THE TAKFĪR DEBATE:
SOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF A CONTEMPORARY DISPUTE AMONG AFRICAN SUFIS
PART I: THE NIGERIAN ARENA*

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Polemical literature can be very illuminating when used as a source for the reconstruction of intellectual history. At the same time, polemical literature might also have a ‘sub-text’ that, if deciphered, can provide for a better understanding not only of the text itself, but also of the circumstances of the production of the text. In this article, I explore the background to a contemporary dispute among African Sufis of the Tijāniyya order by examining the polemical literature that deals with what will be referred to as the Takfīr debate.

Sharīf Ibrāhīm Șāliḥ and his Kitāb al-Mughīr

In 1986, a Lebanese publishing house printed a heavy tome of 584 pages entitled al-Mughīr ‘alā shubuhāt ahl al-ahwā’

* Part II, to be published in SAJHS, 10, will deal exclusively with the sources on the Takfīr debate written by Sudanese. I am grateful to Stefan Reichmuth and Benjamin Soares for commenting on this article.

1 This holds particularly true for polemics between Sufis and their opponents, as the recent volume Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics (ed. Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke, Leiden: Brill 1999) convincingly shows.

2 By using the term sub-text, I do not allude to postmodern literary theory. I rather refer to implicit meanings and motives that are not explicitly expressed in the text itself.

Sudanic Africa, 9, 1998, 39-70
wa-akādhib al-munkir ‘alā kitāb al-Takfīr. The author of the book is sharīf Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ, a well-known leader of the Tijāniyya order from Maiduguri (Borno State/Nigeria), and the work has already come to the attention of an academic public. ALA, II lists the work as entry no. 51 among the numerous writings of Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ, and refers the reader to the chapter entitled ‘Polemical literature for and against Sufism’, written by John O. Hunwick and Muhammad Sani Umar. In that chapter, al-Mughīr is mentioned together with Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ’s earlier work, al-Takfīr akhṭar bid‘a tuhaddid al-salām wa’l-waḥda bayn al-muslimın fı Nayjıriyya, as a response to a polemical treatise by Abubakar Gumi, in which the latter had made a fierce attack on the Sufis. Hunwick and Umar add that al-Mughīr also replies to ‘Tijāni critics of his earlier book in which he had suggested a re-examination of some Tijāni doctrines’.

In his valuable MA thesis, the same Muhammad Sani Umar refers to sharīf Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ as one of the Tijāni leaders who attempted a ‘revision and restatement of some Sufi doctrines of the brotherhood’. Mentioning both al-Takfīr and al-Mughīr, Umar continues by saying that the latter book was written ‘as a further elaboration and systematization of the arguments he has advanced in his first book’.

We find another reference to al-Mughīr in Roman Loimeier’s study of the conflict between Sufis and Muslim

4 For references on Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ (Ibrāhīm b. Ṣāliḥ b. Yūnis al-Husaynī) and a list of his works, cf. ALA, II, 407-16. The question of whether Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ is to be regarded as ‘the leading scholar of Bornu’ (ALA, II, 401) is, in fact, a highly contentious issue in Maiduguri.
5 Cairo: Muṣṭafā ’l-Bābī al-Ḥalabī 1982 (several reprints in Sudan and Nigeria).
6 ALA, II, 554.
8 Ibid.
reformers in Northern Nigeria. His discussion of *al-Mughîr* is mainly concerned with the chapter on *Jawâhir al-maʿânî*, where Ibrâhîm Şâliḥ gives his view on the authenticity of this important source on the life and doctrines of Aḥmad al-Tijâni (1737-1815), the founder of the Tijâniyya Sufi order. Loimeier locates Şâliḥ’s argument in the context of the conflict that has divided the Muslims of Nigeria into two main camps, namely the Sufis (of the Qâdiriyya and the Tijâniyya orders) and the reformist İzâla movement. According to Loimeier, Şâliḥ ‘has successfully developed over the last years a new and more flexible strategy in the defence of the Tijâniyya’. However, this strategy earned him the criticism of other Nigerian Tijâni leaders who regarded it ‘as suicidal and as capitulating to the enemies of the Tijâniyya’.

Auwalu Anwar, the author of another useful analysis of the struggle between the Sufis and the reformers in Northern Nigeria, does mention Ibrâhîm Şâliḥ among his informants, but he only refers to *al-Takfîr*, which he characterises as maintaining a ‘certain degree of objectivity’, and as offering a ‘very good historical perspective’.

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Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ as one of the younger Tijānī leaders who appeared on the scene in the 1980s, but he does not elaborate on Ṣāliḥ’s role since his thesis deals with the ‘ulamā’ of Kano.

Certainly, none of the authors mentioned so far has intended to present a detailed analysis of the book under discussion. This might explain why an important fact has escaped their attention: *al-Mughīr*, a thick book of almost 600 pages, is in the first place a response to a single pamphlet which was not authored by an Izāla member, as one might infer, but by a Tijānī shaykh from the Sudan. The full title of *al-Mughīr* already indicates that it was written in order to refute ‘the lies of the one who rejects (*al-munkir*) the book *al-Takfīr*. And indeed, the permanent allusion to the ‘lies’ of this Sudanese opponent constitutes the central thread of the whole book. Although Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ takes up the charges raised by the Sudanese *munkir* in almost every chapter of *al-Mughīr*, he mentions the name of his adversary only twice. On page 30, he introduces him as ‘Ibrāhīm Sīdī, who connects himself to the house of Shaykh Salmā at El Fasher in the Sudan’, adding that the Sudanese was the only person that objected to his earlier book *al-Takfīr*. Interestingly, the name is cited in a distorted manner: Instead of writing ‘Sīdī’, which is the short version of *sayyīdī* (lit. ‘my master’), Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ writes ‘Sīdī’, which is equivalent to *sayyīdūhu*, ‘his [own] master’. Three pages later, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ mentions the name again in a footnote; here, Ibrāhīm Sīdī is described as being interested only in enhancing his personal reputation, even if this quest involves disobedience to God.15 Like the name of its author, the title of the pamphlet that provoked the voluminous reply by the Nigerian sharīf appears only twice: *al-Summ al-zu‘āf*. Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ adds that he is accused in that book of secretly supporting the Izāla movement (here called

15 *Al-Mughīr*, 33-4.
Ibrāhīm b. Sīdī Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Salmā, the Sudanese who constitutes the target of *al-Mughīr*, is the grandson of a Tijānī shaykh who migrated from the town of Djenné to Darfur in the early twentieth century. During the rule of Sultan ʿAlī Dīnār (d. 1916), he founded the zāwiya at El Fasher that is headed nowadays by Ibrāhīm Sīdī. In *ALa*, I, O’Fahey gives the titles of some writings by Shaykh Salmā and his grandson, but he does not list *al-Summ al-zuʿāf*. In fact, it is extremely difficult to find a copy of this work. It cannot be found among the treatises and booklets sold in the typical small bookshops that specialise in religious literature in the Sahel countries. We would probably not even know that it exists, were it not for the publication of *al-Mughīr*.

But apart from Ibrāhīm ʿṢaliḥ’s own reply, there are numerous responses by Sudanese Tijānīs to *al-Summ al-zuʿāf*. Since 1984, when the first version of *al-Summ al-zuʿāf* was distributed by Ibrāhīm Sīdī, at least five treatises in defence of Ibrāhīm ʿṢaliḥ were published in the Sudan, or circulated as unpublished manuscripts. These texts are still unknown outside limited Tijānī circles in the Sudan, some parts of Chad and Northeastern Nigeria. Following is a general outline of the debate through an examination of the principal texts by Ibrāhīm Sīdī and Ibrāhīm ʿṢaliḥ. The

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16 *Ibid.*, 30-1. For the second reference to *al-Summ al-zuʿāf*, see note 73 below.

