

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Northern Nigerian intellectuals, Sudan, and the “eclectic style” in contemporary Islamic thought

Alexander Thurston

University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, USA
Email: alexjthurston@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines two northern Nigerian Muslim intellectuals – Aminu Sagagi and Sanusi Lamido Sanusi (enthroned as Emir Muhammadu Sanusi II of Kano, 2014–20) – whose approaches, in different ways, exemplify a self-consciously eclectic Islamic intellectual style. Their eclecticism breaks with categories familiar from the study of Islam in Africa and Nigeria, categories such as Sufis, Salafis and Islamists. The eclecticist style – or rather, styles – draw on northern Nigerian Islamic modernist traditions, the curriculum and atmosphere of Sudan’s International University of Africa (where both of these Nigerian intellectuals received degrees), and a wider set of global influences. Given their diverse intellectual formation, the eclecticists’ writings and careers allow for an examination of the translocal exchanges that have shaped what is sometimes perceived as a self-contained unit called ‘northern Nigeria’. The article further explores how the eclecticist style manifests in legal and political thought, analysing the critiques that Sagagi and Sanusi made of shari’a implementation in northern Nigerian states in the early 2000s. The article draws on Nigerian and Sudanese sources, as well as unpublished and published writings by Sagagi and Sanusi, to describe their intellectual trajectories and outlooks and offer a portrait of the eclecticist style.

Résumé

Cet article examine deux intellectuels musulmans du nord du Nigeria, Aminu Sagagi et Sanusi Lamido Sanusi (sacré Émir Muhammadu Sanusi II de Kano, 2014-2020), dont les approches, à différents égards, exemplifient un style intellectuel islamique sciemment éclectique. Leur éclectisme rompt avec les catégories familières de l’étude de l’islam en Afrique et au Nigeria, des catégories telles que soufis, salafistes et islamistes. Le style, ou plutôt les styles éclectiques s’inspirent des traditions modernistes islamiques du nord du Nigeria, du programme d’enseignement et de l’atmosphère de l’Université internationale d’Afrique située au Soudan (dont sont diplômés ces intellectuels nigériens) et d’un ensemble plus large d’influences mondiales. Compte tenu de leur formation intellectuelle variée, les écrits et les carrières de ces éclectiques permettent un examen des échanges translocaux qui ont façonné ce que l’on perçoit parfois comme une unité autonome que l’on appelle le « nord du Nigeria ». L’article explore ensuite comment le style éclectique se manifeste dans la pensée juridique et politique, en analysant les critiques de Sagagi et de Sanusi à l’égard de

© The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the International African Institute. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

l'établissement de la charia dans les États du nord du Nigeria au début des années 2000. L'article s'appuie sur des sources nigérianes et soudanaises, ainsi que sur des écrits non publiés et publiés de Sagagi et de Sanusi, pour décrire leurs trajectoires et perspectives intellectuelles, et offrir un portrait du style éclectique.

Introduction

The study of Islam in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Africa has been marked by an assumed binary between Sufis and anti-Sufis – the latter variously labelled reformists, Wahhabis or Salafis in the literature. The best of this literature has analysed debates on the ground, particularly debates pertaining to theology and worship. Yet emphasizing the Sufi–Salafi binary can oversimplify both Sufi and Salafi identities, overlook reformist trends within Sufi communities (Loimeier 2016), and even play into securitized readings of the African Muslim landscape post-9/11. Additionally, this binary ignores actors who do not fit easily or fully into either category and/or whose interests are not primarily related to theology. Some literature has looked beyond the Sufi–Salafi divide in Africa, both in terms of studying the Shi'a (Leichtman 2015; Akhtar 2016) and also by looking at figures and communities not easily classifiable under any sectarian label (Soares 2000; 2005; 2007; Masquelier 2009). Such figures – whether or not they have mass followings – deserve more attention in order to more accurately render the tapestry of Muslim identities being woven on the continent.

Significantly, substantial numbers of Muslims around the world now identify as 'just Muslim' rather than as Sunni or Shi'i, including over one-fifth of Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa (Pew Research Center 2012). Salafis' exclusivist claims to represent Sunni Islam have elevated the stakes for what Muslims mean when describing themselves or others as 'Sunnis', contributing to some Muslims' aversion to that label or indeed all labels. Meanwhile, institutionalized Islamism along the lines of the Muslim Brotherhood has had a relatively weak footprint in much of sub-Saharan Africa (Thurston 2020). Frustration with sectarianism, and the limits of Islamism, leave large constituencies of African Muslims poised to receive new perspectives on Islamic identity and politics.

In keeping with the theme of this special issue, this article seeks to help remap the study of Islam in Nigeria by looking into minority perspectives. It foregrounds a loose category of thinkers I call 'eclecticists'. These thinkers reach varied conclusions on core Islamic doctrines, but they share an openness to consulting diverse sources – Muslim and non-Muslim – that assist in forming worldviews that are self-consciously eclectic. Eclecticists cross or blur boundaries between sectarian camps, even as they may have their own enemies and rivals. Within politics, eclecticism carries advantages and disadvantages for its bearers, sometimes facilitating their access to non-Muslim institutions and forums, but simultaneously exposing eclecticists to charges of heterodoxy and inauthenticity. Tracing eclecticists' influence on the practices and worldviews of ordinary Muslims is difficult, but eclecticists are well positioned to exercise influence in an era of globalization, rising internet access and mass education; when even in Saudi Arabia the aspiration of many clerics is to be 'al-shaykh al-duktūr' – the PhD-holding shaykh (Mouline 2014: 192) – it signals that contemporary constructions of religious authority increasingly hinge on fluency, flexibility and familiarity with multiple universes of thought.

Here, I am interested in Nigerian eclecticists' attitudes toward shari'a. After Nigeria returned to multiparty civilian rule in 1999, northern states implemented 'full shari'a', drawing popular support from ordinary Muslims (Kendhammer 2016) as well as activist intellectuals (El Tantawi 2017). Some scholars have interpreted the shari'a movement as a vehicle for reactionary 'ethnopolitics', meaning a political backlash by the Muslim-majority north against the election of a southern Christian president (Miles 2000). Others underscore Salafi activists' roles in shari'a implementation (Lubeck 2011; Ben Amara 2014), although Sufis played a substantial role in the project as well (Thurston 2015). Meanwhile, some northern intellectuals critiqued its form and political orientation.

This article focuses on two northern Nigerian intellectuals whom I classify as eclecticists: Aminu Isma'il Sagagi (b. 1966) and Sanusi Lamido Sanusi (b. 1961). Sagagi is intellectually more mainstream than the more famous and more controversial Sanusi. Yet there are two key areas of overlap: both attended and graduated from Sudan's International University of Africa (IUA) in the mid-1990s, and both favoured some form of shari'a but embraced minority intellectual viewpoints on what form shari'a should take. These similarities create the basis for a limited case study of Nigerian eclecticism and its translocal dimensions, including these thinkers' critical encounter with Sudanese Islamism.

Regarding the politics of shari'a implementation in Nigeria, these two men's eclecticism took different forms: Sagagi embraced a neo-traditionalist view rooted in the growing Islamic literature endorsing cross-*madhhab* (school) jurisprudence, while Sanusi endorsed a progressive, anti-Salafi vision of shari'a that was rooted in both Sunni and Shi'i thought. Like Islamists, with whose thought both men are deeply familiar, these eclecticists ask how to create a just Islamic society by using the tools of the state and the law – yet eclecticists deconstruct, rather than objectify, notions such as 'shari'a'. The eclecticists' emphasis on exploring political possibilities rather than championing established political programmes recalls the notion of 'post-Islamism' (Bayat 2013), meaning the frustration-driven search for an Islamic political framework beyond the horizons of the Muslim Brotherhood and its peers. Yet eclecticist politics, particularly for Sanusi, is often fluid and situational, weaving together elements of Sunni traditionalism, modernism and liberalism (Islamic and Western) and Islamism, but constantly rebalancing which elements are emphasized or de-emphasized.

