PULLED`UP BY THEIR BOOT STRAPS: A HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF HOW MUSLIMSI N SOUTH-WEST NIGERIA FARED IN COLONIAL NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
Islam and Christianity, though not indigenous to Nigeria, are the two major religions in the country. Their paths crossed in the colonial period. The study examines what happened in South West Nigeria when the paths of the two religions crossed in the colonial period. The ambivalence of the British colonial officers, which made them promote Islam in the North and stifle it in the South-West, aroused the curiosity of the writer. Using historical and descriptive methods and relying on primary and secondary sources, it was found that if not for the measures taken by South-West Muslims, Islam could have been eclipsed by Christianity in the area. The paper concludes that Islam was deep-rooted in the South-west region. As a result, it produced dyed-in-the-wool Muslim faithfuls, which is why they did not lose focus despite all that the Christian missionaries and British colonial officials did.

Introduction

British colonial enterprise in Nigeria was not without impact on the Nigerian polity. The impact, it needs to be stated, affected different groups and/or regions in different degrees and ways. One of the areas this impact was felt is on the religion of Islam. It is noteworthy that Islam is one of the two major religions in Nigeria, and the bulk of the adherents are found in the defunct Northern and Western Regions. The interesting thing about the impact it has on Islam is that the impact was not the same for the defunct Northern and Western Regions. It was so because the attitude of the colonialists was favorable to Muslims in the North and hostile to their counter parts in the West. The reasons for this are highlighted in the paper.

It may be necessary to observe here that though the policies of the colonialists were not favorable to the defunct Western Region, some works have shown that something beneficial came out of it. One such work is that of Saad. According to him, colonial rule made it possible for Sharia to be implemented in the area as a whole. This contrasts with the situation before the advent of British colonialism when it was applied in only some of the towns. He further stated that that happened because it aided the smooth implementation of indirect rule in the area (148). Another work worth mentioning is that of Stefan Reichmuth. This work noted that there was a significant growth in Arabic literary works in the area of study during this period (553). The above notwithstanding, Abdur-Raheem's position is that British colonial policies frustrated Islamic education in the area of study (15-20). On its part, this paper focuses on how and why British colonial rule endangered Islam in the defunct Western Region and how the adherents responded to the situation. It may be necessary at this point to mention that the defunct Western Region is now known as the South-West geopolitical zone. It is made up of six states, namely, Ekiti, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo, and Lagos States. The paper is divided into four sections viz. introduction, pre-colonial South-

West Nigeria and Islam, colonial rule and Islam in South-west Nigeria, and conclusion.

Pre-Colonial South-West Nigeria and Islam:

It has been deposed that the way and manner Islam was introduced into the South-West geopolitical zone made it difficult to know the precise date the religion was introduced into the region (Abdur-Raheem 13, Saad 147). That notwithstanding, available evidence suggests that it could not have been later than the 17th century (Balogun 219). The aforementioned evidence also indicates that by the 18th century, the religion had spread to many towns in the area of study. Some of the towns are Kisi, Saki, Iseyin, Igboho, Ikoyi, Ogbomoso, Owu, and Badagry (Balogun 219). Others include Osogbo, Ede, Ikirun, Iwo, Ikire, Ejigbo, Ila, and Orile-Owu (Isola 25). The spread of Islam seen above should not be seen as an indication that it was smooth sailing from the outset for the religion in the area of study. As a matter of fact, the adherents did not find it easy as not many people embraced the faith. As a result, they practiced it privately as they were few and uninfluential (Clarke 171-2, Abdur-Raheem 14, and Gbadamosi and Ajayi 347). The difficulty the Muslims faced continued in some places even in the 19th century, as could be seen in the reprisal attack on the adherents when the Fulani jihadists waged war on Old Oyo Empire (Balogun 219, Gbadamosi and Ajayi 347, and Clarke 167). At any rate, the aforementioned resistance to, and rejection of Islam by the people did not deter the Muslim faithfuls. Rather, they held on so much that later the religion became popular among the people, and by the end of the 18th century, the religion could spread from there to neighboring communities in present-day Benin Republic (Balogun 219).

