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Title: "The jihad of Shehu dan Fodio: some problems."

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Source: In *Islam in Tropical Africa*. I. M. Lewis, ed. London: Oxford University Press.  
p. 408-424.

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# ISLAM IN TROPICAL AFRICA

STUDIES PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED  
AT THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN SEMINAR,  
AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA, JANUARY 1964

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*Published for the*  
INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN INSTITUTE  
*by the*  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

1966

## XVII. THE JIHAD OF SHEHU DAN FODIO: SOME PROBLEMS

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Among universalistic religions, Islam is distinguished by its emphasis on war as a means of spreading the Faith. Where likely to succeed, such war is a duty for the Faithful,<sup>1</sup> and it was largely due to the zealous prosecution of this profitable duty by its adherents that Islam spread as far and fast as it did. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Western Sudan experienced a succession of these *jihads*. Beginning in 1725 at Futa Toro, this wave of militant Islam was halted only by the French occupation. The leaders of all these recent West African *jihads* were Torodbe clerics from Futa Toro, who are usually classed as Fulani. Perhaps the most successful of these Torodbe *jihads* was that which Shehu Usumanu dan Fodio (also called Shaikh 'Uthman ibn Fodiye) launched against the Hausa chiefs of Gobir, Kano, Katsina, Zaria, Daura, their allies and congeners, in 1804. In six years of hard fighting the Shehu's followers overran these ancient states and passed beyond to carve out new chiefdoms in areas where no states had previously existed. Thereafter the north-western segment of what is now Nigeria has remained under the control of the Shehu's successors and their lieutenants. This *dar al-Islam* has been ruled mainly by Fulani Muslims. By 1840 it extended from Adamawa in the North Cameroons to Illo on the Niger, from Adar in the North to Ilorin on the borders of Yorubaland.

Assessments of this *jihad* have always varied. According to J. S. Trimingham, dan Fodio 'from 1786 preached the *jihad* in such a way that it became a racial as well as a religious war; (it) . . . differs from the other *jihads* on account of the number of nomads who joined in'.<sup>2</sup> For S. J. Hogben:

Religion was often made the pretext for the acquisition of worldly power. . . . [The *jihad*] had as its confessed object the purification of the Muslim religion, and it was directed against the corrupt rulers of Hausaland, who had been supposedly oppressing or ignoring the rights of their Muslim subjects. In reality, it was originally a national fight of the Fulani, both Muslim and pagan, against the forces of Yunfa, the king of Gobir, who had decreed their extermination. Only after the victory, when the pagan Fulani, who had borne more than their full share in order to achieve it, had retired to their flocks and herds, did the malams who had been the leaders, exploit the opportunity under the cloak of religion to oust the native rulers and put themselves into their places, with Usuman dan Fodio at their head. Henceforth the movement was no longer confined to a particular race; yet from its very nature it appealed more strongly to the fanatical and more highly-strung element in the Fulani clans.<sup>3</sup>

For W. F. Gowers, on the other hand:

The *jihad* was the raising of the standard of revolt by Othman dan Fodio against the tyranny of the non-Moslem rulers of Gobir, in defence of his co-religionists, whether Hausa or Fulani. It was not in any sense a conquest of the Hausa race by the Fulani; indeed, the Hausa adherents of Othman were probably as numerous as his Fulani followers. Even the leaders were not, strictly speaking, Fulanis. The Torabbe or Toronkawa (the tribe from which Shehu dan Fodio came) owe their origin to a mixture of the Jolof . . . element. They are blacker in colour than most Fulanis . . . they originally spoke the Wa-Kore language and are connected with the Suleibawa, who, like the Torabbe, are not Fulani—if there is any such thing as a pure Fulani race.<sup>4</sup>

Trimingham observes that Torodbe or Tokolor and Suleibawa are 'regarded as *rimbe*, assimilated free groups, but not as Fulbe proper'.<sup>5</sup>

Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto, the late Premier of Northern Nigeria and a descendant of Shehu dan Fodio, has recently affirmed the 'official' Fulani view.

