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Managing Religious Conflict in a Multi-religious Setting: A Case Study of Èdẹ (Southwest Nigeria)

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Abstract

Traditional Yoruba religion is known for its ability to tolerate and accommodate other religious beliefs. The emergence of Islam and Christianity in the Yoruba town of Èdẹ, southwest Nigeria, was initially met with opposition from the Traditionalists but was later accommodated. Since the 20th century, the practitioners of these three religions in Èdẹ have continued to live together in harmony and peace. A major social reality in Èdẹ, like in other Yoruba towns and cities, is that there is ample presence of Muslims, Christians and Traditionalists in almost every family group or compound. This reality appears somewhat strange in contemporary Nigerian society which is often prone to ethno-religious intolerance. In Èdẹ's case, the cooperation among adherents of the three religions is one of the factors responsible for the peaceful religious coexistence in the town. This article aims at discussing the roles of traditional (Sango) practice, Islam, and Christia-

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nity in fostering religious co-existence in the now predominantly Muslim Yoruba town of Ede. Data sources are from oral interviews and extant literature. Focusing on historical conflicts among and within religious groups as well as their resolutions, the article argues that religious conflicts often emerge for the purpose of control and power. It shows that peaceful religious coexistence in Ede is a reflection of mutual agreements by adherents of the religious groups over appropriate locations for different religious practices in the town.

Keywords: Traditionalists, Islam, Christianity, Ede, Peaceful Coexistence,

Introduction

Ede is an ancient Yoruba town in present-day Osun State, southwest Nigeria (Olunlade 1961, Oyeweso 2002). Traditionally, Ede's administration is headed by a paramount ruler with the title of *Timi Agbale Olofa Ina* (Agbale, the expert and fiery archer) assisted by a Council of twelve traditional Chiefs whose members represent the main traditional quarters of the town. Edeland today covers such outlying farming communities as Sekona, Akoda, Alajue, Oloki, Olodan, Elewure, Adejunwon, Agbungbu, Owode, Abere, Faosun, and Loogun among others. It is recognised as a Muslim town by the sheer size of its large Muslim population but there is also a considerable number of Christians and adherents of traditional religions in the town (Nolte, Ogen and Jones 2017: 1-30). In this unbalanced religious situation, in what ways do Christians and traditionalists wield sufficient influence in the local affairs of the town? Response to this question will be provided subsequently.

Traditional religion among the Yoruba is fluid and flexible and, therefore, gives no room for competition. It explains why worshippers of a particular deity can participate in the celebration and festivals of another deity. This form of collaboration among worshippers of different deities fostered

cohesion and peaceful co-existence not only in the distant past but even at the time Islam and Christianity began to make steady inroads into Yorubaland around the mid-19th century. That Islam and later Christianity made progress and penetrated the traditional kingship institutions in many Yoruba towns attest to the expression of tolerance by worshippers of Traditional religion towards the two new religions. That many people later embraced the new religions even at the detriment of the existence of Traditional religion corroborates this view. While some frictions did occur along the line between the Traditionalists and the adherents of the new religions at different points in time, such frictions did not always lead to serious confrontations when compared to the reactionary disposition and intolerant attitudes of Muslims and Christians towards the Traditionalists.

Although the new religions began to overshadow Traditional religion from the late 19th century and well into the early 20th century, the latter remain accommodating despite the lack of reciprocity by the former. In the case of Ede, the penetration of Islam, in particular, into the town's kingship (Timi) institution proved to be a very bitter pill to swallow for the Traditionalists, a scenario that eventually prepared the way for conflict and control by contending religious forces. The struggle for space was, however, re-negotiated among each of these contending forces such that the Timi institution and the Traditionalists which claim authority over the Timi stool found a common ground to exercise control and freedom to maintain their religion. As the new religions spread across the town, they became domesticated within family compounds which created a blend of three different religious beliefs existing side-by-side with the realisation that there was, indeed, a need to manage religious tensions in the multi-religious setting of Ede. To avoid religious conflict, Ede pushed for a sympathetic posture towards the three religious groups which became increasingly possible

after the emergence of more Muslim and Christian paramount rulers in Ede. As a result, inter-religious dialogue and mutual settlement of disputes were subsequently encouraged among adherents of the three religions.

Traditional Religious Practice in Ede and the Primacy of the Ogun Deity

Traditionalists in Ede display a high degree of tolerance among themselves just as it is in other Yoruba towns. Although they worship different deities, they do not see themselves as different denominations because “*Ifa* [is] an oracle through [which] these divinities work in consonance with one another and never in discordant tunes” (Ajayi 2004). Traditionalists have the freedom to choose their cult and there is a general belief among them that the deities as agents of the Supreme Being work for their common good. Consequently, the condemnation of each other’s cult does not arise in their interactions. In the pre-colonial period, Ogun worship featured as the most important and dominant traditional religious belief and worship in Ede (Barnes 1997). Ogun in Yoruba cosmic mythology was a powerful, fearless and brave warrior who possessed the power of conquest and victory. He is said to be one of the first of the *Orisa* to descend to the realm of the earth to find suitable habitation for future human life. This explains why in one of his praise names, he is seen as the first of the primordial *Orisa* to descend to the earth from heaven (Awolalu 1979). He is the primordial Yoruba god of iron and all users of instruments or equipment made of iron appease him.

