

The Efflorescence of Arabic and Islamic Studies in the South West, Nigeria: The Intellectual Engagements of Yoruba Scholars (*Ulama'a*)

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Abstract

The growth and expansions in Arabic and Islamic scholarship is marked by the religious activities of Muslims in Yorubaland of Nigeria in the 19th century. This was occasioned by the arrival of Islamic scholars from Islamised areas with varying degrees of contact. The roles played by Muslim merchants, savants, clerics and Muslim slaves had momentous impact on Arabic and Islamic scholarship in Yorubaland as recorded in Arabic documents and other historical materials. This paper is an attempt to present the growth of Arabic and Islamic studies in the 19th century Yorubaland. The significant roles played by Islamic elements in the ways the pre-colonial historical experiences in different parts of the Yorubaland in the nineteenth century were discussed. The role played by the authority of the Muslim political officers varied from place to place with their complex social stratification. Islamic clerics occupied positions of great authority in royal administration. They translated their influence into political power and used it to maximum advantage in the consolidation of Islam. However, the emergence of colonialism and Christian evangelism posed serious challenges, and handicapped the progress of Islam and Muslims for sometimes. The reaction and unfettered struggles of Muslims against European imperialism gives birth to Muslim elites in various fields and production of knowledge in Arabic and Islamic studies.

Keywords: Yorubaland; Arabic; Islam; 'Ulama.

Introduction

The Yoruba people are found primarily in southwest Nigeria and the adjoining parts of neighboring countries, commonly known as Yorubaland. They constitute one of the ethnic groups in Nigeria and occupy the whole of Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, Ekiti, Osun, Lagos, and parts of Kwara and Kogi states. A considerable number of Yoruba people are also found in the south-eastern part of the Republic of Benin. Yoruba people are exquisite statesmen who spread across the globe largely due to migration through the Atlantic slave trade. During the period many Yoruba were captured and sold into the slavery and transported to Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, Venezuela, and other parts of the America. They later constituted and integrated to the core of the 'New World lineages' (Akintoye, 2010).

The origin of the Yoruba people is a subject of intense debate among scholars. This is as a result of diffusion of several traditions about the origin of the people. Hence several schools of thought exist on the origin of Yoruba. However, the Yoruba typology of settlement formations take into consideration in tracing the origin of the people that migrated from different times in successive migratory waves and settled at the Ile Ife, around the villages and hamlets and later developed through nucleation processes, where several independent villages coalesced into a nucleated settlement, transformed into urban Centre under one recognizable monarch. Thus, Ile Ife developed as a city of amalgamation of thirteen or more village communities into an urban Centre between (800- 1000 A.D) ninth and eleventh centuries. (Babatunde Williams 2005). From available historical accounts, it appears that, it was at Ile- Ife that city- life possibly started in Yoruba land. According to the royal house at Ile –Ife Oduduwa was the eponymous ancestor of Yoruba people and one of the divinities of Yoruba theogony, a historical personage who came from Yemen in Arabian land and first settled at Ile – Ife. The story of Oduduwa's flight from Arabia suggests that Yoruba culture is a Middle Eastern origin. (Abdullahi Smith, 1983:20). In the recent times, according to the royal house at Ijebu ode, the Ijebu stock of Yoruba people came from wadai in the central Sudan. (Alayande, 1992:29). Therefore, in all the sources available for understanding Yoruba history the issue of Middle East is of paramount important. The majority of Yoruba people regard Ile –Ife as their origin and cradle of Yoruba Civilization, which has romantic attraction for the people. Growing side by side with Ile-Ife, other kingdoms

emerged; Owo, Oyo, Ijebu, Ijesa, Ketu, Popo, Egba, Sabe, Dassa, Egbado, Ighomina, Ekiti, Owo, and Ondo. (Atanda in Toyin Falola, 2017).

