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**NOTE FOR
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Manuscripts in both hard (duplicate) and soft copy should be sent to Dr. S.A. Shittu, Department of Arabic and Islamic studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria and should be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope or international postal coupons. They should be typed in double spacing and on separate sheets with margins and should not exceed 20 pages if quarto size or 14 if A4 size or fool-scap. Footnotes and references should also be typed in single line spacing and on separate sheets at the end of the article.

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THE ROLE OF MUSLIM ORGANISATIONS OF OYO STATE IN POLICY IMPLEMENTATION OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS STUDIES

BY

L.O. ABBAS

Introduction:

The most effective means of imparting religion to man is through education particularly at the early stage in life. Islamic education was for a long time in Nigeria, taught by individual Mallams, on whom vested the determination of the mode and the curriculum in his local Madrasah. Most graduates of these schools do engage in other professions like farming, teaching, carpentry e.t.c., because of non-availability of gainful regular employment.

The arrival of Western education later was not without Christian faith, as the latter was one of the requirements for admission into schools, most of which were owned by the Christian missions. It entailed preparedness of a pupil to covert to Christianity.

At first, Muslim parents refused to send their children to these schools for fear of conversion, but when Western education became the requirement for getting a white-collar job, the Muslims had no choice than to accept the 'fate'.

When in 1895, Lagos Muslims could not contain the alarming rate at conversion of their children to Christianity in schools, they withdrew their children. This action led to the establishment of government secondary schools where Islamic studies were taught.

Therefore, Muslims in Western region started establishing their own schools. These schools helped in reducing the rate of religious victimization. However, the take over of all schools by the government which the Muslims had hoped would stem the forceful conversion could not do the magic and unfortunately, the government refused to address the issue.

This attitude of the government made Muslim organizations to constantly urge or at times "force" the government to implement areas of constitutions provision in freedom of worship in institutions of learning. It is however sad that with the level of the country's development and in a period when the nation needs peace mostly, acts of persecution still rage on in our educational institutions.

It is this act of religious oppression in schools and the roles being played by Muslim organizations in resisting it that this paper sets out to examine.

2.0 Origin of Early Muslim organizations

An unprecedented rise in the Nigerian Muslims' consciousness of their pathetic situation was first witnessed about the first half of the twentieth century², particularly in the old western region (comprising the present Osun, Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, Edo, Ekiti States). This consciousness was noticed through the establishment of a number of organizations to serve as pressure groups.

Among the early organizations were the Ahmadiyyah Movement (1911), Ansar ud-Deen Society (1923) and the Ijebu Ode based Muslim friendly society (1927). Those that came later were Muslim Association of Nigeria Nawair ud-Deen Society and Isabatu-Deen Women Society, among others.

Prominent among the objectives of each of these organizations was the integration of Western and Islamic education. According to Alhaja human Alaga, leader of Isabatu-Deen Women Society, her opinion represented to a large extent, the aim of other societies. She was quoted to have said that "she found it difficult to get her daughter into (Christian) mission schools and that even Muslim girls in these mission schools are made to change their names and religion."¹¹

Generally, the need to acquire Western education along side Islamic education as felt by the Muslims, was not only to stem up losing their children out to the other religion, but also to be able to participate meaningfully in the economic and political order, as much as it was dictated by the Christian challenge. The formation of Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria in Lagos on the 18th of April, 1954 was of great importance, not only because it added to the pressure mounted by older societies, but because it was formed by the youths who were attending (Christian) mission schools and were still experiencing religious persecutions.

