

Almajiri System: End It, Mend It or Re-Invent It?

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Abstract

This paper introduces the *almajiri* and the *almajiri system* from a historical lens, tracing the adoption and evolution of the system in the Bilad as-Sudan until its subsequent disintegration and collapse. We highlight the interplay of factors leading to its transformation from a system churning out leaders in all aspects of the society to a dysfunctional factory for child neglect and abuse, outputting unemployed and unemployable citizens. We also discuss the perception of the system among various actors in the society and the apparent romanticizing of the noble *almajiri* against the wayward '*dan boko*'. Finally, we try to understand the collapse of the system while raising questions about its future, primarily in Northern Nigeria.

Keywords: Almajiri, Northern Nigeria, Education, Colonialism

Introduction

Firstly, it must be stated that the Nigerian State has a constitutional obligation towards the protection and promotion of children's interest in Nigeria. An examination of Chapter 2 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria leaves no doubt in the mind of any reader. For example, Section 13 imposes an obligation on all arms and tiers of government to observe the fundamental objectives relating to socio-political economy, education and culture. Section 16 provides for control of the national economy in such manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen based on social justice and equality of status and opportunity; ensuring suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food for all citizens of the State. Section 17 introduces the foundation of the State social order: ideals of Freedom, Equality and Justice. It states that the State shall direct its policy towards ensuring that all citizens, without discrimination on any group

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whatsoever, have the opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as well as adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment; also, children and young persons are to be protected against any exploitation whatsoever, and against moral and material neglect. Section 18 further emphasizes that Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels, and shall strive to eradicate illiteracy; and to this end Government shall as and when practicable provide (a) free, compulsory and universal primary education (b) free secondary education (c) free university education.

In addition to the constitutional provisions, The Universal Basic Education Act 2004, provides under Section 2 (1) that “Every Government in Nigeria shall provide free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age”. It further states in Section 2 (2) that “Every parent shall ensure that his or her child or ward attends and completes his or her:

- a. Primary school education; and
- b. Junior secondary school education”.

There are two vital points to be made here. Firstly, the Act in Section 15 defines Universal Basic Education as “early childhood care and education, the nine years of formal schooling, adult literacy and non-formal education, skills acquisition programme and the education of special groups such as nomads and migrants, girl child and women, *almajiri*, street children and disabled groups”. It is important to note that the *almajiri* happens to be one of the persons specifically identified by the Act for the purpose of provision of basic education. Thus, there is no debate whatsoever that the state has a responsibility towards the *almajirai* (pl. of *almajiri*) as citizens of Nigeria and as seekers of education. We argue that institutionalized neglect is a major cause of the collapse and a sustainer of current dilapidated state of the system.

Secondly, in the past decade, the *almajiri* and the *almajiri system of education* have been subjects of many debates and controversies. Many narratives are crafted on misconstruing symptoms for causes, in effect ignoring the interplay of factors especially the socioeconomic dimensions of the issue, and simply pointing at the *almajiri* or the system as the root of the problem. To preface the problem, we acknowledge that there are issues of child neglect and exploitation, and a growing population of uneducated and unemployable young people swarming the streets. However, we also acknowledge the complacency of the society, from the elites to government, that have made “the *almajiri* is a ticking time bomb” a catchphrase in discourse while not engaging further. Sadly, even

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in that discourse, what is worrisome is that content is lacking and it is evident that a significant number of people within the broader Nigerian society do not seem to understand who the *almajirai* are and what the *almajiri system* really entails. Thus, there is a need firstly to trace the history of the *almajiri education system* with the aim of understanding and appreciating its subtle nuances and paint the complete picture of the system.

Meaning of Almajiri and the Almajiri System

The predominant ethnic group in Northern Nigeria is the Hausa-Fulani, and the predominant language is Hausa, which is essentially a derivative of Arabic, albeit with a distinct *Ajani* alphabet (Awofeso, Ritchie, & Degeling, 2003). The word *almajiri* (pl. *almajirai*) was etymologically acquired from the Arabic word 'Al-Muhajir' which means migrant. Its root stems from the Hijrah (migration) of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina. The disciples who relocated with the prophet to Medina were called 'Al-Muhajirun', which means migrants (Abbo, Zain & Njidda, 2017). The message of Islam has enjoined those with means to give Sadaqat [alms] (see for instance Quran 2:270 and 274, Quran 3:92 and 134, etc). However, in the case of the *Al-Muhajirun*, special consideration was given by the prophet to accommodate them and the *Ansar* (people of Medina) went above and beyond to be hospitable (Bukhari, Volume 5; Book 58, Number 125). This accommodation was seen not only as a religious duty but as a religious solidarity to reduce the hardship suffered by the *Al-Muhajirun* who had given up everything during the Hijrah. Thus, the word within the context of Northern Nigeria, originally signifies a seeker of knowledge. It was used to describe those who migrated from their domicile to other places in search of Islamic knowledge (Usman, 2008).

