



## Fastening the Bond with the Qur'an in the Fasting Period: A Study of *Ramaḍān Tafsīr* in Ilorin, Nigeria

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### Abstract

This study explores the significance of *Ramaḍān Tafsīr*, the exegesis of the Qur'an during the fasting month of *Ramaḍān*, in Ilorin, Nigeria. *Ramaḍān Tafsīr* represents a pivotal tradition in Islamic practice, serving as a means for Muslims to deepen their understanding of the Qur'an and strengthen their spiritual connection during the holy month. Through qualitative research methods, including interview, participant observation, and textual analysis, this study investigates the role of *Ramaḍān Tafsīr* in fostering religious devotion, community cohesion, and moral development among Muslims in Ilorin as well as the socio-cultural dynamics shaping the practice in the local context. It examines the *Tafsīr* history in the town, the content, delivery methodologies, and audience engagement strategies employed by *Tafsīr* scholars and other major role players in the *Tafsīr* centres. Beside the *Mufasssir*, who is the main interpreter of the Qur'an, explanation are offered concerning the major players who are recognised in the local context as *Ajanasi* and *Arowasi*. This study offers insights into the multifaceted impacts of *Ramaḍān Tafsīr* on individual religious identity formation and communal solidarity by elucidating the experiences and perceptions of both scholars and participants. Furthermore, it sheds light on the enduring relevance of traditional Islamic pedagogical methods in contemporary Nigerian society, highlighting the resilience and adaptability of religious practices in response to evolving socio-cultural developments. The offered recommendations include promoting accessible and inclusive *Tafsīr* session, utilizing technology for wider outreach and supporting continued education for *Tafsīr* scholars.

**Keywords:** *Ramaḍān*, *Tafsīr*, *Mufasssirūn*, Bond-fastening, Ilorin

## Introduction

The Glorious Qur'an is highly revered by Muslims across the globe as the last divine message to the entire human race. Its eternal nature is vouchsafed with a divine assurance and pledge to preserve and protect it against any forms of distortion and manipulation as it was the case with the previous scriptures earlier sent to Prophet Musa (*Tawrah/Old Testament*) and Prophet Isa (*Injil/New Testament*). Among the means of protecting and preserving the Qur'an is the *Tafsīr* session that is held every day in the month of Ramaḍān which is an old-long tradition in all Muslim communities. This fact is also true of the Muslim community of Ilorin in Nigeria. Virtually, every renowned scholar in the town seizes the golden opportunity presented in the month of Ramaḍān to fasten their bond with the enduring words of Allah as contained in the Glorious Book. Based on the discretion of individual scholars, the time of the *Tafsīr* session varies; while some hold it in the morning, some prefer the evening time, precisely after the 'Asr prayer. Scholars also use different exegetical works and materials as sources for their *Tafsīr* activities wherein they would explain verses of the Qur'an to the audience in the language of the community, such as Hausa or Yoruba as the case maybe. Typically, the *Tafsīr* session is equally attended by both the young and the old members of the community, with the latter group accounting for the larger percentage of the congregation. Since it is not a formal learning centre, the presiding scholars are not under any pressure to cover a particular chapter every day or every period of the month of Ramaḍān. This allows them ample opportunity to provide detailed explanation of every verse or passage of the Qur'an not minding the lengthy period of time such will take. In most cases, the explanation of a whole chapter of about one hundred verses could take three years to be completed. The duration of time every scholar uses to explain a verse or a chapter is largely determined by the extent of their level of knowledge, analytical skills, as well as eloquence.

This paper, therefore, is a study of the *Tafsīr* session in Ilorin in the month of Ramaḍān. It began by explaining the significance of the Qur'an and its connection with the month of Ramaḍān. It discussed the spread of Islam in Ilorin. Thereafter, the paper traced the history of *Tafsīr* sessions in Ilorin as well as methodologies and impacts of the *Tafsīr* sessions. Subsequently, major role players in the *Tafsīr* activities such as *mufasssir*, *ajanasi*, and *arowasi* were identified. The paper was concluded with recommendations.

### **The Nexus between the Qur'ān and Ramaḍān**

The revelation of the Qur'an took place in three major stages. Firstly, Allah put it in the protected tablet, technically known as "*al-Lawh al-Mahfūz*". Secondly, it was transferred therefrom to the lowest level of the heaven in a place called: *bayt al-'izzah*. This was on the night of majesty (*Laylatul-Qadr*). Thirdly, Allah

revealed it to the Prophet (SAW) through the intermediary of the Archangel Jibril (AS) for a period of twenty-three years in Makkah and Madinah.<sup>1</sup> While every stage of revelation was important, the second stage appears to be more unique, because of details provided about it in the Qur'an. For instance, a whole chapter was revealed to explain how the revelation took place on the night of majesty, i.e. (*Laylatul al-Qadr*) after whom the chapter is named.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the night of majesty was identified to fall in the month of Ramadān.<sup>3</sup>

After the whole Qur'an had been perfectly revealed, the Prophet (SAW) used to revise it every year, and specifically in the month of Ramadān, with the archangel, Jibril (AS). However, in the last Ramadān he observed, it was reported that Jibril came for the purpose of revision twice. Following this, prominent scholars used to suspend all teaching activities in the month of Ramadān in order for them to concentrate on the reading of the Qur'an. Thus, it has become a well-established tradition in the Muslim community for Muslims to be more dedicated to the reading of the Qur'an in the month of Ramadān. Essentially, the reading of the Qur'an attracts handsome rewards according to a number of Qur'anic verses as well as many prophetic traditions such as follows:

Verily, those who recite the Book of Allāh (this Qur'ān), and perform As-Salāt (Iqāmat-as-Salāt), and spend (in charity) out of what We have provided for them, secretly and openly, they hope for a (sure) trade-gain that will never perish. [Suratul-Fatir:29]

Generally, the above verse and similar ones emphasise the need for all Muslims to read the Qur'an as fluently as possible. But this does not preclude those who can hardly read it fluently. Both categories of readers shall be rewarded accordingly for reading the Qur'an. This has been well explained in the following prophetic

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<sup>1</sup> Muhammad, Bibr Ismail, *Dirāsāt fī Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (Cairo: Dār al-Manār li al-Tiba'ah wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', 1419 AH/1999 CE), p24-27.

<sup>2</sup> Surah al-'Qadr: 1-5. **1.** Verily! We have sent it (this Qur'ān) down on the night of Al-Qadr (Decree). **2.** And what will make You know what the night of Al-Qadr (Decree) is? **3.** The night of Al-Qadr (Decree) is better than a thousand months (i.e. worshipping Allāh in that night is better than worshipping Him a thousand months, i.e. 83 years and 4 months). **4.** Therein descend the angels and the Rūh [Jibrael (Gabriel)] by Allāh's permission with All Decrees. **5.** Peace! (all that night, there is peace and goodness from Allāh to his believing slaves) until the appearance of dawn.

<sup>3</sup> Surah Al Dukhan: 3. We sent it (this Qur'ān) down on a blessed night [(i.e. night of Qadr, Sūrah No: 97) In the month of Ramadān, the 9th month of the Islāmic calendar]. Verily, we are ever warning [mankind that Our torment will reach those who disbelieve In Our Oneness of Lordship and In Our Oneness of worship].

tradition in which Aishah reported that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said,

The one who is proficient in the recitation of the Qur'an will be with the honourable and obedient scribes (angels) and he who recites the Qur'an and finds it difficult to recite, doing his best to recite it in the best way possible, will have two rewards. (Bukhari, 4937)

In addition to reading the Qur'an in the month of Ramaḍān, Muslims in Nigeria are accustomed to attending *Tafsīr* circles where scholars undertake an in-depth analysis of verses of the Glorious Book. The *Tafsīr* circles usually hold in the morning or in the evening time, specifically after 'Asr prayer. The *Tafsīr* circles are especially patronised by old people who consider doing so an avenue to increase their knowledge of the Qur'an as well as an opportunity to attract more rewards in the month of Ramaḍān. In Ilorin, there are many *Tafsīr* circles held both in the morning and the evening time at the Gambari mosque and the Emir's palace respectively.

