

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE OF THE IMPACT OF THE TRANS-SAHARAN TRADE AND THE 19TH-CENTURY JIHAD ON THE HISTORY OF AKWANGA DIVISION, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The spread of Islam from East and North Africa across the Sahara Desert to Nigeria is ascribed to certain socio-economic and political factors. The development of Islam in the geopolitical zone of central Nigeria faced notable challenges due to the heterogeneity of the ethnic and cultural identity of its local population, the inability of the Muslim Arab merchants to establish trade relations with the area, and the politicization of *jihad* which was met with fierce resistance. This made it impossible to effectively propagate the Islamic teachings among the local population in central Nigeria. This study will explore the history and culture of the Akwanga Division before the advent of Islam and identify the challenges faced by the movement. Emphasis will be laid on the role of the trans-Saharan trade, the *jihad* of Usman Dan Fodio, and their impact on the socio-economic life of the area. Also examined will be the factors responsible for delaying the spread of Islam in central Nigeria. The aims and objectives of this research work will be achieved by using secondary data such as published articles in reputable academic journals, edited works, internet sources, and books.

Keywords: Critical, Discourse, Islam, Trans Saharan, Jihad, Trade

Introduction

The propagation of Islam from North to West Africa was mostly due to the influence of Arab merchants, and by the late 20th century a sizeable portion of sub-Saharan Africa was populated by Muslims. The religion of Islam was disseminated by Muslim clerics and Arab merchants, the latter selling certain goods for consumption and re-distribution to other parts that had not been explored by the traders. Commercial activities with the Muslims in North Africa were soon expanded along the available land routes.

The people of the Borno empire (Kanuris) were the first known Muslims in northern Nigeria before the time of Usman Dan Fodio. His Sokoto *jihad* was primarily driven towards eradicating polytheism, liberating the local populace from crippling taxation, and protecting them from the brutality of their Hausa rulers. Hafiz noted that Islamic reformists globally suffered strong resistance from the “traditional *Ulama*” who often promoted the mixing of Islam along with other superstitious beliefs (syncretism).¹ Idikwu maintains that the spread of Islam happened in

two phases: between the 11th and the 17th century and in the 19th century.² The first phase occurred as a consequence of the trans-Saharan trade between West and North Africa, while the second phase coincided with the *jihad* period of Usman Dan Fodio, also known as the era of Islamic revival.³ The first phase can be characterized as a peaceful and diplomatic form of missionary activity, while the second phase was more pointedly militant and aggressive in nature.⁴ This study seeks to analyze the impact of the trans-Saharan trade and the Sokoto *jihad* on the socio-economic landscape of the Akwanga Division in central Nigeria, with due emphasis on the difficulties faced by the Mulsim *jihadists* in their struggle to Islamize the area.

Central Nigeria is home to a heterogeneous society comprising more than thirty separate ethnic groups with their own culture and traditions. The present area includes Nasarawa, Plateau, Benue, Niger, Kogi, Kwara, and Abuja (federal capital territory). According to the 2006 census, its population is 22,787,249⁵ which accounts for 16.7% or one-sixth of the total population of Nigeria.⁶ Akwanga Division encapsulates the former colonial territories of Wamba, Akwanga, and Nasarawa Eggon, initially under the Nasarawa province and later under the Plateau province.⁷ The area is sharing a common border with Jos Berom Land also situated in northern Nigeria.⁸

Figure: 1. Map of Nigeria showing the NorthCentral Geopolitical zone in Blue.



Source: O. Philip, A Survey of the Muslims of Nigeria's North Central Geo-Political Zone, Working Paper NO.1A, sponsored by Nigeria Research Network (NRN), Oxford Department of International Development Queen Elizabeth House University of Oxford, 2012.

Pre-Islamic practices in the Akwanga Division, Central Nigeria

The way of life of the people of Akwanga before Islam was centered on traditional beliefs and customs, which negated the dictates of natural justice and the moral and ethical teachings of Islam. The people of central Nigeria prayed to different gods for rainfall, harvest, peace and wealth, very much like the pre-Islamic Arabs of the *jahiliyyah*. Idol and spirit worship was commonly practiced in the whole of northern Nigeria and cut across all ethnic groups.⁹ Danfulani informs that the *Maguzanci* cult was a form of traditional totem worship of a snake-like ancestral demigod, while the *Bori* cult was predominantly practiced in the Hausa states.¹⁰ The ancestral *Bori* cult was not limited to Kano in Sokoto and was also practiced in central Nigeria. The community, clan, and family heads served as the emissaries of their ancestors.¹¹ The role of the chief priest was to act as a messenger of the deities responsible for the wellbeing of the community and communications with their super gods.¹² The power of the chief priest was stronger than the power of the tribal leader, considering his primary role as the eye and ambassador of the gods.

