

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAM IN EPE, LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA, 1851-2010

Mufutau Oluwasegun Jimoh

History and International Studies Department

Federal University, Brinin-Kebbi

Kebbi State, Nigeria

oriyomijimoh4@gmail.com; +2348033390977

Abstract

The historiography of Islam in Epe, one of the coastal towns to the east of Lagos, deserves a much closer look, not only because Epe is one of the most Islamised towns on that axis, but also because the circumstances of the spread of Islam into the town was inextricably linked with events in the Lagos Kingdom, especially the dynastic struggles that engulfed the royal family from the middle of the 19th century. This study therefore traced the evolution and the growth of Islam in Epe. The study highlights the factors responsible for the growth of Islam and brings to sharp focus how trade and conflicts were responsible for the growth and development of Islam in that axis of Lagos. It highlights the nexus between politics and religion. The study relied on oral interview, primary documents sourced from the national archives in Ibadan and secondary literatures.

Keywords: Epe, Lagos, Islam, Culture, *Kayo-kayo*

Introduction

The staggering statistics on the phenomenal growth of Islam as the fastest growing monotheistic religion, especially in the so-called Third World, justifies deeper reflection. Different theories have been advanced to explain the surge of the religion from the Arabian Peninsula to other parts of the world. In explaining the growth of Islam in West Africa, a combination of factors has been explored. While economic factors have been adduced as the most fundamental factor behind the spread, others would rather see the spiritual benefits as the motivating factor¹. The earliest presence of Islam in West Africa is linked to trade and commerce with North African people, even though the West Africans had been trading with the Mediterranean world and their North Africa neighbours through the trans-Saharan trade, before the advent of Islam²¹. As the pattern of trade routes in West Africa would show, Islam only later intensified the commercial links between the two worlds. Islam spread to Northern

Nigeria from her West African neighbours by conquest and deliberate but peaceful propagation.

The growth of Islam among the Yoruba of South Western Nigeria has been studied.² Apart from the Hausa/Fulani of Northern Nigeria, Yoruba land has the largest population of Islam adherents in Nigeria. Gbadamosi's work on the spread of Islam in Yoruba towns has shown that many of the towns and cities have reputation as centres of Islamic learning.³ Although the work remains the most detailed study of Islam among the Yoruba, it has been observed that important towns in the coastal area of Yorubaland were treated as a footnote.⁴ For instance, its treatment of the spread of Islam in Lagos and its environs was casual and veiled as part of the study of Yorubaland generally⁵.

To fill the gap, an impressive attempt has been made to document the growth of Islam in metropolitan Lagos, as well as the influence of Muslims in the politics of Lagos society and its environs.³ These studies therefore do not provide a complete understanding of the intricate spread of Islam in the coastal areas of Lagos. For instance, Epe, one of the coastal towns to the east of Lagos, deserves a much closer look, not only for being one of the most Islamised towns on that axis, but also because the circumstances of the spread of Islam into the town were inextricably linked with events in Lagos Kingdom, especially the dynastic struggles that engulfed the royal family from the middle of the 19th century.

The Spread of Islam in Epe

Epe is a riverine Ijebu settlement and part of the larger Ijebu kingdom. Located in the northern shores of Lagos, Epe lies on an arm of Lagos Lagoon. The emergence of Kosoko in 1852 in Epe marked the end of an era and the beginning of a new chapter in the historical trajectory of the town. A community which had hitherto been dominated by devotees of traditional religion was now being absorbed into the new Islamic society that had gradually been taking shape in metropolitan Lagos and the Yoruba hinterland. The coming of Islam to the community changed its socio-political landscape. Hitherto, Epe was a small fishing emporium inhabited by the Ijebu, Mahin, Ijaw and other migrant farmers and fishermen.⁴ Like other Yoruba people, the Ijebu-Epe people were devotees of traditional African religious beliefs. Their religious life is aptly captured by Avoshe:

They worshiped the dust from where cometh the minerals such as iron, gold, brass, and diamond and finally the creation of first man

[sic]. They believed in a future state, hence the worship of the dead and invocation of spirits as observed, annually in the festivals of *Jigbo, Alegbagba, Okoro, Epa Kilajolu, Agbo Agira and Kalagbila*⁵

