

# Editorial

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The bulk of the 2017 issue of the *Journal for Islamic Studies* is the result of the interaction of the editor with a number of Nigerian colleagues based at Bayero University Kano as well as at Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina. During many informal exchanges which have been taking place since 2014, we shared our concern over the reappearance of a simplistic North vs South, Muslims vs Christians reading of contemporary Nigerian politics, resonating once again in the Nigerian, as well as in the international media. A wave of over-politicised local historiographies has provided an intellectual rationale for narratives that tend to read the political history of Nigeria in the light of mutually irreducible and internally homogenous, ethnic and religious categories.<sup>1</sup>

By gathering contributions on Islam and the politics of religious dissent in the history of northern Nigeria, we are ultimately trying to question the usefulness of the 'Northern Muslim' as a heuristic category used in the description of macro-historical processes or in the explanation of contemporary political behaviours. The same scepticism, of course, should apply to the 'Southern Christian' or any other similar category when it is used in the field of political sciences. Our underlying assumption, however, should not be mistaken for a post-modern dismissal of cultural, ethnic or religious identities as such. Our less ambitious aim is to show how Islam, by gradually becoming the dominant system of meaning in an economically, socially and politically diverse region as

1 Samaila Suleiman, "The Nigerian History Machine and the Production of Middle Belt Historiography," unpublished PhD thesis (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 2015).

northern Nigeria, has inevitably become a language of dissent just as it has become a language of hegemony, and that the politics of religious contestation is an aspect of the history of the region that is at least as important to understand, for the student of religion and society, as the politics of religious hegemony.

Our work relies on a wealth of excellent published sources on the history of Islam in northern Nigeria, and some of the contributions in this collection contain extensive historiographical reviews, which we hope the readers will find helpful. At the same time, however, we have also tried to collect new data on some of the least documented instances of intra-Islamic contestation in the country.

The very basic fact that Islam (already from its formative time in the immediately post-Prophetic era) has always constituted a language of dissent just as a symbol of unity, is sufficient to explain why former attempts to transform the 'Northern Muslim' identity into a political project, ultimately failed. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the Sardauna tried to build the North as a political community framed mainly as a homogenous *Umma* (Muslim society) under the control of the traditional authorities. However, not only the Sardauna had to come to terms with the necessity of counting on the simultaneous support of the traditional authorities of the two rival Islamic states of Sokoto and Borno, and with the need to mediate with the (often Christian) political elites of the Middle Belt; he also faced, from the very beginning of his political mission, the challenge launched by Aminu Kano's social and political critique, which was largely framed in the language of Islam. Moreover, the Sardauna's project melted down, well before the bloody coup of 1966, when the North's most populous and wealthiest city (Kano) turned against him in reaction to the 1963 deposition of Emir Sanusi.

Similarly and conversely to early post-colonial northern political discourses such as the Sardauna's, which tried to transform a diverse northern Muslim community into a coherent political community, historiographical attempts to read the North as an intelligible and aggressive political project (the idea of the 'Hausa-Fulani hegemony' as the main source of Nigeria's political problems) are, at best, naïf historical

over-simplifications of a much more complex reality, which often serve the purpose of reinforcing, by opposition, similarly imagined and problematic political categories based on ethnic and religious identities.

Obviously, the constant shift in the use of religious symbols and ideas from signifiers of stability, coherence and power to metaphors of change, critique and dissent, is not unique to Islam as a religious system, nor to northern Nigeria as a specific regional constellation. The flexibility that allows religious systems of meaning to be articulated at the same time in the two apparently opposite registers, is in-built in the complex processes of integration of multiple ideas that contributed to the making of any world religious tradition, while the receptivity of a specific geographic context to adopting the register of dissent is a natural product of its internal social and political diversity.

The data collected here do not have the ambition to exhaust the rich history of dissent that can be documented in the region under study. While our choice was to focus our attention on explicitly religious forms of expression of dissent articulated by the *'ulamā'* and generating grassroots Islamic movements, northern Nigeria has also a rich history of dissent framed in secular (economic) terms, which has been extensively documented especially by the works of Paul Lubeck<sup>2</sup> and Yusufu Bala Usman.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Contributions**

The simultaneous articulation of Islamic visions of cohesion and difference, stability and dissent, is perfectly represented in the experience of Usman Dan Fodio, of his Jihad movement, and of the State it established, the Sokoto Caliphate. In their extensive and erudite scholarship, the *Fodiawa* articulated, among other things, a rigorous critique of the practices

2 *Islam and Urban Labour in Northern Nigeria: The Making of a Muslim Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

3 *Beyond Fairy Tales: Selected Historical Writings of Yusufu Bala Usman* (Zaria: Abdullahi Smith Centre for Historical Research, 2006); *Selected Writings of Yusufu Bala Usman on Politics and Society* (Kano: Centre for Democratic Development, Research and Training, 2015).

of their contemporary Muslims, and of the foundations of the power of the Hausa aristocracy of their time. This project of religious reform generated, during the Jihad, some profound fractures among the Muslim religious scholars, the most famous instances being the conflict between the *Fodiawa* and the 'Yandoto scholarly community, and the confrontation between the states of Sokoto and Borno. At the same time, however, after its successful establishment as a political entity, the Caliphate assumed the paradigmatic image of an Islamic order that guaranteed – at least in its geographic and symbolic centre – stability, unity and peace.

