The Influence of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass on His Followers in Ilorin, Nigeria

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Abstract

The article studies the influence of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass, a Senegalese Sufi scholar, on the notable figures of Ilorin, Nigeria. The study selects some major teachings of the Shaykh and discusses how they influence these followers. It also attempts to explain how such influence is demonstrated by these followers to determine the level of understanding of Shaykh’s followers of his teachings as well as its adaptation. The method adopted in the research is based on participatory observation and interpretation approach. In the final analysis, the findings reveal that a large number of the followers of Shaykh in the city of Ilorin, Nigeria do not only portray themselves as being influenced by the teachings of Shaykh, they also demonstrate their adoption of his teachings in various ways, without giving consideration to the school of law (i.e. Mālikī school), they belong to.

Introduction

Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass al-Kawlakhî (1900–1975) was one of the famous Sufi figures of Tijāniyyah Order whose teachings have continued to influence his followers in Nigeria. Niyass belonged to the Wolof speaking people of the Republic of Senegal in West Africa. He was born in the village of Taiba-Niassène near Kaolack. His father, ‘Abd Allāh, was a scholar and a leader in the Tijāniyyah Order. By 1922 when he died, his family had become a leading Tijāniyyah family in Senegal and the Gambia. ‘Abd Allāh was succeeded as the leader of Tijāniyyah in Senegal by his eldest son Muḥammad al-Khalifah in the late 1920s. Ibrāhīm Niyass decided to separate from his brother, Muhammad

al-Khalifah and established his own independent branch of the *Tijāniyyah* with its headquarters at *Madinah*-Kaolack close to Kaolack.²

In 1930, after establishing himself as Shaykh of the *Tijāniyyah* in *Madinah*-Kaolack, Niyass publicly proclaimed himself as “the Saviour of the Age.”³ According to Abun-Nasr, he started to speak of himself as leader of the *Tijāniyyah Fayḍah* (spiritual flood) by which he apparently meant this Order’s revival. He identified it with a form of *Tarbiyyah* (mystical training), which he made requisite for initiation into it. The *Tarbiyyah* as taught by Niyass, consisted of the recitation of fixed *awrād* (prayers and litanies) under the supervision of a qualified Shaykh during a period of *Khalwah* (mystical retreat) with the aim of purifying the inner-self and attaining mystical knowledge of God.⁴

Abun-Nasr observes that as a prescribed mystical training, Niyass’s *Tarbiyyah* enhanced the *Tijāniyyah* appeal to a large number of Muslims. His branch of the *Tijāniyyah*, which became known as *Jamā’at al-Fayḍah* (congregation of spiritual flood) expanded rapidly.⁵ His status as the Saviour of the Age as well as the Khalifah of the *Tijāniyyah* globally was recognised and accepted by the leadership of the *Tijāniyyah* in Fez (the birth place of the *Tijāniyyah* Order). Niyass began to send his representatives all over West Africa with the aim of urging people to join the *Tijāniyyah* Order and accept his leadership. According to Clarke, this brought him a large followership in Nigeria, particularly in Kano and many other cities. He gained supporters in many countries of West Africa, such as Ghana, the Gambia, Mali, and Mauritania.⁶

However, the mystical training (*Tarbiyyah*) which Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass prescribed as a prerequisite for both the attainment of spiritual flood and Order’s revival was viewed by other *Tijāni Shuyūkh* with misgiving, considering the fact that it gave those who practised it the illusion of superiority over the other members of the *Tijāniyyah* Order.

That notwithstanding, Niyass became a Muslim leader of International repute, involved in the activities of the World Muslim Congress centred in Egypt and Muslim League sponsored by Saudi Arabia.⁷ He then attracted

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³ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
⁷ Abun-Nasr, *Muslim Communities of Grace*. 
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many disciples and students who later became scholars. He made a landmark in the history of Sufism as his teachings continue to attract a large number of Muslims globally to the extent that his disciples and followers who form a segment of the Tijaniyyah Order in Nigeria are tagged as “Reformed Tijaniyyah” by John N. Padan, the term used to distinguish those who accept his teaching and leadership from those called Traditional Tijaniyyah, referring to those who still hold ‘Umar al-Futu (d. 1864) as their leader and do not accept the leadership of Niyass. Ahmed Rufai Mohammed, however, observes no ideological differences between the teachings of ‘Umar al-Futu whose and Ibrahim Niyass. Whatever may be the case, the two terms would be used interchangeably in this paper.

It is pertinent to note that branches of Tijaniyyah globally are more than the two mentioned above. In Senegal for instance, there are various branches of Tijaniyyah. They are ‘Umarians which is traced to ‘Umar al-Futu. It was led by Sayyid Nuru Tal, a grandson of al-Futu. Another branch was that of Sy family led by Malik Sy and that of the house of Niyass led by Ibrahim Niyass. In addition to these branches, there was another one called Hamallah. It is also called Hamalriyyah. The Hamalriyyah was named after Ahmad Hamahullah b. Muhammad at-Tishit, commonly known as Shaykh Hamallah. It had its origin in a controversy over the question of a Tijani ritual, which was believed to have been initiated by Muhammad b. Ahmad b. ‘Abd Allah commonly known as al-Sharif al-Akhdar. The branch believes that others had departed from the rule, which Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani set for the performance of the Wazifa of the Order by having the prayer, Jawhar al-Kamal recited in twelve instead of eleven times as stipulated in the main sources of the Tijaniyyah Order called Jawahir al-Ma‘ani. However, a large