The worship of lifeless objects, corruption, abuse of power, and syncretism prevailed in pre-Islamic Akwanga.¹³ According to Zwemer, the traditional belief systems denied the existence of God, resurrection, and final judgment and upheld that men and society had evolved naturally, some ascribing all power to gods worshipped in the form of idols.¹⁴ Suleiman asserts that tribal worshippers focused on the sun, moon, stones, and other natural features in their physical and social environment.¹⁵ Other common practices were based on the existence of personal gods and other superstitious beliefs. Sacrifices were often offered in daily, weekly, monthly, and annual intervals to appease their gods, either in the form of humans, livestock or property, depending on the culture and conditionalities laid, and to communicate with the ancestors.

Faith in superstitions constituted an integral part of traditional belief in pre-Islamic central Nigeria. Natural phenomena were accredited to supernatural powers and interpreted accordingly.¹⁶ Murtala explains that ignorance spurs superstitious and irrational beliefs, and that erroneous assumption leads to a subjective explanation of events.¹⁷ Thus, prior to Islam the birth of a twin meant doom for the whole family, or the birth of a female child signified evil, to be either buried alive or offered as a sacrifice to the ancestors.¹⁸ This obnoxious tradition of killing female children was perhaps due to poverty and the combination of other political and cultural factors. Another cultural tradition in northern Nigeria was the marriage of one woman to multiple men (polyandry), temporary marriage, and women enjoying the willful right to separation.¹⁹ According to Nwabara, life in the pre-Islamic tribal society was barbaric, uncivilized, brutal, and unpredictable.²⁰ As such, the survival of the fittest was the only rule amid the lawlessness that bedeviled the society in which the consumption of alcohol was common practice, in addition to usury.

Similar to the pre-Islamic Arabs, the people of northern Nigeria were predominantly farmers and traders. They cultivated crops for subsistent and commercial purposes, which fostered intergroup relations. Sadr opines that “*the ignorance (Jahiliya) before Islam, was a culture that not only influenced the livelihood and the economy of the Arabs but also had a considerable effect on their visions and thoughts.*”²¹ The economy suffered under irregularities ranging from usury,

outrageous profit, illicit taxation, the exploitation of the villagers, inflated prices, and all sorts of commercial indecency.

The Trans-Saharan Trade and the Advent of Islam

The people inhabiting Nigeria before Islam had contacts with the Arabs and other nationalities. A series of migrations from North Africa to Nigeria took place due to geographical and economic factors such as drought and the desire for slaves, raw materials, and markets for their goods. At the same time new economic contacts were established between the people of northern Nigeria and the Arabs from North Africa and the Middle East across the Sahara Desert, forming the trans-Saharan trade around the 7th century, which conveyed goods from the Arabian Peninsula to North Africa and Hausaland.²² Yacine claims that the trade was heterogeneous and ethnically biased meaning that each of the Arabs, Jews, Berbers, and other numerous ethnicities had their part to play.²³ Ross affirms that the Arabs were the first to establish contact with Nigeria by crossing the Sahara Desert across West and North Africa, thus following an ancient route established 2,000 years earlier by the Carthaginians for commercial and religious missions.²⁴ The trade routes were later extended to Taghaza-Timbuktu in the west, Ghadames to the south, and Borno in the east. Through these routes commercial contacts were established between Nigeria, the Middle East, North Africa, and some parts of Europe. The articles of trade exported from Nigeria and other African territories were notably leather, skin, dyed cloths, kola nut, ivory, gold, and slaves, while the items imported from North Africa and Europe included salt, Arabic cloth, Manchester cotton, French silk, mirrors, guns, glasses, and beads.²⁵ The good trade relations that developed between the Muslim traders and their non-Muslim counterparts facilitated the spread of Islam further into the African interior and the ready acceptance of Islamic forms of governance. The socio-economic prestige of the Muslim traders resulted in the conversion of a considerable part of the local population and gave impetus to the adoption of Islamic fiscal policies, laws, and administrative measures, followed by the appointment of Muslim judges and the building of mosques and religious centers of learning.²⁶

