

## FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST THE GROWTH OF ISLAM IN EKITILAND, KWARA STATE

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### Abstract

*Ekitiland like other areas in Yorubaland was once without Islam. This paper examined factors militating against the growth of Islam in Ekitiland, Kwara State. In this paper, the advent of Islam was traced through the activities of Muslims from Ilorin, Nupeland and its environs. Despite that Islam is one the fastest-growing religions globally, it faces challenges in Ekitiland which are hindering the growth and expansion of the religion in the land. This study identified and examined the factors militating against the growth of Islam. These factors include low Western Education among Ekiti-Kwara Muslims, disunity, lack of Islamic knowledge, competition from other religions and finally, low representation in politics among others. This research aims to provide comprehensive understanding of the challenges and their impact on the growth of Islam. Historical, analytical and descriptive research methods were adopted in obtaining information. The finding revealed that despite that Islam has entered the land for little less than a decade, the practice of Islam in the land still in its rudimentary state as compared to other areas of Kwara State. This paper concluded by recommending that Muslims need to intensify effort and develop effective strategies to overcome these challenges such as building Islamic brotherhood, implement Qur'an passages that advocate for seeking of knowledge and building of their own schools in order to vacate or reduce the persecutions by the non-Muslims.*

**Key words:** *Ekiti-Kwara, Islam, Minority, Disunity and Non-Muslims*

### Introduction

Ekitiland comprises of comprises of two local government areas namely; Ekiti and Oke-Ero with the headquarters at Araromi-Opin and Iloffa respectively. Both are among the sixteen local government areas in Kwara state. The people of the area are called Ekiti-Kwara people and they are sub-tribe of Yoruba nation.<sup>i</sup> The people cannot be mentioned without people of Ekiti state. It is believed that the people of Ekiti-Kwara migrated from Ile-Ife the same way other *Ekitis* migrated from Ile-Ife. The land covers an area of 918 kilometres square with a population above 100,000 inhabitants. Ekiti local government extends from latitude 7° 45' North in its Northern part to latitude 7° 45' North in its Southern tip and longitude 30' South and 5° East in the astern reach. While Oke-Ero lies between latitude 8° 5' 36" in the North and longitude 5° 8' 32" in the East.<sup>ii</sup> Both local government areas share common boundaries with Ifelodun, Irepodun and Edu Local Government Areas to the North and Ekiti and Osun States to the West as well as Kogi state to the East. Also to the South, the land shares common boundaries with Ondo State.

Ekiti-Kwara people are of the same origin with people of Ekiti State. Many traditions have been ascribed to the origin of the Ekiti people. Some scholars believe that Ekiti ancestors migrated from “the Middle East to Ile-Ife, the cradle of the Yoruba race from where they spread all over the place to form one of the largest ethnic groups in Yorubaland. While some sources believe that some of the present sub-groups of Ekiti were the aborigines of Ekiti, various traditions of origin also claim that many subgroups or towns migrated to the present location from other Yoruba areas and at different times. This seems to receive popular acceptance among some scholars; more so if it is known that the “Ekiti dialect differs, in varying degrees, from one kingdom (town) to another.”<sup>iii</sup>

Ekiti-Kwara is completely homogenous society, made up of different family units within households that were also within districts, all the districts within each town is headed by an *Oba* or king whose chiefs were usually heads of these districts.

### **Factors Militating Against the Growth of Islam in Ekitiland, Kwara State**

#### **Disunity**

Islam canvasses for unity among the Muslims. But this is not always the case in any given Muslim community. Ultimately, promoting unity among Muslims requires a commitment to dialogue, tolerance, cooperation, and mutual respect that transcends narrow sectarian interests or ideologies. Islam is the religion of peace and harmony. It is the religion of tranquility and brotherhood among people. Islam teaches unity which is the most important ingredient for the survival of people on this earth. Islam has laid the great emphasis on the development of brotherhood, love, respect, and prosperity among the Muslims. Allah (SWT) says:

“The believers are nothing but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers. And fear Allah (SWT) that you may receive mercy”. *Sūratu 'l-Hujrāt* 49: 10

Unity gives power, strength, and courage in any particular community or group and it becomes so much difficult for the external sources to crush, break or harm any individual from the united community. People feel strong and secure in those societies and communities where there are less conflicts and more understanding. This leads to grow such societies faster and also helps to achieve something bigger and better in the world. Unity is one of the greatest blessings of Almighty Allah (SWT) and the major element of success in every aspect of life. Muslims should try to ignore the little differences among Muslim brothers in order to avoid the conflicts and if they face difference of opinions then they should try to negotiate the issues among each other in a very decent way. Muslims should also pray along, that may Allah (SWT) save them from such disputes to have a peaceful life.

