

## Arabic Scholar's Governance Advocacy and Nigeria's National Security in Nigeria: Perspective of Al-Shaykh Usman Bin Fodio.

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**Abstract:** *The emergence of Arabic on the shore of West Africa heralded the practise of Islam and advocacy for a just and egalitarian society. Islam, it was argued, has been perverted and subverted by the Hausa leadership. This necessitated the call for reforming Islam. Al-Shaykh Usman Bin Fodio grabbed the opportunity and fought the perverts to restore the glory of Islam and establish shari'ah way of life. This was the practise, especially in the northern part of Nigeria until the incursion of colonialism. The conquest of the colonial master halted the rule of jihadi leaderships and subjected them to colonialism under which only some aspects of Islamic system considered potentially beneficial to the British interest were retained. The current socio-political and economic crises in Nigeria has necessitated the need to look inwardly to the bulk of works, in Arabic, left behind by the Muslim scholars to help to salvage the country from its present political crisis, economic paralysis and legal decadence. This paper, therefore, examines the relevance of Arabic literary works that housed political/legal theories to salvaging the country from its present political crises, economic paralysis and legal decadence.*

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### I. Introduction

The evolution of Islamic political/legal theory in Nigeria can be traced to the northern Nigeria Emirate formation by Kanem Bornu and Sokoto caliphates before the establishment of British colonial rule in the country. The conquest of the colonial master halted the rule of the aforementioned leaderships and subjected them to colonialism under which only some aspects of Islamic system, considered potentially beneficial to the British interest were retained. This led to either the death or deposition of those Emirs who resisted compromising with the British Impostors. Colonialism subverted the rule of the emirs, the custodians, of Islam, documented in Arabic, to the suit agents of imperialism. Thus, English became the medium of documentation and communication, showing Arabic literary traction aside, as if it was of no relevance. This paper locates the Nigeria's current political crises, economic paralysis and legal decadence in this colonial machination.

The paper examines the issues of the relevance of the Arabic literary and political/legal contributions to contemporary Nigeria. It will be argued that the application of these political/legal theories can help to salvage the country from its present political crisis, economic paralysis and legal decadence. The current situation calls for a radical change of the *status quo* and a constructive formulation of the way forward. This would end the persistent political intervention of colonialism in contemporary Nigeria that has denied the average Nigerian a sense of pride and self-belief.

A case by Mr Palmer, an English colonial administrator of Northern Nigeria in 1908 who seems to agree with the inferiority of English criminal law, and he said; "...it is lamentably impossible to deny that in Hausa land the incidence of crimes, notably thief, murder, robbery, and burglary has grown worse instead of better since British occupation"<sup>1</sup>

Mr Palmer submission as above requires review, as he predicted that the modelled panel law by British system could not sustain law and order to an extent.

### USMAN DAN FODIO'S MISSION MODEL OF GOVERNANCE

The formation of the Sokoto Caliphate was the aftermath of the revolutionary activities characterized by spiritual, physical and intellectual struggle by the Jihadist under the leadership of Shaykh Usman Dan Fodio, the flag bearer. The principal aim of the Jihad was not to introduce Islam to Hausaland as a new faith, but rather to get rid of undesirable innovations that had badly given Islam an image that is contrary to what was preached and practiced by the prophet and his faithful followers and adherents.

It is important, at this juncture, to clarify the concept of jihad which is wrongly defined by the colonial administration as warfare by the Fulani against their Hausa overlords.<sup>2</sup> It is also being interpreted as simply affirming the Fulani's long history of Islamization than the Hausa.<sup>3</sup> Literarily, though, the word "jihad" appears more appropriate for as Professor Abdullahi Smith suggested (based on Islamic political thought), that: "The Sokoto jihad should be viewed as an intellectual movement involving the mind of the lead conception of the ideal society and the philosophy of revelation."<sup>4</sup>

From therefore going, we can affirm that great scholars, especially Usman and his brother Abdullah, led the Sokoto jihad. Both were masters of "sword" and "pen" and served as leaders of their community, not only in political affairs but also in the field of learning.<sup>5</sup> In fact, both were nation builders and learned teachers *par excellence*.

