

Rethinking Islamic Unity: A Focus on Mosque Sharing and Ownership Issue in ‘*Oke-magba*’
Communities

By

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*Abstract*In Nigeria, the centrality of literature on religious conflicts has mostly been on inter-religious conflicts among the three religions; Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion. Studies on religious conflict have concentrated on inter-religious conflicts (*Širā‘āt*) while intra-faith conflicts and disagreements (*Ikhtilāfāt*) among Muslims have not been given much attention which has invariably created a vacuum in the discourse and historiography of religious conflict. This paper focuses on the conflict that was generated over mosque sharing and ownership in-“*Oke-magba*”- a cognomen used in describing eleven communities, comprising Ibonwon, Ilara, Igboye, Odoayan, Odogbawojo, Odosiwola, Odoragunsin, Eredo, Odoroga, Odoyangunsin and Odoajogunin the Eredo Local Council Development Area of Epe Local Area Government of Lagos State. This conflict, which bedeviled these communities over the control of the Central Mosque in Ibonwon created a schism that permanently divided the communities into blocs. In a bid to outwit each other, the blocs began to find support and align with both the traditional and political authorities. It is on this premise that this paper is set to interrogate the causes of disunity that emerged over the control and relocation of the *Oke-magba* Central Mosque established in 1905. It discusses the history of Islam in *Okemagba* and explores the effects of the contestation. The study adopts simple historical survey as its methodology and uses both primary and secondary sources to justify its argument

Key Words: *Oke-magba*, Muslim Community, Islamic Unity, Ibonwon, Odoayan, Okemagba Central Mosque

Introduction:

The history of the Yoruba is characterized by the histories of metropolitan towns overshadowing the histories of neighbouring towns and villages. In most cases, these smaller towns and villages are consumed by the narrative of how civilization penetrated into their lands through the benevolence of the metropolitan cities. While this may not be completely out of place, it however ignores the fact that these communities react to a range of challenges in various context which invariably shape the pattern of growth, development and subsequent history. From Oyo, to Ijebu and Epe the trend is the same. The histories of these metropolises and their contact with foreign civilization and religion are mostly taken to be the history of the entire land. This is so because over time, the concentration of scholars has always been on these metropolises. Epe not being an exception

The origin and growth of Islam in Lagos just as the history of Lagos itself is incomplete without reference to Epe land. This is because Epe land is not only one of the most Islamized parts of Lagos, but also because the circumstances of the spread of Islam into the area and its environs were inextricably linked with events in Lagos, especially the dynastic struggles that engulfed the royal family from the middle of the 19th century. These have been well captured by Kunle Lawal and other scholars in their studies.¹ However, while there are plethora of studies on the origin, growth and dynamics of Islam in Epe town,² much has not been done on other communities of Epe land such as the '*Oke-magba*' communities whose history are equally inextricably linked with events in Epe as Epe is to Lagos. In most cases, studies on these communities are treated as attachment to Epe, thereby neglecting the dynamics and complexities in these communities. This study, is therefore a break from the norm as it focuses on the *Oke-magba* not as an attachment under a study of Epe but as a study which interrogates the peculiarities of the *Oke-magba* communities

'Okemagba': The Origin of a Collective Identity

*I am, indeed, very grateful to Alhaji Ismail W.O, Chief Imam of Ibonwon for providing me access to records on the first Okemagba Central Mosque.

¹Lawal Olakunle (1995) "Islam and Colonial Rule in Lagos" in American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences. Also see Mufutau Oluwasegun Jimoh (2006) The Growth and Development OF Islam in Epe, Lagos State, Nigeria, 1851-2010 in Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies, (IJOURALS) Vol.6 No.2, 2016, pp.1-18

² See Morruff Mudashiru., (2017) Who owns the central mosque? Ethnic identity and struggle for spiritual space in Epe, Southwest Nigeria in Yoruba Studies Review, Vol 2, No. 1. Also see Mufutau Oluwasegun Jimoh (2006) The Growth and Development OF Islam in Epe, Lagos State, Nigeria, 1851-2010 in Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies, (IJOURALS) Vol.6 No.2, 2016, pp.1-18

The history of the Yoruba is replete with nomenclatures that serve as collective identity for groups and communities at different times in history for different purposes. Globally, identities are constructed on the basis of various traits and experiences that are peculiar to a particular group of people. Many of these characteristics are open to different interpretations. However, collective identity is derived from belonging to, or affiliation with, precise categories such as social groups, socio-professional categories, ethnic groups, religious, nationals, etc, through which individuals identify themselves and which generate a group of internal and external attributions that define the makeup of this identity.³ The constituents of this identity include ethnic consciousness and traditional customs attached to individuals and group of individuals. In this perspective, ethnicity and identity are inseparable because ethnicity refers to a group of people with a common socio-cultural identity such as language, common worldview, religion and common cultural traits.⁴

