

Re-Islamization of the West African Ummah A Model for Tajdid?

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Introduction

Human development, from the Islamic point of view, can be achieved only by following the footsteps of the Prophet (ṢAAṢ). The nearer one comes to imbibing the Message of the Qurʾān, Sunnah, and Sharīʿah in one's life, the more humanly developed one becomes, because personal development in Islam is measured by one's refinement in living this Message. The more refined and developed are the persons in a community, the better will be their culture and civilization.

As long as Muslims continued moulding their life according to the Sharīʿah, their civilization in Medina, Baghdad, Andulūs, Constantinople, and Delhi flourished. The decline and fall of Islamic civilization came when Muslims started paying mere lip service to the formula of faith and departing from the spirit and purposes of the Sharīʿah. This was the unfortunate phenomenon throughout the Muslim world. Fortunately, the rightly inspired people rose to bring back the erring Muslims to the path of the Sharīʿah. This paper seeks to present an assessment of the dynamics used by a *Mujaddid* (a promoter of *Tajdid* or revival) of West Africa to re-Islamize a society that had sunk into the abyss of confusion.

Islam in West Africa

West Africa, situated south of the Sahara desert, and which the Arab historians called *Bilād al Sūdān*, has witnessed in the past, many Islamic empires, e.g., Ghana, Mali, Songhai, and Bornu, the last of which was the Sokoto Caliphate. It emerged from the process of *Tajdid* (renewal or revival in accordance with the Qurʾān and Sunnah)¹ which was started by Shehu (Shaikh) ʿUthmān Danfodio (1754-1817)² in 1774, and which culminated in

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the establishment of *Dār al-Islām* in the Western Sudan around 1803. Shehu's death in 1817 ended what we may call "the revolutionary phase" in the history of the Caliphate. A new phase followed in the flowering of the ideal Islamic *Ummah* from 1817 to 1837. The Caliphate was properly nurtured into a pure Islamic government according to the guidelines provided by the Shehu in not less than a hundred books and tracts of which the *magnum opus* was *Ihyā al-sunnah wa Ikmād al-Bid'ah*.³

These works taken together graphically discuss the ideals that nourished the Caliphate, enabling it to grow from the Pagan city-state of Gobir ruled by Habe kings into a West African super-state. The efforts of the pious and learned scholars, who had at one time gathered together in Timbuktu to teach and preach the most comprehensive and all-encompassing ideals of *DTn* and *Siyāsah* at Sankore University,⁴ ultimately found an honest and dedicated spokesman who taught and re-enacted their tradition. Mahmūd Ka'tī, the famous West African historian, in his book, *Ta'rīkh al-Fattāsh*, has described the glory of Timbuktu in these words: "Religion flourished and the *Sunnah* enlivened both religious and worldly affairs. . . . In those days it had no equal in the Sudan, from Mali to the edges of the Maghrib, for soundness of institutions, political liberties, purity of customs, security of life and goods, and respect for and assistance to, the students and men of learning."⁵

Shehu 'Uthman did exactly the same. He "enlivened the sunnah" in both religious and worldly affairs. Shehu 'Uthmān became the symbol of the religious Caliphate, its central focus and the final arbiter in moments of crisis for as long as the Islamic dispensation in the Sokoto Caliphate lasted before the coming of the British. Through his Islamization process, Shehu 'Uthman lives in the memory of all the *Ummah* in West Africa even today. He will, inshā' Allāh, remain the veritable symbol of the Muslim *Ummah* in a considerable part of Africa for all time to come.

The Process of Tajdīd

The *Tajdīd* process of the Shehu, popularly known as *Jihād*, was essentially a struggle between believers and unbelievers; and in the political context of the time, it was a struggle between the advocates of justice and the tyrannical rulers. It was, in fact, a culmination of an 'ālim's reform movement, and was nothing other than the repetition of the recurrent drama involving the conflict between the forces of the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) and Abū Jahl. As Allāmah Dr. Iqbāl says:

ستیزہ کارہا ہے ازل سے تا بہ ابد
شرار بو طہبی سے چراغ مصطفوی

From time immemorial, there has been constant rivalry and struggle between the spark of Abū Lahab and the light from the Lamp of Mustafā (ṢAAṢ).

In his struggle, the Shehu started first by cultivating his own ideas on the basis of the Qur'ān and Sunnah and then re-orienting the minds of other men in accordance with these ideas. He was, in a way, following in the footsteps of the *Astāf*, our noble predecessors who lived in the shadows of the memory of the Prophet (ṢAAṢ) in the first century of Islam. Only in this way can a Mujaddid, determined to challenge all decadence and oppression, defeat the evil-doers in their diabolic efforts to de-Islamize Islamic society. When *Zulm*, in the form of unbelief or tyranny, is increasingly threatened, its perpetrators, in utter desperation, resort to force and coercion, thereby bringing into being the phases of *hijrah* (exile) and *jihād* as happened in the Makkan and Medinan periods.

Jihād is the most intensive stage in the process of *tajdīd*. It serves, on the one hand, to purge the revolutionary movement of its wayward elements and fence-sitters—to separate the grain from the chaff as it were—and to grace some of the sincere elements in the revolutionary process with martyrdom. On the other hand, *jihād* serves as a cleansing exercise, to rid the world of tyranny, together with its institutions and the men who symbolize it. It is the moral transformation of the entire *Ummah*.

After all, every man, Islam tells us, is *mukallaf*, i.e., charged with the realization of the Divine will. "This *taklīf*, or charge," says Professor Ismā'il āl-Fārūqī, "is based on his natural endowment constituting his *sensus communis* which he shares with humanity. This innate but educable *sensus* is the faculty by which he recognizes his Creator and perceives His will as the ought-to-be of his life. Islam therefore not only declares every man responsible but categorically denies every assumption of non-*taklīf* to any adult of sound mind. In Islam every man is expected to carry his own personal burden in full consciousness and is given respect in proportion to his realization of his responsibility. This follows from the nature of *amānah* or divine trust, committed to man by Allah.⁶ To that extent, revolution, with all that it entails in bloodshed and destruction, as happened in the case of the Shehu's *Jihād* of renewal, can be seen as a blessing for men, because by it oppression is destroyed, and a new world, based on definite values and on definite moral and social commitments, is created. Through *Jihad* people are given a new breath of life, and a new sense of direction after a long period of decay and disorientation.

