INTEGRATION IN A NIGERIAN SOCIETY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: THE ILORIN EXAMPLE

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ABSTRACT: This is a historical study of the process of integration in Ilorin in the nineteenth century. The concept of integration is discussed as a background to the study. This concept, as argued in the paper is not only relevant to modern nation states but also traditional African societies in general and Ilorin in particular.

Ilorin was an heterogeneous society at the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, the role of the ruling elite in the distribution of political offices; the use of religious idioms of Islam; and the hostility shown towards Ilorin by her southern neighbours brought the people together. Furthermore, the military class was an integrative factor. Indeed, the economy of Ilorin promoted intergroup relations which led to diffusion of cultures which at the end of the century produced a distinct Ilorin culture.

INTRODUCTION

Many African societies have been faced with the issue of integration or several centuries. As African kingdoms and states expanded, more culturally diverse peoples became part of the expanding states. Some of these peoples became acculturated through definite policies by the ruling elite or as a result of inter-group relations within the state. The level of integration that often took place depended on the efforts of the people of the state to accommodate one another. The concept of integration is so important that it has attracted various definitions from scholars. One of such definitions that is relevant to this paper is that of M. E. Doro and N. M. Stultz who see integration from the political angle by saying that "integration represents the cumulative effect of individual

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allegiance to and identification with society and its goal. Related to this definition is that of Pye which can be summarized as bridging the gap between groups by "subsuming" their narrow interests in terms of culture, language and ethnic affinity to the larger interest of the national community. Geertz also looks at integration in a similar vein. Just as these definitions of integration may be adequate to modern nation states, they are equally relevant to developments in Ilorin in the nineteenth century. 

Apart from the definitions of the concept of integration, Smock and Bentsi-Enchill have also identified conditions necessary for integration. They include language, education balancing political power, economic development and nationwide cultural patterns. These conditions are not only necessary for contemporary states in Africa but also necessary for traditional African society such as Ilorin in the nineteenth century. Apart from the conditions enunciated by Smock Bentsi-Enchill, religion, and in the case of Ilorin, Islam was a very important factor.

In an article "The Ibadan Conference of 1845: Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution in Mid-Nineteenth Century Yorubaland" Falola highlighted the attempt by Yoruba leaders to achieve unity through diplomacy and peaceful resolution of conflict which had engulfed Yorubaland since the final collapse of the old Oyo Kingdom in 1835. The peace sought for at this conference was aimed partly at re-integration various Yoruba groups that had fallen apart in the early decades of the 19th century. While the peace conference as Falola has shown did not allow for such integration, some of the "new" towns which emerged powerful in Yoruba politics achieved some measure of integration in the nineteenth century. One of such towns was Ilorin which became the seat of an emirate during the third decade of the nineteenth century.

Ilorin is taken as a case study because the town emerged in the nineteenth century from a small settlement of the old Oyo kingdom into a large town settled into by people of different ethnic groups. Furthermore, the Muslim revolutions that took place in Ilorin during the third decade of the nineteenth century introduced some complexities into the political situation of the town. This paper examines the different variables that came into play during the process of integration in Ilorin in the nineteenth century. It is also the intention of this paper to analyze the gradual amalgamation of the culture of the various groups into one. Finally, the paper focuses on what emerged in Ilorin at the end of the century consequent upon the integrative process.

ILORIN BEFORE 1800

Not much is known about Ilorin before the beginning of the nineteenth century but of the little that is known, much has been written that it will be a waste of ink and paper to repeat it here. However, it is important to state that the accounts on Ilorin in Johnson, Abu Ikoroko, Sulu, Hermon-Hodge and others contain several controversies, though there are many areas of agreement. Nevertheless, the areas of controversies continue to puzzle scholars in Ilorin history.

