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The Feud Between the Salafiyyah And Şūfiyyah And Its Effects on The Unity of Nigerian Muslims

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Abstract

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Salafiyyah and Şūfiyyah are two major groups in Sunni Islam. Despite their strong historical roots in Islam, they have some ideological differences and often clash like a cat and rat. This longstanding conflict is a global issue that affects many Muslim communities and societies, including Nigeria. This paper examines the situation in Nigeria and its impact on Muslims, using both historical and descriptive research methods. The former helps assess relevant historical facts, while the latter describes the current situation in Nigeria. The findings of this paper are that many Muslims in Nigeria are living in the wilderness of doubts and confusion. Also, many have lost bearing vis-à-vis spirituality, while many have been declared as Kuffār (infidels), among others. The paper called on the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) as the apex Islamic body in the land to rise to the occasion while making Ali ibn Abi Talib, the fourth Khalīfah's treatment of the Khawārij as the template for settlement. The paper, therefore, concluded that the fierce battle between the Salafiyyah and Sufi adherents is a major source of disunity among Muslims and has negatively affected the advancement of Islam in Nigeria and the Muslims. All hands must, therefore, be on deck to bring the Muslims in Nigeria under one umbrella.

1. Introduction

Salafiyyah scholars and Sufis are living today like cats and rats. They are always at each other's throats. The scholars of the former identified Sufism as a stumbling block in their efforts to ensure the practice of Islam as it was in the days of the *Salaf*.¹ They considered Sufism as one of the alien practices that crept into Islam through the backdoor.² It is, therefore, branded as a heretical innovation (*Bid'ah*) and an unholy accretion into Islam.³ Sufis are equally declared as *Mushrikūn* (polytheists), *Munafiqūn* (hypocrites), *Mubtadi'ūn* (heretical innovators), and *Kuffār* (Infidels)⁴ among others. They highlighted many grounds for their condemnation of Sufism and intensified efforts to actualize its total displacement from Islam. The Sufis, on the other hand, do not fold their hands but make efforts to defend themselves. They considered Sufism as emanating from the teachings of the *Salaf* and identified some of them (*Salaf*) that were Sufis or from whom they came about Sufism. This scenario, as it happens across the globe, got domesticated in Nigeria.

2. Research Methods

The historical and descriptive methods of research are adopted in this article. The former is imperative considering the nature of this topic, which is deeply rooted in historical facts relating to the country, the emergence of both *Salafīyyah* and Sufism in the land, among others. The latter, on the other hand, enables the presentation of the situation as it is today. With these methods, various relevant published and unpublished works were consulted to extract valuable and relevant information that can enhance the discussions and lead to appropriate findings and conclusions. Interviews were also conducted where relevant to have first-hand information or hear from the horse's mouth. The paper also gathered information from video clips and mp3 audio where necessary.

3. Research Objectives

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the intense conflict between two opposing Muslim groups on a global scale, which has also affected Nigeria. The focus is to examine how this conflict has affected the Muslim community in Nigeria and find ways to address it in order to unite Nigerian Muslims and serve as a template for resolving conflicts between Muslim groups worldwide. This is imperative considering the importance of unity as stressed in the primary sources of Islam.

4. Periscoping *Salafīyyah* and *Şūfiyyah*

Salafīyyah is derived from *Salaf*, which is often translated as a precursor, forbearer, predecessor, primogenitor, ancestor⁵ among others. According to Athari, who aligns himself with the definition of Ibn Manzur,⁶ *Salaf* refers to the people who came before or who had gone ahead of one in an endeavour.⁷ Al-Bashir narrows it down to connote forefather or progenitor or someone who had preceded one in life, time, or experience. At the same time, the one who came after to take inspiration from the earlier people is *Khalīfah* (successor).⁸ Therefore, anyone among the successors who takes after the practices of the *Salaf* is technically known and referred to as a *Salafi* as an individual and *Salafīyyah* as a group or movement.

