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THE SULTAN OF SOKOTO, MUHAMMADU
MACCIDO (1926–2006)*Jean Boyd*

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Sultan Muhammadu Maccido patterned his conduct on the example of Sultan Abubakar III. Interviewed in August 1988 he spoke frankly of his admiration for his father:

The Sultan is so open. People go there to eat with him, or meet in a small group at morning greetings. And they will say, 'Did you hear such and such on the radio?' or 'Do you know what is being discussed at so-and-so's house?' He knows what is going on and he has tried to meet the wishes of the people, never counting the cost to himself. I too have had the opportunity to serve. *Alhamdulillah. Na gode ma Allah.* But some people are bent on getting their own way. I believe that in the process they are determined to destroy my father and myself even though we mean well to everyone. The Sultan has *baraka*—a difficult thing to put into words—but exemplified by the fact that no one has been able to shorten his term of office. The people know this and earlier this year at the *filin Idi* (prayer field) there were more people than ever. It is God's blessing (*baiwar Allah*) on him.

When Abubakar became Sultan in 1938 he had only two children, a son, Muhammadu, and a daughter, Hadiza Ta Modi, both by his senior wife, Hauwa. All the other children born to him up to that point had died in infancy, which is why Muhammadu was given the sobriquet Maccido ('slave'), to ward off further misfortune. (After his accession Abubakar went on to have a further 53 surviving children.) Muhammadu Maccido went to the local school and at home ate local food. He used to say that his favourite meal was *tuwon dawwa* and *miyar kuka*, dumplings made of guinea corn flour with a sauce made from baobab leaves. In his father's household thrift and economy were practised and any left-overs were heated up and eaten the next day.

In his teens Maccido was used to seeing ordinary people pass through the palace gates to discuss their problems with the Sultan. Abubakar not only enjoyed meeting with herders, fishermen, market traders, farmers and workmen—he also learned from them, which is why he was so well informed. Reminiscing in 1988, Maccido said, 'I remember when the Sultan last came to UK for medical treatment. He soon demanded to be taken back home. We wanted him to stay and rest, but he missed the daily contact with his people. We managed to delay his departure for a couple of days but then we had to go.' This relationship to his people was at the heart of Sultan Abubakar's idea of good governance.

In 1943, when Maccido was 17, Sardauna Ahmadu, who had hoped to become Sultan in 1938, was accused of misappropriating tax money. He was given a jail sentence by Sultan Abubakar, whereupon the Sardauna hired a southern lawyer and appealed to the British court where the conviction was quashed for lack of evidence. Commenting in 1987, Waziri Junaidu said: 'There were faults on both sides.' Alkalin Alkalai Mai Wumo told me: 'It was very unfortunate. The wound never healed at all.' From this dispute, which had serious consequences resonating to this day, Maccido learned a great deal. In 1987, *à propos* of unrelated matters, Maccido said: 'I do not wish for recriminations and bitterness. What is the point of confrontations?'

In the 1950s political organizations emerged from social networks dominated by men who had been at the British-run Katsina College. Sardauna Ahmadu Bello, who himself had been educated there, entered the House of Assembly in Kaduna in 1947 and in 1954 he became Premier of the Northern Region. Malam Maccido, made a Member in 1951 at the age of 25, was too young to be anything but a bystander, but as the Sultan's eldest son and the Sardauna's relative all doors were open to him. Quiet and well-mannered, he watched, listened and learned, always reporting to the Sultan. In Kaduna his lodgings were not with the elite but in the house of his friend, the unassuming Alhaji Tijani Malumfashi, a principal livestock officer.

Politics began to get aggressive in the late 1950s, especially in Zamfara, part of Sokoto Province, where the Tijaniyya sect was manipulated by politicians for their own ends, causing a breakdown in community affairs. Maccido, who by then had been made Sarkin Kudu, was despatched to reconcile the differing factions, travelling countless miles between Sokoto and the affected areas. He constantly liaised with district heads who in the run-up to the 1959 elections were being hassled by agents of both parties. Sarkin Kudu [Maccido] was always extremely secretive about his plans, never revealing to anyone where he was going or the purpose of his visits.

