

CHAPTER FOUR

SOCIO-CULTURAL ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES OF ILORIN COMMUNITY TODAY*

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In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

COURTESIES

Let me use this special opportunity to thank Ilorin Emirate Community, University of Ilorin, the organizer of this programme for the honour done to me by inviting me to address this august audience. I am very overwhelmed because I understand from a reliable source that this is its first occasion of this kind. Thank you.

Initially, I was very reluctant to accept the invitation because I am not an Economist, Educationist and Sociologist as I am not a student of Political Science. Even if I am any of them my credentials do not merit being considered to address university dons on any of the issues the topic targets. Even if I do know bits and bits of the issues involved, I do not want to be found guilty of carrying coal to Newcastle or carrying Kolanuts from Kano to Shagamu.

However, this is Ilorin affairs, a place where I have, luckily, been living since 24th April, 1940 and the longest period of time I have ever spent outside Ilorin was a nine months academic session in the University of Khartoum, Sudan (1969/1970). I therefore have no good reason to decline the (offer) request to address you on the topic.

Permit me to be brief and just highlight the issues involved in the topic for two reasons: I want to be guided by a **Hikmah**. a popular wise saying that whoever is in my shoes should be guided by the following:

لا تغفلن سبب الكلام ووقته وكيف وكم والمكان جميعا

Meaning:

Do not forget (a) the cause/the circumstance(s) which prompt(s) the speech, (b) the time allocated for the address (c) the manner of communicating the address so that no damage will be caused (d) how brief or detailed the speech will be (not only to ensure that the audience is not bored down but also to ensure that too much is not said for fear of implication. Nor should it be too brief to avoid being quoted out of context, deliberately, for mischief or purely out of innocent misunderstanding (e) the place where the address is being delivered.

I want to add two more guidelines. To be successful in such a task, a speaker should be very conscious of the goals the programme is designed to achieve. He should also give good consideration to his audience so that he does not insult their intelligence or speak above their level of understanding. I owe you, the august audience and my very humble self, the onerous task to keep religiously to the set guidelines. Permit me also to add that the paper is very conscious that it is not out to open healed or healing wounds in the Society. May Allah guide and guard both the audience and the speaker aright.

THE NAME OF THE COMMUNITY

The paper has no interest in the academic controversy whether the community got its name from Ilu Erin, Town of Elephant, **Ilo Irin**, a place where iron instruments are sharpened or its origin or source is a Baruba word, **Ironi**, meaning alligator pepper, alleged to be commonly found in Ilorin by Baruba who used it for medication. Whichever you choose to be correct or fall for, an undeniable fact is that Ilorin, our Society today, originally, was a typical Yoruba settlement. This is evidently supported by the inextricable link of its history to Yoruba race. The office of **Aare Ona Kakanfo**, Commander in-Chief of the army of Yoruba land,

was ever shifted to Ilorin from Jabata and later from Ilorin to Ogbomosho.¹

Although the formation of the Society comprised Hausa, Fulani, Nupe, Baruba and others, Yoruba is so dominant by the virtue of the location of the town and Yoruba population. Another evidence of its dominance is that Yoruba is the language of business, learning and music in the Society. Consider our entertainment and music of Daduku-ada, Molo, Balu, Pakenke and even Orin Ijo Olomo Oba - our Royal Music and Special Royal Dance. Waka and Were are most recent and have much to do with Islamic faith. Thirdly all citizens of the Community have, usually and as matter of course a Muslim name and a Yoruba cognomen or pet name known as Oriki.² This is culturally peculiar to all the citizens of Ilorin, tribal or ethnic origin notwithstanding. Listen to the following four stanzas from our Royal Dance and Song:

1. Nba ma bi Olori yan ri o
Nba le yan temi
Nma bi Ishola³ yan ri o
Nba le yan temi
B'olorunfe

2. Mo fo' kun weri 2x

Mo fo sa we se 2x

Ishola lo'lorun we to mo roro

3. Ishola fun wa lo'wo
O'fun wan ni agbon obi
Oba kan ko se iru eyiri o

4. Dide dide omo Alabi
Dide ibrahima
Nde kojo
Gbagele kojo
Omo Bolanta⁴

For the community as a whole, the cognomen of Ilorin goes thus:

Omo opo roso Opo gbaja

Oba loni ka rogi laso

Moja opo aromije

Omo esu momi

Esu o jokoo mi

Oga siyamo jeko jeko enikeji

Layanmu omo Adamu Elenpe Ilorin⁵

It may sound very strange or funny while the Yorubas among us generally and passionately go by Muslim names as first and last names, the Fulani in particular, go by Yoruba names which depict royalty. Agbo-ola; Mopelola; Arin-Ola, Segilola are good instances out of many we have in the Society.

