



Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa

Jennifer Lofkrantz

To cite this article: Jennifer Lofkrantz (2017) Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa, History: Reviews of New Books, 45:5, 127-128, DOI: [10.1080/03612759.2017.1336903](https://doi.org/10.1080/03612759.2017.1336903)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03612759.2017.1336903>



Published online: 20 Jul 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 13



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

(77). Conservative leaders expressed trepidation over the 80,000 former slaves suddenly freed. Several linked abolition to the spread of subversive Communism. The wealthy sugar planter Baron of Moniz Aragão lamented that, “with each passing year [penned in October 1887, alluding to the decade of the 1880s], we become holy men and resigned to the evils that surround us, with no outlet except to reach for heaven... Pagode [subgenre of samba], vagrancy and communism! These are the saviors of our ridiculous Nation!” (120).

Several important topics surface in Fraga’s analysis of the days following emancipation. Former slaves protected their small plots of land, used to cultivate subsistence crops and sold surplus in local markets. Some set fires to sugar cane. Others stole cattle to feed themselves. Several went searching for family members from whom they had been separated. In many ways, large and small, former slaves showed that they had thought long and hard about their priorities.

The last four chapters (6–9) provide insights into the world of former slaves during the two decades after liberation. With a huge downturn in sugar output on the plantations of the Recôncavo (strip of land outside of Salvador, some sixty miles long and up to thirty miles in breadth) in 1888–89, tensions mounted between planters and former slaves. Landowners, many of whom had owned slaves, hoped to force freed persons to remain as easily coerced workers. Ex-slaves did everything in their power to undermine constraints imposed on them by the rural patriarchy. As one example of many, they deftly negotiated with planters over terms of employment. It became common that former slaves labored for three days for a planter and devoted their other days to subsistence plots or the cultivation of marketable crops such as tobacco, coffee, cacao, and manioc. Numerous freed persons remained on the plantations where they had been enslaved, maintaining community ties that had been decades in the making. Over time, others moved to local towns in the Recôncavo, to Salvador, or to the villages along the coast.

An epilogue concludes *Crossroads of Freedom*. Like the other chapters, it

includes a wealth of information. One learns of journalists who looked at liberated blacks in a far more positive light than landholders and provincial officials. Black and mixed-race intellectuals condemned the all-pervading racism in their midst. Former slaves and African-descendent workers joined in thirty-one strikes in Salvador and the Recôncavo between 1888 and 1896 (235).

There are many more topics and themes raised by the meticulous research and translation of this monograph. I note two. Former slaves demonstrated, by their actions, the importance of physical space for their well being. They protected subsistence plots, forged rural communities far from local planters, and maintained houses of candomblé (the Brazilian religion that combined West African Yoruba religious practices with Catholicism) where they could worship a pantheon of African gods and goddesses. Second, in the words of Professor Fraga, “they developed strategies for survival that attempted to counteract ex-masters’ [and merchants’] plans to maintain them in subaltern positions” (239). An unquenchable thirst for education and determination to overcome all impediments shone forth at emancipation in 1888 and the months that followed. It continues today.

DALE T. GRADEN
University of Idaho

Copyright © 2017 Taylor & Francis



Kane, Ousmane Oumar
Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
296 pp., \$39.95,
ISBN 978-0674050822
Publication Date: June 2016

Ousmane Oumar Kane’s *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa* is part of the resurgent

interest in African intellectual history. This book is an important contribution to the field, as it ties trends in Muslim West African thought to the development and role of Islamic education in precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial Muslim West African societies. This book is an important addition to the nuancing and fleshing out of the new Muslim West African intellectual history being fostered by books such as Bruce S. Hall’s *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600–1960* (Cambridge University Press 2011); Rudolph Ware III’s *The Walking Qu’ran: Islamic Education, Islamic Knowledge, and History in West Africa* (University of North Carolina Press 2014); and Chouki El Hamel’s *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam* (Cambridge University Press 2012). It is, therefore, aimed at scholars and students interested in Islam, West Africa, and intellectual history.

The book is divided into a prologue, nine chapters, and an epilogue. Kane does not shy away from considering his own personal story within the trends that he is examining, and he includes how the developments in Islamic education and their relationship to Western-style education have shaped him as an academic. In the prologue, he identifies himself as a Senegalese Muslim and a global academic who was educated in both the Islamic and Western education systems. He is currently a professor of contemporary Islamic religion and society at the Harvard Divinity School and of Near Eastern languages and civilizations in the Faculty of Arts.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of Western attempts to chronicle the mostly Arabic-language Muslim West African scholarship and literature. Chapters 2–4 examine the development of Islamic education in West Africa—how students were taught, curricula, the transmission of knowledge, and the development of distinct lineages of scholarship. Chapter 5 focuses on precolonial intellectual discourse, in particular, on the debates on slavery and jihad and on the genre of the chronicle.

