

EXAMINATION OF PRACTICE OF TAWHID (MONOTHEISM) AMONG EBIRA MUSLIMS IN KOGI STATE NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Tawhid Monotheism is the greatest favour of Allah on humanity. Islam as a substantive religion that deals with all aspect of life with the total submission to the will of Allah which tenets also negates 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 Ebira, 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 Ebira Muslims and impact affects them negatively of which if a continuous awareness and campaign against on these beliefs is not carried out, this phenomenon will continue among these Muslims. Hence this research work is a possible outcome and solutions. The paper concludes that the 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, Ebira, Islam, Monotheism.

Introduction

Islam implies complete submission 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 Ebira land before the advent of Islam. The Ebira's 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 none permissible element of the culture were mixed with some Islamic tenets to form some unique ways of life to the Ebira's, Islam as a way of life is not against any culture or tradition as long as element of the culture or tradition does not contradict the teaching of Islam. Any culture, custom or tradition that falls within the frame work provided in the basic guidelines of Islam can be rightly described as Islamic while anything that contradict Islam may be viewed as unislamic.

Hence, this paper focuses on the various traditions and religious beliefs and practices which the Ebira Muslim perpetrates simultaneously with Islam that shows their being in difference to Islamic tenets, it also aim in bringing out the Islamic position on each of these beliefs. A critical survey in the heterogeneous belief and practices of the Ebira brethren have hitherto clung on to, hence 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 Muslim i.e. The Ebira Muslims in some communities an area in Kogi State is being heterogeneous. Despite their proclaimants of Islam, we could still notice the shreds or vestiges of traditional beliefs and practices at the refusal of it abdication, 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 Ebira nation.

The Ebira people, primarily based in Kogi State, Nigeria, and with communities in Nasarawa, Edo, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), form a distinct ethnic group in central Nigeria. Known for their emphasis on values like respect, humility, and good conduct, the name "Ebira" itself translates to "behavior" in their native language. This linguistic root highlights the Ebira people's cultural focus on social etiquette and moral standards, which permeates their interactions and societal expectations (Adamu and Usman, 29).

According to Ajayi and Crowder, the origins of the Ebira people are traced back to the migration from the Jukun people in the Benue Valley region. Over centuries, the Ebira migrated southward, eventually settling in their present-day location in central Nigeria. Historical accounts suggest that the Ebira were once part of the Kwararafa Confederacy, a powerful union of ethnic groups in the region. The migration to their current homeland was driven by conflicts, the search for fertile land, and the desire for a peaceful existence (76).

The Ebira people are traditionally organized into clans, each with its own distinct lineage and leadership structure. The most prominent clans include the Ohizi, Obaji, Ogu, and Ezi. These clans play a significant role in the social, political, and cultural life of the Ebira people. Over time, the Ebira developed a reputation as skilled farmers, hunters, and ironworkers. They have a rich cultural heritage, which includes traditional festivals, music, dance, and oral history. The Ireba Festival, for example, is an important cultural event that celebrates the Ebira people's unity, identity, and history (Okene, 45). The population of the Ebira people is estimated to be around 2 million, with the majority residing in Kogi State. The central part of Kogi State, particularly in Okene, Adavi, Ajaokuta, and Okehi Local Government Areas, is the heartland of the Ebira people. The population is spread across urban and rural areas, with a significant number of Ebira people engaged in agriculture, trading, and artisanal crafts.

Introduction of Islam to Ebira people

Islam has a long history among the Ebira people, dating back to the 19th century when Islamic traders and scholars introduced the religion to the region (Oloruntimehin, 81). Today, the majority of the Ebira people are Muslims, with estimates suggesting that around 70-80% of the Ebira population adheres to Islam. This strong Muslim presence is evident in the numerous mosques and Islamic schools (madrasas) scattered across Ebira land. The introduction of Islam has had a profound impact on the social and cultural life of the Ebira people. It has influenced their educational system, legal practices, and daily routines. Traditional Islamic festivals such as Eidal-Fitr and Eidal-Adha are widely celebrated in Ebira communities, alongside the observance of traditional Ebira cultural festivals (Oloruntimehin, 81).