The Messenger of Allah (SWT), Prophet Muḥammad (S.A.W.) said:

“The parable of the believers in their affection, mercy, and compassion for each other is that of a body. When any limb aches, the whole body reacts with sleeplessness and fever.”  
[Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhari 5665, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2586]

The above hadith shows us the strong relationship among the Muslim brothers. Prophet Mohammad (S. A. W.) has drawn an analogy of brotherhood with the parts of body that how Muslims should need to take care of their brothers and they must worry if one of them is in pain.

The Muslims in Ekitiland face intra-societal discrimination. For example, some of the Imam see themselves as rivals rather than as integral partners. Struggling for societal supremacy, the ensuing power struggles over who becomes the chairman of League of Imam<sup>iv</sup> and elsewhere are defeating the ideal of a unified purpose. Rather than working together as a common force against their common “enemies,” they engage in clandestine fights while posing as friendly people.

In Oke-Ero Local Government Area unlike Ekiti Local Government Area where the chairman of Imams is being rotated among themselves, one of the Imams decided not to relinquish the chairmanship position when his tenure expired. He claimed that the headquarters of the Local Government Area is situated in his town, he should be permanent chairman. He supported his claim with that of Ekiti Local Government Area where the chairmanship is not rotated. There are 10 Imams in Oke-Ero Local Government Area representing all the towns in the Local Government Area. The appointment of the chairman is according the longest serving Imam after the death of the immediate past chairman of the League. This event led to the 9 Imams to be against the Imam who refused to vacate the chairmanship position. The crises exposed the lapses among the Muslim community in Oke-Ero Local Government Area to the extent that a non-Muslim Oba has to be interfering in the affairs of Muslim community by supporting the Imam from his town who refused to relinquish the position.<sup>v</sup>

The issue become more escalated and created division among the Imam and it is one against nine. When the conflict among these Imams could not be resolved locally, it was reported to *Jama'atu-l-Nāsiri-l-Islam*, Kwara State chapter in order to settle the dispute.<sup>vi</sup> As at when this research work was going on, the issue has not been resolved. The dispute among the Imams has also extended to their followers from various towns in the Local Government Area. The Muslims now support their Imam irrespective of who is wrong or right. Then, the Muslims were united against external forces of the non-Muslims socially, politically and economically. But now, Muslims from each town are left to fight and defend themselves from the persecution of the non-Muslims individually.

The case is different in Ekiti Local Government Area as it is conflict and wars between Imam of a town in the Local Government Area and his followers. The root of the dispute was that the *Imam* was alleged of being tyrant and lack the etiquettes of delivering sermon on the pulpit every Friday by some local *Mallams*. Whenever there is conflict between the *Imam* and any of his followers, the incident will be his topic on the pulpit on Friday, to the extent of raining curse on the person that there is dispute between them. This continued until one day when the mosque has filled to its bum and the prayer was about to commence, the congregation left the mosque for and his family to perform the Friday prayer. But later, this issue was resolved partially, however, many among the congregation refused to attend Friday prayer. In retaliation, the Imam ordered that the Ekiti Muslims Assembly should not be allowed into the town for Islamic propagation.<sup>vii</sup>

The local *Mallams* in the town, because of their socio-political influence, one of them stands as Imam and whenever the Muslim community wants to interface with the government, he

represents the *Imam*. The Muslim community now recognized these local *Mallams* as the Muslim leaders and the Muslim's affairs are being administered by them. Not only the issues mentioned above that the *Imam* was accused of, he was also alleged of using Blackmagic which made people to flee from him. This issue continued for over 7 years<sup>viii</sup> and one can imagine the effect of the dispute on the growth and the development of Islam in the town. Whereas Allah (SWT) warned not to dispute, thus, lose courage and then your strength would depart; as such, be patient instead.

