

HETEROGENEOUS PRACTICES AMONG YORUBA MUSLIMS IN NIGERIA WITH A PARTICULAR REFERENCES TO WITCHCRAFT AND DEVINERS

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Abstract	<p><i>This research discusses the history of Islam in Yoruba region which began in the dawn of 18th century. Since no much research so far to systematically study the effects of religious heterogeneity, this research examines the extent to which Yoruba Muslims involve themselves in heterogeneous practices with the intent to highlight the view of Tawḥīd on them. This study notes that religious heterogeneity has long prevailed amidst Yoruba Muslims with its negative impacts left on them. If continuous religious enlightenment can be carried out, the inhamonious elements with the Islamic belief will be wiped out. Using a triangulated method to conduct this study, the findings showed a need for the retrospect the issues correlated with many yoruba muslims'perseverance in heterogeneity and its consequences on their faith (īmān). Meanwhile this study value the great efforts of many muslim scholars to address the issues of spiritual corruption, it narrates that is not yet instil into many Yoruba Muslims within the Yoruba religio-cultural context. Therefore, a concerted effort is necessary in ensuring the Tawḥīdic integrity remains intact.</i></p> <p>Keywords: <i>Yoruba, Heterogeneous, Practices, Witchcraft, Deviners.</i></p>
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INTRODUCTION

Heterogeneous beliefs and practices are manifest themselves in various ways among the Nigeriann Yoruba Muslims. This phenomenon has raised scholarly hot debates among many Muslim scholars of the region. Avast number of Yoruba Muslim scholars have denounced the different heterodox practices among unorthodox Islamic scholars in the region, especially those traditional practices concerning belief in magical and herbal powers, consultation of diviners and herbalists, use of amulets and various forms of herbal concoctions, believe in the life to come after the death, worship of ancestors and effectiveness of local herbs and charms, divided attention to Allah and various dimensions of associating partners with Allah. These sorts of beliefs and practices in the region still remain objects of contension among Yoruba Muslims scholars (Mahmood. A. M, 2019).

Islām does not go against native cults and customs. Indutably, rather than discredit them; Muslim scholars reformed them and shared in religious events such as fertility rites and other events. Therefore, in other to have a better conceptualization of the malicious effects of the unorthodox Islamic trends among Yoruba Muslims in Nigeria, a review of the heterodox practices among some Islamic preachers is deemed of paramount significance. Thus, the researcher aims to analyse the history of some traditional practices that have been embraced by Muslim scholars, and then highlight the circumstances behind these practices as well as suggest possible measures that could lead to reconciliation among Muslim scholars in the Nigerian society. In a nutshell, the study was an attempt to answer the following questions (Mahmood A. M, 2019):

1. What are the traditional practices among Yoruba Muslims prior to *Islām*?
2. What are the reasons for the persistence of heterogeneity among some Yoruba Muslims in Nigeria?
3. Are these practices Islamic?
4. What are the solutions to this problem of un-Islamic creeds and practices?

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 questions and objectives of this study. The tools used in this study are related journals and printed and un-printed books. The descriptive and analytical methods were adopted to analyze the posed research questions. Moreover, the researcher used the descriptive method to describe the reasons for the persistence of heterogeneity among some Yoruba speaking Muslims in Nigeria and the solutions to this problem of un-Islamic practices.

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF YORUBA PEOPLE

Yoruba is a tribe who mostly live in the South-Western part of Nigeria. Originating from Ile Ife, The absolute majority of Yoruba people are mainly engaged in agriculture, while only about 15 percent are merchants, artists and craftsmen. Among the distinguishing characteristics of Yoruba tribe is their inclination towards the formation of large city groups rather than small village groups. The Yorubas represent one of the three major tribes that constitute Nigeria. This tribe are also found living in neighboring countries.

More so, the language spoken by this tribe is one of the most famous languages in Africa. The Yorubas make up almost 35 percent of the Nigeria's entire population, and with those living in the neighboring countries, they amount to 40 million people throughout West Africa. Although the greatest population of Yorubas inhabit the Western part of Nigeria, there are many Yoruba communities in Benin, Ghana, Togo, and the Caribbean. It is very rare to find a Yoruba family without Christians, Muslims, and adherents of an ancient tribal faith. More specifically, the Yorubas are the main inhabitants of Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti and Oyo states, which are subdivisions of the Nigerian territory, whereas they also constitute a sizable proportion of Kwara, Kogi and Edo states (Johnson S., 1966).

Obviously speaking, the Yorubas concentrate in a number of villages, towns and kingdoms led by an Oba (king) or Baale (village chief).