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11 Paden, Religion and Political Culture in Kano, 94.
13 Jawharat al-Kamal is one of the litanies recited in the Wazifa. See ibid.
14 Jawahir al-Ma’ani wa Bulugh al-Amanni is the full name of the work, written by Shaykh Ali Harazim, on the dictate of the founder of the Tijaniyyah Order Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani. It was written in 1213/1792.
number of leading Shaykhs of the Order accept a tradition in which Ahmad al-Tijānī enjoined his followers in his late days to recite the prayer twelve instead of eleven times in the Wāzīfah.\(^\text{15}\)

The influence of this branch was short-lived. But those of both Mālik Sy (d. 1922) and Niyass became the most influential branches of the Tijāniyyah in Senegal.\(^\text{16}\) These two branches later witnessed a more serious split as Niyass branch refused to recognise the spiritual authority of the Sy family.\(^\text{17}\) Meanwhile, Niyass a Khalīfah of the Tijāniyyah Order, recognised by the Central Zāwiyyah of the Order in Fez, travelled with the aim of proselytising his Sufi Order and increasing its membership. He then made his maiden visit to Nigeria in response to a request of the then Emir of Kano, Al-Ḥājj ‘Abd Allāh Bayero (d. 1953), who had met him at Makkah in 1936 and requested him to visit Nigeria.\(^\text{18}\) The time of the maiden visit remains controversial. John Paden for instance, holds the view that the first visit of the Niyass to Kano, Nigeria was in 1937. But according to Rüdiger Seesemann, it took place in 1945 after the World War II.\(^\text{19}\) He holds that the “outbreak of the World War II created serious obstacles for free movement between the French and British colonies.”\(^\text{20}\) Moreover “colonial reports from British and French archives show that, during Vichy years (1940–1942), French and British officials suspected each other of using Niasse’s services to undermine the political stability of their respective colonies.”\(^\text{21}\) Seesmann further states that Niyass “made several attempts in 1943 and 1944 to secure permission from French authorities for a trip to Morocco.”\(^\text{22}\) However, these attempts did not succeed as he could not receive approval from Protectorate Officials in Rabat. For almost ten years, Niyass was unable to expand his relationship with two prominent acquaintances made during his 1937 trip to Makkah, Shaykh

\(^{15}\) Abun-Nasr, Muslim Communities of Grace, 225.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.


\(^{20}\) Ibid.

\(^{21}\) Ibid.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.
Ahmad Sukayraj and ‘Abd Allāhī Bayero, the Emir of Kano, Nigeria.\(^{23}\)

Considering above, Seesemann concludes that “almost immediately after the German capitulation on May 8, 1945, he [Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass] undertook a trip to Kano with stopovers in the Gambia, Siera Leone, Gold Coast (present-day Ghana), apparently with the permission of both the French and the British Administrations.”\(^{24}\)

Whatever might be the date of the visit, it has to be stated that since his first visit to Nigeria, Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass continued to make visits to the country whereby his teachings and practices attracted followers who were later known by different names.

Hardly could one visit a town in Nigeria where there exist no trace of members of Reformed Tijānīyyah. One of such towns is Ilorin, the Kwara State Capital. Ilorin is believed to have been founded by either Yoruba or Baruba speaking people in the sixteenth century and remained into oblivion until it became into limelight in 1800s when Islam dominated the city.\(^{25}\)

According to Stefan Reichmuth, Ilorin is one of the largest Muslim cities in Nigeria.\(^{26}\) It is believed that Muslim scholars and Islamic learning played a crucial role in the emergence of a Muslim Emirate in Ilorin after 1800. It is considered as the second largest town in the Sokoto Caliphate after Kano till 1870, and the major trading and manufacturing centre in the south of Niger.\(^{27}\)

Academic researches have been conducted on the influence of Niyass on his followers by different scholars. For instance, Y. A. Quadri writes on the influence of this Sufi sage and that of his followers on Nigeria as a whole. He discusses some of the teachings and practices of Niyass, which attracted national attention such as the practice of Qabd (i.e., folding of one’s arms while observing ritual prayers (Ṣalāh)). Another teaching of the Shaykh discussed by Quadri is the recitation of Basmalah (Bi Ḣsm Allāh al-Rahmān al-Rahīm) along with the Sūrat al-Fātihah (chapter one of the Qur’ān) during the observance of ritual prayers (Ṣalāh) as well as the admissibility of reciting the Qur’ān on the radio.\(^{28}\) Another scholar, Ahmed Rufai Mohammed, also examines the influence of Niyass in Niger-Benue Confluence area of Nigeria.

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\(^{23}\) Ibid.

\(^{24}\) Ibid.


\(^{26}\) Stefan Reichmuth, “Islamic Learning and Its Interaction with ‘Western’ Education in Ilorin, Nigeria,” *Muslim Identity and Social Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 1993, 179.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 181.

He discusses the historical background of the *Tijāniyyah* Sufi Order, especially how the Order spread to cities in the Niger-Benue Confluence. Among many others, there cities include Lokoja, Bida, Okene. The factors responsible for the spread of the Order in the area were also discussed along with the differences between those whom he referred to as the ‘*Umarian* (i.e., the followers of Shaykh ‘Umar al-’Fūtī and those whom he called the *Nias* *Tijāniyyah*. He also examines some teachings and practices of Niyass such as *Qabd*, *Tarbiyyah* (Spiritual Training) and *Mawlid* al-*Nabī* (i.e., celebration of the birthday of Prophet Muḥammad). 29

**The Central Teachings of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass**

The influence of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass on his followers in Ilorin is manifested in his following teachings:

* Tarbiyyah (Spiritual Training/Education)

