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## ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF ISLAMIC THERAPY AND SORCEROUS HERBAL PRACTICES IN ILORIN EMIRATE, NIGERIA<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

**Methodology:** This study employs a combination of ethnographic and descriptive qualitative methods. Field interviews were conducted with herbal medicine vendors, spiritual practitioners, and Muslim clerics in Ilorin Emirate. The study also incorporates firsthand observations and historical tracing to examine the roots and evolution of sorcerous herbal practices.

**Main Findings:** The findings reveal a widespread misuse of Islamic elements in the practice of sorcerous herbal medicine among some Ilorin clerics. These practices often include invoking demonic forces, desecrating Qur'anic verses, and using unlawful materials in rituals. While initially rooted in Islamic ethnomedical traditions, contemporary practices have diverged into syncretic forms that contradict Islamic teachings.

**Application of this Study:** The study recommends the use of Islamic therapy (*ruqyah shar'iyah*) as a valid alternative for spiritual healing. It urges religious authorities and policymakers to take active steps in regulating spiritual healing practices, banning the sale of sorcerous materials, and establishing proper *hisbah* (Islamic enforcement) agencies.

**Novelty/Originality of this Study:** This paper offers a rare ethnographic insight into the intersection of traditional sorcery and Islamic healing within a Muslim-majority context. It critically distinguishes

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between legitimate Islamic therapy and culturally inherited sorcerous practices disguised as spiritual healing.

**Significance:** The study contributes to the Islamic reform discourse by providing a theological and practical framework to address and combat the growing misuse of sorcery in Muslim communities. It highlights the dangers of syncretism, especially when practiced by clerics who wield influence over the public.

**Keywords:** Sorcery, Islamic therapy, *ruqyah*, herbal medicine, Ilorin Emirate, ethnomedicine, spiritual healing, *ḥisbah*, Qur'anic abuse, syncretism.

## INTRODUCTION

Islām shows concern for several maladies affecting humanity including their medication practices. Medication is so essential in Islām that it acquired special attention. Medication has three categories, namely, *at-tibun-nabawī* (Prophetic medicine), *at-tibush-sha'abī* (Herbal medicine) and *at-tibul-ḥadīthī* (Orthodox medicine). *Ruqyah* (exorcism) as an independent therapy and cure in Islām has emanated from Prophetic medicine. Jabran (1992) sees *ruqyah* as what is used to heal or cure the patient, like recitation of selected Qur'anic verses or seeking refuge with Allāh's Names and His Attributes.

Another source defines it as an act of blowing some verses of the Qur'ān recited as well as Allāh's Names and Attributes purposely for healing or seeking protection. It can be explicitly deduced from the foregoing that *ruqyah* (exorcism) involves the recitation of the Qur'ān, chanting some divine Names to cure a sick person or even to serve as a means of protection. According to Ibrāhīm (2011), sorcery is anything whose cause is hidden and it is performed through falsification and deception. Bali (2010) quoting from Al-Azharī sees sorcery as a method of seeking proximity to the devil for assistance. He added that sorcery involves knitting some threads and chanting incantations with the intent of bewitching a person. Before the sorcerer would gain the assistance of the devil, he would first commit an act of *shirk* (invoking others besides Allāh). The resultant effects of sorcery may lead to death, sickness, impotence, separation between spouses as well as infatuation.

Bali elucidated that the techniques usually deployed by the sorcerers to gain the devil's assistance include wearing the Qur'ān beneath the feet, writing the Qur'anic verses upside down or with menstrual blood, praying without ablution or in a state of sexual defilement, slaughtering animals for the demons. Other methods witnessed by the researchers in the Ilorin emirate, although not peculiar to the residents, include searching for pampers and animal bones disposed of in a dumping ground. Suleiman and Sule (2023) posited that, since sorcery is an adulterated form of ethno-medicine, it is often referred to as black magic. Today, the Muslim black magic practitioners in Yorùbá society are called *onijalabi* (marabouts), while the traditionalist black magicians are known as *Babalawo* (witch doctors).

Suleiman and Sule cited Isa Labara to have reported that some diabolical methods adopted by the sorcerers to woo their clients include fetching the cemetery sand, human semen and dead bodies, geomancy and necromancy. The sorcerers are usually patronised by politicians who are desperate to win political office. Some of them are implored to bury animals alive for ritual purposes or hang amulets for repelling evils. Aside from the politicians, the most vulnerable persons are the women who either desire to subdue their husbands or prevent them from taking another wife (Suleiman and Sule, 2023). The love spell usually given to such women is called *kayanmata* in the Hausa language or *adodun* in the Yorùbá language. Appositely,

sorcerers who worship money or power usually seek demonic intervention for the efficacy of their sorcery (Michael, 2022).

Today, sorcerous medication has been perceived by some Muslim scholars as a remedy for several spiritual problems in the Ilorin emirate. This sorcery involves chanting of incantation. Some Muslim clerics have mistaken sorcery for exorcism. The practice of sorcery could be majorly traced to the *Sufi* scholars and some vulnerable Muslims within the metropolis who usually visit them for spiritual healing. The sale of sorcerous materials has become a normal phenomenon in Ilorin marketplaces as no rule outlaws the business. The study holistically discusses the herbal medication which involves the use of bark, leaves and roots of specific trees for healing purposes, especially the current trends of incorporating sorcery into the practice. Therefore, the study clarifies the misconceptions about sorcery among Ilorin Muslim scholars under the guise of spiritual healing.