FINDINGS

Yoruba Traditional Practices In Nigeria Before Islam

The Pre-Islamic Yoruba Religion

Traditionally, Yorubas believed that Allah is greater than to be invokled directly, and therefore, they chose to seek the help of small gods that are conceived as middlemen, offspring and the priests of God within the theocratic government of the world (Idowu E. B, 1973). These middlemen are (a) the Primeval – whom they believed as living within the paradise right from its establishment, (b) Idolized precursors - who were human creatures that lived an exceptional and secretive life on earth, and upon their demise, they were declared as saints. Sango, deity of thunder (Jakuta) in Yoruba traditional religion, is a perfect example in this regard. (c) The embodiment of normal powers and marvels - which incorporates heap of spirits that are related with trees, waterways, lakes, mountains, etc. The Olumo shake in Abeokuta and the mount Oke-Ibadan in Ibadan can be good illustrations. These deities in Yoruba are altogether around 1700 with the inclusion of: Orinsa-nla, Orunmila, Ogun, Esu, sango Sanpona, Osun, Oya and Ayelala all of which have their distinctive responsibilities and capacities (Idowu E. B, 1973).

All these deities are extremely respected and man will be in great connection with them by sacrament which involves libation, invocation, offering, supplication, melodies, pose and demeanor at worship, and different shapes of give up with different things which

are decided by taste and the event. This can be in form of sheep, goat, egg, yam and other nourishments. The give up may be utilized for prevention, establishment, votive, supper and drink, satisfaction and substitutionary sacrifice (Awolalu J. O., & Dopamu P. A, 1979).

It ought to be famous that pouring out of fluid or a few spirits on the ground for the imperceptible spirits to endorse the favoring, is exceptionally common among all the components of the ritual. They have both objects and places of revere. The clerics serve as official hirelings of godlikeness; they are the intermediaries between human and God. There is also a critical part played by the herbalists, conjurers and cultivators (Awolalu J. O., & Dopamu P. A, 1985). Their conviction in god can moreover be named as 'Henotheism' which is clinging to one specific god out of a few divine beings and female deity.

Practice And Belief In Witchcraft

Concurring to Russel, witchcraft is the work of strange supernatural powers including enchantment and divination to wreak fiendish on the individuals, the control is natural and hereditary. Withcraft is a possession of somesupernatural powers by which to help or harm living beings. Witchcraft is additionally considered as the practice of enchantment, particularly the use of spells and the conjuring of fiendish spirits (S. Soanes & A. Stevenson, 1985).

Talking about witchcraft and the malicious works out of witches and wizards, Reverend Evangelist J.O. Balogun of the God's wonder Outreaching Benefit, who himself conceded to have this magical power, affirmed that witchcraft may be categorized into three sectional parts: the agude, agude (in Yoruba), and the agudegude'. The agudegude are the preeminent viable ones called Oshorong'a'. They are bisexuals. They are fiendish. They alter themselves into dim cats and winged animals. They change into any shape of other creatures they wish.

Indeed, belief in witchcraft among Yorubas is comprehensive, is ubiquitous and one cannot make a categorical enunciation around it and their works out unless one incorporates a put to that puzzle society. All things considered, the works of witches are well known in African communities and all fiascos are attributed to them. Idowu claims that witchcraft is real in Africa. Most of the Yoruba as well share the same idea in any case of their educator establishment, monetary, social and ardent status.

There are various Muslim Clerics among Yorubas who are in support of witchcraft, by permitting the use of charms and extraordinary pieces of jewelry to counter the effects of magical spells. Many scholars of African traditional religion clarify that the confessions made by witches themselves represent a major source of witchcraft information. It is through these confessions that people acknowledge the existence of witches, even though cutting edge analysts and clinicians disproved this assertion, substantiating that these so call confessions are usually made under pressure.

A few analysts of African Routine Religion have come up with specific highlights of witches as thus: Witchcraft cannot be seen nor taken care of, it cannot be physically seen when it moves, it is secured in secret; a witch increases in value puzzle; at anything point she goes around her 'service' or 'trade' she covers herself utilizing feathered animal or recognizable animal which she works continuously with, or flying to their assembly. In other words, man looks to the predominant divine qualities for offering help, security and security against savage spirits and the qualities of beastly which can deter his progress and reveal him to peril.

He, in the same vein, handles the lower spirits in nature like medicine, witchcraft, charm in orchestrate to fulfill his common targets which are changed and different without caring nearly the comes about of such suggests that he makes utilize of in organize to accumulate his common need. It may be troublesome for some Yoruba Muslims in Nigeria to adopt without compromise a belief system that competely agrees with the Qur'an and Prophetic tradition (Idowu E. B, 1973).

