

EXAMINATION OF PRACTICE OF TAWHID (MONOTHEISM) AMONG OKUN MUSLIMS IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Islam as a substantive religion that deals with all aspects of life with the total submission to the will of Allah, whose tenets also negate the concept of polytheism' or heterogeneous belief in any form of divinity. This paper aimed at looking into the various beliefs and cultural practices aside the Islamic monotheism (Islamic faith) in Okun, with the view of bringing out the real concept of Islamic monotheism (Tawhid), i.e. oneness of Allah as the major priority from the perspective of The Qu'ran and Hadith, and the scholars' views on the concept of syncretism. The study reveals that there is a prevalence of religious heterogeneity among many Okun Muslims, and the impact affects them negatively, of which if continuous awareness and campaign against these beliefs were not carried out, this phenomenon will continue among these Muslims. Hence, this research work proffers solutions to such problem. The paper concludes that necessary effort should be intensified by all stakeholders in the area of promoting the effective instillation of practical Tawhid (monotheism) as regards the real teachings of Islamic beliefs.

Keywords: Beliefs, Cultural, Practices, Okun, Islam, Monotheism

Introduction

Islam implies peace and the worship of the supernatural controlling power, it is a way of life. Every community in African setting has a culture peculiar to it; this is also true of Okun land before the advent of Islam. The Okuns had their culture, i.e. way of life, but with the advent of Islam some of their cultural activities were influenced by the Islamic teachings. However, some non-permissible elements of their culture were mixed with some Islamic tenets to form some unique ways of life to the Okuns. Islam as a way of life is not against any culture or tradition as long as no element of the culture or tradition contradicts the teaching of Islam. Any culture, custom or tradition that falls within the framework provided in the basic guidelines of Islam can be rightly described as Islamic, while anything that contradicts Islam may be viewed as un-Islamic.

Hence, this paper focuses on the various traditions and religious beliefs and practices which the Okun Muslim perpetrates simultaneously with Islam that shows their being in difference to Islamic tenets. It also aims at bringing out the Islamic position on each of these beliefs. A critical survey in the heterogeneous beliefs and practices of the Okun brethren have hitherto clung onto. Thus, the seed will be separated from the shaft. Choosing to be a Muslim is not the issue, but the greatest challenge envisaged by the contemporary Muslims i.e the Okun Muslims in some communities and areas in Kogi State is being heterogeneous. Despite their proclamation of Islam, we could still notice the shreds or vestiges of traditional beliefs and practices. It should be reiterated that Islam is a religion that encompasses all spheres of our daily lives as the Quran enjoins all Muslims into the religion of Islam wholeheartedly. Allah says "O you who believe, enter into Islam wholeheartedly and follow not the footsteps of Satan for he is to you a vowed enemy (Q 2:208).

Brief History of the Okun tribe of Kogi West

The Okun people are a distinct sub-group of the Yoruba ethnic group located primarily in the western part of Kogi State, Nigeria. The term "Okun" encompasses several Yoruba-speaking communities, notably the Oworo, Bunu, Owe, Ijumu, Yagba, and Ogidi peoples (Adesina, 37). While these communities share a common Yoruba heritage, they have cultivated unique customs and traditions that reflect their geographical and socio-cultural contexts.

Cultural Identity: The Okun people maintain a rich cultural identity that combines elements of Yoruba traditions with local influences. According to Oladele, the Okun communities celebrate various festivals that highlight their agricultural practices and ancestral worship, such as the Oro Festival, which honors deities and ancestors with music, dance, and offerings (Oladele, 102). This festival serves not only as a religious observance but also as a unifying event that fosters community spirit.

Linguistic Ties: Linguistically, the Okun people speak dialects of the Yoruba language, which are influenced by their unique regional experiences. The nuances in their dialects reflect the adaptation of Yoruba linguistic features to accommodate local expressions and idioms, demonstrating their cultural evolution (Afolabi, 56). This linguistic diversity contributes to their distinct identity within the broader Yoruba ethnic group.

Geographical Influence: The geographical location of the Okun people in Kogi State has significantly shaped their customs and traditions. Their interactions with neighboring ethnic groups, along with the region's rich agricultural landscape, have led to the incorporation of diverse practices into their cultural framework. For instance, their traditional practices related to farming, fishing, and trade highlight the influence of their environment on their way of life (Ogunleye, 78).

