

## **City of Religions, Regalia and Consumerism: Exploring Religious Diversity in the Neo-Liberal City of Isale-Eko, Lagos Island**

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### ***Abstract***

*Social theorists have noted how the recent rise in importance of economics as a determining social field, namely consumerism and neoliberalism, have coincided with the renewal of formerly repressed or delegitimized “traditional” religious forms. Such a claim could be made for Sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria in particular. This paper examines the validity of such a claim and shows how these dynamics are occurring empirically, through complex processes of recomposition, revival, re-interpretation, syncretism, bricolage, et cetera. The paper specifically focuses on the interface between religions in Isale-Eko, Lagos, Nigeria. Isale-Eko is an urban area of Lagos Island in Lagos State, Nigeria. It is a commercial area. In spite of the strong presence of commercialization and the influence of modernization in the area, religion is still accorded prominent attention by the indigenes of Isale-Eko. For example, the Eyo, an African religion fiesta, attracts the attention of both local and foreign tourists. Most of these tourists are Christians and Muslims. The African indigenous faith was the first religion to be established in Isale-Eko, while Christianity and Islam came much later. The influence of the two foreign religions led to a serious decline of traditional cults in the area. However, there is a revival of the beliefs and practices of the autochthonous religion. The state sponsored Eyo festival and the Isele Day attest to this fact. As a result of syncretic activities among Christian and Islamic adherents who patronize traditional priests known as babalawos, the dividing line between traditional and foreign beliefs and practices is becoming difficult to draw. Scholarly publications on religious diversity in Lagos Island have consistently opened academic vacuums yet to be explored. It is in response to the yearnings created by these vacuums that this paper is visualized. Using sociological and historical approaches, this paper submits that there is continuous dialogue between African indigenous religion and foreign religions in Isale-Eko, Lagos Island. This dialogue has given rise to peculiar syncretic beliefs and practices in contemporary Lagos Island.*

**Keywords:** *Consumerism, Isale-Eko, Regalia, Religion, Neoliberal*

## **Introduction**

*Isale-Eko* is in Lagos Island. It is located in the commercial area of Lagos. It hosts the palace of the paramount traditional ruler of Lagos State. This traditional king is known as *Oba* in local Yoruba language. The current *Oba* of Lagos is Rilwan Babatunde Akiolu. Among the traditional festivals in *Isale-Eko*, Lagos Island is the *Isese* cultural fiesta. *Isese* in Yoruba means traditional day. Twentieth of August every year is set aside for the celebration of this festival. On this day, indigenes troop out to the streets in festive mood to celebrate the festival. Usually, *Lagosians* adorned in assorted costumes on this day. This involves the wearing of traditional attire by indigenes and procession to a place called *Ojuolomo* to pray to the Almighty God and the ancestors (Parrinder, 1961) “to make Lagos a peaceful place for everybody.”

Another traditional festival in *Isale-Eko*, Lagos, Nigeria is the *Eyo*. The *Eyo* is a Yoruba traditional festival unique to Lagos. It is a festival of African Indigenous Religion (AIR). However, in modern times, it is presented by the government and people of Lagos State as a social gathering and tourist event. *Eyo* is traditionally performed at *Isale-Eko* on Lagos Island. The *Eyo* festival is otherwise known as the *Adamu Orisha* play. On *Eyo* Day, the main highway in the heart of Lagos is closed to traffic, allowing for procession from Idumota to the *Iga Idunganran* palace, the official residence of the *Oba* of Lagos. The *Eyo* is a cultural heritage (Lucas, 1970) of the indigenes of *Isale-Eko* and it is the most cherished and symbolic cultural fiesta in the whole of Lagos State. Thus, it could be inferred that African Indigenous Religion (AIR), the main custodian of traditional festivals in Africa is still much alive in this area. In spite of the influence of Christianity, civilization and modernization in the area, the *Eyo* festival is still accorded prominent attention by the people of *Isale-Eko*. *Isale-Eko* is the link-shore between Lagos and Badagry. Badagry is the place where Christian missionaries landed in 1842 (Eyobokan, 2012). Thus, it is expected that Christianity would have some influence on the people of the area as well. The two biggest Christian denominations in Nigeria have their Cathedrals very close to *Isale-Eko*. Kings Anglican Church, a popular Church is located at 69, Enu-Owa Street, *Isale-Eko*, Lagos Island.