Oracles /Diviners

In Old Greece, an oracle was known as a person who might converse with the divine beings with regard to a future occurrence. The term 'oracle' is derived from the Latin 'oraculum', meaning to talk. It is additionally seen as a religious leader who represents a medium of divine exhortation or prediction in an ancient relic or an dependable specialist. The seer seeks to decipher and disclose the riddles of human life; to pass on messages of the divine beings; to give directions on day by day issues and settle debate; to reveal the past and to predict the future.

By and large, a soothsayer is a master in herbs in addition to his soothsaying profession. The Yorubas opine that the god of oracle is the senior brother to Osanyin, the doctor's god, being thousands of a long time more seasoned than Osanyin and so the soothsayer knows all the herbalist's cures. It is accepted that the soothsayer hoards a huge quantity of mystery information associating with human nature and fortunes. He is seen as a shrewd man of the town who is respected as a companion of the communities. He plays an important role as a guide, judge, comforter, provider of affirmation and certainty amid people's emergencies etc. The Yoruba fortune telling framework, which is called Ifa, is one of the foremost profoundly created in West Africa.

The Ifa framework is related to the religion of Orunmila and it is based on sixteen fundamental and subordinate figures known as Odu. These figures are procured from the so-called Ikin comprising of sixteen palm nuts or by a chain of eight half units known as opele. Some professional fortune tellers inherited this knowledge from their ancestors. Training for Ifa requires a mastery of the names and signs related to the fortune telling figures, the maxims and stories that are pertinent to them and the hone, ceremonies and faction of divination. There is more often than not a last ceremony gone to by other diviners within the region, when the unused seer is approved to hone, the start being brought to a climax by the modern seer taking with 'flames in his hands, without his skin being burnt'. After that, he solely supplicates to Orunmila on a daily basis, and once a month with his family.

Among Muslims in Yorubaland are a few devout pioneers or Muslim clerics (Aafaa) moreover hone divination and numerous clients from all strolls of life disparage them every day. They consider it as a lucrative business, in addition to their arrangement of charms and ornaments. The Yorubas believe that they began from the Middle-East, and a few researchers have insinuated that the Ifa oracle of Yoruba might have been inferred from the Arabic term al-Fīl. Moreover the title of the divinity, Orunmila is thought to be the debasement of al-Raml (the divination) as a brief frame of Ḍarb al-Raml meaning 'divination by sand'. The unorthodox Yoruba Muslim clerics also have a sort of oracle comparable to the Ifa, but contrary in that the sand particularly brought from Makkah replaces the conventional Iroko tidy utilized by Babalawo (Mbiti J. S, 1990).

Ruling Of Islam On Witchcraft Beliefs And Practices

Islām perceives the presence of fiendish control and hone of enchantment and its effects on individuals both in their mental and physical states. But its impacts are always subjective to the will of Allah. In Surah 113, Allah particularly alludes to the hone 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" (al-Qur'an. Al-Falaq: 1-4).

In other words, these Qur'ān verses and others properly build up the truth that divination truly exists. In regard to this verse *"...and from the fiendish of those who hone witchcraft when they blow within the tie"* (al-Qur'an. Al-Falaq: 4), the majority of exegetes claim that this verse alludes to exercises of the Witchcraft. The act of tying and blowing on ties (i.e. witchcraft) is regarded as another form of Siḥr (divination or enchantment). This

verse is alluding to the fiendish of the witches who blow on strings and thereafter tie them in hitches and cast spells on them.

According to Yusuf Ali (1998) blowing on hitches was an action performed by ladies, since it was a preferred shape of witchcraft polished by distorted ladies and that such puzzled expressions generate a mental fear. To sum up, the verse alludes to all sorts of witches who blow on hitches tied in string. It is indubitable that there are a few individuals who hurt others through enchantment. They accomplish their deed by seeking the help of the fiendish Jinn (Shayāṭīn) and small gods. The witches call on inconspicuous creatures, fiends, to deliver hurt on other individuals through enchantment, mystery utilize of harm, or covered up traps of different sorts, guaranteeing that they get the comes about of their fiendish ruses.

In Islām, there is no any basis for an extenuation on the use of magical power either to obtain and counter evil. Rather, it absolutely considers the hone of enchantment and divination as insidious. Arrogation of control to hurt or to advantage any human is condemned. In actual fact, it is one of the practices that incite the wrath of Allah. Allah states:

“And conjure not other than Allah any such that will not one or the other benefit you nor hurt you, but (in case) you did so, you might certainly be one of the wrong-doers” (al-Qur’ān. al-Nisa’: 48 & 116).

