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SUNNI LITERARY RESPONSES TO THE SPREAD OF SHIA IDEOLOGY IN NORTHERN NIGERIA¹

Abstract:

The infiltration of Shiism and subsequent increasing growth of the Shia community in Sunni dominated northern Nigeria, especially from the 1980s to date (2015), have generated ideological tension and anxiety. The introduction of the Shia into northern Nigeria has challenged Sunni ideological dominance and ascendancy. The Shia *ulama* (scholars) clandestinely converted thousands of Sunnis into the new religious group. The Sunni *ulama* responded to the penetration and emerging Shia community through a myriad of ways in order to arrest what they perceive as a diffusion of antithetical ideology. The responses came in the form of public condemnation, invective songs, theological debates, and literary antiphon. The main thrust of all of these responses is the condemnation of Shia ideology, rituals and practices, especially the ones that oppose Sunni ideological beliefs. One of the major consequences of these responses is the emergence of literature in different languages, namely: Arabic, English and Hausa. However, there is an apparent lack of academic attention to this body of literature in spite of its relevance to understanding Sunni-Shia relations and theological contestations in northern Nigeria. This paper analyses some selected Hausa and English Sunni-reactive literature and assesses its attempt to challenge the spread of Shia ideology in northern Nigeria.

Keywords: Sunni, Shia, literary response, Northern Nigeria, Hausaland

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Northern Nigeria is one of the most hotly contested religious spaces in Africa because of its religious pluralism and the importance attached to religion. The area has been a practicing arena of the two most popular Abrahamic religions: Islam and Christianity. Historically, the early inhabitants of northern Nigerian practiced traditional religion up to the eleventh century, when Islam was introduced in the Borno Empire. Islam remained in Borno and was subsequently introduced in Hausaland, specifically Kano, in the fourteenth century by the Wangara traders from Mali (Phillips 1982/85). The introduction of Islam in northern Nigeria marked a religious shift from paganism/traditionalism to the practice of Islam. However, in spite of the introduction of Islam in Hausaland, it was not everyone that embraced it. A reasonable number of people stuck to paganism until the nineteenth century Sokoto Jihad movement, which further changed and consolidated the practice of Islam. The nineteenth century not only witnessed the Jihad movement, it also saw the diffusion of Christian faith, especially to an area that is today known in the political parlance of Nigeria as north-central Nigeria or the Middle-Belt zone. In the Muslim dominated areas, especially the Muslim north, Christianity did not make a significant in-road up to now. It was in the twentieth century that the pagans of the Muslim northern Nigeria started to embrace Christianity due to the institutionalization of British colonial rule, establishment of non-Muslim settlements and robust evangelism carried-out by different Christian missionaries. Moreover, despite this evangelism, Christianity remains a minority religion in northern Nigeria.

From the eleventh century up to the twentieth century Muslims in northern Nigeria practiced Sunni-Islam. The Maliki School of jurisprudence informed the theological basis of the Muslim North. Sufism was the main feature of Sunni-Islam in northern Nigeria because a number of Sufi scholars visited Hausaland and succeeded in convincing and persuading early Muslims to practice Sufism. The famous North African fifteenth century scholar, Abdulkadir al-Maghili, visited the Hausa states of Kano, Zaria and Katsina and influenced certain political and religious reforms. The influence of al-Maghili, coupled with other fac-

tors led Muslims in Hausaland to embrace the *Qadiriyya* Sufi order² in the fifteenth century. The nineteenth century Sokoto Jihad consolidated and further entrenched the teachings of *Qadiriyya* on the account of the fact that all the Jihad leaders, namely: Usman Danfodio, his brother Abdullahi and his son, Muhammad Bello were all Qadiris (members of *Qadiriyya*). *Qadiriyya*, therefore, enjoyed a monopoly over the religious space of northern Nigeria for a long time; both commoners and ruling families embraced and practiced its rituals at least at an individual level. This monopoly was challenged and broken by the introduction of the *Tijaniyya* Sufi order³ in the nineteenth century by Alhaji Umar Tal. The introduction of *Tijaniyya* created a kind of denominational competition in the religious terrain of northern Nigeria. *Tijaniyya* became increasingly popular among the masses as opposed to *Qadiriyya*, which was identified with both masses and traditional rulers (Hill 2010).