Technically, *Salafīyyah* refers to the adherents of the teachings of the *Salaf*. That is, the first three generations of Muslims start from the Prophet, the generation of Companions, and the *Tabi'ūn* (successors of the Companions). This is premised on the celebrated *ḥadīth*, which describes the best of generations as that of the Prophet and the next two that followed it.⁹ Therefore, the people referred to are those who lived with the Prophet, the Companions who shouldered the responsibilities after his (Prophet) demise, and the *Tabi'ūn* (successors to the Companions), who took over from the Companions. The people of this period are technically called *As-Salaf 'ş-Şāliḥūn* (the pious predecessors).¹⁰ The core teaching of the *Salafīyyah*, therefore, is that Islam should be practised the way and manner its pious predecessors practised it, and anything short of that is an aberration that should be rejected. *Şūfiyyah*, on the other hand, refers to the adherents of *Taşawwuf*. It (*Taşawwuf*) is the process of realizing the ethical and spiritual ideals of Islam.¹¹ Sufism is one of the branches of Islamic sciences which concerns itself with the spiritual aspect of Islam.¹² It deals with the status of the human soul by exploring the teachings of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. It is a science that seeks to connect man with Allah via spiritualities.¹³ Sufism is better understood in the words of Ibn Abdul-Wahhāb, who sees it as one of the sciences that developed from the broad teachings of the Prophet, equating it with *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence).¹⁴ Sufism, therefore, is an integral aspect of Islam.

5. The Advent of Sufism and Salafism in Nigeria

The history of the advent of Sufism in Nigeria is similar to how Islam got to the country. This is because records show that Sufis were not only among those who brought

Islam to the country but also consolidated it in the land. Doi, among other historians, narrated the role of 11th-century *Jihadi* movements like *Al-Murabitūn* in the spread of Islam across West African countries and that of Shaykh Maghili in Nigeria.¹⁵ This movement and individuals were Sufis of note. Therefore, since it can be argued that Islam and Sufism came to what is later known as Nigeria, it is not an overstatement to submit that Sufism predated Salafism in Nigeria. Strengthening this further accounts for the significant landmark in the history of Islam in Nigeria, the 19th-century *Jihād* of Ibn Fūdī, which gave birth to the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate of Sokoto.¹⁶ It is clear from all records that Shaykh Ibn Fūdī, who was instrumental to the *Jihād*, was a staunch Sufi of the Qādiriyyah Order.¹⁷ While commenting on the actors in the *Jihād* that led to the establishment of the Caliphate, Kaura observes that the composition of the *Mujahidūn* shows that the *Jihād* was a Qadiri affair as both the leaders and the led were Qadiriyyah members.¹⁸ This was why Qadiriyyah-tainted Islam remains the official Islam of the Caliphate and a household Order in Sokoto, the headquarters of the Caliphate. Gumi (d.1992) equally observes that an average Sokoto Muslim man does not ordinarily see any difference between Islam and Qādiriyyah. This explains why they often referred to themselves as *Qādirawa* instead of saying I am a Muslim.¹⁹

In the same instance, the history of the advent of Tijāniyyah in Nigeria, according to Quadri, could be traced to the early period of its (Tijāniyyah) formation. In other words, the order reached Nigeria before the death of Shaykh Aḥmad Tijānī (d.1815). He (Quadri) submits further that the entry point is between Kano and Maiduguri.²⁰ In another version of history, Al-Ilorī (d.1992) traced the entry point to Sokoto without a precise date but indicated that it got to the Caliphate territory during the reign of Muhammad Bello (d.1837).²¹ What this paper intends to bring into the limelight is that the existence of Sufism predated Salafism in Nigeria.

However, the history of the emergence of Salafism in Nigeria is traced to the efforts of *Wahhābiyyah*, otherwise known as the Saudi brand of *Salafīyyah*, to spread its tentacles across the Muslim World, Nigeria inclusive. As could be inferred from Alaro, the web of *Saudi* Salafism caught Nigeria with the formation of the Muslim World League (MWL) in 1962.²² History of its formation holds that Sir Ahmadu Bello (d.1966), the Sardauna of Sokoto, the premier of the northern region and most influential Muslim figure in the whole of northern Nigeria and, by implication, the country at that time, was not just a foundation member but also an active one who carried its (MWL) banner across the northern region and beyond.²³ Unfortunately, he had limited knowledge of Islam and needed help communicating in the Arabic language, which is the *lingua franca* of Islam. He, therefore, needed aid. This engendered the proximity between him and Shaykh Abubakar Gumi (d.1992), whom he had noted for his exceptionality in the Arabic language through their interaction when they had a pilgrimage together in 1955.²⁴ Gumi was one of the most learned scholars of the Islamic religion in the North, with a high sense of oratory. He was also a civilized individual in the northern region who could write from both margins of the paper at that time.²⁵

