

CONTRIBUTION OF *SHEIKH* YUSUF ABDULLAHI AL-LOKOJI TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF TIJJANIYYAH *SUFI* ORDER IN LOKOJA, NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

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Abdulrahman Yahaya

yahayaburhan@gmail.com

Educational Support Services and International Partnerships Dept, National Commission for Colleges of Education, (NCCE) Abuja, Nigeria

Abstract:

The paper aimed at discussing the contributions of Sheikh Yusuf Abdullahi Al-Lokoji to the development of Tijjaniyyah Sufi Order in Lokoja, North Central Nigeria. It traces the origin of Lokoja and the factor that led to the settlement of Lokoja town in 1860 during the colonialist as the first administration capital in Northern Nigeria. It sheds light on the introduction of Islam into Lokoja. The paper made use of primary and secondary sources. It discusses the development of Tijjaniyyah Sufi Order and its spread as well as chains of authority that existed earlier in Lokoja before the emergence of Sheikh Ibrahim Niass Kaolack. Finally, the paper provided biography of Sheikh Yusuf Abdullahi Al-Lokoji, his teachings as Sufi scholar in Lokoja and some of his literary works on Tijjaniyyah Sufi Order for the benefit of Muslims.

Keywords: Contribution, *Sheikh* Yusuf, Development, Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order

A. Introduction

Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order is one of the most prominent *Sufi* Orders that many Muslims in Lokoja North Central Nigeria are known with for more than a century. This is to the fact that



the Order had been present in the area from about the beginning of 20th century.¹ However, the emergence of *Sheikh* Ibrahim Niass Kaolack developed the practice of Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order in Nigeria and West Africa especially as the period coincided with that of the rapid spread of Islam in Lokoja area.² According to Muhammad Alhassan Lokoja was seen by many people of the town as a centre of learning due to the influx of *Sufi* scholars and teachers that came from different places in Nigeria and abroad.³ Many of these *Sufi* visiting scholars resided permanently in some wards of Lokoja spearheading fast development of Islam generally and Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order in particular among people. Some of the earliest *Sufi* scholars involved in spread the Order in Lokoja include *Sheikh* AbdulSalam bn Abubakar and *Sheikh* Muhammad bn Sharif Ahmad bn Ayyub popularly known as *Sheikh* Sherif Zangina and *Sheikh* Yusuf Abdullahi.⁴

Sheikh Yusuf Abdullahi is one of the *Sufi Muqaddams* in Lokoja that strengthened the footsteps of the earliest *Sufi* scholars in the development of Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order and Islamic education in the area.⁵ He took the whole North Central Nigeria as his constituency as far as the development of Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order is concerned. Therefore, this paper discusses the contribution of the *Sheikh* to the development of Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order in Lokoja, North Central Nigeria.

B. Methodology

This paper is a survey type which adopted qualitative techniques to elicit primary data from the participants. The population for the study were civil servants and a student. To elicit the data, the researchers conducted In-Depth Interview (IDI) and non-participant

¹ A. R. Mohammed, *history of the spread of Islam in the Niger-Benue confluence area: Igala land, Ebira land and Lokoja C.1900-1960*, Ibadan University press, Ibadan, 2014, P.173

² *Ibid*,

³ A. M. Alhassan, the great *Sheikh* Yusuf Abdullahi, Onisco press Abuja, (nd), P.21

⁴ *Ibid*, P.22

⁵ *Ibid*,

observation. The paper adopted purposive sampling technique to select the participants for the interviews and observations, this has enabled the researchers to select participant who possess in-depth knowledge about the phenomenon investigated. This is because the aim of qualitative study is not to cover large sample but to study select few participants and examine the phenomenon deeply. The researchers purposively selected seven participants and were interviewed based on the issue investigated. The elicited from the participants were transcribed verbatim, coded and analyzed based on theme study. Similarly, data collated from the observations were integrated with the data generated from the interviews.

