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MAIS Degree

Disunity amongst Yoruba Muslims: Impacts and Suggested Solutions

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DECLARATION

I, Bello Ali Babatunde, hereby declare that this thesis titled “Disunity Among Yoruba Muslims: Impacts and Suggested Solutions in South-West Nigeria” has been carried out by me in the Department of Islamic Studies, International Open University.

This work is my original research conducted under the supervision of Dr. Warshu T. Rabi’u and has not been submitted to any other institution of learning for the award of any degree or for any other academic purpose.

All sources of information have been duly acknowledged in the references.

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CERTIFICATION

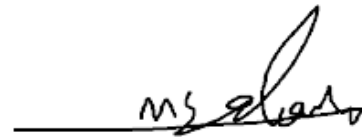
This is to certify that this research work titled “Disunity Among Yoruba Muslims: Impacts and Suggested Solutions in South-West Nigeria” was carried out by Bello Ali Babatunde (Student ID: 10092514) in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Master of Arts (M.A) Degree in Islamic Studies, Faculty of Arts, International Open University.

This work is original and has not been submitted, either in part or in full, for any other degree in this or any other institution of higher learning.

Dr. Warshu T. Rabi’u (Supervisor).



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Alhamdulillah—All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the worlds.

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to Almighty Allah (Subhanahu wa Ta 'ala), the Most Merciful and the ultimate source of knowledge and strength, whose infinite mercy and guidance made this work possible.

I also dedicate it to the noble Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), whom Allah has sent as a guide to mankind, and through whose teachings I have found illumination. May Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, his household, his companions, and the entire Muslim Ummah.

This work is further dedicated to the Muslim Ummah in general, and the Yoruba Muslim community in particular, with the hope that it will contribute to addressing the socio-cultural challenges and fostering unity within the community.

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ABSTRACT

While Islamic unity is a core principle among Muslims, the absence of such poses a myriad of challenges for many Muslim societies across the world. This research study examines the disunity in Yorubaland, taking the southwest of Nigeria as a case study, and applying the qualitative research method to elaborately dissect the historical, institutional, political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions of disunity in the southwest of Nigeria. The research study begins with the literal and practical explanation of unity within the Islamic context to lay the groundwork for the representation of the idea in the religious doctrine, and its realistic representation, which may entail areas of human imperfection in administration, worship, politics, youth, and women's representation. The study delves into the thematic analysis of disunity in Yorubaland, drawing from the interviews undertaken, plus the historical background of the establishment of Islam between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries, to further justify the degree of Islamic pervasiveness across Yorubaland from the old Oyo Empire, and West Africa, by extension. For comparative evaluation, the Senegalese Islamic community was drawn into the context of understanding how Islamic disunity reverberates across religious sects, tribes, economic classes, and generations. The extent of this research is determined by the available historical data and literature sources covering the prominent records of Islamic expansion, collision with the indigenous and colonial rule in Yorubaland, and the manner of co-existence with Christianity, from the colonial era till the present day in southwest Nigeria. The study identified areas of peaceful coexistence and collaboration between Islam and the Yoruba tradition, Islam and Civil Law, and Islam and Christianity, to justify the degree of accommodation and religious tolerance in the religion. On the other hand, the cultural adaptability of the Yoruba ethnicity predominated the elaborate case studies surrounding the relationship between Islam and the Yorubas.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

Unity, also known as “*waḥdah*” in Arabic, implies agreement or cooperation, as used in the Muslim *Ummah* (community), while expressing existential interconnectedness, encouraging solidarity in positive deeds, and avoiding disagreement, conflict, or enmity (Lateef, 2018). The idea and principle of unity in Islam is based on several other Islamic principles, such as *tawhid* (Oneness of Allah), *ummah* (Muslim community), *deen* (Brotherhood), mutual understanding and respect, collective responsibility on common goals, and conflict avoidance (Sulaiman, 2017; Adua & Hadi, 2020). All these principles, alongside unity, constitute the foundation for serving Allah, under the guidance of the Holy book (Quran) and the prophetic traditions (*Sunnah*), while preserving the principles that unify Muslims across economic, political, and intellectual frontiers. Unity is obligatory upon all Muslims, which the almighty Allah has ordered us to observe and fulfil, as described in the *Ummah* (Al-Imran: 103). Allah has repeatedly emphasized the importance of unity in the Muslim community, commanding them to remain steadfast in their adherence to Allah’s book and His noble Prophet’s *Sunnah* in all circumstances.

Therefore, the opposite of unity is disunity, which opposes Islamic messages, as the Quran references in An-Nisa (59): “O you who believe, obey Allah, and obey the Messenger [Muhammad S.A.W.], and those of you [Muslim] who are in authority. And if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allah and His last Messenger, if you should believe in Allah and the Last Day.” (An-Nisa: 59). According to the Quran, Allah commanded that, should there be dispute, confusion, or differences over a religious matter, they should settle them by Allah’s Book and authentic traditional *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad the messenger (PBUH) (Al-Hujurat: 9). This is regarded by Muslims as the best step to resolve issues and settle disputes in the Islamic community. Thus, the methodology of reconciliation is mentioned in the Qur’an and its application in the *Sunnah*: “...Ascertain the truth...” (Al-Hujurat: 6). This approach is believed to foster unity within the Muslim community on the standard level, spreading the messages of Islam across the World. For this reason, all Muslims are encouraged to stay away from what could lead to disunity, hatred, fight, and war in the Muslim community, to avoid damaging and regrettable consequences

“in this life and the hereafter”. The first step to achieving peace, tranquility, and resolving conflict is uncovering the foundation of the issues amongst Muslims (Al-Hujurat: 10).

However, the Muslims of Yorubaland, similar to other Muslim communities around the world, are not immune to the challenges of discord. The disagreement amongst Yoruba Muslims is a multiplex and complicated matter, which has been exacerbated by many historical, cultural, and socio-political conditions (Adeyemo, 2017). In addition, Yoruba Muslims are filled with a rich cultural heritage combined with powerful Islamic traditions, enabling rooted discord that affects integral parts of the Islamic religion in Yorubaland (Dairo, 2018). According to Busari (2024), the Islamic religion in Yorubaland has lost its glory and prestige with the arrival of Western colonization. Abdur-Rasaz (2024) claims that some Islamic scholars’ desires and whims, through their malicious teachings and political influences, are disrupting and destroying the natural light of Islam and its development. Also, Jabata Ali (2024) opines that the rigidity of Islamic societies on the old syllabus, which detests changes in important points, caused discord in the Yoruba Muslim communities.

The discord amongst Yoruba Muslims has become an unhealed wound with inherent problems, including internal differences, sectarianism, and feebleness in the community’s religious applications and social relations (Folorunso, 2018; Gbadamosi, 2019). The discord also undermines the Muslim community’s power of effective resolution of social, economic, and political challenges (Hassan, 2018; Ibrahim, 2019). Nevertheless, there are various reasons to be optimistic regarding the future of Islam in Yorubaland based on the ethnicity’s rich cultural heritage and firm Islamic customs, as the community has a firm, good foundation for unity, even in the Islamic context (Lawal, 2020; Lawal, 2018). Disputes and differences are believed to be parts of human nature, serving as a test for Muslims. These issues should be resolved according to Allah’s commandment as safeguarded by the Qur’an and Sunnah, protecting us from quarrels, disunity, and conflict. The *Sunnah* demonstrated this matter by the statements and actions of the Prophet (PBUH) (Islamic Unity, 1998).

With the effort of dedicated scholars and research institutes towards promoting the importance of unity in the lives of Muslims and their religion, this dissertation aims to examine the matter of

discord amongst Yoruba Muslims, its causes and impacts, and propose solutions. This dissertation will also explore the historical background, cultural, and socio-political conditions that have predated the disunity among Yoruba Muslims. Also, the level of discord among the religious practices of Yoruba Muslims, social connections, and power to conquer social problems, economic and political confrontation will be explained. Lastly, the dissertation will recommend practical approaches towards achieving an enduring unity, comprehension, and solidarity among Yoruba Muslims.

1.1 Study Background

The Yoruba tribe in the southwest region of Nigeria, West Africa, brims with education and civilization, which benefits the natives and inhabitants, including the Muslims. Islam reached Yorubaland around the 14th century through the Mali Empire with the help of minor scholars and businessmen who visited the old Oyo town for their trade purposes, but took advantage of their travel to practice *dawah*, i.e., inviting people to the worship of Allah through the beauty of Islam. According to the Yoruba folklore (*Ifa*), Islam reached Yorubaland before those visitors. Some researchers trust this source because many Arabic morphologies have been mixed with the Yoruba language. Thus, Islam has established and is famous for its practice in cities and villages where the Arabic language becomes part of their culture (Agai, 2021). The Islamic structure within the region includes the practice of *dawah*. The Yoruba cultural integration with Islamic practice by the custodians of the native culture was affecting the growth of pristine Islamic education and practices in Yorubaland (Jabata, 2024). The majority of Yoruba Muslims, out of ignorance, misunderstand the pristine study and practice of the religion, while most have conflated what is true and what is false, leading to plausible misappropriation, animosity, and setback for Muslims in the cause of Islam in society. This circumstance betrays the origin and mission of Islam in Yorubaland, as “leaderless and visionless”, due to the lack of actionable measures to consolidate its practice and growth (Mualaasan, 2024). Regardless, Islam is considered the “perfect and complete religion”, being the way of Allah and the Prophet (PBUH).

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the historical and contemporary factors causing disunity and discord amongst Yoruba Muslims?
2. What are the impacts of disunity in the Islamic Religion, culture, and practices, social cohesion, and political influence of Yoruba Muslims?
3. How do Yoruba Muslims feel and react regarding their experience of the disunity of Yoruba Muslims around them?
4. What do Allah and the Messenger (PBUH) say regarding disunity and its evil consequences, and the stances and statements of Islamic scholars on the issue of conflict amongst Muslims, the roles and responsibilities of Yoruba Muslim leaders, scholars, and all Muslims on this matter?
5. What solutions can be proposed to eliminate and extinguish disunity while promoting unity amongst Yoruba Muslims?

1.3 Statement of the Problem

As the cultural infusion of Yoruba custodians coincided with the practice and propagation of pristine Islamic beliefs and practices in Yorubaland, which laid the foundation of admonitions on “Taoweed-Rububiyah” on unification of Lordships, this progressive experience among Yoruba Muslims has been punctuated by some degree of disunity. Consequently, conflict and dispute have arisen among religious leaders (Imams), Muslim communities, Arabic learning institutes, and teachers, resulting in intolerance, violence, arson, killings, and other forms of inhumanity that have plagued many Islamic communities in Yorubaland (Jabata, 2024). While mosques were shut down, some people were jailed, and some were spiritually afflicted in the process, aggravating enmity. All these oppose what Allah prescribed for Muslims to be considered valuable society members, as they present the religion to Christians, Jews, and traditional Idol worshipers in Yorubaland as intolerant and violent (Agai, 2021). The problem of disunity amongst Yoruba Muslims is also attributed to ineffective leadership and the absence of a unified Islamic authority, leading to the proliferation of different Islamic groups and sects, each of which uniquely interprets the Islamic religion and enforces its leadership structure (Ibrahim, 2019). Poverty is another major and

tangible factor fueled by socio-economic factors, inequality, and political marginalization, which have created an environment of conflict amongst the different sects of Muslims because of limited resources and opportunities (Jimoh, 2020; Kolawole, 2019). The setbacks perpetuated by the imbalanced juxtaposition of the Yoruba culture and Islamic practices have reduced Islamic influences and development (Sarafudeen, 2022). The condemnation of the societal struggles and impacts of other people in Yorubaland contributes to disunity (Jabata, 2024).

Disunity among Yoruba Muslims has become a persistent challenge, leading to differences, division, and setbacks in their religious activities and social interactions (Adeyemo, 2017). The result of discord has appeared in the form of sectarian divisions, ideological differences, leadership crises, ethnocentric tendencies, interpersonal differences, enmity, and hatred (Dairo, 2018). This concerning issue needs immediate attention since the challenge has been confronting Yoruba Muslims with impacts on their community and religion, treating the sacred Islamic principles with profanity, discouraging Islamic practices, decreasing social cohesion, weakening political influence, enhancing the potency of inside and outside influences, and reducing economic empowerment (Egbewole, 2019). This regression has discarded the Muslim *ummah* in Yorubaland and has deformed the dignity of Islam. Therefore, the efforts of good scholars to meet the aims and objectives of Allah in the Yoruba Muslim communities regarding their society have been sabotaged (Jabata, 2024).

The identified sociological challenges of disunity among Yoruba Muslims in Yorubaland leave a wide gap for this research to investigate, necessitating the need for this dissertation to evaluate the historical and contemporary factors influencing the conflicts and disunity among Yoruba Muslims. Also, the consequences of this disunity will be studied to understand the causes and effects for contextual understanding of the trajectory of Islam in Yorubaland. This will also drive this dissertation in the direction of understanding the positions of knowledgeable figures through their scholarly contributions to this research, as will be outlined in the research methodology. Furthermore, the perspectives of the Holy Book (Qur'an) and the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) regarding the pattern of relationships among Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims will be partly referenced for theological intervention to discourage misinterpretation.

This will enable this dissertation to develop a dispassionate and objective critique of disunity among Yoruba Muslims and devise actionable solutions to the lingering problems.

1.4 Aim and Objectives

This research will explore the root and origin of disunity amongst Yoruba Muslims and its effects on the Islamic religion, Islamic culture, and practices. The need for social cohesion, political influence, and economic empowerment will also necessitate the suggestion of a practical solution to this deadly disease.

Thus, the paper will focus on the following objectives:

1. To examine the historical and contemporary factors causing disunity and discord amongst Yoruba Muslims.
2. To investigate the impacts of disunity among Yoruba Muslims on their religion, culture, practices, social cohesion, and political influences.
3. To understand the feelings, perceptions, and reactions of Yoruba Muslims concerning their experience of the disunity among them.
4. To identify the sayings of Allah and the Messenger (PBUH) regarding disunity, its evil consequences, and the roles and responsibilities of Islamic leaders, scholars, and all Muslim faithful.
5. To recommend feasible solutions towards eliminating disunity while promoting unity amongst Yoruba Muslims.

1.5 Literature Review

The habitual challenges of discord amongst Yoruba Muslims result from internal turmoil, divisions, and weaknesses in practices of religion and socialization (Adeyemo, 2017; Babalola, 2019). This literature review assesses the existing research papers on disunity amongst Yoruba Muslims, including its impacts, and suggests solutions. Historically, Islam's history in Yorubaland around the 14th century, and since then, has become a major aspect of the Yoruba culture and identity (Dairo, 2018). Despite the extensive experience of Islam in Yorubaland, discord amongst Yoruba Muslims has been a recurrent theme (Egbewole, 2019). Several factors causing discord

are considered to have contributed to the disunity amongst Yoruba Muslims, such as sectarian divisions, philosophical differences, authority crisis, ethnocentric tendencies, and personal disagreement (Folorunso, 2018; Gbadamosi, 2019). Other causes of this disunity include the deficient Islamic knowledge, doctrinal differences, ethnic and regional loyalties, leadership disputes, and the yearning for socio-economic recognition, and implications for the Muslim community and society at large. These circumstances have led to cracks in the Yoruba Muslim community, making it burdensome to achieve unity and solidarity (Hassan, 2018).

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) vividly warned and forbade all Muslims about disunity and discord; hence, Muslim communities around the world are to bring their people from darkness into the light and are encouraged to do good and forbid them all evils. Thus, disunity amongst Muslims is a deadly disease and destructive habit which has been the opposite and against the teachings and practices of the Islamic religion from the very start. The almighty Allah and His noble Prophet (PBUH) have revealed the dangerous consequences of discord amongst the Muslim community: “And grasp strongly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become separated” (Al-Imran, 103). The rope of Allah has been explained as the Qur’an and Sunnah (Tafsir ibn Kathir). The almighty Allah called Muslims.

The multifaceted impacts of discord amongst Yoruba Muslims include the thinned practices of religion, decreased social unity, reduced political power, increased susceptibility to external influences, and decreased economic empowerment (Ibrahim, 2019; Jimoh, 2020). Therefore, several suggested solutions have been addressed towards discord amongst Yoruba Muslims through discussions, education, and community commitments (Kolawole, 2019; Lawal, 2020). All the suggestions of the solutions are aimed at facilitating unity, understanding, and good cooperation amongst Yoruba Muslims, while edifying their practice better and strengthening social interconnection. The complex, multidimensional, and problematic trajectory of disunity among Yoruba Muslims is rooted in the study of historical, cultural, and socio-political factors (Mahmood, 2018). Addressing this matter requires a multiple and comprehensive approach, including culture, public consultation, and a conference (Ogunbado, 2020). By promoting and advertising unity with understanding and good cooperation amongst Yoruba Muslims, it is possible

to strengthen their relationships and understanding of religious practices, social cooperation, and betterment of well-being and prosperity (Olanipekun, 2019).

1.5.1 The ruling of Islam towards disunity amongst Muslims

The Overview of Disunity

Islamic teaching emphasizes the Importance of unity and cohesion amongst Muslims. The almighty Allah states in the Qur'an. The verse draws attention to the merit of unity and good cooperation amongst Muslims. For further illustration, the Messenger (PBUH) also emphasized the importance of solidarity, forgiveness, and pardon amongst Muslims. He said, *"Pardon each other, and reconcile with each other, because forgiveness, pardon, and reconciliation are the secret to unity (all Muslims) and it is strength."* (Trimidhi). The discord amongst Yoruba Muslims is a serious obstacle facing the community and fostering weakness, vulnerability, and a lack of success and growth (Adedokun, 2017). The Islamic religion has many pillars of unity and emphasizes the importance of avoiding division and promoting cooperation and forgiveness in all aspects of life (Kamali, 2015). Islam has been laying clear emphasis on unity and cohesion, which are essential for strength and progress, the master key to the success of the Muslim community. But to gain all these, forgiveness, reconciliation, and cooperation amongst Muslims are required.

1.6 Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the authentic Islamic rulings, also with the input of specialised Islamic figures such as religious leaders, Islamic legal (Shari'ah) practitioners, and scholars (teachers, philosophers, or researchers) through interviews. The research analyses will also incorporate secondary sources by carefully exploring the reviews of scholars, accompanied by Islamic literature texts, research journals, articles, essays, quotations, books, newspaper reports, videotapes, audio recordings from interviews, and, of course, the Qur'an and the Hadith. These inputs will help shed more light on the causes and impacts of disunity while suggesting lasting solutions. This dissertation will investigate and evaluate the common causes of disagreement amongst Yoruba Muslims and the significant level of negative impact on their socio-

economic development, political influence, and religious practices, employing the in-depth approach of qualitative analysis.

Using the instrument of secondary data, the study will apply knowledge and evidence from secondary sources on the nature of disunity among Yoruba Muslims in the Yoruba community in Southwestern Nigeria. In addition, conference papers, online materials from the electronic and print media outlets covering pertinent issues, and interviews of reputable Islamic scholars and leaders with grounded perspectives will add more value and depth to this research exercise. Also, the judgments of the adherents of the Islamic judicial system (Shari'ah), including judges and lawyers, will be factored into the contextual discussion, alongside the inputs of Western and oriental scholars and legal practitioners, to help juxtapose the stances of both Islamic and Civil laws in the Yoruba community concerning disunity. All these research processes will be aided by historical, thematic, case study, and conceptual analyses of the relevant aspects of community and religious development, Islamic education, unity, and disunity in the Yoruba Muslim community.

However, given the importance of the Qur'an, the Prophetic tradition (Sunnah), and how the Prophet's companions maintained their differences, with scholars' commentaries, the suggested solutions may be Islamic in perspective, to justify the education and awareness of Muslims and Non-Muslims; institutional cum policy recommendations in the concerned region, and community engagements to significantly decrease the impacts and evil consequences of disunity amongst Yoruba Muslims.

1.6.1 Data Collection Method

Reviewed Literature

- Evidence sourced from the Glorious Qur'an and the Sunnah; the classical commentary of the Qur'an, Hadith, and history.
- The Islamic history of West Africa, Nigeria, and particularly Southwest Nigeria.
- Media reports, online academic papers from Research Gate, JSTOR, etc.
- The advice and admonition of scholars.

Interviews

A series of semi-structured interviews will be conducted with:

- **Prominent Scholars:** To know the methods Islam has been presented to the Yoruba people and the reasons behind their acceptance of the Islamic religion, and the lack of a religious leader.
- **Grand Chief Imam:** To fully know the roots of disunity in Yorubaland, and its emergence and impacts on the mosque, and in the practices of Muslims.
- **Grand Mufti:** To know how disunity affects the development, growth, and strength of Islam in Yoruba land.
- **Muslim Community Leaders:** To ask about the impact and effects of discord among Muslims in the community.
- **Elder Muslims:** To ask about their experiences and views on disunity in Yorubaland.

1.6.2 Data Interpretation Method

The collected information will be examined by utilizing the following methods:

- **Historical Analysis:** Using timelines to trace the chronological source of the inherent conflict among Yoruba Muslims in Southwestern Nigeria for proper comprehension of the foundation of disunity.
- **Case Study Analysis:** To single out case studies of disunity in Islamic communities in Southwest Nigeria, with the findings of scholars and their suggested solutions. Findings will be evaluated to highlight variations in scholarly perspectives and their contextual relevance to the discourse disunity amongst Yoruba Muslims.
- **Thematic & Content Analysis:** To facilitate the identification of recurring themes, contexts, and patterns in the utilized literature and collected data from interviews and other verified sources. Analysis of Islamic texts, journals, articles, and opinions to identify the key factors towards disunity and its impacts.

- **Conceptual Analysis:** To juxtapose oriental philosophical theories with the issue of Islamic disunity in Yorubaland, and find a common Western interpretation of indigenous and religious issues in the selected case study.
- **Comparative Analysis:** A comparison of existing research documents on the disunity amongst Yoruba Muslims for contextual evaluation of different angles to the discourse of disunity. Classical Islamic books and modern scholarly perspectives will be juxtaposed to identify the patterns of evolutionary trends, adaptations, and resistances in cultures or communities with a similar history. Also, the issue of disunity in other climes will be compared to what obtains in Yorubaland.

1.7. Ethical Considerations

This has to do with the degree of permissibility of the research in the Islamic scholarly and cultural environment, with the possible societal implications of involving interview participants to help achieve the aim of this study:

- Before conducting interviews, informed consent will be secured from all participants, guaranteeing confidentiality and voluntary involvement.
- This study will be conducted under Islamic research ethics, ensuring respect for sensitive religious and cultural attributes.

1.8 Significance of the study

The Yoruba people, primarily occupying the Southwestern region of Nigeria, are famous for their combination of an enduring cultural tradition and Islamic practices, even though the Yoruba Muslim community faces the challenge of discord, like many other Muslim communities around the world. This challenge limits their chances of progress and development in various life dimensions. Researching the discord among the Yoruba Muslims is essential for grasping the depth and complexity of this issue, with various development strategies focused on building social bonds and promoting mutual understanding. The contribution of this research study on the disunity among Yoruba Muslims is germane to the field of Islamic studies and Social Science by exploring the complex and multifaceted phenomenon of disunity. Furthermore, this research is instrumental

in shedding more light on the complex factors causing discord among Yoruba Muslims, bringing new insight and perspectives on the theme. The practical implications of this paper can be assessed by Islamic leaders, policymakers, and community members to provide suggestions to address the discord and foster cooperation within the Yoruba Islamic community. In addition, the research will help promote interfaith and intercultural cohesion, borrowing from the positive experiences and perspectives of Yoruba Muslim leaders to highlight the importance of tolerance, respect, and support among Muslim faithful, and extend such to different religious and cultural groups.

1.8.1 Study Scope and Limitations

Due to the research focus on the Yoruba Muslim communities and subgroups in southwest Nigeria, the study will gather secondary data for thorough analysis and draw substantial insight from Islamic Studies, Sociology, Politics, and History, to gain an accurate and detailed assessment of the case study. This research exercise will rely more on existing literature from published materials, with scholarly inputs through interviews, to provide a nuanced comprehension of disunity among Yoruba Muslims. This study foresees the benefit of accuracy and authenticity from the gathered information, history, and data through reliable sources.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Definition and Importance of Literature Review

A literature review involves a thorough examination and integration of existing studies on a particular subject or research inquiry, offering insights into the current knowledge landscape (Hart, 1998; Cooper, 2010). By providing a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge, a literature review sets the stage for new research, highlighting areas of consensus, debate, and future inquiry (Webster & Watson, 2002). A literature review plays a vital role in academic research, providing a comprehensive overview of existing knowledge on a specific topic. According to Hart (1988), a literature review is essential for identifying gaps in current research, informing research design, and contextualizing findings (Patton, 2002).

2.1 Disunity in Islam

Disunity implies a situation in which Muslims individually and in groups turn against each other for social, economic, political, or historical reasons (Adeleke, 2017). In other words, this is the state of profound discord, division, fragmentation, and diminished cohesion within the Muslim community, thereby undermining the importance of unity and solidarity that are fundamental to the Islamic faith (Khan, 2013). As disputes and differences are parts of human nature, Muslims also believe that they serve as “a test” for them to ascertain their determination to surmount social challenges according to Allah’s commandment. As the unity of Muslims is safeguarded by the Shari’ah, Allah says in the Quran: “...and fell into no dispute (dividing, and separating with one another), lest you lose bravery and strength, and be patient.” (Al-Anfaal: 46).

