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Reflection on the Intellectual Legacy of the Sokoto Jihad

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ABSTRACT

The Sokoto Jihad was a major Islamic movement in the 19th century West Africa. It was the revolution that influenced other ones that took place at Masina and Tukolor. The Sokoto Jihad brought profound transformations in the social, political and economic spheres of Hausaland and beyond. Some of such changes include the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate, the revival of Islam, and the development of learning and scholarship. In fact, the intellectual development brought by the Jihad was the most important impact of the movement because knowledge is the most valuable machinery in the spread and development of Islam. This paper therefore argue that Sokoto Jihad has achieved its aims since already, the essence of the Sokoto Jihad, as evidenced from the ample writings left by the triumvirate, was the revival of Islam through promotion of learning and scholarship. Consequently, it could be observed that, after the collapse of the Caliphate, the legacy of scholarship continues till the present time. The paper perceives the Jihad as solely intellectual movement and thus contributes in debunking the contention that Jihad was a class struggle, or waged for tribal, economic or political reasons.

Keywords: Sokoto Jihad; Sokoto Caliphate; Scholarship; Intellectual Legacy

1. INTRODUCTION

The 19th century Jihad movement that started in Hausaland subsequently spread to other parts of West Africa. Consequent upon such movement, West Africa witnessed socio-economic and political transformations which include the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate. However, it could be said that, the greatest legacy of such movement was the intellectual revolution. This became possible because the Jihad was led by renowned scholars. In fact, it was the knowledge which they disseminate to people that made the actualisation of the jihad possible. Also, after the end of the Caliphate, the contribution of Jihad leaders to scholarship continued. Literatures were written on legacies of the Sokoto Jihad, some aspects of intellectual impact inclusive. This paper attempts to make a reflection on the intellectual contributions of the Jihad leaders so as to provide further insights on such developments.

2. CONDITIONS PRECEDING THE 19TH CENTURY JIHAD; THE PREVALENCE OF IGNORANCE

It is important to commence although briefly with the conditions that necessitated the 1804 Jihad so as to enable us appreciate much, the impact of the Jihad particularly the intellectual side of it. Although there were scholars in Hausaland even before the advent of Shaykh Usman Danfodio, most of them pre-occupied themselves in teaching their very few students, neglecting the mass of people and even their families. [1] Instead of preaching and struggle for Islamic revivalism, most of the *Ulama'u* before Shaykh aligned themselves with palaces where they engaged themselves with justification of the practices of the corrupt rulers, and legalizing their evils. Therefore there was prevalence of ignorance in the pre-Jihad period. There was little awareness of the pristine teaching of Islam and this was attested by Shaykh Abdullahi, describing their preaching tours to Zamfara;

We remained there for about five years and it was a land people people's ignorance was supreme; the majority of its people had not smelt the scent of Islam. They used to come to Shaykh's gathering mingling with their women. He segregated them that mixing together was forbidden, after he had taught them the laws of Islam. [2]

It was apparent here that, Usman preached to Muslims and non-Muslims, males and females who were abandoned in the depth of ignorance. Moreover, Islam was mixed-up with superstitions, sacrifices to objects and spirit worship. In the pre-Jihad Hausa society, true teaching of Islam could neither be seen in the palaces nor in the judicial settings. Societal administration was based upon whims and caprices of a ruler while *shari'ah* was highly neglected. Thus the level of dishonesty in the palaces and judicial homes was high and there were illegitimate seizure of people's belongings, over taxation, indiscriminate imprisonment without trial and misappropriation of public funds among others. [3] Moreover, owing to ignorance that enveloped the society then, morality and Islamic ethics decayed. Most of the cultural practices therefore, were not in conformity with the *shari'ah*. The mixing of opposite sexes, nudity, gambling, and alcoholism were common. [4] The infringement on women Islamic rights could be seen in men's excessive polygamy and prevention of women's right of

inheritance. These were some of the serious imbalances in Hausaland before the advent of Shaykh Usman Danfodio. There is no doubt, this decay was seriously exacerbated by the level of ignorance among the society. Shehu realised all these and prepared to combat the situation through teaching, preaching and writing.