### **Ilorin: The City and the Spread of Islam**

Ilorin is the state-capital of Kwara in the North Central of Nigeria. Ilorin had a current (2024) estimated population of 1,063,713.<sup>4</sup> The population rise is apparent when compared to 777,667 reported in the 2006 census, making Ilorin the sixth largest city by population in Nigeria.<sup>5</sup> Ilorin province and middle Niger province were the first two provinces created in Northern Nigeria by the British colonial government in 1900. The then Ilorin Province was not only the areas now referred to as Ilorin Emirate but also included parts of the present lands of Nupe, Ibolu, and Igbomina/Ekiti.<sup>6</sup> Nupe land (Shonga district) had been transferred to the Lafiagi Emirate before the creation of Kwara State in 1967.<sup>7</sup> It was in 1968 that Igbomina/Ekiti and Ibolu lands similarly seceded from Ilorin Emirate by the Panel set up by the first Governor of the state, Brigadier General David Bamigboye (1967-1975).<sup>8</sup> Ilorin, which lies along Lagos-Kaduna highway with 409 km distance from Abuja, the Nigerian Federal Capital Territory, is located at latitude 80°30'N and longitude

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<sup>4</sup> <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/ilorin-population> Accessed on the March 20, 2024

<sup>5</sup> Ola, A. Building a food-resilient city through urban agriculture: The case of Ilorin, Nigeria. *Town and Regional Planning*, 77, 2020, pp.89-102.

<sup>6</sup> Badmus A.A., *Spatial Inequalities in the Distribution of Public Facilities. A case study of Ilorin metropolis*. Unpublished Bachelor of Arts Long Essay, submitted to Department of Geography, University of Ilorin, 2000, p.9

<sup>7</sup> Jimoh L.A.K, *Ilorin the Journey So Far*, Atoto Press Ltd, Ilorin, 1994; p.18

<sup>8</sup> Kannike U.M.M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate (1980-2020)*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Submitted to the Department of Islamic Studies and Shari'ah, Bayero University, Kano, 2023, p.15

4<sup>035</sup>1E.<sup>9</sup> The City occupies a strategic position in the country as it is situated about mid-way between the north-western and south-western parts of Nigeria. It is, therefore, appropriate to say that it serves as the gate-way between the North and the South of the country, underscoring the opinion that “Ilorin as a gateway to the north and the south is left with a choice of which of the two directions to follow”.<sup>10</sup> This makes Ilorin a meeting point combining elements of culture, majorly of Northern and some from the Southern parts of Nigeria.

Various categories of scholars, cutting across epoch, age, disciplines, classes, genders and objectives have shown outstanding interest, through their writings, in the history of Ilorin. Consequently, the date in which Ilorin was founded has attracted different opinions, the most acceptable of which is the assertion that Ilorin was founded in the sixteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, up to beginning of nineteenth century, Ilorin was populated, not only by the Muslims but also, by the adherents of African Traditional Religion<sup>12</sup>. Some of these ATR adherents were reported to have worshipped objects of nature like Asa River, Sobi Hill and other mountains and rocks, baobab trees, land and forest and other such physical phenomena including Egungun and Igunnu masquerades<sup>13</sup>. It is noteworthy that Ahmad b. Abubakr Ikokoro (1870-1936) in his *Akhbār al-Qurūn* credits Emir Zubayr, the Third Emir of Ilorin (1861-1869) as the one who was able to completely ban idol worship in the Emirate.<sup>14</sup> However, it is reported that the group of Muslims that had emerged in Ilorin by the seventeenth century got their population continuously increased due to the influx of more Muslim migrants into the town.<sup>15</sup> Notable among the earliest migrants were some Hausa slaves who were Muslims in the old Oyo Empire as well as the Yoruba Muslims who found their ways into Ilorin to escape the persecution from the then Oyo authorities which had no tolerance for Muslims<sup>16</sup>. The historic migration at the time, resulted in the clusters of Muslims in Gambari and Fulani

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<sup>9</sup>Badmus A.A., *Spatial Inequalities in the Distribution of Public Facilities. A case study of Ilorin metropolis*. Unpublished Bachelor of Arts Long Essay, submitted to Department of Geography, University of Ilorin, 2000, p.9

<sup>10</sup>Abubakre R.D., “Ilorin and the Rest of the World: Shaykh Adam Abdulla Al-Ilory as an Ambassador Plenipotentiary” in Abubakre R.D (ed.), *Shaykh Adam Abdullah Al-Ilory in the Tableau of Immortality*, vol II, University of Ilorin, 2012, p.19

<sup>11</sup> Kanneke U.M.M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, p.16

<sup>12</sup>Salihu H. A. and Jawondo I., “Ilorin Emirate: Its People and Politics” in S.A. Jimoh (Ed.) *Ilorin: Centre of Learning*, Jimson Publishers, Unilorin, 2006, p.5

<sup>13</sup>Salihu H. A. and Jawondo I., “Ilorin Emirate: Its People and Politics”, p.5

<sup>14</sup> Ikokoro Ahmad bn Abubakr, *Akhbār al-Qurūn min Umarā' Madīnah Ilorin*, 1912 with commentaries of Al-Ilory Adam Abdullah, Markaz Agege, Lagos, 1991, Pp.12

<sup>15</sup> Kanneke U.M.M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, p.33

<sup>16</sup>Salihu H. A. and Jawondo I., “Ilorin Emirate: Its People and Politics”, p.6

quarters as well as the establishment of Okesuna as an exclusive Muslim colony in the outskirts of the town.<sup>17</sup>

It is noteworthy that a large number of these migrants, especially the residents of Okesuna, were Muslim scholars, otherwise referred to as '*Ulamā*'. The arrival and roles of these '*Ulamā*' contributed to the rapid growth and spread of Islam in Ilorin. The scholars were from diverse backgrounds and were versed in various disciplines of learning.<sup>18</sup> Though some of these '*Ulamā*' were in existence in the town before arrival of Shaykh Sālihu Ālimi, he later became the most popular and was recognised as their leader. Available historical accounts also attribute the spread of Islam to Shaykh Ālimi's relentless efforts on propagation of Islām as the recognised leader of the '*Ulamā*'. As administrative matters were brought to attention of the Shaykh, being the *Amīr al-Mūminīn* (leader of the faithful ones), he engaged his son, Abdul Salām, to attend to them on his behalf, for adjudication or advice. Consequently, Abdul Salām took up political responsibilities and after the death of Shaykh Ālimi, his father, Abdul Salām became the first Emir (1820-1836) and was succeeded by his brother, Shitta (1836-1861). The descendants of these two Emirs formed the offspring that inherited the Ālimi Dynasty and the Emirship has been rotational between the two, till the present time.<sup>19</sup>

The influence of Islam in Ilorin became so pervasive that the ethnic identity of the people is largely recognized more by the religion than by the language. This fact distinguishes the people of Ilorin from the Yoruba of the South West. The circumstances of the history, socio-political experience and affiliation of Ilorin have made identifying with Yoruba ethnically difficult if not impossible.<sup>20</sup> Instead, Islam their main religion, more than anything else, is the rope binding all Ilorin people together.<sup>21</sup> This is an indication of the most prominent position enjoyed by Islām in the Ilorin Emirate. It also gives Islam in Ilorin multiple figures ranging from religious to cultural; a feature, because of which Islam becomes the common denominator and the only unifying factor.

