

3 Nigerians in Medina

How did Salafism emerge in northern Nigeria? What role did the Islamic University of Medina play in this process? How, and for whom, did the Salafi canon become a standard of reference in northern Nigeria?

The previous chapter discussed the Nigerian Shaykh Abubakar Gumi (1924–92) and the anti-Sufi movement he patronized, Izala. I noted that Gumi, despite his decades-long contact with Saudi Arabia, remained an anti-Sufi Mālikī who was more attuned to local political and religious conflicts than to the intellectual flows of global Salafism. Gumi and most of Izala's early leaders had limited engagement with the Salafi canon.

The wide spread of what might be called “full” Salafism in northern Nigeria – a kind of Salafism infused with references to the canon, and attuned not only to anti-Sufism but also to anti-*madhhabism* – began with graduates of the Islamic University of Medina who returned home in the 1990s and 2000s. Figures like Shaykh Ja‘far Maḥmūd Ādam started their careers as preachers in Izala and remained associated with Izala throughout their lives. At the Islamic University of Medina, however, Ādam and his circle had deep exposure to the Salafi canon. This exposure led them to embrace a new self-identification that emphasized global and transhistorical Salafi affiliations.

This chapter argues that the canon provided the central mechanism through which Ādam and his circle distinguished their Salafism from Izala's anti-Sufism, although in practice, dividing lines between the two groups remain blurry. The graduates of Medina learned this canon primarily at the Islamic University, which sought to define a Salafi creed and teach techniques for transmitting it. Defining the creed involved refuting a large catalogue of rivals – not just Sufis, but the Shī‘a, the Ash‘arī theological school, and others. The university's students also received teachings that rejected affiliation to any legal school. Students in Medina engaged a Salafi canon whose contents could be deployed to challenge not only Sufis but also the anti-Sufi reformists in Izala.

The graduates of Medina differentiated themselves from Izala in several ways. First, they considered canonical figures like Ibn Taymiyya, as

well as the canonical authorities of contemporary Salafism – Shaykhs Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Bāz, and Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ al-‘Uthaymīn – to be their preeminent intellectual guides, rather than Gumi. Second, they adopted distinctively Salafi discursive styles, such as introducing their lectures and sermons with the Prophet Muḥammad’s Sermon of Necessity (see Appendix 1), a text that al-Albānī had revived and spread widely among his Salafi audiences. These discursive styles included the graduates’ efforts to put the canon at the center of their teaching, which I discuss in the next chapter. Third, the graduates of Medina referred to themselves not as members of Izala but as Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamā’a (The People of the Sunna and the Muslim Community, colloquially “Ahlussunnah”)¹ – a synonym for “Sunni” and an assertion of continuity with those whom Salafis consider “pure” Muslims around the world and in past epochs.

For Ādam and his circle, the experience of studying the canon at the Islamic University intersected in powerful ways with the politics of generational change inside northern Nigeria’s anti-Sufi milieu. Ādam returned home just one year after Gumi’s death, at a time when Izala was negotiating both internal schisms and changes in leadership. With the incentives and the tools to establish themselves as religious authorities semi-independent of Izala, Ādam and his circle elaborated a full Salafi identity, one that attracted a wide audience.

Much scholarship depicts African graduates of Saudi Arabian universities as embittered figures who, denied access to government jobs or institutional positions of religious leadership, are working at the margins of society to overthrow tradition.² In northern Nigeria, however, many graduates are influential preachers. Some have served in prominent institutional positions, for example, as senior bureaucrats in state governments, faculty members at universities, or advisors to the Central Bank of Nigeria.

The Medina graduates’ appeal stems from the combination of forces they embody. They work to project an image of themselves as deeply learned scholars and as energetic activists leading a movement that has accrued considerable momentum. This movement, they assert, is

¹ The notion of “jamā’a” also conveys the idea of agreement about the meaning and importance of the sunna. For a Salafi explanation of what this entire phrase means to the Salafi movement, see Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ al-‘Uthaymīn, *Sharḥ al-‘Aqīda al-Wāsiṭiyya li-Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya* (‘Ayn Shams: Maktabat al-Hady al-Muḥammadī, 2011), 24–25.

² Various essays in René Otaeyek, ed., *Le radicalisme islamique au sud du Sahara: Da’wa, arabisation et critique de l’Occident* (Paris: Karthala, 1993); and Galilou Abdoulaye, “The Graduates of Islamic Universities in Benin: A Modern Elite Seeking Social, Religious and Political Recognition” in *Islam in Africa*, eds. Thomas Bierschenk and Georg Stauth, 129–46 (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2002).

purifying Islam in northern Nigeria and democratizing Islamic knowledge, thereby enabling youth, married women, poor people, and other marginalized groups to access Islam's foundational texts. Such promises are not new in the context of West Africa; Izala itself has been promising and offering an expanded access to Islamic knowledge for decades,³ including through a wide network of schools.⁴ What the Medina graduates add is their forceful assertion that by studying with them, Nigerian Muslims can participate in a translocal and transhistorical community of pure Muslims, one in which purity and learning, rather than genealogy or charisma, are the currency of authority. By offering up the canon as an intellectual resource and a platform for Muslim activism, moreover, they propose not just shortcuts to accessing foundational Islamic texts but an entire new textual universe governed by rules and methods that promise to disrupt other, more hierarchical and esoteric models of spiritual authority. The Medina graduates offer a way of approaching Islam that promises to give its adherents an almost mathematical certainty that they can derive correct belief and practice from certain core, easily understandable premises. At the same time, the canon allows them to center their preaching and instruction on an affirmative message of spreading a highly specific creed, rather than on the negative message of denouncing Sufism.

The Medina graduates in Nigeria also operate in a broader field where many youth-based Muslim movements are undergoing changes. For example, Izala is also strong across the border in Niger, in part because the border between Nigeria and Niger is political rather than linguistic. Yet in Niamey and elsewhere, new religious entrepreneurs (including Medina graduates) and their youthful followers have sometimes distanced themselves, to different degrees, from Izala. These youth break with Izala's harsh anti-Sufism and its spiritual austerity in favor of more affirmative, flexible messages.⁵ In southwestern Nigeria, youth have also grown restless within older Muslim organizations. Efforts like the Yoruba-dominated Naṣrul-Lahi-L-Fātiḥ (Naṣr Allāh al-Fātiḥ, meaning "The Help/Victory of God, The Victorious" and abbreviated NASFAT) represent both a bid to revitalize Islamic practice on a "non-sectarian and non-political" basis, and a response to the dynamic preaching of Pentecostal Christians. NASFAT has itself, however, been prone to schisms, reflecting the centrifugal tendency of much new Muslim activism in

³ Ousmane Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria: A Study of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

⁴ Elisha Renne, "Educating Muslim Women and the Izala Movement in Zaria City, Nigeria," *Islamic Africa* 3:1 (2012): 55–86.

⁵ Abdoulaye Sounaye, "Irwo Sunnance yan-no! 1: Youth Claiming, Contesting and Transforming Salafism," *Islamic Africa* 6:1–2 (July 2015): 82–108.

Africa and elsewhere.⁶ Such tendencies can result in radicalization, as Part III of this study discusses, but can also generate new combinations of piety and aesthetics. In northern Nigeria, the Medina graduates closely study the experiences of both peer movements and rival groups in Nigeria and elsewhere. Their preference for a loose organizational structure over a formal associational one partly reflects their sense that formal associations are not only rigid but even spiritually dangerous if they obstruct a sense of Muslim unity.

