

SUSTAINABLE ISLAMIC DA'WAH A PANACEA FOR SYNCRETIC PRACTICES AMONG EGGON-ERRO MUSLIMS

DA'WAH ISLAM BERKELANJUTAN PANACEA UNTUK PRAKTIK SINKRETIK DIANTARA MUSLIM EGGON-ERRO

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Abstract:

This paper is a contribution and a piece of Da'wah's work towards eradicating syncretic practice and the worship of ancestors (Likya) among Eggon Erro people in Eggonland. The study revealed that religious syncretism is common among many Eggon Erro Muslims, but its main contention was that it negatively influenced many of them. If continual awareness and Da'wah could be carried out, the problem would be eradicated. This study was conducted using a survey method, and data were collected through in-depth interviews. The results of this study showed the need for a sustainable Da'wah to combat the issue of syncretism that many Eggon Erro Muslims are into and their persistent indulgence in syncretic practices and their effects on their faith (Iman). While acknowledging the efforts of some Muslim scholars to end this



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endemic problem, this study reveals that Tauheed is not well inculcated into the minds of many Eggon Erro Muslims yet. Therefore, to effectively instill practical Tauheed in their minds, a concerted effort is required among all stakeholders to spread Islamic education in the communities of the Eggon Erro. The paper concluded that educating the youthful and elderly through Islamic education would go a long way to eradicating this menace.

Keywords: *Eggon Erro, Likya, Cultural Practices Syncretism, Sustainable Da'wah*

Abstrak:

Tulisan ini merupakan sumbangan dan karya dakwah untuk memberantas praktik sinkretis dan pemujaan terhadap leluhur (Likya) di kalangan masyarakat Eggon Erro di Eggonland. Studi tersebut mengungkapkan bahwa sinkretisme agama adalah umum di antara banyak Muslim Eggon Erro, tetapi anggapan utamanya adalah bahwa hal itu berdampak negatif pada banyak dari mereka. Jika kesadaran dan dakwah terus-menerus dapat dilakukan, masalah itu akan hilang. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan metode survei, dan pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan perlunya dakwah yang berkelanjutan untuk memerangi isu sinkretisme yang dialami oleh banyak Muslim Eggon Erro dan kegemaran mereka yang terus-menerus dalam praktik sinkretis dan pengaruhnya terhadap iman mereka (Iman). Sementara mengakui upaya beberapa cendekiawan Muslim untuk mengakhiri masalah endemik ini, studi ini mengungkapkan bahwa Tauhid belum ditanamkan dengan baik ke dalam pikiran banyak Muslim Eggon Erro. Oleh karena itu, untuk menanamkan Tauhid praktis secara efektif dalam pikiran mereka, diperlukan upaya bersama di antara semua pemangku kepentingan untuk menyebarkan pendidikan Islam di komunitas Eggon Erro. Makalah tersebut menyimpulkan bahwa mendidik kaum muda dan tua melalui pendidikan Islam akan sangat membantu dalam memberantas ancaman ini.

Kata Kunci: *Eggon Erro, Likya, Amalkan Budaya Sinkretisme, Dakwah Berkelanjutan*

A. Introduction

The Islamic religion is considered as a monolithic doctrine whose fundamental dogmas and principles are accepted and practiced comprehensively by Muslims throughout the world. The central principles like the Oneness of Allah, the prophethood of Mohammed, belief in the divine revelations, practice of daily *Namaz*, fasting in the month *Ramadhan*, compulsory charity (*Zakat*), pilgrimage to Makkah etc. are accepted and observed by Muslims as a whole. Besides the fundamental doctrines, Islam sets forth some other related dogmas and rituals too which are also obligatory for all its followers to adhere. The believers living in the multi-religious societies are often exhorted and insisted by imams to maintain 'Islamic identity' and



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keep away from accretions and insertions of foreign ideas into its ideological framework and rituals. Nevertheless, in practice, it is perceived that Islamic societies in many parts of the world are evolved as a mixture of dogmatic Islam and many of the traditions and values of the local social practices whole.¹

Basically, when people of different social, cultural and religious backgrounds embraced Islam they retained many of their old customs and values in the new religion also. Many of the traditions and customs transmitted by preceding generations remained with them even after their adoption of the new Faith.² Significantly, in the long history of Islamic communities across the world, it is a fact that most of the conversions have occurred not because of the conviction of the rationale of the tenets and dogmas of Islam, but largely on account of the various political, social and economic pressures and compulsions. Material benefits, desire for power and positions, fear of the security of life and property and the propensity to escape from the sufferings and hardships of the day-to-day life were very often the causes for many proselytization. In the region of Malabar (the Muslim dominated region in the western coast of the Indian sub-continent) also, the situation is not different, as many indigenous pre-Islamic customs and mores have been found assimilated into Islamic community during the course of its consolidation.