Nwando et al argue that the flexible and adaptive nature of the Islamic teachings spurred mass conversions, one reason being that Islamic law permitted polygamy, which was in tandem with the desires and practices of most African men.²⁷ The active engagement of passionate Muslim clerics also facilitated the teaching and learning of the basic tenets of the Islamic faith by establishing their centers of learning and gathering large congregations of followers.²⁸ The Arab merchants obtained the above-mentioned European goods in exchange for goods purchased in northern Nigeria and western Sudan. Boahen explains that the trade was organized along three major routes:

The Taghaza–Timbuktu or western trade route: It started in Silmasa in Morocco and passed through Taghaza, Taodenin, and Walta before branching out to old Ghana, Mali Jenne and ending in Timbuktu.

- I. The Ghadames air or central route: It began in Tunisia and passed through Ghao, Ghat, Katsina Kano in Hausaland, and Ghadames.
- II. The Fezzan–Kwar or eastern route: It started in Tripoli and Egypt and passed through Fezzan Tibesti, Kwar and Bilma before reaching Borno.²⁹

Figure 2. Map Showing The Trans-Saharan Trade Routes



Source: Cartwright. M. The Camel Caravan of The Ancient Sahara, Ancient History, <https://www.ancient.eu/article/1344/the-camel-caravans-of-the-ancient-sahara/>

According to Cartwright, the caravan from North Africa traversed the Sahara Desert to reach West Africa where it traded its wares. One trip usually took forty to sixty days and was frequently hazarded by beast and bandit attacks.³⁰ At certain intervals the traders embarked on their dangerous journey whose duration depended on their intended destination and itinerary. Each caravan usually consisted of 500 strong camels but could be as large as 12,000 camels. The convoy's major obstacle was water, as the oases were overstretched in most instances.³¹

The Influence of the Trans-Saharan Trade on Akwanga

Bovill posits that Arab merchants controlled and provided the financial capital necessary for the caravan trips which led them across the Sahara Desert to Nigeria and other markets in West Africa, often employing Tuaregs as guides. The merchants had agents installed along the major trade routes who helped in sourcing the goods from the interior traders for export to North Africa.³² Ross,³³ Davidson,³⁴ and Law³⁵ point out the influence of the trans-Saharan trade on western Sudan. The trans-Saharan trade promoted the exchange of goods for goods, the development of other professional services, and encouraged inter-group relations.

The trade has gone a long way in cementing cultural and economic ties between groups that were hitherto in conflict, it also extended cultural assimilation within the areas of operation. The trade also promoted the growth and development of

*cities like Timbuktu, Walata, Jenne, Goa, Tripoli, Tunis, Marrakesh, Fez, Algiers, Kano, Katsina, Zaria, and Borno.*³⁶

Awu argues that the spread of Islam and the Arabic language were possible because of the trans-Saharan trade. Arabic learning and the message of the Qur'an arrived in Nigeria through the activities of the Arab merchants. The trade was also a source of considerable wealth and led to the emergence of a new class of middle-income earners.³⁷ The trans-Saharan trade enriched the economy of most states in northern Nigeria (Hausaland and the forest region) through huge revenues obtained from exporting and importing goods. Regrettably, however, it also gave rise to a booming slave trade, which caused irreparable damage to the population of West Africa for centuries to come. The persistent banditry and insecurity on the western trade route affected the trade negatively, ultimately leading to its decline. However, the central trade route passing through Nigeria flourished as the traders shifted their focus, thus leading to the growth and development of commercial cities like Kano and Katsina.

The trans-Saharan trade not only removed the barriers to the movement of goods and slaves from Nigeria to North Africa, but it also marked the beginning of the African inferiority complex, the submission of Sub-Saharan Africa to the hegemony of the north and its increased dependence on imports. Some Nigerians even went as far as linking their ancestry to certain North African countries, notably Egypt and Morocco.³⁸

Cartwright explains that the trade did not only influence northern Nigeria but the entire African continent: "*The trans-Saharan trade brought with it ideas in art, architecture, and religion transforming many aspects of daily life in the towns and cities of a hitherto isolated part of Africa.*"³⁹ The advent of Islam in northern Nigeria also changed the socio-political and economic life of the area.

