

Intra-Religious Conflict: Greetings as a Propelling Instrument of Conflict among Muslim Community of Ilorin, Nigeria

Agunbiade Nurudeen (M.A. in View)

Agunbiade.nurudeen@yahoo.com

+2347034538917

ABSTRACT

Greeting is an act of communication in which human beings intentionally make their presence known to each other, to show attention to, and to suggest a type of relationship (usually cordial) or social status (formal or informal) between individuals or groups of people coming in contact with each other. Greeting is one of the ways that different people at different cultural background exhibit their values. Greetings dictate the respect and humbleness of the people in a particular community. Ilorin as an early city in Nigeria which was largely dominated linguistically by Yoruba speaking people have their own way of greetings which also exhibit their own way of respecting one another. But the early introduction of Islam to Ilorin has not change holistically the cultural values of greetings in this community. Thus, early Muslim scholars maintain the cultural values of greetings apart from Muslim way of greeting. By early 21st century a new dimension has come in terms of greetings through some sect that refers to themselves as 'New Sunni Sect'. Meanwhile, the word 'Sunni' is to show those who are the followers of the Sunnah of prophet Muhammed (S.A.W) of which even those who are not among the sect members they can refers to themselves as Sunni because they are also followers of the prophet. Unfortunately, the introduction of compulsion and labeling those people who are not among the sect members in terms of greetings and other spheres as Kafir (unbeliever) has been a major instrument of conflict in Ilorin. Hence, the study would explain the concept of greetings and how it serves as an instrument of conflict, effects and way forward.

Keywords: Conflict, Culture, Greetings, Ilorin, Islam, Religion, Sunnah. Muslim community.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The early city of Ilorin is present day capital of Kwara State and headquarters of Ilorin Emirate in Northcentral part of Nigeria. Ilorin refers to the town consisting of such ethnic groups as the Hausa (called Gambari in Ilorin), Nupe, Fulani and Kanuri etc from the northern part of Nigeria. The Yoruba sub groups in Ilorin include Egba, Oyo, Igbomina, Ijesa etc all living together within the geographical area. The town lies some 300 kilometres north of Lagos on latitude North $8^{\circ} 30'$ and longitude East $4^{\circ} 35'$. Ilorin was established within the Sokoto Caliphate in the third decade of the 19th century. Until then, Ilorin which is Yoruba in origin and etymology was part of the Old Oyo Empire headed by the Alaafin (Olumo: 2015).

Ilorin came into limelight because of the role played by Afonja, the Are-Ona Kakanfo (commander of Oyo's provincial forces) in the disintegration of the Oyo Empire at the beginning of the 19th century. Following the rift between Afonja and Alaafin Aole, of a new state. Prior to this period, Ilorin was a small village under the provincial authority of Ikoyi. The Yorubas, the Hausas, the Fulanis and some other groups, were the inhabitant of the village. The Yoruba people constituted the dominant ethnic group in Ilorin at that time (Olumo: 2015). Without much ado, Afonja fought for the independent of Ilorin from imperial Alaafin Aole through the help of Fulani Muslim cleric, Abdulkareem Al-Salih (popularly known as Alimi) who with his Fulani relatives and Muslims faithfuls helped Afonja fulfill his mission of subverting the authority of the Alaafin.

However, the joy was short-lived as the Fulani equally became interested in the control of Ilorin. Thus, the relationship between Afonja and the Fulani group, later led by Alimi's son, Abdulsalam, became characterized by intrigues. The result was the establishment of Ilorin Emirate which excluded Afonja. With the establishment of Ilorin Emirate in 1823, the Fulani were quick to visualize the long-term implication of exclusive political control. Hence, they began to work out strategies that would bring about political stability to the polity. With these strategies, Ilorin assumed a peculiarity in which a minority ethnic group rules over a vast majority and at the same time attracted a wide measure of acceptability. A major factor that helped in this regard was Islam.

