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Religious leadership and governance in Kano

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Religious Leadership and Governance in Kano

David Ehrhardt

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Abstract

This paper aims to analytically describe the ways in which the two most popular religions, and more particularly their leaders, help to address Nigeria's many governance deficits. It uses Kano as its case study, due to its significance as a commercial hub and Muslim stronghold in northern Nigeria. In terms of data, the analysis is based on interviews with Christian and Muslim leaders in Kano, conducted in September 2011. Building on the work by other members of the Nigeria Research Network, the paper first underlines the contrasting trends towards unity and differentiation that characterise both Muslim and Christian communities in Kano. It then analyses the ways in which religious leaders describe their roles in society. In brief, it presents three different sides to the public personas of religious leaders: their roles as scholars and teachers, as caretakers, and as community representatives.

With these roles in mind, the paper then suggests how religious leaders contribute to governance in Kano. It shows that religious leaders primarily contribute to the city's governance in four areas: (religious) education, individual well-being (both in spiritual and material terms), social stability and communal peace, and the position of their faith in the public sphere. In each of these areas, the interviewed leaders generally aim to promote the interests of their own religious community. Some of the leaders, however, are also involved in the struggle for other 'political' issues through faith-based NGOs, such as the provision of public goods and the protection of equal citizenship rights. Although assessing the impact of these contributions goes beyond the purposes of this paper, the paper does suggest some tentative approaches to this issue by outlining the strengths and constraints of the agency of religious leaders.

On this basis, the paper indicates three areas where the capacity of religious leaders to contribute to governance could be enhanced. First, the considerable contribution of religious leaders to the field of social stability could be extended, for example by providing further education to religious leaders in areas such as family planning, maternal health, and gender relations. Second, the high level of access and respect of religious leaders in Kano renders them highly effective media through which reliable information may be distributed. The third way in which religious leaders may yet contribute more to the governance of Kano metropolis, is through a constructive engagement with the role of religion in the city's public sphere. However, while the paper thus suggests some promising avenues for further involvement of religious leaders in Nigerian governance, it also cautions against overly high expectations.

1. Introduction

1.1 *Governing a Troubled Giant*

Even in the highly competitive field of African fragile states, Nigeria stands out as a troubled giant. As the continent's most populous nation, awash with resource riches, it has stunning potential. Moreover, Nigerians are renowned for their creativity and entrepreneurship, as perhaps illustrated best by the flourishing film industries in 'Nollywood' and 'Kannywood'. Over the past 50 years of independent rule, however, the country has also remained highly fragmented along ethnic and religious lines and plagued by violence, corruption, and ubiquitous poverty. The supply of electricity, drinking water, and even fuel is erratic at best and the state of the country's physical infrastructure is poor and rapidly deteriorating. Public services like education and health care are scarce and often privatised, far out of reach of the poor majority of Nigerians. As a result, the country has been in a protracted social and economic crisis for the better part of three decades.

Part of the explanation for Nigeria's troubles lies in the country's political economy. Oil money clogs up the country's political and economic arteries. It incentivises elites to compete over rents rather than push for taxation, democratic politics, and genuine development policies. More or less democratic elections have so far not been able to drastically improve the parasitic behaviour of Nigerian elites. In fact, it may well be argued that these elections have increased interregional and communal tensions, distracting political and public attention from the processes required to foster political, economic, and social development. Nigeria thus suffers from significant deficits related to its 'governance'. These deficits are partly located in the many layers of the Nigerian state, which comprise some of the main actors in the rent-seeking game who have little regard for the interests of the broader population. As such, Nigeria highlights Abrams' (1988) distinction between the state-system and the state as an idea: the reality of the state-system in Nigeria does not come close to the dominant idea of the Nigerian state as the prime actor in the country's governance.

The shortcomings of the Nigerian state-system can help to account for at least part of the country's governance deficit and, consequently, some of its many societal problems. However, the shortcomings of the state-system also beg the question in what ways other authoritative actors – such as traditional, ethnic, or religious leaders – contribute to governance in Nigeria. This paper explores this question for one type of such elites, religious leaders, in the context of metropolitan Kano. Kano is the primary commercial centre of the northern region of Nigeria, capital of the most populous State in Nigeria, and a predominantly Muslim Hausa-Fulani city. It is also home to sizable Christian minorities, both from southern and northern parts of the country. With this in mind, the central question for this paper is: in what ways do Christian and Muslim leaders in Kano contribute to governance in the city?

In order to address this question, the remainder of this introduction will discuss some of its theoretical aspects and the methodology behind the paper. Subsequently, section 2 will introduce the city of Kano and the various religious denominations and organisations that the city is home to. Section 3 will then get into the roles and functions of these religious organisations and their leaders, after which, finally,

section 4 will assess the various ways in which these roles and functions contribute to Kano's governance.

1.2 Theoretical Considerations

To start off, we need to consider the definitions of the main concepts used in this paper: governance, the public interest, and religious leadership. Governance is understood to comprise the actions political leaders take in the public interests, that is, to promote the shared interests of the entire society or of some societal groups without unfairly disadvantaging other groups. It thus consists of two main elements: political leaders and the actions they take in the public interests. The term 'political leaders' is considered to broadly capture actors with authority¹ over a substantial part of a population and whose actions may, therefore, affect the entire population. They may be democratic representatives, leaders of political parties, elected or appointed government officials, bureaucrats, religious leaders, businessmen, traditional rulers, public intellectuals, union leaders, or other kinds of community leaders. Together, this first part of the definition of governance may be considered a society's 'political class'.

With this in mind, let us dwell a little on the meaning of 'public interests'. For the purposes of this paper, this contestable term is understood to mean the shared interests of an entire society (in this case, Kano) as well as the interests of specific sub-groups that do not unfairly disadvantage other sub-groups. As such, there are many public interests, which are also likely to change over time. It is possible, however, to outline some interests that are likely to be shared by all groups, regardless of their specific contexts. Examples of such generic public interests likely include physical security, economic development, social justice, and the well-being of the individual members of the group.

Public interests are thus messy, complicated, and possibly contradictory, and therefore require a nuanced empirical analysis. In this light, this paper argues that public interests in Kano should not be studied from the angle of the 'true' interests of Kano residents, but rather from the actions of Christian and Muslim leaders. In order to analyse the contribution of religious leaders to governance, it is not necessary to outline all group interests before looking at the ways in which religious leaders address them. Rather, this paper argues that it is more efficient to simply consider the actions of religious leaders and consider in what ways they benefit different social groups in Kano. On that basis, we can assess the ways in which religious leaders contribute to Kano's governance – and, by implication, the limitations of these contributions.

With this definition in mind, we also need to consider that Kano's social diversity not only leads to a multitude of overlapping or contrasting public interests, but also to a

¹ 'Authority' is defined here as a form of power in Lukes's (2005) sense, denoting the capacity to influence the thoughts and behaviour of a particular group of people. Authority may thus allow leaders to make people think or do things they would otherwise not have, or rule out particular avenues for thought or action. It may be based, roughly following Weber (1978), on *formal* rules and regulations, such as for many bureaucrats and politicians, or on a more *informal* sense of embeddedness within a particular community. Legitimacy is thus crucial to authority, based either on formal or informal foundations.

range of political leaders, many of whom have different constituencies. Metropolitan Kano, for example, is made up of a myriad ethnic, religious, and other social groups; and political authority is vested not only in formal state representatives and politicians, but also in ethnic, traditional, business, and religious leaders. In such a fragmented social setting, we can make two assumptions about the behaviour of political leaders that help to analyse their contributions to governance.

First, we can assume that political leaders are interested in maintaining or expanding their base of authority and that, therefore, they compete with each other. This applies to democratic politicians, who compete through the formal electoral process, but also to more informal leaders of religious or ethnic communities, who compete for recognition, respect, and other determinants of authority within their communities. For any of these political leaders, the expansion of their mandate is contingent upon the boundaries of their constituency or community. If such boundaries are hard to expand, they provide leaders with a strong incentive to maximise their authority within their existing constituency, instead of attempting to enlist the unlikely support of other groups.

Second, we will assume that there is some division of labour between different kinds of political leaders. The details of such a division of labour depend on the characteristics of different communities and their leaders, as well as the wider context in which these leaders operate. It may be expected, however, that in order to maximise their authority, political leaders ‘play to their strengths’: that is, prioritise those actions that fall within the scope of their authority and that appeal to their followers. Moreover, they will endeavour to ‘spin’ public perception of any of their actions in such a way that their followers believe these actions to be both part of their leaders’ mandate and in the interests of the followers. In other words, leaders have an incentive to contribute to governance, but stay within the scope of their mandate— or, at least, convince their followers that they are doing so.

In sum, this section has sketched a framework through which we can analyse the contributions of religious leaders to the governance of metropolitan Kano. It defines governance as the sum of all actions taken by political leaders in the public interest, or the interests of one or more social groups. Although political leaders have an incentive to contribute to governance, they do so in different ways; they divide their labour, according to their relative capacities, the interests of their constituencies, and other relevant factors. At the same time, however, political leaders also compete with each other over authority.

In principle, these general premises apply to all kinds of political leaders, both within and outside the state. This paper, however, focuses on religious leaders in Kano. Given the broad range of leaders who may be called ‘religious’, this paper limits its analysis to Christian clergy and Islamic *ulama*: elites who occupy a position as preacher or religious scholar. Their leadership is ‘religious’ because it relies on their religious credentials, or ‘spiritual capital’, such as religious charisma (or *baraka* in the Sufi terminology) and knowledge of Christian or Islamic theology. Clergy and *ulama* can use this spiritual capital to influence their followers, for example through public speaking or preaching, institutionalised education, or individual advice and counselling. As such, religious leaders in Kano can be expected to have an impact on governance in the city. The remainder of this paper constitutes an attempt to

analytically describe this contribution in the context of Kano and simultaneously identify the boundaries that, perhaps necessarily, constrain it.

1.3 Methodology

Before engaging with the empirical material, however, this section outlines the methodology used to collect and analyse the data. The paper aims to provide an analytical description of the roles of Christian and Muslim leaders in a single city, Kano, and assess in what ways they contribute to the city's governance. The single case study approach is useful because it allows in-depth analysis of religious leadership within a set of 'controlled' contextual variables. The trade-off of the approach lies in the limitations on the study's representativeness. In relation to religious leadership, Kano may be seen as representative of other northern Nigerian cities. Southern Nigerian cities, in contrast, have different demographic relations between religious groups, which may impact on the roles the leaders of these roles play in their societies. Some of the conclusions of this paper may therefore be representative for other large cities in Nigeria, while others are more limited to the context of northern Nigeria or even Kano city.

In terms of data, the paper is primarily based on 18 semi-structured interviews with religious leaders in Kano, conducted in September 2011. This data reflects the relatively modest analytical aim of the paper: describing the roles of religious leaders in the complex processes of governance from their perspective. At the same time, however, the analysis is also informed by other data sources collected by the author since 2006. These data sources include primary survey data as well as a wide range of qualitative interviews with traditional rulers, politicians, civil servants, NGO workers, academics, and other influential stakeholders in Kano's field of intercommunal relations. This data complements the findings from the interviews and provides them with a broader societal context within which they can be more accurately understood.

Since the main source of data for this paper was collected through 18 semi-structured interviews with Christian and Muslim leaders, however, the issue of representativeness should be discussed in some more detail. Due to the descriptive nature of the research aim, I decided to focus on in-depth, semi-structured interviews rather than large-N structured surveys. On the positive side, this strategy has provided highly detailed and rich descriptions, which have been used to outline the precise ways in which religious leaders view and experience their leadership roles. However, the obvious cost of this strategy has been the relatively small sample size of the study. I have attempted to address this problem by using other data that I collected in earlier fieldwork; but also through purposive sampling, in which interviewees were selected with the aim to include widest range of denominations within both the Islamic and Christian communities in Kano (see the full list of interviewees at the end of this paper).

Within the Islamic community, respondents were selected from the two main Sufi *turuq*, from different parts of the non-Sufi Sunni community, and from the 'Shia'-leaning Islamic Movement of Nigeria. The Muslim part of the sample was thus designed to represent Kano's denominational (or even sectarian) Muslim groups, as well as the broad layer of Muslims who may feel some affiliation to specific sects or brotherhoods but do not consider themselves as sectarian group members. These

Muslims, which will later be referred to as ‘neutral’ Muslims, are not only conceptually an important category, but also in numeric terms – according to the data presented in this paper, they represent by far the largest Muslim constituency in metropolitan Kano. Moreover, care was taken to include both *ulama* with links with the Kano State government, such as the former Hisbah Commander, and *ulama* who operate almost entirely outside the reach of the state.

