

Ideas of Sheikh Isma'il Idris Bin Zakariyya: Legacy for Progressive Contemporary Islamic Movement

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Abstract

This paper discussed the role and ideas of Sheikh Isma'il Idris in religion and politics in Nigeria. It is very paramount that Islamic scholars are considered to be relevant in modelling the minds of Muslims Ummah towards participation in politics and electoral process. Therefore, this article highlights the major contributions made by this Islamic scholar and outlines his role in terms of revivalism during his life-time and beyond. This is accomplished by investigating his major works and his teachings especially in shaping participation in political circle so as to ensure that Muslims are participated in the political and electoral process in Nigeria. In his political thought, Sheikh Idris believed strongly in Muslim's participation in politics and governance as against the other views of anti-democratic arguments. His major concern is to encourage Muslims Ummah particularly the youths to participate in government activities in order to protect the interest of their religion considering the diverse nature of the country. Hence, assessing his role and ideas will significantly improve our understanding of Islamization movement towards determining social reality, justice and equity along Islamic ethics and values.

Keywords: Islamic Political Thought, Islamization of Knowledge, Political Participation, Social Justice, Democracy, Welfarism and Social Responsibilities.

1. Introduction

Nigeria is one of the most populous and heterogeneous nation states in Africa. According to the 2006 census more than 140 Million inhabitants lives in this West African country (Census, 2006). Nigeria is ethnically, linguistically and religiously complex. Approximately over 250 languages are spoken in the country. Hausa in the north, Ibo in the south east and Yoruba in the south west are considered to be among the most major languages and dominant ethnic groups. Nigeria borders with Cameroon and Chad in the east, the Republic of Niger to the north, the Republic of Benin in the west and the Gulf of Guinea to the south. Today, Nigeria is a federation of 36 states with Abuja, as the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). In 1999 the Fourth Republic was evolved after a democratic

election. This was the fourth attempt by a civilian government in Nigeria after three failed attempts and a long experience with military dictatorship (Lemonier, 1997).

Nigeria is well known for oil, ethnic, and religious crises. For example, the issue of Boko Haram mayhem in the north-eastern part of the country and in the southern part Niger Delta area where many international oil companies operate, explosions related to leaking pipelines as well as kidnappings of Nigerians and foreign residents and workers of oil companies happen constantly. The situation in this country is happening as a result of unequal distribution of oil income. Nigeria has been a member of the OilPetroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) since 1971 and yet considered by the World Bank as among the poorest countries in the world. The report of 1996 summarizes the situation of the country in the following; the country is rich but the people are poor.”Indeed this paradox is confirmed by many Nigerians who see themselves as excluded from the wealth of their own federation. Muslims and Christians are the two dominant religious groups in Nigeria. Apart from these two, many traditional religious existed in the country. There are no reliable statistics at hand which account for the exact percentage of each religion rather, Muslims dominated the northern part of the country whereas majority of the Christians live in the southern part, however, in Nigeria; there are no clear cut religious borders. The two dominant religions can be found everywhere in the country and they frequently coexist side by side. Ethnic conflicts in Nigeria are misunderstood and interpreted as purely religious ones. In fact, it is not easy to separate ethnicity from politics, religion, and economy in Nigeria. All these aspects are tied together in a complex way. Events documented by the media as “religious” conflicts between Muslims and Christians in many cases go deeper than this simplistic and often superficial explanation. The last events in Jos in 2001, 2004, 2009, and 2010 were in many cases interpreted as a religious conflict between Muslims and Christians (Kane, 2003).

The spread of Islam in Nigeria can be traced back to the period of contact between trade caravans from North Africa. After that Islam began in the region as the “religion of rulers” before became the “religion of the masses”. Al-Maghali’s influence during the 15th century and the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in the 19th century can be seen as basic elements in the spread of Islam in northern Nigeria as well as in West Africa generally.

