



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

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Abstract

Tawhid (monotheism) is the greatest favour of Allah on humanity. Islam is a substantive religion that deals with all aspects of life with total submission to the will of Allah, whose tenets also negate the concept of polytheism or heterogeneous belief in any form of divinity. This paper aimed to look into the various beliefs and cultural practices aside from Islamic monotheism (Islamic faith) in Igala, with a view to bringing out the real concept of Islamic monotheism (Tawhid), i.e., the oneness of Allah, as the major priority from the perspective of the Qur'an and Hadith and the scholars' views on the concept of syncretism. The study reveals that there is a prevalence of religious heterogeneity among many Igala Muslims and the impact affects them negatively; if a continuous awareness and campaign against these beliefs is not carried out, this phenomenon will continue among these Muslims. Hence, this research work is a possible outcome and solution. 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: Tawhid (Monotheism), Examination, practices, Igala Muslim

Introduction

Islam implies complete submission and the worship of the supernatural controlling power; it is a way of life. Every community in an African setting has a culture peculiar to it; this is also true of Igala land before the advent of Islam. The Igala 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 for the Igala; Islam as a way of life is not against any culture or tradition as long as elements of the culture or tradition do not contradict the teachings of Islam. Any culture, custom, or tradition that falls within the framework provided in the basic guidelines of Islam can be rightly described as Islamic, while anything that contradicts Islam may be viewed as un-Islamic.

Hence, this paper focuses on the various traditions and religious beliefs and practices which the Igala Muslim perpetrates simultaneously with Islam that show their being in difference to Islamic tenets; it also aims at bringing out the Islamic position on each of these beliefs. A critical survey of the heterogeneous beliefs and practices of the Igala brethren who have hitherto clung to, hence, the seed will be separated from the chaff. Choosing to be a Muslim is not the issue, but the greatest challenge envisaged by the contemporary Muslim, i.e., the Igala Muslims in some communities in an area in Kogi State, is heterogeneity. Despite their proclamation of Islam, we could still notice the shreds or vestiges of traditional beliefs and practices; in the refusal of their 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 Historical Origin of the Igala

The *Igala* people, primarily situated in Kogi State, Nigeria, around the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers, have a longstanding history characterized by a unique cultural identity and heritage. Ethnographic studies trace the origins of the *Igala* to early migrations, suggesting a significant historical presence in the region dating back several centuries (Adeniyi, 34). Scholars highlight that the strategic location of the *Igala* around the river confluence contributed to their role in trade and interactions with neighboring groups, including the Jukun and Yoruba, shaping a distinct cultural and political identity (Okpoko and Ezech, 145).

According to Ikwuemesi, the *Igala* established a sophisticated kingdom that, at its peak, exercised considerable influence over parts of present-day Kogi State. This kingdom, governed by the *Ata Igala*, played a central role in administering justice, coordinating trade, and fostering cultural practices that remain prominent in *Igala* society today (Ikwuemesi, 112). The oral traditions and rituals that commemorate these historical roots are vital in *Igala* culture, reflecting their values and sense of place within Nigeria's diverse ethnic tapestry (Akinjogbin, 90).

Furthermore, linguistic studies reveal that the *Igala* language shares similarities with Yoruba and Itsekiri, which may point to historical connections and intermingling among these groups (Ikegbu, 67). These linguistic ties, alongside shared religious and cultural practices, underscore the complex interrelations between the *Igala* and their neighbors, emphasizing their historical significance within the broader Nigerian landscape (Nzewunwa, 9).

The *Igala* kingdom was one of the prominent pre-colonial states in Nigeria, with its influence extending across the central part of the country. According to historical records, the kingdom was founded in the 13th century, with its capital at Idah. The early *Igala* people are believed to have migrated from the Jukun, a group associated with the Kwararafa confederacy, which played a significant role in the political dynamics of the Middle Belt region (Audu, 97).

The *Igala* kingdom reached the height of its power between the 16th and 18th centuries, under the leadership of powerful monarchs known as the "Ata." The *Ata of Igala* wielded significant political and spiritual authority, unifying the various *Igala* clans under a centralized administration. The kingdom's economy was based on agriculture, fishing, and trade, with the Niger River serving as a critical trade route for the exchange of goods with neighboring regions, including the Nupe and Benin kingdoms (Abubakar, 25).

Colonialism brought significant changes to the *Igala* kingdom, as British forces incorporated the region into the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria in the early 20th century. Despite these changes, the *Igala* people have maintained a strong cultural identity, rooted in their language, customs, and traditional governance structures (Okpanachi, 25).

