

The Intellectual Legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate and Its Contemporary Significance

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ABSTRACT

The presence of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa dates back to the eighth century, when the Kingdom of Ghana accepted Islam and spread it among the local people. As Islam spread in the region, a number of Islamic dynasties were established. Islamic empires like Ghana (790-1076), Kanem/Bornu (700-1376), Mali (1230-1600) and Songhay (1340-1591), were clear indications on how Islam was accepted by both the rulers and the ruled. However, as time goes by, these Islamic empires collapsed and the true teachings of Islam were mixed up with local customs due to the widespread of vices and illiteracy. This, however, triggered a reform movement to purify Islam from the impurities attached to it by the local customs. In the early 19th century, a reform movement was orchestrated and led by Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio (1754-1817) in the Hausaland. This reform movement led to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1810. The Caliphate struggled against injustice and ignorance by transforming Hausaland into an organized Islamic state in a predominantly unlearned and peasant society. Despite the hard times it experienced, Sokoto Caliphate left a great intellectual legacy that addressed religious, economic and socio-political problems. This intellectual legacy, if properly studied and applied in modern day Nigeria, will provide the much needed solution to the religious, economic and socio-political challenges of our time. To this end, this paper aspires to examine and analyze the intellectual legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate and its contemporary significance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Before the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate, Hausaland was ravaged by religious and social injustice, political tyranny and moral decadence. The religion of Islam was reduced to mere syncretism and superstition. Spirit worship,

divination and sacrifices to objects had become common practices among Muslims, who had only professed the religion outwardly and never beyond their throats. Other vices committed by the Hausa rulers were illegal confiscation of peoples belongings, over taxation and misappropriation of public funds. (Mukhtar, 2005). To put an end to these deviant practices, Dan Fodio aspired to establish a truly Islamic state through teaching and preaching. His method of raising the generation that brought about the transformation of Hausaland encompasses three areas namely: intellectual, spiritual and the profound training in mysticism (Tasawwuf). This is because he was convinced that establishing Islamic state requires a dedicated vanguard group who share the same zeal of revivalism and reform (Tajdid) and are willing to sacrifice their lives for it. To achieve these purposes, Dan Fodio established his own school, trained his own students and created his own community of scholars and made them the inner core of the movement. That is why some of the noticeable legacies of the Caliphate were its struggle against injustice, ignorance, and its ability to surpass tribal and ethnic boundaries, which transformed groups of depressed and neglected individuals into formidable Jihad warriors in a predominantly unlearned and peasant society. However, the greatest legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate was its inculcation of a culture of learning among the local populace, and its extraordinary outpouring of literacy in the Hausaland. Smith (1979), argued that the Sokoto Jihad was essentially intellectual, involving the concept of an ideal society and a revolutionary drive to achieve it. He further maintained that the ideals of the Sokoto Caliphate were not only intellectual but also academic in the sense that they could be taught in schools and universities. He concluded that whatever else that might have inspired them, the leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate

had essentially drew their ideals from scholarly literature and traditions of learning, and that they were primarily students and teachers, not politicians and warriors. This has left an intellectual legacy that cut across all the fields and disciplines, such as economy, agriculture, religion, commerce, knowledge acquisition, justice, public administration, politics and health. If these intellectual legacies are to be taught and implemented in our modern day Nigeria, the solution to the most complex and multifaceted problems of our time would adequately be addressed. This research aspires to explore the intellectual legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate and its contemporary significance.

Usman Dan Fodio

Usman bin Muhammad bin Usman bin Salih, popularly known as Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio was born in Maratta, a town in the Hausa State of Gobir, on Sunday 15th December, 1847. He was a descendent of Torankawa Fulani tribe, who migrated in the 15th century from the Futa Toro region to Hausaland under the leadership of Musa Jakolo. His father, Muhammad Salih earned the Fulani title of "Fodiye" which means "the learned". (Bugaje, 197). His mother was Hauwa bint Muhammad bin Usman. Shortly after his birth, the family moved to Degel, where Usman Dan Fodio grew up. (Sulaiman, 1986). The traditional Muslim educational system in Degel demanded children at a very early age to learn the Qur'an, in addition to reading and writing. Dan Fodio, had most likely gone through this system, perhaps in a stricter manner, for he was taught the Qur'an by his very father, who was himself a renowned scholar. (Bugaje, 1979).