The reason for the pre-eminence of Ogun worship in Ede in the earliest times is not far-fetched. It was probably because the town was built on military exigencies prompted by the frequent military assaults suffered by Oyo people from the Ijesa marauders. Therefore, the ever-military conscious settlers of the town whose main instruments were guns had to take Ogun

worship very seriously because it was believed that Ogun could win wars for its committed devotees and adherents. This is why Ogun is referred to as the god of iron technology and conquest (Lawuyi 1988: 127-139).

As indicated earlier, Ogun worship was the first officially adopted traditional religion in Ede. The head of Ogun worshippers was called *Olu-Ode* (head hunter). The people engaged in Ogun worship daily, weekly, and annually. In traditional Ede town, there were dedicated compounds identified with the worship of Ogun. These included Ologun (Ogun devotees), Olode Ibadehin, Olode Afenle, Olode Olokuta (hunters) and Alagbede (blacksmiths) compounds. It should be noted that some of these compounds still retain this identity in recent times despite the influence of Islam and Christianity in the town. Some of them have however changed their nomenclatures due to their embrace of the new religions, particularly Islam. Till today, Ogun is worshipped in contemporary Ede town by professionals such as hunters, blacksmiths, drivers, goldsmiths, and other artisans who make use of iron and metals (Oyeweso 2017: 31-56).

From Ogun to Sango: Changing Dynamics of Traditional Religion and Worship in Ede

Sango worship is the most famous traditional religion in contemporary Ede. Sango is the Yoruba god of thunder, lightning, justice, force and male sexuality, among other symbolic representations (Akinyemi 2009). Sango worship supplanted Ogun worship as the principal *Orisa* in Ede during the reign of Timi Lalemo in Ede-Ile around 1780. Traditions have it that one of Timi Lalemo's sons, Ajeniju Bamgbaye, a future paramount ruler of Ede, was born with both fists closed and upon investigation and elaborate ceremonies conducted by an invited Sango priest, the child opened his fists which contained a cowry

shell and a small thunderstone. This was interpreted to mean that Sango did not only claimed the ownership of the child but also made him a natural worshipper and adherent (Olunlade 1961: 15). This event represented a milestone in supplanting Ogun worship with Sango worship, as the principal traditional religion (and deity) in Ede before the coming of Islam in the 19th century. This event was built upon by the emergence of Ajeniju Bamgbaiye, the prince born with Sango emblem, as Timi of Ede in 1825 (Oyeweso 2002: 79).

As an offshoot of Oyo town where Sango worship originated, Sango worship is one of the major traditional religions in Ede. It was second only to Ogun until the reign of Timi Lalemo in Ede-Ile whose son, Bamgbaye Ajeniju, was born with Sango's thunderstone in one of his fists. According to Olunlade (1961: 15 and 20-23), from Lalemo's reign up to the emergence of Bamgbaye Ajeniju as Timi in 1825, Sango worship had emerged as the principal religion of the Ede paramount ruler and his people. Today, the town is easily and generally identified with Sango worship despite the strong influence of Islam and a relatively growing presence of Christianity. The centrality and influence of Sango worship to the Timi of Ede and the generality of his people is reflected in this popular possessive-genitive phrase in Ede: Sango Timi (Timi's Sango). Indeed, the Timi, right from the closing decades of the 18th century, is seen as the incarnation of Sango.

Annual Sango worship in Ede comes up during the dry season preferably in late October or early November. (Adejumo 2009: 53). This is in addition to daily and weekly obeisance and sacrifices to Sango by his devotees at Timi's palace and traditional compounds of Sango worshippers in the town, particularly *Ile Onisango* (compound of Sango's worshippers). The date of the annual Sango festival in Ede is announced 21 days in advance. It is heralded by dancing to the main market square

where Sango devotees put up magical feats and performances. The Chief Priest of Sango in Ede called Baba *Mogba* who, like Sango, is expected to be able to physically spit fire and carry a pot of fire on his head. At the shrine of Sango in Timi's palace, sacrifices of cowries, goats, sheep, oxen, fowls and bitter kola are offered and prayers for peace, long life and prosperity, protection against natural and man-made disasters are said for Timi and the generality of the people of Ede. The last seven days of the annual Sango worship and festival in Ede is accompanied by different daily activities (Adejumo 2009: 53-54).

Sango worship was so important in Ede that the greatest opposition to Islam in its early years in Ede came from Sango worshippers who were so strong in the town (Oyeweso 1999: 11-33). However, two famous rulers of Ede who were devout Sango worshippers, Timi Bamgbaye Ajeniju and Timi Sangolami Abibu Lagunju (1847-1900), later played prominent roles in the introduction and expansion of Islam in Ede in the 19th century (Oyeweso 2002: 80). Despite this, Sango worship has remained the most important traditional religion of the Timi of Ede. Also, the people of Ede remain engaged in Sango worship despite the influence of Islam and Christianity in the town and have continued to negotiate religious spaces with the Muslim majority and Christian minority inhabitants of the town.