In the West African setting under the Habe rulers, it was extremely difficult for the Shehu and the *Jamā'ah* he had formed to distinguish between believers and unbelievers because of their *takhlīf* (syncretism).⁷ In two of his books *Tamyīz al-Muslimīn* and *Sirāj al-Ikhwān*, the Shehu concentrates on this point and defines a Muslim or a believer as a person who affirms his belief

in Allah and in Muhammad (ṢAAS) as His Messenger, who keeps his faith pure and safeguards it against corruption, and practices Islam as laid down in the Sharī'ah to the best of his ability. Moreover, he does not mingle Islamic belief with the beliefs of *kufṛ*, nor the Islamic practices with those of *kufṛ*, nor yet mock at or deny the essential elements of Islamic faith and practice. An unbeliever, on the other hand, the Shehu says, is a person who does not affirm his belief in Allah and His Messenger; he worships idols of all sorts, and he mingles the practices of Islam with those of *kufṛ*, even though he might claim to be a Muslim; and he speaks lightly of Islam and ridicules Islamic sacred institutions. It is true that there can be no doubt that the essence of Islamic civilization is Islam; or that the essence of Islam is *Tawḥīd* or unization of Allah, which is the act of affirming Allah to be the One, the absolute, transcendent Creator, the Lord and Master of all there is.⁸

The Problem of Takhlīṭ

The most difficult task in the process of *Tajdīd*, therefore, is to stamp out *takhlīṭ*, the syncretic beliefs and practices in which a person is engrossed. Innovations in the matter of religion seem always very attractive. They are difficult to remove from a person because he thinks that they are part of religion, whereas in reality they are not. New departures are, as the Shehu has pointed out, *Bid'at al-Shairāniyyah* or diabolic innovations.

It was essential therefore on the part of the Shehu to make this *tamayīz* (distinction) between the believers of *Tawḥīd* and the followers in the footsteps of the Shaitān and elevate it into the central theme in his work plan for reformation. The Shehu defines *Bid'ah* as whatever is extraneous to the Qur'ān, Sunnah, and *Ijmā'*. It is a new thing introduced into Religion which is not part of it—though it has a semblance of being part of it—either in essence or similitude. For a thing to be regarded as *bid'ah*, however, it is not enough that it is a “new thing.” It must also constitute a negation of the essence and spirit of the Qur'ān and Sunnah. But a “new thing” which is consistent with the essence and spirit of the law and which is intended to advance the cause of Islam is not considered as extraneous to the Law. Thus, when the Prophet stated that “whoever introduces in this affair of ours (i.e. Islam) something that does not belong, it shall be rejected,” he was referring to whatever vitiates or has the effect of nullifying religion and its fundamental roots.

The Political Approach

On the political front, the process of integrating the Muslims into one large and loving family of Allah naturally led to a desire on the Shehu's part to

work for *Dār al-Islām* the “home of Islam” and the home of justice, as opposed to the home of unbelief and tyranny to whose rule the family of Allah had been subjected by the Habe rulers. There was no doubt about the intellectual and moral superiority that Muslims enjoyed over the unbelievers; and Shehu ‘Uthmān’s intensive educational, spiritual, and moral programs helped to sharpen the social consciousness of those who were being mobilized for *Islāh*, (the highest form of worship through action) change, and reformation. It was this consciousness, which permeated every corner of society that alarmed the oppressing ruling elites. Muslims gained the awareness that idol worshippers and corrupt and inept rulers and tyrants had no moral right to rule over them nor to be their master. It was beneath their dignity as believers to subdue themselves before tyrants or as the Shehu put it, *Abna’ al-dunyā* (creatures of the material world). They had a duty, they were told, to seek the means to live as Muslims, to secure their own dignity and the integrity of Islam; in short, to overthrow the unbelieving power and establish *Dār al-Islām*.

All the West African scholars before Shehu ‘Uthmān who came and lived in Nigeria were disgusted with the prevailing un-Islamic situation in this country. For example, the revolutionary and vastly respected North African scholar, ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Maghīlī al-Ṭilmasānī, who traveled and lived in some of the key cities and states of *Bilad al-Sudan*, such as Kano, Katsina and Gao, wrote treatises giving advice to some of the rulers, notably Muhammad Rumfa of Kano and Askia Muhammad of Songhai. His advice was instrumental in the establishment and enhancement of the *Sharīah* as the basis of the legal order of those states and helped to bring about an Islamic transformation of those societies in general.

The fire of revolutionary Tajdīd, or fundamental renewal, which he kindled in the 15th century A.C., kept burning for three centuries until it was translated into a real political and social force in the nineteenth century by Shehu ‘Uthmān DanFodio. In his famous work *Ajwibah*,⁹ al-Maghīlī emphasized that *tajdīd* was an historical imperative; it was essentially the responsibility of scholars imbued with both knowledge and piety; and its ultimate purpose was to establish the truth, remove falsehood, overthrow a tyrannical order, and establish justice in the land.

The ‘Ulmā al-Sū’

But such ‘*Ulamā*, imbued with knowledge and piety as envisaged by Al-Maghīlī, were not easy to find in Hausaland. Some were merely court-‘*Ulamā* of the Habe kings. On an ‘Īd day, the ‘*Ulamā* were invited by the king and were given presents in the form of gold. Shehu ‘Uthman did not sit with

these *Ulamā*, but occupied a place towards the *tail-end* of the prayer ground, and refused to accept the present. There was a plan to take his life, but Allah saved him on this occasion. The most serious obstacle encountered by the Shehu in his effort to bring about the moral, political and intellectual transformation of Hausaland therefore came from the '*Ulamā al-Sū*', that is, the corrupt and venal scholars. While the challenge posed by the kings was basically political, the '*Ulamā al-Sū*' challenged the Shehu intellectually by supporting the kings.

If the Shehu had failed in facing up to their challenge, his movement would have lost the moral and intellectual battle it had to win in order to overcome the social and political battles that lay ahead. This intellectual, and in many respects, ideological war with the '*Ulamā al-Sū*' continued from the time the Shehu became prominent towards the end of his life.

