

**ABSTRACT TO THE SYMPOSIUM ON CANONICAL WORKS AND
CONTINUING INNOVATIONS IN AFRICAN ARTS AND HUMANITIES ON
THE TOPIC:**

**ISLAM AND POLITICAL THOUGHT IN PRE-COLONIAL WEST AFRICA:
SOME PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS ON THE CANONICAL WORKS OF
SOKOTO CALIPHATE**

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The Sokoto Caliphate covered an area of about 250,000 square miles in the West African region. There is no doubt about the fact that it was one of the largest Islamic polities in the 19th century. The process of emergence of the caliphate involved the unification of over two dozen sovereign polities by reconstituting them into thirty emirates with Sheikh Usman B. Fodio being its caliph. The Sokoto Caliphate which survived for a hundred years as a political entity from 1804 – 1903, had during this period eleven successive caliphs, hundreds of Emirs and Chiefs. These leaders did not only develop a highly impressive centralized politico-administrative machinery, a strong and balanced economy, but also a sophisticated corpus of intellectual and political thought and ideology through which the entire Muslim communities were governed and likewise related to the non-Islamic communities and systems.

This Islamic political thought was clearly spelt out in the treatises of the three leading intellectuals and ideologues of the caliphate – Sheikh Usman B. Fodio (d. 1817), Sheikh Abdullahi (d. 1829) and Sheikh Mohammed Bello (d.1837) – and of course the subsequent caliphs during their rulerships up to the time of their confrontation, subordination and destruction by the British Colonial System. The last Sokoto Caliph, Attahiru Ahmadu, died as a hero in a battle ground at Burmi in 1903 in the course of fighting and preventing the British Colonial invaders from conquering and subjugating the Sokoto Caliphate.

This paper proposes to reflect on the political treaties and writings of the above three pioneer Sokoto caliphate leadership. This is because of the fact that this early leadership did not only organize and lead the Islamic revolution, but also built and administered, what should be described as the ideal Islamic state in Black Africa. In addition, it turned out to be the most intellectually productive segment of African leadership in pre-colonial Sub-Saharan Africa.

This leadership in the course of overthrowing the Habe states, construction of the Sokoto caliphate and its administration, produced over three dozens of seminal canonical works which need to be collected and classified according to these themes:

- i. Nature and sources of African Islamic revolutionary thought.
- ii. Conception, functions and ideals of an Islamic state in an African setting;
- iii. Selection, responsibilities and purposes of political leadership.
- iv. Citizens' and disadvantaged groups (women, children, the poor, slaves and non Muslims) rights and obligations under an Islamic state.
- v. Principles and conduct of state administration and in international relations.

In conclusion, this paper provides some preliminary observations on the sources, classification and interpretation of these Sokoto caliphate canonical works in the making of African political thought, for further research and documentation.