

## CHAPTER ONE

### WESTERN EDUCATION IN AN ISLAMIC TOWN, ILORIN, PROSPECTS AND DEVELOPMENT

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All thanks are due to Allah for sparing our lives to witness this big occasion in the history of our School, Ilorin Grammar School. I seize this special opportunity to congratulate the Proprietors, Members of the Board of Governors, (present and past) the Principal, Mallam Toyin Akanbi, all his predecessors in office, the staff, past and present, teaching and non-academic, the pupils, old and current, and all who have, in one way or the other, made positive contributions to make Ilorin Grammar School what it is today. I appreciate the honour and privilege given me to participate in the twentieth-year anniversary of Ilorin Grammar School.

Thanks.

***Western Education in an Islamic Town, Ilorin, Prospects and Development***, is a well thought out topic for an occasion of this nature. It will obviously make us cast a glance at the history of Ilorin as a small Yoruba village under the sovereignty of (old)

Oyo empire and make us take another look at how it grew to become a force of great magnitude that a newly installed Alafin had to herald during his assumption of office by sending to Ilorin that The new moon has appeared and Ilorin was strong enough to reply the Alafin's arrogant message saying, Let that new moon speedily set.<sup>1</sup>

The topic will equally make us count the blessings of Ilorin as a young community that provided home for people who were subjected to persecutions because of their Islamic faith in the neighboring Yoruba towns such as Kuwo, Ilobe, and Ikoyi. We shall discuss how such people sought and obtained political asylum in Ilorin, how they enjoyed the freedom to practice their religion according to the dictates of their conscience and how the brotherhood of Islam served as the foundation upon which a Muslim society was established, nurtured and grew to a matured Islamic and powerful community to win for itself the glory of being described by Professor T.G.O. Gbadamosi of History Department of University of Lagos as

***Islamic Lighthouse, a Local Mecca to which  
the***

***Yoruba Muslims turned for study and  
guidance***<sup>2</sup>

Finally, we shall examine what people of Ilorin understand to mean education and the effect of colonialism on their system of education. As a typical Muslim community, we shall attempt to examine the rivalry between Islamic and Western education in the soil of non-Arabian and non-English but purely Islamic atmosphere.

### **Location and Name**

The location of Ilorin on the world map is 8°30' North and 4.35 East. There are three possible explanations for the name of the town but two keenly recommended themselves: Ilorin means a place where sharpening of iron takes place. Hermon Hodge, one-time Resident of Ilorin Province in the colonial era, reported that there was a large stone or stones where iron implements were sharpened. He identified the location as Bandele Compound. The second derivation is closely related to the emblem of Ilorin Grammar School. It is said that the town takes its name from description of the area as "Ilu Erin" - literally translated, 'the town of elephant'. Thirdly, abode of elephants because it actually referred to a place where elephants are found. The second derivation is strengthened by fact that Ilorin is in Savannah region and elephant being a grass-eating mammal. The earliest settlers' profession was hunting. Till today "Oko-Erin" is well known around the site of Queen

Elizabeth School, Ilorin and Ilorin Stadium Complex. Experts in language prefer to accept Ilorin to Ilu-Erin in the sense that it is easier to linguistically trace the source of Ilorin to "Ilo-rin" than to "Ilu-Erin".

I wish to make a clarification that Ilorin as presently known is in fact a conglomeration of a number of villages, each of which was not only on its own but also was developing on its own before they all became integrated into an urban city of Ilorin as we know it today. Among such villages which have been integrated and urbanized are Abe Emi, (off Kamalud-deen Street, West Omoda) Oloje (near Mount Carmel's Grammar School) Ogidi, (area of Ansarul Islam Secondary School, and Federal Government College), Gbako, (present site of Adewole Estate) Atikeke, (near present Offa motor park) Fate, (part of the G.R.A on the way to the permanent site of University of Ilorin) Alalubosa (site of Government Secondary School) and Osere (near the site of Atoto Press Limited). Ilorin where Ojo Isekuse, Eminla, Laderin and Afonja operated happened to be one of these village or settlements that formed the present city of Ilorin.