Generational Changes and Schisms in Izala

Most of the graduates of Medina discussed in this section started their public careers as preachers in Izala in the 1980s. The society connected them with teachers, patrons, and audiences, as well as with one another. Looking back from the vantage of the 2000s, Ādam would posit continuity between the 1980s and his later career, presenting his trajectory as one of uninterrupted participation in “Ahlussunnah.” But to understand the subtleties of Ādam’s trajectory, it is necessary to summarize the history of Izala’s schisms and show how these schisms reverberated in faraway Medina during the early 1990s.

As the previous chapter discussed, Izala was founded in 1978 by Shaykh Ismail Idris (1937–2000), a student of Abubakar Gumi. Although Idris led Izala’s transformation into a mass movement, his confrontational personality and uncompromising anti-Sufism contributed to splits within Izala after Gumi’s death.⁷ Political questions also divided the society, even during Gumi’s lifetime. In Kano, for example, “one patron tried to turn the preachers into an institutional channel for the negotiation of relations with the state,” a move that sidelined and alienated some members.⁸

Theologically, the society became divided over the question of whether Sufis should be regarded as Muslims.⁹ By the mid-1980s, even before they went to Medina, figures like Muḥammad Sani ‘Umar Rijiyar Lemo began to disagree with hardline anti-Sufis within Izala. Rijiyar Lemo writes, “I had some heated situations with some of the extremists (*mutaṭarrifīn*) in [Izala], for I leaned more toward reviving correct

⁶ Benjamin Soares, “An Islamic Social Movement in Contemporary West Africa: NASFAT of Nigeria” in *Movers and Shakers: Social Movements in Africa*, edited by Stephen Ellis and Ineke van Kessel, 178–96 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 180.

⁷ Ramzi Ben Amara, “Shaykh Ismaila Idris (1937–2000), the Founder of the Izala Movement in Nigeria,” *Annual Review of Islam in Africa* 11 (2012): 74–8.

⁸ Kane, *Muslim Modernity*, 217.

⁹ Muhammad Sani Umar, “Education and Islamic Trends in Northern Nigeria: 1970–1990s” in *Africa Today*, 48:2 (Summer 2001): 127–50; 136.

knowledge and spreading it than toward establishing preaching assemblies (*tajammu'āt wa'ziyya*)." Rijiyar Lemo also wrote a critique of Gumi's *Al-'Aqīda*, which he sent to the Shaykh.¹⁰ By 1989–90, when Ādam and Rijiyar Lemo left for Medina, anti-Sufi reformism in northern Nigeria was facing considerable strain.

These strains broke into an open schism during Ādam's time in Medina. In the early 1990s, Izala split into two factions. One group was attached to Idris and was based in his home city of Jos. Another group was headquartered in Kaduna, where Gumi had spent much of his adult life. Reasons for the split included the tensions that had grown within the movement during the 1980s as well as other factors: personality conflicts among senior leaders, disruption resulting from Gumi's death in 1992, and differences of opinion on international issues such as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the ensuing Gulf War.¹¹ Most of the Nigerian students in Medina inclined toward the Kaduna side, which they believed exhibited more nuance in its treatment of Sufis and more openness in its leadership culture. The Kaduna branch also had more in common, intellectually, with the students in Medina. The senior leaders of the Jos branch, such as Shaykh Sanī Yahaya Jingir (b. 1950), have been educated within Nigeria¹² and have not adopted the global Salafi discursive styles that have marked the graduates of Medina. Meanwhile, Medina graduates rose within the Kaduna branch.

There were leadership struggles even within the Kaduna branch. Rivals contended to replace Gumi as the leading preacher at the Sultan Bello Mosque in Kaduna, which Gumi had used as a base to build a local and, through radio, national audience.¹³ Ādam reportedly lost out in his efforts to secure this position, not only when Gumi died but also later, when the position passed to Gumi's son Dr. Aḥmad Gumi (b. 1960).¹⁴ A confluence of factors – growing intellectual and theological differences, but also struggles over power – influenced the decision of Ādam and other graduates to assert their own, semi-independent religious authority.

¹⁰ Muḥammad al-Thānī 'Umar Mūsā Rijiyar Lemo, *Ayyāmī ma'a Dā'iyat al-Ḥil wa-Mufasssīr al-Tanzīl* (Kano: Dar al-Ḥikma li-l-Kitāb al-Islāmī, 2011), 14.

¹¹ Ramzi Ben Amara, "The Izala Movement in Nigeria: Its Split, Relationship to Sufis and Perception of Shari'a Re-Implementation," Ph.D. dissertation, Bayreuth University, 2011.

¹² For his biography see Ben Amara, "Izala Movement," 186–7.

¹³ Andrea Brigaglia, "The Radio Kaduna Tafsīr (1978–1992) and the Construction of Public Images of Muslim Scholars in the Nigerian Media," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 27 (2007): 173–210.

¹⁴ "How I succeeded Dr. Gumi – Sheikh Alhassan Jos," *The Nigerian Voice*, 4 September 2010. Available at: www.thenigerianvoice.com/nvnews/33700/1/how-i-succeeded-dr-gumi-sheikh-alhassan-jos.html; accessed February 2015.

Paths to Medina¹⁵

We can gain a better understanding of the shift from Izala to “Ahlussunnah” by examining the biographies of five graduates of Medina who were based in Kano before and after their time in Saudi Arabia: Ādam, Rijiyar Lemo, Shaykh Abdulwahhab Abdullah (b. 1953), Dr. Bashīr ‘Aliyu ‘Umar (b. 1961), and Dr. Abdullah Ṣāliḥ Pakistan (b. 1957). As discussed subsequently, the first four men no longer identified themselves primarily as members of Izala by the 2000s, while Pakistan remained a senior Izala leader in Kano (affiliated to the Kaduna branch). The movement’s leadership includes women: Shaykha Halima Shitu, who is married to Abdullah, has gained renown for the religious lessons she offers to women in their home and for her work as a Hisbah commissioner under Kano Governor Ibrahim Shekarau (served 2003–11). She is a graduate of Umm al-Qura University in Mecca.

Ādam was the most prominent of the graduates of Medina. Since his assassination on 13 April 2007 by unknown gunmen, his fame and influence have continued to grow. He remains the most visible public face (often literally, on CD and DVD covers, and in the names of mosques and streets) of Salafism in Kano.

Graduates of Medina came from different social backgrounds. ‘Umar’s grandfather and other male ancestors were Imams of Kano, and Rijiyar Lemo comes from a family of Kano scholars. Ādam had humbler origins. Some, like Rijiyar Lemo and ‘Umar, are Kano men. Others immigrated to Kano, like Ādam and Pakistan (both from Daura, in Katsina State) and Abdullah (from Sansanamango in the Republic of Togo).

