

The Center for Global Islamic Studies, University of Florida  
Presents an Online Workshop on

**Remapping the Study of Islam and Muslim Cultures in Nigeria**

January 22, 2021 | Online

**PROGRAM**

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09:00 – 09:15	<i>Introduction:</i>   <b>Benjamin Soares</b> (UF) and <b>Musa Ibrahim</b> (UF)
09:15 – 09:35	<i>Muslim Youth, the State, and Christian-Muslim Relations: The MSSN and the Politics of Religion in Nigeria</i>   <b>Adeyemi Balogun</b> (U Bayreuth)
9:35 – 9:55	<i>Embracing and Denouncing the “Mecca Uniform” in Nigerian Mass Media, 1950s-1970s</i>   <b>Sara Katz</b> (Loyola University)
9:55—10:15	Discussions and Q&A  Discussant: <b>Amidu Sanni</b> (Fountain University, Osogbo)  Chair: <b>Deng Zheyuan</b> (UF)
<i>Coffee Break</i>	
10:35 – 10:55	<i>“God has exposed you”:</i> cosmopolitan unity in Muslim and Christian responses to repression in Northern Nigeria   <b>Carmen McCain</b> (Westmont College)
10:55 – 11:15	<i>Sunni, Shia-Muslim, and Christian Encounters in Northern Nigeria</i>   <b>Musa Ibrahim</b> (UF)
11:15—11:35	Discussions and Q&A  Discussant: <b>Murray Last</b> (University College London)  Chair: <b>Akintunde Akinyemi</b> (UF)
<i>Coffee Break</i>	
11:50 – 12:10	<i>The Clash of Sound and Image: Inter- and Intra-Religious Entanglements and Contestations during Maulud Celebrations in the City of Jos, Nigeria</i>   <b>Murtala Ibrahim</b> (Utrecht University)
12:10—12:30	<i>A Revisionist Islamic Group in Northern Nigeria: A History of Yan-haqiqa in Kano</i>   <b>Kabiru H Isa</b> (Bayero University Kano)
12:30—12:50	Discussions and Q&A  Discussant: <b>Muhammad Sani Umar</b> (Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria)  Chair: <b>Amalia Dragani</b> (UF)
<i>Lunch Break</i>	
14:00 – 14:30	Concluding discussion moderated by <b>Musa Ibrahim &amp; Benjamin Soares</b>
<i>Coffee Break</i>	

15:30 – 17:00

Baraza at the Center for African Studies

*Northern Nigerian Intellectuals, Sudan, and the “Eclectic Style” in Contemporary Islamic Thought* | **Alex Thurston** (U Cincinnati)

Chair: **Benjamin Soares** (UF)

### **Abstracts**

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*Muslim Youth, the State, and Christian-Muslim Relations: The MSSN and the Politics of Religion in Nigeria* | **Adeyemi Balogun** (U Bayreuth)

In Nigeria, Muslim youth have often been at the center of political and social interactions between the nation’s Christian and Muslim populations. And yet, their roles are either misunderstood or less known. Many studies suggest that they are foot soldiers in local interreligious violence and often frame them as radical elements seeking to impose Islamic law on the country in place of its contested secular constitution. However, the role of Muslim youth in Christian-Muslim encounters in Nigeria goes beyond violence and opposition. Since the colonial period, the relation between Christianity and Islam has also included conversion, borrowing from one another, interreligious marriages and power sharing. The history of the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN), established in 1954, demonstrates these varied forms of relation. As a movement representing Muslim students in educational institutions throughout Nigeria, the activities of the MSSN not only unveil the multifarious character of Muslim youth in Christian-Muslim relations but also their role in national religious politics and public policies. This paper compares the activities of MSSN in the north and the south in order to explore the way encounter between Nigerian Christians and Muslims help to understand how religio-political ideologies develop and reproduce.

*Embracing and Denouncing the “Mecca Uniform” in Nigerian Mass Media, 1950s-1970s* | **Sara Katz** (Loyola University)

Nigerian Muslims have undertaken the hajj for centuries. As Nigeria approached independence in the 1950s, Muslims began to think about and debate this practice on a national scale, through Islamic associations, political committees and in the Nigerian press. At the same time, Muslim politicians began to publicly don the so-called “Mecca uniform,” the white robe (thawb) and black cord (‘iqāl) common to Saudi Arabia. While Nigerian pilgrims had worn these garments for decades, their conspicuous adoption by the political elite was novel. This sartorial linkage between politicians and the East was amplified by photos and commentary circulating nationally in the press, and generated a mix of admiration and concern. Christians (and some Muslims) questioned if a secular state ought to be involved in the hajj. Within roughly a decade, politicians ceased their official use the Mecca uniform as the press became saturated with outsized stories of “corrupt” pilgrims engaged in smuggling and other crimes. The proliferation of other mass-media, such as radio and vinyl records, contributed to this critique. This was not the end of the Mecca uniform’s public life, however, as others— such as Yoruba women in the southwest—continued to employ it in self-fashioned public images, such as obituary notices. The transformation of the Mecca uniform into the object of a national discourse engaging not only a range of Muslims but also Christians speaks to the complex dynamics shaping Islam in modern Nigeria.

