

Cross-Culturalism of Yoruba Cultures and Muslim Practices in South West, Nigeria

SALAHUDEEN Taofiq, O., PhD; ADESOPE, Fatimah, PhD & MUSA-OLOMU, Musbaudeen, PhD

Department of Islamic Studies, School of Secondary Education Arts & Social Sciences

Federal College of Education, Abeokuta

Phone Number: +2348030671240

Email: staofiqoladimeji@gmail.com

Abstract

Nigeria consists of many ethnic groups and tribes but the major tribes are Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo. The trio have their culture and cultural values. Particular reference is made to Yoruba tribe which has its socio-religious, political and economic milieus. The penetration of Islam and Christianity into what is known as Yoruba land today met the existence of African Traditional Religion with its cultural settings and peculiarities. Although the two religions could be foreign to them in terms of their culture and practices especially Islam, however, the inclination or idea of embracing a uniquely cultural point of view which is tantamount to cross-culturalism is a common phenomenon among the religions. The study is based on analytical and historical approaches. It discovers that there was and still some cultural interpolations on the activities and practices of some Muslims in South West Nigeria. The importance of this paper lies in the fact that there are large percentage of Yoruba Muslims whose cultural backgrounds are still reflecting in their professed Islamic faith. The work therefore draws attention to these areas of cultural influences with a view to establish the fact that not all Muslims in South West Nigeria have completely keyed into the Islamic culture and that culture is not static but dynamic.

Introduction

Several valuable researches have been carried out on different areas. It is an undeniable fact that some aspects of Islamic studies in Nigeria contribute valuable research, particularly those works which are related to the field of religion. Islam as a religion is a complete way of life and it is rapidly growing across the world. Wherever it penetrates, it has influence on socio-cultural, religious and political life of people. Previous works on the penetration of Islam into Yoruba land have focused on the influence of Islam on Yoruba cultural heritage, Oladiti 2014, Ogunbade 2003, Adeniyi 2011. These works have endeavored to discuss successes that were recorded by Islam on their creed, education and linguistic formation, culture and custom.

The importance and extensive effects that Islam had on Yoruba culture have enjoyed elaborate studies in scholarly literature. Although by the second half of the 19th Century, Islam had become a significant factor that could not be dissociated with from the social, political and educational life of the Yoruba people. However, despite this, there are still

lacunas. It is one of these gaps that this work intends to fill. This study therefore focuses on cultural interpolation particularly (Yoruba culture and customs) that are still reflecting or permanently inherent the activities and practices of some Yoruba Muslims in South West Nigeria. Despite their acceptance of Islam, in some of them can be noticed shreds or vestige of Yoruba traditional cultures\customs beliefs and practices which they hold tenaciously and refuse to abdicate.

Allah has left nothing undiscussed in the Glorious Qur'an be it social, political, economic or religious aspects of life. Allah confirm:” we have neglected nothing in the Book” (Q6:32). Equally Allah says: “And We have sent you (Muhammad) not but as a mercy for the mankind” (Q21:107). It is also clear from the point of shari'ah that there is no partitioned Islam, therefore the practice (s) of Islam and its teaching must be adhered to in totality. *“O you who believe! Enter perfectly into Islam (by obeying all the rules and regulations of the Islamic religion) and follow not the footsteps of shaytan. Very he is to you a plain enemy (Q2:208).*

The question that is begging for answer is why is it that the Yoruba Muslims of South West Nigeria cannot stick wholeheartedly to the culture of Islam. Although, it is apparent that Islam did not demand a violent break with the past, and it shares many similarities in its practices with traditional religions. Doi (1984) writing in the same vein observes that, Islam wherever it goes has not remained a stranger, it usually fits into the culture of the people. However, fitting into the culture does not mean that the anti Islamic culture must dominate. Gbadamosi (1978) for instant opines that Yoruba Muslims in South West Nigeria are still wallowing in mixing some elements of traditional religious with Islam. In similar vein, Clarke and Ryan claim that for the purpose of Islam to be maintained and sustained among the Yoruba in the late 19th Century, it was tolerant, borrowing and striking parables with local customs and traditions, despite some attempts by some Yoruba scholars to reform this attitude, many Yoruba Muslims up until now will continue to be satisfied with borrowing from traditional culture. It is therefore hoped that this study will provide correctional measure to this unIslamic practices.

