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# **ILORIN AS A BEACON OF LEARNING AND CULTURE IN WEST AFRICA**

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## CHAPTER 4

### THE ROLE OF AL-ILORY IN THE SPREAD OF ARABIC AND ISLAMIC LEARNING IN SELECTED WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES.

*Badmos Olanrewaju Yusuf & Lateef Onireti Ibraheem*

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#### INTRODUCTION

Many studies have been carried out on the contributions of Shaykh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilory to the development and spread of Arabic and Islamic learning in Nigeria. The prominent and comprehensive among these works is a book entitled: *Shaykh Adam Abdullah Al-Ilory in the Tableau of Immortality*. The book is a compendium of research on various aspects of Al-Ilory's life and his works, but none of the articles of the book concentrated on the contribution of Al-Ilory to the spread of the twin disciplines in other West African Countries, they all focus on his activities in Nigeria. This work therefore aims at evaluating the contributions of Shaykh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilory to the spread of Arabic and Islamic learning in West Africa, most especially, the Republics of Benin, Togo, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. In order to achieve this, the paper was divided into five sections; the first section is an introduction, that gives background and justification to the study. The second one accounted for the birth and educational pursuit of Al-Ilory as well as his itinerary activities. The third section discusses his strategies in wooing foreign students to his school, while the fourth section highlights his achievements in spreading Arabic and Islamic learning in the selected West African countries. The last section is the conclusion in which the summary of the paper, its findings and recommendations were made.

#### An Overview of the Life of Shaykh Adam Al-Ilory

Shaykh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilory was born in Wasa, Dendi Local Government of the Republic of Benin in 1917. He began his academic career under his father, who taught him the Qura'n and elementary knowledge of Arabic and Islamic Studies (Al-Ilory, 1992). With a solid foundation laid at home, Al-Ilory stepped out of the box by enrolling in learning circles of

notable Islamic scholars such as Shaykh Salihu Esin-niobiwa, Shaykh Umar Agbaji and Shaykh Adam Namaji to study different aspects of Arabic and Islamic learning (Opeloye & Makinde, 2012). Yearning for more knowledge, Al-Ilory travelled to Muslim countries of Sudan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia to learn from acclaimed authorities of Islamic learning in those countries. In fact, his insatiable thirst for knowledge took him to the famous Al-Azhar University, Cairo, in 1946. At the University, he sat as an independent candidate, who never attended a formal educational institution, and passed, creditably, an examination organized for him by the authorities of that University (Abubakre, 2004). With this steady search for knowledge under notable scholars and institutions, no one will be left in doubt that Al-Ilory equipped himself adequately for future challenges of becoming a world class Islamic scholar, the status that he attained and sustained until his death in 1992.

### **Al-Ilory as an Itinerary Preacher and Teacher**

After Al-Ilory's graduation from Shaykh Salihu Esin-niobiwa's Madrasah, he started work as an itinerary Islamic preacher. Starting from Omi-Adio in Oyo State, he toured Yorubaland, preaching and propagating Islam (Ibraheem, 2002). During this period, Al-Ilory engaged in handcopying the Holy Qur'an to earn a living. He was also participating in Prophet Muhammad's Eulogy Competition in order to exhibit his Arabic and Islamic knowledge (Jimoh, 2014).

On getting to Lagos, in addition to participation in Prophetic Eulogy competitions, he enrolled as Shaykh Adam Namaji of Kano's Qadiriyyah disciple and later as his student. While in Lagos, He occasionally visits The Arab community in order to test his Arabic spoken ability and proficiency. After the death of Namaji, he embarked on an academic journey to Arab countries. Upon his return to Nigeria, he joined Ansarudeen Society in Abeokuta as Arabic teacher. During this period he embarked on a tour to the Northern part of the country. He visited Northern leaders to make proposal and recommendations on how to improve Arabic and Islamic learning, which the Colonials and Christian Missionaries have almost succeeded in uprooting. His proposal includes the following:

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يجدر بنا أن نصلح هذه المدارس القديمة حتى تسير المعاهد الدينية في البلاد العربية والإسلامية الحاضرة، وكيفية ذلك كما يلي:

- ١- أن نجمع التلاميذ في مسجد جامع أو بناء خاص كمدرسة.
- ٢- أن نختار موادها لتكون طبقاً لمطالب العصر.
- ٣- أن نختار لها الكتب التي نقرر للتدريس بما يقر بالعلوم إلى عقول الطلبة.
- ٤- أن نمرن فيها الإنشاء للرسائل.
- ٥- أن نمرن على التخاطب بالعربية تمريناً كافياً. (Ibraheem, 2009).

### Meaning

It is pertinent that we upgrade the standard of our old schools to the level of the present formal religious institutions in Arab and Islamic countries, and the ways of achieving that are as follow:

1. We should gather students in the central mosque or a separate building to serve as a school.
2. We should select subjects to be taught in the school to be the ones that would conform to the needs of the contemporary time.
3. We should select the relevant textbooks that would simplify knowledge for the comprehension of the students.
4. We should practically teach in the schools an essay writing in Arabic.
5. We should practice there in spoken of Arabic.