In Ebira society, while Islam is the predominant religion, a minority practice Christianity or adhere to traditional African religions. This diversity has led to a community where multiple belief systems coexist relatively peacefully. The core values of mutual respect and tolerance among the Ebira people play a crucial role in fostering this harmony. Ebira culture places a high emphasis on interpersonal respect, which extends to religious beliefs and practices. This cultural emphasis on respect encourages individuals to honor each other's faiths, regardless of personal

convictions (Usman and Bello, 38).

Historically, the Ebira people have demonstrated a flexible approach to religious expression, allowing various traditions to coexist without significant conflict. According to Adigun, many Ebira families are interfaith, incorporating both Islamic and Christian practices during family events, festivals, and community gatherings. This integration shows the community's resilience and adaptability, as well as its ability to embrace diverse beliefs within a unified cultural identity (Adigun, 57). Traditional African religions also persist among some Ebira people, particularly in rural areas where ancestral beliefs remain deeply embedded in daily life. These practices often involve rituals and celebrations that honor Ebira ancestors and local deities, which, despite religious differences, are respected by the larger community. This inclusive attitude reflects the Ebira principle that respect for each person's background and beliefs is essential for social harmony (Ogundele, 112).

Islam was introduced to the Ebira people mainly through interactions with neighboring Muslim communities, particularly the Nupe, Yoruba, and Hausa traders and settlers. These groups had established themselves as influential Islamic communities in the region long before Islam reached the Ebira land. The introduction of Islam to the Ebira people can be traced back to the 19th century, during the period of the Sokoto Caliphate's expansion and the influence of Muslim traders who traveled through Ebira land for commercial activities (Falola, & Heaton, 20).

Examination of Practice of Tawhīd (Monotheism) Among Ebira Muslims

Some of the traditions practices that contradict (Tawhid) Monotheism by the Ebira Muslims under Kogi state are highlighted below.

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, 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 (*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, 87). This category also includes Christians who regard Prophet Isah (A.S) as a Allah. 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:

ثَاصَدَقَةُ جَرِيَّةٍ، أَوْ عِلْمٌ نَفَعَهُ، أَوْ وَلَدٌ صَالِحٌ يَدْعُو لَهُ: إِذَا مَاتَ نَسَنُ نَقْطَعَ عَمَلَهُ إِلَّا مِنْ ثَلَاثٍ
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 off spring who prays for him” (Sahih Muslim Vol, 3P864 NO
4005)

2. Belief in Jinn

The Ebira people hold a longstanding belief in the existence and influence of *jinn*, reflecting a blend of Islamic and indigenous African spiritual perspectives. Within Islamic tradition, *jinn* are described as supernatural beings made from smokeless fire, existing alongside humans in an unseen realm (Usman and Ahmed, 47). Among the Ebira, this belief has been further influenced by cultural narratives that imbue *jinn* with specific roles and attributes in daily life, particularly in relation to health, fortune, and protection. Research on African indigenous spiritual practices indicates that many Nigerian ethnic groups, including the Ebira, integrate supernatural entities into their understanding of the natural world (Ogundele, 88). Traditionally, the Ebira people have believed in various spirits and forces, a worldview that resonates with the Islamic concept of *jinn*. Adigun describes how these beliefs often intersect; for example, *jinn* are sometimes viewed as protective or punitive beings, whose influence can manifest in mysterious illnesses or unexpected misfortunes (Adigun, 52). Such interpretations align with Ebira customs that involve appeasing spirits for protection or seeking divine intervention to ward off harm.

The acceptance of *jinn* within Ebira society reflects a cultural fusion where Islamic teachings about *jinn* are reinterpreted through local Ebira lenses, resulting in unique expressions of this belief. This blend underscores the way Islamic teachings have adapted within indigenous African contexts, allowing the Ebira people to honor both religious and traditional understandings of the supernatural (Ojo, 69). This dual influence not only maintains the significance of *jinn* in their cultural narrative but also reaffirms the Ebira people's strong connection to both their faith and heritage.

According to Islamic teachings, *jinn* are beings with free will, capable of choosing between good and evil. They are considered to be part of Allah's creation, similar to humans, and are accountable for their actions. While some *jinn* are benevolent, others are believed to be malevolent, capable of causing harm or misfortune. The Ebira people, being predominantly Muslim, have integrated these

beliefs into their cultural understanding, often associating *jinn* with various aspects of life, including illness, fortune, and supernatural occurrences (Oloruntimehin, 82).