The *almajiri system* refers to an organized system of education designed to produce responsible young adults, sound and grounded in the doctrines of Islam as specified in the holy Quran. The system was built upon the foundation that for all Muslims, knowledge and its acquisition leads man to the realization of the truth, the supremacy and greatness of Allah, and the happiness of mankind. Hence, Allah through His prophets enjoin man to constantly endeavor to acquire every type of knowledge for the glorification of Allah and the service of mankind (Odumosu et al., 2013). Furthermore, it was reported that the Prophet (SAW) instructed Muslims to seek knowledge as it is an obligation upon every Muslim (classed as Sahih by Albaani in Saheeh Sunan ibn Majah).

Thus, the *almajiri system* of education was established as an institution for intellectual and moral training as well as life-long discipline within the tenets of Islam.

Unfortunately, the ideas of who an *almajiri* is and what the *almajiri system* of education represents have undergone degenerating changes in the last few decades. Today, the word *almajiri* is used commonly to refer to a boy who begs for food in the street and who is often seen scavenging for food in bins and trash cans. The *almajiri system* has also been reduced to a dilapidated and ramshackle institution which the general populace often blames for facilitating child abuse, child labour, child trafficking and, recently, a breeding ground for terrorists.

History and Structure of the Almajiri Education System

As stated earlier, there is a need to trace the history of the *almajiri* education system. The philosophical underpinning of Islamic education is underlined on the following description of the process of education (*tarbiyyah*): “recognition and acknowledgement of the proper place of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition and acknowledgement of the proper place of Allah in the order of being and existence” (Al-Attas, 1980). Indeed, the prophet’s first encounter with divine revelation was a command by angel Jibril to “READ” (Quran 96:1). This underscores an epistemology built on an ontology that recognizes Allah as the ultimate being and source of knowledge, which is almost contrary to the west’s crowning of rationality in its ontology. This shapes the perception of knowledge as ultimately a path to serving God.

The early Islamic state in Arabia did not establish educational institutions – education was apparently regarded as the private concern of parents. This very circumstance led to the emergence of private teachers, who taught the elements and charged fees. These teachers, who were referred to as ‘Muallims’, taught Quran and Arabic and the site of such instructions was referred to as a ‘Maktab’ (place for teaching writing). The Maktab, remained for the first four centuries, the only universal institution in the Islamic world where skills could be acquired (Awofeso et al., 2003).

The first type of school conceived as a state institution to promote religious indoctrination of the Sunni Islamic faith was founded in Arabia around 1066 AD by Nizam Al-Mulk and was referred to as ‘Madrasa’ (i.e. school for public instruction). These schools were very well funded, and the Islamic state was fully responsible for the education and welfare of the pupils. Under the Abbasid regime, primary education was free and almost universal. During the first 300 years of the Abbasid

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regime, the curriculum of primary education became standardized and the following subjects were established: Quran, hadith, reading, writing, grammar, and Arabic literature. Throughout the curriculum, emphasis was laid on memorization, and the fundamental objective was for the pupil to learn the Quran by heart in three to four years (Awofeso et al., 2003).

The Islamic religion came to Nigeria through the northern region; Fafunwa, as cited in Abbo et al., (2017) narrated that, ‘Islam was introduced to Hausaland in Northern Nigeria during the mid-14th century by merchants...’