The Aesthetics of Islam in Yorubaland

The upper region of the Senegal and Niger rivers were exposed to Islamic influence since the eighth century C.E. Ibn Battuta and other Arab geographers and scholars wrote about this region right from that century. One of the scholars who gave information about the area was al – Mas’udi as far back as 947 C.E. al-Mas’udi drew attention of the people to emergence of Muslim communities in the savanna region of West Africa. (Kani, 1984:11). Commercial activities, through the trans-Saharan routes, between Northern Africa and early kingdoms and city – states of Western Sudan had contributed to the spread and diffusion of Islam among the Sudanic people. The geographical location of Yorubaland placed it to be connected in long – distance trading networks that crisscrossed Yoruba land this gave opportunity to Yoruba people to have contact with Muslim merchants of North African stocks at the early period. The fall of some empires such as Songhai, Mali and Ghana aided the spread of Islam into Yoruba land. The roles of *Mandinka* traders and missionaries were very important and enormous in the diffusion of Islam in the region. Oyo Empire emerged as a cosmopolitan commercial and manufacturing centre. The driving force for Oyo’s pre-eminence in commerce business-oriented state craft, local entrepreneurial spirit, the stimulus of pan regional and trans-Saharan trade networks that crisscrossed Yoruba land between fourteen and nineteenth centuries. The Yoruba traditional policies towards all people of different religions aided the early diffusion of Islam in Yorubaland. (Gbadamasi, 1978: 8) The cumulative consequence of these factors was the emergence of Oyo as the entrepot of the trans-Saharan trade during the fifteenth, and lasting through the early nineteenth centuries. Oyo was not a mere “transit-city” for goods that were produced elsewhere and shipped to other destinations. Rather its ascendancy as one of the most important commercial hubs of the trans-Saharan trade in Central Sudan, developed out of its pre-Oyo empire economic structure (Olaniyi, 2005:310). A remarkable outcome was the unhindered flow of goods, Muslim peoples, and ideas that later gave Oyo empire its cosmopolitan cultural values of Islamic elements and identities. Thus, Oyo Empire rose to its prominence with Islamic elements and the ingress of *‘ulama*; Muslim slaves who became members of the household of the Alafinates and Yoruba rulers who constituted later into Muslim communities.

At the beginning of the fourteen century, two interacting political and economic processes became prominent in Yoruba land the reconfiguration of political systems and the intensification of long-distance commercial transactions, especially the integration of Oyo into the trans-Saharan trade works. The origins of these processes can be traced to the significant waves of migrations into Oyo Empire and Yoruba land in general. It appears that the ecological attractiveness of Ile-Ife and other Yoruba areas as abode of commercial traffic through which Kukawa and Wadai in the east were linked with Gonja and Timbuktu in the West, and Kumasi, Bida and Old Oyo (*Katunga*) in the South. Caravans traversed the Saharan Desert to various circuits of trade on the shores of the Niger and the Nile Rivers, the Mediterranean littoral, and Red Sea. Yorubaland was one of the major centres of the political refugees and economic security was the main pulls for these migrations. (Olaniyi, 2005:306). The Savanna region where Oyo Empire arose had for several centuries been a zone of interaction between Muslim people belonging to very different cultural complexes. After 1000CE, trade over longer distances became the basis for the rise of kingdoms in the Savanna. Trade in golds, salt, and cowries attracted Muslim traders to involve in trans-Saharan commercial networks. The Wangara migrants who were Muslim traders and clerics speaking *Mande* languages of the Mali Empire facilitated the diffusion of Islam in Yoruba by establishing trade settlements in the Savanna (Omosho, 2011:74). The rising of Oyo empire became increasingly more involved in the trans-Saharan complex. These new patterns of trade, migration, and settlement coincided with the expansion of Islam in Yorubaland. Language evidence suggests that relations between Yoruba city – states and Islamized neighbours were deep and led to cultural exchanges not only in political and social life but also in ideas about social organization and production. Historical linguistics has thus far given us some ideas about the directions and themes of word borrowings that have come into Yoruba language. Islamic religious terms, for instance, are thought to have been introduced through the Wangarawa Muslims. And a number of Arabic loan words pertaining to

