

Transformation of Sokoto Caliphate by Sheik Usman Danfodiyo: A Social Thought Perspective*

Dr. Vaffi Foday Sheriff

*Department of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Arts and Islamic studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto-
Nigeria*

I. Introduction

The Sokoto Caliphate was established in 1805. It was the largest state in West Africa during 19th Century that stayed for about one hundred years and bequeathed a number of important legacies to contemporary societies and economies in the region. Although the caliphate collapsed one century ago, never-the-less, its values and relevance are still influencing the course of developments not only in Nigeria, but also in several states in west Africa¹ The paper attempts to discuss some thought aspects of Sheik Usman Danfodiyo and his contribution to sociology or philosophy of society. But the crucial question is Sheik Usmanu Danfodiyo and what was his major social thought in reforming Hausa land down to other states of West Africa?

Brief Biography and thought of Usman Danfodiyo

Usman Danfodiyo was born in December 1754, in a small village called Maratta, Gobir, Hausa land, currently in Nigeria. He died in 1817 in Sokoto. He was a Fulani, mystic, Philosopher and reformer who in Jihad (holy war) between 1804 and 1808, created a new Muslim state, the Fulani empire, in what is now northern Nigeria.² Usman Danfodiyo grew up in Muslim Family where he did earlier of his life Islamic education. Usman's youth, like his childhood was totally given to learning fitting like some of his contemporaries into an already institutionalized system of education in his society. Usman studied quite a variety of subjects. Starting with the Arabic language, tafsir, hadith and Sirah through Fiqh to astronomy arithmetic and tasawwuf. He wrote more than one hundred books³ he was influenced by his teacher Sheyk Jibril Ibn Umar by whom he was admitted to the Qadari Sufi About 1774-75 Usman began his active life as a teacher, and for the next 12 years he combined study with peripatetic teaching and preaching in different parts of the country such as Kebbi and Gabir.

II. Background Of The Study

To consider the transformation of Sokoto Caliphate in Islamic dimension, attention should be turned to one of the famous known verse in the Qur'an (13:11) Allah says "Indeed, Allah does not change people's circumstances unless they change what is in themselves". The meaning of the above verse has to do with individual transformation and growth and social reform, but any change should only be effective "if that occurs first internally in the individual before any meaningful external change can take place from the Qur'anic perspective, the most important locus for generating genuine individual change followed by social change is thus clearly the human heart not to be understood of course merely as physical organ but as the basic cognitive and emotive center of the human system⁴ In the light of these ideas, it is important to read how Sheikh B. Fodio transformed Sokoto Caliphate.

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¹ Ibrahim M. Jumare, land use in the Sokoto Caliphate: Policy and practice. In "The Sokoto Caliphate History and legacies, 1804-2004, Edited by H. Bobboyi and A. M. Yakubu, Vol.1. Published by Arewa House, Ahmadu Bello University, Kaduna, 2006, P.108.

² Usman Danfodiyo "in Encyclopedia Britannica on line see <http://britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/62035/2/usman-dan-fodio>.retrieved on 16.06.2012.

³ See Usman M. Bugaje, A study of the origin, Development and Fruition of the Jihad of Uthman b. Fodye (1754-1817) on <http://madanitimbukti.wordpress.com/category/the-timbukti-tradition>. Retrieved on 15-06-2012. see again sambo wali Junaid, the Islamic concept of leadership and its Application in the sakkwato Caliphate in Madani Timbukti traditions' blog. See more on <http://madanitimbukti.wordpress.com>. visited on 15.06.2012.

⁴ See more Asma Afsaruddin, Taking faith to Heart. Reconciliation and Fraternal love in Islamic Thought in (The Book Bringing Faith Meaning and peace to life in a Multi-Cultural world: The Risale Inur's Approach, NESIL, Istanbul 2004, P.67.

