

Introduction

Nolte, Insa

DOI:

[10.1163/21540993-01001001](https://doi.org/10.1163/21540993-01001001)

License:

None: All rights reserved

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Nolte, I 2019, 'Introduction: learning to be Muslim in West Africa. Islamic engagements with diversity and difference', *Islamic Africa*, vol. 10, no. 1-2, pp. 11-25. <https://doi.org/10.1163/21540993-01001001>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

Publisher Rights Statement:

Checked for eligibility: 02/10/2019

Nolte, I. (2019). Introduction: Learning to be Muslim in West Africa. *Islamic Engagements with Diversity and Difference*, *Islamic Africa*, 10(1-2), 11-25. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/21540993-01001001>

General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

Heading: <Introduction: Learning to be Muslim in West Africa: Islamic engagements with diversity and difference>

L1 <Abstract>

In West Africa, learning to be Muslim has historically been shaped by two key engagements: the participation in wider Islamic debates and the co-existence with non-Muslims. In the twentieth and twenty-first century, Islamic education in West Africa was transformed by the imposition of the secular state and Western education. But as Muslims encountered secularism and Christianity, they also increasingly drew on pedagogies that emanated from Middle Eastern and Asian Islam. This produced a multiplicity of educational practices simultaneously relating to the diversity of Islamic practice and the importance of difference to non-Muslims.

L1 <Key words>

Islam, Muslims, education, learning, Islamic discourse, global Islam, Muslim-secular relations, Muslim-Christian relations

L1 <Introduction: 'Learning to be Muslim in West Africa: Islamic engagements with diversity and difference >

In the socially stratified and often multi-religious and multi-ethnic societies of West Africa, how is knowledge about being Muslim passed on and acquired? How do individuals develop a particular Islamic identity amongst many, often competing or conflicting, ways of being Muslim? Equally importantly, how do Muslims differentiate themselves from non-Muslim others?

Like all religious learning, Islamic learning is not limited to the transmission of knowledge or to educational institutions:¹ it takes place in the context of specific intellectual engagements, which in turn reflect and shape the social and interpersonal encounters in which Muslims understand and negotiate their commitment to Islam. While West African Muslims have long participated in Islamic discourses that transcended the geographical boundaries of West Africa, they have also coexisted with non-Muslims for centuries. Learning to be Muslim has therefore been shaped by two key engagements: the participation in wider Islamic debates and the encounter with non-Muslims.

Focusing on marginal social groups and Muslim-minority contexts, the articles in this special issue illustrate that new forms of learning to be Muslim in West Africa emerged not only from the Muslim experience of the colonial state and the spread of Western education, but also from the engagement with modernised educational practices developed in the Middle East and Asia, and the competition with Christianity. The

¹ Launay, Robert. "Introduction: Writing Boards and Blackboards", in Launay, Robert (ed.). *Islamic Education in Africa: Writing Boards and Blackboards* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), pp. 1-26, p. 21.

diversity and cosmopolitanism of local discourses facilitated the emergence of a multiplicity of Muslim pedagogies,² which relate both to the diversity of Islamic practice and the importance of difference to non-Muslims.

The next section of this introduction emphasises the historical complexity and sophistication of Islamic learning in West Africa in order to contextualise the Muslim encounter with Western education beyond the experience of European domination. The following part focuses on the transformation of Islamic education following the advent of colonial rule. It sets out how the contributions to this issue highlighting the diversity of West African Muslims' responses to, and engagements with, non-Muslim pedagogies. Exploring the contributions to this issue in greater depth, the section after that emphasises that Muslim learning takes place in the context of a wider 'field' of discourse that includes Islam, but is not limited to it. As a result, Muslim learning consists both in the engagement with Islamic discourse and in debates about the boundaries of Islam. The introduction ends with a short reflection on the genesis of this Special Issue.

