

THE SPREAD OF SHIA AND ITS ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The aftermath of the Iranian revolution and emergence of Shia Immamiya as the religion of government in Iran in 1979. The Razavi charitable Endowment under the Iran's supreme religious leader has been spending a lot of money, especially in Africa to indoctrinate and convert Muslims to Shia. The paper traced the origin of Shia in Nigeria. Identified the factors that facilitated the spread of Shia in Nigeria. A desk review methodology was adopted. The study found out that the Iranian government has devoted a lot of funds to Africa and under the pretext of aid in the area of building Mosques, establishing schools and giving the scholarship to study in Iran. It has been observed that ignorance of Shia among most Islamic scholars, teachers, and preachers has contributed its spread until when Nigerians started studying in Universities in Saudi Arabia, the real identity of Shia is known.

Abstrak

Buntut dari revolusi Iran dan kemunculan Syiah Immamiya sebagai agama pemerintah di Iran pada tahun 1979. Sumbangan amal Razavi di bawah pimpinan agamawan Iran telah menghabiskan banyak uang, terutama di Afrika untuk mengindoktrinasi dan mengubah Muslim menjadi Syiah. Makalah ini menelusuri asal-usul Syiah di Nigeria. Mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang memfasilitasi penyebaran Syiah di Nigeria. Metodologi desk review diadopsi. Studi ini menemukan bahwa pemerintah Iran telah mencurahkan banyak dana untuk Afrika dan dengan dalih bantuan di bidang pembangunan masjid, mendirikan sekolah dan memberikan beasiswa untuk belajar di Iran. Telah diamati bahwa ketidaktahuan Syiah di antara kebanyakan cendekiawan Islam, guru, dan pengkhotbah telah berkontribusi

penyebarannya sampai ketika Nigeria mulai belajar di Universitas di Arab Saudi, identitas asli Syiah diketahui.

Keywords: activities of Shia; effects on Islam; factors that facilitated its spread; followers of Shia in Nigeria; leadership of Shia in Nigeria; origin of Shia in Nigeria.

Introduction

Prior to the 1979 Iranian revolution, there was virtually no Nigerian, follower or leader claimed to the believer or follower Shia in Nigeria. Shi'a or Shi'ism is one of the sects separated from Islam after the demised of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) during the crises that occurred in the aftermath of the assassination of Caliph Uthman Ibn Affan. Most writers that have deep knowledge of Shi'a categorise Shi'ism main sectarian branches of Islam (the other is Sunni Islam) and reflect significant doctrinal, cultural, and political differences.

Nigeria has a small but growing Shi'a population of roughly 4 million since the early 1980s t date. In addition to a significant Lebanese expatriate community that has been present since the 19th century, there are Isma'ili Shi'is in Nigeria and, increasingly, individuals who pursue a more militant strands of Shi'ism under the leadership of Ibrahim al-Zakzaky (b. 1953) and the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN), which has been active since the 1980s. Zakzaky participated in northern Nigerian protest movements in the 1970s during his time as an Economics student at Ahmadu Bello University, from which he was expelled for his anti-government political activities in 1979.

The activities of Shia became suspicious when it started confronting armed personnel during their processions and gathering without authority's approval. Minchakpu (2016) reported that the outbreak of constant conflicts between the Shi'ite Islamic sect under the auspices of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), led by its leader, Sheik Ibrahim Yakubu El-Zakzaky, against the Nigerian military and the state, has brought to the fore, the need to take a microscopic look at the activities of a militant Islamic sect that is beginning

to create fears of an impending implosion in Nigeria's polity if efforts are not made to urgently and cautiously handle the crisis.

How Shia Came to Nigeria

At birth, originally a Sunni, Ibrahim Yaqub El-Zakzaky was inspired by the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and called for a similar overthrow of the Nigerian government and complete institution of Islamic law. He identified himself as a Shi'a Muslim in one of his many popular cassette sermons that circulated around northern Nigeria in the 1980s and 1990s. He was imprisoned numerous times throughout this period for his seditious speech and calls to revolution. The IMN was responsible for violence in Katsina in the 1990s, encouraged by Zakzaky, and has recently been implicated in running militant training camps that have been linked to Lebanon's Hezbollah and to Iran. Zakzaky remains an outspoken critic of northern Nigeria's political elite and continues to push for a more thorough adoption of Islamic legal principles and systems.

