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Fulfilling a Religious Duty: Emigration of *Hausa* Salafists of Ghana to Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Literature on West African migrants to the Gulf Arab States have over the years been enmeshed in what has come to be known as ‘Pull-Push’ factors, the socio-economic forces influencing movements of people. Despite enduring link between religion and migration of West Africans to the Gulf Arab sub-region, the subject is yet to receive the needed academic attention. This article fills the vacuum by illuminating a connection between secular education and the emigration of *Hausa* Salafists of Ghana to Saudi Arabia. It reveals how the coming into force of the *Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education* (FCUBE) policy in 1995 spurred the *Hausa* Salafists on to settle in the Gulf Kingdom. Thus, the article argues that unlike the traditional Ghanaian migrants in Saudi Arabia, the *Hausa* Salafists do not intend to ever return to homeland Ghana.

Keywords: Ghana, Saudi Arabia, Gulf Kingdom, Hausa Salafists, Secular Education, Emigration

1. Introduction

Movement of Ghanaian migrants to Saudi Arabia is not a recent phenomenon. Available job opportunities for highly skilled labors lured 100s of Ghanaian technocrats to the kingdom, although such is not the case of the 1000s of menial workers there. As a rentier states,¹ benefiting from abundant oil reserves, Saudi Arabia has been experiencing structural changes and social developments with tremendous returns on its energy export. Thus, from human assets perspective the kingdom has generated huge demand of workforce especially unskilled workers for immediate employment in their structural development: construction of roads, skyscrapers, expansion of the transport sector, provision of security and domestic works. The labor shortage in Saudi Arabia has become an important issue employing Ghanaian migrant workers to do largely menial and domestic jobs that are the most viable short-term solution. Ghanaian workers in Saudi Arabia are, therefore, largely economic migrants.

¹ For theoretical perspective on rentier states, see Beblawi, *The Rentier State in the Arab World* (1987).

Many years before Saudi Arabia began exploring oil in the early 1930s; however, religion has influenced the movements of Ghanaians to the Gulf kingdom. The desire of capable Ghanaian Muslims to perform the annual *hajj* and the *umrah*² at least once in their lifetimes made them thronged Saudi Arabia. Unlike the economic migrants who stay a long while, the annual religious migrants, in theory, leave the Gulf kingdom immediately after completing the required rituals. Yet, while literature abounds on the classical ‘Pull-Push’ factors influencing the movements of Ghanaians to Saudi Arabia, movements of the religious migrants to the Gulf Kingdom has received no academic attention. In the same vein, literature discusses Salafi immigrants in Saudi Arabia, yet far less is known of *Hausa* Salafists of Ghana (hereinafter, *Hausa* Salafists) in the Gulf Kingdom. The available academic discourse closer to this usually stresses economic migrants portraying the larger *Hausa* communities as a population seeking greener pastures in the kingdom. Two lines of thought have been analyzed to support this view. On one hand, some authors have emphasis high poverty rate and lack of job opportunities in Northern Nigeria as a legitimate case for *Hausas* absconding in the Gulf kingdom after completing the *hajj* and *umrah* rituals (Ikuteyijo, 2020; Afolayan, 1998; O’Brien, 1999). Others have proposed [un]conscious replication of the phenomenon of *almājiris*,³ in an environment abound with philanthropists ready to dish out goodies (Salisu, 2011). In stressing the ‘Pull-Push’ factors, both views employed ‘economics’ as the main factor. I argue in this article that not all *Hausa* settlers in Saudi Arabia are economic migrants. My argument hinges on the emigration of *Hausa* Salafists to Saudi Arabia to escape the imposition of secular education on their children. Hence, the objective of this article: to reveal a direct connection between secular education and the emigration of the *Hausa* Salafists to Saudi Arabia. The article argues that the implementation of the *Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education* (FCUBE) policy goaded their movements. Further, given the growing concern of the activities of the *Ahl al-Sunna Li al-Da’wati Wa al-Jihād* (a.k.a. *Boko Haram*)⁴ and their inveterate hostility to secular education, the article brings to the fore the possible existence of like-minded groups in other West African countries, albeit they may not be militants in posture as the former. The optics of the article will be twofold: individual members and the group as an entity. The article begins by outlining trends in the development of global Salafi movements. The second part examines the structure and ideology of the *Hausa* Salafists. The processes and procedures that characterized their emigration constitute the third part. The pre-nuptial part discusses their fundamental antipathy towards secular education and the reason for fleeing to Saudi Arabia. The article concludes with descriptive analysis of the social life and status of the group in Saudi Arabia.