There appear to be several traditions of origin in Eggon. These traditions of origins are divergent and conflicting and are carefully discussed by Dugga in the book ‘The Eggon of Central Nigeria’.³ However, to say, but a little concerning the origin of the Eggon people, Blench, in his ‘A Dictionary of Eggon’ writes on one of the traditions as is seen in the quote below. This work, however, does not seek to look into the various traditions of Eggon origin.

The Eggon land lies to the South of the Southern division of the former plateau province of central Nigeria. The area has savannah type vegetation with occasional rain forest type vegetation found mostly in the river banks of Mada and Arikya Rivers. The area falls within the larger geographical location formerly called plateau province, which forms part of what is

¹ Musthafa, 2021

² Ibid

³ Dugga, 1996



today called Nasarawa state. The Nasarawa area is approximately 2,906 square kilometres.⁴ The area is bounded to the north by the Mada and Rindre ethnic groups, to the east and south by the Lafia Chiefdom, and to the west by Keffi Chiefdom. One of the special features of the area is the Eggon hills, rising in a block from the surrounding plains to form the centre of the area. The hills form the watershed between the basins of the Mada River to the west and Arikya River to the east. Both rivers flow in a generally southerly direction, the former meeting the Benue River west of Makurdi and the latter west of Ibi. The Arikya River forms the Eggon-Wamba boundary and its innumerable tributaries flow from the hills to the east areas. The area lies within the savannah zone, although occasional patches of rain forest type of vegetation are formed in close vicinity to the rivers, especially in the southern part of the plain. The hills and the plateau are at present almost deforested, doubtless due to intensive cultivation. The hills still present one of the most picturesque features of the area.⁵

The people of Eggon are "one of the largest ethnic groups in the former Nasarawa State. The Eggon ethnic group had a majority population of about 47 per cent of the entire Nasarawa State". Manga (2012) affirms that "the Eggon people are found in almost all the local government areas of the state but densely in places like Nasarawa-Eggon, Lafia, Obi, Akwanga and Doma respectively". According to Ombugunawu, (1984) colonial officials stressed the importance of Eggon people "in terms of their population and economic activities. Ombugunawu further asserts that "a great deal of the Eggon people lives outside of what they refer to as *Obein-Eggon* (Eggon land) now. This is due to the population explosion. Many among the Eggon people went off to other places in search of fertile soil being mainly agriculturalists. The Eggon indigenous people especially men are well built, tall and black with prominent checks and the women are sturdy, averagely tall and hardworking" (1984).

Etiologically, the word Eggon denotes "gifted sensitivity", According to Mallam Usman Abbo Angbolo says that the term according to the Wana-Eggon clan means "Stone" or "highlanders" but to Eggon-Erro, it is a word derived from an ancient place from east-west

⁴ Ombugunawu, E.S., (1984). *Major themes in the history of Eggon people, from the late nineteenth century to the present day*. BA Project, University of Sokoto, Nigeria. And Kigbu, K.A. (1996). *The Eggon people: An early history*. In: Enna M. D. ed. *The Eggon of central Nigeria*. Jos: Anex Press.

⁵ Enna, D.M., (2015). Resurgence of ethnic minority identity through performance: A Case of the Eggon. *International Journal of African Society, Cultures, and Tradition*, 2(3), 13-33.



migration. This was because history informed us that during slave raiding and wars, there was a tribe called Eggon-Erro that settled in a place (cave) called Likya.⁶

Anthropological evidence have shown that before the arrival of the colonialist, Eggon were on the move. This migratory nature of the people of Eggon showed that the Eggon people came to their present location from the East (Yemen) through the old city of Ngazargamu the present Yobe State of Nigeria.⁷ They migrated and joined the Kwararafa Kingdom, after the dissipation of the kingdom they crossed the Benue River at Ibi. In their journey, they stopped at various settlements (this is the predominant reason for their dispersed distribution within North-Central Nigeria), they finally arrived at Eggon hill of Nasarawa State, Nigeria and were known to be settlers on a hilltop before coming down to the grasslands toward urbanization (Its Chrisdfirst, 2016).