During the last quarter of the 18th Century Uthman Danfodiyo's ideas and asceticism became famous. He represented the ideal life of the Islamic mystic, dedicated to the teaching of the Qur'an and undefiled by the material desires that corrupted the world around him. But Usman Danfodiyo was more than a preacher. He was also a social reformer who objected to the non-Islamic practices of the Hausa leaders and continually criticized their rule and questioned the legitimacy of the taxes they imposed on his Fulani (Fulbe) brethren. His teaching and the ever increasing number of his followers throughout Hausa land caused growing alarm among the Hausa chiefs, especially the Sultan of Gobir, who sought to undermine his influence. In 1804 Usman and his followers were forced to flee for safety from Gobir, in a manner reminiscent of Mohammed's flight from Mecca, Known as the Hejira, and proclaimed the jihad, or holy war, against the Sultan and eventually against all the Hausa chiefs.⁵

Usmanu Danfodiyo as a Spiritual Leader, Mediator and Reformer (Mujaddid)

At his time, Usmanu Danfodiyo was a spiritual leader mediator, reformer and chief source of inspiration for his followers. He was neither a warrior nor a politician but the commander of the faithful (Sarkin Muslim), and he left the practical affairs of the jihad to his brother Abdullahi and his son Muhammad Bello, who commanded Usman's army.⁶ One by one the Hausa states of Gobir, Kebbi, Zamfara, Kano, Katsina, and Zazzau capitulated to the Fulani and were emulated by pagan areas on the periphery of the Hausa states. All were organized into emirates by the Fulani, but the establishment of political power was for the purpose of implementing the social, legal and religious ideas of Islam as interpreted by sheik Usman⁷. Many of these ideals were of course, compromised by the realities of the jihad and the increasing Fulani orientation that accompanied the establishment of the emirates, but Usman's teaching continued to provide the ideological justification for Fulani control until after his death.⁸

The importance of Usmanu Danfodiyo in 19th and 20th Century West Africa cannot be restricted to Hausaland, for the resurgence and reform of Islam which he had accomplished spread throughout west Africa. The expansion of Islam into Yoruba land, the conquest of Ilorin and the destruction of Oyo inaugurated 70 years of civil war in south west Nigeria which ultimately drew the British into the inferior of Nigeria in the late 19th century. Similarly, the pressure of his forces on the moribund state of Bornu east of Lake Chad contributed to its rebirth under El-Kanemi and his successor.⁹

Factors behind the Success of Usman Danfodiyo in Transformation of Sokoto Caliphate

1. Possessed a good generation of followership whose hearts were soft and who listened to him and obeyed his commands.
2. Assistance given to him by scholars and students who were his assistances in all matters in addition to intellectual preparation where was a significant contribution to the success of transformation of the Sokoto caliphate. The Shehu took pains to build a formidable body of scholars, jurists and saints – both men and women – on whom he depended almost totally for the dissemination of message for his contact with masses, for the conduct of the war and eventually for the running of the caliphate.¹⁰
3. His call was distinctly phased. It means Sheykh Usman did not force one stages on to another. He patiently disseminated education and moral consciousness among the people for almost three decades, without seeking any occasion to provoke the rulers¹¹. Throughout this period, he never mentioned jihad in any of his open air preaching's, rather he sought to purify people's faith enlighten them about the worship and transactions, and initiate them into the tariqa. When the Shehu brought about the desired transformation that Allah permitted. According to Ibrahim Suleiman,¹² the social and political transformation of the region as a whole to take place¹³ and as soon as jihad started, the Shehu's emphasis shifted and he began to speak of hijra- jihads. This went on for several years. When victory came and the caliphate was established, the Usman Danfodiyo changed his themes in response to historical and political changes: the emphasis now was on how to run the caliphate, strengthen the solidarity of Muslims, apply the shari'ah and generally how

⁵ See Uthman don fodio Biography on <http://bookrags.com/biogrphay/uthman-don-fodio/visited> on 5/ 06/ 2012.