### **ORIGIN OF SORCERY FROM THE QUR'ANIC NARRATIVES**

Philips (2005) reported that the Jews used to ascribe the practice of sorcery to Prophet Sulaymān in their Torah, while Allāh exonerated him from their falsehood. Rather the Qur'an had clarified that the Jews had only upheld the sorcerous formulas taught to them by the devils as evident in the passage below:

*Meaning, "And they pursue the course which the demons followed during the reign of Solomon. And Solomon did not disbelieve; but it was the demons who disbelieved, teaching people falsehood and deception. And they pursue what was revealed to the two angels in Babylon, Hārūt and Mārūt. But these two taught no one until they had said: 'We are but a trial, do not therefore disbelieve.' So men learnt from them that by which they cause separation between a man and his wife, but they harmed no one thereby, except by the command of Allāh; on the contrary, these people are learning that which would harm them and do them no good..." (Q2:102).*

From the above verse, it is clear that the demons that were under the control of Prophet Sulaymān had learnt sorcery and later transmitted the art of sorcery called astrology (*tanjīm*) to others after Hārūt and Mārūt were sent as a trial to teach sorcery to the people of Babylon. The Babylonians were heedless to the angels' instruction who had dissuaded them from teaching sorcery to others. Philips added that today, the followers of some *Sufi* extremists were plagued with the weird belief that mysteriously producing money and food from nowhere is a sign of divine prodigies (*karāmāt*). This sorcerous manifestation had led several Muslims to saint worship in Sufism.

### **Forms of Sorcery in the Qur'anic Context**

Based on the division of sorcery in the Qur'ān, Al-Fawzān (2007) highlighted the two major forms of sorcery as below:

***Sīhr ḥaqīqī (Real Sorcery)***: This kind of sorcery can cause death or sickness as well as affection or hatred between spouses and friends. An example of this spell was the sorcery afflicted with the Prophet by the Jewish man called Labīd bin Al-Aṣṣam until he was cured of the spell by the revelation of *Sūratul-Falaq* and *Nās*. The Prophet was informed by Jibrīl that the spell was a knotted comb thrown into the well of Dharwān. The Prophet later sent for some companions

to break the spell and he got well. In 2006, a master's student in the Department of Religions at the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria, carried out an empirical research on *'The Use and Abuse of Sūratu Yāsīn*. The researcher brought a fowl alive to the presentation venue which he caused to die at the end of the presentation, thereby concluding that Chapter 36 of the Glorious Qur'ān can be used to cast a spell of death on someone. This is an example of real sorcery.

***Siḥr takhyīlī (Imaginary Sorcery)***: This kind of sorcery deludes the eyes like the similitude of the sorcery displayed by the sorcerers of Fir'āun in Q7:116. Allāh has established that the sorcery was delusional. Hence, Mūsa's wooden rod that transformed into a big snake was one of the *mu'jizāt* (miracles) conferred on him to prove his divine mission. The striking difference between sorcery and miracles is that the former is acquired through demonic influence, while the latter is achieved through divine influence.

A paradigm of imaginary sorcery in Yorùbáland was the case of a late Oyo-based magician in Nigeria whose stage name was Professor Peller (d.1997). Professor Peller was said to have attended the School of Magical Arts in India for 18 months. It was reported that he once laid his wife into a coffin, cut her into two and then brought her back to life. Moreover, it was narrated that whenever he stretched his white handkerchief up and down, a white dove would fly out of the handkerchief. Another jaw-breaking performance of Peller was swallowing a stone in front of his spectators and excreting it before their bare eyes. (OyoAffairs,2022). All these forms of sorcery are fictitious and not real.

### **SOME CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF SORCEROUS PRACTICES**

The researchers identified some causes of sorcerous practices as below:

**Envy**: This is to feel aggrieved towards someone for his good fortune or personal possessions. Since someone's good fortune causes his displeasure, he takes pride in another's misfortune and seeing what such a person possessed perished. One of the common attitudes of the envious people is to attack another person spiritually through the use of sorcery.

**Fear of Poverty**: Some clerics who practise sorcery could be said to have chosen the path to increase their fame and wealth. Some scholars are aware of its prohibition, but could not forsake it as a result of their fear of poverty. Likewise, those patronising them are striving hard against poverty.

**Joblessness**: Some Arabic school graduates who had no hope of furthering their studies or being gainfully employed indulge in sorcery. Some of them are employed but not handsomely remunerated. Thus, they usually find other way-outs by turning to soothsayers and spiritual healers, thereby indulging in sorcerous practices.

**Malice**: Some people at times will just decide to harm others due to hatred or grudges. So, by the way of finding how to harm them, leads to the practice of sorcery.

**Unforeseen Calamities**: Due to fear of calamities that may befall some people, such as the fear of road accidents, war survival and sudden death, they usually run to the sorcerers for evil repellents, which often amount to the practice of sorcery.