Paden observes that the proximity of Gumi to the Sardauna and his subsequent adoption as his mouthpiece, primarily to mediate between the Saudi government and Sardauna, exposed him to Saudi ideology. He was lured by their government, having been identified as a vibrant and influential scholar from northern Nigeria who could be used to achieve their set objectives (Wahhabism).²⁶ The closeness also informed the resolve of Sardauna to give him more roles, especially those that bordered on Islamic scholarship, when *Jamā'at Nasril-Islam* (JNI) was created in 1963/64. This wielded him more influence as he became a prominent member of JNI and a voice to be reckoned with in the North. The death of Sardauna in 1966, therefore, positioned Gumi well to pursue the Saudi mission without any check; in 1972, he authored his famous book that had far-reaching effects on Sufism in

Nigeria, entitled *‘Aqīdatu ‘s-Ṣaḥīḥah Bi Muwāfaqati ‘s-Sharī‘ah*. It is often translated as *The Right Belief based on Sharī‘ah*. The Saudi Government published it. One of the effects of the book was the emergence of *Jamā‘atu Izālatil bid‘ah wa Iqamati ‘s-Sunnah*, popularly known as *Izālah*, in 1978, which was formed under his influence as the first anti-Sufi body in Nigeria. This came after several failed attempts to use JNI for the same purpose.²⁷ Also, Gumi himself was the first individual to speak against Sufism in the North openly.²⁸ Shaykh Adam Abdullahi Al-Ilorī (d.1992) was one of those who took Gumi up and challenged his audacity for causing disunity among the Muslims because of his *Wahhābiyyah* inclination. He accused him of forsaking the efforts of Sir Ahmadu Bello to unite the Muslims in Nigeria.²⁹

As could be inferred from Alaro, the move by the Saudi government to incorporate the southern part in the spread of *Wahhābiyyah*-Islam could be said to have started from the translation of Al-Qur’ān into the Yoruba language.³⁰ Sardauna suggested the idea at the WML meeting after the successful translation of the same into the Hausa Language by Shaykh Gumi.³¹ Due to the absence of any Saudi-trained scholars in the whole of the region, they (the Saudi Arabia government) decided to engage the services of local scholars, like Shaykh Adam Abdullahi and Shaykh Kamaldeen Al-Adabī (d.2005)³² among others. This opened the door to free interaction between these scholars and the Saudi government. Ashlie (d.1999), therefore, argues that having recognized the intellectual prowess of Shaykh Adam as well as his rare and exceptional talent, the Saudi government (Saudi) requested him to engage the Sufis and preach their version of Islam (*Wahhābiyyah*), just as it was happening in the North. He, however, turned it down, stating that Sufis did not only bring Islam to Nigeria but were also responsible for its consolidation.³³ Another but remote attempt by the Saudi government, which seems to have fetched them their desires, is an award of scholarships to Nigerians to study Islam and Islamic-related courses in their Universities. These Saudi-trained individuals would return to their various towns and villages of their origin after their graduation to spread *Wahhābiyyah* ideologies. Today, Saudi graduates have flooded every nook and cranny of Nigerian societies, preaching their ideologies and mainly targeting the Sufis and condemning Sufism with relish and enthusiasm.

6. *Salafīyyūn* and the Sufis' Activities and Manifestations of Hostility Between Them

There are different activities staged in Nigeria by the adherents of both blocs to explain and defend their doctrines. The *Salafīyyūn*, whose activities are more coordinated than those of the *Ṣūfīyyūn*, are more active in this regard. This may not be unconnected to Saudi sponsorship³⁴ through the award of scholarships, the building of mosques, *Madāris*, endowments, and sponsorship of preaching programmes, especially public ones. It should not be forgotten that Nigeria is not the only country where such is done.³⁵ So, it is a well-planned and adequately orchestrated mission by the Saudis. As stated earlier, the formal anti-Sufi activities of the *Salafīyyah* in Nigeria started with the launch of the *Izālah* Movement, which coordinates anti-Sufi activities across the North. The South equally has different *Ahlu ‘s-Sunnah Wa ‘l-Jamā‘at* bodies. Their activities include preaching, debates, the establishment of different *Madāris* (Islamic schools), and study circles (*halaqah*), among others.