Among Christians, care was taken to include ‘orthodox’ Protestant groups (e.g. the Anglicans, ECWA, Baptists), the Catholics, and the ‘born-again’ Pentecostal churches (Living Faith and Redeemed). Based on previous fieldwork experience, and exploratory discussions with the dRPC staff and research assistants, these groups were identified to represent the broad spectrum of Christian groups and affiliations in the Kano context. Moreover, the sample was also designed to include Christian clergy with experience in the operations of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), which connects and unites all major Christian denominations in Nigeria. As such, while the small number of interviewees (18) obviously limits the representativeness of the study, the wide range of sects, denominations, and orientations of the interviewed leaders enhances it. On that basis, it may be expected that while the sample was not a statistical representation of Kano’s body of religious leaders, the analysis does give a good representation of the diversity of ‘voices’ from the different kinds of leaders that constitute this body.

As noted above, except for the survey that was conducted earlier, the main method of data collection in 2011 was through semi-structured interviews, each interview lasting between 45 minutes and 2 hours. All but one of the interviews were conducted by the author² and one of the cooperating researchers. For the Muslim leaders, Malam Gaddafi Abubakar helped to conduct (and translate) the interviews; for the Christian leaders, this role was fulfilled by Malama Ladi Wayi. Their presence at the interviews was an enormous help, not merely because of the author’s linguistic limits, but also because they helped to rapidly build constructive relationships with the respondents. The interviews were conducted with a topic list as their starting point, covering the societal roles of the interviewees, their doctrines, their interactions with other religious organisations, and finally a set of ‘vignettes’ (Finch 1987) focused on various situations of conflict.

One final methodological note concerns a significant limitation inherent in the design of this research: its focus on a single perspective on the role of religious leaders in governance, namely that of religious leaders themselves. This approach has the advantage of allowing in-depth analysis of the self-identification and views of Christian and Muslim leaders on their own role in Kano society, an important perspective that has had no structured attention in the literature on religion in Nigeria. However, its weakness is that it does not allow us to compare the perspectives of the leaders with those of others, for example their followers, beyond the findings of the contextual information discussed in the paper. Nor does it allow any categorical statements about the actual impact of religious leadership in Kano; rather, the claims of this study describe the aspirations and self-assessments of the interviewed religious leaders in this area. Further research is therefore necessary to add these perspectives to the analysis presented in this paper.

² The interview with dr. Umar Aliyu Bashir was conducted by Mal. Gaddafi Abubakar.

2. Competition and Cooperation: Religious Leaders in Kano

Metropolitan Kano is the major urban centre in the Sudanic region of West Africa and the commercial and industrial heart of northern Nigeria. Based on the most recent and contested Nigerian census, Kano is the second largest city in Nigeria, with close to three million people³. It is built around the Old City (*birni*), the walled part of metropolis that is home to the Emir's palace, the central mosque, and the famous *kurmi* market. Although hit heavily by Nigeria's protracted economic crisis, Kano has retained some of its commercial stature through several vast, labyrinthine, and highly atmospheric markets.

Kano has a long history of affiliation with Islam, starting even before the 19th-century *jihad* led by Uthman Dan Fodio. However, as a city with a long-standing reputation as a hub in the trans-Saharan and Sahelian trading routes (Mustapha 2003), Kano also has an extensive record of immigration and diversity, bringing together people from across the African continent and beyond. In precolonial and colonial times, this diversity was largely a matter of divisions within the Muslim community; for as Last (2012) argues, dissent and dissidence have been a continuous feature of Islam in northern Nigeria. The nature of this intra-Islamic diversity, however, changed drastically throughout the course of Kano's history. In the first half of the 20th century, for example, the main religious cleavages were those within and between the two main Sufi brotherhoods: the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya. After independence, however, these tensions began to fade and give way to a new line of dissent between the Sufi orders and a new generation of reformists, best exemplified by Abubakar Gumi's *Izala* movement.

Further intra-Muslim cleavages evolved with the rise of Maitatsine in the 1980s and, more recently, the 'Boko Haram' movement of the early 21st century. But while these divisions remained salient and, at times, violently explosive, the late 20th century also witnessed a gradual merging of Islamic movements. This development was partly a consequence of the dissolution of some of the sources of dissent within the Muslim community. But, perhaps more importantly, it was also a product of the increasing integration of the Nigerian federation and the subsequent rise of a new source of religious tension: the proximity and intermingling of Nigeria's Muslim and Christian communities. In Kano, the immigration of southern Christians began in earnest in the 1930s; but it was only in the 1980s that the Christian-Muslim dynamic really began to acquire an aspect of competition and violent conflict (cf. Falola 1998). This increasing salience of Christian-Muslim divisions developed hand in glove with the nation-wide politicisation of religion and religious affiliation (Ibrahim 1989). But it also coincided with the rise of reformist or 'fundamentalist' religious organisations, exemplified by the Islamic *Izala* and the Christian Pentecostalist movements.

³ Metropolitan Kano (or in short: Kano) is defined here as the eight Local Government Areas at the heart of Kano State, which are dominated by the urban sprawl around the walled Old City of Kano. These LGAs are: Kano Municipal (population 2006 census: 365,525), Dala (418,777), Nasarawa (596,669), Fagge (198,828), Gwale (362,059), Tarauni (221,367), Ungogo (369,657) and Kumbotso (295,979). The total population of Kano based on the 2006 census (Federal Government of Nigeria 2007) is thus 2,828,861; however, while in Kano in 2006 and 2008, I met many residents who had not been counted in the census - giving credence to the widely held opinion that the census drastically underestimated Kano's true population.

As many scholars have highlighted before, religious divisions have time and again fed into communal conflict and episodes of collective violence in Kano. At the same time, however, it is undisputed that most of the time in contemporary Kano, Nigerians of all religious affiliations live and work together peacefully. Due to the historical connection of Kano with Islam, the central Old City is inhabited almost exclusively by ‘native’ Hausa-Fulani Muslims; Kano as a whole is therefore often still regarded as a Muslim city. However, neighbourhoods outside the walls (*waje*) also host economic migrant communities with divergent ethnic and religious affiliations. One neighbourhood - Sabon Gari, to the north east of *birnin* Kano - has since colonial times been considered the ‘strangers quarters’, the place where ‘non-natives’ reside. However, Sabon Gari is no longer the only neighbourhood inhabited by non-Hausa or non-Muslim residents; many other areas in *waje* are also ethnically and religiously mixed.

Table 1: Religions in Kano (N=418)

	% of Muslims	% of Christians	% of Kano population
Islam (No brotherhood)	83%		53%
Islam - Qadiriyya	3%		2%
Islam - Tijanniyya	8%		5%
Islam - Other groups (incl. <i>Izala</i>)	7%		5%
Christian - Catholic		52%	18%
Christian - Protestant		11%	4%
Christian - Pentecostal		20%	7%
Christian - African Independent Church		9%	3%
Others		8%	2%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

Table 1 presents data collected through a perceptions survey⁴ conducted in four of Kano’s neighbourhoods: the Old City (*birni*), Sabon Gari, Naibawa and Badawa. The total sample size was 420 individuals, selected at random through a walking pattern. The four neighbourhoods were selected to comprise the entire range of Kano’s ethnic and religious diversity; as such, they are likely to overstate the proportion of Christians of the Kano population at large. However, even taking this bias into account, the data does suggest that while the majority of Kano’s population is Muslim, there is a considerable Christian minority of *Kanawa* (‘Kano people’). Moreover, if the data is broken down by neighbourhood, it shows that the Old City is the only area that is almost exclusively Muslim; all three other neighbourhoods have Christian minorities.

Looking in some more detail at the breakdown of Islam and Christianity in table 1, the majority of Muslims in Kano reports not to have particular affiliation to a sect or brotherhood. Instead, they may be regarded as generic or ‘neutral’ Sunni Muslims of the Maliki school, who attend different mosques for prayer and accept advice and

⁴ The perceptions survey is adapted from the one used by the Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security, and Ethnicity (CRISE) at the Department for International Development (Oxford). The CRISE survey was administered in various other places in Nigeria (e.g. Maiduguri, Kaduna, and Lagos), as well as in Ghana, Peru, Indonesia, and Malaysia. For more details on CRISE and the survey results, see Stewart (2008a) and the discussion papers at www.crise.ox.ac.uk.

interpretations from scholars of different doctrinal hues. A much smaller proportion of Muslims report to belong to either the main Sufi brotherhoods, Qadiriyya or Tijaniyya, or other groups (including the reformist *Izala*). Among Christians, the Catholics constitute the largest group, followed by the Pentecostals, the different orthodox Protestant groups, and finally the African Independent Church. Especially among Christians, there are distinct ethnic patterns to these proportions, as for example the Igbo are predominantly Catholic while the Yoruba are more likely to belong to orthodox Protestant groups.

All in all, however, table 1 indicates that the religious sphere in Kano is diverse and, moreover, that all respondents (save 2 individuals for whom data was missing) have a religion. In other words, religion in Kano is not only diverse but also salient – a point underlined by the fact that 94% of the survey respondents rated their religious identity as one of their three most important self-identifications. This made religious identities by far the most salient social identities in the survey, even compared to ethnicity, language, gender, and class. Moreover, this high percentage was consistent across religious and ethnic divides, once again reaffirming the uniform importance of religious identity in Nigerian society (Ibrahim 1989, 1991).

Most of the time, people of different religious orientations in Kano live together peacefully and cooperatively. However, there is also an aspect of contestation and competition to the sphere of religion and religious politics. This contestation is no doubt partly due to the high level of authority and respect accorded to the position of religious leaders: over 90% of the survey respondents reported to have at least some level of trust in religious authorities. This proportion was not only 10% higher than for community or traditional leaders, but over 50% higher than for politicians. Religious leaders thus command considerable levels of legitimacy and authority, which is likely to increase the competition between them. The subsequent three sections will discuss some of the most important rifts in this regard and, as such, introduce the main actors in the analysis of religious leadership and governance.

2.1 Muslims

In many ways, contemporary “Muslims in Kano are one”⁵. Most, if not all, Islamic leaders interviewed in the course of this research, went out of their way to emphasise the unity of Islam, within and beyond Kano. Being a Muslim, in this view, is defined by the basics: faith in Allah, in the Quran, and in the teachings of the Prophet; adherence to the five pillars of Islam; and belief in the prophets, the afterlife, and the day of judgement. Regardless of the diverging opinions different mosques and scholars may have on aspects of these cornerstones, there is a broad consensus that, in essence, someone who meets the above criteria is a Muslim. Even the leader of one of the more controversial Islamic movements in Kano, Sheikh Turi⁶, is adamant that “Muslims are categorically enjoined to be one and foster Islamic unity”. To illustrate this unity, Sheikh Turi prays and preaches in a nearby Tijaniyya mosque, rather than construct a separate house of prayer for the IMN in Kano.

Perhaps partly due to this sense of Islamic unity, a large proportion of Kano’s Muslims do not characterise themselves in sectarian terms, but simply as Muslims

⁵ Interview with dr Salaudeen Yusuf in 2006 in Kano.

⁶ Sheikh Turi is the leader of the Iran-leaning Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) in Kano.

(albeit with a Sunni orientation of the Maliki school)⁷. In interviews with Islamic leaders who identified as such ‘neutral’ Muslims, the issue of sectarian affiliation was consequently shrugged off awkwardly. Some of them called themselves *ahlus sunna*, with the apparent intention of underlining their orthodox interpretation of Islam⁸. Others, however, simply refer to themselves as Muslims, without any specific sectarian affiliation. They often attend different mosques to perform their five daily prayers, depending on where they are at prayer time and who is preaching. They listen to the teachings of Islamic scholars with diverging doctrinal orientations, depending on their individual assessment of the knowledge and skill of these scholars. And finally these ‘neutral’ Muslims may seek the advice of an Islamic leader not on the basis of his group membership, but on the basis of his reputation for wisdom and personal integrity.