Nigerian eclecticists' translocal encounters: Sudan's International University of Africa

Nigerian eclecticists' intellectual and activist networks, both within Nigeria and beyond, are more idiosyncratic and less institutionalized than those of Sufis (Loimeier 1997; 2005; Thurston 2018) and Salafis (Kane 2003; Thurston 2016), or indeed Islamists. Both Sufis and Salafis operate within robust and evolving translocal frameworks. For African Sufis, there are the centuries-old frameworks of Sufi orders themselves, in addition to Sufi-friendly educational institutions (such as Egypt's Al-Azhar University) and, more recently, new regional, state-backed associations such as Morocco's Mohammed VI Foundation of African Oulema. For African Salafis, there are formal institutions, such as the Islamic University of Medina, and the informal

Africa or IUA.³ Sudanese foreign policy was moving in ‘a new direction, with a strong focus on pan-Islamism and pan-Africanism rather than pan-Arabism’ (Ahmed 2018: 98).

The IUA has several sources of appeal for Nigerian eclecticists. First, the university has been a hub for Sudanese intellectuals who are self-consciously eclectic in their use of Islamic and non-Islamic sources. While many contemporary northern Nigerian intellectuals have studied in the Arab world or in the UK, IUA represented a more intellectually flexible milieu than sites such as the Islamic University of Medina, which has a Salafi curriculum (Farquhar 2016), or even than sites such as Al-Azhar, which takes a broad approach to the Sunni Islamic tradition but is not as open to non-Islamic thinkers as is IUA. More broadly, within postcolonial Africa, Sudan has been a centre for Islamic tertiary institutions, such as the Islamic University of Omdurman (which grew out of the Islamic Institute of Omdurman and was formalized as a university in 1965). IUA is thus an Islamic educational hub within a country that is also a hub.

Second, the educational histories of northern Nigeria and Sudan have been intertwined since at least the colonial period. British authorities brought Sudanese instructors to teach in Kano’s Shahuji Judicial School and Northern Provinces Law School (later the School for Arabic Studies) in the 1930s. For both policy and staffing, these northern Nigerian schools drew on Sudan’s Gordon College – a modernist institution. In the 1950s, British policymakers (and the Sudanese shaykhs in Kano) organized overseas studies programmes for northern Nigerian students at destinations such as Bakht er Ruda in Sudan. Beyond the educational sector, Nigeria and Sudan have deep ties as well, including through the many Nigerians who settled in Sudan on their way to or from Mecca, sometimes for generations.

Student life at IUA during the 1990s, as one scholar and graduate of IUA recounts, involved considerable political and religious activity:

The mosque was the hub of intellectual life of the Center, which was transformed into a university in the early 1990s. Weekly poetry readings, lectures, and cultural contests could be scheduled in the mosque as in any of the other lecture halls around campus. Not only was it a religious place, it was also a public place, a meeting ground, and above all, the platform for political claims among different actors. It was a true representative of Arab and Sudanese mainstream feelings toward the war [in Iraq]. As the coalition of nations led by the United States prepared to move toward Iraq in order to liberate Kuwait, the climate at the mosque became tense, anxious, and at times, confrontational. Friday’s sermon, whether delivered by professors, guest speakers or internationally known Islamists, portrayed the build-up as a new colonial occupation, and crusade of the age. (Lo 2009: 76)

The presence of foreign Islamists at IUA’s mosque reflected a broader effort by Sudan, and especially the NIF leader Dr Hasan al-Turabi (1932–2016), to project leadership within the international Islamist movement. Through conferences, publications and invitations to foreign leaders, the NIF made Sudan a centre for Islamist thought

³ *Ibid.*

and activism. Foreign students at IUA during the early 1990s witnessed both the NIF government's domestic Islamization projects and a range of international Islamist perspectives.

The NIF appointed prominent Islamists to key positions within the educational sector, including to administer IUA. The minister of education from 1989 to 2001 (with a brief break in 1999–2000) was Dr Ibrāhīm Aḥmad ʿUmar (b. 1939), an NIF member, Cambridge-educated philosopher and author of works such as his 1989 *Falsafat al-Tanmiya: Ruʿya Islāmiyya* (The Philosophy of Development: An Islamic Vision) and his 1992 *al-ʿIlm wa-l-ʿImān: Madkhal ilā Naẓariyāt al Maʿrifa fi al-Islām* (Science and Faith: Introduction to Theories of Knowledge in Islam). Professor Aḥmad Maḥjūb Ḥajj Nūr (1945–2002), an Islamic judge and member of the NIF's executive council, became dean of student affairs around 1990 (Lo 2009: 73). Nūr, notably, had previously taught at Nigeria's Ahmadu Bello University Zaria (ABU), likely during the 1970s, although I was unable to confirm precisely when. He referred frequently to Nigeria and its scholars in his teaching at IUA (Sagagi 2012). Nūr was, infamously, a member of the judicial panel that reviewed and affirmed the death sentence of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭāhā (d. 1985), whose views (especially that most of the shariʿa was abrogated) led the Sudanese government to execute him on apostasy charges (Thomas 2010: 216–17).

Another key figure at IUA was Dr Ḥasan Makkī Muḥammad Aḥmad (b. 1950), who became dean of the Centre for Research and African Studies in 1991. Aḥmad's autobiography, *Qissatī maʿa al-Ḥaraka al-Islāmiyya* (My Story with the Islamic Movement), provides some insight into the formation of these prominent Sudanese Islamists. He lists several dozen authors he read during his own time as a student at the University of Khartoum. Aḥmad mentions at least six kinds of texts: (1) works now often associated with the contemporary Salafi movement, such as texts by Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Kathīr and Muḥammad al-Shawkāni; (2) late classical Muslim scholars such as Ibn Khaldūn and Ibn Rushd; (3) Muslim Brotherhood literature, such as Sayyid Quṭb's *Maʿālim fi al-Ṭarīq* (Milestones) and the works of Ḥasan al-Banna, Muḥammad Quṭb and Muḥammad al-Ghazālī; (4) writings by twentieth-century Shiʿī leaders such as Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr and Ruhollah Khomeini; (5) Egyptian authors such as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Muḥammad Ḥasanayn Haykal; and (6) Marxist writers such as Mao Zedong and Karl Marx himself (Aḥmad 2006: 110). Senior administrators at IUA like Aḥmad were rooted in a Muslim Brotherhood tradition of Islamism. But they cultivated intellectual eclecticism as well as global links within the Muslim world; Aḥmad, for example, worked in the late 1980s as a researcher for the Islamic Foundation in Leicester, England, where he came into contact with Islamists from around the Arab world (*ibid.*: 99).

The prominence the NIF government accorded to Islamist intellectuals, the range of Islamist perspectives heard in Sudan, and the opportunity to witness first-hand the effort of a postcolonial state to apply shariʿa may have encouraged IUA students to think critically about the meaning of Islamic law. The role of intellectuals in government was symbolized above all by Turabi, who continued to update his scholarly works and contribute to government Islamist publications, such as the 1995 *al-Mashrūʿ al-Islāmī al-Sūdānī: Qirāʾāt fi al-Fikr wa-l-Mumārasa* (The Sudanese Islamic Project: Readings in Thought and Practice). Another prominent Islamist academic in the NIF who likewise represented the government on the international stage

was Turabi's colleague Dr Muṣṭafā ʿUṭhmān Ismāʿīl. In the 1980s, Ismāʿīl served as secretary general of the Islamic Association of Student Organizations. After the NIF takeover, he became head of the Council for International People's Friendship, an organization founded by Numayri in 1980; under the NIF, the Council became a key institution in the government's relations with foreign Islamists, and Ismāʿīl a key figure in hosting foreign delegations to Sudan (Burr and Collins 2003: 140–1).

