

# The *Mujamma' Aṣḥāb al-Kahf wa'l-Raqīm* of Shaykh Abduḥjabbar Nasiru Kabara: An Anti-Salafi Mass Movement in Contemporary Northern Nigeria

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## Introduction

Over the centuries, Kano has acquired the status of being the most cosmopolitan Hausa city, by accommodating diverse migrant elements in its social fabric. Most of the migrants were attracted by Kano's commerce and industries.<sup>1</sup> Coupled with these economic factors, the introduction of Islam and Islamic literature by *Wangarawa* missionaries in the fourteenth century,<sup>2</sup> and the coming of Shaykh Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Maghīlī (1425-1504)<sup>3</sup> played a central role in the development of Islam and Islamic scholarship in Kano. It is because of its volume of trade, industry and scholarship, that Kano came to be referred to as "the emporium of the caliphate."<sup>4</sup> Through the various contacts that Kano established with the

- 1 See Phillip J. Shea, *The Development of an Export Oriented Dyed Cloth Industry in Kano Emirate in the Nineteenth Century* (PhD thesis, Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1975); Sule Bello, *State and Economy in Kano c. 1894-1960: A Study of Colonial Domination* (PhD thesis, Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University, 1982).
- 2 Olayemi Akinwumi and Adesina Y. Raji, "The Wangarawa Factor in the History of Nigerian Islam: The Examples of Kano and Borgu," *Islamic Studies*, 29, 4, 1990, pp. 375-385.
- 3 'Abd-Al-'Azīz 'Abd-Allah Batrān, "A Contribution to the Biography of Shaikh Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd-Al-Karīm Ibn Muḥammad ('Umar-A'Mar) Al-Maghīlī, Al-Tilimsānī," *The Journal of African History*, 14, 3, 1973, pp. 381-394.
- 4 Sa'ad Abubakar, "The Established Caliphate: Sokoto, the Emirates and their Neighbors," in Obaro Ikime (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980), p. 306. The origin of this phrase is traced to Clapperton's description of Kano as "the great emporium of the kingdom of Haussa" cited in Ibrahim B. Kano, "Representations of Kano in the Writings of Clapperton, Barth and Lugard, 1824-1903," in Musa O. Hambolu (ed.), *Perspectives on Kano-British Relations* (Kano: Gidan Makama Museum, 2003), p. 15.

rest of the Muslim world, especially with the cities of the Western Sudan and North Africa, spiritual ideas and practices were imported, and Sufism gradually became one of the most prominent forces in shaping the religious life of the city.

The Qadiriyya was the first Sufi order to be introduced in Kano. Before the nineteenth century, the Qadiriyya was the most influential force both among the Ulama (Islamic scholars) and the *talakawa* (the masses), throughout Hausaland. The dominance of Qadiriyya was challenged by the introduction of the Tijaniyya in the early nineteenth century and by its expansion in the twentieth century. In the second half of the twentieth century, with the formal establishment of the Salafi-oriented *Jamā'at' Izālat al-Bid'a wa-Iqāmat al-Sunna* (Society for the Removal of Innovation and the Reinstatement of Tradition),<sup>5</sup> the Kano doctrinal and spiritual landscape changed dramatically, as militant Salafi ideas started to spread and the hegemonic position of the Sufi order was challenged. It is in this highly competitive space that the *Mujamma' Aṣḥāb al-Kahf wa'l-Raqīm* emerged as a new, dynamic branch of the Qadiriyya led by a charismatic son of the late leader of the Qadiriyya in Kano, Shaykh Muḥammad al-Nāṣir Kabara (d. 1996).

### The Qadiriyya-Nāṣiriyya

During the twentieth century, the Kano-based scholar and ascetic Shaykh Muḥammad al-Nāṣir b. Muḥammad al-Mukhtār b. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Kabarī, al-Ṣinhajī, al-Timbuktī al-Kanawī<sup>6</sup> (1916-1996; known as Shaykh Nasiru Kabara) had emerged as the most prominent figure of the Qadiriyya in Nigeria, and arguably in the whole West African sub-region. Nasiru Kabara's activities had led to a massive spiritual revival of the order, at a time in which its popularity was threatened by the expansion of the branch of the Tijaniyya guided by the Senegalese Shaykh Ibrāhīm

5 For a detailed sociological study of the Izala group, see Ousmane Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria: A Study of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003).

6 This is the genealogy of Shaykh Nāṣiru Kabara and the order in which it appears in both Arabic and 'ajamī treatises authored by him.

Niasse (d. 1975).<sup>7</sup> Kabara emerged at the time when most Qadiri scholars in Kano were following various *silsila*-s (chains of authority) of the order and were practicing the Qadiri rituals individually or in small, fragmented groups. Among the branches of the Qadiriyya that were practiced in Kano at the time were the *Ahl al-Bayt*,<sup>8</sup> Kuntiyya, Shinqīṭiyya, Shādhiliyya, Munzaliyya, Sammāniyya, Mahdiyya and 'Arūsiyya.

Shaykh Nasiru Kabara was initiated first into the *silsila*-s of the Kuntiyya and *Ahl al-Bayt*.<sup>9</sup> His intellectual prowess, as well as the connections that he later established with Baghdad and Sudan (the birth places of the "original" Qadiriyya and of the Qadiriyya-Sammāniyya respectively), helped him to unify the local Qadiri networks that had previously operated independently in Kano. This process was initiated in 1949 and lasted until Kabara's death in 1996.

Kabara is also credited with the renewal of Qadiri ritual practices in Kano. Among other things, he introduced the *maukibi*, an annual procession to celebrate the birthday of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī, the founder of the order. This practice became instrumental in the mass mobilization of the Qadiri followers. These developments have been examined through different lenses. Thus, John Paden refers to Kabara's branch as "Reformed Qadiriyya."<sup>10</sup> Roman Loimeier, however, warns that the use of the term "reformed" may wrongly suggest the introduction of new practices into the order and to Islam at large; however, this was not

7 For more on the life and contribution of Shaykh Nasiru Kabara, see Roman Loimeier, *Islamic Reform and Political Change in Northern Nigeria* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997); and John Paden, *Religion and Political Culture in Kano* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973). Shaykh Nasiru Kabara's birth date is disputed. According to John O. Hunwick, "the date of his birth is disputed, but it was probably in 1916." John O. Hunwick, "Obituries," *Sudanic Africa*, 7, 1996, pp. 1-4. Loimeier, however, assertively gives it as 18April, 1925 (*Islamic Reform and Political Change*, p. 52). The official website of the Qadiriyya Nāṣiriyya zawiya in Kano (*Gidan Kadiriyya*, Kabara), gives 1914 as Kabara's birth date ([www.scribd.com/mobile/doc/110485119?width=540](http://www.scribd.com/mobile/doc/110485119?width=540)).

8 The *Ahl al-Bayt* branch of Qadiriyya is said to be the oldest in Hausaland, having been introduced in Kano during the reign of *Sarki* Muhammad Kokuna (1651-1652; removed but restored after *Sarki* Soyaki; ruled again 1652-1660). See Paden, *Religion and Political Culture*, p. 148.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 156.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 152-160.

the case, as in most instances Kabara was only introducing, into Kano, rituals that were practiced by branches of the order elsewhere. His aim in doing so was to “activate the Qadiriyya and also transform it into a mass movement.”<sup>11</sup> Auwalu Anwar proposes a better term by describing Kabara’s initiative as a “revitalization”<sup>12</sup> of Qadiri practices. While I agree with Anwar, I prefer simply to follow Loimeier’s designation of *Qadiriyya-Nāṣiriyya*. This term refers to the fact that Nasiru Kabara combined the *silsila*-s of different branches of the Qadiriyya and integrated their diverse ritual practices creatively without, however, establishing new practices upon his own initiative.

Besides the above-mentioned example of the *mawkiḥi*, the characteristic Qadiriyya-Nāṣiriyya practices include the *dhikr bi'l-bandīr* which are litanies accompanied by the *bandīr* (broad-trimmed drums), as previously practiced in the Qadiriyya-‘Arūsiyya. Another practice is the *dhikr bi'l-anfās*, which are litanies accompanied by breathing (respiratory exercises of rhythmic inhaling and exhaling), as previously practiced in the Qadiriyya-Sammāniyya. Similarly, the intercessory poems (*qaṣā'id*) of Shaykh Muḥammad Munzali, the founder of the Munzaliyya Sufi Brotherhood and those of Shaykh Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 1258) as well as the litanies of the *Ahl al-Bayt* Qadiriyya, have all been integrated into the practice of the followers of Shaykh Kabara: the *qaṣā'id* of Munzali and al-Shādhilī are recited during the weekly (on Fridays) recitation of *al-Mī'ād* (the pledge),<sup>13</sup> and the *Ahlal-Bayt* litanies are recited after the *fajr* (dawn) and *maghrib* (sunset) prayers. Kabara initiated his followers in all these practices.

