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SHAYKH ĀDAM ‘ABD ALLĀH AL-ALŪRI (R.A):  
HIS INFLUENCES IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT  
ON NIGERIAN YORUBA

B Y

MOHAMMED MUNEEB DEEN OLODO AL-SHAFI'I

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Art  
(Philosophy, Ethics and Contemporary Issues)

International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization  
International Islamic University  
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## ABSTRACT

This study commences with an enduring and intellectual recognition of al-Alūri for his impressive work in the field of Islamic *da'wah*, social, humanitarian and intellectual contributions in the Yorubaland in particular, Nigeria as a whole, and Africa in general. It is a motion to give to Caesar what is Caesar's. This study seeks to investigate the factors that led to the transformation of the Yoruba Muslim society through the influence of Shaykh Ādam 'Abd Allāh al-Alūri, and his influences on the Muslim-Arabic institution in Nigeria, with particular reference to the Yoruba. There is lack of agreement among scholars concerning the date of Islam's arrival at Yorubaland in western Nigeria. The study aims to clarify this disagreement and reiterate the fact as maintained by the famous African Nigerian Yoruba Muslim scholar, 'Abd Allāh al-Alūri, who ascertained that Islam came to Yoruba land from Mali during the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. According to him, the importance attached to the family unit as a cornerstone of a healthy and balanced society, is one of the most striking features of the Muslim society. Is it possible for one, after attaining the age of puberty, to master other language other than one's mother tongue? Anyway, al-Alūri promised that and achieved it through his contribution in the process of Arabization which he embarked on. According to al-Alūri, the process of modernization essentially involves a rational structural transformation of simultaneous changes in its linguistic system, values and way of life as a whole. The dominance of Western values which has left the Yoruba Muslim families in a confused state was removed through the drastic steps taken by individuals like al-Alūri. The study examines the changes that have taken place in Yoruba land due to modernization and the impact of those changes on the Yoruba Muslim society. Education also has been found to be one of the factors that led al-Alūri to establish his sole Markaz (centre for education of Arabic-Islamic studies), which has now branches throughout the country as well as abroad, since 1952. Al-Alūri said that, the rate of literacy in Arabic – Islamic education is alarmingly becoming lower and decreasing. As the prayer is the sword of a *Mu'min*, the study ends with an elaboration of one of the most significant supplications of the *tariqahs*; *al-Tijāniyyah* and *al-Qādiriyyah* precisely, *Du'ā' S(a)efī* and *Hizb al-Mughnī*, as also recited by al-Alūri as a weapon against setbacks and calamities.

1952

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Art (Philosophy, Ethics, and Contemporary Issues).

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Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Art (Philosophy, Ethics, and Contemporary Issues).

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Examiner

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Dean, Kulliyyah of ISTAC

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Mohammed Muneer'deen Olodo Al-Shafi'i

Signature:.....

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ON NIGERIAN YORUBA.**

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I sincerely dedicate this work to my parents Mr. and Mrs. Ọladimeji Al-Shafī'i Olodo and Hassanat Aweke Ọladimeji Al-Shafī'I Olodo respectively, and my religious and spiritual mentor Alhāj Shaykh 'Abd al-Latīf Alatishe for their gargantuan contributions in my life.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Quotation.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Abstract in Arabic.....	iv
Approval Page.....	v
Declaration Page.....	vi
Copyright Page.....	vii
Dedication.....	vii
Acknowledgements.....	ix

<b>CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>2</b>
1.0 Introduction.....	2
1.1 Background of the study.....	3
1.2 Statement of the problem.....	4
1.3 Research questions.....	5
1.4 Objective of the study.....	6
1.5 Significance of the study.....	6
1.6 Organization of the study.....	7
1.7 Literature review.....	8
1.8 Conceptual framework.....	12
1.9 The setting.....	12

