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TRADITIONAL RULERS AND THE "BORN AGAIN" SYNDROME: A CHALLENGE TO TRADITION AND CULTURE IN YORUBALAND, SOUTH-WESTERN, NIGERIA

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Introduction

A debate on the relevance of Traditional Institution is an ongoing discussion at all levels in Nigeria today. The traditional rulers are calling for recognition and relevance in the governance and administration of the country. The 1979 Constitution did not give any relevance or role to the traditional rulers in Nigeria. They are only regarded as advisers to the people in government.¹

During the tenure of President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999 – 2007), many appeals were made by traditional rulers to the Government to amend the constitution, so as to give relevance to them. The same request was made during the life time of the late President Musa Yar' Adua. The latter called a meeting of Traditional rulers known as National Council of Traditional Rulers (NCTR) to consider the request. This was done in the hope of finding some functions for them in future constitutional amendments. However, it is observed that apart from the interest of traditional rulers in governance, some Obas who are

Ade Dopamu et al, Ikenne, National Association for the Study of Religions, p. 173.

39. *Sunday Tribune*, 28 October, 2007 p.2
40. Ibid
41. Rotimi Omotoye, "The Concept of God and its Understanding by the Christian Missionaries in Yorubaland" pp101 – 112
42. Olumide Kayode pp102 – 103
43. S. O. Abogunrin (eds) et al, *Decolonization of Biblical Interpretation in Africa*, A Publication of the Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies (NABIS), Ibadan, Number 4, 2005. Articles were written on the title by many scholars.
44. *Nigerian Tribune*, Tuesday, 25 March, 2008 p.42
45. *Nigerian Tribune*, Tuesday 25 March, 2008 p.9
46. *Nigerian Tribune*, Sunday, 3rd March, 2013, p.58

COMMON GROUNDS IN THE RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OF THE IGBOMINA IN EASTERN YORUBALAND

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Abstract

Religion has been part of every society. Indigenous religion was also a culture. Centuries later, came Islam and subsequently, Christianity. In the course of propagating the neo-religions, there emerged a proliferation of their organs, which have continued to increase in number and wax stronger. They have become a source of disunity among the members of the same faith and inter-faith. However, in this disunity, there is unity which provided common grounds that guarantee continuous peace and harmony among the Igbomina in eastern Yorubaland. While this paper does not deny the differences in the beliefs and practices of the alien religions among the Igbomina which could be explosive time bombs or kegs of gun powder, if not well managed, the focus is to examine one of the common grounds (festivals, the most elaborate), and its strength and capability of sustaining peace in Igbomina land, in the face of the increasing crises engendered by religion. Through exploratory method,¹ it is discovered that many nuclear and extended families across Igbominaland are mixed up with both Christians and Muslims. In some cases, the husband is of a religion while the wife is of the other. This development, rather than being a source of discord, is a blessing in disguise. This is obvious in their festivals and ceremonies that family bond bring both Christian and Muslim siblings or friends together in the church or mosques, family house,

or designated venues, irrespective of their differences. Affinity and consanguinity kinship are equally potent connecting rods. Therefore, this paper concludes that the present challenges to separate the co-religionists in Nigeria may be an unrealizable dream among the Igbomina if the common features are stressed and the interest of every group or religion is upheld, none, to the detriment of the other.

Introduction

What is today known as Igbominaland begins from about 145km North-East of the ancient city of Ile-Ife and extends as far as South-Eastern banks of River Niger up to Jebba. It lies roughly between latitudes 8° and $8^{\circ} 48' 39''$ North of the Equator and longitudes $4^{\circ} 30'$ and $4^{\circ} 56' 25''$ East of the Greenwich. It shares boundaries with Kabba to the North-East, Ekiti to the South-East, Ilorin and Afon to the North-West, Ijagbo and Oyan to the West and Otan Ayegbaju to the South-West.² Other descriptive remarks say that "the Igbomina is one of the major ethnic groupings found in Eastern Yorubaland";³ "the powerful Igbona or Igbomina predominate in the area to the south and east of Ilorin town";⁴ "the Igbomina formed at least, three-quarters of the inhabitants of Ilorin Province, occupying a large area extending as far back as Ila-Orangun in Oyo Province...They are pure Yoruba";⁵ "the Igbomina area was said to have included Ilofa, Ekan, Odo-Owa, Osi, Oshin, and Obo whose people are no more particularly keen in joining their Igbomina brethren";⁶ Though the Igbomina are natively the people of Isin, Irepodun, Ifelodun Local Government Areas in Kwara State and Ila and Ifedayo in Osun State; they are found in almost every part of Nigeria and overseas. They regularly hold their branch meetings at home and abroad. Once upon a time, the

only known religion in Igbominaland and Africa as a whole was the Indigenous Religion. In Nigeria at large today, Islam and Christianity are the two most contentious and competing religions. On the one hand, the spread and popular adoption of the more vigorous missionary-religions caused historical erosion; steadily, some beliefs and practices of the indigenous religion were eroded and modified. On the other hand, missionary drive led to clash of interest among Christians and Muslims. Nigerian society is full of divisible physical, political, social and religious differences. Religious gap is fast widening and more pronounced more than ever before. This is evident in Borno, Bauchi, Yobe states in northern Nigeria and recently in Iwo, Osun State in southern Nigeria.

