

POLYTHEISM AMONG MADA MUSLIMS IN NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The research work titled polytheism among Mada Muslims is to examine the practice of monotheism in this study area. 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 Mada, 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 Mada Muslims and impact affects them negatively of which if a continuous awareness and campaign against these beliefs is not carried out, this phenomenon will continue among these Muslims. The primary data were gathered from few individuals and the secondary data were gathered through extensive literature review including books, journals and Islamic manuscripts. The research employs a historical approach to analyze the collected data, focusing on reconstructing and interpreting the past to understand current practices and predict future trend. The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of continuous education and religious guidance in reinforcing the principles of tawhid Islamic monotheism among Muslims in Nasarawa, it provides recommendation for enhancing religious understanding and promoting adherence to monotheistic principles, contributing broader discourse on Islamic practices in Nasarawa State.

Keywords: Beliefs, Cultural, practices, Mada, Islam, Monotheism.

Introduction

Islamic monotheism, known as tawhid, is the foundational concept that defines the Islamic faith. It represents the unwavering belief in the oneness of Allah (Allah) and encompasses the principles of worship, devotion and ethical conduct prescribed in the Glorious Qur'an and exemplified by the life of Prophet Muhammed (SAW). The significance of Tawhid transcends mere theological understanding; It forms the core of a Muslim's identity and shapes their worldview, guiding their interactions with the divine, fellow humans and the environment. 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 Mada land before the advent of Islam. The Mada 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 Mada, 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 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 focus on the various traditions and religious beliefs and practices which the Mada Muslim perpetrates simultaneously with Islam that shows their being in difference to Islamic monotheism, it also aims at bringing out the Islamic position on each of these beliefs. A critical survey in the heterogeneous belief and practices of the Mada 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, that is, The Mada Muslims in some communities and areas in Kogi State as being heterogeneous. Despite their proclamation of Islam, we could still notice some 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 to embrace 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 your ardent enemy (Q 2:208).

Brief history of the Mada Tribe

The population of the Mada people is difficult to ascertain with precision due to the lack of specific census data focused on ethnic groups in Nigeria. However, the Mada are one of the significant ethnic groups in Nasarawa State, contributing to the state's diverse cultural landscape. As of the latest estimates, the population of Nasarawa State is over 2 million people, with the Mada people forming a considerable portion of this population. Despite their relatively small numbers compared to other ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Mada people have maintained a strong cultural identity and continue to play an essential role in the region's socio-cultural fabric (National Population Commission, 2006).

Islam began to make inroads into the Mada community in the early 20th century, although its spread was slow compared to other regions in northern Nigeria. The arrival of Islam among the Mada people can be attributed to several factors, including trade, migration, and the influence of neighboring Muslim communities (Abdulrazak, 97). Islam was first introduced to the Mada people through interactions with Muslim traders and settlers who traveled through the region. These traders, primarily from the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups, brought with them not only goods but also their Islamic faith. Over time, some Mada people, especially those engaged in trade or those who had frequent contact with Muslims, began to adopt Islam (Suleiman, 97).

Another significant factor in the spread of Islam was the influence of neighboring ethnic groups who had already embraced the religion. As the Mada people interacted with these communities, particularly in areas of intermarriage and trade, the appeal of Islam grew. Islam offered a new religious framework that was seen as modern and aligned with broader socio-political developments in Nigeria. The spread of Islam among the Mada people, however, did not lead to the complete abandonment of traditional beliefs. Instead, there

was a gradual syncretism where Islamic practices were integrated with existing traditional religious practices. Today, a significant portion of the Mada population is Muslim, but traditional beliefs and practices still coexist alongside Islam (Suleiman, 90). The exact population of Muslims among the Mada people is not well-documented, but it is estimated that a significant minority of the Mada population has embraced Islam. The majority of the population still practices traditional religions, but Islam continues to grow, particularly in urban areas and among younger generations. The spread of Islam has also led to the establishment of mosques and Islamic schools within Mada communities, further solidifying the presence of Islam in the region (Yakubu, 103). The history of the Mada people is rich and complex, shaped by their migration, settlement, and interactions with neighboring ethnic groups. The coming of Islam to the Mada people marked a significant religious transformation, contributing to the diverse cultural and religious landscape of the region. While Islam continues to grow among the Mada, traditional beliefs remain an integral part of their cultural identity.