Besides his renewal of Qadiri ritual activities, the most important contributions of Kabara to the history of the Qadiriyya lie in his efforts of *da'wa* (proselytization), as well as in his outstanding contributions to classical Arabic literature and to Islamic education. These activities earned him the honorific title of *Amīr al-Jaysh al-'Uthmānī* or “Leader

11 Loimeier, *Islamic Reform and Political Change*, p. 14.

12 Auwalu Anwar, *Struggle for Influence and Identity: The Ulama in Kano 1937-1987* (M.A. Dissertation, Maiduguri: University of Maiduguri, 1992), p. 134.

13 *Al-Mī'ād* is the abbreviation of a collection of intercessory poems and supplications on Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and Shaykh Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Sammānī (d. 1775), entitled *Ighāthat al-'Ibād ila Ḥaqqat al-Mī'ād*.

of the Uthmanian Army,” in reference to the leader of the nineteenth-century northern Nigerian jihad, the Qadiri scholar Usman Dan Fodio (d. 1817).<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in the light of his reputation, Baghdad recognized him as the “leader of Qadiriyya in Africa.”

In view of his paramount influence, the spiritual and scholarly legacy of Shaykh Nasiru Kabara was understandably a delicate issue to tackle after his death. During his lifetime, Kabara had strategically decentralized his annual, occasional and daily routine activities, by assigning specific roles and responsibilities to some of his biological sons and grandsons, as well as to some of his senior *murīd*-s (disciples). For example, the annual *tafsīr* (exegesis of the Holy Quran) during the month of Ramadan was assigned to his son, Qarīb Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Nāṣir Kabara (Qaribullah Nasiru Kabara).<sup>15</sup> The analytical interpretation of the *Kitāb al-Shifā' bi-Ta'rif Ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā* by al-Qāḍī 'Iyād (d. 1149), another activity that used to draw large crowds to the *Gidan Kadiriyya* during the month of Ramadan, was given to his son Qāsiyūn b. Muḥammad al-Nāṣir Kabara (Qasyuni Kabara). Another son, 'Abd al-Jabbār b. Muḥammad al-Nāṣir Kabara (Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara), was designated as *Amīr al-wā'izīn* (the chief preacher). Kabara's astute choice of de-centralizing authority had an enormous

14 The title of *Amīr al-Jaysh al-'Uthmānī* was conferred on Shaykh Nasiru Kabara by the “Commander of the Faithful” of Nigeria (in Hausa, *Sarkin Musulmi*, the honorific title of the Sultan of Sokoto), Siqqid Abubakar III (1938-1988). The title of *Amīr al-Jaysh* was the conventional title of the military commander of the Sokoto Caliphate's jihadist army. According to Loimeier, “the Sultan of Sokoto handed Kabara the sword of the army of Usman dan Fodio with the mission to lead the Qadiriyya in Nigeria in its struggle against the Izala” (Loimeier, *Islamic Reform and Political Change*, p. 57). In 1995, the Islamic University of Omdurman (Sudan) honoured Kabara with an honorary doctoral degree. For a comprehensive list of Kabara's works, see the introduction of Muḥammad Nasiru Kabara, *Iḥsān al-Mannān fī Ikhrāj Khabāyā al-Qur'ān: Tafsīr wa-Tarjamat Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān ilā Lughat Hausā*, (Tripoli: Jam'iyya al-Da'wa al-Islāmiyya al-'Ālamiyya, 1998).

15 Qaribullah is the third son of Shaykh Nasiru Kabara and his first Caliph (successor). He was appointed on 7 October, 1996, three days after the death of his father, on the basis of a unanimous endorsement by his brothers and by the disciples of Shaykh Nasiru Kabara. Kabara had formally handed over the highly symbolic exegesis of the Quran at the Kano Emir's palace to Qaribullah in 1989, while the exegesis was in session. Kabara stopped at Q5:19 and Qaribullah started from Q5:20. A documentary video of the event is available at the shop of the *Gidan Kadiriyya* and the author has a copy. This event was widely considered to be an implicit appointment of Qaribullah as Kabara's successor.

impact on the future of the movement. His decision, in fact, minimized immediate succession disputes because each of his sons acted at his own capacity as Kabara's full-fledged "successor" in a particular field, having been given confidence and a sense of autonomy by their father. As such, overlapping functions were also avoided. In the long term, however, with each of the sons developing as independent scholarly authorities, some kind of conflict was likely to surface.

### **Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara: Scholarship and Activism**

Born in 1970 in the Kabara quarters in the heart of old Kano city, just opposite the royal house of the Emir of Kano, the seventh son of Shaykh Nasiru Kabara was named Abduljabbar after Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī's son, 'Abd al-Jabbār, who acted as the custodian of his father's residence and tomb (*Amīr al-dār*). This accounts for Abduljabbar Kabara's Hausa nickname *Sarkin Gida*, meaning "custodian of the house."<sup>16</sup> His paternal ancestry is linked to Shaykh Umar b. Ibrāhīm al-Kuwaye, popularly known as Malam Kabara, who founded *Gidan Kadiriyya* (Centre of Qadiriyya).<sup>17</sup> His

16 Part of the information contained in this biography is derived from a "Long Essay" by Munzali Muhammad Koki, submitted to the Department of Arabic, Bayero University, Kano, the summary of which was prefaced in the introductory part of Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara, *al-Muqaddimat al-Āzifa al-Musammā bi-Qadimmū al-Tawḥīd Qabla al-Nasab*, vol. 1. 2010, pp. 1-38.

17 *Gidan Kabara*, also commonly designated as *Gidan Kadiriyya*, is regarded as the headquarters of the Qadiriyya-Nāṣiriyya not only in Kano but throughout the areas of extension of Shaykh Nasiru Kabara's influence. *Gidan Kadiriyya* was established by Malam Umar Kabara (d. ca 1840s), from whose name the etymology Kabara is derived. Kabara had migrated from Timbuktu, Mali. He hailed from the Ṣaḥāja Arab/Berber clan. For a brief biography of Malam Umar Kabara, see Ahmad Sammani Nufawa, *Hasken Allah Ba Ya Gushewa: Tarihin Sheikh Muhammad Nasiru Kabara*, Galadima Press, n.d., pp. 1-2. *Gidan Kadiriyya* served as the residence of the Qadiriyya shaykhs and as a *zāwiya* (Sufi centre) right from Malam Umar Kabara's time to the present date. The house underwent a number of expansion projects at different times, to accommodate the many *murīd-s* (disciples) from different walks of life who were coming for spiritual induction and in search of knowledge. The house was expanded once again during the time of Shaykh Nasiru Kabara to include a library, a mosque (named *Bāz al-aṣḥāb*, the grey falcon, an epithet by which Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī is known) a *dhikr* (meditation) space (named *al-Ṣuffā*), a special space for the reading of *Kitāb al-Shifā'* during the month of Ramadan, a section for hosting the family of the Shaykh, a guest section and a shop of religious items, recorded videos and audio lectures, etc.

maternal ancestry extends to Shaykh Muḥammad b. 'Uthmān, known as Malam Zaki, who was one of Shaykh Usman 'Dan Fodio's disciples. Malam Kabara and Malam Zaki are said to have been friends.<sup>18</sup> Malam Zaki had previously lived in Getso but had fled to Gwarzo as a result of the 1836 *tawaye* (rebellion) of Katsina-Maradi that affected some parts of Getso and Gwarzo. In Gwarzo, Malam Zaki founded a settlement that came to be known as *Hayin Masallata* ("the ward of those who pray").<sup>19</sup>

In his teens, Abduljabbar was trained at home by his father in classical Arabic literature, grammar, syntax, morphology, theology, jurisprudence etc. He was also taught by several local scholars in his father's network. One of the teachers who influenced him most in his career was Ustādh Muḥammadal-Awwal, popularly known as Malam 'Danyelwa. 'Danyelwa was a maternal uncle to Abduljabbar and he was renowned for his knowledge of Arabic language and literature.

Abduljabbar is notable among Kabara's sons for a number of reasons. Besides having concurrently served as *Sarkin Gida* (custodian of the house) and *Amīr al-wā'izīn* (chief preacher) during Kabara's life time, he was the first of Kabara's sons to be allowed by his father to conduct *abuzu* (informal) learning circle at *Gidan Kadiriyya*, independently from the circle of his father; he began this when he was only nineteen years of age.<sup>20</sup>

Starting from the 1950s, Shaykh Nasiru Kabara used his trans-local Sufi links with Baghdad to send his sons to study advanced Islamic education at the University of Baghdad (UOB), Iraq. Abduljabbar was sent in 1993.<sup>21</sup> In Baghdad, Abduljabbar was exposed to the modern system of university education that involves scholarly brainstorming through conferences, seminar presentations, intellectual debates, lectures, and

18 Kabara, *al-Muqaddimat al-Āzifa*, p. 7.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 8. For details on the offensive and defensive by Katsina against the *Tawaye*, see Yusuf B. Usman, *The Transformation of Katsina 1400-1883: The Emergence and Overthrow of the Sarauta System and the Establishment of the Emirate*, (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1981), pp. 147-168.

