

Islam and Colonial Rule in Lagos

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Introduction

This essay provides an explanation of the dynamics of the interaction between Islam and politics by placing emphasis on the role played by Muslims in the collision of traditionalism and British rule as colonialism took root in Lagos. The focus is on the development of a political schism within the nascent Muslim community of metropolitan Lagos at the start of the twentieth century up until the end of the 1940s. It highlights the role of Islam in an emerging urban settlement experiencing rapid transformation from a purely rural and traditional center into a colonial urban center. The essay is located within the broader issues of urban change and transition in twentieth-century tropical Africa. Three major developments (viz: the central mosque crisis, the Eleko affair, and the Oluwa land case) are used as the vehicles through which the objectives of the essay are achieved.

The introduction of Islam into Lagos has been studied by T. G. O. Gbadamosi as part of the history of Islam in southwestern Nigeria.¹ This epic study does not pay specific attention to Lagos, devoted as it is to the growth of Islam in a far-flung territory like the whole of modern southwestern Nigeria. His contribution to a collection of essays on the history of Lagos² curiously leaves out Islam's phenomenal impact on Lagosian politics during the first half of the twentieth century. In an attempt to fill this gap, Hakeem Danmole's essay also stops short of appreciating the fundamental link between the process of urbanization, symbolized in this case by colonial rule, and the vanguard role played by Muslims in the inevitable clash of tradition and colonial rule in Lagos between 1900 and 1950.³

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The Aftermath of the British Bombardment of Lagos

To understand the constant crisis within Lagosian society during the first half of the twentieth century, it is necessary to recall Britain's forcible acquisition of Lagos under the cession treaty with Dosumu. This action, and the subsequent transformation of its consulate into a colony in 1861, laid the foundation for the political problems that dominated the relationship between the traditional ruling class and the British colonial administration in the period covered under study. The bombardment of Lagos in 1851 has been well discussed elsewhere and need not concern us here.⁴

One significant outcome of this incident and the reinstatement of Prince Akitoye to the throne of Lagos was that a number of traditional ceremonies normally performed at the installation of the traditional Lagosian ruler, the Eleko, were not performed. This may be explained partly by the fact that Akitoye was not a new ruler. However, his burial was carried out by his son, Dosumu, in Lagos and not in Benin as tradition demanded. Other related traditional customs were also ignored. In fact, Dosumu succeeded his father with the assistance of the British, who claimed that the latter had designated the former as his successor.⁵ Thus, the 1853 succession of Akitoye by Dosumu was the beginning of the bastardization of the Lagosian political tradition.

In addition to the foregoing, the 1861 treaty of cession signed by Dosumu and Acting British Consul McCoskry rendered the position of the Eleko less important: he was allowed to use the title of "king" only in its "African signification" and could only settle disputes between Lagos indigenes, subject to British laws.⁶ It is also important to note that the cession treaty made the Eleko a complete puppet, as the authority conferred by tradition and custom was taken over by the colonial government in exchange for an annual pension from the Queen of Britain. Any refusal by the Eleko to obey the colonial government's orders usually resulted in the stoppage of his stipend.⁷ A graphic summary of the 1861 treaty vis-à-vis the Eleko's wielding of traditional authority is that it led to the loss of his political power and, correspondingly, ushered in a new sociopolitical order in Lagos. While his position became that of an honorable member of a traditional oligarchy, the new British colonial officials became the aristocracy, repatriated Africans constituted the middle class, and the very numerous indigenous elements were located at the bottom of the ladder.⁸ Some members of the traditional elites also belonged to the middle class.

The experience under Dosumu was repeated at the ascension of Oyekan I to the Lagosian throne. At the death of Dosumu in 1885, Oyekan I was presented by the chiefs to the British officials for approval as the chosen candidate for the vacant stool of Eleko. What began as an accidental phenomenon after the death of Akitoye in 1853 thus became a

permanent feature of traditional Lagosian politics. This role of recognizing a newly chosen Eleko by the British became an important, but clearly damaging, weapon against the traditional system of selecting an Eleko (phased out in 1900 when Oyekan I died). At the death of Oyekan I, Sir William MacGregor, the colonial governor in Lagos, ordered that the Lagosian chiefs, who hitherto had the responsibility for choosing a new Eleko, should no longer perform this function. He then gave this responsibility to the princes of Lagos. After a series of succession disputes among the princes, all of whom were qualified to ascend the throne by virtue of their birth, Yesufu Omoba, their leader, presented Audu Eshugbayi to MacGregor for recognition. In approving this selection, MacGregor described graphically the new status of the Lagosian ruler within the context of the British administration at that time:

The successor to Oyekan is only head of the family; that he has no ruling function and that he is with regard to the Government, no official position beyond that of Chief of the Docemo-Oyekan house.⁹