Polytheism among Mada Muslims

Some of the Mada traditions practiced by the Muslims under Nasarawa state that are polytheism are highlighted below:

Odu Festival

The Odu Festival holds immense cultural and religious significance for the Mada people, serving as a vital expression of their identity and community values. According to Wada, the festival is celebrated annually to honor the spirits of ancestors and to invoke blessings for a prosperous harvest. This event reflects the Mada people's deep connection to their agrarian lifestyle and the land they inhabit, as they believe that their agricultural success is directly tied to the favor of their deities (112-126). The Odu Festival typically takes place annually, marking the beginning of the harvest season. According to Abubakar (297-311), it is a time when the Mada people give thanks to their deities for a bountiful harvest and seek blessings for the coming year. The festival is also an opportunity for the community to come together, reinforce social bonds, and celebrate their cultural heritage. The festival involves various rituals and ceremonies, including the offering of sacrifices to the Allah and ancestors, traditional dances, drumming, and singing. One of the central elements of the Odu Festival is the masquerade performance, where masked dancers representing different spirits and ancestors entertain and bless the community (Abubakar, 290). The masquerades are believed to have the power to communicate with the spiritual realm, and their presence during the festival is seen as a way to ensure protection and prosperity for the community.

Another important aspect of the Odu Festival is the communal feast, where food is shared among all members of the community. This act of sharing is symbolic of unity and the collective responsibility of the Mada people to care for one another. The elders of the community play a significant role during the festival, leading the rituals and ensuring that

the traditions are upheld (Yakubu, 110). With the spread of Islam among the Mada people, the Odu Festival has seen some changes, particularly in how it is observed by Muslim members of the community. As noted by Yakubu (112), Islam, as a monotheistic religion, generally discourages the worship of spirits, ancestors, and deities other than Allah. However, in the context of the Mada community, there has been a level of syncretism where Islamic practices are blended with traditional customs.

Many Muslims participate in the Odu Festival, but they do so in a way that aligns with their Islamic faith. For example, while they may attend the communal gatherings and feasts, they may refrain from participating in the sacrificial rituals or the worship of deities. Instead, they may offer prayers to Allah for a successful harvest and the well-being of the community (Yakubu, 107). In some cases, Muslim leaders in the community might even lead prayers during the festival, asking for Allah's blessings. The Odu Festival is not only a celebration of the agricultural roots and spiritual beliefs of the Mada people but also a vivid illustration of the cultural dynamics introduced by the presence of Islam in the region. As noted by Muhammad in an interview conducted by the researcher, "the Odu Festival, rooted in idol worship, is celebrated annually with the hope of ensuring a good harvest" (Muhammad). This highlights the festival's historical significance and its connection to agricultural prosperity, which remains a central theme for the Mada community. The blending of Islamic practices with traditional Mada customs has transformed the observance of the Odu Festival, allowing the community to honor their heritage while adhering to their faith. According to Adamu (77-90), "Muslim participation in the Odu Festival exemplifies the integration of cultural traditions with Islamic values, as the festival becomes a space for communal gathering and cultural expression." This integration is seen in the leadership roles assumed by Muslims during the festival, which reflects a harmonious coexistence of both religious identities.

Moreover, the festival features vibrant masquerades that add color and excitement to the event. As noted by Waziri (112-126), "the display of masquerades during the Odu Festival not only serves to entertain but also reinforces cultural identity and continuity." Additionally, the practices observed during marriage and naming ceremonies, which involve consultations with soothsayers and the inclusion of non-Islamic elements, further illustrate the complexities of cultural expression among the Mada people (Ibrahim, 105).

Attributing meaning to Cock Crows

According to my interview with Abdullahi Zuweretu, in Aso village Karo, Nassarawa State, there is a specific time when a cock should crow. If it crows at the wrong time, it is considered a bad omen, potentially signaling the impending death of a family member. To avoid this perceived danger, they will slaughter or kill the cock. However, it is important to note that the cock is one of Allah Almighty's creatures. Allah has given every creature the ability to communicate, and their actions are acts of praise to Allah. As He said:

لَهُ تَسْبُحُ سَمَآوَاتٍ وَرُضٌ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ يَسْبُحُونَ لَهُ وَمَا مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ
أَرَأَيْتُمْ أَتَسْبِّحُونَهُ كَانَ حَكِيمًا غَفُورًا

*The seven heavens, the earth, and all those in them glorify Him.
There is not a single thing that does not glorify His praises - but you
?simply? cannot comprehend their glorification. He is indeed Most
Forbearing, All-Forgiving. (Q17:44)*

Mountain Worship

Mountain worship among the Mada people illustrates a significant blending of indigenous beliefs and Islamic practices, particularly in areas where Islam has gained a foothold. As stated by Gimba (23-37), "the mountains are viewed as powerful symbols of strength and stability within the Mada community, reflecting their indigenous reverence for nature while also aligning with Islamic teachings about Allah's omnipotence." This dual significance of mountains allows for a rich tapestry of spiritual practices that incorporate both traditional and Islamic elements. Muslims within the Mada community often engage in spiritual reflection during their visits to these mountainous sites. According to Bako (56-70), "it is common for Muslims to perform Salah (prayers) or engage in personal supplications (Dua) at significant mountain locations, thus utilizing the natural environment to deepen their spiritual connection to Allah." These practices highlight how the mountains serve not only as physical landmarks but also as spiritual venues where faith and tradition intersect.

