

## Reflection on the State of Islam and Muslim Scholars in Continuing the Islamic Tradition in Arawa Land, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

The study aimed to identify the contributions of scholars on the State of Islam and Muslim Scholars in Continuing the Islamic Tradition in Arawa Land. The paper attempted to bring into limelight the various contributions of Islamic scholars from North Africa (Maghrib) the entrenchment of Islamic teachings in Arawa Land particularly the Wangarawa traders and Muhammad Kanta, Askia Muhammad, Muhammad bn Abd al-karim al Maghili. The paper also discusses the role played by the Sokoto Jihad scholars to the development of Islam and Islamic tradition in Arawa Land. However, the outcomes confirmed that Arawa Land is currently witnessing the proliferation of Muslim scholars and preachers whose proselytization activities have continued to impact positively on the life of the people. The researchers collected data from secondary sources as well as interviews complemented by observation and analyzed them. The findings of this research have portrayed the various contributions of Muslim scholars to the development of Islam and Islamic tradition in Arawa Land.

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### Introduction

The acceptance of Islam had spread to Africa in the time of Prophet (SAW), when some Muslims fled persecution at Makkah and arrived Habsha (present day Ethiopia). The contact between Islam and Africa was much earlier than the period of its spread to north Africa when Muslim troops conquered Palestine, Egypt, Iraq and Persia. Uqba bn Nafi reached Fezzan and Kowar some routes that extended to Kanem-Borno, around 666CE. At this period the times of the rightly-guided caliphs have lapsed, he therefore did not undertake the military campaign in the time of the third caliph. Qairawan was established by Uqba, but not in 1670, because he reached

Afriqiyah in 666CE. He has never established control on whole continent. Thus, Islam spread to Kanem-Borno in 10th century and this place where Islam made its earliest contact with some part of Nigeria. The history presented must be rechecked to get facts straight and in order to avoid false narrative and inaccurate information (Doi, 1984).

Through commercial links established with North Africa, Islam reached Savannah regions of West Africa in the eighth century. In essence, trade and commerce paved the way for the introduction of new elements of method culture, and made possible the intellectual development that actually followed the introduction and spread of literacy, and for which parts of the Sudan have become famous in centuries to come (Tsiga, 1997). Therefore, the spread of Islam in West Africa was through Muslim traders and the Muslim Scholars. Some Muslim business men introduced the religion to the ruling class, their business associates and to the rural areas.

Majority of the people of Arawa Land are located in the present day Arewa local government area of Kebbi state and spread to other parts of Sokoto state and the Republic of Niger. Muhammad Kanta played a major role in entrenching the teachings of Islam in Arawa Land and Kebbi in general. Islam in Arawa Land like other areas of Hausaland had been in place before the Jihad of Usmanu Ibn Fodio. The people of the area even before the seventh century during the reign of Muhammad Kanta (Balogun, 1980). Since before the fourteenth century, Hausaland and Kanem Borno have had a direct relationship with the North African state. As a result, Islam began to spread by peaceful means, i.e., there was no fighting between North and West Africa. The Trans-Sahara route connected Kano-Katsina with Tuwat (in today's Algeria), Chad, and Chat (in today's Libya) across Tripolitania (in Libya), i.e. Tunisia via Ghadames, Chat Agadez to Hausaland. The second path is to travel through Egypt to Kanem-Borno and then to Hausaland, i.e. from Tripoli to Bornu via Fezzan. (Lawal, 2016).

The contact of Arabs with the people of Northern Nigeria marked a new era for religious, social, and intellectual life of the people of that region. The role of Muslim clerics greatly impacted the growth and development of Islamic civilisation. Katsina and particularly Arawa Land acquired a sizeable amount of reputation in Islamic scholarship, in fact, the pioneer to welcome international visiting scholars like Muhammad al-Maghili (d.1504) from Tilmisan in Tunisia, and the first in northern Nigeria to produce indigenous scholars like Muhammad bn al-Sabbaqh popularly known as Danmarina (d. 1655) and Muhammad Ahmad bin Nuh popularly known as Dan Masani (d.1667 CE). For anyone conversant with the historical dynamics in Hausaland, Islam and Islamic tradition readily come to mind as part of a long surviving traditions among people inhabiting the area. At least, extant written evidences pointing to the earlier introduction of Islam in 15th century Hausaland abound (Maishanu, 2006). And in the case of Borno, which all through

history has been politically, culturally and geographically associated with Hausaland, records of Islam and Islamic influences appeared much earlier (Clarke,1982).