With the reality of Igbomina religion, Islam and Christianity, the push and pull factor came to the open; brotherhood of cultural link versus religious affiliations. Hence, the three divisive people living within three different religious traditions: the Traditionalists, Muslims and Christians. While Islam was conforming in practice to the indigenous religion⁷, Christianity was transforming. The polarization, due to differences in belief system (i.e. belief in the Trinity, resurrection of Jesus Christ, baptism, rapture, worship leaders, mode of worship, objects of worship) paved the way for the battle for recognition and identity. Therefore, the problem of the study stems from the fact that many religious leaders or many others often publicly raise offensive and controversial issues in their sermons, teachings and festivals, in the course of propagating their faith. Undue emphasis is often laid on areas of differences which plant the seed of dissension and eventually germinate into harvest of crises, bigotry and rivalry. Again, religion seems to have become a potent tool to agitate for and

determine political sharing, appointments, promotion, endorsement of candidates jostling for posts, representative imbalance, political equation, etc. This is the trend in schools, towns, tiers of government where rotational representative or 'equal representations' are adopted. In Igbominaland and Nigeria at large, while the President/Governor/Chairman or any leader is of religion A, the deputy is of religion B. This correlates with Lewis Coser's view of the function of religion that "although it may draw men together; it may also separate them and set them against each other". 'Religion can be divisive in an atmosphere of competition between religious groups or segments of a group.'⁸ The trend seems to have snowballed everywhere as strict adherence to this formula leads to mutual understanding and co-existence but on the other hand often promotes sycophancy over merit.

The recent religious clashes between Muslims and Christians in Iwo (Osun State) could have been prevented if government, religious leaders and individuals practically bear it in mind that both Prophet Mohammed (SAW) and Jesus Christ centred on love, peace and truth. It is only by understanding, tolerating and preaching more of what they have in common than differences that religion will have more positive effect on the development of the nation, economically, socially and politically. The writer's information sourced from oral interviews, diplomatic chats, visitations, personal experience, as well as attendance at different religious, socio-cultural festivals and ceremonies informed his position that the common grounds among the adherents of the three religions are intertwined-binding cord which will last for ages if well harnessed and sustained. Only one of the identified common grounds (i.e. festivals) is critically examined in this paper.

X-ray of Festivals in Igbomina Religion, Islam and Christianity

Before Islam and Christianity, every event had religious undertone because religion and culture cannot be separated. Most festivals were associated with specific divinities, spirits or ancestors and therefore, religious in outlook. There was no schism in the socio-cultural and religious festival of a pristine community; it was a festival of the people by the people for the people. There were national Yoruba festivals such as: Ifá, The Earth (Ilè), Èsù, Sàngó, Ògún, Òrìsà Oko, Egungun. More importantly, all communities in Igbominaland have their peculiar religious festivals. To mention but a few are: OjuOdo in Igbonla, Akoyi in Edidi, Oro (i.e. Ìla Orangun), Egungun Festival, Ipa Ceremony (celebrated among hunters in Igbominaland), Agbaasin in Isinland, Awoji in Iwoland, Ese Deity in Agbeku, Alaguso in Ijara-Isin, Èrè (Mud) in Oba-Isin, Oba EeGba (The king refused the order) in Ajase-Ipo, Esii in Oke Oyi, Epa in Omu-Aran, Aba/Oniwaro in Oro Ago, etc. There are equally other less-elaborate personal and natural ceremonies like naming, wedding, burial, initiation, housewarming, graduation, coronations and installations which are not synonymous with festivals.⁹

Festivals are indispensable carry-over celebrations among the Igbomina Christians and Muslims to commemorate historical, cultural and religious events that are of great significance in the Bible and the Qu'ran. Today, festivals or anniversaries may be purely secular (i.e. Democracy Day, Workers' Day, Independence Day) or religious (i.e. Palm/Easter Sunday, Christmas for Christians or Id-el- Maulud, Id-el- Fitri, Id-el Kabir, exclusively for the Muslims). Therefore, certain dates or season of the year have been noted for special occasions

when people gather together from all walks of life to celebrate important festivals (usually at designated venues). Hence, the celebration of these events, marked by public enjoyment or religious ceremonies is known as festival. It is therefore, expedient to explore the enduring common features in their religious festivals.

Foremost, every festival associated with any religion has a definite motive or purpose as well as its origin which is jealously preserved. Basically, their festivals are held in honour of ancestors, legendary figures, natural features, with the basis of continuum or the belief that life does not end in the physical world and that life continues in the spirit world after death. This link explains why their festivals would not but give the whole community a sense of meaning, realization, actualization or cohesiveness. Such legendary figures are immortalized via annual celebrations, hence, festivals serve as a socializing agent. Equivalence of such heroic figures (i.e. Orangun Fagbamila Ajagunla, Aworo Ose-Ila, Baragbon-Esie, Tiji-Ijara, Ogbagbai-Iwo, Igana-Ajasse-po, Ogundiran Aja-Amoyo, Sango, etc) are Biblical and Qur'anic patriarchs, prophets, founders of faith such as Adam, Noah/Nuhu, Moses/Musa, Abraham/Ibrahim, Mohammed (S.A.W.) and Jesus Christ. Islamic festivals (i.e. Maulud, Id-el- Fitri, Id-el Kabir) as well as Christians' Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday (Galilee Day), Christmas, etc are commemorations of events held in memory of their founders or patriarchs. The origin of them is therefore, annually emphasized and preached during these festivals in order to sustain the festivals, justify the significance of the season and teach the new generation with rigour the antecedents of such festivals.¹⁰ Some examples are hereby examined.

