

A History of Shia and its Development in Nigeria: The Case-Study of Kano

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Abstract

This article outlines the history of Shiism in Kano State. Most existing studies on Shiism in Nigeria focus exclusively on the political activism of Ibrahim El-Zakzaky and his Islamic Movement in Nigeria (formerly, Muslim Brothers). This article, on the contrary, tries to bring to light the activities of a variety of Shia actors, including Lebanese migrants, Iranian officials, and competing networks of Nigerian Shiites (Zakzaky's IMN and Nur Dass' Rasulul A'zam Foundation). The diversification of Shia actors – this article argues – can be explained as the result of the complexities of the social and religious space of Kano; as the reflection of changing Iranian policies over the years; or as a combination of both factors.

Islam in Nigeria: The Background

The traditional Islamic groups in Nigeria for the past centuries have been the two Sufi orders, the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya. The former is named after Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani; a scholar and jurist who rose to prominence in Baghdad in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries.¹ The latter's eponym is Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani (1735-1815) who was born

1 Jonathan Hill, *Sufism in Northern Nigeria: A Force for Counter Radicalization?* (Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, 2010), 17. For more information on the Qadiriyya in Nigeria see Asif Folarin Ahmed, "The Qadiriyya and its Impact in Nigeria" (PhD Dissertation, University of Ibadan, 1986).

in ‘Ayn Madi (a village in the Algerian desert) into a family of learned scholars, and established a Sufi *ṭarīqa* around the claim of being the “seal of saints” (*khātim al-awliya*).²

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the face of Islam in northern Nigeria was changed by a jihad waged by Shaykh Usman Dan Fodio (1754-1817), a religious scholar and reformer who fought the rulers of Hausaland condemning the superficial practice of religion and syncretism which was the order of the day at the beginning of the nineteenth century,³ successfully establishing an Islamic state, known as the Sokoto Caliphate. Dan Fodio was a Qadiri, and thus the Qadiriyya became the official doctrine of the new state. The Tijaniyya, on the other hand, after having been introduced in Nigeria by the leader of another nineteenth-century West African jihad, al-Hajj Umar al-Futi (d. 1864), experienced an unprecedented development after the major leaders of the order (mainly based in Kano and Zaria) affiliated themselves with the Senegalese scholar Ibrahim Niassé, who had claimed to be the depository of the divine flood (*sahib al-fayda*) of Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani.⁴

The virtual monopoly of the Sufi orders over the Islamic public space in Nigeria was broken in the second half of the twentieth century by the introduction of Wahhabism. Although Mervyn Hiskett has argued that Wahhabism found its way into Nigeria in the late nineteenth century, there is no concrete evidence to support such a claim,⁵ and we can say that

2 Lucy Behrman, *Muslim Brotherhood and Politics in Senegal* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), 18-19. For more information on the Tijaniyya in Nigeria, see Yasir Anjola Quadri, “The Tijaniyya in Nigeria: A Case Study” (PhD Dissertation, University of Ibadan, 1981); John Paden, *Religion and Political Culture in Kano* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

3 For more on the Sokoto Jihad, see Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* (London: Longman, 1967).

4 For a biography of Shaykh Ibrahim Niassé, see Rüdiger Seeseman, *The Divine Flood: Ibrahim Niassé and the Roots of a Twentieth Century Sufi Revival* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011); Muhammad Tahir Maigari “*Ash Shaikh Ibrahim Niass as-Sunghali*” (Master’s Dissertation, Bayero University Kano, 1981).

5 For this claim and its criticism, see Mervyn Hiskett, “The Community of Grace, and its Opponents, ‘the Rejecters’, A Debate about Theology and Mysticism in Muslim West Africa with Special Reference to its Hausa Expression,” *African Language Studies*, XVII, 1981, 99-140 and Muhammad Sani Umar, “Sufism and anti-Sufism in Nigeria” (Master’s Dissertation, Bayero University Kano, 1988).

Wahhabism was popularized in Nigeria largely through the activities of Shaykh Abubakar Mahmud Gumi (d. 1992).⁶ Gumi was a close associate of Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of the Northern Region in the Nigerian First Republic, which collapsed in 1966. In the 1950s, the former accompanied the latter in his various trips to Saudi Arabia for pilgrimage. There, Gumi was exposed to the Wahhabi doctrine and in the 1960s, he became its champion in the Nigerian arena, by subjecting the Sufi scholars to perpetual criticism. In 1978, a group of students of Gumi led by Shaykh Ismail Idris,⁷ established the *Jamā'at Izālat al-Bid'a wa-Iqāmat al-Sunna* (Society for the Removal of Innovations and Reinstatement of Tradition, henceforth *Izala*)⁸ to champion and peddle the Wahhabi ideology. The emergence of *Izala* in Nigeria constituted a serious threat to the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya and to some extent weakened their influence and followership. In the same vein, however, in the early 1980s, while the Sufi brotherhoods were struggling to contain the infiltration of Wahhabism into their religious enclaves, another force in the form of Shiism emerged, creating a new religio-political space in Nigerian Islam. The impact of the Iranian Revolution and the subsequent formation of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria were the key factors responsible for the spread of the Shia in Nigeria.

The Shia and the Lebanese community in Kano

The name Shia means, among other things “partisan,” or a “party.” The word is a shortened form of the Arabic *Shi'at Ali*, i.e. the party of

6 For more information on Gumi, see his autobiography, Abubakar Gumi with Isma'il Abubakar Tsiga, *Where I Stand*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd, 1992).

7 For details on the biography of Shaykh Ismail Idris see Ramzi Ben Amara, “The *Izala* Movement in Nigeria: Its Split, Relationship to Sufis and Perception of Shari'a Re-Implementation” (PhD Dissertation, University of Bayruth, 2011).

8 The *Izala* group was formed on 8 February, 1978 in Jos, Plateau, under the auspices of Malam Isma'il Idris and Malam Bala Sirajo. The leading figure that attempted to introduce *Izala* to Kano was Shaykh L. Suleiman who was a disciple of Shaykh Abubakar Gumi and former preacher of the *Jama'at Nasril Islam*. Other people that collaborated with Shaykh Suleiman were Alhaji Ali Birnin Kudu, Malam Sa'idu Hadejia, A. Hamid, Lawal Abubakar Kano and Alhaji Ado Kano. For more information, see Gumi with Tsiga, *Where I Stand*; Ousmane Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Northern Nigeria: A Study of the Society for the Removal of Innovations and the Reinstatement of Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

Ali, which initially comprised of a few companions of the Prophet Muhammad that were held together by the common goal of supporting Ali to the claim of succession to the Prophet, after the latter's departure in 632. Apparently, Ali had a number of admirers right from the time of the Prophet, and such people constituted the core of his supporters after the latter's departure. Therefore, what began as a spontaneous support gradually developed into an established movement with its own dogmas and practices. The major point of departure between the Sunnis and the Shia is the concept of imamate: the persistence with which the Shia clings to its basic belief in Ali and his descendants as the true imams has remained its distinguishing feature. In accordance with the Shia belief, the Imam (leader of the community) is the sole legitimate head of the Muslim community, divinely designated for the supreme office. The Imam must be a direct descendant of Muhammad through Ali and Fatima, daughter of the prophet, and in principle, he has the right to assume both spiritual and temporal role in the Muslim community. The Imam also embodies supernatural powers transmitted to him from his predecessors. As such, Ali and his descendants represent a continuous divine revelation in a human form. The Shia is broadly divided into three groups, each having several sub-branches. The first are the so-called 'Twelvers' (*ithnā 'ashariyya*), who recognize a succession of twelve legitimate Imams, (concluded with Muhammad al-Mahdi in the late ninth century; according to their beliefs, the twelfth Imam entered into a state of 'occultation' (*ghayba*) from which he is still guiding the community. This branch has been the official religion of Persia since the Safavid dynasty came to power in the early sixteenth century, and has an important following also in Iraq, Bahrain and Lebanon, as well as in India and Pakistan. The second are the Zaydiyya of 'Fivers,' who constitute an important segment of the population of Yemen. The third are the Isma'ilites or 'Sevensers,' whose followers are small communities scattered through the Indian sub-continent, Central Asia, Syria and East Africa. Over the centuries, the Shia went through a lot of transformations largely shaped by local historical forces, the account of which is outside the scope of this paper. The 1979 Islamic revolution that transformed

Iran into a modern Islamic state with Shiism as the official religion, has a more direct impact on our topic, as it is the Iranians who have been championing the cause of the *Ithnā ‘Ashariyya* branch of Shiism in West Africa, facilitating its introduction for the first time in Nigeria. Here, they have found some following initially among university students fascinated with the Islamic revolution and later, with the wider population.