Most horrifying was the laxity of the '*Ulamā al-Sū*', even on the fundamental issues of faith (*Imān*) and *Tawhīd*. When Shehu realized that these selfish '*Ulamā*' were not doing their duties, he thought that another effective method was to write books and treatises on this important subject. He kept on writing to guide his own followers, to persuade others with contrary views to accept the opinions of the great jurists, and to demolish the "delusions" created by the '*Ulamā al-Sū*' regarding the faith of the common people. Muhammad Bello, Shehu's son, says in *Infāq al-Maysūr* that the Shehu wrote as many as fifty books on this question of *Tawhīd* and *Imān* alone. Of these, the most important works were *Tanbīh al-Talabā*, *ātā anna-Altāh Tā 'atā Ma'rūf bil-Fitrah*¹⁰ and *Irshād ahl al-Tafrīt wa al-Ifrāta*.¹¹

In his books *Ta'īm al-Ikhwān* and *Tanbīh al-Ikhwān*, Shehu 'Uthmān enlighten the reader about the type of syncretic rulers against whom he was to proclaim his *Jihād* of reform and justifies his resorting to arms against these kings. Shehu 'Uthmān gives four broad reasons: First, most of the rulers were idol-worshippers, the Hausa rulers in particular, the Shehu states in *Ta'īm al-Ikhwān* that *al-Ikhwān* paid homage to trees and stones, made animal sacrifices to them, and turned to them for the fulfillment of their needs. Thus, they were unbelievers, even though they prayed, fasted, and performed other rites of Islam.

"To be sure, the Shehu writes further, in the effort to stress the clearcut distinction between Islam and *Kufir*, "the believers give glory to Allah by prostrating themselves before Him, by slaughtering animals by way of sacrifice, and (giving) alms and offerings (in the cause of Allah). Thus by showing respect for the holy things of Allah and the manifestation of His religion, they attain goodness. . . unbelievers, in contrast, show respect to trees and stones and other things that are the objects of polytheistic worship by their prostration, sacrifice, and offerings. They glorify the manifestations of unbelief, and in so doing they follow the promptings of the Evil One. So, in glorifying the manifestations of unbelief they go astray, and are undone and lost."

Secondly, the kings consciously became obstacles in the path of Islam: they prevented people from becoming Muslims, persecuted those who had already joined its fold, and organized their policies to favor pagan customs and institutions. In the Shehu's eyes, therefore, they behaved in the manner of Pharaoh, and rising against them in those circumstances accordingly was perfectly justified. "They obstructed many from repentance," the Shehu states in *Ta'īim al-Ikhwān*. "Such an attitude constitutes unbelief. . . because it (indicates) one's inner satisfaction with people's relapse into unbelief, and outwardly is an (undisguised attempt) to turn (people) away from the path of Allah. . . . Such (passive) disinterest and active obstruction is unbelief according to the consensus of the Muslims. . . ."

Thirdly, the Habe kings were, at their very best, secular rulers. While pretending outward respect for Islam and its institutions and values, they nevertheless subordinated Islam to secular considerations and policies. They never, for example, fought in the name of Islam in their numerous wars nor undertook the spread and consolidation of Islam. Instead they devoted themselves wholly to secular domain, acquiring its glory as avidly as they could, and in the words of the Shehu, were "raising the flag of earthly power above the flag of Islam." The flag of Islam thus had to be raised by someone else if the rulers refused to raise it.

Fourthly, it was not the Muslims who started the fight; it was the unbelieving powers that sought to crush the Muslims and annihilate Islam. The revolution therefore was provoked by the need on the part of the Muslims to defend their faith, their lives, their family and their possessions. In other words, the *jihād* was forced on the Shehu and his *Mamā'ah* Movement.

The final moments just before the revolutionary momentum exploded are described thus by the Shehu's brother Abdullahi Dan Fodio, as quoted by the Shehu in *Tanbīh*:

So we migrated from their land in the year 1218 A.H. (1803). . . to a place outside Gobir territory. The Muslims all migrated, following us. Many of them joined us with their people 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 those who fled or prevent them from leaving. 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. And Hausaland, in consequence, exploded.

The Hausa establishment, by seeking to crush Islam, brought about its own end. In short, the revolution was the outcome of the conflict between those who, to borrow the Shehu's words, glorified the manifestation of *kufṛ*.

On the whole, the revolution was effected, as in all other Islamic revolutions, not in order for one set of people to annihilate another or gain political ascendancy and territory. The revolution aimed principally to achieve four goals: to make the word of Allah supreme; to bring unbelief, corruption, and tyranny to an end; to bring dignity and honor to Muslims and save them from the humiliation of having to live under an un-Islamic power; and finally to give people – Muslims and non-Muslims alike – the opportunity and privilege to enjoy a life in a territory ennobled by faith and permeated by morality and justice.

Jihād of the Sokoto Caliphate

For the purpose of convenience, we may classify the *Jihād* of the Sokoto Caliphate into two categories; 1) internal *Jihād*, or what the Shehu called *hurūb al masālih*, i.e., corrective wars aimed at preserving internal stability and peace; and 2) external *jihād*, aimed at eliminating injustice, defending Islam and the realm against its enemies, and exalting the Word of Allah.

The first kind of *Jihād*, the corrective war, is fought principally against three forces, as the Shehu explains in his book, *Bayān Wujūb al Hijrah*, namely, the forces of apostasy, social destabilization, and rebellion. The first category was strictly limited. The general understanding in Hausa society at the time of the Shehu was that apostates are those who undermine the ideology of society by reneging on their belief in Islam *and* actively seeking to subvert legitimate authority by force of arms. In addition to the requirement that they use force to qualify as apostates, they must, in Islam thinking, also be guilty of oppression or hypocrisy. If they are oppressing people and violating their human rights, they must be opposed for that reason. If they became Muslims hypocritically with the specific intent later to apostasize at a critical moment in order to discredit Islam, as happened in several well-known instances at the time of the early Umma in Medina, then they must be destroyed for their duplicity in support of armed subversion.

The war against apostates should never undermine the rights of those non-Muslims who share the spiritual wisdom and moral principles of the primordial Dīn, which is common to all the great religions of the world. In tribal West Africa at the time of the Shehu, few former Muslims would qualify as genuinely religious people. Admittedly this distinction between true freedom of religion, which is Islam's most basic requirement for human dignity, and a false freedom for immorality, license, and injustice is not easily understood or maintained by the oppressor's victims in the heat of revolution.

