

INFLUENCE OF ISLAMIC SOCIO-RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES ON THE PEOPLE OF EKITILAND, KWARA STATE

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of Islamic socio-religious activities on the people of Ekitiland, Kwara State in Nigeria. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research investigates how Islamic practices and traditions shape the social and cultural lives of Muslims in the state. Islam plays a significant role in shaping moral value and communal interactions. Through religious practices such as daily prayers, festivals, *Zakah*, and Quranic education, Islamic teachings foster unity, ethical behavior, and social development. The findings revealed that Islamic socio-religious activities have fostered a sense of community, social cohesion, and moral values among Muslims in Ekitiland, Kwara State. The study highlighted the socio-religious practices of Ekiti people before Islam and the current practices among the Muslims of Ekitiland, Kwara State. The paper contributed to a deeper understanding of the role of Islamic socio-religious activities in shaping the lives of Muslims in Ekitiland. The paper concluded that Islamic socio-religious activities remain a vital force in shaping the identity and progress of Ekitiland.

Keywords: Ekitiland; Muslims; Inheritance; Festival; and Funeral Rite.

Introduction

Religion plays a crucial role in shaping the beliefs, values, and social structures of any society. Islam is a comprehensive way of life that combines spiritual devotion with an elaborate socio-cultural system that guides the moral, social, educational, and communal conduct of its followers. This Islamic socio-culture—manifested in acts of worship, family roles, community relations, modesty, justice, and social responsibility—serves as the foundation upon which Muslim identity and communal cohesion are built (Rehman, Faisal, & Rehman, 2025); Ali, 2019). Its effective transmission ensures the preservation of Islamic values across generations and strengthens the social fabric of Muslim communities (Bensaid & Machouche, 2019). In Nigeria, Islam is one of the dominant religions, with a deep historical and cultural presence in various regions.

This study examined the influence of Islamic socio-religious activities on the people of Ekitiland, Kwara state. Understanding these influences will provide insights into the role of Islam in shaping both the spiritual and socio-cultural aspects of Muslim's live in the region. This paper adopted a range of methods—historical, descriptive and analytical methods which include different types of interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, and even field notes in order to give comprehensive accounts of the social lives of people of Ekitiland and practice of Islam among them.

The Practice of Islam in Ekitiland

Ekitiland in Kwara State consists of **Ekiti** and **Oke-Ero** Local Government Areas, with headquarters in **Araromi-Opin** and **Iloffa**. Together, they form part of the sixteen LGAs in the state. The inhabitants, known as **Ekiti-Kwara people**, are a sub-group of the **Yoruba** and share historical and cultural ties with the people of present-day **Ekiti State** (Samuel, 1960). Traditions hold that the Ekiti-Kwara people migrated from **Ile-Ife**, similar to other Ekiti groups, though some accounts suggest mixed origins, including local aborigines and migrants from other Yoruba regions. The area spans **918 km²** with a population of over **100,000** (City Population, 2022).

Geographically, Ekiti and Oke-Ero LGAs lie between specific latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates (Mindat (2023). Retrieved from <https://www.mindat.org/feature-2337655.html>) and share boundaries with **Ifeleodun, Irepodun and Edu** Local Government Areas in Kwara State, as well with **Osun, Ekiti, Kogi and Ondo** States. Linguistically and culturally, the Ekiti-Kwara groups show variations in dialect across towns, supporting the idea of diverse migratory origins (Femi, 2004). Islam has maintained a presence in various parts of Kwara State for over a century, yet its expression and growth vary across different towns and villages in Ekitiland. Therefore, the practice of Islam in various towns is discussed as follows:

Practice of Islam in Isolo-Opin

The practice of Islam is still at low status because of early persecution of the Muslims and recent victimization which will be discussed in full under the challenges facing the Muslim minorities in the community. Majorly, population of Muslim community is increasing with the emigration of *Fulanis*. The *Fulanis* do not isolate themselves in the forest but join the Muslims of the town to observe Friday prayer, festival prayers and other Islamic events. Since the advent of Islam, the town has had five *Imams* including the current chief Imam (Muhammad J. I. Olayinka, personal, June 9th, 2023). Presently, there are two *Ratibi* mosques (Mosque is where daily prayers are being performed) and a central mosque where *Jumu'ah* prayer is performed every Friday. The town has a new proposed site for the construction of a central mosque along Ilorin-Kabba Express Road.