The development of Shiism in Kano can be divided into two different phases. During the first phase, the presence of Shia in Kano was associated with the community of Lebanese settlers. During the second phase, however, Shiism would be promoted by the native Nigerians. The presence of a Shia community of Lebanese origin has been neglected by most observers. Most scholars, in fact, have written that Shia started to penetrate into Kano and Nigeria in general in the late 1970s and early 1980s due to the Iranian Revolution and the activities of the movement originally known as ‘Muslim Brothers,’ which was a local movement led by Ibrahim el-Zakzaky.⁹ It is true that the brand of Shiism propagated and disseminated by Nigerians emerged in the public in the 1970s and 1980s. It is important to remember, however, that Shiism was already practiced and promoted by the Lebanese traders, who had been in Kano since the first decade of the twentieth century. According to Sabo Abdullahi Albasu, the earliest Lebanese immigrants who settled in Kano were Christians; it was only later that Muslim Lebanese started to settle in Kano. In 1915, the British colonial authority established a separate ‘Syrian quarters’ in Kano to accommodate the Lebanese as part of its policy of social segregation. This area was located west of the railway station, between the European trading site and the Hausa city, symbolically indicating the role the

9 The earliest writings on Shia in Nigeria include: Muhammad Dahiru Sulaiman “Shiism and the Islamic Movement in Nigeria 1970-1991,” *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara*, 7, 1993 pp. 5-16; Muhammad Dahiru Sulaiman, “Islamic Fundamentalism: The Shia in Katsina,” in Isma’il Abubakar Tsiga & Abdallah Uba Adamu (eds.), *Islam and the History of Learning in Katsina* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1997); Tahir H. Gwarzo, “Islamic Civil Society Associations and the State: A Kano State Case Study, 1994-2004” (PhD Dissertation, Bayero University Kano, 2006); Ashiru Tukur Umar, *A History of Jama’at Tajdidil Islamy* (Master’s Dissertation, Bayero University Kano, 2011); Dahiru S. Yola, “Religious Awareness and Islamic Political Activism in Kano: A Case Study of Jama’atu Tajdidil Islamy” (Master’s Dissertation, Bayero University Kano, 2000).

Lebanese traders were meant to have as middlemen between the local traders and the colonial authorities.¹⁰

Although we do not have any precise statistics of their religious affiliation, Albasu has argued that most of the Muslim Lebanese immigrants in Kano were Shiites, and perhaps because of the colonial segregation policy, they were not able to live and intermingle with the larger indigenous community in the city and spread their ideology. The most important factor that prevented them from disseminating Shiism was the fact that the people of Kano strongly upheld Sunni beliefs. Equally important was the fact that the Lebanese, at the early stage, were struggling to survive in the highly competitive economic environment of Kano. Therefore, they hardly had the time for the personal practice of the religion, let alone to engage in missionary activities. According to a Kano Shiite informant, Isa Makama,¹¹ racism also played a role in the refusal of the Lebanese to spread Shiism in Kano. According to Makama, the Lebanese had a strong culture of racial prejudice. Hence, they felt that Shiism was strictly for them and Sunnism for the indigenous people.¹² It is also important to note that the Lebanese, if compared with the average Kano Muslim dwellers, were highly exposed to ‘modern’ social life—they were the ones who established the first cinema houses¹³ and hotels¹⁴ in

10 Sabo A. Albasu, *The Lebanese in Kano: An Immigrant Community in a Hausa Society in the Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods* (Kano: Kabs Print Services, 1995) pp. 64-65.

11 Isa Usman Makama was born in Ningi Local Government area of Bauchi state. He attended East Primary School from 1969-1975, and proceeded to Doma Secondary School in what would later become Gombe State from 1975-1978. Doma Secondary School was converted to Girls Senior Secondary school before Isa completed his high school, so he was transferred to Billiri Secondary School in the same today's Gombe State. He later attended International Theological Centre, Qom in Iran from 1984-1986. When he returned to Nigeria, he got admission to study Electrical Engineering in Kaduna Polytechnics. In the late 1980s, he joined the Muslim Brothers in Nigeria under the leadership of Ibrahim el-Zakzaky. He taught at Ahlul-Bait Institute, a Shia inclined school located at Gyadi-Gyadi, Kano. He currently teaches at Darul Thaqaalayn Organization under Iranian proprietors.

12 Interview with Isa Makama on 23rd July, 2014 at Darul-Thaqaalayn Organization, Zaria Road, Kano.

13 Shuaibu Garba, *A History of Plaza and Orion Cinema in Kano, 1954-2012* (B.A. Dissertation, Bayero University Kano, 2015).

14 For more on this, see Albasu, *The Lebanese in Kano*.

Kano, as well as being known for engaging in gambling and other worldly activities. This exposure to ‘modern’ social life made them less likely to be occupied in religious missionary activity, and in any case, spoiled their reputation with the local Kano population, who would have been unlikely to accept their preaching.

It is only after the Iranian revolution and the emergence of an indigenous Nigerian Shia community that the Lebanese in Kano started to develop interest in converting Hausa Muslims into Shiism. The activities of the ‘Muslim Brothers,’ in fact, indirectly encouraged the Lebanese to compete in the religious terrain of Kano. The first attempt made by the Lebanese was to convert the shop clerks who assisted them in conducting their businesses in Kwari Market.¹⁵ An example here is the case of Alhaji Adar, a Nigeria-born Lebanese, who attempted to convert his subordinate, Usman Lawan, into Shiism; the latter, however, refused to accept Shiism as his religious ideology due to his strong attachment to Qadiri Sufism. The Lebanese Shiites in Kano also related with the young Islamically educated youths of Kano, who were well versed in Arabic and exhibited strong desire to learn more about Islam. The Lebanese gave the latter Shia literature for free and invited them to their houses. The leading Lebanese who engaged in inviting such youths was Ali Sadiq Fadlallah, a brother to Tahir Oil,¹⁶ who resides at Sokoto Road behind the Umar ibn al-Khattab mosque along Zaria Road. Fadlallah also attracted distressed and impoverished members of the society into Shiism by giving them moral and financial support. Those who accepted Shiism through Fadlallah used to meet at his house to celebrate certain Shia ceremonies. Even though a number of his followers

15 Kwari market was established in the 1930s and the earliest traders in this market were Lebanese. For more, see Junaidu Danladi, “A History of Kantin Kwari Market in Kano C. 1933-2012” (Master’s Dissertation, Bayero University Kano); Interview with Malam Usman Lawan Makwarari on 28 July 2014 at Kwari market.

16 Tahir Oil was one of the prominent Lebanese in Kano and had huge investments in the state. He owned the Tahir Oil Company, whose product (cooking oil) was widely advertized on Kano media and equally patronized by the locals. He also owned a soccer club, Tahir United, which played in the highest football league in Kano. He owned gambling houses and was a friend to the Kano elites. The advertisement of the Tahir Company’s product on Kano media made the owner and his household very popular in the state.

are indigenes of Kano, they act independently of Nigerian-promoted brand of Shiism like the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN), the Rasulul A'azam Foundation, as well as of the Iranian-promoted Shiism in Nigeria, which mainly takes the form of the Darul-Thaqalayn Organization.

