

British Rule and Muslim Education in Ago-Iwoye: The Historical Metaphors in Twentieth Century Pedagogy

A.O. HASHIMI

Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State

Abstract. Colonialism has attracted a lot of academic interest all over the World, this accounts for many studies carried out in various disciplines on colonial temper in African history. The themes of the studies focus more on the socio-political, religious-economic, educational and cultural implication of post colonialism and effects on the people. British rulers occupied Ijebu towns in Yorubaland in Nigeria, through the superiority and supremacy of military prowess at Magbon war of 1892, where thousands of Ijebu fell. This exterminative war against the Ijebu, installed British rulers over the people. This paper examines the British rule and Muslim education in Ago-Iwoye. The study employs analytical research method. Colonial education was largely dominated by the missionaries and when the Wesley primary school was established in the town in 1893, it was exclusive preserve of mission boards and consequently, conversion of Muslim children to Christianity took place. In responses to the colonial exploits, Muslims employed strategies which included avoidance, withdrawal submission, confrontation and alliance. The findings of this study x-ray the effects of the British rule disillusionments on the growth of Islam and education of Muslim children. The colonial character and actions portrayed a mighty and power at war with Islam. The study establishes a constitutive relationship between the British rulers and Christian evangelists in the town.

Keywords: Ago-Iwoye, British rule, Muslim education, Colonialism, Evangelism

1. Introduction

Ago Iwoye is one of the ancient towns in Yorubaland. It was founded in 1425 by Imososi people as the first settlers, while other people settled

at Orile Iwoye. It had a substantial population made up of seventy three homesteads, they lived fairly amicably among themselves.(Adesegun, 1981: 3) But the fratricidal war which lasted over 70 years in Yorubaland was a progenitor and an accelerator of change. Therefore the confusion and commotion brought into the politics and society of Yorubaland in the nineteenth century led to the destruction and desertion of many places. According to Atanda (1985:92), the desire of the Egba to create elbow room for themselves in their new place of abode at Abeokuta made them clashed with the Ijebu. The immediate cause of their movement from Orile Iwoye to the present place (Ago-Iwoye) was the ruinous fratricidal Gbedeke war of 1831, that debilitated and ruined the people at their homesteads, Orile Iwoye, when Egbas attacked the people at Orile Iwoye, the condition made the people panic-stricken, they later moved to the land of Imososi, under the generalissimo Balogun Meleki and launched a defensive war against the Egbas and drove them back (Adebajo, 2000: 492).

1.1 Location and Site of Ago-Iwoye

Ago-Iwoye lies at a distance of about 700km from the equator within the equatorial belt of Nigeria at longitude 30° 55' east of the Greenwich Meridian and at latitude 60° 56' north of the equator. (Oyesiku, 2000: 465) Ago-Iwoye, is located in the Ijebu North Local government in Ogun State. It lies in the North West of Ijebu Ode; it has a common boundary with Ijebu-Igbo at Opebi, with Oyo State at Mamu, with Remo at Odoye and Egba at Isan and Ogunmakin via Aba Jeje in Ago-Iwoye respectively.

1.2 Islam and Pre-British Rule.

The varied contact by the people of Ago-Iwoye with outsiders through the activities of soldiers in wars, settlers and above all the immigrants facilitated the introduction of Islam into the town. The date of entry of Islam into Ago-Iwoye cannot be established with any degree of certainty because, it came unannounced. However, from the meagre information available, the most informed and reliable sources seem to indicate that Islam first arrived in the area now known as Ago-Iwoye about one hundred and forty years ago, brought initially by the itinerant traders and Muslim slaves brought to the town at the different time, who belonged to different families. Initially, the first Muslims had to worship in privacy and in secrecy, but it was certain that by the middle of 19th century, there were Muslims among the people of Ago-Iwoye, and towards the close of that century, the position of Islam had already changed, there were sprinklings of Muslims in the town, and it had penetrated in almost into all quarters in Ago-Iwoye. Evidence shows that by 1870s, there was a considerable number of Muslims at Imososi and Odosinusi, quarters. Difase and Eredo Villages had some Muslim communities whose colourful celebration of Muslim festivals was held by the people. (Imere, 1985:2) By and large, Muslim communities existed in some villages in Ago-Iwoye. For example, there was a section of a Muslim community called Kogbojebu at Eredo village, a village with a considerable size mostly occupied by the Hausa, Fulani, Tapa, and Yoruba. Hence the early Muslims in the town composed of people of Ago-Iwoye and non indigenes. The communities organized themselves generally under their Imam. In some of these areas, particularly Odosinusi some active roles seem to have been played by Alfa Uthman Akeugberu who organized the early Muslim community for some times. By the time of its entry, the setting up of Qur'anic class was a feature of the practice of Islam in Ago-Iwoye. The driving force behind this idea was Alfa 'Uthman Akeugberu who brazed the trail of the Arabic and Qur'anic school in Ago-Iwoye (Kareem, 1984)

