

but also puts into practice the essence and outcome of these methodologies. One can say Moraes Farias laid the foundation and the contributors have taken his propositions a step further. The book will introduce a generation of African students to the methodologies discussed in this work, which will in turn help them in their field research. This book suggests that precolonial African history should be the starting point of any African history.

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## ISLAMIC INTELLECTUAL HISTORY IN WEST AFRICA

*Jihad of the Pen: The Sufi Literature of West Africa.*

Edited by Rudolph Ware, Zachary Wright, and Amir Syed.

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Historians in the expanding subfield of Islam in Africa have long lamented the superficial degree to which the textual production of Muslim scholars has figured in academic work on relevant topics by nonspecialists. The problem has not so much been that texts in Arabic and *ajami* (the writing of African languages in Arabic script) have been completely ignored or wholly dismissed; it is that they have been read, much in the way religion is approached by the social sciences more generally, as epiphenomena of something else. Echoing a certain current in religious studies that asks researchers to take religion seriously, on its own terms, 'Islam in Africa' appears to have made a definite turn toward the religious where it had been more concerned with the political-economic, the social, and the cultural. In offering graceful translations of West Africa's most important and influential Muslim scholars stretching from West Africa's age of Islamic revolution at the end of the eighteenth century to the postcolonial moment, historians Rudolph Ware, Zachary Wright, and Amir Syed have made a significant contribution to this turn. Along with works by Chiekh Anta Babou, Ousmane Kane, Fallou Ngom, Rudiger Seesemann, and others, *Jihad of the Pen* allows the field to move, in the words of one of the editors in another publication, 'from texts to meanings'.<sup>1</sup>


After a thoughtful introductory essay by Wright, the volume offers a representative sampling of West Africa's major Sufi leaders, connecting four generations that stretch from present-day Northern Nigeria to Senegal and beyond to their global following. Each of the four parts present a biography of the saintly figure and a discussion of their major works as well as abridged translations of the author's most important works in various

<sup>1</sup> A. Syed and C. Stewart, 'From texts to meanings: close reading of the textual cultures of Islamic Africa', *Islamic Africa*, 9:1 (2018), 1–9.

genres. Part One features translations of the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate ‘Uthman Dan Fodio (1754–1817) by Rudolph Ware and Muhammad Shareef, an independent scholar long committed to this kind of translation work. Part Two compiles and translates parts of the oeuvre of Hajj ‘Umar Tal (1797–1864), the leader of one of the largest messianic movements of nineteenth-century West Africa, by Amir Syed. Ware also translates selected works from the massive corpus of Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba Mbacké (1855–1927), the founder of the Muridiyya Sufi order, in Part Three. Part Four completes the historical sequence of paradigmatic Sufi saints with works by Shaykh Ibrahim Niassé (1900–75), the leader of one of the most globally oriented branches of the Tijaniyya Sufi order. Finally, the concluding essay by Ware offers a substantive analysis of the content of the included writings and their shared themes such as the Prophetic model, the centrality of Qur’anic scripture, as well as Islamic ethics and its place in society.

Three features of this book warrant highlighting here. First, the book emphasizes the contemplative dimensions of Sufi thought. Indeed, the idea that Sufism in Africa is just a cover for the syncretic blend of Islam and ancestral religions has been squarely dismissed by most serious scholars of the topic. These translations, in their faithfulness to the content and feel of the original texts, allow readers to appreciate the extent to which scholars such as ‘Uthman Dan Fodio in his *Sciences of Behavior* and Ibrahim Niassé in his *Spirit of Etiquette* transmitted and contributed to a great tradition that wrestles with the fate of being human. Second, the selection of these texts highlights an intertextuality that defines both connection with the broader Muslim community of the global *ummah* and the specificity of the tradition in West Africa. As the book progresses, the reader can note how successive generations of scholars refer back to previous ones with an increasing density. Finally, the editors offer a sophisticated but varied approach to translation that should be explored further in the field. On the one hand, the editors have performed a much needed and appreciated service in making translations that are accessible for and relatable to contemporary anglophone audiences. On the other hand, the editors suggest that translating these works amounts to not simply giving Islamic scholarship in Africa a voice, but passing it the microphone. However, the internal variety of translation choices and styles within this volume poses the question of whether or not translation could ever be such a neutral affair.

In sum, *Jihad of the Pen* is a valuable contribution to scholarship and teaching. The elegant binding and typesetting honors its subject respectfully and invites the solemn reading it is due. The text will perhaps be most useful in undergraduate classrooms in which instructors would like to give students a sense of the content of Islamic intellectual history in Africa. Reading the book along with Ousmane Kane’s *Beyond Timbuktu* for even more context and conceptualization would make a great pairing for history, African studies, and religious studies courses.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, this book is enthusiastically recommended.

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