

The Influence of Saudi Arabian Scholarships on Islamic Education in Kano, 1960-2015

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Abstract

The influence of Saudi Arabian Scholarships on Islamic Education in Kano has great impact on the development of Islamic education in the state. Since the 1960s, Saudi Arabian government have been giving out educational scholarships to Kano indigenes to study both in Makkah and at Islamic University of Medina. Using both oral and written sources, this paper finds out that Saudi struggle for influence and religious space in Kano has promoted the development of Islamic education in Kano not only in terms of the growing number of university graduates, but also in the establishment and proliferation of schools and study centres throughout the state. On this basis therefore, this paper examines the impact of Saudi Arabian educational scholarships on Islamic education, specifically, in Kano metropolis from 1960-2015.

Introduction

This paper examines the influence of Saudi Arabian Scholarships on Islamic Education in Kano from 1960-2015. The paper argues that Saudi Arabia had long educational relations with Nigeria. There were also initial attempts to send Northern Nigerian students to study at the Islamic University of Medina prior to Nigeria's independence, but such attempts proved unsuccessful due to the British fear of radical nationalism, which was then trending in the Middle East. In 1962 however, the Saudi Arabian government awarded scholarships to eighteen northerners. Saudi government wanted Northern Nigerian students to study at the Islamic University so that they could be taught the *Salafi* Canon to help them define a *Salafi* creed, as well as teaching techniques for propagation. After two to three decades, many people from Kano were sponsored to study at University of Medina and it was from there that many of them were indoctrinated with *Salafi* theological doctrines who further spread it in Kano and Nigeria.

The Influence of Saudi Arabian Scholarships on Islamic Education in Kano 1962-2015

For decades, Muslims from all over the world have been travelling to Mecca and Medina to study Islam not only because of its large number of Islamic scholars, but also because of its geo-political location as the birthplace of the holy Prophet (p.b.u.h) and his pious companions. Few years after the Nigerian independence from British colonialism, Saudi Arabian clerics began to frequent Nigeria with the intension of further educating its Muslims about *Salafism* and to enhance their spheres of influence in the populous African country. As Nigerian students got scholarships in the 1980s to study at Saudi Arabian universities, doctrinal inculcation becomes relatively easy due to the power of structural norms in the society and religious authority Saudi Arabia's clerics possess. It is important at this juncture to note that education is of great importance as illustrated by the establishment of the Islamic University in Medina, which was created to train proselytizers and with regulations that 75% should come from abroad¹.

Saudi Arabia in popular discourse is often seen as a quasi- medieval kingdom that uses its oil wealth to disseminate its unchanging "*Wahhabism*". Yet, as Lacroix once argued, "It is necessary to effect a kind of Copernican revolution in the accepted approach: although Saudi Arabia is often considered solely as a power that exports Islam, it also has to be seen as the recipient of influences emanating from most currents of nineteenth and twentieth century revivalism."² Saudi Arabia's material resources have allowed her to extend her influences to other parts of the world, and Nigeria inclusive, especially through financing the establishment of mosques, schools, and organizations with the aim of converting people into *Salafi* theological doctrines in Nigeria³.

The route of Saudi outreach to Nigeria has importance for understanding the broader relationship to the non-Arab Muslim world in the second half of the twentieth century. From the 1960s to the 1980s, Saudi Arabia's outreach to Africa generally and Nigeria specifically became more sophisticated in both intellectual and logistical terms. Therefore, for Saudi leaders in the mid-twentieth century, Nigeria represented an appealing zone for outreach⁴. Northern and Western Nigeria had some of the largest Muslim communities in sub-Saharan Africa, and leaders in both regions were receptive to outreach from foreign Muslims. Nigeria's importance to Saudi Arabia grew over time, as Nigeria became a mid-sized player in the global oil market, joining the organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries in 1971. On the other hand, Nigerian pilgrims came to Saudi Arabia in ever increasing numbers through the 1970s, reaching a peak of more than 100, 000 in 1977⁵. Because of its economic, political and cultural importance, Nigeria presented major incentives for *Salafi* outreach. To Saudi Arabia, Nigeria is valuable not only for its own sake, but also, along with Mauritania and Sudan, as countries Saudi Arabia perceived as "a springboard to enter sub-Saharan Africa."