The tail end of the 19th Century witnessed an intensive number of the Muslims and Islamic evangelization and reform preachers. The main duty of the 'Ulamaa among the people was teaching the Muslim children how to read the holy Qur'an and leading the Muslim community in congregational prayers. Two of these active scholars were notable, the first was Alfa Ibrahim domiciled at Imosu and the second was Alfa 'Uthman Akeugberu who resided at Odosinusi. Alfa Akeugberu had travelled to many Islamised areas particularly Ilorin, Ibadan, Ile-Ife and Ijebu-Ode. He sojourned with Alfa Alli Akayinode I

of Igboguna at Ijebu -ode. He departed Akayinode at the wave of religious crisis which forced Akayinode to embark on self imposed exile to Sagamu in 1879. (Gbadamasi, 1978:96) Consequently, Akeugberu returned to Ago-Iwoye, settled down at Odosinusi for teaching and preaching in 1879. Akeugberu set up his Qur'ani school, according to Kareem (1984:11) his *madrasah* was the first traditional Arabic school in Ago-Iwoye. Hence, in the course of time, Odosinusi became the rendezvous for the Muslims and Quranic students. Among his students who studied at his feet were Alfa Abdullahi Akeusola and Yusuf Saluwaki from Isamuro. Others were Muhammad Qaseem Okekoto, Alfa shittu Okekoto, Tairu Sonaiwo, Alfa Sadiq Ajeseferi, Alfa Bakare Lalu, Alfa zubairu Alawiye, Alfa Zubairu Oworu, Alfa zubairu Oniwolimo, and Alfa Ashiru Akeugberu, the biological son of Alfa 'Uthman Akeugberu who was the first male Muslim child born into Islam and received Islamic name in the eighth day in Ago-Iwoye around 1881C.E

2. Early Persecution of Muslims

Islam as a religion in Ago-Iwoye like any other places, such as Oyo, Ijebu-ode, Igboho faced series of hardship. The early Muslims in Ago-Iwoye were confronted by the traditionalists. The intensive Islamic activities, growth and progress of Islam at the early stage led to the clash of values between the nascent Muslim community and died-hearted pagans. The public call to prayer and the erection of boot in the place of worship gave a serious concern to the traditionalists, (ATR) and this openly exposed the early Muslims to religious trouble in the town. The clash of values was well dramatised in person of Alfa 'Uthman Akeugberu, the historical personage who laid the foundation of Islam in Ago-Iwoye. Alfa Akeugberu and members of his community were threatened with death penalties by the Osugbo who was an organ of control at that period of history. Picturing the horrible situation of the time, a historian and the educationist put forward the illustration which merits presentation, it is as follows.

Fajobi was a firm friend of Akeugberu who was versed in Qur'anic recitation, Fajobi used to pray with Akeugberu, he wished him to build a boot and helped by Fajobi when completed Fajobi encouraged him to call prayer after which he worshipped while Fajobi was sitting near him. Elders felt insulted and Akeugberu was called to question before Baba Odude where they decided that he should be offered in sacrifice to Ifa and he was tied to a tree at Igbody. Fajobi went secretly to untie Akeugberu and took him to his mother's brother in Igan for safety in Old

market place from where he was escorted to Erodo (Ademosu, 1989:1).

