

# Religious Encounters in Osogbo, Nigeria: A Muslim Perspective

Mumini O. Rauf<sup>1</sup> & AbdulGafar Olawale Fahm<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Fountain University, Osogbo, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup> Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

✉ fahm.ao@unilorin.edu.ng

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the level of religious encounters among people of diverse faiths in Osogbo. It addresses the open exchange and interrelationship of adherents of different faiths within the city as well as the level of misunderstanding that exists from a Muslim perspective. The study is historical and descriptive. It is historical in the sense that it assesses newspaper reports, oral interviews, and court records while a descriptive approach was used in analyzing all the issues related to concepts and ideas of religious encounters. It reveals that the actions and inactions of people of other faiths in Osogbo are threats to social cohesion in the community. The study shows areas of conflict with the Muslims in Osogbo despite the open relationship among people of diverse faiths. The paper, therefore, recommends that for a good relationship to be sustained in Osogbo, there is a need for adherents of the three religions to keep off confrontational approaches and embrace dialogue and mutual understanding to promote peaceful co-existence within the community.*

**Keywords:** Religious Encounters; Islam; Osogbo; Muslim

# Pertemuan Beragama di Osogbo, Nigeria: Sebuah Perspektif Muslim

## Abstrak

Tulisan ini mengkaji tingkat perjumpaan keagamaan di antara orang-orang yang berbeda keyakinan di Osogbo. Ini membahas pertukaran terbuka dan hubungan timbal balik dari penganut agama yang berbeda di dalam kota serta tingkat kesalahpahaman yang ada dari perspektif Muslim. Penelitian ini bersifat historis dan deskriptif. Bersifat historis dalam arti menilai laporan surat kabar, wawancara lisan, dan catatan pengadilan sementara pendekatan deskriptif digunakan dalam menganalisis semua masalah yang berkaitan dengan konsep dan gagasan pertemuan keagamaan. Diungkapkan bahwa tindakan dan kelambanan pemeluk agama lain di Osogbo merupakan ancaman bagi kohesi sosial di masyarakat. Studi ini menunjukkan daerah konflik dengan umat Islam di Osogbo meskipun hubungan terbuka di antara orang-orang dari agama yang berbeda. Makalah ini, oleh karena itu, merekomendasikan agar hubungan yang baik dapat dipertahankan di Osogbo, ada kebutuhan bagi penganut ketiga agama untuk menghindari pendekatan konfrontatif dan merangkul dialog dan saling pengertian untuk mempromosikan koeksistensi damai dalam masyarakat.

**Kata kunci:** Perjumpaan Beragama; Islam; Osogbo; Muslim

## INTRODUCTION

As a pluralistic society, Osogbo just like any other town in Nigeria has been facing a problem arising from the failure to utilize the multidimensional benefits inherent in diverse faiths. The benefits were instead abused by faith's fanaticism and intolerance, faith's bigotry, discrimination, misunderstanding, and intolerance.<sup>1</sup> The abnormalities are apparent in Osogbo in the recent past.<sup>2</sup> The need to show respect and compassion towards people of other religions, strive for peace and love, and live and let others live in a peaceful atmosphere is good conduct expected in religious encounters of various faiths in Osogbo. However, there have been cases of violent encounters, though relatively minimal compared to other cities in the country. This, it may be said, is due to the culture and receptive nature of the people. This study provides a Muslim perspective to the various account of religious encounters in Osogbo; the metropolis of Osun State, Nigeria; the background and aspects of these encounters vis-à-vis the Muslims, and the effects of the religious encounters on the well-being of the community in general.

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<sup>1</sup> Ekpenyong Nyong Akpanika, "Religious and Political Crises in Nigeria: A Historical Exploration," *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* 22, no. 9 (2017): 65–74, <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-2209026574>; Okechukwu Ajaegbu, "Religion and National Development in Nigeria," *American Academic & Scholarly Research Journal* 4, no. 4 (2012): 50–56, <http://www.aasrc.org/aasrj/index.php/aasrj/article/view/329>; Haldun Çancı and Opeyemi Adedoyin Odukoya, "Ethnic and Religious Crises in Nigeria," *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 16, no. 1 (2016): 87–110, <https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/ethnic-religious-crises-nigeria/>.

<sup>2</sup> D. Y. Akinyemi, "Islamic View of Religious Crisis in Nigeria: An Historical Perspective," *Religions' Educator* 8, no. 1 (2005): 92-103.

## Christianity, Islam, and Traditional Religion in Osogbo

Osogbo is the capital city of Osun State in Nigeria. It is located in the North-Eastern part of Oyo State, bounded in the North by Ifelodun Local Government Area, in the south by Ede Local Government Area, in the East by the Atakumosa Local Government Area, and in the West by Irepodun Local Government Area.<sup>3</sup> Historically, Osogbo, one of the ancient Yoruba cities with an affinity with Ile-Ife, was founded by Larooye (the son of Owa Ajibogun) from Ilesa and Oguntimehin (a prince and a hunter) from Oyo Alaafin in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Both strangers met each other at what is today known as Osogbo and agreed to coexist.<sup>4</sup> Oguntimehin was a renowned elephant hunter from “Ipole-Omu in Obokun Ijesa.” He discovered the grove while on a hunting expedition. He encouraged his King Laaroye to migrate to the grove as their original settlement was constantly facing the challenge of an adequate water supply, drought, and famine.<sup>5</sup>

From there, Larooye became the first Oba of the town, and the second person, Oguntimehin, wholeheartedly agreed to be in the position of guard for the security of the town. The Oba’s title was ‘Owa’ simply because the pioneer Oba hailed from Ijesaland and was the son of Ajibogun. The latter was the Owa of Ilesa at that period. The Larooye’s descendants are recognized as bonafide princes, and their families remain royal houses till today, while the descendants of Oguntimehin succeeded the title of “Oluode” (Chief Hunter) till

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Local Government and Information, *Oyo State Town Series* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Oyo State Ministry of Information, 1977); Tunde Agbola, “Osogbo,” *Cities* 9, no. 4 (1992): 249–60, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0264-2751\(92\)90024-Y](https://doi.org/10.1016/0264-2751(92)90024-Y).