20 Author's interview with Malam Abdulqadir Mai Anwaru, Secretary-General of *Mujamma' Aṣḥāb al-Kahf wa'l-Raqīm*, Kofar Kabuga quarters, September 2014.

21 The University of Baghdad was established in 1957 and is a public institution. As of 2015, the university was the largest in Iraq and the second largest Arab university after the University of Cairo. ([www.uobaghdad.edu.iq](http://www.uobaghdad.edu.iq)).

the like. He confesses that he feels heavily indebted to the university method of imparting knowledge and that he regards that opportunity as a “laboratory” where his mastery of classical Arabic, that he had previously learnt informally at his father’s home-based traditional school, could be put into practice.<sup>22</sup> During his stay in Baghdad, his interaction with the Iraqi native speakers of Arabic language groomed and greatly improved his proficiency in the language.<sup>23</sup> Equally important for his growth was the fact that in Baghdad he continued to pursue his traditional studies (mainly at the *madrasa* adjacent to Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir’s mosque) under scholars of repute such as Shaykh ‘Abd al-Karīm Biyāra (d. 2005), who was the Sunni mufti of Iraq, and Shaykh ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Rāwī. Abduljabbar acknowledges the intellectual depth that he owes to their scholarship, especially in the fields of Hadith and *fiqh*.<sup>24</sup>

Among the Sufi scholars from whose knowledge he benefited are Shaykh Nāzīm al-Ḥaqqānī al-Qubruṣī (d. 2014), from Cyprus,<sup>25</sup> and the Jordanian/Palestinian Shaykh Ḥāzīm Nāyif Abū Ghazāla (b. 1933). During some of his more recent visits to Baghdad, Abduljabbar also attended the Ramadan *tafsīr* sessions of al-Sayyid Ḥabīb ‘Umar b. Ḥāmid al-Jilānī al-Yamanī. These three scholars were or are active in dynamic and global Sufi revivalist networks, respectively, of the Naqshbandiyya, the Shādhiliyya and the Ba‘lawiyya orders.

In Nigeria, Abduljabbar is known for his confrontational style, especially in the tone of his anti-Salafi speeches. The youth movement he established has been active in challenging the diffusion of Salafi doctrines in Kano and other northern Nigerian states and in attempting to promote a “corrective” stand against a number of Sufi practices that he considered to be “unscrupulous.” Because of this twofold agenda, Abduljabbar has gained many enemies both from outside and within the Sufi camp in Nigeria. Because of his oratorical qualities and his outspoken personality, Abduljabbar has become the most visible and controversial of all the

22 Author’s interview with Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara, September 2014.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*

25 Abduljabbar met Shaykh Nāzīm at the tomb of the Prophet Yaḥyā (John the Baptist) in Damascus.



sons of Shaykh Nasiru Kabara. To his loyalists, Abduljabbar is an erudite scholar, a prolific writer and an eloquent orator. To his detractors, he is arrogant, temperamental, intolerant, verbose, and “a Shiite.”

### **The *Mujamma' Aṣḥāb al-Kahf wa'l-Raqīm* (MAK)**

The *Mujamma' Aṣḥāb al-Kahf wa'l-Raqīm* (Union of the Companions of the Cave and the Inscription, abbreviated as MAK) evolved from the informal Islamic circle of learning conducted by Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara at *Gidan Kadiriyya* from 1989. The informal school operated on the evenings of Saturdays and Sundays, and the teaching was focused on the *Muwaṭṭa'* of Imam Mālik b. Anas. At this stage, the circle did not have a name. As noted above, Abduljabbar was the only one of Kabara's children to operate an informal network of learning concurrently with that of his father. In 1992, the school moved from *Gidan Kadiriyya* to a residence known as *Dār al-Ta'lif*, Gandun Albasa in Kano city, where Nasiru Kabara used to seclude himself to write. At *Dār al-Ta'lif*, Abduljabbar named his circle as *Safīnat al-Qādiriyya* (the Qadiri ship), from the title of a book authored by Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī.

The school was run for a few years at *Dār al-Ta'lif*, before it was moved again to the premises of the *Ma'had Shaykh Nasiru Kabara*, the first Senior Islamic school that had been established by Shaykh Nasiru Kabara in 1961 in Gwale, Kano.<sup>26</sup> In Gwale, the school was renamed after Shaykh 'Abd Allāh al-Thiqā (Abdullahi Siḩa, fl. 1660),<sup>27</sup> as *Madrasat Imām Muhaddithī Bilād Iqlīm Namāzaya*; his tomb is situated within the institute. Abdullahi Siḩa was probably the best-known scholar and ascetic of Hausaland before the Usman 'Dan Fodio's jihad. A nomadic Fulani, he is primarily known for a long homiletic poem titled '*Aṭīyyat al-Mu'ṭī* (The Gift of the Giver). Naming the school after Abdullahi Siḩa was an attempt to link it to the oldest legacy of Islamic knowledge in the region. By using the title “the imam of the scholars of Hadith” in reference to Abdullahi Siḩa, the name also stressed the school's mission of introducing standard methods of teaching and learning the prophetic traditions.

26 Paden, *Religion and Political Culture*, p. 157.

27 See John O. Hunwick (ed.), *Arabic Literature of Africa, Vol. II, the Writings of Central Sudanic Africa*, (Leiden: Brill, 1995), p. 3.

It was against this background that in 1994, Kabara assigned Abduljabbar to travel to the former Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan to represent him in an international Islamic conference. During the trip, the conference participants visited the main cities and historical monuments, including the tomb and *madrasa* of Imam al-Bukhāri (d. 870) in Samarkand, and the University of Bukhara. One of the things that impressed him during the trip was to see how the university had retained the classical learning methods that were used during the time of Bukhāri, including the use of a wooden slate, handmade pen and inks, side-by-side with a modern pedagogy.<sup>28</sup>

Abduljabbar's wish to introduce the methodology that he observed in central Asia, coupled with the expansion of the activities of the school and his intention to give the school a neutral image (so that youth belonging to non-Qadiri groups could be included) led him to rename his institution once again. The name he chose on this occasion was *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf wa'l-Raqīm*. The name is drawn from the Quranic *aṣḥāb al-kahf* (companions of the cave) mentioned in Sura 18. In the Quranic narrative, the companions of the cave are a group of young believers who hid in a cave to escape persecution. The Quranic narrative echoes the Christian legend of the "seven sleepers of Ephesus," who had escaped the persecution of the Roman emperor Decius (d. 251). The main intention of Abduljabbar was to give his organization a neutral identity, free from any exclusive affiliation to any particular Sufi order. Thus, the organization could claim to represent all Sufi groups irrespective of conventional affiliations, and could mobilize them in the common fight against Salafi/Wahhabism. One of the slogans frequently recited by Abduljabbar Kabara sums up the mobilizing and unifying mission of MAK. It reads: *Naḥnu atbā' al-dalīl ayna-mā māla namīl* ("we believe in sound proof, in whatever direction it bends, we follow").

The MAK was formally established in 2000 with Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara as its intellectual and spiritual leader. At this stage, the lectures delivered at the school were entitled *Muryar Hadīn Kai* (The Voice of Unity).<sup>29</sup>

28 Author's interview with Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara, September 2014.

29 Abduljabbar Sheikh Nasiru Kabara, *Fassarar Littafin Alfyyat al-Siyar*, Audio-recording, 1997-1999. The Monthly Qadiriyya Newspaper (ISSN 0795-0209) bears the same slogan, *Muryar Hadīn Kai*.

The adoption of this title was against the background of the resurgence of Sharia in most northern Nigerian states, resulting in an increased level of competition between Muslim groups and a pressing need for unity in the Muslim community.<sup>30</sup> The school operated as a formal classroom with a timetable of subjects (Hadith, *Fiqh*, *Sīra*, *Naḥw*). *Alfiyyat al-Siyar*, a one-thousand-verse poem on the biography of the Prophet written by Shaykh Nasiru Kabara was taught every Sunday from 4-6 pm, in a public session where outsiders attended along with all the school's students. Abduljabbar also produced a short compilation of approximately one hundred hadiths on various theological themes titled *Irshād al-khalafila ittibā' manhaj al-Salaf*, which was used as the main teaching material for the subject of Hadith. The main objective of this compilation was to collate the hadiths that show how the beliefs of the Prophet and the first generation of Muslims differed, in some key theological issues, from those of today's Salafi/Wahhabi school. The first set of students at the school reportedly memorized almost ninety percent of the compilation.<sup>31</sup> A library was also constructed as part of the school's infrastructure and it was named *Dār al-Qur'ān*.