Al-Ilory also made suggestions on how Nigerian Muslim Ummah could be united. On these recommendations, he authored a book entitled: *AddinuNasihah* (Religion is Sincerity). It was reported that when he took the book to Sokoto, the then Sultan ask him to be detained (Al-Ilory, 2014).

When this effort was frustrated, he returned to his itinerary preaching. He then added to it scouting for students to be used to establish a formal Arabic school, in and outside the country. Especially West African countries

like Benin Republic (Then Dahomey), Togo, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Senegal.

### **Method of Recruiting students across West Africa**

Whenever Al-Ilory gets to a country, according to Jimoh (2014), he looks for Nigerian communities living there to preach to them, during which he:

- Exhibits outstanding knowledge of Islam and unparalleled eloquence in Arabic and scholarship and
- explains to them his Mission and Vision of training their wards for just four years to be outstanding scholars like him and even better.

This approach yielded the desired dividends, because in every town or country he visited, he came back with students and with promise to send students to him. These students were always in two categories, the indigenous students and the Nigerian students who live in the place or whose parents are living there. The examples of such indigenous students from Ghana include:

- Ibrahim Hamdi Kofor, the first Ghanaian to become Al-Ilory's student. After the completion of their study at Markaz, Agege, he returned to his country to spread Islam and Arabic Studies (Jimoh, 2014).
- Hamid Ibrahim Keita from Tamale, Ghana, he is among the eighth sets of Markaz. He is a graduate of Al-Azhar University and once worked with the Organization of African Unity (OAU)
- Imran Dindi (Al-Ketuwi, 2004)

The Nigerian Citizens who followed Al-Ilory to Nigeria or joined his School later include:

- Abdul-Rahman Jumah Saro, his father, was based in Ghana, he sent him to Al-Ilory after his visit to Ghana. He graduated from Markaz and later worked as a teacher there.
- Isa Bello, born in Tamale, his father is from Offa but based in Ghana. After graduation, he became *Ajanasifor* Al-Ilory and later returned to Ghana to become a *Mufassir* (Quranic Exegete) and Islamic propagator. ( Jimoh, 2014)

- Shuaib Uthman Balogun, born in Kumasi, his father is a Native of Ojoku, Kwara State. After graduation from Markaz, he got his B.A. Degree from Libya, M.Phil. and Ph.D. from the University of Ibadan. He later became a Professor of Islamic Studies at Usman Fodiyo University, Sokoto. Died in 2010.
- Mahmud Uthman Abdul Hadi Eleyinla, born in Accra, Ghana, after graduating from Markaz, he returned to Accra and became the Chief Missioner of Anwaruldeen Islami based in Accra, Ghana. He established Markaz Alumni Association in Accra with the headquarters at Alawiye Mosque in Okechin, Accra. He is the Principal of Markaz Rawdatul 'Ulum and engages in public lectures for Yoruba community in Accra during Ramadan (Isalekoto, 2007).
- Mustafah Muhammad Ghidado Atuti, born at Adabraka, Accra, Ghana. After graduation from Markaz, he returned to Ghana to become a Mufassir at the Central Mosque of New Town, Ghana. He later became the Deputy Imam and finally the Imam of the Mosque. He gives a sermon every Friday and 'id festivals (Isalekoto, 2007).
- Lateef Oniretilbraheem, was born in Kumasi, he became a student of al-Ilory because of Al-Ilory's visit to Kumasi. Al-Ilory impressed his father, and he vowed to send one of his sons to his school. After graduation from Markaz, Lateef has visited Ghana several times to participate in academic conferences.

At Benin Republic, the towns visited most by Al-Ilory are Ajashe, Sakete, Ketu, and others. Among the Indigenous Students who responded to his invitation are:

- Mahmud Ibrahim (Bulbul Markaz)
- Bala Ajashe
- Sa'id Alim
- Nadhif Yusuf
- Hasan Abubakri (Jimoh, 2014)

Among the Nigerian Students who were living in Ajashe and later came back to Nigeria are:

- Abdul Kabir Sayuti, whose parent is from Ilorin, Nigeria. His father was also a scholar and preacher. He later became Nigeria Ambassador to Kuwait and Burkina Faso
- Shuaib Ologele Sayuti, a younger brother to Abdul Kabir. He is, at the time of writing this paper the Head of Department of Languages, Al-Hikmah University in Ilorin, Nigeria.

The Indigenous students from Sakete include:

- Shaykh Shith Shakete, who, according to Jimoh (2014) has his own Arabic School but because of the outstanding scholarship and reformatory ideas displayed by Al-Ilory, he became close to him to acquire knowledge and to learn how to manage a modern Arabic School.
- Fatih Shith Shakete, the elder son of Shaykh Shith, he is among the third set that graduated from Markaz. He was popularly known as *Bulbul Markaz* (Bulbul of Markaz) due to his eloquence and ability to speak Arabic with utmost fluency.