Shi'a Ja'afariya entered Nigeria after the Iranian revolution when the Ismaic inspired young Muslims students under the auspices of the Muslim Student Society of Nigeria (MSSN) went to Tehran to rejoice with the Iranian over their victory over the old regime of Sha, erroneously thinking the new government under the Supreme leadership of Imam Khomeini was an Islamic regime. The response to the visit of the MSSN delegation to Iran, the Iranian delegation sent a delegation to Nigerian in appreciation of the visit. It was during the visit that the Nigerian delegation asked the MSSN officials the assistance they want from the Iranian government at that time. Mal. Aliyu Tukur-Tukur was the spokesperson of the MSSN, where sought their assistant to print the books written by the late Islamic scholar and Jihadist Sheikh Usmanu Ibn Fodiyo. The Iranian delegation refused the demands of the MSSN and forwarded some requests in turn, where they demanded the MSSN to spread Shi'a in Nigeria. The MSSN at the time declined the requests. Because they told the Iranian

delegation that they are practising their religion based on the teachings of Usmanu Ibn Fodiyo and they want to revive Islam the way he did.

Furthermore, reliable anecdotal accounts revealed the acclaimed Shia leader in Nigeria Ibrahim Yaqub El-Zakzaky narrated that, unknown to the MSSN officials that refused the demands of the Iranian delegation, El-Zakzaky secretly went entered an agreement with the Iranian government to spread Shia in Nigeria. He started his activities covertly until in the early 1980s during the Islamic Vocational Course (IVC) in Basaawa held at Government College Basaawa, an outskirt of Zaria, Kaduna State in the 1980s when it became apparent he was practising Shia. Because on his return from Iran in 1981, he refused to fold his hands during prayer, citing that henceforth would strictly restrict himself to the Maliki School of Thought which it is not compulsory to fold hand during prayers.

Similarly, Falola (1990) opined that Nigeria has a small but growing Shi'a population of roughly 4 million since the early 1980s to 1990. In addition to a significant Lebanese expatriate community that has been present since the 19th century, there are Isma'ili Shi'is in Nigeria and, increasingly, individuals who pursue a more militant strands of Shi'ism under the leadership of Ibrahim al-Zakzaky (born 1953) and the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN), which has been active since the 1980s. Zakzaky participated in northern Nigerian protest movements in the 1970s during his time as an Economics student at Ahmadu Bello University, from which he was expelled for his anti-government political activities in 1979. However, a lot of it changes took place the study conducted by Falola in 1990 in terms of population, the scope of their activities and the system of government under operation in Nigeria.

Leadership of Shi'a in Nigeria

All religious organization is compelled by the law to register with Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), an agency that register companies and all non-governmental organizations in Nigeria. In compliance with the law, all Islamic religious organizations duly registered

with the government except Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN) established by Ibrahim Yaqub El-Zakzaky. That is why IMN has no organized or structured leadership, there is no organizational chart top-bottom. What El-Zakzaky did is, he appoints his representative (Wakilin Zakzaky) not substantive leaders in all places where they have a sizeable number of followers. This helps El-Zakzaky to amass a lot of power and command huge influence on his members due to the strict centralization of authority.

Therefore, in almost 38 years of existence in Nigeria, Ibrahim Yaqub El-Zakzaky is the one handling and controlling the affairs of Shi'a in Nigeria without executive officials. However, there were prominent personalities and clerics close to El-Zakzaky which the public rank them as next in command to the Shi'a leader in Nigeria. Before his death during the fiasco between the members of the IMN and Nigerian Army in December 2015, Sheikh Muhammad Turi based in Kano State has been adjudged the second in command after Zakzaky followed by Sheikh Yakubu Yahaya Katsina, based in Katsina State. Apart from these two men, there was the only prominent leader of the guards (Harisawa) of Zakzaky who was killed by the Nigerian Army, Hamza Yauri from Kebbi State.