<b>CHAPTER TWO : SHAYKH ĀDAM ‘ABD ALLAH AL-ALŪRI... ..</b>	<b>13</b>
2.0 An African crusader for Arabization.....	13
2.1 Birth and origin.....	15
2.2 Relationships with the Arab World.....	16
2.3 The Crusade against the banishment.....	16
2.4 Incentives and reasons for defending the Arabic language.....	17
2.5 Mechanisms for Implementing the Project of Arabization.....	18
2.6 His opinions and ideas in different situations.....	18
2.7 Shaykh Ādam ‘Abd Allāh Al-Alūri’s parenthood and lineage.....	21
2.8 Early childhood and scholarship.....	22
2.9 Achievements and glories in brief.....	23
2.10 Crusades for Muslim community.....	25
2.11 The Development of Agege.....	27
2.12 Trials and Tribulations.....	28
2.13 His style of delivering lectures.....	29
2.14 Markaz's spread of Islamic Education and Arabic Language.....	31
2.15 Disciples of Shaykh Al-Alūri.....	33
2.16 Farewell messages of Al-Alūri to the whole world.....	35
2.17 The forgotten words of Al-Alūri to the Markazians.....	37
2.18 The last respect.....	38

<b>CHAPTER THREE : ISLAMIZATION PROCESSES IN YORUBA LAND...39</b>	
3.0 Islamization processes in yoruba land .....	39
3.1 Islam among the Yoruba: 1600 -1800 .....	46
3.2 Islam in Yorubaland .....	47
3.3 Southern Nigeria and the process of Islamization .....	57
3.4 Colonial rule, an epoch of brisk extension and development .....	58
<b>CHAPTER FOUR : AL-ALŪRI'S PHILOSOPHY IN HIS AL-DĪN AL-NASĪHA..66</b>	
4.0 philosophy of shaykh ādam .....	66
4.1 <i>Al-Dīn</i> (Religion) is Admonition .....	70
4.2 Why is Al-Dīn (Religion) Admonition? .....	71
4.3 Our ailment and its remedy .....	75
4.4 Foundation for our message .....	76
4.4.1 Foundation to our message .....	76
4.4.1.1 Acquiring knowledge and its teaching .....	76
4.4.1.2 Promoting standard of education .....	78
4.5 Types of knowledge.....	78
4.6 Learning Arabic Language and its importance.....	79
4.7 Distinguishing/Separating Arabic from Islam.....	80
4.8 Islamic organizations in Nigeria.....	82
4.9 Education and its conveyment.....	82
4.10 Librating students from slavery.....	84
<b>CHAPTER FIVE : HIS SŪFI IDEOLOGY.....87</b>	
5.1 Allāhma Kāto.....	89
5.1.1 Introduction to AlhmaKaato .....	89
5.2 S(a)efī – 'Sword' .....	95
5.2.1 Introduction to S(a)efī .....	95
5.3 Hizb al-Mughnī 'The S(a)efī Poverty Neutralizer' .....	109
<b>CHAPTER SIX : CONCLUSION.....112</b>	
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....117</b>	
<b>APPENDIX 1 : Some Of Al-Alūri's Publications And Books .....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1: Al-DīN Al-Nasīha .....</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>APPENDIX 11: Allāhma kāto.....</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>APPENDIX 111: Hizb al-Sayfī and Hizb al-Mughnī .....</b>	<b>131</b>

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

The study will seek to investigate the factors or processes that led to the transformation of the Yoruba Muslim society through the influence of Shaykh Ādam ‘Abd Allāh Al-Alūri, and their influences on the Muslim-Arabic institution in Nigeria, with particular reference to the Yoruba.

Scholars are not in agreement concerning the date of Islam's arrival among the Yoruba in western Nigeria. The one time famous Nigerian Yoruba Muslim scholar ‘Abd Allāh al-Alūri maintains that Islam came to Yoruba land from Mali in the first half of the 14th century, while others hold to the view that Muslim traders from Mali, the Wangarawa, entered the region in the 15th century. Then there are also those who suggest a 16th-century date for the advent of Islam in Yoruba land.<sup>1</sup> A number of Muslim scholars, probably of Songhay origin but resident in Nupe to the north, may have entered northern Yoruba land in the 16th century, their purpose being to request the Alāfin of Old Oyo, Ajibode, to treat a group of his subjects, believed by the Alaafin to be responsible for the death of his son, in a more just way. By the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century there were in all likelihood Muslims living in Yoruba land.<sup>2</sup> Some of these were teachers, others were merchants and others slaves. This study will also devote a chapter for it to clear all these confusions in line with the contribution of the Shaykh.