Àwòrò Òsé is worshipped in Ila Orangun in appreciation

and remembrance of Àwòrò Òsé, a skillful archer sent by Alárá (of Arámọkọ) who killed the evil bird. This was after the collective celebration of Orò festival and a meeting of the trio (Ajerò (of Ìjerò), Alara and Orangun Ogboye (of Ila Orangun), the three sons of Morenikẹ Agbọnmiregun also known as Iwa, at Okitimẹta (town's gate where three heaps were). Tradition has it that situated at the heart of the town (the market square) was a tree where a strange bird used to perch. The mysterious sounds made by it were always calamitous. When it cries Pogún! Pogún!! Pogún!!! Or Pogbòn! Pogbòn!! Pogbòn!!!; it meant twenty or thirty people respectively would die. Renowned hunters had earlier lost their lives in their attempt to kill the evil bird and myriad of consults to the Babalawos (Seers) proved futile. On his third attempt came the long desired victory - the successful killing of the strange bird. In appreciation of his meritorious service, Orangun bestowed on him a white-beaded crown and several valuables and promised to worship his god annually. Orangun also prevailed on him to stay with him permanently, with a large land given to him to farm on. Àwòrò Òsé then became an annual festival in the month of August, which coincides with the new yam season.¹¹ Therefore, religion has not ceased from being a mechanism of adjustment and of solving problems, not only of overcoming anxiety but also of ordering one's relationship with the supernatural and in the process supporting social norms and integrating society and personalities.¹²

The Ese deity in Agbeku, a deity originally owned by Ila Orangun people but bequeathed to the people of Agbeku is also a means of appreciation of their hospitality during the reign of Oba Bamigboye Ariyowonye (the Orangun). Inter-tribal wars over the entire Yoruba country forced Ila people into exile at

Omupo, Omu-Aran, Agbeku, Okutalla, Ilota, etc. Oba E Egba (the king refused the order) Festival in Ajase-po became an historic celebration following the end of rancour between one of the earliest Olupo and his chiefs. The conflict resolution was credited to the chief priests.¹³ Awoji in Iwoland, Agbaasin in Isinland, Shagbe Ogede and Olosun rivers in Shagbe, Obatala, Esu Oba and Esu Ipetu, etc. were also renowned for fertility and fruitfulness. No family could afford having a barren because of the stigma.

Like the legendary Sango, Akoyi festival in Edidi is usually celebrated in remembrance of a woman of great supernatural boldness who was known for unilaterally combating invaders or ward off enemy aggression. When she was forced out of her matrimonial home in Esie, under heavy rains due to childlessness, she took a supernatural dive across the heavily flooded Osin River. Deified Osin (river) flows across major Igbomina communities. "The ancestor worship and the deification of illustrious warriors and kings is not even peculiar to traditional African religion. Even modern religion like Christianity, believes in the resurrection of the dead".¹⁴ Also significant are natural or sacred places that are worshipped, for they are symbols of unity, protection and refuge. To mention but a few are: Awoji hills in Iwo, Oke Aba and Odo Ore) land, Para Oke in Ila Orangun, Oke-Agunjin in Agunjin, Oke Ara in Ora, Alaguso in Ijara, Oke Agbana in Share, etc. In both the Muslim and Christian Holy books, hills/mountains (Mt. Sinai, Mt. Horeb, Mt. Zion, Mt. Arafat, Mt. Hira) are sacred. Many Igbomina Christians still use them especially for prayers, seclusion and testimony grounds (i.e. CAC Oke Anu, Oke Isẹgun, Oke Ayo, Adura Ori Oke), etc.¹⁵