Some of the Nigerian students from Shakete are:

- Mashood Ramadan Jibril (Later became the Principal of Markaz. Now a proprietor of Arabic School in Shakete and Ojokoro, Nigeria)
- Mas'ud Abubakar

Most of the students from Côte d'Ivoire were Nigerians. Prominent among them are:

- Murtadha Nasir (later established an Arabic School in Abidjan)
- Idrees Ayeogbo (the leading Islamic scholar in Yamoussoukro. He has Arabic School and Assalat Society)

The prominent students of Al-Ilory from Senegal, according to Jimoh (2014) are indigenes. They are:

- Abdul Kabir Senegal
- Balla Senegal ( he is presently a King in Senegal ) (Jimoh, 2014)



## The Second Stage of Recruiting Students from West African Countries

After the first tour of West African, Al-Ilory established his popular Arabic Training Centre (Markaz), first in Abeokuta, 1952 and later moved it to the present abode at Agege, Lagos in 1955. He then embarked on a second tour. The method he adopted this time is to take along with him some of the students from these countries (both the indigenous and Nigerians living there. Most of the time, he scheduled his visit for *MawliduNabiyyi* periods or any other social and religious events (Jimoh, 2014). While in these countries, he carries out the following programmes:

- (i) Reading from the Holy Quran by the students with the *Markazivoice* (which he created himself)
- (ii) Students entertain audience with different songs and people dance to the songs. This act used to attract crowds.
- (iii) Students present beautiful speeches in standard Arabic off hand with utmost eloquence
- (iv) Students present drama in Arabic.
- (v) Al-Ilory himself delivers lectures

These strategies were also applied in Nigeria, and they yielded outstanding results, which include:

- Students trooping to *Markaz* in their hundreds, most especially from Benin Republic, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.
- Muslim Communities and individuals requested for Arabic teachers and curriculum from Al-Ilory for their schools and to establish one
- Some of the students after their graduation returned to their countries to be Imams, Preachers, Teachers, Proprietors, Interpreters, Missionaries, writers, poets and others.

### Arabic Schools Affiliated to Al-Ilory's Markaz in Republic of Benin:

- MarkazutT'alimilArabi Al-Islaami, Shakete, established by AshaykhShithMuhammaduth-Thani
- MrkazutT'alimilArabi Al-Islaami, Ikate. Port Novo, established by Ashaykh Mahmud Ibrahim Ayinde.

- MarkazutT'alimilArabi Al-Islaami, Ajashe, established by Muhammad Taofiq Abu
- MadrasatuDaril 'Mu'alimin, Ketu, established by ShaykhMas'udAbubakri (Shith, 2014)

### **Arabic Schools Affiliated to Al-Ilory'sMarkaz in Côte d'Ivoire**

- MarkazDaruNadwatuJamaliyah, Abobo by Ustadh Abdul Kabir Yusuf
- MarkazShamsuddin Al-Islamiyyah, Abodo, Abidjan by UstadhSulaiman
- MarkazShababulNurulIslami, Kumasi, Abidjan by UstadhMiftau
- MarkazDairatulMuhammadiyyah, Abidjan by Ustadh Abbas Jimoh
- Markaz 'UlumulArabiyyahWallIslamiyyah, Yamoussoukro, by UstadhIdrisAyeogbo
- MarkazDarulUlum, Abobo, Abidjan by ShaykhMurtadahNasir
- MarlazDaruNaeem, Treichville, Abidjan, by Ustaz Khalil Murtado. (Zubair, 2014)

### **Ghana**

MarkazRawdatul 'Ulum, Kaneshie, Accra its principal is Mahmud Uthman Abdul Hadi (Isalekoto, 2005). It is significant to note here that a large number of the schools mentionedabove derived their teaching staff from the Alumni of Al-Ilory'sMarkaz or from Institutions that have affiliation with the school. It is equally important to note that most of these schools across West Africa use the books authored by Al-Ilory as their textbooks, while most of the Imams, Scholars, preachers, writers, poets and other Islamic propagators took Al-Iloryas their role model.

### **Conclusion**

The trend is ongoing, even after the death of Al-Ilory and it is contributing immensely to the growth and development of Arabic and Islamic Studies and by extension contributes to the spread of Islam in West Africa. Due to these efforts of Al-Ilory the population of Muslims is on the increase by the day in the region, Arabic and Islamic Scholars are emerging by the day and Arabic and Islamic Schools, Islamic Organizations, Islamic awareness are improving vigorously.

These, to a large extent, underscore the role of Ilorin Scholars in the development of Language and thereligious scholarship in West Africa. During the course of this research, it was discovered that many works have been carried out on the contribution of Al-Ilory to Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria, but little or nothing was done on his contributions to the twin discipline in other West African countries. We therefore, implore scholars to beam their searchlight to this area. In fact,a research team should be constituted by Centre for Ilorin Studies and theUniversity of Ilorin to address this problem.

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