

# The “Triangular Politics” of Mosque Ownership and Imamship in Kano State: The Case of Sabuwar Gandu Juma’a Mosque

Kabiru Haruna Isa  
(Bayero University, Kano)

## Abstract

Using the case study of the Sabuwar Gandu Friday mosque, whose building led to a conflict for ownership and control that extended over several years, this article discusses the conflict for mosques in Kano State. The apparent protagonists of this conflict are usually the leaders of the Sufi and Salafi groups who constantly compete for the control of sacred space, as well as their supporters. The article argues, however, that this conflict can only be understood in the light of a broader context that involves the religious actors, the Kano Emirate Council and the Kano State government. It is only in the light of this “triangular politics,” that the deeper legal and political dynamics of this conflict can be properly understood.

## Introduction: The Politics of Mosques in Kano City

The mosque as an Islamic institution occupies a central place in the life of Muslims. By attracting the faithful five times a day to congregate for prayers, the mosque plays a central role not only in religious and spiritual terms, but also as a social and political space. A comprehensive study of mosques and mosque politics in a Nigerian city, similar to the one that Abdulkader Tayob conducted for South Africa,<sup>1</sup> is still to be made.<sup>2</sup> Historically, the

1 Abdulkader Tayob, *Islam in South Africa: Mosques, Imams and Sermons* (University Press of Florida, 1999).

2 For an attempt to look at mosques in Kano, see Kabiru H. Isa (2016), *Religion and Society in Kano Metropolis: A History of Muslim Intra-faith Relations, 1978-2015*” (PhD Thesis, Sokoto: Usmanu Danfodiyo University).

mosque has served in Kano city as a powerful factor of unity and social cohesion, assembling the worshippers of given neighbourhoods to observe *salat* (obligatory prayer). People who live in a particular neighbourhood usually come to know one another at the mosque.

In Kano and in general in Hausaland, there are two distinct types of mosques: *khamsus-salawat* (daily prayers) mosques and *Jumma’a* (Ar. *jumu’a*, Friday) mosques. The first of these are used only for the five daily prayers, and are usually run directly by the local community of the neighbourhood where they are located. The second type host the *jumu’a* (Friday) congregational prayer and are usually run by the government or by a major Islamic organization. Muslims of a particular community meet five times daily at the *khamsus-salawat* mosque to observe obligatory prayers and possibly additional rituals (such as the collective litanies of Sufi orders) or teaching activities. Muslims from different neighbourhoods come together every Friday to observe weekly *salatul-Jumu’a* (Friday afternoon prayer). The Friday prayer in Kano always draws large crowds, numbering thousands, and is an occasion for petty traders to offer their goods.

Both categories of mosque have their unique politics, hierarchies and power struggles, which largely depend on the location of the mosque, the composition of its congregants and the religious and political affiliation of those who first established it. The politics of mosques in Kano is multi-layered and complex, as multiple negotiations are involved; first, during the process of land allocation and then for the appointment of the imam and for the control of the mosque’s activities. Sectarian/denominational politics, issues of doctrinal affiliation, funding and issues of political loyalty are central to the politics associated with the mosque in Kano. Historically, imams were selected by the members of the congregation and appointed centrally by the Emir. The two main dominant Sufi groups in Kano, namely the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya, used to share the space of each other’s mosques. This was true until the mid-twentieth century, when the process of politicization of religion by the northern political elites, in what is remembered in Hausa as *zamanin siyasa* (the age of politics), dramatically affected the politics of the mosque in northern

Nigeria.<sup>3</sup> In 1951, two antagonistic political parties were formed in northern Nigeria: the conservative Northern Peoples’ Congress (NPC), and the progressive Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU).<sup>4</sup> While NPC identified with the traditional leaders (emirs) and was generally closer to the Qadiriyya Sufi order, NEPU was popular among the masses and was perceived as being closer to the Tijaniyya.<sup>5</sup>

The leadership of NPC and of the Qadiri-led Sokoto Caliphate were uncomfortable with the growing influence of the followers of the Senegalese Tijani scholar Shaykh Ibrahim Niassé, who was the leader of Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya (also known as *ḥayḍa* Tijaniyya). In Sokoto, the followers of Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya were heavily persecuted by the leadership of NPC to the extent that they were denied their rights, in a number of places, to practice rituals associated with the teachings of their group. There were instances where mosques of Tijanis (followers of Tijaniyya) were attacked and even demolished in Zamfara and Sokoto provinces.<sup>6</sup> The persecution of the Tijanis in Sokoto contributed towards making them more organized and determined to practice and propagate their doctrines, which led to the further polarization of mosques.

In post-colonial times, from 1960 onwards, the relationship between the Tijanis and Qadiris gradually became friendlier. The reconciliation between the Qadiris and Tijanis resulted from two main factors, one political, one religious. From the political point of view, the collapse of the First Republic in 1966 caused the NPC vs NEPU politics in the North

3 Jonathan T. Reynolds, *The Time of Politics (Zamanin Siyasa): Islam and the Politics of Legitimacy in Northern Nigeria, 1950-1966* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001).

4 See Alkassim Abba, *The Northern Elements Progressive Union and the Radical Nationalism in Nigeria, 1938-1960* (Bauchi: Ramadan Printing Press, 2007).

5 For more on this, see Auwalu Anwar, *Tasirin Siyasa a Addini* (Zaria: Gaskiya Corporation Limited, 1992). Jonathan Reynolds correctly points out how the conflict between Tijanis and Qadiris was functional to the British policy of indirect rule. See Jonathan Reynolds, “Good and Bad Muslims: Islam and Indirect Rule in Northern Nigeria,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 34, 3, 2001, pp. 601-618.