The *almajiri education system*, originally called the ‘Tsangaya’, was first established under the Kanem-Borno empire, one of the oldest ruling empires in the world extending from the frontiers of Northern Nigeria across the Chadian region up to the borders of Libya (Odumosu et al., 2013). It was a replica of Islamic learning centers in many Muslim countries such as the madrassa in Pakistan, Malaysia, Egypt, Indonesia and so on. The system was funded by the state treasury (Bait-ul Mal) and the zakat fund and was under the control of the emirs of the traditional government system (Okonkwo and Alhaji, 2014). Since Islam encouraged charity to a wayfarer and to a student of learning, the community as well readily supported this *almajirai* most of whom came from faraway places to enroll in the Tsangaya schools. In return, the *almajirai* offered services such as laundry, cobbling, gardening, weaving, sewing and so on as charity to the community that contributed to their wellbeing; hence, they gave back to society as the society gave to them (Okonkwo and Alhaji, 2014). The classical structure of the Tsangaya is that they were located on the outskirts of town near farmlands that are devoid of any activity during the dry season – thus providing a conducive atmosphere for learning (Odumosu et al., 2013).

The Kanem-Borno empire remained the major power in the region up until late 19th century. The outstanding man of the 19th century in West Africa was Shehu Usman Dan Fodio, a Fulani, who was born in the Gobir territory, present day Northern Nigeria, about 1750. He was brought up with his brother as a strict Muslim who was well educated in classical Islamic science, philosophy and theology, and after studying for some years in Agades, he felt the call to dedicate his life to teaching the faith. He became a preeminent mallam in Alkalawa. However, Shehu was critical of the monarchy in Gobir and condemned many of its traditional practices which he called ‘unislamic’. His rising popularity alarmed Yunfa, the emir of Gobir, who feared that the austerity of Islam would leave no room for the comfort and privileges enjoyed under the status quo, thus he planned to eliminate Shehu. In response, Shehu declared jihad on the ‘infidel rulers’ in Gobir based on their

impiety, corruption and lack of concern for the ‘disinherited peasants’ (Awofeso et al., 2003). His charisma and influence amongst other mallams enabled him to secure the tacit support of both the peasants and devout bourgeoisie. From these beginnings arose the eventful years of the jihad, from 21 February 1804, the date of the hijrah (flight) of Shehu to Degel, to the slaughter of Yunfa and his gobirawa at Alkalawa in 1808; and the subjugation of the more distant Hausa states by about 1810 (Ademoyega, 1962). Thus, Shehu Usman Dan Fodio and other mallams pioneered the establishment of the Sokoto Empire, which until 1904, ruled the northern parts of most of modern-day West Africa, from Cameroon in the east to Burkina Faso in the west. The political administration of the empire was within the framework of Sharia (Islamic law) (Ademoyega, 1962).

Shehu Dan Fodio strengthened the *almajiri* education system, and transformed it into a free, well-funded and adequately staffed universal Muslim primary education in the Sokoto Empire, of which present day Northern Nigeria was a political, religious, educational and commercial nerve center. Thus, the *almajiri system* is not exclusively Nigerian, but exists (under different names) in all regions of West Africa formerly under the political authority of the Sokoto Caliphate (Awofeso et al., 2003). Shehu also oversaw the creation of an inspectorate of Qur’anic and Arabic studies, which invariably served as a regulative mechanism thereby representing an important milestone in the annals of Qur’anic education in Nigeria (Aliyu, 2015). Indeed, the *almajiri system*, and the predominantly Muslim population of the northern regions of West African nations situated between modern day Cameroon and Burkina Faso are a legacy of the Islamic expansionism of the Sokoto Caliphate, whose headquarters was in Sokoto, present day Northern Nigeria (Anene, as cited in Awofeso et al., 2003). During the lifetime of Shehu, and indeed until colonial conquest, Mallams were well-regarded members of the Hausa-Fulani society, and they played an important role in maintaining the social structure of this emerging feudal empire, in part by serving as judicial officers in Sharia courts (Abdurrahman & Canham, 1978). Furthermore, even though the system was state funded, it was not over dependent on the state. The students were at liberty to acquire vocational and occupational skills in between their Islamic lessons and so were involved in farming, fishing, well construction, masonry, production, trade, tailoring, small businesses and so on. Many of them were the farmers of the Northern Nigerian cotton and groundnut pyramids. They formed the majority of the traders in the commercial city of Kano. They were the leather tanners and leather shoe and bag makers in the old Sokoto Empire. The weavers and tailors in Zaria city

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were said to be *almajirai*. Thus, they formed the largest percentage of the community work force and made significant contribution to the economy of the society before the introduction of white-collar jobs. After colonization, they were recruited by the British as columbite and tin miners in Jos city which was then under Bauchi before the creation of Plateau state (Okonkwo and Alhaji, 2014). The system also produced judges, clerks, teachers and so on, and laid an elaborate system of administration in Northern Nigeria. They provided the colonial administration with the needed staff. The first set of colonial staff in Northern Nigeria was provided by the *almajiri* schools and this went on for years. In fact, the *almajiri system* was a civilizing agent second to none, before they were gradually replaced, phased out and indeed abandoned (Okonkwo and Alhaji, 2014).