The article employs a qualitative set data to elicit information about the group. It consists of interviewing thirty-five members of the group living in *Jabal Umar* in Mecca, *al-Nakhīl* neighborhood in Medina, and *al-Salāmah* in Jeddah. Further, I had a focus-group discussion with ten (male and female) members of the group in each of the three cities. My trip to Saudi Arabia in 2018 to observe the last ten days midnight Ramadan prayers (*Salāt al-Tahajjud*) and my subsequent two weeks stay after the *Eid al-Fitr*⁵ festival accorded me the opportunity to undertake the fieldwork. Prior to this though, I met with two (nonagenarian and centenarian) members of the group at *Sabon Zongo*⁶ in Accra who are among the few lefts behind due to desiccating old age and putrefying health state. They gave me contact addresses of the leading members of the group and their families in Saudi Arabia. These persons granted me stupendous interviews about their life and activities in the kingdom. The interview covered wide range of questions encompassing: the year of leaving Ghana and reaching Saudi Arabia; reason(s) for leaving; the means of leaving; economic activities of the religious emigrants in the kingdom; and the possibilities of returning to homeland, Ghana.

². *Hajj* is a mandatory Islamic pilgrimage undertaken by capable a Muslim at least once in his or her lifetime in Saudi Arabia. In contrast, the *Umrah* is a voluntary Islamic pilgrimage that under-taken by a Muslim in Mecca within specific dates in accordance with the Islamic lunar calendar.

³. *Almājiri* is a corruption of the Arabic word, *almuhājir* (a migrant), denoting children sent to live and study with a traditional Islamic scholar. These children go a-begging on streets to raise funds for the cleric and to fend for themselves. This phenomenon has caught the attention of almost all governors of northern Nigerian states with the current governor of Kano state leading the crusade to outlaw it.

⁴. On all occasions voice of the Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shaykawa, was played on the electronic media in Nigeria, this is the name he called his group (*Sunna Fraternity for Islamic Proselytization and Jihad*). Nonetheless, the group is rarely addressed with this name because the Nigerian media and the larger Muslim community of the country have refused to recognize it as such.

⁵. *Eid al-Fitr* is an Islamic festival celebrated by Muslims across the globe to mark the end of the month-long dawn-to-Sunset Ramadan fasting.

⁶. For more about the community called *Sabon Zongo* see Owusu, Social Effects of Poor Sanitation and Waste Management on Poor Urban Communities:

2. Salafism In Global Context

Because the *Hausa* Salafists are an aspect of global Salafi movement, an overview of trends in the development of global Salafism is crucial for grounding the subject of this article. The concept of *Salafiyya* and those it designates remain ill-defined and often misunderstood in the literature on the movement and studies on Islamism in general. The term derives from the Arabic root word, *al-Salaf* that means ‘the past’. It signifies the pious ancestors (*al-Salaf al-Sālih*) who represented the golden age of Islam, which made up the period of the four rightly guided caliphs (*al-Khulafā al-Rāshidūn*) whose rule spanned the years 632 to 661. Salafists argue that the corruption of the original teaching of Islam is the primary reason for metastasizing *jāhiliyya*⁷ and decline of Muslim societies across the globe (Ayoob, 2008). It behooves on all Muslims, therefore, to strive to practice the religion as was done in the nascent age. “[B]y asserting that Muslims must look back to their earliest history to discover the principles of their faith, they encouraged others to reexamine traditional institutions of government and law as they had presumably existed in the great days of the *Rashidun* [the righteously guided] and to explain in what respects they had become corrupted”. Although global Salafi movements share a common creed (*aqīda*), they differ on the methods of ‘purifying’ Islam (Saeed, 2006). Thus, whereas Sunni *Sufis*⁸ advocate for asceticism, contentment, and self-cleansing to protecting and defending Muslim societies from deviant behaviors, Wahhabis are of the view that straight-forward and un-figurative explanation of the Qur’an and the Sunna⁹ is the only way to liberating Muslim societies from its social cancers.

A Sunni reform movement, “Salafism originated from the teachings of Taqī al-Dīn Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) and gained momentum in the course of the eighteenth century when Muhammad Abdul Wahhab (d.1791), the founder of Wahhabism who was highly inspired by the former preached against the perceived moral decline and extensive corruption of the Islamic faith with innovations (*bid’a*)”. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, the concept of Salafism geared up across the globe due to the concomitant spillovers of colonial rules in Muslim majority countries. Consequently, the idea of returning to the pristine Islam of the earliest centuries gained momentum through jurists like Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1839) and Muhammad Rashid Rida (d. 1865). Modernists such as Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905) and Muhammad Iqbāl (d.1938) gave a different interpretation of the idea in their bid to matching the religion with the realities of modern times. These group of scholars who were opposed to traditionalists accepted modernity as a development tool but rejected modernism as a westernization boom. Thus, contextualization of global Salafism must take into consideration the convergences, divergences, and fragmentations of the concept (Sounaye, 2017).