At the dawn of the twentieth century, therefore, the Eleko had no ruling power. As far as the British were concerned, he was a chief of the Docemo-Oyekan house rather than the ruler of Lagos. He had no ruling function and could not be seen as the authorized ruler, a function that now belonged to the colonial administration. The new situation also brought in its wake a direct contradistinction to the case in the Yoruba hinterland, where other traditional rulers were used as agents of British administration (indirect rule).¹⁰ Thus a situation arose in Lagos in which the British colonial administration found itself in a dilemma over a policy that sought to utilize traditional institutions for some local administration purposes but without recognizing its custodians as such. As long as a traditional ruler did the bidding of the British, the inherent contradictions in this type of arrangement remained veiled.

When the reverse was true, the contradiction and dilemma of such a policy ignited conflict between erstwhile collaborating groups. In Lagos, beginning in 1908, the conflict between the traditional ruler and the British was a direct manifestation of the contradiction of the policy that had begun in 1853, whereby the British imposed a ruler on Lagos without regard for tradition and custom. The entire episode, lasting from 1908 to about 1931, was known as the "Eleko Affair." It should be regarded as having commenced in earnest in 1915,¹¹ although the antecedents of the crisis can be traced to 1908, when the colonial government introduced the idea of a water rate levy (which first polarized the society). However, the real outbreak of mutual hostility between the Eleko and the colonial government commenced in 1915. This was also the time of the Central Mosque crisis, in which the different sections of the Lagosian Muslim community were deeply involved (discussed below).

The Growth of Islam in Lagos before 1900

Gbadamosi suggests that Islam reached Lagos through its northern neighbors via Ijeboland, Oyo, and Ilorin.¹² Although the actual date of its introduction into Lagos remains unknown, it is known that Islam was being practiced as far south of Lagos as Badagry by the late 1790s.¹³ It is also suggested that Lagos introduced Islam to its southwestern neighbors.¹⁴ Going by the dating of the chronological sequence of the Lagosian rulers, it is reasonable to suggest that Islam was introduced into Lagos in the 1760s.¹⁵ By the reign of Adele Ajosun I (c. 1805), Islam had become reasonably popular as some members of the royalty embraced it openly.¹⁶

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Islam had grown from a religion practiced quietly by a few adherents into one with an apparent indirect royal sanction. In spite of the paucity of information on this subject, some data can be adduced to reconstruct its pre-1900 history. The first mosque was built in the Idoluwo area of Lagos in 1776.¹⁷ This did not necessarily imply that Islam was entrenched firmly in Lagos by this period. In reality the opposite was true. Losi suggests that one of the reasons for the initial problems encountered by Adele Ajosun with the Lagosian oligarchy was his open support for Islam.¹⁸ Thus it can be said that the first major political backing that Islam received in Lagos was from the royalty.

The transformation of the Lagosian economy from subsistence into a complex and intricate slave-dominated commercial system from the late eighteenth century had a radiating influence on the fortunes of Islam. One significant social impact of this trade was the abundant wealth it brought to Lagos. As this trade grew steadily in the early nineteenth century, the fortunes of the Lagosian ruler changed: he became wealthy from the tolls and customs duties he was able to levy on the Europeans slave traders. Consequently, the throne became more attractive to those princes who had the right to aspire to the throne. From the late eighteenth century, therefore, Lagos witnessed turbulent social upheavals as princes created factions that supported them in the civil uprisings attending their drives for power. Between 1800 and 1851, Lagos witnessed no less than four civil princely uprisings. In some cases, these disputes assumed the dimension of civil wars: the 1835 Ewekoko war (Oluwole vs. Kosoko) and the 1845 Olomiro war (Akitoye vs. Kosoko) are ready examples in this regard.¹⁹ These wars provided the first major platform for the assertion of Muslims in Lagosian politics.

As the princes gathered supporters in their quests for control over the slave trade in Lagos, the ranks of the quiet adherents and practitioners of Islam became a ready recruitment ground for the warring factions. Most Muslims supported Kosoko, an affable but *enfant terrible* of the royal household who later became the Eleko of Lagos. This preference was based on the memory of his father, Esinloku, who had provided sanctuary for a number of Muslim sojourners who had been trading in the Lagos area since the early nineteenth century. He had even adopted a former

slave of the royal household, Oshodi Landuji, a Nupeman from modern central Nigeria, in the early nineteenth century and later appointed him to the post of chief customs collector and interpreter. Other itinerant Muslims must have been sufficiently impressed by this transformation in the fortunes of Oshodi to support the offspring of such a liberal aristocrat. Kosoko, though not a practicing Muslim, was affable, kind, generous, and supported the freedom of worship. In the ensuing crises between Kosoko and his brethren, most of his supporters were Muslims who admired his religious liberalism and generosity.²⁰ While the largely Muslim Kosoko party attained victory in 1845 during the Olomiro war, it suffered defeats at the hands of the British during the bombardment of December 1851.²¹ Consequently, Kosoko was forced to flee Lagos at the end of 1851.

