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THE SOKOTO CALIPHATE AFTER 200YEARS: A REFLECTION

BY

**Mukhtar Umar Bunza
Department of history
Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria**

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Introduction

The revivalist movement of Shaikh Usmanu Danfodiyo that led to the establishment of a Caliphate with its Headquarters at Sokoto is two hundred years old. It was a federated state system, complex, assorted, diverse, heterogeneous and plural. It was unprecedented in the history of West Africa and unique for its structure and sophisticated administrative machinery. Indeed, it was the first state in the Nigerian area to have established itself and managed multiplicity of tribes and ethnic groups within its boundaries. It was neither tribal nor ethnic or regional polity, but a welfare state based on social justice, equity and fair play derived from the Shari'ah. No discrimination whatsoever between tribes, instead all were given equal opportunity to serve in the best way possible in their profession and expertise. One of the most remarkable achievements of the Caliphate was intellectual revolution. Knowledge and scholarship became the main pre-occupation of the state and individuals. To date the greatest legacy left behind by the caliphate is literacy and scholarship, which translated itself into action through a polity that survived for a century and the legacy of which refused to fade away after another century of colonial subjugation.

The discussion in this paper as requested by the organizers of this conference will be centered on a general survey of the Caliphate in the last two centuries, 1804-2004; with special emphasis on its major achievements and lessons for the present and future generations in Nigeria. In order to provide a foundation for the discussion, starting with reasons that compelled the Jihadists to embark on the reform movement would not out of place.

ii. Conditions in the 1804 Hausaland and the call for the Jihad Movement

The condition of the common person, the level of injustice in the palaces and judicial homes, the alarming moral decadence and mass oppression and suppression of the highest order, the corruption of religion and the ulama' became intolerable and a redeemer was found in the person of Shaikh Usmanu Danfodiyo. At the age of twenty (by 1774,) Shehu started preaching and teaching in a wide scale in Gobir, Kebbi and Zamfara kingdoms. These preaching tours provided ample opportunity for the Shehu to address most of the social ills in the society as well addressing the injustices in the land. Within a short period, his teaching became very appealing to the populace in Hausaland especially the under privileged ones.

Ibrahim Sulaiman tells us that, Shehu's perception and character were modified because of in depth study of the religion the fountain of knowledge with he drank as made available by the itinerant scholars who preceded him in the western Sudan. He was conscious that the first responsibility of a scholar was to acquaint himself with all required knowledge for the betterment of the society and to guide the people to the right path: to stand up in defence society's values and preservation of its moral standards. Fundamentally too, to stand up against injustice and for the poor and oppressed; and establish society of men and women faithful and submissive to the wills of Allah.

(Sulaiman, 1986:15).

Under this premise, our argument of why the jihad took place at the time it happened could be understood. The situation at the period prior to the jihad was multifarious in

nature and bordered all facets of human endeavor ranging from religion, polity, economy, socio-cultural and the entire fabric of the society needed an overhaul to make it responsible to the creator and considerate of human welfare.

Corruption of Religion: The practice of the religion of Islam in Hausaland before the jihad was reduced to mere syncretism and superstitions. **Bori-** spirit divination and sacrifices to objects like trees and mountains became common practices among the Muslims who only profess the religion verbally but upheld paganism. The aim was to purify Islam to Sunni practices based on the teaching and practices of the holy prophet and his companions (Hiskett, 1984:159). The ulama' the supposedly vanguard of the religion turned to justifying to the corrupt rulers their practices and legalizing evils in the name of religious guidance. This class of people was condemned by the Shehu as (**Ulama' al-su'-**) venal ulama. He described them in his book **wathiqat al-ikhwan** "as more dangerous than the devil, and their position in the society was no better than a rock in the sea, which can neither drink water nor allows any body to drink".

That was one of the reasons, which made Shehu to bluntly aim at reforming Islam to its pristine position. The major works of Shehu, which includes, **Ihya al-Sunnah, Nur al-Bab** and **Bayan bid'a al-shaitaniya** were directed to purifying the religious practices of Hausaland. In order to achieve this objective Shehu and his lieutenants tried all diplomatic means possible. At the end, because of the continuing threat and aggression particularly from the Gobir rulers the **jama'a** took up arms in defence of their faith and persons (El-Masri, 1978:17).

