

This is the accepted version of the following book note: Donaldson, Coleman. 2019. Review of “Beyond Jihad: The Pacifist Tradition in West African Islam. By Lamin Sanneh. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. Xv + 352. \$34.95.” *Religious Studies Review* 45 (2): 217–18., which has been published in final form at <https://doi.org/10.1111/rsr.13888>

BEYOND JIHAD: THE PACIFIST TRADITION IN WEST AFRICAN ISLAM. By Lamin Sanneh. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. xv + 352. \$34.95

In recent years, capitals and vast regions of the West African Sahel have been marked by Islamist-inspired terrorist attacks as well as overt combat between their backing groups and state military forces. What are the roots of this violence? With its provocative title, Sanneh’s book is marketed as an intellectual attempt to move “beyond” an alarmist analysis of the problem being rooted in Islam itself. In truth, the book is less directly about our current moment. Instead, it is a scholar’s monograph that aims to unsettle the academic and popular conception that Islam spread in West Africa primarily through coercive force or “jihad”. What results is a sprawling work divided into three parts that respectively hop from 1) early Arabic sources about medieval West African Empires, 2) to the particular scholarly network at the heart of Sanneh’s career, the Jakhanke, 3) to other pacifists such as the Philadelphia Quakers. As a case for a deep historical West African pacifist tradition with global parallels, it succeeds, despite a steady barrage of names, places and references. Without a clear narrative to guide things, more judicious editing could have helped the important argument shine through when a West Africanist linguistic anthropologist, for instance, slogs through early Islamic and Christian theology. Ultimately, the heart of the work is the second part which focuses on the Jakhanke. In essence, a second Sanneh book on the clerical network (his original monograph was published in 1979), it is an invaluable chronicling of the Western migration of the Islamic tradition stemming from the Mali Empire’s town of “Diakha” (spelling cues, in general, are missing

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from the work). From this perspective, the book is part of a larger trend of works centered on West African Muslim scholarship and education (e.g., Rudolph Ware’s *The Walking Qur’an*, Fallou Ngom’s *Muslims Beyond the Arab World* [RSR 43:73] and Ousmane Kane’s *Beyond Timbuktu*). But have we walked beyond Arabs, Timbuktu and Jihad? Recent conversations in Bamako suggest they remain front and center as concepts and concerns—scholarship aside.

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