

# African Research Review

*An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia*

*Vol. 5 (5), Serial No. 22, October, 2011*

ISSN 1994-9057 (Print)

ISSN 2070--0083 (Online)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrrrev.v5i5.1>

## **The Fulani Jihad and its Implication for National Integration and Development in Nigeria** *(Pp. 1-12)*

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### **Abstract**

*The Fulani Jihad (1804-1810) led by Shehu, Uthman Dan Fodio was successfully prosecuted against the established Hausa dynasty in Northern Nigeria. It led to the emergence of a theocratic state, the Sokoto Caliphate, which was administered largely as a federation, due to its wide expanse and diverse composition of its people. The causes, management and impact of the Jihad as well as important lessons for national integration and development in contemporary Nigerian political life form the basic themes of this paper.*

**Key words:** Jihad, Integration, Theocracy, National Development, Caliphate

### **Introduction**

The Fulani Jihad (1804-1810), had its heart and beginning in Gobir. It should be noted that the very essence of the Jihad against established Hausa dynasty was in itself a revolution in relationship between the Hausa and the Fulanis.

It is informative to note that Islam was introduced into Hausa land about the 14<sup>th</sup> century by foreign Mallams and merchants, such as Wagara Arabs and the Fulanis (Adeleye 1971:560; Afe 2003:23; Hill,2009:8). The latter group (Fulani's) was said to have migrated over the centuries from Futa-Toro area

of Senegal and had settled in towns and villages of northwestern Hausaland (Robinson, 2004). This had produced a high degree of cultural mix among the indigenes and the “alien” group, (Hunwick 1966:293), for the Hausas were largely pagan, while the Fulanis were predominantly Muslims. Adeleye has observed that through the ensuing admixture between the Islamic culture and the indigenous Hausa ‘pagan’ culture, a gradual polarization of society along the lines of two conflicting religio-political ideologies began (Adeleye, 1971:560).

It is interesting to note that the whole episode of the Fulani Jihad revolves around the life and teachings of Shehu, UthmandanFodio who was believed to have been born in 1754 (Fage 1988:200; Crowder & Abdullahi 1979:83) in Marata, Gobir, to the Toronkawa tribe of Fulani descent (Milsome 1979:1). His descent has been traced to one Mura Jakolo or Jakalo, who had migrated to Gobir from Futa-Toro at around the 15<sup>th</sup> century. UthmandanFodio’s ancestors were also believed to have settled originally in Konni before they eventually migrated to Degel.

The Toronkawa, described by Hunwick (1996:293) as a “missionary tribe”, had an ancient tradition of Islamic learning and piety. It is not surprising therefore that UthmandanFodio himself was an erudite scholar who had undertaken a deep study of Islamic law, theology and mysticism, first under the tutelage of his father and uncles (Ibid) and later at Agades, north of Marata, at the feet of Jebril (Milsome 1979:4). He started preaching at the tender age of twenty in the area around Degel at about 1774-1775 (Hunwick 1966:295; Isichei 1983:202). UthmandanFodio was also reported to have embarked on preaching tours or missionary journeys to Kebbi, Zamfara and Gobir where he explained the tenets of Islam. Coupled with the use of poems and pamphlets written in Arabic, Fulfude and Hausa languages, he was able to spread his teachings to most parts of Northern Nigeria. As a reward, he won a great number of admirers and followers across the whole of Hausa land. This was to play a decisive role in the success of the Jihad some years later.

### **Causes of the Jihad**

The basic causes of the Fulani Jihad of 1840-1810 have continued to generate controversies among scholars (Adeleye 1971(b); Isichei op cit.; Onwubiko 1982). While some have advanced religious reasons for the outbreak of the ‘holy war’, others have identified political, socio-economic causes, as well as the influence of Islamic reforms elsewhere in West Africa.

