

STATECRAFT

**Laying The Foundation For
Modern Development**

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Extra Case Presentation 6

The Case Study

Number Eighteen

Religion and Cultural Balances as Instrument for Harmony

Introduction

Some of the qualities attributed to Kwara State which makes it a State of harmony are the high sense of religious tolerance, mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence by the Kwarans in the face of multi religious adherents. Since 1967, approximately forty four years ago, when, Kwara State was created along with the first twelve (12) created States across the nation, which included, by then, the major parts of Kogi and some parts of Niger States, there were no records of religious disturbances, except once, around 1986 and it was quickly nipped in the bud. If for forty four years, people of different ethnic groups; of diverse culture and languages; of different religions and political inclinations have lived and continue living together in peace, harmony and tranquility, the secret behind such achievement is worthy of acknowledgment and recording for posterity.

The inability of human beings to control their agitated minds is the root cause of man-made problems. Thanks to the tremendous stride in technological advancement and human intelligence in recent times, the quality of research on both the inner and physical world has reached higher levels. However, the world is also facing a lot of new problems, most of which are man-made.

More than a thousand years have passed since the great religions of the world flourished, and the world had witnessed a lot of conflicts. Despite the fact that different religions of the world have provided many solutions about how to control an agitated mind, we still have not been able to realise our full potential.

It is very important to distinguish between "belief in one religion" and "belief in many religions". The former directly

contradicts the latter. In the past it was not a major problem because nations remained aloof from each other with their own distinct religion. However, in today's close and inter-connected world there are so many differences. In such a society it is very important to have harmony and respect amongst the different religions, so we must distinguish between belief and respect. Belief refers to total faith, which you must have in your own religion. At the same time you should have respect for all other religions.

If a harmonious relationship is established amongst societies and religious beliefs in today's multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural world, then it will surely set a very good example for others

The majority must consider the minority as their invited guests. The minority, on the other hand, should be able to live sensibly with the majority. In other words, both sides should live in harmony. In order to sustain this harmony, both sides should not take lightly the sensitive issues between themselves. Indeed, the majority should pay attention to and appreciate the views and opinion of the minority. Both sides should discuss and clearly express what they think about the other's view and opinion. The minority, on the other hand, should be careful about where the sensitive issues of the majority lies and express whatever doubts they have in their minds. If problems are resolved in such a friendly manner; then both sides will gain. Suspicion of each other will only harm both communities. Therefore, it is very important to live in harmony and analyse where the opinion of the other lies. The best way to do this is to engage in dialogue, dialogue and dialogue.

The above explains how and why the harmonious nature of Kwara State has been sustained over the years since the creation of the state as we will discover in the brief history of the state below.

Brief History of Kwara and its Cultural mix

Kwara State is one of the 36 states of Nigeria with Ilorin as its capital. The primary ethnic group of Kwara State is Yoruba, Nupe, Bariba and Fulani minorities. Kwara State was created on

27 May 1967 by the Federal Military Government of General Yakubu Gowon who broke the then four regions that constituted the Federation of Nigeria into 12 new states. At its creation, the state was made up of the former Ilorin and Kabba provinces of the then former northern region and was initially named the West Central State but later changed to "Kwara", which is the local name for River Niger. The State has since 1976 reduced considerably in size as a result of further state creation exercises in Nigeria. On 13 February 1976, the Idah/Dekina part of the state was carved out and merged with a part of the then Benue/Plateau State to establish a new Benue State. Again on 27 August 1991, five local government areas, namely Oyi, Yagba, Okene, Okehi and Kogi were also excised to form part of the new Kogi State along with a sixth Local Government Area excised from Niger State. Kwara State as presently constituted is made up of sixteen Local Government Area, namely; Asa, Baruten, Edu, Ekiti, Ifelodun, Ilorin East, Ilorin South, Ilorin West, Irepodun, Isin, Kaiama, Moro, Offa, Oke Ero, Oyun and Pategi. The State is Muslim dominated with about sixty percent of the population, yet there is relative peace and harmony among the people of the state, hence the reference to Kwara as the "State of Harmony".