Because of the Caliphate's paradigmatic role in the Islamic history of northern Nigeria, our collection is inaugurated by a section that includes the contributions of two leading authorities in the field of studies on the Caliphate; Murray Last and John Philips. Last's brief essay ("Without the Sokoto Caliphate, Would There Ever Have Been a Nigeria?") was originally delivered as the keynote address for the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the appointment of the present Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar III. No one can doubt that the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate was the foundational event in the construction of a modern northern Nigerian Islamic identity. Murray Last, however, pushes this idea further and submits the thought-provoking argument that the Sokoto Caliphate also established the political foundations for the existence of the modern Nigerian state as such.

In the following essay, Philips provides a detailed overview of the historiographical debate around the causes of the Sokoto Jihad. In a piece that will provide a useful orientation for the readers to find their way in the extensive literature on the topic, Philips reads the various possible causes of the Jihad identified by contemporary historians, in the light of the ten categories of people who, according to Muhammad Bello, joined the Jihad: the 'debate' around the causes of the Jihad, one can say, had already been part of a process of self-reflection initiated by the Jihad leaders themselves.

The following set of contributions looks at three examples of religious dissent and religious identity politics during the late stages of the Caliphate and the colonial era. In those times, a growing crisis of political

and religious legitimacy in the Caliphate was reflected (and at the same time aggravated) by a shift in religious affiliation from the Qadiriyya to the then expanding networks of the Mahdiyya and of the Tijaniyya. In her contribution (“The Mahdiyya in Adamawa Emirate: The poem on the battle of Danki (1892), by Shaykh Hayāt b. Sa‘īd”), Asma’u G. Saeed discusses a Fulfulde poem written by the leader of the Mahdist army after a battle in Adamawa (in today’s eastern Nigeria), which opposed his men to the forces of the Caliphate. Saeed’s contribution shows, in particular, how the messianic theme, which was originally used by the *Fodiawa* scholars in support of their cause, had become quite naturally, with the stabilisation of the Caliphate, a powerful ideological weapon to argue against the legitimacy of its leadership.

In “The Politics of Inter-Ṭarīqa Relations in Katsina Emirate from the Early Nineteenth to the Mid-Twentieth Century,” Zaharaddeen Sulaiman outlines the history of the relations between the two dominant Sufi orders in Katsina (the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya), weaving it with the narration of the changing political history of the Katsina Emirate. The policies of Muslim states vis-à-vis their ‘*ulamā*’, argues Sulaiman, always have to navigate a delicate balance between, on the one side, the need to rely on the religious scholars as a source of legitimacy, and, on the other side, the potential instability created by the competition between multiple networks of ‘*ulamā*’. The Tijaniyya in Katsina, initially repressed when it was perceived as a challenge to the continuity of the Qadiri establishment, was later embraced by the ruling class (when the latter aspired to emancipate itself from Sokoto tutelage) and transformed into a tool to reinforce the Emirate’s stability.

Another instance of inter-Ṭarīqa conflict is the object of the next contribution, authored by Andrea Brigaglia (“The Outburst of Rage and The Divine Dagger: Invective Poetry and Inter-Ṭarīqa Conflict in Northern Nigeria, 1949”). Similarly to Saeed’s contribution on Mahdism, Brigaglia’s paper is framed as a study of the literary ramification of a religious conflict, in the form of two examples of Hausa and Arabic invective poems produced by Tijani authors in the wake of the demolition of the Tijani mosques and *zawiya*-s ordered in 1949 by the then Sultan of Sokoto,

Abubakar III, leader of the *Kadirawa* (the Qadiri citizens of the Caliphate). In this case, invective poetry proved a powerful tool to mobilise passive resistance among the Tijanis of Sokoto and to create solidarity with their cause in the mainly Tijani emirates of Kano, thus ultimately forcing the Sultan to restrain his policies so as to avoid a regional confrontation.

A third set of contributions looks at more recent examples of intra-Islamic conflict and politics of religious identity. Sani Y. Adam (“Politics and Sufism in Nigeria: The Salgawa and the Political History of Kano State, Northern Nigeria, 1950-2011”) reconstructs the history of the political engagement of a specific network of the Tijaniyya of Kano, the Salgawa. This paper draws attention to the fact that (a) Sufi political behaviour is highly contextual and does not follow linear patterns strictly defined by ideology, and (b) the politics of the Sufi orders, especially in a case like the Tijaniyya in northern Nigeria (where affiliation cuts across all social strata creating very nuanced local configurations) can be appreciated only by looking at specific networks within a Sufi order, who act under a relatively well-defined leadership, rather than using elusive categories like ‘Sufism’ or ‘Tijaniyya’ as political ones.