The Sokoto Caliphate started as a reform movement led by Sheikh Dan Fodio and lasted for about one hundred years and affected not only northern Nigeria, but the whole region. By the end of the 19th century the Caliphate entered a period of weakness, eventually lead to its decline. The coming of the British put to an end of the Islamic administrative system of the SokotoCaliphate. In the year 1900 northern Nigeria was declared a British protectorate (Umar, 1993).The colonial legacy have been polluted all the moral values established by the Islamic reform of Sheikh Othman Bin Fodio, Muslims identities, politics, and ways of living were polluted with the western values and norms. Hence, to deal with this problem facing the Muslim Ummah, Scholars like Sheikh Abubakar Mahmud Gumi who was a teacher to Sheikh Isma’il Idris Bin Zakariyya emerged and started preaching also involved themselves into the affairs of government in order to provide changes based on Islamic principles. They contributed positively towards moulding the society based on Islamic values and ideologies.

2. Biography of Sheikh Isma’il Idris Bin Zakariyya

Sheikh Isma’il Idris was born in the year 1937 in Gwaskwarom which is now in the modern time of Bauchi state, Nigeria. His grandfather belonging to Jahun tribe (Fulani), but initially came from Kano state and settled there with his family in that area. Sheikh Isma’il Idris acquired his early education with his father. Sheikh Idris father was an Islamic scholar, Imam, and a preacher in his community. A part from recitation of the Qur’an and reading of Islamic books of fiqh, Hadith and Arabic language, Sheikh Idris looked after their cattle as the case of many Fulani’s. He started learning under different scholars where he was taught Islamic theology, Jurisprudence, and Balaaga (Adam, 2005).

Moreover, one of his teachers Malam Mahmud in Bauchi drew his attention especially to the concept of Tawheed (Oneness of Allah). With him, Sheikh Idris read Mukhtassar and many other Islamic books of the Maliki school of Law. He attended the school of Arabic in Kano, where he studied Arabic under Sheikh Abubakar Mahmud Gumi and Sheikh Hassan Khalil who were known for their anti-suffism ideas. Therefore, after his graduation, he was appointed as a teacher in Bauchi State. He was not satisfied with that job because his aim in life was to preach and teach about Islam. As a result he left Bauchi in order to go to Kaduna where he was appointed as a teacher in the sultan Bello primary school which was under the control of the newly founded organisation, Jama'atul Nasarul Islam (JNI).

His dream of preaching to people realised in Kaduna where he started talking to the people after Friday prayers in different Mosques such as Kawo Mosque, Doka Mosque particularly Sultan Bello Mosque and from time to time in Army Barracks. One day a report came to the Jama'atul Nasarul Islam (JNI) which indicates that the Kakuri Mosqueturned into a "beer parlour" by some soldiers and there is no any reaction to stop it, Sheikh Idris decided to join the Nigerian Army as an Imam and his application was successful (Aliyu, nd).

3. His Career as an Army and Islamic Scholar

Sheikh Idris was employed as the chief Imam of 1st Division in Kakuri Barrack Kaduna. He was known by his seniors because of his radicalism in terms of preaching and from time to time they tried to send him to go and teach soldier's children at primary school a duty that Sheikh Idris was not comfortable with. At the same time Sheikh was also preaching to the people in town, outside barracks. As a result of that he was punished and transferred to Ibadan where Muslims are few in number. Apart from leading prayers, Sheikh Idris had the duty of solving problems between Muslims soldiers. In Ibadan he observed that junior soldiers has to pay certain amount of money from their own salaries to their superior officers, so he issued a fatwa (legal opinion) condemning that act. This act influenced the relationship between Sheikh and his superiors in Ibadan. He was regarded by many people as a trouble maker since his first day in Ibadan and his open criticism of the Imam for performing recitation after the zuhur prayer.