Worship was traditionally held in designated places such

as shrines, temples, market squares, rivers, forests, etc. Aside the shrines noted for the national festivals (i.e. Sango, Ogun) were peculiar shrines (i.e. Igbonnibi and Idi Ogun Oja in Ila Orangun, Obalufon Shrine in Agbamu, Esu Oba and Eṛe in Obalsin, Akuwon Shrine in Owu, Oke Awoji in Iwo, Kooyi Shrine in Olla, Agbaasin in Isanlu Isin, Idi Eṣe in Agbeku, etc). All roads led to them during the procession. Like the medicinal Ero-Omo Pond in Idofian, Oju Odo festival in Igbonla is as a result of a lake which looks like a mortal with medicinal power to heal diseases. With the advent of Islam and Christianity, the Muslims have the mosque and the Christians, the Church as the sacred houses for socio-religious functions. Muslims make pilgrimages (the Hajj & Umra) to the holy lands of Mecca and Medina just as Christians equally regard Israel and Rome as sacred lands in place of the traditional shrines. Whatever the purpose may be, it remains constant that they are being celebrated with pomp and pageantry. They mark important social and religious events in the lives of the people and they culminate in series of performances, entertainment, merrymaking, rites and ceremonies. Most of their festivals (i.e. Aworo Ose -Ila, Akoyi - Edidi, Anlugbua -Owu), were observed when new yams were out to be eaten (harvest season). In this case, their success in agriculture, hunting expeditions, trade, fertility, security, good luck, artisanship and domination of the environment depended on how much their gods were propitiated. This is true of the sociologists' point of view represented by Emile Durkheim that religion provides a patterned and familiar way of overcoming life and environmental crises and of the preparation and hope for a comfortable future.¹⁶ The psychological theory as presented by Sigmund Freud also argues that the institution of religion arose because of man's (psychosis in the thinking of humanity) fear

and uncertainties and his mental limitations in his environment.¹⁷

Common to the festivals of the three religions of the Igbomina are congregational worship, offerings and sacrifices, merrymaking, flamboyant dressing, showcase of talents, music and (symbolic dance), animal slaughter, time for hospitality, gift exchange, etc. For instance, a fat pig, two big snails and kolanut are the ingredients used to propitiate Esii deity in Oke Oyi; a tuber of yam taken from each farmer to Ohoso (the spot where the first Olowu went into the ground) for the ritual for Anlugbua festival in Owu Isin; various food items, cocks, hens, goats and sheep to worship Awoji in Iwoland; kolanuts with fish to propitiate Ere (mud) festival in Oba Isin; she-goat or cow for the OjuOdo in Igbonla; fried corn, beans, libations of red palm oil, chicken, a hen, ram, kolanuts to propitiate Esu Oba; she goat, snail, kolanut, palm wine, solid pap, ekuru, to propitiate (River) Osin; etc¹⁸

Offerings, sacrifice of praises and thanksgivings are evident in Islam and Christianity.¹⁹ Offerings and sacrifices are practiced in Islam and Christianity today i.e. cheerful donations, launching, fund raising and spiritual sacrifices such as sacrifice of praise and worship (Hebrews 13:15, John 4:24), obedience (I Samuel 15:22), prayer (Hebrews 11:6), sacrifice of tithing (Malachi 3:8-10), ministering to the needy (Proverbs. 23:6), offering oneself as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2), visitation (Matthew 25:36). The Bible admonishes giving offering cheerfully and without ostentation (II Corinthians 9:6-7). Many references support the need to give to the needy i.e. Deut. 15:7-11, II Cor. 9:8-15. Likewise, The Qur'an discusses the need for provision for the poor, the need to care for travellers, the need to free slaves and hostages, etc., (Sura2:196) and the Zakat or alms tax. Celebrants cook delicious foods for visitors, loved ones, the

less privileged and both their Christian and Muslim neighbours.¹⁹ With Islam and Christianity, the fact remains during their festivals that every food or gift is dedicated to God and received with thanksgiving. However, dietary laws brought by Islam and Christianity have brought to fore the spiritual relevance of some animals or habits. For instance, more humane methods of animal slaughter (especially in Islam—reciting of some verses before slaughter) as well as the prohibition of eating carrion, dead animals, blood, pigs, dogs or all, which can be associated with one disease or the other. This, in effect, has affected the universal patronage of some of these businesses and it is, indeed, a factor to reckon with when determining the nature of business. The most common animals for slaughter or use in such elaborate ceremonies are: ram, sheep, goat, cow, chicken/turkey, fish, etc. Hazardous eating and avoidance of edibles that are injurious to health (i.e. cigarettes, alcoholic beverages, addictions, adultery, glutton, too much intake of sugar, salt, fat, carbohydrates) have, for a long time topped the list of religious-cum public enlightenment matters. Some who violate 'godly' or regulated dieting are denied some religious offices or functions.

Till date, the Igbomina are renowned merry makers. The age-long slogan is 'owo ni e je keni j'egbado' ('na money e go chup'). They have always been supportive and friendly to a fault both in times of celebrations and distress. The Okunloye family's sophisticated outing ceremony on December 2012 in Ijara is a much talked about lavish-display of wealth. There was 'mass' cow slaughter and gift of cows to compounds, different musicians (i.e. Yinka Ayefele) at different spots for the reception, gift of gospel van to the church, declaration of surplus for every Tom, Dick and Harry. Not too long ago (5th May, 2013)