The group came from the East, specifically Yemen through Ngazargamu in the present Borno state of Nigeria with other tribes Nungu (Rindre). Leaving there they moved away to become part of the Kwararafa kingdom, but when the kingdom got scattered, they crossed the river Benue at Ibi and settled in the hills according to their clans and dialects. They settled in different places before going to the hills.⁸

The Eggons are religious people, like in many African cultures. In the pre-colonial era, before Christianity and Islam, they believe that there is a supreme being *Ahogbmre* who is over all. According to Dugga this Supreme Being can be approached in rituals through sacrifices (1996). Kigbu in the same volume notes that the societies of Eggon were ‘small-scale states.’ He adds that contrary to the wrong assertions made by the colonialists that Eggon is stateless, and without a chief, Eggon always had someone *adña obin* (the father of the land) who presides over all the clans. Whoever this person was, he is considered god’s representative on earth.⁹ Each clan is made up of a semi-independent unit, and had an institution made up of *adña ashim*

⁶ Tijani, D.A., (1996). The Problem of Syncretism in Islam: A Case Study of Nassarawa Eggon Local Government Area, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. B.A Dissertation, University of Jos, Jos, Nigeria.

⁷ Ministry of Internal Affairs and Information Jos. (1972). The Twelve Administrative Divisions of Benue-Plateau State of Nigeria. Akwanga Division.

⁸ Obadiah, A., (2021). A History of Administration and Politics in Eggon Land in Central Nigeria 1907-2013. Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University, Press.

⁹ Dugga, 1996



assisted by *moandak'po ashim* Together, they exercise religious, administrative and judicial functions.

The Eggons worship a deity identified with the name *Ahogbmre*: thus the morphemes *ahan* 'firmament' and *ogbmre* 'petition.' It is believed that *Ahogbmre* lived among men until when a woman who was pounding yam lifted her pistol so high that it hit him on the forehead, making him withdraw from the affairs of men.¹⁰ He however makes a different provision and medium for approaching him. Akika identifies it as: the *angba-ashim*. The concept *angba-ashim* refers to the spirits of some powerful people in the community easily identified as ancestral spirits. They are spirits and can see God.¹¹ It is not clear whether or not these ancestral spirits were represented by other objects. The ancestors are usually contacted through the *adja ashim* 'priest' and anywhere designated by god for an offering of prayers is called *azhli*. By pouring libations of traditional drinks, the ancestral spirit is summoned. Each clan has its *Azhli* but they all share the *Abre Agbi* which is the centre of worship.

In either case, the *azhli* can only be approached by a group not just an individual.¹² Affiku (2015), notes that some clans still have their *azhli* and have refused to let go their traditional way of worship for Christianity or Islam. The Eggon people believe in reincarnation. So, whenever one dies, his spirit/soul, *amu* leaves him. When anyone who is suspected of witchcraft dies, the people are engulfed in fear as they fear his *amu* can cause unrest in the community, or turn into an animal and cause evil. The belief is seen in Eggon personal names like *ablaba* and *asaba*, all carrying the basic meaning of one coming back from the dead.

In April 1924, Mr Ivan Hepburn of the Sudan United Mission brought the Gospel to Eggon land, establishing their first mission station in a place called Agbro,¹³ in Lizin, later Wanna on the hills.¹⁴ Blench adds that these missionaries had a passion for literacy in the mother tongue, so they organized for literacy classes where the people came together to learn reading. Thus, their major media were education, healthcare, and the gospel of Jesus. In 1929, Blench says the gospel of Mark was already completed and it was followed by another book

¹⁰ Affiku 2015

¹¹ Akika, A., (2015). *The Eggon People*. N.pub.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Blench, R., (2015). *A dictionary of Eggon language*. Cambridge, UK: Kay Williamson Foundation.

¹⁴ Envuladu, 1983



titled *Allah alu odlo* meaning ‘God has spoken.’ In 1935, Mr. C. Sanderson completed the translation of the Gospel of John. The New Testament *ohwihwim olehe* was published in 1970 by Bible Society of Nigeria. However, reports have it that the Bible was published only once and the exact copies that were printed remain unknown. By implication, not many got to buy it.

Islam on the other hand came to Eggon land through trade with the Hausa traders. As Yusufu puts it, once they were accepted by one Idde Ebe who was then a ruler in Alogani and his son who later became the Areṅ Eggon in 1953, other chiefs followed easily as well.¹⁵ It is not clear, however, the exact year that Islam came to Eggon land. Today Islam is practiced in Eggon especially among the Eggon-Erro clan of dialects, namely; Umme, Bakyono, Arugbadu and Alizaga. Christianity on the other hand is common among Eggon-Anzo and Eggon-Ehlo clans of dialects.