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1966).

<sup>5</sup> W. O. Bello, *Advent of Islam in Osogbo and the Lists of Imams* (Osogbo, Nigeria: Peaceful Press, 2001); M. A. Ibitoye, *Osun: A Study in the Mysteries of an African Goddess* (Ado Ekiti, Nigeria: Ekiti State University, 2011).

today. The descendants keep and maintain the town's security and their family members.<sup>6</sup>

River Omu (Odo Awerele), located twenty miles west of Ilesa, offered some benefits and attractions, such as water supply for household use. The soil of the area is also fertile for agricultural purposes. This first settlement was named Ipole, but soon after its establishment, River Omu was found to have dried up for an extended period during the dry season. It must be said that water was scarce during the reign of Oba Larooye, the first Oba of Ipole, and as a result, there was a need for a better site.<sup>7</sup> Some hunters were sent out under the leadership of Oguntimehin to look for a better place of settlement further in the west of Ipole. The hunters detected a spring; the mainspring of River Omu, under a rock (Apata-Ere), and as a result of this, Oba Larooye and his people moved to the new site with a sure source of water supply, and he (Larooye), later named the new site Ohuntoto after his mother.<sup>8</sup>

Oba Larooye later sent out hunters for another time to search for another source of water supply, and their efforts became fruitful as the river Osun was found along the old Ife road. It was said that Oguntimehin, the Chief Hunter shot an elephant by the riverside, which he tied to a tree on the uppermost terrace of Osun at a point known as "Idi-Ogun" where six old roads from Ife, Ilesa, Ekiti, Ilorin, Oyo, and Ibadan converged.<sup>9</sup> From the gigantic and active performance, the descendants of Oguntimehin are today often

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<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Local Government and Information, *Oyo State Town Series*; S. Ade Falade, *The Comprehensive History of Osogbo: A Honest and Diligent Person Is the Enemy of the Townspeople* (Osogbo, Nigeria: S.A. Falade, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Osogbo Local Government, *365 Days of Adejare of Osogbo* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Dan Communications Co., 1989).

<sup>8</sup> Deji Olugunna, *Osogbo: The Origin, Growth & Problems* (Osogbo, Nigeria: Osogbo Fad's Press, 1959); Deji Olugunna, *History of Osogbo* (Osogbo, Nigeria: Osogbo Fad's Press, 1987).

<sup>9</sup> Falade, *The Comprehensive History of Osogbo*.

referred to as “Omo am’erin wo’lu Osogbo”, meaning ‘the descendants of the Chief Hunter who brought an elephant into Osogbo’. The dried site on the meandering loop of the river was selected by Oba Larooye and his people for settlement, which he named “Ita-Ohuntoto”.<sup>10</sup>

River Osun proved to be a stable and reliable source of water supply, but the terrible flooding of the lower terraces during the rainy season was to become a menace. In the rainy season, the river overflowed its banks and destroyed the inhabitants' buildings and properties.<sup>11</sup> Oracles were consulted for a clue to the problem. It was discovered that the inhabitants must vacate the place and move to the upper terrace of the river where an elephant was previously tied to a tree and at the same time make a sacrifice of a ram, “Yanrin” (a kind of spinach) and “Igbo” (cooked smashed corn) were to be offered to appease the gods. This sacrifice eventually developed into a yearly ceremony popularly known as the ‘Osun festival’ which has been observed by all Obas of Osogbo.<sup>12</sup>

Special activities like *Iwopopo* (rallying around the street) are performed whereby people of Osogbo, especially the wives of the ruling houses (royal families’ wives), appear in the same garments that distinguish them house-by-house on an annual basis. On occasion, people would be dancing, singing, and moving up and down the street known as *Popo*, the street which precedes and leads to

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<sup>10</sup> Olugunna, *History of Osogbo*; Akinwumi Ogundiran, “The Osun-Osogbo Grove as a Social Common and an Uncommon Ground: An Analysis of Patrimonial Patronage in Postcolonial Nigeria,” *International Journal of Cultural Property* 21, no. 2 (2014): 173–98, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0940739114000058>; Akinwumi Ogundiran, “The Making of an Internal Frontier Settlement: Archaeology and Historical Process in Osun Grove (Nigeria), Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries,” *African Archaeological Review* 31, no. 1 (2014): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10437-014-9152-9>.

<sup>11</sup> Kayode Afolabi, *Osun Osogbo: Sacred People and Sacred Spaces* (Charleston, United States: BookSurge Publishing, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Olugunna, *History of Osogbo*.