### Low Level of Islamic Education

It is observed that Muslims in Ekitiland do not have adequate knowledge of Islam. Thus, this is really affecting the practice of Islam among the faithful. It is so disheartening that the few Muslims in the area have inappropriate Islamic education. Islam placed more emphasis on seeking of knowledge. Islamic Education implies a thinking system, directly or indirectly, originating from the Islamic values. Muhibbuddin Abu Salih defines Islamic education as the rearing and formation of an ideal Muslim individual whose life is brought to bear on the Islamic ideal intellectually and mentally. The content and methods of his education being closely bound by the ideology of Islam. Abu Salih precisely presented Islamic Education as the rearing and preparation of the Muslim for his earthly and immortal life.<sup>ix</sup> Dr. Saied characterizes Islamic Education in a fairly means. He indicates Islamic Education as the interrelated ideas and concepts which are systematized in one intellectual scheme itself based on an Islamic ideological and moral framework. Such ideas, intellectual and moral are ideologically bound and are passed to the Muslim learners through strategic and methods of instruction which cause him in the end to behave in an Islamic way.<sup>x</sup>

Islamic education is an independent educational system which has its distinct basic aspects, objectives and methods, all inspired by the fundamental philosophic principals of Islam.<sup>xi</sup> It is a process which produces human resources following the Islamic teaching; especially spirituality and morality. It is the device for enabling an individual to attain full stature and realize his divine nature. It is an attitude and code of conduct for human life. Islamic education deals with many subjects, i.e. Islamic theology, sociology, geography, philosophy, Islamic culture, law and civilization.

Islam is the only religion which first revealed verses of the Holy Scripture, Qur'ān was with the instruction of education. Allah (SWT) says:

"Read (*Iqra*) in the name of Your Lord Who created. He created man from congealed-blood. Read and your Lord is Most Honorable, who taught (to write) with the pen, who taught man what he knew not." *Sūratu 'l- 'A'ālā*: 96:1-5

The first word *Iqra* is a command that means 'read' in Arabic, and that implies the concepts of 'learning', 'exploring' and 'seeking enlightenment'. This demonstrates that reading (knowledge) is the way to approach the Creator of all that exist. Knowledge is thus the starting point of every human activity. Allah (SWT) created man and provided him with the tools for acquiring knowledge, namely intellect hearing, sight and wisdom.

The advent of Islam in Ekitiland is dated to 1882. However, it was in 1989 that the land will first witness an Arabic and Islamic college named Anwar-ul-Islam Arabic and Islamic College. This shows that it is more than a century before the land could witness a formal Islamic

school. Though, there are some local Islamic centres across the land before the formal Islamic college. However, these centres have not really delivered Islamic education pristinely. There are only three formal Islamic institutions including the aforementioned college, Al-Athar Qur'an and Islamic Studies Centre and *Markaz Aq'Diyā'*. Many Muslims in the area are still ignorant about the nitty gritty of Islam. This ignorance perhaps is bore out of a nonchalant attitude and the preference given to secular education, which has made many Muslims prone to practise Islam as they like without recourse to the fundamental sources of Islamic guidance. Despite the great emphasis Islam places on the pursuance of education, many Muslims are still apparently ignorant of their religion, and this has caused some negative effects on the ways and manners by which some Muslims practise Islam.<sup>xii</sup>

Lack of Islamic education in the area has led to syncretism. Muslims in the land have blend Islam belief with other religious beliefs specifically, traditional religion. Because of the nature and the way Islam was introduced to Ekiti-Kwara, in terms of accommodating and accepting some African culture, some Muslims in the area find it difficult to abdicate the negative aspects of Yoruba culture which obviously contradict the spirit and fundamental principles of *Tawhīd*. Some Muslims participate in traditional festivals, use of charms and amulets, visit fortune tellers etc. Up until now, many Muslims in the area do syncretise in their religious beliefs and practices, believing that Islam does not debar them from practising them.<sup>xiii</sup>

Traditional festivals are one of the legacies of African Traditional Religion; they are celebrated purposely among others to commemorate historical, cultural and religious events that are of great significance to the community. They may be for specific divinities, spirits and heroes held in specific months or seasons; particular rituals and rites dominate the event, usually performed by the head of the community. There is always an origin or myth that associated with the festival. This demonstrates their roots in syncretism. We are concerned here with traditional festivals that have relationship with associating partners with Allah (SWT). Agricultural festival (*Odun Ijesu*) and other similar festivals that are celebrated for the purpose of historical event are not included.