B. Methods

The approach used in writing this paper is a survey study approach. Basically, Survey research are use in a variety of data collection methods with the most common being interviews and questionnaires, but the research data obtained is primary data using the interview and observation study method. The three steps that the researcher will take in preparing this article include: first, finding and collecting reference sources that are relevant to the theme of this research. Second, several interview and observation have been collected are then processed and elaborated, in order to comprehensively explain the inter-sections of this article. Third, as the last step, the researcher concludes specifically referring to the title raised in this study, namely the syncretic practices among the Eggon Erro Muslims and approaches to sustainable Da’wah in Eggon Erro communities.

¹⁵ Yusufu, 2021



C. Result and Discussion

1. Islam and Syncretism

The term syncretism has been variously defined by seasoned scholars, all arriving of the same meaning. For instance, Ferguson and Wright define it as a process of borrowing elements by one religion from another so much so that the receiving religion basic character will not be changed.¹⁶ It is also described as a situation in which one religion adopts, or absorbs elements of another religion.¹⁷ In the Dictionary of Comparative Religion, the term is meant to be a fusion of religions, cults which occurred in Graeco-Roman world which is now used in all places where there is contact among religions.¹⁸ It is also seen as reconciliation or fusion of differing systems of belief, as in philosophy or religion, especially when success is partial or the result is heterogeneous. The import of all these definitions shows clearly seemingly contradiction in the thoughts, beliefs and practices of different religions. This scenario happens quite commonly in areas where multiple religions traditions exist in proximity and function actively in the culture, or when a culture is conquered, and the conquerors bring their religious beliefs with them, but do not succeed in entirely eradicating the old beliefs or, especially, practices.

Mbiti rightly observes that syncretic practices is that people of other religious faith still believed that, “the living dead are still people” and they have not yet become ‘thing’ but ‘spirit’. Thus, the spirit of the departed are venerated annually to ensure continue communication with the dead ones. To this end, offerings and sacrifices are made to the ancestors to appease them.¹⁹

In Islamic framework, the term syncretism is referred to as *Takhlit* which denotes the practice of mixing Islam with other beliefs and practices which are opposed to its tenets.²⁰ Those involved in this practice are known as *Mukhlitun* (syncretists or Mixers), and in the

¹⁶ Ferguson, S.B. & Wright, D.F., (eds), (1988). *New Dictionary of Theology*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, p.670.

¹⁷ Maroney, E., (2006). *Religions Syncretism*, London, SCM Press, p.6.

¹⁸ Brandon, S.G.F., (ed), (1970). *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

¹⁹ Mbiti, J.S., (1967). *Africa Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinmann.

²⁰ Jimoh, S.L., (2007). *Demonic-Possession Exorcism By Yoruba Muslim Aafas in Osun State of Nigeria: A Critical Examination*, an Unpublished Ph.D Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts, Lagos State University, Ojo, p.15.



views of Muslim theologians, such people are definitely unbelievers (*Kuffar*) and are not subject to the rules of Islam.²¹

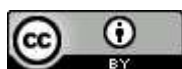
The syncretists in the view of Fudi are known through such actions like veneration of trees and stones by offering slaughtered animals and alms to them; or by pouring (grain) paste on them. Claiming to know something about the realm of the unknown through lines made on sand; or by the state of the stars; or by promptings from *inns* or through the sounds or movements of birds, or by some other means. Also included are coatings of cotton or some other things on stones by the roadside or at the foot of trees, or at the junction of two roads, or at some such locations where such is sacrificially cost. Writing the Qur'an and the names of the Almighty Allah on filthy objects such as dead people's bones or the head of a dog; or writing the Qur'an or the names of Allah with blood spilled during slaughter, or writing the Qur'an or names of Allah, washing it with water, and also shredding a snake's slough and mixing it with the water.²²

The position of Islam as a non-syncretic religion has been clearly enunciated in both the Glorious Qur'an and Sunnah of Muhammad Prophet (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). In verse 208 of *Suratu'l-Baqarah*, Muslims have been enjoined to enter into Islam wholeheartedly and that they should not take the path of Satan for he is an avowed enemy. Also, the whole of *Suratu'l-Kafir* in (Qur'an chapter, 109) was revealed to demarcate monotheism (*Tauhid*) from polytheism (*Shirk*), and to establish a true criterion, allowing no further wrangling or vain argument. It should be noted that the unbelievers had proposed that Prophet Muhammad (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) should prostrate himself before their gods in return for their prostration to His God, and that he should cease denouncing their gods and their manner of worship in reciprocation for whatever he demanded of them.²³ Be that as it may, Islam is a universal religion that emphasizes categorical submission to its fold and it covers all aspects of our life; be it social economic, political, medical, environmental. Therefore, it does not stand in need of and borrowing from other faith.

