

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.¹ At the same time, polemical literature might also have a 'sub-text'² 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 Ṣāliḥ* and his *Kitāb al-Mughīr*

In 1986, a Lebanese publishing house printed a heavy tome of 584 pages entitled *al-Mughīr ʿalā shubuhāt ahl al-ahwāʾ*³

- * 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.

wa-akādhīb al-munkir ʿalā kitāb al-Takfīr.³ 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,⁴ 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 akhtar bidʿa tuhaddid al-salām wa’l-waḥda bayn al-muslimīn fī Nayjīriyya*,⁵ 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 ‘Tijānī critics of his earlier book in which he had suggested a re-examination of some Tijānī doctrines’.⁶

In his valuable MA thesis, the same Muhammad Sani Umar refers to *sharīf* Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ as one of the Tijānī leaders who attempted a ‘revision and restatement of some Sufi doctrines of the brotherhood’.⁷ 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’.⁸

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

3 Beirut: Muʿassasat Fuʿād li’l-Tajlīd, 1986.

4 For references on Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ (Ibrāhīm b. Ṣāliḥ b. Yūnis al-Ḥusaynī) 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 Borno’ (*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.

7 Muhammad Sani Umar, ‘Sufism and anti-Sufism in Nigeria’, MA thesis, University of Kano 1988, 254.

8 *Ibid.*

reformers in Northern Nigeria.⁹ His discussion of *al-Mughīr* is mainly concerned with the chapter on *Jawāhir al-ma‘ānī*,¹⁰ where Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ gives his view on the authenticity of this important source on the life and doctrines of Aḥmad al-Tijānī (1737-1815), the founder of the Tijāniyya Sufi order.¹¹ Loimeier locates Ṣāliḥ’s argument in the context of the conflict that has divided the Muslims of Nigeria into two main camps, namely the Sufis (of the Qādiriyya and the Tijāniyya orders) and the reformist Izāla movement. According to Loimeier, Ṣāliḥ ‘has successfully developed over the last years a new and more flexible strategy in the defence of the Tijāniyya’.¹² However, this strategy earned him the criticism of other Nigerian Tijānī leaders who regarded it ‘as suicidal and as capitulating to the enemies of the Tijāniyya’.¹³

Auwalu Anwar, the author of another useful analysis of the struggle between the Sufis and the reformers in Northern Nigeria, does mention Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ among his informants, but he only refers to *al-Takfīr*, which he characterises as maintaining a ‘certain degree of objectivity’, and as offering a ‘very good historical perspective’.¹⁴ Anwar later presents

9 Roman Loimeier, *Islamic reform and political change in Northern Nigeria*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1997, 273.

10 *Al-Mughīr*, 65-72. The book in question is ‘Alī Ḥarāzīm Barāda, *Jawāhir al-ma‘ānī wa-bulūgh al-amānī fī fayḍ Sīdī Abī ‘l-‘Abbās al-Tijānī*. It was first published in 1927; in the following, I will quote from the Beirut edition, Dār al-Fikr 1383/1963.

11 The standard reference for Aḥmad al-Tijānī and Tijāniyya doctrines is Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *The Tijaniyya: A Sufi order in the modern world*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1965 (in particular Chapters II and III). A more recent assessment was written by Maria Awad, ‘Un fondateur de confrérie religieuse maghrébine: Sidi Ahmad al-Tijani (1737–1815)’, *Revue Maroc Europe*, ii, 1992, 233-66.

12 Loimeier, *Islamic reform*, 275.

13 *Ibid.*, 276.

14 Auwalu Anwar, ‘Struggle for influence and identity: The Ulama in Kano, 1937–1987’, MA dissertation, University of Maiduguri 1989, xxviii.

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 Sīdih, 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 *sayyidī* (lit. 'my master'), Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ writes 'Sīdih', which is equivalent to *sayyiduhu*, '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.

Wahhābiyya).¹⁶

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 °Alī 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,¹⁷ but he does not list *al-Summ al-zu°āf*. 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 Ṣāliḥ's own reply, there are numerous responses by Sudanese Tijānīs to *al-Summ al-zu°āf*. Since 1984, when the first version of *al-Summ al-zu°āf* was distributed by Ibrāhīm Sīdī,¹⁸ at least five treatises in defence of Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ 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 Ṣāliḥ. The

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

17 *ALA*, I, 300-3.

