

Full Length Research

A NOTE ON THE LEGACY OF SOKOTO CALIPHATE

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Sokoto caliphate was part of a network of one thousand years of state formation which ran across the *Bilal as Sudan* right from the establishment of the city of Qayrawan in the second century of Islam up to the nineteenth century. This region saw the emergence of ancient Ghana, the old Mali Empire, Songhay, the Hausa city states and lastly, the Sokoto Caliphate which was established by Shehu Usman Danfodio and his lieutenants. The Shehu started preaching to his community at the age of twenty; took twenty six years before he established the caliphate and seventeen odd years to consolidate and rid it of rebellions and warring challenges from nonconformist, adversary neighbouring states. Throughout this brilliant career, the Shehu remained the political, spiritual and intellectual mentor of the nascent caliphate, assisted all through by his brother, Abdullahi Bin Fodio and his son Muhammadu Bello. This, he continued to do until his death in 1817. This paper attempts to assess the legacies of the caliphate and how such legacies left visible traces despite several years of colonialism and countless years of misrule after independence. This would be achieved by answering the following questions: What is this Sokoto caliphate? What are the legacies of this legendary caliphate? How far have such legacies impacted on the region? What lessons will the Nigerian state learn from the enduring legacies of Sokoto, now that the democratic ideals are failing, corruption is on the rise, transparency is in short supply and credible election is eluding the nation?

Keywords: Sokoto Caliphate, Ethnic crisis, Eastern Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is by far the most populated country in Africa (Potts, 2012). It has more than one-seventh of the continent's population. Endowed with many different ethnic groups, the country enjoys rich and diverse cultures. But these cultural diversities pose major challenges to nation building. Ethnic strife has plagued Nigeria since it gained independence in 1960.

Ruled by the British during the colonial era, the country settled for a parliamentary system at independence - an experiment which lasted a paltry six years. A bloody coup in 1966, swept away a rare crop of Northern leaders (both civilian and military), ushered in thirty years of military rule, and catapulted the country into the era of oil boom with all its attendant consequences. After a

courtship with numerous military regimes, Nigeria once again reverted to yet another civilian administration (second Republic) under Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari; this time experimenting on US-type Presidentialism. But that also did not last long. Four and a half years later, a new military junta under General Muhammadu Buhari emerged.

The military continued to have its field day until 1999 when a new civilian regime, this time under the former military Head of State Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo emerged. For more than fifteen years now, the ruling party, People's Democratic Party, has brought the nation to its present status: chronically corrupt, totally bankrupt, politically unstable, socially apathetic, religiously stale and internationally distrusted (Lewis, 1999, 2003). Today Nigeria is on the brink of a precipice and unless care is taken and something is done fast; and fast enough, it will plunge headlong towards a failed state. Western styled democracy has failed to provide the nation with peace, security and political stability. Corruption has become an institution, indeed the very national character of Nigeria.

Ethnic crisis, religious disturbances, social insecurity, apathy, massive poverty, these and all, have become the bane of the Nigerian society. What is the genesis of these Crises? Why have democracy and democratic ideals failed to thrive on the Nigerian soil? Now that both the civilian and military regimes have failed to provide Nigeria with the barest minimum that qualifies a nation - sovereignty, stability, peace, self reliance, independence and security; what other options lie open for the Nigerian state? To answer these questions, let us make a little excursion into the nation's history. (Coleman, 1958; Fage, 1962; Marks, 2019; Russell-Wood, 1998).

In their famous travelogues and autobiographies, these early explorers expressed their deep feelings about the African continent and its inhabitants, its climate, its terrain, even its hot sun (that bakes white men into black, as it was believed then) as well as its mosquitoes - harbingers of malaria. Some of these early explorers who came in pursuit of an ancient trading route or the source of a mighty (possibly) navigable river, these and many more were advanced as the fundamental motives behind their journeys, not just to Nigeria, but to the continent of Africa.

But before then, the white man had different views about Africa and Africans. For him, Africa was believed to be a hostile continent inhabited by primitive and backward people. It was because of its harsh and unfriendly climate that Africa was considered "the white man's grave", a name which continued to be in vogue for many years afterwards. Africa's knowledge of and contact with the white man's world is indeed long and has left indelible marks which are destined to last almost to eternity- slave trade, colonialism, imperialism, the debt burden, dumping of radioactive wastes as well as the bolstering of autocratic regimes.