The graduates’ educational backgrounds differed, although all of them experienced and blended different educational tracks, formal and informal. Some, like Abdullah and Ādam, studied extensively inside the traditional system. Others initially had greater exposure to Western-style schools and universities. ‘Umar said that his “first contact with deep Islamic education” came only in his twenties. Through different means – Qur’an schooling, attendance at Western-style schools, and study with Arabs in Kano – most of them achieved Arabic proficiency before leaving Nigeria. Although for brevity’s sake I refer to this group as “graduates of

¹⁵ This section is based on interviews with Dr. Bashir Aliyu ‘Umar (2 October 2011, Kano), Shaykh Abdulwahhab Abdallah (5 October 2011, Kano), Shaykh Muhammad Nazifi Inuwa (12 October 2011), Dr. Abdullahi Saleh Pakistan (22 October 2011, Kano); on several informal conversations with Shaykh Abdulwahhab Abdullah and Shaykh Nazifi Inuwa; and on field notes from visits to Kano in July–August 2010 and September 2011–January 2012. I have also benefited from Andrea Brigaglia’s biographical sketch of Ādam: Brigaglia, “A Contribution to the History of the Wahhabi Da‘wa in West Africa: The Career and the Murder of Shaykh Ja‘far Mahmūd Adam (Daura, ca. 1961/1962–Kano 2007),” *Islamic Africa* 3:1 (Spring 2012): 1–23.

Medina,” it is worth bearing in mind that their learning represents the intertwining of multiple institutional and tutorial strands.

The paths these men took to Saudi Arabia varied, although the tightly networked nature of the group meant that some went at the suggestion of their friends. Some were recruited through the Islamic University’s *dawrāt* (Arabic: “tours,” singular *dawra*), educational programs that partly aimed to bring students to the University. As the previous chapter noted, Saudi Arabia began its *dawrāt* in northern Nigeria in 1981, and Nigeria became the site of the most intensive *dawra* program in the world.

The first members of “Ahlussunnah” to go to Saudi Arabia were Pakistan and Abdullah. In 1981, after participating in the *dawra*, they went respectively to Medina and Mecca. Pakistan, who held a secondary certificate from the Arabic Teachers’ College in Gwale, a school where several members of this network studied, completed a B.A. in Qur’anic Studies at the Islamic University of Medina in 1985. From 1986 to 1991, he lived in Pakistan. He completed an M.A. at the Islamic University in Islamabad in 1989 and, from 1989 to 1991, supervised schools run by the Muslim World League. Abdullah attended primary and secondary school in Mecca before proceeding to Medina, where he obtained his B.A. in 1991.

‘Umar enrolled in Electrical Engineering at Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria in 1978. He joined Nigeria’s Muslim Students’ Society at a time when the Iranian Revolution of 1979 was inspiring many of the society’s members to more strident activism. After helping his peers destroy the alcohol at the university faculty club, ‘Umar was expelled. Back in Kano, he worked as a water engineer but continued to study Islamic subjects and give religious lectures. He participated in the *dawra* in 1981 but declined a scholarship to Saudi Arabia, partly out of concern that abandoning his career might produce family conflict. After a period of soul-searching, he gave up his post to pursue the path of Islamic learning. When he made the pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia in 1986, Abdullah convinced him to apply to the Islamic University of Medina; he joined the Faculty of Ḥadīth in 1988. He obtained his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. from Medina, completing the last of these in 2004.

Ādam took a different route to Medina. As a youth, he memorized the Qur’an as an itinerant student. He then studied with classically trained scholars in Kano, learning Mālikī legal manuals like the *Mukhtaṣar* (Compendium) of Khalīl, but also reading works like Shaykh Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* – one of the few texts in the Salafi canon taught widely in Nigeria at that time. He also studied with Shaykh Jazuli Nuhu, one of only two members of the first Nigerian cohort at Medina to remain and complete a degree at the Islamic University. Another key mentor to the future Medina graduates and their peers

was Dr. Ahmad Bamba of the Bayero University Kano mosque, a ḥadīth specialist who continues to be a major figure in Kano's Salafi community. The early 1980s was a pivotal time for Ādam. He studied at an evening literacy program. At the Egyptian Cultural Center, an Egyptian Arabic instructor taught him the recitation of the Qur'an (*tajwid*), an experience that Ādam would later say brought his Qur'anic learning to life.¹⁶ Undoubtedly this training played a role in Ādam's victory in a 1987 Qur'an competition, another turning point in his life. After winning the Nigerian competition, Ādam placed fifth at the international competition in Saudi Arabia. This accomplishment solidified his status as a rising Izala preacher and paved the way for his scholarship to Medina. In 1987, Ādam obtained a secondary diploma at the Arabic Teachers' College of Gwale.¹⁷ In 1989, he obtained a scholarship to Medina, where he joined the Qur'an College.

Rijiyar Lemo, who attended primary and secondary schools in Kano, completed a higher secondary certificate at the Arabic Teachers' College in 1989 and joined Ādam at the Islamic University the following year. Despite the diverse paths these men took to Medina, significant commonalities emerge, including exposure to traditional northern Nigerian Islamic educational curricula and, in almost all cases, some attendance at Nigerian secondary schools and/or universities.

Life and Study in Medina

The future Nigerian Salafi leaders were in Saudi Arabia during a period of political tension and change. Events in the Kingdom would have implications for the construction of global Salafi canonical authority. The period of the Nigerians' studies (roughly 1981–2005 for the whole group, with some members staying for just four years and others staying well over a decade) largely overlapped with the reign of one king, Fahd (1923–2005, ruled 1982–2005, with then-Crown Prince Abdullah serving as *de facto* ruler after Fahd's 1995 stroke).

Despite continuity on the throne, this period saw major upheavals, particularly the 1990–1 Gulf War, which brought American soldiers to Saudi soil and triggered widespread political-religious dissent in the Kingdom. In the face of this dissent – the outgrowth of decades-old Muslim Brotherhood influences in Saudi Arabia, including at the Islamic University – the Kingdom's Grand Mufti 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Bāz strove to defend the religious legitimacy of the King's policy choices. The political suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood-inspired dissent was accompanied by an assertion of senior scholars' religious authority as well as systematic

¹⁶ Ja'far Maḥmūd Ādam, "Tarihin Rayuwata a Ilmi," undated recording.

¹⁷ Rijiyar Lemo, *Ayyāmī*, 30–1.

efforts (led by thinkers at the Islamic University) to attack the theological integrity of the Muslim Brotherhood, especially its thinker Sayyid Quṭb (1906–66).¹⁸

Nigerian Salafis, after they returned home, did not typically comment on these events – but from their continued admiration of Ibn Bāz and their lack of references to any of the Muslim Brotherhood-inspired Salafis, it seems clear that they sided with the global canonical authorities and the Islamic University’s “quietists” against the Saudi dissidents. Even though Nigerian Salafis would become politically outspoken at home, they would do so within a framework that continued to position figures like Ibn Bāz as the contemporary world’s foremost scholars. Finally, it should be noted that the 1990s represented the apex of the career of Ibn Bāz (who was appointed Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia in 1993). The deaths of al-Albānī, Ibn Bāz, and Ibn ‘Uthaymīn in 1999–2001 occasioned new reflections among Salafis worldwide about the canonical status of these three shaykhs. In short, Nigerian Salafis studied in Medina at a time when the construction of contemporary canonical authority took on a new urgency.

