'ULAMA' AL-IMARAH

(Scholars of the Emirate)

Volume Two

Edited by

Moshood Mahmood Jimba

&

Ismail Salihu Otukoko



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Ilorin Emirate: Some Aspects of the Consolidation, Socio-Political and Cultural Integration of a Multi-Ethnic Community

Moshood M. Jimba & Salihu I. Otukoko

There is no doubt that the foundations of the Ilorin Emirate are traceable to the activities of Shaykh Alimi as he was one of the leading scholars who promoted the spread of Islam in Ilorin and facilitated the process that transformed the town to a bastion of Islamic state in the 1820s. Apart from his teaching and preaching activities, which had started well before he settled in Ilorin in c.1817, Alimi also built mosques and engaged in activities that unified the different Muslim groups within Ilorin. In addition, as consequences of his personal qualities and activities, Alimi won the respect and acknowledgement of other scholars he met on ground and those he attracted to Ilorin and succeeded in rallying and mobilizing them for religio-spiritual efforts towards the establishment of an Islamic state in the town. According to Al-Ilory,

> When he [Alimi] intended to pray to have a Muslim city, he informed them [Islamic scholars] and sought their opinion and they agreed to fast for a month, starting and breaking their fast with dates only. After the fast, they prayed to Allah and their prayer was answered (Al-Ilory, 1982).

Despite the fact that Shaykh Alimi had died by the time of the formal establishment of the Ilorin Emirate in c.1823, the Islamic scholars who had pledged their support and loyalty to him did not renege. Rather, they reportedly extended their support to his eldest son, Abdul-Salami and thus 'made him the Emir and assisted him in establishing the emirate' (Al-Ilory, 1982; Ikokoro, 1912). The 'appointment' of Abdul-Salami as the first emir of Ilorin was based largely on extant tradition of the Sokoto *Jihad*. Within the latter tradition, Islamic scholars who successfully initiated or led *Jihad* in their local areas or elsewhere became recognised as '*Amirs* or Emirs by the local Muslim communities. Such recognised local *Jihad* and religio-political leaders (who had not initially received flags from Shaikh Dan Fodio) were subsequently given official recognition by the authorities in Sokoto and/or Gwandu. Thus, while Abdul-Salami had emerged, based on this tradition, as the Emir of Ilorin in c. 1823, it was not until c. 1829 that he was officially recognised as "*Emir of Yarba*" by the caliphate authorities (*Risala* reproduced in Smith, 1983).

Although the establishment of the Ilorin emirate was not without internal (and indeed external) challenges characterised by armed conflicts and power struggles, especially prior to the official recognition of Abdul-Salami by Gwandu in c. 1829, Emir Abdul-Salami made reconciliatory efforts to calm the nerves and to bring the different people together. This was not only through prayers but also through diplomacy and administrative ingenuity

displayed with political reforms including creation of titles to reward supporters as well as to mobilise and unite the different groups and leaders within the town (Danmole, 1980, 1992; Oral evidence). The success of the first emirs in this regard is reflected, among others, in the zeal and determination with which the Ilorins strove to defend and consolidate their nascent state against all odds during the first few decades of the existence of the emirate.

The establishment and survival of the Ilorin emirate, therefore, involved a series of wars of defence, conquests, expansion, and consolidation that lasted up to the 1840s and 1850s (Jimoh, 1994; Danmole, 1992; Johnson, 1921). In the course of these wars, territories were added to the emirate through military conquest or subjugation by the Ilorin as well as by voluntary submission to Ilorin's overlordship or application for her protection from attacks and harassment by other powerful states around. Those territories that gradually constituted the land of emirate or '*Dar al-Islam*' were divided into fiefs and allocated by the first emirs to members of the royalty, nobility, and the military elite. This was both for administrative and security reasons. Many of those to whom such allocations were made especially by the first two emirs (Abdul-Salami, c. 1823-c.1836 and Shitta, c. 1836-c.1860) became hereditary landowners and overlords of such territories (Jimoh, 1994; O'Hear, 1997; Danmole, 1980; Hogben and Kirk-Greene, 1993).