In Yorubaland, for instance, the *Salafīyyah* adherents organized themselves under different names and scattered across the land. Some prominent ones include Ustadh Sulaymān Amubieya, Dr Lukman Idris Alagunfon, and Ustadh Rashid Mustapha Abu-Ibeji, among others in Ibadan. Dr Sharafudeen Raji and Ustadh Rashid Abdul-‘Azīz in Ogbomoso. Dr Faḍīl Abiola in Osogbo, Shaykh ‘Abdul-‘Azīz Bello and Shaykh Najmudeen Sulaymān, and Shaykh Imran Abdulmajeed Eleha among others, all in Lagos. Prof. Abdur-Razzāq Abdul-Majīd Alaro, Dr. Abdul-Ganiyy Akorede Agbarigidoma, Shaykh Abdul-

Wahhab Ajia, Shaykh Muhammad Ali Jabata, and Prof. Abdur-Rahman Ahmad Al-Imam Kakuri among others in Ilorin, the Kwara State capital.

There is also the formation of different groups under the canopy of *Ahlu-Sunnah wal-Jamā'ah*, with the critical objective of embarking on a clampdown against Sufism. Media, both electronic and print, including social media, are filled with different programmes on Sufism anchored by different *Salafīyyah*-trained preachers. An instance of this is given vis-à-vis Sunnah TV, which the Izālah Movement established in the northern part of the country.⁴⁴ In some other instances, anti-*Ṣūfī* programmes are sponsored by both public and private media outfits to enlighten the masses against Sufism. Some include *Ad-Dalil 's-Shar'*, which is anchored on Radio Kwara by Prof. Abdur-Rahman Kakuri. Equally, Muhammad Ali Jabata anchors programmes on different Radio stations like Okin FM (Offa), Al-Barka FM (Ilorin), Gravity FM (Igbobo), and Lagelu FM station (Ibadan), among others. Shaykh Gumi is on the record to have actively engaged the likes of Shaykh Uthman Dahiru Bauchi, Shaykh Nasiru Kabara, and Shaykh Ibrahim Saleh on live programmes both on Television and Radio to debate topical issues related to Sufism.³⁶ Despite his (Gumi) demise, his anti-Sufi propaganda continues to wax more vital courtesy of his followers and disciples, who constituted themselves as the *Izālah* Movement.

Apart from the general and individual websites created by *Salafīyyah* scholars, there are specific sites that serve as platforms for all *Salafīyyah* scholars in Nigeria across the three zones. Some of these sites are called *DawahNigeria*,³⁷ *Voice of Salafīyyah*,³⁸ , and *Simply Salafīyyah*³⁹ Among others. Lectures of various *Salafīyyah* scholars in the three major languages in Nigeria and English are uploaded for download under different topics. The sites equally play host to different topical issues in Islam related to Nigeria but in *Salafīyyah* colouration and understanding. Also, *Ahlu's-Sunnah* has different Facebook pages, Twitter handles, and Whatsapp groups, like *Al-^cAqīdah Al-Wasatiyyah*, *Fatima Mosques Programmes*, *DaruNaim*, *Dawahlink*, *Al-Madrasatu An-Nabawiyyah*, *The Truth*, *Al-Wasatiyyah* among others wherein campaign against Sufism is featured.

Also, public lectures, *Ta'lim* and *Halaqāt* (studies circles) are organized at regular intervals where people are invited for lectures or members of *Ahlu 's-Sunnah* in a particular locality will invite a *Salafīyyah* scholar for a public lecture. Along with this, different books are written, and pamphlets are issued by the *Salafīyyah* scholars for their campaign to have a broader outreach. In some instances, schools are established at various levels for the same purpose. It is said that Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, and Al-Falah Islamic Institute, Ekperi, Edo State, are higher institutions of learning established in connection with the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), which has its headquarters in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to strengthen Salafism/Wahhābisim in Nigeria.⁴⁰ This is not unconnected to the fact that many of the lecturers in the departments of both Arabic and Islamic studies, especially Al-Hikmah University, are Saudi-trained and paid scholars.⁵¹

The *Salafīyyah* preaching against Sufism, as compiled by Olayiwola, centred majorly on the origin and legitimacy of Sufism in Islam. They also asked questions on *Mawlid 'n-Nabiyy* celebration, *Awrād* (litanies), *Ziyāratu 'l-Qubūr* (grave visitation), initiation, and veneration of saints. Also, the two major Sufi orders in the country, *Tijāniyyah* and *Qādiriyyah*, were explicitly charged with different allegations bordering on the personalities of Shaykh Abdul-Qādiri and Shaykh Ahmad Tijānī, the founders of the two orders. The allegations also covered their Sufi utterances, miracles, works, *awrād* (litanies), *Salātul-Fātiḥ*, *Jawharatul-Kamāl*, *Jawahirul-Ma'ānī*, and many other doctrines, practices, and works of both orders.