*“God has exposed you”: cosmopolitan unity in Muslim and Christian responses to repression in Northern Nigeria* | **Carmen McCain** (Westmont College)

Nigeria is often portrayed by the Western media and sometimes even by national publications as being riven between a “Muslim North” and a “Christian South.” Such representations oversimplify the complicated interrelations between the two religious communities and their geographic locations, obscuring the large Muslim communities in Southwestern Nigeria and the sizeable Christian communities in Nigeria’s northeast and north-central regions. While there has been much attention paid to the conflict between Muslims and Christians particularly in Nigeria’s “middlebelt” region following the implementation of shari’a law in twelve northern states, there has been much less scholarly attention to the deep-rooted philosophical relationships between the adherents of the two religions in northern Nigeria. I argue that there are connections between the way Hausa Muslim artists responded to a censorship crisis that occurred in Kano from 2007 to 2011, and in the way Hausa-speaking Christian musicians from Nigeria’s northeast responded a few years later to the Boko Haram crisis. I will focus specifically on the calls for a Nigerian identity in Hamisu Lamido Iyan-Tama’s musical docudrama *Kurkuku* that recounts his arrest and imprisonment by the Kano State censorship board and in the music videos of Christian musician Saviour Y. Inuwa from his album *‘Yan Chibok (The Children of Chibok)* made in response to the violence of the terrorist group Boko Haram. Although Iyan-Tama is Muslim and Inuwa is Christian, both express parallel understandings of their identities as citizens in two frameworks that give them more moral and legal authority than those who persecute them. First, they both claim the constitutional rights they have as citizens of Nigeria, and, second, they claim the privileges they gain as righteous members of religious communities that emphasize God’s justice in the end times. Finally, they both emphasize the strength and support found in interreligious relationships. I argue that these Hausa-language artists pose a vision of cosmopolitan unity across ethnicity and religion as the alternative to the repressive forces of both state censorship and the anarchic violence of Boko Haram. Attention to these works complicates assumptions about the solely Muslim identity of Hausa cultural production and provides an important counterpoint to the proliferation of scholarship on political and religious conflict in Nigeria.

*Sunni, Shia-Muslim, and Christian Encounters in Northern Nigeria* | **Musa Ibrahim** (UF)

This paper explores the connections and shared struggles between Shia-Muslims and Christians amidst Sunni dominance in northern Nigeria. Both Shia-Muslims and Christians are minority groups in the region, and their relationship with the Sunni-Muslim majority is often hostile. However, conflict between Muslims and Christians has attracted the attention of both foreign and Nigerian scholars alike, yet rendered invisible alternate encounters between minority religious groups in the region. Recently, Christians and Shia-Muslims, particularly those called the “Islamic Movement of Nigeria,” have been cooperating. Beyond political solidarities to each other in times of crisis, ideas and rituals circulate between one another. One example of ritual borrowing is how the Shia in the north invented “Jesus Maulid,” (Jesus’ Birthday) which they annually perform, albeit differently from the conventional Christmas (in both beliefs and practices). In contrast to narratives of Muslim-Christian conflict, this novel Shia ritual is attended by some Christians. Similarly, some Christians in the region have introduced the annual celebration of Maulid Nabi (Prophet Muhammad’s birthday) into their churches, even though this has no scriptural basis. Mirroring the Jesus Maulid, the Christian Maulid Nabi is attended by some Shia. This paper analyzes these new dynamics of Shia-Muslims and Christian relations in Northern

Nigeria as a form of resistance carried out against the political and social domination of the Sunni Muslim majority, which is on the rise since the reintroduction of sharia in the region. It argues that Sunni hegemony has made both Shia-Muslims and Christians to recognize their shared struggle and become united and creative in their responses. Although their new alliance has led to the emergence of mixed religious practices performed by the adherents of the two religions, they continue to see themselves separately as Muslims and Christians. While these new religious encounters between Christians and Muslims in the North could be interpreted as a sign of religious tolerance, in contrast to much scholarship on the region, the development is perhaps less driven by tolerance than a shared sense of vulnerability in the face of increasing dominance by the Sunni majority. Moreover, Maulid Nabi, in general, is one of the most contested issues between Sufis and Salafis, who together constitute the Sunni majority in Northern Nigeria. Salafism considers commemorating Prophet Muhammad's birthday as unIslamic, let alone celebrating Jesus Maulid alongside Christians. However, developments that followed the adoption of sharia show that Sufis sometimes supported Shia due to their shared interest in opposing Salafism.

