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A Historical Account of Peace Initiatives in Ilorin Emirate Mosque in the Contemporary Period

I. A. JAWONDO AND S. D. YUSUF

Abstract

Mosque is a place of worship of the Muslims. The Muslims are encouraged to pray in the mosque congregationally to foster unity, peace and brotherhood amongst them. The Mosque also assist in building their knowledge (through cross fertilization of ideas) and strengthening their faith. Thus, the mosque has become an important centre for the Muslims worldwide wherein their minds are broadened on the physical and spiritual spheres. For peace and orderliness to reign supreme among Muslims who resort to mosques, some fundamental rules and regulations are provided on the use of mosques by the Muslims as drawn from the primary sources of Islam. However, despite the existence of these rules and regulations, there are occasional clashes among the Muslims in one mosque or another or between one mosque and another due to different reasons ranging from social, political and economic to religious extremism. The Ilorin Emirate mosques are not free from these crises which are impacting negatively on the peace of the Emirate in particular and Kwara state in general. For this reason, some peace initiatives are devised by Islamic clerics, elders, group of opinion leaders, Islamic organizations, Muslim leaders and even the government. This paper, therefore, examined the various reasons for the mosque crises and the steps taken to resolve the crises. It also examined the effectiveness of the peace initiatives in bringing about a lasting peace. The paper after exploring both primary and secondary sources concluded that the peace-making bodies are to a large extent doing well but they would need some degree of legal backing to enjoin maximum co-operation of disputing parties.

Introduction

The most popular religions in Nigeria are Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion. Each of the world's religions is believed to have emerged to provide guidance to Man to save him from being consumed by conflicts and crises arising from his interaction with the environment. Furthermore, each prophet of God is believed to have been sent to the world to provide solutions to the problems of Man at one time or another. Thus, in some quarters, Religion is believed to be a solution to all problems. In spite of these beliefs, there are intra and inter religious crises and conflicts in Nigeria. What could have been responsible for these crises? The simple answer to this question is the fact that crises are inevitable in the society of Man. No matter how simple or complex a society is, it lives with its own problems. The prophets of God from Adam to Muhammad (S.A.W.), who were said to be apostles of peace to mankind were quite unfortunately, greeted by their fellow men, kiths and kins with crises and conflicts. Most of the prophets lived and died in crises and conflicts. Since their deaths, their disciples continue to face

some of these crises and conflicts which are affected by time. However, our concentration in this paper is on Islam with particular focus on crises and peace initiatives in mosques with particular reference to Ilorin Emirate.

Islam is believed by the Muslims to be a religion of peace introduced to the world as a guide to mankind. The prophet of Islam was said to have been raised to address issues of ungodly activities of man after the death of Christ which created lawlessness and anarchy. Thus, Islam came to slam doors of corruptions, discriminations, racisms, nepotisms and ungodliness. Islam which was introduced to humanity by Prophet Muhammad is based on some certain pillars and principles which are connected with attainment of peace among humanity and between humanity and the Lord of the Universe which are the essence of the religion. One of these pillars is prayer known as *Salat* in Arabic. Prayer is compulsory among the Muslims and it's about the only spiritual activity that distinguishes the Muslims from the non-Muslims. Prayer is believed by the Muslims to be a connecting string between the performer and the Lord. It is also through prayers that the unity of purpose, sincerity of oneness of the Muslims is exemplified. Prayer which is second in the hierarchy of the pillars of Islam is believed to be a means of purifying the souls of the Muslims and of keeping them away from the evils of the world (Mishad, 1970: 239, 244 and 252). Although the Muslims are allowed to pray at any place the hours of prayers overcome them but the best of the places is the mosque. Thus, the Muslims strive to perform their prayers in the mosque congregationally to benefit from the earthly and heavenly rewards promised for such in their holy Books.

Conceptual Analysis

It is pertinent to briefly examine some concepts which are integral to this discourse in order to enhance our understanding of them in the contexts in which they are used and their interconnectivity. The concepts are crisis, peace, initiative, peace initiative, mosque and Emirate.

Crisis: A time of great danger, difficulty, uncertainty, a decisive moment, an unstable or crucial time or a state of affairs when problem must be solved or important decision must be taken to forestall the possibility of a highly undesirable outcome

(<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/crisis>, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/crisis>, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/crisis>).