2.2 Islam's Arrival and Expansion in Yorubaland

According to Sheikh Adam Al-Ilory (1950), Islam was introduced to the ancient Yoruba Kingdom of Oyo by the 14th century through trans-Saharan trade interactions with the Wangara people of Mali. This view is supported by the Orisa Blog, which states that Islam had come to the Oyo empire in the 1300s during the reign of Mansa Kankan Musa in Mali (c. 1312-1337). The Wangara traders

from Mali played a significant role in spreading Islam in Yorubaland, and their influence can be seen in the establishment of mosques and Islamic practices in the region¹.

As Islam expanded across sub-Saharan West Africa through various factors, including trade, cultural exchange, and the activities of Muslim scholars and clerics, such as the *Jihad*, the introduction of Islam to Yorubaland, a region in southwestern Nigeria, is a topic of significant historical interest. While the Abbasid Dynasty (750 CE – 1258 CE) played a crucial role in the global spread of Islam, the specific trajectory of Islam's introduction to Yorubaland during this period is relatively less documented. According to historical accounts, Islam might have reached Yorubaland through inter-relations with the old Mali Empire, rather than directly from the Abbasid Dynasty. Professor Wande Abimbola's research suggests that Islam was introduced to Yorubaland via trade and cultural exchanges with the Mali Empire, which is why the religion was initially referred to as "*Esin Mali*" ("The religion of Mali" in Yoruba dialect).

Key Dates and Events include:

- i. **11th Century:** Islam is believed to have arrived in Nigeria hundreds of years before Uthman Dan Fodio's contact with Nigeria.
- ii. **1440 AD:** Islam is thought to have gained significant traction in Yorubaland.
- iii. **1550 AD:** The first mosque was built in Oyo-Ile, initially serving the spiritual needs of foreign Muslims living in the area.
- iv. **18th Century:** Islam spread to various towns in Yorubaland, including Iwo, Iseyin, Lagos, Saki, Osogbo, Ibadan, Abeokuta, Ijebu-Ode, Ikirun, and Ede (Al-ilory, 1950).

2.2.1 Introduction Pathways: Early Contacts, Conversions, and Diverse Perspectives

When Did Islam Enter Yorubaland?

Islam is believed to have entered Yorubaland from a north-westerly direction through the lands of the Bariba/Borgu, situated halfway between the Yoruba and the Mande tribes. The Wangara traders from Mali introduced Islam to the Oyo Empire, which was a major hub for trade and commerce in the region. Other Yoruba towns, such as Igboho, Ogbomosho, Ibadan, and Lagos,

also had significant Muslim populations before the 19th century. Scholarly consensus largely attributes the initial introduction of Islam to Yorubaland to the activities of trans-Saharan trade and migration (Al-Ilory, 1950). In his foundational work, “The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba, 1841-1908”, Gbadamosi (1978) meticulously traces the influx of Islam from the northern reaches of West Africa. He highlights the crucial role of Hausa and Wangara (Malian) traders who, as they traversed extensive commercial networks, inadvertently served as conduits for the new faith. These early interactions were largely peaceful, with Muslim communities often settling in designated quarters (Imale quarters) within established Yoruba towns, thus fostering a gradual exposure to Islamic practices and beliefs.

Gbadamosi emphasizes the pragmatic nature of this initial embrace, as Islam offered a shared framework for commerce, including a common language (Arabic) and a system of trust among merchants across vast regions. Gbadamosi’s research attention to the observable 19th-century Islamic developmental period conflicts with the perspectives of other scholars who cited earlier influences. According to a prominent indigenous Yoruba Islamic scholar, Shaykh Adam Abdullah Al-Ilory (1950), the arrival of Islam in Yorubaland as far back as the 10th to 13th centuries AD, through the 'Imale', the Malian traders, adds more context to the rather scarce evidence of the pervasive conversion. His (Al-Ilory) proposition also underlines the rooted historical depth of the enduring Islamic advent and regional influences. In the same vein, Balogun (1978) cites that the pastoral movement of the nomadic Bororo Fulani communities gradually advanced the Yoruba’s exposure to Islam. What stands out in these diverse historical positions is the common pattern of a gradual, structured, and multidimensional introduction of the religion to Yorubaland, further determining the Yoruba’s cumulative adoption of Islam.

How Did Islam Enter Yorubaland?

The conversion of the Yoruba indigenes to Islam steered far from the monolithic approach, as it encompassed an array of drivers while amplifying the dynamic interconnection of societal influences and individual motivations, even though the generally agreed-upon drivers among scholars are the initial socio-economic and pragmatic motivations for conversion. The opinion of Paden (1973) centers around the universal appeal of Islamic monotheism, the literary and linguistic

emphasis on Arabic studies, and the densely structured and rigid legal system (Sharia), which ushered the global community into a new religious and socio-economic paradigm relatable to the Yoruba society in many aspects. The bourgeois class of merchants adopted Islam to expand the trade networks, enable broader access among commercial partners with a shared identity across West Africa, enhance the opportunities for economic growth, and the intellectual allure of Islam, and the spiritual consciousness among Muslims (Gbadamosi, 1978). Early Muslim scholars, known as Alfas or Mallams, gained considerable prestige not only for their religious erudition but also for their perceived spiritual powers. They served as diviners, healers, scribes, and legal advisors, roles that often overlapped with traditional Yoruba spiritual functions (Parrinder, 1967). This allowed for a degree of continuity, as existing societal needs were reinterpreted and fulfilled within an Islamic framework, facilitating a smoother transition for many seeking spiritual guidance or practical solutions.

However, the 19th century introduced a more complex dynamic to the conversion process, particularly with the rise of the Sokoto Caliphate and the Ilorin Emirate. The Fulani-led Sokoto Jihad and its subsequent southward expansion transformed the nature of Islamic propagation, often intertwining it with military conquest and political subjugation (Al-Ilory, 1950). The city of Ilorin, initially emerging from an alliance between an Oyo warlord and Muslim scholars, eventually declared allegiance to the Caliphate, establishing an Islamic emirate that fundamentally challenged the existing Yoruba political order. This period saw instances of coercion and forced conversion, as the imposition of Islamic rule in Ilorin and its military campaigns against neighboring Yoruba states compelled some populations to embrace Islam, at least outwardly, to secure peace or political alignment (Sacred Footsteps, 2024). While scholars like Laitin (1986) argue that such conversions were often superficial in their initial stages, the political landscape undeniably influenced the spread of the faith. Nevertheless, even in periods of coercion, deeper, voluntary conversion remained a gradual process driven by personal conviction and community integration.

The spread of Islam in Yorubaland can be attributed to the Wangara traders who traveled extensively throughout West Africa, sharing their faith with the local population. These traders established trade networks between the Niger River and the Chad Basin, introducing Islam to

various kingdoms, including the Oyo Empire. Sheik Adam Al-Ilory notes that the original mosques in Oyo Ile were built to serve the spiritual needs of the Wangara traders, and over time, locals began to convert to Islam and build their mosques. The spread of Islam in Yorubaland can be attributed to several factors, including:

- i. **Trade and Commerce:** Muslim traders played a crucial role in introducing Islam to new regions.
- ii. **Islamic Scholarship:** The establishment of Islamic educational institutions and the work of Muslim scholars helped promote Islamic knowledge and practices.
- iii. **Cultural Exchange:** The Muslim-non-Muslim community interactions promoted socio-cultural and intellectual exchange of ideas (Al-Ilory, 1950).

2.3 Development and Impact of Islam in Yorubaland

The Yoruba's cultural landscape constitutes the vibrant Southwestern Nigerian region, which has been greatly influenced by the century-long advancement, integration, and expansion of Islam in the areas of culture, ideology, politics, and historical evolution. The multidimensional impact of this longstanding experience forms this literature review and draws upon the dense scholarly and meticulous research discourse that profiles the transformations facilitated by the Islamic faith across socioeconomic, political, and historical frontiers. From the nascent environment and period of contact, down to contemporary manifestations, the narratives of a distinctive "Yoruba Islam" through conversion, cultural adaptation, and evolution amplify a complex network of occasional conflict, negotiation, and eventual accommodation (Gbadamosi, 1978).

The 19th-century record of the Jihadists' occupation of Ilorin made the sub-region an epicenter of Islamic education, which attracted Yoruba Muslim scholars, also positioning Ilorin as a harbinger of the Islamic regional expansion, exemplified by scholars disseminating the Islamic message to other Yoruba sub-regions, including cities and hinterlands. Ilorin played a significant role in the Islamic growth and development in Yorubaland, as several Muslims traveled to the town for Islamic education. Furthermore, the Islamic significance in and impact on Yorubaland show in its cultural, traditional, and political influence on the region. The Usman Dan Fodio-led Sokoto Jihad in the 19th century also profoundly influenced the Islamic spread in Yorubaland. While the

Abbasid Dynasty's direct influence on Yorubaland is not well-documented, even though trade, cultural exchange, and Islamic scholarly activities facilitated the spread of Islam in West Africa, further research is necessary to fully understand the Islamic historical advent in Yorubaland.

Islam, with its emphasis on a single God (Allah), a sacred scripture (the Quran), and a codified legal system (*Shariah*), offered a different paradigm of religious experience. The literacy associated with Islam, particularly through Arabic, was highly valued because early Muslim scholars (Alfas or Mallams) played a crucial role, not only as religious teachers but also as scribes, diviners, and healers, with services which resonated with pre-existing Yoruba spiritual practices (Parrinder, 1967). Crucially, the agency of indigenous Yoruba Muslim scholars and community leaders played a pivotal role in this development. These Alfas were not merely recipients of an external faith but active interpreters and disseminators of Islamic knowledge within their cultural context. They established Quranic schools (Ile Kewu), taught in Yoruba, and composed a rich body of Islamic literature in Ajami (Yoruba written in Arabic script), thereby fostering a vibrant localized intellectual tradition (Busari, 2024). This internal propagation ensured that Islam became deeply rooted in Yoruba society, understood and practiced in ways that resonated with local sensibilities.

The history of Islam in Yorubaland reflects a dynamic interplay of accommodation, adaptation, and occasional resistance, ultimately shaping a unique Yoruba Islamic identity (Gbadamosi, 1978; Al-Ilory, 1990). The attribution of Islam's propagation in Yorubaland to trade and interactions with Malian traders (or *Wangara*) from the ancient Mali Empire plays a crucial role in the regional history of the religion, as the traders travelled extensively throughout West Africa, sharing not only goods but also their Islamic faith and way of life. Perhaps the most profound impact of Islam in Yorubaland is the remarkable process of cultural adaptation and synthesis that led to the emergence of a distinctive "Yoruba Islam." This was not a mere superimposition of an alien faith but a dynamic and creative negotiation between Islamic tenets and indigenous Yoruba traditions, resulting in a unique religious expression. Scholars frequently employ the concept of syncretism to describe this blending, though the term itself is sometimes debated in terms of its negative connotations.

Balogun (2011), in his detailed study of syncretic beliefs among Yoruba Muslims, illustrates how traditional Yoruba spiritual concepts, rituals, and even elements of deity veneration were sometimes reinterpreted or integrated into Islamic practices. These dynamics implied that pioneer Yoruba converts might not ditch their traditional festivals, but rather remain connected to traditional diviners through consultations while adhering to Islamic spiritual practices. This proved how adaptable they were in the famous Yoruba liberal philosophy, *"bó ti wu ni làá sè mòle ẹni"*, i.e., "you practice your Islam as you like", reflecting the depth of pluralistic and pragmatic cultural and religious inclination (Balogun, 2011). Although the Yorubas in this regard made Islam accessible and relatable to the wider Yoruba populace to encourage cultural acceptance and integration instead of rejection and exclusion, many orthodox Islamic scholars consider such practices as deviations. The cultural interface is further explored by Ogunbado (2013), who exposed the degree of integration of Islamic practices and structures in the existing Yoruba cultural landscape, instead of outright replacement, as proven in naming ceremonies where Islamic and traditional Yoruba names are concurrently used to identify indigenes, further symbolizing a dual identity of culture and religion. The indigenization of the Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha (Odun Ileya) celebration as prominent Islamic festivals is symbolized by communal feasting, elaborate attire, Yoruba drumming, and the integration of Yoruba panegyric (Oriki) into Islamic praise songs (Gbadamosi, 1978). The architectural designs of mosques often incorporated local Yoruba aesthetics with Islamic design principles to create unique sociocultural and sacred religious expressions.

The profound political impact of Islam in Yorubaland fundamentally altered the inherent power dynamics and contributed to significant social restructuring. The rise of the Ilorin Emirate, as extensively discussed by scholars, represented a direct challenge to the traditional Yoruba political system centered on the Oba. The subsequent decline of the Old Oyo Empire in the 19th century was undeniably exacerbated by the internal and external pressures exerted by the burgeoning Islamic state of Ilorin (Al-Ilori, 1950). This period saw a shift from passive resistance to active military confrontation, as various Yoruba city-states formed alliances, such as the "Ekiti Parapo" (Ekiti, Assemble), to counter the expansion of Ilorin and maintain their autonomy. Despite initial resistance from traditional rulers, Islam gradually became an undeniable political force. Many

Yoruba rulers, even those who initially opposed its spread, eventually found it pragmatic to accommodate Muslim communities within their domains and even appoint Muslim officials to their courts.

Laitin (1986) highlights how, during the colonial era, British policies inadvertently sometimes bolstered the position of Islamic leaders. The British administration often sought to govern through existing religious and social hierarchies, inadvertently empowering Muslim *Alfas* who could serve as intermediaries between the colonial authorities and the local populace, thereby increasing their political influence. Socially, Islam introduced new forms of organization and legal frameworks. The establishment of Muslim *jama'ah* (congregations) provided new communal structures, fostering a sense of shared identity among converts. The Islamic legal system (*Shariah*), while not entirely replacing customary law, significantly influenced aspects of marriage, inheritance, and commercial transactions (Ogunbado, 2013). This often led to a dual legal system where both the *Shariah* and customary laws operated, sometimes intertwining, and sometimes, paralleling.

The emphasis on literacy, particularly in Arabic, also fostered the emergence of a new class of educated elites who served as scribes, judges, and administrators, contributing to the development of a more formalized bureaucratic system in some areas. However, scholars also emphasize that while Islam introduced new structures, it often adapted to, rather than fundamentally dismantled, existing Yoruba social norms. For instance, while Islam regulated polygyny to a maximum of four wives, it was a practice already prevalent in Yoruba society. The deeply ingrained Yoruba values of extended family, communal solidarity, respect for elders, and a hierarchical social order largely remained, with Islamic values often reinforcing these existing social tenets.

2.4 The Acceptance of Islam by the Yoruba

The longstanding and dynamic Islamic acceptance among the Yoruba people happened in various ways, including the early encounters of the 14th-century introduction of Islam to Yorubaland by Malian traders who used commerce and *da'wah* practices to endear Islam to the region, alongside possible earlier influences. The significant momentum gained by the widespread practice of Islam in the 18th and 19th centuries was made possible by a Fulani scholar, Shehu Alimi, and Abdussalam Arugbo Oniwiridi, as key figures who introduced the *Tijani Sufi* brotherhood to

Yorubaland and contributed to Islamic progress. Instead of entirely abandoning their indigenous beliefs, the Yoruba people incorporated their traditional ways of life into Islamic practices to create "Yoruba Islam". This hybrid acculturation successfully negotiated the significant place of Islamic identity in the region. When the Emirate of Ilorin was established in the early 19th century, it became a hub for Islamic learning and practice, and Yorubaland's Islamic history witnessed a significant shift. The establishment was led by Shehu Alimi and Abdussalam, his son, who both played crucial roles (Al-Ilory, 1950). The Yoruba people, already active in commerce, found Islam beneficial for trade due to the common legal framework, for which Islam provided a standardized system of law called the *Shariah*, facilitating transactions and resolving disputes between merchants. Also, the shared script is through the use of the Arabic script (*Ajami*). This eased the communication among Muslim merchants across West Africa. The network of trust consolidated Islamic trade networks among merchants, promoting cooperation and economic growth (Gbadamosi, 1978)

Oyo-Ile, which was established in 1550 AD, attended to foreign Muslim traders and epitomized the commercial influence of Islam on Yorubaland, as the Yoruba people gradually embraced and integrated the religion in their regular activities and culture, further consolidating their hybrid identity (Al Ilory, 1950). Hence, the nascent embrace of Islam among the merchant class in the urban environment and the universal and structured knowledge scope of the religion demonstrated the material appeal of this foreign way of life to the complex, decentralized, localized, and spiritually rich Yoruba religious system beyond economic factors, as the political structure was also significant in the spread, appeal, and embrace of Islam. The rise of the Oyo Empire, with its extensive trading relationships, facilitated the movement of Muslim individuals. However, the 19th century, particularly with the collapse of the Oyo Empire and the emergence of new power centers like Ilorin, witnessed a more profound shift. The Ilorin Jihad, while initially a local conflict, became a significant turning point, leading to the establishment of an Islamic emirate and exerting considerable influence across Yorubaland (Al-Ilory, 1978). This period saw both forced conversions and voluntary adoption of Islam, as people sought alignment with the new political and social order.

Islam also profoundly influenced various aspects of Yoruba culture, including language and literacy, by which Arabic became a scholarly and administrative lingua franca. Yoruba Muslims adopted Arabic script (Ajami) to write in Yoruba, leading to the development of a rich body of Yoruba Islamic literature. Arabic words also found their way into the Yoruba lexicon, particularly in religious and legal contexts (Busari, 2024). In the social practices and institutions, Islamic law (Sharia) influenced aspects of marriage, inheritance, and judicial processes, often coexisting with customary law (Ogunbado, 2013). Ceremonies such as weddings (Nikkah) also took the route of Islamic rites. While polygyny was already present in Yoruba culture, Islam regulated it to a maximum of four wives, offering a different framework. On the aspect of naming, the adoption of Islamic names became conventional, alongside or in combination with traditional Yoruba names, reflecting the new religious identity. The design of mosques began to integrate local Yoruba (and Brazilian) architectural styles, creating unique forms of Islamic sacred spaces. Islamic festivals like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha* (“Odun Ileya” in Yoruba) were integrated into the Yoruba cultural calendar, often celebrated with a distinctive Yoruba flair, incorporating elements of drumming, singing, and elaborate attire (Gbadamosi, 1978).

2.5 The Cultural Resistance of the Yoruba to Islam

Islam's spread in Yorubaland was a complex process marked by significant cultural integration, but not without challenges. The challenges and periods of tensions that accompanied the Yoruba's acceptance of Islam stemmed from the religion's confrontation with opposition and persecution from traditional Yoruba rulers and priests. The resistance of the Yoruba custodians manifested in various ways, including suppression, as remote areas and ghettos became the habitats of Muslims, and oppression, as early Muslim preachers and teachers like Shehu Alimi had to withstand opposition or were forced to evacuate the environments of their religious, educational, and social activities. The public humiliation, environmental restriction, and religious ostracization of many Muslims in the 19th century exemplified how the Yoruba society somehow resisted Islam, and their resistance was caused by political, religious, and cultural factors.

Because the Yoruba traditional religious cults (Awo's) and political leaders (Oba's and Oloye's) considered Islam a threat to their traditional structure, culture, and power, they forced Muslims

into the hinterlands to suppress, restrict their Islamic practices, and humiliate them. Tensions were further fueled between the Muslim and non-Muslim Yoruba societies by the establishment of the Ilorin Emirate, a knock-off of the Sokoto Caliphate.

These periods marked a significant shift, from peaceful proselytization to one associated with military expansion and political subjugation, which became a key means of spreading Islam and political influence, as the Sokoto Caliphate's influence extended beyond military conquest, shaping the social and cultural landscape of Yorubaland. The Oba's, Oloye's, and Awo's of the indigenous religion of "Òrìṣà" (deity or idol) worship considered Islam a threat to their power and legitimacy, since the monotheistic message of Islam colluded with the traditional Yoruba polytheistic religion and the King's "divine" authority. The social order was threatened by the increasing popularity of Islam, which overshadowed the myths and rhetoric that canonized the traditional cults and kingdoms. Cultural identity became a bone of contention, as the Islamic adoption and growing influence were considered a subtle jettisoning of the traditional Yoruba culture, creating Muslim-non-Muslim social tensions.

Religion-wise, the Yoruba traditional kingdoms and cults considered the Islamic expansion and influence a threat to their cultural learning and practice models among the indigenes, leading to major conflicts in Ilorin, a Yoruba Islamic epicenter. The 19th century saw increased resistance to Islam in Yorubaland, primarily due to the Sokoto Jihad and the rise of the Ilorin Emirate. Through military approaches, the Uthman Dan Fodio-pioneered, and the Fulani-led Sokoto Caliphate reached Yorubaland. The establishment of the Ilorin Emirate as an Islamic state within the Sokoto Caliphate further fueled tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim Yoruba communities. Culturally, Yoruba resistance to Islam was because their traditional religious system of idolizing and venerating a large number of "Òrìṣà" (deities) and ancestors was entrenched in their regular lives. The Islamic adoption and growing influence were considered a subtle jettisoning of the traditional Yoruba culture, creating conflictual dynamics that entailed the simultaneous acceptance and rejection of Islam while shaping the region's degree of Islamic relevance. Hence, Many Yorubas were reluctant and resistant to ditching their traditional religion and ways of life for a new one.

This skeptical attitude led to religious syncretism and the indigenization of Islam. The blending of Islamic rites and Yoruba traditional practices aimed at preserving indigenous cultural elements, termed syncretism, was accompanied by partial acceptance and subtle resistance. The traditional hybridization endeared Islam to the Yorubas, who resorted to maintaining the dual cultural identity that accommodates the indigenous and the foreign. Various groups viewed this approach differently, as the fundamental Muslims considered the syncretism a departure from fundamental Islam, while the Yoruba Muslims meant to relate more with Islam in their unique cultural ways. The legacy of this period continues to shape the complex history of Islam in Yorubaland, with ongoing debates about the role of force in spreading the faith (Al-Ilory, 1950). The city of Ilorin, which initially emerged from an alliance between an Oyo warlord, Afonja, and Muslim scholars like Shehu Alimi, became a focal point of this resistance. When Ilorin declared allegiance to the Sokoto Caliphate and established itself as an Islamic emirate, it fundamentally challenged the traditional Yoruba political structure and the authority of the Old Oyo Empire. This declaration was deemed unacceptable by Afonja and his supporters, leading to internal conflict where Afonja eventually met his demise at the hands of Ilorin's Muslims.

The significant threat that the Islamic revolution posed to Yoruba non-Muslim rulers heightened the persecution of Muslims, as shown in the suppression of Ibadan, the refuge of Ado-Ekiti, and the Kiriji war (1878 – 1893). During Bashorun Oluyole's reign (1836 – 1850), Islam was harshly suppressed, and every mosque in the city was demolished, leading many Muslims to Ilorin, Ado-Ekiti, and other southwestern sub-regions. The refuge provided for the persecuted Muslims by King Ali Atewogboye (1836 – 1886) enabled the former to practice their faith safely. Regional instability was intensified by this major conflict of rivalries and alliances in a complex network, while highlighting the historical nexus of religion and politics in Yorubaland. The Kiriji War was a political secessionist conflict against Ibadan's dominance, and was influenced by the insecurity concerning the Islamic occupation of Ilorin (Al-Ilory, 1950).

Islam has continued to defy the apparent historical challenges through its profound impact on the Yoruba society, as it eventually found its way into the region's culture, and attracted many Yorubas to adopt Islam without deviating from their traditional identities. The significant roles and legacies

of Shehu Alimi, Abdussalam Arugbo Oniwiridi, and other key figures helped to regionally propagate Islam, aside from Yoruba's complex history, which continues to accommodate and amplify the region's hybridized identity (Al-Ilory, 1950). This creates room for a degree of continuity, as some traditional functions were reinterpreted within an Islamic framework, making the two distinct ways of life and religious practices co-exist, leading to phenomena often described as Syncretism (Balogun, 2011; Ogunbado, 2013). Early converts might continue to participate in traditional festivals, consult traditional diviners, or blend Islamic prayers with traditional rituals. This fluidity reflected the Yoruba people's inherent religious tolerance and their pragmatic approach to new belief systems. While some Islamic purists might view such practices as deviations, they were instrumental in making Islam relatable and accessible to the broader Yoruba populace. The Yoruba saying, *"bó ti wu ni làá sè mòlè ẹni"*, meaning "one practices one's Islam as one likes," encapsulates the culture's unique and adaptable spirit (Balogun, 2011). This inherent tolerance, reflected in the Yoruba saying "live and let live," meant that outright religious confrontation was not always the preferred approach, though it did occur.