6 For more on the crisis between the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya in Sokoto Caliphate, see Andrea Brigaglia, “The Outburst of Rage and The Divine Dagger: Invective Poetry and Inter-Ṭarīqa Conflict in Northern Nigeria, 1949,” in the current issue of the *Journal for Islamic Studies*.

to become outdated.<sup>7</sup> From the religious point of view, the promotion of Salafi-oriented doctrines by Shaykh Abubakar Gumi and the establishment of a missionary Salafi organization (*Jama'at Izalatul Bid'a wa Iqamatus Sunna*, popularly known simply as Izala) led by Gumi's student Isma'ila Idris, helped to convince Qadiris and Tijanis of the need for a reconciliation.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Isma'ila Idris was reported to have given a verdict (*fatwa*) stating that it is unlawful for any Muslim (read: Salafi) to marry a woman from a Sufi family, or to eat the meat of an animal slaughtered by a Sufi or to pray behind a Sufi imam.<sup>9</sup> Such a frontal attack on Sufi identity and practices compelled Qadiris and Tijanis to obliterate their differences and face the new common rival. A pamphlet distributed by Izala during its early years, titled *Hujjojin da suka hana bin dan darika salla* (The Proofs that it is Prohibited to Pray Behind a Sufi Imam), is translated in Ousmane Kane's study of the group.<sup>10</sup>

At the time, the Sufi groups constituted the vast majority in northern Nigeria and most of the mosques in the region were under their control. With the formation of Izala, the competition for sacred space and the contestation for the control of mosques increased, in some instances leading to open conflict. It was especially in the 1980s, that the struggle for the control of mosques took a new dimension, becoming one of the main arenas for the overall conflict between Sufis (Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya)

- 7 The First Republic collapsed as a result of a military coup d'état which led to the assassination of major political figures of Nigeria such as the Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and the Premier of Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello Sardauna of Sokoto. For more on this, see Adewale Ademoyega, *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup* (Evans Brothers Nigeria Limited, 1981); D. J. M. Muffett, *Let the Truth Be Told: The Coups d'état of 1966* (Zaria: Hudahuda Publishing Company, 1982).
- 8 For Gumi's autobiography, see Abubakar Gumi (with Ismaila A. Tsigi), *Where I Stand* (Ibadan: Spectrum, 1992). For a biography of Isma'ila Idris see, Ramzi Ben Amara, "Shaykh Ismaila Idris (1937-2000): The Founder of the Izala Movement in Nigeria," *Annual Review of Islam in Africa*, 11, 2012, pp. 74-78.
- 9 Author's interview with Shaykh Ibrahim Khalil, Kano State Council of Ulama, Gyadi-Gyadi quarters (Kano), 23 March 2013.
- 10 Ousmane Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Post-Colonial Nigeria: A Study of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

and Salafis (Izala and, more recently, *Ahlus Sunna* group).<sup>11</sup> This struggle usually involves a variety of interest groups and institutions, both at the formal and informal level, and is predicated on a kind of “triangular politics” that involves the religious actors (Sufi vs Izala), the Kano Emirate Council and the Kano State Government.

The loyalty, recognition and respect showed to the Emirate Council by the Sufi groups, coupled with the historical links between the royal house and the Tijaniyya, usually make the Council more inclined to side with the Sufis whenever conflicts arise between them and the Salafi groups. It must also be noted that Izala tends to be outspoken in its criticism of traditional authority. Its *‘ulamā’* usually demystify the authority of the Emirate Council over religious issues. This plays a part in making the traditional authority fearful of the influence of Izala and encourages it to sympathise with its Sufi opponents. As for the formal political authorities (the State Governor and its bodies in charge of religious matters), they normally tend to be neutral and serve as mediating agents in the conflict for mosques. In Nigeria’s democratic dispensation, the power of the politicians depends on their success in elections, so political actors are usually careful to not alienate any particular groups. However, government functionaries are also naturally sympathetic to the group whose doctrine is personally more appealing to them. As Izala tends to have a stronger presence than the Sufi orders in the government bureaucracy, and as the Izala normally uses the formal language of the law to make their case, this means that the government authorities often mildly support the position of the Izala in instances of mosque contestation.

### **The Sabuwar Gandu Mosque Case: Contestation over Ownership**

A good example of the triangular politics of the conflict for mosques in Kano can be seen in a crisis that erupted between Izala and Sufis over the control of Sabuwar Gandu Juma’a mosque in 2006. Sabuwar Gandu quarter

11 For more on the recent conflict over the ownership and imamship of mosques in Kano see Kabiru H. Isa, “The Struggle for Religious Space: The Conflict for the Imamship of Sabon Garin Doka Mosque (Kano, May, 2014),” *Annual Review of Islam in Africa*, 12/1, 2013/2014.

is one of the new settlements of Kano metropolis that have emerged due to the demographic growth of the old settlements. When ancient settlements in the walled city of Kano become saturated and congested, the residents, who are often linked by old family or trading ties, would often start to move to newly developed layouts and build houses there. Sabuwar Gandu is located in the Kumbotso local government area and it was established to relocate the residents of the old settlement of Gandun Sarki. In 1982, during the Second Republic,<sup>12</sup> the civilian Governor of Kano State at the time, Abubakar Rimi (d. 2011),<sup>13</sup> planned to build a new State Secretariat where a number of government ministries would operate. The area allocated for the new construction was the old settlement of Gandun Sarki, only a few metres from the Kano State Government House (the official residence of the Governor). The proximity of this area to Government House and its strategic location had presumably led to the Government’s decision to build the new State Secretariat there. In order to make enough room for the new construction, the Government decided to relocate the residents of the Gandun Sarki quarter. The Government allocated new land to these residents and paid them compensation to build new houses. Many of them built houses on the allocated land and named their settlement Sabuwar Gandu (New Gandu).<sup>14</sup>

The Government also provided a space in this new settlement that was to be used for building a hospital, a market, a school and a *Juma’at* mosque. According to an informant named Ahmad Dan Asabe,<sup>15</sup> these public spaces were illegally sold by some officials of Kumbotso Local Government area to private individuals who started to build on them, so no major mosque (and no hospital) was actually built in Sabuwar Gandu for several years. In 1995, Ahmad Dan Asabe bought a piece of land intending to build a

12 The term ‘Second Republic’ refers to the second constitutional and democratic dispensation in Nigeria which lasted from 1979 to 1983.