Apart from the spread and adoption of Islam as a state religion in most of the areas, the trade also stimulated the development of agriculture and the emergence of new crops into Akwanga in north-central Nigeria. New types of crops from Arabia were introduced in sub-Saharan Africa. Lyndon affirms that the trans-Saharan trade was a major milestone in African history, its major contribution being the introduction of Islamic jurisprudence and a diaspora trade network.⁴⁰ The penetration of Islam into northern Nigeria before the 19th century laid the foundation for the *jihad* of Usman Dan Fodio and other revivalist movements that firmly established monotheism in the region.

Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio in Northern Nigeria

The *jihad* took which took place in Hausaland 1804-1810 was championed by the renowned Muslim cleric Usman Dan Fodio. He was born in Gobir in 1754 and trained by local and foreign Muslim clerics of repute, with strict adherence to Maliki doctrines. Awu emphasizes that among the eminent scholars that taught him were Muhammadu Bidduru, Muhammadu Sambo (both from Gobir), and Alhaji Jibril Umar. Usman Dan Fodio was trained in Islamic law, philosophy, theology, *hadith*, and *fiqh*.⁴¹ He started preaching against the excesses and anti-Islamic attitudes and practices of the local Hausa rulers, which greatly infuriated them, and attempts were made to

silence him. Akpofure and Crowther aptly described him as a reformer, revivalist, and warrior.⁴² According to Omolewa, Dan Fodio preached vigorously against the Hausa rulers who mixed Islam with traditional African religion in his determination to eradicate such practices in Hausaland.⁴³ This moral conflict soon turned into an armed political conflict led by Usman Dan Fodio and supported by his kinsmen by way of capturing defeated opponents and appointing new rulers who supported the movement. This *jihad*, according to Omolewa, was also called “the Fulani struggle or Fulani movement” for the purification of Islam.⁴⁴ According to Enoch and Ebony, the culture of the pre-*jihad* Hausa kingdoms was characterized by the worship of lifeless objects, administrative inefficiency, and anti-Islamic practices that were harmful to society.⁴⁵

Dan Fodio’s reform agenda was vehemently opposed by the Hausa and Habe rulers who considered him as a threat to their status and power in society. They instigated two assassination attempts, one in 1774 and another in 1803.⁴⁶ The ruler of Gobir, for example, actively prevented Muslim men from wearing turbans and Muslim women from covering their heads. He denied his subjects the right to chose their religion freely, and Muslim converts were forced to revert to their old tribal religion.⁴⁷ The Muslim reformers could not tolerate this and accused the Hausa rulers of forcibly keeping their subjects trapped in paganism to protect their own wealth and status by undermining Islam.⁴⁸ Despite several failed murder attempts, Dan Fodio continued propagating his message and succeeded in building a strong base of followers who found him worthy of emulation. The movement’s manifesto can be found in *Wathiquat al-Sudan* and *Kitab al-farq*.⁴⁹

The people of Akwanga had early contact with *jihadists* from the emirates of Keffi and Jama’a.⁵⁰ The rationale for the military campaigns by Fulani warriors was to put an end to syncretism. They began with the Hausa states and later expanded further south into central Nigeria. Although Islam had been established in northern Nigeria before the 19th century, it was being practiced alongside paganism. Katsina affirms that religious purification constituted the main mission of the Sokoto *jihad*.⁵¹ The reformers aimed at correcting the ills perpetrated by the Hausa rulers in northern Nigeria, such as polytheism, corruption, and extortion.⁵² Additionally, Gokaru et al assert that Usman Dan Fodio played a vital role in elevating and enhancing Islamic best practices in northern Nigeria, notably advocating against moral double standards and polyandry while propagating Islamic knowledge and establishing the Shari’ah and a sound code of Islamic conduct.⁵³ Philip maintains that the *jihad* of Usman Dan Fodio was caused by multiple factors notably religious, economic, social and tribal.⁵⁴ Ochunu argues that the *jihadists* were determined to expand their spheres of influence, build their commercial network, put an end to the slave trade business and wanton destruction of life and property, and finally establish a caliphate under the tutelage of the Fulani.⁵⁵ Although the *jihad* was meant to sanitize the religious practices and end the corrupt leadership of the Hausa rulers, ethnic sentiments, the desire for power, and territorial expansion were soon to crop up, thus undermining the initial objective.