Furthermore, the communal nature of Yoruba society and its emphasis on shared identity often meant that religious differences were initially downplayed in favor of broader urban or sub-ethnic identities, especially during the colonial era when the British support for traditional rulers encouraged this (Laitin, 1986). The lack of an initial, widespread political and military force among early Yoruba Muslims to rival traditional authorities also limited the pace of Islam's spread and contributed to periods of resistance. Unlike the rapid expansion seen in some other parts of West Africa, Islam in Yorubaland grew more gradually, often through the influence of individual scholars and traders, allowing for more time for traditional structures to react and resist.

Summary

The concept of unity (or its absence, disunity) among Yoruba Muslims is a rich area of scholarly inquiry, revealing the intricate interplay of theological interpretations, socio-political dynamics, cultural adaptations, and historical legacies. While the fundamental tenets of Islam and a shared Yoruba heritage provide a strong foundation for solidarity, various factors have historically contributed to, and continue to fuel, periods of fragmentation and contention within the

community. The impact of Islam in Yorubaland represents a profound and ongoing historical process, meticulously documented and interpreted by a rich body of scholarship. From its initial, peaceful introduction through trade to its later expansion intertwined with political and military dynamics, Islam has indelibly shaped the Yoruba identity. Scholars like Gbadamosi, Al-Ilory, Balogun, Laitin, and others have illuminated the diverse pathways of conversion, the remarkable capacity for cultural adaptation that forged a unique "Yoruba Islam," and the intricate political and social ramifications of its growth. The various opinions across specific timelines, the level of coercion alongside voluntary conversions, or the syncretic nature of the adopted religion, give room for a broad discourse on Islam's ability to transform society without necessarily replacing or overshadowing existing traditions, but engaging a dynamic conversation with them. This goal is mutual acceptance by promoting a unique force with an evolving sociocultural and religious landscape that proves the enduring spiritual and faith-based legacy in West Africa, with the active involvement of the Yoruba Muslims.

The increasing consolidation of Islam is witnessed by emerging indigenous Yoruba philosophers, academics, and community leaders who translated and interpreted the teachings of fundamental Islam in the local context within established Islamic institutions and engineered the propagation of the Islamic community (*Jama'ah*). Yoruba's liberal culture showed in its acceptance, which led to the hybrid "Yoruba Islam", and its indigenous propagation postured Islam, not as a merely external imposition, but as a deeply rooted institution within the Yoruba society. The multifaceted historical efforts of the Yorubas to culturally accept Islam were informed by trade, Islam's structural and universal appeal, and the evolving political landscape, among other pragmatic considerations. Though initially labeled "syncretism" while witnessing occasional conflict, the enduring legacy of "Yoruba Islam" remains a historically rooted and institutionally vibrant Muslim community extensively edified Yorubaland's sociocultural, religious, and philosophical landscape. However, the strong adherence of the Yoruba people to their indigenous religious traditions intensified Yorubaland's cultural resistance to Islam, as illustrated by the traditional rulers and cult's political opposition accompanied by military conflicts, especially on the Sokoto Caliphate and Ilorin's expansionist goals. While this resistance evolved into deviating from preventing large-scale Islamic practices in Yorubaland, it significantly formed the culture's

character with the distinct, hybrid, and accommodating "Yoruba Islam", and ultimately reflects the culture's complex and adaptable nature (Al-Ilory, 1950; Ogunbado, 2013; Balogun, 2011).

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Demonstrating how valid and reliable research findings occur is one of the fundamental factors that determine the value of scientific research. (Mohajan, 2018). This is one of the qualities of qualitative research methodology in the study of disunity among Muslims in Yorubaland. The qualities that qualitative analysis requires enhance the trustworthiness of the case studies being observed, interpreted, and concluded upon, making it necessary for researchers to describe the foundation upon which they've considered the findings obtained during the research process.

3.1.1 Research Design

Notable approaches to qualitative analysis include the exploration of themes and concepts, i.e., thematic analysis; the understanding of the development of ideas around a topic (content analysis), and the study of a chosen area of interest to illustrate a concept (case study analysis). Some of these approaches, including the historical, case-study, conceptual, and comparative analyses, will be useful in deconstructing the trajectory of disunity in the Yoruba Muslim communities in Western Nigeria, considering the highly institutional and historical nature of the case study. With qualitative research methods, evolving patterns, themes, and trends are uncovered and identified for future decision-making towards conflict resolution. (Mohajan, 2018).

3.1.2 Rationale for Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research methodology integrates the findings in existing literature and the researcher's evidence into the detailed investigation of case studies, as various academic and media sources are considered instrumental in extracting facts and juxtaposing them with documented history, enabling the researcher to revise insufficient data for a grounded conclusion. This is termed "reflexivity", as qualitative researchers are allowed to consider the influence of their own interpretations of the research processes throughout the findings (Jamieson, Govaart, & Pownall,

2023). Reflexivity will enable this study to coincide personal experiences within the Yoruba Islamic environment with well-informed scholarly research outputs concerning the same case study. While this is likely to expose the researcher's bias or blind spots, qualitative research methods will employ literature sources to redirect the research process towards an acceptable framework for the study.

3.1.3 Study Area and Case Selection

To achieve a streamlined case-study evaluation, the research scope is amplified by the Islamic historical development in the geographical study areas attributed to the evolution of the Oyo Empire, including Kwara, Oyo, Osun, and Lagos States, with a partial comparison with the Senegalese Islamic community (Adediran, 1998; Adeniran, 2015; Seck, 2014). These parcels of the southwestern region of Nigeria constitute the predominant influence of Islam in Yorubaland, without which the discourse of disunity among Yoruba Muslims would be insufficient. Therefore, the chosen research methodology will extensively highlight the development timelines of Islam in Yorubaland, to add more historical and cultural value to the dynamism that characterizes the Yoruba brand of Islam. This study will then outline the political, economic, and administrative factors that accompanied the development of Islam in Yorubaland, including the rationale behind the disunity that informs this research.

3.1.4 Analytical Method

The case study, Yorubaland, on which the discourse of disunity among Muslims is based, will be evaluated from an institutional standpoint due to its larger portion of influence on the behavioral patterns of the Muslim community. Also, the institutional and doctrinal fundamentals determine the Muslims' religious and cultural trajectory, philosophy, and evolution. In other words, Islam in Yorubaland is better observed through the aggregation of all the cultural, administrative, and institutional constituents of the regional branding of the religion, considering the fixed framework of the religion through the Quran, the Sunnah, and the Shari'ah. These frameworks cannot be subjected to personal interpretation, which is the behavioral and numerical foundation of quantitative analysis, except for the experiential observation of the adherents in the communities.

Therefore, the qualitative research method makes use of case study, historical, and conceptual analysis.

3.2 Responses of the Participants of the Interviews

3.2.1 Academic Thematic Analysis of Participants' Responses

This study adopts a thematic analysis approach, consistent with the framework proposed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006). The responses were stratified into themes reflecting both historical and contemporary causes, as well as impacts and solutions regarding the disunity among Yoruba Muslims. The analysis juxtaposes participants' narratives with the existing scholarly discourse on Islam, leadership, and intra-religious dynamics.

3.2.1.1 Causes of Disunity Among Yoruba Muslims

Theme 1: Lack of Unified Structure and Institutional Fragmentation

Participants consistently emphasized a decentralized Islamic authority, which aligns with broader discussions in Islamic studies that highlight the challenges of decentralized religious governance (Lapidus, 2014). The structural weaknesses stem from the lack of standardized curricula, divergent mosque practices, and inconsistent leadership selection processes, especially for those influenced by lineage rather than by the Shari'ah. This reflects what Ali Mazrui (2001) describes as uncoordinated institutional pluralism and the resultant fragmentation. In a nutshell, institutional disunity undermines legitimacy by weakening coordination and fostering competing religious authorities.

Theme 2: Epistemological Differences and Scholarly Tensions

Differential knowledge production and information dissemination emerged as a key factor, as the epistemological clash between locally trained scholars and those educated in Arab institutions. Historically, Islam in Yorubaland spread through Sufi networks (Trimingham, 1962). However, contemporary critiques of Sufism reflect global reformist influences, often associated with Salafi

movements. In summary, this tension represents a broader traditional and reformist struggle involving the competing and divisive interpretations of “authentic Islam”.

Theme 3: Leadership Crisis and Organizational Fragmentation

Participants identified weak and fragmented leadership as a major precursor to disunity. The proliferation of independent Islamic organizations without overarching coordination reflects what Political Sociology describes as “elite fragmentation.” (Adediran, 1998). Leadership inefficiency reduces collective bargaining power and limits the ability of Muslims to function as a unified socio-political entity (Busari, 2021).

Theme 4: Socio-Economic and External Pressures

Disunity was also linked to poverty, tribalism, and external religious competition. These findings align with socio-religious theories that emphasize the role of material conditions in shaping religious cohesion (Esposito, 2011). In other words, economic vulnerability exacerbates internal divisions and increases susceptibility to external influence.

3.2.1.2 Impacts of Disunity

Theme 1: Social Fragmentation and Religious Alienation

Participants described increased suspicion, hatred, and reduced mosque participation. This reflects the breakdown of social capital, a concept developed by Robert Putnam (2000). Therefore, disunity erodes trust and weakens the communal religious framework of Yorubaland.

Theme 2: Doctrinal Conflict and Intolerance

The labeling of other Muslims as deviants or unbelievers indicates rising “takfir” tendencies (excommunication) (Lateef, 2018). This phenomenon has been widely discussed in Islamic scholarship as a driver of sectarian conflict. Doctrinal rigidity transforms theological differences into social divisions (Muhammad, 2024).

Theme 3: The Decline of Scholarly Authority

Participants noted the diminishing regard for scholars, which weakens religious guidance. This aligns with Weber's (1919) theoretical projection of the decline of traditional authority structures. In other words, when scholarly authority declines, interpretive chaos and religious individualism increase.

Theme 4: Misinterpretation of Islamic Texts

Improper interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah was identified as a major issue. This reflects the dangers of non-specialist religious interpretation, which classical scholars have historically warned against (Jah, 2022). So, textual misinterpretation contributes to doctrinal confusion and legitimizes division.

3.2.1.3 Perceptions and Reactions to Disunity

Theme 1: Behavioral and Emotional Responses

Participants reported avoidance behaviors, sectarian alignment, and even conflict. These reactions demonstrate identity-based polarization, a concept explored in social psychology. The findings are consistent with the position of Raji Taofeeq (2025), that intra-Muslim divisions hinder collective development. Hence, disunity becomes self-reinforcing, as negative perceptions drive further division.

Theme 2: The Islamic Theological Perspective on Unity

Islam strongly condemns division, as reflected in key Qur'anic verses:

- Qur'an (3:103) – Unity as an obligation.
- (8:46) – Disunity leads to weakness.
- (49:10) – Believers are brothers.

The teachings of Prophet Muhammad emphasize that internal conflict undermines the ummah. Classical scholars such as Imam Malik stress returning to foundational principles as the path to

reform. Participants' responses are deeply rooted in normative Islamic theology, reinforcing the moral imperative of unity.

3.2.1.4 Proposed Solutions

Theme 1: Pathways to Unity

1. Religious and Ideological reforms across Yorubaland to reinforce the originality and contextual unison in schools of thought.
2. Emphasis on shared beliefs over differences, to prioritize the need for oneness in congregation and community development.
3. Return to the Qur'an and Sunnah for reference on how to foster unity among Yoruba Muslims.

Theme 2: Educational Development

1. Standardized curricula that are consistent with the provisions of the Quran, the Sunnah, and the hadith.
2. Improved scholarly training among the Islamic leaders, teachers, and priests, with a unified reference point for correct appeal to authority.

Theme 3: Leadership Restructuring

1. The need for strengthening institutions like the League of Imams and Alfas across states in Yorubaland, and between this region and other regions in the country, for national Islamic consciousness.
2. Promoting merit-based leadership that appreciates and rewards adherence to Islamic principles, competence, and portfolio over ethnic sentiments or economic superiority.

Theme 4: Dialogue and Conflict Resolution

1. Regular scholarly engagement among the leaders and students, and among the western-oriented Islamic scholars and the traditionally trained clerics, for a complete sense of belonging and the prevention of disunity resulting from ideological conflicts.
2. Inter-group collaboration among various Muslim societies in Yorubaland, with a shared purpose of propagating the ummah and respecting a common leadership structure.

Theme 5: Socio-Economic Empowerment

1. Employment initiatives for trained and studious Muslim individuals from the youth population and the senior population, with the capacity to contribute functionally and structurally.
2. Community development programs, to encourage inclusive participation of the youth and women towards societal improvement across the Islamic fronts, as a good preparation for nation building according to the Islamic principles of unity.

3.3 Case Study Analysis

3.3.1 Pathways of Islam into Yorubaland

Trading and Commercial Networks

The Wangara tribe had played a tangible role in these Muslim commercial traders; many of them spoke the Wangara language. (Busari, 2024). Those who had strong ties with the Mali Empire used to transport gold, Kola nuts, salt, etc., and later settled in communities in the forest-savanna transition Zones. (Alapo, 2022; Busari, 2024). Thus, their presence eased cultural interactions, including the spread of Islam and Literacy. Those Muslim traders often acted as middlemen, both economic and religious. At trade fairs and long-distance markets, merchants who connected the forest regions to the savanna Islamic centers likely introduced clerics, religious ideas, and Islamic materials to these areas. (Alapo, 2022; Naylor, 2024). Over time, some Yoruba rulers and elites encountered, or began to patronize, Muslim Traders, all of these facilitating Islam to spread beyond

the traders' class into wider society. Muslim traders played a crucial role in introducing Islam to new regions.

The bourgeois class of merchants adopted Islam to expand the trade networks, enable broader access among commercial partners with a shared identity across West Africa, enhance the opportunities for economic growth, and the intellectual allure of Islam, and the spiritual consciousness among Muslims (Naylor, 2024; Gbadamosi, 1978). This allowed for a degree of continuity, as existing societal needs were reinterpreted and fulfilled within an Islamic framework, facilitating a smoother transition for many seeking spiritual guidance or practical solutions. Furthermore, the spread of Islam in Yorubaland can be attributed to the Wangara traders who traveled extensively throughout West Africa, sharing their faith with the local population. These traders established trade networks between the Niger River and the Chad Basin, introducing Islam to various kingdoms, including the Oyo Empire (Al-Ilory, 1950). Sheik Adam Al-Ilory (1950) notes that the original mosques in Oyo Ile were built to serve the spiritual needs of the Wangara traders, and over time, locals began to convert to Islam and build their mosques.

Islamic Linguistic Development and Scholarship

Arabic became a language of scholarship and administration. Yoruba Muslims adopted the Arabic script (Ajami) to write in Yoruba, leading to the development of a rich body of Yoruba Islamic literature (Busari, 2024). Arabic words also found their way into the Yoruba lexicon, particularly in religious and legal contexts (Busari, 2024). Islamic tradition focuses on literacy by reading the Glorious Qur'an, Tawheed, Fiqh, and other are most important topics to teach a new Muslim. Yoruba new converts were learning the Arabic language, script, and Qur'anic schooling through their Wangara teachers (Alapo, 2022). Therefore, those new convert Muslims gradually developed Arabic literacy, and their language mixed with the Arabic language; therefore, Yoruba Muslims are notable with Islam and the Arabic language. This is why people used to call Islam "Esin Male", because they were taught and converted by Muslim traders (Greer, 2024). They assumed Islam is the religion of Mali merchants, the same as unbelievers and ignorant people around the world are now calling Islam the Arabian Peninsula's religion only, but the truth is otherwise.

The conversion of the Yoruba indigenes to Islam deviated significantly from a monolithic approach, as it encompassed a range of drivers that amplified the dynamic interconnection of societal influences and individual motivations. Although the generally agreed-upon drivers among scholars are the initial socio-economic and pragmatic motivations for conversion, the actual process was more complex. The establishment of Islamic educational institutions and the work of Muslim scholars helped promote Islamic knowledge and practices. The opinion of Paden (1973) centers around the universal appeal of Islamic monotheism, the literary and linguistic emphasis on Arabic studies, and the densely structured and rigid legal system (Sharia), which ushered the global community into a new religious and socio-economic paradigm relatable to the Yoruba society in many aspects. Early Muslim scholars, known as *Alfas* or *Mallams*, gained considerable prestige not only for their religious erudition but also for their perceived spiritual powers. They served as diviners, healers, scribes, and legal advisors, roles that often overlapped with traditional Yoruba spiritual functions (Parrinder, 1967).

Islamic-Yoruba Cultural Interplay

The Muslim-non-Muslim community interactions promoted socio-cultural and intellectual exchange of ideas, as the 19th century introduced a more complex dynamic to the conversion process, particularly with the rise of the Sokoto Caliphate and the Ilorin Emirate (Global Saddaqa, 2024; Muslim Voice, 2024). The Fulani-led Sokoto Jihad and its subsequent southward expansion transformed the nature of Islamic propagation, often intertwining it with military conquest and political subjugation (Al-Ilory, 1950). The city of Ilorin, initially emerging from an alliance between an Oyo warlord and Muslim scholars, eventually declared allegiance to the Caliphate, establishing an Islamic emirate that fundamentally challenged the existing Yoruba political order (Al-Ilory, 1950). This period saw instances of coercion and forced conversion, as the imposition of Islamic rule in Ilorin and its military campaigns against neighboring Yoruba states compelled some populations to embrace Islam, at least outwardly, to secure peace or political alignment (Sacred Footsteps, 2024). While scholars like Laitin (1986) argue that such conversions were often superficial in their initial stages, the political landscape undeniably influenced the spread of the

faith. Nevertheless, even in periods of coercion, deeper, voluntary conversion remained a gradual process driven by personal conviction and community integration.

3.4 Influence of Islam in Yorubaland

The Yoruba's cultural landscape constitutes the vibrant Southwestern Nigerian region, which has been greatly influenced by the century-long advancement, integration, and expansion of Islam. The multidimensional impact of this longstanding experience forms this literature review and draws upon the dense scholarly and meticulous research discourse that profiles the transformations facilitated by the Islamic faith across socioeconomic, political, and historical frontiers. From the nascent environment and period of contact, down to contemporary manifestations, the narratives of a distinctive "Yoruba Islam" through conversion, cultural adaptation, and evolution amplify a complex network of occasional conflict, negotiation, and eventual accommodation (Gbadamosi, 1978).

3.4.1 Ideological Influence

Islam, with its emphasis on a single God (Allah), a sacred scripture (the Quran), and a codified legal system (Shari'ah), offered a different paradigm of religious experience. The literacy associated with Islam, particularly through Arabic, was highly valued because early Muslim scholars (Alfas or Mallams) played a crucial role, not only as religious teachers but also as scribes, diviners, and healers, with services which resonated with pre-existing Yoruba spiritual practices (Parrinder, 1967). Crucially, the agency of indigenous Yoruba Muslim scholars and community leaders played a pivotal role in this development. These Alfas were not merely recipients of an external faith but active interpreters and disseminators of Islamic knowledge within their cultural context (Busari, 2024). They established Quranic schools ("Ile Kewu"), taught in Yoruba, and composed a rich body of Islamic literature in "Ajami" (Yoruba written in Arabic script), thereby fostering a vibrant localized intellectual tradition (Busari, 2024). This internal propagation ensured that Islam became deeply rooted in Yoruba society, understood and practiced in ways that resonated with local sensibilities.

The 19th-century record of the Jihadists' occupation of Ilorin made the sub-region an epicenter of Islamic education, which attracted Yoruba Muslim scholars, also positioning Ilorin as a harbinger of the Islamic regional expansion, exemplified by scholars disseminating the Islamic message to other Yoruba sub-regions, including cities and hinterlands (Muslim Voice, 2024). Ilorin played a significant role in the Islamic growth and development in Yorubaland, as several Muslims traveled to the town for Islamic education (Third Estate, 2015). Furthermore, the Islamic significance in and impact on Yorubaland show in its cultural, traditional, and political influence on the region. The Usman Dan Fodio-led Sokoto Jihad in the 19th century also profoundly influenced the Islamic spread in Yorubaland (Nmah & Amanambu, 2018). While the Abbasid Dynasty's direct influence on Yorubaland is not well-documented, trade, cultural exchange, and Islamic scholarly activities facilitated the spread of Islam in West Africa (Hassanah, 2022). Further research is necessary to fully understand the Islamic historical advent in Yorubaland.

3.4.2 Cultural Influence

In his granular study of syncretism among Yoruba Muslims, Balogun (2011) illustrates how traditional Yoruba spiritual concepts, rituals, and even elements of deity veneration were sometimes reinterpreted or integrated into Islamic practices. These dynamics implied that pioneer Yoruba converts might not ditch their traditional festivals, but rather remain connected to traditional diviners through consultations while adhering to Islamic spiritual practices (Balogun, 2011). In the history of Islam in Yorubaland, this exemplifies the adaptability of the southwesterners through their accommodation, and occasional resistance, ultimately shaping a unique Yoruba Islamic identity (Gbadamosi, 1978; Al-Ilory, 1990). The adoption of Islamic names became common, alongside or in combination with traditional Yoruba names, reflecting the new religious identity. This proved how adaptable they were in the famous Yoruba liberal philosophy, *"bó ti wu ni làá sè mòle ẹni"*, i.e., "you practice your Islam as you like", reflecting the depth of pluralistic and pragmatic cultural and religious inclination (Balogun, 2011). Islamic festivals like *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha* ("Odun Ileya" in Yoruba) were integrated into the Yoruba cultural calendar, often celebrated with a distinctive Yoruba flair, incorporating elements of drumming, singing, and elaborate attire (Gbadamosi, 1978). In the discourse of marriage, polygyny was

already present in Yoruba culture; Islam regulated it to a maximum of four wives, offering a different framework (Hussain-Abubakar, 2016).

Although the Yorubas in this regard made Islam accessible and relatable to the wider Yoruba populace to encourage cultural acceptance and integration instead of rejection and exclusion, many orthodox Islamic scholars consider such practices as deviations. The cultural interface is further explored by Ogunbado (2013), who exposed the degree of integration of Islamic practices and structures in the existing Yoruba cultural landscape, instead of outright replacement, as proven in naming ceremonies where Islamic and traditional Yoruba names are concurrently used to identify indigenes, further symbolizing a dual identity of culture and religion (Ogunbado, 2013). The indigenization of the *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha* (“Odun Ileya”) celebration as prominent Islamic festivals is symbolized by communal feasting, elaborate attire, Yoruba drumming, and the integration of Yoruba panegyric (Oriki) into Islamic praise songs (Gbadamosi, 1978). The architectural designs of mosques often incorporated local Yoruba aesthetics with Islamic design principles to create unique sociocultural and sacred religious expressions.

The attribution of Islam's propagation in Yorubaland to trade and interactions with Malian traders (or Wangara) from the ancient Mali Empire plays a crucial role in the regional history of the religion, as the traders travelled extensively throughout West Africa, sharing not only goods but also their Islamic faith and way of life (Alapo, 2022; Naylor, 2024). Perhaps the most profound impact of Islam in Yorubaland is the remarkable process of cultural adaptation and synthesis that led to the emergence of a distinctive "Yoruba Islam." (Odeniyi, 2023). This was not a mere superimposition of an alien faith but a dynamic and creative negotiation between Islamic tenets and indigenous Yoruba traditions, resulting in a unique religious expression. Scholars frequently employ the concept of syncretism to describe this blending, though the term itself is sometimes debated in terms of its negative connotations.

3.4.3 Political Influence

The emphasis on literacy, particularly in Arabic, also fostered the emergence of a new class of educated elites who served as scribes, judges, and administrators, contributing to the development of a more formalized bureaucratic system in some areas (Global Saddaqa, 2024; Greer, 2024).

However, scholars also emphasize that while Islam introduced new structures, it often adapted to, rather than fundamentally dismantled, existing Yoruba social norms. For instance, while Islam regulated polygyny to a maximum of four wives, it was a practice already prevalent in Yoruba society (Hussain-Abubakar, 2016). The deeply ingrained Yoruba values of extended family, communal solidarity, respect for elders, and a hierarchical social order largely remained, with Islamic values often reinforcing these existing social tenets.

The profound political impact of Islam in Yorubaland fundamentally altered the inherent power dynamics and contributed to significant social restructuring. The rise of the Ilorin Emirate, as extensively discussed by scholars, represented a direct challenge to the traditional Yoruba political system centered on the Oba (Oladosu, 2021; Muslim Voice, 2024). The subsequent decline of the Old Oyo Empire in the 19th century was undeniably exacerbated by the internal and external pressures exerted by the burgeoning Islamic state of Ilorin (Al-Ilory, 1950). This period saw a shift from passive resistance to active military confrontation, as various Yoruba city-states formed alliances, such as the “Ekiti Parapo” (Ekiti, Assemble), to counter the expansion of Ilorin and maintain their autonomy. Despite initial resistance from traditional rulers, Islam gradually became an undeniable political force. Many Yoruba rulers, even those who initially opposed its spread, eventually found it pragmatic to accommodate Muslim communities within their domains and even appoint Muslim officials to their courts.