The Igbomina for example are a collective identity for a subgroup of the Yoruba which spread across what is now northern Osun State and eastern Kwara State. Also is with the Ekiti- Parapo which was a military alliance (identity) during the kiriji war. Rev Johnson confirmed in his book that the cause of the EkitiParapo War was “a programmed attempt to liberate the Ekitis, the Ijesas and the Efons from the yoke and identity of Ibadan” stressing that “instead of tendering their submission to the Are (of Ibadan) the Ijesa, the Ekitis, the Efons and other tribes formed an alliance which they termed EkitiParapo(i.e. Ekiti Confederation) which became their identity for more than a decade of the war.

The “*Okemagba*” which this study focuses on is a collective identity of eleven communities, located at the northern district of Epe. They comprise Ibonwon, Ilara, Igboye, Odoayan, Odogbawojo, Odosiwola, Odoragunsin, Eredo, Odoroga, Odoyangunsen and Odoajogun all in the Eredo Local Council Development Area of Epe Local Government Area of Lagos State. How and when the term ‘*Oke-magba*’ came about as a collective identity of these communities is shrouded in mystery given the different accounts about its origin. One account, opines that the term was coined to recognize a military alliance formed during the

³Asiyanbola R. A., (2009) *Identity issues in urban ethno-communal conflict in Africa: an empirical study of Ife-Modakeke crisis in Nigeria* in *African Sociological Review* 13(2)

⁴Boaten A. (2000) “Ethnicity and ethnic conflicts in Africa: Ghana’s example” in Paul Nchoji Nkwi (ed.) *The anthropology of Africa: Challenges for the 21st century* Proceedings of the 9th Annual conference of the Pan African Anthropological Association.. p. 266-270

Ijebu War of 1892 to resist colonial penetration”⁵. The war also known as the Ijebu Expedition was fallout of trade agreement between the Awujale of Ijebu and the colonial authority over Ejinrin Market. The colonial troop led by Colonel F.C. Scott landed at Epe on the 12th of May, 1892, and marched towards Ijebu Ode. The Awujalehere gathered soldiers from across Ijebu land to resist colonial intrusion and penetration. In the process, the Okemagba became a bloc of the Ijebu troops. Soldiers from Okemagba were gathered at Eredo and OdoRagunsen for meetings. The name stuck after the war and became a collective identity of this bloc of the Ijebu troop.⁶ Another version states that Okemagba was derived from the “*Agba*” drum of the Osugbos which is a ceremonial drum used to summon people or call the attention of people to something. The Baale of Eredo captures this well

“When traditional religion was the only religion and most of the founders of towns in the area known as Okemagba were not just ordinary men because they were part of the Osugbo from their different ancestral homeland. At a time, these men felt the need to create a medium of exchanging information and catching up with each other once in a while. “This was how the “*Agba*” drum was placed at the top of a tree here in *OdoAyan* and whenever there was need for meeting, the Osugbo will beat the drum as a sign of notification and invitation. The drum produces different sound and only the initiates would understand. To the ears of an ordinary man, it is just a sound but to an initiate, it is a code” they emphasized.”⁷

The above versions of origin of *Oke-magba* as a collective identity of the people seem contradictory; however, beneath the carapace of these accounts lay a similarity that requires critical examination for the purpose of clarity. First, in traditional Yoruba military set up, the use of drums as a means of communication has been well established by scholars. As a result, one can opine here, that there is a possibility that the name actually originated from the Osugbo drum which was used during the Ijebu Expedition

⁵ Interview with Baale of Eredo, Chief Safua Ademola on 21th September 2016 at his residence in Eredo. This view was corroborated by the Chiefs of Odorangunsen during a collective interview I had with them on 24th of September 2016

⁶ Collective Interview with Chiefs of Odorangunsen held on 24th of September 2016

⁷ Interview with OdoAyan Chiefs on 24/9/2016 and with Chief Olusegun Kazim, a retired soldier and “Jewo of OdoAyan” on 2nd October 2017