Perhaps the most important factor that led to the Jihad was the need to purify Islam among the Habe states of Northern Nigeria. Hunwick (1966:294), Adeleye (1971a:598-99) Crowder (1978:72-6), and Milsome (1979:12), seem to agree that the Jihad was a holy war declared and prosecuted with a view to establishing a purer form of Islam in a predominantly decadent pagan society. It was argued that the Shehu (danFodio) was absolutely sincere to his ideals of reviving Islam in Hausa land along the orthodox line. The Fulanis accused the Hausa rulers of polytheism. Un-Islamic practices in which the Hausa rulers were indulged included: banning of women from wearing veil, veneration of rocks and trees, consultation with magicians and soothsayers and offering of sacrifices to such deities as *Uwandowa* (goddess of hunting) and *Uwargona* (goddess of agriculture). The Habe states of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century could therefore be said to belong to a world in which Islam was marginally and ceremonially conditioning traditional cultures. As Adeleye (1971a:599) has rightly affirmed, it was circumstances such as these to which Muslims were radically opposed that brought about the tension which precipitated the Jihad. The religious undertone of the Jihad is well articulated in the words of Milsome: (1979:12):

It troubled him (Fodio) greatly that only lip service was paid to the Muslim faith in Gobir. Everywhere he went with Abdullahi, they saw how lax people were towards their religion. The SarkinGobir was deliberately discouraging people from observing their religion carefully. So angry was UsmandanFodio at what he saw that he made up his mind to organize an uprising against Yunfa.

Given the fact that the Muslim law provides a legal justification for holy war (revolt) against a state if the ruler places obstacles in the way of the practice of the Muslim faith or mixes Muslim and pagan practices (Crowder 1978:71) the declaration of a Jihad in February 1804 by UthmandanFodio against the Sultan of Gobir could therefore be justified as a religious war, a clash of religious outlook between Muslims and pagans.

The political factor in the outbreak of the Jihad has also been emphasized. Adeleye (1971a:578) argues that politically, the Fulanis had remained aliens in Hausa land and Borno despite the fact that they had lived there for centuries. Without any regard to the substantial number of learned men among the Fulanis, they suffered the disabilities of second-rate citizens

among the Hausas (Ibid). Though some Fulanis were observed to have served in the governments of many states in very high places, but this was not in their right as representative of Fulani groups, but rather on individual merits. In a similar vein, J.D Fage has also argued that, appointments notwithstanding, the Fulanis had no voice in the selection of rulers (Fage 1979:93). The most important consequence of Fulani isolation, as noted by Adeleye was a common bond of 'Pan-Fulanism'. It is argued that the isolation of the Fulani as a group created cohesion among them, with scattered groups in different localities in Hausa land and Borno, nursing deep feelings of resentment against existing governments. Resentment at their total lack of political power had induced the view that the Jihad was more of a desire for the expression of Fulani nationalism than a religious confrontation. The distribution of power after the Jihad lends credence to this political undertone of the Jihad as the Caliphate was largely ruled by the Fulani's (Crowder 1978:76, Afe 2003:25).

A related political factor that prompted the Jihad was the tension between Hausa rulers and Muslim clerics. Earlier in this paper, it has been stated that UthmandanFodio, through his teachings, had gained a good number of followership and admirers. Unfortunately, this was to attract the wrath of the rulers of Gobir (Hunwick, 295' Isichie 203-04). Beginning from Bawa in 1789/1790, Nafata (1794-1801) to Yunfa in 1801, the kings of Gobir attempted, through series of legislation, to restrict the Shehu's power and authority to preach and to curb the activities of his Jama'a. This was to culminate in the threat to the life of UthmandanFodio by Yunfa. With Yunfa's attack on Abd al-Salam, a staunch disciple of UthmandanFodio who resided at Gimbassa, in 1801 (Crowder, 1978:73) the stage seemed set for an open confrontation between the Jihadists and the king of Gobir. Perhaps this explains the militant posture of Uthman Dan Fodio and his recourse to a legal justification of the war under Islamic law. According to Michael Crowder (1978), the holy war becomes sanctioned under the following conditions: if the enemy launches a sudden attack on a Muslim territory and if it was to rescue captured Muslims from the hands of the heathen (Ibid). The fact that these two conditions were met as highlighted in the foregoing analysis, especially with the threat to destroy Degel and exterminate the Muslims by Yunfa coupled with the earlier attack on Abd al-Salam, was to inform the flight to Hijra by UthmandanFodio and his followers from the land of the pagans, Degel, to Gudu in February 1804 as a prelude to the declaration of

the war. This may perhaps be argued to be the immediate cause of the 1804 Jihad.

