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## BIOGRAHY OF SHEIKH ABDULLAHI BIN FODIO AND THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNANCE IN HIS LIGHT

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### Abstract:

*This paper titled: “biography of sheikh Abdullahi Bin Fodio and the structure of government in his light” aims at finding out the ideas of Sheikh Abdullahi Bin Fodio’s structure of government in his light. The study pinpoints out his biography covering his early life, his educational background, his scholarly works, and political career. The study also highlights the structure of government by sheikh as: the caliphate, wazir, and the Qadi of his time. The researchers use historical approaches in conducting this research. Findings have revealed that Sheikh Abdullahi Bin Fodio through his unique government system in Sokoto Caliphate aimed to create a just and equitable society where the rule of law was upheld. The system was characterized by consultation, accountability, justice, and designed to ensure that the welfare of the people was prioritized.*

**Keywords:** Sheikh Abdullahi; government; biograph; system ; structure.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The man who dedicated his life to the service of humanity in the early period of 19<sup>th</sup> century, in West Africa, was Sheikh Abdullahi bin Fodio. Sheikh Abdullahi bin Fodio was a religious and political leader who played a major role in the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in what is now called Northern Nigeria. He was a devout Muslim who lived in the late 18th and early 19th century and advocated for the implementation of Islamic law (Sharia) in the society. His political system, therefore, was based on the principles of Islam and aimed to create a just and equitable society where the rule of law was upheld (Ibrahim, 2012). The system was characterized by consultation, accountability, and justice, and was designed to ensure that the welfare of the people was prioritized. The Sokoto Caliphate remains an important example of a successful Islamic state that implemented a political system based on the principles of Islam. This study aims at documenting a brief history of Sheikh Abdullahi Bin Fodio and discussing his ideas in structure of government.

Historical approaches have been adopted in compiling this work, The data were collected through journals, published works of other researchers, and undergraduate final year essays were consulted as well.

### 2.0 A BRIEF ACCOUNT ON SHEIKH ABDULLAHI BIN FODIO

He is Abu Muhammad Abdullahi Bin Muhammad bin Uthman Bin Salih Bin Harun Bin Gurdo Bin Jabbo Bin Muhammad Sambo Bin Ayyub Bin Masiran Bin Buba Baba bin Musa Jakollo (Umar, 2005).

He was born approximately 1181 AH (1767 CE) in a region of Central West Africa known as Hausaland to two noble parents. He memorized the Qur'an from his father, Muhammad, who was known as "Fodiyo" which means "the scholar" in the Hausa language (Bello, 2008).

He was raised religiously, studying the outward and inward Sacred Sciences and devoted his life to inviting non-Muslims to Islam and Muslims to the Sunnah, studying, teaching, waging jihad, traveling the spiritual path of inner excellence, and establishing Islamic governance.

He learned from and kept the company of his full brother, the Mujaddid Shaykh Uthman ibn Fodiyo, and studied and mastered the sciences of theology, jurisprudence, Arabic, legal philosophy, Qur'anic exegesis, and many others, especially the Sciences of Intellectual Reasoning (ulum al-aqli) (Sankore Institute, 2016).

He studied the science of hadith along with his brother from his maternal uncle, the Traveler, Shaykh Muhammad Raji in 1201AH; and he studied the Qur'an and ahadith from the outstanding Shaykh Abu Amana Jibril ibn Umar.

He studied logic from his cousin Mustafa and thoroughly researched the science of hadith from al-Farbari and entirely concerned himself with the sciences of the Arabic language. His aptitude for memorization was miraculous and it was said that he had memorized the entire al-Qamus dictionary.

Thus, he acquired sacred knowledge from hundreds of learned masters, all of them were top scholars of his region from the tribes of the Fulani, Hausa, and Burnawa, and not one of them was an Arab- this is from the great bounty that Allah has bestowed upon the *Ahl as-Sudan* ("the People of the Black



Lands” of East-West-Central Africa) from the blessings of sacred knowledge and Islam (Sankore Institute. 2016).

## 2.1 HIS FAMILY BACKGROUND

Abdullahi comes from a learned family. His father, Muhammad bin Uthman was nick-named Foduye (corrupted as Fodio), a Fulfulde word meaning Faqih, a jurist or learned man. His uncles Abdullahi bin Muhammad bin al-Hajj al-Hasan, Muhammad Buttugha Bin Muhammad bin al-Hajj, Abdurrahman and Muhammad Bin Raji were all great scholars. His mother was Hauwa Bint Muhammad bin Uthman bin Hamma (Abubakar, 2014).