The fief holders and landowners, which included members of the royal family and of the emergent politico-military elite, had to

make arrangements to secure and protect the lands and also to turn them into profitable use economically. Thus, while remaining within the city, the Ilorin chiefs and landowners sent their relatives, friends, followers, and servants out of the city to open up the lands in their respective fiefs for settlement, protection of the lands, and production activities such as farming (O'Hear, 1983; 1997). Thus, while the processes involved in the establishment of the emirate had brought about the inward movement of individuals and groups to Ilorin for various socio-economic and political reasons, the expansion and consolidation of the emirate involved a process of outward movement of people from Ilorin city into various parts of the emirate. Although a number of those people involved in the outward movement stayed permanently in the outlying areas, others stayed temporarily and continued to fluctuate between the city and the fiefs, that is, the villages in the outlying districts of the emirate. In many instances, both categories of people had (and still have) houses in both Ilorin city and in the fiefs especially in those areas that came to be known as metropolitan districts of the emirate.

The above process and development gave rise to the phenomenon known as ***Ilorin n'ile l'oko*** (that is 'Ilorin both at home [i.e. in the city] and in the villages'). The phenomenon is expressed in the common saying or tradition that there is hardly a typical Ilorin house that has no connection or relations with a village (s) in the outlying districts (Jimoh, 1994). By the early period of colonial period, specifically from 1906 onwards, the

fiefs or outlying Ilorin emirate territories in the 'villages' were formally constituted into 'districts' and placed under resident District Heads (usually called *Daodus* in a number of places). This was primarily aimed at bringing about effective colonial administration of the emirate. The *Daodus* were appointed from among members of the traditional Ilorin ruling elite and were made to reside more or less permanently in their districts (Hermon-Hodge, 1929). Thus, by the 1920s, most of the areas that came to be described as 'metropolitan areas' of the Ilorin emirate had, after series of colonial reorganisations, been constituted into several districts: these include Afon, Akanbi, Ejidongari, Iponrin, Lanwa, Malete, Oloru, Onire, Owode, and Paiye Districts (Hermon-Hodge, 1929; Onikoko, 1990; Jimoh, 1994; O'Hear, 1997). Despite the challenges of colonial and post-colonial reforms, there have continued to be socio-political and economic ties and relations between these areas and Ilorin city.

Like other traditional states and societies, Ilorin is associated with a number of epithets and praise poems or *Oriki*. Whether formulated locally by the Ilorins themselves or ascribed to Ilorin and its people, these epithets are derived from various aspects of Ilorin including the circumstances of its origin or foundation, landmark historical developments, remarkable roles played by some of its prominent historical personalities, the roles and exploits of the Ilorins in warfare and diplomatic maneuverings that characterized 19th-century politics in Yorubaland as well as their contributions to Islamization and Islamic scholarship in the

region south of the Niger. To the Yoruba, for example, Ilorin was a city acknowledged to be so skillful in the 'science' of 'grinding iron to powdery dust.' Hence, Ilorin is *'Ilu tin lọ irin abọntase eniyan,'* meaning 'Ilorin, the city that grinds iron to powdery dust not to talk of human beings.'

With particular reference to its role in the *Jihad* in the region south of the Niger River within the Nigerian area, especially in Yorubaland, Ilorin was both a key player and a formidable force to reckon with in the history of 19th-century warfare and diplomacy. Central to the Ilorins' involvement and performance in the wars were '*the Ilorin horse and spear*' both of which have specifically given Ilorin the epithet '*ẹsin l'egun, ọkọ l'oro*' ('the horse is [their] masquerade [and] the spear is [their] fetish'). Militarily, the relationship between the Ilorins and their horse (i.e. the cavalry force) in the history of its *Jihad*, military exploits and survival during the 19th century is reflected in the saying (Jimba, 1990):

'Ilorin, Geri Alimi;	Ilorin, the city of Alimi;
Ilu to yi ko l'egun,	A large city with no cultic masquerades,
Ilu to yi ko l'oro,	A city though big but has no cultic tradition or fetishes,
Ẹsin l'egun ile wọn	The horse is their masquerade,
Ọkọ si l'oro bẹ.'	[and] Spears are their only tradition and fetish.