Furthermore, the declaration of the Jihad of 1804 has also been explained in terms of socio-economic problems that were prevalent in Hausa land prior to the Jihad. It has been suggested that the Jihad was a revolt against the illegal and excessive taxation imposed on the masses by the governments of the Habe states which was widely criticized by UsmandanFodio (Ibid; Milsome p.8; Afe, 26). Some of the erratic taxes were the cattle tax (Jingali), market tax, rent for the use of grazing lands imposed on the Fulanis and the collection of increased tributes from farmers. These illegal extortions, especially the cattle tax, were vehemently opposed and criticized by the Fulani pastoralists. It may therefore be argued that the heavy taxation levied on the peasantry alienated the peasants from the ruling class and may partly explain the rationale for the UthmandanFodio led Jihad.

Apart from this, allegations of corruption were rife against the governments of the Habe states. State officials perpetrated corruption in the giving and taking of bribe. The perversion of justice was also noted to have become the order of the day among judges. Isichie (1983:2003) caught a glimpse of the state of corruption in the pre-Jihad Habe states when she quoted UsmandanFodio as saying:

If you have an adversary in law and he precedes you to them (judges) and give them some money, then your word will not be accepted by them, even though they know for a certainty of your truthfulness, unless you give them more (money) than your adversary gave.

Given this untold hardship and cruelty meted on the people and the ostentatious way in which most of the chieftains of Gobir lived, the Jihad almost became a class struggle between the Hausa-Fulani commoners and their Habe rulers. (Age, 7).

Onwubiko and Crowder opine that the UthmandanFodio Jihad was caused in part by the inspiration and influence of reform movements in the Islamic world during the period. It was argued that the successes recorded by jihadists at Futa Djallon (1725), FutaBondu and Futa Toro (1768) served as impetus for Fodio in his own jihad against the rulers of Hausa land (Onwubikoop.cit 403). The earlier jihads mentioned here were meant to

establish states governed according to Islamic law and aimed at returning the pure and primitive faith of Islam, purged off heresies and accretions in which Shariah law would be the guiding rule of the state. The UthmandanFodio Jihad shared the same goals. It may therefore be true to a very large extent that UthmandanFodio was further motivated by the success of jihadists in other parts of West Africa. This however should not erode the fact the holy war of UthmandanFodio had enough political, religious and socio-economic justifications.

The UthmandanFodio jihad eventually started in 1804 and lasted till around 1810. Perhaps the most remarkable thing to note about the Jihad was its success in Gobir and most parts of Northern Nigeria. By 1810, the Jihad had succeeded in the old Habe states of Katsina, Daura, Kano and Zaria. Although it failed in Borno, three emirates: Gombe, Hadejia and Katagum, were nevertheless established. The establishment of new emirates continued till 1859 (Isicheiop.cit 207).

### **Reasons for Success of the Jihad**

Historians and political observers have attempted to explain the reasons or factors for the success of the jihad against embellished Hausa dynasties. One of such factors as identified by Adeleye (1971:600) was the charisma of Shehu, UthmandanFodio. It was noted that UthmandanFodio, being a learned theologian and a pious Sufi, heir to a tradition of learning and social respectability in his family, had all the makings of a charismatic leader. His towering personality would rightly explain the success with which he co-ordinated the scattered jama'as across Hausa land. His leadership qualities enhanced the success of the jihad.

Equally important for the success of the jihad was the ideological factor. The basic doctrine which the Shehu explained and elaborated upon in his numerous pamphlets and books is as follows:

A Muslim should not willingly dwell in a land of unbelief, but if he has the means at his disposal, should migrate from it to the abode of Islam, should wage the jihad against those in the Abode of war (the unbelievers). This is the more urgent if the unbelievers are making pretence of Islam which may lead others astray or are claiming their actions to be in the name of Islam while in fact they contradict the

law of Islam. Furthermore, Muslims should come to the aid of other Muslims who are being attacked or oppressed by unbelievers (Hunwick 1966:296).

Judging from the above, it may be observed that the jihadists needed only a little awakening to take up arms in the eventual outbreak of war as they were already indoctrinated for such an action.

Another remarkable force that enhanced the success of the jihad was the large followership enjoyed by UthmandanFodio. By the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Shehu's power had grown considerably that he had groups of supporters scattered throughout Gobir, Zamfara and Kebbi who were willing to come to his support in time of trouble. It was this widespread allegiance to him and his ideals which was to be crucial when the final clash with authority came in 1804.

The superior morale and determination of the Shehu's forces that fought for their survival as a group and for their faith was another decisive factor for success. The Islamic scholars and disciples fought fiercely, not minding death, which they even saw as a ladder to martyrdom (Isichei 1983:201).

