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**The Role of '*Ulama* (Arabic Scholars) In The 19th
Century Yoruba Nation And Politics**

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Abstract

The nineteenth Century was a revolutionary period in the history of societies, kingdoms and empires in Yorubaland. The Century witnessed profound and irreversible social, religious and political transformations in the lives of the people who lived in the region. Both internal and external factors were responsible for these processes of change. The consequential events centred on commerce, politics, religion, warfare, intra-and intergroup relations, and reform and adjustment to new ways of life. This paper describes the activities of the Muslims in the 19th century Yoruba Politics,

and the significant roles played by the 'Ulama in the period under study. Islam was introduced to Yorubaland before the 19th century, and the population was reinforced by the ingress of Muslim immigrants and Hausa slaves who were brought to Oyo Empire. In this diverse group different roles were played by the Muslim community and the 'Ulama (clerics). The activities of the Muslims had momentous impact on 19th century Yoruba politics in different ways as recorded in Arabic documents and other historical materials. In the course of time, Muslims occupied positions of great authority in royal administration. They used their position to promote Islam. This paper argues that the roles of the 'Ulama in the political transformation and social change in Yorubaland was so important that its impact is felt till today.

Keywords

Yoruba, Islam, Warfare, 'Ulama and Politics

Introduction

In the recent times, scholars of history have drawn attention to what they regard as the wide spread belief in "myths" which characterize the ideas of people about origin among the Nigerians in this respect. Thus, the antiquity of many Yoruba source of origin, tracing the people to the Middle East is well known in present state of historical researches. Therefore, the origin of the Yoruba people is a subject of intense debate among scholars¹. This is as a result of the

¹ Babatunde Agbaje- Williams, 'Yoruba Urbanism: The Archaeology and Historical Ethnography of Ile- Ife and Old Oyo' *Pre-Colonial Nigeria. Essays*

diffusion of several traditions about the origin of the people. Hence several schools of thought exist on the origin of Yoruba, these include scholars of ethnography, anthropology, archaeology and other allied disciplines. However, the Yoruba typology of settlement formations take into consideration in tracing the origin of the people that migrated from different times in successive migratory waves and settled at the Ile - Ife; the spiritual home of Yoruba race around the villages and hamlets and later developed through confederated processes, where several independent villages coalesced into confederated settlement, transformed into an urban Centre under one recognizable monarch. Thus, Ile Ife developed as a city of unification of thirteen or more hamlets into an urban Centre between ninth and eleventh centuries (800-1000 A.D)². Glimpses from oral traditions; Babatunde Agbaje establishes that there were dispersed settlement patterns in Yorubaland before the ninth Century. (9th C). The establishment and consolidation of a new dynasty and a new political institution developed at Ile Ife and the harbingers of the new dynasty completed the process of political transformation by building a wall around the new settlement that served as the focus of power and kingly authority. From available historical accounts, it appears that, it was at Ile- Ife that city- life possibly started in Yoruba

in Honour of Toyin Falola. Ed. Akinwunmi Ogundiran. Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2005. 217.print.

² Babatunde Agbaje- Williams, 'Yoruba Urbanism: The Archaeology and Historical Ethnography of Ile- Ife and Old Oyo.' *Pre-Colonial Nigeria. Essays in Honour of Toyin Falola*. Ed. Akinwunmi Ogundiran. Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2005. 217 print.

land³. According to the royal house at Ile –Ife, Oduduwa was the eponymous ancestor of Yoruba people and who in some myths a primordial divinity and a deified ancestor of Yoruba people⁴. In the same breath, other school of thought claims that the Yoruba came from Yemen and first settled at Ile–Ife around tenth century (10thC). In his work Abdullahi Smith notes that the story of Oduduwa’s flight from Arabia suggests that Yoruba culture is of Middle Eastern origin⁵. In recent times, according to the royal house at Ijebu ode, the Ijebu stock of Yoruba people came from Wadai in the central Sudan⁶. Therefore, in all the sources available for understanding the Yoruba history the name of Middle East as a source of Yoruba origin is of paramount important.

Study Area

The Yoruba homeland is located in the south Western Nigeria, lies between latitudes 6⁰ and 9⁰ North and longitudes 2⁰3⁰ and 6⁰ 3⁰1 East with estimated area of about 181,300 square kilometres. The Yoruba people are found primarily in southwest Nigeria and the adjoining parts of neighboring countries. They constitute one of the ethnic

³ Babatunde Agbaje- Williams, 219

⁴ P.B. Clarke, *A West Africa and Islam. A study of Religious Development from the 8th to the 20th Century.* Londo Edward Arnold Publishers, 1982. 166. Print.

⁵ Abdullahi Smith “The Legend of the Seifuwa: A study in the origins of a tradition of Origin” Eds. Bala Usman and Nur AlKali *Studies in the history of Pre-Colonial Borno.* Nigeria: Northern Nigeria Publishing Company, 1983. 16-56. Print. S. O. Biobaku, *The Origin of the Yoruba.* Lagos: Government Printer, 1956. 20 – 21. Print.