⁶ See Utman don Fodio from Encyclopedia of world 2005-2006 Thomson Gale, a part of the Thomson corporation, See more on <http://www.bookrags.com/diography/uthman-don-fodio/retrived> on 15.06.2012.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

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¹⁰ Ibrahim Sulaiman, A Revolution in History the Jihad of Usman Danfodiyo," with a foreword by Shehu Usmanu M. Bugaje, Mansell publishing limited, London and New York (ND) P.15.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid . p 152.

¹³ Ibid.

to preserve, the order of the Ummah. The gradualist, systematic approach is the natural one known of the Prophets and all genuine Mujaddids. Sheikh Usman Danfodiyo believed in the firmness of Islam that no one can preserve Islam better than Allah, nor ever hope to love Islam more than Allah does and that time has never been against Islam. He had confidence in Islam, confidence in Allah's judgment, confidence in the eventual triumph of his cause- the confidence paid off, and we had an Ummah an Islamic order, a caliphate¹⁴.

4. The fourth factor, according to Waziri Gidado was that the Shehu took his appeal directly to the masses- the women, the poor, and all other groups of the under privileged and disposed in society. The ulama helped him to reach the masses. He lived like them, shared their aspirations and endeavored to know and experience personally their plight and their grievances. He identified with them completely and championed their cause unconditionally.¹⁵

It is Islam's abiding responsibility to defend the poor against the oppressive rich, a tyrannical social order and a tyrannical government, and to secure for them their interests. It is Islam's duty and commitment to work for the overthrow of any government or social order that denies to the poor their rights, or seeks to tilt the socio-economic balance in favour of the rich.¹⁶

5. The fifth factor for the success of Shehu's revolution in transformation Sokoto caliphate was that the body of his consultants and those who worked with him and migrated to him were keen and obedient, more importantly perhaps was the existence of this body of consultant itself. What appears clearly in the course of the movement is that the Shehu was not working alone: indeed he hardly ever took any decision unilaterally ¹⁷For example, the election of Amir al-muminin was suggested to him and he left the matter to his advisers throughout the jihad decisions on the conduct of the war were left to the council. When these advisers became rulers, they were left to follow their own initiatives, for the Shehu withdrew to occupy himself in teaching and training. The movement was not a one affair, but a collective undertaking which rested very much on mutual consultation.¹⁸

6. Sixth factor was that the members of the Jamaa related to Danfodiyo preferred the hereafter to the world, and were these ready to forego their homes, property families and other personal conveniences in order to undertake the hijra. They chose knowledge rather than ignorance hence each of them strove to learn and work by it. They preferred consciousness of Allah to moral degradation and were thus able to shun what ever preferred social transformation of society to corruption in the Caliphate.¹⁹

The Jamaa worked as a single body and were clear in their objectives and goals. That they were working for a cause the reward which lay in the level after, that they had to acquire knowledge and live enlightened lives, that the triumph of their cause depended on their relationship with Allah and not on the pleasures of this world that they were involved in a process of tajdid and could not accept what was bound to corrupt them. That keen consciousness of a common goal a mission, a cause and a unique identity helped to weld the Jamaa together and gave it the strength to work for many years and to fight continuously for more than a decade.²⁰

A contributing factor to the successes the transformation of Sokoto Caliphate was the personality characteristics and methods of Sheikh Usman himself which were influential and attracted.

Methodology of Sheik Usman Danfodiyo in Transformation of Sokoto Caliphate

The methodology of Sheik Uman in transformation Sokoto Caliphate was based essentially on training his men by personal example and not by theory, his own life was the embodiment of Islam. But that did not prevent his going out to preach. Indeed that was his main life-engagement. It was realized that his preaching was excellent, that in compliance with the Qur'an, he preached with wisdom and goody exhortation, and his training of the men around him and his call to people, were all based on knowledge. Thus the Shehu fully utilized the sciences (ulum) in his efforts to transform his society, the science of Tawhid, the science of hadith, the science of tafsir" the science of figh, as well as the sciences of medicine, astronomy and mathematics. Any aspect of knowledge which they thought was benefit to the community was taught and acquired²¹ Johnson sees in the sheikh Usman Danfodiyo as a truly great leader. Though a man of peace he sustained a lengthy war and though an unworthy mystic, he created a territorial empire. According to Johnson, his spiritual magnetism helped him to maintain the loyalty of his followers for life. His moral courage enabled him, even in most trying and desperate

