

The Yoruba Cocoa Migrant Farmers And The Growth Of Islam In Some Rural Communities Of The Defunct Ondo Division Of Southeastern Yorubaland, Nigeria Since The 1930s

By

ADESOTE Samson Adesola, PhD

Department of History & International Studies

Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria

Email: solaade2007@ymail.com

&

Raifu Isiaka Okunola

Department of History & International Studies

Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria

Email: isiaka.raifu@uniosun.edu.ng

Abstract

There exist some works on the permanent or temporary movement of Nigerian peoples within the same and across geographical regions, mainly as a result of factors of economic opportunities in the places of destinations. However, the discussion on migrants as agents of socio-economic and political development in their places of destination has not been adequately interrogated. This paper, therefore, discusses the emigration of Yoruba cocoa migrant farmers from Western and Northern Yorubaland into Ondo Division of Southeastern Yorubaland since the 1930s. The emigration of these migrant farmers was mainly caused by the British colonial economic policy, which emphasised cash crop economy. One of the main centres of attraction for these migrants in the Southeastern Yorubaland during this period was Ondo Division. The division attracted a large number of other sub-groups of Yoruba (who were mostly Muslims and Christians) from the defunct Oyo, Abeokuta, Ijebu, Ilorin Provinces, and Ekiti Division from the 1930s mainly for the establishment of cocoa farms. Migration of these people increased in the 1940s and 1960s due to the boom in cocoa business coupled with other factors such as the availability of abundant fertile land, liberal reception and disposition of migrants by indigenes and commercialisation of rural land. The paper examines the impact of Yoruba Muslim cocoa migrant farmers on the growth of Islam in some rural communities of the defunct Ondo Division such as Kajola, Lipanu, Ago-Ikirun, Sokoto, Labosipo, Bamikemo-Oja among others. Although Islam had got to the division as early as the 1880s, it was restricted to few towns such as Ode-Ondo and Ile-Oluji. Its spread and growth in the interior parts of the division since the 1930s was majorly facilitated by the coming of the Yoruba cocoa migrant farmers from other parts of Yorubaland. Their efforts were later complemented by the Hausa traders, who engaged in kolanut trading in places like Kajola. The methodological approach adopted in this paper is historical, thematic and qualitative. Sources of information include primary and secondary materials derived from oral interviews, archives and extant literature. The paper is based on Everett Lee push and pull theory of migration.

Keywords: Farmers, Islam, Migration, Migrants, Ondo Division and Nigeria.

Introduction

There is no doubt the fact that the movement of Nigerian peoples within and across regional frontier has been documented in the extant literature by scholars in the disciplines of history, geography, sociology and anthropology.¹ The movement of people either voluntarily

¹See Udo, R.K. 1975. *Migrant tenant farmers of Nigeria: A geographical study of rural migrations in Nigeria*. Lagos: African University Press, Ajaegbu, H.I. 1976. *Migrants and the Rural Economy of Nigeria*. Adepoju, A. (Ed). *Internal Migration in Nigeria*. Ile-Ife: Institute of Population and Manpower Studies, and Makinwa, P. 1981. *Internal Migration and Rural Development in Nigeria: Lessons from Bendel State*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nig) Limited

or forcefully from one geographical area to another remains a major social phenomenon that is not new in Nigeria. In historical perspective, the study of migration patterns in Nigeria falls into three distinct periods; the pre-colonial, the colonial and post-colonial.² However, each historical phase of migration reflects the people's response to widely divergent socio-political, economic and environmental conditions.³ For instance, in the pre-colonial Yorubaland, large scale movements of people in forms of regional, occupational and seasonal rural-rural, rural-urban and urban-rural (which was rare) took place primarily for security reasons. A good example was the political crisis that faced old Oyo Empire that later culminated in the outbreak of civil wars in Yorubaland in the 19th century. One major immediate effect of the collapse of the Old Oyo Empire in Yorubaland was the problem of population displacement. The destruction of all major cities of the Old Oyo Empire as a result of the Fulani invasion between 1817 and 1835 led to the production of large number of population displacement.⁴ These refugees, who were forced to flee Northern Yorubaland and sought for safety and protection in some communities in Southern Yorubaland like Ogbomoso, Iwo, Iseyin, Osogbo, Ile-Ife, Owu, Ipet-Modu, Gbongan, Ikire, and Apomu.⁵ Other reasons responsible for pre-colonial internal and external migration included adventurism and economic opportunities in the places of destinations.⁶