In Ebira culture, *jinn* are often associated with certain natural landmarks, such as rivers, forests, and mountains. These locations are considered sacred and are believed to be inhabited by *jinn* or other spirits. The belief in *jinn* is also linked to traditional practices, such as divination, healing, and protection against evil forces. For instance, traditional healers, known as *Azi*, may invoke the help of *jinn* in diagnosing and treating illnesses, or in providing protection against curses and other malevolent forces (Okene, 45-62).

The fear of *jinn* is also prevalent, with many Ebira people taking precautions to avoid offending or attracting these beings. This includes observing certain taboos, performing rituals, and seeking protection through prayers and amulets. The belief in *jinn* is particularly strong in rural areas, where traditional practices and Islamic beliefs often intersect. While the Ebira Muslims primarily adhere to the Islamic teachings about *jinn*, these beliefs are often interwoven with indigenous practices. Traditionally, the Ebira people believed in various spirits and supernatural entities, and the concept of *jinn* was easily integrated into this spiritual framework. Many Ebira Muslims believe that *jinn* inhabit specific natural locations, such as forests, rivers, and mountains, which are considered sacred. These places are often approached with reverence, and specific rituals may be performed to appease or seek protection from *jinn* (Ajayi & Crowder, 72).

The introduction of Islam to the Ebira people has reinforced and shaped the belief in *jinn*. Islamic teachings provide a framework for understanding the nature and behavior of *jinn*, as well as the means of protection from their influence. Many Ebira Muslims recite specific verses from the Glorious *Qur'ān*, such as *Sūrah Al-Falaq* and *Sūrah An-Nas*, to seek protection from *jinn*. Additionally, Islamic scholars and clerics in Ebira land often play a key role in educating the community about the proper Islamic perspective on *jinn*, discouraging practices that may be considered superstitious or un-Islamic (Ajayi & Crowder, 90).

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.

3. The Different Festivals in Ebira land

The Ebira ethnic group celebrates several annual festivals that play vital roles in their cultural identity and social cohesion. Among these, three festivals stand out for their significance: Echene, Echeori, and Ekuechi.

Echene Festival: The Echene festival, which is celebrated to honor the ancestors and deities, is marked by communal prayers, feasting, and various cultural performances (Adigun, 78). This festival typically occurs at the end of the harvest season and serves as a time for the Ebira people

to express gratitude for the bountiful yield and to seek blessings for future crops. It is also an opportunity for family reunions, strengthening social ties within the community (Ojo, 112).

Echeori Festival: The Echeori festival is a celebration of the Ebira's cultural heritage and identity. It features traditional music, dance, and theatrical performances that narrate the history and values of the Ebira people (Usman, 94). According to research, this festival serves as an educational platform where younger generations learn about their customs and the importance of preserving their cultural legacy (Ogundele, 56).

Ekuechi Festival: The Ekuechi festival is particularly significant as it marks the New Year for the Ebira people. It is characterized by colorful parades, traditional attire, and various forms of artistic expression (Okeowo, 65). During this festival, the community engages in rituals to cleanse the land and seek protection from misfortune in the coming year. The vibrant celebrations foster a sense of unity and renewal among the Ebira people, reinforcing their cultural identity and collective spirit (Ibrahim, 43).

Recommendations

1. It is pertinent on 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"
2. The spirit of monotheism in terms of beliefs should be inculcated in all brethren of Islam at all level.
3. This work recommends vividly the rejection of the concept of reincarnation as it's 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 which follows is resurrection.
4. 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 that perspective of this research.
5. It is mandatory on the learned and erudite Islamic scholars in Ebira land turn a new leave in the redirection of the infiltration of culture in Islam.
6. 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.
7. The practice of the real doctrines of Islam should be encouraged which 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 at 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 besides other beliefs found in our contemporary societies such as the various beliefs in the African Tradition, which is contrary to the real injunction of Allah, hence this should be ignored. Therefore, Muslims should not be part to such beliefs and the Islamic Scholars should also preach fervently in the redirection of monotheism and its practice in Ebira land.

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PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

S/N	NAME	Address	Age	Sex	Occupation	Date
1	Danlami Isah	Okene Town, Okene LGA, Kogi State	43	M	Engineering	02/20/202
2.	Ahmed Abdulkarim	Ajaokuta Road Okene LGA, Kogi State	53	M	Business man	02/06/202
3.	Habib Salawodeen	Auchi Road Okene, Kogi State	42	M	Student	08/03/202