The Sufi brotherhoods competed against each other from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. The scholars of these two groups established schools and mosques in different places where they taught students, performed rituals and observed prayers. Generally, their relationship and competition on the surface appeared to be cordial; it only got strained in the 1950s when scholars from an emerging sub-group of the *Tijaniyya* known as *Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya* engaged in a series of doctrinal debates in Kano with the leader of *Qadiriyya*, Shaykh Nasiru Kabara. The followers of the two groups in some instances locked themselves in physical confrontation with one another, especially in the 1950s and 1960s (Brigaglia 2017). The emergence and popularization of Salafism⁴ and Salafi ideology which was mostly promoted by Shaykh Mahmoud Gumi, posed a collective threat to the Sufi brotherhood in northern Nigeria. The formation of a Salafi-oriented organization, *Jama'at Izalatul Bid'awa Iqamatus Sunna* (Izala) in 1978 in Jos⁵ by a disciple of Gumi, Shaykh Ismaila Idris, further challenged the religious hegemony of Sufi groups in northern Nigeria. The challenge of Salafism to Sufi brotherhoods ne-

² For a comprehensive history of *Qadiriyya* in Nigeria see (Folarin1986).

³ For the history of *Tijaniyya* see (Quadri 1981)

⁴ For a recent work on Salafism see (Thurston 2016)

⁵ For a history of Izala see (BenAmara 2011; Kane 2003; Yandaki1990).

cessitated them to unite and bury their difference in order to contain a common doctrinal threat (Loimeier 1997). The religious landscape of northern Nigeria became dominated by Sufi groups and the Izala; hence, it was also characterized by competition and contestation. It was in the midst of competition and rivalry between Sufi and Salafi groups that Shia ideology emerged on the scene and constituted a threat of increasing diversity among Sunni-Muslims. The spread of Shia ideology and the subsequent emergence of a Shiite community in northern Nigeria attracted huge Sunni-responses which appeared in the form of public condemnation, invective songs, theological debates, and literary antiphon.

2 | A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SHIA⁶ IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

Most of the scholars of Islamic movements in Nigeria tend to erroneously believe that the Shia came to Nigeria as a result of the Iranian Revolution of 1979⁷. There has been a passive Shia community in northern Nigeria since the early colonial period. Lebanese traders were the first Shia community in northern Nigeria and they constituted an exclusivist religious ensemble. The British colonial residential segregation policy separated the Lebanese settlements from the indigenous community. For instance, in Kano the Lebanese were settled at the Syrian Quarters far away from the local Hausa community⁸. Therefore, there was not much engaging cultural contacts and exchange between the host community and the Lebanese. The Lebanese came to Nigeria in the second decade of the twentieth century for trading purposes and devoted a substantial part of their time to trade. They served as Licensed Buying Agents (LBA) in order to expatriate companies in Nigeria. They did not engage in any missionary activities from the time of their arrival up to the post-colonial period. It was in the 1980s and 1990s that some of them who remained in northern Nigeria started to relate closely with locals with a clear intent of converting them to Shiism⁹. The Lebanese were exposed to social

⁶ For the general history of Shia see (Nasr 2006; Hazleton2009).

⁷ (Bunza 2005, Suleiman 1997, Umar 2011, & Yola 2000).

⁸ For more see (Albasu1995).

⁹ Interview with Usman Lawal, 47, at Kwari Market on 23 May, 2014

life which presumably distracted them from any proselytizing campaign. They were the first to build cinemas, casinos and other social centres in northern Nigeria. During the colonial period, these institutions were perceived by the Sunni-Muslims as agents of social vices and moral laxity and therefore were harshly condemned by *ulama* (scholars) and moral-watchdogs of the society.