The arrival of Kosoko's followers changed the fortunes of the community; Islam was introduced into Epe in 1852. Muhammad Audu, a Hausa slave from Katsina was the first person to call to prayer in Epe.⁶ The spread of Islam among leading Kosoko's generals (first among the Eko-Epe community and later among the Ijebu) encouraged the subalterns to emulate their masters and embrace the new religion. It is quite instructive to note that the fortunes of Islam were aided in West Africa by chiefs, traders and the elite.⁷ The generosity of *Balogun Ajeniya*, one of the Kosoko chiefs, who had been converted to Islam prior to their arrival in Epe 1852,⁸ proved to be the necessary impetus needed for the development of Islam in Epe and its environs. The fear that had hitherto foreshadowed the Muslim proselytisers, was dissipated by Ajeniya who offered the Muslims a piece of land near his house to build the first mosque named *Atirin*⁹. The date of the construction of this mosque remains abstruse, but one could hazard a guess that the mosque was built around 1853.¹⁰ From this mosque, Audu started his evangelisation and was assisted by another of Kosoko's Hausa attendants, Aliru, who specialised in teaching Arabic in and around Epe

The Spread of Islam Beyond Epe Town

It is important to note that the retinue of Islamised servants and chiefs who fled with Kosoko from Lagos, especially the Hausa and Nupe, were largely responsible for the spread of Islam in Epe and its environs. Others were immigrant Muslim traders who frequented markets that were located on the fringes of the town in places such as Ejirin and Palma for their economic activities. These markets served the Yoruba from the hinterland who came to Lagos to purchase goods in bulk. Some of these Islamised immigrants later settled among Eko-Epe people, both in Epe and *Etikun* (seaside communities), such as Abomiti, Yeguda, Ide, Ise, Obada, Ilagbo, Tiye, Emina, Igbogun, Ere-ishe, Moba, Saga, Ikeran, Oriyanrin, Magbon-Folu, Magbon-Segun, Okegun, Okegun Eleran-Igbe, Lekki, Ide, Idata, and Igbo Apawa. As propagators of the religion in their new homes, some of the immigrant Muslim settlers became pioneer *alfas* (Islamic clerics) and Imams. Thus, Audu became the first Chief Imam of Epe in 1862.¹¹

Islam appears to be stronger among the rural villages of Epe than among the town folks. As Epe became a major European trading centre, especially around 1920s, many of the farmers and fishermen moved into farming and fishing camps, away from the town, in pursuit of their economic activities. They produced greater surplus for the growing local consumer market, which had greatly developed following the settlement of European trading firms. Out of 32 villages in Epe, 21, representing over 65% were exclusively fishing villages¹². These people, like other West Africans, carried their cultures and traditions with them. It was through this means that places like Obada, Igbogun and other riverine communities came into contact with the Islamic religion. The whole of Eyin-Osa was populated by Epe people who had moved into these fishing camps to satisfy the growing demand for fish. Some of these communities invited Quranic teachers from the mainland to teach their children.¹³ A classic example is the case of one Alhaji Salam, a native authority teacher who was invited by the people of Obada between 1955 and 1979 and was also invited by Iraye-Oke, Epe Muslim community between 1980 and 2010. This example illustrates the desire of the people for Islamic religion and its educational correlate. It, however, violated the practice of the Yoruba, which does not allow a non-indigene to occupy such a religious and politically powerful position.¹⁴

From Epe, Islam spread to the outlying districts in the northern section such as Iraye-Oke, Odomola, Odo-Egiri, Ibonwon and Odo-Ragunshen largely through the effort of Badiru Adebogun and Imam Awesu, the third Imam of Eko-Epe extraction¹⁵. Badiru hailed from *Onake*¹⁶ and served as apprentice to one Sule Folami of Oke-Balogun. He was a devotee of traditional religion like his contemporaries.¹⁷ His journey to Epe led to his conversion to Islam. Folami was a tailor as well as Islamic scholar who could not entertain the possibility of harbouring a non-adherent of Islam. When he returned home, he remained a Muslim despite strong opposition.¹⁸ From his base at Odo-Gbawojo, he started preaching in other towns and villages such as Ibonwon¹⁹, which was hitherto a traditionalist enclave, but came under Islam in the 1890s. The case of Ibonwon is interesting because the town was founded by the *Agemo* worshippers, a pan-Ijebu deity. The coming of the Roman Catholic Church into the community in 1903²⁰ resulted in the war known as *Ogun Padi*.

It is instructive to note that people turned to Islam rather than Christianity because Islamic influences could easily be assimilated by the

Yoruba and other local groups. The fact that Islamic beliefs and practices had, at first, been accommodated as a supplement rather than as substitute to the existing religious systems only encouraged the people to accept Islam. The West African social structures and values were preserved by Islam and presented no threat to the existing structures.