Further, Sheikh Idris reacted to the Imam and congregation that there is no proof of their practices neither in the Qur'an nor in the Sunna of the Prophet (SAW). He invited them to read the book of Sheikh Usman Bin Fodio Ihya' Ussunna (revivalism of the Sunna). After three months in Ibadan he was transferred to Kontagora which is now presently Niger State. Sheikh Idris continued his preaching to soldiers in Kontagora and even people from outside came to listen his preaching and lessons. He then examined the need for the establishment of Friday Mosque in the Barracks and obtained permission from his captain. The Mosque attracted many people from outside and inside the Barracks which caused problem with the local authorities. A dispute was occurred between Sheikh and Sufi Imam from the town, the situation escalated and finally Sheikh Idris was demoted to warrant officer 1, later on, Sheikh Gumi intervened as a mediator and organised a meeting in order to reconcile them. After the meeting, the Sufi Imam who was then Emir of Kontagora left his Sufi order and joins the camp of Sheikh Idris; this event marked the political and religious success of Sheikh Idris in Kontagora (Umar, 1983). Another important event in the life of Sheikh Idris was his transfer to Jos, the capital of Plateau state. Jos is an influential city because of its ethnic and religious diversity. The city still holds symbolic relevance for many Izala members today. Not because Izala as an organization was formed in Jos but it has also succeeded in a milieu where Christianity has had a long tradition. Sheikh Idris was sent to Jos, to the 3rd Armoured Division. In Jos he was under the supervision of Major Alhassan who was warned about the activities and troubles created by the new-comer in the last stations he passed through. First of all a commitment was made that the Sheikh should not preach in places where a mosque does not exist. Sheikh Idris was in the Rukuba Barrack when he started preaching in his residence. After that, he extended his activity to other areas in Jos, especially in the private houses of those who were attracted by his preaching the

house of Alhaji Lawal Mai Suga, and the house of Alhaji Garba Pasali. The preaching activities were also extended to other areas of the town Dagon Dutse. He attracted more and more people especially among the Tijjani's, the dominant Sufi brotherhood in Jos.

As in other places, there was attempt to transfer Sheikh Idris to Borno State but it was failed. The Sheikh was successful in establishing a network of followers. The fact that the preaching of Sheikh Idris attracted many followers was the basis for establishing an organized body. It is not clear if Sheikh Idris resigned from the Nigerian Army or if he was dismissed, but it is a fact that he left his job to form the Izala-organization in 1978. Sheikh Ismaila Idris died in 2000, while his prominence might have been somewhat eclipsed by that of his charismatic teacher and patron Sheikh Abubakar Mahmud Gumi, he remains an important figure when striving to understand the complex trajectory of a dynamic movement such as Izala in the recent Nigerian history.

4. Formation of Jama'atu Izalatul Bid'a Wa' iqamatus Sunna (Society for Removal of Islamic Innovation and Re-establishment of the Sunna of the Prophet) (JIBWIS) Nigeria

Many people argued that the establishment of the JIBWIS organization was a means to protect Sheikh Abubakar Mahmud Gumi because he opposed the Sufi brotherhoods as a single person and for the Sheikh Idris, made the establishment of the organization in order to become stumbling block to Suffism. In a wider framework, many politically interested Muslims search an alternative ways to express their political energies and thus engaged themselves in religious organizations. The launch of the organization, it took place in Jos on the 8th February 1978. As part of the preparations for the establishment, a committee of seven people was set up. Among others, the committee included Sheikh Ismaila Idris, Alhaji Ibrahim Musalla, Alhaji Musa Muhammad, Alhaji Hussein, Alhaji Sabo, and Mallam Tanimu Aliyu. The first concern of the committee was to give a name to the organization. Alhaji Musalla suggested "Jama'at al-Birr wa'l-Taqwa (Society for Welfare and Fear of God) and the name were rejected. Sheikh Musa Muhammad suggested "Jama'at Izalatul Bid'a" (Society for the Removal of Innovation). A comment came from Sheikh Gumi who was informed of the suggestions concerning the name. According to him, if the Society wanted to fight Bid'a so what should be established? Sheikh Gumi proposed "Jama'at Izalatul Bid'a wa-Iqamatus Sunna" (Society for Removal of Islamic Innovations and Re-establishment of the Sunna of the Prophet). Consequently Izala movement was formed and it was formally registered as an Islamic organisation on 11th December 1985 by the federal ministry of Internal affairs (Abun-Nasr, and Jamil, 2007).