Abdullahi was thus brought up in a learned environment. The Toronkawa clan of the Fulani to which he belonged had a very long tradition of Islamization and scholarship. Various accounts are given of their movements. They were known to have moved to Futo- Toro and from hence to have moved westwards until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Musa Jakollo, Abdullahi’s ancestor led them to settle in the area of Birnin Kwonni from there they spread throughout the Hausa country.

The Toronkawa brought within them to Hausa land their tradition of Islamic scholarship and learning. They lived in closely-knit families. They intermarried mainly among themselves, though marriages outside the clan could take place. These two features of Toronkawa Fulani are evident to anyone who cast even cursory look at their genealogies. Many of them were great scholars and everyone seems to have been related to everyone else (Bello, 2008).

## 2.2 HIS WIVES AND CHILDREN

Waziri Junaidu in his book *Tanisul Ahibba'I* mentioned twenty-one (21) names of Sheikh Abdullahi Bin Fodio's children without mentioning names of his wives, but in Sarkin Musulmi Bello in his book *Majmu'ul Ansabi* mentioned the names of his wives and their children as follow:

### His wives:

1. Fatima daughter of Muhammad Sa'adu son of Abdullahi.
2. Jannatu daughter of Abdullahi son of Muhammad bello.
3. Rahmatu daughter of Jumma.
4. Inna Hauwa daughter of Alh. Gaya son of Dogayel.
5. Iyya daughter of Abdullahi son of Muhammad Alhassan son of Ali Tana.
6. Aishtu.
7. Yar'ai.
8. Allazayi (Boyi, 2007).

### His Children:

1. Aishatu.
2. Muhammadu.
3. Ibrahim.
4. Muhammad Sambo.
5. Safiya.
6. Ummu Haira.
7. Gabdo.
8. Amina.
9. Hauwa'u.
10. Aliyu.



11. Fatima.
12. Khadija.
13. Fatima.
14. Aishatu.
15. Maimuna.
16. Maryam.
17. Hasana.
18. Hafsatu.
19. Ramlatu.
20. Hassan.
21. Abdulqadir.
22. Ishaqa.
23. Fatima.
24. Aishatu.
25. Haliru.
26. Aliyu.
27. Safiya.
28. Maimuna.
29. Usmanu.
30. Ahmadu.
31. Ummu.
32. Abubakar.
33. Fadimatu.
34. Abdulkadir.
35. Faitma.
36. Zainab.
37. Abdurrahman.
38. Aishatu.
39. Abdulkadir.
40. Maimunatu.
41. Khadija.

42. Abubakar.
43. Saudatu.
44. Halimatu.
45. Hafsatu.
46. Maryamu (Boyi, 2007).

### **2.3 HIS SCHOLARLY WORKS**

Despite the struggle and challenges ahead of them in facing the enemies of Chiefs of Hausa, Sheikh Abdullahi was a great scholar who devoted most of his life in research and writing, he wrote many books from almost all the areas in Islamic knowledge which include: Qur'an commentaries, *Ilmul Tajweed*, *Hadis*, *Fiqh*, *Siirah*, Arabic, Literature etc. After the division of the caliphate by Abdullahi's elder's brother Sheikh Usman Bin Fodiyo, Western Part of the Caliphate was handed over to him, later Shehu Abdullahi handed over the affairs of the state to his son Muhammad and his Nephew Bukhari. He devoted rest of his life to research and writings some of his works include the following:

1. *Al-Bahrul Muhidu*.
2. *Bayan Adabil Ibaadaat*.
3. *Diyaa'ut Taawiili*.
4. *Kifayatud Du'afa Fit Tafsir*.
5. *Wirdul Azkar*.
6. *Miftahul Usul*.
7. *Lubabul Madkha;l Fii Adaab Ahlid Din*.
8. *Qawaa'idus Salati*.
9. *Fathul Basiri Fi Ilmit Tafsiiri*.
10. *Khulasatul Usuli Fi Ilm Usulil Fiqh*. Among others (Bukhari, 2011).