In Lagos and Epe, acceptance of Islam might have also been helped by economic considerations. For instance, in Epe, the Ijebu traders who were Muslims enjoyed more economic patronage from Kosoko followers than their Christian counterparts. Economic incentives played a very vital role in the surge of Islam from Epe to other adjoining areas. Epe was the centre of dispersal and, from there, Islam spread to the northern section of the province.²¹ The nascent Muslim community was able to sustain itself through the co-operation and assistance of Muslims in Epe. Sule Folami and *Alfa* Abu of Epe persuaded many to join the community, which continued to grow until each of the Muslim villages was able to fend for itself, endowed with a mosque and an Imam

The spread of Islam was aided by the establishment of Arabic learning centre during the reign of Efundipo (1887-1891)²² as in the *Olu*-Epe of Eko section of the town. By 1891, Bado-sale and Oke-Balogun were also the centres of Islamic education.²³ This might be connected with the fact that the Islamic scholars from Ilorin and Nupeland resided in those areas and they formed the nucleus of Islamic teachers.²⁴ By 1908, the plethora of Islamic and Arabic schools were springing up in Epe, established mostly by foreign, itinerant scholars, prominent among whom were Alantakun and Uthman. These two scholars were said to have come from Nupeland and resided among the Eko-Epe. They were often referred to as *Gambari*.²⁵ It was a period when written materials were insufficient. Pupils were made to sit on the ground and Arabic inscriptions were inscribed on the ground.²⁶ The influence of Lagos migrants in the development of Islam in Epe has never been in doubt, but the possibility of the religion being aided on the northern side of the town by the Hausa who were kolanut merchants has never been properly explored.

Prior to 1892, when the British bombarded Ijebu-Ode, the capital and the spiritual home of Ijebu people, Epe people were exclusively Muslims and traditionalists. The Church Missionary Society, however, entered the Ijebu Kingdom after the British invasion of 1892. The initial efforts of Reverend Braithwaite did not yield very encouraging results, although he succeeded in gathering a few converts. Some of the converts were Johnson Agiri, Balogun Alausa, a prominent war chief among the

Ijebu, who was later to turn to Islam.²⁷ The coming of the C.M.S. to Epe led to the opening of a mission school in 1894.²⁸ This was a direct challenge to the Muslim majority because their wards were expected to renounce Islam and embrace Christianity before they were allowed to enroll in the Christian Missionary School. The Muslim response to this initiative was to finance a Muslim school. Leading Islamic scholars and wealthy Muslim traders came together to establish the Government Muslim School in 1898, with a Sierra Leonean, Haroun Rashid as school's first headmaster.²⁹

The opening of a Muslim school in 1898 led to an influx of pupils from the riverine area into Epe. These students, after their education in Epe, which they combined with Arabic class, went back to their community to either become Imams or Arabic teachers. For instance, the first Imam of Yeguda, Ilagbo and Obada were sent from Epe during the reign of Imam Tukur in 1939.³⁰ In 1939, there were only two indigenous families who were Christians compared to 98% Muslims³¹ in Ilagbo. Obada was 90% Muslims and 10% traditionalists.³² In 1935, a European visitor to Epe captured this situation graphically:

I observed with surprise that about 75% of the inhabitants of the town are Muslims, not by name only but by being keen in their religious observance, and can read and understand very well the word of their leader as written in the holy Quran.³³

According to an Intelligence Report on Epe District dating 1960, the number of Muslims in Epe Township was 79%, while Christians was 10%, and traditionalists 9% by 1960.³⁴ In fact, most of the Christian population were Mahin immigrants, who resided along the Marina. Up to early 2000, the whole of Marina was dominated by the Cherubim and Seraphim church, which had its origin in Ugbo Bini, the capital of Mahin kingdom. In other words, those who embraced Christianity were mostly migrants who came to Epe for fishing purposes.³⁵ By 1952, the official population result gave the break down as follows:

Ethnic Group	Figure (%)	
Ikale	2,000	(9%)
Isobo	2,500	(11%)
Ilaje	600	(3%)
Ijebu	77	(0.5%)

Source: Adapted from H.I. Ajaegbu, 1967, *The Impact of Lagos on the Changing Rural Economy of the Creeks and Lagoon Areas of Epe and Ikeja Division, Western Nigeria*,

These non- indigenes were Christians and, going by this figure, they would have constituted about 23% of the population. It would not be out of place to suggest that by 1952, 75% of the indigenous elements were Muslims.

