

Causes of the Jihad of Usman ʿDan Fodio: A Historiographical Review

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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the historiography of the causes of the Jihad of Usman ʿDan Fodio. While classifying them under separate headings as religious, ethnic and socio-economic causes, the paper argues that the historian should integrate all these explanations within a coherent framework in order to account for the multi-dimensional process of transformation of northern Nigerian society triggered by the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate.

Introduction

Like the heated debate over the causes of the American Civil War, the debate over the causes of the Jihad of Usman ʿDan Fodio and the other jihads of nineteenth century West Africa continues, and is unlikely to be resolved simply or easily.¹ History is a complex process, in which the relative proportions of various causes are difficult to separate out. It is also a chaotic process in which one small, unrecorded event may have

1 For a summary of the major theories of the causes of the American Civil War, see Edwin C. Rozwenc, *The Causes of the American Civil War* (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1961). For a recent summary of the major theories of the causes of the jihad of Usman ʿDan Fodio, see M.O. Junaid, "19th Century Reforms in Hausaland: an Appraisal of Conflicting Hypotheses," *Hamdard Islamicus* 13, 1, 1990, pp. 33-38.

great ramifications which would be impossible for anyone to anticipate.² Thus, important causes of historical events can never be known with certainty. As one major investigator of the question has put it:

the causation behind the *jihad* and the nature of the Shehu's support may be thought of as a mosaic: some of its pieces are by now clearly delineated, others only dimly discernible, and many more have yet to be discovered.³

It is difficult to generalize about these causes for every area where the jihad occurred. This paper will concentrate on northwestern Hausaland and the ideas of the jihad leaders there, since that area is better documented, and since the jihad began and the overall leadership emerged there. However, one should remember that in other areas, especially outside Hausaland, the mix of factors was different, with some factors not being present at all, while new factors were present.⁴

Sultan Bello acknowledged the complexity of the causes which drove people into the community which the jihad had created. In a short work listing the types of people in the new community he included ten groups. Some merely feared the previous rulers. These participated neither in classes nor in campaigns. Another group were Fulani chauvinists who despised anybody who was not Fulani, a frank admission of the problems caused by the ethnic factor in the jihad. These were better than the first group since they went on military campaigns, but neglected religion. The third group were learned men who supported the jihad because it was intellectually fashionable. They were found in classes but not on

2 For a brief introduction to the mathematical theory of chaos, and why scientists no longer think that knowing all the variables would be sufficient to predict the outcome of chaotic processes, see J.P. Crutchfield, J. D. Farmer and Norman H. Packard, "Chaos," *Scientific American* 255, 6 (December, 1986), pp. 38-49.

3 Mervyn Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth: The Life and Times of the Shehu Usman Dan Fodio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 80.

4 For example, "it cannot be said that the Muslims in Fombina were denied freedom of worship or that they were forced to practice the pagan religion of the non-Fulbe. The jihad in the upper Benue region arose out of the social, economic and political conditions under which the Fulbe had been living." Sa'ad Abubakar, *The Lamibe of Fombina* (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1977).

campaigns; a mirror image of the previous group. A fourth group was also scholarly, but were those whose students had left them to join the Shaykh's community. They were always finding fault with the jihad and the community. A fifth group was those whose children had left them for the community. They also had no other place to go to, and criticised not only the community but Islam in general. The sixth group was only interested in worldly benefits. The seventh group had once been sincere, but had been tempted by the devil and succumbed to the attractions of the world. An eighth group was those young people who had grown up in the community. They were only interested in fighting: an interesting admission of how the values of the community had become changed by the process of fighting, first for survival and then supremacy. The ninth group were those who had no alternative but to join. They were always depressed. Only the last of the ten groups was a true member. These were those who gave up all for the love of God and joined the community in the hope of spreading Islam.⁵

Thus, in Bello's own assessment we find a complex mix of religious, ethnic and socio-economic causes bringing people into the community. This paper will discuss these causes in an attempt to make sense of them and integrate them into a coherent framework for explaining the causes of the jihad which led to the creation of the Sokoto Caliphate.

Religious Causes of the Jihad

There can be no question that, while followers joined for any number of complex reasons, its leaders regarded the jihad as essentially a religious duty. They were some of the most learned Muslim intellectuals of their day, and their readings had brought them to a conception of an ideal society and a philosophy of revolution which would help them attain that ideal society. They were also west Africans who had never been outside the relatively narrow confines of a very limited geographical area. Although they were in contact with others who had traveled widely and were influenced by the thinking of other scholars in the Muslim world,

5 Muhammad Bello, two untitled folios in the Nizamiyya School library, cited in Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* (London: Longman, 1967), p. 59.

both of their own time and from centuries before, their scholarship represented nothing that was not available in the intellectual tradition of Islam as practiced in west Africa, and may therefore be considered to be a wholly indigenous, and original, intellectual movement.⁶ It was most certainly not a case of an outside influence, for a movement with this ideology and characteristics had not appeared outside west Africa.

“The war itself was an extension of intensive teaching and preaching.”⁷ The takeover of existing states of Hausaland and adjacent areas, not to mention the founding of new states in areas such as Bauchi and Adamawa, by Muslim intellectuals could not have taken place without the continued growth of the Muslim community in the area, and the growth of the belief in Islamic scholarship as a legitimation of authority at the expense of previous forms of legitimation. Such Islamic legitimacy affected many non-Muslims as well, since there was no impermeable barrier between Islam and other west African religions. Given the tradition of remote creator gods and the tendency to syncretism among west African cults, it is not surprising that Islam, like other religions in other parts of the world, took on much local colouring, but local beliefs also took on some of the colour of Islam. Indeed, the question of where to draw the line between Islam and other systems of belief and practice became a major issue in the jihad.⁸ But for almost all members of the society Islamic authority, which in west Africa primarily meant scholarship, had become paramount.⁹ Usman 'Dan Fodio himself preached that learning was the most important thing for a ruler, and indeed was more important for rulers than for others.¹⁰

6 H.F.C. Smith, “A Neglected Theme of West African History: The Islamic Revolutions of the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, 2, 1961, pp. 175-6.

7 Murray Last, “Reform in West Africa - the Jihad Movements of the Nineteenth Century,” in *History of West Africa*, edited by J. F. A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder (London: Longman, 1974), v. 2, pp. 1-3.

8 Last, “Reform in West Africa” p. 4; M. A. Al-Hajj, “The Fulani Concept of Jihad: Shehu Uthman dan Fodio,” *Odu* 1, 1964, pp. 45-58.

9 Yusufu B. Usman, *The Transformation of Katsina 1400-1883* (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1981), p. 75.

10 ‘Uthman ibn Fudi, *Bayan Wujub al-Hijra ‘ala ‘l-‘Ibad*, edited and translated by F. H. El-Masri (Khartoum: Khartoum University Press and Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 143-144.

The political authority of religious leaders immediately suggests a parallel with the situation of African-Americans, whose political leaders have also often been religious figures. However, it is not necessary to explain the similarity by reference to this being an African cultural survival in the United States. This is probably a case of parallel evolution, where the lack of alternative organizational outlets and the weakening of the extended family under slavery led to the importance of the church for social and political organization among African-Americans, while the scholarly, rather than militant, nature of the introduction of Islam to West Africa meant that Islamic legitimacy would eventually be taken up by scholars.¹¹

The fact that this revolution was led by scholars highlights another important fact about Islam, which distinguished it clearly from other west African belief systems. Islam is a written religion. The Qur'an and the other written records of its precepts provide permanent reference points which may be reinterpreted but never changed. The 'ulama, or scholars, are the guardians of this written tradition against backsliding and syncretism. Their literacy gives them the means to communicate across vast distances of space and time. While this does not guarantee their agreement, it does unite them in a self-conscious community with common standards and values. This existence of a constant written reference point leads to periodic revival and reform movements motivated by a desire to reach the unchanging essence of Islam behind all the syncretic accretions and regressions that obscured it.¹²

Although Islam is the only traditional belief system in west Africa that relies on written records for its transmission, the importance of this

- 11 For an analysis of the political nature and roles of religious leadership in African-American society see E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America*, printed with C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Church Since Frazier* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975).
- 12 Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 133-138; see also Jack Goody, "The Impact of Islamic Writing on the Oral Cultures of West Africa," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 11, 3, 1971, pp. 456-466. Goody's fieldwork was carried out in areas only marginally affected by Islam, and cannot be applied uncritically to other areas of west Africa where the spread of Islam and Islamic literacy was much greater, such as Hausaland or the inland Niger delta.

permanent verbal record ties it in with another important west African tradition, one that also helped lead to the assumption of power by scholars. West African societies are verbally oriented. A high value is placed on verbal skill and the rate of multilingualism is very high. Not only are intricate forms of verbal play found in every west African language, but as one colonial manual described the situation “the natives can acquire a native language in about one-fiftieth of the time that it takes the most expert European linguist to do so.”¹³ Names are an important statement about a person or thing, a source of power over them.¹⁴ The magic of literacy consists in its capturing the power of words and then fixing the words materially so that they could be carried around to give power to their possessor. Thus Qur’anic amulets, which contain the word of God (the most powerful magic), are avidly sought by Muslim and non-Muslim alike. Even those west Africans who don’t pray, and who are therefore not considered to be Muslim, believe in the power of the magic possessed by literate Muslim scholars.¹⁵

A distinction is often made between revival and reform in Islam, but this distinction is of limited relevance here. Religious reform movements often use language which suggests a return to a purer conception of the religion, and all revivalist movements are faced with practical problems of reinterpreting the essence of their beliefs to fit the changing times in which the followers find themselves living. In this sense it is safe to say that the jihad under investigation here was both a revival and a reform of Islam, in that it sought to return to the original ideals of primitive Islam,

13 O. Temple and C. L. Temple, *Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria* second edition (Lagos: C.M.S. Bookshop, 1922), p. 406.

14 For the importance of the word and its power in non-Muslim west African thought, see Marcel Griaule, *Conversations with Ogotemmêlé* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

15 A similar pattern often takes place among Christians. An acquaintance of mine in Ghana importuned me incessantly for a “zip Bible.” He was most insistent that the Bible I sent him must have a leather cover and be closed with a zipper. Friends of mine in his village later confirmed what I had suspected. He was not reading the bible, but was using it as a charm. The parallel with the pre-jihad Kano charm Dirki, a Qur’an sewn in a leather case, should be obvious.

and in that it sought to reinterpret those ideals for nineteenth century west African society.¹⁶

Muslim scholars in west Africa had traditionally been peacemakers. Many groups, such as the Jakhanke and the Kunta of the Sahara, were pacifists and considered themselves above the lesser jihad, that of the sword. They were concerned only with purifying their practice of Islam, and made their living offering advice and amulets, and providing other intellectual services which their literacy gave them a monopoly on, for rulers, merchants and whoever else had use for them. They were thus outside the arena of political competition. Jihad, especially jihad as rebellion against an existing state, was not without Islamic legal precedent but was such a novel and unexpected pattern of behavior for scholars in West Africa that at first, many rulers didn't realize what was happening.¹⁷ This element of surprise was another factor in the success of the jihad.

