

# **African States on the Eve of Colonial Rule: A Case of Ilorin Emirate at the End of Nineteenth Century**

**Saliu Danlad Yusuf,**

Department of History and International Studies,  
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.

## **Abstract**

The British had already laid claim to Lagos, when towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century they were trying to ‘pacify’ the other areas that were to be later known as Nigeria. As a matter of fact, the European powers had been trading in some of the kingdoms in the Nigerian area before they felt it was time to impose their hegemony on them. Diplomacy was first adopted and force was only an adoption of last resort in most of the kingdoms or mini-states conquered. Ilorin, an emirate under the Sokoto Caliphate had its own established political and administrative system before the British came calling. The emirate’s administrative system, her war and diplomacy with her neighbours as well as her diplomatic relations with the British and the events that eventually led to the conquest of this African state by this European power later in 1897 are what this paper sets out to explore. Both written sources: primary and secondary as well as oral sources are to be utilized in this research.

## **Introduction**

Ilorin, a transitional zone between the open savanna belt-of which the town is a part to the north and the forest area to the south<sup>1</sup>- has continued to be of great interest to scholars, due principally to its peculiar nature conferred on it by its geographical location and the role she was destined to play in the histories of pre-colonial Sokoto Caliphate and the declining Oyo Empire. The term or rather name “Ilorin” itself has been a subject of debate, just like the founding of the town. For instance, Balogun is of the opinion that the name is associated with some of its occupational activities like elephant – hunting, *ilu-erin* (place of elephants) or where people engage in iron works (*ilu irin* – place of

iron, or *lo irin* which means sharpen it)<sup>2</sup>. With regard to the name, it is also suggested that it is on this stone that Ojo, popularly known as Ojo Isekuse (about whom we shall learn later) sharpen his hunting implement<sup>3</sup>.

However, as regards the founding of Ilorin, various versions of the story abound and there is always need for careful analysis. According to Ahmad b., Abi Bakir, popularly known as Abu Ikokoro, Ilorin was established by a certain Ayinla, a hunter who had been in Ilorin before Afonja's arrival. According to this source, Afonja only came to Ilorin when he heard about this Ayinla after the Iwere campaign to which he was sent by the then *Alafin*<sup>4</sup>. According to Johnson, as cited by Danmole, the town was founded by Laderin who was the great grandfather of Afonja<sup>5</sup>. Yet, according to another source, Ilorin was founded between 1600-1700AD by Ojo Isekuse, earlier referred to in this write-up. Ojo, a hunter that hailed from Oyoile, according to a source, is believed to have come from a village called Gambe-Ilotta<sup>6</sup>. According to Olumoh, citing Law, it was Alaafin Ojigi (1698-1732) who first appointed Laderin as Bale of Ilorin for the purpose of defending Oyo's interest in the Ilorin area against Nupe's threat. Olumoh is of the opinion that Laderin could not have been appointed as a *Baale* (Community Head) in Ilorin if there was no any community in existence<sup>7</sup>. It is likely that the debate on when, how and who founded Ilorin would continue to rage as contrasting versions on this theme abound and scholars and interest groups are always ready to emphasize the pre-eminent position of their argument. For instance, a letter jointly written and signed by Saliu Magaji Aare and Alfa Belo Baba Sale, and sent to the Resident of Ilorin province in 1936 claimed inter alia that they are:

“...sons of Afonja and Agbonri, the original owners of Ilorin have the honour most humbly and respectfully to bring the facts before your lordship for transmission to his honour, the resident for his favourable consideration. Afonja and agborin, migrated from Oyoile and .... Founded Ilorin 140 years ago....”<sup>8</sup>

It is important to note here that the letter quoted above also attributes the founding of Ilorin to Afonja himself and his brother, Agbonri rather than to Laderin, his great grand father as Johnson opined and pointed out above. What is however clear is that al-salih popularly known as

Alimi, a Fulani cleric who was destined to play a critical role in the history of Ilorin, came to the town when Afonja was already established in the community. Yet according to Jimada, as a consequence of the crisis between Afonja and the Alafin, the former decided to carve an independent realm centered at Ilorin for himself. His success in this enterprise reflect in province chiefs that followed him to Ilorin. They were Olupo of AjeseIpo, the Bale of Gbogun, Adegun, Onikoyi of Ikoyi, Basorun, Asamu, Solagberu of Kuwo and Owota of Lafianu among others. Due to the succession crisis rocking the Oyo capital then, it became virtually impossible for the reigning AlaafinMaku (1796-1797) to take effective measures against Afonja. At Ilorin, Afonja enjoyed the support of various groups of Nupe, Hausa, Bariba, Fulani and Yoruba Muslims<sup>9</sup>.