It is important to underline the broad consensus that Islam should be unified. At the same time, however, it should be noted that Islamic unity remains a highly aspirational concept: all interviewees readily accepted that, in fact, there are many divisions and distinctions within Kano’s Muslim community. When asked to describe the distinctions within Islam in Kano, the answers of interviewed Islamic leaders varied. Umar Sani Fagge, for example, described Islam as a house, where different groups and sects may decide to put their mattress in various places of the house – provided that the foundation of the house remained intact. Similarly, Sheikh Turi described Islam as a tree with sects as its branches, emphasising the common root of all Muslims. In contrast, however, Dr Murtala considered the differences between Sunni and Shia Muslims as foundational: “they [the Shia] say they believe in the Quran, but they actually do not”.

The common denominator of these notions of difference is that only those groups that do not conform to a set of basic standards, such as those described above, are categorically excluded from Islam. Within such boundaries, further distinctions only serve to indicate degrees of piety and spiritual purity. Almost all interviewees had clear ways to define these more subtle differences of interpretation between Islamic groups. Besides the ‘neutral’ Muslims and the umbrella groups such as the Kano State Council of *Ulama*, the main Muslim groups in Kano include the Sufi brotherhoods (Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya), the anti-Sufi reformists (chiefly Izala), and the ‘Shia’ Islamic Movement of Nigeria. Because these general outline of these groups has already been discussed in NRN Working Paper on the North-West zone, the remainder of this section will serve to refine the major distinctions in the local context of urban Kano.

The main source of division within Kano Islam, according to the leaders who were interviewed, derives from the interpretation of the Quran and Hadith – or, in other words, from Islamic doctrine. In this sense, the intra-Muslim divisions in Kano are simply local expressions of worldwide doctrinal divisions within Islam, for example between the Sunni, Shia, and Sufi groups. The interview transcripts provide many examples of the ways in which these doctrinal differences play out in the local context of Kano.

⁷ The vast majority of Muslims in Kano are Sunni; only some within the IMN consider themselves Shia.

⁸ Interview with Ali Yunus on 12/9/2011 in Kano.

According to Sheikh Salga, for example, one of the main differences between his (Tijaniyya) Sufi faith and that of the reformist Izala concerns the nature of Allah: for Salga, “God is everywhere”, while Izala members view God as seated on a throne. As Larémont (2011: 157), this was one of the main bones of contention between the Tijaniyya and Abubakar Gumi, one of the founders of the reformist *Izala* movement. As a second example, Salga notes that only the Sufis believe that certain religious leaders (*waliyai*) can be closer to Allah than others. A third doctrinal point of contention concerns the position of the companions of Prophet Muhammad and divides Kano’s majority Sunni Muslims from those considered ‘Shia’. Finally, other points of doctrinal disagreement relate to the value of the Hadith (disregarded by e.g. the Quraniyyun), the role of reason over faith (among e.g. the Mua’tazilites), and the issue of *takiyya*: the concealment, allegedly common among Shia, of one’s true beliefs in situations where these may lead to persecution.

This set of examples of doctrinal divergence should be taken as neither comprehensive, nor necessarily reflective of actual differences: rather, it is meant to represent the wide range of perceptions of doctrinal differences reported by Kano’s Muslim leaders. Closely related to doctrine, a second source of intra-Muslim division was reported to lie in practices and rituals. One classic example of this is the ritual of *zikr*, the distinctly Sufi form of prayer and supplication. Because there is little Quranic basis for the specific form of *zikr*, reformist Muslims often consider it *bida* – or unwanted innovation⁹. A second example is the issue of temporary marriages, which some Sunni Muslims in Kano attribute to the ‘Shia’ of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria.

Finally, a third example of divergent religious practices is found in the leaders’ attitudes towards delivering a *fatwa*, or Islamic legal opinion. The Sunni scholars Ali Yunus and Aminullahi El-Gambari, for example, often proclaim their opinions as *fatwas*, even though they are aware of the fact that their impact may be limited due to competing pronouncements or *sharia* court rulings. Sheikh Turi of the IMN, in contrast, hesitates to deliver a *fatwa* because it is “a major issue [that] should not be trifled with just by any *alim*, any small *alim*. [...] There are only a few *ulama* who can do that.” The weight and importance of a *fatwa* thus represents a third example of the ways in which rituals and practices of Islamic scholars in Kano differ.

Islamic leaders in Kano mention religious doctrine and ritual as the two main sources of division within the city’s Muslim community. In addition, there is also a generational dimension to religious affiliation. Ali Yunus’s mosque in Gadon Kaya, for example, is an offshoot of the mosque led by the late Sheikh Ja’afar. As such, it caters mostly to young people to whom the teachings of the late sheikh appeal¹⁰. Other groups, such as the more ‘traditional’ Sufi orders, are likely to have a broader base among the more senior citizens of Kano. Different Islamic groups and doctrines thus appeal to different age groups in Kano metropolis. Moreover, some mosques also have a distinct ethnic character. For example, while the mosque led by Aminullahi El-Gambari is mostly attended by Hausa-speaking people, they also cater for the large Yoruba population of the Sabon Gari area by translating the sermons into the Yoruba

⁹ Interview with Ahmad Murtala on 8/9/2011 in Kano; interview with Muhammad Turi on 11/9/2011 in Kano.

¹⁰ Ali Yusus *op. cit.*

language. Similar mosques exist in the areas of Kano with non-Hausa minorities, including those oriented towards the Ansar-ud-deen (see Working Paper 3).

Finally, Islamic movements in Kano are also divided along the lines of status and class. The interactions between Islam and class have a long history, going back at least to the intricate status distinctions between the aristocratic *sarauta* and commoner *talakawa* and their respective connections to the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya orders. Later, in the tumultuous 1950s and 1960s, these status/class dynamics became intertwined with party politics, as the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and Aminu Kano's Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) developed constituencies among the *sarauta* and *talakawa* classes, respectively. More recently, the radical movements of the Maitatsine and, arguably, 'Boko Haram' have been characterised by their strong support among the urban poor. Class has thus been a continuous source of division and dissent among Kano's Muslims, intersecting with cleavages of doctrine, generation, ritual, and ethnicity.

In sum, then, Muslim leaders in Kano thus emphasise both the unity and the subtle divisions of the Islamic community in Kano. This section has served to outline ways to understand Islamic unity, while also acknowledging some of the main sources of division and disagreement among Kano's Muslims. Depending on the attitude of an individual Islamic leader, such disagreements may be considered as either a minor squabble between Muslims, or a categorical dividing line between Muslims and non-Muslims. In the latter sense, several leaders questioned the Muslim credentials of groups like the Quraniyyun, Maitatsine, or 'Boko Haram'; some also doubted the true Muslim identity of presumed 'Shias', such as the members of the IMN. There is thus a considerable tension between, on the one hand, the aspiration to unify Islam and, on the other, the wish to draw a line around the beliefs of 'true' Muslims and exclude those who profess discordant articles of faith.

2.2 Christians

Interestingly, similarly contrasting trends exist among Kano's many Christian communities, with CAN representing Christian efforts at constructing religious unity, or perhaps even ecumenism, and the myriad different churches representing their diverse doctrinal interpretations and resulting drive for unique self-identification and exclusivity. One significant difference between the way Christians and Muslims are organised, however, is that Christians are generally attached to specific churches. As a consequence, there is no real conception of a 'neutral' Christian, devoid of any institutional affiliation. Reflecting this strong institutionalisation of Christianity, the only attempt at 'ecumenism' in Nigeria is represented by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). CAN brings together the five main Christian groups in Nigeria:

- the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN);
- the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN);
- the Christian Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (CPFN) / Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN);
- the Organisation of African Instituted Churches (OAIC); and
- the Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Nigeria (TEKAN) and Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) Fellowships.

Moreover, as we will discuss in more detail in section 2.3, CAN has few attempts to unite its various sub-groups on an ideological or doctrinal level. Rather, it has focused on representing the shared political interests of Christians in Nigeria and, to some extent, improving the relations between Christians and Muslims in the country. As such, CAN is at best a partially ecumenical organisation, focused primarily on the shared societal interests of the Christian community rather than enhancing Christian unity in a more structural and doctrinal sense. To fully understand the character and functions of CAN (see also section 3), therefore, we first need to consider some of the ways in which the individual churches differ from each other. Like the lines of division in the Muslim community of Kano, issues of doctrine and religious ritual are the main sources of divergence between the city's myriad church groups. In addition, however, interviewees also suggested differences between churches based on ethnic or regional origins of the members, class backgrounds, and geographic location (i.e. the urban churches versus those in the rural areas of Kano State).

Although largely within the realm of 'Western' Christianity, divisions between Christian movements in Nigeria have long histories, are highly dynamic, and consequently deeply complicated. Kano's Christian diversity reflects, to a large extent, the diversity of Christianity in Nigeria, albeit in ways that have become accustomed to local circumstances. Some examples can help to illustrate this diversity. First, a central division is between the Pentecostal and other charismatic churches and the 'orthodox' Protestants and Catholics. Although the dividing lines between these groups of churches are more complex than this discussion allows, some of the central defining characteristics of Pentecostal churches were noted to be their belief in the process of being 'born again' through baptism, in 'speaking in tongues', and in the strength of spirits – and, consequently, in the power of charismatic prayer and divine healing¹¹. Some of these elements are not exclusive to the Pentecostal churches; Maurice Hassan, for example, described a charismatic segment of the Nigerian Catholic church, whose members also believe in the strength of the spirit world and the power of charismatic prayer. He explained that,

spiritual problems can be resolved through prayers. I believe so much in this charismatic way of prayer. Some spiritual problems need deliverance. Maybe it may be strange to you [*chuckles*]... But sometimes people have spiritual problems that need to be solved spiritually.

Belief in the spirit world and charismatic prayer and healing is thus one line of doctrinal division in the Christian community of Kano. A second source of disagreement relates to baptism. As John Adeyemo said, "for instance, in the baptism of believers, there are churches who do infant baptism, but we don't do this. Faith comes first, and we hold that the child is not responsible enough to believe. And the type of the baptism also matters: there are churches who sprinkle water, who pour water, but we immerse...". Finally, a third example of doctrinal difference relates to the importance given to the two Testaments in the Bible. Many Nigerian churches, including the Baptists and many Pentecostal churches, put a strong emphasis on the New Testament, in contrast to, for example, the Catholic church.

¹¹ Interview with Joseph Akinbola on 6/9/2011 in Kano.

The previous few paragraphs only presented the tip of the iceberg of doctrinal and ritualistic differences between Nigerian churches and betray very little of the deep theological debates that underlie them. However, they should be sufficient to give the reader a rough idea of the kinds of issues that divide the church groups. In addition to these differences, moreover, the interviewees also suggested other lines of the division, such as ethnicity, class, and geographical location. Ethnicity is important, partly because many of Kano's Christians are so-called non-indigenes: Nigerians with historical roots outside of Kano. As a consequence, many churches (especially in Sabon Gari) were set up to cater for particular immigrant Christians, such as Igbo and Yoruba from southern Nigeria (e.g. Redeemed Church) or the people from Plateau State and the Middle Belt (e.g. Evangelical Church of Christ in Nigeria, ECCN). Moreover, certain ethnic communities also have a connection to particular churches throughout Nigeria, such as the Igbo and the Catholic church.

These doctrinal and ethnic divisions are complicated further by class and geographical location. In class terms, some churches are known to have more affluent constituencies than others. For example, orthodox Protestant churches like ECWA and the Anglican church are more often attended by poor Christians than the Pentecostal churches, possibly because Pentecostal preachers emphasise 'making it' and explicitly connect material wealth to divine grace. Geography can also make a difference, though: the Anglican church near Bompai Road, for example, has more affluent members than the Anglican church in Sabon Gari, due to the relative wealth of the neighbourhood it is located in. But geography does not only relate to class differences; there is also a strong urban-rural differentiation in church membership in Kano. For example, Maurice Hassan highlighted that most of the Catholics in rural Kano are indigenes, often Maguzawa, while those in urban Kano are mostly settlers from the south.

Churches in Kano are thus differentiated by doctrine, rituals, ethnicity, class, and geographical location. However, as noted before, they are also united through the Christian Association of Nigeria. Although we will return to the functions of CAN in Kano, it is useful to understand this organisation as a way of mobilising Christians in relation to the city's Muslims. CAN serves to bring different churches together in pursuit of their common interests, such as rebuilding churches that have been destroyed. However, several leaders were also open about the limitations of CAN in this respect. Auta Jinta even goes so far as to say that CAN represents only self-interested "travelling people" [i.e. non-indigenes] from Sabon Gari, rather than all Christians from Kano State.