The jihad was not only a revolt of Muslims against their rulers, it was also a fight of self-identified Muslims against other self-identified Muslims. Not only ordinary, God-fearing Muslims who prayed regularly, but even Muslim scholars found themselves on both sides of the barricades in this contest. Even the venerable and famous scholarly community of 'Yandoto, where Usman 'Dan Fodio's ancestor Muhammad Sa'ad and the famous al-Bakri had studied, was destroyed by the forces of the jihad. In part this was a result of the continuum mentioned above between Islam and other systems of belief, but that continuum had given rise to a very heated and acrimonious debate over who was or was not a Muslim. Those who would consider themselves to be Muslims were probably a majority in the area, but other cults were often practiced by such people, and were

16 Thomas Hodgkin, "The Radical Tradition in the Literature of Muslim West Africa," unpublished seminar paper, Seminar on Islamic Influences on the Literary Cultures of Africa, Centre of African Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1968, p. 16.

17 Nehemiah Levtzion, "Background to the Islamic Revolutions in West Africa," in *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*, edited by N. Levtzion and John O. Voll (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), pp. 21-22; Even Al-Maghili's justification of Askia Muhammad's coup against Sunni Ali was justification after the fact.

still important enough, especially for the legitimacy of ancient dynasties, that their ceremonies were common in the courts of the rulers.¹⁸

Robin Horton has developed a theory to explain the co-existence within the same community, and indeed often within the same individual, of Islamic and non-Islamic beliefs. He posits a two-tier African cosmology, in which the world as a whole (the 'Macrocosm') is controlled by the creator God, while the local 'microcosms' are controlled by lesser gods and spirits. Long-distance trade, whether intra-Sudanic, trans-Saharan or trans-Atlantic, tended to make the larger world, and thus God (Allah) and his cult (in this area Islam) more important. Subsistence peasants who were concerned about only their local area were more interested in nature spirits and thus remained unconverted to, though not uninfluenced by, Islam. Merchants and craftspersons who produced for long-distance trade were very concerned about the situation over a wide area and thus converted to Islam. Rulers, who had to relate to both these groups, were forced to bridge the gap between them. This may have appeared contradictory to the stricter Islamic scholars, but to the rulers it was just part of their job, as sovereigns of diverse communities. Fulani pastoralists were likewise involved in both Islam and local cults, since like the merchants they travelled over great distances, but, like the peasants with whom they traded dairy products for grain, were also involved in local subsistence production. Muslim scholars as a group emerged to provide services for the merchants, and later the rulers. Torodbe scholars served Fulani herders, and mediated between them and other groups outside their community, and had the least ties to the rulers of the states, but all the scholars needed the maximum erudition, as well as Sufism, in order to pursue their vocation effectively.¹⁹

Horton's theory has a number of advantages in explaining the intellectual process leading up to the jihad but it fails to account satisfactorily for the support that these scholars received for their jihad

18 Murray Last and M.A. Al-Hajj, "Attempts at Defining a Muslim in Nineteenth Century Hausaland and Bornu," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, 2, 1965, pp. 231-236.

19 Robin Horton, "On the Rationality of Conversion," *Africa* 45, 1975, 3, pp. 219-220, 4, pp. 374-381.

from other elements of the population, especially from herders and farmers, who were syncretic at best. It would seem that the growth of long-distance trade, including the slave trade, and in Hausaland the increasing production by peasants and herders for the long-distance markets, would have increased the pull of Islam for those groups. At the same time, the growth of the rural Muslim scholarly settlements to provide services for those groups would have helped spread the norms of literate, scholarly Islam and undermine the traditional emphasis on local cults.²⁰

It was this increasingly rural character of Islam in the area that probably led Usman 'Dan Fodio to insist that Islam was widespread among the people of Hausaland, but not among the rulers.²¹ No one, with the possible exception of priests of other cults, seems to have had a strong antipathy to Islam in this society.

As on the colonial frontiers of early eighteenth century America during the Great Awakening and later religious revivals, traveling preachers and their camp meetings provided some of the best entertainment available for the rural masses. Whenever a traveling circuit preacher heading a religious revival came through a village, anyone with even a marginal interest in Islam could be expected to come out and participate. They would not be anxious to flaunt their personal household deities, spirits, sacred stones, etc. but when the preacher moved on to the next town they would have gone back to their usual mixture of Islamic and other practices, with a somewhat stronger Islamic content in the mix, but with the exact mix determined by whatever benefits they expected to get from the practices. In any event they probably did not see the various practices as contradictory, no matter what the preacher said when he came around to promise hell-fire and damnation to syncretists and sinners. The kings, on the other hand, performed their rituals in front of everyone in order

20 R.A. Adeleye, "Hausaland and Bornu 1600-1800," in *History of West Africa 1* (third edition), edited by J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder (New York: Longman, 1985), p. 619.

21 For example see *Tanbih al-Ikhwān* cited by A. R. Augi, "Beyond the Shadow to the Substance: The Legacy of Gobir in the Sokoto Caliphate," seminar paper, Department of History, University of Sokoto, 7th June, 1985, as well as H.R. Palmer, "An Early Fulani Conception of Islam," *Journal of the African Society* 14, 53-54, 1915, p. 54.

to gain the allegiance of all groups, and thus exposed themselves to the censure of strict Muslim scholars who demanded exclusive adherence to their own cult, only.

The rural scholars with the least ties to the state were the freest to criticise it.²² These rural scholars were primarily Torodbe while the urban scholars, who depended to a great extent on court patronage, were mainly Hausa. The Torodbe network spread over a long distance and had ties with the equally widespread Fulani. They saw themselves as distinct from other social groups, even the Fulani, by virtue of the purity of their Islam. Likewise they and the Fulani had few internal divisions and were not riven by feuds as were the Tuareg. They were united by their ideal of Islam, an ideal which appealed to almost all in their society, to some degree.²³

The dichotomy between rural, predominantly Fulfulde speaking Torodbe scholars and urban, Hausa speaking scholars appears in Kano, too. Sarkin Kano Alwali sent his scholars to negotiate with the jihadists. These urban scholars ridiculed the rural Sufi beggars leading the jihad in Kano not only for their alleged ignorance, but also for their Fulani names, such as Fati, Ja'uji, and Dabo.²⁴

The distinction survives even today between the "mallama nduniya" or worldly scholars, who specialize in law and administration and who frequent the courts of the rulers, and the "mallama ngudunduniya" or world-fleeing scholars, who specialize in Sufism and have closer ties with commoners.²⁵ However, it would be wrong to draw too sharp a distinction between the two groups. Individuals could move back and forth from town to city several times in the course of a career that took them wherever the living was best.²⁶ Islamic legal knowledge would also have been important for rural scholars, and Sufism flourished in the cities

22 Last and Al-Hajj "Attempts at Defining a Muslim," p. 231.

23 Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, pp. lxxx-lxxxii.

24 Muhammad b. Salih, *Taqyid Akhbar Jama'at al-Shaykh*, Jos Museum manuscript number 97, fs. 7-8.

25 John Paden, *Religion and Political Culture in Kano* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 57

26 Lamin Sanneh, "The Origins of Clericalism in West Africa," *Journal of African History* 17, 1, 1976, p. 50.

and even at the courts. The difference between the two groups was one of emphasis and source of support, and it took a long, slow and painful process to find themselves on opposite sides of battlefields.

The spread of Mahdism and Sufism were also factors predisposing the society to Islamic revival. The belief that the appearance of the Mahdi was imminent and that the end of the world would come shortly thereafter certainly played a role in making west Africans ready to fight and die for the cause of Islam. Likewise the spread of the Qadiriyya order of Sufis gave added enthusiasm to supporters and communal organization to their efforts.²⁷ While the specific impact of the organization as distinct from the general role of Sufism in providing legitimacy to an Islamic scholar who aspired to political leadership may have been exaggerated,²⁸ there can be no doubt that the Shaykh's Fulfulde poem "Qadiriyya" was one of the most important pieces of propaganda for the jihad. Its short, rhythmic beat and repetitive refrain could produce a trance-like state, and it served as a simple, popular, vernacular text which could attract support for the order and its leader.²⁹

Usman 'Dan Fodio's religious ideas

Although he was one of the most highly educated Muslim scholars of his day, Usman 'Dan Fodio spent much of his time on tour, preaching the basics of Islam to rural Hausa and Fulani commoners. This helped to spread his fame and the prestige of his students, not only among other scholars who read his books, but also among the ordinary people, who came to know and respect him.³⁰ He saw himself, especially at first, as a teacher, rather than as a reformer, and he was more concerned with explaining the basics of Islamic beliefs and practices, and with maximizing

27 Last, "Reform in West Africa," p. 6.

28 C.C. Stewart, "Southern Saharan Scholarship and the Bilad as-Sudan," *Journal of African History* 17, 1976, pp. 90-92.

29 Abdullah ibn Muhammad, *Tazyin al-Waraqat*, edited with a translation and introduction by Mervyn Hiskett (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1963), introduction, p. 14.

30 F.H. El-Masri, "The Life of Usumandan Fodio before the Jihad," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, 4, 1963, pp. 442-443.

conversions, than with accusing his listeners of unbelief and hypocrisy.³¹ Consensus (*ijmā'*) was a very important religious principle to him, as it is in his Maliki *madhhab* in general, and he refused to condemn anything permitted by a minority of scholars.³² It has been suggested that this moderation was a result of his lack of critical thinking, or perhaps the provincial orientation of a scholar not familiar with foreign disputes,³³ but such moderation combined with erudition made it hard for opposing scholars to criticise him on Islamic grounds, and helped him to maximize his support.³⁴ It is a quality more religious leaders should imitate.

In line with his moderate approach to Islam is his categorization of the inhabitants of the Sudan with regard to their Islamization. He considered most of them to be Muslims. He considered the scholars, their students and those who imitated them to be Muslims, unquestionably, just as there could be no dispute about those who were forthright pagans. He considered those who accepted Islam while still venerating trees and rocks to be non-Muslims, and the same applied to those who claimed to be Muslims but who mocked the religion and the injunctions of the Shariah. Two other groups about whom there was some controversy he considered to be imperfect Muslims. These were those who performed impermissible innovations such as praying without washing, and ignorant people who adopted Islam without understanding it. Here again we see evidence of his moderation and his concern for education and upliftment of the ordinary people, whose Islam he refused to deny on grounds of sin or ignorance of speculative theological details.³⁵

His most important original idea was an offshoot of this moderation and insistence on consensus. That is his claim that nothing obliges anyone to follow only one school of law, or rite (*madhhab*). In addition he said that those who followed one of the four Sunni rites could freely adopt ideas from the other schools. Since in Sunni Islam, all four of these *madhahib*

31 Last and Al-Hajj, "Attempts at Defining a Muslim," pp. 233-234.

32 El Masri, "Introduction," *Bayan Wujub*, p. 18.

33 *ibid.* p. 30.