To counterbalance the activities of the *Salafīyyah*, the Sufis started by removing various forms of hostility that had been lingering among them, which bordered on superiority and inferiority complex but later degenerated into political brouhaha between the *Tijāniyyah*

members who dominated Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU) and the Qādiriyyah who also dominated the Northern People Congress (NPC).⁴¹ The Sufis started by emphasizing learning and scholarship to fortify their members with the requisite knowledge of Sufism and to prepare them for the challenges of the anti-Sufis. Each *Zawiyyah* nowadays established a *Madrasah* to teach its members different aspects of Islam, including the Arabic language. They also make lectures as part of *Wazifah*, which is observed routinely daily.⁴² Also, books are jointly authored to explain the nitty-gritty of Sufism and to respond to various anti-Sufi statements and allegations as may be contained in the works authored by anti-Sufi scholars, which are gaining momentum. An instance is that of *‘Aqīdatu ‘s-Ṣaḥīḥah* of Gumi, which *Raf‘u ‘l-Ṣhubuhāt ‘an mā fī Qādiriyyah wa ‘t-Tijāniyyah min al-Ṣhaḥāhāt* (Lifting the Doubts about the Qādiriyyah and the *Tijāniyyah*) is jointly written by Shaykh Muhammad Ibrahim Maimasa (d.1982) and Shaykh Ali Jabata (d.2009) as a rejoinder.⁴³ Also, Shaykh Naṣīru ‘d-Dīn Kabarā and Sani Kafangha wrote *An-Naṣīḥatu ‘s-Ṣarīḥah fī ‘r-Raddi ‘Alā ‘l-‘Aqīdati ‘s-Ṣaḥīḥah* and *Al-Minḥu ‘l-Ḥamīdah fī ‘r-Raddi ‘Alā Fāsīd ‘l-‘Aqīdah* respectively.⁴⁴ As resourceful as the two books are, the duo could not immediately redeem the effects of the devastating blow of *‘Aqīdatu ‘s-Ṣaḥīḥah* on Sufism in Nigeria.

There are programmes today in Nigeria media that Sufis sponsored on Television and Radio, sometimes live programmes to explain and defend their doctrines. Some programmes and stations include Da’watul-Haqq by Shaikh Rabiū Adebayo, Owo, and Lagos State on MiTV. The *Tijāniyyah* in Kwara state sponsors a weekly programme on Harmony FM Radio station tagged: *At-Taṣawwuf ‘l-Islāmī*⁴⁵ While *Qādiriyyah* uses *As-Shar‘atu ‘l-Islamiyyah*, a Friday morning programme on Radio Kwara.⁴⁶ Also, public lectures are organized by both the Qādiriyyah and *Tijāniyyah* to elucidate on Sufi doctrines and practices.⁴⁷ Sufis have, in recent times, taken to social media to explain their doctrines and practices. This was, however, necessitated by the recent COVID-19 lockdown. They seized the opportunity to create many platforms for their *da’wah* activities. Some of those platforms include Al-Islam and Sufism TV, As-Shariah and Life TV, and Al-Islam First TV.

7. Effects of the Feud on Sufism, Salafism, and Nigerian Muslims

The first significant effect of the feud was the birth of unity among the Sufis, who organized themselves into various groups and opened up international connections. Some of the groups are *Jamā‘at aṣ-Ṣūfīyyah* in Ilorin, *Jamā‘at Ahlu Sunnah* in Kaduna and *Kungiyar Dakarun Dan Fodio* in Sokoto, and *Jundullahi* Movement in Kano. The international bodies include *Jamā‘at al Faydah*, *Jamā‘at Anṣār ad-Dīn*, *Jamā‘at Anwār al-Faydah*, *Fityān al-Islam*, and International Organization of *Tijāniyyah* Brotherhood (IOTB) among others. The students were not left out as they formed the *Tijāniyyah* Muslim Students Association of Nigeria (TIMSAN) and Qādiriyyah Muslim Students Association of Nigeria (QAMSAN)⁴⁸ And many more. They equally hold several events like *Mawlidu ‘n-Nabiyy*. The instance is seen in 2015 when the *Mawlid* celebration was held collectively by the Sufis across Northern Nigeria at Eagle Square, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, and it is sustained till now.⁴⁹ Also, joint confrontations by the Sufis of the *Tijāniyyah* and the Qādiriyyah on Television against anti-Sufi scholars. An instance is Shaykh Gumi’s debate with Shaykh Dahiru Bauchi and others, as stated above.⁵⁰