17 *ALa*, I, 300-3.

polemical exchange between Ibrāhīm Śāliḥ and the Sudanese supporters of the Nigerian sharīf will be the topic of the second part of this article. Let us begin by looking at the origins of the debate.

_The Takfīr debate_

The debate in question was started by the above-mentioned book _al-Takfīr_ written by Ibrāhīm Śāliḥ in 1982 and published in Cairo by Muṣṭafā ʾl-Bābī al-Halabī in the same year. The exchange of polemical writings by Sudanese Tijānīs can therefore be referred to as the ‘Takfīr debate’. Yet the controversy is not about the accusation of unbelief (Arabic: _takfīr_), but about the restatement of Tijānī doctrines as proposed by Ibrāhīm Śāliḥ. As stated by Hunwick and Umar, _al-Takfīr_ was actually written as a response to Abubakar Gumi,¹⁹ and the title of the book aims to discredit the Izāla movement because it described the Sufis as unbelievers. The refutation of the _takfīr_ charge only occupies a small part of the book. In most chapters Ibrāhīm Śāliḥ is concerned with the presentation of Sufi beliefs, and only in a few sections does he deal with the Tijāniyya. It was in this area that his statements gave rise to discord.

According to the account given by Ibrāhīm Śāliḥ himself in the introduction to _al-Mughīr_, the story is as follows: As a reaction to the increasing tension among the Muslim community of Nigeria caused by the Izāla movement and its leader Abubakar Gumi, he decided to speak out in the defence of the Sufis by writing _al-Takfīr_. He did this by choosing a ‘cautious and objective approach’, because the issue at hand required ‘wisdom and patience’, as well as a ‘logical construction in the argument’.²⁰ The primary task consisted of showing that the positions taken by Gumi

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¹⁹ _ALA_, II, 554.
²⁰ _Al-Mughīr_, 28.
were erroneous and dangerous for the entire Muslim community.

However, in order to reply to Gumi’s attack on Tijānī doctrines, Ibrāhīm Šāliņ considered it necessary to address a particular question raised by Gumi, namely the comparison between the Qurān and the ṣalāt al-fātiĥ, the latter being a famous prayer formula in praise of the Prophet that plays a central role in the recitations of the Tijānīs. It is a common practice among the adversaries of the Tijāniyya order to base their attack on the claim that the Tijānīs believe the ṣalāt al-fātiĥ to be superior to the Qurān.21 As the same accusation was made by Abubakar Gumi, Ibrāhīm Šāliņ included an elaborate response on that issue in al-Takfīr, emphasising the fact that Aḥmad al-Tijānī, the order’s founder, has explicitly stated that ‘there can be no formula of remembrance of God (dhikr) and no pious work superior to the recitation of the Qurān, and neither the ṣalāt al-fātiĥ nor any other text or prayer can compensate the Qurān’.22 Yet, Ibrāhīm Šāliņ tells us that ‘some of the dearly beloved’ (aḥbāb; this is the common term to address fellow Tijānīs), after having read the section on the controversial prayer formula in al-Takfīr, ‘have found my rejection of the comparability of the ṣalāt al-fātiĥ to the Qurān ambiguous’.23 At that point of the text, the sharīf briefly refers to a number of other famous leaders of the Tijāniyya, such as the Moroccan shaykh Aḥmad Skīraj (d. 1944) and the Egyptian Muḥammad al-Ḥāfīz b. ʾAbd al-Laṭīf (d. 1978), who have made similar statements on the ṣalāt al-fātiĥ.

According to Ibrāhīm Šāliņ’s account, he was then asked by his spiritual master Shaykh Aḥmad Abū ʾI-Fatḥ to explain more clearly what he wanted to say about the ṣalāt

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21 See Abun-Nasr, Tijaniyya, 173-81.
22 Al-Mughīr, 29.
23 Ibid. See below for Ibrāhīm Šāliņ’s ‘ambiguous’ statements on the ṣalāt al-fātiĥ in al-Takfīr and Ibrāhīm Sīdi’s reply.
Obviously, the issue had already led to a certain unrest within the Tijānī community of Nigeria, as we can conclude from the reason given by Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ for the demand of his shaykh: The sharīf was supposed to clarify his position in order to ‘eliminate the pretext of the rumours’. Nevertheless, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ says that al-Takfīr was welcomed by the public, and that it was only after his return from the ḥajj in 1984 that he heard of ‘some of the dearly beloved’ asking him for an apology for what he had written on the ṣalāt al-fātiḥ. At the same time, the sharīf emphasises that the majority of the Tijānīs took sides with him, and that criticism came only from those who are either ‘extremists’ or not accustomed to reading scholarly books. Because the book had been written for scholars and for the ‘relatively well-educated classes’, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ says that he saw no reason to care about the ‘objections of the deficient people’. He then introduces Ibrāhīm Sīdī, his Sudanese opponent: ‘But it did not come to my mind that somebody could ignore to such an extent the reasons that made me write al-Takfīr’. In this section, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ implicitly

24 Al-Mughīr, 29. Ahmad Abū ‘l-Fath (b. c. 1921) is one of the senior figures of the Tijānīyya in Nigeria. Cf. the biographical note and a list of his works in ALA, II, 400-3.
25 Al-Mughīr, 29. On page 34, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ explains that ‘the brothers found ambiguous only what al-Takfīr said about the ṣalāt al-fātiḥ and its comparability with the Qur‘ān. This was due to the condensed summary [of the issue]. Most of them apologized to the author because of their confidence (ḥusn ẓannihim) in God and His creatures, and others asked for clarification of his intention, and he explained it to them, whereupon they were satisfied.’ However, Ousmane Kane mentions that ‘la réinterprétation [of the ṣalāt al-fātiḥ] du Cheikh Ṣāliḥ, il convient de le faire observer, a été vivement critiqué par d’autres tijānīs’ (‘La polémique contre le soufisme et les ordres soufis en Afrique de l’Ouest post-coloniale’, in De Jong & Radtke, Islamic Mysticism Contested, 336. See further below.
26 Al-Mughīr, 29.
27 Ibid., 30.
28 Ibid.
(and later explicitly)\(^{29}\) informs us that \textit{al-Takfīr} was not meant to be an outline of Tijānī doctrines written for Tijānīs, but an attempt at making Tijānī beliefs acceptable for a wider public. This was understood by everybody, with the exception of Ibrāhīm Sīdī.