It was on this development, that the early Muslim community in the town was scattered and the community was broken. The majority of the early ardent Muslims fled the town. The fleeing Muslims settled at new places outside the urban called Difase and Eredo villages respectively. But towards the last decade of the 19th century a new Muslim community emerged at Imere and the tiny number of Muslims at home joined the new Muslim community in communal prayers and religious activities. (Iwe Itan Imere, n.d) The existence of Islam at Imere and its consolidation was remarkable and necessary to observe with a touch of merry explanation of how members of the Onihale family got converted to Islam in Ago- Iwoye. The conversion of the members of the family was remarkably evident, where the essence of Islam seems to have been personified in Abosede, when the prayer organized by the Muslims for his recovery from sickness was realised, he converted to Islam, and he was joined by score of others from his family who were also converted. The list includes Alfa Bakare Onihale, Alfa Alli Gbadesire, Alfa Bello, Qasim Elesin. The Muslim community really enjoyed the patronage of the family.

3. Challenges of Western Education

The period of Progress and expansion of Islam in Ago- iwoye in 20th century was accompanied by the rise and growth of Christianity and radiation of European civilization, when an attempt had been made by Christian missionaries to introduce it before 1892. The military expedition against Ijebu was a most rewarding masterstroke for the Ijebu, bloody and spectacular that inoculated with a terror that sent shivers down their spines of the Ijebu. (Alayande, 1992:34). However subsequent to the Magbo war (Anglo – ijebu war) of 1892 and occupation of Ijebuland by British soldiers, (Otoide, 2005:533), Christian missionary work started with fresh and greater confidence. Spasmodic evangelical work began in Ago- Iwoye under the protection of the British soldiers. (Alayande,1992:34) Mission stations were erected with the aid of British soldiers called by them Oke-Oyinbo at old Muslim Praying ground. The incursion of the British rule and Christian missionaries posed a great challenge to Muslims, with a dose of arrogance. For the first time the monopoly of Arabic literacy was challenged and the introduction of Western education lured many Muslim children away from Arabic schools. The British agents were in a clandestine alliance with the

missionaries. Methodist Church and C.M.S were the oldest Christian missionary agencies in the town. In the urgent task of intensifying missionary work, reliance was placed on Education. The glorious opportunity was indeed fully utilised when Wesley school was established in 1893. Consequently, Mr. Joseph Bailey was sent to Ago-Iwoye in 1894. (Ajibola, 1966) Christian leaders were worried about expansion of Islam, and When Rev. B.W. George was sent to Ago- Iwoye, he was amazed when he saw the population of the Muslims in the town. Preaching, teaching and discussion were no doubt the chief elements of Christian propaganda, the most potent instrument laid in the school. The school had an enviable magnet that attracted people to the Christian way of life and outlook. Western education was designed by that time to lure Muslim children from Islam. Conversion and Baptism were forced on Muslim children. Muslim parents realised a great danger lurked in the exposure of their children to Christian doctrine as a result of their association with schools, where many Muslim children were converted to Christianity. They were made to adopt Christian names; people such as S.A Oshiyemi., D.O Sipe, S.A Oshitoye, A.B Olufeisan were converted to Christianity. Sunday schools and other church activities were planned by the school. The Muslim children who attended Christian schools affirmed that absence from such religious activities was hardly tolerated. Muslim children faced with this bewildering conflict and confusion, they tended to choose the way of least resistance and taking to Christianity whose neglect threatened them with severe penalty. The Missionaries were using education a tool of conversion, more so, their presence at Ago-Iwoye posed serious challenge to Muslims, especially when they started looking into the holy Qur'an and *Hadith* for information on Christians with the distorted meanings and twisted information to sway away the Muslim children. The introduction of western education posed great challenge to Muslims, these challenges were nebulous, these included the competition for literacy, introduction of western civilization and European culture, wide spread literacy of art of reading and writing, gaining access to governmental position, economic resources and social prestige. It is a common belief that British rule posed a threat to Islam, its norms, practice and world view. Thus the introduction of western education challenged the monopoly of Arabic scholars over literacy. Indeed the Muslims whom the '*Ulamaa* were teachers and guides in Islamic affairs, now fell under a new teachers and a new system of literacy.