As of 2011, the university comprised eleven schools representing the humanities, medicine and technical subjects including computer science. The School of Sharia and Islamic Studies had the largest student population during 2005–09, a period for which Mbaye Lo has provided detailed data; students in this school represented 1,028 of a total 3,137 students at IUA in 2005, and 1,099 of 5,756 in 2009. In 2008–09, over half of the total student body was Sudanese (54.3 per cent), but other African countries had significant representation, notably Somalia (11.3 per cent). Nigerians made up 3.5 per cent of the student population, a figure comparable to those of Kenya (3.6 per cent) and Ethiopia (3.5 per cent) (Lo 2011: 79–83). Roughly similar figures have come from Chanfi Ahmed, who reports 5,000 students for 2006 and 6,199 for 2007, 'more than half of whom were Sudanese' (Ahmed 2018: 99). IUA, beyond its schools, hosts centres and institutes, including the Centre for Daʿwa and Social Engagement and the Arabic Language Institute (Lo 2011: 62). I was unable to locate statistics on the types of careers that alumni, including Nigerian alumni, pursue after graduation; the two Nigerian alumni discussed here are prominent, but not necessarily representative. As of the mid-2000s, there was a considerable emphasis at the university on training students to engage in daʿwa within their home countries (Ahmed 2018: 100–1).

The Nigerian intellectuals discussed here completed their degrees at IUA in, respectively, 1996 and 1997. The two men's public writings allow for only a partial reconstruction of how their time at IUA may have affected their religious and intellectual commitments. Aminu Sagagi has linked his positions on shariʿa more strongly to his education in Sudan than Sanusi Lamido Sanusi has. Studying Islam at IUA, where students in the 1990s encountered a range of Islamist intellectual perspectives and witnessed the early stages of an experiment in government-imposed Islamization, appears to have contributed to the development of eclecticist intellectual perspectives on shariʿa among graduates of the university. Such an encounter could have also raised profound questions about the tension between key NIF Islamists' intellectual openness on the one hand and the harshness of the NIF project, including vis-à-vis South Sudan, on the other. Examining how these intellectuals articulated their visions of shariʿa after returning home highlights processes by which graduates of Arab universities localize their perspectives without simply importing models from elsewhere.

Aminu Sagagi

Aminu Sagagi was born in 1966, presumably in the Sagagi neighbourhood of Kano. His father, Ismāʿīl bin Hamza, was a traditional specialist in Arabic language and literature as well as in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). The historian Dr Aliyu Abubakar, writing in the 1960s, called the elder scholar 'one of the major scholars in the city of Kano' (1972: 357). The younger Sagagi exemplifies the educational pluralism that has characterized many Arab-educated northern Nigerian intellectuals. He acquired a strong

background in Arabic before he left Nigeria for Sudan. Through his father's teaching and his own studies at the school of the Sufi Shaykh Nasiru Kabara from 1978 to 1983, he partook of the Arabic literary heritage of northern Nigeria; notably, Kabara was a transformational figure within the Qadiriyya order, with intellectual and spiritual influence that reached beyond the order (Paden 1973; Loimeier 1997). Sagagi also studied Arabic at the Egyptian Cultural Centre in Kano, the School for Arabic Studies (1983–89) and Bayero University Kano (BUK), where he earned a diploma in Arabic, Islamic Studies and Hausa in 1992. From 1992 to 1996, he completed his BA in shari'ah at IUA, writing a thesis entitled 'Al-Shari'ah wa-l-Tarbiya al-Akhlaqiyya' (The Shari'ah and Moral Education).⁴

Sagagi's education was eclectic in a theological and sectarian sense, a quality he emphasizes rather than downplays. Sagagi's biography in his collection of poems *Sigh of Relief* (*Ajiyar Zuciya*) lists his time at the institute of Kabara, yet the collection also includes a poem eulogizing the anti-Sufi Shaykh Abubukar Gumi. Another poem praises the anti-colonial modernist Muslim thinker and poet Sa'adu Zungur. Sagagi also worked with the Islamic Foundation, where he was mentored by the Islamic modernist intellectual Na'ibi Sulaiman Wali (d. 2013) – himself a pupil of the Sudanese shaykhs in Kano mentioned above, a member of one of the Nigerian delegations sent to Sudan in the 1950s, and a key publisher and public intellectual from the 1950s onwards (Thurston 2017). Sagagi's thesis, discussed below, cites an array of Muslim thinkers, including the classical Sufi revivalist thinker Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī (1058–1111), the Egyptian reformist rector of Al-Azhar Maḥmūd Shaltūt (1893–1963), al-Qaraḍāwī, and others. The eclecticism in Sagagi's references and the absence of overtly Salafi themes suggests that he is less interested in sectarian disputes than in advancing Islamic legal thought from an eclecticist standpoint partly influenced by the (itself eclecticist) tradition of northern Nigerian Islamic modernism.

Sagagi's experiences in Sudan, he said, 'opened new horizons'. He interacted with internationally renowned Islamic scholars who visited the university. These included Ahmad Deedat (1918–2005), a South African preacher; Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (b. 1926), the Egyptian cleric and 'global mufti' whose thought is close to that of the Muslim Brotherhood (Gräf and Skovgaard-Petersen 2009); and Professor Wahba Zuhayli (1932–2015), a Syrian specialist in *fiqh*. The study of comparative *fiqh* at IUA strongly influenced Sagagi's thinking.⁵ His undergraduate work, he wrote, was 'a golden opportunity that enabled me to consult numerous legal horizons. It increased my confidence in the suitability of Islamic shari'ah for solving man's problems in every time and place' (Sagagi 2003: 1). Al-Qaraḍāwī, notably, is famous for *talfiq* or drawing from different Sunni legal schools to provide latitude to Muslims, particularly in the West, confronting challenges in reconciling shari'ah with the demands of life under neoliberal capitalist postmodernity.

Engagement with Sudan has continued to shape Sagagi's intellectual career since his return from IUA. In 2012, Sagagi published an essay entitled 'Sudan's relationship with West Africa: Nigeria as an example'. Sagagi wrote: 'The most important thing that distinguishes the relationship between [Sudan and Nigeria] is education, and especially Islamic education.' As examples of this relationship, Sagagi noted the role

⁴ Interview with Aminu Isma'il Sagagi, 2 November 2011, Kano, Nigeria.

⁵ *Ibid.*

of Sudanese shaykhs at the School for Arabic Studies and the influence of early scholarship winners to Sudan, such as Abubakar Gumi (1924–92), the forerunner of the contemporary northern Nigerian Salafi movement (Sagagi 2012). Sagagi frames such encounters positively, perhaps eliding a kind of cultural clash between some traditionalists in Kano and the relatively modernist Sudanese shaykhs who arrived in the 1930s after graduating from Gordon College. Although Sagagi alludes only briefly to his own experiences in Sudan in the essay, he situates his studies in Sudan within a larger tradition of educational exchanges between the two countries.