Despite the initial effort of Saudi to give scholarships to Nigerian students in 1962 however, it awarded scholarships to eighteen Northern Nigerians. This is because, Saudi wanted Northern Nigerian students to study at the Islamic University; so that they could be taught the *Salafi* Canon and be taught to define a *Salafi*

creed, as well as teaching techniques for transmitting it⁶. It is significant to make it clear at this juncture that defining the *Salafi* creed involves refuting a large catalogue of rivals not just *Sufis*, but the *Shia* and others. Thus, at the Islamic University of Medina, many students rejected both the methods and the contents of their instruction. Ultimately, all but two of the eighteen students dropped out of the program. In one letter to the Northern Nigerian Regional Government, students complained:

This University does not suit us. Since we came here, we don't learn anything new. We are still learning the Arabic alphabets, which we already knew. The only new thing we learn in our class is how to call people to their new Islamic mission. We even prefer going back to Nigeria and continuing with our home study better to this University if we can't get any transfer. We cannot live here and waste our time for nothing⁷.

It is therefore instructive at this point that the above quotations clearly showed that the students that were sent to study at the University of Medina were not satisfied with all forms of teaching in the University, because they were restricted to the study of Arabic alphabets which was not something new to them. They therefore found it difficult to continue with their study there since there was nothing new to them. However, the researcher argues that with the graduation of some highly versed Northern Nigerian students from the University of Madinah, especially in the 1980s, the earlier said resentments of the Nigerian students as reported in the archival sources of Northern Nigeria did not only seem to be questionable, but also proved contrary. Some students with *Sufi* inclination, felt deeply uncomfortable in Medina because of the university's outright criticism to what they believed in. Therefore, the influence of Saudi Arabian scholarships on Islamic education in Kano can better be understood based on the religious adjustments of *Jamā'at Izzalat al-Bid'ah wa Iqamat al-Sunnah* (Society for the Removal of Innovation and the Re-instatement of the *Sunnah*)⁸:

Some of the Madinah graduates include: *Shaikh* Jafar Mahmud Adam, Muhammad Sani Umar Rijiyar Lemo, *Shaikh* Abdulwahhab Abdullah, Dr. Bashir Aliyu Umar and Dr. Abdullah Saleh Pakistan⁹. One of the first graduates of the Islamic University of Madinah was Sheikh Abdallah Pakistan. In 1981, after participating in the *Da'awah* (propagation), he visited Madinah and Makkah. Pakistan who held a secondary certificate from the Arabic Teachers' College in Gwale, a school where several members of this network studied, completed a B.A in Qur'anic Studies at the Islamic University of Madinah in 1985. His primary and secondary school education were all sponsored by Saudi government before he finally proceeded to Madinah where he obtained his first degree¹⁰.

Another graduate was Umar, who was enrolled a student of Electrical Engineering at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1978. He joined Nigeria's Muslim

Students' Society at a time when the Iranian Revolution of 1979 was inspiring many of the society's members to more strident activism. After helping his peers destroy the school at the university faculty club of Ahmadu Bello, he was expelled. When he returned back to Kano, he worked as a water engineer, but continued to study Islamic subjects and gave religious lectures. He also participated in the *Da'awah* in 1981, but declined a scholarship to Saudi Arabia, partly out of concern that abandoning his career might produce family conflict. After a period of soul-searching, he gave up his post to pursue the path of Islamic learning. When he made the pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia in 1986, Abdullahi Pakistan convinced him to apply to the Islamic University of Madinah; he joined the faculty of Hadith in 1988. He finally, obtained his B.A, M.A, and Ph.D. from the University, completing the last one in 2004.¹¹