Wiktorowicz (2005) categorized global Salafi movements into purists, politicians, and jihadists. The purists, he explains, emphasis on propagating and practicing the faith in a way that combat social deviance, polytheism, human desire, and philosophical syllogism. This is because, “until the religion is purified, any political action will likely lead to corruption and injustice because society does not yet understand the tenets of faith”. Whilst purists denounce violent and armed struggle - unless perhaps when they are pushed to -, they are [in]famous for their virulent campaign against western ideas, values, and their philosophy in discussing religion (Wiktorowicz, 2005). Organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the *al-Sahwa* of Saudi Arabia started on this tangent. Elaborating on their activities, Blecher (2006) states, the Muslim Brotherhood “operate[d] peacefully within national boundaries and attempt to influence and transform their societies and politics largely through constitutional means, even when the constitutional and political cards are stacked against them”. They adopted ‘bottom-up’ approach by providing free education and healthcare facilities, constructed boreholes in deprived communities, maintained 100s of orphanages, paid monthly stipends to the sick, the needy, widows, and engaged the masses through their media networks (Blecher, 2006). With this, they were able to convince many people to join them (Ibd.).

⁷. *Jāhiliyya* (i.e., the era of ignorant) is an Islamic concept denoting the period before Islam in Arabian Peninsula characterized by incessant tribal rancor, felony, homicide, assassination, and the likes. In contemporary usage, leading Salafi scholars like Sayyid Qutb and Abu al ‘Ala Maududi viewed modernity as a new or modern *Jāhiliyya*. Radical Islamist groups such as ISIS, al Qaeda, and Boko Haram have justified armed struggle against [Muslim] governments for promoting the phenomenon.

⁸. *Sufis* are Islamic mystics who live and propagate values, contentment, and asceticism as a tool to self-cleansing and social control method. Examples of famous Sunni *Sufis* are Muhyidīn ibn Arabi, Abdul Hamid Al Gazhālī, Jalāl al Dīn al-Rūmi, etc.

⁹. The tradition (*Sunna*) of the Prophet is divided into *Qawliyya* (what he said), *Fi’liyya* (what he did) and *Taqrīriyya* (events he consented to).

Nonetheless, the authority of the senior members of the purists was challenged by their younger followers who felt more sophisticated to applying the Salafi creed to the complexity of contemporary world (Hegghammer, 2010). Due to their political inclination and perception of [inter]national politics as an organic part of Islam, members of this [new] faction became known as *politicos* (Ibid.). The methodological fallout between purists and *politicos* led to the emergence of the Jihadi faction of Salafism (Wiktorowicz, 2005). The Jihadi Salafists accused senior purists as scholars of power (*ulamā al-sulta*), a term connoting negativity and denoting surreptitious relationship with regimes and political establishments that undermines their independence and affect their interpretations of the sacred texts (Wiktorowicz, 2005). Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Shām (ISIS) and *Boko Haram* fall within this categorization. They adopt a top-down approach,¹⁰ and consider ousting ‘unjust’ rulers from power a *primus gradus* to achieving all other objectives. It is in relation to this Hegghammer (2010) offers five rationales upon which Salafists act: “state-oriented, nation-oriented, *umma*-oriented, morality-oriented, and sectarian”. The two manifestations of these rationales are non-violent and violent in form. For instance, Hegghammer puts the Muslim Brothers and the Saudi *al-Sahwa* in one category as non-violent manifestations of ‘state-oriented’ Salafists. Its violent manifestations are, for example, al Qaeda, ISIS, Islamic Group of Algeria, and Boko Haram.

3. The Hausa Salafists: Structure and Ideology

Hausa Salafists denote Muslims of native *Hausa* who, until 1996, were settlers in Ghana. Known as the Gold Coast before independence, Ghana is located north of the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa bordering the Atlantic Ocean to the South, Côte d’Ivoire to the West, Togo to the East and Burkina Faso to the North. It has a geographical area of 238,537 square kilometers (or roughly 93,000 square miles). Per the last population and housing census (2020), Ghana has a population of 32 million and 17.5 % of this is Muslims.



Figure 1: 2020 Ghana Map displaying the geographical location of the country on world atlas and indicating countries it borders with.

Source: Website of the Ministry of Information, Ghana.

