

Sean Hanretta
Northwestern University
Department of History
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curriculum vitae

Academic Positions:

Associate Professor, Northwestern University (2014-present)
Associate Professor, Stanford University (2011-2014)
Visiting Assistant Professor, University of Florida (2010-2011)
Assistant Professor, Stanford University (2004-2011)
Visiting Lecturer, Dartmouth College (Jan-June 2004)
Visiting Assistant Professor, Colorado College (Sept-Dec 2003)

Administrative Positions:

Director of Graduate Studies, Department of History, Northwestern (2018-2021)
Interim Director, Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (2015-2016)
Director, Center for African Studies at Stanford (2013-2014)

Education:

PhD (History, 2003) University of Wisconsin-Madison
MA (History, 1997) University of Wisconsin-Madison
BA (History, 1994) Colorado College

Writing/Editing

Peer-reviewed Publications:

Books

Islam and Social Change in French West Africa: History of an Emancipatory Community (2009, Cambridge University Press)

Articles and book chapters

- “Islam and Emancipation,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (Oxford, 2022)
“Al-Ghazali and the Politics of Death,” in Dolgoy, Hale, and Peabody (eds.), *Political Theory on Death and Dying* (Routledge, 2022)
“Islam in African History,” in *A Companion to African History*, ed. Nwando Achebe, Charles Ambler, and William Worger (Wiley/Blackwell, 2018) (as co-author with Shobana Shankar), 225-246.
“Formal Care: Bureaucracy and Muslim Religious Identity in the Cold Coast/Ghana,” in *Religion, Media and Marginality in Modern Africa*, ed. Becker, Cabrita and Rodet (Ohio University Press, 2018), 38-69.
“The River of Salvation Flows through Africa: Blyden, Armattoe, and the Redemption of the Culture Concept,” in *Indigenous Visions: Rediscovering the Legacy of Franz Boas*, Isaiah Lorado Wilner and Ned Blackhawk, eds. (Yale University Press, 2018), 279-315.

- “Ḥamallāh (Ḥamawīyya, Mali, Mauritania),” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 3rd ed. (Brill, 2016)
- “New Religious Movements,” in *Oxford Handbook of Modern African History*, ed. Parker and Reid (Oxford, 2013)
- “‘Kaffir’ Renner’s Conversion: Being Muslim in Public in Colonial Ghana,” *Past & Present* no. 210 (Feb., 2011), 187-220.
- “‘To Never Shed Blood’: Yacouba Sylla, Félix Houphouët-Boigny and Islamic Modernization in Côte d’Ivoire,” *Journal of African History* 49:2 (2008), 281-304.
- “Gender and Agency in the History of a West African Sufi Community: The Followers of Yacouba Sylla,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50:2 (2008), 478-508. Reprinted in *Practicing Sufism: Sufi Politics and Performance in Africa*, Abdelmajid Hannoum, ed. (Routledge Sufi Series) (Routledge, 2016), pp. 74-104. Translated and reprinted as “Genre et capacité d’action dans l’histoire d’une communauté soufie d’Afrique de l’Ouest : les partisans de Yacouba Sylla,” in *Le Sahel musulman entre soufisme et salafisme : subalternité, luttes de classement et transnationalisme*. Abdel Wedoud ould Cheikh, Cédric Jourde, and Jean Schmitz, eds. (Paris: Karthala, 2022).
- “Muslim Histories, African Societies: The Venture of Islamic Studies in Africa,” *Journal of African History* 46 (2005), 479-492.
- “Space and Conflict in the Elisabethville Mining Camps, 1923-1938,” in *A History of Prison and Confinement in Africa*. Florence Bernault, ed. (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003). [revised version of 1999 chapter below]
- “Space in the Discourses on the Elisabethville Mining Camps: 1923 to 1938,” in *Enfermement, prison et châtements en Afrique: du 19e siècle à nos jours*. Florence Bernault, ed. (Paris: Karthala, 1999)
- “Women, Marginality and the Zulu State: Women’s Institutions and Power in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of African History* 39 (1998), 389-415.

