INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NUSANTARA ISLAM
ISSN:
2355-651X (online)
2252-5904 (print)

Contesting Sufis' Quietism: The role of Sufism in the Islamization of West Africa

Kante Hamed

Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Author Email: kanteh097@gmail.com

Received: June 11, 2026; *Revised*: October 18, 2026, *Accepted*: October 23, 2026, *Published*: October 30, 2026

Abstract: This qualitative, historical study challenges the dominant view of West African Sufism as an apolitical and passive spiritual tradition. It examines the active, reformist, and at times militant roles of Sufi orders in Islamization, state formation, and social transformation during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Using a descriptive-analytical and historical approach, the study draws on an in-depth review and thematic analysis of secondary sources, including academic books, peer-reviewed articles, and historical references. Its scope covers the Dyula trading networks, the Almoravid movement, the Jakhanke clerical tradition, and the jihad movements of Usman dan Fodio, Umar al-Futi Tall, and Samori Touré. The findings show that Sufism operated as a dynamic framework linking spirituality with socio-political action. Sufi orders functioned as key institutions for Islamic education, legal reform, economic networking, and political mobilization. Sufi-led jihad movements are interpreted not merely as territorial expansion, but as responses to perceived moral decay and political failure aimed at establishing a just, Sharīʿah-based social order. The study is limited by its reliance on secondary sources, the breadth of its historical and geographical scope, and limited access to primary West African manuscripts. It recommends that policy and academic discourse move beyond simplistic portrayals of Sufism as apolitical and recognize Sufi communities as potential partners in education, conflict mediation, and community development. The study contributes empirically by documenting Sufi political agency, theoretically by proposing the framework of "Embedded Religious Mobilization" to deconstruct the Sufism–politics dichotomy, and methodologically by demonstrating the value of historical-qualitative analysis in studying complex religious phenomena.

Keywords: Almoravids; embedded religious mobilization; ethical reform; Islamization; Sufism; Usman dan Fodio.

Introduction

The historical expansion of Islam in West Africa cannot be adequately understood without recognizing the adaptive, integrative, and transformative character of Islamic religiosity as it encountered diverse African societies. Islam's theological emphasis on *tawḥīd* (the unity of God), combined with its capacity to accommodate local customs that did not contradict core doctrinal principles, allowed the religion to embed itself organically within West African cultural frameworks. Rather than erasing indigenous traditions wholesale, Islam often rearticulated them through Islamic moral and spiritual idioms, thereby fostering a form of religious continuity rather than rupture (B. F. Soares, 2021). Recent scholarship emphasizes that this cultural elasticity was a decisive factor in Islam's success across the region, particularly in non-urban and rural contexts where communal traditions and spiritual authority played a central role in social life (Kane, 2022).

Within this broader process, Sufism emerged as one of the most influential and enduring expressions of Islam in West Africa. Far from being a marginal or purely mystical phenomenon, Sufi orders (*ṭuruq*) functioned as institutions of religious education, moral regulation, economic networking, and political mobilization (Loimeier, 2021). Contemporary studies increasingly underline that Sufi brotherhoods such as the Qādiriyya and Tijāniyya were not only vehicles of spiritual formation but also agents of social transformation and state formation (Seesemann, 2023a). This challenges older portrayals of African Sufism as inward-looking or apolitical, a depiction that continues to dominate popular and policy-oriented narratives today.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries marked a critical turning point in the Islamization of West Africa, particularly with the consolidation of Sufi networks in rural areas. While earlier scholarship often framed this period primarily in terms of trade-based diffusion or elite conversion, recent historiography points to the role of Sufi scholars as grassroots reformers who actively reshaped religious practice, legal norms, and political authority (Kaba, 2020). The spread of Sufism during this period was closely linked to educational institutions such as *zāwiyas* and *madrasas*, which functioned as centers for Qur'anic learning, ethical discipline, and communal leadership (Kane & Levtzion, 2021). Through these institutions, Sufi scholars were able to articulate a vision of Islamic society that was both spiritually grounded and socially transformative.

Despite this historical record, contemporary discourse—both academic and popular—tends to frame Sufism in West Africa as synonymous with peace, political quietism, and non-interference in state affairs. This image is often reinforced in contrast to Salafi or Wahhabi movements, which are commonly associated with political Islam, jihadist violence, and opposition to existing governments. Extremist groups such as Boko Haram, Ansar Dine, and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb explicitly reject Sufi identity, instead grounding their ideological claims in Salafi interpretations inspired by figures such as Ibn Taymiyya and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (Thurston, 2021). As a result, Sufism is frequently positioned as a counter-extremist force rather than as a historically dynamic movement with its own political and reformist legacy.

However, this dichotomous framing obscures a crucial historical reality: many of the most influential jihad and reform movements in West African Islamic history were led by Sufi scholars. Figures such as Usman dan Fodio, al-Hajj Umar Tall, and Samori Touré were deeply embedded in Sufi intellectual traditions, yet they also mobilized armed struggle, legal reform, and state-building projects in the name of Islam. Recent research has begun to revisit these movements not merely as episodes of religious violence, but as complex responses to moral decay, social injustice, and political fragmentation (Last, 2020). These studies suggest that jihad in the Sufi context was often understood as a comprehensive project of ethical renewal (*tajdīd*) rather than as indiscriminate warfare (Babou, 2023).

This historiographical tension points to a significant research gap. While there is a growing body of literature on Sufism as a force for peace and social cohesion in contemporary West Africa, comparatively little attention has been paid to the historical continuity between Sufi spirituality, reformist activism, and political transformation. Existing studies tend to isolate Sufi jihad as an exceptional or anomalous phenomenon, rather than situating it within broader Sufi epistemologies of authority, morality, and social responsibility (Seesemann, 2023a). As a result, the dominant narrative reproduces an overly static understanding of Sufism, one that underestimates its capacity for political engagement and societal restructuring (Kane, 2022).

Moreover, the role of non-state actors such as merchant networks and itinerant scholars in the Islamization of West Africa remains under-theorized in recent scholarship. Movements such as the Dyula traders, the Almoravids (*al-Murābiṭūn*), and the Jakhanke Islamic tradition played a decisive role in spreading Islam through trade, pedagogy, and moral persuasion rather than conquest alone (Green, 2020a). Recent interdisciplinary studies combining history, anthropology, and religious studies emphasize that these actors facilitated Islamization by embedding Islamic norms within everyday economic and social practices (Ware, 2022). Yet, their relationship to Sufi ethics and organizational structures has not been sufficiently explored.

This study seeks to address these gaps by challenging the prevailing notion of Sufi quietism and by foregrounding the active, reformist, and sometimes militant dimensions of Sufi engagement in West Africa. Rather than treating Sufism as inherently apolitical, this research conceptualizes it as a flexible religious framework capable of producing multiple modes of social action depending on historical and contextual conditions. By examining key Sufi figures and movements—such as

Usman dan Fodio, Umar Tall, Samori Touré, the Dyula networks, the Almoravid legacy, and the Jakhanke tradition—this study aims to demonstrate how Sufi brotherhoods functioned as engines of Islamization, moral reform, and political organization.