The *Igala* people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Kogi State, with a population estimated at over 4 million. The majority of the *Igala* population resides in Kogi State, with significant communities in neighboring states like Anambra, Benue, and Delta. According to the National



Population Commission (2021), the *Igala* constitute a substantial portion of Kogi State's overall population.

Islam has a notable presence among the *Igala* people, although the majority practice Christianity and traditional African religions. The Muslim population among the *Igala* is estimated to be around 45-55% of the total *Igala* population. The introduction of Islam to the *Igala* people can be traced back to the 19th century through trade contacts with the Nupe and Hausa traders (Audu,16). Over time, Islam has gained a foothold in various *Igala* communities, particularly in urban areas where intermarriage and trade with northern Nigerian Muslims are more common.

Muslims in *Igala* society actively participate in religious and cultural events, contributing to the region's diversity. They engage in community activities, including festivals, where they often collaborate with Christians and practitioners of traditional religions. This interfaith interaction fosters a sense of unity and mutual respect among the different religious groups in *Igala* land (Okpanachi,26).

The coming of Islam to Igala land.

Islam was introduced to the *Igala* people through the influence of Hausa and Nupe traders and settlers who traveled into the region in search of commercial opportunities. These traders, who were devout Muslims, brought with them Islamic religious practices and established small Muslim communities within *Igala* land. The presence of the Nupe people, who had long embraced Islam, was particularly influential in spreading the religion to the *Igala* (Nadel,42).

Some of the Igala traditional festivities practiced by the Muslims in Kogi State are highlighted below:

Ocho Festival

According to Adigun, the Ocho is the most significant version of the Ane (land) cleansing ceremony, performed by the Attah to appease the land on behalf of his subjects. A majority of the Muslims in the region actively participate in this event. Some Muslims with weaker faith (*Iman*) believe that the ceremony is conducted for their benefit, and thus, they contribute financially or otherwise and deeply engage in all aspects of the ceremony from beginning to end. Isaka further asserts that, to these Muslims with weaker beliefs, it is not considered *Haram* (forbidden) to be involved in practices perceived to be conducted for their own sake (152).

The Ocho and Ogani festivals are significant cultural events celebrated by the *Igala* people, showcasing intricate customs and spiritual rites that have been preserved across generations. The Ocho festival, an elaborate affair, begins with a sequence of preparatory rituals ten days prior, during which the Attah's incarnate beings, including the king of incarnate beings, Ekwe, are brought forth. The Achadu, a high-ranking official, plays an essential role in communicating the Attah's message to the Ikabi, who acts as a town crier, informing the public about the upcoming festival (Adigun, 152). According to *Igala* tradition, the chiefs gather at the palace in Idah two to three days before the festival to solidify the ceremonial preparations, reflecting the high degree of organization and reverence for the festival (Ogbo, 78).

On the day of Ocho, the Okenya people arrive with bundles of dry millet or guinea corn stalks, which they light to guide the Attah *Igala* to the Ocho site. These bundles symbolize protection and guidance, illuminating the path for the Attah during the nighttime journey to the ceremonial site (Ojo, 54). At the site, a hut and altar are constructed by the Okenya, where the ritual is performed. Ohinga, the Attah's appointed driver, selects the ritual site after consulting Ifa, a divination system



that guides decision-making in *Igala* spiritual practices (Oke, 33). The role of the Attah's wives who have borne children is also noteworthy, as they prepare food for the ritual, demonstrating the integration of familial and religious responsibilities in the festival (Ibrahim, 44).

Nine days after the Ocho festival, the Ogani festival is held as an expression of thanksgiving to the Attah. This colorful event takes place behind the Attah *Igala*'s palace and features dancing incarnate beings, abundant feasting, and celebratory music. The Ogani festival not only celebrates the successful Ocho festival but also functions as a ritual to usher in peace and prosperity across the *Igala* land (Okpoko and Njoku, 214). The festival culminates in a display of acrobatics, performed by the Angwa people of *Igala* land, which traces back to their roots in Bebeji, Kano State. This performance, known as the bury dance, is a tribute to ancestral practices, showcasing the connection between the *Igala* and their historical ties to northern Nigeria (Obe, 101).

The Attah, as the central figure, presents gifts of cows and cash to the participants, reinforcing the festival's role in unifying the community and ensuring cultural continuity. Through these festivities, the *Igala* people embody a respect for tradition, spirituality, and communal harmony, reflecting similar values seen across various Nigerian ethnic groups' annual celebrations (Adesina, 67).