18 In my possession is a copy printed by the author in 1985, together with two other texts that deal with *al-Takfīr*: Ibrāhīm Sīdī Muḥammad, *al-Summ zu°āf al-muḍamman fī kitāb al-takfīr li-ifsād al-ṭarīqa wa'l-itlāf*, followed by *al-Hidāya al-hādiya li-Muḥammad Taqī 'l-Dīn takshif kawn ṣāhib al-takfīr Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ min al-Wahhābiyyīn*, followed by *al-Najm al-thāqib al-Tijānī bi'l-burhān al-qāṭi° min zawāl al-ḥayra li-Skīraj al-°arif al-rabbānī yubaddid turrahāt ṣāhib al-takfīr al-jānī*. Although I have not seen it, there must have been a first edition of the text that circulated in the Sudan and Northern Nigeria in 1984.

polemical exchange between Ibrāhīm Sīdī 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 Ṣāliḥ in 1982 and published in Cairo by Muṣṭafā 'l-Bābī al-Ḥalabī 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 Ṣāliḥ. 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 Ṣāliḥ 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 Ṣāliḥ 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

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 Ṣāliḥ considered it necessary to address a particular question raised by Gumi, namely the comparison between the Qur'ān and the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ*, 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-fātiḥ* to be superior to the Qur'ān.²¹ As the same accusation was made by Abubakar Gumi, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ 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 Qur'ān, and neither the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* nor any other text or prayer can compensate the Qur'ān'.²² Yet, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ 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-fātiḥ* to the Qur'ān 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-Ḥāfiẓ b. °Abd al-Laṭīf (d. 1978), who have made similar statements on the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ*.

According to Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ's account, he was then asked by his spiritual master Shaykh Aḥmad Abū 'l-Faṭḥ to explain more clearly what he wanted to say about the *ṣalāt*

21 See Abun-Nasr, *Tijaniyya*, 173-81.

22 *Al-Mughīr*, 29.

23 *Ibid.* See below for Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ's 'ambiguous' statements on the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* in *al-Takfīr* and Ibrāhīm Sidi's reply.

al-fātiḥ. 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’.²⁴ 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*.²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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’.²⁷ 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*’.²⁸ In this section, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ implicitly

24 *Al-Mughīr*, 29. Aḥmad Abū ’l-Faṭḥ (b. c. 1921) is one of the senior figures of the Tijāniyya 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 Qurʾān. This was due to the condensed summary [of the issue]. Most of them apologized to the author because of their confidence (*ḥusn ḥannihim*) 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 *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 Ṣāliḥ's account of the events that led to the writing of *al-Mughīr* does not give more details of the reaction of Nigerian Tijānī leaders to the publication of *al-Takfīr*. We only find a few hints at the existence of voices expressing their disagreement with the *sharīf*. Instead, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ focuses on the 'lies' and the 'impertinence'³⁰ of Ibrāhīm Sīdī, and his presentation gives the impression that the author of *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 °Uthmān 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 *sharīf* Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ, but he is doing it in a rude manner. If he had found anything ambiguous in the writings of the *sharīf*, 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 *khalīfa*.³¹ If

29 *Ibid.*, 38.

30 *Ibid.*, 31.

31 The *khalīfa* in question is the Senegalese *shaykh* Ibrāhīm Nīyās (on him see Mervyn Hiskett, 'The "Community of grace" and its opponents', *African Language Studies*, xvii, 1980, 99-140; Christopher Gray, 'The Rise of the Niassene Tijaniyya, 1875 to the present', *ISSS*, ii, 1988, 34-60; and recently, Ousmane Kane, 'Shaikh al-Islam Al-Hajj Ibrahim Niassé', in David Robinson and Jean-Louis Triaud (eds.), *Le Temps des marabouts*, Paris: Karthala

