

The Socio- Political Effects of the Conferment of Titles in Ilorin Emirate in the 20th Century

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Abstract

Sokoto Caliphate came to being in 1809 after a successful Jihad against the Habe rulers for their persistence in syncretism, political and economic exploitations, social degradation and corruption, in spite of religious and political exhortation by the Ulama. The success of the Sokoto Jihad informed other Jihads within the northern region. This culminated into the birth of the different Emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate. The Caliphate served as a guide to the Emirate Authorities. The Ilorin Emirate authority which was established 1823 was no exception. It looked up to the Caliphate authorities on matters of policies, either political, religious, social or economic. Abdulsalam, having been recognised as the Amir of Ilorin by the Gwandu authorities, he also conferred titles on some people for effective

administration of Ilorin Emirate. This paper examines the effects of the conferment of Islamic titles on the Socio-Political development of the Ilorin Emirate in the 20th Century. It argues that although the pattern has been affected among other factors by time, local peculiarities and modernity, the system has contributed immensely to the growth and development of Ilorin Emirate.

Introduction

Since the establishment of Ilorin Emirate in 1823, different categories of Islamic titles have evolved, each category serving different but related and complementary roles in the Emirate. The first category and the oldest is the religio-political titles such as *Imams, Ladani, Ajanasi* and *Alfa Rabana*. The second category is socio-political. This includes the *Baloguns, Maggajis* and *Daudus*. The third category is political and socio-economic in nature. This includes titles such as *Waziri, Wali* and such other honorific titles. Although, all of the categories are mentioned in this paper, attention is paid to the honorific Islamic titles to the development of the Emirate. It is important to stress here that some titled like *Balogun, Makama, Iyalaje, Turaki, Dan Mazani* etc. that are not of Islamic origin but that have been adopted to promote Islam and Islamic culture have been used in this paper as Islamic titles because they have been conferred on Muslims to further the cause of Islam.

Historical Origin of Islamic Titles

The origin of Islamic titles is traceable to God who besides making Prophets the leaders (Imams) of their communities also conferred on them some titles in recognition of their strong devotion to their missions. The Prophets conferred with titles were Ibrahim (Khalilullah – friend of Allah), Musa (Khalimullah – one to whom Allah spoke), Isa (Al-Ruhullah – The spirit of Allah) and Muhammad (Habibullah – Beloved friend of Allah). Among women honoured by God were Asiat, the wife of Pharaoh (the confidant of Allah) and Mariam (as-Sidiqat-A woman of Truth)¹

During the lifetime of the Prophet of Islam, the practice of conferment of Islamic titles became well entrenched. He conferred titles on people for their high sense of devotion to God, justice and fair-play, goodness to people and moderation in dealings, continence, self-sacrifice and contentment. The Prophet conferred the title of *Muezzin* (prayer caller) on Bilal while titles such as *as-saddiq* (the trustworthy), *al-Faruq* (*The Just*), *Dhu-Nurayn* (possessor of double stars) and *Asadullah* (The Lion of Allah) were conferred on caliphs Abubakar, Uthman and Ali respectively.²

Furthermore, during the dynasty and caliphate periods, titles such as *Caliph, Imam, Wazir, Qadi, Amil* were prominent,³ in the northern part of Nigeria. With the establishment of Sokoto Caliphate in 1809, titles like *Sultan, Amir, Imam, Qadi, Mu-adhdhin, Wali*, were used

as against the traditional Habe rulers titles.⁴ However, the traditional Habe rulers titles seemed to have been shunned temporarily as we shall see later.

Among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria, the practice of conferment of Islamic titles started in the 19th century⁵ and continues till date with some peculiarities which shall be discussed later in this paper.