Non-peer Reviewed

Publications:

- “Islam and Postemancipation in French West Africa: Exploring the History of Yacouba Sylla,” *Items and Issues (Social Science Research Council)* 3:1-2 (2002), 16-18.
- Contributor to “All You Need to Know about Ghana’s December 2016 Elections,” *Africa is a Country* (Nov. 2016), <https://africasacountry.com/2016/11/all-you-need-to-know-about-ghanas-december-7-2016-elections>

Publications in

Progress:

- “Egypt in Africa: William A. Brown and a Liberating African History” (short essay, *Journal of African History*, forthcoming)
- Dying and Marrying Muslim in Ghana: Ethics of the Body, Secrecy, and Privacy* (monograph)
- A Global History of Death and Dying* (textbook, under contract)

As Editor:

- Special section of the *Journal of African History* on William Allen Brown (co-editor with Ousman Kobo) (forthcoming)

Teaching

Doctoral Students Supervised:

As sole advisor: Keren Weitzberg (2013), Sphiwe Ndlovu (2013), Bright Gyamfi (in progress), Semiu Adegbenle (in progress)

As co-advisor: Liz Thornberry (2011), Lauren Jarvis (2012), Erin Pettigrew (2014), Stephanie Hassell (2014), Rebecca Wall (2020), Chernoh Bah (in progress), Aaron Wilford (in progress)

Courses Taught:

Northwestern University:

“Global Christianity,” “Studying Religion as a Historian,” “Background to African Civilization and Culture: 1875-1994,” “Pictures, Voices, Texts: Theory of Historical Methods,” “A Global History of Death and Dying,” “Africa and the Cold War,” “First Year Graduate Research Seminar,” “African History through Literature and Film (first-year writing seminar)”; Forthcoming new courses: “Killing Lumumba: Death and Afterlives of an African Hero” (first-year seminar); “Africa Field Seminar: Modern Africa” (PhD seminar)

Previous Institutions:

“Africa in an Age of Empires,” “Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Beyond,” “Africa in the Twentieth Century,” “Worlds of Islam: Introduction to the Humanities,” “History without Documents,” “African History before European Conquest,” “Islam in Africa,” “Intellectual and Cultural History of Modern Africa,” “Muslim Modernities,” “Capitalism and Its Discontents,” “Approaches to History,” “Africa to 1800,” “France’s Empire,” “Africa since 1800,” “Nationalism and Decolonization in Africa,” “Religion in Africa and the African Diaspora,” “Africa and the Making of the Atlantic World,” “An Interdisciplinary Introduction to Africa”

Teaching Honors:

Student Government Association Teaching Honor Roll (Northwestern, 2014-2015)

Knight Fellows Program Favorite Professor Award (Stanford, 2013)

Major Grants and Fellowships

National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship (2022-23)

Mellon-Stanford Humanities Center Seminar Grant (2009)

Selected Service

Public Service History, Outreach, etc.:

“Death and Dying” talk for Northwestern University Community for Human Rights (NUCHR), May, 2021

Newberry Teachers Workshops: “Islamic Africa and African Islam,” October 2018; “Does Death Have a History?” February 2018

National Museum of Mexican Art panel for Dia de los Muertos, “Death in Africa and the African Diaspora,” October 2015

Institutional:

Northwestern

Director of Graduate Studies (2018-2021); Chair, Early African history search committee; South Asia search committee; Tenure committee (Latin America); Chair, search committee for Director, Institute for the Study of Islam in Africa; Acting Director, Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (2015-2016); FLAS Selection Committee; Fulbright IIE interviewer panels; Arts and Sciences Language Initiative (2017-18); Kaplan Humanities Council (2017-2019); Kaplan Franke Fellows committee; Program of African Studies Executive/Steering Committee (2018-2022); Fulbright-Hays Review Committee (2018, 2019); ISITA Steering Committee (2019-present)