Indeed, over the centuries, scholars have realized that Arabic, as a language and Islam as a religion, have contributed immensely to world civilization and culture. Islam revived the human pursuit of science. Through the Arabs, the Romans were able to invent light and power albeit the contribution of science. In the ninth and tenth centuries, Muslims compiled great lexicons and developed philological learning in Islam.<sup>6</sup>

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE**

Undoubtedly, Arabic Administration among Arabs and non-Arab Muslim societies has a strong influence on both the literate elite and the masses. A public speaker, be he a politician, a preacher or a charlatan, is able, with proper and correct Arabic, to captivate his audience. Professor Hitti affirms this situation, stating that:

*No people in the world, perhaps manifest such enthusiastic admiration for literary expression and are so moved by the word, spoken or written, as the Arabs. Hardly, any language seems capable of exercising over the minds of its users such irresistible influence as Arabic. Modern audience in Baghdad, Damascus and Cairo can be stirred to the highest degree by the recital of poems, only vaguely comprehended and by the delivery of orations in the classical tongue, though it could be only partially understood. The rhythm, the rhyme, the music produce of them effect of what they call "lawful magic" (al-sihr halal)*<sup>7</sup>

To Muslims in general and Arabs in particular, Arabic is a God-given language, unique in beauty and majesty, the best equipped and most eloquent of all languages for expressing thought and emotions. It is considered as the mainstay of faith, the pillar of nationality and nationalism. The Arabic language is the register of the experience and achievements of the Arab people throughout the centuries.<sup>8</sup> It is a fact that Arabic is the language of the Holy Quran, as evident in the following verse:

إنا أنزلناه قرآنا عربيا لعلكم تعقلون

Meaning:

"We have sent Quran in Arabic in order that you may learn wisdom" (Q12:2)

Prior to the rise of Islam, Arabic had played a significant role in the Arabian society through the medium of oral poetry. It occupied an important place among several communities and served as the unifying factor among them. The poetry was abundant and rich, and contained the artistic, intellectual and spiritual expressions of the Arab. The importance of the poetry is further signified by the enviable position of influence the pre-Islamic poet enjoyed among members of his tribe through the power of his highly rhythmical and forceful poetry. He was the spokesperson of the tribe and was often consulted before decisions were taken on major issues. During the Islamic times, poetry continued to flourish, although it became imbued with new themes and language compatible with the new dispensation, and remained the hallmark of culture. Hardly was there any scholar of consequence in Arab-Muslim society who did not try his hand on poetry or show some familiarity with the great poet of the pre-Islamic or Islamic times.<sup>9</sup>

### **ARABIC LANGUAGE IN WEST AFRICA AND NIGERIA IN PARTICULAR**

The presence of Arabic language in West Africa has been associated with trade and commerce. Long before the coming of the Almoravid movement, there had been Muslim communities in large centres of West Africa.<sup>10</sup> Al-Bakri, the Spanish geographer, writing a century later during the time of the Almoravid expansion, tells of Arab merchants in Awdaghast, which was at the time, under the sovereignty of Ghana.<sup>11</sup> He also reported that Kanem was still pagan in his time but that there was a group of Arab Muslims there who had probably arrived two centuries earlier as refugees from Abbasid inspired persecution. Sir Richmond Palmer states that it was about that time, that Kanem began to profess Islam.

## **THE ARABIC LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA**

The geographical entity known today as Nigeria was formerly a collection of kingdoms, empires, emirates and non-centralised societies. In 1914, the southern and northern parts of the country, then known as southern and northern protectorates were joined together by Lord Lugard to form Nigeria. Hence, discussion on Arabic in West Africa should not be done to the exclusion of Kanem Bornu and Hausaland. In this regard, the role which Usman Dan Fodio (d.1817), played in the spread of Arabic in Hausaland, in fact, Northern Nigeria needs to be recognised and emphasised. The activities of this scholar placed Islam on a firm footing in the northern part of the country; where it became the "state religion" while Arabic also became the official language and the lingua franca.<sup>12</sup>

The Fulani Jihadist were not only war generals but also prolific writers. Many works were written in Arabic by them; for instance, the leader of the movement of Shaykh Usman Dan Fodio, his brother Abdullahi bin Fodio, who was regarded the servant of the movement, Sultan Muhammad Bello, son of Shaykh Usman Dan Fodio and a host of other scholars and the teachers.<sup>13</sup>

The exchange of polemical letters between Shaykh Abdul-Karim and the Sokoto Jihadist Muhammad Bello on the legality of the Jihad shows how the literary Arabic was put into use during this era. The fact that the Arabic language goes hand in hand with the spread of Islam made its establishment possible when it reached the southern parts of Nigeria, particularly Yoruba land.<sup>14</sup> However, the extension of the Arabic language into Yoruba land has not been confined to the area of scholarship; it has percolated to the lowest state of the society.