C. Results and Discussion

Lokoja

The name 'Lokoja' in the North Central Nigeria sounds controversial to some ethnic groups in Lokoja town who claimed ownership of the name probably in a bid to establish their respective historical precedence in the town.⁶ One tradition has traced the origin of the name Lokoja to one of the kings of *Pati*,⁷ a hill top settlement by name Oki who called his town *Olo Kaja* (meaning the strong).⁸ Similarly, the Oworo language people in Kogi see the name 'Lokoja' as the fine place that attracted men to it. While in Nupe language the word Lokoja is derived from the name *Pati-Lukongi* meaning the hill of the dove.⁹

Lokoja Local Government Area is the present capital of Kogi State in the North Central Nigeria.¹⁰ The town is situated at the confluence of the rivers Niger and Benue at the foot of the mountain.¹¹ According to Ocheja, Lokoja was founded in 1860 by William Baikei as a settlement between confluence of the river mountain when he took a clear view of the area

⁶ A. R Mohammed, *Op cit*, P.31

⁷ *Pati* is a Nupe word that means hill.

⁸ H. Z. Pedraza, the story of Lokoja, O. U. P, London, 1960, P.56

⁹ *Ibid*,

¹⁰ www.historyoflokoja.lokobay as of 22nd April, 2021

¹¹ A. R. Mohammed, *Op cit*, P.32

during his Benue expedition of 1854.¹² Lokoja settlement in Nigeria rapidly developed in the 1860^s as a result of the European economic and political activities in the area.¹³ Its settlement attracted people from various parts of Nigeria and other parts of Africa most especially people from Niger Republic, Mali, Sierra Leone, and Europe¹⁴ The tribes that settled in Lokoja before the arrival of the colonialist included the Igala, Bassa Nge, Nupe, Kakanda, Oworo and Yoruba.¹⁵ These tribes and Hausas who joined them at that time were the main ethnic groups that lay claim to indigene ship of the town.¹⁶ The significance of the Lokoja is not only due to its geographical location as the confluence of rivers Niger and Benue but to the historical fact that it was the first colonial administration capital of Northern Nigeria.¹⁷

The population of Lokoja is 195,261 as of 2006 National Census.¹⁸ The major occupations of the people are farming, fishing and trading.¹⁹ The introduction of Islam into Lokoja was traced to 1830 CE as was provided that there was a presence of Muslims in the villages around the location of Lokoja before 1860s.²⁰ Although the actual settlement of Muslim scholars at Lokoja was recorded to have begun around 1870s and since then Islam has spread across the nook and crannies of Lokoja.²¹

¹² D. H. Ocheja, *Lokoja the mother of Nigeria: history of Lokoja from 1800-2005*, Ogun De-Rueben enterprise, Lokoja, 2010, P. 9

¹³ *Ibid*,

¹⁴ M. D. Suleiman, *the Hausa in Lokoja 1860-1966 A study of the evolution of a migrant community in the Niger-Benue communities*, Gaskiya Cooperation Ltd, Zaria, 2001, Pp.23-26

¹⁵ M. M. Jimba, *Muslims of Kogi State: NRN Background Paper No.2*, 2012, P.7

¹⁶ A. R. Mohammed, *Op cit*, P.32

¹⁷ *Ibid*,

¹⁸ 2006 National Census figure

¹⁹ M. M. Jimba, *Op cit*, P.7

²⁰ P. A. John, *the native history of Lokoja*, (np), (nd), P.4

²¹ A. R. Mohammed, *Op cit*, Pp. 45-94

Origin of *Sufi* and Tijjaniyyah Order

The derivational origins of the word "*Sufi*" that seems to have enjoyed a general acceptance is that which links it with 'Suf' or wool. It is believed that wool garments were commonly worn by men of ascetic life in the early times of Islam. This was therefore to distinguish them from men who wore luxurious dress.²² *Sufi* way of life is simple. This is because anything that has to do with lavishness does not attract the interest of a *Sufi* in anyway, his endeavor is the constant devotion to Allah.²³ Islam in Africa was greatly influenced by *Sufi* ideas and understanding of salvation. The majority of African Muslims practice Sufism. Historically, the two Orders of the Tijjaniyyah and *Qadiriyyah* spread in the whole Islamized parts of the African continent during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²⁴ These Orders promoted a strong spiritual mysticism among the Muslims.