¹⁴ Ibid, p 152.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

circumstances, to stand on his principles. His faith in his own destiny was so intense that it fired all those who came in contact with him, inspiring them to turn defeat to victory an several an instance. Usman Danfodiyo moreover, remained totally unworldly, “unspoilt in triumph” as he had been unshaken in disaster. To the very end Johnson concludes his assessment, sheikh Usman has led a simple, pious and abstemious life, enhancing the world precisely at the time he had gained it on achievements alone, he says, he deserved to be ranked the greatest men whom Africa has produced. If his character and achievement are taken together, however, his place is unique.²²

III. Impacts Of The Transformation Of Sokoto Caliphate

Socio-political Impact: Issues of justice were done and every citizen was asked to comply with law. As a result of that the Caliphate was “peaceful, honest, pious and scholarly judges were appointed throughout the Caliphate. According to Sambo Wali Junaidu, in fact, descendants of these judges like the Qadi Qudat (Chief judge) still retain the titles if not, the functions. We also have other title like the sa’i, who takes charge of the collection and distribution of Zakah. Other are the Sarkin Yaki (war commander) the title still held by the descendants of Aliyu Jedo, the war commander at the time of the jihad and the Muhtasib (Censor of Morals). As for Waziri, the Shaykh appointed four viziers, namely; Abdullahi Ben Fodiyo, Muhammad Bello, Umar Alkammu and Malam Sa’adare. When the Caliphate became stronger, the vizier ship positions were reduced to only two. The western flank under the charge of Abdullah has its own vizier as was the case with Eastern flank under Bello. However as Muhammad Bello became the second Caliph the viziership position of the Caliphate held by Abdullahi shifted to Uthan Godo, to look into peoples’ affairs.²³

Educational Impact

Sokoto Caliphate leaders tried to promote learning and scholarship. This promotion was vigorously pursued by the Caliphate so much that there was no Islamic revivalist movement in the whole of Africa during that time that had bequeathed to the generations of the Sokoto Caliphate. Shehu Usman had written not less than one hundred books and manuals in the three languages, namely: Fulfulde, Hausa and Arabic. So was also done by his son Bello and Abdullah, and Emirs who received flags from the Shehu. All the flag bearers were at one time or another students of Sheikh Usman b. Fodiyo who in turn encouraged scholarship in their own areas of jurisdiction²⁴ in addition to this, educational campaign mounted by Nana Asma’u, the Sheikh’s daughter to educate the women-folk Nana herself, a poetess in three languages, did not hesitate to compose poems which are still sung today to educate the omen masses. She organized the ysn-teru’ (Associates) system of knowledge dissemination whereby older women from rural areas converged to her home and received lessons from her and in turn disseminated such lessons to the wives in Purdah in the rural areas the lessons usually imported by Nana Asma’u included Islamic ritual like the five daily prayers, aspects of Teunia, the Zakah, responsibilities of the wife to the family, etc. These rituals are composed in poems for easy memorization.²⁵

Security Impact

Security is a major concern for any sovereign state. By the way, after the establishment of Sokoto Caliphate, Usman Danfodiyo built a strong army to defend and extend territories of the nation of Islam the leaders led many successful expeditions against the enemy.²⁶ Abdullahi B. Fodiyo who was in charge of western flank of the Caliphate and his able lieutenants, ably extended the areas of the Caliphate as far away as the Nupe and Yoruba lands, while Bello effectively controlled the whole of the Eastern flank which extended for beyond Adamawa. The Caliphate remained intact and the leaders successfully subdued to submission the attempted rebellion after the demise of Sultan Bello. Sultan Bello had, during his reign which spanned for over 20 years, led 17 military campaigns against the enemies of Islam. The Caliphate became the Islamic umbrella under which all citizens of the nation of Islam, irrespective of language, colour or place of birth converge to worship Allah alone and maintain justice among human beings as representative of Allah on the earth.