The specific role played by Timi Ajeniju and Timi Lagunju to the growth of Islam in the town is an interesting one. In the search for a potent power to assist the town in a battle against Ibadan, Timi Ajeniju was introduced by his brother, Ojo Arohanran, to his friend called Buremo Owon-la-a-rogo who came to Ede from Nupeland. Buremo prepared some concoctions which were taken to the battleground leading to the Ibadan camp. This action caused heavy rain for three successive days which decimated the Ibadan forces without firing a single shot (Olunlade 1961: 23). The victory over Ibadan forces encouraged Timi

Ajeniju to permit Buremo to settle in Ede to continue to pray for the town in subsequent battles. Buremo's settlement in Ede was a major factor in the growth of Islam in the town. The people of Ede were aware of his supernatural powers, and thus apart from practising his religion, got attracted to his house with requests for assistance in attending to one ailment or the other. He used this opportunity to preach Islam to his host community and this gradually encouraged the growth of Muslim population in the town. The role played by Timi Lagunju is somewhat tied to the consequences of the rising profile of Islam in Ede which the Traditionalists feared could become influential as to obliterate the traditional religion and Sango cult.

The first generation of Muslims in the town were seriously repressed by the Traditionalists and this manifested in the different ordeals they went through (personal communication with Al-Imam Mas'ud Husain Akajewole on 20th March, 2013). This continued for a long time until the emergence of Timi Lagunju who gave his support to the growth of the religion and protection to the Muslims. It is apt to note that Timi Lagunju was also one of the persecuted Muslims in Ede. He was abhorred by his parents for following the new religion and he subsequently fled to Ilorin where Islam had gained a foothold. He remained at Ilorin to learn Arabic before returning to Ede. When he discovered that the Traditionalists continued to torment the Muslims, he retreated to a bush in a place known as Agbongbe or Sooro where he improvised with a thatched hut serving as a mosque to practise his religion.

From Hostility to Accommodation: The Rise of Islam into Prominence in Ede

As earlier stated, Timi Ajeniju's decision to aid the growth of, and convert to, a 'new' religion that was different from the religion of his forebears emerged in response to the assistance he received

from Buremo Owon-la-a-rogo against the ravaging Ibadan army. The war against Ede, Oyeweso (2002: 78) suggests, was the decision of the newly appointed Balogun Oderinlo of Ibadan who had to prove his mettle as a military chief. Even though Ede was one of the strongest allies of Ibadan, its military might was lean and its chances of victory in a contest with Ibadan were slim. The fear of defeat, thus, necessitated the search for help from a more powerful source which Timi Ajeniju found in Buremo. In a desperate situation of this nature, Buremo may have extracted some form of religious commitments from the Timi before accepting to help him. Buremo's supernatural powers could not have gone unnoticed by the Timi and may have been a very useful avenue for him to exert his authority further within and outside Ede. Lastly, given that Buremo's religion was able to secure victory for the Timi, a task that seemed difficult for the Traditionalists to do, this may have changed the Timi's faith in the traditional religion. Also, Timi Lagunju from the accounts was wary of the traditional religion ever before he was installed as the Timi and was able to encourage the growth and spread of Islam when he finally became the Timi.

The gradual acceptance of Muslims and their religion into the mainstream traditional Ede society was achieved through a blend of diplomacy (Oyeweso 2012: 1-18) and coercive strategies to a lesser degree. This was one of the main agenda of Timi Lagunju upon his ascension to the throne in 1847. One of the strategies he employed was to ensure the swift conversion of members of his immediate family, relatives and friends to Islam. His other method was to encourage the conversion of influential chiefs by giving out his daughters in marriage to them (Gbadamosi 1970: 72). He further bestowed free chieftaincy titles on wealthy individuals, many of who embraced the religion to avoid persecution and to gain his favour. Another method Timi Lagunju adopted included putting himself forward as a patron to

many craft guilds which not only relied on his protection and goodwill but also served as counsel to other Traditionalists (Oyeweso 2017: 35).

The accommodation of the Muslims was also made possible by Timi Lagunju's forceful character. He was feared by the Traditionalists which made it possible for him to purge the town of its traditional religious practices by ensuring that those who accepted Islam brought their idols to the public for burning or dumping into the local Osun River. Even though the custodians of the traditional religion were not happy with this development, they could not muster enough courage to oppose him. Timi Lagunju consolidated the practice of Islam in Ede with the appointment of one of his friends, Noah Adekilekun, as the Imam of the Ede central mosque. Sheikh Noah Adekilekun, as he was later called, was well versed in Arabic and Islamic knowledge and had attracted large followers to himself before his appointment. He accommodated many of the Muslims that were rejected by their families in his house (Azeez [undated]). Apart from him, Timi Lagunju invited other itinerant Muslim teachers/preachers to Ede, many of who later settled permanently in the town, had families and successfully converted many people to Islam. Timi Lagunju mandated his chiefs to wear turbans in the palace and also ensured that his followers performed the five daily Muslim prayers and the Friday congregational prayers at appropriate times.

He introduced Islamic law in the administration of justice in the town. The British preserved the Shari'ah court in Ede which was presided over by Qadi Sidiq at Agbeni up till 1913 (Azeez [undated]). The law was aimed at wiping out all forms of vices in the town such as adultery, theft, back-biting among others. Serious attempts were made to purge Islam of accretions, syncretism, and adulteration. However, the system of law was too strict for the early converts who were afraid to oppose Timi

Lagunju for many years. Despite his mission to promote Islam in Ede, Timi Lagunju's reign witnessed some frictions and flaming consequences. His application of the Shari'ah law was regarded as absolutely authoritarian and cruel which eventually led to a successful plot that deposed him three times although he was re-instated twice but eventually exiled and later died in 1900 (Laoye 1956: 18).