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 Ṣāliḥ concludes his account by stating that the Nigerian Tijānīs unanimously rejected the position taken by Ibrāhīm Sīdī in *al-Summ al-zu^cāf*. 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-zu^cāf* 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-zu^cāf* is a just worthless document written by an impertinent liar, why does Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ 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 Ṣāliḥ 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 Ṣāliḥ in his

1997, 299-316). Maigari, a former Tijānī who then joined the Izāla, is the author of an MA thesis entitled ‘al-Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyās ḥayātuhu wa-arā^uuhu wa-ta^cālīmuḥu’. After its publication in Beirut (Dār al-^cArabiyya 1981), the book gave rise to fierce disputes between Tijānīs and Izāla members (cf. the review by Ousmane Kane, ‘La vie, les idées et les enseignements de Cheikh Ibrahim Niass’, *ISSS*, iii, 1989, 294-5; see also *ALA*, II, 555-6).

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 *al-Summ al-zu^cāf* may shed light on these questions.

Al-Summ al-zu^cāf

As mentioned above, it is almost impossible to find a copy of Ibrāhīm Sīdī's reply to *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 *al-Summ al-zu^cāf*, and they assume that it constitutes a furious attack on Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ.³⁵ The pamphlet is mentioned by Awad al-Sid al-Karsani in his study of what he calls 'millennial Islam in the Sudan'.³⁶ It is introduced as a response to Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ's attempt 'to prove that ... *Jawāhir al-ma^cānī* is full of heresy and innovations, and that it is the duty of all Tijanis to free their doctrine from such unorthodox ideas'.³⁷ This is a notably free interpretation of the contents of *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, *al-Summ al-zu^cāf* is an 'aggressive attack on

35 This view was expressed by many informants I met during my research trips to Senegal, Nigeria, Chad and Sudan between 1994 and 1998.

36 Awad al-Sid al-Karsani, 'Beyond Sufism: The case of millennial Islam in the Sudan', in Louis Brenner (ed.), *Muslim identity and social change in sub-Saharan Africa*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1993, 135-53.

37 Al-Karsani, 'Beyond Sufism', 142.

Ibrahim Salih', led by 'an ordinary *fakī*'.³⁸

The full title of Ibrāhīm Sīdī's book is *al-Summ zu^cāf al-muḍamman fī kitāb al-takfīr li-ifsād al-ṭarīqa wa'l-iltāf*. It is arranged in five chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. Each of the five chapters deals with a particular issue raised by Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ 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.'³⁹ 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. ...'⁴⁰ Indeed, Ibrāhīm Sīdī's purpose in writing *al-Summ al-zu^cāf* is to show that Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ has adopted the position of the Wahnābiyya 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 Tijāniyya en Afrique subsaharienne: Bilan, enjeux et débats*, Paris: Karthala, in press.

39 *Al-Summ al-zu^cāf*, 7. The term *munkir* is commonly used by Tijānīs to describe their enemies (see for instance Hiskett, 'Community of grace'); here it refers to Abubakar Gumi.

40 *Al-Summ al-zu^cāf*, 7.

to the *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 Sidī 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 *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 (*faḍl*) of the *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 (*tasbīḥ*) since Creation, of every formula of remembrance of God (*dhikr*), of every supplicatory prayer (*du'ā'*) big or small, and of the Qur'ān (*min al-qur'ān*), because it belongs to the formulas of remembrance (*li-annah min 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 *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ*. The Nigerian *sharīf* introduces his reflections on the issue in *al-Takfīr* by saying that 'while studying the books of the Tijāniyya with regard to the *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.

43 *Al-Takfīr*, 87. On the history of the controversy, see Abun-Nasr, *Tijaniyya*, 173-81.

44 *Al-Takfīr*, 86.

paragraph from the *Jawāhir* quoted above: ‘Here, it is necessary to stress that the statement according to which the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* equals six or 6,000 recitations of the Qurʾān—as it is commonly known among the people—is not correct (*ghayr ṣaḥīḥ*). 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 Tijāniyya. 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 *ṣalāt 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 ḏāhiran*) 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 *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ*. So how can it be reasonable that the *ṣalāt 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 Ṣāliḥ does not add a eulogy to the name of Aḥmad al-Tijānī.

