

## Learning, Gnosis and Exegesis: Public *tafsīr* and Sufi Revival in the City of Kano (Northern Nigeria), 1950-1970

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### Abstract

This article explores the transformation of the study of *tafsīr* in Kano city (Northern Nigeria) during the twentieth century, highlighting the role of a Sufi phenomenon of revival (*al-fayḍa*, the 'flood') within an established order (the Tijāniyya) in promoting intellectual change. The historical background to the Nigerian 'flood' is the encounter between the Senegalese Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse (d. 1975) and a dynamic sector of the scholarly class of Kano. Two case-studies of local *tafsīr* networks are presented here in order to assess the position that the studying, the teaching and the public performing of *tafsīr* had in the broader edifice of Islamic knowledge of the West African city before and after the 'flood'. The article emphasizes the intensity of the participation of the West African Muslim scholars to the intellectual tradition of *tafsīr*; and looks at the links between a contemporary Sufi revival, local traditions of Qur'ānic exegesis, and wider bodies of Islamic knowledge.

### Keywords

Nigeria, Kano, Hausa, *tafsīr*, transmission of knowledge; Sufism, Tijāniyya, *fayḍa*, *ma'rifa*

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\* An earlier version of this article was presented in May 2007 at the Program of African Studies, Northwestern University, Evanston. I am especially grateful to Rüdiger Seesemann and Zachary Wright for their comments on that, as well as on other occasions.

## Introduction: Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse, Kano and the *fayḍa tijāniyya*

In 1929 Ibrāhīm Niasse, a cadet son of the Senegalese Muslim scholar and leader of an influential branch of the Tijāniyya Sufi order al-Ḥājj ‘Abd Allāh Niasse (d. 1922), publicly claimed that he had been gifted by God a special function in the Tijānī tradition, that of *ṣāhib al-fayḍa*, the depository of ‘the flood’.<sup>1</sup> The occurrence of a ‘flood’, whereby the Tijānī order would experience, during a troubled time, a vast expansion, was awaited based on a prediction by the order’s founder Shaykh Aḥmad at-Tijānī (d. 1815), transmitted in a collection of his sayings published as *al-Ifāda al-aḥmadiyya*.<sup>2</sup> Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse would expose his arguments justifying his conviction that he was the depository of the flood of Shaykh Aḥmad at-Tijānī in the book *Kāshif al-ilbās*, which he wrote in 1931. At the core of the *fayḍa* rationale as it was articulated by Ibrāhīm Niasse and his followers was the idea that the Senegalese Sufi had the role and mission of spreading a technique of a particularly effective—though simplified and accessible to everyone—system of spiritual training (*tarbiya*) in the method of Shaykh Aḥmad at-Tijānī. This would allow the

<sup>1</sup> For two short biographical accounts on ‘Abd Allāh Niasse, see Kane, O.: “Shaykh al-Islam Al-Hajj Ibrahim Niasse”, in: D. Robinson & J.-L. Triaud (eds.), *Le temps des marabouts: Itinéraires et stratégies islamiques en Afrique occidentale française v. 1880-1960*, Paris: Karthala, 1997, 300-3; Gray, C.: “The Rise of the Niassene Tijaniyya, 1875 to present”, in: *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara* (Paris), 2, 1988, 35-9. For a biographical account on his son Ibrāhīm, focusing on his relations with the French colonial authorities, see Kane: “Shaykh al-Islam”; see also, on other aspects: Gray: “The rise of the Niassene Tijaniyya”; Hiskett, M.: “The ‘Community of Grace’ and its Opponents, the ‘Rejecters’: a Debate about Theology and Mysticism in Muslim West Africa with Special Reference to its Hausa Expression”, in: *African Language Studies*, 7, 1980; Seesemann, R.: “The *Shurafā* and the ‘Blacksmith’: The role of the Idaw ‘Alī of Mauritania in the career of the Senegalese Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse (1900-1975)”, in: S.S. Reese (ed.): *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa*, Leiden: Brill, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> The book has been edited several times. Cairo editions (for example the 1971 edition that I have consulted: al-Sufyānī, M.Ṭ.: *al-Ifāda al-aḥmadiyya li-murīd as-sā‘āda al-abadiyya*) are commented by the head of the Tijānī *zāwiya* in Cairo, Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Miṣrī (d. 1978). I have discussed some of the meanings associated with the term *fayḍa* in the Tijānī tradition in Brigaglia, A.: “The Fayḍa Tijaniyya of Ibrahim Nyass: Genesis and Implications of a Sufi Doctrine”, in: *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara* (Paris), 14/15, 2001.

spiritual seeker, notwithstanding the limitations inherent in our age, through the repetition of certain formulas based on the prayer on the Prophet, to traverse at a quick pace the five *ḥaḍarāt* ('presences', levels) of celestial and inner existence and rapidly achieve the ultimate goal of the Sufi path, i.e. spiritual realization (*taḥaqquq*), or 'illumination', 'opening' (*fath*).<sup>3</sup> Such an 'empirical' evidence of the *fayḍa* was not open to being counter-argued from the outside, for it could only be believed or questioned after having undergone the Niassene *tarbiya*, i.e. after having accepted his spiritual mastership.

The theoretical background of the esoteric practice of *tarbiya* itself was nothing new.<sup>4</sup> What was peculiar to the followers of Ibrāhīm Niassé was the claim that through the intercession of the depository of the flood its experience would easily become accessible to all, though at different degrees of realization. Niassé's claims were strengthened by the fact that some representatives of the major Tijānī families of the Idaw 'Alī clan in Mauritania, who were the heirs of the oldest initiatic chain (*silsila*) of the order in sub-Saharan Africa, had earnestly (and surprisingly, if one considers the traditional attitude of 'white' Mauriticians towards 'black' Senegalese) submitted to the spiritual authority of a very young Ibrāhīm and recognized

<sup>3</sup> The claims of the followers of Ibrāhīm Niassé have sometimes met with opposition from other Tijānīs in local contexts; an example of this kind, relative to the Darfur (Western Sudan) has been treated by Rüdiger Seesemann: "The history of the Tijāniyya and the issue of *tarbiya* in Darfur (Sudan)", in: D. Robinson & J.-L. Triaud (eds.), *La Tijāniyya: Une confrérie musulmane à la conquête de l'Afrique*, Paris: Karthala, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Before the Senegalese, the concept of *tarbiya* in the Tijānī path had been discussed theoretically by the Mauritanian 'Ubayda b. Anbūja in his *Mizāb al-rahma al-rahmāniyya*, which has been identified as one of the most important sources of Ibrāhīm Niassé on the subject (Seesemann: "The *Shurafā'* and the Blacksmith", 94). The progression of the *ḥaḍarāt* as it is discussed in 'Umar al-Fūṭī's *Rimāḥ (Rimāḥ ḥizb al-rahīm*, published on the margins of 'Alī Ḥarāzim Barāda: *Jawāhir al-ma'ānī wa-bulūgh al-am'ānī*, Bayrūt: Dār al-Jil, no date) also constitutes an important antecedent in the order, as it attached in a systematic way the traditional Sufi idea of the cosmic hierarchy of the *ḥaḍarāt* to the specific hierarchy of sainthood envisaged by Tijānīs based on the claim that the founder Shaykh Aḥmad at-Tijānī is the *khātim al-awliyā'* ('seal of saints') and the exclusive vehicle of the Muḥammadan *fayḍ* (effusion). The book *al-Irā'a (Irā'at 'arā'is shumūs falak al-ḥaqa'iq al-'irfāniyya*, Casablanca, 1934) by the Moroccan al-Ḥasan (*Sīdī Laḥsan*) al-Ba'qilī is another important Tijānī book on the subject of *tarbiya*, and it is used in Morocco and Tunisian *zāwiyyas*.

him as the depository of the flood.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the endorsement of some of the Mauritanian leading Tijānī families, the evidence that those amongst the Tijānīs who agreed to the belief that Ibrāhīm Niasse was the awaited *ṣāhib al-fayḍa* will later advance to support their contention, was a *de facto* argument, based on a quantitative consideration, i.e. the quick spread of the Tijānī *ṭarīqa* under his guidance. The spread of the *ṭarīqa* was, in fact, an essential element in the prediction attributed to Shaykh Aḥmad at-Tijānī: ‘a flood (*fayḍa*) will occur, so that people will enter my order in swarms (*afwājan*)’<sup>6</sup>.

For almost twenty years however, the claims that Ibrāhīm Niasse had put forward in his *Kāshif al-ilbās* and that his Mauritanian supporters had endorsed would remain virtually inconsequential outside a local, marginal circle of Senegalese and Mauritians that had started gathering around him and renewing their affiliation (*silsila*) to the Tijānī path through him. It was only starting from the 1950s, after the affiliation of a vast and particularly dynamic sector of the scholarly class of the Northern Nigerian city of Kano, that the movement started to acquire a visible international dimension and to transform the geography of the Tijāniyya that had been remained virtually unchanged through the colonial age. Through the medium of the Kano scholars and of the (often commercial, side by side scholarly) networks they run through Nigeria, Niger, Ghana, Chad and the Cameroon, the promise of a mass initiation into the Tijāniyya order at the hand of the depository of the *fayḍa* will be realized. In particular, the idea that the Sufi *tarbiya*, the initiatic training leading to spiritual realization could be made accessible to the common folk would be systematically believed and employed for the first time on a large scale.

The Kano scholars’ recognition of Ibrāhīm Niasse gave a decisive impetus to the Tijānī flood, and fixed the hagiographical record of the movement around five core elements: 1) a prediction by the order’s founder; 2) an ‘unveiling’ (*mukāshafa*) received by Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse; 3) the endorsement of the latter by some key sources of authority

<sup>5</sup> The significance of the Mauritanian link in the career of Ibrāhīm Niasse is discussed thoroughly in Seesemann: “The *Shurafā*’ and the Blacksmith”.