trade and Islam are found in Yoruba vocabularies. These are indications that these loan words may be attributed to Wangarawa traders. The population of Yoruba Muslims was swelled by enslaved Muslim groups some of whom were captured in the wars of expansion and aggrandizement that Oyo Empire waged against her Islamized neighbours. While others were purchased in the long-distance trading activities with her Northern neighbours especially from Nupe and some slaves were given to Alaafin as tributes as done by Dahomeyans.¹² Many of the enslaved men and women were sold across the Sahara, and many were retained in the local economic activities. By the seventeenth century, some of the enslaved Muslim men and women transformed into eunuchs and employed in the high and middle level administration cadres in Oyo empire, and other Yoruba kingdoms even as advisers to the monarch.

Kano factor was a major catalyst in the expansion of Islam in Yorubaland in sixteenth century and the trade relation between Kano and Yoruba land especially Oyo-Ile deserves attention. The establishment of Kurmi market as a commercial hub for both regional and intercontinental traders and the market put in place major commercial transformations that increased the volume, value and variety of goods exchanged across the Sahara. The Kurmi market earned Kano the prestigious position of being one of the three most important major commercial centres in Africa during the sixteenth century. The others were Fez (Tripoli) and Cairo (Egypt). From Kano, caravans traversed the Saharan Desert to various circuits of trade on the shores of the Niger and the Nile Rivers, the Mediterranean littoral, and the Red Sea. Kano was also one of the major centres of the trans- Sudan commercial traffic through which Kukawa and Wadai in the east were linked with Gonja and Timbuktu in the West, and Kumasi, Bida and Old Oyo (*Katunga*) in the South and to Nupe and Yoruba. Kano traders exported livestock, salt, natron, leather goods, horses, and cloth, and in turn products of the forest and savanna belts such as Kolanut, pepper, and spices were imported into Kano and other parts of Hausaland⁽¹³⁾ From Kano, salt, glass, beads, silk, leather goods, livestock and horses, and human cargoes radiated southwards to Old Oyo and Ilorin, and caravans passing through Old Oyo supplied Kolanut, pepper, and other spices Northwards. The chief export of Kano to Old Oyo that eventually reached the coast was human cargo. The commodities sent to the coast included textiles, dyestuffs, and Ivory in return for European, Asian, Mediterranean commodities including textiles and beads, iron and to a lesser degree, firearms, and ammunitions. The Yoruba traders were so important to the Kano market that Yoruba traders established a trading section called *Yancitta* or *Yantaffarnuwwa* in Kurmi market, and a residential quarter established by the Yoruba traders in Kano during the eighteenth century is reportedly being occupied by their descendants today.(Olaniyi, 2005:310) Likewise, Hausa commercial and artisan Diaspora including pastoralists and horse attendants, were established in Yorubaland, especially in Old Oyo at the Northern territories during the century. Kano's commercial empire was further consolidated by the establishment of Hausa Diaspora communities in West Africa centres of trade such as Gonja, Salaga, Old Oyo and Borno, and the early nineteenth century in Lagos, Badagry and other parts of coastal Bight of Benin. These communities in Yoruba land aided the spread and radiation of Islam in Yoruba land.

