

# A History of Islam among the Fakkawa of Zuru Emirate, 1910-2015

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**Abstract**— Zuru Emirate is one of the four existing emirates in Kebbi States, Nigeria. Within the emirate, Fakkawa are mostly found in Fakai Local Government. Because of the prevalence of traditional belief system among the Fakkawa up to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and limited literature on the development of Islam in the area, people outside region still look at Fakkawa as traditionalists, which is not the case. Traders and Muslim scholars played important roles in the spread of Islam among the Fakkawa. Also important were the roles of Muslim organizations principally the Jama'atul Izalatil Bid'ah Wa Ikamatis Sunnah. This organization contributed significantly towards the spread of Islam and development of Islamic education among the Fakkawa. Consequently, the traditional belief system has been in a state of decline in the area. Data obtained from books, dissertations and thesis, and through oral interviews, were studied, analysed and corroborated.

**Keywords**— Fakkawa, Islam, Muslim, Scholars, Izala.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Just as traders played important roles in the introduction of Islam to West Africa, they also continued to play roles in its spread. In this, geography, as it influences human migration and settlement, so it also influences spread of Islam. Therefore, the savanna region of West Africa featured early the evolution of human settlement and empires. In most of such empires such as Ghana, Mali, Songhay and in Kanem-Bornu and in centralized Hausa states, Islam appeared early than in some forested areas.<sup>1</sup> The centralized states were also favoured by the advantage of their location, along the trade routes. However, in societies that lived in fragmented settlements and on the hilltops, the presence of Islam was a later development. Likewise, the influence of Islam in the area of Zuru Emirate was so much influence by the distribution of human settlements. Since about the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when Sarkin Katsina, Gozo mounted an expedition against the kingdom of Karishen in the vicinity of Zuru Emirate<sup>2</sup>, some Katsinawa migrants decided to settle in the region due largely to the availability of land for agriculture. However, they did not pay much attention to the spread of

Islam in the area. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period of Islamic revivalism in Hausaland. However, among the Fakkawa and in the area of Zuru emirate in general, the impact of the Jihad was highly minimal. The development of Islam among the Fakkawa only featured prominently right from the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was attributed to many factors such as desertion from hilltop and establishment of settlements on the plain, arrival of Muslim traders and scholars, and the role played by Muslim organizations, principally *Jama'atu Nasril Islam* and the Izala.

## II. THE INTRODUCTION OF ISLAM AMONG THE FAKKAWA

Up to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the predominant system of belief in Fakai was traditional. However, this does not mean that, the people who inhabited various settlements on the hilltops were not aware of the religion of Islam. This was because, since before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the hilltop communities engaged in local and long distance exchange through which they had contact with Muslim merchants who attended markets at Bena, Danko and Isgogo, within the vicinity of Zuru Emirate.<sup>3</sup> These merchants mostly came from Kabi, Katsina, Zamfara and Zazzau. Traders, of course, were instrumental in the introduction and spread of Islam in Hausaland and West Africa entirely.<sup>4</sup>

The arrival of Kabawa, Fulani and other Hausa speaking people in Zuru area in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was significant in the spread of Islam in among the Fakkawa. Kabawa were Muslims, right from the time of their migration. This made them to be the second Muslim group to settle in the area of Zuru Emirate, apart from Katsinawan laka, who migrated from southern Katsina and settled at Wasagu and Bena.<sup>5</sup> The settlement of Kabawa in the midst of the peoples of Birnin-tudu and Kele, though further brought much awareness about the religion of Islam in our area of study, did not make remarkable influence on the spread of the Religion. Although it was revealed that, Na- Allah, who led the migration of Kabawa, attempted to wage jihad in the area,<sup>6</sup> we do not have much explanation on how he

organised his movement. Moreover, the fact that Kabawa were assimilated by the aboriginal communities they met, in which some of them accepted the traditional belief of their hosts explains that, they did not engage in the spread of Islam. Kabawa thus, did not make effort in order to spread Islam to their hosts. Therefore, up to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the hilltop Polities that comprised Aror, Kelawa, Kulawa, Gelawa, Usawa and Zuksun remained predominantly traditionalists. The religion of Islam then was practised mainly by some few Kabawa and some Hausa migrants.

Meanwhile, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when jihad broke out in Hausaland, various attempts were subsequently made by jihadists in order to incorporate the entire area of Zuru Emirate into the Sokoto Caliphate. In 1806, after the expedition on Yauri, the jihadists then moved to Bena in the area of Zuru Emirate. Another expedition under Aliyu Jedo and Muhammad Moyijo also ventured into the area of the emirate, specifically near the towns of Gwanhi, Kandu, Sendi, Kele, Gele and Birnin Tudu. However, the terrain of the area which was hilly and forested, and fragmented distribution of settlements on the hilltops, made it difficult for the jihadists to inspire the development of Islam among the Fakkawa and other communities of Zuru Emirate.