Islamic learning is going on in the town. There is an Islamic centre that has graduated many students over the years. The importance of Islamic propagation among Isolo-Opin Muslims cannot be overemphasized, as daily post Dawn prayer sermon used to be delivered in the mosque daily with effective results. Before the performance of *Salātu-l-Jumu'ah*, post *Jumu'ah* sermon is delivered every Friday. During Ramadan, there is daily *Tafsīr* among the Muslims and this usually takes place at the central mosque. Ekiti Assembly of Muslim Youths uses to come into the town for Islamic propagation during Ramadan (AbdulSalam S., June 11th, 2023).

Islamic socio-religious activities are not left out in the town as Muslims are now celebrating Islamic festivals- *'Idu-l-Fitr* and *'Idu-l-'Adhā* as well as Islamic marriage system and naming ceremonies are performed according to Islamic traditions. Local *mallams* are being invited to officiate both events. The traditional bride price is still common among the Muslims. But, the inclusion of alcohol, pig, dog and other forbidden items in Islam are excluded from the bride price. Islamic dressing code is also observed by the Muslim women, both young and adults. Funeral service is observed in Islamic way and there is a separate cemetery for the burial of Muslim corpses.

Practice of Islam in Ikerin-Opin

The numbers of Muslims in the town is very meager because of the persecutions faced by the converts in hands of the Non-Muslims. For many years, only the family of the first convert was Muslims. However, with the emigration of the *Fulanis* the population of the Muslims has increased. Despite the fact that the *Fulanis* live in the forest, they always join the Muslim natives to observe Islamic rites. Even, there are Muslims who traveled from Ilorin to the town in order to propagate Islam and established Islamic centre. It is the only Islamic centre which exists in the town currently.

There is only a mosque where daily prayers are being performed as well as Friday prayer and an *Id* praying ground. At least, the town has appointed 2 *Imams* since the arrival of Islam there. Islamic socio-cultural activities are observed among the Muslims such as naming ceremony, marriage, festivals etc; all these are performed according to Islamic injunctions. During Ramadan, *Tafsīr* class is done. Apart from Friday sermon, there is also Islamic propagation every Friday. Little observance of Islamic dressing can be seen. Presently, there is no compound that a Muslim is not found due to

intermarriage between the female non-Muslims and the native Muslims. The female non-Muslims converted to Islam through marriage. There are also some native non-Muslims who accepted Islam outside the town. These Muslims used to join the inhabitant Muslims, especially during Islamic festivals to show that they have accepted to Islam whenever they come home.

The socio-religious activities are now practised according the Islamic rites by the Muslims. Naming and marriage ceremonies which were done in traditional way before the advent of Islam are now being conducted according to Islamic injunctions. Local *Mallams* are invited to conduct the events. They will preach as well pronounce the name of the child if it naming event while the couples will be joined together in Islamic way when it comes to marriage. Islamic names are given to the Muslim children. Even, the converts are now bearing Muslim names by changing their traditional names which are ascribed to deities such as *Ifatayo*, *Ogungbemi* etc (Odugoye, 1972). Islamic socio-religious activities in the town are now devoid of alcohol, pork meat and other illicit acts in Islam.

Muslim corps are being buried Islamically. Unlike before when a person died, the corps will be displayed outside of the house before being buried especially if the deceased is a traditional title holder. Ritual acts were done traditionally before the deceased would be buried. But now, the Muslims are buried according to Islamic rites. On the eighth day, the Local *Mallams* and mourners will gather to pray for the deceased as well as preach to the living to prepare for the hereafter.

Islam in Idofin-Igbana

Since the advent of Islam, the village has appointed two *Imams*. Presently there are two Islamic learning centres including two mosques one of which is used for Friday prayer where weekly sermon is being delivered. The population of Muslims does not increase appropriately due to the conflict that usually occurred between the Muslims and the idol worshipper and this till creates fears in among them. The numbers of the Muslims are only being increased by giving birth by the Muslim parents. Whenever non-Muslim wishes to embrace Islam, his family will against his choice to become a Muslim and warned him not to embracing Islam. However, the emigrant *Fulanis* added to the number of the Muslims. The Muslim youths were able to organize themselves for weekly prayer. However, they lacked basic Islamic knowledge.