It is significant that Şāliḥ’s account of the events that led to the writing of \textit{al-Mughīr} does not give more details of the reaction of Nigerian Tijānī leaders to the publication of \textit{al-Takfīr}. We only find a few hints at the existence of voices expressing their disagreement with the \textit{shārif}. Instead, Ibrāhīm Şāliḥ focuses on the ‘lies’ and the ‘impertinence’\(^{30}\) of Ibrāhīm Sīdī, and his presentation gives the impression that the author of \textit{al-Summ al-zu‘āf} is completely isolated, whereas he himself has the most eminent leaders of the Tijāniyya in Nigeria at his side. A lengthy quote from a letter written by al-Ṭāhir ʿUthmān Bauchi, one of the leading Nigerian Tijānīs, to Muḥammad al-Thānī Kafanga (d. 1989), the most senior figure among the Tijānīs of Kano at the time, is supposed to confirm this view. Bauchi writes: ‘I have received the document written by the Sudanese. I felt very sorry for what he wrote, because it is damaging to the dignity of Islam and the Tijāniyya. … This man tells me that he replies to Shaykh \textit{shārif} Ibrāhīm Şāliḥ, but he is doing it in a rude manner. If he had found anything ambiguous in the writings of the \textit{shārif}, he should have contacted him directly, asking for clarification. I am now sending you a copy of the book by al-Ṭāhir Maigari, the enemy who has besmirched the honour of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Tijānī and his \textit{khalīfa}.\(^{31}\) If

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 38.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 31.

this man really wishes to write a response, he should reply to Maigari, and not to the sharīf, the great warrior (mujāhid), the pious and famous scholar. The defamation of his reputation undermines the reputation of Islam and of the Tijāniyya. … If he still wants to reply to the sharīf, he should keep the copies with him, since we do not need them here in Nigeria. May God protect the sharīf.’32 Ibrāhīm Śaliḥ concludes his account by stating that the Nigerian Tijānīs unanimously rejected the position taken by Ibrāhīm Sīdī in al-Summ al-zuʿāf. That is why ‘the fate of Ibrāhīm Sīdī’s book and all his other writings was destruction by fire in Nigeria’.33

Yet, in spite of al-Summ al-zuʿāf being burnt, the Nigerian sharīf still seems to have considered it necessary to refute the allegations and claims of Ibrāhīm Sīdī by writing al-Mughīr. Here, a number of questions arise. If it is true that al-Summ al-zuʿāf is a just worthless document written by an impertinent liar, why does Ibrāhīm Śaliḥ feel the need to respond with such a massive book?

Indeed, the reader cannot but wonder why it takes such a long run up to jump so short a distance. Why does Ibrāhīm Śaliḥ dedicate almost twenty pages of the ‘Introduction’ of al-Mughīr to the search for the possible motives of Ibrāhīm Sīdī by contemplating psychological explanations for human behaviour? Is it really so that Ibrāhīm Sīdī belongs to ‘the group of people who believe they can achieve their objectives by incursions into other peoples’ freedom and integrity’?34 The approach taken by Ibrāhīm Śaliḥ in his

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32 Translation of Bauchi’s letter as published in al-Mughīr, 30.
33 Al-Mughīr, 31.
34 Ibid., 10.
book, together with the structure of his argument, gives rise
to the suspicion that there is something more to the whole
story than just a single insulting pamphlet. A closer look at
\textit{al-Summ al-\text{zu'\=af}} may shed light on these questions.

\textbf{Al-Summ al-\text{zu'\=af}}

As mentioned above, it is almost impossible to find a copy of
Ibrāhīm Sīdī’s reply to \textit{al-Takfīr}. Although many of the
significant Tijānī leaders have heard of the book, very few of
them have ever seen it. They usually only know the short
title \textit{al-Summ al-\text{zu'\=af}}, and they assume that it constitutes a
furious attack on Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ.\footnote{This view was expressed by many informants I met during my
research trips to Senegal, Nigeria, Chad and Sudan between 1994
and 1998.} The pamphlet is mentioned by Awad al-Sid al-Karsani in his study of what he calls
‘millennial Islam in the Sudan’.\footnote{Awad al-Sid al-Karsani, ‘Beyond Sufism: The case of millennial
Islam in the Sudan’, in Louis Brenner (ed.), \textit{Muslim identity and
social change in sub-Saharan Africa}, Bloomington: Indiana
University Press 1993, 135-53.} It is introduced as a
response to Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ’s attempt ‘to prove that … Jawāhir
\textit{al-ma'ānī} is full of heresy and innovations, and that it is the
duty of all Tijanis to free their doctrine from such unorthodox
ideas’.\footnote{Al-Karsani, ‘Beyond Sufism’, 142.} This is a notably free interpretation of the contents
of \textit{al-Takfīr}, which would certainly be contested by Ibrāhīm
Ṣāliḥ. Al-Karsani then states that Ibrāhīm Sīdī accused
Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ of being a Wahhābī collaborator working for
the destruction of the Tijāniyya. According to al-Karsani’s
assessment, \textit{al-Summ al-\text{zu'\=af}} is an ‘aggressive attack on

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\footnotetext[35]{This view was expressed by many informants I met during my
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University Press 1993, 135-53.}
\footnotetext[37]{Al-Karsani, ‘Beyond Sufism’, 142.}
\end{thebibliography}
Ibrahim Salih’, led by ‘an ordinary fakī’.

The full title of Ibrāhīm Sīdī’s book is al-Summ zuʿāf al-muḍāmman fi kitāb al-takfīr li-ifsād al-ṭarīqa waʾl-itlāf. It is arranged in five chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. Each of the five chapters deals with a particular issue raised by Ibrāhīm Śāliḥ in al-Takfīr. In the following, I will give a short general outline of the argument and then concentrate on one specific issue, that is, the question of the reward for the recitation of the ṣalāt al-fātiḥ.

In the introduction, Ibrāhīm Sīdī tells the reader that he has come across a copy of al-Takfīr and introduces the author as somebody who ‘does not associate himself with the Tijāniyya order, but who claims to reply to one of the rejecters (munkirīn) of our master Aḥmad al-Tijānī … and to defend the bastion of the Tijāniyya order.’ According to Ibrāhīm Sīdī, the book then gives an overview of the development of Islamic sects and the Sufi order, and later, ‘when the author arrives at [the discussion of] the Tijāniyya, … the reader enters into a strange labyrinth, and he does not see where the rejecter stops and where the author of the reply starts. The reader does not know whether the author agrees with what the rejecter claims, which would mean that they are in fact one person. …’ Indeed, Ibrāhīm Sīdī’s purpose in writing al-Summ al-zuʿāf is to show that Ibrāhīm Śāliḥ has adopted the position of the Wahhābiyya instead of defending the Tijāniyya. The main argument to prove this claim relates

38 Ibid. The term fakī is a Sudanese corruption of the Arabic faqīh that refers to a local amulet writer or teacher of a Qur’anic school. This opinion of al-Karsani is off the mark. Cf. my discussion of al-Karsani’s argument in my forthcoming article ‘The history of the Tijāniyya and the issue of tarbiya in Darfur (Sudan)’, to be published in David Robinson and Jean-Louis Triaud (eds.), La Tijaniyya en Afrique subsaharienne: Bilan, enjeux et débats, Paris: Karthala, in press.

39 Al-Summ al-zuʿāf, 7. The term munkir is commonly used by Tijānis to describe their enemies (see for instance Hiskett, ‘Community of grace’); here it refers to Abubakar Gumi.

40 Al-Summ al-zuʿāf, 7.
to the \( \text{ṣalāt al-fātiḥ} \). This may thus merit a discussion in detail, although there are many other interesting points raised in *al-Summ al-zu‘āf* and the two books written by Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ that would amply deserve further consideration in a study of Tijānī doctrines.