Furthermore, there is no doubt that sorcery has some negative effects, not only on the lives of Muslims but on the larger society. It affects people's social, political, economic, marital, mental and religious lives. Some of the resultant effects of sorcery are as below:

**Separation between Spouses:** Ibn Kathīr (2003) claimed that the sorcery learned from Hārūt and Mārūt was used to indulge in evil acts that included separating spouses, no matter how close they are to each other. This is one of the effects of sorcery in Q2:102.

**Influencing Evil Actions:** Sayyid Qutb (1998) perceived sorcery as a means to influence other people's minds, making them act according to one's command. In corroboration to this, a report reveals that there is a charm which a wife can use for her husband to make him submit to her desires. Yūnus Shādhilī (2024) claimed that if a woman finds the leaf called *amūnimuyè* and *àwerèpépé* in Yorùbá and grinds them together, and then she mixes her menstrual blood with the powder and then uses it to cook a meal for her husband; the husband will become submissive to her. It is explicit, therefore, that the use of menstrual blood would attract the demon to cast the spell of submission over the husband.

**Reduction of Faith:** Muḥammad (2007) confirmed that faith can never stay firm with an individual until he leaves all sorcerous acts. It channels a man to acts of disbelief before he can attain his cravings as the sorcerer agrees with the devil to commit some frivolous acts in return for his obedience in fulfilling his request.

**Spread of Hatred and Enmity:** For instance, the early Jews who learned sorcery were not only causing division between the husband and wife, but they used it to cause enmity among people and separate them by severing family ties (Haleemah, 2021).

**Adversity:** Although sorcery may first appear to be beneficial to the sorcerer, it would later make him reprehensible for his action. Q20:69 affirms that no matter what benefits the sorcerer might have gained, it would not avail him in the afterlife (Abdul-Aziz, 1992).

### **EMERGENCE OF ISLĀM IN ILORIN**

Olatundun (2018) reported that Ilorin is an ancient settlement that hosts people of different ethnic backgrounds and religions. The consolidation of Islām in the city of Ilorin can be traced to 1816 with the arrival of an itinerant Islamic scholar called *Shāykh ʿĀlim* who came to settle down in Ilorin, as he found the land salubrious to live after a protracted years of persecution. *Shāykh ʿĀlim* had an encounter with Ogboni cult members in Oyo state, which has been the reason for his journey to Ilorin. He did not only arrive at the land but also with some Muslims who were persecuted together with him. A contrast report was given by Ridwan (2022) who traced the city's consolidation to 1808. *Shāykh ʿĀlim*, also known as Ṣāliḥ bin Aḥmad Janta, was said to be an erudite scholar and the rationale behind his epithet ʿĀlim was because he was a polymathic scholar who taught some segments of *tafsīr al-Jalālayn* to the then Ilorin Muslim scholars.

Olatundun added that, shortly after the confirmation of his scholarship, people rushed to him heterogeneously to benefit from his endowed knowledge or to seek spiritual assistance. ʿĀlim's knowledge became one of the factors that promoted scholarship in Ilorin and conversion into Islām. In other words, the then adherents of Ilorin who were majorly Yorùbá people, found Islām as a fast-growing religion that proffers solutions to human problems. The conversion of the Yorùbá people of Ilorin into Islām got Alaafin (The King of the Oyo Empire) exasperated who then sent forces against him to put an end to his missionary activities. *Shāykh ʿĀlim* sought the assistance of his friend, *Shāykh ʿUthmān dan Fodio*, who in response sent his formidable forces and they eventually defeated the warriors of Alaafin. Hence, Islām became well entrenched in the land.

Ridwan (2022) claimed that *Shāykh ʿĀlim* arrived in Ilorin from a place called Gwandu. This chronicle has it that *Shāykh ʿĀlim* has traversed through many towns and villages before Ilorin

was discovered to be a suitable place for his mission. He was reported to have first settled at a place around Kuwo and Kajola which were said to be villages in Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State. It was said that the people of Kuwo left their place of settlement as a result of an inferno that destroyed the village years back. Hence, Kuwo, where *Shāykh* ʿĀlim initially settled on his arrival in Ilorin is no longer recognised as a village. After discovering Ilorin, he brought his family to the place and did not return to Gwandu. *Shāykh* ʿĀlim's family since then rules Ilorin till date. Moreover, ʿUthmān dan Fodio worked together with *Shāykh* ʿĀlim for the promotion of Islām in Ilorin. They worked together for the common goal of spreading Islām and promoting scholarship.

Romoke held that Ilorin, before the arrival of *Shāykh* ʿĀlimi, was like a sheep without a shepherd, therefore, he had not only organised and educated the Ilorin people, but also saved Afonja, who was said to be exiled by the then *Alaafin* of Oyo. Some Islamic scholars in Ilorin were products of the *Shāykh* ʿĀlim's school which was located in his residence. *Shāykh* ʿĀlim's intelligence and peaceful nature made the then-Ilorin people appoint him as their religious leader. *Shāykh* ʿĀlim feared that the leadership role might overhaul his Islamic mission and he rejected the offer. Thus, he was asked to present one of his children who could succeed in his mission, and his first son, ʿAbdus-Salām emerged as the first Emir of Ilorin.