## **RELEVANCE OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE TO NIGERIA**

Arabic is the language in which Nigeria's past, as indeed the past of many African societies before European colonialism was documented. There are many works in Arabic by Nigerians. Many of the manuscripts are now kept in libraries, archives and in private collections. The renowned historian, Prof K.O. Dike, a former Vice Chancellor of the University of Ibadan, and the architect of National Archives of Nigeria assigned critical importance to Arabic literature. He wrote:

*As a historian myself, I have taken keenest interest in this development for it is through the aids of these Arabic documents, and those written in African language in the Arabic script, that the scholar will be aided in his task of unlocking the secrets of African past. It has been a revelation to the whole world of scholarship to realize for the first time that Africa before European penetration, so far from being a dark continent, was in fact a continent where the light of scholarship shone brightly, as the Arabic works now being discovered bear testimony<sup>15</sup>*

However, in an Arab context, this refers to the coexistence of both a standard form of the language and a colloquial form of the same language. It varies not only from one country to another but also from one area to another within Nigeria country

To buttress the above, the late professor El-Gharh of University of Ibadan states:

*It is no exaggeration at all to say that Arabic is the first non-native language which brought its educational achievements as well as its rich literature to the Nigerian and West African's environment many centuries before a single Nigerian or West African citizen ever spoke a word of English or French. Indeed one wonders whether Arabic is a non-native language in Nigeria or Western Africa since a considerable segment of the native population of present day Nigeria namely the Shuwa Arabs speaks Arabic as their mother tongue...<sup>16</sup>*

## **Pre-Jihad Social life in Hausa Land.**

The social life of pre-jihad Hausa land mirrored that of pre-Islamic Arabia; for the former witnessed deterioration similar to that of the latter in almost all aspects of life. For instance, the gender relationship between male and female was lax and promiscuous. As Professor M.S. Zaharadeen narrated that perhaps with some exaggeration! "...some rulers of the era were getting married to more than one thousand women and or taking other women forcibly for their own pleasure."<sup>17</sup>

People were not committed to their daily routines as women paraded the streets, markets and public places in un-Islamic fashions and dresses at that time. Adultery, fornication and abomination were committed daily. Shaykh Usman Dan Fodio, observed that men and women congregated at various places with evil intentions. The renowned scholar, Sambo Junaide expatiated pointedly on the horrible situation created by the pre-jihad Hausa society thus:

*He who sees them (at the stage) has seen senselessness (itself). Men and women laying down half-naked in the open, each of them with shamelessly dazzling eyes bulging out. The women folk were exploited economically.*

*They were deprived of inheritance and dowry and were mostly subjected to heavy manual labour in the farms their masters slept at home.*<sup>18</sup>

Thus Allah, The only Creator of heaven and earth lamented:

أَفَعَيَّرَ دِينَ اللَّهِ يَبْغُونَ وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ

Meaning:

So they seek for other things than the religion of Allah, while all creatures in the heavens and on earth have willingly or unwillingly bowed to His will (accepted Islam) and to Him shall they be brought back<sup>19</sup>

This Quranic reference had unwittingly been complemented by a re-nown English jurist when he said:  
*... If religion perishes in the land, Truth and justice will also. We have already strayed too far from the faith of our fathers; let us return to it, for it is the only thing that can save us.*<sup>20</sup>

It was this sordid situation that prompted Usman Dan Fodioto embark on the jihad in order to purge away the syncretic practice that was in vogue.

Therefore, it is ideally better for man to be in need and be good rather than to be full and be a fool. In other words, God did the best thing by making man to be dependent on Him and substantially depending on fellow human beings and other creatures.<sup>21</sup>

### **Brainwashing Colonial Education**

Unfortunately, badly the colonial impostors introduced an educational system that brainwashed the colonised to believe that the system was the best possible and that without them nothing good could ever be achieved by the colonised. The result of this was the development of inferiority complex by the colonised. Not surprisingly, the colonial education destroyed the normal way of thinking of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The colonial power fostered this mental colonization of the people for two principal reasons. These were to:

- i. uphold the supremacy of the colonial race, and
- ii. Protect their economic interests.
- iii. Hence, the intrinsic merits in other religions were suppressed and a bogey image of them was created.

Islam became a subject of slander and was painted in a very hideous image, especially in the southern part that only those who were strongly steeped in it continued to adhere to it. Many others either dissociated themselves from it or hid their Islamic identity. Islam was scandalised as an anti-secular religion and strong enemy of progress and development.