Traditional African beliefs have been passed down from one generation to another orally and can be found through arts and culture, beliefs and customs, rituals and festivals, names of people

and places, myths and proverbs, songs and dances in *Isale-Eko*. Adherence to the autochthonous religion in the area is herculean to evaluate due to syncretism with Christianity and Islam. The continuous negotiation (Kalu, 2010) between African Christianity and indigenous faith has given rise to conspicuous syncretic beliefs and practices in contemporary *Isale-Eko*. This syncretism may be responsible for the recipience of alien religious symbolic contents and the recurrent negotiation of foreign symbolic material routinely. The privilege to negotiate emblematic contents and the ability to arrive at a tolerable mix seem to be artistically and congenially conditioned during *Eyo* festival. The origin of this syncretism could be traced to the missionary and colonial history of Lagos.

### **Traditional *Eyo* Festival in *Isale-Eko***

*Eyo* festival is a tradition unique to *Isale-Eko* in Lagos Island (Aromashodu, 2017). However, based on historical records, the *Eyo* festival is not original to *Isale-Eko*, but was brought there from a town called Ibe fun in Ogun State, Nigeria. Sources claim that the cultural display also known as *Adamu Orisa* was brought to *Isale-Eko* from Ibe fun where according to Yoruba folklore (Lucas, 1948), the then *Oba* of Lagos, *Oba Akinsemoyin*, went to appease the *Eyo* deity so that his childless sibling, *Erelu Kuti* could bear a child. Eventually, the *Erelu* had two children whose line of descent, till date, determines who ascends to the throne of the *Oba* of Lagos.

Another version has it that the main deity behind the festival known as *Adamu Orisha* came from Ibe fun and that the *Eyo* masquerade came as a result of the need to preserve and protect the deity (Edward, 1905) from some hooligans who would want to steal it or destroy it completely. According to those who hold this view, the iconic staff of the masquerade known as *Opambata*, was designed as part of the costume for the main purpose of keeping undesirable elements at bay. According to historians, the history of *Eyo* festival dates back to 1750 C.E. (Okojie, 2017). *Eyo* festival is an aspect of African Indigenous Religion practiced by Yoruba traditionalists in *Isale-Eko*, Lagos Island once in a year or a couple of years to honour a deceased person of iconic status. The deceased must have contributed greatly to the progress and well-being of the people of the area. *Eyo* is also celebrated as final burial rites of a prominent chief. The coronation of a new *Oba* could also call for the celebration of the festival.

The word *Eyo* means the costumed dancers. These are the masquerades that come out during the festival. *Eyo* is mainly characterized by the presence of masquerades dressed in all-white regalia from the head to the toe. There is a lacy net which covers their faces to allow them see clearly what is happening and where they are going. The white regalia are a symbol of peace and cosmology of African Indigenous Religion (AIR), showing that the masquerade is not human but divine. It represents the spirit of the diseased soul being commemorated as coming back to earth.

### **Consumerism and *Eyo* Traditional Festival**

The following is a popular saying among Nigerians: “Nigeria has the population, it has the market.” Nigeria has the second largest oil and gas reserves in Africa (Asu, 2018). It is Africa’s largest mobile phone market with more than 162 million phone subscribers (Jumia Mobile Report, 2018). It is the largest economy in Africa (Vanguard, 2016) and Lagos is its commercial hub. Lagos is Africa’s most populous metropolitan city with an estimated population of twenty-one (21) million people (Ambode, 2016). It boasts the biggest economy of any city in Africa. Lagos state is a socio-cultural melting pot. It is the most economically important state in Nigeria and by extension, West Africa. It generates 25% of Nigeria’s gross domestic product (World Population Review, 2017). It is a place which attracts both Nigerians and foreigners. The name “Lagos,” means “lakes” in Portuguese. Lagos State got its name from a Portuguese explorer called Ruy de Sequeira who visited the place in 1472 (Anon, 2016). Lagos is a port city and *Isale-Eko* is on Lagos Island. The commercial, financial and business centre of Lagos and indeed Nigeria is located in the Business District of Lagos Island. Most of the country’s biggest banks and important financial institutions are situated on the Island. Therefore, *Isale-Eko* is a strategic location economically, socially and culturally.

With a population of over twenty-million inhabitants and the prevalence of business enabling environment, Lagos is one of the best places to locate a business venture in Nigeria and one of the best business location points in Africa (Bumdel, 2015). Food and Catering service is one of the thriving businesses in Lagos (Bumdel, 2015). The busy schedule of most workers, coupled with traffic issues has made food and catering business very profitable in Lagos. With the influx of tourists, visitors and workers to Lagos, car hire business is becoming more lucrative. Cleaning

services venture is another profitable business that people do in Lagos. Laundry services, car wash, home cleaning and office cleaning fall under this category.

