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Transmission of Learning in Modern Ilorin: A History of Islamic Education 1897-2012

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Citation

Aliyu, S. A. (2015, October 6). *Transmission of Learning in Modern Ilorin: A History of Islamic Education 1897-2012*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/35802>

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Title: Transmission of learning in modern Ilorin : a history of islamic education 1897-2012

Issue Date: 2015-10-06

Chapter Seven

Summary and Conclusion

Islamic education has always been an adjunct to the religion of Islam. The sacred and immutable nature of Qur'an as the constitution of the religion presupposes some learning will be taking place wherever the religion of Islam has taken a foothold. The rituals of the religion can only be conducted in Arabic language, in which the Qur'an was revealed. Hence from early in the history of Islam, education has been given priority by Muslims.

The original and cardinal purpose of Islamic education was to explicate on the divine revelation. It became necessary to understand Arabic language (even if only of a rudimentary nature) because the revelation was done in Arabic. Arabic became the lingua franca of the religion. The practice of the religion is not possible without the most rudimentary understanding of Arabic and one could not be a successful cleric, teacher of religion or government official (where Islam is a state religion) unless he is familiar with the language.¹ At the heart of the Islamic concept of education is the aim of producing good Muslims with an understanding of Islamic rules of behavior and a strong knowledge of and commitment to faith.²

The Islamic heritage and identity of Ilorin had an early root in the history of the city. This foundation began at Okesuna where the Muslims of diverse ethnic origins established an exclusive Muslim settlement. The coming of Alimi to Ilorin between late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, first en route to Old Oyo capital and later on the invitation of Afonja would spark a new dynamic in the history of the various settlements that eventually coalesced to form Ilorin.

Intrigues of power at old Oyo set Afonja against the sovereign to which Ilorin was a vassal. He sought the assistance of Alimi which gave Afonja victory against a punitive expedition from the capital. This helped the consolidation of the Muslim population in Ilorin; a community began to be built around the charisma of Alimi. Afonja had him bring his children to join him in Ilorin. After his death, his children, Abdulsalami and Shitta, in further intrigues of power, first between the Muslim community around their father and Afonja and later between the followers of Alimi and Solagberu the leader of Okesuna, emerged victorious over the rivals and established the emirate of Ilorin, no doubt influenced by the Fulani jihadist takeover of the Hausa kingdoms further north.³

With the legitimacy of their leadership anchored in the religion they pursued vigorous campaign of making the city an Islamic one.⁴ Scholars were encouraged to settle, teach and promote the religion of Islam in Ilorin. The city, its rulers, elites, scholars and ordinary citizens

¹ Dodge, *Muslim Education*, 31.

² Syed, *Aims and Objectives*.

³ See Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*; Jimba, *Iwe Itan*; Ikokoro, 'Taalif Akbar'; and Jimoh, *Ilorin the Journey*.

⁴ Reichmuth, *A Sacred Community*, 35-54; Na-Allah, *Africanity, Islamicity*.

thus have their legitimacy rooted in Islam. The whole of the nineteenth century was spent building and consolidating this Islamic identity of Ilorin. Ilorin became the citadel of Muslims among the Yoruba speaking people of southwestern Nigeria.

At the height of Ilorin's military power and the flowering of her intellectual endeavors towards the end of the nineteenth century, she encountered the colonial order.⁵ This changed the course of Ilorin's history, politically and economically, as well as in the social and intellectual life of the people, ruler and the ruled alike. The focus of this thesis begins around this period, examining the institution of Islamic education that is continuously recreating the Islamic identity of the people. From the period of colonial encounter, the history of the institution has remained one of continuous interaction with the western *weltanschauung*, most clearly represented in western education, introduced since the colonial era.

In chapter two, the encounter of the Muslim society of Ilorin with colonialism and the introduction of western education and implication for the Islamic system of education is explored. Needing personnel who would serve the colonial bureaucracy, the colonial authority introduced a secular western education. This met with some resistance by the people who considered the western education system an extension of the colonial order and Christianity, the religion of the colonizers. The new educational system posed a number of challenges to the Muslim scholars, who were now getting relegated to the background, their system having little relevance to the new political order. They in return resisted the new system and guided the people against embracing a system not rooted in their religion.⁶

The inequality of power between the two systems has been playing out from the early colonial period of stout resistance, then acquiescence and modernization into the twenty-first century. The problematic of Islamic education system in the period covered by this research is rooted in its lack of economic power that could harness the potentials of the system. It lacks state support; this had some root in the colonial period and once set in this groove, it has been largely intractable. But that alone does not fully explain the problem.