Ibrahim El-Zakzaky: From the Muslim Brothers to the Tajdid Crisis

The second phase of Shiism in northern Nigeria in general and in Kano in particular, started in the early 1980s as a result of the activities of some members of the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN)¹⁷ at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria branch, under the leadership of Ibrahim El-Zakzaky.¹⁸ With the Iranian revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini, which resulted in the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty and the subsequent establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the foundations were laid for a new Iranian foreign policy characterized by the promotion and exportation of the Iranian brand of Shiism, along with the political doctrine that Jacob Zenn described as 'Khomeinism'¹⁹ to other countries, Nigeria included.

17 The MSSN was founded in 1954 in Lagos, and from 1956 it was based at the University of Ibadan. The society, which was initially dominated by Yoruba Muslim students from the south-west of Nigeria, opened branches in the north, at Ahmadu Bello University (Zaria) and Abdullahi Bayero College (Kano), in 1963. By 1970, there were four hundred branches of the society throughout Nigeria, located at secondary schools and universities. See John Paden, *Faith and Politics in Nigeria: Nigeria as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World* (Washington: US Institute of Peace Press), p. 30.

18 Malam Ibrahim El-Zakzaky was born in Zaria on May 5, 1953. First he attended a provincial Arabic school, where the then Native Authority (NA) used to train Arabic teachers for its primary schools. Then, he went to the School for Arabic Studies (SAS) in Kano (1971-1975) and subsequently, to Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, from 1976 to 1979.

19 Jacob Zenn is a consultant on countering violent extremism and a policy adviser for the Nigerian-American Leadership Council. For more on him, visit www.ctc.usma.edu/feed. Zenn quoted a scholar (whose name he did not mention) defining Khomeinism "as a form of Third world Political Populism—a radical but pragmatic middle-class movement that strives to enter, rather than reject, the modern age. [...] a militant, sometimes contradictory, political ideology that focuses not on issues of scripture and theology but on the immediate political, social, and economic grievances of workers and the middle-class [...]. It is often associated with Shi'ism and support for Iran, it has also been accepted without a Shia or Iranian connotation." See Jacob Zenn, "The Islamic Movement and Iranian Intelligence Activities in Nigeria," Retrieved October 24, 2013, from www.ctc.usma.edu/feed.

Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, a student in the Faculty of Arts and Social Science (FASS) at Ahmadu Bello University, was a charismatic leader of the MSSN. Admiring the activism of the leftist students on campus, El-Zakzaky tried to 'wake' the Muslim students up from what he believed was an excessive quietism, and to develop a more politically active wing of the organization. Although his original models were the Egyptians Hasan al-Banna (d. 1949) and Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), in 1980 he visited Iran for the first time and gradually became enmeshed in the religio-political system of the country. Upon his return to Nigeria, he started to advocate for the transformation of Nigeria into a 'purely Islamic' form of government under the platform of a new movement that he established, named 'Muslim Brothers' and popularly known in Kano and other parts of northern Nigeria as '*Yan Uwa Musulmi* (Muslim brothers) or '*Yan Brothers*'.²⁰ During the military rule of Babangida (1985-93) and Abacha (1993-8), the 'Yan Brothers became the embodiment of the Islamist opposition in the country. Both El-Zakzaky and his followers were repeatedly arrested and harassed by the Nigerian security forces. El-Zakzaky's total prison experiences spanned nine years in nine different prisons across the country, the most famous being his stay in Enugu prison (1981-1984); in the Interrogation Centre of the National Security Organization, Lagos (1984-1985); in Kiri-Kiri Maximum Security (1985); in Port Harcourt (1987-1989 and 1996-1997) and in Kaduna (1987 and 1997-1998).²¹

It is not clear when exactly El-Zakzaky 'converted' to Shiism. In order to facilitate the establishment of his movement in an overwhelmingly Sunni country like Nigeria, in fact, El-Zakzaky focused on a vague political discourse, keeping his theological convictions private. In 1994, however, he made his Shia convictions public, causing a crisis within the 'Yan Brothers. Those who were not satisfied with the leaning of El-Zakzaky towards Shiism, in fact, immediately broke away and founded a new association known as *Jama'at Tajdid al-Islam* (Movement for the

20 Jacob Zenn "The Islamic Movement."

21 Interview with El-Zakzaky by the Daily Trust Newspaper available online. Retrieved May 4, 2014, from (http://sunday.dailytrust.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7464&catid=3&Itemid=110).

Revival of Islam, JTI) under the leadership of Abubakar Mujahid, with its headquarters at Sabuwar Unguwa, Yakasai quarters, Kano.²² This was the first break-away faction that emerged from the Shiism not only in Kano, but in the entire northern Nigeria. The foundation of the JTI created a lot of tension, as most members of the group would embrace a form of politically active Salafism with a pronounced anti-Shia taint. The overt animosity that JTI members harboured towards El-Zakzaky led them to engage him in a clash that went almost physical at an event in Bayero University old campus, Kano.²³

Not long after JTI was established, in a climate of bitter competition with the Muslim Brothers of El-Zakzaky, an opportunity presented itself to the members of the movement to portray themselves as the true champions of Islam in Kano.²⁴ In December 1994, in fact, members of the JTI led an attack against an Igbo²⁵ man called Gideon Akaluka, who had been arrested under the accusation of desecrating the Holy Quran by using its pages as toilet tissues. Alleged JTI members climbed the walls of the Kano prison at Goron Dutse and beheaded Akaluka. When JTI members were contacted, they distanced themselves from the murder. The fact remains that many supported the killing of Akaluka, believing what he had done could only be punished by death in order to deter the same to occur in the future. It is also clear that JTI members celebrated the death

22 Gwarzo, *Islamic Civil Society Associations*, 188-189.

23 When the civilian administration returned in 1999, twelve northern Nigerian states, including Kano, implemented Sharia. Before the implementation of Sharia, an event was organized by some Islamic organizations in Kano, and JTI members were heavily represented. El-Zakzaky was also in attendance and he criticized the whole idea of implementing Sharia in a secular state like Nigeria, opining that Sharia could not be operated under a secular constitution. Members of JTI used that criticism as an alibi to attack him because of their old rivalry with him, coupled with their ambition to monopolize religious space of Kano (interview with Malam Ibrahim Mu'azzam, Department of Political Science, Bayero University Kano). We are indebted to Andrea Brigaglia for drawing our attention to this incident.

24 This argument was put forward by Andrea Brigaglia while we were discussing the incident with him.

25 Igbo is one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Igbo-speaking people are largely found in south-eastern Nigeria, but they have also spread to different parts of the country where they have established trading communities. In the whole Nigeria, Kano has the largest number of Igbo immigrants.

of Mr. Akaluka, and it is reported that members of the movement walked around the city brandishing his severed head.²⁶

The Gideon Akaluka incident is still surrounded by mystery, and it has generated many debates. At the heart of the controversy is the argument some people made that the alleged desecration of the Holy Quran might not have happened in the first place. Some argued that it was a woman in Gideon Akaluka's compound who was found with the papers with Arabic script, which could hardly be pages of the Quran. Akaluka's lawyer was reported to have obtained affidavits which proved that his client was not in the compound at the time, and that the woman allegedly guilty of the offence was not his wife.²⁷ Whatever the truth behind the case, this event exposed the increasing tension in the Islamist rhetoric of the Nigerian Muslim Brothers, and put the group and its break-away offshoots under the watch list of the Nigerian authorities. Those who were accused of having participated in the act were clandestinely arrested and some of them were killed. In the same vein, many of the JTI members were arrested and detained in 1995, as a result of the distribution of leaflets giving notice to all Christians living in Kano to vacate. This second incident had been triggered by a quarrel between a Hausa young man and an Igbo Christian at Sabon Gari quarters in Kano, in the course of which the Igbo had allegedly pushed the Hausa into a frying pan for beans-cakes (*kosai*). After this incident, the group gradually became less radical in its approach.²⁸

During the 1990s, many Hausa religious singers (sing. *sha'iri*; pl. *sha'irai*), both members of JTI and non-members, were also instrumental in popularizing a Sunni critique of the increasing influence of Shiism in Kano and in other parts of Nigeria. In 1994, Malam Bashir Dandago, who was a member of JTI and one of the most popular and outspoken Hausa religious singers in Kano, composed a song titled "The secret has been unveiled: El-Zakzaky has become a Shiite" (*Asiri ya bayyana ai Zakzaky*

26 Umar, "A History of Jama'at Tajdidil Islamiy," pp. 83-84.

27 Karl Meir, "Beheading Stirs Nigerian Tension," *The Independent*, Wednesday 16 August, 1995. Retrieved May, 25, 2014 from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/beheading-stirs-nigerian-tension-1596448.html>, 1-3.