5. Aims and Objective of JIBWIS

Izala was established in order to invite Muslims to come back to their religion on the path of As-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ. The organization invites Muslims to Al-aqida as-saḥiḥa (rightful faith) and considers the Qur'an and the Sunna to be principal sources for unifying Muslims. What is outside these two sources is the view as to whether the concept of ijtihad (in Arabic effort, individual reasoning) can be considered "true or false".

- The situation of the Muslims Ummah was corrupted with many innovations and moral decadence therefore, the Izala was established to bring them back to the Sunna and free them from Jahl al-aqida al-Islamiyya (ignorance of Islamic faith).
- Izala is not a political organization operating secretly; it is an organization of da'awa in lines with Qur'an and Sunna. When it comes to Islamic sharia (Siyasat al-Shar'iyah al-Islamiyyah) Izala is regarded to be part of it.
- Izala tries to avoid any ethnic, sectarian or provincial differences. It works for the oneness of God (Tawheed) that is the sovereignty of Allah both inside and outside of Nigeria.
- Warning Muslims against polytheism, innovation, new ideas of atheists and communists, returning to the Qur'an and the Sunna following al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ in faith, worshipping, human transactions, and in all fields of life.

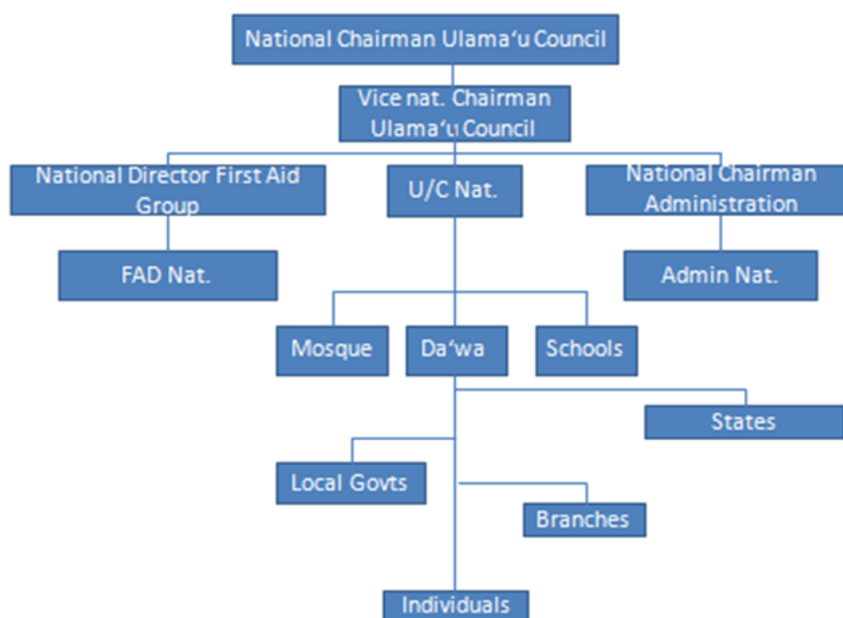
- Izala does not rely on a particular madhhab (school of Law), group of people, or persons. The difference is based on taqwa (Fear of God) showing Muslims their religion and inviting them to follow its rules.
- Unite the Muslims under the same faith and same path in order to establish an Ummah organized under one flag and one Imam and comfortable atmosphere in which to educate generations of Muslims.
- Establishing good Muslim who is far from polytheism, fundamentalism and belief in myths and free the Muslim world from its enemies who destroyed the unity of Muslims.
- Al-Tasfiya wa'l-Tarbiya (Purification of soul). Izala movement emphasized the need of establishing Islamic schools that would provide both Islamic and western education in line with the teaching of Islam, and rejected the idea of sending children to missionary schools due to the corruption of moral values and aqida.
- Attempt to set up an Islamic society and practice the rule of God on earth. This is the path of Izala in Nigeria. The organization invites people in and outside the country to assist in propagating the message of Islam.