The social relevance of the scholars was also challenged by the new system as their influence over the emirs dwindled in favor of the new order, seen as an anathema in a Muslim polity. By subjugating the political and military authorities of the city, every other group under these two were implicated by the consequences of the conquest. As a group supportive of the political agenda of the emir and the military affairs of the aristocrats in the pre-colonial era, the subjugation of these two created a problem of loyalty for many of the clerics. The surrender of the emir and his warlords to the British was seen by many of the scholars as a betrayal of their trust and responsibility as protectors and guarantors of the Islamic identity of the town.⁷

⁵ NAK Iloprof 3575/1917 'Early Exploration and Administration and Military Expedition'.

⁶ Rhodes House, 'Dwyer's Report 958, Extracts from January 1904.'

⁷ Rhodes House, 'Dwyer's Report 958, Extracts from January 1904'.

The legitimizing role of the scholars was partly circumscribed under the indirect rule system since the emir, now greatly empowered by the colonial authority, had the colonial authority as the most important source of his power. The power of the military aristocrats and the scholars to check on the powers of the emirs was greatly reduced. This reduced power of the scholars and the military aristocrats led to a number of incidents in the colonial period between the emir and the aristocrats backed by the scholars such as the 1913 tax riots, used as an opportunity to protest their loss of relevance.⁸

While the new political order had no direct bearing on the transmission of learning, indirectly it had great implications for the scholars. The patronage of the emir and the aristocrats was affected since the source of that patronage had been reconfigured under the guidance of the colonial order. More importantly, the introduction of western education proved the most important challenge to Islamic education as a rival and more powerful educational system, since it had the formal backing of the government and fed into the system. The disparity in the power of the two systems of education would remain the challenge the Islamic education system would continue to respond to, adapt to and innovate around well into the twenty-first century.

The colonial authority on its part, realizing the importance of this institution in the life of the people, appropriated parts of the system into the western system it had introduced. The people, led by the scholars resisted the new system as part of the resistance to colonialism. For instance, to be educated in the early colonial period is to inevitably end up as a worker for the colonial authority. Western education and colonialism were seen by the people as two sides of the same coin. The colonial officials, seeing no value in the rote aspect of Islamic learning, promoted the learning of Arabic, which also served its judicial arm (the shariah courts) of the indirect rule system. This formed the foundation of higher Islamic education in the western system of education.⁹

In chapter three, the responses of the scholars of Ilorin to the trends of the colonial era are examined. In the failure of military resistance, Muslims continued their resistance in the intellectual field. But the Muslims not only resisted colonialism and its adjunct, western education; the scholars of Islam in Ilorin and the Yoruba region where Ilorin scholars were the leading scholars also adapted and appropriated aspects of the colonial legacy into their own system as a means of not only protecting their vocation, threatened by the new regime, they also used these means to promote Muslim learning. This led to reforms in Muslim educational system in Ilorin. The encounter of the Muslim educational system with the colonial education system led to a divergence of responses.

⁸ Hermon-Hodge, *Gazetteers*, 79.

⁹ NAK 'Annual Report Education Department Ilorin Province', Iloprof file No. 3/1 0433/1928; NAK 'Proposed Classes of Koranic Teachers', Iloprof file No. 2276; NAK 'Mohammedan Native Schools', Iloprof file No. 3177.SCH 75.