Ochunu posits that creating a model state according to the dictates of Islam and expanding its teachings and practices remained the primary mission of the *jihad*.⁵⁶ The major contention was the demarcation between Islam and other religions in Hausaland and the desire to make Islam the foundation of society.⁵⁷

The *jihad* of Usman Dan Fodio in Hausaland was a war fought by the Fulani to take over power from their Hausa lords. The Hausa rulers retaliated in the form of attacks against the Fulani *jihadists* to maintain their control. Abdullahi and Crowder mention that many Fulanis used their perceived religious superiority and piousness as an excuse to relegate others to the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy.⁵⁸ This feeling was common among the Fulani in northern Nigeria, considering their pedigree and strong background in religious education. Their resentment over the enslavement of their non-religious and corrupt kinsmen manifested in clear terms, emphasizing the need to eliminate nepotism as it destroyed the social fabric.⁵⁹

The social and economic conditions of the poor (Talakawa) had become increasingly unbearable before the *jihad*. The Fulani were stratified as common and second-class citizens of northern Nigeria. Thus, most of them responded to the movement's call, anticipating that the *jihad* would lead to their emancipation. The success of the struggle rested on the promise of social equality, honesty, and justice. Illegal extortion in form of over-taxation was among the primary reasons why the *jihadists* declared war on their Hausa rulers. Extensive taxes were imposed on grazing the cattle and selling them and other produce on the market, which weighed heavily on the farmers.⁶⁰ These obnoxious practices were resisted by the Fulani, leading to a full-blown military conflict, bloodshed, and the overthrow of the government. The trend of Islamic revivalism in the Middle East in the 19th century could aptly be attributed as an impetus for the Sokoto *jihad* in northern Nigeria, which in turn inspired the *jihad* of Futa Bondu, Futa Toro and Futa Jallon.⁶¹

Causes of the *Jihad*

Although Islam had already arrived in northern Nigeria before the 19th century, it was practiced alongside paganism. According to Katsina, religious purification constituted the primary mission of the Sokoto *jihad*.⁶² The *jihadists* were determined to correcting the ills perpetrated by the Hausa rulers and put an end to the crimes of polytheism, corruption, and extortion.⁶³ Gokaru, Abdulhamid, and Mat Zin agree that Usman Dan Fodio played a vital role in introducing orthodox Islamic practices in northern Nigeria and initiating the call for a just Islamic society, sound government, and the rule of the Shari'ah.⁶⁴ However, Philips maintains that the circumstances that led to the Sokoto *jihad* were multi-causal and consisted of different religious, economic, social, and tribal factors.⁶⁵ Ochunu also understands the *jihad* to be motivated by more than just religion. In his view the *jihadists* were equally interested in expanding their sphere of influence to encourage trade and establish a caliphate under the tutelage of Fulani.⁶⁶ Saidin opines that decades of dissatisfaction with prolonged authoritarian rule, old political grievances, changing demographic trends and economic difficulties are the general causes of both instances of revolutions.⁶⁷ The *jihad* was meant to purify the local religious practices and rid the society of un-Islamic elements and put an end to the corrupt leadership of the Hausa rulers.

The main purpose of the *jihad* was to eradicate traditional religious practices in Hausaland and ensure that the populace ceased worshipping idols and devoting their faith to superstition. Since, however, the status, position and wealth of the Hausa rulers were based on a tribal and traditionalistic power structure, they were strictly opposed to change. Ochunu explains that creating a model state according to the dictates of Islam and expanding its teachings and

practices remained the primary mission of the early *jihadists*.⁶⁸ The movement's major contention was the demarcation between Islam and other religions in Hausaland. According to the conviction of its Muslim leaders, reform was necessary to ensure that government, trade and culture were in accordance with Islamic law, if necessary by force.⁶⁹

The *jihadists* argued that for Islam to be strictly adhered to in all spheres of life, they had to assume political leadership and replace the ignorant and corrupt Hausa elite rulers with educated Fulani leaders. Changing the structure of leadership was their perceived way to eliminate the corruption and oppression of the Habe ruling class. The *jihadists* desired to establish a new state that was in strict harmony with the dictates of Islam, free of the current social inequality and oppression.⁷⁰ It was a process of hijacking the existing machinery of governance at the hands of the educated and versatile Fulani, thereby invigorating every sphere of society. Thus, although the Sokoto *jihad* was initially a purely religious movement, it soon evolved into a political movement as well.