13 For more details on the administration of Abubakar Rimi, see Muhammad A. Yakasai, *Kano State under Administration of Abubakar Rimi, 1979-1983* (MA dissertation, Kano: Bayero University Kano, 2013).

14 Sabuwar Gandu means new settlements of the vacated Gandun Sarki residents.

15 Author’s interview with Malam Ahmad Dan Asabe at Sabuwar Gandu quarters, 25 January 2012.

*Juma'at* mosque and he contacted Al-Muntada Al-Islami Trust for financial assistance. With its main offices in London, Al-Muntada Trust is a charity organization that was established by Muḥammad Surūr b. Nāyif Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (d. 2016), a Syrian scholar who is credited with the establishment of so-called “*Sururism*,” a blend between Salafi theology and the political methodology of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>16</sup> In Kano, Al-Muntada runs the most popular Salafi mosque of the city, which is in ‘Dorayi Karama ward. The organization has also been active building schools, mosques and boreholes in Muslim communities, to help construct the mosque. When Mr ‘Dan Asabe approached the Al-Muntada officials, they requested proof of ownership of the land. In an effort to get the certificate of occupancy from the Local Government Secretariat, Mr ‘Dan Asabe found out that the plots he had bought had been actually reserved by the State Government as public spaces in Sabuwar Gandu. He therefore decided to mobilize members of the Sabuwar Gandu Development Association (SGDA) to retrieve the land that had been illegally sold. After writing a series of letters to the District Head of Kumbotso, Alhaji Ahmad Ado Bayero; to the Kano Emirate Council and to the Ministry of Land and Physical Planning, the SGDA finally succeeded in recovering the land originally allocated for building a *Juma'at* mosque.<sup>17</sup> It is important to note at this juncture that the recovery took the SGDA almost four years, because of the legal intricacy and the different interests involved in the disputed land. The collective efforts of the residents of Sabuwar Gandu, especially

16 Stéphane Lacroix, “Understanding Stability and Dissent: The Double-Edged Role of the *jama'at* in Saudi Politics,” in Bernard Haykel, Thomas Hegghammer, and Stéphane Lacroix (eds.), *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights in Social, Political, Economic and Religious Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 171. The accusation that individuals linked to the Al-Muntada network in Nigeria might have been involved in the genesis of Boko Haram has emerged in the Nigerian press and has been discussed in Andrea Brigaglia, “Ja’far Mahmoud Adam, Muhammad Yusuf and *al-Muntada Islamic Trust*: Reflections on the Genesis of the Boko Haram Phenomenon in Nigeria,” *Annual Review of Islam in Africa*, 11, 2012, where more details on the activities of the organization in Nigeria are presented.

17 Muhammad Ahmad, *Gwagwarmaya Tsakanin Gaskiya da Karya a kan Mallakar Masallacin Juma’ana Sheikh Ja’afar Mahmud Adam Sabuwar Gandu* (Kano: Al-Kitab Printing Press, 1010), pp. 8-15.

the members of SGDA and the goodwill of the Kano Emirate Council, were instrumental in the successful resolution of the land ownership dispute. This, however, was only the beginning of the conflict for the religious control of the mosque.

The crisis over the Sabuwar Gandu *Juma'at* mosque began right at the outset, when the idea of building up the site was first envisaged. The location of the mosque was the principal factor that triggered the conflict. The land is situated on a double border, as it lies between the neighbourhoods of Sabuwar Gandu and Gidan Maza, which also separates the local government areas (LGAs) of Kumbotso and Kano Municipal. The Gidan Maza quarter falls under the Kano Municipal Local Government and is dominated by adherents of the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya, while Sabuwar Gandu falls under the jurisdiction of Kumbotso Local Government and has a mixed population of Sufis and Salafis with a predominance of the latter. The leadership of the SGDA, however, and especially those who were at the forefront of recovering the land and building the mosque, were either affiliated with or sympathisers of Izala. The diverse socio-religious composition of the two neighbourhoods, coupled with their geographic proximity, produced a context of identity and symbolic tension that subsequently erupted into a violent conflict during and after the building of the mosque.

At the initial stage, when the land was recovered, members of SGDA contacted the director of the *Al-Muntada* branch in Kano, Shaykh Muhyiddeen Abdallah,<sup>18</sup> in order to start with the construction of the mosque. As early as 2000, *Al-Muntada* erected its project sign-boards on the land and started preparations for the construction. Knowing the religious affiliation of the organization, the residents of Gidan Maza became suspicious that the new mosque would be Salafi-controlled. According to some allegations, a Quranic teacher and a resident of Gidan Maza by the name of Malam Yunusa asked his *almajirai* (Quranic students) to remove the sign-boards and uproot the plants that were planted on the

18 Muhyiddeen Abdallah would be arrested by the Kano police in February 2004, accused of having channeled funds to the Nigerian “*Talebans*,” the organization that would later develop into Boko Haram (<http://allafrica.com/stories/200403020574.html>).



proposed mosque site.<sup>19</sup> Malam Yunusa denied this allegation and claimed that he had no knowledge of what transpired.<sup>20</sup> As the removal of these boards signalled looming tension that could escalate into confrontation, and as the issue of the legal status of the land had not yet been resolved, *Al-Muntada* decided to refrain, temporarily, from building the mosque.<sup>21</sup>

In 2002, after the legal dispute over the ownership of the land had been resolved, an Islamic donor by the name of Alhaji Musa Rijiyar Lemo came to Sabuwar Gandu with the intention of buying a plot of land and building a *Juma’at* mosque as a charitable undertaking. The leadership of the SGDA learnt about his visit and submitted a proposal to him to build the mosque on the recovered site. The SGDA set up a 32-man committee to oversee the building and possibly to confront any challenge that the residents of Gidan Maza could pose to the project. Alhaji Musa Rijiyar Lemo, a sympathiser of the Tijaniyya Sufi group, was said to have been informed by an anonymous source that the members of the SGDA were adherents of Izala and that therefore, he should not build a mosque for them.<sup>22</sup> His sources told him that the SGDA was composed of Izala activists hiding behind the veneer of the Sabuwar Gandu community interest so that they could build a mosque and use it for the spread of Izala in the area. In view of this, Alhaji Musa abandoned the project. Three months later, when the SGDA sent a seven-man delegation to inquire about his willingness to build the mosque, he intimated that he was no longer interested in the project, advising them that they should look for another sponsor to build the mosque.<sup>23</sup> At that point, the leadership of the association decided to mobilize people from the neighbourhood, asking them to contribute in order to start building the mosque. They distributed eighteen charity boxes to different parts of Sabuwar Gandu and neighbouring areas and people contributed money