### **History of *Tafsīr* Sessions in Ilorin.**

The historical accounts on the genesis of *Tafsīr* in Ilorin vary and can be subjected to an accurate survey under two major perspectives. A school of thought considers Shaykh Sālihu Ālimi as the pioneer *Mufassir* in Ilorin. This opinion is based on the report that the Shaykh was the scholar who first brought a copy of

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<sup>17</sup> Kannike U.M.M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, p.34

<sup>18</sup> Al-Ilori A.A., *Lamhāt al-Balawry fī Mashāhīr 'Ulamā Ilorin*, Markaz Publication, Agege, 1982:18-75

<sup>19</sup> Hassan A. S. and Jawondo I.A., "Ilorin Emirate: Its People and Politics" in S.A. Jimoh (Ed.) *Ilorin: Centre of Learning*, Jimson Publishers, Unilorin, 2006, p. 12

<sup>20</sup> Jawondo I.A., *Islam in Nigeria Since Independence: A History of Mosque Administration in Ilorin Emirate, 1960-2010*" in *Journal of Islam in Nigeria*, 2015, Vol, 1 No 1, Accessed through [www.unilorin.edu.ng](http://www.unilorin.edu.ng) on July 10, 2018

<sup>21</sup> Kannike U.M.M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, p.35

the second half of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*<sup>22</sup> into Ilorin and taught it to the existing scholars in the defunct Oke-Sunna settlement on his second arrival in the town.<sup>23</sup> Other schools of thought, however, trace the beginning of *Tafsīr* in Ilorin to the *Tafsīr* session organized at the Imām Gambari mosque. The mosque is reported to have existed in Gambari quarters before the settlement of Shaykh Ālimi as a resident of Oke-Suna.<sup>24</sup> According to a relevant source, among the usual activities that have been taking place in Imām Gambari mosque, from the inception is the organisation of *Tafsīr* session during the month of Ramaḍān<sup>25</sup>. It is therefore crucial to study the personalities and circumstances surrounding the two opinions *viz-a-viz* the first scholar of *Tafsīr*, who resided in Oke-suna and the first gathering of *Tafsīr*, that had earlier started in Gambari but presided over by non-resident scholars.

A biographical account presents the profile of Shaykh Ālimi as As-Shaykh Sālihu Ālimi b. Ahmad Janta, b. Zubair, b. Muhammad b. Ahmadu Buka'i b. Ahmad b. Muhammad Hamman b. Iliasu b. Akabu b. Musa Jokolo, al-Fulānī, at-Tūrūdī. He was born in Tankara in 1156 AH/1740 CE to a renown Toronkawa family of Fulani extraction. His father was born in Bunza, in the present day Kebbi State but formerly a western part of Sokoto State.<sup>26</sup> Shaykh Ālimi had memorised the entire Qur'ān since he was about ten years old and was well learned in the Jurisprudence of Imām Mālik School of Law at the early stage of his life, under the tutelage of his father and numerous notable scholars of Kebbi, Sokoto and

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<sup>22</sup> *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* simply means *Tafsīr* of the two Jalāls or a book of *Tafsīr* written by two authors who share the name Jalāl-ad-Dīn. The two scholars were prominent Egyptian exegetes of the fifteenth-century. The work was initiated by Imām Jalāl ad-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Maḥallī (d. 864 AH/ 1459 CE) and completed by Imām Jalāl ad-Dīn 'Abd ar-Raḥmān b. Kamal ad-Dīn b. Abī Bakr b. Muḥammad b. Sābiq ad-Dīn al-Miṣrī, ash-Shāfi'ī, al-'Ash'arī, as-Suyūfī (d. 911 AH / 1505 CE). The former was only able to write a half of the *Tafsīr* work which covered from *Sūrah al-Kahf* to *Sūrah an-Nās* and *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* when he died in the year 1459 CE. He therefore left the continuation of the engagement in the hand of the second Jalāl-ad-Dīn, his prominent student and namesake. Methodology of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* involves various elements, some of which are attributed to *Tafsīr* based on narration (*Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*) while some of the elements are purely of *Tafsīr* based on opinion (*Tafsīr bi ar-Ra'y*).

<sup>23</sup> Al-Ilorī, A.A., Lamhah *al-Balawry fi Mashar al-Ulama ...*, Maktabah al-Adab al-Jamahir, 1982, p.21

<sup>24</sup> Kannike U.M.M., "Evolution of *Tafsīr* in Ilorin Between the First *Mufassir* and the First *Tafsīr* Circle" in *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies*, Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, vol.10, No.2, 2020, p. 63

<sup>25</sup> Imām A.S. , *The Life, Works and Lineage of Imām Gambari Descendants*, a Bachelor of Arts Project submitted to the Department of Islamic Studies, Bayero University, Kano, 2007, Pp. 2-3

<sup>26</sup> El-Gambari A.A, "Shaykh Ālimi Bi-Janta in the History of Sokoto" in, Gambari M.B (ed) *The Golden Image, :Essays in Honour of the 11th Emir of Ilorin*, A Publication of Ilorin Emirate Students Union, BUK, Kano, 2012: 143



Gwandu.<sup>27</sup> Shaykh Ālimi spent only a month during his first migration into Ilorin in 1804 and before his second coming to the town, he had sojourned in a number of places which included Oyo-Ile, Ogbomoso, Ikoyi, Iseyin, Igboho, Saki and Kuwo where he was preoccupied with teaching, preaching, ransoming of slaves and assisting people spiritually through efficacy of the prayers he offered.<sup>28</sup> After a sojourn of ten years (1804-1814)<sup>29</sup> in those places, Shaykh Ālimi returned to Ilorin and reunited with the scholars of Oke-suna, an outskirt settlement in Ilorin.<sup>30</sup>

It is important to note that during the first visit of Shaykh Ālimi, the scholars of Oke-suna had expressed to him their interest in the second half of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* which was in his possession. When the Shaykh finally returned, he presented the copy and the scholars of Oke-suna copied it and studied its contents under his tutelage. Consequently, Oke-suna scholars became students under the Shaykh and nicknamed him Ālim or Ālimi, meaning the knowledgeable (scholar).<sup>31</sup> Researchers attributed the absence of a half of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* among the scholars of Oke-suna to the general scarcity of writing materials during their time, rigorous effort that an individual would go through to copy a book and the fact that those who might have possessed it before, left their former places to Ilorin in overwhelming circumstances that did not permit them to take along their possessions.<sup>32</sup> It has also been observed that the availability of a half part of the *Tafsīr* book with the scholars of Oke-suna is an indication that the scholars were conversant with *Tafsīr* studies prior to the arrival of Shaykh Ālimi.<sup>33</sup> However, historians could not ascertain the exact one of the two halves of the *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* that the Oke-suna scholars demanded and could not get till the long awaited return of Ālimi.<sup>34</sup>

There is no substantive evidence that Shaykh Ālimi organised a *Tafsīr* circle to commemorate the months of Ramaḍān as it is presently the common practice in many places in Ilorin, but there are clear proofs that the educational circles under the pedagogy of Shaykh Ālimi were lively with various discussions on religious

<sup>27</sup> Kannike U.M. M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, p.35

<sup>28</sup> Sa'ad H., *The Dynamics of Political Development in a Multicultural Society: The Case of Ilorin During The 19th and 20th Centuries*. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation submitted to Postgraduate School, ABU, Zaria, (2015): 67

<sup>29</sup> El-Gambari A.A., "Ash-Shaykh Sālih (Ālim b Janta) al-Fulāny at-Tūrūdy" in '*Ulamā al-Imārah*, Ed. M.M. Jimba, (Centre for Ilorin Manuscripts and Culture, KWASU, Maleta, 2015):

<sup>30</sup> Kannike U.M.M., "Evolution of *Tafsīr* in Ilorin Between the First *Mufassīr* ...", p. 55

<sup>31</sup> Al-Ilorī A.A., *Lamhah al-Balawry*.p. 21

<sup>32</sup> Kannike U.M.M., "Evolution of *Tafsīr* in Ilorin... p. 55

<sup>33</sup> Sambo A. A., *The Development of Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate (1950-2000)* Unpublished Ph.D Thesis in the Department of Islamic Studies, Bayero University, Kano, (2008) 100

<sup>34</sup> Kannike U.M. M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, p.81

matters, particularly his commentary on the Qur'anic verses.<sup>35</sup> On this basis, researchers suggest that the convergence of the scholars for the purpose of tutorials at the premises of the Shaykh was what later metamorphosed into *Tafsīr* session during the month of Ramadān.<sup>36</sup> Hence, it is described as the origin of Ramadān *Tafsīr* session, which is currently held daily, in the Ilorin Emir's Palace, during the month of Ramadān.<sup>37</sup> The foregoing account represents the basis for a group of researchers to conclude that the religious position such as *Mufassīr* was not known in Ilorin before Shaykh Ālimi came in contact with his hosts at Oke-suna.