The above praise poetry or *Oriki Ilorin* has come to be symbolically represented in the '*Statue of the Horseman*', the traditional logo of Ilorin emirate. It captures some of the remarkable aspects of the transformation of Ilorin during the 19th century and the centrality of '*the Horse and Spear*' in the history of such transformation. The *Oriki* opens with the epithet "*Ilorin, Geri Alimi*," which reflects the religio-spiritual position of Shaykh Alimi as *"the Patron-Saint"* and his role as the initiator of the Islamic movement in northern Yorubaland, Islamization within Ilorin city and which transformed it into an Islamic community of scholars and saints among whom masquerades, cults and fetishes were not tolerated. "*Geri Alimi*" (i.e. City of Alimi) or the *Islamic Ilorin*, (the emirate) founded by Shaykh Salih Alimi and his supporters, and as the nucleus of the emirate, has remained a city of scholar-warriors.

Historically, the Ilorins, collectively and individually, were proud of themselves as "expert horsemen" and spearmen and of their horses as reliable companions in the course of their exploits (Clark, 1872; Milum, 1881; Johnson, 1921; Crowther, 1872; Campbell, 1860; Mockler-Ferryman, 1892). In addition, the Ilorins were confident of the effectiveness and superiority of their horses especially in the plains (Johnson, 1921). In the Ilorins' expertise in horsemanship, members of the '*Ulama*' or religious class were not left out. The dual role played by the *'Ulama' al-*

Imarah as religious scholars as well as warriors (*Jihadists*) in the establishment, survival, consolidation, and further transformation of Ilorin is aptly immortalized in the city's traditional logo, the *Statue of the Horseman*—the spear-wielding, rosary-bearing and turban-wearing horseman. Thus, preserved in the statue are such pieces of historical information including the fact that an average Ilorin cavalryman doubled both as a scholar and a warrior; that the Ilorins as a community did not depend entirely on the physical strength of their military force and resources namely the horse and spear (*ẹsin* and *ọkọ*) but also the spiritual, that is, prayer and reliance on Allah, and that in the historical Ilorin horseman is combined the emirate's traditions of *Jihad,* Islamic scholarship, and religious devotion for which Ilorin has continued to thrive and to be widely acknowledged as a citadel of scholars or "*Ilu Aafa.*"

Closely related to the processes associated with the survival and consolidation of Ilorin emirate was the twin process of Islamization and socio-political integration of the different ethnic groups that settled in the city before, during and since the early 19th century. In the process of unification and integration of the different groups, the unifying and integrative role of Islam and Islamic scholars cannot be overemphasized (Danmole, 1989/1990). With the establishment of the emirate, Islam became a major factor that influenced Ilorin politics and society; government and administrative activities were based on Islam and

the *Shari'ah*; appointment into offices as well as the attitudes, conduct, and behaviour of both the rulers and the ruled came to be defined and regulated based on Islamic tenets. In addition, Islam became the major source of unity, brotherhood, and common purpose for the emergent multi-ethnic community. Against this background, the *'Ulama' al-Imara*, just as the *'Umara'* (the rulers), were crucial in facilitating the process of socio-political integration within the city through their preaching, scholarly activities, holding some important offices of state such as *Imam*, *Qadi*, religious and legal advisors to the rulers as well as various roles they played in the day-to-day life of the community such as in marriage, naming, burial, healing, conflict resolution, among others (Jawondo, 2003).