Later on, as the graduates of the school started to open new branches, and as the students attending the mosque sessions helped the school develop into a multifunctional centre, the word *Mujamma'* was prefixed to the name *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf wa'l-Raqīm*. In the meantime, however, the conventional school that *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf wa'l-Raqīm* had previously been, had also transformed into a profoundly different institution and it had become a religious and social movement led by one man but with a broad community base and a strong activist profile. Of all the subjects previously taught, only the *sīra* continued to flourish, probably because the registration-free sessions delivered on Sundays at the mosque were more attuned to the needs of the community.

The transformation of MAK was propelled by two fundamental developments. First, the gradual development of an internal rift between

30 For a historical background to the resurgence of the Sharia issue in northern Nigeria, see Tijjani M. Naniya, "History of the *Shari'a* in Some States of Northern Nigeria to circa 2000," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 13, 1, 2002, pp. 14-31.

31 Author's interview with Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara, September 2014.

Abduljabbar and his brother Qaribullah, the official successor of Shaykh Nasiru Kabara, pushed the former to distance himself and his followers from participating in the spiritual activities that take place at *Gidan Kadiriyya* in Kabara ward; they rather focused on the development of their own centre at Gwale. In this way, MAK developed from being a school affiliated to the main Qadiri centre, into becoming a mass Sufi movement of its own. Secondly, the escalation of Sufi vs Salafi confrontations in Kano, to which MAK contributed to a large extent, contributed towards diversifying the activities of MAK from “pure” learning to a wider variety of activism. The confrontational approach used by Abduljabbar in challenging the growing influence of the Salafi movement in Kano actually contributed to the appeal of MAK as a kind of “vanguard” Sufi group that attracted the youth, especially in the areas outside of the Kano city walls, where the threats of anti-Sufi rhetoric were stronger. This was particularly true in the areas of Kano where the charismatic Salafi scholar Shaykh Ja'far Maḥmūd Ādam (d. 2007) had proselytized more, creating (perhaps for the first time in Kano, where the influence of Izala had remained relatively weaker than elsewhere) a popular Salafi youth sub-culture.<sup>32</sup>

The antagonistic relations between MAK and the Nigerian Salafi movement, especially with the leaders of the Ahlus Sunna movement,<sup>33</sup> were often related to the conflict over ownership and control of the sacred space of the mosques. Whenever plots of land are allocated for the construction of a new mosque in Kano, a conflict emerges between the Salafis and the Sufis for the control of the mosque. MAK has often been at the forefront of the popular mobilization of a trans-*ṭarīqa* (Qadiri and Tijani) Sufi public for claiming the space of the mosques in preference

32 For more on Shaykh Ja'far Ādam, see Andrea Brigaglia, “A Contribution to the History of the Wahhabi Da'wa in West Africa: The Career and the Murder of Shaykh Ja'far Mahmoud Adam (Daura, ca. 1961/1962-Kano 2007),” *Islamic Africa*, 3, 1, 2012, pp. 1-23.

33 Ahlus Sunna is a Salafi network led mainly by Nigerian graduates of the Islamic University of Medina (Saudi Arabia). From the mid-1990s, Ahlus Sunna has overrun Izala as the most influential Salafi network in the country. See Alex Thurston, “Nigeria's Ahlussunnah: A Preaching Network from Kano to Medina and Back,” in Masooda Bano and Keiko Sakurai (eds.), *Shaping Global Islamic Discourses: The Role of Al-Azhar, Al-Medina, and Al-Mustafa* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 93-116.

to the Salafis. The polemics between MAK and Ahlus Sunna, however, are broader than that, involving also the production of a large body of argumentative literature. While the Sufi vs anti-Sufi literature produced in Nigeria in the 1980s and 1990s has been the object of thorough studies,<sup>34</sup> the most recent chapters of this ongoing debate have not been covered yet by the extant literature, and the role of Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara and the MAK has not been documented.

### **MAK: Structure of an Activist Sufi Movement**

As part of MAK's new strategy, which was aimed at marking its transformation from a learning circle to a mass movement, MAK started to focus on developing a network of mosques, which became the centres for mass mobilization. This strategy is not too dissimilar from what Izala, the first Nigerian Salafi movement, had been doing in Nigeria over the last decades; that is, challenging the traditional, more centralized structure of the Kano mosques, which used to be under the direct control of the Emir.

MAK sought a plot of land in 2001 at Filin Mushe, Gwale, in Kano city and established its first Juma'a (Friday) mosque, naming it, after Shaykh Nasiru Kabara's honorific title, as *Jāmi' Amīr al-Jaysh*. The allocation of the plot was granted to MAK after protracted discord between MAK and the District Head of Gwale Local Government area and Chiroma of Kano Emirate, at that time, Alhaji Lamido Ado Bayero.<sup>35</sup> This mosque immediately became the veritable headquarters of MAK. As such, it became the arena for a new public study session open to all, similar to the study of *sīra* delivered at the *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf wa'l-Raqīm*. At the new mosque, the teaching focused on the translation and commentary of *al-Ghunya li-ṭālibī ṭarīq al-Ḥaqq* (The Essentials for those who Search a Path to the True One), a Sufi text by Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī. The study of *al-Ghunya* was later extended to *Jāmi' al-Rasūl* (The Mosque of the Prophet) in Gidan

34 See, especially, Muhammad S. Umar, "Sufism and its Opponents in Nigeria: The Doctrinal and Intellectual Aspects," in Frederick De Jong and Bernd Radtke (eds.), *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 375-385.

35 It is not clear why Lamido opposed to the grant of the plot but it is alleged that he was "against" converting the plot for purposes other than commercial.

Maza, another MAK Friday mosque. These two mosques serve as the main venues for Abduljabbar's lecture sessions in Kano city.

With the exception of al-Jilānī's *al-Ghunya*, Usman 'Dan Fodio's *Ihyā' al-Sunna wa-Ikḥmād al-Bid'a*, and Abū Zayd al-Qayrawānī's (d. 996) *al-Risāla*, all the texts translated and commented upon by Abduljabbar at the two mosques are written by him. These are: *Muqaddimat al-āzifa* (Introduction to the 'The Day of Judgement', themed to 'decipher' Ibn Taymiyya's *Minhāj al-Sunnah*), vol. 1 and 2; *al-Salafiyya ma'a Asmā' Allāh al-Ḥusnā* (The Salafis and [their wrong interpretation of] the Names of God); *Waqafāt ma'a al-Salafiyya* (Engagement with the Salafis); *Ṣiyām Rajab Sunna min al-Sunan wa-l-Ṭa'n fīhi Sū' Adab* (Fasting during the Month of Rajab is a Sunna, and Contesting it is a Sign of Bad Manners); *al-Taḥālīl fī Naqḍ Abāṭīl Aḥsan al-Aqāwīl* (Deciphering the Inauthentic Transmission of the "Best Sayings"); and, *Ihyā' al-'Aqīda al-Islāmiyya al-Ṣaḥīḥa* (Reviving the Authentic Islamic Doctrine). Most of these texts are orally translated into Hausa, concurrently with the commentary of *al-Ghunya*.<sup>36</sup>

Besides coordinating these public teaching activities, mostly focused on Sufism and on the refutation of Salafism, MAK also established an elaborate structure of committees and voluntary associations of followers, each with its specific responsibilities. These committees include: the executive committee; the *da'wa* (proselytization) committee; the financial committee; the security committee; the strategy and planning committee; the media and publicity committee; and, the welfare and mosques committee. The executive committee acts as the central working committee. It oversees the activities of other committees and receives their reports; it screens/appoints members into the different committees; it approves financial transactions and sets up *ad hoc* committees for short-

36 The commentary of *al-Ghunya* is taking several years because of the detailed elucidations that characterize the sessions. Handouts are produced by Shaykh Abduljabbar at every session of study of *al-Ghunya*, for the use of attendants: this is another sign of Abduljabbar's lecturing style inspired by his experience at University. Abduljabbar has pledged that these handouts will be compiled into a voluminous book on the commentary of *al-Ghunya* with the title *Taḥqīq al-Munya bi-Sharḥ Kitāb al-Ghunya*. All recorded audio files of MAK lectures and sessions are circulated by *Hukum Allah* Recording Centre in Alfindiki and *Auliya Allah* Recording Centre in Kofar Wambai, both in Kano.

term assignments. Shaykh Abduljabbar is the chairman of the executive committee. Other members include the Secretary-General of MAK and his assistant; the MAK legal consultant; and all the chairmen and secretaries of the various committees.