Jafar Mahmud Adam's route to Medina on the other hand, was different compared to others. As a youth, he memorized the Qur'an as an itinerant student. He also studied under well-trained scholars in Kano, learning Maliki legal manuals like the *Mukhtasar* (compendium) of Khalil, but also reading works like Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's *Kitab al-Tawhid*- one of the few texts in the *Salafi* canon taught widely in Nigeria¹². He also studied with Sheikh Jazuli Nuhu, one of only two members of the first Nigerian cohort at Medina to remain and complete a degree at the Islamic University. The early 1980s was a pivotal time for Adam. He studied at an evening literacy program. At the Egyptian Cultural Center, an Egyptian Arabic instructor, Sheikh Abdulaziz, taught him the recitation of the Qur'an (*Tajwid*), an experience that Adam later said brought his Qur'anic learning to life. The training therefore played a significant role to Adam's victory in a 1987 national Qur'anic competition. After winning the Nigerian competition, he also won the third position at the international competition held in Saudi Arabia in 1988. After Adam obtained a secondary diploma at the Arabic Teachers' College of Gwale in 1987, the Saudi government in 1989 gave him a scholarship to study at the Islamic University of Madinah due to his accomplishment not only as a promising and rising Izala preacher, a movement he joined in 1980, but also for his performance during the international Qur'anic competition.

One of the informants interviewed during the conduct of this research was Malam Muhammad Sunusi Abubakar. Abubakar was born on 12th July, 1962 at Marmara in Kano Municipal Local Government area of Kano state¹³. He studied Qur'an under Malama Inna at Marmara and later moved to Malam Moddibo Hamagurdo for further Qur'anic studies, *Fiqh*, *Kitab al-Qawaidi*, *Risala*, *Kitab al-Akdhari* etc. He attended Goron Dutse Primary School from 1972 to 1979. From there, he proceeded to the School for Arabic Studies (SAS) in 1979 and finally graduated in 1984 with a Grade II Certificate. Muhammad Sunusi attended Bayero University, Kano for his pre-degree Programme from 1985 to 1987 and immediately after his completion; he was sponsored by Saudi Arabia and admitted into the Faculty of Islamic Law to read B.A Islamic Studies in the University of Madinah in 1987.¹⁴

As time went on, Saudi Arabia sent many Islamic scholars to Islamic institutions of Kano to teach the Arabic language and teachings of other Islamic books. For

examples, Malam Abubakar Jibril, Muhammad Nuhr, Abdullahi Kabbas and many other scholars were sent to Kano to teach and educate the people of the state based on Sunni/Salafi doctrines. Saudi Arabia also financed the activities of many Islamic schools in Kano so as to promote their Salafi theological religious doctrines and University of Madinah has been the leading group of such Islamic activities in Kano. It also gives scholarship to many Kano indigenes ranging from primary school up to PhD level.

The studies and activities of the above *Salafi* personalities who studied at Madinah have greater influence on Islamic education in Kano, because they used various techniques in winning peoples' heart to *Salafism*.¹⁵ Larkin has pointed out that Northern Nigerian Muslim scholars came to embrace electronic media over the course of the twentieth century. Scholars skeptical of new media such as those who opposed broadcasts of Qur'anic recitation in the 1950s, lost out.¹⁶

By the end of the twentieth century, Larkin writes, prominent Muslim scholars dismissed their earlier resistance to electronic media as a product of ignorance. In the scholar's eyes, the new position of knowledge and familiarity with technology is not just the result of Hausa people's becoming more westernized and more familiar with western technology but also, significantly, because of their better education Islamically. Therefore, by the time some of Madinah graduates such as Jafar Mahmud Adam and Sani Umar Rijiyar Lemo returned from Medina in the 1990s and 2000s, radio, television, and cassette tapes were familiar parts of the religious and media landscape, and their contents could be controversial, but the fact of their use by Muslim scholars was not. In Kano, electronic media have permeated urban dwellers' quotidian religiosity, from religious programming on television and radio to mobile telephone ringtones featuring recitations of Qur'anic verses. Kano has teeming media landscape, attuned heavily. Survey data has shown that in 2012, 92.6 percent of Nigerians had a radio in their home¹⁷. Internet use is rapidly rising, especially because of the proliferation of smartphones. The Madinah graduates therefore used all of these media to interact with one another and create overlapping audiences and more followers in Kano.