Like the *'Ulama'*, the *'Umara'a,* on the other hand, played their part both in ensuring the survival of the nascent emirate and in facilitating the process of Islamization and socio-political integration of the different ethnic groups in the city. Politically, the first emirs were able to adopt a power-sharing mechanism that succeeded in bringing leaders of the major groups on board. Among other steps, this was achieved through reorganisation of the town and the creation and distribution of state offices and titles (political, military, as well as religious) to their supporters across the four major quarters and the three major ethnic groups namely the Fulani, Hausa/Gambari, and Yoruba (Danmole, 1989/1990). Of course, other groups and individuals were not left out in the

new scheme of things. These and other steps to manage the initial challenges of ethnic pluralism in the town went a long way to unify and integrate the different groups as well as to promote a strong sense of belonging to Ilorin and loyalty to the constituted authorities among all groups and strata of the Ilorin society.

The socio-political integration facilitated by the above contributed to the making of Ilorin as "a melting pot" of peoples and cultures such that, by the end of the 19th century and as a result of the great 'admixture of blood' that had taken place via inter-group marriages, there had evolved a people, with a common identity and history, collectively referred to as the "*Ilorins*" with a 'peculiar' form of the Yoruba language tagged "*Yoruba Ilorin*," and the gradual adoption of a 'common facial mark of one on each side of the cheek' also described as "Ilorin" (Danmole, 1989/1990). As Danmole observes,

> While the use of Yoruba language by the Emirs of Ilorin could be paralleled to the adoption of the Hausa language by the Fulani emirs of Kano, Katsina, and other parts of Hausaland in the 19th century, the spread of Yoruba language in Ilorin was not a one way affair. In the process, the Yoruba language acquired certain vocabulary from the other languages such as Hausa, Fulani, and Nupe which it had come in contact with in Ilorin. This language interference manifests itself not only in the choice of lexical items, but also in varying degrees, in the handling of the prosodic properties of spoken Yoruba of Ilorin which deviates greatly from standard Yoruba.

Added to the above features of Ilorin and the *Ilorins* is hospitality and accommodation of 'strangers.' From the late 18th through the 19th century till recent times, Ilorin has continued to attract influx and settlement of people from near and far. A number of factors contributed to this development. These included the geo-strategic location of the city as a border settlement between the northern and southern regions of the Nigerian area and astride important trade routes from Hausaland and Borno in the north and Yorubaland to the south (O'Hear, 1983). Other factors were the relative security in the city amidst the turbulence and widespread insecurity that characterised the 19th century, the role played by the Ilorin rulers and scholars, as well as Islamization and religious scholarship for which Ilorin came to be renowned since the early 19th century.

Gbadamosi has pointed out that Ilorin, as a result of its central role in Islamic religious propagation and scholarly activities in Yorubaland, became a sort of 'local Mecca' for Muslims from different parts of the region (Gbadamosi, 1968) As these factors continued to attract people to the city, the Ilorins received them with open hands and demonstrated their hospitality through various efforts to bring about temporary or permanent settlement of the new immigrants, peaceful pursuit of their ambitions and activities and, in several instances, integration and assumption of Ilorin identity (Jawondo and Aliagan, in press; Salihu, 2015).

The continuous influx and settlement of people of various backgrounds further reinforced the initial ethnic pluralism in Ilorin while the integration and Islamization processes facilitated by both the *Umara'a* and *'Ulama' al-Imara* have enhanced the unification of the peoples and evolution of an Ilorin people. Thus, despite their diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds, the emergent Ilorin people have tried to evolve a unique culture that share elements from various cultures and traditions. Perhaps in addition to the processes of Islamization and socio-political integration, contributory to the evolution of their culture are the various socio-cultural avenues created by the Ilorins to promote regular social intercourse and continuous inter-group relations. These avenues included traditional games and sports, festivals, and various local songs and oral performances designed to entertain and mobilise the people. Two examples of these suffice. These are *Waka* and *Were* performances, which are important aspects of the traditional Ilorin culture.