Despite his persecution, the strategies he adopted for the spread of Islam proved effective. The firm foundation he laid for the religion ensured that Muslims enjoyed the freedom to practise their religion in the public and attracted the patronage of various segments of the population, including the wealthy and the poor. Even though Timi Lagunju was persecuted for introducing the Shari'ah, the law continued to be applied after he was banished from the town while Islam has remained a dominant religion in Ede since then. His departure led to a temporary setback in the spread of Islam in Ede. This was most evident in the attitude of Traditionalists who accepted Islam because of him and later returned to their gods after Timi Lagunju's exit. There was also a renewed act of persecution against Muslims by the Traditionalists, most of who later fled to Owon-la-rogo Compound (now Imale Compound), where they were able to freely practise their religion. Yet, the Muslim clerics made efforts to continue to encourage the practice of Islam. It is important to state that the fear of the damaging effects of Islam on the social order of the town was responsible for its restriction by the Traditionalists. Many parents and relatives refused to accommodate the new Muslim converts in their homes because they were regarded as rebels. Most of these converts were also disowned and could only seek refuge in Buremo's house. Moreover, these early Muslims could not practise their religion in the public. Their call to prayer (adhan) was also said into a keg in order not to call the attention of the Traditionalists (Dokun 1974:

25). Timi Lagunju's emergence although gave the Muslims a lifeline but after he was deposed, renewed attacks were carried out against them.

One noticeable feature of the spread of Islam in Ede in contemporary times is the emergence of societies and groups. Some of these groups belong to orthodox Islam which set out to give Islamic practices a new lease of life. Other Islamic societies and organisations are anti-orthodox in principle and practice. Together, these Muslim groups have encouraged the spread and acceptance of Islam in Ede. Even though their doctrines differ on issues such as the conduct of social ceremonies like marriage, birth and funeral, they jointly promote the consolidation of Islam in Ede. These Islamic groups are mostly composed of the elites in the society who have refused to be misled by modernity and other religions.

Christianity in Ede: Introduction, Growth, and Methods of Proselytization since 1900

Despite the dominance of Islamic religion in Ede in contemporary times, Christianity also has a significant presence in the town. In the second half of the 19th century, European Christian missionary activities emerged in Nigeria following the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade (Ajayi 1965: xiii-xiv). The impact of Christianity on Yorubaland was profound and Ede was not an exception. Like Islam in the early period, the introduction of Christianity into Ede in the first decade of the 20th century was faced with serious opposition. Its major challenges came mainly from the firmly established Muslim community in the town and also from the Traditionalists. It must be stated that the first encounter of the people of Ede with Christianity occurred in 1856 when the famous Baptist missionary, W. H. Clarke, visited Timi Lagunju during his travels in Yorubaland. Clarke used the opportunity of his visit to preach Christianity to the people who

accommodated him and listened to his messages carefully (Atanda 1972: 115). Although Christianity was not embraced by the people during this period, the foundation of Baptist mission, which was later to become the first Christian denomination in Ede, was firmly laid through Clarke's visit.

The introduction of Christianity in Ede could be traced to one Jacob Oyeboade Akerele of the Olosun Compound in the early part of the 20th century (Atanda 1972: 37). He was an indigene of Ede born of parents who were practitioners of traditional religions but he departed for Ogbomosho, a stronghold of the Baptist mission in Yorubaland, in 1892. His guardians in Ogbomosho were staunch Baptists through whom he was converted to Christianity and given Western education at the Baptist schools in the town. After his education, Akerele returned to Ede, his hometown, and began an evangelising mission around 1900. He was greatly assisted by his literacy in Western education in a preliterate Ede community of the period. He was appointed by Timi Oyelekan (1899-1924) as his scribe given his Western education background which gave him the opportunity of proximity to the traditional authority (Dokun 1974: 37).

As a literate man and personal scribe of the traditional ruler of the town, Akerele started his evangelising mission by organising literacy classes for young men and women in the town where he taught them how to read and write in the English language. He also used the opportunity to instruct the children in Bible verses and messages. By this act, Akerele had indirectly started to preach Christianity in a predominantly Muslim town of Ede. His cause received a royal blessing from the Timi and as a consequence, Akerele established the oldest Baptist Church in Ede towards the end of the 19th century with his 30-member congregation on a portion of land given by Timi Oyelekan amidst pomp and pageantry and support from Baptists from Ogbomosho (Atanda 1988: 156-158). These first 30 converts to Baptist

Christianity were drawn mainly from Muslims and Traditionalists. Unfortunately, due to irreconcilable differences in the leadership and among the congregation, the First Baptist Christian congregation disintegrated. This made many of the Christians revert to their earlier religions, Islam and traditional religions.