The Shehu treated the true apostates as total enemies of the community. Thus "no treaty can be concluded permitting them to remain in their land, no peace treaty can be made allowing them to remain as apostates merely

by paying a sum of money, . . . and no marriage contract with them is valid," explained the Shehu in *Bayān*. In short, they have forfeited their citizenship in *Dār al Islām* and cannot be permitted to live within its borders unless they first renounce their apostasy and stop their active subversion of the Islamic faith.

Rebels, or *bughāt*, as defined in *Bayān Wujūb al Hijrah* as well as in *Diya al Hukkām*, are "those who revolt against the leader or refuse to follow his way, or withhold a lawful due such as *Zakāt* or the like," or prevent others from obeying the Imām (Amīr or leader). The first thing to do with them is to call them "back to the truth." If they respond favorably, they must be left in peace; if they refuse, then they should be brought under control by military means.

The *magnum opus* of Shehu ʿUthmān DanFodio, as we have observed before, was his *ihyā al-Sunnah wa Ikhmād al-Bidʿah*, the Revival of the Sunnah of the Prophet (ṢAAṢ) and the destruction of the diabolic innovations in the belief and practices of Muslims. *Ihyā* is the work-plan for the Shehu's *Tajdīd* movement. He calls for the principles he carefully laid down in the introduction to this book.

We call these principles in the work-plan of the Shehu, the "Principles of Social Mobilization," because they explain why the Shehu succeeded where others had failed in their efforts to bring about an abiding social transformation of the *Ummah* in this part of the world.

The first and the foremost of these principles was the revival of the *Sunnah* and the removal of innovations, i.e., the re-orientation of society in Islamic lines, rests fundamentally on counseling and giving sincere advice (*nasīḥah*) to individual Muslims. While doing so, the intention is the fulfillment of one's obligation as an *ʿālim* of *Dīn* and not at all to bring shame upon them or find fault with them. "Whoever," the Shehu says, "is motivated by the intent to expose the secrets of other people and is pre-occupied with their faults, will be brought to account and taken to task by Allah, because if ever one pursues the weakness of his brother, Allah will pursue his weakness until He exposes him, even if he is in the recess of his house." Fault-finding and putting people to shame, even under the pretext of seeking a social transformation, constitute "a grave risk and a tremendous sin" and reveals the attitude of a hypocrite (*Munāfiq*).

A second principle of his *Tajdīd* process was the establishment of the *Sunnah*. By implication, this suggested the attraction of the people to the fold of Islam, to reassure them in their faith and actions, and not to reject them.

The third principle require those who call others to Islam to work for the unity of all Muslims, without which the entire work-plan will fail.

The Shehu's *Tajdīd* was therefore not merely a political revolution or change of leadership. If it were so, then there would be quicker ways than recourse to the Qurʾān and Sunnah. But *Tajdīd*, he rightly thought, was the

transformation of the heart, of human disposition, and that of the destiny of man itself, which clearly transcends the attainment of political power. Time can never run against Islam, so to believe that a quick political ascendancy is all that Islam is about is to cast a vulgar look at a sublime system; what Islam aims at is an enduring transformation, which cannot be realized by a social hurricane that brings about destruction everywhere and consumes even what it claims to restore.

The Shehu's concept of *Tajdīd* therefore implied that human society should never be left in darkness and corruption; it must be guided to light and uprightness. Nor should injustice be allowed to prevail in the land, because this would frustrate the divine purpose for men, which is the establishment of justice on earth. Man collectively and every person individually has an obligation to overthrow any system of injustice and to establish a just system in its place. Nor indeed should *Kalimat al-kufr*, the false gods of deviant, godless, misleading ideologies be allowed to prevail on earth; man has an obligation to strive until *Kalimat-Allāh*, becomes supreme on earth, and remains so forever. In short, until corruption, injustice, and the polytheism of false ideologies are uprooted completely and the religion of Allah prevails everywhere, the world should never be left in peace. After all, as the Qur'an outlines, *Kalimat-Allāh hiyal 'ulyā*, the word of Allah reigns supreme, and all in opposition are *sufṭā*, the lowest of the low.

The *Tajdīd* revolution eventually succeeded, the Kokoto Caliphate became a reality, and *Dār al-Islām* was established, but only at an enormous cost. The *jihād* required the Muslims to undertake a long and arduous trek—covering hundreds of miles—and to undergo starvation, epidemics, deprivation, and death to attain *Dār al-Islā*. "Our country was ruined," lamented Sultān Muhammad Bello in *Infāq al-Maysūr*,¹² when assessing the effects of the struggle.

Shehu 'Uthmān DanFodio had established firm principles on which the Sokoto Caliphate was to be run. His method of preaching and teaching, his formation of the *Jamā'ah*, his hijrah from Degel to Gudi, the socio-political frame-work that he found time to write in at least one hundred books, in spite of his extremely busy career, had left enough guidelines for Sultān Muhammad Bello to manage the affairs of the Caliphate on the basis of Islamic principles.

The principles, as Professor 'Abdullahi Smith has pointed out, remained in force throughout the entire life of the Sokoto Caliphate, where rulers had to justify their actions and policies on the basis of the Shar'ah. As he put it: "Why must *Amīrs* consult their subjects before making a decision? Because God said so. Why must *Amīrs* not take bribes? Because the last of the Prophets of God said so. Throughout the *jihād* literature it is the authority of the Qur'an and of the accepted Traditions that is invariably quoted to justify the ideals of government which *Amīrs* must continually have in mind. No other authority

is adequate. . . .¹³ In the final analysis, the unity and cohesion of the Caliphate was upheld by its absolute commitment to the Sharī'ah in every way and by the clearly greater success in doing so than could be found anywhere in Islamic history outside the early Rāshidū period. The Sharī'ah, in effect, preserved the Caliphate, and not the other way round. As Professor Murry Last puts it: "Respect for the Law and Islam was the source of authority for the Sokoto Caliphate. So long as the Caliph upheld the Sharī'ah, he was unimpeachable, and those who denied his authority were unbelievers. . . . The universal nature of the law, having an existence and validity separate from the Sokoto Caliphate, gave Sokoto the power it did not have militarily. The Amīrs outside Sokoto. . . respected this law and obeyed Sokoto as established under it. . . . (The Law) gave to their position the same universal legality possessed by the Caliphate."