²² -See the Fulani Empire, pp. 111-12 see again this information in Ibrahim Sulaiman, A Revolution History, the Jihad of Usman Danfodiyo, P.154.

²³ Sambo wali Junaid, The Islamic Concept of leadership and its Application in the sakkwato Caliphate in Madani Timbukti Traditions Blog. See more on <http://madani.timbukti.wordpress.com/category/the-timbukti-tradition...> retrieved on 15.0.2012.

²⁴ Sambo Wali Junaid. Ibid.

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²⁶ In the time of Mohammad Bello, “The country when not in a state of war, was so well regulated that a woman might travel with a casket of gold upon her head from one end of the Fellata dominions to the other without any danger. (see Rashid Islamic law in Nigeria p.39. See the same quotation in Sambo wali Junaid, Ibid.

Economic Impact

The transformation of Sokoto Caliphate provided opportunities for greater economic relations among people in the region. On the socio- economic field the Sokoto Caliphate leaders contributed a lot to economic growth so, no doubt, the most profound and easily visible impact of jihad in the Caliphate was economic development, especially in Agriculture. According to Abdulkadir Adamu sustainable development formed the bedrock of the economy by which the leaders provided food for the population and raw materials for the industries²⁷ Reading the *Tanbih al-Ikhwan*, Caliph Muhammad cited verses from the Qur'an and Ahadith (prophetic tradition) to demonstrate that the most honourable and dignified member of the society was he who satisfied his personal livelihood requirements from gainful employment²⁸ the Sokoto Caliphate leaders encouraged the establishment of new towns and villages both for defence and for the enhancement of agricultural activities and related industries in the *Usul al siyasa* written to the Emir of Katsina, Umaru Dallaji, he advised that; "One of the duties of the Muslim leader was to see to the colonization of rural areas through the foundation of villages and walled towns. This was part of a general policy of fostering the material welfare of the people. It should involve the encouragement of farmers and artisans the provision for the storage of food, and the regulation of market and road."²⁹

Other factor that contributed to economic growth in Sokoto Caliphate was the size of the Caliphate itself which had enormous economic advantages for long distance traders as well as for the producers way supplied them with some of their trading goods. Large size guaranteed not only good supplies of a variety of raw materials at competitive prices, but it also guaranteed a very large internal market – but in the open market and in procurement of supplies for the state.³⁰ According to Philip (2006) external markets were also easily secured when supported by a powerful and respected state. The quality of labour – in the sense of different skills, different technologies, different tastes- also was an advantage of the mega state.³¹

According to Philip (2006): The textile industry was one of the most important industries in the Sokoto Caliphate in the 19th century – arguably second only to agriculture. It has generally been assumed that the new Caliphate government, with its ideological stress on Islamic norms and practices, led to a rising demand for greatest and greater amounts of textiles and particularly of high quality ones. This certainly seems to have been the case and reports throughout the 19th century and the time of the British conquest all stressed the growth and strength of the textile industry. The most populous and probably the most textile oriented economy within the Caliphate economy was certainly Kano which had in that time wide ranging markets throughout West Africa and even beyond to North Africa.³² One of the criticisms directed Sokoto Caliphate leaders towards the pre Jihad Hausa kings and their officials was that they did not bind themselves to the legally approved means of wealth acquisition. Corruption was rampant in high, places and illegal taxes and levies were imposed on the ordinary people. These evil practices were strongly condemned by sheikh Usman and his brother Abdullahi Fodiyo. In his *kifah kifayat al-Awam fi-Buyu'I*, he dealt with commercial transactions in all their different ramifications and showed the right and proper rules that should guide the Muslims in transacting them. In his "Diya al-Anam fil-Halah wal-"Haram", he attempt to set out a comprehensive guide line determining what is "halal" (lawful), haram (unlawful) and "Shubha" (doubt ful). All Muslims were exhorted to learn the rules governing "halah", "haram" and "hsubha" at and meticulously apply them in the process of wealth acquisition.