Even though, Islam has been practiced in Ilorin before the coming of Alimi because it was reported that there are various quarters in Ilorin who have their origin from Mali, Egypt among others who found their way to Ilorin during the Trans-sahara trade as a traders. They

settled in Ilorin at various places like Oke-Mali which now called Oke-Imale, Abuwaji (from Egypt) quarters which now called Agbaji quarters, among others quarters have been practicing Islamic religion before the coming of Alimi. Couple with this, the likes of Sholagberu, a Kanuri man was a Muslim whom Alimi met when he entered Ilorin cannot be exempted has one of the prominent Muslim cleric in Ilorin prior to Alimi's incursion. The coming of Alimi unified these quarters together to build a central mosque and other mosques in Ilorin where people pray and various issues bothering them are discussed (Danmole: 1982). The involvement of some sect like Sufi sect like Quadriyya, Tijanniyya, Jafariyyah among other sects has consolidated some extent of Islamic evangelism in Ilorin (Adekilekun: 1987).

To set the record straight, the religion could be perceived as a matter of individual belief and not so much an attribute of ethnicity, the religion of Islam is seen differently in Ilorin. The totality of the life of various groups in Ilorin revolves around Islam. It is difficult to see an Ilorin inhabitant who does not practice Islam as a religion. Thus, Islam has become a distinctive mark of identification of the inhabitants of Ilorin which is dominated linguistically by Yoruba speaking people. In that case, for many Muslims cleric to preach effectively there is needs to learn how to speak Yoruba language. Many people living in Ilorin irrespective of cultural background assimilated the speaking of Yoruba language and culture. Even though there is no statistical analysis that revealed over population of Yoruba speaking people in Ilorin that would have warrant domination of Yoruba language, but it was observed that most people in Ilorin speaks Yoruba language and imbibed Yoruba culture. To a large extent, to show the sensitivity of Yoruba language in Islamic preaching in Ilorin, just of recent the central mosque *Jum'at Uthba* (Friday sermon) was now been translated to Yoruba language taking into consideration the linguistically dominated ethnic group.

2.0 THE CONCEPT OF GREETINGS

It is not new that culture is the total way of life of the people living in a particular environment. There are two types of culture which include material and non-material culture. One of the integral parts of non-material culture is greetings. Greeting is an act of communication in which human beings intentionally make their presence known to each other, to show attention to, and to suggest a type of relationship (usually cordial) or social status (formal or informal) between individuals or groups of people coming in contact with each other. Greetings sometimes are used just prior to a conversation or to greet in passing,

such as on a sidewalk or trail. While greeting customs are highly culture and situation-specific and may change within a culture depending on social status and relationship, they exist in all known human cultures. Greetings can be expressed both audibly and physically, and often involve a combination of the two. This topic excludes military and ceremonial salutes but includes rituals other than gestures. A greeting, or salutation, can also be expressed in written communications, such as letters and emails. Some epochs and cultures have had very elaborate greeting rituals, for example, greeting of a sovereign. Conversely, secret societies have often furtive or arcane greeting gestures and rituals, such as a secret handshake, which allow members to recognize each other (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greeting>).

2.1 CULTURAL GREETINGS IN ILORIN

In Yoruba culture it will be an understatement to say that the Yoruba cherished greetings so much. We can equally say that greetings are inseparable from the Yoruba because, this is the first thing a stranger will notice when he meets the Yoruba people. In fact, the Yoruba men and women rescued from slavery the British warship and settled in Freetown in the present Republic of Sierraleone at the beginning of 19th century were known and called ‘Aku’ which is the prefix that attached to all types of greetings in Yoruba. Greeting is a way of showing respect to each other, peers (Crowther: 1843). A child or an adult who wakes up in the morning, meet people on their way, and do not greet them is regarded as being untutored and without the required home training. However, the content of greeting may include questions about the trip, how stressful it is, the cost of transportation, how he/she is able to locate the house and so on.

Indeed, greetings in Yoruba are countless. There is no occasion that does not have its distinct and peculiar greetings for days and seasons, there are greetings for every early morning, morning, mid-day, afternoon, evening and night. There also special greetings for the seasons and the different festivals when there is food drought and when there is plenty to eat. In the same vein, there are greetings for different state of health either sick or death. And these showcase how Yoruba speaking people value their culture of greetings (Smith: 1965).