However, there are powerful State representatives (Wakilin Zakzaky) that are prominent in the IMN but they have no power to take any decision regarding demonstration (Muzahara), trekking in commemoration of the 40th days of Imam Hussein known as *Tattaki*, and Maulud (celebrating the birth of Prophet Muhammad, Peace be Upon Him). The same one man show is found in Local Government Areas where they are found. This type of uncoordinated leadership has helped Zakzaky to wield a great deal of control over his followers and prevented them from listening to any other Islamic scholar except him.

However, in Iran, unlike Nigeria, most of the Shia clergy lacked proper training and education except very few. In Iran, Shi'a cleric is educated at seminaries, the most important of which are clustered around Najaf in Iraq and Qom in Iran. Seminarians attend many years of tutorials and lectures at the feet of senior ulama. They have

to complete particular sets of lectures and excel in law, jurisprudence, and theology as well as philosophy, logic, rhetoric, and, at times, literature. When a student has completed this regimen to his superiors' satisfaction, he receives permission (*ijazā*) to become a bonafide member of the ulama, someone who can practice *ijtihad* (independent reasoning to give a new ruling) a *mujtahid* collect religious taxes, and serve as the guardian of a flock. Clerical students and seminary dropouts from the lower ranks of the clergy, carrying out a variety of religious functions from performing marriages to leading prayers and public liturgies (Nasr, 2006).

Followers of Shi'a Jafariya in Nigeria

As the history of the Shia in illustrates, it drew its pioneering leader and members of the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN) in the late 1970s and early part of the 1980s. Before the Iranian revolution, the ideological base of the MSSN was an imitation of the Egyptian Muslims Brotherhood. Most of the Muslim students studying in various students in Nigeria at the time mistakenly equated Muslim Brotherhood led by Sayyed Qutb and the revolution led by Khomeini. Nigerians mostly youth with little or no Islamic education and knowledge embraced the call of Zakzaky to emulate what the Iranian did in 1979 to have its replica in Nigeria at the when Nigeria was in the full grip of military dictatorship.

In rejection of military rule, some young students and youth Muslim that acquired Western education viewed Shi'a as a radical avenue to challenge and ventilate their rejection and anger against the military regimes of Major General Buhari (1983-1986), General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (1986-1993) and General Sani Abacha (1993-1998). Educated elites and academics were cajoled under the pretext of fighting injustice and bad governance while beneath the surface, Ibrahim Yaqub Zakzaky was spreading the creeds of Shi'a Ja'afariya. However, the IMN started recruiting followers from villages where there was no adequate Islamic education in the early 1990s when it became apparent some of the intellectuals found out

that there is a clear-cut difference between Muslim Brotherhood and the ideology of the Iranian government.

The Shiite is a minority sect in Nigeria's approximately 86 million Muslims - around 10 million. Shi'a communities are based in Northern Nigeria, especially in Kano, Sokoto, and Kaduna. Shi'a Muslims are present in all strata of the Muslim Ummah in Nigeria, including the civil service and active in economic trade. Their members are close aides to several politicians. The main Shia activities include demonstrations organized on specific occasions like Quds (an annual event held on the last Friday of Ramadan) and Ashura (the tenth day of Muharram [the first month of the Islamic calendar] in the Islamic calendar and marks the climax of the Remembrance of Muharram) Days. During these demonstrations, their members blocked the main roads in the northern cities and intimidated the public, including the police, whose permission they do not seek. In Nigeria, Shi'ism represents an anti-establishment movement that militates against normative northern religious practices viewed as un-Islamic. (Policy Paper, 2013).