The emergence and development of the three main schools of Islamic education pedagogy in Ilorin was examined. The first to emerge was the tolerant/integrationist Adabiyya School led by Sheikh Kamalud-deen Al-Adaby, a student of Sheikh Tajul Adab, an important precursor of the reformist scholars of the twentieth century. Appropriating aspects of the western system into the Islamic education system, such as the use of benches and table, classes for different categories of students and uniform dress for the students: it met with stiff resistance but it held out and eventually became a leading school of Islamic pedagogy in Ilorin.¹⁰

Following on the heels of the Adabiyya was the Zumratul Mu'meenina (*makondoro*) school of pedagogy, indirectly rooted in the teachings of Tajul Adab as well; a non-conformist school of pedagogy. Unlike the Adabiyya, it did not tolerate western education, which it called a Judeo-Christian education aimed at misleading Muslims. Distinguished by their Spartan living and teaching methods; wearing of big gowns and turbans and the keeping of beard for the men and keeping their women in purdah, over the years, however, their resistance thawed from an uncompromising resistance to western education and ideas to a more critical engagement. This showed in their belief that a Muslim should be steeped in Islamic knowledge if at all he or she must engage with western education.¹¹

The third stream of response, the Markazi stream, starting out in Abeokuta at the approach of independence, is rooted in the remarkable work of Sheikh Adam Abdullahi al-Iluri. His strand of reform favors reform of Arabic and Islamic education, however not in co-habitation with western education as the Adabiyyah School had done. Not averse to western education, however, he felt western education has been privileged and empowered over and above Islamic education by the colonial enterprise to the detriment of Islamic education. His response was to privilege Arabic education in a single stream while his students were encouraged to seek western education outside of the Markazi School, before and after coming into his school. This system birthed in Ilorin after independence at the prompting of the ninth emir, Muhammad Sulukarnaini Gambari.¹² All future developments in Islamic education would tilt in the direction of one or more of these foundational streams.

Chapter four examines the developments in Islamic education in the post-independence period. By the time Nigeria got her independence in 1960, resistance to western education had greatly yielded and new reformist scholars emerged. Building on the works of the early reformers, these scholars also contributed to the development of Islamic education. Independence and experience gave the scholars reasons to develop Islamic education system along the lines of the earlier reformers. By the 1970s more *madaris* had emerged and they benefitted from the mass

¹⁰ Discussion with Alhaji Saadu Kuranga. 3-9-12 and Discussions with Alfa Ibrahim Alfa.5-6-2012; Aliagan, *Shaykh Muhammad Kamalud-deen*, 27; Discussions with Alfa Mumeen Ayara. 11-9-2012.

¹¹ Kankawi, 'Intajat I Arabiyyah,' 69-72; Discussions with Sheikh Abdulkareem Adaara, Agbaji, 22-7-2012.

¹² Al Iluri, *Al Islam fi Nijeriyya*, 154; Reichmuth, Sheikh Adam; Adebayo and Sirajudeen, 'An Appraisal of Sheikh Adam.'

education program of the government even as it also threatened their survival. Major problems confronting these *madaris* include little or no attention by the government, forcing most *madaris* to be running their schools independently. Individual ownership and lack of financial wherewithal to make their schools compete with the western schools has remained a major challenge to the *madaris* as well.

Mostly the children of the economically less privileged Muslims were to be found in these schools. This has positively served to bridge the less privileged citizens into the middle and elite class of the society through higher education. Connection to the Middle East for higher education is one of the means for this social mobility and has been a corrective to the inequality of the two systems. Study in the Middle East has not only produced scholars of religion but also provided opportunities for some to branch into non-religious fields such as medicine, engineering, journalism and law.¹³ However, this emancipatory experience is limited only to some. Most of the scholars remained within the local Islamic education system that is financially constrained to achieve its potentials.

The emancipatory reforms of the traditional system of Islamic education into the more formal *madaris* have been hampered by the structural inequalities between the two systems of education. Economic input and output of the western system far outweighs that of the Islamic education system. As such the enormous efforts put into restructuring the system by the Islamic scholars have been overshadowed by the inadequacies of necessary economic buttress which it lacked. Its potential to correct the inequalities of the two systems is thus restrained.