Against this backdrop, and giving Arawa Land as a microcosmic part of the larger Hausa society (Hausaland), the subject of Islam and its attendant tradition among Arawa will no doubt stretch back to some few centuries. It is a well-documented theme that the rise of Islam after the 14th century did much to change the customs of former times in government as in trade and religion throughout the western Sudan (Davidson,1969). And by the turn of the 14th century when Arawa Land had experience growth of Islamic tradition with the influx of Islamic teachings from different scholars. Arawa Land was to witness a more drastic and far reaching reform, the old belief system had returned to compete side by side with Islamic faith. Consequently, the resultant plethora of religious syncretism which also afflicted Hausaland in much of the 18th century, combined with a new wave of religious reawakening, produced the 19th century reform movement which gave birth to the legendary Sokoto Caliphate (Bobboyi and Yakubu, 2006).

Thus the 19th century reform movement became a turning point in the relaunch and aggressive proselytization of Islam and Islamic ideals throughout Hausaland. In all these, Arawa Land due to the influence of Muhaamad Kanta of Kebbe, stood at the centre and not just the periphery of change and transformations which engulfed Hausaland. Consequently, Arawa Land has witnessed the rise of local Islamic scholars and intelligentsia who continued to champion the cause of Islam among the Arawa people and beyond and whose activities have been a shining light in the social, political, economic and religious upliftment of the area. This paper is, therefore, a continuation of the discussion on the state of Islam and Arawa Muslim scholars in Arawa Land. It reviews the progress and challenges, as well as points at areas that call for improvement, this is due to the importance of the contributions of the scholars who settled and teach in Arawa Land.

This study is completely based on the published secondary data. This paper sourced for its data largely from documented history generated from different sources in relation to the State of Islam and Muslims in Arawa Land. This study does not manipulate anything from the history and make an attempt to examine. The use of secondary data for the study became necessary due the fact many of the oral tradition relating to the history of Islam and Muslims in Arawa Land is lacking. Hence, the adoption of the secondary sources for data. The use of secondary data in a research was pioneered by Glaser (1963). He submits that secondary analysis carried out by an independent researcher could, amongst other things, 'lend new strength to the body of fundamental knowledge of human beings.

Different studies have shown that secondary analysis of data has been an old practice in the fields of social sciences and humanities disciplines where data are analyzed with a different purpose(s) other than what motivated the original researcher(s) to collect the data (Hinds, Vogel.

and Clarke-Steffen, 1997). It is a normal practice in social research to undertake or analyze an existing data for a different purpose or objective as the case maybe. (Hinds, Vogel. and Clarke-Steffen, 1997; Heaton, 1998). The use of secondary data is often motivated by a desire to adopt a fresh perspective or a new theoretical framework other than the original research orientation and objectives (Heaton, 1998). The researcher therefore, sourced secondary data and analyzed them and found how scholars from Nigeria and other parts of Africa have written on the history of Islam and Muslims in the Sokoto Caliphate and other parts of Hausaland which also includes Arawa Land.

### **The Arawa People**

To tackle the poser as regards to who the Arawa are, will entail a profile of the origin of the people and the location of their areas or homeland. To this end, as noted by Horton, (1979) that the issues surrounding the origins of people and states in Africa, have all along been problematic owing partly to their long period of existence and partly resulting from lack of detailed concrete written evidence. Thus, Arawa people, like all other inhabitants of Hausaland and Borno, have had their traditions of origin speculated on two major fronts: one of aboriginality and the other, on migration. Harris (1932) claimed in his different accounts of the origin of the Arawa (singular Ba'are) as people resulting from the intermarriage between one Abubakar, a Bornoan Prince, (time and period unidentified) and a Bagazawa woman of Malian origin.

The said Bornoan Prince, Abubakar, was said to have stopped over at Bagaje while leading an expedition against Gurma. At Bagaje, he married Shatu, a daughter of the Sarkin Baura, and she bore him a son who was named 'Ari', a Kanuri equivalent for 'Aliyu'. 'Ari' was subsequently apportioned the whole area where Arawa came to be found, by his grandfather the King of Borno. Both Harris and Temple further identified two clear divisions of the Arawa as exemplified by their tribal marks. Their accounts though, much as they contained some elements of conjecture, points towards the direction of Borno as an ancestral nexus of the Arawa. However, a more hermitic version of their origin was contained in most oral accounts by Malam Samo Waliy, (2005), which claimed an Arab origin through Abu Yazid of Banu Umayyad, who having lost out in a power tussle found his way to Borno, and after a brief stay at Bagarmi, Chad region, married a daughter of the King who bore him two sons: Buraimuh and 'Ari'. It was Ari (meaning Aliyu) who became the precursor of the Arawa.