Furthermore, the military prowess of Abdullahi and Mohamed Bello cannot be over-emphasized in the success story of the Jihad. Both of them were good soldiers who also trained their followers to fight for their faith. The pastoral Fulani's (Boroje) were reported to have been a widely spread reservoirs of manpower for the military service of the Jihad. Having being accustomed to a hard nomadic life with a long experience of fighting either in self defence or in the service of others, and given their skilled use of bow and arrow, the Fulani pastoralists proved to be a useful addition to Usman's army (Fage op. Cit, Milsomeop.cit 12, 24).

The flags given to his chieftains by UsmandanFodio as symbols of authority also served to unite the jihadists in spirit. The flag signified the protection of the Shehu and his authority. It went to a very large extent to develop in the flag-bearers and their adherents a sense of *esprit de corps*, which provided the much-needed cohesion for the Jihad forces across the whole of Hausa land (Milsome, 24).

Lack of unity among the Hausa states greatly enabled the jihadists to run over the states on a piece-meal basis without much resistance. The internecine conflicts between the Hausa states ruled out a combination of forces against

an external power. It need be stated that the attempt to realize boundaries most conducive to political and economic survival as well as prosperity and power was the perennial source of conflict and wars among the Hausa states between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. As a result of inter-state wars, the forces of each state appear already spent before the attack of the jihadists, making them easy prey before the conquering religious militants (Adeleye I (a), 593-94; Isichei, 2002).

Given the enabling environment in which the Jihadists operated, success became a matter of forgone conclusion as observed in the spread of the Sokoto Caliphate after the cessation of hostilities in 1810.

### **Effects of the Jihad on Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria**

The UthmandanFodio Jihad marks a milestone in the history of Nigeria. The impact of the Jihad which officially came to an end between 1809 and 1810 is still being felt in the nation's socio-political life. It is said to be at the root of the infamous north-south dichotomy impeding the cohesion, unity and stability of the Nigerian polity. An examination of the momentous effect of this all-important event will be the theme of subsequent paragraphs.

Perhaps the greatest impact of the Jihad was the creation of the vast religious-political edifice known as the Sokoto Caliphate. According to Ikime, the Caliphate embraced most of the Hausa states, parts of the Bornu empire: which became the emirates of Gombe, Hadejia and Katagum; Nupe and Ilorin. Fage(op.cit200) estimates that the Islamic empire covered about 180,000 square miles and had a population of about ten million people. Not minding the accuracy or otherwise of these estimates, going by the absorption of all the important Hausa states by the caliphate and its extension into other parts of the country, one cannot but agree with Crowder and Abdullahi (op.cit 97) that the caliphate was the largest political entity ever created in Nigeria. It was headed by the Caliph. The caliphate was divided into emirates (Abubakar 1980:203). Each was headed by an Emir who was responsible to the Caliph who had its headquarters at Sokoto. It is interesting to note that the caliphate was largely a federal state. This was informed by its geography as the caliphate contained diverse independent communities and states within its borders (Ibid.304). The Caliph provided the much needed leadership and direction for the emirate councils through the issuance of fatwa on legal issues of different nature in the caliphate. He also arbitrated in intra and inter-emirate disputes (Ibid: 307).



The UthmandanFodio Jihad also resulted in the flowering of Islam in Hausaland and the consolidation of Muslim culture first in Hausaland and then in non-Hausa areas such as Nupe, Ilorin and parts of the Benue valley region (Ikime, op cit).Prior to the Jihad, Islam was essentially a royal religion. However, the Jihad ensured its flowering among the Hausa peasantry who had little or no experience of Islam before (Afeop.cit: 27).

The Jihad also led to the emergence of a lingua franca over a large area of Nigeria. Ikime has asserted that with the triumph of Hausa language over Fulfude, Hausa language became the everyday language of the caliphate, though Arabic remained the language of Islam. The British recognized this lingua franca over a large area of northern Nigeria and made use of it as the official language of native administration. This has promoted the unity of the north (Ikime, op.cit:14).

Furthermore, the Uthmandan Jihad could be said to have brought unity to Hausaland. It would be recalled that through inter-state wars, Hausa states had for centuries tried without success to impose an imperial authority which could guarantee political order, stability and unity among the Habe states. Fortunately, the Jihad, by enthroning Islam provided the much-needed supra-state ideology for integration among the Hausa states. The Jihad brought a new peace to the north. The intermittent and internecine wars were brought to an end (Adeleye (a) op.cit 601; Ikimeop.cit II).

