

THE IBADAN SCHOOL OF ORIENTALISM: CONTRIBUTIONS OF PROF MUSA OLADIPUPO AJILOGBA ABDUL TO TEACHING AND RESEARCHING ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the history of the Orientalist project for the study of the twin-discipline for over sixty years at the University of Ibadan, which have been used by some to contest the legitimacy of its products as they base their critiques on how Orientalism has undermined Islam. It engages the Orientalist perspectives and approaches to the academic study of Islam in Nigeria as reflected in the contributions of Prof. Abdul, a substantial pioneering figure who has shaped the trajectories of the study of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria. It also employs the concept of cultural capital and Edward Said's Orientalism to interrogate the Orientalist vision at Ibadan and uncover the enduring achievements of Prof. Abdul.

KEY WORDS

Orientalism, Teaching and Researching, Substantial Pioneering

Introduction

The history of the studies on Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria is as old as Islam in Sudanic Africa¹ because wherever it goes, it goes with its educational system.² Thus, the history of Islam in Nigeria went as far back as the 7th century when Islam was introduced to the Kanuri kingdoms of Kanem-Bornu by Muhammad Mani during the reign of Mai Bulu. However, it was not until the 11th century that Islam started to gain several converts through the patronage of Kanem-Bornu rulers, particularly Idris Aloma (1570-1602) and later spread to Kano, Katsina, Zaira and other parts of Hausaland as well several parts of Yorubaland in the 14th century through the scholars who migrated to the areas after the collapse of the Old Mali Empire.³ This engendered the major trajectory of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria as not only was there a fluorescent Islamic educational system but so also were great centres of Islamic learning permanently established in Kanem-Bornu, Hausaland and Yorubaland, which conditioned the sociopolitical, economic, historical and religious utility of Arabic and Islamic Studies in these areas such that before the advent of colonialism and Christian missionary education, Islamic educational system was firmly rooted and the scholars of Arabo-Islamic learning were the most influential members of their community referred to as the "West African Muslim Aristocracy."⁴ Nonetheless, Islam did not penetrate South Southern and Eastern Nigeria until after the establishment of a military base in Calabar, an important Efik town in 1890. This facilitated the arrival of Muslim traders and the building of a mosque that together with the dressing and devotions of these Muslims attracted the natives who began to imitate them.⁵ Thus, Arabic and Islamic Studies have not been firmly rooted in these areas like Northern and Southwestern Nigeria.

The Advent of Colonialism and the Sociocultural Capital of Arabic and Islamic Studies

The teaching of Arabic and Islamic Studies like any other discipline is not just pedagogical, bordering on the concept, scope, curricular, teachers-students' relationship and reforms in its teaching and learning but also conditioned by several factors including political, economic, sociocultural and religious. This becomes very glaring with the coming of the British colonial government to Nigeria, which accounts for the second trajectory of Arabic and Islamic Studies. While Arabic and Islamic scholars were the elites in precolonial Northern and Southwestern parts of Nigeria before the coming of the colonialism, they became relegated and the hitherto flourishing traditional Islamic schools suffered a serious setback due to the Christian missionary project of using education to win converts. Core to this project is the conversion of Muslim students in missionary schools. Hence, Muslims in Northern Nigeria generally rejected missionary education until the government entered the educational field by cutting off Christian conversion.⁶

For southern Nigeria, missionaries freely used their schools for conversion and hence, Muslims became skeptical about attending them. However, they initiated different moves that culminated in the first attempt at the synthesis of modern and Islamic education. Muslim societies and communities such as the Young Ansar-ud-Deen, Ijebu-Ode and Abeokuta Muslim communities opened modern schools that incorporated Islamic education on Western lines. This is because the Nigerian school environment in Southern Nigeria, was usually not conducive for the teaching of Arabic Studies and Islamic Studies while Arabic and Islamic Studies teachers were mostly poorly treated.⁷ In short, the advent of British colonialism undermined students' love for the study of the two subjects by undermining the 'ulama' monopoly over literacy and access to positions, resources, and prestige as well as their initial crucial roles in the establishment of colonial administrative infrastructures. Till today the twin-discipline are considered unsuitable in many governments owned schools, especially in Southern Nigeria. The colonial government, therefore, unknowingly set the stage for what is today referred to as the almajirai and danbakai syndromes⁸ as many of the products of the *madrasah* or the traditional Islamic school became unemployable and also unable to further their education in government tertiary institutions.