28 Umar, "A History of Jama'at Tajdidil Islamiy," p. 84.

ya zama dan Shi'a). The tape of this song achieved wide popularity not only in Kano, but across the Hausa-speaking communities of northern Nigeria, where *sha'irai* were considered as celebrities. It was (and still is, to some extent) common for people to invite *sha'irai* to perform at weddings and naming ceremonies, where money would be showered on them by the celebrants, by their family members and friends, as well as by casual listeners. Such Hausa religious songs were instrumental in communicating to the Sunni audience that el-Zakzaky's movement, which had been previously celebrated as the most committed form of Islamist activism in the country, had started to gravitate towards Shiism and that therefore, it had to be avoided. Another *sha'iri* who composed a mocking song against Shiism was Malam Mukhtar Yusuf Magashi.²⁹ His most famous song was "I hold unto the four rightly-guided Caliphs of the Prophet! I won't allow anyone to abuse them" (*Ya khulafa sahabu Muhammad, ku na riƙa! Ni ban yarda a zaƙi ɗayanƙu ba*). In one of the verses of the song he says:

*Wanda duk ya zaƙi Abubakari wannan maƙiyin annabi ne
Kun ga ƙiyayyar Annabi ko babu tantama ƙin Mai-Duka ne*

Whoever abuses Abū Bakr is a foe to the Prophet
And enmity to the Prophet without doubt, is enmity towards God.

The central theme of this song is showing that anyone who abuses the four rightly-guided Caliphs is an enemy of the Prophet. This song was composed because of the belief among the Sunni community that Shiites allegedly abuse the first three caliphs (successors) of the Prophet namely: Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān.³⁰ Mukhtar Magashi was very virulent in his poetic criticism of Shiism and he composed another song to discredit followers of the sect entitled "O Prophet, here are those who (claim that they) love you but hate Abū Bakr, 'Umar and your 'Uthmān" (*Ya rasulallah,*

29 Born at Magashi quarters in Kano city, Malam Mukhtar Magashi was a member of Tijaniyya Sufi order.

30 Cassette tapes of these songs are sold in the Shaykh Nasiru Kabara market, Kofar Wambai quarters, Kano, Nigeria.

wasu bayi ne ke sonka, wai kuma sai suka ce Abubakar, Umar har Usmanunka sun ki). The message of the song is centered on the allegation that Shiites abuse the companions of the Prophet. According to Mukhtar, this song is meant to defend the integrity of the companions and at the same time to admonish those who joined el-Zakzaky without knowing the implication of his theological creed. Mukhtar argues that Shiite *'ulamā'* use *taqiyya* (dissimulation) to lure their followers and that it is the responsibility of the *sha'irai* to enlighten the public through their songs. Songs, in fact, are the easiest way of communicating with the public. According to Mukhtar, the Shiites believe in a different Quran and falsified a number of the authentic traditions of the Prophet – even if in the song, he does not make mention of any of such alleged forgeries.

Muhammad Turi and the IMN in Kano

The break-away of the JTI from the Muslim Brothers changed forever the face of El-Zakzaky's movement, leading to an even more explicit embrace of Shiism by El-Zakzaky and his closest associates. The JTI crisis was a symptom that brought to light a deep leadership crisis existing in the movement. This crisis was particularly acute in Kano. In order to face the crisis and rejuvenate his leadership position, El-Zakzaky decided to form a new organization, which he called the *Islamic Movement in Nigeria* (IMN), with the aim of spreading and coordinating the Shia ideology in Nigeria. Leaders of this movement, who were all faithful to El-Zakzaky, were appointed in various Muslim states and sent to their places of primary assignment. When the crisis broke out, the leader of the MB in Kano was one Malam Kabiru Kofi. Although the latter did not immediately join the JTI, he too seemed to have been uneasy with El-Zakzaky's increasingly explicit Shia affiliation. What is certain is that in the late 1990s, Malam Kofi was not considered sufficiently devoted to El-Zakzaky's leadership. Initially, after the dissolution of the MB, Malam Kabir Kofi led the newly established branch of the IMN in Kano. Subsequently, however, a crisis broke out between him and some of his followers due to his non-affiliation to Shiism and to his friendship with the leaders of the JTI. As a consequence, Muhammad Turi was appointed as the new leader of the

IMN in Kano, perhaps because of his experience and maturity, as well as because of his allegiance to El-Zakzaky.³¹

Muhammad Mahmoud Turi was sent to Kano in 1999. He was born on 7 July 1963, in Zaria city, Kaduna State, from a family of the second generation of western-educated elites of northern Nigeria. His father, Mahmoud Turi, had been a prominent journalist working with the first northern-based English newspaper, *New Nigerian*.³² After shortly attending a traditional Quranic school, in 1969 Mahmoud Turi enrolled into a primary school. From 1974 to 1979, he attended the Federal Government College, Sokoto. He then proceeded to the School of Basic Studies, Zaria and in 1980 gained admission into the prestigious Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (ABU) to read Accounting. Like many of the first-generation MB members, he emerged in the field of student activism. In 1982, he and some of his cohorts clashed with the ABU authorities and were expelled. In the same year, he was admitted into the University of Maiduguri to read the same courses that he had started studying in ABU and he finally graduated in 1984. Since then, he has attended courses on Islamic Law and Sharia, first in Sudan, then in Iran.³³

Presumably, Turi realized the need for him to acquire a solid Islamic education, because most of his youthful life was spent pursuing university certificate and engaging in student activism, a life that was parallel to most prominent leaders of the various activist Islamic organizations in northern Nigeria. Most of the leaders of the traditional Islamic groups like the Sufi orders, attended traditional Quranic schools, followed by the private scholarly circles where they learned the different branches of Islamic knowledge. Their expertise in Islamic knowledge became an automatic certificate for them to open schools and teach their disciples, a situation that normally opens the doors for them to become future

31 According to a section of Kano Shiites, Kabir Kofi was removed based on an alleged mental break-down. They alleged that he started to isolate himself from the public and that he was always mute when in the midst of people (interview with Aliyu Sambo, 23 June 2013).

32 For more on this, see Matthew Hassan Kukah, *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1993).

33 Interview with Muhammad Turi, 4 January 2014.

religious leaders. To compensate for his lack of exposure to traditional Islamic knowledge, Turi went to Sudan to get basics Islamic knowledge that could prepare him to guide and teach his disciples, and subsequently traveled to Iran where he studied Shia doctrine, so as to have a deeper theological grasp of the creed of his group and to defend it in the face of incessant attack from dominant Sunni *'ulamā'* in Kano.

When the IMN started operating in Kano, former members of the local branch of the defunct Muslim Brotherhood who shared the ideological and doctrinal affiliation of El-Zakzaky, expressed their loyalty to Muhammad Turi and gradually helped him reorganize the cadres of the new movement. Thanks to the new organizational structures and to the IMN's open embrace of Shiism, the *ithnā 'ashariyya* creed started to spread to different parts of Kano. It is important to note that the strongholds of the Shia in Kano are the newly-developed areas that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s outside the walled city as a result of the population explosion coupled with rapid process of urbanization in the state. These areas include neighborhoods such as Kurna, Rijiyar Lemo and Rimin Kebe. The group has only limited membership in the ancient walled city of Kano,³⁴ mainly because of the long tradition of Sunni Islam dominating there and to the control that the Sufi orders exercise on the territory.