19 Author’s interview with Malam Ahmad Dan Asabe at Sabuwar Gandu quarters, 25 January 2012.

20 Author’s interview with Malam Yunusa at Gidan Maza quarters on 25 January, 2012.

21 Ahmad, *Gwaqwarmaya Tsakanin Gaskiya da Karya*.

22 Author’s interview with the son of Malam Yunusa Gidan Maza, 27 November, 2013.

23 Author’s interview with the son of Malam Yunusa Gidan Maza, 27 November, 2013.

anonymously.<sup>24</sup> Table 1, below, provides the names of the places where the boxes were placed and the amount contributed in each place.

**Table 1: List of the areas that donated for the construction of Sabuwar Gandu mosque.<sup>25</sup>**

S/N	Places	Amount Contributed
1	Kwarin Barka	N 595. 00
2	Sabuwar Gandu A	N 3,765.00
3	Sabuwar Gandu B	N 4,714.00
4	Sabuwar Gandu C	N909.00
5	Sabuwar Gandu D	N22,785.00
6	Sabuwar Gandu E	N2,580.00
7	Kwarin Barka	N485.00
8	Kwarin Barka	N1,600.00
9	Kwarin Barka	N1,311.00
10	Shekar Maidaki	N1,311.00
11	Shekar Maidaki	N864.00
12	Shekar Maidaki	N899.00
13	Shekar Maidaki	N580.00
14	Medule	N230.00
15	Medule	N100.00
16	Medule	N60.00
17	Gidan Maza	N14,312.00
18	Gidan Maza	N942.00
<b>Total Amount</b>		<b>N56,732.00</b>

The total amount raised from the individual donors was 56,732 naira, which at today’s exchange rate roughly corresponds to 170 US dollars;

24 Ahmad, *Gwagwarmaya Tskanin Gaskiya da Karya*, p. 26.

25 Source: Ahmad, *Gwagwarmaya Tsakanin Gaskiya da Karya*, p. 26.

at the time of the collection it was probably worth twice as much. Subsequently, residents of other areas where boxes were not placed contributed an additional 4,205 naira and twenty-two bags of cement. Wealthy individuals were later approached to contribute towards building the mosque. The prominent Kano businessman Alhaji Aminu Dantata,<sup>26</sup> who belongs to a family that has been known for generations for contributing to Islamic activities in Kano, donated five million naira. One of the members of the fund-raising committee, Engineer Suleiman, who is the director of a construction company known as Sani Engineering and Construction Company, volunteered to start building the mosque. The Kano State Government subsequently intervened and finished building the mosque in 2005.

### **The Sabuwar Gandu Mosque Case: Contestation over Imamship**

Once the construction of the mosque had been completed, the issue of the imamship needed to be addressed. It is important to note that in Kano, according to a long-established judicial tradition, the Emir has the sole authority to approve and appoint the imam of any Juma’at mosque. This tradition was perhaps established in the fourteenth century, when Islam was introduced to Kano during the reign of Sarki Yaji (1359-1385) and

26 Alhaji Aminu Dantata was born in 1931 in Kano, northern Nigeria and he is the fifteenth child of the Alhassan Dantata family. His father, Alhassan Dantata, belonged to the Agalawa trading family, and his grandfather, Madugu Abdullahi was a wealthy trader and caravan leader. His great grandfather, Madugu Baba Talatin, was also an influential and affluent trader who migrated from Katsina and settled at the town of Bebeji in Kano, which was situated along the trade route that linked Kano with Lagos and Gonja. Aminu Dantata was elected as a member of the dissolved Northern House of Assembly (1961-1965) and was a member of the Kano Provincial Council (1961-1965). He was appointed Commissioner for Economic Planning, Trade and Industry by the first Military Government of Kano State in 1968. He is one of the most successful businessmen and philanthropists in Kano. He is also one of the promoters of the Kano State Foundation, an endowment fund that supported educational initiatives and provided grants to small-scale entrepreneurs in Kano. He is the head of the group of companies that manages his real estates and other business ventures. Dantata is the founder of the Express Petroleum & Gas Ltd and one of the organizers of Jaiz Bank in Nigeria. See Abdulkarim U. Dan-Asabe, *Biographies of Selected Leaders of the Kano Commercial Establishment* (MA dissertation, Kano: Bayero University Kano), pp. 114-142.

Mandawari was appointed as the first Chief Imam of Kano.<sup>27</sup> The tradition has been maintained by the successive rulers of Kano up to the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, when a section of the leadership of Izala eschewed and circumvented the tradition and went ahead to appoint imams to lead prayers in their designated Juma’at mosques. Izala ignored this tradition because of what they perceived as the partiality and lack of fairness of the Emirate Council, as well as because the tradition is not explicitly sanctioned by Islamic scripture.<sup>28</sup> In spite of the jettisoning of this tradition by Izala, the followers of Sufi groups always submit the names of the selected people to the Emirate Council for approval and appointment as imams to newly built Juma’at mosques. The Emirate Council has a procedure for appointing the imam of Juma’at mosque. According to Zahradeen:

With the exception of the Jumma Central Mosque, and that of Waje, whose imam the Emir appoints directly, all the Imams of the mosques are elected by the members of their respective congregations, and approved by the Emir. The Emir would then send to the new Imam a gown (babbar riga), a cloak (alkyabba), and a turban (rawani). The Emir also sends each a ram during *Id-al-Adha*.<sup>29</sup>

The SDGA committee submitted the names of ten Islamic scholars to the Emirate Council on 27 July, 2006, seeking the approval and appointment of two of them, respectively as chief-imam and *nā’ib* (deputy chief-imam).<sup>30</sup>

27 Muhammad S. Zahradeen “The Place of Mosque in the History of Kano,” in Bawuro M. Barkindo (ed.), *Studies in the History of Kano* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books), p. 58.