These various traditional festivals aim at thanking the divinities and ancestors and soliciting for their continued blessing and protection. The festivals are usually accompanied with elaborate rituals, sacrifices and appeasements, which are referred to as *Irubo*, *Etutu* and *Ipese*. Take the issue of *Egungun* festival for instance, this festival symbolises the traditional belief in life after death. The superstitious belief associated with this festival is that those that died live elsewhere and is meant to appease the dead people. Some Yoruba Muslims and non-Muslims worship through this festival in the area, hence, it is syncretism.<sup>xiv</sup> Many of them have the same characteristics and rationale for their celebration. Participation in some of these festivals which have their root in *shirk* (associating partner with Allah (SWT) in worship) by some Yoruba Muslims is an indication of syncretism.

There was also a decline in pupils' enrolment in Arabic cum Qur'anic school, western education has taken and preoccupied the attention of the parents because of its extrinsic value, thus the percentage of Muslim children and youth attending Islamic informal schools is now compared to conventional schools in the area. The researcher found that Ekiti-Kwara Muslims now prefer to send their children to Christian missionary schools to few available primary and secondary schools where western education is taught alongside Islamic education.



### **Low Level of Western Education**

Western education is a system that originated in the west and spread throughout the world following Islamic education in the early 15th century.<sup>xv</sup> Its main strategy was to modernize social life through scientific and technological advancement. Western education was first spread by missionaries and then promoted by colonialists to various parts of the world in the name of civilization and globalization in modernity. It is a complete secular system that separates life and religion and emphasizes materialism. It is also rationalistic in its quest for knowledge, relying on human reason rather than spiritual inspiration. Because the modern western system does not consider the relationship between God and man to be socially or intellectually relevant. Revelation or revealed knowledge is ignored even when modern secular subjects are introduced into the curriculum for the traditional older system.<sup>xvi</sup>

No doubt that western education contributes immensely to personality and integrity of an individual in Nigeria. It is really sad that the few Muslims in Ekitiland are far behind the non-Muslims in term of conventional education.<sup>xvii</sup> As many of those who enjoy white-collar jobs in government parastatals are mostly non-Muslims and a very large number of people found in the blue-and pink-collar jobs are Muslims. The majority of petty traders, hawkers and messengers in various government offices are Muslim.

Not that the Muslims were opposed to seeking of knowledge but the hidden agenda of the Christian missionaries who brought Western Education to the area affected the Muslims in attending the non-Muslim schools. James Johnson confirmed this when he said: ‘...our desire is to get as much as we can of our religion into the Mohammedan scholars before they leave school’.<sup>xviii</sup> They were looking for every means to counter Islam and to check its growing influence. But their most potent instrument was the school, which served as the magnet to attract all, especially Muslims, to the Christianity.

Prof. Fafunwa further highlighted some of the factors which made the Muslim parents not to send their children to schools. He noted that during the colonial period, many Nigerian Muslims were skeptical of Western education, which was largely provided by Christian missionaries. Muslims were reluctant to send their children to missionary schools. Muslims were worried that Christian schools would convert their children to Christianity. Cultural and religious preservation were also part of the Muslim parent’s plights in which they sought to maintain their Islamic identity and cultural heritage. They suspected Western influence on their children, thus, Muslims viewed Western education as a tool for colonial domination. Had it been that the available missionary schools provided Islamic education, Muslim parents would not have prevented their children from attending the schools. The conversion agenda was done through translating some of biblical passages into the native language of the Muslims and praying in the Christian way on the assembly ground or hall.<sup>xix</sup>

Not the fear of Muslim children being converted to Christianity, the educational policies of the colonists were favorable to the Christian missionaries against the Muslims in Nigeria. The missionary schools were being given government grant from the public fund collected from both the Christians and the Muslims.<sup>xx</sup> Secondary schools were made to be boarding schools where children’s daily life will be supervised as well as controlled and indoctrinated by the Christian missionaries and the colonial government. During 1882-1914, no Muslim school was being grant-aided by the government nor recognized the Qur’anic schools that were spread all over the north and south.<sup>xxi</sup>

It should be noticed that Islam does not against seeking knowledge apart from Islamic education. However, the hidden agenda of converting Muslim children into Christianity made the Muslim parents to reject conventional education.