L1 <Diversity and difference in West Africa>

Like most Muslims, West African Muslims have historically participated in wider networks constituted by Islam. At the same time, they were also often part of highly differentiated and internally heterogeneous societies. While learning to be Muslim centred on the acquisition of knowledge and dispositions shared by other Muslims across time and space, it also took place in relation to difference. For this reason historical Islamic debates have focused on internal differentiation including lineage identity, descent or 'race',³ or distinctions between free and unfree or enslaved peoples.⁴ But in many parts of West Africa where Muslims and non-Muslims lived in close proximity to each other, Islamic discourse also focused on the distinction between these two groups.⁵

As Paulo Fernando de Moraes Farias points out, historical forms of coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims relied on the spread of narratives rooted in the Qur'an and hadith to non-Muslim populations. Islam became an intellectual resource across West Africa because unlike in many non-Muslim contexts, stories surrounding the cultural

² For an insightful discussion of 'Saharan cosmopolitanism', see Hill, Joseph. "The cosmopolitan Sahara: Building a Global Islamic Village in Mauritania", *City & Society*, 24.1 (2012), pp. 62-83.

³ Hall, Bruce S. *A history of race in Muslim West Africa, 1600–1960*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁴ Cf. Lecocq, Baz. "The bellah question: slave emancipation, race, and social categories in late twentieth-century northern Mali," *Canadian Journal of African Studies/ La Revue canadienne des études africaines* 39.1 (2005), pp. 42-68.

⁵ For a magisterial discussion of medieval relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in eastern Mali, see Moraes Farias, Paulo Fernando de. *Arabic Medieval Inscriptions from the Republic of Mali: Epigraphy, Chronicles, and Songhay-Tuareg History*, *Fontes Historiae Africae*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press for The British Academy, 2004).

heritage of Islam were freely shared. The shared engagement with this heritage partly centred on the understanding that Islam required Muslims to maintain clear boundaries to non-Muslims. At the same time, many Muslims believed that Islam recognised a space for collaboration between both groups as long as such boundaries were maintained.⁶ This often allowed Muslim and non-Muslim groups to conceive of their differences in productive ways.⁷

The interplay between West Africa's long participation in wider Islamic networks and its differentiated history of Muslim coexistence with non-Muslims is central to understanding the variety of Islamic learning practices in West Africa today. The transformation of these relationships over time deserves careful exploration.⁸ Recently several scholars have noted that the contestations over correct Islamic practice that characterised the West African jihads in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were closely bound up with debates about Muslim relations to non-Muslims.⁹ Certainly the discourses and practices that created distinctions between different groups of Muslims and non-Muslims across West Africa by the early twentieth century varied significantly. The forms of Muslim learning that emerged in these different constellations provide the proper context for the attempted universalization of Western education that followed the European expansion to West Africa.¹⁰

Certainly the expansion of Western education – discussed here in these terms to emphasise its association with the expansion of Europe and to relativize its implicit claims to universality – was an intrinsic aspect of the colonial experience.¹¹ In the context of colonial domination, the spread of Western education both revealed and reflected the hegemony of Western modes of knowing. But colonisation also enabled growing numbers of Africans to communicate across national, regional and international networks. As West African Muslims created spaces for debate and

⁶ Nolte, Insa. "Imitation and creativity in the establishment of Islam in Oyo", in Benedetta Rossi and Tobias Green (eds), *Landscapes, Sources, and Intellectual Projects in African History*. (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 91-115.

⁷ Moraes Farias, Paulo Fernando de. "Muslim Orality in West Africa: A Neglected Subject", Third Fage Lecture, Department of African Studies and Anthropology, University of Birmingham, 12 November 2015.

⁸ Sanneh, Lamin O. *Beyond Jihad: The Pacifist Tradition in West African Islam*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁹ Recently several scholars have noted that such contestations were closely bound up with debates about Muslim relations to non-Muslims, and in particular the sale of Muslim slaves to Christians. See Ware, Rudolph T. III. *The Walking Qur'an. Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*. (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press, 2014); Lovejoy, Paul. *Jihad in West Africa during the Age of Revolutions* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016).