Mallam 'alim al-Salih, according to Balogun, came to Ilorin in C. 1817, the same year the Hausa slaves in Oyoile revolted<sup>10</sup>. The cleric's coming to Ilorin itself has been subjected to critical study, but many scholars agree that al-Salih came to Ilorin at the instance of Afonja<sup>11</sup>. When al-Salih came to Ilorin several of the Hausa slaves that revolted in Oyoile joined the *Jama'a*, a community of al-Salih who rallied their support for Afonja in Ilorin<sup>12</sup>. But it is equally important to note here that before settling down in Ilorin, al-Salih had passed through the town where he was on his preaching tours to such places as Ogbomoso, Ikoyi and Kuwo<sup>13</sup>. The presence of al-Salih in Ilorin contributed greatly to migration of Yoruba muslims to the town from the old Oyo kingdom that was mired in crisis. Afonja's presence also provided both security and spiritual satisfaction for the muslims. Again in the same Ilorin, the muslim community of Okesuna under Solagberu also attracted muslims from many towns in Yorubaland<sup>14</sup>. After a stay of six years in Ilorin, the muslim leader, alim al-Salih died in 1823<sup>15</sup>. However, the succession of al-Salih by Abdulsalam his son did not turn out to be automatic. The leadership of the muslim community was contested by both Abdulsalam and Bako the *Sarkin Gambari* (Head of the Hausa community). Apart from the people of Hausa origin, there were also other people of northern origin like Gobir, Nupe, Kemberi, Kanuri and Baruba in Gambari community. Abdulsalam eventually emerged victorious for two obvious reasons. The first advantage Abdulsalam had over Bako was that he was the son of Mallam of al-Salih. The support he received from Solagberu is the second<sup>16</sup>. But a confrontation was inevitable between

Afonja and Abdulsalam as it was unacceptable to the former that the latter would dream of ruling over the town. The two later clashed and Afonja eventually fell. Solagberu who was neutral in the course of the conflict between Abdulsalam and Afonja eventually clashed with the former, resulting in the death of Solagberu. Thus, with the death of Afonja and Solagberu the position of Abdulsalam as the ruler could hardly be challenged by anybody within Ilorin<sup>17</sup>.

### **The Political Structure of Ilorin as a Yoruba Emirate**

With all the developments discussed above, it would be reasonable to date the formal and proper establishment of Ilorin to about 1823 when Abdulsalam was appointed as the Emir. Thus, we can safely say that the year 1823 marked the commencement of the emirate type of political institution in Ilorin. So, as an emirate within the Sokoto Caliphate, there were some basic obligations for Ilorin to fulfill by establishing an administration based on Islamic pattern and also paying tribute to Gwandu. This was because Ilorin had by then become a Gwandu vassal as she was directly responsible for the supervision of Ilorin. Efforts to establish a *sharia*-based administration was indicated by a letter from the second Emir of Gwandu, Muhammed Wani b. Abdullah, to an earlier one from Abdulsalam, the Emir of Ilorin<sup>18</sup>. But one point is important to be noted here: the Ilorin Emirate, the southernmost emirate in the caliphate was a frontier emirate between Hausaland and Yorubaland as it possessed the features of the two different cultures. In this regard, the style of government in the nineteenth century was a mixture of several cultures even though it had Islamic stamp<sup>19</sup>. The political structures of the emirate was determined by her first Emir, Abdulsalam (1823-1838). He created many offices of state for effective and efficient administration and was influenced by the ethnic composition of the town, the desire to reward the leaders of the different ethnic groups who contributed to the success of the muslim revolutions and the need to promote the teaching of Islam and the *sharia*<sup>20</sup>.