was the one-week grand style 50th birthday celebration of Oba (Dr.) Solomon O. Oloyede (Olusin, Isanlu-Isin & Chairman Isin Traditional Council) in Isanlu, that brought eminent dignitaries, including the most expensive musician (King Sunny Ade) who added colour to the celebration. At Iwo on 18th April, 2014 was a ground breaking and sophisticated till-dawn party at the primary school open field in memory of Pa and Mrs. Ishola of Irese compound. The occasion had the popular General Kollington Ayinla as the guest musician and renowned actor/comedian, Pa Ajirebi as the master of ceremony. The Igbomina throw parties at will and visit club houses for relaxation and socialization during their religious festivals and other ceremonies. (Festivals and ceremonies (secular or religious) have kept alive the concept of Ankoo (uniform), Asọ Ebi and the matching accessories. The slogan is 'a o ri re barawase (one good turn deserves another). Their religious and secular (i.e. Igbomina Day)²⁰ have continued to be a source of social reunion, making of new and renewal of friendship, settlement of conflicts and initiation of self-help developmental projects. Therefore, the three forms of religion in Igbominaland have solidarity and integrative functions. Communal living and collectivism stressed by Islam and Christianity gave birth to associations and groups (Janmq, Egbē-alasalatu/obinrinrere- Hebrews 10:25, Acts 2:42a, John 15:12, Hebrews 13:1-2, I Peter 2:17, Hadith 14-15, etc) which are carryover of the age-long practice of brother's keeper. This supports Durkheim's solidarity theory, "Religion contributes to order in society by creating conditions for social well-being, self-discipline, social cohesion and continuity of cultures and traditions".²¹

Festivals help to keep traditions/reminiscences (origin, development and significance) of a religion to the new

generation or new converts. This is reiterated and emphasized at the yearly festival by the designated (priest/oba). They do not only train the youths for heroic services or uphold the societies' best practices, their festivals help to keep memories alive, arouse curiosity and consequently develop sense of history. For instance, such help to know why no Elesie of Esie (Obailú) must at no time set his eyes on the stone king (ObaÈre); why indigenes of Iwo (Isin) are popularly called Iwonile, omo Awoji; or why the Oba people are described as OmọÈrẹ (children of the mud), or why the OmuAran are regarded as omoolomu Aperan; what informed the popular slogan "omọapọpọlọnipaęsin; why Kudu in Isin is regarded as Kudu Oga Isin; why there is bond among some villages within the state or outside i.e. Omu Aran, Arandun and Aran Orin; Isanlu-Isin, Ijara Isin and Iji Isin; Òwù in Kwara and the Òwu in Ogun State; ObalSin in Kwara, Osun, Ondo and Delta, etc). Religion is still used by the Igbomina as a moral weapon to mould people's character (omoluabi) and direct them towards the exhibition of appropriate behaviour. It could also be used as a reformative weapon for social equity and justice as exemplified by the Sokoto Jihad. The belief was very strong among the Igbomina that the ancestral spirit punishes such action by sending sickness and misfortune. In this way, the adherents of the three religions in Igbominaland obey and respect constituted (traditional, political, spiritual) authorities and take directives from them. This explains why the leaders have crucial but delicate roles to play in co-habitation and nation building or vice versa.

Again, all festivals are deservedly given the widest publicity and planning. To fail to plan is to plan to fail. No festival or anniversary is celebrated without adequate preparation. Christmas comes but once in a year. All festivals are

pre-announced and reminded by the priests, town criers and family heads. Hence, adequate preparation is expected to be made as regards the journey, sacrifices, clothing, entertainment, socialization, contacts, site clearing, souvenirs, etc. This aids proper planning and preparation as the motive is equally to prevent clash or fixture of any other serious event (wedding, burial, installation). Like the predominant study of the moon, sun or season for the sacred calendar; most of the Muslim festivals is determined by the lunar calendar. With the modernity of the Gregorian calendar (movable and fixed dates), diaries, calendar of events, course manuals are made ahead of the current year. Late sighting and signal of the moon oftentimes takes some worshippers unawares i.e. Muslims' commencement of fasting during the month of Ramadan and the variation in the festival day.

Their traditional festivals lasted for varying days i.e. Esii Festival in Oke Oyi (3 days), Alaguso Festival in Ijara Isin (7 days), Aworo Ose in Ila Orangun (14 days), Egungun Festival in Ila Orangun and Okella (17 days), etc. The influence of numeral concept is thus evident in both the Christian and Muslim worship today; they often organize 3, 7, 21, 40 days prayers, revivals, etc. However, some other numbers are also adopted directly from their holy books i.e. Ramadan season 30 days, Lenten season 40 days. More importantly, like the annual traditional festivals,²² Maulud, Id-el-Fitri, Id-el-Kabir, Palm/Easter Sunday, Christmas, anniversaries and other memorials (i.e. naming, wedding) come up once in a year. Christian and Muslim festivals come up every year, an element of the past in the present. People pray on such festivals saying: Àsèyísàmódún (just as we celebrate this year, may we celebrate yet another). Till today, the word *odún* (festival) is used as a prefix to the

actual name of the festival i.e. *Odún Ifá* (Ifá Festival), *Odún Kérésimesì* (Christmas), *Odún Itúnu Àwè* (Ramadan Festival), etc. As it is, George Frazer's theory originates from man's functional and natural world order as well as its routine programmes which suggest the existence of a supernatural being. If the world follows its programmes without any intervention by man, the sun rises and sets without permission from anybody; the rain falls and seasons come without being thwarted by man; aging of man; inevitability of man's death, etc, then, there must be a higher power beyond humanity that has put in place these world orders.