The central objective of this research is threefold. *First*, it aims to re-evaluate the historical role of Sufism in the spread of Islam in West Africa by emphasizing its institutional, educational, and political dimensions. *Second*, it seeks to interrogate contemporary assumptions that equate Sufism with political disengagement by situating present-day Sufi identities within a longer historical continuum (Thurston, 2021). *Third*, the study intends to contribute to broader debates on Islam and politics in Africa by offering a more nuanced framework for understanding religious movements beyond the binary of "peaceful Sufism" versus "violent Salafism" (B. F. Soares, 2021).

By adopting this approach, the study not only fills an empirical gap in the literature but also offers a conceptual intervention into the study of Islam in Africa. It argues that Sufism's success in winning the hearts of West African societies lay precisely in its ability to integrate spirituality, social reform, and political authority into a coherent moral vision. Understanding this legacy is essential not only for historical accuracy but also for contemporary policy and academic discussions surrounding Islam, governance, and religious pluralism in West Africa.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in a descriptive–analytical and historical approach to examine the role of Sufism in the Islamization of West Africa. Qualitative methods are particularly appropriate for this research as they enable an in-depth exploration of religious meanings, historical narratives, and socio-political dynamics that are embedded within texts, traditions, and historical experiences rather than numerical data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The descriptive–analytical approach is employed to analyze concepts, actors, and institutional structures of Sufism, while the historical approach facilitates an understanding of the temporal development of Sufi movements and their influence on Islamic expansion and social transformation in West Africa (Fulbrook, 2021).

The study relies exclusively on secondary data sources. These include classical and contemporary scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, historical manuscripts, archival materials, and reputable academic online resources relevant to Sufism, Islamic reform, and Islamization processes in West Africa. The use of secondary sources is methodologically justified, as historical and religious studies often depend on textual and documentary analysis to reconstruct intellectual traditions and socio-religious movements across time (Bowen, 2020). Priority is given to sources that critically discuss major Sufi orders, prominent religious figures, and Islamic movements that played a significant role in shaping religious authority and political organization in the region.

Data collection is conducted through systematic documentation and literature review techniques. Relevant texts are identified through keyword-based searches, bibliographic tracing, and thematic relevance to the research questions. The collected materials are then categorized according to themes such as the conceptual foundations of Sufism, strategies of Islamic dissemination, reformist jihad, and the relationship between Sufi brotherhoods and political authority (Snyder, 2019). This procedure aligns with established qualitative research practices that emphasize transparency, rigor, and thematic coherence in literature-based studies (Ridder, 2020).

Data analysis follows an interpretative and thematic analysis strategy. The selected materials are critically examined to identify recurring patterns, continuities, and transformations in Sufi engagement with society and governance. Comparative analysis is applied to different scholarly interpretations in order to highlight dominant narratives as well as contested perspectives on Sufi quietism, reform, and political activism (Kane, 2022). This interpretive approach allows the study to challenge reductionist views of Sufism by situating Sufi practices within their broader historical, cultural, and ideological contexts (B. F. Soares, 2021).

By integrating descriptive, historical, and interpretative methods, this study seeks to produce a nuanced and context-sensitive analysis of Sufism as a dynamic Islamic tradition in West Africa—one that encompasses spiritual devotion, social reform, and political engagement rather than being confined to apolitical or purely mystical interpretations.

Results and Discussion

Reduction of the Definitions of Sufism

The problem of defining Sufism has long occupied both classical Muslim scholars and modern academics. Most definitions of Sufism emerge from observed spiritual practices and ethical disciplines exercised by Sufi practitioners, which often results in a reductive understanding of Sufism as merely inward devotion or ascetic spirituality (Laude, 2025). Such an approach, however, risks oversimplifying Sufism by detaching it from its epistemological, ethical, and theological foundations within Islam. Recent scholarship increasingly emphasizes that Sufism should be understood not only as an inner spiritual experience but also as a systematic Islamic science concerned with moral refinement, spiritual cognition, and the cultivation of *ihsān* as an integral dimension of religious life (Salleh & Mahmood, 2025).

Classical Muslim scholars articulated definitions of Sufism that firmly anchored it within Islamic orthodoxy. Zakaria al-Ansari and Ahmad Zarrouq, for example, defined Sufism as a disciplined science aimed at reforming the heart, purifying intention, and directing the individual entirely toward God. This process was inseparable from jurisprudence (*fiqh*), which regulates outward actions, and theology (*ʿilm al-tawḥīd*), which establishes certainty through rational and revelatory proof. In this framework, Sufism does not function as an alternative to Islamic law or doctrine, but rather as their spiritual completion, ensuring coherence between inner transformation and outward religious practice (Ahmad & Hubayshi, 2013). Similarly, al-Junayd's famous formulation that Sufism consists in adopting every *sunni* virtue while abandoning worldly dispositions underscores the ethical and normative orientation of early Sufism, positioning it as a moral discipline rather than an esoteric deviation.

This ethical-theological orientation is further reinforced in the teachings of later Sufi authorities such as Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili, who described Sufism as the training of the soul in servitude and its return to divine order. Such definitions indicate that early Sufism conceived spiritual realization as inseparable from obedience, discipline, and conformity to prophetic norms. In this sense, Sufism historically functioned as what contemporary scholars describe as the *spiritual epistemology of Islam*—a mode of knowing God grounded in ethical practice, self-purification, and experiential certainty rather than speculative abstraction (Sholikah, 2025).

However, modern academic discourse reveals increasing tension between classical definitions of Sufism and contemporary representations. Some contemporary groups define Sufism in ways that emphasize ritual symbolism or extraordinary bodily practices while neglecting the foundational ethical and doctrinal constraints articulated by early Sufi scholars. This divergence has prompted renewed scholarly attention to figures such as Uthman dan Fodio, who explicitly warned against *bidʿah* within Sufi practice. Dan Fodio argued that while *ihsān* represents the essence of Sufism, practices that inflict physical harm or violate prophetic guidance contradict the very moral logic of Islamic spirituality (Erol, 2025). Modern studies interpret such critiques as evidence that Sufism historically possessed an internal mechanism of self-regulation grounded in *sunnah* and ethical rationality, rather than unrestrained mystical expression (Munandar & Fahrurrozi, 2024).

Western scholarship has further contributed to the definitional reduction of Sufism by privileging metaphysical abstraction over ethical discipline (Lipton & Zarrabi-Zadeh, 2023). Early Orientalist scholars such as Reynold Nicholson famously described Sufism as the "apprehension of divine realities," framing it primarily as a mystical philosophy concerned with transcendental experience. While this interpretation captures an important dimension of Sufi thought, recent academic reassessments argue that it remains incomplete because it overlooks the practical, moral, and juridical dimensions emphasized in Islamic sources. Contemporary researchers thus advocate a multidimensional definition of Sufism that integrates spirituality, ethics, theology, and social practice within a coherent Islamic worldview (Salleh & Mahmood, 2025).

Taken together, both classical and contemporary scholarship suggest that Sufism cannot be reduced to inward mysticism alone. Rather, it constitutes a comprehensive Islamic discipline aimed at transforming the human self through ethical refinement, spiritual cognition, and disciplined practice rooted in revelation. Recent studies increasingly conceptualize Sufism as *scientia sacra*—a sacred science that operates within lived tradition, ritual discipline, and moral responsibility, rather than as an abstract mystical ideology detached from historical and normative constraints (Sholikah,

2025). This integrative understanding allows Sufism to be analyzed not only as a spiritual path but also as a dynamic intellectual and social force that has shaped Muslim societies across time and space (Rozi et al., 2025).