²¹ Ogunbiyi, I.A., (1991). "Nur al-Albab: The Litmus Test of Pure Islam as Interpreted by Shaykh 'Uthman b. Fudi" in *Research Bulletin*, Centre of Arabic and Documentation, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, 1991, Vols. 18 and 19, p.24.

²² Ibid

²³ Sayyid Qutb, (1979). *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, London, London Publishers, (Vol. 30), p. 329.



2. Syncretic Practices of the Eggon-Erro Muslims

The Eggon people are divided into three major clans namely: Anzo, Eholo, and Eggon Erro. The people Anzo clan were mostly found around Alogani Galle, Wakama, Ogba, AGunji, Angbaku, Ogbagi, Ubbe, and Wogna while the Eholo clan were in villages like Kagbu Wana, Wangibi, Ikka, Alushi, Ginda, Wulko, Wowyen, Endeho, Gaji, Ungwashuru, Lambaga, Bori and Lizzin Keffi. The Eggon Erro are mostly around Umme, Nassarawa Eggon, Alizaga, Bakyano, and Arugbadu, Sako, Arikyia, and other small settlements in Lafia Local Government Area. However today, these clans have spread and inter-woven with each other in the quest for fertile farmland among other tribes such as the Alago, Kambari, Gwandara and Mighili.²⁴ What is unique about these clans is that Anzo and Eholo have the largest concentration of Christian population whereas Eggon Erro have the largest number of Muslim population but most of the authors who wrote the history of Eggon people tend to neglect this vital aspect of Islam in Eggonland.

Furthermore, these clans have different tribal marks. The Anzo and Eholo have fifteen lines on each cheek running from the temple. The Eggon Erro has nine marks on the face. This group is also called (*Madan Tara*). They both have patterns of lizards and birds on the neck, while some choose to draw drums or arms and other objects. Marks are also cut on other parts of the body like the belly, sometimes even the legs, and women's backs.²⁵ Both men and women in Eggon land traditionally pierced their ears, but only women pierce one nostril. All these marks were for decoration and to prove how brave those who had them were, to have endured the pain of making them.

According to Blench, (2008) that it appears the dispute surrounding the grouping of the language rages because of the existence of the dialect of the Eggon Erro which is not mutually intelligible to that spoken by the Eggon Eholo and Anzo clans. However, the latest classification of the linguistic family of Eggon is that it forms its own family along with Ake, a group in Lafia East and Lafia Local Government Areas, under the *Eggonic* group.

²⁴ Nasara, M., (2011). *Eggon and the Power of the Ancestors*. Lafia: Sakpa Press.

²⁵ Ibid



The history and origins of the Eggon appear to also share in the debate. Three major traditions of the historical account appear popular. These are the mythological explanation, traditions of migration from the Kanem Bornu Empire and dispersal from the Kwararafa Empire as a result of its collapse in 1700 A.D.²⁶ Following an analysis of the various sources, Enna, (2004) relied on cultural and linguistic authorities to conclude that there is a very high probability that the Eggon migrated from Apa in Jukun land to their present locations in Nasarawa State.

The *Ashim* cult is believed to ward off wicked or evil spirits from the land. The cult is physically represented by the leaves of the tree called *mijikadenya* in Hausa. These leaves are kept on a farm to ward off thieves. The victims of this cult are afflicted with severe sickness until they confess.²⁷ No one has the right to play with *Ashim* and if one eats *Ashim's* food unworthily one is afflicted by *Ashim* in such a way that one's stomach will become swollen. Women are not allowed to go near nor see *Ashim* (oracle). However, women past menopause may be introduced to the cult. They are warned strictly never to disclose the secrets to younger ones and such old women are not allowed to eat *Ashim's* food. The Eggon Ero people also have their own *Ashim* called *likya* which are being feared by all.²⁸

Apart from *Ashim*, there are other cults kept by individuals, families or clans. Among such cults are Akuk, Gango, Yamba and Arikya. These cults are represented by objects like pots, stones, sticks or cowries. They are believed to function in various ways, that is, to make the soil fertile for a good harvest, to protect the family or clan from any misfortune or evil, to bless the wombs of women so that they might give birth, and to ward off sicknesses and diseases of all sorts. That is why sacrifices of chicken, goat, and beer are made to these gods to appease them and to maintain a good relationship with the gods of the land. A related cult known as *Yambu* is found in the Tashan-Mada area. From January to April, offerings are made to the gods before the planting season during which people plead for sufficient rainfall and blessings on their farms. In September, they again appease these gods and give sacrifices in

²⁶ Enna, D.M., (2015). Resurgence of ethnic minority identity through performance: A Case of the Eggon. *International Journal of African Society, Cultures, and Tradition*, 2(3), 13-33.