34 Y.B. Usman, *Transformation*, pp. 107-110.

35 El Masri, "Introduction," *Bayan Wujub*, pp. 7-8, 19-20.

are recognized as safe ways to paradise, they should no longer be treated as separate and exclusive entities.³⁶

With such a broad and tolerant attitude toward Islam, his most consistent intellectual enemies were two groups: those scholars who took a narrower approach towards Islam and considered ordinary people to be non-Muslim if they were not conversant with the details of speculative theology, or *kalām*, and those who justified political corruption.³⁷ The former group were known as the *mutakallimūn*, and the Shaykh wrote almost half his works, more than fifty books, refuting their ideas. They have been identified with the competing group of scholars known as 'kabbenkoobe' in Fulfulde.³⁸ The fact that such a group of highly educated scholars was not only present but was influential enough for the Shaykh to spend so much time refuting their ideas shows that he was not the only highly educated scholar in the area. Instead, he was part of a strong and diverse tradition of Islamic scholarship, and was simply the most popular of many highly educated scholars of his time and place.³⁹ His genius was in uniting the high level of scholarship around him with popular grievances.

"Usman decided that *jihad* was obligatory only when it had become inevitable."⁴⁰ That his intention was never to start a war is suggested by the fact that his writings contain so few citations of Islamic works on military science, although this may also be part of the generally pacific emphasis of traditional west African Islamic scholarship. This traditional pacifist emphasis is suggested by his most famous call to arms "Verily the

36 A.H. Hajj Nour, "An Elementary Study of the Fiqh of Dan Fodio," in *Studies in The History of the Sokoto Caliphate: The Sokoto Seminar Papers*, edited by Yusufu Bala Usman (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1979), p. 226; El Masri, "Introduction," *Bayan Wujub*, pp. 31-32; Uthman b. Fudi, *Hidayat Tullab* (printed with facing Hausa translation in *Littattafai Uku a Hade*, Zaria: Gaskiya, n.d.), p. 3.

37 M.A. Al-Hajj, "The Meaning of the Sokoto Jihad," in *Studies in the History of the Sokoto Caliphate*, pp. 8-9.

38 Louis Brenner, "Muslim Thought in Eighteenth Century West Africa: The Case of Uthman b. Fudi," *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*, edited by N. Levtzion and J.O. Voll (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), pp. 44-48.

39 El Masri, "Introduction," *Bayan Wujub*, p. 20.

40 M.R. Waldman, "The Fulani Jihad: A Reassessment," *Journal of African History* 6, 3, 1965, p. 349.

preparation of weapons is sunnah.”⁴¹ It is doubtful whether any Muslim scholar in the Middle East, where Islamic supremacy spread first by force of arms and only later by intellectual persuasion and conversion of the population, would have had to inform other Islamic scholars that it was permissible for Muslims to carry weapons and defend themselves. Shaykh Uthman did have a chapter on manoeuvres and tactics (chapter 28) and another on methods of fighting (chapter 30) in his *Bayan Wujub*, but these show practical experience rather than the cornucopia of citations that is his usual approach to any intellectual question. His sources here may have been experienced fighters who joined his community, rather than books.

His main military enemies were the traditional kings of Hausaland. His jihad began on the tenth of Dhu 'l-Qida, 1218 AH, or February 21, 1804 AD, when he made hijra, and emigrated outside the kingdom of Gobir.⁴² This was a result of an attack made on the settlement of one of his students, the Hausa scholar Abd al-Salam, by forces of Gobir. Abd al-Salam took refuge with some Fulani and the Shaykh's brother Abdullahi freed the prisoners. Thus self-defense became the ultimate justification for the jihad, at least in Gobir. This was a justification which few Muslims found it possible to quarrel with.⁴³

Usman 'Dan Fodio was among the first people in west Africa to begin a jihad by repeating the steps of persecution, hijra and jihad that had marked the life of Muhammad in Mecca. This pattern was later followed by other west African Muslim scholars, and was perhaps his most important contribution to Islam in nineteenth century west Africa.⁴⁴

Five reasons were given by Usman 'Dan Fodio for declaring most of the kings of the Sudan to be unbelievers. The first of these was their

41 “Inna isti‘dad al-salah sunna,” cited in Mervyn Hiskett, “Material Relating to the State of Learning Among the Fulani before their Jihad,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 19, 3, 1957, p. 576; also cited by his brother Abdullahi in *Tazyin al-Waraqat*, p. 51. The translation is my own from the original Arabic rather than Hiskett's English.

42 H.R. Palmer, “An Early Fulani Conception of Islam,” (translation of *Tanbih al-Ikhwan*), p. 198; Waldman, “Reassessment,” p. 348.

43 Last and Al-Hajj, “Attempts at Defining a Muslim,” pp. 235-240.

44 B.G. Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth Century Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 33.

persecution of those who repented, and hindering those who wished to repent and convert to Islam. Second, third and fourth were sacrifice, offerings and praying to rocks and trees for favours. All these acts, mixed with Islam, made them hypocrites, and it was more preferable to oppose them than forthright pagans. He gave many examples of scholars, such as the seventeenth century Moroccan scholar Ustadh 'Abd al-Rahman b. Yusuf al-Sharif, who went to great lengths to oppose and prevent such mixing of non-Islamic practices with Islam. Finally he said that those who gave military support to unbelievers against Muslims had allied with the unbelievers and thus belonged to their camp. He acknowledged that the famous scholar of Timbuktu, Ahmad Baba, said that the kings of Hausaland were Muslims but maintained that the situation must have changed, since they were manifestly not Muslims in his own time.⁴⁵

However, 'Dan Fodio offered lenient terms of surrender even to the king of Gobir who had attacked him, and these might have formed a basis for negotiations. He offered to return to Degel in peace on three conditions: that Yunfa should repent and become a true Muslim; that he should treat all his subjects with justice and equanimity, and that he should return all property and free all prisoners. On the advice of his scholars Yunfa refused,⁴⁶ as did most of the other Hausa kings.⁴⁷ The only permanent exception was Yauri, where an old, non-Fulani dynasty accepted the terms and remained in power throughout the nineteenth century.⁴⁸

45 B.G. Martin, "Unbelief in the Western Sudan: Uthman dan Fodio's 'Ta'lim al-Ikhwan,'" *Middle East Studies* 4, 1, 1967, pp. 80-88. For further discussion of non-Islamic practices, see Yusuf Wali, "The Translation of the Nur al-Albab," *Kano Studies*, n. s. 2, 1, pp. 10-36, and Last and Al-Hajj, "Attempts at Defining a Muslim," p. 234; Muhammad Bello considered that since there was no date when they were known to have reverted and apostacized from Islam, they must have always been hypocrites and that Ahmad Baba made a mistake. "Qadh al zinad fi amri hadha 'l-jihad," translated by Elisabeth Longuenesse in "Les causes du gihâd d'Usman Dan Fodio à travers un manuscrit de Muhammad Bello - Qadh al zinâd fî amri hâdha-l gihâd," *Cahiers d'Etudes Arabes et Islamiques* 4, 1977, pp. 70-89.

46 El Masri, "Introduction," *Bayan Wujub*, p. 12.

47 For the example of Sarkin Kano Alwali, see Muhammad b. Salih, *Taqyid Akhbar Jama'at al-Shaykh*, f. 7v

48 H. A. S. Johnston, *The Fulani Empire of Sokoto* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 92.

The outbreak of the jihad gave Usman 'Dan Fodio not only military enemies but also a new intellectual enemy, perhaps the only scholar in the area who was both his intellectual equal and more tolerant of questionable Muslims. This was the Bornu scholar Shaykh Al-Amin Al-Kanemi. He wrote to question the jihad in Bornu, saying that the Fulani there had been enslaving the free people of a land long recognized as Muslim, and denying that the practices of venerating trees and stones made it a land of unbelief. "Consider Damietta, a great Islamic city between Egypt and Syria, a place of learning and Islam: in it there is a tree, and the common people do to this tree as did the non-Arabs. But not one of the 'ulama' rises to fight them or has spoken of their paganism." Bello's forthright answer was threefold: sacrificing to rocks and trees is symptomatic of unbelief, joining unbelievers in attacking Muslims is also symptomatic of unbelief, and just because other people tolerate something doesn't justify it.⁴⁹

The reconciliation of Sufism and orthodox theology was not new in Islam, and was not confined to west Africa. One of the most important influences on Usman 'Dan Fodio was the famous scholar and Sufi al-Ghazali (d. 1111), the first to make such a reconciliation.⁵⁰ But Usman 'Dan Fodio was also securely in a local tradition of Islam, one that had reached its previous apogee at Timbuktu.⁵¹ Al-Maghili was one of the most famous authors of this tradition, and he became one of the jihadists favorite authorities.⁵²

The most important idea that Usman 'Dan Fodio received from al-Maghili related to *takfir*: the issue of what acts make a person a non-believer. Al-Maghili had justified Askia Muhammad Ture's coup against the Songhay monarch Sunni Ali not only on the grounds of performing

49 This account of their famous controversy, and the quote, is taken from T. Hodgkin, *Nigerian Perspectives* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 262-267. Interestingly a friend of mine from Damietta informs me that such veneration of trees is still common not only in Damietta but throughout Egypt, but that to the present day no Muslim reformer has sought to abolish it.

50 For more on Al-Ghazali and his thought see Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, second edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), especially pp. 94-96.