### **The Crisis of Oyo**

Oyo Empire like any other organization, a nation or civilization, underwent the usual transformation as theorized by Ibn Khaldun, the famous scholar of History. The Empire had its phases of infancy and growth. It attained its zenith and finally experienced the inevitable age of decay and decline. Although these are obvious developmental phases that characterized all human civilizations, historians do find causes to explain the rise and fall of an empire. Three major factors of the decline of (old) Oyo empire are firstly, the spread of lawlessness, secondly injustice and thirdly 'corruption on the land and on the sea'. They serve as a signal to the beginning of the end of any reigning power. Gradually, degenerating disregard for the right of the governed reached its peak after the death of Alafin Abiodun and during the reign of Alafin Aole. As Samuel Johnson put it,

*The cup of iniquity of the nation was full; cruelty, usurpation and treachery were rife, especially in the capital; and the provinces were groaning under the yoke of oppression. Confiscation and slavery for the slightest*

*offence became matters of daily occurrence, and the tyranny, executions and lawlessness of the princes and the other members of the royal family were simply insupportable.*<sup>3</sup>

(History repeats itself)

The second factor of the fall of Oyo Empire which is relevant to Ilorin's emergence as powerful emirate was the poor leadership that degenerated to constitutional crisis in Oyo during the era of Aole. To consolidate his position on the throne, the Bale of Apomu was the first victim to be summarily dealt with for personal and unjustifiable excuse. The latter sacrificed his life to save that of Apomu community.

The next victim was Bashorun Asamu whose failure to recover the copy of Koran of a Hausa man for him despite the royal order that it should be recovered from those who robbed him of his belongings, was interpreted as indiscipline and disrespect for the royal directive. It became a reason to incur the curse of Alafin who invoked the wrath of Sango on the Bashorun. Owota, another prominent Chief had his own share of the conflicts in the return of Jankalawa to Oyo and the

irresistible pressure on the Aole that he should deal with him for the offence he had committed in the past before Aole became Alafin.

The head of the army, Are Onakakanfo, in person of Afonja was another personality Alafin did not want to see his face. The grand design to eliminate him was to assign him the military expedition against Iwere, an impregnable and well-fortified place both by nature and art. The choice before Afonja then was either to accomplish the impossible task within three months or commit suicide. Although the mission was not disclosed to him till the army got to the gate of Iwere. Afonja intelligence network had brought the full details of the plot to him at Ilorin - This was a pointer to the degree of the loyalty (low or high) the then Oyo authority enjoyed.

It showed how tight/loose the security was then in the capital. The master counter plan was not unfolded till they got to Iwere and all the plotters were taught the lessons of their lives. It was there that the Chief Opele of Gbogun acquired his title "Ari Agada Pa Aburo Oba" Meaning, "A man who had a blade or sword to slay the king's brother".<sup>4</sup>

The army ignored the royal order to call at the headquarters whether they were victorious or defeated. Instead, his majesty received a covered calabash demanding

that he should commit suicide. He complied and cursed the nation. As the crisis got to the peak and things hopelessly fell apart, Afonja, Are Onakakanfo, threw off the hegemony of Oyo and declared independence. He was not alone in the belief that things have fallen apart,

*Several other Yoruba community leaders such as Adegun of Ikoyi and Opele the ruler of Gbogan also tried to convert their local autonomy to outright independence by carving out separate domains.<sup>5</sup>*

The third factor was the movement for Islamic reform. There existed in Oyo or Yoruba towns, Yoruba and non-Yoruba Muslims such as Hausa and Nupe Muslims. Although they were neither socially nor economically-highly placed, the Muslims were vocal to challenge the excesses of the ruling class. There was a case when a son of Alafin died. His Majesty did not believe that the Oyo nobles who came to sympathize with him were sincere because the smell at their hand indicated that they

had just eaten when he was fasting because of the bereavement. He ordered that they all should be killed.