Muslims in the Theatre of the 19th Century Yoruba Power Sharing

Adjudged from the prism of political history of the nineteenth century of Yoruba nation, there is no doubt that Muslim intelligentsia were among the key historical markers in the political theatre of the period. A survey of the political situation of the period reveals the political engagements of '*Ulama* and Muslim individual in the corridor of power. This political power of Muslims rose considerably in many big towns in Yorubaland, such as Ikirun, Iwo, Igboho, Iseyin, Ogbomoso, Ijebu, Ondo etc. Right from the start, at the dawn of the history, in the third decade of the nineteenth century, Islam had attained the pinnacle of traditional political power. Most of the Yoruba towns had become progressively Muslim containing an increasing number of indogenous '*ulama* (Arabic scholars), itinerant teachers and Muslim slaves. Some of the traditional rulers either embraced Islam or be patrons of Islam. Oba Ali Atewogboye, the Ewi of Ado-Ekiti (1836 – 1885) was a Muslim. He was a great patron of Islam and employed the spiritual services of "*ulama*" (Arabic scholars) for the efficacy of their spiritual prayers. (Gbadamasi, 1978). At Lagos, Adele I (1775 – 80, 1832 – 1834) the Oba of Lagos was a great patron of Islam, he allowed Muslims and '*ulama* to practise Islam in his court. Oba Aboki Tuwase Arojojoye (1885-1886), the Awujale of Ijebuland

(Gbadamasi, 1978:96) was friendly with Muslims, granted a piece of land to perform prayers (*As-salaat*). Oba Adele I (1775 – 80, 1832 – 1834) permitted the practice of Islam at the expense of his throne in 1780 C.E. One of the reasons for his expulsion from the throne was his latitude he gave to Muslims and the consequent neglect of traditional worship. When he returned to Lagos in 1832, Islam was again firmly planted in his court and Muslims and *'ulama* enjoyed his patronage (Gbadamasi,1978:) Muslims enjoyed the support of prince Kosoko of Lagos, when he assumed power in Lagos in August 1845, he allowed Muslims to practise Islam in his court, with the patronage of King Kosoko, Islam developed noticeably in Lagos, however, when he was expelled from Lagos in 1850 by the British Government, many Muslims followed him to Epe and by the time he was recalled to the throne in 1862, many Muslims followed him back to Lagos. There were other places where Islam had actually attained the political power. In Iwo for example, most of the civilians and military chiefs were Muslims and Oba Muhammad who ascended the throne around 1860, was a Muslim. At Ede and Ikirun Obas were Muslims. Timi of Ede Oba Abibu Lagunju and Oba Aliyu Oyewole of Ikirun were Muslims and strong supporters of Islam and patrons of Islamic clerics in their respective domains. It is of a particular interest that Oba Oyewole of Ikirun, distinguished himself and excelled all other Muslim Obas in the 19th century in Yorubaland. In addition, Oba Oyewole, employed the service of a Muslim judge, Mallam Bako from Ilorin, who performed judicial function at the royal court. He could hear and decide cases brought to the palace on issues concerned Muslims. Epe became a Muslim town with the arrival of Kosoko in 1851, under the ardent leadership of Ajeniya, the Muslim Balogun and it was near his house that the Central Mosque was built. A definite Islamic community began, by which Eko –Epe had a Muslim Bale, and a political set-up entirely composed of Muslims. Islam became the way of life of the majority of the people. The people had Muslim rulers and their cases were tried according to Maliki law by these rulers in concept with the Chief Imam and their lives were guided by the Muslim code of conduct. At Ijebuland, Balogun Kuku played an important role in the advancement of Islam and involved deeply in the local power politics of Ijebuland. He was Seriki, traded in salt and ammunitions; he provided Ibadan warriors ammunitions in` some of the battles fought by Ibadan. (Gbadamasi,1978:117) He deployed his wealth to maximum advantage in the consolidation of his economic and political resources. He translated the economic power into political power, and even military power. The record of progress of Islam in Yorubaland in the nineteenth century was impressive and remarkable. The *'ulama* climbed up the administrative ladder, at Ibadan, Osundina became the Osi Balogun, the third rank senior war Chief and his praise name has preserved a picture of him as the Muslim titled officer who put on his turban to the battle field and performed his ablutions even under a hail of arrows.