51 Hiskett, "State of Learning," p. 573.

52 Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods*, p. 31.

acts of worship incompatible with Islamic monotheism, but also on the grounds that he declared un-Islamic taxes to be lawful. This declaration of the unlawful to be lawful pushed him beyond the pale of Islam and made him not merely a disobedient Muslim, which he would have been if had he simply collected the taxes and did not declare them to be legal, but an unbeliever and a hypocrite. "The logic of this argument is impeccable and its various components had long existed in Islamic law. What al-Maghili did was to bring the components together in a ruling which sanctioned the overthrow of other reputedly Muslim governments" and which provided the justification for future Islamic revolutions in west Africa.⁵³

Another important influence on Usman 'Dan Fodio's thoughts was the Saharan scholar Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti (c. 1729-1811) who was the Khalifa of the Qadiriyya order in the Sahara. He was also a Sufi reformer, who preached moderation but who combined it with the importance of discipline and loyalty to one's superiors in the order. He may have been the first to introduce the Qadiriyya, although not Sufism in general, south of the Sahara. He was an outspoken critic of the Wahhabi movement in Arabia, calling its partisans *Khawarij*, or seceders from Islam. He was generally opposed to military jihad, but late in his life he expressed his support for Usman 'Dan Fodio's jihad.⁵⁴

One of the most direct and important influences on Usman 'Dan Fodio was Shaykh Jibril b. Umar of Agades.⁵⁵ It has even been claimed that the strains which first appeared between Usman 'Dan Fodio and the Gobir court were a result of Jibril's influence.⁵⁶ Jibril had been expelled from Gobir and Air for attempting to start a jihad. He held the opinion commonly associated with the Kharijites, that acts of grave sin made Muslims become unbelievers: Usman 'Dan Fodio disagreed profoundly with this view, which prevented Jibril from attracting a sizable base of support for his reforms, despite his later support for Usman's jihad.

53 John O. Hunwick, *Shari'ah in Songhay: The Replies of al-Maghili to the Questions of Askia al-Hajj Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 131.

54 J.O. Hunwick, "Kunta," *Encyclopedia of Islam* second edition pp. 393-395; Levtzion, "Islamic Revolutions," pp. 30-35..

55 Hiskett, "State of Learning," p. 575.

56 Johnston, *Fulani Empire*, p. 38.

Jibril had been in Mecca when it was under the control of the Wahhabis, and it has been claimed that both he and, through his influence, Usman 'Dan Fodio were Wahhabis.⁵⁷ This idea has proved to be surprisingly widespread and persistent, even appearing in an important recent survey of Islamic political movements.⁵⁸ It may have originated in the first direct report to reach the west about the Sokoto Caliphate, when Captain Hugh Clapperton reported meeting a Fulani:

who had been at Baghdad, Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Mecca, and belonged to the order of the Dervishes [Sufis]. He was a chattering little fellow, and told me that he had seen the Wahabees [sic] at Mecca, who, he said, were the same people and spoke the same language as the Felatahs [Fulani].⁵⁹

It is hard to deny that there are many features in common between the Wahhabi movement and that of Usman 'Dan Fodio. Both movements objected to veneration of trees and stones. Both spoke against political corruption and bribery. Leaders of both movements were expelled for their ideas and began jihads after this hijra, although Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab used existing political authorities instead of ruling himself. He also, like 'Dan Fodio, denounced the *mutakallimūn* and considered all who were not supporters of his own movement to be unbelievers. His jihad resulted in the unification of many small, warring societies into a larger state. Perhaps most interestingly, he also opposed the practice of any of the four orthodox legal schools being taken as an absolute authority, and, like Usman 'Dan Fodio, was an advocate of *ijtihād* or interpretation of the

57 I. A. B. Balogun, *The Life and Works of Uthman dan Fodio* (Lagos: Islamic Publications Bureau, 1975), pp. 29-33.

58 "Some of these [reform movements] seem to have been inspired by the Wahhabiyya, such as the *jihad* of Uthman dan-Fodio in central West Africa." Edward Mortimer, *Faith and Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), p. 71.

59 Dixon Denham and Hugh Clapperton, *Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa in the Years 1822, 1823 and 1824* (London: John Murray, 1826; reprinted Darf Publishers, 1985), p. 231.

law, and not *taqlid*, or blind following.⁶⁰

However, there were significant differences in their teachings, too. Sidi Mukhtar, Jibril and their pupil 'Dan Fodio were all Sufis, and the Wahhabi movement was strongly opposed to Sufism.⁶¹ The Wahhabis were most famous for their opposition to the veneration of the tombs of saints, which they equated with the veneration of trees and rocks by the ignorant. Among the satanic heresies to which Usman 'Dan Fodio objected was the denial of the miracles of saints, which he said was forbidden by consensus.⁶² The Wahhabis are also often accused of believing in an anthropomorphic deity, which is a characteristic belief of the Hanbali *madhhab* in general.⁶³ Usman 'Dan Fodio rejected such anthropomorphism in no uncertain terms,⁶⁴ but he refused to declare anyone who accepted it an unbeliever, since the Hanbali school accepted it and there was therefore no consensus among the scholars about it.

The common features of these and other eighteenth century reforms can be explained by their being part of a network of Muslim scholars tying the Muslim world together with pivots in Cairo, Mecca, and Medina.⁶⁵ This is not simply an abstraction because recent research has made it possible to identify some of the bearers of the ideas that link the west African jihads with the Wahhabis.

One such scholar was Salih b. Muhammad al-Fullani al-Umari (d. 1803-4), a west African scholar who was born in Futa Jallon and who travelled all over west Africa studying. He eventually travelled to north Africa and ended up in the Hejaz. He helped to spread west African ideas,

60 This description of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's thought is taken largely from Mortimer, *Faith and Power*, pp. 61-67, and M. S. Zaharaddin, "Wahhabism and its Influence Outside Arabia," *Islamic Quarterly* 23, 1979, pp. 146-157.

61 El-Masri, "Introduction," p. 19n; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had been a Sufi in his younger days, but recanted and became the most anti-Sufi Muslim scholar of his generation. Rahman, *Islam*, pp. 196-198.

62 *Ihya' al-Sunna wa ikhmad al-Bid'a* (Cairo: Al Hajj Dan Age Dabiruru, 1962), p. 248.

63 Zaharaddin, "Wahhabism and its Influence."

64 *Usul al-Din* (Zaria: Gaskiya, n.d.).

65 N. Levtzion and J.O. Voll, "Introduction," in *Eighteenth Century Renewal and Reform in Islam* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), pp. 7-19; J.R. Willis, "Jihad fi Sabil Allah - Its Doctrinal Basis in Islam and Some Aspects of its Evolution in Nineteenth Century West Africa," *Journal of African History* 8, 3, 1967, p. 400.

such as the importance of *ijtihād* rather than *taqlīd*, in Mecca and Medina. From there his ideas reached India where many Muslims consider him to be a *mujaddid*, or renewer of Islam. His influence there has been especially strong on the “Ahl al-Hadith” Islamic reform movement.⁶⁶

Another such scholar was Muhammad Hayat al-Sindi, who taught hadith to Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab. He also taught the person who taught Usman 'Dan Fodio's hadith teacher, Muhammad b. Raj. Through Hayat al-Sindi's teacher 'Abd Allah b. Salim al-Basri this intellectual genealogy connects up with major Muslim revivalists of south Asia such as Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi.⁶⁷

It is curious that there is no mention in any of Usman 'Dan Fodio's works of the Wahhabi movement. His mentor and supporter Sidi al-Mukhtar was unsparing in his criticism of that movement. Likewise his other mentor, Shaykh Jibril, must have known of them, as did many other west Africans who had visited the Middle East, including the Wahhabi domains. The only hint that this writer has found of his attitude to what was happening in Mecca and Medina is from his vernacular poem “Tabbat Haqiqa” where he advocates ignoring the practices of Mecca and Medina since “both Mecca and Medina are inferior to the Sunna.”⁶⁸

It is most likely that this jihad was, at least, part of the Sufi response to Wahhabism, attempting to answer Wahhabist criticisms of Sufism and to reform Sufism from within. It is also obvious that it was primarily a response to local conditions and problems. It shows that Islamic revolutions led by scholars are not necessarily characteristically Shi'ite, which contrasts with the assertions of western Orientalists who confine

66 John O. Hunwick. “Salih al-Fullani (1752/3-1803): The Career and Teachings of a West African 'Alim in Medina,” in *In Quest of an Islamic Humanism: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Memory of Mohammed al-Nowaihi*, edited by A. H. Green (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1984), pp. 139-154.

67 John O. Voll, “'Uthman b. Fudi's Sanad to al-Bukhari as Presented in Tazyin al-Waraqat,” *Fontes Historiae Africanae: Bulletin of Information* 11/12, 1986-7, pp. 48-51.

68 Quoted in Alhaji Garba Sa'idu, “The Significance of the Shehu's Sermons and Poems in Ajami,” *Studies in the History of the Sokoto Caliphate*, edited by Yusufu Bala Usman (Lagos: Third Press International, 1979), p. 208.

their studies to the Middle East.⁶⁹ Islamic reform and revival are complex and idiosyncratic phenomena, which owe much to local cultures and conditions. Oversimplifications such as “fundamentalism,” which conjure up parallels with twentieth century American Protestantism, obscure rather than explain such movements.⁷⁰

It is also obvious that this jihad must have had influences outside of west Africa. The prestigious *Encyclopedia of Islam* claims that “The first time that the *kadiris* [sic] appear to have played a political part was during the French conquest of Algeria,” when a revolt was led by the son of the local Qadiriyya official.⁷¹ Usman 'Dan Fodio's jihad was earlier than Abd al-Qadir's, and there were even earlier Qadiriyya jihads in west Africa. Algeria was closely connected to the Sudan by trade and scholarship, and there must have been some connection between the movements, but this has never been investigated by scholars as far as this writer is aware.⁷²

An unexamined aspect of 'Dan Fodio's thought that deserves

- 69 Ernst Gellner, “The Moslem Reformation” (review of Mortimer, *Faith and Power*) in *The New Republic*, November 22, 1982 pp. 25-30; cf. Bernard Lewis, “On the Quietist and Activist Traditions in Islamic Political Writing,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 49, 1986, pp. 141-147. Both these works acknowledge the existence of Sunni revolts, but find them to be abnormal. All the scholar-led jihads in west Africa have been Sunni, without exception. There was no Shi'ism in west Africa until very recently.
- 70 For more on the contrast between Wahhabism and 'Dan Fodio's movement and others of around the same time that have been mistakenly labeled “Wahhabi,” see Ahmad Dallal “The Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750-1850,” in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 113, 3, Jul. - Sep. 1993, pp. 341-359, where even parallel influences from hadith scholars in the Hijaz are discounted. Here, he makes the point that “The ‘intellectual family-trees’ of students and teachers cannot serve as evidence for common origins; education acquired from the same teacher could be, and indeed was, put to completely different uses by different students, and the commonality of the source does not prove that the outcome is identical or even similar.” This point shows how difficult it can be to construct links between scholars within a century, much less across the centuries, including such questions as possible links between Plato's ideal state, the Republic, and the ideal state established by Usman 'Dan Fodio.
- 71 D.S. Margoliouth, “Kadiriyya,” *Encyclopedia of Islam* (second edition), pp. 380-383.
- 72 For Abd al-Qadir's jihad in Algeria see “Opposition to French Colonialism in Algeria: Abd al-Qadir, his Predecessors and his Rivals,” in *Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth Century Africa* by B. G. Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). This book contains a chapter on Usman 'Dan Fodio, but does not consider the question of the relations between the two movements.

investigation is a possible neoplatonic influence through Sufism. This jihad resulted in an attempt to set up ideal states ruled by scholar-Sufi kings, not unlike the philosopher-kings of Plato's ideal *Republic*. Much more work needs to be done on the intellectual history of Islam, especially in the Sudanic belt of Africa south of the Sahara. Neoplatonist influences on Sufism are well known,⁷³ as are Neoplatonist influences on such Christian utopians as St. Augustine and his *City of God*. The roots of Platonic utopianism into west Africa and the details of the intellectual influences on 'Dan Fodio and his influential movement deserve to be investigated better, and to become known as part of Islamic intellectual history.