The active Shia community in northern Nigeria represents the Iranian brand of Shiism, *Ithna Ashariyya* or the Twelvers, which infiltrated Nigeria as a result of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. This brand of Shiism was promoted by a group of young Muslim political activists known as the Muslim Brothers (*Yan-uwa Musulmi*) under the leadership of Malam Ibrahim el-Zakzaky¹⁰. The root of the Muslim Brothers was the Muslim Student Society (MSS) which was an association of Muslim students in various Nigerian tertiary institutions. Former members of MSS under the influence of el-Zakzaky created the Muslim Brothers. At the initial stage, the Muslim Brothers was a Sunni-oriented Islamic organization largely influenced by the rhetorics and activities of the founders/leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, *Ikhwan Muslim*, of Egypt. The Iranian Revolution impacted and changed both the philosophy and ideology of this movement. The leader of the movement, el-Zakzaky, visited Iran and embraced Shiism and subsequently he influenced thousands of his followers

¹⁰ Malam Ibrahim Yaqoub el-Zakzaky was born on May 5th, 1953 at Kwarbai Residential Area, in Zaria, Kaduna state. He first attended Fada Provincial Arabic School, Zaria from 1969-1971. He secured admission into the famous School for Arabic Studies (SAS), Kano in 1971 and finished in 1975. He was admitted into the prestigious Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1976 to study BSc. Economics and was unable to graduate due to his religious activism on campus which prompted him and his colleagues to clamp-down and prevent some students from holding a wine drinkers' party on the premises of the university. He was arrested by Nigerian security agents and incarcerated in Enugu prison only to be released in 1984. During his university days, he held many positions in a Muslim students association known as the Muslim Student Society (MSS) and the highest position he held was that of Secretary General in 1978. Subsequently he became the Vice President of the association. The position that el-Zakzaky held in MSS is what gave him the opportunity to have a large following and form the Yan-uwa Muslim, Muslim Brothers, which later metamorphosed into a Shia-oriented Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN). (Rashid 2017)

to renounce Sunnism and embraced Shiism (Isa & Adam 2013/2014). Those who were not comfortable with the Shia leaning of the movement broke away and formed an opposing group called *Jama'at Tajdidil Islamy* (JTI) in 1994 under the leadership of Malam Abubakar Mujahid (Umar 2012). With the break of JTI, the Nigerian media started to address the movement and followers of el-Zakzaky as the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN)¹¹. IMN had a larger followership than JTI, hence, it engaged in a massive underground conversion campaign in different Muslim states in order to create space for itself and compete actively on the religious terrain of Nigeria. IMN adopted different strategies to win a following, which included proselytization in rural areas, efficient welfare packages and economic empowerment of the distressed members of the society. Many observers have argued that the most potent weapon of the Shia is temporary marriage, *mutu'a*¹², which lured and tempted thousands of Sunni-youth. Now, in the 21st century, IMN boasts of having millions of followers in Nigeria with a modern organizational structure. The leader of the movement in Nigeria is Ibrahim el-Zakzaky, who is ably represented by an *amir* (deputy) in each of the predominantly Muslim states of northern Nigeria. The *amir* is saddled with the responsibilities of coordinating the activities of the movement in a given state. There is a sub-structure in each state where the *amir* appoints leaders of centres, *halaqa*, to manage the affairs of members and activities of the movement at a local government level. (The) IMN has a clear political motive which

¹¹ In the course of conducting research I interviewed the *amir* (leader) of Shia in Kano, the late Shaykh Muhammad Mahmoud Turi who opined that the name Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN) was not coined by either the leaders of the movement or by its followers. According to him, the name was created and given to them by journalists and they accepted and adopted the nomenclature. Interview with Muhammad Mahmoud Turi on 4th January, 2014 at Goron Dutse, Kano

¹² *Mutu'a* is a temporary marriage which is very popular and legal according to Shia theology. According to Sunni teachings, *mutu'a* is prohibited and therefore the Sunnis do not practice it. Because of the abstinence from sexual intercourse outside of marriage by the Sunnis, when Shiism was introduced to northern Nigeria those who embraced the new ideology, especially the youth, tended to find the practice of *mutu'a* appealing to them. (Isa 2016)

is establishing an Islamic government in Nigeria similar to what happened in Iran¹³.