⁶ E. A. Alayande, *The Ijebu Of Yorubaland 1850-1950 Politics, Economy and Society.* Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1992. 29. Print.

groups in Nigeria and occupy the whole of Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, Ekiti, Osun, Lagos, and parts of Kwara and Kogi states. Due to long distance trade, a considerable number of Yoruba people are found in the south-eastern part of the Republic of Benin. And due to the transatlantic slave trade, they are also found in Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, Venezuela, and other parts of the America. They later constituted and integrated to the core of the 'New World lineages'⁷.

There were other centres of Yoruba settlement growing side by side with Ile-Ife and deriving inspiration from it which were well-organized political entities known as kingdoms. With the passage of time some of these kingdoms became more powerful politically than Ile-Ife itself. The other kingdoms apart from Ife that developed in Yorubaland up to the 19th Century were Owu, Oyo, Ijebu, Ijesa, Ketu, Popo, Egba, Sabe, Dassa, Egbado, Igbomina, the sixteenth Ekiti principalities, Owo and Ondo. The oldest kingdom is Owu that first established and wielded authority over other kingdoms. Soon, however Oyo rose to prominence and became the largest and the most powerful of the kingdoms ever established in Yorubaland. According to oral traditions, the real founder of Oyo was Oranyan, the youngest and bravest son of Oduduwa, who made Oyo his kingdom and became the first ruler (Oba) with the title of Alaafin of Oyo. The Oyo people lived in a strong walled city, with a tall earthen wall for defense with seventeenth gates. The Oyo Empire in Yorubaland was located in the savanna

⁷ S.A. Akintoye, *A history of the Yoruba people*. Ibadan, Amalion Publishing, 2010 Print.

grassland and the forest region west of the Niger, between the Hausa kingdoms and the coast, the Yoruba people were the dominant tribes. In the sixteen century, a larger Oyo empire developed, based slightly further from the forest of Oyo, using the profits of trade to organize a forceful cavalry. The Oyo Empire grew in strength during the sixteenth century and by the end of the eighteen century, the rulers of Oyo were controlling a region from the Niger to the west of Dahomey⁸.

Islam in Yorubland

The upper region of the Senegal and Niger rivers are reported to have been exposed to Islamic influence since the eight century C.E. Arab geographers and scholars wrote about this region right from that century. One of the scholars who gave information about the area was al-Mas'udi as far back as 947 C.E. Al-Mas'udi drew attention to emergence of Muslim communities in the savanna region of West Africa.⁹ Commercial activities, through the trans-Saharan routes, between Northern Africa and the early kingdoms and city - states of the western Sudan had contributed to the spread and diffusion of Islam among the Sudanic people. The geographical location of Yorubaland made it possible to involve in a long-distance trading long networks that crisscrossed Yorubaland. This gave the Yoruba people the opportunity to establish contact with Muslim merchants of West Africa and Islamised areas at the

⁸ Akinwunmi Ogundiran, *Pre-Colonial Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Toyin Falola*. Eritrea, Africa World Press, 2005. 215. Print.

⁹ Ahmad Muhammad Kani, *The intellectual Origin Of Sokoto Jihad* Ibadan, Iman Publication, 1984. 11. Print.

early period. The fall of empires such as Songhai, Mali and Ghana aided the spread of Islam into Yoruba land¹⁰. The roles of Mandinka traders and missionaries were very instrumental in the diffusion of Islam in the region. Within Yorubaland, the Oyo Empire emerged as a cosmopolitan commercial and manufacturing centre. The driving force for Oyo's pre-eminence in commerce oriented state craft, local entrepreneurial spirit, the stimulus of pan regional and trans-Saharan trade networks that crisscrossed Yorubaland between fourteenth and nineteenth centuries¹¹. The Yoruba traditional policies towards people of different religions aided the early diffusion of Islam in Yorubaland¹². The cumulative consequence of these factors was the emergence of Oyo as an entrepot of the trans-Saharan trade during the fifteenth century, and lasting through the early nineteenth century. Oyo was not a mere "transit-city" for goods that were produced elsewhere and shipped to other destinations. Rather its ascendancy as one of the most important commercial hubs of the trans-Saharan trade in Central Sudan developed out of its pre-Oyo empire. A remarkable outcome was the flow of goods, Muslim peoples, and ideas that later gave the Oyo empire its cosmopolitan cultural values with Islamic elements and identities. Thus, the Oyo Empire rose to its prominence with Islamic elements and the ingress of the *'ulama* who became members of the

¹⁰ Adam ai-illuri, *Islam fi Naijiriyyah Wa Shaykh Uthman bin Fudi al-Fulaniy*. Lagos, Agege, 1978. 140. Print.

¹¹ Rasheed Olaniyi, 'Kano: The Development of Trading City in Central Sudan' *Pre-Colonial Nigeria. Essays in Honour of Toyin Falola*. Ed. Akinwunmi Ogundiran. Eritrea, Africa World Press, 2005.p. 310. Print.