Previous Institutions

Stanford: Director, Center for African Studies (2013-2014); Dean's Faculty Advisory Committee Abbasi Program in Islamic Studies (2004-2011); Center for African Studies Steering Committee (2004-2013); African and African American Studies Advisory Board (2012-2014); Program in Modern Thought and Literature Steering Committee (2006-2013); Affiliate of Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity (2007-2014); Application reviewer: Stanford Humanities Center external faculty fellowships (2006-2012), RISCARE fellowship reviewer (2012); Co-coordinator, Stanford Humanities Center Workshop on Empires and Cultures (2005-2006); Medieval Search Committee; Islamic Studies Search Committee; Advisor for History, Literature and Arts track
Florida: Advisory Committee, Center for African Studies; Islam in Africa Working Group (Center for African Studies); Advisory Committee, Center for the Humanities and the Public Sphere

Professional:

Editor, *Ghana Studies*, 2013-2016

Advisory Board, *Islamic Africa* (2015-present)

Advisory Editorial Board, *Journal of African History* (2010-2014)

Manuscripts reviewed: Oxford Research Encyclopedia (articles), Indiana University Press (book, book chapter), Brill (book), Longman Publishers (book), Oxford University Press (book chapter), Palgrave Macmillan (book), Princeton University Press (book), *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *The Canadian Journal of History*, *Africa Today*, *Journal of African History*

Major grants and fellowships reviewed: SSRC-DPDF applications (2014, 2015); American Academy in Berlin (2017)

Conferences and workshops organized (selected): section chair for papers on religion (seven panels), African Studies Association Annual Meeting, 2006; organizer, "Rethinking the Islamic Library: African Archives, Scholars and the Public," Stanford University, May 2007; "Globalizing Black Intellectual History," Stanford University, spring 2010 (co-organizer); "Slavery, Social Justice and Islam in West Africa," University of Florida, April 2011; Abbasi Program in Islamic Studies Workshop, "Beyond the Islamic Public Sphere in Africa," April 2014; CAS Symposium, "Political Theory and Practice in the Central African Crises," May 2014; African Studies Association of the United Kingdom, "New Approaches to the Study of Islam in Africa," stream of panels, co-organized with Shobana

Shankar, Sept 2016; "Ghana at a Crossroads," Triennial Conference of the Ghana Studies Association, Tamale, Local Arrangements Committee and Fundraising Committee, July 2022

External tenure reviews: 11 from 2010-2022

Conferences/Presentations

Papers Presented (selected):

- "Authoritative Bundles: Material, Practice, and Ritual Transformation among Muslims in Ghana,"
The Fragmentation of Religious Authority in Muslim Africa, Berlin, October 2019
- "A Moving Minority in Twentieth-Century Ghana: Goods, Discourses, and the Trap of
Islamization," Assessing the Islamic Past: Historical and Philosophical Interventions,
Brown University, April 2018
- "A Moving Minority: Muslims in Ghana and Material History," Chabreja Center for Historical
Studies Works-In-Progress Series, March 2018
- "Formal Care: Paperwork, Authority, and Community among Muslims in Ghana (1920-2000),"
Department of History, Ohio State University, March 2018
- "Defining Islam: Goods, Movement, and Ritual in Colonial Ghana," at ASA Annual Meeting,
Chicago, November 2017
- "The Intellectual Roots of Islamophobia in Ghana and the Ivory Coast" at ASA-UK Annual
Meeting, Cambridge, UK, 9 September 2016
- "Towards an Intellectual History of Islamophobia in West Africa," at Ghana Studies Association
Triennial Conference, "Global Ghana," Cape Coast, Ghana, 7 July 2016
- "The Place of Islam in the Early Historiography of the Gold Coast and Ghana" at ASA Annual
Meeting, San Diego, 20 November 2015
- "Dying and Remembrance in Africa (and the Diaspora)" at "Dancing with the Dead: Mourning
and Honoring in the Ancient World," National Museum of Mexican Art, October 2015
- "Rethinking the Invisible in African Islam" at "Authenticating Religious Leadership in Divided
Public Spheres," Cologne, Germany, October 2014
- "The 'Crisis' of West African History and the Question of the Historical Fact," Columbia
University African Studies Seminar, October 2014
- "The River of Salvation Runs Through Africa: Edward Blyden and the Culture Concept," African
Studies Association Annual Meeting, Baltimore, MD, November 2013 (and Panel Chair
and Discussant)
- "Formal Care: Religion and Written Genres in the Gold Coast/Ghana," Religion, Media and
Marginality in Africa since 1800, London, March 2013
- "Preaching and Burying: Modernism and Funeral Debates in the Gold Coast, 1908-1960," African
Studies Association Annual Meeting, Washington, DC, November 2011
- "Dying Muslim in Ghana: Death as an Intellectual and Social Practice in the Nineteenth and
Twentieth Centuries," William Allen Brown Memorial Lecture, University of Wisconsin,
April 2010
- "Marrying Muslim in Ghana (Gold Coast): Wedding Debates and Practices in an Era of
Development and Reform," African Studies Association Annual Meeting, New Orleans,
November 2009

