



An Assessment of the Practice of (Tawid) Monotheism among Muslims in Ebira Land Kogi Nigeria

Sulaiman Muhammed Saleh P.hD¹, Ahmed Musa²

^{1,2}Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State, Nigeria

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*Corresponding Author: Sulaiman Muhammed Saleh P.hD¹

Abstract		Original Research Article
<p>Islam is religion that deals with all aspect of human life with total submission to the will of Allah. It also negates the concept of polytheism or heterogeneous belief in any form of divinity. This paper aimed at looking into various practices along with Islamic monotheism (Islamic faith) among the Ebira Muslims, with the view of bringing out the real concept of Islamic monotheism (Tawid) i.e oneness of Allah as the major priority of the perspective of Qur'an and hadith. The study revealed that there is a prevalence of religious heterogeneity practices among many Ebira Muslims which if a continuous awareness and campaign is not carried out against may lead these Muslims earning nothing on the day of reckoning. The paper concludes that the necessary effort should be intensified by all orthodox Muslims to ensure that Muslims in Ebira land practice Islam in line with the dictate of Islamic Sharia strictly monotheism.</p> <p>Keywords: Islam, Religion, Nigeria, Muslims in Ebira Land, Islamic monotheism,</p>		

INTRODUCTION

Islamic monotheism implies peace and worship of 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 Ebira tribe before the coming of Islam. The Ebira had their culture i.e way of life but with the advent of Islam, some of their cultural activities were influenced by Islamic teachings. However, some none permissible element of culture were mixed with some Islamic tenets to form some unique way of life of the Ebira. Islam as a way of life is against any culture or tradition as long as no element of the culture or tradition that falls within the frame work provided in the basic guidelines of Islam can be said to be Islamic while any one that contradict Islam may be viewed as Un - Islamic (Muhammed Yusuf 2019).

Hence, this paper focuses on the various traditions, and religious beliefs and practice which the Ebira Muslims perpetrates simultaneously with Islam that show their being heterogeneous. It also aim in bringing the Islamic position on these practices. Hence, the seed will be separated from the shaft, choosing to be Muslim is not the issue but the challenge is heterogeneous involvement (Brandson, 1970). Despite their proclaimants of Islam, we could still notice the traditional beliefs and practices in their life. Islam is a religion that encompasses all spheres of our daily lives as the Qur'an enjoins all Muslims into Islam wholeheartedly and follow not the footsteps of satan for he is to you an ardent enemy (Q2.208)

Tawhid (monotheism) in Islam

According to (Bilal 1990) the concept of monotheism (known as *Tawhīd* in Arabic) is the single most important concept in Islam. Everything in Islam is built upon it. Islam calls for the absolute oneness of God. No act of worship or devotion has any meaning or value if this concept is compromised in any way.

Monotheism can be examined from three perspectives:

- i. The Oneness of God in His Lordship
- ii. Devotion of All Worship to God Alone
- iii. The Oneness of God in His Names and Attributes

These perspectives can be elaborated upon as follows:

The Oneness of God in His Lordship

The oneness of God in His Lordship means that God has complete mastery over the universe in every way. He alone is the Creator of all things. He alone causes everything to happen. He is all-powerful. No one shares in His dominion, and none can resist His decree. This concept is one that most people on Earth would agree with, as most recognize that the Creator of the universe is one and He has no partner (Bilal 1990).

Devotion of All Worship to God Alone

(Bilal 1990) also posited, no one has the right to be worshipped except for God (Allah). This concept is the central idea proclaimed by all the Prophets throughout the ages. It is the most fundamental aspect of faith, calling people away from the worship of creation and towards the worship of the Creator. This is where Islam greatly differs from most other religions. Though most religions teach that there is a Supreme Being who created all that exists, they are rarely free of some form of polytheism with respect to worship. These religions either call on their adherents to worship other beings as gods besides God (Allah), often placing these other gods on a lower level than the Supreme Being, or they demand that their adherents call on other beings as intercessors between them and God.