The society is the first Muslim organisation that has a national outlook, and unlike others, its membership is almost 100% literate. The normal traditional youthful zeal and vigour have also helped it in launching a formidable tirade against the attack of non-Muslims (especially in schools) and the sad ineptitude of the Muslim elders. In no long a time, the society had branches in almost all secondary schools, mostly Christian schools, and later in the Universities and other tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Realizing the low level of understanding of Islamic tenets by Muslim students which allowed for easy conversion to Christianity, the society, as part of its programme, first focused on enlightenment programmes at all member branches on Sundays. This programme tagged "Sunday Schools"⁵ was such that an Islamic Scholar was assigned to a school to teach Islamic studies to Muslim students between 10a.m and 12 noon when their Christian counterparts would be in the church. Apart from this, the society organized and still organizes Islamic Vacation Course (IVC) during the holidays to disengage the Muslims students from the usual attraction to Christian programmes like Easter retreats and Christmas picnics. At the I.V.C., various subjects on Islam are taught in theory and practice to enforce full understanding of Islam, particularly by those from Christian mission schools where Islamic studies was not offered.

As the society improved in its enlightenment activities to members, so also was the problem of religious indoctrination increased by the school heads. And with increase in the number of secondary schools, the problem became envious and it seemed certain that the society would not be able to contain the trend being students who have limited time to spare. Then came a plan of the formation of more Muslim (non-student) youth organizations to cater for the working class Muslims. The idea yielded good results with the establishment of organizations like Young Muslim Brothers and Sisters (YOUMBAS), Islamic Progressive Association of Nigeria (IPAN) both in Ibadan, Deenul Haq in Ilesa, Muslim Elites of Ejigbo among several others. These societies were established between 1974 and 1980.

The Da'wah activities of the societies in towns and villages helped a great deal in retaining many Muslims from drifting away. It at the same time allows the members of the M.S.S. to concentrate fully with their studies in schools. These, notwithstanding, could not stem the seemingly observed religious persecutions in schools.

It was as if collusion was in operation. This is because the same problem was being reported in almost all schools at the same time. They utterly disregarded the provision of the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria and the National Policy on education.

The 1979 Constitution, corroborated by those of 1989 and 1999, states: "No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction, ceremony or observance relating to a religion other than his own, or a religion not approved by his parent or guardian"⁶ when all appeals made to the principals to stop these illegal acts failed to yield the desired result, and the government tagged the M.S.S. members

who were trying to enforce the compliance of the constitutional provisions as unserious lots, who would not concentrate on their studies, some members within the higher echelon of the society met and decided to form a council whose responsibility would be to coordinate all the existing societies to serve as a common front to the government.

3.0 Emergence of Council of Muslim Youth Organisation (COMYO) in Oyo State.

The above information briefly formed the general background to the formation of COMYO. The immediate cause could however be attributed to two major incidents. First, some Muslim elders, mainly from the department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan, led by Professor M.O.A. Abdul, observed and formerly discussed the uncoordinated and at times contrary responses of the various Muslim Youth organizations in the state. These elders resolved that there was need for coordination. Coincidentally, it was at this same time that Mr. R.A. Shittu, a former President of M.S.S. at Obafemi Awolowo University, (then University of Ife) who was a member of the old Oyo State House of Assembly raised a motion in the house, praying the Assembly to pass a motion entrenching religious equity in the state and to call on the executive to design and execute a crash programme for the training of Islamic Studies' Teachers, the dearth of which was highly pronounced in the state post primary institutions.

The motion was not only rejected, the mover was condemned by most of his colleagues even in the same party (Unity Party of Nigeria) apparently on religious ground. He was referred to as a religious fanatic. The leading members of the executive of the M.S.S. went to Honourable Shittu's home in the evening of this day to solidavise with him. There, they met the grand patron of the society, Alhaji Yisa Yagboyaju and they all expressed their disappointment at the lost motion. Discussions at that informal meeting led to an agreement to form a body of Muslim organisations which shall present a united force against any government's decision that might be unfair to Islam and the Muslims.⁸

Dr. K.K. Oloso who attended both the first elders' meeting and the second informal meeting was charged with the responsibility of convening a meeting of representatives of all Muslim organizations in the State. The meeting was held at the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan on the 30th of March, 1980. The meeting was attended enthusiastically by many Muslim elders who also addressed the gathering. The establishment of the Council (Council of Muslim Youth Organisations of Oyo State - 'COMYO') then resolved at that meeting,

marked the birth of a Principal formidable front, which resisted the religious oppression against the Oyo State Activities of the Council.