According to Shaykh Ādam, the importance attached to family as a cornerstone of a healthy and balanced society, is one of the most striking features of the Muslim

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Ajayi Crowther quoted in P.J. Ryan, *Imale* p. 112.

society. His contribution in Arabization cannot be over emphasised. He was the one who promised and maintained that a non-Arab speaker can be thought to be fluent in the language within the period ranging from two to four years. According to al-Alūri, the process of modernization essentially involves a rational structural transformation of not only the social, economic and political order of a society, but also simultaneous changes in its linguistic system, values and way of life as a whole.

The dominance of Western values in the Yoruba society of Nigeria due to colonization and modernization process has left Muslim families in a confused state as whether to hold on to the Islamic values and maintain the Muslim family or adopt values of modernization, with the hope of deriving material benefits. It was, and still is, the drastic steps taken by people like Al-Alūri that revive the notions.

This study will seek to examine, the changes that have taken place in Yoruba due to modernization process and the impact of those changes to the Yoruba Muslim society. It will also explore factors that contributed to the stability of the Yoruba Muslim socio-cultural-religious thought in the face of pressures to modernize.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Modernization process has had a long history in Yoruba race. But due to the influence of al-Alūri introducing the Modern Arabic – Islamic Education in 1945 the transformation did not have a lot of negative impact on the Yoruba Muslims.

However, most of the transformations in many cities are concentrated on social change and family attitude, especially the status of women and the role of a family in the society. In Yoruba society and environment, one of the striking features of social

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<sup>2</sup> J.D. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rights*, (London, 1979)

change is that women have more physical presence in public life, outdoor activities, festivity and heading households.

The presence of women in public is attributed mostly to the constitutional provisions. In the constitution, Yoruba women are granted equal rights as citizen such as equality before the law, regarding the labour laws, the right to pass citizenship to their children, equality in political rights like voting, passive suffrage, and holding any civil post including judiciary. Women are entitled equal rights compared to men in education, health, and work.

According to statistics, the number of girls who enrol in Markaz yearly is more than any single government institutions of higher education, and it has been increasing over the years, though there is a slight amount of gender discrepancy in some specializations.

Education also has been found to be one of the factors that led al-Alūri to him properly founding his sole Markaz, which has now branches throughout the country as well as abroad, in 1952. According to al-Alūri, the rate of literacy in Arabic – Islamic education was becoming lower and decreasing.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In his recognition, little or no scholarly and intellectually recognized work has been done on his philosophical thought and its influence on the Yoruba race of Nigeria. It is the aim of this study to give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and bring out to light some of his contributions and works done, both islamically and traditionally.

Therefore, the study seeks to investigate the changes that have taken place in the Yoruba Muslim environment since the inception of the Markaz of al-Alūri and how can the Yoruba race retains its central Islamic features of care for the family,

children, and respect for elders, modesty and protection of its members in the face of pressure to westernize. The research will also assess the relationship between the Yoruba historical backgrounds and their effects on the race.

The study will also elaborate one of the most significant supplications of the *tarīqahs*; *al-Tījāniyyah* and *al-Qādiriyyah* precisely, *Du‘ā’* Sayfī and Hizb al-Mughnī. As popularly used, al-Alūri also used it as a weapon against any setback and calamity.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is going to address the following research questions:

**RQ1:** Who is Shaykh Ādam ‘Abd Allāh al-Alūri?

**RQ2:** what are Shaykh Ādam ‘Abd Allāh al-Alūri's philosophical thought and its impact on:

1. Nigerian Islamic Environment,
2. Yoruba philosophical belief and thought and,
3. Nigerian Yoruba Muslim and Islamic scholars.

**RQ3:** What is the relationship between indicators of modernization and Muslim family change in the Nigerian Yoruba?

**RQ4:** What is the relationship between modernization indicators and Islamic belief or values?

**RQ5:** To what extent do the al-Alūri's thought or values account for the Yoruba Muslim change?

## **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The general objective of the study is to investigate the influence of al-Alūri's thought on Muslims in Nigerian Yoruba. Specifically, the objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To identify who Shaykh Ādam ‘Abd Allāh al-Alūri is.
2. To clarify briefly the conflicts in identifying Islam and its arrival into Nigerian Yoruba people.
3. To analyse the philosophy of al-Alūri behind his sole Markaz founded in 1945.
4. To examine the importance of al-Alūri's Markaz to the environment in which it is situated.
5. To attempt an answer to the question 'would Arabic-Islamic thought have reached its present recognition and height had al-Alūri not initiated the Markaz and his process of Arabization?'