A community of factors were at work in making Islam that was at a time rejected popular among the people. One such factor was the identification of the religion with royalty. The point being made is that in many towns, Kings and Chiefs and their households embraced the faith. Muslims, as a result, were adequately protected and had a conducive environment to carry out their proselytization activities (Balogun 221). One of the things that attracted the Kings and their Chiefs to the religion was the literacy that came with it. It is noteworthy that the literate status of the Muslim scholars enabled them to work in the courts and hold important positions in the governments of those communities (Abdur-Raheem 13). Another reason for which kings and chiefs were attracted to Islam was that the early Muslim scholars were people with mystic powers. They were said to be "not only Imams and teachers but also spiritualists and healers" (Abdur-Raheem 14). Among the leaders of their communities who benefited from the prayers of the Muslim scholars were Ataoja Matanmi I (1854-1864) of Osogbo (Isola 27) and Aare Latosisa of Ibadan (Abdur-Raheem 14). In both cases, the issue bordered on fruit of the womb. For the former, the wife who was barren gave birth to a child, while for the latter, the wife was able to give the king what he greatly desired, a son. They are also credited with helping kings and their towns in many other ways with their prayers. This includes helping them achieve victory in war, dislodging the evil spell cast on them through witchcraft, and bringing drought to an end by causing rain to fall (Balogun 221). The point being made is that the ability of the Muslim scholars to bring succour to the people by effectively tackling the challenges that confronted them drew people to their religion.

Apart from kings and chiefs, another group of highly respected people the religion was associated with were warriors and long-distance traders. In the 19th-century society of the area of study, members of the two groups were revered. Thus, when members of the two groups embraced Islam, the people could not but revise their opinions about the faith and embrace it (Ghadamosi and Ajayi 349). Mention must also be made of the role played by the Muslim festivals of Idal-Fitri and Idal-Adha. These festivals usually offered Muslims the opportunity of exhibiting their gorgeous dresses. Some of them rode on horses to and from the praying ground. Added to all the above was the act of charity, which is an integral part of the festivals. All these greatly aided in drawing the people to Islam because they were pleasant and exciting to them. When one considers the fact that the people's indigenous festivals instilled much fear in the people because they were occasions for exhibiting dangerous charms and other negative attitudes, one cannot but reason with them (Abdur-Raheem 14).

Another issue worthy of being mentioned is that the contact Muslims had with the wider world earned them respect from the people. As at then, the indigenes hardly went beyond their immediate environments and as a result hardly interacted with people beyond the aforementioned vicinities. Thus, they were limited in knowledge about other areas and their peoples, especially when they are far-flung

places. This was not so with those who embraced Islam. This is because of their interaction with Muslim scholars, and these came from far and wide, even up to North Africa and the Middle East. Added to that is that some of the indigenes who were Muslims might have gone on pilgrimage to Mecca, which would expose them to many places in the world beyond their environments. Some others travelled to other outside places in the course of proselytization assignment. The point being made is that contact with the outside world enhanced the image of the Muslims among the non-Muslim indigenes. Thus, they (non-Muslim indigenes) saw the faith as something worthwhile (Abdur-Raheem 14).

