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Contents

1. The Historical Features of Orthographic Change and Semantic Broadening in Yoruba Language
J. O. Friday-Otun..... 1-13
2. The Evolution of Modern Administrative Structures in Ijumu (1913-1937)
E. J. Ige..... 14-24
3. Economic Foundations of Pre-Colonial Isoko Land
S. O. Aghalino..... 25-39
4. Democratic Direction and the Aesthetics of Military Theatre in Nigeria
R. A. Musa..... 40-60
5. Crisis in Ilorin Emirate Mosque 1960 - 2000
I. A. Jawondo..... 61-72
6. Diplomacy as a Veritable Instrument of War: A Study of Ilorin Wars of Survival as an Emirate
S. Y. Omoiya..... 73 - 85
7. The Integration of the Yoruba Migrant Community in Kano Emirate in the 20th Century
A. F. Usman & A. Bako..... 86-94
8. The Catholic Mission and Human Trafficking in Nigeria
M.A. Y. Lewu..... 95-109
9. An Historical Analysis of the Economic Activities of Ilorin People in Kano c.1819-1960
Z. S. Sambo..... 110-123
10. Ilorin Traditional Markets in the 19th Century
B. O. Ibrahim..... 124-136

Crisis in Ilorin Emirate Mosque 1960 - 2000

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Abstract

Man is a sensitive being, thus, in a society, set of rules and regulations are put together to guide its corporate existence. Any time any of these rules and regulations are broken either by an individual or a group of individuals or by an authority, there might occur an uprising which is herein referred to as a conflict and crisis. Although to man what is good or bad is clear but even then what is good or bad varies from community to community. In addition, man also reacts to issues in different forms. While some shallowly appreciate or condemn issues, some deepeningly appreciate or condemn issues. Thus, conflicts and crises which are reactions to infringement on ones human rights are expressed in different forms, sometimes overtly or covertly, verbally or physically, diplomatically or violently or by a combination of strategies. This study attempts to examine (using colonial period as background) how the corporate existence of the Ilorin Emirate Mosque was trampled upon by the various authorities it was subjected to and the reactions of the Mosque which created protracted conflicts and crises in Ilorin Emirate. Although the crises linger till date, the period between 1960 and year 2000 is focused upon.

Introduction

Mosque has been defined by scholars as a place of worship for the Muslims¹. However, in the context of this study, the term 'Mosque' is adopted to refer to the entirety of the Muslim community in Ilorin Emirate in the same way 'the Church' has been used to refer to the priests and other members of the church or the institution of Christianity².

With the establishment of Ilorin Emirate in 1823, the primordial identities of the pre-emirate period suffered a repression. In order to consolidate and improve upon the religious and political gains of the nascent emirate, responsibilities were shared among the integral parts of the Mosque that laboured hard for the establishment of the emirate³. Posts of responsibility were given in accordance to the proven abilities of individuals or groups of individuals. The positions of Imams (*Imam Fulani*, *Imam Imale*, *Imam Gambari* who were first, second and third in the political hierarchy respectively) were given to Muslim scholars of Fulani and Hausa stocks⁴. There were also the four *Balogun* (war-lords), namely, *Balogun Alanamu*, *Balogun Ajikobi*, *Balogun Gambari* and *Balogun Fulani*, who represented the four major quarters in Ilorin⁵. The appointments were thus spread among the major ethnic groups Fulani, Hausa and Yoruba that made up Ilorin Emirate Mosque. Other individuals who distinguished themselves at war front or in other areas of responsibilities were rewarded with fiefs⁶. They all looked up to the Emir as the custodian of the *shariah* (which the Mosque represented) for guidance. The members of the Mosque placed themselves at the services of the Emir who was the political, judicial and religious leader of the emirate. He had the over-all responsibilities for the defence, security and other day-to-day administration in the emirate⁷. The Emir, the Imam and the *Balogun* formed the Emirate Council that legislated for and implemented the *sharia* on the Emirate Mosque.