In chapter 6, Kane transitions from the precolonial to the colonial and postcolonial periods. In this chapter, he chronicles the emergence and

implementation of European systems of education that operated parallel to the pre-existing and continuing Islamic system. Kane identifies three educational options for students during the colonial period: a wholly Westernized system, where students were immersed in a Western curriculum taught completely in a European language; a hybrid state-sponsored system that had a combined Islamic and Western curriculum taught in both Arabic and a colonial language; and a third, privately funded system offering a modernized Islamic education. According to Kane, graduates from the third system were shut out of West African universities because they had trouble passing national exams due to their lack of fluency in the relevant European language and the non-recognition of their high school diplomas by public universities. Before the founding of modern Arabic Islamic universities in West Africa, such as the University of Say, which is discussed in great detail in chapter 7, Arabophone students in pursuit of a university education had to attend Islamic universities in North Africa or the Middle East in order to pursue post-secondary education and were faced with job discrimination upon returning home.

Chapter 7 traces the formation of Arabic Islamic institutions of post-secondary learning in West Africa in the post-independence period. The establishment of these schools not only highlights a critique of Western and secular education but also shows attempts by Africans to reclaim an ancient intellectual path. These schools provided Arabophone students post-secondary opportunities in West Africa but, according to Kane, did not solve the problem of prejudice against their education credentials on the job market. Kane argues that the frustration of Arabophone school graduates was not only the catalyst for reforming Islamic education in the region but was also central to the formation of modern Islamic reform movements throughout West Africa. Some of these reform movements were still linked to the Sufi orders that dominated West African Islamic practice,

but others, such as the 1970s Yan Izala movement in Nigeria, were informed by Salafi interpretations of Islam, with strong connections to Islamic universities in Saudi Arabia. In chapters 8 and 9, Kane's focus shifts from an account of the trajectory of Islamic learning in West Africa to contemporary political developments, especially the rise of Salafi jihadist groups, such as Boko Haram in Nigeria and AQIM in Mali.

Overall, this book is a stimulating read. It makes a vital contribution to the study of Islam in West Africa. Considering the historic importance of female scholarship and education in the region, however, I would have appreciated a greater discussion of women intellectuals and the transformation of women's education.

JENNIFER LOFKRANTZ

St. Mary's College of California

Copyright © 2017 Taylor & Francis



Harding, Richard

Modern Naval History: Debates and Prospects

New York: Bloomsbury Press

260 pp., \$29.95,

ISBN 978-1-4725-7808-9

Publication Date: December 2015

The field of naval history is often treated as military history's poor relation. For many, what few important historical questions might reside in the field largely have to do with building ships and fighting battles at sea. To the casual observer, it might seem that all the important battles have been analyzed, the noteworthy ships written about, and the famous admirals memorialized in biographies. What more remains for would-be students of naval history? In *Modern Naval History: Debates and Prospects*, the task before historian Richard Harding is to convince the reader—indeed, anyone with an interest in studying history—that the field of naval history has much to

offer, and much more to examine. In his words, “this book is an attempt to encourage and inform potential researchers about the opportunities naval history presents. It seeks to explain how it has developed, what its contribution has been and thus what are the lacunae, the opportunities for new questions, new research and even a new agenda for naval history” (2).

Richard Harding is professor of organizational history and head of the Department of Leadership and Development at Westminster Business School. Perhaps it is directly to his point to note that Harding's academic posting is not studying ships and battles in some musty corner of a military educational institution. Naval history, Harding argues, “has also involved a widening and deepening of connections with other sub-disciplines . . . now including the newer sub-discipline of cultural history, as well as social sciences such as international relations and organizational studies” (1).

The book consists of three thematically based chapters. In chapter 1, “Sea Power and International Relations: History in the Service of Policy,” Harding explores the origins of the modern study of naval history. He locates this during the so-called Pax Britannica of the nineteenth century. Those who wanted to understand (and, perhaps, copy) the rise of Great Britain to a world power necessarily looked to the sea for answers. “History,” in Harding's words, “became the explicit servant of policy—to explain the correct course of action for nations engaged in the great struggle for survival” (14). Naturally, he identifies Alfred Thayer Mahan as the lead practitioner of this art, with the publication of his seminal work *The Influence of Sea Power upon History: 1660–1783*, in 1890. He then goes on to discuss the role of naval history and the topics investigated over the course of the next one hundred years.

Chapter 2, “Navies, Politics, and Government, 1500–1789” shows how the crucial questions of the early modern period, namely, “international trade, state formation, and colonial expansion” (65), can be addressed through the study