One of the teachings or practices of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass, which is adopted by his followers in Ilorin is *Tarbiyyah* or spiritual training/education. *Tarbiyyah* is considered “a system whereby a *murīd* (Sufi novice) strives to attain spiritual uplift to the extent of knowing God properly.” 30 The main purpose of *Tarbiyyah*, according to this perspective, is to control and purify the soul, and consequently become gnostic. 31 The Sufis view *Tarbiyyah* from two perspectives. These are *Tarbiyyah bi ‘l-Iṣṭīlāh* and *Tarbiyyah Ḥaḍīqīyyah*. The former is a form of spiritual training that involves complete retreat and seclusion from the public, minimising the level of food consumption while engaging in constant *dhikr* i.e., remembrance of Allah and recitation of litanies. 32 The latter centres on spiritual guidance based on divine scripture, prophetic tradition, and initiation of spiritual leader as well as engagement with constant recitation of certain prayers and litanies (*adhkār*). 33 As a matter of principle, the Sufis are of the opinion that any Sufi novice undergoing *Tarbiyyah* is mandated to go through the companionship of *al-Shaykh al-‘Waṣīl*

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(a spiritual master who has attained Gnosis), who guides him through the spiritual journey to the desired spiritual goal. The concept of *Tarbiyyah* is emphasised by Niyass. For instance, some of his works such as *Kashif al-Ilbäs 'an Faydat Khâtät Abî 'l-Abbâs* discusses the basic teachings of Sufism and the issue of *Tarbiyyah* is given prominence. In this work, he interprets the views of Ahmad Zarqūq (1441–1449) and his spiritual mentor, Shaykh al-Ḥadrâmî, who believed that *Tarbiyyah* had ceased to exist. One may observe that perhaps, they based their submissions on the speculation that conditions governing the spiritual trainers could hardly be satisfied, based on that, Niyass was of the view that the submissions of both Zarqūq and his spiritual mentor, al-Ḥadrâmî, could not be interpreted as if the *Tarbiyyah* has completely ceased or become into oblivion. Instead, those who deny the existence of *Tarbiyyah* might have been referring to *Tarbiyyah bi 'l-Iṣṭilâh* (i.e., spiritual training through seclusion), which is generally believed by the Sufis to have ceased and become into oblivion.  

Since the appearance of Shaykh Niyass on Sufi stage, *Tarbiyyah* has been made available to all members of the Order both literates and illiterates with ease. Furthermore, according to the his teachings, *Tarbiyyah* helps the faith to attain perfection. Based on that, a stronger emphasis is placed on mystical experience as an essential aspect, although, not totally mandatory. His work *Kashif al-Ilbäs* puts the him in the limelight for not being a scholar alone but also an authority in Sufism. Following the adoption of *Tarbiyyah* by his followers and consequently identified with it, this issue has attracted the attention of the Sufi critics such as former Grand Qâdi of Northern Nigeria Al-Ḥâjj Abû Bakr Mahmûd Gumi (d. 1992). He wrote an open letter to Niyass seeking further explanation on the concept. In his response, Niyass points out that *Tarbiyyah* could not be rationally explained but only be experienced. His response is contained in a book entitled: *Ijâbat al-Fatwâ fi Tahâfut al-Ṣâfîyyah.*

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35 Shaykh al-Ḥadrâmî was the teacher to Shaykh al-Zarqūq who studied for a period of time in his Zâwiyyah, His full name is Abû ’Abbâs Aḥmad b. al-’Uqâbâ al-Ḥadrâmî. See Ibid.


In the city of Ilorin, the practice of *Tarbiyiyah* is noticed among the followers of Ibrāhīm Niyass to the extent that, one could hardly find a Sufi novice being initiated into the Reformed *Tijāniyyah* Order, who could not be urged by his *Muqaddam* to go through the process of *Tarbiyiyah*. The practice is so pronounced in the city, as it is not restricted to a particular gender. As a result, their *Zāwiyahs* in the city, usually appoint some senior members called *Sayyids* to guide and monitor the novices undertaking *Tarbiyiyah* on behalf of the *Muqaddam* or Shaykh. The *Tarbiyiyah* is usually undertaken without *Khalwah* (seclusion). Considering the afore-mentioned fact, one is given to know that *Tarbiyiyah* is a fundamental doctrine of the Sufi Orders, only to be more emphasised by the *Tijāniyyah* Order under Niyass. However, it is noticed that many of the followers of Niyass usually use proverbs and parables after undertaking the *Tarbiyiyah*. Eventually their preachings are mostly mystical. A particular reference can be made to Nūr al-Dīn ʿĀlī Ḥakīm (d. 2011), ʿĀbd al-ʿWāḥīb Abemi, Awwal Bābā Tawfiq, Mūsā Aloba and many others. In sum, one observes that the influence of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass on the issue of *Tarbiyiyah* is noted among his followers in the city, as there is no historical evidence for such influence before the appearance of Niyass on Sufi stage.

**Qabd**

*Qabd*, (i.e., the practice of folding one’s arms across the chest during the performance of the ritual prayers), is another aspect in the teachings of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass, adopted by his followers in Ilorin. It has become a symbol identified with the followers of Niyass to the extent that they are called Yan Kabulu (those who practice Qabd) is some parts of northern states of Nigeria. Previously, the practice of *Qabd* was virtually non-existent in Ilorin. It only appeared during the Niyass’ visit to Nigeria. Prior to that period, the mode of performing ritual prayers in Nigeria as a whole by both *Tijānis* and non-*Tijānis* was to let down their arms at their sides. Though many Prophetic traditions support the practice of *Qabd*, it attracted criticism resulting from misgivings of different Nigerian Muslim communities about it. Perhaps, what accounted for such misgivings was, according to Quadri, the fact that *Qabd* was earlier practised by people called *Ahmadiyyah* who were isolated from

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41 I had a conversation with Sayyidah Nušrat al-Imām (a Leading female *Ṣūfiyah* who disclosed to me that she undertook *Tarbiyah* under Shaykh Nūr al-Ḥakīm (d. 2011).
42 I personally attended lectures delivered by many of the scholars mentioned where they talked in paradox.
43 Quadri, “The Influence of Shaykh Ibrahim Niyass,” 51.
the majority of Muslims in the country.