Inter Faith Relations in Epe

It is important to admit that relations between adherents of Islam and those of other religions, especially the traditional religion worshippers were not eventless. There were moments of peaceful co-existence, as well as periods of rivalry that threatened the corporate existence of the town. One of such took place in 1945 between the Eko and Ijebu communities over the sharing of gifts.³⁶ The problem started when a cow was donated to the Muslim community by Kaka, a wealthy prince merchant, for the funeral of his father. According to information obtained during the field interview, the Ijebu community that constituted the majority of the population was given a small portion of the cow, while the Eko who obviously were the minority took the lion share. This infuriated the entire Ijebu Muslim community and they decided to put a stop to what they regarded as a recurring problem. The Osugbo Society and the *Oloja* in Council donated land for their own mosque to be constructed. This led to the construction of another central mosque by the Ijebu-Epe in Ita-Opo in 1945. It is important to point out that the Osugbo cult of the Ijebu people who felt insulted by the Eko-Epe actions organised and coordinated the construction of the mosque. In fact, the mosque was erected next to the community shrine (*Oju-Alaro*).The location of this mosque suggests religious tolerance rather than that of antagonism or competition.

The most recent inter faith conflict in Epe happened between the Muslim community and the Iji-Nla secret society. While the leader of the Iji-Nla society is not known due to the nature of the organisation, the Muslims were led by Shaykh Safwan Bello Akodo. Though born in the

riverine area of Epe, Shaykh Bello influence in the propagation of Islam in Epe in the first decade of this century was unprecedented. Born on the 9th of April in 1963, Shaykh Akodo had his primary and secondary education in Epe before he was admitted to the Islamic school of Alhaji Idunnu. He was arguably the most radical Islamic preacher of the Tijaniyyah order in Epe in the 20th century. On 9th March, 2003, Shaykh Akodo was murdered by the adherents of Iji-Nla who alleged "that he has committed sacrilegious offence". The murder of Akodo by the Iji-Nla should be seen within the contest of ideological struggle, space and identity contestation. Though a predominantly Muslim community, religious space has been fiercely contested by different ideological groups in the last two decades in Nigeria. This phenomenon can be attributed to the changing demographical configuration and the effect of rapid urbanisation of Epe.

The role of non-governmental organisations in the dissemination of Islamic ideas is another interesting dimension to the history of Islam in Epe. As early as 1900, Muslims had been coming together to agitate for their rights. This can be seen as part of the nationalist ferment that was about to take a centre stage in the evolution of the political history of Nigeria.³⁷ Many organisations were formed to serve as a vehicle for Islamic propagation. While most of these organisations were based in Lagos, branches were also established in the countryside³⁸. By 1960, many Muslim organisations had spread their tentacles to Epe and its environs. They included Ansar-ud-Deen (founded 1943), the Ahmaddiyya Muslim Mission (1921), the Zumratul Islamiyyah (1945) and, more recently, the National Council for Muslim Youth Organisation (1990).³⁹ In fact, there are about twenty-two Muslim Organisations in Epe. In 1958, the United Muslims Council of Nigeria was formed in Ode Omu, Osun State. In Lagos, it was led by the late Alhaji Jubril Martins⁴⁰. In 1985, a local branch was established in Epe by Alhaji Tele Olukoya⁴¹.

The establishment of Islamic organisations in the town was to advance the course of Islam. The first of such organisations established in late 1898 the *Egbe Killa alassalatu* group was founded by women to propagate Islam through social activities. By 1921, such groups had multiplied. Ahmaddiyya Muslim Society was founded in 1921, and Ansar-ud-Deen Islam was founded in 1923 in Lagos; the Zumratul Islamiyyah was established in 1945 and The United Muslims Council came into the community in 1980. National Council for Muslims Youth Organisation was established in 1990.⁴² Most of the organizations devised various means of converting non-Muslims and of entrenching Islam within and

out-side the community. UMC members built mosques across the town as part of a grand strategy to foster the growth of Islam among the people. From 1985 to 2001, twelve mosques were built by members of this organisation, as illustrated in the table below.