46 The Sufis generally believe 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*, I, 69.

shaykh.⁴⁸

Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ 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.⁴⁹ The *sharīf* takes this as evidence for the fact that the words *min al-qurʾān* were not used by Shaykh Aḥmad al-Tijānī in the account of his meeting with the Prophet as related in the previous paragraph.⁵⁰ 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’.⁵¹ According to Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ, ‘it does not stand to reason that the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* equals anything of the Qurʾān’.⁵²

After this summary of the argument as presented in *al-Takfīr*, we may now turn to *al-Summ al-zuʿāf*. In his reply, Ibrāhīm Sīdī follows the sequence of Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ’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,⁵³ *al-Kawkab al-wahhāj* by Aḥmad Skīraj,⁵⁴ *al-Jawhar al-muʿazzam fī ism Allāh al-aʿzam* by Muḥam-

48 *Al-Takfīr*, 88-9. Kane quotes the same paragraph in French translation (‘La polémique contre le soufisme’, 336).

49 *Jawāhir al-maʿānī*, I, 138.

50 Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ states: ‘All this has not been said by *shaykh* al-Tijānī’ (*al-Takfīr*, 89).

51 *Al-Takfīr*, 89.

52 *Ibid.*, 90.

53 Ibrāhīm b. ʿAbd Allāh Nīyās, *Kāshif al-ilbās ʿan fayḍat al-khatm Abī ʿl-ʿAbbās*. There are several editions since 1936; I have used a new edition published by Muḥammad al-Maʾmūn Nīyās, Dakar 1988.

54 Aḥmad b. al-ʿAyāshī Skīraj, *al-Kawkab al-wahhāj li-tawḍīḥ al-minhāj*. I have not seen this book yet. Abun-Nasr mentions an edition published in Tunis in 1328 AH; *Tijaniyya*, 194.

mad Salmā,⁵⁵ or the *Rimāḥ* by *al-ḥājj* °Umar 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 Ibrāhīm Sīdī, 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 Ibrāhīm Sīdī 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 taqtaḍī al-afḍaliyya*).⁵⁸ On the basis of this argument, *al-Summ al-zuʿāf* sets out to denounce Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ’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 Ibrāhīm Sīdī, 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 Ibrāhīm Sīdī repeats his accusation that Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ 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 Ibrāhīm Sīdī. It is not mentioned in *ALA*, I, and I have never seen it.

56 °Umar b. Saʿīd al-Fūtī, *Rimāḥ ḥizb al-rahīm ʿalā nuḥūr hizb al-rajīm*, in the margin of *Jawāhir al-maʿānī*.

57 *Al-Summ al-zuʿāf*, 29.

58 *Ibid.*, 32. This argument is well known from the numerous replies to the attacks on the Tijāniyya, and it is also used by Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ 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 *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* means nothing less than giving credence to the Wahhābīs and declaring the Tijānīs to be liars.’⁶⁰

Al-Summ al-zu‘āf then addresses the ‘apparent contradiction’ identified by Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ. Ibrāhīm Sīdī ironically talks about Ṣāliḥ’s ‘dangerous and exciting discovery’,⁶¹ 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 Qur’ān. Ibrāhīm Sīdī replied: ‘Yes, it is equivalent to the reward for one recitation of the Qur’ān—but besides, it is equivalent to the reward of 6,000 recitations of the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ*, and one recitation of the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* is equivalent to 6,000 recitations of the Qur’ān. There is no contradiction at all in the statements of our master [Aḥmad al-Tijānī]. ... Your analogy is null and void.’⁶² Once more, Ibrāhīm Sīdī takes offence at the terms used by Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ and chastises him for calling the statement of Aḥmad al-Tijānī ‘repulsive’ (*al-qawla al-nakrā‘*), ‘You are the prototype of a rejecter’.⁶³

The author of *al-Summ al-zu‘āf* now proceeds to the question, ‘What is the number of the recitations of the Qur’ān awarded to the one who recites the “greatest name”?’⁶⁴ 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-mu‘azzam*: ‘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