There is an erroneous assumption that the IMN is the only promoter of the Iranian brand of Shiism in northern Nigeria¹⁴. There exist other groups that promoted Shia ideology independent of IMN; one, there is *Rasulul A'Azam* Foundation (RAAF), and two; there is *Darul Thaqalyn* Organization (DTO). RAAF was founded in 2003 by Nigerians who studied at the International Theological Centre Qom, Iran. Shaykh Muhammad Nura Dass, who spent sixteen years in Iran, is the chairman of RAAF, while Shaykh Saleh Sani Zaria, who spent five years at *Ahlul Bait* Institute in Ghana and an additional five years at Iran, is its Secretary General. The objective of this organization is to educate their members and spread Shia ideology in Nigeria using its school, *Baqirul Ulum* Theological Centre, as a catalyst. RAAF, at least for now, has no political motive and recognizes the Nigerian state. It avoids any informal assembly that antagonizes the Nigerian state, that is why its members do not participate in procession, *Muzahara*, an annual trek which is very popular and a trademark of IMN¹⁵. RAAF had an interactive session with Nigerian security agents (Nigeria Police Force and State Security Service) and media in April, 2016 and explained its position on the army/Shia clash in Zaria in December, 2015. RAAF disassociated itself from the religious activities of IMN and condemned its leadership for portraying the Shia in a negative way. The leader of RAAF, Shaykh Nura Muhammad Dass, made it clear to the Nigerian security and media that their members are law-abiding citizens and they recognize the sovereignty of Nigeria and respect its constitution. Dass said that the leading Shia *ulama* in Iran have admonished them to respect the sovereignty, constitution and laws of their country. Perhaps RAAF wants to construct a unique identity and does not like to

¹³ Interview at Goron Dutse quarters, Kano with a Shia cleric who sought anonymity

¹⁴ The existing writings on the history of the Shia in Nigeria tend to conclude that IMN is the only promoter of Shiism in Nigeria. But there are other groups who subscribed to Shiism and engaged in massive prozelytization. For more information on these writings see, (Umar 2012, Suleiman 1997, and Bunza 2005)

¹⁵ Source: http://www.bbc.com/hausa/news/2016/04/160428_shia_nigeria_division.

be submerged in the shadow of IMN and that is why it discourages its members from participating in procession and other public celebrations often associated with IMN. However, DTO was established by Iranian nationals in Nigeria in collaboration with some indigenous Shiites such as Malam Isa Makama who withdrew their membership from IMN (Isa & Adam 2013/2014).

3 | THE SUNNI LITERARY RESPONSES TO THE SPREAD OF SHIISM

There are two genres of Sunni reactive literature against the infiltration of Shiism in northern Nigeria. First, there are books/pamphlets written in either English or Hausa to counter the initially clandestine and later meteoric spread of the Shia ideology and Shiitization¹⁶. Second, there are books/pamphlets written in Arabic and translated into either English or Hausa by the Sunni *ulama* because of the role they could play in shackling the spread of Shiism in northern Nigeria. The choice of Hausa and English to write these books/pamphlets is strategic, since it is easier to communicate with and send a message to the target-audience in these languages. The majority of the target-readers at least speak or understand Hausa, this being the most widely spoken language in the region. English is the official language in Nigeria; therefore, a substantial number of Muslims could read and understand English. Perhaps English is chosen by the Sunni Muslims because of the number of western educated Muslims that have been embracing Shiism. However the books written in English could possibly be more appealing to them than, say, those written in Arabic.