Laitin (1986) highlights how, during the colonial era, British policies inadvertently sometimes bolstered the position of Islamic leaders. The British administration often sought to govern through existing religious and social hierarchies, inadvertently empowering Muslim clerics (Alfas) who could serve as intermediaries between the colonial authorities and the local populace, thereby increasing their political influence (Jah, 2022; Nolte, Ancarno, & Jones, 2018; Raifu, 2016). Socially, Islam introduced new forms of organization and legal frameworks. The establishment of Muslim “jama'ah” (congregations) provided new communal structures, fostering a sense of shared identity among converts. Islam also profoundly influenced various aspects of Yoruba culture through social practices and institutions, for which the Islamic law (Sharia) influenced aspects of marriage, inheritance, and judicial processes, often coexisting with customary law (Ogunbado,

2013). The Islamic legal system (Shariah), while not entirely replacing customary law, significantly influenced aspects of marriage, inheritance, and commercial transactions (Ogunbado, 2013). This often led to a dual legal system where both the “Shariah” and customary laws operated, sometimes intertwining, and sometimes, paralleling. In the area of architecture, the design of mosques began to integrate local Yoruba architectural styles, creating unique forms of Islamic sacred spaces (African Studies Centre, Leiden, 2022; Olabimtan, 2009; Ogunbado, 2012).

3.5 The Relationship Dynamics Between Islam and the Yorubas

The enduring and dynamic Islamic acceptance among the Yoruba people started in the 14th century when Islam was reportedly introduced to Yorubaland through the Malian traders with their commercial and *da'wah* practices to endear Islam to the region, alongside possible earlier influences (Alapo, 2022; Naylor, 2024). The active involvement of the Yoruba people in commerce made the acceptance of Islam easy and beneficial due to its flexible legal framework, as the religion provided a standardized system of law called the *Shariah*, facilitating transactions and resolving disputes between merchants (Olabimtan, 2009; Ogunbado, 2012). Also, the use of shared script through the adoption of the *Ajami* enabled seamless communication among Muslim merchants across West Africa. This contributed to the network of trust between the Islamic and Yoruba merchants, promoting cooperation and economic growth (Gbadamosi, 1978).

Instead of entirely abandoning their indigenous beliefs, the Yoruba people incorporated their traditional ways of life into Islamic practices to create "Yoruba Islam". This hybrid acculturation successfully negotiated the significant place of Islamic identity in the region (Busari, 2024). Since the establishment of the Oyo-Ile in 1550 AD, the ancient Yoruba society attended to foreign Muslim traders and epitomized the commercial influence of Islam on Yorubaland (Adediran, 1998), as the Yoruba people gradually embraced and integrated the religion in their regular activities and culture, further consolidating their hybrid identity (Al Ilory, 1950). Hence, the nascent embrace of Islam among the merchant class in the urban environment and the universal and structured knowledge scope of the religion demonstrated the material appeal of this foreign way of life to the complex, decentralized, localized, and spiritually rich Yoruba religious system

beyond economic factors, as the political structure was also significant in the spread, appeal and embrace of Islam (Olayinka & Kuponu, 2021).

The rise of the Oyo Empire, with its extensive trading relationships, facilitated the movement of Muslim individuals. However, the 19th century, particularly with the collapse of the Oyo Empire and the emergence of new power centers like Ilorin, witnessed a more profound shift (Busari, 2024; Otunola, 2021). The Ilorin Jihad, while initially a local conflict, became a significant turning point, leading to the establishment of an Islamic emirate and exerting considerable influence across Yorubaland (Al-Ilory, 1978). This period saw both forced conversions and voluntary adoption of Islam, as people sought alignment with the new political and social order (Oladosu, 2021). The significant momentum gained by the widespread practice of Islam in the 18th and 19th centuries was made possible by a Fulani scholar, Shehu Alimi, and Abdussalam Arugbo Oniwiridi, as key figures who introduced the “Tijani Sufi” brotherhood to Yorubaland and contributed to Islamic progress. The establishment of the Emirate in the early 19th century created a hub for Islamic learning and practice, and Yorubaland's Islamic history witnessed a significant shift. The establishment was led by Shehu Alimi and Abdussalam, his son, who both played crucial roles (Al-Ilory, 1950).

3.6 The Effect of the Islamic Evolution on the Foundations and Institutions of Yorubaland

3.6.1 Clash with the Colonial Government

In the late nineteenth century, the European colonial masters in Southwestern Nigeria experienced intensified penetration, which had a strong impact on the Islamic religion and Muslims. (Ogunbado, 2012). The Ottoman Empire’s recognition of Yoruba Muslim elites and institutions granted them moral authority and international legitimacy, a famous instance of which is the patronage and recognition associated with Chief Muhammad Shitta-Bey of Lagos, who built the Shitta-Bey Mosque (Isale-Eko Descendants Union, 2025). As of 1894, the inauguration representative bearing credentials from Sultan Abdulhamid II attended Shitta and received the Ottoman honorific “Bey”. This incident connected the Lagos axis of Islam to the broader Muslim world and established a visible emblem of transcontinental Islamic solidarity that reassured local adherents under missionary influence. Structurally and traditionally, the Shitta-Bey Mosque itself

became a heart for Islamic life in Lagos and the adjacent Yoruba areas (Isale-Eko Descendants Union, 2025; Oladosu, 2021). Synthesis of Afro-Brazilian architecture, combined with Ottoman symbolic sponsorship, produced a major Islamic need; communal memory serves a central function for a group (Castillo & Mann, 2024). Because mosques used to have madrasas and dispute resolution bodies, the structure played a crucial role in preserving and transmitting Islamic law, preserving literary and educational heritage across generations in Yorubaland.

Such symbolic connections carried tangible implications for sustaining Islamic identity in Yorubaland. Ottoman recognition enhanced the prestige of certain Muslim leaders in the eyes of both colonial administrators and local rulers, thereby strengthening their ability to sustain religious schools, charitable networks, and communal institutions (Comstock, 1979). The implicit endorsement conveyed through Ottoman titles and correspondences enabled these leaders to assert the legitimacy of the Islamic court and educational efforts in negotiations with British officials and Christian missionary agents. Moreover, the participation of an Ottoman-accredited representative in public Muslim ceremonies attracted the attention of Muslim networks in Serra Leone and Britain, linking Yorubaland Muslims to wider intellectual and organizational currents. Beyond the case of Lagos state, earlier Ottoman engagements with Sudanic states, known as the Kanem–Bornu embassy to Istanbul in 1574, set a model for trans-Saharan international relations and faith, indirectly advancing the spread and the state of being united of Islam across West Africa, as well as the Yoruba region (Adediran, 1998; Alapo, 2022). Eventually, such a system sustained the dissemination of North African and Ottoman intellectual traditions through texts, legal opinions, and models of waqf and religious government circulating in Sahelian and forest-edge communities (Busari, 2024). Like furnished with Yoruba Muslim reformers and scholars with comparative institutional frameworks that they could adapt to their own local contexts (Comstock, 1979).

3.6.2 The Ordeal of Oppression and Mounting Coercion

A key obstruction to the foundation and development of Islam in Yorubaland came from Oyo traditional religion, Oyo elites, and the Ogboni society, which bitterly opposed the small Muslim communities (Otunola, 2021). The growing propagation of Muslims created significant concern amongst the traditional authorities. The native religious group even intimidated the ruler should

he convert to the Islamic ideas instituted by the Muslims. The rulers foresaw and perceived that the spread of the Islamic religion posed a political menace to their dominion. Therefore, Muslims and the scholars became objects of attack, derision, brutality, and persecution (Ogunbado, 2012). Many Muslims ran off to Oyo-Ile, leading the Muslim community to leave and relocate to Ilorin (Al-Ilory, 1978). Atmosphere of intimidation, unintegrated with Islam, meant that ‘Ulama and entablements lacked the full rightfulness and preservation that might have been more helpful for the Muslim state’s structure. The scarcity of the Alaafin of Oyo and his court inhibited the development of schools, Muslim libraries, Arabic literacy, and Shari’ah structures such as waqfs and patron trusts. Similar programs are present in most African Islamic centers (Junayd, 2024).

3.6.3 The Political and Military Architecture

The major blockage to the development of Islam under the Oyo Empire was its reliance on a tributary client model of states and vassal regions. Dominated or subordinate states paid taxes in goods and slaves, along with military assistance, which fed the metropolitan capital (Oyo-Ile) and the ruling class; however, this redirected wealth from local investment in public works, human development, and sustainable economic growth across the provinces (Otunola, 2021; Adelowo, 1978). Meaning why, the system stressed the extraction of wealth rather than social advancement. Peripheral regions often remained undeveloped, thereby constraining broad-based growth. Furthermore, the empire’s economic power was centered on merchandise, including slaves such as kola nuts, ivory, textiles, and ironware, rather than focusing on industrialization or the expansion of educational establishments (Morten, 2016).

1. **The Intra-Government Tensions:** The Oyo empire system of government comprises the Alaafin, the Oyo Mesi Council, the Bashorun, the Ogboni society, and a sophisticated system. Moreover, the system created inherent tensions and instability when power dynamics changed (Otunola, 2021). For example, if the Alaafin of Oyo took a step and lost the support of the Bashorun or the Oyo Mesi, they could force him to attempt suicide, thus resulting in political fragility (Shariff, 2018). Such unsteadiness blocked long-term institutional development, particularly those necessary for continuous education, legal codification, and religious architecture, because power frequently devolved into internal

conflict rather than helpful investment. As one study observes, the Oyo Alaafin king had already disagreed with the States' decision council of elders; persistent conflict made the Oyo Empire a house of cards awaiting the winds of change (Ibitomi, 2021).

2. **Priority on Military Development over Social Architecture:** The Oyo empire system of government strongly invested in military force, particularly cavalry, and in growth rather than building massive, resilient civil institutions such as universities, comprehensive Islamic schooling, vocational centers, humanitarian programs, and hospitals, and irrigation (Otunola, 2021). They diverted most material military and human resources rather than brooding on human devilment (Akinjogbin, 1966). Because of environment circumstances such as civil wars was hindered Muslims scholars from created everlasting Islamically infrastructures to support people such as, town planning, security, patronage, mosques, Arabic schoolings, libraries, creation of Islamic state, chosen of Ameer, Islamic missions, and vision and their structure, was often faced challenges, Unlike the Islamic regions in the North-where strong states was actively backed bone of these establishments through urban planning, safety, and patronage- the public utilities in these regions was often undependable or unstable (Joseph, 1957).

3.7 Historical Analysis

3.7.1 Background of the Development of Islam in Yorubaland

Regardless of how highly contestable the timeline of the Islamic introduction into Yorubaland is, several scholarly pieces of evidence are corroborated and arranged chronologically. Islam is believed to have arrived in Nigeria in the 11th Century, hundreds of years before Uthman Dan Fodio's contact with Nigeria, and was introduced to the ancient Yoruba Kingdom of Oyo by the 14th century through trans-Saharan trade interactions with the Wangara people of Mali (Adelowo, 1978; Alapo, 2022; Busari, 2024). To further corroborate this position, historical accounts suggest that Islam might have reached Yorubaland through inter-relations with the old Mali Empire (1312 – 1337 C.E.), rather than directly from the Abbasid Dynasty, even though the Abbasid Dynasty (750 CE – 1258 CE) played a crucial role in the global spread of Islam, of which the specific trajectory of Islam's introduction to Yorubaland during this period is relatively less documented

(Hassanah, 2022). Professor Wande Abimbola's research also suggests that Islam was introduced to Yorubaland via trade and cultural exchanges with the Mali Empire, which is why the religion was initially referred to as "Esin Male" ("The religion of Mali" in Yoruba dialect). Also, the influence of the Ottoman Empire (1299 – 1922 C.E.) on Islam in Yorubaland was indirect but symbolically and institutionally important.

The Mali Empire (1312 – 1337 C.E.)

Islam had come to the Oyo empire in the 1300s during the reign of Mansa Kankan Musa in the Mali Empire (1312 – 1337 C.E.), when the latter was the emperor, notable for his plentiful wealth. Through his Hajj and Umra pilgrimage (1324 – 25), he donated gold to support the Muslim world through Islamic constructions and education in the Western Sudan, and also enhanced Mali's status across the Islamic world (Folorunsho, 2021; Alapo, 2022; Hassanah, 2022). The Mansa Musa empire did not extend into forest regions occupied by the Yoruba people. The Wangara traders from Mali played a significant role in spreading Islam in Yorubaland, and their influence is evident in the establishment of mosques and the adoption of Islamic practices in the region. As Islam expanded across sub-Saharan West Africa through various factors, including trade, cultural exchange, and the activities of Muslim scholars and clerics, such as the *Jihad*, the introduction of Islam to Yorubaland, a region in southwestern Nigeria, is a topic of significant historical interest (Folorunsho, 2021; Alapo, 2022; Hassanah, 2022).

However, scholars such as Samuel Johnson, a Yoruba clergyman and historian, disagree that Mansa Musa's reign in Mali directly influenced the Islamic penetration and development in Yorubaland. Johnson posited that Islam was introduced to Yorubaland towards the end of the eighteenth century (Olabimtan, 2009). This position counters scholars who believe in the earlier introduction of Islam, particularly in the 14th century. In 1440 AD, Islam is thought to have gained significant traction in Yorubaland, and the first mosque was built in Oyo-Ile in 1550 AD, initially serving the spiritual needs of foreign Muslims living in the area (Busari, 2024; Otunola, 2021). In the 18th Century, when Islam spread to various towns in Yorubaland, including Iwo, Iseyin, Lagos, Saki, Osogbo, Ibadan, Abeokuta, Ijebu-Ode, Ikirun, and Ede (Al-Ilory, 1950). Also, some Malians disagree that Mansa Musa's monarchy directly impacted this regional development of the religion.

Historically, some West African observers and scholars regard Mansa Musa's monarchical impact on the development of Islam in Yorubaland based on presented nuances; hence, they didn't totally reject the earlier notion (Hendrie, 2022).

Furthermore, their arguments are premised on pre-existing Islamic presence and the dichotomy of elite and popular religion. While some scholars highlight the establishment of Islam in the old Oyo Empire before Mansa Musa's advent, others suppose that the popular Malian monarch leveraged Islam to propagate his empire across Africa and strengthen trade routes (Marriott, 2019). In other words, his priority was economic expansion and political stability rather than religious growth, with diplomatic importance (Green, 2025). However, Mansa Musa was recognized to have mobilized the academia and other institutions to build schools and mosques; hence, the debate focuses on the genuineness of Islam as a top-down imposition that supplanted a more syncretic, earlier form, or as a part of a gradual process of adaptation in the long run (Ahmed, 2025). Specifically, the Mali empire had an effect through buying and selling, Hajj and Umra, cultural levelling, cross-linguistic influence, and Mali-connected Muslim dealers, such as Wangara, Dyula, and Mandinka, in planting the Islamic religion in Yoruba society. The control of Sub-Saharan trade routes was in the hands of the Mali empire, covering transportation paths such as gold, salt, kola nuts, and other beneficial commodities between north and west Africa (Ahmed, 2025).

The Oyo Empire (1400 – 1835 C.E.)

Islam in Yorubaland reached early in the Oyo Empire via Muslim Malian merchants, and by the 15th – 19th centuries, Muslim communities were present but were small. The Oyo Empire has established a strong system of government (Adelowo, 1978; Busari, 2024; Otunola, 2021). This is why, in its heyday, it did not unite with Islam fully into its framework of institution; different from the great Mali empire, there was minor, if any, Islamic influence in the Oyo empire, although Muslim communities existed in several regions throughout the empire by the 19th century (Robin, 1977). Thus, the Oyo Empire's political culture, which was immersed in the religion of Yorubaland, the denominations of the Alaafin of Oyo, the Ogboni institution, the system of Ifa divination blocked to establish a solid structural foundation for Islamic educational institutions or for structures of Islamic jurisprudence, the absent of all of these institutions and structures were

affected when pressures mounted of military, political, and economic. The Muslim community was so endangered (Al-Ilory, 1978).

The Oyo Empire was one of the most dominant Yoruba states that oversaw large regions of what is now called southwestern and north-central Nigeria (Adelowo, 1978). Its strength in the military, especially the cavalry, the extensive merchandise networks, and the political organization that integrated monarchical rule under the Alaafin Oyo with checks and balances, such as the Oyo Mesi council and the Ogboni fraternity society (Otunola, 2021). However, the Oyo Empire's evolution came with limiting factors such as heavy reliance on tribute and trade of slaves, political centralization with internal power struggles, the rising and falling of integration with the notable Islamic religion, and trade dynamics. The growth and eventual stagnation and decline of the Oyo Empire had a crucial bearing on the propagation and establishment of Islam into the region, on the founding of an Islamic institution such as Islamic schooling, Islamic teachers, Islamic preachers, and mosques, and on the brother development of urbanization, expansion of trade, and strengthening of institutional stability (Salami, 2010).

Islam is believed to have entered Yorubaland from a north-westerly direction through the lands of the Bariba/Borgu, situated halfway between the Yoruba and the Mande tribes. The Wangara traders from Mali introduced Islam to the Oyo Empire, which was a major hub for trade and commerce in the region (Ahmed, 2025; Folorunsho, 2021; Alapo, 2022). Other Yoruba towns, such as Igboho, Ogbomosho, Ibadan, and Lagos, also had significant Muslim populations before the 19th century. Scholarly consensus largely attributes the initial introduction of Islam to Yorubaland to the activities of trans-Saharan trade and migration (Al-Ilory, 1950). In his foundational work, "The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba, 1841-1908", Gbadamosi (1978) meticulously traces the influx of Islam from the northern reaches of West Africa. He highlights the crucial role of Hausa and Wangara (Malian) traders who, as they traversed extensive commercial networks, inadvertently served as conduits for the new faith (Busari, 2024; Jah, 2022). These early interactions were largely peaceful, with Muslim communities often settling in designated quarters (Imale quarters) within established Yoruba towns, thus fostering a gradual exposure to Islamic practices and beliefs.

Gbadamosi (1978) emphasizes the pragmatic nature of this initial embrace, as Islam offered a shared framework for commerce, including a common language (Arabic) and a system of trust among merchants across vast regions. Gbadamosi's research attention to the observable 19th-century Islamic developmental period conflicts with the perspectives of other scholars who cited earlier influences (Gbadamosi, 1978). According to a prominent indigenous Yoruba Islamic scholar, Shaykh Adam Abdullah Al-Ilory (1950), the arrival of Islam in Yorubaland as far back as the 10th to 13th centuries AD, through the 'Imale', the Malian traders, adds more context to the rather scarce evidence of the pervasive conversion. His (Al-Ilory) proposition also underlines the rooted historical depth of the enduring Islamic advent and regional influences. In the same vein, Balogun (1978) cites that the pastoral movement of the nomadic Bororo Fulani communities gradually advanced the Yoruba's exposure to Islam. What stands out in these diverse historical positions is the common pattern of a gradual, structured, and multidimensional introduction of the religion to Yorubaland, further determining the Yoruba's cumulative adoption of Islam (Balogun, 1978).

3.7.2 The Collapse of the Oyo Empire and Its Resultant Disruptions

The Oyo empire was in disintegration in the early 19th century due to its unjust system, pressure from the Caliphate Sultan of Sokoto, and the Ilorin emirate further disabled the establishment of Islamic structures in Yorubaland (Otunola, 2021). Therefore, the absence and loss of the Oyo-Ile capital and the stand war against 'Ulama and Muslims weakened the architectural base because Islam was founded and established from Oyo-Ile to across Yorubaland in the region, thus beginning to stagnate and decline as a result of the fall of the old Oyo Empire to date (Junayd, 2024). Thus, the fall of Oyo empire had a bad effect that was lack of strong central patron, the scatter of regions, run off of 'Ulama, and Muslims left of the tadeonal centers, all these made it difficult for Islamic architectures to firmly fixed and growth reliably in those years and left mark appearing at Islam and Muslim in Yorubaland now (Atanda, 2007).

- 1. Bumpy Geography of Islamic Expansion:** Since Oyo's empire political system ceased to integrate Islam vigorously, the dissemination of Islamic structures tended to grace frontier or northern cities such as Bauchi, Ilorin, etc., the limited center of the Oyo empire. After

Oyo's fall, countless Muslim Ulama relocated to Ilorin, where Islamic architecture was stronger (Salami, 2010). This migration meant that Oyo's central area fell behind in the earlier evolution of Islamic practices, such as Arabic schooling, mosques attached to social networks, and the long-term growth of Muslim-run educational funds (Al-Ilory, 1978). The rise and final fall of the Oyo Empire started with how Islam laid the foundation of the account of the community of Oyo, the first chapter pictures, until the time when the Islamic religion began to decline and stagnate as a consequence of the Oyo Empire's stumble (Junayd, 2024). Thus, Oyo's infrastructural shortcomings and decrease hindered the advantageous development of the Islamic religion and its structures in Yorubaland time a key period of Islamic growth in West Africa (Busari, 2024).

2. **Wide Development Hampers: Economy, Merchandise, and Human Capital:** Economy takes a setback and dramatically declines because of a shift in trade routes, because Oyo's economy in its primary was primarily fastened on the Trans-Saharan trade, such as horses, donkeys, camels, Salt, kola-nuts, slaves, and afterward Atlantic coastal business. Nevertheless, situation changes such as the rise of coastal ports, the swapping of European business patterns, and the Islamic states crippled its power. Coastal shipping with Europeans growing, power moved toward offshore Yoruba towns such as Lagos and Badagry. Oyo, being inland, started to lose its trade control (Busari, 2024). These decreases and recession caused less economic output available for education, religious institutions, local investment, and longer-term development that helps vigorous infrastructures, including the Islamic religion, which often struggle to build the social capital that backs Arabic schooling, scholarship, collection of libraries, and infrastructures of endowment (Al-Ilory, 1978).
3. **Enhancement of Human Capital and Education Literacy:** The Oyo empire did not stress formal education structures, especially those related to the Arabic language, Qur'anic school, and universities related to the Islamic north; the practice of Muslim scholarship fell back (Olabimtan, 2009). Without standard structural frameworks of learning, the scattering of Islamic education, the professional development of Islamic teachers and scholars, and the creation of waqf were a limited system. This fell back in human capital enhancement meant that when the Islamic re-establishment movements of the 19th century flowed

southwards, the Yoruba-speaking Muslims and their communities often had a deficiency in institutional infrastructure to amalgamate rapidly, compared with northern Islamic states (Adediran, 1998). In the 19th century, Islam in Oyo and its regions described the starting point until the period when the Islamic religion became stagnant because of the old Oyo kingdom. Consequently, the human resources base for Islamic institutions was impeded.

4. **Societal Progress and Institutional Pluralism:** All social systems of the Oyo empire were dominated and controlled by Yoruba-speaking traditional religious institutions such as Orisa worship, Ifa divination, masquerade cults, Ogboni society, Ogun, the God of iron, etc. (Nolte, Ancarno, & Jones, 2018). These long-established religious institutions often competed with, restricted, or inhibited the advancement of Islamic institutions and their structures. The traditional idol-worshippers' elites, such as the priesthoods, chiefs firmly hold traditional religion; it seems they had vested interest in protecting their dominance, which sometimes hindered the development of Islam and its spreading or non-incorporation to integrate Muslim institutions and structures into the state plans (Busari, 2024).
5. **Insufficient Support for Muslim Institutions:** A major part of the Islamic world, Muslim scholarship and developing institutions prospered and flourished when rulers patronized them, such as mosques, madrasahs, Islamic endowments, and the training of the "Ulama" (Jabata, 2025). During the Oyo empire, the allegiance of the political headship stayed and was mainly associated with traditional religion, or was disconnected from Islam. This refers to the fact that Muslim institutions are facing a lack of sponsorship, safeguarding, advocacy, and legitimacy that would promote their development (Adelowo, 1978). If an Islamic institution has majorly lacked backup of the state and relies more on merchants or grassroots support, which, given the resource-based economy and political disturbances in Oyo, was minor. This greatly affected the development of Islamic education, Arabic literacy, and institutional structuring, juxtaposed to regions where Muslim states were completely accepted as a state religion.
6. **Muslims Migrations and Institutions Stopped:** While the Oyo Empire became politically stagnant, declined, and experienced the migration of Muslim scholars, there was a vivid discontinuity in institutional development. Muslims were disappearing toward

persecution or seeking another sponsorship and moved to places like Ilorin (Third Estate, 2015), therefore, shifting the hub of Islamic institutional expansion away from the Oyo core. This suggests that Islamic institutions in the Oyo core region frequently emerged later, more divided, and less grounded. For example, most scholars and Muslims left Oyo-Ile when the case of expulsion of the ‘Ulama and the leader of scholars was greatly alarming because dismissal order was mandated then, the slaughter terrified the Muslims and made them embittered. Such an event caused institutional destruction (African Studies Centre, Leiden, 2022).