The issue of *Hausa* Salafists’ settlement in Ghana raises questions concerning how they migrated from Northern Nigeria, exactly when they arrived in Ghana, and their links with relatives back in Nigeria and other West African countries.¹¹ Whiles these questions could be relevant in reconstructing their broader itineraries in condominium

¹⁰. See for example Moghadam, Top-Down and Bottom-Up Innovations in Terrorism:

¹¹. For an overview on different perspectives dealing with these issues see Aremu, Exploring the Role of Trade and Migrations in Nigeria – Ghana Relations in the Pre – Colonial and Colonial Periods (2014); Pellow, The Power of Space in the Evolution of an Accra Zongo (1991):

archives, it is not the focus of this paper. A splinter faction of the global Salafi Movements,¹² who emerged mainly as associates, families and relatives gravitating to blur the message of the Islamic faith and engage in trade. *Hausa* Salafists is a misguided blanket term when one considers the complex identities within Salafi movements in Ghana and the West African context. The Oxford Dictionary (1989) defines it as “a language spoken by the *Hausa* people of Africa, now used in Nigeria and Niger, and other parts of West Africa as a language of communication between different peoples”. Given a definition like this, it may appear absurd for me to seek to describe the group in such a toponymal manner. Thus, the generic use of the word ‘*Hausa*’ for the group may be imprecise; but as ideological juggernauts, I use the term to describe their ethnic uniqueness. So, unlike other Salafists in and outside Ghana, *Hausa* Salafists comprise of only native *Hausa*¹³ tribes. Literature has it that they arrived in Ghana in a humongous number and all tribes joined and aligned themselves as one ideological group.¹⁴

Traditionally, most *Hausas* with Islamic belief belong to some form of denominational and/or sectarian organization. Salafism among *Hausas* is, in fact, a concentration of various sectarian expressions which, characteristically, appear homogenous. Although ideological affinity among them caused such a resemblance of a character in their activities, it did not give rise to the obliteration of the various *Hausa* Salafi groups nor was the originality of each trounced. While, within the *Hausa* tradition, most describe their organization as *Yan Salafiyya* (i.e., adherents of Salafism) it is imperative to differentiate between the very different sort of Salafi organizations that exist, from progressive, regressive, and transgressive. At the risk of sounding like a cliché, I would make the argument that the regressive *Hausa* Salafists are less malignant to secular education than the transgressive groups. It is not as if the former seeks to outrightly prohibit the learning experiment of secular schools as being done by the latter, although they have found the structures in West Africa as not favorable to Muslim students. In the scripted world of pro secular sciences, the progressive Salafists are cast as the heel for much of its development among the ethnic group.

Like the etymology of the word ‘*Hausa*’, the history of Islam in Ghana is very eclectic. Because of its geographic location, Ghana was a desirable destination for trade for Northern Nigerians (Aremu, 2014; Wilks, 2000). The *Hausa* Salafists are generally thought to have taken after or were part of the *Jamā’at Izālat al-Bid’a Wa Iqāmat al-Sunna* (a.k.a. The Izalah Movement)¹⁵ of Nigeria known for violent-plagued history, an anachronism that has survived the passing years. If such was the case, I argue that the two groups have long parted way based on axiomatic that those early days the agreement in doctrinal values between the two groups depended on the prevailing *Hausa* traditional values in pre-colonial Nigeria. However, such agreement of their historical moments remained freight with weight of inherited doctrinal meanings and contemporary polemical context.

The vertical structure of the *Hausa* Salafists almost parallels other Islamist groups across the globe. At the top is a leader who wields religious and political powers, sets goals, and doles out orders. The second most important layer of power is the legislative council comprising learned elders of the group who assist the leader in the day-to-day administration. Below the council are well-defined functionary portfolios that make up the support and operations of the group. The established portfolios comprise multiple assisting personnel excluding females; except for teaching/counselling portfolios as only women teach and counsel their female members. Under the hierarchy of the group, each defined functionary unit undertakes compartmentalized tasks and the leader reports to the council. An important functionary unit of the group is the portfolio focusing on supporting the aged, the sick, distressed families, people of disabilities, orphans, and widows. The different functionary units dependently operate with intra and inter meetings frequently held. Maintenance of membership is through a lifetime commitment and is re-enforced with identification such as the way of dressing and determination to undertaking Islamic teachings and proselytization.

¹². The other major Salafi group in Ghana is “The *Ahl al-Sunna Wa al-Jamā’a*” which is an offspring of Wahhabism and whose adherents are of different ethnic background. For more on this, see Kobo, *Shifting Trajectories of Salafi/Ahl-Sunna Reformism in Ghana* (2015);

¹³. There is not record of a known member of the group from an ethnic group other than *Hausa*.

¹⁴. They comprise of two main *Hausa* tribes: *Bahre* and *Gobiri*, although there are minorities from other tribes.

¹⁵. Although the *Izālah* movement was officially established by Sheikh Ismail Idris in 1978 in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, the idea, and the *modus operandi* of the group began in pre – colonial Nigeria. For a better understanding of the history, activities, and divisions within the *Izālah* movements of Nigeria, see Amara, *The Izalah Movements in Nigeria* (2011).