Political Tyranny: A close study of Shehu's **Kitab al-farq** will suffice our brief reference on this matter. In the book, about thirty charges were posed against Hausa rulers. Among them were excessive corruption among the people in authority; illegal possession of peoples properties and belonging, misappropriation of public treasury, over taxation, unauthorized by the shari'a, confiscation of estates of deceased against the will of inheritors, over luxurious life in the palaces and neglect of the commoners, etc. The Shehu's concern of these issues could be seen in his request at Magami to Sarkin Gobir Bawa. He requested among other things, (instead of gifts of gold, which his fellow scholars collected) that: "all political prisoners should be set free, people should not be over burdened with taxes above their capacity".(Adeleye, 1971:13)

His brother Abdullahi described the situation after the Magami meeting as a triumph for the **Jama'a** who returned "with authority to establish the religion while others returned with gifts". After the death of Sarkin Gobir Bawa, who granted the request, his successor Yunfa withdrew all, and sanctioned that, only Shehu was allowed to call people to the religion and no more conversion to Islam by those already not within its fold. This measure was further followed by threat and attacks against the **jama'a**. The atmosphere was tense and the condition unbearable. Shehu migrated to a safer place out of Gobir authority where he and his followers could practice the religion as ordained by God called Gudu on 21st February 1804 and the Jihad broke out on 21st June the same year at Tabkin Kwotto for the defence of their faith, lives and properties.

Moral Decadence: The pre jihad Hausa society was characterized by social ills and moral decadence. The prevailing nudity and disrespect for women who veiled themselves became of serious concern to the reformers. As indicated in **Nurul Al –Bab**, most of cultural practices in Hausa society were not in conformity with the shari'a'. Thus, the society needed to be transformed and refashioned in accordance with the dictates of Islam.

Alcoholism and indiscriminate intermingling between men and women in markets, streets, and social gatherings were the main social imbalances addressed by the Shehu in Hausa society. A practice, which Shehu called **Jandudu** became widespread particularly among the slave girls of the Sultans and from among the free born. This was in form of exposure of nakedness and committing of fornication and adultery (**Kitab al-farq**: 4). The extent of moral laxity and free mixing of the opposite sexes was described in the following terms by Shehu:

They (men and women) assembled at a place with evil intention. He who sees them (at that stage) has seen senselessness (by itself). Men and women lying down (half-naked) in the open; each of them with shameless dazzling eyes bulging out. Men and women thou keep on clapping their hands. Jumping up and down turning aside ways staggering (See Kaura, 1990:79).

In the efforts of Shehu and his supporters to transform the society, they came into an open conflict with different segments of the society. The rulers viewed their action with suspicion for its political implication. The ulama' also perceived the trend of the movement threatening their status and influence in the society.

It is unnatural for such persons with ideas for reform of the society for the better to remain unmolested and their followers undisturbed by the forces which derived their influence and control through oppression and injustice (Morel, 1968:158).

The forces of Gobir thus, were mobilized to deal with any follower of Shehu, confiscating their properties and families especially when joining for a **Hijrah** (migration) from Degel to Gudu. In an account by Abdullahi Fodiyo(see Hodgkin, 1975: 247) about the breakout of the jihad, he said:

So we fled from their land in the year 1218 on the 10 of Dzul- Qa'da to a place outside Gobir territory. The Muslims all fled following us. Many of them joined us with their families and property; some brought nothing but their people; some came with no following at all. The sultan of Gobir ordered his chiefs to seize the goods of all who fled or prevent them leaving. They seized much property of the Muslims, and killed some of them. Then he ordered those of the chiefs nearest to us on the east to keep on killing our people, and plundering, and imprisoning. The people suffered sorely. We went to Shaikh and said: truly, this matter has become intolerable; recourse must be had to arms. There can be no doubt that the situation demands a prince to manage our affairs, for Muslims should not be without order or government. Then we did homage to the Shaikh, as is directed by the Qur'an and Sunnah in such circumstances, and made him the leader of the jihad. We rose to ward off attack. Self defence and defence of dependents and possessions is a righteous act, according to received opinion...