Immediately after its formation, the Council swung into operation under the leadership of its principal co-coordinator, Alhaji Ishaq Kunle Sanni and the close supervision of the Muslim elders. The initial pre-occupation of the Council was underground enlightenment of the Muslim parents on the plight of their children in educational institutions. The first effect of such campaign was the Council's open declaration of support for Iragbiji Muslim parents who withdrew all their children from the two primary Schools in the town on the 10th of April, 1980 in protest against the sack of two teachers of Islamic Studies at both Baptist and Anglican primary Schools in the town. The action embarrassed the government and it quickly reabsorbed⁹ the teachers.

The Council, having established a number of cases of persecutions in schools, sought audience with the government through an official letter to the governor in November 1980 to discuss some issues affecting the Muslim populace. Some of the issues listed for discussion were:

- (a) Refusal to make provision for the teaching of Islamic Studies in schools;
- (b) Refusal of the government to post teachers of Islamic studies to all schools. Rather, it saturated the few Muslim Schools with a disproportionately high number of Islamic teachers;
- (c) Changing the names of some Muslim Schools to Community Schools, cases of Muslim Grammar School Ilero which was changed to Ilero Community Grammar School by the State Ministry of Education, and the Muslim Grammar School, Igbeti changed to Marble Grammar School were cited as examples, the two schools have however been given back their original names;
- (d) Deliberate refusal of the government to post Islamic studies graduates teachers colleges, which would have helped in producing teachers for primary schools.

When no response was forthcoming from the governor, the Council sought and got the consent of the then Chief Imam of Ibadan, Alhaji Muili Abdullah (who was the Chairman of Oyo State Council of Chief Imams) to personally seek an audience with the governor, on behalf of the State's Muslim Community. The governor, in his prompt response to the request of the Chief Imam, scheduled the meeting for the 13th of January, 1981 at the Government Executive Chamber.

At the meeting, Alhaji Sanusi- Elesinmeta (the Grand Mufti of Oyo State), represented Chief Imam of Ibadan, while Governor Bola Ige led the team of politicians and government officials. The coordinator of COMYO read the Muslims' address which mentioned a number of government policies considered unfair to Islam. Apart from the problems mentioned in the letter sent earlier to the governor, others mentioned in the Coordinator's address were that many heads of schools were conducting the early morning school assembly with Christian songs of praise, and that all students including Muslims were compelled to purchase it. This is apart from the refusal of heads of these schools to allow Muslims to attend Jumat services on Fridays. The governor promised to look into the matter with a view to solving them.

The Muslims, after a month of anxious expectation wrote, via a letter from COMYO on the 13th of February, 1981, to remind the governor of his promises, which as far as the Muslims knew, had not been fulfilled. The Council in support of its allegation against further religious oppression in schools, even after the meeting with Governor on January 13, 1981, gave an instance of one Azeez Aderemi, a student of Ibadan city Academy who was slapped on the face by the Principal of the School, Mr. Gabriel Adeyemo during the School Assembly on the 23rd of January, 1981, because the former refused to recite the Christian's "our Lord's prayer".¹⁰ When no response was received from the government, the Council wrote another letter of reminder to the governor on the 13th of March, 1981. The letter was concluded with "We do not want to believe, as it is being rumoured in certain Christian quarters that your pledge to us on January 13, 1981 was a ruse and with no genuine intention of finding a lasting solution to the problems. And that a master plan is underway which would make a nonsense of a peaceful solution."¹¹ As usual, there was no tangible response.

The only reaction to the council's correspondences came from the office of the then Commissioner of Education which informed the Council that "... It would take time before the issue could be resolved".¹² Further to that, the long awaited government policy came in form of a circular towards the end of April 1981. Rather than resolve the problems as assumed, the circular placed a ban on the activities of the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSS) and the Scripture Union (SU) in Oyo State Schools.