Two fundamental elements distinguish the group from other major Salafī organizations. In addition to prohibiting secular education in all dimension, members of the *Hausa* Salafists have the character of cladding in the Gulf Arab apparels of (preferably white) *Jalbāb* for the males and black *Abāya* and *Niqāb* for the females.¹⁶ These dresses are inseparable component of their daily lives and a significant value in the manner they exhibit faith.¹⁷ Their canonical interpretation of the sacred texts pigeons them among those describes by Abdullah Saeed (2006) as legalistic traditionalists who consider any view contrary to that of the classical Muslim scholars, heretical. They regard these crop of scholars as ‘*the men*’ (*Hum al-Rijāl*) whose exercise of critical thinking and discretionary judgment (*ijtihād*) is not in dispute (Ibid.). Teaching and/or learning of art, music, sports, philosophy, Jewish and Christian religious studies, and singing of the national anthem are sacrilege. They remain impervious to their doctrine and no amount of threats and intimidation could dissuade them. Thus, holding on to their doctrinal teachings, they spurn the idea of sending their wards to secular schools. In fact, learning of only Islamic sciences is the *raison d’être* of the lives of the *Hausa* Salafists. They resist any usage of western values and behaviors in practicing Islam and exhibit incessant bravados towards rivalry Muslim sects. They are unable to stop portraying themselves as paragons of virtue and everyone who disagrees with them as a metaphorical if not actual devil. Although not gratuitously aggressive, they are highly intractable and really troubled the mainstream Ghanaian Muslims before emigrating.

4. Antipathy Towards Secular Education

Recognizing the need to raise the literacy rate of the country, the 1992 Fourth Republican constitution of Ghana made provision for the first 9 years of basic education to be free and compulsory for all children. “By requiring that all children in Ghana receive nine years of free schooling, the government wished to ensure that all products of the basic education system were prepared for further education. The government was under constitutional obligation to implement the ‘Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education within a ten-year period spanning 1996 to 2005 (Ekuandayo, 2018). Article 38(2) of the 1992 constitution state that “The Government shall [...] draw up the program for implementation within the following ten years for the provision of Free Universal Basic Education”. Thus, although the idea of the free basic education policy has been there since independence, emphasis on compulsory and stricter implementation became the new themes (Ekuandayo, 2018). The compulsory indicates the determination to put pressure on parents to ensure the enrollment of their wards in secular schools. Consequently, parents caught on the wrong side of the law shall pay hefty fines as restitution the government to ensure there is no recidivism (Ibid.). The constitution also contains a provision specifically for children’s rights with Article 28 (1) placing an obligation on parliament to enact laws that will ensure that parents do not abdicate their responsibility to care and maintain children they have brought into the world (Ekundayo, 2018). The development led to a launch of a vigorous civic education projecting the importance of secular education for all children. The state constituted a task force to enforce the policy and arrest parents and religious groups delivering tirades against secular education.¹⁸ In the midst of this, the task force frequented the *Hausa* Salafists’ mosque at *Sabon Zongo* in Accra, *Aboabo* in Kumasi, and *Atebubu Zongo* in the Bono East region, imploring them to heed the national policy.

Thus, while the National Commission for Civic Education made a concerted effort to lay off the sneering and contemptuous ideology of the group, the task force overshadowed them with cascading threats of prosecution. Teetering on the edge of abyss, the *Hausa* Salafists considered the incessant visits to their mosques an attempt to circumvent their way of worship and pit their wits against the will of *Allāh*. Further, they regarded the repeated threats of prosecution the last bastions of their ideology and escaping the dragnet of the state as the only panacea. High-spirited members relished the opportunity of settling in Saudi Arabia, albeit many were beset by financial and logistic challenges ahead. Nonetheless, as people who demonstrate tenacious loyalty to their doctrine, they galvanized their members into action and left to Saudi Arabia.

¹⁶ *Jalbāb* is a long baggy dress that covers all parts of the body from shoulder to toe. *Abāya* is mostly black, and it is a loose-fitting dress covering every part of the female’s body. *Niqāb* is a light black scarf used to cover the face.

¹⁷ It is imperative to state, that not all men and women clad in these Arabian dresses belonged to membership of the *Hausa* Salafists of Ghana. Until date there are some Ghanaian Muslims who dress this way, although not as staunchly as the former do.

¹⁸ Members of the *Spoken Word Church* who live and worship in a deepest forest and openly preach against secular education were also pursued by the task force. For more on this see myjoyonline.com, “Mother wants Oyibi Forest ‘Fake Pastor’ Arrested for Brainwashing her Daughter”, 24 February 2014.