The emirate under Abdul salam established a centralized form of administration. The Emir was the political head and *Amir-al-Mumin* which translates to leader of the faithful. Coming next after the Emir in viz a viz political hierarchy was the office of the *Balogun*, that is, War Commander<sup>21</sup>. The Balogun were Ajikobi, Fulani and Gambari. Although Danmole included Balogun Alanamu among the offices created by

Abdulsalam. Olumo is of the view that Alanamu was not part of the original three. Thus the Balogun offices created were to represent the three major ethnic groups in Ilorin then :Yoruba, Fulani and Hausa. Abdulsalam also appointed a Chief *Imam* to lead the Friday prayers and also Chief *Qadi* to advise him on legal matters<sup>22</sup>. It is however important to note here that the details of political organization in this Yoruba emirate was a reflection of the peculiar circumstances of the emirate<sup>23</sup>. And this is why Balogun opines that “it is therefore likely that the political culture that eventually emerged in Ilorin was a hybrid of a predominantly Islamic system with heavy doses of the Yoruba traditional variant tainted with a little of Nupe influence<sup>24</sup>. Thus, we can see that Ilorin, an Islamic state that was established within the Yoruba cultural milieu was being influenced by the resilient Yoruba traditional culture, even though she tried to make Ilorin an Islamic society. For instance, whereas there was one *Maiyaki* (war lord) in several other emirates under the Sokoto Caliphate, there were four *Baloguns* in Ilorin. Again, the Baloguns in Ilorin played various roles markedly different from the normal roles of the other military generals in the other emirates<sup>25</sup>. Thus, in Ilorin, the Baloguns involved in virtually all aspects of administration. In this regard, they were not only members of the Emir’s council, taking policy decisions, they also carried out similar decisions in wards and fiefs under their control. In these wards and fiefs, they also served as judges. As a matter of fact, the Emir was only a mere puppet towards the end of the nineteenth century, due to their power and influence as military leaders<sup>26</sup>. With the foregoing, we can see that besides the fact that it is only in Ilorin Emirate that the title of war lord or military general is known as *Balogun*, its responsibilities are so central to the administration of the town that it can be concluded, as aptly observed by Omoiya, that the holders of this title form the pillars on which this Yoruba emirate was built<sup>27</sup>.

In the political hierarchy, following the Balogun was the office of the *Magaji*. In this regard, each ward within the city composed of many sub-wards. Thus, the magaji administered the sub-ward and reported directly to the Balogun. Within these sub-wards were some compounds within the city. Again, the Magajis were also junior war commanders as they followed the Balogun during the time of war. Some of the well known Magajis in the emirate were Magaji Maiyaki, Badari, Ibagun, Ogidi, Oloje, Okaka, Ojuekun, Okeogun and Sheni<sup>28</sup>.

Again, an important member of the Emir's Council was the Chief Imam. Apart from his role in the investiture of the Emir, the role of the Chief Imam in the nineteenth century is often difficult to assess. Of course, the Chief Imam was generally present at the Emir's official audience at the palace, especially those granted to foreigners. There was however an occasion when during his negotiation with Majo Macdonald, the Chief *Imam* was asked to prepare the necessary documents in Arabic language<sup>29</sup>. But we have to note here that apart from the four *Baloguns* and the *Magajis*, there were some other officials with titles who performed other administrative functions within Ilorin Emirate. These titled officials were *Sarkin Gambari*, *Waziri*, *Sarkin Gobir*, *Magajin Gari*, *Galladiman Gari*, *Magajin Ido*, *Ajia* and the Chief *Qadi*. Like in the other emirates in the Sokoto Caliphate, the *Waziri* was like a Prime Minister and he was in charge of the day to day running of the affairs of Ilorin emirate. The duty of the *Galadiman Gari* was to keep the property of the Emir. *Magajin Ido*'s duty was as the chief observer of the state as well as the Emir's informant. The *Qadi* was the Chief Judge in the Emirate and his main responsibility was handling the legal matters, strictly based on the Islamic code of conduct. But it is very important for us to note here that there was a *Qadi* in each of the principal wards of the emirate, performing similar functions as the Chief *Qadi*. These ward *qadis* not only acknowledged the Chief *Qadi*'s superiority, they were also accountable to him. In his own case, the *Ajia* was a junior war commander<sup>30</sup>.