Furthermore, the act of visiting mountains for spiritual purposes reinforces the importance of nature in the religious practices of the Mada people. As noted by Kanu (90-105), "these sites of worship allow the Mada people to cultivate a sense of peace and stability, reflecting the broader Islamic understanding of nature as a creation of Allah that deserves reverence." This integration of environmental appreciation and spiritual devotion illustrates how the Mada people navigate their cultural and religious identities in a contemporary context. In some cases, certain mountains may be regarded as sacred sites within the Mada culture. Muslims might participate in pilgrimages to these sites, where they can perform prayers and engage in spiritual reflection. While the purpose of the pilgrimage is not to worship the mountain itself, the experience serves as a means to connect with Allah and the community. (Rahman,70). Muslims among the Mada people actively participate in mountain worship by integrating Islamic practices with local traditions. Through prayer, cultural gatherings, environmental stewardship, and respectful acknowledgment of indigenous beliefs, they create a unique expression of their faith that honors both their religion and cultural heritage. (Esposito,90)

Sun Worship

The Mada people, like many ethnic groups, have historical beliefs associated with celestial bodies, particularly the sun. In traditional practices, the sun is often seen as a source of life,

energy, and fertility. Rituals may include offerings or prayers at sunrise or sunset, invoking blessings for agricultural prosperity and general well-being (Ahmad, 56-68). Traditionally, the Mada engage in sun worship by performing rituals during specific times of the day, particularly at dawn and dusk. These rituals may involve singing, dancing, and making offerings to the sun as a way to seek favor and blessings. Festivals or communal gatherings might also be organized around solar events, such as solstices and equinoxes (Rahman, 80). According to Ahmad, the Muslims among Mada people also engage in the worship of the sun. They turn their faces towards the sun to make their requests, instead of directing their supplications to Allah, who created the sun and is the one truly deserving of worship (57). As stated in the *Qur'ān*:

مَهُ وَجَّهًا وَقَوْمًا يَسْجُدُونَ لِلشَّمْسِ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ وَرَبِّ لَعْنَةُ الشَّيَاطِينِ أَعْمَلِمَهُمْ فَفَصَّلَهُمْ عَنِ السَّبِيلِ إِفْهَمُوا يَتَّبِعُونَ

I found her and her people prostrating to the sun instead of Allah. For Satan has made their deeds appealing to them—hindering them from the ^{the}Right^{Way} and leaving them unguided (Q27:24)

So they do not prostrate to Allah, Who brings forth what is hidden in the heavens and the earth, and knows what you ?all?conceal and what you reveal.

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ الْفُلُ وَإِلَىٰ دَارُ وَالشَّامِ ۖ وَالشَّمْسُ سُدَّ وَالْقَمَرُ ۖ تَسْجُدُوا لِلشَّمْسِ سِدِّ وَالْقَمَرِ ۖ وَسَجْدُوا لِلَّهِ الْخَلْقِ ۖ إِنَّكُمْ بِأَعْيُنِكُمْ لَا تَبْصُرُونَ ۚ

And among His signs are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon. Prostrate not to the sun nor to the moon, but prostrate to Allah who created them, if it is Him that you worship. (Q41:37).

These acts are performed with the hope of attaining good fortune and averting affliction and harm.

Belief in Witchcraft

Witchcraft, known as "*sihr*" in Islam, refers to the practice of invoking supernatural forces or magic to cause harm or influence events in unnatural ways. It is strictly prohibited in Islam, as it involves relying on entities other than Allah, leading to *shirk* (associating partners with Allah), which is considered a major sin. The Glorious *Qur'ān* condemns witchcraft and describes it as a practice introduced by devils, leading practitioners away from the path of righteousness (Glorious *Qur'ān*, 2:102).