In interviews, graduates of Medina characterized the religious landscape in the Kingdom both positively and negatively. Shaykh Nazifi Inuwa (b. 1970) mentioned that Saudi Arabian society was more closed to new ideas than either Sudan (where he also studied) or Nigeria, but he said that this atmosphere did not make his time in the Kingdom unpleasant.¹⁹ Dr. Pakistan said that Saudi Arabia funds charity and social welfare much more lavishly than Nigeria does, but he added that Nigerian society is more pious. Another difference Pakistan mentioned is that in Saudi Arabia, the government pays and supervises preachers and imams. “Therefore,” he said approvingly, “unrest seldom occurs there.” In Nigeria, he continued, people (i.e., Sufis) say whatever they want. They live by what they can get from their supporters, which leads to *kadhib* (lying) and *dajl* (trickery) – a reference to Salafis’ feeling that many Sufi shaykhs are charlatans who exploit their followers.²⁰

Nigerian students were impressed with the care the Islamic University put into welcoming and hosting them,²¹ but their relations with Arabs were not free of racial discrimination. ‘Umar mentioned several incidents of racism to me, including harassment by Saudi Arabian traffic police.

¹⁸ Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, translated by George Holoch (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Rabī‘ ibn Hādī al-Madkhālī, *Aḍwā’ Islāmīyya ‘alā ‘Aqīdat Sayyid Quṭb wa-Fikrihi* (Al-Madīna: Maktabat al-Ghurabā’ al-Atharīyya, 1993).

¹⁹ Interview with Inuwa, 12 October 2011, Kano.

²⁰ Interview with Pakistan, 22 October 2011, Kano.

²¹ ‘Al-Jāmi‘a al-Islāmīyya Talṭaqī Kharījī al-Jāmi‘āt al-Sa‘ūdiyya fī Nayjīrīyā,’ *Al-Jazirah*, 22 December 2001. Available at: www.al-jazirah.com/2001/20011222/fu1.htm; accessed February 2015.

Once, he related, he was with his son in the library of the Prophet's Mosque. His son sneezed. An attendant brought a tissue, but another attendant said he should not bring children to the mosque, citing a *ḥadīth*. When 'Umar told him this *ḥadīth* was weak, the attendant said that an African could not challenge him on a *ḥadīth*. Some Saudis, 'Umar said, think Africans have "no background knowledge of Islam." Saudi Arabia's growing sophistication in recruitment and outreach strategies, in other words, did not mean that Nigerian students felt completely comfortable in the Kingdom.

'Umar's rebuttal in the mosque was no accident: at the Islamic University, the Nigerian students delved into the study of *ḥadīth*. 'Umar and Rijiyar Lemo studied in the Department of Ḥadīth Sciences (*Qism 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*), where they learned the Salafi canon and Salafi methods of *ḥadīth* criticism. Rijiyar Lemo's M.A. thesis was entitled 'Dawābiṭ al-Jarḥ wa-l-Ta'dīl 'ind al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Dhahabī min khilāl Kitābihi *Siyar al-A'lām al-Nubalā'*: Jam'an wa-Dirāsatan' (Al-Dhahabī's Rules of Critique and Evaluation through His Book *The Biographies of the Noble Scholars: A Collection and a Study*).²² The title shows Rijiyar Lemo's engagement with a canonical figure (a fourteenth-century Damascene *ḥadīth* collector and historian, and a student of Ibn Taymiyya). The title also reflects Rijiyar Lemo's immersion in methods honed and reimagined by prominent Salafi scholars such as al-Albānī and the Saudi scholar Dr. Rabī' al-Madkhalī, a longtime teacher at the Islamic University who is known for his contemporary interpretation of *al-jarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl* (critique and evaluation, or disparagement and praise, which in Salafi hands is a method for deciding whether a scholar is qualified).²³ For their doctoral theses in the same Department, 'Umar and Rijiyar Lemo examined classical *ḥadīth* scholarship. 'Umar wrote on Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (and the resulting book was published in Saudi Arabia).²⁴ Rijiyar Lemo examined the study of *ḥadīth* in the early Muslim community in Mecca and Medina.²⁵ Nigerian Salafis would return home equipped with an advanced knowledge not just of the canon, but of its foundational principles, especially *ḥadīth* criticism, which also involved painstaking research on the early Muslim community.

²² Muḥammad al-Thānī 'Umar Mūsā, 'Dawābiṭ al-Jarḥ wa-l-Ta'dīl 'ind al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Dhahabī min khilāl Kitābihi *Siyar al-A'lām al-Nubalā'*: Jam'an wa-Dirāsatan,' M.A. thesis, Islamic University of Medina, 1999.

²³ Roel Meijer, "Politicizing *al-jarḥ wa-l-ta'dīl*: Rabi b. Hadi al-Madkhali and the Transnational Battle for Religious Authority," in *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam: Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki*, eds. Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Kees Versteegh and Joas Wagemakers, 375–99 (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

²⁴ Bashīr 'Alī 'Umar, *Manhaj al-Imām Aḥmad fī I'lāl al-Ḥadīth* (Waqf al-Salām 2005).

²⁵ Muḥammad al-Thānī 'Umar Mūsā, 'Al-Madrasa al-Ḥadīthiyya fī Makka wa-l-Madīna wa-Atharuhā fī al-Ḥadīth wa-'Ulūmihi min Nash'atihā ḥattā Nihāyat al-Qarn al-Thānī al-Hijrī,' Ph.D. dissertation, Islamic University of Medina, 2005.

In addition to their classroom learning, the Nigerians studied extensively with scholars in mosques. ‘Umar said the atmosphere was lively in Medina during his undergraduate days: “Everything was new to me.” He had classes from morning until the mid-afternoon prayer, then he would read at home. At evening prayer, he came to the mosque for lessons. During his first two years at Medina, a former Vice Chancellor of the University and an associate of Shaykh Ibn Bāz, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-‘Abbād (b. 1934), taught *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, the most famous *ḥadīth* collection in the Muslim world.²⁶ This kind of study enhanced the young preachers’ command of scripture and their ability to cite textual evidence in lectures and debates back home in Nigeria.

Paths Back to Nigeria

Salafi leaders maintained ties to Nigeria throughout their time in Medina, visiting Nigeria periodically and remaining abreast of developments there through correspondence. They returned permanently to Nigeria at different times – Abdullah in 1991, Ādam in 1993, and ‘Umar and Rijiyar Lemo, who obtained Ph.D.s in Medina, in 2004 and 2005, respectively.

Following his homecoming, Ādam returned to the teaching and lecturing circuits to which he had belonged before leaving for Medina. He also created new institutions. He became director of the ‘Uthmān bin Affan group, a mosque and school complex named after the third caliph. The complex was established in the Gadon Kaya neighborhood of Kano’s Old City by one of Ādam’s local patrons. Shaykh Abdulwahhab Abdullah worked closely with him there.²⁷ Ādam’s circle received some support from international Muslim charities such as al-Muntada al-Islāmī,²⁸ but local financial support strongly aided their rise to prominence. The mosque in Gadon Kaya has remained a central institution for the movement. Rijiyar Lemo and Abdullah still offer lessons there. ‘Umar began his preaching there after his return from Saudi Arabia, before Al-Furqān mosque, where he became imam, opened in 2007. Graduates of Medina have maintained connections to Saudi Arabia through pilgrimages and visits; in 2011, for example, ‘Umar was a royal guest on the hajj.

The Islamic University was often not the endpoint of Kano Salafis’ educational trajectories. Ādam, after completing his B.A. in Medina, later entered (and subsequently left, amid some controversy) an M.A.

²⁶ Interview with Umar, 2 October 2011, Kano.

²⁷ Rijiyar Lemo, *Ayyāmī*, 46.

²⁸ Andrea Brigaglia, “Ja’far Mahmood Adam, Mohammed 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): 35–44.

program in Islamic Studies at Bayero University Kano. He completed an M.A. at the Africa International University in Khartoum and enrolled in a Ph.D. program at Usman Danfodiyo University in Sokoto (where Dr. Pakistan obtained his Ph.D. in 2006). Paths that led to Medina often led back to Nigeria or to other destinations in Africa or the Arab world.