A Nupe Muslim scholar called *Baba Kewu* could not stomach the injustice and sent his son to "remonstrate with him for his unjust and cruel acts in avenging his son's death on innocent people, when his son had died a natural death. This he said "is a sin against God who took away the life of your son."<sup>6</sup>

Muslims became organized and became distinct group through the way they dressed. Parakoyi is a Muslim title holder who played significant role in the commercial life of the town as a toll collector and as a Muslim leader, next only to Imam in Oyo, Ogbomosho and Oshogbo. The stand of Muslim leaders in Yorubaland notwithstanding whether they are indigenes or not, on the injustices against the governed is obvious. Naturally, they would react and they did. Muslim communities produced leaders who intensified Muslim evangelization and reformist preaching. One of them was Sheikh Salih who is popularly known as Alimi. He had travelled extensively in the area, particularly Oyo, Ogbomosho, Iseyin, where he spent one year, Kuwo where he spent a period of three years.

He moved and taught within the Muslim communities and became very much revered for his piety and learning. For

his religious activities and popularity, he was driven out of Oyo by Alafin. He later settled at Ilorin.

### **The Establishment of Ilorin Emirate**

Another significant group of Ilorin Founding Fathers were the Muslims who were present in Ilorin before the beginning of 19th Century. They included Hausa traders and Fulani pastoralists who had come to trade but later settled in the area. Amongst such Muslims were Bako, who later became Sarkin Gambari, Uthman Olufadi, who was the head of the earliest Fulani pastoralists in Ilorin. There were also Yoruba Muslims whose ancestral origin stemmed from the old Mali. Similarly, Okesuna formed a small village occupied by a group of Muslims who migrated from Yorubaland to Ilorin to protect their religious freedom. That's why it was popularly referred to as Oke-suna. Sheikh Adam Abdullah of Ilorin identified the spot along the mini-campus of the University of Ilorin on the left side as you enter Ilorin from Ogbomosho and on the right side on your way to Ibadan and Lagos. The group was headed by a distinguished and pious scholar called Solagberu. Other pious colleagues included Sheikh Shazili, Sheikh Muhammad, Shiekh Thanni, the grandfather of Basharu Adangba and a host of others. It was reported that Sheikh Alimi was first hosted in Okesuna village for about a month before travelling to Iseyin

and Ikoyi. His arrival in 1817 was a significant turning point both in the history of Islam and Ilorin itself as a community.

Islam changed from private religion to state religion in the society. The magnetic personality of Sheikh Salihu won the attraction, recognition and respect of all the groups who had earlier settled there as the personality attracted followers and admirers from both North and South of what is known from 1914 as Nigeria. This marked the turning point of transformation of Ilorin from a village "wrapped in obscurity" to a town destined to play a leading role in the history of Nigeria and indeed West Africa.

The recognition of superiority, of Sheikh Salihu by the settled pious scholars in Okesuna was attested to by giving him the title '*Alimi*' the learned. It was reported that the earlier settlers had only the first volume of *Tafsirul-Jalalain* while the second volume of it was given to them by him. Hence, they sought and obtained his permission to copy it, learnt it from him and named him "Alimi", the learned. The legitimacy of leadership was seized as a golden opportunity to establish Ilorin Emirate. He obtained the co-operation of all the groups ranging from his pupils, associates to companions some of whom were Fulanis, Hausas, Nupes, Yorubas and Kanuris. They jointly sought the help of God to establish the *Dawlah*. They were

unanimous to seek God's favour by one month fasting in which they look only dates for the morning and evening breakfasts. It was at the end of the fasting without taking meat or fish that they laid the foundation of Ilorin Emirate, which most of us are proud to be its descendants today. The prominent groups that formed the Founding Fathers of Ilorin today are the Okesuna group, under the leadership of Solagberu, the Afonja followers and other Muslims who were not Yoruba settlers. All the groups were loyal to the leadership of Alfa Alimi. Historians generally refer to the group of non-Yoruba Muslims in Ilorin as **Jama'a**.