Apparently because of the inconsistencies in the account of Ilorin before 1800, attempts continue to be made by official and traditional historians to give various versions of the history of Ilorin before the nineteenth century. For instance, while acknowledging the authority of the Alafin of Oyo over Ilorin as other towns in the old Oyo Kindom, official historians in Ilorin want us to


(9) Ahmad Ilu Ali Bulu (Abu Ikoroko), Ta'lib abub bakar a sunna min umur bi Ilorin. This document will henceforth be referred to as Tilbi in this paper, M. Sulu, 'History of Ilorin', Typescript, Rhodes House, Oxford.
believe that Ilorin was a settlement of different independent ethnic groups each with its own ruler. These independent groups were according to this source, Oke Suna with Solagberu as its ruler, Okelele was headed by Ojo Iseke, Ibi-Ape had Afonja as its ruler and two other settlements had Olufadi, a man of Fulani descent and Sarkin Gambari as the ruler of the Fulani and Hausa communities respectively. This account is a complete departure from the evidence of Johnson, and Mallam Sulu’s History of Ilorin. While Ojo Iseke has consistently been linked in the sources with the foundation of the town, there is no evidence to suggest that he was a ruler of a distinct group based at Okelele in Ilorin.

The growth of Ilorin seems to have preceded the development of different quarters in the town of which Okelele was and is still one. Oke-Suna has also been consistently linked with the Muslim settlers in Ilorin for which Solagberu was the leader. It is doubtful if Oke-Suna existed as an independent entity from Ilorin. Indeed the settlement of both Olufadi and Sarkin Gambari were very near each other that it is very doubtful if they existed independently of each other.

Perhaps in the same vein, many Muslims in the Oke Imale area of Ilorin insist that their ancestors came from old Mali to settle in the town. By this claim, it is suggested that their ancestors were in Ilorin well before the beginning of the eighteenth century as the settlement took place after the fall of the old Mali Kingdom. One is at pains to verify this historic claim which seems to remind one of a similar report from Iseyin. However, it is not impossible that these Muslims were descendants of Wangara lineages which had their origins in the old Mali kingdom and who spread their trading network throughout West Africa. It is also possible that the claim to Mali origin is a recent reconstruction as it is difficult to establish contact with Mali. Indeed the term Oke Imale seems to have derived from Yoruba language referring to settlement of Muslims.

(10) See, ‘Ilorin’ in Kwara State Local Government Series. Published and Produced by the Information Division, Ministry of Home Affairs, Information and Social Development, Ilorin, Kwara State. Undated p. 2. This view is widely gaining ground in spite of the fact that, no other written or early collected Omi traditions attest to it.

(11) Ibid.

(12) Johnson, The History of the Yoruba, p. 199; Sulu History of Ilorin.


Map showing migration of different ethnic groups to Ilorin in the Nineteenth century.
What these accounts suggest is a modern synthesis of the various groups in Ilorin. The accounts evidently attempt to underplay the importance of Afonja and even that of Al-Salih in the history of Ilorin. What is fairly certain is that before 1800, Ilorin was an important town in Ekun Osi of the old Oyo Kingdom. Because of its geographical location, Ilorin within the old Oyo system had considerable commercial advantage. Caravan routes from Hausaland crossed the Niger through Murngi-Patigi-Kusogo, Lafagi and thence to Ilorin. Consequently, many Hausa, Fulani, Nupe, Kamberi, Kamuri, Igbomina and several other Yoruba groups were attracted to Ilorin. Many of the settlers from the north were Muslim although some of them were Muslim slaves who were working for their non-Muslim masters. The presence of these Muslims aided the conversion of other Yoruba groups into Islam. Ilorin was at this stage when the developments that led to the collapse of the old Oyo Kingdom began. Ilorin through Afonja played a crucial role in the process of fall of the kingdom.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ILORIN EMIRATE

The events which led to the birth of an emirate in Ilorin are now so well known that we need not repeat them here. However, it is important in this paper to highlight certain developments. By the end of the eighteenth century, the cracks in the old Oyo Kingdom became widened because of various factors which had received considerable attention from scholars. These factors were furthermore compounded by the role of Afonja and Muslims in Ilorin. Consequently, the old Oyo Kingdom tottered and then collapsed in 1835. During

