it except Him alone'.⁸³

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The focus was to appraise the extent to which *Islām*, the knowledge and understanding of *Tawhīd* have brought to bear on the beliefs and practices of the Yoruba traditional culture which was being practised by the Yoruba long before their acceptance of *Islām* in the early 17th/18th century. This study has built on previous work by Yoruba scholars to inculcate the teachings of *Tawhīd*. Heterogeneity, otherwise known in Arabic as '*Takhlīf*' ('mixing') is an age long practice among Muslims in Africa. The approaches and attitudes adopted at different age in different periods to its study however vary. Indeed, there is quite a large amount of literature existing on this subject. In order to gain insight into what scholars - both classical and modern - have written on this subject, an extensive literature review was carried out at the outset of this study. Published materials in the form of books and articles, written in Arabic, Yoruba and English by Muslim and Christian authors as well as authors from African Traditional Religions were reviewed. A step-by-step explanation of the methods adopted in carrying out the research work was given: the rationale, the research questions, the objectives, and the sampling method of random sampling technique.

As a matter of logic and agreement with the research methodology, chapter two of this work gave a brief history of the origin of the Yoruba, marshaling all the theories about the origin of the Yoruba, which all agree upon one point, that the Yoruba migrated into their present areas, and all the theories point to near-Eastern origin. We also traced the history of kwara State, being the location of the study, with emphasis on its traditional, political and cultural milieu. The history of *Islām* in Yoruba land was briefly traced, culminating on proposal of controversial date; of an earlier time scale to the introduction of *Islām*, on the basis that it was being practiced clandestinely because of its vulnerability to traditionalists.

The practice of and belief in the evil machinations of witchcraft which entails seeking other power to benefit or harm aside from Allah constitutes heterogeneity.

To form a league with devils to cause harm or to use sorcery to induce love, madness among others, is evil. It is arrogation or sharing of power between Allah and the devil which is heterogeneous. Also explained in the chapter is the heterogeneity involved in secret societies which entails the formation of cultic groups, allegiance to the group, initiatory rites, rituals, oath takings among members, etc., make it heterogeneous. The mere secrecy itself speaks volumes of its heterogeneity. *Islām* has nothing to do with secrecy. The Qur'ān makes it clear that secret counsels and conspiracies are from the devil.

Having analysed and discussed the various heterogeneous beliefs and practices among the Yoruba Muslims, there is the need to subject those beliefs and practices to critical examination with a view to determining their level of heterogeneity and association of partners with Allah (*shirk*). This was done to determine their deviation from orthodoxy. All these were critically examined in this chapter for the purpose of adjudging their heterodoxy and heresy. Subsequently of this work is the core of the study as it gives the *Islamic* rulings on each of the aforementioned heterogeneous beliefs and practices that are prevalent among the Yoruba Muslims. Each of the heterogeneous beliefs and practices attracted both Qur'anic verses and sayings of the Prophet (S.A.W) and views of orthodox Muslim theologians, disapproving and condemning such practices as they connote idolatry, the most grievous atrocity in *Islām* which Allah will not forgive except if the perpetrator repents and re-admits him/herself into *Islām*. Superstition in *Islām* can be classified as *ṭiyyārah* (bad omen) which the Prophet (S.A.W) condemns as irrational. The power to make things permissible or impermissible belongs only to Allah and Prophet Muḥammad (S.A.W)

⁸¹ Qur'ān 72:26, Q31:34.

⁸² Qur'ān 27:65.

⁸³ Qur'ān 6:59.

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

 Vol. 5, Issue 6, pp: (108-120), Month: November - December 2018, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

Thus, It is recommended that more concerted efforts should be geared towards, public *da'wah*; issues such as: accountability, lawful sources of livelihood, sincere *Īmān* (faith), hardworking, intergrated education, and reliance on Allah with wisdom and beautiful preaching; education against all forms of heterodoxy and heresy in order to reduce the rate of its growth and spread could be embarked upon. In towns in kwara State, where the practice is in vogue, a series of public lectures could be organized. The lectures might also be put on audio-tapes and the internet to ensure wider circulation and continuous benefit.

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