PROPOSAL FOR THE DIGITIZATION OF ISLAMIC COLLECTION OF LATE USMAN DAN FODIO: A MODEL FOR RESOURCE SHARING AMONG LIBRARIES

By

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a Resource Sharing Model through digitization initiative of an important Islamic collection of Usman Dan Fodio a Calipth and Islamic leader in Sokoto, Northern Nigeria, who reigned between the years of 1775-1817. It observes the subjects area covered by the collections, significances and why they need to be digitized and shared beyond the border of Nigeria and Africa. The paper suggests a similar projects model to digitization efforts of Timbuktu collections of Mali carried out by the Library of Congress. It explains the proposed gateway model of resource sharing through digitization in details, where by the scatted collections of Usman Dan Fodio would be retrieved from the various locations, transported to the digitization centre, digitized and uploaded onto the Internet for Libraries to download and make use of them easily accessible to their clientele.

Keywords: Digitization, Resource Sharing, Libraries, Usuman Dan Fodio, Gateway Model, Nigeria

Introduction

Libraries and archives that serve the academic community and general public have a critical role and responsibility to preserve the scholarly records available at their disposal. Needless to say, what these institutions do (or fail to do) will have an impact on future generations. Converting and preserving scholarly and policy materials are generally seen as the way forward for providing access and preserving the cultural heritage. Since 1990s, Libraries all over the world have paid attention to cooperating in digitization projects that focus on unique collections as a cost-efficient way to give scholars all over the world access to rich resources and to preserve those valuable print materials that were deteriorating.

Digitization is the process of taking traditional library materials that are in form of books and papers and converting them to the electronic form where they can be stored and manipulated by a computer (Witten, Ian and David Bainbridge, 2003). Ding, Choo Ming (2000) has elaborated the works of Getz (1997), Line (1996) and Mckinley (1997) on the advantages of digitization. They maintained that:

i. Digital materials can be sorted, transmitted and retrieved easily and quickly.
ii. Access to electronic information is cheaper than its print counterpart when all the files are stored in an electronic warehouse with compatible facilities and equipment.
iii. Digital texts can be linked, thus made interactive; besides, it enhances the retrieval of more information.

In the light of the mentioned advantages, it is natural today to find more information being digitized and uploaded onto the Internet or Compact-Disc Read Only Memory (CD-ROM) in order to be made instantaneously accessible to a virtual' audience.

On the other hand the American Library Association (ALA) *Glossary of Library and Information Science* (1983) defined resource sharing as a term covering a variety of organizations and activities by a group of libraries, jointly engaged for the purposes of improving services and/ or cutting costs. Resource sharing may be established by informal or formal agreements or by contract, and it may operate locally, regionally, nationally, or internationally. The resources shared may be collections, bibliographic data, personnel, planning activities, etc. Maigari (1991) highlighted the benefits accrued to institutions with networks of resource sharing as follows:

1. There would be better and wider knowledge and effective use of the resources.
2. Such arrangement facilitates global information and data flow.

This paper intends to draw the attention of researchers, scholars and institutions both in the United States and the United Kingdom to the obvious imperative for the digitization, preservation and scientific study of the Islamic manuscripts available in Nigeria and Africa at large. The paper therefore, focuses on a proposed programme for the digitization of Usman Dan Fodio collection, the subject areas covers by the collection, significances of the collection, the needs to digitize and the model to be adopted.

Background: Sheikh Usuman Dan Fodio and his Islamic Literature
Usuman Dan Fodio also referred to as Sheikh Usman Ibn Fodio or Shehu Usman Dan Fodio was born in Maratta, Gobir, Hausa land in 1754. A prolific writer and Islamic reformer, Dan Fodio was one of a class of urbanized ethnic Fulani living in the Hausa city-states in what is today called northern Nigeria. Usuman Dan Fodio was a follower of the Maliki School of law and Qadiri order in Sufism. He strongly criticised the Hausa ruling elite for their heavy taxation and unacceptable violation of the Sharia. He is considered an Islamic revivalist. He encouraged the education of women in religious matters and several of his daughters emerged as scholars and writers.