<sup>6</sup> Sufyānī: *al-Ifāda*, 83.

within the order, in particular the Moroccan Shaykh Aḥmad Sukayrij (d. 1943)<sup>7</sup> and some prominent Mauritanian circles; 4) the efficacy of his method of *tarbiya*; 5) the quick spread of the order in Nigeria and West Africa.

The events that occurred in Kano, though obviously connected with the general history of the movement, were also rooted in the cultural ambiance of the Nigerian town, and can be appreciated to their fullest from the point of view of its intellectual and religious history. This is what this article will try to do, and such was already the approach of John Paden in his book *Religion and Political Culture in Kano*, whose sections on the Tijāniyya provide abundant insights into the history of the order in the Nigerian city to the early 1960s.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Shaykh Aḥmad Sukayrij was the main source of authority in the *ṭarīqa* of Shaykh Ibrāhīm's father, al-Ḥājj 'Abd Allāh Niasse. Ibrāhīm also met him in 1936, when he first visited Morocco. Sukayrij was a *qāḍī* and a Sufi, and was widely considered as the foremost spiritual authority of the Tijāniyya in the early twentieth century.

<sup>8</sup> Paden, J.: *Religion and Political Culture in Kano*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973, 73-145. The date of Shaykh Ibrāhīm's first visit to Nigeria that set off the realignment of the Kano Hausa scholarly class, identified by John Paden as 1938, has been reassessed by Rüdiger Seesemann, with evidence from Ibrāhīm Niasse's own travelogues and other writings, as 1945 (oral communication; see also Seesemann: "The *Shurafā'* and the Blacksmith", 85). In a first-hand written account by the Nigerian Muḥammad ath-Thānī b. al-Ḥasan Kāfanghā (Kāfanghā, M. Th., *Risāla fī tārikh majī' ash-Shaykh Ibrāhīm Inyās ilā Kanū auwal marra*, Kano: Northern Maktabat Printing Press, no date, 41) the date is stated as 1364/1944-45, at the end of 'the war to Hitler'. Paden claims that the first, pre-war visit was kept secret, but does not mention his sources. Kāfanghā's above-quoted *risāla* adds that the Moroccan Shaykh Aḥmad Sukayrij was communicated in a dream of Shaykh Aḥmad at-Tijānī two verses of poetry that had to be sent to Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse, urging him to postpone his trip to Fez and Kano after the end of the war (Kāfanghā: *Risāla*, 43; in this verse, Shaykh at-Tijānī addresses the Senegalese as 'authentic inheritor of my secret'). The fact that the Senegalese traveled to Nigeria after World War II modifies significantly the chronology of the events as narrated in Paden's book, but the main arguments put forward as explanation of the transition from the point of view of the town's political history remain valid: in a time of commercial and political growth of Kano, the Emir Abdullāhi Bayero and his entourage of Fulani '*ulamā'* found in the Tijāniyya Niyāssiyya an avenue to promote the independence of Kano Emirate from the Sultan of Sokoto, traditionally linked to the Qādiriyya, while the Hausa and Kanuri scholars who were associated with the commoners and the traders of the city were attracted by the idea of the mass participation to Sufism, that echoed their aspiration to increased social participation.

Ibrāhīm Niasse met for the first time with the Emir of Kano Abdullāhi Bayero in Mecca, during the pilgrimage rites of 1937.<sup>9</sup> Abdullāhi Bayero had previously been persuaded by his religious counselor and minister, Wālī Sulaymān (d. 1939), that during the trip he would meet with the *ghawth az-zamān* (the savior of the age), the highest rank in the esoteric hierarchy of Sufi saints at every given time. Returning to Nigeria, Abdullāhi Bayero informed his closest associates among the Tijānī scholars in Kano of his meeting with Ibrāhīm Niasse and of the station (*maqām*) that he reportedly had. The prestige of the Senegalese spread first among the scholarly families that were associated with the aristocracy of the town. Then, when Ibrāhīm Niasse visited Kano after the war bringing some copies of his books (a key text being the *Kāshif al-ilbās*), his influence also started to spread among another influential circle of Tijānī scholars of the city, those formed in legal studies at the hand of Muḥammad Salga (d. 1938). Most of the *salgāwā*, as this network of scholars was known in Kano, affiliated to the Senegalese, and a group of them followed him in Kaolack to undergo personalized training in Sufism. Upon their return, they would begin a capillary action of promotion of the Tijāniyya and would engage in a remarkable literary activity.

Based on these two processes, John Paden identifies the role of the movement he calls 'reformed Tijāniyya', and the reason behind its success, in overcoming the ethnic cleavages that affected the expanding but separate Tijānī circles existing in Kano at the beginning of the twentieth century: a Fulani scholarly class close to Wālī Sulaymān, the Emir and his power base, which had been animated principally by the Mauritanian Sharīf Ujdūd, and a Hausa and Kanuri scholarly class (principally represented by the followers of Muḥammad Salga), which was associated with traders and commoners and whose link to the Tijāniyya had been revived in the 1920s by a visit of the Moroccan Muḥammad al-'Alamī (d. 1969).<sup>10</sup> The realignment of these two groups

<sup>9</sup> Paden: *Religion and Political Culture*, 97.

<sup>10</sup> Muḥammad al-'Alamī founded the first public *zāwiya* of the order in Kano city, in the Northern ward of Koki. For the activities of this Tijānī center, and of the major figures who animated it (Muḥammad Salga and Abū Bakr Mijinyawa), see Paden: *Religion and Political Culture*, 87-90. It is worth noting that both Ujdūd and al-'Alamī were disciples of the Moroccan Maḥammad al-Nazīfī (d. 1943), a scholar of Marrakesh. In a poem on

of scholars under the leadership of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niase—concludes Paden—reunited the Tijānī scholarly community of Kano under a single, external authority provided with a solid international arrangement.

Other significant contributions to the study of the *fayḍa tijāniyya* movement in Kano are an article by Mervyn Hiskett<sup>11</sup> and an unpublished thesis by Ibrahim Tahir.<sup>12</sup> While the first connects the expansion of the movement to its promise of broadening the access to spiritual attainments commonly reserved to an elite of ascetics, the second illustrates the correspondences between the expansion of Kano as an international commercial center at the half of the century and the construction of the *fayḍa tijāniyya* network.

The present article, which originates from a research on the developments of networks of *tafsīr* studies in contemporary Northern Nigeria,<sup>13</sup> explores the impact of the *fayḍa tijāniyya* transition upon the wider networks of Islamic knowledge in the Northern Nigerian metropolis of Kano. John Paden has already stressed the role of the ‘tijānī flood’ in inspiring a sort of ‘literary renaissance’ in Kano and a boom of religious

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the Tijānī path (*al-Yāqūta al-farīda*), Naẓīfī had some verses that mentioned the coming of the *fayḍa* and emphasized its connection to the end of time. These verses would be quoted by the followers of the *fayḍa tijāniyya* as an anticipation of the achievements of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niase. It is possible that the expectation of the *fayḍa* was a theme that was discretely emphasized by some disciples of Naẓīfī, and that the link to the Moroccan scholar revived in Kano by Ujdūd and al-‘Alamī in the 1920s was an important element to create the *humus* of expectations upon which the *fayḍa* of Ibrāhīm Niase would blossom a few years later.

<sup>11</sup> Hiskett: “The Community of Grace”. This article, in fact, observes the emergence of the *fayḍa tijāniyya* (here named ‘the Community of Grace’) among the Hausa-speaking Muslim communities of urban Togo and Ghana, and is not directly concerned with Nigeria as such. The Tijānī communities of Togo and Ghana, however, after the 1960s were largely dependant upon the Nigerian (Kano) link.

<sup>12</sup> Tahir, I.A.: *Scholars, Sufis, Saints and Capitalists in Kano 1904-1974: the Pattern of a Bourgeois Revolution in an Islamic Society*, unpublished PhD Thesis, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1975.

<sup>13</sup> In two preceding articles drawing on the same research, I have looked at written Hausa translations of the Qur’ān (Brigaglia, A.: “Two recent Hausa translations of the Qur’ān and their doctrinal background”, in: *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 35, 4, 2005) and at oral *tafsīr* broadcast through the radio (Brigaglia, A.: “The Radio Kaduna *Tafsīr* (1978-1992) and the construction of public images of Muslim scholars in the Nigerian media”, in: *Journal of Islamic Studies* (Cape Town), 27, 2007).

literature in Arabic and Hausa.<sup>14</sup> Paden sees the Kano scholarship revival mainly as a revival of Sufi knowledge, and emphasizes the *mawlid* collective celebrations as the chief yearly occasion for the elaboration of the order's doctrine, with laudatory poems written and/or recited allowing the articulation and popularization of its doctrine about the Prophet's supra-temporal *ḥaqīqa*—'real essence'.<sup>15</sup> The latter is a recurrent theme of the Tijāniyya, and one to which a vital role is attached in the process of spiritual realization.<sup>16</sup> For most of those who joined the *fayḍa* movement in Kano, Sufi gnosis was, in fact, the strongest motivating force. As one of the *salgāwā* scholars/traders and a chief protagonist of the transition says:

We had been hoping to acquire from our masters—may the mercy of God be upon them—the second major component of Sufi knowledge, that is, being drawn (*al-jadhḥ*) to the divine presence (*al-ḥaḍra al-quḍsiyya*), but we did not succeed to achieve that from them. What they had been pointing us to, and trained in—may God reward them abundantly—was only the first component of Sufism, which is compulsory to every Muslim (*fard 'ayn*): acquitting blameworthy qualities from oneself, and acquiring praiseworthy ones. This is what is referred to conventionally as 'the etiquette of the spiritual path' (*ādab as-sulūk*), and it is the subject about which al-Imām al-Ghazālī has written in the second half of his book 'the Revivification' (*al-Iḥyā'*), praised by an erudite with the verse: 'If you want to be brought back to life / stick to what you find in the Revivification'. All the books and poems of our scholars, of Shaykh 'Uthmān (Ḍan Fodio), the reviver of religion, of his brother ('Abd Allāh Ḍan Fodio) and his son (Muḥammad Bello) revolve around the first component (of Sufism) [...]. But when I met with the Shaykh [Ibrāhīm Niase]—may God be pleased with him—, and he was shown something about me, he said: 'what do you want?' I answered: 'I hope from

<sup>14</sup> Paden: *Religion and Political Culture*, 117. As a literary phenomenon in the history of the region, the boom of Tijāni authorship in Kano is probably the most important development after the one that had been inspired by the Ḍan Fodio family and its associates in connection with the Fulani *jihād* between the end the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. For an overview of the literary output of the two groups, see Hunwick J.O. (comp.): *Arabic Literature of Africa, vol. II*, Leiden: Brill, 1995, 52-212 (the *Ḍan Fodio* family) and 256-316 (the Kano Tijānis of the twentieth century).

