

**The University of Florida  
The Islam in Africa Working Group, the Sahel Research Group, and the  
Center for Global Islamic Studies**

**Present the Symposium:**

**Winning Hearts and Minds?  
African Muslims and the Negotiation of Counterterrorism Policies**

February 19-20, 2016

The “global war on terror” may or may not have contributed to reducing the level of security threat, but it has certainly had some serious unintended consequences. Labels such as “violent extremists” have been often applied indiscriminately to Muslim communities, and policy measures frequently fail to recognize the heterogeneous nature of such communities. These dynamics are very much at play in African contexts as policymakers have found themselves struggling to find ways to react to violent developments. Inspired by the global discourse of “countering violent extremism” (CVE), supported by international funding for these efforts, and driven by often legitimate concerns about national security, many African states have embraced strong counterterrorism policies. These responses, however, often pay insufficient attention to inherent local complexities. In addition, local regimes can easily yield to the temptation to use counterterrorism measures as a means to marginalize or eliminate unwanted political opposition. These developments have placed African Muslims in a difficult situation, in which they are forced to negotiate their position within a political environment perceived as increasingly hostile. The resulting marginalization and stigmatization of Muslim communities as a consequence of such policies can lead to withdrawal from national political life with as yet unclear long-term consequences. Importantly, however, it can also often result in self-fulfilling prophecies as Muslim groups are further politicized and embrace new forms of religious militancy.

This symposium aims to investigate such dynamics by focusing on African states’ counterterrorism policies and analyzing how Muslim communities are responding. The intention is to interrogate commonly-held assumptions, to point to the need to recognize inherent complexities on the ground, and to stimulate constructive discussion around this topic. The symposium will include talks that address these issues from a general perspective as well as talks that focus on particularly relevant cases, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and Mali.

**Speakers**

- Murray Last, University College London
- David Anderson, University of Warwick/University of Oxford
- Hamidou Magassa, the National Administration School, Bamako
- Terje Østebø, University of Florida

**Program:**

## Friday February 19

3:30-5:00 (*Baraza*)

**Murray Last**

*Few Participants but many "Enablers": the Problem of Support for Militant Religious Movements in Northern Nigeria from 1800 till Today.*

## Saturday February 20

8:30 – 9:00

**Coffee & Tea**

9:00-10:00

**David Anderson**

*Kenya's Fight against Islamic 'Extremism'*

10:00-11:00

**Terje Ostebo**

*CVE Backfiring: The al-Ahbash and Muslim Protests in Ethiopia*

11:00-11:15

**Coffee & Tea**

11:15-12:15

**Hamidou Magaassa**

*State, Islam, and the Fight against Terrorism in Mali: The Paradoxes of an Imposed Collaboration*

12:15-1:30:

**Lunch**

1:30-3:00:

**Plenary panel discussion, all four speakers plus UF moderator**

### **Abstracts**

Murray Last: *Few Participants but many "Enablers": the Problem of Support for Militant Religious Movements in Northern Nigeria from 1800 till Today.*

In confronting radical religious movements we need to include the penumbra of tacit supporters that the radicals had – and often still have – despite the demonization of the radicals in the media. Historians from abroad as well as political scientists tend to rely on the local media, and never talk “live” to ordinary people, young and old, on the streets and in the alley-ways. Yet around groups like *Boko haram* there has long been a widespread ‘economy’, not only supplying fuel and foodstuffs but buying up loot – admittedly sometimes under duress. But all these ‘enablers’ also provided shelter, cared for the sick, buried bodies, and retained a general sympathy for the militants’ cause even though they were perhaps shocked by the brutalities and hurt by losses. Hence policy-makers in northern Nigeria, themselves Muslims and part (albeit much richer than most) of the 80 million-strong local Muslim community, if they are to counter a potential resurgence of militancy, need not only to identify the 5,000+ surviving militants in *Boko haram* but also work out how to satisfy the vast numbers that tacitly sympathized with the militants’ dreams. It is wrong, however, to assume *Boko haram* were all Muslim militants: some

Christians and opportunists joined the insurgency (it paid well). Thus any actual implementation of another “amnesty” (this time for Boko Haram; the previous one was for Niger Delta militants) and processes of “de-radicalization” will need to separate out the persistent militants from both the enablers and the secret sympathizers. The first task, however, is re-building the broken economy of Borno; there has been neither farming nor herding there this past year; even the fish-trade is near-dead.

David Anderson: *Kenya's Fight against Islamic 'Extremism'*

Since its invasion of southern Somalia in October 2011 to combat the threat of al-Shabaab, Kenya has been confronted by a domestic Islamist terror campaign. With the *Salafists* of al-Shabaab now committed to a regional insurrection that seeks to unite the *Ummah* against the enemies of Islam in eastern Africa, Kenya finds itself in the frontline of a war against Islamic fundamentalism. This paper reviews how the Kenyan state has reacted to this challenge, reflecting firstly upon the history of the treatment of Somalis and Muslims by the Kenyan state, before examining critical aspects of the current campaign – the cordon-and-search operations in Nairobi, the security measures against mosques, the role of the Anti-Terrorist Police Unit, the place of police reform in the current anti-terror campaign, and the role of the Kenyan military in combatting domestic insurrection in the aftermath of the attacks on the Westgate Mall and the university at Garissa. Dissent and disaffection have their causes. There is a need for a more subtle response on the part of the Kenyan state, addressing the propaganda efforts of al-Shabaab and tackling the substantive economic grievances and political marginalisation that is the reality for Muslim communities in Kenya.

Terje Ostebo: *CVE Backfiring: The al-Ahbash and Muslim Protests in Ethiopia*

While the distinction between “moderate” and “extremist” Muslims generally is construed as a Western project, depicting a reality of the West vs. Islam, we should not overlook how similar images are present in non-Western contexts, where historical narratives are being merged with the “war on terror” narrative. This contribution addresses such issues, and with Ethiopia as a case it explores the continued relevance of this context’s local perceptions of Islam and how disparate discourses of “othering” currently converge. It demonstrates how the current Ethiopian regime has moved from a policy of containing Islam, to promoting its own form of “governmental Islam”. Crucial in this regard is the cooperation between the regime and the Lebanese organization al-Ahbash and how this has created a reinforced narrative of perceived Islamic “extremism”. Moreover, the contribution also explores how this approach backfired on the government, something clearly expressed through large Muslim protests – charging the government of violating its own constitutional secularist principle. It also discusses how the protests became a “moderating” factor, strengthening Ethiopian Muslims’ commitment to secularism, constitutional rule and democratic values.

Hamidou Magassa: *State, Islam, and the Fight against Terrorism in Mali: The Paradoxes of an Imposed Collaboration*

Situated in-between the legality and the legitimacy of institutions—both public and private—that inform the political and religious choices of individuals, how have Malians managed to peacefully fight against the various forms of terrorism (separatist and Islamist, national and international) since the 1990s? In a sub-region haunted by the radicalization of religious trends,

notably Islamic ones, the combined effect of the French model of secularism and the traditions of the Islamic community still manage to provide a measure of public service, and even security, in Mali, though these efforts are still fragile. These two competing paradigms of power (formal and informal) have successfully balanced the complex management of resources, both real and symbolic, via a paradoxical negotiation of the roles assigned by democratic institutions to each of these two competing powers, simultaneously opposed and complicit."