¹² T.G.O. Gbadamasi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908* London, Longman Group Limited 1978. Pp. 12, 34. Print

household of the Yoruba rulers¹³. The beginning of the fourteenth century witnessed a political interaction and an economic processes in Yorubaland, when Oyo Empire reorganized her political system and intensely involved in a long distance commercial transactions, this was integration of Oyo into the trans-Saharan trade. Kano one of the major centres of the trans-Saharan commercial traffic through which Kukawa and Wadai in the east were linked with Gonja and Timbuktu in the West, and Kumasi, Bida and Old Oyo (*Katunga*) in the South¹⁴. Caravans traversed the Saharan Desert to various circuits of trade on the shores of the Niger and the Nile Rivers, the Mediterranean littoral, and Red Sea. Yorubaland was one of the major centres of the political refugees and economic security was the main pulls for these migrations. The Savanna region where the Oyo Empire arose had for several centuries been a zone of interaction between people belonging to very different cultural background. After 1000CE, trade over longer distances became the basis for the rise of kingdoms in the Savanna. Trade in golds, salt, and cowries attracted Muslim traders to the trans-Saharan commercial networks. The Wangara migrants who were Muslim traders and clerics speaking *Mande* languages of the Mali Empire facilitated the diffusion of Islam in Yorubaland by establishing trade centres in Savanna.¹⁵ The rising Oyo Empire in Yorubaland

¹³ T.G.O. Gbadamasi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908* p . 5.

¹⁴ Rasheed Olaniyi, 'Kano: The Development of Trading City in Central Sudan' ... p. 306 Print.

¹⁵ Stefan Reichmuth and Rasaan Abubakre, 'Illorin and Nupe in the Nineteenth and twentieth Centuries' in John Hunwick of *Africa, volume II, The writings of Central Sudanic Africa* Leiden. New York, E.J. Brill, Koln, 1995, 439-441.

became increasingly more involved in the trans-Saharan trades. These new patterns of trade, migration, and settlement coincided with the expansion of Islam in Yorubaland especially in the 17th century. Linguistic evidence suggests that relations between the Yoruba city - states and Islamised neighbours were deep and led to cultural exchanges not only in political and social life but also in ideas about social organization. Historical linguistics has thus far given us some ideas about the directions and themes of word borrowings that have come into the Yoruba language. Islamic religious terms, for instance, are thought to have been introduced through the Wangara. And a number of Arabic loan words pertaining to trade and Islam are found in Yoruba vocabularies. These are indications that these loan words may be attributed to Muslim people including the Arabs who came to Yorubaland. According to Gbadamasi, the population of Yoruba Muslims was increased by enslaved Muslim groups some of whom were captured in the wars of expansion and aggrandizement that Oyo Empire waged against her Islamised neighbours, while others were Muslim slaves purchased in the long distance trading activities with northern neighbours especially from Nupe while some slaves were given to the Alaafin as tributes as done by Dahomeyans.¹⁶ Many of the enslaved men and women were sold across the Sahara, and many were retained in the local economic activities, and by the seventeenth century, some of the enslaved Muslim men and women were being transformed into eunuchs and employed in the high and middle level administration cadres in the Oyo empire, even as advisers to the

¹⁶T .G.O, Gbadamasi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1 908* ... 8.

monarch¹⁶. The contact of the Yoruba with Islamized areas was a major catalyst in the expansion of Islam in Yorubaland in the sixteenth century and the trade relation between Kano and Yoruba land especially at Oyo-Ile deserves attention. The establishment of the Kurmi market as a commercial hub for both regional and intercontinental traders and the market put in place major commercial transformations that increased the volume, value and variety of goods exchanged across the Sahara. The Kurmi market earned Kano the prestigious position of being one of the three major commercial centres in Africa during the sixteenth century. From Kano, caravans traversed the Saharan Desert to various circuits of trade on the shores of the Niger and the Nile Rivers, the Mediterranean littoral, and the Red Sea. Kano was also one of the major centres of the trans- Sudan commercial traffic through which Kukawa and Wadai in the east were linked with Gonja and Timbuktu in the West, and Kumasi, Bida and Old Oyo (*Katunga*) in the South and to Nupe and Yoruba.¹⁷

¹⁷ Rasheed Olaniyi, 'Kano: The Development of Trading City in Central Sudan' 306.