However, the spread and consolidation of Islām in Ilorin cannot be exclusively accorded to *Shāykh* ʿĀlim as other sources have claimed the existence of some scholars whom he met on his arrival, such as *Shāykh*s Ṭāhir ʿAbdullāhi, Muḥammad Mumbai, Shadhili and others. The work of Riḍwān, ʿAbdulGaniyy, and Ishola gives insights into this. *Shāykh* Solagberu called ʿAbdullāh Ṭāhir, and his compatriots, Muḥammad Mumbai, Shadhili, Sanusi, and Muḥammad Thāni settled at Oke-Sunnah in Ilorin. Before the arrival of *Shāykh* ʿĀlim, these scholars have been teaching, preaching and converting non-Muslims to Islām. However, with the arrival of *Shāykh* ʿĀlim, the Arabic and Islamic teaching profession was standardised. Being the fact that *Shāykh* ʿĀlim was a Hausa man, he opened the gate for the influx of more scholars from Hausa, Borno and Nupe lands to Ilorin. Thus, Islamic scholarship could be considered a prime factor for people's migration to the city of Ilorin (Ridwan, 2022).

### **MAJOR MUSLIM FACTIONS IN ILORIN**

There are numerous Muslim factions in Ilorin, but the prominent ones among them are the *Sufis* and the *Salafis*. These two factions have the major Muslim adherents within the metropolis. They are as below:

**Sufis:** They are referred to as *ahlul-Ṭarīqah*. They maintain the ideology of a mystical approach to Islām. To account for the exact beginning of Sufi practices in the Ilorin Emirate is difficult. However, it was said that Islām and Sufism arrived together in Ilorin as those scholars of Oke Sunnah, who were claimed to have facilitated the spread of Islām in the area were *Tijāniyyah* adherents. Thus, other *Sufi* orders like the *Qādiriyyah*, *Ikhlāṣiyyah* and *Rifāʿiyyah* later sprang up in Ilorin Emirate. Today, *Qādiriyyah* and *Tijāniyyah* can be considered as the most popular *Sufi* orders in Ilorin (Jawondo, 2013). The aforementioned *Sufi* groups have different methods of spiritual healing and invocations. However, the *Sufi* method of healing nowadays involves the use of sorcerous materials which calls for Islamic reforms.

**Sunnis:** They are Muslims who adhere strictly to the laws of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. They are another prominent existing Muslim faction in Ilorin. Philip (2012) classified the Sunnis as an independent faction of Islām in North-Central Nigeria. He further asserted that Sunnis are subdivided into four groups. The groups include Izālah, *Sufis*, neither *Sufi* nor anti-Sufi and Darul-Islām.

The Philip's sub-division of the Sunnis is inaccurate. Firstly, the Sunnis and the Sufis are independent Muslim factions in terms of beliefs and practices. Some areas of differences between the Sufis and the Sunnis revolved around the issue of esoterism (*bātin*) and exoterism (*zāhir*). Unlike the Sunnis, the Sufis believe in an esoteric approach to Qur'anic interpretations. They maintained that the Qur'ān has esoteric connotations other than the apparent meanings. Conversely, the Sunnis believe that the Qur'ān addresses the masses in a clear expression, and they disregard any other interpretation aside from what the orthodox *mufassirūn* (exegetes) had interpreted. Also, the concept of *tarbiyah* (spiritual training) is another dichotomy between the Sufis and the Sunnis. According to the Sufis, a man cannot attain the peak of spirituality without undergoing *tarbiyah*. The Sunni belief is antithetical to this view. They claimed that a Muslim could attain the pinnacle of spirituality by obeying Allāh through constant supererogatory prayers and abstinence from His prohibitions.

### **The Conflict Between Muslims and *Ise* Devotees (Traditionalists) in Ilorin**

For every conflict, there is a cause. Julius Ogunro (2023) reported that the main cause for the conflict that arose between the Muslims and *Ise* religious adherents in Ilorin can be traced to three reasons. The first reason was that a priestess was dissuaded from celebrating her *Ise* festival. The priestess whose name was identified to be *Yeye Ajesikemi Olokun* broadcasted her proposed traditional festival on social media. The viral news captivated the attention of the Emir of Ilorin who delegated some individuals to ban the priestess, stressing that, Islām is the only identity of Ilorin and pagan festival might drag the city's identity through the mud. Thus, she was warned to desist from the proposed festival.

The International Council of *Ifa* Religion's announcement could be considered as the second reason that led to the conflict. The council members announced that they were going to host the *Ise* Youth Festival which was said to be the first of its kind in the history of Ilorin. This announcement was denounced by both the scholars and elites in the Ilorin emirate.

The third reason was the case of the *Ise* devotees whose rituals were disrupted by some Ilorin Muslims. It was reported that while the former was performing their traditional rituals at a river called Odo Iyemoja in the Okolowo area of Ilorin, some clerics suddenly terminated their rituals and instructed them to exit the river.

