

Gwandu Emirate: The Domain of Abdullahi Fodiyo, Since 1805

A review by

Mufutau Oluwasegun Jimoh

oriyomijimoh4@gmail.com

Department of History and International Studies,
Federal University, Brinin-Kebbi, Kebbi State, Nigeria;

Gwandu Emirate: The Domain of Abdullahi Fodiyo, Since 1805 (Birnin-Kebbi, Nigeria: Gwandu Emirate Development Association, 2016, pp.656, ISBN: 978-978-938-157-9) by Mukhtar Umar Bunza.

In six engaging chapters and appendixes, Mukhtar Bunza has produced a very important contribution to African history and Nigerian historiography. Graduate students who are desirous of having reading materials on the nation building process in Northern Nigeria would appreciate the depth and analytical prowess of the author. The book challenges the long held Eurocentric assumption about the inability of Africans to organize an effective society that is based on law and order. Chapter one details the historical background to the establishment of the caliphate. Northern Nigeria was a combination of different civilizations ranging from the Berbers to the Jews and the Arabs who are from North Africa. Central to the evolution of Islam and the classical Islamic culture in the North was the Wangarawa, who were from Mali in the Western region of Africa. They brought with them large numbers of followers who were scholars and administrators. It was these scholars whose teaching and world view shaped the religious development of Usman Danfodiyo and his brother Abdullahi Danfodiyo, the two architects of Sokoto Jihad. The intellectual richness of the Kingdom and that of Sokoto was evident from the account of the scholar's details in this work. This clearly dispels the notion that northern Nigeria was educationally backward in the centuries preceding formal western colonialism. On the eve of the Jihad, Gwandu and Sokoto were an epitome of immorality and bad governance. It was the basis that provided the socio-political and economic incentives for the Jihad. This perhaps explains the ease at which Abdullahi and his brother mobilized the people against the Habe ruler of pre-nineteenth century Northern society.

Chapter two of the book details the birth, growth and intellectual development of Abdullahi Fodiyo. Abdullahi came from a long line of intellectual class of Fulani oligarchy. The word Foduye (Fodiyo) means learned and Jurist, which testifies to the intellectual depth of the family.

Born 1766 in Degel, a town that would later become the academic headquarters of his brother, though his academic development took place under different scholars, the most enduring influence came from his brother, Shehu Usman the son of Fodiyo, who he acknowledged to have illuminated his intellectual life. He was an outstanding scholar with undisguised bias for history and an astute administrator. Though the tradition of historical scholarship pre-dates the Sokoto Jihad, Abdullahi and his brother expanded it and attracted Ulammas from the Bornu axis to complement that of Sokoto. It was this background that casted him in his role as the defender of the new caliphate on eastern front with his headquarter in Gwandu which was first administered by Usmanu before Abdullahi was saddled with the responsibility of defending and expanding the new emirate. This chapter captured the totality of Abdullahi's life beyond the religious space and as empire builder and a modernizer who sized the momentum of the Jihad to institute a wide range administrative reform.

Chapter three explains the dynamics and the centrality of Gwandu to the development and expansion of the jihad. Gwandu was not just the first administrative capital of the new Fulani emirate but a spiritual headquarters where many important decisions concerning the principle of administration was made. It is quite refreshing to see how the Fulani oligarchy sustained the power structure through intricate family marriage that ensured the survival of the ruling class in Sokoto and Gwandu including the vassal states. The boundary of the emirate stretches from Gwandu to Dosso in the present day republic of Niger to the fringe of Yorubaland in the south; this expansive territory was administered by proxies who swore allegiance to Gwandu after military campaign in the nineteenth century. Though some states capitulated without a fight, others were subjugated by military conquest. The constant change of the administrative capital of the emirate from Gwandu to Ambrussa and later Birnin-Kebbi perhaps revealed the seemingly unease within the emirate and among its leadership. Abdullahi and his brother Usmanu demonstrated uncommon characteristic of leaders who relinquished their acquired territories by dedicating their subordinate to govern while they concentrated on the intellectual development of the campaign. However, the British subjugation of Gwandu reduced its importance in the new socio-political matrix, with the new capital at Birnin-Kebbi, it remains a historical relic struggling for visibility.

Chapter four provides the comprehensive history of the king list in Gwandu emirate and the hierarchical structure of the emirate. At the top of the political and administrative structure of the emirate is the Emir, whose function covers a wide spectrum life of the society. He is the chief security officer of the emirate and sees to the general wellbeing of his people. One of the uncompromising characteristic features of the Emir is high level of Islamic knowledge and intelligence. Starting from 1912 to 2016, twenty Emirs have ruled Gwandu with varying degree of successes and controversies. The Emir is assisted by a number of officials who ensure the smooth running of the emirate. The Majalisar Sarki though an advisory council played so important role in the emirate.