### **Arabic Influence on the Economic**

Commerce plays a significant role in any developing polity and also in making a language a *lingua franca* of everyday use language. The movement of people with government to administrative centres automatically necessitates the movement and use of languages. However, the economic power of a people corroborates with the spread of their language. This explains why people in developing countries accept to use the language of Europeans working in their countries while the Europeans hardly attempt to study the languages of the people.

Likewise, the trans-Sahara trade between the Arab world and West Africa introduced Arab trade goods along with their Arab names. In the process the Arabic language progressively made its way into West African languages, especially the Hausa language. Other instruments through which the Arabic language has been spreading in West Africa in general and Nigeria in particular include technical and economic aid and technical assistance by one country to another.<sup>22</sup>

### **Arabic literary Political factor:**

The political system adopted by a country might mandate such a country to seek her friendship just to benefit her moral support and material assistance. The view of Abdul Qudus explains this notion:  
*A country may be forced to adapt a foreign language of communication among her people. This may be as a result of the competition between local languages. For example, Nigeria has to take English as its official language because of the plethora of local languages, (over 250) and the rivalry between them, especially the three major ones: Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo.*<sup>23</sup>

However, for British interactions, this language problem might not have arisen. In fact, under the leadership of Usman Dan Fodio, the Arabic language was spreading very fast in all parts of Northern Nigeria and could have signified the governance of Nigeria as a whole.

In his book, *Diya al-Hukkam*, Shaykh ‘Abdullah Dan Fodio refers to a muslim theorist, *al-Nafrawi*, which identifies four types of leadership. These are as follows:

- i. Leadership in terms of revelation (prophet-hood).
- ii. Leadership in terms of knowledge (being a scholar).
- iii. Leadership in terms of worship (Imam of a mosque).

iv. Leadership in terms of administration (Caliph).

The prophetic leadership of Mohammed (S.A.W) absorbed the above kinds of leadership. Professor A.I. Lawal observed:

"The Prophet (S.A.W) is believed to have combined all the four types of leadership during his life time. He was a prophet (S.A.W), a Divine scholar, an exemplary Imam of the mosque, and an exemplary political leader of the Islamic state of his time. According to this theory being a reputable scholar does not stop someone from being an Imam of a mosque or a political leader or even to combine the three categories together".<sup>24</sup>

Appointment of leaders to all the aforementioned positions is legally Islamic, with the exception of that "Prophethood" which has divinely terminated.<sup>25</sup>

The concepts of leadership and followership are bones of contention in this study. In Islam, everybody is regarded as a *bonafidesocio-political* leader. Hence, the rulers and the ruled demand guidance. The fact is that Islam means peace and in all circumstances guarantees nothing but absolute peace whether in an Islamic state or a secular society. This explains why the Arabic literary political/legal theorists have explicitly spelt out the reciprocal relations between leader and the led.

#### **Reciprocal duties of followers and leadership:**

According to Arabic political/ legal prescription, leaders deserve total loyalty and submission of their subjects (followers) as far as they do not engage in unlawful acts. Professor A.I. Lawal states: "The major thing Islam requires from the followers is total submission to the constituted authority provided it is not directing them to sinful things".<sup>26</sup>

A one-time administrator and general military commander under the Usman Dan Fodio's administration, explained the gravity of the responsibility of leadership, stressing that only people of sterling qualities should aspire to it. This is evident from his speech that reads:

"ويعلم أن الإمارة خلافة من الله ونيابة عن رسول الله فما أعظم فضلها وما أثقل حملها..."

Meaning:

He (a leader) must know that leadership is a succession (appointed) by Allah and preservation of the messengers of Allah. How great it's honour and how heavy it's burden....<sup>27</sup>

This leadership therefore, is a challenge that requires absolute good intention to serve the people to the best of one's ability and to bring pleasure and joy to them. The leader must avoid arrogance; rather, he must assist his subjects to reform their lives and religion.<sup>28</sup> He should remain a lover of good deeds and of those who keep to it.

A leader should:

- not be a treasury looter or liar.
- wear humble dress that deserves respect
- speak gently to his followers.
- keep to his promise
- be exemplary in his behaviour.
- not act on rumours, be available to his followers, and make good attempt to study the language of his people.