The Fulani Ethnic Factor in the Jihad

The history of Islam in west Africa is littered with the remains of minor Islamic revolts, petty Mahdis, and reformers who led ill-fated power grabs. Only the revolts which involved the Fulani to some extent were successful.⁷⁴ This section will attempt to answer the question "Why?" and will aim to provide a basis for understanding the ethnic factor in the jihad.

We can begin by dismissing some of the more absurd examples of colonialist historiography. The idea that religion was a mere pretext for a Fulani power grab⁷⁵ has been thoroughly refuted by the preceding section on religious factors. Some of the early colonial racial theories about the Fulani are almost embarrassing to read today because they are so absurd.

73 For a brief introduction to Neoplatonic influences on Sufism that includes references for further research see the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article "Mysticism in Arabic and Islamic Philosophy" especially the section "Neoplatonism and Sufism" online at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arabic-islamic-mysticism/> (first published Saturday, March 7, 2009; substantive revision Wednesday, April 13, 2016) retrieved March 29, 2017. Neoplatonism and the construction of an ideal society might also be a link between this movement and the other revolutionary movements in the west at the same time; a parallel dismissed as contrast by Lovejoy despite the fact that the move towards republicanism and constitutional monarchy that characterized the Age of Revolution in the west was paralleled by calls for nonhereditary succession and legal limits on the powers of monarchs by 'Dan Fodio and others in west Africa. See Paul Lovejoy, *Jihad in West Africa during the Age of Revolutions* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016), p. 88.

74 Murray Last, "Reform in West Africa," p. 3.

75 S.J. Hogben, *Muhammadan Emirates of Northern Nigeria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), pp. 73-75.

Sir Charles Orr wrote that the Fulani considered themselves to be white people who were “infinitely superior to the negro.” Orr himself thought that their language was Indo-European and closely related to Romani, the Gypsy language. He did not think that the jihad had been ethnically motivated but that the Fulani came to dominate it simply because of their racially superior intelligence. The fact that the Fulani scholars were the least white of the Fulani did not escape him, but he simply ignored the contradiction.⁷⁶ Temple and Temple wrote that it was difficult to say just who was or was not Fulani, since many Hausa “have Filane [sic] blood in their veins, [...] The least drop of Filane [sic] in a native, however, is clearly demonstrated by his superior intelligence, and generally by the comeliness of his exterior.”⁷⁷ This explanation of intelligence by means of pre-Mendelian conceptions of heredity is a perfect example of the circular logic of racial colonialism. Thus, if an African is intelligent then he or she must be Fulani, since Fulani are more intelligent than other Africans.

A much more logical and consistent explanation of the ethnic factor had long since been provided by a north African Muslim historian and social scientist, Ibn Khaldun, in his *Muqaddimah*, or “introduction” to history. He gave many examples of religious reformers who even managed to gather a following but were killed. “Religious propaganda cannot materialize without group feeling.”⁷⁸ Thus, no religious reform can be successful without group feeling, or *‘asabiyya*, the social solidarity of those who share a community and a lifestyle they seek to maintain. In Ibn Khaldun’s opinion, such solidarity was especially characteristic of nomadic herders and was one explanation for the preponderance of dynasties of nomadic origins.⁷⁹

76 Sir Charles Orr, *The Making of Northern Nigeria* (London; Macmillan & Co., 1911; reprinted Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1965), pp. 67-69, 71, 258.

77 Temple and Temple, *Notes*, p. 399.

78 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, translated by Franz Rosenthal (second edition) (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1967), I, pp. 322 et. seq.

79 Fuad Baali, *Society, State and Urbanism: Ibn Khaldun’s Sociological Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 44; A start towards the application of Khaldunian analysis to the study of the Sokoto Caliphate has been made by Ahmed Adam Okene and Shukri B. Ahmad in “Ibn Khaldun, Cyclical Theory and the Rise and Fall of Sokoto Caliphate, Nigeria, West Africa,” *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 2, 4, March 2011, pp. 80-91.

However, this solidarity was not the only explanation that Ibn Khaldun had for nomadic conquests. By using such examples as the Almoravids, he showed that the mobility of nomads enabled them to conquer a wide area.⁸⁰ On the basis of his extensive experience of living among herders in north Africa, he found them more courageous than sedentary people. In addition to their rugged mode of living, they were responsible for their own defense and usually carried weapons. Sedentary people, on the other hand, trusted the government and its corps of professional militia to defend them, and thus became effete.⁸¹

Ibn Khaldun made another interesting comment which relates to this jihad when he observed that religious motivation was necessary for nomadic conquests. This explains why only at certain times did nomads unite and conquer wide areas. Because of their "savagery" (lack of corruption and bad habits) and the desire of each one to be his own leader, only a charismatic religious authority could unite them. "Besides, no people are as quick (as the Arabs [i.e. nomads]) to accept (religious) truth and right guidance, because their natures have been preserved free from distorted habits and uncontaminated by base character qualities."⁸²

Thus we see how Islam gave the Fulani an ideology of social and political change that mobilized them to take over states, not only in Hausaland but also elsewhere in West Africa, in other jihads.⁸³ Such Islamic means of self-identification as the use of turbans, veils and other distinct items of dress gave the jama'at a further sense of unique cohesion and mission which contributed to their morale and ultimate victory.⁸⁴ This same pattern of religious organization of nomads was used by other contemporary Islamic movements such as the Wahhabiyya and the Sanusiyya.⁸⁵ Although multi-

80 *Muqaddimah*, v. I, pp. 295-296.

81 *Muqaddimah*, v. I, pp. 257-8.

82 *Muqaddimah*, v. I, pp. 305-306.

83 Jean Suret-Canale, "Essai sur la signification social et historique des hegemonies Peules (XVIIème - XIXème siècles)," (Paris: Centre d'études et de recherches marxistes, 1964), p. 33.

84 M. Hiskett, "Kitab al-Farq: a work on the Habe Kingdoms Attributed to Uthman dan Fodio," *Bulletin, School of Oriental and African Studies*, 23, 1960, p. 578.

85 Levtzion, "Islamic Revolutions," p. 23.

ethnic in character and support, these movements depended on nomadic participation for their ultimate victory.⁸⁶

Ibn Khaldun's views show that nomadic support is important for the victory of a religious movement but they do not show how that support was mobilized in this particular jihad and what such support meant to its religious leaders. "Little is known and much assumed about the importance of ethnic consciousness among the Fulani or among their learned class before the jihad."⁸⁷ In order to gain a good understanding of what the ethnic factor meant to the leaders and their followers, one must look in detail at the writings of those leaders and the evolution of their movement. "Ethnic groups are not natural ones. Ethnicity itself is a socially used cultural symbol."⁸⁸

Ethnicity and ethnic identity are complex matters that are hard to define, as they are dependent on context. Moreover, the viewpoint of those outside a self-identified group often differs from that of people within the group. Identity is not always "ethnic" or linguistic, but is usually multiple, as people consider themselves to be members of national, lineage, religious and other forms of identity, each of which may seem more important at different times or in different contexts in a society. Much has been written about the colonial invention of ethnicity, yet there were ethnic, clan, linguistic, and regional identities in precolonial times, and these contributed to the course and ultimate success of this jihad and the Sokoto Caliphate it established. Let us consider, as far as we can, what ethnic, regional, and various other identities meant to those who led it, since those are best documented and most important.

Abdullahi 'Dan Fodio described himself as "Turudi by lineage (*nasab*), Hausa by province (*iqlīm*) and country (*balad*)."⁸⁹ This suggests that he saw no contradiction between Hausa and other ethnicities. Even in the early colonial period the British recognized that the Hausa were not a

86 Last, "Reform in West Africa," pp. 5-7.

87 M.R. Waldman, "A Note on the Ethnic Interpretation of the Fulani Jihad," *Africa* 36, 3, 1966, p. 288.

88 F.A. Salamone, "Colonialism and the Emergence of Fulani Identity," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (Leiden) 20, 3-4, 1985, pp. 193-202.

89 *Tazyin al-Waraqat*, pp. 25 (Arabic) and 84 (translation).

distinct “tribe” or “race” but a large group of people of many different ancestries who all spoke the Hausa language.⁹⁰ Thus, Abdullahi seems to have thought of himself as being a Hausa of Torodbe ancestry.

Abdullahi considered at some length the question of the relation of the Turudbbi, as he also spelled it, to the Fulani herders. He explained that the Turudbbi were “the maternal uncles of all the Fulani” and were the original speakers of Fulfulde. The Fulani were descended from the first Arab conqueror of North Africa, ‘Uqba b. Amir, by a Turudbbi princess. From their father they got their cattle, from their mother they got their tongue, and from their mixed ancestry they got their light color. Rather than claiming to be white and thus superior to the blacks, Abdullahi claims that his people are pure blacks, although “brothers [in-law] of the Arabs.” Unlike the colonial scholars of a century later he claims that the Fulani are the mixed group, while the Turudbbi scholars are the original, pure ones.⁹¹

Of course, many groups claim purity of descent for themselves, although this does not mean that any of them really have it. John Ralph Willis has argued that the Torodbe are really a mixed group of humble origins who united around the professions of begging and scholarship. As wanderers they adopted the language of the Fulani, but their society was open to anyone, including outcasts and escaped slaves, who was willing to take up Islamic scholarship. Eventually their communities became large enough to conquer established kingdoms.⁹² This scenario is a little too much like the American self-image of humble origins, emigration, Puritanism, frontier, open society, achieved status, melting pot, and even cowboys; as such, it should perhaps not be adopted wholly, especially when advanced by an American scholar. It is quite possible that the ultimate origins of the Fulani and Torodbe are both lost in the past and will never be known for certain. Perhaps recent genetic studies can provide some clues.

90 Temple and Temple, *Notes*, p. 405.

91 *Tazyin al-Waraqat*, pp. 40, 97, 98, 110.