3. KNOWLEDGE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF CHANGE

Having knowledge of the society in which he found himself, Shaykh Usman Danfodio considered teaching, preaching, and writing as of paramount importance. Therefore the first step for such movement was the acquisition of ample knowledge by the jihad leaders themselves. Starting from his home town-Degel-Usman spent his childhood learning the Qur'an in addition to reading and writing from his father. He then followed the traditional Muslim system of education which comprises the memorisation of the Glorious Qur'an, rudimentary reading and writing at the early stage, followed by the translation of Glorious Qur'an, some knowledge of Hadith and progressing to the study of law, grammar, rhetoric, and simple arithmetic among other branches of learning. [5] The leaders of the jihad therefore equipped themselves with knowledge necessary for societal transformation. They studied variety of subjects so as to enable them cope with the challenges of the dynamic society. This was because transformation of that complex society required firm intellectual background. According to AM Nour,

The society where this movement started was a mixed society with mixed belief, Islamic and non Islamic, overwhelming ignorance, corruption, injustices and almost a complete departure from the Islamic teachings in all aspects of life. [6]

Usman therefore travelled from one place to another for the quest of knowledge. According to Abdullahi Fodio, Usman's teachers were too many to be recorded. [7] However, prominent among them were his father, then Muhammad Sambo, Usman Binduri, Abdul Rahman bn Hammada, Muhammad bn Raj, and Ahmad bn Muhammad. However it was Jibril bn Umar, a scholar of high learning and revolutionary zeal who influenced Usman tremendously. [8] As shaykh advanced his knowledge through various scholars, he became endeared to populace because of his charisma, piety, extreme simplicity, and exceptional ability. He thus began to attract disciples from his immediate society. Moreover, Abdullahi Fodio and Muhammad Bello were also great intellectual scholars. [9]

Therefore, right from the beginning of his preaching tours, Usman focused his attention on the problems of mass ignorance of Islam in the society, the rigidity and venality of *Ulamau*, the issue of syncretism, and the question of belief and unbelief. The ideological orientation of the jihad leaders were then shaped based on the problems in the society. Tauhid, eradication of injustice and establishment of pristine Sunnah served as their main focus. [10] The struggle thus was mainly against superstitions, political tyranny and innovation. The jihad leaders were also influenced by literature of other scholars such as Abdul-Kareem al-Maghili of the 15th century. Ibrahim Suleiman wrote about the influence of Al-Maghili on the triumvirate

The treatises he wrote while staying in some of the key cities and states of Bilad as-Sudan such as Kano, Katsina and Gao, and the advice he gave to certain rulers, notably Muhammad Rumfa of Kano and Askiya Muhammad of Songhai, were largely instrumental in the enhancement of the Shariah as the legal order of those societies and in the Islamic transformation of those societies in general. [10]

Moreover, in *Ajwiba*, Almaghili made a reply to the question of Askiya Muhammad where he (Al-Maghili) stated that *Tajdid* is historically imperative and is essentially the responsibility of scholars imbued with knowledge and piety. Its ultimate purpose is to ascertain the truth, banish falsehood, overthrow a tyrannical order and establish justice. The theme of Al-Maghili's *Taj al-din* was the fundamental duties of state towards ensuring comprehensive social justice and establishment of rule of law within a society. The literary works of Al-Maghili had great influence on Usman Danfodio. In his book, *Taalim al – Ikhwan*, Usman described Al- Maghili as a learned and erudite imam, the exemplary, the pious Sunni, a truly intelligent that lent him so much insight. [12] Hence the leaders of the jihad realised that it was incumbent upon them to check the persistence of evils through teaching, preaching and writings which was exactly what they did. The jihad therefore was an intellectual revolution-a movement led by scholars. According to Murray Last,