(Bilal 1990) also asserted, all the Prophets and Messengers, from Adam to Muhammad (may God praise them all), called people to worship God alone. This is the purest, simplest, most natural faith. Islam rejects the notion posited by some cultural anthropologists that the early religion of human beings was polytheism, and that the idea of monotheism evolved from that:

The truth is that the natural religion of humanity is to worship God alone. Over time, people corrupted this pure religion, introducing the worship of other beings. Humans seem to have a tendency to focus their devotions on something tangible and imaginable, even though they instinctively know that the Creator of the universe is far beyond their imaginations. Throughout history, God sent Prophets and Messengers to call people back to the worship of the One True God, but repeatedly, people returned to the worship of created beings (Bilal 1990).

God created human beings to worship Him alone. The greatest possible sin is to worship anyone other than God (Allah). This sin is not mitigated if the worshipper intends to get nearer to God by offering devotions to another being. God does not need intercessors or intermediaries; He hears all of our prayers and has complete knowledge of everything that happens.

At the same time, God does not need our worship. He is completely independent of all things. If every person in the world were to come together to worship God alone, they would not benefit God in the least. They would not add an atom's weight to His dominion. Conversely, if all creation abandoned the worship of God, this would not decrease His dominion in the least. By worshipping God, we benefit our own souls and fulfill the purpose for which we were created. We do not fulfill any need of God. He is needless (Bilal 1990).

The Oneness of God in His Names and Attributes

The oneness of God (Allah) in His names and attributes implies that God does not share any attributes with created beings, nor do they share any of His. God is unique in every way. Muslims believe in all the attributes that God asserts for Himself and that His Prophet ascribes to Him, with the understanding that these attributes are not the same as those of created things. Likewise, any name or attribute that God and His Messenger negate for Him is also negated (Bilal 1990).

God's attributes are all attributes of perfection and completeness. Human deficiencies cannot be ascribed to God. He has no deficiency or weakness whatsoever. It is a form of polytheism to ascribe to created things attributes that belong to God alone. Anyone who believes that another being is, for instance, All-Knowledgeable or All-Powerful, has committed the sin of polytheism, which is the greatest of all sins in Islam (Bilal 1990).

AFRICAN TRADITION BELIEFS

African traditional belief is indigenous religion of Africans. It is religion that has been practiced from generation to generation

by the forebears. It is not fossil religion but a religion that is still in practice by the Africans despite the emergence of Islam on the African soil. This religion has no written literature but historically documented. It is largely written in people myth and folk tales in their songs and dances in their liturgies and shrines and their proverbs, it is a religion that has no zeal for members drive yet it offer persistent fascination for the African young or old (Awolalu, 1996). The African traditional beliefs include the followings, the high gods of primitive people, polytheism, idolatry, paganism, juju, animism, the withdrawn god, ancestral worship, belief in reincarnation, clan deity, meme fetishism and heathenism etc (Awolalu, 1976).

Practice of Tawhīd (Monotheism) Among Ebira Muslims

The Ebira people are located in the central part of Kogi State, Nigeria. Historically, they have been known for their agricultural practices and trade. The Ebira have a rich cultural heritage that includes traditional festivals, ceremonies, and a clan-based social system. Their society is organized around communal living and traditional leadership. Traditional religious practices, including ancestor worship and local deities, have been central to Ebira culture. Islam was introduced through interactions with Muslim traders and missionaries, resulting in a growing Muslim population. Traditional practices remain influential, though Islam has established a notable presence within the Ebira community. In Kogi State, the Ebira tribe had a population of about 1.2 million according to the 2006 census. The Muslim population among the Ebira is estimated to be 15-20% of the total, amounting to roughly 180,000 to 240,000 individuals. Despite the growing Muslim presence, traditional practices and beliefs continue to be an integral part of Ebira culture. Some of the Ebira traditions practiced by the Muslims under Kogi state are highlighted below.