The role of Afa Abdulhamid Anisulowo who is from Osin-Ekiti, Ekiti State and has lived for over 30 years in the town in the spreading of Islam cannot be over emphasized in the modern Islam in the town. On his arrival, he met a Muslim scholar from Ifon, Osun State who established Islamic centre and the Muslim children were attending his Islamic centre. He also served as the Imam and led other Islamic activities in the town. After his departure, the Islamic centre was no longer functioning. Then, Afa Abdulhamid took over the Islamic activities and established another Islamic centre for teaching of Islamic education and gathering of Muslim women every Sunday for prayer. He was the one serving as Imam before the current Imam, Shaykh Abdulhamid Raji was appointed as the Imam. It is through the effort of Afa Anisulowo that the second mosque was built.

Religious activities such as public preaching and Ramadan *Tafsir* are not being done due to the nonchalant attitude of the few Muslims towards Islamic enlightenment. However, the town is witnessing the Islamic socio-religious events such as naming and marriage ceremonies. The naming ceremony now done on the eighth day and an animal is sacrificed as well as the child will be given Muslim name. Muslim men marrying Muslim women in Islamic way is being witnessed in the town contrary to what was the case at the beginning of Islam in the town.

Practice of Islam in Erinmope

Islam has spread over the time as the town houses a central mosque where Friday prayer is being observed every Friday including five daily prayers. At least three *Imams* have been appointed since the advent of Islam in the town. There is a *Madrasah* where Islamic education is being taught and it has produced few numbers of Quran reciters. There is also *'Id* praying ground where *Šalātu-l-'Idayn* is observed during *'Idu-l'Kabīr* and *'Idu-l'Fitr* every year. Islam has expanded over time because of emigration of *Fulanis* into the town. They have joined the natives in observance of Islamic rites. During the field work, the researcher also joined them at the madrasah where Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet are being taught.

Islamic Socio-Religious Life and People of Ekitiland

Ekitiland town was an off shoot of Ile-Ife as recorded by Michael Adewumi in one of his publications: *Itan Isedale Ilu-Ekiti-Kwara* (Michael, nd.). This is the more reason why the socio-religious life of her people was a replica of the most Yoruba communities. Ekitiland people preserved the status quo until 1922 when the overbearing influence of Islam began to have effect on the people. However, the trend in the socio-religious aspects shall be examined in relation to the following.

- (i) Marriage Ceremony
- (ii) Naming Ceremony
- (iii) Funeral rite
- (iv) Inheritance system
- (v) Festival.

Marriage Ceremony

The marriage system in Ekitiland before Islam could be described as purely traditional which had manifested in different methods. For examples, a man could impose marriage of his grown-up daughter on the matured boy of his friend or vice versa. At times, it might be that, a man would give out her grown up daughter to his friend to either replace his dead wife or add to the number of his wives. The idea was to strengthen the tie of their friendship. Another instance could be that the parent of a little girl of less than ten (10) years of age might be approached by another family who desires to marry the girl for their young boys. Although, marriage solemnization would not be conducted until both of them reached the age of maturity. In this instance, the family of the groom did buy gifts for the parents of the bride-to-be. *Owe* system was still in existence. *Owe* system means: groom together with his friends would earmark a certain day which they would use to organize themselves to work hard on the farm of their father in-law. Having gone through, the father in-law would entertain his special guests to a high level of satisfaction (Baba Raji, personal communication, 25th June, 2024).

The process of marriage could take any of the forms described above. Besides before the marriage could be solemnized, the list containing certain requirements must be satisfied. The items include: 50 tubers of yam, kolanut 50 numbers, 25kg of palm oil, fowl (two hens and two cocks), Ram 1 number. 2 crate of soft drinks, 2 crates of Malt, 1 bag of Salt, 1 bottle of Honey, variety of fruits (a full basket), 1 bottle of schnapps and some cash. It is from this cash, they give the bride the 'bride price', the father and mother's in-law, and other deserving members of the family. It has to be stated however that, the request varies from one family to the other (Aisha Ibrahim Olonje, personal communication, June 10th, 2022).

Islam retains some of the practices that were in consonance with it while it rejected the traditions which ran in contrary against its teachings. For instance, the act of disregarding the consent of a daughter before the marriage is contracted is not allowed in Islam. In Islam, a lady is at liberty either

to accept or reject the marriage proposed for her by her father when she was at infant stage, whenever she reached the age of maturity (Ibn Quddamah, nd.). Similarly, Islam also disallows union of male and female unless certain conditions are fulfilled. These include, seeking consent of the two spouses, payment of *Mahr*, presence of at least two witnesses and approval of *Waliyy* of the bride (Ibn Quddamah, nd.).