Equally important in making the people see embracing Islam as a good idea is the uniformity of the mode of worship in the religion. This uniformity made it possible for the adherents to understand each other when worshipping together, notwithstanding that they came from different ethnic groups. This was fascinating to the indigenes because they were aware that the Muslim scholars in their towns were from different ethnic groups, and in their indigenous religion, it was not possible for someone who was not Yoruba-speaking to be part of it because of the incantations and invocations involved (Abdur-Raheem 14). Another issue was that as Islam was being introduced into the different towns, steps were taken to deepen it. This could be seen in the establishment of Qur'anic schools. It may be necessary to observe that in the history of Islam, the establishment of Qur'anic school always followed on the heels of the introduction of the religion. The situation was not different concerning the South-west region. In the Qur'anic school, pupils (young and adults) are taught the history of the Prophet and Islam and other basics that help to make an adherent strong in faith (Makinde 56). This probably explains why thoroughness was upheld in their practice of the faith from virtually the beginning. For instance, in the 17th century, the Muslim community in Oyo sought guidance from Katsina on the issue of Ramadan Fast (Balogun 219).

So far, it has been shown why and how Islam that suffered rejection and persecution along the line later became popular among the people to the point of being preponderant in the area. It was also shown that as Islam was being introduced in the various towns, measures were put in place to deepen the faith in the adherents. This explains why dyed-in-the-wool Muslim faithfuls were produced in the area. Thus, despite the challenges that confronted the Muslim faithful from the beginning, they did not give up. This attribute came in handy, as we shall see later when Christianity threatened the existence of Islam in the colonial period.

Colonial Rule and Islam in South-West Nigeria:

One important feature of British Colonial enterprise in Nigeria was its ambivalence. The ambivalence, it is important to note, stemmed from the pragmatic approach adopted by the colonialists. The point being made here is that what determined the position taken by the British on any issue was whether the matter would advance British colonial interests. This explains why on some issues; the colonialists took contradictory positions. An instance of this is seen in their disposition to Islam. In the South-West region, the policy adopted by the British colonial officers tended to stifle Islam while in the defunct Northern region, it was the opposite. Here, the colonialists not only shielded Islam from competition with Christianity but also aided its spread (Gbadamosi and Ajayi 352, Clarke 191-193). As a result, the high hope of success in the region entertained by the Christian missionaries was not met with commensurate success (Gbadamosi and Ajayi 350-352).

It is noteworthy that the new challenger, Christianity, came into the country in the last decade of the first half of the 19th century. It came so as to help in bringing the trans-Atlantic slave trade to a complete cessation. This was to be achieved through getting the indigenes converted to Christianity (Crowder 140 and 148). This Christianization mission, thus, pitched Christianity against Islam, which got established earlier. What really set the stage for a tough battle between the two religions was the mindset of the Christian missionaries. To them, there was an urgent need to redeem the indigenes from Islam and their traditional religions (Kukah 3). However, they met with limited success in the North. This was due to a number of factors.

One such factor was that the northerners saw the Christian missionaries as one and the same group with the British colonial officers whom they saw as a threat to the existence of the Sokoto Caliphate. Another dimension of the threat to the existence of the Caliphate was that the Christian missionaries, as a strategy of gaining a foothold in the area, presented

themselves as people who desired to liberate the Hausa and other groups from the hegemony of the Fulani. This, the leadership of the Caliphate (Emirates inclusive), was not ready to tolerate (Gbadamosi and Ajayi 352). In addition, the people did not see anything enticing about Christianity. As far as they were concerned, Islam provided all they needed to function effectively in the society and, by so doing, move the same forward (Gbadamosi and Ajayi 352). As a result of the above, both the rulers and other members of the Caliphate were united in opposition to the activities of the Christian missionaries in the area.

Another reason was the opposition of the British colonial authorities to the Christianization of the North. It is worthy to note that this factor was what enabled the opposition of the Caliphate to succeed. This is because if the colonialists had sided with the Christian missionaries, they could have recorded far more success than they did. One of the factors that prompted the opposition of the colonial officers to the activities of the Christian missionaries in the area was the respect they had for Islam. This respect derived from their belief that a society that practices monotheism has got to a high level of human development. Put in another way, the colonialists saw people of the Caliphate, who as Muslims, were monotheists, as superior to their neighbors who practiced polytheism (Clarke 190-191, Gbadamosi and Ajayi 352).