Belief in Masquerade

According to Ismaila, U.N. 2019, *Ekuechi* is the name given to the *Ebira* masquerade, a cultural practice common among all *Ebira* people due to their historical migration patterns. This tradition is also observed in Igalaland within the *Ebira* Kingdom. The first practitioners were two brothers, *Ododo* and *Obaji*, descendants of *Eika*, one of the five children of the patriarch *Ebira*.

According to her:

The *Ekuechi* masquerade eventually became a central figure in the administration of *Ebira* Tao. Community actions and decisions were often deferred to the *Ekuechi* for guidance, and no actions were taken without their approval. There are various types of *Ekuechi*, such as "*Ekuechi*," "*Ekuechi*," "*Ekuechi*," "*Ovuna*," "*Ibagi*," "*Agadagidi*," and "*Akisobe*," each holding significance in the *Ebira* Tao areas.

The *Ebira* people placed immense importance on the *Ekuechi*, to the extent that it influenced their administration and daily life. Religion among the *Ebira* was centered around the *Ekuechi*, which was perceived as an intermediary between God, the spirits, mother earth, and ancestors. This veneration of the *Ekuechi* served as a link between the world of the living and the dead. Laws were enacted and sanctioned on behalf of the ancestors, particularly during the *Ekuechi* festival, where the dead were believed to return as *Ekuechi* to advise the living.

She also posited that During the *Ekuechi* festival, women were encouraged to be good to their husbands, children were urged to obey their parents, and the wicked were admonished to avoid evil practices. Thus, the religion of the *Ebira* at that time revolved around ancestor worship, with each community relating to its ancestors through the *Ekuechi* in their unique ways.

According to Ibrahim K.M Okene, it is the Muslims who now spearhead traditional celebrations, originally of traditional origin. The traditional practicalities of carrying out these events have dwindled, and it is now the Muslims who appear in the masquerades. They believe that since these practices were observed by their ancestors, continuing them will honor and please their forebears, making it an event to be observed continuously. The same applies to the *Eheori* celebration, where only a few traditionalists exist, but a large number of personnel, predominantly Muslims, are involved. This indicates that Muslims are the primary organizers of these acts, alongside a few traditional people, despite being adherents of Islam. The consequences of their involvement in these traditional practices have been analyzed in preceding pages concerning other tribes.

Patronage of Christian Prayers

Kebiru I., from Lokoja Expressway, Okene, Kogi State, stated during an interview that Muslims in the study area are significantly inclined toward Christian worship. He noted that many Muslims partake in Christian church prayers, indicating a blending of religious practices in the community.

Allah Says:

لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ ۗ وَقَالَ الْمَسِيحُ يَبْنَىٰ إِسْرَائِيلَ ۗ ااعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبَّكُمْ ۗ إِنَّهُ مَن يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ الْجَنَّةَ

وَمَا أُوهُهُ النَّارُ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ أَنْصَارٍ ۝ ٧٢

(5:72) And surely they disbelieved when they said: 'Christ, the son of Mary, is indeed God'; whereas Christ had said: 'Children of Israel! Serve Allah, Who is your Lord and my Lord.' Allah has forbidden Paradise to those who associate anything with Him in His divinity and their refuge shall be the Fire. No one will be able to help such wrong-doers.

لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ ثَلَاثَةٌ ۚ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَهٍ إِلَّا إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ ۚ وَإِنْ لَمْ يَنْتَهُوا عَمَّا يَقُولُونَ لَيَمَسَّنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ۝ ٧٣

(5:73) Those who said: 'Allah is one of the Three', certainly they disbelieved, for there is no god save the One God. And if they do not give up this claim, all who have disbelieved among them shall be subjected to painful chastisement.