Although the exact period of the advent of *Were* entertainment in Ilorin cannot be ascertained, it can be established that the performance had become part of Ilorin's Ramadan culture by the colonial period (Onikoko, 1990). In addition to the *Tarawih* and *Tahajjud* prayers, other features of the Ramadan culture were *Wa'asi* (Islamic preaching) and *Tafsir* (daily sessions of Islamic exegesis). While the religious scholars conducted the *Wa'asi* and

Tafsir sessions usually during the day and at nights, *Were* was conducted by individuals and group of local performers. It was primarily designed to be essentially night entertainment sessions and to further serve as a means to wake fellow Muslims for the *Sahur* or pre-dawn meal throughout the nights of the month of Ramadan. As time went on, *Were* performance developed from being a mere means of entertainment to an effective instrument for social mobilization, communal get-together, and social criticism of emerging vices in the society (Onikoko, 1990; Jimoh, 1994). Consequently, the performance was institutionalised with competitions organised for prizes and awards and at the Emir's palace as from the 1950s. By the 1960s, the umbrella organisation of all Ilorin indigenes, the Ilorin Descendants Progressive Union (IDPU, now Ilorin Emirate Descendants Progressive Union, IEDPU), began to popularize *Were* as an annual event scheduled to mark the end of the Ramadan fast (Onikoko, 1990; Jimoh, 1994; Akodudu, 2015).

In addition to *were* performance, another interesting aspect of the Ilorin culture, especially the Ramadan culture, is the Ramadan night performance by children named *"Iya mi lo-i-lo"*. Though essentially composed by children and full of prayers for the elderly, the *"Iya mi lo-i-lo"* is repetitive in nature and it involved a lead 'child-singer' and members of his chorus ranging from one

to as many as may be mobilised to join a particular group in a particular area of the city. The prayerful song goes thus:

The lines

Lead singer: Iya mi lo-i-lo (i.e. La Ilaha)
Chorus: ilo huwo (that is Illa Huwa)
Lead singer: Emin gigun

Chorus: Alaafia
Lead singer: T'Owo, t'Ọmọ
Chorus: L'ọdẹdẹ rẹ
Lead singer: Iwoyi ẹmi-i
Chorus: Alhaja l'ẹ ma jẹ
Lead singer: Iwoyi ẹmi-i
Chorus: Alhaji l'ẹ ma jẹ

The meaning

'my mum, '[there is] no deity'
'except Allah'
May Long life
abundant health
with wealth and children
be in your home (lit. parlour)
by this time next season,
you will be called 'Alhaja'
by this time next season,
you will be called 'Alhaji'

Another version of this tradition is the '*iya mi or baba mi tin lọ ti n'bọ*', which is also composed of prayers for the elders by young children. Usually, the traditional children's prayer-songs are appreciated or acknowledged with gifts of money, food items, drinks, etc. This annual tradition usually lasted for the duration of the Ramadan fast and is rounded up with an elaborate version that

involved the children going round the city including markets on the last day of Ramadan.

Another interesting feature of Ilorin is the naming of places within the city, which goes a long way to shed some light, not only on important events and personalities in the history of the city, but also the extent of its multi-ethnic composition and social integration. With regards to the latter, there are a number of places in the city whose names reflect the places of origin as well as ethnicity of the 'earliest' or core inhabitants. These included *Ode Alausa* (Alausa's Frontage, for that area 'founded' by people of Borno origin); *Ita-Egba* (Egba's Arena, that is for people or group from Egbaland); *Kọrọ Tapa* and *Isale Tapa* (Tapa's Corner and Tapa's Valley inhabited by people of Nupe origin); *Kọrọ Guruma* (Gurma's Corner for people from Gurma in Burkina Faso); *Kọrọ Afọju* (the Blind People's Corner); *Oke-Imale* ('Hilltop' (sometimes Quarters) of the 'Malians' which included people of Malian origin and other Muslims including those of Yoruba origin who inhabited the entire area); *Oke Apomu, Oke Ikoyi, Ile Olugbon, Ologbin,* etc. (referring to settlements of people from such places in Yorubaland as Apomu, Ikoyi, etc.); *Apalando* (Baruba) among others.