## 2.4 HIS POLITICAL CAREER

Sheikh Abdullahi bin Fodio's political views were based on Islamic principles, which emphasized the importance of justice, equality, and good governance. He believed that the state had a responsibility to protect the rights of its citizens and ensure that they were treated fairly. His political views were also informed by his opposition to corrupt and oppressive rulers whom he saw as deviating from the principles of Islam.

Sheikh Abdullahi bin Fodio believed in the concept of shura, which is a system of consultation and consensus building. He believed that all members of the community should have a say in the affairs of the state and that decisions should be made through a process of consultation. This system of governance was designed to promote transparency and accountability and to prevent the abuse of power by those in authority.

Sheikh Abdullahi bin Fodio's administrative system and political views were instrumental in shaping the Sokoto Caliphate and its legacy in the region. His system was based on a strict adherence to Islamic law and promoted justice, equality, and good governance. His political views were informed by his opposition to corrupt and oppressive rulers and his belief in the importance of consultation and consensus building. Overall, Sheikh Abdullahi bin Fodio's legacy in the region is a testament to the enduring influence of his ideas and principles.

## 2.5 HIS DEATH

Sheikh Abdullahi Bin Fodio died on Wednesday, the 1<sup>st</sup> of Muharram in the year 1245 A.H, equivalent to August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1829. At the age of sixty-six (66). (Sharif, 2021)

### **3.0 GOVERNANCE AND ITS STRUCTURE IN LIGHT OF SHEIKH ABDULLAHI BIN FODIO'S IDEAS**

#### **3.1 THE CALIPHATE**

In his writings, Abdullahi gave a good deal of attention to the administration of the Muslim community, this is because of his realization of the fact that it is upon the proper administration of the community that the happiness and well-being of Muslims in this life and in the hereafter depends. The whole purpose of life on earth is to prepare for the eternal life after death. Salvation is achieved only by submitting to the will of God as embodied in the Shari'ah the Islamic way of life. The Prophet received divine revelation which he transmitted and interpreted to the faithful. On his death revelation ceased but the faith remains and so does the Muslim community. The faith must be upheld and protected and proper administration is essential to secure and maintain conditions under which members of the Muslim community can live a good Muslim life. This cannot be achieved without a leader, a successor to the Prophet. It is the head of the Muslim community that is referred to as *Khalifah*, the Caliph, the successor to the Prophet. Abdullahi refers to him variously as *Khalifah*, Imam, Amir al-muminin and Sultan (Abubaker, 1977).

According to Abdullahi the election of a Caliph is a religious duty obligatory upon the community at all times and under all circumstances. This insistence on the necessity of the caliphate is very important. A community without a leader is like a flock without a shepherd. The community must have a leader a symbol of its unity and solidarity. This symbol must be maintained at all costs for upon it rests the strength of the community. That is why Abdullahi like most Muslim constitutional writers maintains that



as far as possible there should be only one caliph to head the whole Muslim community. Significance in the proper discharge of the caliph's duties that he should be a Muslim, is obvious for he is the religious as well as the political head of the Muslim community whose first duty is to uphold and protect the faith and to administer the Caliphate in accordance with the demands of the Shari'ah. He also leads the faithful in prayer (Abubaker, 1977).

The candidate for the Caliphate must also be *mukallaf* i.e. legally responsible that is to say he must reach legal majority and be sane. Since the office of Caliph is the highest one in the caliphates the incumbent must possess those qualities which enable him to administer the Caliphate in a responsible manner. This provision helps to protect the Muslim community against having their most important institution headed by a young inexperienced. Next a Caliph must possess *kifayah* or the ability to fulfil the material requirements of his office. This is necessary if he is to perform his duty of defending the land of Islam of fighting jihad and of supervising the administration of the Caliphate (Sani, 1976).

### 3.2 WAZIR

Wazir or Minister of all the Caliph's officials who help in the administration of the Caliphate the most important is the Wazir or minister Abdullahi distinguishes three categories of Wazirs the highest being *Wazir al-tafwid* (Minister with delegated authority), one to whom the Caliph has delegated full authority. This type is similar to a modern Prime Minister and is likened to a father in his relationship with the Caliphs "He awakens him when he sleeps guides him when he becomes blind and reminds him when he forgets. He is the Caliph's partner in the

organization of the affairs of the realm his chief support in the political administration and the refuge to whom he resorts in times of crisis." His authority is co-extensive with the Caliph's and therefore he exercises general supervision over all the affairs of the Caliphate. He is competent to make political decisions and is invested with judicial authority the first and most important requirement being knowledge of the Law and its application in courts. The *Wazir al-tafwid* must be extremely learned is inferred from Abdullahi statement that the Caliph "gains from him knowledge about what he is ignorant of and confirms from him knowledge of what he knows," The suggestion here is that the Caliph himself need not necessarily possess learning which allows for *ijtihad* (Ayerege, 1971s).