<sup>15</sup> Paden: *Religion and Political Culture*, 125ff.

<sup>16</sup> See Wright Z.V.: *On the Path of the Prophet: Shaykh Ahmad Tijani and the Tariqa Muhammadiyya*, Atlanta: The African-American Islamic Institute, 2005: especially Ch. V, pp. 135-158.

God the most high that He may bring me to Him through you'. He said: 'this is nothing difficult to God'. And indeed, it was as he had said, may God be pleased with him.<sup>17</sup>

The fact that the *fayḍa tijāniyya* group emphasized direct taste (*dhawq*) of spiritual knowledge (*ma'rifa*) was certainly true as stressed by John Paden and confirmed by Muḥammad ath-Thānī (*Sani*) Kāfanghā's account. This is not sufficient, however, to assess the group's impact in Kano intellectual and religious life. The strategies these scholars implemented to enhance the impact of the *fayḍa tijāniyya* in the public arena of Kano, in fact, will be focused—as will be seen below—on the dissemination of Islamic knowledge, with a special emphasis on *tafsīr*, and not on ubiquitous ecstatic gatherings of *dhikr*. The doctrines on cosmology, prophethood and sainthood from which the spiritual practices of the group derived their meaningfulness were understood in the light of the Qur'ānic paradigm, and transmitted between the lines of God's own words. Public sessions of *tafsīr* were from the very beginning a chief element of the *fayḍa* revival in Kano, involving a profound introversion (in the sense of 'twisting inward') of the standard parameters of interpretation, which on its turn would reinforce the extroversion (movement outward, 'flood') of the scholarly group who championed it.

### Islamic Education and *tafsīr* Studies in Kano

Some important contributions have been made to the history and to the anthropology of Islamic education and learning in West Africa. While the elementary level of Qur'ānic education has drawn mainly the attention of anthropologists<sup>18</sup>, historians and scholars of Islamic

<sup>17</sup> Kāfanghā: *Risāla*, 45.

<sup>18</sup> For an introduction to Qur'ānic schooling in a West African society (Jenne in Mali) and to the esoteric practices that were associated with it, see the works of Geert Mommersteeg (especially Mommersteeg, G.: "L'education coranique au Mali: le pouvoir des mots sacrés", in: B. Sanankoua & L. Brenner (eds.): *L'enseignement islamique au Mali*, Bamako: Jamana, 1991). Other useful materials on the subject, always with a regional focus, are the works of Corinne Fortier on Mauritania (Fortier, C.: "Mémorisation et audition: l'enseignement coranique chez les Maures de Mauritanie", in: *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara*, Paris, 11,

studies have focused primarily on the formation of literate classes and the multiple ways they have engaged political power.<sup>19</sup>

Traditional education in Muslim West Africa was often characterized by a markedly initiatic nature. A deep fracture was maintained between the methodology of the elementary level, prior to puberty and intellectual maturity and focused only on the *passive* memorization of the Qur'ān and on the practical embodiment of the essential markers of a Muslim life, and that of the higher level, which promoted the *active* search of knowledge of various disciplines at the feet of several individual masters. The curricula of the secondary level of education, which

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1997; Fortier, C.: "Une pédagogie coranique: modes de transmission des savoirs islamiques (Mauritanie)", in: *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 169/170, 2003) and of Renaud Santerre on Cameroon (Santerre, R.: *Pédagogie musulmane d'Afrique Noire*, Montréal: Presse de l'Université De Montréal, 1973), as well as Seydou Cissé's book on Islamic education in Africa (Cissé, S.: *L'enseignement islamique en Afrique de l'Ouest*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992)—focused also on Mali, its title notwithstanding. Louis Brenner's monograph (*Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), which reconstructs the transformations of Islamic education in Mali from an anthropological, political and sociological perspective, with a wealth of historical data, is the most comprehensive interpretative essay on Islam and education in Africa to date. See also Rudolph Ware's thesis (Ware, R.T.: *Knowledge, Faith and Power: A History of Qur'anic Schooling in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Senegal*, PhD Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2004) for another attempt to make a cultural, economic and political history of Qur'anic education in a West African country.

<sup>19)</sup> Examples of studies with a regional focus are: Wilks, I.: "The Transmission of Islamic Learning in the Western Sudan", in: J. Goody (ed.), *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968 (on Ghana); Chamberlin, J.W.: *The Development of Islamic Education in Kano Nigeria with Emphasis on Legal Education in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, PhD Thesis, New York: Columbia University, 1975 (on Northern Nigeria); Anwar, A.: *Struggle for influence and identity: the 'Ulama in Kano, 1937-1987*, MA Thesis, Maiduguri: University of Maiduguri, 1989 (on Northern Nigeria); Bobboyi, H.: *The 'Ulama' of Borno: A Study of the Relations between Scholars and the State under the Sayfawa, 1470-1808*, PhD Thesis, Evanston: Northwestern University, 1992 (on Northern Nigeria); Reichmuth, S.: "A Regional Centre of Islamic Learning in Nigeria: Ilorin and its Influence on Yoruba Islam", in: N. Grandin & M. Gaborieau (eds.): *Madrassa: la Transmission du Savoir dans le Monde Musulman*, Paris: Arguments, 1997 (on South-Western Nigeria). See also the many case-studies published in a volume edited by Scott S. Reese: *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa*, Leiden: Brill, 2004. For a general overview of Islamic education and scholarship in Africa, see Reichmuth, S.: "Islamic Education and Scholarship in Sub-Saharan Africa", in: N. Levtzion & R.L. Pouwels (eds.): *The History of Islam in Africa*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000.

were pursued within a large scope of individual freedom, were usually modeled on standard classical Maghrebian sources covering Mālikī law, Arabic literature and grammar, Ash‘arī theology and, often, elements of Sufism and some practical-esoteric knowledge (amulet manufacture, prayers and herbal medicine).<sup>20</sup>

The study of *tafsīr* in West Africa was usually addressed only at the end of the higher training course. In a context of broad curricular freedom, where the student usually chooses the subjects and the books he will study and addresses them without observing a strict sequential order and time schedule (some *fiqh* and some linguistics being considered, however, as fundamental and propedeutic), the study of *tafsīr* makes exception, and access to it is often restricted in some way, either formally—in some cases allowing the study of *tafsīr* only after the symbolic age of forty (the conventional age of prophecy)—or informally, by discouraging a student who is yet to undergo a thorough training in all the subsidiary disciplines to start attending *tafsīr* classes.<sup>21</sup> On the whole, a strong initiatic meaning is attached to the study of *tafsīr* in the formation of a Muslim scholar in West Africa, *tafsīr* studying being the phase that marks the consecration of a senior Muslim scholar and his access to the circle of the *‘ulamā’*. Just as the circular process of learning is started as a child by concentrating on the passive memorization of the Qur’ān, and continued as a student by experiencing a certain degree of ‘dispersal’ into multiplicity through the study of a number of apparently independent disciplines, it is also sealed by reverting back

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<sup>20</sup> A systematic study of the Malian *majlis*—the traditional setting of private higher Islamic education—has been attempted during the last few years by Tal Tamari. For an overview of Islamic higher education including lists of the standard works studied in the Malian *majlis* tradition, see Tamari, T.: “Islamic Higher Education in West Africa: Some Examples from Mali”, in: T. Bierschenk & G. Stauth (eds.): *Islam in Africa* (Yearbook of the Sociology of Islam, No. 4), Münster: LIT Verlag, 2002. The same author has also attempted a systematic analysis and comparison of the oral (especially Bambara) teaching of *tafsīr* by selected Malian *majlis* scholars, providing many insights on higher Islamic education in West Africa, and on its influence on the languages of the area (Tamari, T.: “L’Exégèse coranique (*Tafsīr*) en milieu Mandingue: rapport préliminaire sur une recherche en cours”, in: *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara*, 10, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> I have not observed any formal age limit being established for the study of *tafsīr* in Nigeria, but emphasis is always laid on the fact that one should only address it after having mastered Law, Grammar and Theology.

to the Qurʾān, this time with the theoretical apparatus that enables him to understand it and to grasp the fundamental unity of knowledge.

Other researches in different regions of West Africa have also suggested that a special value is accorded to *tafsīr*, often an initiatic one. Lamine Sanneh, in his classic study of the Mande-speaking Jakhanké clerical clan of Senegambia has pointed to the turbanding of a *tafsīr* scholar as the traditional ceremony marking the definitive acquisition of the status of a senior Jakhanké scholar,<sup>22</sup> while Elghassem has compared *tafsīr*-studying in Mauritania to a sort of ‘university’ of traditional Islamic education.<sup>23</sup>

The restriction of the study of *tafsīr* to small circles of scholars often meant that its practitioners rigidly attached themselves to a very limited set of sources, which they surrounded with a semi-sacral value.<sup>24</sup> In West Africa the nucleus of the exegetical tradition, the source that enjoyed universal recognition as the ‘authentic’, essential core of *tafsīr*, had been since the sixteenth century the concise exegesis of Jalāl ad-Dīn al-Maḥallī and Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī known as *Tafsīr al-jalālayn*. The *Tafsīr al-jalālayn* was used with all probability as an Arabic model for oral translations of the Qurʾān into local languages. The discipline of *tafsīr* in West Africa, in fact, was prevalently an oral activity, and was performed during the month of *Ramaḍān* as a sort of ritual to reinforce the piety of the Muslim community and to renew its bond to the Qurʾānic revelation, but rarely had it become an arena for the negotiation of theological orthodoxy as it often had in the Middle East during the Middle Age. In West Africa, limiting access to the more complex (and often doctrinally sectarian) classical *tafsīrs* to very restricted and cohesive circles of scholars was a strategy to avoid theological controversy.