Therefore, no serious Muslim prayer observer would like to be associated or linked with this sect. Added to that, is the fact that, Nigerian Muslims basically belong to Mālikī school of law that does not allow Qabd as a mode of performing prayer, rather prefers sādīfl (letting down the arms by one’s sides). The practice later became a national issue.

On the academic Niyass wrote a work entitled: Raf’ al-malām ‘an man rafa’a wa qabaḍa ihtid’ā bi Sayyid al-Anām (Exonerating those who lifted and folded [their arms while performing the prayer] following the Leader of the mankind). In this work, he attempts to explain the practice of Qabd and justify it by stating that neither God nor His Prophet Muḥammad directed the Muslims to follow any specific school of law. This work attracted attention of other scholars who wrote either in favour or against the practice. Reference can be made to Qam’ al-fasād fi tafsīl al-sādīl ‘alā ‘l-qabḍ fi hadīthi ‘l-bilād, written by Shaykh Muhammad al-Nāṣur al-Kabara (d. 1996) (the leader of Qādiriyah Sufi Order in West Africa) against the practice of Qabḍ and in defense of Qabḍ and against Shaykh al-Nāṣir Kabara among many others. Shaykh Ibrahim had earlier written another work entitled al-Khubṭab al-musammāt tawṣīl al-‘ilm wa ‘l-‘irfān li shuyūkh wa shubbān where he challenged the anti-Qabḍ people to produce their evidence on Sādīl and pledged that had a prophetic tradition (hadīth) be produced to substantiate their claims, he would donate all his collections and those of his disciple al-Ḥājj ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Uba Ringim (d. 1999) of Kano to such individuals.

In the city of Ilorin, the story was not that different among the followers of Niyass who faced strong opposition from their critics for adopting the teachings of the Shaykh on the practice of Qabḍ. They were oppressed,

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45 Quadri, “The Influence of Shaykh Ibrahim Niyass,” 51.
47 See Quadri, “The Influence of Shaykh Ibrahim Niyass,” 52–54. See also Naygayr, al-Shaykh Ibrahim Niyass al-Sīnighālī, 144–50.
48 Al-Ḥājj ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Uba Ringim of Kano (d. 1999) was one of the followers of Shaykh Ibrahim Niyass in Nigeria and a direct Sufi disciple of Shaykh Abū Bakr ‘Atiq of Kano (d. 1974). He was one of the richest merchants in Kano. He has a large collection of books on different disciplines. I personally had contact with him on many occasions, between 1980 and 1984 when I was a student at Bayero University Kano, and later in 1998 when I was writing my PhD thesis on his Sufi teacher and mentor, Shaykh Abū Bakr ‘Atiq of Kano.
discriminated against, and stigmatised. For instance, notable Sufi scholars and followers of in the city were given different epithets. A typical example was al-Hājj Muḥy al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Ḥāmīn al-‘Ābidūn (d. 1973), a staunch follower of Niyās and a descendant of the great Islamic forerunners in Ilorin (i.e., Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-‘Ābidūn [d. 1954]). He was accused of being “rebel” against Mālikī School of law, for whose growth and development in Ilorin his fore-fathers had laboured. Added to that, the followers of Shaykh were accused of having association with the Ahmadiyya movement. Rather, they were portrayed as disloyal to the teaching and practice of their forefathers.\(^50\)

At Balogun Gambari ward of Ilorin city in 1960s, an Islamic legal verdict (Fatwā) was promulgated by the Imam and Alfas (Islamic Scholars) of the area announcing that henceforth, any worshiper who would practice Qabāl should be banned from entering the Imam Gambari Mosque and other mosques of the area. This Fatwā affected some Tijāniyya members, especially, the followers of the Shaykh such as al-Ḥājj ‘Abd al-Karīm Lagbe Balogun Gambari (d. 2006) who was then a tailor at Gambari Market. The same situation prevailed in almost all wards in Ilorin city and its environs.\(^51\)

The oppressive conditions faced by the followers of Niyās living around Gambari area of Ilorin in the early 1960s led to develop an in-door training at the houses of some learned ones among them. The aim of the training and re-training themselves was to expose members to aspects of the religion that affect their Sufi practices and their religious activities generally such as the practice of Qabāl. The house of al-Ḥājj al-Imām ‘Alī Abū Bakr Jabata (d. 2009)\(^52\) was one of the central points. The opposition to the followers of the Niyās did not put a stop to their training. Instead, they thought it strengthened their faith and increased confidence in their activities.

However, a succour came to relieve these members of Reformed Tijāniyya from exclusion, when a group of Muslim missionaries from Indo-Pakistan came to Ilorin in the late 1960s moving from one mosque to another for proselytisation. In Imam Gambari Mosque, one of the Reformed

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\(^{50}\) Informants: Al-Ḥājj ‘Abd al-Karīm Lagbe Balogun Gambari, (d. 2006) a senior Muqaddam in Ilorin, interviewed on Sunday 19th September, 2004 at his Gambari residence. Also Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahmān Mayaki, the current Imam of Balogun Gambari mosque of Ilorin narrated similar story in a public lecture at a Mawlid celebration of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyās organised by Zāwiyah Apalacndo on June 24, 2011.