92 John Ralph Willis, “The Torodbe Clerisy: A Social View,” *Journal of African History* 19, 2, 1978, pp. 195-212.

The best sources we have for the origins of the Fulani are linguistics and physical anthropology. Both these sources agree that they are an indigenous west African people. Their language is a member of the West Atlantic branch of the Niger-Congo Language Family.⁹³ While their physical appearance is distinct in west Africa, that is a result of natural selection caused by the dry heat of the Sahelian climate in the region they traditionally inhabit on the southern fringes of the Sahara. This factor is also responsible for similar features among Masai, Tutsi and other “elongated Africans.” Neither the frequencies of various genetically determined traits in their blood nor their fingerprints show significant differences from other west Africans. The strong preferences of nomadic Fulani for particular physical attributes, especially noses, is sufficient to explain the physical differences between the Fulani and other west African populations.⁹⁴

The leaders of the jihad expressed their opinions about the role of ethnic Fulani in their movement, saying that most Fulani were Muslim and therefore should not be enslaved;⁹⁵ however, as we have seen above, they said the same about Hausa commoners. However, they did not maintain that all Fulani were Muslims. In a list of 101 illusions about Islam as described by Usman 'Dan Fodio, illusion no. 36 was “to believe that every Fulani is a Muslim” which opinion he said was “false and an illusion according to consensus” although Islam predominated among the Fulani more than among others.⁹⁶ The scholastic theologians who were 'Dan Fodio's worst intellectual enemies seem also to have been mostly Fulani; thus, any of their writings in Hausa have yet been discovered, even from areas and states resisting the jihad. He did not hesitate to attack Fulani with whom he disagreed, but was rather interested in orthodox Islam.⁹⁷

93 J.H. Greenberg, *The Languages of Africa* (revised edition) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970).

94 Jean Hiernaux, *The People of Africa* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1974), pp. 56-58, 82-85, 134-140, 183.

95 El Masri, “Introduction,” *Bayan Wujub*, pp. 8-9.

96 Uthman b. Fudi, *Hisn al-Afham min Juyush al-Awham (Islam Against Illusions)*, edited and translated with a commentary by Dr. Fazlur Rahman Siddiqi, (Kano: Quality Press, 1989), pp. 96-97; Arabic section p. 88.

97 Brenner, “Muslim Thought,” pp. 48, 65n.

He also wrote that “One of the swiftest ways of destroying a kingdom is to give preference to one particular tribe over another, or to show favour to one group of people over another [...]. A kingdom can endure with unbelief, but it cannot endure with injustice.”⁹⁸ This quotation should be enough to refute the simplistic views of some scholars that “from 1786 [he] preached the *jihad* in such a way that it became a racial as well as a religious war, and differs from the other *jihads* on account of the number of nomads who joined in.”⁹⁹

Yet, it is a fact that all of the flag bearers appointed by Usman 'Dan Fodio were Fulani, except Yakubu of Bauchi. Also, most of the civil servants and councillors appointed by those emirs were Fulani.¹⁰⁰ The reasons for this lie in the complicated development of the jihad.

During the last fifty years, most of major writers about the jihad, including Last, Johnston and Adeleye, agree that the ethnic factor in the jihad developed slowly during the course of the fighting. The initial incident which ignited the fighting was an attack on a Hausa speaking, non-Fulani scholar, and one of the first groups that supported the community on its hijra from Degel was the supporters of the Tuareg scholar Agali.¹⁰¹ The king of Zaria, Ishaq, announced his support for the jihad from the beginning. Only later did his successor revoke the allegiance and the fighting spread to Zaria.¹⁰² When the jihad broke out in Kano the first information that King Alwali received of it was “that the feeble ones whom you knew and the Sufi beggars to whom we gave alms and who read with our scholars in the city have assembled” and begun to revolt, carrying off food and killing those who resisted.¹⁰³ Abdullahi

98 *Bayan Wujub*, pp. 142 (English) 121 (Arabic).

99 J.S. Trimmingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962) p. 162.

100 Mahdi Adamu, “The Role of the Fulani and Twareg Pastoralists in the Central Sudan 1405-1903,” in *Pastoralists of the West African Savannah* edited by Mahdi Adamu and A.H.M. Kirk-Greene (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 60.

101 El Masri, “Life,” p. 447.

102 Murray Last, “A Solution to the Problems of Dynastic Chronology in Nineteenth Century Zaria and Kano,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, 3, December 1966, pp. 464-465.

103 Muhammad b. Salih, *Taqyid Akhbar Jama'at al-Shaykh* (Jos Museum Arabic Manuscript 97) f6v.

Dan Fodio wrote that at the beginning of the jihad “most of the country” followed his brother, but not “the majority of our tribe.”¹⁰⁴ Later, a special appeal was made to attract the other Torodbe scholars.

At the first battle, all the ethnic groups were found on both sides. “Nubians,” Tuareg and Fulani all joined the Sarkin Gobir Yunfa. On the side of Usman ʿDan Fodio stood “our Fulani and our Hausa all united, and among us other than these, certain tribes joined together - For the help of God’s religion - made up the union.”¹⁰⁵

However, the situation was to change as the fighting dragged on. According to Abdullahi’s account, most of the Kebbi Hausa who had been supporting the jihad deserted the community at the battle of Alwasa. Although the enemy was driven back eventually, a great number of the fighters died, especially the more devout ones. Without the many scholars who died and the many Hausa who ran away at this crucial battle, the forces of the jihad became dominated by the Fulani herders and the adventurous soldiers of fortune among them. With this change of emphasis, Abdullahi soon became disillusioned despite the subsequent victories, and started on his pilgrimage to Mecca, which took him as far as Kano before he was prevailed upon to return to the jihad.¹⁰⁶

Last dates the shift somewhat earlier to the battle of Tsuntsua in December 1804. There, about two hundred scholars died, and the Fulani clan leaders and professional soldiers took over much of their influence. To balance their power Usman ʿDan Fodio chose scholars from minor Fulani groups as his flag bearers, but the clan leaders were always represented on the councils.¹⁰⁷ The longer the fighting went on, the more important the Fulani became. Their bravery, which is evident because they held fast when the Hausa broke ranks at Alwasa, and their skills in archery, became indispensable to the success of the jihad.

In Bornu the fighting was even more exclusively a Fulani movement. Bello in his dispute with al-Kanemi referred to “our Fulani brothers”

104 *Tazyin al-Waraqat*, pp. 41 (Arabic), 98 (English).

105 *Tazyin al-Waraqat*, pp. 109-110.

106 *Tazyin al-Waraqat*, pp. 118, 120.

107 Last, “Reform in West Africa,” pp. 9-13.

and made other ethnic references which were rare in his other writings. Likewise, eyewitness accounts from Bornu suggest that few peasants or merchants participated in the revolt there; a situation not necessarily characteristic of Hausaland.¹⁰⁸

Even at its end, the jihad was not a totally Fulani affair anywhere in Hausaland, and not all the Fulani supported it. In Kano only six of the twelve Fulani clans in the area at the time supported it. These were the Mundabawa (the name for the scholarly Fulani in Kano), the Sullubawa, the Danejawa, the Yolawa, the Dambazawa and the Jobawa.¹⁰⁹ The Jahunawa, among others, stayed on good terms with the Hausa rulers and did not participate in the jihad.¹¹⁰ Even long after the fighting had ended, many Fulani were disaffected from the Caliphate authorities. Many of them spied for Ningi or settled there in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹¹¹

The rulers of the Caliphate were also not prepared to turn their society into one wholly dominated by Fulani. There is evidence from the "Majmu'" of Bello's Wazir Gidado that representatives of many different ethnic groups were found in Bello's administration.¹¹² Ibrahim Dabo of Kano replaced a Fulani Sarkin Karaye with a Hausa who was more acceptable to the local people.¹¹³ The first chief judge (alkali) appointed in Kano after the jihad was the scholar Uthman al-Hausi (Uthman the Hausa). One of Emir Suleiman's top advisors was another Hausa, Yusuf al-Hausi.¹¹⁴

108 Last and Al Hajj, op. cit. p. 237; Last, "Reform in West Africa," p. 10.

109 A.M. Fika, *The Kano Civil War and British Over-Rule 1882-1940* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 16.

110 John R. Paden, *Religion and Political Culture in Kano* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 22.

111 Adell Patton (jr.), "The Ningi Chieftdom and the African Frontier: Mountaineers and Resistance to the Sokoto Caliphate 1800-1908," Ph.D. dissertation (History) University of Wisconsin (Madison), 1975, p. 239. For a reconsideration of the idea that the Ningi state was non-Islamic see John Philips, "A Letter from Ningi in the Sokoto Archives," *Journal of Asia and Africa Studies* (Tokyo), 1993c, 45, pp. 221-226.

112 Shehu Yamusa, "The Political Ideas of the Jihad Leaders," M. A. thesis, Ahmadu Bello University (Zaria), 1975, p. 10.

113 H.I. Sa'id, "Revolution and Reaction: The Fulani Jihad in Kano and its Aftermath 1807-1919," Ph.D. dissertation (History), University of Michigan, 1978 p. 168.

114 *Taqyid al-Akhbar*, f18v.

The fate of Uthman al-Hausi's office suggests that the real consolidation of Fulani control came after the jihad had been won, when the struggle for control of the offices of the Caliphate began. Uthman was succeeded by Salih b. Muhammad, a Fulani.¹¹⁵ The strong clan structure and social solidarity of the Fulani scholars helped them in power struggles after the jihad and gave them an advantage over their less well-supported Hausa colleagues. Oral traditions preserved in the court of Kano in the late twentieth century agree that Hausa scholars' offices tended not to go to their descendants, and attribute this to their piety. It is reported that these Hausa scholars asked their children not to inherit because they did not believe that succession to office should be hereditary.¹¹⁶ If true, then this is an interesting admission by the Fulani rulers of Kano that the Hausa scholars whom they gradually squeezed out were their superiors in religious devotion. It is unlikely that Hausa scholars were more religious than the Fulani; rather, they were probably not as well prepared in the struggle for power after the jihad, since their society was not organized in clans with large numbers of supporters among their kin.

As Ibn Khaldun pointed out, in the first stage of a dynasty a ruler fills offices with his relatives and clients because of *'asabiyya*. Only in the second stage, as *'asabiyya* weakens, does he fill offices with other followers, which in the case of the Sokoto Caliphate tended to be the slave officials which Sarkin Kano Abdullahi and his successors used to boost their personal power.¹¹⁷

The consolidation of power by the Fulani scholars during the

115 This Salih b. Muhammad may have been the father of Muhammad b. Salih, the Alkali for Sarkin Kano Abdullahi, against whom the Ningi revolt was launched by a Hausa scholar. Muhammad's constant emphasis on the importance of the Fulani in the jihad and the minimal role played by the Hausa participants (e.g. folios 5, 6) may be seen as an attempt to bolster the status quo of 1864, when his account was written, in the midst of fighting against the Ningi revolt.