### **Ilorin as an Imperial Power**

In order to further consolidate their power and authority, political leaders in Ilorin embarked on territorial expansion. Thus, in the process, numerous towns and settlements were subjugated and incorporated. In this wise, the position of *ajele* (political representatives of the Emirs and *Baloguns* in conquered territories) was constituted in each of the conquered territories. These *Ajeles* administered incorporated settlements on behalf of officials of the emirate who were not resident in such territory but in the city<sup>31</sup>. This is in fact the reason why some villages that were originally parts of Igbomina have been annexed to Ilorin, albeit administratively. And this is why Adeyemi is of the opinion that the affected towns seem to be closer to Ilorin politically, culturally and religiously than to Igbomina. According to him, they are Igbomina

only in name and their historical background. These towns are known as “Ilorin Igbomina” as against “Lafiaji Igbomina”, the towns under Lafiaji until 1946<sup>32</sup>. Again, many villages that were culturally and politically “annexed” to the then Ilorin Local Government Area had *Ajias* from Ilorin residing in them. In Adeyemi’s opinion, these Igbomina towns had the culture and religion of Ilorin imposed on them ‘until they were virtually absorbed into Ilorin system’. This is not to talk of their language which is much more of Ilorin than Igbomina. Thus, even though they were in the then Ilorin Local Government Area, the following villages are Igbomina: Omode, Ilota, Apaola, Magaji, Igbomina (Kajola), Joromo, Osin, Apado, Aiyetoro ile, (former Aiyeejowu), Jolasun, (Babangbe), Aregun, Oko-oba, Obate, Isokun, Alaya, Kawu, Bodu Oku, Pepele, Marafa, Elesin meta, Budo Oba, Okeoyi, Okeose, Agbeyangi, Otan (in Asa LGA )<sup>33</sup>.

It is interesting to note at this juncture that Oyo ile became a tributary of Ilorin during the reign of Alafin Amodo (1831-1833). This Alafin, according to a source, was forced to accept Islam in line with the emirate’s militant posture during the period. Thus, when Alafin Oluewu (1833-36) succeeded Amodo, he too paid the customary homage to Ilorin in recognition of Ilorin’s position as Oyo’s superior. Unlike his predecessor, however, Oluewu did not accept Islam or pretended to like the religion. As a result of this, he refused to go back to Ilorin to perform the conversion ceremony. Alafin Oluewu’s refusal to go to Ilorin was the main cause of his conflict with Emir Shitta<sup>34</sup>.

Meanwhile, apart from the wars of supremacy between Ilorin Emirate and Ibadan decades before the colonial conquest of the Yorubaland, these two powerful states continued to tussle on spheres of influence, even towards the close of nineteenth century. It was in the light of this that the British colonial government in Lagos enforced peace between Ilorin and Ibadan in March 1893. The government in Lagos had to intervene due to its own desire for prosperous trade for its companies in the Yoruba hinterland. After declaring Awere stream, south of Erin ile as the boundary between Ibadan and Ilorin by Governor Carter, Ilorin placed its *Ajele* at Ikirun under the pretext that the town had formerly belonged to her as she had previously conquered it. Seeing that this was a very weak excuse, Captain Bower, earlier posted to the area by Carter turned the *Ajele* out. The authorities in Ilorin responded by sending a protest mission to Governor Carter in Lagos over the

boundary issue, arguing that Ikirun ought to have been included in Ilorin territories. In reply, Carter asked Ilorin to abide by the boundary arrangement, but Ilorin remained unyielding. As a result of Ilorin's attitude, another investigation was carried out, the outcome of which was the Lugard-Bower boundary delimitation exercise of 1894 which confirmed the earlier boundary fixed in 1893 by Captain Bower<sup>35</sup>. As a matter of fact, hostilities continued between the Lagos government and Ilorin on account of this boundary dispute. The hostilities between the two were such that they never saw eye to eye until 1897 when Ilorin was conquered. In fact, Governor Carter would have acted by ordering a swift expedition against Ilorin except that Ilorin was belonging to the Royal Niger Company which itself was not really in control. Anyway, due to the problems with Ilorin, Carter believed strongly that 'if Lagos is to continue to thrive, (as a British colony), the Ilorins must be kept in check at all cost'<sup>36</sup>.