Activities of Shi'a in Nigeria

Like any other sects in Islam that are not Sunni, the IMN has been organizing yearly Maulud celebrating the birth of Prophet Muhammad. Apart Maulud which they perform together with the Sufis in Nigeria, there a yearly procession on last Jum'a (Friday) of every Ramadhan to show solidarity to the struggle and plights of the Palestinians in the Israeli occupied territories, mu'utamah, annual maulud for all their twelve Imams, Imam Khomeini and their leader in Nigeria Ibrahim Yaqub Zakzaky. A longitudinal study by Runsewe (2015) found out that Zakzaky claimed, in an interview with BBC in 2012, that he trained his men as guards, but that it is more "like teaching karate to the boy scouts." His supporters also claim he is no supporter of violence. However, incidents involving the group in the last two years (2013-2015) (coincidental, or not, with the rise of Boko Haram) seem to disparage those remarks. At least 33 Shia members were gunned down by the Nigerian army in 2013 when fights broke

out between the two groups during a Shiite procession. A suicide bomb attack in November 2014 on another procession (Boko Haram claims responsibility) and last weekend's killings in Zaria, Kaduna seem to suggest two possibilities- they are either victims of their extremism or victims of discrimination.

In early 2012, Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN) introduced grand trekking to their shrine built in polo field, Zaria. The trekking is in commemoration of the 40th days after the death of Imam Hussein. The shrine was named after Iman Hussein (RA) *Hussainiyya Bakiiyatullah*, one of the children of Imam Ali (RA). The trekking was introduced in lieu of trekking to Karbala in Iraq according to Ibrahim Yaqub Zakzaky in his speeches while other sources revealed that he introduced the trekking in order to counter the plot planned against him by the leader of the splinter group among the Shi'a in Nigeria Sheikh Hamza Lawal Baddiko who studied in Qum, Iran with the aid of Zakzaky. Hamza Lawal Baddiko and Sheikh Saleh Sani Zaria are the two prominent Shi'a cleric who studied in Iran that operates parallel activities of Shi'a but not under Zakzaky because they regarded him as illiterates and only relied only on criticizing the Nigerian under military and democratic government, Israeli and the USA. Therefore, elaborating further the activities of Shi'a in Nigeria, Minchakpu (2016) stated that every year, hundreds of thousands of Shiites in Nigeria observe the day of Al-Quds, a March in solidarity with the Palestinians

It was the activities of the Shi'a under the leadership of Ibrahim Yaqub Zakzaky since its inception that often led to confrontation with the security personnel and government which led to his arrest by the Babangida and Abacha's regimes and as at July 2017, he in detention after confrontation with the Nigerian Army in December 2015, they barricaded the road and prevented the Chief of Army Staff and his entourage from passing a thoroughfare in front of the *Hussainiyya Bakiiyatulah* on his way to Zaria city. In all their programmes, the Shi'a always came out en masse with women, children, men and the elderly to barricade the highways preventing motorists from passing in flagrant violation of security orders and the

laws of Nigeria. This in most cases led to confrontations with the security agents in their attempts to stop the members of the IMN from carrying out their activities which they conduct without the approval of the authorities concerned because, in his entire life as the leader of Shi'a, Zakzaky had publicly refused recognized the Nigerian government and surrender his allegiance. That was why during their processions, they raised the Iranian national flag which is a treasonable felony according to the Nigerian constitution.

Substantiating further, Runsewe (2015) documented that Adel Assadinia, a former Iranian diplomat, claimed that the IMN was set up by and modelled on the Lebanese Hezbollah and that Iran provides the IMN with training “in guerrilla warfare: bomb-making, use of arms such as handguns, rifles and RPGs, and the manufacturing of bombs and hand grenades.” These claims raised some questions concerning the radicalization of the sect, and a researcher at Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Mr. Isa, in an interview with BBC in 2012 compared the group's movement to that of “a state within a state.” Shiite traditions have also led to widespread animosity from the Sunni. There were minor feuds between Shiites and Sunnis in Sokoto state, however, things escalated quickly when an anti-Shiite Imam in Northern Nigeria, Imam Umaru Danmaishiyya, was murdered by unknown men in 2007. His death marked the beginning of Shiite vs. Sunni violence in Nigeria, with the Sokoto state government launching assaults on the Shiite groups in Sokoto, which in a particular incident, culminated in the destruction of their headquarters. As a result, the sect moved its headquarters to Zakzaky's hometown in Zaria, Kaduna. Their headquarters, which was called “Husainiyya Baqiyatullah” has now, allegedly, been destroyed by the Nigerian. (Giorgis, 2013)