Origins and Development of Islamic Titles in Ilorin Emirate

In Ilorin, conferment of titles could be traced back to 1817 when Shaikh Alimi arrived in Ilorin. The Ulama group he met on ground conferred on him the title of Chief Imam (Imam Jamiu) for his piety and erudition.⁶ The system became standardized and well entrenched after the establishment of Ilorin Emirate in 1823 and the recognition of Abdulsalam by the Sokoto Caliphate authorities as the Emir.⁷ He conferred some titles on eminent personalities in order to consolidate the religious, social and political gains of the nascent Emirate. The titles created and the officers appointed were *Imam Fulani* (Shaikh Ahmad Sanni succeeded Shaikh Alimi as the Chief Imam and was the first Imam Fulani). *Imam Imole* (Shaikh Garuba Yusuf was the first *Imam Imole* but his father Shaikh Yusuf Al-Mali was until his death the *Ajanasi* (Reciter of Quran) to Shaikh Alimi). The third title was *Imam Gambari* given to Shaikh AbdulBaki. Since the establishment of these titles, the holders functioned primarily as spiritual leaders and advisers on religio-political affairs in the Emirate. These titles are domesticated by their families.⁸ The positions of *Ladan* (caller of prayers) and *Ajanasi* (Reciter of Quran) were introduced and conferred on people by Emir Zulu Karnaini Gambari (1959-1992).⁹ The position of *Ladani* is rotated between Isale Oja and Agunbiade families while the position of *Ajanasi* is rotated between Oloyin and Bature families. The Sarumi and Erubu families have also produced one *Ajanasi* each. The Sarumi candidate was a student of Oloyin who deputized for him while in his sick bed. Upon the death of his master, he was appointed. The Erubu candidate got it through the magnanimity of Emir Zulu Karnaini Gambari. Within the above structure there is the *Alfa Rabana* who offers closing prayer at functions.¹⁰

In the second category of titles, there are the Baloguns (Alanamu, Ajikobi, Gambari, and Fulani) whom Danmole described as *Imarat al Jaysh*, (principal officers) and the *Magajis* and *Daudus* that could be described as sub-Baloguns. They man the sub-wards of the Baloguns but they are independent of the Baloguns. They are accountable to the Emir who appoints and turbans them. The Baloguns, *Magajis* and *Daudus* are the political heads of their different wards and sub-wards respectively.¹¹ These appointments which were first made by Emir Abdulsalam were meant to reward soldiers who distinguished themselves at war fronts. It equally gave the opportunity of equal representation to the various ethnic groups

in Ilorin at the Emirs Council, the highest decision making body in Ilorin. As the Emir relates with the principal Imams on matters of religion, so also do the *Baloguns*, *Magajis* and *Daudus* relate with principal Imam and other quarters Imams on matters that concern Islamic legislation. This translates into the integration of the different groups. Besides the advisory role of the Baloguns to the Emir, they are also king makers.¹²

The third category of Islamic titles started in Ilorin in 1955 during the reign of Emir Abdulkadir 1 (1896-1957). He conferred titles on two illustrious sons of Ilorin who were found worthy, for their contributions to the continuous existence and stability of Ilorin Emirate and the socio-political and religio-economic advancement of both the Emirate and its people. The title of *Madawaki* of Ilorin Emirate was conferred on Alhaji Yahaya Popoola while Alhaji Muhammed Ajelagbe Gobir was conferred with the title of the first *Waziri* of Ilorin.¹³ These two personalities were among the first group of people in Ilorin Emirate that had western education, and they ranked to the peak of their professions as civil servants and politicians. They were believed to have used their positions to advance the cause of the Emirate anytime anywhere. They were the liaison officers between the Emirate authorities and the colonial authorities. All of these qualified them for the titles. By the death of Emir Abdulkadir in 1959, there were only the *Madawaki* and the *Waziri*.¹⁴

Between 1959 and 1992, which coincided with the reign of Emir Zulu Karnaini Gambari, about eleven substantive titles were introduced and conferred on Ilorin Emirate indigenes by the Emirate council. The titles were that much at that time because the period witnessed array of achievements, progress and advancement of the Emirate indigenes in all walks of life. Many Ilorin indigenes attained enviable heights in their chosen careers – Military, Civil Service, Business and Politics. Many of them worked dutifully to advance the cause of the Emirate within the limits of their power.¹⁵ The conferment of the titles, beside being a reward also helped to increase their participation in the affairs of the Emirate.