Tijjaniyyah is a *Sufi* Order within the *Sunni* Islam. The appellation At-Tijjani from which the name Tijjaniyyah is derived comes from the name of an Algerian Berber tribe near Tilmsan called Tidjan or Tijjanah.²⁵ The name came into prominence when one of *Sheikh* Ahmad Tijjani's forefathers settled in the oasis of *Ain Madi* in South of Algeria. Therefore, the Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order originated from North Africa in the 18th century C.E by *Sheikh* Abul Abass bn Muhammad bn Al-Mukhtar- At-Tijjani who was born in 1150/1738 C.E at *Ain Madi*, Algeria. He became affiliated to many Orders and was once a *Muqaddam* of the Khalwatiyyah.²⁶ *Sheikh* Ahmad Tijjani learnt the reading of Qur'anic text and its memorization under the guardianship of *Sheikh* Muhammad Ibn Hamu (d.1749 C.E.) It is reported that he mastered so

²² J. M. Abun-Nasir, *the Tijjaniyyah*, O.U.P, London, 1965, P.42

²³ *Ibid*,

²⁴ M. M Jimba, *Op cit*, P.8

²⁵ A. F. Ahmed, *Major Sufi Orders in Africa*, Module 3, National Open University, Lagos, 2014, P.114

²⁶ J.S. Tirmingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, Oxford University Press, London, 1971, P.107.

many Islamic books which included *Al-Risalah*, *Mukhtasar Al- Khalil*, *Tafsir Al- Jalalayn* to mention but few.²⁷ *Sheikh* Ahmad Tijjani started his normal *Sufi* way of life at the age of twenty-one and travelled throughout the *Maghrib* in search of learned men of mystical knowledge.²⁸

The devotional practices and responsibilities of members of the Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order apart from the normal obligatory prayers are many. The member of the Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order have to carry out the meditation consisting of three exercises: *Al-Lazim*, twice per day and done on individual basis alone; *Al-Wazifah* at least once daily and preferable in congregation.²⁹ *Hailalah Dhikr* means there is no God except Allah observed every Friday evening.³⁰ The litanies usually recited during the meditation consist of the normal *Dhikr*, *Istighfar*, *Salat Fatih* as well as the *Jawharah Al-Kamal* which are special praises of the Prophet (SAW) the latter is peculiar only to the Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order.³¹ *Jawharah Al-Kamal* is recited twelve (12) times at the end of *Wazifah* but as it is difficult for non-literates, substitution by *Salat Fatih* to be recited twenty times is allowed.³²

The Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order became more widespread than the *Qadiriyyah* and in some areas replaced it. At the time of the conquest of *Sheikh* Umar Tall (d. 1864) in the Western Sudan, *Qadiriyyah* was in Africa as far back as the 16th and 17th century C.E. The Tijjaniyyah

²⁷ T.A. Baba, "A study of Ja'afariyyah *Sufi* group in Nigeria" Ph. D thesis submitted to the department of religions, University of Ilorin, 2016, P.39

²⁸ *Ibid*,

²⁹ A. R. Mohammed, *Op cit*, P.184

³⁰ *Ibid*,

³¹ J. M. Abun-Nasir, *Op cit*, P.52

³² S. A. Aboki, "*Shaykh* Ahmad B. Ali Abul Fathi Al-Yarwawi; A *Sufi* of the 20th century" Ph. D thesis submitted to the department of Islamic Studies, UDUS, 2010, Pp.48-49

Order was officially recognized and promoted in Tokolor Empire established by him. When the Empire broke up the Tijjaniyyah allegiance remained strong.³³