The jihad was thus, declared and within four years (i.e. 1804-1808) the entire Hausa states were brought under the control of the Jihadists centrally governed through a Caliphate that emerged there after following the strict application of the Shari'ah.

It is important now to give reference briefly to some interpretation about the Jihad movement. Other scholars mischievously presented the Jihad as racial or tribal and according to some it was simply aimed at establishing an empire for the Fulani to rule.

This is generally the view of the European colonialists and their cohorts for them to justify their heinous occupation and illegitimate forced leadership. Tribes are diverse on Shehu's **jama'a** and the side of the Gobir. In both, there were Fulani, Hausa, Touregs and other tribes. Therefore, there is no way the jihad could be tribal, ethnic or regional, based on the undisputable historical evidences available. Shaikh Abdullahi Fodiyo writes in his book **Tazyin al-waraqat** on the composition of the jihad forces in following:

**We are an army victorious in Islam,
And we are proud of nothing but that,
Tribes of Islam-and Turubbi is our clan,
Our Fulani and our Hausa all united,
And among us other than these, certain tribes joined together.
For the help of God's religion-made up the union**

This holy coalition and union of the god-fearing **mujahiduns** from different ethnic and tribal groups were able to establish an edifice, which has achieved wonderful results in all slants of human endeavor. The legacies left behind are indeed indelible and immutable for generations to come. It is fascinating to conclude on this point with the statement by Professor O.S.A. Ismail (1979: 172) that:

(The jihad) 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 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 not subtly overlooked or ignored. Had that movement been conceived or presented on a tribal or ethnic basis, as some want us to believe, it would have been doomed to failure, not to mention the fact that it could not have found a place in Islam.

iii. Intellectual Legacy

The greatest legacy left the Jihadists is knowledge and intellectualism. Literary revolution that accompanied the movement had transformed the entire structure and fabric of the societies under the caliphate. On the main, education became the yardstick for all opportunities in the state and knowledge a ladder for climbing heights of respect and dignity. Thus, schools were widely established for the educational needs of all levels of people in the society.

The triumvirate scholars who championed the movement served as exemplary on the scholarly enterprise. They were scholars of the highest order and prolific writers that *bilad al-Sudan* ever produced. Ismail (1979:165) describes the jihad leaders thus:

If anything, writing appears to have been their first and foremost occupation. On the other hand, they were scholars of the highest order. They were masters of all sciences of Islam, and the Arabic language. On the other hand, they were men of unusual abilities, accomplishing a lot, and taking in many things on their stride... for them the essence of their mission was education, the goal the implementation of the teachings therein expounded. And educators of unusual caliber they were.

These sterling qualities as described above are replica of their writings as one can easily see from their titles such as **Diya'**, **Bayan**, **Irshad**, **Tanbih**, **Risala**, **Taa'lim**, **Nasa'ih**, **wathiqat**, etc. All these run through as the dominant titles of their works, which indicate attempts to enlighten and educate the masses.

Professors Abdullahi Smith and Murray Last made a wide range of works on the intellectual legacy of the jihad. According to Abdullahi Smith (1979:245), "All ideals are intellectual, but the ideals of the Sokoto Jihad were also academic: not academic in the

sense of unreal or impracticable, but in the sense of educational, having to do with what is taught in schools, in academics...(the leaders) were primarily students and teachers, not politicians or warriors". According to Last,(1977: 12) "the Shaikh Usman's primary role as a teacher, scholar and reluctant fighter seems to have set the trend in Sokoto for tolerance". This is because intellectualism erodes bigotry and instills openness and accommodation.