However, our area of study which was not directly influence by the jihad was influenced by several migrant communities who were pushed by the Jihad.<sup>7</sup> A lot of Fulani, Gimbanawa and other Hausa speaking people migrated and settled among the Fakkawa during the Jihad period. Majority of Gimbanawa migrated from Jega under the leadership of Mallam Isah, and then established the town of Garin Isah, within the Fakai territory, in the 1820s.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Mallam Auwal, who came from Janzomo, not far from Argungu, settled among the Fakkawa and founded the settlement of Garin Awal in the 1830s. Also, some Fulani herdsmen settled at Maijanhula and Jagala, all within the Fakai territory.<sup>9</sup> These migrants were Muslims who had good cordial relation with the Fakkawa Islam therefore was introduced to Fakkawa gradually and peacefully mostly through interaction with traders and migrant communities, and subsequently through occasional visit by some Islamic scholars, particularly Hausa and Nupe. This became more apparent when the various hilltop polities descended and settled on the plain, particularly at Mahuta. The establishment of Mahuta in 1899 in which it served as centre of trade was significant in the spread of Islam in among the Fakkawa as it fostered interaction between Muslim migrants, traders and traditionalists.

In about 1910, Mallam Mamuda arrived and settled in Mahuta, which was significant in the spread and development of Islam. Mallam Mamuda was a Kanuri man who came from Kukawa.<sup>10</sup> Upon his arrival at Mahuta, people, mostly from the Fakai ruling dynasty requested that, he should stay in the town so as to establish *Madrasah* for their children. Mallam was given a house not far from the palace of Sarkin Fakai and was also given a wife from the ruling house, a younger sister of Maiyaki, the third Sarkin Fakai. Mosque was therefore built in front of the palace of Sarkin Fakai, which became the first Jumu'at Mosque in Mahuta. *Makarantar Allo* was also founded by Mallam Mamuda which contributed to the spread of Islamic education. Mallam Mamuda thus, served as the first Imam and scribe to Sarkin Fakai.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, other migrant scholars include Mallam Barji who came from Rijau, Mallam Bube and Mallam Amada who came from Gwandu. Some rulers in Fakai played significant role in the spread of Islam especially those whose reign coincided with the administration of the first Premier of Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto. Some of such rulers included Sarkin Fakai, Alhaji Muhammad Danbauchi (1945-58), and Sarkin Birnin tudu, Alhaji Abubakar Tari (1948-1975). These rulers were influenced by the Sardauna's role in the spread of Islam, popularly known as Sardauna's Conversion Campaign.<sup>12</sup> Although Sardauna did not come to our area of study, Sarkin Fakai, Danbauchi, was part of the Council of Chiefs from Zuru Native Authority who on several occasions, attended meeting of the Council of Chiefs in Kaduna.

The two Chiefs, Danbauchi and Tari encouraged their subordinates to practice Islam and supported the establishment of several Mosques in Fakai. The commitment to Islam shown by Sarkin Fakai Alhaji Muhammad Danbauchi, made him to be the first Sarkin Fakai to perform the pilgrimage in Mecca. Likewise, Sarkin Birnin tudu (a chieftaincy under Fakai), Alhaji Abubakar Tari was the first ruler of Birnin tudu to perform the pilgrimage. The people of Birnin tudu could recall how Sarki Abubakar Tari normally attended weekly market where he invited people to Islam.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, a lot of people, who hitherto upheld traditional belief, were converted to Islam.

Moreover, some of the Fakkawa, particularly among the Gelawa were converted not within the area of Fakai. This explains the significance of migration and contact with they had with other Muslim communities, particularly Nupe. The earliest Muslims among the Gelawa were converted in Rijau (now in Niger State) in about 1965.<sup>14</sup> They were

highly influenced by Sardauna's Conversion Campaign whereby items like rosaries, kettle and cloth were distributed to them. Some of these early Muslims practised Islam when they came back to Fakai. There were quite a lot of people among the Fakkawa who were fascinated by the five daily prayers which were observed by Muslims and therefore, decided to join in the daily prayers.

By the early the 1970s, some scholars, particularly from Kontagora normally came to Fakai for Islamic preaching. The visiting scholars had no difficulty in getting large number of people because, they normally preached in front of the palace, adjacent to where a market had already developed. Gradually therefore, *Makarantun Allo* became abound in Mahuta, though such schools were already established in other villages founded by Hausa migrants such as Garin Awal and Garin Isah. Islam therefore, spread gradually in Fakai District owing to the roles played by traders and rulers, influence of Sardauna's Conversion Campaign and interaction between the host communities and Muslim migrants. However, mass conversion to Islam and its development through education featured prominently with the introduction of the Izala movement.