Associated with festivals with great consequence on harmonious and co-habitation among the three religions of the Igbomina is rest (holidays at work) or temporary paralyses of normal events.²³ Customarily, celebrants of their festivals (Egungun, Oro, Ogun, Maulud, Id-el-Fitri, Id-el-Kabir, Easter, Christmas) suspend their day-to-day activities for days or weeks. This to an extent has an adverse effect on production, buying and selling. However, economic situation, nature of job, distance, fear of the witches and evil doers, unfounded envy, insecurity and civil service bureaucracy have led to decline in the exodus of indigenes to their community festivals, be it secular or religious. While some private establishments do not even recognize the public holidays, to some others, declaration of one or two days rest from work is insufficient or sheer waste of resources for such trips.²⁴

Again, the beauty of every festival rests on the procession, which often marks the beginning of the festival. This serves the purpose of public awareness. The starting and the finishing points as well as the officials vary from village to village. For instance, vis-à-vis, planning and procession, there is

line-up of activities for the *Odun Oro* (the festival for the king in *Ila Orangun*). Nine days to the commencement of the festival, *Olori Awo* and other priests would go to the palace with *Ifa Ajobo* at midnight for divination; after which the *Baale Onilu* (Chief drummer) make chronicles of king lists called *Eka* in the first day. Next is the *Isun Isü L'efa* (roasting of 3 new tubers of yam) by the priest the second day; procession to the palace for *Iwa Iyan -Ojo Awejewemu* (feasting) on the third day; *Iwa Aso* (king takes seat at the veranda to receive chiefs' homage on the 7th day); *Isule/Imarugbo* from the 8th through the 10th day (when the king and wives first go to his family compound to sacrifice a ram at his father's grave and then to the *Obalumo's* compound to honour *Timo* (the first settler) and sacrifice a cock at the grave of the mother of *Orangun Igbonnibi*; a repetition of *Iwaaso* on the 11th day; *Sakungbengbe* (queens of present and past *Oranguns* first make procession from the palace to Chief *Odoode's* compound before leaving for the market square to dance in honor of *Orangun Amotagesi's* medicinal prowess) on the 12th day; and the *Isinro* (king's rites) at Chief *Odoode's* house on the 13th day.²⁵

Traditional priests and village heads had the market squares, shrines and designated spots to reach and worship during their processions and festivals. The *Aworo Orangun* in *Ila* moves to *Moosa* the main shrine for the new yam festival, the *Owu* people make procession round the village to *Ohoso* (the spot where the first *Olowu* sank); round *Oke Awoji* in *Iwo*; dance round the town before converging on *Olupo's* palace in *Ajasse-po*; round *Oju Odo* in *Igbonla*; round the market square to *Ojubo Ere* in *Esie*, etc. Muslims and Christians also have their sacred places and functionaries such as *Eid-praying grounds*, mosques, churches, mountains, etc. Most of the groves gave way

to schools, churches and dispensaries during the colonial era. Prayers and services with approval are still congregationally held by both Muslims and Christians or either of the religions at the market square, *Oba's* palace, etc. For instance is *Iwo City CAN*,²⁶ where Christians end up their one-week-long by beginning the year with the Lord prayers in the *Oba's* palace. Dancing round the town on Palm/Easter Sundays, *Walimah*, *Hajj* thanksgiving and funeral rites are carry-over practices of dancing round the town during traditional annual festivals.

As rituals and rites in the traditional festivals were performed by prominent figures like the king (*Oro* festival, *Iye*) and priests, so do community heads and religious leaders still offer prayers, goodwill messages to all, exchange of pleasantries, and pronounce blessings in public arena on the entire community or congregation on every matter. New rites and rituals are the Muslims' *Arkan* (the five pillars of Islam)²⁷ and Christian denominational doctrines (sacrament, baptism). This is true of *Mbiti* that 'festivals are religious ways of implementing the values and beliefs of society'.²⁸ Having made an exposé on the common grounds in their religious beliefs and practices as reflected in their festivals, the following can be deduced:

— Religious festivals continue to play a role in the public life of Nigerians. The problem is neither with Islam nor Christianity, but with Nigerians who want to use religion as a means to an end through fair competition. This is why it appears as if religion has been playing a negative role in the affairs of the nation.

— No doubt, "in every religion, there are always the elements of changelessness and change".²⁹ Today, the *Igbomina* are either officially professed Christians or Muslims but the fact remains that there are elements of

traditionalism in them. Syncretism is the order of the day as those who participate in the Egungun masquerade or other fetish festivals bear Christian or Muslim names while their observers are predominantly Christians and Muslims. Not only are circumstantial names still given by Muslim and Christian parents (i.e. Abòdunde, Iyabò, Abidemi), many attributive names or cognomen (i.e. Alake, Asabi, Akande) are also retained. Many totem names have been criticized and modified to reflect alignment with Islam and Christianity (i.e. Orisabunmi-Oluwabunmi, Abogunrin-Abolurin, Awotunde-Olutunde, and pure religious names such as Mohammed, Abdullahi, Islamiat, Peter, John and James). While the concept of giving such names remains the same, many who retain the totem names merely do so to avoid loss of identity and the legal rigours involved in the change of names.