4. Muslim Reaction

There were varied opinions on the British rule in the town, while some Muslims believed that the British worked in the interest of the Muslims as people and Islam as religion, others opined that, British attitude and activities showed a relation that oscillated between alliance and hostility. There was gradual modification of Islamic programmes, Qur'anic schools, slave manumission and self-redemption, and surveillance of some perceived anti-colonial people. In response to British might and exploits, Muslims employed strategies which included withdrawal, avoidance, submission and confrontation and alliance. These actions were determined by the periodical situations. In the pre-independence era western education was largely dominated by the Christian missions in the town, indeed for the sixty – eight years of colonial rule, it was exclusive preserve of Christian Missionaries. Many colonial schools insisted on conversion to Christianity as a prerequisite for getting admission or gainful employments. The establishment of schools was considered by many colonial missionaries to be one of the most effective ways of preventing the spread of Islam or its advancement and they used it as a tactic for stopping their rival religious advancement. Western education was employed as a tool by Missionaries as means of proselytization. Muslims reacted against western education; the reaction was one of the withdrawals of their children from schools. Muslims faced these challenges till 1930, when they established Muslim schools. Moreso, there was legal protection afford to non Christians against the religious indoctrination, under the operation of education ordinance ‘‘ No child in a government school could receive religious instruction to which the parent or guardian objected or could be forced to be present when such instruction was given at such school’’. (Fafunwa, 1982)

The beginning of the first quarter of the nineteenth century in Ago-Iwoye witnessed a monumental step and solution to some problems. Muslims established schools of their own where Arabic and Islamic studies were taught, and other Islamic programmes were introduced. However the previous situation brought advantages to the Muslims, the Muslims later studied the holy Qur'an deeper and complemented their knowledge by studying the Bible and other Christian literature. This led to the birth of a new cream of Muslim scholars with cynosure *Akeu-kewe*. This group of people became torch bearers of the new civilization to Muslims. They were pioneer (Founders) of various Muslim organizations and educational instructors in Muslim schools. Top on the

list is Alhaji Olohunmbe Bello, Alhaji Hussain Arikeuyo, Alhaji Mas'ud Owolowo, Alhaji the most Qadr, Alhaji Idris Aboka owo, Alhaji Lawal, Alhaji Ike Arikeuyo, Alhaji Akeukanwo, Alhaji Oba Adewale Abdul Lateef, Alhaja Olori Lateefat Adewale, Alhaji Tirimisiyu Akeusola Okekoto, Alhaji Zakariyau Shuaib, Alhaji Fazazi Oladunjoye, Alhaji Uztas Ibrahim Owodunni, Uztas Tola Abdul Kareem, Dr. Bayo Yusuf and scores of others. This group of Muslims were pioneers and founders of various Muslim organizations and educational instructions in the Muslim schools. The organizations such as *Ja'mat Ma'rufudeen*, *Nawairu 'l-deen*, and *Ahmadiyyah* mission were the Islamic organizations mainly concerned with education of Muslim children and checkmated the influence of western influence and modernity on the Muslims , so these educated Muslims were the new leaders of the Muslim community. They had access to some English literature in Islam and better informed about Islamic tenets and championed the cause of Islam in the town.

The establishment of schools by Muslims from 1930s marked the early inception of the emancipation of Muslim school children from forceful conversion to Christianity in the town. The early established Muslim schools in Ago-Iwoye, such as Ako Moslem school in 1930, Imere Moslem school in 1947, Nawair-ud-deen primary school in 1950s, Moslem modern school in 1960, Muslim High school in 1977, and *Ahmadiyyah* High school in 1980 and the Ansar-ud-Deen primary school 1984, mainly due to the efforts of the early Muslim educated elite.