Source: From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia¹⁸

Kano traders exported livestock, salt, natron, leather goods, horses, and cloth, and in turn products of the forest and savanna belt such as Kolanut, pepper, and spices were imported into Kano and other parts of Hausaland.¹⁹ From Kano, salt, glass, beads, silk, leather goods, livestock and horses, and human cargoes radiated southwards to Old Oyo and Ilorin, and caravans passing through Old Oyo supplied Kolanut, pepper, and other spices northwards. The merchants of Nupe and Old Oyo were the chief middlemen in the importation of cowries into Hausaland

¹⁸ (Online) Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yorubaland>. downloaded on Monday, 16/3/2020

¹⁹ Rasheed Olaniyi ' Kano: The Development of Trading City in Central Sudan' ...p. 307.

during the century. The chief export of Kano to Old Oyo that eventually reached the coast was human cargo²⁰. The commodities sent to the coast included textiles, dyestuffs, and Ivory in return for European, Asian, Mediterranean commodities including textiles and beads, iron and to a lesser degree, firearms, and ammunitions²¹. The Yoruba traders were so important to the Kano market that Yoruba traders established a trading section called *Yancitta* or *Yantaffarnuwwa* at the Kurmi market, and a residential quarter established by the Yoruba traders in Kano during the eighteenth century is reportedly being occupied by their descendants today²². Likewise, Hausa commercial and artisan Diaspora including pastoralists and horse attendants, were established in Yoruba land, especially in Old Oyo at the Northern territories during the century. These communities in Yoruba land aided the spread and diffusion of Islam in Yoruba land.

Muslim Office Holders in the 19th Century Politics of Yoruba

Looking in retrospect and through the lenses of political history of the nineteenth century of Yoruba nation, there is no doubt that the Muslim intelligentsia were among the key markers in the political game of the period. A survey of the political situation of the period reveals the gain the Muslims,

²⁰ Rasheed Olaniyi ' Kano: The Development of Trading City in Central Sudan' ... p. 307.

²¹ Rasheed Olaniyi ' Kano: The Development of Trading City in Central Sudan' ...p. 310.

²² Rasheed Olaniyi ' Kano: The Development of Trading City in Central Sudan' ...p. 310.

particularly the '*Ulama* made in the politics of the state. This political power of Islam had risen considerably in many big towns in Yorubaland, such as Ikirun, Iwo, Igboho, Iseyin, Ogbomoso, Epe etc. From the first three decades of the nineteenth century, Islam attained the pinnacle of political influence in Yorubaland with has huge number of '*ulama* (Arabic teachers) and Muslim Oba (Kings). Oba Ali Atewogboye, the Ewi of Ado-Ekiti (1836 - 1885) for example was a Muslim. He was a patron of Islam and employed the services of the "*ulama*" (Arabic scholars). At Lagos, Adele I (1775 - 80, 1832 - 1834), the Oba of Lagos was a patron of Islam; they allowed the practice of Islam in their domains. Oba Adele I (1775 - 80, 1832 - 1834) permitted the practice of Islam. He was dethroned in 1780 C.E. on account of his patronage to Islam and the consequent neglect of traditional worship. When he was recalled and returned to Lagos in 1832, Islam was again firmly established in his court and Muslims enjoyed his patronage ²³. When prince Kosoko assumed power and became Oba of Lagos in 1845, he supported Islam and allowed Muslims to practice Islam in his domain. This early patronage of Kosoko to Islam prompted Muslims to follow him to Epe when he was expelled from Lagos in 1850 by the British Government, and by the time he was recalled in 1862 many Muslims followed him back to Lagos. There were other places where Islam had actually attained the political influence. In Iwo for example, most of the civilians and military chiefs were Muslims. Oba Muhammad who ascended the throne in 1860, was Muslim Oba. At Ede and Ikirun Obas were Muslims. Timi of Ede Oba Abibu Lagunju and Oba Aliyu Oyewole of Ikirun were Muslims in their

respective domains. Oba Oyewole of Ikirun, however distinguished himself and excelled all other Yoruba Muslim Obas in the 19th century. He was popularly eulogised and described as a friend of Muslims and helper of Islam²³. In addition, Oba Oyewole, employed the service of a Muslim judge, Mallam Bako from Ilorin, who performed judicial function at the royal court. He could hear and decide cases brought to the palace for adjudication on Islamic matters²⁴. Epe became a Muslim town with the arrival of Kosoko in 1851, under the ardent leadership of Ajeniya, he bore Islamic title the Muslim Balogun (war chief and commander), and it was near his house that the Central Mosque was built. Gbadamosi notes that a definite Islamic community began, by which Eko –Epe had a Muslim Bale, and a political set-up entirely composed of Muslims. Islam became the way of life of the majority of the people. The people had Muslim rulers and their cases were tried according to Maliki law by these rulers with the Chief Imam and their lives were guided by the Muslim code of conduct²⁵. At Ijebuland, Balogun Kuku played an important role in the advancement of Islam and involved deeply in the local power politics of the nineteenth century in his domain in the Ijebu, one of the ethnic groups in Yorubaland. He was traded in salt and ammunitions; he provided Ibadan warriors ammunitions in some of the battles fought by Ibadan warriors²⁶. He used his wealth to maximum

²³Gbadamasi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908* ...p. 69.

²⁴Gbadamasi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908* ... p. 69.

²⁵Gbadamasi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908* P. 69.