After several decades, and in some countries more than a century of misrule, the white man relinquished power and handed over to his willing tools (the native elites) except in areas where independence was got through vehement armed struggles. With his exit, came independence which signalled self rule by local elites. Where the white man supplanted his rule over a living and dynamic system like the Shari'a, there was a serious agitation for a return to the status quo ante. In majority of cases such agitations were quickly nipped in the bud and never allowed to see the light of day. When such regimes fail to satisfy the yearnings and aspirations of the citizens, the last resort is the cry for the Shari'a.

I have already mentioned that the white man had had contact with the coastal part of Nigeria right from the fifteen hundreds. But despite this early contact, real colonial administration became visible with the fall of the caliphate in 1903.

Earlier there were the two protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria which were later amalgamated in 1914 under a single administration, with Lord Lugard as the Governor General. Thanks to the structures created by the Sokoto Caliphate over the years, the British colonial administration quickly began to utilize such structures through the medium of the "Indirect Rule."

The Emirates system which was the basic structure of the caliphal administration was used to give the British effective control at least in Northern Nigeria. In the south however, the story was different. Direct rule was resorted to because of the absence of similar structures as were found in the North. Moreover, in stateless societies like the Ibo land, the colonial administration met with stiff resistance and some of their local appointees like warrant chiefs and court messengers (Kotma) were not only totally rejected but became subjects of derision and absolute ridicule. Opposition to colonialism was equally extended to the white man's religion, Christianity; the early converts, comprising mostly of the dregs of the society, the stigmatized and the slaves found solace and acceptability in the new religion. Chinua Achebe, in his maiden novel, *Things fall apart*, satirizes these early converts in their overzealousness and desperate attempts to outdo the white man in the new religion.

Thus through the two varying colonial administrative systems, the white man continued to maintain control over the vast territory he christened, Nigeria. Within a spell of fifty seven years since the conquest of the caliphate, conditions internal and external, were ripe for a review of the age old relationship which started since the fifteen hundreds. First, two major wars which engulfed Europe not only shattered the myth about the white man but also rendered the old colonial empires both impoverished and exhausted. Their devastated economies as a result of the two wars made extra expenses to their appendages outside Europe both economically impossible as well as quite unthinkable.

In addition, a wind of change was blowing after 1945, with the coming of a Labour government in Britain which promised to grant independence to many British colonized communities in Africa and Asia, especially where such colonies were willing to assist in fighting Adolf Hitler of Germany. Colonies that allowed conscription on their soil did reap the benefit of the British promise and they included such countries as Ghana and Nigeria in West Africa.

In Nigeria, the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) was the harbinger of early political activities and it provided the impetus for serious agitations against colonial rule. From that time on, political parties began to emerge within the three Nigerian regions- North, East and West. But, before then different constitutions became operational and a number of constitutional conferences were held in London, all in preparation for effective governance and grooming the nation towards independence (Adekoya, 2018; Okome, 2000; Onuoha, 2011).

It was these developments which made possible the gradual emergence of numerous political parties in Nigeria, often of regional base, except in very few cases. Each region had a mass based political party. In the North, there were the Northern People's Congress (NPC), the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and the Middle Belt Congress (MBC). In the Western region, there were the Action Group (AG), the United Peoples Grand Alliance (UPGA) and others (Joseph, 2014).

In Eastern Nigeria, there were the NCNC which had follower ship in the two regions as well. Even though Nigeria was run as a single entity, under one colonial administration, it was regional, not national politics which was in vogue at the time. That was why regional, tribal as well as ethnic divisions took deep roots and were what really characterized the Nigerian political scene, unfortunately, even to this day, Regional political crises, mudslinging and political thuggery became the order of the day. Even at independence, the majority party (Northern People Congress) could not command a commendable majority to form a national government. In the end it had to opt for an alliance with the NCNC in order to form a government at the centre under the platform of Nigerian National Alliance (NNA).