UNITED MUSLIM COUNCIL MEMBER MOSQUE

NAMES*	MOSQUE NAME AND WHERE THEY ARE LOCATED
Alhaji Hassan Temitope	Temitope 1-III, Temitope Street, AriskuEpe. (Central mosque)
Alhaji Hassan Arepo	ArepoRatibi Mosque 1-11, Eyindi, Epe (Ratibi Mosque) for daily prayer
Ope-Olu Ratibi Mosque	Alhaji T.A Otuniyi, Logun Street, Epe (Ratibi)
Chief Arashi Balogun	Rahamat Mosque, Marina Epe (Central Mosque)
Chief Tele Olukoya	Tele Olukoya Mosque, Ibonwon (Ratibi)
Alhaji Surakat Apena	Baba Salam Mosque, Zumratul Islamiyyah Central Mosque, Papa Epe (Central Mosque)
Alhaji R. Ola Sadiq	Sadiq Ratibi Mosque Ibonwon.(Ratibi Mosque)
Alhaji Salawu Saka Olorunlogbon	Salawu Mosque, Poka Epe (Central Mosque)

Sources: Field work.

***These individuals were Muslim philanthropists, clerics and businessmen.**

Like the Ahmaddiyya Muslim Society and other Islamic organisations, the United Muslims Council also founded a secular secondary school in Epe Township, (UMCN Primary and Secondary school)⁴³. They also ensured that riverine communities were provided with daily food provisions during the Ramadan period.

Among the different Muslim organisations that found their ways to Epe and its environ, the Mahdi Movement, established by Muhammad Jumat Adesina in 1936 at Ijebu Ode, is worth looking at in detail. Muhammad Jumat Adesina was born May 8, 1896 at Ijebu-Ode. After his successful journey to the holy land of Makkah in 1926, he came back to his home town where he started his religious activities. By 1936, he

formed the *Mahdi* Movement. The introduction of this sect to Epe town was resisted by the people who were of the opinion that it had no basis in the Qur'ān and Hadith. The reason for this rejection is probably due to the fact that majority of Epe people were of the *Malik* School of Thought in Islam.⁴⁴ However, the movement was later established in late 1960s by *Alfa* Mojid in Epe.⁴⁵

By 1970, Epe was tagged as coastal Ilorin and *Epe o ni Qurani*(Epe the custodian of the Holy Qur'ān).⁴⁶ From Noforija to Etikun, it appears that Islam remained the main religion of these communities. For instance, in the 1970s in Epe and Etikun, visitors or strangers who were not Muslims would not be offered any assistance by the host communities.⁴⁷ Establishment of churches was confined to the shores of the lagoon among the Mahin migrants who were mainly fishermen. Put differently, Islam was seen as an element of civilisation and also represented a way of life which promised both personal dignity and economic welfare and, which to a very large extent remained closer to the traditional communal life than missionary Christianity.⁴⁸ According to Muhammad Asad:

Islam appears to me like a perfect work of architecture. All its parts are harmoniously conceived to complement and support each other, nothing lacking, with the result of an absolute balance and solid composure. Everything in the teaching and postulate of Islam is in its proper place.⁴⁹

The above statement by Asad might have helped to explain the attitude of Epe and other Yoruba people and the way they allowed Islam to permeate them. The religion appealed to the Yoruba largely due to the fact that it was not difficult for its adherents to adapt it to suit local socio- cultural realities.⁵⁰ For instance, the coming of Islam does not negate existing traditions in Yorubaland and Epe in particular. Islam accepts Africans mode of life, especially in the area of their social activities like African dress, polygamy, charm, ceremonies etc. Obviously, there is a nexus between Islam and Africa's culture and tradition. Islam is tolerant to African culture and people did not find it difficult to adapt to Islamic culture and its way of life.

Islam, Social, Economic and Political Development in Epe

The importance of Islam, as it has been discovered in metropolitan Lagos, is so all encompassing that any decision about who becomes what

in the different political offices as well as socio-cultural institution in the town is often determined by the kind of religious affiliation of the contenders.

By 1901, Muslims had emerged as the dominant political force in Epe and its environs. The creation of the native authority by the British in 1901 afforded them the opportunity to assert their authority over the new political institutions.⁵¹ The native council was dominated by members of the Muslim community.⁵² Out of the six members, five were Muslims. The creation of central native authority by Governor Macgregor did not alter the trend as the two members nominated from Epe were Muslims. By then it was perceived by the pre-dominantly Eko-Epe community as sacrilegious for a non-Muslim to head the native authority council. This might have explained the non-acceptance of Bale Ogunbona when he was the head of the native authority.⁵³ Among the Eko-Epe community, the political institution is modeled after that of Islamic society. For instance, the coronation of a new king is performed by the Chief Imam of the central mosque, rather than being crowned like a typical Yoruba Oba, the king wears a turban like that of the Imam of a Mosque. His proclamation is usually done in the mosque after Jumuh (Friday) prayer. No ritual is performed and no sacrifices are made. The line between politics and religion in the community is so thin that whoever wants to aspire for any political office must first seek the endorsement of the League of Imams and Alfas.⁵⁴