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 (*du^cā³*), and 36 million recitations of the Qur³ān. This is so because one recitation of the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* is equivalent to 6,000 recitations of every *tasbīḥ*, every *dhikr*, every *du^cā³*, and of the Qur³ān. If you multiply 6,000 by 6,000, the result is 36 million—this is the reward for every recitation of the “greatest name”.⁶⁵

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 Qur³ān? After all, Ibrāhīm Ṣālīḥ’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-zu^cāf*, Ibrāhīm Sīdī has a solution to this problem as well. In the same *Jawāhir al-ma^cānī*, ‘Alī Ḥarāzīm informs us of another meeting between Aḥmad 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-a^cẓam*] is as follows: Everybody who recites it among the common people of my community only gets the reward for one recitation of the Qur³ān (*kullu man talāhu min ‘umūm ummatī fa-lahu thawāb khatma min al-Qur³ān faqat*). ... 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 Qur³ān.’⁶⁶ 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-a^cẓam*.

Ibrāhīm Sīdī vehemently rejects the assumption that the words *min al-qur³ān* were not said by Aḥmad al-Tijānī, as Ibrāhīm Ṣālīḥ stated in his book. Therefore, *al-Summ al-zu^cāf* turns the accusation of ‘distortion and denigration’—

65 *Ibid.*

66 *Jawāhir al-ma^cānī*, I, 70.

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’.⁶⁷ 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 (*ṭarīqa*) other than the Tijāniyya.⁶⁸

Finally, this chapter of *al-Summ al-zu‘āf* 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 ‘Uthmān Bauchi said, ‘The *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* is a cheque to be cashed at the Bank of the Qur’ān’.⁶⁹ Thus the final advice given to Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ is to ‘first ask al-Ṭāhir Bauchi for clarification whenever you notice something important’.⁷⁰

Back to al-Mughīr

Being now acquainted with *al-Summ al-zu‘āf*, 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-zu‘āf* 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

67 *Al-Summ al-zu‘āf*, 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-zu‘āf*, 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-zu'āf*: '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 Qur'ān 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 (*mulhid*) in his *al-Summ al-zu'āf* 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-zu'āf*] does indeed reject the excellent qualities of the 'Muḥammadan 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-zu'āf* 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 *sharīf* provides us with a prolonged discussion of the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* in *al-Mughīr*,⁷⁴ he carefully tries not to reiterate the statement contested by *al-Summ al-zu'āf*. However, the structure of Ṣāliḥ's argument in that part of the book does deserve further consideration. Here, it is crucial to recall that in *al-Takfīr*, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ clearly stated that he believes the words *min al-qur'ān* to have been added to the above-mentioned paragraph on the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* in the *Jawāhir*, and that this has been done by the enemies of the Tijāniyya.

In the section on the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* in *al-Mughīr*, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ 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' (*tajāwuzāt*) of the 'extremists' (*al-ghulāt*).⁷⁵ Ṣāliḥ 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.⁷⁶ Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ interprets Ibrāhīm Sīdī'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*.⁷⁷ Thus, his use of the words 'not correct' in his statement about the comparison between the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* and the Qur'ān 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 Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ 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-fātiḥ* 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 Ṣāliḥ 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-fātiḥ* and the ‘greatest name’. Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ 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-fātiḥ* that counts 6,000 recitations of the Qurʾān. This issue requires inspection and investigation.’⁸⁰

In *al-Takfīr*, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ 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 Ḥarāzīm. This text is entitled *al-Jāmiʿ li-mā iftaraqa min al-ʿulūm al-fāʾida min biḥār al-quṭb al-maktūm* and has never been published.⁸¹ Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ gives the following quotation

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 Tijāniyya

from *al-Jāmi*^c, ‘The Prophet first told me that one recitation of it [the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ*] is equivalent to six recitations of the Qur^ʿān. 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.’⁸² 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 Qur^ʿān is not mentioned, and the word *al-qur^ʿān* is not pronounced by the shaykh.’⁸³ It is only after this comment that Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ continues with the account of Ibn al-Mushrī: ‘I asked the shaykh: “Is the Qur^ʿān 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 (*yaḥtamil dukhūluhu fīhi*)”. I say: “Because it is a formula of remembrance (*li-annahu dhikr*)”.’⁸⁴ In contrast to the version given by ^cAlī Ḥarāzīm in the *Jawāhir*, where Aḥmad al-Tijānī clearly said that the Qur^ʿān 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 Qur^ʿān 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-Jāmi*^c, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ has yet another discovery to announce: He tells the reader that this quotation from *al-Jāmi*^c ‘is divergent from what is in the Nigerian manuscript—and I do not doubt that I

(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-Jāmi*^c for the present article. El-Adnani 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.