The circular further stated that there would be separate morning assemblies for Muslims and that "all schools allow Muslims who wish to do so attend Jumat Service ... it must be made clear that no child is forced to do so ... and that the school must close at the normal time..."¹³

The injustice which the circular contained is very obvious. M.S.S. (the only Muslim Society in schools) was banned alongside the Scripture Union (one of the many Christian Societies in Schools). The action by implication meant total cancellation of Islamic activities in Schools. The circular neither mentioned any step being taken to arrest the shortage of Islamic teachers nor stated any decision on alleged persecution of Muslim Students in Schools, the two main concerns of the Muslim Community. This development, the Muslim opined, is a confirmation of the speculation that all the governor was promising was a deceit. Some Muslims, who had sympathy for the government being in the same political party, could not believe such an open ill treatment either. All the appeal to the authorities for reversal of the decision was to no avail. It should be noted that the government remained consistent in their persecution of the Muslims till October 1983 when there was a change in government. For example:

- (1) The government which in 1979 outlawed the establishment of Missionary Schools, approved the establishment of Baptist High School, Igboho and New Eden School Bodija in September 1981 but disallowed the establishment of Muslim Grammar School, Erin Osun and Nawair-Ud-Deen Grammar School, Kishi also in September, 1981.
- (2) The government distributed copies of the bible to Students in Public Schools, while the Holy Qur'an was neither purchased nor distributed to any group of Muslim Students in any part of the State. A newspaper report¹⁴ credited to the then Governor claimed that copies of the Holy Qur'an had been distributed to Muslim Students in Oyo State Schools was denied by the Governor himself two weeks later on a life Oyo State radio Programme, entitled "Guest of the Month".
- (3) Three teachers' Colleges formerly owned by Christian missions were upgraded to Colleges of Education (Baptist College, Iwo, St. Andrew's College, Oyo and Wesley College, Ibadan), whereas no Muslim institution was so upgraded. The Colleges were fully financed by the 'Secular' government of Oyo State. Whereas, Islamic Studies was not allowed to be taught in these government colleges only because they were formerly owned by Christians.

Even a circular letter from the Ministry of Education sometime in June 1984, directed the authorities of St. Andrew's campus not to allow the teaching of Islamic Studies, the establishment of a branch of the M.S.S. and the observance of Salat¹⁵ (acts of worship in Islam).

It was only in the late 1984 that the teaching of Islamic Studies was allowed to the three Colleges of Education mentioned above only on part-time¹⁶ basis, consequent upon pressure mounted by the Council with the support of the Muslim leaders. It is important to mention that Oyo State Muslim Community experienced more persecution in schools during the period between October 1979 and September 1983. The short regime of Dr. Omololu Olunloyo as Oyo State Governor between October and December 1983 saw some peace and understanding between the Muslim Community and the government. It was during this short period that government lifted the ban on the M.S.S. in the State Schools. Not only that, Ansarud-Deen High School, Saki was upgraded to higher School certificate (H.S.C.) awarding institution.

When in 1984, the Military came to power and styled itself a "Corrective regime" the Oyo State Muslims thought that there would be a stop to the religious persecution. But instead of addressing the issue of religion seriously, successive governors with the exception of Governor (late Brigadier Adetunji Olurin, and understandably Governor A.K. Adisa) seemed to be pleased with the situation and allowed the status quo. So many methods were adopted to suppress Islam in public schools and flout the nation's constitution. For instance on the 14th of April, 1987¹⁷, the Principal of Estate High School in Ibadan (a community School) assembled all students irrespective of their parents' religious beliefs, into the school hall for a one hour bible talk. A female agricultural teacher (who is a Muslim) in the school called the attention of the Principal to the illegality of the act particularly at a time the federal Government placed a ban¹⁸ on religious activities in Secondary and tertiary institutions in the country.