There was mutual respect and understanding among the principal officials of the Mosque. At any occasion, be it political, social or religious, they were always together and did things in common and for common interest. Mockler Ferryman in 1889 noted a colourful procession of the Emir and his chiefs to the Jummat Central Mosque. According to him:

A number of men on foot armed with flintlocks, moved ahead, then followed a crowd of gaily-dressed chieftains, mounted and carrying spears and then the Emir himself... attended by an immense bodyguard of functionaries on foot...⁸

Their togetherness endeared them to the hearts of the rank and file of the Emirate Mosque. Consequently, the Mosque became a strong, united and focused organ of governance in Ilorin Emirate until the infiltration and eventual conquest of Ilorin Emirate by the British in 1897⁹.

The British intrusion into the political, religious and socio-economic affairs of Ilorin started as early as 1883. In 1883, 1893 and 1895, moves were made by the British colonial government in Ibadan and Lagos to settle the boundary dispute between Ilorin and Ibadan as it was already affecting British interests in Yorubaland¹⁰. The failure of Ilorin to agree with the British colonial government on the fixing of the boundary between Ilorin and Ibadan at Awere and not Ikirun was used as an excuse for the British to place economic blockade on Ilorin between January and December, 1896¹¹. On the other hand, the Royal Niger Company since 1885 had been making attempts to colonize Ilorin Emirate¹². A trade treaty signed by the emirate authority was deliberately taken for political protection¹³. These events created confusion and hardship, consequently, in this state of affairs, colonial conquest was met with feeble resistance, hence, colonialism in the emirate in 1897¹⁴.

Upon the conquest of Ilorin Emirate, the British colonial administration introduced various political, social and economic policies to break up the unity of the Mosque that was considered an inhibition to effective colonial administration of the emirate. The policies included the deposition of some of the *Balogun*, imposition of direct taxation, creation of Native Authority, District administration, area courts and others¹⁵. The Mosque was deeply affected in varying degrees by the colonial policies. For instance it led to differences of opinion on how to relate with the British. Consequently, the Mosque became polarised and weakened in the face of unending divide and rule tactics of the British colonial administration¹⁶. Division was created in the Emirate Mosque as a result of the British colonial conquest and administration of Ilorin and the consequent conflicts persisted throughout the colonial period. The conflict survived into the post-colonial era and worsened as a result of some socio-political and religious-economic factors. How this happened and its effects on the Emirate Mosque are the focus of this study.

The Colonial Era and the Mosque Crisis

The processes of the conquest of Ilorin by the British colonialists were concluded with the attack on and eventual conquest of Ilorin by the soldiers of the Royal Niger Company in 1897. With this conquest, the British colonialists in Ilorin were faced with the problem of effective administration of Ilorin Emirate. Having understood the power blocks in Ilorin politics and their strengths and weaknesses, the British decided to put to use some divide and rule tactics in order to achieve effective administrative control over Ilorin Emirate.

Firstly, the Emir (Suleiman) who was the religious and political leader of the emirate as *Amir al-Mumin* and who was held in high esteem, was re-appointed the Emir of Ilorin but now as an appointee of the British and he was to carry out the British directives in Ilorin Emirate even if they were anti-*Sharia* which he initially stood for¹⁷. This means that the Emir no longer had the over-riding say in the administration of the emirate. Secondly, the British colonialists took steps to arrest the growing influence and power of the *Balogun* over and above that of the Emir among the masses. The *Balogun* had used their military prowess to challenge the incursion of the British and of course to delay their conquest of Ilorin Emirate till 1897. The British got this opportunity when the senior *Balogun*, Ali Inakoju, the *Balogun Alanamu*, who was dissatisfied with the conclusion reached by Emir Suleiman that Allah gives power to and takes it from whoever He wishes, was alleged to be mobilising the masses against British administration. He was, in 1902, deposed and arrested for maladministration and exiled to Ogbomoso where he died in 1910¹⁸. The *Balogun Ajikobi* who also shared anti-British sentiments was similarly deposed and exiled to Yola where he died in 1907¹⁹. With these two steps, the British colonialists had succeeded in widening the cracks created in the pre-conquest period on the walls of unity of the Ilorin Emirate Mosque.

In order to sustain the gap, the British colonialists made available to the emir the British colonial force to replace the *Balogun*, provide security to the emir and other British loyalists and more importantly to subdue uprising against British administration. For instance, in 1907, British soldiers were used to crush rioters against the payment of hunting implement levy introduced by the British, which the Emir wanted to implement²⁰. Also in 1913 the Ilorin Tax Riot was quenched by the British soldiers²¹. In this situation, the Ilorin Emirate Mosque was divided into three groups the British loyalists led by the Emir, the anti-British led by the *Balogun* and the *laissez-faire* group which comprised those scared by British arms and ammunition and care-free people. In this manner, the British paddled the canoe of Ilorin Emirate till independence.