The terms "Sufi" and "Sufi" have been defined in a variety of ways by modern Sufi leaders. One supports that The essence of Sufism lies in the purification of the senses and the will, the building up of inner and outer life, and the attainment of eternal felicity and blessedness by apprehending the Divine Realities (M. S. Khan & Ghazanfar, 1994). Other scholars defined it as "The purification of the heart from associating with created beings, separation from natural characteristics, suppression of human qualities, avoiding the temptations of the carnal soul, taking up the qualities of the spirit, attachment to the sciences of the reality, using what is more proper to the eternal, counseling all the community, being truly faithful to God and following the Prophet (saw) according to the law" Sharif Khan However, such distinctions only existed because each master is addressing to his audience according to their spiritual state and comprehension (M. S. Khan & Ghazanfar, 1994). Thus every definition represents a unique facet of Sufism and is therefore accurate in its perspective. To understand Sufism as a whole, one should take into account as many interpretations as possible.

The diversity of definitions attributed to Sufism reflects not conceptual confusion, but rather the intellectual richness and historical depth of *taṣawwuf* as an Islamic tradition. Across classical, modern, and contemporary scholarship, Sufism has been defined through various lenses: as spiritual discipline, ethical refinement, epistemological framework, and socio-religious praxis (Chowdury, 2025). However, many dominant definitions—especially those popularized in modern academic and public discourse—tend to reduce Sufism to inward spirituality and personal devotion, marginalizing its broader intellectual and historical roles. To clarify this tendency of reduction, the following table synthesizes key definitional orientations of Sufism, highlighting both their core emphases and inherent limitations. This comparative overview serves to demonstrate why a more holistic understanding of Sufism is necessary, particularly when analyzing its historical manifestations in regions such as West Africa.

Table 1. Core Definitions of Sufism and Their Analytical Limitations

Definitional Orientation	Key Proponents / Sources	Core Emphasis	Analytical Limitation
Ascetic–Spiritual Definition	Al-Junayd; Zakaria al-Ansari; al-Shadhili	Inner devotion, moral purification, spiritual discipline (tazkiyat al-nafs)	Reduces Sufism to inward piety, neglecting social and political engagement
Ethical–Normative Definition	Ahmad Zarrouq; Ousmane Dan Fodio	Reform of the heart in accordance with Sunnah; integration of ihsan and orthodoxy	Often interpreted narrowly as personal ethics rather than collective reform
Philosophical–Epistemological Definition	Classical Sufi metaphysicians; modern scholars	Apprehension of divine reality; knowledge of truth (ma'rifa)	Abstracted from historical praxis and material contexts
Western Mystical Definition	Nicholson; modern encyclopedic accounts	Mysticism, inner experience, direct encounter with the divine	Orientalist tendency to detach Sufism from Islamic law and society
Contemporary Reductionist View	Popular modern discourse	Peaceful, apolitical spirituality	Erases historical evidence of Sufi reformism and jihad
Holistic Historical Definition	Recent Islamic studies scholarship (2020–2025)	Spiritual, ethical, intellectual, and socio-political dimensions	Requires contextual historical analysis, often absent in simplified narratives

The table above illustrates that the problem does not lie in the plurality of definitions of Sufism, but rather in the dominance of selective readings that privilege inward spirituality while sidelining Sufism's broader historical functions. Classical definitions articulated by early Sufi authorities such as al-Junayd and al-Shadhili foregrounded ethical discipline and spiritual refinement, yet these figures operated within vibrant intellectual and social milieus (Dickson, 2022). Their teachings were never intended to isolate spirituality from communal responsibility, but modern appropriations often abstract these definitions from their original contexts, transforming Sufism into a purely private religious experience.

Similarly, ethical–normative definitions advanced by scholars like Ahmad Zarrouq and Ousmane Dan Fodio demonstrate that Sufism was deeply concerned with orthodoxy, moral order, and the preservation of Sunnah (Cissé & Niasse, 2021). However, contemporary interpretations frequently read these formulations as advocating personal piety alone, overlooking their reformist orientation. Dan Fodio's insistence on combating *bid'a* and restoring prophetic norms, for instance, reflects a vision of Sufism as an engine of societal transformation rather than spiritual withdrawal.

Western scholarly definitions, while invaluable in introducing Sufism to global academic discourse, often frame it primarily as Islamic mysticism (Sahin, 2024). This framing, influenced by phenomenological and comparative religious studies, tends to detach Sufism from its legal, ethical, and political foundations within Islam. As a result, Sufism is frequently portrayed as an alternative to normative Islam rather than as one of its constitutive dimensions (Nasser, 2022).

Most critically, contemporary reductionist views that depict Sufism as inherently peaceful and apolitical obscure substantial historical evidence to the contrary. In regions such as West Africa, Sufi brotherhoods functioned as agents of Islamization, education, legal reform, and at times political mobilization (Layachi, 2023). By ignoring these dimensions, modern discourse risks producing an incomplete and historically inaccurate portrait of Sufism.

Therefore, the holistic historical definition emerging in recent scholarship offers a corrective framework. It conceptualizes Sufism as a dynamic Islamic tradition that integrates spirituality, ethics, intellectual inquiry, and socio-political engagement (Bozbaş & Bozbaş, 2025). This framework does not deny the centrality of inner devotion but situates it within a broader matrix of lived religious practice. Such an understanding is indispensable for analyzing Sufism's role in shaping Islamic societies, particularly in West Africa, where Sufi actors were instrumental in both spiritual cultivation and structural transformation.

Sufism in west Africa.

There is evidence of earlier Sufi activities in parts of the Western and Central Sahara, most notably in Timbuktu as early as in the fifteenth century; and the Aır mountains in present-day Niger. However, in many instances, Sufism seems to have been a matter of individual devotion, and the extent to which the early Sufi presence contributed to the gradual Islamization of many West African peoples is anything but clear. It seems that it was not the influence of Sufism as mystical religiosity, but rather the combination of da'wa (the call to Islam) with social, economic, and political factors that turned Sufi communities into such formidable forces that were able to attract Muslims and non-Muslims alike (Seesemann, 2010).

Sufism stands as the most prominent tradition of Islamic spirituality and mysticism in West Africa, deeply embedded in the region's religious life through organized *ṭuruq* (*orders*) governed by master-disciple transmissions (*silsila*) that claim spiritual lineages ultimately tracing back to the Prophet Muhammad (*tariqa*). Across West Africa, *ṭuruq* such as the Tijaniyya, Qadiriyya, and the Muridiyya have become central pillars of Islamic identity, shaping not only personal devotional practices but also communal structures of learning, authority, and leadership (Hamed, 2024). These orders crystallized into socially significant institutions particularly after the 18th century, expanding from early informal networks of spiritual masters and familial teachers into widespread organized brotherhoods that influenced education, law, and community governance.

Historical scholarship emphasizes that the institutionalization of Sufi *ṭuruq* in West Africa corresponded with major socio-political transformations throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, including colonial encounters and the rise of nationalist movements, which altered patterns of religious authority and social organization. This expanded role of Sufi orders marked a shift from localized spiritual lineages (as seen in early traditions associated with figures like the Jakhanke

scholars) toward structured brotherhoods that could mobilize large followings and mediate between communities and political power. Moreover, contemporary research highlights that Sufi brotherhoods continued to adapt and respond to evolving challenges, including internal debates about spiritual authority, the role of the living master (*tarbiya*), and the transmission of *maʿrifa* (gnosis) across diverse West African contexts (Wright, 2022).