Central to the weakening of Arabic and Islamic Studies is what Abdul observes about mainly the universities situated in the Southern parts of the country, where a credit in English at Ordinary Level examination is required for admission even when only very few secondary schools in the areas offer Arabic these subjects due to a dearth of qualified teachers. Conversely, there are many Arabic and Islamic Studies institutes and colleges though unrecognised by the Ministry of Education, which teach them to such a standard that would compare well with the Advanced level. Consequently, such candidates despite their Arabic mastery acquired outside formal secondary education could not be admitted into the university because they could not satisfy the English requirement while those who study Arabic in the formal secondary schools recognised by the Ministry of Education and who are able to satisfy the English language requirement but whose standard in Arabic is very low could manage to gain admission.⁹

The last point shows that the Southwestern part of Nigeria like many parts of Western and Eastern Sudan is home to great scholars of Arabic as there is empirical evidence that many people who cannot write either in the English or the Latin script still read and write in their local languages using the Arabic script. This is not unconnected with the manner the *madrasah* helped trained administrators, diplomats and bilingual experts who served as interpreters in palaces all over Africa. Graduates of these schools also became professional reciters, religious specialists, teachers, scribes, judges, letter-writers and occupy governmental positions in the precolonial period. The graduates of the *madrasah* are, therefore, not illiterate and have preserved various accounts of Yorubaland in Arabic writings.¹⁰

The above factors have been responsible for the major trajectory of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria today. This trajectory can be explained by the concept of cultural capital, which according to Pierre Bourdieu refers to the arts, skills and expertise that are acquired through social interactions and like other forms of capital carry with them values. Thus, while Arabic and Islamic Studies were highly valued in precolonial Nigeria both in the Northern and Southwestern parts, they became devalued after the advent of the British government, a fact that has remained till today, especially in Southern Nigeria. For instance, the capacity to speak English and quote from the Bible are still seen by many educated Nigerians in the South as the requirements for being civilised, educated and exposed. As such, they are both overvalued in seeking admissions into the university, getting employments in the civil service and conducting official and government businesses. This is the fallout of the dominant colonial Christian vision for a western, secular and

modern Nigerian society, a vision that reduces the Islamic images and symbols to oxymorons. In this way not only is Arabic or Islamic learning devalued but also is the social, economic and political values of Islamic scholars in contrast with the values of Christian studies and clergy. This is an element of de-Islamising Muslims in a contemporary Christian project of reconstituting Nigeria as a secular Christian nation leading to what can be described as the downward turn in the fortunes of the twin-discipline at the hands of the educated Christian in accordance with the missionary cum colonial agenda, especially in Southern Nigeria.¹¹

In other words, colonialism affected all levels and aspects of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria from the philosophy, aims and objectives, curricular to the arrangements for timetable and even reforms that have taken place.

History of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Ibadan and the Orientalist Label

That the devaluation of Arabic and Islamic Studies continues till today is partly because of what Abdul-Rahmon has described as "the excessive theocentric perception of Arabic language" and perhaps also Islamic Studies. This perception, according to him, has been worsened by the ridiculous labelling of the department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan's (henceforth, Ibadan) approaches to the teaching and learning of Arabic and Islamic Studies as Orientalistic, a development that has shut down the door of the twin-discipline against non-Muslims who could have contributed in no small measure to the growth of the fields of study and has led to exclusiveness of Arabic studies in contrast to the inclusiveness championed at Ibadan.¹²

Thus, it is important to explain that of the positive reforms in the teaching and learning of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria engendered by colonialism is the establishment of Ibadan. The establishment became a desideratum because Arabic literacy had served as medium for the preservation of African indigenous history, arts and culture. This is why Arabic has been referred to as the "Latin of Africa" and "the classical language of West Africa" respectively.¹³ The historical utility of Arabic was the primary factor that informed the establishment of an Arabic unit in the department of history at Ibadan in 1961 before becoming a full-fledged Department, a year later in 1962. This point has been made by one of the foundation students at Ibadan, the foremost professor of Arabic in Southern Nigeria, the globally recognised Christian Arabist and perhaps the so-called foremost Orientalist in Ibadan when he explains that "Arabic Language is unparalleled by any other language in its role as a written medium in which much of the Nigerian, nay the African past is recorded, that the past thus preserved in this written medium is a national common heritage, not a sectorial one."¹⁴