Muslims in the *Igala* community generally engage in the non-religious aspects of the Ocho Festival. For instance, they take part in the communal feasts, attend public dances, and participate in the social gatherings that are central to the festival's celebrations. These activities allow Muslims to celebrate their cultural heritage while respecting their religious beliefs (Okpanachi, 29).

According to Okpanachi, *Igala* land has a rich heritage of traditional beliefs and festivals, some of which predate the advent of Islam and continue to be observed today. These practices serve various purposes in accordance with tradition and are deeply embedded in the culture of the *Igala* people. Here are a few notable beliefs and festivals:

Belief in the Ubi Ceremony

According to Lawal, the Ubi ceremony, or second burial ceremony, aims to prevent the spirit of the deceased from wandering. It involves sacrifices of animals and food propitiations to invoke divinities. Families set aside days for this ceremony, which includes music, dancing, and gunfire. The belief is that if this ceremony is not performed, the deceased will be unhappy, affecting their children and immediate family (77).

Adaji describes this as a second burial ceremony, typically held to prevent the spirit of the deceased from wandering. The process involves the sacrifice of certain animals to appease the ancestors (78). In an interview conducted on January 2, 2021, Jibrin I. (110 years old) from Iyaya Abache, Ankpa Local Government, explained that seven days before the Ubi festival, a welcoming ceremony is held, during which the Ogba dance—a popular dance in *Igala* culture—is performed every evening until the day of the event. The day before the ceremony, rituals known as Atogwu and Etakala take place.

An Okpe (woven cloth) is spread out, with four individuals holding up its corners as they bring it from outside into the compound of the deceased. They proceed to the burial site, accompanied by a person carrying a sharp cutlass, which is used to slaughter a ram for a male or a goat for a female, symbolically.



Outside the deceased's compound, a mound of baked clay is molded to represent three stones, which are used as a base for cooking yam and beniseed soup. Onumu Okele, a dish resembling fried eggs, is prepared at the same location, and the participants consume these foods there.

Muslims whose parents practiced traditional religion often observe this ceremony. They believe it ensures their safety from harm and helps them gain favor from their deceased parents. Additionally, they claim that participating in the ceremony is a way of showing respect to their parents. Despite being Muslims, they feel compelled to continue observing these traditions because it was part of their parents' practices.

It is important to note that Muslims are forbidden from participating in this act of *shirk* (polytheism). Islamic teachings emphasize entering Islam wholeheartedly and avoiding any involvement in such practices due to their potential consequences in the hereafter.

Ogani Festival

According to Okpanachi, the Ogani Festival is a festival celebrated annually at Angwa district, i.e., various quarters of the Hausas in the modern-day *Igala* land. The ogani festival is usually observed on Afor day, i.e., a big market day usually patronized every fifth day. A day before the Ogani Festival, a tradition is usually performed and known as Akpata; it is said to be an important ceremony which serves as the cleansing for the main perpetrators of the Ogani Festival before its commencement. It is usually observed as the real opening ceremony of this festival (24). As regards the akpata ceremony, a series of abominations are being perpetrated which are contrary to the rules of Islam. For instance, in the course of performing this tradition, a man dresses in female attire, applying local cosmetics and painting the face in different colors. Moreso, others with the local stretchers made up of bamboo stick on their head on this stretcher, a log of dried tree or stem shrouded like a corp tagged with a name of whome they have grodges as his father's corp, hence, this tradition, akpata ogani creates an avenue for terrorism, hoodlums and hooliganism; among the youths who engage themselves in all these activities even at time lead to chaotic situations when the motorist or the pedestrians are being taxed for money and were not given, they pass insult and assault abuses of various are reigned on them. Sometimes, the elites and those in political positions were also ridiculed. The rights and respect of others were not considered by the main actors of this festival, all in the name of the Ogani Festival. The major components of the tradition of ogani festival includes, thus, singing, drumming, mocking, insulting, raining curses on one another, even to one's paternal or maternal background or clan, and dressing in a modesty not suitable and as expected of a normal being, based on their transformation from their original being. This festival is celebrated in the two major local governments in *Igala* land, including Ankpa and Idah, and their various suburbs (Okpanachi,30).

Despite the Ogani Festival being rooted in traditional *Igala* religion, Muslims within the *Igala* community actively participate in the event. The participation of Muslims in the Ogani Festival highlights the interfaith harmony that exists within the *Igala* society. This inclusive approach is a reflection of the broader *Igala* culture, which values unity and community cohesion above religious differences.