28 This position was articulated by the late Shaykh Ja’far Mahmoud Adam in his 2006 public lecture titled *Gwagwarmaya Tsakanin Gaskiya da Karya* (The Struggle between Falsehood and Truth). Shaykh Ja’far claimed that whenever there was a conflict between the Izala and Sufi groups, the Emirate Council tended to support the latter. He further argued that the traditional authority in Kano had been treating Izala unfairly and unjustly.

29 Muhammad S. Zahradeen “The Place of Mosque in the History of Kano,” pp. 63-64.

30 The nominees were Alkali Sadisu Ibrahim, Malam Iliyasu Muhammad, Malam Abdulmumin Umar, Malam Yunusa Gidan Maza, Malam Garba Sodawa, Malam Ibrahim A. Tofa, Malam Abdullahi Jibrin, Malam Nazifi Inuwa, Malam Hidir Bashir and Malam Abdullahi Garangamawa.

In their letter to the Emirate Council, the committee pleaded for the appointment of Malam Abdulmumini Umar as *imam-ratib* to lead the five daily prayers because he lived close to the mosque. They also requested the Emir to appoint Malam Nazifi Inuwa (a Salafi-oriented scholar who was very close to the *Al-Muntada* leadership)<sup>31</sup> as chief imam, and Malam Iliyasu Muhammad as his deputy. Although the residents of the Gidan Maza quarter wanted the Emirate Council to appoint a chief imam who was either a member or a sympathiser of Sufi groups, the Emirate Council considered the request of the committee and appointed Nazifi Inuwa as chief imam and Iliyasu Muhammad as deputy. The plan was for the mosque to be inaugurated by the Emir Alhaji Ado Bayero, as customary, on 15 September, 2006.<sup>32</sup>

When the appointment of Nazifi Inuwa was announced by Radio Kano, the residents of Gidan Maza compiled a list of elder residents who objected to the appointments of followers of Izala as imam and deputy-imam of the mosque. They submitted the list to the Chief Imam of Waje Juma’at mosque, Shaykh Nasir Muhammad Nasir, who is a Tijani and one of the most influential palace scholars as well as a close personal friend of the Emir at that time, Alhaji Ado Bayero (d. 2014). Nasir M. Nasir asked the Gidan Maza elders to submit the list and their grievances to the Emirate Council. Following the intervention of the Chief Imam of Waje mosque, the Emirate Council sent a letter via the office of the District Head and chairman of Kumbotso local government, suspending the inauguration of the mosque. The Emirate Council also assigned the District Head of Kano Municipal, Alhaji Sani Sarki Yola, to adjudicate over the crisis. Thus, delegates from the two parties were invited for a dialogue by the district head of Kano Municipal.

The representatives of Gidan Maza complained that they had contributed financially towards and actively participated in the building

31 Malam Nazifi Inuwa had been under arrest from June 2001 to July 2004, for his alleged role in recruiting Nigerian students to send to a militant camp in Mauritania (<http://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/07/boko-haram-the-northern-nigeria-hausaland-2/>).

32 Author’s interview with Muhammad Ahmad at Sabuwa Gandu, on 25 January 2012.

of the mosque, yet they were not consulted before the submission of the list of nominees for the imamship. They also made it clear that the people appointed as imam and deputy-imam were adherents of Izala and therefore they rejected their appointment.<sup>33</sup> They also alleged that the deputy-imam, Ilyasu Muhammad, was a controversial Islamic cleric who was known, whenever he was to lead a funeral prayer, to place the dead person facing west instead of east.<sup>34</sup>

In their response, the representatives of the SGDA admitted their inclination to Izala and argued that Gidan Maza is located within the borders of Kano Municipal while the mosque is in the Kumbotso Local Government area; hence, it was unnecessary to consult the residents of Gidan Maza over the appointment of any imam. They further argued that the SGDA was responsible for the recovery of the land and the construction of the mosque, and so its members had the sole right to determine who was to be appointed as Imam. The meeting ended acrimoniously and the district head of Kano Municipal called for adjournment to calm the situation.

During the second meeting, the District Head of Kano Municipal told the two conflicting parties that the case had been transferred to the Emir’s court. The delegates of the two parties attended a hearing session in the Emir’s court and Nasir Muhammad Nasir spoke about the incidents of intra-faith conflict in Islam. According to the delegates of SGDA, he spoke in favour of their opponents. The Emir finally decided to refer the case to the Fatwa Committee<sup>35</sup> chaired by the *waziri* of Kano, Shaykh Isa Waziri.<sup>36</sup> The Committee told the delegates that they be would summoned at an appropriate time. On 13 September, the Fatwa Committee heard and adjudicated the case in favour of the Gidan Maza elders. One of

33 Author’s interview with Malam Mahmud Inusa Gidan Maza, 26 January 2012.

34 Ilyasu Muhammad and some elderly members of Sabuwar Gandu refuted this allegation when interviewed by the author, 8 November 2013.

35 The leading court ‘*ulamā*’ are members of the Fatwa Committee and are responsible for giving their legal opinion on contentious issues. The Emir has high regard for them and always consults them before executing any action concerning religion. Members of this committee also mediate and resolve intra-communal and intra-Muslim conflict in Kano.

36 For a short biography of Shaykh Isa Waziri see Usman S. Abbas, “Shaykh Isa Waziri (1925-2011): Exegete of the Quran,” *Annual Review of Islam in Africa*, 12/1, 2013/2014, pp. 118-122.

the representatives of SGDA became annoyed over what he perceived as the unfairness of the presiding committee and made contemptuous comments which resulted in bitter exchanges. The Committee adjourned the hearing till further notice. It then decided to compile a report based on what happened during the hearing session and this was duly submitted to the Emirate Council. The Committee suggested that a new imam and his deputy should be appointed by the Emirate Council in order to avoid recurring contestation between the opposing parties. The Emirate Council appointed Shaykh Yusuf Ali, who is a well-known Tijani and a *qāḍī*, as the new imam of the mosque.