Advanced educational credentials placed the graduates of Medina in a tiny minority of Nigerians and helped them to reach diverse audiences. Despite their own relative youth within a scholarly gerontocracy, Ādam and other preachers earned a following among Kano youth. These youth saw them as credible scholars but also as down-to-earth speakers who address, without resorting to euphemism, issues such as marriage, sex, family, and politics. Although audiences at study circles have often been primarily male, the Medina graduates have reached women through radio, recordings, and co-educational lectures in mosques. Advanced educational credentials have earned the graduates some following among politicians, civil servants, and professionals. The relationships between graduates of Medina and these different groups show how Salafi preachers have partially tailored lectures to local audiences' concerns, a theme that is discussed more in the next three chapters.

Ādam's popularity and influence began to soar by the end of the 1990s. In 2000, as the Kano State government was moving to reimplement *sharī'a*, he served on a ten-man review committee for the draft *sharī'a* code, indicating his position as a representative of a major religious constituency.²⁹ By 1999, Ādam's followers began systematically recording his lectures, hundreds of which still circulate in northern Nigeria and online. By the mid-2000s, after Rijiyar Lemo and 'Umar returned home, the Medina graduates and their local Salafi peers had representatives in some of the city's most prominent institutions, including Bayero University Kano ('Umar) and the Shekarau administration (Abdullah, 'Umar). Over three decades, "Ahlussunnah" became a major force in the religious and political life of one of Nigeria's largest cities.

Ethnographic Snapshots of the Medina Graduates in Kano

Salafis around the world are often depicted as grim, conservative, and fanatical. To add humanity and complexity to this study's portrait of Kano's Salafis, it is important to note their frequent use of humor as well as other potentially surprising aspects of their demeanor. Ādam often began his lectures with personal anecdotes and made frequent

²⁹ Ibrahim Na'ija Sada, "The Making of the Zamfara and Kano State Sharia Penal Codes," in *Shari'a Implementation in Northern Nigeria, 1999–2006*, edited by Philip Ostien (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2007), 29.

use of self-deprecating humor. Audiences can often be heard laughing in the recordings. In person, Shaykh Abdulwahhab Abdullah regularly made jokes. At his house one evening, my research assistant Usman and I witnessed the shaykh discussing plans with a group of about twenty young followers to take up a collection for slaughtering animals at Eid. The shaykh at one point teased a young man whom he was sending out to buy phone recharge cards, calling him *shege* (Hausa: “bastard”) in a kind of joking banter that would be out of character for most ‘*ulamā*’ in Kano. Other researchers have also noted the striking egalitarianism in Nigerian Salafi and anti-Sufi circles.³⁰

Nigerian Salafis draw sharp theological boundaries in their lectures, and their followers have sometimes clashed violently with Sufis; yet in day-to-day life, many Salafis interact on polite and even friendly terms with Sufis. During the period of my research, I attended an evening prayer and social circle in Kano, whose members had met daily for years. One member was an outspoken Salafi who knew the major Salafi preachers of the city well, but he faithfully attended this evening prayer circle, whose habitual attendees included Sufis and other non-Salafis. He participated in group prayer, common meals, and lively discussions with his non-Salafi friends. In general, relations between Salafis and the Qadiriyya order seemed more respectful than those between Salafis and the Tijāniyya. For example, Abdullah emphasized his study with the Qadiri Sufi Shaykh Nāṣir Kabara (1912–96), yet asked me intently whether I was a Tijāni upon hearing that I had done prior research in Senegal.

As Salafis have moved into positions of intellectual, political, and religious authority, they have interacted with a wide range of other Muslims, influencing them but at the same time taking on the responsibilities of having a wider audience and constituency. Several Salafis, including graduates of Medina and Sudan’s International University of Africa, teach at the Aminu Kano College of Islamic and Legal Studies, a well-regarded tertiary institution in Kano that trains future legal elites. These Salafis held positions as deans and heads of departments. In these capacities, they could shape the curriculum, but they also had to work closely with scholars and administrators from other theological backgrounds. The changes Nigerian Salafis have experienced as their social status rises recall Robert Launay’s description of how one prominent Muslim leader in Côte d’Ivoire transitioned from outspoken anti-Sufism to accommodation with Sufism as he became a local elder and took on a range of social roles “that flagrantly contradicted his Wahhabi ideas.”³¹ Although the transitions are not so dramatic in Nigeria, some Nigerian Salafis

³⁰ Kane, *Muslim Modernity*.

³¹ Robert Launay, *Beyond the Stream: Islam and Society in a West African Town* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 90.

have had to negotiate what it means to present themselves not just as Salafi leaders but as authorities for larger Muslim communities. At the same time, their institutional positions can afford them opportunities to present the fundamentals of Salafism as a kind of “generic Islam”³² and to attempt to Salafize colleagues and students.

In line with this, some Salafi-controlled mosques are hubs for many kinds of activity, especially the pursuit of adult education by Muslims who are not necessarily “full” Salafis but who have an interest in and sympathy for Salafi styles of teaching scripture. Al-Furqān, where ‘Umar became imam, is a huge, gleaming mosque in the Government Reserve Area, a wealthy neighborhood in Kano. During prayer times, many expensive cars are parked out front, as well as some motorbikes. Out front, one vendor might be selling oranges, while another sells MP3s and DVDs of recordings of prominent Nigerian ‘*ulamā*’ – not just of Salafis like Ādam but also of prominent Sufis like Shaykh Isa Waziri (1925–2013), a prominent adviser to the late emir of Kano, Ado Bayero. The mosque has an active program of adult Arabic education, offering courses on *tajwīd* (recitation) and other subjects. Al-Furqān attracts pupils and worshippers who are not Salafi. The influence of the Medina graduates extends far beyond just those Nigerians who fully accept the Salafi theological vision.

The Medina graduates have obtained financial support from various sources. Global Islamic charities have been one key source: Al-Muntada al-Islāmī Trust was key to Ādam’s establishment of his network of mosques and schools in Kano and later to the establishment of Al-Furqān Mosque. At the same time, the role of external funders should not overshadow the importance of local funders: Muhammad Indimi (or Ndimi), founder and chairman of the oil company Oriental Energy Resources, built the mosque in Maiduguri where Ādam delivered *tafsīr* during Ramadan; the Sabuwar Gandu mosque in Kano was built with the support of local businessmen, such as the Izala member Muhammad Ahmad. For book publishing, Salafis have turned to both Nigerian and Arab publishers, including institutions like Al-Muntada. The Islamic University and Saudi publishers also sometimes help graduates of Medina publish M.A. and doctoral theses. For the recording and dissemination of lectures, Salafis have relied primarily on existing networks of technicians, small shops, and peddlers in Kano and other cities.