In addition to the encumbered representation of Christian interests, however, CAN also serves a more symbolic, ecumenical purpose: uniting the fragmented community of Christians. For much like the Muslim leaders, several Christian leaders insist on the unity of Christianity in Nigeria. As Lado Abdul says, "Christ is one. There is no difference, except maybe in the way I understand my denomination and the way in which I worship. But Christ is one, so I believe there is no difference [between Christians]". Similarly, John Adeyemo argues that "in matters of faith, there may not be much difference. The church is one, the church is built on the faith in Jesus Christ, and I believe most churches are built on that foundation". So while Christians in Kano are organised in distinct churches, CAN unites them on the basis of shared interests and, in a basic foundational way, a shared faith in Jesus Christ.

2.3 Muslims and Christians

Contrasting trends of unification and diversification thus characterise both Muslim and Christian communities in Kano. Moreover, religious leaders on both sides display a similar ambivalence when describing the relationship between Christianity and Islam. To explore this ambivalence, all interviewees were asked whether they thought Christians and Muslims believe in the same god. Most leaders responded with qualified answers, highlighting on the one hand that both Christians and Muslims are ‘people of the book’, while on the other hand pointing to significant differences of interpretation of their respective books. Most Muslim leaders accepted that Christians believe in the same god that they believe in, but not without highlighting two substantive differences: first, the tripartite nature of the Christian god as the Holy Trinity and, second, the status of Jesus as the son of god rather than one of the prophets¹². So while Christians and Muslims may believe in the same god, Christians envision this god in a different way than Muslims.

The Baptist leader John Adeyemo argued along similar lines, claiming that while there can only be one god, “we talk about god from different perspectives. For instance, the Christian faith holds that god is love and our response to him should be of love. [But] what I understand of Islam is that the approach to god is to fear him! You fear Allah.” Moreover, Adeyemo argues, “the Christian faith believes that it is faith in Jesus Christ alone that gives salvation. [But] Muslims don’t hold that Jesus is the son of god, [so] faith in him is non-consequential”. Maurice Hassan, of the Catholic Church in Kano, believes

we come from the same root, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam [and] believe in the same god. [But] the teaching of Islam is distorted here. Jihad should be about the conversion of the heart [...] but to them, they believe if a person kills a Christian and gets killed, he is going to heaven.

Other Christian leaders put these reservations even more strongly. For example, Lado Abdul, District Church Council chairman of the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) in Kano: “We know our god is alive. Our god is grace. Our god is a god of love. Our god said, do not kill. But their god says: you should kill. When you kill, you will get a reward.”

The ambivalence over, and in some cases clear rejection of, any overlap between Christianity and Islam, that was tangible in these responses, also arose in discussions about the ways to evaluate the religious diversity of Kano. On the one hand, Muslim leaders such as Abdullahi Salga, Qasiyyuni Kabara, and Aminullahi El-Gambari argued that there is no compulsion in religion and that if Allah wanted everyone to be Muslim, he would have created the world thus. This is clearly an argument in favour of religious pluralism and the freedom of conscience and religious practice. On the other hand, however, most of the Muslim leaders also used words such as ‘misunderstanding’ and ‘adulteration’ to suggest that many Christians may not

¹² Interview with Abdallah Salga on 3/9/2011 in Kano; interview with Aminudeen Abubakar on 7/9/2011 in Kano; Murtala *op. cit.*; interview with Qasiyyuni Kabara on 4/9/2011 in Kano.

understand their own faith and that of Muslims in the correct way. These claims of ‘misunderstanding’ were mirrored, as noted above, in the responses of Christian leaders Maurice Hassan and John Adeyemo – ‘misunderstanding’ being suggested as the cause of disagreements over the nature of god and his relationship with his followers.

An additional theme in the interviews with Christian leaders, however, was that of marginalisation as a religious minority. In Auta Jinta’s evocative words, “we [Christians] here in Kano are like meat in the oven”. Or as Maurice Hassan put it,

When you find yourself as a Christian in the far north [of Nigeria], it is not easy. You are living [at risk of] martyrdom every day. It can begin every day: going to Bayero University Kano, you have to cross the entire city, and you don’t know what is happening. There may be a riot and they see your mode of dressing and the next thing: ‘Ah! This one is not a Muslim’ and they will mob against you.

While many of the Muslim leaders thus emphasised the shared origins of the two Abrahamic faiths and the pluralist nature of Kano society, even as they hinted at misunderstandings among Nigerian Christians, the Christian leaders were less positive about Kano’s interfaith relations. Several of them expressed a real concern with what they understood as the violent nature of Islam, as well as with their precarious position in the city as non-Muslim minorities. Both groups of leaders, however, were equally negative about actual cooperation between Christian and Muslim elites. Most leaders paid lip service to the idea of Christian-Muslim co-operation, but only a few were able to give concrete examples of such co-operation. Lado Abdul mentioned a Christian-Muslim initiative that existed before he came into office; similarly, Maurice Hassan describes a dialogue forum that existed in the 1990s but was abandoned in 1999.

John Adeyemo described two further attempts at interfaith cooperation: a two-day forum organised by the Bridge Builders Association of Nigeria and series of meetings initiated by the State Security Services in Kano. None of these examples extended beyond sporadic meetings, however, and none led to a structured integration of Christian and Muslim leadership or institutions. Only two examples of positive interfaith interactions were given: first, dr. Aminudeen Abubakar was adamant on insisting on the cordial relations between Christian and Muslim leaders in Kano: “we share the same road, we share the same water, electricity, farms, schools... [...] I preached in Enugu, in the east, and they come to me to preach about their religion”. The second, inspiring, example of interfaith co-operation is the recent initiative of the Kano Covenant, organised by the Muslim Concerned Citizens of Kano and the Kano branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).

In general, however, the interviewees painted a picture of Christian and Muslim leaders interested in strengthening ties with their own communities, rather than initiating and maintaining structural interfaith networks. Having thus presented some of the main ways in which Muslim and Christian communities in Kano, work together and differentiate themselves, we will now look in more detail at the roles taken by religious leaders of these communities.

3. Leadership Roles

So far, this paper has defined its terms and sketched the religious landscape of metropolitan Kano, outlining the issues that simultaneously unite and divide Christians and Muslims. With this context in mind, this section will hone in on the ways in which religious leaders in Kano describe their positions and roles in Kano society. As before, the analysis in this section is primarily based on elite interviews with imams, scholars, caretakers, and other representatives of Muslim and Christian communities in Kano. As such, it does not purport to be an objectively comprehensive account of religious leadership in Kano, but rather an analysis of subjective descriptions of the various societal roles of Christian and Muslim leaders in the city.

As the analysis itself will indicate, these descriptions differ from individual to individual. For example, interviewees even differed in the extent to which they considered themselves ‘leaders’: while all Christian leaders were happy to define themselves in these terms, several Muslim leaders viewed themselves as ‘scholars’ or ‘teachers’ rather than ‘leaders’. Moreover, in addition to the contemporary diversity of individual forms of religious leadership, the institution of religious authority has also undergone tremendous transformation over the last century. In precolonial and colonial times, for example, the traditional Islamic rulers (the Kano Emirate) and their Islamic scholars constituted the executive political and legislative authorities in Kano. Islamic and ‘worldly’ authority were thus completely intertwined under the dictates of a *sharia* polity.

Colonial indirect rule did little to upset the connections between Islam, politics, and power. This changed after independence, however, with the Local Government reforms and constitutional debates of the 1960s and 1970s. Traditional Islamic authorities lost their executive functions, while the subsequent constitutional debates questioned the legitimacy of *sharia* law (and by implication the connections between Islam and politics) in the multireligious federation of Nigeria. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, increasing Christian-Muslim tensions and a continuing proliferation of new Christian and Islamic movements set the scene for a tense period of renegotiating the boundaries and relations between religious authority, politics, and the state. The early years of the current democratic dispensation then witnessed the reintroduction of the *sharia* criminal code in many northern States, a development that yet again reinvigorated and transformed religious authority and its connections to politics, power, and wider society.

Within this wider context, two main trends may be highlighted as characteristics of the current phase of the development of religious authority in northern Nigeria, and Kano in particular. Firstly, the adoption of the *sharia* criminal code and the widespread use of a *sharia* discourse in electoral politics has changed the political economy of religious leaders, particularly in Kano’s Islamic communities. Within this new framework, Islamic leaders have an incentive and opportunity to collaborate more closely with the state, or even become part of the state through one of the *sharia* institutions. This has strengthened the political position of some leaders, at the obvious expense of others, and generally further politicised the societal functions of Islamic religious leaders. At the same time, however, it has also further marginalised Christian leaders in political terms.

Second, there is the curious fact that the large majority of Kano Muslims in the survey sample above identified themselves as Muslims, rather than as members of a specific Muslim sect or organisation. Although more research would be necessary to investigate these ‘neutral’ Muslims, this survey finding is interpreted here as an indication of a high level of autonomy and flexibility in the doctrinal and institutional orientation of Kano’s contemporary Muslim population. In other words, it is suggested here that many individual Kano Muslims construct their own version of their faith from different sources of Islamic knowledge, rather than from their membership of a single (sectarian) Muslim organisation.

This development fits well with the rapid ‘modernisation’ of Nigerian Islam and Christianity, in the sense of the rapidly increasing use of mobile phones, digital recordings, and the internet by religious leaders and organisations. This has dramatically increased the amount of easily accessible Islamic knowledge and allowed Kano Muslims to become more autonomous in the experience of their faith. It has also, however, increased the need for religious leaders to actively compete for followership – a feature of the Nigerian religious sphere that has been commented on time and again. Recent developments in the nature of religious authority are thus complex, showing an increasing integration of Islamic authority with *sharia* politics, rising competition between religious leaders, as well as an increasingly autonomous, and perhaps even individualist, Muslim community.

Taking this historical dynamism and contemporary complexity into account, it would be unhelpful to attempt a strict analytical categorisation of individual leaders into ideal-types of leadership. Instead, this paper will highlight three different roles that arose in the interviews with all religious leaders approached for this research: the roles of teachers or scholars, of caretakers, and of community representatives. All interviewees reported, in one way or another, to assume these three roles at different times in their social lives; they differed, however, in the relative importance and individual interpretation accorded to each of the roles. Religious leaders as teachers and scholars, as caretakers, and as representatives. The subsequent three sections will focus on each of the roles separately, teasing out some of the overlaps and individual differences that were found in the course of this research.

3.1 Scholars and Teachers

The first roles that Christian and Muslim leaders play in their communities in Kano are those of scholars and teachers. All of the interviewees emphasised the importance of teaching and preaching as part of their work as religious leaders. Particularly among Muslim leaders, there is a strong sense that religious authority is connected to knowledge of religious affairs. Thus, Sheikh Umar Sani Fagge underlines that he is “not playing any role except teaching and guiding people”, while al-Qadiri argues that, “you can use your knowledge to prevent evil, which is a prerogative of the scholars”. Similarly, Ahmad Murtala not only teaches Islamic Studies at Bayero University Kano, but also runs several schools (*majlis*) in the city; Sheikh Turi runs several IMN schools and teaches Islamic jurisprudence.

Christian leaders also put considerable emphasis on their roles as teachers of the Christian communities. However, while Islamic leaders often actually label

themselves as ‘scholars’, Christian leaders more often see themselves as ‘caretakers’, who also have the responsibility to organise Christian education. The interviews suggest that the idea of religious knowledge as a basis for religious authority is slightly stronger among Muslims than Christians, but that both Christian and Muslim leaders prioritise education as one of their salient societal tasks. It is important, however, to note that the general purpose of teaching religious knowledge may be achieved through different means. Specifically, the interviewees repeatedly mentioned three forms of imparting religious knowledge to their constituents: sermons and preaching, study groups, and formally organised schools. We will now consider a few examples of each of these modes of communication.

First, preaching is perhaps the primary occupation of the interviewed religious leaders. Sermons are part of Christian church services and Muslim prayer rituals and provide leaders of both denominations with regular opportunities to share their religious insights with their constituencies. These religious insights may relate to a wide range of issues. Ali Yunus, for example, leads the Friday prayers in ‘his’ Gadon Kaya mosque, after which he preaches to the congregation about any issues that are salient at the time. Mahmoud Salga “preaches in mosques and religious gatherings and admonishes people to practice their religion in a good manner, [...] to fight injustice”. He also preaches “on good attitudes, not to tell lies, not to steal, not to be proud, not to commit adultery, and other things prohibited in the Islamic religion”. Finally, John Adeyemo preaches “in the name of god and to prepare people beyond living here on earth”.