At this point, the balance of power had shifted dramatically between the two contending parties: while the residents of Gidan Maza enthusiastically accepted the new appointment, the SGDA and a significant number of Sabuwar Gandu residents rejected the new imam, mainly for doctrinal and procedural reasons.<sup>37</sup> Refusing to accept the Emirate’s appointment, the SGDA members decided to hand over the mosque’s ownership to the Salafi organization, *Izalatul Bid’a wa Iqamatus Sunna*. This was done via a letter addressed to the Kano leadership of the organization, in which the committee pledged to transfer all legal rights of ownership of the mosque to Izala. The organization replied by accepting the transfer subject to the condition that its lawyer would sign the transfer documents, and that the members of the SDGA would have no right to back out from any legal battle that Izala might decide to pursue with the Kano Emirate Council.<sup>38</sup>

After taking this matter into its hands, Izala involved its lawyers to use possible constitutional provisions to circumvent the traditional authority of the Emir who, they felt, was not treating the Salafis equally with other competing groups. Izala immediately wrote to the Commissioner of Police of Kano State, advising him that the organization would inaugurate its mosque on 29 September 2006 (7 Ramadan 1427). They might have decided to open the mosque during Ramadan because Muslims are not

37 Author’s interview with Alhaji Mannir Musa, a resident of Gidan Maza, 23 September 2012.

38 The author retrieved all the legal documents that SGDA used to sue Kano Emirate Council. I am hugely indebted to Malam Ahmad for providing me with these valuable documents.

supposed to fight during the holy month, because of their observance of the obligatory fast and their intense practices of devotion. On the designated day, Izala opened the mosque and announced that they would observe the Friday prayer at 1pm, led by Nazifi Inuwa, the imam who had originally been selected by the SDGA committee and appointed by the Emirate Council. Immediately after noon, just before the time of prayer, the residents of Gidan Maza started to set tyres on fire to block the road and stop congregants from passing through their area to the mosque. A group of them also moved to the mosque with locally made arms such as cutlasses, clubs, and stones, with the aim of dispersing the congregants who converged inside the mosque. Some of the residents of Sabuwar Gandu also took up arms in self-defence. In the resulting clashes, six people sustained injuries and some of the vehicles of the congregants were destroyed, including that of the Izala-appointed imam, Nazifi Inuwa. The state police had to intervene and disperse the crowd to avoid more casualties.<sup>39</sup> Despite the clash, the Izala imam led the prayer to consolidate their ownership of the mosque and resist the hegemonic ambitions of the Gidan Maza residents, as well as to challenge the authority of the Emirate Council and the imamship of Yusuf Ali. After completing their prayer, the Izala activists locked the mosque, but the residents of Gidan Maza managed to break into it, where they then observed their own Friday prayer at 2pm, led by Emirate-appointed imam Yusuf Ali. Although conflict over the control of mosques in Kano has been common, this was the first instance where two different Friday prayers were observed on the same day, in the same mosque. After the incident, the security forces under the directives of the Commissioner of Police closed down the mosque to prevent the conflicting groups from praying (and clashing) there again. The commissioner invited the representatives of the two groups to his office on 4 October 2006, with the aim of fostering dialogue. The two sides honoured the invitation, but failed to reach an agreement.<sup>40</sup>

39 Group interview with some of the residents of Sabuwar Gandu who were affected by the crisis, 23 December 2013.

40 Author's interview with an anonymous informant and one of the people invited to the office of the Commissioner of Police.



The deterioration of the relationship between the residents of Gidan Maza and Sabuwar Gandu, coupled with Izala’s objection to the Emirate Council’s appointment of Yusuf Ali as the new imam, led the Governor of Kano State at the time, Ibrahim Shekarau (2003–2011), to step into the conflict. On 3 November 2006, the Governor set up a 13-man committee under the auspices of the Kano State Shura Council,<sup>41</sup> to look into the causes of the recurring crises over the ownership and imamship of the mosque. Members of this committee were selected from the three main Islamic groups of Kano: Qadiriyya, Tijaniyya and Izala.<sup>42</sup> Some of the members were neutral, in the sense that they did not openly identify themselves with any of the three groups; nevertheless, most of them were known to sympathise

41 The Kano State Shura Council was set up in 2003 by the administration of Malam Ibrahim Shekarau in his effort to implement and apply Sharia in Kano. Shaykh Isa Waziri was the chairman of the council and Na’ibi Suleiman Wali was his deputy. There were almost fifty members of the council, mostly Islamic scholars and elder statesmen. The representatives among the *‘ulamā’* were chosen from the Qadiriyya, Tijaniyya and Izala. When the council was set up, the Governor tried to influence the State House of Assembly to pass a bill that would give it constitutional power, but he did not succeed. Therefore, the council operated under the Kano State Sharia Commission. Shura served as a consultative forum that advised the government of Shekarau on religious matters, and on the one hand, resolved intra religious conflicts between Sufis and Salafis and on the other hand, within Sufi groups. When there was a controversy over the administration of the polio vaccine on children in Kano during the first tenure of Shekarau (2003–2007), the Shura Council advised the governor that laboratory tests should be carried out to verify whether the vaccine contains any substance that could reduce fertility – as alleged by those who opposed the vaccination campaign. The council also advised that the Kano State Government should stop using polio vaccine produced in western countries (Europe and America) and start using other versions imported from Asia (author’s interview with Aliyu Ibrahim Khalil, Kano State Sharia Commission, 6 September 2017).