*The Clash of Sound and Image: Inter- and Intra-Religious Entanglements and Contestations during Maulud Celebrations in the City of Jos, Nigeria* | **Murtala Ibrahim** (Utrecht University)

This article explores recent inter- and intra-religious entanglements and contestations between Sufis, the Izala, and Christians, which have emerged as a result of a new way of celebrating Maulud – the observance of the prophet Muhammad's birthday – in the Nigerian city of Jos. Through the adept use of mass public preaching and sound mediums such as loudspeakers, audiotapes, and broadcasting media, the Izala – an Islamic reform Muslim movement – project a sense of dominance over the public sphere of the city. As part of their critique of the Izala, the Sufis rejuvenated and reorganized their own Maulud celebrations into a mass public spectacle, with images of Sheikh Ibrahim Nyass – a key Sufi leader in West Africa – as its most important visual element. To make their Maulud celebration more conspicuous, Sufis have adopted the use of Christmas lights to decorate the city, and they construct several temporary wooden gates decorated with flowers, Christmas objects and images of Sheikh Ibrahim Nyass at the entrance to major streets that stand throughout the Maulud period. Sufis' incorporation of decorative Christmas objects into the Maulud celebration reveals the fluid boundaries that exist between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria, which sometimes generate dynamics of inter-religious borrowing and mutual influence. This article argues that Sufis, who are disadvantaged in the practice of organized preaching and the use of sound media, have transformed the Maulud celebration into a mechanism to counterbalance Izala dominance of the public sphere, and to reassert their presence in the city. The practice of borrowing Christian elements, however, coupled with the construction of street gates, exacerbate tensions between Sufis and Izala, resulting in a volatile situation that sometimes degenerates into physical conflict.

*A Revisionist Islamic Group in Northern Nigeria: A History of Yan-haqiqa in Kano* | **Kabiru H Isa** (Bayero University Kano)

Yan-haqiqa is a Sufi group that came into prominence in 21st century northern Nigeria with significant followership in Kano. Even though, the members of the group perceive themselves as bona fide followers of the path of Shaykh Ibrahim Niassa (Senegalese Islamic scholar and founder of Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya), they are considered by Sunni Muslims (both Salafis and Sufis) as a heretical faction of

Tijaniyyah-Ibrahimiyya. The basic ideology of this group is that Niasse is a 'deity' and they also deify their members. Their ideology stems from the concept of Tarbiyya (spiritual training) which is a method used by Sufi Shaykhs to guide their disciples on the mystical journey to direct experiences of the divine—a method popularized by Tijaniyyah-Ibrahimiyya. Yan-haqiqa believe that only God is certain and since they have close relationship with Him, then ipso facto there is no need for them to worship Him. Initially, the group operated clandestinely and in recent years its members attracted public attention through mawlid (celebrating the birthday of Niasse). During the celebration, they showered praises on Niasse and ranked him above Prophet Muhammad. Their comments generate violent reactions from Salafi and Sufi communities. While Salafi consider the creed of Yan-haqiqa as typical Sufi heresy, the Sufis not only disown them but also question their 'Muslimness.' The emergence of Yan-haqiqa has changed the contour and composition of Tijaniyya in Kano because its defining ideology of deifying Niasse and its members contradicts the teaching and doctrine of the mainstream Tijaniyya. This paper attempts to unpack the place of Yan-haqiqa in a highly contested and tensed religious geography of Kano and how their emergence complicates the category of "Muslim" within mainstream Sunni Islam.

*"Northern Nigerian Intellectuals, Sudan, and the "Eclectic Style" in Contemporary Islamic Thought | Alex Thurston (U Cincinnati)*

This paper examines intellectual exchanges between northern Nigeria and Sudan. After briefly discussing the history of several important bilateral educational connections in the late colonial period, the paper focuses on postcolonial encounters, and particularly on two Nigerian graduates of the International University of Africa, Khartoum: Aminu Sagagi and Sanusi Lamido Sanusi. The paper argues that these figures, in different ways, exemplify a self-consciously eclectic Islamic intellectual style that breaks with categories familiar from the study of Islam in Africa and Nigeria, categories such as Sufis, Salafis, and Islamists. The eclectic style draws on northern Nigerian Islamic modernist traditions, the curriculum and atmosphere of the International University of Africa, and a wider set of global influences; although time spent in Sudan is not the sole factor in these intellectuals' trajectories, the paper suggests that the International University has a fundamentally different role in the global Islamic educational arena than do institutions such as the Islamic University of Medina, a popular destination for Nigerian Salafis, or Al-Azhar University, a haven for Nigerian Sufis. The paper further explores how the eclectic style manifests in politics, analyzing the critiques that Sagagi and Sanusi made of shari'a implementation in northern Nigerian states, as well as the broader critiques that Sanusi – as a public intellectual and later as Emir of Kano (2014-2020) – made of northern Nigerian society generally. The paper draws on Nigerian and Sudanese sources, as well as unpublished and published writings by Sagagi and Sanusi, to describe their intellectual trajectories and outlooks and to offer a portrait of the eclectic style. Finally, the paper assesses why the eclectic style, despite its intellectual attractions to some northern Nigerian Muslim elites, has limited popularity in the wider religious arena – and why it is vulnerable to other groups' critiques.

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