\(^{51}\) Ibid.

Tijāniyyah members asked their view about Qabd and Sadl. They explained that Qabd is equally supported by the prophetic traditions. Their answer helped in changing the public opinion as the ban placed on the worshipers who observed Qabd was later lifted and many other people who were not members of the Reformed Tijāniyyah started folding their arms while performing prayers. They even made reference to what they witnessed during the pilgrimage to Makkah, whereby a large number of pilgrims performed their prayers folding their arms. Today, the practice of Qabd is practiced by a great number of Muslims globally irrespective of their affiliation to a Sufi Order (Tariqah).

Recitation of Basmalah

Another teaching of Niyass adopted by some of his followers in Ilorin is connected with recitation of Basmalah during the ritual prayers. Basmalah refers to reciting Bi Ism Allāh al-Rahmān al-Raḥim. It is recited along with the Sūrat al-Fatihah during the performance of prayers. It ought to be stated that Mālikī school of law has differentiated between superogatory prayers (Nawāfil) and obligatory prayers (Farā’id) in terms of reciting Basmalah. It approves of reciting the Basmalah in the superogatory prayer but not in obligatory prayers. The issue also aroused a bitter controversy. However, the controversy was not as bitter as about Qabd. Perhaps, what accounts for that is, according to Quadri, availability of both approving and disapproving statements on the recitation of the Basmalah. In sum, as a result of the influence of Niyass on his followers in Ilorin, majority of the Reformed Tijānis recite Basmalah in their ritual prayers regardless of the school of law they belong to.

Mawlid al-Nabī

Mawlid al-Nabī Celebration (Birthday Celebration of Prophet Muhammad) is another practice within the teachings of Niyass adopted by his followers. This does not suggest that members of the Tijāniyyah in Nigeria in general or Ilorin in particular had not been celebrating Mawlid al-Nabī before his rise to prominence. As a matter of fact, the history of celebrating Mawlid al-Nabī among the Tijāniyyah Sufi Order dates back to the days of the founder of the

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56 Quadri, “The Influence of Shaykh Ibrahim Niyass.”
Order, Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijānī (d. 1815), who directed his followers and Sufi disciples to celebrate the birthday of Prophet Muhammad (Mawlid) on the eve of his birthday by reciting panegyrics and eulogising the Prophet throughout the night.  

He particularly made reference to both al-Burdah and Hamzīyyah of al-Buṣayrī. In Ilorin, majority of the Tijāniyyah members were of the habit of celebrating the birthday ceremony of Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) in form of Qiyām al-layl (night vigil prayers) before the advent of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass. The format however differs from one Zāwiyyah to another. For instance, the celebration usually starts on the eleventh day of the month of Rabī‘ al-Awwal of the Islamic calendar by 10.00 p.m. and continues till the following morning. It was a form of Tahajjud where a number of raka‘at would be offered in congregation, together with recitation of certain kinds of adhkar such as Ya Latif and Haylalah which are chanted in multiple times.

However, the mode of celebrating Mawlid in Ilorin later assumed a new dimension as a result of the influence. For example, among the larger number of members of the Tijāniyyah Sufi Order Niyass’ Mawlid celebration now start the first day of Rabī‘ al-Awwal. A collection of poems compiled by for this celebrations are recited after ’Ishā’ prayer. Such recitation is done for welcoming the month in which the Prophet was born. The composed poems are tagged Majmū‘āt qaṣā‘id al-mawlid al-nabawī commonly known as Tahni‘ah. Such activities continue till the eleventh day of Rabī‘ al-Awwal when a grand birthday ceremony is staged.

The great celebration of Mawlid al-Nabī is usually slated for the eleventh day of Rabī‘ al-Awwal. The vast majority of the Muqaddamūn of the Tijāniyyah Order, especially, the followers of Shaykh Niyass travel to Kaolack Republic of Senegal for the annual international Mawlid celebration. The celebration is nowadays staged at the convenience of the celebrants. Travelling to Kaolack for the annual celebration of Mawlid al-Nabī is another evidence of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass’s influence on his followers in Ilorin. In staging the celebration, some of the teachings of Niyass are discussed and explained. For instance, the common features of the celebration include the recitation of Khuṣbat al-mawlid (Mawlid sermon), a speech once delivered by Shaykh Niyass to mark the birthday celebration of Prophet Muhammad. An ode called Tahni‘ah introduced by Niyass is also recited. In addition, lectures on multiple

57 Sayyid Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥājj Ahmad ibn al-‘Ayashi Sukayrij, Kāshif Al-Ḥijāb ’an man Talaqqā ma‘a al-Shaykh al-Tijānī min al-Shāb (Cairo, 1961), 54.
58 Buṣayrī or al-Bushirī. He is Muḥammad al-Buṣayrī (d. 694/1295). He was a Sāfi scholar, who has some prophylactic poems, Qaṣidat al-Burdah as well as Hamzīyyah to his credit. See Trimingham, The Sufi Orders in Islam, 27, 44 and 207.
aspects of Prophet Muhammad are also featured. To further show their commitment to the teachings of Niyass, a mystical work written by the Shaykh on the mystical aspects of Prophet Muhammad entitled al-Fayd al-Ahmadi fi l-mawlid al-Muhammadi (The Spiritual Flood of Ahmad on the Birthday of Muhammad) is also translated and discussed during the celebration. The celebrants observe their Fajr prayers at the venue of the celebration and then an ode al-Burda of al-Busayri is recited. In fact, there is a particular place in al-Burda where whenever Niyass reached during the recitation of the ode at the Mawlid celebration, he would raise up in reverence for the Prophet. In Ilorin, the same tradition is adopted. The position starts with:

\[ \text{Abānā mawliduhu 'an tībi 'unṣurihi} \\
\text{Yā tība mubtada'īn minhu wa mukhtatimi}^{62} \]

(His [Prophet Muhammad] birth has caused his pure lineage to be manifest
O you [Prophet Muhammad] who has good beginning and [perfect] ending).