In later years, other Christian denominations found their way into Ede. One of them was the Anglican Church Mission which marked its presence in 1911. The Anglican Mission was one of the five oldest European Christian missions which arrived in Nigeria under Henry Townsend in the 1840s (Ajayi 1965: 1). The Anglican Mission began in the house of one Mr. Akeju who was greatly assisted by a European school master-catechist, Dr. K. Scott Patterson. The first Anglican Church in Ede was built in 1920 and their first Baptism was conducted by Reverend J. A. Ajayi on 16th August, 1935 (Personal communication with Reverend Canon O. A. Fabuluje, 2 April, 2013; Chief Rufus Oluwole Ojeniran, 30 April, 2013; and Reverend S. T. Adeyemi, 29 May, 2013). The Anglican Church also established branches at different villages in Ede. As a means of proselytization, the first Anglican school opened in Ede in 1929. Interestingly, the first set of students in the school were Muslims (Anglican Diocese of Osun 2007: 78-94).

The third major Christian mission that came to Ede was the Roman Catholic Church which was established in the town in 1921. To win converts, the Catholic Church established a Seminary in the town in 1955. Our Lady and St. Kizito Catholic Minor Seminary were later added in 1975. Today, there are several Catholic Churches in Ede.

The Catholic Church was followed by the Christ Apostolic Church which came to Ede in 1939, just nine years after it was founded by the Late Apostle J. A. Babalola (Dokun 1974: 37; Adelegan 2013: 395). The founder of the Christ Apostolic

Church in Ede was the late Prophet Samson Oladeji Akande who was originally a Muslim with the name, Salami. He turned blind in 1935 and encountered several life challenges and as a result, unsuccessfully attempted suicide at various times. He was converted to Christianity in 1938 and subsequently changed his name to Samson. He established the first Christ Apostolic Church on a portion of land given to him by Timi Sanusi Akangbe (1934-1946).

Next is The African Church Mission which was introduced to Ede in 1926. The pioneer of the Church was one Mr. Coker, a cocoa trader and Light bearer Worker who came to Ede for produce business. He was not a clergyman nor a missionary but a businessman whose exemplary life impacted and inspired many to embrace Christianity. Together with his early converts from among his trading partners and friends in Ede, Mr. Coker established the first African Church, Ebenezer African Church, in 1926. After a heavy rain destroyed the Church in 1940, a second African Church was established in 1940. A third one was opened by a faction of the members who broke away from the Ebenezer Church in 1944. Today, the African Church in Ede is a force to reckon with, with several branches located within and beyond the town (personal communication with Chief S. O. Fadara on 10th May, 2013).

The Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Mission is another early Christian mission in Ede. It was introduced in the country in 1914 and spread to Ede in the early 1950s. Prince S. B. Oniye, a soldier in the Nigerian Army, established the first Parish of the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) in 1968. The Parish started at the rented room of Prince S. B. Oniye at the private residence of one Mrs. Laoye, a supporter. The pioneers of the church engaged in public announcements of God's wonders through the church in different parts of Ede while the founder travelled in consultation with leaders of the CCC across the country. The Church moved

to its first site in 1969 and has since made tremendous progress in the town with significant growth in membership and branches (personal communication with Prophet J. Segun Oniye on 10th May, 2013).

In contemporary Ede, there are other numerous Christian denominations such as the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Deeper Life Christian Ministry, Celestial Church of Christ, and a host of other new-generation Pentecostal movements. As indicated earlier, some of the methods adopted by the Christian missions in Ede included establishment of primary, post-primary and higher institutions of learning in the town; establishment of hospitals, maternities and dispensaries; offer of admission to people who were willing to embrace Christianity; provision of jobs to Christians only; among other methods to entice Muslims and Traditionalists in the town. These proved very effective in winning many members from the Muslim and Traditionalist majority in the town in the early period.

The early Christians in Ede faced challenges from the Muslims and Traditionalists because they condemned traditional practices such as polygamy, participation in cultural festivals, among other practices. As noted by Olukoju (1997: 138), apart from opposition from Muslims and Traditionalists, early Christian evangelists in Yorubaland also jostled for a sphere of influence often with acrimony as a result of their doctrinal differences. However despite opposition from Muslims and Traditionalists as well as inter-denominational acrimonies among Christian churches, Christian missionary bodies made tremendous progress in Ede and recorded significant achievements. Today, a good number of the indigenous people of Ede, as well as non-indigenes, now profess Christianity. Ede Christians have continued to live with their Muslim and

Traditionalist neighbours in peace and harmony, although some periods of conflicts and disagreements do occur.

Religious Interactions in Ede: Issues in Inter-Religious Conflict and Resolution

Since the 19th century when Islam was introduced to Ede, religious frictions have been issues of concern and one of the major characteristics of the town as the Traditionalists and the Muslims usually have to negotiate occupation and use of space among themselves. This became problematic with the emergence of Christianity at the beginning of the 20th century. In other words, after the initial antagonism from the Traditionalists, the interaction among the three religious groups in Ede was characterised by peaceful coexistence and occasional conflicts and misunderstanding over the use of public spaces. This was due, in particular, to changes in the attitude of the traditional institution which not only paved the way for Islam and Christianity but also invited converts within its fold. Most of the traditional rulers who emerged after the deposition of Lagunju were either sympathetic to Islam and Christianity or had earlier embraced either of the religions. Most importantly, a significant number of the traditional rulers who emerged after Timi Lagunju's deposition were Muslims except Timi John Adetoyese Laoye (1946-1975) who was a devout Christian. Due to the religious affiliation of these traditional rulers, the palace became one of the keenly contested public domains among the three religious groups.