Development of Tijjaniyyah Sufi Order and its Spread in Lokoja

According to Ahmed Rufai that Lokoja was one of the first places in the North Central Nigeria that had contact with the Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order during its emergence in the region.³⁴ Two major chains of the Tijjaniyyah that was said to have existed in Lokoja during its earliest period are *Magribian* branch of *Sheikh* Muhammad Arabi and West African branch of *Sheikh* Umar Tall before the emergence of *Sheikh* Ibrahim Niass Kaolack.³⁵ However, the authority structure of the Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order is hierarchical in nature with the *Sheikh* at the top followed by the *Muqaddams* who are vested with various categories of authority.³⁶ The *Muqaddams* are the representative of the *Sheikh* whose duty is to initiate, train and guide the members in his domain in the collective recitation of the *Wird* (litany).³⁷

The spread of Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order in Lokoja was carried out by some prominent *Sufi* scholars at its earliest stage. Among them was *Sheikh* AbdulSalam bn Abubakar (d.1933) who became *Muqaddam* of Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order in 1917 after accepting *Tariqah* from *Sheikh* Sidi Muhammad the grandson of *Sheikh* Ahmad Tijjani who visited Lokoja from *Maghrib* around 1916.³⁸ Another *Sufi* scholar who spread the Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order among people in Lokoja and its environs in the early period of its emergence was *Sheikh* Muhammad bn Sharif Ahmad bn Ayyub popularly known as *Sheikh* Sherif Zangina.³⁹ According to M. D. Suleiman *Sheikh*

³³ J. S. Tirmingham, Op cit, P.107

³⁴ A. R. Mohammed, Op cit, P.185

³⁵ *Ibid*,

³⁶ B. Louis, West African *Sufi*. The religious heritage and spiritual search of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal, C. Hurst and co, London, 1984, P.44

³⁷ *Ibid*,

³⁸ M. D. Suleiman, Op cit, P.102

³⁹ *Ibid*, P.106

Sherif Zangina succession as *Muqaddam* to *Sheikh* AbdulSalam was approved in Fez in Morocco by the successor of *Sheikh* Ahmad Tijjani called Sayyid Abdulkarim bn Sayyid Muhammad Al-Arabi.⁴⁰ As a *Muqaddam* of the Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order, one of his students Malam Umar Falke described him as the *Mujtahid* (striver) in the spread of Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order in the Lokoja and its environs. *Sheikh* Sherif Zangina was a traditional *Sufi* Order who owed his allegiance to his *Sufi* Master *Sheikh* AbdulSalam who initiated him to the Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order. *Sheikh* Sherif Zangina died on 29th August, 1966 in Lokoja.⁴¹

Other *Sufi Muqaddam* that visited Lokoja for the spread of Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order in the earliest period was *Sheikh* Idris that came from Timbuktu. He was said to have got his *Silsilah* from *Sheikh* Muhammad Al-Ghali whom *Sheikh* Umar Tall branch of Tijjaniyyah is connected to from Mauritania West Africa. He contributed immensely to the spread of Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order in Lokoja.⁴² Above all was the visit of *Sheikh* Ibrahim Niass Kaolack to Lokoja in the late 1940's facilitated to the fast spread of Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order among people in the area.⁴³ Record had it that as of the time that *Sheikh* Ibrahim Niass Kaolack visited Lokoja many traditional *Sufi* followers renewed their allegiance with him to the extent that some of them were given his authorization to initiate people into Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order. Among *Sufi* scholars that he granted his authorization to initiate people into *Sufi Tariqah* include *Sheikh* Yusuf Abdullahi Al-Lokoji, *Sheikh* Abubakar Shuaibu Kenchi and *Sheikh* Ibrahim Umar Yabagi among others.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, P.108

⁴¹ *Ibid*,

⁴² *Ibid*, P. 110

⁴³ A. R. Mohammed, *Op cit*, p.188

⁴⁴ *Ibid*,

Some records had it that the first person to visit Kaolack in Senegal from Lokoja Nigeria was *Sheikh* Yusuf Abdullahi.⁴⁵ It is said that during his visit to Kaolack he stayed there for three months studying various books on Islam such as *Tafsir Sawi* and *Mautha bn Malik* under *Sheikh* Ibrahim Niass Kaolack.⁴⁶ *Sheikh* Yusuf Abdullahi was one of the *Sufi* scholars that spearheaded the spread of Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order to many areas including Igala towns and villages across the river Niger.⁴⁷ Under his *Muqaddam* ship he made it a tradition to undertake itinerant visits to villages and towns around the confluence area of the Niger-Benue in order to initiate people into the Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order. He as well educates Muslims and renew the chain of authority of some members during his visits to their places.⁴⁸