I argue therefore that it is prejudicial that such an unbiased mentor and teacher of Arabic as professor Isaac Ogunbiyi would be labelled as an Orientalist. I was personally an observant participant in his mentoring trajectory in 1987 when I was at Ansar-Ud-Deen Secondary School, Randle Avenue, Surulere Lagos to take part in the Oral examination of Arabic in the West African School Certificate Examinations (WAEC). At the end of the exam, he asked me about my career ambition, and I told him that it was Law. To my surprise, Prof Ogunbiyi urged me to switch to Arabic and Islamic Studies, considering my background at the *madrrasah*. Today, the rest as they say is history. I, therefore, consider myself as one of the remote indirect students of this Arabist per excellent as I attest to the fact that he "takes pride in making good Muslims out of his Muslim students." The labelling of Ibadan teaching and scholarship as Orientalistic might have been reinforced by our Ibadan academic spectrum, which following the inclusiveness notion tend to privilege the use of "the Nigerian official language" because "the curricular of the twin-discipline at various levels of Nigerian educational system are not designed to produce imams and alfas, but high level manpower in humanistic studies" and because "it is no secret that the disability of many of the Arabists in written and spoken English has hampered their efficiency, among other reasons."¹⁵

However, the above justification for the Ibadan position that tends to emphasise the proficiency in English language should not and cannot be oblivious to the "prejudicial and tendentious preconceptions in the Western approaches" and orientalist methods in the study of Arabic and Islamic Studies. Training in Arabic and Islamic Studies in line with the Orientalistic perspectives neglects the scriptural heritage of Islam while focusing on the training of diplomats and civil servants, among others, in order to boost colonial administration and Christian evangelisation. Put another way, "the motivations, goals, and paradigms in the West for engagement in the field of Arabic and Islamics had always been different from those of Sudanic Africans." For as part of the Orientalistic vision, "until the end of the 20th century, the study of Arabic was considered an essential tool for the linguistic analysis of the old testament."¹⁶

Of course, right from inception the Ibadan institutional and academic orientation of teaching, learning and research have always been part of the Western, European and indeed Orientalist heritage. In line with this heritage, all the pioneering scholars in the department of Arabic and Islamic Studies from Hunwick to Abdul and later Ogunbiyi were either fully or partially European or American trained in the several departments of Orientalist scholarship, which has since become an integral and organic part of Ibadan scholarship. For this Orientalist heritage, it could be pardonable when other Arabists and Islamists in Nigeria refer to those of us who are part of the Ibadan institutional and academic heritage as "products of an Orientalist." For most Muslim critics of Orientalism often base their criticism on how Orientalism and the Orientalistic perspectives tended to undermine the Islamic heritage, education and culture. To these scholars, an Orientalist is an inherently biased scholar and academic whose scholarship aims to undermine Islam. For example, Sadar enumerates the goals of Orientalism to include dominating the Muslims and Islam religiously, politically, economically socially and culturally as well as destroying Islam and Muslims from within through attacking the primary sources of the religion. Maryam Jameelah also argues that the various academic, departments, units and centres established by the Orientalists as well as their stellite offshoots in the Muslim majority countries are purely inspired by the goals of subverting the religion of Islam and frustrate any attempt to bring about genuine Islamic renaissance. According to Jameelah, the personality of the prophet Muhammad (SAW) remains a subject of the biased scholarship of orientalists, with some Orientalists bringing up strange laims about how he forgot the initial revelations. She names among the academic periodicals devoted to these Orientalist objectives, the *Muslim World*, *Middle East Studies*, *the Middle East Journal*, *Journal of the Oriental Society*, and *American Near Easter Studies*.¹⁷

The above is seemingly supported by Edward Said's seminal work, which depicts Orientalist scholarship as lacking an objectivity as it sets out to put down the peoples of the Orient as lesser beings. He underscores this Orientalist bias when he asks "isn't it true that following upon all sorts of advances in the twentieth century sociology, anthropology, linguistics and history, American scholars who teach the Middle East and Islam in places like Princeton, Howard and Chicago are therefore unbiased and free of special pleading in what they do? The answer is no." Orientalism is therefore, most often inherently predicated on Euro-American prejudice towards the Orient. Consequently, it views Islam, in particular and Muslims in general, "as static in both time and place, and in capable of defining themselves." Orientalism, thus, becomes "the creation of an object of knowledge in order to transform it into an object of power and domination, an objective which was achieved through the academic study of the Orient."¹⁸