Oba's palace at *Oja-Oba*. This function is done throughout the whole day before the festival. Another activity is *Oloju-merindinlogun* whereby a sixteen-face lamp is kindled from the night and must be blazing till dawn.<sup>13</sup>

Being part of the tradition, it was superstitiously believed that immediately after the sacrifice, a god fish (*Iko*) became magnified from the river, an indication that the sacrifice has been accepted. The *Oba* then stepped forward to welcome the god fish by spreading his hands and from this practice, the *Oba* derived his traditional title of *Atewogbeja*, meaning One who welcomed the god fish with spread hands. This, therefore, explains why the *Oba* does not share with the Owa of Ilesa anymore the traditional title of Owa which is common to both of them from the beginning.<sup>14</sup>

Osogbo was derived from the word '*Oso-Igbo*' (Spirit of the Osun forest). According to history, the goddess of the Osun river was believed to have exclaimed "*Oso Igbo, gbogboIkkoko aroo mi ni e fo tan*" meaning 'You spirit of the forest; you have broken all my pots of dye'. This was as a result of a tree that fell on the river and broke her pots of dye. The tree fell as a fire made at its root by both Larooye and Oguntimehin, the two founders of Osogbo.<sup>15</sup> Osogbo is very rich in art and culture. It is known for traditional cloth weaving and dyeing and

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<sup>13</sup> Osogbo Cultural Group, *Osun Festival Osogbo* (Osogbo, Nigeria: Igbalaye Printing Press, 1985); A. B. Adejumo, "Osun Festival and Fertility: A Celebration in Yoruba Mythology," *Africana Marburgensia* 22, no. 2 (1989): 45–52, <https://www.africabib.org/rec.php?RID=066601746>; Joni L. Jones, "Performing Osun without Bodies: Documenting the Osun Festival in Print," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1997): 69–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10462939709366170>; Kyle M. Woosnam, Kayode D. Aleshinloye, and Naho Maruyama, "Solidarity at the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove—a UNESCO World Heritage Site," *Tourism Planning & Development* 13, no. 3 (2016): 274–91, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2015.1104380>.

<sup>14</sup> Olugunna, *Osogbo*; Olugunna, *History of Osogbo*.

<sup>15</sup> Olugunna, *History of Osogbo*.

this accorded the town the appellation of “Osogbo Ilu Aro” meaning: Osogbo the town of dye.<sup>16</sup>

It is clear that the advent of Islam in Osogbo came through the successful emergence of Islam in Yoruba land. It will be therefore pertinent and salient, before assessment of the advent of Islam in Osogbo, to concisely examine the advent of Islam in Osun State vis-à-vis Yoruba land at large. The late Nigerian great Islamic and Arabic scholar, Shaykh Adam Abdullahi al-Ilori (d. 1992) and other contemporary scholars like T.G.O. Gbadamosi, I.A.B. Balogun, and A.B. Fafunwa, have expressed divergent opinions on the exact date the Yoruba came into contact with Islam.<sup>17</sup> Other scholars have also contributed to the discourse.<sup>18</sup>

To start with, there is no gainsaying the fact that on the 27<sup>th</sup> of August 1991, Osun State was carved out of the former Oyo State to accord the former its autonomy. As a result of this, it became one of the component units of Nigeria and one of the Yoruba-speaking states.<sup>19</sup> Apart from Osogbo which is the state capital, there are some

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<sup>16</sup> Bode Omojola, “Ọ̀ṣun Ọ̀ṣogbo: Power, Song and Performance in a Yoruba Festival,” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 20, no. 1 (2011): 79–106, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41303565>.

<sup>17</sup> Tajudeen Gbadebo Olusanya Gbadamosi, *The Growth of Islam Among the Yoruba, 1841-1908* (London, United Kingdom: Longman, 1979).

<sup>18</sup> J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, African Systems of Thought (Bloomington, United States: Indiana University Press, 2003); Peter Probst, *Osogbo and the Art of Heritage: Monuments, Deities, and Money* (Bloomington, United States: Indiana University Press, 2011); Peter Probst, “Picturing the Past: Heritage, Photography, and the Politics of Appearance in a Yoruba City,” in *Reclaiming Heritage: Alternative Imaginaries of Memory in West Africa*, ed. Ferdinand De Jong and Michael Rowlands (London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2007); Insa Nolte, Nathaniel Danjibo, and Abubakar Oladeji, “Religion, Politics and Governance in Nigeria,” Monograph, vol. 39, Religions and Development Research Programme (Birmingham, United Kingdom: University of Birmingham, 2009), [http://www.religionsanddevelopment.org/files/resourcesmodule/@random454f80f60b3f4/1269512095\\_working\\_paper\\_39\\_for\\_the\\_web\\_2\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.religionsanddevelopment.org/files/resourcesmodule/@random454f80f60b3f4/1269512095_working_paper_39_for_the_web_2_2_.pdf); Insa Nolte, Olukoya Ogen, and Rebecca Jones, eds., *Beyond Religious Tolerance: Muslim, Christian and Traditionalist Encounters in an African Town*, Religion in Transforming Africa 2 (Rochester, United States: James Currey Ltd, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Nolte, Danjibo, and Oladeji, “Religion, Politics and Governance in Nigeria”; Nolte, Ogen, and Jones, *Beyond Religious Tolerance*.