7. **A Lack of Legal-Juristic and Educational Systems:** Islamic institutions are primarily known as mosques and Qur’an schools, but also include legal-juristic systems, sharia courts and judge systems, Islamic endowment (waqf), and connection networks of scholarship. In Oyo, because Islam had constrained integration into the state, these systems passed through weakly or emerged slowly (Aliyu, 2015; Jah, 2022). Similarly to the Islamic north, where the Caliphate of Sokoto had a moderately well-grown legal-juristic infrastructure, while the Yorubaland under Oyo was devoid of a corresponding institutional depth for a lengthy period. Lacking that infrastructure, learners of Islamic studies often had to travel northwards, or Islamic institutional networks declined. That slowed the spread of advanced Islamic scholarship, the manufacture of scholars, and the strengthening and institutionalization of major madrasahs within Oyo-Yorubaland (Oladosu, 2021).
8. **Rivalry with Heritage-based Religious Institutions:** Islamic buildings also had to rival with firmly embedded Yoruba religious institutions, such as Orisa worship and political-religious cults (Adelowo, 1978). This traditional social order held legal, cultural, and spiritual power. Most Yoruba elites concluded that accepting the Islamic religion could undermine their social standing or threaten current religious and political alliances. Therefore, rivalry slowed the adoption, sponsorship, and institutional growth of Islam. The traditional religious groups contacted the ruler and started threatening him; thus, the ruler then observed the spread of the Islamic religion, and conversion posed a political threat to his kingdom (Busari, 2024). Therefore, ‘ulama became the center of attacks, ridicule, hatred, and persecution. The availability of such tension limited the expansion of Islam that could be institutionalized.

- 9. Crawling Spread Islamic Education and Literacy:** Given the condition of the factors above, the spread of Islamic schoolings, Arabic literacy, Islamic scholarship, and deeply rooted Islamic educational connection was creeping in the Oyo area, similar to northern regional Nigeria (Otunola, 2021; Oladosu, 2021). In fact, other southwestern Yoruba towns were later accepted into the Islamic religion more rigorously. This implies that human resources, such as educating Ulama, jurists, and teachers, were restricted, hindering the potential of Muslim communities to lead wider development in education, social services, or business networks tied to Muslim learning.
- 10. Decreased Area Integration into Broader Islamic Civilization:** In Yorubaland, any areas with standard and strong Islamic institutions frequently connect into wider networks of scholarship, Muslim businessmen, pilgrimage, jurisprudence, and cultural exchange, for example, relationships with Timbuktu, Kano, and Sokoto (Adelowo, 1978). Since Oyo's political environment is hindering combination, the region's Muslim communities fell back into these broader networks. That narrows the social, intellectual, and economic dividends from being part of the vast Muslim-world advancement.
- 11. Effect on Economic and Social-Educations:** The backward development of Muslim institutions also meant that social services sometimes connected with historically Islamic institutions, such as Waqf-founded schools, hospitals, lodges, travelers' hostels, and legal arbitration by Muslim scholars, were less popular (Busari, 2024). This finite the dissemination of services infrastructure into new regions that could have assisted development. Moreover, because Oyo's kingdom had declined, shifting merchandise routes, loss of tributary states, and political breakdown, few resources were available for investment in human social civilization, such as education and religious institutions, which was unlike other regions where they had been advancing (Olawale, 2019).
- 12. Breakdown and Vulnerability to External Conditions:** It was not surprising that when Oyo's kingdom declined and split, it was because it was vulnerable to military invasion from the Ilorin-Sokoto hub, which led to further destruction of public order, institutional stability, population evacuations, and urban decline (Third Estate, 2015; Otunola, 2021). This kind of instability poses a danger to both secular and religious organizational environments. A form of Muslim military, the Fulani was launched in the 1820s from the

northern side of the Oyo kingdom, and the result was that the Oyo empire fragmented into smaller states and cities during a series of catastrophic events. Thus, Oyo's decline not only hampered its own organization but also slowed the development of Islamic institutions, which might otherwise have grown stronger and more influential (Al-Ilory, 1978).

3.8 Mosque Administration, Sacred Buildings and Organizations

The mosque serves the dual purpose of being a worship center while functioning as a community development hub, hence, demanding the leverage of the presence of mosques and the augmentation of their roles in communities (Salami, 2010). Also, the social importance of mosques is reflected in the support they provide for religious education and the improvement of the socio-economic condition of society, which can be achieved through role-strengthening interventions of the mosques for the fulfillment of socioeconomic and educational functions (Global Saddaqah, 2024). The art of managing the affairs of the mosque is usually the Imam's duty, with the assistance of other personnel. Studies on the administrative affairs of the mosques in southwestern Nigeria are mostly concentrated on community mosques, which were a notable part of the earlier wave of Islamic expansion in the Southwest, having catered to the growing Muslim population (Raifu, 2016). These early mosques played a crucial role in shaping the religious and social landscape of colonial Lagos (Odeniyi, 2023). The first mosque in Yorubaland was built in 1550, C.E., and was used to perform their prayers and other activities by the Muslim merchants. Later, other mosques were built within cities for communal prayers, Friday prayer, and the space of the two feast prayers. The historical sequence of other earlier prominent mosques in Yorubaland includes:

The Oldest Mosque in Oyo (Oyo-Ile) (built in 150 C.E.)

This was the first-ever mosque in Yorubaland, which was proposed and structured by foreign Muslims and traders for their worship, such as five daily prayers, Jumah service, Arabic schooling, Islamic court, Islamic enlightenment, lodging a stranger, and other legitimate actions (Al-Ilory, 1950). This indicates they were scholars, pious Muslims, good character, practicing Muslims, but blended Islam with Sufism ideologies. However, inviting people to the cause of Allah and building a mosque are amongst the primary messages of Islam and crucial practical sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), because when the Messenger (PBUH) landed in Cuba, he built Cuba's

mosque, when he reached Madinah, he bought the land of his mosque, and built on it (Mubarakpuri, 1976).

The Iwo Central Mosque (built in 1655 C.E.)

Sometimes called the first and oldest mosque in Yorubaland since the oldest mosque in Oyo had ceased to exist, the original structure of the mosque has been rebuilt and expanded multiple times over the centuries into the current Iwo Central Mosque building to accommodate the growing Muslim population. Often cited as a significant Islamic landmark in the region's history, ever since then-ruling Oba (King) Ibirinade Abioye Adekanbi (Alawusa) brought Islam to Iwo around 1600 C.E. and converted the then-shrine into the central mosque (Osun State Government, 2023).

Ebu Aboki Iseyin Mosque (1760 C.E.)

The Ebu Aboki mosque was the first ever mosque built in Iseyin town in 1760 C.E., and was recognized as the first Islamic worship place established in that town. The Iseyin mosque is one of the early mosques built in Yorubaland after the mosque in Iwo (1655) and the mosque in the ancient Oyo-Ile (1550). The structure (now Oja-Oba Central Mosque) underwent major changes and was recommissioned in February 2024 (Oladosu, 2021).

Iddo Oluwo Mosque (1774 C.E.)

Widely recognized as the first mosque in Lagos, the Iddo-Oluwo mosque was first built in Lagos state in 1774 C.E. in the Idoluwo area of Lagos Island (Isale Eko Descendants Union, 2025). The religious and historical significance of the mosque to Lagos can be attributed to being the first mosque in the state to be publicly approved to perform the call to prayer (Adhan), being one of several local mosques in the Isale-Eko area of Lagos Island with deep historical Islamic heritage, and adding to the growth of Islam in Lagos, which was hitherto practiced more discreetly since the 16th century. Still a functioning local mosque in Lagos Island, the Iddo Oluwo mosque's establishment predates the Enu Owa Mosque (built in 1787) and the Salvador Mosque (built in 1848).

For further clarification and the avoidance of disinformation, another prominent mosque, also named the “Iddo Oluwo Mosque”, is the Oluwo Central Mosque in Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria. Highly significant for the Islamic history of Iwo, the Iddo Oluwo Mosque in Iwo is considered the “oldest existing” mosque in Yorubaland, while the town is considered the traditional Islamic headquarters of the region (Adediran, 1998). This also contradicts popular claims of the first mosque in Oyo-Ile around 1550 C.E. (for foreign Muslims, which no longer exists). However, the date 1774 C.E. is, in the Iwo context, rather associated with the Oba Ogunmakinde’s reign from 1744 to 1816. During this period, the promotion and institutionalization of Islam in Iwo entailed the appointment of a Qadi (Islamic judge) and the building of more mosques.

Enu-Owa Mosque (1787 C.E.)

Established in 1787 C.E., the Enu-Owa Mosque is widely regarded as the first mosque in Lagos, serving the religious needs of the local Muslim community of Isale-Eko for nearly three centuries (Isale Eko Descendants Union, 2025). As one of the earliest in Lagos state, the mosque’s site used to be a shrine for the worship of Oj’ogun, a traditional idol. The current Chief Imam of Enu Owa Mosque, Imam Ibrahim Olabisi Agoro, was selected from the Olumegbon family in 2014.

Saliu Salvador Mosque (1848 C.E.)

Also known as the Brazilian Salvador Mosque, Saliu Salvador Mosque was built in 1848 C.E., on the corner of Bamgbose Street and Joseph Harden Street, by Saliu Salvador Ramos das Neves, a prominent Brazilian returnee in Lagos Island, Nigeria, after being freed from Bahia, Brazil. As one of the oldest “Brazilian Mosques” in Lagos, Saliu Salvador Mosque poses a strong influence of Afro-Brazilian returnees on the city's culture and architecture, and is still relevant today. Saliu Salvador was also a respected leader among the Muslim returnee community who played a significant role in the establishment and growth of Islam in 19th-century Lagos (Castillo & Mann, 2024).

Tairu-Eko Mosque (1882 C.E.)

The Tairu-Eko Mosque was, alongside the Salvador Mosque and others, one of the mosques built by the burgeoning Afro-Brazilian Muslim community founded by the returnees in 1882 C.E. (Raifu, 2016). The establishment date makes it one of the oldest mosques in Southwestern Nigeria, built to accommodate the expanding Muslim community in Eko (Lagos). The Tairu-Eko Mosque remains a historic place of worship established on Lagos Island in the 19th century, and one of several early mosques in the "Brazilian Quarter" of Lagos.

Shitta-Bey Mosque (1891 – 1894 C.E.)

Built in 1892 as one of the oldest mosques in Nigeria and commissioned in 1894 by businessman and philanthropist, Chief Mohammed Shitta Bey, the Shitta-Bey Mosque is often internationally praised for its grand architecture. Particularly, it was described as “the finest specimen of ecclesiastical architecture in West Africa” by The Record newspaper of July 7, 1894. Construction of the mosque started in 1891 and was funded by the founder, having a capacity of about 200, and was built in the Afro-Brazilian architectural style. In 2013, the Shitta-Bey Mosque was designated as a national monument by the Nigerian Commission for Museums and Monuments (Isale-Eko Descendants Union, 2025).

The first Saki Central Mosque (1790 C.E.)

The first Saki Central Mosque was built in 1790 C.E., further establishing Islam in the town of Saki, Oyo, long before the Fulani Jihad. As one of the oldest mosques in Yorubaland, the central mosque was the fourth mosque built for local Muslim communities in Yorubaland, following those in Iwo (1655), Iseyin (1760), and Lagos (1774), according to historical sources (Oladosu, 2021). It’s important to note that the very first mosque established earlier in Oyo-Ile around 1550 C.E. was built mainly for foreign Muslims, for which reason the Shaki Central Mosque was built to serve the local community till today (Global Saddaqah, 2024).

The first Ilorin Central Mosque (1820 C.E.)

Established in the 19th century, the first Ilorin Central Mosque is subject to debates on the exact date of its establishment. While some sources posit that this first Central Mosque in Ilorin was founded in 1820, others claim that 1828 was the founding date, although by the same religious figure, the eleventh Emir of Ilorin, Alhaji Ibrahim Zulu Gambari (Muslim Voice, 2024). This remarkable monument with significant Islamic architectural features, striking design elements, and a library, marked a significant moment for Islam in the city after the Fulani jihad, serving as a central religious and cultural site for diverse communities like Yoruba, Hausa, and Nupe. The current grand structure is a modern result of extensive remodeling between the late 1970s and 2012, situated near the Emir's palace. The Ilorin Central Mosque remains a cornerstone for Islamic life, education, and community gathering in Ilorin (Muslim Voice, 2024).

The Second Ilorin Mosque (1830s/1925 C.E.)

The Second Ilorin Central Mosque at Idi-Ape was constructed during the reign of the first Emir of Ilorin, Abdus-Salaam, in 1835, to succeed the very first central mosque in the Agbarere area, which was built in 1820 (Aliyu, 2015). Although no longer the main central mosque, this historic mosque still stands and is an important heritage site in Ilorin, and functions as a community prayer site where Muslims also break their fast (iftar). Before the establishment of the present-day, larger Ilorin Central Mosque, the Idi-Ape Central Mosque was the primary site for Juma'at prayers, underscoring its historical significance. Yet, new Ilorin Emirs still visit this mosque for their traditional “turbaning” rites (Third Estate, 2015).

Abeokuta Central Mosque (1835s/1925 C.E.)

The Abeokuta Central Mosque, located at Kobiti, Abeokuta, dates back to the 1830s, when the first mosque was built from the first Alake of Egbaland, Oba Sodeke's land donation, after the Egba's settlement in Abeokuta. The current prominent structure dates to its reconstruction in 1925, reflecting Afro-Brazilian architectural influences on the site of the original Egba mosque (Britannica, 2025).

The Ilobu First Mosque (1845 C.E.)

The first central mosque in Ilobu was built in 1845 C.E. (and visibly erected in 1950) to serve the Muslim communities of Ilobu, Ifon-Osun, and Erin-Osun, and other adjacent villages for the Jumat (Friday) prayer at the time. Headed by the Chief Imam of Ilobu, who directed religious affairs from the site, the three-story central mosque was the primary community worship place until Ifon-Osun built its own central mosque in 1923 (Ilobu DIaspora, 2023).

Ikorodu First Mosque (1894 C.E.)

The exact date of the construction of the mosque has been subject to chronological debates because the existence of the mosque predates 1894, when Balogun Jaiyesimi (1855 – 1901), a powerful figure in Ikorodu who doubled as the first Local Government Chairman, erected the first mosque in Isele (Ikorodu Muslim Community Association, 2024). The year is also connected to the Balogun's embrace of Islam after a spiritual vision from the oracle, and his involvement in signing the local government into the Lagos Colony under Governor Carter. This milestone marked the formal establishment of Islam in Ikorodu while bridging it to traditional Yoruba leadership. The Isele Mosque was later superseded by the more central Ikorodu Central Mosque, established in 1933.

Osogbo Central Mosque (1889 C.E.)

Being among the early monuments founded in Osogbo town, Central Osogbo, the Osogbo Central Mosque is adjacent to the Ataoja's palace, Oba's market, and town hall. Built in 1889, the mosque highlights the deep roots of Islam in the Yoruba region by being a significant, enduring Islamic landmark in Osogbo, Nigeria, and also one of the largest mosques in Osun State (Ogunbado, 2012). While many of the aforementioned Islamic monuments existed long before the coveted Jihad by Usman Dan Fodio and the British Colonial rule in Nigeria, their legacy goes to show how rooted Islam is in the heritage of Yorubaland. The contribution of various traditional rulers and prominent Afro-Brazilian freed slaves to the propagation of Islam, and their partial collaboration with the nascent Malian traders, is reflected in their institutionalization of Islam, the construction of state-of-the-art mosques, and their overall accommodation of the religion within their indigenous

customs without much friction. This historical backdrop lays the foundation of the understanding of the Yoruba liberal and adaptive cultural framework, and the diversion into the judgment of the nuance of religious syncretism in Yorubaland. This also enables the understanding of the potential conflict that this integration creates among Muslims in Southwest Nigeria through the misalignment of values between the modern Islamic communities and the century-old establishments, and between transnational Islamic organizations with significant distinguishing features.

3.9 The Resistance of the Yoruba to Islam

Islam's spread in Yorubaland was a complex process marked by significant cultural integration, but not without challenges. The challenges and periods of tensions that accompanied the Yoruba's acceptance of Islam stemmed from the religion's confrontation with opposition and persecution from traditional Yoruba rulers and priests (Akeem, 2015). The resistance of the Yoruba custodians manifested in various ways, including suppression, as remote areas and ghettos became the habitats of Muslims, and oppression, as early Muslim preachers and teachers like Shehu Alimi had to withstand opposition or were forced to evacuate the environments of their religious, educational, and social activities (Muhammad, 2024). The public humiliation, environmental restriction, and religious ostracization of many Muslims in the 19th century exemplified how the Yoruba society somehow resisted Islam, and their resistance was caused by:

3.9.1 Political Dimensions

Because the Yoruba traditional religious cults (Awo's) and political leaders (Oba's and Oloye's) considered Islam a threat to their traditional structure, culture, and power, they forced Muslims into the hinterlands to suppress, restrict their Islamic practices, and humiliate them. Tensions were further fueled between the Muslim and non-Muslim Yoruba societies by the establishment of the Ilorin Emirate, a knock-off of the Sokoto Caliphate (Adelowo, 1978; Akeem, 2015; Busari, 2024).

These periods marked a significant shift, like Islamic propagation, from peaceful proselytization to one associated with:

- i. **Conquest:** Military expansion and political subjugation became key means of spreading Islam.
- ii. **Political Influence:** The Sokoto Caliphate's influence extended beyond military conquest, shaping the social and cultural landscape of Yorubaland (Greer, 2024).

The Oba's, Oloye's, and Awo's of the indigenous religion of Òrìṣà idolatry and worship considered Islam a threat to their:

- i. **Power and Legitimacy:** The monotheistic message of Islam colluded with the traditional Yoruba polytheistic religion and the King's "divine" authority.
- ii. **Social Order:** The increasing popularity of Islam overshadowed the myths and rhetoric that canonized the traditional cults and kingdoms.
- iii. **Cultural Identity:** The Islamic adoption and growing influence were considered a subtle jettisoning of the traditional Yoruba culture, creating Muslim-non-Muslim social tensions.

3.9.2 Religious Dimensions

The Yoruba traditional kingdoms and cults considered the Islamic expansion and influence a threat to their cultural learning and practice models among the indigenes, leading to major conflicts in Ilorin, a Yoruba Islamic epicenter (Otunola, 2021; Ogunbado, 2012).

The 19th century saw increased resistance to Islam in Yorubaland, primarily due to:

- i. **Sokoto Jihad:** Through military approaches, the Uthman Dan Fodio-pioneered and Fulani-led Sokoto Caliphate reached Yorubaland.
- ii. **Rise of Ilorin Emirate:** The establishment of the Ilorin Emirate as an Islamic state within the Sokoto Caliphate further fueled tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim Yoruba communities.

3.9.3 Cultural Dimensions

Resistance to Islam by the Yorubas was largely cultural in perception, as their traditional religious system of idolizing and venerating a large number of deities and ancestors was entrenched in their

regular lives (Folorunsho, 2021; Greer, 2024). The Islamic adoption and growing influence were considered a subtle jettisoning of the traditional Yoruba culture, creating conflictual dynamics entailing the simultaneous acceptance and rejection of Islam while shaping the region's Islamic degree of relevance (Greer, 2024). Hence, Many Yorubas were reluctant and resistant to ditching their traditional religion and ways of life for a new one.

This skeptical attitude led to:

- i. **Religious Syncretism:** The blending of Islamic rites and Yoruba traditional practices aimed at preserving indigenous cultural elements, termed syncretism, was accompanied by partial acceptance and subtle resistance (Folorunsho, 2021).
- ii. **Indigenization of Islam:** The traditional hybridization endeared Islam to the Yorubas, who resorted to maintaining the dual cultural identity that accommodates the indigenous and the foreign (Jabata, 2025; Muhammad, 2024). Various groups viewed this approach differently, as the fundamental Muslims considered the syncretism a departure from fundamental Islam, while the Yoruba Muslims meant to relate more with Islam in their unique cultural ways.

The legacy of this period continues to shape the complex history of Islam in Yorubaland, with ongoing debates about the role of force in spreading the faith (Al-Ilory, 1950). The city of Ilorin, which initially emerged from an alliance between an Oyo warlord, Afonja, and Muslim scholars like Shehu Alimi, became a focal point of this resistance. When Ilorin declared allegiance to the Sokoto Caliphate and established itself as an Islamic emirate, it fundamentally challenged the traditional Yoruba political structure and the authority of the Old Oyo Empire (Adelowo, 1978; Nolte, Ancarno, & Jones, 2018). This declaration was deemed unacceptable by Afonja and his supporters, leading to internal conflict where Afonja eventually met his demise at the hands of Ilorin's Muslims (Otunola, 2021). The significant threat that the Islamic revolution posed to Yoruba non-Muslim rulers heightened the persecution of Muslims, as shown in the following:

- i. **Ibadan's Suppression:** During Bashorun Oluyole's reign (1836 – 1850), Islam was harshly suppressed, and every mosque in the city was demolished, leading many Muslims to Ilorin, Ado-Ekiti, and other southwestern sub-regions (Greer, 2024; Oladiti, 2014).
- ii. **Ado-Ekiti's Refuge:** The refuge provided for the persecuted Muslims by King Ali Atewogboye (1836 – 1886) enabled the former to practice their faith safely (Sulaiman, 2013).
- iii. **The Kiriji War (1878 – 1893):** Regional instability was intensified by this major conflict of rivalries and alliances in a complex network, while highlighting the historical nexus of religion and politics in Yorubaland. The Kiriji War was a political secessionist conflict against Ibadan's dominance, influenced by concerns over the Islamic occupation of Ilorin (Al-Ilory, 1950).

Islam has continued to defy the apparent historical challenges through its profound impact on the Yoruba society, as it eventually found its way into the region's culture, and attracted many Yorubas to adopt Islam without deviating from their traditional identities (Oladosu, 2021). The significant roles and legacies of Shehu Alimi, Abdussalam Arugbo Oniwiridi, and other key figures helped to regionally propagate Islam, aside from Yoruba's complex history, which continues to accommodate and amplify the region's hybridized identity (Al-Ilory, 1950). This creates room for a degree of continuity, as some traditional functions were reinterpreted within an Islamic framework, making the two distinct ways of life and religious practices co-exist, leading to phenomena often described as Syncretism (Balogun, 2011; Ogunbado, 2013). Early converts might continue to participate in traditional festivals, consult traditional diviners, or blend Islamic prayers with traditional rituals. This fluidity reflected the Yoruba people's inherent religious tolerance and their pragmatic approach to new belief systems. While some Islamic purists might view such practices as deviations, they were instrumental in making Islam relatable and accessible to the broader Yoruba populace (Aguwa, 1997). The Yoruba saying, *"bó ti wu ni làá sè mòlẹ ẹni"* meaning that one practices one's Islam as one likes, encapsulates the culture's unique and adaptable spirit (Balogun, 2011). This inherent tolerance, reflected in the Yoruba saying "live and let live," meant that outright religious confrontation was not always the preferred approach, though it did occur (Adelowo, 1978; Busari, 2024).

Furthermore, the communal nature of Yoruba society and its emphasis on shared identity often meant that religious differences were initially downplayed in favor of broader urban or sub-ethnic identities, especially during the colonial era when the British support for traditional rulers encouraged this (Laitin, 1986). The lack of an initial, widespread political and military force among early Yoruba Muslims to rival traditional authorities also limited the pace of Islam's spread and contributed to periods of resistance (Nolte, Ancarno, & Jones, 2018). Unlike the rapid expansion seen in some other parts of West Africa, Islam in Yorubaland grew more gradually, often through the influence of individual scholars and traders, allowing for more time for traditional structures to react and resist.

3.10 Impact of British Colonial Rule on Disunity Among Yoruba Muslims

The British colonial rule in Nigeria (c. 1861–1960) significantly reshaped religious, political, and educational structures in Yorubaland. The policies implemented by the British Empire had enduring consequences on Muslim unity, contributing to divisions that persist in contemporary Yoruba Muslim society by promoting Western Education and marginalizing Islamic Learning (Aguwa, 1997). One of the most significant colonial interventions was the former, through Christian missionary activities. Colonial authorities supported missionary schools while largely neglecting traditional Islamic institutions (African Studies Centre, Leiden, 2022). As a result, the access of Muslims to administrative and economic opportunities was based on their Western educational history. In other words, those who remained in traditional Islamic education were marginalized. This trajectory influenced disunity by distinguishing between Western-educated Muslims and Traditional (Arabic-educated) Muslims. This educational imbalance, according to Trimingham (1962), weakened Islamic institutions and created internal class and ideological divisions among Muslims.

The Indirect Rule introduced by Frederick Lugard deepened internal divisions by prioritizing administrative convenience over religious balance. This gave the Christian Missionary some advantages over the Islamic system and inspired religious competition (Olayinka & Kuponu, 2021). Also, the overbearing colonial system maintained a close relationship with Christian missions, giving them control of education, administrative influence, and access to the state

treasury. Muslims, on the other hand, suffered the lack of coordination in response to this marginalization and responded to Christian expansion in fragmented ways (Busari, 2024). Politically, the restructuring through the Indirect Rule enabled the British to govern Yorubaland by empowering the traditional rulers (Obas) and political elites. Hence, many traditional rulers were influenced by Christianity or colonial interests, while the traditional Muslim elites were often excluded from political authority. As a result, the Muslims lacked unified political representation due to the enabled competition for recognition and influence among Muslim elites.