Another activity of Shi'a in Nigeria and also celebrated across the world they have believers s Ashoura. Every year on the tenth day of the holy month of Muharram, the first on the Islamic lunar calendar, Shia Muslims show a distinctive face of Islam, one that sees spirituality in passion and rituals rather than in law and the familiar practices that punctuate Muslim lives. Open spaces and narrow alleys

in cities, towns, and villages take over from mosques and seminaries as Shias individually and collectively make a show of their piety and their identity. No observer of this day, the festival of Ashoura, will remain unaffected by the Shias' display of fealty to their faith. None will fail to see the uniqueness of Shia Islam or the values and spirituality that define it.

Nasr (2006) further submitted that every year on this day whose date on the Western calendar changes from year to year because of differences between the Gregorian solar reckoning and the lunar months of the traditional Muslim calendar—the Shia mark the anniversary of the death of their most vividly recalled saint, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad known among the Shia as the Imam Husayn. The day is called Ashura, from the Arabic word for “tenth.” It is an occasion for collective atonement through lamentation and self-flagellation. It is a distinctly Shia practice and has no parallel in Sunnism. In those areas of the Muslim world where Shias and Sunnis live side by side, Ashoura underscores Shia distinctiveness and often draws Sunni opprobrium. Ashura is a day when the Shias announce who they are—often going to great extremes to do so—and when the Sunnis, by condemning and protesting, in an equal measure may announce their objection to Shia practices.

Factors that Facilitated the Spread of Shia in Nigeria.

Several factors were adduced which aided the acceptance and spread of Shi'a in Nigeria. The prime factor is the ignorance.

Ignorance among the Islamic Scholars

Most of the Islamic scholars in Nigeria before 1990s were ignorant of the basic creeds of Shi'a because most of the Islamic texts of Fiqh Malik are silent about Shi'a and the significant majority of the scholars especially in Northern Nigerian used Tafsir Jalalaini. Therefore, when the Shi'a came in. they were ignorant and allowed it to spread because they have no ample knowledge to counter it. Most scholars, preachers, and teachers regarded Shi'a as an idea initiated by young radical Muslim who was anxious about jihads and against an unjust regime which time, as they grow up, they would abandon the

ideology. This ignorance of the orthodox scholars has allowed the Shi'a to permeate even in the civil servants and notably students that devoted to Islamic affairs.

Therefore the Iranians capitalized on the deficiency of the Islamic scholars in Nigerian and most parts of West Africa where scholars restricted themselves to the books of Maliki school of Thought. The Iranian had devoted a lot of financial resources under the Rezavi Endowment to support the activities of Shi'a in foreign countries. Nasr (2006) observed that since the Khomeini revolution, Shia centers of learning in Iran, especially in the city of Qom, have prospered. There are large new libraries in Mashad and Qom, each housing millions of books and manuscripts, electronically cataloged with searchable databases and the latest technology for retrieving and maintaining them. A visitor to the Library of the Shrine of Imam Reza in Mashad or the Ayatollah Marashi Library in Qom cannot fail to be impressed by the size of the collections, the scale of the services provided, and the care that has been given to infrastructure and the use of technology. The achievement is as much in furthering Shia studies by making rare manuscripts and archaic texts available to eager clerics and seminarians as it is in promoting library science by creating the means to manage such vast collections. Ancient manuscripts commingle with computer terminals and high-tech restoration and preservation labs. The vast libraries are full of turbaned seminarians, some buried in theological texts, others absorbed in managing the collections on their computer terminals. This has contributed immensely in aiding the spread of Shi'a to other parts of the world. Under this scheme and endowment, Sheikh Saleh Sani Zaria and Sheikh Hamza Lawal Badikko were offered slots to study in Iran in the early 1990s. From then, prominent members of the IMN are sponsored by the Iranian government to attend lectures, visitation, and symposium.