Two decades later, Osundina's brother Alli Luluwoye and Momodu Latosisa became the fourth and fifth officers respectively in the political hierarchy. Alli Luluwoye rose to become the second in command by October 1871, while Momodu Latosisa who was Are-OnaKakanfo became the supreme authority in Ibadan in the period 1871 – 1885 C.E. The activities of the Muslims and Islamic clerics were among the dominant features of the nineteenth century politics of Yoruba land. In view of continuous wars of the period, Islam recorded a remarkable achievement. Muslims and Islamic clerics (*'ulama*) were recognized by the society for their qualification and personal merits or for other considerations. They had political officers. Yisa of Itoku in Abeokuta was the Balogun, the war Chief, and Summonu Adelokun was the head of parakoyi. In Oyo, Yesufu, the Alaafin's uncle was parakoyi, disposed towards Islam. The rulers often summoned the *'ulama* on matters concerned community or society. In time of wars, famine or plague the *'ulama* were consulted to provide spiritual assistance and prayers were held as necessary as required by the society. The *'ulama* began to occupy strategic position in the society they served both civil and military leaders as advisers, Quranic teachers and religious chamberlains. Their titles became important sources of legitimatizing their political aspirations and used their growing influence to contribute to Islam in their societies. The trading relations between the Yoruba country and Islamic neighbours such as, Kano, Nupe and Borgu were well presented and analyzed in the historical data. Old Oyo served as the chief intermediary between the Central Sudan and the coastal markets. The Islamic clerics and Arabic scholars became major middlemen and interpreters between Hausa traders and Yoruba people. Yoruba was able to take advantage of long-distance trade through active involvement of the Hausa-Fulani slaves and Islamic clerics. The

potential that Oyo held for profits also attracted immigrants, many of whom who came with special skills and knowledge. The influx of skilled immigrants was responsible for a profound increase in the amount of knowledge acquired by scholars of Arabic and Islamic studies. Thus, Muslims contributed to the economic, social and cultural life of the people. They introduced new occupations. The liberated African Muslim slaves from Sierra Leone and Brazil introduced new skills of carpentry, masons and architecture etc. They also introduced and promoted the growth of cash crops like cocoa and coffee. New fashions in dress and architecture were also introduced by them. (Atanda in Toyin Falola, 2017).

Languages evidence discloses some ideas about the directions and themes of word borrowings that have come into Yoruba language through Muslims merchants and Islamic clerics. They exchanged a range of concepts, including agricultural terminology and familial categories through residential Islamic clerics in the Oyo Empire. Arabic characters and words associated with Islam greatly enriched Yorubba language. A number of words in Yoruba language are known to be loaned from Arabic such as Adura derived from Arabic 'Adu'aa', Anfani is derived from *A-naf*' (Benefit), Aniyan , *A-niyyah* (intension) The word Asiri is derived from *As-sirr* (secret) *Gafara* is derived from *Ghafara* (pardon), Suuna –naming is derived from *sunna* of the prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). (Atanda in Toyin Falola,2017).

The Intellectual Engagements of 'Ulama in Yorubaland

The numerous sources for the nineteenth century of Yorubaland disclose the intellectual engagements of Yoruba scholars and the historical interpretation of the efforts of 'ulama and Muslims. It is a particularly remarkable that Ibadan became a romantic centre of attraction, partly because of military might and its geographical location that suitable for human habitation. Consequently, Ibadan received groups of immigrants from different parts of Islamised areas with varied skills. It is of a particular interest to note that these groups of immigrants contributed significantly to the growth and success recorded by the Arabic and Islamic scholars in Yoruba land. As Islam introduced literacy and promoted scholarship, the coming of Islam to Yorubaland brought five daily prayers and promoted the art of reading and writing. Intellectual evidence presents some ideas about the directions and forms of literacy received by the Yoruba people in the period. The Islamic religious terms and Muslim prayers culled from the holy Qur'an are thought to be introduced by the immigrant Muslims at the early period. The form of education involved reading, writing and pronunciation. The role played by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim slaves in spreading Islamic literacy is significant. They constituted themselves into small Muslim community, organized learning and conducted teaching. They were the early teachers, and people learned at their feet. They contributed to the spread of scholarship in Yorubaland. The 'Ulamaa introduced literacy in Arabic through the establishment of many Qu'ranic and Arabic centres. The resultant effect was a proliferation of Islamic literacy and the increasing number of Yoruba Muslims and Islamic Scholars. (Atanda in Toyin Falola, 2017:118)