Yoruba Ethno genesis

Nigeria as a country comprises 371 ethnic group (Anon 2015). Of these ethnic groups, the three major ones are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The Yoruba ethnic group is situated in the South West part of Nigeria. It is estimated that in Nigeria alone the population of Yoruba

group is about fifteen million (C.I.A 2016). The Yoruba are also found in every large numbers in the South of Darhomy Republic, and Togo land while smaller population of the race are located in Siera Leone, Ghana and other West African countries.

Historians are of the view that, the Yoruba are a dynamic people who trace their origin to the city of Ile-Ife ori aye gbogbo”, “Ile-Ife, the land of the most ancient days the dawn. Ile-Ife where the work of creator took place, where the dawn of the day was first experienced, Ile-Ife the land or nucleus of the whole universe.” Yoruba identified Oduduwa as the original ancestor and that he was a priest king of Ile-Ife. That is the reason why they refer to themselves as children of Oduduwa. Oduduwa got several children who later became the ancestor of the various clans which form the Yoruba race.

Importantly, Peel (2016) confirms that the Yoruba kingdom never enjoyed political unity or a common ethnic name till the twentieth century, but they recognized their affinity through the claim of their kings to descent from Oduduwa, a god who had reigned at Ile-Ife. Ife had been the first great kingdom of the West African forest (1100-1450), and even then it had declined to a town of modest political importance, the Yoruba always looked to it not as a supreme cultic centre but as the very site of the creation of mankind.

It is a great task to trace the origin of the Yoruba people. Doi (1984) submitted that there were a number of theories some of which are based on legends. Johnson (2009) opined that Yoruba origin is difficult to understand. He however suggested that the Yoruba sprang from Lamurudu, one of the kings of Makkah. He stressed further that the Oduduwa, who is believed to be the ancestor of the Yoruba, was one of the three off-springs of the king of Makkah. Johnson (2009) further suggested that the Yoruba originated from the East. He pointed out that the Yoruba people’s life style, manners and customs all go to suggest that they are Eastern origin. The Yoruba live in South West Nigeria. They are found in the present states of Oyo, Ogun, Osun, ekiti, Ondo, Lagos and some parts of Kwara and Kogi. The sub-ethnic groups found in Yoruba land are Ijebu, Oyo, Ife, Ijesa, Ondoo, Akoko, Ekiti, Ikale, Ilaje, Egbado, Okun-Igbomina.

Traditional Yoruba Religion

Traditional Yoruba Religion is captioned under African Traditional Religion in this paper. Rotimi (2011) affirms that Africa Scholars have different views on the description of the religion. However, we are not giving this aspect an in-depth look believing that Yoruba are

African. The African Traditional Religion is believed to be a religion brought about by God who is regarded as the Supreme Being. The Yoruba people call Him Olohun, Olodumare and Oluwa. Apart from these names, there are numerous attributes that are ascribed to him. These are the creator, king, transcendence and immanence. Others are immortality, omnipotence and uniqueness. There is also the expression of god in proverbs, short statements, songs, prayers, names, myths, storey and religious ceremonies.

Apart from this belief in the Supreme Being, the Yoruba also believe in some divinities and spirits. The divinities are classified into three groups (the Primordial Obatala, Orunmila, Esu and Ogun). These divinities are believed to be divinities of heaven. They were with the Supreme Being from the creation of the Universe. They partook in the creative work. The divinities are believed to have emanated from the Supreme Being. The second classification of divinities is regarded as deified ancestors. Some examples in this category are Sango, Orisa-Oko and Ayelala. The deified ancestors were human beings who had lived extraordinary and mysterious lives on earth, so much that when they died they were deified as gods. The third category is personification of natural forces and phenomena. The divinities in this category are the earth, rivers, lagoon and the sea. Others are mountain, hills, trees and wind. All these are found among the Yoruba, (Rotimi, 2011)

Importantly, before the emergence of Islam in Yoruba society, the people regarded their religion as an aspect of culture that requires no controversy, competition or crusades of evangelism, (Oladiti, 2014). Venessa (2019) further affirms this position thus, “this idea of the lack of separation between religion and culture is not unfounded....there is plenty to suggest that culture and religion are intertwined in an African context”.