The extent of the power of *Wazir al-tafwid* of whom Reuben Levy says that "From his important official duties and from his great powers of patronage he filled a position akin to that of a modern Prime Minister" is to be seen in Abdullahi's statement that his powers are identical with the Caliph's except in three ways he cannot appoint an heir-apparent to succeed the Caliph, he cannot ask to be relieved of his duty, nor can he remove from office those appointed by the Caliph.

In contrast with this powerful official the second type of Wazir, *Wazir al-tanfidh*. (Executive Minister) cannot initiate decisions nor can he exercise judicial authority. His duty is to see to it that the decisions of the Caliph are carried out.

The third category of Wazir, is *Wazir al-istisharah* (Advisory Minister). His function as the name suggests is to advise the caliph whenever he is consulted. He must be a man of wisdom, learning and piety whom the caliph is urged to consult on



matters relating to all sections of the community it is the duty of an advisory minister to make sure that the caliph does not act despotically. Learned scholars to whom the Caliph turns for advice on legal decisions in novel cases may belong to this category of Wazir who, like the executive Wazir, has no judicial authority (Ayerege, 1971).

### **3.3 EMIR OR PROVINCIAL GOVERNORS.**

Emirs are officers in charge of the provinces of the Caliphate. Like the Wazirs they are of different categories. The highest in rank are the provincial governors who have general overall powers delegated to them at least in theory over their provinces. These governors enjoy a wide latitude of freedom and autonomy and are in fact though not in theory often independent of the central authority. The extent of their power and authority can be inferred from Abdullahi's statement that they are like kings and Caliphs. They exercise in their areas of jurisdiction the same duties and functions of the Caliph. Political, military, financial and judicial administration as well as religious matters all fall under their authority (Abubaker, 1977).

Of the three categories of Emirs charged with the provincial administration one is authorized to deal with military matters only, while the other is delegated with authority to deal with the political and military administration. Both these officials may however exercise judicial authority although strictly speaking it does not fall within their jurisdiction. There are no fixed rules regarding these appointments much seems to depend on local customs and traditions.

The first category of Emirs represents those Emirs who succeeded in setting themselves as defector independent rulers

but who would seek to legitimize their rule through a nominal recognition of the authority of the caliph.

As for the second and third types of Emirs, their power seems to have been limited. In a historical context they may have represented those emirs who in the course of time lost their initial power and came to occupy a position within the province lower than that of the treasury officer. There is even a suggestion that some of them were appointed to accompany the treasury officers and enforce payment of taxes.

The fourth and last official listed under the Emirs has neither political nor military functions. He is the *Wali al-Nayzr fi mazalim or Wali al-Jarim* (the reviewer of crimes), an officer whose function is similar to that of a judge but much wider in scope. He can exercise the power *siyasa*h. deciding cases like the Caliph. In fact, his function was previously performed by the Caliph who, ideally, was the only person able to perform it efficiently. The court of *Wali al-Jaraim* concerns itself with acts of oppression of the citizens by the governors and other government officials occupying high rank over whom the judges are unable to enforce their decisions. Apart from the caliph himself, the only other people qualified to hold this office are those emirs who resemble him in their power and authority. These are presumably the emirs who fall under the first category discussed above (Abubaker, 1977).

### 3.4 QADI

Although the officials treated so far in this section may have authority to administer justice a fact which demonstrates how important it is the *Qadi* (judge) is the one official for whom it is the principal function. The importance attached to the office of



*Qadi* can be gauged from Abdullahi's statement that for a suitably qualified person its occupation is "one of the greatest acts of worship". It is a function for which Prophets have been sent. The settling of disputes the suppression of the injustices of the wicked the protection of the weak against the strong these functions of the *Qadi* are essential to the preservation of the Ummah the Muslim Community. The Law acts as a deterrent against criminals. By locking them up in prisons the healthy members of the community are protected from their crimes and also from their infectious moral disease. Always very keen on the preservation of the unity of the Muslim Community and on the maintenance of its moral purity Abdullahi saw it necessary to dilate on the office of the *Qadi*. His dilation may also be due to his concern with the trend he had observed in his society where judges did not always follow the right procedure in deciding cases (Abubaker, 1977).