However, before the narrated event at Oke-suna, there were Imāms who led each of the isolated patches of the unstructured Muslim community in the town, the Gambari settlement for example, had an Imām.<sup>38</sup> Shaykh Abdul-Mūmin, the initiator of *Tafsīr* session, was the first Imām for the Gambari settlement before and during Shaykh Ālimi's Era.<sup>39</sup> Some historical records indicate that about two years after the inception of the Imām Gambari mosque, it started having its *Tafsīr* session concurrently.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the historical account on oral *Tafsīr* circles in Ilorin would not be accurate without a reference to the events that took place, prior to the nineteenth century, at the Imām Gambari mosque.

The composition of Gambari quarters, of the migrants who arrived from Northern parts of Nigeria (Hausa, Nupe, Gwari, Kanuri, etc.) and the eminent status with leadership that gave Mallam Ibrāhīm Bako the recognition with the title of *Sarkin* Gambari, from time immemorial, were parts of the background of the *Tafsīr* circle that emerged at the Imām Gambari mosque. Shaykh Abdul-Mūmin Dogo, the progenitor of Imām Gambari's family, was among the scholars that had arrived at Ilorin before the coming of Shaykh Ālimi. Abdul-Mūmin's migration to Ilorin was reported in two versions: From Borno through Bukani near Bida (Nupeland) and from Egypt through Kano to Bakano (Now Bukani) before concluding his journey in Ilorin.<sup>41</sup> Upon his arrival in Ilorin, Shaykh Abdul-Mūmin was hosted by the *Sarkin* Gambari, Mallam Bako, who allocated for him a piece of land that later became the residence where his descendants and those of his elder brother,

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<sup>35</sup> Al-Thaqāfi U.A.M., *Ta'rīkh al-Adab al-Araby fi Madīnah Ilorin*, (Lagos: Ibrash publication, 2007) p.9

<sup>36</sup> Kannike U.M.M., "Evolution of *Tafsīr* in Ilorin... p. 56

<sup>37</sup> Nadwi B.O.A., "The Administration of *Tafsīr* in the Ilorin Emirate and Offa" *Al-Hikmah Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 1, No. 1(January, 2010),p. 147

<sup>38</sup> Sambo A.A, *The Development of Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, p.116

<sup>39</sup> Jimoh, *Ilorin the Journey So Far*, p. 474

<sup>40</sup> Kannike U.M.M., "Evolution of *Tafsīr* in Ilorin... p.63

<sup>41</sup> Kannike U.M. M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, p.89

Shaykh Aminullah Nda, live till the present time.<sup>42</sup> Shortly after Shaykh Abdul-Mūmin's arrival, the young and the old in the Gambari area congregated around him in multitude to gain from his knowledge. His residence therefore became a sort of knowledge fountain.<sup>43</sup> This implies that the historical school of Imām Gambari was in existence alongside the educational centre of Oke-suna which was said to date back to about forty years before the coming of Shaykh Ālimi.<sup>44</sup> In no distant time, with the approval of the *Sarkin* Gambari and support of residents and marketers in Gambari quarters, a mosque was erected which, at the time of completion, was ranked by many as befitting.<sup>45</sup>

Shaykh Abdul-Mūmin emerged as the first Imām of the Imām Gambari mosque which was used, not only for the five daily prayers and learning, but also for the weekly Friday *Jum'ah* prayer and the annual *īd al-Fiṭr* and *īd al-Adhā* prayers.<sup>46</sup> Shaykh Abdul-Mūmin started by conducting a continuous educative interaction with his students both outside and during *Ramaḍān* in the new mosque until about two years later when it was decided that the exclusive study and explanation of the Qur'ān be limited to the month of *Ramaḍān*. In the subsequent years, the arrangement for *Ramaḍān Tafsīr* session was made.<sup>47</sup> Shaykh Abdul-Mūmin, who had always been in contact with his associates who were knowledgeable scholars of note at Bukani, did not want to spearhead all the activities alone. He therefore incorporated scholars who were specialists in the field of *Tafsīr* at Bukani as well as neighbouring Nupe towns and villages. The Shaykh used to invite a *Mufasssir* and hosted him for the complete month of *Ramaḍān* each year. The succeeding years witnessed different scholars as *Mufasssirūn* (pl. of *mufasssir*). The available information indicates that some of these scholars were invited regularly. Though the number of years could not be ascertained, it was certain that at the end of this system, four of such exegetes were hosted by Shaykh Abdul-Mūmin with the support of the *Sarkin* Gambari.<sup>48</sup> Afterwards, scholars resident in the Gambari area were appointed by the Imam for the function of *Tafsīr*. The succession procedure is very simple: upon the death of a *mufasssir*, a new one would be appointed. The practice remains the same till the present time.<sup>49</sup> Available records

<sup>42</sup> Issa S., *Contribution of Shaykh Abdul-Quadir Jumu'ah Maimasa to the Spread of Qur'anic Understanding in Gambari Area, Ilorin*, Unpublished M.A. Dissertation in Islamic Studies, submitted to Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, (2019). 42

<sup>43</sup> Saḥbān A.J, *Nubdhah 'an Ta'rīkh ba'd 'Ulama' fī Madīnah al-Ilory*, (Ilorin, Ladan Print, 2017). 23

<sup>44</sup> Kannike U.M. M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, p.90

<sup>45</sup> Imam A.S., *The Life, Works and Lineage of Imam Gambari Descendants:3*

<sup>46</sup> Shaykh Isa Muhammad Marafa, the reciter at Imām Gambari *Tafsīr* session (2003 to Date), interviewed

<sup>47</sup> Kannike U.M.M., "Evolution of *Tafsīr* in Ilorin... p.63

<sup>48</sup> Kannike U.M. M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, p.91

<sup>49</sup> Imām A.S., *The Life, Works and Lineage of Imām Gambari Descendants*, ..., p.13

indicate that after the second arrival of Shaykh Ālimi in Ilorin, there were occasions when he attended the *Jum'ah* prayer and *Tafsīr* session at the Imām Gambari mosque.<sup>50</sup> This indicates the existence of a very sound and cordial relationship between Shaykh Ālimi and Shaykh Abdul-Mūmin as contemporaries who met each other on certain occasions.

Among the first set of *Tafsīr* circles that followed the pioneer ones in Ilorin was *Tafsīr* Circle of Shaykh Abubakr Garba, Isalekoto (d.1916). The Shaykh was succeeded as *Mufassir* during Ramadān in 1916 by his son, Shaykh Muhammad Mukhtar Isalekoto (d.1957). The Successor, who is considered as the second *Mufassir*, rebuilt his father's mosque which served as venue of the *Tafsīr* twice; in 1920 and 1928.<sup>51</sup> When this *Mufassir* died in 1957, his son, Shaykh Ghazali Mukhtar Isalekoto (d.1989) who became the *Mufassir* renovated his ancestral mosque, used as *Tafsīr* venue, twice; the first phase was in 1959 while the second phase was between 1982 and 1985.<sup>52</sup>

Makana *Tafsīr* Circle is similarly among the oldest *Tafsīr* circles with remarkable impact in Ilorin Emirate. The beginning of *Tafsīr* session in Makana mosque attracted different reports from various sides. This is because different scholars from different family backgrounds have occupied the position of *Mufassir* of Makana in the past. It is though unanimously reported that conduct of *Tafsīr* has started in the mosque from the nineteenth century; precisely in 1892.<sup>53</sup> During the reign of Shaykh Zulkarnaini Gambari, the ninth Emir of Ilorin (1959-1992), Shaykh Umar Dan Maiduka (d.1979) was appointed as the *Mufassir*. After his death in 1979, his son, Shaykh Ibrahim Halabī Umar Dan Maiduka (d.2007) was appointed as the *Mufassir* of Makana mosque *Tafsīr* Circle.

### **Major Role Players and their Activities in the *Tafsīr* Session.**

Right from the inception of Ramadān *Tafsīr* session in Ilorin, the function has always been performed with a variety of integral activities by notable categories of individuals playing certain important roles. The most prominent part of this function is performed by the *Mufassir*, whose roles include identifying the portion of the Qur'an to be interpreted, interpreting the portion from Arabic to the native language and giving further explanation and examples as may be required to

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<sup>50</sup> Kannike U.M. M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, p.92

<sup>51</sup> Isalekoto H.M.M., *Jawharah al-Akhyār an Ta'rīkh al-'Allāmah Muḥammad al- Mukhtār*, Fatylum Investment, Lagos, 2003, p.180

<sup>52</sup> The second renovation was basically an expansion of the mosque to accommodate the students of *Dar al-'Ulūm* School after they were denied continuation of study at the supposed permanent site, Eruda, Ilorin. Isalekoto mosque became the next option because it was initially used as a take-off site and Shaykh Ghazali was the school manager, appointed by the council of the school stakeholders.