PIONEERING HEROES

This paper recognizes the key roles played by the pioneering heroes, (no heroines) such as Ojo, Ela, Afonja, Laderin, Tahir Solagberu, Usman Olufadi, Bako and prominently and distinguishably. Sheikh As-Salih, later referred to as Alimi, the learned, because

"leaders of the communal groups accepted his spiritual superiority and subordinated (submitted) themselves to his leadership".

The focus and emphasis of the paper is that each and every one of them played key role in the history of Ilorin changing from a traditional Yoruba settlement of little or no significance to Islamic society recognized and respected by both the North and South of Nigeria. The confederation of the Yorubas at Idi-Ape, the pastoral Fulani headed by Olufadi. Hausas under the leadership of Bako,

Nupe and Baruba settlements at Gambari area, transformed to the powerful Ilorin Emirate that won the admiration of the North and respect of the South because they (the latter) had no choice.

Our challenge then is how to maintain the status our history and the position the strategic location won us. Professor T.G.O. Gbadamosi formerly of History Department, University of Lagos remarked:

Henceforth Ilorin remained to Yoruba land a sort of Islamic lighthouse, a local Mecca to which the Yoruba Muslims turned for study and guidance⁷

Our failure to make good use of these chances constitutes one of the challenges of Ilorin Community today, especially in the power-sharing game in the country. Our political strategy is very inadequate to meet our needs in that sphere.

Another challenge is whatever cultural background we belong to: Hausa, Fulani, Baruba, Nupe or Yoruba our Muslim scholars have to shed enough light on the concept of culture and Islamic faith with a view to maintaining, retaining and developing our respective cultural heritage(s), which do not run afoul of Islamic doctrines. We shall then discard those that run afoul of our

faith and put them where they should belong. We shall then concentrate on improving on those aspects of our culture which do not offend Islam.⁸ This is a way that we shall not throw away the baby and the water.

Ordinarily, the natural growth of the population of Ilorin would not have posed much problem to its economy and sanity because our traditional arrangement (set up) would have efficiently coped with the challenges. However, the sporadic population increase became a source of our challenge. Consider the influx of the people of South West as a result of series of crises in the North. Linguistically and culturally and especially due to the relative peace which prevailed in Ilorin. most of the victims found Ilorin as a good place of abode business-secured and business friendly environment.

Economically, the movement had its merits but its advantages took toll on Ilorin people for the obvious reasons the paper will discuss later.

The political status of Ilorin is another source of challenge to its people. In 1967 we were divided on whether the then North Central State Capital should be in Lokoja or Ilorin. The genuine fear of the opponents of having the state headquarters in Ilorin was the fate of our age long and highly valued cultural practices. Today, the

supporters point to the rapid development and their benefits. The opponents will respond counting what we have missed or sacrificed in terms of culture and religion. While some communities in the state are able to jealously protect their cultural heritages, they come to Ilorin and tell the people of Ilorin that the State Capital belongs to all indigenes of the state and even others from other states. Can we contest that?