Conflicts, political wranglings and petty squabbles, especially from the opposition, this time Action Group from the Western Region, not only wrecked the alliance but also jeopardized the very existence of the civilian administration. On the 15 of January 1966, the first civilian administration under Sir, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was overthrown in a bloody military coup ending the lives of the Prime Minister, two Premiers, (Northern and Western), several top ranking military personnel of northern origin as well as few other less fortunate souls. The coup was one sided as it involved officers from one section of the country, (Eastern Nigeria). Since the collapse of the First Republic and the cold murder of

Northern and selected Yoruba leaders, enmity and general mistrust characterized the general relationship between Northern and Southern Nigeria (Bah, 2005).

Since then, the Nigerian nation had witnessed long years of military rule punctuated, here and there by short period of civilian administrations. Of the fifty one odd years of nation hood, nearly two third of the period was spent under military dictatorship. The rest, a paltry eighteen years, recorded various shades of civilian administrations, ranging from parliamentary democracy to American styled presidentialism all, ending merely, as futile exercises in corruption, massive fraud and wanton destruction of enormous resources, human and material; while drift, apathy and general insecurity become the most noticeable features.

Is it any wonder if conscientious Nigerians look for alternatives? Now that Western secular democratic ideals have failed to provide the yearnings as well as the true aspirations of the people, is it any wonder if politicians cash on a homemade alternative as the sanest path to salvation?

As we said earlier, Nigeria became independent in 1960, but the first Republic was short lived for a number of reasons. First, it was the first national government to be formed by the national elites after several years of regional politics under the British administration. The national government inherited many problems like, the Western regional crises as a result of the increasing rivalry between two powerful contesting regional, political stalwarts- Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief L. S. Akintola.

Secondly, the new government was equally facing stiff challenges from the opposition especially the Action Group. At one stage, the leader of the party had to be brought to trial for treasonable felony. Chief Awolowo was accused of importing arms into the country in order to overthrow the federal government. Thirdly the general breakdown of law and order in the Western region forced the government at the centre to declare a state of emergency (IDEGWU, 2015).

So many forces were at work at the disadvantage of the newly elected government of Sir, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. They included regional and ethnic tensions which escalated barely two years after the inception of the Balewa government, the censuses of 1962 and 1963, the trial of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, and his imprisonment later, these and all, fuelled bitter disputes which strained relations between the central government and the Western region of Nigeria. The creation of the Midwestern Region in 1963 from an eastern section of the Western Region further compounded matters. Following closely were the general strikes of 1964 and the violence marred elections of the same year (Morobane, 2015).

The last straw which broke the camel's back was the election victory of the Northern People's Congress (NPC) in 1964. Ethnic tensions, general mistrust and political

thuggery began to resurface by the day. On January 15, 1966, junior army officers (mostly of Ibo origin) revolted and killed Balewa and several other politicians, including the premiers of the Northern and Western regions. Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, the commander of the army and an Igbo, emerged as the country's new leader¹. But why did both systems (civilian and military) failed?

CONCLUSION

The drift, hopelessness and apathy which daily stared the Nigerian nation day in and day out since the collapse of the first republic is what informed this paper. The nation has for long been experimenting with one political system or other with virtually no success and often at an enormous cost of both human and material resources. Even when the military emerged in the early 1966 and ruled the nation for nearly thirty years, there were very little changes except for the blissful interludes that punctuated Murtala's, Buhari's and Abacha regimes.

The average Nigerian, despite the enormous wealth of the nation, continued to wallow in abject poverty, diseases and apathy. Today, when the nation is exporting 2.5 million barrels of oil daily, the Nigerian citizen is categorized by the United Nations among the world's less fortunate humanity that survives on a paltry income of less than one dollar per day.

In a striking parallelism, the ruling aristocrats, civilian or military, swim in a cesspool of excessive materialism and ostentatious lifestyle, quite oblivious of the decadent condition of the nation's poor. No man of conscience would ever tolerate this kind of condition. Necessity or want could force one to borrow. But, borrowing is uncalled for in a situation where one has an alternative. The average Nigerian feels a sense of indignation at the way the nation borrows one political garb.

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