#### **Ilorin as a Military Power**

War, as Banwo observed, played a prominent role in the political development of Ilorin Emirate<sup>37</sup>, as an emirate within the Sokoto Caliphate, part of the functions of the political authority in Ilorin was to further extend the spheres of Islam. In this regard, religion seemed to provide the justification for the series of territorial conquests and annexation by the political elite in this period, especially the military top brass, the four war generals, the Baloguns. Ilorin sometimes got support from other emirates like Lafajji, but especially its suzerain, Gwandu. Thus, it was very common for emirates in the Sokoto Caliphate to send troops to assist each other in the course of self defence or territorial expansion<sup>38</sup>. But we have to note here that the military commanders, the Baloguns continuously waged war in order to increase their power.

Apart from their administrative and sundry duties in their wards, they also led the soldiers in most of Ilorin's military expeditions in the nineteenth century. As they commanded the loyalty of their soldiers, success in battle increased their power within Ilorin town itself. Ilorin's military struggles against its neighbours began as counter-offensive wars. This is because the emirate state had to initially ward off six abortive attempts to invade it. The offensive launched by Ilorin, when it finally came, shattered the Oyo empire and led to the emergence of such new Yoruba states like Ibadan, Modakeke and Abeokuta that was



founded by the Egbas, according to Jimoh<sup>39</sup>. The first external war Ilorin participated in was Pamo War. It was a war between Ikoyi and an alliance that involved Ogbomoso, Ede and Iwo. The war was a result of the Ogele War between Ilorin and the Yorubas whose outcome was disastrous for the latter<sup>40</sup>. The war was fought by Ilorin on the side of Onikoyi and resulted in the siege laid on Ikoyi by Kakanfo Toyeye's troops to be successfully lifted. Following the victory won by Ilorin cavalry forces, this emirate state also engaged in such wars as the Gbogun War and the first Oshogbo War. The ultimate outcome of the fall of Gbogun was that the whole of the northern area of Oyo empire became Ilorin's vassals. The emirate however suffered a reversal of fortune in the latter<sup>41</sup>.

Ilorin's connection with Gwandu was also a very important factor. In this vein, through Gwandu, the Emir could get military support as happened during the battle of Ilorin in 1837. Ilorin did not get military cooperation from Gwandu alone, the Emir also at times negotiated military alliance with some of Ilorin neighbours. For instance, the Emir negotiated with Ibadan and Nupe for joint expedition as it happened in the case of Ilorin's conflict with Igbira. This alliance gave the Emir leverage as he could choose which of his own commanders would take part in such expedition<sup>42</sup>. At this point, reference should be made to Ijaiye War which occupies an important place in the trouble to beset the Yoruba nation in the nineteenth century. The ramification of the alliances that eventually involved virtually all Yoruba states is a testimony to the importance of this war. Of course, Ilorin as a power to reckon with in this region was actively involved in the alliances that also involved such non-Yoruba states like Benin, Borgu, Nupe, Dahomey and Ashanti<sup>43</sup>. Again, when in early 1878, Ekiti revolted against Ibadan by murdering its *Ajeles* (political agents), they were not only joined in these revolts by Ilesha alone but also by Ilorin which entered the alliance in June of the same year<sup>44</sup>. As a matter of fact, at the beginning of the wars with her Yoruba adversaries, Ilorin derived enormous advantage from the mobility of their horse men. During the same period, horses were of little use in Yorubaland, and the heroic performance of Ilorin cavalry forces in the *Mugbamugba* (locus fruit) war, was as a result of this edge possessed in the use of horses<sup>45</sup>.

Emir Shitta continued the campaigns that expanded the frontier of the emirate with successful campaigns like that of Kanla and also those

of Gbogun and Ikoyi already referred to above. But it was Emir Shitta's decisive and convincing victory over the combined forces of the Yoruba and Borgu that consolidated the position of this Yoruba emirate as a power to reckon with in Yorubaland. As we have discussed above, the refusal of Alafin Oluewu to go back to Ilorin to be converted to Islam was said to be the immediate cause of the armed conflict between Oyo and Ilorin. Emir Shitta (1836-1861), we have to note, was the one who succeeded his elder brother Emir Abd al-salam..