It takes Ibrāhīm Sīdī thirteen pages to set out his position against the statements made by Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ in *al-Takfīr*.\(^{41}\) Both shaykhs start their discussion of the \( \text{ṣalāt al-fātiḥ} \) with a lengthy quotation from Jawāhir al-ma‘ānī on the reward for the recitation of this prayer formula: ‘Alī Ḥarāzim Barāda relates Aḥmad al-Tijānī’s account of a meeting between the Prophet and himself in which he asks about the merit (\( \text{faḍl} \)) of the \( \text{ṣalāt al-fātiḥ} \): ‘The Prophet first told me that one recitation of it is equivalent to six recitations of the Qur’ān. Then he informed me that one recitation is equivalent to 6,000 recitations of every formula that praises God (\( \text{tasbīḥ} \)) since Creation, of every formula of remembrance of God (\( \text{dhikr} \)), of every supplicatory prayer (\( \text{du‘ā’} \)) big or small, and of the Qur’ān (\( \min \text{al-qur’ān} \)), because it belongs to the formulas of remembrance (\( \text{li-} \)annahu \( \min \text{al-adhkār} \)).’\(^ {42}\)

As Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ says, this declaration by Aḥmad al-Tijānī provoked a very long and ardent controversy between the Tijānīs and their opponents.\(^ {43}\) This might be the reason that he tries to suggest a new interpretation of the merit of the \( \text{ṣalāt al-fātiḥ} \). The Nigerian sharīf introduces his reflections on the issue in *al-Takfīr* by saying that ‘while studying the books of the Tijānīyya with regard to the \( \text{ṣalāt al-fātiḥ} \), I have noticed something important which I am going to explain’.\(^ {44}\) He then makes the following comment on the

\(^{41}\) *Al-Takfīr*, 87-90 and *al-Summ al-zu‘āf*, 27-40.

\(^{42}\) Jawāhir al-ma‘ānī, I, 136. I have not included the eulogies for the Prophet and Aḥmad al-Tijānī in the translation.


\(^{44}\) *Al-Takfīr*, 86.
paragraph from the Jawāhir quoted above: ‘Here, it is necessary to stress that the statement according to which the šalāt al-fātiḥ equals six or 6,000 recitations of the Qurʾān—as it is commonly known among the people—is not correct (ghayr ṣahih). It is invalidated by the correct statement of Shaykh al-Tijānī in the same Jawāhir al-maʿānī.⁴⁵ After that the Nigerian sharīf explains what is to be considered the truth by quoting a passage from the Jawāhir about the reward for the recitation of God’s ‘greatest name’ (al-ism al-aʿẓam).⁴⁶ The context is another communication made by the Prophet to the founder of the Tijānīyya. Here, the Prophet states that ‘whoever recites al-ism al-aʿẓam once gets exactly the same reward as he gets for 6,000 recitations of the šalāt al-fātiḥ. … And he gets the reward (thawāb) of somebody who reads the whole Qurʾān, which means for one recitation of the ism he gets the reward (ajr) of one complete reading (khatma).’⁴⁷

Then follows the crucial paragraph of al-Takfīr, ‘If you compare this statement to the one quoted before, you will find a clear contradiction (tanāquḍan ṣāhiran) between the two statements: The “greatest name”—which is superior—equals the reward for one recitation of the Qurʾān, and it is 6,000 times above the šalāt al-fātiḥ. So how can it be reasonable that the šalāt al-fātiḥ—which is inferior—equals 6,000 recitations of the Qurʾān? There is no doubt that only one of the two statements can be correct. And it has to be the first one, because this is more common sense, and it is closer to the nature of the believers. The second, repulsive statement has been added by some enemies of the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 88. In this book, Ibrāhīm Şāliḥ does not add a eulogy to the name of Aḥmad al-Tijānī.

⁴⁶ The Sufis generally belief that God has hundred names, but only 99 of them are known. The hundredth name is only revealed to the most distinguished awliyāʾ (‘saints’), and its recitation entails an enormous reward. Hence the term al-ism al-aʿẓam.

⁴⁷ Jawāhir al-maʿānī, 1, 69.
Ibrāhīm Şāliḥ finally refers to another passage in the *Jawāhir* in order to support this conclusion. Again it is said that the ‘greatest name’ equals 6,000 recitations of the ṣalāt al-fātiḥ, and that the ṣalāt al-fātiḥ equals 6,000 recitations of other prayer formulas—but here the Qurʾān is not mentioned among these formulas. The *shārif* takes this as evidence for the fact that the words *min al-qurʾān* were not used by Shaykh ʿAḥmad al-Tijānī in the account of his meeting with the Prophet as related in the previous paragraph. He concludes, ‘Either this is due to the error of some of those who copied the manuscript, or the words have been inserted into the text by those who published the book, with the aim of distortion and denigration’. According to Ibrāhīm Şāliḥ, ‘it does not stand to reason that the ṣalāt al-fātiḥ equals anything of the Qurʾān’.

After this summary of the argument as presented in *al-Takfīr*, we may now turn to *al-Summ al-zufīf*. In his reply, Ibrāhīm Sīdī follows the sequence of Ibrāhīm Şāliḥ’s statements, and attempts to refute them one after the other. He starts with quotations from the *Jawāhir* and other important books written by Tijānī leaders, such as *Kāshif al-ilbās* by Ibrāhīm Nīyās, *al-Kawkab al-wahhāj* by ʿAḥmad Skiraj, *al-Jawhar al-muʿazzam fi ism Allāh al-aʿzām* by Muḥam-

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50 Ibrāhīm Şāliḥ states: ‘All this has not been said by *shaykh* al-Tijānī’ (*al-Takfīr*, 89).
51 *Al-Takfīr*, 89.
mad Salmā,55 or the *Rimāh* by *al-ḥājj* ʿUmar Tal,56 who all agree in stating that the recitation of the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* is equivalent to 6,000 recitations of the Qurʾān. According to ʿIbrāhīm Śildī, this means that ‘what is mentioned about the reward of the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* has not been smuggled into the *Jawāhir*, but it is a firmly established fact.’57

Thereupon ʿIbrāhīm Śildī points out that even if the reward for reciting the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* is higher than the reward for reciting the Qurʾān, it does not mean at all that the Tijānīs believe in the superiority of the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* to the Qurʾān. Here he quotes an Arabic proverb that is often used by the defenders of Tijānī doctrines: ‘a distinction does not entail superiority’ (*al-maziyya lā taqtaḏī al-afdalīyya*).58 On the basis of this argument, *al-Summ al-zuʿāf* sets out to denounce ʿIbrāhīm Śalīh’s comment that the statement of the *Jawāhir* on the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* is ‘not correct’. ‘This announcement is made by the author of *al-Takfīr* on behalf of the Wahhābīs’, is the retort of ʿIbrāhīm Śildī, and he continues, ‘As if he was a teacher giving a rash lesson to stupid disciples, he says “not correct”, which means a lie, or what else could the meaning of “not correct” be? … If the statement from the *Jawāhir* is “commonly known among the people”, and nobody [among the Tijānīs] has rejected it before you, we have to take it as evidence that it is the truth.'59 Again ʿIbrāhīm Śildī repeats his accusation that ʿIbrāhīm Śalīh is a Wahhābī, saying that ‘what you claim to have noticed has been noticed before you—by

55 This book does only exist as a manuscript and was written by the grandfather of ʿIbrāhīm Śildī. It is not mentioned in *ALA*, I, and I have never seen it.
57 *Al-Summ al-zuʿāf*, 29.
58 *Ibid.*, 32. This argument is well known from the numerous replies to the attacks on the Tijānīyya, and it is also used by ʿIbrāhīm Śalīh himself in *al-Takfīr* and *al-Mughīr*.
59 *Al-Summ al-zuʿāf*, 32.
the Wahhābīs and the rejecters. … Denying the reward for the recitation of the ʿalāʾ al-fātiḥ means nothing less than giving credence to the Wahhābīs and declaring the Tijānīs to be liars.’