Peace: Is a state of tranquility or a freedom from civil disturbance or a state of security or order within a community provided for by law or custom. It is also a freedom from oppressive thoughts or deeds which brings about mutual agreement and harmonious relationship between those who have been at war. (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/crisis>, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/crisis>, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/crisis>).

Initiative: Is an attempt by an individual, group, community or organization to address issues of interest to them using either law or customs. (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/crisis>, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/crisis>, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/crisis>).

Peace initiatives therefore refer to all steps adopted by individuals, groups or organizations at bringing about peace in a troubled environment.

Emirate: An area of land that is ruled over by an Emir.

Mosque: Is generally, simply and literarily defined as a place of worship of the Muslims or a building, simple or complex, local, national or international, where Muslims offer congregational prayers. However, the term mosque is not a monopoly of the Muslims alone, other places of worship of other religions have also been referred to by scholars as mosques, this perhaps strengthens the argument of the Muslims that 'the whole expanse of the earth has been made a mosque' (Doi, 1976: 124-129) and the justification for the adoption of other religious sanctuaries in Africa for Islamic worship (Hitti, 1984: 261-262).

This paper examined the various efforts adopted at bringing peace to the Ilorin Emirate mosques where Muslims are at logger head with each other on issues of origin, leadership, maintenance and administration.

Major causes of Mosque Crises in Ilorin Emirate

It is important to state here that one of the major causes of mosque crises and conflicts in Islam in general and in Ilorin in particular has to do with the traditions of origin of mosques. Islam encourages Muslims who have the wherewithal to build or contribute to the building of mosques, for Muslims to worship, with a promise of a befitting abode in the heaven. This admonition and promise led Muslim individuals, groups, communities, rulers, organisations; tribal, ethnic and professional groups etc into building of

mosques for congregational prayers. Thus, for these reasons scholars of mosques history Such as Al-Mishad, A. A. (1970) & Dickie, J. (Yaqub Zaki) (1978) have categorised mosques into different types using their origins, functions, structure and importance. However, our focus here is on how the traditions of origin have become a source of crises in Ilorin Emirate mosques. Since, the establishment of Ilorin Emirate in 1823, successive emirs supported building of mosques within their limited resources and encouraged Muslims to build mosques so that the religion of Islam could spread far and wide within and outside the Emirate (Danmole 1980)). Thus, Muslim scholars, rich individuals, Islamic organisations and sects built mosques for worship in some of the nooks and crannies of the emirate. However, once the mosque is built and commissioned for prayers the mosque is named consciously or unconsciously either by the founder(s) or by the users. Again the constitution of the leadership in the mosque automatically becomes the responsibility of the founder(s) which he exercises or delegates to others (Oral interview with Alhaji Sadallah, 2012). This is exactly the situation surrounding the historical origin of most mosques in Ilorin. However, today this age long tradition is being challenged by some worshippers either for envy or for inclusion. While some are challenging the name for which the mosques are known, some are challenging the leadership of mosques (Oral interview with the chief Imam of Ilorin, Shaikh Muhammad Bashir, 2015). The third and very important issue is the issue of mosque maintenance. The fact that money is usually voted for the regular maintenance of mosques from the money realized in the conduct of religious rites, some impoverished worshippers usually approach members for secret loans. Experience has shown that such loans are always very difficult to recover and so most often, the treasurer turns down such financial request. For this reason, the Mosque Maintenance Committee is prone to untimely dissolution usually sponsored by those who are denied access to the funds. On the other hand, Investigation revealed that while some members of the mosque are denied loan for fear of default, some members of Mosque Maintenance Committee loan one another the mosque funds in their care. This is usually discovered either when one of them decided to expose them or when they failed to carry out urgent repairs in the mosque (Jawondo, 2015). Among the Islamic organisational mosques, leadership and maintenance are bones of contention and these have led to proliferation of organisational mosques from the very First group of Islamic Organisations to the contemporary emerging group of Islamic organization in Nigeria (Jawondo, 2015).

Peace initiatives in Ilorin Emirate Mosques

Islam as a way of life envisages crises and conflict among its adherents, thus, the holy book unequivocally states the steps to take whenever it occurs and it says:

If parties among the believers fall into a quarrel, make ye peace between them, but if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other, then fight ye (all) against the one that transgresses until it complies with the command of God; but if it complies, then make peace between them with justice, and be fair, for God loves those who are fair (and) just (Q. 49: 9).