Out of a deep sense of loyalty and commitment to a popular leader, most of the pro-Kosoko Muslims, among them Imam Salu Gana and other prominent Muslim leaders, followed him when he took refuge in the surrounding villages of the eastern districts of Lagos from 1852 onwards. In this way, Muslims formed the first group of Islamic preachers in the emergent lagoon Kingdom of Lagos since the eighteenth century and also in the surrounding settlements to the east and the west of Lagos. However, while some of those who went into exile with Kosoko refused to return with him to Lagos after he reached an agreement with the British in 1868, the majority returned and led the budding Islamic community from the 1870s. In August 1884, the first two Muslims to return from a pilgrimage to Mecca arrived in Lagos. A local historian captured graphically the social mood on that occasion:

It was a grand occasion for the Mohammedans to see them return, after their departure since 1877. All the Mohammedans went to meet them at Ebute Ero. Many went on horseback; on their way home they visited Imam, and also King Dosumu at his palace. He received them kindly.²²

In the late nineteenth century, the Muslim community continued to play a significant role in Lagosian politics. As colonialism was being entrenched in Lagos and its immediate environs, Muslim leaders assisted the British colonial administration in settling inter-Muslim disputes in different parts of Yorubaland (Epe and Ilorin) in the late 1890s.²³

From the middle of the nineteenth century, Lagos witnessed an influx of ex-slaves who had been freed as a result of London's abolition crusade. For the Lagosian Muslims, the presence of these ex-slaves provided an impetus for their rehabilitation after the bitter civil wars of the 1840s and early 1850s. Freed Muslim slaves gave considerable support to Islam with the hope of enhancing its fortunes in Lagos. One prominent person in this respect was Muhammad Shitta-Bey, a rich Muslim merchant who, in 1892, financed singlehandedly the building of a mosque that contemporary Lagosians considered an architectural masterpiece. This undertaking cost him over three thousand pounds and earned him the title of "Bey"

from the Ottoman sultan. The mosque was commissioned by Abdullahi Quillam, president of the Liverpool Mosque Association, who had come to Lagos solely for that purpose.²⁴ Such Muslim nobles soon provided a new rallying point for the expanding Muslim community. It was said of Muhammad Shitta-Bey that "during the long course of his residence at Lagos, he constantly gave support to the kings of Lagos."²⁵ Thus it was not surprising that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the Muslims had rallied around prominent and wealthy indigenous elements who also constituted the new oligarchy and patrons/intermediaries between the emergent British colonial administration and the traditional people.

By the beginning of 1900, its transformation appears to have cast the Muslim community in the role that its leaders would play subsequently in Lagosian politics and society. It can also be said that by 1900, Islam had been transformed from an unknown quantity into the most important and dominant political force in Lagos. The phenomenal transformation of the Muslim community can be gleaned from its consistent population increase between 1860 and 1880. From about eight thousand in 1862, its population grew to over fourteen thousand in 1881 (out of a total of about forty-two thousand).²⁶ The 1872 population census indicates that Muslims numbered about eleven thousand, compared to less than five thousand Christians and about fourteen thousand traditional worshippers.²⁷ At the dawn of the twentieth century, Muslims were both numerous and were found among the merchants in the town. Some of the well-known Muslim merchants in Lagos were A. M. Mustapha, the foremost silk and cotton merchant, and Karimu Kotun, a general merchant who was the sole agent for a number of European manufacturers in 1910. His father, Brimah Kotun, was a frontline Muslim leader up to the turn of the century. Karimu Kotun became president of the Muslim Cricket Club of Lagos, was elected president of the Muslim-dominated cooperative society Olowolagba (1913), and, in 1919, was appointed private secretary to the Eshugbayi Eleko, the traditional ruler of Lagos.²⁸ The Muslim community led and sustained the resistance against colonial rule and its policy of non-consultation and repression from the beginning of the twentieth century until the end of the 1930s.

Prior to 1908 when the "water rate crisis" broke out and divided the Muslim community into two major factions, it was united and represented a major source of support for the emergent British administration. Apart from the assistance it rendered to concluding the above-mentioned truce in Epe and Ilorin, its leadership was a major bastion of colonial rule. The chief imam of Lagos, Ibrahim, was awarded the commemoration medal on the occasion of Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee (January 1898). In a similar manner, another prominent Muslim leader and local financial potentate, Alli-Balogun, was appointed a member of the General Sanitation Board, which was established in 1899 by Sir William MacGregor, the colonial governor.²⁹ Most Muslims continued to support the position taken by their leaders until they were factionalized by the British decision to introduce a water rate levy in 1908.