After studying the Qur'an with his father, Dan Fodio moved to other teachers such as Usman Binduri and Muhammad Sambo, who are both his relatives. (Murry, 19889). According to (Sulaiman, 1986), Dan Fodio also studied from Abdurrahman ibn Hammada and Muhammad Sambo, who supervised parts of Dan Fodio's early teachings. Dan Fodio later joined the company of Sheikh Jibril bin Umar, who had gone on pilgrimage and returned to preach and teach among the Tuaregs. His preaching was rigorous, defining a Muslim by strictest standard, which later had become a subject of disagreement between him and Dan Fodio. Among Jibril's students were Dan Fodio's brother Abdullahi and two of his cousins, Muhammad Firabri and al-Muṣṭafa bin Usman. (Murry, 1986).

However, the real impact of Jibril bin Umar on Dan Fodio, according to (Elmasri, 1963),

was that he introduced him to the concept of Tajdid, the foundations of which he had himself laid. He gave his student the intellectual, moral, spiritual and ideological training needed for the Tajdid. Later, even before the official commencement of the Jihad, Jibril was the first to pledge allegiance to him. As reported by his brother (Abdullah, 1963), his teachers were too many to be recorded. This was not surprising for Dan Fodio never spared an opportunity to add more to his knowledge. Prominent among his teachers, beside the ones mentioned earlier, were Hajj Muhammad bin Raji and Ahmad bin Muhammad who taught him Sahih al-Bukhari and Tafsir of the Qur'an respectively. (Bugaje, 1981).

Beek, (1988), argued that through these teachers, Usman Dan Fodio was grounded in the Qur'an, the Sunnah, jurisprudence and judicial reasoning of the Shari'ah in the Maliki School. With this rigorous educational background, Dan Fodio gained a thorough grounding in the traditional Islamic sciences under the best scholars of the area. He matured as a scholar early in life, and before the age of twenty he had started writing in his mother tongue Fulfulde, and, later, in Arabic. The prosody and diction of his writings revealed a talented young man of sound training in Arabic language. Now the signs of a great scholar and reformer had started manifesting themselves in him, having combined exceptionally high moral character with great intellectual gifts, and grew into a man of vivid eloquence.

Establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate

The seeds of revivalism and reform planted by Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio in the early 19th century in Hausaland resulted in the establishment of Sokoto Caliphate. The Sokoto triumvirate, as they came to be called, was not only imbued with the vision of the society they wanted to establish, but also had the patience and perseverance to struggle for the realization of many aspects of this vision. (Bobboi, 2011). The success of the Jihad and the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate had a profound influence on the entire continent. In fact, much of Usman Dan Fodio's criticism of the rulers in the Hausaland stemmed from the fact that the patronage of Muslim scholars did not necessarily indicate an acceptance of the restrictions and demands which an orthodox Muslim ruler should place upon the polity and society. However, the Jihad resulted in a theocratic state, with extensive autonomy for emirates, recognizing the spiritual authority of the caliph.

Sokoto caliphate developed as a state concerned primarily with military and economic

expansion with organized Islamic rule of law. The contribution of people towards the success of Jihad cannot be over emphasized, particularly his younger brother Abdullahi and his son Muhammad Bello, who were both actively involved in the Jihad that brought about the Caliphate. (Sheriff, 2008).

According to (Falola, 2009), from 1808 until the mid-1830s, the Sokoto Caliphate expanded gradually annexing the plains to the West and key parts of Yorubaland. It became one of the largest empires in Africa, stretching from modern day Burkina Faso to Cameroon, including most of Northern Nigeria. At its height, the Sokoto Caliphate included over thirty different emirates under its political structure.

Before Dan Fodio died in 1817, the philosophy as well as the structure of the Islamic order the movement fought to establish was already laid down. The task of putting in the details and developing the institutions naturally fell on Muhammad Bello, a scholar of high standing, on whom the leadership of the Caliphate fell after his father. It was under Muhammad Bello, that the frontiers of the state got pushed further south incorporating more policies, which naturally led to the development of more complex government apparatus and a permanent organized and professionalized military forces. The political structure, according to Bugaje U. (1981), was organized with the Sultan ruling from Sokoto, and the leader of each emirate was appointed by the Sultan as the flag bearer of that city with a great deal of independence and autonomy.