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study is a study on the life and religious and philosophical ideas of Shaykh Ādam al-Alūri. It concerns and delves in his life activities. It brings into light some of his intellectual participation in the field of da'wah, both among scholars and non-scholars. For the sake of engaging in good deeds for Allāh's sake, the study, if successfully completed, will inculcate into others that whatever they are engaged in doing today is surely of great importance and history of tomorrow. It will surely engage others to do well in their endeavours.

Since the study also seeks to understand how Islamic belief affects Muslim family change, it could contribute to the formulation of sound policies of keeping the

Muslim family institution relevant in the face of serious challenges from some of the negative modernization process currently affecting the Muslim world.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

This study will be organized into five chapters. Chapter one will introduce the study and be devoted to providing background information, statement of the problem, research questions and objectives. The significance of the study will also be discussed. The literature review related to the area of the study shall also be entertained.

Chapter two will delve deeply into the area under study. The biographical background and account of the personality in question will be fully and in detail elaborated. His life time, practices, and philosophy will also be in detail focused upon.

Chapter four will provide a detailed explanation of his thought by reviewing and translating for the first time his philosophy on the Markaz through some of his significant works, such as:

1. *Al-Dīn al-Nasīha: Risālah tan'asiru fīha ahdāf al-Markaz al-'Arabī wa maḥmūd da'watuh.*
2. *Markaz al-Ta'līm al-'Arabi al-Islāmī, ajiḡi – lagos – Naijīriya fī arba'in 'āman.*
3. *Al-'īd al-arba'ūn 'alā ta'sīs Markaz al-Ta'līm al-'Arabī al-Islāmī Ajiḡi – Naijīriya fī suwar wa sutūr.*

This will give clear pictures of how the personality's philosophical thought has influenced, and still influences, the thought of the Nigerian Yorubas.

In this case the description of the Yorubas and their belief, in addition to the advent of Islam into the county will have been elaborated in the third chapter. It will also provide details of the sample and the population of the Yorubas. The Islamization process in the region will be at work in this chapter.



Chapter five will be devoted to introducing one of the most important supplications of the *Tarīqah al-Tijāniyyah and al-Qādiriyyah* as also recited by Shaykh Ādam ‘Abd Allāh al-Alūri. The supplication, *sayfī* is used as a weapon against all evils and evil-doers. In this light, the *Hizb al-Mughnī (the neutralizer)* shall also be introduced.

This will be followed immediately by the general conclusion, and recommendations for the researchers and future study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Since little or no scholarly work has being done on this area before, the main source of the research shall be close scrutiny of most or all of the works of the scholar. The study will also need to depend on the informations and interviews which shall be conducted with the khalīfah of the Markaz Alhāj Shaykh Habību’Llāh Ādam al-Alūri, Alhāj Shaykh Thaubān al-Alūri, and Alhāj Shaykh barrister ‘Abd Allāh al-Alūri.

The study will also bring the researcher to some of the followers of the Markaz who are studying here in Malaysia; their responses to the research questions shall greatly influence this study.

In addition, the following works, both of the al-Alūri and others will be utilized:

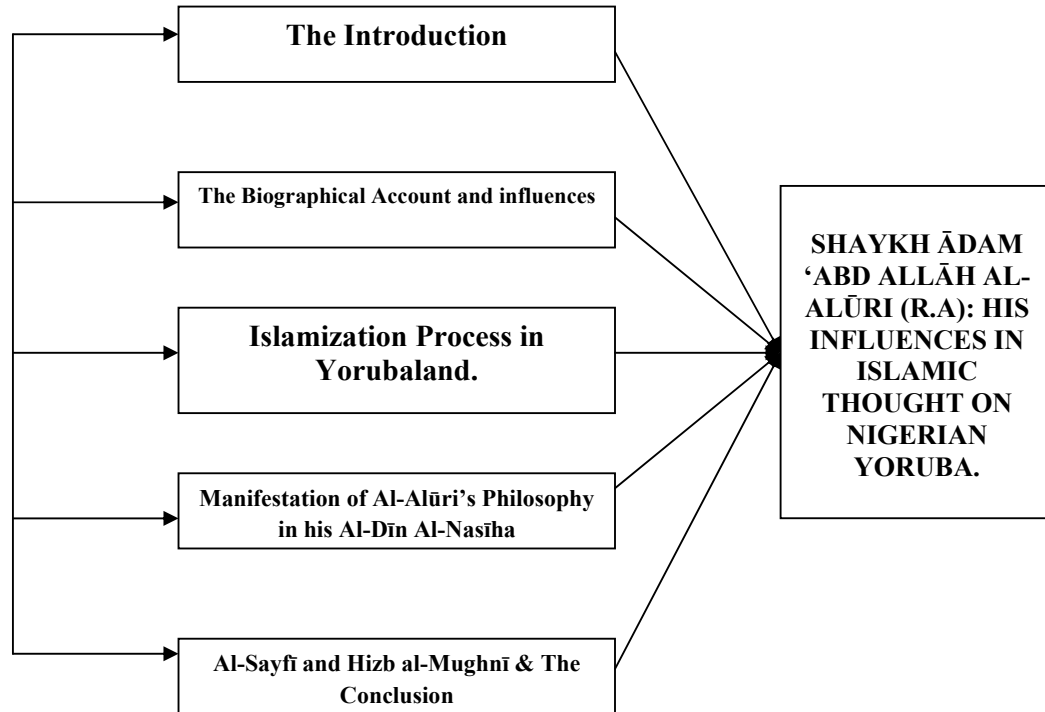
1. Doi, ‘Abdul Rahman I. (1992). *Islam in a multi-religious society: Nigeria: A case study*. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: A.S Noordeen. This piece of work is of utmost importance for it delves deeply into the arrival of Islam in the Yoruba land, Nigeria. It introduces the focus of this study as a popular and an important personality.
2. Clarke, Peter B. (1984). *West Africa and Islam: A study of religious development from the 8<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century*. London WC1B 3DQ: Edward Arnold (publishers)

- Ltd. This work tells us some of the adventures of Islam into the present day Nigeria.
3. (Ed) McCall, Daniel F. & Bennett, Norman R. (1971). Boston University Papers on Africa (vol. V): *Aspects of West African Islam*. Boston University: African Studies Center. It is important for its introduction of Islam in West Africa.
  4. Robinson, David. (2004). *Muslim societies in African history: new approaches to African history*. Cambridge, U.K, Cambridge university press.
  5. Bravmann, Rene A. (1971). *Islam and tribal art in West Africa: A re-evaluation*. Michigan, U.S.A, Ann Arbor.
  6. Raji, Rasheed A. (2002). *Tangled complexity: Muslim Christian relations and the issue of the Arabic language in Nigeria*. This work particularly deals with the foreign nature of Arabic language to the Yoruba people and its comprehension by the widely respected scholars of the Yoruba people.
  7. Brenner, Louis. (1993). *Muslim identity and social change in sub-saharan Africa*. London: Hurst & company.
  8. Al-Alūri, Ādam ‘Abd Allāh. (1979 A.D – 1399A.H). *Tārīkh al-da’wah ilā-Allāh bayn al-ams wa al-yawm*. Cairo: Maktabah wahbah. This book '*the history of (Islamic) call to Allāh between the past and the present*' gives an insight into the contribution of Al-Alūri into the process of Islamic call and guidance in the Yoruba land.
  9. Al-Alūri, Ādam ‘Abd Allāh. (1991A.D – 1411A.H). *Aqāl qabāil Yoruba wa al-qabāil al-mujāwarah lahā fīy Naijīriya*. Lagos, Nigeria: Markaz al-Ta’līm al-‘Arabi al-Islāmī; (*the origin of the race of Yoruba and those races surrounding it in Nigeria*). Al-Alūri's factual contribution to the true historical background of the Yoruba people in an Islamic perspective is best understood from the grim light of this book; the book is referred to by almost all the Yoruba Muslim historians of the past and the present.