One clear purpose of preaching is thus to disseminate the general values of a religious doctrine and admonish followers to abide by its norms and regulations. This may be aimed at fighting injustices or preventing crises in the physical world, but it may also serve a more spiritual purpose: to teach people how to prepare for the afterlife. Sheikh Aminudeen gave examples of prayers and preaching to address real-world problems, such as those posed by political corruption and communal violence: “I’m telling you prayer is a gigantic weapon to stop conflicts. And god listens. Prayer and teaching, [...] that will help”. Ali Yunus reasoned along similar lines, saying that “what we normally do is preach in the mosque. Before the [2011 presidential] elections I had about three sermons concerning politics, trying to make the people know that leadership should be based on trust”. Sheikh Turi also agrees, quoting a sermon by IMN leader Zakzaky saying “that elections [are] a question of what kind of robber you wish. If you want a Christian robber, fine. If you want a Muslim robber, fine. So choose! Why would you kill each other?”

Real-world issues and injustices are thus an important target of religious preaching and prayers. In addition, however, religious leaders also expressed an interest in the welfare of their constituents in a spiritual sense. And here too, preaching was thought to be a powerful tool. As John Ademoye phrases it, “as I prepare people for the kingdom of god, it leaves them with the responsibility of living in a meaningful society. Of tolerance, of peace, of love, of sacrifice, all of that. Because with much of that, we are expected to enter the kingdom of god”. Or, following Sheikh Turi,

my role has to do with trying to help them lead a good life, to help people understand the essence of existence. Try to make them understand that life in this world has a particular purpose and it is not the end, but rather the

beginning. Life is temporal, and then there is the life hereafter which will never end; and the reward, or punishment, one gets in the hereafter depends on how they live their life here. This is very important: trying to make people, individuals, realise that there is a reason for living, that they are accountable to their creator.

Christian and Muslim preaching, as the first mode of imparting religious knowledge, may thus be aimed both at real-world and otherworldly targets. It may be organised as part of church services or mosque prayer rituals, but also through the modern media – although in Kano, the latter option is more readily available to Muslim leaders than Christians. Al-Qadiri, for example, goes around rural Kano to engage in “mobile preaching” and has recurrent appearances on one of Kano’s wildly popular Hausa radio stations. Similarly, Ibrahim Muazzam preaches in mosques as well as public places and on the radio.

In addition to preaching, the second way of disseminating religious knowledge is through recurrent study groups, focused on the study of either the Islamic or Christian religious texts. Several Islamic leaders referred to such study groups as *majlis*, or religious gatherings, where the imam teaches his followers how to understand the Quran and other Islamic holy scriptures. Among Christians, the closest equivalent to these *majlis* is the bible class, which many Kano churches organise for their followers.

Finally, the third way of disseminating religious knowledge is closely related, and sometimes overlapping, with these informal study groups: through Christian and Muslim schools. The majority of interviewees noted that their church, mosque, or other religious organisation supervised primary and/or secondary schools. For example, Sheikh Qasiyyuni Kabara is the head of the youth wing of the Qadiriyya *tariqa* in Kano and entrusted by his father, Sheikh Nasiru Kabara, to administer the Ma’ahad Sheikh Nasiru Kabara primary school. This is only one of the schools run by the *tariqa*; similarly, the Tijaniyya also run schools throughout Kano’s Old City. An example of the more ‘orthodox’, and some would say ‘Wahhabi’¹³, Muslim clerics who run a school is Aminudeen Abubakar. His school provides both primary and secondary education and is situated in Nassarawa, but oriented towards Kano’s poor. As Abubakar explains,

it was originally in Arabic and Islamic studies, but we put science, English, mathematics [on the curriculum], so that our students can be up to date. Because [...] we northerners are left behind; we can even see it in their appearance, most of our people are poor, they are very dirty. [...] So what kind of religion [would we be] without helping the poor?.

Abubakar’s schools thus provides both Islamic and ‘secular’ education, in an attempt to improve the opportunities of the many poor Muslim youths in Kano. But while many Muslim parents and pupils appreciate and aspire to both Islamic and secular forms of schooling, this is by no means uncontested. Few would support Boko Haram’s extremist position on this issue, but many still prioritise Islamic schooling over the secular subjects. Moreover, the socio-economic reality of Kano and Nigeria’s

¹³ E.g. Kabara *op. cit.*

northern region more broadly forces parents to accept the limited opportunities available to their children, regardless of their level of education. In sum, therefore, some Islamic scholars are providing both Islamic and secular education, but it remains an open question to what extent Muslim parents are open to sending their children to these schools (for more details, see Hoechner 2012).

Churches also run schools, especially in neighbourhoods outside the Old City, such as St. Thomas Catholic boys school (secondary) on Airport Road and the recently attacked St. Louis Secondary School in Bompai. Of the Christian interviewees, all were involved in formal primary or secondary education through their respective churches, indicating the importance of formal education to Christian organisations. Secular schooling has a long historical connection with Christianity in Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa, because of the emphasis put on teaching by missionaries. Especially in Kano, where public education is scarce, of poor quality, and often oriented towards Islam, Christian organisations continue to prioritise the provision of Christian and secular education to their communities. While both Christian and Muslim leaders provide formal education to their communities, secular education continues to be more of a priority among Christians than among Muslims.

3.2 Caretakers

The first role religious leaders in Kano assume is thus that of the scholar and the teacher: a person with superior religious knowledge who can impart this knowledge through preaching and various forms of education. Besides teaching and preaching, the second role that came up in every interview was that of the caretaker: the religious leader who takes care of his community members through counselling, advice, and mediation. In all of the interviews, the role of the caretaker received most attention and the individual descriptions of this role showed many similarities between leaders, even between those with different religious affiliations. This section will outline the different fields within which the interviewed leaders take care of their followers and analyse some of the methods they use in the process. Briefly, the bulk of the section will discuss caretaking in the fields of marriage, inheritance, healing, conflict, and crisis management.

Discussing the various fields in which religious leaders strive to care for their community, marriage and marital difficulties were at the top of the list of all interviewees. Without exception, all interviewed leaders had extensive experience in dealing with marital difficulties and could give lively examples of their efforts. Lado Abdu of ECWA Kano, for example, describes:

I remember one husband, he fought with his wife. So in the night, around 10.30, the wife comes to knock on my door. She was crying. The husband had beaten her, beaten her, beaten her thoroughly, so she would not go back to that house. And I say to her: please be patient. So I asked my wife, let her escort me to their house in Brigade. So we went there. We sat down and I asked the husband – it was very hard before he opened the door, because he identified my voice... I pleaded with him: even if you don't open the door for your wife, you will do it for me. I'm here together with my wife. So he opened the door, we sat down: "what happened?" And he

narrated the whole story and the wife was crying. So I realised that, when the son misbehaved, the wife would talk to him. Warn him. And you know, we in Africa... Sometimes, she beats the child. And the husband doesn't like this, or even if she talks to him. So that caused the problem.

So after we finish, I tell him the truth! I say: so you don't want your child to cry now, but if you don't start from now, I'm telling you, your child will one day make you cry. So please, what she is doing is right. Because you love the child, but she loves him too. Because she is the one who bore the child. And you know how much she suffered because of that child and she wants him to become a man of his own later on. So we prayed, we left the house. After two or three days, around 7.30pm, they brought a bag of rice to my house, together with the wife. He said 'Thank you reverend, thank you very much'. I will never forget that.

Another example is provided by Auta Jinta, also from ECWA Kano:

There was this instance where a woman married a Muslim. They were having problems and though the husband was a Muslim he came to me at night around 11 o'clock. He asked me to go see his wife because she was a heavy drinker. Her attitude hurt the man and so he came to see me. I went to see her. The first time I went I didn't say anything as she was drunk and advised the man to wait till the next day when she must have been sober. The following day she ran away because of the shame she felt on her husband coming to me. So he came to me worried that his wife had run. I told him not to worry but he said he had had enough and wanted to marry another wife. I pleaded with him saying it won't be necessary.

Afterwards I sent my associate after his wife because at the time she seemed afraid of me. When my associate went, she didn't talk much. My associate asked her why she couldn't set a good example as a Christian to her husband and even convert him to Christianity. Then he left. I called the husband and told the husband that I would like to see his wife. They both came. We all sat and talked together. Afterwards she said 'reverend, I'm asking for forgiveness and can't continue in this drinking'. She said she was ashamed the first time she saw me and was afraid. I said 'don't fear me, fear god'. Soon after she abandoned the drinking and now everything is going smoothly.

As may be expected, the origins of the marital difficulties dealt with by the interviewed leaders varied considerably. Some mentioned diverging opinions on the raising of children or other forms of parental conduct, such as the example given above. Others mentioned other causes of marital conflict, including issues around sexuality, poverty (or rather the inability of the husband to provide for the wife and family), religious differences, forced or arranged marriages, and even issues of a spiritual nature:

Sometimes people have spiritual problems that need to be solved spiritually. Like somebody who has been dreaming. Another wife comes to sleep with him. A night wife, or a night husband. [...] The person is experiencing everything as if it is real, but it is not real. It is spiritual. And then he finds he cannot perform with the partner he is

married to in the real natural world. So if that is the aspect, it calls for prayers. To an entity being there.

One of the striking aspects of these examples and discussions was the intimacy of the problems and the depth of the involvement of these religious leaders with the marriage partners. If the interviewee accounts are accurate, religious leaders in Kano do not shy away from addressing highly intimate issues in marital relationships, often of a sexual nature. Among some Muslims, one explanation for the ease with which such issues are discussed may lie in a particular understanding of marital obligations, in which the wife is obliged to sleep with the husband, so long as he provides for the wife and the children in a material sense. Although many Muslims would doubtless object to this depiction of a marriage, it was expressed by several Muslim leaders whom I interviewed. One of them, for example, explained what he would do if he was asked to help resolve a marital conflict where the husband beat the wife:

As far as Islam is concerned, no man is allowed to beat his wife... without any reason. And the reason must be conformist with the provision of *sharia*. That is when a man comes to seek for marital relationship with his wife, and she refuses, for a number of days, refuses to listen to him. According to the Quran, Allah says: 'Give them a warning, admonish them. Please, this thing you are doing is contrary to the teachings of Islam. You are deviating from the path of God, contravening the teachings of the Prophet. You are living in sin. Please try and repent'. That is the first thing we do: advise the woman, if we come to understand that this is the problem.

Now, if the thing persists after they go back to their house, the man comes back to us, and we invite the woman again. She will come to us. So, what happens? Do you have any complaint against this man? 'Yes I have. I don't have enough food to eat, no proper place to dwell, no proper dress to wear, so how can I accede to this man? He is not taking good care of me'. So we say: this is a problem we can understand. [So the man] must go back and correct this deviation [...]. And we ask [the wife] to come back after a month to tell us the situation. And after two weeks she will come back: he has changed now, he has provided me with everything I need. So OK, go back and cooperate with him. And that is the end of the problem.

Christian leaders also indicated that intimacy, often exemplified by the rejection of the husband by the wife, was a cause for marital difficulties. John Adeyemo gave the example of a wife "having problems with meeting her husband", even though "the bible says: woman, submit to your husband"; suggesting a similar scriptural guidance for marital intimacy. The husband, on his part, found it "difficult to love his wife". However, other Christian interviewees did not refer to a religiously-sanctioned norm in terms of marital sexuality. Rather, they referred to other causes for rejection, for example in a situation where the wife does not want to have another child while she is breastfeeding¹⁴. Such causes consequently also called for different solutions; in this case, for example, a "natural method of family planning".

¹⁴ Interview Maurice Hassan on 9/9/2011 in Kano.

The intimacy of the problems and the depth of the involvement of religious leaders in marital difficulties is thus a striking feature of their caretaking role. It suggests, as we will discuss in a bit more detail below, that religious leaders can use their position to offer highly personal counselling services. Such services are mostly directed at members of their own community, although some of the interviewees could also give examples of their involvement with members of other denominations, sects, or churches. For example, Muazzam deals with a fighting Muslim husband and Christian wife by speaking to “the Christian from a Christian perspective, from her own book. ‘This is what is contained in your own book, it says this and this concerning this’ [...] And in most cases, most of the provisions of the two sacred texts are almost identical. In most cases, almost identical”.