Emergence and spread of Islam in South West, Nigeria

Historians did not agree as to when Islam got to Yorubaland. However, it is said that by the middle of the 17th Century, a Muslim Community had been established in the Old Oyo (Obaro 1980). Samuel Johnson (2009) opined that it was introduced late in the eighteenth century, but the circumstances under which Islam was introduced depicts that Islam was in Yorubaland much earlier. Johnson mentioned the presence of a Nupe Muslim emissary Baba Yigi – who was sent there by another Muslim cleric Baba Kewu to caution the ruler Alaafin Ajiboye, over his excesses. Alaafin Ajiboyede is believed to be one of the rulers of Oyo who was exiled in Igboho at a period dated back to C.1535 – C.1610. Therefore, Islam was introduced during the reign of Alaafin Ajagbe as suggested by Gbadamosi this would still fall

within the seventeenth century. Specifically, by the eighteenth century, Islam had spread, mainly along the trade route, not only to Oyo but also to Igbobo, Kisi, Saki, Ikoyi, Ogbomoso, Owu, Ijana, Ketu and Badagry, Obaro (1980).

South West Muslims

The South West Muslims are majorly Yoruba. They are otherwise referred to as the Yoruba Muslims. They belong to one of the major religious group (Islam) in the region. Most South West Muslims are Yoruba by tribe. They spread over the Local Government areas of the six South West States in Nigeria. They are Ekiti, Lagos, Osun, Ogun, Ondo and Oyo States. Muslims in South West, Nigeria engage in various occupations such as farming, craftsmanship, trading and civil service.

The South West Muslims have been living among the non-Muslims particularly the traditionalist. There had been cultural and linguistic influence of Islam on their people on one hand and equally the Yoruba cultural influence(s) are not completely jettisoned by some Muslims.

Cultural Perceptions among south West Muslims, Nigeria

One of the distinctive features of Islam is that it has never become an alien wherever it is introduced. Islam does not condemn tradition(s) or culture of any nation as long as the fundamental principles of faith are not disobeyed or neglected. As earlier noted, one of the primary reasons for Islam's progress is that it has always become the religion of its hosts, (for instance in Africa its agents are Africans) which can be assimilated gradually without causing too great a disruption in communal life, Trimmingham (nd)

The acceptance of Islam, for some Yoruba folks was a sort of other way of life, while other perceives it as new religion different from what they have been practicing. Islam either accommodates non-Islamic culture or reject it. It accommodates a local culture if the culture is in tandem with the Islamic principles. However, if the indigenous culture goes against the belief system of Islam, it is rejected. Hence the saying of the Prophet (pbuh)

He who innovates something in this matter of ours

(Islam) that is not of it will have it rejected. Abdul (1982)

The hadith above emphasizes that Islam is a perfect religion. Scholars describe innovation as thing that is introduced into an existing system or practice. Hence, any new thing that is

induced into the Islamic faith which is against its rules and the fundamental principles is prohibited. It is referred to as *bid'ah* (innovation). However, any new thing that can assist one to become better person is acceptable to and also regarded as original intention of Islam. Therefore, nobody can introduce anything arbitrarily into it unless the thing is in line with the principles of Islam. Although, this has been the position of Islam, some south West Muslims were of the opinion that becoming a Muslims should not cause a break with the past, rather it should be fully integrated into the early religion. These groups of Muslims believed that it should not be a crime for any Yoruba Muslims to be involved in religion-cultural festivals by partaking in the rituals. This view can be perceived by an act of syncretism which Islam frowns at. Another group of Muslims in South West holds the belief that Islam is a fixed culture which does not allow local culture practices. Another group opines that any culture which is not against the tenets of Islam is acceptable.