In the late 1990s, between the time of his return from Sudan and the implementation of shari'a, Sagagi was committed to preaching and writing in favour of shari'a. He published short tracts on spiritual and moral themes, including *Man As Allah Wants Him To Be (Dan Adam Kamar Yadda Allah Ya Ke Sonsa)*. From 1999 to 2003 – in other words, during the most intensive phase of shari'a implementation – Sagagi studied at BUK, completing his MA in Islamic Studies and producing the thesis analysed below, entitled 'Al-Madhab al-Mālikī wa-Taṭbīq al-Sharī'a al-Islāmiyya fī Kānū' (The Maliki Legal School and the Application of the Islamic Shari'a in Kano). Sagagi began teaching in the faculty of shari'a at Aminu Kano College of Islamic Studies, where he held the post of assistant dean of shari'a as of 2011. From 2009 to 2011, he was adviser to Kano State governor Ibrahim Shekarau on traditional Islamic schools (*tsangayu*).⁶ He completed his PhD at IUA in 2012, and joined the Department of Islamic Studies at BUK.

Sagagi's MA thesis addresses practical problems as well as conceptual errors that he perceived in the selection of sources for Kano State's shari'a code. Sagagi seeks to establish that it is not only permissible to seek rulings from outside one's legal school (*madhhab*), but also necessary. He pursues a middle way between two poles, namely '[1] those who perceive the necessity of being bound by the Maliki school and [2] those who see liberation from the yoke of all the schools'. Instead, he advocates 'the method that combines working with the Maliki school as a basis, authorizing the use of fatwas of other schools and other individuals when their fatwas have stronger proof and are closer to fulfilling the aims of the shari'a' (Sagagi 2003: 6). Sagagi refers to this principle as *infitāh* or 'openness', which he defines as 'expanding the chest to welcome an opinion of another school and preferring it to our school under necessity, if it serves the legal goal of carrying out justice and securing the public interest more than if we used the fatwa of our school' (*ibid.*: 99). Sagagi's notion of *infitāh* accords with some Salafis' belief that it is necessary to directly consult Islamic scriptures in jurisprudence rather than following established legal schools, but Sagagi does not link *infitāh* to the Salafi canon or to other Salafi themes such as anti-Shi'ism or anti-Sufism, nor does he advocate abandoning legal schools entirely.

In advocating *infitāh*, Sagagi opposes himself to Maliki traditionalists in Kano. He contrasts the idea of *infitāh* to the notions of *taqayyud* or 'being bound' to one school alone. He pays special attention to refuting the traditionalists' core arguments against *infitāh*. The traditionalists' arguments, as summarized by Sagagi, include: (1) the idea that exclusive affiliation to a school was crucial for preventing chaos within the community; (2) the idea that Kano lacked ulama who had attained the capacity to perform *ijtihād*, or Islamic legal reasoning based directly on interpreting foundational source

⁶ *Ibid.*

texts to solve ambiguous issues, rather than relying fully on inherited scholarly opinions; and (3) the idea that the history of the Islamic community in northern Nigeria had established Malikism as the unshakeable tradition of the region.

A core issue in this debate is Sagagi's contention that one's positions must be backed by a proof (*hujja*) or piece of evidence (*dalil*). For Sagagi, the need for proof applies not only to individual fatwas, and to the question of whether one school's proof for a certain ruling is stronger than that of another school, but also to one's overall stance on the question of *infitāh* and *taqayyud*. Sagagi writes: 'He who calls for being restricted to the walls of the *madhhab* alone, and blocks the mujtahid (practitioner of independent legal reasoning) from benefiting from other schools, lacks proof [*hujja*]' (Sagagi 2003: 26). Sagagi's arguments here parallel the types of arguments that Salafis deploy against Sufis to condemn practices such as visiting saints' tombs, or that Salafis deploy against traditionalist Malikis to challenge practices such as praying with one's hands at one's sides while standing. Yet Sagagi is less interested in pursuing controversies over spirituality and worship than he is in conceptualizing the law as a fundamentally open field; Sagagi is also more interested than the Salafis in preserving the authority of the schools, favouring a blending of the positions of different schools over the common Salafi posture that the schools themselves are screens between the believer and a supposedly pure, clear, singular interpretation of the law.

The issue of evidence brings Sagagi to the question of *ijtihād*, which he treats as a methodological stance vis-à-vis proofs and pieces of evidence. *Ijtihād* is superior to another possible stance, *taqlid*. *Ijtihād* is also a necessary corrective to the dangers of yet a third possible stance, *ittibā'*. Sagagi defines these concepts as follows: 'Taqlid is following the imam without knowing his evidence, and *ittibā'* is following the imam after knowing his evidence. *Taqlid* is blameworthy and *ittibā'* is praiseworthy. Yet *ittibā'* may be worse than *taqlid* when the follower knows the weakness of his imam's proof and follows him despite that' (Sagagi 2003: 89). The need to supply and weigh proofs is thus present at every level of one's legal worldview. For Sagagi, *ijtihād* is 'legitimate by the text of the Qur'an and the Sunna' (*ibid.*: 89) and a communal obligation (*farḍ kifāya*), meaning that every Muslim community must possess a mujtahid.

With these arguments in hand, Sagagi can address some of the traditionalists' practical objections to *infitāh*. First, he writes that chaos stemming from *infitāh* can be avoided if laws are properly codified. Sagagi rejects the claim that Kano lacks qualified mujtahids, writing: '*Ijtihād* is as easy as can be [*aysar mā yakūn*] in the present age, where the fatwas of the 'ulamā' have been set down, and scattered fields of knowledge gathered, and different arts classified' (Sagagi 2003: 90). Kano has the assets, he asserts, to produce mujtahids: 'We have seen that the city of Kano, in terms of what it contains by way of ulama, sources, and intellectual institutes, surpasses the degree of *taqlid*. It is within the capacity of its scholars to perform *ijtihād*, deduce rulings, and weigh different pieces of evidence' (*ibid.*: 92). Rather than viewing the present as degraded and incapable of producing authentic legal thought at the highest level, Sagagi posits a hopeful present where the barriers to *ijtihād* are decreasing.

Like Sanusi (see below), Sagagi suggests that his opponents are parochial. This move relativizes aspects of northern Nigerian history. Sagagi characterizes the conflict between traditionalists and proponents of *infitāh* as the result of Nigeria's

growing contacts with the Arab world. When adherence to Malikism was encoded by northern Nigerian legal scholars at independence, Sagagi writes:

Embracing the Maliki school and confining legislation to its circle was not considered a problem at the beginning, for it was not a site of struggle or an object of controversy among the ulama and judges in those bygone days. But it became a problem at a later time, a time after the independence of Nigeria, which was the time that saw more intellectual delegations to Arab countries, and also more intellectual deputations from Arab countries to Nigeria, and likewise more higher Islamic institutions and universities, and more books and articles coming from the Arab countries. These factors have worked together to widen the horizons of ulama and students in Nigeria and to acquaint them with the specifics of the other schools. (Sagagi 2003: 60)

The idea of ‘widening horizons’ fits with Sagagi’s own intellectual experience at IUA and with his emphasis on the ‘openness’ necessary for *infitāh*. Contacts with the Arab world, Sagagi continues, gave some scholars ‘moral courage that allows them to openly criticize some of the Maliki fatwas’, or even reject the four schools entirely. Traditionalists reacted to these changes with ‘resentment [*ḥafīza*]’. Traditionalists avowed ‘the necessity of returning to the foundations of being bound to the Maliki School and not going outside it to any other school, because the Maliki School is the school followed in the country since the age of ‘Uthmān dan Fodio’ (Sagagi 2003: 61). Echoes of Nigerian modernists’ condemnations of traditionalists in the 1960s and 1970s are heard in Sagagi’s writing; like the modernists, Sagagi charges traditionalists with using tradition as a screen for their fear of change.