### III. THE IZALA MOVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAM AMONG THE FAKKAWA

Before the introduction of Izala into Fakai District, most of the people of the area were predominantly of dariqa sects. The sect established various Mosques and taught several students, including *almajirai* in their schools that were mostly located in *Zaure*. By the early 1970s, Mallam Bala Mai tafsiiri, who came from Gwandu, had started preaching in Fakai Districts. However, some of his teachings were not in accordance with the doctrines of dariqa.<sup>15</sup> Mallam Bala, for instance, preached for *qablu* during the five daily prayers instead of *sadlu*. This slightly brought friction between followers of Mallam Bala and adherents of dariqa that Assistant District Officer at Zuru had to interfere in the settlement of dispute. Although Izala movement was not founded then, this could be the early attempt to introduce some of the teachings that Izala was to subsequently press for.<sup>16</sup>

In the 1970s, the people of Fakai District had started going to other towns, particularly Gusau and Zaria for Islamic learning.<sup>17</sup> Though they were the early people among the Fakkawa to be acquainted with, and accepted the ideology of Izala, the teachings of Izala were introduced before their return. It was Mallam Muhammad, an indigene of Fakai, who resided at Zuru that usually came to Mahuta to visit his

friends and relatives that introduced the teachings mainly through conversations. Gradually, he started to invite his conversance, particularly Ahmadu Magaji, Garba Komi-sabo, Lawal Arama, Labbo Tela and others to national preaching which, from Mahuta, they then travelled to Zuru and followed other people there to any town where preaching would be hold.<sup>18</sup>

The early people who accepted the doctrine of Izala were mostly youth. They initially preached against naming ceremony, congregational supplication after each of the five daily prayers and use of charms among others. The youth then resented these acts and sought for clarification from *dariqa* scholars. Therefore, other scholars subsequently followed. The early scholars to join the youth in such movement were Mallam Aliyu Damana, Mallam Lawal Alarama, Mallam Abubakar Komi-sabo and Mallam Altine.<sup>19</sup> Although they joined the Izala, they continued to pray together with the dariqa adherents.

The challenge posed to dariqa was not resolve without schism. The early attempt for the establishment of Izala Mosque took place on Friday of about 1986 in which some group of youth stayed and contemplated on whether to attend the Friday congregation in a single Friday Mosque then in Mahuta, which was under the leadership of dariqa. The group finally observed their Friday prayer at the Mosque of Mallam Ibrahim Na Kaulaha, which was led by Mallam Umaru Na Danko.<sup>20</sup> The following week, the Jumuat prayer was led by Mallam Ibrahim na Kaulaha before the Imam was finally chosen in the person of Mallam Inwa.

However, Mallam Inwa, though the first formal Imam, was reluctant to lead from the beginning. Therefore Liman Inwa, his brother; Mallam Ibrahim na Kaulaha and Alhaji Dan-Cirinda went to Mallam Abubakar Mahmud Gummi at Kaduna for clarification on the teachings of Izala. Being satisfied with the movement, they came back home, encouraged others to join Izala and Liman Inwa maintained his position as Imam.<sup>21</sup> With the establishment of separate mosque for Izala, the movement became well organised under the leadership of Mallam Aliyu Damana. The famous Mallam who preached then was Mallam Ibrahim Na Kaulaha after he returned from Islamic studies at Zaria. Subsequently, other scholars engaged in itinerant preaching throughout Fakai, District particularly the head of the movement, Mallam Aliyu Damana and others who included Mallam Abubakar Garin Hausawa, Mallam Ibrahim Gele and Mallam Bala Fasa-Gunki among others.<sup>22</sup> However, a lot of challenges came from Tariqa and police forces. On several occasions, Tariqa reported to the palace that Izala

admonished contrary to their own teachings and as such insulted them. Sarkin Fakai, Alhaji Isah Wamale (reigned 1976-2005) tried to amicably resolve the conflict between Izala and Tariqa. The movement encountered more challenges from the police officers of Mahuta and Zuru respectively, in which some of the leaders of the movement were occasionally interrogated by police officers. But, members of the movement remained firm in their ideals which gradually, endeared them more followers.