¹⁰ Adick, Christel. *Die Universalisierung der modernen Schule: eine theoretische Problemskizze zur Erklärung der weltweiten Verbreitung der modernen Schule in den letzten 200 Jahren mit Fallstudien aus Westafrika* (Paderborn: Schoenigh, 1992).

¹¹ Launay, "Writing Boards", p. 2.

exchange across local and colonial boundaries, they also engaged increasingly with debates by Muslims beyond the region.¹²

As a result, Muslim learning reflected a wide range of influences. The engagement with Islam by British, French, and other colonial administrations reflected different European historical experiences. Yet colonial rule also strengthened wider networks that enabled West African Muslims to communicate increasingly with fellow Muslims in North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. The diverse practices and debates that emerged within different West African states and Islamic scholarly networks shaped ideas about what it meant to be Muslim under European rule. They informed multiple Muslim engagements with Western knowledge and practice, and they are clearly reflected in the diverse trajectories of colonial Islam across West Africa.¹³

L1 <Learning to be Muslim in colonial and postcolonial West Africa>

The complexity of the encounter between Islam and Western education has attracted some scholarly attention. West African Islamic education emphasises the importance of embodied knowledge, which constitutes intellectual and spiritual achievement as inextricably linked to an ethos of modesty and respect and expressed through gendered physical repertoires.¹⁴ In some contexts, this contrasted strongly with Western forms of learning that primarily emphasised the academic.¹⁵ Yet the differences between these two forms of learning should not be overstated: an underestimation of the intellectual demands of traditional Islamic learning would be misleading. At the same time, many Western educational practices encouraged the adoption of particular forms of sociality and embodiment, in particular in relation to gender.¹⁶

The participation of West African Muslims in wider networks of learning and exchange brought them into contact with debates about Islamic education that emerged in the Middle East and Asia, where the encounter with colonialism and Western education had

¹² Launay, Robert, and Benjamin F. Soares. "The formation of an 'Islamic sphere' in French colonial West Africa." *Economy and Society* 28.4 (1999), pp. 497-519.

¹³ The variety of Muslim societies is illustrated by a comparison of local and regional studies, for example of Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Northern Nigeria. See respectively, Launay, Robert. *Beyond the Stream: Islam and society in a West African town*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Soares, Benjamin. *Islam and the Prayer Economy. History and Authority in a Malian Town*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005); and Umar, Muhammad Sani. *Islam and Colonialism: Intellectual responses of Muslims of northern Nigeria to British colonial rule*. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006).

¹⁴ Ware, *The Walking Qur'an*.

¹⁵ Brenner, Louis. *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society*. (London: C. Hurst & Co, 2000).

¹⁶ See for example White, Bob W. "Talk about School: education and the colonial project in French and British Africa (1860-1960)." *Comparative Education* 32.1 (1996), pp. 9-26; Leach, Fiona. "African girls, nineteenth-century mission education and the patriarchal imperative." *Gender and Education* 20.4 (2008), pp.335-347.

also inspired new pedagogies.¹⁷ Several articles in this issue illustrate that forms of Islamic learning that originated outside of West Africa inspired African responses to the perceived challenges of Western education. ██████████ study of Islamic educational networks in Ilorin discusses in detail how scholars' experiences of education and educational debates emanating from Egypt and the Indian subcontinent could inspire a multiplicity of pedagogical approaches and philosophies.

In many parts of West Africa, Muslims perceived Western education as morally problematic. Fearing that their children would be encouraged to abandon Islam, parents sometimes prevented their children from attending Western schools.¹⁸ Partly as a result (and at the same time confirming existing fears), Western education was at times enforced: in some parts of West Africa, children were removed from their families to attend Western schools.¹⁹ In northern Nigeria, criticism of Western education has continued to shape Muslim discourses since the colonial period.²⁰ But especially where Muslim men acquired Western education, they could also act as brokers between Islamic and Western ideas. In this issue, ██████████ discusses the Nigerian intellectual and politician Boubou Hama, whose insistence on the importance of Islam complemented the emphasis on 'traditional' African knowledge by other educated members of his generation.

