



POLITICAL SCIENCE REVIEW

Vol. 3 Nos. 1 & 2 March 2004

ISSN 1996-4124



**Published by the Department of Political Science,
Faculty of Business and Social Sciences,
University of Ilorin, Nigeria.**

**POLITICAL SCIENCE
REVIEW**

VOL. 3 NOS. 1 & 2 MARCH 2004

ISSN 1996 - 4124

**PUBLISHED BY
THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE,
FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES,
UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, NIGERIA.**

Printed by:
T. A. OLAYERI PRINTERS & PUBLISHERS
16, Opo-Malu Street, Ilorin,
Kwara State, Nigeria.
Tel: 0802 - 862 - 6296

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THE FACTOR OF COLONIALISM IN THE ILORIN EMIRATE MOSQUE CONFLICTS, 1897-1960

By

Ibrahim AbdulGaniyu Jawondo

THE FACTOR OF COLONIALISM IN THE ILORIN EMIRATE MOSQUE CONFLICTS, 1897-1960

Abstract

Every society however simple or complex, homogenous or heterogeneous, developed or developing, large or small, witnesses conflict at every stage of its life. Hence, conflict is an unavoidable phenomenon in human society. The continuous existence of a society depends largely on how best its authorities handles or manages conflicts and crises. Conflicts are multidimensional so also are causative factors. In some societies, conflict arises as a result of purely internal factors while in others external factors. However, no one is independent of one another, the degree only varies. This paper examines the role played by the British colonialists in the Ilorin Emirate Mosque Conflicts between 1897 and 1960.

Introduction

There are numerous scholarly works on the British conquest of Nigeria. The attempt here is not to reproduce the good works of the scholars rather to examine the factor of colonialism in the Ilorin Emirate Mosque Conflicts. Thus, a brief account of the colonial conquest of Ilorin is necessary to make us understand in detail the role played by the British colonialists as the architect of the Mosque conflicts in Ilorin Emirate.

Ilorin Emirate authority came into close contact with the British in 1885 through the activities of the Royal Niger Company (RNC) in the Niger area and the activities of the Lagos colonial government under Governor Gilbert Carter in 1893 as a result of Ilorin warfare with Ibadan over boundary demarcation (Danmole, 1980:140, Adeleye, 1971:143). Taubman Goldie, the Governor of the RNC was purely interested in the monopoly of the trade in the Niger and Benue areas. On the other hand, Governor Gilbert Carter of Lagos was interested in bringing Ilorin which he believed was an integral part of Yorubaland under the control of Lagos for political and economic gains (Olaoye, 1984:39). Thus, Ilorin Emirate was sandwich between two rival powers the RNC and Lagos Colonial Government.

Ilorin Emirate authority became apprehensive of the activities of the colonialists in Ilorin in 1885. This was brought about by the deliberate misinterpretation

of the Trade Treaty of 1885 signed by Aliyu (1868-1891) with the RNC to mean cession of Ilorin to the British. The British attack and subjugation of Ijebu, Ibadan and Oyo to British rule in 1892, 1893 and 1895 respectively increased the scepticism (Crowder (ed) 1971:174, Crowder, 1978:154).

As a result of the experience of the Ilorin Emirate authority, it resolved not to have any dealing (that would make it forsake its religion and authority) with the Europeans whom it considered infidels. The resolution strengthened the Ilorin authority against the British colonialists who made spirited efforts to diplomatically win over Ilorin Emirate authority. On the relationship of the Ilorin Emirate authority and the British colonialists Danmole noted:

The desire to preserve Muslim states and Muslim law and to project legitimate political and commercial interests; the unwillingness to surrender dar al Islam to dar al harb and the resistance to the penetration of non-Muslim religious preaching certainly had great weight in the minds of Muslims in Ilorin as well as elsewhere (1980:137).

It is also important to stress here that although the events appeared to have strengthened the Emirate authority in the struggle against the British colonialists, it is not unlikely that the causalities recorded by the conquered people in the face of sophisticated European fire arms must have created panic in the minds of Ilorin masses and other ranks in the Ilorin army.

Conceptual Analysis

Ilorin Emirate came into existence in 1823 after a successful Jihad led by Shaikh Alimi and his Jamaa against traditional belief systems in Ilorin (Johnson 1973:197). The Jihad was a continuation of that of Shaikh Usumanu Danfodiyo of Sokoto in 1804 (Ikime, (ed) 1980:215). The Emirate which was a conglomerate with linguistic and cultural identities practised Islamic governance in its deep sense (Danmole, 1980:90). The Emir was the head of government assisted by Imams, Qadis and a Council of Chiefs comprising the Baloguns, Magajis and Daudus (Jimoh, 1994:105). In spite of the diversified nature of the people of the Emirate, religion provided a common ground and gradually through inter-group relations leading to inter-marriages, business interactions, interward settlements etc. the different cultures fused to become an Ilorin culture (Danmole, 1989).