Sagagi spends much of his thesis discussing the historical legacy of Malikism in present-day northern Nigeria. First, he questions the idea that Malikism was always the sole school available in the region (Sagagi 2003: 54–6). Second, he questions traditionalists’ portrayal of dan Fodio as an exclusivist Maliki (*ibid.*: 73). Indeed, Sagagi invokes dan Fodio’s authority as a means of bolstering his own argument: ‘He is the one who is especially esteemed by all the people of knowledge in Nigeria, and known for knowledge, labour, seriousness, and *jītihād*. He is among Allah’s pious saints [*awliyāʾ Allah al-ṣāliḥīn*], and his word is heeded, so we will pose the question to him and listen to his answer to it’ (*ibid.*: 79). Sagagi then produces numerous quotations from dan Fodio expressing the permissibility of going outside one’s legal school in search of individual rulings. Sagagi concludes:

It has been established that Shaykh ‘Uthmān dan Fodio gave weight to the view [*al-rājiḥ ‘inda al-Shaykh ‘Uthmān bin Fudī*] that it was permissible to move from one school to another school, and that there was no *taqayyud* to a certain school by compulsion, and that this did not prevent a man from having a specific school that he followed as a basis, only leaving it under necessity, such as the weakness of a proof from his school for example, and that if he did this no one needed to rebuke him. (Sagagi 2003: 84)

Sagagi invokes the example of dan Fodio to legitimate calls for the introduction of ideas that go against the political, legal and religious status quo.

In a demonstration of his eclecticism, Sagagi also cites opinions and cases from the contemporary world to support his stance of *infitāh*. In response to (unnamed) opponents of *infitāh* who say that Arab countries each follow a specific school, Sagagi responds that Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan and other countries all allow for the use of multiple schools. He mentions prominent Arab scholars as supporters of *infitāh*, such as Al-Azhar's Muhammad Shaltūt and al-Qaradāwī (Sagagi 2003: 67–8). He closes with recommendations for Kano, including the active promotion of *infitāh* and *ijtihad*: 'We must seek to erase the idea of the closure of the gate of *ijtihad* by every legitimate means' (*ibid.*: 102).

Sagagi focuses on details of shari'a implementation, advocating values not only as ends in themselves, but also as the basis for policy changes at the micro level. Sagagi's efforts remained unsuccessful – the penal code in Kano retained its exclusive adherence to Malikism – but his thought offers a perspective on both the versatility and the limits of history for Islamic reformers in contemporary northern Nigeria. History allowed Sagagi to localize his call for change. Yet it also constrained him, making him feel compelled to address the issue of *infitāh* not only on a scriptural level or through abstract intellectual arguments, but in terms of the principle's possible relationships to the local past.

Sanusi Lamido Sanusi

Sanusi Lamido Sanusi was born in 1961. His father, Muhammad Lamido Sanusi, served as Nigeria's ambassador to Canada, Belgium and China, and as permanent secretary of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His grandfather, Muhammad Sanusi, was the emir of Kano from 1954 to 1963. Sanusi attended St Anne's primary school in Kaduna, and then studied at King's College Lagos from 1973 to 1977, an experience that may have provided an early dose of eclecticism. He attended ABU, graduating with a BSc in Economics in 1981. As a student at ABU during this time, he encountered a student body strongly influenced by the Muslim Students' Society and forms of pro-Iranian Islamism. From approximately 1991 to 1997, Sanusi studied at IUA, obtaining a diploma (or, according to some sources, a BA) in shari'a and Islamic Studies.⁷ Since the 1980s, Sanusi has spent much of his career in banking, working for two of the largest banks in Nigeria. In the 1990s and 2000s, he published editorials in Nigerian print and online sources and authored a scholarly article on shari'a in northern Nigeria for the edited volume *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa* (Sanusi 2007). In 2009, President Umaru Yar'Adua appointed Sanusi as governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, but he was forced out in early 2014, several months before the end of his first five-year term, due to allegations Sanusi made regarding corruption under then president Goodluck Jonathan (in office 2010–15). Sanusi was appointed emir of Kano in 2014 by then Kano governor Rabiu Kwankwaso on the death of Sanusi's great-uncle Emir Ado Bayero (in power 1963–2014); he remained emir until he was forced out of that post in 2020 amid a conflict with Kano governor Abdullahi Ganduje (who took office in 2015). Sanusi's relatively brief tenure as emir was heavily affected by the vicissitudes of politics. Politics facilitated his rise to the emirship (bypassing the

⁷ 'Sanusi Lamido Sanusi: a profile', *Leadership*, 15 December 2009 <<http://allafrica.com/stories/200912160227.html>>.

Bayero family) when it was advantageous to Kwankwaso, but then cost him the emirship when Ganduje perceived him as an enemy and a threat. For reasons of space, I analyse Sanusi's political views here as expressed through the mid-2000s, and do not deal with the complex topic of his role in politics from his time as Central Bank governor, emir of Kano, and post-dethronement as a public intellectual and activist.

Tracking the influence of IUA on Sanusi's thought is difficult. In public remarks, Sanusi has said little about the content of his studies there or his experience of life in Sudan. In his writings on Islam in contemporary northern Nigeria and on the shari'a movement, Sanusi has sometimes referred to Nigerian graduates of Arab universities, noting their influence and occasionally critiquing their training, particularly the training of graduates of Saudi Arabian universities. One of Sanusi's public references to Arab-educated Nigerians came in a 2005 lecture at the University of Bayreuth, entitled 'Globalization, modernity and the shari'ah in Nigeria'. He argued:

The structure of northern society and the deliberate insulation of its people from the influence of modernity have combined to facilitate the resort to Islam as the resource for identity in a time of economic and political insecurity. This means that 'globalization' has, in the local context of Muslim northern Nigeria, brought in influences not from the western, but from the Arab and Islamic worlds. To the extent that most of the rest of the country is, on the contrary, under the strong influence of western discourses, the fabric of the nation is thus dragged, if you like, in two radically opposed directions. (Sanusi 2005b)

African graduates of Arab universities, he said, were part of the process whereby Arab and Middle Eastern influences were increasingly transmitted to northern Nigeria (Sanusi 2005b). Building on this notion, Sanusi has accorded graduates of Arab universities a major role in his historical explanation of the shari'a project. 'In many [northern] states,' he wrote in 2007, 'the implementation of sharia was a result, at least outwardly, of mass popular demand for it, led by mainly young and educated Muslims associated with Muslim activism and supported by Islamic scholars, particularly graduates of Arab universities' (Sanusi 2007: 177). A more critical remark by Sanusi concerns the content of Islamic studies programmes. In 2005, he wrote: 'Many of the problems associated with public intellectual discourse on Islam in Nigeria have their roots in the failure of the academic faculties of Islamic studies in the universities that trained the participants, especially in Nigeria and Saudi Arabia' (Sanusi 2005a).

To this 'failure', Sanusi contrasts what he calls 'modern research in Islamic studies'. That kind of study, he argues, brings an emphasis on the social sciences, which allows students to de-essentialize Islam and grasp how the language of religion covers ideological agendas: 'Through application of the generic methods of political economy, one is able to lift the veil of mumbo-jumbo and expose the implicit social and political violence to which the masses of Muslims are subjected, a violence that must thereafter be resisted irrespective of the religious affiliation of the perpetrators' (Sanusi 2005a). Sanusi indicates here that he considers himself a product of educational pluralism, rather than simply an Arab-educated Nigerian, and he dissociates himself from Salafism. Related to this educational pluralism is the intellectual eclecticism that characterizes Sanusi's writings on Islam. Sanusi routinely cites figures in the Islamic

tradition such as Ibn al Qayyim and Ibn Taymiyya, but he also engages the ideas of non-Muslim scholars, particularly philosophers such as G. F. W. Hegel and Bertrand Russell, and Marxists including Antonio Gramsci. Sanusi deploys this eclecticism to integrate his brand of progressive Islam into a broader, global intellectual discursive sphere.