Al-Summ al-zuʿāf then addresses the ‘apparent contradiction’ identified by Ibrāhīm Śalīḥ. Ibrāhīm Sīdī ironically talks about Śalīḥ’s ‘dangerous and exciting discovery’, meaning the claim that only one of the two statements in the Jawāhir can be considered true, namely, that the reward for one recitation of the ‘greatest name’ is equivalent to the reward for one recitation of the Qurʾān. Ibrāhīm Sīdī replied: ‘Yes, it is equivalent to the reward for one recitation of the Qurʾān—but besides, it is equivalent to the reward of 6,000 recitations of the ʿalāʾ al-fātiḥ, and one recitation of the ʿalāʾ al-fātiḥ is equivalent to 6,000 recitations of the Qurʾān. There is no contradiction at all in the statements of our master [Aḥmad al-Tijānī]. … Your analogy is null and void.’

Once more, Ibrāhīm Sīdī takes offence at the terms used by Ibrāhīm Śalīḥ and chastises him for calling the statement of Aḥmad al-Tijānī ‘repulsive’ (al-qawla al-nakrā), ‘You are the prototype of a rejecter’. The author of Al-Summ al-zuʿāf now proceeds to the question, ‘What is the number of the recitations of the Qurʾān awarded to the one who recites the “greatest name”? For Ibrāhīm Sīdī, the correct answer is provided by his grandfather Muḥammad Salmā, and he gives the following quotation from his book al-Jawhar al-muʿazzam:

‘We deduce [from the Jawāhir] that one recitation of the “greatest name” is equivalent to 36 million recitations of every formula that praises God (tasbīḥ), and 36 million

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60 Ibid.
61 Ibid., 33.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., 34.
recitations of every formula of remembrance (*dhikr*), and 36 million recitations of every supplicatory prayer (*duʿāʾ*), and 36 million recitations of the Qurʾān. This is so because one recitation of the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* is equivalent to 6,000 recitations of every *tasbīḥ*, every *dhikr*, every *duʿāʾ*, and of the Qurʾān. If you multiply 6,000 by 6,000, the result is 36 million—this is the reward for every recitation of the “greatest name”.

If we take this gigantic reward for granted, how is it compatible with the passage from the *Jawāhir* that equals one recitation of the ‘greatest name’ to one recitation of the Qurʾān? After all, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ’s conclusion regarding the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* was largely based on this particular statement of the *Jawāhir*. As we might expect from the preceding argumentation in *al-Summ al-zufīf*, Ibrāhīm Sīdī has a solution to this problem as well. In the same *Jawāhir al-mafiṇī*, Ḥarāzim informs us of another meeting between Ahmad al-Tijānī and the Prophet Muḥammad during which the latter said with regard to the ‘greatest name’: ‘The reward for reciting it [*al-ism al-afīām*] is as follows: Everybody who recites it among the common people of my community only gets the reward for one recitation of the Qurʾān (*kullu man talāhu min fīumūm ummatī fa-lahu thawāb khatma min al-Qurʾān faqāt*). … The one who knows that it is the name of the Divine Essence (*al-dhāt*) with all its distinct qualities … gets all of the reward, surpassing the reward for one recitation of the Qurʾān.’ For Ibrāhīm Sīdī, this is the irrefutable proof of the truth of everything mentioned in the *Jawāhir* about the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* and *al-ism al-afīām*.

Ibrāhīm Sīdī vehemently rejects the assumption that the words *min al-qurʾān* were not said by Ahmad al-Tijānī, as Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ stated in his book. Therefore, *al-Summ al-zuʿāf* turns the accusation of ‘distortion and denigration’—
which was aimed at the publishers who allegedly changed the original text of the Jawāhir—to the reverse. Now, the Nigerian sharīf is charged with defamation and distortion, and he is told that ‘your logic is never a yardstick for the Tijāniyya’. In fact, Ibrāhīm Sīdī is not sparing with harsh terms. He concludes his stream of abuse with a call on Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ to look for a Sufi order (tārīqa) other than the Tijāniyya.

Finally, this chapter of al-Summ al-zuʿāf gives a short account of a meeting that took place at a zāwiya in Kano in 1984. According to Ibrāhīm Sīdī, who attended the meeting, the subject of the reward for the ṣalāt al-fātiḥ came up, and al-Ṭāhir ʿUthmān Bauchi said, ‘The ṣalāt al-fātiḥ is a cheque to be cashed at the Bank of the Qurʾān’. Thus the final advice given to Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ is to ‘first ask al-Ṭāhir Bauchi for clarification whenever you notice something important’.

Back to al-Mughīr

Being now acquainted with al-Summ al-zuʿāf, we may have another look at Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ’s reply. It is hardly surprising that al-Mughīr repeatedly refers to the offensive and sometimes abusive language used by Ibrāhīm Sīdī. Indeed, the style of his argument is outstanding in the sense that the book more or less ignores the rules of respect to be observed in an exchange of arguments between Tijānīs. Al-Summ al-zuʿāf clearly follows the pattern and the style of the numerous replies addressed to the rejecters. Certainly, Ibrāhīm Sīdī leaves no room for doubt that for him, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ has

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67 Al-Summ al-zuʿāf, 36.
68 Ibid.
69 As quoted in ibid., 39. This is the same al-Ṭāhir Bauchi whose letter is quoted in al-Mughīr (above).
70 Al-Summ al-zuʿāf, 39. Here, Ibrāhīm Sīdī alludes to the phrase used by Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ in al-Takfīr, 86.
ceased to be a Tijānī. In Nigeria, however, the sharīf enjoyed (and continues to enjoy) widespread acceptance as a Tijānī leader, and this position made it easy for him to attack Ibrāhīm Sīdī for the inappropriate accusation of being a Wahhābī.71

But if we disregard the pure polemic, what is the response of al-Mughīr to the principal objection raised by Ibrāhīm Sīdī, which concerns the re-interpretation of the reward for the ṣalāt al-fātiḥ as suggested in al-Takfīr? Here, it is striking to see that Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ avoids mentioning the criticism completely. The references to the position of Ibrāhīm Sīdī on the ṣalāt al-fātiḥ in al-Mughīr are rather vague and constitute an attempt to ridicule the author of al-Summ al-zuʿāf: ‘His delusion has driven him into opposing the tenets of the shaykh [Aḥmad al-Tijānī], … as can be seen in his disgusting analysis in which he declares something fabricated by his own mind to be superior to the Qurʾān 36 million times’.72 Later, in one of the last chapters of al-Mughīr which is almost exclusively concerned with raising charges against Ibrāhīm Sīdī, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ says, ‘Everything produced by this deviant (mulḥīd) in his al-Summ al-zuʿāf about the elevation of Shaykh al-Tijānī, as well as his lengthy flow of gibberish on the excellent qualities of the shaykh … are nothing more than an attempt to deceive and to conceal the facts. He does that in order to make those who do not have any knowledge believe that the one who is addressed [Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ] in his reply [al-Summ al-zuʿāf] does indeed reject the excellent qualities of the ‘Muhammedan seal’, our master, the shaykh [Aḥmad al-Tijānī]’.73

Thus, the strategy of Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ essentially consists of

71 The replies by the Sudanese supporters of Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ to al-Summ al-zuʿāf centered mainly on this accusation (to be discussed in Part II of this article).
72 Al-Mughīr, 32.
73 Ibid., 475.
challenging the credibility of his opponent without addressing the controversial issue itself. Although the Nigerian shari' provides us with a prolonged discussion of the ṣalāt al-fāṭiḥ in al-Mughīr, he carefully tries not to reiterate the statement contested by al-Summ al-zuʾāf. However, the structure of Şaliḥ’s argument in that part of the book does deserve further consideration. Here, it is crucial to recall that in al-Takfīr, İbrāhīm Şaliḥ clearly stated that he believes the words min al-qurʾān to have been added to the above-mentioned paragraph on the ṣalāt al-fāṭiḥ in the Jawāhib, and that this has been done by the enemies of the Tijāniyya.