The nature of migration within the same geographical and across regional frontier in the colonial period was majorly facilitated by the colonial economic policy of the British, which centred on cash economy. The need to survive within the new colonial economic system stimulated individual migration, which took three major forms, namely rural-rural, rural-urban and urban-urban.⁷ In this paper, own main focus is on rural-rural internal migration, with major emphasis on rural communities of Ondo Division of Southeastern Yorubaland of Nigeria. Although different parts of Nigeria during colonial period attracted different categories of migrants (tenant farmers and labourers), Ondo Division received a

²Adesote, S.A. 2016. Plantation Agriculture and the Growth of Migrant Settlements in Ondo Division, Southwestern Nigeria, 1947-1986. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Department of History, University of Ibadan,p.5

³Makinwa, P. 1981. *Internal Migration and Rural Development in Nigeria: Lessons from Bendel State*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nig) Limited, p.19

⁴Falola, T, Mahadi, A, Uhomoibhi, M and Anyanwu, U. 1989. *History of Nigeria 2*. (Ibadan: Longman Publishers Limited

⁵Atanda, J.A. 1980. *An Introduction to Yoruba History*. Ibadan: Ibadan university Press, p.33

⁶Adesote, S.A. 2016. Plantation Agriculture and the Growth of Migrant Settlements in Ondo Division, Southwestern Nigeria, 1947-1986. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Department of History, University of Ibadan,p.5

⁷Ajaegbu, H.I. 1976. Migrants and the Rural Economy of Nigeria. Adepoju, A. (Ed). *Internal Migration in Nigeria*. Ile-Ife: Institute of Population and Manpower Studies, p.119

disproportionally high percentage of the migrants in Southwestern Nigeria⁸. Majority of these migrant tenant farmers, who were cocoa farmers in their different places of origin came from Western and Northern parts of Yorubaland of Southwestern Nigeria. The emigration of these migrants into the division which began which began in the 1930s,⁹ became unprecedented between 1940s and 1960s.¹⁰ This development was caused by both push and pull factors of internal migration.

It is against this background that this paper is set out to fill a major gap in the historiography of internal migration in Yorubaland during colonial and post-colonial periods by focusing on the specificity of Yoruba migrant farmers and the growth of Islam among some rural communities in the defunct Ondo Division of Southwestern Nigeria since the 1930s. The paper examines the contribution of these migrants to the growth of Islam in Ondo Division during this period of study. The paper is divided into seven major sections. Section one introduces the discussion and the methodological approach. The second section centres on geographical location of Ondo Division of Southwestern Nigeria. The third section deals with theoretical framework adopted for the study. The fourth part discusses the origin and spread of Islam in Yorubaland of Nigeria. The fifth section examines the origin of Islam in Ondo up to 1930s. The sixth part analyses the Yoruba cocoa migrant farmers and the spread of Islam in the rural communities of Ondo Division since 1930s. The last section is the conclusion. The methodological approach is historical, thematic and analytical. Sources include primary and secondary materials.

The Geographical Location of Ondo Division of Southwestern Nigeria

Ondo Division was one of the four major divisions of Ondo Province of Southwestern Nigeria created by the colonial government on 1st July 1915.¹¹ The headquarters of the division was located at Ode-Ondo. The other three remaining divisions that made up of Ondo Province were Ekiti, Owo and Okitipupa Divisions. The Headquarters of Ondo Province was at Akure. The defunct Ondo Division being covered in this study comprises of the present

⁸Obinta, R.F. 2007. Cash Crop Cultivation and Labour Migration in Ondo District, 1890-1970. MPhil Thesis. Department of History. Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, p.67

⁹Berry, S.S. 1975. *Cocoa, custom and socio-economic change in rural Western Nigeria*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.27

¹⁰Osoba, S.O. 1969. The phenomenon of labour migration in the era of British colonial rule: A neglected aspect of Nigeria's social history. *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* iv. 4:515-538 and Walker, E.A. 2000. The changing patterns of labour relations in the cocoa farming belt of Southwestern Nigeria, 1950s to 1990s. *African Economic History* 28:123-140.

¹¹NAI, CSO 03996, Vol. 1. Ondo Province Annual Report, 1921, p.1.

day four local government areas of Ondo State, namely Ondo West, Ondo East, Ile-Oluji/Okeigbo and Odigbo local government areas. The rural communities where these Yoruba cocoa migrant farmers settled and contributed to the Islamisation of the area in the study are all located within all these four local government areas. The major migrant cocoa farmers with largest settlements and as well constituted the large population are the “Oyo-Osun migrants” who migrated from the defunct Oyo Province (now made up of Oyo and Osun states). Aside these major Yoruba cocoa migrant farmers, others, though of small population came from the defunct Abeokuta and Ondo Provinces (such as the Egbado and Ekiti), Ilorin and so on. The two maps below show the geographical location of Ondo Division of Southwestern Nigeria.