Mention must also be made of the desire of the British colonialists not to disrupt the operation of the indirect rule system of government in the area. The colonialists realized that they needed the cooperation of the Emirs and other Caliphate officials if they were to succeed in the North. It could not have been otherwise given the vast territory with its large population they were to administer and the inadequate (British) personnel and financial resources at their disposal. The colonialists knew that anything to the contrary would provoke a Muslim uprising which they detested (Gbadamosi and Ajayi 352). With all the above, it is not a surprise that Christian missionaries did not make much headway in the North. It is also necessary to state here that though what the British colonialists did helped to preserve the Caliphate for their indigenous leaders, it was an ill wind that blew on the Caliphate. In a nutshell, it left the Caliphate and the entire North educationally backward. This situation piqued some of their indigenes (Clarke 221-223).

The situation seen above about the defunct Northern Region contrasted sharply with what obtained in the South-West region. It could not have been otherwise because outside "northern Nigeria..., British policies did nothing to promote Islam" (Clarke 193). The corollary of the above is that Christian missionaries had an unfettered access in the South-West region. The missionaries, who probably, saw that as an opportunity to make up for what they lost in the North, threw in everything at their disposal. Thus, they came up with a four-point programme of action. These are intensification of their evangelization, training their missionaries to be versed in Arabic, production of pamphlets, tracts, and other literature in local languages with the aim of undermining Islam, and the utilization of Western education as a tool for Christianization (Abdr-Raheem 14). The above-mentioned strategies had a two-fold aim, namely, making Muslims see the need to abandon Islam for Christianity and making the non-Muslims prefer Christianity to Islam. It is noteworthy that of the four strategies, the most potent was the utilization of Western education as a tool of evangelization (Abdur-Raheem 15, Gbadamosi and Ajayi 354-355). The other three had little or no effect on the standing of Islam in the area of study. Rather, they not only ended up making the people see the missionaries as making a mockery of themselves but also provoked an intense disdain for the missionaries (Gbadamosi and Ajayi 353).

What made the use of Western education as a tool of evangelization a potent weapon was that British colonialism introduced a new socio-economic order that was driven by Western education. Thus, being equipped with Western education translated to possessing the password for success in the then emerging society (Oyeweso n.p, Gbadamosi and Ajayi 355, Reichmuth 366 and 368). What this means is that if, in an attempt to protect their faith, the Muslims rejected Western education, they would be relegated to the background in the scheme of things. This they did not want as it would translate to a reversal of fortunes for them. It could not have been otherwise given the fact that prior to the advent of the Christian missionaries, the Muslims were an envied class in their communities (Nwachukwu and Azeez 218). Their situation was made pathetic by the failure of the colonial government to protect them as was the case in the North. The above situation made it abundantly clear to the Muslims that they needed to pull themselves up by their bootstraps if Islam was to be saved. To

appreciate what those Muslims did, one needs to understand that a Muslim does not see Islam as a mere religion but as a way of life (Saad 145). Accordingly, necessary steps were taken by them. One such step was getting traditional authorities to fight for them. Earlier, we saw that when traditional authorities got converted to Islam, they created a conducive environment for the religion to thrive and spread. This is logical because they accepted the faith because they found it beneficial. That being the case, one would not expect them to allow a strange faith to displace what they had tasted and found good. This was why it was not difficult to get them to assist in checkmating the activities of the Christian missionaries as it happened in many towns in the South-West region (Gbadamosi and Ajayi 353).

Another method adopted by the Muslims bothered on working on their children. This took different forms. Some refused to send their children to school while those already in school were withdrawn. Another dimension of this method is that their children were forbidden from mingling with children who were Christians, and in rare cases where they were allowed to interact, discussions about religion were barred. In addition, was the issue of corporal punishment which was used when necessary to extract obedience from their children (Abdur-Raheem 16). Yet another dimension of this method was that some parents allowed their children to go to school, but the activities of those children were closely monitored by them. This, probably, was employed by those who were fascinated by the socio-economic upliftment Western education conferred on the beneficiaries yet they were not ready to compromise their faith. Thus, such parents made it a duty to strengthen the faith of their children by studying the Quran with them regularly (Clarke 171).

