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THE CHALLENGES AND ASPIRATION OF
ISLAMIC CALL IN AFRICA

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Preamble
Great is the Almighty Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful, who out of His boundless generosity magnanimity and compassion, chose Africa to be one of the few regions in the world that will play a crucial role in the promotion, preservation and propagation of Islam. The first African contact with Islam dated back to the 5th year of the advent of Islam, a period when Islam was a stranger even to most parts of the Jazeera. Africa had played host to Islam at its most trying moment. A time when the Quraysh leadership had bared its fangs intending to unleash terror on it, or even to nip it in the bud, by coercing the then small content of believers who according to Quraysh mentality, had forsaken the path trodden by their forefathers, to denounce their faith in Islam, an inordinate ambition that was never to be realized, courtesy of among other things, African intervention and hospitality. The then emperor of Abyssinia, King Negus may Allah be pleased with him had played the most important role in support of Islam, by giving asylum to the first contingent of Muslim immigrants under the leadership of Ja’afar Ibn Abbas, and refusing to hand them over to the Quraysh brutish predators. The Almighty Allah did not cause the effort and the contribution of King Negus to go in vain, because Negus had embraced Islam and died as a believer. This fact was made known by the Prophet (SAW) when he informed his Companions that King Negus had died, and enjoined companions to rise and observe funeral prayer in honour of their deceased brother, Negus. One month later, information about King Negus demise was received in Madina. The most famous African in the cabinet of the Prophet (SAW) was Bilal Ibn
Rabah. He was a minister in charge of Azan and the first Mu’azzin in Islam, may Allah be pleased with them all. Da’awa Activities From the first debut of Islam in the African territory up to the colonial misadventure in Africa in the early 20th century, Da’awa activities have never subsided or abated. In the contrary it had always been on the rise. This was due to the revivalist activities across Africa. Before the colonial onslaught on Nigeria and many other African countries and reducing them to colonies of British government, Islam had been the driving force in most of its States, like, Songhai, Mali, Ghana, Kanem Bornu, Senegal, Northern Nigeria, etc, some of those empires have thrived for centuries. Colonial Challenge: Shehu Usman Danfodiyo established a Caliphate, which was founded on the principles of the Sharia, and in which consent of the people provided further legitimacy for governance. Politically, the Caliphate was headed at the Centre by the Shehu the commander of the faithful with power dispersed and delegated to flag bearers, the Emirs in the provinces. Other offices as those of the Muhtasib complemented this structure, i.e. keeper of public morals, the Wazir who served as the conscience and chief adviser to the leader of the Caliphate. The Caliphate system worked fine for quite sometimes. With passing years and the demise of its founding leaders, degeneration set in. The remnant of this Caliphate was what the British had fought with and conquered in the early part of the century. Upon conquering the Caliphate, Lugard found a vast territory with complex and centralized administrative machinery. He also noticed the existence of a legal system with its distinct judicial structure, which complemented the administrative set up, and a structure, which he admired. The colonial advent was one of the most singular challenges posed to Da’awah activities in the entire African continent. During the time under reference, Nigeria as it is today
was non-existent. Instead, it was distinct North with its predominant Muslim population, with its comprehensive educational and judicial systems. Courts proceedings were conducted in Arabic. While the West and the East were predominantly populated with pagans and traditionalists. The West had a pocket of Muslims scattered across it, but the two regions had neither a comprehensive educational nor sound judicial systems. To this latter group, colonialism and colonial adventure was seen as a blessing and a good omen, because of the kind of organization, administration and mutual benefit it has brought to the hitherto chaotic, dislocated and uncoordinated social order. The colonial system of education, judicial and health care delivery systems were all to them a welcome development. Since they were superior to what was then in vogue, they swallowed everything, line, hook and sinker. The same development was viewed as the greatest disaster that could ever be fall any nation. To the North, it was the saddest moment. It was sad because people with penchant for territorial expansion and greed for the control of African resources, with contaminated legal and educational system and inferior religion were foisting themselves on Muslims as political leaders. When the British conquest was more or less complete and Lugard assumed office as the High Commissioner for Northern Nigeria, he officially adopted the policy of ‘Indirect Rule’ – i.e. ruling through the native chiefs. This policy entitled the British rulers to run the country partly by proxy; as a result, some of the native rulers who were conquered were reinstated (including at first, the notorious Ibrahim Nagwamatse) and were supported by the British colonial administration.