The beginning of the second quarter of the 19th century saw the rise and arrival of many 'Ulamaa in Yorubaland. Prominent teachers and founders of Arabic centres emerged at Illorin, Ibadan, Abeokuta, Lagos etc. Muhammad Mahmud b. Shitta b. Salih (d. 1891 C.E.) Muhammad b. Ahmad Begore (d. 1913 C.E), Busari b. Badr. Al-Din (d. 1915 C.E.), Muhammad Jum 'a Alabi fondly called Taju al-Adab (d. 1923). Also on record were Ahmad b. Abu Bakr al-Qasim Alaga (d. 1888C.E.) Muhammad Sanusi b. Harun (d. 1938C.E), Shaykh Abdus Salam Yusuf Alikinla (d.1960), Shaykh Ya'qub Al-Mukhtar (d.1965), Shaykh Ahmad Tijani Awelenje, (d.1967) (Ahmad b. Rufai b. Muhammad Bello (d. 1971C.E) and Haruna matanmi (d.1935.C.E) , Adam Abdullah al- illuri (d.1992) and Shaykh Kamaldeen al Adabi (d.2005).

Muslims and the Threat of Western Education

The incursion of colonial masters in the middle of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century into areas presently known as Yorubaland was accompanied by the rise of Christianity and introduction of Western education. The colonial education programme was allowed to be handled by the churches. 'Christian missionaries turned attention to education work, they opened schools, and this led to the problem of distinction between what was essentially Christianity and what was secular education. According to (Gbadamosi, (1978:138) Western education was evidently seen as a mirage designed to lure Muslim children

from Islam to Christianity. Therefore, Muslim attendance of the schools was conceived as dangerous and ominous". Colonial educational policy had reduced the status of Islamic studies to a few norms of individual and private affairs. The colonial educational policy had bad consequence on the teaching of Islamic studies in the public schools and little attention was paid to the interest of the Muslim parents in the education of their children. The government policies on education in the southern part of Nigeria were by no means different from what were seen in the North. The intensive efforts of Christian missionary under the shade of colonial officers to use schools to convert Muslim children to Christianity were realized by the Muslim parents, they showed objection to this through withdrawal of the children from Government schools and wrote petitions to the regional authorities. The significant effect of the petitions was the gradual awakening of the government to the real objections of the Muslim community to western education. Consequently, in the course of the series of government — Muslim meetings, the government came to appreciate the Muslims' stand clearly. Government realization of the Muslim position and fears predisposed Governor Carter to modify government policy on education. He initiated several discussions with influential Muslim officials and elders, and particularly Muhammad Shitta, with a view to persuading them to support the placing of at least one Muslim school under the Board of Education which would have to conform to the 1887 policy on education, by introducing new subjects.

The period of negotiation between Muslim community and government was co- incidental with the arrival of two Muslim scholars in Lagos; from Sierra Leone and Turkey; al Hajj-Harun-al arrived from Sierra Leone and Mr. Abdallah Quillam, a personal representative of Sultan of Turkey, Abd al-Hamid II. According to Gbadamosi (1978), the role played by these Muslim scholars hastened the establishment of Government Muslim Schools. The first Government Muslim School was officially opened on 15th June, 1896, opened with forty boys and forty-six young men under the direction of the Head teacher, Idris Animasaun assisted by two teachers recruited from Sierra Leone on a salary of £2.10s per month each. At this time, due prominence was given to Arabic and Islamic studies in the Government Muslim Schools held only five days in a week, Saturday to Wednesday, from 9.00 am to 1.30p.m there were no classes on Thursday and Friday in order to prepare for and attend *Jumat* service on Friday. The successful establishment of Government Muslim School in Lagos had immediate good effect among the Muslims as a whole. The Muslim town of Epe requested the government to establish at Epe Muslim School conducted on similar lines to the one that was established in Lagos in 1896.