The Shaykh would remain standing till he reached a spot which reads,

\[ \text{Jā'at li da'watibī 'l-ashjēru sājidatan} \\
\text{Tamshi ilayhi 'alā sāqin bila qadamī}^{63} \]

(The trees came to him, in response to his (Prophet Muhammad) beckoning in a state of bowing down.
Walking toward him on (its) stem, without having foot).

It will be followed by the recitation of the Qurʾān in congregation before bringing the programme to an end. All these steps are followed by the Mawlid celebrants in Ilorin as a way of demonstrating their love and respect for Niyass.\(^{64}\)

\[^{61}\text{Shaykh Abū Ishāq Ibrahim ibn 'Abd Allāh Niyass, al-Fayd al-Ahmadi fi l-Mawlid al-Muhammad, appended to Majmūʿ Qašāʾid al-Mawlid al-Nabawī by the same author (Kano: Northern Maktabat Press, Ltd, 1992), 1–10.}\]


\[^{63}\text{Ibid., 6.}\]

\[^{64}\text{I attended many Mawlid Celebrations organized by some followers of Shaykh Ibrahim Niyass between 1970–2012.}\]
Annual Recitation of the Qur’an

Another area where the influence of Niyass on his followers can be noticed in the city of Ilorin is the congregational annual recitation of the Qur’an. One of the senior disciples of Niyass in Ilorin, Shaykh Muqaddam ‘Abd al-Qādir Apalando states that it is a well-established tradition among the Sufi disciples of Niyass in Kaolack, to recite the whole Qur’an in multiple congregations at least three times a day (i.e., after Fajr, ‘Asr, and ‘Ishā prayers). These are done in Niyass’s mosque and at the end of the year, a large congregation would gather to recite the whole Qur’an for certain days.65 This practice is still in vogue in some Zawiyā of the Tijāniyyah Order in Ilorin.

Niyass in one of his works emphasises the importance of reciting the Qur’an, urging the Muslims, especially, his followers to make sure that they complete the recitation of the Qur’an at every three days, if they could not complete the recitation of the whole Qur’an everyday. And if completing it in three days is not possible, they should make it their habit of completing the recitation of the Qur’an weekly. And if such is not possible either, they should endeavour to complete the recitation of the whole Qur’an every month.66 Added to that, Niyass at another occasion timetabled for reciting the whole Qur’an within one week, starting from Saturday and concluding it on Friday.67 Perhaps, this accounts for the reason why some Muqaddamūn especially in Ilorin mandated their disciples to recite the Qur’an everyday or night at their Zawiyā collectively as well as individually, as it is the case in Apalando, Mazankore, Balogun Gambari, Baboko, Ida-Ose-Okesuna, Ita-Egba, Agbade among many others.

That notwithstanding, the practice of annual congregational recitation of the Qur’an was firstly observed effectively in an elaborated style in Ilorin in the year 2000 at the instance of Al-Hājj Muḥammad Nūr-Faydah’s Zawiyah at Mazankore, where the recitation of the whole Qur’an was completed for four hundred and seventy times in a three-day programme.68 According to Nūr-Faydah, the origin of the programme can be traced to Kaolack, adding that he had permission (Ijāzah) to organise such a programme.69 And since then, the practice has continued in the Zawiyah annually. Apart from Nūr-Faydah,
other scholars like ‘Abd al-Qādir Bamidele Apalando also adopted the practice. He too claimed to have borrowed the idea of organising this programme at his Ẓawiyah at Badiko in Ilorin from Kaolack. In the year 2000, the practice was held for the first time at Apalando Mosque. However, in the subsequent years, the members of the Ẓawiyah joined hands with those of Mazankore and observed the programmes together at the Ẓawiyah of Nur-Faydah in Ilorin.70

Special Du‘ā’ (Supplication)

There are certain Du‘ā’s, which are ascribed to Niyass. The Du‘ā’ includes the one recommended for concluding the rites of Wazīfah, Lāzim, and Dhikr al-Jumu‘ah.71 The supplication is a Khutbah, which commences with72 Allāhumma Anta ’l-‘Awwal “Oh Allah, you are the First.” Majority of the followers of Niyass in the city adopt this very Khutbah despite the fact that there are many multiple Khutbahs recommended by various scholars of Tijāniyyah Sufi Order as concluding prayers for the rites of Lāzim, Wazīfah, and Dhikr al-Jumu‘ah.73 Similar to that are other special prayers such as, Dā’irat al-maṭālib74 (Circle of Requests),75 Kanz al-aqwīya’ (Treasure of Saints) and Liwā’ al-ḥamd (Flag of Gratitude.)76 Similar to those prayers is a prayer used for concluding the recitation of the Qurʾān among many others. All these prayers are composed by the Niyass and are used to seek Allah’s favour and blessing as well as protection. Due to the influence of the Niyass on his followers, the