A large part of the caretaking work performed by religious leaders is thus aimed at resolving marital problems. Sometimes, however, such problems can only be resolved through separation or divorce. And while it should not be overstated, the interviews suggested a difference in the attitudes towards divorce between the Christian and Muslim leaders. Christian leaders expressed a strong opposition to divorce. As Adeyemo explains, “god has not commissioned me to do divorce. [...] Even if a Christian is married to a Muslim, I will not tell them to get a divorce. [...] If they eventually go there, they will be responsible to god for breaking up their marriage, because god hates divorce”. But while most Christian leaders agreed with this position, Muslim leaders reported a wider range of opinions on the matter.

Some Islamic leaders expressed similar opinions to the Christians, such as Ahmad Murtala: “Being together is a very blissful thing to [marriage partners]. They have to be together, separation has no benefits”. Others, however, were quicker to resort to divorce in order to resolve marital problems. Ali Yunus, for example, says that if he thinks it is proper, “my advice is: we have *sharia* courts here. So whenever a woman has a problem in the family, she goes to the courts. I will advice them, especially the wife, if she thinks she cannot stay with the man, I advise her that in the religion she is allowed to seek divorce”. The conditions for such a divorce are specified in the Islamic texts: “If the husband cannot provide for the wife [...], she has a right to divorce. But if he provides for her, and she seeks divorce, then there is *khul*, which means she has to give back the dowry, and then she frees herself”. The husband, by contrast, has the right to divorce the wife “whenever he thinks he cannot stay with the wife”¹⁵.

While Christian interviewees were thus uniformly opposed to divorce, Islamic leaders allowed for situations where Islamic law considers divorce as justified. This points to a significant, but subtle, difference between Christian and Muslim caretaker leadership: Islamic law appears to lay down regulations on a wider set of issues than Christian norms do. A case in point is the issue of inheritance, which all Islamic treated as a simple matter, to be advised on by religious leaders and ruled on by the *qadi* in *sharia* court. Sheikh Turi summarises the Islamic rules on inheritance thus:

In less than a minute we know who should inherit what. For example, the Quran says that if a person dies with children and parents, the father of the deceased should be given 1/6 of the wealth. The mother similarly

¹⁵ Yunus *op. cit.*

should be given 1/6. And then what is left should be shared amongst the children. And the Quran spells out that as far as the children are concerned, the males are to have two parts, while the women should have one part.

Meanwhile, Christian leaders had less strong opinions on the matter, often leaving it up to the cultural customs of the church members in question. If they were called upon to decide in matters of inheritance, however, their strategies varied: while Lado Abdul went back to the scriptures to find rules for the division of the inheritance, John Adeyemo and [redeemed/Living Faith] advised their followers to reject the inheritance altogether. “Who says you can’t raise your own?”

Islamic law thus guides a wider range of pastoral issues than biblical texts do for Christian leaders. This is not to say, however, that Christian leaders do not refer to their religious texts in finding solutions to caretaking problems; it is only meant to suggest that the range of issues covered by Islamic law is somewhat larger. There remain many issues for both sets of leaders, however, which require more than a uniform application of scriptural principles, not least of which are interpersonal conflicts, crisis management, and divine healing.

As for conflicts, several Islamic leaders highlighted the importance of mediation as part of their (caretaker) role as a leader. Dr. Muazzam, for example, mentions conflicts between Islamiyya schools that he has resolved through personal, informal interventions, as well as a large number of conflicts that he had to address in his former position as Commander-General of the Kano State Hisbah Board. Ahmad Murtala, similarly, describes his intervention in conflicts between “those who are not *ahlus sunna* and those who are” in addition to his conciliatory role as head of *da’wa* in the Hisbah of Gwale LG. Such interventions, even on the part of the Hisbah, should be understood largely as mediation or reconciliation efforts; when all else fails, the conflicting parties may still choose to visit the *sharia* courts in order to obtain a legal ruling on their case. This suggests an overlap between interventions in marital problems and other types of conflict management. However, while the former was characterised by intimacy and personal advice, the latter is more accurately characterised as mediation and arbitration.

Neither of these characterisations applies particularly well to yet another field of caretaking leadership: crisis management. As an example case, the interviewees were asked about their involvement in the violence that followed the presidential elections in the spring of 2011. As may be expected, responses on this issue were varied. One way in which religious leaders of both denominations addressed violence has already been mentioned: through preaching and prayers, admonishing people to cast their votes and express their opinions peacefully. A second way, particularly important among Christian leaders, was to warn church members of the on-going events and care for those who had fallen victim to the violence.

In this regard, Lado Abdul describes how “we spent almost two to three days, not sleeping, together with boys, trying to watch over the compound and to ask our pastors that they should be vigilant. [...] We have these two groups in the churches, so we use them, mobilise them, let them be vigilant, [and] team up with other churches”. Auta Jinta confirms these actions, saying that “for three days, we did not

sleep, we were moving, standing guard, watching to secure the place. In Sabon Gari, if you were a Hausa man, you couldn't enter. Even me as a Christian, wearing these robes, I can't enter Sabon Gari". Some Christian leaders thus mobilised and coordinated their youth groups to protect and close the church neighbourhood (Sabon Gari), at least for all those who were not clearly Christians. John Adeyemo provides another example of caretaking in these times of crisis:

The first thing we do is, people who are injured, people who lost their properties, who are stranded, hungry, sleeping outside on the floor... [...] we go out there after them. We seek security aid. I remember after the last riot, I was the one in person to go to the commissioner of police to get a police escort. So in my car, six hefty policemen, I took them to our departure point for CAN. We departed from the church of the CAN chairman. To see churches burnt down, in Naibawa, Badawa layout, those were the places we could go to, because it was a very hot afternoon, and we had to trek so we became exhausted and we were fasting. So it was difficult to keep going after 3pm. And then we went to the refugee camps, so we went round to address the people there. In Kano, the people who were refugees were Christian.

A third way of engaging with the electoral violence was to intervene directly, as illustrated by dr. Muazzam: "There were a number of youths who decided to go and attack places. But [because] I am neutral in whatever I do, I was able to invite them to come to my house here. And more than a hundred came and I said 'this is what you're going to do'. [...] I can speak to them, as a father, as a brother, as a leader; they agree [that I] am here for them". Dr. Muazzam also argues, however, that such authority can only be acquired through consistent and long-term engagement with the youths involved in the violence. "They come to me for help, and I give them what I have. But for anybody who doesn't give a helping hand, when [the youths] are doing things, he has no right whatsoever to talk to them".

The interviewees thus highlighted three ways in which they engaged with the electoral crisis of April 2011: through prayer and preaching, through care and protection, and through direct interventions with violent youths. Some of the leaders also described how their interactions with state officials and security services helped to manage the crisis; these actions, however, will be discussed more in section 3.3. Having looked at caring in marital problems, inheritance, conflict, and crisis management, the final example of caretaking to be mentioned here is healing. Although not discussed in every interview, several Christian and Muslim leaders indicated that they had a role providing health care to their followers. Two methods of health care were highlighted. First, Sheikh Turi described the IMN medical wing; the ECWA Eye Hospital is another example of efforts to provide 'modern' medicine. In addition, however, Christian leaders especially indicated their faith in 'divine healing' – either in addition to 'modern medicine'¹⁶ or applied separately¹⁷.

So far, this section has illustrated some of the main areas in which the interviewed religious leaders help their community members, as caretakers. In some of these fields, care was provided in the shape of material care, as in the case of health care

¹⁶ Adeyemo *op. cit.*

¹⁷ Interview with Auta Jinta on 5/9/2011 in Kano.

and crisis management, or in the shape of prayer. Mostly, however, help was provided in the shape of advice; advice on marital issues, on inheritance, on health care, and on conflict resolution, provided in personal meetings with the people involved. Partly, religious leaders source their advice from their sacred texts; partly, they use their common sense and personal experience to devise acceptable solutions to the problem at hand. None of the leaders considered their advice legally binding. As such, the authority and impact of advice is predicated on the fact that those who come to a leader for advice believe in his level of religious knowledge and feel a personal connection to him. Consequently, advice differs significantly from the rulings provided by either Islamic or secular judges, which are impersonal and legally binding.

3.3 Representatives

Having thus discussed religious leaders and their role as caretakers of their community, this section will analyse their views on the final of their three roles: representatives of their religious constituency. Essentially, in this role religious leaders represent the interests of their community externally, either in relation to other religious groups or organisations or more widely to the rest of society. It is perhaps, in Lonsdale's (1994) famous phrase, the religious equivalent of 'political tribalism', while the tasks of preaching and caretaking are more akin to his notion of 'moral ethnicity'. Building on the interview data, there are roughly two ways in which religious leaders in Kano are representatives to their communities: first, through individual involvement in electoral politics and government and, second, through collective action as part of organisations outside the state. We will discuss each of the two ways in more detail.

As Wakili (2009) argues in his paper on the *ulama* and elections, prior to 1999 Islamic leaders in the north of Nigeria preferred to stay at arm's length from politics. Following the lead of the governor of Zamfara in 1999, however, *ulama* all over the north began to involve themselves in the push for the reintroduction of the criminal code of the *sharia* law. Riding on the wave of public support for this move, political leaders used this increased involvement to their own benefit, for example by appointing important *ulama* into official positions. Governor Shekarau of Kano, for example, during his two terms appointed *ulama* in most of the state bodies that focused on *sharia* implementation (ibid.).

These appointments increased support for the governor's regime, not only among the population but also among those *ulama* who were appointed. By contrast, those who remained outside these (lucrative) state positions, and those who objected to the particular ways in which *sharia* was implemented in Kano, on the other hand, came to oppose the governor and his political party, the ANPP. Thus, the reintroduction of *sharia* did not uniformly increase support for the state and ruling political party, but rather politicised sectarian affiliation within the Islamic community, differentiating those in support of the regime and those opposed to it. Christian leaders also indicated political preferences, mostly in favour of the current Governor Kwankwaso (PDP), due to his hesitation to implement *sharia* during his previous term as Kano's governor.

Although the particularities of religious political allegiances are far more complex and dynamic than can be discussed here, the general point is that the side-effects of *sharia* re-implementation were the increased engagement of some Christian and Muslim leaders in politics and the simultaneous increasing divergence between them and the leaders that distanced themselves from the political sphere. In other words, religious affiliation became more politicised. Wakili (2009) discusses the political preaching leading up to the elections as one example of this political engagement. In some cases, this preaching went so far as to endorse and campaign for one particular candidate; in other cases, it remained limited to admonishment of the followers to choose the ‘best man’. Another example of this engagement lies in the increased numbers of mostly Islamic leader employed as state officials. Several of the interviewed leaders provided examples of such employment.

Umar Sani Fagge, for example, noted how Governor Shekarau called on him to assist the government as the chairman of the *Sharia* Independent Support Committee. By the same token, dr. Muazzam was once the Commissioner of *Zakat* in Kano State, after which he became the Commander-General of the *Hisbah* in Kano State. Finally, Ahmad Murtala explained how he is currently the head of *Da’wa* in the *Hisbah* of Gwale LG, one of the local governments that constitute Kano metropolis. All three of these interviewees are *ulama* in their own right, with both Umar Sani Fagge and dr. Muazzam as members of the Kano State Council of *Ulama*. As such, they perform their ‘normal’ leadership roles of teaching, praying, and caretaking, while the same time being employed by the State Government.

For obvious reasons, such government positions in Kano State are only available to some Muslim leaders; Christians are only included into the state apparatus as advisors on minority issues (see Ehrhardt 2011 for more details on these positions). As Wakili (2009) highlights, however, Christian leaders also increasingly seek government positions in other parts of Nigeria. Moreover, some Christian and Muslim leaders without official positions do work together with the government on a more sporadic basis. Reverend Iliya of Kano’s Anglican Church, for example, describes that he has a good relationship with Kano’s security services. Security agents often call on him for help with a Christian suspect, or in situations of Christian-Muslim tensions. Similarly, even Ali Yunus, a follower of the late Sheikh Ja’afar who was notoriously critical of the Shekarau administration, professes that after the electoral violence in 2011,

we were called in immediately by the security agents, and they asked us to preach to the people concerning the peaceful, peace-loving, and these things. To call them to their attention, especially during Friday sermons.

Even some of those without official state positions, or even those who are critical of the state, thus interact and cooperate with political and government leaders, if only on a sporadic basis. It may therefore be argued that there is an increasing number of ways in which individual Islamic leaders involve themselves in the political arena in Kano. However, many Islamic leaders feel that while this involvement is in principle positive, the reality of Nigerian politics leaves a lot to desired: “Probably what we are having today is the beginning, the rudiments, of religious leaders being in charge. But there is a lot that has to be done until we have a situation whereby governance is in the hands of religious leaders and laws are being made according to the dictates of

religion”¹⁸. Moreover, all interviewed leaders noted that there are limits to the political engagement of religious leaders; for example, they all disapproved of teachers propagating political agenda’s in schools, and many viewed their role in politics solely through preaching rather than through political office.