Since the focus of this work is to examine the strong influence of Yoruba culture on some Muslims in South West, Nigeria, it behooves to look at the position of some Muslims in South West Nigeria saying that becoming a Muslims should not cause a break with the past rather it should be fully integrated whether what to be integrated is acceptable is within the confine of *Shari'ah* or not. This set of people has found it difficult to disengage totally from their cultural practices and they are not bordered whether Islam allows them or not.

Some Areas of Cultural Interpolation among the Yoruba Muslims in South West, Nigeria

Iman (Faith)

The word *Iman*, in Islam is generally translated as faith or belief. It was used in the Qur'an, signifies either simply a confession of the truth with the tongue, or simply an assent of the heart and a firm conviction of the truth brought by the Prophet, or the doing of good deeds and carrying into practice of the principle accepted, or it may signify a combination of the three Q2:62, Q4:130, Q57:19, Q57:8. Ali (1971)

Compromising this faith and bringing in another faith leads to interpolation of faith which eventually leads to interpolation of culture and custom. One important area where Yoruba traditional religion culture has firm grip on Muslims in South West Nigeria is involvement of Muslims in their traditional festival. Yoruba Muslims are noted for cultural syncretism as supported by a popular song among them which goes thus:

Awa o sooroilewa o

Awa o sooroilewa o

Imale o pe o ye

Imale o pekawa ma soro

Awa o sooroilewa o

Translation

We shall observe or celebrate the tradition of our family (2ce)

Islam does not debar us from observing our tradition

We shall (surely) observe the tradition of our family.

The above song is common among the Yoruba. However, the researcher can attest to this having come from Alapinni Compound in Idere, Ibarapa Central Local Government of Oyo state where it is commonly practiced. During Egungun festival, Islamic culture and practices are nearly completely jettisoned. Apparently lamenting on the dilution of Islam with persistent cultural and traditional institutions of Yoruba society Abdullah (2006) is of the opinion that:

Those who come from cultures where Islam is deeply embedded in the tradition often are unaware of the distinction between Islam and tradition: they may believe that many traditional practices are part of Islam, while in fact those practices may even violate Islamic practices.

In line with the above, Adeniyi (2011) quoting Laitiri who avers that some Muslims who involved in syncretism were highly influenced by Yoruba divination; these categories of Muslims developed a parallel system and henceforth asserted that both Yoruba traditional beliefs and Islamic religion were originated from Arabia. Paden (2007) discusses that, some of the traditional leaders in the fourth Republic's Yoruba towns in south West Nigeria are Muslims. However, most of them continue to perform or preside over the rituals and traditional customs.

Marriage, Naming and Burial

Another areas where Muslims in South West Nigeria have deviated from Islamic culture are in their social activities like marriage, naming, burial etc. There are laid down principles regarding these. Muhsin (2011) submits that the interplay of and acculturation of traditional,

Islamic and Western culture has in one way had some negative impact on Yoruba Muslims and their practice of Islam. One cannot rule out the influence of colonialism, Christianity and western in this regard by way of interaction. Thus, in some of their Islamic ceremonies, there seems to be more instances of mixture of some negative western culture with Islam. Further looking at the practices of marriage, naming and funerals among the Yoruba Muslims in South West Nigeria, there is intermingling of these three forces. Take for instance, the practice of marriage, one will discern that some Yoruba Muslims begin their marriage in the traditional way, by seeking the selection of the oracle.

Curative Method (s)

The curative method (s) in Yoruba Traditional Religion is quite different from that of Islam. While Islam lays emphasis on efficacy of prayer as contained in the Glorious Qur'an and as directed by the holy Prophet Muhammad when facing challenges that they should call on Allah "and call on me I shall answer you" (Q), traditional religion offers sacrifices (Ebo) through many divinities. Surprisingly, some Muslims in South West Nigeria, still stick to sacrifices (Ebo). This cultural influence has deeply penetrated into their lives. It is a known fact that has been further established by many authors that the vast majority of people of Yorubaland are now belong to Islam or Christianity, but the indigenous beliefs are very much rooted that they do visit the traditional medicine practitioners secretly at night for assistance in the area of protection, promotion and productivity or during times of dire need. Adeniyi (2011).