While scholars disagree on the exact patterns of causality, it is generally accepted that colonial rule was associated with the rise of monotheism in Africa.²¹ In many African societies with significant Muslim populations, the establishment of colonial states encouraged large-scale conversion to Islam.²² But histories of conversion were inextricably linked to complex local relations of power, and in some cases, populations aiming to distance themselves from a Muslim elite turned to Christianity.²³ In addition, Western education was an important factor in the expansion of Christianity, because educational provision was often linked to mission churches. In many parts of Ghana and

¹⁷ Hill, Joseph. "The cosmopolitan Sahara".

¹⁸ Kane, Ousmane. *Beyond Timbuktu. An intellectual history of Muslim West Africa*. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2016), p.2.

¹⁹ See also Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge*, p. 75.

²⁰ Thurston, Alexander. *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), pp. 72-81.

²¹ See for example Horton, Robin. "On the rationality of conversion 1 (Part I)." *Africa* 45.3 (1975), pp. 219-235; Ensminger, Jean. "Transaction costs and Islam: Explaining conversion in Africa." *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics (JITE)/ Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft* (1997), pp. 4-29.

²² Launay and Soares. "Islamic sphere".

²³ Kastfelt, Niels. *Religion and Politics in Nigeria. A Study in Middle Belt Christianity*. (New York: IB Tauris, 1994).

Nigeria, where Christian groups established significant educational networks, Islamic educational institutions competed with Christian schools.²⁴

The centrality of Western education for the engagement with the colonial state and beyond meant that Muslims came to appreciate the social and economic opportunities it offered. In some cases, Islamic scholars worked closely with colonial officials in order to re-conceive Western and Western-inspired pedagogies in a manner that recognised Muslim concerns.²⁵ In addition, enterprising Islamic scholars produced different systems of modern Islamic education that often coexisted both with classical Qur'anic, secular, and Christian schools, though often not on equal terms.²⁶ [REDACTED] article in this issue illustrates that in early twentieth-century Lagos, Muslims literate in English often participated in debates dominated by Christians. But even though these Muslims were rarely able to change the parameters of the discourse, their participation enabled them to educate new audiences about Islam.

Where Islamic and other educational systems came to coexist, complex patterns of engagement emerged. Muslim students often engaged with several forms of learning, for example by attending Western schools in the morning and attending Islamic institutions in the afternoons and on weekends. The reliance of modernised Islamic education on formalised curricula, teaching methods, and assessments also often attracted groups historically less exposed to formal Islamic education, such as students from non-scholarly or less religious backgrounds.²⁷ As Kane has noted for northern Nigeria, the expansion of Islamic education was sometimes linked to new ideas about Islam and could change social relations within Muslim communities dramatically.²⁸ As [REDACTED] illustrates in this issue, Islamic education provided by Salafist groups played an important role in the assertion of socially marginalised groups in Ghana.

There is little evidence that the expansion of Western education encouraged significant conversion to Christianity in Muslim-majority societies, which was a concern for many Muslims.²⁹ However, education was linked to the expansion of Christianity in some mixed or minority-Muslim parts of West Africa. A recent survey of southwest Nigeria

²⁴ Launay, "Writing Boards".

²⁵ G.T.O Gbadamosi, *The Growth of Islam Among the Yorubas 1841- 1908*. (London: Longman Group Limited, 1978), pp. 167-76; Skinner, David E. "Islamic Education and Missionary Work in the Gambia, Ghana and Sierra Leone During the 20th Century", *Bulletin on Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa* 1.4 (1983), pp.5-24.

²⁶ Launay, "Writing Boards", p. 16.

²⁷ Brenner, Louis. *Controlling Knowledge*.