10. Al-Alūri, Ādam ‘Abd Allāh. (2002ad – 1423ah). *Nizām al-Ta‘līm al-‘Arabi wa al-Tārīkhuh fī al-‘ālam al-Islāmi (the process of teaching Arabic and its history in the Islamic world)* . Lagos – Nigeria: Daarun-Nuur printing company. The Arabization process proclaimed by al-Alūri can best be viewed in the light of this work. For any perfect and accurate Muslim, to AlAluri, he must know how to read the scripture of Islam; the holy Qur'an, in the language and tongue in which it was revealed to the holy prophet Muhammad (SAW), hence his insistence on making sure that any student of his Markaz be able to converse fluently in Arabic language within the first two years of his or her admission into the school.
11. Al-Alūri, Ādam ‘Abd Allāh. (n.d) *Tārīkh al-da‘wah al-Islāmiyah min al-ams ila al-yawm ('the history of 'Islamic' call to Allāh from yesterday till today)*. Beirut-Lebanon: Maktabah al-hayat.
12. Ibrahim, ‘Abd Allāh Abdul Rāziq. (1984). *Al-Islām wa al-hadārah al-Islāmiyah fīy Najjiriya (Islam and Islamic civilization in Nigeria)*. Cairo: Maktabah al-Anglo al-Masriya (Anglo Bookshop, Egypt).
13. Al-Alūri, Ādam ‘Abd Allāh. (1948). *Al-Dīn al-Nasīhah: Risālah tan‘asiru fīha ahdāf al-Markaz al-‘Arabi wa mafhūm da‘watuh (Din 'Religion' is Admonition: A message containing aims 'and objectives' of the Markaz Al-'Arabi and the comprehension of its call)*. Agege, Lagos – Nigeria: Matba’ah al-Thaqafah al-Islamiyah. The first part of this piece will be translated and commented on for its clear picture of the philosophical thought of Al-Alūri in Islamic thought in Nigerian Yoruba. This is one of the most important focus and part of the study. It and the two that follows shall contribute greatly to the discussion of the thesis.
14. Al-Alūri, Ādam ‘Abd Allāh. (1952ad – 1991ad, 1371ah - 1411). *Markaz al-Ta‘līm al-‘Arabi al-Islāmi, aji – lagos – Najjiriya fī arba‘īn ‘āman 1371ah – 1411ah (centre for the Arabic and Islamic teaching in its forty years)*. (n.p).

15. Al-Alūri, Ādam ‘Abd Allāh. (1991ad, 1411ah). *Al-‘īd al-arba’ūn ‘alā ta’sīs Markaz al-Ta’līm al-‘Arabi al-Islāmi Ajiji – Naijiriya fī suwar wa sutūr (fortieth year anniversary of founding centre for the ‘Arabic and Islamic teaching in shapes and writings)*. (n.p). this and the previous one, number fourteen are best studied for the philosophical thought of al-Alūri which manifests through his teachings and services in the Markaz.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



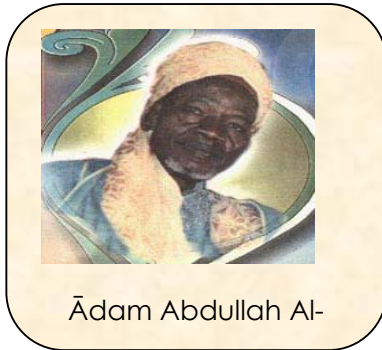
## THE SETTING

The study will be conducted in Kuala Lumpur City, Malaysia, and the main setting will be the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)'s main Library in Gombak.

And since the researcher is a student at the faculty of The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), the drafting and the typesetting will be conducted mainly in the ISTAC's library in the IIUM Kuala Lumpur Campus. The study shall solely depend on the advices and instruction given by the assigned supervisor to the researcher; whose guidance will be of decisive importance.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SHAYKH ĀDAM ‘ABD ALLĀH AL-ALŪRI; AN AFRICAN NIGERIAN YORUBA CRUSADER FOR ARABIZATION



Ādam Abdullah Al-

When speaking about geniuses of thought and great ‘Ulamas (religious scholars) and callers who have influenced the modern historical tracts and affairs of Nigeria, first on the list is Shaykh Ādam ‘Abd Allāh al-Alūri whose personality shines in both the African-Arabian space, whose writings, tours and

movements are engraved in the historical records of the African–Arab Islamic da’wah. His efforts at spreading and enhancing the Arab civilization and culture, the Islamic work and the social challenge have greatly influenced the political and cultural situation as well as in the efforts of the eradication of corruption in the region.