The social and economic conditions of the poor masses (Talakawa) before the commencement of the *jihad* were indeed dire. The Fulanis were stratified as common and second-class citizens in northern Nigeria, and many of them joined the *jihad* with the promise of their future emancipation. The movement's impetus rested on the call for social equality and justice, but also on the demand to end over taxation. The farmers were suffering under the many taxes imposed on them and saw the movement as a way to challenge the status quo.⁷¹ On a different note, the Islamic revivalism that was sweeping through the Muslim world in the 19th century might have also inspired the *jihad* in northern Nigeria, and equally the Futa Bondu, Futa Toro, and Futa Jallon are regarded as the forebears of the Sokoto *jihad*.⁷²

Besides the aforementioned religious and socio-economic reasons, the *jihad* of Usman Dan Fodio in Hausaland can also be viewed as a tribal war fought by the Fulani to take the power away from their Hausa overlords. Abdulahi and Crowder argue that certain tribes perceived themselves as morally superior to others. Thus, the factor of ethnic identity must not be disregarded in the context of the *jihad* movement.⁷³ The Fulani of northern Nigeria considered their lineage and level of Islamic education as superior to that of other tribes. Also, their resentment over the bad treatment of their kinsmen was manifested in clear terms, as they called for the need to eliminate the nepotism that was destroying the fabric of society.⁷⁴

It was certainly the racial discrimination and social segregation enforced by the Hausa elite that compelled many ethnic Fulanis to support the *jihad*. They were, for instance, prevented from partaking in the political affairs of the Hausa states and deprived of certain privileges such as access to farmland and grazing grounds, the right to carry arms, and the right to own slaves.⁷⁵

Influence of the *Jihad* in the Akwanga Division

The *jihad* was a decisive period in the history of Islam in Nigeria and West Africa. The 19th century witnessed a radical transformation of the society brought about by the revolution. These changes were all-encompassing and cut across religious, political, and socio-economic lines.

Religious Influence

The new *jihadist* leadership declared Islam as the official religion of northern Nigeria. Islamic law (*Shari'ah*) was recognized as the means of adjudicating justice on behalf of the emirs and their appointed representatives. All forms of excessive taxation were revised by the new leadership of the Akwanga Division (a southern division of the Plateau province).⁷⁶ Conversion to Islam was officially permitted and supported by the new regime. This facilitated the spread of Islamic education and culture in the hitherto pagan southern fringes of the Plateau province and central Nigeria.⁷⁷ This also explains the predominance of Islamic culture in the area and the peaceful co-existence of the various ethnic groups. The Fulani Jihadist like their south Asian Cambodian counterparts admits that their religious conviction is a driving force and “unifying factor in their desire to retain their identity, they tried to rebuild their society by renovating mosques and *surau*,”⁷⁸ and made effort towards the teaching and learning of their religion.

However, Ochunu suggests that the presence of the *jihadists* in central Nigeria also facilitated the subsequent colonial subjugation of the area.⁷⁹ In his view the relationship the local population established with the *jihadists* would later weaken their ability to successfully resist the colonial powers.⁸⁰ Despite the diminishing religious interest that was exhibited in the initial phase of the *jihad*, the ideological sentiments of the reformists remained strong and persisted. The *jihadists* succeeded in establishing Islamic practices in some parts of north-central Nigeria. Officially, the non-Islamic societies of central Nigeria were successfully Islamized. Apart from purifying and establishing Islam as the official religion in the area, the *jihadists* also established new emirates in their spheres of influence. Even though they were not accepted by the ethnic groups in central Nigeria, their impact was felt everywhere.