Within the family setting, both nuclear and extended, greetings are crucial. Young people are trained to learn and offer greetings for each appropriate time or occasion. Leading by example, the Baale or Magaji wakes up very early in the morning and greet everybody within the compound. In the process of greetings, he mentions their names individually, no matter

how young or old. In his process, he makes enquiry about the state of their health, work and even progress. Since he is the Baale or Magaji, he knows the Oriki “Cognomen” or praise attribute names of everybody within the nuclear and extended family. As the greetings progress, he laced them with individuals attributive and praise names. This early morning greetings are particularly important in the Yoruba setting of which Ilorin cannot be exempted. Any Baale or Magaji that does not do this is regarded as irresponsible and ignoring his duty to his family members. This opportunity of early morning greetings is also used acquainting himself with state of affairs of everybody within his community (www.Africa.uga.edu/Yoruba/unit_08/cultureunit12.html).

It is important to note that Ilorin as a Yoruba setting have some specific way of greetings culturally, for instance, when the younger ones are greeting the elders, the boys will prostrate- full stretch with their chests and chin on the ground while the girls will knee down with their two knees. They then, greet as circumstance demands. They will be in position until the elders complete their own part of the greetings. It is also forbidden for the younger ones to look into the eyes of the older ones in the process of greetings.

The Yoruba speaking people use some pronouns to greet themselves and these include:

Kaaro “good morning” to an age mate of colleague

Ekaaro o’ “good morning” to an older person, more than one person

Kaabo “welcome”

E Kaabo” welcome (sir/madam or more than one person)

(www.Africa.uga.edu/Yoruba/unit_08/cultureunit12.html)

The above showcase the extent of Yoruba culture of greetings and value added to greeting in their community. Even though civilization is gradually eroding the value of greetings in Ilorin, nevertheless, the people still cherished their cultural of greetings.

2.2 MUSLIM GREETINGS IN ILORIN

In Islamic religion, Asalam Alaykum is a Muslim greeting in Arabic that means “Peace be upon you”. The greeting is a standard salutation among Muslims and is routinely used whenever and wherever Muslim gathered and interacted, whether socially or within worship and other contexts. The typical response to the greeting is “Wa alaykum s-salam” which means “and upon you, Peace”. This greeting appears in greatly abbreviated forms in many

languages from Malagasy to Urdu as some variant of salam (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/As-salam_Alaykum).

It is also preferred to use the greeting when arriving and also when leaving. It was reported that Abu Hurairah said:

“When one of you joins a gathering, let him say “Peace”. When he wants get up and leave, let him say “Peace”. The former is not more important than the latter. (Hassan hadith reported in Jami at-Tirmidhi)

It is also preferred to shake hands when greeting. It was reported that Ka’b Ibn Malik narrates *“I entered the mosque and thereupon I found Allah’s messenger (Peace be upon him). Then Talhan Ibn Ubaydallah stood up to shake my hand and greet me”*

In the vein, Qatada narrates that that he asked Anas:

“Had the Companions of the prophet (peace be upon him) been in the custom of shaking hands?” and that Anas told him that they were” (Sahih al-Bukhari:n 6263)

It is also stated that one should give the Salam greeting upon entering a house. This is based upon a verse of the Quran:

“But when you enter the houses, greet one another with a greeting from God blessed and good” (An-Nur 24 vs 61)

3.0CLASH OF INTEREST BETWEEN CULTURAL GREETINGS AND MUSLIM GREETINGS AMONG MUSLIM COMMUNITY OF ILORIN

It is interesting to acknowledge the fact that the major causes of conflict is clash of interest. Even the etymology of conflict is from Latin word *“confligere”* means “to clash” (Albert: 2002). In that case, clash of interest can be refers to conflict. Ilorin as a Yoruba dominated environment have specific way of greetings which is specified for male and female, old and younger ones. The male have to prostrate and stretched their body while the female will kneels down to greet the elderly ones. Unfortunately, this is a clashing point with the “New Sunni Sect’ who believes that Muslims should not in any way use any part of his body that is use to worship Allah and use it for anybody and he whoever against this rule is a “Kafir” (unbeliever). They believe that the best of greeting is saying “salam alaykum” and reply will be “waalekum salam” and shaking hands too simultaneously as the case may be and

irrespective of the persons age or status. Taken into consideration the Yoruba cultural values of greeting and Islamic way of greetings has been major bone of contention that today has splitted Ilorin community into two stereotyping groups i.e. “Muslim community” and “Self-stereotype Sunnist Community”.