The Origin, Growth and Formation of Unity of Islam in *Oke-magba*

It is imperative to state that the origin of Islam in *Oke-magba* as a group may be difficult to ascertain because Islam came into the communities at different times through different agencies. However, irrespective of how and when these communities came in contact with Islam, it is instructive to state that the religion came into the *Oke-magba* majorly through Epe. By 1852, after the emergence of Kosoko in Epe, the community was subsequently integrated into the new Islamic society that had gradually been taking shape in metropolitan Lagos and the Yoruba hinterland. From Epe, Islam penetrated into neighbouring towns and villages including the *Oke-magba* which were hitherto polytheistic. Jimoh states that Islam spread to the outlying districts in the northern section (*Oke-magba*) such as Iraye-Oke, Odomola, Odo-Egiri, Ibonwon and OdoRagunshen largely through the effort of Badiru Adebogun and Imam Awesu, the third Imam of Eko-Epe extraction.⁸ Other Okemagba communities also came in contact with Islam through traders and scholars who had connections with the Islamic community in Epe. The scope of this paper may not give room for a discussion of Islam in these communities individually but Islam in Ibonwon community will be discussed as a premise to understanding the formation of the Okemagba Muslim Community and the forms of unity this generated.

The actual date of Islam's entrance into Ibonwon like other Yoruba states cannot be fixed with precision. However, by 1900, there were features of Islam in the community which suggests that the community had encountered Islam before then. Islam came into Ibonwon through one Amosa Oguntoye, a native of Ibonwon who had resided in Epe and had experienced the influence of the new religion.⁹ As a result, he led two Islamic clerics to his hometown. These scholars introduced Islam to the people and within a short while, gathered a good number of converts. The introduction and acceptance of Islam in Ibonwon was not without some rigid resistance from the traditionalists who were the founders and owners of the town. The town was founded by Agemo worshippers, a pan-Ijebu deity that unites the Ijebu. There are 16 Agemos in various part of Ijebu, Ibonwon being one. They emerge every July and all meet at Ijebu-Ode before moving to Imodi Mosan. From all indications, Ibonwon was a land of the Agemos. So, when Islam came, there was a strong resistance against it. The Oloja of Ibonwon who doubles as the head of the Agemos and head of the community led his

⁸Mufutau Oluwasegun Jimoh (2006) The Growth and Development of Islam in Epe, Lagos State, Nigeria, 1851-2010 in *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies, (IJOURALS)* Vol.6 No.2, 2016, pp.1-18

⁹ Interview with Alhaji Ismail W.O, Chief Imam of Ibonwon on the 1st of October 2017

followers to fight back to suppress the activities of the Islamic clerics but their attempts failed.

One major factor that aided the spread of Islam in Ibonwon was because it was brought by a native who had acquired wealth and exposure in Epe. He was like the touch bearer in the town- who has seen and encountered the new religion that was making wave in cities. Everybody wanted to hear from him and thus, wasted no time in talking about his experiences. He was also the 'Oloritun' (head of a quarter) which invariably gave him great influence in his quarter 'Lapeni'. As a member of the administrative set up of the town, AmosaOguntoye stood by the clerics and supported them in all their activities. He later adopted Yusuf as his Muslim name when the first praying site which eventually became a Mosque was established in 1898. This Mosque was later expanded to become the *Okemagba* Central Mosque in 1905.¹⁰

Besides, the activities of the clerics who came along with AmosaOguntoye facilitated the growth of Islamic religion in Ibonwon and environs in no small measure. The emergence of these clerics into Ibonwon as stated earlier was invitational in nature and by the arrangement they had with their host, they were to spend a couple of days and return to Epe. However, their short stay metamorphosed into permanency as they became integrated into the community. Their strategy as suggested by their host was to get the heads of families to accept Islam because any household whose head embraces Islam would automatically become a Muslim family. This strategy got the following heads who eventually became the pioneer Muslims in Ibonwon. Pa. ShittuSolade, Pa. Sayeed Bologun, Bellow Alawiye, Saibu Bada, Pa. Gbadamosi, Yusuf Bakre, and Yusuf Awoyama.¹¹ They set up Qur'anic centres and through the use of prayers and 'Jalabi' (Protective Medication) they were able overcome the resistance. From their base in Ibonwon, they reached neighbouring communities such as Igboye, Odoayanetc and preached Islam to the people. It is not certain if these clerics were the first to introduce Islam to these communities because of the paucity of records on how Islam got to other parts of the *Okemagba* or if they built on a foundation that had already been laid. What is certain nonetheless is that these clerics through their activities brought all their converts under a singular coordination and this invariably laid the foundation for the *Okemagba* Islamic community and Unity in 1903.