By 1965 the whole country was in the grip of a political crisis which was out of control. On 15 January 1966 an Igbo officer, Major Nzeogwu, assembled a group of soldiers who attacked the Sardauna's house and killed him. In Lagos the Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, was also killed. A full account of the shocking events which followed can be found elsewhere. In Sokoto the Sultan advised the Igbos to leave, most of them reaching safety, but there was an incident which occurred when a crowd of angry young men advanced on the Catholic Church intent on its destruction. They were turned away by Sarkin Kudu and Marafa, the late Sardauna's son-in-law, who persuaded them to disperse. Reports I have seen claiming the church was burned down are false.

During and after the civil war (1967–70) it was all change in Nigeria. New states were created and General Gowon headed what was now a unitary state. Oil began to flow, Nigeria becoming a full member of OPEC in 1971. The push for development brought a sudden mushrooming of newly built courts, schools, colleges, dams, roads,

houses and hospitals. Many were built by corrupt contractors who quickly became rich. To staff all these institutions state governments recruited personnel from the four corners of the earth, paying little heed to proper selection procedures. As a result standards started to slip while, with the same rapidity, ill-constructed buildings crumbled. Top officials were rarely held responsible for their mistakes.

In 1967 Sarkin Kudu was made a Commissioner with a seat on the North Western State Executive Council, first at the Ministry of Agriculture and then at the Ministry of Health. His permanent secretary told me

He was quiet and unobtrusive with an encyclopaedic knowledge of everyone in Sokoto. In the Executive Council he had opinions and contributed from his experience to the discussions. But the thing I most vividly remember was the way in which he presided over a clean-up of corruption at the Ministry of Health where drugs were routinely misappropriated. Some were undoubtedly sold to private pharmacists to be sold on to desperate patients. Two top people, both related to VIPs, were sent letters of dismissal which Sarkin Kudu had signed.

At home he lived simply and travelled in modest cars, which always carried ordinary number plates. On a daily basis people gathered in the entrance to his house to be admitted by a *major domo*; in the old days it was Malam Musa, followed by Jekada Abu Mafara and latterly Salama Ibrahim. He also visited expatriate friends, some of whom occasionally turned to him for help. Professor Chris Dunton wrote recently: 'I remember meeting him at your house in Sokoto and finding him courteous and genial. A few years later he was extremely considerate and offered me wise advice in helping to resolve a dispute between a friend of mine and the University.' A former Principal of Federal Government College, Sokoto, where Sarkin Kudu was Chairman of Governors, remarked how 'in his unobtrusive way he was a great support to me'.

In the late 1970s when, in the run-up to the first elections for 15 years, new political parties were being formed, Sarkin Kudu played an unobtrusive but increasingly influential role. Alhaji Shehu Shagari persistently refused to accept the NPN nomination for the presidency. It was only after much persuasion that he agreed. He said,

I got an urgent message from Sokoto to see Sultan Abubakar . . . I was met at the airport by Alhaji Muhammadu Maccido, Sarkin Kudu and Alhaji Muhammadu Aminu, Tafidan Sokoto. Both were the Sultan's councillors and also my close associates. The Sultan had asked them to explore with me the prospect of my entering the party nomination race for the presidency. My two friends revealed that the Sultan had been approached by some notables to help persuade me to join the contest, but he assured me he would not force my hand.

Shehu Shagari declined to accept, but later in the year, having been 'reminded by the Sokoto State delegates of Abdullahi dan Fodio's wise

dictum regarding the obligation that anyone whom the community calls upon to lead was duty-bound to accept the invitation', decided to let his name go forward 'because my party branch [Sokoto] and friends would not budge an inch'.

Sarkin Kudu's position was made manifest when he accepted the chairmanship of NPN in Sokoto. On one occasion when I asked him whether he had first sought the Sultan's permission, he said: 'No. I made my own decision. I would not involve the Sultan that way, but he did not call me and ask for an explanation, so tacit approval was there.' He felt that by making this move he was acting to promote the highest standards of leadership based on the precepts of the Caliphate founders.

The role of presidential liaison officer, which he eventually became, suited Sarkin Kudu. He travelled frequently to Lagos, where he enjoyed privileged access to the Head of State, who eventually became beset with problems to do with the high level of government spending and the volatile nature of the global oil market. In 1979 when Shehu Shagari first became President, oil was \$40 a barrel; in 1983 it was just \$14. In these circumstances the President imposed an economic squeeze 'which did not go down well even with our own supporters'. 'The scourge of corruption' was spinning out of control in spite of the President's efforts to check it.