²⁷ Blench, R., (2015). *A dictionary of Eggon language*. Cambridge, UK: Kay Williamson Foundation.

²⁸ Enna, D.M., (2015). Resurgence of ethnic minority identity through performance: A Case of the Eggon. *International Journal of African Society, Cultures, and Tradition*, 2(3), 13-33.



thanksgiving. The cult shrines are kept sacred and away from people. Only the priest and those involved are allowed to go there.²⁹

In honour of these gods, important festivals are celebrated. An example is the *Ashimu* festival celebrated in March/April annually. During the ceremony, only men who have been initiated into the *Ashim* cult can participate in the feast. The ceremony lasts for about a week. This period is marked by much beer drinking and feasting. The *Arashim* dance is done during the ceremony.³⁰

Despite age-long history of acceptance of Islam among Eggon-Erro Muslims, it is quite surprising that one could still find a large proportion of Eggon-Erro Muslims still wallowing in mixing traditional beliefs and practices with Islam. They still repose belief in witchcraft and their diabolical machinations. They do not see anything wrong in a Muslim partaking in traditional festivals and such other activities like ancestor worship, belonging to secret cults, believe in magic and enormous use of claims and amulet and consulting dinners. It is against this background that their paper seeks to examine their level of Islamic syncretism, with special reference to the case of *Likya* Cult. It also aims at enlightening and sensitizing them on the great danger of Islamic syncretism and reduces it.

There are some objects such as stones, Trees, Rivers and others which in Eggon Erro believed to possess powerful spirits. These spirits are believed to have been created and sent by the Supreme Being and they are not in any way to be tempered with. Such objects with such spirits by God are what Eggon Erro people regard as *Likya* deities. They also play an intermediary role between the Supreme Being and man.³¹

Sacrifices and offerings constituted one the commonest act of worship amongst Eggon Erro people who believed that the *Likya* cult is a means of communion with their deities. These sacrifices are made in such occasions with particular animals such as white Cock or Hen or a goat is killed in order to present the blood or pour same on symbols of belief and worship such as stone, trees, rivers etc.³²

²⁹ Blench, R., (2015). *A dictionary of Eggon language*. Cambridge, UK: Kay Williamson Foundation.

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ayimon, (1986). National Union of Eggon Students' Annual Magazine. Jos: University Press, Vol. 1.

³² ibid



In an interview with Oku-Umbugu, he maintained that most of the Eggon Erro people like any other ethnic groups in Africa, believed strongly that there is life after death. For this reason, significant population of Eggon Erro people regards their ancestors as the elder member of their various families. They maintain discipline in their families by inflicting severe punishments on those members whose behaviours threaten the existence and progress of the family. Food, drinks, animals and sometimes money will be served to the ancestors believing that they would actually consume such foods and drinks in the night. This is because the people believed that the dead person still lives and are very close to living quarters of human beings. Women and children are prevented from seeing and participating in the Likya ancestral festival, but women can offer their gifts to the departed members through a senior living male member of the family. During this festival, it is believed by the practitioners that ancestors come out to talk with the human being on matters affecting both of them. In this case, they come out as masquerades which serve as the meeting point for the dead and the living. The ancestral cult is highly regarded by some of the Eggon Erro. When there is trouble, libations are poured on some particular ancestors who require sustenance.

An in-depth discussion with Zakari Abbo he stated that, sacrifices and offerings are directed to *bibli* (spirits) or ancestors among the adherents of the Likya cult. Sacrifices are always made for the purposes of propitiation and as thanks of offerings. If a person is sick, a white Cock is offered as sacrifice, if the sickness is severe a goat is slaughtered for the sacrificial ritual process. Sacrifice is also made to cure barrenness; this is because barrenness is believed to occur as a result of the woman's sins or it could be that the woman has offended the ancestors.

Zakari added that generally, to the Eggon Erro people, death and other misfortune are usually attributed to the action of human agents, living or death. When disease, illness, or sudden death strikes it is believed that there is an underlying cause that must be brought to light. The belief that death or illness is cause by some personal agents does not necessarily rule out a material cause. For instance, the idea that certain diseases are caused by germs might well be accepted. But the most important question would remain, "why did the germ affect this person at this particular time?" A pill or some other form of western medication may be



welcomed to counteract the germ, but this is only a kind of primary first aid. A real cure depends on the identification of the proper procedure to counteract its influence. To put it differently, relationship must be restored in order to bring about true healing.