It appears the commercial impact of *Eyo* festival is one of the factors that led to the gradual revival of the autochthonous religion of the aborigines of *Isale-Eko*. The fiesta brings money into the coffers of government and pockets of individuals, hence the support it receives from government and citizens (Omosogbon, 2010). This “support” inadvertently leads to the promotion of the indigenous religion, the main custodian of *Eyo* festival.

The practice of AIR is ubiquitous in Lagos Island. It is therefore natural to speculate that it may affect important economic outcomes as some scholars have noted (Eigelaar-Meets, 2010). While this possibility is appealing, evaluating its ubiquity and importance is a rather complicated task both conceptually and empirically, because AIR is a multifaceted social phenomenon whose different aspects could most likely have different effects. One fundamental aspect of AIR is that it prescribes rules of behaviour to followers. These rules of behaviour include imbibing traits like honesty, loyalty, faithfulness, integrity, thrift, openness to strangers and willingness to work hard. The above-mentioned traits no doubt influence economic outcomes in this age of globalization (Kalu, 2010). Thus, AIR influences economic outcomes in *Isale-Eko*, Lagos Island by affecting such personal traits as thrift, honesty and hardwork. In other words, AIR is a kind of informal institution that imposes behavioural patterns and constrains that structure socio-economic and political interaction (Gifford, 2009) in Lagos Island.

The notion that religion influences economies has a long history, but the specifics have been vexingly difficult to pin down. Today, as researchers start to answer the question more definitely with the tools of modern economics, what is emerging is a clearer picture of how nation’s prosperity can depend, in part, on seemingly abstract concerns like theology- and sometimes on quite nuanced points of belief or religious fervour (Fitzgerald, 2009).

Recent empirical literature that has looked into the relationship between religion and economic outcomes (Adesina, 2013) has discovered that religious beliefs can influence economic performance. Barro and McCleary (2003) are notable scholars who conducted research in this area. They found out that religion *qua* religion changes individuals economic behaviour and

wondered why economists did not consider religion as a potential factor in economic development.

The commercial impact of *Eyo* festival has attracted more and more people to AIR. As more people participate in *Eyo* masquerade festival, the autochthonous religion that was threatened as a result of the influence of both Christianity and Islam comes alive. Although those who identify as practitioners of AIR are in the minority in *Isale Eko*, many who profess faith in Christianity or Islam are involved in *Eyo* festival because of financial gains and material benefits (Schuurman, 2011). Therefore, AIR still informs the socio-economic life (Agbiji & Swart 2013) of the people of *Isale-Eko*.

There are quite a number of revival groups and movements within and outside Nigeria, whose aim is to ensure that the beliefs and practices of AIR that are threatened survive. These groups collaborate with government and multi-national companies to sponsor *Eyo* festival. The sponsorship has made the festival a major attraction to Africans in the Diaspora who travel to Lagos on pilgrimage to celebrate the traditional fiesta.

### **African Christianity in *Isale-Eko***

Christianity in Africa started in Egypt in the middle of the first century (Bantu, 2016). Although it suffered serious setback in the North of Africa as a result of Islamic expansionism in the seventh century, Christianity is embraced by the majority of people in most Central African, Southern African and Southeast African countries. Majority of the followers of African Indigenous Religion (AIR) in the country have been converted to either Christianity or Islam. However, both Christianity and Islam are considered as foreign religions by indigenes of *Isale-Eko* because, they were “imported” from the Middle-East and North Africa respectively. Christianity and Islam came into Nigeria as a result of missionary enterprises. Suffice it to say that, the type of Christianity brought to *Isale-Eko* by the European missionaries has consistently maintained a hostile attitude towards African Indigenous Religion (Kalu, 2010). This could be seen in the way and manner western Christianity dealt with cultural issues in the area. For example, the influence of western Christianity led to serious decline in polygyny and the extended family value system among the aborigines. For more than a century, the Christian Church (Agbiji, 2012) with a westernized identity, character and attitude spread to different

nooks and crannies of *Isale-Eko*. Interestingly, it appears attention is being shifted from ‘Christianizing Africa to Africanizing Christianity’ in this area. There is a strong agenda through “African Christian Theology” to Africanize Christianity and de-westernize it in the area (Nwibo, 2010). This is because; western Christianity often neglects many cultural challenges that faced Africans who relinquished the autochthonous religion of their ancestors to embrace Christianity. A good example could be seen in the failure of western Christianity to handle marital issues bordering on polygamy meticulously in Yorubaland. Consequently, many people in the area embraced Islam, a tradition that supports polygamy.