6. Structural Organization of Jama'atul Izalatul Bid'a Wa 'iqamatus Sunnah (JIBWIS) Nigeria

The administrative structure of the organization comprises the following hierarchical order:-

- The General President (Ameer) is responsible for leading the organisation in all its administrative and Da'awa activities.
- The General Committee of Organization: comprised of seventy members representing local governments. The committee elects members of the advisory committee and executive committee of the Society. This committee is headed by the leader of the organization or one of his deputies.
- Department of Da'awa or Advisory Committee: comprised of twenty-five members and is headed by the leader of al-Majlis al-a'la li'Shu'un Da'awa wa Irshad wa Ta'lim (High Council of Da'awa Affairs, Orientation and Education), a secretary and his deputy. This department deals with da'awa, schools and mosques, fatwas, and teaching. The committees of Education, of fatwas, of Mosques are headed by Administrative leaders within this department.
- The Executive Committee: made of fifteen members, its meetings are headed by the General Leader of Izala or his deputy (head of the al-Majlis al-'la li'Shu'un Da'awa Irshad wa' Ta'lim). In this part, qualifications of da'i (a person practicing da'awa) are fixed.
- First Aid Groups: trained members who assist sick and injured people. They also organize places of gathering and meetings. They have a particular uniform similar to the armed forces.
- Secretariat: is responsible for letters, prints, and everything needed by the society. This body is headed by a General Secretary who has a deputy.
- Information Section: shows activities of the organization through publications, loudspeaker, records, and cassettes.
- Communication Section: Communication within local governments and Islamic organizations in and outside the country. It represents the Society in any location within the Islamic world.
- Organization Section: organizes meetings and workshops of Izala. It fixes the date of meetings. It collects da'awa requirements and directs preachers to their places of da'awa. This body is made of eleven members (the president and his deputy, Secretary and his deputy, three from the Council of Ulama, Leader of Information Section, two representatives from the First Aid groups and a representative from the Finance Committee.
- Finances Section: collects money and plans the budget of the Society and organizes the management of resources. Cannot act without the treasurer of the Society, the Leader of Izala, and leader of the Ulama Council. A seal is necessary for all documents and no transaction can be achieved orally. This section can also initiate projects for the Society to fulfil its objectives.

The organisational structure of Jama'atu Izalatul Bid'a Wa'iqamatus Sunna (JIBWIS)



After the establishment of Izala, internal disagreement emanated as a result power tussle. And after the death of the movement's Patron, Sheikh Abubakar Gumi in 1992, Izala splatted into two factions, one based in Jos, the other in Kaduna. Many, both inside and outside the movement speculated that the division was caused by Sheikh Idris' radical teachings. His opponents within the Izala criticised his styles of leadership, his harshness, and even his rigidity in terms of Islamic fatwa (legal opinion). According to one of his early followers who later split from him, Sheikh Ismaila Idris had a strong, severe attitude, and his rigid personality led many Izala followers to break within the organization. However, his sympathizers and followers describe him as a dutiful scholar devoted to his students, and a humble person who respects the Ulama but has the courage to speak the truth when necessary (Jallo, nd).

7. His contribution in terms of Education and Enlightenment

Sheikh Ismaila Idris is one of the leading figure in terms of Islamic da'awa in Nigeria, he viewed that seeking Islamic knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslims based on the hadith of the Prophet (SAW) "*Which he says seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslims irrespective of sexes*". Sheikh Idris devoted his time in preaching and calling people to Islam based on Qur'an and Sunna. He was known for rejecting Sufism in all its forms. He wrote also about aqida (belief) from a point of view sympathetic to the Salafi School, and he opposed anything that he believed to be an innovation in religion. His fatwas (legal opinions) were often highly debated by scholars both within and outside the Izala movement. On certain points, he held views that differed from those of most of the Izala scholars.