other big towns such as Iwo, Ikirun, Ife, Ilesa, Ikire, Ejigbo, Okuku, Inisa, Ila, Gbongan, Ede, etc. An attempt to discuss Islam in Osun State is only to give insight into Islam in the state. The introduction of Islam began a long time before the creation of the State and so, our focus, therefore, should be when Islam was introduced in the area now called Osun State.<sup>20</sup>

Gbadamosi maintained that by the 17th century, mention was made of Muslims in Yorubaland. Before this period, Yorubaland seemed to have had contact with the already Islamized areas (Songhai, Mali), especially those to the North-West of Yorubaland, through the activities of traders, settlers, preachers, and mendicants. Thus by the 18th Century, Islam had spread to places like Osogbo, Ede, Ikirun, Iwo, Ikire, Ejigbo, Ila, Inisa, Orile-Owu, and many other places in the area now called Osun State.<sup>21</sup> Historically, records have it that Islam has been in existence in the town before the Fulani attack that halted at Osogbo in the year 1840. It is also suggested that Islam was introduced to Osogbo in the 1820s by Oyo Muslim traders.<sup>22</sup>

There is however oral information that states that Islam was introduced to Osogbo during the reign of Ataoja Matanmi I (1854 – 1864) when some scholars from Bornu migrated to the town. The King's title is "Ataoja" from "Atewogbeja".<sup>23</sup> The report had it that Ifa Oracle predicted the coming of those people to the Oba who received

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<sup>20</sup> Gbadamosi, *The Growth of Islam Among the Yoruba, 1841-1908*.

<sup>21</sup> A.S. Seriki, *Islamic Organisation in Osogbo* (Ilorin, Nigeria: University of Ilorin, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> Abdul Fattah 'Kola Makinde, "The Institution of Shari'ah in Oyo and Osun States, Nigeria, 1890–2005" (Ph.D. Thesis, Ibadan, Nigeria, University of Ibadan, 2007), <http://catalog.ihsn.org/citations/60292>.

<sup>23</sup> Seriki, *Islamic Organisation in Osogbo*; Abdul Fattah 'Kola Makinde, *A Study of the Life and Arabic Works of Alhaji Ashiru Uthman of Osogbo* (Ibadan, Nigeria: University of Ibadan, 1990); Abdul Fattah 'Kola Makinde, "The Emergence Growth of Islam in Osogbo: Islam and Society in Osun State," in *Eminent Muslims in Osun State : Essays in Honour of HRM Oba Raufu Olayiwola Olawale Adedeji II, Akinrun of Ikirun*, ed. Siyan Oyeweso (Abuja, Nigeria: Megapress Limited, 2012).

and accommodated them. They were requested to pray for the barren wife of the Oba who later bore a child. The coming of the scholars seemed to be a boost to Islam in the town particularly when the visitors were received at the palace by the Ataoja himself. Some other records reveal how Islam became more prominent in Osogbo as a result of the influx of Oyo immigrants to the town in 1835. When Old Oyo was sacked by the Fulani in that year, the Oyos migrated to the towns they frequented for trade during the peace period and Osogbo was one of these towns frequented by them. Among the Muslim immigrants from Old Oyo who came to Osogbo and settled there after the sack of Oyo in 1835 were people like Muhammad Idris and Salih Abu Abd-ar-Rahman.<sup>24</sup> From there, many people embraced Islam, and Muslim communities were formed. On the contrary, Nasiru and Folorunso have argued that Osogbo was Islamized by the northerners whose language of conversation was neither Yoruba nor Hausa but pure Arabic, probably, the Shuwa Arabs of Bornu State in Nigeria.<sup>25</sup>

### **Religious Relations in Osogbo**

People with diverse religions in the town lived peacefully together in the same compound under the family tie.<sup>26</sup> From the foregoing nature of the people of Osogbo, Osun State has an influence on the interaction of Muslims with Christians. Except for the aspect of the religious practices and doctrines where Allah Has cautioned the Muslims in the Glorious Qur'an that: "to you is your religion and to me, mine", Muslims in Osogbo land relate in a respectable, peaceful, and humble manner with Christians.

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<sup>24</sup> Makinde, "The Institution of Shari'ah in Oyo and Osun States, Nigeria, 1890–2005."

<sup>25</sup> Makinde.

<sup>26</sup> Alhaji (Chief) AbdulJeleel Yusuf, Personal Communication, December 23, 2016.

Although, there are some slights of misunderstanding and argument arising from the Muslims' feeling of being marginalized by Christians in the public sector coupled with the Christians' confrontational approaches towards Muslims on some issues, especially religious ones. Muslims and Christians in Osogbo, Osun State, are not free from engaging in open debates, controversies, and theological argumentations on some of the theological issues mentioned above in the open air, in towns and villages, in front of churches and mosques, and perhaps in private homes though, at very minimum level due to receptive nature of people in the Southwest.<sup>27</sup>

Traditional Religion in Africa is perceived to be naturally passive in terms of Evangelization.<sup>28</sup> In Osogboland, Osun State, for instance, the religion's adherents could never be heard or seen anywhere preaching to or inviting people of other faiths into the religion of forefathers of the former and so, they need not be invited into the doctrine. The Traditional Religion in the state of Osun could only be noticed or heard except during their annual festivals such as Osun Osogbo, Egungun, and hunting festivals. It may also be viewed that the instance is a result of an inferiority complex that set by way of thinking that both Islam and Christianity are superior, refined, and acceptable than Traditional religions. Therefore, the converts to Christianity or Islam cannot forgo their present religion for Traditional Religion.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Mallam Abdulfattahi Jagunmolu, Personal Communication, January 21, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Sibusiso Mazono, "Indigenous Conceptions of Conversion among African Christians in South Africa," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 28, no. 2 (2015): 87–112, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24805693>; Fidelis Nkomazana and Senzokuhle Doreen Setume, "Missionary Colonial Mentality and the Expansion of Christianity in Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1800 to 1900," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 29, no. 2 (2016): 29–55, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24902913>.