— Relics of shrines are bushy, hardly visited or reduced to objects of mockery. It is obvious today that most traditional festivals are not overtly celebrated and most renowned priests, maskers of Egungun and custodians of traditions are dead. Hence, many pristine traditions cannot be sustained; whatever is obtainable today is a mere shadow of its real self. Little or no forum is officially often available to enable the scanty adherents of traditional religion to narrate the myths and stories leading to their worship. Consequently, little or nothing is known about Awoji by middle aged or youths in Iwo, Oke Aba, Odo Oṛẹ; about Agan in Aran Orin; about Iye in Owu-Isin; about Alaguso in Ijara-Isin; about Agbaasin in Isinland, etc.

— One wonders today if there is any repercussion in eating

or offering for sales or as gifts new yam before the new yam festival in Esie, Ila Orangun, Owu, etc, or whether the corpse of any son or daughter of Igbonla that dies, first returns to Oju Odo before his final journey to the celestial world or not. Many traditional beliefs have been labeled superstitious in modern day.

— Today, the Igbomina are less enthusiastic about traditional rites and rituals except for cases of referral services in times of mysterious challenges. This is commonly termed, *aájò* (solution), *títeṣè ilé bòó*, (seeking solution from one's background). In the same vein, insecurity, financial status, previous emergency journeys made to their villages or elsewhere have drastically reduced the zeal of Muslims and Christians to travel down to celebrate the religious festivals in their home towns.

— Truly, Islam and Christianity have great influence on the traditional festivals, the level of syncretism across Igbomina communities also shows that traditional religion has its obvious influence on Islam and Christianity. It therefore, means that no total love is lost between traditionalism and the universal religions.

— Festivals have their features such as: definite motive of celebration, renewal of covenant; expression and achievement of unity; preservation of culture, religion and philosophy; festival procession performs the function of publicity; spiritual values.³⁰

— All these common functions and features of festivals in the three religions help to bring to the fore the elements of the past in the present, otherwise called cultural dynamism.

— In spite of the differences, the uniformity in function remains mandatorily intact because all the three religions share common identity on the grounds that they are all religions.

Conclusion

Religion has existed in all human societies from early times. Although belief systems and traditions of worship differ from culture to culture, they also have many common elements. Although, the primary purpose of the religions is to worship and then preach the message of God to people in their festivals and ceremonies, in most cases (as peculiar to Islam and Christianity) there are underlining tendencies to attract people of other faiths which have not put an end to clashes and suspicion between Muslims and Christians today. No religion teaches immorality, inhumanity, bigotry, prejudice, etc. The root cause of the problems is perhaps bent on misinterpretation of religious doctrine, which results in fanaticism, sectionalism, bigotry, hatred, and intolerance amongst Nigerians of various religious backgrounds. This also cause rampant religious crises. It is against this background that the author examined festivals, as one of the common grounds in the beliefs and practices of the Igbomina.

The Igbomina communities once had their peculiar festivals apart from the Yoruba national deities which culturally bounded them together. With the advent of Islam and Christianity, the emphasis on their religious differences especially during their festivals and ceremonies became a source of disunity within the cultural setting. However, culture and religion cannot be separated; the intertwined theory resulted in syncretism that guarantees sustainable peace. Following series of

oral interviews, observations during festivals, and secondary sources, the paper described festivals, through its features, as an effective weapon in the hands of religious, community and political leaders to sincerely preach peace, love, and co-habitation. With the common grounds, religion will play its cohesive function.

As regards the Igbomina, religious tolerance and harmonious living is unprecedented and more noticeable among them than elsewhere. This is due to inter-marriages even among feuding communities, communal calls or extended offer of honorary chieftaincy titles across Igbominaland, mixed up of both Muslims and Christians in their nuclear and extended families, trade and cultural links, common Egbẹ Ọmọ Igbomina Agenda, national festivals (Igbomina Day) and religious associations and the age-long emphasis on the central values reflecting in their local government names (i.e. Ifẹlodun-Love is rewarding, Irẹpọdun-Unity/Togetherness is rewarding, Isin also known as (Isinmeto)-Organizational/consensus, Ifẹdayọ (Joy resulting from love towards all) and Ila (Orangun) traditionally coined from Ilajinimopin (half portion of Oduduwa's property I received) and Ọrànmgún (my cause is straight forward). These five local governments in Kwara and Osun states still have their cultural bond; common pursuit (i.e. regrouping, clamour for Igbomina State, rotational national day) and overlapping common grounds in their religious beliefs and practices which if sustained will guarantee continuous peace and co-existence among them and in diaspora. No doubt, this relative peace and harmony contributes to the (Kwara) State slogan, State of Harmony.