<sup>22</sup>) Sanneh, L.: *The Jakhanké Muslim Clerics: A Religious and Historical Study of Islam in Senegambia*, University Press of America, 1989.

<sup>23</sup>) Elghassem, O.A.: *Enseignement traditionnel en Mauritanie: la mahadra ou l'école à dos de chameau*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997, 73.

<sup>24</sup>) A certain caution towards *tafsīr*-studying and *tafsīr*-making is in no way exclusive to West Africa, and the very fact that commenting upon God's own words should be considered licit or not from the point of view of the sacred law was not clear for the early Muslims. For an overview of the debates surrounding early *tafsīr*, see Birkeland, H.: “Old Muslim opposition against interpretation of the Koran”, in: A. Rippin (ed.): *The Qurʾān: Formative Interpretation*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.

All the same, written *tafsīr* had also experienced some original developments in West Africa, the most important being the works of the Nigerian ‘Abd Allāh ‘Dan Fodio (d. 1829). The junior brother of the Qādirī shaykh and leader of the Fulani *jihād* ‘Uthmān ‘Dan Fodio had to his credit a rich encyclopaedic exegesis (*Ḍiyā’ at-ta’wīl*) which was based on an extensive range of classical sources of the genre; a summarized one, *Kifāyat ḏu ‘afā’ as-Sūdān* meant at popularizing the essentials of the exegetical tradition for a wider public; and a didactic poem for students, *Miftāḥ at-tafsīr*. Mauritians had also their own record of works on *tafsīr*, the most important being the Sufi exegesis of Muḥammad b. al-Mukhtār al-Yadālī (d. 1753) of the Shādhiliyya order.<sup>25</sup>

In Nigeria, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Borno was unanimously considered as the most renowned place for the study of *tafsīr*. Some schools, however, existed in Kano too. As was the case for most of the disciplines of the higher Islamic curriculum, the teaching of exegesis was provided in the vestibule (in Hausa *soro*, or *zaurē*) of the teacher’s house. While basic Qur’ānic education was provided ubiquitously through the omnipresent Qur’ānic schools, some kind of a clanic arrangement presided over the supply of advanced disciplinary training in the *ilimi* (from Ar. *‘ilm*) schools. The teaching of each major discipline was concentrated in the houses of specialists of the subject, and kept under the supervision of a particular scholarly family. Elder members taught the major books to junior or aspirant *mālams* (from Ar. *mu’allim*), while part of the secondary teaching activity was delegated to the advanced students who attended the dwelling. The term ‘school’ (*makaranta*) designated either the house of an influential scholar, or a network of neighbouring houses under the control of a leading family specialized in the teaching of a discipline, sometimes even of a single book along with its commentaries. This does not mean that teachers did not know and consult wider sources for their *fatwās*. But they usually refrained from teaching books other than core traditional sources. This system guaranteed the uniform transmission of a solid

<sup>25</sup> See Leconte, F.: *Une exégèse [sic] mystique du Coran au XVIIIème siècle [sic] dans le Sud-Ouest de la Mauritanie (al-Gibla): aḏ-Ḍahab [sic] al-Ibrīz fī Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-‘Azīz de Muḥammad ibn al-Muḥtār al-Yadālī (1685-1753)*, Mémoire de Troisième Cycle, Aix-Marseille : Université de Provence, 1995.

body of knowledge, founded on a resolute Mālikism and on the commitment to the essentials of the Ash‘arī theological tradition. Yet, a certain degree of flexibility was allowed in the system: the importance attached to oral comments permitted the development of local bodies of knowledge around the basic texts, while the practice of free curricular choice and the absence of centralized institutions implementing an educational policy from above ensured that the teaching provided was, at the end of the day, the result of an informal negotiation between the offer (transmitted bodies of knowledge) and the demand of students, that could be partly influenced by changing circumstances.

The Kano scholarly community was permeated with a network of relations founded on reciprocal need: no family could claim universal pre-eminence in all fields of knowledge, and students had to be sent from one school to another if they wanted to diversify their curriculum. This reduced the risk of competition between scholarly networks. One may wonder if this system was not, to a certain degree, a product of the strict Fulani etiquette of shyness, dignified avoidance and self-restraint (*pulaako*), combined with the need for maintaining a certain level of cohesion among the scholarly class. According to a tacit agreement which provided the foundation of the town scholars’ etiquette, a *mālam* who had been formed into one of the major scholarly families was not expected to teach any book except the ones he had been explicitly entrusted with by his mentors, even when he had the skill to do so. Should students come to him from abroad asking for knowledge outside of his strict competence, he was supposed to send them to the ‘right’ family. Teaching a discipline out of one’s own competence was looked upon as interfering with somebody else’s affairs.

It was only at the time of the Emir Abdullāhi Bayero<sup>26</sup> that *tafsīrs* multiplied in Kano. Before that time, only three or four *mālams* performed *tafsīr* in the whole city. This was because those who learned *tafsīr* would not teach it, out of respect for the place where they had been trained in the discipline. Even if you asked them, they would not teach you *tafsīr*. Rather, they would address

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<sup>26</sup> Reigned 1927-53. As it was mentioned above, Emir Abdullāhi was one of the major brains behind the *fayda tijāniyya* transition in Kano.

you to their own master, or to the latter's sons. They would not dare teaching it themselves.<sup>27</sup>

It is difficult of course to rate how far this system did effectively work in Kano in the nineteenth century. Its somewhat idealized memory, however, is still strong within the scholarly families which hitherto controlled these networks of learning, as the Jar Kasa *tafsīr* school, to which Mālam Muḥammad al-Ghālī, author of the above statement, belongs.<sup>28</sup> Today, marginalized by the transformation of the whole system, the heads of the older schools tend to speak with some nostalgia of a 'golden age' based on an inflexible code of reciprocal respect (and avoidance) among scholars.

### The Jar Kasa School of *tafsīr*

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Kano was reputed mainly for the study of Mālikī jurisprudence, which was the monopoly of a scholarly clan based in Madabo ward, in the Northwestern section of the walled city. The study of advanced *fiqh* there was usually restricted to Khalīl b. Iṣḥāq's *Mukhtaṣar* and to its commentaries. The teaching of the *Mukhtaṣar* at Madabo and in Kano had been seemingly founded in the early nineteenth century by a scholar coming from Katsina.<sup>29</sup> The scholars who controlled the teaching of Mālikī law in Madabo were collectively referred to as the *madabāwā*, and constituted the main 'scholarly corporation' in Kano. Other (house or clan-based) schools existed that were known for the teaching of *ḥadīth* and *sīra*.

At that time, the city was not renowned for the study of *tafsīr*. The most sought after teachers for all the Qur'ānic subjects (memorization,

<sup>27</sup> Mālam Muḥammad al-Ghālī, interview (Kano, 2 Sept. 2005).

<sup>28</sup> My main source on the history of the Jar Kasa school is a series of interviews with Mālam Muḥammad al-Ghālī, with his brother 'Abd al-Wahhāb b. Muḥammad Nūr al-Dīn, and with his nephew Ja'far b. Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad Nūr al-Dīn (Kano, 2-15 Sept 2005). I am grateful to all of them for their generous sharing of information and comments.

<sup>29</sup> Hunwick: *Arabic Literature of Africa*, vol. II, 256. Other sources claim an older origin, and trace it back to a clan of *Wangarāwā* (Mande speaking) immigrants who settled in the area as early as the fourteenth or fifteenth century (Chamberlin: *The Development of Islamic Education*, 53).

recitation, calligraphy, exegesis) were traditionally concentrated in Borno (Northeastern Nigeria), while the major centers for specializing in Arabic language (a necessary prerequisite of exegesis) were in the Emirate of Zaria, on the Southern confines of Hausaland. Oral *tafsīr*, however, was performed in Kano during the month of *Ramadān* at the Emir's Palace. More importantly, *tafsīr* was taught on a regular basis by some scholars, the most renowned being those attached to a house in the ward of 'Jar Kasa' ('red soil'). Jar Kasa is the older Hausa name of a neighbourhood located west of the central mosque and the Emir's palace, otherwise known as 'Kabara', from the village of origin of the Timbuktu scholar 'Umar al-Kabarī, who, after moving from Kabara near Timbuktu, had settled in Kano at the time of 'Uthmān 'Dan Fodio's *jihād* and established a center of Islamic learning in the city. According to the local tradition, another scholar and a contemporary of 'Umar al-Kabarī, 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh, had also come to Kano from the West, the Songhay speaking town of Gao in today's Eastern Mali. Mālam 'Alī settled in the area, founded a school of *tafsīr*, and when Shaykh 'Uthmān 'Dan Fodio's army conquered Kano he was appointed as the town's 'chief Qur'ānic recitor', *amīr al-qurrā*'.<sup>30</sup> The original building of the school has undergone several restorations, but still exists in its original structure. Its size and its location, in the heart of Kabara ward, confirm the claims made in the family's foundation history about the leading position that Mālam 'Alī was accorded within the town's scholarly circles.