Nonetheless, many works have shown the positive contributions of Orientalism to the study of Arabic and Islamic Studies. This, paradoxically, includes the establishment of Ibadan in line with the Orientalistic vision of the University of London. It is striking that though modelled after the Orientalistic vision, Ibadan has existed from the very first day as an autonomous and unified department. Thus, the curricular of Arabic and Islamic Studies in the Ibadan School have always been taught in an integrative manner. The Ibadan School also ensured, especially at inception that the approach does not undermine proficiency in Arabic for students who are not graduates of *madrasah* and are, therefore, not proficient in the language because excepting those with a very solid background in the *madrasah*, "the product of our degree would have learnt all but the grammar and the literature of the Arabs in their own terms."¹⁹ This negative trajectory was forestalled at Ibadan by the immersion programmes used to booster the Arabic proficieny of non-*Madrasah* intakes and to ensure that the language was not considered a dead classical language. Thus, students of Ibadan graduate developing the required proficiency in Arabic while graduates of Islamic Studies unit had a fairly good grasp of reading the Qur'an and classical Islamic texts. Most importantly, the Ibadan School ensured that even graduates of traditional Arabic schools who are proficient in Arabic, but not proficient in linguistic skills are also trained to forestall their becoming nonproficient teachers who will inturn go out to teach and produce nonproficient students.²⁰

Of significance to this discussion is the fact that whatever obtains at the University level will have serious impacts all other tiers of Nigerian educational system, the primary, secondary, colleges and institutes etc. These different tiers of education teach Arabic and Islamic Studies in different capacities. Therefore, Ibadan in its philological approaches offer training to students from the *madrasah* and secondary schools, who were either only profient in Arabic and deficient in English or vice versa. To achieve this, it opened its door to expatriates such as Dr. B.G. Martins (later Professor Martins, in the U.S.A.), Mr. J.O. Hunwick (Later Professor Hunwick) and Mr. F.H. El-Masri (Later Professor El-Masri in the University of Nairobi, Kenya). They were joined in 1963 by Mr A.R. Dehaini, a Lecturer seconded by the Lebanese government from the Lebanese Teachers' Training School Yaba, which later formed a nucleus of Ibadan.²¹

In 1964, the first Nigerian member of the academic staff, Mr Musa Oladipupo Ajilogba Abdul who later rose to become a Professor and Head of the Department, was employed and together with the other pioneering intellectuals at Ibadan had an inevitable task to improve upon the poor state of teaching Arabic and Islamic studies at different levels in Nigeria and they came up with the successful introduction of different subdegree programmes such as the Syllabus A, Syllabus B, the Certificate and Diploma programmes to serve as remedial courses for both the graduates of conventional secondary schools without background in Arabic and Islamic Studies and the graduates of *madrasah* without background in English respectively. To launch the Certificate and Diploma programmes, Baba embarked on a tour of the traditional Arabic schools in Southwestern Nigeria to fish out the students. The subdegree programmes were used to train students with no background in either Arabic or English such that they attained near native fluency in the language.²² This and other gigantic steps ensured the solid footing of Arabic and Islamic Studies as well as the Islamic heritage at Ibadan. Here again, my personal experiences in the 1980s as a secondary school students and later as a student majoring in Arabic and Islamic Studies at Ibadan show that the general knowledge of many of my friends and myself in preparing for both the WAEC and GCE Examinations in Arabic and Islamic Studies as well as our formative years in the University were shaped by the textbooks on Arabic and Islamic Studies written by Ibadan intellectuals such as Prof. Ogunbiyi, Prof. Dawud Olatokunbo Shittu Noibi, Prof. Sayed Hamzat Malik and of course Baba.

The above courses and textbooks were used by the "Orientalists" at Ibadan as instruments in successfully fixing the educational deficiencies of students in Arabic and Islamic Studies. They thereby ensure the academic competency of graduates of the department in the twin-discipline without devaluing their English proficiency. Thus, the academic study of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Ibadan reveal an objective and civilisational approach to intellectual production on the part of the pioneering intellectuals who in their defense of the Islamic heritage did not uncritically accept the Orientalist vision. Therefore, the Ibadan approaches to the teaching and learning of Arabic and Islamic are not Orientalistic in the mould of Edward Said's thesis.