Map 1: Map of Southwestern Nigeria showing Major Provinces and Divisions



Source: Adapted from: Faluyi, E. K. 1994. A History of Agriculture in Western Nigeria, 1900-1960. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis. Department of History, University of Lagos, p.19

Map 2: Map of Ondo Division Showing Some rural settlements that embraced Islam

social scientists such as geographers, sociologists, anthropologists among others posit that migration decision is made up of two stages. The first decision to migrate preceding a second decision regarding the choice of destination. The former, though usually heavily predicated on economic factors, is seen as necessarily moderated by various non-economic considerations such as means of transport, presence of relatives, friends and/co-villagers at destination, ethnic compatibility and residual environmental factors at both places of origin and destination.¹⁴ These two perspectives of internal migration are represented in various theories of migration. Notable among these migration theories are Ravenstein's Laws of Migration (1885); Everett Lee's push and pull" theory of migration (1966); Charles Tilly's three determinants of migration (1974); Mabogunje's (1970) systems approach to rural-urban migration among others.¹⁵ While majority of the above theories of migration majorly focused on rural-urban migration, the Everett Lee's push and pull theory of migration in particular is relevant to this paper. The theory is constructed around some fundamental factors (economic, social and political hardships in the sending regions) and factors of attraction (comparative economic and social advantages in the receiving regions). They serve as causal variables which determine the size and direction of migration.¹⁶

More importantly, this paper adopts three major theoretical approaches as regard the internal migration of Yoruba cocoa farmers to Ondo Division during this period. These are the ecological approach, liberal political economy and the thesis of rural-rural migration.¹⁷ According to Ogen, the ecological approach establishes the close relationship between agricultural practices and the nature of environment.¹⁸ This reveals the extent to which Ondo ecological factors provided most of the major pre-conditions for the development of agriculture in Ondo Division. This is because the place of adequate integration of the ecosystem into the analysis of socio-economic change cannot be overemphasised. Geographically, Ondo Division forms major part of the cocoa belt of Southwestern Nigeria that is dominated by the influx of migrant farmers. The factor of environment in terms of abundance and fertility is of paramount significance in the growth and development of cocoa and rubber production in Ondo Division. The liberal political economy according to Ogen, integrates both political and social forces as explanatory elements in economic analysis. This

¹⁴Makinwa, P.K. 1981. *Internal Migration and Rural Development in Nigeria*...p.6

¹⁵For details on theories of migration see Adepoju, A. Ed. 1976. *Internal Migration in Nigeria*. Ile-Ife: Institute of Population and Manpower Studies

¹⁶Adesote, S.A &Olaniyi, R.O. (2016). Land Acquisition, Cocoa farming and Internal Migration in Ondo Division, 1947-1972.*Lagos Historical Review, Vol.16, No.1*, pp.107-126

¹⁷Ogen, O. 2003. Urhobo Migrants and the Ikale Palm Oil Industry, 1850-1968. *The Nigerian Journal of Economic History*. 5&6, June, pp.1-16.

¹⁸Ogen, O. 2003. Urhobo Migrants and the Ikale Palm Oil Industry, 1850-1968. *The Nigerian*... p.1

theoretical approach emphasises the enduring relationship between agricultural activities in their social and political situations.¹⁹ In other words, the approach has the tendency of determining the extent to which the waves of migrations and incursions by different groups were decisive in fashioning the socio-political relations and nature of the economy that evolved. The production of cocoa and rubber in Ondo Division provides an excellent case study of this conceptual approach. The dynamics of settlements' formation processes, caused by the incursions of migrants (farmers and labourers) from the defunct Oyo Province (now Oyo and Osun States), Edo, Urhobo, Igbo, Ebira, Agatu and Ijebu were decisive in fashioning the social relations and the structure of the economy that evolved in Ondo Division during this period of study. Lastly, it employs the rural-rural migration thesis of H.I Ajaegbu and R.K Udo²⁰. The issue is that majority of the Yoruba migrant farmers that migrated into Ondo Division during this period came from the rural areas where they had been involved actively in the cultivation of cash crop like cocoa.