This inadvertently led to the emergence of African Indigenous Churches (AICs) as a challenge to the Eurocentric disposition of mainline churches. These indigenous churches were later perceived as authentic African expressions of Christianity by indigenes of *Isale-Eko*. The effect of this new and contextual expression of Christianity on churches in the area was the monumental degree of the exodus of members of the mainline churches to join some of the AICs. Thus, western Christianity is gradually being replaced by African Christianity in the milieu. Nwibo (2010) asserts that the shift of Christianity’s centre of gravity from Europe to Africa and Asia in modern time is a contributory factor to the de-westernization of Christianity in some parts of Africa. This assertion is highly plausible especially considering the high rate of proliferation of indigenous churches in *Isale-Eko* in Lagos Island. In this regard, African Christianity can be described as peculiar African initiatives, appropriations and contributions to the growth of Christianity the world over. Affinity to the existing African worldviews serves as a catalyst for the growth of African Christianity in *Isale-Eko*. The practice of Christianity (Magesa, 2010) in African cultural context is a major boost in the proliferation of indigenous churches especially, by those that profess Pentecostal Christianity (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2010). The holistic view of indigenous churches like the Celestial Church of Christ, Cherubim and Seraphim Church and some white garment churches dovetail with traditional African worldview like the recognition of spiritual forces at work in the world. Gifford (2015) rightly suggests that Africa is characterized by a fascinated or bewitched spiritual imagination and that African Christianity advances the enraptured philosophy of the autochthonous religions. According to him, this worldview is concerned with elucidating, foretelling or prophesying and controlling occurrences

in the world and in the individual's life. Gifford's position is relevant to the present discussion because "in all things, Africans are religious."

Fuller (1994) observes the need for African Christians to understand the environment in which they operate and minister. She observes further that, almost all Africans are affected in one way or the other by the powers and ideas of African Indigenous Religion. A good example is the fact that, African traditional worldview of metaphysical causation looms large in the practice of healing and deliverance among indigenous churches in *Isale-Eko*. A major interface between African Indigenous Religion and indigenous Christian organizations in *Isale-Eko* is the practice of exorcism. The autochthonous religion (Chitando, 2013) in this area is expected to deal with the effects of evil caused by demonic spirits and witchcraft. The indigenes believe that evil powers represented by principalities and powers, demons, and "generational curses" in the contexts of their milieu, result in all manners of set-back in life. These set-backs include sickness, barrenness, failure and all sorts of misfortunes and corruption (Kwashi, 2008). Indigenous churches equally provide the ritual contexts for prayer and exorcism to set the captives free and deliver the afflicted. Consequently, these churches (Tracey, 2012) draw attention to the fact that the Gospel of Christ is about restoration, which includes spiritual (Koenig, 2009) as well as physical abundance (Nieman, 2010). This is synonymous with some of the functions AIR performs in *Isale-Eko*.

Anderson (2011) contends that the rapid growth of Pentecostal forms of Christianity in Africa in recent years can be partly attributed to the prevalent practice of exorcism or 'deliverance' that characterizes it. He considers the phenomenon from the perspective of the African popular religious spirit world, where spirits and 'demons' abound. He remarks that Pentecostal Christianity with its offer of 'deliverance' from evil powers fulfills a felt need and therefore produces a 'product' that is attractive in African's religious market, resulting in multiple conversions (Tsele, 2001). Suffice it to say that there are different forms of Pentecostal churches in *Isale-Eko* whose activities dovetail into Anderson's succinct description of African Pentecostalism.