The Independence Era and the Mosque Crisis

In 1951, the colonial administration, in preparation for the political independence of Nigeria, registered three political parties. The parties were the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons which changed to the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), and the Action Group, (AG). The parties contested the 1959 elections. These parties had supporters among the people of Ilorin Emirate.

The location of Ilorin in Northern Nigeria made the NPC the most popular there. Thus, it won the elections in the emirate²².

In order to exercise 'full control' over the emirate, and, perhaps, to be able to punish political opponents, as oral sources claim, the NPC stalwarts supported the candidature of Mallam Zulukarnaini Gambari as the ninth Emir of Ilorin. Mallam Saadu Alanamu NPC elder and later Secretary Nigeria Produce Marketing Board and the chairman of Ilorin Emirate NPC, Mallam Buhari Edun, prevailed on the Premier, Sir Ahmadu Bello, to endorse the candidature of Mallam Zulukarnaini Gambari, who was also a prominent member of the party²³. He was preferred for his toughness and uncompromising attitude to the popular candidature of Mallam Aliyu Abdulkadir²⁴. Abdulkadir was actually recommended by the kingmakers to the Premier²⁵. He later became the tenth Emir of Ilorin (1992 - 1997). The appointment of Mallam Zulukarnaini Gambari as the ninth Emir of Ilorin in 1959 was not well received by those who were in support of Mallam Aliyu Abdulkadir²⁶. This further widened the cracks in the walls of the unity of the Ilorin Emirate Mosque.

It is important to note and in fact stress here, that the NPC government intervention in the selection process of Emir in Ilorin and the subsequent imposition of Mallam Zulukarnaini Gambari on the people of Ilorin for a vindictive mission, shows that the Northern politicians, like the British colonial administration, had no regard for traditional institutions. They regarded the traditional rulers as mere civil servants who were to carry out the wishes of the government even at the expense of their subjects. The traditional rulers held offices in as much as they were loyal to and supportive of the NPC government. Thus, the government used Emir Zulukarnaini Gambari against his subjects in the same way Emir Suleiman (1896-1915) was used by the colonial administration²⁷.

The Emir (with the political goodwill of the NPC government) was believed to have whipped up sentiments against some top political opponents of the NPC government. Consequently, they were arrested, tried and imprisoned by the NPC government. Chief J.S. Olawoyin of Offa and Alhaji Suleiman Maito of Omolabi Compound, Alhaji Adebimpe Oniyeye of Oniyeye compound, both of Ilorin who were members of the A.G. were among the victims of these political circumstances.²⁸ They were arrested, tortured publicly and imprisoned²⁹. The *Oloffa*, Wuraola Isioye was diplomatically deposed through compulsory retirement and exiled overtly on the grounds of old age but covertly for allegedly associating with the opposition party the AG³⁰. The families, political supporters and well wishers of these perceived enemies of the Emir and who were integral parts

of the Emirate Mosque became unhappy, not only with the Emir, but also with the party that enthroned him³¹. This further worsened the conflict in the Ilorin Emirate Mosque.

The mode of administration of the Emir moreover, is said to have brought him into clash with one of his benefactors, Mallam Buhari Edun, the NPC chairman in Ilorin Emirate. In 1964, the teeming supporters of the NPC, in the presence of the Premier, Sir Ahmadu Bello, demonstrated against the Emir, calling for his dethronement³². It is most likely that the unwillingness of Mallam Saadu Alanamu, that an Ilorin Emir be removed as was the case in Kano and the letter of appeal written by the Emir to the Premier, saved Zulukarnaini from being dethroned³³. of the Emirate. This was because the arrest of opponents stopped and some political prisoners were released³⁴.