Interestingly, there is need to identify some possible reasons for this clash of interest and these include the following:

- **Cultural Background:** It is important to note that one of the reasons that have contributed to the clash of interest of the groups is cultural background. It obvious that majority of the people in Ilorin are Yoruba speaking people and they value their culture and the contesting point is that those who even introduce Islam to Ilorin met our culture and they preserve it without tampering with it and they were able to preach ferociously to the calls of Allah without any overwhelming obstacles while it is now that one sect will spring up and eradicate our cultural values of greetings of which they too they were even part of right from their childhood. In another angle to the argument, it was debated that the culture of Islamic greeting was originated from Arab culture of which either you a non-muslim or not is part of their culture. Shaking hands irrespective of age or status is part and parcel of Arabs culture. It is only their idol that they postrate or kneel down for. But here in Ilorin, Muslims community see themselves as believer of Allah and the followers of Prophet Muhammad (May peace upon him) and as a Yoruba man postrating or kneeling down for elders is not intentionally to worship them rather to show a sign of humility and respect.

It is believe that every action shall be judge according to intention

Couple with the above there is another quote from Hadith that:

“A believer’s intention is better than his deeds”

In contrast, the Self-stereotyping Sunni community believes that any culture that goes against Quran and Hadith should be left alone and any contrary opinion to this then the person is associating partner with Allah (Shirk). According to Sahih Bukhari, prophet said:

“if prostration were allowed to any other than Allah then he would have commanded the wives to prostrate to their husbands” (al-Bukahri)

Thus, inability of Ilorin Muslim community to shift their position and interest and labeling of Muslim community as Kafir by Sunni group led to different brouhaha in Ilorin metropolis.

- **Pride or Pompous:** This is another cause of this conflict. Some people believe that most of those people who refers to themselves as a new Sunnist group, in term of their character they are too proud prior to their embracement of new sect. In that respect most of the people does not believe what they are even preaching because they believe that they are just using religion to exhibit their arrogance and disrespect to other people in the community. Islam does not give any room for pride or pompous, that is why in Q16 vs23:

“Certainly He does not love the proud ones”

Couple with the above, It is narrated that Hazrat Moosa asked exalted Allah:

“Oh my Lord! Who is the most deserving of your wrath and displeasure?”
Allah Ta’aala told him: *“It is he whose heart is filled with pride and his tongue is filthy (i.e. Abusive), his eyes are devoid of shame, his hands are miserly and he is of bad conduct and character.*

In view of the above, even if what the sect is preaching is true they have to inculcate habit of humility in their preaching which is part and parcel of Prophet Muhammad behaviour. It is in this background that most of the people in the community always ready to counter this sect at different strategic point in the community.

- **Inadequate Knowledge of Islamic Teachings:** This is another cause of conflict whereby most of the people who practice the new Sunnist group greetings does not even have adequate knowledge that even backup that such greetings. What they only know is that, Muslims are not allowed to bowl for anybody except Allah. In this case, those people who embrace this type of greeting of saying “Salam Alaykum” and shaking hands does not know how to apply it in sensible manner taking into consideration the community cultural value of greetings. Islam is a holistic religion that incorporates respect, respect for elders, young ones, mothers, fathers, relatives among others. To ascertain the importance of knowledge in Islam, Q27vs5 says:

No such were their houses in utter ruin because they practiced wrongdoing.
Verily in this is a sign for people of knowledge

In Quran 29vs4 also says that:

And such are the parables we set for mankind but none will understand them except those who have knowledge

Our beloved prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

Seeking of knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim (Al-Tirmidhi: 218)

With the above that vehemently proved the importance of knowledge in Islam, it is disheartening that most of the members of the new sect just assimilate what their leaders are preaching to them without proper scrutiny in their own Hikmah (knowledge) whether it is properly justified with the prominent book of Islam (Quran, Hadith and Ijmaa). It is on this background that most people in the community highly hesitating to accept what the group sect is preaching.

