**CERIS Book Discussion, Spring 2018**

Ousmane Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa*. Harvard University Press, 2016.

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Discussion Questions

Ousmane Kane’s *Beyond Timbuktu* is a *longue durée* meditation on Islamic intellectual history in West Africa. In this historiography, he attempts to highlight, in broad brushstrokes, the changing educational, political and social, circumstances of various Muslim actors in the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial periods. While one could argue that there are a lot of aspects that are left out of the work, his stated purpose in this broad synthetic work is quite clear. He explains “The scope of this book is simply to bring to the attention of Europhone intellectuals the authentic lived experience of millions of Muslim in West Africa” (208). This “experience” is multivalent and is not static—it has changed in many different directions over time. The key point is that the lived experiences of Muslims and the manifold ways that Muslims have created religious meanings in West Africa, over time, often remains overlooked in academic discussions. In addition, Islam and the Arabic language have played an important part of this region’s history, and are very much part of “African traditions.” In keeping this frame in mind, I would like to propose the following broad set of discussion questions:

1. Why does Kane dedicate the first several chapters to Islamic educational practices and knowledge transmission in the precolonial period? What larger arguments is he trying to make?
2. What are the main contours of this educational philosophy and system of transmitting knowledge?
3. What is the “Islamic archive” or “Islamic library” and how are they different from the “colonial library” as conceptualized by Foucault and later by Mudimbe? What are the possibilities and/or limitations of this conceptualization?
4. Is this a story just about sub-Saharan West Africa, or is Kane trying to bridge several different historiographies to make larger claims about the African continent as a whole?
5. What trends and transformations in education does he identify occurred as a consequence of the emergence of modern schools and colonialism? How did Muslim intellectuals respond to their new positions of marginality in the colonial/post-colonial state?
6. What are the relationship between Kane’s autobiography and the historiographical elements of the book? What is he trying to explain through his own example about Islamic knowledge and the meanings that African Muslims create in post-colonial nation states?
7. How does Kane conceptualize the “Arabophones”? Does this term take on different meanings throughout this work? Do the Arabophones themselves change?
8. How have post-colonial African Muslims brought religion into the public sphere, and what consequences has this had?
9. This is primary a book about Muslim intellectuals, and the different ways that intellectual have conceived of, transmitted, and used Islamic knowledge and practice over time. What limitations are there in uncovering the experiences and religious meanings of African Muslims if we only focus on intellectuals?

**Further Readings:**

Islamic Intellectual History (Africa)

Jeppie, Shamil and Souleymane Bachir Diagne (eds), *The Meaning of Timbuktu.* Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2008.

Islamic Education and Educational Transformations in Africa

Brenner, Louis*. Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.

Kane, Ousmane. *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria: A Study of the Society for Removal and Reinstatement of Tradition*. Brill, 2003.

Østebø, Terje. *Localising Salafism: Religious Change among Oromo Muslims in Bale, Ethiopia.* Brill, 2011.

Reese, Scott. ed. *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa*. Brill: 2004.

Ware, Rudolph. *The Walking Qur’an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History In West Africa*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014.

Sufi Brotherhoods: Resistance, Adaption, and Transformations

Babou, Cheikh Anta. *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal*, 1853-1913. Ohio University Press, 2007.

Batran. Aziz A. *The Qadiryya Brotherhood in West Africa and the Western Sahara: The Life and Times of Shaykh al-Mukhtar al-Kunti*. Rabat: University of Mohammed V, 2001.

Seesemann, Rüdiger. *The Divine Flood: Ibrāhīm Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

Soares, Benjamin. *Islam and the Prayer Economy: History and Authority in a Malian Town*. Edinburgh University Press, 2005.

Wright, Zachary. *Living Knowledge in West African Islam: The Sufi Community of Ibrāhīm Niasse*. Brill, 2015.

More on Arabophones and Europhones:

Kane, Ousmane Oumar. Non-Europhone Intellectuals, translated by Victoria Bawtree. Dakar:

Codesria, nd.

Diagne, Souleymane Bachir, *The Ink of the Scholars: Reflections on Philosophy in Africa*, Translated by Jonathan Adjemian. Codesria, 2016.