The *almajiri* system is closely modeled to the madrassas in central Asia and Arabia. Indeed, when one takes a closer look, one will discover that the Hausa word for Qur'anic school is *Makarantan*, which is derived from the Arabic word *Maktab*. Also, the Hausa term for a Qur'anic instructor, *Mallam* is derived from the Arabic word *Muallim* (or *Mullah*), meaning teacher/clergy. Even the manner of writing, such as teaching the pupils to write using a slate and a quill pen, was meant to conform to the early Arabian madrassas.

The *almajiri system* had four important features. First, it involves children relocating from their family usually in villages to the guardianship of Mallams wherever they may be. Second, it is restricted almost exclusively to boys—the girls who attend these schools are not classified as *Almajirai*, as they normally attend Qur'anic schools nearby their homes in the villages for relatively short periods. Third, the curriculum of the schools is concerned primarily with learning the 60 chapters of the Quran. Finally, each school, consisting of between 25 and 500 pupils, is largely autonomous (Abdurrahman and Canham, 1978).

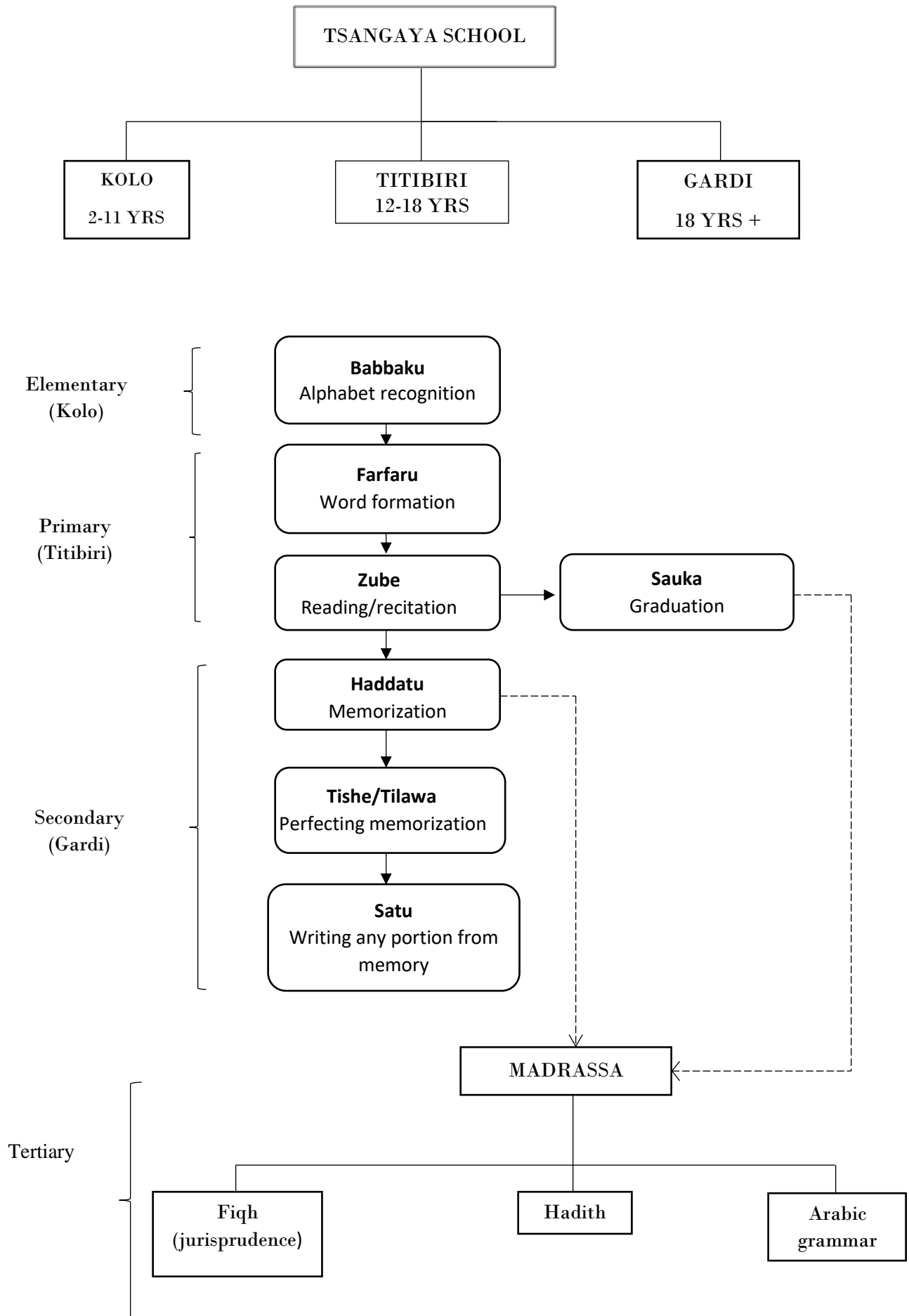
According to Bambale (as cited in Yusha'u et al., 2013), *almajirai* are categorized into 3 classes:

- a. Kolo (infant) 2-11 years.
- b. Titibiri (adolescent) 12-18 years.
- c. Gardi (adult) 18 and above.

The beginning class, *babbaku*, is also the beginning of the academic structure of the Tsangaya which starts with understanding of the basic Arabic alphabet. The second school stage is *Farfaru* – beginning of word formation and understanding the vowels of the Arabic alphabet. This signals the beginning of what can be considered elementary schooling, progression being determined by

the personal development of the pupil (e.g. speech capabilities). Once the pupil has sufficient grasp of the vowels and word formation, he begins studying the Qur'an proper in a third stage called *Zube*. The end of *Zube* is *Sauka* – graduation, in which a student demonstrates his training by reading any portion of the Qur'an shown to him. *Zube* merges into a fourth stage, *Haddatu*, the process of memorizing the Qur'an in a piecemeal manner until the entire 114 chapters have been committed to memory. While many pupils can actually graduate at *Zube* level and move on to the Madrassa, *Haddatu* is for those dedicated to memorizing the Qur'an, and who may or may not proceed to the Madrassa. The next stage is *Tishe/Tilawa*, which is a revision period in which the student goes over the *Haddatu* stage again and again until he perfects it. Once a pupil has memorised the Qur'an, he earns the exalted and highly respected position of *Hafeez*. The final stage in the advanced study of the Qur'an is *Satu*, in which the student demonstrates ability to write any portion of the Qur'an from memory – in contrast to *Haddatu* where the skill displayed is vocalized memory recall. Once a pupil commits the Qur'an to memory and graduates and can demonstrate his ability to reproduce the Qur'an from memory without recourse to the actual printed Qur'an, he becomes an *Alaramma* (a derivative from an Arabic expression *Allah Yarhamka* meaning May God bless you). Graduates of this system were often referred to as *Gardi Alaramma*. The *Gardi Alaramma* may or may not proceed to the next level of schooling – i.e. the Madrassa. According to Odumosu et al., (2013), the instruction in the Northern Nigerian Madrassa is divided into three “faculties”. The first is *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), then *Hadith* studies (saying of the Prophet Muhammad), and the last stage is Arabic Grammar and Lexicon during which major classical books of Arabic literature are perused by the learner. The graduates of the Madrassa are also referred to as *Alaramma*. A literary and intellectual rivalry in fact exists between the two types of *Alarammas*. The *Gardi Alaramma* considers his schooling purer because his curriculum was only the Qur'an. The Madrassa *Alaramma* on the other hand, who might or might not be a *Hafeez*, often feels superior to the *Gardi Alaramma* because of his expanded curriculum which makes him more knowledgeable of Islam. They often do work in tandem, however, especially during the *Tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis), where the *Gardi Alaramma* would recite the Qur'an, and the Madrassa *Alaramma* would translate and explain the meaning. The *Gardi Alaramma* clearly could not translate the meaning of the Qur'an, but can recite it very well in its correct grammatical and linguistic form; the Madrassa *Alaramma* may or may not be able to recite the Qur'an from memory with the same skill as the *Gardi Alaramma*, but he understands Arabic as a language and can.