...the war itself was an extension of intensive teaching and preaching; ...Shaykh Usman's primary role of a teacher, a scholar and a reluctant fighter seem to have set a trend in Sokoto for tolerance". [13]

4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOLARSHIP

The Sokoto jihad was essentially an intellectual movement involving the conception of an ideal society and a theory of revolution by which this ideal could be approached. According to A. Smith;

All ideals are intellectual but the ideals of the Sokoto jihad were also academic; ... in the sense of educational, having to do with what is taught in schools, in academies. ...the Mujahidun in Sokoto drew their ideas from scholarly literatures, from a tradition of learning. They were primarily students and teachers, not politicians or warriors. [14]

Since the most important factor in the spread and development of Islam is education, Usman preoccupied himself with teaching and preaching. In this, he remained indefatigable, moving from one place to another. He started from Kebbi and Zamfara and then to other parts of Hausaland. Before he finally settled at Degel, Usman spent practically nineteenth years travelling, teaching, preaching, converting and writing along with his expanding team of disciples. [15] This clearly shows his commitment to mass education as a key to reforming the society. It could be observed that Usman distinguished himself from other scholars not so much by superior learning and exceptional ability, but by his deep sense of mission and

commitment to reform. During such preaching tour, he was silently but consciously building all over his itinerary a body of scholars and students whom he left behind to continue instructing his increasing number of followers on the basic tenets of Islam as well as his idea of reform. Definitely, such tours also acquainted him with the nature, problems, and aspirations of the society.

These experiences subsequently influenced him to write relevant and effective literature. Part of his strategy was that, in every Mosque, there must be a scholar engaged in teaching and preaching. [16] By the time that Shaykh settled at Degel, the town then developed to be a kind of University of its time. Scholars all over Hausaland and Bornu were finding their ways to Degel and becoming a student of Shaykh Usman became not only a prestige, but a qualification.

This therefore helped tremendously to get educative people who afterwards helped in the running of the administration of the Caliphate. A. Smith further said Shaykh Usman “was a great teacher, and his students became Emirs, Governors of provinces, directing the lives of millions of peoples in the effort to build a reformed society.” [17]

The triumvirate generally wrote various literatures covering various branches of knowledge in Islam, including natural sciences such as Medicine, Mathematics, Astronomy and Geography among others. In addition, they made series of intellectual correspondences and composed educative poems. Without doubt, the titles of their works indicated their commitment and mission towards societal education; *Bayan*, expounding; *Diya*, guiding light, *Irshad*, counselling; *Najm*, guiding star; *Nasiha*, advice; *Taalim*, educating; *Tanbih*, drawing attention to etc.

Also, the Jihadist left the literary justification of why Jihad was carried out. For instance, on accusing Hausa rulers about their un-Islamic practises, *Kitab Farq* was written; *Wathiqat al -ikhwaan* condemned the venal *Ulama’u*; *Ihya-us -Sunnah Nur-al Bab* and *Bayan al bid’ah shaydaniyya* discussed the need for reforming Islam to its pristine position; the need for unity among Muslims were discussed in *Tamyiz ahl-Sunnah*; other literature such as *Masail Muhimma*, *Bayan Wujub al Hijrah alal-Ibad*, *Ta’alim al-Ikhwan*, *Tanbih al-Ikhwan*, *Amr bil-Maaruf* and *Wathiqat ahl-Sudan* among others educate people that Muslims should get prepared arms ready, the need for Hijrah, the need for the establishment of Islam, and justification on why jihad was carried out.

The movement was therefore intellectually based, and interestingly enough, those literatures are still very relevant in our contemporary societies. For proper administration, rule of law and accountability, the triumvirate wrote among other literature *Diya al-Hukkam*, *Usul as-Siyasa* and *Ghayth al-Shubub* among others. It could be observed that Knowledge served as stimulus to action rather than arbitrary command.