Aside from their religious obligations, the large or smaller Islamic organisations organise and participate in social activities in the community. For instance, they mobilise their members for social functions, such as naming ceremonies, funerals, marriages, and completion of studies. Islamic festivals are usually celebrated with funfair. During ^ĀId al-Mawlid, and Laylatu l-Qadr,⁵⁵ Muslims gather at different venues in the town to celebrate. One of such venues is Popo-Oba square and Balagada open space. Women and children dance round the town, thereby unconsciously creating awareness about Islam. ^ĀId al-Kabir (Ileya) festival is always celebrated with pomp and pageantry. While children move round the town, various age groups come together to celebrate in a colourful atmosphere. This usually happens on the third day of the festival.⁵⁶ The most spectacular festival celebrated in the Muslim community is the famous Kayo-Kayo festival.⁵⁷ This festival, though traced to the prophet Nūḥ by Muslims, it is not celebrated by other Islamic societies. So, why is it peculiar to Epe Muslims? Perhaps it is an attempt by the people to colour

traditional festival with religious flavour. During the festival, the Oba would lead Chiefs and Islamic scholars to the spot where king Kosoko disembarked from his canoe after he was removed from his throne by the British in 1851.⁵⁸ From that spot, the king would offer prayers for the peace and progress of the community and later proceed to pay homage to the compounds of leading members of Kosoko's followers, especially the Oshodi and Iposu families.⁵⁹ This indicates that the Kayo-Kayo festival is more of a commemoration of Eleko Kosoko's sojourn in Epe than a religious festival. However, the festival is now celebrated as part of Ileya festival by the community, rather than as a separate event. It is a one week programme, commencing with Quranic and quiz competitions among the six wards of Eko-Epe community⁶⁰. This is to enhance and deepen the understanding of the Qur'ān among the youths. The grand finale comes up on Saturday after a spectacular Friday (Jumu'ah) service where all the kings in Lagos State join their counterparts from Epe to offer prayers for the progress of the community. On that Saturday, every member of the community would converge at Popo-Oba square where they would be entertained by invited musicians.

However, the political flavour of the festival comes to the fore when politicians try to outclass themselves. It thus becomes a perfect avenue for them to publicise themselves in the community. Any notable politician who fails to appear during the celebration might lose his/her political relevance.

Conclusion

This study traced the evolution and the growth of Islam in Epe, one of the coastal town of Lagos State. The study highlights the factors responsible for the growth of Islam in Epe of Lagos, and brings to sharp focus how trade and conflicts were responsible for the growth and development of Islam. It also lays to rest the controversy that Islam was introduced to Lagos by its northern neighbours. The study also highlights the nexus between politics and religion. In Epe and Lagos, Islam was so entrenched in the politics of the area that political offices are often shared based on religious consideration. Also, the social setting of these communities is largely coloured by Islamic practices. From the foregoing, it will be accurate to note that Islam was introduced from Lagos to other parts of the coastal area.

However, Epe appeared to be the most affected. The introduction of Islam to Epe totally changed the fortune of the town to the extent that it became the centre of Islamic activities in the eastern district of Lagos. In fact, by 1890, Epe was decidedly a Muslim community. Islam had been transformed from an unknown religion into the most important and dominant political force in Epe and its environs. By this period, the British had already recognised Epe as a Mohammedan Muslim community. What started as a temporary home for Kosoko's followers, who were mostly Muslims, became a veritable ground for Islam to thrive. Epe was not only turned to coastal Ilorin it became a centre of Islamisation as other communities in the area embraced Islam. Today, Epe and its environs are still largely Muslim communities

