

THE AGE OF REVOLUTIONS AND JIHAD IN WEST AFRICA

Jihad in West Africa During the Age of Revolutions.

By Paul E. Lovejoy.

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Key Words: Islam, West Africa, intellectual, Atlantic World.

Paul Lovejoy is the author of many books that cover a wide range of topics. They treat subjects such as comparative slavery, Islam, the political and social economies of slavery, and the slave trade in West Africa and the Americas. In addition to his original contributions to each of those topics, he has decisively engaged with issues of method, theory, and sources, as well as the historiographies associated with them. After having illustrated in his previous books the changing political, social, religious, ideological, and demographic landscapes of West Africa in the era of the Atlantic slave trade, this book mounts a methodological challenge to the exclusion of Africanist scholarship in Atlantic studies and confronts the ‘inhibition to historical reconstruction’ that such ignorance has produced in historical literature (32).

Jihad in West Africa During the Age of Revolutions is a very bold intervention in three broad fields of historical inquiry, including the histories of West Africa, jihads in the late eighteenth to the second half of the nineteenth century, and the ‘age of revolutions’ in Western Europe and the Atlantic world. The ambitions of this book are to engage with the epistemological definition of Atlantic studies, propose an interpretation of the West African jihads in the age of revolutions, incorporate African history into global history, and reassess and redress the (mis)understanding of the role of Islam in Africa and in the world. What unites previous studies of jihad and of the age of revolutions, Lovejoy points out, is their consistent omission of, and collective silence on, West Africa.¹¹

By examining local and global forces during the period under consideration, Lovejoy thereby re-conceptualizes the age of revolutions by charting the course of jihads alongside the revolutionary movements that took place in Western Europe and the Americas. He carefully examines the components of the new political order established by the jihads, in terms of their sources of legitimacy, their control over elites and resources, and their management of religious and ethnic diversity. The very effective epistemological turn he makes privileges the genealogies of two long-standing traditions: Muslim resistance and homegrown Islamic radicalism. He stresses that studying these religious and political reformist efforts helps to illuminate why jihad still holds strong appeal in West Africa.

Lovejoy’s focus on the mechanisms and machinery of West African jihads in the age of revolutions not only resonates with core conclusions drawn from Atlantic studies, but also

¹¹ See for example the adaptation of C. A. Bayly’s map of the World in the Age of Revolution by D. Armitage S. Subrahmanyam, ‘Introduction: The age of revolutions, c. 1640–1840 — Global causation, connection, and comparison’, in D. Armitage and S. Subrahmanyam (eds.), *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840* (New York, 2010), xxii.

identifies the key features of the revolutionary model in Africa. In so doing, he successfully tests the causal links between economic and political forces, and also illuminates the determining influence of cultural factors, religion in particular. Through a close and astute reading of Eric Hobsbawm and Eugene Genovese, Lovejoy deploys an Africanist perspective — based on rich source material — that not only creates space for the incorporation of Africa in the mainstream of global history, but also redraws the perimeters of world history. As a result, Lovejoy goes beyond the dominant economic perspective that has shaped the way scholars discuss African connections to the Atlantic world.¹²

Lovejoy builds his case by illustrating the modalities of new governance that emerged in West Africa's age of revolutions, which were influenced by context, heritage, and different religious, social, ethnic, and economic practices. These transformations created new identities and social relations and resulted in new networks that mobilized and revised diverse Islamic ideas. Furthermore, Lovejoy identifies geographic factors that contributed to these movements, as well as the connections and networks that nurtured intellectual communities and Islamic libraries, which effectively served as a sort of foundational infrastructure of jihad.¹³

The book is fundamentally a comparative history of revolutions. In gauging the impact of the Sokoto jihad on religious theories and practices in West Africa, for example, Lovejoy compares its scale and influence to the revolutions of Europe and the Americas. By focusing on the role of books — the way in which they circulated, and commentaries about them — Lovejoy reveals the contours of a common intellectual terrain which animated religious civil societies across different ethnic and political entities. Lovejoy contends that West Africa was home to a shared literary imagination comparable to that of the Enlightenment. This, in turn, provided the intellectual inspiration, the tactical training, and the scriptural knowledge that served as the doctrinal background for jihad in West Africa.

The broad, well-documented, and convincingly argued reconstruction of the history of these jihads is further elaborated by an extensive bibliography as well as the copious notes accompanying the chapters. They attest to Lovejoy's critical engagement with existing literature and his contribution to various historiographies. Those include, specifically, narratives of the jihads (their historical trajectories, goals, and objectives); the geography of Islam; and historical anthropology of Muslim communities (from peaceful integration, toleration, and respect of multicultural settings to resistance against military regimes and oppressive aristocracies involved in the Atlantic slave trade). Moreover, Lovejoy skillfully revisits the ethnic association of jihad with Fulbe peoples and examines the two most significant factors highlighted in the literature: the structure of the Muslim trade and the transhumance patterns of the cattle-owning Fulbe. And finally, Lovejoy assesses the impact of jihad on the transatlantic slave trade by paying close attention to the resistance of

12 In addition to J. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (New York, 1992); R. J. Sparks, *Where the Negroes Are Masters: An African Port in the Era of the Slave Trade*, (Cambridge, 2014), and in particular, J.C. Miller, "The dynamics of history in Africa and the Atlantic "age of revolutions", in Armitage and Subrahmanyam, *The Age of Revolutions*.

13 O. Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa* (Cambridge, 2016).

Muslim communities, the responses by Muslim clerics calling for jihads to the issue of enslavement, and the underrepresentation of Muslims in the Atlantic slave trade.

What makes *Jihad in West Africa During the Age of Revolutions* a tour de force is the vivid, expositive analysis. The richness and extraordinary appeal of the work emerges from the liveliness of the narrative, which include biographical sketches and a very careful rendering of both the unity and fragmentation of the region. Following in the footsteps of Eugene Genovese, Lovejoy convincingly proves that jihads, like ‘slave revolts, like so much else, cannot be understood outside the context of a developing world history within which the politics, economics, and ideology of Europe, Africa, the Americas, and Asia as well, had become inseparable.’¹⁴ The book will certainly affirm itself as a milestone in the renewal of interpretations of jihads and of the age of revolutions in global history.

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AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF MUSLIM WEST AFRICA

Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa.

By Ousmane Oumar Kane.

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Timbuktu is a paradox. In the West, the name still evokes the very edge of the known world, making it literally synonymous with the *periphery*. Yet it has long been a false *center* for European discourse on Africa and Islamic scholarship. This contradictory positioning of Timbuktu’s scholarly tradition — simultaneously in the middle and at the margins — marks it as both irrelevant and exceptional. Ousmane Kane makes a signal reassessment of Timbuktu’s exceptionalism by painting a portrait of the broader African Islamic scholarly networks of which Timbuktu was but one key node.

This book both expands and refines core arguments that Kane made in his fine earlier study, *Non-Europhone Intellectuals* (2012). It also synthesizes key conclusions from a career of primary research on Islamic thought in Africa. Drawing on a wealth of published scholarship, Kane’s research approach and methods engage with — and contribute to — political science, anthropology, history, religious studies, and the ‘orientalist’ philological tradition of Islamic studies. In *Beyond Timbuktu*, Kane sheds interdisciplinary light on more than 1,000 years of scholarship, which I define as both schooling and intellectual production.

¹⁴ E. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1979), xx.