The emergence of Timi Lagunju, a Muslim, meant that Islam was accommodated in the palace. It also marked the introduction of a separate Supreme Being believed to be superior to the traditional deities (Sango and others). Timi Lagunju particularly made it known to the Traditionalists that Islam was his preferred religion for the town. This was greatly demonstrated

in his request for Traditionalists who accepted Islam to destroy their deities in the public and his introduction of Shari'ah in the administration of justice in the town. Apart from ensuring that his followers performed the five daily prayers and the Friday congregational prayers at stipulated times, he also tried as much as possible to purge Islam of syncretism and accretions. While he used the Shari'ah to check immoralities and crimes in the town, he further encouraged the wearing of turban by his chiefs in the palace instead of their traditional caps (Abdul-Fatah 2007). For the most part, therefore, the Traditionalists felt threatened by his preference for Islam at the expense of Sango and other deities. This was why the period before and after his deposition was characterised by waves of crises between the Muslims and Traditionalists.

The conflict between the two groups was also observed over religious syncretism. Many of the Traditionalists who accepted Islam found it difficult to abandon traditional practices. This was often the case with many of those who patronised traditional Yoruba priests for various socio-economic and personal spiritual problems. Some of them participated in the celebration of deities such as Egungun (Houlberg 1978) and Sango, while those who worked as hunters and blacksmiths could not leave the worship of deities associated with their trade. It was also a challenge for many Muslims not to perform the rituals associated with the traditional cults of their families and compounds. These pantheons were believed to govern the life of every member of the compound, and failure to appease them with the necessary ritual was believed to spell doom to the entire family. This was why Traditionalists tried as much as possible to oppose any family member that failed in that responsibility on account of being a Muslim or Christian (Dokun 1974: 35). While these syncretic practices continued to be noticed, even in recent times, criticisms against them by both Christian and Muslim

clerics made conflict unavoidable in the context of the twentieth century.

One method used by the Muslim clerics in Ede was to organise open-air lectures (wáàsí) to educate the Muslim community on the need to inculcate pure Islamic practices in their lives. In this way, Dokun (year) notes that they condemned traditional religious values that sought to promote syncretism. These open-air lectures recorded some successes, as many Muslims abandoned their traditional deities. Traditionalists, who were threatened by this development, attacked the Muslim preachers in the public, condemning their religion and preventing them from organising further lectures. The open hostility between the two groups also played out at the family level. Conflicts often arose in the family when Muslim sons attempted to convert their Traditionalist parents to Islam or destroy the family deity. To prevent such conflicts, many parents initiated one of their sons into the family cult while they allowed others to join the new religion. Parents often threatened to eliminate any initiates who abandoned the family cults. Over time, this strategy also failed, as many of the sons revolted against their fathers' refusal to embrace Islam.

Largely, the predominance of Islam in Ede appears to have emboldened the Muslim community to check the Traditionalists in some spheres. An example of this was the crisis which erupted over the relocation of Sango shrine to Timi's palace during the reign of Timi Tijani Oladokun Oyewusi, Agbonran II (1976-2007). During the period, the statue was placed in the centre of the market by the Traditionalists, a strategic public domain where four major roads are linked – the Timi Palace Road, Poly Road, Alapa/Oluobinu Road and Agunyan Masesu/Apaso Road. The statue was placed directly in front of the Ratibi Mosque behind the Ede Central Mosque, and an electric power sourced from this Ratibi Mosque supplied

power to the statue together with a bulb in its mouth which made it seem like Sango was spitting fire in sync with its legendary tale. For some time, the action of the Traditionalists did not seem to have prompted criticisms from the Muslim community, not until the popular Yoruba poet and critic, Olanrewaju Adepoju (1978) visited the town and made fun of the people in one of his albums:

*Nígbà tí èyàn ò gò bí ará Èdẹ,
Wón kọ mọsálásí
Wón fi Sàngó jẹ lẹmòmù*

When one is not as foolish as Èdẹ folks,
They built a mosque,
and made Sango their Imam

Piqued by this remark, some members of the Muslim community led by Sheikh Salaudeen Olayiwola, Abdul-Ganiyu Olagunju, and other members of the Joint Association of Ede Muslim Youth Organizations (JAEMYO) decided to remove the Sango statue. They destroyed the statue in a late-night operation which called the attention of people close to the market. Protests against this action by the Traditionalists were led by one of the Sango priests, Prince Jimoh of Ajeniju Ruling House. In resolving the crisis, a decision was reached to move the statue to the palace of Timi, where it stands till date (personal communication with Alhaji Nureni Lawal and Alhaji Adio, 27th July, 2013).

Another incident occurred when the organisers of the 2010 Èdẹ Day Annual Celebration intended to stage a festival in honour of Sango as part of events marking the day. Some Muslim members of the Organising Committee reacted against the plan, noting that this would portray the town as a promoter of traditional religion. Talking Drum competition was staged to replace the idea of hosting the Sango festival. This was reluctantly

accepted by the Traditionalists and other liberal Muslims in the town for the sake of peace and progress of the town. This concession is one of the ways through which conflicts capable of causing religious conflagrations are managed and resolved in Ede (personal communication with Alhaji Ibraheem Adekilekun, 5th May, 2013).