Pertinently, the *Ise* devotees have been claiming that some Muslims practise traditional religion under the guise of Islām. An *Ise* man called Tani Olohun in a viral video gave an instance of Suleiman Faruq Onikijipa (now the Mufti of Ilorin), who had once preached in the public that it is permitted to combine traditional medicine with Islamic therapy to boost its efficacy. From his words, he encouraged his audience to find sixteen eyes of a cow, sixteen *obi gbanja* (kola nuts with two lobes), sixteen alligator pepper, sixteen *orogbo* (bitter cola), and *afoma lapalapa* (*cheirotendron platyphyllum*) to burn it together and start licking it while reciting Q19:57 which reads: *warafa'nāhu makānan 'aliyyā*. This was claimed to be an effective charm for getting rich. Based on this statement, Tani Olohun argued that Muslims still have to indulge in *ise* practices to solve some problems. Although the Mufti retracted his statement in 1446 Ramaḍān *tafsīr*, the effect lingers in the minds of the Muslim youths. Justifiably, the scholars fighting the *ise* people seemingly practise some elements of their rituals under the guise of Islām. Some of these Ilorin scholars claimed to have confronted the *ise* people and fought them with charms to justify that they were more powerful than them (Tani Olohun, 2023). Ali-Agan argued that the use of charm takes one out of the fold of Islām as evident below:

*"For those urging Muslims to bring out charms, Islām is against the use of charms. Since charm itself belongs to the ise worshippers, any cleric who supports that*

*charms should be used to fight isese worshippers is not a Muslim but an idolater”*  
(Fattah, 2023).

It is clear from the above that, the use of charm for fighting against the traditionalists is tantamount to *shirk* in Islām. By and large, even though some contemporary Ilorin scholars had neglected the preaching method of their ancestors, there still exist some pious scholars. The Ilorin Muslim scholars' efforts could be extolled through the aforementioned *Isese* priestess as she was later announced to have embraced Islām in 2023. However, the practice of Islām in Ilorin is not completely free from indigenous beliefs and practices.

### **EVOLUTION OF SORCEROUS HERBAL MEDICATIONS IN ILORIN**

Spiritual healing had begun since the advent of Islām in Ilorin. The early scholars in Ilorin healed some Muslims by preparing drinkable substances for them or guiding them to some prayer rituals. However, these practices were not sorcerous at the initial stage. Today, it is quite difficult to distinguish between *isese* devotees and Muslim marabouts due to their symbiotic relationship. Although some spiritual healings could be traced to the early scholars in the emirate, the modern healing practice has metamorphosed into sorcery.

Abdullatīf (2024) asserted that some of these early scholars were once idolaters before they embraced Islām. Some of them possessed charms as at the time they were idolaters. After they embraced Islām, they adopted only the charms that were not sorcerous. However, they kept the record of all these charms in their custody until their successors later inherited it from them without discrimination. He added that some of them sought the *asrār* (mystical litanies) alongside herbal medications from the traditionalists. Even though they were not using some of them, they kept everything in their possession. Shādhilī (2024) traced the evolution of sorcerous herbal medications among contemporary scholars to their ancestral heritage. This is because the level of their faith was low and they did not consider charms as a potential nullifier of Islām.

At this stage, many scholars took less interest in theological issues. Even though, some of them were later abreast of the sorcerous status of their practices. However, the students who had learned under them continued to use what they gathered from these scholars during the consolidating years of Islām in Ilorin. They further referred to some legendary reports of these scholars to validate their practices. Shādhilī continued that another set of scholars were those who knew the practices were idolatrous but used them for *da'wah* (inviting people into Islām). An example of this was the case of a cleric who was challenged by the traditionalists to turn paper into money. The cleric danced to their tune as he also knew the trick. He thereafter preached to them and they embraced Islām.

Later, Ilorin, despite being a city known for Islamic identity, has a display of sorcerous items in her marketplaces. The major markets where these materials are sold in Ilorin include Oja Tuntun (New Market) and Oja Oba (Emir's Market). Some other places where these sorcerous herbal materials are sold include Oke Kura, Ipatá Olójè, Oja Agò etc. Although some of the items are used for herbal concoctions by the Muslim clerics in Ilorin, the contemporary experience of their usage within the metropolis has transcended beyond herbal medicine. Today, some Muslim spiritual healers and *isese* herbalists usually consult Oja Tuntun and Oja Oba marketplaces to buy carcasses and specific leaves to perform sorcery for their clients. It is a common practice for the sellers of the items to display some materials like the skins, bones and preserved flesh of dogs, cats, tigers, lions, monkeys, chimpanzees, rats, snakes, wild birds etc., for sale to their customers, who are mostly Ilorin Muslims.



Pertinently, the marabouts are mainly three categories and they held different perspectives concerning the method of making herbal medications, even though soothsaying remains the conflux of their sorcery. The first group maintained that the use of herbal medication should be restricted to lawful substances. This opinion was revealed to the researcher by a marabout in the Oja Oba area of Ilorin (Zubāyr, 2024). The second group of marabouts held that every material is lawful for medication even if such material is prohibited for consumption. This can be established from their usage of prohibited animals, such as dogs, pigs and cats. Based on the researchers' interaction with some marabouts, they vehemently argued that Allāh has created every creation for the benefit of mankind.

The third group is those who indulge in syncretic medications. To this group, the practice of taking ritual pot to T-junction does not contradict the Islamic tenets. An Ilorin scholar called Al-Kishkī posited that taking a sacrifice pot to T-junction is permissible (Alabi, 2023). Some of them went on professing the use of human dead bodies. Likewise, the popular *shāykh* Farūq Onikijipa (now the Grand Mufti of Ilorin) had once said, "*toba je eyan oole je eyan*" (if you do not eat human flesh, you cannot be great in life). As regards the first group that upheld using lawful materials for medications, this was in tandem with the Prophetic instruction which enjoined the Muslims to practice lawful medications. The *hadīth* reads:

*"Allāh has verily descended disease and its cure; and he makes for each disease its cure, thus, practise meditation and do not use unlawful materials"* (Suleiman, 1996).