Mention must also be made of the strategy of using Islamic societies and organizations. This was why many of the societies sprung up in the area in the colonial period. Their focus, it may be necessary to point out, was more on enabling Muslim faithfuls acquire Western education without comprising their faith (Adekilekun 107 - 108 -, 120 - 121, 141 -143,151, 162, Clarke 225 - 226, NwachukwuandAzeez218). The societies are Egbe Kila founded in Lagos in the 1890s, the Ahmadiyya Movement which began in India and entered Lagos in1911(Clarke225 and Reichmuth 370-371), the Ansar-Ud-Deen Society founded in Lagos in1923, The Ijebu Muslim Friendly Society established in 1927 and the Isabatudeen (Band of Religious Enthusiasts) founded in Ibadan in the 1950s (Clarke 225). There were also Jamaat-ul Islamiya of Nigeria founded in Lagos in 1924, Zumratul Islamiyya Society of Nigeria founded in Lagos in 1927, Nawairud-Deen Society founded in Abeokuta in 1939, Ansarul Islam Society of Nigeria founded in 1942 and the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria founded in Lagos in 1954 (Adekilekun106 - 177). Muslims in the South-West leveraged Islamic societies because of the role they play in faith building and the societies did not fail them. This is attested to by some examples space constraints could allow here: Ansar-Ud-Deen Society in Osogbo (Nwachukwu and Azeez 222-3), Nawair-Ud-Deen Society in Ikirun (Akinjobi 3) and Isabatudeen and Ijebu Muslim Friendly Society in Ibadan and Ijebu-Ode respectively (Clarke 225). These examples mirror the situation in the other towns in the area of study. That the societies lived up to expectations should not come as a surprise because they are, basically, meant to help in strengthening the failthfuls and make them see the need to remain steadfast (Nwachukwu and Azeez 222). This is usually facilitated by the social contacts, interaction and cooperation the societies promote among the Muslim faithfuls (Akinjobi2).

The above does not suggest that the Christian missionaries failed. It could not have been so especially when compared with what they achieved in the North. Nevertheless, their success was not to the level of overshadowing Islam. This was so because of the tenacity and resourcefulness of the Muslims who dug deep to make Islam remain preponderant in the area. Rather, they recorded some reasonable level of success. Personal communications with some people from the area of study attest to that. The individuals are Professor Johnson Aremu (Dept. of History and Intl Studies, Ekiti State University (EKSU) Ado-Ekiti,15/10/21),Sullyat Azeez and Grace Agboola (former students of History and Int'l Studies, EKSU15/10/21),Ustaz Murtada Badmus (Lecturer,Dept. of Religious Studies (RES),EKSU15/10/21), Alhaji (Dr.) Morufu Isola (who recently bagged a Ph.D in Islamic Studies, from Dept. of RES,EKSU12/10/21),and Alhaji Musa Bello (Secretary Ansar-Ud-DeenSociety,Osogbo,12/10/21).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it has been shown that British colonialism posed a serious challenge to Islam in the South West region and that out of the

hostility of the colonialists came some positive things that happened to the faith in the area of study.It has also been shown that prior to this, the religion was confronted by issues of rejection and later rpersecution of the adherents by the indigenes.These not withstanding, we also saw that Islam was not suppressed.The reason for this, as has been shown, was the commitment of the adherents which made it difficult for anything to cow them into submission. This played out much during the colonial period when, against all odds, they effectively tackled the threat which the Christian missionaries represented. As a result, the preponderance of Islam in the area of study, which predates British colonial rule, has remained till date.

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