Alkali (1969) was however, emphatic in his account of the Arawa as a people who for centuries inhabited the Dalol Mauri and that they are a Hausa speaking people whose stay in Kebbi region is as legendary as that of the Kebbawa their long-term allies. At this juncture, it is the view of these writers that the origin of the Arawa is strongly linked with that of Kanuri. This fact is buttressed not only by shared history as pointed out in the various accounts, but also by the

unassailable fact that their name was of Kanuri origin. This picture becomes clearer when we note that Arawa rulers bear the same title of “Mai” as Kanuri rulers. Thus, barring further foreign hypothesis, it is the view of these researchers that the origin of the Arawa should not be traced beyond that of the Kanuri.

### **Location of Arawa Land**

Today, Arawa Land is located between the Northern fringes of Nigeria (via the states of Kebbi and Sokoto) and the Republic of Niger which unarguably harboured larger percentage of their population. This division was a direct fallout of European colonial intervention in Africa, which left many homogenous groups divided along colonial boundaries (Crowder,1968). This divide occurred in the case of Arawa Land as a result of the Anglo-French boundary demarcation of 1907, which clearly separates modern Nigeria from the Republic of Niger (Hogben and Kirk-Green, 1966).

This area clearly lies within latitude 12o to 14o north of equator and longitude 30to 50 east of Greenwich (Yeldu, 2006). It has been observed by the researchers that, the Arawa people who are on the Nigerian side are mostly found in the districts of Bachaka, Yeldu, Bui, and Kangiwa all in Arewa Local Government Area of Kebbi State. Equally, Arawa people are found in parts of Gudu and Tangaza Local Government Areas of Sokoto State as well as pockets of Arawa within Sokoto metropolis in such areas as Kwannirn Arawa, Hausare, Rungumi, Kalhu, ‘Yar Akija, and Gandu among others. It is in Kebbi State however, that their larger concentration is evident giving their numerous settlements in towns and villages.

### **Arawa Land before and after Islam**

The pre-Islamic Hausaland Arawa Land inclusive offered a picture that was not unlike to that of the Arabs' dark (Jahiliyyah) age or the Europeans' medieval time (Nadama, 1977). In comparison, Arawa Land all other parts of Hausaland during the comparable period was a hotbed of superstitious belief in the spirit realm's intermediary power (actual or imagined), known as iskoki. From Arawa Land in present day Kibbe State, Kano to and from Katsina through Zamfara Kingdoms of old, oral tradition are replete with cases of supernatural belief in some sort of spirits or another. Thus, from Durbi-ta-kunsheyi shrine in Katsina, to the tsunburburai shrine at Dala in Kano, to innaDogowa shrine among Gobirwa, Zamfara and Kabbawa, cases of traditional shrine dotted communities in the area prior to the 14th century (Usman,1979).

These spirits, worshipped in various shrines symbolized by trees, stones (hills/rocks), rivers, lakes and streams, animals or other such natural phenomena, are believed to possess some powers or even causative power on almost all matters of life and death. These spirits are believed to be appeasable and approachable through human custodians known as Priest or Bokaye (single Boka). And in most cases each family has its separate ancestral shrine through which the living

continued to cohabit, and even converse with the dead. There are some un-Islamic practices among the Arawa people before the arrival of Islamic teachings in their fold. These belief systems were also centered on the Iskoki (spirits) contactable through Bori (demon possession by humans). For the Arawa, Doguwa spirits believed to inhabit KukarYaji (a baobab tree now in Gecheme, Niger Republic) occupied prime position in their traditional (ancient) belief calculations. It was this which gave birth to the epithet Ba' are nakukaryaji (Augi, 1984).

Additionally, belief in, as well as practice of, witchcraft was widespread and through this the Arawa seemed to have found explanation for every natural action or any disaster (individual or communal) that struck in the community (Alkali, 1969). Added to the above was the belief in power of divination where fortune tellers thrived. This traditional belief system was what conferred on Arawa Land some semblance of law and order through which the actions and inactions of members of the community were controlled. This is so as every human society imposed on its members certain restraints and constraints which make for harmonious co-habitations of members, explaining natural occurrence, and safeguarding the continuity of its culture in its most acceptable ways. This was the true picture of Arawa Land as in much of Hausaland prior to the advent of Islam in the 15th century.