The main thrust of Sunni literary responses to the spread of Shia ideology borders on the condemnation of certain practices and beliefs associated with the Shiites. Traditionally, the Muslims in northern Nigeria are taught to love and respect the *Ah-lulbait* (progeny of the Prophet), the *sahaba* (the companions of the Prophet) and wives of the Prophet

¹⁶ This term is used by Israel Elad-Altman (2007) to denote the conversion of Sunnis into Shia in Sunni majority countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, Egypt, and Syria. According to Elad-Altman, this conversion was carried out by Iranian missionaries and Iranian Cultural Centres (Elad-Altman 2007: 2-4).

without any preference or discrimination. The Sunni *ulama*, especially those who operate traditional Islamic schools, abstain from recounting the history of early intra-Muslim conflict which involved companions and wives of the Prophets, perhaps, to discourage their students from being judgmental and taking sides. However, when some people in northern Nigeria started embracing Shiism after the Iranian Revolution, Sunni scholars engaged in a kind of literary campaign against the Shiite ideology and the Shia community. One of the main themes of this reactive literature was the position of *sahaba* according to the teachings of Shia ideology. Most of the literature has unanimously concluded that Shiites disparage the closest companions of the prophet, namely: Abubakar, Umar and Uthman. The Sunni reactive literature alleges that Shiites treat and regard these companions as usurpers, saboteurs, and renegades. In one of his books, Umar Labdo¹⁷ asserts:

Shiites believe that the majority of the companions committed apostasy after the death of the Prophet (peace be upon him)...some even believe that most of the companions never accepted Islam in the first place, but they were acting hypocritically and deceiving the Prophet...

It is a common belief within the Sunni community that all those who subscribe to Shiism treat the companions contemptuously. According to Sunni literature, the leading Shia scholars popularize the disdain and hatred of the companions and some of the wives of the prophet. Labdo

¹⁷ Professor Umar Labdo was born in Kano, which is the commercial and religious nerve-centre of northern Nigeria. He attended the School for Arabic Studies (SAS), Kano. He completed a B.A. in Islamic Studies at Usmanu Danfodiyo Sokoto, Nigeria and proceeded to Bayero University Kano, Nigeria where he completed his M. A and PhD in Islamic Studies. He worked with Usmanu Danfodiyo University before he was appointed as Vice Chancellor of Katsina University. He is currently the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Northwest University Kano, Nigeria. He is also a member of the Kaduna State Judicial Commission of Inquiry which was inaugurated in January, 2016 after the Army/Shiite Clash in December, 2015, which resulted in the death of over 300 members of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria. Labdo wrote many books and pamphlets on the Shia and dominant Sufi groups, *Qadiriyya* and *Tijaniyya*, in northern Nigeria. He is associated with Salafi-oriented organization, *Jama'at Izalatul Bid'a wa Iqamatus Sunna*. (Labdo no date)

argued that the notable Shia scholar and prolific writer, Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, said that Abubakar and Umar were unbelievers. Labdo claims that al-Majlisi lumped these two companions with Uthman and Mu'awiyya and described them as four idols who must be renounced and disowned. Abdul Hussain al-Rashti, who is another Shia scholar, wrote that Abubakar and Umar were the major cause for misguiding the *umma* (Muslim community) (Labdo no date⁴: 16). Even though he did not cite any of the Shiite literature, Shaykh Aminuddeen Abubakar¹⁸ postulates in his book that the Shiite in their literature accused Umar of homosexuality (Abubakar 1991: 21). The Sunni scholars popularized the views of Shia on companions, especially the ones that are regarded as disdainful and sneering. Presumably, the popularization of these views through writings is to discourage Sunni Muslims from embracing Shiism because all of the Sunni Muslims hold the companions, including Mu'awiyya, in high esteem. The Sunni have a strong belief that the characters and personalities as well as the deeds of the companions, especially Abubakar, Umar, Uthman and Ali are sacrosanct; therefore, could neither be questioned nor criticized. They consider anyone who shows them contempt to be their enemy.

Most of these reactive literatures try to disconnect Shiism from Islam and connect it with other religions, basically in order to defend the Sunni fortress of northern Nigeria from the ever-increasing influence of Shiism. According to Umar Labdo: (Labdo no date)

Shiism was founded by the Jews and Persians as a reaction to Islam's destruction of their civilizations and effectively wiping them off the map of the world [...] the companions of the prophet under the leadership of the

¹⁸ The late Shaykh Aminuddeen Abubakar was born in 1947 in the Shahuci quarters in Kano city. He received a traditional Qur'anic education and subsequently attended Judicial School Shahuci, Kano and graduated in 1967. He proceeded to the School for Arabic Studies (SAS) and completed his studies there in 1970. He also obtained diploma and degree certificates from Abdullahi Bayero College (now Bayero University Kano, Nigeria). He taught temporarily at the Centre for Qur'anic Studies, Bayero University, Kano. He died on July 9th, 2015 in Mecca while on a medical trip. (Abubakar 1991: 21)

second Caliph, Umar bn Khattab, fought the Persian Empire in a series of battles, dispossessing it of its territories until they destroyed it completely...