Similarly focused on the northern metropolis of Kano are the two following contributions. In “The ‘Triangular Politics’ of Mosque Ownership and Imamship in Kano State: The Case of Sabuwar Gandu *Juma’a* Mosque,” Kabiru H. Isa discusses a specific case in the ongoing contestation between Sufi and Salafi groups for the control of sacred space in Kano. The case of the Sabuwar Gandu mosque – argues Isa – shows that, rather than simply reflecting the theological conflict between the two groups, the contestation for the control of mosques reveals a ‘triangular politics’ that involves, along with religious actors, the two layers of political authority (the traditional authority of the Emirate and the formal one of the State) which constantly negotiate over their respective influence.

In “The *Mujamma’ Aṣḥāb al-Kahf wa’l-Raqīm* of Shaykh Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara: An Anti-Salafi Mass Movement in Contemporary Northern Nigeria,” Abdullahi H. Shehu too is concerned with a case of Sufi vs Salafi conflict. His paper, however, also documents one of the most serious cases of an internal conflict within a contemporary Nigerian Sufi order.

While previous contributions had highlighted the role of Shaykh Nasiru Kabara (d. 1996) in the unification and the revival of the Qadiriyya in Kano, in fact, no previous sources in English had documented the serious rifts that occurred after his death between his son and *khalifa*, Shaykh Qaribullah, and the latter's younger brother, Shaykh Abduljabbar. The charismatic preaching of Abduljabbar; his renewed confrontations with the Salafis; and his establishment of a modern mass movement (the *Mujamma' Aṣḥāb al-Kahf wa'l-Raqīm*), has had a twofold effect in the arena of northern Nigerian Sufism: on the one side, it has fragmented the Qadiriyya-Nasiriyya into competing networks; on the other side, it has created a new platform for a form of revivalist anti-Salafi activism that tries to cut across traditional *ṭarīqa* boundaries (Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya) and to reach out even to the Shias.

The Shias in Kano are the object of the following contribution ("A History of Shia and its Development in Nigeria: The Case-Study of Kano"), by Kabiru H. Isa and Sani Y. Adam. In an innovative turn – compared to previously published articles on the topic – Isa and Adam's contribution focuses especially on the internal splits experienced by the Nigerian Shia movement. While the initial success of the Nigerian Shia movement was rooted in its capacity to propose a new version of a discourse of religious dissent that has a long history in the region, its successive fragmentations can be attributed partly – Isa and Adam argue – to the competition between different Iranian theological and political trends for influence in the global Shia communities, and partly, to the inherent complexities of the context of Kano.

The last article published in this collection touches on the most recent and infamous example of a northern Nigerian revivalist Islamic network, *Ahl al-Sunna li'l-Da'wa wa'l-Jihad*, popularly known as Boko Haram. While ostensibly claiming to be representing the interests of Muslims, Boko Haram has contributed far more than any other previous Islamic movement to the creation of deep rifts within the Muslim community. Establishing rigid boundaries between 'real' believers (the members of the group, who are ready to sacrifice their lives in the struggle to implement the Jihadi-Salafi project), 'hypocrites' (the mainstream Salafis

who collaborate with the Nigerian State in the repression of the group), and ‘unbelievers’ (all the non-Salafi Muslim denominations), Boko Haram has also drawn from these boundaries their most radical possible consequences and declared an all-out war on mainstream Muslims. This aspect of Boko Haram’s ideology has been widely documented in the existing literature on the topic. Alex Thurston’s contribution to this volume (a richly annotated translation of the interview of a leader of Boko Haram originally published in the official magazine of the Islamic State), however, sheds light on a dynamic that had been less documented so far, i.e. the process of internal fragmentation of the Nigerian Salafi-Jihadi organisation. The interview here translated, in fact, shows the recent attempt of the Islamic State (to which Boko Haram’s leader Abubakar Shekau had originally pledged allegiance since March 2015) to marginalise Shekau by supporting, instead, a rival faction of *Ahl al-Sunna li’l-Da’wa wa’l-Jihad*, led by Abū Muṣ’ab al-Barnāwī.

The issue is concluded by two book reviews dedicated to recently published monographs on Islam in northern Nigeria: Alex Thurston’s *Salafism in Nigeria: Islam, Preaching and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); and Sarah Eltantawi’s *Shari’ah on Trial: Northern Nigeria’s Islamic Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

In editing the present contributions, the editor has attempted to minimise repetitions whenever possible, especially when the authors provide a historical background on Islam in northern Nigeria. As these articles are published as independent papers (and not as chapters of a book that is meant to be read in a specific order), however, removing each and every possible overlap between the articles proved impossible: in certain cases, in fact, the removal of the sections dedicated to a historical contextualisation would have compromised the legibility of some of the articles as self-standing essays.

The editor would like to convey his thanks to some of the authors who contributed their papers as early as 2015, for patiently waiting the editing of other contributions submitted at a later stage. The editing and the publication would not have been possible without the support (in different ways and during different phases of the work) of the Department



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This issue is dedicated to Murray Last, in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of his monograph, *The Sokoto Caliphate*. Without the foundations laid by his masterpiece work, any successive contribution to the writing of the Islamic history of northern Nigeria would have been resting on shaky grounds.

*Allah ya kara lafiya ya kuma ja kwananka!*