The *da'wa* committee is the most important one after the executive committee. It oversees the state of mosques and Islamic schools under MAK; it edits and co-publishes Shaykh Abduljabbar's works; it circulates lecture handouts/pamphlets; and it provides logistics for *da'wa* and related philanthropic activities.<sup>37</sup>

All the committees work in consultation with the central working committee. Membership of any committee is determined by the follower's level of commitment to the general activities of MAK.

Membership of voluntary groups, as in the case of the committees, tends to be in accordance with the group member's ranking within MAK. The voluntary groups include the following: *Aqrab al-ṣaffila majlis Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* (Closest Row to the Mosque of *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf*), which consists mostly of the most activist members of MAK; *Rijāl al-khidma* which consists mostly of service/maintenance men; *Fityat al-kahf* (the youth of the cave); *A'wān al-Mahdī* (the helpers of the Mahdi)<sup>38</sup> and *Yan Daqa* (lit. "the warriors," a kind of security force that at times works as a militia). All these groups are initiated by their respective members but are approved by the executive committee. Age is given precedence when membership is considered. For example, none of the members of the *A'wān al-Mahdī* group members is older than fifteen years.

All these groups play important roles in the activities of MAK. For instance, *Rijāl al-khidma* singlehandedly funded the publication of the 2013 edition of Shaykh Abduljabbar's *Ihyā' al-'Aqīda al-Islāmiyya al-Ṣaḥīḥa* (Reviving the Authentic Islamic Doctrine) and paid for the replacement

37 Many of the places where MAK's influence has extended have been reached by the activities of the *da'wa* committee. The philanthropic activities include visits to hospitals, prisons and orphanages (information sourced from documents available from the Assistant Secretary-General of MAK, Malam Abubakar Ahmad Soron Dinki).

38 The name of this voluntary group is said to be informed by one prophetic tradition which states that "the group of the companions of the cave are helpers of the Mahdī."

of some of the faulty facilities in the mosque.<sup>39</sup> The ‘*Yan Daga*, as the name implies, represents the most radical wing of the MAK. This group prepares members to guard, secure and even to “counter-strike” if the interests of MAK are threatened. The term *daga* (“battle line” in Hausa) is repeatedly echoed in a number of Abduljabbar’s lectures where he refers to this group as the frontline of the struggle to defend Sufism from Salafi attacks in the religious public sphere of Kano. The rise of the group is clearly a result of Abduljabbar’s lectures.

Besides being active in Kano, MAK rapidly established a network of followers in some of the states of northern Nigeria. The activities of the *da’wa* committee and the circulation of audio files of Abduljabbar’s lectures have been instrumental in mobilizing followers.<sup>40</sup> The new members recruited by MAK outside Kano present themselves in batches at its Gwale headquarters, usually on Fridays, for recognition, formal initiation into the Qadiriyya order and registration. Forms are distributed to acquire basic information on all new followers. An *ijāza* is also distributed for those who have been initiated into the *ṭariqa*.<sup>41</sup> An MAK branch in Bauchi city was the first to pay homage in this way. It is estimated that in the period 2008-2015, nearly five thousand followers, mostly youth, have been initiated into the Qadiriyya through MAK.<sup>42</sup> The figures might be exaggerated as they come from internal sources, but it is obvious that many more youth are initiated into the Qadiriyya at MAK than at the order’s headquarters in *Gidan Kadirīyya*; this is one of the main reasons for the tension between the two brothers, Qaribullah and Abduljabbar.<sup>43</sup>

MAK registration documents, as at 2014, show that the movement has established a vast network of followership in the areas shown in the following table.

39 Author’s interview with Malam Abdulqadir Mai Anwaru, Secretary-General of MAK, September 2014.

40 *Ibid.*

41 Author’s interview with Malam Abubakar Ahmad Soron Dinki, Assistant Secretary-General of MAK, September 2014.

42 Author’s interview with Malam Abdulqadir Mai Anwaru, Secretary-General of MAK, September 2014

43 *Ibid.* Also field observation by author.



**Table 1: MAK Friday and Five Congregational Prayer (FCP)  
Mosques in northern Nigerian States (as of 2014).<sup>44</sup>**

States	Branches Status and Location						Remarks
Kano	<i>Jāmi' Amīr al-Jaysh</i> , Gwale, MAK Headquarters.	<i>Jāmi' Aṣḥāb al-Kahf</i> , Maidile.	<i>Jāmi' Aṣḥāb al-Kahf</i> , Rinji, Ja'en.	<i>Jāmi' Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir</i> , Gano.	<i>Jāmi' Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir</i> , Danladi, Nasidi.	<i>Jāmi' Tūr Sin</i> , Lengel.	Seven Friday mosques and a number of FCP mosques (not recorded here).
Jigawa	<i>Jāmi' Aṣḥāb al-Kahf</i> , Bakin, Kasuwa, Hadejia.	<i>Jāmi' Aṣḥāb al-Kahf</i> , G.R.A., Hadejia.	FCP at Auyo.	FCP at Ringim.	FCP at Roni, Taura, Kazaure.	FCP at Birniwa.	Two Friday mosques and seven FCP mosques.
Bauchi	<i>Jāmi' Aṣḥāb al-Kahf</i> , Kandahar, opposite Eid ground, Bauchi.	FCP at Ningi.	FCP at Dass.	FCP at Jama'are.	FCP at Torro.	FCP at Sorro, Zaki, Darazau.	One Friday mosque and eight FCP mosques.
Yobe	<i>Jāmi' Aṣḥāb al-Kahf</i> , Gashua.	<i>Jāmi' Aṣḥāb al-Kahf</i> , Nguru.					Two Friday mosques and one FCP mosque.
Gombe	FCP at Bolari.	FCP at Bajoga.	FCP at Dukku.	FCP at Timfire.	FCP at Jaura Umar.		Six FCP mosques.
Katsina	FCP at Kofar Kaura.	FCP at Daura.	FCP at Funtua.	FCP at Bakori.	FCP at Faskari.	FCP at Bindawa.	Seven FCP mosques.
Zamfara	FCP at Gusau.	FCP at Zurmi.					Three FCP mosques.
Kaduna	FCP at Zaria.	FCP at Tudun Wada.					Two FCP mosques.

Some of the Friday mosques are handed over to MAK by their owners once they become involved with the movement. For example, the *Jāmi'*

44 Registration documents obtained from the MAK Assistant Secretary-General, Malam Abubakar Ahmad Soron Dinki, at *Jāmi' Amīr al-Jaysh* (MAK Headquarters), Filin Mushe, Gwale, Kano.

*Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir* in Gano (Kano State) was granted to MAK by Alhaji Abubakar Gano, and the *Jāmi' Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* in Maidile was donated by Hajiya Sabuwa Maidile. Other mosques are owned directly by MAK, which purchases an existing mosque (or an empty plot to build a new one) with the support of wealthy individuals. For example, the national leader of the Tijaniyya Sufi order, *al-Khalīfa* Shaykh Iṣḥāq b. Muḥammad al-Rābi' (Halifa Isiyaka Rabi), has contributed substantially to the construction of *Jāmi' al-Rasūl* in Gidan Maza. As is often the case in Kano State, the issue of ownership of some of the mosques involved a bitter conflict between MAK, members of the Tijaniyya Sufi order and Salafi groups; this certainly applied in the case of *Jāmi' al-Rasūl* in Gidan Maza. Thus, the Tijanis and the Qadiris formed a common front against the Salafis, and the mosque was established to counter the presence of a nearby Friday mosque controlled by the Salafis. The question of ownership of the Gidan Maza mosque led to conflict between MAK and the Tijanis on the one hand, and between MAK and the Salafis on the other hand. According to Abduljabbar, the mosque was “handed over” to MAK by Shaykh Iṣḥāq al-Rābi' (Isiyaka Rabi), the caliph of Tijaniyya and a wealthy business and Quranic teacher, who had given the largest contribution for the construction of the mosque. Mallam Shehi Shehi and a few other Tijanis, however, were alleged to “connive” with the Salafis and to have objected to Isiyaka Rabi's philanthropic gesture; this situation incited MAK to resist, doggedly, any attempt to dispossess it of the mosques. The mosque is currently under the administration of MAK and named *Jāmi' al-Rasūl*.<sup>45</sup>

The *Jāmi' Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir* in Gano is also a recently contested Friday mosque. Here, however, the contestation was an inter-*ṭarīqa* one, as it involved on one side MAK, and on the other side, Shaykh Ṭāhir b. 'Uthmān Bauchi (Dahiru Usman Bauchi), who is one of the senior leaders

45 Information on the struggle for the Sabuwar Gandu mosque is contained in some of Abduljabbar's lecture sessions (*Waqāfāt ma'a al-Salafiyya* lecture series). The issue is also captured in Kabiru H. Isa, *Religion and Society in Kano Metropolis: A Study of Muslim Intra-faith Relations, 1978-2015*, (PhD thesis, Sokoto: Usman Danfodiyo University, 2016), pp. 139-144, and in Kabiru H. Isa, “The ‘Triangular Politics’ of Mosque Ownership and Imamship in Kano State: The Case of Sabuwar Gandu Juma'a Mosque,” in the current issue of the *Journal for Islamic Studies*.

of the Tijaniyya in the country. The case had to be settled at the palace of the Emir of Kano and the Emirate Council had to stop the contesting parties from using the mosque until the right claimant had been established; the outcome was that the mosque was handed over to MAK. The issue is discussed by Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara in an audio lecture titled *Ina da mai karo* (Who is ready to fight me?).