In the section on the ṣalāt al-fāṭiḥ in al-Mughīr, İbrāhīm Şaliḥ emphasises that he sees it as his duty to restore the truth to its place. He believes that the whole controversy over Tijānī doctrine only arose because of the ‘exaggerations’ (mubālaghāt) and ‘excesses’ (tajawuzāt) of the ‘extremists’ (al-ghulāt). Şaliḥ is of the opinion that originally, Sufi doctrines were free of these notions, and that the decline of the Sufis’ reputation is only due to the distortions and changes introduced by the intruders (dukhalā) who infiltrate the Tijāniyya with their alien ideas that aim at creating divisions within the ranks of the faithful. İbrāhīm Şaliḥ interprets İbrāhīm Sīdi’s criticism of al-Takfīr in this context. He says that the objections against his earlier book only came from those ‘extremists’ who are guided by personal interests, whereas the just and righteous understand his purpose in writing al-Takfīr. Thus, his use of the words ‘not correct’ in his statement about the comparison between the ṣalāt al-fāṭiḥ and the Qurʾān was not meant to deny the truth of the utterances of Aḥmad al-Tijānī. Instead, the intention was to

74  Ibid., 33-64.
75  All these terms are often used by İbrāhīm Şaliḥ in both al-Mughīr and al-Takfīr.
76  Al-Mughīr, 43.
77  Ibid., 39-40.
underline the rule that the comparison between the *ṣalāt al-fāṭiḥh* and the ‘essence’ (*dhāt*) of the Qurʾān is not admissible. The author of *al-Mughīr* adds that the wrong interpretation of his statement can ‘only occur to those who did not receive the *ṭarīqa* from its leaders’.⁷⁸ Yet, even if Ibrāhīm Śāliḥ maintains that the meaning of ‘not correct’ was clear from the context, the misunderstanding does certainly go back to the ambiguity of his phrase in *al-Takfīr*.

Thereupon *al-Mughīr* resumes the discussion of the two statements by Aḥmad al-Tijānī on the reward for the recitation of the *ṣalāt al-fāṭiḥh* and the ‘greatest name’. Ibrāhīm Śāliḥ says that he ‘did not elaborate on this issue [in *al-Takfīr*] by giving a comprehensive analysis in order to make it short’.⁷⁹ In *al-Mughīr*, he does not repeat his previous judgement about the ‘apparent contradiction’, but says, ‘[In *al-Takfīr*] I pointed to the necessity of paying attention to the question of how the two statements of our master Shaykh al-Tijānī in the *Jawāhir* can be made compatible. … There is a clear difference between … the more preferred (*al-fāḍil*) ‘greatest name’ which counts one recitation of the Qurʾān, and the less preferred (*al-mafḍūla*) *ṣalāt al-fāṭiḥh* that counts 6,000 recitations of the Qurʾān. This issue requires inspection and investigation.’⁸⁰

In *al-Takfīr*, Ibrāhīm Śāliḥ conducted his investigation by comparing different passages in the text of *Jawāhir al-maʿānī*. In *al-Mughīr*, he sets out to examine another account of the life and doctrines of Aḥmad al-Tijānī written by Muḥammad b. al-Mushrī, a contemporary of ʿAlī Harāzīm. This text is entitled *al-Jāmiʿ li-mā iftaraqa min al-ʿulūm al-fāʿida min biḥār al-quṭb al-maktūm* and has never been published.⁸¹ Ibrāhīm Śāliḥ gives the following quotation

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78 Ibid., 42.
79 Ibid., 44.
80 Al-Mughīr, 45.
81 A recent French thesis discusses both *Jawāhir al-maʿānī* and *al-Jāmiʿ*: Jillali El-Adnani, ‘Entre hagiographie et histoire, les origines d’une confrérie musulmane maghrébine: La Tijānīyya
from *al-Jāmiʿ*, ‘The Prophet first told me that one recitation of it [the ṣalāt al-fātiḥ] is equivalent to six recitations of the Qurʾān. Then he informed me that one recitation is equivalent to 6,000 recitations of every formula that praises God since the creation, of every formula of remembrance of God (dhikr), of every supplicatory prayer big or small.’

At this point, the Nigerian sharīf stops the quotation and gives his interpretation, ‘This is what the shaykh [Aḥmad al-Tijānī] said, and here the Qurʾān is not mentioned, and the word al-qurʾān is not pronounced by the shaykh.’ It is only after this comment that Ibrāhīm Śāliḥ continues with the account of Ibn al-Mushrī: ‘I asked the shaykh: “Is the Qurʾān included in the second account (that is, the second statement about the ṣalāt al-fātiḥ equating 6,000 recitations)?”. He said: “It is likely to be included (yaḥtwamil dūḥūluhu fīhī)”. I say: “Because it is a formula of remembrance (li-annahu dhikr)”.’

In contrast to the version given by Ālī Ḥarāzīm in the *Jawāhir*, where Aḥmad al-Tijānī clearly said that the Qurʾān is included, Ibn al-Mushrī’s version only talks about the probability, which means that Aḥmad al-Tijānī presumes, but does not know with certainty that the Qurʾān is among the formulas that are put in relation to the ṣalāt al-fātiḥ.

Now the issue becomes even more intricate. In addition to this difference between the *Jawāhir* and *al-Jāmiʿ*, Ibrāhīm Śāliḥ has yet another discovery to announce: He tells the reader that this quotation from *al-Jāmiʿ* ‘is divergent from what is in the Nigerian manuscript—and I do not doubt that I

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(1781-1880)* Thèse de Doctorat (NR), Université de Provence Aix-Marseille 1998 (see in particular pp. 169-209). I have not been able to consult *al-Jāmiʿ* for the present article. El-Adnānī mentions a manuscript of 463 pages in Rabat (‘Entre hagiographie et histoire’, 540).

82 *Al-Mughīr*, 45. Cf. the passage from the *Jawāhir* quoted above.

83 *Al-Mughīr*, 45.

have seen it—to the effect that it clearly shows that the inclusion of the word *al-qur’an* in the first account [that is, the equation of the *salāt al-fātiḥ* with six recitations of the *Qur’an*] is an addition to the text’. Here, the *sharīf* tries to evoke the impression that the *Qur’an* has not been mentioned at all by Aḥmad al-Tijānī. This would mean that the other manuscripts of *al-Jāmi‘* do not relate the authentic statement; however, Ibrāhīm Šāliḥ fails to provide more information on the mysterious manuscript he claims to have seen. Instead, he goes back to Muḥammad b. al-Mushrī’s dialogue with Ahmad al-Tijānī and arrives at the following conclusion: ‘The appearance of the word “likely” means that there are two possible explanations: The first is that the *Qur’an* is included, the second is that it is not.’ At this point, Ibrāhīm Šāliḥ suddenly switches to another topic, and the question of whether he believes that the word *al-qur’an* appeared in the original text or not is left unanswered.

The next ten pages of the section on *salāt al-fātiḥ* in *al-Mughīr* are taken up with the discussion of the comparison of this prayer formula to the *Qur’an*. The author essentially arrives at the same conclusion as his Sudanese adversary, stressing that the whole issue is about the reward given for the recitation of certain texts and not about the superiority of a prayer formula over the *Qur’an*. Finally, Ibrāhīm Šāliḥ refers again to the difference (*ikhtilāf*) between the versions of ʿAlī Ḥarāzīm and Muḥammad b. al-Mushrī, and he says, hinting at Ibrāhīm Sīdi, ‘Whoever keeps to what the two masters have recorded is not to blame. But those who are not competent in these matters should consult those who have the required knowledge among the leaders of the *ṭariqa*.’