The lack of direct state support predates the advent of colonialism but the system fared better then because it had no rival system to contend with and its reproductions fits in with the social, economic and political contexts it was operating in. It depended on patronage of the ruling class, some of whom were also part of the ulama class. This informal support for the system, largely ideological, never translated into structures upon which a colonial system could latch onto. Rooted in religion, a clash of ideology also made attempts to bridge the dichotomy between the two systems difficult, with mutual suspicion, based on the bitter encounter of colonialism with the Muslim society of Ilorin, making for integration difficult. The unequal economic dividends of the two systems further deepened the unequal structures between the two. Graduates of the western system have disproportionate advantage in employment especially in the formal sector against graduates of the Islamic system.

Although attempts were made from the 1970s for the *madaris* to have an organization that will represent their interest with the government, the efforts only succeeded for a while before socio-economic challenges of the country contributed to help fizzle out this effort. As government dominance of the provision of education began to decline in favor of private ownership of schools, Muslims were further challenged with Christian dominance of private schools' ownership; who used these to promote Christian values.

¹³ Alhaji Mahmud Hanafi (geologist) 2-1-2014.Jimba, 'The Role of Azhar.'

First, western educated Muslims rose to this challenge by establishing Muslim-focused western schools and later some of the proprietors of the *madaris*, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, partly encouraged by the community, began to establish western nursery/primary schools within their *madaris*. As a result, the mostly tuition free Arabic/Islamic education lessons were shifted to the evenings while the fee paying western nursery/primary lessons took place in the morning. While some scholars berated the new trend as commercializing Islamic education, the owners of the bifurcate schools saw it in a positive light. It not only provided funds helping to sustain the mostly tuition free Arabic/Islamic education but also helped in entrenching Arabic/Islamic education through some of the students of the western section staying back to attend the Arabic Islamic/ education section.

In this chapter also, a survey carried out among the *madaris* has provided some understanding into the workings and organization of these schools, highlighting some of the challenges before the schools such as lack of uniform curriculum, poor interface with government and most importantly, inadequate funding.¹⁴ The chapter as well examined the emergence of a new type of Islamic schools, the Tahfiz (Qur'an memorization) schools. An outcome of the interconnectivity of the Muslim world resulting from globalization, these new type of Islamic schools resulted from the institutionalization of the National Qur'anic Recitation Competition initiated by the Centre for Islamic Studies of Usmanu Dan Fodiyo University, Sokoto, in 1986. These schools established mostly by alumni of the competition, young scholars in their thirties and forties; differ from the other *madaris* in focusing on the scientific recitation and memorization of the Qur'an.

Unlike the *madaris*, they are few and still emerging. Their students are also few, given that learning is largely orally based and is more suitable in a one-on-one setting rather than a large class that is the norm in the *madaris*. Funding and people's attitude to the new system also constitute a challenge but the young proprietors, virtually all of whom have had some western schooling, appears to be controlling this challenge by charging fees in ways Qur'anic and *madaris* type schools have not been able to do.

The presence of the female was also examined in this male dominated system of education. Although the female has equal right to education like the male, socio-cultural and subordinate roles of the female has meant females had limited education compared to their male counterparts. However, they have benefitted from the general improvement on Islamic education that the reforms of the system had enjoyed and have enjoyed greater participation in learning under the period examined. Western education as well contributed to this increased presence.

Chapter five focuses on the history of higher Islamic education, that level where the scholars of Islam are made. Referred to as *kewu ilimi* in the traditional system, it witnessed developments and improvement as well. The reforms of the Qur'anic schools into the *madaris* formed part of

¹⁴ See also Muhammad, 'A Study of Selected.'

the development of this level. The colonial authority as well contributed to the development of this level in the western system through the promotion of Arabic as well as Islamic legal learning.¹⁵ This was built on in the post-independence period in the western higher education system inherited from the colonial period. Connection to the Middle East, mentioned earlier, resulting from the developments in the *madaris* added another strand to this mode of learning.

Chapter six is concerned with the post-learning connection and relationship of the Islamic education institution with the larger society. Here, the roles and impacts of the products of the institution on the larger Muslim society of Ilorin were examined. As a pivotal institution to the Islamic heritage and identity of Ilorin, its influence radiates into the socio-economic and political spheres of the society. Through the different occupational tracks open to the ulama as the guardian of the institution, we see the influence of the institution in the lives of the people, the ruler and the ruled. More than teachers, the ulama are also opinion moulders, religious leaders, spiritual consultants and legal experts. Reforms had also produced scholars not limited to the traditional clerical circle but who are also part of the formal sector of the society.