5. Emigration to Saudi Arabia

The *Hausa* Salafists are far from the only group upended by the state's explosive compulsory education policy. The issue of secular education in postcolonial Ghana has simmered for years and boiled over as some Salafists in the country have consistently and insistently call for the submission of all knowledge to Qur'anic teachings (Kobo, 2015; Sounaye, 2017). Even in most recent times, a vociferous Ghanaian *Hausa* cleric of Nigerian descent, Mallam Bashir Yandu, delivered series of harangue against secular education indicating "[T]he system is not viable because it destroys our youth and promote *turanci* (i.e., western values)". I argue, however, that the affirmed resolve of the *Hausa* Salafists to learning just the Islamic sciences has nothing to do with perceived corruptibility and adulterating tendencies of the system. Suffice to say they consider it bogus *hoc detour* insinuations of ethics and morality associated with their stance. Their excoriation of the system is completely ideological gleaned from the Qur'an and the tradition that sanctioned classical Islamic sciences as the only knowledge to seek. The classical Islamic sciences, they argue, draws Muslims closer to *Allāh*, softens their understanding of the Islamic faith, and guard against wrong philosophical thoughts to traducing the creator. Subjects other than Islamic sciences are evil and incur the wrath of *Allāh*. In my discussion with him, Abdullah intimated,

Those who wanted to impose their shortsighted bible-Nazi dogma on us must know that we will not relent in dealing with anything that obstruct us from carrying out our religious duty. Those pressure and threats mounted on us is a residual sentiment of inferiority left behind by colonialism and the reason classical Islamic sciences are treated as second fiddles in the dispensation of education in Ghana. Nonetheless, we have demonstrated beyond any doubt the capability of charting our ideological path and we can never be whipped to pander to the whim of nihilists.

The sense of embroiling in similar circumstances in neighboring West African countries influenced the choice of Saudi Arabia. They have absolutely no desire to have secular education foisted on them. Such is like carting away their identity and dignity, or put succinctly, severing their umbilical cord. Thus, as the government of Ghana led the rope of prosecution into their dark abyss and the pressure got to it apogee, they whipped themselves up into a fantastic rage to avoid living with a lurking fear of exposure as recalcitrant. They ramped-up their efforts, had a knack of warping preparation and solicitously inched away from Ghana. So, just as "large numbers of Egyptian Muslim Brothers found refuge in Saudi Arabia (in the 80s) from persecution by the secular regime in their home country," the *Hausa* Salafist of Ghana sought sanctuary in same from ideological persecution.

The flight of the *Hausa* Salafists from Ghana is full of recondite information. The movement had no spotlight because witnesses considered it transitory trips in the religious lives of the group. They are known to organizing periodic camping in remote landscapes for multitude of religious festivities. Lack of media pluralism at the time could also explain why their movements triggered less attention in Ghana. As a result, there are no written records chronicling the events barring oral explanations from my informants.

Such an adventure, however, requires planning and most importantly, money. It was a bit up hill, yet the desire to settle in Saudi Arabia was too tempting. Aside from the steep cost in renting the buses, they required money to fix temporal shelters on an entirely different country. Majority of the members who made the trip were poor, mostly women and children who had little or no money to invest in such adventure. Besides, there was apprehension about fatigue associated with the trip and nonagenarian members decided to stay behind. In addition to selling their personal belongings, there were logistic and financial supports from their bankrollers. Only about 800 succeeded in travelling from Ghana to Saudi Arabia in 1996 with *hajj* and *umrah* visas they obtained. Other members packed up movable belongings in rented buses and flocked to mainly Togo, Benin, and Burkina Faso where they spent furtive periods as a stopgap to Saudi Arabia. Some of these distressed members succeeded in flying directly to Saudi Arabia while others labored through Sudan and Egypt, boarded ships, and sailed across the ocean to the destination. In Saudi Arabia, they surreptitiously absconded into mainly Jeddah, Mecca, and Medina with the assistance of families, relatives, and friends.

Among the many convictions that have shaped the course of the *Hausa* Salafists, one stands out as particularly crucial – prohibition of secular education. Thus, any starting point for discussing of the life of *Hausa* Salafists in Saudi Arabia must commence with consideration of a crucial ideological conduit – learning of only Islamic

sciences. A threat of which goaded their flight to the Gulf kingdom. In Saudi Arabia, their clerics operate segregated *madrasas*¹⁹ in different houses where children between the ages of 7 and 18 clad in white *Jalbābs* and black *Abāya* are subjected to the rigor of Qur'anic memorization (*Tahfīz*) and the rubrics of reciting it (*Tajwīd*). From Sunday to Thursday, the *madrasas* are teeming with 100s of children reciting in loud voices from memory. After mid-day prayers, the children troop to other centers for further studies in the sciences of the Qur'an and *Hadith*. The centers were established as an organized system of learning, starting with understanding basic Arabic alphabets to covering subjects in Arabic Grammar, Syntax, theology, Jurisprudence, etc. Some children of the *Hausa* Salafists have successfully obtained *Ijāza* (equivalent of a first degree) from these centers authorizing them to teach and transmit classical Islamic sciences.