<sup>53</sup> Sambo A.A., *The Development of Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate (1950-2000)* Unpublished PhD thesis submitted to the Department of Islamic Studies, Bayero University, Kano, 2008, p. 246

satisfy the audience needs. Other role players in the *Tafsīr* session conducted in the month of Ramaḍān in Ilorin are the reciter (*ajanasi*) and the relaying man (*arowasi*). It is not out of place to shed some lights on these role players and their major activities.

### ***Mufasssir***

The word *Mufasssir*, whose plural form is *Mufasssirūn*, is primarily used to describe a scholar who is the author of a commentary on the Qur'an.<sup>54</sup> It is however used casually in Ilorin, like other parts of Nigeria, for a scholar who only conducts oral interpretation of *Tafsīr* in local language without necessarily having authored any book of *Tafsīr*. The use of the word *Mufasssir* as found in this context, may be considered acceptable and applicable because Muslim authors generally refer to the Prophet Muhammad as the first *Mufasssir* or interpreter of the Qur'an.<sup>55</sup> The justification relies on the fact that the Prophet delivered only the oral *Tafsīr* and no written *Tafsīr* was in existence during his lifetime. It is, therefore, apparently logical that the Muslims in Ilorin refer to any scholar that conducts an oral *Tafsīr* session as *Mufasssir*.

The Oke-suna *Tafsīr* circle that was started by Shaykh Ālimi resurfaced after his death through the efforts of subsequent *Mufasssirūn* and it continues till date in the Palace of emirs of Ilorin, who are the descendants of Shaykh Ālimi.<sup>56</sup> Qualities required in a *Mufasssir* are considered each time there is vacancy for the Emir to appoint any of the three principal Imams of Ilorin because one of the major functions of these imams is to conduct the *Tafsīr* circle in the Palace during the month of Ramaḍān. The Imam Fulani and the Imam Imale, who are selected from different quarters in the City, jointly deliver the *Tafsīr* in the morning while the Imam Gambari, from the Gambari quarters, nominates one or two competent scholars from his quarters, who shall conduct the Ramaḍān *Tafsīr* session at Imam Gambari mosque in the morning and at the Emir's Palace in the late afternoon.<sup>57</sup> These Tafsir activities take place every day in the month of Ramaḍān.

The occupants of the seat of Imam Fulani who have been *Mufasssirūn* in the Emir's Palace during their reigns are currently twelve with Imām Bashīr b. Imām Sālihu Onida of Baboko (1983 to date) being the twelfth.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, twelve notable scholars, including the current one, had been appointed to serve as the

<sup>54</sup> Hamisan, Nur Saadah, and Norwardatun Mohamed Razali. "Women's Role as Mufasssir and Their Contributions to Qur'anic Exegesis." *al-Burhān: Journal of Qur'ān and Sunnah Studies* 5.2 (2021): 48-62

<sup>55</sup> Ali, S.A., *A Brief Introduction to Qur'anic Exegesis*, the International Institute of Islamic Thought, USA, 2017, p. 5

<sup>56</sup> Kanneke U.M. M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, p.82

<sup>57</sup> Sambo A. A., *The Development of Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate (1950-2000)* Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis submitted to the Department of Islamic Studies, Bayero University, Kano, 2008, p. 140

<sup>58</sup> Sahban Abdullah Jibril al-Imam, *Nubdhah 'an Ta'rīkh ba'd 'Ulama' fī Madīnah al-Ilory Wilāyah Kwara Nayjīriyya*, S. Ladan Print, Ilorin, 2017, Pp17-18.

Imam Imale and *Mufassir* in the Ramadān *Tafsīr* session of the Emir Palace. The current Imam Imale is Imām Abdullah b. Imām Abdul Hamīd of Fagba lineage. (1987 to date).<sup>59</sup> In other words, the Oke-suna *Tafsīr* session that emanated from Shaykh Ālimi and now takes place at the palace, has featured not less than twenty four *Mufassirūn*. It should be reasserted that the position of *Mufassir* is exclusively reserved for the three leading Imams, namely Imam Fulani, Imam Imale, and Imam Gambari.<sup>60</sup> In addition to the *Tafsir* circle in the palace, there is another one at the Imām Gambari mosque which was initiated by Shaykh Abdul Mumin as an avenue for *Tafsīr* in the month of Ramadān. This has also been sustained and it presently takes place at Imam Gambari mosque in the morning during the month of Ramadān.

The indigenous *Mufassirūn* appointed so far at the *Tafsīr* session of the Imām Gambari Mosque, are eleven including the current duo of Shaykh Abdul-Qādir Jum'ah Maimasa (2009 - date) and Shaykh Uthmān Oladimeji Sannu Shehu (2009 - date).<sup>61</sup> They are the tenth and the eleventh of the indigenous *Mufassirūn*. It is noted from the available records that a single *Mufassir* had always been appointed at a time but the two scholars who were the immediate past ones were appointed and made to resume duty at the same time, in 1990.<sup>62</sup> After the death of one of them, the second *Mufassir* continued, and after his death, another set of two emerged and replaced him. They are the current exegetes at the Imām Gambari mosque in the morning and Emir palace in the late afternoon. Any *Mufassir* appointed for this role by the Emir is, by principle, from Gambari quarters and must only function under the auspices and coordination of the current Imam Gambari.

Beside those highlighted above, different categories of *Mufassirūn* later emerged and are recognized for the role of conducting oral *Tafsīr* sessions in their various mosques during the month of Ramadān. These *Tafsīr* sessions are being carried out in different parts of Ilorin Emirate; in the five local government areas, which make up the entity called Ilorin Emirate. Ilorin Emirate is made up of Ilorin East where Gambari quarter is located, Ilorin South where Fulani quarter exists, Ilorin West where Okemale quarter is found, Asa and Moro Local Government Areas.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Profile of Prominent Imāms in *Kakaki*, A Publication of Ilorin Emirate Students Union, Bayero University Kano Chapter, 2005, p.9

<sup>60</sup> Jimoh L.A.K, *Ilorin the Journey So Far*, Atoto Press Ltd, Ilorin, 1994: 470-473

<sup>61</sup> Muhammad Jamiu Idris, *Al-Mufassirūn [Qur'ānic Exegetes] and their Methodologies in Tafsīr, a Case Study of Selected Mufassirūn of Gambari Mosque, Isale Gambari, Ilorin*, a B.A. Long Essay in Islamic Studies, submitted to al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, 2011, p.31

<sup>62</sup> Soliu Issa, *Contribution of Shaykh Abdul-Quadir Jumu'ah Maimasa to the Spread of Qur'anic Understanding in Gambari Area, Ilorin*, Unpublished M.A. Dissertation in Islamic Studies, submitted to Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, 2019, p. 22

<sup>63</sup> Kannike U.M. M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, p. 165

The five local government areas spread across but share a number of cultural elements including religious practices and studies, especially conduct of Tafsir sessions in the month of Ramaḍān.