Belief in Jinn

In an interview with Habib S. from Auchi Road, Okene, Kogi State, the researcher explored the practice of Tawhīd (monotheism) among Muslims in Okene metropolis. Habib revealed that the adherence to Tawhīd among these Muslims requires orthodoxy to eliminate polytheism and the association of partners with Allah. The Muslims in this area engage in various forms of polytheism, such as believing that Jinns have the power to harm or favor them and attributing similar powers to their ancestors.

Additionally, some Muslims believe that their worship (Ibada) is incomplete without the intercession of notable sheikhs like Sheikh Tijani, Ibrahim Kola Inyas, and other contemporary figures. They place these sheikhs in higher regard than even the Prophet Muhammad, whom Allah sent to guide all of humanity. The Prophet himself warned his companions (Sahaba) against excessive praise, as it was the excessive veneration of Isa (Jesus) by his followers that led them to elevate him to the status of Allah, the Creator of the universe.

Believing that anything other than Allah can harm or benefit is considered *Shirk* (polytheism), which is the most detestable and unforgivable sin in Islam.

Grave worship

Danlami I., from Okehi LGA, Kogi State, provided insights into the practice of grave worship among Muslims in the area. He revealed that many Muslims in the region resort to graves to resolve disputes or locate missing items. They approach the graves, kneel, and swear by them, showing a greater fear of the grave than of Allah. This is evidenced by their readiness to swear falsely in Allah's name while being truthful when swearing by the grave. This practice has persisted for centuries and continues today. Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips, in his book *Fundamentals of Tawhīd (Islamic Monotheism)*, asserts that honoring the dead through elaborate burial rites, tombs, and decorated graves, along with commemorative festivals, has led to significant religious confusion and misguidance. Much of mankind has become involved in some form of grave worship. For instance, a large proportion of the Chinese population practices ancestral worship, with many religious rites connected to graves and the worship of ancestral representations (Dictionary of Religions, p. 38).

Among Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians, the graves of holy or saintly men have become shrines where acts of worship, such as prayer, sacrifice, and pilgrimage, are performed on a large scale. Over time, Muslim rulers and the masses have deviated from the fundamental principles of the Islamic creed, creating further religious confusion. As a result, many Muslims have begun to imitate the pagan practices of surrounding non-Islamic nations. Some Muslims who engage in grave worship pray to the dead, asking them to convey their requests to Allah. This practice is based on the belief that righteous deceased individuals are closer to Allah and can hear and fulfill the requests of the living. Thus, the dead become intermediaries capable of granting favors to the living. Others pray directly to the dead, seeking forgiveness for their sins, attributing to the deceased Allah's attribute of being At-Tawwaab (The Acceptor of Repentance). Only Allah Almighty is capable of forgiving sins.

There is a strong similarity between this practice and that of Catholics, who call on special saints for their daily needs. For example, Saint Anthony of Thebes is prayed to for finding lost items (Chicago World Book, 1987). This category also includes Christians who regard Prophet Jesus as a god. Ignorant Muslims worldwide also direct their prayers to Prophet Muhammad in a similar fashion. Both of these methods are entirely rejected by Islamic teachings, which hold that once a person dies, they enter a dimension called Barzakh (a barrier) where their deeds come to an end. The deceased are unable to influence the living, although the results of their deeds may continue to earn them reward or punishment. Abu Hurayrah reported Allah's Messenger as saying:

إِذَا مَاتَ الْإِنْسَانُ انْقَطَعَ عَنْهُ عَمَلُهُ إِلَّا مِنْ ثَلَاثٍ: صَدَقَةٍ جَارِيَةٍ، أَوْ عِلْمٍ يُنْتَفَعُ بِهِ، أَوْ وَلَدٍ صَالِحٍ يَدْعُو لَهُ

"when a man dies, his (good) deeds come to an end except three types of charity of continued benefit. Knowledge beneficial to people and a righteous offspring who prays for him" (Sahih Muslim Vol, 3P864 NO 4005)