Illiteracy of the Muslims in the Villagers

When the activities of Ibrahim Yaqub El-Zakzaky became apparent he is practicing Shi'a Ja'afariya and the Sunni scholars started

preaching against the creeds. The IMN shifted its focus to villages where there is little Islamic awareness. They usually enter villages, providing financial assistance, humanitarian services then later introduce their creeds. They usually start by lambasting the lapses of the government in power and then tell fairy-tales of injustice against the family (*Abli Bayt*) of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) perpetrated by some of the noble companions of the prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) Abubakar, Uman and Uthman as well as Yazid. The villagers are people that lack fundamental knowledge of cardinal issues in Islam let alone what transpired during the periods of four rightly guided Caliph of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). Therefore, they captured hearts of the villagers who based on the stories developed sympathy to the family of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) mostly women because they are too emotional and children when the adulterated is told.

Effects of Shi'a on Islam in Nigeria

Since the demise of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), there is no any calamity that befall Islam like the associating Shi'a with Islam. The entire creeds of Shi'a are aimed at attacking the cardinal points of Islam. In *Biharul Anwar* authored by Majlisi, stated that they have their own Qur'an different from the Glorious Qur'an that Muslims are using now. They claimed that the companions of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) changed most of the verses that revealed the supremacy of Ali Ibn Abu Talib (RA). On this premise, most of the adherents do not consider the learning, memorization, and teaching of the Glorious Qur'an as something worth doing because of the belief that their Mahdi who hides in a cave in Iraq would come out with unadulterated Qur'an. That is why Anwarul Naumaniyya, the Shi'a were advised to read the Qur'an in the hands of Muslims pending the coming of their Mahdi hiding in a cave in Iraq. Therefore, it has significantly reduced the number of memorizers of the Glorious Qur'an in Nigeria.

Apart from that, the IMN has indoctrinated its followers to delay prayers at its time. For instance, they often delay Zuhr to Asr time

called Zuhriani and delayed Maghrib prayer to Isha called Magari-baini. In this regard, it attacks the fundamental pillar of Islam which is Salat. Also, members of the IMN were fooled to believe that Jum'a prayer is not obligatory until the arrival of Mahdi from a cave in Iraq.

In sum, the activities of Shi'a in Nigeria and associating the IMN with Islam has misled most non-Muslim and ignorant Muslim to view Islam as radical religion or religion of fundamentalists. Because its heydays Zakzaky banned his followers from acquiring Western education, accepting an offer to work as a civil servant and respect the constitution hence attract more hatred than believers for Islam. Their military like the parade and occasional use of guns wherever there was fiasco between the security agents and the members of the IMN. This was evident when the violent e ensued due to a barricade of the road in front of their shrine in Zaria (*Hussainiyya Bakiyayatul*) on 12th December 2015. At that time, the residents and thousands of IMN were killed or are in detention.

However, the rise of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the establishment of scholarship scheme for African students to study in the Makkah and Madina was one of the vital intervention that halted the spread of Shi'a and its activities in Nigeria. On their return, graduates and participants that enrolled for story time courses in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia started revealing the creeds of Shi'a and bought books that extensively and thoroughly captured everything about the religion of Shi'a, one of the books is *Minhajul Sunnah* by Imam Ibn Taymiyyah. The oil boom Suaid Arabia has allowed them to provide books pertaining authentic Sunnah and Shi'a for graduates and scholars. This strategy has been working effectively because of the avalanche of proof and evidence that Shi'a was a sinister plan by the Jewto distort Islam as the history of the Shi'a suggest, it was established by Abdullahi Ibn Saba

Conclusion

For all four decades, Nigeria and Islamic by extension have been struggling with a within unlike Christians, the Shi'a claim being part of Islam yet turned the insult of women of the Prophet Muhammad

(Peace Be Upon Him) and his companions as part of their worship. This is a major setback, instead of the Islamic scholars to concentrate on spreading the Islam to villagers, eradication of Shi'a is essential because on believers would want to enter a divided house. It could be deduced that ignorance and poverty have contributed in making some Muslim vulnerable and become easy prey for alien beliefs like Shi'a. The task ahead of Nigerian government is to ensure Islam has a custodian in Nigeria part from the Sultan of Sokoto, who would regulate the activities of overnight Islamic teachers and scholars who recruits young villagers with the meager amount.

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