Available literature has shown that Islamic influence first gained ground in Hausaland in the 15th century coming through migrant scholars from Mali known mostly as Wangarawa (Kani, 1983). However, an early date was recorded for Borno where Islamic influence became noticeable as far back as the 10th century (Clarke, 1982). Thus, during the 15th century, there were record of scholars who have visited Hausaland, settled and even composed scholarly works thereby giving credence to the growth of the religion. Muhammad bn Abd al-karim al Maghili visited Kano (and Katsina) during the reign of Muhammad Rumfa (1463-1499) and wrote the Obligation of Princes (Clarke, 1982). Another scholar, Ahmad Umar bn Muhammad Aqit visited Kano in 1492. Ahmed Baba of Timbuktu and Aida Ahmed al-Tazakhati all settled and taught at Katsina between 1492 and 1509. Islam continued to spread, and embraced in the cities as well as country sides such that by the turn of the 17th century indigenous scholars and indigenous authorship of Islamic works have begun to appear in a number of learning centres across the Area; Muhammad ibn al – Sabbaghi. (Dan Marinad. 1655); Abu Abdullah Muhammad b. Masnih b. Ghumuhu al-Barnawi (Dan Masani d. 1667) and Muhammad bn al-Fulani al-Kashnawi (d. 1741) all left their imprints through their scholarly works (Salihu, 2007).

Equally, Islamic centres of learning sprang up such as Gobarau Mosque and School, 'Yandoto learning centre, Salame, Alkalawa in Gobir; Agades, Asben and Air (in present day Niger Republic) all churning out scholars and religious works. For instance, Shaykh Jibril bn Umar, a well-known teacher of Shaykh Uthman bn Foduye lived and taught at 'Yandoto, while Shaykh Uthman bn

Foduye himself acquired most of his learning within the enclave of the Islamic centres in Hausaland. All these went to confirm the presence of a deeply rooted Islam in Hausaland prior to the 19th century when a further revival of the faith was witnessed (Salihu, 2007).

Arawa Land, as part of the larger extension of Hausaland, received its initial dose of Islam much earlier than some parts of the Sokoto Caliphate. This is due to the influence of Askia Muhammad and Muhammad Kanta and contact with other scholars from North Africa. More so, giving Arawa's long standing relation with Kebbi Kingdom that experienced greatness in the 16th and 17th centuries were another source of Islamic influence on the Arawa. Arawa's further ancestral link with the Kanuri of Borno Empire all tend to point to a long period of contact with Islam and Islamic influences. However, Arawa Land like the rest of Hausaland, it took the 19th century Islamic reform movement which was led by Shaykh Uthman b. Foduye, to restore the true practice of Islam and its teachings among the people of Hausaland including Arawa Land. For instance, an important member of the persons from Arawa Land, Shaykh Abdusalam Bagimbane was a well-established scholar whose role in the 19th century Jihad was well documented and acknowledged, notwithstanding the controversy which later ensued between him and the other leading figures of the Jihad (and which is beyond the context of this paper) (Musa, 2004).

The 19th century Sokoto Jihad Movement was all informed opinion, precipitated by an honest desire for change following the waning of Islamic ideals throughout Hausaland which the Arawa Land is part of. Four centuries since its introduction, passage of the time and intermittent economic rivalries and conflicts among the Hausa states had taken its toll on Islam both in cities and across the countryside. Fortunately, however, in the midst of the aberrant social milieu of the 18th century, are pockets of informed intelligentsia bent on returning to the real Islamic status quo. These army of scholars have never been in short supply in Hausaland (Yandaki, 1990). It was from this class that the reformer Shaykh Uthman bn Foduye emerged to champion a movement which led to the emergence of Sokoto caliphate consequent upon the subjugation, unification and political transformation of the hitherto warring independent kingdoms and city states. The Sokoto Jihad Movement, so called after one of its founded capitals, Sokoto, brought about a total social reengineering of societies in affected areas (Yandaki, 1990).