From 1823 to 1897 when colonialism was entrenched, the Emirate remained intact politically. The people worked for the survival of the Emirate which was the vanguard of Islam to the Yoruba towns. With colonialism, the wall of unity of the Emirate was gradually axed down between 1897 and 1960.

Colonialism has been perceived differently by scholars. One group sees it as a phenomenon brought about by the efforts of the Europeans to find a lasting solution to economic problems caused by Industrial Revolution in Europe. A leading scholar of this group defines colonialism as 'political subjugation and economic exploitation' (Lenin, 1978). On the other hand, the second group sees colonialism from the point of view of Europeans finding solution to the social problems of Africans caused by the Atlantic slave trade. It therefore sees colonialism as a humanitarian attempt to bring civilization to the colonised. In Nigeria, colonialism was experienced between 1900 and 1960. And it had all the above features. It was a political subjugation because the pre-colonial political structures were seriously restructured to the taste of the British colonialists. It was economic exploitation because the human and material resources were fully

tapped for economic development of Britain. However, in attempts to satisfy their political and economic motives, some aspects of Nigerian cultures were destroyed some European civilizations were handed over to Nigerians. Western Education, Christianity and administrative strategies.

Conflict which is a common event in human society has been defined as 'opposition among social entities directed against one another' (Wright, 1990:19). It is also a relationship between two or more parties with incompatible goals (Kriesberg, 1973:17). Or incompatible behaviour between parties whose interests are incompatible or clashing (Action Aid 1994, Haivik and Meijer 1994).

Conflict could arise as a result of social, political, religious, economic etc. interests. It could be individual, group, community, or nation based. Conflict could be constructive and/or destructive depending on the nature and mode of management. The Ilorin Emirate Mosque crises started as a political conflict against the British colonialists but between 1900 and 1960 when independence was granted to Nigeria, it was all encompassing.

Colonialism and Ilorin Emirate Mosque Conflicts

The British colonialists before and after the conquest of Ilorin, used maximally the principle of divide and rule on the Emirate Mosque in order to conquer and have effective control over Ilorin as we shall soon see. This brought about conflict within the Emirate Mosque as it translated into differences of opinion among the rank and file on how to relate with the British colonialists.

As part of the British move to conquer Ilorin, in 1883 Caliph Umar of Sokoto and Etsu Nupe Malik, on the instruction of the British, settled in vain the hostilities between Ibadan and Ilorin. This was because Balogun Karara of Ilorin and the Aare Subiario of Ibadan were bent on exhibiting their military might on one another (Hogben and Kirk-Greene, 1966:296 and Danmole, 1980:141). In 1895, the British used the Lagos Muslim community under the leadership of the Chief Imam of Lagos, Imam Ibrahim, to intervene in the boundary dispute between Ilorin and Ibadan (Gbadamosi, 1978:180-184). The peace moves by the British as earlier noted were directed to Ilorin (among other reasons) because the British were afraid of the Ilorin Emirate military advances to the Yoruba area, which were believed would jeopardise their political-economic interest in the area (Ajayi and Smith, 1964). The British peace moves had political and economic undertones. It would therefore be said that the peace moves were mere political propaganda and black-mail against Ilorin. Perhaps to make Ilorin lose the sympathy and respect enjoined from Sokoto, Nupe and Lagos Muslims (Danmole, 1980:154) so that its conquest could be a walk over.

The visit of Governor Carter to Ilorin in 1893 was considered to have produced the desired result for the Lagos colonial government. It was believed to have created confusion and conflict within the Ilorin Emirate Mosque. On hearing the news of Carter's proposed visit to Ilorin to negotiate peace between Ilorin and Ibadan; the Ilorin Emirate Mosque was said to have become polarised. The Emir (Momo (1891-1895) who had a Yoruba mother and war experiences was said to have sued for peace with Ibadan and Lagos colonial government (Abubakar, 1912, Hermon-Hodge, 1929:72, Johnson 1976:609 and Danmole, 1984:143). The people of Ilorin who were resident in and travellers to Yoruba towns as teachers, preachers and traders were said to have supported the stance of Emir Momo. The Balogun and the Mallams were believed to have rejected Governor Carter's visitation for socio-political and religious reasons respectively (Danmole, 1980:144 and Omo-Iya, 2000:60). The peace proclamation made by Emir Momo to Carter in spite of the resistance of his generals and masses

further aggravated anti-British feeling in Ilorin. The Emir might have acted in good faith but failed to carry along his principal officers and masses. Thus, the Mosque was polarised. The Emir, the travellers and Ilorin resident in Yoruba towns were on the one side while the Balogun and the Mallams were on the other side.