The Shehu Usumanu was a Fulani leader . . . a great preacher and man of the utmost piety . . . he was among a people who were nominally Muhammadan; . . . the religion had become very corrupt, and many pagan practices had crept in and had taken firm hold even in the highest quarters. The Shehu Usuman declared a Holy War against the polluters of the Faith. In 1804 he started by attacking the Chief of Gobir, one of the worst offenders, in whose

<sup>1</sup> Levy, 1957, p. 254.

<sup>2</sup> Trimingham, 1962, p. 162.

<sup>3</sup> Hogben, 1930, p. 73.

<sup>4</sup> Gowers, 1921, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Trimingham, *op. cit.*, p. 195, note 2; see also Arnett, 1922, pp. 137-9.

territory he was living . . . Meanwhile, to cleanse the religion, the Shehu had organised revolts in all the great Hausa states; the Fulani living in them rose and overthrew the Hausa kings. The Shehu appointed new rulers, either from among the victorious generals, or from among other important Fulani.<sup>6</sup>

There are also other popular interpretations, radical and dissident. In one view the *jihad* was a political revolution against oppression and misrule; in another it was a cloak for racial conquest and imperialism.

These differing interpretations raise some important problems which can only be treated allusively here. As Trimmingham observes, 'the history of the *jihad* of 'Uthman dan Fodio and of the Fulani states has yet to be written'.<sup>7</sup> Until this is done, and perhaps even afterwards, it may be wiser to suspend judgement between these conflicting views. They are in any case fully intelligible only in context. The late Sardauna saw himself as heir and custodian of a great and vital tradition derived from Shehu Usumanu. In 1959 those young Muslims who stressed the radical view of Shehu's *jihad* also advocated radical reforms in the Emirates of Northern Nigeria which were founded by this *jihad*. Others, with a dissident view of the *jihad*, preferred the wholesale elimination of the old régime and of the traditional Fulani ruling stratum. As we have seen, assessments of the Shehu's *jihad* made by British administrators who have worked in this area are very similar to these Nigerian views. Such divergent opinions might well reflect differing personal appraisals of the Fulani performance as a ruling stratum, since the *jihad*, and especially during this century.

Despite such contextualization, these differing viewpoints present important problems. Together, they obstruct and might well deny that an impartial historical account of these events is possible; yet the viewpoints are so opposed that instinctively one suspects the truth—that is, the historical reality of the *jihad*—to lie somewhere in between. What remains problematic is whether such 'historical truth' can be discovered at this stage, or would get a fair hearing if it were. Clearly, an individual's

<sup>6</sup> Ahmadu Bello, 1962, pp. 10–11.

<sup>7</sup> Trimmingham, op. cit., p. 195, note 1.

view of this *jihad* is closely related to his ideological preference and his personal experience of recent Fulani administration. Traditionalists, Muslim or British, have tended to see the *jihad* as a genuine attempt to purify and spread Islam in this region. While admitting many subsequent lapses by its supporters and custodians, they argue that its historical effect was overwhelmingly beneficent in various ways; and that fairly moderate reforms, which will preserve and realize the spirit and aims of the *jihad* more effectively, are all that is necessary. Radicals and dissidents, who view the *jihad* as a revolutionary or imperialist war, derive quite different consequences which correspond with their ideology and personal experience. The British parallels to these Nigerian views strongly suggest that political involvement in North Nigerian affairs underlies all these conflicting interpretations. If so, this also seems to reduce the likelihood of an impartial historical account and assessment of the *jihad*, since this presupposes such knowledge and experience of the area that some sense of personal commitment is likely. Indeed, it may be unavoidable, since the *jihad*, whatever its merits or demerits, has had a decisive political impact on the region, and still exercises a predominant influence on current policy.

It is clearly unsound to seek an understanding of the course of this struggle, or the motives of its actors, in events which occurred long after the conflict had ended, but one suspects this retrospective interpretation to be rather common. Since the events of 1804–10 are fundamental to the present political order, there is scant hope that they will escape such ideological interpretation, or even that their presentation will proceed unaffected by political considerations, future and present as well as past. There is no doubt that the ruling Fulani, particularly in Sokoto Province, have actively nourished and reinterpreted the memory of this *jihad*, and especially the charisma of Shehu dan Fodio, in ways politically serviceable to their rule. The Shehu's books and writings, some of which might well be politically explosive, even today, have long been difficult for commoners and subjects, especially Habe, to come by. In their new independence and Federal political context the Northern rulers might now see fit