Memorialising and Acknowledging Prof. Musa Abdul (1964-1986)

This section focuses on the impacts of the revered pioneering mentor and doyen of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Prof Musa Oladipupo Ajilogba Abdul (the shortened version of Abdul Aziz) popularly known to all his students and junior colleagues as Baba Abdul (henceforth Baba). This is because with the exception of a few works such as Amidu Sanni's *Oriental Pearls From Southern Nigeria-Arabic-Islamic Scholarship in Yorubaland*, which was completed during his tenure as a fellow of the Alexander Von Humloldt Foundation and dedicated to the memory of Baba "in recognition of his efforts in promoting the study of indigenous Islamic intellectual tradition," Oladimeji's BA Long Essay and article on Baba as well as Prof. Yasir Anjola Quadri's memorial lecture on Baba, there appears to be a monumental omission of the memories of Baba in the anthologies on Muslim eminent personalities in Nigeria. For instance, two compendiums on the "Eminent Yoruba Muslims of the 19th and early 20th centuries" and "Influential Muslim Personalities and Achievers of South West Nigeria respectively omit the contributions of Baba. In my view, this lack of mention of Baba constitutes a serious means of erasing the memory of his pioneering works and "efforts in promoting the study of indigenous Islamic intellectual tradition" as well as in the growth of the University of Ibadan Muslim community,²³ This is a big gap, which this study fills up.

As stated in the epigraph, the editor in-Chief of *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (AJISS) while announcing the passing away of Prof. Abdul in 1986 notes that "students and faculty of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, and all others who came to know his work in Islamic studies will always benefit, inshallah, from his inspiring devotion to the cause of Islam." This depiction of the achievements and unique contributions of Baba is a good beginning of the story of the legacy of Baba, who was born in Ijebu-Ode, Ogun state, Nigeria on the 6 February, 1926 to Abdul Aziz Olorunishola, a local Imām in the town from whom he studied the Qur'an while his mother Sa'adat was a Kolanut seller. He attended Muslim School, Isoku in Ijebu-Ode where he completed his primary school education. After which, he could not continue his schooling due to the death of his father in 1935 and the inability of mother to pay his school fees. After his primary school education, he took up teaching in 1942 at one of the schools of the Ijebu-Ode Muslim Mission and continued to teach in their different schools till 1960 such as Ansarudeen Primary School and Moslem Modern School. During the period, he was a pioneering teacher, headmaster and principal at different times. Baba later sat for the Junior Cambridge Examination in 1944 and because of his brilliant performance he was

sponsored by the Ijebu Muslim Mission to Government Teachers' College in 1945 where he obtained Teachers' Grade III Certificate in 1946.²⁴

After passing the Senior Cambridge Examination in 1947 and the Teachers' Higher Elementary Certificate Examination, Baba won the defunct Western regional government's scholarship with which he studied for the Diploma in Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of London. On completion, having a year left he entered the BA in Arabic and Islamic Studies. After that he returned to Nigeria in 1964 and joined Ibadan as the pioneer Nigerian academic, utilising Rockefeller sponsorship secured by his forerunner, Prof. Prof. Ismail Ayinla Balogun but who could not take up the offer. As an Assistant Lecturer, he travelled to McGill University for his Master and PhD degrees in 1965 and received his MA and PhD in 1967 and 1969 respectively. He returned to Ibadan and rose through the ranks to become a Professor and Head of the Department in 1983. Baba was married and four children, three males and a female. Then came his tragic death after nine months of illness on the 27 February, 1986, exactly 28 days after he delivered the first inaugural lecture in Arabic and Islamic Studies at Ibadan and he was buried the following day on Friday 28 February, 1986 in the Cemetery at Ijebu-Ode.²⁵