When the successor of Aole, Alafin Maku sent to Afonja that "New moon has appeared". Afonja sought and obtained the support of both Solagberu and Alimi groups to sustain independence of Ilorin. As the power of Oyo was on decrease that of Ilorin was on increase to subdue many powerful Yoruba towns such as Gbohun, Edu and Ikoyi. Alafin Oluewu was first summoned to Ilorin but when he failed to honour the second call Oyo paid the price dearly. Oyo then mobilized his supporters including Barubas. There was a call for assistance from Sokoto but before it came Ilorin had succeeded to put the situation under control in a war in which Ikoko as the leader of Borgawas was known, was defeated at Ita Kudima on the way to Pakata from the central mosque. According to Johnson "Jimba

pursued the routed army, sacked Oyo and carried away various insignia of office including the egun dress and 100 brass posts from Alafin's palace".<sup>7</sup>

Earlier on, Oyo sent military expeditions to exterminate Ilorin. The first was Mugbamugba war, later were Kaula, Ogele and Nupe wars. Ilorin was successful to defend its territory against all the attacks. The defeat of Ilorin by Ibadan forces at Osogbo in 1838 or 1940 put an end to the expansionist movement of Ilorin in the south. It then became clear to Ilorin that its ambition to physically over run all Yoruba land was not realistic. She then resorted to diplomacy of alliances among the Yoruba groups to ensure that the divided Yoruba groups never had opportunity to unite against her. The strategy yielded the desired goal for Ilorin till the beginning of the colonial rule.

### **Colonial Administration**

Ilorin army was away in Ekiti land when Royal Niger Company forces crossed Niger at Jebba. The army had to rush home from Orimope to defend their town but with little resistance, Ilorin joined the list of British colonized empires on Friday 16th February, 1897.

### **Association of Ilorin with the North**

The cultural association of the majority of the people of Ilorin with Yoruba is evident in so many ways. The indigenes who are of Nupe, Hausa, Fulani or Kanuri origin speak Yoruba very fluently that a man of Yoruba origin cannot claim superiority over them in matter of expression in the language. They have 'Oriki', an indigenous Yoruba name. In fact, Ilorin Fulanis bear the Yoruba names more than the Yoruba themselves such as Bolakales, Bolajokos, Oluwatoyins, Omotayos etc. As time goes on, their eloquence or majesty of Yoruba is at the expense of their original languages. Dr. S.A. Balogun said, in one of his papers on Ilorin:

Equally significant is the strong Yoruba cultural tradition in the area. The Fulani ruling dynasty has been acculturated. The present Emir of Ilorin does not understand Fulfude. His usual language of communication is Yoruba.<sup>8</sup>

Research revealed that at least the first two Emirs of Ilorin did not speak Yoruba. They operated through an interpreter for "Oriki" it is traced to the fact that there were "inter-tribal" marriages. The Fulani got their "Orikis" from their Yoruba mothers. It was less of Yoruba marrying Hausa or Fulani but people of the same town contracting marrying according to their Islamic faith.

However, a number of practices of these people refused in die with their language in Ilorin. They remain the distinguishing characteristics that point to their origin. For instance, you will not be left in doubt as to the origin of an Ilorin man during his marriage ceremony when he talks of Sisa, Lali and some interesting jokes they crack which are dated back to long history in their associations. A good instance is the popular joke between the Fulanis and Kanikes which is age long as that of Fulanis and Tivs. In the same manner, Ilorin Yoruba was largely influenced by their fellow citizens from the North. Hormon Hodge observed.

*The population, as already stated, is predominantly Yoruba, though it is now of so cosmopolitan a character as so defy classification respecting its*

*origin. Even Johnson the historian would have some difficulty in deciding to which of his four great sections of the Yoruba race these people may be said to belong. Indeed, it is doubtful whether it ever was capable of such classification; it probably grew at an early date to be a town of refuge to all and sundry in times of unrest. Ajikobi and Alanamu are definitely Yoruba wards, as are the Ibagun and Okaka sub-wards of the Gambari and Fulani wards respectively. The Emir's ward and two of the sub-wards of the Fulani Ward possess Fulani rulers and three sub-wards of the Gambari ward a Hausa administration; but in none save Zongo and Karuma in the Gambari ward, essentially Hausa quarters, does any but the*