Furthermore, fixing of boundary between Ilorin and Ibadan at Awere by Captain Bower, the British Resident in Ibadan, on the instruction of Governor Gilbert Carter also deepened the gulf created by the British in the Ilorin Emirate Mosque. While the Balogun were insisting that Ikirun should belong to Ilorin, Emir Momo was believed to have been on the side of the British. Emir Momo took this stance because he believed Ilorin military might was not a match to the British army stationed at Odo Otin. Secondly, he had a contrary belief that the British colonialists were people of the book with whom Muslims could co-operate (Atanda, 1973:79, Danmole, 1980:148). For these reasons, the Balogun with the support of the Mallams who saw Momo's steps as anti-Islam and with other elements of the Ilorin Emirate Mosque were believed to have plotted a coup in 1895 against Emir Momo in which he was assassinated. The death of Emir Momo rather than bringing an end to the Emirate Mosque conflict, widened it the more. The Mallams and the masses later came to understand that the Balogun were interested in power and not the consolidation of the gains of Islam which the Emir represented (Danmole, 1980:150).

More still, in order to check anti-British feeling in Ilorin Mosque and to pave way for the British conquest, the Lagos colonial government sanctioned economic blockade on Ilorin between January and December 1896. This blockade expectedly, widened and deepened the conflict in Ilorin Emirate Mosque, Ilorin elements were deeply affected in varying degrees, hence, the divergent of opinion on what Ilorin-British relations should be. Consequently, the position of Ilorin shifted from being total hatred and forceful resistance to compromise. The itinerant Mallams and traders who had it tough with the British at the borders wanted settlement but the Emir backed by the Balogun remained to a little extent uncompromising (Danmole, 1980:156).

As anti-British feeling persisted in Ilorin, Governor Carter wrote a letter to report the unfriendly attitude of Ilorin to the Colonial Office in London (Ikime, 1977:121). The letter also undermined the power of the RNC at controlling Ilorin Emirate. He therefore made case for the conquest and annexation of Ilorin to Lagos Colony (Olaoye, 1984:37). Consequently, in 1896 when British was threatened by the French aggressive imperial policy in West Africa and Nigeria in particular (Crowder, 19789:154), the British began to see the RNC as ineffective and inefficient tool to consolidate British gains and speed up the pursuance of Britain's expansionist policy in the Niger and Benue areas (Ikime, 1977:121). The RNC thereafter, perhaps to impress the British Colonial Office, attacked and conquered Nupe and Ilorin in 1897 under the pretext of stopping their incessant raids for slaves in the Niger and Benue areas (Hermon-Hodge, 1929:177-188).

With the conquest of Ilorin Emirate in 1897, the Emir Suleiman and the Balogun pledged their loyalty to the British on the recognition that Allah gives and takes power. Thus, the Emir was re-appointed and saddled with the responsibility of managing the affairs of Ilorin in accordance with the rules of the RNC (Hermon-Hodge, 1929:167-178, Jimoh, 1994:187). To ease the Emir's job as an appointee of the British, the British colonialists diplomatically widened the already created conflict within the Mosque in order to effectively control the Emirate. The British cut the growing wings of the Balogun who had been thorns in the flesh of the Emirs and who, of course, delayed the British conquest of the Emirate. Traps were set for Balogun Alanamu Ali Inakoju

who was believed to be whipping up sentiments against colonial administration (Danmole, 1980:164, Olaoye, 1984:77). In 1902 Balogun Alanamu was deposed for maladministration. He died in exile at Ogbomoso in 1910. Balogun Ajikobi was also deposed and exiled to Yola in 1907 for the same reason (Hermon-Hodge, 1929:202, Olaoye, 1984:78). It should be noted that the wrangling among the Emirate Mosque was not too strong to lead to serious conflict if the British had not explored the situation to play them against one another.

The deposition of two Baloguns no doubt created a mixed feeling among the people of Ilorin. The loyalists of late Emir Momo rejoiced over the deposition of the Baloguns whom they felt whipped up sentiments against Momo. The loyalists of the deposed Baloguns and the remaining Baloguns had ill-feeling against the British and the Emir whom they believed the British supported. The fact that there was no mass riot after the deposition of the two Baloguns showed the level of the mixed feelings among the members of the Ilorin Emirate Mosque. However, this is not to undermine the fear the British sophisticated weapons instilled in the people. On the mixed feelings Jimoh reported:

The cheapish and humiliating deposition of the powerful Balogun Alanamu without a word of protest by the community depressed the remaining three Baloguns. The Baloguns had thought that ... (the) deposition should provoke public sympathy and retaliatory public disorder against the colonial administration. There probably would have been such ... but for the fact that to the Emir, the weakening of the Baloguns was a great relief. Furthermore, influential Mallams ... were loyal to the Emir ... The colonial administration too was evidently poised to deal ruthlessly with any uprising in support of the deposed Balogun ... (1994:199).