Council of kingmakers ensures the selection of right candidates, while Shura comprises of eminent scholars deal with religious and theological issues. Over the years, the Council has gone through a number of modifications in pre-colonial and post-colonial era. Members of the council of Gwandu emirate includes the Waziri, Magajin Rafi, Magajin Gari, Walin Gwandu, Bunu Gwandu, Sarkin Kudun Gwandu, Iyan Gwandu. While the kingmakers comprises the Waziri, Magajin Rafi, Magaji Gari, Sarkin Kabin Jega, Sarkin Aliero, Sarkin Zagga and Sarkin Illo. The vagaries colonialism though modified this structure from time to time; it has continued to serve the administrative demand of the emirate across different times and space.

Chapter five focuses on the British occupation and subjugation of Gwandu emirate with the first contact in 1824 when Hugh Clapperton visited Sultan Mohammed Bello with all the diplomatic civilities. The conquest of Gwandu followed similar pattern with other parts of the country. However, the intense competition that characterised space acquisition by the Europeans imperial power manifested in the dubious ways in which the British forged treaties to secure political sovereignty to prevent the French from gaining foothold in any territories under Gwandu. Gwandu sovereignty was never surrender without a fight; the entire Gwandu emirate confronted the British colonial machinery without any success. However, the most enduring encountered was recorded in Nupe. Interestingly, unable to muster enough forces and fire power, opinion with the emirate was divided between those who wanted a peaceful negotiation with British and others who desired that the emirate should fight to defeat the ‘infidels.’ However, the third opinion favoured Hijirah to the east. Eventually, peace was pursued, resistance was offered and Hijirah was embarked upon.

Chapter six bring to the forefront the economic potentials of Kebbi state and Gwandu emirate. From Kebbi to Zuru, Yauri and Ilorin, one would discover a kingdom that is blessed with rich mineral resources and self-sustaining in food production. However, in the post-colonial era, the emirate citizens desirous of industrialization invested in the economic development of the emirate to stimulate growth and industrial development. This is evident in the number of cottage industry spread across the length and breadth of the emirate. The chapter also highlights the socio-economic and political diversity of an emirate that emerged that is constantly evolving within the larger Nigerian state.

This book contributes to three important themes in Nigerian history. First, it fills in the dearth of research on the history of Gwandu emirate. It explicates the intellectual and personality behind the development of the emirate before the interruption of colonialism. The book marked a departure from the works of Adeleye - “Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria, 1804-1906,” “Murray Last - “The Sokoto Caliphate.”” It bring to the forefront the major military and intellectual contributions of Gwandu to the jihad. Gwandu was a major flank in the drive and expansion of the Jihad on eastern front. Second, it established the fact that Africans are indeed capable of building a nation where justice is administered base on the accepted judicial code of the society. Thirdly, the book re-validates the fact that inter-group relations existed among Nigerians before colonialism.

However, the book suffers from insufficient data on women who participated in the Jihad. The work could have built on Jean Boyd and Beverly Mack's "Collected Works of Nana Asma'u: Daughter of Usman 'dan Fodiyo (1793-1864)" From his own evidence, women were an essential part of the intellectual part of the movement, but we know little about the member of this privileged class. Their socio-economic contributions were largely missing. Perhaps, the main reasons for this omission were the ideological perspective of the society in which they lived and the sources of the writer which is mainly works of the leading intellectual light of the Jihadist and to an extent the colonial records. The book could have extend the frontier of our knowledge on the politics within the larger family of Shehu Usman and Abdullahi Fodiyo during and after the jihad which was mostly centered on legal disagreements between 'Abdullahi and Shehu Usman in ca. 1806-7, and later between 'Abdullahi and Bello Fodiyo in ca. 1817-8. Important questions that would have illuminated our understanding of the caliphate were not answer. For instance, why was Gwandu reluctant to govern the west (e.g. Dori and Liptako generally); what was Gwandu attitude and perception towards the Royal Niger Company conquest of Bida and Ilorin - did Gwandu do anything to help them? Also did Gwandu organize any effective resistance later against Lugard & co. at Zungeru?. Besides, if the leadership of the emirate has being more pragmatic politically and militarily, Nigeria would have included much of both Niger and Burkina! This lacuna left a yawning gap in the history of Gwandu. On the whole, Bunza's work has opened up a greater space in the historiography of northern Nigeria history, specifically on the history of Gwandu emirate and the intellectual life of Abdullahi Fodiyo. This is a definitive history of Gwandu emirate in the 18th and 19th centuries.