Sunnism in Kano is represented in the form of the Sufi orders (Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya), whose activities permeate and dominate the life of the inhabitants of the walled city, but also by the more recent Wahhabi-oriented group Izala, which has also struggled to establish itself in the ancient section of the city due to the influence of the Sufis; nonetheless, the latter group has been able to gain a much stronger impact than the Shiites inside the walled city. It is very difficult, however, to make a credible estimate of the presence of Shiites in the walled city,

34 The term walled city refers to the most ancient settled area of Kano, whose first nucleus is around Dala Hill. The city used to be surrounded by fortified walls with several gates (most of which can still be seen today) and is a home to Sunni Islam. For more on the earliest settlements in Kano, see Michael Garfield Smith, *Government in Kano 1350-1950* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1997); Muhammad Adamu Fika, *The Kano Civil War and British Over-Rule* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press).

as many choose to hide their identity for fear of discrimination and ostracism.

When Turi came to Kano, he first settled at Bachirawa Quarters, which perhaps explains the reason why the place and its neighbourhoods like Kurna and Mil-Tara (9th mile) have the largest number of Shiite followers in Metropolitan Kano. In his effort for Shiism to gain more ground within the walled-city, Malam Turi built an edifice at Goron Dutse Quarters, an area which is one of the oldest and the earliest human settlements in the whole of Kano. This place is strategic and offered a perfect location to introduce Shia ideas in the city of Kano through the educational sessions conducted by the IMN leader especially on Sundays. The followers of the group visit the residence regularly, and their gatherings have impacted the residents of the area and its neighbourhoods. Those who resented the sect might have been disarmed by constantly seeing them moving in large masses. An important weapon which the leader of the movement has used to gain more followers at Goron Dutse and other areas is his emphasis on *mu'āmalāt* (proper social conduct). Having realized that his neighbours were mainly Sunnis and had developed animosity towards his group, he tried to foster good relationships between them and his followers. In an interview with the authors, Turi said that because of the good relationships that all the women who were gathering at his residence had with the neighbourhood, whenever a ceremony or educational session takes place in his centre, they are allowed to freely come and go from the houses of his neighbours to ease themselves and perform ablutions.³⁵ This does not mean, however, that relationships are cordial to all his neighbours. There are many, in fact, who purposely avoid any interaction so as to preserve their children from the influence of the movement.

The Islamic Movement in Nigeria has a well-organized structure and a clear strategy for recruiting new members in Kano. The movement currently has eight *halaqāt* (centres) in different parts of the Kano metropolis. Each *halaqa* has a leader who is responsible for overseeing the

35 Interview with Muhammad Turi, 4 January 2014.

activities of the group in the assigned area. These *ḥalaqāt* are usually named after the Shia Imams (leaders) and various personalities who are sacred to Shiism. The first *ḥalaqa* dedicated to the Prophet, is *Rasūl al-akram*, located in Kurna quarters. The leader of this *ḥalaqa* is Malam Imamu Kurna and his jurisdiction covers the areas of Bachirawa, Dawanau and surrounding neighborhoods. The second *ḥalaqa*, dedicated to ‘Alī, is *Amīr al-mu’minīn*, located in Na’ibawa quarters. It is led by Malam Yusuf Abdullahi and covers ‘Yan Lemo, Unguwa Uku, Gidan Zoo and Darmanawa. The third is *Al-Zahrā’*, dedicated to Fāṭima (the Prophet’s daughter and the wife of ‘Alī). Led by Abdul-Qadir Hassan, it is located in Gwammaja Quarters and covers Kofar Ruwa and neighbouring areas. The fourth, dedicated to the first son of ‘Alī and Fāṭima, is *Imām Ḥasan al-Mujtabā*. Located in Sabon Titi road, it is led by Malam Bashir Ibrahim and oversees areas like Mandawari, Goron Dutse, Rijiyar Zaki, Kabuga and Tudun Yola. The fifth, dedicated to the second son of ‘Alī and Fāṭima, is *Imām Ḥusayn*. Located in Tudun Wada Quarters, it is led by Malam Bashir Sani who is in charge of Brigade, Kwana Huḍu, Rimi Kebe, etc. The sixth, dedicated to Ḥusayn’s son who survived the Karbala martyrdom, is *‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn*. Located in Fagge Quarters, it is led by Malam Sani Abdul-Rahim and is in charge of Kōki, Malafa, Sabon Gari and Kofar Mata. The seventh, dedicated to the son of ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, is *Imām Bāqir*. Located in Kawo quarters, it is led by Malam Ibrahim Kawo and its jurisdiction covers Kawo, Giginyu, Hotoro, Tarauni, ‘Yankaba and Badawa. Finally, the eighth *ḥalaqa*, dedicated to the son of Imām al-Bāqir, is named *Imām Ja’far al-Ṣādiq*. Located in the Kofar Waika Quarters, it is led by Malam Ali Modibbo and its activities cover Kofar Dawanau, ‘Dan Dinshe, Unguwar Dawanau and neighbouring areas. The names and numbering reflect the influence and popularity of the various *ḥalaqāt*. The Kurna quarters’ *ḥalaqa*, named after the Prophet, is the most important and the one which has the largest followership in Kano, and so on in descending order.

The IMN *ḥalaqāt* are also in control of Islamic schools, known as *Fudiyya*, where the children of Shiites are trained. The name *Fudiyya* is a reference to Usman ‘Dan Fodio. Although the latter was a Sunni and a scholar of the Qadiriyya Sufi order, naming its schools after a local Islamic hero allows

the movement to establish an ideal symbolic link with the local Islamic history. The name Fudiyya allows the IMN to link its schools to the legacy of Usman 'Dan Fodio, while at the same time avoiding association with the name of the third caliph 'Uthmān, which would result from the more obvious use of the term *Usmaniyya*. The Fudiyya schools serve as centres of indoctrination, where students are taught the basic philosophy of Shiism. The schools are also meant to keep children away from Sunni schools, which are dominant in Kano.

Shiites, Salafis and Sufis in Kano: Antagonism and Marriage of Convenience

The emergence of Shiism in the Sunni-dominated community of would naturally create a new configuration of the religious space. The relationship between Shia and Sunni groups in Kano is twofold. On one side, there is the Izala/Salafiyya and on the other side, there are the Sufi groups like Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya. In the 1990s, all Sunni groups reacted to the first appearance of Shiism on the public space of Kano, to which they were unprepared. Their reactions, however, were different in tones. The reaction of Izala revolves around three fundamental points. First, the theological position of Izala is that Shiism is not part of Islam, as clearly articulated by the public lectures delivered by its '*ulamā*'. According to Shaykh Auwal Adam Albani (d. 2014), who was one of the most outspoken Salafi scholars in northern Nigeria, Shiites are not Muslims.³⁶ This position resulted in verbal attacks and counter-attacks between Salafis and Shiites, often in the form of public debates circulating in audio and video recordings.³⁷

The second central point that explains the reaction of Izala to Shiism is that both movements emerged in Nigeria in the twentieth century as

36 Audio clip of Shaykh Auwal Adam Albani's (n.d.) public lecture entitled *Munafurchi dodo ne*.

37 One famous debate occurred between two Shia scholars (Auwal Tal'udi and Saleh Sani Zaria) and two Izala scholars (Abba Kofiki and Ja'far Mahmoud Adam). The central theme of the debate was on the Shia position on the leadership of the early four caliphs of Islam: Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī. The two Shia scholars defended the view that the first three caliphs "usurped" the leadership of their twelve imams.

dynamic movements that attracted an activist-oriented public mainly composed of urban youth. Thus, the two groups competed for the same space and public, and this explains why the response of Izala to the spread of Shiism was harsh.