The establishment of educational institutions of higher learning, admittedly contributed to the growth of the economy of the society but as nothing is free, the cultural identity of Ilorin paid the price of the development. For instance, it was a tug of war initially to recognize University of Ilorin as a community, which deserved its own Central Mosque. Why two central mosques in Ilorin, Gerin Alimi? The establishment of churches and chapels followed in succession in the name of freedom of religion as stipulated in the Constitution.⁹ That freedom was enjoyed and tapped to establish Okemale Apostolic Church. There was another attempt to operate a church on top of the Okesuna hill. Eruda Apostolic Church feud is yet to settle. The position of Okesuna is identified along the present site of the mini Campus of University of Ilorin on the right side when you are heading for Lagos at the outskirts of Ilorin.¹⁰

As the population of Ilorin grows, it attracts the most enterprising tribe of Nigeria the way honey attracts flies and sugar attracts ants. Go to Old Yidi, Agaka and Taiwo roads to appreciate what I am trying to say. Ilorin's own the land. That is not in doubt. They collect twenty-year tenancy rates and spend them in less than one month. The tenants utilize the land for long years, if not for ever. We can no longer cry over spilled milk or honey. Whose door's steps do you put the blame? If I may ask, can we faithfully enforce the injunction of our religion that our Muslim daughters should not marry men of different faith?¹¹

ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

The size of the population of any given society determines its volume of economic activities. What is important is that the needs of the society are provided, preferably within the society or the excess of what it produces has the value to pay for what it has to look for from outside. All groups: the Fulanis, Hausas, Nupes, Yorubas and others came along with their skills. Fulanis, for instance, kept livestock, Nupes specialized on production of groundnut oil and cake (Kuli Kuli), Hausas wove mats, made ropes, did embroidery of all kinds, dug and maintained wells and canned out other labour-intensive jobs.

Let us see how in the time of our ancestors, Ilorin Community was able to "feed itself, so to say, by providing all its needs. Let's restrict ourselves to some major trades which then constituted the key economic activities of Ilorin traditional society, what they produced and the tools they used. Ebu can be conveniently referred to as our "Pottery Factory" where essentially, certain categories of the Society's needs were produced to satisfy the immediate needs of the Society then and partly today's needs. For frying activities, the potters produce(d) {agbada, isasun and koko) pots of all sizes for cooking. For storing and making portable water cool, the factory produced 'Amu'. The taste of such cool water is distinguishable from the taste of water from refrigerators in terms of taste and thirst refreshing effects. Ebu factory-produces kolobo for solid paps, kolo to save money for children and some adults and masakolo, somi and anumadaro. All are now displaced and replaced by plates of all sizes as kengbes and Igbas-calabash are replaced with drinking glasses as igbakos are replaced by all kinds of spoons.

Another class of industry was Agbede, blacksmith. Their products serve other businesses. Hoes, cutlass, are used for farming, hoeing and maintaining the environments. Blacksmith workshops produced guns for hunters, doge for fetching grasses to make thatch roof-house, emu, omo-owu for their own workshops,

asigbe, key for the gates and houses, traps takute for hunters, knives, big and small, needles ikoti and ponpodo for domestic uses. Of interest and connected with their beliefs, then, were ide, shackles to prevent abikus from running back home prematurely.

Of interest is the business of (Ona gbibe) wood carving which produces aruko, hoe-handles, and handles for axes, cutlasses and knives. Of special interest is its production of mortars and pestles (odo & omo odo) for pounding yam. Compare the taste of traditionally pounded yam with that of pando yam. Wala, traditional slates were produced for our school age pupils in different sizes. Leather works had its place in that age. The tanner and leather workers produced onde, belts, tira, shoes, purses, (apo owo), gafa, and bante-leather under wears for the Sabarumas.

I will not have excuse if my mind escapes weaving industry which benefits from other trades in the process of its services in the society. Igowu is a combination of the arts of woodcarving and black smiting. Kokogun, serin and agbonrin were made by the alagbede, blacksmiths while okukus were made by gbena-gbena, wood carvers. The essence of all these is not only to show that the traditional society was self-sufficient in providing its needs but also that the citizens and their handiwork were inter dependent.

Our economic challenges began with colonial administration when we were exposed to "modern" tools, utensils and other items because Industrial Revolution forced it on the colonialists to look for markets for their finished goods. Craze for white collar jobs became the order of the day. Unfortunately, the pioneers of such system of education initially benefited from it. However, there was irresistible drift away from the trades that kept the society together economically well. Everybody wanted his or her child to become a teacher, clerk, lawyer, judge, **Kadi** etc. When the labour markets for such jobs became saturated it became too late to trace our steps back.