²⁶Samuel Johnson, *History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*. London, Routledge, 1921. 13,

²⁷Gbadamasi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908*67.

advantage to wield power and influence. He translated the economic power into political power, and even military power. Thus, the record of progress of Islam in Yorubaland in the nineteenth century was impressive and remarkable. At the Ibadan the *'ulama* climbed up the administrative ladder, for instance Osundina became the Osi Balogun (the third rank war chief)²⁷. Two decades later, Osundina's brother, Alli Laluwoye and Momodu Latosisa became the fourth and fifth officers respectively in the political hierarchy. Alli Laluwoye rose to become the second in command by October 1871, while Momodu Latosisa who was Are-Ona Kakanfo (Generalissimo or field Marshall), became the supreme authority in Ibadan in the period 1871 - 1885 C.E. The activities of the Muslims and Islamic clerics were among the dominant features of the nineteenth century politics of Yorubaland. In view of continuous wars of the period, Islam recorded a remarkable growth and expansion. The Muslims and Islamic clerics (*'ulama*) were recognized by the society for their qualification and personal merits or for other considerations. They had political officers. Yisa of Itoku in Abeokuta was the Balogun, (the war Chief), and Summonu Adelokun was the head of parakoyi (religious leader). In Oyo, Yesufu, the Alaafin's uncle was parakoyi, (early Muslim leader) well disposed towards Islam²⁸. The rulers often summoned the *'ulama* on matters concerned society. In time of wars, famine or plague, the *'ulama* in the Oyo empire were consulted to provide spiritual assistance and prayers were held as necessary as required by the society. The *'ulama* began to

²⁸Gbadamasi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908*,... p.33

occupy strategic positions in the society they served both civil and military leaders as advisers, Quranic teachers and religious chamberlains ²⁹.

Argument on the Islamic Factor in the collapse of Oyo Empire

In the early geographies and histories of West Africa, the conflicts between Muslims and the traditionalists attract the attention of historiographers. Therefore, a historical and local understanding of religion can bring new perspectives on the model of religious conflict, most commonly between Islam and indigenous religious world view in West Africa. In the Oyo Empire, there was a similar occurrence in the descriptions of the encounter of traditionalists with Islam, when Muslims relations with the Oyo rulers turned sour. The intensive Muslim activity gave a considerable concern to the traditional authorities and aggravated the latent tension between the Muslims and the pagans in the Oyo Empire. The indigenous religious group went to the ruler threatening him with the loss of his position if he persisted in accommodating the religious principles broached by the Muslims and Islamic clerics³⁰. The rulers realized that the expansion of Islam posed political threat to their rule, therefore the Muslims and the *'ulama* became objects of attacks, ridicule, hatred and oppression. The period was marked by societal skirmishes among Muslims. An expulsion order was given to the leader of the *'ulama*, (the

²⁹Gbadamasi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908*, ... p.37

³⁰Clarke, *A West Africa and Islam. Astudy of Religious Development from the 8th to the 20th Century*, ... p. 167

Islamic clerics). This action was seen by the *'ulama* and the Muslim community as an affront and an act of persecution. The decision by the *'ulama*, notably Shaykh as-Salih 'Alimi to flee from old Oyo to Ilorin and other secured places, signaled the beginning of *Jihad* (self-defence against aggression)³¹. In the course of event, the Alaafin; according to Gbadamosi summoned the Muslims to his palace and massacred those he could gather, only a few of them escaped. The massacre terrified the Muslims and made them bitter against the entire traditional system³². Thus the era of persecution marked in effect a watershed in the history of Islam in Yorubaland; because Muslims were killed on a scale quite high alarming and this condition made the Muslims panic-stricken. The outcome of this religious persecution was that many Muslims fled Oyo-Ile, the capital of the Oyo Empire and this flight from the capital occurred in successive waves so badly that Oyo-Ile was denuded of Muslim population. In the general confusion and holocaust that engulfed the empire, the *'ulama* and the community of Muslims migrated to Ilorin with serenity of mind and pleasure, as they found relief in *Hjrah* (flight) and settled around Oke-Sunna at Ilorin. Meanwhile Muslims formed a formidable Islamic community. Shaykh Alimi mobilized a number of Hausa slaves in and around Ilorin. Realizing the worth of these slaves as soldiers, Afonja induced away Hausa Muslim slaves from their masters in the adjacent towns those that were employed as barbers, rope-makers cow-herds and enlisted them in his army.

³¹Gbadamasi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908*, ... p.8

³² Gbadamasi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908*, ... p.8

Following the disintegration in the central authority and the factional conflicts among the Oyo Chiefs and officials on the account of lust for power, many of the provincial towns seceded from the Oyo Empire in order to contain the Alaafin and his court officials who were based in the state's capital³³. The provincial states and officials saw the crisis in the Oyo Empire from the last quarter of the eighteenth century as opportunity to obtain freedom. Consequently, Borgu and Nupe forcefully attained independence from Oyo in 1783 and 1791 respectively³⁴. The declaration of independence by the tributary states was followed in 1796 by a mutiny of Oyo army. The cumulative outcome of the revolt forced the reigning king (the Alaafin Aole) to commit suicide³⁵. Afonja had dreamed the throne of Alaafin but in his delusion and chimerical belief, expected that the council of Kingmakers (Oyemesi) would appoint him as the new Alaafin, but instead, Oyomesi selected Prince Adebo the son of Alaafin Abiodun. Disappointed, Afonja (Field Marshall) immediately repudiated his allegiance to Oyo, sought for support to his side the Hausa, Fulani and Borgu Muslim slaves and Islamic clerics, who had nursed bitter complaints and grievances against the authorities of the Oyo Empire and effectively established an autonomous kingdom in Ilorin on