Thirdly, the antagonism between Izala and Shiism has an international dimension, as Shiites are directly or indirectly supported by Iran, while most of the Nigerian *'ulamā'* who have assumed leading positions in Izala and its fellow Salafi organizations have either studied in higher institutions of learning in Saudi Arabia, or rely on religious verdicts emanating from the scholars of the Gulf countries. Starting from the Iranian revolution of 1979, Saudi Arabia and Iran have been engaged in a rivalry to claim leadership of the Muslim world. Saudi Arabia has tried to spread Sunnism in its Salafi form, while Iran has attempted to promote Shiism and its political message in Muslim countries, including Sunni-dominated ones. As Vali Nasr puts it,

[...] Sunni ulama confronted the Khomeini challenge head-on, branding his vitriol against the House of Saud as a species of *fitna* (sedition) wielded against the Muslim community. The Saudi rulers, conversely, were routinely painted as Sunnism's greatest defenders and the symbols of its resistance to Shia attempts at "usurpation." [...] Saudi Arabia continued to pursue its strategy of containing Shiism by working closely with Wahhabi ulama to build a network of seminaries, mosques, educational institutions, preachers, activists, writers, journalists, and academics that would articulate and emphasize Sunni identity, push it in the direction of militant Wahhabism, drive all possible wedges between Sunnism and Shiism, and eliminate Iran's ideological influence.³⁸

Izala's struggle to contain the spread of Shiism takes different forms. The symbolic policy of place-naming, for instance, is part of this strategy.

38 Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflict within Islam will Shape the Future* (New York-London: W. W. Norton & Company), p. 157.

Over the last few years, in fact, Izala has stressed the habit of naming their mosques and schools after the early three caliphs of Islam, in order to express their allegiance to them and stress their difference from Shiite beliefs. Examples are the ‘Uthmān bin Affān mosque at Kofar Gadon Kaya; the ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb mosque at Zaria road; and the *masjid al-Ṣaḥābā* at Kundila Housing Estate.

The rift between Izala and Shiism has also contributed to create new dynamics of intra-faith relationships in Kano. Due to the challenge traditionally posed by Izala to Sufi doctrines, most Sufi leaders have been more passive and less confrontational in their engagement with Shiites. The latter, on their turn, have tried to use this opportunity to move closer to the Sufi orders and to arrange a sort of “marriage of convenience” between them and some of the Sufi leaders. This relationship has been made easier to the presence of an affinity between certain rituals and doctrines held by both parties. Both Shiites and Sufis, in fact, celebrate the birthday (*mawlid*) of the Prophet during the Muslim month of Rabī‘ al-Awwal. Just as the Shiites celebrate the birthdays of their imams, the Sufis too celebrate the birthdays of their founding saints.³⁹ The Izala ‘*ulamā*’, however, are very critical of these celebrations, which they consider as unwarranted *bida*’ (innovations).

The national leadership of Shiism under el-Zakzaky has been actively trying to foster a peaceful relationship with the Sufi leaders. For example, in 1995 el-Zakzaky paid a courtesy visit to the venerated Qadiri leader Shaykh Nasiru Kabara (d. 1996). Before his recent death, the leader of IMN in Kano, Muhammad Mahmoud Turi, has been regularly paying the same yearly visit to the successor of Nasiru Kabara, his son Shaykh Qaribullah.⁴⁰ Various Qadiri ‘*ulamā*’, especially Shaykh Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara and Musa al-Qasiyuni Nasiru Kabara, attend events organized by Shiites on invitation, and deliver lectures to a Shiite public. In spite of the fact that both the Izala and the Sufi groups are Sunni, some Qadiri

39 In Kano, the Shiites hold public celebrations for the birthday of Ḥusayn; the Qadiriyya celebrate the birthday of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī; the Tijaniyya celebrate the birthdays of Aḥmad al-Tijānī and of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niāsse.

40 Interview with Muhammad Mahmoud Turi, 4 January 2014.

and Tijani *'ulamā'* prefer to relate with the Shiites than with the Salafis. It is important to note, however, that this cannot be applied to all Sufis in Kano, for there are a number of Sufi *'ulamā'* who neither relate with the Salafis, nor with Shiism. They keep both groups at arm's length as a way of expressing their discomfort with the ideas and approaches of the two.

The Shiites often participate in the activities of Sufi orders in Kano, and its leadership is always looking for an avenue to foster a closer relationship with them. The Shiites have everything to gain from this relationship, because it gives them recognition and an opportunity to peddle their ideology. The Shiites have also used this window to attract some followers from Sufi groups. In a nutshell, the Shiites' relations with the Sufis serve as a springboard for disseminating their influence in Kano and presenting themselves as an acceptable player in the Islamic arena.

An anonymous informant is of the opinion that the practice of *mut'a* (temporary marriage) has been a powerful conversion weapon for Shia in Kano and other places. According to this informant, many youths have been attracted by Shiism because it allows them to engage in temporary marriage, which all Sunni branches declared as prohibited, thereby bypassing the costly traditions associated with the performance of a normal wedding in Kano.⁴¹ The colorful display and use of modern musical instruments during *mawlid* and other celebrations like *'Āshūrā'* also contribute to the appeal of Shiism. Whenever they celebrate *'Āshūrā'* day in the month of Muḥarram, to commemorate the killing of Ḥusayn at the hands of the army of Yazīd in Karbala, the Shiite used to parade and block many roads in Kano city. The public display of numeric strength exhibited during the *'Āshūrā'* commemoration, contributes to entrench the public presence of Shiism in Kano and to gain new followers.

The Ahlul Bait Institute, Muhammad Nur Dass and the Fragmentation of Shia in Kano

Apart from the IMN, there is a second group of Shiites in Kano, which has grown around the Ahlul Bait Institute, a centre that was initially

41 Interview with a Kano Sunni scholar who prefers to remain anonymous.

promoted by Iranian nationals. This group is entirely independent of the IMN and purposely tries to avoid local Nigerian politics, focusing on Shia theology and religious philosophy. The Ahlul Bait institute, however, has also been able to gain Nigerian converts, challenging the monopoly of the IMN over Shia identity and politics in Kano. Unlike the IMN, the Shiites affiliated through the Ahlul Bait Institute are not moved by a strong political commitment. This is probably due to the fact that the founders of the Ahlul Bait were Iranian immigrants and functionaries, who knew very well that any political involvement in Nigeria could be viewed with suspicion by their host country. As part of a strategy of outreach and conversion, however, the Ahlul Bait Institute established a school of its own as early as 1991. This school is located at Court Road in Kano, and had an Iranian, Mansur Liqa'i, as the pioneering director.⁴² When the school started to operate, several Sunni scholars of Kano, especially those of Salafi leaning such as Aminuddeen Abubakar and Abba Adam Kofi, became very critical of its mission and allegedly tried to use their connections with top government officials to have the school banned.⁴³

In 1997, however, the school succeeded in being registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) in Abuja. Another Iranian national, Najaf Ali Mirza'e, was registered as the new director. After the registration, the school opened a second branch at Kofar Dan Agundi quarters, Kano. The school was later relocated to Sokoto Road, Kano, due to the many challenges it faced from the Sunni scholars. After a while, the school relocated once again to its present location at Zaria road, where it has been operating since. In 2004, the school has applied

42 Saleh Muhammed Sani Zaria (aged 47), interview with authors, 26 June 2013 (Danbare quarters, Gwarzo Road, Kano).

43 Aminuddeen Abubakar has written several pamphlets in Hausa to sensitize the Sunni public about the risk of infiltration of Shiism in Nigeria, and to discourage people from embracing it because of what he calls its "weird and abusive" approach to some of the *Ṣaḥābā* (companions) of the Prophet, especially the first three caliphs. In these publications, Abubakar has voiced the opinion that Shiites have no respect for the wives of the Prophet. In addition to that, he examined their beliefs and practices such as *mut'a* (temporary marriage) and *taqiyya* (dissimulation).

for registration with the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies of the Ministry of Education, Kano. The registration was allegedly denied by some staff of the ministry. According to Isa Makama, who is currently the Secretary General of Darul Thaqaalayn Organization, the proprietors to were advised to change the school's name because the name *Ahlul Bait* was indicating they were Shiites. After some consultation, they decided to change the name to *Darul Thaqaalayn* organization, and the school was eventually registered.