### *Ajanasi*

The word *Ajanasi* is used by Yoruba Muslims to describe a reciter of the glorious Qur'an who recites for a *Mufasssir* or Muslim preacher for the latter to find easy the process of interpreting and commenting on the recited portion, in Yoruba language. The role of a reciter during the *Tafsir* session, as practised among the *Mufasssirūn* in Ilorin could be likened to that of Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 104 AH), a reciter among the *Tābi'ūn* who recited for his master, a companion of the Prophet, 'Abdullah b. 'Abbās. Upon the recitation of Mujāhid, his master would explain and interpret the recited verses, a practice being emulated by the succeeding *Mufasssirūn*, including those from Ilorin. According to Mujāhid:

عرضت القرآن على ابن عباس ثلاث عرضات، أقف عند كل آية، أسأله فيم نزلت،  
وكيف كانت؟

I repeated the recitation (studying the meaning) of the Qur'an before Ibn 'Abbās three times in which I paused at every verse, asking him why and how it was revealed<sup>64</sup>

The tradition of engaging the reciters during the *Tafsir* session at the Ilorin Emir's Palace started during the time of Shaykh Sālih Ālimi at Oke-suna. The first reciter for Shaykh Ālimi was Shaykh Yūsuf al-Malli who was later joined by Shaykh Ahmad Bī Sani. The significance of the role of *Ajanasi* is underscored in the fact that following the death of Shaykh Ālimi, the two reciters were appointed as the most prominent Imāms in Ilorin. The two Imāms subsequently replaced their master, Shaykh Ālimi, in the role of *Tafsir* presentation at the Palace.<sup>65</sup> The two Imāms and the Imām Gambari, who was later recognized as the third of the duo, also adopted the practice of engaging certain individuals as reciters and the practice has been sustained in the *Tafsir* circles in Ilorin till the present time.

The position of *Ajanasi Agba* (The Grand Reciter) of Ilorin has been occupied by different scholars of different family backgrounds from the onset to the present time. As a procedure, appointment of the reciter is based on recommendation by the Imāms (*Mufasssirūn*) to the Emir, who may wish to consider their recommendation.<sup>66</sup> This is because traditionally, it is the Emir that has the singular authority of appointing whosoever he wills. It is obvious that factors considered by the Emir include disposition and reputation of the candidate, his background, knowledge as well as capacity to discharge his duties. The current

<sup>64</sup> Adh-Dhahabi Muhammad b. Rizq b. Abdil Nāsir, *al-Tafsir wa al-Mufasssirūn*, Dār Ibn Jawzī li an-Nashr wa at-Tawzī', Riyald, 1426 AH, vol. 1, p.79

<sup>65</sup> Jimoh L.A.K, *Ilorin the Journey So Far*, Atoto Press Ltd, Ilorin, 1994, p.468

<sup>66</sup> Kanneke U.M. M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsir in Ilorin Emirate*, p.116

Grand Reciter of Ilorin is Shaykh Muhammad Mujtaba Bature who was appointed on September 29, 2020.

### ***Arowasi***

*Arowasi* can simply be interpreted as a relay man or a human amplifier. It is the title that Yoruba Muslim community confers on somebody whose role is to amplify statements of the *mufassir* or the preacher for the large audience to get the message instantly. The *Arowasi* must speak loudly and clearly so that every member of the audience can get the message of the *Mufassir* or preacher correctly. The circumstance in which the two ancient *Tafsīr* circles were conducted in Ilorin necessitated the involvement of *Arowasi* in the process. According to available records, the ancient *Tafsīr* circles were conducted in a Muslim densely populated area at a time when technology had not introduced sound system devices to the people.<sup>67</sup> Hence, with the large audience in each *Tafsir* circle, there was, therefore, the need for *Arowasi*, relay men or human amplifiers.

Language barriers also necessitated the need for relay men or human amplifiers. The pioneer *Mufassirūn* at the Imām Gambari mosque were Nupe natives, while a larger percentage of the people were Hausas and some others were Yorubas who spoke languages other than Nupe spoken by the *mufassir*.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, an available historical account that describes Shaykh Ālimi's methodology of *Tafsīr* presentation reveals that after recitation of the verses by him and his reciters, the Shaykh would read the Arabic content of the *Tafsīr* book, and would thereafter interpret it in Hausa and Fulfulde languages respectively.<sup>69</sup> While many of the audience of the Shaykh understood the two languages, there were some of the listeners who understood only Yoruba; there was, therefore, the need for an interpreter who must raise his voice for the target audience to understand the message. At this point, a member of the congregation who understood both languages of Shaykh Ālimi and Yoruba language was engaged to relay the statements of the Shaykh in Yoruba language to the group of audience who understood neither Hausa nor Fulfulde. The most prominent interpreter cum relaying person engaged by the Shaykh was a Fulani Mallam called Olufadi. He

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<sup>67</sup> Kannike U.M. M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, p.83

<sup>68</sup> Ahmad Saheed Imām, *The Life, Works and Lineage of Imām Gambari Descendants*, a Bachelor of Arts Project submitted to the Department of Islamic Studies, Bayero University, Kano, 2007, p.3

<sup>69</sup> El-Gambari Aminullahi Adamu "Ash-Shaykh Sālih (Ālim b Janta) al-Fulāny at-Tūrūdy" in Jimba Moshood M. (Ed.) *Ulamā al-Imārah*, a publication of Centre for Ilorin Manuscripts and Culture, Kwara State University, Malete, 2015, p.48



was the head of the Fulani pastoral farmers residing at Gaa.<sup>70</sup> Gaa is the area that later became known as Balogun Fulani area in Ilorin.

The practice of engaging *Arowasi* has been continuously popular in every part of Ilorin city and beyond during their Ramaḍān *Tafsīr* sessions. Yoruba speaking Muslim scholars across Nigeria have extensively adopted this practice during preaching and supplication in public. It is, though, astonishing to notice that sometimes, with the use of modern sound system devices, some of these clerics still engage their students to play the role of the relay men or human amplifiers.

### **Methodologies of the Ramaḍān *Tafsīr* Circles in Ilorin Emirate**

The two pioneer *Tafsīr* circles in Ilorin were exemplary and prominent. Worthy of note were Methodologies and impacts of the *Tafsīr* circle of Oke-suna conducted by Shaykh Ālimi and that of Imam Gambari mosque conducted by the invited Nupe scholars in response to the invitation of the Imam Gambari. Shaykh Ālimi's methodology inclined to heavy reliance on *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, written by the duo of Jalālud-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Maḥallī (d.864 AH) and Jalālud-Dīn Abdur-Rahmān b. Abi Bakr as-Suyūfī (d. 911 AH). The contents and the approach used in the book influenced to a large extent the methodology of the *Tafsīr* session conducted by Shaykh Ālimi because it was a copy of this book and its duplicates that the Shaykh, who was the *Mufassir* and the audience, who have successfully copied it, respectively held during the *Tafsīr* session.<sup>71</sup> This has apparently informed the popularity of the exegetical work among the residents in Ilorin so much that the Ramaḍān *Tafsīr* in the town has been largely synonymous with *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*.

Methodologies of the *Tafsīr* circles conducted in the Imām Gambari mosque by the four invited *Tafsīr* exponents were similar with negligible differences. The similarity lies first in their language of communication, which was Nupe. Every *Mufassir* arrived along with his reciter. The *Mufassir* would recite the part of the Qur'ān he intended to explain and the reciter would do the same afterwards. The reciter assisted the *Mufassir* by reciting in piecemeal and pausing to allow the *Mufassir* explain all the necessary details of the part.<sup>72</sup> *Mufassir* gave the commentary in Nupe language. On every occasion, somebody among the Nupe natives of Gambari quarters would be available to interpret the *Mufassir*'s explanation in Hausa language.<sup>73</sup> It should be noted that at that time nobody was appointed as substantive interpreter as different people carried out the function interchangeably. It is also remarkable that Hausa language was considered as

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<sup>70</sup> Ikokoro Ahmad bn Abubakr, *Akḥbār al-Qur'ūn min Umarā' Madīnah Ilorin*, 1912 with commentaries of Al-Ilori Adam Abdullah, Markaz Agege, Lagos, 1991, Pp.27-28

<sup>71</sup> Kanneke U.M.M., "Evolution of *Tafsīr* in Ilorin... p.63

<sup>72</sup> Shaykh Isa Muhammad Marafa, the reciter at Imām Gambari *Tafsīr* session (2003 to Date), interviewed on December 19, 2018 around 5:00 pm at his residence, Gambari, Ilorin.

<sup>73</sup> Issa S., *Contribution of Shaykh Abdul-Quadir Jumu'ah Maimasa* : 48

*lingua franca* of the Gambari residents; so there was no objection to the fact that the interpretation was only made in Hausa, and not in other languages during the *Tafsīr* session.<sup>74</sup> Another important point to note was the liberty of each of the *Mufasssīrūn* to select the chapter (*Sūrah*) or verses (*Āyāt*) he preferred to benefit his audience with, within the period of one month. However, it was gathered that each of the *Mufasssīrūn* encouraged the scholars in attendance who might be in possession of the exegetical book of reference, namely, *Tafsīr Jalālayn* to bring it along to the gathering for maximum benefit from the *Tafsīr* circle.<sup>75</sup> This is an indication that the *Mufasssīrūn* made use of the book and made it more popular among the people of Gambari quarters.