Nowhere in *al-Mughīr* does Ibrāhīm Šāliḥ repeat his earlier

87 *Ibid.*, 53. Here, as elsewhere in the text (cf. above, note 78), Ibrāhīm Šāliḥ tries to denounce Ibrāhīm Sīdi on account of the fact that he does not possess the same prestigious *asānīd* (sg. *sanad*; ‘chain of initiation’) as the *sharīf*. 
assumption that ‘it does not stand to reason that the șalāt al-fātiḥ equals anything of the Qurʾān’.

The fact that İbrahim Şaliḥ does not mention his controversial statement again suggests that he was not able to provide convincing evidence for the assertion that the existing versions of the Jawāhir do not contain the authentic account of Ahmad al-Tijānī. Nevertheless, the sharīf takes every opportunity to denounce his Sudanese opponent, thus repaying the insulting statements of al-Summ al-zuʿāf. İbrahim Sidi is not only called a liar, but also a rejecter (munkir), an impostor (dajjāl) and an intruder (dakhīl) who pokes his nose into affairs which are not his business. According to İbrahim Şaliḥ, he will surely receive the punishment he deserves—not only in the Hereafter, but in this world also.88

How can we interpret this dispute between two shaykhs each accusing the other of destroying the Tijāniyya? Before attempting a tentative reply to this question, let us consider a last text that deals with the issue: Mirat al-ikhwān, written in February 1985 by Shaykh Muḥammad al-Thānī Kafanga from Kano.89

Mirat al-ikhwān

This short treatise is the only published text written by a Nigerian that addresses İbrahim Şaliḥ’s re-interpretation of the șalāt al-fātiḥ. Kafanga’s reply to al-Takfir covers only three pages, starting with the quotation from Muhammad b. al-Mushrī’s book al-Jāmiʿ on the reward of the șalāt al-

88 Cf. al-Mughīr, 61 and passim.
89 Muḥammad al-Thānī b. al-Ḥasan Kafanga, Mirat al-ikhwān, Kano: Northern Maktabat Press 1985 (ALA, II, 307 only lists a manuscript of this text held in Sokoto).
As *Mir’at al-ikhwān* was written before the publication of *al-Mughīr*, one wonders why Kafanga refers to *al-Jāmi‘*, a source not discussed by Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ in *al-Takfīr*. A letter from Muḥammad al-Thānī Kafanga to Abū ‘l-Fatḥ, the shaykh and mentor of Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ, throws light on the matter.

The letter dates from November 1984 and is published in the appendix to *al-Summ al-zu’āf*.91 Kafanga writes to Abū ‘l-Fatḥ, ‘When I received the document which you have ordered him [Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ] to write in order to explain his intention and his statement, I found that he wrote on page 7: “Our notification that the word *al-qur‘ān* might have been added to the statement of the shaykh [Ahmad al-Tijānī] is based on a manuscript of the book *al-Jāmi‘ li-mā ʾiftaraqa min al-ʾulūm* which I borrowed from Shaykh Ismā‘īl Khalīfa in Kano. I have not quoted the statement in *al-Takfīr* in order to make it short. Whoever wants to read that statement can consult the manuscript at the ẓāwiya of Ismā‘īl Khalīfa.” … I say: The matter would have been easier if he had quoted the text [from *al-Jāmi‘*]. After borrowing the manuscript from Ismā‘īl Khalīfa and reading the statement, I decided to withdraw my consent to your disciple completely.’93 The following explanation of why Kafanga disagrees with Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ is also included in *Mir’at al-ikhwān* and refers to the question of whether the Qur‘ān is among the formulas that are put in relation to the ṣalāt al-fātiḥ: ‘If we examine the statement [of Ibn al-Mushrī]

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90 *Mir’at al-ikhwān*, 6-7. The same passage from *al-Jāmi‘* as was quoted in *al-Mughīr* (above).
92 Ismā‘īl Khalīfa is the head of one of the most important Nigerian ẓāwiyas of the Tijānīyya (cf. his entry in *ALA*, II, 286-7). The ẓāwiya was founded by Shaykh al-Tijānī ʿUthmān (d. 1970) and is located in the old city of Kano. For a short biography of al-Tijānī ʿUthmān and a list of his writings, see *ALA*, II, 284-6.
“Because it is a formula of remembrance”, we understand that Ibn al-Mushrī is inclined to one of the two probabilities, that is that the Qurʾān is included in the second account. But sharīf Ibrāhīm from Borno tends to the other probability and does not include the Qurʾān in the second account. Yet the companions of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Tijānī agree upon the way Ibn al-Mushrī comprehends it. And this is what we profess.94 In the letter as well as in Mirʿat al-ikhwān, Kafanga emphasises that Aḥmad al-Tijānī’s equation of one recitation of the ṣalāt al-fātiḥ to 6,000 recitations of the Qurʾān is to be seen as a distinction which does not entail superiority.95

The information provided by Kafanga, together with Ibrāhīm Şāliḥ’s own account given in al-Mughīr, now allows us to reconstruct the course of events that followed the publication of al-Takfīr in Nigeria: A significant number of Nigerian Tijānī leaders expressed their disagreement with Ibrāhīm Şaliḫ’s discovery about the ṣalāt al-fātiḥ. At the same time, the first copies of Ibrāhīm Sīdī’s al-Summ al-zuʿāf circulated in Northern Nigeria. On the insistence of his master Abūʾl-Fatḥ, the sharīf wrote a more detailed comment in order to clarify his position. This comment was sent to the leading shaykhs, such as al-Ṭāhir Uthmān Bauchi, Muḥammad al-Thānī Kafanga, and Ismāʿīl Khalīfa, to mention only a few. Here, Ibrāhīm Şaliḫ referred to Ibn al-Mushrī’s al-Jāmiʿ in order to justify his assumption about the non-appearance of the word al-qurʾān in the controversial statement of Aḥmad al-Tijānī. Yet, in his letter of clarification the sharīf seems to have given the impression that the word al-qurʾān does not appear at all in the manuscript he has borrowed from Ismāʿīl Khalīfa.

We have to remember what Ibrāhīm Şaliḫ stated in al-Mughīr, that the ‘Nigerian manuscript’ gives a divergent version, showing that ‘the inclusion of the word al-qurʾān in

94 Mirʿat al-ikhwān, 7.
95 Ibid., and al-Summ al-zuʿāf, 66. Cf. note 58 above.
the first account [that is, the equation of the ṣalāt al-fātiḥ with six recitations of the Qurʾān] is an addition to the text’. Upon reading the sharīf’s justification in the letter, Muḥammad al-Thānī Kafanga went to have a look at Ismāʾīl Khalīfa’s copy of al-Jāmiʿc. As is obvious from Kafanga’s letter to Abū ʿl-Faṭḥ, as well as from the account given in Mirʾat al-ikhwān,96 the word al-qurʾān did indeed appear in the text, contrary to the assertion of Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ. This was the reason that Kafanga expressed his disagreement with the sharīf.

This explains why Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ is anxious to stress in the introduction of al-Mughīr that his position was shared by the Nigerian Tijānīs—which in fact was not true. The letter from al-Ṯāhir ʿUthmān Bauchi to Muḥammad al-Thānī Kafanga—quoted in full length in al-Mughīr97—shows that there was no consensus on the issue. Although Bauchi comes to the defence of Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ, he does not explicitly say that he agrees with the view expressed in al-Takfīr. In addition, although he does write to Kafanga, the advice given in the letter is directed to Ibrāhīm Sīdī, as if the two shaykhs were taking the same stance.