The government representatives were much fascinated by this idea coming as it did from Epe, a Muslim stronghold, and in view of the government's interest to introduce a system of European education among the Muslims. After thorough discussion, with Muslim leaders coupled with necessary consultation with legislative council and inspector of schools, the work began in earnest on the Epe Muslim School. When all was ready, the school was officially opened on November. 1898. News about the establishment and progress of these Government Muslim Schools at Lagos and Epe spread far and wide among the Muslims. It was not surprised that Badagry Muslims forwarded a letter to the Government for the establishment of similar school to those at Epe and Lagos. And having ascertained the readiness and support of the Badagry Muslims, the government established another Government Muslim School at Badagry which was officially opened in 1899. The success recorded from these three Government Muslim Schools prompted other Yoruba Muslim towns to demand for the establishment of similar schools in their respective towns. For example, Ilorin, Ibadan and Ijebu—Ode made similar request (Gbadamosi, 1978:173). But, the inadequate of school personnels and drying up interest of Government could not allow the establishment of the schools to take place. The last years of the nineteenth century provided an atmosphere so favourable for Muslim education, given the enthusiasm displayed by both the government and Muslim communities. The attempted alliance of western education and Islamic education provided the Muslims in the Yoruba land first practical experience in the management of schools along Western lines; for the established schools were only government schools, largely because they were financed and inspected by the government, the administration and day-to-day management of the schools were the responsibilities of the local Muslim community. The Muslims provided land and labour; they tackled the problems of organisation, staff

equipment and the like. They even sometimes provided the necessary finances. Thus, the financial assistance of government rendered to Muslim communities on schools continued till 1926.

Teaching of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Government Schools in Yorubaland

An Islamic Religious study is a form of Islamic education taught in the formal institutions in Nigeria from the primary school to the secondary school level. According to Hassan, (2007:39) “it is the totality of learning experiences which centre on the relationship between man and his Creator and between man and his fellow men”. Islamic educational system in Nigeria has followed an evolutionary trend over a period predating the colonial era, through the colonial period and across the post independent time and to date. Islamic education started in Nigeria with the introduction of Islam into the country since the 11th century, through the Old Kanem-Bomu Empire. Islam found its way gradually to other parts of the country. During its introduction, its curriculum was confined to the branches of knowledge associated with the Holy Qur’an. The teachings of Islamic studies were confined to private schools established by the individual Muslims and organizations. The realization of the significance of Western education by the Muslims in the age of industrialization, scientific and technological advancement especially in the beginning of nineteenth century, led to the emergence of a number of Muslim organizations such as: Ansar-ud-Deen, Zumratul Islamiyyah, Ansar-us-Islam, Ijebu Muslim Mission, Isabatu Deen, Ansar-Islam and Ahmadiyyah. They established primary, secondary schools and teacher training colleges in the southern part of Nigeria. In these established schools, Arabic and Islamic studies were well taught. Despite the fact that Arabic and Islamic studies were taught at Muslim private schools adequately, Muslim elites exerted pressure on the colonial government to provide opportunity for Muslim children in public schools to offer Arabic and Islamic studies. The fruit of this effort was early realized in 1896 upward when Government Muslim Schools were established in Lagos in 1896, in Epe in 1898 and Badagry in 1899. In 1922, another Muslim school was established at Elegbeta in Lagos. It worthy of note that, Muslim schools were opened at that time from Saturday to Wednesday. Thursday and Friday were weekly work free-days. (Gbadamasi, 1978:171) This was the beginning of teaching Arabic and Islamic studies in public schools in Yorubaland.