### **Political Weakness**

Politics refers to the activities attached with the control of public opinion among a particular people and within a particular territory, where this control may be supported up by authoritative and coercive means. In another words, politics refers to the use of these authoritative and coercive means.<sup>xxii</sup> It is also the art or science dealing with how to win an election and hold the control of the government of a given country. Politics, especially in Nigeria involves the formation of political parties, registration of the parties, registration and collection of voters' cards, exercise one's franchise and contest for a particular position if one has interest. The winning of the election makes one to become the leader in the area of one's constituency irrespective of the political party he or she belongs to. He or she must treat everybody in his or her constituency well no matter the political party they belong to in the art of governance, administration and politicking.<sup>xxiii</sup>

No doubt that politics of religion interplays between the Christians and Muslims especially where one of the adherents has more population than the other. Looking at the major states in the northern part of Nigeria, the non-Muslims are being marginalized politically. The same occurs in the southern part of the country. Especially in the south-east and south-south, where there is presence of Muslims who are politically and financially influence. It is entrenched in Nigeria constitution that everyone citizen of Nigeria has the right to vote and to be voted for.<sup>xxiv</sup> However, the low numerical strength of the minority always put them at the disadvantage politically to be voted for and elected through electoral process.

Ekitiland Muslims might be a minority group, but they have held one political position to another. They have once held political positions ranging from Chairman, Vice chairman, Commissioner, member of House of Assembly, Speaker of Assembly of Councilors etc. They also participate actively in electoral activities, as well as vote and contest elections, however, their low numerical strength puts them at a disadvantage. As a result, they are always treated as second-class citizens. Their representation in the government is not adequate, thus, it affects the growth and spread of Islam in the area as well as denial of their constitutional rights. For instance, the number of Christians who are sponsored to Jerusalem for pilgrimage are more than the number of Muslims who are sponsored to Makkah. The sponsorship is done through public fund which both Muslims and no-Muslims equal right to.

In Ekitiland, the three religions i.e ATR, Christianity and Islam co-exist, however, Christianity and Islam are two major religions. The religious adherents in Ekitiland co-exist with each other. In some compounds, there are Christian and Muslim brothers and sisters who live under the same roof. Despite the close relationship between both religions, Islam appears to have series of challenges including political marginalization. No doubt that the Christians are more than Muslims in Ekitiland except in Osi where Muslims compete equally in number. The Christians dominate all sectors in the both local government areas. Starting from 1999 to date, they dominate every stratum of political affairs. Unlike other areas in Kwara state where Muslims are in majority (Igbominaland, Ibololand and Ilorin Emirate).

The political marginalization of Muslims in Ekitiland was narrated by a former Muslim councilor who served between 2007 and 2010. He said that during that period only two Muslim councilors were elected and that was the first time in the political history of Ekiti local government area that the Muslims will have the highest number of representatives out of ten councilors.<sup>xxv</sup> He further said that the attitude of the Muslims in the area towards politics is very poor. Many of them do not participate in politics. Sometimes a Muslim politician will be used to fight another Muslim politician who is a civil servant. He gave an instance of a political holder who decided to seize the salary of a Muslim in an opposition party because the later did not belong to his political party. Thus, this will give the non-Muslims opportunity of persecuting the Muslims politically.<sup>xxvi</sup>