This aspect of Islamic history in Yorubaland aligns with the position of Esposito (2011), who states that colonial and Christian favoritism intensified intra-Muslim fragmentation in many African societies. Furthermore, the institutional, administrative, and legal displacement of Islamic systems reflects on the dominance of the common law. Unlike the partial or weakened Islamic injunction (Shari'ah) under colonial rule, Islam once played a role in dispute resolution and governance in parts of Yorubaland, even after the common law replaced Islamic legal systems (Guardian Nigeria, 2025). This, in turn, weakened the legal framework for Muslims through the fragmented interpretations of Islamic law. In response to colonial marginalization, Muslims formed various Islamic societies, e.g., Ansar-ud-Deen and Nawair-ud-Deen, to promote and sustain Islam, even though they often differed methodologically and ideologically, and in their educational approaches (Greer, 2024). Hence, the rivalry and competition among them disrupt the achievement of the objectives of unity through uncoordinated institutional pluralism and the long-term identity fragmentation among the Muslims. In addition, as transnational Muslim Organizations emerged, the removal of a centralized legal authority contributed to internal rivalries and religious and leadership fragmentation in Islam in Yorubaland (Jabata, 2025).

Another product of the influence of the indirect rule on the Islamic framework in Yorubaland is the class division, which the dichotomy of the western-educated Muslims and the traditional Muslims represents, and the socio-economic inequality that accompanies this division, since the Colonial economic structures favored those aligned with the West (Church Times, 2025). This structural fragmentation stratified the Islamic society and aided the division among the elites and the members of the grassroots (Lapidus, 2014). A major impact of this reality is the generational

reinforcement of ideological and intra-religious divisions within the Muslim community in Yorubaland, which, in the long run, gives more leverage to the colonial legacy to continue shaping the disunity among Yoruba Muslims in contemporary times (Busari, 2024).

3.11 Theoretical Evaluation of Disunity among Muslims in Yorubaland

3.11.1 Social Identity Theory

The Social Identity Theory (SIT) posits that individuals' membership in social groups helps them derive self-esteem and a sense of identity. Developed in 1979 by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, this theory helps in deconstructing the religious, ideological, sectarian, and ethnic clusters and the attendant conflict among Yoruba Muslims in southwest Nigeria. Regardless of their common cultural background, the Yoruba Muslim communities are fragmented along sectarian, ideological, and political divisions (Aguwa, 1997).

Group Identity and Sectarianism

In Social Identity Theory, the core in-group-out-group distinctions reflect on Yoruba Muslims through the existence of various sects that have distinct in-groups, e.g., the Salafiyya (Izala), Tijaniyya, NASFAT, Qadiriyya, and Ansar-Ud-Deen (Moshood, 2017). These distinctions inspire an exclusive sense of superiority, emphasizing cohesion among members while opposing members of out-groups. The emphases of these sects on specific ritual practices, theological interpretations, and doctrinal purity distinguish them (Adediran, 1998). While the Sufi-oriented Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya, for instance, lay claim to spiritual hierarchy and mysticism, the Salafiyyah rejects the Sufi tradition on grounds of innovations (*bid'ah*) by resorting to the practices of the nascent Muslim community (Akeem, 2015). Consequently, cooperation becomes difficult due to a fragmented religious environment bedeviled by mutual suspicion, as exemplified by the usage of separate religious events, mosques, and prayer grounds in the same environments (Aguwa, 1997).

Historical Roots of Identity Fragmentation

The Islamic fragmentation can also be traced to its historical development, since Islamic traditions were localized in regions where the religion arrived through trade and migration, until new Islamic

movements with their own sense of authenticity were informed by colonial and postcolonial influences (Oladiti, 2018). In the early 20th century and later in the 1990s, the Ansar-Ud-Deen Society and NASFAT, respectively, were reformist movements that emerged and challenged traditional structures and authorities by introducing new religious identities, thereby further entrenching long-term disunity (Busari, 2024). These reformist approaches were positioned as urban, educated, and modern, and contrasted with rural and conservative Islamic traditions, and also created a divide along classes and generations within the Muslim community.

Ethnic and Religious Internationalism

Although Yoruba Muslims share a common ethnic identity, their religious affiliations often override ethnic solidarity. This is particularly evident in inter-sectarian conflicts, where theological differences are prioritized over ethnic unity (Eteng, 2023). Moreover, the Yoruba ethnic group is religiously pluralistic, with significant Christian and traditional religious populations (Nolte, Ancarno, & Jones, 2018). This pluralism has led to a competitive religious environment, where Muslim groups feel the need to assert their identity more aggressively, sometimes at the expense of intra-faith unity.

Leadership and Prestige

In determining group identity, the Social Identity Theory champions the role of leadership and the competition for such, as is the case in Yorubaland, where the Chief Imam and other religious positions are subjected to localized ethnic contests and factionalism. For this reason, followers may be mobilized by their religious leaders against perceived rival groups over supposed injustices or threats to the community's integrity (Akeem, 2015). Political influences highly aggravate this dynamic with access to state resources, material benefits, political influence, and prestige associated with religious leadership (Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C., 1979).

Media and Identity Construction

The division from distinct identities among Muslim communities and groups is further intensified by the proliferation of Islamic media through social media, television programs, and radio stations.

Being an echo chamber, these platforms demonize opposing views by reinforcing sectarian narratives, an instance of which is when Salafis denounce Sufi practices through the media (Busari, 2024; Seck, 2014), while the latter, in response, questions the former's interpretive legitimacy. Disunity further thrives through this cycle of mutual delegitimization.

3.11.2 Institutional Theory

The premise of the Institutional Theory is that the establishment of customs, norms, and laws determines organizational dynamics and social behavior, and that formal and informal religious institutions enable fragmentation and other grounds for disunity, and the context or nuance of the Yoruba Muslim community justifies that (Scott, 2001). In other words, theological differences among Yoruba Muslims and Muslims in Yorubaland are not the only source of disunity, but the deep incursion of these differences into historical legacies, institutional structures, and governance.

Colonial Legacies and Institutional Fragmentation

In Yorubaland, Islamic institutions were partly influenced by the British colonial administration through indirect rule, as colonial authorities often co-opted Islamic leaders and traditional rulers, which created a hybrid governance structure that blurred the lines between religious, traditional, and political authority (Oloyede, 2024). The discord is caused by the institutionalization of certain Islamic authorities and the sidelining of others, politically influenced by colonial or postcolonial state actors, as is the case with the appointment of Chief Imams. The dispute results from parallel leadership structures of competing factions who lobby for their chosen candidates in some localities housing the Muslim community (Gbadamosi, 1978).

Multiplicity of Islamic Organizations

The ideological orientation, leadership hierarchy, and institutional framework in the Yoruba Muslim community are characterized by a proliferation of distinct Islamic organizations such as the Tijaniyyah, NASFAT, Salafi, Qadiriyya, and Ansar-Ud-Deen Society (Moshood, 2017). All these organizations operate independently, have sectarian boundaries, and institutionalized Islamic education and social welfare structures, without any form of coordination, collaboration, or unity.

In other words, members are discouraged from engaging with rival groups, having been conditioned into distinct organizational cultures, with a lack of a unifying umbrella body and common legitimate authority (Adediran, 1998; Akeem, 2015).

Institutional Isomorphism and Competition

Under the Institutional Theory is also the concept of isomorphism, which implies a similar tendency of organizations to become normative, coercive, and competitive in their expectations. To remain relevant in Yorubaland, the separate Islamic organizations often simulate each other's outreach strategies (Global Saddaqah, 2024; Jabata, 2025). Welfare strategies, administrative structures, and programs, without necessarily leading to unity. An example is NASFAT, whose success fascinates urban professionals and inspires other organizations to adopt similar models, including digital outreach, English-language sermons, and youth-friendly programs (Jah, 2022). Instead of unity among these organizations duplicating each other's frameworks, it intensifies competition, as organizations vie for legitimacy, funding, and followers, resulting in institutional survival taking precedence over communal harmony in a congested religious marketplace.

State–Religion Interface

Further complications arise from the relationship between the Nigerian state and Islamic institutions, as government support and recognition, though access to public contracts, pilgrimage funding, religious boards, and appointments are often negotiated through Islamic institutions (African Studies Centre, Leiden, 2022). This enables alignment between factions and political actors, and the politicization of religious institutions, for which state actors exploit the divisions among these transnational religious organizations to usurp and consolidate power, endorsing compliant religious leaders while marginalizing dissenting voices (Jah, 2022). This dynamic downplays institutional objectivity and discourages trust among Muslim groups.

Institutional Decay and Leadership Crisis

In many southwest-based Islamic institutions, there are challenges, including a lack of transparency, weak governance structures, and leadership crises, which create opportunities for

common succession disputes and legal conflicts, ultimately leading to the formation of breakaway factions (Oloyede, 2024). Opportunistic parties exploit the vacuum created by the absence of defined institutional and leadership rules to further deepen disunity. Furthermore, younger, Western-educated Muslims and older, traditional scholars (ulama) experience tensions caused by generational shifts, ideological disconnection, competing claims, and parallel structures, which have led to the former challenging the legitimacy of the latter, and the authority of age-long institutions (African Studies Centre, Leiden, 2022).

3.11.3 Resource Mobilization Theory

According to the Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT), social movements use resources to achieve their goals, such as personnel, money, legitimacy, and media, and in the Yoruba Muslim context, this theory helps explain the persistent conflict among Yoruba Muslim groups in Nigeria. RMT espouses that fragmentation is driven by the strategic jostle for scarce resources; instead of considering disunity a cultural or theological issue (McCarthy & Zald, 1977).

Religious Organizations as Resource-Driven Entities

In Yorubaland, Islamic organizations function both as spiritual communities and socio-economic institutions by providing welfare, education, political representation, and healthcare, using human capital, funding, political support, and infrastructure (Busari, 2024). These Muslim organizations compete for dominance to have more access to these resources by engaging in aggressive public relations campaigns, memberships, and fundraising. Hence, rivalry ensues as groups seek visibility, access, and influence to outdo each other (Jabata, 2025).

External Funding and Donor Influence

In Yorubaland, lots of Islamic organizations are funded by diaspora networks, Gulf-based initiatives, and international charities that often possess ideological preferences with certain peculiar interpretations of Islam (Oladiti, 2018). For example, while the Salafi groups receive Saudi-based organizational support, Sufi groups are backed by Western and North African networks, and Salafism influenced by the Wahhabis has been attributed to Middle Eastern funding

(Seck, 2014; Muhammad, 2024). The latter has created tensions with the indigenous Sufis, who consider such movements foreign impositions on local Islamic heritage. This external financial support creates new competitive and dependency dynamics, and incentivizes sharp differentiation among groups with a drive for superiority and uniqueness (Oladosu, 2021). To further secure more funding, these groups may adjust the trajectory of their outreach strategies, organizational structures, and messages in tandem with donors' expectations, thereby causing ideological changes or the adoption of foreign, imported, and un-Islamic religious discourses. The competition for external funding is also a consequence of the differentiation strategy, which solely attracts resources instead of cooperation and unity.

Human Capital and Leadership Rivalries

In the Yorubaland religious landscape, leaders, preachers, and scholars constitute the human resources as critical assets in which Islamic organizations invest through training and retention to champion the movement and attract followers (Jabata, 2023). However, commonplace are leadership disputes involving prominent figures who defect to form their own organizations or opposing factions and seek influence or control of resources on theological pretexts (African Studies Centre, Leiden, 2022). An example is a popular preacher who contends with the authority of a group and secedes to form a new organization with a considerable portion of the membership and donor base, a pattern which has been repeatedly recorded in Yorubaland, with a resultant competition from small groups.

Media and Technological Resources

The contest for religious influence has necessitated access to media platforms, as groups secure donations after gaining visibility and attracting followers, and media-driven competitions are facilitated by investment in advanced digital and branding strategies in outreach and communication (Eteng, 2023). However, due to the information autonomy, anyone with a mobile device and gadgets can lay claim to the title of "religious influencer" and inspire other independent, divisive, and controversial preachers outside traditional institutional frameworks and without

regulatory oversight. As a result, misinformation, ad hominem, and sectarian rhetoric thrive and worsen disunity.

Material and Political Patronage

Material resources like land for mosques, pilgrimage slots, and government contracts are often allocated through religious networks. Politicians may use these resources to reward loyal Islamic groups, establishing patron-client relationships (Busari, 2024). In turn, religious leaders rally their followers to support political candidates, especially during elections. This politicization encourages Islamic groups to align with various political parties or candidates, fostering rivalries and accusations of betrayal (Jabata, 2025). As a result, competition for political patronage adds another layer of disunity, with groups more focused on gaining state resources than on community solidarity.

Class and Economic Stratification

Resource Mobilization Theory also draws attention to how socio-economic class shapes access to resources. In Yorubaland, Islamic organizations often reflect broader class divisions. Elite groups like NASFAT cater to upwardly mobile, Western-educated professionals, offering services such as English-language sermons, networking opportunities, and career development programs (Jabata, 2025). In contrast, traditional Sufi orders may be more rooted in rural or working-class communities (Seck, 2014). These class-based distinctions influence the types of resources each group can mobilize. Elite groups have greater access to financial capital, media platforms, and political connections, while grassroots organizations rely more on communal solidarity and local networks (Jah, 2022). The resulting disparities in resource access can breed resentment and reinforce perceptions of exclusion, fueling further disunity.

Strategic Fragmentation and Organizational Survival

In some cases, fragmentation is a deliberate strategy for organizational survival. When a group reaches a saturation point or faces internal dissent, splintering may be seen as a way to preserve ideological purity, maintain control, or tap into new resource pools. This logic of strategic

fragmentation is evident in the frequent emergence of breakaway factions, each claiming to represent the “true” Islam (Moshood, 2017). While such fragmentation may benefit individual leaders or factions in the short term, it undermines the collective bargaining power of the Muslim community. It also creates confusion among followers, weakens institutional memory, and dilutes the impact of Islamic advocacy in the public sphere.

3.12 Comparative Analysis

This qualitative approach will help evaluate the broader spectrum of disunity among Muslims in Yorubaland, using analogies from Senegal, another predominantly Islamic community with a history of internal conflict. The purpose of this comparison is to minimize the impression that disunity or the quest for solidarity in Islam is largely limited to Nigeria, over time. This refers back to the idea of unity in Islam as one of the Prophet’s core recommendations, for which he delegated the duty of the dawah to the first group of his Companions when he sent them to the Negus, the King of Abyssinia, during the Islamic theological stage (Jah, 2022). Hence, this qualitative approach will further serve as a theoretical armchair to dissect the patterns of disunity in the aforementioned regions.

3.12.1 Juxtaposing the Disunity among Muslims in Yorubaland and the Senegalese Sufi

Southwest Nigeria (Yorubaland) and Senegal are predominantly Muslim with mixed community religious compositions. While the Yorubas accommodate Christianity and traditional religions, over 90% of Muslims in Senegal are Sufi, including the Tijaniyya, Muridiyya, Qadiriyya, and Layene (Akeem, 2015; Alapo, 2022). Historically, Islam was introduced to West Africa in the 11th century, but arrived in Yorubaland in the 14th century via trade routes, and then the Sufi orders gained dominance in Senegal in the 18th–19th centuries. Traditional religion has been on the continent before the arrival of Islam (and Christianity, which came through colonial missionaries) (Alapo, 2022; Busari, 2024). While Yorubaland deals with the structural and humanistic fragmentation that emanate from new religious movements (transnationalism in Islam and Pentecostalism in Christianity) with political machination which challenges traditional Islamic-Christian coexistence, Senegal is reputed for its remarkable interfaith peace maintenance between Muslims and the small Christian minority, with the evidently strong Sufi traditions with shared

cultural values, although punctuated by theological and ideological fractures (internal Tariqa dynamics) among the Sufi variants (Seck, 2014; Folorunsho, 2021; Muhammad, 2024).

3.12.2 Socio-Cultural and Political Trajectory

Islam in Yorubaland is widely known to be mixed with traditional beliefs, giving much room for syncretism, while Islam in Senegal, through Sufi orders, is highly embedded in national identity. In other words, Islam in Yorubaland embodies less internal religious disunity due to shared cultural values across history and deep religious syncretism, giving room for harmony among Muslims, Christians, and Traditionalists, despite the protracted conflict in Nigeria (Adelowo, 1978; Folorunsho, 2021; Adeniran, 2015). The degree of harmony is illustrated by shared social spaces and ceremonies such as festivals and weddings. These qualities promote interaction and peaceful coexistence, prioritizing the coveted Yoruba identity (Omoluabi) over religious identity (Olayinka & Kuponu, 2021). Senegal, on the other hand, defines its Islamic landscape with competitive Sufi brotherhoods known as “Tariqas”, thereby creating distinct loyalties within the broader religious coexistence. Despite the rivalries among the Sufi groups, high interfaith (Muslim-Christian) and intra-faith tolerance exists with shared celebrations (e.g., Magal, Korité), signaling their diversity (Roy, 2024; Seck, 2014).

3.12.3 Sources of Disunity

Some areas of contrast exist between Yorubaland and Senegal in the discourse of disunity among Muslims and the sources of such. Disunity in the former is more about the internal relationship struggles among the intra-faith sub-groups, fueled by the individual sense of importance of each faith without syncretism, and less about conflict. Also, while both Yorubaland and Senegal possess strong Islamic traditions, the degree of disunity manifests differently. For instance, Yorubaland’s challenges lie in both inter-religious (Christian-Muslim-Traditionalism) and intra-religious divisions (Sunni and Shia; Sufi and Salafi; Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani ethnic-based doctrines and sects). On the other hand, Senegal's (dis-)unity shows in the powerful Sufi brotherhoods, i.e., Tariqas, which foster strong social cohesion despite their doctrinal differences, which mounts immense pressure on the unity through evolving interpretations. In addition, the disunity in

Senegal is exacerbated by economic problems, while modernizing influences tend to hinder their harmony. Due to Yorubaland's cum religious fragmentation with political undertone, the Islamic landscape is highly competitive, with differing leadership representation and interpretations of the brotherhood. In essence, both face challenges in the modern era (Muaz, 2021; Adeniran, 2015; Adediran, 1998).

Specifically, disunity in Yorubaland is a gradual consequence of intra-Muslim tensions where the fragmented identities of the traditional Sunni Muslims, the Salafis (Wahabism), and the Shia Muslims have led to rivalry, worsened by leadership disputes driven by ego and the lack of unified Islamic education (Jabata, 2025). Inter-faith tensions also result from doctrinal diversity and sectarianism, as the supposed cultural coexistence with Yoruba Christians can be fractured by political and economic competition. In this case, evidence of politicization was levied against Islamic organizations like the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA) (Olayinka & Kuponu, 2021). Another potent cause of disunity among Muslims in Yorubaland is ethnic and lineage Divisions, as various Yoruba Muslim groups have distinct histories and leadership, creating separate organizational structures, e.g., Ansar-ud-Deen, Jamatul Islamiyyah, Nawair-ud-Deen, etc. Furthermore, the disunity in Yorubaland arises from interfaith and intra-faith tensions fueled by modern influences of the media, and wrongful cum divisive teachings and leadership among clerics, as discussed in the transnational Islamic organizational context (Nolte, Ancarno, & Jones, 2018). All these factors boil down to the inherent power struggles characterizing the political interference in Islamic affairs, where many of the leaders are compromised by the state to fulfill inordinate ambitions at the expense of the Ummah.

In Senegal, disunity usually occurs among the obviously competing Sufi orders, as each has strong leadership (Khalifs) and followings with distinct practices which degenerate into internal divisions as loyalty to a specific Sheikh or Tariqa supersedes everything else. Hence, Senegal's internal dynamics entail intra-faith rivalries (Tijani vs. Murid), despite the outward impression of widespread peace. Major challenges are often driven by economic limitations (poverty) and modern pressures on conventional Islamic frameworks, which confront the supposedly strong interfaith harmony (Seck, 2014). In contrast to Senegal's Sufi-led unity (though

with Tariqa rivalries), where Sufi Islam fosters social cohesion with Christianity, the rise of charismatic Christianity (Pentecostalism) creates new spiritual and cultural fragments within the already syncretic Yoruba society, even in Islam (Olayinka & Kuponu, 2021).

The spiritual authority of Sufi Marabouts often transcends religious and political divides, amplifying a unique brand of Islamic pluralism (Diop, 2025). While religious leaders have limited formal political power, they're capable of influencing local governance by endorsing politicians. The Sufi-centric harmony in Senegal is strained by the tendency of brotherhood dominance since concentrated Sufi in-groups (Mouride, Khadir, Tidjane, Layene) provide cohesive social structures to unite large followings under Khalifs (Seck, 2014; Roy, 2024). Therefore, disunity arises from rivalries among the hegemonic Tariqas, even though fundamentalist ideas and newer Islamic movements challenge the conventional Sufi authorities. Most of all, governance issues and poverty are the key sources of national concern, rather than doctrinal conflicts, and these challenges are usually mediated by leaders, which adds to the credit of the Tariqas (Quinn & Quinn, 2003).

Coupled with the Oyo Empire's collapse in Yorubaland, colonial infiltration and fragmentation after independence in the 1960s, disunity in Yorubaland is largely driven by internal political rivalries and traditional leadership disputes, making the trajectory of disunity more doctrinal and organizational, aided by multiple sects and fragmented leadership structures (Church Times, 2025). Disunity in Senegal is more hierarchical and politically rooted in Sufi rivalries and their integration into state power. Senegal's Muslim community experiences more subtle tensions rooted in Sufi brotherhood competition and cultural-religious balancing (Quinn & Quinn, 2003). Despite both being predominantly Muslim regions, the nature, causes, and consequences of disunity differ significantly in historical depth, institutional structure, and societal impact.

Additionally, disunity in Yorubaland and the Senegalese Muslim community stems from distinct historical, cultural, and religious dynamics. While Yoruba disunity often revolves around denominational and ethnic fragmentation within Islam and Christianity, Senegalese Muslim disunity is shaped more by Sufi order rivalries, political entanglements, and generational shifts. The multi-faceted nature of disunity in Yorubaland is marked by ethnic, sectarian, and theological dynamics, while that of Senegal fixates on Sufi hegemony.

Summary

The findings reveal that disunity among Yoruba Muslims is a multi-layered phenomenon, shaped by historical legacies, institutional weaknesses, epistemological differences, and socio-economic challenges. Its impacts extend beyond religion into social cohesion and political influence. Addressing this issue requires holistic interventions, combining theological guidance, educational reform, and effective leadership. Sustainable unity requires a multi-dimensional approach, integrating religious, institutional, and socio-economic reforms. The discourse on disunity among Muslims in Yorubaland is not unique to the Southwestern region of Nigeria, as various historical pointers highlight the inevitable consequences of intercultural and Intra-religious differences among Muslims in Southwest Nigeria. Ever since the religion of Islam set foot in the Oyo Empire through the Ottoman Empire, on the one hand, and the Mali Empire, on the other hand, various approaches to observing the fundamental tenets of Islam have been confronted with the pristine nature of the religion since its dissemination.

Also, the religion has had to contend with the traditional framework of Yorubaland, leading many of the traditional leaders to achieve coexistence with Muslims by culturally integrating Islam with the Yoruba culture (syncretism). These approaches depended highly on the idiosyncrasies of the various Islamic sects, which, through their unique leaders, devised their distinct ways of interpreting the Quran, practicing the Sunnah, and documenting the Hadiths. This uniqueness alone has, throughout history, underlined the areas of dispute in the larger global Islamic framework, especially with reference to the Senegalese brand of Islam (Sufism and Tariqa). While the Islamic community in Senegal shows a much more Islamic cohesion and unity from the frontline, the backend is rife with the hegemonic posture of each Sufi administration and leadership. The Yoruba Islamic dynamism in its adaptation to other religions is its major area of unity in diversity. So, it's rather safe to say that some degree of disunity or conflict is only a given in a pluralistic cultural and religious society, regardless of its degree of cohesion.

In a nutshell, both regions exemplify remarkable religious coexistence, but through different mechanisms; just that disunity in Yorubaland often occurs between groups and conventions (Muslims vs. Christians, new vs. old faiths) due to modernity and politics, while Senegal's Islamic

community focuses on tackling internal Sufi structural conflicts and poverty while presenting a united front against external doctrinal religious tensions. Both communities experience varying degrees of challenges with disunity, but Senegal's Sufi networks strengthen internal cohesion, while Yoruba Muslims are actively pushing for unity through inter-sectarian dialogues.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The trajectory of this research study is based on the observation of several literatures and the deployment of the qualitative research method to extensively evaluate the various angles by which disunity erupts among Muslims in Yorubaland, which is not limited to Yoruba Muslims, for a rather elaborate assessment of Islamic sociopolitical, religious, and economic sustenance. This assessment acknowledges the place of law, politics, and economics in religion, and by implication, the interrelationship among these entities, considering the enduring history of Islamic commercial penetration of Sub-Saharan Africa and, particularly, Nigeria, before the Islamic clerics assume the responsibility of propagating the religion as a way of life in hitherto traditional settings of Nigeria. Using Islamic education, the Shariah, and the Jihad, the effort of Muslims to ensure that the Southwest embraces Islam was initially met with partial resistance, unlike other regions with the egalitarian system (Sulaiman, 2013; Adelowo, 1978). This progression gave rise to the establishment of the Shariah legal system in the Nigerian sub-regions, accommodating both the Yoruba and the Fulani Muslims, such as in Kwara State.