The Water Rate Crisis and Its Aftermath

In 1908 the colonial administration, with the aim of improving the town's sanitation situation, decided to introduce pipe-borne water into Lagos.³⁰ The cost of this "new" source of water supply was to be defrayed partly by the indigenous people, who were to pay a water rate levy. In general, Lagosians opposed this levy vehemently. In fact, this opposition was captured graphically in a popular song of the time:

Ka sanwo ina, ka sanwo oju eta
Oluwa re k ma sere

Should we continue to use all our meager resources to pay levies and rates (for light and now water), we will have nothing left to improve ourselves.³¹

Incidentally, this levy laid the foundation for the first polarization of Lagosian society since it had fallen under British control some fifty years earlier.³² Lagos was divided into two mutually opposing camps—the pro- and antiwater rate factions—that would continue on almost every point at issue within Lagosian society until well into the 1940s. Meanwhile, the two groups were led by prominent Muslim leaders of the Lagos community who were also the political and social elites of the period.

In the circumstances Ibrahim, the chief imam of Lagos, and a few other traditional elites led the prolevy (progovernment) faction. The antilevy (antigovernment) group was led by Adamu Animashaun,³³ a very important Muslim cleric, who had the support of other influential members. It should be added that the chief imam supported the levy partly because he believed in its inherent usefulness. In addition, available evidence seems to suggest that his support was also encouraged by the fact that he had been in the good books of the colonial government since the 1890s³⁴ and had become an important ally of the imperial administration.³⁵ On the other hand, the majority who opposed the levy did so because they thought it preposterous that they should pay for portable water. To them, if the "British water" had to be paid for, they would prefer to continue drinking the water they had had before the advent of the British. In spite of these pockets of local support, however, the colonial administration was forced to abandon this levy when the majority's agitation against it became unbearable.

The Central Mosque Crisis

Prior to 1915 when the first major crisis in the Central Mosque brought the colonial government directly into Muslim communal politics, the resident Muslim community had had a series of intraparty conflicts.³⁶ Disagreements existed as to the manner in which the chief imam (Ibra-

him) was handling some of the Central Mosque's affairs. To some, he appeared highhanded and arbitrary. The major crisis that brought the colonial administration into the affairs of the Muslim community was the conversion of the Obanikoro (Adamo Akeju), head of the "Ifa priest" and traditional physicians, to Islam by the chief imam. Some sections of the Muslim community could not see why the imam should do this and demanded his removal.³⁷

However, one must take cognizance of the fact that the attitude of the Muslim majority to the chief imam was dictated by the fact that he had supported the colonial administration over the introduction of the water rate levy. The demand for his removal over the conversion of the chief priest to the traditional ruler of Lagos was thus an opportunity for them to remove him from the leadership of the Muslim community. The imam and his handful of supporters resisted this and thus inaugurated a crisis that was to last for three decades. The Jamat Muslims did not allow Imam Ibrahim to lead their prayers at the Central Mosque, an action that served as a first step toward removing him from the imamate of Lagos. In a way, therefore, an imamate crisis was provoked as another person was appointed imam in his place. The crisis reached a head when the majority group prevented physically the embattled chief imam from leading any prayer in the mosque.

The colonial administration intervened by ordering the police to lock up the mosque. In a calculated move, the British decided that the mosque should be used in turns by the warring factions. However, in a clearly partisan manner, the mosque was flooded by the Colonial Fire Service after the chief imam's party had prayed, thus denying the Jamat party its turn. The excuse offered by the British administration for this "dastardly act" was that they had received a call that the mosque was on fire.³⁸ This singular act by the colonial authorities, rather than discouraging the Jamat party, toughened its members resolve.

In addition, the colonial administration invited an Islamic jurist from Nupeland to intervene, apportion blame appropriately, and solve it. However, the Islamic scholar merely cautioned tolerance and, on the eve of his departure, confided in some of the Muslim leaders that he had been prevailed upon by the British to blame the majority group.³⁹ Similarly, in an attempt to further intimidate the imam and his supporters, the majority group declared some Central Mosque posts vacant, when in actual fact they belonged to some members who supported the imam. The Jamat party decided to fill these posts with their own supporters. Thus Abibu Oki, an influential party member, was made the Balogun, Sanni Shitta-Bey the Seriki Musulumi, and Mumuni Animashaun, the Mogaji. These appointments were sanctioned by the Eleko, who also presided over their installation (turbanning) ceremonies, which took place in his palace.