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(Encyclopaedia of Religion, 2006). He came of a line of Muslim scholars of the Fulbe clan Torodbe that had been established in the area since about 854/1450. They worked as scribes, teachers, and in other literate roles, contributing knowledge over several generations and disseminating the Sunnī Islam amongst the inhabitants of Gobir.

The immediate political consequences of the jihad were the overthrow of the Hausa principalities based on traditional, unwritten customary codes and to substitute the unified Islamic system of the caliphate governed by Sharia, as enshrined in divine revelation (Qur'an) and Prophet Muhammad's traditions (Hadith) (Usman Muhammad Bugaje, 1979).

One of the most important tasks of Usman Dan Fodio was the cultivation of a crop of learned scholars and activists through whom the revolutionary message was transmitted to the generality of society, and who would eventually shoulder the responsibility of running the new social order when it was finally established. The greater the number of people so trained, the greater the prospects of transformation. This cultivation is but a process through which Usman multiplied himself on a continuous basis: he created people in his own image, who in turn created others in the same fashion and so on. This ensured continuity in the process of change, because the movement is being continuously nourished morally and intellectually. Moreover it ensures for the movement of the loyalty and dedication it requires if it is to move successfully through the lengthy process of change to the desired state of solidarity.

Subjects Covered
Usman Dan Fodio wrote one hundred and fifteen books concerning his thoughts about religion, government, culture, poetry, logic, rhetoric, economy, trade, law and society. The Shehu was not only a war leader but also a scholar and poet in the classical Arabic tradition. Best known among his verse works is his panegyric to the prophet Muhammad (SAW), *Al-dālīyah (The Ode Rhyming in Dāl)*, that helped to spread the prophet's Ṣūfī order.

The Encyclopaedia of Religion (2006) echoed the numerous Arabic prose works he had. The main thrust of the work is against all manifestations of indigenous, non-Islamic Hausa culture—song, music, ornate dress, architecture, social mores, and so on—and an insistence that these be replaced by Islamic alternatives. His works also influenced his society, and posterity, by disseminating the ideas of the Qādirī order of Ṣūfīs, to which he was deeply committed.

Some important titles worth mentioning include: **Talim al-ikhwan** where the Dan Fodio discusses philosophy of law, with jurisprudence as a vehicle of protest and dissemination of revolutionary principles. The Shehu further wrote in **Kitab al-Farq** on the question of leadership. In both works, the Shehu pointed out the oppressive policies instituted by Hausa (Habe) rulers, illegal taxations levied on common people, arbitrary confiscation of property, corruption by judges, perversion of the legal process, alteration of the sacred law to suit the interest of rulers and aristocrats, and large-scale corruption in government. The two collections also offered solutions on how to curb these problems.

Ibraheem Suleiman (1986) in his work "A Revolution in History: The Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio" listed some good titles of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio and explained their subject areas. These titles include:

i. **Hidayat al-Tullab.** The Shehu dealt with several issues relating to Islamic Law and Muslim society. The first of which was the very definition of law itself. In addition, the volume dealt in Hidayat with the issue of right and wrong in society. The work can be seen as Shehu Dan Fodio's attempt to instill in a universal approach to law and to expand their attitudes to society based on the principles of Islam.

ii. **Umdat al-Ubbad**. Shehu provides guidelines for the minimum voluntary acts of devotions; prayer, fasting, Quranic recitation, remembrance of Allah and acts of charity. In a nutshell, this volume discusses spiritual training

iii. **Al-Amrbt-maruf waalnahy anl-munkar.** The Shehu dealt with three broad matters in this treatise. Firstly, he looked at the philosophical call as a historical, social necessity, particularly at a time of social decay; secondly, he proposed basic guidelines for discharging this duty. Finally, he tackled the issue of armed confrontation as it relates to a movement in the initial phase of the revolutionary process.