116 Abdullahi Mahadi, "The State and the Economy: the Sarauta System and its Roles in Shaping the Society and Economy of Kano with Particular Reference to the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries" (three volumes), Ph.D. dissertation (History), Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 1982, p. 347.

117 Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, v. 1 pp. 353-354, 372-375. This is similar to the interpretation of Waldman, "Ethnic Interpretation," pp. 289-290, who says that the new rulers, who were in what was for them an unprecedented and perhaps uncomfortable situation, came to fear their subjects and therefore used ethnic boundaries to perpetuate their class rule.

bureaucratic infighting which followed the jihad was one factor that led to Hausa-based revolts such as that of Abd al-Salam, the scholar whose persecution by Gobir had begun the jihad.¹¹⁸ At the same time, the Fulani scholars who came to rule were equally mistrustful of the cattle herders who were their main base of support. The same source on the Kano jihad that stressed that only one Hausa scholar came out in support of the jihad with his followers reported that only one illiterate Fulani chief went on hijra and supported the jihad.¹¹⁹ The policy of the later jihad authorities, especially the ribat policy, was to settle and Hausacize the Fulani nomads.¹²⁰ By 1864, a Fulani scholar could refer to both Hausa and Fulfulde as “our language.”¹²¹ In the twentieth century there could be no doubt that Muslim Hausa, especially merchants or craftsmen from the cities, had higher status than non-Muslim Fulani, especially rural cattle herders.¹²²

Social and Economic Factors¹²³

Even those who would minimize the existence of any factors in the jihad other than religious ones, would admit that Islam includes in its teachings not only an abstract concept of social justice, but also specific

118 For Abd al-Salam's revolt see Last, *Sokoto Caliphate*, especially pp. 67-69, and Muhammad Bello's *Sard al-Kalam*, translated into Hausa as “Labarin Abin da ya Faru Tsakanin Muhammad Bello da Abdu'ssalami,” *Hausawa da Makwabtansu*, edited by R. M. East (Zaria: Northern Nigerian Publishing Company, 1933, 1970), 1, pp. 19-35.

119 *Taqyid al-Akhbar*, f 10v.

120 John E. Phillips, *Black Africa's Largest Islamic Kingdom: Royal Ribats of Kano and Sokoto* (New World African Press: Northridge, California, 2016).

121 *Taqyid al-Akhbar* f 6r, “bi lughatina al-Fulaniyya” “in our Fulani language.” “Fulani” is the Hausa form, not that of Fulfulde, suggesting that the author's native language was already Hausa, but cf. Abdullahi 'Dan Fodio in *Tazyin al-Waraqat*, pp. 40, 55 and 58, where he uses the Hausa derived term “Al-Fulaniyyun” to describe the Fulani, and never refers to them as “Fulbe” or even “Felata,” although he refers to his own people, the Torodbe, as “Turubbi” (p. 58) or “Turudabbi” (p. 40), but never in the Hausa form as “Toronkawa.”

122 E.R. Yeld, “Islam and Social Stratification in Northern Nigeria,” *British Journal of Sociology*, 11, 2, 1966, pp. 112-128.

123 For an earlier study of social and economic factors in Islamic revolutions in the Senegambia, a part of west Africa that was more intimately connected to overseas trade, see Martin Klein's “Social and Economic Factors in the Muslim Revolution in Senegambia,” *The Journal of African History* 13, 3, 1972, pp. 419-441.

teachings about social welfare and the social responsibilities of rulers. Such teachings were an important part of the ideology of Usman 'Dan Fodio and probably accounted for much of his appeal.¹²⁴

However, his teachings did not begin with criticisms of the social conditions around him and the corrupt practices of the Hausa monarchs. His first major work, the *Ihya al-Sunna* (1793) was completely apolitical. It made no mention of the abuses or oppression which were the major themes of later works such as *Kitab al-Farq*.¹²⁵ It was his deepening understanding of the society around him, as well as his deepening understanding of the relevance of Islam to that society, caused by his tours of the countryside, that turned him more and more towards social concerns, and made him a critic not just of "heathen idolatry" but of corruption, unjust taxation and oppression too.

Three deepening social contradictions that led to the jihad may be identified. These three contradictions provided the fertile ground of discontent on which the seeds of Islamic revolution were sown by Usman 'Dan Fodio and his followers.

The first of these is a contradiction between economies which were increasingly based on long-distance trade (predominately intra-Sudanic but also trans-Saharan and even trans-Atlantic) and political units which were small-scale and local in orientation. Thus, the growth of interstate trade and the search for larger and wider political units became one of the major themes of Hausa history from the centuries before the jihad, but this search was generally conducted by local monarchs trying to conquer their neighbours through force of arms.¹²⁶ Under Usman 'Dan Fodio this dilemma was resolved by means of a type of federal structure, where the central government in Sokoto acted as mediator between the states, co-ordinating them and acting to ensure overall unity of action and purpose,

124 e.g. Alhaji Shehu Shagari and Jean Boyd, *Uthman Dan Fodio* (Lagos; Islamic Publications Bureau, 1978); Ismail A. B. Balogun, "The Penetration of Islam into Nigeria" African Studies Seminar Paper No. 7, Sudan Research Unit (Faculty of Arts, University of Khartoum, 1969).

125 Brenner, "Muslim Thought," p. 40.

126 R.A. Adeleye, *Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria 1804-1906* (New York: Humanities Press, 1971), pp. 5-7.

while uniting not only most Hausa states but other, neighboring areas as well.¹²⁷ This pattern is similar to the one followed by scholarly lineages in the Sahara which mediate between noble lineages. As in the case of Usman 'Dan Fodio, members of these scholarly lineages must know both Sufism and jurisprudence to understand both the letter and the spirit of the law, and they must have enough spiritual power (*baraka*) to compel enforcement.¹²⁸ The perceived neutrality of the scholars vis-à-vis other groups, their omnipresence and their wide variety of social backgrounds helped them to be seen as neutral mediators between other interest groups in the society, rather than as an interest group of their own.¹²⁹

The second major contradiction was between an Islamic society where Muslim scholars legitimated authority and mediated power, and pre-Islamic dynasties where myths and rituals of non-Islamic origin were the basis of the traditional ruling order. This contradiction could be ignored up to the end of the eighteenth century, when other conditions made the situation reach a state of crisis.¹³⁰ Some of these dynasties may have claimed an origin from the Caliphs of Baghdad, according to the Bayajida legend; however, a recent detailed study of the legend shows that there is no evidence of its existence before the nineteenth century, and argues that it was actually woven at that time out of fragments of previous legends.¹³¹

The third contradiction was between the traditional Islamic exemption from slavery and the increasingly omnivorous appetites of two competing slave trades: the trans-Atlantic and the trans-Saharan. This issue was almost certainly of much more immediate concern to

127 Hiskett, "Kitab al-Farq," p. 579.

128 C.C. Stewart, "Southern Saharan Scholarship and the Bilad as-Sudan," *Journal of African History* 17, 1976, pp. 85-87.

129 Yusufu Abba, "The 1804 Jihad in Hausaland as a Revolution," *Studies in the History of the Sokoto Caliphate: the Sokoto Seminar Papers*, edited by Y. B. Usman (Lagos and New York: Third Press International, 1979) p. 28.

130 Yusufu B. Usman, "The Transformation of Political Communities: Some Notes on a Significant Dimension of the Sokoto Jihad," *Studies in the History of the Sokoto Caliphate* edited by Y. B. Usman (Lagos and New York: Third Press International, 1979), p. 50.

131 D. Lange, "The Evolution of the Hausa Story: from Bawo to Bayajida," *Afrika und Übersee*, 70, 1987, pp. 195-209.

most commoners in the society than the abstractions represented by the other two contradictions. It perhaps furnished more converts for Usman 'Dan Fodio's preaching tours than any other cause. Illegal enslavement certainly became a major concern of his teaching as time passed. Eventually, this concern over illegal enslavement became the *casus belli* of the jihad itself.

For the typical supporter of the jihad, these contradictions were embodied in the increasingly arbitrary and despotic rule of the traditional dynasties, and the alternative offered by Usman 'Dan Fodio of uniform application of the Islamic Sharia law. The fact that corruption has been an important element of Hausa life for a long time is shown by an analysis of the language. Yet there is no generic term for corruption in the sense of the private use of public office for enrichment, only for various forms of oppression.¹³² Such oppression seems to have been particularly acute and felt, or perhaps was best denounced by the jihad leaders, in areas where Islam is particularly precise, such as taxation and the administration of justice.¹³³ One of Usman 'Dan Fodio's first demands of Sultan Gobir Bawa was to lighten the taxes on his people and not to levy taxes that were not approved by Islam.¹³⁴

His most detailed critique of the practices of the preceding dynasties is contained in his work *Kitab al-Farq*, an Arabic composition written after the jihad, but which seems to be modeled on his vernacular preaching from before the jihad.¹³⁵ He criticised the traditional dynasties for claiming the right to rule by heredity and force rather than through consultation. They used arbitrary punishments rather than holding trials under the strict rules of procedure and evidence demanded by Islamic law. They imposed unauthorized taxes, such as *kudin gari* and *kudin salla*, a tax on Islamic festival days. They took women without permission and kept up

132 M.G. Smith, "Historical and Cultural Conditions of Political Corruption Among the Hausa," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 6, 2, 1964, p. 164.

133 Last, *Sokoto Caliphate*, p. lxxxii.

134 Wazirin Sokoto Junaidu, *Tarihin Fulani* (Zaria: Gaskiya, 1959) p. 12.

135 This description of Usman 'Dan Fodio's criticism of the society he found, as well as his prescription for reform, is taken from Hiskett, *Kitab al-Farq* translation pages 567-571.

to a thousand wives. They ignored the needs of the poor and unfortunate in society while they lived luxuriously and demanded presents known as *gaisuwa*, or “greetings.” Even those who conveyed subjects before the ruler demanded bribes for so doing. Their slaves abused anyone who ventured near royal plantations, while their animals grazed at will on other people’s farms. Muslims were drafted into their armies to support states that Usman 'Dan Fodio declared were non-Muslim. Their judges ruled in favour of those who could offer the largest bribes. They punished anyone who disrespected them, and they bestowed grandiose titles which have no basis in the strict and simple administration preferred by Islam.

Such complaints would have affected all members of the society outside the courts, but many of the complaints would have been of special concern to merchants and others involved in commerce and trade, especially across state borders. Usman 'Dan Fodio complained of illegal market imposts, especially the *tawasa* charged on meat and the *agama* charged on cotton. The kings routinely seized beasts of burden and only returned them if the owner followed them to court, which was something that busy travelers would probably have been unwilling to take the time to do. They replaced the strict, Qur’anic corporal punishment for thieves with fines. They seized goods of travelers who died in their domains. Finally, they levied unauthorized taxes on trade and on merchants.