The Principal, according to information, assured the teacher that there would be no problem and that if any problem arises, she would quickly contain it after all Bible is a subject on the time-table. However, the insistence of the Muslim teacher that a stop be put to such acts earned her two queries¹⁹ from the principal on the same day for daring to challenge her authority. The Muslim teacher sent a protest letter to the Teaching Service Commission to explain what was in practice in her School, nothing was done by the Commission. The Council of Muslim Youth Organisations got hinted about the matter and reported the case to the police, after the Council had asked the principal, about the matter and she denied; Mrs. J. F. Olusanya, organized a Bible Talk again and she assembled all the students in the hall. The talk was to be presented by Gideon International Group (a Christian society which brought along with it, copies of Bible for free distribution to students. On hearing about the incident, the University of Ibadan Muslim graduates' Association

(U.I.M.G.A.) wrote an appeal letter²⁰ each to both the state Governor and the Commissioner of Education. The group, an organization under NACOMYO, renewed the call on the authority to call the Principal to order in the interest of peace. There was no reaction from either quarters. The matter however came up for discussion, when, on 5th June 1990, the Oyo State Muslim Community visited the governor, protesting against the lopsided composition of Board of Governors of newly created Oyo state University of technology, Ogbomosho. There, the School and that her officials were investigating²¹ the matter. Nothing was done afterwards.

Muslim Students of Ibadan Grammar School were happy on hearing that a graduate of Islamic Studies had been posted to the school on February 9, 1990. Little did they know that their joy and hopes for Islamic education would be shortlived. The Principal of the school rejected the teacher the same day he reported on the excuse that "We do not offer Islamic Studies here".²² Government did nothing to it in spite of series of letters from Muslim groups calling its attention to it. One wonders what justification that remains for the continued existence of the teaching commission if its directives to principals can be flagrantly disregarded.

Allegations and suspicion from some sections of the Muslim Community that some 'powerful' Christian leaders could make useless any directive to the principals that are not pleased to them could be true. Otherwise, how can one believe that Canon Immanuel Alayande, a respected Christian leader in the State could sanction the action of the principal of Ibadan grammar School for rejecting an Islamic teacher? According to the Canon "only the subjects that are requested for by the school are taught there"²³ and that "Why the Ministry (that is the Commission) should send a teacher of Islamic Studies to the School when it did not request for it?" he queried.

At Ikolaba Grammar School, Ibadan, similar problems ensued in the school, there were seven teachers of Bible knowledge and one in charge of Islamic Studies. The only Islamic teacher, Mr. M. D. Yusuf was on the 27th April, 1990 transferred²⁵ to Baptist Grammar School Eruwa. For a long time, no replacement was made. At St. Gabriel Grammar School, Ibadan, the principal was reported to have declared three hours between 8 a.m. and 11 a.m of first Friday of every month a Christian evangelical period in the assembly hall.

It is also reported that one Mr. Amoo, a geography teacher at Peoples' Girls' Grammar School, Ibadan was fond of telling students in his class that "Whoever fails to accept Christ will always fail in his subject"²⁶.

A lot of acts of religious persecution such as mentioned above abound in Oyo State Schools. But what surprised the State's Muslims is the seeming non-challenge of the government to delicate issues like this, despite various representatives to the government for peaceful settlement.

In addition, Muslim leaders use advantage of government official occasions to raise such issues. It is the responsibility of the government to promote peace and religious understanding among different religions. After all the two (Islam and Christianity) do not teach hatred or disharmony. Rather, they enjoin their adherents to live in love with other members of the society of different beliefs.

In Islam, one's faith is not complete until he loves for others what he loves for neighbours".²⁸ If the two religions teach love as a duty before the creator, it then goes without saying that leaders of the two sink their differences and work together as brothers.

Conclusion

The surge of various Muslim Organisations in Oyo State, especially since about 21 decades ago is the implementation of great awareness about their plight in the society. The religious persecution to which Muslim students have been subjected since colonial era is one of the major factors behind the formation of many of these groups.

The achievements which these bodies have recorded to the advantage of Islam could probably not have been possible if their founders had been docile.

The challenge especially before the Oyo State Muslims is much of an intellectual one. Muslims therefore, have the enormous task of raising their heads above all odds in order to ensure that they neither persecute nor be persecuted. They should resist within the legal provision, any form of religious persecution particularly in public schools, for as the Qur'an states, "...persecution is worse than willing".²⁹

Religious leaders in the state should learn to tolerate one another. Their seemingly good intention for setting up Christian-Muslim peace movement should not be defeated by ungodly activities. They should serve as good ambassadors of their divine religions. The two should be in position to advise government for better society.