By 1998, shortly after he returned from Sudan, Sanusi was writing columns in the *Daily Trust* and in online forums. Already in these pieces, he articulated the intellectual framework that runs through his writings on shari'ā. A central component of this framework is the idea that Islamic movements and institutions are historically conditioned rather than universally replicable. In written exchanges in 1998 and 1999, Sanusi and a columnist named Dalhatu Sani Yola debated the place of Nigerian Christians in a possible Islamic state. Sanusi wrote that the Islamic state as represented by the Abbasid caliphate was more advanced than other civilizations of its time in granting rights to women, slaves and non-Muslims, but also argued that 'human civilization has moved on':

Every civilized democracy guarantees its citizens the rights Yola lists out as being guaranteed to non-Muslims by the Islamic State . . . The surprise, for me, is that an intelligent Muslim can consider this 'paradigmatic construct' [i.e. of the Islamic state] both 'viable and feasible' in 'contemporary Nigeria'. It is also a travesty of Islam to insist on holding on to the interpretations of the law which were made by scholars of earlier generations, rather than the spirit of preserving the status of Islamic Society as a model for human liberation and happiness to which human beings would converge and which they would emulate. (Sanusi 1999a)

This passage implies some of the principles that Sanusi advocates elsewhere, especially the notions that the most valuable aspects of the Islamic tradition are universal, and that what Islam means in any particular historical period can and should shift. Contemporary examples of Muslim activists' (failed, in Sanusi's eyes) efforts to treat Islamic institutions as universal, he has often argued, expose anomalies in their paradigm that render it untenable.

For Sanusi, this means that true Muslim activists work for the broad benefit of ordinary Muslims in a manner that acknowledges historical change and avoids the exploitative politicization of the faith. In a second response to Yola, Sanusi clarified:

For me, the Islamic struggle is, on the political plane, a struggle aimed at the revolutionary transformation of society such as to bring it closer to the Islamic ideals of justice, honesty and fair play and create a society that respects the liberty and dignity of its citizens irrespective of creed. (Sanusi 1999b)

In another essay from the same period, Sanusi warns that Muslim activists face terrible risks if they cannot adapt to present realities:

Committed to the Islamic ideal but blissfully ignorant of reality and what it takes to change it, the movement has kept itself apart from the very processes that need to be controlled if society is to be changed. Holding on to slogans and

declaring its commitment to an Islamic State and no other, the movement has been left holding up an ideal incapable of bearing fruit. Instead of Islamizing the politics of the country, the movement has succeeded in politicising Islam, using it to gain some popularity and, in some cases, turning Muslim youth into vandals and drop-outs with little hope for building a life of their own, not to talk of leading society to the path of progress. (Sanusi 1998)

These views are reflected in Sanusi's attitude towards the shari'a project; instead of using shari'a as a means to empower the poor and promote social justice, he felt, unscrupulous activists had taken advantage of ordinary Muslims' aspirations for a better Nigeria.

In his 2000 article 'Shariacracy in Nigeria', Sanusi depicts the mobilization for shari'a as a bid for power on the part of the religious scholars, especially the 'Wahhabis':

Even if the ulama's recent conversion to fundamentalist discourse were to be taken as a genuine religious miracle, the implementation of shariah makes them indispensable as custodians of knowledge of what the shariah is. The religious establishment, as a class, therefore stands most to benefit politically from shariacracy, since the project propels them into the role of policy makers after decades of marginalisation by western-educated 'yan boko. (Sanusi 2000)

Sanusi echoes these remarks in his 2007 chapter for the volume *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa*, writing that the movement for shari'a must be understood 'within the context of an ongoing struggle among various factions of the political elite for ascendancy' and reiterating his argument that 'many of the scholars at the forefront of the project to establish sharia in Nigeria today – understood as the implementation of penal laws – are of a strict Wahhabist orientation' and 'use Wahhabism as a vehicle for social mobility and a challenge to the establishment' (Sanusi 2007: 184).

Sanusi does not understand the shari'a movement as an instance of *tajdid*, a recurring purification of Islam, but as a historically contingent and deeply problematic social construct. He does not object to the implementation of shari'a in the abstract. For him, the issue is how activists define shari'a. In keeping with the idea of the shari'a project as historically contingent, he perceives 'a contest over the definition of Islam and the limits of the rights due to religious scholars in the public sphere' (Sanusi 2000). An 'excessive focus on the penal code' in 'existing "Islamic" states', he writes, engenders 'despotism', violations of human freedoms, corruption, 'the suppression of women', and a tendency to religious conflict. These conditions in turn undermine 'the principles of peace, tolerance, freedom, equality, justice promised by Islam to all irrespective of race, class, creed and gender and fight against trends that undermine these principles' (*ibid.*). Labelling himself as a member of the 'progressive/liberal elements of the Muslim intelligentsia', Sanusi endorses the vision of shari'a as social and economic justice articulated by the Iranian leftist intellectual Dr Ali Shariati:

Shariati's system, stripped of its doctrinaire elements, is one possible source of inspiration for the Muslims in Nigeria. It represents a progressive ideology

aimed at not just imposing morals and laws but actualising Islam's objective of establishing justice and equity in the relation of man with man, and of liberating mankind from the service of men to the service of the 'Creator of men' . . . This has placed me in seeming conflict with traditional scholarship and the political class. What they portray as piety I consider hypocrisy. What they see as achievement I see as diversion. Until shariacracy focuses on the true problem of the north, the condition of its people, it will not in my book be serving its purpose. (Sanusi 2000)

The contrast Sanusi hints at between 'Islamic' states – a term he places in scare quotes – and the progressive vision of Shariati also opens up alternative readings of the history of Iran, one that suggests alternative historical pathways that the Iranian Revolution could have taken and, by extension, alternative pathways available to Nigeria.

Noteworthy in this context are Sanusi's occasionally critical comments on episodes of shari'ā implementation in Sudan. 'We know from the experience of the Sudan under Gaafar El-Numayri,' he wrote in a 2002 essay, 'that all attempts at implementing the hudood without consideration of the material conditions of the majority have ended in disaster.' In this passage Sanusi cites Dr Abdullahi Ahmed al Na'im (b. 1946), a Sudanese dissident intellectual who has sharply criticized shari'ā implementation under both Numayri and the NIF (Sanusi 2002). Sanusi elsewhere rejects al Na'im's proposal (and that of al Na'im's teacher, the abovementioned Ṭāhā, who was executed by Numayri's government) for an abrogation of Qur'anic verses revealed in Medina, a proposal al Na'im argues will allow for the progressive vision of the Meccan verses of the Qur'an to shine forth. Sanusi instead favours the wholesale reinterpretation of the Qur'an advocated by the Syrian thinker Muhammad Shahrur (Sanusi 2003). Sanusi's disagreements with al Na'im and Ṭāhā aside, his willingness to criticize shari'ā implementation in Sudan and to engage sympathetically with a tradition of Islamic dissent by Sudanese intellectuals indicates that his time at IUA did not leave Sanusi with allegiances to state-led Islamization in Sudan; on the contrary, Islamization in Sudan becomes a negative example for Sanusi when he discusses the shari'ā question in contemporary Nigeria.