The Sunni *ulama*, especially those who are inclined to Salafism, use this narrative of the Jewish and Persian connection to Shiism repeatedly in their public lectures, *Khutbah* (Friday sermon) and writings, in order to disabuse the minds of their followers from accepting or recognizing the Shia as part of Islam. Moreover, these *ulama* discourage inviting Shiites to any forum organized to discuss either Islamic issues or problems facing the Muslim community¹⁹. Symbolically, the followers of Sunni groups use their power of majority to push the Shia to the margins of the Muslim community. In one popular anti-Shia publication which is widely circulated within the Sunni community, the author opines (Yunus 2011: 1):

Shia is basically and primarily a political party which should have nothing to do with Islam, or its doctrine and practices. The so-called Shia did not exist in days of Ali bn Abi Talib. However, the word Shia, in this context does not owe its origin to any difference of opinion among Muslims in matters of the faith and practice...

Most of the Sunni literary responses to the Shia ideology are replete with words such as heretics, apostates, and *rawafids* (rejectionists). There are Sunni *ulama* in northern Nigeria who called Shiites 'heretics' based on their understanding and interpretation of a "true Muslim". These *ulama* assumed the will to power and deployed their ideological/doctrinal yardstick to measure the religiosity or otherwise of "others", especially those who differ from them in terms of theological worldviews

¹⁹ For instance, the representatives of different Islamic groups in Kano, namely: *Qadiriyya*, *Tijaniyya* and *Izala*, visited *Rahama Radio Kano* in 2015 and discussed the blasphemous statements made by members of a revisionist faction of *Tijaniyya* called *Yan-haqiqa* about the Prophet (PBUH). Shiites were not invited because some of the representatives of these Islamic groups do not consider them as Muslim. Subsequently, the deputy director of *Darul Thaqaayn* Organization (a Shia organization), Malam Haliru Lawan Mu'azu, came on *Freedom Radio Kano* and complained bitterly about the marginalization, libel and (mis)perception of Shiism promoted by Sunni scholars.

and interpretation. Muhammad bin Uthman²⁰ in his pamphlet titled *The Shi'as are a Heretical Group* accuses Shiites of lies, misrepresentation of facts and distortion of the teachings of Islam. This pamphlet was a rejoinder to a paper written by an anonymous Shiite writer and distributed in Sunni communities of northern Nigeria. The paper was a kind of self-representation in which the author explained who the Shiites are. The paper enumerated the good qualities of those who identified themselves with Shia. Bin Uthman disputed those qualities and described the content of the paper as “a propaganda strategy devised by the heterodox Shiite apologists for selling false beliefs to people” (Uthman no date: 2). The pamphlet was also circulated and distributed to Sunni youth in order to insulate them from the rapidly infiltrating Shia ideology which competed for religious space and followership with dominant Sunni groups.

The issue of *mutu'a* (temporary marriage) features prominently in most of the Sunni literature consulted in writing this paper. The Sunni *ulama* are unequivocal in their condemnation and refutation of *mutu'a*. According to Shehu Dala, *mutu'a* was practised during the period of ignorance (*jahiliyya*) and early years of Islam and subsequently outlawed by the Prophet. He argued that it was not Caliph Umar that prohibited *mutu'a* as suggested by Shiites (Dala 2016: 27). Shiites are accused of promoting social vices and promiscuity in Muslim society through *mutu'a*. Mansur tried to draw an analogy between *mutu'a* and prostitution; he said that *mutu'a* and prostitution are two sides of the same coin. He outlined eleven similarities between the two practices to justify his claims and a number of them are mere repetitions (Dala 2016: 24f). The major similarities, however, according to him, are that both practices are temporary, flexible, and devoid of *mutu'a* inheritance. Much of the Sunni literature written in northern Nigeria argues that Shiites used *mutu'a* as a powerful weapon to tempt, lure and convert “ignorant” Sunni youth into Shiism (Labdo no date⁵: 2; Dala 2016: 1-24). The Shia have a large following of young people in Nigeria and a substantial number of