Biography of *Sheikh* Yusuf Abdullahi Al-Lokoji

Sheikh Yusuf Abdullah Al-Lokoji, widely called *Sheikh* Yusuf Lokoja was the last of the four male children of his father *Sheikh* Abdullah (Baba Nma) bn Ibrahim Ndamayaki. It is said that his grandfather is called Ndamayaki because he took part in the *Jihad* of *Sheikh* Usmanu Danfodiyo in the early 19th century C.E.⁴⁹ The actual birth date of *Sheikh* Yusuf could not be established due to lack of documented records as of that time. However, some oral sources claimed that he was born between 1894 and 1916 CE.⁵⁰ He was born in Bagana town of Igala land in the present Omala Local Government Area of Kogi State. When he was four years old his parents relocated and settled at Lokoja permanently. Thereafter, when he was eight years old, he was enrolled into Malam Abubakar Qur'anic school in Lokoja where he was said to

⁴⁵ Malam Tijjani Yusuf Abdullahi, (51 years) Islamic scholar is the third son of *Sheikh* Yusuf Abdullahi Al-Lokoji, interviewed at his residence in Lokoja on 14th March, 2020

⁴⁶ *Ibid*,

⁴⁷ *Ibid*,

⁴⁸ *Ibid*,

⁴⁹ Nasir Yusuf Abdullahi, (57 years) Islamic scholar, he is the 2nd son of late *Sheikh* Yusuf Abdullahi al-Lokoji, interviewed at *Sheikh's* resident on 3rd August, 2019.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*,

have committed Qur'an to memory at a tender age. Similarly, he learnt at Malam Ashafa Qur'anic school where he read and mastered many basic Islamic books such as *Ashmawi*, *Izziyyah*, *Risalah* and *Thamaradani*. He also studied under numerous *Sufi* scholars in Lokoja.⁵¹

Sheikh Yusuf Al-Lokoji was initiated into the Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order by Malam Haruna in Lokoja in 1949. Thereafter, in 1959 he visited *Sheikh* Ibrahim Niass in Kaolack who was said to have granted him *Ijazah*⁵² (authorization) to confer *Muqaddamship* on his followers. He visited to many parts of Nigeria and West Africa in general. He also visited Senegal on several occasions, Ghana, Mali, Republic of Benin and some Arab countries including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Morocco. He has a wide knowledge of Arabic and Islamic Studies. He authored more than one hundred prose and versified works on various aspects of Sufism.⁵³

Sheikh Yusuf is admired and cherished by many of his followers because of his passion for Islam. However, one of his major achievements is his school *Markaz Al-Ta'lim Al-Arabi Wal Islami* Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies which he established in Lokoja in 1962. Its students are largely drawn from various parts of the country most especially from Kogi, Kwara and Niger States.⁵⁴

His Teachings as Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Scholar in Lokoja

Shiekh Yusuf Abdullahi was a Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* scholar of repute who did his best in the teaching of *Tasawwuf* to the people in Lokoja Kogi State.⁵⁵ He teaches many books on *Tasawwuf* such as *Muniyyah Al-Muridi*, *Makarim Al Ahlaq*, *Kitab Al- Zuhd Al-Kabir* and *Kitab*

⁵¹ *Ibid*,

⁵² *Ijazah* is an Arabic word that means 'permission or authorization' to its holder to transmit a certain text or subject which is issued by the *Sheikh* that possesses such authority in a *Sufi* way.