As a result of his involvement, the colonial government decided to suspend the Eleko on the ground that he had no right to sanction such appointments, especially when the presiding Balogun (Alli-Balogun) was molested by the people on the installation day.⁴⁰ In addition, the colonial

administration also stopped the Eleko's stipend. The major reason given for this action was that the Eleko had acted in a manner contrary to local custom and that he was aware that in "doing so, he was acting in defiance of the wishes of the government."⁴¹ To reach a decision, the colonial administration formed a committee of thirteen (known as the famous thirteen) to deliberate on the matter. Ten members of the committee, viz: Sir Kitoyi Ajasa, Bishop Isaac Oluwole, T. A. J. Ogunbiyi, John Randle, and Orisadipe Obasa (to mention a few) supported the Eleko's deposition, while E. O. Moore, J. K. Coker, and Akinwande Savage opposed it.⁴² On 14 November 1919, the Eleko was suspended.

The news of the Eleko's suspension evoked a feeling of sadness in most Lagosians. They seemed to have been enveloped in a "funeral mood" when they heard about the suspension and his possible dethronement. Furthermore, an atmosphere of order, calm, and comparative quietness of several thousands of people, who believed rightly that their political liberty and rights were at stake, was noticeable at a meeting in Iluipesi Hall that was called to discuss the matter.⁴³ Apart from this psychological and emotional display of loyalty and support for the ruler, the whole atmosphere of Lagos became charged, while some people even saw the government's actions as an "overreaction to a purely religious event."⁴⁴ *The Lagos Weekly Record* commented aptly that it did not "share the opinion that Prince Eleko has acted contrary to local custom and precedent, or in wilful defiance of the unexpressed wishes of the government."⁴⁵

On its part, the colonial administration predicated its suspension of the Eleko on the premise that his sanctioning of Islamic chieftaincies was wrong. The government believed that the action would have been wrong anytime, claiming that the Eleko was mischievous considering the fact that the society was polarized at the time. It was also believed that the Eleko's approval of the chieftaincies was capable of complicating the situation and making it more difficult to solve.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, the cancellation of the Eleko's stipend had little or no effect on him. Rich and influential members of the Jamat party, among them Chief Ahmadu Tijani, the Oluwa of Lagos, Abibu Oki, Karimu Kotun, Brimah Igbo, and many others, donated money.⁴⁷ This financial support led the Eleko's adversaries (the chief imam's group) to send a deputation, in conjunction with members of the royal family, to the colonial government for the sole purpose of seeking an outright deposition of Eshugbayi as the Eleko.⁴⁸ Correspondingly, the pro-Eleko group sent its own deputation to explain that the Eleko did not act in the Muslim titles' imbroglio in order to defy the colonial authorities but that his role was performed in good faith.⁴⁹ In the end, the colonial government reinstated Eshugbayi after he agreed to cancel the controversial appointments.⁵⁰

The government expected that the Eleko would stop supporting the majority of Lagosians, who were always ready to oppose various decisions taken by the colonial government that they considered inimical to their interests. However, and contrary to this expectation, the Eleko's support for the majority continued to increase.

The Oluwa Land Case

No sooner had the Eleko been reinstated than the Lagosian Muslims launched themselves into another controversy: a legal tussle with the colonial administration over one of their leader's property rights. Known popularly as the "Oluwa land case," this episode refers to the legal dispute between Chief Oluwa of Lagos and the colonial administration over the former's land at Apapa.⁵¹ Since 1915, Chief Ahmadu Tijani, the Oluwa of Lagos and Apapa, had requested British compensation for his confiscated land at Apapa to no avail. This prompted him to institute legal action against the government. A Lagos court decided in 1915 that compensation could only be paid on the basis of seigniorial rights⁵² and not as owner by right of his being the head of the Oluwa family. Having found the court decision unacceptable, Chief Oluwa lodged an appeal with the Privy Council in London in 1916.

Throughout the period of the appeal, which lasted until 1920, most Lagosian Muslims rallied around Chief Oluwa and gave moral and financial support for his journey to London to listen to the case. However, it was during this trip that a "minor" incident took place, one that was to have a profound effect on the history of the colonial administration's relationship with the vast majority of Lagosian Muslims.