The 'Dominant' Ilorin Emirate of Kwara State

The Ilorin Emirate is a significantly traditional state that revolves around the city of Ilorin. As an emirate, it is fashioned after the traditional Hausa Kingdom. At the start of the 19th century Ilorin was a border town in the northeast of the Old Oyo Empire, with a mainly Yoruba population but with many Hausa-Fulani immigrants or slaves. It was the headquarters of an Oyo General, Afonja, who rebelled against the empire and helped bring about the collapse of the Oyo Empire with the assistance of the Hausa-Fulani. The rebellion was powered by Hausa, Nupe and Bornu Moslem slaves. Afonja was greatly assisted by Salih Janta, also called Shehu Alimi, a leader of the local Fulani, but was assassinated in 1824, and Alimi's son Abdusalami became Emir as Ilorin became an emirate of the Sokoto Caliphate.

Ilorin and the Jihad

It is necessary to discuss what jihad means and its significance in Islam in an attempt to dispel some long held outrageous views on the movement, particularly with regard to Ilorin. Some contemporary Nigerian historians hold the view that the jihad in Ilorin contravened the tenets of Islam. They predicated their stand by asserting that the presence of Islam within Oyo Empire was negligible as its citizen predominantly observed traditional Yoruba beliefs. Therefore unlike in Gobir and other Hausa States where the rulers were Muslims, although their observance of the religion was nominal, a similar situation did not exist in Ilorin or within Oyo Empire at the beginning of the 19th century. Consequently, some scholars argue that the motive of the Ilorin jihad was purely political. It simply was a camouflage by an immigrant minority group to snatch power and lord it over the Yoruba peoples in the name of Islam. Such scholars buttress their arguments by pointing out that Muslims within Oyo Empire lived peacefully and practiced their religion for centuries without any hindrance up to the time of the outbreak of hostilities between newly arrived Fulbe Muslims and their hosts in Ilorin. In as much as most of these arguments seem convincing, nonetheless, they lack proper understanding of the true meanings of jihad and what factors may have compelled the Fulbe to deploy it.

In its ordinary sense, jihad simply means a 'struggle' in the path of righteousness. A number of leading Muslim jurists identify three basic types of jihad. Firstly, jihad of oneself, secondly, there is jihad of the mouth, which entails the proclamation, propagation, and dissemination of the word of God without fear or favour. Thirdly, there was jihad of taking up arms in defence of the faith. This becomes necessary when a Muslim umma is faced with threat. In such a scenario, it becomes obligatory for a true Muslim to stand out and fight for the sustenance of their faith and umma. It has been decreed in the Holy Quran verse.

When people talk about the 19th century jihad anywhere in contemporary Northern Nigeria, the tendency is to link it to the one led by Sheikh Usman Dan Fodiyo, which began in the Hausa State of Gobir in 1804. That was not the case with regard to Sheikh Alimi's jihad in the northern part of the metropolis of Oyo

Empire, even though the two Islamic movements fused into one later on. However at inception not only were the two movements independent of one another but the immediate causes of each were different also. One fundamental difference between the two movements was that while in Gobir, Usman Dan Fodiyo confronted a sovereign state and its ruler, in Ilorin, Sheikh Alimi grappled with a renegade provincial lieutenant driven by the burning desire to take over power from his sovereign at the centre.

The combined forces of Afonja and Alimi defeated Alafin Aole and captured him, but the refusal of Alimi to release the Alafin to Afonja for him to use for sacrificial purpose but rather releasing the Alafin and ensuring his safe return to his capital led to sudden collapse of friendly relations between the two allies. Afonja however, initiated an action to deceive Alimi, on the premise that he was willing to accept Islam, and requested that Sheikh Alimi and his men moved from Kuo to Ago, presumably in preparation for the conversion ceremony of Afonja to Islam. On the contrary, Afonja and his men marched in secretly on the night before the day of conversion to lay ambush and attack Alimi and his men during the early morning prayer. In the process, many of the devotees were killed while Sheikh Alimi escaped with his men and retreated to Agbabiaka, from where he launched his attack to preserve his life, his umma and the dignity of Islam.

It is therefore noteworthy to state that Sheikh Alimi and his men did not initiate the action that ended the life of Afonja. Also, he did not know that Afonja's mission for inviting him and his men to Ilorin from Kuo which was protected by a grove of trees was to annihilate them. Moreover, Sheikh Alimi did not know that the purported desire to convert to Islam was only a ploy with Afonja's impending early morning attack with an ambush laid against them. Therefore, although Sheikh Alimi did not formally declare a jihad, the action he took after Afonja's surprise attack on him and his supporters was tantamount to one.