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British Colonialism and The Collapse of The Almajiri System

Slavery abolition, which was an integral component of Northern Nigeria's economy throughout the nineteenth century, was the major reason advanced by Britain for waging war on the Sokoto Empire between 1900 and 1903. They killed and disposed those emirs who resisted the foreign rule, while those who were subjugated lost control of their territories and had to accept their new roles as mere traditional rulers (AbdulQadir, 2003). Following the fall of the Sokoto caliphate in March 1903, Captain Lugard, who led the colonial administration, implemented Indirect Rule, which has as its philosophy that the success of any colonial administration depends on how well integrated its administrative machinery is with those of the indigenous ruling class (Cook, 1964). One would assume that flowing from the philosophical argument of the concept of indirect rule, the existing educational structure would be maintained and be officially recognized, albeit with some modifications and alongside any other system that may be introduced. However, Lugard introduced new educational policies which ultimately laid the foundation for a dysfunctional *almajiri system* in present day Northern Nigeria (Awofeso et al., 2003). For example, Lugard brushed aside the comprehensive proposals of Walter Miller (the Christian Missionary Society's Secretary-General) for mass (Western) education of Hausa-Fulani, as the acceptance of such a proposal would have contradicted his official position not to interfere with the cultural and religious practices of the Hausa-Fulani. Instead, he initiated a six-month training in reading and writing in the Roman script and elementary science to only children of the aristocracy. He thus became the pioneer of an educational system based on the class system of Northern Nigeria society (Cook, 1964). Furthermore, by implementing changes in the taxation system, such as the abolition of the funding sources of the *almajiri system* (e.g., *Zakat* religious tax on personal income, one of the primary funding source for the heritage, was abolished), and denial of official recognition or funding to the custodians of the heritage, he created deep distrust and frustration among mallams (Lovejoy and Hogendorn as cited in Awofeso et al., 2003).

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Circumstantially, all the learned people who were at the helm of affairs in pre-colonial North fell in one swoop and were considered illiterate or uneducated (at least to the government), in the new status quo making them not only unemployed but unqualified to be employed despite being able to read and write (Okonkwo and Alhaji, 2014). The mallams who were revered professionally for holding the moral fibers of the society were relegated to delivering sermon once a week at the local Friday mosque. They were considered not qualified enough to have a say in government or to sit in the chambers of the state house of assembly to deliberate on the laws and constitution of the state because they were considered uneducated and illiterate. With loss of support from government and the helpless emirs, the *almajiri* system collapsed like a pile of cards. With lack of financial support, the *almajirai*, with the support of their mallams, resorted to begging and other menial jobs (Taiwo 2013). Indeed, lack of government and public funding or support contributed to the mallams sending *almajirai*-children to beg for alms/food in order to fend for themselves, and at times for the mallam's families (Kolo and Ladan 2006). This is certainly the genesis of the predicament of the *almajiri* system today. According to Okonkwo and Alhaji (2014, p.24):

To make ends meet, some of these mallams began to impose on the *almajirai* what is called “kundin sati”, a form of weekly fees for the lessons they derived. They were reassured that to beg was better than to steal. These boys swarm into the society with no bearing, moving from street to street, house to house, vehicle to vehicle. They were everywhere.... markets, car parks, restaurants, university gates, and so on. They became a burden as well as a nuisance to the society. They sang, begged and prayed appealing to the mercy and good will of the people. It is really sad when you see these *almajirai*, hungry, malnourished, wounded, rushing for fly invested left over food, searching through trash can for little morsels just to stay alive. They consume all kinds of food, fresh or stale. Their common food called “jagala” which is stored by an *almajiri* over a number of days, is a combination of locally made corn food (tuwo), pasta and boiled yam altogether like a fresh vomit. They roam about dirty, tattered, bare foot, pale with flies pecking on their cracked lips and dry faces which is filled with rashes or ring worm. They sleep on worn out mats in uncompleted building, goats may not find the small rooms where about 15 *almajirai* sleep conducive as there are no windows for cross ventilation and the walls have given room to cracks as if it will fall the next minute.