From the above, it could be deduced that the Prophet enjoined the Muslims to treat their ailments with lawful materials. However, the materials that are brought together may not be the reason for invalidating the herbal medication, but the techniques involved in preparing the medication may be sorcerous. Although Q2:29 has clarified that Allāh has created every creature for the benefit of mankind, certain things may be prohibited based on established legal authorities. Likewise, the claim that taking ritual pot to a T-junction does not contradict the Islamic tenets is baseless as Islamic doctrines are not restricted to internal convictions. Rather, sorcerous medication could invalidate the external observance of Islām. The Prophet said:

Narrated Nuḥmān bin Bashīr that he heard the Prophet saying: "*Indeed supplication is the essence of worship*" (Ibn Hajar, 2008).

Based on the above, Ibn ʿAbbās reported from the Prophet that only Allāh deserves to be invoked for assistance (Yahya, 1999). This justifies that all forms of spiritual help could be sought from Allāh alone. Hence, the argument of Kishki does not hold water. Iya Mutiat (2024), a seller of herbal items in Oja Tuntun marketplace in Ilorin revealed that their main customers are Muslim clerics and there is no difference in what the Muslim marabouts and the *isese* devotees buy from them. The only striking difference is that the Muslim clerics invoke the Name of Allāh before using the medication, while the *Isese* devotees invoke the name of their deities like *Ogun* (the god of iron), *Sango* (the god of thunder), *Oya* (the god of the river) etc. Contrary to this view, Iya Ayinde (2024) submitted that some *Isese* devotees used to buy some materials which an upright Muslim marabout would never buy. She addressed these Muslim marabouts as *Alfa sebo se mole* (syncretic scholars). It could be surmised that, even though the latter's opinion might be true, the former's view cannot be jettisoned.

#### **PARADIGMS OF SORCEROUS MEDICATIONS IN ILORIN EMIRATE: AN ISLAMIC PANACEA**

*Ruqyah* has two connotations under Islamic medication; *ruqyatun sharʿiyyah* (Islamic exorcism) and *ruqyatun shirkīyyah* (black magic). The former deals with the method of treating

both spiritual and natural afflictions affecting man by reciting the healing verses from the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* and believing that only Allāh possesses healing powers. This Islamic exorcism could be done in mosques, clinics and homes. On the contrary, black magic involves blowing the knot by chanting incantations and acquiring demonic powers to cure or bewitch a person (Jatmiko, 2024). The sorcerous medications fall under black magic through the utilisation of demonic powers.

One of the examples of sorcerous practices inherent in traditional medication is called *firaqu* in Yorùbá (spell of separation). The doer of this spell would find a white paper and copy *Sūratu Quraysh* therein to separate between some individuals whose names are usually written in every letter *mim* contained in the chapter. The doer will thereafter spread the excretion of a lizard and a rat on the paper, wrap it with white and black thread, and then insert it inside the mouth of a cat and discard it in a septic tank (Abdullatif, 2024).

Furthermore, another traditional medication called *aworo* (spell of patronage) is meant to pull the patronage of people to a shopping mall, school, mosque, church, museum, recreation centre, tourist centre, etc. Shadhili (2024) narrated that the technique involved in the practice is for the doer to find the skin of a mongoose and the skin of a cute grass cutter; then he will burn it with an alligator pepper and keep it inside a calabash, then he would add shear butter, palm oil and palm kernel oil to the calabash before hanging it at the door entrance. In 2024, an alleged Imam of Shuaib Alaye's Central Mosque near Nana Aishat Memorial College in Ilorin metropolis was reported to have buried a pig alive in his central mosque to pull patronage for prayer observers (Adam Thani, 2025). This incident justifies the fact that some Ilorin clerics practise the spell of patronage even in their places of worship.

Loma (2024) argues that the technique of herbal medication called *arobi* (charm for repelling witchcraft) is for the doer to find the outer skin of a snake, and then grind it with a bundle of alligator pepper, and then make incisions around the neck and rub it with the grounded powder. According to him, such a person would be protected from consuming poison. Similarly, in Ilorin, the researchers had a personal experience of the sale of an ash colour iron ring used for protection and usually inscribed with a talisman and worn by some clerics and students of Arabic schools. It was claimed that the iron ring would become hot whenever a disaster was about to occur.

Moreover, the technique of traditional herbal medication called *osole* (charm for getting rich) is for the doer to get a leaf called *ègiri alubósá èlewé* in Yorùbá and carob, and then grind them together. The person will thereafter make an oracle drawing called *èji ógbè* on the grounded powder while chanting the incantation as translated below:

*“As we entered a village called ròtórótó, a bird began to shout so loudly in the presence of Òrúnmilà (a deity venerated by Yorubas). Òrúnmilà said: how do we do this? Eji Ogbe replied that if it were to be its own, it would never escape him unless it became a reality. It is Carob that orders you to bring your blessings to me. It is Egiri that orders you to be trooping to my place, day and night. It is the onion that orders you to bring all your belongings to me”* (Loma, 2024).