In 1962, Alhaji AbdulGaniy Folorunsho Abdulrazaq was conferred with *Mutawali* of Ilorin. Late Alhaji Sanni Olarewaju Ibrahim Okin was conferred with *Turaki* of Ilorin in 1963 (d. 1973). Late Alhaji Saadu Ayinla Alanamu (a.k.a. Gbogbo-Iwe) was conferred with *Waziri* in 1963 after the death of the first *Waziri*. Alhaji (Dr) Abubakar Olusola Saraki in 1974 was conferred with the *Turaki* of Ilorin after the death of the first *Turaki*. In 1979, Alhaji Abubakar Lah was conferred with *Shetima* of Ilorin. In 1984, the present Emir Alhaji Ibrahim Gambari was conferred with *Ciroma* of Ilorin. In 1986, Alhaji (Dr) Amuda Aluko was conferred with Tafidan Ilorin. While in 1987, Alhaji Mamud Akanbi Oniyangi was conferred with *Wali* of Ilorin. The title of *Iyalaje* was conferred on Alhaja Abebi Akosile in 1987, while the title of *Ajiroba* was conferred on Alhaji Abdulsalam Egun Agbabiaka. In 1990, Lawyer Safi Jimba

was conferred with *Shamakin* Ilorin.¹⁶

Between 1992, when Emir Zulu Gambari died, and year 2000, the Ilorin Emirate council has conferred about six titles on individuals. Among the titles were *Dan-Iya* conferred on Alhaji Folorunsho Kawu, Daudu Agaka, *Makama*, conferred on Alhaji Ibrahim Oniye; *Magayakin*, conferred on Alhaji Idirs Mahmud; *Dan-Madami* conferred on Alhaji Adebayo Alaya and *Dan-Masani* conferred on Alhaji Hassan Abdulkadir, all in 1993. In 1997, the *Iya Adinni*, Alhaja Asimau Gogo Alawo honoured by Zulu Gambari died and Alhaja Salimota Yahaya Ori-Okoh became the new *Iya Adinni* of Ilorin.¹⁷

At this juncture, it is important to note that some Yoruba titles have found their ways into the list of the Emirate titles. They include the *Balogun*, the *Ajiroba*, *Iyalaje* and *Iya Adinni*. Danmole is of the opinion that the first Emir of Ilorin Abdulsalam might have been ignorant of the warning of Shaikh Usman Danfodiyo against the use of pre-Islamic titles when he ratified the use of *Balogun* as a title in Ilorin. Or that he ignored the teaching because of the local circumstances in Ilorin.¹⁸ Although Danmole does not explain the circumstances, it is possible that he adopted the use of the title of *Balogun* on the advice of his Yoruba lieutenants some of whom the title was to be given. Since they were Yoruba, they must have preferred the title bearing in mind the power of the *Balogun* in the political arrangement or structure of old Oyo Empire.¹⁹ Another reason could be that Shaikh Usman's warning only affected titles that ran contrary to Islamic beliefs and philosophy. It should be noted too that at this period, the pre-caliphate titles had also found their way into the caliphate system, most especially after the death of Shaikh Usman Danfodiyo. Titles like *Galadima*, *Ciroma*, *Hakimai*, *Sarki Yaki* and a host of others resurfaced²⁰ but now conferred on genuine Muslims. This might have informed the use of the title *Balogun* by the Emir and the reason for the caliphate authorities not to challenge the use of the title.

