

## **The Izala Movement in Nigeria: From Guiding the Muslim Umma to Losing Authority**

Ramzi Ben Amara<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Bayreuth, Religious Studies/BIGSAS , Bayreuth, Germany

ramzibenamara@gmail.com

The Izala Movement in Nigeria is an anti-Sufi movement that was established 1978 in Jos, Nigeria by Sheikh Ismaila Idris (1937-2000). It is considered by scholars as one of the fast-growing Islamic Reform Movements in Nigeria and even in Africa. The reform program of the movement consists primary of fighting *bid'a* (innovation) and establishing the *sunna* of the Prophet. By going back to the Prophetic tradition Izala developed a “modernity project” – as shown by Kane (2003) and Loimeier (1997). The movement became an authority in guiding the Muslim community, “correcting” its faith, and inviting non-Muslims to Islam. No doubt that Sheikh Gumi (1922-1992), the pioneer of reform in 20<sup>th</sup> century Nigeria, influenced Izala in many directions.

This paper goes beyond Izala-Sufi controversy on defining “true Islam” and guiding Muslims. It looks moreover at recent Izala internal debates. Through the division of the movement end of the 1980s Izala seems to lose its authority and credibility among Muslims. The conflict within Izala over finances and leadership led to a new controversy between the two Izala factions in Jos and Kaduna. The discourse on authority and internal issues of the movement is analysed through interviews conducted in Nigeria with Izala leaders as well through writings of Izala insiders.