Since the inception of differences among the Muslim *Ummah* in Nigeria, courtesy of the *Salafīyyah* and Sufis imbroglio, the hitherto unity and brotherhood among them (Muslims) has been threatened. This has been responsible for various divisions among Nigerian Muslims. There are unhealthy campaigns against each other, with both sides levelling several allegations against each other. They castigate and lampoon each other. For instance, the popular *Salafīyyah* monthly programme, which used to be held under the umbrella of *Hadhā Bayānu li ‘n-Nās*, is ridiculed by Sufis as *Hadhā Buhtānu Li ‘n-Nās*. To

counterbalance that, the *Salafīyyah* also referred to the popular radio programme of the Sufis, tagged *At-Tasawwuf 'l-Islāmī* as *At-Tasawwuf 'l-Kufri*. Also, *Dāru 'l-Kitāb Wa 's-Sunnah* is called *Dāru 'l-Bid'ah wa 'd-Ḍalālah*, Dr Asra' Bilāl is called Dr Asra' Ḍalāl among others. Also, there are cases of physical attacks among the members of the two groups. Quadri listed that of Danji village, near Funtua, and another one in Jos, Plateau State.⁵¹ More cases in Idah, Kogi, and He (Quadri) also documented how some Imams were removed, and many mosques were disserted for this feud.⁵² He gave the instance of Mallam Sani in Sagamu, Ogun State; Mallam Muhammad Lawan Sidi, Idah, Kogi State; and Mallam Muhammad Mustafa, Funtua, Katsina State, among others. They were Sufis but were made to forfeit their Imamship by *Izālah* due to their adherence to Sufism.

Also, the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN), which should ordinarily serve as an umbrella body for every Muslim student in Nigeria as it exists today, has its hands sink in this dispute. MSSN is more of *Salafīyyah* than any other Muslim group in the land. The absence of justification for the discontinuation of the celebration of *Mawlidu 'n-Nabiyy*, which was held in high esteem by the founding fathers of the MSSN,⁵³ Strengthens this fact. On some campuses, MSSN openly stood against the Sufis and Sufism. The instances are those of the University of Ilorin in 2003 and 2015, when the MSSN executive prevented the Sufis brothers from holding their Friday *Wazifah* and *Kubura* in the mosque.⁵⁴ Another instance is Federal Polytechnic, Bida, where an Imam was made to denounce Sufism to retain his Imamship. Other places where there had been brawls between the Sufis and MSSN are Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri, and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi,⁵⁵ among others.

Another significant effect of the unhealthy rivalry between the *Salafīyyūn* and the Sufis in Nigeria is that many Muslims are left in the wilderness of doubts and confusion. This is responsible for a massive reduction in membership from both sides, as many do not want to be identified with either side; some individuals renounce their membership to align with the other group or stay aloof. Some practice Sufism secretly. There are also elimination, reductions, and low-key celebrations of Nigerian-coined Islamic festivals like *Mawlid*, *Nisfu-Shaban*, *Laylatul-Qadri*, and *Al-Isra' wal Mi'raj*, among other activities. Before the feud, most Muslims in Nigeria did not know the status of these celebrations or considered them compulsory. Hence, every Islamic calendar listed them as festivals or notable dates in Islam.⁵⁶

Also, there is a high level of discrimination among Muslims, pluralization, and polarisation of sectarian mosques (*fatwa* on the prohibition of *Salat* behind imam). The absence of unity among the Muslims in Nigeria has been responsible for the denial of due recognition of Islam by the Nigerian government.⁵⁷ Before the dichotomy between the *Salafīyyah* and Sufis in Nigeria, the Nigerian Muslims spoke with one voice and secured the annual declaration of public holidays to mark the two *Elds*(Islamic festivals) and *Mawlidu 'n-Nabiyy*, also, the inclusion of Islamic Studies at various levels of education and membership in the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), among others, was achieved seamlessly.⁵⁸ Today, there have been agitations from some quarters calling for a declaration of a public holiday to mark the annual *Hijrah* celebration. However, since the voice is not one, it falls to people who are deaf or hard of hearing hear of government.