It is against this backdrop that some peace initiatives are organized to deal with crises and conflicts emanating from Mosques in Ilorin Emirate.

As it has been mentioned in the introduction, the peace initiatives are organized and executed by individuals, group of individuals, Islamic scholars or religious leaders, opinion leaders or charismatic leaders, traditional political leaders, Islamic organizations and a host of others.

In this section the different interest groups shall be grouped into two major categories; the informal and formal categories. The informal category comprises of all efforts and ad hoc interest groups at local level which are not institutionalized or formally registered or recognized by the Emirate authority and/or the Kwara State government. The second group shall comprise of the institutionalized groups charged with the responsibility of monitoring religious affairs at the nooks and crannies of Ilorin Emirate in particular and Kwara state in general.

In almost all the mosques in Ilorin Emirate there is Elders' Committee which usually comprised of Islamic scholars, charismatic leaders, traditional political leader(s) and responsible philanthropists among the worshippers in the mosques. The Elders' Committee is put in place in order to heed the Quranic injunction (Q42:38) which calls for consultation in the affairs of the Muslims.

The members are usually vigilant on the affairs of the mosque and those of the individual worshippers in the mosque. Any time any abnormality is noticed in the mosque against any member, such thing is usually nib in the bud but when it blows open they stand to resolve the crises and conflicts that may be

associated. Because of the existence of the Elders' Committee in most mosques and the unrelented efforts of members in some mosques, many issues which would have resulted into violence were resolved without destruction of lives and properties (Oral interview with Imam of Ita-Ahmadu Mosque, Alhaji AbdulRaheem, 2016).

However, the Committee has to contend with problems of wasting of time, energy, limited resources and insults on the personality of members as disputing parties are not easily brought together and issues are not easily resolved. The methodologies remain purely persuasion, negotiation, mediation and reconciliation devoid of any form of coercion. Issues resolved here usually lack records and are morally based. The disputing parties may accept or reject their decision (Oral interview with Justice AbdulKadir Orire, 2016). Furthermore, most members of the Elders' Committee today in most mosques are not really elders that could weather storms, most of them are in their 50s and would not stand their grounds when the chiefs are down. Thus, rather than telling the truth, they dance around it, thereby complicating the matter the more (Oral Interview with Imam Zakariyyah 2010).

In the formal category, we have the League of Imams under the three principal Imams of Ilorin- Imams Fulani, Imale and Gambari; the League of Traditional Rulers under each Balogun- Alanamu, Fulani, Ajikobi, and Gambari; the Emirate Council, Islamic organizations such as the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), the Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), the Jama'a, the Council of Muslim Organizations (CMO) and a host of others. For the purpose of this paper concentration will be on the activities of the Emirate Council, the CMO, the JNI, and the Kwara State Committee on Religious Matters.

The Emirate Council

The Emirate Council, until recently, was the only Council charged with the responsibility of giving approval for building of mosques and monitoring their affairs. Disputes, crises and conflicts in the Emirate mosques are resolved by the Council with the Emir as the head, assisted by the three principal Imams and other eminent scholars and indigenes of Ilorin.

This is the apex Council at the Emirate level to which complicated cases which would not be resolved at the levels of each of the principal Imams are brought. Any mosque crisis is first tried by the Elders' Committee (Agbagba Masalasi) within a mosque and from there to elders' in the quarters (Agbagba Aduabo), from there to ward traditional political leader(s) (this comprised of

the Balogun as the head, magajis, Imam and some respected scholars of the quarters) who work independently or in conjunction with the ward chief Imam, if not, the case may be referred to him later if unsettled. The last place is the Emirate Council.

This Council has been very effective in its schedule of duties and the Emirate Muslims have always abided by the verdicts of the Council. However, the increasing pressure of work at the offices of the members have been making sittings very difficult, hence cases continue to pile up and justice delayed. Furthermore, the political violence of the first segment of the Fourth Republic infected the Emirate Council which led to a reorganization of the Council. Since the reorganization, the affected segments of Ilorin preferred to seek judgment in the law courts on any case affecting them. Normalcy is returning as the crisis relating to the first phase of the Fourth Republic is gradually settled on the one hand, and on another hand the troubles involved going through the police and litigation all together, is, instilling soft attitude into people on mosque related crises.