71 Lāzim is a rite whereby the obligatory litanies are performed by members of the Tijāniyyah Order twice daily, while Wazīfah is another rite of the Tijāniyyah Sufi Order performed either once or twice a day and Dhikr al-Jumu‘ah is a rite of the Order which is performed once a week after ‘Aṣr prayers on Fridays. For detail see Quadri, “Some Rites of the Tijāniyyah Examined,” 52–60. See also Abun-Nasr, The Tijāniyya, 50–55.
prayers are available to his followers in Ilorin and are recited collectively as well as individually.77

New Understanding to Certain Terminologies

Niyass introduced new understanding to certain terminologies compared to their universal usage. These new meanings continue to influence the thought of his followers. A typical example is Ṣadaqa (alms or charity).78 Niyass was of the view that Ṣadaqa should be given to the poor and needy and not to scholars because the scholars are representatives of the Prophet, who himself did not take or receive Ṣadaqa. Instead, he accepted gift (Hadiyyah). Niyass, therefore, ascribe Hadiyyah to the scholars.79 Due to his influence, the term Ṣadaqa has been replaced with the term Hadiyyah (gift, present or donation).80

Recitation of Qur’ānic Verses on Radio

There are some legal verdicts (fatwā) issued by Niyass on certain matters that invited attention of indigenous scholars. A typical example was the issue of recitation of verses of the Qur’ān on Radio which in 1954 became a controversial issue in Nigeria as to its being permissible or otherwise. Due to the controversy surrounding the issue, the then Emir of Zaria, Nigeria Ja’afaru wrote a letter to the then Emir of Kano, Sanūsî (d. 1992) who was, at that time, a member of Governing Council of Radio Kaduna (now Radio Nigeria, Kaduna) seeking clarification on the issue. Sanūsî, disciple of Niyass, on receiving the letter sent it to the Shaykh for further guidance. Niyass approved the act and justified it, since then, the management of Radio Kaduna approved it and continues to air the programme on Radio till date.81 The followers of Niyass in Ilorin borrowed a leaf from his Fatwā and considered it a reference point when similar case occurred in the city in the late 1960s.

Presentation of Hadiyyah to Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass by His Followers

There are multiple ways in which the influence Niyass is demonstrated by his followers in the city of Ilorin. Such demonstrations are in form of their love and affection for the Shaykh. One of such ways is offering special prayers for him at the end of their rituals, especially, the rites of Lāzīm, Wazīfah, and

77 I have in my possession all the prayers mentioned.
79 Shaykh Abū Bakr Salah al-Din Agbarigidoma disclosed it to me at his Agbarigidoma, Alore on April 25, 1999.
80 Wehr, A dictionary of modern written Arabic, 1024.
81 Quadri, “The Influence of Shaykh Ibrahīm Niyass,” 57–58.
Dhikr al-Jumu’ah, as well as the end of their obligatory ritual prayers, which are considered a gift (Hadiyyah). The format of Hadiyyah is to recite Sūrat al-Fātiḥah once, Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ eleven times and Ṣalāt al-Fātiḥah (one of the litanies of the Tijāniyyah Order) ten times. This is a global prayer, which the disciples of the Shaykh offer for him. In Ilorin, the story is the same. That does not suggest that the Sufi novices (Murīdin) in Ilorin do not offer prayers for other scholars. As a matter of fact, prayers are offered to all especially the senior members of the Order whom they consider as Caliphs (Khulafāʾ) or Representatives of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Tijānī. Yet, special one is offered to Niyass.

Another form of Hadiyyah which is offered to Niyass in the city of Ilorin is offering material gifts. The mode of giving this form of gift is to make donation to any descendants of Shaykh Niyass or any of his senior Sufi disciples who might have visited the members of the Reformed Tijāniyyah at their respective Zāwiyah. In some cases, a descendant or a senior disciple of the Shaykh might have introduced a Murīd (Sufi novice) to members of the Reformed Tijāniyyah in the city through a letter of attestation, which is usually honoured. The Hadiyyah may even be in form of cash or material such as copies of Qurʾān, Islamic books of various aspects, prayer mats, or carpets among many other things, based on one’s wishes and means, just to show their affection and love for the Shaykh. In some Zāwiyahs of Ilorin especially at Apalando, Mazankore, Balogun Gambari and their branches, Hadiyyah is also collected for the newly born baby named after Shaykh Ibrāhīm or any of his relations as a mark of respect and honour for Shaykh.

Desire to Have Shaykh’s Name in the Family

The followers of Shaykh Niyass demonstrate their affection naming their sons after him, or any of his relations, either by birth or affinity, such as his father al-Ḥajj ‘Abd Allah Scribe or his son Sayyid ‘Alī Cisse (d. 1982). If the followers are blessed with female children, they are named after the mother of Shaykh Ibrāhīm (i.e., ‘A’ishah or any of his daughters such as Fātimah, Maryam, Umm Kulthūm among many others). Added to that, many of the followers of Shaykh Niyass in Ilorin who do not restrict themselves to exploring ways of immortalising the ideas and views of the Shaykh but also name their schools, Madinah (new city), and mosques after Shaykh Niyass or any of his lieutenants. For instance, there are Shaykh Ibrāhīm Nursery and Primary School, Abayawo; Madinat Sayyid Ali Cisse, Alagbado, and Shaykh Ibrāhīm Central Mosques at Tanke and Madinat Abayawo among many
At times, a new city acquired by followers of Shaykh Niyass would get its name at the instance of a relation of the Shaykh. A typical example is Madīnat al-Hudā at Lower Niger River Basin, Ilorin, which belongs to Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir Apalando. It was named as such by Shaykh Muhammad Tah, a grand son of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass through his eldest son, Kbalifah ‘Abd Allāhī Niyass. Shaykh Muhammad Tah visited this place on the request of its owner during his sojourn in Ilorin and named it so when he was told that no name had been given to the site.