³³ J.F. Atanda, "Collision and Coalition in the politics and society of Western Nigeria in the nineteenth century" *Evolution of Political Culture in Nigeria*, Eds J.F. Ade-Ajayi and Bashir Ikara. Kaduna: University Press Limited and Kaduna State Council For Arts and Culture, 1985. 91-92.print.

³⁴ O.W, Ogbomo, 'Revolutionary Changes in the Nineteenth Century Pre - Colonial Nigeria. *Essays in Honour of Toyin Falola*. Ed Akinwunmi Ogundiran. Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2005. 474. Print.

³⁵ O.W, Ogbomo, 'Revolutionary Changes in the Nineteenth Century ... 474 Print.

the northern borders of Oyo. Religiously, there was a reciprocal misunderstanding between the Muslims and the Oyo authorities. The Muslims accused the Oyo authorities of corrupt practices, unjust killings of Muslims. There were accusations of miscarriage of justice and corruption in the empire. On the other hand, the Oyo authorities accused the Muslims that they were the chief cause of the troubles in the Oyo Empire³⁶. Subsequently, a sizable of Muslims tramped to Ilorin from nearby towns and villages, while some came out from their hide places. The newly established Muslim community at Ilorin solicited and won the military support of the Sokoto Jihadists that provided a modicum of stability to allied forces. By and large Ilorin turned into larger and firmer Muslim community. A sizeable number of ardent Muslims, men of talent who could rise to war carried flag of jihad (Holy war) against the Oyo authorities, shouting Islamic slogan Allahu Akbar! War began in earnest; the Jihadists attacked Oyo Ile, the capital of the empire, carried incessant wars against Oyo and put the greater part of the empire in a considerable confusion. The allied forces of the Afonja group and the Jihadists won the war against the Oyo Empire. Afonja established himself at the helm of affairs in Ilorin, unfortunately, his control of Ilorin did not last long, because his empire was an edifice built with sputum which must collapse at the fall of mist. He was neither a sincere Muslim nor a Yoruba loyalist but a tertium quid between the two. He was just a political gambler in the midst of religious zealots. The jihadists, the former Hausa and Fulani Muslim slaves and ex-labourers, besieged Offa roaming the

³⁶Gbadamasi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908*, ... pp. 12, 22. Print.

towns and villages of the Oyo Empire, pillaging and selling their former Yoruba aristocratic masters as slaves to white slave buyers and Afonja was not pleased with the conduct of jihadists in their marauding and slaving activities. War of supremacy soon broke out between Afonja loyalists and Hausa –Fulani jihadists; Afonja was defeated and killed in 1824³⁷. The attack of the Jihadists on Oyo authorities continued after the death of Afonja, and series of wars were waged against Oyo towns and villages between 1831 and 1834. The Oyo Empire was defeated and destroyed by the Jihadists in 1835.

The Distinct Roles of the ‘Ulama in the 19th Century Politics of Yorubaland

The numerous sources for the nineteenth century Yoruba Nation may explain the historical interpretation of the roles of the ‘*ulama*. It is a particularly remarkable that Islam was one of the factors led to the collapse of the Oyo empire in 1835. It is also worthy of note that Islam contributed significantly to the growth and success recorded by the Empire in the previous years. In the general sense, the roles of the ‘*ulama* covered different aspects of the achievements of the Oyo Empire, these roles included, spiritual services, enlistment in the Oyo army, provision of skills for caring and maintaining horses used for wars, they served as diplomats between the Oyo empire and neighbouring Islamic states, such as Borgu, Nupe and Hausa land. Some

³⁷J.A. Atanda, ‘The Fulani Jihad and the Collapse of the Old Oyo Empire’
The Collected Works of J.A Atanda Ed. Toyin Falola. Texas: Pan-African
University Press, U.S.A 2017.309. Print

also served as palace clerks, judges, barbers, rope-makers, cowherds and court attendants. In addition some became members of Alaafin's household.