Sharia politics has thus strengthened the incentives for some Islamic leaders to engage with the political process in Kano, but this involvement remains limited as well as contested. In addition to this direct political involvement, a second way in which many interviewed leaders act as representatives for their communities is through religious organisations. Prime examples of such organisations are the Christian umbrella of CAN; the Muslim Councils of *Ulama*, Jama’atu Nasril Islam (JNI), and the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA); the wide range of faith-based NGOs; and finally the inter-religious National Inter-religious Council (NIREC). Much has been written all of these organisations, so this section will only sketch the activities of these organisations in broad strokes, using the interview data from the leaders in Kano as a starting point.

Starting with CAN, this is the primary organisation through which Christian leaders represent their community’s interests in wider Kano society. As John Adeyemo, who is the head of the CCN block of CAN Kano branch, describes it: “CAN [...] is the religious instrument from the Christian side that the government of the State or even of the nation recognises as the religious body that provides leadership for the Christian community”. As such, his role in CAN is to “coordinate religious affairs of this block, CCN, and then to represent the interests of the Christian community in the governance of the State”. This representation, he later explains, entails mostly “[being] a stakeholder in maintaining peace, in educating the people... so from time to time we sit together with the State government, with the security agencies, and then we give feedback to the people”.

As the first representative of the Catholic block in CAN Kano branch, Maurice Hassan describes his role in CAN as follows:

We come together to share issues from churches... First, everybody will pray together and then people will bring the issues of the day. The chairman will ask for a burning issue. Is there something that concerns churches that we can talk to the government or authorities about? We can draw their attention, if they are not aware of it, to see how we can have a dialogue with them. We are not confrontational, but we are there to broker dialogue. Either with the government, or with other faiths, like Islam. To see where our rights can be respected. [...] Take, for example, a church that was burnt down in the year 2007. The churches in Tudun Wada LG, about 15 of them; and they cannot rebuild. [...] These things have been giving us concern. And we have to go to the relevant authorities to find out what can be done.

CAN is thus viewed as the main representative of the Christian community in Kano and discusses many things, “politics not excluded”¹⁹. Because, as Hassan explains,

¹⁸ Turi *op. cit.*

¹⁹ Hassan *op. cit.*

“what affects an ECWA man affects a Catholic man”. At the same time, however, Hassan is also clear about the fact that CAN’s main concern is that “churches may exist and that we may practice [our religion] freely”. And as Adeyemo admits, it is not usually easy to tell the State government the interests of the Christian community: “It is easier for the government to arrange for a meeting than for us to seek audience of government. So we use the little opportunity when the government says, ‘Come, there is something to discuss’ [...] to put our own issues forward for consideration”. Thus, while CAN is well-organised and aims to represent Christian interests, its access to other authorities is constrained and its agenda is often limited to removing restrictions on the practice of Christianity in Kano.

Although there are several Muslim umbrella bodies in Kano, there is no single Muslim equivalent of CAN in terms of its level of organisation and its national reach. Arguably the most important body is the broad Kano State Council of *Ulama*, created in 1984 by Sheikh Umar Sani Fagge, among others, and currently led by Sheikh Ibrahim Khaleel. Dr. Muazzam, interviewed for this paper, is also a member of this Council; other umbrella organisations for Muslims include the JNI and the NSCIA (see also the other NRN working papers at www.qeh.ox.ac.uk/nrn). But while CAN represents the minority Christian interests against the interests of the Muslim majority and the *sharia* government, Islamic umbrella groups are more concerned with discussions and disagreements within Kano’s Muslim community. These disagreements may relate to issues of jurisprudence and Islamic law, but also to larger societal tensions. For example, all umbrella Muslim groups denounced Boko Haram in early 2012, suggesting that the violence categorically separates Boko Haram followers from the mainstream Muslim community in northern Nigeria.

There are thus several organisations that embody the entire Christian and Muslim communities and, to some extent, represent their interests. In addition to these umbrella bodies, there is also a wide range of faith-based NGOs, which represent specific issues and interests and thus contribute to governance. It may be argued that NGO leaders are not by definition religious leaders; but it cannot be denied that many leaders are both. Faith-based NGOs are, expectedly, highly diverse in the issues they choose to focus on. Some focus on religious issues, such as providing pilgrimage assistance; others represent the interests of specific social constituencies, such as women or youths; yet others aim to contribute to certain issue areas, such as development, conflict prevention, or basic education. CDRT (2005a, 2005b) provides an overview of some of the most important faith-based NGOs throughout northern Nigeria.

Finally, the fourth organisation through which religious leaders in Kano act as the representatives of their community is NIREC. Of those leaders who were interviewed for this study, only Ibrahim Muazzam has been involved in NIREC as a representative of (Kano) Muslims. As he explains, “I represent the Emir’s palace; and aside from me, Professor Isa Hashim, the imam of the Kano Central Mosque is a member”. Their main task, according to him, is to “discuss the issue of peace: how to stop people from attacking and insulting one another. It is very dangerous. [...] If I’m fair, most of the problems come from the Christians. Because while Muslims recognise Jesus as a messenger from god, Christians think Prophet Muhammad was an impostor”. When asked about the practicalities of NIREC membership, however, Muazzam noted that

the Council meets only once every three to four months. Moreover, the meetings only exist at the national level; nothing is organised at the State or city level in Kano.

Having discussed the various ways in which religious leaders play the role of community representative in Kano society, we will now look at the entire range of their behaviour as leaders and assess the ways in which they contribute to the city's governance.

4. Religious Leaders and Governance

Nigerian religions are flourishing; at the same time, the country's politics and institutions appear to be in ever greater disrepair. This paper aims to analytically describe the ways in which the two most popular religions, and more particularly their leaders, help to address Nigeria's many governance deficits. It has used Kano as its case study, due to its significance as a commercial hub and Muslim stronghold in northern Nigeria. In terms of data, the analysis is based on 18 interviews with Christian and Muslim leaders in Kano, conducted in September 2011. The preceding sections of the paper have outlined a conceptual framework to look at religious leadership and governance, sketched the religious landscape of Kano, and analysed the three main roles that religious leaders in Kano assume take on: teachers and scholars, caretakers, and representatives.

This final section will summarise the findings presented in the paper and discuss them in relation to the central research question: in what ways do Christian and Muslim leaders in Kano contribute to governance in the city? Section 4.1 will provide the summary of the findings presented in sections 2 and 3, while section 4.2 will connect these findings to the central research question, outlining the ways in which religious leaders contribute to governance. Finally, section 4.3 will attempt to assess these contributions, while also analysing the group interests that religious leaders fail to address and the reasons for this failure.

4.1 Religious diversity and leadership roles

Building on the work by other members of the Nigeria Research Network²⁰, which comprehensively draws out the historical and doctrinal diversity of Islamic movements in northern Nigeria, the first empirical section of this paper has discussed the religious landscape of metropolitan Kano. In particular, it has underlined the contrasting trends towards unity and differentiation that characterise both Muslims and Christians in Kano. On the one hand, both religious communities have a strong sense of unity, expressed through the Islamic notion of the *ummah* and the Christian idea of the undivided body of Christ. This sense of unity is also translated into organisations, through the Council of *Ulama*, the Jama'atu Nasril Islam, and the Nigerian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs among Muslims, and the Christian Association of Nigeria among Christians.

On the other hand, however, both Muslims and Christians are deeply divided within themselves. Doctrine and religious ritual are the prime dividing lines in both

²⁰ Abdussalam (2012); Alkali et al. (2012); Ibrahim (2012); Jimba (2012); Liman and Wakawa (2012); Medugu (2012); Modibbo (2012); Ndagi (2012); Ostien (2012a, (2012b)

communities, although opinions differ as to the meaning and value of these differences. In addition, Muslims and Christians are also divided by generation, ethnicity, class, and geographical origins. Both Muslims and Christians are thus subject to forces that unite and divide them. One significant difference between the two, however, is that while Christians all belong to a specific church, there is a large group of 'neutral' Muslims without sectarian affiliations. Moreover, even those Muslims who are affiliated to a specific movement or mosque are not necessarily 'members' in the same sense that Christians are members of their church. Muslims in Kano thus appear to be more loosely organised than Christians – an observation that also applies to the Muslim and Christian umbrella organisations.

In the context of this diverse religious landscape, this paper has analysed the ways in which the interviewed leaders describe their roles in Kano society. It has there are at least three different sides to the public personas of Christian and Muslim leaders in Kano: their roles as scholars and teachers, as caretakers, and as community representatives. First, as scholars and teachers, Muslim and Christian leaders use their position of religious erudition and scholarship to educate their followers. Such education may focus on spiritual or on worldly knowledge, and commonly takes place through preaching, informal study groups, and formally organised educational institutions. Especially among the Muslim leaders who were interviewed, the image of scholar and teacher was a popular mode of self-identification.

Second, the interviewed leaders also highlighted the importance of their work as community caretakers, who take care of their community members through counselling, advice, and mediation. In this role, both Christian and Muslim leaders described a regular involvement in matters of marriage and divorce, inheritance, and other forms of family counselling. In these matters, the interviewees were remarkably comfortable dealing with deeply intimate issues, related to domestic violence, child rearing, and sexuality. The general *modus operandi* in these situations was for the leader to meet and discuss with the people involved, pray with them, and provide them with advice on the basis of their sacred texts. The term 'advice' is significant in this regard: especially among Islamic leaders, this type of counselling was to be differentiated from the binding legal rulings provided by *sharia* court judges.

Other issues that the interviewed leaders engaged with as caretakers were those related to healing, social conflict, and crisis management. Some of the Christian leaders practice 'charismatic' healing, in which charismatic group prayers are used to address health problems with spiritual origins. Although it is known that some of Kano's 'traditional' *ulama* engage in their own forms of spiritual healing, none of the interviewed Islamic leaders mentioned this. Most leaders, however, noted that they would help to refer their followers to 'modern' health care institutions, either in conjunction with or separately from any attempts at spiritual healing. The function of conflict management, through informal mediation, was also highlighted, extending not only to familial disagreements but also to larger interpersonal and collective forms of violence²¹. Finally, in times of widespread crisis in the city (e.g. the post-election riots in April 2011), religious leaders noted their involvement in preaching for peace, caring for the victims and, in some cases, intervening with the riotous youths.

²¹ See also Ehrhardt (2007) and Blench (2006).

A third role religious leaders play in Kano society is the role of representing the interests of their community externally, in relation to other social groups and organisations. In this role, the demographic proportions between the two religions have affected the nature of representation and caused differentiation between Christian and Muslim leaders, as well as within the Muslim community. Some Islamic *ulama* have become engaged in the formal political sphere, either through permanent political positions or more sporadic interactions with the state and its institutions. Their main purpose has been to implement and consolidate the connections between Islam and the state, largely through the re-implementation of the *sharia* criminal code and the discursive ‘Islamisation’ of the Kano State Government. Christians and reformist, or critical, Islamic leaders, by contrast, have used their respective organisations to negotiate with the state, or even distance themselves from it.

The paper has thus analysed three societal roles that Christian and Islamic leaders in Kano describe as the core of their everyday leadership behaviour in the city. It has also argued, however, that different leaders conduct these roles in very different ways, on the basis of examples from the interview data. Moreover, the paper does not mean to suggest that the agency of religious leaders is limited to these three roles. For example, many clerics and *ulama* in contemporary Nigeria have developed themselves as veritable entrepreneurs, setting up businesses and amassing wealth to support their religious community as well as themselves. It is unlikely, however, that religious leaders would describe themselves in these terms, or highlight these forms of elite behaviour as part and parcel of their leadership roles. Further research is therefore necessary to shed light on these other aspects of religious leadership in northern Nigeria.

4.2 Religious leaders and governance in Kano

Considering the three roles outlined in this paper, however, how should we assess the contribution of Muslim and Christian leaders to governance in the metropolis? This section will tackle this question by specifying which public or sub-group interests are addressed and promoted through the three leadership roles as described above. In brief, the argument presented in this section consists of two parts. First, the above analysis clearly indicates that in each of their three roles, religious leaders cater primarily for their own religious constituency, rather than for the Kano population at large. Second, the analysis suggests that religious leaders focus mostly on their group’s interests in terms of (religious) education, individual well-being, social stability, and the position of their faith in the public sphere.