¹⁰*Ibid*

¹¹ 'A century Long History of Islam in Ibowon' an unpublished manuscript by Alhaji Ismail W.O, Chief Imam of Ibonwon

By 1904, the representatives of the Muslim communities of Ibonwon, Ilara, Igboye, Odoyangunsen, OdoAyan, Odogbawojo, Odosiwola, Odoajogun, Odoragunsin, Odoroga and Eredo collapsed their different Muslim communities to form the *Okemagba* Muslim Community. Thus, the foundation of the *Okemagba* Islamic Unity was established with the following resolutions. The Central Mosque in Ibonwon was agreed upon as the *Okemagba* Central Mosque. Odoayan as the central place for *Tafsir* (Ramadhan Gatherings) while Odoragunsin was to host *MaoluduNabiyyi* Festivals¹². These three communities as at the time had the largest number of Muslim faithfuls which was why consideration was given to them. The structure of leadership of the new Muslim Community was also resolved. It was agreed that all positions would be rotational but conditions of appointments would be anchored on Islamic injunctions concerning such position. Hence, for the first set of leaders, Ibonwon was asked to provide a candidate for the position of Chief Imam, Odoayan was allocated the position of *Naibi Imam* (Deputy Chief Imam) while *Eketa and EkerinAdinni* were left for Odoragunsin and Igboye respectively.¹³ Under the leadership of IsmailaOgunyemi who became the first *Okemagba* Chief Imam, Islam experienced unprecedented growth and development across board. He was loved by all and respected for his approach towards the traditionalists who continued to resist the spread of Islam. Under his leadership, contributions were collected from Muslim faithfuls for the construction of Mosques in other *Okemagba* communities. In 1906, for instance, the Lebe Mosque was founded in Ibonwon and few years later, Aledo Mosque was also established in Ibonwon. In Odoayan, Mojoda and Igboye, he facilitated the building of Mosques also for the Muslim communities in these areas. As the numbers of converts increased, many local scholars and preachers emerged. The speed at which these developments occurred could be attributed to the unity of these communities.

The Emerging Tension and Dissolution of *Oke-magba* Muslim Community

Struggle and contestation over the leadership, ownership and control of the Central Mosque during the colonial administration was common in Lagos generally and Epe land in particular. For instance, before 1915 when the first major crisis in the Central Mosque in Lagos brought colonial government directly into the Muslim politics, the resident Muslim Community had had series of intra-party conflicts. Disagreements existed as to the manner in

¹² Interview with AlhajiAhmend Ola Saliu, the Chief Imam of the New *Okemagba* Central Mosque and president of the Eredo LCDA League of Imam on 1st of October 2017

¹³ Interview with Alhaji Ismail W.O, the Chief Imam of Ibonwon 1st of October 2017

which the Chief Imam was handled some affairs of the Central Mosque.¹⁴ Invariably, this led to the division of the Muslim Community in Lagos into blocs. Also in Epe, the struggle over who owned and controlled the Central Mosque between the 'IjebuEpe' and 'EkoEpe' has been a recurring issue since the colonial period.¹⁵ The 1903 incidence in Epe is an example of this regular skirmish between 'IjebuEpe' and 'EkoEpe'. Then, an Ijebu-Epe man named Aafaamota was selected as the Chief Imām of the Central Mosque which was frowned at by Eko-Epe Muslims, leading to a heated conflict. In consequence of this, the Central mosque was closed down in 1903 to both parties.¹⁶ The effects of these skirmishes within the Muslim communities in Lagos and Epe adversely affected the Muslim communities in villages and towns that were looking up to these cities for leadership and guidance in religious matters. The *Okemagba* Muslim Community was not left out of this unpleasant situation that had engulfed the Muslim communities of Lagos and Epe during this period.

The *Oke-magba* Muslim Community existed for two decades between 1905 and 1925. By the end of the year 1925, five among the original eleven *Okemagba* communities had broken away to establish a new *Okemagba* Central Mosque at Odoayan(Mojoda).¹⁷ As a result, two blocs emerged from the dissolution which for the sake of this study shall be classified as the Ibonwon group comprising Ibonwon, Ilara and a part of Igboye Muslim Communities and the Mojoda group comprising Odoayan, Odosiwola, Odoragunsin, Odogbawojo and the remaining part of Igboye. The causes of this tension and subsequent dissolution are shrouded in controversy among the blocs that emerged with each side justifying their actions. While, the emergent group (Mojoda) accused Ibonwon community of having overbearing influence in the *Okemagba* Muslim Community¹⁸, Ibonwon accused them of embracing members of Osugbo into their fold.