Inheritance

Another area of cultural interpolation is observed in the inheritance system. Before, the advent of Islam, Yoruba system of inheritance is based on three systems viz 'Idi-Igi', "Oriojori" and "Omo Ajemogun". Idi Igi is a system of distribution of the estate of deceased by dividing the estate per stripes that is equally among the mothers-wives of the deceased, the children taking the portion of their respective mothers, (Nwogugu, 1990). Another one is Ori Ojori, this is also a Yoruba word meaning sharing the estate of the deceased per capital (individual) among the children of the deceased. Abdul Rahman (1992). Omo Ajemogun means the surviving small children; babies and infants of the deceased are regarded as part of the property to be inherited by either the eldest son or relative of the deceased. The inheritor of the wives would take care of such children, Adeniyi (2002). Islam frowns at this cultural system because it embraces injustice. How a property could be shared equally to a wife who

has eight children and another wife that is barren. The Islamic system of inheritance is contained in Qur'an chapter 4 verses 7-14. The Muslim law of inheritance has always been admired for its completeness as the success with which it has achieved. The ambitious aim of providing not merely for the selection of a single individual or homogenous group of individuals on whom the estate of the deceased should devolve by universal succession but for adjusting the competitive claims of all the nearest relations is laudable. Despite all this, it is glaringly observed that Yoruba culture of inheritance is still embraced by some Muslims in South West Nigeria till today.

Appointment of Imams

The appointment of Imams and other Muslims Chieftaincy titles are within the purveyance of Shari'ah and Islamic scholars. Earlier, the appointment of Imam and other Muslims chieftaincy titles are culturally subjected to the approval of the kind of the community in which if he fails to accept the candidature of any prospective Imam, his nomination will be rendered invalid whether such a person meets the laid down religious conditions to the throne or not. This Yoruba traditional culture which has been crookedly embedded in the process of appointment of Imam abi initio was as a result of the socio religious and cultural interactions that have been existing between the duo of Islam and African Traditional Religion right from the inception. It is not surprise that some Muslims in South West Nigeria tenaciously hold to this practice having known that it goes contrary to the principles of Islamic culture. These are few out of many Yoruba cultural practices that have continued to flourish till today among some Yoruba Muslims in South West, Nigeria despite their profession of Islamic faith.

Conclusion

This paper has investigated the influence of Yoruba culture on some Yoruba Muslims in South West Nigeria. It looked into ethno genesis of Yoruba and the incursion of Islam into Yorubaland and the nature of South West Muslims. The summary of this work is based on the fact that Islam has not completely usurped Yoruba culture particularly from those who professed Islam as a faith. Yourba Muslims in South West are still found entangled in the web of traditionalists in areas like marriage, naming, burial and inheritance.

Recommendations

The influence of Islam of Yoruba cultural heritage has been established by many scholars. However, this does not erode the fact that some Yoruba Muslims still hold on to Yoruba

culture. The so called “Aafaa” believes in Yoruba customs, superstitions, witchcraft charms etc which they found difficult to shed, despite the Islamic teaching of total submission to Allah’s will. Therefore, it will be better if they are properly placed in terms of their faith.

Culture is not static but dynamic. However, its dynamism cannot erode the fundamental teaching of religion. Therefore compromising one’s faith and identity is amount to unbelieving in Islam. Thus Allah says “Unto you is your religion and unto me is my religion” (Q 109:6).

Considering the insecurity in Nigeria, today, proper identification of individual is needed. The word “Aafaa” is common to both Christians and Muslims, the adherents of this two religious may still hide under cultural interpolation by being a traditionalist. At times the security agents find it difficult to ascertain whether they are Christian, Muslims or Ritualist. In the same vein cultural interpolation at times brings in cultural conflicts in ceremonies like marriages, naming, funeral, housewarming etc. Therefore, Muslims in South West Nigeria should stick to their faith based cultural practices. Although, it is noted that ability to accept and identity with the cultural values of its converts anywhere is part of the features of Islam but not unaccepted cultural values in Islam.

There is also need for further research works by scholar on interdisciplinary studies as an attempt to examine the problems often arise from a one dimensional perspective. Although some works have been written on influence of Islam on Yoruba culture but there are still areas to be looked into where Yoruba cultures are still dominating.

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