²⁸ Kane, Ousmane. *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria: a study of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition*. (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

²⁹ See for example Ayandele, Emmanuel A. "The missionary factor in northern Nigeria, 1870-1918", *Journal of the historical society of Nigeria* 3.3 (1966), pp. 503-522; Umar, *Islam and Colonialism*, pp. 56-60.

indicates that Yoruba speakers born in the 1940s and early 1950s, who benefited from the introduction of Universal Primary Education in 1955, formed the first generational cohort where Christians outnumbered Muslims.³⁰ Strong population growth means that these overall trends are not likely to indicate an overall decrease of the Muslim community, but they do suggest that numbers of Christians increased at faster rates than those of Muslims.³¹

Faced with the double threat of Western education's impact on the Muslim community, and an increasing educational gap between Muslims and Christians, Muslims in some parts of West Africa developed explicitly Muslim schools modelled on Western templates.³² In addition to schools, Muslim groups set up educational charities, pressure groups, and even universities.³³ Possibly in response to the competition provided by Western schools, modernised Islamic education has also become increasingly available to women.³⁴ In this issue, ██████████ study of the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN) illustrates that Yoruba Muslims' engagement with the Christian dominance of Western education explicitly addresses women, and provides opportunities for female leadership. At the same time, the complex trajectory of the MSSN's privileged discourses also reflects the ambition to guide MSSN members to be good Muslims in a multireligious society.

L1 <Engagements with Islam, the secular, and Christianity>

Learning to be Muslim takes place in the context of a wider, and yet contextually specific, 'field' of discourse that includes, but is not limited to, Islam.³⁵ The simultaneous expansion of Muslim and Western forms of education in the colonial period meant that in many part of West Africa, learning to be Muslim was linked both to Islamic discourses that transcended Africa and to local non-Islamic forms of learning. A comprehensive engagement with Islamic learning must therefore not only explore the full range of Islamic discursive traditions and their adaptation in diverse local contexts, but also the

³⁰ Nolte, Insa, Rebecca Jones, Khadijeh Taiyari, and Giovanni Occhiali. "Research note: Exploring survey data for historical and anthropological research: Muslim-Christian relations in south-west Nigeria." *African Affairs* 115.460 (2016), pp. 541-561.

³¹ See also Peel, JDY. *Christianity, Islam and Orisha Religion. Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction*. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), pp. 127-135.

³² Reichmuth, Stefan. "Education and the Growth of Religious Associations among Yoruba Muslims: The Ansar-Ud-Deen Society of Nigeria", *Journal of Religion in Africa* 26.4 (1996), pp. 365-405.

³³ Soares, Benjamin. An Islamic Social Movement in Contemporary West Africa. In Ellis, Stephen and Ineke v. Kessel (eds), *Movers and Shakers. Social Movements in Africa*. (Leiden NL: Brill, 2009), pp. 178-196.

³⁴ Bano, Masooda. *Female Islamic Education Movements. The Re-democratisation of Islamic Knowledge*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

³⁵ For a discussion of the multireligious field, see Janson, Marloes, and Birgit Meyer. "Introduction: Towards a Framework for the Study of Christian-Muslim encounters in Africa." *Africa* 86.4 (2016), pp. 615-19.

ability of these traditions to engage with discourses originally largely external to Islam.³⁶

Talal Asad highlights the importance of the ‘discursive tradition’ within Islam, which emphasises the centrality of ongoing debate about a widely shared canon of foundational Islamic texts.³⁷ These texts do not provide Muslims with a monolithic set of commands. Rather, as the starting points for debate, they offer a frame of reference which enables individuals to understand themselves as Muslims, and to re-imagine their relationships to Muslims, non-Muslims, and the world. While political power is often employed in the pursuit of apparent coherence, different traditions of exegesis and reflection continue to produce seemingly competing or incompatible discourses.³⁸ This is illustrated by several articles in this issue, which confirm the importance of personal bonds historically associated with Sufi Islam even in Reformist or thoroughly modernised pedagogical contexts.