Away from these accusations, it is important to state that with the spread and growth of Islam in the *Okemagba*, there was an unprecedented increase in membership. The *Okemagba* Mosque became inadequate to accommodate faithful during *Jummaton* Fridays. As a result,

¹⁴LawalOlakunle, (1995) "Islam and Colonial Rule in Lagos" in The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences No 12,

¹⁵MorruffMudashiru., (2017) Who owns the central mosque? Ethnic identity and struggle for spiritual space in Epe, southwest Nigeria in Yoruba Studies Review

¹⁶MuhsinAdekunleBalogun: (2011) Syncretic Beliefs And Practices Amongst Muslims In Lagos State Nigeria; With Special Reference To The Yoruba Speaking People Of Epe. A Thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the Degree of Doctor Of Philosophy

¹⁷Mojoda is the name of *Okemagba* market located at Odoayan. The new Mosque was constructed close to the market and over time, the name of the market has synonymously been used to refer to the town

¹⁸ Interview with AlhajiAhmend Ola Saliu, the Chief Imam of the New *Okemagba* Central Mosque and president of the Eredo LCDA League of Imam on 23rd September 2016

there was need to accommodate the teeming population. Besides, with the opening of the Ijebu road by the colonial administration in 1925, Ibonwon where the *Okemagba* Mosque was located fell into the interior part of *Okemagba* while communities like Odoayan, Odosiwola, Odoragunsin and Odogbawojo all had the new road passed through them. This invariably opened these communities to Islamic civilization coming through and from Epe to Ijebu Ode. Subsequently, this necessitated an agitation for the construction and possible relocation of the *Okemagba* Central Mosque. According to the Chief Imam of Ibonwon:

The cause of the misunderstanding was that majority of Muslims in other villages beside Ibonwon felt that the Mosque was then too small for the teeming population of Muslims observing Jumaat service in Ibonwon. This assertion was thrown open and the Muslims in Ibonwon accepted. The Muslims in Ibonwon were asked to look for another spacious land where all of them could erect another bigger and more spacious Mosque. Financial contributions towards the building started.¹⁹

However, the inability of Ibonwon to provide the land quickly led to the demand for a refund of the money contributed by other communities. All appeals fell on deaf ears. Eventually, the Chief Imam Ismaila Ogunyemi returned their contributions thereby ending the unity of the *Okemagba* Muslim Community

With the return of the contributions of Odoayan, Odosiwola, Odoragunsin and Odogbawojo, a new Muslim Community was founded and a new Mosque constructed in 1926, named the *Okemagba* Central Mosque Mojoda. While Chief Imam Ismaila continued as the Chief Imam of the central Mosque in Ibonwon, Chief Abu Bakare his deputy (*Naibi*) resumed the headship of the new *Okemagba* Central Mosque in Mojoda (Odoayan). However, he was never turbaned since the Chief Imam of Ibonwon was still alive. It should be noted, that there were interventions from notable Muslim leaders from Epe and Lagos during these skirmishes in *Okemagba* but these proved abortive. This was basically because the disunity in *Okemagba*

¹⁹Interview with Alhaji Ismail W.O, the Chief Imam of Ibonwon on the 1st of October 2017

was a reflection of constant conflicts and clashes of interests among the Muslim communities in Lagos and Epe as cited above.

The schism created by this conflict permanently divided the *Okemagba* Muslim Community into blocs and in a bid to outwit each other, began to find support and align with both the traditional and political authorities. Invariably, the first contention was over whose bloc had the rights to adopt ‘*Okemagba*’; the collective identity of the eleven communities for its Central Mosque. To outwit the Ibonwon bloc, the emergent bloc aligned with the Osugbo to lay claim to the title. As explained in the introductory part of this paper, the name ‘*Okemagba*’ was said to have originated from the ‘Magba’ drum of the Osugbo. Odoayan, being a strong hold of the Osugbo had the drum hoisted at the centre of the town before the coming of the colonial administrators. Hence, the argument was that Odoayan was more qualified to use the title than any other communities. Thus, the new group adopted *Okemagba* and named their Central Mosque *Okemagba* Central Mosque Mojoda (Odoayan) while the first *Okemagba* Central Mosque was renamed Ibonwon Central Mosque.