*Yoruba predominate among  
the ordinary population.<sup>9</sup>*

Apart from the personal individual attachment of a large number of people of Ilorin to different places in the North, documented official contacts of Ilorin with Sokoto Caliphate dated back to the reign of Abdul Salami. He wrote the Emir of Gwandu Muhammed Wanib Abdullahi seeking certain legal (Sharia) clarifications. Ilorin acknowledged the superior authority of the Caliphate because it paid tribute to Gwandu. The latter offered military aid to the former as occasions demanded. It is on record that Ibrahim Khalil B. Abdullahi, the third Emir of Gwandu personally led a joint military expedition of Sokoto and Gwandu forces to assist Ilorin.<sup>10</sup> The tradition of Ilorin looking towards the North, particularly Sokoto, her religious and political association and fraternization stemmed out her affinity with the people of the North. The associations began formally from the inception of the Emirate through the colonial era up to the present day.<sup>11</sup>

### **Introduction of Western Education to Ilorin**

Ever before the imperialists introduced Western Education, Ilorin had its system of Islamic and secular education. The latter predated the former in Ilorin. Before and during Islamic era Ilorin had engaged in a number of

occupations as records revealed that Ilorin had about 92,000 farmers. A colonial staff remarked about Ilorin, saying:

*In spite of the size of the town, the term 'Urban' can hardly be applied to the population of Ilorin, so constant is the movement between town and country. **Most families have both a compound in the town and a farm in the bush and migrate from one to the other for two, three, or four months at a time**<sup>12</sup> (emphasis mine)*

The records gave the population of potters as 1,400, merchants 1,422, blacksmiths 548, hunters 180, tailors 1,764, weavers 219 and traders, who were mainly women as 120,734. The trades had been with the people ever before the people embraced Islam. Islamic education was only introduced as additional not in place of the training. Sheikh Adam Abdullah confirmed that the morning period of the people was devoted to acquiring Islamic Education, the afternoon was left for industrial activities and the evenings and nights were for commercial activities when they sell their products.

This was the situation till the imperialists introduced Western Education to Ilorin. In September 1914, one Mr. H.H. Annets assembled fifteen local Mallams to form the nucleus of the teaching staff. In 1915 a school of four classes, headed by one Mallam Musa from Kano was opened. In 1916 boarding system was introduced. For the first few years Western Education was unpopular for several reasons. Naturally, man is hesitant embrace new ideas. More basically the fact that Christianity and Western Education are like Siamese twins and weapons of imperialism in Nigeria, Western Education was largely influenced by Christianity. The then Resident of Ilorin complained saying:

*“More than one attempt was made to burn down the compound, (school). Needless to say, education was no more popular with the pupils' absentees were the rule rather than the exception; boys were continually running away and no one could attend sick parade if he could possibly*

*help it. In the Department Annual Report of 1920 Ilorin is referred to as the most disheartening centre of our work".<sup>13</sup> (sic)*

In 1920, an Elementary School was opened and in 1921 the founding fathers of Western Education in Ilorin, Mallams Muhammad Gobir and Usman went to the Training College, Katsina. In 1928 Mallam (then) Yahaya Popoola (the pioneer Madawaki of Ilorin) one of the surviving teachers of the Emir of Ilorin today,<sup>14</sup> passed out with flying colours from the College.

It did not take long when the resistance ceased. As the products of the newly introduced system graduated to take up strategic positions in the society, the traditional and Islamic Education were seriously challenged. The children of farmers, weavers, merchants and Mallams abandoned the trades of their fathers in search of Western Education that qualified them for white collar jobs. At that time, it was wise and lucrative.

Poor Nigerians, little did we realize that the education planned by the imperialists was to serve the colonial interest in our land for the period of colonialism only. In 1960, we obtained empty and hollow political independence. We did not and have not yet realized that we need to liberate our mentalities,

especially in the field of education. We continue to Britain, America and generally the West. We adopted objective examination pattern and course system in our universities because that is the vogue in United States Education Institutions. Little did we realize that West has shifted from using manual calculations to computer Science? Even if there was the temporary oil boom (boom) to purchase the computers, we failed to recognize that we need brains to operate and maintain the computers when they develop problems. In due course, we over produced white collar job personnel and unemployment problems filled all our cities and rural areas.