A survey of Baba's works reveals that as at the time of his death in 1986, he had written over fifty works, a good number of which were for training both students and teachers at the preuniversity level. These include his series on Islamic Studies such as *Islam as a Religion: Faith and Duties*. Lagos: Islamic Publications Bureau, *The Historical Origin of Islam* (with three chapters on West Africa) Lagos: Islamic Publications Bureau, *Gateway to Islam*, Lagos: Islamic Publications Bureau, *The Holy Book of Islam* (Studies in Islam series) Lagos: Islamic Publications Bureau, *The Classical Caliphate: Islamic Institutions* (Studies in Islam series book 7), Lagos: Islamic Publications Bureau, *Syncretism in Islam among the Yoruba West African Religion 15: 44-56*, Yoruba divination and Islam. Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies 4/1: 17-25, *Islam in Ijebu-Ode*, Baba's dissertation submitted to the McGill University's Institute of Islamic Studies for the Degree of Master of Arts, *The Qur'an: Tabarsi Commentary: His Approach to Theological Issues*, his PhD thesis submitted to the same McGill University's Institute of Islamic Studies and *Religious Challenges of National Development*, his inaugural lecture at the University of Ibadan. One clear point from these publications *Challenges of National Development*, his inaugural lecture at the University of Ibadan. One clear point from these publications is that Baba's luminous mind was very deep with layers and layers of vast understanding of Islam with expertise in the spectrum of Islamic Studies: *Tafsīr*, Philosophy, Islamic Thought, Theology, History, *Hadīth*, *Fiqh* and modernity, other faiths and development etc. In the area of theology for example, he was impressed by the Islamic rationalism of classical Islamic scholars such as Shaykh Tabarsī, Zamakhasharī and al-Razī on the themes of beatific vision, Imānship of 'Alī and great sin. He agrees with Watt that Muslim orthodoxy has a psychological reason for not accepting the Mu'tazilite and the Shi'ites' rejection of divine attributes that suggest anthropomorphism in God because of the place they occupy in popular piety. For to say that God is not "All hearing" might have weakened the belief in the efficacy of prayers just as denying He could be seen by the believers in the hereafter could have negated belief in the day of judgement. Baba was also impressed by the way Tabarsī handles the issue of the inheritance of the Prophets where he agrees with the Sunnites and the Mu'tazilites; on the issue of the intercession of the Prophets as he agrees with the Shi'ites and the Sunnites against the Mu'tazilites and on the issue of the beatific vision on which he agrees with the Mu'tazilites and the Shi'ites against the Sunnites. This according to Baba shows Tabarsī as a free, independent thinker, learned scholar and unbiased theologian in his commentary of the Qur'an, a work which presents him as an authority to the scholars outside the Shi'ite circle such as the Sunnites and modern scholars.²⁶

Furthermore, Baba successfully taught and supervised students. According to most of his students, he was a scholar-activist. For him, teaching, research and mentoring were life-affirming activism. He was a fatherly figure to his students, majority of whom he fished out from the *madrashah* and knowing that they were not up to the high standard of required proficiency in English and other areas of scholarship, went out of his way to exhort them to be of the highest academic standards and at the same time dedicated Muslims who are committed to uplifting the Muslim community. Though his life ended too soon, he had completed seven M. A. projects and six Ph.D. theses in Arabic and Islamic Studies at the time of his demise. He was at the same time affiliated with several professional national and international associations such as the International Muslim Society for the Study of Religion, Ottawa where he served as adviser. He also served as the Specialist Consultant of the National Institute of Moral and Religious Education, Lagos and as the Consultant on Islam in Black Africa for the World Congress on Religion for Peace. He was the Foundation Vice President of the Nigerian Association of Teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NATAIS) and served as the Editor-in-Chief.

As stated before, Baba was a serving member of the Advisory Editorial Board of AJISS when he died. Thus, Baba was a *locus classicus* of the fidelity of the Ibadan School to the cause of Islam, in general, and Arabic and Islamic Studies in particular between 1964 when he joined Ibadan and 1986 when he departed the world.²⁷