to distribute these widely. Early British administrators, such as H. G. Harris, F. Edgar, Major Burdon, E. J. Arnett, and Sir H. R. Palmer, had access to various writings of primarily historical interest, such as *Taṣṣīn al-waraqat*, by 'Abdullahi dan Fodio, the *Tanbih al-ikhwan*, by Shehu Usumanu, and the *Infaq al-maysur* by Sultan Mamman Bello. The great majority of free subjects in the Fulani empire were illiterate, and may hardly have known these titles, much less their contents. As late as 1959, Hausa Arabists in Northern Nigeria were surprised to learn of Shehu Usumanu's *Kitab al-farq* and *Bayan wujub al-hijra 'ala al-'ibad*. Yet it is clear from internal evidence that the Shehu intended these books for a wide public. No accurate assessment of Usumanu's *jihad* can ignore these critical documents. As political testaments, they rank with Lugard's Political Memoranda.

A further problem which these conflicting viewpoints raise concerns the nature of this *jihad* and of the *jihad* as a general form of Islamic expansion. *Jihads* fall into two main classes: revolts by Muslims against their non-Muslim rulers; and attacks by Muslims organized in autonomous political units against non-Muslims. The historically notable *jihads* are those which succeeded; but providing that other conditions are fulfilled, unsuccessful attacks might well be included.

The character of the Fulani *jihad* of Northern Nigeria is disputed mainly because it was launched against rulers who claimed to be Muslim, although undoubtedly lax in their observances. As the Sarlauna put it, 'the Shehu Usumanu declared a Holy War against the polluters of the Faith'; that is, an armed rebellion aimed at enforcing correct observance of Islamic ritual and law. Much of the debate about the legitimacy of this *jihad* derives from the fact that it was a revolt against chiefs who were formally Muslim.

This problem receives extensive treatment in Shehu Usumanu's *Bayan wujub al-hijra*, especially section 1, 4-6, 12, 16, 31, 46-7. Citing a wide range of Muslim authorities, Koranic texts and traditions, the Shehu carefully distinguishes the various contexts in which *jihad* is obligatory or unlawful, and the rules which regulate it. He begins by discussing the obligation of *hijra*—

that is, for Muslims to withdraw from the lands of the heathen. Except for the physically disabled, this obligation is shown to be unconditional. Shehu argues that:

Withdrawal from the towns of the heathen is an essential duty, both in the Koran and the Traditions, and in the consensus of the learned. . . . Now the capital cities of the Sudan are included in the towns of the heathen; . . . these cities fall into three classes . . . In one class of these towns, paganism predominates and Islam is very weak, for instance . . . Mossi, Gurma, Bussa, Borgu, Dagomba, Yoruba . . . and Gombe. . . . The rulers of these countries are all heathen, and so too . . . their subjects. . . . Another class of towns are those in which Islam is dominant and there is little paganism; but the countries of Bornu, Kano, Katsina, Songhai and Malle, as Ahmed Baba shows, . . . all these are heathen states without any doubt, since the chiefs . . . are heathens like the first group, although they practise religion of Islam, because they are polytheists also. They have obstructed the way of Islam, and have put worldly standards before the Faith. In the view of all the 'ulama, all this is simply heathen.<sup>8</sup>

With these arguments, Shehu justifies his flight of 21 February 1804 from Degel in Gobir territory to Gudu near Kwonni just over the boundary, and also his summons to other Muslims to withdraw from the (heathen) Hausa states. In the *Infaq al-maysur*, Sultan Mamman Bello, the Shehu's son and successor, devotes more space to the documentation of heathen practices among the rulers of Hausaland and Bornu, and also reproduces the correspondence between the Shehu and himself, on the one hand, and the Shaikh Alhaji Aminu al-Kanemi, who defended Bornu, concerning this charge of heathenism and the counter-charge of an illegitimate '*jihad*' on the other.<sup>9</sup>

The charge of heathenism seems crucial to the legitimacy of this *jihad*, since the general weight of Muslim authorities prohibits rebellions against unjust or tyrannous chiefs, provided they observe Islam. The Shehu writes that:

The Prophet said . . . 'he who obeys my Representative undoubtedly obeys me also; he who disobeys my Representative undoubtedly disobeys me also' . . . Subki says 'it is unlawful to withdraw allegiance from the ruler. All agree on this if the ruler is righteous, and even when he is not righteous this is the better opinion, that is, unless he becomes a heretic (*muntazil*).'