The Nigerians have lost the skills of their fathers and they did not master that of their colonial masters. Western Education makes us poor and hungry in the midst of plenty. The resources abound everywhere but our “education” did not train us on how to tap them. We have “caps” but we have no “heads”! Our resources are itching for tapping but we have no money to employ expatriates. Our universities produce brigade of ‘unemployables’. This situation is not peculiar to Ilorin as a community whose system of education suffered seriously as a result of colonialism. India was under direct British rule for a long period. North Africa came under French rule and Indonesia

under Dutch. Egypt and Iran had their experience of colonial domination.

The difference in the results of the experience of imperialism on the Muslim countries depends on: (a) Whether a particular cultural region retained its sovereignty vis-a-vis the European political expansion and whether it was dominated and governed de jure and de facto by a European colonial power; (b) The character of the organization of the religious leadership, and the character of their relationship with the governing institutions before the colonial encroachment; (c) The State of the development of Islamic education and its accompanying culture immediately before the colonial encroachment; and (d) The character of overall colonial policy of the particular colonizing power-British, French, or Dutch.

To face this challenge Muslim scholars all over the world are sharply divided into two groups: The first group maintains that the acquisition of modern knowledge should be limited to the practical technological sphere. They argued that Muslims do not need Western intellectual products in matter of thoughts because Islam has provided it. The second view is that Muslims should acquire western technology and its intellectualism because no type of knowledge can be harmful. In addition, science and pure thought had been cultivated by Muslims in the

early medieval centuries before they were taken over by Europeans. Majority of elite Muslims in Nigeria belong to the first school.

Whatever side we belong, there is need to appreciate the difference between mere acquisition of Science and Technology and cultivation of the spirit of scientific inquiry as demanded by Qur'an. We should stop giving the false impression that our brain is black because our skin is black because our skin is black. Technology, western or eastern, is not to be transferred to us on the platter of gold. They, the people of the West or East are not fools. We must realize that transfer of technology from West or East means economic suicide to them. If they transfer it where are they going to find markets for their goods?

The problems Western Education ran into in Ilorin like many other places in Nigeria today, cannot be blamed on Islam-far from that. It is the problems Western education as planned operated and executed, created for itself. It is planned and operated without taking cognizance of the people for whom it is planned. Professor Fred W. Riggs of the University of Hawaii remarked in the field of public administration said:

*There is an old conundrum which asks:  
what is the difference between a diplomat  
and lady? Answer: when a diplomat says*

*'Yes' he means 'maybe'. When he says 'maybe' he means 'no' and if he says 'no' he is not a diplomat. By contrast, of course, a lady means 'maybe', when she says 'no'. She means 'yes' when she says 'maybe' and is no lady if she says yes. A derivation puzzle would ask how you know what someone means who says maybe? Clearly, the answer is contextual, for you must know whom the speaker is to interpret his or her meaning.*

*The conundrum is intended as a joke but it carries an important idea which has been amply confirmed by semantics and linguistics: the meaning of a word can rarely be determined from the word alone but emerges from the context in which it is used.*

*What is true of words is equally true of other actions, for the significance of a behaviour is rarely intrinsic to the act but can be learned only when the act is interpreted in context. The general lesson*

may be drawn from these *considerations* is that the relevance of administration and other doctrines is contingent on the total setting in which they are employed: what works well in some places may lead to disaster in *others*. The old proverb "one man's meat is another man's poison" expresses the same thought in different terms. Yet, we often act in our overseas programs as though what is food for one must be food for all.<sup>15</sup>

Compare the parliamentary system in Britain and Nigeria (1959 - 1966) and Presidential system in America and Nigeria (1979 - 1983). The brand of 'Democracy' in Nigeria is understandably different from what obtains in Britain or United States of America. We are all human beings but the environments in which these systems operate make the world of difference between their success there and failure here. The case of Western Education in Nigeria is not different. The answer to the problem of the system of our education is to tailor it to suit and respect our beliefs and backgrounds.

Thanks God bless.