Picture: 1: Signpost of the First *Oke-magba* Central Mosque now Ibonwon Central Mosque



Picture. 2: The new Okemagba Mosque located in Mojoda/OdoAyan Community

Similarly, the outwitting and sidelining was extended to the control and ownership of the Mojoda market. Originally known as ‘Egbejoda’, the Mojoda market was the Okemagba joint market located at Odoayan. The market which is said to be as old as Okemagba was a periodic market that served as the commercial bond of the Okemagba communities. For years, the market was conducted in the open space in Odoayan until 1945 when the colonial government built stalls. The market stalls were built and patterned after the Ejirin and the leadership of the market was on rotational basis. However, the skirmish in the Okemagba Muslim community was re-enacted over the control of the market between Ibonwon and Mojoda blocs. This time, it was over boosting the status of the market (traditionally) in order to increase sales for traders and general goodness of the market with specialized ‘rituals’ which the Ibonwon bloc vehemently opposed. As a result, the Mojodabloc herein known as the new Okemagba Muslim Community supported the traditionalists to conduct the ritual and Ibonwonbloc was invariably barred from occupying the position of IyaOloja of Mojoda market.²⁰This syncretic act, though exhibited by the Mojoda bloc in this scenario was a general feature of Islam in the Epe-Okemagba axis during this period. This was because of the nature and the way Islam was introduced in Yoruba land, within the context of its accommodation and acceptance some African cultures.²¹

²⁰ Interview with Mrs. Mary Adekoya, the Iyaoloja of Mojoda Market on 25/9/2016 at her residence at Odoayan

²¹Gbadamosi, T.G.O., (1978) *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908*, Lagos: Longman Press,

The struggle for recognition and acceptance between the blocs was taken into the traditional and political space. Prior to 1925, the colonial administration recognized Okemagba Muslim Community to be headquartered in Ibonwon. All correspondence was directed to Ibonwon for action. Thus, Ibonwon was regarded as the *de factor* leader of the Okemagba. Also, Ibonwon had resident priests of the catholic mission which invariably made the community a town of importance to the colonial administrators. It is worthy of note, that the 1903 revolt against the Catholic Missionaries in Ibonwon known as Ogun Padi also made the town a place of colonial interest.²² However, with the emergence of a new Muslim Community, led by Odoayan Community, the recognition of Ibonwon as the *de factoleader* of the Okemagba was challenged. The leaders of the emergent bloc wrote officially to the District Officer in Epe notifying his office of the changes that had been carried out.²³ The implication of this was that Ibonwon ceased to be the *de factoleader* of the Okemagba while Odoayan became the new bride of the colonial administrators. Two reasons can be attributed to this; firstly, Odoayan was easily accessible geographically given that it is located between Epe and Ijebu Ode. Secondly, it was relatively accommodating unlike Ibonwon which was hostile to Christianity and the missionaries. Based on these reasons, Odoayan was politically recognized as the *de factoleader* of the Okemagba. Thus, colonial social amenities such as the School in Mojoda and Mojoda Markets which was patterned after the Ejinrin market were cited in Odoayan by subsequent administrations in the district.

The Re-unification Attempts, Breaks and Consequences

It is important to note; that while the blocs maintained their individuality and disunity continued, there were attempts at peace and re-unification of these blocs. From 1925, there were intermitted interventions from the traditional and political space into the religious space. Several attempts were also made by both religious and political leaders from Epe, Lagos and Ilorin to re-unite the Muslim faithful but all efforts proved abortive as the blocs insisted on maintaining their stands. However, on February 18, 1968, the Alara of Ilara. His Royal Majesty, Oba. A. O Adesanya summoned a meeting of the representatives of all towns and villages in Okemagba for the settlement of the conflict that had existed for forty three years. The meeting which was well attended was the first holistic approach to resolving the issue since the conflict started in 1925. The convener, Oba Adesanya appealed to all to live

²²Mufutau Oluwasegun Jimoh (2006) The Growth and Development of Islam In Epe, Lagos State, Nigeria, 1851-2010 in Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies, (IJOURELS) Vol.6 No.2, 2016, pp.1-18

²³ Interview with the Mr. Eyitayo, retired civil servant at Eredo, on 21st September 2017

according to Islamic tenets by embracing unity and peace. Consequently, the blocs agreed to unite and come together again. Upon these agreements, the following resolutions amongst others were made: that the next *EidulKabir* prayer would be observed together by both blocs at Mojoda praying ground, observe the *Jummat* prayer following the *Eid* prayer at Ibonwon, and have the *Tafsir* held at Odoayan - while the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed would be observed at Odoragunsin. Also, to prevent leadership tussle, the Oba appointed Chief Imam of Odoayan Central as leader of the New *Okemagba* Muslim Community. Consequently, all Islamic festivals that was held in 1968, especially the *Ileya* Day of March 9, were jointly celebrated and led by the Chief Imam of Odoayan Central Mosque.²⁴