Cook (1964) further argues that the “Emirs schools” created by Lugard were designed to produce sycophants who accepted subordinate roles vis-à-vis British colonialists. The selected students were trained to accept the indigenous social order and perceive the British as natural directors of public affairs, and the Emirs as natural rulers. The measure of literary skill they acquired through these Emirs schools reinforced their birth privilege and increased their superiority over the *talakawa*, that is, peasants. Currently, most of pupils in the *Almajiri* heritage are children of peasants and descendants of slaves, whereas most of the pupils attending elite secular schools are children of the aristocracy (Awofeso et al., 2003).

Disregard for the *almajiri* system in preference to western education ignited animosity and antagonism from the mallams, the people and the society at large. The case scenario is worsened by the belief that the western education (boko) was of a Christian-European origin and therefore anti-Islamic. It bred the fear that a child with western belief would eventually lose his Islamic identity and embrace vices that negate the values and principles of Islam, such as alcoholism, fornication, semi naked dressing, partying, abandoning religious rites including prayer, fasting, zakat and so on. This predicament is often reflected in the grievances vented out at those attending the western schools as echoed in a popular *almajiri* song “dan makarantan bokoko, ba karatu ba sallah sai yawan zagin mallam” meaning “oh students of western education, you do not learn the Quran and you do not pray except to be mocking the mallam”. Describing this deep-seated mistrust, a former governor of Kaduna state, Alhaji Balarabe Musa (1979-1981) said even in his own time, “western education was resisted so that even we who were attending school despite the integration of Islam were called ‘Yan Boko’, meaning products of decadent western culture and we were told that the consequences of us being subservient to western culture was that we will end up in hell after death” (Odumosu, 2013). Abbo et al. (2017) observed that there exists of an established social and cultural resistance to western values and culture in Northern Nigeria which has created a room for social categorization in which all individual associated with the state institution are classified as ‘Yan Boko, a categorization which carries a serious negative connotation as all individuals classified as ‘Yan Boko are considered deceitful, dubious, impious, and corrupt hence responsible for the national predicaments. Abbo et al. (2017) further points out that the disdain towards and fear of Boko (Western education) arose from its historically close association with the colonial state and Christian missionaries. The aim of colonial education, particularly in Northern Nigeria, was to maintain the existing status quo by imparting some literacy

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to the aristocratic class, to the exclusion of the commoner classes. By the 1930s, colonial education had produced a limited cadre of Western-educated elite, who were conscious of their education and were yearning to play a role in society. This new education enabled them to climb the social and economic ladder over and above their peers who had a different kind of education, Qur'anic education. This was the origin of the animosity and distrust between the traditionally educated and Western-educated elite in northern Nigeria.

Flowing from this distrust, genuine efforts by Lugard's successors, including those by post-independence governments, to incorporate the *almajiri* system into mainstream educational system were opposed by the mallams and some section of the society (Awofeso et al., 2003). It has also been argued by Taiwo (2013) that the government and elites of the north have deliberately left this situation to continue probably due to what many of them derived from it. In their thinking, the education of many is the liberation of all, a situation which will create competition, and which will make them lose their exalted positions, as such these *almajirai*-children are neglected and even subjected to all sort of ill treatment. Today, it is estimated that there are currently over 9.5 million *almajirai* in Nigeria (Ladan, 2019).

Conclusion

While not overlooking other factors underpinning the current state of the *almajiri system* (one may argue these include neglect of the parents, unchecked population growth, low economic activity, etc.), we have attempted to highlight the structure and evolution of the *almajiri system*. We have traced the systemic decay of the institution which in hindsight can be argued to have been engineered; we have also painted a picture describing the current state of the system. We have also described who the *almajiri* is, (or what he ought to be) and in the process underscored how romantically engrained in the psyche of the society the system is. It is worth mentioning the incredible sway the mallams have in the society and how much benefit they currently accrue when thinking about how to engage in rectifying the decaying system. The next big question to answer is, now that we are here, how do we move forward? What becomes of the fate of the *almajiri* in Northern Nigeria and what becomes of the system? The *almajiri system* is somewhat closely tied

to the Sokoto caliphate as a remnant of its legacy. The author of “The Past as Future: Some Preliminary Thoughts on The Sokoto Caliphate” also struggled to identify a direction for what remains of the caliphate. “To end it, mend it or reinvent it?”, and we find it apt to ask the same question for the *almajiri system*. But also, to understand where the lines must be drawn and how broad coalitions can be formed. In effect, to what extent can we carve a reasonable solution that can rally public support to achieving it?

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