Muslim participation in the Ogani Festival often involves engaging in non-religious aspects of the celebration, such as communal feasting, attending public dances, and participating in the social activities that accompany the festival. For many Muslims, involvement in the Ogani Festival is seen as an expression of cultural identity rather than religious observance. As noted by (Okpanachi,27),



Muslims in *Igala* land view their participation in the festival as a way to maintain their cultural heritage while respecting their religious beliefs.

Belief in Egbe Festival

The *Egbe* festival, observed by the inhabitants of Egume in Dekina Local Government of Kogi State, is a central cultural event for the *Igala* people. The festival is held annually as a tribute to the community's founders and ancestral figures, expressing reverence for the departed through the worship of divinities. Primarily, *Egbe* honors the dead chiefs of Egume, symbolizing continuity and respect for traditional leadership that has shaped the community (Adigun, 87). The ceremony reflects the *Igala* belief in the interconnectedness of the living and the dead, affirming that the departed ancestors influence the well-being of the town.

During *Egbe*, sacrifices are made to honor these ancestors, with offerings ranging from food to symbolic items. Public celebrations are reserved for the community's prominent figures, while common people perform similar rituals within their homes to honor their own familial ancestors. This blend of public and private veneration underscores the belief that all members of society, regardless of status, owe a debt of respect to their lineage (Ogbo and Adesina, 133). According to Njoku, the festival strengthens social cohesion, as community members gather to honor their shared heritage, and reinforces the cultural importance of ancestry in *Igala* society (Njoku, 54).

The spiritual aspect of *Egbe* is significant, as it is thought that neglecting ancestral rites could lead to misfortune or unrest. Through this festival, the people of Egume seek the favor and protection of the ancestral spirits, reaffirming their cultural and spiritual obligations. Such festivals are seen across various ethnic groups in Nigeria, serving as both religious rites and cultural affirmations that maintain societal balance (Ojo, 98).

In this way, the *Egbe* festival highlights the *Igala* people's commitment to honoring the past, ensuring communal well-being, and preserving the cultural identity of their town through annual ancestral worship (Adesina, 102).

The custodians of the *Egbe* deity are the Ora Ogelewu clan. The *Egbe* priests come from that clan. They are the ones who go into the *Egbe* grove to consummate the sacrifices. They supervise the cooking and eating of the sacrifice animals. The leader of that clan who performs the ritual at the graves of the past chiefs of the town is Oral Ego (Adesina, 90).

Despite the *Egbe* Festival's roots in traditional African religion, Muslims in the Egume community actively participate in the festival. Their involvement is a reflection of the inclusive and harmonious relationship between different religious groups in Egume. This interfaith interaction is common in many parts of Kogi State, where traditional practices and modern religions often coexist peacefully. Muslims in Egume typically engage in the non-religious aspects of the *Egbe* Festival. For example, they participate in communal feasts, attend dances, and take part in other social activities associated with the festival. These activities are seen as cultural rather than religious, allowing Muslims to celebrate their heritage while adhering to their Islamic beliefs (Abubakar, 297-311).

Moreover, during the *Egbe* Festival, Muslims may offer prayers for peace and prosperity in the community. These prayers are often aligned with the festival's themes of blessing and protection, contributing to the festival's overall spiritual significance. By participating in these ways, Muslims in Egume help to strengthen community ties and promote unity among the diverse religious groups in the area (Okpanachi, 35).



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 it's principle as the apex beliefs worthy of not practicing asides other beliefs found in our contemporary societies, such as the various beliefs in the African Tradition, which are contrary to the real injunction of Allah, hence this should be ignored. Therefore Muslims should not be part to such believes and the Islamic Scholars should also preach fervently in the redirection of monotheism and its practice in Igala land and Nigeria at large.

Recommendations

- ✓ It is pertinent for all Muslims to abide by the will of Allah and the footsteps of the Prophet in their religious rites in line with this verse of the Quran in chapter 59 verse 7 when Allah says, "And whatever the messenger gives you accept it and whatever he forbids you abstain (there) and keep your duty to Allah"
- ✓ The spirit of monotheism in terms of beliefs should be inculcated in all brethren of Islam at all levels.
- ✓ This work recommends 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 what follows is resurrection.
- ✓ At the instance of individual death, there is no room for transmigration of the soul into another body or reincarnation as the case may be, from the perspective of this research.
- ✓ It is mandatory for the learned and erudite Islamic scholars in Igala 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 enforced at all levels. Hence, this will curb the idea of diluting traditional Africa: belief with the doctrines of Islam.
- ✓ The practice of the real doctrines of Islam should be encouraged, while innovations should be ignored, based on the Quranic injunction which says. "O ye who believe, enter into Islam wholeheartedly and follow not the foe 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 are against its tenets will be reduced to a minimal level.

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