All the branches listed in Table 1 may be classified as either *zāwiya* (Sufi devotional centre) or *rāwiya* (an educational centre).<sup>46</sup> For the formal commissioning of either a *zāwiya* or *rāwiya*, at the MAK headquarters, the names of two active members have to be presented for endorsement by the executive committee: one as the chairman of the new branch and the second as *wa'izi* (preacher). In contrast to the traditional Qadiriyya practice where a *muqaddam* (initiator) leads the order's rituals including initiation into the order, the role of the *wa'izi* is more central in the MAK; thus, it includes proselytization and the initiation of people into the Qadiriyya. This helps to facilitate the operation of MAK as a mass movement with a less hierarchical orientation.

### **From Conciliation to Polemics: MAK's Relations with the Salafis in Kano**

Towards the latter part of his life (1990), Shaykh Nasiru Kabara started an initiative known as *Taron Wahda* (The Assembly of Unity). This was an effort by Kabara to visit, personally, the houses of Islamic leaders of different orientations in an effort to settle disputes. The effort included visits not only to leaders of the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya, which was not unusual, but also to the spiritual patron and pioneer of the Nigerian Salafi movement, Shaykh Abū Bakr Maḥmūd Gumi (d. 1992).<sup>47</sup> One of the factors

46 The terms *zāwiya* and *rāwiya* are adopted from a verse of one of Shaykh Nasiru Kabara's poems that reads: *zawāyānā rawāyānā- rawāyānā masājīdunā* (our Sufi *zawiya*-s are our learning circles, and our learning circles are our mosques). On the role of Friday mosques, Sufi *zāwiya*-s and local mosques in the pre-modern Middle East, see Rith Roded, "Great Mosques, *Zawiyas*, and Neighborhood Mosques: Popular Beneficiaries of *Waqf* Endowments in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Aleppo," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 110, 1, 1990, pp. 32-38.

47 See *Taron Wahda*, video recording by Isas Printing Press, Kabara quarters, Kano.

that motivated Kabara to start his tours for unity was the wider circulation of a booklet titled *Faḍā'ih al-Ṣūfiyya* (The Shameful Deeds of the Sufis) by Shaykh Amīn al-Dīn Abū Bakr (Aminudeen Abubakar), the founder of the *Da'awa* group in Kano (d. 2015). This book was alleged to have been circulated with the help of some anti-Sufi elements in Kano. Kabara gave a copy of the book to his son Abduljabbar, implying that he was requesting him to respond. Abduljabbar responded with a treatise titled *Sayf al-Jabbār 'alāman Adhā Awliyā' al-Raḥmān* (The Sword of the Mighty on those who Antagonize the Friends of the Merciful). This incident sanctioned the role of Abduljabbar as a defender of Sufism, paving the way for the emergence of MAK as a critical rival to the Salafi movements.

New attempts to revive the union of northern Nigerian Muslims emerged in 1999, with the resurgence of “political Sharia” in most states of the region.<sup>48</sup> On this occasion, different Islamic groups came together in Kano to exert pressure on the government to implement Sharia reforms. Within that context, public lectures on Sharia and its meanings were organized. While the mobilization for Sharia encouraged certain groups to set aside their differences, the renewed visibility acquired by the various Islamic movements in Kano also meant that their deep theological differences were destined to re-emerge. When the Salafi scholar Shaykh Ja'far Maḥmud Ādam delivered a lecture in 2001 titled *Yanzu muka fara* (literally, “We Have Just Started”), in which he labelled traditional Qadiri practices such as the use of *bandīr* and *dhikr bi'l-anfās* as un-Islamic (implying that, as part of the implementation of Sharia reforms, these practices also needed to be banned), the fragile accord between the Qadiris and the Salafis was hampered. Abduljabbar immediately retorted with a lecture titled *Dan halak ka fasa* (literally, “You legitimate child, do you surrender?,” being a Hausa innuendo meaning “I will not surrender”). A growing cycle of antagonistic relations between the two was thus established,

48 Brandon Kendhammer, “The Sharia Controversy in Northern Nigeria and the Politics of Islamic Law in New and Uncertain Democracies,” *Comparative Politics*, 45, 3, 2013, pp. 291-311.

leading to a new lecture by Ja'far titled *Karangiya* (The Thorny Bush), implying that whoever touched the Salafis was going to be hurt, to which Abduljabbar counter-replied with a lecture entitled *Takalmin karfe* (The Armoured Shoes), implying that Abduljabbar (and with him, MAK) was going to step on the “thorny bush” of Ja'far (and with him, the Salafis) without feeling any pain.

The many episodes of conflict over the ownership and control of sacred space in Kano contributed towards radicalizing, further, the positions of the parties. The Salafi faction was accusing the Kano Emirate Council of being biased in favour of the Sufis concerning the allocation of plots for new mosques and the appointment of imams for existing ones. The issue of the Sabuwar Gandu Friday mosque is a case in point. Ja'far bitterly lamented the alleged injustices meted out to them and categorically rejected the appointment of the Tijani Shaykh Yusuf Ali as imam of the mosque, considering this to be an undue imposition by the Emirate Council. This viewpoint was voiced especially in a lecture titled *Gwagwarmaya tsakanin gaskiya da karya* (The Struggle between Truth and Falsehood). Reacting to that lecture, Abduljabbar reasserted his allegiance to the Emirate Council as the legitimate heir of the legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate in a lecture titled *Tataburza* (The Hardship).

Besides audio lectures on specific confrontations for sacred space, Abduljabbar also wrote pamphlets and books responding to books written by Salafi scholars and preachers. The first work produced in this doctrinal skirmish was a pamphlet titled *Hadhihi Hujjatunā fī al-Istiwā'* by Malam Auwalu Madabo,<sup>49</sup> a Salafi-oriented scholar. The pamphlet criticised the standard Ash'ari position of interpreting the Quranic verses related to God's “establishment” on the Throne in a figurative way and endorsed their literal interpretation as endorsed by Salafi/Wahhabi

49 Madabo is one of the oldest centres of Islamic learning in Kano, tracing its origin to the Wangarawa and Fulani clerics who first brought Islam to Kano. See Isa A. Abba and Ahmad R. Mohammed, “Aliyu Babba Emir of Kano (1894-1903) in Exile 1903-1926 Revisited,” paper presented at the *International Conference on the Transformation of Northern Nigeria 1903-2003*, organized by Usman Danfodio University (Sokoto) and Arewa House, 27-29 March, 2003, Arewa House, Kaduna, p. 2.

theology.<sup>50</sup> A copy of this pamphlet was said to have been taken to Shaykh Abduljabbar by some elements in Madabo who were disappointed with the development and were hoping for a response. Madabo ward is one of the oldest centres of Islamic learning in Kano, and the scholars of the area were seeing Salafism as a new development and as a break with the strictly Mālikī/Ash'arī/Sufi tradition of the ward. Abduljabbar responded by writing his *Ihyā' al-'Aqīda al-Islāmiyya al-Ṣaḥīḥa* in which he discussed fifteen topics on different aspects of theology.

A reply to *Ihyā' al-'Aqīda* was written by another Salafī scholar, Muḥammad al-Rābi' (Malam Rabiū) Rijiyar Lemo, titled *al-Kāshif 'ammā fī risālat Ihyā' al-'aqīda min al-abāṭil* (Unveiling the Errors Contained in “The Revival of the Doctrine”), to which Abduljabbar retorted once again with *'Aṣā Mūsā bayna Ḥibal al-Suḥarā'* (The Staff of Moses and the Tricks of the Magicians). In this work, Abduljabbar openly criticised the classical scholar Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) for his alleged “indiscriminate attacks” on the persona and faith of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the fourth Caliph, while criticising Shia doctrines. Ibn Taymiyya's works, according to Abduljabbar, were also “the source of classical Salafism” and the origin of the theological mistakes of the Salafis of today. In response to this book, the Nigerian Salafis wrote *Tuḥfat al-Nasab al-Saniyya bi Daf' al-Nasab 'an al-Shaykh Ibn Taymiyya* (The Luminous Gift to our Affiliation, in Defense of the Affiliation to Shaykh Ibn Taymiyya). The subsequent rebuttals by Abduljabbar centred on a critique of the doctrines held by Ibn Taymiyya and his disciples, especially in his work *Minhāj al-Sunna fī Naqd Kalām al-Shī'a wa'l-Qadariyya*. Most of the themes addressed by Abduljabbar in his *Muqaddimat al-Āzifa al-Musammā bi-Qaddimū al-Tawḥīd qabla al-Nasab*, vol. 1 and 2 are built around that polemic.