The growing diversity of Kano's media parallels a growth in educational institutions in the city since Nigeria's oil boom in the 1970s. Many of the city's new schools are privately ran Islamic schools, which proliferated after the 1980s, when the federal government of Nigeria scaled back its ambition to provide universal primary education. Changes in schooling have created new classes of media consumers that were eager to receive a variety of contents including religious contents through oral, print and visual media. The penetration of electronic media affected religious discourses in Kano by the late 1990s¹⁸. Islamic scholars, even from traditional backgrounds evinced a growing interest in commenting on global affairs and debating topics like the "secularity of the Nigerian state, gender equality, human rights, democracy and rights of ethnic and religious minorities". Electronic media therefore created opportunities for religious leaders to engage broader audiences and followers in new ways, operating in the spaces where textual traditions and mass mobilization interest becomes possible.

Another significant influence of Saudi Arabian scholarship scheme on Islamic education in Kano was that those who studied at the Islamic University of Madinah and Makkah spent much of their considerable time to invest and attract many indigenes of Kano into Salafism, and concentrated on oral performances through electronic media. The *Salafi Sheikh* Muhammad Nazifi Inuwa, for example conducts *Al-Azkar* (Supplications), one of the most popular radio programmes in the city of Kano in the early 2010. *Al-Azkar* is a live Arabic-to-Hausa translation, every Friday morning, of the congregational sermon delivered at the Central Mosque in Makkah, which was often followed by commentary in Hausa on the sermon's context. This and *Salafi* radio-media engagement highlight *Salafi* preacher's rhetorical abilities in Arabic and Hausa. This focus on orality and electronic media is a deliberate strategic choice: Inuwa explained in one *Al-Azkar* episode, broadcast on 14th October, 2011, that because few Kano residents read newspapers or attend lectures in mosques, it was important to propound "righteous speech" on the radio. Kano's *Salafi* leaders also wrote various texts in Arabic and Hausa such as *Kitab wal Sunna* and so on, but they invest less energy in writing than in lectures and electronic media interventions. *Salafis'* investment in electronic media involves decisions on how to manage the relationship among different media, and also how to disseminate *Salafi* creed and ideologies to Kano indigenes.¹⁹

Similarly, hoping to outcompete with their rivals, especially the *Shi'ah*, on the basis of Islamic intellectual merit, *Salafi* scholars demand a larger niche within Kano's media landscape. This ambition parallels and enhances their efforts to expand their networks of mosques and schools. In Kano as elsewhere, media represent and feed into a web of relationships; when *Salafis* circulate recorded lectures and appear on radio and television, and generate Web contents, they broadcast their messages beyond the mosque or the study circle, but also work to draw more Muslims to the physical sites where *Salafism* is discussed and transmitted.²⁰

One reason for Madinah graduates' success in growing their followership in Kano since the 1990s to the present had been their ability to discuss politics in a highly accessible, scripture-heavy discursive style. In political discourses, the *Salafi* scholars correctly situate the ideal of Salafism as a vanguard of pure Muslims. At times, Kano they invoke canonical figures such as ibn Taymiyya to reference an ideal and situate the present in relation to it.²¹

The Spread of Saudi Arabian Islamic Ideologies and their Influence on Islamic Education in Kano

People from Kano travelled to Saudi Arabia purposely for businesses where they purchased certain items of trade such as date palm, *Zamzam*, clothes, gold and silver and other valuable item for trade. It was this relationship which existed since 1960's that Kano considered Saudi Arabia as one of the great centers of religious learning and worship. Therefore, the relations between Saudi religious actors and Kano Muslims are not new. Examples include Saudi's donations to the building of mosques in Kano, Saudi financial support to the *Jama'atu Nasril Islami* (Society for the Victory of Islam) branch in Kano, and Saudi distributed books to Kano indigenes.