<sup>29</sup> Akinyemi, "Islamic View of Religious Crisis in Nigeria: An Historical Perspective"; Pew Research Center, "Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa," HTML, *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), April 15, 2010,

It must be acknowledged that people of the town were predominantly practicing African Traditional Religion before the advent of Islam and Christianity. That notwithstanding, the people of the old belief affirmed the existence of God; the Almighty whom they referred to as 'Eledumare' Majority of the compounds in Osogboland have a mixture of the three religions; that is, people are diverse in beliefs. However, people who are diverse in religion live peacefully in the same compound under the family tie. This family bond has positively influenced the interaction of Muslims with the adherents of African Traditional Religion as the mutual ground of interaction and discussion on issues relating to the progress of individuals, and the development of the land is opened. This is except religious practices and doctrines where and when Allah Has checked the Muslims to stick to their religion and steer clear of *shirk* (an act associating partners with Allah).<sup>30</sup>

### **The Establishment of Museums and Monuments Centre**

There existed an Arabic and Islamic Training Centre established in 1965 at Oke-Osun by Alhaji Ibrahim Yans to flourish the teaching and learning of Arabic and Islamic Studies in the township. The Federal Government of Nigeria later released the fund to Osun Cultural Heritage towards the establishment of museums and monuments around the Osun groove.<sup>31</sup> The National Museum, in its

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<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2010/04/15/executive-summary-islam-and-christianity-in-sub-saharan-africa/>; Jason Bruner and David Dmitri Hurlbut, "New Approaches to 'Converts' and 'Conversion' in Africa: An Introduction to the Special Issue," *Religions* 11, no. 8 (2020): 389, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11080389>.

<sup>30</sup> Y.O. Liasu, Personal Communication, May 28, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Yemi Adewoyin, Ekene Michael Mokwenye, and Ndidiamaka Vivian Ugwu, "Environmental Ethics, Religious Taboos and the Osun-Osogbo Grove, Nigeria," *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development* 11, no. 4 (2020): 516–27, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-01-2020-0019>.

movement towards the establishment of a branch through its officials, sought to demolish the Arabic and Islamic Training Centre with a seven-day quit notice as advertised by Daily Sketch on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> June 1989. The advertisement generated heat in the town and strong reactions from Muslims, Muslim scholars as well as fir-minded people who felt that the action was unjust.<sup>32</sup>

Thereupon, the National Council of Arabic Schools' Proprietors converged at Iwo town and at the end of their meeting, a letter indicating their firm stand was sent to the then Chief Imam of Osogbo making him realize the danger in the forced acquisition of the land which originally belongs to the Training Centre but not the National Museum as claimed in the paper advertisement. A copy of the letter was forwarded to the then Ataoja of Osogbo for necessary action.<sup>33</sup>

It is worthy to mention that the Osogbo Cultural Heritage under the leadership of Oba Iyiola Oyewale Matanmi fairly intervened in the issue as it issued two successive public notices to counter the advertisement of the national museum. The Osogbo Cultural Heritage posited that the advertisement was misleading coupled with the fact that the claim of the commission to have possessed a totality of 185.59 acres of land within the Osun groove area lacked merits and that the commission should have claimed 400 feet radius of the Osun shrine,<sup>34</sup> which excluded the area where the Arabic and Islamic Training Centre covers.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, upon this, the atmosphere was so tense to the extent that lives would have been lost except for the intervention of

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<sup>32</sup> Seriki, *Islamic Organisation in Osogbo*.

<sup>33</sup> Seriki.

<sup>34</sup> Emeka Okonkwo and Afamefuna Eyisi, "Pilgrimage Circuit of Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Shrine, Osun State, Nigeria," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* 8, no. 4 (2020): Article 9., <https://doi.org/10.21427/5h0v-g023>.

<sup>35</sup> Seriki, *Islamic Organisation in Osogbo*.

the Osogbo Cultural Heritage and mediation of the peace-loving people of Osogbo and its environs who rose to avert the tragedy.<sup>36</sup>

### **The Ibrazul-Haqq Da'wah Society Activities and Reactions of Other Faiths**

Ibrazul-Haqq Da'wah Society of Nigeria, a movement that adopted religious comparative and dialogue with people of other faiths style of preaching were formed by Ustadh Abdul-Fattahi Oladimeji Jagunmolu from the popular Izharul-Haqq founded by Ustadh Abdullateef Adebowale. Ustadh Abdul-Fattahi Jagunmolu, who hailed from Maryland Local Government, Lagos State is a major character in the formation of Ibrazul-Haqq Da'wah Society of Nigeria due to motivation and inspiration he had received from his mentor; Alhaji Abdullateef Adebowale whom he met in 1997 during public preaching that featured the latter. Ustadh Jagunmolu joined the Da'wah group when served as one of the Bible readers to the mentor at Lagos between 1997 and 1998. As a result of his commitment, deep knowledge, and retentive memory of verses of the Bible, he was later appointed the Coordinator of the Ebutemeta Branch of the group. The Movement was later bereaved in 1998 with the demise of the founder, Alhaji Abdullateef Adebowale.<sup>37</sup>

However, Ustadh AbdulFattahi Jagunmolu came to Osogbo in 1999 to establish and nourish a movement branch in Osogbo. The branch was successfully launched while Ustadh used to return to Lagos after each public lecture before he finally settled in Osogbo in the year 2006. The Movement has been able to take its public lecture to every nook and cranny of Osogboland and its environs. As a result,

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<sup>36</sup> Seriki.