42 The following are the names of the members of the committee appointed by the Kano State Government: Prof Muhammad Sani Zahradeen (chairman); Dr Saidu Ahmad Dukawa (secretary); Prof Auwalu Hamisu Yadudu; Walin Kano Alhaji Mahe Bashir Wali; Shaykh Idris Kuliya Alkali; Shaykh Ibrahim Shehu Maihula (Tijaniyya); Shaykh Muntari Atamma (Qadiriyya); Shaykh Abdullahi Saleh Pakistan (chairman of Izala in Kano); Shaykh Muhammad Nasir Adam (imam of Shaykh Ahmadu Tijani Juma’a mosque); Shaykh Ibrahim Khalil (chairman, Kano State Council of Ulama); Shaykh Sammani Yusuf Makwarari (Qadiriyya); Shaykh Umar Sani Fagge (Tijaniyya); Malam Adamu Gwaram. Source: *Report of the Kano State Shura Committee*. I am grateful to a member of the committee who preferred to remain anonymous, for giving me access to the report.

with either the Sufi or Salafi camp. The selection of the membership of the committee was based on the principle that the various components of the Kano Muslim community should all be represented, and by the desire to bring an end to the conflict over the mosque. The conflict had not only increased the factionalism of the parties involved and their sympathisers, but had also challenged the authority of traditional institutions. During its work, the committee invited representatives of the two factions for a fair hearing. At the end of its sittings, the committee gave the following recommendations to the Kano State Government:

1. The appointment of Yusuf Ali (Tijaniyya) as made by the Kano Emirate Council should be ratified.
2. Alternatively, each conflicting faction should provide the names of other candidates to the Emirate Council for screening and reappointment as imam and deputy-imam.
3. Or: both Muhammad Nazifi Inuwa (Izala) and Yusuf Ali should be removed from their positions and a neutral person appointed as new imam if accepted by both conflicting parties.
4. Or: Yusuf Ali should be ratified as imam and Nazifi Inuwa as his deputy.
5. Or: Nazifi Inuwa should be ratified as imam and the Kano State Government should allocate the Gidan Maza residents a plot of the same size as the contested mosque and donate the same amount of money which it donated to the SGDA.<sup>43</sup>

When the committee sent its report to the Government and to representatives of the conflicting factions, the SGDA and Izala were disappointed with the outcome.<sup>44</sup> They asked their lawyer, Malam

43 *Report of the Kano State Shura Committee.*

44 Izala organized a public lecture titled *Gwagwarmaya tsakanin gaskiya da karya* (The Struggle between Falsehood and Truth) delivered jointly by the late Shaykh Ja'far Mahmud Adam (d. 2007) and Shaykh Abdullahi Pakistan (chairman of Izala Kano branch). The speakers criticised the Kano Emirate Council and the Sufi groups, and declared the Emirate-appointed imam Yusuf Ali as a heretic, accusing him of having given a fatwa in the 1990s, claiming that a Muslim could write a letter to God and send it to Him via a running river. For more on this, see Alexander Thurston, *Salafism in Nigeria: Islam, Preaching and Politics* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 147-152.

Abbas Ibrahim Jaafar, to file a court case against the Kano Emirate Council, Dr. Yusuf Ali and the Commissioner of Police. This was the first time to this writer’s knowledge that the Kano Emirate Council had been taken to court over a religious matter. On 22 July 2007, SGDA/Izala filed the case (SUIT No. K/56/2007) in the Kano State High Court, under the jurisdiction of Sunusi Chiroma. Two other lawyers, Barristers Usman Zunnuraini and Yahaya Satatima, volunteered to join hands with the lawyer of SGDA/Izala with the aim of defeating the defendants. Barrister Ibrahim Mukhtar was the lawyer who stood for the Kano Emirate Council, Yusuf Ali and the Commissioner of Police. The court heard the case on four occasions without giving a judgement. The media coverage of this crisis, together with the public lecture organized by Izala on the conflict over the mosque and the over-amplification of the court suit against the Emirate Council, all raised concerns among the elders of Kano. The traditional authority of the Emirate Council tends to be widely revered by the people, and it was felt that the continuation of the court case could erode its influence and symbolic authority. Hence, Dr Ibrahim Datti Ahmad, an influential Salafi scholar whom Izala regards as of one of its patrons, asked the SGDA/Izala to withdraw the case.<sup>45</sup>

Aprivate consultation between Datti Ahmad and the Emirate Council duly took place. This probably led to an assurance from the Emirate Council that Izala would ultimately keep control over the mosque; the SDGA/Izala agreed and ordered their lawyer to withdraw the case. Immediately afterwards, the SGDA/Izala was asked to submit the names of two new people who were to be screened and appointed as imam and deputy-imam. The names of Ishaq Abdullahi Garangamawa and Muhammad Sani Ahmad were presented to the Emirate Council, which appointed the former as imam and the latter as deputy-imam. The mosque was thus reopened on 21 December 2007.

In a gesture to celebrate the symbolic victory, the chairman of Izala, Abdullahi Pakistan, personally led the Friday prayer and the mosque was named after Shaykh Ja’far Mahmud (d. 2007), widely considered to

45 Author’s interview with Shaykh Sale Abdullahi Pakistan (Chairman JIBWIS, Kano branch).

be the most popular Salafi cleric of his generation in Kano. He had been murdered only a few months earlier (April 2007), while leading the dawn prayers in the *Al-Muntada* mosque of Dorayi, probably under the orders of former Salafi activist turned Boko Haram leader, Muhammad Yusuf.

### **Conclusion: The Triangular Politics and the Sovereignty of the Secular**

The contestation for the control and ownership of mosques has become a central issue in the religious politics of Kano state. Although there are important precedents in the Qadiri/Tijani conflict over mosques in Sokoto (1950s-1960s), this type of conflict has assumed a new dimension since the establishment of Izala (1978) and the beginning of its campaigns against Sufism. The conflict focuses on the disputed mosques, especially the ones that are established in newly emerging settlements, and the protagonist actors in the conflict are competing Islamic groups and their sympathisers. One factor that makes the politics more intricate is the involvement of the traditional authority (the Emirs), political authority (the State Government) and the legal authority (the court). The traditional authority uses the informal networks of family relationships and clientele, but moves diplomatically and encourages negotiations between all parties. The political authority tries to solve conflict by using the language of democratic proportional representation. The legal authority of the court is a more impersonal tool that can be used by various parties to shift the balance of power in their favour.