But in discussing the military strength of Ilorin, there is need to make reference to the ambition of the Baloguns. For instance, as set on record by Johnson, Karara, the Hausa Balogun in Ilorin was denied the honour of leading the battle which ended disastrously. Eventually, he unilaterally declared war against Offa. He left Ganmo, where he was then, to pitch his first camp. But as Emir Aliyu preferred to be on good terms with Ibadan, in order to ransom the Ilorin chiefs captured in the last war he was not in support of this war with Offa as the generality of the people in Ilorin too were against any armed conflict. According to Johnson, however, Karara threatened to convert his camp into a town that would be ruled by Momo, the heir apparent, in opposition to Ilorin. In order to avoid this crisis, Emir Aliyu soft pedaled and allowed him to have his way<sup>46</sup>. At this point, it is important for us to note that the Baloguns gradually reduced the Emir to the precarious situation it found itself close to the nineteenth century. As a matter of fact, only the first emir, Abdul Salam who appointed the Baloguns appears to have been the only emir that enjoyed effective control over his generals. The suicide of Emir Moma, as widely reported was caused by his Baloguns. Some observers are of the opinion that the Emirs generally had the feelings that any attempt to reduce the Baloguns power might lead to civil war<sup>47</sup>. Thus during the time of Emir Aliyu, the Emir himself told Major Macdonald, who was on a peace mission to the palace that his war generals would not leave the theatre of war, even if he called them. We must however acknowledge here that the military effectiveness of Ilorin army started showing signs of weaknesses during the second half of the nineteenth century, as a result of the declining value of horses in warfare as against the increased importance of fire arms<sup>48</sup>.

### **Ilorin as an Economic Power**

There is no gainsaying the fact that Ilorin was a very great economic power in the nineteenth century, both in Yoruba land and among the emirates in the Sokoto Caliphate. The importance of Ilorin as an economic power was the reason why the visiting Europeans among whom were traders were always interested in visiting the town to establish cordial relations with her monarchs. It was also the reason why the British government in Lagos wanted to bring it under total control. It was the reason why Emir Momo of Ilorin signed a treaty with the Governor of Lagos in 1893. Of course, the Europeans had established contacts with Sokoto Caliphate before the 1880s as travelers like Clapperton and Barth visited the caliphate and they were cordially received by the reigning caliphs during their visits: Muhammed Bello and Alli<sup>49</sup>. Around the middle of nineteenth century, British and American missionaries F. J. Bowen and Adolphus Mann visited Ilorin. In the 1870s, Crowther of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) also visited Ilorin. Even though the main purpose of their visit was evangelization, the reports of their visits exposed the high level of the commercial activities in Ilorin to the British. As a matter of fact, the high degree of the British interest in Yorubaland in the second half of the nineteenth century had implications for Ilorin as a frontier emirate<sup>50</sup>. One of the reasons why Ilorin was attractive to the British was its position as a trading centre as it was on the trade route between the north and the south. As a result of this, Hausa traders from the north sold their wares in Ilorin markets, just as traders from Yoruba land and coastal areas brought their goods to the town to sell<sup>51</sup>. Ilorin, as a major commercial and industrial town in the pre-colonial period, especially 18<sup>th</sup> century, had a high concentration of markets, not only within the city, but also in the districts. Thus, on the economic situation that had been on ground since the pre-colonial period, the 1921 Gazetteer of Ilorin Province records as cited by Jimoh: "Ilorin city, the capital of the Emirate is a large Yoruba city...the most striking feature to a stranger visiting Ilorin for the first time is the size of the markets..." such markets were located in Emir's quarters and others like Ajikobi, Gambari, Fulani and Alanamu quarters. The most prominent of these markets were Emir's market, Itakure, Omoda, Oloje, Gambari, Ojagboro, Awodi, Pake, Ondoko, Asunnara, Gada, Alanamu and Pakata markets. The Emir's

market was the largest of the markets and held every night from 6pm to midnight<sup>52</sup>.