Although ostensibly obvious, the first part of the argument is an important point to make: that religious leaders focus almost exclusively on the issues that concern all or most members of their own religious constituency. Muslim leaders educate, counsel, and represent their fellow Muslims, while Christian leaders do the same for their own communities. Depending on the personality of the leader and the situation in which he finds himself, a Muslim *alim* or Christian minister may define his religious constituency narrowly, limited to a specific mosque or church, or broadly, inclusive of all Muslims or Christians. Very rarely, however, did any of the leaders refer to issues in which Muslims and Christians had a shared interest; much less the entirety of

Kano's population. The only exceptions in this regard were the sporadic (and externally organised) NGO interfaith workshops, the efforts made at the national level by NIREC and the local initiative known as the 'Kano Covenant'.

In most every other aspect of their everyday behaviour, religious leaders cater for their own religious group. Moreover, their actions benefit their community members in a limited number of areas, defined here as education, individual well-being, social stability, and, to a lesser extent, the position of their faith in the public sphere. Education is perhaps the most obvious group interest that religious leaders attempt to address, and hence the most obvious way in which they contribute to Kano's governance. As Hoechner (2012) and Ostien (2012) have argued elsewhere, the demand for education in northern Nigeria is staggering. Religious leaders, in their role as scholars and teachers, contribute to meeting this demand, through preaching, (informal) religious education, as well as formally organised 'secular' schools. However, this contribution is by no means sufficient; especially for Muslims, good education remains scarce and, consequently, expensive.

Closely related to education, a second field in which religious leaders contribute to governance is individual well-being, both in its spiritual and material meanings. Muslim and Christian leaders aim to contribute to the spiritual well-being of their followers through preaching and religious schooling, but also through counselling. Their aim, in this respect is, is to prepare their followers for their lives after death, showing them the ways to lead pious lives. In addition to the spiritual welfare of their followers, section 3 also showed that religious leaders contribute to their material and physical well-being. This is done mainly through spiritual healing (and referral to 'modern' health care in situations where spiritual healing is deemed insufficient), physical protection in situations of crisis, and financial support – for example, through the Islamic institution of *zakat* or through support in kind, such as waving school fees for poor church members²².

The third contribution of religious leaders to the governance of Kano metropolis, lies in their role as community caretakers. In this role, they aim to help maintain a level of social stability, through marriage counselling, settling inheritance disputes, and mediating in family or other kinds of interpersonal conflicts. It may be argued that this is a service that, in Western societies, is often delegated to state organisations. But while state bodies are often bureaucratic and impersonal in their approach, the engagement of Kano's religious leaders is characterised, as described in more detail above, by intimate personal contact between the religious leaders and their followers. Moreover, it is focused primarily on the institution of the family, yet again underlining the emphasis that religious thought puts on the family as the 'cornerstone' of society.

The fourth way in which religious leaders aim to contribute to the governance of Kano is by strengthening the role of religion in the public sphere. For Islamic leaders, this includes the increased involvement of *ulama* in the politics of Kano State, the discursive identification of Kano as a Muslim State, as well as the extension of *sharia* law beyond civic law. For Christian leaders, in contrast, enhancing the role of religion in the public sphere mostly means negotiating for a space to practise their religion

²² See e.g. interview with Lado Abdul on 5/9/2011 in Kano.

freely and publicly. The Sabon Gari neighbourhood has long been the primary location for Kano Christians to practise their faith, but several interviewed leaders also indicated to have struggled for church space in other parts of the city. Within this field of activity, Muslim and Christian leaders thus have partly conflicting agendas; moreover, the means through which they attempt to achieve their objects also differ. Muslim leaders have the opportunity to access the formal political system, either through political parties or through political appointments. Christian leaders, however, often have to rely on CAN to represent their interests in dialogue with the formal political leaders.

In sum, therefore, religious leaders in Kano mostly contribute to the city's governance in four areas: education, individual well-being, social stability, and the role of religion in the public sphere. In each of these areas, the interviewed leaders aim to promote specific interests of their own religious community. Moreover, through faith-based NGOs, some religious leaders are also involved in the struggle for other 'political' issues, such as the provision of public goods and the protection of equal citizenship rights. The important question in this regard, however, is to what extent these contributions actually impact on Kano society. In its entirety, this question lies well beyond the scope of this study and requires further empirical research. However, we can suggest some conceptual ways in which to approach the issue, highlighting the incentives, strengths, and weaknesses that characterise religious leadership in Kano.

4.3 The limits and opportunities of religious leadership

If we reconsider the above descriptions of the roles of religious leaders in Kano society and their contributions to governance, two main points of strength may be seen to emerge. The principal strength of religious leaders derives from the combined effect of three factors: first, the overall salience of religion in Kano; second, the high level of respect and authority that residents of Kano accord their religious leaders; and third, the high level of access that religious leaders have to their followers. Religion's high salience renders the actions of religious leaders more visible and socially significant. The high level of authority wielded by religious leaders ensures that their words and actions are likely to have a large effect on their followers. The high level of access of religious leaders to their followers increases the size of the group of people affected by the leaders' words and actions. Finally, it may be clear that all three factors interact positively, continuously reinforcing each other.

The combination of salience, authority, and access may thus be posited as the main strength of religious leaders in Kano – and the main reason why they can aim to contribute to the city's governance in the areas described above. In addition, a second source of strength, or influence, of religious leaders in Kano relates to their political involvement. In this regard, the significant factor is the increasing politicisation of religion, or the ever-stronger religious undertones of politics in Kano, and in Nigeria at large. Although many object to this development, it is undeniable that in political terms, the politicisation of religion has increased the influence of (Islamic) religious leaders on Kano politics. It may therefore be noted here as a source of strength, even if it may also be seen as a cause of the intensification of religious competition and conflict. It should, however, be underlined that political involvement remains a risky

strategy for religious leaders, because engagement in Nigerian politics always entails the risk of being tainted by its highly negative image.

In addition to the strengths of religious leaders in Kano, the analysis above has also highlighted the many factors that limit their contribution to the city's governance. In this regard, four constraining factors stand out. First, there is the simple issue of resource limitations: while religious organisations are among the most functional and efficient institutions in the country, they mostly have to rely on voluntary donations from their, often very poor, followership. These limits on their resources, by necessity, also limit the capacity of religious leaders to contribute to governance. A second limitation on their contribution is the highly competitive nature of Kano's religious landscape. As a consequence, religious leaders have to focus a lot of their attention on maintaining their position of authority, which they often do by catering narrowly for the interests of their own group members. Religious leaders are therefore unlikely to address issues that are relevant to people outside their religious constituency.

Moreover, thirdly, it is important to realise that the authority of religious leaders depends on their connection with their entire religious constituency. This implies that religious leaders have a strong incentive to focus their efforts on issues that are relevant to all of their followers, or at least the large majority of them. Considering the mixed social-economic and political make-up of many religious groupings, the consequence of this incentive is that religious leaders have a relatively narrow margin of issues they can, uncontroversially, address. In fact, the only interests that religious groups share by definition are those that are connected to their faith. Therefore, religious leaders have a strong incentive to address only those issues that may be interpreted as 'religious' and to frame all their actions in religious terms. Based on the above analysis, this paper suggests that such issues are primarily centred on, and often limited to, family matters, education, spiritual well-being, and the position of religion in the public sphere.

The final factors that constrain the ways in which religious leaders can contribute to governance are related to their role in politics. As noted above, in recent years the access of some Islamic leaders into Kano politics has increased. However, it has also been noted that such access continues to entail the risk of being 'tainted' by the negative image of Nigerian politics and that this has led many *ulama* to keep their distance from the political sphere. Moreover, another factor constraining religious leaders to become engaged in politics is the 'secular' nature of the Nigerian Federal constitution (Federal Government of Nigeria 1999). Although there have been many longstanding debates about the precise nature and implications of Nigerian 'secularity', the constitution clearly stipulates that Nigeria shall have no state religion and that all Nigerians are free to practise their religions. Although contested, these constitutional provisions constrain the implementation of *sharia* and continue to provide those opposed to the ever-deepening connections between religious leaders and Kano politics with a powerful legal instrument to oppose them (Suberu 2009).

Finally, with regard to Christian clergy in Kano, it has been argued that the demographic minority position of Christians in Kano has strongly constrained the political engagement of Christian leaders. As a consequence of their minority status, Christians are all but completely excluded from Kano politics, even as Islamic leaders

have become increasingly politically involved. Taken together, therefore, the factors that constrain religious leaders reinforce the assessment that there are clear limitations to their actual and potential contributions to governance in Kano. At the same time, however, the factors that enhance their agency indicate opportunities where their contribution may yet be strengthened.

In brief, the analysis has indicated three such opportunities. First, the contribution of religious leaders to the field of social stability and harmony, primarily through family counselling and mediation, is unparalleled in the Nigerian context. It could be extended and enhanced, for example by providing further education to religious leaders in areas such as family planning, maternal health, and gender relations – issues where northern Nigeria is in particular need for rapid development. Second, the high level of access and respect that religious leaders in Kano have, renders them highly effective media through which reliable information may be distributed, either through (formal) education or through messages of public information. This function is particularly important in a context where access to reliable information is hampered by free, but imperfect news media, a low literacy rate, and a historical prevalence of powerful gossip and rumours.

Finally, the third way in which religious leaders may yet contribute more to the governance of Kano metropolis, is through a constructive engagement with the role of religion in the city's public sphere. It is clear that the current combination of the secular Federation, the *sharia* State of Kano, and the city's marginalised Christian community is tense and requires a more lasting and equitable resolution. And while constructive engagement of religious leaders may seem difficult to achieve in the current context, it is equally hard to think of a resolution that does not involve Christian and Muslim leaders. But while the paper thus suggests some promising avenues for further involvement of religious leaders in Nigerian governance, it also cautions against overly high expectations. In all their roles as scholars, teachers, caretakers, and representatives, both Christian and Muslim leaders remain primarily committed to the prominence of their faith in relation to the other faiths, the welfare of their own religious group, and their own position of authority within this group. It would therefore be unwise to expect these leaders alone to solve Nigeria's enormous governance problems.

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Interviews

Name	Position	Date
Abdallah Mahmoud Salga	Deputy imam of Isyaku Rabi'u's mosque in Kano; and Education Secretary of Fityanul Islam (Tijaniyya).	3/9/2011
Ibrahim Mu'azzam Maibushira	Lecturer in Islamic Studies, BUK; former <i>Zakat</i> Commissioner, Kano State; and former Commander-General Hisbah Board, Kano State.	4/9/2011
Qasiyyuni Nasiru Kabara	Head of the Youth Wing of the Qadiriyya <i>tariqa</i> .	4/9/2011
Jamilu Fagge al-Qadiri	Scholar and imam in Qadiriyya <i>tariqa</i>	4/9/2011
Auta Jinta	Minister in ECWA Kano; DCC vice-chairman	5/9/2011
Lado Abdul	Minister in ECWA Kano; DCC chairman	5/9/2011
Umar Sani Fagge	Lecturer in BUK; founding member of Kano State Council of <i>Ulama</i> ; Commissioner 1 of the Kano State Shari'ah Commission; and former leader of the Independent Shariah Implementation Committee.	5/9/2011
Joseph Akinbola	Pastor in Redeemed Christian Church of God, Kano	6/9/2011
Aminullahi Adamu El-Gambari	Lecturer at BUK; imam at Sabon Gari mosque	6/9/2011
Aminudeen Abubakar	Imam at the Da'wah Juma'at Mosque; head of the Da'wah school on Suleiman Crescent, Kano	7/9/2011
John Adeyemo	Pastor at the Baptist Church, Sabon Gari Kano	7/9/2011
Ahmad Murtala	Deputy dean at Faculty of Arts and Islamic Studies BUK; imam at a mosque outside the Old City Kano	8/9/2011
Maurice Hassan	Priest in Catholic Diocese of Kano; University Chaplain of BUK.	9/9/2011
L.S. Iliya	Reverend in the Anglican Diocese of Kano	9/9/2011
Muhammad Turi	Leader of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria, Kano	11/9/2011
Komolafe Olanrewaju	Pastor in Living Faith Church (Winners Chapel), Kano	12/9/2011
Ali Yunus	Imam at Gadon Kaya mosque, Old City Kano	12/9/2011
Bashir Aliyu Umar	Director-General Al-Furqan charitable foundation; imam Al-Furqan mosque, Nassarawa Kano	17/9/2011

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