#### AN AFRICAN CRUSADER FOR ARABIZATION

The personality of al-Alūri materializes a prominent model life of an African crusader for the dād (Arabic) language; he is like a horseman facing the challenge in the campaign for Arab culture in west Africa as a whole and Nigeria in particular; he is worthy of the title, among other things, for his ambitious project “*Arabizing new callers’ tongue and reconsideration on the Arabic language*”.<sup>3</sup> He succeeded in presenting his project and putting it into practical operation with his own efforts an even bringing it

out into practical operation in other states in Africa until he became an important role model to thousands of Nigerian and the neighbouring African countries. He was/is the man who, with his ambition, transformed the whole city of ‘Agege’ (1952A.D – 1371A.H), where he established his seat and center of education, the Arabic-Islamic Training Centre (MARKAZ), throughout the period of fifty-six years (1952 – 2008) to a spiritual society (Jāmi’ah al-Rūhiyah) and a centre of knowledge for training and representing the black race of Nigeria and Africa, from scholars, students, callers, preachers, to jurists, until now that the city has become an Islamic religious tourism space visited by thousands of people.

Al-Alūri's movement and strenuous efforts in the field of teaching the Arabic language, enlightenment, and Islamic call started from as far back as 1940s and Allāh has blessed him and his movement so much that more than half a million students graduated and were certified excellent on his hands both from within Nigeria and the neighbouring countries like Benin Republic, Ivory Coast, Niger, Togo and so on. He worked on the revival of many elements that have run into extinction or nearly extinct of the Arabic-Islamic heritage in Africa as a whole, Nigeria in particular, and especially in a manner so intimately linked to him, in Yoruba land, and gathered/collected great number of poems belonging to the ancient scholars and printed them, just as he also collected works of unpopular Nigerian Scholars and brought them into light. He interpreted many of the Arabic Literature books and gave comments on them in addition to his strong contribution on recording all that which has transpired in relation to them in unanticipated and eccentric situations and all that they did in relation to extraordinary events (karāmāt).

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<sup>3</sup> This is a process of encouraging the religious callers to use Arabic language among their contemporaries. If they do this it is the belief of Al-Alūri that others around them will regard Arabic as an important tool in Islam.

He was the first writer and a scientific researcher in the tribe of Yoruba and inculcated the same scholarly and scientific attitude among the scholars in the Yoruba land. He was also the first scholar to gather together scholars in the Yoruba land under one single umbrella labelled "league of Imams and 'Ulama' (religious scholars)", and he was the first contemporary Yoruba scholar to vie with Arab scholars with many of his well composed and organized books and his printed presentations in various fields and area of specializations, and for this, he was the first Nigerian to obtain an honorary degree of education from Al-Azhar Al-Sharīf in the Arab Republic of Egypt (A.R.E).

### **HIS BIRTH AND ORIGIN**

Ādam ‘Abd Allāh was born in Wasa town in the Republic of Benin in the year 1917A.D. He started his educational life by memorizing the Glorious Qur’an under the guidance of his father, and He accompanied his father in his travels until He became his right-hand man. He also learned from other local scholars in Nigeria, such like Shaykh Sālih Mohammad al-Awwal, a preacher in the city of Ibadan, and Shaykh ‘Umar Ahmad Alabejẹ in Lagos, he was influenced by men of the *sūfi* orders, particularly the *al-Qādiriyyah* that was spreading during that period, and it is from there that he met shaykh Ādam Nāmaji al-Kanōwi from Kano, northern part of Nigeria, who was of Arab descendant from Morocco who came to Kano in the 18th century. ‘Al-Alūri met him when he wanted to join the *al-Qādiriyyah sūfi* order in 1941, and he mentions him in his biography *Min huna nasha’ tu wa hākazā ta‘allamtu atta takharrajtu* saying: “*when I saw/met him an ocean without a bank in knowledge I joined the line of his students, and I started being educated by him by receiving the dictation from his profound knowledge*”.