<sup>37</sup> Jagunmolu, interview.

many people had been converted to Islam and many others had been reverted.<sup>38</sup>

The public comparative lecture which took place at Asipa junction in Osogbo prior November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2001 accompanied by sound success as several people of other faiths wholeheartedly embraced Islam as a result of the beautiful and convincing lecture delivered by the preacher; Ustadh AbdulFattahi Oladimeji Jagunmolu. In their reaction to the above success, some people of other faiths adopted a confrontational approach as they started stoning the preacher and his followers. It must be mentioned that three members of the Da'wah Movement sustained serious injuries as they were hit at the heads. One of the hooligans popularly called "Afin" was apprehended and detained at Dugbe Police Station by the Nigerian Police, Osun State Command but he was later released.<sup>39</sup>

The public lecture also encountered a deeper crisis on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2001 specifically during the month of Ramadan at Egbatedo Area of Osogboland. The day must be said to have coincided with the arrival of the German Christian Evangelist; Reinhard Bonnke into the town. The public lecture was in progress when a foam with petrol wrapped in a tin and lighted; suspected to have emanated from the crowd of people of other faiths was thrown at the midst of people, leading to disruption, dismantle and many people sustained injuries. The suspects were chased by the audience and one of them was caught while he was trying to escape. The audience pounced on him after he had confessed to the act and he was as a result wounded. The preacher appealed to the audience to release him so that he could be taken to the nearest Police Station. The Police after critical examination

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<sup>38</sup> Jagunmolu.

<sup>39</sup> Jagunmolu.

received him in their custody and directed the audience with the preacher to leave after thorough interrogation.<sup>40</sup>

It was so sad the following day when the town became engulfed with news that the boy had died at the Police Station and that some of the nearby churches including the All Saint Church, Balogun Agoro have been spoilt. Christians and the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Osun State Chapter strongly reacted to this scenario and made case for it while the Muslim leaders in the town remained reticent with some of them speaking against the preacher. Muslim youths reacted against the uncared attitude of the League of Imams and Alfas, in fact, they nearly disallowed the then Chief Imam of Osogboland; Sheikh Mustapha Ajisafe from observing I'dil-Fitr Prayer. Consequently, Ustadh Jagunmolu was remanded at Ilesa Prison for 64 days before he was granted bail by late Justice Rabi'u Yusuf.<sup>41</sup>

### **Qomarud-Deen Islamic Society of Nigeria and Reactions of African Traditionalists**

The Society was formed as a result of divine inspiration received by Alhaji AbdulWahab Alarape Yahya who hailed from Ibadan. He was a bricklayer but claimed to have got inspiration in 1966 that he should sacrifice the profession and his life for the propagation of Islam through preaching against anomalies cum associating partnership with Allah in all ramifications; otherwise, he will perish. He delivered a public lecture in 1967 at Oloolu compound where he could conquer and completely silence Oguntade Oloolu; a very powerful and harsh herbalist in Ibadan. Alhaji AbdulWahab Oyo took his public lecture to Oyo in 1976 and Iwo in 1979 where he had contact with Kelebe's

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<sup>40</sup> Jagunmolu.

<sup>41</sup> Jagunmolu.

masquerade. He successfully unmasked Kelebe masquerade at Iwo and incinerated its garment.<sup>42</sup>

He later moved to Osogbo where he met Sheikh Sherifdeen. Both of them worked together under the platform of Sherifdeen till 1974 when they separated. As a result, the group took another nomenclature as Qomarud-Deen Islamic Society of Nigeria (*Kosebo-Kosoogun*) at Lagos in 1984. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1990, the society was launched in Osogbo with Alhaji Mahmud Adekunle as the leader. The seat of leadership however shifted to Alhaji Muhammadu-Qosim Yunus who hailed from Edo State but with a matriarchal lineage from Osogbo.<sup>43</sup> By 1991, the society has recorded a series of achievements including increased propagation of Islam but at the same time encountered some attacks from people of other faiths through the confrontational approaches of the latter.<sup>44</sup>

Qomarud-Deen Islamic Society of Nigeria was attacked in 1991 and some members sustained injuries from stoning by adherents of traditional religion who felt hurt by the public lecture delivered by the society. In 1993, the society was attacked at Owode-Oluode area by the Fayemi Elebubon's family on the ground that the society preached against idol-worshipping (Ogun: god of iron) and masquerade festivals. A member of the society was mal-handled and was taken to the Ogun shrine where he was tortured. Following the Osun festival, the society was attacked by Traditionalists at its public preaching in front of the Matanmi compound, Oke-Baale area where its instruments were destroyed.<sup>45</sup>

On the 11<sup>th</sup> July 2004, the society had a bitter experience in front of *Oluode Aran-in* mosque (built by Qomarud-Deen Islamic Society of

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<sup>42</sup> Alhaji Muhammadu-Qosim Yunus, Personal Communication, June 7, 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Yunus.