At the end of 1983 Shehu Shagari was ousted and placed under house arrest in Ikoyi. He described himself as 'a trapped former President' and so he remained for two and a half years. As for Sarkin Kudu, he was offered no appointment in a military regime headed by rash young governors. He returned to be at the side of his ailing father. When in 1986 Sultan Abubakar was deemed to have relinquished control, Sarkin Kudu was made part of an Inner Council authorized to use the official seal. For the next two years the palace was a quiet and sombre place.

On 1 November 1988, during the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida, Sultan Abubakar died. The two main contenders for the position of Sultan were Sarkin Kudu and Barade, who at the time was chairman of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI). Both men were of the lineage of Shehu Usuman dan Fodio, the electors being descendants of the men who had chosen the Shehu to be their Imam in 1804. Sarkin Kudu's name was announced as the new Sultan before the decision of the electors was ratified by the military governor. The following newspaper headlines explain what happened next:

- 2 November – The Sultan Is Dead
- 4 November – Behold the New Sultan Maccido
- 5 November – Government OKs Selection of New Sultan Maccido
- 6 November – Maccido Performs Sultan's Duties
- 7 November – Dasuki Is New Sultan
- 8 November – Sokoto Burns

An Italian academic who was working in Sokoto at the time told me: 'I heard the news that Sarkin Kudu had been elected on the TV... then Dasuki was imposed. Immediately there were clouds of smoke everywhere... the police were unable to handle the situation... When the army came in they shot indiscriminately. I saw them myself.'

Sarkin Kudu's old friend, Alhaji Tijani Malumfashi, wrote to us saying: 'We are yet to recover from the shock we felt following what has happened to our beloved Sarkin Kudu. The consolation is that the whole of Nigeria – I mean 95 per cent – feel that Sarkin Kudu should be installed on merit.'

Sarkin Kudu then began an internal exile that was to last eight years, but he made no hostile moves. In the New Year, telephoning from Lagos, he said, 'I'm not bitter against anyone. When force is used what can one do?' He surprised people by going regularly to greet Sultan Dasuki, a duty which he performed with dignity in a situation he described as 'tense'. His message to his supporters was, 'Do not provoke confrontations, but do not associate.'

In 1991 Sarkin Kudu said that 'most people' were still with him. As for himself, he shrugged off any hurts, saying 'It's called *A yi masu Filanci*; we don't like to show that we have been affected, we laugh it off.' By 1994 there were signs that his time would come. I heard from a judge that some of the influential Islamic scholars had returned presents sent by Sultan Dasuki. One of the most senior of all had chosen to pray at the new mosque built outside the town rather than the mosque used by all the Sultans since the time of Caliph Mohammed Bello. The new mosque was named after Sultan Abubakar.

Much resentment was roused in the populace when Sultan Dasuki invited the German construction firm Julius Berger to rebuild the palace. Reconstructions had been made before but not on this scale. It is said the cost was £40 million. I wrote: 'In parts it is sumptuous with chandeliers and marble. Each of the wives' houses has ten rooms and the Sultan's suite has fifteen.' However it was when Caliph Muhammad Bello's *shigifa* (tower room), built in 1810, was razed and the rubble spread outside the city that people became incensed. Sultan Abubakar, who had shown me the *shigifa* in 1962, had pointed to the bell rope which the Caliph had pulled to call his messenger, Yargurma. 'This will never be demolished,' Abubakar said. Now the news soon spread: '*An rushe gidan Bello*' (the house of Bello is demolished).

During these difficult years Sarkin Kudu maintained an unruffled manner and his patience was commented on by people who came to see him, some of whom helped him financially. By 1995 his own *shigifa* in what was an official residence had started to collapse, lending a derelict look to the house, and his telephone was removed by the Posts and Telegraphs Department for non-payment of the bill. The reasons for the deposition of Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki on 19 April 1996, during the regime of General Sanni Abacha, are complex; but what concerned the people of the heartlands were the domestic issues, including the matter of Bello's *shigifa*.

Sarkin Musulmi Muhammadu Maccido was 70 when he was turbaned in the Sultan Bello Mosque on 21 April 1996. His attributes certainly included courage and patience in the face of adversity. He was not a scholar but he consorted with scholars and actively assisted students of Sokoto history in their research. He felt he had a duty to the people and worked with perseverance and tenacity of purpose in their interest. He sought reconciliation when disputes arose and refused to retaliate when provoked. He was honest and never accumulated wealth. To his rivals he was generous in defeat. He asked the Head of State to ensure that the ex-Sultan was treated humanely and visited him in Kaduna when Dasuki was released from exile in Taraba State. He later sent an envoy to commiserate with him when Dasuki and his wives were attacked in their own home by armed robbers.