6. Social Life, Status, and Fulfilment

The last two and half decades of the 20th century marks a significant milestone in the group life of the *Hausa* Salafists. Settling in mainly Mecca, Medina and Jeddah has facilitated frequent interaction in their day-to-day lives with social contacts ranging deep into the group. Among the well-noticed continuity within the group is intra-marriage among members with its dowerless feature, as the ability of the bridegroom to recite parts of the Qur'an and *Hadith* from memory can trade that requirement. The knock-on effects of the trend in the marriage are high child marriage and polygamy that has ensured the monolithic state of the group. Further, it has helped in maintaining the group's identity and protected their ideological boundaries. Existing literature shows how intra-marriage as a long-standing sociological theme is a major indicator to protecting the homogeneity of a group (Simon & Pettigrew, 1990). Their attitude towards women's rights is equally elastic. They perceive such rights simply as a Trojan horse for westernizing the Muslim *Ummah*. While recognizing a vast success of the *Hausa* Salafists to this effect, there are few exceptions where male members had gone on to marry other native *Hausa* women in the kingdom.

An intriguing aspect of the group is a generational similarity in family patterns. When religion becomes an important cultural capital of staunch adherents, the cultural capital remains with them even if they lose all their possession as migrants in a foreign land (Dupré, 2008).

My observations reveal millennials exhibit most traits consistent with the older generation. To the extent that these millennials were born in the Gulf Kingdom, one would have expected to see some form of attitudinal shift to social orientation and ideological disposition. One of the most significant continuities is the growing repugnance of the millennials at listening to music and singing national anthem. They have been trained to abjure any kind of music as they portend vulgarity. The continuity in cultural homogeneity between the old and the new generation are also due in part to the rare contacts the group maintains with other migrant communities in Saudi Arabia. Their ideological background means they tend to nerd out a bit on 'others'. Members of the *Hausa* Salafists identify more with the indigenous *Hausas* from West Africa than seems to broadly be the case with non-*Hausa* Ghanaian migrants. It is difficult to navigate their identity as they barely can speak any of the local Ghanaian languages, bar pockets of isolated *Ga*²⁰ and *Twi*²¹ words.

So, much of the culture of the group in Saudi Arabia is about navigating gains, contemplating the good price of assimilating, and attempting to magnify identities they feel they must uphold. Consequently, they have come to realize the continuity process as the most central aspect of their identity. They have found an environment of ideological landmine in Saudi Arabia and an effort to convert them is a fraught endeavor.

The status of the *Hausa* Salafists in Saudi Arabia is a mixed bag, with indications of some success, decline and stagnation. Few members are making progress in socioeconomic gains, having successfully profited from trading

¹⁹. Although coeducation is prohibited in Saudi Arabia, it has been an ideological culture of the *Hausa* Salafists to operate different *Madrasas* for their male and female wards.

²⁰. "Ga is a *Kwa* language spoken in Ghana, in and around the capital, Accra" (Dakubu, 2008).

²¹. "Twi is a language spoken by the indigenous people inhabiting Southern parts of Ghana who form part of the Akan ethnic group" (The New Penguin English Dictionary, 1986).

activities. Others languish in abject poverty, seemingly trapped in slum communities largely isolated from opportunities abound in the Kingdom. While few members of the group are living a dignified life having successfully obtained resident visas from Saudi authorities, many of them barely eke out a living. They live a pathetic life in unhygienic areas in Mecca, Medina, and Jeddah. These include agile men and women, elderly and children who engage in all sorts of menial jobs to earn a living. In comparison to other West African communities in the Kingdom, the *Hausa* Salafists have unreasonable standards of shelter, healthcare, electricity, and water. Life for many of them is very difficult as members engage in petty trades including operating local eateries, providing car washing services, grocery shops, and selling traditional herbal medicines. It is common to see female members and children briskly trading in petty stuffs by the roadside, with others sending their children between the ages of eight and sixteen a-begging on the streets. Such petty trades by women and children provides a sustained source of supplementary incomes the family requires for survival in the Gulf Kingdom. There is an enduring assumption of generosity in religion within the group such that members with no income-generated activity are catered for.

The experience of the male members relative to their lives in the Gulf Kingdom converges across board. Similar experience of settling in Saudi Arabia extends to both young and older members of the group. Although some of them had performed *hajj* and *umrah* prior to fleeing Ghana, they had little insights in the contemporary Saudi social setting. They perceived the kingdom as a hub for learning only Islamic sciences with music and arts vehemently prohibited. Coming to terms with the reality has, however, neither deterred nor dented their enthusiasm. Members of the group never succumb to ennui and despair because their thoughts were engrossed in the realm of fantasies. They created a utopian environment in their minds that help them overcome administrative and social challenges they are faced with in the kingdom.