[illegible]

And they followed what the devils had recited during the reign of

Solomon. It was not Solomon who disbelieved, but the devils disbelieved, teaching people magic and that which was revealed to the two angels at Babylon, Harut and Marut. But the two angels did not teach anyone unless they said, 'We are a trial, so do not disbelieve [by practicing magic].' And [yet] they learned from them that by which they cause separation between a man and his wife. But they do not harm anyone through it except by permission of Allah. And they [i.e., the people] learn what harms them and does not benefit them. But the Children of Israel certainly knew that whoever purchased the magic would not have in the Hereafter any share. And wretched is that for which they sold themselves, if they only knew. (Glorious Qur'ān, 2:102)

In my interview on May 20, 2023, with Ilyasu Musa Yomya at Lafiya, he explained that the Mada tribe has a strong belief in the power of witchcraft, considering it's capable of causing both harm and fortune. This belief is most prevalent at night when people are asleep but can also occur during the day. They believe witchcraft can inflict sickness, sabotage their enemies' businesses, and cause the downfall of their adversaries. Sometimes, witchcraft is even believed to affect their own relatives or immediate family members. Because of this belief, the Mada tribe often attributes occurrences to these evil beings rather than seeing them as acts of Allah, which constitutes *Shirk* (polytheism).

Nnanna Kaln, a mystical philosopher, provided a historico-metaphysical origin of witchcraft. He traced it back to the agricultural age when it was common for men to marry many wives. He explained that people joined witchcraft cults to obtain spiritual power for self-defence and the protection of their children. According to him, initiates are disciplined to prevent the abuse of spiritual power. However, this power eventually passed to younger individuals who abused it, leading to the negative connotations associated with witchcraft today (Sunny Ekwealo, Sunday Punch, 22, in Sirajudeen, 51).

There are some groups that believe in deceitful imagination and the primordial power of the soul, which they associate with witchcraft. The reality and effects of witchcraft, confirmed by divine law, are evident. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) stated, "Al-ayn (witchcraft) is real, and if there was something that precedes Qadar (predestination), al-ayn has preceded it" (Sahih Muslim, *Hadith* no. 2188). The above explanations by Prophet Muhammad and *Qur'ānic* comments on magic and witchcraft highlight their reality as part of the tests from Allah (SWT), as stated in *Qur'ān* 21:35. The solution to these problems is provided in the *Qur'ān*. Examples include the recitation of Ayat al-Kursi (*Qur'ān* 2:255), *Sūrah* Al-Ikhlās (*Qur'ān* 112:1-4), *Sūrah* Al-Falaq (*Qur'ān* 113:1-5), and *Sūrah* An-Nas (*Qur'ān* 114:1-6). Muslims should recite these verses and chapters with firm belief and hope in Allah (SWT), trusting that, by His grace, they will be protected from all harm.

Magic can be understood as the perceived ability to control or predict natural forces through ritual invocations of supernatural entities. It encompasses the belief that individuals can manipulate nature through specific rites, formulas, and actions. This notion of magic is commonly categorized into two types: "white" or "natural magic," which pertains to the study of natural phenomena and has evolved into modern natural science, and "black magic," or sorcery, which seeks to invoke supernatural powers for personal gain or malevolent purposes (Smith,34-50). The terminology surrounding magic is diverse, with witchcraft, divination, and necromancy being some of the most frequently referenced terms. Witchcraft is traditionally defined as sorcery performed by a woman believed to be possessed by a demon, while divination involves attempts to gain supernatural knowledge about the future. Necromancy, another method of divination, refers to the practice of communicating with the dead (Johnson,79).

In contrast, the Arabic term “*Sihr*” encompasses all branches of magic without differentiation. *Sihr* is described as phenomena caused by hidden or subtle forces, highlighting the broader implications of magic within Islamic traditions. As stated by Abdullahi (84), "the concept of *Sihr* includes sorcery, witchcraft, divination, and necromancy, reflecting a comprehensive understanding of supernatural practices." This perspective is reinforced by a *Hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), which notes that "some forms of speech are magic," indicating the powerful influence of rhetoric and communication (Abdullah,90).

Recommendations

- ✓ It is mandatory on all Muslims to abide by the will of Allah and footsteps of the prophet in their religious rites in line with this verse of the Quran in chapter 59 verse 7 where 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'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.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ It is mandatory on the learned and erudite Islamic scholars in Mada land to turn a new leaf 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 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 Mada land.

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PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

S/N	NAME	Address	Age	Sex	Occupation	Date
1	Abdullahi Juweretu	Aso village Karo Nasarawa State	43	Female	Trading	06/-9/2025
2.	Ahmed Mahmud	Keffi	52	Male	Businessman	02/12/2025
3.	Wada Musa	Lafia road Akwanga	60	Male	Farming	05/10/2025