It is worthy of note that Western education brought some advantages to Muslims, yet the school organization later adversely affects Qur'anic education which is the basis of Islam. Some Muslim parents became fascinated by the material gains of western education and looked with contempt at Islamic education received in the Qur'anic schools. The system of operation in the western oriented schools make many Quranic schools to open only in the evenings and on the weekends, Muslims children go to western schools in the morning during the weekends more so, the language of instruction is English language or Yoruba, even in the Muslim established schools, it is no longer Arabic as expected and operated in Qur'anic schools. Another disadvantage that western education brought to Muslims disregard to Islamic teachings on dress code and intermingling of members of opposite sex. Though, issues of indoctrination and conversion reduced but have not been fully eliminated. However, one important consequence for Muslim children is

that there is no longer any possibility of their being excluded from any school on the ground of their religion.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The academic interest of the Muslims in the effects of colonialism on Islam in Ago-Iwoye is vast and inexhaustible. The paper argues that colonial masters obtained their recognition of sovereignty by punitive expeditions and ruthless engagements against the Ijebu who were considered recalcitrant. In real sense of it, the paper also noted that colonial masters were Christians; hence they protected and supported Christian programmes throughout the period of British rule in the town. The episode of the time demonstrated a great test of time for the Muslims in Ago-Iwoye. The enormity of challenges faced by the Muslims was so great but the Muslims stood rightly and faced the challenges of colonial rule that confronting them with endurance and temerity. It is also noted in the paper that, Muslim education under British rule in Ago-Iwoye was stifled but survived along the troubles; despite the hip-hop situation, Muslim community mustered courage and faced the various challenges of the time under study. A good summary account of relation between Muslims and colonial rulers in all aspects of the period oscillated between alliance and hostility, thus Islam survives along the colonial history in the town. However, despite the fact that colonial rule has its shortcomings, it brought some advantages; the organization of schools, introduction of curricula, periodization of teaching subjects, time table, uniform, issuance of certificates etc. are advantageous to Muslims. In above all Colonial education system brought improvement to Qur'anic education in the town.

In conclusion, the colonial legacies are replete as they are found almost all over the Muslim places in the contemporary Nigeria.

References

- Adebajo S. (2000) *Ogun State: Local and Regional Perspectives*. In Onakomaiya, S.O, Odugbemi, O.O, Oyesiku, O.O Ademiluyi, I.A (eds) Royal Link Printing Press, Ijebu-Ode, 2000
- Ademosu J.O (1989) *Foundation of Ijebu Ago-Iwoye* (Ago Iwoye: Oluseyi Printing Press)
- Adesegun S.O. (1981) *An Outline History of Ago-Iwoye* . Joye meji press, Ago-Iwoye.
- Ajibola J.O (1966), *A brief History of Ago- Iwoye*. Ago Iwoye:
- Alayande E.A (1992) *The Ijebu Of Yorubaland 1850-1950 Politics, Economy and Society* Heinemann Educational Books, Ibadan.
- Atanda J.F. (1985) ‘Collision and Coalition in the Politics and society of Western Nigeria in the nineteenth century’ In J.F Ade-Ajayi and Bashir Ikara (Eds) ‘*Evolution of Political Culture in Nigeria*, . Kaduna: University Press Limited and Kaduna State Council For Arts and Culture.
- Atanda J.F. (2017) ‘How the Yoruba came under Colonial Rule’ *The Collected Works of J.A Atanda* Ed. Toyin Falola. Texas: Pan-African University Press, U.S.A .
- Fafunwa (1982) *History of Education in Nigeria*, London:
- Gbadamasi T.G.O , (1978) *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908* London: Longman Group Limited
- M.T Kareem (1984) *The Growth and Development of Arabic studies in Ijebu- Ode and Ago-Iwoye*. B.A Final Year Project submitted to the Department of Religions, University of Ilorin
- Muslim Community Imere. (N.D) *Itan bi Islam se wo ilu Ago-Iwoye* (in Manuscript)
- Muslim Community Odosinusi (1984) *Itan bi Islam se wo ilu wa Ago-Iwoye*.
- Oyesiku O.O (2000) *Ogun State: Local and Regional Perspectives*. Onakomaiya, S.O, Odugbemi, O.O, Oyesiku, O. O Ademiluyi, I. A (eds) Ijebu-Ode: Royal Link Printing Press
- Otoide L .O.(2005) ‘Prelude to the British ‘Punitive Expedition’ to Benin : An Analysis Of the Gallwey Treaty’ In Akinwunmi Ogundiran (Ed.) *Pre-Colonial Nigeria. Essays in Honour of Toyin Falola*. Eritrea: Africa World Press