It must be mentioned that this is far from giving a satisfactory explanation to defend the general notion that "Ilorins are lazy folks and hangers on." In a sense, this general opinion is difficult to prove because there is no society, modern or traditional that does not have its own share of lazy, average and hardworking members. So, life will continue. There is no field of human endeavour, traditional or modern, where some citizens of Ilorin have not distinguished themselves. The Kanikes distinguished themselves as cattle traders, so were Toyin Barubas. Olori Egbes and Olowo Okeres excelled in textile related businesses, Sagaya transformed traditional business into industrial activities. In the

area of public service: be it public administration, medical or judicial services and many others, we have excelled.

As some disprove the notion that we are lazy lots many are ready examples to justify it. Good instances abound in Agaka, Old Yidi road, Taiwo, Gambari and other prominent streets where the economic benefits of the society go to those who know how to maximally tap them. We relax, as landlords, on the token rental fees and watch our guests enjoy the best of the economy of the society. In Agaka; Ibos employ the indigenes as sales boys. Hausas produce vegetable and fruits all-round the year, yet the eyes of our people do not open to the fact that fortunes can be made out of such small-scale adventures. Hausas go now to the extent of hawking these locally produced fruits, pepper, beans etc. all in the nooks and crannies of the city. We remain in different. They compete with our women in the markets in the sale of all sorts of food items. Can we justify our protest when we are told the bitter truth reflecting to us what majority of us are? No thanks to the way we play our local politics. I believe that it is not fish but the skill to catch fish that the common men in our society need.

EDUCATION

In the area of education, the efforts of Ilorin Community in the past deserve commendation. For this purpose, the paper

intends to focus on two categories of schools established by the Community to promote Western Education in the society. The first category is the results of the communal efforts while the second category is those of the then Native Administration that went by different nomenclatures: Ilorin Native Authority, Ilorin Division or Ilorin Local Government.

The case of founding, Ilorin United School, (Primary) is as striking, interesting, pleasing as it is most challenging to all of us today-be you indigenes or guests of Ilorin. Why? I cannot resist producing the list of the attendants at the inaugural meeting of the great founding fathers, held on 16th August, 1943 (See Annexure A). Secondly, let me reproduce the minutes of the meeting of the Founding Fathers of United Primary School. Ilorin.

**Minutes of a Meeting Representative of African,
Baptist and Apostolic Churches and a Section of
the Muhammedan Natives of Ilorin**

Present Messrs; S.K. Babarinsa, J.O. Lajorin, C.M. Shofoluwe, A.O. Eboda, Brima Pratt, Alhaji Memudu, Jimoh Olumo, Mustapha Olodo, Sanusi Oyeleke, Durosinlorun, Alhaji Kuranga, Ayinla Jida, P.O. Ajayi, Abdu Mosalasi Gogoro, Salihu akanbi, Yaya Elesu, Gbada

adisa, Yesufu amuda Ede, B.O. Joseph, S.B. Olukanmi, Liasu Sule, Yaya Bello akodudu. (Sic)

Mr. Babarinsa briefly restated the object of the meeting which was to found a school capable of meeting the present rapidly increasing demand for modern education in Ilorin. He appealed to those present to act like heroes to lay solid foundation for posterity.

Alhaji Memudu asked what the Christian elements were prepared to contribute towards the scheme.

Mr. Durosinlorun explained that it was Scheme in the subscription to which they natives of Ilorin who know its value should lead, after all most if not all the Christians elements were merely assisting the land of their sojourn.

The Muhammedan elements held a separate meeting, at the end of which an idea of estimated cost of running a school was enquired.

Mr Eboda gave the following rough estimate

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|--------------------|------------|
| 1. Building | £60 |
| 2. Material | £28 |

3. 1 Headmaster @ £96 p.a (for 6 months)

£48

4. 3 Assistant Teacher each @ £36 p.a (for 6 months)

£54

5. 1 Assistant Teacher @ £24 p.a (for 6 months)

£15

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£30

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Alhaji Memud announced that the Muhammedan elements could hold responsible for £200 expecting £100 from all the Christians.

Alhaji Memudu and Mr. B. Pratt were deputed to see and acquaint the Emir with the project.