Rather than with the name of the founder 'Alī of Gao, however, the Jar Kasa school of *tafsīr* is known today as *makarantar Mālam Shamsu*, by the name of Mālam Shams ad-Dīn (d. about 1947), who, among 'Alī's direct descendants, is the one who has contributed the greatest to the school's fame. His complete name was Muḥammad Shams ad-Dīn b. Muḥammad al-Madanī. He was born around 1871, and was a great-grandson of Mālam 'Alī, and the fourth in the line of his successors at the head of the school. His activity flourished in the same years as Muḥammad Salga, an era of profound transformation of Kano's religious culture. He may also have played some role in the events which led to the boom of the *salgāwā* network, for he was a teacher to some

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<sup>30</sup> Interviews with Mālam Muḥammad al-Ghālī (Kano: 2002).

of its future leading figures such as Mālam ‘Uthmān (known as *Shehu*)<sup>31</sup> Mai Hula (d. 1988). The development of the *salgāwā* network, however, would ultimately set off a decline of the Jar Kasa school of *tafsīr* together with that of other older networks.

Mālam Shamsu is not reported to have introduced any significant innovation in the content of the teaching of *tafsīr*, which was restricted among the Jar Kasa *mālam*s to the *Jalālayn*, nor in its technique. His achievements are assessed by his successors only in terms of quantity, the number of the students enrolled under his tutorage reaching extraordinary peaks particularly during the years 1930s-1940s, and of the regional extent of his network of students. The reason beyond this success reputedly lied only in his personal charisma due to an extraordinary *taqwā* (piety).

Mālam Shamsu’s grandchildren, who are the present principals of the Jar Kasa school, point to the growth of a regional network of students out of Kano town as the most significant development peculiar to Mālam Shamsu’s time, but stress that no change was made in the ways the *Jalālayn* was taught. Mālam Shamsu is remembered also for being the first of the Jar Kasa house *mālam*s to affiliate to the Tijāniyya *ṭariqa*, after a dream he made of the order’s founder. The teaching of the *Jalālayn* at the Jar Kasa school was greatly in vogue in the 1940s. Several well-known scholars of Kano, and some prominent figures who had an important role in the successive developments of the town’s religious life, such as Yūsuf Makwarari, who was the main deputy of the Qādiriyya leader Mālam Nāṣir Kabara, and Mālam ‘Shehu’ Mai Hula, who would become one of the leading promoters of the *fayḍa tijāniyya*, were introduced to the study of *tafsīr* by Mālam Shamsu.

Before Mālam Shamsu’s time, most of the *tafsīr* scholars living in neighboring towns and formed at Jar Kasa would not establish schools of *tafsīr* of their own, but would always insist on sending their own students to Jar Kasa in Kano. Decentralization, on the contrary, would become a hallmark of the *salgāwā*, and would contribute to their success in establishing wider—though somewhat less homogenous—networks.

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<sup>31</sup> As a form of respect for Shaykh ‘Uthmān ‘Dan Fodio, all those who carry the name ‘Uthmān are simply addressed as *Shehu* (*shaykh*) in the Fulani scholarly circles of Northern Nigeria.

The fact that the authority on which they depended was an external one (Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niase, based in Senegal) was a major factor that helped the *salgāwā* to emancipate themselves from the strict patterns of authority of Kano elderly scholarly class, and produce an independent, multi-centric scholarly network.

Today, the teaching of the *Jalālayn* is still performed at the Jar Kasa school, reportedly identically to the way it was in the 1930s. About twenty senior students attend the *Jalālayn* class of Mālam Muḥammad al-Ghālī (Mālam Shamsu's grandson). It is still a significant number, but not if compared to the golden age of Mālam Shamsu, when students attending advanced *tafsīr* training at any given time reportedly exceeded a hundred. The teaching of *tafsīr* is run every day (except Thursdays and Fridays) in the morning. A normal teaching session starts at about 7.30 am, and continues until about 11 am. Though the rhythm is, consistently with the standards of traditional Islamic higher teaching, a quiet one to allow concentration, there is no break and the work can be indeed a very demanding one for the teacher. Only one senior *mālam* is allowed to teach *tafsīr* at each generation, and he will hold the title of *mai tafsiri* (chief-exegete). With the authorization to teach the *Jalālayn* to students, at each generation the *mai tafsiri* inherits the direction of the whole school activities.

On the whole, the organism of the Jar Kasa school is clearly grown out of the imperative of guaranteeing the greatest uniformity of transmission. Techniques and content of the teaching routine, but also the rules governing the transmission of the position of chief *mai tafsiri* are oriented towards a conservative goal.

The only matter taught in the school, as far as *tafsīr* is concerned, is the *Jalālayn*, and students learn a very accurate translation of the book into Hausa. Though scholars may read other *tafsīrs* on their own, none of the more voluminous books of *tafsīr* is allowed to penetrate into the curricular offer of this school. This is not perceived as a limit by the Jar Kasa *tafsīr* scholars. As the emphasis is entirely placed upon soundness and uniformity of transmission, the introduction of new books is discouraged because it may open the door to innovation and to deviation from accepted patterns of interpretation.

From the time of the founder to the present principal of the Jar Kasa school, the position of *mai tafsiri* has been always transmitted according

to a strict hereditary pattern. The designated successor undergoes a rigorous training, by acting for a number of years as the *mai jan baki* (*Jalālayn* text-reader) of his father or senior brother, until the death or retirement of the latter. In this way, memorization of the oral text (the translation in Hausa performed by the *mai tafsiri*) is facilitated along with that of the written one (the Arabic *Jalālayn* read when acting as a *mai jan baki*), and the uniformity of the oral transmission is better preserved.

### The Emergence of the *salgāwā*

According to Mālam Muḥammad al-Ghālī, in the late 1930s, when the older tradition of *tafsir* teaching at Jar Kasa was reaching its peak under Mālam Shamsu's headship, there were only about three or four locations in Kano where public sessions of *Ramaḍān tafsir* were performed. In the early 1960s on the other hand, according to another local source, the number of public *Ramaḍān tafsir* in town could be ranged at about fifty.<sup>32</sup> This dramatic increase in the popularity of public *tafsir* was the result of the efforts of the scholars who, following Ibrāhīm Niasse, rallied under the banner of the *ḥayda tijāniyya*. The *salgāwā* network, in particular, was the main responsible for popularization of *tafsir*, and, at the same time, of the Tijānī 'flood' in Kano.

Muḥammad Salga (d. 1938) was the *imām* of the first Tijānī *zāwiya* in Kano, founded by al-ʿAlamī in the 1920s, and most of his students were affiliated with the Tijāniyya. Their scholarly activities in the 1930s, however, had focused mainly on the interpretation of Mālikī law. Though Sufism was practiced actively and the Tijānī identity was already distinctive of the network, Sufi knowledge was not an issue of intellectual exercise. Muḥammad Salga had risen to public notoriety when he had attacked the rituals of the burial and the prayer for the dead, as they were practiced and taught by the scholars of Madabo (*madabāwā*)

<sup>32</sup> Mālam Muḥammad Kani, interview (Kano: 14 Sept. 2005). This number is limited to what may be classified as 'scholarly' *tafsirs*, and does not include more popular genres, like the sessions of dramatized *tafsir* based on the Qur'ānic stories of the prophets (*qiṣṣa*) that itinerant *mālams*/story-tellers improvise at public places (markets, bus stations). The accuracy of the number mentioned by Mālam Muḥammad Kani is difficult to assess. Today the number of public *tafsirs* in Kano is no doubt well above fifty.

with whom he had previously studied, condemning them as unlawful *bida'* (innovations).<sup>33</sup> A significant body of polemical legal literature was produced in the 1930s by the *salgāwā* and *madabāwā* scholars on the issue of the burial rites. The *salgāwā* showed to be particularly resourceful writers of doctrinal literature. Muḥammad Salga, in fact, had encouraged his students to engage in the deep study of Arabic grammar, to which scarce emphasis was hitherto given in the Kano traditional curricula. More generally, he had tried to provide them with a more multi-disciplinary approach to Islamic knowledge than the one provided by the *Madabo* tradition, focused only on Law. In the latter field, moreover, he had introduced some commentaries to the *Mukhtaṣar* of Khalīl b. Iṣḥāq that were not used by the *Madabo* scholars. In such a way, he had pushed his students to detour the monopoly that the *madabāwā* scholars exerted on the town's legal studies, and encouraged them to be more receptive to change. His students were provided with a new multidisciplinary synthesis of the traditional curriculum, and their study of other disciplines such as *sīra*, *ḥadīth*, grammar and *tafsīr* was to influence their understanding of the legal corpus. The *salgāwā* were also keen to expand their intellectual activities beyond the narrow confines of Kano's clan-based and mono-disciplinary schools.

After the death of their master, and probably under the inspiration, if not the direct encouragement, of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niase, *tafsīr* would naturally become the arena wherein the *salgāwā* scholars would be able to display, transmit and reproduce their new approach to knowledge. As it has already been remarked above, in the local arrangement of Islamic knowledge *tafsīr* was the only disciplinary field which allowed, for the few who had reached it, a relative disentanglement from the strict rules of *taqlīd* ('imitation'; abiding by the principle of scholastic authority) which governed other field. Salga's pupils would also start performing public sessions of *tafsīr* in Hausa independently from existing networks like that of the Jar Kasa school, thus favouring the formation of a wider space for the circulation of religious knowledge than was permitted by customary allotments.

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<sup>33</sup> On Muḥammad Salga and the *salgāwā*, see Paden: *Religion and Political Culture*, 90-94, 99-104.

It is probably upon a suggestion from Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse that the *salgāwā* scholars began to organize ubiquitously in Kano public sessions of *tafsīr* in Hausa during the month of *Ramaḍān*. What is certain, at least, is that they started to do so only in the early 1950s, after a first group of them had undergone a period of study in Kaolack with the Senegalese Sufi.

Interestingly, *tafsīr* had already played a decisive role in the earlier career of Ibrāhīm Niasse. In the late 1920s, about one year before his public claim of the *fayḍa* (1929), the Senegalese had established an independent public teaching of *tafsīr* in the village of Kosi, near the town of Kaolack in Senegal. The establishment of his oral *tafsīr* performance had also triggered a quarrel with his senior brother and *khalīfa* of their father, Muḥammad.<sup>34</sup> Notwithstanding the young age of the scholar (he was then in his twenties), the *tafsīr* of Ibrāhīm Niasse quickly became a pole of attraction for the group of Senegalese and Mauritanian followers that would become the first nucleus of the ‘people of the flood’.