The most important principles for social mobilization was unity, that is, the requirement that the Caliphate pursue vigorously the integration of the Muslim *Ummah*. The *Ummah* has faced this problem throughout the centuries with the exception of the period of the four Rāshidūn Caliphs, and it is still facing it today. This first task was the internal organization of the society to ensure harmony based on justice and brotherhood. If so doing required subduing venal scholars (*Ulamā al-Sū*), rebels, and all those who would seek to destroy the harmony of the *Ummah* by military means, then so be it. The policy of integration also entailed the absorption of weak and fragmentary Muslim communities into the *Dār-al-Islām*, by peaceful means if possible or by force of arms if need be. The highest priority was for the *Ummah* to remain strong. "It is not lawful," as Shehu 'Uthmān says in *Sirāj al-Ikhwān*, (quoting al-Maghīlī), "for a group of Muslims to remain without a ruler," or an effective government. "So strive against them with the sword until they all enter into (the bond of) obedience to God and His Messenger. That is one of the worthiest and most important of *jihāds*. Nor must oppressive rulers in Muslim countries be spared; these should be fought and brought to their knees ". . . as long as you fight them for the victory of truth over falsehood and the victory of the oppressed over the oppressor."

For his internal reforms in the Sokoto Caliphate, says Professor Abdullahi Smith, "the Shehu continually cried out against bribery and corruption in government and the general immorality of officials, and emphasized the need for positive action by the government to promote the welfare of the people. The chief officials of the Sokoto Caliphs held the title *amīr al masālih* which could be translated. . . as officer in charge of public welfare.¹⁴ The Shehu first noted in his *Kitāb al-Farq*¹⁵ that the system of government which the Caliphate had displaced was characterized by arbitrary rule, disrespect for the Sharī'ah, luxury, universal corruption, dispossession of the poor, to whom the gates of welfare were closed; and then he pledged that the Islamic

government would in all respects create a society in which there would be justice and moral rectitude.

The Caliphate, he emphasized, would effect, as 'Abdullahi Smith puts it, "spiritual reform aimed at raising the moral tone of society and providing a social ideology in accordance with Islamic ideas." There would be universal dissemination of knowledge under a system of education based fundamentally on the Qur'ān and Sunnah. Then, of course, there would be a reformed economic system, which emphasized improvement of markets, the development of communication, and provision of social services to the poor and the needy. The Shehu also pledged to promote the moral good of society by safeguarding the economic well-being of society through strict judicial control over the financial transactions of government. The Shehu summed up these cardinal principles of State policy in his book *Najm al-Ikhwān* in these words: "*al-mulk huwa nizām al-'ālam, wa'l adl rūhuhu*" in other words, government pertains to proper organization of the world, and justice is its soul."

The four main sources concerning Shehu 'Uthmān's educational reforms are *Nūr al-Albāb*¹⁶ in which he emphasized ways and means for the education of women, *Idā 'al-Nusūkh*,¹⁷ the *Tazyīn al-Waraqāt* of his brother 'Abdullahi DanFodio, and *Asānīd al-Faqīr* of Shehu 'Uthmān himself. In his book, *Nūr al-Albāb*, the Shehu said that "the prevalence of calamity in the Hausa country had resulted from the negligence of women's education. . . One of these impious practices is the custom of most of the 'Ulamā to leave their wives and daughters neglected like animals without teaching them what Allah had enjoined on them regarding not only articles of faith, ablution, and prayer, but other things which God commands that they should be taught, such as their economic rights in business transactions. This (behavior towards women) is a grievous error and a forbidden innovation." He concluded:

They treat their wives and daughters like household implements which are used until they are broken and thrown into the rubbish heap. Alas! How can they abandon their wives and daughters in the perpetual darkness of ignorance while they daily impart their knowledge to their students? This is nothing but error because they are instructing their students in this manner out of sheer egotism and hypocrisy.

Shehu 'Uthmān has again repeated the need to educate women in his famous work *Ihyā al-Sunnah*:

If anyone says that women are generally ignorant of these matters (i.e. matters relating to business transactions) my reply is that it is as incumbent upon them to endeavor to know these (commercial regulations) as it is binding upon them to know about others matters pertaining to their religion like ablutions, fasting, and praying.

The Impact of Shehu 'Uthmān's Message

The message of Shehu 'Uthman worked so well that female education among the Muslims in Northern Nigeria became a matter of pride. His *jihād* was followed by a literary resurgence. The Shehu's two daughters were highly educated and their literary contributions have come down to us as specimens of learning among Muslim women in West Africa. The elder daughter of Shehu 'Uthman used to give religious instructions and lessons on Islamic Studies, law, and jurisprudence. The younger daughter of the Shehu, Asmā Nānā, was a renowned poetess. The Shehu used to encourage women to attend his lectures and preachings as mentioned in the famous work *Tazyīn al-Waraqāt*¹⁹ by the Shehu's brother 'Abdullahi.

Another priority area in the Shehu's work-plan was the institution of *walī al-mazalim*, which provided an Ombudsman or system to accommodate and respond to public complaints. This system was introduced, Shehu 'Uthmān says in *Bayān wujūb al-Hijrah*, later in Islamic history when people had become corrupt, and despotic rulers had "weakened the judges so as to be in a position to oppress their subjects and reduced people to dependency on them. Thus the despots could continue their injustices unopposed." Basically this office falls within the jurisdiction of the judiciary, but the force of circumstances made it necessary to establish it as an independent institution in its own right. It was conceived as an institution with greater political power, though not necessarily moral authority, than the judiciary.

As the Shehu states in *Bayān*, the *walī al-mazālim* deals with cases beyond the *qādī's* power, and requiring, therefore, a man of greater political authority. In an ideal setting, this "greater authority" is the *Imām* or leader himself. A typical case arises when there is a dispute between two weak persons, one of whom has been favored, or between a weak and a strong man or between two strong men, where one has the advantage of being supported by men in authority such as *amīrs* and provincial governors acting unjustly. These are the cases which the caliph took it upon himself to settle. The office is necessitated by the presumption that it is calamitous for the *imam* to remain inaccessible to his people, and therefore it is his binding obligation to hear the complaints of his people, particularly women,²⁰ against himself, his governors, and his officials; for unless he deals with such matters with the attention and promptness they deserve, he will only be undermining his own government.