Many Salafi preachers are not personally wealthy. They often live middle-class lifestyles, drawing personal incomes from multiple sources, especially teaching at schools and universities and/or serving in

³² Benjamin Soares, *Islam and the Prayer Economy. History and Authority in a Malian Town* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 224.

government posts. For example, during the period of my fieldwork, one of the younger graduates of Medina, Nazifi Inuwa, was operating his own private school, serving as the head of the Department of Qur'anic Studies at the state government-run tertiary institution The Aminu Kano College of Islamic and Legal Studies, offering lessons at mosques in Kano, and conducting two radio programs. Some Salafis have important connections elsewhere in Nigeria – the Kano-based preacher Shaykh Muhammad bin Uthman, for example, traveled regularly to preach in Port Harcourt during the period of my fieldwork – that may supplement their incomes. Salafis do not, however, have access to the same level of redistributive financial power that the most prominent Sufi shaykhs do, nor have any Salafi preachers emerged as major businessmen at the level of, for example, the Kano-based Tijani Shaykh Isyaku Rabi'u or his son Abdulsamad Rabi'u, Nigeria's fourth richest man as of 2015.³³

Breaking with Izala

At the Islamic University, Ādam and Rijiyar Lemo underwent two intellectual shifts. First, deepening their disagreements with Izala hardliners, they adopted somewhat greater tolerance for Sufis. Second, they began preaching outside of the context of a formalized, hierarchical organization. The university and the canon have remained a potent reference point in Rijiyar Lemo's presentation of his circle's break with Izala: he invokes the canon as the standard of authority by which he measured Izala's claims to represent Salafism.

Networks formed by Izala continued to link the Nigerian students in Medina even as their studies opened new questions about Izala's theological integrity. Rijiyar Lemo relates that he, Ādam, and Dr. Ibrāhīm Jalo of Taraba State formed an extracurricular study circle dedicated to reading works by Ibn Taymiyya. "One doctrinal affiliation brought us together, and that was affiliation to [Izala], as *du'āt* [preachers] in it. We were comrades before the university, and we became more connected at the university."³⁴ At the Islamic University, however, the young preachers cultivated the spirit of open debate that they felt Izala lacked. Ādam later said, "We would gather books and read, or we would open a chapter in a book. [Rijiyar Lemo] would read or I would read and we would comment on it to each other. Sometimes we would agree, sometimes we would differ, and so forth."³⁵ This atmosphere encouraged the

³³ *Forbes* profile of Abdulsamad Rabi'u, 2015. Available at: www.forbes.com/profile/abdulsamad-rabi'u/; accessed October 2015.

³⁴ Rijiyar Lemo, *Ayyāmī*, 23.

³⁵ Ādam, "Tarihin Rayuwata."

investigations that led the students in Medina to reevaluate their relationship to Izala and to foreground the Salafi canon.

During their time at the Islamic University, the circle around Ādam came to feel that they had textual evidence to support their stances against the Izala hardliners – a significant asset in a community that prizes textual evidence as the decisive criterion for settling disputes. Rijiyar Lemo wrote that study and debate in Medina took on a wider scope than discussions inside Izala circles at home. “When we met together at the campus of the Islamic University, we would re-examine many of the preaching issues (*al-qaḍāya al-da wīyya*) that [Izala] had adopted” such as “the issue of prayer behind the heretical innovator (*mubtadi*), or the one whose status is hidden (*al-mastūr*), and the issue of eating something sacrificed by Sufis (*mas’alat akl dhabīḥat al-turuqīyyīn*).”³⁶ On this issue, Rijiyar Lemo mentioned that reading the works of two canonical authorities, Shaykhs Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān al-Qannūjī and Muḥammad al-Shawkānī, “increased my conviction (*qanā’ati*) in my stance.”³⁷

Rijiyar Lemo’s invocation of these figures has at least two salient contexts. First, he mentioned them while recalling a legal debate with Izala hardliners in the 1990s; canonical Salafis became intellectual authorities supporting his stances. Second, he mentioned these figures in a book attempting to define Ādam’s legacy – and the identity of his successors in the “Ahlussunnah” network – after the shaykh’s death. By invoking canonical Salafis, Rijiyar Lemo suggested that time in Medina expanded his and Ādam’s command of the canon to a degree the Izala hardliners could not match. The mention of Khān and al-Shawkānī also highlights how the canon taught at the Islamic University was broader than just Wahhābī works.

In 1991, while Ādam and Rijiyar Lemo were at the Islamic University, Izala split into two camps. As noted earlier, one camp was based in Jos and the other in Kaduna. The sympathies of Ādam and Rijiyar Lemo lay with the latter, which they perceived as more moderate and less authoritarian. The Jos camp, Rijiyar Lemo wrote, went too far in “excommunicating without any thinking” (*takfīr bilā adna tafkīr*).³⁸ Significantly, in Kano, where Izala also split, the leader of those aligned with Kaduna was Abdullah Pakistan, an alumnus of Medina. Dr. Ibrāhīm Jalo, another close friend of Ādam’s at the Islamic University, also affiliated himself with the Kaduna branch.³⁹ To the students in Medina, this branch seemed to offer a less authoritarian, more intellectual, and even more Salafi worldview.

³⁶ Rijiyar Lemo, *Ayyāmī*, 25.

³⁷ Rijiyar Lemo, *Ayyāmī*, 26.

³⁸ Rijiyar Lemo, *Ayyāmī*, 29–30.

³⁹ Ben Amara, “Izala Movement,” 194.

Despite their sympathies for Kaduna, many Nigerian students at Medina attempted to remain neutral. Rijiyar Lemo wrote, “When this split occurred, we decided to meet with all the students in the University belonging to [Izala], and take one stance characterized by neutrality (*al-ḥiyādiyya*) and justice (*al-‘adāla*), and not support a side against the other side.” They authored a “letter of advice” (*risāla naṣiḥa*) to the two sides and delegated Ādam to deliver it.⁴⁰ Rijiyar Lemo described this episode as a formative experience in Ādam’s career as a preacher:

There is no doubt that this stance that the students took then is what formed for the brother [Ādam], may Allah have mercy on him, an intellectual basis for launching his preaching after his return to Nigeria. It created for the Salafi *da‘wa* a special air, and gave it a distinguished dimension in Nigerian society. After some of the students had been fettered by the decisions [Izala] issued, they became free in their *da‘wa* and free in their approach, not compelled to follow a certain person who would impose his views on them.⁴¹

This new platform for *da‘wa* was the Salafi canon. In their debates with Izala, the graduates of Medina invoked their learning at Medina, their mastery of Salafi methodologies, and their respect for thinkers in the global Salafi canon.

Not all Nigerian Salafis had the same experience at the university. Some members of Izala remained within the fold. Still others promoted reform within Izala. Dr. Pakistan, who rose to leadership within the Kaduna-affiliated branch of Izala in Kano after 1991, told me that he moved the society’s emphasis from *takfīr* (anathematization) to *ta‘līm* (education).⁴²

It is important not to exaggerate the extent of the split between Ādam’s circle and Izala. The graduates emphasized their break with Izala in some contexts while downplaying it in others. Rijiyar Lemo’s biography of Ādam – the place where the graduates’ rejection of Izala is most clearly and sharply articulated – was written in Arabic, not Hausa. Given the large number of Nigerian figures and places Rijiyar Lemo mentions in the book, Rijiyar Lemo may have envisioned Nigerian Arabophone scholars as his primary audience. The biography, in other words, was not necessarily aimed at a mass audience. Worth noting too is that Ādam, in his oral, Hausa-language intellectual autobiography *Tarihin Rayuwata a Ilmi* (The History of My Life in Knowledge), mentioned the Islamic University only briefly, and he included little discussion of the Salafi intellectual canon. Ādam often glossed over his circle’s split with Izala, referring to his membership in Izala in the 1980s without rancor and, simultaneously, identifying Izala – even in the 1980s – as part of

⁴⁰ Rijiyar Lemo, *Ayyāmī*, 32.