The introduction of Izala into Zuru and Fakai District considerably helped in the spread and development of Islam. In fact, it could rightly be expressed that Izala movement has revived the religion of Islam in the area. This could mainly be observed with the prevalence of traditions among the people of Fakai before the advent of Izala. Although the Tariqa sect taught significant number of students in *Zaure* before Izala was introduced, they did not engage much in the itinerant preaching. However, Izala then adopted the method of preaching in various villages, among Muslims and non Muslim community. Therefore, as they preached for the introduction of Islam among non Muslims, they preached for the revival of the religion among Muslim communities. Mallam Aliyu Damana, for instance could be remembered for his preaching in various villages in which sometimes he moved from house to house, inviting some traditionalists to Islam. Through this method, a lot of people from various villages were converted. For instance, Alhaji Muhammad Magaji, the Mauzzim of Tudun-Wada, Mahuta also informed the researcher that, he was converted to Islam by Mallam Aliyu Damana. This took place when Mallam Aliyu Damana went on itinerant preaching, moving from one village to another that he arrived at *Ibgomor*, the village where Alhaji Magaji previously resided. Mallam Aliyu then invited him to Islam which he accepted. This happened in the 1980s.

Moreover, this method was also adopted by Mallam Ibrahim Gele. The significance of Mallam Ibrahim's preaching was his ability to preach fluently in Hausa and in Fakkanci languages and also to teach Comparative Studies. This therefore gave him access to preach among Hausa and Fakkawa who comprised Muslims, Traditionalists and Christians. Through the teachings and preaching of Mallam Ibrahim, a lot of people who were previously adherents of traditional belief accepted Islam. The religion of Islam thus became widespread among Gelawa, Kelawa, Zuksun and other polities who were previously staunch to *Magiro* traditional mode of belief.<sup>23</sup>

Other scholars also played significant roles in the spread of Islam such as Mallam Bala Fasa-Gunki and Mallam Garba

Gawa. While Mallam Aliyu Damana and Mallam Ibrahim Gele made effort for the conversion of non-Muslims, Mallam Bala Fasa-Gunki contributed to the revival of Islam in Fakai District, particularly as he preached predominantly, among those who mixed Islam with syncretism.<sup>24</sup> Starting from his Zamfarawa community within the Fakai District, Mallam Bala preached and ensured the eradication of *bori* which was prevalent then among the Zamfarawa of Fakai District. He enlightened them on the real teachings of Islam which enhanced Islamic learning among the Zamfarawa and other communities. Mallam Bala also engaged in itinerant preaching in which he packed his luggage and moved through various villages and preached to whoever he came upon. It was in the course of his struggle for the eradication of spirit worship so as to sanitise the religion of Islam that Mallam Bala became known as 'Fasa-Gunki' (Breaker of idol).

Therefore, from the 1970s, there was mass conversion to Islam among the Fakkawa and impressive reduction in the number of adherents of traditional system of belief. Islam thus, became widespread among the various communities, unlike before the arrival of Izala in which it appeared as the religion that involved predominantly Hausa people. Before the introduction of Izala, some of those who accepted Islam among the Gelawa, Kelawa, Kulawa, Tudawa, Usawa, Zuksun and Fakkawa, also engaged in some traditions that were done by adherents of traditional belief system which manifested mostly in marriage and naming ceremonies.<sup>25</sup> The emergence of Izala thus inhibited the progress of such traditions which were not in accordance with Islam. More Islamic schools were also established which enhanced literacy among the Fakkawa. The schools founded by Izala, gave students among the Fakkawa firm foundation to later study Islam, Arabic language and courses on Shari'a in some Higher Institutions of learning and to successfully participate in Qur'anic recitation competitions.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Fakkawa are today found in Fakai Local Government, Zuru Emirate, Nigeria. As shown above, the earliest form of religion in Fakai and Zuru area in general was traditional belief system which the people of the area, for a long period of time, adhered to. The Jihad of 1804 did not directly influence the development of Islam in the area. One of the reasons that made it difficult for the early penetration of Islam among the Fakkawa was the nature of their settlements. They established various fragmentary settlements on the hilltops. The spread of Islam among the Fakkawa was therefore the development of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and

early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. A number of factors have played important roles in this. The evolution of markets in Zuru area facilitated contacts between Fakkawa and Muslim traders. Muslim scholars also visited the area mainly for preaching. The establishment of settlements on the plain and development of infrastructures such as roads which facilitated movement of peoples and interactions, contributed to peoples' conversion to Islam. Furthermore, the *Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'ah wa Ikamatis Sunnah* have played significant roles by engaging in itinerant and organization of public preaching and establishment of schools. Consequently, traditional belief system is in a state of decline. Even some few Christians who accepted Christianity through Christian Missionary Schools have been continuously drifting to Islam. It is therefore imperative for *Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'ah wa Ikamatis Sunnah* to strengthen its efforts of propagation among the Fakkawa and in the area of Zuru Emirate in general.

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