However, the adoption of the titles *Ajiroba*, *Iyalaje* and *Iya Adinni* could be explained from the point of view of the influence of the Yoruba on Ilorin. Since Ilorin is geographically a transitory zone, it borrows ideas from both the northern and the western parts of Nigeria. The Yoruba of western Nigeria instituted Islamic titles in the 19th century to aid the spread of Islam in Yorubaland.²¹ However, the titles are indigenized and some were coined from the traditional political structure. The titles so far conferred in Yorubaland include *Imam*, *Noibi*, *Onitafusiru*, *Baba Adinni*, *Balogun*, *Otun-Balogun*, *Osi-Balogun*, *Eketa*, *Ekerin-Balogun*, *Ajanasi*, *Seriki*, *Parakoyi*, *Sarumi*, *Asipa* and *Ladani*.²²

Other titles awarded by the league of Imams and Alfas in southern Nigeria include the *Baba Adinni* of Nigeria conferred on Alhaji Abdulwahab Folawiyo, *Aare Musulumi* given to Alhaji AbdulAzeez Arisekola Alao, *Baba adinni* of Yorubaland conferred on late Alhaji

Mashood Abiola. Others are *Iya Adinni* of Yorubaland, Alhaja Sekinat Adekola²³, and *Iya Adinni* of Nigeria, Alhaja Bolajoko Kadir.

At this juncture it is important to stress that although one cannot ascribe total perfection to the system of conferment of titles in Ilorin Emirate to a large extent, it is sanitized. Unlike in the South-west where Islamic titles are said to be conferred on people of lower integrity, for socio-political and economic reasons, the Ilorin Emirate authorities so far have conferred titles on people of proven integrity and outstanding contributions to Islam and humanity.²⁴

According to Adekunle, Islamic titles are conferred on Muslims to discourage them from taking unislamic titles inculcate in their minds Islamic orientation and awareness and to maximize the use of their influence and financial buoyancy in the cause of Islam.²⁵ The system has aided the spread of Islam in Yorubaland. The title holders have been contributing their quotas immensely in the religious, educational, social, political, economic advancement of the Muslims and Islam in their areas through the use of their political and financial powers.²⁶

Socio-Political Effects

The title holders have remained the centre point to which the Emirate authority and its people recourse in terms of need. They have been contributing individually and collectively to the advancement of the Emirate, socially, politically, economically and most importantly religiously. For instance, on religious programmes like sponsoring Islamic programmes on the radio and television and in the newspapers as well as mobilizing people for religious activities. Names like Dr. Olusola Saraki, The *Turaki* of Ilorin, Alhaji Adebayo Alaya, The *Dan-Madami* of Ilorin, Alhaji Ibrahim Oniye, The *Makama* of Ilorin and Alhaja Salimota Yahaya Ori-Okoh, the *Iya Adinni* of Ilorin are prominent.²⁷

Educationally, it is on record that Dr. Olusola Saraki, the *Turaki* of Ilorin was the largest donor in the establishment and running of Ilorin Grammar School and Ilorin Comprehensive High School Ilorin all belonging to the Ilorin community. Alhaji A.G.F. Abdulrazaq, the *Mutawali* of Ilorin saved Ilorin from the problems of admissions into secondary school in 1967 by establishing Community College, Ilorin (ICI) now called Government High School, Ilorin, beside his donations to the establishment of Ilorin Grammar School.²⁸ This school, not only provided opportunity for secondary education to Ilorin indigenes and other Muslims but also provided employment opportunity to a number of qualified indigenes both at the academic and non-academic cadres. Alhaji Saadu Ayinla Alanamu, the second *Wazir* of Ilorin and the ninth *Balogun Alanamu* of Ilorin, was said to have laid water pipes from a distance of about two kilometres to the Ilorin Grammar School

compound while Dr. Amuda Aluko placed his hospital – Gari Alimi Hospital, at the service of the school community free of charge.²⁹

Alhaji Sanni Okin, the first *Turaki* of Ilorin, was extolled for his role in the establishment and administration of the first community primary school in Ilorin. United Primary School, Ilorin in 1944; and he extended government scholarship to Ilorin indigenes to pursue western education. In the same vein, the *Wali* of Ilorin, Alhaji Mamud Akanbi Oniyangi, is also believed to have granted scholarship to Ilorin indigenes for the pursuit of western education.³⁰