Like Sagagi, Sanusi seeks to anchor his vision of shari'ā in local history by invoking the legacy of Nigerian leaders:

I will go as far as to say that the Revolutionary Islam preached by Shariati is exactly the same ideology guiding Mallam Aminu Kano and his NEPU/PRP [Northern Elements Progressive Union/People's Redemption Party]. Aminu Kano, himself a committed Muslim, saw the correct direction of Islam lying in the liberation of the oppressed and dispossessed (Talakawa) from the proprietors and oppressors. (Sanusi 2000)

Sanusi also aligns himself with the views of Dr Yusuf Bala Usman and other 'left-wing Muslim intellectuals based in ABU, Zaria' who called on northern governors to 'focus on the welfare of the masses rather than divert attention through fundamentalist rhetoric' (Sanusi 2000). Alternative pathways for the shari'ā projects, he suggests,

are available based on Nigeria's own historical experience as well. When Sanusi relates Shariati to Aminu Kano, he is localizing and internationalizing at the same time, legitimating his position by localizing it and connecting northern Nigerian leftist Muslim politics to global histories of 'progressive' Islam.

Treating Islamic values and systems helps Sanusi to resolve the problem of northern identity itself, and here too he has recourse to history. Northerners, Sanusi writes, confront the 'question of a triple identity' as they struggle to determine the relationship between their religious, regional and ethnic identities. In this context, Sanusi also localizes his ideas with respect to Shaykh 'Uthmān dan Fodio while globalizing the significance of the Sokoto caliphate (see Last 1967). Drawing on but also critiquing the work of the Nigerian intellectual Dr Muhammad Tukur, who wrote on values in the Sokoto caliphate, Sanusi argues:

The definitive basis for identity of the northern Muslim is Islam, as a corpus of teachings rather than of actions of persons . . . Every other identity is subsumed under our Islamic identity and the Islamic values are the ones worthy of defending. These are not to be sacrificed in the name of 'nationalism' or 'northern politics' or even 'Muslims'. (Sanusi 2001)

Going a step further, Sanusi argues that these values are not exclusively Islamic:

Accepting the principle means that a system being 'Christian,' or 'Western,' or 'Chinese' or whatever does not, in itself, make it incompatible with the political values identified by Dr. Tukur . . . Indeed the evidence of the world we live in today is that the 'core caliphal values' Dr. Tukur wishes us to have, are more present in the 'Christian Civilisations' of the 'Western Liberal Democracies' than in Muslim countries. (Sanusi 2001)

Sanusi both upholds and decentres the experience of Sokoto, and even the experience of Islam itself. A search for progressive Islamic values and political systems, he suggests, should lead Muslims to re-evaluate how they view their own and other societies, and how they define the universality of values.

Historical interpretation permeates Sanusi's progressive notions of Islam and shari'a. First, Sanusi analyses Islamic institutions and concepts as historically situated phenomena that are subject to change. Shari'a is, for him, a set of principles that can be actualized in different, historically appropriate ways. Second, Sanusi situates the shari'a project in northern Nigeria within a specific historical context and casts doubt on the motives of the project's supporters, questioning their claims to religious authority and depicting them as opportunists who exploit religion to gain popularity. Third, Sanusi finds expressions of progressive Islam in both global Islamic intellectual history and the northern Nigerian progressive political tradition. Sanusi uses history as a tool to define, globalize and localize a progressive shari'a.

Conclusion

The implementation of shari'a in northern Nigeria evoked diverse responses from Muslim intellectuals. This article has explored the minority perspectives of two

Nigerian graduates of Sudan's IUA. As products of educational pluralism, these intellectuals' perspectives should be understood as the result of interactions between their views and the different educational settings they encountered. Attending IUA in the early 1990s exposed them to the NIF's efforts to Islamize Sudanese society and implement shari'a, as well as to the stream of international Islamists and Muslim thinkers who visited Sudan in response to the NIF's global outreach. Aminu Sagagi linked his later views on shari'a to the 'horizon-widening' effects of his time at IUA and his study of comparative *fiqh*. Sanusi Lamido Sanusi has not drawn such a tight connection between his views and his time at IUA, but his writings critically engaged Sudan's shari'a project as part of his broader engagement with debates over the nature of shari'a. Both Sagagi and Sanusi embody an intellectual eclecticism that seems partly shaped by their time in Sudan, and deeply connected to their willingness to break with majority views in northern Nigeria of what shari'a should mean.

Sagagi and Sanusi critique the shari'a project at different levels. Sagagi calls for *infitāh* or open-mindedness regarding jurisprudential methodologies. Rather than strict adherence to the Maliki *madhhab*, he urges *ijtihad* and the willingness to derive rulings from other schools. Sagagi grounds his advocacy of *infitāh* in a textualist emphasis on the necessity of supporting individual jurisprudential rulings, as well as one's overall jurisprudential framework, with scriptural evidence. Sanusi, for his part, defines shari'a as a set of goals oriented towards bettering the lives of poor people and promoting social justice. Muslim activists, and particularly Arab-educated reformers, have in his eyes often invoked shari'a not to establish justice but to acquire popularity. Sanusi favours activism that adapts to what he calls social realities.

That Sagagi and Sanusi have both achieved public prominence despite their minority views on shari'a highlights the existence of multiple Islamic worldviews, even outlier perspectives, in contemporary northern Nigeria. Thinkers advocating new models of shari'a and Islam sometimes reach for diverse components in generating these models, embracing intellectual eclecticism while attempting to narrate history in ways that make new ideas resonant in the local context. The shari'a project itself provides new spaces, at least at the margins, where new legal and religious worldviews are constructed and negotiated.

The intellectuals discussed in this article show one way in which common frameworks for analysing Islam in Nigeria, and particularly northern Nigeria, are limiting. The Sufi-Salafi dichotomy does not capture the full range of debates occurring around law and politics. Meanwhile, sites of consequential translocal contacts (Sudan here, but one might add Malaysia) have not been sufficiently considered in research on the changing identities and worldviews of Nigerian Muslims. Finally, the intellectual history of contemporary northern Nigeria remains woefully under-analysed – topics such as the Boko Haram insurgency, the rise of the Salafi movement and the politics of shari'a implementation (all topics that I myself have tried to understand) have at times overshadowed the need to understand quieter but still important dynamics in the intellectual sphere. Part of remapping the study of Islam in Nigeria will involve greater attention to spaces and conversations where Muslims' intellectual and spiritual exploration, rather than polemics and contestation, is occurring.