(16) Law, The Oyo Empire, pp. 105-108.
(21) Ibid., pp. 43-44.
(22) Ibid.
(23) Ibid.
(24) Tolif, Chapter one.
In the bid to achieve this objective, a conflict ensued between Afonja and the Muslims led by Abd al-Salam with considerable support from Solagberu, the Muslim leader of Oke-Suna. Afonja was killed. With the death of Afonja Ilorin became an emirate under al-Salam as emir. No sooner had Afonja died than Solagberu fell out with the Muslims who accused him of practices contrary to the sharia. Solagberu also lost his life in the struggle with the supporters of Abd-al-Salam. Thus the new emir became the most powerful figure in the affairs of the emirate. It is important to stress here that in 1823, when Ilorin became an emirate, its Muslims and non-Muslims population was heterogeneous that the survival of the new emirate depended on the integrating mechanisms which the new leadership evolved. These mechanisms coupled with the relationships that developed amongst the various ethnic groups resulted in political, social and cultural integration in Ilorin in the nineteenth century.

THE PROCESS OF INTEGRATION

An important instrument necessary for an heterogeneous society to achieve integration is the sharing of political power such that the participation of different groups in the society would be ensured. Consequently, through the involvement of the composite groups in the administration the aims and aspirations of the state can be guaranteed. When the emirate was established in 1823, the emirate was faced with the problems of survival and consolidation which required urgent attention. It was therefore imperative on the part of the emir, Abd-al-Salam (1823-1836) to take steps which he considered necessary to bind the emirate together with a view to solving his immediate problems.

One of the crucial steps taken by the emir was the establishment of a political structure which took cognizance of the major ethnic groups in Ilorin. He appointed four Balogun, namely Fulani, Aijikobi, Alanganu and Gambari. These Balogun represented the Fulani, Yoruba (Aijikobi and Alanganu) and Hausa who constituted the major ethnic groups in Ilorin at that time. Apart from that, the three groups comprised the fighting force in the Muslim army although there were other smaller groups.

(26) Ibid., pp. 68-71.
various quarters in Ilorin and who fought at the battle front for the larger interest of Ilorin rather than the interest of their various ethnic groups in the town. What was more, the estimated size of the Ilorin army which was put at about three thousand men in 1889 indicates that the soldiers must have been recruited from various parts of Ilorin and the emirate. The Ilorin army was made up of volunteers, but unlike other parts of Yorubaland majority of those who volunteered did so with some specialisation. Most of the horsemen were from Gambiri (Hausa) and Fulani wards. The footmen were mostly Yoruba from Ajikobi and Alalano wards, although some also volunteered from the districts. The fact that they were united under a single command seems to have promoted some measure of integration.

The military was also an important integrative factor because Ilorin soldiers shared common experiences during the wars of expansion and consolidation. Many of the soldiers established personal relationships which transcended the period of wars. Not only that, some of the distinguished soldiers were rewarded with fiefs, land and titles for their performances and loyalty. These rewards cut across ethnic lines. For instance, Balogun Gambiri Al appointed some of his followers as Ajele in Igbomina and Ekiti districts of Ilorin emirate. In Ilorin town, many of the Mogaji appointed earlier in the nineteenth century were followers of the four Balogun of Ilorin.

The attitude of the immediate neighbours of Ilorin to the south, that is, Yorubaland, such as Ogbomosho, Ikoyi and other towns in Igbomina and Osun districts of the Old Oyo Kingdom facilitated the initial process of integration in Ilorin. These towns were hostile to Ilorin for several reasons, namely, the estrangement of Ilorin from the Old Oyo Kingdom consequent upon the Muslim revolution of 1823; the fact that the ruling elite in Ilorin was predominantly Fulani; and perhaps the most important the aggressive expansionist policy of Ilorin which was a threat to her southern neighbours. The hostility towards Ilorin produced a unifying effect at home. The various ethnic groups that had

taken abode in Ilorin worked for the survival of the new state through active participation in her wars of consolidation and expansion.

Islam was perhaps the most important integrative factor in Ilorin in the nineteenth century. The Muslims who fought initially for the establishment of the emirate did so because of the religious bond between them. This religious affiliation remained the magnetic pull that drew the people of Ilorin together. Islam was so important to the different groups that right from the inception of the emirate religious offices were created to cater for their need. For instance, Emir Abdul-Salam established the offices of Imam Fulani, Imam Imale and Imam Gambiri. However, the creation of these offices did not mean that the three groups had their religious functions independent of one another. Rather, they complemented the religious affairs of the people of Ilorin. It is important to mention here that Imam Fulani was the Chief Imam while Imam Imale always acted for him whenever the position was vacant.