⁵³ M.M Jimba, *Op cit*, P.14

⁵⁴ *Ibid*,

⁵⁵ Malam Muhammadu Gimba, *Op cit*,

Haqiqatu Tasawwuf on daily basis for the benefit of Muslims.⁵⁶ In addition, *Sheikh Yusuf* taught many Islamic books apart from books on *Tasawwuf* that include *Tafsir Sawi*, *Muwattah bn Malik*, *Mukhtarul Hadith*, *Kashful Gummati*, *Riyadil Salihin* along with some subjects under Arabic language such as *Nahw*, *Balaghah*, *Sarf*, *Ilm Arudi* and *Adab*. This was the teaching exercise that he holds on to throughout his life time.⁵⁷

The studies time at *Sheikh's Zawiyah* runs on three stages of morning, afternoon and night. Morning lesson commences from 6:00 am to 8:30 am. While afternoon lesson starts from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm. Night studies begin from 8:00 pm 10:00 pm with the exception of Friday in the week.⁵⁸ *Sheikh Yusuf Abdullahi* teaches his students in Arabic, Hausa, Igala, Nupe and Yoruba languages with explanatory method. Among his prominent students include *Sheikh Suleiman Chief Imam* of Ankpa town central mosque, Col. Dr. Abubakar Sadeeq Yakubu Rtd and Justice Aliyu Ibrahim of *Shari'ah* Court of Appeal, Nasarawa State.⁵⁹ Therefore, the impact of the *Sheikh Yusuf* can never be over emphasized. This is because many followers of *Tijjaniyyah Sufi* Order in Lokoja testified that they have benefited from his Islamic daily teachings. He conducts a *Ta'lim* every Thursday evening between 4:30 pm to 6:30 in the area for Muslims.⁶⁰

His Literary Contribution on Tijjaniyyah Sufi Order

Sheikh Yusuf Abdullahi was a prolific writer who wrote many works on *Tijjaniyyah Sufi* Order for the benefit of Muslims. His works are written in a simple Arabic language for easy

⁵⁶ Malam Nasir Yusuf Abdullahi, *Op cit*,

⁵⁷ *Ibid*,

⁵⁸ Malam Muhammadu Gimba, *Op cit*,

⁵⁹ *Ibid*,

⁶⁰ *Ibid*,

comprehension of Muslims. The following classifications represent some of his works on *Sufi*

Order:

1. *Al- Bayan Safi Fima Alaihi Sufiyyah* (clear explanation on what *Sufi* stand for)
2. *Libas At-Taqwah* (cloth of righteousness)
3. *Asa Rihlat Al- Ahbab Ila Ziyarah Ulul Al-bab* (lovers' journey for the visit of wise people)
4. *Mahawi At-Tariqah At-Tijjaniyyah Zat Al- Asrar Ar-Rabaniyyah* (containers of Tijjaniyyah Order)
5. *Al- Mizaj Fi Zikr Ba'ad Al-Ahbab* (a mixture of remembrance for some lovers)
6. *Al-Adab As-Samim* (pure ethics)
7. *Lataif Al-Faidah Al-Qur'aniyyah* (benevolence to the super abundance of the glorious Qur'an)
8. *Majmu'ul Ulumat Tarbiyyah* (collection of science of education)
9. *Ajwibatu Al-Qayyimah* (valuable replies)
10. *Tibr Az-Zahab Al- Khalis* (the precious gold)
11. *Minhatul Qadeer* (gift of Almighty)⁶¹

D. Conclusion

The Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order flourishes among Muslims in Lokoja and its environs through the effort of *Sheikh* Yusuf Abdullahi Al-Lokoji. Hardly one could find a community in the environment of Lokoja that is not entrenched in Sufism or without at least a *Muqaddam*. The fact that the majority of the Muslims in Lokoja area took the Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order has helped in strengthening the spiritual devotion of the Muslims to their religion. Therefore, the

⁶¹ Malam Muhammadu Gimba, *Op cit*,

prominence of Tijjaniyyah *Sufi* Order in the Niger-Benue confluence area accounted for its popular acceptance among people from its emergence up to the present moment.

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Nasir Yusuf Abdullahi (57 years) Islamic scholar is the 2nd son of late *Sheikh* Yusuf Abdullahi al-Lokoji, interviewed at *Sheikh's* resident on 3rd August, 2019.