While the purpose of this legal approach is to lay a constitutional foundation for the peaceful coexistence of the Islamic, common, and traditional laws, other factors, such as ethnoreligious distinction (e.g. Yoruba Muslims and Fulani Muslims), sects (Tijaniyyah, Quadriyyah, Maliki, etc.), class division, and misaligned group interests, cut deep into the fabric of the Muslim-Muslim relationships in the southwest, across different constituencies the region whose grassroots identification and attribution are stronger than the expectations of a unified religious interest, even within the larger national consciousness (Aguwa, 1997). Therefore, disunity is a gradual consequence that arises from a multitude of relational inconsistencies, goal misalignment, divided interests, economic inequality, and differing political preferences (Oladosu, 2021). This phenomenon in the Yoruba Islamic community prevents the promotion of a united front and the achievement of collective progress among Yoruba Muslims, despite shared fundamental beliefs

like the oneness of Allah and the five pillars of Islam. This chapter will elaborate more on the major findings underlying the case of disunity among Muslims in Yorubaland.

It is noteworthy that the diverse inclinations of transnational Islamic movements now shape modern Islamic thoughts, and this influence differs from one place to another among these diverse movements. The disunity among Yoruba Muslims and Muslims in Yorubaland emerges mainly from internal differences across doctrines and jurisprudences (Busari, 2024). This includes the politicization of religious discourse and leadership, the influence of transnational Islamic movements, and pre-Islamic (traditional) cultural practices (Jabata, 2025). Other causes are inter-group conflicts involving the likes of the Sunni and Shia Muslims; the Salafis and Sufis, the political motivations behind these conflicts, and the social media misuse for propagating hate speech.

4.2 Evaluation of the Disunity amongst Yoruba Muslims

The Yoruba tribe, being one of Nigeria's largest ethnicities, has an enduring history of internal rivalries since the 18th-century collapse of the Oyo Empire, which involved powerful city-states, e.g., Oyo, Ife, Egba, and Ijebu. each with its own political structure and monarchical system (Adelowo, 1978). The close contact between Islam and Yorubaland dates to the 14th century in the old Oyo Empire, where the first mosque was built in Oyo Ile, after which several mosques began to exist across other sub-regions of the southwest from the 15th to the 19th century (Busari, 2024). All these happened before the Fulani Jihad of 1804. The notable support of the traditional and the colonial authorities flipped into a dynamic that entailed a crisis in the Yorubaland Muslim community over time. This crisis further divided the Yoruba community into two factions, trying to outwit each other by aligning with the two other authorities that constituted a pluralistic political environment in southwest Nigeria (Greer, 2024). Hence, disunity in Yorubaland is underlined by political rivalries through historical fragmentation, while religious divisions compound the issue. In other words, the case with the Islamic division in Yorubaland is more political and ethnic, unlike the theological and generational coloration of the Senegalese division.

An example of this conflict is the Lagos Muslim community, which fortunately witnessed the peaceful succession process for the throne of the Chief Imam of Lagos, courtesy of the support

system provided by the colonial and traditional authorities (Raifu, 2016). To avoid further conflict in the Muslim community, the throne must rotate between notable chieftaincy families such as the Olumegbon, Ojogun, Obanikoro, and Shomade. To qualify as a Chief Imam of Lagos, the candidate must double as a White Cap Chieftaincy family member and as an Isale Eko Indigene (Isale Eko Descendants Union, 2025). To wit, given the diverse nature of Islam in these communities and their integrated traditional practices, the challenges of internal factionalism and political connivance were likely. Islamic-borne disunity in modern times is also worsened by competition among traditional rulers (e.g., Ooni of Ife vs. Alaafin of Oyo) and political elites vying for influence within Nigeria's federal structure. This was the reason prominent traditional leaders like the Aare Ona Kakanfo, Gani Adams, warned against media narratives that inflame monarchical tensions (Adeniran, 2015).

Furthermore, many events contributed towards the root of discord amongst Yoruba Muslims, and their consequences and results have appeared as disunity and caused setbacks for the Muslims and Islamic development nowadays. The great sign towards the disunity was that Islam contacted the Yoruba tribe when the Islamic state's root and its foundation had started to stagnate, decline, and fall, which was the execution of the last Abbasid Caliph, al-Mutassim (750-1258, CE), a considerable bad omen towards the foundation and establishment of Islam in Yorubaland at that time (Hassanah, 2022). The Islamic system government Abbasids regime was golden age for Islam and Muslims and had greatly impacted, contributed, promoted and keen for development of the pristine Islamic knowledge across globe during their regime by spending wealth to boost Islamic education and, Islamic culture, building madrasah, mosques, houses for scholars, hospitals, distribution of Zakat, Islamizing of trade, royal influence, and military power for expansion of Islamic religion (Ghafar, 1984).

Sheikh Adam Al-Ilory said: "Islam entered and contacted the Yoruba people during the reign of Mansa Kankan Musa, the king of the Mali Empire, through good Malian itinerant traders called Wangara Traders around the 14th Century. But Conversions remained rare for centuries, but seeds were planted. (Al-Ilory, 1950). This is the reason Yoruba Muslim known as "Esin Imale" and it appears in the above statement that Yoruba people knew Islam through the efforts of Muslim

Malian merchants, who combined trading and preaching together, they were the Wangara tribe (Alapo, 2022). Despite all the circumstances they were facing in their trading and journey did not deter them from conveying and disseminating the message of Islam to any tribes they encountered; therefore, they successfully built the first ever in history, the beautiful mosque in Oyo-Ile in 1550 (Adelowo, 1978). Then, Islam started to enter all Yoruba lands and their people, and it was narrated that the Yoruba tribe wasn't accepted at first, but later. These were the first set of mosques built after the Oyo Mosque. As trade and cultural exchange between the Wangara and Yoruba people grew, Islam's influence expanded (Adelowo, 1978; Oladiti, 2014).

The Yoruba Muslims in south-western Nigeria comprise a significant portion of the Nigerian Muslim community, and they have traditionally been marked by intimate tension, disintegration, and disunity. On the historical roots of division, the tussle for prominence between tradition and modernity reflects through controversial debates over Islamic practices, further reflecting the conflict between local Yoruba traditions and fundamental Islamic narratives, e.g., the wearing of the Hijab for women, and ankle-high trousers for men (Olayinka & Kuponu). The challenge of discord among Muslims is stressed in the Islamic texts, such as the Qur'an (3:103), and then remains a matter of great importance for Muslim scholars. As it was recently commented. "The persistent matter of discord has frequently undermined the collective development of these Muslim communities in Yorubaland" (Oloyede, 2024). To comprehend the roots and factors of disunity is essential not only for community integration but also for social-religious and political engagement.

4.3 Fragments of the Disunity

The Lasting Influence of Historical Leadership and Colonial Disruption

Though considered arriving early in Yorubaland, the Islamic religion was not documented until the 14th century by most scholars, including Sheikh Adam al-Ilory (1950). Within the 18th and 19th centuries, the colonial masters introduced Christianity, which co-existed with the existing diverse streams of Muslim institutions (Adelowo, 1978). The application of the British rule in the Yoruba land by the colonial government clashed with the application of the Islamic law within the statutory (Shariah) frameworks for Yoruba Muslims (Busari & Ashafa, 2024). Such disruptions have influenced communal disunity by juxtaposing the Islamic legacy with common law and decreasing

religious-legal structures, while opening ways for divergent practices. These internal discords may continue to cause several clashes across the localities, which is why local traditions and differing levels of Islamic institutional advancement exist across various towns and states to ensure balance (Aguwa, 1997; Akeem, 2015; Busari, 2024). The colonial government adjusted Islamic institutions to coincide with the Common Law; hence, Islam in Yorubaland lacked many fundamental structures, missions, and visions at the beginning. For example, there were no structures of Islamic government, and those who introduced Islam into Yorubaland were not scholars, and the Islam they disseminated across Yorubaland was that of Sufiism (Church Times, 2025). In the northern region, however, the Islamic system was founded and established completely before the advent of the colonial masters, so it seemed hard for the British colonial government to establish common laws in northern communities (Odeniyi, 2023). The Oyo Empire had been strongly established, dominated, and controlled major parts of Africa before the arrival (Mulaasan, 2024).

Amalgamation and Cultural Hybridity

Yorubaland has a long-standing tradition of intercultural and inter-religious interaction, including idol-worshipping and the Islamic religion, and these two have co-existed for many centuries before Christianity came. Research reveals that Islamic asceticism and mysticism came into Oyo-Ile around the 14th Century; thus, most Yoruba Muslims continue to practice religious syncretism, combined with pristine Islamic practices (Adelowo, 1978; Otunola, 2021). The ideology of Sufism and indigenous Yoruba creeds are considered ritualistic. Balogun (2011) in his doctoral thesis described a predominance of amalgamation creeds amongst Yoruba-speaking Muslims in Lagos, stating that “the occurrence affects most of them adversely” (Balogun, 2011). This syncretism has been causing tension and problems, as the majority of scholars view the heresy and unorthodoxy as catalysts of internal disunity amongst Muslims (Mahmood, 2019). Whenever cultural Muslims combined components of traditional Yoruba rites, such as diviners, witchcraft, and masquerades, blended with Islamic identities, those scholars who adhere to pristine Islamic orthodoxy started explaining the differentiations between the pure original practice of Islam and the amalgamation of the obtaining religious systems (Salami, 2010; Oladosu, 2021). However, they regarded others

as cultural Muslims or insufficiently Muslim. Thus, differential fosters internal break-up and fragmentation.

Cultural Orientation and Language

Another aspect to mention is the interplay between Yoruba cultural identity and the expectations of the wider Islamic orthodox. For instance, Toyibu and Hassan (2015) perceive that the majority of Muslims in Yoruba land establish Arabic language education because it's a characteristic of Islamic scholarship. Unfortunately, it's less recognized and less profitable, leading to decreasing engagements with Islamic education and weakening religious unity. The deterioration or slow attrition of Arabic/Islamic education among Yoruba-speaking Muslims can also reduce shared pure religious knowledge, practices, and rites, thereby leading to an increase in ignorance and disunity (Akeem, 2015; Busari, 2024; Church Times, 2025).

Religious Leadership Overabundance and Critical

Discord can also be caused by the overbearing nature of several religious scholars or preachers. A report cited the allegation by a Yoruba king that “overabundance exhibited by some Islamic scholars is responsible for hatred and ground amongst Yoruba Muslims.” (Folorunsho, 2021). When delivering sermon polemics, personalities, or conflicts of authority come out, and may cause factionalism. For instance, academics confirm that the overuse of social media and its freedom by some Muslim preachers among Yoruba Muslims is responsible for intra-Muslim pressures. Dauda and Lawal (2022) establish that social communication misapplied by Yoruba preachers leads to constant hostility, disaffection, and disunity among religious sects and mistrust among Muslims.

Disagreements in Religious Jurisprudence and Doctrine

Religious jurisprudential and doctrinal disagreements are a major locus of disunity amongst Muslims globally, and Yoruba-speaking Muslims are included. Islam has different schools of thought called the “Madhahib” and Sufi system modes of practice. Yoruba-Muslims have various groups aligned with orientations, for instance, the Tijani, the Qadiri, the Jafari, the Nakabandi, the Tebleeg, the Amadi, the Samunsideen, the RMQK, the reformist Salafi trends, and many more

(Church Times, 2025; Comstock, 1979). All these inconsistencies sometimes become a basis for common suspicion, as a recent news commentary says: “One important cause of these differences stems from divisions in the interpretation of primary sources such as al-Qur’an, Sunnah, Ijmaun of Companions, secondary sources, and others.” (Yusuf & Yusuf, 2025). The multiplicities in schools of thought and, likewise, schools of theologies have sometimes caused disunity that fostered discord (Oloyede, 2024). If major Muslim scholars hold a weak view in interpreting primary sources of Islam related to basic religion, such as ritual practices, leadership legitimacy, and mosque organization, this may cause ground communal discord, and the group can consider another as the deviant (African Studies Centre, Leiden, 2022; Greer, 2024).

Blended Beliefs and the Challenge of Orthodoxy

Some of those who have issues with syncretic beliefs do not realize its dangerous results, and orthodoxy-oriented Muslims may view syncretic practices within the Muslim community in Yorubaland as a sign of spiritual degeneration or bad creeds. For example, Oloruntele’s (2009) thesis on “Evil Forces and Shirk amid the Yoruba Muslims” with Ilorin as a case study, documents how accusations of associating with partnership with Allah and “evil-forces” practices fuel internal strife (Oloruntele, 2009). This is another accusation that destroys trust, fragments networks, and decreases the sense of a consolidated Muslim Ummah.

Leadership, Organization, and Institutional Elements

Other elements that cause discord and enmity are the structure of Muslim organizations, leadership disagreements, institutional fragility, and limited resources. In some ways, Leadership differences and position contests occur either over local mosques or central mosque imams, educational institutions, or Islamic societies, and are often responsible for factions. Oloyede (2024) explains that conflicts over leadership have strongly contributed to the unity of the Yoruba Muslim community. In Yorubaland, the Muslim community is powered by an amalgamation of religious authority, lineage, and self-interests. When many claimants or groups vie for influence, friendships and networks become divided, weakening unity.

Fragmented Institutional Framework

The northern region of Nigeria is a good example of a large Muslim community, or Islamic societies, or state-sponsored structures, which can help concord, but among the Yoruba Muslims, the organizational base can be fragile or more multinational. Wide and broad research case studies on Nigerian Muslims support the notion that “the disagreement among Nigerian Muslims usually stems from a sense of tribal superiority, as it’s hardly seen that Hausa Muslims consent to performing Solat behind Yoruba Imams.” (Aguwa, 1997; Akeem, 2015; Church Times, 2025). This reflects the institutional and cultural breakdown of different ethnic Muslim blocks, diverse institutions, and a lack of coordinated institutional structure. For Yoruba Muslims, the absence of strong pan-Yoruba bodies or the establishment of a uniform regional coordination framework could render them more susceptible to internal fragmentation (Church Times, 2025).

Juridical and structural Downsides

Yoruba-speaking Muslims have tackled the long-standing objections to having a recognized and applied Islamic regulatory system. For instance, Busari (2024) discovers how the application of *al-afraid* (Islamic law of inheritance) in Lagos and Oyo states is impeded by the power of customary law and common law, and in the absence of legally founded Shariah courts. Such an unclear structure may lead to differing local customs, conflicts, disputes over estates, and distrust among Muslims who expect a unity of Islamic legal structure. These legal organizational insufficiencies hamper concord (Busari, 2024).

Regional Political and Moral Dynamics

Socio-political elements external to the Yoruba Muslim community intersect with religious identity to cause discord among Yoruba Muslims (Akeem, 2015; Busari, 2024). The wider Nigerian context characteristics marked the north-south splits, religious-practice mixes, Hausa-Fulani Muslim north, Yoruba-speaking Muslims in the southwest, and the Igbo Christians in the southeast (Olayinka & Kuponu, 2021). This research on divisiveness amid Nigerian Muslims corroborates the “tribal superiority” and that “the Hausa Muslims usually dislike praying behind a Yoruba Imam.” (African Studies Centre, Leiden, 2022; Aguwa, 1997). Such ethnic/regional-

based sense of superiority and preconception can filter down into Muslim communal connections in Yorubaland, revealing a breach of identity and leadership, political competition, and affiliations mixed with malpractice, which can cause Muslim communities to be co-opted into ethnic and regional power struggles, which can split rather than unite them. Oloyede (2020) says that “political attachments have also facilitated disunity amid Yoruba Muslims because politicians have long taken advantage and caused sectarian and ideological disagreement within the Muslim community, using these divisions to weaken our collective voices”. Therefore, while Muslims are fragmented along political lines, unity among Muslims gradually deteriorates (Oloyede, 2020).

Social Power, Inequality, and Voice

In the political, social, and economic spheres, Yoruba-speaking Muslims might encounter marginalization or experience themselves as being sidelined, which may promote intra-Muslim rivalry or blame (Sulaiman, 2013). As The Guardian Nigeria reported, Yoruba Muslims perceived a “lack of equal access to political and economic opportunities in the Southwestern area, " which has greatly affected their commitment towards unity in Islam (Guardian Nigeria, 2025). While diverse Muslim subgroups strive for scarce resources or are perceived as disadvantaged, unity is equally eroded (Salau, 2025).

Social Media, Technology, and Modern Influences

The misuse of social media by Muslim preachers (“Duaat”) has been established to fuel hatred and disunity among religious sects, madrasahs, and imams, and lead to mistrust among Yoruba-speaking Muslims and promote intra-religious conflicts (Jabata, 2025). While social media amplifies and boosts criticism, polemics, or sensationalized religious content, it may disrupt internal harmony and unity, as noted by Dauda and Lawal (2020). An almost powerful promoter of disunity among Yoruba Muslims and a great anti-unity is that modern communication media changes and rapid social shifts have mined the roots and significant roles in causing and fueling disunity among Yoruba-speaking Muslims.

Generational Dynamics, Educational Systems, and Secular Values

The collision of oriental ideologies, secularization, and generational shift is an important component among Yoruba Muslims. Ahmed (2024) notes that most Muslims who know Western education still experience internal pressure from secularization, which has greatly decreased their allegiance and commitment to the Islamic religion. Most young Muslims in Yorubaland are less devoted to traditional Islamic schooling, or secular education influences weaken collective responsibilities, thus, the sense of shared Islamic practices and identities may be deceased (Busari, 2024).

Mobility, Migration, and Urbanization

The urbanization, migration, and mobility in southwestern Nigeria mean that Muslims in Yorubaland come from different backgrounds and bring diverse customs and standards. When this may improve community life, it also makes it more difficult to maintain cohesive yet competing communal identities. Certain ethnicities, classes, and generations may dominate a distinct unified Muslim identity, thus contributing to disunity (Busari, 2024).

4.4 Human Nature and Disunity

Differences and discord are germane to mankind's nature since antiquity to the present. In other words, it is an inevitable force which is also considered “a test from Allah”, on one hand, and a bad tool by Shaytan (Satan) and his allies, on the other hand, to plot evil around the Muslim Ummah. Hence, the Almighty Allah himself vividly warns all Muslims against disunity, from the glorious Qur'an and Sunnah. Shunning disputes that arise from differences in opinions, backgrounds, experiences, and perceptions is imperative in Islam to prevent conflict. Moreover, disunity amongst Muslims is considered an enemy of progress, a deadly disease, and a dangerous habit.

Sheikh ibn Baaz (2000) has commented and said:

“It is a Muslim's individual obligation to hold fast to Allah's religion, the Qur'an, and the Sunnah, and to stay away from division and disagreement. Before Islam, the tribe of Aws and the Khazraj

were noted for their mutual disunity, as they constantly fought each other, until Allah united them with the Islamic religion and prophetic guidance (Kabir, 2025). They became brothers and sisters who sincerely loved one another for the sake of Allah. Muslims of all ages and places must adhere to the Islamic religion based on authentic Sunnah, unite on the truth, cooperate in righteousness and piety, advise one another, and reject the causes of animosity and hostility”.

4.5 Struggles to Discourage Discord and Disunity amid Yoruba Muslims: Religious Leaders, Institutions, Policy, and Scholarly Perspectives

The discord among Yoruba-speaking Muslims, revealed as sectarian strife, leadership contest, and organizational fragmentation, poses a problem to communal welfare, education, and political representation in southwestern Nigeria (Aguwa, 1997; Busari, 2024; Folorunsho, 2021). Since the last decade, stakeholders have engaged religious leadership, institutional coordination, administrative policy tools, and scholarly mediation to curb fragmentation and foster unity among Muslims Humnah (Salami, 2010; Oladosu, 2021). The religious leaders in Yorubaland and institutions play a central normative and practical role in the unity of action. Senior scholars and university-based figures such as Professor Ishaq Oloyede, Professor Alaro, Mufti Dauda Mualaasan, and many more have publicly called for a revived good relationship among Yoruba Muslims, urging collective investment in Islamic education and coordinated social programs to conquer disunity (Oloyede, 2024). Such preaching appeals are usually delivered at annual conferences and central mosques where Imams, Alfas, and traditional Muslim rulers are present and summoned to join communiques that emphasize common beliefs and group effort (Daily Trust, 2024; Platform Times, 2024). These programs engage traditional levers of religious authorities – fatwas, sermons, and community arbitration – to counter divisive rhetoric and encourage cooperation among opposing factions (Muslim News, 2024). The moral leadership and local rootedness of religious authority make them uniquely placed to decrease distrust and foster dialogue in culturally salient ways.

Organizational umbrellas have been a complementary mechanism. National-level bodies such as the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) give an official platform planned to conduct Muslim organizations across ethnic and regional lines and to organize a uniform voice on

national matters (Shittu, 2010). In the southwestern context, local coalitions of Imams, Council of Muslim Organizations, and informal scholar associations have held seminars and symposiums specifically to iron out sectarian discord and to develop joint programs in education and social well-being (Daily Trust, 2024). These institutions support a standardized dispute-resolution process (Sulh and Shura apparatus), endorse rotation and inclusive norms for authority posts, and establish networks for the sharing of resources (Adeleke, 2017). Policy and administrative endeavors by state and non-state actors aim to shape the organizational environment that either amplifies or buffers fragmentation. At the administrative levels, advocacy for equitable representation in national Muslim organizing bodies, through constitutional amendments, rotation of offices, and transparent selection processes, has been proposed as an antidote to perceptions of regional domination and to build trust among Yoruba Muslims (Research Synergy Press, 2022).

Furthermore, civil society and development partners have promoted organizational capacity building for mosque committees, community trusts (Waqf management), and Shariah arbitration panels to enhance governance, accountability, and enforcement of local dispute-resolution outcomes (Guardian, 2025). Educational policy interventions, through the support for joint Islamic-modern schools and standardized curricula, emphasize discord and political pluralism to address the social reproduction of sectarian characters amongst youth (Platform Times, 2024). Scholarly perspectives, prescriptive frameworks, and diagnostic contributions via academic analyses emphasize both theological and structural roots of Yoruba Muslim disunity.

To address doctrinal plurality (e.g., Sufi orders vs reform movements) and rivalry for scarce leadership legitimacy and external political manipulation (Adeleke, 2017; Research Synergy Press, 2022), Scholars advance several evidence-based remedies, such as:

- a) Institutionalizing “Sulh” (amicable settlement) procedures and elevating arbitration councils that combine religious legitimacy with procedural transparency.
- b) Promoting educational reforms that foreground ukhuwwah (brotherhood) when allowing doctrinal difference.
- c) Fostering inter-group consultation mechanisms such as joint committees of imams, scholars, and youth leaders.

- d) Encouraging socio-economic collaboration through co-funded welfare initiatives, which create shared stakes and interdependence (Daily Trust, 2024).

Empirical reporting suggests some traction, as conferences and joint statements have reduced open hostilities in local cases and stimulated multi-mosque educational projects (Daily Trust, 2024). Yet stumbling blocks persist. Observers note that entrenched grassroots loyalty, personal scholarly rivalries, unequal resource distribution, and the limited enforcement capacity of local arbitration panels foster disunity, particularly in places where state courts are fractioned across the common law and the shariah law (Yusuf & Yusuf, 2025; Church Times, 2025; Guardian Nigeria, 2025). Moreover, external factors such as politicians or rival interest groups can exploit vulnerabilities unless institutional safeguards and transparency are strengthened to discourage any catalyst of disunity among Yoruba Muslims (Muslim News, 2024).

4.6 Current and Future Scholarship Directions on Islam in Yorubaland

Contemporary Islamic-related research and literature in Yorubaland continues to transcend with new questions while addressing earlier interpretations, considering the growing concentration on the sociocultural diversity among Yoruba Muslims beyond the monolithic narratives of Islam (Church Times, 2025; Jah, 2022). The objective is to explore the dynamics and influences of various schools of thought, such as the Sufi denomination, and their encounters with reform movements that rose in the 20th and 21st centuries to challenge the hybrid “Yoruba Islam” (Clarke, 2018). This hybrid posture integrated syncretic features to advocate for a more complete observance of orthodox principles, and has led to debates over identity and commitment to religious practice. The rise of these movements was often informed by the desire for "genuine" Islamic practice amidst global Islamic ramifications, and has caused internal sociocultural and religious conflict within the larger community of Yoruba Muslims. Furthermore, researchers are dedicated to exploring the relationship between Islam and other religions in Yorubaland, particularly Christianity.

In his seminal work on religious conversion in the Yoruba society, Peel (2000) deconstructed the religiously pluralistic society on the nexus of Islam and Christianity concerning conversion to highlight the religious fluidity in identity and competitiveness that attend proselytization. The

Yoruba religious landscape continues to be shaped by perpetual negotiation between the two religions in Yorubaland, which has led to individual navigations of the "spiritual marketplace" in practice and affiliations (Salami, 2010; Muhammad, 2024). In future research contexts, the evaluation of the influence of globalization on Yoruba Islam, the Islamic significance of women in the communities, and the issues concerning religious fundamentalism in a culturally liberal society.