One of its lasting legacies of the revivalism in Arawa Land as observed and understood by the researchers was the continued teachings of the true morals of Islam as well as entrenchment of Islamic ideals throughout the territory of the Caliphate; there was the revolutionary growth and spread of Islam and Islamic ideals in every nook and cranny of Hausaland which included the Arawa Land; there was a revolutionary restoration of learning and widespread literacy among large segments of the population, there was massive dismantling of the traditional belief system (fetishism, witchcraft, idolatry, etc.) across the caliphal society. As a consequence, there was

equally a marked increase in the number of Islamic scholars and Qur'anic schools all over the area. This effort was to checkmate the activities of Christian missions in the effort to convert people to Christianity in Muslim Arawa Land and other parts of Northern Nigeria, in most cases, quite impossible. Thus, the sixty or so year's sojourn of colonialism in Northern Nigeria, if anything, only succeeded in halting the spread of Islam to hitherto un-Islamised areas rather than dismantling or de-Islamising the Islamized area under the defeated caliphal authority. Thus, as at the time of political independence in 1960, Northern Nigerian area and in particular, Arawa Land and Hausaland in general, presented a picture of a largely Muslims dominated territory notwithstanding the pockets of colonial relics in the area (Salihu). This was buttressed by widespread Islamic learning and Islamic scholarship, which continues to thrive to the present, and to which the Islamic tradition in Northern Nigeria owes its survival despite the indifference shown to it by successive authorities even after the demise of colonialism.

### **Post-Independence and the Continued Progress and Spread of Islamic Ideals in Arawa Land**

Since the demise of colonialism in 1960, Arawa Land has witnessed a marked increase in the number of Islamic scholars and preachers whose proselytization activities have continued to impact positively on the life of the people. Prominent scholars whose activities continued to grace the life of Arawa people in present day Sokoto and Kebbi states include Mallam Abdulrazak Yeldu, Malam Abubakar Sulaiman (Chilas), Malam Hatimu Muazu, Malam Abdullahi Umar Maikano, Malam Umar Sulaiman, and Mallam Adamu Falsango among several others.

These scholars have, in their respective capacities, embarked on teaching and preaching as well as composing scholarly works all in an effort to promote and sustain Islamic tradition in the areas (Salihu, 2007). In addition, these scholars have equally established numerous Mosques and Qur'anic Schools including Modern Islamiyyah Schools all meant for the purpose of disseminating Islam in the society. To this end, Arawa Land has been rid of, to a large extent, most of the surviving relics of traditional belief system such as bori, witchcraft, etc. Similarly, cultural practices which appeared to negate the moral principle of Islam have been relegated to the theme of historical discourse owing to the persistent teaching of Arawa scholars. And as a mark of progress, quite a number of Muslims who had nonchalant attitude about Islam have fully accepted and adopted Islam as a way of life. This is particularly so with local people mostly found in small villages.

Hausaland with Arawa Land inclusive had for a very long time been home to Qadiriyyah and Tijjaniyyah Sufi orders. Yandaki (1990) however, states that with the advent of independence and specifically the modern age, newer Islamic perspective such as the Jama'atu Izalatil Bidi'ah Wa Iqamatis Sunnah (JIBWIS) movement have emerged, expounding ideological principles different

from those of existing orders. This similar trend has manifested in Arawa Land where Islamic scholars are found widespread among the three leading groups: Qadiriyyah, Tijjaniyyah and Izala. And so far, all effort seemed to be directed toward religious enlightenment and betterment of the society through ridding it of un-Islamic practices. An intra-religious harmony exists among the leading Muslim scholars and their adherents and it is this that effort should be made to sustain. This becomes particularly necessary giving the experience, in certain quarters, where intra-religious struggle for supremacy and winning of adherents have produced not too healthy effects.

## **Conclusion**

The growing dimension and perception of Islam in Arawa Land, as earlier indicated, Arawa Land is part of an extension of the larger Hausa society and as such whatever happened in Hausaland reflected in Arawa Land. Thus, for observers of the Islamic events in Northern Nigeria since the appearance of the Wangarawa settlers in the 15th century, one thing that stands clear was their introduction of Islamic teachings and ideals different parts of Hausaland which included the Arawa Land. It has become imperative to sustain existing religious harmony in Arawa Land is by ensuring equity, justice, and openness in dealing with Muslim bodies. Government authorities should accord equal respect and status to Muslim groups in the area and should not be seen to accord or confer undue advantage or recognition to one group at the expense of the others. For a long time now, Islamic scholarship and learning has thrived on the support of private individuals or scholars and goodwill donation from communities. This vexatious trend is also true of Arawa Land, and its high time concerned authorities should reverse this trend by ensuring adequate funding and provision of facilities to Islamic schools and scholars. This will no doubt go a long way in removing the likelihood of friction as may arise if it were to continue otherwise.

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