However, in spite of the dissension provoked by al-Takfīr, none of the Nigerians spoke out publicly against Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ. Abū ʿl-Faṭḥ made no statement at all, and Muḥammad al-Thānī Kafanga is obviously at pains to strike the right note in his discussion of al-Takfīr, as is evident from Mirʾat al-ikhwān. He says that it is ‘a valuable book’,98 and that he has distributed it among his disciples. Moreover, he states that ‘we know that the purpose of Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ is honest’.99 When we compare this statement to what Kafanga says in the letter to Abū ʿl-Faṭḥ, we can get an idea of the degree to which he restrained himself in his published

96 Mirʾat al-ikhwān, 8.
97 See above.
98 Mirʾat al-ikhwān, 7.
99 Ibid., 8.
comment. He writes, ‘Your disciple wants to extinguish a fire that has been burning for ages. … But his book has ignited a fire in our own ranks, and this is the objective of Satan and the followers of Satan. … It would be more appropriate if the sharīf was in agreement with our position, because—praise be to God—it is the truth, instead of agreeing to our enemies. I believe that the matter is easy: Whoever wants to give credence to the friends of God (awliyā’ Allāh) should do so; whoever wants to keep silent should be silent; and whoever wants to reject [the friends of God] should reject [them].’\footnote{100}

Thus, Kafanga agreed in principle with Ibrāhīm Sīdi, but he followed another policy, emphasising the importance of closing ranks and working together for the same objective. It may be assumed that Shaykh Abū ’l-Faṭḥ played the leading role in defining the strategy of how to deal with the unfortunate affair. Thanks to the influence he exerts over the other Nigerian Tijānī leaders—Muḥammad al-Thānī Kafanga included—he managed to calm things down.\footnote{101}

\textit{Al-Mughīr, or: The art of covering up the breaking of a taboo}

It is likely that the tactics of Abū ’l-Faṭḥ would have turned out to be successful, had not \textit{al-Summ al-zu‘āf} thwarted his plans. Whereas the Nigerians had reached a consensus on not bringing the issue to the public, the loud voice of Ibrāhīm Sīdi broke the silence. It was at this point that Ibrāhīm Śāliḥ’s re-interpretation of Tijānī doctrine took on the proportions of a major affair. Moreover, Muḥammad al-Thānī Kafanga showed the invalidity of the claim that the controversial phrase on the \textit{ṣalāt al-fātiḥ} related by Muḥammad b. al-

\footnote{100} Letter from Muḥammad al-Thānī Kafanga to Aḥmad Abū ’l-Faṭḥ, as published in \textit{al-Summ al-zu‘āf}, 67.
\footnote{101} This view has been expressed by a number of Nigerian informants I met in 1997, Abū ’l-Faṭḥ included.
Mushrī might not be authentic. This situation forced Ibrāhīm Şāliḥ to take action, and the result was the composition of *al-Mughīr*. In fact, the 584 pages of *al-Mughīr* constitute nothing other than an attempt to cover up the mess caused by a single statement published in *al-Takfīr*.

As we have seen, Ibrāhīm Şāliḥ does not repeat his earlier assertion that the word *al-qurān* was added to the text of *Jawāhir al-maqānī*. Even with regard to the authenticity of Aḥmad al-Tijānī’s contested statement as related in *al-Jāmī*[^102^], the author of *al-Mughīr* keeps a low profile. He confines himself to the vague conclusion that there are ‘two possible explanations: The first is that the Qurān is included, the second is that it is not.’ It is revealing that Ibrāhīm Şāliḥ introduces Muḥammad b. al-Mushrī’s book into the debate, because he does it while being aware of the deficiency of his argument: *al-Jāmī*[^102^] does not support the assertion that the word *al-qurān* has been added to Aḥmad al-Tijānī’s statement on the slaughtering al-fātih. Yet by referring to the two possible interpretations provided by *al-Jāmī*[^102^], Ibrāhīm Şāliḥ manages to divert attention from the actual essence of the whole debate. It is as if he had never contested the authenticity of the *Jawāhir*. In fact, one cannot but admit that *al-Mughīr* provides convincing evidence for the outstanding eloquence of Ibrāhīm Şāliḥ. The way he wriggles out of the dilemma is worthy of respect—the sharīf can indeed claim to be a master of words.

An observation made by Jamil Abun-Nasr can help to place the issue in a wider context. He pointed to ‘the blind trust which even the best instructed followers of Aḥmad al-Tijānī had in their master, and their inability to apply any measure of independent judgement while examining his claims’.[^102^] Although this assessment has a biased connotation, the following statement of Abun-Nasr is absolutely accurate: ‘Ahmad al-Tijānī was to his followers what he claimed to be: every criticism made against him was neces-

sarily wrong from their point of view, and it was the duty of the Tijanis to write and expose its error'.

This seems to be what happened to Ibrāhīm Şāliḥ who expressed an ‘independent judgement’. By making claims that no other Tijānī had made before, he contravened accepted tenets of Tijānī doctrine. It seems that he later tried to cover up the whole affair by writing al-Mughīr.

Whatever the motives of Ibrāhīm Şāliḥ may have been with the publication of al-Takfīr, he was caught in the trap of his own ambiguous discourse. Probably he would not have made the same statements to an audience exclusively composed of Tijānīs. Yet in al-Takfīr, the shārīf tried to dispel the doubts raised by the critics of the Tijāniyya. This approach led him to deviate from what the Tijānīs believe to be the original doctrine of the order’s founder. The case of Ibrāhīm Sīdī stands for the opposite: he does not care about the objections of the ‘rejecters’ at all and only addresses those who have already embraced the Tijāniyya.

Thus, the Takfīr debate provides an excellent example of the tension that characterises the current development of Muslim societies in Africa. The confrontation between the two perspectives does indeed have further implications and far-reaching consequences. On the intellectual level, the debate might only concern a few scholars. But the underlying pattern of conflict does involve the ordinary followers as well. Furthermore, apart from the fact that ‘religious scholars prefer to rely on a dogmatic argumentation in order to fight their opponents’, their debates often take on a political

103 Ibid. However, El-Adnani assumes that there were critical voices among al-Tijānī’s followers in the formative period of the Tijāniyya (‘Entre hagiographie et histoire’, 153-65). But at a later stage, criticism was certainly considered by Tijānīs to be out of the question.

104 In al-Mughīr—but not in al-Takfīr—Ibrāhīm Şāliḥ makes a distinction between what he says to Tijānīs and to non-Tijānīs (see for instance al-Mughīr, 60-1).

105 Loimeier, Islamic Reform, 173.
dimension. These issues will be addressed in more detail in the second part of this article, which will consider the resounding echo of the Takfīr debate among the Tijāniyya in the Sudan. Suffice it here to state that the entire text of al-Mughīr seems to be mere subterfuge. It was written to divert attention from statements in al-Takfīr widely regarded as inappropriate, and the necessity of writing the book goes back to al-Summ al-zuʿāf, where Ibrāhīm Sīdī publicly revealed Ibrāhīm Şāliḥ’s breaking of what amounts to a taboo.

106 I have offered an interpretation of the political dimensions of the Takfīr debate in another article: ‘Der lange Arm des Ibrāhīm Şāliḥ’, to be published in Roman Loimeier (ed.), Vernetzungen in islamischen Gesellschaften, in press.