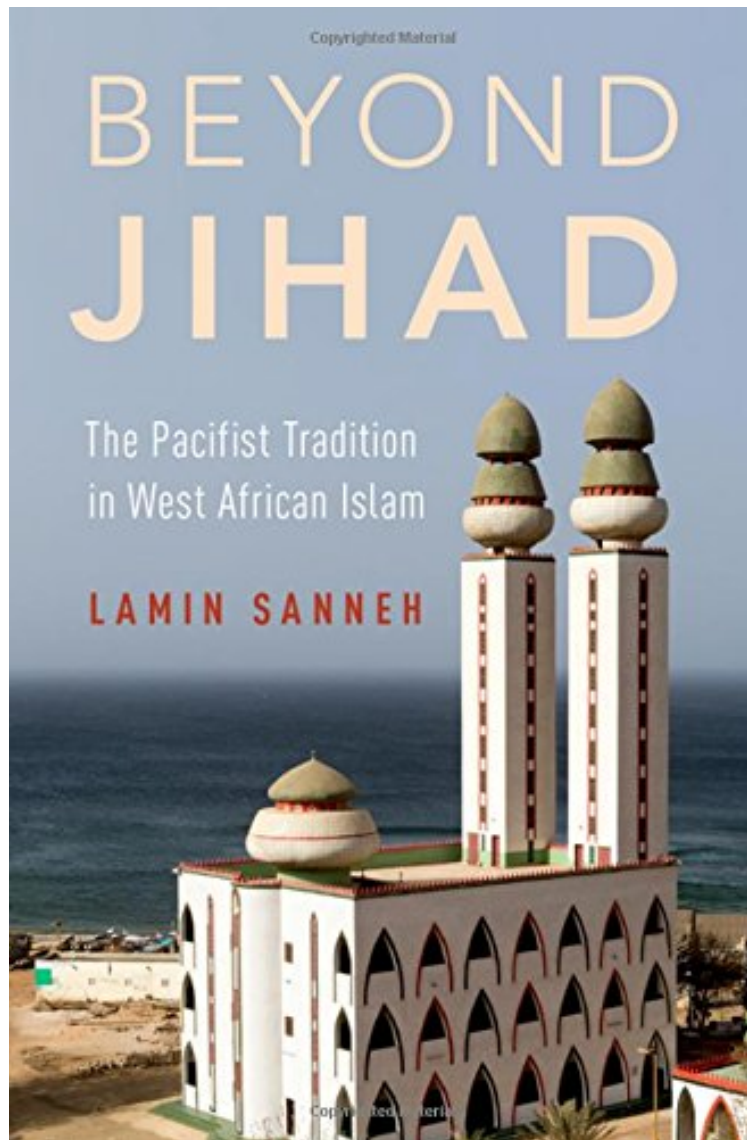


Beyond Jihad: The Pacifist Tradition in West African Islam

Lamin Sanneh

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Lamin Sanneh : Beyond Jihad: The Pacifist Tradition in West African Islam before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Beyond Jihad: The Pacifist Tradition in West African Islam:

Over the course of the last 1400 years, Islam has grown from a small band of followers on the Arabian peninsula into a

global religion of over a billion believers. How did this happen? The usual answer is that Islam spread by the sword—believers waged jihad against rival tribes and kingdoms and forced them to convert. Lamin Sanneh argues that this is far from the whole story. *Beyond Jihad* examines the origin and evolution of the African pacifist tradition in Islam, beginning with an inquiry into the faith's origins and expansion in North Africa and its transmission across trans-Saharan trade routes to West Africa. The book focuses on the ways in which, without jihad, the religion spread and took hold, and what that tells us about the nature of religious and social change. At the heart of this process were clerics who used religious and legal scholarship to promote Islam. Once this clerical class emerged, it offered continuity and stability in the midst of political changes and cultural shifts, helping to inhibit the spread of radicalism, and subduing the urge to wage jihad. With its policy of religious and inter-ethnic accommodation, this pacifist tradition took Islam beyond traditional trade routes and kingdoms into remote districts of the Mali Empire, instilling a patient, Sufi-inspired, and jihad-negating impulse into religious life and practice. Islam was successful in Africa, Sanneh argues, not because of military might but because it was made African by Africans who adapted it to a variety of contexts.

"Scholarly discussions of the history of Islam in West Africa, from its medieval origins to the latest contemporary developments, are riddled with accounts of jihad. Sanneh authoritatively argues that such depictions are misleading at best, flatly erroneous at worst. Focus on armed struggle has directed attention away from an enduring tradition he labels 'pacifist,' and which has characterized much of Islam in West Africa from its earliest introduction down to the present day."--*The International Journal of African Historical Studies* "[T]he level of scholarship, critical use of historical and religious source material, and insightful interdisciplinary approach make this book not only a good read but an outstanding contribution to Islamic, West African, and comparative religious history...Highly recommended."--CHOICE "Sanneh makes a persuasive argument that the growth of West African Islam has been, and continues to be, primarily pacific rather than coercive. The level of scholarship, critical use of historical and religious source material, and insightful interdisciplinary approach make this book not only a good read but an outstanding contribution to Islamic, West African, and comparative religious history."--CHOICE "Beyond Jihad is a grand narrative of the pacifist practice of inter-generational peaceful conversion and assimilation of Islam in West Africa, masterfully told by a multilingual, intellectually honest, and scholarly rigorous native son. The unique combination of down-to-earth yet sophisticated analysis by a compassionate yet impartial narrator is to be savored in multiple readings. With its expansive and comprehensive yet integrated span of religious traditions and their rejuvenation, commerce and travel, politics and anthropology, identity formation and transformation in the ancient and recent past to the future, this book is highly instructive for undergraduate and graduate students and their teachers in a range of fields and disciplines."--Abdullahi An-Na'im, Emory Law School, author of *What is an American Muslim?* and *Islam and the Secular State* "This important study of Islam's peaceful development in the history of West Africa comes as a vital antidote to the scholarly overemphasis on jihad and syncretism as its defining characteristics. Drawing upon his considerable erudition and lifelong engagement with the region, Sanneh reconstructs the everyday practices of Islamic clerical work in teaching, worship, devotion, and pastoral care, showing how these fixed the habits of Muslims, most of whom never saw jihad. At a time when our media is dominated by images of religious extremism this timely book reminds us that Islam was established in West Africa not by force but through peaceful, gradual means in the hands of traders and clerics."--David Maxwell, Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History, University of Cambridge and Fellow of Emmanuel College "Beyond Jihad offers a welcome and much-needed alternative to much of the current alarmist discourse about religious extremism and violence in West African Islam. A distinguished scholar of West African religious practice, Lamin Sanneh offers a historically grounded and finely nuanced account of the much deeper and more significant tradition of tolerance and openness that has characterized Muslim religious practice in the region."--Leonardo A. Villalón, Professor and Dean, University of Florida "Beyond Jihad embodies a lifetime of research and fieldwork gathering both oral and written primary sources. The book explores the spread and growth of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa. Sanneh argues that understanding the development and spread of the Sufi clerical movement, starting in the Mali Empire and spreading into modern-day Guinea and Senegambia, throws light on the growth of Islam in the region...The book also contains extensive endnotes, a scholarly bibliography and an index which scholars and students will find especially useful."--*Mission Studies* About the Author Lamin Sanneh is D. Willis James Professor of Missions and World Christianity and Professor of History at Yale. He is the author of several books, including *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (OUP 2007).