References

- Abbas, A. A. (1991) 'The National Islamic Front and the politics of education', *Middle East Report* 172 (September/October) <<http://www.merip.org/mer/mer172/national-islamic-front-politics-education>>.
- Abubakar, A. (1972) *Al-Thaqāfa al-'Arabiyya fi Najjīriyā min 1804 ilā 1960 'Ām al-Istiqlāl*. Beirut: [no publisher].
- Ahmad, H. M. M. (2006) *Qissatī ma'a al-Haraka al-Islāmiyya*. Khartoum: Hay'at al-A'māl al-Fikriyya.
- Ahmed, C. (2018) *Preaching Islamic Revival in East Africa*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Akhtar, I. (2016) *The Khōjā of Tanzania: discontinuities of a postcolonial religious identity*. Leiden: Brill.
- Bayat, A. (ed.) (2013) *Post-Islamism: the changing faces of political Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ben Amara, R. (2014) "'We introduced shari'a' – the Izala movement in Nigeria as initiator of shari'a-reimplementation in the north of the country: some reflections' in J. Chesworth and F. Kogelmann (eds), *Shari'a in Africa Today: reactions and responses*. Leiden: Brill.
- Burr, J. M. and R. O. Collins (2003) *Revolutionary Sudan: Hasan al-Turabi and the Islamist state, 1989–2000*. Leiden and Boston MA: Brill.
- El Tantawi, S. (2017) *Shari'ah on Trial: northern Nigeria's Islamic revolution*. Berkeley and Los Angeles CA: University of California Press.
- Farquhar, M. (2016) *Circuits of Faith: migration, education, and the Wahhabi mission*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press.
- Gräf, B. and J. Skovgaard-Petersen (eds) (2009) *Global Mufti: the phenomenon of Yusuf al-Qaradawi*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kane, O. (2003) *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria: a study of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition*. Leiden: Brill.
- Kendhammer, B. (2016) *Muslims Talking Politics: framing Islam, democracy, and law in northern Nigeria*. Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Last, M. (1967) *The Sokoto Caliphate*. London: Longmans, Green and Co.
- Leichtman, M. (2015) *Shi'i Cosmopolitanisms in Africa: Lebanese migration and religious conversion in Senegal*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press.
- Lo, M. (2009) *Understanding Muslim Discourse: language, tradition, and the message of Bin Laden*. Lanham MD: University Press of America.
- Lo, M. (2011) *Reforming Higher Education in Africa: the case of IUA*. Second edition. Cairo: Dar al Ittihad li Taba'a.
- Loimeier, R. (1997) *Islamic Reform and Political Change in Northern Nigeria*. Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Loimeier, R. (2005) 'Playing with affiliations: Muslims in northern Nigeria in the 20th century' in L. Fourchard, A. Mary and R. Otayek (eds), *Entreprises religieuses transnationales en Afrique de l'Ouest*. Paris: Karthala.
- Loimeier, R. (2016) *Islamic Reform in Twentieth-Century Africa*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Lubeck, P. (2011) 'Nigeria: mapping a shari'a restorationist movement' in R. Hefner (ed.), *Shari'a Politics: Islamic law and society in the modern world*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press.
- Masquelier, A. (2009) *Women and Islamic Revival in a West African Town*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press.
- Miles, W. F. S. (2000) 'Muslim ethnopolitics and presidential elections in Nigeria', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 20: 229–41.
- Mouline, N. (2014) *The Clerics of Islam: religious authority and political power in Saudi Arabia*. Translated by E. Rundell. New Haven CT: Yale University Press.
- Musa, A. (2010) 'The return of "African Islamic Center"', *The Nile*, 16 September.
- Østebø, T. (2012) *Localising Salafism: religious change among Oromo Muslims in Bale, Ethiopia*. Leiden: Brill.
- Paden, J. (1973) *Religion and Political Culture in Kano*. Berkeley and Los Angeles CA: University of California Press.
- Pew Research Center (2012) *The World's Muslims: unity and diversity*. Washington DC: Forum on Religion and Public Life, Pew Research Center.
- Sagagi, A. (2003) 'Al-Madhab al-Mālikī wa-Taṭbīq al-Shari'a al-Islāmiyya fi Kānū'. MA dissertation, Bayero University Kano.

- Sagagi, A. (2012) 'Alāqat al-Sūdān ma'ā Gharb Ifriqiyyā: Nayjiriyā Namūdhajan', *Sudanile*, 23 November <http://www.sudanile.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=47068:-----q-q-----&catid=34:2008-05-19-17-14-27&Itemid=55>.
- Salomon, N. (2016) *For Love of the Prophet: an ethnography of Sudan's Islamic state*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sanusi, S. L. (1998) 'On the Islamisation of politics & the politicisation of Islam (revised)', Gamji [online] <<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:ga4snFqh32UJ:www.gamji.com/sanusi/sanusi14.htm+&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>>.
- Sanusi, S. L. (c.1999a) 'Non-Muslims in a contemporary Islamic state', Gamji [online] <<http://www.gamji.com/sanusi/sanusi4.htm>>.
- Sanusi, S. L. (c.1999b) 'The Islamic movement: the real issues a response to Yola', Gamji [online] <<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:de4mvo85c9GJ:www.gamji.com/sanusi/sanusi5.htm+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>>.
- Sanusi, S. L. (2000) 'Shariacracy in Nigeria: the intellectual roots of Islamist discourses', Niger Delta Congress [online] <http://www.nigerdeltacongress.com/sarticles/shariacracy_in_nigeria.htm>.
- Sanusi, S. L. (2001) 'Values and identity in the Muslim north', Gamji, 21 January [online] <<http://www.gamji.com/sanusi/sanusi19.htm>>.
- Sanusi, S. L. (2002) 'The hudood punishments in the northern Nigeria: a Muslim criticism', Gamji, 1 October [online] <<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:ruyje9gpkQgJ:www.gamji.com/sanusi/sanusi30.htm+&cd=48&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>>, accessed 1 June 2013.
- Sanusi, S. L. (2003) 'Democracy, rights and Islam: theory, epistemology and the quest for synthesis'. Conference presentation, 'Shari'ah Penal and Family Law in Nigeria and in the Muslim World: A Rights Based Approach', International Human Rights Law Group, Abuja, 5-7 August <<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:vdVF5ax3678J:www.gamji.com/sanusi/sanusi36.htm+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>>.
- Sanusi, S. L. (2005a) 'Identity, political ethics and parochialism: engagement with Ja'far Adam (2)', Gamji, 3 May [online] <<http://www.gamji.com/sanusi/sanusi50.htm>>.
- Sanusi, S. L. (2005b) 'Globalization, modernity and the shari'ah in Nigeria: an essay in political economy'. Lecture delivered at the University of Bayreuth, 22 June <<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:LlKHKNofpYJ:www.gamji.com/sanusi/sanusi52.htm+&cd=53&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>>.
- Sanusi, S. L. (2007) 'Politics and shari'a in northern Nigeria' in B. F. Soares and R. Otayek (eds), *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa*. New York NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Soares, B. (2000) 'Notes on the anthropological study of Islam and Muslim societies in Africa', *Culture and Religion* 1: 277-85.
- Soares, B. (2005) *Islam and the Prayer Economy: history and authority in a Malian town*. Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Soares, B. (2007) 'Rethinking Islam and Muslim societies in Africa', *African Affairs* 106: 319-26.
- Thomas, E. (2010) *Islam's Perfect Stranger: the life of Mahmud Muhammad Taha, Muslim reformer of Sudan*. London and New York NY: I. B. Tauris.
- Thurston, A. (2015) 'Muslim politics and shari'a in Kano State, northern Nigeria', *African Affairs* 114 (454): 28-51.
- Thurston, A. (2016) *Salafism in Nigeria: Islam, preaching and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thurston, A. (2017) 'Islamic modernism and colonial education in northern Nigeria: Na'ibi Sulaiman Wali (1927-2013)', *Religion and Education* 44 (1): 101-17.
- Thurston, A. (2018) 'Polyvalent, transnational religious authority: the Tijaniyya Sufi order and Al-Azhar University', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 86 (3): 789-820.
- Thurston, A. (2020) 'Why are there few Islamist parties south of the Sahara?' in H. Aidi, M. Lynch and Z. Mampilly (eds), *Africa and the Middle East: beyond the divides*. Washington DC: Project on Middle East Political Science.

Alexander Thurston is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Cincinnati. His research focuses on Islam and politics in West and North Africa. He is the author of three books: *Salafism in Nigeria* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); *Boko Haram: the history of an African jihadist movement* (Princeton University Press, 2018); and *Jihadists of North Africa and the Sahel* (Cambridge University Press, 2020). He has held fellowships with the Council on Foreign Relations, the Wilson Center and the American Council of Learned Societies. He has conducted field research in Nigeria, Mauritania, Mali, Senegal and Burkina Faso.

Cite this article: Thurston, A. (2022). 'Northern Nigerian intellectuals, Sudan, and the "eclectic style" in contemporary Islamic thought'. *Africa* 92, 798–818. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972022000602>