The school has a well-organized structure. The overall leader of the school is called *musharrif* (supervisor or director).⁴⁴ He has an assistant *musharrif*⁴⁵ who helps overseeing the various teachers working for the school, and a librarian who manages the library of the school. It is important to note that all those who served as directors were Iranians, and were sent from Iran to administer the school, while all those who served as assistant directors were Nigerians. In most cases, the Iranians that ran the organization had problems with their assistants due to different approaches to the issues of administration. The school has a Board of Trustees which was originally made of ten members: Najaf Ali Mirza'ee, Barrister Bello Ibrahim, late Dr. Suleiman Kumo, Ghali Umar Na'abba, Halliru Lawan, Engineer Muhammad Yakasai, Dr. Lawi Abubakar Atiku, Sidi Muhammad Maula Ali (president of *Shurafa* Social Welfare Council of Nigeria), Ali Sidi Fadlallah and late Barrister M.T. Modibo. Najaf Ali

44 The following is the roll call of the directors of the school, Mansur Liqa'ee, Mahmoud Musavi, Najaf Ali Mirza'ee, Mustapha Ranjibar, Ali Imam Zadeh, Reza Badi'ee, Mahdi Zia'ee, Dr Ali Fallah. The pioneer director was Mansur Liqa'ee and the current director is Dr Ali Fallah.

45 The following is the list of assistant directors: Idris Ali, Nur Muhammad Dass, Muhammad Bashir Lawan, Saleh Muhammad Sani Zaria, Hafiz Muhammad Sa'id, Halliru Lawan. The first assistant director was Idris Ali who was an Igbirra man from Okene, Kogi state. Shortly after his appointment, he was relieved of his responsibility because of some problems that occurred between him and the school authorities. He was replaced with Nur Dass, but was later re-appointed when Saleh Zaria vacated the position. Once again, however, Idris Ali did not stay long, as he had some problems with the Shia community of *Darul Thaqaalayn* and was alleged by some to have recanted Shiism. His opponents accused him of harbouring the beliefs of *Kala-Kato* (the common Hausa nickname for the group elsewhere in the Muslims world as al-Qur'āniyyūn) and rejecting all Islamic books except the Quran as the only source of Sharia and belief.

Mirza'e is the chairman of the board while Barrister Bello is the secretary of the board. The other eight people are members of the board.⁴⁶

The members of the board of trustees came from different Islamic groups and most of them are not adherents of Shiism. They were appointed based on their experience, on their social or political influence, or on the consideration they hold as Islamic scholars. A number of them are academics and professionals who could use their positions and to provide the school with protection, perhaps to minimize the challenges that the school was going to face from the dominant Sunni community. Some are politicians, like the former speaker of the House of Representatives, Ghali Umar Na'Abba, and the late Dr. Suleiman Kumo, another influential figure in Nigerian politics. The chairman of the board, Najf Ali Mirza'e, is an Iranian Shiite and was appointed as the head in his position as the founder and one-time director of the school. Ali Sadiq Fadlallah is a Lebanese businessman who has been living in Kano for a number of years. Comparing to other Lebanese residents of Kano, he mingles more with Nigerians and knows a lot about the dynamics of the country. Sidi Muhammad Maula Ali is not a Shiite, but is a descendant of the Prophet who has been active in the promotion of the interests of the community of *shurafa'* (descendants of the Prophet) in Kano. As respect and love for the descendants of the Prophet is a cornerstone of Shia beliefs, a link with the Sunni (and generally Sufi-oriented) community of local *shurafa'* was clearly useful for the school and the organization. Dr Lawi Abubakar Atiku is a well-known scholar of the Tijaniyya and the son of Shaykh Abubakar Atiku of Sanka ward (d. 1974).

Darul Thaqaalayn organization has given employment as teachers to many of the Nigerians who had travelled to Iran in the 1980s, studying in the international theological centre of Qom. In such a way, the organization has successfully established a link to Iran and to the central Shia religious authorities, independently from Ibrahim El-Zakzaky and his network. Some of these Nigerians include Muhammad Nur Dass, a native of Dass local government in Bauchi state, who spent

46 Interview with Isa Usman Makama on 23/07/2014 at Darul Thaqaalayn organization, Zaria Road, Kano.

sixteen years studying in Qom; Bashir Lawan, who has spent ten years in Iran; Saleh Muhammad Sani, a native of Zaria city who has studied for five years at the Ahlul Bait Institute in Ghana and for another five years in Iran; Isa Makama, a native of Ningi local government, Bauchi state; finally, Aliyu Sambo. Muhammad Nur Dass is considered as the most learned of all. For some time, Dass also headed the school of *Darul Thaqalayn*, before encountering some difficulties with the Iranians managers. Thereafter, Dass decided to join forces with Saleh Zaria and Bashir Lawan to establish an independent organization, which he named Rasulul A'zam Foundation (RAAF), whose aim is to educate, promote and spread the theology of Shiism. Registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission in 2003, the RAAF has also opened a school of its own, named *Baqirul Ulum* Theological Centre, in Dambare, Kano. By virtue of his vast knowledge and the many *ijāzāt* (written permissions to teach and answer jurisprudential questions) collected from top Shia scholars (Ayatollahs) during his many years of study in Iran, Nur Dass has been enjoying the respect of the Shia community and has been acting as the leader of RAAF. The *ijāzāt* of Nur Dass are a source of pride to the followers of the RAAF, who often challenge the members of IMN arguing that their leader, El-Zakzaky, does not hold any written permission from an Ayatollah and therefore, he is just running a “political Shia,” without having the credentials required to be considered a scholar. The members of RAAF also accuse El-Zakzaky of lacking in-depth knowledge of religious doctrine, due to his failure to study in any of the recognized Shia institutes.⁴⁷ While the RAAF recognizes a variety of established *marja'*-s (the highest authorities in the Shia clergy), ranging from some who holds a conciliatory stand vis-à-vis the Sunnis, like the one of Ayatollah Fadlallah (d. 2010), to some who are known to be very confrontational in their anti-Sunni rhetoric, like the one of Ayatollah Sadiq Husayni al-Shirazi, they accuse the IMN of unduly conferring El-Zakzaky with the religious authority of a *marja'*.⁴⁸

47 Saleh Muhammed Sani Zaria, interview with authors, 26 June 2013, Danbare Quarters, Gwarzo Road, Kano.

48 Saleh Muhammed Sani Zaria, interview with authors, 12 September 2017.

In response to these challenges, the members of IMN call RAAF a “commercial Shia” which has rebelled against the leadership of El-Zakzaky for parochial interest and to obtain independent funding from Iran.⁴⁹

The December 2015 Massacre, the Death of Muhammad Turi and the Future of the IMN

The constant and perpetual clashes between the IMN and the Nigerian security forces came to a head in 2014 and 2015. The later year was the bloodiest in the history of the movement. On 25 July 2014, at the end of the Quds Day procession organized annually by the IMN to identify with the Palestinian struggle, the Nigerian army claimed that their convoy was held by the members of the movement. The attempt by the army to pass through the crowd resulted in clashes between the two sides the result of which led to the killing of 35 members of the IMN, according to the leadership of the movement.⁵⁰

The deadliest clash ever occurred in the following year. On 12 December 2015, the convoy of the Nigerian Chief of Army Staff was denied access to the PZ-Samaru Road due to the road blockage by the IMN members who started gathering to participate in the change of flag ceremony.⁵¹ The army had to use force to secure access to the road.⁵² The army then invaded

49 Dauda Nalado Dangora (Bayero University Kano), interview with authors, 11 February 2013.

50 See Sani Yakubu Adam, “Shia Processions and the Competition for Religious Public Space in Northern Nigeria 1980-2015.” A paper presented by Kabiru Haruna Isa at the 2nd International Conference on Shi’i Studies organized by the Islamic College, London, 7 to 8 May 2016.

51 In every first month of the Islamic Calendar, the Shiites in Nigeria under Zakzaky hoist a black flag symbolizing the beginning of mourning over the killing of Imam Husain. Zakzaky obtained the flag from the tomb of Husain in Iraq. Then in Rabi’ul Auwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar and the month when Prophet Muhammad was born, the black flag was replaced with a green one symbolizing the celebration of the Prophet’s birthday. The 12 December 2015 coincided with the last day of second month of Islamic calendar. Many Shiites had started gathering to participate in the change of flag ceremony when the clash with the army occurred.