The Tijaniyya order, founded in North Africa in the late 18th century, became one of West Africa's most influential *ṭuruq*, with its teachings spreading rapidly through networks of scholars and merchants before establishing major centers of devotion and instruction in Senegal, Mali, and beyond. Ethnographic and historical studies note that the Tijaniyya's emphasis on direct experiential knowledge of God (*maʿrifa*) and the role of a spiritually realized guide helped shape patterns of religious belonging and social mobilization throughout West Africa; this includes debates over the necessity of a living sheikh, a discourse that reflects regional variations in Sufi pedagogy and authority (Wright, 2022). Similarly, the Qadiriyya has long been present in the region, with local adaptations that articulate spiritual guidance in relation to communal life and economic exchange, reinforcing Sufism's embeddedness within West African societies.

Importantly, recent scholarship problematizes simplistic representations of West African Sufism as either exclusively quietist or purely apolitical. Some studies challenge the notion that Sufi orders are inherently disengaged from socio-political spheres, detailing how *ṭuruq* structured community cohesion, resisted colonial pressures, and contributed to the articulation of Islamic reform in varying contexts (Hamed, 2024). In this light, Sufi epistemology in West Africa must be understood not only as a pursuit of personal mystical insight but as a socially situated and historically dynamic system of knowledge and authority, shaped through Qurʾanic teachings, prophetic tradition, lived practice, and the teachings of both local and transregional Sufi masters. These epistemic commitments emphasize transformative, experiential knowledge that contrasts ordinary intellectual learning with the immediacy of direct spiritual experience—as embodied in ritual practices like *dhikr* and structured by the guidance of respected *shaykhs* (Barrientos-Rastrojo, 2025).

Thus, while the historical contours of West African Sufism are varied and regionally specific, contemporary academic research with validated sources confirms that *ṭuruq* such as Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya remain central to understanding Islamic spirituality, community formation, and epistemological frameworks in the region today. Their endurance and adaptability across centuries demonstrate Sufism's persistent relevance to West African Muslim identities and socio-religious life.

The spread of Islam through Sufi jihadist movements in West Africa

In this part of our study will talk about the first Sufis traders, who seem to be the first to spread Islam peacefully Islam, and then the shifting to the Sufis movements Wich made an important effort in spreading or reforming Islam all over west Africa. starting with Al Murabitun movement and Jakhanke Islamic Movement their jihad, Ousmane dan fodio, Oumar tall, and end with The, and Samori Toure (Miles, 2017).

The Dyulas are an ethnic group in West Africa who have long been known for their trade between West Africa or Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa, they have been greatly influenced by Muslim traders from the north who were belonging to the Islamic sufi brotherhood (DjeDje, 2010). They easily accept this religion. and for several reasons, but particularly, and to facilitate their trades.

From the Atlantic coast of Senegambia to Niger and from the southern edge of the Sahara to forest zones further south, the Dyula conquered the former territory of the Mande culture (Goody, 2018). They established decentralized townships in non-Muslim colonies that were connected to a vast commercial network, creating what was known as a (trading diaspora) moreover due to commercial necessity, they established settlements under the protection of various local kings who frequently gave them self-governance and autonomy. They also opened up new markets. The structure of Dyula trading companies was based on the (lu) which literally means the (house) and also means a (working unit) made up of a father and his sons as well as other attached males. Thus, members of a specific Dyula dispersed from the savanna to the forest, governed the flow of merchandise and information, made decisions, and successfully oversaw the supply and demand

economic mechanisms (Shillington, 2004).

In the Ghana empire, Muslims lived under the auspices of a non-Muslim king, who invited Muslim traders to the capital and employed literate Muslims in his court. According to the geographer Abu Abdallah Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr al-Zuhri (1137–54) writing in 1137, the people of Ghana converted to Islam in 1076. This must have happened under the influence of the Almoravids, a militant Islamic movement in the southwestern Sahara. According to the geographer al-Sharif al-Idrisi (1100–65), Ghana was a Muslim state in 1154 and was still among the most powerful in western Sudan. By the middle of the thirteenth century, however, Ghana's power had declined and the political center of gravity shifted southward, where Mali, on the upper reaches of the Niger River, emerged as the dominant power. Al-Bakri's writings imply that there were also local Muslims in Ghana, traders who were part of a commercial network that extended from the towns of the Sahel to the sources of gold in the south. Muslims established trading centers that by the end of the fifteenth century reached the fringes of the forest. They created a commercial diaspora with a common religion, language, and legal system, the Shariah, a personal and extraterritorial divinely ordained law, which added to the mutual trust among merchants. Conversion to Islam thus became necessary for those who wished to join the commercial network. Therefore, their desire to succeed in business and their positive interactions with other businesspeople who have converted to Islam may have been major factors that influenced their choice to become Muslims.

Islamization in sub-Saharan Africa which has been going on for almost a thousand years ago was through a peaceful process. Hunwick in his book stated, "that the Berbers who inhabited the buffer zone between the Arabs in the north and the black Africans who lived in the south took on the active role as the agents of Islamization after having been converted". (Hunwick, 2006, pp. .25-26) the dyulas accepted Islam From the Sanhaja Berbers, and through their scholars and merchants, they began to actively disseminate the Islamic faith throughout Sub-Saharan Africa and beyond (Hunwick, 2006). The Dyula traders then spread it across West Africa, especially around the Volta basin. All these were because of the rationality, simplicity, and adaptability of Islam coupled with its tradition of scholarship. Hunwick, along the caravan routes and to various cities on their trade missions they diffused Islam. After a while, many of them became knowledgeable in the Islamic faith and pursued further learning (Hunwick, 2006). Thus the Saghanughu clan of the Wangara especially had an early interaction with Islam. And Some speculate that its members may have belonged to the Ibadiyya sect, an offshoot of the Kharijiyya sect that preceded the Almoravid conquest (Ibrahim, 2011).

The Almoravids or al-Murabitun is an Arabic term, as they called themselves, were an Islamic Berber dynasty that established an empire in Morocco and eventually took it over a wide region of Northwest Africa including modern Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania, and part of Algeria. The empire stretched as far south as modern Senegal and as far north as the Iberian Peninsula 'modern Spain and Portugal'. The Almoravids aimed to spread Islamic traditions throughout Northern Africa and Al-Andalus which was Islamic Spain at the time. The dynasty was founded by Abdallah Ibn Yasin. And the capital was Marrakesh, a city that was the ruling house founded in 1062 (Elkholy, 2016). The Gudala nomadic Berber tribes of the Sahara, traversing the territory between the Draa, the Niger, and the Senegal rivers. They were crucial in preventing the fall of Al-Andalus to the Iberian Christian kingdoms when they decisively defeated a coalition at the Battle of Sagrajas in 1086. This enabled them to control an empire that stretched 3,000 kilometers North to South, from Senegambia to Spain (Adu-Gyamfi, 2018). This power enables them to spread Islam in all the lands.

They conquered Ghana Empire which is the first empire known in west Africa sometime around 1076. and collected tribute from the Sudan, to the extent that the authority of the rules of Ghana dwindled away, and they were subjected and absorbed by the Soso, a neighboring people of Sudan. Moreover, the traditions in Mali related that the Soso attacking and took over Mali as well, and the ruler of the Soso, Soumaoro Kante (Soumangourou Kante) took over the land (Adu-Gyamfi, 2018).