Notes and References

- * I am grateful to Dr. Elodie Appard of Ifra-Nigeria, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan and Mr. Ojetola of Anthropology Department, University of Ibadan for their comments and constructive criticisms on earlier versions of this paper
- 1 <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/04/23/why-muslims-are-the-worlds-fastest-growing-religious-group>
 - 2 Trimingham, John Spencer, *Islam in West Africa*, (U.S.A Oxford University Press, 1970), 4-36
 - 3 Trimingham, John Spencer, *Islam in West Africa*, (U.S.A Oxford University Press, 1970), 4-36
 - 4 Gbadamosi, T.G.O. *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba, 1841-1908* (London, Longman Group Limited, 1978), Until 1976. when Gbadamosi carried out his study on the spread of Islam among the Yoruba, little was known about the growth of Islam among the Yoruba. However, apart from the fact that its scope was limited to major urban centres, the terminal date for the study also suggests that one could not rely on it solely for the study of Islam within the period covered by this work.
 - 3 Lawal Olakunle, "Islam and Colonial Rule in Lagos"
 - 4 Interview with Alhaji Shittu, Retired teacher, aged 85, at his residence, No.2 Eyindi Epe 12/9/2011
 - 5 Avoseh, T.O. *A Short History of Epe*, (A Publication of The Parochial Committee, Saint Michael's Anglican Church, 1960), 3-8. It is important to note that deities worshipped were not indigenous to Epe. They must have been introduced by their Mahin neighbours who had for centuries been frequenting Epe waters for fishing activities. Epe people are Ijebu, but located along the coast. The emergence of some deities might have been as a result of years of interaction with the Mahin and Ijaw fishermen. For instance, the institution of *Aiyelala* was introduced to them by the Mahin who are well known for their effectiveness in using this deity to unveil mysterious issues.
 - 6 Falola T. and Avoseh, T.O. "Avoseh on the History of Epe and Its Environs", *African Studies Association*, 22. (1995), 165-195.
 - 7 Margari Hill, "The Spread of Islam in West Africa: Containment, Mixing, and Reform from the Eighth to the Twentieth Century" A publication of Stanford University USA. (2009), 1-4

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- 8 Interview with Alhaji Ajeniya, the head of Ajeniya family of Epe on 12/5/2012
 - 9 Interview with Alhaji Agbara- Ojo, aged 79, at his residence, No 3 Adebowale Street, Odomola Epe on 12/5/2012
 - 10 The reason for this date is because Kosoko arrived at Epe in December 1852. It would be reasonable to assume that they could not construct the mosque immediately. A possible date for the construction is 1853.
 - 11 Interview with Hakeem Sarumi, aged 47, at his residence, Sarumi court, Sabo Epe. His house is located at Popo-Oba Street Epe, and it is clearly written in front of his house.
 - 12 Interview with Mr. Tomori, aged 76 at his residence, No. 10 Ita-Opo Epe. This figure was corroborated by this author during field survey of the area.
 - 13 Interview with Alhaji Salam, aged 80. Though he was born at Obada, he was invited to come and teach and lead Muslim congregation in various villages. For instance, in Obada between 1955-1979 and Iraye-Oke between 1980-2010.
 - 14 For more on the power of Islamic leader, see, Lawal Olakunle, "Islam and Colonial Rule in Lagos" in *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* No 12, (1995): 66-80.
 - 15 Onake is a collective name for all the towns and villages in Epe north up to Ijebu-Isiwo along Ijebu- Ode road
 - 16 Balogun, M.A, *Syncretic Beliefs and Practices among Muslims in Lagos Nigeria*; with special reference to the Yoruba speaking people of Epe. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, London, (2011), 97-101
 - 17 Balogun, M.A, *Syncretic Beliefs and Practices among Muslims in Lagos Nigeria*.
 - 18 Balogun, M.A, *Syncretic Beliefs and Practices among Muslims in Lagos Nigeria*.

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- 19 The case of Ibonwon is interesting because the town is dominated by the Agemo worshippers. Agemo is a pan-Ijebu deity. It is a deity of unity that is worshipped annually at a particular time, usually at the peak of the raining season, across all Ijebu towns. Interview with Pa. Ogungbola, aged 84, at his residence Ibonwon, 18/9/2011
 - 20 Interview with Rev. Okunubi, a retired Anglican Bishop, aged 81, at his residence, No5. Ijebu-Ode Road Odo-Siwola
 - 21 Interview with Mr. M.A Shittu, aged 87, at his residence, Oke-Oriwu, Iraye-Oke-Epe on 14/10/2011
 - 22 Interview with Alhaji Kawojue, aged 81, at his residence, Kawojue Compound, Oke-Epe, 12/10/2011
 - 23 Interview with Alhaji Kawojue, aged 81
 - 24 Interview with Alhaji Kawojue, aged 81.
 - 25 Interview with Chief Sanni, the Chief Imam of Epe, aged 78 at his residence Arisku Epe, 8/10/2011, Gambari is a pejorative appellation for the Hausa speaking people.
 - 26 Interview with Chief Agbaraojo, at his residence, Odomola Epe, 23/10/2011
 - 27 Avoshe, T.O. *A Short History of Epe*, The Parochial Committee, Saint Michael Anglican Church Epe, (1960), 4-34.
 - 28 Avoshe, T.O. *A Short History of Epe*
 - 29 Interview with Dr. Onibon, at his Residence, No.1 Onibon Street off LASU road Epe, 11/10/2011
 - 30 Interview with Chief Imam of Ilagbo, aged 65, Oke-Ebute, Ilagbo, 12/11/2011
 - 31 Interview with Pa. Kareem, aged 95 at his residence, Oke-Ebute, Ilagbo, 12/11/2011
 - 32 Interview with Alhaji Salam, 10/11/2011. He is an Islamic teacher who was born at Obada. He also served as a native authority teacher before independence and later taught in the various communities around Epe before he was appointed as Chief Imam of Iraye in 1975
 - 33 A report of a visit to Ikalé Community by E.A Kenyo in Akede Eko, 23/02/1935
 - 34 N.A.I, CSO 26/2361, Intelligence report on Epe District, colony province, 1929 by J.D Thomson