Spiritual Services

The use of charms by Yoruba's Kings was very popular and continued after the nineteenth century; therefore they employed the spiritual services of the '*Ulama* for themselves and their kingdoms. In appreciation, the rulers bestowed great wealth on the Muslims in exchange for their assurance of victory in battles³⁸. After the battles the Muslims also had share in the spoils of war, these included slaves, seized goods and other materials that the victorious rulers brought to the empire. New kinds of charm were provided in the beginning of nineteenth century, at the time of the war between the Oyo forces and the Afonja army. In his work, Atanda submits that the role Afonja wanted Shaykh Alim to play was to prepare charms for him as Afonja believed in the superiority of the Muslim charms over the traditional ones. Alimi's main role was to be that of the priest who ensure Afonja's success through supernatural means. Consequently, the royal class in the Oyo Empire recognized the spiritual services of the '*ulama* Arabic scholars). Such spiritual services covered amulet making, writing chapters and verses of the holy Qur'an on wooden slate and decocting it for oral use; rubbing the body offering prayers, in time of need, plague, as well as predicting events. (*Hisaabi*)

³⁸ Gbadamasi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908*, ... p.33

Military Services

Historical records reveal that Muslim warriors were among the group that migrated and participated in the internal wars that covered the 18th and 19th Centuries in the Yorubaland³⁹. The *'ulama* (Arabic scholars) served both as civil and military leaders. The Muslim army provided the skills needed in the care of horses which was an important aspect of keeping cavalry force. The skills of caring and maintaining horses were very essential in executing wars. The importation of horses into Yorubaland had political significance to the Yoruba Nation in the 19th Century. Horses played significant role in the lives of many rulers of Yorubaland, the animals were used for slave raiding. The military roles played by the *'ulama* was evident in Ibadan warriors. Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, Osundina became the Osi Balogun ,(third rank senior war chief) . Next to him were Alli Laluwoye and Momodu Latosisa; the fourth and fifth officers respectively in the political hierarchy. Alli Laluwoye became the second in command in 1871 and Momodu Latosisa was the Are Onakakanfo (the field Marshall) in Ibadan in the period 1871 and 1885⁴⁰. He was a Muslim and Islamic titled officer who put on his turban to the battlefield and performed his ablutions under the hail of arrows.⁴¹ He raised the military fame of Ibadan to its highest pitch of glory. While engaged

³⁹ Gbadamasi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908*, ... pp. 33, 46

⁴⁰ Stefan Reichmuth and Risaq Abubakre, 'Ibadan, Lagos and other Areas of Southern Nigeria' in John Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa, volume II, The writings of Central Sudanic Africa*, E.J. Brill, Leiden. New York, Koln. 1995, P. 493

⁴¹ Gbadamasi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908* ... p. 67

in the Ekiti parapo war, he ensured that the military camp of Ibadan had a clearing space for prayers where he and his followers said *'id* prayers every year at the praying ground which is outside the gate at the eastern end of Ibadan⁴².

Civil Roles

The Muslims and Islamic clerics (*'ulama*) played distinct roles in the Oyo Empire. The rulers often summoned them on matters concerned community, while some were employed on a permanent basis, as some became members of the Alaafin's household, some were palace officials, keeping records of events, attendants, barbers, rope-making, cowherds. Those who were knowledgeable in Islamic law adjudicated cases. According to Gbadamosi, Oba Oyewole of Ikirun employed the service of a Muslim judge; Mallam Bako from Ilorin to adjudicate cases in his domain.⁴³

Literacy / Intellectualism

There is no doubt that Islam introduced literacy and promoted scholarship among the Yoruba in the nineteenth century politics. The coming of Islam to Yorubaland brought the five daily prayers and promoted the art of reading and writing in Arabic scripts⁴⁴. Intellectual evidence presents to us some ideas about the directions and forms of literacy

⁴² Gbadamosi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908* ... p. 71

⁴³ Gbadamosi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908* ...69

⁴⁴ J.A.Atanda, 'The Impact Of Foreign Religions On Yoruba Politics And Society Since The Nineteenth Century''

The Collected Works of J.A Atanda Ed. Toyin Falola. Texas: Pan-African University Press, U.S.A 2017.309. Print

received by the Yoruba people in the period⁴⁵. The Islamic religious terms and Muslim prayers culled from the holy Qur'an are thought to be introduced by the immigrant Muslims at the early period. The form of education involved reading, writing and pronunciation. The role played by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim slaves in spreading Islamic literacy is significant. They constituted themselves into a small Muslim community, organized learning and conducted teaching. They were the early teachers, and people learned at their feet. They contributed to the spread of scholarship in Yorubaland⁴⁶. The *'Ulama* introduced literacy in Arabic through the establishment of many Qu'ranic schools. The resultant effect was a proliferation of Islamic literacy and the increasing number of Yoruba Muslims⁴⁷.

Economic promotions

The trading relations between the Yorubaland and Islamic neighbours such as, Kano, Nupe and Borgu were well presented and analyzed in the historical data. The Old Oyo served as the chief intermediary between the Central Sudan and the coastal markets⁴⁸. The Islamic clerics became major middlemen and interpreters between Hausa traders and the Yoruba people. The Yoruba were able to take advantage of long-distance trade through the active involvement of the

⁴⁵ Gbadamasi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908* ...6

⁴⁶ Gbadamasi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba 1841-1908* ...6

⁴⁷ J.A.Atanda, 'The Impact Of Foreign Religions On Yoruba Politics And Society Since The Nineteenth Century' ... p. 118

⁴⁸ Rasheed Olaniyi ' Kano: The Development of A Trading City in Central Sudan' ... p. 310

Hausa-Fulani slaves and Islamic clerics, many of whom who came with special skills and knowledge. The influx of the skilled immigrants was responsible for a profound increase in the amount of goods such as horses, donkeys, cattle, clothing and slaves. The *'Ulama* contributed to the economic, social and cultural life of the people⁴⁹. They introduced new occupations. The liberated African Muslim slaves from Sierra Leone and Brazil introduced new skills of Carpentry, Masonry and architecture, etc.⁵⁰. They also introduced and promoted the growth of cash crops like cocoa and coffee. New styles in dress and architecture were introduced by them⁵¹.