The Jakhanke Islamic Movement which arose in the 12th century under the charismatic scholar Alhajj Salim Suwareh who helped to spread Islam in the present-day countries of Mali, Guinea, Senegal, and The Gambia, the most Islamized countries in West Africa today.

The Jakhanke Islamization effort has indeed borne rich fruit; they belong to a bigger group, the Serahuli ethnic group also called Soninke in other writings. Today, they are erroneously categorized as Mandinka. They speak a dialect of Mandinka, but their 'Mandikanization' was largely because they were hosted by Mandinka chiefs when the Jakhanke moved from the present-day Republic of Mali to the Senegambia region. They started a peaceful propagation of Islam in the Senegambia region (Adu-Gyamfi, 2018).

This is all the more relevant as we write today because of the rampant violence associated with Islam in many parts of the world. Much of the subsequent styles and techniques associated with the peaceful spread of Islam in Senegambia is their creation. they professed the peaceful path to Islam. They did not raise the sword to spread the religion. They resorted to more peaceful methods such as establishing Koranic schools and mosques, upgrading of mosques, holding sessions on Koranic exegesis, preservation of holy sites where yearly Islamic gatherings take place, and being itinerant traders who took Islam to their clients and customers. (Samuel adu-gyamfi, 2018) But just as they had methods, they also had tactics! For example, they believed in numbers and therefore were keen to multiply their tribes or disciples. The disciples had gone through years of tutelage and would be allowed to disperse and then mass up new disciples themselves. Through massification, the Jakhanke helped to strengthen their religion (Adu-Gyamfi, 2018).

Alhaji Salim Suwareh, the founder of the Jakhanke Islamic movement was central in the success of the Jakhanke missionary work. His early life is shrouded in mystery He died around 1500 and reputedly made seven pilgrimages to Mecca where he had relatives and lived before relocating to Black Africa to spread Islam, settling in the Jaka region of Masina, in present-day Mali. Hence the name of his people Jakankhe, meaning in Mandinka 'those who hail from Jaka'. When he completed his seventh hajj, he returned to Africa and stayed. He led his people from Jaka Masina to Jaka Bambuku. When the animist ruler of Bambuku became hostile, Suwareh did as the prophet of Islam did when Meccans started to throw stones at him: flee into exile. Suwareh led his band of talibes toward present-day Senegambia. The historian Professor Sanneh writes that since this hijra or flight-like movement, Jakhanke 'have been united by a close bond of solidarity based on fidelity to Suwareh characterized by bonds of solidarity (Adu-Gyamfi, 2018).

Dan Fodio, ethnically a Fulani, is particularly remembered for his jihad against local Hausa leaders in areas nowadays located in the south of Niger and Northern Nigeria. And up to the present day, Muslims in Niger and Nigeria continue to evoke the memory of the Islamic state established as a result of dan Fodio's successful jihad, and many regard him as the renewer (mujaddid) of Islam during his time. Dan Fodio's writings index him as a scholar of Islam who combined a strong profile as a Sufi with expertise in fiqh, or Islamic jurisprudence. Several of his works were written to justify his decision to wage jihad against nominally Muslim rulers who failed to implement the shari'a. It is noteworthy, however, that the final impetus to start the jihad came from a vision where 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, the founder of the Qadiriyya, permitted him to take military action. Once the structures of his Islamic state were in place, dan Fodio withdrew from politics and devoted the last years of his life to teaching and contemplation. Although considered the pivotal figure in the spread of the Qadiriyya in this part of West Africa, dan Fodio did actually not set up firm organizational structures for his Sufi path, nor was the Qadiriyya his only Sufi affiliation. Rather than organizing their followers into tight-knit Sufi communities, his descendants established the Sokoto Caliphate as their political and religious power base. Up to the present day, the Sultan of Sokoto figures as the nominal head of the Qadiriyya in the region. It was only in the twentieth century, under the leadership of Nasiru Kabara in Kano, that the Qadiryya emerged as a Sufi order with a mass following (Seesemann, 2010).

These figures were not merely itinerant traders but Sufi intellectual-activists who articulated a robust ethical framework linking spirituality with productive labor (Butts, 2023). As previously noted, early Sufi authorities such as Ḥujjat al-Islām Imām al-Ghazālī, and later West African reformers like Shaykh ʿUthmān ibn Fūdī (Dan Fodio), consistently warned against idleness, passivity, and social dependency. In *Iḥyāʾ al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya wa Ikhmād al-Bidʿa al-Shayṭāniyya* (*Reviving the Muhammadan Sunnah and Extinguishing Satanic Innovations*), particularly Chapter Thirty-Three, Dan Fodio explicitly classified excessive withdrawal from work, refusal to earn a livelihood, and prolonged inactivity as reprehensible practices—even when justified in the name of Sufism. Citing the Maghribi Sufi jurist Aḥmad Zarrūq, he emphasized that

"just as it is improper to bury seeds in infertile land, it is equally improper to remain idle in an unsound spiritual condition," a stance grounded in scholarly consensus (Belhaj, 2012).

For Dan Fodio, therefore, authentic Sufism demanded active social engagement. A true Sufi was expected to rise, work, and integrate into communal life, not only to sustain personal dignity but also to exert a constructive moral influence on society. This ethical posture enabled Sufi figures to function simultaneously as spiritual guides, economic actors, and agents of daʿwa, capable of calling people to Islam while defending the social and religious interests of Muslim communities (Zárate, 2026).

This normative vision of labor-oriented spirituality is further corroborated by the manuscript tradition preserved in the libraries of Timbuktu, which house thousands of works produced by West African Muslim—particularly Sufi—scholars. Among these texts are treatises devoted exclusively to labor ethics, craftsmanship, and agriculture. A notable example is *al-Barakāt fī Faḍl al-Ḥiraf wa al-Zirāʿa* (Blessings in the Virtue of Crafts and Agriculture) by Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar al-Yamānī al-Ḥabashī. This work explicitly encourages Muslims to engage in productive trades so as not to become a burden on the community (F. R. Khan et al., 2023). Drawing extensively on Prophetic traditions and Qurʾanic verses that affirm the moral value of work, the text frames labor as a religious obligation that sustains both spiritual vitality and social resilience, rather than a distraction leading to lethargy or worldliness (Badrul Zaman et al., 2023).



Image of a page from the book, accessed from the Electronic Manuscript Library of Timbuktu, (https://artsandculture.google.com/experiment/the-timbuktu-manuscripts/BQE6pL2U3Qsu2A)

ʿUmar ibn Saʿīd al-Fūtī Tall (1794–1864), born in Futa Tooro in the Senegambian region, was a prominent West African Islamic scholar, Tijānī Sufi, political leader, and Toucouleur military commander. He founded what later became known as the Toucouleur Empire, a short-lived but influential polity that at its height encompassed large parts of present-day Guinea, Senegal, and Mali (Mbodj-Pouye, 2023). Like ʿUthmān dan Fodio before him, al-Ḥājj ʿUmar grounded his political and military project in a Sufi religious framework. According to Tijānī narratives, his campaign was initiated after a visionary encounter with the Prophet Muḥammad, in which he received authorization to wage jihad against what he perceived as pagan practices among the Bamana communities of the Upper Niger region. The final twelve years of his life were thus marked by sustained military campaigns framed explicitly as religious jihad (Seesemann, 2010).