iv. **Kitab al-Adab** dealt with more than fifteen issues for example: knowledge; good qualities and attitudes; obligations of a man owes to his wife, the wife to her husband and mutual obligations between Muslims and non-Muslims; ethics of visits to a sick person; social behavior and the ethics of sleep. The Shehu advised his people to regard sleep not merely as a physical phenomenon but rather as a profound lesson which repeats itself daily. They should see sleep 'as a form of death' and their wakening 'as a form of resurrection' In other words, the thought of the hereafter should be paramount in their minds when going to bed. It could, in fact, be their last sleep. Therefore, they should go to bed in a state of purity, teeth brushed, and *wudu* performed; they should ask Allah.s forgiveness for all their sins and offer the supplication *(dua)* appropriate for going to bed.

v. *Ihya al-Sunna wa Ikhmad al-Bida.* The book is unique in two respects. It is a book of practical, social and moral education which focuses its attention entirely on Hausa society with the sole object of rectifying its wrong deeds and guiding it aright. There is no theory in it: everything it deals with was practised by society. Secondly, it is a book of protest, albeit of a legal nature, and restrained. In a way it takes the line of al-Barnawi's *Shurb al-Zulal*, except that the *Ihya* was written by Usman and is a textbook of *tajdid*.

Its thirty-three chapters deal with the three fundamental issues of Shehu's message: *Iman, Islam* and *Ihsan,* with *Islam.* The regulation of life in general took twenty seven chapters. Both *Iman* and *Ihsan* have one chapter each, and one chapter is devoted to the *sunna* in its broader sense and one to innovations

Other titles are **Tariq al-janna** which dealt with moral ideals, **Wathiqat al-Ikhwan,** call for intellectual excellence and social manifesto. *Tanbih,* in this book, the Shehu mobilized women and defended his action in allowing women to attend his lectures, as justifiable and, indeed, sanctioned by law. **Bayan Wujub al-hijra** dealt with principles of warfare. While *Irshad ahl al-Tafrit*, seeks to guide the extremists to the right understanding of the fundamentals of religion.

Significances of the Collection
For reasons far too numerous to mention, the study of Islam in Nigeria and Africa is significant and Usman Dan Fodio occupies an important position in the history of Sub-Sahara African mass mobilization to Islam. Some of the reasons that made the manuscripts valuable include:

1. The manuscripts are amongst the finest in existence and are internationally renowned for the overall high quality and scope of the material.

2. The manuscripts comprise the collections range in date from the seventh century to the early years of the eighth century.

3. The collections manifest the scale of the Shehu's success and achievement, in the area of mass mobilization and the sheer force of his character.

4. Together they illustrate in exquisite form and detail the history and development of Islam in the Northern Nigeria

5. The collections clearly stated the methods used by Usman in raising the generation that transformed the Hausa land in Nigeria.

Through the systematic and scientific study of the manuscripts, the prosodic and rhetoric values of these manuscripts can be brought to limelight for the literary benefit of contemporary scholars and students of literature.

The Need to Digitize the Shehu Usman Dan Fodio Collection
The dramatic growth in the capabilities of computers and communication technology networks has not only radically revolutionized the process of access and preserving resources, but also brought about a fundamental transformation from the traditional approach of accessing information to a modern approach. Today scholars in the humanities and social sciences are looking to their colleagues in the sciences, modeling their behavior after them, because all scholars want to save time and be more productive. At a symposium titled "Scholarship and Libraries in Transition: Clifford Lynch, (2006), proposed that digitization is a form of insurance— in fact, one of the best forms of insurance we have. He said it is not a replacement for the physical object, but increasingly a good

surrogate. Initially, historians were hostile to JSTOR (a trusted archive of scholarly journals), but now most find it extremely helpful in their research. Coleman (2006) maintained that "General Motors does not need to maintain the tools for its 1957 Chevys, and would have a hard time manufacturing a car from that year. But a university is responsible for stewarding the knowledge of 1957, and for all the years before and after—the books and magazines; the widely known research findings and the narrow monographs; the arcane and the popular, need to be preserved."