According to Shehu 'Uthmān, seven specific functions are assigned to this office. These details are available in his brother 'Abdullahi's books, *Diya al-Hukkām* and *Diya al-Wilāyat*, and his son Bello's, *al-Ghayth al-Wābl*. Muhammad Bello suggests before enumerating these functions that the custodian of this office "must be more powerful than the *qādī*, since he deals essentially

with complaints against the mighty, who must be restrained from dragging the people down by fear, i.e., from governing by terror, intimidation and, coercion." "It is essential" Sultān Bello writes further, "that he be seen to have knowledge of the law and to be pious." He is to be assisted by the police, and by judges, jurists, clerks, and witnesses.

According to Muhammad Bello, the *walī al-mazālim* has the fundamental responsibility to ensure that governmental polices are neither harsh nor cruel, and do not constitute an excessive burden on the people. He should ensure that the taxes imposed are lawful, fair and not excessive; that the method of collecting them is guided by "equitable regulations," and that where citizens are overtaxed they are duly refunded; and, above all, he must keep a vigilant eye on the "custodians of the muslim treasury," to make sure that they keep to the strict Islamic rules of accounting and financial management.

In addition, the *walī al-mazālim* has the responsibility to ensure that public servants are paid their salaries promptly, and in full, and are not oppressed by having their salaries deducted and the like. Furthermore, he should ensure that citizens' goods "seized illegally by the authority" or by some powerful elements in society are restored to their legitimate owners. It is also his duty to implement those laws of Islam regarding the rights of ordinary citizens which the judges and the inspectors of public morality may have judged "too weak to put into effect." Finally, the *walī al-mazālim* looks after charitable endowments (*awqāf*) — such as schools, hospitals, and similar institutions committed for public purposes — and has a say in the upkeep of mosques and matters affecting the Hajj.

The other important aspect that Shehu 'Uthmān emphasized in his work plan for the proper functioning of the Sokoto Caliphate was the institution of *Hisbah*, or accountability for the preservation of social morality. This institution, was to be supervised by the *muhtasib*, charged with the care of one of Islam's greatest concerns: *Amr bil Ma'rūf wa Nahy 'anil munkar*, that is, commanding the good prohibiting the wrong, or in other words, the preservation of Islamic social morality.

Details about the functions of this institution of *Hisbah* are to be found in 'Abdullahi's *Diyā ahl-Ihtisāb*, *Diyā al-Imām*, and Muhammad Bello's *al-Ghayth al-Wabl*.²¹ To start with, 'Abdullahi states in his definitive work on this subject, *Diyā ahl al-Ihtisāb*, that the basis for *Hisbah* is to be found in the obligations of the Muslim *Ummah* "to command the right and forbid the evil," that is, to safeguard its own moral integrity so as not to fall into a moral debacle in which the Islamic social and political structure is turned upside down, enabling the worst of its members to take control of the affairs of state. Ideally, this responsibility should be carried by the *'ulamā*, since it is, in principle, a matter of public education aimed at awakening individual Muslims to their basic moral responsibilities. The institution of *Hisbah* rests on the notion that

every member of society should be sufficiently educated so that he may know what his responsibilities to the *Ummah* are and how they can be discharged. As long as even one single individual is left without this minimum social consciousness, the Islamic government, as 'Abdullahi implies, has yet to discharge its obligations in full.

In broad terms, the *muhtasib* is supposed to deal with three matters: regulation of the market; promotion of justice in society, especially as it relates to economic dealings; and finally, the preservation of public morality. With regards to the market or trade and commerce, the *muhtasib's* first function is to control the quality of goods being sold. The Shehu complained in *Sirāj al-Ikhwān* that some tradesmen were in the habit of embellishing passing it for silver, others were refusing to separate gold dust from sand, and others yet were enlarging portions of meat by blowing air into them or mixing milk with water. It was the duty of the *muhtasib*, he said, to put an end to all these practices. Muhammad Bello, in *al-Ghayth al-Wabl*, adds that all commodities that are adulterated, ill-prepared, or otherwise below the required standard should be destroyed, and, to ensure that offenders are apprehended, all commodities must bear the stamp and name of their respective manufacturers, so that evidence can easily be established against them.

The *muhtasib's* second function according to 'Abdullahi, is the responsibility of preventing artificial and unwarranted rises in prices without necessarily imposing artificial prices of his own. He insists, it is not good to impose prices on people (*Lā khair fī tas'īr 'alan nās*).²² In addition, the *muhtasib* should strive to eliminate all forms of *ribā*, i.e., fixed interest rates and unjust enrichment in commercial transactions.

Perhaps the most important of *muhtasib's* functions in the market, however, is to standardize weights and measures, and eliminate all traces of fraud in this regard. Shehu 'Uthmān, in agreement with Shaikh al-Maghīlī, suggests that the country should be divided into economic zones, each zone having one standard of weights and measures which should be checked constantly to ensure that "no excess or deficiency would be apparent, or none that is of any significance." The *muhtasib*, the Shehu urges further, must accept nothing less than absolute perfection in weights and measures, and in scales and balances in the market. The principle is the establishment of justice between seller and customer by using perfect and flawless means of measures. The Shehu elsewhere makes the additional demand on the *muhtasib* that he should prevent ignorant people from acting either as tradesmen or agents in Muslim markets and permit only those acquainted with the basic Islamic rules guiding transactions.

In the sphere of social morality, the third function, the *muhtasib*, according to Abdullahi, has the following responsibilities: to safeguard the spiritual values of Islam, the most important of which is public worship (*ṣalāt*); to

ensure that proper hygiene standards are maintained in homes, and that neighbors do not cause health injuries to one another; and to ensure that public health is maintained, for example, that streets are kept clean and free of wastes; the sewage system is properly organized; and animals are fairly treated and not physically abused. Similarly, the *muhtasib* must act as a city planner to be sure that the layout of houses agrees with Islamic law so roads are not obstructed and homes are not deprived of fresh air by ill-placed walls. In addition, the *muhtasib* should safeguard public decency, by making sure that interactions of the sexes in public as well as the dress code complies generally with the Sharī'ah,²³ and equally important, that food is not wasted, especially in public, or perhaps official banquets. He should prevent the rich from immodest and extravagant display of wealth in public.²⁴

Finally, the *muhtasib* should ensure that the fundamental purposes of the Sharī'ah, such as the preservation of the human intellect and strengthening of the family institution, are realized. To that end, he shall control the flow of alcohol in society, and block all temptations to indecency and permissiveness, such as prostitution.