²⁰ Muhammad bn Uthman al-Kafawy is the Imam of *Sahaba Juma'at* Mosque, Kano. He is a Salafi-scholar who specializes in delivering his Friday sermons in three languages namely: Arabic, Hausa and English. The tone and rhetoric of Uthman attract Muslim youth who are fascinated by his eloquence.

them were enticed by *mutu'a*²¹. This view seems to be a mere assumption because none of the authors were able to provide concrete fact to support his argument. It could be part of the reason that make the Shia popular among the youth in Nigeria but there is the need to conduct thorough research to establish the veracity of this claim. The late *amir* (deputy) of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria, Shaykh Mahmud Turi²², posited that the followers of the Shia in Nigeria believe in *mutu'a* but they do not practice it as it was over-amplified by Sunni scholars²³.

The Sunni literature on the Shia asserts that the Shiites do not believe and read the “authentic Qur’an”; Shiites are alleged to have a different Qur’an from that of Sunni. Umar Labdo (no date⁵: 2) posits:

The Shiites believe that the Qur’an is incomplete. According to them, the Book is full of contradictions, interpretations, inaccuracies and inconsistencies...the Shiites say it is the Sahaba, companions who were the custodians of the Book and who preserved and compiled it after the Prophet. They say the companions embarked on this slanting of the Qur’an in order to cover their scandalous and disgraceful acts, which are graphically exposed in the Qur’an, and to hide the outstanding traits and qualities of the family of

²¹ Interview with an anonymous Sunni scholar in Kano on 23/05/2014.

²² Mahmud Turi was born on July 7th, 1963 in Zaria city, Kaduna State, Nigeria, into a family of second generation western-educated elites of northern Nigeria. His father, Muhammad Turi, had been a prominent journalist working with the first northern-based English newspaper, *New Nigerian*. After attending a traditional Qur’anic school for a short time, in 1969, Mahmud Turi enrolled in 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 members of the Muslim Brothers, 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. In 1999, Turi was appointed as the *amir* (leader) of IMN in Kano and remained in this position until 2015 when he died as a result of the army/Shia clash in Zaria.

²³ Interview with Muhammad Mahmud Turi on 4th January, 2014 at Goron Dutse, Kano.

the Prophet, the Ahlul Bait, including Ali's right to be the Imam after the Prophet, which are explicitly set in the Qur'an...

The popular discourse among the Sunni is that the Shiites accused the companions of distorting the verses of the Qur'an basically for political reasons. This literature further asserts that the Shiites have a distinct Qur'an, *Mus'haf Fatimah*, which they describe as authentic and uncorrupted. This Qur'an, as suggested by the Sunni literature, was bequeathed to the Shiites by Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet and mother of the Imams (Labdo no date⁵: 4). It is alleged that the Shiites' Qur'an contains verses, *Suratal-wilaya* and *Suratal-nurayn*, which are not in the Sunni Qur'an. These verses, as suggested by the Sunni literature, were inserted to justify Caliph Ali's right to succeed the Prophet (Bar 2005: 91). The Shiites in Nigeria denied the claim that they have a different Qur'an and challenged all the Sunnis to present a copy of the said Qur'an. Shaykh Sale Sani, secretary general of RAFF, accused Salafi scholars of spreading rumours about Shiite Qur'an and opined that there is no any difference between the Shiite and the Sunni Qur'an. He said that the Qur'an is one and it cannot be distorted easily by any Islamic group. He asserted that individual scholars can distort the interpretation but certainly not the content of the Qur'an²⁴.