Chief Oluwa had appointed Herbert Macaulay, the fierce anticolonial and pioneer nationalist of Lagos, as his interpreter. The Eleko had given his staff of office to Chief Oluwa as a mark of solidarity. During this trip, Macaulay was reported to have said that the Eleko was acclaimed by all Nigerians as their king and that five million pounds of revenue accruing to Lagos, which the British had promised him as his personal income, had not been paid. Although Hugh Clifford considered the purported statement "irresponsible vapouring and wilful distortion of historical fact," he accused the Eleko of having prior knowledge of the incident.⁵³ Macaulay denied the statement and pointed out that what he had said was different from what had been published. In his refutation, he said that Prince Eleko was acclaimed by seventeen million Nigerians as the titular king of Lagos and that King Docemo, who had ceded Lagos in 1861, had been promised a pension equal to its net revenue. However, he still had not received the net revenue to the British government, which was four million pounds.⁵⁴

In spite of this refutation, the Eleko was asked to denounce publicly Macaulay, since he was carrying his staff. The Eleko refused to tarnish Macaulay's image by obeying this order. Furthermore, the implication of such a denial would have been more far-reaching for the anticolonial group in Lagos, since Macaulay would have been humiliated publicly and denied by the Eleko, who was the foremost political elite and symbol of traditional, charismatic, and legal authority among the indigenous elements.⁵⁵ Apart from this, the Eleko was not naive about the intention of the colonial authorities to use such a public denial to discredit Macaulay further among the vast indigenous populace, who had come to see him as a symbol of their resistance to foreign (British) rule.

The Eleko's refusal earned him another suspension from office, the cancellation of his stipend, and the withdrawal of recognition by the colonial authorities. This problem is significant for this essay. The political schism that had been perpetuated in Lagos since 1908 was enhanced further. As expected, it was more pronounced within the Lagos Muslim community. The community quickly organized itself into anti- and pro-Eleko factions, following the demarcation from the time of the Central Mosque imbroglio. However, the Muslim community now, more than ever, sought to make maximum use of educated non-Muslim elites to fight the Eleko's case. The pro-Eleko group witnessed the amalgam of most Lagosian Muslims and such educated members of the elite as Herbert Macaulay, Egerton Shyngle, C. O. Blaize, and Akinwande Savage, to mention a few. On the other hand, the minority Muslim faction sought the support and assistance of such elite personages as Henry Carr, John Randle, Orisadipe Obasa, S. H. Pearce, Sir Kitoyi Ajasa, Bishop Isaac Oluwole, and Reverend T. A. J. Ogunbiyi, among others. Thus in Lagos of the 1920s, colonial rule was able to divide the Muslim community.

Undoubtedly the majority of Muslims, who formed the Jamat party had the sympathy of the indigenous elements of Lagos. Leaders of this group included Bakare Misiyun, Braimoh Igbo, Alli Sanni, Momo Oloko, Lawani Kekereogun, Abibu Oki, Braimoh Ekun-Giwa, and Adamo Akinola, among others. Together with the educated elites who supported them, these men formed the "Ilu Committee," which took on the responsibility of protecting the Eleko's rights and person throughout the turbulent period. The Eleko would be derecognized once again and, in 1925 he was deposed and eventually banished to Oyo in the Oyo province on 8 August 1925. As in the case of the previous suspensions and derecognitions, the reaction of the Muslim community, which had been effectively transformed into the foremost anticolonial group, was that of shock at the extent, this time, of their ruler's persecution. Their revulsion was to determine their dedication not only to the mitigation of the Eleko's plight in terms of his upkeep but also their desire to see the case to a logical conclusion.

Between 1925, when the Eleko was in Oyo, and 1931, when a favorable court decision in London enabled him to return to the throne, the Muslim-led Ilu Committee supported the Eleko in all possible ways. The committee levied its members and contributed thirty-five pounds monthly for the Eleko's stipend, instead of the twenty-five pounds that the government was paying him.⁵⁶ It is also significant that apart from paying his stipend, the committee bore the entire cost of the legal services relating to its leader's reinstatement. The latter was the most important indication of its dedication to the Eleko and his welfare, as more than five hundred pounds was contributed and paid to lawyers to pursue the case at the Privy Council in London. Members were so committed to this course of action that some mortgaged their properties in order to pursue the matter vigorously.⁵⁷ The case was to be retried, as directed by the Privy Council, when Sir Donald Cameron, appointed governor in 1931, ordered that the suit be withdrawn and that Eshugbayi be allowed to return to Lagos as Eleko.

With the Eleko's return to Lagos, the content and nature of Lagosian politics changed. Muslims who had been in the anticolonial camp became the new collaborating class with the government, while those who were progovernment automatically became the anticolonial group.

The Eleko affair had a number of consequences on Lagosian society. It led to the growth of many vernacular newspapers, as different writers sought to preserve the details of the developments by writing about the incident. But more significantly, the issue crystallized further the organizational ability of indigenous Muslim elites in colonial Lagos, for they were able to rally the generality of the populace to the protection of their beliefs. However, in an essay dealing with the role of religion in an emerging urban settlement that was also undergoing the entrenchment of foreign rule, the impact of such a phenomenon as the one under discussion would be multidimensional.