84 *Ibid.*

have seen it—to the effect that it clearly shows that the inclusion of the word *al-qurʿān* in the first account [that is, the equation of the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* with six recitations of the Qurʿān] is an addition to the text'.⁸⁵ Here, the *sharīf* tries to evoke the impression that the Qurʿān has not been mentioned at all by Aḥmad al-Tijānī. This would mean that the other manuscripts of *al-Jāmiʿ*^c do not relate the authentic statement; however, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ 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 Aḥmad 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 Qurʿān is included, the second is that it is not.'⁸⁶ At this point, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ suddenly switches to another topic, and the question of whether he believes that the word *al-qurʿān* appeared in the original text or not is left unanswered.

The next ten pages of the section on *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* in *al-Mughīr* are taken up with the discussion of the comparison of this prayer formula to the Qurʿān. 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 Qurʿān. Finally, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ refers again to the difference (*ikhtilāf*) between the versions of ʿAlī Ḥarāzīm and Muḥammad b. al-Mushrī, and he says, hinting at Ibrāhīm Sīdī, '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 *ṭarīqa*.'⁸⁷ Nowhere in *al-Mughīr* does Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ repeat his earlier

85 *Ibid.*

86 *Ibid.*

87 *Ibid.*, 53. Here, as elsewhere in the text (cf. above, note 78), Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ tries to denounce Ibrāhīm Sīdī 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 *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* equals anything of the Qur’ān’.

The fact that Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ 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 Aḥmad al-Tijānī. Nevertheless, the *sharīf* takes every opportunity to denounce his Sudanese opponent, thus repaying the insulting statements of *al-Summ al-zu^cāf*. Ibrāhīm Sīdī 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 Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ, 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: *Mir’at al-ikhwān*, written in February 1985 by Shaykh Muḥammad al-Thānī Kafanga from Kano.⁸⁹

Mir’at al-ikhwān

This short treatise is the only published text written by a Nigerian that addresses Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ’s re-interpretation of the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ*. Kafanga’s reply to *al-Takfīr* covers only three pages, starting with the quotation from Muḥammad b. al-Mushrī’s book *al-Jāmi^c* on the reward of the *ṣalāt al-*

88 Cf. *al-Mughīr*, 61 and *passim*.

89 Muḥammad al-Thānī b. al-Ḥasan Kafanga, *Mir’at al-ikhwān*, Kano: Northern Maktabat Press 1985 (*ALA*, II, 307 only lists a manuscript of this text held in Sokoto).

fātiḥ.⁹⁰ As *Mirʿat al-ikhwān* was written before the publication of *al-Mughīr*, one wonders why Kafanga refers to *al-Jāmiʿ*, a source not discussed by Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ in *al-Takfīr*. A letter from Muḥammad al-Thānī Kafanga to Abū ʿl-Faṭḥ, 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-zuʿāf*.⁹¹ Kafanga writes to Abū ʿl-Faṭḥ, ‘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-qurʿān* might have been added to the statement of the shaykh [Aḥmad al-Tijānī] is based on a manuscript of the book *al-Jāmiʿ li-mā iftaraqa min al-ʿulūm* which I borrowed from Shaykh Ismāʿīl Khalīfa⁹² 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 *zāwiya* of Ismāʿīl Khalīfa.” ... I say: The matter would have been easier if he had quoted the text [from *al-Jāmiʿ*]. After borrowing the manuscript from Ismāʿīl 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 *Mirʿat al-ikhwān* and refers to the question of whether the Qurʿān is among the formulas that are put in relation to the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ*: ‘If we examine the statement [of Ibn al-Mushrī]

90 *Mirʿat al-ikhwān*, 6-7. The same passage from *al-Jāmiʿ* as was quoted in *al-Mughīr* (above).