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That was not withstanding; they went ahead and proscribed the use of Arabic as official language and brought in its stead, English as the new official language. That was the first devastating blow against Islam. With these devils at the helm of Muslim affairs, many of our Islamic values, heritage and principles were dumped and their functions restricted or outrightly sanctioned. The hitherto official status been accorded Islam, which was the factor for its development and advancement, was discontinued and its potentiality for growth was halted. The Islamic educational system was completely divested of all authoritative support, and that reduced all its students to a state of destitution. The Islamic judicial system became a victim of gradual destruction, and by the time the colonialists were sent packing, nothing was left of the system, except a caricature of its former self. But more fundamentally the status accorded Islam, of state religion, was withdrawn, and every business of the government was secularized. Its criminal as well as all civil jurisdictions, except a tiny aspect of Ahwal al-Shakhsiyya, i.e. personal status, was completely taken away. This was what had befallen the predominant Muslim North. Muslims that were versed in Islam were sidelined and eventually reduced to nonentity. In the West, where pocket of Muslims exist, they were never allowed the enjoyment of any Islamic principles even in the contaminated form that the North had enjoyed. They were compelled to resolve their conflicts of whatever type, either in accordance with the pagan practices or the imposed English Law. On the other hand Western education was petted, patronized and heavily bankrolled. Schools were constructed all over the places and provided with every conceivable facilities and equipment, its
teachers were been paid heavy salaries and the graduate of such schools occupied high positions in government offices, Para states, and private companies with attractive emoluments and fat pay packages. Additionally, Western education was the only genuine passport to good living. However, some people, especially in the northern parts of Nigeria began to realize the damage done by the colonial administration to their system of education, which was prevalent before. They found out also that for all the years the British remained in Nigeria, the government was grant-aiding private missionary schools all over the country, while Qur’anic schools were not even recognized.

At the initial stage of the colonial invasion of Northern Nigeria, Muslims were never impressed with their educational system. To them it was a suspect, because the Qur’an has made a lot of revelations about the identity of the imposters whose religion has been making blasphemous statements against the unity of Allah. They steered clear of the whole thing, until they received in concrete terms the assurances of the colonialists not to impose Christianity on their children, as they did to Muslim children in the West.

Change of Buttons:
At the dawn of the country’s independence, many Northerners have gone through the Western educational system, but were nowhere comparable to their western counterparts, who have fully embraced the system ab-initio, because they had no basis for rejecting it due to reasons stated earlier. The system of democracy that succeeded the colonial government was the Westminster. In it, the country was divided into North, West and Eastern regions and later on Mid-western region was curved out of the Western
and Eastern regions, and that brought the regions to four, which were all semi-autonomous with a central government that was not very strong. Under that dispensation, the country was handed over to crop of politicians who were adequately trained and drilled to perpetuate the colonial system bequeathed by the British government, a system that is incompatible with Islamic development. The British in its divisive ploy insinuated that Islamic judicial system would not be welcome by the international community, and insisted that some reforms are necessary. Narrating the incident, Sir Ahmadu Bello the Premier of Northern Nigeria addressed the Northern House of Assembly as follows:

"Honorable members will be aware that some of the features of the legal and judicial system of the region have provoked criticism, not only in Nigeria but also in the United Kingdom and other parts of the world. It was borne on us that this legal and judicial reforms would have to be carried out if the self-governing regime was to fulfill its role in the Federation of Nigeria and command respect among the nations of the world."

It can be seen how the country in general but the north specifically were intimidated with boycott from the community of nations, who felt provoked by our legal system, and doubted its capacity to dispense justice. That was how the trend continued, one plot after the other, until such a time that hopes could almost be said to have been lost.

Ignorance.

Another deadly challenge facing Islam in Africa is that of ignorance. The Muslim majorities are abysmally ignorant both in Islamic and modern education. Their reading culture is fast diminishing,
and scholars are not favorably disposed to mobilize people massively as required. Factors responsible for all these may not be completely removed from economic situation in the country. On the one hand the generality of the populace is toiling hard to earn a living under a battered economy, and that means they have to put up extra labour hours for survival. Obviously only little time will be left for any meaningful learning. And on the other hand religious activities are not being properly funded by those endowed with means, as such, the scholars were forced to derail from their fundamental responsibilities of propelling scholarship to that of mendicancy. The ulama cannot adequately cope with the situation without authoritative backing, which is virtually not forthcoming at the rate it is supposed to come. The private support being generated is grossly in adequate and uncoordinated. Muslim Converts: The activities of Du’at are heavily concentrated among Muslims leaving out a big chunk of non-Muslims unattended to, in spite of the high prospect. That notwithstanding, the few thousands that were embracing Islam were virtually left to cater for themselves. Some of them do face a number of problems ranging from that of training to social maltreatment and economic subjugation. Included among the social problems are, expulsions from family setting, court litigations, etc. Converts usually suffer from scholarship withdrawal, lost of employment, etc. There were also no established institutions for training the converts, etc. These are serious problems facing Islam in Africa. If attention will be focused on the non-Muslims, the rate at which Islam will be attracting converts will rise geometrically. Sectarian Conflicts:
Sectarian conflicts between Islamic groups, organizations and individuals are equally posing serious challenges to Islam in Africa. Taking Nigeria as a case study, it can be said that, there are two major sects; Izala and the Sufi orders. There are also sharp divisions within each of the two major organizations. Sometimes, these conflicts go beyond what each organization or group can handle. It will naturally be handled by the law enforcement agents, who more often than not are non-Muslims. There also could be a replication of this problem across Africa in view of the fact the two organizations have multiple follower ship across many African states. There are many more similar organizations throughout Africa, who were also involved in one kind of conflict or another. This unfortunately, is hamstringing the development and growth of Islam in Africa.