The roles of the agency of the mass media and Muslim organizations in the dissemination of education to Muslims formed part of this exploration. These modern phenomena play important roles not only in the secondary production and dissemination of knowledge, but they also served as a means to put into the service of the community, the practical use of the knowledge acquired by the scholars, opportunities not available in the pre-modern period. The adaptive nature of Islamic knowledge system thus played out in these experiences. The role of women as propagators of the religion was also examined. Mostly working in the background, but increasingly having greater voice and presence in the public, women have been very influential in the propagation of religion, especially among their fellow womenfolk, as teachers and women leaders.

Perceptible notions running through this work include the significance of the institution of Islamic education in the life of the people of Ilorin. It is not only the regenerative agency of the quintessence identity and heritage of the people but also the history of the people is synonymous with the developments in this institution. As Ware demonstrated in his thesis, against colonial argument that the Islamic education system is rote and stagnant, based on western rational logic, the system develops the whole of the being of the Muslim and the absence of meaning or comprehension at the early and more popular stage of Quranic learning does not preclude an absence of value for the Muslims.¹⁶ It is essentially a seeding stage whose import would later be realized in the subsequent lived experience of the Muslim. As Ware argued, the secondary value of meaning in Quranic education is not peculiar to Africans to whom Arabic is a secondary and often incomprehensible language at that stage of learning, but also for the Arab native speakers, the agency of a human interlocutor is no less significant when it comes to comprehending the knowledge embodied through memorization and mimetic

¹⁵ Alexander, 'The Era of Overseas Scholarships.'

¹⁶ Ware, *The Walking Qur'an*, 2-4.

praxes.¹⁷ Aimed at piety and despite the large number of Muslims literate in Arabic language and improvement in pedagogic techniques, the system is still relevant and a core element of Islamic education for the majority who no such command of Arabic.

This work has also demonstrated the adaptive nature of Islamic education system and vanguards of this institution, from the colonial period through to the twenty-first century. The work has shown the scholars as not averse to new and modern trends even though there were always some resistances to these new phenomena. It has shown the scholars as responsive and not necessarily reactionary to novel ideas or events in the society. This is most noticeable in the response to western education, from the colonial period to the present. As Ware noted, until the late nineteenth century, the embodied paradigm of learning was universal throughout the Muslim world.¹⁸ The encounter of Muslims with western imperialism in their different locations ruptured this universal approach, leading to a divergence of approaches. In Ilorin, the emergence of three pedagogical schools of thought testified to this. Although events then and now has given the impression of scholars as averse to western education, this thesis has shown that the scholars in Ilorin were more positive in their response to the phenomenon of western education than they were reactionary. The responses to the colonial encounter have shaped the directions of Islamic education since then.

Though western education relegated their system to the background and has remained a competitor with their system, these scholars have responded in a number of positive ways such as adopting some methods of the western system. They went as far as promoting western education through self-learning, taking on some of its subjects and establishment of western schools. In more recent time, the adaptive nature of the scholar is seen in the development of bifocal and *Tahfiz* schools. This dynamic relationship with western education is paradoxical; while it poses a challenge and competes with Islamic education, within it have also emerged opportunities being used to reform, improve and sustain the Islamic education system.

Closely related to this is the enhanced public presence and voice of women. Reforms in the Islamic education system and western education and norms have led to more women having access to Islamic education, both the Quranic and higher forms of it as well as in the western education system. Through women organizations and lately through the electronic media, women voices and presence are being felt in areas hitherto the reserve of the men. These have not come without their challenges but the support of the men and the women's assertion of their supportive roles, not necessarily as equals of the men, have been instrumental in their new status not being seen as intrusive or challenging leading role of the men.

Among the argument of this thesis is the weak financial structure of the Islamic education system, best illustrated in the *madaris*, the closest example to the western system. This is somehow also paradoxical. If the Islamic education system holds such high value in the minds

¹⁷ Ware, *The Walking Qur'an*, 213.