The process of integration in Ilorin in the nineteenth century was furthermore enhanced by Islam because an individual must be a Muslim before he could hold a political or military office in Ilorin during the period. Thus many problems were approached from the perspective of religion. Indeed, religion determined the attitudes of Ilorin leaders to the Christian Missionaries that visited the town during the nineteenth century. It was also easier to apply the Sharia as a code of law in Ilorin town, although other towns in the emirate were not forced to follow Ilorin's example. Apart from that, the Muslim calendar played a prominent part in Ilorin military expeditions. Oral information indicates that expeditions were not normally carried out during the month of Ramadan.

Islam was so much a driving force in the integrative process that the Emirs of Ilorin continually allocated lands to Muslim settlers many years after the emirate had been established. Not only was the allocation of land confined to settlers from the areas around Ilorin, the offer was extended to Nupe and Hausa returnees from Brazil during the reign of Emir Shitt. These returnees as well as those from different parts of Yorubaland were able to integrate with the

Various groups in Ilorin because of their religion which to a large extent had influenced their outlook to life. Christian missionary accounts indicate that by the middle of the nineteenth century about half of the population of Ilorin was not Muslim, however, the same sources would want to believe that by the end of the century, the whole population was essentially Muslim. What is important here is that by the time many of the non-Muslim population were converted to Islam during the century, they had passed through a process of islamisation which integrated them into the society.

Ilorin by its geographical location played an important role in the north-south trade during the nineteenth century. The town had trading connections with Ogbomoso, New Oyo, Ikrun, Oshogbo, Ibadan, Ijebu, Abeokuta and Lagos to the south. It also maintained a lucrative long-distance trade relations with Kano and Born to the north. These trading network had implications for developments at home. Markets began to grow with specialization in goods demanded by buyers. Such markets were Gambari and Emir's markets. Through constant flow of traders there was improved communication resulting in cross-fertilization of ideas (religious, commercial etc). Both the Gambari and Emir's markets were international markets. As these markets were frequented by long-distance traders, the Hausa of Ilorin were able to act as middle-men by providing brokerage and lending houses to these traders. Indeed, the Hausa of the Gambari ward provided mediatory roles for their Yoruba and Fulani counter-parts in Ilorin. Yoruba garments needed in the north and woven by the Yoruba of Ilorin went through Hausa traders to the north. Conversely, during the same period, goods provided in north were exchanged in Ilorin and taken down south by the Yoruba of Ilorin. Consequently, there was booming trade in Ilorin for a considerable part of the century. The booming trade was facilitated by the mediatory roles of the Hausa, Yoruba, Nupe, Fulani, and other groups in Ilorin. The outcome of this was the promotion of understanding which brought the different groups together.

Apart from closer understanding through long-distance trade, internal trade within the surroundings of Ilorin was also an integrative factor. Each of the wards in Ilorin had markets under the control of the Balogun and their agents. These markets were popular for local exchanges particularly food-stuffs and other items for local consumption. These markets served as important links with the villages around Ilorin where most of the articles were brought to Ilorin for sale. The markets provided access for diffusion of culture which took place among the people of Ilorin during the nineteenth century.

The pace at which the people of Ilorin were integrated during the nineteenth century was quickened by the high level of interactions by the different groups in Ilorin. Oral information insists that by the second half of the nineteenth century, many inter-marriages had taken place across ethnic lines. These inter-marriages must have helped to cement relationships in the town. Inter-marriages in Ilorin was not confined to the ordinary people of the town, the ruling elite was also involved. The mother of Emir Moma was said to be a Yoruba woman. Indeed the Emir's efforts at putting an end to the continual wars between Ilorin and other parts of Yorubaland were interpreted as deriving from the fact that his mother was a Yoruba. Apart from inter-marriages other social interactions such as naming ceremonies and festivals helped the spread of cultural traits such as language and facial marks among the people of Ilorin.