Interview with Lukman Y. on the Practice of Tawhīd in Okene Town

In an interview conducted by the researcher with Lukman Y. from Okene town, Okene LGA, it was revealed that many Muslims in Okene town do not practice Tawhīd (monotheism) without incorporating beliefs in other gods. For example, in the event of an accident while working or when using vehicles such as motorcycles, tricycles, and cars, instead of calling upon Allah, who alone has the power to save, they call upon sheikhs (saints) whom they believe are pious and closer to Allah for safety. This practice constitutes polytheism, which is detestable in the sight of Allah. Sheikhs are humans and have no power to save any creature, let alone a human being.

The term "saint" is often used to translate the Arabic word "waliyy" (plural: "awliyya"), which Allah uses to designate those who are close to Him. However, a more appropriate translation would be "close friend" because "waliyy" literally means an "ally." Allah even used this term to refer to Himself in the verse:

وَاللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِنَّ أَوْلَى النَّاسِ بِإِبْرَاهِيمَ لَأَذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُ وَهَذَا النَّبِيُّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا

"Surely the people who have the best claim to a relationship with Abraham are those who followed him in the past, and presently this Prophet and those who believe in him; Allah is the guardian of the men of faith." (Q3:68)

Allah also used the term "waliyy" to refer to Satan in the verse:

"Whoever takes Satan as a waliyy instead of Allah has clearly lost everything." (Qur'an 4:119)

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَمَنْ قَتَلَ مَظْلُومًا فَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا لَوْلِيهِ سُلْطَانًا فَلَا يَسْرِفُ فِي الْقَتْلِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مَنْصُورًا

"we have give power to the walee of whoever is wrongly killed, but do not be excessive in the execution (of the murderer) (17:33)

It is also used in Qur'an to indicate closeness between men, example

لَا يَتَّخِذِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الْكَافِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَلَيْسَ مِنَ اللَّهِ فِي شَيْءٍ إِلَّا أَنْ تَتَّقُوا مِنْهُمْ تُقَاتًا وَيَحْذَرُكُمْ اللَّهُ نَفْسَهُ وَاللَّهُ الْمَصِيرُ

يَأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الْكَافِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَنْ تَحْبَطَ أَعْمَالُكُمْ لَكُمْ سُلْطَانًا مُبِينًا

يَأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالنَّصَارَى أَوْلِيَاءَ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ وَمَنْ يَتَّخِذْ مِنْكُمْ فَائَةً مِنْهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ

"the believers should not take disbelievers as awliyya instead of other believers (Q 3:28, 4:139, 144 and 5:51)

The usage of the term "waliyy" that concerns us most is "awliyya' Allah," which means "close friends of Allah." In the Qur'an, Allah designates certain individuals among humanity who He considers especially close to Himself. Allah's description of His walee can be found in Surah Al-Anfal, where He states:

وَمَا لَهُمْ آلَا يُعَذِّبُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَهُمْ يَصُدُّونَ عَنْ مَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَمَا كَانُوا أَوْلِيَاءَهُ إِلَّا الَّامْتَنُّونَ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

"But why should Allah not punish them while they obstruct [people] from al-Masjid al- Haram and they were not [fit to be] its guardians? Its [true] guardians are not but the righteous, but most of them do not know." (Q 8:34)

And surah younus:

لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَلَا كِدًّا ۖ إِلَّا قِيلًا سَلَامًا سَلَامًا ۗ وَمَنْ يَزِدْكُمْ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَيَمُتْ وَهُوَ كَافِرٌ فَأُولَئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ ۖ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الشَّاكِرُونَ

"behold! Certainly no fear nor grief shall overcome the awliya of Allah those who believe and have (taqwa) (Q19:62-63)