Social Structure: The Okun people also exhibit unique social structures characterized by strong familial ties and communal living. This is evident in their traditional governance systems, where local chiefs and elders play crucial roles in decision-making and conflict

resolution, maintaining the fabric of their society (Ibrahim, 47). According to historians, the Okun people trace their origins to Ile-Ife, the spiritual and cultural homeland of the Yoruba. The migration from Ile-Ife occurred during various waves that spread Yoruba communities across present-day Nigeria. Over time, the Okun people established settlements in what is now Kogi State, where they engaged in farming, trading, and crafts (Ajayi & Crowder, 19).

The Okun society was traditionally organized into kingdoms and chiefdoms, each governed by local chiefs and traditional councils. The arrival of British colonial rule in the late 19th and early 20th centuries brought significant changes to the region, including the introduction of Christianity, Western education, and new administrative systems. This period marked a shift in the cultural and religious practices of the Okun people, particularly with the spread of Christianity (Akinwumi, 23-31).

The Okun people are estimated to number around 1 million, though precise figures are challenging to determine due to the dispersed nature of their settlements and the lack of specific census data for sub-ethnic groups. The majority of the Okun population is concentrated in several local government areas within Kogi State, including Kabba-Bunu, Ijumu, Yagba East, Yagba West, and Mopa-Muro (Adegbija, 50-68).

Introduction of Islam to the Okun

Islam was introduced to the Okun people primarily through trade and interactions with neighboring Muslim communities. Historical records indicate that the trans-Saharan trade routes facilitated the exchange of goods and ideas, leading to the gradual acceptance of Islam among various Yoruba groups, including the Okun. According to Ibrahim (45), the proximity of the Okun people to Muslim communities, especially during the 19th century, contributed to the slow but steady spread of Islam in the region.

However, the adoption of Islam among the Okun people has been comparatively slower than in other Yoruba groups, such as the Oyo and Ilorin. This difference can be attributed to the Okun people's strong adherence to their traditional beliefs and customs, which provided a barrier to rapid conversion (Afolabi, 88). While many Okun individuals have embraced Islamic practices, the integration of Islam into their cultural identity has been a gradual process, often characterized by syncretism with traditional beliefs (Ogunleye, 120).

In contrast, Christianity, introduced during the colonial period, has had a more significant impact on the religious landscape of the Okun region. Missionary activities began in earnest in the 19th century, leading to the establishment of churches and schools that facilitated the spread of Christian teachings (Adesina, 102). The resilience of Christian communities in the Okun area has resulted in a diverse religious environment, where both Islam and Christianity coexist alongside traditional African religions. The interplay between these religious influences has led to a unique cultural synthesis within the Okun

communities. For instance, many Okun individuals identify as Christians or Muslims while also participating in traditional rituals, highlighting the fluid nature of religious practice in the region (Ibrahim, 47).

Today, it is estimated that about 10-15% of the Okun population practices Islam. This estimation is supported by demographic surveys conducted in Kogi State, which highlight the presence of Muslims within the Okun ethnic group, particularly in urban centers such as Lokoja and Okene (Ogunleye, 135). The establishment of mosques, Islamic schools, and other religious institutions in these areas reflects the community's commitment to practicing their faith. The majority of Okun Muslims adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam, specifically following the Maliki school of thought. This affiliation is prevalent across West Africa, where the Maliki school is recognized for its emphasis on community consensus and the use of local customs in interpreting Islamic law (Adegbija, 54). Studies indicate that the Maliki jurisprudence has a significant influence on the religious practices of Muslims in Kogi State, including the Okun people, fostering a unique blend of Islamic teachings and local traditions (Afolabi, 121).

The presence of Islamic institutions in urban areas not only serves the spiritual needs of the Muslim community but also plays a crucial role in education and community development. Islamic schools, in particular, have become vital centers for learning, offering both religious and secular education to children and youth in the Okun communities (Ibrahim, 72).