The discourses of West Africa’s Muslim scholars are not limited to the deeply meaningful or philosophical, and many debates they are also open to more ‘banal questions’.³⁹ In West Africa’s postcolonial states, the engagement of Muslims with concerns including the crisis of the state, the failures of economic development, and the changes in life chances associated with urbanization and demographic expansion have been described as *Islam mondain*, or Islam ‘in the world’.⁴⁰ Like the notion of *Islam mondain*, the concept of ‘everyday Islam’ suggests that areas of life which are not historically seen as religious should not automatically be understood as separate from orthodox Muslim practice.⁴¹ As [REDACTED] description of intra-Muslim polarisation in Ghana illustrates, the trajectory of Salafism in Ghanaian Islam was shaped by a number of factors including – if indirectly – Ghanaian party politics.

Certainly, ‘everyday’ or ‘worldly’ practices by Muslims may be seen by them or by other Muslims as having little to do with Islam. But the very informality and openness of ‘everyday’ practice can also include the reinterpretation, postponement, and even challenging of more established discourses.⁴² Irrespective of whether such arguments

³⁶ While the trajectory of Western/ Christian practice in West Africa is beyond the remit of this article, a similar point applies to its engagement with Islam.

³⁷ Asad, Talal. “The idea of an anthropology of Islam.” *Qui Parle* 17:2, (2009), 1-30.

³⁸ Asad, “The idea”, p. 23.

³⁹ Loimeier, Roman. “Translating the Qur’ān in Sub-Saharan Africa: Dynamics and Disputes”, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 35.4 (2005): 403-423, p. 407.

⁴⁰ Soares, Benjamin and René Otayek (eds). *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 7.

⁴¹ Fadil, Nadia, and Mayanthi Fernando. “Rediscovering the ‘everyday’ Muslim: Notes on an anthropological divide”, *HAU: journal of ethnographic theory* 5.2 (2015), pp. 59-88.

⁴² Schielke, Samuli and Liza Debevec (eds). *Ordinary Lives And Grand Schemes. An Anthropology of Everyday*

are produced by scholars or less educated Muslims, they reflect the enduring relevance of Islam to Muslim lives. Where Muslims' engagements with everyday practices and debates are informed by Islam's core injunctions, they do not exist outside of Islam's discursive traditions. Like understandings of what constitutes 'authenticated Islam',⁴³ the boundaries of Islamic practice are themselves subject to contestation and negotiation.

Groups and individuals discern the debates and practices relevant to their lives on the basis of contemporary understandings of Islam. This is clearly illustrated by ██████████ discussion of the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria, which introduced Christian-inspired dances and socials for Muslims as forms of sociality that could compete with those enjoyed by their Christian contemporaries. The Society's commitment to limiting the attraction of Christianity for both men and women clearly constituted these practices as part of 'everyday' Islamic debates. Yet over time, and in the engagement with wider Islamic discourses, the MSSN came to distance itself from such practices and instead focused on gendered forms of learning that were more widely recognizable as Islamic.

West African Muslims have interacted with non-Muslims, and especially Christians, in a broad range of ways.⁴⁴ Focusing on education and identity formation, the articles in this issue do not focus on sustained violence, although they explore contestation and conflict as well as other forms of engagement. Peaceful forms of engagement between Muslims and non-Muslims are often understood in terms of mixing, and the emergence of self-consciously hybrid or accretive practices, such as 'Chrislam', suggests that such ideas resonate with some West African groups.⁴⁵ However, analyses in such terms must be pursued with extreme circumspection where individuals identify as Muslims because debates about the boundaries of Islam are historically and culturally contingent.⁴⁶ The articles in this issue illuminate that Muslim discourses about Islam in relation to non-Muslim practice are themselves an important object of study.

Several articles in this issue reveal the importance of global Islamic discourses for West African responses to the challenges of colonization and Western education. Alabi Aliyu's discussion of modern Islamic education shows that diverse forms of Islamic modernisation 'from below' emerged side by side in the former emirate of Ilorin.

Religion. (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2012).