<sup>8</sup> Smith and Kumasi, 1959, Section 1.

<sup>9</sup> Arnett, op. cit., pp. 6-8, 21, 24-26, 47-48, and 99-120.

Ahmadu Zaruk says . . . 'It is forbidden to withdraw allegiance from a ruler, either in speech or in deed, and this consensus extends to praying under all rulers and their officials, good and bad alike.'<sup>10</sup>

For the classification of heathen, the Shehu relies on Muhammad al-Maghili's Epistle to the Askia:

There are three classes of heathen; first those who are clearly heathen by descent; . . . second . . . the man who has been a Muslim, and then openly apostasized, returning to heathendom and abandoning Islam. His apostasy is quite open and he declares it with his own mouth; . . . third, there is the one who claims he is a Muslim while we for our part classify him as a heathen because that which does not occur apart from heathenism occurs with him openly.<sup>11</sup>

It was the substance of Shehu's and Bello's charges that the Hausa rulers of their day fell into this third category; that for this reason the withdrawal of Muslims from their kingdoms was obligatory, since 'the Prophet said . . . "he who associates with the heathen or lives with them is just like them"';<sup>12</sup> and thus, that a Holy War against them was obligatory as well as legitimate.

Besides the evidence which Shehu and Mamman Bello cite themselves, observations by Landeroin in the Hausa successor-states of Tsibiri (Gobir), Maradi, and Tasawa (Katsina), and the recent account of Abuja, to which the Zaria Hausa retired, tend to support this charge of heathenism, while emphasizing that the Hausa rulers were formally Muslim.<sup>13</sup>

Shehu argues also that:

Holy War becomes obligatory under three conditions. Firstly, on the orders of the (Muslim) ruler . . . Secondly, if the enemy launch a sudden attack on Muslim territory . . . Thirdly, to rescue captured Muslims from the hands of the heathen.<sup>14</sup>

The relevance of these doctrinal points is shown by the following outline of events which precipitated the *jihad* of 1804. For some years previously an uneasy situation had prevailed in the dominions of Gobir, where Shehu lived and taught, and where there were also many Fulani, some Muslim and sedentary, others

<sup>10</sup> Smith and Kumasi, op. cit., Section 6.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Section 46.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Section 1.

<sup>13</sup> Mission Tilho, 1906-9, vol. 2, pp. 528-37.

<sup>14</sup> Smith and Kumasi, op. cit., Section 13.

pagan and nomad. Some time around 1802 the Sarkin (Chief of) Gobir, Nafata, proclaimed that no one should be a Muslim unless his father had been one; and that without permission no man could wear a turban nor any woman a veil.<sup>15</sup> Bello says, 'Nothing . . . caused us so much fear as this proclamation.'<sup>16</sup> When Shehu 'saw the number of his assemblies and their desire to withdraw from the infidels and to begin the *jihad*, he began to urge them to prepare weapons for one year; and we set to prepare it'.<sup>17</sup> Nafata died shortly after, and was succeeded by Yunfa, who pressed the anti-Muslim policy. In December 1803, at the request of his officials, Yunfa sent a force against a group of Arewa tribesmen who had accepted Shehu's teaching and leadership, under their head, 'Abdusallami. Following Nafata's proclamation and Gobir harassments, these non-Fulani converts had already *withdrawn* from Gobir territory to Gimbana, a site in the Kebbi chiefdom from which they originally came. They were ordered by Yunfa to return to Gobir, but refused unless the Shehu expressly required this. Gimbana was then overrun by Yunfa's troops during the Fast of Ramadan; its surviving occupants were captured and escorted towards Alkalawa, the capital of Gobir. 'Abdusallami, the Gimbana leader, escaped with some of his closest aides to a Fulani settlement near by.