Historicising the Origin and Spread of Islam in Yorubaland of Nigeria

Islam is the first foreign religion to be introduced to Yorubaland of Nigeria in particular and Nigeria in general. The second foreign religion that found its way into the region is Christianity.²¹ However, prior to the introduction of these two foreign religions, the Yoruba worshipped many gods and goddesses and deities called *Orisas* (Adesote & Raifu). In fact, different families, compounds and towns worship different *Orisas*. This often reflects in the names bear by some families such as Sangodeyi, Sangosanya, Ogunmolu, Ifayemi, Ogunyemi, Ogunbusola, Ogundairo and so on. Notable Orisas among the Yoruba are Ogun, Osun, Yemoja, Olokun, Oya, Esu and so on. The people also engaged in different traditional festival celebrations like Eyo (by Awori), Oramfe (Ondo), Iwo (Ikale), Egungun (Ijesa), Osun (Osun), Lisabi (Egba), Ojude-Oba (Ijebu) and Ogun (Ondo and Ife).²² Looking at Yorubaland today, Islam has taken a prime place and has been a contending force in the socio-economic, educational and political arrangements in the scheme of things. This is noticeable in both

¹⁹Ogen, O. 2003. Urhobo migrants and the Ikale palm oil industry, 1850-1968. *The Nigerian Journal of Economic History*. 5&6:1-16, p.2

²⁰Ajaegbu, H.I. 1976. Migrants and the Rural Economy of Nigeria. Adepoju, A. (Ed). *Internal Migration in Nigeria*. Ile-Ife: Institute of Population and Manpower Studies and Udo, R.K. 1975. *Migrant Tenant Farmers of Nigeria: A Geographical Study of Rural Migrations in Nigeria*. Lagos: African University Press.

²¹Adesote, S.A & Raifu, I.O 2024. The Yoruba of Western Nigeria up to the 20th century. In Imbua, D.L, Ajor, J.O, Okorn, F.T & Kwaghe, Z.E. *Nigeria from the Earliest time to the down to the 21st century*, Chapter Eight, pp.107-127

²²Yomi Odu. n.d. "Traditional Festivals in Nigeria". In R.O Ajetunmobi and B.O Osiyale. Eds. *Themes in Nigeria as a nation*. (Lagos: Gabby Printing (Nigeria) Enterprises (Revised Edition), 90-128

private and public life of the Yoruba people. Although a foreign religion, Islamic cultures have been well entrenched and domesticated among the Yoruba Muslims such that some communities are seen to be strongholds of Islam, while some families are also known to be well acculturated and integrated into the Islamic practices and hence the emergence of cleric dynasties and compounds in Yorubaland. The concerted efforts of the early migrant scholars and Yoruba converts notwithstanding the initial persecution and opposition from the traditional belief practitioners were the fillips needed and which were significantly responsible for embrace, spread and much later the domestication of Islamic cultures that are noticeable throughout the nooks and crannies of Yorubaland today.

Although there are extant studies on the advent of Islam in Yorubaland by scholars of history and Islamic studies²³, its spread in some rural communities is yet to be adequately documented. Generally, there is no consensus among scholars on the arrival date of Islam in Yorubaland. Its arrival and spread in Yorubaland has been viewed by scholars from different perspectives. For instance, Atanda argues that the introduction and spread of Islam in Yorubaland was through different sources. First, Islam first reached Yorubaland through Mali and Songhai and later through Bornu and Hausaland through the trade route, which traversed western Yorubaland.²⁴ It further spread during the Uthman dan Fodio Jihad of 1804. The second source of the spread of Islam in Yorubaland was through the activities of liberated African slaves who came to Nigeria from the 1840. While the Christians at first settled largely in Badagry, the core of the Muslims settled in Lagos. They comprised two groups: those from Sierra Leone who became known as Saro Muslims and those from Brazil and Cuba who became known as aguda Muslims. These immigrants greatly increased the Muslim population in Yorubaland between 1840 and 1870.²⁵ While some of these ex-slaves were Muslims, some of them got converted upon their arrival, but majority of them initially settled in Lagos and Badagry. Meanwhile, as professionals and artisans, they added a lot of attractions to Islam through their professions and the way they did their work. Notable names

²³Gbadamosi, T.G.O. 1978. *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba, 1841-1908* (London: Longman, 1978), Abdullah Adam Al-Ilory, Naseem Sabaa (Cairo: Maktabatu Wahbah, 1990) quoted in T.G.O. Gbadamosi, 'Islam in Yorubaland' in Muibi O. Opeloye et.al (eds.) *Islam in Yorubaland, History, Education and Culture* (Lagos: University of Lagos Press and Bookshop, 2018) p. 2, Abdur Rahman Doi, *Islam in Nigeria*, (Zaria: Gasikiya, 1984) and Abdul Fattah Olayiwola, *Islam in Nigeria, One Crescent many Focuses* (Lagos: Sakirabe, 2007)

²⁴Atanda, J.A. 1980. *An Introduction to Yoruba History*. Ibadan: Ibadan university Press, p.37