The introduction of Christianity in Ede aggravated the religious tension and competition for space among the religious groups. It brought about a new twist whereby Traditionalists and Muslims could both condemn the Christians, or where Muslims and Christians condemn the Traditionalists, or where Christians and Traditionalists condemn the Muslims, all depending on individual group interests and the issues at stake. Christianity and Islam are united in their claim to the oneness of God and as such, are opposed to the 'polytheistic' belief of the Traditionalists. The two religious groups usually oppose the Traditionalists for associating partners with God among other idolatry practices. Being the two oldest religions in the town, both Muslims and Traditionalists are also united in their support for polygamy and condemnation of Christianity.

Although both Christians and Traditionalists view the predominance of Muslims in Ede as a threat, they respond to it differently. While Traditionalists accommodate the Muslims and appropriated many Islamic practices, Christianity sought to compete with them and even surpass them through various methods such as Western education. Western education was an attraction for the people of Ede but the fear of conversion discouraged many Muslims and Traditionalists from attending the mission schools in the early period. Indeed, the Church successfully converted many pupils who attended the mission schools to increase its fold. In 1949, the Baptist Church also established a Teacher Training College to increase the number of teachers in Ede and other Yoruba towns. The school also provided

job opportunities for educated Christians to the exclusion of the dominant Muslim population. The college gave Christians an edge to produce more teachers in the town. To be at par with the Christians in educational advancement, an attempt was made to raise money from the entire Èdẹ community to build a community school that would accommodate every child without the fear of being converted into Christianity. However, when the school was completed in 1963, only Christians were qualified as teachers, all of whom were subsequently employed by Timi Laoye. His action, as a Christian trained by the Baptist Church, was viewed in a negative light by Muslims who also feared that their children would be converted under Christian teachers. They, therefore, raised money for the second time to build a new school which they named Èdẹ Muslim Grammar School, in 1974. Despite the bias against him, Timi Laoye was, nonetheless, responsible for encouraging the establishment of Muslim schools such as Bamigbaye Memorial School which later changed its name to Tajudeen School with branches in Ejigbo and Ikirun. The new schools changed the apathy of Muslims towards western education (personal communication with Alhaja Lateefat Giwa, 2nd March, 2013).

The construction of Èdẹ Central Mosque was another issue that pitched the Muslims against Timi Laoye. In 1958, there was a need to expand the mosque located at Oja-Timi to accommodate the growing Muslim population. Timi Laoye provided a piece of land located adjacent to the old mosque. While some Muslims accepted the offer, the majority did not noting that the new site given to them by Timi Laoye could not accommodate them. They eventually revolted, stoning the palace and chanting protest songs for their perceived attempt by the Timi to contain the predominance of Islam. The crisis was finally settled in the court of law in favour of the Muslims who supported the use of the old site at Oja-Timi (Dokun 1974: 52).

Competition for space is also rife within Islamic and Christian religious groups. Among the Islamic groups, the competition occurs mostly between the conservative clerics and the puritan *Ahmadiyya* group or reformist sects such as the *Tabligh Jama'at*. The Ahmadiyyah group has mostly been criticised for not accepting Prophet Muhammed as the seal of prophets in Islam. The belief of the *Ahmadis* was unimaginable for many Muslims in Ede. The early *Ahmadis* in the town were severely criticised and such often result in conflicts. Dokun (1974: 111) observes that the group was allowed to be inaugurated in the town in August 1970 at the intervention of Timi Laoye. However, the group appears to be discriminatory against other Muslim groups in certain areas. For instance, members of the group may not pray behind a cleric who is not an Ahmadi. Similarly, they may not marry anyone from any Islamic denomination apart from Ahmadiyyah (Personal communication with Mutiu Lawal, 20th July, 2013).

In the Christian community, doctrinal differences appear to have caused a divide between the indigenous people and settler groups. A case in point is the Baptist Church. Part of the reasons why the Babasanya branch of the church was abandoned and the members broke into two factions was as a result of the traditional practices, such as polygamy, that were tolerated by Akerele, the founder of the Church. The indigenous people of the town who supported him, therefore, broke away to establish the First Baptist Church at Oke Apaso. Also, the split in the Ebenezer African Church produced one faction for indigenes and another one for non-indigenes. Similarly, most Ede indigenes do not attend churches such as The Anglican Church which they refer to as 'churches for strangers.'

The organisation of public religious activities by the Christian community has also caused rancour between them and Muslims who perceive it as an attempt to win them over. An

example was the Healing Jesus Crusade held in July 2011. The crusade was organised by the Dag-Heward Mills Christian Ministry of Ghana in concert with some local churches in Osun State. The event was preceded with about six weeks of intensive mass mobilisation and publicity which offended the sensibility of a section of the Muslim population. Apart from the print and electronic media, the walls of some public and private buildings in Ede and adjoining towns were painted with Dag-Heward Mills' yellow colour while several banners were hung in strategic places within and outside the town. Billboards and posters of the visiting Evangelist, Dag Heward Mills, were also pasted in several places while many commercial vehicles had one or two bumper stickers about the crusade. There were also regular street parades by Christian volunteers, sensitizing the public about the forthcoming crusade.