Aside from the above, a recent case of ritual killing took place on February 10, 2025, in Ilorin. An alleged cleric murdered and dismembered the corpse of a final-year female student of the Kwara State College of Education, following the complaint lodged to the Area C Divisional Police Station, Oja-Oba, Ilorin, by the parents of the victim called Hafsah Yetunde Lawal that their daughter was missing. The culprit initially denied the whereabouts of the murdered lady but he later confessed after a thorough investigation by the policemen in his house where they found

the dismembered dead body of the lady. The culprit and the other four accomplices were later arraigned in the court in Ilorin (Aramide, 2025).

Aptly, one of the sorcerous herbal medications that are used to win a lady's heart is called *mùhibà* or *ogun ife* (love spell). This spell is usually done to attract love between two or more people. It is performed by some individuals who want to attract people's countenance towards them. It could be used to establish love between couples and friends, masters and apprentices etc. Shadhili (2024) narrated that the doer would search for *kókó gbègi* located at a T-junction, a local sponge and a bundle of alligator pepper. Then he will burn them together and mix them with black soap. Thereafter, he would be using the black soap to bathe his head while chanting the incantation below:

*"No one will ever take over the bathroom from kókó gbègi at a T-junction, and no one will take over the bathroom from the sponge. No one should take over so-and-so, the daughter of so-and-so from me. My love should dominate her mind"* (Shadhili, 2024).

Islām as a divine way of life has a peculiar method of healing that is free from sorcerous medication and consultation. Since the septic tank is known as the demon's habitation, there exists a relationship between the spell of separation and the applied technique. The practice of writing and discarding some verses of the Qur'ān inside a septic tank amounts to the desecration of the Qur'ān. It is noteworthy that spraying of lizard excretion on the written Qur'anic verses justifies the sorcerous nature of the practice to attract the demons and expedite the result. It is clear from the foregoing that envy is a major cause for indulging in this sorcerous act. In Q4:32, Allāh enjoins man to seek His bounties as envy could lead him to disobedience and psychological discontentment.

Moreover, Q5:2 warns the Muslims against assisting one another in perpetrating sinful acts which may pave the way to other mischiefs. Hence, the rule of blocking the means to evils (*ṣaddudh-dhari'ah*) under Islamic Jurisprudence becomes necessary. Earning livelihood from the sale of carcasses and sorcerous items called *leku leja* in Yorùbá within Ilorin marketplaces is not only prohibited but amounts to spreading corruption in the land. Since the law of Q5:3 has prohibited the sale of *maytah* (dead animals), its profit becomes unlawful. It is apt to state that even though the consumption of carrion is inimical to sound health and food hygiene, its decomposed body could enhance soil fertility and crop production. However, the tradition warning against poor treatment of animals reads:

It was narrated by 'Abdullah bin 'Amr, who attributed it to the Messenger of Allah: *"There is no person who kills a sparrow or anything larger, for no just reason, but Allah will ask him about it."* It was said: *"O Messenger of Allah, what does 'just reason' mean?"* He said: *"That you slaughter it and eat it, and do not cut off its head and throw it aside"* (An-Nasai, 2007; Hadith No: 4450).

The above tradition elucidates the practical illustration of how the marabouts usually handle animals that are used for sorcerous medications. Based on personal experience, the marabouts may cut the head of a bird without slaughtering it properly and throw the remaining body away, or throw it inside a very hot saucepan or kill it with a pestle and mortar. Sometimes, they may kill the bird or animal with a very hot knife. These various methods of killing animals are usually part of the demonic preconditions for the efficacy of the sorcery which amounts to inhumane treatment of animals in Islām.

In addition, the technique adopted for attracting people's patronage is sorcerous as it involves the burning of the skins of dead animals. It could also be deduced that hanging a calabash at the entrance of one's door for pulling patronage or burying a pig inside the mosque depicts associating partners with Allāh. Therefore, a businessman who anticipates people's patronage could supplicate to Allāh in his prayer prostration. In addition, one could also find the *Zamzam* water and pray to Allāh to seek patronage as the Prophet prescribed that: *Zamzam* water works for whatever intention it is drunk for (Al-Qazwini, 2007). It should be noted that Q71:10-12 alluded to the chanting of abundant *istighfār* (saying the word *astaghfirullāh*) for an increase in crop production, wealth and children.

Furthermore, the herbal medication for holding an individual's throat from swallowing poisonous food is sorcerous as the demon attracted by the medication holds the person's throat to stop the passage of the food to the stomach. The Prophet has prescribed the consumption of seven *ʿajwah* dates as a daily diet and a natural antidote to the consumption of poisonous food and repulsion of spiritual attack (Muslim, 2007). Another Prophetic method of expelling sorcerous and poisonous stings from the bloodstream is through the practice of cupping therapy as evident below:

Narrated Ibn ʿAbbas that the Prophet said, "*Healing is in three things: cupping, a gulp of honey or cauterization, (branding with fire) but I forbid my followers to use cauterization* (Al-Bukhari, 1997; Hadith No: 5681).