²⁵Atanda, J.A. 1980. *An Introduction to Yoruba History*. Ibadan: Ibadan university Press, p.115

among these Muslims were Amodu Carew, Pedro, Tiamiyu Gomez, and Muhammad Savage.²⁶

Also, Gbadamosi quoted a record by T.W. Arnold claims that Islam's first and earlier contact was through a Hausa missionary in Ile-Ife around 11th or 12th century. This contact however did not make any impact as it was short lived and no soul was won. As a matter of fact, the Hausa missionary died few months after his arrival in Ile-Ife.²⁷ Nevertheless, the consensus of opinion by scholars, such as Abdullah al-Ilori and Gbadamosi, has suggested the Malian traders and scholars as the agents that brought Islam into Yorubaland possibly in the first half of the 14th century. This is the reason for christening Islam its Yoruba name "*esin imale*" meaning the religion of the Malians.²⁸

Oyo Ile was the first place to receive Islam but the converts were very negligible and could not surmount necessary courage to practise the religion in public.³ However, the decline and fall of Old Oyo Empire by the beginning of the 19th Century which led to the downward movement of Oyo elements including the Muslims was what the religion needed to spread to other parts of Yorubaland. Much later in the century, Hausas and Fulanis had the opportunity to make incursions into the heart of Yorubaland to preach and spread Islam. Yoruba civil wars of the 19th century led the creation of new towns and Muslims were among the settlers of these towns. They rendered assistance to the rulers of these towns particularly during the war period. Such assistance, human and spiritual, imbued in the military the power to overcome and conquer their enemies. A case in point here was Alfa Gunnugun of Ibadan who later became the first Chief Imam of Ibadan.²⁹ Following from this was the appeal the religion made to the traditional authorities. A traditional chief with the title *parakoyi* was the liaison between the Muslims and the traditional authorities but when he was later converted began to see himself as one of the Muslims. His responsibilities thus increased from liaison to the defence of the interest of the Muslims.³⁰ Muslim communities began to grow and stabilise in Yorubaland. Islam became more entrenched in towns like Oyo, Iwo, Ikirun, Iseyin, Saki, Ibadan, Lagos, Ijebu Ode, Ota, Epe and other parts of Yorubaland. It is important to note that

²⁶Abdulrazaq O. Kilani, *Minaret in the Delta, Islam in Port Harcourt and its Environs, 1896-2007* (Lagos: J.J.I. Publishers, 2008) p.36

²⁷Gbadamosi, T.G.O. 2018. 'Islam in Yorubaland' in Muibi O. Opeyoye et.al (eds.) *Islam in Yorubaland, History, Education and Culture*. Lagos: University of Lagos Press and Bookshop, p.2

²⁸Raifu Isiaka O. 2016. 'Intrigues and Twist in the Imamate Crisis of Lagos Central Mosque (Jama'atul Muslimeen Council), 1841-1947. *International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 5(4), pp.36-38.

²⁹Raheemson, M.O. 1997. 'The Rise and Growth of Islam in Ibadan' in G.O. Ogunremi (ed.) *Ibadan, A Historical, Cultural and Socio-Economic Study of an African City* (Lagos: Oluyole Club, 1997) pp.325-326

³⁰Gbadamosi, T.G.O. 1978. *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba, 1841-1908*. London: Longman Group Limited, p.230 and Raifu Isiaka O. 2016. 'Intrigues and Twist in the Imamate Crisis of Lagos Central Mosque (Jama'atul Muslimeen Council), 1841-1947. *International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 5(4), pp.36-38.

by the mid nineteenth century, notable Yoruba towns began to have their Muslim rulers. Ibadan produced its first Muslim ruler in person of Are Muhamadu Latosa, 1871-1895, Iwo had Muhamadu Lamuye, Ede, Timi Abibu Lagunju among others.³¹ With growth and development especially increase in converts meant the exigency for more and bigger mosques and invariably the establishment of the Imamate. Gbadamosi, has itemised three phases in the emergence of Imamate. The third phase which is in operation till today. This is the appointment of the Chief Imam or overall Imam for the whole of the town supported by other local Imams known as Imam Ratib.³² With time, each town established a body known as League of Imams and Alfas to regulate, coordinate and oversee the activities of the Muslim clerics and other matters affecting the interest of the Muslim.