The Dimension of the Crisis in the Post-Independence Era

Emir Zulukarnaini Gambari ruled for a relatively long period of thirty-three years (1959 to 1992). This gave him the opportunity of introducing different dimensions in his administration of Ilorin Emirate. Within his period of reign he over-politicized a number of Emirate Mosque titles. For instance, the office of the *Balogun*, the principal Imams, the *Magaji*, *Alangua* and others were politicized. Whenever there was a vacancy in any of these offices, it was a tradition that the family or lineage associated with such office would put forward a consensus candidate for the Emir to approve. According to oral sources, the Emir, for social and political reasons, breached the traditional protocols of appointment. Instead of the lineage presenting a candidate, two or three candidates were requested for, out of whom the Emir appointed his choice³⁵. This system ordinarily should lead to the appointment of the best candidate. However, it has been observed that it brought about unhealthy rivalry among the candidates and lobbying of the Emir, hence the controversy that surrounded most of his appointments³⁶.

For instance, Alhaji Ibrahim Adisa Zubair, who was appointed *Magaji Aare* (1983-2003), was his in-law³⁷. Alhaji Abdulkarim Laro and Alhaji Suleiman Oba Tukur, who were appointed *Balogun Gambari* and *Balogun Ajikobi* in 1988 and 1993 respectively, were friends of his first son, Ibrahim Zulu-Gambari, the current Emir. Also the appointment of Alhaji AbdulRahman Salah as the *Imam Imale* (1986-1987) was among the controversial appointments of his reign³⁸. It is important to note that those he appointed were legal heirs to those positions but he seemed to have largely breached the protocol of succession by age. In the case of Alhaji AbdulRahman Salah, he broke the line of succession by appointing him from the maternal side³⁹. The Emir's indecisiveness prolonged the crisis in the Oke-

Oyi community over the appointment of *Baale*, until the death of one of the contestants. It also left Odegbangba and Adeyi Compounds that were members of the same mosque divided since the 1980s and the members of the Orekan Mosque spilt since the same period over the appointment of Imams⁴⁰.

During the Second Republic, as in the First, members of the Ilorin Emirate Mosque belonged to different political parties. The political parties that were registered were the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) and the Peoples' Redemption Party (PRP)⁴¹. The most popular ones were the NPN and the UPN, which represented the former NPC and AG respectively. Apart from the fact that the Emirate Mosque was again politically divided, there came an intra-party crisis within the rank and file of the NPN in Ilorin Emirate. This was as a result of disagreements among the leaders.

A serious political crisis ensued between Dr. Olusola Saraki, the *Turakin Ilorin* (now the *Wazirin Ilorin*) and the NPN government of the Kwara State headed by Alhaji Adamu Attah (1979-1983). The crisis claimed a number of lives and invaluable properties. This was about the first time that members of the Emirate Mosque took up arms against one another⁴². Consequently, NPN lost Kwara State in the 1983 elections. This created two opposing and militant political camps in Ilorin Emirate Mosque. They were the Olusola Saraki camp against the camp of Alhaji Mahmud Akanbi Oniyangi (ex-NPN Minister), Alhaji Kunle Suleiman (ex-Chairman of the Federal Tenders' Board), led group Alhaji Rasheed Alada (ex-Secretary to the Kwara State Government) group and a host of other opposition groups who aligned and realigned as situations demanded. In another instance, the Emir and Dr. Olusola Saraki, a member of the Emirate Council clashed. The cause of this is difficult to establish. Dr. Saraki's political supporters, sympathizers and those on whose toes the Emir had stepped shouted him down at any given opportunity inside or outside the Mosque. Although the crisis ended with the Second Republic, the effect is boldly written on the walls of the Emirate Mosque. The aggrieved seem to be awaiting an opportunity to avenge the humiliation suffered.

The Factor of Religion in the Crisis

The untiring efforts of the Muslim scholars of Ilorin at teaching and preaching since the 19th century led to the production of many indigenous Muslim scholars in Ilorin Emirate by the beginning of the 20th century⁴³. Such scholars also established Quranic schools and by the close of the 20th

century many more scholars had been produced. The result of this was both positive and negative. While it led to the advancement of Islam and Islamic scholarship, it also brought about conflict among the emerging 'Ulama' as they tried to establish their authority within the Emirate. Moreso, the large following that usually greeted such emerging scholars and Islamic organizations usually threatened the existence of older ones, hence, the struggle for survival which was usually intense. This strengthened the Ilorin Emirate Mosque conflict.