The Sheikh ordered them (the Fulani) not to deliver him (Abdusallami) up to his enemy, and the enemy sent to them saying 'Hand over to us the remnant of the Muslim fugitives.' But the enemy was afraid to prove them and matters were adjusted for them, so they (the pursuers) returned, and as they returned they passed by the settlement of the Sheikh (at Degel); and they (the Gobirawa) began to mock at the Muslims and say 'You are the only ones left and you shall see us again soon.' And our foolish ones opposed them and took from them some of the treasures (booty from Gimbana) and let them (the Gimbana captives) go. The Gobir people fled. And when news of this reached their chief, he sent word to the Sheikh, 'Come out, thou and thy sons and thy brethren, from the village, for I propose to make an attack on the rest.' And the Sheikh made him refrain until he had emigrated with his company; and he fled from out of their country to a district called Gudu, and he bade the Muslims flee from the land of the infidels to the region to which he had removed. So the people emigrated to him steadily, until

<sup>15</sup> Arnett, op. cit., p. 105. <sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 48. <sup>17</sup> Harris, n.d. (a); Hiskett, 1963, p. 105.

the infidels prevented the Muslims from further emigration, and his followers swore allegiance to the Sheikh on the Koran and the Law.<sup>18</sup>

The Sarkin Gobir then sent a messenger to recall Shehu. Even before the Shehu's messenger could set out with his reply to Alkalawa:

When the Sarkin Gobir blocked the roads to those who were fleeing to us, our people rose up on a Thursday and fell upon the Sudanese who were in the district and slew and captured and plundered and caught slaves. When God brought us to Friday, Shehu rose up and preached to his people. He commanded them to release those whom they had captured and to restore what they had taken away. Thereupon they released their captives and restored the property they had taken. It also happened before the journey of our messenger that the chiefs of Gobir were making war on us and harrying us. They were expelling our people and making captives of them. Shehu protested against this.<sup>19</sup>

While the Shehu's emissary to Yunfa was at Alkalawa, a force of Gobir horsemen attacked. The Shehu's followers defeated them at Matankare. The Shehu was also attacked three times by the chief of Kwonni near Gudu.<sup>20</sup> By then the situation was quite out of hand and war was inevitable. 'The prince of Gobir (with Tuareg allies) came out against us and met us in a place called (Tabkin) Kwotto, and God routed them.'<sup>21</sup> This was in June 1804. To celebrate the victory the Shehu's brother, 'Abdullahi, wrote a poem in which he says:

Now the different races among us Mohammedans were first the Toronkawa (Torodbe): they are our kindred; then our Fulani and our Hausas. There were also some of other races who assembled and aided us in the service of God.<sup>22</sup>

In July 1804 the Shehu withdrew from Gudu to Nagabci and wrote circular letters to 'the chiefs of Sudan' relating the cause and course of his dispute with the chief of Gobir, enjoining their observance of Islam and its Law, and calling on them to assist him against Gobir, or at least to desist from assisting Gobir.<sup>23</sup> The Sarkin Gobir also

<sup>18</sup> Harris, n.d. (b).

<sup>20</sup> Mission Tilho . . . , vol. 2, pp. 473-4, 485-6.

<sup>21</sup> Harris, n.d. (b).

<sup>22</sup> Arnett, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>19</sup> Arnett, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 62-63.

sent messages to his brother chiefs, the Sarkin Katsina, the Sarkin Kano, Sarkin Zazzau, Sarkin Daura, and Sarkin Adar. He informed them that he had left a small fire in his country and it had grown until . . . now it had burnt him. He warned them to be careful lest a fire like this burnt them also. Thereupon each one of them rose up and attacked all those who allied themselves with Shehu; they slew them and captured them. They (Shehu's supporters) fled and took refuge in certain towns . . . till they became very numerous. Then they rose up, and in self-defence . . . drove away the forces sent against them.<sup>24</sup>

This is Bello's version of the way the conflict spread; but when the chief of Gobir received help from other Hausa chiefs as well as the Tuareg, the Shehu also organized this general revolt. In this way the conflict spread from Gobir throughout and beyond Hausaland. This general spread was perhaps inevitable, but so were the alignments and composition of the opposing groups.