Since the *muhtasib* is concerned mainly with raising the moral tone of society, it is essential for him, as 'Abdullahi has expressed it, to observe high moral standards in discharging his duties. First of all, he must not create offenses out of his own imagination and then start apprehending people for contravening them. He must avoid acts which the society unanimously holds as constituting offenses against its fundamental moral values, and which are therefore known to be such by the majority of the people. Secondly, the *muhtasib* must observe maximum respect for individual rights; he cannot, for example, apprehend a person for an offence being committed in private; he cannot break into a house without the owner's permission. Nor can he go out of his way to deliberately seek out information about individuals, or subject people to search without warning or listen in on their conversations, or sniff their mouths for the smell of wine, or otherwise spy on them. Furthermore, *muhtasib* may not apprehend a person on the basis of the latter's mere intent, however strong, to commit a moral crime. As 'Abdullahi has summed up the principle: "We are ordered [by the Sharī'ah] to keep as secret what Allah has Himself kept secret, and to censure only what we see being committed in the open."

Above all, the *muhtasib* is required to employ a blend of firmness and leniency, using the most appropriate, rather than the lesser means in a given circumstance, in dealing with crimes. Thus, says 'Abdullahi, offenses committed out of ignorance should be dealt with "in a kindly manner, without roughness or injury," as it is unlawful to cause harm to Muslims. Ordinary offenses should similarly be disposed of "with compassion, not with harshness or anger," and, in some cases, with exhortations, appeals, and education.

It is only when all this fails to deter an offender that recourse can be made to strong, but not obscene, language.

Where willful damage is done to property, or where there has been a blatant violation of other people's rights, such as illegal occupation of another person's house, the *muhtasib* can use force without the use of arms, to rectify the situation. But no more force may be used than is necessary under the circumstances. Incurable criminals, however, may be subjected to threats and beating, when all peaceful means have been exhausted and they still persist in committing repeated crimes (*Tazīr*). Lastly, criminals who carry lethal weapons and are not amenable to appeals and moral education may, with the explicit permission of the Imam, be fought until they are overpowered. Any of the *muhtasib's* men killed in this fight would have died a martyr in the cause of Allah, says 'Abdullahi.

From its functions as elaborated in the Sokoto Caliphate, one cannot but agree with the Shehu that *Hisbah* is the most versatile and extensive of the organs of state. Under Caliph Muhammad Bello, the *muhtasib*, also known as *alkālin Kasuwa* in Hausa language (the judge in charge of matters related to the market place), maintained a considerable influence in the governmental hierarchy. In addition to overseeing commerce, supervising buildings and streets to ensure that they complied with the law in respect to their upkeep and layout, the *muhtasib*, Muhammad Julde, administered the capital whenever the Caliph was away.

The ethical and cultural values of the Sokoto Caliphate can also be witnessed in the *Kitāb adab al-ādat 'alā sunnat al-Rasūl* and *Diya' al-ummah* by Shaikh 'Abdullahi. The Islamic legal rules governing wages, income, and profits applied also to illegal trafficking and other such practices. In the words of Professor Sani Zahradeen: "The selling of free men and making them servants by force, and withholding their wages, were all illegal acts. . . and fraud and cheating were prohibited. The use of deceitful charms had also been forbidden."²⁵ 'Abdullahi said in his book *Kifāyat al-Awām Fil buyū*: "O you sellers in the market, beware of the actions of the godless people as well as the hoarding of food or cotton because they are all illegal acts."²⁶

Shehu 'Abdullahi said that social intercourse with people was permissible only with those who were of agreeable mental or intellectual disposition, of good character, and "not covetous." People of evil repute were bound to be harmful to others, for even when they were intelligent, they could easily succumb to "passion, anger, miserliness, or cowardice." Besides, no one could be safe from the treachery of the profligate, and "associating with the greedy is a deadly poison."

Social intercourse might be avoided only for the sake of retiring for worship (*ṣalāt*), escaping from social upheavals (*fitnah*) and disputes, and saving oneself from the temptation to harm others, coveting their possessions, or

similar evils. Withdrawal from society, especially by the learned people who were best capable of changing it, might have calamitous consequences for the fabric of society, because it might cause a decline of knowledge, loss of mutual benefit, and failure to uphold the rights of the people. Withdrawal from society was the concern of the scholars (*Ulamā*) alone, who as it frequently happened, might be compelled to do so by social and political circumstances; however, withdrawal in this case should be undertaken only as a last resort, and the object should always be to come back, if possible, to change it. Ordinary people should not withdraw from society; otherwise, said 'Abdullahi, "they would run the risk of making themselves a laughing stock for a Shaitān."

The Sokoto Caliphate, established on these solid Islamic foundations by Shehu 'Uthmān DanFodio and further strengthened by his brother, 'Abdullahi and Sultān Muhammad Bello, unfortunately fell to the British imperialists who had no regard for the Islamic value system. On the contrary, they had wanted to destroy its very foundation. This unfortunate event took place on March 15, 1903.

Caliph Attahiru and Muslims in general showed such great heroism that fifty of their number died, one after the other, just to keep the Caliphate's flag aloft. Caliph Muhammad Attahiru (Muhammad al-Tāhir) who commanded the Muslim forces in person, thereupon embarked on the *Hijrah*, heading eastward. All along his route, the Caliph was joined by thousands upon thousands of Muslims of all classes. In some cities practically all able-bodied people, poor and rich, high and low, left their homes and property to answer the Caliph's call. The scale of movement of people was, as Adeleye²⁷ remarks, unprecedented in the African encounter with Imperialism. As the colonial officer reported: "Attahiru's following is immense, his people are said to walk from sunrise to mid-day passing." And: "The *Sarkin Muslumi* (*Amir al'Mu'minin*) has now many thousands of people with him. The whole population from Kano to the Gongola have joined him." Reports continued to indicate the alarming proportion of people the *Hijrah* was taking, stating that to allow the Caliph to stay in one place for even one week would cause the entire population to join him *en masse*.