Significance of the earliest *Tafsīr* circles were apparent. As hinted in the foregoing paragraphs, the *Tafsīr* session conducted by Shaykh Ālimi, in line with the applied methodology, had great impacts on the people of Oke-suna and by extension, the entirety of Ilorin City. The new converts discovered the beauty of Islām; and after a few years of introduction of *Tafsīr*, Islam became the major identity marker in Ilorin.<sup>76</sup> Both students and scholars achieved academic growth; prior to the arrival of the British in 1910, the 'Ulamā' in Ilorin were more than one thousand.<sup>77</sup> Robust brotherhood was established as the community life was standardised with improved knowledge about the religion, high moral standard and piety.<sup>78</sup> Above all, the effective and sustainable nature of the methodology of Shaykh Ālimi's *Tafsīr* session caused it to be inherited and adopted by the succeeding generations of scholars who had always continued with this methodology up to the present time.

The benefits of the first *Tafsīr* circle that took place at the Imām Gambari mosque cannot be unnoticed. Ramadān period has been identified with *Tafsīr* circles in Ilorin where a *Mufasssīr* usually recites and explains certain verses of the Qur'ān throughout the month of Ramadān, within some hours either in the morning or early evening; some *Tafsīr* circles were similarly held at night after 'Ishā' prayer.<sup>79</sup> The earlier indigenous exponents who were of the Nupe origin continued the use of Nupe language to conduct the *Tafsīr* circle at the Imām Gambari

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<sup>74</sup> Alhaji Ahmadu Atanda, (Serikin Gambari, Ilorin), 75 year-old was interviewed on August 28, 2019 around 8:00pm at his residence, Seriki compound, Gambari, Ilorin.

<sup>75</sup> Kanneke U.M. M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, p.93

<sup>76</sup> Alabi A. S., *Transmission of learning in modern Ilorin: a history of islamic education 1897-2012*, 2015. Accessed on 5th August, 2018 through <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/35802>

<sup>77</sup> Al-Ilory, *Lamhah al-Balawry fī Mashāhīr 'Ulamā Ilorin*: p.4

<sup>78</sup> As-Salāty A. A., *Dawr-ul-Ulamā ul-Qādiriyyah fī ash-Shi'r al-'Arabī aṣ-Ṣūfī Bi Imārah Ilorin an-Nijīriyyah*, (Ilorin: el-Mubarak Print Ltd, , 2019). 56

<sup>79</sup> Sambo A. A., *The Development of Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, 108

mosque for some years.<sup>80</sup> The methodology was of remarkable significance that the use of an interpreter continued even when the exegetes conducted the *Tafsīr* session in Hausa language, which was the common language among the people. It is interesting to note that the use of interpreters in the *Tafsīr* circle of Imām Gambari mosque was later adopted in subsequent *Tafsīr* circles established across and outside Ilorin. Even where both the *Mufasssīr* and the audience speak Yoruba language, an individual, who speaks louder and clearer, is appointed to relay what the *Mufasssīr* says<sup>81</sup>. In other words, most of the *Tafsīr* circles established in Ilorin in the nineteenth or early twentieth century appointed an interpreter, a relaying person or someone who carried out the two functions concurrently.

It is rational to observe that the two pioneer *Tafsīr* circles have jointly influenced the subsequent *Tafsīr* circles in Ilorin and its environs, particularly in accelerating the use of *Ajanasi* (reciter), *Arowasi* (relayer/interpreter) and popularity of *Tafsīr Jalālayn*, a book of *Tafsīr*, commonly used by Shaykh Ālimi, the first *Mufasssīr* and the Nupe scholars, the invitees who presided over the first *Tafsīr* session.<sup>82</sup> The credit for this complementary impact of the two pioneer *Tafsīr* circles in Ilorin goes to, not only the proximity of their location but also, the contemporaneousness of their era.

The method of *Tafsīr* session of Shaykh Isalekoto, particularly during the reign of Shaykh Ghazali, between 1957 and 1989, was significantly remarkable. The *Mufasssīr* changed the system of the *Tafsīr* Circle to what is subsequently regarded as a modified style in the *Tafsīr* of Shaykh Isalekoto mosque. He had special interest in jurisprudential issues in the Glorious Qur'an, which earned him the recognition for *Tafsīr al-Fiqhī* (Jurisprudential *Tafsīr*). Shaykh Ghazali would make reference to related verses and books of Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) relevant to the verses of the Qur'an being interpreted.<sup>83</sup> The modification brought by Shaykh Ghazali b. Mukhtar constitutes a remarkable impact in the *Tafsīr* circle of Shaykh Garba Isalekoto.

The method of Makana *Tafsīr* Centre was improved significantly between 1979 and 2007, during the reign of Shaykh Ibrahim Halabī Dan Maiduka. It is on record that this *Mufasssīr* improved on the trend inherited from his predecessors, whereby the *Tafsīr* circle was characterised by the *Fiqh* method of Maliki School of law. In this case, the verses of the Qur'ān would be discussed with emphasis on the relevant aspects of *fiqh* in the interpreted verses. He also made advancement

<sup>80</sup> Shaykh Uthman Ahmad Baba Eleja, (Khalifah of Gbodofu, Ilorin) 92 year-old was interviewed on December 26, 2018 around 2:30pm at his residence, Gbodofu compound, Ilorin.

<sup>81</sup> Nadwi B.O.A, "The Administration of *Tafsīr* in the Ilorin Emirate and Offa": p.151

<sup>82</sup> Kannike U.M. M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, p.94

<sup>83</sup> Kannike U.M. M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, P. 180

in the use of the book *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* with inclusion of *Hāshiyah aṣ-Ṣāwī*, a book of commentary on *al-Jalālayn*.<sup>84</sup>

### **Impact of Ramadān *Tafsīr* Circles among the Muslims in Ilorin Emirate**

Not only the two centres-of-studies in the history of *Tafsīr* emergence in Ilorin that had impacted in the process of fastening the Muslims' bond with the Qur'an but indeed other *Tafsīr* circles that evolved later played different significant roles. Though the two pioneer *Tafsīr* circles undoubtedly impacted on the subsequent ones, every centre of Ramadān *Tafsīr* has an impact on different aspects in the lives of various categories of Muslims in the Ilorin Emirate. It is therefore important to cite some examples of Ramadān *Tafsīr* centres and their diverse impacts among the Muslims in Ilorin Emirate.

The methodology applied by Shaykh Ālimi in the *Tafsīr* session which took place during Ramadān was slightly different from the *Tafsīr* classes he had outside Ramadān. Some of the classes served as source of inspiration and conviction to the new converts who ran with their new faith to get shelter at Oke-suna and those who just embraced Islām and followed Shaykh Ālimi after getting the guidance through him at their respective places.<sup>85</sup> During the Ramadān *Tafsīr* session, Shaykh Ālimi was occupied with rigorous explanation of verses of the Qur'an with a methodology that was eventually described as effective and sustainable.<sup>86</sup> The impact of Shaykh Ālimi's *Tafsīr* session on the process of forming a bond between the Muslims and the Qur'an is notice in the procedure described elsewhere as:

وهم يجتمعون عند هذا العالم وهو يأمرهم بالمعروف وينهاهم عن المنكر ويهديهم طريق

الهدى ويعد لهم عن طريق الهوى ويأمرهم بالإسلام فيسلم من أراد الله أسلامه بيده

And they (the crowd) use to gather around this Ālimi while he was enjoining them on righteousness, forbidding them from immoralities, guiding them to the right path, dissuading them from the path of fantasy and directing them to Islām. Thus, those whom Allah destined to embrace Islām through him did embrace.<sup>87</sup>

The preceding paragraphs make clear that Shaykh Ālimi's *Tafsīr* session, which followed the applicable methodology, had a significant impact on the Oke-suna community and, consequently, the entire city of Ilorin. The beauty of Islam was shown to the new converts, and consequently, a few years after the emergence of the *Tafsīr*, Islam had become the primary identification marker among the people