Lessons for the contemporary period

The wisdom and lessons that should be drawn from our discussion are that the achievements of sheykh Usman Danfodiyo, malam Abdullahi Fodiyo and Sheykh Muhammad Bello along with the various flag bearers who established the emirates works made great efforts to establish a new society based on the time-tasted and time-honored principles of justice and the rule of laws. There is no doubt saying that the principle of justice and the rule of law in governance firmly rooted is scholarship, is the caliphate's mote enduring legacy 200 years later,

²⁷ Abdulkadir Adamu (2006) *The Establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate and its impact on Society and Economy. The case of Zazzau in the Nineteenth Century*, in (the Sokoto Caliphate, History and Legacies (1804 – 2004) celebrating 200 years of the Sokoto Caliphate and its legacies edited by H. Bobboyi and A.M. Yakubu, 1st edition 2006. vol.1 P.100.

²⁸ See more in Abdulkadir Adamu, *Ibid*, and in O Bello. "The Political Thought of Muhammad Bello (1781-1837) as Reveal in his Arabic writings more especially *al-ghayth al-wabl fi sirat al-imam al-adl*" (PhD thesis, University of London, 1983, p.113.

²⁹ Y.B Usman, "The Transformation of katsina C. 1796-1903. the overthrow of the Sarauta System and the Establishment and Evolution of the Emirate" (Ph.D thesis, ABU Zaria, 1974, p426.

³⁰ Philip J Shea, *The Sokoto Caliphate and economic advantages of size; Quality, variety and efficiency in the textile industry in (the Sokoto Caliphate history and legacies (1804-2004) vol.1 p.134.*

³¹ *Ibid* p.134.

³² *Ibid* p134-135

books written by the caliphates leaders on the management of public trust and the betterment of society were relevant in their time, they are relevant today and will remain relevant to eternity as we reflect on the glorious history of the Caliphate, therefore we must not forget to draw inference and lessons for the contemporary period. In this respect there are three critical issues around which the caliphate was established which, further, more, underscore its greatness and ensured the durability of its value and institutions over the years.³³

The basic teaching of Usman Danfodiyo was on good governance. He set out its principle and lived by its transparent examples. He was therefore a reformer. Changing society for the better is always difficult, at times even painful. Reforms cannot be cosmetic, otherwise relief for citizens will be ephemeral. It must be profound of total involving change in attitude at all levels and an overhauling the institutions that will sustain and guarantee positive change. The second important factor is tolerance. In its great diversity stretching from Masinal in present Mali Republic to Nikki in Benin Republic, from Maradi in Niger Republic to Tibati in Cameroon, various ethnic groups, economic communities, religious groups and even religious sects peacefully existed of course, the glory of the past is always a reference point of how communities should live harmoniously with one another irrespective of whatever difference exist. The leaders of the caliphate not only laid the ground work but also provided the model for cooperation and integration in our sub-region and in the world.³⁴

IV. Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis, the paper concludes by pointing out that the first attempt of this work was to give introduction, background of the study, factors behind the success of sheik Usman Danfodiyo in the establishment of Sokoto Caliphate, methodology and impacts of Sokoto Caliphate on transformation of the socio-political, educational, security and economic lives of the communities living within the caliphate.

More fundamentally, the paper has demonstrated how a single person was able to turn things around in the Sokoto caliphate by transforming attitude, knowledge and the citizenry. The teaching of Sheikh Usman Danfodiyo continue to resonate with people even today.

The corpus scholarship left behind continues to excite new thinking and debates on the relevance of Islam to progress and development. Not only that, the political model of governance left behind exemplified justice and rule of law soundly backed by religious zeal and commitment to a better human society. These legacies will no doubt continue to guide Islamic thought and jurisprudence both far and near.

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³³ Appendix v. Address by the special guest of Honour President of Federal Republic of Nigeria

³⁴ Ibid. in (the Sokoto Caliphate, History and legacies, 1804-2004) Ibid. P. 363.

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