From the foregoing, it has become manifested that Ekiti-Kwara Muslims have adhered to the Islamic rite concerning marriage as well as other issues related to marriage. Same faith marriage i.e. male Muslim marries female Muslims is in vogue. Marriage ceremony is conducted according to Islamic injunction where people will gather and serve as witnesses and *Alfas* will officiate the ceremony.

Naming Ceremony

In the case of naming ceremony before Islam, eight days were usually counted from the day of birth, before the new born baby was named and its hair shaved. The required items used in the naming ceremony include: honey, sugarcane, kolanut, bitter kola, salt, oil etc. Meanwhile the aforementioned items would be taken one after the other and tasted by the *Baale* who used to preside over the ceremony. The taste of each item determined the types of prayer he would offer for the baby. Even, some families would have to perform ritual acts on the new born baby such as putting the baby in a calabash or in a bowl of water to ascertain the original paternity of the child and the child would be given name(s) related to their deities (Baba Raji, personal communication, 25th June, 2024).

Introduction of Islam to Ekitiland has influenced the above practice. The idea of breaking Kolanut, tasting salt, giving the babies the traditional names like: *Osamukomi*, *Imole*, *Ajari* etc. have been replaced with Islamic names. Furthermore, the father who is blessed with a new child enjoyed the privilege to call *Adhān* to its right ear and *Iqāmah* to the left. He is equally allowed to pronounce the name of the child within the seventh day, counting from the day of birth although the father could appoint someone to perform such on his behalf (Ibn Quddamah, nd.).

On the seventh day, the head of the baby is shaved while ram or goat is slaughtered. The number of ram or goat that would be slaughtered depends largely on the sex of the child as stipulated in the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). If it is male, either two rams or goats are to be slaughtered while female child a ram or a goat is slaughtered (Ibn Rushd, 1989). However, it has to be stressed that not all the Muslims in Ekitiland adhere to seventh day naming ceremony but rather eighth day.

Furthermore, the naming ceremony in Ekitiland presently is celebrated with family members, *Alfas*, friends, neighbours and well-wishers that would grace the occasion. These people would gather in the morning to offer prayers for the new baby. The prayer is either led by Imam or any other designated *Mallam*. The *Eran-Suna* (sacrificial ram) already slaughtered would be used to serve food for the attendants.

Funeral Rite

The Yoruba traditional way of burial was replicated in Ekitiland before the advent of Islam. The corpse is kept in the coffin and it would be carried on the shoulder while moving around the town. The sacrifice of *Adiye Irana* (fare-fowl) was also witnessed. In fact, burial of the dead body in the house or in the front of it and the backyard was the order of the day. If the dead person holds traditional title, the corpse would be seated on chair and well dressed with traditional clothes for people to see before the corpse will be buried (Michael, nd.).

However, the injunction of Islam forbids the sacrifice of fare-fowl (*Adiye Irana*) because it constitutes *Shirk*. It is believed that the spirit of fare-fowl will open heaven for the deceased. Islam teaches that deceased Muslim should be buried as soon as possible. Before Islam, corpses were buried without being washed according to Islamic rite. With the advent of Islam in Ekitiland, Muslim corpses are being washed and *Salātu'l-Janāzah* (It is a prayer observed on the dead corpse as a supplication for the dead) would be observed on the deceased Muslim and would thereafter be buried according to Islamic injunction. The deceased Muslims are being immortalized through *Sadaqatun Jāriyatun* (continuous charity). The Prophet said "When a man dies, all his good deeds come to an end except three: Ongoing charity, beneficial knowledge, or a righteous child who will pray for him" (*Sahīh Muslim, Hadīth* 4223.). In the past, statue of a prominent person will be erected at the market square or centre of the town. But now through *Sadaqatun Jāriyah*, mosques are renovated or built in the name of the deceased Muslims and wells are dug as well as foundations are established for charity purpose.

Inheritance system

The inheritance system which was practised in Ekitiland before the introduction of Islam was a replica of the practice in some other Yoruba communities. Hitherto the advent of Islam, the belief and tradition of Ekitiland people was to disregard the wife of the deceased in the share of her husband estate. Instead, she would be categorized as part of the property to be inherited (Babatunde, 2014). She might be inherited by a younger brother of the deceased or sometime given to his first son of the deceased as a wife. The estate of the deceased would be handed over to his/her eldest child especially, the son to manage. Inheritance system was based on *Idi Igi* or *Ori Ojori* which means, the number of wives who survived the deceased determines the share of the estate and on the other hand, *Ori Ojori* means sharing of the deceased estate equally among the surviving children without considering gender respectively (Ademola & Adekunbi 2019).

