



**The Sanneh Institute (TSI)**

**Call for Proposals**

**“The Pacifist Tradition of West African Islam”**

At the time when the overwhelming majority of Western and some African scholars were obsessed with the militant tradition of Islam in West Africa, Lamin Sanneh pursued his doctoral studies on the pacifist Jakhanke clerical communities dotted around the West African sub-region. Sanneh’s study formed the basis of his seminal work, *Beyond Jihad* (2016), in which he documented and argued for the Suwarian Tradition’s principled disavowal of Jihad and politics in favour of a pacifism that tolerates religious diversity and prefers accommodation over against absolutism. TSI is launching this research project into the pacifist tradition of Islam in West Africa in keeping with the late Prof. Sanneh’s research interest and quest for harmonious relations between persons of different and no faith.

This call for proposals is part of a three-year research project entitled, *Engaging the Mosque, the Church, and the Academy in Africa for the Transformation of Society*, funded by the Templeton Religion Trust. The project builds on Sanneh’s work as it seeks to challenge and interrogate prevailing ideas about “normative Islam”, among Muslims and non-Muslims alike, through scholarly inquiry into the non-violent, and a-political Suwarian Tradition of West African Islam. The project seeks to amplify the hitherto marginalized, yet deeply rooted and widespread non-violent narratives across West Africa. Thus, the project aims at providing a fuller understanding of the historic and contemporary manifestation of West African Islam and the conditions for what Stewart, Seiple and Hoover call “Covenantal Pluralism”.<sup>1</sup>

**Proposed focus areas include but are not limited to:**

- Biographical studies of leading historical clerics of the pacifist tradition in West African Islam.
- Specific clerical communities in West Africa that have not yet been extensively studied, with priority given to areas not covered in recent scholarship. Of importance is the historical development and evolution of these communities as well as the life and works of the leading/founding clerics of those communities.
- The current state, teaching on non-violence and influence of the Sufi Orders in West Africa.
- The presence, relevance, and reconfiguration of the pacifist Suwarian Tradition among African Muslims in the diaspora.
- Islamic theological and philosophical underpinnings of pacifism. This is pointed to, but not explored in detail in Sanneh’s work.
- The theological exchanges in the 19<sup>th</sup> century between opponents to jihad and their co-religionists who declared war in the path of Allah. This includes current

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<sup>1</sup> W. Christopher Stewart, Chris Seiple, and Dennis R. Hoover, “Toward a Global Covenant of Peaceable Neighborhood: Introducing the Philosophy of Covenantal Pluralism,” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2020): 1-17.



debates between militant groups and their Muslim opponents and the scriptural, historical and theological resources each draws from.

- Gendered dimensions of pacifist Islam in West Africa.
- The 'Ilmiyyah schools, Arabic curriculum and pacifist thought in West Africa.
- The attitude of clerics of the pacifist tradition towards politics and Muslim involvement in modern nation state in the context of increasingly liberal democracies.
- Examinations of the Suwarian Tradition in light of the Maliki School of Law to establish the mainstream grounding of pacifism in Islam or otherwise.
- Comparative approaches to pacifist Islamic teaching by majority and minority Muslim communities in other regions, e.g. Asia and the West.

This call is for proposals for 8000-word book chapters. Proposals must be grounded in the “[Project Background Paper](#)” attached to this call and must include a literature review of published works starting with the core bibliography listed below. This is an interdisciplinary and interfaith research project which means research teams must be made up of one Muslim scholar and one non-Muslim scholar, or one scholar of religions and a partner from a different social science discipline. Both scholars must have PhDs and be part of the faculty of an existing institution, one of which must be in West Africa.

For successful proposals, each of the two scholars will be awarded \$6,000.00 paid in two instalments over the period of the research which must be concluded at the end of twelve months from the date of the award. The research will be published in one edited volume and in peer review journals.

**Those interested in submitting a proposal should include the following information and supporting documents:**

- Proposal (not to exceed 4,000 words) should include: 1) Statement of the background and Significance, 2) Statement of the Problem and key questions, 3) Literature review, 4) Research Process (methodology), 5) Plan of Action (describe the steps the team will take), and 6) Contribution to the field.
- Curriculum Vitae (CVs) for both scholars
- Contact info (*name, institutional affiliation and status, email address, phone*).

Proposals should be submitted via email to the Academic Programs Coordinator, Matthew J. Krabill, at [krabillm@tsinet.org](mailto:krabillm@tsinet.org). The proposal deadline is **September 1, 2022**. The submitted proposals will be reviewed by a team of [senior academic advisors](#) and the award announcements for the selected proposals will be made by **March 1, 2023** for awardees to begin work on **April 1, 2023**.

**John Azumah, PhD**

Project Director



### **Core Bibliography**

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- Ryan, Patrick J. 1977. *Imale: Yoruba participation in the Muslim tradition: a study of clerical piety*. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press.
- Sanneh, Lamin O. 2016. *Beyond jihad: the pacifist tradition in West African Islam*. In. New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press.
- Wilks, Ivor. 2000. "The Juula and the expansion of Islam into the forest." *History of Islam in Africa*.: 93-115.