It is also believed that spirit *Bibli* (Spirit) are both good and bad. Some are kind, harmless while others are bad, wicked and harmful. That the good spirits are those who shower man with good luck, success in all pursuits of life, prosperity and material wealth after incidental meeting, even though the victim may develop slight fever.

But the bad, wicked and harmful *Bibli* spell danger for one, it may lead to terrible and prolonged illness, madness or even death. Therefore, *Bibli* according to the Eggon Erro Clan of the Eggon people are responsible for both fortune and misfortune that befall every person.³³ The channel of Communion with the ancestor through Likya, is one of the central core among the Eggon Erro traditional belief system. The Likya ancestral festival is the relationship between the living and their departed relatives and it occurs annually before the harvest of Guinea-Corn and Yam.

In his extensive survey on Islam among the Eggon Erro, Sule & Yahaya maintains that some Eggon Erro Muslims still hold on to traditional beliefs in Eggon customs, superstitions, witchcraft, charms etc., which they found difficult to shed, despite the Islamic teaching of total submission to Allah's will.³⁴ Islam is monotheistic and demands uncompromising faith in Allah. Modern problems in relations to Islam and the Muslims are solved by the well informed Muslims through *Ijmā'*, consensus of opinions of the '*Ulamā'*', which must be based on the Qur'an. Having explained how some of these beliefs and practices have become mixed in with Islam, Sule & Yahaya concludes that most of the Muslim clerics in the villages 'get their bread and butter by exploiting the ordinary Muslims who look upon them as their 'saviours' in times of stress and strain.

It has also been observed that some Eggon Erro Muslims' persistence in syncretism cannot be factored on ignorance alone. This is because some of the *Ulama* who lived among

³³ Tijani, D.A., (1996). The Problem of Syncretism in Islam: A Case Study of Nassarawa Eggon Local Government Area, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. B.A Dissertation, University of Jos, Jos, Nigeria.

³⁴ Sule, M.M & Yahaya, A.G., (2021). Islam in Eggonland: Its History, Development and Prospects. *Journal of Islamic Social Sciences and Humanities*. Vol. 24 (1), 61-73.



the Eggon Erro people are literate in Arabic and also have familiarity with the pharmacopoeia stemming from Traditionalist sources. The *Ulama* may claim superiority as an interpreter of the moral teaching of the Qur'an, and add the ability to manufacture amulets and to divine based on the effect of his traditionalist background.

According to Meya Audu Musa, Likya is a belief system which strongly believed that there is life after death. For this reason, the Eggon Erro people regard the ancestors as the elder members of their various families. They jealously maintain discipline in their families by inflicting severe punishment on those members whose behaviours threaten the existence and progress of the family.

According to Adamu Mohammad Ebba in an in-depth interview avers that today many Muslims and Christians among the Eggon-Erro join in the celebration of the Likya cult traditional festivals with splendid ceremony in the different villages of the Eggon-Erro. This clan today is unique among the Eggon people for its annual observance of the Likya festivals and these have assumed a major position in the life of most of the people of the Eggon Erro; this is a manifestation of respect for tradition and socio-cultural phenomena; and on the other hand socialise the people, display aesthetic consciousness, and even an avenue for launching. He further states that many Eggon-Erro from far and wide troop to their various localities at different during the Likya festival to celebrate the traditional festivals not regarding their Islamic background. Accompanying this festival is; elaborate rituals, sacrifices and appeasements which they often do to appease the gods.

Also, Abdullahi Tanimu Gama averred in an interview that in the course of the month-long activities of the Likya ancestral cult, all religious events have to be low-keyed. The call to prayers in the *Masjid* in this community has to be in a low voice without the use of loudspeakers and anything short of this, the Muhadhim and other persons in the Masjid would have to face sanction from the ancestral cult.

Likya festival which normally occurs before the harvest of Guinea-Corn and Yam do witness large turnout of young adults from each of the sub-clan of the Eggon Erro popularly known as (Madan Tara), this is according to the statement of Garba Isa Makpa. The Likya cult members move round the village at night for some days hitting certain metallic objects and



song till around 5am in the morning. During their movement women and children are not allowed to see them, this because according to them any woman who see the *Bibli* (spirit) would be barred and until certain sacrifice are made, she would not be able to bear the fruit of the womb. What may surprise one is that majority of the participants are Muslims and they hardly listen anyone who try to cast anything bad about what they do. Not only are that, majority of the people who participate and involved in the Likya cult activities are mostly youths.