Their intellectual contribution has extended to all disciplines of Islamic and indeed the natural sciences particularly medicine, mathematics, geography, astronomy and other fields. Muhammad Bello alone wrote over a dozen of books treating different aspects of medicine like pharmacology, ophthalmology, and other complex medical cases such as liver and kidney diseases. Some of these include **Kitab al-Rahmat fi al-tib**, **Qaul al-Manthsur fi Adwiyat illat al-bathur**, **Risalat al-kilya** etc. Similarly, Shaikh Abdullah **Masalih al-insan** was rated as source material for researches in natural sciences like Chemistry, physics and medicine. (See Bunza 1995) The wealth of literature they left behind are well known and daily studied in schools, research institutes and universities within Nigeria and abroad. At the same time, they combined these scholarly enterprises with an exemplary political leadership.

Abdullahi Smith (1979:246) emphasized that, the Shehu, the *mujajddid*, was the great teacher, and his students became emirs, governors of provinces, directing the lives of millions of people in the effort to build a reformed society. To them the point of studying the law of God was to learn how men's thought and action should be guided. Had they

lived in an age of complicated technology they would have been concerned with what men should do with machines in order to build a better world to live in.

Another remarkable achievement of the jihad was development of women education. For the first time the level and status of women were ranked equal with men in pursuit of knowledge. The literary contribution of his daughters Khadija, Fatima and the prolific Nana Asma'u was a testimony to that (See Kani .1985 and Kaura 1990).

That was the basis and foundation upon which, the Sokoto caliphate was built for a century 1804 to 1903 that was the year of the British occupation.

iv. The British Occupation and its aftermath

The Caliphate started coming into contact with the Europeans during the period of Muhammad Bello. At that early stage of the relationship, they presented themselves as those interested in trade and commercial relations with the Caliphate. Hugh Claperton and other explorers exchanged gifts with Sultan Muhammad Bello on behalf of the British Government. Thereafter, treaties were signed over the period of the relation with different Sultans and emirs. The Caliphal leadership from Bello to Sultan Aliyu in 1853 and finally to Abdul-Rahman in 1899 conceded certain commercial and trading agreements with the British within the limits of the shari'ah. This is because commercial transactions with non-Muslims, particularly the people of the Book, involving legal articles of trade is allowed in Islam.

Mischievously however, these treatises were turned by the British to justify their occupation and sovereignty over the lands of the Caliphate. Consequently, Caliph Abdul-

Rahman revoked all the treaties signed with the Europeans considering their future implication to the Muslim Ummah.

In a letter, which he sent to the Royal Niger Company in 1899-1900, Abdul-Rahman disengaged the Caliphate from any obligation to the Europeans he said:

... To the Royal Niger Company Limited. The fullest regards and the purest of greetings. To continue, that you may know that we have received your letter and we understand your words. But for us, our Lord is Allah (May He be exalted), our creator and possessor. We take what our prophet, Muhammad (upon whom be peace) brought to us. As He God said: Whatever comes to you from the messenger to you take it (-the verse- i.e., of the holy Qur'an). Thus, we shall not change it for anything until our end. Do not send us after this. Peace. (See Adeleye 1971:335)

After the Lugard declaration of 1900 and assuming direct control of the areas of the caliphate from the Royal Niger Company, he embarked on pacification of the southern emirates of the caliphate such as Nupe, Kontagora and Bauchi. This also followed by deployment of British forces in the region: thereby making the imperial interest of the Europeans against the Caliphate very obtrusive. Therefore, in May 1902 a letter from Abdul-Rahman marked an end to any relationship with the Europeans and Lugard perceived it to mean an invitation to war. The letter reads:

From us to you. I do not consent that any one from you should ever dwell with us. I will never agree with you. I will have nothing ever to do with you. Between you and us there is no dealing except as between Musulmans and unbelievers (**kafiri**), war, as God almighty has enjoined on us. There is no power or strength saves in God on high. This with salutations.

This letter ended all correspondences between the Caliphate and Lugard; at least seeking the endorsement of the sultan for his direct intervention in the affairs of the Caliphate. The British military action therefore became inevitable after a clear denial of such demands by the Sultan. The British forces had an advantage of military superiority over

the Caliphal armies. The conquest started with Ilorin emirate up to Nupe, Kontagora, Bauchi and other emirates and finally Kano in February and Sokoto in March 1903.