4.7 Key Findings

4.7.1 Doctrinal, Ideological, and Jurisprudential Differences

A significant source of conflict and disunity lies in the different interpretations of Islamic beliefs, laws (fiqh al-ikhtilāf), practices, and non-fundamental issues (furū ‘) (Aguwa, 1997; Church Times, 2025; Folorunsho, 2021). Examples of this include debatable topics on rosary usage (misbahah), seeking the prophet’s intercession (tawassul), and the bowing as a permissible form of greeting. Another debate centers on the Shari’a law and its application. Debates surrounding the implementation of Shari’ah law in the multi-religious context of Yorubaland are a major point of contention (Church Times, 2025). Some scholars argue that essential Islamic personal laws (marriage, burial, inheritance) are already practiced without state interference, and the push for formal Shari’ah courts is seen as unnecessary and potentially divisive political maneuvering.

Influence of Transnational Movements, the Da'wah, and Social Media

With the emergence of various ideological movements, their teachings are usually divisive among different transnational Islamic movements, as the introduction of hitherto unknown or strange ideologies creates a “wild gulf” among followers, among whom are scholars and partisans of these doctrines (Busari, 2024). Also, the wrong use of the doctrine of “da’wah” by some clerics to promote their individual organizational interests while stampeding others adds to the conflict. In the propagation of the da'wah, social media platforms are being misused to disseminate wrong information and other instruments of hate speech among the Muslim ummah, thereby increasing mistrust and hostility (Jabata, 2025). In other words, the advent of social media as an ultimate

vessel of information is being exploited by some Muslim preachers in the Yoruba community to fuel disunity by spreading misinformation and missives against rival groups.

Traditionalism and Revivalism

The ages of conflicts between these movements and the traditional Muslims, and among the various movements, remain contestable. Currently, the enduring contempt between revivalist groups (Salafiyyah and Muslim Brotherhood) and traditional Muslims, known for syncretism (Jalabi), boils down to the consistent observation of the Quran and the Sunnah without blemish or *bid'a* (heretical innovation), since the latter is reputed for mixing local Yoruba traditions with Islamic practices (Yusuf & Yusuf, 2025; Salami, 2010). The concept and practice of Jalabi alone have always been a significant point of contention, as Salafi scholars oppose (commercialized) Jalabi (with amulets, divination, and healing) (Oladosu, 2021). Sometimes, practitioners of the Jalabi are confused with Sufi practitioners, and they're both considered polytheist scholars (Alfa Elebo) (Muhammad, 2024).

Intra-sect Conflicts

The reality of conflicts among Yoruba Muslims is not restricted to the traditionalists and the revivalists, as it pervades among the various revivalist sub-groups that operate. For instance, the different Sufi orders, such as the Qadiriyyah and the Tijaniyyah, the anti-Sufi groups, including the Salafiyyah and the Izālah, and various other Salafi scholars do have serious inter-sect conflicts (Aguwa, 1997; Akeem, 2015; Comstock, 1979). The Salafiyyahs often label the Sufis as polytheists (*kufaar*) for “misguided” or *bid'a* practices, resulting in division of mosques and other causes of friction. Although Yorubaland is rife with different transnational movements, the Salafiyyah and the Muslim Brotherhood are the most controversial in contemporary times. The emergence of these Islamic movements in the Southwest gave rise to the religious polemics, which the traditional Muslims vehemently oppose (Greer, 2024).

Politicization of Religious Leadership

In Southwest Nigeria, struggles for political power and leadership have hindered the consolidation of a unified Islamic authority over the Yoruba Muslim society (Salami, 2010; Raifu, 2016). In other words, all efforts to unify the Muslims under an Emirate or a league of Imams and Alphas (Rābiṭah) have been difficult through the fragmented political outlook in the region, from which the Muslims are not detached. While some Muslims push for the implementation of Shariah Law and a judicial system, others do not consider that necessary in the religious sense because they presume that it could be a gainful political tool to marginalize established indigenous authorities (Church Times, 2025). Therefore, political objectives have been considered a precursor for disunity, because some politicians use religious machinations to ascend to power and sideline or relegate indigenous leaders.

Lack of Unified Structure

Due to the lack of structure for the standard of coordination across Yorubaland, disagreements and conflicts are not effectively managed, leading to the external perceptions of the southwest Islamic environment by the Northerners, as unyielding to a unified authority, especially when figures similar to the Sultan of Sokoto or the Emir of Kano cannot have a final say in their affairs due to regional distance or ethnic differences (Aguwa, 1997; Folorunsho, 2021; Jah, 2022). The heightened ethnic tensions alone have led to internal withdrawals from the efforts towards promoting unity. Groups representing Islam in the southwest have steered away from capitalizing on the mercy contained in the natural flexibility of Islamic jurisprudence. Instead, their rigid positioning has fragmented the leadership framework of the Islamic community in Yorubaland, where they should have applied the likes of *fiqh al-ikhtilāf* for tolerance (the jurisprudence of differences), which accommodates mutual respect among pluralistic yet valid interpretations on secondary issues (Jah, 2022).

Summary

This chapter centers on the findings collated from the foregoing evaluation of the qualitative analysis deployed on the various sociopolitical, religious, and economic standpoints by which disunity among Muslims in Yorubaland is considered, such as the influence of transnational organizations known for representing Islamic principles in different ways depending on their leadership and group objectives. The mutual contest on the place of law, politics, and economics in religion implies that the evolution of these entities seems to dilute the original foundation of Islam due to their syncretic, inventive, and interest-driven approaches in southwestern Nigeria.

While the purpose of this legal approach is to lay a constitutional foundation for the peaceful coexistence of the Islamic, common, and traditional laws, other factors, such as ethnoreligious distinction (e.g. Yoruba Muslims and Fulani Muslims), sects (Tijaniyyah, Quadriyyah, Maliki, etc.), class division, and misaligned group interests, cut deep into the fabric of the Muslim-Muslim relationships in the southwest, across different constituencies the region whose grassroots identification and attribution are stronger than the expectations of a unified religious interest, even within the larger national consciousness. Therefore, disunity is a gradual consequence that arises from a multitude of relational inconsistencies, goal misalignment, divided interests, economic inequality, and differing political preferences. This phenomenon in the Yoruba Islamic community prevents the promotion of a united front and the achievement of collective progress among Yoruba Muslims, despite shared fundamental beliefs like the oneness of Allah and the five pillars of Islam. This chapter will elaborate more on the major findings underlying the case of disunity among Muslims in Yorubaland.

Social Identity Theory provides a robust framework for understanding the disunity among Yoruba Muslims. It highlights how group affiliations, historical trajectories, leadership struggles, and media dynamics contribute to the construction and reinforcement of sectarian identities. Addressing this disunity requires deliberate efforts to foster inclusive narratives, promote inter-sectarian dialogue, and prioritize shared values over divisive doctrines. Institutional Theory reveals how the organizational architecture of Yoruba Muslim communities contributes to disunity. From colonial legacies and organizational silos to leadership crises and state interference, institutional

dynamics play a central role in shaping the fragmented landscape of Islam in southwest Nigeria. Addressing these challenges requires institutional reform, transparent governance, and the creation of inclusive platforms for dialogue and cooperation. Resource Mobilization Theory offers a powerful lens for understanding the disunity among Yoruba Muslims. It shifts the focus from purely doctrinal disagreements to the strategic competition for resources—financial, human, technological, and political. This competition, while driving innovation and growth in some cases, also fosters fragmentation, rivalry, and mistrust. Addressing these challenges requires a rethinking of resource governance within the Muslim community, greater transparency in leadership, and the creation of collaborative platforms that prioritize collective well-being over organizational self-interest.

It is noteworthy that the diverse inclinations of transnational Islamic movements now shape modern Islamic thoughts, and this influence differs from one place to another among these diverse movements. The disunity among Yoruba Muslims and Muslims in Yorubaland emerges mainly from internal differences across doctrines and jurisprudences. This includes the politicization of religious discourse and leadership, the influence of transnational Islamic movements, and pre-Islamic (traditional) cultural practices. Other causes are inter-group conflicts involving the likes of the Sunni and Shia Muslims; the Salafis and Sufis, the political motivations behind these conflicts, and the social media misuse for propagating hate speech.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

The conceptual complexity of the qualitative research method facilitates the gradual deconstruction of the discourse on disunity among Muslims in Yorubaland by drawing on the available literature surrounding the history and evolution of Islam in the southwest region. The analytical tools, such as conceptual, case-study, and comparative analyses, further elaborate the dynamics of the relationship between the religion and the indigenes of Yorubaland, who also have to contend with the existing traditions through culture, politics, and religion, and the periods of colonial rule. These notions shall reflect the importance of understanding the historical, socio-cultural, and economic influences on the Yoruba Muslims in their propagation of Islam (Mohajan, 2018).

This research process exposes the double-edged sword of a pluralistic society where the people have to adjust their preexisting way of life to new cultural, linguistic, and religious frameworks, to prove their adaptability and accommodating traits. On one hand, the Yoruba community experienced the conflict of interest in sustaining their tradition while embracing another way of showing a sense of community and spiritual duty in the face of political support among divided interests (Akeem, 2015). On the other hand, they struggle internally due to the emerging transnational Islamic organizations and their “modern” way of representing Islam, in which case each sect has to flex its ideological muscle towards dominating others in a complex society (Adediran, 1998).

Practicing the religion in Nigeria only further emphasizes the inevitability of these frictions across various Islamic sects, while boiling down to other multiple factors, from the economic to the sociocultural, in which case ethnicity and factors of production further amplify the differences among Nigerian Muslims from the North to the Southwest (Folorunsho, 2021). Worse still, in the Southwest, the case study upon which this research is based, the interface of grassroots cultural pluralities does so little to mitigate the enduring negative impact of cultural and sectoral

differences among the natives and between the natives and settlers, particularly the Yorubas and the Hausa-Fulanis, whose sense of superiority reflects in their prayer observation and general coexistence within the religious context (Folorunsho, 2021; Greer, 2024). In addition, these areas of disparity are amplified by the pluralistic legal system in Nigeria, which borrows largely from the British Civil Law and the Islamic Shariah Law, to address civil and criminal cases to citizens who tend to share a multireligious identity along a lineage of intertribal family relationships through marriage (Church Times, 2025).

The prominence of Islam among the Yorubas was partly strengthened by the Brazilian slaves, who possessed the influence and resources to establish a religious community bound by a shared history across Lagos and Osun state, with architectural fascination adorning the community mosques and their ties with certain families (Castillo & Mann, 2024; Busari, 2024). This century-long heritage further proves the long history of the religion, while the colonial government and the traditional rulers also facilitated the appointment of leadership roles among members of the White Cap chieftaincy of various indigenous families (Raifu, 2016). As the religion flourished over the years, the growth of Islamic sects both improved the religious evolution while at the same time creating fragments of interpretation of Islam with different dress codes, modes of prayer, and congregation, and ideological idiosyncrasies (Odeniyi, 2023). The modernity that attended the practices of these sects conflicted with the conservatism of fundamental Islam, hence discouraging unity between the old generation and the new (Aguwa, 1997; Busari, 2024). Also, the cultural integration of different tribes under the umbrella of Islam in Yorubaland has led to conflict in the observation of ceremonies and festivals, as the conflict is more pronounced in the sense of importance that each tribe holds over the other.

Furthermore, on the political front, Islam in the modern-day Yorubaland is wrought with conflict over access to limited resources and leadership roles in both local and state government levels (Adeniran, 2015; Aguwa, 1997). This is prolonged by the favors that some Islamic organizations gain at the expense of others, leaving behind the traces of dissatisfaction over the affairs of the general Muslim populace. The religious syncretism prevalent in Yorubaland does more damage than good to the original framework of Islam, in which case many Islamic fundamentalists express

disapproval of the practice of “Jalabi”, as the simplification of the process of Islamic rites through the integration of traditional spiritualism is considered corruptive to the pristine nature of the religion. In other words, the introduction of several “alien” practices to the recommendations of the Quran and the Sunnah is considered “bidi’ah”, which some sects embrace with indifference to the reactions of the fundamental Muslims (African Studies Centre, Leiden, 2022; Akeem, 2015). All these factors collectively form the basis of the conflict among Yoruba Muslims, which, by extension, involves non-Yoruba Muslims dwelling in Yorubaland (Folorunsho, 2021).

On a positive note, however, Islam in Yorubaland has been enjoying the region's historical and cultural accommodation, which undermines the degree of conflict the people may experience among themselves. Nonetheless, efforts must be made to sustain the structure and cherished heritage of Islam in Yorubaland, to prevent further erosion by future generations. Regardless, various political, administrative, and institutional efforts have been moving towards safeguarding the shared interests of Muslims across various cultures, grassroots, and economic statuses in Yorubaland, even though more is yet expected of the people and the government by bridging the knowledge, interpretation, and institutional gaps among various Islamic sects, and between fundamental Muslims and nominal Muslims who seem far apart in every sense of identity (Comstock, 1979).

The use of qualitative research methods through various sources of literature and the application of concepts helps to dissect the various factors through which the disunity in Yorubaland can be observed (Jamieson, Govaart, & Pownall, 2023). While the historical analysis traces the aforementioned development to the glory days of the Oyo empire, the case-study analysis identified the significant areas in which the issues are discussed. The comparative analysis sheds more light on the external environments where similar issues are experienced to varying degrees. The conceptual analysis proves the existence of disunity with the social identity theory, which justifies the attribution of the conflict to the various sects and tribes; the institutional theory, which establishes the ethnic differences among the various Muslims in Yorubaland; and the resource control theory, which corroborates the political motivations behind the disunity among Yoruba Muslims (Tisdell, Merriam, & Stuckey-Peyrot, 2025).

5.2 Recommendations

The restoration of Islamic unity among Muslims in Yorubaland requires a multidimensional approach across the political, cultural, and institutional frontiers to address the policy, administrative, and ethnic frameworks towards guiding the relationships and correcting the conflicts. This leads to the provision of a structured set of recommendations as follows:

5.2.1 Policy-Level Recommendations

A Policy Framework for National and Regional Islamic Unity

The local, state, and federal governments should collaborate with Muslim organizations to develop a policy framework promoting unity in Islam, which should also prioritize cultural inclusion, collective action, and conflict prevention in Yorubaland. This framework aims to reduce factionalism caused by theological disputes among transnational movements and individual ethnicities, and promote ethical engagement and inclusive governance policies to ensure the representation of Muslims in decision-making processes (Imam, 2020).

Religious Practice Regulation by Preventing Polarization

Statutory guidelines for Islamic practice in Yorubaland should be established to balance worship liberty with public order and reduce the potential for social crises arising from sectarian conflicts (Salami, 2010; Nolte, Ancarno, & Jones, 2018).

Promote Religious Tolerance by Enacting Favorable Public Policies

Religious tolerance should be incentivized and integrated into the frameworks of the public service and the curricula of state education in the southwest, to reinforce the historical peaceful inter-faith coexistence between Islam and other religions and cultures in Yorubaland (Muslim Voice, 2024; Nolte, Ancarno, & Jones, 2018).

5.2.2 Administrative Recommendations

Encourage Inter-Faith Dialogue

Islamic leaders at different levels should embrace interfaith dialogue and inter-sect collaboration between Muslim organizations (Sulaiman, 2018) and with other faith groups and government agencies, and also establish joint mosque committees with representatives from different Muslim groups, to promote peaceful coexistence, cooperation, and understanding (Akinade, 2018; Gbadamosi, 2015). To specifically address the challenges of disunity, education, welfare, and healthcare should be the core objectives of community development initiatives (Adeyemi, 2019).

Establish Muslim Unity Councils

To address disputes and create consensus, formal Muslim unity councils at the various government levels should be established to involve scholars, clerics, youth leaders, and women representatives, with clear objectives and mandates. This can encourage transparency, accountability, and discourage unilateral decisions and division that conflict causes (Guardian Nigeria, 2025).

Ensure Organizational Coordination Among Bodies

This implies the activities of joint-mosque committees, the Muslim Ummah of South West Nigeria (MUSWEN), and other leagues of Imams and Alfas, towards strategic partnerships with administrative support from public service institutions. The representatives of these associations can effectively collaborate instead of competing (Muslim News Nigeria, 2024; Gbadamosi, 2015).

Administer Standard Religious Education

State administrations across the southwest should collaborate to standardize the consistency of the Islamic academic curricula by monitoring Islamic educational boards. By so doing, Arabic schools, madrasahs, and Quranic institutions will be encouraged to reduce doctrinal misinterpretations and differences (Guardian Nigeria, 2025).

5.2.3 Political Recommendations

Encourage Collective Political Awareness and Shield Muslim Unity from Political Manipulation

Muslim communities should be mobilized and involved in the country's democratic processes, as their active and coherent participation in the state formation will help recognize their rights and inclusion and protect them from political exploitation for electoral or partisan purposes (African Studies Centre, Leiden, 2022). This will also require these communities to shun alignment with political factions, but develop codes of conduct for political stakeholders to prevent manipulation of Islamic identities (Muslim Voice, 2024).

Embrace Representative Inclusiveness

The Muslims' efforts in the southwest towards representation in the state and federal decision-making processes should be supported with policies that represent the community's needs and shun internal division (Global Saddaqah, 2024). In other words, the representation of Muslims in decision-making processes should be encouraged to promote inclusive governance (Imam, 2020). Support for these efforts should promote unity through inclusive Islamic education and collaboration between Muslim organizations (Adebayo, 2016; Sulaiman, 2018).

Allocate Resources Equitably

To reduce the chances of disunity in Yorubaland and facilitate conflict resolution, resources should be fairly distributed among Muslim-majority areas (Olanrewaju, 2020; Adegbite, 2017).

5.2.4 Institutional Recommendations

Push for Islamic Scholarship Reform

This can be done through the reformation of Islamic education that targets objectives such as inclusiveness and unity. Also, Islamic scholarly institutions should promote disagreement ethics in case of such contingency, and discourage rhetoric responsible for social rifts (Adebayo, 2016).

Create and Leverage Dialogue and Reconciliation Platforms

Inter-sectarian dialogues among Muslims should be institutionally mandated and supervised by qualified professionals and respected scholars, to encourage ethical disagreement and steps towards conflict resolution when certain differences arise (African Studies Centre, Leiden, 2022).

Engage Women and Youth with Forums

To bridge gender representation and generational gaps, structured youth and women forums within Muslim institutions should be encouraged to promote peer dialogue, inclusive leadership training, and community projects (Greer, 2024).

5.2.5 Ethno-Cultural Considerations

Promote Shared Cultural-Religious Narratives Around the Yoruba Heritage of Coexistence

Reassure Muslims in Yorubaland of the religious accommodative qualities of the historic Yoruba heritage. Aspects of the Yoruba history, such as Yoruba Islamic scholarly heritage, inclusive mosques, and socio-economic contributions, should be leveraged to emphasize the ethos of cultural and religious pluralism, integration, and dynamism (Akeem, 2015; Busari, 2024). This will help reaffirm the “Omoluabi” values that transcend sectarian identities and remind Muslims of the importance of cultural diversity in Islamic unity (Guardian Nigeria, 2025).

Build Inter-Ethnic Religious Solidarity

A shared environment for Muslim and Christian festivals, interfaith peace initiatives, and community service should be encouraged to peacefully resolve disputes between Muslims and other Yoruba ethnic communities, strengthen solidarity, and counter divisive narratives (Olayinka & Kuponu, 2021). This approach is a potentially effective mechanism of inter-faith and intra-faith conflict resolution (Adegbite, 2017).

Cultural Exchange Programs and Unity Initiatives

Inter-ethnic cultural exchange should be fostered to enhance understanding between tribes existing in the southwest (Fadipe, 2019). Youths should also be engaged in unity initiatives to prepare them for future leadership responsibilities (Ojo, 2020).

To efficiently implement these recommendations, Islamic communities, organizations, leaders, government agencies, and other stakeholders should collaborate to cushion the effect of historical grievances, foster dialogue, promote economic opportunities, and ensure equal representation in governance, hence, contribute to an enduring unity.

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APPENDIX

A: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT AND DATA PRESENTATION

A1. Introduction

This appendix presents the qualitative instruments and supporting materials used to explore the causes, impacts, perceptions, and solutions to disunity among Yoruba Muslims. It includes the research questions, interview guide, thematic framework, and synthesized participant responses.

A2. Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, using a phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of Yoruba Muslims regarding disunity within their community. This approach enabled an in-depth understanding of participants' views, beliefs, and interpretations.

A3. Data Collection Method

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing flexibility for participants to express their views while ensuring alignment with the research questions. Interviews focused on historical, religious, social, and political dimensions of disunity.

A4. Participants

Participants consisted of Muftis, Islamic scholars (Imams, Alfas), Muslim community leaders, Teachers in madrasas, and general Muslim community members. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their knowledge and experience of Islamic practices within Yorubaland.

A5. Interview Guide (Research Questions)

1. What are the historical and contemporary factors causing disunity and discord amongst Yoruba Muslims?
2. What are the impacts of disunity on Islamic religion, culture, practices, social cohesion, and political influence?
3. How do Yoruba Muslims feel and react to the disunity within their community?
4. What do the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic scholars say about disunity and its consequences? What roles should Muslim leaders play?
5. What solutions can be proposed to promote unity among Yoruba Muslims?

A6. Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving the transcription of interviews, the familiarization with data, the coding of responses, the development of themes, and the Interpretation and synthesis.

A7. Thematic Presentation of Findings

Theme 1: Historical and Structural Causes of Disunity

Participants identified both historical and contemporary factors contributing to disunity, including:

- The legacy of colonial influence, which disrupted Islamic institutional development
- Lack of a centralized Islamic authority
- Absence of uniform systems in mosques, madrasas, zakat institutions, and leadership structures
- Selection of religious leaders based on social or family considerations rather than Shari'ah

Additionally, participants noted that Islam spread through **early traders and scholars**, but later ideological differences contributed to fragmentation.

Theme 2: Differences in Knowledge and Scholarly Influence

Participants highlighted disparities in Islamic knowledge as a key factor:

- Differences between locally trained scholars and those educated abroad
- Tensions arising from the criticism of traditional scholars by foreign-trained scholars
- Lack of standardized curricula in Islamic education

These differences have led to ideological divisions and scholarly rivalry.

Theme 3: Weak Leadership and Institutional Fragmentation

Participants emphasized:

- Lack of unified leadership among Yoruba Muslims
- Existence of multiple Islamic organizations with separate agendas
- Absence of a governing body overseeing religious affairs

This fragmentation has weakened collective decision-making and unity.

Theme 4: Manifestations of Disunity

Disunity is reflected in group affiliations and sectarianism, favoritism toward certain scholars and mosques, labeling of other scholars as innovators, cooperation among Islamic groups, and conflicts, including legal disputes and interpersonal tensions. Participants also noted the interaction between different Jama'ah groups and the discrediting of other Islamic schools and sects.

Theme 5: Impacts of Disunity

Participants identified several consequences, such as religious impacts through the misunderstanding of Islam, the loss of spiritual blessings (barakah), and the weakening of da 'wah activities. The social impacts include the breakdown of unity within families and communities, the confusion among the youth population of Muslims, and the decline in mutual support. The political impacts include the loss of political influence and representation, and the external manipulation of divided Muslim communities. The developmental impacts include the hindrance to community

development and institutional growth. The perceptual impacts are the negative image of Islam among non-Muslims, such as terrorism.

Theme 6: Emotional and Behavioral Reactions

Participants reported that Muslims:

- Feel concerned and dissatisfied with disunity
- React by aligning with specific groups
- Develop hostility toward other sects
- Withdraw support from broader community initiatives

Theme 7: Islamic Perspective on Unity and Disunity

Participants emphasized that Islamic teachings strongly condemn disunity:

- Unity is obligatory, as commanded in the Qur'an
- Disunity leads to failure, weakness, and loss of strength
- Muslims are instructed to resolve conflicts peacefully
- Brotherhood and mutual respect are central principles

Prophetic traditions highlight:

- The danger of internal conflict
- The role of disunity as a tool of Shaytan
- The importance of maintaining unity after the Prophet

Classical scholars (e.g., Imam Malik) emphasized returning to foundational principles as a means of reform.

Theme 8: Contributing Social Factors

Additional contributing factors include:

- Sectarianism and fanaticism
- Tribal and cultural biases
- Poverty and economic struggles
- Lack of awareness about the importance of unity

Theme 9: Proposed Solutions

Participants suggested the following solutions:

1. Establishment of a centralized Islamic authority
2. Standardization of Islamic education and curricula
3. Promotion of Qur'an and Sunnah-based unity
4. Strengthening leadership and accountability
5. Encouraging dialogue among scholars and groups
6. Public enlightenment on the dangers of disunity
7. Development of unified institutions (mosques, schools, zakat bodies)
8. Emphasis on Islamic brotherhood and mutual respect

A8. Summary of Key Findings

The findings reveal that disunity among Yoruba Muslims is a multifaceted issue rooted in historical, educational, institutional, and social factors. Its impacts are far-reaching, affecting religious practice, social cohesion, political influence, and community development. However, Islamic teachings and participant suggestions provide a clear framework for fostering unity.

A9. Ethical Considerations

- Participants' identities were kept confidential
- Informed consent was obtained

- Data were used strictly for academic purposes

A10. Conclusion

This appendix provides detailed qualitative evidence supporting the study's findings. It highlights the complexity of disunity among Yoruba Muslims while offering insights into pathways for achieving sustainable unity based on Islamic principles and effective leadership.