The Ilorin Central Mosque

The first Ilorin central mosque was founded in 1820. This was followed in 1835 when another central mosque was built at Idi-

Ape during the reign of the first Emir of Ilorin, Abdul Salam. However, more than a century later, this central mosque could no longer cope with the phenomenal growth in the population of the Muslim Ummah of the city. For this reason, in 1974, the 9th Emir of Ilorin, Alhaji (Dr) Zulkarnaini Gambari invited Grand Mufti Alhaji Mohammed Kamal-u-deen and the present Wazirin Ngeri of Ilorin, Dr Abubakar Olusola Saraki to coordinate the fund-raising and the construction of a new central mosque befitting of the status of Ilorin as a city of Islam.

On 30 April 1977, the foundation was laid for the new mosque by the Emir of Gwandu on behalf of the Sarki Musulmi, Sultan Abubabar III. At the time the new Ilorin Central Mosque was completed and officially opened in 1981 by the former president Alhaji Shehu Shagari, it was big enough and befitting the status of the Muslim dominated town.

Over a period of thirty years the mosque has generally dilapidated with visible structural defects like cracks showing on some of the columns, the concrete walls and the domes, causing profuse leakages in a number of locations. The glass mosaic finishes on the walls and marble floors are cracked or chipped off making the mosque look generally rough and unsightly. Similarly, all the auxiliary structures like the toilet building and the steel stanchions are either dysfunctional or completely bad. The need for the reconstruction of the mosque became obvious, and the state could no longer look the other way.

The 'New' Ilorin Central Mosque

This project, the rehabilitation, refurbishment and redecoration of the Central Mosque is an effort to restore this important cultural icon. The planning work had started in 2007 when Alhaji (Dr) Ibrahim Zulu Gambari, CFR, the Eleventh Emir of Ilorin, with great assistance of Dr Abubakar Bukola Saraki, the Waziri of Ilorin, and the Executive Governor of Kwara State, set up a technical committee headed by Alhaji Shehu Abdulgafar, on the rehabilitation and enhancement of the central mosque. The committee has worked actively and had invited expertise from specialists in mosque construction from around the World,

especially from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Nigeria.

In addition to the general restoration of enhancement of the mosque, it now has a total of 99 domes of different diameters, 75 feet above the floor. The large dome is of gold finish while the four big domes around it are now coated in green and reflective illumination. The mosque form is enveloped within a pyramid shape of square base and 45 inclinations for the faces. It has four accessible minarets each standing at the height of 150 feet. Moreover all the dilapidated domes and minarets with mosaic finishing have been restored and finished with cut-to-size marble. The exterior and interior have also been covered by special marble while the expanded courtyard has been constructed with heat-absorbing granite (marble) finish. The doors and windows have been replaced with specially designed ones befitting the new mosque concept.

Additional facilities now provided in the new mosque are:

- 3 Modern Ablution centres with toilet facilities, each able to hold 100 worshipers at a time.
- A well-equipped multi-purpose hall.
- An Islamic library with modern facilities.
- A car park.
- Modern lighting equipment, air-conditioners and long-range speakers for salat calls, among others.

From the above historical foundation of the state and the religious background of the establishment and rulership of Ilorin, the capital of the state and a significant part of the political landscape, the ability to accomplish harmonious relationships between the different religions in the state requires further analysis. However, the harmony status of the state cannot be divorced from the religious understanding that has predominated the leadership and followership of Kwara State.

As human, we have the tendency to take peace and peaceful co-existence for granted, particularly when we cannot measure our direct contribution to it. However, the government of the state in their understanding of this unique status in the comity of states

have not only made the harmonious status of the state a slogan to promote the state but also devoted resources towards its sustenance. This has been done perfectly in partnership with the traditional rulers of the communities of the state and the religious leaders in the state. The ability to manage the leadership of the various religions by the government has been a major factor for peaceful co-existence in the state.

For every successful man, they say, there is a woman. But in this scenario, it is for every successful community or state there must be a good ruler or Governor governing an understanding people. This write up is not an attempt to assess the works of all past Governments in Kwara State and their governance. Neither is it to have the present government activities in various spheres of life x-rayed. But to have a flash back at the efforts made by the government of Dr Abubakar Bukola Saraki, by consolidating what had been done by his predecessors, the improvements he has made on them, and the solid foundation he has laid for the future, particularly in the area of religious tolerance, elimination of thuggery, ensuring a cultists free society, and peaceful coexistence, so as to keep the state truly as 'State of Harmony.'

This case presentation was drawn from contributions by Sulaiman Adua, Lydia Akande and Jamiu Sulaiman. with copious reference on Ilorin Emirates from, Imam, H. (2009) A Judicial Path: Biography of Honourable Justice SMA Belgore, Safari Books, Ibadan, pp. 3 -25