The history of Islam in Yorubaland cannot be discussed without the incident of syncretism. Although Yoruba people accepted the religion, some still find justification in romancing with traditional beliefs and practices. What attests to this fact is the popular and common song among the Yoruba which goes thus:

Awa o s'oro ile wa, awa o s'oro ile wa Imale ko so'pe k'awa ma s'oro
Igbagbo ko so'pe k'awa ma s'oro
Awa o s'oro ile wa (meaning: We will observe our traditional family rite, we will observe our traditional family rite. *Imale* (Islam) cannot prevent us from observing our traditional family rite Christianity cannot prevent us from observing our traditional family rite. We will observe our traditional family rite

However, Muslim scholars and clerics have condemned this practice with other acts believed to be unaccepted in Islam and it has often generated crisis between the Muslims and the traditional authorities.

The dawn of colonialism was regarded as a new epoch in the annals of Islam in Yorubaland. By the beginning of the 20th century, while making steady growth and progress, Islam had to face a fierce competition from Christian missionaries who were the agents and precursor of the colonialists. With their ownership and control of western schools and education, Muslim children were not allowed into their schools. They made the provision of western education as a tool for conversion. Muslims were given the option of either choosing Islam or western education. Many parents that were suspicious of the plan either retained

³¹Siyan Oyeweso. 1999. Eminent Yoruba Muslims. Ibadan: Rex Charles. this is a detailed work on these Muslim rulers and Raifu Isiaka, Interrogating Shariah Practice in Yorubaland, 1829-1918, *Uniosun Journal of Law, Development and the Humanities*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, 2016, pp.181-188

³²Gbadamosi, T.G.O. 1978. *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba, 1841-1908*. London: Longman Group Limited, p.230

their wards at the local Arabic schools or pulled resources to establish Muslims formal schools offering western education in addition to Arabic and Islamic studies.³³

Origin of Islam in Ondo Division of Southeastern Yorubaland up to 1930: An Overview

The Southeastern part of Yorubaland was a major part of Yorubaland that equally embraced Islam in the 19th century. As argued by Atanda, it was towards the end of the nineteenth century that Islam spread to eastern Yorubaland, which comprises Ondo, Akure, Ekiti, Owo, Akoko and so on.³⁴ Islam got to different towns in this part of Yorubaland at different times. Its introduction to this part of Yorubaland was a function of varying sources. For instance, the introduction of Islam to Akoko was by the Nupe through their military incursion into the area. In fact, it was recorded that it was only Oka, a major town in Akokoland, with well organised military that was able to repel the incursion of the Nupe, and thus remained unconquered. Others were defeated. However, Islam is very strong in Ikare-Akoko.³⁵ From Akoko, the influence of Islam began to spread and penetrate other parts of Southeastern Yorubaland such as Owo, Akure and Ondo.

Ondo was a major town in the Southeastern Yorubaland that embraced Islam in the 19th century. According to Gbadamosi, the earliest record of Islam in Ondo was around 1880.³⁶ Meanwhile, as time went on, a core of Muslim residents developed in Ondo and their number increased to such an extent that early in the reign of *Oba* Jimkun (1881-1894), a Muslim community was formed under the leadership of Afa (Alhaji) Muhammed Alimi, who was chosen as their Imam.³⁷ Even up till 1930s, only a very small population had embraced Islam in the whole of the division.³⁸ For example, in Ode-Ondo (the first community to embrace Islam in the whole of the division), where the presence of Islam had been felt since 1880, there was only one small mosque there. This mosque was located at Iparuku Street,

³³Raheemson, M.O. 1997. 'The Rise and Growth of Islam in Ibadan' in G.O. Ogunremi (ed.) *Ibadan, A Historical, Cultural and Socio-Economic Study of an African City*. Lagos: Oluyole Club, pp.320-329

³⁴Atanda, J.A. 1980: *An Introduction to Yoruba History*...p.38

³⁵Razaq 'Deremi Abubakre 'Islam and the Palace in Yorubaland' in Muibi O. Opeloye et.al (eds.) *Islam in Yorubaland, History, Education and Culture* pp.186-187, also Sunday Abraham Ogunode 'From Kingdoms to Kingdom: A Historical Appraisal of the Chieftaincy Institution in Okaland' in O.B. Olaoba et.al (eds.) *Yoruba History and Historians. A Festschrift for Professor Gabriel Olorundare Oguntomisin* (Ibadan: John Archers, 2015) p.146

³⁶Gbadamosi, T.G.O. 1978. *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba, 1841-1908*. London: Longman Group Limited, p.85

³⁷Gbadamosi, T.G.O. 1978. *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba, 1841-1908*. London: Longman Group Limited, p.85

³⁸Olaniyan, A.B. 2013. Education in Ondo Kingdom. Ajayi, S.I (ed) *The Evolution of Ondo Kingdom, over 500 years (1510-2010)*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, p.125