Their intellectual contributions, as explained by Bunza, extended to field of sciences. [18] For instance, Muhammad Bello alone wrote over dozen of works treating different aspects of medicine such as Ophthalmology, Pharmacology, and other complex medical cases such as liver and kidney diseases. [19] OSA Ismail commented on the bulk of literature left by the jihadists;

In the literature there is everything, the poetry, the prose, the fiction, the true story, the parable, the anecdote, most of what we call the creative recreational art as well as the matters that pertain to faith, state, medicine, the applied sciences, and the crafts. It drew very well

from the Islamic traditions of learning and writing, leaving us with a society that knows about literacy and education than many who think of it otherwise. Its impact, unprecedented in this part of Africa, is yet to be superseded. [20]

Here comes the role of poetry used by the jihad leaders in dissemination of knowledge and ideas. Books were simplified and abridge versions were written in verse and in prose to serve students and teachers alike. According to Bugaje, the poetries which were composed in both Arabic and vernacular turned out to be as effective as our contemporary radio and television. [21] These poetries were of various kinds, ranging from those that meant to simplify complicated instructions, through those that were meant to appeal or preach, to those of praising the Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

The poetry inspired the spread of knowledge and Islamic scholarship that Hisket said “the poems, more than anything, seems to arrest the imagination of the Shaykh’s followers...” [22] Despite the teachings and messages which those poems contained, they also helped in the development of literacy in the society since they were written in *Ajami*. [23] This therefore inspired reading and writing and eventually facilitated communication. Equally important were the sermons which owing to their relevance, transcends towards the present time. Another remarkable aspect was the development of women education. Women education was given prominence because of their role in society.

Therefore, apart from the Shaykh’s weekly public preaching on every Friday, he also maintained separate class for women. For the first time the endeavour for the pursuit of knowledge among women became at par with that of men. This definitely raised the status of women. Fafunwa added that;

Apart from Usman Danfodio’s efforts to remove syncretism from the beliefs and practises of Muslims, his most outstanding reform within the Hausa Muslim community of his time was the education of women. In his book, Nur al-Albab, he said, about the pre-jihad society, they treat their wives and daughters like household implements which are used until they are broken and then throw on the rubbish heap. [24]

Fafunwa further expatiate on the education of women where he said that the message of Shaykh Usman worked so well that female education among the Muslims in Northern Nigeria became a matter of pride. [25] This can be rightly substantiated by the statement of Muhammad Bello that there were in the company of Shaykh Usman countless of women who were righteous, obedient to Allah... and whose deeds and qualities should be emulated.[26] An indication to this was the Shaykh’s daughter, Nana Asma’u, a famous poet who also established school for women education. Consequent upon the importance attached to education, scholars gained prominence in Hausaland and education became a yardstick for all opportunities in the Caliphate. Knowledge then became the ladder for climbing heights of respect and dignity. In most parts of the Caliphate, scholars were appointed as state officials, hence were partaking in the running of the affairs of the state.

The literary contributions of the Jihad leaders became accessible in other parts of West Africa. Some of such literatures influenced the subsequent Jihads that took place in West African region.

Before his jihad, Seku Ahmad acquainted himself with the works of the triumvirate and it was his reference to those literatures that finally enabled him to convince and control his Council of *Ulama'u*. Similarly, Alhaji Umar was also influenced by the writings from Sokoto Caliphate which he studied thoroughly prior to his movement.