50 Founded by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 936), a Muslim scholar who established the theological school that functioned as the semi-official “orthodoxy” of Sunnism for centuries after him. The interpretation of the verses that seem to attribute physical characteristics to God is one of the oldest issues of contention between the Salafi and the Ash'ari school and it has had important ramifications in Nigeria, where it has been debated by Shaykh Nasiru Kabara and the Salafi Shaykh Abū Bakr M. Gumi. See Andrea Brigaglia, “Two published Hausa translations of the Qur'an and their doctrinal background,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 35, 4, 2005, pp. 424-449.

### MAK's Relations with Other Kano Sufi Leaders

On 7 October, 1996, three days after the demise of Shaykh Nasiru Kabara, Qaribullah was unanimously endorsed by his brothers (represented by Qasiyuni) and by Kabara's disciples (represented by Malam Yusuf Makwarari; d. 1998),<sup>51</sup> as the Khalifa (successor) to the leadership of Qadiriyya. An auspicious event followed, during which Kabara's regalia were handed over to Qaribullah in the presence of Kabara's family members and disciples. In what could be regarded as an expression of submission, Abduljabbar, Qaribullah's half-brother, presented a poem during the event full of "eulogy" and words of spiritual motivation for the new *khalifa*, preparing him for a "huge task" ahead. Although he had been made part of the decision-making processes for the administration of Qadiri administration under the new *khalifa*, Abduljabbar spent much of his resources in the following years in developing his own centre, MAK. Thus, he was rarely seen taking any active role in the activities of the mainstream Qadiriyya led by Khalifa. This, according to Abduljabbar's students, prompted some "unscrupulous" elements close to Khalifa to interpret Abduljabbar's inaction as an indirect "sabotage" against his brother's position, igniting the flame of a misunderstanding between the two.<sup>52</sup>

There are many factors that led to the intensification of the polemic between the Khalifa and Abduljabbar and these include internal and external ones. The main internal factor was the alleged insubordination of Abduljabbar towards the leadership position of his brother while the main external one was the politics of Kano State. When Malam Ibrahim Shekaru became the governor of Kano state in 2003, his association with many prominent Salafi scholars and the widespread rumour that he was a *ḍan Izala* (a follower of Izala) created an atmosphere of suspicion among

51 Malam Yusuf Makwarari was the closest disciple of Shaykh Nasiru Kabara. Much of the responsibility for deciding what to do regarding the succession to the leadership of the Qadiriyya after the demise of Kabara was left with him and a few other close disciples of the shaykh.

52 There are allegations within the circle of Qadiriyya adherents, to the effect that some elements whom Khalifa had entrusted with key Qadiriyya activities, were responsible for inciting one party against the other. Abduljabbar often claimed in his speeches that those elements were "more important to Khalifa than his own brothers."

the Sufi-inclined public of Kano; this had reverberations on the internal politics of *Gidan Kadiriyya*. Shekarau's tactical move was to lure some of his presumed opponents with the offer of material benefits, resulting in a kind of "divide and rule" that created a fraction within the Qadiris. Thus, Khalifa was closely allied with Shekarau's predecessor Engr. Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso, who had been the governor in the period 1999-2003 (and who would then assume governorship again, 2011-2015); however, Abduljabbar openly criticised him for an alleged reconciliation with Khalifa that had been the result of the offer by the governor of huge sums of money to the religious scholar.<sup>53</sup> This bickering further widened the existing rift between Khalifa and Abduljabbar. Abduljabbar reprimanded Khalifa heavily for the alleged "misuse" of his leadership of Qadiriyya to secure support from the government and wealthy individuals, at the expense of other members of the immediate family of Shaykh Nasiru Kabara and of the wider Qadiri community for whom the alleged donations were meant.

Recently, a dramatic event brought the conflict to another level. This occurred in a climate of wild accusations and counter-accusations that were being built up and used in the feud between the two brothers. Mallam Aliyul Hawwas,<sup>54</sup> the immediate senior brother of Abduljabbar, died on 8 October 2016, at a hospital in Morocco. A medical report on his illness showed that he had been poisoned a few months earlier. On the seventh day of mourning, Abduljabbar gave a speech during which he looked extremely traumatized and vowed to kill whoever was responsible for Hawwas' death.<sup>55</sup> First, he linked the incident of his brother's death to previous instances in which Khalifa had allegedly mobilized "his boys" to humiliate Hawwas, and he cited the example of an incident during which Hawwas was "innocently beaten and stripped off half-naked on the

53 The sum of sixty million Naira was said to have been given to Khalifa in 2006 for the preparations ahead of the yearly *maukibi*. For details, see Isa, *Religion and Society in Kano Metropolis*, pp. 139-144.

54 Mallam Hawwas is the immediate senior brother of Abduljabbar, and until his death, he had acted as the closest person to Abduljabbar in the activities of *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf wa'l-Raqīm*.

55 Audio recording, 15 October 2016.



instruction of Khalifa,” at *Gidan Kadiriyya*, for having organized a *Babban Dare* (Special Night) *dhikr*. Abduljabbar then openly accused Khalifa of the murder of Mallam Hawwas. On Friday, 26 October 2016, Mallam Lalan, a lawyer and a Qadiri; Fatiya Shayk Nasiru Kabara, a sister of Qaribullah and Abduljabbar; and Mustafa Shaykh Nasiru Kabara, another brother of the two, gave open talks at the *anfās* ground, which is the open yard where the weekly rituals of the Qadiriyya are performed. Here they publicly exonerated Khalifa Qaribullah from the accusation of poisoning the deceased.

Khalifa had to use the services of the Kano State Command of the Nigerian Police Force to obtain a thorough investigation of the matter. The police issued a “warrant of investigation” to the hospital, requesting a thorough medical explanation concerning the state of Hawwas’ illness that led to his death; they especially required information that might shed light on any alleged poisoning. The hospital supplied the police with a comprehensive medical report in French which was then taken to French Department, Bayero University, Kano, for translation into English. The report produced by the police after their interpretation and analysis of the translated medical report, absolved Khalifa from the accusation.<sup>56</sup>

Although the tension created by this incident has gradually eased, relations between the followers of both camps remain strained, with occasional physical attacks and ongoing confrontational assaults on social media. According to Abduljabbar and Qasiyuni, Khalifa’s alleged misuse of his connection with the Police Force to physically obstruct the followers of Abduljabbar and Qasiyuni from having full access to *Gidan Kadiriyya* and conduct their own religious activities, is the factor that has caused most tension in the fragile relations between the two camps. The most recent examples are the suspension of the teaching of *Shamā’il al-Rasūl*, a weekly Hadith session traditionally conducted on Saturdays by Qasiyuni, and the Kabara family politics related to the ritual visit to Shehu Usman Dan Fodio’s tomb in Sokoto. The Khalifa rallies only his followers for the

56 Author’s interview with one of the close disciples of Khalifa who sought to remain anonymous.

annual visit, while Qasiyuni and Abduljabbar have to organize the visits of their students on a separate day to avoid conflict.

The outspokenly activist side of Abduljabbar's activities has also led him to confront other major authorities within the Sufi camps. His relationship with Halifa Isiyaka Rabiū, the formal leader of the Tijaniyya in Nigeria, was very friendly until the establishment of the *Jāmi' al-Rasūl* Juma'at Mosque in Gidan Maza. Doctrinal differences between the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya seemed not to resonate in their interpersonal relations, to the extent that for many years, Isiyaka Rabiū was considered to be much closer to Abduljabbar than many of his fellow Qadiris. Isiyaka Rabiū was a close friend of Abduljabbar's father Nasiru Kabara, and Abduljabbar, in turn, treated him as a father. The cordial relationship entertained by Nasiru Kabara during his lifetime with the leaders of other Sufi orders, was reflected by his sons; despite their internal family feud, they are all known to have friendly relationships with the various Tijani communities of Kano.<sup>57</sup> The conflict associated with the administration of the Gidan Maza mosque, however, caused a strain in the relationship between Abduljabbar and Isiyaka Rabiū. As noted earlier, the latter's decision to favour his fellow Tijanis after having seemingly donated the mosque to MAK, created a rift that is still to be settled.