Ondo.³⁹ From the oral interview conducted with Justice Rasheed Fawehinmi, it was revealed that up till early 1930s, Islam in the whole of Ondo Division was majorly restricted to main towns like Ode-Ondo and Ile-Oluji.⁴⁰ Generally, Islam began to spread in Ondo community in the 1940s through the activity of Seidu Tugbobo, who later attracted Ansar-ud-Deen Society to the town.⁴¹ In order words, Ansar-ud-Deen Society played significant role in the growth and spread of Islam in Ondo town. Its contribution to the spread of Islam in the community was made possible through its regular evangelism *da'wah*

The Yoruba Cocoa migrant farmers and the growth of Islam in the rural communities of Ondo Division since 1930s

As argued by Berry, the emigration of Yoruba cocoa migrant farmers to Ondo Division began in the 1930s.⁴² These Yoruba cocoa migrant farmers (both Muslims and Christians) who migrated mainly from the defunct Oyo Province (now made up of Oyo and Osun States), Abeokuta and Ilorin Provinces, Ekiti Division of Nigeria to Ondo Division was caused by some geographical and economic reasons (which were both pull and push factors). While the availability and accessibility to abundant fertile land, rise in the prices of cocoa, liberality of Ondo people to strangers constituted the pull factors, the challenge of swollen shoot disease and environmental degradation were the major pull factors. These details of their waves of migration since 1930s, which are not focus of this section, had been discussed in extant literature.⁴³

Having settled in different areas within the division, one major positive impact of the cocoa migrant farmers was the spread of Islam. The firm establishment of Islam in some rural communities of Ondo Division during this period was attributed to these migrant farmers. These migrant Yoruba Muslims mostly migrated from the defunct Oyo Province of Ibadan, Osogbo, Oyan, Ifo, Ikirun, Ede, Ago-Are, Saki, Iragbiji, Ogbomoso among others with significant few from Ilorin and other places to some rural communities of Ondo Division. The role of these migrant Yoruba Muslims in the spread of Islam in some rural communities

³⁹Olaniyan, A.B. 2013. Education in Ondo Kingdom. Ajayi, S.I (ed) *The Evolution of Ondo....*

⁴⁰Oral interview held with Justice Rasheed Fawehinmi, Aged 76 at Ondo town on 21 September, 2013

⁴¹Olaniyan, A.B. 2013. Education in Ondo Kingdom. Ajayi, S.I. Ed. *The Evolution of Ondo Kingdom...*

⁴²Berry, S.S. 1975. Cocoa, Custom and Socio-Economic Change in Rural Western Nigeria. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.58

⁴³Berry, S.S. 1975. Cocoa, Custom and Socio-Economic Change in Rural Western Nigeria. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.58; Walker, E.A. 2000. The Changing patterns of Labour relations in the cocoa farming belt of Southwestern Nigeria, 1950s to 1990s. African Economic History of Nigeria, No.28, pp.123-140 and Adesote, S.A. (2024). Environmental Influence on the Migration and Settlement of OyoOsun Cocoa Migrant Farmers in Ondo Division, Southwestern Nigeria, 1930s-1970s. Romanian Journal of Historical Studies Volume VII – Issues 1-2, pp.85-98

of Ondo Division such as Iyere-Adeboyekun, Kajola, Lipanu, Labosipo, Ago-Ikirun and Bamikemo-Oja cannot be overemphasised. Before the coming of migrants, these rural areas of Ondo Division had not been exposed to Islam. Thus, it was through the coming of Yoruba cocoa migrant farmers and labourers (who came from the areas of Yorubaland where Islam had already been firmly established) that eventually introduced Islamic religion to these rural communities.⁴⁴

As pointed out earlier, Islam had been introduced to the migrants' places of origins as far back as early 19th century through the activities of soldiers, settlers and above all traders.⁴⁵ It was from these Islamised areas, especially those of the Northwestern Yorubaland (such as Oyo, Iseyin, Igboho, Saki and Ago-Are) as well as those from Ogbomoso, Osogbo and Ede (these were areas where Muslim migrants settled after the fall of Old Oyo empire)⁴⁶ that Islam later spread to the interior part of eastern Yorubaland of Ondo Division in particular during this period of study. In all, the spread of Islam into the eastern part of Yorubaland which was peaceful was through trade relations carried out by the Yoruba Muslims⁴⁷ and who were mostly rural farmers, unlike in other parts of Yorubaland (Northern and Western parts such as Old Oyo, Ikoyi, Ogbomoso, Iseyin, Igboho, Ketu and Lagos) where it spread through war and liberated Africans who returned to these parts of Yorubaland (Ketu and Lagos in particular) from Sierra Leone and Brazil between 1840 and 1870.⁴⁸