The introduction of Islam to the Okun people can be traced back to the 19th century. Islam was brought to the Okun region by itinerant Muslim traders and clerics who traveled from the northern parts of Nigeria. These traders were primarily Hausa and Fulani, who had embraced Islam earlier and were actively involved in spreading the religion through their commercial and social interactions (Adegbija, 52). The influence of these traders extended beyond commerce, as they also served as Islamic teachers and preachers. They established small Muslim communities and introduced Islamic practices and teachings. However, the spread of Islam was relatively slow due to the strong presence of indigenous religious practices and the later introduction of Christianity during the colonial period (Akinwumi, 26).

Examination of Practice of Tawhīd (monotheism) Among Okun Muslims

Some of the Okun traditions practiced by the Okun Muslims that contradict monotheistic practices are highlighted below:

Community Beliefs and Practices

In the course of the researchers' interview with Babalaye, H. dated 06-09-2023 in Kaba Kogi West Senatorial District, he stated that the practice of *Tawhīd* (monotheism) of Muslims in the area is mixture of monotheism and *Shirk* (Polytheism). There are several acts of *Shirk* (Polytheism) such as participating in non-muslims festivities which roots is Idol worship. Also, before any event, they must investigate through fortune-telling before

they will go into what they wish to do. *Shirk* (Polytheism) is witnessed in their marriage, in the naming ceremony and in several other of their activities. He suggested to the researchers that Muslim scholars have much role to play if the practice of *Tawhīd* (monotheism) of this people must be in line with the dictate of *shariah*.

Hanging of Amulet on the Neck with Belief that they are Safe and Protected

Mufu Olokoba in his own part in *Yagba* West asserted that only 30% muslims out 100% practice true *Tawhīd* monotheism in the area. He narrated his personal experience of Muslim Woman whose baby amulet *Laya* which was hanging round the baby's neck and wrist got lost and the mother of the baby was crying and saying that their enemy are at work and that they want to kill their baby. He stated that there are other several acts of *Shirk* (polytheism) in marriage naming ceremony and annual festival celebration of the non-muslims that many muslims partake.

أَرَوَيْكَ عَلَىٰ لَدَيْ لَدِي يَمُوتُ وَسَيَدِّحَمْدُهُ وَكَفَىٰ بِهِ بَدْنُو بِهِ عِبَادِهِ خَيْرًا

put your trust in the ever-living, who never dies, and glorify His Praises. Sufficient is He as All-Aware of the sins of His servants(Q 25:58),

إِشْهُو الَّذِي يَخْلُقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ الرَّحْمَنُ ذُو الْقُدْرَةِ الْكَبِيرِ

He is' the One who created the heavens and the earth and everything in between in six Days, then established Himself on the Throne. 'He is' the Most Compassionate! Ask 'none other than' the All-knowledgeable about Himsel” (Q25:59)

Bunu Yam festival for Good Food Harvests

The Bunu Yam Festival, celebrated annually on July 7th, is a significant cultural event among the Okun people. This festival is deeply rooted in agricultural traditions, particularly the cultivation of yams, which are central to the community's sustenance and economic well-being. Historical accounts indicate that the festival has been observed for generations, serving as a ritual to express gratitude to the earth for the bounty of yams harvested (Adeyemo, 89).

During the festival, various rituals and ceremonies are performed, reflecting the community's reverence for both their land and their ancestors. These practices include traditional dances, offerings to deities, and communal feasting, all aimed at ensuring a bountiful harvest for the coming year (Ogunleye, 145). The festival not only strengthens community bonds but also serves as a vital platform for passing down agricultural knowledge and cultural values to younger generations.

The Bunu Yam Festival also plays a crucial role in promoting local tourism and enhancing the community's economic activities, as people from neighboring regions often participate in the celebrations. This influx of visitors boosts the local economy through the sale of crafts, food, and traditional clothing, further cementing the festival's importance to the Okun people (Ibrahim, 64).

The festival's preparations begin with rituals involving fortune-telling and divination conducted a few days before the main event. These practices, common in many African cultures, are intended to predict the success of the upcoming harvest and to determine the proper conduct of the festival (Ojo, 45). The reliance on spiritual guidance during these rituals highlights the community's connection to the unseen forces believed to influence their agricultural success.