The foregoing could be duly understood in the literary work of Abdullah bin Fodio *Diyaal-Hukkam*, (Nomenclature of judgement). He therein lamented:

"وأن يحسن هيئته برداء الهيبة والوقار وحب الخير وأهله وبغض الشر وأهله ... ولا مفسد لبيت المال ... وبغض البصر وكف السمع الى أقوال الوشاة وخفض الصوت وحفظ اللسان عن كل حرام وعرض عن الكذب وخلف الوعد وإذا أمر أو نهى عن شئ فلا يغفل عنه حتى يحمل المقصود منه ولا يفصر خطوته عن مقاله فتذهب هيئته وخوفه من رعيته وعماله ولا يكن عبد ثوبه ولا حمار ولا بساط ولا مكان ورأس كل بلية احتجابه عن الرعية"

Meaning:

"... and bind him to dress decently and present a dignified appearance and respect. He must love good and its doer and he must hate evil and its doer. He must not be a treasury looter he must lower his gaze and cease his ear from hearing utterances of slanderers he must lower the voice and protect the tongue from every unlawful thing he ought to keep far from lie and breaking of promise. If he orders or forbids something, he must not ignore the same, lest he becomes a victim of his own order. His action must not fall short of his speech so that the respect and fear his followers and workers have for him may not be lost. He must not worship cloth (materials), horse, rug or piece of land. Indeed, the beginning of every calamity concealment (of a leader) from the subject"<sup>29</sup>

In a nutshell, among the responsibilities expected of a good leader are to:

- create a conducive atmosphere, for free running and discharging of individual duty.
- restrain from unlawful in dealing with women, children and desist from being power drunk.<sup>30</sup>
- have concern for the prisoners (so that may be useful to society after).
- cater for orphans, widows, workers, jobless and the weak.
- urge for Civil Servant's declaration of assets or rather government officials before assuming governmental posts.

The rationale for this is that any government functionary found in possession of illegally acquired wealth should be made to return it to the treasury. This is what Shaykh Abdullahi means, when he says:

"فمن ظهر منه تقصير زجره أو ظلم عزله أو تكررت فيه الشكوى أبدله ومن زاد له من عمله مال أخذه رده إلى بيت المال"

Meaning:

(...anyone in whom a shortcoming is observed should be warned or if oppressive should be removed or if repeatedly complained against should be replaced. Anyone whose wealth is more than his salary must be made to return the excess (to the treasury). Any government based on the principles suggested above will surely bring tremendous abundance and happiness to its citizens.

## II. Suggestion

Arising from the fore-going discussion, it is worthwhile to draw the attention of any ideal governance that may be in power to the following:

Those at the helm of leadership should be conscious of the tenets well laid out in the Holy Books – the Bible and the Quran. If they govern according to the injunctions of the Holy Books, all the iniquities that the people are suffering will be no more. Adherence to those injunctions is the only way of attaining good and Godly governance and all the good things that flow from it.

The spiritual leaders of both Islam and Christianity should discharge their roles and duties with faith and fear of Allah (S.W.A), the only creator God Almighty to whom we all are answerable in the hereafter. Both leadership and followership should also remain just and maintain equity in judgment while penalizing any found guilty; as stated in Quran:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ فَإِن تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ إِن كُنتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا [النساء، الآية: 59]

Meaning:

“O ye who believe! obey Allah, and obey the messenger, and those charged with authority among you. If you differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His messenger, if you do believe in Allah and the Last Day: that is the best and most suitable for final determination. [Quran.4: vs.59]

The followership should be loyal to their leaders, provided they are not misled. In addition, the leaders should be compassionate, show concern for the welfare of their objects and disburse the nation's wealth justly for the benefit of every citizen.

The fore-going Islamic demands on leadership is interwoven in Arabic literary legal theory of governance and has been propagated via Arabic literature. Renowned Western scholars such as WHG Armytage, Professor Drayra as well as colonial administrators such as Mr. Palmer, concede to the legitimacy of Arabic literary legal governors' legacy as superior to the Western administrative system. This is especially so with respect to Nigeria during the British colonial period.

## III. Conclusion

This paper has criticised the prevailing system of governance in the contemporary world in general and Nigeria specifically. The present system of government is a mockery of democracy. It has brought about political instability, general insecurity, mass poverty and national indiscipline. A solution to this problem is the adoption of Arabic legal code which is based on respect for human dignity, fair play and justice. Governments run according to Arabic legal system have demonstrated their superiority over the exploitative colonial system. If Nigeria is to be purged of her current social, economic, political and moral decadence, introduction of Arabic legal system should be a priority.

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