First, Lipanu community was one of the major migrant community in Ondo Division where Islam was introduced to during this period. The first central mosque to be established in the community was set up in the late 1940s by the first set of cocoa migrant Muslim farmers that came to the community. Those Muslim farmers were led by Alhaji Raji (the first chief Imam of the mosque, who came from Oyan), and Alhaji Adeleke (who came from Ifo).⁴⁹ Aside the central mosque, other small mosques sprang up in the community and were set up by other muslim farmers. Also, Iyere-Adeboyekun, Labosipo and Bamikemo-Oja were other rural communities of Ondo Division that witnessed the presence of Islam. For instance, while the first mosque in Iyere-Adeboyekun was built in 1959 by Pa. Salawu Ajayi (who came from Otan Ayegbaju), that of Labosipo and Bamikemo-Oja were built around 1960 and 1962 respectively. Pa. Tihamiyu Iyiola became the first Chief Imam of the mosque in

⁴⁴Oral interview held with Pa. Olalere Ajayi, Aged 75 years at Lipanu on 13 August, 2013

⁴⁵Gbadamosi, T.G.O. 1978. *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba, 1841-1908*.... P.4. See also Falola, T and Adediran, A. 1983. *Islam and Christianity in West Africa*. Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, p.23

⁴⁶Gbadamosi, T.G.O. 1978. *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba, 1841-1908*....pp.4 and 24

⁴⁷Gbadamosi, T.G.O. 1978. *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba, 1841-1908*....

⁴⁸Atanda, J.A. 1980: *An Introduction to Yoruba History*... p.38

⁴⁹Oral interview held with Pa. Olalere Ajayi, Aged 75 years at Lipanu on 13 August, 2013

Labosipo, while Pa. Aransi (who came from Ibadan) was first chief Imam of Bamikemo-Oja.⁵⁰

In Kajola community, the evolution of Islam was traced to Kadiri Ayelabola (migrant labourer who relocated from Maiduguri) rather than the Yoruba cocoa migrant farmers. However, Kadiri was later supported by Yoruba cocoa migrant farmers in the spread of Islam in the community. He was assisted by Yoruba Muslims who came mainly from places such as Ibadan, Erin-Osun, Osogbo and Ilorin. Through the activities of Alhaji Raji (first chief Imam from Ilorin), Alhaji Bodupe (from Osogbo), Alhaji Ibrahim (from Ilorin), Alhaji Alato (from Ilorin) and Alhaji Aransi (from Ibadan), the first central mosque in the community was built in 1965.⁵¹ Other mosques equally sprang up in the community. Up till 1986, there were about five mosques in Kajola.⁵² With firm establishment of Islam in Kajola, Islam spread to other neighbouring communities like Ifara Panu, Obadore, Basola, Aba Baale, Aba Panu among others.⁵³

Conclusion

The foregoing discourse has critically historicised the role of the Yoruba cocoa migrant farmers to the spread of Islam in the rural communities of Ondo Division of Southeastern Yorubaland. It argued that prior to the arrival of the Yoruba migrants in the division in the 1930s, Islam had been introduced to the division, but was restricted to only the urban areas like Ode-Ondo and Ile-Oluji. The spread of Islam in the rural areas of the division like Lipanu, Kajola, Labosipo, Ago-Ikirun among others was attributed to the coming of the cocoa migrant farmers who came majorly from the defunct Oyo and Abeokuta Provinces, with few of them from Ilorin. These migrant farmers who came purposely to set up cocoa farms, succeeded in building mosques in their various host communities in the division. It concluded that the liberal reception of the migrants by the host helped the migrants to contribute immensely to the socio-economic development of their various host communities. This development facilitated the socio-economic integration of migrants in Ondo Division during this period.

⁵⁰Oral interviews held with Alhaji Yusuf Afolabi (Alias Baba Kwara), Aged 70+ at Bamikemo-Oja; Pa. Ogundele Joseph, Aged 85+ at Iyere-Adeboyekun and Alhaji Raifu Olabosipo, Aged 78+ at Labosipo between 6 and 13 August, 2013

⁵¹Oral interview held with Alhaji Bamidepo Abdulhaseez Maruf (Teacher), Aged 51 years at Kajola on 5 August, 2013

⁵² Oral interviews held with Chief Awokunle Sulaiman, Aged 80 years at Kajola on 5 August, 2013 and Alhaji Bamidepo Abdulhaseez Maruf (Teacher), Aged 51...

⁵³Oral interview held with Alhaji Bamidepo Abdulhaseez Maruf (Teacher), Aged 51 years at Kajola on 5 August, 2013