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<sup>84</sup> Kannike U.M. M., *A Study of the Trends of Contemporary Oral Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate*, P. 189

<sup>85</sup> El-Gambari A.A., "Ash-Shaykh Sālih (Ālim b Janta)al-Fulāny at-Tūrūdy":39-40

<sup>86</sup> Kannike U.M.M., "Evolution of *Tafsīr* in Ilorin... p 57

<sup>87</sup> Ikokoro A, *Akhbār al-Qurūn min Umarā' Madīnah Ilorin*, 1912:p. 28

of Ilorin.<sup>88</sup> Strong brotherhood was developed as the community's life was standardised with increased piety, moral standards, and knowledge of Allah.<sup>89</sup> Academic growth was highly experienced by both students and scholars; that prior to the arrival of the British in 1910; the 'Ulamā' in Ilorin were more than one thousand.<sup>90</sup> Above all, the effective and sustainable nature of the methodology of Shaykh Ālimi's *Tafsīr* session caused it to be inherited by the succeeding generations of scholars who had always continued with this methodology up to the present time.<sup>91</sup>

It is impossible to ignore the impact of the first *Tafsīr* circle held at the Imām Gambari mosque. Part of it is that the month of Ramaḍān has a designated period for *Tafsīr* sessions in different parts of Gambari and Ilorin, where a *Mufassir* typically recites and explains a portion of the Qur'ān within a few hours, either daily or weekly. Similar to this, certain *Tafsīr* sessions were held at night following the "Ishā" prayer.<sup>92</sup> The methodology was of remarkable impact that it becomes interesting to note that the interpreter used in the *Tafsīr* session of Imām Gambari mosque was later emulated in the subsequent *Tafsīr* circles created across and outside Ilorin. Even where both the *Mufassir* and the audience speak Yoruba language; an individual, who speaks louder and clearer, is appointed to relay what the *Mufassir* utters.<sup>93</sup> In other words, most of the *Tafsīr* circles created in Ilorin in the nineteenth or early twentieth century appointed an interpreter, a relay person or someone who carried out the two functions concurrently.<sup>94</sup>

The impact recorded of *Tafsīr* centre of Shaykh Abubakr Garba Isalekoto was remarkable during the reign of Shaykh Garba. His daily *Tafsīr* session, during Ramaḍān and weekly admonition, on every Thursday, in his mosque, were both consistent and famous among the people of Fulani quarters throughout his lifetime. In similar vein, Shaykh Ibrahim Halabī Dan Maiduka of Makana *Tafsīr* Centre made outstanding impact by always reserving enough time for question and answer during the *Tafsīr* session whereby most of the questions are jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) related. Similarly, he employed different books on Islamic Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) to ensure that the Circle remains that of *al-Tafsīr al-Fiqhī*. This remains the most beloved branch of knowledge to the *Mufassir* even outside

<sup>88</sup> Alabi A.S., *Transmission of learning in modern Ilorin: a history of islamic education 1897-2012*, 2015. Accessed on 5th August, 2018 through <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/35802>

<sup>89</sup> Salāty A.A., *Dawr-ul-Ulamā ul-Qādiriyyah fi ash-Shi'r al-'Arabī aṣ-Ṣūfī Bi Imārah Ilorin an-Nijīriyyah*, (Ilorin: el-Mubarak Print Ltd, , 2019). p. 56

<sup>90</sup> Al-Ilory A.A., *Lamhah al-Balawry fi Mashāhīr 'Ulamā Ilorin*: p.4

<sup>91</sup> Kanneke U.M.M., "Evolution of *Tafsīr* in Ilorin... p. 61

<sup>92</sup> Sambo A.A., *The Development of Tafsīr in Ilorin Emirate* p.108

<sup>93</sup> Nadwi B.A., "The Administration of *Tafsīr* in the Ilorin Emirate and Offā": p.151

<sup>94</sup> Kanneke U.M.M., "Evolution of *Tafsīr* in Ilorin... p. 65

the *Tafsīr* session.<sup>95</sup> The trend of *al-Tafsīr al-Fiqhī* and giving room for question and answer benefited the audience a lot and made the *Tafsīr* session highly impactful.

### **Conclusion/ Recommendation**

*Tafsīr* is one of many ways used by Muslims to fasten their bond with the Glorious Qur'an more especially during the month of Ramadān. This is due to an intimate connection between the Book and the month. In Ilorin, Muslims attend *Tafsīr* circles morning and evening, to learn more about the Qur'an under the instruction of a scholar known as *mufasssīr*. Though versatile in Islamic sciences, *mufasssīr* is ably assisted by *ajanasi* and *arowasi*, each of them playing distinct roles that make the *Tafsīr* circles interesting to the delight of the audience. This is a tradition that the people of the city have been known for since the time of Shaykh Alimi who founded *Tafsīr* circle at Oke-Sunnah. There was another *Tafsīr* session at the mosque of the Imam Gambari's quarter in Ilorin. While the latter *Tafsīr* circle maintains the venue from time immemorial till date, the former has since relocated to the Emir's palace where the three leading Imams in Ilorin play the role of *mufasssīrun*. No doubt, there are many *Tafsīr* circles in Ilorin at the present time. But among the first set of *Tafsīr* circles that followed the pioneer ones in Ilorin was *Tafsīr* Circle of Shaykh Abubakr Garba, Isalekoto. Makana *Tafsīr* Circle is also among the oldest *Tafsīr* circles with remarkable impact in Ilorin Emirate. All in all, the main essence of *Tafsīr* circle is to serve as a platform for Muslims to fasten their bonds with the Qur'an in the fasting period.

The study of Ramadān *Tafsīr* in Ilorin, Nigeria, has shed the light on the profound significance of this traditional practice in fostering religious devotion, community cohesion, and moral development among Muslims during the fasting month of Ramadān. Through qualitative research methods, we have made insights into the content, delivery styles, and socio-cultural dynamics shaping the practice of *Tafsīr* in the local context. The findings underscore the pivotal role of *Tafsīr* scholars in disseminating knowledge, promoting spiritual growth, and nurturing a sense of communal belonging among participants. Moreover, the study has highlighted the enduring relevance of traditional Islamic pedagogical methods in contemporary Nigerian society, emphasizing their adaptability and resilience in the face of evolving socio-cultural developments.

Based on the insights gleaned from this study, several recommendations can be made to further enhance the practice of Ramadān *Tafsīr* in Ilorin, Nigeria, and similar contexts'. The following are relevant in this regard:

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<sup>95</sup> Muhammad S.S., *Ishāmāt as-Shaykh Ibrāhīm b. Umar b. Abibakr al-Halabī Dan-Maiduka Makana Litatwīr al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah wa ad-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah*, A Long Essay for B.A, Arabic Language, submitted to Ado Ekiti University, Nigeria, 2014, p. 12

**Promoting Accessible and Inclusive *Tafsīr* Session:** Efforts should be made to ensure that *Tafsīr* sessions are accessible to a diverse range of participants, including women, youth, and individuals with disabilities. This may involve organizing separate sessions or providing accommodations to facilitate greater participation.

**Utilizing Technology for Outreach:** Leveraging digital platforms and social media can enhance the reach and impact of *Tafsīr* sessions, allowing for broader dissemination of religious knowledge and engagement with a wider audience, including those outside of Ilorin.

**Encouraging Scholars-Community Collaboration:** Collaboration between *Tafsīr* scholars and community members can enrich the content and relevance of *Tafsīr* sessions, ensuring that they address contemporary issues and resonate with the lived experiences of participants.

**Supporting Continued Education for *Tafsīr* Scholars:** Providing opportunities for ongoing education and professional development can empower *Tafsīr* scholars to deepen their knowledge and refine their teaching methodologies, thereby enhancing the quality and effectiveness of *Tafsīr* sessions.

**Strengthening Interfaith Dialogue:** Engaging in interfaith dialogue and collaboration can foster greater understanding, tolerance, and mutual respect among religious communities in Ilorin and beyond, promoting social harmony and cohesion.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can further enrich the practice of Ramadān *Tafsīr* and strengthen its positive impact on individuals and communities in Ilorin, Nigeria, and beyond.