

Islam in Nigeria since Independence: A History of Mosque Administration in Ilorin Emirate, 1960-2010

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Abstract

Since the political independence of Nigeria in 1960, there have been scanty attempts by scholars on the history of Islam in Nigeria. Most of these efforts have also not seen the light of the day. Thus, heavy reliance is still on the earlier efforts made by the old generation of scholars of Islam in Nigeria. However, political independence in Nigeria had opened another new chapter in the political, social, economic cultural and religious life of Nigerians. Furthermore, the history of Islam in Nigeria and its spread to some early communities in Nigeria is no longer hidden but the administration of it becomes very important. Mosque is one of the outward parameters for measuring the presence and the triumph of Islam in a community. It is against these backgrounds that this paper traces the history of mosque administration in Ilorin emirate from 1960 to 2010. The paper uses both primary and secondary sources to discuss the influence of political independence on the pattern of mosque administration in Ilorin Emirate. It concluded that mosque administration in the period under consideration has significantly changed for better from the earlier period with some attendant consequences.

1. Introduction

Islam had been in Ilorin as early as the 17th century or even earlier and mosque had been one of its physical features. Thus, since the establishment of Islam in Ilorin there had been mosque(s) which was/were used for prayers and were taken care of in accordance with the dictate of their experience and economy. However, by 1823 when an emirate was established, Islam became a state religion and one of the major functions of the Amir (Emir) was the building and administration of mosques in the nooks and crannies of the nascent emirate.

The administration of mosques in Ilorin emirate can be categorised into three different successive and progressive stages which are: - the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial stages. The stages are closely knit together; however, our focus here is on the post colonial stage with particular reference to the period after independence, hence the choice of 1960 as the beginning of the study. Nigeria's independence was a hard earn one, the Nigerian elite led

the masses in a struggle against political oppression, economic exploitation and social subjugation perpetrated by the British colonialists. The end result was the political independence of Nigeria even though it was not devoid of temporary and permanent damages some of which Nigerians still grappled with till date. With independence, Nigerians were becoming psychologically free to determine their religio-economic life and what countries of the world they could freely relate with.

The resultant effect of this as well as the economic prosperity of Nigeria as a result of wealth created by agricultural produce and later through oil boom, was that some Nigerian Muslims began to visit Islamic states of North Africa, Middle East and Saudi Arabia on business, education and spiritual interests respectively. The visitation broadened the horizon of some Nigerian Muslims on how Islam could be better practiced, and how best to administer mosques. Thus, in Ilorin from the 1960 through 1980 there were continual agitations from the returnees from North Africa and the Middle East as businessmen, scholars and al-hajj (pilgrims) on the need to change the structural and administrative patterns of the mosques in Ilorin emirate. The Ilorin emirate central Jummat mosque became a proto-type as the structural out look and management style were over hauled.

2. Conceptual Analysis

In this paper, the following concepts are defined operationally to give their contextual meanings: - Islam, Political independence, mosques, administration, mosques administration and Ilorin emirate.

Islam has been perceived differently by different authors, peoples and even adherents, which reflect the trans-disciplinary nature of the term. However, while some see it from the point of view of being one of the world's religions established in the Arabia, the culturally inclined, see it as a way of life and indeed a culture. Etymologists orchestrated the linguistic aspect saying Islam is a derivative of an Arabic word 'Salam' meaning 'peace', thus Islam is a religion of peace.

Political independence is a freedom from the political control of an imperialist power by the subjugated. Thus, political independence of Nigeria refers to the political freedom of Nigerians from the British over lord on the 1st October, 1960. Mosque could be literally and simply defined as a place of prayers of the Muslims. Technically, it also involves the people

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that resort to it and their activities therein. Ilorin Emirate is a political entity which started in 1823 as an independent Islamic state but now under Kwara state as a result of modernity. It is largely a Muslim community guided by the Sharia as contained in Nigeria's constitution. Administration is often interchanged with management which is the organization of human and material resources for the realization of some sets of objectives or goals. It is 'a problem solving process of effectively achieving organizational objectives through efficient use of scarce resources in changing environment (Chandan, 2003 quoting Kreitner). Thus, if mankind must progress, there is need for effective administration which will 'identify a great need of our time and improve standards of living of all people' (Chandan, 2003 quoting J F Kennedy)

The word administrator and manager have the same connotation. Administrators are saddled with the responsibilities of planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, instructing, moderating and controlling the organizational resources for the attainment of the set objectives (Chandan, 2003). It is the understanding of the impact of administration in the realization of organizational objectives that this paper examines the administrative strategies put in place in the Ilorin Emirate mosques since independence.

3. Mosque Administration in Ilorin Emirate; The Case of Central Jummat Mosque

The Administration discussed here is divided into two; the structural administration and spiritual administration. The structural, comprised of the building and maintenance while the spiritual comprised the functional spiritual and social classes in the mosques.