After 1811, Usman retired and left the administration of the empire in the hands of his brother Abdullahi and his son Bello, and devoted himself to scholarship. Upon his death in 1817, his son, Muhammed Bello, succeeded him as Amir al-Muminin (Leader of the Faithful) and became the Sultan of the Sokoto Caliphate which was the biggest state south of the Sahara at that time. Usman's brother Abdullahi was given the title of Emir of Gwandu and he was placed in charge of the Western Emirates, Nupe and Ilorin. The Sokoto caliphate became one of the largest and most powerful empires in sub-Saharan Africa before the arrival of the colonial masters. (Balogun, 1990). By the end of 1890, the empire began to disintegrate as a result of internal rivalry, an opportunity seized by the colonial armies to encroach on the periphery of the empire. And by 1903, the Sokoto Caliphate fell to the French and British colonial armies. During this period, the British, which controlled over eighty per cent of the empire, allowed the Sultan to remain as a ceremonial ruler. (Falola, 2008).

The legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate

Some of the achievements of the Sokoto Caliphate were its struggle against injustice, ignorance and the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in the present day northern Nigeria that continued for almost a century. Its ability to surpass tribal and ethnic boundaries and to transform groups of depressed and neglected individuals into formidable Jihad warriors deserves special attention. This interesting development, which transformed the Hausaland into an organized Islamic state in a predominantly unlearned and peasant society, had left a noticeable legacy. But the seemingly greatest legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate was its inculcation of a culture of learning among the local populace, and its extraordinary outpouring of literacy in the Hausaland. Smith (1979), argued that the Sokoto Jihad was essentially intellectual, involving the concept of an ideal society and a revolutionary drive to achieve it. He further maintained that the ideals of the Sokoto Caliphate were not only intellectual but also academic in the sense that they could be taught in schools and universities. He concluded that whatever else that might have inspired them, the leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate had essentially drew their ideals from scholarly literature and traditions of learning, and that they were primarily students and teachers, not politicians and warriors.

The Caliphate itself (Bunza, 2004) asserts, was based upon sound knowledge, as its political, economic and military leadership was placed under the command of scholars. In the caliphate, knowledge became the yardstick of opportunities and a vehicle for attaining respect and dignity. Schools were established and a proper system of education was put in place. In the words of (Smith, 1979): "Here was a political revolution on a remarkable scale, but the movement represented much more than an attempt of a few under-privileged and determined men to seize political power for their own benefit. In origin, it was also an important intellectual movement involving in the minds of the leaders a conception of the ideal society and philosophy of revolution. In their search for the ideal society and a just ruler, they looked back to a previous golden age in the history of Dar al-Islam, and their aim was to re-create in the western Sudan the society of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs."

It is imperative to note that despite the hard times they experienced and their continuous pre-occupation and involvement in war, the leaders of the Sokoto Jihad left a great legacy in writing. This written legacy had addressed the much needed

religious, economic and socio-political problems of their times (Bugaje, 1980).

To address the religious laxity in the Caliphate, Dan Fodio authored his magnum opus "Ihya al-Sunnah walkhmad al-Bid'ah" and some other books such as "Bayan al-Bid'ah al-Shaytaniyyah" and "Al-Amr bi al-Ma'arufwa al-Nahyi an al-Munkar". (Adam, 2016). These books deal with religious and moral training of the Jama'ah, calling on them to uphold to the Sunnah and shun satanic practices in their day-to-day affairs. The motive behind these books was to convince them to turn to God, purify their souls and remedy their shortcomings. And to serve as model, Dan Fodio himself sometimes withdraws from the public, confines himself in a secret place and dedicates his time to the worship of Allah, a practice known in the Sufi term as "Khalwa". Beside Dan Fodio, his brother Abdullahi, has also contributed greatly in this regard, as he wrote a complete Tafsir in Arabic language titled "Diya al-Ta'wil".

To motivate general public to the acquisition of knowledge, Dan Fodio authored "Hidayat al-Tullab" and "Nurul al-Bab". The former consists of etiquettes and guidelines for knowledge acquisition, while later was dedicated to the right of women in education and serious criticism against those who keep women at home and stop them from enjoying the benefits of knowledge. Other books in this category include: Irshad al-Ummah, Tauqif al-Muslimin and Kitab al-FarqbainalImUsul al-Din wabainalIm al-Kalam. (Alhaj, 1995).