Based on the above, the traditionists clarified that the Prophet was cupped on his head when he was afflicted with a spell of imagination by the Jewish sorcerer. Cupping is one of the best curative therapies to expel toxic and physical contaminants from the bloodstream as a result of witchcraft. Additionally, the best period for doing cupping therapy is between the seventeenth and the twenty-first days of the lunar month except if there is a pressing need for cupping. Al-Imām Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal used to apply cupping therapy in any part of the lunar month when the need arose. Besides, it is highly recommended to do cupping on an empty stomach to expedite the result (Al-Jauziyyah, 2010). Moreover, cupping therapists need to make slight incisions on the body surface afflicted with sorcery to facilitate the painless removal of the poisonous blood as well as sterilising the cupping apparatus to safeguard his clients from contagious skin infections (Kompier, 2025).

Similarly, the modern method of expediting the cure of spiritual and demonic attacks is by administering *ruqyah* injections. Marlow quoting from Didan, a *ruqyah* specialist, argued that the verses of exorcism and Prophetic invocations may be recited to inject the acute patient with a syringe. This *ruqyah* method was inspired by the Prophetic tradition that: *Satan flows through the son of Adam like blood* (Ibn Majjah, 2007; Hadith No: 1779). It was added that the use of *ruqyah* injections is effective in killing the *jinn* (demon) immediately as observed by Didan after applying the treatment to a psychiatric patient from Iraq. *Ruqyah* injections could be used by medical doctors who are not professional exorcists (Marlow, 2022). Since the composition of the injections was not mentioned, one could submit that *Zamzam* water could be used for the purpose based on its spiritual significance in the aforementioned tradition. However, this method of *ruqyah* injections will not avail the *jinn* the opportunity of embracing Islām if it were to be a non-Muslim.

Regarding the spell of getting rich (*osole*) and the love spell (*muhiba*), it is explicit that they share similarities in common which include invoking specific deities other than Allāh, such as *Òrúnmilà*, which is usually venerated by the past and contemporary Yorùbá traditionalists. Surprisingly, some Muslim clerics do call upon *Òrúnmilà* while chanting incantations before consuming some herbal concoctions. It is clear that the Prophet has not condemned all forms

of incantation known to the pre-Islamic Arabs; rather he reformed the ones that embodied invoking other deities besides Allāh (Sulaiman, 2008).

## CONCLUSION

The study assessed the practice and evolution of sorcerous herbal medication as well as its impact on the development of the Muslim creed in Ilorin emirate, Nigeria. It was established that the practice of herbal medication in Ilorin involves seeking assistance through some peculiar techniques aimed at attracting demonic powers to enhance its efficacy. The research stressed the adoption of Islamic therapy which involves *ruqyah* (Islamic exorcism) as well as Prophetic invocations towards reforming the extant practice. Since the clerics had been deeply engrossed in justifying sorcerous medications under the guise of spiritual healing, the paper sieved the wheat from the chaff by explaining the process involved in the practice. Therefore, the rise of sorcerous herbal medication in the Ilorin emirate was traced back to the early Muslim scholars whose primary objective was to propagate Islām through convictions, but less concerned about the theological implications.

Furthermore, Ilorin, despite being a cosmopolitan of homogenous ethnic groups, has the unifying entity of the Sufis and Salafis who remained the two major Muslim factions in the emirate. The presence of Islām in Ilorin has made the metropolis a conflux of cultural diversity and trading activities. *Shāykh ʿĀlim* is extolled for the city's Islamic identity alongside the scholars who had contributed to the consolidation of Islām before his arrival. Despite the pronounced Islamic identity of the Ilorin emirate, the research observed that some Muslim clerics still indulge in syncretism akin to the practices of the traditionalists. However, the Muslim domination in the Ilorin emirate had subdued the traditionalists in several clashes encountered with the Muslims in recent times.

The study emphasised the evolution and reality of sorcery in the Qur'ān at the time of Prophet Sulāymān, even though he was exonerated from the practice of sorcery. Furthermore, it is established that sorcerous ethno-medical practices evolved in Ilorin from the early scholars who were idolaters before they embraced Islām. Likewise, most students taught in the Islamic schools by the then scholars later inherited the herbal medications from their ancestors indiscriminately. The practice therefore sprang up aftermath as the Muslim clerics in Ilorin now patronise Oja Oba, Oja Tuntun and other marketplaces within the Ilorin emirate for the purchase of carcasses and sorcerous herbal materials. Hence, the paper concluded that the Muslim youths practising sorcerous medications today are victims of indoctrination through some viral misleading social media talks and public lectures of the contemporary Muslim preachers in the Ilorin emirate and beyond.

Based on the foregoing discourse, the research recommends the following:

1. Religious scholars have to intensify preaching against sorcerous herbal medications through their public religious talks and on radio stations to keep the masses abreast of the heinous crime attributed to the practice.
2. The Kwara State Government has to set up the State Council for Religious Affairs to oversee and regulate the modern preaching method within the Ilorin emirate.
3. The Arabic and Islamic learning centres need to embellish their curriculum with entrepreneurial and vocational studies to ameliorate the lives of the young Islamic school graduates in the Ilorin emirate.
4. Religious scholars need to organise educative colloquiums to enlighten the masses about the efficacy of Islamic therapy and exorcism.

5. The Kwara State Government and the Emir need to put their hands on deck to ban the sale of carcasses and sorcerous herbal items within the Ilorin emirate through the initiation of the *hisbah* agency.

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