At this juncture, we have to note that the largest single commercial zone in pre-colonial Nigeria was in the north. This commercial zone was the most extensive, apart from being “the best ordered and richest capital market”<sup>53</sup>. It is therefore not surprising that Ilorin profited immensely by being closely linked with the zone since the time of Sheikh Alim al-Salih, popularly known as Alimi. Thus, maintaining very close political relations with this commercial hub (referred to above), was the lynch pin of Ilorin authorities policy. Thus caravan leaders from the north needed not to proceed further when they reached Ilorin<sup>54</sup>. It is however important to emphasise here that the collapse of old Oyo empire had tremendous impact on the economy of Ilorin in the period under discussion. Part of this is the diversion of the transnational trade routes to Ilorin from Oyo which was a commercial hub in its hey days. Not only this, Ilorin was an entrepot where people with various skills settled. Thus, there was hardly any family compound in the city in those days not identified with a craft or profession. That is why in Ilorin there were, and still are, family compounds with following names: Ile Alagbede (blacksmiths), Ile Onikere (Raffia mat weavers), Ile Asileke, (bead makers), Ile Alata, Ile Ofinde (Brass casters), Ile Elewu-etu, Ile Alagbon, (Basket weavers), Ile Olokun (Rope makers), Ile Onigba (Calabash sellers), Ile Alawo (Hides and skin sellers and leather craftsmen), Ile Onitolotolo (Turkey breeders), Ile Onikoko (pot makers) among others. Most of the families involved in these vocations and crafts were those who fled Oyo and had no better place to settle in than Ilorin<sup>55</sup>. Also, Ilorin provided access to traders from Lagos on their way to River Niger when they rested in Ilorin in the course of their journey. Again economic consideration was behind the British policy to spread their influence to Ilorin as their occupation of Lagos in 1861 and the expansion of their economic interests into the hinterland provided opportunity for them to consider this<sup>56</sup>. Perhaps, this economic importance made the famous British explorers, Richard and John Lander to conclude, as cited by Jimoh, thus :

Besides Raka (i.e. Raba) which is peopled by Falatah (i.e. Fulani) who have strengthened it amazingly and rendered it exceedingly populous, another town of prodigious size has lately sprung into being which

already has surpassed Katunga (i.e. Old Oyo) wealth and population and extent. It was at first resorted to by Falatas (Fulani) who named it Alorie.....Alorie (Ilorin) had become by far the largest and most flourishing city in Yoruba (i.e. Yoruba)<sup>57</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, it is clear that the peculiar nature of Ilorin, a Yoruba speaking polity, an emirate within the sphere of Sokoto Caliphate influence was a very important factor in the day to day conduct of its political, social and economic affairs. That this emirate town was founded by the Yoruba -and part of Yoruba land- is not in doubt. Circumstances beyond the principal actors' control only made it possible that Ilorin would emerge as an organized state with all features of political administration under the Fulani sub-group in Ilorin, ably led by that great scholar, Alim al-Salih, popularly known as Sheikh Alimi. Interestingly, despite his overwhelming influence on the group that looked up to him, the *Jama'a* he was not to wield any political power while alive.

That distinction goes to his son Abd al-Salam who was destined to be the first sovereign of the town. It was this first ruler of Ilorin, the first emir, that was to formally make Ilorin an emirate under the Sokoto Caliphate.

Ilorin Emirate, a transitional zone between the predominantly Muslim Fulani-Hausa north was a military power in the pre-colonial period, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Her power was principally based on her adventure-loving war generals, known as Baloguns. The principal war commanders represented-and still represent- the major ethnic components of the town: Yoruba, represented by Baloguns Alanamu and Ajikobi; Fulani, represented by Balogun Fulani and Hausas, represented by Balogun Gambari. They were so powerful up to the time of the British advent in Ilorin. So powerful were they that they virtually turned any emir in power to their puppet. And finally, Ilorin Emirate was a very important economic power, enjoying its special geographical position, serving as the gate way between Yoruba land with which she speaks the same language and the Muslim north with which she not only practiced the same religion but shared common political fate.

**Footnotes**

- 1 Balogun S.A. "Historical Significance of Ilorin : A Preliminary Survey"  
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