The traditional authority plays a role in conflict management and conflict resolution in Kano because of the respect it enjoys from the masses and because it is perceived to be close to the ordinary people. Many people in Kano and Hausaland at large still respect traditional authorities because they represent the legacy of the nineteenth-century Islamic reform movement of Shaykh Usman ʿDan Fodio (d. 1817). Most Muslims in northern Nigeria revere the nineteenth-century jihadists and the religious and political institutions they established and entrenched. Although the role of the traditional authority was partially undermined by its perceived closeness to the colonial interests during the colonial period (1903-1960) –

when they were re-framed as NA (Native Authority) and used in the context of the British policy of indirect rule – the emirs still hold a special place in the social life of many Muslims in the North, and they are perceived by many as the ultimate authority in religious matters.

Whenever there is a conflict in society, especially on religious matters, the parties involved would normally refer to the traditional authority for reconciliation.<sup>46</sup> From the 1980s onwards, whenever followers of different Islamic groups were involved in a conflict over the ownership or the imamship of a mosque, the matter was normally referred to the Emirate Council for intervention and mediation. Usually, the traditional authority would tend to be more sympathetic to the cause of the Sufi groups, for two main reasons: firstly, most of the traditional title-holders, who adjudicate over the conflicts, belong to one of the two main Sufi groups (Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya) or have close family relations with their leaders; secondly, the attitude of the Sufis towards traditional authority is perceived as being more loyal than that of their Salafi counterparts.

The traditional authority is, at least in theory, subject to the formal political authority represented by the Kano State Government. This political authority is, in principle, sovereign in the state under its competence. Its competence includes the constitutional right to appoint and remove a traditional authority in its territory. Because of the influence of the traditional authority in society, however, the political authority is always extremely cautious and attempts to avoid open conflict with the Emir. In the case of the Shekarau administration, the state government was known to be closer to Izala. However, because it was anxious to maintain stability and to draw the votes of all sides, it was careful to appear as impartial as possible when addressing the Sabuwar Gandu mosque issue. Therefore, it appointed a committee that represented all sides. The committee suggested a variety of possible solutions, but as it failed to take a clear stand, it was ultimately ineffective.

46 For more information about the role of emirs in Nigerian politics see, Alhaji M. Yakubu, *Emirs and Politicians: Reform, Reaction and Recrimination in Northern Nigeria, 1950-1966* (Kaduna: Baraka Press, 2006.)

The legal authority of the court, in the issue of the Sabuwar Gandu mosque, was cleverly used by Izala when they were on the verge of losing their case. Izala’s use of the legal authority of the court was decisive in redressing the balance of the contestation in their favour. Although the court did not adjudicate before the case was dropped, the very existence of a long court case against the Emir on a religious issue, was perceived by the traditional authority as an embarrassment and as a potentially dangerous precedent. The Emirate Council is actually perceived customarily as having the ultimate authority in religious matters. How, then, could a secular court adjudicate in a suit brought before it on a religious issue?

Although we cannot know precisely what happened behind the scenes, it is clear that the involvement of Dr Ibrahim Datti Ahmed led to a new informal negotiation between the parties involved; as a negotiating tactic, Izala could now use the threat of pursuing the legal case further to put pressure on the Emirate Council to resolve the issue in their favour. The Emirate calculated that it would be better ‘losing’ the Sabuwar Gandu mosque in an informal way, rather than taking the risk of losing the formal legal battle. By agreeing to ‘give’ the mosque to Izala as the outcome of an informal negotiation with a patron of the organization such as Datti Ahmed, it was possible to maintain the outward appearance of adhering to the principle that the Emirate is the ultimate authority as far as the appointment of imams in Kano state is concerned. A prolonged court case, regardless of the ultimate outcome, would have sent the public the message that the Nigerian constitution is the ultimate authority over religious issues amongst Muslims; this would have contributed towards eroding the power of traditional authority.

The case of the Sabuwar Gandu mosque is still celebrated as a landmark victory by the Salafis of Kano. Lectures delivered at the Sabuwar Gandu mosque are often introduced by remarks that stress the symbolic value of the mosque as the one where a historic struggle “between truth and falsehood” took place.<sup>47</sup> While the Izala were admittedly the successful side

47 Some of these lectures are available online. See for instance, *Lacca a kan Shi’a Sabuwar Gandu Asadussunnah* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ym-K6PrwkWg>, last checked 1 July 2017).

in the Sabuwar Gandu mosque dispute, the case has also set a precedent that in the long term might have ambivalent repercussions in terms of Izala’s own ideology of activism. Izala claims to have provided the main inspiration for the mass movement for implementing Sharia reforms.<sup>48</sup> Besides the “purification” of Nigerian Islam from Sufi (and increasingly, from Shia) influence, the full implementation of Sharia is certainly item number two on the agenda of the Nigerian Salafi movement. In principle, Sharia law considers the Emir as the ultimate and uncontested authority as far as the appointment of imams of mosques is concerned. Cases such as the Sabuwar Gandu mosque, however, show that the leadership of Izala is more than happy to revert to a court system that issues its rulings based on the secular law of the country, whenever it wishes to circumvent the ruling of a traditional ruler (the Emir) who, just like Izala, speaks in the name of religion. If there is any general lesson to be drawn from the case of the Sabuwar Gandu mosque, then, it is that competing Islamic religious actors who are pushing the agenda of the islamization of the Nigerian public sphere, can only settle their disputes by bowing down to the secular authority of the state. In competing for religious authority, the Emirate and Izala unwittingly contributed to the reaffirmation of the sovereignty of the secular law in the Nigerian public space.

48 Ramzi Ben Amara, “ ‘We Introduced Shari’a’: The Izala Movement in Nigeria as Initiator of shari’a-re-implementation in the North of the Country: Some Reflections,” in John A. Chesworth and Franz Kogelmann (eds.), *Shari’a in Africa today: Reactions and Responses* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).