The Reintroduction of Sharia: Zamfara state, in the Northwestern part of Nigeria was the first to re-introduce Sharia. In the declaration of Ahmad Sani Yarimar Bakura, on the 27th October 2000, he said, he was fulfilling his campaign promise, and that, in a political dispensation people were free to determine the type of law that should govern them. The declaration had received an overwhelming response throughout Nigeria including the neighbouring countries. There were of course some pockets of resistance from the non-Muslims locally and abroad. Germany for example was the country that had put up the stiffest opposition. More than one thousand protest letters were received from there, particularly on the eve of amputating the hand of the first thief.

Internally, many states of the North with predominant Muslim population started agitating for the introduction of Sharia in their various states.
Initially, the leadership of such states paid no heed to the agitation believing in the fantasy of one of the leaders who said that the Sharia been agitated for was a political Sharia, so it will fizzle out. Unfortunately for them not only did it refuse to fizzle out, but it continued to wax stronger with its roots getting firmly established, until it reached a stage that neglecting it was quite unsafe. Thus, the only option left to such self-serving leaders was to endorse it willy-nilly. That been said, the cumulative success of the Sharia reintroduction in the Northern states is glaring. Many Arabic and Islamic colleges were established, Qur’anic institutions were opened, traditional Qur’anic tsangayoyi have received a boost, Da’awah activities have been intensified, etc. Even though the Constitution is absolutely against any state holding a particular religion as official, many Sharia observing states have promoted Islam in such a way that, it will be difficult not to assume that it is accorded the status of a state religion. This reintroduction of Sharia has dealt a mortal blow to those categories of elites, who succeeded the colonial masters, who were left to accomplish the political act started by the colonialists. This is because; all the Sharia proponents are the product of the same system. This is an interesting development as far as Islam in Africa is concerned. All the machinery for Sharia development, set in motion by the reintroduction of Sharia shall insha Allah continue to generate awareness, understanding and followership.

Recommendation:
The menace of ignorance among Muslims is souring and has to be confronted headlong. People’s reading culture is fast diminishing, it has to be reinvented. Leading Muslim nations should sponsor mass production
of Islamic literature in various vernaculars and have it distributed for free. Imams and Muslim scholars should pay particular attention to this area. They should launch an all-out assault with a view of effacing it. Inspite of the fact that Da’awa activities is now enchained globally, Muslims endowed countries should revive the practice of shipping large consignment of Islamic books to their brothers and sisters in less privileged countries. It is hoped that this combined effort would yield a positive results in the promotion of knowledge internationally. Among the problems Islam in Africa is suffering from, is that of neglecting the area of non-Muslims. In Nigeria for example, even in the core-North where you have a predominant Muslim population not much is being done in the area of the Maguzawa. In the eastern part of Nigeria there are a lot of potential Muslims, just waiting to be ushered in. It is my belief that this assertion holds good even in most part of the African countries. I am very optimistic that if we would set aside a decade of experiment, the success would be amazing. I know that countries like Libya, Saudi Arabia and a score of other Arab countries are doing their best in the area of propagation in different forms, I still appeal to them to focus attention now in the area of non-Muslims. Alhamdu Lillah in Nigeria such a body has just been formed. The volume of energy being dissipated in sectarian conflicts, which sometimes degenerates into blood letting is by all standard of civility unacceptable. The overwhelming challenges issuing from our adversaries are enough to give us sleepless nights. They are always scheming and strategizing on how to destabilize Islam and to set its adherents against each other’s throat. Instead of us to always be on the watch and to plan counter strategies, we are
falling prey to their evil machinations. The recently set up body to look into the unending feud between the Sunni and the Shi’a in Iraq is a welcome development. Every country with such problems should constitute a similar committee to look into such conflicts and misunderstanding with a view to resolving them. We are people governed by Allah’s Book, in which clear guidelines for resolving conflicts have been adequately provided. The Qur’an says, “And if two factions among the believers should fight, then make settlement between the two. But if one of them oppresses the other, then fight against the one that oppresses until it returns into the ordinance of Allah. And if it returns, then make settlement between them in justice and act justly, indeed Allah love those who act justly. The believers are but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers. And fear Allah that you may receive mercy.” [Q49:9-10]

It is therefore surprising that Muslim will abandon this guidance, or will not pursue this settlement independently until other people who are groping in darkness without any guidance, whose motive for any such mediation is tension aggravation and promotion of personal interests, get involved. Muslim nations should evolve a body within its membership that will mediate between members whenever there is any conflict, or any misunderstanding has set in. This is fundamental because the process and the approach will be as sanctioned by Allah to whom every Muslim leader should bow in reverence. Allowing all sorts of people to meddle into our affairs is negating the promotion of brotherhood amongst Muslim nations, and is insinuating that we don’t have adequate provisions for conflict resolutions. Conclusion
The challenges are stupendous and daunting but not unsurmountable. It is my belief that with the active participation of endowed Muslim nations, all the challenges mentioned in this paper, including others not within it realm should with Allah’s support be addressed and settled fair and square.