In 1907 the colonial authority introduced special levy on hunting implements in Ilorin Emirate. The Emir in trying to implement this financial policy was met with stiff opposition from the hunters. They resisted the policy violently by killing the messenger of the Emir who shuttled between the two parties. The colonial administration instantly crushed the revolt leaving much causality on the part of the hunters (Omoiya, 2000:68). The Emir with the backing of the British was believed to be ready to implement to the letter colonial policies even at the expense of his subjects. This incident was strongly believed to have further widened the gap between the Emir and the masses on the one hand and the Emir and the Balogun on the other. In effect, it translated into transformation of the Ilorin Emirate Mosque from being a strong and united force to a weak and divided one.

In 1913 too, there was a large-scale tax riot in Ilorin Emirate. The riot was to protest colonial taxation. It should be noted that the members of the Ilorin Emirate Mosque protested against colonial taxation for different reasons. Muslim scholars felt it was anti-sharia while others protested for ethno-political and economic reasons (Jimoh, 1994:238). The Report of Hermon-Hodge will make this point clearer. According to him:

In 1913 the town of Ilorin refused to pay tax, ... The reason ... was that the populace in general did not approve of the manner in which funds of the Native Treasury were being expended, and therefore refused to pay tax. The chief complaint was that many members of the ruling Fulani

dynasty were receiving handsome salaries whereas none of the old Yoruba families who assisted to form the Emirate held any office or received any salary from the public Treasury (1929:79).

From the above, it is clear that by 1913 the Emirate Mosque was polarised as a result of the penetration of the colonial administration and could not speak with one voice.

Furthermore, by 1913 the British colonial government had succeeded to a large extent in clearing the air of anti-British feeling by promoting the entrenched confusion and conflict among the rank and file of the Ilorin Emirate Mosque. Palmer's Panel Report of 1913 shows clearly that members of the Ilorin Emirate Mosque were already seeking relevance and reconciliation with the colonial authority and improved participation in colonial administration (Hermon-Hodge, 1929:79, Omoiya, 2000:75). Thus, from 1913 to independence the task of the colonialists was how to accommodate the various divisions of the Ilorin Emirate Mosque in the administration of the Emirate.

Effects of the Conflicts on Ilorin Emirate Mosque

The conflicts created as a result of the entrenchment of colonialism in Ilorin have had serious implications on the Ilorin Emirate Mosque. First, it slowed down the Islamisation activities of the Ilorin Muslim scholars in some Yoruba towns. For instance, the Ilorin fief holders at Ikirun and Odo-Otin who were to promote Islam and Islamic education there were ejected by Bower, the British Resident in Ibadan. It is not unlikely that some scholars would have left with them since the absence of the fief holders may mean insecurity to the scholars.

The conflicts changed the course of history of the Ilorin Emirate Mosque. This is because not until the time of Emir Momo, Ilorin had never had a cause to reject any of its Emirs talkless of extermination. However, the conflicts led to the murder of Emir Momo in 1895. This sad event has changed the course of the history of Ilorin and created some social and psychological depressions on the Momo lineage; that might be looking for opportunity to settle its old scores.

The conflicts eventually made Ilorin Emirate to fall an easy prey to the British conquerors. At the eve of the colonial conquest findings revealed that Ilorin opinions on what to do were in three folds the traders wanted peaceful settlement; the Balogun wanted military resistance while the Ulama proposed emigration. No concrete decision was taken, hence the feeble resistance to the British conquerors.

The conflicts were transferred to political parties formed to transit Nigeria to independence. Some people aligned with the Northern Peoples Congress while some aligned with the Action Group. The unhealthy rivalry between the two parties had a negative legacy on the Ilorin Emirate Mosque. The conflicts have awoken tribal consciousness among the Emirate Mosque. People saw themselves as Yoruba, Fulani, or Hausa rather than as a body of Muslims committed to a cause. Today, the situation is not in any way improved upon. In effective or bad governance on the part of the political and traditional authorities at the state and Emirate levels has reawaken more dangerously tribal and other primordial identities in Ilorin Emirate and Kwara State in general.

Conclusion

This paper argues that the British colonialists administration of Ilorin between 1897 and 1960 have caused serious injury to the social, political, economic and religious solidarity of the Ilorin Emirate. The Emirate which is a conglomerate of

linguistic and cultural identity was seriously shaken by the colonialists through obnoxious colonial policies. The members of the Emirate Mosque were used against one another in order to realise colonial motives. The crises and conflicts cause division among the Emirate Mosque. The division was carried into the political parties that transited Nigeria into independence. Till date, the Ilorin Emirate authorities and people continue to patch on the relationship which colonialism had battered.

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