In 1852, al-Ḥājj ʿUmar formally proclaimed jihad not only against non-Muslim groups, but also against what he regarded as morally lax or apostate Muslim rulers, European intruders, and the backsliding elites of Futa Toro and Futa Jallon. His campaign initially succeeded in consolidating power in Futa Toro, and by 1862 his empire had expanded to include major centers such as Timbuktu, Masina, Hamdallahi, and Ségou (Lapidus, 2014). After failing to decisively defeat French colonial forces, al-Ḥājj ʿUmar redirected his military efforts toward the Bambara kingdoms of Kaarta and Ségou. The fall of Nioro du Sahel, the capital of Kaarta, was followed by the capture of Ségou on 10 March 1861 (Delafosse, 1968). The Bambara ruler, Ali Diara (Bina Ali), fled to Hamdallahi, reportedly carrying with him the royal family's traditional ritual idols, a symbolic act marking both political defeat and religious displacement (Roberts, 1987).

Following al-Ḥājj ʿUmar's death, the empire fragmented under the rule of his sons into several successor states, all of which eventually succumbed to French military conquest in the Western Sudan. Despite their relatively short political lifespan, the movements led by ʿUthmān dan Fodio and ʿUmar Tall remain the two most significant Sufi-led jihad projects in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century West Africa. While these movements made substantial contributions to the Islamization of vast regions, it was paradoxically during the consolidation of European colonial rule that Islam expanded most rapidly. Between the 1880s and the 1930s, Islam advanced across West Africa at an unprecedented scale—a development that alarmed colonial administrators whose policies, often unintentionally, facilitated Islamic expansion rather than restraining it (Seesemann, 2010).

A parallel yet distinct trajectory can be observed in the career of Samory Touré (c. 1830–1900), also known as Almamy Samory Lafiya Touré. A Muslim cleric, skilled military strategist, and founder of the Wassoulou Empire, Samory established an Islamic polity spanning parts of present-day Guinea, Sierra Leone, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso. A devout adherent of Sunni Islam following the Mālikī school of jurisprudence, Samory combined military resistance with religious reform (Person, 1975). Often described by European observers as the "Napoleon of Africa," he mounted a prolonged resistance against French colonial expansion while simultaneously promoting Islamic education and social ethics.

Samory Touré actively sponsored Qurʾanic instruction, dispatching teachers to villages throughout his territories and personally overseeing students' mastery of the Qurʾan. Those who excelled were publicly recognized and rewarded, reinforcing the moral authority of Islamic learning within his empire. Graduates of these Islamic schools played a decisive role in disseminating Islam across the wider region, contributing to its rapid expansion in Guinea, Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire during the late nineteenth century (Mark-Thiesen & Mihatsch, 2022). Despite his military successes, Samory eventually faced insurmountable colonial pressure. By 1898, after Britain refused to supply him with arms, he relocated to Liberia, where he attempted to establish a second imperial center in Kong, in Upper Côte d'Ivoire (Person & White, 2023).

What emerges from this historical trajectory of Sufi-led Islamization in West Africa is not merely a sequence of religious or military expansions, but a profound theoretical challenge to dominant paradigms in the study of Islam, jihad, and religious change. Prevailing global discourses—particularly those shaped by post-9/11 security-oriented frameworks—tend to reduce jihad to violence, militancy, and ideological rigidity (Roose et al., 2022). The West African experience, however, reveals a layered typology of jihad in which spiritual discipline, ethical reform, economic integration, pedagogical networks, and selective armed struggle coexist within a coherent Sufi worldview (Matusitz & Wesley, 2024). This complexity compels a reassessment of analytical binaries that separate "mysticism" from "activism" or "spiritual Islam" from "political Islam," distinctions that prove inadequate when confronted with the lived historical realities of Sufi movements in African Islam.

From a theoretical standpoint, the Sufi jihad in West Africa may be read through the lens of what contemporary scholars describe as embedded religious mobilization, a form of Islamic activism that grows organically from social, economic, and moral infrastructures rather than from abstract ideological blueprints (B. Soares, 2021). Unlike modern jihadist movements that often emerge in opposition to existing social orders, West African Sufi movements were deeply enmeshed within local societies. Dyula traders, for instance, did not impose Islam through coercion but embedded it within commercial ethics, trust-based networks, and shared legal norms that facilitated long-distance trade. Conversion, in this context, was not merely theological assent but an entry into a moral economy regulated by Islamic law and Sufi ethical discipline (Green, 2020b).

This model of Islamization complicates Max Weber's classical thesis that religious ethics primarily shape economic behavior in abstract terms. In the West African Sufi context, economic participation itself became a vehicle of religious transmission, while Sufi discipline functioned as a moral technology for sustaining trust across vast transregional networks (B. Soares, 2021). Islam here was neither passively absorbed nor violently imposed; it was operationalized as a civilizational grammar that ordered commerce, education, and political legitimacy simultaneously. Such a configuration resonates strongly with contemporary theories of religion as a *social infrastructure* rather than a discrete belief system (Kane, 2022).

The transition from peaceful commercial propagation to organized Sufi jihad, particularly in movements such as al-Murabitun, Dan Fodio's Sokoto jihad, and al-Hajj Umar Tall's campaigns, should therefore not be interpreted as a rupture, but as a contextual recalibration of religious strategy. Recent historiography emphasizes that Sufi-led jihad emerged not from doctrinal extremism but from perceived moral crises: the erosion of Islamic norms, syncretic excesses deemed illegitimate, unjust taxation, and the failure of nominally Muslim rulers to uphold shari'a-based governance (Seesemann, 2023b). In this sense, jihad functioned as a corrective mechanism aimed at restoring ethical and legal order rather than as an expansionist ideology (Lapidus, 2024).

This insight carries significant global relevance. Contemporary policy and academic frameworks often treat Sufism as a counterweight to radicalism, framing it as inherently quietist and apolitical. While well-intentioned, this narrative risks reproducing another form of reductionism. The West African experience demonstrates that Sufism possesses a capacity for disciplined mobilization, including armed struggle, without collapsing into nihilistic violence or takfiri logic. The jihad of Dan Fodio, for example, was embedded within a sophisticated scholarly tradition, justified through legal argumentation, constrained by ethical norms, and ultimately oriented toward state-building rather than perpetual warfare (Kane, 2022). This sharply contrasts with contemporary jihadist movements whose violence is often decoupled from coherent social reconstruction (Seesemann, 2023b).

Moreover, the pedagogical infrastructures established by Sufi movements—Qur'anic schools, manuscript cultures, itinerant scholarship, and vocational ethics—underscore a crucial theoretical point: religious authority in Sufi Islam is produced through knowledge transmission rather than charismatic rupture. The Timbuktu manuscript tradition, including texts devoted to labor, craftsmanship, and agriculture, illustrates that Sufi ethics valorized productivity, social contribution, and economic independence as integral to spiritual excellence (Hunwick & Ngom, 2021). Recent manuscript studies confirm that West African Sufism articulated a theology of work that directly challenges modern stereotypes of mysticism as escapist or anti-material (Kane, 2022).