52 A Video was circulated online after this incident which showed some senior military officers, including the spokesperson of the Army, trying to persuade the members of the IMN to allow the convoy of the Chief of Army Staff access to the road. The IMN members were chanting Allah is great! (*Allahu Akbar*); Ya Mahdi (Oh, Mahdi!). From the video one would observe that the IMN was

the house of the IMN leader, Shaykh Ibrahim El-Zakzaky perhaps with the intention of arresting him which was resisted by his followers. This led to the massacre of many Shiites. El-Zakzaky's house as well as the Husainiyya and Fudiyya Islamic Centres belonging to the IMN were demolished by the army; Zakzaky and his wife who sustained bullet injuries were arrested. There were conflicting figures of the casualties from this incidence. According to Major General Adeniyi Oyebade, an officer in charge of the 1 Mechanized Army Division Kaduna; he deployed more troops in the three sites mentioned above after receiving information that the IMN members were mobilizing there. He gave the instruction that the sites should be secured and the leader of the movement "be brought into custody." His forces "came under attack, and the resulting confrontation led to casualties on both sides."⁵³

According to a report by Amnesty International, more than 350 Shiites were killed in the clash between the Nigerian army and members of the IMN between 12 and 14 December, 2015:

Between 12 and 14 December 2015, soldiers killed more than 350 protesters and supporters of IMN at two sites in Zaria, Kaduna state. Hundreds of IMN members were arrested and continued to be held in detention facilities in Kaduna, Bauchi, Plateau and Kano states. On 11 April, the Kaduna state authorities admitted to a Judicial Commission of Inquiry that they had secretly buried 347 bodies in a mass grave two days after the December 2015 massacre.⁵⁴

suspicious of the army's motive of passing through the road while the army was trying to convince them that it was just by coincidence that they were passing through the road. At the last segment of the video, corpses could be seen on ground; how the army cleared the road was not recorded.

- 53 See Premium Times, "Zaria Massacre: Human Right Watch Says Over 300 Killed, Buried by Soldiers," Press Release, 23rd December, 2015. Retrieved September 30, 2017, from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/195620-zaria-massacre-human-rights-watch-says-over-300-killed-buried-by-soldiers.html>
- 54 Amnesty international, *The Amnesty International Report 2016/2017: The State of the World's Human Right* (London: Amnesty International Ltd, 2017) 280

The above clash affected the activities of the IMN more than ever for many reasons, including the fact that the major leaders of the movement were either killed or arrested. The leader of the movement in Kano, Shaykh Muhammad Turi was among the IMN members that were killed during this incident. El-Zakzaky himself was rendered incapacitated as he sustained bullet injuries with speculation that he lost one of his eyes. All attempt by the IMN members to secure his release proved abortive. This incident had attracted criticism of the Nigerian government by Human Right Activists all over the world. The future of the IMN, for now, is not promising as the movement has lost its most active and charismatic leaders and strategists. The outcome of this clash also exposed the gory picture of the politics of the intra-faith relations in Nigeria. Despite the brutal massacre of the Shiites, video clips were circulated in the social media showing how Muslims, apparently with Sunni ideology, celebrated the killings of the Shiites. This position is also reflected in the social media debates that followed the incident. For Kano in particular, the IMN has lost one of its greatest leaders. Turi was charismatic and his very nature affability not only attracted many people from the Sunni population to join the IMN but also provided ground for cordial relationship between the IMN and other Islamic groups in Kano. Turi always led his followers in major processions and ensured the diffusion of the movement throughout Kano. His death in this incident would, no doubt, have far reaching consequences on the IMN in Kano in particular and Nigeria at large.

Conclusion

From the point of view of religious doctrine, all the factions of Shia in Kano are followers of the *ithnā ‘ashariyya* (twelvers) branch. The basic difference between the Shia groups present in Kano emanates from their different goals and missions, from their political approach, or for competition for leadership. The RAAF does not support the popular processions (*muḥāharāt*) which have become the hallmark of the IMN, and which often turn into political demonstrations. According to the RAAF Secretary General, the main objective of RAAF is to spread the Shia doctrines through learning and teaching, a function which is carried out

by Baqirul Ulum Theological Centre. Unlike the IMN, the RAAF recognizes the supremacy of the Nigerian government and abides by the laws of the state. In contrast, El-Zakzaky's IMN is more ambiguous in its stand about the authority of the government over its members, and often shuns any ruling that can tamper with their programmes such as weekly events, processions and other celebrations. It must be also stressed, however, that El-Zakzaky had gradually turned more pragmatic over the years, so much so that the November 2015 repression and arrest are surprising, as they have come during a phase of pragmatic political quietism of IMN.

From one side, the first thirty years of presence of Shiism in Kano can be considered as a relative success-story. The group, in fact, has been able to exploit the competition between the Sufi orders and Izala so as to cut for itself a space in a potentially hostile environment like Kano, traditionally known as a city of ancient and deep Sunni religious culture. On the other side, however, Shiism in Kano, which originally started as a genuine movement of political protest among university students, has also been entangled in a process of internal fragmentation that has dramatically decreased its relevance as a political force in the north.

Why such recurrent fragmentation experienced by all Islamic groups in Kano? Is such a fragmentation the reflection of the complexity of the (political, social and economic) territory of Kano? Is it a reflection of the various interests that different members of the groups represent? What role has international politics played in fragmenting these groups? Probably, there is no single answer to the above questions. It seems that in each case, there were specific forces at play that contributed to create a dynamic of fragmentation.

Differences over views related to specific practices have often contributed to create divisions inside various groups. Kano has always been known in Nigeria as the centre of legal scholarship, and the scholars there tend to take differences in legal interpretation very seriously. For instance, the Qadiris were divided over the legitimacy of the *mawkibi* (procession on the occasion of the birthdays of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī), with some arguing that it led to an improper mixing of males and females. The Tijanis divided between *Madabawa* and *Salgawa* over

the legitimacy of certain funerary practices. The Izala too, had their own internal divisions, and in the 1990s, in the Izala mosques of Kano two groups were praying separately in the same mosques: the so-called Izala-Jos, who recognized the old leadership of Ismaila Idris in Jos, and the Izala-Kaduna, who were aligned to a new leadership based in Kaduna. More recently, the emergence of the Jihadi-Salafi organization of Boko Haram, which has been harshly opposed by the mainstream Salafis of Izala, has made the arena of Nigerian Salafism even more complex. The case of Salafism is quite unique, because its internal splits were the culmination of many factors, ranging from different theological verdicts emanating from the Gulf countries, to local leadership struggle to global Saudi politics (it is not impossible that Saudi donors used a divide and rule tactic to polarize the organization in order have a stronger control over it).

In the case of the Shia, changing Iranian politics or different religious verdicts emanating from different religious leaders (*marja'-s*) in Iran, might also have contributed to the divisions described in this paper. Initially, Iran supported El-Zakzaky and promoted his movement on account of his large following and popularity. Later, however, things became more complex and new Shiite actors emerged. Nigerian students who studied in Iran established their own contacts in the country, and when they returned to Nigeria, they formed their independent Shia groups. All the various *marja'-s* of Shia theology are represented in Qom, and some of them have very different attitudes towards politics. The old school of Ayatollah Khomeini, for instance, which did not support Khomeini's concept of *velayat e-faqih* (guardianship of the religious jurist) and the Iranian revolution, is still well represented there and maintains a more detached attitude towards politics. The emergence of a new Shia leadership independent from El-Zakzaky could be explained in either of two ways. The first explanation would be that there has been a change in Iranian approach from revolutionary idealism to pragmatism, leading the government to support a less politically active branch of Shiism and to avoid enmeshing into Nigerian politics. The second would be that the new generation of Nigerian students who studied in Iran got in touch

with scholars of the less politically inclined branches of Iranian Shiism, and once they returned back to Nigeria, they promoted a form of activism that tends to de-emphasise revolution and the idea of the Islamic Republic, focusing on theology and philosophy. It is not also impossible that the explanation lies in a combination of the two above factors. Only further research could shed light on this.