Salafism was introduced in the religious sphere of Nigeria in the second half of the twentieth century through the activities of *Sheikh* Abubakar Mahmud Gumi.²² He was a close associate of Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of the Northern Region in the Nigeria's First Republic which collapsed in 1966. In the 1960s, the former accompanied the latter in his various trips to Saudi Arabia for pilgrimage. There, Gumi was exposed to *Wahhabi* doctrine and since then, he became its champion in Nigeria, by subjecting the *Sufi* scholars to perpetual intellectual, but constructive criticism²³. On 8th February, 1978, students of Gumi led by *Sheikh* Ismaila Idris, established the *Juma'at Izalat al- Bid'a wa-Iqama'at al-Sunna* (Society for the Removal of Innovations and Reinstatement of Tradition, henceforth *Izala*) to champion and promote the *Wahhabi* ideology.²⁴

Although, members of the organization preferred to identify themselves as *Izala* rather than *Salafi*,²⁵ they clearly admit that they followed the *Salafi* path. Due to their importance for the rise of a *Salafi* doctrine in Nigeria, Gumi and *Izala* required brief descriptions. A pious cleric Gumi rose to the top of both the religious and the political sphere in Northern states.²⁶ During the prominence of Ahmadu Bello, Gumi became the Grand Khadi in the *Sharia* Court of Appeal of Northern Nigeria, making him central to the interpretation of *Sharia*. Due to his fluency in Arabic, he became the liaison with Saudi clerics and institutions, and he later translated the Qur'an into Hausa language, which naturally increased his local popularity. Emphasizing his importance, he was awarded the King Faisal International Prize for his 'services to Islam'. However, Gumi was indeed also a controversial figure despite his popularity because he constantly challenged *Sufi* practices in the Nigeria.

Conclusion

It is worthy of note at this juncture to make it clear that Saudi Arabia wanted to extend her political interests and theological religious doctrines to other parts of the Muslim world in order to have more influence. Therefore, the Saudi struggle for extending the realm of her ideological and theological religious influence is enough to explain the reasons for the presence of intense religious competitions and rivalries in Kano as evidenced in the widespread animosity and deployment of theological doctrines and resources to Kano with the aim of spreading her versions of ideology and religious supremacy in Kano. It was based on these reasons that Saudi Arabian clerics travelled abroad to educate Muslims in order to enhance their spheres of influence. Therefore, prominent *Salafi* scholars such as late *Sheikh* Jafar Mahmud Adam, Sani Umar Rijiyar Lemo, Abdulwahhab Abdullah, Dr. Bashir Aliyu Umar and Dr. Abdullah Saleh Pakistan used electronic media such as radio and television to disseminate information based on *Salafi* theological doctrines and interact with one another and create overlapping audiences and more followers in Kano. Another significant influence of Saudi Arabian scholarship on Islamic education in Kano was that those who studied at Makkah and Islamic University of Madinah spent much of their considerable time to invest and attract many indigenes of Kano into *Salafism* and concentrated on oral performances which they achieved through electronic media.

Bibliography

List of informants

S/N	Names	Age	Occupation	Place of interview	Date of interview
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2	Dr. Abdullahi Saleh Pakistan	62	Imam	Tudun Murtala	19/04/2018
3	Lawan Abubakar	48	Imam	Gwammaja	24/04/2018
4	Shaykh Ibrahim Khaleel	82	Businessman (Islamic Scholar)	Rijiyar Zaki	29/04/2018
5	Sheikh Abubakar Umar	55	Imam	Rijiyar Lemo	04/05/2021

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