### **Dialogue between Christianity and African Traditional Belief System in *Isale-Eko***

It is quite obvious that there was a serious decline of the African traditional cults in *Isale-Eko*, Lagos Island in the face of Christianity. The two biggest denominations in Nigeria, namely: the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) and the Roman Catholic Church both have big Cathedrals near *Isale-Eko*. The impact of colonial rule and missionary activities especially by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) accelerated the process of the decline of traditional cults in the area (Idikwu, 2017). The majority of men and women in *Isale-Eko* are now members of Christian or Islamic groups. However, at the level of the individual, traditional beliefs and practices are more tenacious (Whaling, 1984). Most indigenes of *Isale-Eko* feel that there is nothing wrong with combining traditional rites at home with Church attendance. The dividing line between traditional and Christian beliefs and practices in some instances is often difficult to draw. Some aspects of Christianity in *Isale-Eko* have been modified, while some Christian groups now share organizational similarities with old traditional cults such as Ogboni fraternity and Oro cult. In some cases, Yoruba traditional rites of passage have been adapted to fit the new beliefs. Thus, there are some similarities in the ways some Christian groups and traditional belief systems in *Isale-Eko* view the supernatural (Filipino, 1996). First, words are believed to have inherent efficacy of their own. Thus, the recitation of passages from the Book of Psalms as a magical formula is rife. Some prophets prepare charms for both members and non-members of their church using written verses from the Scriptures. The extensive use of holy water for rituals is quite reminiscent of traditional practices and some Christian denominations in *Isale-Eko* are well-known to have emphasized ritual rather than a developed theology. A good example is the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC). CCC is an African indigenous church founded by Samuel Oshoffa in 1947 in Porto-Novo, Benin (Ayegboyin & Ishola 1997). The church now has many branches in Nigeria. CCC is an indigenous church that uses two types of water for its ritual practices namely: holy water and green water. The two types of water play important role in the liturgical rites of the church. Holy water is blessed and then used for therapeutic and purification purposes. Green water is used in rare circumstances as purgative medication.

One of the features of African Indigenous Religion is its tolerance of religious pluralism (Hick, 1985). This feature is very much observable in *Isale-Eko*. Although African Indigenous Religion was on ground in *Isale-Eko* before the advent of Christianity, membership of Christian denominations has been dealt with, with some level of tolerance. The rapid spread of Christianity in the area means that members of the same household often belong to different religious traditions. However, the older people usually keep the traditional cults alive (Johnson, 1985). While indigenes of *Isale-Eko* are being exposed to modern education and civilization, traditional thought is still the source of the basic world-view of the people. The revival of African Indigenous Religion in *Isale-Eko* presents an unavoidable challenge to African Christianity. AIR serves as an indispensable tool for enculturation that reinforces African identity. AIR is considered as the “stepping stones” to Christianity and Islam and it is currently well-appreciated as an authentic experience of the Divine. Some Christians in *Isale-Eko* are deeply involved in Church activities and at the same time, participate actively in African Indigenous Religion. The Christian Church (Ferguson, 1968) on the whole, disapproves of this development. The development simply shows that some individuals in *Isale-Eko* enact two different religions in their daily lives (Anderson, 1960).

Some of the characteristics of African Indigenous Religion include belief in God, humanity (the anthropocentric aspect of the religion), sacrifices, afterlife and ancestors. Some of these characteristics equally feature prominently in African Christianity (Bryant, 1985). Thus, there is a modern encounter (Hayward, 1979) between African Christianity and African Indigenous Religion in *Isale-Eko*. This encounter is shaped by modern ideologies about tolerance, social justice, equality and mutual respect. In *Isale-Eko*, some Christians, particularly members of the white garment denominations (the Aladura churches), in practice, mix Christianity with some elements of African traditional religious beliefs and practices. Some of the links with traditional beliefs and practices are being retained by some indigenes of the area who claim to be believers in Christianity.

Although there are some similarities between African Christianity and the autochthonous religion of the indigenes of *Isale-Eko* in Lagos Island, there are many differences as well. The adherents of autochthonous religion in the area believe that the Supreme Being is very distant from man, whereas in Christianity, God has been close to humanity through the ages and reaches

down in love to draw humanity towards Him. In African autochthonous religion, man could be the initiator of a covenant relationship with the Supreme Deity, whereas in Christianity, God is the covenant maker and He bestows the power to adherents to keep the terms of the relationship. The difference between African Indigenous Religion and Christianity could also be seen in the belief by Africans that the spirits of the dead can be ‘born’ back into the realm of the living. On the other hand, Christianity teaches that every human being has one life to live on earth and that judgment follows immediately after death. Furthermore, African Indigenous Religion does not seem to be interested in proselytization. Its worldviews are quite specific to each ethnic group on the African continent. It appears none of the various ethnic groups in Africa is motivated to teach another ethnic group its form of religion with a view to converting them. On the other hand, the evangelistic mandate of Christianity encompasses all ethnic groups not only in Africa, but the entire planet. This is a sharp difference between African Indigenous Religion and Christianity. This sharp difference is noticed in *Isale-Eko*, Lagos Island. All the major festivals of the traditional religion of the indigenes of *Isale-Eko* are not meant for proselytization, but for preservation. In other words, the festivals are not celebrated for the purpose of evangelization, but for conservation of customs and traditions. They are solely meant to preserve the tradition from going into extinction. The above illustrations show that African Indigenous Religion in the area would always be at the receiving end.

