

AN INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON

Islam, Islamism, and Human Rights in Africa

PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS AND PRESENTER BIOGRAPHIES *in program order*

The Interplay of Politics and Religion

Moderator: James Bono, Department of History, University at Buffalo



Jacob Kathman: "The Rationality of Abusing Civilians in Civil War"

Abstract: A routine aspect of civil wars is the abuse of civilians by the combatant factions. Civilian populations are often subjected to mistreatment, repression, and systematic killings. Yet, the collusion of the civilian population with rebel or government forces is critical to determining which combatant faction is successful in conflict. Why then are civilians so often abused by the combatants when these same combatants are reliant upon civilian loyalties? My research broadly examines this question. While I do not focus on particular cases of conflict and violence, my work looks across cases in an attempt to determine the conditions under which the combatants believe it rational to use violence against civilians. Further, I assess conflict

resolution techniques, such as United Nations peacekeeping, for ameliorating this violence.

Bio: Jacob D. Kathman is Associate Professor in Comparative Politics and International Relations, Department of Political Science, University at Buffalo. He received his B.A. from the University of Rochester, M.A. from George Washington University, and Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He currently studies processes of conflict, including civil war, interstate conflict, the victimization of civilians, various means of managing conflict. He has published in the *American Political Science Review*, the *American Journal of Political Science*, the *British Journal of Political Science*, and elsewhere.



Ndubueze Mbah: "Historical Perspectives on Jihadism in Africa: The Religious Logic of Boko Haram"

Abstract: Existing narratives that portray Boko Haram (BH) as a symptom of a failed Nigerian state, victim-psychology, frustration-aggression, and ethnocentrism, poverty and sectarianism, fail to explain the transformation of the movement from a non-violent organization to a radicalized and nihilist movement. They fail to explain the movement's simultaneous mobilization of local historic and Islamic traditions, and transformative mirroring of tactics and strategies of contemporary international jihadist groups, often in conflicting ways. By dismissing BH as mindless "terrorists" and uneducated "extremists", the media, scholars and Nigerian

government oversimplified the movement's complex religious and historical ideological base. This paper outlines the history of the organization, focusing on the ideological evolution of its successive leaders. It argues that BH is best understood in the context of historical regional jihadism and Islamic fundamentalism in Africa. BH's fundamentalist interpretation of Islam is characteristic of the historical ideological crisis of Islam as a religion of accommodation, and mirrors antecedent cases of reactionary revolt against the crisis of modernity. These processes have always entailed a revolutionary attempt to realize Islam as a total system, not just a religion, but rather a way of life that determines the social, economic, political, moral and legal norms of society.

Continues overleaf

Ndubueze Mbah: “Historical Perspectives on Jihadism in Africa: The Religious Logic of Boko Haram” *(continued)*

Bio: Ndubueze Mbah is Assistant Professor of African History at the University at Buffalo, where he teaches undergraduate and graduate classes in African History, covering topics such as Gender and Sexuality, Christian and Muslim Societies, Comparative Slavery, and Atlantic Creoles. His book manuscript examines how shifts in female power and authority and dynamic masculinity constructions defined Bight of Biafra’s socio-political transformation during the Atlantic Age of the 19th century.

The Interplay of Terrorism and Modernity

Moderator: Shaun Irlam, Department of Comparative Literature, University at Buffalo

Martin Klein: “Islam, Islamism and Terror in West Africa”

Abstract: The first part of this presentation will be an examination of the history of terror. It will make the argument that terror has been used by a wide range of different social and religious movements, and that it is not an ism in that there is no single terrorist ideology. Terror is a tactic generally used by movements that are weak and usually unsuccessful. I will then examine why in West Africa terror has had little appeal in spite of the history of jihads in the 19th century. I will focus on two areas. The first is Senegal, where Islam has been a pillar of democracy and tolerance, and where not only terror but fundamentalism has had little effect. The second is Northeast Nigeria, where Boko Haram has been one of the more brutal “Islamist” movements.

Bio: Martin Klein is Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Toronto. He taught African History at the University of Toronto for twenty-nine years. He also taught at the University of California at Berkeley, Wellesley College, Carleton College, Stanford University, Lovanium University in Kinshasa, and the University of Rhode Island. He has written or edited seven books of which the most important were *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa and Islam*, and *Imperialism in Senegal: Sine-Saloum 1847-1914*. Most of his research has been on the history of slavery and the slave trade in Africa.



Bruce Hall: “What are the Islamist Solutions to Post-colonial Crises in West Africa? Rethinking Competing Muslim Modernities in Mali”

Abstract: One of the most far-flung consequences of the Arab Spring was the collapse of state institutions in the Saharan borderlands of Mali in early 2012, and the subsequent occupation of the region by various Islamist-jihadists. Under the cover of a complicated mix of ethnic nationalism and global jihadism, rebels who had been living in Libya were able to acquire sophisticated military equipment from the collapsing regime of Mu’amar Gadhafi and use it to launch a highly successful invasion of Northern Mali. This paper will attempt to explain some of the underlying causes of this conflict, focusing especially on different Islamist projects for West Africa that claim to be based on a kind of Muslim

cosmopolitanism.

Bio: Bruce S. Hall is Associate Professor in the Department of History at Duke University. He previously held a position at the University at Buffalo. His book, entitled *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), was the co-winner of the 2012 Martin Klein Prize from the American Historical Association for best book in English on African History. He has also published articles in the *Journal of African History*, *Journal of North African Studies*, and *International Journal of African Historical Studies*. He earned his Ph.D. in History at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2005.

Focus on Human Rights

Moderator: Roger des Forges, Department of History, University at Buffalo



Maria Burnett: "Challenges to Human Rights Research and Documentation in Central and East Africa"

Abstract: Documenting human rights violations in the context of terrorist attacks and counter-terrorism operations raises significant challenges. In Kenya, Uganda and Somalia, among other countries in Africa, Human Rights Watch has both condemned attacks and consistently worked to document the range of abuses Muslim communities endure during counter-terrorism operations – including unlawful extraditions, detention without trial, and torture. This context also presents challenging advocacy, in which human rights groups are sometimes perceived to be at odds with law enforcement. How have we gathered and

corroborated these types of abuses? What has worked well and where have we faced obstacles? How do we engage with state and non-state actors to improve human rights protections for all?

Bio: Maria Burnett is Senior Researcher, Africa Division of Human Rights Watch. She currently covers Uganda and emerging human rights issues in Central Africa, and she supervises work on Somalia. She has worked with the organization since 2005, first as the Burundi researcher in the Bujumbura field office. She has worked on a variety of human rights issues, including child soldiers, torture and killings by intelligence and counterterrorism agents, abuses by the Lord's Resistance Army, and justice reform in Central and East Africa. Before joining Human Rights Watch, she worked as an architect and journalist in Africa. She holds a bachelor's degree in architecture from Princeton University and a law degree from Yale Law School. She speaks French.



John Foley: "Terrorism and State Culture: Creating a Human Rights Agenda in Somalia" (via Skype)

Abstract: *forthcoming*

Bio: John Foley is Advocacy and Research Manager with the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project based in Nairobi. He has conducted human rights research across several counties in the region and represents his organization in defending defenders of human rights at the United Nations Human Rights Council and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. He previously worked for the Africa

Division of Human Rights Watch in the United Kingdom and the United States, where his work focused on human rights issues in Rwanda and the Great Lakes Region. Prior to this, he spent five years working as a human rights lawyer in the United Kingdom.