A land at Oke Aluko was earmarked as a possible site for proposed School building. The meeting rose.¹² (sic)

The first commendation goes for the collective spirit of the patriotic indigenes of Ilorin and the distinguished guests of the community to pursue a common goal for the promotion of

education in the society (see Annexure A). Secondly, both groups did not allow their difference in religious beliefs to distract them from pursuing and achieving their common lofty goal. I believe the greatest challenge of it lies in the friendly atmosphere of love and peaceful co-existence which existed between the two groups and served as bed-rock for serving the society where they were born or where they were making their legitimate living and livelihood.

I find it difficult to succumb to the belief that the establishment of the school was because the admissions into Public Schools were restricted to indigenes or the quality of education provided by the public schools was poor. Why, for instance, did the patriots of Ilorin were so involved in funding the school? It will only be valid to say that the spaces in the Public schools were not enough to satisfy the need of the population of the Society.

Akanbi Apalando, the Contractor who built the school at £150 was introduced to the Proprietor by Mr “Parat Itajia” What a friendly atmosphere that existed between the indigenes and their wonderful guests! I want to add that the assertion that the society was self-sufficient reflected in the letter of Alhaji Akanbi Apalando, the Contractor who Quoted a number of construction jobs he has undertaken to merit the contract.

The closest but distinct effort to what led to the establishment of Ilorin United Primary School was the circumstance that gave birth to Ilorin Grammar School in 1967. It was the 1966/1967 convention of Ilorin Descendants Students Union (IDSU) that clamored for establishment of a Grammar School. Impressively and positively the then Ilorin Native Authority, rose to the call. It went into the record that Alhaji Saka Opobiyi, the then Development Secretary played a leading role in the establishment of the school by fully involving the Native Authority in the laudable venture. That remains a challenge to the present-day managers of the five Local Governments in the Emirate.

In 1980, Ilorin Descendants Progressive Union, (IDPU) as was then known followed suit and established six Secondary Schools in the Emirate at a go. It is rare in the history of education in the country. The Schools are: Baboko, Banni, Barakat, Iponrin, United Secondary Schools and Ajumoni now Government Secondary School, Omode.

In 1995, to satisfy the thirst of the community for Western Education, IDPU, Ilorin Descendants Progressive Union during the tenure of the presidency of Alhaji M.A. Gold established, Ilorin Comprehensive High School, (ICOHS). Thanks for the wonderful professional supports of Professor S.A. Jimoh (OON), Dr. Toyin

Akanbi, Alhaji Hameed Adi and other patriots. It ranks today as one of the best-managed and performing Secondary Schools in the state. Part of Alhaji M.A. Gold's presidential address in the year's conference read as follows:

The Union continues to look for solutions to our educational problems in conjunction with education authorities. Last year under our educational endowment fund we were able to assist many indigenes pay the high WAEC examination fees, we are happy the Ilorin Emirate Forum has also distributed some money to indigent students this year. (Sic)

The newly established Ilorin Comprehensive High School established under the Endowment Fund; has moved to its permanent site after His

Royal Highness the Emir of Ilorin performed the commissioning of the two blocks of classrooms. The Military Administrator of Kwara State Col. P. Ogar also visited the school as part of his familiarization visit to Ilorin West local Government. He was very happy with what he saw and he commended the Union and the community for complementing what the State Government is doing in the areas of Education.¹³

Ilorin Native Authority, as a public institution established in 1914/1915, Pakata, Okesuna and Omu Aran Primary Schools. Bala was much later in 1943/1944 to cater mainly for the children of school age in Bala District. The then Daudu Bala, late Alhaji Alao Omo Oloni could not be forgotten for “drafting” many pupils to the school. One of such students became the state Chief Judge and

other became the pioneer Grand Kadi of the state. “Alhaja Mistress” was part of many other beneficiaries of the benevolence of the late Daudu Bala. In 1979, Ilorin Local Government under the Chairmanship of Alhaji Said Obalowu Muhammad (Agarawu) founded Okelelele Secondary School.