When viewed through contemporary global debates on Islam and modernity, the West African Sufi model offers an alternative genealogy of Islamic reform. Rather than framing reform as either Salafi purification or secular modernization, Sufi reformism pursued moral regeneration through spiritual discipline combined with social engagement. This model disrupts linear narratives that portray Islamic history as oscillating between mysticism and legalism, suggesting instead that Sufism historically functioned as a bridge between inward piety and outward governance (Ilcus, 2025).

The cases of Umar Tall and Samori Touré further complicate simplistic binaries. Both figures combined Sufi affiliation with military leadership and statecraft, yet their projects were not reducible to religious militancy. Recent scholarship situates their struggles within broader anti-colonial epistemologies, where Islam functioned as a source of political legitimacy, ethical restraint, and communal solidarity in the face of European imperial encroachment (Gani, 2023). In this light, Sufi jihad appears not as an anachronistic relic, but as an early form of religiously grounded resistance to global asymmetries of power (Mohiuddin, 2023).

Globally, this analysis urges scholars to rethink how Islamic movements are categorized (Iner & Cufurovic, 2022). The West African experience suggests that the categories of "moderate Islam" and "radical Islam" obscure more than they reveal. Sufi movements were capable of peace and war, commerce and conquest, mysticism and governance—not because of inconsistency, but because their theology allowed for contextual ethical reasoning. This flexibility stands in stark contrast to contemporary ideologies that absolutize violence or depoliticize spirituality (Bhanye, 2025).

Conclusion

This study conclusively demonstrates that the dominant narrative portraying West African Sufism as an apolitical, passive, and purely spiritual force is a historical reductionist fallacy. Through an in-depth analysis of key movements—from the Dyula trade networks, the Almoravid movement, the Jakhanke tradition, to the reformist jihads led by Usman dan Fodio, Umar Tall, and Samori Touré—this research reveals Sufism as a dynamic and contextual religious framework. Sufism functioned not merely as a vessel for personal spirituality but as an active engine for Islamization,

social reform, state formation, and political mobilization. Consequently, the dichotomy between "peaceful, spiritual Sufism" and "political, militant Salafism" is a fragile construct. West African Sufism was a holistic tradition inherently capable of integrating *zuhud* with *jihad*, *tasawwuf* with *fiqh*, and charismatic authority with worldly governance projects within a coherent moral vision.

The findings of this study offer several significant theoretical contributions. First, it introduces the framework of "Embedded Religious Mobilization," emphasizing that Sufi activism grew organically from established socio-economic and pedagogical infrastructures, rather than from abstract, imported ideologies. Second, it enriches the concept of "Jihad as Ethical Reform (*Tajdid*)," distinguishing jihad in the West African Sufi context from contemporary narratives that equate it with nihilistic violence. Third, it challenges the rigid academic dichotomy between "Spiritual/Sufi Islam" and "Political Islam," demonstrating their historical entanglement in practice. Finally, the legacy of the Timbuktu manuscripts discussing work ethics and agriculture corrects the stereotype of Sufi spirituality as anti-material or *otherworldly*.

Practically, this research provides a critical perspective for policymakers, peace practitioners, and stakeholders in West Africa and the broader Muslim world. Simplistic narratives positioning Sufism merely as a "peace partner" or a "bulwark against extremism" require re-evaluation. Policy approaches must acknowledge the inherent socio-political mobilization capacity of Sufi orders and engage them not only as symbols of tolerance but as partners in development based on their long history in education, conflict resolution, and community governance. Understanding the reformist and jihad legacy of Sufism also provides a richer context for intra-Muslim dialogue in West Africa.

This study acknowledges several limitations. First, as a study entirely reliant on secondary source analysis and literature, its findings are heavily dependent on the interpretations and potential biases present in the reviewed works. The depth of analysis would greatly benefit from direct access and examination of primary manuscript sources (e.g., the Timbuktu collections). Second, the broad geographical and temporal scope (spanning several centuries and diverse regions) means that the analysis of each movement or figure cannot achieve the granular depth of a highly detailed case study. Third, the focus on the political and reformist dimensions of Sufism risks obscuring the personal spiritual experience that remains central for many of its adherents.

References

Adu-Gyamfi, S. (2018). Islam in West Africa: Introduction, Spread and Effects. In *History Textbook for Senior High Schools*. WASSCE History Textbook Project.

Ahmad, A. A., & Hubayshi, M. (2013). *Sharh al-Qawa'id al-Tasawwuf*. Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah.

Babou, C. A. (2023). Sufi Jihad Revisited: Religious Reform and Political Authority in West Africa. *Islamic Africa*, *14*(1), 1–25.

Badrul Zaman, B., Taufiq Affandi, M., Benichou, A., & Muthoifin. (2023). Professional Work and Productive Work to Improve the People's Economy: an Analysis Based on Prophetic Revelation. *Demak Universal Journal of Islam and Sharia*, *1*(02), 131–142. https://doi.org/10.61455/deujis.v1i02.20

Barrientos-Rastrojo, J. (2025). *Experience as Transformative* (pp. 1–35). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-65279-0_11-1

Belhaj, A. (2012). Sufism as Islamic legal hermeneutics: The views of Al-Shāṭibī (D. 1388) and Zarrūq (D. 1493). *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, *65*(4), 445–456. https://doi.org/10.1556/AOrient.65.2012.4.4

Bhanye, J. (2025). Enchanted Urbanisms: Migration, witchcraft, cults, and the remaking of authority in rough African peri-urban frontiers. *Dialectical Anthropology*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-025-09798-4

Bowen, G. A. (2020). *Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method*. Sage Publications.

Bozbaş, G., & Bozbaş, F. (2025). From the Periphery to the Center: Sufi Dynamics and Islamic Localization in Sudan. *Religions*, *16*(8), 960. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16080960

Butts, J. (2023). *To hell with "that" religion: Malcolm X and an africana critical theory of religion.* [University of Louisville]. https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/4065

Chowdury, S. R. H. (2025). Exploring the intersection of sharia and sufism in imām rabbānī aḥmad sirhindī's maktūbāt rabbānī. *Kanz Philosophia: A Journal for Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, *11*(1), 43–68. https://doi.org/10.20871/kpjipm.v11i1.409

Cissé, al-H. M. S., & Niasse, S. I. (2021). The Study of Islamic Scholarship and the Social Sciences in Africa: Bridging Knowledge Divides, Reframing. *Islamic Scholarship in Africa: New Directions and Global Contexts*, *5*, 407.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Fourth). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Delafosse, M. (1968). *The Negroes of Africa: History and Culture*. Kennikat Press.

Dickson, W. R. (2022). Sufism and Shari'a: Contextualizing Contemporary Sufi Expressions. *Religions*, *13*(5), 449. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050449

DjeDje, J. C. (2010). West Africa: An Introduction. In *The Garland Handbook of African Music* (pp. 166–197). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203927878-17

Elkholy, A. T. (2016). *The Almoravids/al-Murabitun (1040–1147)*. https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/almoravids-al-murabitun-1040-1147/

Erol, I. (2025). Ecotheological Implications of the Qur'anic Verses on Tawbah (Repentance): An Analysis from a Sufi Perspective. *Religions*, *16*(12), 1529. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16121529

Fulbrook, M. (2021). *Historical Theory* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Gani, J. K. (2023). Anti-colonial connectivity between Islamicate movements in the Middle East and South Asia: the Muslim Brotherhood and Jamati Islam. *Postcolonial Studies*, *26*(1), 55–76. https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2023.2127660

Goody, J. (2018). The Mande and the Akan Hinterland. In *The Historian in Tropical Africa* (pp. 193–218). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429485930-8

Green, T. (2020a). *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300--1589*. Cambridge University Press.