It was also narrated that the political weakness of the Ekiti-Kwara Muslims is due to their nonchalant attitude towards politics. Alhaji Salih said that one of the Muslim leaders in the area had once told him that the population of Muslims in politics is part of challenges facing the Muslims in holding elective positions and being given political appointment. He further said that due to the dusty game of politics, Muslims decided to desert politics in order to save their faith and not to be corrupt by the fraudulent political system. However, he advised that involving in politics does not affect one's faith but participating in dusty politics is what Islam preaches against. More so, if Muslims fail to participate in politics, how would they sanitize the system or get their rights? He went further to add that Allah (SWT) said that the Muslims are the best of mankind ever raised, commanding goodness and forbid evil. If Muslims decided to stay away from politics how would the injunction of Allah (SWT) will be put into practice.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Alhaji Salih continued by saying that the low numerical population of the Muslims has made the non-Muslims to be able to marginalize the Muslims politically. Presently in the both Local Government Areas, the appointed Transition Interim Committee (TIC) executive members are only dominated by the non-Muslims. Why this, despite the governor of the State is a Muslim? He said that those who are at the helm of political affairs at state level from the areas are non-Muslims, thus, this gave them the opportunity to support their non-Muslims counterparts to be given political appointments. In furtherance of the political challenges being faced by the Muslims in Ekitiland is the collaboration of some Muslims with the non-Muslims to go against their brethren vying for political posts. The non-Muslims used some Muslims to oppose their brethren by promising them political appointment or getting the non-Muslims support in the next political activities. Even, the political opportunities that were given to the Muslims were not utilized in favour of the Muslim minorities despite the fact that the appointees or the elected know the political plights of the Muslims in the areas prior to their appointments.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Some Muslims accused Ilorin Emirate politicians who know that Ekiti-Kwara Muslims are being marginalized but choose not to support the Muslims whenever political appointment is slated to the area to the extent of supporting political arrangement that will be disadvantageous to the Muslims of the area. Mr. Abdulrahman Abdulrasheed who has held various executive posts in his political party at the Local Government level narrated that currently the position of Vice Chairman of his Local Government Area was zoned to his ward and the stakeholders agreed that it should be given to a Muslim which makes his chance to be bright to get that position. However, instruction came from Ilorin that a woman should be considered for the post of Vice Chairman and no Muslim woman that is active in politics.<sup>xxix</sup> Thus, the Muslims will eventually loss the slot to the non-Muslims if the Ilorin politicians do not come to their aid.



He further explained that he had an encounter before now that the stakeholders agreed that he should be the flag-bearer of his party. But since those who will submit the name of the flag-bearer are non-Muslims, thus, his nomination was replaced with the name of a non-Muslim. More so, he said that since the Oke-Ero local Government Area was created in 1996 by Gen, Sanni Abacha regime, only once that a Muslim had become the chairman of the Local government Area.<sup>xxx</sup>

To collaborate the information above, the researcher met with Ekiti Muslim Assembly at its secretariat that lamented the political backwardness of the Muslims in Ekitiland and highlighted some of the factors which contributed to the political weakness. The assembly mentioned that the low population of the Muslims who are willing to participate in politics is very low couple with their knowledge of Islamic concept of brotherhood when it comes to voting for their brethren and support them while vying for elective posts or political appointment. More so, before the Muslims could have awoken to the issue of politics, the non-Muslims have occupied the political positions at the top which gave them advantage over the Muslims not to talk that Muslims are minorities.<sup>xxxi</sup>

## Conclusion

Efforts have been made to show the emergence of Islam and its growth in Ekitiland in Kwara State in this article. It could be observed that within the period of little less than a decade the practice of Islam in all Islamic rituals; prayers (*Ṣalāh*), alms giving (*Zakāh*), fasting (*Ṣawm*), pilgrimage (*Hajj*) and manifestation of belief (faith) in Allah (SWT) including Islamic socio-economic and political affairs are still in its rudimentary state as compared to other local government areas of Kwara State. However, the fact remains that the effect of the Muslims in Ekitiland in Kwara State being in minority continues to tell on the growth of Islam there and the status of Muslims as well, compare to other parts of Kwara State. How and why such phenomenon still continues, and the way to minimize it if not stopped completely is the focus of our further discourse.

It is recommended that the Muslims should foster unity as it is the infomidable pillar in spreading of Islam. The Muslim scholars needed to intensify effort in the area of enlightening the Muslims on the practice of Islam and educating about Islamic teachings as well as the Islamic propagation for the remaining non-Muslims, especially the traditional worshippers to be convinced that Islam is a complete way of life.

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