Some Fulani assisted the Hausa chiefs openly; others secretly; others remained neutral, and yet other Fulani groups sought to assist both parties in order to profit, whichever won.<sup>25</sup> But in most areas as well as Katsina 'some of their Fulani kindred (the pagan nomads) joined our folk, the followers of the Faith'.<sup>26</sup> From Futa Toro, Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti, the Qadiriyya *sufi*, sent others, Fulani and Torodbe, to swell the Shehu's *jihad*. Probably most Fulani who engaged in the struggle sided with dan Fodio's party irrespective of faith. For generations the nomads had suffered oppression and contumely from the Hausa rulers, and they had old scores to repay.<sup>27</sup> They were also tempted by the prospects of plunder and politically privileged positions, such as they received in eastern Katsina in return for their support. With only one known exception, the Chief of Zaria, the Hausa rulers uniformly declared against the Shehu and his followers and tried to help one another in certain campaigns, without much effect. In Bornu the Alhaji Shaikh Aminu, to whom this state owed its continued independence, like the nomad Fulani and Hausa warriors, took the side of the Kanuri ethnic group nearest his own Kanembu. The opposition between Muslims and non-Muslims was thus confused from the very start of

<sup>24</sup> Arnett, op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>26</sup> Arnett, op. cit., p. 77.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, 1958-59.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, op. cit.

the conflict by other ties and alignments, such as kinship, ethnic identity, secular political resentments and loyalties, calculations of advantage, communal solidarities and antagonisms, etc. Given this coalescence of very diverse interests among their followers, the control exercised by leaders on either side was uncertain and incomplete. As can be seen from the events just related, the initial conflicts developed inevitably, but were not under the direction of Yunfa or Shehu. Party followers took matters into their own hands. The Shehu's chief lieutenants, his brother 'Abdullahi and his son Bello, exercised a tenuous control over their undisciplined warriors.<sup>28</sup> In Kano, Katsina, and Zazzau the Shehu's supporters disputed precedence and political claims with one another, even before the struggle was over, and often to their adversaries' advantage.

Especially in Western Hausaland, there was a large and widely dispersed Fulani population, the pastoral nomads being pagan, the sedentary Fulani mainly Muslim. Both divisions were for different reasons dissatisfied with their lot under the Hausa chiefs; before the Shehu's *jihad* there had been a number of clashes between Fulani and Hausa throughout this area from Zaria to Zamfara. The processes of polarization brought to a head by the Shehu's declaration of *jihad* would probably have generated conflicts, even without this; but when Shehu and Yunfa came to blows these latent hostilities and cleavages between Muslim and heathen, pastoralist and farmer, immigrant and native people, Fulani and Hausa, all poured themselves into this conflict, with the result that the critical principles for which the Shehu stood were often obscured. Perhaps it was his recognition of the need to clarify this situation, and to regulate conduct according to Islam, that led the Shehu to devote himself to writing political and religious tracts such as the *Kitab al-farq* and the *Bayan wujub al-hijra*, for the guidance and enlightenment of his followers. Moreover, once this conflict had come to a head at Tabkin Kwotto, it could not be localized within a single Hausa state; inevitably it spread to the limits of the social field in which this combination of forces and cleavages was general. For the

Muslim leaders, this multiplied the problems of directing and regulating their *jihad* in accord with the rules of religion and of good policy. But perhaps this need to pursue political advantage while observing the Law and religion is a general feature of all those *jihads* which originate as revolts against 'heathen' rulers. The results are always liable to differing interpretations. Where religious scruples obstruct effective political action, the *jihad* will normally fail; where political action of a secular, instrumental type disguises its nature under religious banners, its religious claims are easily discredited; but no one who has studied the Shehu's writings or life can doubt his primary religious commitment. His *jihad* was successful through a skilful combination of religious and political factors; yet it is precisely this combination which lends it an ambiguous character. As I have tried to show, the Shehu and his closest supporters, having identified themselves as the focus of opposition to Gobir government, were very largely governed by the circumstances of their situation and had to adjust, within the limits their religion permitted, to its requirements. This pattern is a general characteristic of Islam, enshrined in the doctrine of *ijma'*, by which consensus legitimates necessary changes. As Weber pointed out, Islam is one of the very few major religions which has a practical orientation to the affairs of this world, 'an essentially political character',<sup>29</sup> as seen in the injunction of *jihad*. The ambiguous character of Shehu dan Fodio's *jihad* derives from the ambiguous character of *jihad* itself.