During the first few years of the establishment of Ilorin emirate the official language with which business was conducted was Fulfulde, although contemporary accounts posit that Emir Shittu could speak one or two more languages. However, by the 1870s and 1890s, Yoruba language seems to have replaced any other language as the official language of the ruling elite and it was also the language spoken by majority of the people. These reasons can be proffered for the spread of the Yoruba language among the ethnic groups of Ilorin, namely, Yoruba were the largest single ethnic group in Ilorin;

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(44) Ann O'Hear, 'The Economic History of Ilorin', 63-64.
(47) Ibid.
(48) Oral Evidence, Mallam Ahmad (1978) Alhaji Muritala (1978) Duroti Slade, Woro Adam; Alhaji Iyako Kawa (last three informants were interviewed in March, 1987).
(50) Ibid.
geographically, Iorin was within the Old Oyo Kingdom; and many of the emirate officials were Yoruba, they popularized the language in their official and private dealings. The use of Yoruba language must have helped to remove the problem of language barrier in inter-personal relations in the town. Consequently, the spread of the Yoruba language must have contributed to the integration of the people of the town in the nineteenth century.

One of the cultural traits that promoted integration in Iorin towards the end of the nineteenth century was the evolution of a common facial mark. At the beginning of the century, the various ethnic groups in Iorin had facial marks characteristics of their group. These marks became useful in identifying each group in terms of its original places of migration to Iorin. For instance, the Yoruba had among others, keke, pele, abaja and buamu. The Nupe, Kanuri, Borgawa, kamberi Kanuri, Fulani and Hausa had theirs. However, by the last decade of the century, majority of the people of Iorin had adopted a common facial mark of one on each side of the cheek. Opinion differs as to the origin of this facial mark. A school of thought believes that it was because some Muslims preached against the multiplicity of marks, claiming that it was against the ethics of Islam. As a result, the Muslims of Iorin reduced the marks to one on each cheek. However, another school of thought holds the view that the facial mark common in Iorin resulted from the outbreak of an epidemic of fever which caused many deaths amongst the young ones during the second half of the nineteenth century. According to this school of thought, the cure for this epidemic at that time was the making of an incision on each side of the cheek; this was then rubbed with dried herbs. The herbs were so efficacious that they became popular in the town. After the epidemic had subsided the facial mark became fashionable. Related to the second position is the evidence that the facial mark of one on each cheek was begun by a certain Balogun Gambire who was very good in traditional medicine. He was said to use herbs on the marks for preservation of life from small pox. Consequently, the facial mark became popular. While these arguments may not sound unconvincing, the view that the facial mark spread through epidemic of fever is more plausible. If Mallams had preached against facial marks of the various groups particularly those of the

Yoruba early in the nineteenth century, the practice would have been abandoned completely. Also, there was no Islamic injunction that forbids the practice of having facial marks. Moreover, many Muslims in different parts of Nigeria still have facial marks. The use of herbs to reduce the incidence of infantile mortality is a feature of traditional African medicine in Nigeria. It was therefore not impossible that the people of Iorin resorted to such practice since it did not run contrary to the dictates of their religion. It is important to stress here that some of the old facial marks are still existing in Iorin. The commonest facial mark of one on each side of the cheek would seem to have promoted a common sense of identity among the various groups in Iorin.

THE POSITION BY 1900

By the end of the nineteenth century, Iorin was politically integrated. However, this is not to say that there were no political tensions or crises in Iorin during the process of integration. Two examples will be sufficient to illustrate this point: Balogun Kamara did not agree with the peace treaty between Emir Aliyu (1869-1891) and the invasion of Oyo in 1887. The Balogun threatened to set up Prince Moma as emir at Gana. Also, Emir Moma had to commit suicide in September 1895 because of sharp disagreement with his Balogun over his friendly attitude towards Yorubaland and the colonial administration in Lagos.

The Emir of Iorin although not as powerful as other emir in the Sokoto caliphate remained the rallying point of unity. For example, when the independence of Iorin was threatened by both the Royal Niger Company and the colonial administration in Lagos between 1885 and 1887, the Balogun and other chiefs gave the emir the much needed support. Eventually, Iorin lost to the company in 1897, yet the whole town was united in her defiance of instructions from the company. Furthermore, after the imposition of colonial rule in 1900, the


(56) Ibid.