Apart from the *Jalālayn*, the main sources of the Senegalese in the field of *tafsīr*, judging from the quotations in some of his writings<sup>35</sup> and

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<sup>34</sup> The story has it that Muḥammad Khalīfa prevented his brother from having access to a copy of a manuscript of the *Tafsīr al-jalālayn* that had belonged to their father, which Ibrāhīm wanted to use during his *tafsīr* reading. Ibrāhīm insisted that he had not to stop his reading, and began an independent teaching, quoting from memory whenever necessary. Students started gathering around Ibrāhīm, and Muḥammad Khalīfa decided to send his brothers Muḥammad Zaynab and ‘Uthmān to listen to their cadet brother’s *tafsīr* and report back about it. Apparently they said: ‘What he is teaching, if our father knew it, he kept it secret. What Ibrāhīm is teaching now is not found in any books’ (interview with Shaykh Ḥasan Cisse, New York: June 2007; I am also thankful to Zachary Wright and to Shaykh Tijānī Cisse for their comments). Muḥammad Niasse was also a prolific author of prose and of compelling religious verses. One of his prose works has been discussed in Kane, O.: “Muhammad Niasse (1881-1956) et sa réplique contre le pamphlet anti-tijānī de Ibn Mayaba”, in: D. Robinson & J.-L. Triaud (eds.), *Le temps des marabouts. A ḍiwān* of his in praise of the Prophet, and another in praise of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Tijānī are preserved in the collection of Arabic manuscripts of the Herskovits Library, Northwestern University, Evanston (respectively, No. Hunwick/492/PE and Hunwick/493/PE). Several of the many works by Ibrāhīm Niasse can also be consulted in the same collection.

<sup>35</sup> For instance, in *Kāshif al-ilbās* (Niasse, I.: *Kāshif al-ilbās ‘an fayḍat al-khatm Abi al-Abbās*, Cairo 2001) and *al-Hujja al-bāligha* (publ. Kano, no date).

from the manuscripts in his personal library,<sup>36</sup> were the following: 1) the Sufi *tafsīr* of the Mauritanian al-Yadālī (d. 1753); 2) that of the Turkish Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī (d. 1725); 3) the commentary on the *Jalālayn* by the Egyptian Mālikī jurist and Khalwatī Sufi Aḥmad aṣ-Ṣāwī (d. 1825). His audience, however, particularly appreciated the moments when—thus has it the account of the Nigerian Ṭāhir Baucī—‘taken off his glasses and laid down the book’, he left room for his additional comments, enriched with quotations from classical Sufi literature (the Moroccan Aḥmad Zarrūq and the Egyptian Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh).<sup>37</sup>

Shaykh Ibrāhīm’s exegesis was punctuated with metaphysical and cosmological themes. Reference was often made to the symbolic architecture of the Qur’ān, through references to the doctrine of numbers. The underlying idea was that God’s creation is disseminated with marks linking mundane and ultra-mundane realities, encoded in numbers of which the Qur’ān is the ultimate key. A central place is reserved in particular to the number 5, the cipher of the created worlds, which rests at the heart of a set of analogies explored by a number of Sufis well before the Senegalese scholar. In the realm of macrocosmic reality number 5 corresponds to the five ‘presences’ (*ḥaḍarāt*) or stratified realms of cosmic existence, that provide the architecture for the flood of spiritual knowledge to the disciple as it is conceptualized in the process of *tarbiya* (Sufi training). In the microcosmic realm it corresponds to the five organs of knowledge: *nafs* or individual soul,

<sup>36</sup> The catalogue of the manuscripts of Shaykh Ibrāhīm’s library has been published by Ousmane Kane (*Fihris makḥṭūṭāt maktabat ash-shaykh Mūr Mbāy Sīsī wa-maktabat al-Ḥājj Mālik Sī wa-maktabat ash-shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyās fī Sinighāl*, London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Mālam Ṭāhir Baucī (interview, Kaduna: October 2002). Some old tapes of Ibrāhīm Niassé’ Arabic *tafsīr* still circulate in Nigeria, and some attempts have also been made at putting them into writing for publishing. Notes from a public *tafsīr* performed by the Senegalese in the month of Sha‘bān 1375 (March-April 1956), presumably during a visit in Nigeria, have been published at the initiative of ‘Uthmān al-Fallātī, one of the leaders of the Tijāniyya in Nguru (today’s Yobe State, Northeastern Nigeria). The collection, published with the title *al-Ḥikam al-quṭbiyya al-ma’khūdhā min al-qalam al-sirinbiyya*, is about 19 pages long, and includes sections on the esoteric commentary of the *Fātiḥa*, of *Sūrat al-Ikhlās*, *al-Falaq* and *al-Nās*. It is also followed by an interesting mystical dialogue that occurred between the Senegalese and his ‘innermost self’ (*‘an sirri*), who was reporting from my Lord (*‘an rabbī*)’.

which perceives through the physical senses; *'aql* or logical intellect, which elaborates the data of senses into notions; *qalb* or heart, which illuminates analogies; *rūḥ* or spiritual self, which perceives authentic visions; *sirr* or innermost Self (the abode where perception, perceiving subject and perceived object are but one thing). To these meanings allude, in reversed order, the five Names of God mentioned in the *Fātiḥa*: *Allāh* (the Name of the Essence) presides over the human *sirr*; *ar-Rabb* (Breeder) is the Name presiding over the human *rūḥ*; *ar-Raḥmān* (All-Merciful) is the Name presiding over the human *qalb*; *ar-Raḥīm* (Compassionate) is the Name presiding over the human *'aql*; *al-Malik* (King) is the Name presiding over the human *nafs*. These Names, on their turn, correspond to the fundamental rulings of the sacred Law (*sharī'a*), enclosed in the five pillars (*arkān*) of Islam as the last revealed religion: the *shahāda* (testifying that there is no other God than Allāh, and that Muḥammad is his messenger, the *ṣalāt* (ritual prayer), the *ṣiyām* (fast of Ramaḍān), the *zakāt* (obligatory alms), the *ḥajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca).<sup>38</sup> The audience was left with a vivid feeling of the unity underlying existing entities, but at the same time supplied with a coherent theological view of the implications of the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān, and persuaded to adhere firmly to the legal aspects of religion.

The latter aspect was undoubtedly a major ingredient of the success of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niassé' *tafsīr* among the Nigerian group of the *salgāwā*, who were primarily students of Law trying to implement locally an agenda of reform. It is primarily through his *tafsīr* that the Senegalese could bond exterior and interior aspects of the revelation in a coherent whole: the sacred text endorsed the pursuit of gnosis (*ma'rifa*), by pointing to the fundamental unity of all existing realities; gnosis, by unveiling the secrets of the acts of worship and of the architecture of 'formal' religion, reinforced the audience's commitment to the law established by the sacred text.

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<sup>38</sup>) The correspondence between the five of God mentioned in the *Fātiḥa* and the five pillars of Islam is a favorite theme in the *tafsīr* of most of Ibrāhīm Niassé's students in Nigeria. See for instance the *tafsīr* of Shaykh Ṭāhir 'Uthmān Baucī briefly described in Brigaglia: "The Radio Kaduna *Tafsīr* (1978-1992)".

The intellectual aspirations that had been nurtured by the *salgāwā* in the local context of Kano found also a powerful parallel, on the spiritual domain, in Niasse's characteristic Sufi doctrine of the *fayḍa tijāniyya*. The latter's suggestion of the possibility of a transforming, instant effusion (*fayḍ*) of gnosis (*ma'rifa*), of a generous facilitation of spiritual training (*tarbiya*), of a liberating, abundant series of breathings (*nafahāt*) following a time of contraction (*ḍīq*), resonated as an answer to the *salgāwā*'s aspiration to a freer circulation of Islamic knowledge in Kano city. At the same time, the encounter with Ibrāhīm Niasse would produce among the *salgāwā* a shift in the overall emphasis of their intellectual revival from Law to Sufism. The young *salgāwā* scholars (Tijānī 'Uthmān and Muḥammad ath-Thānī Kāfanghā) who had written in support of Muḥammad Salga's condemnation of the burial practices, had shown in their earlier writings a rather intransigent standing, and in their zeal towards change of local practices they had developed a harsh concept of *bid'a*, somehow anticipating the attitudes of later, and much more radical, reformist movements of Salafi or Wahhābī inspiration.<sup>39</sup> By having their focus on Sufism reinforced through Niasse's influence, the *salgāwā* scholars experienced a fundamental re-orientation. In the 1970s, it will be from the *fayḍa tijāniyya* scholars that the most formidable opponents of Wahhābī-oriented reformism in Nigeria will stem.

The impact of the *salgāwā-fayḍa* network in the history of Kano *tafsīr* tradition is to be appreciated not only in terms of the diffusion and popularization of public exegesis, but also of the introduction of a wider range of sources in the scholarly tradition, of innovative elements in the performance of public exegesis, and of a more versatile approach to Islamic knowledge.