On its own, the State Government should desist from religious politics and open support for one religion to the disadvantage of the other. Government should not promote the already serious mutual suspicion

between the two religions. There is need for government to be firm in the implementation of religious politics in public schools.

Teachers of religion should note the danger inherent in the call by some religious leaders³⁰ that government should return schools to missions.³⁰ This writer believes that the teachers would be worse for it should the call materialize. If with the government's take over of schools, there exist religious segregation, persecution and acrimony in schools, one wonders the level it could reach when schools are returned to their former owners.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. I. O. Oloyede, "The Council of Muslim Youth Organisation in Oyo State", *Islamic Studies* (1987): p. 26.
3. Ibid.
4. K.K. Oloso, "The Contributions of the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria in the Islamic resurgence in Southern Nigeria (1954 – 1980)". M. A. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1981), p.42.
5. Ibid.
6. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Promulgation) 1989 No. 12 section 37, Sub-Section 2, p.29.
7. L. O. Abbas, "The Establishment and Activities of Council of Muslim Youth Organisation of Oyo State." (M. A. Project, University of Ibadan, 1985) p.6.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. I.O. Oloyede, op.cit p. 90.
12. The letter with reference No. Wsu. 1107/410 was signed by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Oyo State.
13. The letter with reference No. Edu 107/412.
14. The Nigerian Tribune, 5 September, 1982.
15. The statement was made by the Provost of St. Andrew's College of Education, Oyo at a meeting he held with representatives of the

- College Muslim Community on 30th June, 1986 as reflected in the minutes of the meeting, page 3, paragraph 4.
16. Professor D.O.S. Nobi and Dr. S. H. A. Malik were employed as part-time lecturers Wesley Campus, Ibadan and Mr. A. H. Jumah and Mr. G. A. Adewole were part-timers at St. Andrew's College campus while the writer and late L. A. Badru were part-timers at Baptist Campus, Iwo. All between October 1984 and June 1985.
 17. A letter of query dated 29th April, 1987 to Mrs. L.O. Dairo on the issue was signed by the Principal Mrs. J. F. Olusanya, paragraph 2 of the letter confirmed that she (The Principal) assembled all students for Bible talk.
 18. In her letter of protest against false accusation and in paragraph 2 reminded the Principal of the ban on religious activities in all public schools sometime in 1987.
 19. The two queries were issued to the teacher on 29/4/87.
 20. The letter with Ref. No. UIMGA/MGJ/001 dated 23rd May, 1990 was signed by both the Secretary and the Chairman Mr. H. Adetunji and Alhaji R. A. Aderinoye respectively.
 21. The Guardian, Wednesday, 6 June, 1990.
 22. The principal minuted the rejection of the Islamic religious Knowledge teacher on the letter of offer of appointment with reference No: SBTP 69062/17 and signed by one 'Sola Oladoko on behalf of the Chairman, Post Primary Schools' Board, Secretariat, Ibadan.
 23. Canon Emmanuel Alayande made the statement on 7 July, 1990 at N.T.A. Ibadan premises venue of the Luncheon.
 24. The manuscripts was formed by some Christians and Muslim leaders in Oyo State in January 1990 to create avenue for understanding and joint efforts by both religionists to stem acts of persecution in the state. Alhaji Arisekola Alao and reverend Dr. S.T. Ola Akande are Co-Chairmen.
 25. The transfer letter was signed by one A. O. Akinyemi on behalf of Chairman Post Primary Schools board on 27th April, 1990.
 26. Alhaji Arisekola raised the issue in his address at the Government house on July 3, 1990 during the 1990 Ileya get-together.
 27. Hadith Number 13 of al-Nawawi's collection.

28. Bible Luke 10:28
29. Qu'ran 2:191
30. Arch. Bishop Olubunmi Okogie renewed his call for the return of Mission Schools to former owners as carried by the Guardian Wednesday, 8 August, 1990.

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