Thus, Islam removed all the abnormalities in inheritance through the proclamation made in *Suratu'n-Nisā' 4:7* as follows:

“For men is a share and for women is a share of what is left by parents and those nearest related, whether, the property be small or large – a legal share” (*Sūratu'n-Nisā' 4:7*)

The Ekiti-Kwara Muslims have embraced the Islamic system of inheritance. Both male and female children are now heirs to the left-behind-estates of their parents. It is established in the Qur'an that a male child takes twice of a female child is child because of the burden of responsibilities placed on a male. Women are therefore made to inherit their husband and vice versa. And daughters, mothers, sisters and granddaughters are also granted right to inheritance along with their male counterparts. Parents have shares in the estate of their children and vice versa. The shares of each heir are stated in *Sūratu'n-Nisā' 4:11-12*.

Festival

Some of Ekiti-Kwara natives believed that their ancestors are from the earth and they were greatest of the gods, thus deserved the greatest respect. Festival is being held yearly and it is still the most honoured and the longest item of the festivals. Yearly appeasement unto these gods was not enough and so their images were carved out and kept in the corner of their houses for daily worship.

There are some other festivals being celebrated in Ekitiland. For instance, new yam festival called *Idasu*. During the celebration, women would prepare for their husbands/suitors pounded yam. In the case of the ones dating, the suitor (young man) would fetch for his spouse fire wood in return. However, *Ijesu* (yam festival) is another festival. In this case, women would cook *Olele* (food made

from beans) for their men who in turn must have provided them with beans used to take care of their gods. There are still some other festivals like *Oroo*, *Oke*, *ore* etc which were being celebrated in the past before the advent of Islam (Abejide & Ogunjimi, 2024). It has to be stressed that, not all the aforementioned doings have been gotten rid of.

Above all, as some Ekiti-Kwara natives accepted Islam, they had invariably embraced Islamic culture of its festival celebration. It is related in one of the traditions of prophet Muhammad (SAW) saying that he had proscribed all festivals for the Muslims except two festivals viz: *'Idu'l-'Adha* and *'Idul-fitr*. The celebration of Ramadan is to mark the end of either twenty-nine or thirty day fasting (Ibn Fawzan, 2012). In the course of the celebration, Muslim faithful are enjoined by *Sunnah* to give out *Sadaqah*, some food items to the needy before setting out to *'Id* praying ground for *Salāh*. This *sadaqa* (gift) is called *Zakat-fitri* (Sabiq, 2014).

'Idu'l-'Adha is celebrated in the twelfth month of Islamic calendar that is *Dhu'l-Hijjah*. While the pilgrims at *Makkah* are performing their religious rite the Muslims at home are to slaughter rams as directed by Allah. The owners of the rams have a portion out of the three portions the rams are divided to. Meanwhile, the other portions are expected to be distributed among the needy, the relatives as well as friends and well-wishers (Al-Jazayri, 2003). All these gifts in form of either *Zakatu'l-fitri* or sharing of meat are meant to alleviate the sufferings of Muslims and as well make them happy. This would not only foster love among the Muslims but also make the less privileged to have sense of belonging.

Conclusion

Among the Muslims of Ekitiland, the historical spread of Islam created profound changes in their social and religious existence. A gradual transmission of traditional cultural features followed as marriage practices, naming traditions, funeral protocols, inheritance systems and festive observances turned Islamic according to prescribed teachings. Ekiti-Kwara Muslim community is increasingly dedicated to establishing authentic Islamic identity while replacing prohibited conduct with Qur'anic and Sunnah-approved religious practices.

Despite all these obstacles Islam remains the foundation that binds together the community and encourages ethical behavior and functions as an all-encompassing socio-religious framework which boosts the spiritual and cultural soul of Muslims in Ekitiland. The region needs continued dissemination of Islamic knowledge through education combined with missionary work alongside community advancement programs to strengthen deep Islamic commitment. Despite the presence of other religious beliefs, Islam continues to play a significant role in fostering unity, discipline, and progress in Ekitiland, reinforcing both traditional and modern societal structures.

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