In the second half of twenty century, 1953 to be specific, Muslim dignitaries held meetings with the Northern Region Ministry of Education, Kaduna. The objective of the meetings was appeal to the Ministry, to include Arabic and Islamic studies among the subjects offered in West African Examination Council. The request was granted and the candidates started to offer the subjects in the late 1950s (Balogun, n.d.:73-81). Initially, private candidates were not allowed to sit for Arabic and Islamic studies. Examinations were only opened to school candidates but with the passage of time, private candidates were allowed to take Arabic and Islamic studies. For some years, Arabic and Islamic studies did not have standard syllabus, *al-iziyyat* book written in Arabic was used, examinations were prepared in Arabic and English translation. Candidates could answer either in English language or Arabic. However, the problem of standard syllabus was resolved in 1966, when panel was mandated to draw up a syllabus on Islamic studies. The approved syllabus came for use in 1968. This syllabus catered for examination candidates for school certificate and the General Certificate in Education, at ordinary level. Sequel to that, syllabus for school certificate and General Certificate in Education for Arabic and Islamic studies was produced in 1975.

The introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system of Education and the National Policy on Education of 1981 prompted a review of the syllabus for Islamic Religious studies, consequently, the Federal Ministry of Education set up a panel in 1982 to carry out the review. The review panel observed that the former syllabus was limited in scope and did not provide the students adequate knowledge of Islam for positive behavior. The panel also observed that moral education such as ethics, commercial ethics and basis of *shar‘ah* were left out. The panel further identified that emphasis was not laid on relating Islamic teachings to the society, the family and daily life, while memorization was encouraged among the students rather than understanding of the subject (Hassan, 2007:41). The aforementioned contentions resulted to the production of a new syllabus for Islamic studies which is more comprehensive in scope and contents than the former one. The name Islamic Religious knowledge was changed to Islamic Religious studies during the review. It should be noted that

despite the sublime effort on the new syllabus, it receives criticism of some scholars as cumbersome and too impressionistic in package, it, however, exposes the learners to have more exposure to Islamic teachings than the former syllabus.

The second half of the twenty-one Century witnessed a new crew of Arabic and Islamic scholars in Yorubaland, this was marked by the arrival of Yoruba Universities' graduates who trained abroad or from Nigeria Universities. The period produced likes of Professors M. A. Abdul, Daud Naibi, Ogunbiyi, Malik Sayyid, Balogun I.A, Raji, R.A, Abdul Razaq Aderemi, Nassir, Qadir. Balogun S.U, Balogun I.A.B, Balogun K.A, Z.I Oseni, Issa Lawal, Amidu Sanni, Abdul Rahman Oloyede, Ishaq Oloyede and others.

Conclusions

In this paper, an attempt was made to examine the intellectual history of Islam in Yorubaland and the distinct roles played by the Muslim clerics (*'Ulama*) in the 19th Century of Yoruba Nation. The introduction of Islam brought new perspectives in Oyo Empire and this gave key theological and political concerns. Numerous sources for the nineteenth century Yoruba Nation explain the historical interpretation about the roles of *'ulama* in the Yorubaland. This is very interesting and quite fascinating. This study identifies that at the dawn of history of Islam in Yoruba land, Muslims enjoyed religious tolerance and the patronage of Yoruba rulers. At the later period, Muslim relations with the rulers turned sour. There was counter accusation; Muslims accused the Oyo authorities of corrupt practices, unjust killings of Muslims and miscarriage of justice. On the other hand, there was belief lingered that Muslims were the chief cause of the troubles. It is a particularly remarkable that Islam was considered as one of the identifiable factors led to the collapse of Oyo empire in 1835, but it is also of a particular interest to note that Islam contributed significantly to the growth and success recorded by the empire in the past. However, in the services of Muslims to Oyo authorities, the roles of *'Ulama* covered different aspects of the achievements of Oyo Empire. These roles included spiritual services, enlistment in Oyo army, and provision of skills for caring and maintaining horses used for wars, they also served as diplomats between the Oyo Empire and neighboring Islamic states, such as Borgu, Nupe and Hausaland. Some also served as palace clerks, Judges, barbers, ropemakers, cowherds and court attendants. In above all some became members of household of Yoruba rulers and Chiefs.

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