Realizing the futility of arm resistance before superior weapons, Wazir Bukhari led a truce at Marnona with the British. Details of the accord was contained in the Wazir's **Risala ila ahl alr wa al-tadabbur**, which Adeleye converted as 'The Dilemma of the Wazir'. (See Adeleye, 1968) . On the other hand, Sultan Attahiru I opted for migration instead of any reconciliation with the Europeans after a serious battle at Giginya in Sokoto. Therefore, Lugard installed Sultan Attahiru II as the new Sultan. The Lugard's speech at the occasion was very important in our review of the history of the Caliphate in the last two centuries.

On the 19th day of March 1903, in Sokoto town, Lugard celebrating their victory over the forces of the Caliphate addressed the people as follows:

The old treaties are dead -you have killed them. Now these are the words, which I, the High Commissioner have to say for the future. **The Fulani in old times, under Danfodio conquered this country.** They took the right to rule over it, to levy taxes, to depose kings and to create kings. **They in turn, have by defeat lost their rule, which has come to the hands of the British.** All those things, which I have said the Fulani by conquest took the right to do, now pass to the British. Every Sultan and emir and the principal officers of the State, will be appointed by the High Commissioner throughout all this country. (See Lady Lugard 1960: 450-451)

The implication of the above statement started manifesting when the Sultan; the overall leader and dispenser of the affairs of the caliphate became an appointee of the Governor General. This trend continued after independence. The president of Nigeria like the High Commissioner of those days, either elected or self imposed, directly or through his representative as a state Governor or even a local government Chairman can impose or

depose Sultan or emir in the whole of the areas of the Caliphate. In the letter of appointment issued to Sultan Attahiru II, which was drafted by Lugard, the total relegation of the Caliph influence and power to the background manifested. The letter read:

I Swear in the name of Allah and the Mahomet (sic) His prophet, to well and truly serve His Majesty King Edward VII and His representative the High Commissioner of Northern Nigeria. To obey Laws of the protectorate and lawful commands of the High Commissioner and the Resident provided that they are not contrary to my religion. And If they are so contrary (to my religion) I will at once inform the Resident for the information of High Commissioner. I will cherish in my heart no treachery or disloyalty. I will rule my people with justice and without partiality. And as I carryout this, so may Allah judge me. (See Perham, 1960: pp. 505- 506)

The British thereafter laid down their rules and administrative machinery with the Residents, District Officers(D.O.s) and other European officials as superior, reducing the role the Sultan and his emirs to the collection taxes. As Albasu pointed out in his work, the office of the Sultan was the most affected organ by the British rule than any other institution in the Sokoto caliphate. The role of the Sultan as the Chief Justice of the Caliphate was transferred to the High Commissioner, his influence, which was hitherto all over the Caliphate was restricted to the Sokoto emirate only, he was seen more as ceremonial monarch rather than a functional Muslim leader.(Albasu, 1990: 25-27)

On education and judiciary, colonial government turned the sectors to favour their administration and serve for them. Islamic education was marginalized in terms of government patronage and sponsorship, and the role and status of the ulama's seriously faded away. Western education took over from Islamic education in providing labour and training for government officials and other services. This seriously continue to affect the

pursuit and commitment of the people to Islamic education. Resources and energies and government care and concern were geared towards acquiring the new system of education, which open abundant opportunities to holders of its certificates (Bako& Kano, 1994).

Judiciary was of great concern to the British from the beginning of conquest. The system of law they met in operation-Shari'ah- could not accommodate colonialism. They were at variance. Immediately, the criminal aspect of the law was suspended in 1903. The Shari'ah legal system could only be effective in civil matters, under other nomenclature not the Shari'ah as left behind by the Jihadists. Consequently, English legal system was given supremacy and legal ethics as well as code of conducts in the courts of justice reflect the British tradition not the Caliphal legacy (Naniya, 1995).