The *Tabligh Jama'at* was one of the groups that reacted against the crusade, and their opposition to it seems difficult to disprove (Personal communication with Yemi Balogun, 30th July, 2013). The crusaders chose either predominantly Muslim towns such as Ede in Osun, Auchi in Edo, Iseyin in Oyo State or 'less' Christianised towns like Badagry in Lagos State, for the event. Since the Ministry also planned to invite the Timi, a Muslim Oba and the Chief Imam of Ede Central Mosque to the event, these Muslim critics believed that the ultimate objective of the crusaders was to corrupt their faith and strong devotion to Islam. They, therefore, made counter move to organise vigils for Muslims in the same period. They also posted banners and posters in several locations in the town with such inscriptions as: "Allah is the Healer, the Saviour and the Provider" (Banaat 2011). This episode represents a critical period in religious interactions in Ede but did not lead to any disturbance or breach of peace in the town as the crusade was held as planned. A resolution was, however, achieved after several days of mediation by Ede Interreligious

Council comprising of leading professionals and elites in the town.

The location of Redeemers University permanent site owned by the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Ede is another issue that raised the fear of pollution of Islam in the town. Many of those that reacted against the location of the university in Ede were disturbed by the understanding that the Redeemed Christian Church of God is one of the biggest Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, commanding large followership within and outside the country. They were also worried that another church, the Baptist Church, had established its university – Bowen University – in a neighbouring Muslim-dominated town of Iwo. Therefore, when Ede was announced as the location of the permanent site of Redeemers University, they seemed to have taken several measures to hinder its take-off. Part of the moves was to incite families who owned the land on which the university was to be built against the Redeemed Christian Church of God, a factor which caused some delay in the take-off of the university. Until 2012, when its foundation was finally laid in the town, the university operated temporarily at the headquarters of the church located in Mowe, Ogun State.

Largely, the competition among members of various religious groups has been managed in such a way as not to cause a wide-scale conflict in the town. The religious groups understand each other's differences and have learned to accommodate one another (Raheem 2019). The case of Ede is not different from what obtains in some Yoruba towns where the traditional institution worked with religious leaders to promote interreligious peace (Oyeweso 2012). In particular, most of the Timi in Ede have been responsible for mediating in various religious issues that could have led to conflict. Therefore, crises such as the one occasioned by the building of Ede Central Mosque, the Sango shrine in the market, the Mills Crusade, and the location of

Redeemers University were impressively managed in ways that prevented them from degenerating to major religious conflicts or disturbances. This is unlike what usually happens in other parts of the country, especially in Northern Nigeria.

Other major factors in religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence in Ede are interreligious marriages and kinship relations. Today, there are numerous examples of family groups comprising Muslim and Christian members as well as adherents of the traditional religions. There are various instances of Muslim men who married Christian women and vice versa. The famous Adeleke family is a typical example of families with a blend of Muslim and Christian members. The patriarch of the family, Late Senator Raji Ayoola Adeleke, was a devout Muslim married to a Christian Igbo woman. The family is blessed with several successful children out of who are devout Muslims and Christians. Describing the nature of religious interactions in Ede with specific references to the Adeleke family, Senator Isiaka A. Adeleke holds that:

There is no doubt that Ede is one room in terms of history, religions and culture. My late father was a devout Muslim while my mother who was of Igbo extraction was a zealous Christian. I am a Muslim with Muslim and Christian wives but my children are all Muslims. My immediate younger brother, Dr. Deji Adeleke, is a prominent member and leader of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. He has also constructed two magnificent churches for the Seventh Day; one in Ikeja and the other in Lekki. His wife and children are all Christians. Our younger brothers and sisters chose the faith of their choice and consequently, there are several *Alhajis* and practising Christians in the family. All members of the family participate actively during the Eid-el-Fitr and Eid-el-Kabir festivals ditto for

Christmas and New Year festivities. In our family and the larger Ede community, Islam and Christianity co-exist peacefully.

(Personal communication, 18th August, 2013)

It is indisputable that many family groups like the Adelekes abound in modern Ede as well as other Yoruba towns and cities. Therefore, the relatively peaceful religious coexistence and absence of religious disturbances in Ede could be explained from the perspective of the fact that many family groups have Christian and Muslim members. Apart from the family, evidence of interreligious interaction can also be found in public places such as Ori-Oke Baba Abiye, a prayer mountain established in 1944 by Prophet Samson Oladeji Akande, located between Awo and Iwoye. The mountain has a church and hostels for visitors who regularly go to pray and seek solutions to their socio-economic and spiritual problems. Although it was established by a Christian cleric, many of those who visit the mountain are members of other religious faiths from within and outside Ede. It has, therefore, become one avenue where people of different religious faiths interact, offer prayers and call on God together to answer their prayers.

Conclusion

This article has examined the nature of religious interactions in Ede among the practitioners of the three major religions in the town – traditional religion, Islam, and Christianity. It showed that the people of Ede were originally adherents of Yoruba traditional religions before the advent of Islam and Christianity in the 19th and 20th centuries, respectively. Today the modern town of Ede has elements of a Muslim town but traditional religion continues to be relevant while Christianity continues to grow steadily among the inhabitants. The people of Ede, despite differences in

their religious affiliations, have continued to live in peace and harmony. While there have been instances of cold and open conflicts among the adherents of the three religions in the town, such have been carefully managed without degenerating to civil disturbances or crises. The paper concluded that Èdẹ represents a stand out case of peaceful and cordial management of religious differences in Yorubaland, and that such has been a major characteristic of religious tolerance among the Yoruba of South-western Nigeria.

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