⁴³ Deeb, Lara. *An enchanted modern: Gender and public piety in Shi'i Lebanon*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁴⁴ Soares, Benjamin. "Introduction: Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa", in Soares, Benjamin (ed.), *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa*. (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 1-16.

⁴⁵ Janson, Marloes. "Unity through diversity: a case study of Chrislam in Lagos." *Africa* 86.4 (2016), pp. 646-672.

⁴⁶ Asad, "The idea", pp. 23-4.

Leading educationalists of the two most important streams of reformist Islamic education in colonial Ilorin, the Adabiyya and Markaziyya, drew significantly on Islamic influences from Egypt and the Indian subcontinent in order to encourage new ways of Islamic learning. Their co-existence as separate and yet mutually engaged educational systems reflected different forms of engagement with the twin challenges of mission schooling and the establishment of the colonial state.

But despite their differences, both educational systems were based on forms of personal leadership inspired by Sufi practices. This implied that even educational practices shaped by the encounter with Western schooling could encourage forms of self-fashioning an interpersonal relationships that resonated with older Islamic practices. In addition, the domestication of these global influences went hand in hand with ongoing debates about the proper boundaries between Islamic and Western educational systems. While some Muslims insisted that Islamic education needed to remain spacially as well as pedagogically separate from non-Islamic forms of learning, others accepted that this would constitute a social disadvantage Muslims and therefore allowed for both forms of learning to take place in close proximity.

A complex engagement with the secular state facilitated differentiation within the Muslim community in Ghana. As ██████ sets out, by the 1990s the political focus on co-opting an established Islamic elite largely associated with the Tijaniyya encouraged young and otherwise marginalised Muslims from different backgrounds to embrace Salafist positions. In this case, too, Muslim self-fashioning took place in the engagement with wider – global – discourses, but as differences between Tijani and Salafi groups became increasingly salient politically, they challenged these groups stereotypical associations of ‘tolerance’ and ‘radicalisation’ respectively. Even as the distinctions within the Muslim community reflected wider divisions within contemporary Islam, the modes of mobilisation illustrated that religious contestation was aimed at the state and its resources. Thus the rise of ideological differences in Ghana, where Muslims do not constitute an overall majority, was a by-product of the co-optation of (some) Muslims into the wider political sphere.

Language and multiple processes of translation played an important role in the Muslim encounter with non-Muslims. Texts and debates in African languages embedded Islam in the conceptual world of local societies by linking it to the ideas and practices that underpinned local social practice.⁴⁷ At the same time, the translation of Islamic ideas into African languages often went hand in hand with a popularisation of Islamic ideas and practices, which transformed the conceptual worlds of local societies. Where such processes predate the production of written sources, the intellectual histories produced by this process have only been partially explored.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Reese, Scott S. “Islam in Africa/ Africans and Islam”, *Journal of African History* 55 (2014), 17-26, pp. 22-4.

⁴⁸ For an example of Islam’s conceptual influences on non-Islamic practice, see Brenner, Louis. “Muslim

Yet West African Islamic traditions of learning were not limited to African languages. In this issue, the articles by [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] show that West African Muslims discussed Islam in the idioms and genres of English, French, and other colonial languages. In this manner, they located Islamic ideals within the conceptual worlds of cultural and religious outsiders. This enabled Muslims to take on intellectual positions that were explicitly independent of local norms. By arguing and publishing in colonial languages, Muslim local intellectuals could make interventions in debates otherwise dominated by audiences with little historical affinity to Islam. But equally importantly, by discussing Islam in colonial languages, African Muslims confirmed its universality.

[REDACTED] article focuses on debates about Islam in colonial Lagosian newspapers which published in both English and Yoruba. Inspired by the debates of their Christian contemporaries, Muslim-authored English-language texts contributed to Lagosian newspapers advocated modernising both Islam and Muslim behaviour through practices that reflected British and Christian missionary values and aesthetics. In contrast, Yoruba-language discourses centred on the moral obligations of the individual to the wider community. This illuminates how language competency, itself an important aspect of education conceived broadly, played an important role in the formation of different Muslim discourses.