As Sultan, Maccido automatically became Chairman of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in Nigeria and in that capacity attended a world conference on Islam at the al-Azhar University, Cairo. He had access to the Head of State, to whom he said he 'told the truth'. To the people assembled at the 'Id he explained how he had expressed his concern to the President at 'the lack of sound policies, the failure to provide work for young people, the closure of factories and the sacking of workers'. Using his authority, he tried to stop the riots between Muslim and Christian youths. With sincerity he gave encouragement to the Sokoto branch of FOMWAN, a Muslim women's organization; he met with its leader and sent two of his grand-daughters to university.

Sultan Maccido came out in favour of the polio vaccination policy, his own councillor Magajin Gari being a member of the official party which flew to India to examine how the vaccines were made. He went to Saudi Arabia to raise money for Islamic schools, and founded one of his own on the western outskirts of the city. In 2004 he played a central role in planning the celebrations to mark the two hundredth anniversary of the *hijra* of the Shehu, events which brought the question of northern unity back into focus, a political issue which had been much debated fifty years previously.

When a sect new to Sokoto, the Shi'ites, demanded the right to pray in their distinctive way in the Shehu and Bello mosques, he and a majority of the people of Sokoto were opposed to the disruptions in worship. The state government, citing human rights legislation, disagreed, but the Sultan stood his ground as his father had done when the Izala sect tried to take over the mosques in the 1970s.

I visited Sokoto four times during the reign of Sultan Maccido, and from time to time was in the Sultan's public reception room where I saw how he related to the people who called to see him – a group of nomadic Fulani, for example. Complete with their knee breeches, cloaks and staves, they sat comfortably on the red carpet and chatted to the Sultan as easily as they would have talked to someone in their own camp. He asked them about the health of their cattle, the state of water resources and the condition of pastures in locations, with which he seemed perfectly familiar. Then in a respectful manner they took their leave.

Other men came with complaints about neighbours, the non-payment of a debt or a wrongful dismissal. The Sultan dealt patiently, and sometimes, when necessary, sternly, with them all. He told me when he needed to hear the other side of the story he would say to the complainant, 'Take this letter to your district head and return here with his reply.' When I asked him if people were afraid to come to him direct, he said: 'Why on earth should they be afraid of me? They know they can come.'

As for women petitioners, he saw them every morning inside the gate of the inner palace where his wives lived and where I was staying. By seven o'clock he was seated and the women came one by one with their own grievances, to which he listened with the same attention that he gave to the men. But what surprised me most of all was to see the arrival through the main gate of a group of elderly village women accompanied by a number of young girls aged around ten. Their poverty was apparent – their robes were made of cheap material, their jewellery of white alloy – but it was their feet that caught my attention. They had obviously not only walked miles, but were used to walking miles, because their heels were cracked, their toes splayed and their nails thickened. I asked their leader, the Jaji, the purpose of their visit. 'To greet Sarkin Musulmi,' she said. 'He listens to our problems, cares about us and prays for us.'

The Sultan celebrated the 2006 'Id al-fitr at home in Sokoto; then he flew to Abuja to exchange greetings with the Head of State. On Sunday 29 October he boarded Flight 053 bound for Sokoto, which crashed after take-off, killing almost all on board. The Sultan's body, which was not burnt in the conflagration, was recognized quickly and flown to Sokoto for burial. The body was borne on a bier and very slowly carried through streets lined with tens of thousands of people crying '*Allahu akbar*'. He was buried in the Hubbare near the tomb of the Shehu, and that of his father. *Allah shi ji kansa, amin.*

IV

YUSUFU BALA USMAN (1945–2005)

M. M. Gwadabe

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The intellectual community in Nigeria received with great shock the news of the death of Dr Yusufu Bala Usman on 24 September 2005. Indeed, the shock went beyond the intellectual community or the Nigerian nation because Dr Yusufu Bala Usman was not only a Nigerian intellectual but one recognized across Africa and abroad. He was not just an intellectual but also a democrat, a freedom fighter, and a lover of peace and justice. Thus his house, at Hanwa in Zaria (Kaduna