Another major impact of the Jihad was the Fulani ascendance to governance. The old Hausa aristocracy was replaced by a Fulani aristocracy. Prior to the Jihad, the Fulanis, despite their long stay in Hausaland, had been foreigners in the realm of government in the real sense of it. They were largely treated as second-class citizens. However, with the success of the Fulani Jihad, the Hausas were dispossessed of political authority. As Hill (2009) observes, with the help of a large Fulani cavalry and Hausa peasants, Uthman Dan Fodio overthrew the region's Hausa rulers and replaced them with Fulani emirs. The stage was set for this development when the flag-bearers who became the first set of emirs were primarily clerics and scholars (Macmillan, 1968:29). The consequence of this is still found today as the Fulani still dominate Nigerian politics.

The UthmandanFodioJihad also led to the emergence of the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group in Nigeria. Yusuf BalaUsman argues that due to long period of co-existence between the Hausa and Fulani, the ethnic line between them had

become remarkably blurred (Usman 1979:34-58). This new found solidarity has been enhanced by a common religion and culture. The two groups have since been acting collectively in the political dynamics of Nigeria. This has presented a more 'United' North as against the seemingly divided south.

The dichotomy between Muslims and non-Muslims, noticed considerably in the North-Middle Belt relations may be said to have its roots in the Jihad of 1804. Its negative impact on inter-group relations in Nigeria continues to linger on. Ikime has submitted that the middle belt region suffered a great deal of depopulation occasioned by incessant slave raids by the emirates of Sokoto caliphate. It is informative to mention here that payment of tributes in form of slaves was part of the obligations of the emirs to the caliph. The non-Muslim people of the middle-belt were in essence under constant attack as enslavement of fellow Muslims was forbidden. Noticeable depopulation and displacement became the lot of these peoples. This is said to be responsible for the uneasy peace that reigns between the North and Middle Belt regions of Nigeria today (Ward 1966, p.314).

It is important to stress the impact of the Jihad on Yoruba land. The end result of Ilorin imperial activities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the spread of Islam to Yoruba land. But much more than that, Ilorin, a one-time province of the Old Oyo Empire became part of the Sokoto caliphate. This is creating tension in Ilorin today with respect to political classification. Is it part of the South Western states or a part of the North? The answer to this question may not be easily provided for some time to come. Again, the clamour for the establishment of Shariah court in Yoruba land will continue to generate controversy as Yoruba land has a long history of religious plurality.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper an attempt has been made at examining the UthmandanFodio or the Fulani Jihad (1804-1810) with particular reference to its impact on inter-group relations in Nigeria. The main causes of the Jihad as well as the conditions that enhanced its success were also highlighted. The main thrust of the foregoing analysis and discussion has been that the Fulani Jihad offers some lessons to Nigeria's political leaders in terms of policy making for national integration. Given the huge size of the Sokoto caliphate, the by-product of the Jihad, its cohesion and unity, stability as well as its seeming easy administration, the prospects for a united, strong and stable Nigerian polity is an attainable goal.

Furthermore, the various sources of tension in the country can be adequately managed and possibly eliminated if leaders would be sincere in the pursuit of the nation's ideology. The case of the Jihad putting an end to the intermittent wars in Northern Nigeria and the peaceful conduct of relations among diverse ethnic groups under the Sokoto caliphate offer good examples to Nigerians. Without mincing words, a state ideology is a *sine qua non* for political integration in any nation. It serves as a unifying factor in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria. It also forges a sense of commitment to the wellbeing of a nation by its diverse peoples.

The leadership factor is also of paramount importance to national integration in Nigeria. A major lesson from the Fulani Jihad therefore is that we need sincere, energetic and charismatic leadership like Uthman Dan Fodio for a successful co-ordination and integration of Nigerian peoples for growth and development.

Lastly, given the variety of the Nigerian land and peoples, the experiment of the Sokoto caliphate suggests that federalism is perhaps the best form of government for Nigeria. This will ensure unity in diversify as each of the component units will be able to develop at its own pace while the federal or central government will be engaged in co-coordinating the general affairs of the nation for her survival and greatness. Hence all the component units of the Nigerian federation should strive to uphold and strengthen the existing federal structure for there-in lies the greatness of the country.

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