The dynamic expansion of MAK into many parts of Bauchi State, the home of one of the most popular Tijani leaders of Kano, Shaykh Dahiru Bauchi, created an alternative form of "radical" anti-Salafi Sufi activism that became appealing to the youth. The relationship between Abduljabbar and Dahiru Bauchi carries some traces of the old polemics between the Qadiris and the Tijanis, with the former accusing the latter of having an "exclusivist" approach. While Dahiru Bauchi consistently discourages trans-*ṭarīqa* blessing-seeking with non-Tijani shaykhs, Abduljabbar has blatantly accused this exclusivist attitude of being "un-Islamic." The rivalry between the two, however, is also rooted in their

57 Abduljabbar's lecture sessions are replete with the rhetoric of the "harmonious" relations that Shaykh Nasiru Kabara had established with his contemporaries of other Islamic groups. In one instance, Kabara is said to have initiated, upon request by initiates, a number of people into the Tijaniyya. Abduljabbar has also done the same.

competition for the same type of public. As a result of his popular *tafsīr* sessions, Dahiru Bauchi has become known since the 1980s as an icon of youth Sufi activism.<sup>58</sup> By making inroads in Bauchi and spreading his video-recorded lectures on anti-Salafi topics, MAK has threatened the appeal that the old and outspoken Tijani preacher had for the Sufi-oriented Nigerian youth. At the same time, Abduljabbar's approach to the Sufi tradition is predicated on a radical repositioning of the Sufi practices within a more explicit context of references to Quran and Hadith. In this way, Abduljabbar's Sufi discourses jettison the more mythical dimension that characterizes the traditional Sufi discourse of Dahiru Bauchi. Youth from different parts of Nigeria, as well as from neighbouring countries such as Niger, Chad and Cameroon Republics, troop to *Jāmi' Amīr al-Jaysh* and *Jāmi' al-Rasūl* to be initiated into the Qadiriyya,<sup>59</sup> and Dahiru Bauchi has been quoted as having said that "Abduljabbar is taking our youth back to Kabara."<sup>60</sup>

The relationship between Abduljabbar and representatives of the old guard of the Tijaniyya, such as Isiyaḳa Rabiū and Dahiru Bauchi, has never went beyond occasional oral confrontations to dangerous levels of conflict. The retaliatory voices of Isiyaḳa Rabiū and Dahiru Bauchi are rarely heard during these standoffs, which helps minimize the risk of physical confrontation between the students of the two groups. However, Abduljabbar had a perilous confrontation, in 2015, against a blasphemous statement made by a representative of the *'Yan hakīka* (a faction of the Tijaniyya considered to be heretical by most Tijanis) popularly known as Abdul Inyass. Although most Tijanis had distanced themselves from

58 See Andrea Brigaglia, "Note on Shaykh Dahiru Usman Bauchi and the July 2014 Kaduna Bombing," *Annual Review of Islam in Africa*, 12/1, 2013–2014, pp. 39–42.

59 It is estimated that during the period 2009–2014, Abduljabbar initiated more than five thousand youth into Qadiriyya (author's interview with Malam Abdulqadir Mai Anwaru, Secretary-General of MAK, September 2014). Initiation take place every Friday, before the start of the *Muqaddima* lecture session, and on Sundays, before the lecture on *al-Abābīl 'alā Jamā'īm al-Ma'ājīl* (a 2 vols. book written by Abduljabbar as a rejoinder to *al-Ma'ājīl* written by Malam Ashiru, a Zamfara state-based Salafi).

60 Author's interview with Malam Ahmad Gwadabe, one of the earliest students of MAK.

Abdul Inyass, the harsh tones of Abduljabbar's intervention on this matter led many Tijanis to believe that the young and outspoken Qadiri leader has a broader confrontational agenda. This agenda – many Tijanis argue – aims at countering the movement from Qadiri to Tijani affiliation that had occurred in the country during the *ḥaḍra* of Shaykh Ibrahim Niassa (d. 1975). As a result, relations between MAK and many Tijanis have deteriorated during the last few years.

### **Conclusion: MAK as an anti-Salafi Mass Movement**

During its various transformations, the *Mujamma' Aṣḥāb al-Kahf wa'l-Raqīm* has evolved from an informal circle of learning in the traditional style (1989), to an innovative Islamic school in Gandun Allbasa and then in Gwale, and finally, to a mosque-based mass movement after the establishment of its new headquarters at the *Jāmi' Amīr al-Jaysh*. Today, MAK functions as an activist Sufi movement under the authority of one man, Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara. Because of its organized structure, it has been able to establish a network of followers active in various states of northern Nigeria. Although MAK has always claimed to be part of the Qadiriyya-Nāṣiriyya, it operates independently today out of the headquarters of Qadiriyya-Nāṣiriyya in Kabara ward, and it can be considered to be an autonomous Sufi movement.

All the innovative developments stimulated by MAK vis-à-vis “mainstream” Qadiri practices in Kano, need to be understood as manifestations of the more activist profile of the former when compared to the latter. This can be observed, for instance, in the ritual dimension. At the MAK headquarters, as well as at the branches, *dhikr bi'l-bandīr* and *dhikr bi'l-anfās*, which had become the hallmarks of the Qadiriyya-Nāṣiriyya during the life of Shaykh Nasiru Kabara, are not practiced, even if their orthodoxy is defended at the theoretical level by Abduljabbar in his lectures. The main rationale behind the diminished emphasis on specifically Qadiri ritual practices<sup>61</sup> is the perceived need for a more inclusive strategy of *da'wa*; another motivation is the aspiration to

61 Author's interview with Malam Abdulqadir Mai Anwaru, Secretary-General of MAK, September 2014.

become a centre of Sufi mobilization irrespective of the affiliation to a specific *ṭarīqa*,

The *dhikr* (Sufi litany) practiced at MAK differs in rhythm, formulae and numbers from the one performed at the *Gidan Kadiriyya*. As far as the rhythm is concerned, Abduljabbar claims to have adopted a style that he observed among the Qadiris of Baghdad during his stay there as a student.<sup>62</sup> As far as the formulae of the litanies and the number of their recitations are concerned, Abduljabbar claims to give precedence to the prophetic *dhikr* narrated in the hadith literature over the conventional Qadiriyya litanies. For this purpose, he has compiled a pamphlet titled *Riyāḍ al-Janna*, which gives instructions on the *dhikr* that he enjoins his followers to practice. The practice of the *dhikr* of *Riyāḍ al-Janna* has become a new hallmark of the MAK branches in Kano and elsewhere.

As mentioned previously, MAK claims a neutral identity and attempts to accommodate youth with different doctrinal inclinations but a common aversion to Salafism, including Qadiris, Tijanis, Shiites and unaffiliated traditional Sunnis.<sup>63</sup> The presence of Shia elements in MAK, along with Abduljabbar's tendency to speak of contentious issues concerning the Islamic caliphate between 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 661) and Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 680), which are traditionally shunned by most northern Nigerian Sunni scholars, have fed the insistent rumour that the MAK movement is infiltrated by and leans towards Shiism. Abduljabbar's *Muqaddima*, vol. 2, explores many of these contentious issues. It is difficult to establish the extent of any Shia presence in MAK, the extent of which is often exaggerated by MAK's opponents in the context of growing anti-Shia sectarianism. However, this paper posits that any discussion of such contentious issues in the history of Islam is, in itself, a radical departure from the mainstream practices of northern Nigerian Qadiris. This new development, too, has to be understood in the context of MAK's anti-Salafi activism, as well as, probably, in the context of Abduljabbar's exposure to Sufi scholars of Iraq who are more familiar than the Nigerian public with Shia doctrines. For Abduljabbar, neutralizing the potential for Sunni-Shia

62 *Ibid.*

63 Author's interview with Shaykh Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara, September 2014.

sectarian conflict is a necessary step towards creating a common front against what he believes to be the most serious threat to orthodox Islam in Nigeria today: the spread of Salafism.

Another significant innovation in MAK, when compared to previous Qadiri practice, is the use of the designation of *wa'izi* (preacher) to include the traditional functions of a *muqaddam* (spiritual initiator). In MAK, the *wa'izi* (pl. *wa'izai*) has assumed responsibility for initiating people into the Qadiriyya, as well as for the administration of its mosques. *Wa'izai* are not directly appointed by MAK but are introduced by the local branches to the MAK headquarters on Fridays. It is important to note that even non-Qadiris can be appointed as *wa'izai* (without, however, permission to initiate people into the Qadiriyya), provided they accept MAK policies.<sup>64</sup> The emphasis on the role of preachers and the simultaneous overruling of the role of a *muqaddam*, points to the transformation of *Mujamma' Aṣḥāb al-Kahf wa'l-Raqīm* from a branch of a traditional *ṭarīqa* focused on spiritual training, to a modern mass movement focused on religious activism.

64 *Ibid.*