A monumental aspect of Baba's legacy that eminently deserves mention and place of pride in this chapter is his scholarly, inspiring and visionary activities in the University of Ibadan Muslim Community. This is largely because his leadership was concerned about the training of future leaders as he saw his students as who will champion the leadership of the Muslim community in their spaces upon the completion of their studies. Before Baba, Prof Ismail Balogun of the Ibadan School had been the substantive Chief Imām and Chairman of the Community. The leadership, however, fell on Baba in 1974 when he took over as the Imām and Chairman of the Mosque Management Committee. The change in the leadership was consequent upon the objections to the Imāmship of Prof. Balogun as a then member of the Ahmadiyyah Mission by a delegation of Saudi Arabian government that came to inspect the new University Mosque. This was followed by a protest by some Muslim students under the leadership of Prof. (then Mr) Agbetola, demanding the resignation of Prof. Balogun. He subsequently resigned his positions as both the Chairman and Imām of the Community. With the leadership of Baba came the policy of rotating the Imāmship of the mosque among the students of the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, a policy in tandem with global practice in the Muslim World as witnessed by this author at the International Islamic University, Malaysia and which I also put in place at the Crescent University where I was the Chief Imām between January 2006 and May 2008. The policy reflects the passion of Baba to imbibe in the young generations of students both knowledge and leadership qualities, which materialised as several graduates of the department have since become famous Imāms. Baba achieved this feat by choosing an undergraduate student running his second year at the University to act as the Imām for one academic session or more. Student Imāms during the leadership of Baba included late Prof. Wahab Nasiru, late Professor S.A. Agbetola, late Dr. A.J Amoloye, Prof. M.A. Muhibu-Din, late Dr. D.A.A. Tijani and Dr M.O. Rahimson. However, with the demise of Baba on 27 February 1986, the arrangements were terminated with the appointment of Prof. (then Dr.) Noibi as the substantive Chairman of the Mosque Management Committee and Chief Imām in line with the constitution of the community. At the same time, Prof. (then Dr.) Wahab Nasiru and Dr. Tijani were appointed as first and second Deputy Imāms respectively.²⁸

One of the toughest challenges that the University of Ibadan Muslim Community has ever confronted was the Cross-Mosque crisis, which started, according to Prof. Noibi during the leadership of Baba. The Muslim community noticed that a part of the mosque premises, which had been hitherto used for the festival prayers had been fenced in by the Chapel of Resurrection in preparation for the construction of its hall. It took the timely intervention of Baba, who calmed down the congregation to prevent the issue from exploding. Two days after, Baba in his capacity as the Chairman of the Ibadan Mosque Management Committee wrote a letter to the Vice-Chancellor of the university, Professor Ayo Banjo “urging him to take prompt action over the matter” to avert its explosion. In the process, the community prepared an alternative space northeast of the new mosque for the coming festival prayer only to discover “that the huge concrete Cross on the ‘holy ground’ was right in the direction of the *Qiblah* (prayer direction for Muslims) from the new mosque,” a development that contradicts the belief of Muslims. Consequently, the Community wrote another letter to the Vice-Chancellor “requesting him to facilitate the transfer of the Cross to a place close to the chapel.” This was followed by series of meetings between the Vice-Chancellor and representatives of the Muslims and Christians, during which Baba finally returned to Allāh in February 1986. It is worthy of mention that both Baba and his successor, Prof. Noibi worked tirelessly towards the peaceful and amicable resolution of the crisis and thereby laid the foundation of peaceful and dynamic approaches to the challenges of interfaith relations at Ibadan, which has impacted on the growth and developments of the Muslim community.²⁹

It should also be stated that Baba laid the foundation of the *Fatwa* and Ceremonies Committee of the Ibadan Muslim Community to ensure that ceremonies such as marriages, naming of new babies, housewarming events and thanksgiving services among others are conducted in line with strict Islamic rules and global Islamic practices. In line with his training mission, Baba maintained the policy of asking any of his students in the Ibadan School to perform various roles without any prior notice.³⁰

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that several factors have conditioned the evolution of the teaching and researching of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Nigeria in various but contradictory ways. These factors combined to make up the different trajectories of the twin-discipline and the impactful legacy of Prof. Abdul.

The chapter has raised some relevant issues about the paradigmatic context of the Orientalist academic perspectives and approaches to the academic study of Islam at Ibadan and one of the paradigmatic academics that have shaped the trajectories at Ibadan and indeed Nigeria, Baba Abdul. Baba was a great scholar, teacher and mentor. Though the doyen of the twin-discipline at Ibadan, his achievements and influence were far reaching and global. His achievements and accomplishments in the field of Arabic and Islamic Studies as well as community service can be seen in his committed teaching, mentorship and publications, training of future Imāms and Islamic leaders as well as peacebuilding between the Muslim community at Ibadan and the Christian faithful, hence the need to continue keeping his memory alive. It would be sad to forget, omit or ignore the impactful legacy of Baba for without him, Ibadan School would not be what it is and without the Ibadan School, the history of the academic study of Islam in Nigeria would not be complete.

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