### Diversification of Sources

The sources of the *salgāwā/fayḍa tijāniyya* authors were partially stemming from Niasse's input, combined with their earlier formation at the

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<sup>39</sup> For details on the arguments put forward during the *madabāwā* vs. *salgāwā* polemics, see Anwar: *Struggle for Influence and Identity*, 42-57.

hand of Muḥammad Salga. Characteristic sources of this group of exegetes soon became the following: the already mentioned *Ḥāshiya 'alā al-jalālayn* by Aḥmad b. aṣ-Ṣāwī and *Rūḥ al-bayān* by Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī al-Bursawī, and *Zād al-masīr fī 'ilm at-tafsīr* by Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1200).<sup>40</sup>

The use of Ṣāwī's supra-commentary to the *Jalālayn* was probably encouraged by the fact that it offered an uncompromising rejoinder to the spread of Wahhābī anti-Sufi doctrines. The introduction of this text in the Malian curricula of *tafsīr* has also been reported as a relatively recent addition.<sup>41</sup> This *tafsīr* contained a passage in which Wahhābism was equated with Khārijism (commentary to verse XXXV: 6: 'The devil is an enemy for you, so treat him as an enemy. He only summons his faction to be prey of the flaming Fire'), which has been reportedly censored from more recent editions of the book.<sup>42</sup> Its introduction in the curricula of the Nigerian scholars, while reinforcing their commitment to the collective scholarly heritage encompassed in the *Jalālayn*, confirmed that Sufism was an integral part of the same heritage, and provided them with an authoritative polemical precedent against Wahhābism. As for Jawzī's, it is a theological *tafsīr*, containing amongst other things a strong denunciation of the anthropomorphic doctrines (*tashbīh*) of some of the author's contemporaries. The debate over the interpretation of the Qur'ānic verses mentioning attributes of God as 'the Hand', 'the Face', and his 'settling on the Throne', will also become a *topos* of the Nigerian polemical *tafsīrs*, with Sufi/Ash'arī scholars accusing their Salafī/Wahhābī counterparts of upholding anthropomorphic ideas. In this perspective, the exegesis of Jawzī, who was a strict Ḥanbalī critical of some of his Sufi contemporaries, was instrumental to oppose the anti-Ash'arī dimension of the reformists' *tafsīr*. As for Ḥaqqī's, his comments on Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine and his quotes from classical mystical poets—endorsed and transmitted by Ibrāhīm Niasse—provided the *salgāwā's* exegesis with an explicit Sufic input.

<sup>40</sup> These considerations are based on a series of interviews I had with a number of *ḥajjā* Kano scholars during the years 2002 to 2005. In particular, I wish to mention and thank the following: Mālam Bashīr Buhārī al-Rūmī, Mālam Ismā'īl Khalīfā, Mālam Muḥammad Kani Gusau, Mālam Rufā'ī Abū Bakr Na-Wālī.

<sup>41</sup> Tamari: *Islamic Higher Education*, 108.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/nub/masudq3.htm> (last consulted 13/03/2009).

Taken as a whole, these three sources provide a highly organic approach to Muslim exegesis under its classical tripartite articulation, with Ṣāwī featuring as a mainly *fiqhī* (legal) *tafsīr*, Jawzī as a theological one, and Ḥaqqī as a Sufi or mystical one. On the whole, the *salgāwā/fayḍa* scholars' ambition was to refresh the local scholarly tradition and enhance its dynamism, rather than to revise its fundamental tenets.

The three texts mentioned, however, though they enjoyed greater diffusion than others, can not be considered as the sole sources of Nigerian modern *tafsīr*. This is especially true in the case of the *salgāwā* scholars, more than in the case of their counterparts formed at earlier traditions. The *Jalālayn* and Ṣāwī remain the most common *muqarrar* texts (texts read through the oral performance, providing the basis for the author's additional comments), but many other texts are consulted and occasionally quoted by the authors of oral communal *tafsīr*, from the exegesis of the local father of Nigerian *tafsīr* 'Abd Allāh 'Dan Fodio to standard classical sources such as aṭ-Ṭabarī (d. 923), Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373), as-Suyūṭī (d. 1505), al-Jamal (d. 1789), al-Qurṭubī (d. 1272), al-Bayḍāwī (d. 1286), al-Khāzin (d. 1341), an-Nasafī (d. 1310), ar-Rāzī (d. 1209) and az-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144).

### Stylistic Innovation

Aḥmad at-Tijānī b. 'Uthmān al-Kanawī (d. 1970), popularly known as Mālam Tijānī 'Uthmān *Zangon Barebari*, was a leading representative of the *fayḍa tijāniyya* in Kano, one of the first to engage in public *tafsīr*, and the most audacious in innovating its practice in Kano.<sup>43</sup> His earlier formation was entirely local. He had studied Law and Linguistics with Muḥammad Salga, and Sufism with Abū Bakr Mijinyawa.<sup>44</sup> He had also studied *tafsīr* with Mālam Sānī (i.e. Muḥammad ath-Thānī) of *Shatsari* ward, the other leading place for the study of the discipline in Kano in the early twentieth century, side by side the Jar Kasa school. In the 1930s, he had set a school of his own, where he was teaching

<sup>43</sup> Tijānī 'Uthmān has also written some works. For a list, see Hunwick: *Arabic Literature of Africa*, vol. I, 284-86.

<sup>44</sup> Abū Bakr, I.: *Lamḥa 'an tarjamat ash-Shaykh Aḥmad at-Tijānī bin 'Uthmān*, unpublished paper (Kano: no date, library of Shaykh Ismā'īl Khalīfa), 2.

primarily Mālikī Law. Mālam Tijānī ʿUthmān belonged to first group of Kano scholars that travelled to Kaolack to undergo training at the hands of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse. Upon his return he started to organize annual public activities (night gatherings based on *dhikr* and reading of poetry during the month of *Rabīʿ al-Awwal*, the month of the Prophet's birthday; sessions of public Qurʾānic exegesis during the early afternoons of the month of *Ramaḍān*) that transformed his school into the most popular venue of Kano collective devotional life during through the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>45</sup>

Tijānī ʿUthmān started performing his public *tafsīr* at the mosque of *Zangon Barebari* ward, which was located in the daedalus of narrow roads of the *birni*, east of Kano central market, but had a small open place (*dandali*) in the front. As it was customary, Tijānī ʿUthmān would sit on a mat or on a goat skin (*buzu*) inside the mosque, facing the audience sitting in front of him. For those who could not find room inside, additional mats would be spread out of the small mosque. After a few years, when the people attending *tafsīr* increased dramatically, he decided to move a few hundred meters further, to the larger paved street where his native house was located, close to *Gabari* corner, adjacent the city central market. To meet the logistic needs of this new arrangement, he introduced the habit of sitting upon a wooden platform, making his figure visible even from afar in the crowded street. An organizing committee had also to be established, to ensure that the increasingly demanding practical aspects of the organization be carried out efficiently. Later, also a loudspeaker was added, which enabled not only men attending, but also women of the surrounding neighbourhood to listen from the courtyards of houses.

The change from sitting on a goat skin to a small podium, and the introduction of a loudspeaker, were very significant at that time, as they concretely marked the transformation of *tafsīr* in Kano from a discipline of indoor learning to a public expression of scholarly talents. Tijānī

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<sup>45</sup>) For a description of such *mawlid* gatherings at the house of Mālam Tijānī ʿUthmān, see Paden: *Religion and Political Culture*, 124f. My reconstruction of his *tafsīr* includes data collected during interviews with Mālam Ismāʿil Khalīfā, and others provided by people of the area's neighborhood, together with further comments during conversations with other members of the town's scholarly class.

‘Uthmān was accompanied, canonically, by a *mai jan Aya* who read the Qur’ān. Aside the *mai jan Aya*, three or four of his students also sat, each of them holding a particular book. Tijānī’s favorite sources were aṣ-Ṣāwī, al-Jamal (an Egyptian and one of Ṣāwī’s teachers, author of another commentary on the *Jalālayn*), al-Khāzin (a fourteenth century theological exegesis) and Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī. When he wanted to quote from a relevant commentary, Tijānī ‘Uthmān would summon the correspondent student by saying, for instance: ‘*mai Sawi, wuri kaza!*’ (‘holder of Ṣāwī’s *tafsīr*, [read] the given passage’). The presence of different readers with several books displayed the assorted background of the *salgāwā* legacy, and the agility of the exegete in ‘calling’ quotations from them at the right moment showed to the public the novelty of their approach to knowledge.

### The Qur’ān and Traditional Bodies of Knowledge

Tijānī ‘Uthmān’s *tafsīr* was performed at a very fast pace (one *ḥizb*, a sixtieth of the Qur’ān, per day). The author, however, found the time to address several themes, and occasionally to mention differences of opinion between the four legal schools concerning particular aspects of religious practice (though preference would finally be given to the positions of the Mālikī school).<sup>46</sup> This was a legacy of the eclectic formation of the *salgāwā*, and showed their ambition of popularizing and expanding (not challenging in its basic tenets) traditional religious knowledge. In most other networks of Kano, it was only customary in public teaching to take the standard Mālikī position as fixed in the *Mukhtaṣar* of Khalīl b. Iṣḥāq for granted: digressions that would take into consideration differences of opinion were reserved to senior scholarly gatherings or writing, and they were considered as irrelevant to what a basic public *tafsīr* was supposed to offer to the populace. The *tafsīr* of Tijānī ‘Uthmān changed radically the concept of what constitutes Islamic knowledge of ‘public’ concern.

<sup>46</sup> I have been able to listen to about five old tapes of Tijānī ‘Uthmān’s *tafsīr*, purchased in Kano.

Short inner interpretations (*ta'wīl*) were also often provided after linguistic, legal and historic considerations had been explored in a rapid sequence. A crucial point that the *fayḍa tijāniyya* generally tries to convey with insistence is the realization that God's Being ultimately absorbs all entities. Thus, the *ta'wīl* of the *isti'ādha* (the formula: 'I take refuge in God from Satan, the accursed one'), is pointed at as being contained in the famous prayer transmitted by the Prophet: 'I seek refuge in Your pleasure from Your wrath, and in Your pardon from Your punishment, and in You from You'. Similarly, the *ta'wīl* of the *Basmala* (the formula 'In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the most Merciful')—according to a Sufi tradition mentioned by Tijānī 'Uthmān that would become a *topos* of the later *fayḍa tijāniyya* scholars' *tafsīr*—is hidden in its first letter, the locative particle *bi-* ('in'), and is to be explained as follows: 'Within Me (*bī*) was all that was, and within Me (*bī*) will be whatever will be; the true being of the world is within Me, and the world has not a real existence, except in a nominal and metaphorical way'. These would become a *topos* introduction to the exegesis of the *Fātiḥa* by the *fayḍa* scholars.