Language Borrowings and Yoruba domestication of Arabic Words

Language usage discloses some ideas about the directions and themes of word borrowings that have come into Yoruba language through Muslims merchants and Islamic clerics. They exchanged a range of concepts, including agricultural terminology and familial categories through resident Muslim clerics in the Oyo Empire. According to professor Malik; a number of Yoruba words are known to be loaned from Arabic which enriched the Yoruba language and this shows the impact of Arabic language on the

⁴⁹ Rasheed Olaniyi ' Kano: The Development of A Trading City in Central Sudan'... p. 307

⁵⁰ J.A. Atanda, 'The Impact Of Foreign Religions On Yoruba Politics And Society Since The Nineteenth Century'... p .118

⁵¹ J.A. Atanda, 'The Impact Of Foreign Religions On Yoruba Politics And Society Since The Nineteenth Century'... p. 118

linguistic and cultural life of the Yoruba people⁵². A number of words in Yoruba language that are known to be loaned from Arabic include *Sababi* is borrowed from Arabic word *sabab* meaning "reason, cause", *kadara* is borrowed from the Arabic word *qadar* meaning "destiny, fate", the Yoruba word *Alamori* is borrowed from the Arabic word *al' amr* meaning affair, the word *aniyan* is borrowed from the Arabic word *anniyah.*, the meaning 'intention'. The word *ibaadah* is borrowed from the Arabic word *ibaadah* meaning "divine service", the word *sadankata* is a loan word from the Arabic expression *sadaqta* meaning "you have spoken the truth"⁵³.

Conclusion

The paper attempts to make a survey of the critical historical events and changes in the nineteenth century Yoruba politics; with a focus on the role of the 'Ulama in the Yoruba politics. The Yoruba warfare of the nineteenth century brought with it a shift in a population concentration from the Savanna belt in the northern Yoruba to the rainforest in the south. In response to war, many people either relocated to more fortified sites, or retreated from grassland into the neighbouring forest belt to either found new settlements of their own or to settle in the existing ones. The findings of the paper reveal that the introduction of Islam brought new perspectives to the Yorubaland and this

⁵²S.H.A. Malik, Arabic, The Muslim Prayers And Beyond. An Inaugural Lecture, University of Ibadan. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1999. Pp.26-31 print.

⁵³ S.H.A. Malik, Arabic, The Muslim Prayers And Beyond. An Inaugural Lecture ... 27-28

gave key theological and political concerns to the people. This is very interesting and quite fascinating. It is revealed that at the dawn of the history of Islam in Yorubaland, Muslims enjoyed religious tolerance and the patronage of the Yoruba rulers. During the later period, Muslim relations with the rulers turned sour; oscillated between persecution and toleration at a time and between toleration and extermination at another time. Muslims accused the Oyo authorities of corrupt practices and unjust killings of the Muslims. It is a particularly remarkable that Islam was considered as one of the factors that led to the collapse of the Oyo Empire in 1835. The paper discovers that after the fall of the Oyo Empire, Ibadan emerged as a powerful centre and became a welcome harbor of refuge for the people who fled from the fear and destruction of the war; hence Ibadan provided a haven for many refugees. Nevertheless, Islam contributed significantly to the growth and success recorded by the Yoruba nation. They served in different capacities depending on their skills and circumstances. The *'Ulama* played different roles, these included spiritual services, enlistment in the army, and provision of skills for caring and maintaining horses used for wars. Those that were knowledgeable in Arabic and Islam were held in high esteem in the society for their learning, piety and ability to make powerful charms. The overseas Muslims possessed professional skill; there were many tailors, carpenter, masons, master bakers and other skilled men. Their practical skill and talent enhanced their position in the society and benefited the Muslim community greatly and the society at large. The *'Ulama* also served as diplomats between the Oyo Empire and

neighboring Islamic states, such as Borgu, Nupe and Hausaland. Some also served as palace clerks, Judges, barbers, rope-makers, cowherds and court attendants and some became members of the household of Yoruba rulers and Chiefs. The paper concludes that the 'Ulama played distinct roles in the nineteenth century Yoruba politics; they were harbingers of change that characterized the Yorubaland. They contributed to the economic, social and cultural life of the people. They introduced new occupations and literacy through Arabic medium; they conducted teaching and learning, and produced the new elites that served as potent forces of change in the Yorubaland.