[REDACTED] analysis of Boubou Hama's publications in French suggests that his work was not primarily aimed at fellow Muslims or Islamic debates but at the ideas that emanated from the *Négritude* movement. While many Francophone African intellectuals of Hama's generation emphasised the importance of a 'traditional' Africa for a radical critique of European domination, Hama insisted on the joint importance of 'traditional' and Islamic knowledge for African culture and self-assertion. Recognising both Islamic and 'traditional' forms of education as equally authentic, Hama refused to gloss over the importance of difference between the two forms of education even as he noted historical relations of mutual tolerance or collaboration between African Muslims and non-Muslims. In this manner, he suggested that both non-Islamic 'tradition' and Islam could serve as points of departure for challenges to European domination and the status quo.

L1 <Genesis of this Special Issue and Outlook>

The articles in the special issue contribute to debates about the complex range of relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims, including Muslims and Christians, in West Africa. As most articles focus on societies and social contexts in which Islam is not the majority religion, they illustrate that the multiple ways of learning to be Muslim in West Africa include both the engagement with the secular state and with Christianity. The three articles that focus on the Yoruba region southwest Nigeria, where Muslims and Christians have coexisted largely peacefully for most of the twentieth century,

Divination and the History of Religion of Sub-Saharan Africa", in John Pemberton III (ed.), *Insight and Artistry in African Divination* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), pp. 45–59.

offers a particularly important insight into the possibilities of learning to be Muslim in a religiously mixed society.

All articles were originally produced in the context of the [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The programme was part of a larger commitment of [REDACTED] to working with scholars based in Africa:
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] discussed recent publications relating to their research with staff and postgraduates in the department and interested colleagues from all over the University. One aim of the workshop programme is to encourage early career scholars from Africa to prepare a paper of publishable quality to be delivered at an international conference. Attracting over 40 early career and more senior scholars from African, UK, continental European, and North American universities [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

This special issue brings together articles originally presented by [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] The members of this group are presently based in universities in Brazil, Germany, Ghana, Nigeria, the UK and the USA. Reflecting the coming generation of scholars, three contributors are West African by origin, and three are women. As neither the editor nor – with one exception – the contributors speak English as a first language, conceptual differences underlying the use of English complicated the process of collaboration and debate, even as it was illuminating and insightful for all participants.

This process illustrated the importance of cross-cultural learning and engagement in the production of knowledge about West African Islam. Debates over the translation of local concepts and author's understandings pointed to the obstacles to publication in

international formats faced in particular by early career African scholars, which is borne out by the publication landscape in the study of African Islam, and Africa more generally. Even stronger points could be made about the presence of Muslim authors and women in publications about African Islam. We believe that by publishing a collection of articles about Africa in which neither African nor Muslim or female scholars constitute a minority, this special issue makes an important statement about knowledge production that is only superficially independent from the content of the articles.

The articles of the special issue are included here in roughly historical order, not because this order reveals a clear historical trajectory but because this illustrates that the multiplicity of such trajectories itself is a historical fact across the twentieth century. Moving from [REDACTED] discussion of Islamic debates in both English and Yoruba in the rich bilingual print culture of early twentieth-century Lagos to [REDACTED] exploration of the modernisation of Islamic education in the former Emirate of Ilorin, the first two articles illuminate the multiple and not always overlapping discourses among Islamic intellectuals in southwest Nigeria alone.

The full breadth of the engagement of Muslim intellectuals with the local practice of Islam is illuminated by [REDACTED] discussion of Boubou Hama's reflections on the role of Islam in Africa's past and future and followed by [REDACTED] examination of the activities of Western educated Muslims encouraging Muslim self-realisation in pedagogical and psychological terms. Challenging the political assimilation of the Muslim community into the state, [REDACTED] analysis of the mobilisation of Islamic Reformers in Ghana illuminates both the different local trajectories of Islamic debate and the internal diversity of Ghana's Muslims.