For centuries, books were simply the most efficient and usable technology for the transmission of culture and ideas. We need only to reflect on the past few years to sense how quickly and radically the ways that we write and communicate have been and will be altered. What do modern scholars and students really want or need? Have we factored their rapidly changing needs, preferences, and habits into our preservation programmes? Predicting what, exactly, will happen to print books or even e-books in this century and beyond is impossible. Andrew Richard Albanese (2006) was confident enough to note that certain kinds of books "will cease to exist on paper: directories, reference works, textbooks, travel guides, to name a few." No one can say how much scholars and students will care about linear, narrative and book-length. We do not know how much generations to come will care about preserving *words,* compared to visual and multimedia documents or even raw data. The only thing we may be certain of is there will be a sudden increase of interest in networked and digital media. Are our preservation programmes responding to those trends? For some time now, libraries have paid attention to cooperating in digitization projects that focus on unique collections as a cost-efficient way to give scholars all over the world access to rich resources and to preserve those valuable print materials that were deteriorating.

Other reasons may include:

i. To preserve the documents: That is to allow people to read older or unique documents without damage to the originals.
ii. To make the documents more accessible: This is to serve the existing users better; e.g. to serve more users than envisaged in remote locations, or more than one person at a time, or to bring together scattered materials on a specific topic and to respond to a particular request for a digital library.
iii. To reuse the documents. It means to convert documents into different formats; for example to use images in a slideshow and to adopt the content for a different purpose.

The soul of scholarship is research. From the current to ancient researches and findings, we must make all information discoverable to faculty, students and the public. Therefore, these manuscripts deserved to be digitized and made correspondingly available and accessible beyond Nigerian boarders.

The Project Model
The shift from ownership to access began the revolution towards the virtual availability which we see today in electronic documents. Nowadays, the access of free information available via the World Wide Web has changed the concept of having to go to the neighborhood library and turn the pages of a

book with paper pages. This is not to say that some of our best information and our most entertaining texts are not to be found in hard copy. The challenge here is to transmit even these hard copy texts to a patron who might not be standing in front of you.

The so called "digitization revolution" is moving ahead and we have probably all heard of the project that Google has undertaken with 5 large libraries in order to scan and digitize many of their holdings, a scanning project that will bring millions of volumes of printed books into the Google Print database for open public use. Martha Speirs (2006) elaborated in her work by saying that "in the 21st century, networked structures are taking over the command and control structures of the last century and consequently we need to work with others not only in our own institution, but with those who share common goals in order to enable knowledge and information to flow across spaces and borders". Partnership and strategy are keys to making this ownership-to-access transition work effectively. Strategic approaches can be applied on these collections to achieve result. The proposed model of digitizing Usman Dan Fodio collections has the following approaches:

i.   A Center would be set up in Sokoto State of Nigeria under supervision of a responsible non-governmental organization with the responsibilities of drafting the policy thrust; work plan; mobilizing; creating awareness and collecting all scattered materials around the areas Usman Dan Fodio lived and carried out his activities. This would help in collecting all his works without missing any copy.

ii.   The non-governmental organization would organized a network of, curators, archives and librarians through recruiting/internship and provide training and financial aid for the procurement of necessary materials for the project.

iii. The Center would organize the selection and digitize the materials through scanning, and filming to create a digital format for easy access

iv. A digital library would be created using the Greenstone Digital Library Software, whereby it could be exported to CD-ROM and hosted on the Internet for the benefits of scholars and general public

v.   A token fee would be charged by the non-governmental organization for accessing the collections all over the world in order to sustain the project.

This model approach can be put together under the supervision of an independent non-governmental organization with clear statements of goals and objectives of achieving this task. The non-governmental organization can therefore socialite resources and capital to carry out the activities to a logical conclusion and generated report for evaluation and sustainability. The Islamic Manuscript Association (TIMA) can also serve as the centre point to aid in the fund raising activities of the project and assist with any personnel and technical know how.

Conclusion

Digitization is a complex process with many crucial dependencies between different stages over time. In view of these and other unmentioned imperatives, manuscripts digitization initiative is therefore suggested with title: "Usman Dan Fodio Islamic Manuscripts Digitization Projects" to be funded by interested government agencies and non-governmental organizations.

It is an opportunity for all stakeholders to visit Nigeria to see things for themselves and contribute positively to the development and digitization of these rare materials for the benefits of the present and future generations.

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