8. The Role of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA)

The strained relationship between the *Salafīyyah* and Sufi adherents has become widespread, and it has contributed in no small measure to the divisions among Nigerian Muslims. In proffering a lasting solution to this menace, therefore, the onus lies mainly on the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), which is the apex Islamic body that

oversees Islamic affairs in the country. It was founded in August 1973 as an umbrella body for Muslims in Nigeria to oversee Islamic activities. It has eminent Nigerians, including the scholars serving on its committees.⁵⁹ The NSCIA is more disposed to tackling any form of marginalization against the interest of Muslims, especially in political matters and for the advancement of the cause of Nigerian Muslims.⁶⁰ It has the following as part of its main objectives:

- To promote Islamic solidarity through fostering brotherhood and cooperation among Muslims in Nigeria and other parts of the World.
- To promote better understanding and practice of Islam.⁶¹

The above items are some of the critical objectives of NSCIA, especially as they are related to this discourse. As spelt out, it is clear that the main objective of the NSCIA as the umbrella body for Muslims of different backgrounds in Nigeria is to promote and protect the unity of the *Ummah*. A significant division that bedevils the fates of Nigerian Muslims today is between the *Salafīyyah* and Ṣūfī adherents. It started when anti-Sufism was brewing. It was not initially seen as a problem, perhaps due to the prominence of Shaykh Abubakr Gumi, who was masterminding the anti-Sufi activities then. However, with the formation of NSCIA as the current apex body in the land,⁶² The issue of Muslim unity should be of paramount importance to the body because the first of its objectives is to ensure unity among the Muslims in Nigeria.⁶³

If the Council had worked on this objective, the dispute between the two major Muslim bodies would have been long resolved. This is because, as spelt out in the constitution, item 3 of Article 10 provides various committees as the machinery for achieving the set of objectives of the NSCIA. Among the standing committees which can tackle this menace are Elders, *Fatāwā*, *Da'wah*, Research and Policy, and legal councils.⁶⁴ The functions of each of these committees, as contained in the constitution, are geared towards resolving whatever crisis may be brewing among the Muslims and fostering peace and brotherhood.

Notwithstanding, Shittu mentions the NSCIA's move in 2010 to settle the rift between *Izalah* and *Tariqah* adherents by setting up a committee with members including His Highness Alhaji (Dr) Shehu Idris, Emir of Zazzau (Chairman), His Highness Alhaji Muhammad Awwal Ibrahim, Emir of Suleja, His Highness Alhaji Muhammad Nuhu Sanusi, Emir of Dutse, Alhaji Usman Faruk, Jarman Gombe, Sheikh Ahmad Lemu, Sheikh Abdulaziz Yusuf and Dr. Salisu Shehu (Secretary).⁶⁵ He observes that the intervention of the NSCIA was rather too late, and the committee's action took little time but could have been more fruitful.⁶⁶ Another significant observation that may be likely responsible for the unfruitfulness of the effort was the composition of the members. They are majorly royal fathers instead of Islamic scholars who understand the nitty-gritty of what lies between the two warring Muslim groups. The job would have been better done by those committees listed above.

9. Mirroring the past

From annals of Islamic history, a critical understanding of what transpired between ʿAlī bin Abī Ṭālib (d.40AH/661CE), the fourth *Khalīfah* and the *Khawārij*, the group of Muslims who ceded away after the battle of *Ṣifīn* (657AD), from which Ali took different decisions in proffering solution to them can go a long way in addressing the current *Salafīyyah* and *Ṣūfīyyah* imbroglio which ravages Nigerian Muslims. The first of the measures that ʿAlī used was his appointment of Ibn ʿAbbās (d.688) to engage the *Khawārij* in a dialogue.⁶⁷ ʿAlī's choice of Ibn ʿAbbās was unique, and the appointee (Ibn ʿAbbās) displayed a high sense of pragmatism in his engagement with the *Khawārij*. He towed the pattern of dialogue and not debate, which will psychologically characterize winners and losers and may jettison the objectives. He (Ibn ʿAbbās) asked them to table their grievances against ʿAlī, which they did, and he carefully explained each to them. They (*Khawārij*)

itemized three things. These are ʿAlī's refusal to acquire booties or take captives from the Battle of Jamal (camel), his acceptance to erase his title as *Amīru 'l-Mu'minin* (Commander of the faithful), and his acceptance to go into arbitration (*Tahkīm*).⁶⁸

In dismantling each of these, Ibn Abbās explained that booties can only be acquired in a battle or war between Muslims and *Kuffār* and not in a face-off among Muslims. He said that the agreement by ʿAlī to drop the title of *Amīru 'l-Mu'minin* was prophesied by the Prophet himself when ʿAlī was to write the treaty of *Udaybiyyah*. Therefore, it must come to pass. The third was put down by Ibn ʿAbbās when he referred to Quran 4 verse 35 and 5: 95, among others, where Allah allows arbitration to solve matrimonial problems between the husband and wife and in a matter of hunting.⁶⁹ The display of exceptionality by Ibn ʿAbbās made many *Khawārij* rescind and join the camp of ʿAlī.