On the advancement of the cause of Ilorin, it is noted that the *Mutawali* of Ilorin, Alhaji A.G.F.Abdulrazaq, in 1957, single-handedly, and successfully too, prevented Ilorin Emirates merge with the western region at the Willink Commission.³¹ He is, since then, being called defender-of-no-merger. In 1974, lawyers Mustapha Akanbi, Mahmud Akanbi Oniyangi, and Ibrahim Gambari (present Emir) successfully defended the community's interest against illegal acquisition of some sections of the Emirate land by the State Government at the Soladoye Commission of 1974.³² Furthermore, in 1988, the *Samaki* of Ilorin – Lawyer Safi Jimba, successfully defended Ilorin Local Government Area edict that prohibits the manufacturing and sales of liquor within the indigenous areas of Ilorin, which was challenged at the law court by the Kwara State Beer Dealers.

On welfarism, Dr. Olushola Saraki, the *Turaki* of Ilorin reigns prominently, not only in Ilorin but all over Kwara State. He spends lavishly to assist the masses and embarks on community development projects, like sinking of boreholes, water tanks, laying of water pipes etc. He also contributed financially into the construction of Pakata road in Ilorin and a number of mosques within and outside the Emirate. He sends some Muslims (from among the masses) to Mecca for the holy pilgrimage annually.³⁴ All these, some people believe, are done for political relevance as he gives money to the Christians too. Of note also is the worthy efforts of the *Iyalaje* of Ilorin, Alhaja Abebi Akosile, at making food available and affordable to the masses. The *Iyalaje* is the architect of food revolving scheme in Ilorin. In order to check the unprecedented hike in food prices in Ilorin, and Kwara State as a whole, in the 90s, she, in conjunction with some private businessmen and organizations and the State Women Commission, bought food items (in commercial quantity) and sold them to the masses at an open market at a reduced price.³⁵

Furthermore, many of the title holders have used their multifarious influences to assist the unemployed graduates of Ilorin to secure employment at all levels of government and at private firms. Some have also provided employment to indigenes in their private businesses. Dr. Amuda Aluko *Tafidan* Ilorin, established his Garin-Alimi hospital, Ilorin, where about

seventy percent of the work-force is from Ilorin. A number of Ilorin indigenes also work at the various branches of the Societe Generale Bank of Nigeria, established by Dr. Abubakar Olushola Saraki, the *Turaki* of Ilorin before it went distressed.

On the part of the title holders, the titles conferred on them socio-political and economic relevance, not only within the Emirate but also in Nigeria and beyond. In fact, people respect them wherever they go and see them as ambassadors of their community. The positions give them the opportunity to be known and heard in the society. They enhance their personal, social, political and religious status and those of their families.

People associate with them, extend to and seek marriage relationship with them and their families, in order that their social status too would be enhanced. Little wonders then that the turbanding ceremonies are usually characterized with fun fair, pomp and pageantry.

It is important to note, and in fact stress that the Emir remains the rallying point for all the title holders. There seems to exist a wide gap among the title holders. There is no visible collective development project, rather each one on his/her own project. The causes of these are beyond the scope of this work. This situation, no doubt, has its implications on the prosperity of the Emirate.

Conclusion

The conferment of titles in Ilorin Emirate is as old as the Emirate itself. It started as a means to consolidate religio-political and socio-economic gains of the then nascent Emirate. It grew gradually and steadily, through the ages, to become a powerful tool to reward selfless communal efforts. The titles ranged from religio-political, to socio-economic ones. The first two are hereditary while the latter is not.

The holders of these titles commit themselves to the upliftment of the Emirate by contributing their quotas within the limits of their powers. Today their visible contributions have boosted the socio-political standards of Ilorin Emirate.

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sponsored by Dr. Olushola Saraki for 2003 Hajj.

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