Similarly, in the area of Justice and equality, Dan authored a famous book titled "Usul al-Adl li Wulat al-UmurwaAhl al-Fadi". The book discusses issues relating to maintenance of justice and adherence to the rule of law. The book was to serve as guidelines to the public office holders in the Caliphate where the limit of both the ruler and the ruled, principles of justice, equity and good governance are explained. Another book of great importance in this area of social justice is "Nasa'ih al-Ummah al-Muhammadiyya". (Balogun, 1990).

On the other hand, Masa'ilMuhimmah, WathiqatAhl al-Sudan wa man ShaAllahu min Ahl al-Ikhwan and Bayan Wujub al-Hijraala al-Ibad were the books carrying his clarion call for Hijrah and Jihad. In these books, he presented his views on why the Hausa rulers were to be considered heathens and their land Dar al-Kufr. His Jihad ideologies and messages were vividly explained in these books. (Adam, 2016).

When it comes to their legacy in the areas of public administration and state policy, these

Jihad leaders have also contributed intellectually by writing books such as Diya al-Hukkam and Diya al-Sultan both of Abdullahi bin Fodio, and Ifadat al-Ikhwan of Bello. In these books, the authors formulated a theory of political administration, code of conduct for the rulers and addressed some general administrative problems in the Hausaland. (Chafe, 1999).

Interestingly, among the legacy of the Sokoto caliphate within our reach was special attention given to trade and business, encouraging people to identify legal means of earning a living. Prominent among them are Tanbih al-Sahib alaAhkam al-Makasib of Muhammad Bello, Kifayat al-Awam fi al-Buyu' of Abdullahi and Siraj al-Ikhwan fiAham maYahtajuilaihi fiHadha al-Zaman of Dan Fodio. The books, discussed and analysed economic activities such as labour, agriculture and trade. Similarly, people's attention was drawn to the avoidance of un-Islamic practices such as Ribaand cheating. Other general principles and guidelines of buying and selling were also discussed. (Adam, 2016). In the areas of history and historiography, books such as Tazyin al-Waraqat of Abdullahi, Infaq al-Maysur and al-Ghayth al-Wabl fiSirat al-Imam al-Adil of Muhammad Bello were authored.

Interestingly, in what appears to be rare attitude of reformers in the Muslim world, the Sokoto Jihad leaders also left a legacy in the areas of health and well-being. Their ideas on medicine and health were recorded in Kitab al-Rahma fi al-Tib, al-Qawl al-Manthur fiAdwiyatIllat al-Basur, Risalat al-Kulya and Masalih al-Insan. (Adam, 2016).

All in all, the intellectual legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate was summarized by (Balogun, 1975)in the following words: "That there was an Islamic movement with all that Islam stands for by virtue of its universality, its openness, its tolerance, its justice and equity, its knowledge, recognition and provision for previous religions, its civilizations and history, shaking the socio-political order after successfully eroding its cultural and intellectual basis, and that it had achieved all this by education and patient persuasion, precisely not to compromise Islam, is simply but subtly overlooked or ignored. Had that movement been conceived or presented on a tribal basis as some wants us to believe it would have been doomed to fail not to mention the fact that it couldn't have found a place in Islam."

II. CONCLUSION

The greatest noticeable legacy left by the Sokoto caliphate was the intellectual activities of

its leaders, who inculcated the culture of extensive learning among the local populace. The Jihad movement that led to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate was essentially an intellectual movement involving the concept of an ideal society and a theory of revolution by which this ideal could be approached. The legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate is not only intellectual but also academic which can be taught in schools and universities. The leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate drew their inspiration from scholarly literature and traditions of learning, and that they were primarily students and teachers before they became politicians and warriors. The Caliphate was founded upon sound knowledge and all aspects of the political, economic and military leadership were placed under the leadership of scholars. In the caliphate, knowledge became the yardstick of opportunities and a ladder for attaining respect and dignity. The intellectual legacy left by the caliphate addressed the much needed problems of their times and future generations. The legacy addressed religious laxity, acquisition of knowledge, justice, equality, Hijra, Jihad, public administration, state policy, trade and business.

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