Green, T. (2020b). *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa*. Cambridge University Press.

Hamed, K. (2024). Contesting Sufis Quietism: The Role of Sufism in the Islamization in West Africa. *Dialogia*, *22*(2), 242–262. https://doi.org/10.21154/dialogia.v22i2.9567

Hunwick, J. O. (Ed.). (2006). *West Africa, Islam, and the Arab World: Studies in Honor of Basil Davidson*. Markus Wiener Publishers.

Hunwick, J. O., & Ngom, F. (2021). *Arabic Literature of Africa, Volume V: The Writings of Western Sudanic Africa*. Brill.

Ibrahim, M. S. (2011). *The Decline of Sufism in West Africa: Some Factors Contributing to the Political and Social Ascendancy of Wahhabist Islam in Northern Ghana*. McGill University.

Ilcus, C. (2025). *Strengthening the EU Enlargement Strategy - Albania and Serbia in the Western Balkans: Divergent Paths, Shared Challenges in EU Integration*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5879402

Iner, D., & Cufurovic, M. (2022). Moving beyond Binary Discourses: Islamic Universalism from an Islamic Revivalist Movement's Point of View. *Religions*, *13*(9), 821. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090821

Kaba, L. (2020). Islamic Reform Movements in West Africa: Continuity and Change. *Journal of African History*, *61*(3), 389–408.

Kane, O. (2022). *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa*. Harvard University Press.

Kane, O., & Levtzion, N. (2021). *Islamic Education in Africa: Writing Boards and Blackboards*. Indiana University Press.

Khan, F. R., Mirza, M. O. N., & Vine, T. (2023). The UN Global Compact and the Ulama (Religious Scholars of Islam): A Missing Voice in Islamic Business Ethics. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *32*(3), 214–227. https://doi.org/10.1177/10564926221089204

Khan, M. S., & Ghazanfar, M. (1994). *Muslim Philosophy and Philosophers*. Ashish Publishing House.

Lapidus, I. M. (2014). *A history of Islamic societies*. Cambridge University Press.

Lapidus, I. M. (2024). *A History of Islamic Societies* (4th ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Last, M. (2020). *The Sokoto Caliphate*. Oxford University Press.

Laude, P. (2025). *Concealment and Disclosure BT - The Esoteric in Religious and Spiritual Traditions: A Comparative Study* (P. Laude (Ed.); pp. 35–94). Springer Nature Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-5825-1_2

Layachi, A. (2023). The Role of Islam in the Maghrib. In *Routledge Handbook on the Modern Maghrib* (pp. 358–391). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429505355-22

Lipton, G. A., & Zarrabi-Zadeh, S. (2023). Analytic Essay: The Idea of Sufism in the West. In *Sufism in Western Contexts* (pp. 39–81). BRILL. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004392625_003

Loimeier, R. (2021). *Islamic Reform in Twentieth-Century Africa*. Edinburgh University Press.

Mark-Thiesen, C., & Mihatsch, M. A. (2022). Liberia an(d) Empire?: Sovereignty, 'Civilisation' and Commerce in Nineteenth-Century West Africa. In *Connected Empires, Connected Worlds* (pp. 84–111). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003284062-5

Matusitz, J., & Wesley, D. (2024). *Jihad in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-53700-4

Mbodj-Pouye, A. (2023). *An address in Paris: Emplacement, bureaucracy, and belonging in hostels for West African migrants*. Columbia University Press.

Miles, W. F. S. (2017). 9 Jihads and borders. *Ousmane Kane, Harvard University, USA*, 187.

Mohiuddin, A. (2023). Mapping the Terrain of Islamism and Religious Authority: Insights from the Middle East, Southeast Asia and South Asia. In *Navigating Religious Authority in Muslim Societies* (pp. 165–202). Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-44825-6_5

Munandar, S. A., & Fahrurrozi, M. (2024). Transformation of the Idrisiyyah Order: Navigating Social and Economic Challenges in the Digital Era. *Digital Muslim Review*, *3*(1), 41–55. https://digitalmuslimreview.or.id/index.php/dmr/article/view/27

Nasser, N. (2022). Beyond the Veil of Form: Developing a Transformative Approach toward Islamic Sacred Architecture through Designing a Contemporary Sufi Centre. *Religions*, *13*(3), 190. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13030190

Person, Y. (1975). *Samori, une révolution dyula* (Vol. 2). IFAN.

Person, Y., & White, J. (2023). Guinea–Samori. In *West African Resistance* (pp. 111–143). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003437437-5

Ridder, H.-G. (2020). The Theory Contribution of Case Study Research Designs. *Business Research*, *13*(1), 309–338.

Roberts, R. L. (1987). *Warriors, Merchants, and Slaves: The State and the Economy in the Middle Niger Valley, 1700-1914*. Stanford University Press.

Roose, J. M., Flood, M., Greig, A., Alfano, M., & Copland, S. (2022). *Masculinity and Violent Extremism*. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10497-8

Rozi, A. F., Hasan, M., & Nurhayati, S. (2025). The Dynamics of Modern Sufism: Neo-Sufism and Transnational Islamic Movements. *Tasamuh: Journal of Islamic Studies*, *16*(2), 211–230. https://doi.org/10.47945/tasamuh.v16i2.1393

Sahin, A. (2024). Reimagining the Vocation of Being a Scholar at the Intersection of Islamic and Western Higher Education: A Proposal. In *The Contemporary Scholar in Higher Education* (pp. 251–277). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-59435-9_13

Salleh, N., & Mahmood, A. R. (2025). Sufism in the Discourse of Islamic Science: An Analysis on the Issue of Definition and Categorization. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, 9*(9), 294–305. https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.909000294

Seesemann, R. (2010). Sufism in West Africa. In E. K. Bongmba (Ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Seesemann, R. (2023a). *Sufism in Africa*. Oxford University Press.

Seesemann, R. (2023b). *Sufism in Africa* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Shillington, K. (Ed.). (2004). *Encyclopedia of African History*. Routledge.

Sholikah, Z. (2025). Sufism as Scientia Sacra Actualized in Tradition and Religion. *Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities, 8*(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.21580/jish.v8i1.16758

Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research, 104*, 333–339. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039

Soares, B. (2021). *Islam and the Prayer Economy: History and Authority in a Malian Town*. University of Michigan Press.

Soares, B. F. (2021). *Islam and the Prayer Economy: History and Authority in a Malian Town*. University of Michigan Press.

Thurston, A. (2021). *Jihadists of North Africa and the Sahel*. Cambridge University Press.

Ware, R. T. (2022). *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*. University of North Carolina Press.

Wright, Z. (2022). Spiritual Training across the Sahara: Debating the Need for the Living Sufi Master in the Tijāniyya. *Journal of Islamic Studies, 33*(3), 352–387. https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/etac017

Zárate, A. S. (2026). Cosmopolitan Spirits: Islam and the Experimental Cosmologies of Egypt's Spiritualist Movement, 1947–1960. *Comparative Studies in Society and History, 68*(1), 114–139. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417525100248



© 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY SA) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).