Paying Visits to Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass

Visitation is another aspect of life, which the Sufi masters enjoy mostly. The followers of Shaykh Niyass are fond of paying visits to the grave of Niyass in Kaolack. The practice started during the lifetime of Shaykh and it continues till today. It would be recalled that Shaykh Niyass was invited to visit Nigeria by the then Emir of Kano, al-Hājī ‘Abd Allāhī Bayero in 1936 and the invitation was honoured and materialised in 1937. Later in the year, a set of scholars comprising both Shaykh Tijānī ‘Uthmān (d. 1970) and Shaykh Thānī Kafanga (d. 1989)

83 both of Kano visited Shaykh in Kaolack. Since then people from all walks of life have continued to visit the Shaykh at Kaolack, and his Khulahtah as they visit his grave and some of others after his demise, the practice still continues. In Ilorin, the situation is similar as a large number of scholars and their Sufi disciples visit Kaolack annually. Majority of them make the visit during the month of Rabī’ al-‘Awwal when international Mawlid al-Nabī celebrations take place or during the month of Ramadān where they would perform spiritual retreat (i’tikāf) in the mosque of the Shaykh. There are some who visit Kaolack twice, while some make the visit at their own convenient time. As a matter of fact, majority of Shaykh Niyass’s followers make it a tradition to visit Kaolack during Mawlid al-Nabī celebration. Notable among the scholars who used to visit Kaolack for annual Mawlid al-Nabī celebration include Muḥy al-Dīn al-‘Ābidūn (d. 1973), Abū Bakr Miskin (Shaykh Tinubu) (d. 1991), Ibrāhīm ‘Abd Allāhī Olorunbebe (d. 1997), ‘Abd al-Qādir Popo (d. 1995) ‘Abd-Quṭār Apalando, Muḥammad Nūr-Faydah Saliu Baboko (d. 2011), ‘Abd al-Karīm Lagbe (d. 2006), Abū Bakr Yūṣūf Agbade, Abū Bakr Akeyede and ‘Abd Allāh Bābā Tawfiq (d. 2005).

82 I personally visited some of the places while preparing this paper on the year 2011.
83 The Madinah for the first time played host to a congregation of Muslims who attended the Mawlid al-Nabī at the cite on March 2, 2013. I participated in the Mawlid celebration.
Translation of His Works

As a result of the influence of Shaykh Niyass in the city of Ilorin, some of his works have been translated into either Yoruba or English or both with the aim of conveying his ideas and views to the general public, especially, the members of Tijāniyyah Order. For instance, two senior leaders of the Tijāniyyah in Ilorin (i.e., ‘Alī Abū Bakr Jabata (d. 2009) and Abū Bakr Yusuf Agbade) translated the maiden work of Niyass Rūḥ al-Adab into Yoruba and English respectively. Added to that, his other works have been translated into English. For instance, Abū Bakr Ishāq Imām Otte translated Tahniah of the Shaykh into English while Awwal Bābā Tawfīq translated al-Dawāwin al-Sit into English. Related to that is an attempt made by some other followers of the Shaykh in the city to publish his selected speeches. A typical example is a work of the Shaykh rendered into English but edited by a Committee of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass followers in Ilorin led by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahmān Olanrewaju Ahmad (the current National Chief Imām of Ansār al-Dīn of Nigeria) under the platform of Zāwiyyah Erubu, Ilorin. Similar to that is the translation of Risālat al-Tawbah made into English by ‘Abd al-Razzāq Muṣṭafā b. Solagberu.

Some followers of Niyass prefer the poetry Niyass by committing them to memory and reciting them during different festivals such as Mawlid celebration in and outside the city. Reference has to be made to al-Dawāwin al-Sit of the Shaykh which has received the attention of many members of the

85 Rūḥ al-Adab is believed to be the maiden work of Shaykh Ibrāhīm. It is a collection of poems; it has one hundred and twenty-one (121) stanzas. Its contents cut across all moral ethics of Sufism, especially, the Tijāniyyah Order. For detail on Rūḥ al-Adab see D. A. Tijani, “A Translation and Appraisal of Shaykh Ibrahim Kawlakhi’s Rūḥ al-Adab,” Al-Fikr Journal, no. 7 (1986): 14-40. See also Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse, Spirit of Good Morals, trans. Shaykh Hassan Cisse and Chief Imam of Medina Kaolack Senegal (Medina-Kaolack, Senegal: The Africa-American Islamic Institute, 1998).
90 Abdur-Razzaq Mustapha Balogun Solagberu, trans., Translation and Commentary on Risālat At-Tawbah (Epistle of Repentance) of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niass Al-Kawlakhi (Ilorin: The Establishment of Nasr al-‘Ilm African American Islamic Institute (AAII), 2011).
reformed Ṭijāniyyah in the city. A large portion of the work has been committed to memory by the youths. The influence of the Shaykh on the people is also demonstrated by how his followers, mass-producing the Shaykh’s posters, which are pasted at members’ homes as well as their Zāwiyahs, or on their vehicles as well as on their personal effects.

**Conclusion**

Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass, teachings and practices have influenced their religious and social life. One may recommend that some works of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyass which are yet to be translated should be done into English and local languages so that his thought will be appreciated further. Effort should be made to study how his moral teachings have influenced his followers. Not to limit the study of the Shaykh to spiritual aspect alone, perhaps such study will serve as a solution to the national moral decadence.

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