Another difference between Christianity and the traditional belief system of the indigenes of *Isale-Eko*, Lagos Island is the way both religious traditions view the issue of sin. Sin is defined in African autochthonous religion to cover mostly transgression of morals (Kunhiyop, 2008) or community norms. Also, in African religion, particularly the Yoruba version of it, there is difference in the severity or degree of sins. A sin committed against someone of the same ethnic group is a more serious sin than the one committed against someone from another ethnic group. On the other hand, in Christianity all sins “are equal before God.” In African Christianity, sin is defined to mean any form of disobedience and rebellion against God (Adigwe & Grau 2007).

## **Conclusion**

There is a growing negotiation between African Indigenous Religion and Christianity in *Isale-Eko*, Lagos Island. This is evident in the inter-religious dialogue since the arrival of Christianity and Islam in the area. When siblings of the same family professed two different religions, they are always forced to interact. For instance, when there is a religious festival either amongst Christians, Muslims or adherents of AIR in *Isale-Eko*, people celebrate together irrespective of their religious affiliation. A good example is the situation that occurs virtually every year, whereby Muslims and traditionalists join Christians to celebrate Christmas. It is a common practice for practitioners of AIR, and Islam to join their Christian brothers in different socio-cultural aspects of Christmas. In some cases, Muslims and traditionalists in the spirit of the festivity, join Christians in churches for series of events to celebrate the yuletide season (Swart, 2006). In the same vein, Christians also felicitate with the Muslim Ummah during *Eid-el-Kabir* celebrations.

Another area where AIR encounters both Islam and Christianity is marriage. In contrast to many other parts of the Nigerian society, participatory research shows that inter-religious marriage – between Christians, Muslims and traditionalists is relatively common in *Isale-Eko*. For example, a former governor of Lagos State, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a Muslim, married a Christian wife. Thus, one of the ways AIR and the mission religions (Islam and Christianity) interface is through inter-religious marriage. This includes people who were married to someone who had been of a different religious tradition prior to their spouse changed religion. Although inter-religious marriage is relatively common in *Isale-Eko*, participatory research shows that not everyone agrees with it. Be that as it may, it can be argued that there are positive forms of Muslim/Christian/traditionalists' interaction that go beyond tolerance in *Isale-Eko*, of which inter-religious marriage is one. Inter-religious marriages are acceptable in *Isale-Eko* by some Christians, Muslims and adherents of AIR because, they are considered better than remaining unmarried. These marriages confirm the productivity of Muslim/Christian/traditionalists collaboration in *Isale-Eko*, particularly, where such unions produce children.

Generally, *Lagosians* perceive Muslim/Christian/traditionalists co-existence as positive development. For many traditionalists whose religion is constantly threatened by Islam and Christianity, the engagement or better still, encounter or ‘negotiation’ with ‘other’ religion is fundamental to success because, it expands their personal and spiritual networks and repertoires. Furthermore, many *Lagosians* equally consider the fact that, in contrast to other areas of Nigeria, *Isale-Eko* has not experienced large-scale religious violence, as a proof of their values. Therefore, religious difference can contribute positively to people of diverse faiths and society as a whole.

Although there was a decline of African traditional cults in *Isale-Eko* in the face of Christianity and the growing influence of Islam, the *Eyo* Festival seems to be reviving the cultural heritage of the indigenes of this area. Ordinarily, one would not have expected such type of festival in an urban area like Lagos Island, the heartbeat of the commercial nerve centre of Nigeria. Although the impact of colonial rule (the colonial masters were Christians) and missionary activities by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) accelerated the rapid process of the decline of African Indigenous Religion in *Isale-Eko*, individuals still hold tenaciously to traditional beliefs and practices. Some indigenes see nothing wrong with combining traditional rites with Christianity or Islam. Thus, it is not possible to fully understand contemporary *Isale-Eko* in Lagos Island without the religious dimension, especially, the reconciliation and blending of autochthonous beliefs and practices with African Christianity.

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