

A Letter to Malam Lawan Kalarawi¹

Greetings in the name of Allah

To the honorable and venerable son of the venerable cleric Lawan, also called Kalarawi², of the house of Alhaji Alhassan ibn Tata, Kano. May Allah forgive him and have mercy on him, Amen! So, I have some queries for you. Say a person has a wife and it is during a time of war and there is famine while she is pregnant. Under these circumstances, she gives birth to a baby boy; how should the child be named? The other question apart from this is this: Is it lawful for a person who wants to observe the salah (ritual prayers) to join someone who practices *Qabdu*³?

Yours truly, Issa Wajuwa, Daurawa, Kano. Allah is the Greatest! Sawaba.⁴ In the name of Allah.

Below is the transcription for the one-page [envelope of the letter]:

The Leader of the Scholars of Kano

¹ This letter asks a prominent cleric in Kano, *Malam Lawan Kalarawi* (d. 1999), some questions on jurisprudence. It is an interesting piece that speaks to how correspondence was made by the Hausa people vis-a-vis their writing culture. It also points to how the people shared knowledge and engaged in intellectual discussions across sub-Saharan Africa (especially West Africa). Importantly, the letter, though brief, has addresses of both the sender and the recipient.

² The cleric's nickname *Kalarawi* is from an Arabic term – *Qāla* (he said) and *al-rāwīyyū* (the narrator). Together, *Qāla al-rāwīyyū* literally means "the narrator said." This is a common expression in hadith narrations (narrations concerning the traditions of Prophet Muhammad). The nickname *Kalarawi* helped raise the popularity of the scholar and his teaching method, which mixed a good sense of humor and the ability to speak to power without fear or favor.

³ *Qabdu* is an Arabic word meaning to pray while the hands/arms are folded towards the chest as opposed to bringing the hands or arms down while standing throughout the supplication. The former is associated with the Tijaniyya Sufi order.

⁴ *Sawaba* means recompense. In Nigerian Hausa communities, it is associated with a political party (NEPU-PRR) that advocated for commoners. Hajiya Gambo Sawaba popularized the term. Being the most jailed woman politician in the country, Sawaba joined politics at the age of seventeen and suffered persecution from both colonial and native authorities. Sawaba became a cherished nickname, especially for people who are proponents of emancipating the masses and women. The letter writer may have used 'Sawaba' as a nickname or in solidarity, since the recipient, Malam Lawan Kalarawi, was affiliated with the Sawaba ideology.