⁴¹ Rijiyar Lemo, *Ayyāmī*, 33.

⁴² Interview with Pakistan.

“Ahlussunnah.”⁴³ These lectures were intended for mass audiences. In different contexts, the graduates of Medina have framed their relationship with Izala, and the significance of their time in Medina for that relationship, differently.

Within the broader anti-Sufi fold, there have been sharp differences of opinion about theology. The graduates of Medina have invoked the Salafi canon to defend their positions and distinguish themselves from Izala. Partly for this reason, the Medina graduates came to be perceived as a distinct and troublesome group by some Izala leaders.⁴⁴ Yet the Salafis around Ādam continued to work with Izala, especially with reformers like Pakistan. All of these leaders are interconnected through friendship, marriage, and kinship. In conflicts with hereditary Muslim rulers and other adversaries, Izala and the graduates of Medina have often presented a united front.

The subtle differences between the Medina graduates and Izala did, however, have consequences in terms of discursive styles and the content of preaching. For Ādam and his circle, shifting the emphasis from identifying themselves as members of Izala to describing themselves as representatives of Salafism was a way of universalizing their identity. One graduate of Medina, Shaykh Abdullahi Garangamawa, explained that from the perspective of the graduates, Izala is “only an organization,” one with a specific history and context. Being part of “Ahlussunnah,” on the other hand, is “an approach, dating from the time of the Messenger of God.” This approach is distinguished by adherence to the Qur’an and the Sunna. “Everyone you see inside [Izala] is Ahlussunnah, but it is not necessary for everyone who is Ahlussunnah to be inside [Izala].” Some Salafis preferred not to label themselves as Izala, Garangamawa added, “Because in the past, there was foolishness . . . and excommunications and some things that had no basis.”⁴⁵ Referring to Salafism as an “approach” is itself one marker of a global Salafi identity.

In the 1990s, as Ādam and his circle began to present Salafism as a category that transcended the boundaries of Izala as an organization, their preaching became accessible to new constituencies, especially professionals and civil servants. Rijiyar Lemo wrote:

There had been among them some who evaded the Sunna because of the harshness (*ghilṣa*) in social interaction, cruelty in expression, and excess in *takfīr* and driving people out (*tanfīr*) which characterized some individuals of the Society. Then when they saw a form of *da’wa* unaligned with a sect, not fanatic toward a group, and at the same time one whose leaders were endowed with the

⁴³ In the latter lecture (delivered in Kano, 2006), for example, when discussing Sufi attempts to shut down a Salafi mosque in the mid-1980s, Adam says, “The number of Kano’s Ahlussunnah at that time did not reach a tenth of Kano’s Ahlussunnah now.”

⁴⁴ Ben Amara, “The Izala Movement,” 267.

⁴⁵ Interview with Garangamawa, Kano.

spirit of good treatment toward the one who is different, they appreciated the Sunna. [Adam], may Allah have mercy on him, was a pioneer and a leader in this direction.⁴⁶

The graduates of Medina placed a premium on the ability to demonstrate textual knowledge. In recruiting teachers for lessons at the mosque, Ādam emphasized scholarly credentials, for he “saw the majority of those who undertook *da‘wa* and instruction as weak in knowledge and poor in understanding.”⁴⁷ Graduates of Medina were attempting to enforce a new standard for intellectual accomplishment among reformist preachers and to shift the tone and focus of their preaching.

One of the greatest testimonies to the efficacy of the graduates’ bid to pioneer a new style of preaching and education has been their success in influencing and even producing locally trained Salafis. For example, one prominent Nigerian Salafi is Shaykh Aminu Daurawa (b. 1969), whose televised lectures on Islamic history have earned him attention, along with his preaching and his service as commander general of the Kano State Hisbah (a law enforcement body with responsibility for public morality) starting in 2011. Daurawa’s education occurred within Nigeria rather than at the Islamic University. Daurawa writes in his intellectual autobiography that he studied with numerous scholars in Nigeria. He emphasizes his relationship with Shaykh Abdulwahhab Abdullah, one of the Medina graduates. He adds, “There are some scholars who influenced me in my life, but by means of studying their books and listening to their cassettes.” He lists Ibn ‘Uthaymīn and al-Albānī as two major influences and also mentions canonical authorities such as Ibn Taymiyya. Of al-Albānī, Daurawa writes, “All his books that have appeared in the market, and the cassettes, I purchase them, because of their many benefits.”⁴⁸ The Medina graduates, in other words, have helped bring domestically trained northern Nigerian Salafis into intensive contact with the global Salafi canon.

When considering the relationship between Izala and “Ahlussunnah,” an interesting comparative case is the relationship between Al-Gam‘iyya al-Shar‘iyya and Anṣār al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya in Egypt. Richard Gauvain categorizes the latter as Salafi but notes that the former is not, even though they are widely perceived as Salafi. The former maintain an Ash‘arī theological affiliation and work within the schools of law, and even (unlike Nigeria’s Izala) show sympathy for Sufism. Yet there is institutional and social overlap between the two movements; preachers

⁴⁶ Rijiyar Lemo, *Ayyāmī*, 33.

⁴⁷ Rijiyar Lemo, *Ayyāmī*, 48.

⁴⁸ Aminu Ibrahim Daurawa, “Tarihin Shaikh Aminu Ibrahim Daurawa,” 2013. Available at: <http://zakariahdg.blogspot.com/2013/12/tarihin-shaikh-aminu-ibrahim-daurawa.html>; accessed October 2014.

within Anṣār al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya regularly speak in mosques affiliated with Al-Gamʿiyya al-Sharʿiyya.⁴⁹ In Egypt as in Nigeria, Salafis who adhere strictly to the Salafi canon nonetheless operate within a broader religious field of sympathetic allies.

Local Daʿwa in the Context of Universal History

In their own eyes, the Nigerian graduates returned from Medina as spokesmen for a global Salafi worldview, rather than a parochial Nigerian anti-Sufism with questionable textual bases. Religious action, for the graduates of Medina, centres on *daʿwa*, a category that is intended to be at once an embodiment of a universal Islamic mission and a locally situated practice.

The Arabic word *daʿwa* can be translated as the “call” to Islam. Those who practice *daʿwa* are *duʿāt* (singular *dāʿiyya*). Rijiyyar Lemo’s memoir of Ādam bears the Arabic subtitle *Dāʿiyat al-Ḥil wa-Mufasssīr al-Tanzīl* (The Preacher of the Generation and the Exegete of the Revelation). These epithets stress two core aspects of Salafi identity: an activist stance toward Islamic reform and a mastery of scripture. Salafi leaders enjoined followers in Kano to be activists too. In one 2006 lecture, Ādam told the crowd, “Understanding sunna does not mean ‘registering’ with some ‘registration card’ such that if you enter your name, that’s it, you become a member. . . . The creed of *Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Ĵamāʿa* does not mean . . . *daʿwa* with the mouth alone without any work that makes it real on a daily basis.”⁵⁰

Daʿwa, in Salafi discourses worldwide, is not limited to converting non-Muslims to Islam; it includes calling other Muslims to become better Muslims. The *dāʿiyya* is, for Salafi thinkers in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, a universal category. An article published in the journal of the Muslim World League in 1990 outlined how the *dāʿiyya* needed to possess certain qualities to succeed, including “following the example of the Messenger” (*iqṭifāʾ āthār al-rasūl*). The article presented the *dāʿiyya*’s struggle as basically unchanging:

For if our pious predecessors were fought by ignorant classes (*ṭabaqāt jāhila*), failed leaderships (*riʾāsāt fāshila*), obscure tribes, and belligerent, combative peoples, we today are fought by classes who claim they are cultured. Indeed, we are fought by unbelieving governments who have jointly decided and jointly stated that they will fight Islam and unite to block its *daʿwa* and to judge its men.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Gauvain, *Salafi Ritual Purity: In the Presence of God* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 37–38.