This re-unification was short lived. By 1970, there was a resurgence of tension and hostility which permanently divided the re-united *Okemagba* Muslim Community this time into four groups; Ibonwon Central Mosque, consisting of Ibonwon, Ilara and Itawo, Odoayan Central Mosque comprising Odoayan, Odogbawojo and Odosiwola, Odoragunsin Central Mosque with Odoragunsin, Odoroga and Eredo. Then Igboye Central Mosque which had Odoyangunsen and Igboye as members. The cause of this eventual break was the contestation over who becomes the Balogun of *Okemagba* between Alhaji J.K Odomosu of Odoragunsin and Alhaji. Tele Olukoya. It was reported that both rode on the back of Horses into the *Okemagba* praying ground during the *Ileya Day* of February 11, 1970 with the intention of wooing the people to their sides. This show of traditional military grandeur in a religious space dominated the event of the day to the extent that the *Eid-el-kabir* prayer of the day was observed very late when a good number of dedicated Muslims from the various communities left in annoyance. The consequence of this was that the fragile unity was severely affected and in 1971, the blocs resumed their individual disagreement during the two *Eid* prayers. While the Ibonwon Muslim Community held their prayers at the *Okemagba* High School Compound, the Odoayan Muslim Community established a new prayer ground along Epe road. The joint prayer ground in Mojoda was completely abandoned this year (1971) to avoid physical confrontation and a repeat of what transpired the previous year.

One fundamental consequence of the skirmish and eventual disunity among the *Okemagba* communities was the domestication of Islam and pollution of Islamic traditions by the traditional religion and its adherents. Domestication of Islam has been said to be a key factor that aided the growth and spread of Islam in Yoruba land. Muslims across Yoruba- land have

²⁴ Unpublished Manuscripts from the Central Mosque at Ibonwon accessed 1st of October 2017

often adopted politico-religious titles of the Yoruba in the formation of their organizational structures. These Islamic titles for political office holders among the Yoruba were borrowed from the indigenous traditional customary religious practices. The adaptation of Yoruba political titles to the growth of Islam in the town was deemed necessary to celebrate important personalities that had contributed in one way or the other to the development of Islam in the town²⁵. In *Okemagba*, as a result of the conflict, each bloc became attached to important traditional personalities who invariably became more powerful than the leadership of the Muslim community. Such personalities dictated who gets what and how the Islamic communities they belonged to were administered. The case of Chief Tele Olukoya and Alhaji J.K.O.T Odumosuover who becomes the Balogun of *Okemagba* reflects this well. After the power tussle between the two which disrupted the Ileya Day celebration as reported above, both of them subsequently provided new grounds for *Eidprayers*. While Chief Tele Olukoya, who doubles as the proprietor of Okemagba High School, gave out the school to the Ibonwon Muslim Community for the observation of *Eidprayer*, Alhaji J.K.O.T Odomosugave out his personal land along Epe road to the Majoda bloc. The implication of this was that with the overbearing influence of these individuals, the leadership of the Muslim communities lost control of the direction of the Muslim faithful under their care.

Similarly, the conflict led to heightened distrust among both blocs. With the pollution of Islam by the traditional religion and its adherents, syncretism became the order of the day. Accusation and counter accusations of the use of charms and association with cult groups characterized the relations among all the communities in the *Okemagba*. For example, the Ibonwon bloc accused the Mojoda bloc of romancing with the *Osugbo* who they claimed were the ones who gave out the land upon which the Mosque in Mojoda was built. As a result, the Muslims in Ibonwon were advised strongly never to observe any prayers in the Mosque for any reason. In reaction, the Mojoda bloc accused the Ibonwon bloc of accepting the *Alagemosinto* their fold. The allegations trailed everything they had in common. It was also alleged that one reason why the Mojoda praying ground was abandoned in 1971 by both camps was based on the suspicion that the ground had be charmed. For this reason, both camps avoided the ground that has served as a spiritual space for all since 1925. Back and forth, both camps continued to blackmail each other in order to outwit themselves

²⁵Danmole. H. O, "Religious Encounter in Southwestern Nigeria: The Domestication of Islam among the Yoruba". In J.K. Olupona and Terry Rey (eds.). *Orisa Devotion as World Religion: The Globalization of Yoruba Religious Culture*. Wisconsin University Press., pp. 202 – 235.