<sup>44</sup> Yunus.

<sup>45</sup> Yunus.

Nigeria- *kosebo-kosoogun*) as a man known as Ogunleke entered the mosque with his masquerade garment to foment trouble. The leader of the society, Alhaji Muhammadu-Qosim Yunus quickly reported to the Police. The lecture continued after a while and the masquerade resurfaced amidst the Muslim group. The group successfully removed the uncovered masquerade, gave him a strict punishment, and incinerated the garment. Following this, a traditionalist called Dauda Aworo Osun rushed down to the place with a sword to retaliate. He attempted killing but not succeeded, but created an indelible mark on one of the Muslims as he cut three veins on his hand. The sword was forcefully retrieved from Daud Aworo Osun after which he was mercilessly dealt with.<sup>46</sup>

In August 2008, adherents of the *Gogoru* masquerade defaced the *Oluode Aran-in* mosque as part of the mosque was raised with fire. Some of them were arrested and they were made to appear before the then Ataoja of Osogboland; Oba Arazim Oyewale Matanmi. The then Chief Imam of Osogboland; Sheikh Mustapha Olayiwola was also embittered by the repugnant trend and emphasized that the vandals must be punished, an opinion that was strongly supported by the Ataoja. The damage was estimated to be the sum of N280,000 and it was paid for the renovation of the mosque.<sup>47</sup>

In the year 2014, Sango (god of thunder)'s adherents also attacked Qomarud-Deen society at its public lecture at *Oluode Aran-in* mosque. The nearest Police Station was instantly notified. The Police arrived with its Commissioner to ensure the safety of lives and properties. It must be said that the wristwatch used by the

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<sup>46</sup> Yunus.

<sup>47</sup> Yunus.

Commissioner of Police was smashed by a stone thrown by the traditionalists.<sup>48</sup>

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of June, 2021, some Muslims and Traditionalists traded blame over who provoked the first attack in an alleged religious crisis in Osogbo, Osun State capital leading to the death of an elderly Muslim worshipper; Alhaji Moshood Salawudeen, an Iwo resident, who was at the mosque for the service in the mosque with 14 other persons sustained various degrees of injuries including gunshot and cutlass wounds. The Missioner, Kamorudeen Society, Ustaz Qosim Yunus, said that almost three hours into the prayer, commotion exchanged place within the hitherto peaceful environment of the mosque. Alas, the society praying for peace ended up being casualties as the Masquerade and its supporters, led by an Ifa worshipper, who is also an APC stalwart in Osun state, Chief Kayode Idowu stormed the mosque and unleashed mayhem on the Islamic Faithful at the society's central Mosque at Oluode Aranyin. However, Ifashola Esuleke, who escorted the masquerade, said the Muslim worshippers, who attempted to unveil the masquerade, but the latter was protected by its followers. He added that about five supporters of the masquerade were also injured during the crisis, including a young boy stabbed in the stomach.<sup>49</sup>

### ***Hijab Issue in Osogbo***

It was not a rumor in Osun State on Monday, June 6, 2016, that some public secondary schools were attended by students in church apparel, with some donning white garments and others wearing *Hijabs* as well cassocks. One of the notable among the schools is Baptist

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<sup>48</sup> Yunus.

<sup>49</sup> Shina Abubakar, "One Dead, 14 Injured During Religious Crisis in Osogbo," Vanguard News, June 28, 2021, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/06/one-dead-14-injured-during-religious-crisis-in-osogbo/>.

High School, Iwo. Things fell apart, and activities were destabilized as the center appeared not holding. The scenario was such that Christians and Muslims stood against one another in a country perceived as secular.<sup>50</sup>

The bone of contention here is the hatred and confrontational approach of the Christian community against female Muslims using *hijab* most especially in schools (public and the private that are owned and being run by Christians) in the state. Before the wide and popular crisis, a Christian teacher at Adenle Government Middle School, Ayetoro Junction, Osogbo, forcefully untied the *hijab* from the head of a female student, and instead of returning it to the girl; she brought out scissors and tore it into pieces. The scenario could have led to chaos if not for the school principal who pleaded to parents and Muslim teachers who came to register their dissatisfaction.<sup>51</sup>

It must be said that female Muslim students in public schools were being insulted, harassed, and maltreated by Christian teachers owing to the application of *hijab* on their uniform. Efforts of the Muslim community to dialogue with Christian religious leaders to harvest a peaceful result from the issue proved abortive as the latter refused. The Muslim community therefore resorted to seeking a legal injunction by suing the government.<sup>52</sup>

In a case filed against the Osun State Government, the Muslim community in Osun State demanded that Muslim female students be allowed to use *hijab* in public schools. The suit instituted against the

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<sup>50</sup> Josiah Oluwole, "Osun Hijab Crisis: Students Attend Schools in Church Garments," HTML, Premium Times Nigeria, June 14, 2016, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/205276-osun-hijab-crisis-students-attend-school-church-garments.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Alhaja Lateefat Kolawole, Personal Communication, July 23, 2017.

<sup>52</sup> Ameh Comrade Godwin, "Osun Hijab Drama: Christian, Muslims Unions in War of Words," *Daily Post Nigeria* (blog), June 28, 2016, <https://dailypost.ng/2016/06/28/osun-hijab-drama-christian-muslims-unions-in-war-of-words/>.

state government, also had the state Commissioner for Education, Attorney General, and Commissioner for Justice as defendants. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), its Chairman, and others had joined the case as respondents. The proclamation that female Muslim students be allowed to use *hijab* was made in February 2016 by Justice Jide Falola and that any act of harassment, molestation, humiliation, and torture against female Muslim students using *hijab* constitutes an apparent infringement on their fundamental rights.