By the last half of the 20th century two prominent indigenous scholars had emerged in Ilorin. They were Shaikh Kamaluddeen al-Adabi who established the Ansarul-Islam Society of Nigeria in 1943 and Shaikh Adam Abdullahi El-Alori who founded *Markaz Taalim al-Arabi* in 1952⁴⁴. They represented the two distinctive Islamic schools of thought in Ilorin since their emergence⁴⁵. In spite of the clear cut differences in style of operation, preaching, propagation of Islam and Islamic education within and outside the Emirate, frequent use of abusive songs occurred between the followers of the two groups most especially in the 1980s. The cause of the crisis is said to be traceable to the attempts by the followers of one leader to promote their leader over and above the other leader. The followers of the two leaders preached and wrote poems against each other at any given opportunity. Today, the rivalry could be considered a healthy one as they now vie with each other in the advancement of Arabic and Islamic education and in seeking government political appointments for their members. Be that as it may, the two groups remain distinct from each other. The leaders and the rank and file saw themselves as either *Markazi* or *Adabi*, instead of one indivisible member of the Emirate Mosque. Thus, the Ilorin Emirate Mosque, which before this time was united, strong and spoke with one voice, was infected by conflict.

Furthermore, the emergence of militant Islamic groups in Ilorin also heightened the Ilorin Emirate Mosque conflict. The militant Islamic groups include the *Ummah*, which started in the early 1980s, the *Shiia* (which broke away about 1985 from the *Ummah*) and the *Sherif* group⁴⁶. Apart from the incessant clashes that occurred between the *Ummah* and *Shiia* because of ideological differences, the groups polarized the Emirate Mosque into two viz: the young and the old, the non-conformists and the liberal, the progressives and the conservatives. In addition, conflicts over the appointment of Imams and ownership of land have led to the demolition of mosques, and kept the members poles apart. For example, in Aare Ogele Village of Asa Local Government Area of Kwara State, the mosque built by a certain Jimoh Family was demolished as a result of land dispute between

Jimoh and Orire Families. Also, at Okelele, Ilorin, the original Alawo Mosque was demolished over the appointment of Imam and properties shared⁴⁷.

Apart from the crises among the *Ulama*, there was also crisis between the *Ulama* and the political class. For instance, the prolonged crisis between Shaikh Adam Abdullahi and Emir Zulukarnaini Gambari in the 1980s was believed to be chief among other reasons that informed the Emir's antagonism to the establishment of Shaikh Yahaya Muritala Jummat Mosque at Oke-Agodi⁴⁸. Shaikh Yahaya was a leading student of Shaikh Adam. Although the cause of the crisis could not be established, the fact that the Emir who was supposed to encourage the building of mosques, vehemently opposed the establishment of this mosque, though unsuccessfully, shows that he saw it as a spite on his authority. The political class is not free from internal wrangling. For instance, Emir Aliyu Abdulkadir (1992-1997) reportedly set up a Committee of Stakeholders in Ilorin, to work out the modality for making Ilorin economically viable. It is believed that the mistrust among the members of the Committee was responsible for the inactivity of the Committee⁴⁹.

The leaders who had always put heads together to better the lot of the Mosque since the pre-colonial time, could no longer sit together to discuss the plight of the Mosque, even in the face of external threats. Instead, each division stayed aloof, kept its distance and operated independently of the others. The Emirate Council, which had always striven to bring the parties together, is gradually losing relevance as it has been infected by the crisis. The issuance of threats to Ilorin by the *Oodua* Peoples Congress to install an *Oba* instead of Emir in Ilorin and the subsequent unsuccessful attempts to invade Ilorin in the year 2000 is believed to be a manifestation of the crisis in the Emirate Mosque. As a result of the conflict and consequent mistrust, members of the Emirate Mosque no longer take Mosque verdict on issues affecting individuals or groups seriously. Court actions are taken against one another. Series of peace moves made by different stakeholders such as Justice Mustapha Akanbi, Justice Saidu Kawu, Shaikh Kamaluddeen and others to put an end to conflict and crisis in the Emirate Mosque have always been short-lived.

Conclusion

The crises and conflicts of the Ilorin Emirate Mosque are traceable to the imposition of colonialism and transition to civil rule in Nigeria. The crises and conflicts have transformed the Mosque from being a united and strong

body to a divided and weak one. It has also affected the course of history of the Mosque. Many traditional political protocols have been foregone for Western protocols. As a result of these crises, the opinions of the Mosque are always divided on any issue be it religious, political, economic or social.

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