- 35 Interview with Chief Imam. Today most Epe non-Indigenes are Christians. The first Cherubim and Seraphim Church was established in March, 1930.
- 36 Interview with chief Olufowobi, the Jagun Oba of Epe, 90 year old plus and former school teacher
- 37 Lawal Olakunle, "Islam and Colonial Rule in Lagos".
- 38 Lawal Olakunle, "Islam and Colonial Rule in Lagos".
- 39 Field work by the author to Epe and its environs from August to Dec. 2011
- 40 He was a Muslim philanthropist
- 41 He was a frontline politician in Lagos State. He built the Okemagba High School for the Okemagba community near Epe in the 1965
- 42 He was a frontline politician in Lagos State.
- 43 The school has since been abandoned due to disagreement among its founders
- 44 Doi, A.R.I, 1971, "The Yoruba Mahdi", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 4. No 2 (1971), 119-136
- 45 Interview with Chief Laide Folorunsho, aged 86, Popo-Oba Street Epe.
- 46 Among the Yoruba of South Western Nigeria, Epe is popularly referred to as Epe *onikurani*. This points to the level of Islamisation of the town.
- 47 An interview with Prof. Olakunle Lawal, aged 51, History Department, University of Ibadan.
- 48 Parrinder, E.G, "Islam and West African Indigenous Religion" *Numen*, 16?, No 2. (1959), 130-141
- 49 Muhammad A, *Islam at the Crossroad*, (New Dehil, New Era Publication, 1982), 5-7
- 50 For instance, many traditional chieftaincy titles such as the Balogun Adini, and Iya Adini are Islamised indigenous Yoruba traditional titles.
- 51 Oguntomisin, G.O, *The Transformation of a Nigerian Town Epe: 1852-1942* (Ibadan, John Archers Publishers, 1999), 54-65
- 52 Oguntomisin, G.O, *The Transformation of a Nigerian Town Epe*
- 53 Oguntomisin, G.O, *The Transformation of a Nigerian Town Epe*

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- 54 Interview with Chief Olufowobi, aged 87, no 3 Kalesanmi street Epe, 12/9/2011. Chief Olufowobi agreed to talk to me despite his health condition, but throughout the interview he was mentally alert.
- 55 The Night of Majesty when Qur’ān was said to have been revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad. It is one of the odd nights of the last ten days of Ramadan. Muslims believe that on this night the blessings and mercy of Allah are abundant, sins are forgiven, supplications are accepted, and that the annual decree is revealed to the angels who also descend to earth
- 56 Interview with Mrs. Taye Oshodi, aged 58, No 1 Oshodi Court, Popo Oba Epe, 12/10/ 2011.
- 57 Interview with Mrs. Taye Oshodi. I also witnessed the celebration of this festival in 2010 and 2011. This is an annual religious and cultural festival observed by the descendants of Oba Kosoko, generally called Eko-Epe. Kayo-kayo festival is celebrated during the first month of the Islamic calendar in commemoration of "Yawm-al' Ashūra", the tenth day of Muharram in the Islamic Calendar. For more on this, see, Olusegun Adeyeri, "Socio- Economic Significance Of Cultural Festivals In Epe Division Of Lagos State: Overview"*International Journal of Research in Arts and Social Sciences*" 2012 Vol.4, 1-6
- 58 Interview with Mrs. Taye Oshodi.
- 59 Interview with Mrs. Taye Oshodi.
- 60 Interview with Mrs. Taye Oshodi