91 *Al-Summ al-zuʿāf*, 66-7.

92 Ismāʿīl Khalīfa is the head of one of the most important Nigerian *zāwiyas* of the Tijāniyya (cf. his entry in *ALA*, II, 286-7). The *zāwiya* 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.

93 Letter from Muḥammad al-Thānī Kafanga to Aḥmad Abū ʿl-Faṭḥ, as published in *al-Summ al-zuʿāf*, 66.

“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 *Mirʾat 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 Ṣāliḥ’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 Ṣāliḥ’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 Abū ʿl-Faṭḥ, the *sharīf* wrote a more detailed comment in order to clarify his position. This comment was sent to the leading shaykhs, such as al-Tāḥir ʿUthmān Bauchi, Muḥammad al-Thānī Kafanga, and Ismāʿīl Khalīfa, to mention only a few. Here, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ 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 Ṣāliḥ stated in *al-Mughīr*, that the ‘Nigerian manuscript’ gives a divergent version, showing that ‘the inclusion of the word *al-qurʾān* in

94 *Mirʾat 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 Ismāʿīl Khalīfa's copy of *al-Jāmiʿ*. As is obvious from Kafanga's letter to Abū 'l-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-Mugh̃ir* that his position was shared by the Nigerian Tijānīs—which in fact was not true. The letter from al-Ṭāhir ʿUthmān Bauchi to Muḥammad al-Thānī Kafanga—quoted in full length in *al-Mugh̃ir*⁹⁷—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 'l-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 'l-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 (*awliyāʾ Allāh*) should do so; whoever wants to keep silent should be silent; and whoever wants to reject [the friends of God] should reject [them].’¹⁰⁰

Thus, Kafanga agreed in principle with Ibrāhīm Sīdī, 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 ʿl-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.¹⁰¹

*Al-Mughīr, or: The art of covering up the breaking of a
taboo*

It is likely that the tactics of Abū ʿl-Faṭḥ would have turned out to be successful, had not *al-Summ al-zuʿāf* thwarted his plans. Whereas the Nigerians had reached a consensus on not bringing the issue to the public, the loud voice of Ibrāhīm Sīdī broke the silence. It was at this point that Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ’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 *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ* related by Muḥammad b. al-

100 Letter from Muḥammad al-Thānī Kafanga to Aḥmad Abū ʿl-Faṭḥ, as published in *al-Summ al-zuʿāf*, 67.

101 This view has been expressed by a number of Nigerian informants I met in 1997, Abū ʿl-Faṭḥ included.

Mushrī might not be authentic. This situation forced Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ 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 Ṣāliḥ does not repeat his earlier assertion that the word *al-qurʿān* was added to the text of *Jawāhir al-maʿānī*. Even with regard to the authenticity of Aḥmad al-Tijānī's contested statement as related in *al-Jāmiʿ*, 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 Qurʿān is included, the second is that it is not.' It is revealing that Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ introduces Muḥammad b. al-Mushrī's book into the debate, because he does it while being aware of the deficiency of his argument: *al-Jāmiʿ* does not support the assertion that the word *al-qurʿān* has been added to Aḥmad al-Tijānī's statement on the *ṣalāt al-fātiḥ*. Yet by referring to the two possible interpretations provided by *al-Jāmiʿ*, Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ 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 Ṣāliḥ. 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-Tijani 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-Tijani was to his followers what he claimed to be: every criticism made against him was neces-

102 Abun-Nasr, *Tijaniyya*, 182.

sarily wrong from their point of view, and it was the duty of the Tijānis to write and expose its error'.¹⁰³ This seems to be what happened to Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ 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 Ṣāliḥ 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.¹⁰⁴ Yet in *al-Takfīr*, the *sharīf* 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',¹⁰⁵ 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 Ṣāliḥ 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.¹⁰⁶ 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-Mughhīr* 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-zu^cāf*, where Ibrāhīm Sīdī publicly revealed Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ'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 Ṣāliḥ', to be published in Roman Loimeier (ed.), *Vernetzungen in islamischen Gesellschaften*, in press.