The *Qadi's* jurisdiction may include other functions besides his legal duties, depending on the terms of his appointment and on local traditions. Generally, his duties include the administration of the property of orphans and of the mentally handicapped, the supervision of pious endowments (hubs) the execution of testaments (*wasaya*) and acting as guardian in the marriage of women without guardians. In serious cases where hudud or penalties specified by the Shari'ah involve execution, the judge's decision must be ratified by the caliph or the emir. In lesser hudud his decision is final.

The judge must make himself easily accessible to all people. He should therefore hold court in public where everyone can reach him without hindrance. He must be fair and treat both sides in a dispute with absolute equality. To ensure fairness the judge is

warned against passing judgement when in a physical or temperamental condition which is likely to influence his decision. The judge must follow the proper legal procedure in trying cases. His decisions must be based on the provisions of the Law as they are laid down in the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet and the consensus of the Community. Only when no provisions on the case at hand are available in these sources is the judge justified in resorting to *ijtihad*. if he is qualified to perform it, otherwise he must base his decision on the well-known and generally recognized view (*mash-hur*) of the School of Law to which he belongs. Failure to observe the above procedure renders his decisions null and void as does his failure to give the accused a chance to defend himself (Sani, 1976s).

### **3.5 MUHTASIB OR CENSOR OF PUBLIC MORALS.**

*Muhtasib* is the officer whose function is to see that the religious and moral precepts of Islam are observed. Although he is subordinate to the qadi in rank and power his function is almost as important. Abdullahi sees hisbah, or the duty of a *Muhtasib* as one of the foundations upon which the religious and mundane well-being of the Muslim community rests. The duty to enjoin people to do good and to avoid evil which is the essence of the *Mufatasib's* function is one of the fundamental functions of the Prophets comparable to prayers and giving alms in importance, A society which neglect these functions does so only at its peril - moral depravity, corruption, crime and strife being the inevitable consequences Abdullahi attributes most of the religious, moral and social evils which pervaded his society to the neglect of enforcing public morality. He complains that most of the people lived in abject ignorance even of the most fundamental religious principles (Sani, 1976).



The official *muhtasib* is competent to deal only with matters which are explicitly forbidden or disapproved by the Qur'an, Sunnah and the consensus of the Muslims. He is concerned with what people do and, for this reason, even the actions of persons who are not legally responsible come go under his authority. The *muhtasib's* function covers actions done in public. He has no authority over offenders who confine their activities within their homes. But he can intervene to stop an evil act committed in a private place if a complaint is lodged with him. However, in public places the official *muhtasib*, as well as any member of the Muslim community can intervene to stop evil-doing and enforce right-dealing on his own initiative and without having to receive a complaint.

The functions of a *muhtasib* cover a wide range of human activities but the transactions in the market-place occupy a central position. For this reason, he is referred to as *Sahib al-Suq* or market inspector. He deals with such matters as dishonesty and cheating in sales and refusal to settle debts. He inspects weights and measures to ensure uniformity of standard, and prevents the sale of items not recognized as saleable property by the Shari'ah. Outside the markets the *muhtasib* inspects streets and stops obstructions to their users. He inspects public baths and other public places to ensure conformity to the standards of morality and hygiene set down by the Shari'ah. In the Mosque he instructs those in need of help on the proper way of observing prayer (Abubaker, 1977).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that Sheikh Abdullahi Bin Fodio in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century after the establishment of Sokoto Caliphate played an important role in politics after he was assigned by his brother Sheikh Uthman Dan fodio as the head of Gwandu.

Sheikh Abdullahi Bin Fodio was born to a family of great scholars, travelled to various places in quest of knowledge. He later become a great scholar who contributed in politics and government system. His political system was based on the principles of Islamic law and aimed to create an equitable society where the rule of law was upheld, finally Sheikh Abdullahi Bin Fodio can be regarded as a great leader who contributed in different aspects of life during his life time.

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