According to Agaya Osko in an interview where he averred that the during the Likya procession anyone who is caught that is not part of the Likya cult will be beaten and ask to make certain sacrifice. Notwithstanding the religious belief of that particular person, this is because; the people involved in the activities of the Likya are a combination of persons for the traditional, Christianity and Islam. If a person that violates that custom is from that particular community, he will face a specific sanction from the *Ashim* (Oracle) of that community.

It has been observed by the researchers that the month long Likya cult activities are being followed by a feaster. This feaster at each clan level is been celebrated with the slaughtering of different kind of animals and abundant food at the outskirts of the village to mark the end of the cult activities for the year.

3. Approaches to Sustainable Da'wah in Eggon Erro Communities

To eradicate or eliminate the syncretic practices among the Eggon Erro Muslims in Nasarawa State, there is the need for sustained Islamic Da'wah to educate the Muslim. The Da'wah effort supposed take multi-dimensional approaches to eliminate the continuation of the un-Islamic practices among Muslims in the Eggon Erro clan of Eggon people.

The researchers suggest that to sustain the Islamic Da'wah in the communities inhabited by the Eggon Erro people, the following strategies should be put in place.

The first strategy to ensure to weaken the continuous syncretic practices among the Eggon Erro people is through education. In this regard, Islamic conventional schools, Islamic learning centres for adults, and continuous Islamic preaching in their dialect by Muslim scholars who are conversant with the area.



The establishment of conventional Islamic schools in these areas will go a long way to inculcate the true Islamic teachings in the minds of the younger generation among the people of the Eggon Erro. This is because majority of those who usually participate in the Likya festival are the youth in the areas. Therefore, when these age-cohort are given sound Islamic education, it will reduce the population of adherents and believers in the reincarnation of the dead ancestors. It is hoped that educating them will greatly assist in sustaining the Da'wah efforts by Muslim scholars and educationist as well as philanthropists in the area.

For the adult members of the communities, the establishment of Islamic learning centres would be of immense benefit for the growth of Islam and its teachings in such communities that have been bedeviled with in-Islamic practices among the fold of Muslims. The adults learning centres when established, should be equipped with scholars, books and other teaching aid. Similarly, Islamic teachers deployed to the communities should use Eggon language as the language of instruction for easy comprehension and understating. Teaching, learning and preaching in the established centres or schools in Eggon language would encourage the people to listen and embrace because Islam would not be viewed as an alien practice that contradict their longstanding cultural tenets and belief.

It could be observed that syncretic practices withstand the test of time and social change because the communities were neglected by Muslim Organisations that are into Da'wah. In most of the communities that are predominantly occupied by Eggon Erro people, there is no prevalence of Da'wah activities. Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) and Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'ah Wa Iqamatus Sunnah (JIBWIS) have little in impacts in the Eggon Erro communities in shaping their belief system regarding their syncretic practice called Likya. Therefore, concerted effort is needed from these organisations to eliminate these vices.

D. Conclusion

In ensuring or achieving sustainable Da'wah against the syncretic practices among the Eggon Erro people of Nasarawa State, Nigeria, the youth and elderly persons are the targets of the Da'wah. When younger generation are given sufficient Islamic education at their formative age, they will grow up with a belief and understanding that are contrary to their culture. In this



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sense, the line of transmission of the cultural practices from the old to their offspring will be cut-off.

Additionally, targeting the elderly members of the communities with Islamic education would also help in the reduction of transmission of syncretic practices in the Eggon Erro communities. Elders are known as the custodians of society's traditions, when they embraced Islam and its tenets, such practices would not receive support from the community leaders and rulers that would help it to continue and withstand the test of time. Communities where Likya festival is being observe yearly are inhabited by Muslim and believers of traditional religion. Among the Muslims due to the lack of Islamic knowledge, they do participate in the festivals and rituals of the pagans in their communities. This is prevalent because the Muslims also believe in some of the traditions ignorantly, thinking erroneously, that such practices are not against the fundamental of Islam (*Tauheed*). To conclude this paper, it is safe to state that a continuous or sustainable proselytization in the form of teaching and learning instead of occasional field visit, and preaching would cement Islam in the communities. Through the above-mentioned approaches, Islamic and its practices would be deeply entrenched in the communities and hence bring an end to the syncretic practices generally and Likya festival particular.

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