¹⁸ Ware, *The Walking Qur'an*, 10.

of Muslims, how is it then that the system's financial structure is weak? Why would Muslims argue for and defend the system but have not shown commensurate financial commitment? The answer can be found in the ultimate aim of Islamic education, the invaluable positive hereafter. Historically, payment for knowledge in the modern sense of fee was not known among Muslims, not only in Ilorin but throughout the Muslim world. It cannot be really paid for but it can be appreciated through gifts, service and honour to the clerical class. The capitalist mode of production introduced since the colonial time has contributed to the disruption of this informal and communal mode of remuneration.

Society's attitude toward the remuneration of the Islamic system has remained largely unchanged from the pre-colonial mindset regarding the institution as a charitable institution even as the structures of the system and the economic system of the society have changed. This restricted mindset against a complex need helped to reinforce the structural inequality between the western and Islamic education systems. While the former has the state financial backing and the people's patronage, the same cannot be said of the latter even as important as it is to the life of the people. This paradox complicates the challenge before the Islamic education system.

Although some *madaris* charge fees, taking a cue from the western system, it is not reliable nor is it enforced, in the tradition of providing education for all who seek it with or without payment. Some have devised alternative means, especially those who have been able to connect to the charities from the Arab world. But this is also limited to a few well connected scholars. A new emerging alternative is the operation of bifocal schools, whereby the western system supports the Islamic. The fear that money or wealth would corrupt faith and knowledge if given a free rein remains a constant contention in the minds of scholars.

As Brenner pointed out in his work on Mali,¹⁹ there has been a shift in the episteme of Islamic education since the encounter with colonialism as exemplified by the emergence of the madrasah mode against what Ware referred to as the universal paradigm of embodied episteme that have been largely relegated into a 'traditional' mode.²⁰ Although there is some difference in Africans' experience of British and French colonialism, there has been an emergence of different structures of thought on how Islamic education is transmitted among West African Muslims irrespective of their colonial experience. As demonstrated in this work, it is an ongoing process.

As the years progressed, the esoteric and hierarchical nature of Islamic learning gets into the more rational disembodied mode to be found in the madrasah system and has virtually become the new normal. However, Muslims are at the forefront of this development and is seen by them more as Modernization less as westernization, even if the structures have been modeled after the western system and is seen as empowering Muslims and their religion unlike in the

¹⁹ Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*, 3-7.

²⁰ Ware III, *The Walking Qur'an*, 10.

colonial period when such was partly loathed as anti-Islam. Muslims in Ilorin have largely moved from a rejection of western education to a controlling accommodation and by the twenty-first century as government role in the provision of education to the masses recede following years of misgovernance and structural adjustment programs, leading to private sector dominance of the provision of education, private Islamic education providers have also keyed-in into this edupreneurship and it has empowered them enough to begin to reconnect to the political economic process and control of education, something they had a brief benefit of in the 1980s before the economic downturn in the country in the same period.

Ilorin's experience of the challenges of Islamic education has been unique, compared to the rest of the Muslim north, perhaps because of being geo-culturally positioned between the north and the southwest of Nigeria. Unlike in the Hausa/Fulani areas of the greater part of northern Nigeria, where poverty and the structural inequalities between the two systems has led to the development of a pervasive street begging by students (*almajirai* sing. *almajiri*) of Traditional Qur'anic Schools in most northern Nigerian cities; students of Qur'anic education system in Ilorin fared better. Ilorin scholars were also quicker to adapt to the western system of education than the rest of the Muslim north either through establishment of western schools as adjunct to their Islamic madrasah within the same premise; accommodation of some western subjects in their madrasah curriculum and encouragement of acquisition of western education outside of the madrasah system for the more wary of the scholars, not ready to risk the domination of their system by the western system.

Despite the bitter beginning of the encounter and unequal power relations between western education and Islamic education, both have interacted and influenced each other. Despite the challenge that western education poses to Islamic education as a better organized and funded system of education, constantly threatening to overshadow Islamic education: through the positive response of most of the ulama as well as participation of Muslims in western education, western education has remained an important agency of regeneration and development of Islamic education throughout the period of this study; through the ulama's appropriation and adaptation of aspects of the structures of the western system into the Islamic system, in part as a defense but also for the promotion of the Islamic education system.