The British at last came to the realization that Hijrah was proving to be an even more potent threat to their occupation of the Caliphate than the Jihād. So they decided to pursue the Caliph with the aim of liquidating him, having conceded to their utter consternation that Attahiru in exile was even more dangerous than Attahiru at home. Hence the battle of Burmi took place some six hundred miles from Sokoto on 27th July, 1903. It was to be the last battle between the Caliphate and Britain. But spears, swords, and bows and arrows were no match for the superior British firearms. The Muslims lost. At last the Caliph, who had been praying in the mosque, emerged. "He was on foot, unarmed," says Johnson, "and his intention was not to fight but to go out and

meet his fate. . . Death came to him with merciful swiftness, for when he was within a stone's throw of the southern wall he was shot through the head. Two of his sons died by his side, and ninety of his followers, showing the same devotion that the bodyguards of Hayātu and the Amī Zabeiru chose, perished with him rather than save themselves in flight."

Ten years after the collapse of the Caliphate, in 1914, the British created the country called Nigeria, which incorporated the better part of the Caliphate. But strange are the ways of Allah. After barely forty-five years of power over Nigeria, the British found that their rule had become utterly untenable. It had neither roots in the hearts of the people, nor legitimacy. In 1960, they pulled down their flag with their own hands, and left. The Caliphate and its history will never be forgotten by the Nigerian Muslims nor should it be by sincere worshippers of Allah anywhere, because it may provide a useful and inspiring model for Tajdid in other cultures of the world.

¹*Tajdīd* is a built-in process of *Ihyā al-Dīn*, the revival of religion. It is believed that at the turn of every century a *Mujaddid* will appear to remove the *fasād* and confusion from the *Ummah* and bring it back to the established principles of the Qur'ān and Sunnah.

²*Shehu* is a corrupt form of the word *Shaikh*. It means a learned scholar. The word has become so popular in West Africa that a person named 'Uthmān is called Shehu out of respect for Shehu 'Uthān Danfordio.

³*Ihyā al-Sunnah* has been published several times. The most authentic edited version was published by Dār al-Fikr in Beirut at the request of the Late Sir Ahmadu Bello in 1962.

⁴The remains of Sankore University today stand as a huge mud mosque built in a typical West African style. Although built with mud, it has stood the test of time and even the torrential West African rain has not done much damage to it. It was a residential university modelled after al-Azhar, and hence the non-Muslim writers simply refer to it as a mosque university. The Ibadan University in Nigeria has named the housing area of its academicians as 'Sankore Avenue' to commemorate the name of that great institution.

⁵See J.O. Hunwick, *Ahmad Bābā and the Moroccan Invasion of the Sudan (1591)* in *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, 2 1962.

⁶Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, Philadelphia, 1982, p. 119.

⁷For a detailed discussion on *Takhlīṭ* (syncretism), see 'Abdur Rahmān I. Doi, *Islam in Nigeria*, Gaskiya Corporation, Zaria, 1984 (pp. 379).

⁸Cf. Isma'il Raji al-Faruqi, *Tawhid, Its Implications for Thought and Life*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, Philadelphia, 1982, p. 18.

⁹On the life and works of Al-Maghili, see *The Life and Teachings of Al-Maghili*, by Dr. Hasan Ibrāhīm Gwarzo, Ph.D. Thesis submitted to University of London, 1972. See also 'Abdul'Azīz Batran, "A Contribution to the Biography of 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Muhammad al-Maghili al-Tilmasāni" in *Journal of African History*, Vol. 14, 1973.

¹⁰Published by Alhaji Sayyidi Maude Hubbare.

¹¹Manuscript deposited in Ibadan University Library.

¹²See Muhammad Bello, *Infāq al-Maysur fī Tarikh Bilad al-Takur*, Cairo edition.

¹³Abdullahi Smith, (Prof.). *The Ideal of Development Administration: An Historical Perspective. Journal of Public Affairs*, A.B.U., Zaria, Vol. k, May, 1971.

¹⁴Smith, Abdullahi, op. cit.

¹⁵M. Hiskett. "Translation of *Kitāb al-Farq* of 'Uthmān DanFodio," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, London 25, 1960.

¹⁶Manuscript in the possession of the author.

¹⁷*Idā al-Nusūkhman akhadhtu 'anhu min al-shuyūkh*, edited and translated by M. Hiskett in "Matrīal Relating to the State of Learning among the Fulani before their Jihād." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 19, 1957. See Appendix One for an abridged version of *Idā al-Nusūkh*.

¹⁸Manuscript in the possession of the author.

¹⁹See *Abdullahi Dan Fodio, Tāzīn al-Waraqat* edited by M. Hiskett, Ibadan University Press, 1963.

²⁰It is unfortunate that even today some Sharḥ judges perpetrate their tyranny against women. When they ask for *Khul'*, I am told that the Registrar and the Judge ask for gratification in terms of money, and in some cases demand *Zina* from the complainant before granting them *Khul'*.

²¹For further discussion of Muhammad Bello's *Ghayth al-wabi fī šīrāt al-Imām al'Adl*, see see Omar Bello's Ph.D. Thesis at the University of London, 1983, entitled: *The Political Thought of Muhammad Bello (1781-1837)*.

²²A real problem in the present day West African countries is the artificial rise of prices through hoarding (TahkTr), so much abhorred in Islam. If these can be avoided through the office of an Ombudsman (*Muhtasib*), public welfare and prosperity can be witnessed once again.

²³The fashion of see-through dresses and half-nakedness of women in the Western world is not a new phenomenon. In West Africa, before the coming of Islam, women used to ride about almost naked as witnessed by Ibn Butūtah during his visit to Mansa Kankan Musa in Mali.

²⁴The extravagant show of wealth became almost a disease, mostly among non-Muslims in West Africa. On childbirth, marriage, and even in funeral ceremonies after death, there is singing and dancing, and currency notes are glued to the foreheads of the dancing celebrants.

²⁵M.S. Zahradeen. 'Abdullahi Ibn Fodio's contribution to the *Fulani Jihad in 19th Century Hausaland*, Ph.D., Mcgill, 1976.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷R.A. Adeleye. *Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria, 1804 1906* (London, 1977).