There are other places that were so named after some personalities including titleholders, Islamic scholars, warriors, etc. These include those places named after Islam and Islamic

religious scholars such as *Oke Suna* (Hill or 'Abode of the Sunnis' first referring to the ancient Muslim settlement located on the outskirts of Ilorin and later to a section of the city), *Ode Aafa Nda* (Alfa Nda's Premises named after Shaykh Ahmad Rufai Nda Salati) and *Ode Kamaru* (Kamaru's Premises named after Shaykh Muhammad Kamalud-Deen Al-Adaby), *Ita Amodu* (Ahmadu Barke's frontage); those named after titleholders such as the Baloguns Alanamu, Ajikobi, Gambari and Fulani wards; *Ita Ajia* (Ajia's Frontage or Arena), *Ita Kure* (Kure's frontage), and *Ode Sarumi* (a warrior, Sarumi's Premises).

Other places are named after important historical events including wars or battles. Examples of these include *Ita Osifila* (the 'Arena where caps were doffed'); *Ita Ogunbọ and Ita Kudimoh* (the Arena where charms dropped and 'Arena where death hemmed them' respectively: both referring to historical spots during the decisive battles of the Eleduwe or Woru Kura War of c. 1835/6 during which invaders of Ilorin were finally defeated and crushed within the city walls).

Other names of places in the city were derived from the topography of particular places, certain prominent natural or geo-physical features, or dominant traditional economic activity or activities of the people in the areas. These include such places with prefixes such as *Oke* (literally Hill), *Isale* (literally 'Valley'), *Idi*, etc. and *Kọrọ* as already noted above. In addition to Oke

Imale, Oke Sunna, and Oke Apomu, other examples of places named after '*Oke*' include *Okelele*, *Okekere*, *Oke-Ebo Alaṣọ*, *Oke Kura*, *Oke-leru*, *Oke Aluko*, *Oke Agodi*, *Oke Anifowose*, *Oke Foma*, etc. For "*Isale*", in addition to *Isale Tapa*, there are such places as *Isale Oja*, *Isale Ajasa*, *Isale Aluko*, *Isale Maliki*, *Isale Akanni*, *Isale Koto*, *Isale Ajanaku*, etc. In addition to such names that reflect economic activities such as *Idi-Aro* (Dyer's Stead) and *Idi-Agbede* (Blacksmith's Stead), others show such natural features as trees such as *Idi-Igba* (locust fruit tree) and *Idi-Ape* (*Ape* tree) among others (Danmole; Jimoh, 1994; Oral evidence).

From the above outline of some aspects of Ilorin history, the role played by various agents and factors in the processes involved in the emergence and socio-political transformation of Ilorin emirate since the 19th century cannot be overemphasized. As religious leaders and scholars, both the *Umarā'* and '*Ulamā' al-Imarah* were actively involved in the establishment, consolidation, expansion and survival of the Ilorin emirate as well as the unification and integration of its people. Also, the role of Islam and Islamic scholars in the 'evolution' and Islamization of the people known as the "Ilorins" and their culture has been critical. In other words, because of their centrality to Islamic scholarship, spiritual guidance, politics and administration of Ilorin emirate, the *Umarā'* and '*Ulamā' al-Imarah* (leaders and scholars of the emirate) have been crucial agents of change in the historical

development of Ilorin. In addition to the diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds of the people that evolved to become known as the "Ilorins", the ties, relations, and interconnections between Ilorin city, the headquarters of the emirate, and the outlying villages and districts, as exemplified in the notion of '*Ilorin n'ile, l'oko*,' ('Ilorin at home and in the villages') are captured both in the history of the emirate, its scholars as well as in the tradition of settlement and internal migrations of people to and from the city. Various avenues for social intercourse, integration, and harmonious inter-group relations included the intellectual and religious activities of the '*Ulamā'*, inter-group marriages and exchanges, traditional songs and oral performances, the Ramadan culture, and *Wa'asi*, *Were*, *Waka*, among others. As it is abundantly reflected in the composition of the *Umara* and '*Ulamā al-Imarah*, aspects of Ilorin emirate's ethnic plurality, complexity, and rich culture and history are also captured in various place names and traditions of the Ilorins.

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