Female members are particularly committed to life in the Gulf Kingdom as it provides an Islamic context for raising children. The obligations of rearing children constitute an important motivation for Amina who, despite the icky situation she finds herself is happy “she and her husband succeeded in fleeing Ghana to the holy land to escape the ravage of satanic education designed for their children. Amina’s justification resonates with the female members of the group who seem happy with the Qur’anic memorization and classical Islamic education their children are receiving in various mosques in the kingdom. Rabiyyatu Abubakar first migrated to Saudi Arabia in 1996 and now living with her nuclear family in Mecca. Her eyes brimmed with tears as she posits a perfectible religious life of the group in the kingdom. “We are enjoying a peaceful life in Mecca, [a] much more pro-children environment, being able to observe daily prayers in the *Ka’ba*, we love it”. Awarded an *Ijāza* from a learning center in Mecca, Rabiyyatu serves as a teacher/counselor to female members of the *Hausa* Salafists who seek further understanding of the Islamic faith. Elated and beaming with joy, Fatimatu explains her “family’s palpable sense of relief for successfully scurried away our children from a system of education animated by evil forces”. She considered it a figment of imagination for anyone to think of imposing such a sacrilege act on them. Her impenetrable eyes and inscrutable countenance during our discussion gave little away. A frail looking Salimatu who trades in talismans by the roadside in Jeddah sulked a little but perked up explaining, “I had completely repressed the idea my children would be taught subjects sacrilege to the *dīn* (Islamic faith)”. She vented her spleen on the task force who poked their noses in the group’s affair. Salimatu indicated an engrossing story of how something that started as an advice ended up as a memory-etching scary tale that sends shivers down their spines with every recollection. She blurted out how they snapped out of the anamorphic illusions of the state and exposed the kernel of the matter with her ideological elegance and felicity. Writing on such ideological reflexes, Anderson (2016) postulates, a search for a conducive context to observing and practicing one’s ideology is another major causer for migration. This is because ideologies or doctrines tend to set the value-based goals of its adherents (Ibid). Since values determine individual’s line of action, adherents of such ideology do not only commit to it, but they also pursue it (Wellman and Keyes, 2007; Stadler, 2002). Consequently, states that [un]consciously pursue policies injurious toward religious ideology may prompt a wave of adherents to flee the country (Anderson 2016).

It is, therefore, understandable as members of the *Hausa* Salafists are still basking in the favorable reviews of their lives in Saudi Arabia. The estrangement between the group and the Ghanaian state officials became stressful causing them emotional harm. In their conceptions, harm of such magnitude assumed much portentous dimensions that it seemed to overcloud their ideology and threaten their faith with ruin. Appraising the situation and perceiving the impossibility of eliminating the challenge that is causing them emotional harm, they thought of things they

could do to make coping easier, leaving the country. The emigration of the *Hausa* Salafists, more especially to Saudi Arabia, is probably the most efficient means of coping with the challenges they were faced with in Ghana. As many of them intimated to me, “we emigrated to fulfill a religious duty bestowed on us by *Allāh*.”

7. Conclusion

The launch of the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education policy in 1995 was a milestone in the educational history of Ghana. The state pursued such investments to boost the growth of the economy as evidence in leading Asian countries like Japan and South Korea. Embarking on such a relentless effort, the state focused attention on religious groups whose continuous fulmination on secular education threatens its development agenda. Among these groups is the *Hausa* Salafists. Inundated with incessant threats of prosecution, members began to have pent-up frustrations and the knock-on effects was graciously leaving the country in throngs. Despite living in a religious pluralistic country for almost a century, the esoteric interpretational debate of the *Hausa* Salafists remains implacable. Pith to abhorring secular education and fulminating at it, they reject all absolute ideas of it, a fortiori, dragnets the system go with. Secular subjects are incongruous with their doctrine.

As it sought to do, therefore, this article revealed a direct link between the implementation of the FCUBE policy and the emigration of *Hausa* Salafists to Saudi Arabia. The results of the fieldwork I conducted in 3 Saudi cities revealed members of the *Hausa* Salafists emigrated from Ghana to avoid imposition of secular education on their children. Despite the socio-economic challenges facing many of them, the group is clenching tightly on the bonnet of their religious conviction.

Note

In this article, secular education is a structural system that promote teaching and learning all subjects of immediate relevant to the mundane world.

Mainstream Ghanaian Muslims denote those who belong to all other [different] Islamic sects other than the *Hausa* Salafists.

All interviews and focus group discussions conducted in the *Hausa* language, then edited, condensed, and translated into English.

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