Religious Heterogeneity Involved In The Belief And Practice Of Oracles/Divination

Oracles and divining cruel communicating with the divine beings and direction individuals, telling them what will happen in future. Counseling through divination is common among Yorubas. Another practice of similar nature with traditionalism in Muslim clerics’ divination is that they convey predictions to their clients in a delighted state; something the likes of which a few Muslim diviners and a few Sufi orders drop into. Diviners examined signs, occasions, or signs or through a charged contact with a powerful organization (Odumuyiwa O. & Dopamu P.A, 1999).

Ruling Of Islam On The Belief And Practice Of Oracles And Fortunetelling

As examined earlier, oracle, which is known as *osanyin* in Yoruba language implies an act of interfacing with the deities in order to foretell a future action or event (al-Qur’ān. al-An’am: 59 & al-Naml: 65). In the Aafaa’s part as custodians of magical inscriptions, or onisegun (herbalist), the Aafaa makes use of certain methods he can access not because of his proficiency in Arabic, but by the virtue of his mastery of pharmacopoeia which is of Yoruba traditional sources, particularly the Ifa framework.

A Muslim soothsayer does not completely manifest himself with the soothsaying methods of traditional herbalists, but he prefers to hide under the blanket of Arabic so as to obscure his business. As a traditional herbalist, they do combine some traditional herbalist methods such as Ifa with the use of Qur’an verses to accomplish benefits and counter evils. This very strict blending strikes such Muslim clerics as down to earth and sensible, but this hone is an deplorable profanity. The Qur’an has extensively explains that the information of the obscure has a place to Allah solely.

No any act of crystal gazing, palm perusing, drawing in sand, casting bolts, perusing numbers and perusing designs in animal’s insides can unveil the obscurity. The Qur’an says: ‘He Allah knows the unseen, and He does not unveil any secrets with regard to His own incomprehensible knowledge’. He further affirms that none within the heavens and earth fathoms the secret except Him. This is because He alone is the custodian of the keys to the inconspicuous (al-Qur’ān. al-An’am: 59).

Discussion And Conclusion

The focus was to throw light on the view of the Islāmic belief system on the belief associated with the Yoruba classical culture adopted long time ago prior to advent of Islām in their society. This light shedding has built on previous literature by Yoruba

researchers to instill the lessons of Tawhīd.

Heterogeneity, which is known in Arabic as ‘Takhliṭ’ (mixing) is a feature inherent in a good number of Muslims in Africa. However, the ways of studying this phenomenon in different eras have always been different. Undoubtedly, there is plethora of studies on this subject. In an endeavor to contribute to what researchers have produced so far on this subject, a thorough review of literature was done in the beginning. To be precise, a good number of works compiled in Arabic were reviewed, in addition to a range of other works in Yoruba and English written by Muslims, and other works compiled by Christian authors as well as writers from African traditional faith.

In an attempt to scrutinize and discuss about the various heterogeneous beliefs and practices among the Yoruba Muslims, it became necessary to thoroughly examine those beliefs and practices with a view to ascertaining extent of their heterogeneity and association of small gods to Allah. This was fundamentally scrutinized in this paper so as to adjudge their heresy and heterodoxy. In this way of this research is the center of the ponder because it gives the Islamic perspective on each of the previously mentioned heterogeneous convictions and hones that are predominant among the Yoruba Muslims.

Having examined each of the heterogeneous convictions on the basis of the Qur’anic principles and those of the tradition of the Prophet (S.A.W) as well as views of standard Muslim scholars, they are found as condemned belief practices as they are antithetical to the principles of Tawhid. So, they are among the foremost egregious abomination in Islām which Allah will not excuse, and the custodian or adherent of which do have to re-enter themselves into Islām . Superstition in Islām can be viewed as ṭiyyārah (terrible sign) which is absolutely condemned in Islam. The control to form things reasonable or impermissible has a place as it were to Allah and Prophet Muḥammad (S.A.W).

Hence, It is prescribed that more concerted endeavors need to be put towards, open exhortations on issues such as: responsibility, legal means of livelihood, true belief, dedicated, intergrated knowledge, and dependence on Allah with shrewdness and wonderful preaching; education against all shapes of heterodoxy and sin in arrange to diminish the rate of its development and spread may be set out upon. In towns in kwara State, where the hone is in fashion, a arrangement of open addresses may be organized. The addresses might moreover be put on audio-tapes and the web to guarantee more extensive circulation and ceaseless benefit.

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