- **Popularity or Fame:** This is another cause of clash of interest, it is perceived by some people in the community that the new sect wants just to be famous or popular in their immediate environment. Interestingly, most of the leaders of this new sect went abroad like Sudan, Saudi Arabia among other Islamic states to learn Islamic teaching and doctrines and when they now comes back, for them to be noticeable they have to bring some creed which are even alien to the culture of their community. Even though, there are some part of Yoruba culture that are highly subjective in terms of respect for the elders like prostrating but not everybody in the community condemned it, it depend the way you as a recipient feel like. Not that somebody will come and condemn it in totality so that people in the community will notice him or her of the new sect he has joined. According to Quran 107 vs 4-7 says:

So woe unto those performers of Salat (hypocrites). Those who delay their Salat (from their stated fixed times). Those who do good deeds only to be seen (of men). And prevent small kindness.

Performing worship or a righteous deed for wordly reasons is minor Shirk. In view of this prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

Verily, what I fear most for you is the lesser idolatory". And he elaborated, "It is showing off. Allah the Exalted will say to them (who show off), on the Day of Resurrection when the people are being rewarded for their deeds: Go to those whom you wished to show off in the world and look for your reward with them" (Musnad Ahmad: 23119)

In view of the above, some member of Muslim community make reference to this above quote in order to justify the action of the new sect and which they have even go against considering what they are preaching. All these cumulated together and led to clash of interest between the Muslim community and the New Sunni Sect.

3.1 EFFECT OF CLASH INTEREST TO THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

It is not new that any place when there is clash of interest the ripple of effect will be detrimental to the development of that place. In view of this, the conflicting interest of the member of Muslim community and the New Sunni Sect have polarized the community that they did not see themselves as one rather they are being mirror as Bidah (innovation) doer or Kafir (Muslim community) and fanatics extremist sect (New Sunni Sect). Without mincing word, there is Yoruba adage that “ibi ti erin meji ba ti nja, koriko be ni o foriko” which means that anywhere where there is a fight between two elephant it is the grass that will suffer. Thus, the Muslim community that suppose to work together to fight the common problems i.e. inadequate basic amenities and environmental challenges are been facing with another challenges and these include the following:

i. **Disunity:** it is important to note that people living in this community are not seeing themselves as Muslim again rather as two blocs. Even the families that are highly respected through their unionism have been divided along the ideological lines. The community is in disarray, different people are just debating at different part of the community just to showcase their resistance to the preaching of new sect without even look at the ripple effect of this to their community. To the extent that, the blood brother, father to children are not in good terms because of greetings, a lot of family ties have been broken which the prophet Muhammad cherish most have been violated. In Quran 3 vs 103

And hold fast, all together, by the rope of Allah and be not divided among themselves

With the above quote, the community is already going against the teachings of Quran on unity.

ii. **Envy:** It is now ravaging the community because those sect who have been in existence in the community (Quadriyyah, Tijaniyah and others), see the preaching of the new sect to supersede their own preaching and even the fair of influx of most of their sect members to the new sect. In that case, the various religious sect in the community have to

come together to resist the preaching of the new sect at different occasions or venue where they are to preach to the people. Prophet Muhammad said:

Beware of envy because indeed destroys good deeds in the same manner as fire destroys woods

In view of the above, the earliest sects in the community have to come together to fight their perceive enemy (New Sunni Sect) and making the New Sunni Sect as their subject matter in their Dawah (preaching). Likewise the New Sunni Sect, they also make the earliest sects in Ilorin as their own subject of discussion without taking into consideration the ethics of Dawah to the unity of the community. They embarked on *tit for tat* of which is highly disastrous for peaceful co-existence of the people in the community.

iii. Gradual Eradication of Cultural Values: this is another effect of the clash of interest of the two sects, it is important to note that one of the significant parts of our culture is greeting. A greeting unveils the cultural value of the people and any contrary to opinion to this value is a threat to people's culture which can eradicate the culture of greeting in the community. In that case, the Muslim community believes that the new culture is gradually eroding their own cultural way of greeting and if care is not taken their cultural way of greeting will be in extinction. To this end, this has been the most ripple effect of New Sunni Sect where they have been trying to plant their creed on peoples mind on the negative effect of Cultural greetings. In that case, people in the community have been trying to jettison the cultural way of greetings at the expense the new sect mode of greetings. However, the New Sunni Sect mode of greetings is not new to the person which of course they have been practicing it right from time immemorial but there is nothing that goes against their cultural way of greetings. Then, the labeling of the people as Kafir (unbeliever) serves to some extent why people are trying to shift holistically from cultural greetings to Sunnis' greetings without taken into consideration their cultural values.