Allah explains that the criterion for "walayah" (divine friendship) is *iman* (faith) and *taqwa* (piety). These qualities are shared by all true believers (Al-Aqeedah At-Tahawiyyah, p. 358). Among the ignorant masses, the main criterion for walayah (sainthood) is the performance of miracles, commonly called *karamat*, to distinguish them from the miracles (*mu'jizat*) of the Prophets. To those who hold this belief, the faith and practice of the miracle worker are of no consequence. Some designated "saints" held heretical beliefs and practices, while others were involved in licentious and vulgar behavior. However, nowhere has Allah made the working of miracles a stipulation for being His *walee*. Therefore, as earlier stated, all believers who have *iman* and *taqwa* are *waliyy*s of Allah, and He is their *walee*, as Allah Himself said:

اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ

"Allah is the walee of those who believe"

Consequently, Muslims are not permitted to designate certain believers as *awliyya' of Allah* and exclude others. Despite this clear Islamic position, the veneration of so-called Muslim saints has become a prominent feature in Sufi circles and among the masses who blindly follow them. This practice diverges from the true Islamic understanding of *walayah*, which is based on *iman* and *taqwa*, rather than the performance of miracles or the approval of certain individuals.

Islam teaches that all believers who possess faith and piety are considered close friends of Allah, without the need for miraculous deeds to validate their status. The misguided emphasis on miracles and the elevation of specific individuals as saints only serves to distort the essence of Islamic monotheism and the principles of *Tawhīd*.

عَلَيْكُمْ بِسُنَّتِي وَسُنَّةِ الْخُلَفَاءِ الرَّاشِدِينَ الْمُهْتَدِينَ مِنْ بَعْدِي ۚ عُضُّوا عَلَيْهَا بِالتَّوَّاجِدِ ۚ وَإِيَّاكُمْ وَمُحَدَّثَاتِ الْأُمُورِ ۚ فَإِنَّ كُلَّ مُحَدَّثَةٍ بِدْعَةٌ وَكُلَّ بِدْعَةٍ ضَلَالَةٌ وَكُلَّ ضَلَالَةٍ فِي النَّارِ

“Keep to my sunnah and that of the rightly guided caliphs and beware of innovations, for vainly they are all heresy (*bid’ah*) and heresy is misguidance, which leads to the hell fire” (Abu Dawud, vol 3, P 1294 No 4590 and at Trimidhee).

In the view of Ahmed A., from Aajaokuta Road, Okene LGA, Kogi State, there is a notable divergence in the adherence to Islamic doctrine among the local Muslims. He posited that while some individuals comply with the principles of Islam, the majority do not. The primary reason for their indulgence in *shirk* (polytheism) is their tendency to integrate their cultural and traditional practices with their Islamic faith. This syncretism leads to deviations from the pure monotheistic teachings of Islam, as cultural customs often introduce elements that contradict the fundamentals of *Tawhīd*.

The Different Festivals in Ebira land

According to (Ismail U. N 2019) The *Ebira* ethnic group celebrates several annual festivals, with three being particularly significant: Echene, Echeori, and *Ekuechi*.

Echene: Echene is an annual masquerade festival celebrated across various districts in *Ebira* land from April to June. During this festival, girls who have been betrothed are given away in marriage. Masquerades roam the streets, wielding large canes to entertain and amuse the public, often receiving monetary gifts. However, in recent times, this amusement has turned problematic, as people are sometimes injured by the canes, which is an issue that needs addressing.

Echeori: Echeori is a new yam festival celebrated exclusively in the Ihima and Eguyi districts of *Ebira* land. Traditional worshippers make sacrifices to the “ori” deity in the mountains to express gratitude for its protection and bountiful harvest.

Ekuechi: *Ekuechi* is a masquerade festival that marks the end of the year for the *Ebira* and the beginning of a new one. Ododo is considered the master of this festival. At the start of the festival, the Akatapa masquerades proclaim, “Irayi Ododo Osigu, Irayi Akatapa Osigee hiosayeeh,” meaning “The year of Ododo has ended. The year of Akatapa has ended. Here is another year.” Women prepare a special beans meal called ‘Apapa’ and he-goat for their relatives.