On the whole, Mālam Tijānī 'Uthmān's *tafsīr* took Islamic knowledge, its reference texts and its concepts out of the *soro* (private vestibule) of Kano scholars, infused them with an explicit Sufi connotation and made them a popular thing and object of discussion in the city. The idea that Islamic knowledge constitutes a coherent body whose ultimate sense lies in *ma'rifa* (gnosis) is powerfully expressed in the set of analogies upon which he builds his *tafsīr* of the *Fātiḥa*. This fragment can be considered as emblematic of the role he (and his fellow scholars of the *salgāwālfayḍa tijāniyya* network) played in Kano at the half of the twentieth century, through the combination of Mālam Muḥammad Salga's multi-disciplinary approach to '*ulūm* with Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse' encompassing emphasis on *ma'rifa*. The basic scheme (the idea of the 9 fields of Qur'ānic knowledge contained in the *Fātiḥa*) is taken from Ibrāhīm Niasse's own *tafsīr*, with some additional elaborations (for example: the distinction between 'utensils' and 'fruits' of knowledge).<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> 'Uthmān, T.: *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* (undated recording), and Niasse, I.: *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* (undated recording).

The author starts by reminding a classical definition of the Qur'ān as 'the matrix of all sciences' (*umm al-'ulūm*). Sciences have—he continues—ancillary disciplines or technical 'utensils' (*kāyan aiki*): *lugha* (lexicography), *nahw* (syntax), *taṣrīf* (morphology), *balāgha* (rhetoric), *mantiq* (logic), *uṣūl* (principles of Law), *muṣṭalaḥ* (*ḥadīth* taxonomy). They also have their fruits (*yā'yā*), which are the objects of knowledge, the things which are known. Since it produces fruits, the Qur'ān can be considered also as their seed (*irī*). The author does not comment further on this point, but it is worthy noting that he defines the Qur'ān first as the 'feminine' principle of knowledge ('the matrix [lit.: *the mother*] of all sciences') and then as a 'masculine' one ('the seed of all objects of knowledge').

The 'fruits'—continues Mālam Tijānī—are of nine species, which correspond to the nine fields (*funūn*) of sacred knowledge. These disciplinary fields are contained in the nine main phrases of the *Fātiḥa*, according to the following scheme:

Qur'ānic verse or expression	Translation	Corresponding knowledge ('fruit')
1 <i>al-ḥamdu li-l-lābi</i>	All praise belongs to God	Praise. It comprises 'every word which can be addressed to the Creator'. It is the real 'science of God's Unity', and stands on a level above the Unity professed by the theologians.
2 <i>Rabbi l-'ālamīn</i>	The Lord of the created worlds	<i>tawḥīd/ 'aqīda</i> . Theology as 'science of God's Unity', intended as a discursive (and not purely metaphysical or supra-rational) knowledge which includes the doctrines of the theologians and presupposes a distinction between the Lord ( <i>ar-Rabb</i> ) and the created things ( <i>al-'ālamīn</i> ).
3 <i>ar-raḥmāni r-raḥīm</i>	The all-Merciful, the Compassionate	<i>al-wa'd</i> . The Promise (of Heaven). This discipline is the first sub-branch of eschatology, and is related to the knowledge of God's attributes of Beauty ( <i>jamāl</i> ), and to the psychological state of 'hope'.

Qur'anic verse or expression	Translation	Corresponding knowledge ('fruit')
4 <i>maliki yawmi d -dīn</i>	The Sovereign of the day of Judgment	<i>al-wa'īd</i> . The Menace (of Hell). As a discipline, it is the second sub-branch of eschatology, and it is related to the knowledge of God's attributes of Majesty ( <i>jalāl</i> ), and to the psychological state of 'fear'.
5 <i>Iyyāka na'budu</i>	Thee do we adore	<i>sharī'a</i> . The Law, whose foundation is the knowl- edge of how to perform ritual acts of adoration.
6 <i>wa iyyāka nasta'in</i>	And unto Thee do we seek help	<i>Ḥaqīqa</i> . The Truth, i.e. Sufism as the 'realization ( <i>tabaqquq</i> ) of God's overpowering Unity'. It's the inner reality of the external Law (this verse points to the fact that no acts of adoration [or: of will] can be performed without the help of the only True agent.
7 <i>ihdīnā ṣ-ṣirāta l-mustaqīm</i>	Guide us to the straight path	<i>ad-du'ā'</i> . 'Prayer', intended here not as the ritual prayer ( <i>ṣalāt</i> ) which is included in the knowledge of the Law, but as special formulas recited for different aims. It includes the esoteric practices and medi- cine.
8 <i>ṣirāta iladhīna an'anta 'alayhim</i>	The path of those You have covered with bounties	<i>qiṣṣa</i> . Narrations about prophets of the past, lives of saints and all that is worthy of being recorded of history.
9 <i>ghayri l-maghdūbi 'alayhim wa lā d-dāllīn</i>	Not the path of those You have covered with anger, nor those who have gone astray	<i>wa'z</i> . 'Admonishment', 'preaching'. It includes the knowledge of ethics ( <i>akhlāq</i> ) and proper behavior ( <i>adab</i> ).

The 'technical instruments' mentioned by the author (lexicography, syntax, rhetorics, etc.) correspond to the technical disciplines that are usually considered as propedeutic to exegesis, and that form the philological background upon which much emphasis was placed by Muḥammad Salga and his students. The 'fruits' correspond more or less to the different categories of knowledge as they were classified by classical scholars. Interestingly, field 1 (the science of 'the Praise') is not

identifiable as a particular field of knowledge, but to all the lyric verses of the Qur'ān. The knowledge is refers to is—observes Mālam Tijānī—the realization of the fact that ‘in the end Praise is to Him, from Him, in Him, through Him (*labu minhu fihi bihi*)’. Allusion is made to the ‘knowledge of the Essence’ (*ilm adh-dhāt*), the knowledge of *Huwa* (He), the absolute Self. It can not be the object of any particular discipline (the absolute subject-Self can not be ‘made an object’, by definition), but lies beyond every formal knowledge, while being implied by any form of knowledge: ‘to Him, from Him, in Him, through Him’; at the end, everything goes back to Allāh, nay, nothing has ever left Him. As the phrase *al-Ḥamdu lil-Lāh* is the principle of the Qur'ān, this knowledge is the ineffable principle of all sacred knowledge.

### **Conclusion: Learning, Gnosis, Scholarly Expansion**

In older, conservative networks of Kano as the Jar Kasa school of *tafsīr*, scholarly sources were strictly scrutinized and rules of succession closely monitored through a hereditary pattern rules of succession. Higher forms of knowledge as encompassed in the transmitted *tafsīr* corpus were taken extremely seriously and their pursuit encouraged, but new sources were looked upon as irrelevant and redundant. The teaching method was carefully tested but stereotyped, and the relations with other networks were founded upon an attitude of prudence. On the whole, expansion was not encouraged, and students were satisfied with receiving from the study of *tafsīr* the blessing that would enhance their scholarly prestige. The *fayḍa tijāniyya* network, on the contrary, was moved by an aspiration to a wider intellectual freedom that would turn quickly into an expansionist drive. Many of the scholars formed at the hands of the first group of *fayḍa tijāniyya* scholars in Kano were given *ijāzāt* and encouraged to start independent teachings and public *Ramaḍān tafsīr* at their home-base. In a couple of decades, the *tafsīr* network of Tijānī ‘Uthmān extended through most of the Hausa-speaking areas of Northern Nigeria, and likewise through the Middle Belt, Yorubaland, Adamawa, the Cameroon, the Central African Republic and the Republic of Niger. This network included at least a dozen of major scholars whose schools became on their turn the centers

of local networks of a certain significance (one example is Mālam ‘Abd ar-Razzāq of Magaria, who became one of the leading scholars in Niger). Most of Tijānī ‘Uthmān’s students died in the 1990s, but their sub-networks have maintained the link with Tijānī ‘Uthmān’s school. Succession to Tijānī ‘Uthmān’s school has not followed a dynastic pattern, and after his sudden death in a car accident in 1970, the school has been directed by his student Ismā‘il Ibrāhīm Khalīfa. Most of the scholars formed at the school in *Zangon Barebari* have continued to maintain the link with it after the death of its founder, but cultivate also their own independent connections with the larger Nigerian scholarly community, and with international centers of the Tijāniyya brotherhood like Fez (Morocco) and Kaolack (Senegal).

The combination between their reformist approach to legal studies and their stress on Sufi knowledge infused with a missionary drive gave the *salgāwā* a unique propelling force and turned them into the most successful scholarly network of twentieth century’s Nigerian Islam. Their new synthesis provided them with the ability of arousing a longing for gnosis through learning, and a longing for learning through gnosis, thereby cyclically reproducing the group’s self-confidence. The network’s structure of scholarly and spiritual authority formed along a multi-centric pattern that added to the group’s capacity of reproducing itself and extending internationally.

Regionally, the *salgāwā* have contributed enormously to spread the belief that Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niassé’ announcement of the upcoming *fayḍa* of Shaykh Aḥmad at-Tijānī had been realized, and that the Senegalese was its depository. Locally, they have uplifted the position of Kano in the geography of Nigerian scholarship to an unprecedented extent. The role of *tafsīr*-making in the town’s life has also been profoundly changed by the group’s activities. *Tafsīr* has become an unfailing element of the urban population’s collective life during the month of *Ramadān*. The public *tafsīr* boom has not been limited to Kano, but has had a pervasive effect on the style of Islamic public life in the whole of Nigeria. Successive reformist movements that will start their activities in the 1970s, though very different—in fact, opposed—in ideological orientation, will build on the exceptional popularity that *tafsīr* has attained in Northern Nigeria during the 1950s-60s, to carry out their distinctive agendas of reform.