The Jam'atu Nasrul Islam (JNI)

Jama'atu Nasril Islam, (JNI), is an umbrella organization under which all Islamic Organizations in Nigeria operate. It was established in 1961/62 by the then Premier of northern Nigeria, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello (Sardauna of Sokoto) in conjunction with Sheikh Abubakar Mahmud Gummi, a renowned Islamic Scholar and the then Acting Grand Khadi of northern Nigeria. Its chief assignment is to protect and project far and wide the image of Islam. It's also concerned with defending the legitimate rights and interest of Muslims throughout Nigeria

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jama%E2%80%99atu_Nasril_Islam). The Headquarters of JNI is Kaduna but has branches all over northern Nigeria at the instance of the Emirs. The ninth Emir of Ilorin Dr. Alhaji Zuluqarnain Gambari realizing the increase in the rate of mosque crises instituted *Sulhu* (A Reconciliation Committee) under the auspices of the JNI to complement the efforts of the Emirate Council. The Reconciliation Committee comprised of seven members. The first Chairman was Late Alhaji Alabi Makana and followed by Justice Abdulkadir Orire rtd. (CFR) who was also an ex- National Secretary of JNI. The current Chairman of JNI in Kwara State is Professor Jamiu Mosobalaje Olaloye Oyawoye.

The Reconciliation Committee has heard several cases of intra religious crises over the decades with eighty percent success. The method adopted is largely persuasion. However, the Committee has instituted Court action against some transgressors. The teething problem of the committee is finance.

The Council of Muslim Organizations CMO

This organization was formed in 1999 by Emir Alhaji (Dr.) Ibrahim Zulu Gambari with the advice of Alhaji Abdulkadir Orire. After a while Professor Shehu Ahmad Jimoh became the coordinator and led the Organisation until his death in 2014. The current Coordinator is Justice Idris Abdullahi Haroun rtd. The CMO, coordinates the activities of Muslims and Islamic Organizations and foster religious harmony among various religious groups in Kwara State (Jimoh, 2009). For proper coordination, the Council embarked upon rigorous enlightenment campaigns through lectures, workshops, symposia and excursions to prison yard, hospitals and villages in order to reduce cases of intra and inter religious crises in the state. This Council has done so well in the area of prevention through enlightenment campaigns and not settlement of disputes. Its always very proactive in issuing statements on local, national and continental issues that need clarity to keep the Muslims better informed and to prevent crisis (<http://www.kwaranews.com/muslim-organization-urged-muslims-to-embrace-peace/>).

The Kwara State Committee on Religious Matters

This Committee was established in the year 2004 by the state government to promote inter religious understanding and to bridge communication gap among religious adherents (Koro 2009). It is an eighteen member committee of people of proven integrity chosen from all walks of life and headed by Alhaji M. S. Koro (OON). In keeping with the terms of reference, the committee adopted enlightenment campaign as chief of its methodologies. A part from its in-house activities, the committee brings together annually, stakeholders within and from outside the state, to discuss issues on religious understanding and peaceful-coexistence.

In order that the committee becomes successful in its assignment, the state government promised religious balancing, justice, and fair-play and urged adherents to shun bitterness and bigotry for tolerance, love, and understanding (Governor's speech; Jimoh, 2009: 6).

The committee's activities between 2004 and 2008 led to the settlement of forty two (42) cases out of sixty four cases of intra and inter religious crises brought before it which could have led to serious religious crises and conflicts which usually lead to loss of lives and properties. On the activities of the committee, the state government observes:

One of the veritable tools in the promotion of peace in Kwara state today is committee on Religious Matters. Feeders from the people on the activities of the committee and the situation of the state today are indicative of the fact that it is up to the task (Governor's speech, Jimoh, 2009: 5).

.... In Kwara state today, religion is no longer a divisive agent but an agent of unity, stability, cohesion and prosperity. As a matter of fact religion is a veritable source of power and strength in the governance of this state (Governor's speech, Jimoh, 2009: 6).