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<sup>28</sup> Arnett, op. cit., pp. 53, 77-8, 82, 107; see also Whitting, n.d., p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Weber, 1963, p. 263.

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### Résumé

## LE DJIHAD DU SHEHU DAN FODIO: QUELQUES PROBLÈMES

Le *Djihad* comme moyen de propager la religion est un signe distinctif de l'Islam. Au 18<sup>e</sup> siècle et au 19<sup>e</sup>, le Soudan occidental fut soumis au principe du *djihad*. Il y eut plusieurs *djihads*, tous conduits par des clercs Torodbés ou Toukouleurs venus du Fouta Toro. L'un de ces *djihads* fut celui du Shehu Usumanu Dan Fodio contre le chef Haoussa de Gobir et ses alliés, en 1804. En six années, les partisans du Shehu établirent leur domination sur presque toute la Région Septentrionale actuelle du Nigéria. Cet empire dura, sous les Sultans Torodbés (Fulanis) de Sokoto, jusqu'à l'instauration du Protectorat Britannique par Lugard. Les *djihads* sont des procédés particulier de propagation d'un culte. Ce sont des conquêtes aux intentions religieuses

qui se réalisent politiquement et ont des conséquences politiques. Une analyse impartiale de la légitimité d'un *djihad*, des motifs et de la conduite de ses chefs, se heurte donc à des difficultés dues à l'esprit partisan, aux intérêts établis, à l'idéologie politique, etc. En ce qui concerne le *djihad* du Shehu, les opinions des administrateurs britanniques, comme celles des musulmans nigériens, divergent selon ces mêmes lignes. Les intentions déclarées de cette entreprise étaient la purification et la propagation de l'Islam, mais les musulmans eurent recours massivement au soutien de pasteurs nomades Foulanis en majorité païens. Sa réussite a fait des Foulanis la couche dirigeante du Nigéria Septentrional. Quelques commentateurs nigériens et britanniques en ont conclu que le *djihad* d'Usumanu a été avant tout un combat politique ou même racial, les chefs indigènes Haoussas étant renversés par des Foulanis musulmans ou païens, sous le prétexte et les bannières d'une Guerre Sainte. Le point de vue opposé, 'orthodoxe', insiste sur le caractère rigoureusement religieux de ce *djihad* et sur le besoin qu'il y a de poursuivre aujourd'hui les mêmes desseins, en le complétant par des réformes qui affermissent et purifient son héritage politique. Ces points de vue sont présentés comme diamétralement opposés. Ils soutiennent des programmes politiques tout à fait différents. Ils nous permettent aussi de faire ressortir quelques problèmes théoriques posés par l'étude des *djihads*. L'un est celui de l'exposé impartial et exact d'un *djihad*; un autre concerne la nature des *djihads* eux mêmes. Puisque n'ont d'importance historique que les *djihads* qui 'réussissent' du moins politiquement et puisqu'un tel succès dépend normalement d'une politique adroite, les *djihads* sont en général ambigus. Il en est tout spécialement ainsi du *djihad* qui implique plus une révolte contre des dominateurs 'païens' que la soumission d'un troupe extérieur par les musulmans. Mais la plus grande ambiguïté se trouve là où les dominateurs 'païens' étaient officiellement musulmans, alors que les forces de l'Islam comprenaient de nombreux 'païens' et que les héritiers du *djihad* usent de formes et d'institutions culturelles 'païennes' dont certaines étaient proscrites par les chefs du *djihad*. Cette dernière combinaison de circonstances se trouve dans le *djihad* du Shehu Usumanu. Et

politique et en essayant de leur imposer l'ordre religieux musulman. Le succès du *djihad* témoigne du succès de cet accommodement. Mais ce même succès donne au *djihad* son caractère ambigu et laisse intact le problème moral. Cette ambiguïté est frappante dans le *djihad* d'Usumanu: pourtant cette même qualité s'attache à tous les *djihads* réussis, puisque ce sont des applications politiquement efficaces de la violence au service de la religion, que, politiquement efficaces, ils sont tout spécialement profitables aux vainqueurs. Le *djihad* pose un problème moral fondamental dans l'Islam, comme Weber l'a remarqué en définissant l'Islam 'comme la religion d'une classe de guerriers'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Weber, 1963, p. 262.