Another instance, still on *Khawārij*, was when the Muslims came to ʿAlī, expecting him to take a specific step, which he did not. He was therefore approached to make a formal declaration on the remaining *Khawārij* members who stuck to their guns after Ibn ʿAbbās engagement of them. ʿAlī was asked whether they (those *Khawārij*) are *Mushrikūn* (Idolaters) or *Munafiqūn* (hypocrites). This is because the Muslims were convinced that those *Khawārij* exhibited various attributes that the Prophet described, and then the expectation was that ʿAlī would declare them as *Kuffār* (infidels). Contrary to the general expectation and against all odds, ʿAlī described them as brothers who wronged their fellow brothers.⁷⁰ ʿAlī did this to preserve the unity and brotherhood of the *Ummah*.

What could be deduced from the two instances above is that NSCIA rises to the occasion by practically creating a formidable mechanism for reconciliation and synergy for intelligence gathering. As ʿAlī did, NSCIA can make a move to engage the adherents of *Salafīyyah* and *Şūfīyyah* in scholarly dialogue on burning issues between them, with the sole aim of making each realize the concept of "unity in diversity" and that "unity does not mean uniformity". The Elders Committee should serve as observers who ensure fairness in the process. The *Fatāwā*, *Daʿwah*, and Research and Policy committees have Islamic scholars who can act as Ibn Abbās members. They should, therefore, take the lead in the intellectual engagements between the adherents of the two sects. At the same time, the legal committee provides a legal framework for engagements and implementation of the resolutions afterwards. To ensure fair play, scholars from outside the country can be invited either as significant actors in the process or observers. This will go a long way in preserving the unity of Muslims and limiting the level of divisions among the Muslim *Ummah* in Nigeria.

Another point of inference from the second situation above is the refusal of ʿAlī to declare the *Khawārij* as *Kuffār* to preserve the unity of *Ummah*. There is an excellent lesson for the scholars and the leaders of Muslims in contemporary times. Despite the presence of many scholars of repute (Companions) in the days of ʿAlī, no one dared make such a pronouncement unilaterally. Today, there is a frequent and arbitrary pronouncement of *Takfīr*, especially from the side of the *Salafīyyah* on the Sufis. This has contributed in no small measure to the escalation of the feud between the *Salafīyyah* and *Şūfīyyah* and making reconciliation an impossibility. The pronouncement of *Takfīr* is an exclusive right of the leaders and not the individual scholars. The involved individuals in this face-off should borrow a leaf from Ali's template and the early Muslim Community by keeping off from arbitrary declaration of people of another camp as *Kuffār*.

10. Conclusion

Efforts have been made in this paper to examine various issues related to *Salafīyyah* and *Şūfīyyah* in Nigeria and how the feud has affected the unity of Nigerian Muslims. It is clear from every indication that both the *Salafīyyah* and *Şūfīyyah* have a firm and inalienable ground in Islam, and the feud between them has been lingering for a long. So, it is not a

Nigerian saga but a global phenomenon. The findings of this paper revealed that Salafism came to Nigeria much later after Sufism, which came almost with Islam. The hostilities between the *Salafīyyah* and *Ṣūfīyyah* manifested in their various activities, which are geared towards explaining and defending their principles and doctrines. This has left many Nigerian Muslims in the wilderness of doubts and confusion. Some were discriminated against due to their adherence or non-adherence to either of the groups, while some were lured or forced to join either side. It has accounted for the inability of Nigerian Muslims to speak with one voice and defend their interest, both in their public and private lives. NSCIA, the apex Islamic body in the land, is therefore identified as the only body that can proffer a lasting solution to the problem. The paper revealed that if Alī's methods are adopted by setting up a mechanism for reconciliation and synergy for intellectual engagement among the scholars, and they desist from the arbitrary pronouncement of *Takfīr*, the matter can be controlled. Muslims can see themselves as brothers and speak with one voice.

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