The religious and political schism within the Lagosian Muslim community became fundamental and seemingly irreconcilable for nearly forty years. For the majority of the Muslims who constituted the Jamat party, the disagreement with the progovernment group led by the chief imam would be irreconcilable as long the principle of majority rule was not allowed to prosper within the Islamic community. The problem became somewhat intractable, because the colonial administration played the role of a biased umpire. In fact, available evidence suggests that such partisan interference on the part of the colonial government was a major factor in toughening Muslim resolve to fight the progovernment group to submission. Perhaps the most significant development in this regard was the building by the anti-Eleko group of another central mosque, the Wasinmi mosque, adequately funded by Alli-Balogun, a local progovernment millionaire.

The crisis and division continued until 1947 when a truce saw the merger of the two factions under a single imam. It is also worthy of note that the factions were no longer at daggers drawn two years later (1949) when a new Eleko, Adeniji Adele, a devout Muslim who was knowledgeable in the Qur'an and Islamic jurisprudence and who was also popular among majority of the two erstwhile warring factions, was chosen.

Conclusion

The totality of the experience brought forth by the events in Lagos between 1908 and 1933 indicates the major indices of a society in transition. While the political history of the emergent metropolis was largely turbulent, the basis of such turbulence should be sought in the process of urbanization and colonization. As is the case with societies undergoing such a process as colonization, conflicting ideas and ideals were present in early twentieth-century Lagos. Thus an atmosphere of social conflict was created in which no responsible member of the society was spared involvement. However, owing to the predominant influence of Muslims in Lagos, the town's politics between 1900 and 1950 witnessed a high

dose of influence of the Islamic community. Although Islam had been introduced into Lagos well before the nineteenth century, it was only in the late 1800s that conscious Islamic proselytization began. Thus by the dawn of the twentieth century, many Lagosians had been converted to Islam. The individual and group interests shown in Lagos' political and social issues by this preponderant group earned the politics of Lagos the tag of Muslim community politics.

However, it would be erroneous to assume that the entire developments revisited above were those of Muslims alone. The interplay of issues and personalities in the matters considered were a complex whole. First in line of the elements and forces at play was the British imperial authority. The entire period under consideration was one of consolidation of colonial rule and the resulting drive to keep the indigenous people weak and divided for Britain to succeed. This, particularly, was the *raison d'être* for the conspiratorial readiness of British officials to encourage infighting among Lagos' traditional and modern Muslim elites. Under the prevailing circumstances, the majority group became the defender of traditionalism, while the minority group chose to be on the opposing side. It was not too long before their exclusive interests and differences became mutually irreconcilable.

As in the case of all societies that experienced alien rule, the people of Lagos formed a bulwark against the power and authority of the "intruding" European *civilisateur* with his "superior culture." In Lagos, the role of the majority group of the Muslim community depicts, classically, the extent to which Islam and its adherents have led a conscious anticolonial struggle. Apart from this, it shows clearly the extent to which the Islamic community played the dominant role in shaping the politics of the traditional society even when indifference may not have injured its interests significantly.

Endnotes

1. T. G. O. Gbadamosi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba: 1841-1908* (London: Longmans, 1978).
2. T. G. O. Gbadamosi, "Patterns and Developments in Lagos Religious History," in *Lagos: The Development of an African City*, ed. Aderibigbe (Lagos: Longmans, 1975).
3. H. O. Danmole, "The Crisis of the Lagos Muslim Community" in *A History of the Peoples of Lagos State*, eds. Ade Adefuye et al. (Lagos: Lantern Books, 1987).
4. See R. S. Smith, *The Lagos Consulate, 1851-1861* (Lagos: Macmillan, 1978); J. B. Losi, *History of Lagos* (Lagos: CMS, 1921); and O. A. R. Lawal, "Background to Urbanization: Lagos Society on the Eve of 1900" in *Lagos Society in Transition: Aspects of Urbanization and Change*, ed. Kunle Lawal (Lagos: 1993), among others.
5. See NAI CSO 26/14962 prof IX, pp. 824-31.
6. See Article II of the Cession Treaty in Takiu Folami, *A History of Lagos, Nigeria* (New York: 1982).
7. NAI CSO 26/29709 "Oba of the House of Docemo's Subsidy."
8. Titi Euba, "Dress and Status in Nineteenth-Century Lagos" in *A History of the Peoples of Lagos State*, eds. A. Adefuye et al. (Lagos: Lantern Books, 1987), 146.
9. See Letter from Resident to Eleko, November 1920, in Herbert Macaulay's Collection Box 40, File 2 in University of Ibadan Library, Manuscript Section.