Sunni reactive literatures discussed other issues extensively, such as *Taqiyya*²⁵ (dissimulation) and the position of the *ahlulbait*, progenies of the prophet, in Shia ideology. Muhammad Mansur²⁶ asserts that *Taqiyya* is a tool that Shiites used to deliberately misquote the Prophet (Ibrahim

²⁴ Interview with Shaykh Saleh Sani Zaria, at Baqirul Ulum Danbare Kano, on 27th June, 2013.

²⁵ *Taqiyya* is a precautionary dissimulation or denial of religious belief and practice in the face of persecution. This practice is associated and promoted by the Shiites perhaps because of the numerical position in the Muslim world. In most of the Muslim countries in the world, Shiites constitute a minority Muslim group with the exception of countries such as Iran and Lebanon. (Nasr 2006)

²⁶ Dr Muhammad Mansur Ibrahim is a staff of the Department of Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, Nigeria. He wrote many books on the Shia and the most popular is *Kalubalega Yan Shi'ah: Tambayoyi 70 Wadanda ba su da Amsa*, (Challenge to Shiites: Seventy Unanswered Questions).

2006: 39-41). Therefore, Sunnis even in other parts of the Muslim world condemn and distrust the Shiites because of *Taqiyya* and other practices (Bar 2005: 91). Shiites are used to over-venerating Caliph Ali (Labdo no date); it is said that they gave him divine status by adding his name to the *Shahada* (testimony of faith), *ashhadu anna Aliyyun waliyyullah* ' I am witness that Ali is the agent of Allah' (Labdo no date³: 4-5).

4 | CONCLUSION

The representation of the Shia in Sunni literature is aimed at purifying and freeing the Sunni community from the massive and destructive influence of Shia ideology. The Sunni *ulama* took up their pens and engaged in writing about the identity, beliefs, ideology, and ritual practices of Shiites. The Shiites are presented as others in Sunni reactive literature and their ideology as venomous and antithetical to Sunni ideology. Based on a close study of the Sunni literatures, their representation of the Shia and the Shiites are completely negative. The authors of these literatures questioned the moral and spiritual authenticity of the Shiites and accused them of debauchery, distortion of the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet. The way and manner in which Shiites are presented coupled with the general views of Sunnis on the Shia created reservation, antagonism and ostracism. The ideological differences between the Sunnis and the Shiites in northern Nigeria coupled with other factors factionalized the Muslim community.

One of the primary goals of Sunni reactive literature is mainly to keep the Sunnis from converting to Shiism and to fight the clandestine and increasing Shiitization of the Sunni populace. It can be argued that a majority of these converts were previously Sunnis including the leading figures and actors in the domain of Shiism in northern Nigeria. The central figures that spearheaded the Shiitization campaign, figures such as Ibrahim el-Zakzaky, Muhamad Nura Dass, Saleh Sani Zaria, late Auwal Tal'udi, Isa Makama and other leaders of the three dominant Shia factions in northern Nigeria were hitherto Sunnis. The Shia constitute a minority community in Muslim northern Nigeria, hence, they engaged in massive missionary activities in order to get as many followers as they

could convert. The Sunnis realized that the gains of the Shia mean a loss to their sect, so they adopted strategies to contain and resist what they perceived as the Shiites' ideological incursion and invasion. One of the strategies was production and distribution of the reactive literature to their followers in order to re-orient and avert them from embracing Shiism. The Shiites devised a means of peddling their ideology to the Sunnis; they went to country-sides and engaged in massive conversions of unlettered and semi-lettered rural-dwellers, especially those who know little about the dividing line between Shiism and Sunnism. The Shiites also developed effective welfare packages to assist distressed converts in rural areas. They maintained the loyalty of their urban converts through economic empowerment, indoctrination and regular re-orientation. According to Sani Saleh Zaria²⁷, the Shiites invested hugely in the Nigerian economy and they employed the services of their members to manage the investments. They also sponsored their members, especially those from lowly social background, to study in different tertiary institutions.

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²⁷ This information was narrated to me by Shaykh Saleh Sani Zaria in an interview at Baqirul Ulum Danbare quarters, Kano state in 2014.

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