In substantiating her proclamation, the Judge cited the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended) as the basis of the judgment that “Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including the freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance” Section 38 (1). The Judge cited further:

No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own, or a religion not approved by his parents or guardian. Section 38 (2)

Using a confrontational approach, the Christians reacted to the judgment by instigating their female children to wear church garments to public schools. This rudeness was also suppressed by the communiqué issued by the State Government that every student should comply with the ruling of the court and that any student who wears church garments or that of masquerade to the schools shall face the wrath of the law.

The Muslim Ummah of South-West, Nigeria (MUSWEN) could not resist their mixed feelings on the *hijab* crisis that raised dust in Osun State and organized a Press Conference. The general public was

made to understand that it is part of the *Ummah*'s primary obligations not only to propagate Islam and defend the interests of Muslims but also to promote the cause of peace and peaceful co-existence among the people, irrespective of their faith and ethnicity in the region.<sup>53</sup>

The Muslim *Ummah* emphasized that it is well known that the Nigerian Constitution prevails where any law or administrative directive conflicts with it. To this end, no previous or current school proprietor or administrator can deny a female Muslim pupil/student the right to wear *hijab*, not even in a private school, let alone a public one. Concerning some Muslim parents and clerics who made attempts to enforce the court order on *hijab* at St. Charles High School and Ife-Oluwa Middle School, both in Osogbo, Osun State, such actions had been disregarded by the leadership of MUSWEN as no citizen has the right to take the law into his hands.<sup>54</sup>

### **Effects of the Religious Encounters between the Faiths**

Scholars, religious people, politicians, clergymen, and pressmen had used many adjectives to qualify some of the unhealthy rivalries that existed among adherents of diverse faiths in the country. The summary of the genesis of one crisis or the other is religious whereas some are political; some are tribal, while some are truly religious.<sup>55</sup> Generally, the resultant effects of unhealthy religious encounters are enormous as they pervade all sectors of the economy of a nation. It should be noted that to a large extent, the scenarios of religious encounters in Osogbo generated heated debate and high tension as every individual began to conceive fear and panic arising from the

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<sup>53</sup> Dawud O. S. Noibi, "The Crisis Over Hijab in Osun State: Our Response - Muswen," HTML, The Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), June 28, 2016, <https://www.nscia.com.ng/news/the-crisis-over-hijab-in-osun-state-our-response-muswen>.

<sup>54</sup> Noibi.

<sup>55</sup> Akinyemi, "Islamic View of Religious Crisis in Nigeria: An Historical Perspective."

occasions mentioned above. People were even warned to avoid traversing some parts of the town late.

The record has also shown that at least a life was lost particularly in the 2021 religious crisis in Osogbo. Some churches and mosques were vandalized with properties destroyed by those who could not resist their feelings and as a result, resorted to a confrontational approach. The destruction was also extended to some mosques by men of other faiths who displayed their enmity against Islam and the action had put the community in chaos. Some people had sustained an injury as a result of a severe attack from people who felt uncomfortable with certain religious preaching.<sup>56</sup>

When people of different religions fail to understand and manage the diversity of their beliefs to the extent that one party sued the other in a law court, hatred and discrimination certainly become the order of the day. Different watersheds that emanated from religious differences in Osogbo land had resulted in hatred, as adherents of particular religion perceived nothing as good in the religious tenets of others and felt comfortable to sue adherents of another religion to court. This indeed has led to suspicion, feelings of being cheated, short-changed, and marginalized among people of various faiths in the city. The mutual trust had been lost to the unhealthy interactions that existed among them.

## CONCLUSION

Efforts have been made to shed light on the introduction of Islam to Osogbo in the 18<sup>th</sup> century according to the majority of scholars and archives. The study assessed the kind of religious encounters witnessed by the Muslims in their interactions with people of other faiths in Osogbo. It shed light on the *hijab* crisis, problems emanated

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<sup>56</sup> Abubakar, "One Dead, 14 Injured During Religious Crisis in Osogbo."

from the court's order on the demolition of an Arabic School for use of National Museum and Monument Centre, and those emanated from public lectures some of which have led to confrontations, the effects of these confrontations were identified. This research found that the *hijab* issue is one of the major reasons for confrontation between Christian and Muslim leaders in the city, however, there is hope that the interaction cum relationship between people of various faiths in the city can still be rebuilt by keeping off hate speeches, sentiment, fault-finding, extremism, and unnecessary confrontations and allowing mutual understanding.

Given the above findings, it is recommended that the Muslim community of Osogbo should be more proactive in sensitizing Muslims of their responsibilities on socio-economic, political, and religious fronts in the city. Muslims should sustain the quality of being peace-loving, adopt the principle of live and let us others live to promote the good image of Islam and its principles that call for peaceful co-existence regardless of the religious disparity. Osogbo is generally accepted as a peaceful town, so, government agents should steer clear of any act suggestive of giving priority, recognition, or support whatsoever to a particular religious community at the expense of the others. Therefore, there is the need to adopt the policy that no law should prohibit what religions prescribe or require the populace to do what religions prohibit.

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