On the day of the festival, the community is enlivened by cultural displays featuring numerous masquerades. These masquerades, often seen as embodiments of ancestral spirits, carry large sticks or canes as they move through the streets. Their appearance is both a form of entertainment and a spiritual act, reinforcing the connection between the living and their ancestors (Adeyemi, 123). The masquerades serve as a reminder of the community's heritage and their reliance on the blessings of their forebears.

In addition to its spiritual aspects, the Bunu Yam Festival is also a social event characterized by communal activities such as feasting and drinking. Palm wine and other alcoholic beverages are shared among participants, symbolizing unity and the shared hope for a prosperous harvest (Eze, 89). However, cultural restrictions are observed, including the exclusion of pregnant women from participating in or witnessing the event. This custom is likely rooted in traditional beliefs regarding purity and the protection of the unborn child (Ogundipe, 34).

Despite its non-Islamic origins, the Bunu Yam Festival sees active participation from Muslims in the region. According to a report from Yusufu Okayi College of Education Technical Kaba, Muslims in the locality participate in the festival alongside their non-Muslim neighbors, reflecting a unique blend of cultural and religious practices ("Yusufu Okayi College Report", 14).

The participation extends to other related events, such as the Oru annual yam festival, celebrated over three days. The involvement of Muslims in these festivals underscores the cultural integration and religious tolerance that exists within the Okun community (Adeyemi, 129).

The Bunu Yam Festival exemplifies how traditional practices can bring together diverse groups within a community. For the Okun people, including the Muslim population, the festival is an opportunity to celebrate their shared heritage and to express their collective hope for a successful harvest. This harmonious blend of tradition and inclusivity ensures the continued cultural significance of the Bunu Yam Festival, even as it adapts to the evolving social and religious landscape of the region.

Recommendations

- ✓ It is pertinent for all Muslims to abide by the will of Allah and foot-steps of the prophet in their religious rites in line with this verse of the Quran in chapter 59 verse 7 when Allah says, "And whatever the messenger gives you accept it and whatever he

forbids you abstain (there) and keep your duty to Allah"

- ✓ The spirit of monotheism in terms of beliefs should be inculcated in all brethren of Islam at all level.
- ✓ This work recommends vividly the rejection of the concept of reincarnation as it is stated categorically in the Quran that all souls shall definitely have the taste of death and it's incumbent on all souls to die once and what follows is resurrection.
- ✓ At the instance of individual death, there is no room for transmigration of soul into another body or reincarnation as the case may be from the perspective of this research.
- ✓ It is mandatory for the learned and erudite Islamic scholars in Okun land to turn a new leave in the redirection of the infiltration of culture in Islam.
- ✓ Monotheism as the basic concept of Islam should be effected at all parameters. Hence, this will curb the idea of diluting traditional Africa: belief with the doctrines of Islam.
- ✓ The practice of the real doctrines of Islam should be encouraged, while innovations should be ignored based on the Quranic injunction which says. "O ye who believe enter into Islam whole heartedly and follow not the foot-step of Satan for he is to you an avowed enemy (Q 2:208).

If these recommendations stated above are properly utilized and well taken into consideration, the various beliefs attributed to Islam which is against its tenets will be reduced to a minimal level.

Conclusion

It is pertinent to understand from the foregoing deliberations and various-arguments that Islam is a pure religion with its basic fundamentals as monotheistic. Virtue as the real belief of Islam and its principle as the apex belief worthy of not practicing asides other beliefs found in our contemporary societies such as the various beliefs in the African Tradition, which are contrary to the real injunction of Allah. Such beliefs should be ignored. Therefore, Muslims should not be part to such beliefs. Islamic Scholars should also preach fervently in the redirection of monotheism and its practice in Okun land.

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PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

S/N	NAME	Address	Age	Sex	Occupation	Date
1	Husseini Babalaye	Akure Road kabba	49	Male	Trading	06/-9/202
2.	Olokoba Mufu	No. 11 Market Lane ogorimagogo Yagba West Kogi State	53	Male	Transporting	01/08/202
3.	Yusufu Okayi	College of Education Tchnical College Kaba, Kogi State	47	Male	Non teaching staff	13/07/202