iv. Indiscipline: Indiscipline is another effect of clash of interest between the community and the new sect. the elderly ones who believes that their mode of greetings should be culturally based see the new sect mode of greetings has disrespectful and to some extent creates a lot of rancor between the elderly ones and the younger ones in the community. Without much ado, it is important to note that most people who are members of this group are highly disrespectful prior to the joining of the sect and for them to join the sect people in the community already perceive it as just an excuse for them to justify their disrespectful nature.

Even though not all the members of this sect are disrespectful but people perceive all of them as bed of the same feather that flocks together. Islam does not allow indiscipline rather it preaches inculcation of discipline throughout one life time.

4.0 CONCLUSION

From the above analysis, it can be deduced that greetings is one of the boiling point of conflict among Muslims in Ilorin metropolis. The new sect mode of greeting which is not new to the people but the extent of labeling people Kafir (unbeliever) serves as a clash of interest between the community members who are Muslim and the new sect members too. Hence, the ripple effect of this conflict to the community includes disunity, fear of cultural eradication, envy and indiscipline. Whereas the common enemy that the communities suppose to fight which include basic amenities which are not adequate in their community is there and for them to seek for collective solution to it they are fighting for the course of Islam which is already preserved by Allah. In that case, for us to fight this common enemy there is need for adequate knowledge on Islamic teachings and preaching, mutual understanding, discipline and respect for human dignity as a community ethics and social cohesion. These are the prerequisite for the development of any society and it will also pave way for pure practice of Islam without any diffusion from individuals or groups.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is disastrous that a community without cooperation would witness disunity, conflict and underdevelopment and this cannot be escaped in Ilorin Muslim community. The general enemies which include inadequate infrastructural facilities, non-payment of salaries, unemployment, dwindling educational system, low power supply, absence of drinkable water among others which community suppose to come together and fight is still prevalent while they are in loggerhead against one another because of unnecessary ego and claiming of superiority over religion doctrines. It is a community that have basic amenities that would be able to practice Islam very well, a case of Saudi Arabia where Islam originated from have all these amenities and this make their citizen to practice pure Islam without any diffusion. To set the record straight, the following could be taken into consideration for surgical solution to the conflict:

- **Adequate Islamic and Western Education:** Adequate Islamic and western Knowledge by attending Quranic and Western Education Schools in order to have deep knowledge of Islam and Human philosophy of life. Through this, Muslim would be able to showcase

the beauty of Islamic greetings. In addition, Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) encourages Muslim to seek for knowledge even is going to be in China. There should be a well conducted Dawah (preaching) and Munakosah (debate) among scholars in order to clarify some major issues in Islam and this will go a long way in blocking anybody or group who want to twist religion preaching for selfish gains.

- **Discipline:** Discipline should be inculcated in whatever we are doing because Islam against indiscipline and there is a popular Yoruba adage that says “Igberaga ni se wa ju iparun” which means ‘proudness is the beginning of extinction’. This showcase that Yoruba speaking people and Islamic teachings are against indiscipline which of course the sect should jettison and embrace sense of discipline and moral values which should be the watchword of the elderly ones and the younger ones in the community.
- **Enhancement of Socio-Cultural cohesion:** Enhancement of Socio-Cultural cohesion should be the watchword of the community who want to have socio-cultural unity and development. It is popularly saying that ‘united we stand divided we fall’ critically picture a society that is united would able to achieve their set goals while the society which divided hand will witness disunity, incessant conflict and underdevelopment. At this juncture, the community must note their differences but use it as their rallying point for their community development.

The issue of greetings as a case among Muslim community and New Sunni Sect in Ilorin metropolis should not be an instrument of division rather it suppose to serve as their melting point that will serve as a medium for the people to fight their common enemy which include unemployment, inadequate infrastructural facilities, no payment of salaries, low power supply among others basic amenities. Hence, if this diversity serves as a unity for the community then the prevalent problems in the community will be jointly-solved (joint problem solving).

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