The structural revolution in mosque building in Ilorin emirate started with the central Jummat mosque during the reign of Alhaji (Dr.) Zulukarnaini Gambari the (9th) ninth emir of Ilorin. He became the emir in 1959 among other reasons for his high level of social interactions with people within and outside the emirate and his working experience as a court clerk. This experience, people believed would be needed as the country transitioned to civilian rule to fill the vacuum created by the gradual exit of the British colonialists from Nigeria. Upon advice from the notables among Ilorin indigenes, he called for the construction of a new ultra modern central Jummat mosque which began in the 70s and was completed through fund raising and was commissioned in 1981 (Jimoh, 1994). This was a great opportunity provided by political independence. The Ilorin central mosque is a reflection of North African mosques architecture, which is a direct pointer to the relationship of Ilorin Emirate with societies and

citizens of North Africa. Since the commissioning, it has served as a proto-type for other *ratibi* mosques in the emirate. Since 1981, when the Ilorin Jummat central mosque was commissioned, it was maintained through the internally generated revenue from the shops attached to the fence of the mosque and proceeds from the religious ceremonies officiated by the principal Imams and some *ratibi* Imams. Other sources of revenue included financial donations from Muslim individuals, groups, organisations and associations from within Ilorin, Nigeria and outside.

A mosque committee was constituted, which was saddled with the structural maintenance as an aspect of mosque administration. The spiritualists (Ulama) in the mosque comprised of the three principal Imams headed by the chief Imam otherwise known as Imam Fulani of Ilorin. Others are Imam Imale and Imam Gambari in order of hierarchy. Also in this category are the *muezzin* popularly called the **Ladani**, the Quranic reciter called **Ajanasi** and **Alufa Rabana**. Each of these positions is domesticated within some families in Ilorin. The functions of this group are strictly spiritual – leading prayers, giving of moral lessons, offering advice from Islamic viewpoint on issues affecting the Emirate, leading supplications for the progress of the Emirate and its subjects, officiating at religious and social functions, mediating among Muslims in dispute and crisis.

Closely connected to the administration of the mosque is the Emirate Council led by the Emir. The Emir as the head of the Muslim community superintends, over the affairs of the Muslims within and outside the mosque. He gives approval for whatever is to be done in the mosque. He appoints and turban all the officials of the mosque from the principal Imams through the ranks of **Ajanasi** to **Ladani** and **Alufa Rabana** (Danmole, 1980). The Emir is assisted by other functionaries like the Baloguns, the Magajis, the Baqes and a host of other honorific title holders. Although the afore mentioned offices look more political and cultural than Islamic but the titles are islamised as they were created to further the cause of Islam and most of the occupants or their progenitors merited the position for their indelible contributions to the spread of Islam in the Emirate.

4. The Administration of Quarters' Mosques (Ratibi or Masalasi Adugbo)

The history of the establishment of these mosques is traceable to the sojourn in Ilorin of renowned Muslim scholars, individuals or families. Such mosques are named after them and the administration of such mosques is linked to them and their Jama'a (congregation). Until

1981 when the new ultra modern mosque was commissioned for prayers, the Ratibi mosques did not appreciate the need for a separate committee order than that of the Ulama in their mosques. The Ulama committee comprised of the Imam, the deputy (where applicable), the **Muezin (Ladani)**, the **Ajanasi** (Quranic reciter), the **Mufasir (Oniwasi)**, the **Arowasi** (megaphonist) etc. The functions of the members are not in anyway different from those at the central Jummat mosque but limited to their environment and members of their congregation. The only checks on the activities of this group were the elders and or the ward head who prayed in such mosque.

With the advent of committee system, two to three major committees are in use; the spiritual (the Ulama) and the Youth and Elders committees in charge of mosque maintenance. The elders in the mosques, particularly the Magajis of some compounds constituting the congregation of the mosque and some charismatic individuals maintain a general check on the affairs of the mosque but more particularly on maintenance committee because it involves money. In some mosques, the maintenance committee composed of the youths who initiate ideas on mosque maintenance and raise funds to actualize them, while the elders committee approves of the plans and authorizes the release of funds.

In each case, there are advantages and disadvantages. In some cases, the elders have been found very stingy and uncompromising in the release of funds thereby delaying progress in the development of the mosque but certainly, they ensured probity and accountability among the members of the youths' committee and mosque members in general. On the other hand, where the elders' committee is relaxed, developments seem to be fast but cases of fraud are rampant with members of the youth or mosque maintenance committee and generally with the members. Cases of frauds have rendered some mosques undeveloped and committees dissolved and congregation split into parts.

In order to speed up development in **ratibi** mosques, some initiated the idea of conferring titles on some deserving Muslims within the membership of a mosque, a quarters and in Ilorin in general. During the turbaning or veiling (male and female respectively) money realized are usually put to use in the mosques. The conferees are initially invited on special occasions like Wolimat ceremony, celebration of Lailatul Qadr, Maolud Nabiy or fund raising ceremonies where they donate money to the purse of the mosque. As responsive as the system is in

meeting the financial needs of the mosques, it is also causing infringement in the administration of mosques. Some title holders within the mosque often infringe on the rights of the Ulama class and Elders' in the affairs of the mosques.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, the history of the administration of mosques in Ilorin Emirate since independence with specific concentration on the central mosque was x-rayed. The paper stated clearly the direct and indirect roles of Nigeria's political independence on the administration of the Ilorin Emirate mosques. First, it was political independence that brought about self determination not only in political affairs but also in religions. Muslims in Nigeria since then related freely with their sister Muslim societies and countries without hindrances usually experienced during colonialism. Mosque administration as discussed was divided into two: structural transformation and maintenance by the youths and /or elders usually called Mosque maintenance committee and spiritual administration under the leadership of the Imam and his aides. Methods adopted in raising funds for mosques administration included giving out of religious titles to deserving Muslims in other to encourage them to spend their wealth in the cause of Allah or to appreciate their good gestures. In spite of the fact that it is a matter of religion, there were cases of fraud in the affairs of **ratibi** mosques in Ilorin Emirate.

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