Also, the disunity of the Okemagba Muslim Community resonated and affected the commercial relationship of the communities. As discussed above, apart from Islam which brought the people together, trade and commerce also did much through the establishment of a joint market known as Mojoda at Odoayan community. Buying and selling in the market was conducted for years without rancour. However, with the tension and eventual breakup of the Okemagba Muslim Community, the Mojoda market was not left out of the consequence. Firstly, the Ibonwon bloc was denied the right of occupying leadership position in the administration of the market and secondly, they were regarded as second class sellers in the market. This, among other factors facilitated the withdrawal of Ibonwon from Mojoda and subsequent establishment of a market in Ibonwon

Equally important as a consequence is the proliferation of Central Mosques across Okemagba. This could be seen in the emergence of the Ibonwon Central Mosque, consisting of Ibonwon, Ilara and Itawo communities, Odoayan Central Mosque comprising Odoayan, Odogbawojo and Odosiwola, Odoragunsin Central Mosque with Odoragunsin, Odoroga and Eredo. Then Igboye Central Mosque which had Odoyangunsen and Igboye as members. Though, when this is looked from the perspective of growth and spread of Islam, this could be argued as a positive consequence because it connotes the acceptance of Islam. However, the implication of this proliferation was that such Mosques and new Muslim communities were headed by Muslims with insufficient knowledge on Islam. The place of knowledge in Islam cannot be overemphasized. In fact, Islam is a religion of knowledge. The Prophet (S.A.W.) says: "It is obligatory for every Muslim to acquire knowledge. Allah likes those who seek knowledge". Invariably, the new leadership of the proliferated Central Mosques was practically not ready and ripe in terms of Knowledge when the breakup necessitated the establishment of their own Central Mosques in 1970. Besides, the establishment of these mosques were not precipitated by actual growth but were caused by conflict that characterized the relationship of Okemagba Muslims and the desire of each community to stand alone.

Recommendation and Conclusion

"Verily this Ummah of yours is one Ummah..."²⁶ "And hold fast by the covenant of Allah all together, and be not disunited..."²⁷

²⁶ (Al-Qur'an, 21:92.)

The unity of the Muslim *ummah* is a reality proclaimed in the Qur'an, in the *ayaat*(verse) above and numerous others like them; it is one of the key strengths of the *Ummah* at many levels, from the cultural to the political. It is the unity of the *ummah*, the common understanding that all Muslims are brothers and sisters in faith, that makes Muslims feel at home wherever they may go in the Muslim world.²⁸ However, translating this principle of unity into practical unity at a more functional level has always proved problematic. The *ummah* Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) toiled for and established was one single fortified family with one leader (himself) and one goal (Allah). This remained the character of the *ummah* until inordinate desire for power, tribalism, corruption and jaundiced understanding and interpretation of Islam crept in. Thus, the rope of Allah that had hitherto bonded the *umma* together in love and compassion became severed while dissent, division and disunity became manifest in the body of the *ummah*.²⁹

In reality disunity and dissension has no basis in Islam. Only unity is the basis provided by Islam. Islam is the gift from Allah that is perfectly moulded to ensure peace and unity. Islam means "a state of peace through submission to Allah's Will" and a Muslim is one "who earns that peace through submission to Allah's Will". Therefore, when there is no peace then the Muslim's submission is either weak or it lacks quality)' A Muslim would not take pride in disunity; rather he would strive to unite the *ummah*. Based on this, this paper recommends that the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on unity and community be adhered to at all times.

In all, this paper has shown that the coming together of the Muslim communities in *Oke-magbawas* linked to strategies of competition and concerns over where the central mosque should be located. Despite the fact that the communities were increasingly united by Islam, yet the followers of the religion allowed the love for their community override the love of Islam.

²⁷ (Al-Qur'an, 3:103)

²⁸ **Iqbal Siddiqui** (2016) Primacy of Islamic Unity in Crescent International Newsmagazine; Newsmagazine of the Islamic movement

²⁹ Basic Islamic Unity accessed Via <http://dawahnigeria.com/articles/faith-and-creed/basis-unity-islam>

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Interview with the Mr. Eyitayo, retired civil servant at Eredo, on 21st September 2017

Interview with Baale of Eredo, Chief SafuaAdemola on 21st September 2016 at his residence in Eredo

Interview with Mrs. Mary Adekoya, the Iyaoloja of Mojoda Market on 25th September 2016 at her residence at Odoayan

Interview with AlhajiAhmend Ola Saliu, the Chief Imam of the New Okemagba Central Mosque and president of the Eredo LCDA League of Imam on 23rd September 2016

Interview with OdoAyan Chiefs on 24th of September 2016

Interview with Chief Olusegun Kazim, a retired soldier and “Jewo of OdoAyan” on 2nd October 2017

Interview with Alhaji Ismail W.O, Chief Imam of Ibonwonon 1st of October 2017