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Received: 17.06.2025.

Accepted for publication: 20.06.2025.

OLGA CHIKRIZOVA. SHIA ISLAM IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: THE ROLE OF THE LEBANESE DIASPORA

Keywords: Islam; West Africa; Lebanon; Senegal; identity; transnational Shia Islam.

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Citation: Chikrizova O. Shia Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Role of the Lebanese Diaspora // Russia and the Moslem World, 2026, № 1 (331), P. 27–35. DOI: 10.31249/rmw/2026.01.03

Abstract. The article studies the role of the Lebanese diaspora in the spread of Shia Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa. Using the example of Senegal, it analyzes the stages of Shia Islam's incorporation into the identity of Lebanese immigrants, as well as determines the impact this process has on the indigenous population of Senegal.

Introduction

The relevance of the research topic stems from the decisive role played by Lebanese Shiites in the formation of so-called transnational Shiism, understood as the totality of Shiite communities, parties, movements, and groups that constitute a network of religious, political, and social ties extending beyond the borders of nation-states and uniting Shiites worldwide. Transnational Shiism encompasses the spread and influence of Shiite Islam as a distinct religious identity that transcends the nation-state, creating a global Shiite community united by common beliefs, rituals, and political solidarity. However, while the role of Iran and its foreign policy in developing the network of transnational Shiism is sufficiently well-studied (see, for example: [1], [2]), the role of Lebanese Shiites in research on this phenomenon occupies a marginal position.

The spread of Shiism in Sub-Saharan Africa appears to occur along two trajectories. The first trajectory is associated with the popularization of Shiism more as a political ideology than a religious doctrine. This scenario is characteristic, for instance, of Nigeria, where Shiism initially arrived as the religion of Lebanese migrants and for a long time remained confined to the "Syrian quarters" created by British colonial authorities for Lebanese to separate them from the local population and mark the buffer position Lebanese occupied between Europeans and Africans in Nigeria [3, p. 527]. It was only in the late 1970s and early 1980s that Shiism, specifically in its political iteration, moved beyond the Lebanese diaspora and began gaining popularity among Nigerians themselves, reaching its peak in the activities of Ibrahim al-Zakzaky and the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN). The central role in this process was played by the Islamic Republic of Iran as the embodiment of Islam's triumph over Western hegemony.

The second trajectory of the spread of Shiism in Sub-Saharan Africa is linked precisely to the religious aspects of Shiite doctrine. And if for migrants from the Middle East the task is one of forming a new identity in a new homeland, the indigenous African population faces a different task – to prevent the isolation of an out-group confessional community from the main population.