Regarding the pre-Islamic religion of the *Ebira*, it was based on traditional practices involving the worship of animate and inanimate objects such as the sun, moon, stones, trees, rivers, and carved objects. The *Ekuechi* cult, a significant aspect of their traditional religion, was used to control society and pass secret judgments. It was sometimes used to extort money from wealthy women, foreigners, or soothsayers. The origin of the masquerades is linked to secret cultists who were believed to be deceased ancestors returning to visit their living descendants and protect them from evil. Therefore, it can be stated that the pre-Islamic religion of the *Ebira* people was rooted in ancestral worship.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the research to achieve its objectives, several key recommendations are essential:

- i. The spirit of monotheism, as outlined in Islamic beliefs, should be consistently promoted among all members of the Muslim community, at every level and continuously.
- ii. It is crucial for all Muslims to adhere strictly to the teachings of Allah and the Prophet Muhammad in their religious practices, in accordance with the verses of the Qur’an.

These recommendations aim to strengthen adherence to monotheism within the Muslim community and ensure alignment with Islamic teachings.

وَمَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا

Where Allah says “And whatever the messenger gives you accept it and whatever he forbids you abstain from and keep your duty to Allah”. (Q59v7)

- This work strongly recommends the rejection of the concept of reincarnation, as it is explicitly stated in the Qur'an that all souls shall experience death, and it is incumbent upon them to die only once, followed by resurrection.
- Monotheism, as the fundamental concept of Islam, should be upheld comprehensively. This approach will help discourage the integration of traditional African beliefs with Islamic doctrines.
- Genuine adherence to the doctrines of Islam should be promoted, while innovations should be disregarded. This recommendation is based on the Qur'anic injunction which advises, "O ye who believe, enter into Islam wholeheartedly and do not follow the footsteps of Satan, for he is to you a clear enemy."

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِي السِّلْمِ
كَآفَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ
الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ

"O believers! Enter into Islam wholeheartedly and do not follow satan's footsteps. Surely he is your sworn enemy(Q 2:208)

- iii. It is incumbent upon knowledgeable Islamic scholars in the states of Benue, Kogi, and Nasarawa to initiate a paradigm shift towards minimizing the influence of cultural practices within Islam. Many of the annual festivals celebrated in these regions are intertwined with ancestral worship, which constitutes polytheism and should therefore be discouraged. Instead, Muslims should embrace festivals endorsed by Islam such as the two Eids (Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha).
- iv. The intention and focus of every Muslim should be directed towards actions that earn rewards in the Hereafter and lead to eternal bliss in Paradise.

Implementation of these recommendations can significantly reduce the prevalence of beliefs contrary to Islam, often categorized as polytheism

CONCLUSION

Islam is a religion of peace that demands total submission to the will of Allah and it does not accommodate syncretism, but from the light of our findings, it has been observed that Muslims in Ebira land are in one way or the other still practiced traditional beliefs and that explains why we experience syncretism in the practice of Islam in Ebira land as explained in the body of this work. However, to eradicate this practices, lectures should be organize from time to time so as to educate the people, seminar should be organized for Islamic studies teachers who will in turn pass the message across to Muslims in order to minimize if not completely eradicate this syncretism been practice continuously among Ebira Muslims tribes.

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LIST OF INTERVIEWERS

S/N	NAME	ADDRESS	AGE	SEX	OCCUPATION	DATE
1	Ibrahim Kebir	Lokoja express way Okene Kogi state	46	M	Prison Armed Squard	07//22
2	Isa Dalami	Okehi Kogi state	51	M	Teaching	07/20/23
3	Ahmed Abdulkarim	Ajaokuta road, Okene Kogi state	53	M	Business man	02/06/23
4	Habib Salawodeen	Auchi road, Okene Kogi state	42	M	Student	08/03/23