In contrast, Islamic rulers would reform the markets and take care of the poor and unfortunate members of society. They would seek office by consultation, not through force or heredity, and would award offices according to the principle that authority shall not be given to one who seeks it. They would abandon harshness in relations with law-abiding citizens, but would instead seek to promote justice and good works in all their dealings. They would have only four ministers, to keep the costs of administration to a minimum. These would be the wazir, the judge, the chief of police, and the tax collector. Revenue would come only from the state’s share of booty, land tax, poll tax on protected non-Muslims, tithe on Muslims, inheritance tax, and abandoned property. Expenditures would be allocated to the army, the judges, governors, building and repair of mosques and bridges, and alms for the poor. Any surplus would be kept

as a reserve or would be distributed generally. Thus Muslim law would regularize and simplify the administration of the state.

The famines of the eighteenth century and the subsequent recovery had profound effects on the society, which also helped to create conditions leading to the jihad. Famine was more advantageous for the Fulani herders than it was for others, since deforestation opened new lands for cattle, and allowed them to expand their activities and move south, increasing their potential influence in the society.¹³⁶ Many people migrated to river valleys, such as the Rima valley, where settlements such as Degel and Marnona were located. It was here that Usman 'Dan Fodio and his relatives lived. The increasing competition for a shrinking economic pie by the small states of the time led to an intensification of warfare and enslavement, further exacerbating the social and economic crisis.¹³⁷ Kinship gradually became less important in the society as trade continued its slow transformation of society and contractual arrangements became more important. As a result of these changes a rootless group of "déclassés," especially young people who felt little loyalty to family or traditional authority, began to emerge. They could be mobilized by the jihad, if not necessarily by Islam.¹³⁸ The existence of this group is suggested by several of the categories of people mentioned by Bello as belonging to his community. Those included people only interested in worldly gain, and people whose children left them for the community and thus who had no alternative but to join.

The role of long-distance trade was also an important element in the social changes leading up to the jihad. Hausa trade networks underwent an enormous expansion in the decades before the jihad, but the divisions and decentralization caused by the collapse of Songhay kept the full dynamic potential of the craft-oriented Hausa culture from being tapped. The gold, salt, kola and slave trades were all important and helped to make the society more diverse and more tied in with surrounding societies.

136 George E. Brooks, "A Provisional Historical Schema for Western Africa Based on Seven Climate Periods," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 101-102, XXVI-1-2, 1986, pp. 56-57.

137 Augi, "Beyond the Shadow," pp.6-16.

138 Suret-Canale, "Signification sociale," p. 25.

Hausa merchants even began to appear on the coast of Dahomey in the 1790s, suggesting participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade.¹³⁹

The four long-distance trades, mentioned above, were not the only ones which helped to create the conditions for the jihad. It has been noted that the main grain sources for the southern Saharan economies - the valleys of the Senegal and Rima rivers, the inland Niger delta, and the western Chad basin - were also the locations of the three most important jihads of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: Futa Toro, Masina and Sokoto.¹⁴⁰ In addition, in the case of this jihad in Hausaland, one must remember the importance of craft production for trade in textiles, leather goods and other manufactured items. The social differentiation resulting from increasing production for trade was another cause of the jihad.¹⁴¹

Incidental facts obtained from the actual details of the jihad tend to reinforce the impression that mobile groups were involved, who moved across state boundaries and who therefore had an interest in the creation of larger polities. Many people, presumably those tied to one place, were unaware of what was happening and did not know about the large number of people joining the jihad in Kano. However, people who were tied to a particular spot but who were producing for trade would have heard the news from traders. In addition, much of the fighting in Kano seems to have taken place in the southeast, a major axis of caravan trade with Zaria. A scholar from Kano was sent to Zaria to confirm the old king, Jatau, as a Muslim ruler following the call of Usman 'Dan Fodio.¹⁴²

However, the role of trade in the jihad did not imply that the revolt was urban. Here, one should remember that much trade, even long-distance trade in Hausaland is rural in origin. Most of the dyepits of Kano, for example, were in small villages. Their production was directly marketed by merchants based in these villages, and not necessarily brought to the

139 Paul Lovejoy, "The Internal Trade of West Africa Before 1800," *History of West Africa*, volume one (third edition) (New York: Longman, 1985), pp. 653-680.

140 Stewart, "Southern Saharan Scholarship," p. 84.

141 Suret-Canale, "Signification sociale," p. 30.

142 Muhammad b. Salih, *Taqyid al-Akhbar*, f. 8r, 11r.

city first, for central collection.

In any event, the Islamization of the countryside led to the jihad. Scholars tied to the political authorities in the cities could not have made the call for revolt. The growth of slave settlements owned by scholars also freed them from patronage and thus more able to speak their mind about Islamic standards than court scholars.¹⁴³

The rural communities which came to support the jihad have been placed in four categories by M. A. Al-Hajj: the settled Fulani scholars, the Fulani herders, the Hausa peasants, and the runaway slaves, who often came to the scholarly settlements for refuge.¹⁴⁴ However, Usman 'Dan Fodio did not just sit in Degel waiting for people to run to him. He went on extensive rural tours seeking to convert commoners to Islam and did not visit the courts until he had a large following.¹⁴⁵

There is uncertainty concerning the actual extent of participation by merchants in the jihad, or the amount of material support they provided. Scholars have taken various positions on this issue, often with little real data either to confirm or deny their assertions. It is known that in other jihads, such as the one in Futa Jallon, traders did support and participate in the jihad.¹⁴⁶ In addition to the propaganda aimed at merchants cited above, in his teachings about slavery Usman 'Dan Fodio stressed the importance of clothing male and female slaves.¹⁴⁷ Regardless of whether merchants supported or participated in the jihad, the cloth merchants were one of the groups which benefited most from it, as more and more people converted to Islam and adopted the Islamic mode of dress.

Slavery and the slave trade had affected Hausa society profoundly

143 Nehemia Levtzion, "Rural and Urban Islam in West Africa: an Introductory Essay," in *Rural and Urban Islam in West Africa*, edited by Nehemia Levtzion and Humphrey J. Fisher (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1986), pp. 10, 19; Levtzion, "Islamic Revolutions," pp. 28-29; Paul E. Lovejoy, "Plantations in the History of the Sokoto Caliphate," *Journal of African History*, 19, 3, 1978, p. 391.

144 M.A. Al-Hajj, "The Meaning of the Sokoto Jihad," pp. 10-12; M. A. Al-Hajj, "The Mahdist Tradition in Northern Nigeria," Ph.D. dissertation (History) Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 1973, pp. 71-74.

145 Abdullah b. Fudi, *Tazyin al-Waraqat*, p. 86.

146 Walter Rodney, "Jihad and Social Revolution in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 4, 1968, p. 276.

147 *Tanbih al-Ikhwan* translated by Palmer, "Early Fulani Conception," p. 187.

for centuries,¹⁴⁸ but with the increase in slaving following the tapping of Hausaland by the Atlantic slave trade,¹⁴⁹ the issue of enslavement became urgent; this applied especially for strict Muslim scholars, but perhaps even more for the potential victims of slave raids. One of Usman 'Dan Fodio's famous five demands which he submitted to Sarkin Gobir Bawa in lieu of gifts on the occasion of the Muslim festival, was the release of prisoners.¹⁵⁰ This is often interpreted to be a demand for the release of political prisoners, but it is more likely that the Shehu was demanding that the king release all freeborn Muslims who had been captured in his many campaigns, especially in Zamfara. Among the prisoners released by Usman 'Dan Fodio's intervention was Prince Abarshi of Zamfara.¹⁵¹

Usman 'Dan Fodio wrote in many of his works about the legal rules of enslavement in Islam.¹⁵² Among the detailed instructions he included in his longer works was that runaway slaves from the camp of the enemy who claimed to have been free born Muslims must be believed. The burden of proof that they had not been wrongfully enslaved was on their owner.¹⁵³

Slave escapes were common from the beginning of the jihad. Slaves generally tended to escape at times of political crisis when the power of their owners was weak. In later, better documented, jihad operations, such as the uprisings in Oyo and Nupe, the support of such runaway slaves can clearly be shown to have been an important factor in the success of the jihad. It was probably just as critical from the beginning of the jihad in Gobir. Ideology was now a part of slave resistance, which had not had

148 R.A. Adeleye, "Hausaland and Bornu 1600-1800," *History of West Africa*, volume two, third edition (New York: Longman, 1985), p. 618.

149 A.G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), pp. 104-105.

150 Junaidu, *Tarihin, Fulani*, p. 12.

151 El Masri, "Life," p. 442.

152 e.g. in *Wathiqat ahl al-Sudan*, translated and published by A. D. H. Bivar, in *Journal of African History*, 2, 2, 1961.

153 *Bayan Wujub*, chapter 39, pp. 119-120.

much intellectual content before.¹⁵⁴

However, it would be wrong to believe that the jihad leaders were abolitionists. After all, they were slave owners, and may have gained much of their livelihood from the ownership of slaves. They did not object to slavery as such, but to the enslavement of Muslims. Their insistence on this attitude, both before and after their successful jihad, brought many converts to their cause among both actual and potential slaves.

To summarize: the society of Hausaland on the eve of the jihad was divided by contradictions and conflicts, with both prosperity and social violence and dislocation increasing. Important groups were largely unrepresented in the state and were increasingly alienated from it. Certain Muslim scholars were able to articulate the grievances of many members of society and gain their allegiance. The society was in such a state that even a very minor event could touch off a sweeping revolution:

systems as large and as complicated as the earth's crust, the stock market and the ecosystem can break down not only under the force of a mighty blow but also at the drop of a pin. Large interactive systems perpetually organize themselves to a critical state in which a minor event starts a chain reaction that can lead to a catastrophe."¹⁵⁵

In the case of the increasingly complex and interdependent society of Hausaland, the one minor event was a slave raid by a prince of Gobir on the followers of a Hausa scholar, Abd al-Salam. In this raid, all the contradictions and grievances of the society came together, and an explosion took place that changed the history of West Africa forever.

154 Paul E. Lovejoy, "Fugitive Slaves: Resistance to Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate," in *In Resistance: Studies in African, Afro-American, and Caribbean History*, edited by G. Okihiro (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), pp. 74-80; Paul E. Lovejoy, "Problems of Slave Control in the Sokoto Caliphate," in *Africans in Bondage* edited by Paul Lovejoy (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986) p. 236; Last, "Reform in West Africa," pp. 5-10.

155 Per Bak and Kan Chen, "Self-Organized Criticality," *Scientific American*, January 1991, pp. 26-33.