⁵⁰ Jaʿfar Maḥmūd Ādam, untitled lecture, mid-2000s, Kano.

⁵¹ Muḥammad Maḥmūd al-Sawwāb, “Shakhsiyyat al-Dāʿiyya Ḥiya al-ʿĀmil al-Asāsī fī Najāḥihi,” *Al-Rābiʿa*, 29:34 (May 1990), 21.

Nigerian Salafi leaders' conception of *da'wa* is similar. Just as Nigerian Salafis have viewed their historical circumstances as fundamentally similar to those of other Salafis, so too have they viewed their core mission as identical to that of other Salafi figures, past and present.

The Nigerian graduates of Medina have urged their followers to view themselves as part of a broader community of people who understand monotheism correctly. Nigerian Salafi leaders narrate local events in ways that attempt to transcend local chronologies and geographies. The community to which Nigerian Salafis link their local community's experiences includes the Qur'anic prophets before Muḥammad, but its historical center is the Prophet and his Companions. The community extends forward in time from the Prophet to any Muslim, in any place, considered to follow his Sunna. As Chapter 6 details, Salafi leaders have presented their struggles in Kano as part of an ongoing struggle wherein true Muslims, surrounded by hostile communities and/or faithless Muslims, are a permanent vanguard and a vulnerable minority.

African graduates of Saudi Arabian universities have noted that local contexts shape the challenges each *dā'iya* faces. In this way, they echo the theorizations of Salafi outreach that al-Jāmī proposed decades earlier (see Chapter 2). In 2001, at a conference the Saudi Arabian government held in Kano for African graduates of Saudi Islamic universities, a Malian scholar outlined five challenges for the African *dā'iya*: converting non-Muslims, purifying Islamic practices, fighting "Christianization" (*al-tanṣīr*) and Westernization, opposing Sufism, and confronting "waves of Shī'ism." In West Africa, the scholar continued, fighting polytheistic beliefs and opposing Sufism were the most salient challenges, due to the historical linkages between Sufism and the initial Islamization of the region.⁵²

Strikingly, however, in keeping with their effort to project a universal Salafi identity, the graduates of Medina have identified a broad range of theological enemies, including sects with a minimal presence in Nigeria. Attacking sects perceived as heterodox has allowed Salafis to draw boundaries around their identity, emphasizing what it is at the same time that they emphasize what it is not. Salafis in Kano are known for opposing Sufism, especially the Tijaniyya order, which they charge with introducing heresies into Islam. Yet they also oppose the Shī'a, the Ahmadiyya, and "Qur'āniyyūn," meaning people who take the Qur'an as their sole scriptural authority, rejecting the Sunnah. All of these groups represent, for Salafis, present incarnations of longstanding threats to genuine

⁵² Muḥammad al-Bashīr Dakūrī, "Al-Da'wa wa-al-Du'ā fi Ifrīqiya: Al-Wāqi' wa-l-Taṭallu'āt," in *Buḥūth Multaqa Khādīm al-Haramayn al-Sharīfayn li-Khīrrijī al-Jāmi'āt al-Sa'ūdiyya min Ifrīqiya*, *al-Awwal: al-Muqām bi-Nayjīriyā*, *Kanu taḥta Ishrāf al-Jāmi'a al-Islāmiyya bi-l-Madīna al-Munawwara* (Medina: al-Jāmi'a al-Islāmiyya bi-l-Madīna al-Munawwara, 2003), 539.

Muslims. In a lecture on the Qur'āniyyūn, Ādam traced their founding back to doctrinal controversies in the early centuries of the Muslim community, citing the Shī'a, the Mu'tazila, and the Kharijites as the forerunners of the Qur'āniyyūn. These three sects, he said, "are groups that began refusing to apply the *aḥādīth* of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, except they did not say so openly. They followed some principles and methods that they invented . . . by means of which they brought these evil creeds and caused destruction with them."⁵³ Qur'anism, Ādam said, met the same fate in all of its historical incarnations: "contempt in the world and the afterlife. Here in the world Allah humiliates them."⁵⁴ As often in his lectures, Ādam stressed the importance of avoiding any heresy: "We must distance ourselves from any heresy, for every heresy is an error, and a path toward fire. Therefore any form of worship that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, did not use to worship Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, and the Companions did not use to worship Allah, is not worship."⁵⁵ Viewing Nigeria through the lens of global Salafism has meant, for the graduates of Medina, reading the local religious landscape as a reinstatement of primordial theological conflicts in Islam. This attitude treats not just Sufism but any sect perceived to deviate from Sunni orthodoxy as a dangerous rival.

Conclusion

Graduates of the Islamic University of Medina are prominent leaders in the "Ahlussunnah" network in Kano. They have made use of their learning at the university and of different aspects of the classical and contemporary Salafi canons to promote a global Salafi identity. The Medina graduates built a wide audience, including youth but also married women and certain social and political elites, partly through their ability to shift intellectual registers. As the next chapters show, the Medina graduates' popular messages have often emphasized scripture in an accessible way, while in other intellectual settings Salafi leaders demonstrated their mastery of Salafi methodologies of *ḥadīth* criticism and engaged a variety of Salafi thinkers. Mastery of Salafi methodologies and the Salafi canon proved particularly useful to the Medina graduates when they engaged in technical debates with rival Nigerian Salafis such as "hardliners" from the Izala movement or with the radical preacher Muḥammad Yūsuf (see Chapter 7). The graduates invoked their learning at Medina

⁵³ Ja'far Maḥmūd Ādam, *Yan Alkuraniyyun: (Yan Tatsine, Kala-Kato): Tarihin Kafuwarsu da Akidunsu* (Kano: Usman bin Affan Islamic Trust, 2005), 4.

⁵⁴ Ādam, *Yan Alkuraniyyun*, 24–5.

⁵⁵ Ādam, *Yan Alkuraniyyun*, 26.

and the authority of contemporary Salafi thinkers in such debates to discredit rivals and present them as intellectually deficient. These intellectual attacks on their rivals reinforced Salafi leaders' self-presentations as highly credentialed, sober representatives of Islamic *da'wa*.

The Salafi *da'wa* in Kano and throughout northern Nigeria departs in key ways from the anti-Sufi reformism that preceded it and still competes with it. Despite shared priorities between Izala and the Medina graduates, the Ahlussunnah network emphasizes a broader canon, identifies a wider range of theological enemies, and presents a larger identity that links local and global concerns outside the framework of a hierarchical organization. The Medina graduates have invoked the full Salafi canon to delegitimize the positions of their rivals in Izala. The graduates have at times downplayed their connections to Izala in favor of asserting an allegedly universal identity as Salafis. Yet the graduates have then reinscribed this universal identity in the local environment by connecting local struggles to broader histories and geographies. An ability to shift between local concerns and translocal identities has lain at the heart of these Salafis' rhetorical power.