Political Influence

The *jihad* brought significant political changes, not only in Akwanga but in all of northern Nigeria. A theocratic system of governance was established in accordance with Islamic law and also enforced in the non-Muslim areas of northern, southern, and eastern Nigeria. Mamu asserts that Magaji Dan Yamusa penetrated Akwanga Division from the Keffi emirate to spread Islam and explore the possibilities of slave raids. The eminence of Keffi, Jama'a, and Lafia emirates resulted in the establishment of similar forms of government established in the Wamba, Nunku, and Nasarawa Eggon districts of Akwanga by 1905.⁸¹ The Akwanga Division and its adjoining communities underwent a complete political transformation, and in some cases native commoners were elevated to the position of rulers governing their land. The research also unveils the “conflict between Islam and Western economic principles.”⁸² There was a sharp

difference between the Jihadist mode of operation and when colonial rule was established in the area.

The World Watch Monitor gives the following description of the events:

*When Usman dan Fodio successfully staged a jihad in northern Nigeria, the Fulani and Hausa traders who had settled in the Middle Belt and other parts of the region heard his call and some left for Sokoto to join him. Upon return, they brought the jihad flags with them and started a jihad among the neighboring ethnic groups in the Middle Belt.*⁸³

Most indigenous tribes of the Middle Belt belonged to the Christian faith, yet adopted the form of governance introduced by the Sokoto caliphate. However, Islamic law was not practiced in these Christian-dominated areas, mostly because the populace offered strong resistance.

Economic Influence

The *jihad* of Dan Fodio increased the volume of trade and other commercial activities in Hausaland and opened hitherto isolated areas in central Nigeria that were not easily accessible. Eze opines that the *jihad* overhauled the entire economy of the Sokoto caliphate, including that of central Nigeria that had remained hostile to the revolution.⁸⁴ Significant improvements were achieved in the area of commerce and industry once Kano had regained its glory as the center of the caravan trade and the center of the Sokoto caliphate. Traders could move freely in the region, without fear of attack by slave raiders and bandits.⁸⁵ Falola stresses that it was the Sokoto caliphate that successfully introduced the principle of decentralization and separation of power.⁸⁶ In short, the reformist struggle initiated by Usman Dan Fodio brought a new economic and social order to northern Nigeria.

Conclusion

The Sokoto *jihad* was instigated by a group of pious Muslim scholars and clerics from the Fulani tribe who were determined to put an end to superstition, corruption, nepotism, and exploitation perpetrated by the Hausa aristocracy. It was the championing of Islam on part of the Fulani leaders that spearheaded the revolution and achieved the realization of its objectives.⁸⁷ Their *jihad* was waged against tyranny, moral decadence, injustice, social segregation, racial discrimination, and most importantly, syncretism and the worship of other deities besides Allah.

This research has revealed that the people of the Akwanga Division practiced their forms of religion prior to the arrival of the *jihadists*. Therefore, their incursion was seen as a threat to their traditions. No doubt this fierce confrontation between the two groups led to the loss of life and property, however, the unity of purpose, organized military strategy, and the leadership style of the frontliners made it possible for the revolutionary army to overcome any resistance.

Our investigation has shown that the Sokoto *jihad* contributed to the flourishing of Islamic civilization in the Akwanga Division. Islam was now practiced openly among the nobility, statesmen, and the general populace. The opening of Quranic schools, the influx of Islamic

scholars, and the establishment of centers for the teaching and learning of Islam fundamentally altered the religious and cultural landscape of central and northern Nigeria.

Another finding of this research is the evolution of a centralized power structure. The emergence of Sarkin Nunku in Madaland was a result of the diplomatic conquest by the Jama'a Emirate. The Rindre people accepted Magaji Dan Yamusa with humility and accepted Islam when he indicated his intention of capturing the area. However, the Eggons did not oblige to the persuasive military action of the *jihadists* easily, even though they were subdued in the long run. Hence the establishment of political institutions similar to that of the Sokoto Caliphate in all of Akwanga.

Also worth noting is that the non-Muslim tribes of Akwanga referred to Nunku and Wamba as the allies of the Fulani *jihadists* and labeled them as traitors and agents of the *jihadists*. The Sokoto *jihad* was intended to eliminate the un-Islamic practices and social ills prevailing in northern Nigeria. Regrettably, the pure intentions of the founding fathers of this movement were later sullied by political ambition, tribalistic sentiment, and corruption in the later years of the caliphate.

Notes

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