Notes and References

- 1) Exploratory method used by the author refers to oral interviews, diplomatic chats, visitations, personal experience, as well as attendance at different religious, socio-cultural festivals and ceremonies. Relevant published books were also sought.
- 2) F. Afolabi, *Igbominaland in the Context of Yoruba History*, (Ibadan: Sceptre Prints Limited; 2006), p.1.
- 3) E.A. Ayandele, "Ijebuland 1800-1891: Era of Splendid Isolation" in Olusanya G.O. (Ed.) *Studies in Yoruba History and Culture*, (Ibadan: University Press Limited; 1983), p.88.
- 4) S.J. Hogben S.J. & A.H.M. Kirk-Green, *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria* (Great Britain: Gregg Revivals; 1966), pp.283-306.
- 5) NAK ILOR PROF.2700 Vol. II. p.132. Extract from *Daily Times* of 6th July, 1949.
- 6) NAK ILOR PROF 5083, p.17.
- 7) For a long time, Islam did not appear to have disturbed the peace of adherents of traditional religion. The Muslim clerics, *alfa* were all Oyo- and Ilorin-Yoruba elements; the Muslim community itself was small. They lived among their kinsmen and interacted with all and sundry. The Muslims tolerated the adherents of the indigenous religion and vice versa. The apparent laxity they observed in the manner most of the Muslims were articulated informed the saying, "B ó bá se wunilàún se ìmòlẹ́araḗni' meaning one is free to profess Islam as one pleases.

- 8) See L. Coser in his *Continuities in the Study of Social Conflict* (1967) cited in O. Otite & W. Ogionwo, *An Introduction to Sociological Studies*, (Lagos: HEB Nig. Plc.; 1971), p.157 where he counters Durkheim's *solidarity theory of religion*.
- 9) Oral interview with Chief J.A. Ogundele on 14th April, 2014.
- 10) Oral interviews: Elder J.O. Adunbarin on 15th April, 2014; Mallam Abiodun Jimoh on 16th April, 2014.
- 11) F. Afolabi, *Igbominaland in the Context of Yoruba History...*, pp.55-57.
- 12) O. Otite O. & W. Ogionwo, *An Introduction to Sociological Studies...*, p.156-157.
- 13) F. Afolabi, *Igbominaland in the Context of Yoruba History...*, pp.55-57.
- 14) M.O. Afolabi, "Traditional Drama in Africa" in *Africa Quarterly*, Vol. XVII NO.2 October 1977, P.21.
- 15) Oral interview with the Retired Revd J.L. Olagunju on 16th April, 2014.
- 16) E.B.Idowu, *African Traditional Religion –A Definition*, (Ibadan: Fountain Publications, 1973); pp.43-46.
- 17) See Malinowski's "The Role of Magic and Religion" in *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach*, Ed. by W.A. Lessa and E.Z. Vogt (1958).
- 18) Oral interview with High Chief S.K.O. Olayioye, the Asanlu of Oro on 26/5/2013.
- 19) Books, chapters and verses are found in The Holy Books-
a) *The Holy Bible: Topical Study Bible*, N e w

- Living Translation 2nd Edition, The Bible League, Chicago, Illinois, 19?* b) *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary (Yusuf Ali) Published in the UK by Islamic Foundation in co-operation with The Muslim Students' Association of the US & Canada, 1975.*
- 20) The last Igbomina Day was held in Iwo, Isin LGA on 2nd November, 2013.
- 21) Durkheim's Solidarity Theory cited in Onigu O. & Ogionwo W., *An Introduction to Sociological Studies ...* p.157.
- 22) Awoji Festival in Iwo, Esii Festival in OkeOyi, Ere Esie in Esie, Anlungbua Festival in Owu, Agan Festival in Obbo, Ishapa, Ajuba, hill worship (Gegele) in Igbaja, etc. However, it is plus or short elsewhere. For instance, Agan Festival is celebrated in 2 calendar years (between March/April) in Aran Orin.
- 23) Awolalu J.O. & Dopamu P.A., *West African Traditional Religion, (Ibadan: Onibonoje Press, 1979),* p.155.
- 24) Oral interview: Mr. Dele Olokoba on 15th April, 2014 (Senior Civil servant), Dr. Olaitan Ogundiran (owns a private hospital in Lagos) on April 18, 2014 and Engr. S.O. Aboyeji on 18th April, 2014 (a senior Mechanical Engineer at The Guardian Newspaper, Lagos).
- 25) Oral interview with the Revd. J.O. Olagunju (Retired) on 16th April, 2014. See also F. Afolabi, *Igbominaland in the Context of Yoruba History, ...* Pp78-82.
- 26) Iwo City CAN (Christian Association of Nigeria) includes all the church denominations in Iwo i.e. 1st ECWA (Evangelical Church Winning All), 2nd ECWA,

- Baptist Church, the Christ Apostolic Church, Winners' Family, Winners' Church and the Redeemed Christian Church of God.
- 27) The five pillars of Islam, *arkan in Arabic, spell out five ritual duties and mainstream that Muslims view to be central to their faith. These are: pronouncing the confession of faith (Shahada/Kalima), performing the five obligatory daily prayers (Salat), fasting during the month of Ramadan (Sawm), paying the alms tax (Zakat) and pilgrimage to Mecca- (Hajj).*
- 28) J.S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion, Second Revised Edition, (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd; 1992),* P.49
- 29) W.C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion, (...?:Mentor Books; 1964),* p.62.
- 30) J.O. Awolalu & P.A. Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion, (Ibadan: Onibonoje; 1979),* pp.154-158.