The suppression of the legacies of the Caliphate continued even after independence. The neo-colonial state of Nigeria inherited systems and ethos that were well entrenched in to the fabric of the society and thus not easy to due away with within a short span of time. This is because, the new system of education, economic structure, polity and governance and even the socio-cultural practices favoured the alien colonial system more than the existing practice.

However, the spirit and specter of the Caliphate refused to die and give way. The Caliphal influence persistently manifests itself in every aspect of human endeavour. That was why after 200 years of the movement it is still fresh in the mind of people. Pioneers of the Jihad such as Shehu Usmanu , Abdullahi, Muhammad Bello and their helpers are daily mentioned remembered and reverend. The respect that Muslims do have today for

the office of the **Sarkin Musulmi** and emirs in Nigeria was because their directly linkage with the Caliphate.

The Muslim organizations such as Jama'atu Nasril Islam, Jama'atu Izalat al-Bid'atu wa Iqamat al-Sunnah, Jama'atu Al-Muslimeen, The Qadiriya order, Muslim Students Society, etc. all have tried to link their activities with that of the Shehu and the Jama'atu that struggled for the establishment of the Caliphate in the last two centuries. The deep-rootedness of Islamic culture and tradition in Nigeria and more importantly the present demand and agitation for the implementation of Shari'ah legal system in Nigeria, which is unique of its kind in the contemporary Muslim World could have no better explanation than the Caliphal influence and legacies.

The Caliphate made remarkable achievements that remain to be worthy of emulation. The President of Nigeria Olusegun Obasanjo even though not a Muslim had to confess at the ceremonies marking the 200 years anniversary of the Caliphate that, "Contrary to the misinterpretation of some... we were already a highly organized people before the arrival of the adventurers of colonization". And thus, "It is never too late to return to those values (of the Caliphate)".

V. Conclusion

What we are supposed to learn and remember about the Caliphate should not be in the pageantry, pomp and display that accompanied the Durbar and ceremonies commemorating its bicentenary. Nevertheless, to study what made the Jihadists great and worthy of remembrance so that we emulate. Dr. Mahmud Tukur (2004) identified some

qualities of the Jihadists, such as truth and justice, unity and trust, combination of knowledge and its practice, perseverance and commitment, hard work, self-reliance, ascetism and struggle for the liberation of the weak and oppressed that the Muslims in Nigeria should adopt to attain progress and development.

All these could be deduced in the statement of Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo in his book, **Bayan Wujub al- hijrah ala- l-'Ibad** from chapter 52-55 (El- Masri,1978). It suffice a great lesson for Nigerians and the Nigerian state to mention the word of advice from Shehu to leaders upon whom the entire society depends for their affairs saying:

One of the swiftest ways of destroying a kingdom is to give preference to one particular tribe over another, or to show favour to one group of people rather than another, and draw near those who should be kept away and kept away those who should be drawn near... Do not do injustice if you are in a powerful position, for doing injustice leads to regret...A country can endure with unbelief but it cannot endure with injustice... A man without learning is like country without inhabitants. The best thing in a ruler, in particular, and in people in general, is to associate with learning, yearning to listen to it and holding the bearers of knowledge in great respect...

The contrary we have in our situation today where each wants to have undue preference and advantage over another. People worship money and throwaway learning, no respect for scholars and learning. Ignorance has become the order of the day even though education was theoretically mentioned without practice.

We should collectively and individually, put into practice the principles of justice and equity that the Jihadists laid down for both leaders, led, and uphold them for the next generation. This we could only do if favoritism, nepotism, corruption, greediness, intolerance, laziness, over indulgence and luxuries living style, deception and double

standards are eschewed from our dealings between our selves and with others in the country.

I conclude with the statement of Professor Abdullahi Smith(1979)urging that:

It is our business to inspire the young, to give them a glimpse of things worth fighting for, a vision of ideals which they should seek, rather than leave them to flounder in the terrible mental confusion of this corrupt society into which they have been born. If this is our duty, then I think it is here that we may find the chief value in our study of the Sokoto Jihad: in an appreciation of the ideals for which the leaders of that movement stood.

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