5. SCHOLARSHIP IN THE CALIPHATE ON THE EVE OF THE BRITISH CONQUEST

Interestingly enough, the Sokoto Caliphate, from its foundation until the British conquest in 1903, maintained a high legacy of Islamic and Arabic scholarship. It was estimated that by 1903, there were over 25,000 Qur'anic schools with over 250,000 pupils engaged in them. Therefore, when the protectorate of Northern Nigeria was declared in 1903, to the astonishment of the British, there was already in existence a great legacy of Arabic and Islamic scholarship with a highly sophisticated administration that was intellectually based. Islamic education was widely spread while Arabic language was then the medium of scholarly activities especially teaching, learning, and production of Books and treatises. Also, all correspondences whether for internal consumption, official, personal or for diplomatic purposes, were written either in Arabic or in *Ajami*. For this reason, Lugard appreciated the differences between the Northern and Southern part of Nigerian areas. The North, he found, had a powerful and established religion, with an elaborate system of education. Based on that Lugard argued that;

The Islamic schools (the north) had produced malammai learned in Arabic and the teachings of the Qur'an and commentaries from whose ranks the officers of the native authority, the judges of the native courts and exponents of the creed of Islam could be drawn. [27]

The availability of literacy in the north thus facilitated the Native Authority Administration and the success of "Indirect Rule" system. This was the reason why, in the early part of colonialism, some missionaries and colonial administrators such as W.R.S Miller, J.A. Burdon, and H. Robinson argued that Arabic should be retained in Native administrative system.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO HISTORIOGRAPHY

As part of the intellectual legacy left by the Jihadist was the development of Historiography. The Jihad leaders wrote extensively on variety of subjects, History inclusive. To the Jihad leaders, knowledge of History was of considerable importance. Therefore, they read and became familiar with the history of Islam and Muslim society. Their knowledge of history not only aided the success of the jihad but also the consolidation of the Caliphate. Describing the administration of Muhammad Bello, Maishanu said;

His policies like the establishment of Ribats to provide security to the metropolitan areas of the Caliphate were as a result of his wide

reading of classical Islamic literatures, particularly historical works.
[28]

The Jihad leaders also wrote number of historical works on pre-jihad period and on the developments after the jihad. Some of such works include *Tazyin al Waraqat* written by Abdullahi bn. Fodio and *Infaq al-Maysur* by Muhammad Bello. M. U. Bunza did an extensive work on exploring the Arabic/*Ajami* manuscripts left by Jihad leaders, which can be used in the reconstruction of the history of Northern Nigeria. [29] He identified sources that can be used in the reconstruction of early history of the Central Sudan, history of Political Developments and Intellectual History. No doubt, Bunza's work unveils worthy primary sources for readers, historians and other researchers. The *Tazyin al Waraqat* for instance, "provides first hand account of the Jihad movement from the preaching tours, the military engagements to the problems and challenges associated with the emergence and consolidation of the new Caliphate". [30] Muhammad Bello's *infaq al-Maysur* discussed the 19th century jihad movement. The book also contains biography of the jihad leader, Shaykh Usman bn Fodio, his character, his teaching and sermons and the opposition and sufferings he encountered. The book further discussed some aspects of intellectual history-the history of *Ulamau* and their literatures. Undoubtedly, the description of the jihad by the triumvirate themselves give us first hand information on the nature of the movement for easy and further historical reconstruction. However, with the coming of Europeans, Africa was described as a continent without history and lacking civilisation. But it was realised that, the jihad movement and ample literature left by the Jihadists could be used to refute such Eurocentric perception. A. Smith was the forerunner in this perspective;

The history of West African Savannah in the 19th century has its own independent theme; and this consists in a series of revolutionary movements which radically changed the social and political complexion of the whole zone during the hundred years or so before the establishment of European governments. These movements were jihads resulting in the formation of Islamic states, the emergence of new West African Muslim aristocracy and widespread conversion to Islam. [31]

Consequently, Islamic revolutions in West Africa had its independent theme in African history to the extent that writing papers in such an area worthy of publication are highly regarded as contribution to knowledge and scholarship.

7. CONCLUSION

In the preceding analysis, it was discussed that the most important legacy of 1804 Jihad was development of education. Scholarship continued beyond 1903 when the Caliphate collapse because of Colonial incursion. The mass literatures produced by the triumvirate are still being studied which contributed to the establishment of schools, emergence of scholars and spread of education. In fact, this intellectual development forms an integral part of West African civilisation.

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