The challenges facing me and you individually or collectively today are what is our contributions to ensure good maintenance in these institutions and to ensure that enough schools and facilities are provided for today's generation of school age population of Ilorin. In my days in Primary School, we were taught in Arabic the story of a Caliph who saw a very old man planting and nurturing date palm trees and asked: “Why at your old age are you planting date trees which take long time to grow and long time to yield fruits?” His response to the Caliph is the focus in this paper, “Those before us planted what we eat today and we should plant for those coming behind us”. I deduce from the old man that what we benefit today is the fruits of the labour of our predecessors. What do we want to leave for the generations coming behind us? How do we, as individuals or groups want the prosperity to judge us?

IEDPU

We cannot talk of any development in Ilorin now or in the recent past without making reference to Ilorin Descendants

Progressive Union, IDPU now put in new bottle Ilorin Emirate Descendants Progressive Union (IEDPU). How do we explain the dwindling influence of our dear Union? It has ceased for too long to enjoy the listening ears of the authority. A reliable source confirmed that in 1979, the Ministerial post Kwara had, was filled by the Union's nominee. What impact does the union enjoy now in the Emirate's political life? It played a big role to mobilize our people during 1963 and 1973 censuses. Its role in 1979 elections was remarkable and indispensable. Today the Union watches events freely going the way they choose helplessly. The Union is just a passenger in the ship it should be the captain. What do we do to give it a lifeline and resuscitate it? Today's challenges of the Emirate demand that the Union be restructured, reformed and re-orientated to be able to play the role of an umbrella organization in the Emirate. Certainly, it should cease to be one unitary organization.

Each unit of the Emirate requires a body of its own to face its own peculiar challenges socially, culturally and economically. The business of IEDPU within the Emirate is the Union's primary business while its functions outside the Emirate are secondary. Its roles in the Emirate are on the increase daily and call for its re-organization to allow each area within the town, each settlement

and community outside the gates of the town work for realization of developmental dreams, which are peculiar to each unit.

The central union will only supervise and co-ordinate the programmes of the federating units. All the existing areas, villages and community bodies for development, have to stand on their own and operate as federating units. They will have their respective executives. The traditional head of each area/community will serve as deputy patron acting for His Highness, the Emir in their respective jurisdictions.

If the Union cannot be saved from the challenges facing it, the way out is to look for an alternative organization with the support of all who have capacity to serve the interest of the Emirate. We need such a body that no institution in the State will take us for granted and take decisions without caring for what that organization will say or do. I mean a body that commands the respect of all because its leaderships and memberships are all out to serve and not looking for any material benefits for their services.

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OUR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The importance of virile Local Governments in the development of the Emirates cannot be over emphasized. We have on records the developmental projects undertaken and accomplished by different

Local Administrations in the past, ranging from civil works, education, health services, library to markets. The same cannot be said in the Emirate today despite the fact the monthly allocations are received in millions of Naira. Our brothers and sisters who occupy the positions of leaderships in our Local Government Administration owe explanation to the electorates that gave them the mandate to administer our affairs. What drains these allocations? The elite of the society are not helping the matter when we fold our arms and watch the situation going from bad to worse. Don't we have a stake in the fate of the Emirate? Are the common men and women of the Emirate not our blood brothers and sisters?

I believe very strongly that we need to rise collectively through IEDPU or an alternative institution to arrest the unfortunately deteriorating situation. Let us create a forum where periodically our brothers and sisters in charge will be called upon to let the citizens of the Emirate know the Local Government's revenues: internally generated and what comes in form of statutory allocations and what they are spent upon. It may be monthly rotated in turns among the five Local Governments. Such programmes should be open to all. Additionally, the members of public will have input in how to run their own affairs. Such

programmes could be aired in television stations in the state capital.

CONCLUSION

A reflection over our past should be a source of pride to us. So, we owe Allah thanks for belonging to the Society with record of achievements. We should appreciate the roles played by the founding fathers of the Emirate. The generations that succeeded them before passing the mantle of the membership of the Emirate to us deserved commendation for the good jobs they did. We owe them and ourselves the duty to emulate them and sustain their achievements for the good people of the Emirate. Our challenge is how to improve on these legacies of success in manners that satisfy the needs of our Society today. We owe ourselves the responsibility to give the generations coming behind us good cause to praise our efforts as we have cause today, to praise the generations before us.

Thank you. God bless.