10. A titanic study of British indirect rule system in Yorubaland can be found in J. A. Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire* (London: Longmans, 1972).
11. Cf. P.D. Cole, *Modern and Traditional Elites in the Politics of Lagos* (C.U.P.: 1975), 123, where he suggests that it started in 1920; Deniga Adeoye, *History of the Eleko Episode: 1913-1933*, who believes that it started in 1913.
12. Gbadamosi, *Growth of Islam*, 161-79.
13. Gbadamosi, *Growth of Islam*.
14. Gbadamosi, *Growth of Islam*.
15. Losi, *History of Lagos*, 22-23.
16. Losi, *History of Lagos*, 23.
17. See I. A. B. Balogun, "Excellence for Lagos State University" (Send-Off Lecture delivered in Lagos State University [LASU] in 1988).
18. Losi, *History of Lagos*, 23.
19. The details of these civil wars can be found in Losi, *History of Lagos* and R. S. Smith, *The Lagos Consulate*.
20. Details of the role of the Muslims in the civil uprisings in Lagos and the specific case of Oshodi Landuji can be found in O. A. R. Lawal, "Slavery and Slave Trade in Lagos Society Before 1900," in *Abuja: The Journal of Humanities* 1, no. 1 (1992).
21. Smith, *The Lagos Consulate*, chapter three.
22. Losi, *History of Lagos*, 28.
23. Gbadamosi, *Growth of Islam*, 161-79.
24. The details of the career of Muhammad Shitta Bey can be found in Losi, *History of Lagos*, 42-43.
25. Losi, *History of Lagos*, 44.
26. Gbadamosi, *Growth of Islam*, 180.
27. See J. B. Wood, *Historical Notices of Lagos, West Africa*, rev. ed. (Lagos: CMS, 1933), 62.
28. See Allister Macmillan, *The Red Book of West Africa* (London: 1920), 115-18.
29. Cole, *Modern and Traditional Elites*, 115.
30. Apart from Cole, *Modern and Traditional Elites*, see O. A. R. Lawal, "The Role of the Ilu Committee in the Politics of Lagos Society: 1900-1950" in *Odu: A Journal of West African Studies* (New Series), no. 4 (January 1989), which also examines the background to this issue in Lagosian politics in the first half of the twentieth century.
31. I am grateful to Habeeb Sanni for bringing this song to my notice.
32. One of the best discussions of the water rate crisis can be found in Cole, *Modern and Traditional Elites*, chapter 4.
33. See Danmole, "Crisis," 292.
34. He was awarded the commemorative medal on the occasion of the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria in January, 1898.
35. Danmole, "Crisis," 292.
36. Danmole, "Crisis," 296.
37. Danmole, "Crisis," 303.
38. See *Lagos Weekly Record*, 12 October 1915, for the details of this episode.
39. I am grateful to Said Ologunro for bringing the relevant archival materials on this issue to my notice. See also his "Islam and Politics in Lagos: 1900-1950" (BA diss., Lagos State University [LASU], June 1989).
40. The Jamat party molested Alli-Balogun by singing about the town *Ko to ti idun-nagbo de Oki ti je Balogun*: "Before he (Alli) returned from his business at Idunmagbo, Oki has been installed the Balogun." See Herbert Macaulay's Collection Box 40 File 2, University of Ibadan Library.
41. See *Lagos Weekly Record*, 20 November 1919.
42. *Lagos Weekly Record*, 20 November 1919.
43. *Lagos Weekly Record*, 20 November 1919.
44. *Lagos Weekly Record*, 20 November 1919.
45. *Lagos Weekly Record*, 20 November 1919.
46. *Lagos Weekly Record*, 6 December 1919.
47. *Lagos Weekly Record*, 22 November 1919.

48. *Lagos Weekly Record*, 22 November 1919.

49. *Lagos Weekly Record*, 22 November 1919.

50. "Prince Eleko re-instated," *Lagos Weekly Record*, 6 December 1919.

51. See Cole, *Modern and Traditional Elites*, for details of this case.

52. A Latin word meaning "a right of a feudal lord over his land."

53. See Sir Hugh Clifford's address to the Nigerian Council in Lagos on 29 December 1920, cited in Cole, *Modern and Traditional Elites*.

54. *Daily Mail*, 18 July 1920.

55. See Lawal, "The Role of the Ilu Committee."

56. Herbert Macaulay's Collection Box 41 File 8. See also Cole, *Modern and Traditional Elites*.

57. The details of the trial and judgment, as well as the perception and attitude of the colonial administration in London to the Eleko affair, can be found in Cole, *Modern and Traditional Elites*; E. A. Akintan, *Closing Scene of the Eleko Case and the Return of Prince Eleko* (Lagos: Tikatore Press, 1933); and Adeoye, *History of the Eleko Episode*.