(57) H.O. Danmole, 'The Frontier Emirate,' pp. 140-166.
various measures taken by the British to upturn the power structure were not able to disintegrate the people although these measures led to some disturbances. Arguably, Ilorin at the end of the nineteenth century had passed through a process of integration which appears to have produced a common sense of identity.

Culturally, the people of Ilorin had achieved a high degree of integration at the end of the nineteenth century. Whereas it was possible between the 1820s and the 1870s to identify a particular individual with his place of migration to Ilorin through his name, the position was different at about 1900 as Yoruba names had been widely adopted by all the ethnic groups in Ilorin. These names were and are still middle names of many people in Ilorin. Apart from ordinary names, the Yoruba practice of *Oriti* had become a common practice in Ilorin, even among the ruling elite. Nevertheless, it is necessary to indicate that although Yoruba names were widely adopted by this period, a few Ilorin Yoruba had also abandoned their Yoruba names for Muslim names as in other parts of Yorubaland with significant Muslim influence. The process of integration in Ilorin also resulted in the spread of Muslim and Hausa-Fulani culture of bearing names of towns and places. Thus, it was and is not unusual for some people in Ilorin to bear names like Okelele, Pakata, Agbaji and many others.

It has already been mentioned that the Yoruba language had become a common language of the people of Ilorin by the second half of the nineteenth century. The fact that the ruling elite particularly the emirs who were of Fulani descent also used the language has been mentioned. While the use of Yoruba by the Emirs of Ilorin could be paralleled to the adoption of the Hausa language by the Fulani emirs of Kano, Katsina and other parts of Hausaland in the nineteenth century, the spread of Yoruba in Ilorin was not a one-way affair. In the process, the Yoruba language acquired certain vocabulary from the other languages such as Hausa, Fulani and Nupe which it had come in contact with in Ilorin. This language interference manifests itself not only in the choice of lexical items, but also in varying degrees, in the hand-ling of the prosodic properties of spoken Yoruba of Ilorin which deviates greatly from standard Yoruba.

Archival record suggests that during the first decade of the twentieth century, it was not easy to find pure blooded Yoruba, Fulani or Hausa amongst the population of Ilorin. This was perhaps an exaggeration. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that a considerable admixture had taken place amongst the people of Ilorin which had given them a peculiar identity. The amalgam of different sub-cultures and attitudes in Ilorin over the nineteenth century had permanent effect on the socio-cultural life of the people - marriage, naming ceremonies, dressing and social activities.

CONCLUSION

Ilorin emerged from a small town within the Old Oyo Kingdom before the beginning of the nineteenth century into a large town with many ethnic groups by the third decade of the nineteenth century. The establishment of an emirate there introduced new elements of administration and culture into the town. However, the policy adopted by the rulers of Ilorin which attempted to balance political and military power helped to promote unity, although occasional quarrels often occurred. besides, other integrative forces were at play during the nineteenth century. These were the hostility shown towards Ilorin by her neighbours, Islam, which provided spiritual upliftment and unity of purpose for the people, trading and the growth of markets which guaranteed avenues for the various ethnic groups to relate with one another, and other social relationships which helped to bridge the gaps between different groups.

The extent of integration which emerged in Ilorin at the end of the nineteenth century has continued to evade many large polities in Africa.
including Nigeria up till this day. Perhaps a careful application of some of the variables that operated in Ilorin was likely to promote the much needed integration which has eluded Nigeria and many new states in Africa.

RESUMO: O presente artigo analisa a cidade de Ilorin no seu processo de crescimento e consolidação e posterior integração, durante o século XIX. Reesalta o papel dos elites, dos comerciantes e dos científicos nesse processo lento, porém forte, de integração no século passado. Analisa também, com profundidade as questões culturais, demonstrando a importância da fé no sociedade que se estabilizava em Ilorin.

UNITERMOS: Crescimento, integração, camadas sociais, Ilim, processo histórico sêc. XIX, Ilorin, Nigéria.