Problems and Prospects of the Peace Initiatives

First and foremost modernity is affecting the status of the committees. As much as the world is giving Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) a trial, some individuals still have confidence in the law courts, in spite their short comings. Such individuals look at the committees as toothless bull dogs which bark but could not bite because of their inability in most cases to enforce their verdict. This is so because warring parties are at liberty to accept or reject their verdicts. Partisan politics has compounded the problems of the committees as the warring parties are always suspicious of political interference.

The committees are usually run on humanitarian ground. Most of them except the Kwara State Committee on Religious Matters depend largely on the meagre resources of members. This would have been good as it could put them on advantage, if most committees' members are economically buoyant. It might make them be free from corruption of any sort. As it is today, members could easily be discouraged giving the uncooperative attitude usually witnessed from warring parties.

Furthermore, human being respects age over and above all other qualities of man; because it is believed that wisdom accompany age. Thus, words of the elders are laws to the young ones. Unfortunately most members of the peace committees are usually occupants of traditional stools or retired high ranking civil servants or rich individuals who are not necessarily old but are respected because of their social status in the society. Most members also found it difficult to cut off totally from the influence of the warring parties in the interest of justice and fair-play.

The Kwara State Committee on Religious Matters is operating at the mercy of the State government, thus, it is feared that its continuous existence and functionality depend on the mood of the successive government of Kwara State. It is also hoped that it will not become a missionary tool in the hands of the authorities to cushion the minds of the citizens who are not exempted from hunger, diseases and environmental problems caused by bad governance in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the institutionalized committees are elitist in nature and scope and their enlightenment activities are limited to the State capital. Radio, television and newspapers jingles, advertisements and sermons would do little in bringing about positive attitudinal change of people, thus, face-to-face is far better.

The peace initiatives will be able to stand the test of time if all the members see their membership on the committees as a divine call and a service to the humanity and discharge their duties without fear or favour as enjoined by religions. Apart from age which should be a principal factor in choosing persons to serve on the committees, people with integrity, should be enlisted irrespective of their social standing or political inclination.

The committees would need to have their eyes and ears on the ground to harvest early warning signals of mosque crises so that much of them could be prevented. This process would also afford the committees the opportunity of collecting facts with which to cross-check reported cases.

The enlightenment programmes of the committees should be taking to the grassroots where people are yet to be aware of its existence or fill the impact of such committees. While there is the need for the informal committees to start documenting their proceedings for use both formal and informal committees would need to work cautiously with the law enforcement agencies to effectively check transgressors.

Although the financial state of most of the committees is pathetic and indeed a big hindrance, more commitment on the part of the members, particularly, the leadership of the committees may likely play down the effects of finance to the minimum.

Finally, the committees need to be alive to the root causes of the embarrassing increase in the rate of mosque crises in the Emirate and the State at large. The principal cause is poverty due to idleness. Thus, effective methods of collection and distribution of *Zakat* (religious alms) should be put in place to

reduce hunger. They should also liaise with the governments on how citizen friendly poverty alleviation programmes could be designed and executed through the committees in addition to or in conjunction with other organs/agencies. If this is done, government efforts at reducing poverty will be felt at the grassroots and the rate of mosque crises might reduce drastically.

It is also an onerous duty on the committee to sensitize the government as the chief security of the State to adhere strictly to decorum and the rule of law against victimization of the oppositions, so that the fear of the oppositions using religion as a cover to fuel political crises and causing disaster of unimaginable magnitude would be averted.

If all the above suggestions are tried, the committees are likely to make religion attain its goal of building a stable society.

Conclusion

This paper, which focuses on the peace initiatives in the Ilorin Emirate mosques, has identified issues of traditions of origins of mosques, leadership questions and mosques maintenance as some of the major causes of mosques crises in Ilorin Emirate which are triggered off by increasing rate of poverty among the Muslims. Some peace initiatives have also been identified which are grouped into formal and informal categories. Those in the formal category are initiatives supported by authorities such as the Emirate Council and Kwara State, and Federal governments. These include the Emirate Council Peace Committee, The Jamatu Nasril Islam Reconciliation Committee (*Sulhu*), The Council of Muslim Organisations and The Kwara State Committee on Religious Matters. The informal category include mosques Elders' Committee and all other ad hoc committees usually put together to resolve crises in the mosques.

The various committees are doing creditably well within their capacity and limited resources but much needs to be done in the areas of poverty alleviation and legal backing on the committees activities for the committees to be effective in their assignment

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