The movement established schools for Higher Islamic Education which offers both ordinary diploma and certificates in Arabic and Islamic Studies. It has also established technical and science secondary schools, and nomadic education schools in many states. In the area of health care, the movement has fifty primary health care centres and 11 Sunnah Hospitals. The movement established da'awa training Schools for Preachers, propagators, Instructors and teachers of the religion. Islamic training centres in many towns and cities are established. The

movement also organised training circles for the older and adult Muslims both male and females in the Mosques. The organisation established schools for the married and single Muslim ladies, because they believe that women share equal rights with men in seeking education both Islamic and western.

8. Social Welfare and Community Service

Jama'atu Izalatul Bid'a Wa'iqamatus Sunna established centres for taking care of widows, orphanages and incapacitated people in many States in Nigeria. The organisation provides relief materials to the victims of disasters such as flood, fire outbreak, war refugees, etc. JIBWIS established primary healthcare centres especially in villages in order to help the rural communities such as children and pregnant women. Also they provide scholarship to those who are not able to pay their school fees.

9. Leadership, Political Participation and Social Justice

Sheikh Idris provides good exemplary manner of leadership style, through his teachings, he encouraged Muslims Ummah to participate in government affairs in order to bring about positive changes based on Islamic values and principles. In many occasions during his sermon, preaching, lectures and seminars he uses that opportunity to call on the Muslims youth to join any governmental work in order to represent Islam. As a retired military man, always encouraged Muslims youth to join security forces with the aim of protecting the interest of Islam and defence of the country against external aggression. He believed with strong leadership based on the principles of Shariah and hope for that in Nigeria. He opined that a true leader must possess the following qualities such as good character, honesty, trustworthy, education and physical fitness. According to Sheikh Idris a true leader is the one that has patience never take revenge if any one attacks him. With regards to the election or participation in politics he encourages Muslims to come out and cast their vote together with their wives and adult girls. He strongly and openly supported the Muslim candidate during election and throughout his life never supporting unbeliever candidates in an election.

Moreover, Sheikh Idris always talks about the issue of social justice and viewed that justice is a prerequisite and requirement of religious rules and regulations. A rule that is not just is not religious, justice means fulfil the needs, attain the rights, and eliminate discrimination and inequality within the society. Thus, the issue concerning power, government and relationship between the ruler and ruled are among the significant issues with regards to social justice (Amanaah). Allah (S.W.T) will ask every one and account of his deeds in the day of resurrection.

10. Methodology of Izala movement

The methodology of Izala movement was peaceful, political rather than violence or revolutionary. Izala as an Islamic organisation formed by Sheikh Idris did not transform or join political party rather it is very active in terms of politics because of its significance. Their major emphasis is indoctrination of Muslims Ummah based on Qur'an and Sunnah and avoids any kinds of innovation.

11. Islamization of knowledge

The Izala Organization which had its headquarter in Jos Plateau state the Christians dominated area in the north central saw the necessity for the need of Islamizing the knowledge. In order to protect the faith of the Muslims Ummah against the corrupt values of missionaries' school of Christians, Izala established many schools from primary, secondary and college of higher Islamic education which combined both Islamic and western education. Sheikh Idris emphasized that Islamizing of knowledge based on Qur'an and Sunna is the foundation of norms and values of the society based on revealed book. Hence, Izala established many schools across the country with aim of purifying the heart of the Ummah towards Islam.

12. Summary and Conclusion

Sheikh Isma'il Idris Bin Zakariyya founder of Jama'atu Izalatul Bid'a Wa Iqamatus Sunna (JIBWIS) Nigeria,

played a significant role in moulding the society through his Islamic and political reform. He contribute immensely through his teaching and Da'awa, (calling people to Islam). With the formation of this vibrant Islamic organisation many people converted to Islam, many Sufi orders turn to Sunni adherents, many leaders accepted the truth and worked with it. Also, the organisation played a significant role in terms of Islamization of knowledge and establishment of many schools across the country. The Izala as an Islamic Organisation is not only operating in Nigeria but in many West African Countries such as Republic of Niger, Benin, Ghana, Cameroon and others. The reforms provide meaningful achievement in those countries.

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