- “The Struggles of Muslim Youth in Ghana: Rituals as Flashpoints,” conference on “Muslim Youth in Africa,” Northwestern University, Program in African Studies, April 2009
- “Sources on the Muslim Social History of the Gold Coast/Ghana,” Invited Seminar, Institute of African Studies, Legon, Ghana, February 2009
- “‘Kaffir’ Renner’s Conversion: Being Muslim and the Politics of Self-Invention in Ghana, 1923-1954,” conference on “Islam, Contested Authority, and the Making of Everyday Lives in Africa,” Indiana University, October 2007
- “Text De-Centered Research and the Guest House of African History,” Rethinking the Islamic Library: African Archives, Scholars and the Public, Stanford University, May 2007
- “Defining Muslim Communities in Colonial Gold Coast,” Historical Society of Ghana Annual Meeting, Accra, Ghana, August 2006
- “Ghostwriters in the Archives: French Colonial Knowledge and African Religious Competition,” Empire Lost: France and Its Worlds, Stanford University, April 2006
- “Islam and Emancipation in French West Africa: The Case of Yacouba Sylla,” Invited Seminar, University of Ghana at Legon, September 2005
- “Explanation and Narration in the History of a West African Sufi Community: Gender and Agency among the Followers of Yacouba Sylla,” Faculty Seminar, Center for African Studies, Stanford University, May 2005
- “Traditions, Oral Traditions, and the Traditional: Reflections on Categories of Sources and Interpretations,” Pre-Colonial African History in a Post-Colonial Age: University of Wisconsin African History Symposium, March 2005
- “The Meaning of Freedom: Islam and the End of Slavery in West Africa,” Africa Table, Stanford University, February 2005
- “Repaying the Gift of Work: Yacouba Sylla and the Moral Economy of Sufi Labor in the Ivory Coast,” African Studies Association Annual Meeting, October 2003
- “Sufism and ‘Afro-pessimism’ in Ouologuem’s *Bound to Violence*,” Colloquium on Islam in African Literature, University of Wisconsin, November 1999
- “The Uses of History and Literature in Contemporary South Africa,” Midwest Graduate Students African Studies Conference, February 1998

Other Panels and Presentations (selected):

- Chair: “New Paradigms in the Study of Islam in Africa,” Africa, Globalization, and the Muslim Worlds, Harvard Divinity School, September 2019
- Respondent to Lamin Sanneh, *Beyond Jihad* and Alexander Thurston, *Boko Haram*, ISITA New Books Series, April 2018
- Discussant: “Intellectual History from the Margins,” ASA Annual Meeting, Chicago, November 2017
- Respondent to Paul Grant, “Missionaries as Shrine Priests: Akuapem, Gold Coast, 1842-1866,” UW-NU African History Workshop, 1 October 2016
- Discussant: “Islam: Beyond Security and Authority,” ASA-UK Annual Meeting, Cambridge, UK, 9 September 2016
- Chair: “Islam: Ethics in Social Practice,” ASA-UK Annual Meeting, Cambridge, UK, 9 September 2016
- Chair: “Islam: Politics, Identity and Doctrinal Debates,” GSA Triennial Conference, Cape Coast, Ghana, 9 July 2016

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Invited Discussant: "Moral Philosophies," Yale Workshop in African Intellectual History, 2 April 2016

Chair: "From the West Looking South: Richard L. Roberts and Southern African History," ASA Annual Meeting, San Diego, November 2015

Organized film series, *Chris Marker and the World*, Fall 2013 (*Grin without a Cat*, *Letter from Siberia*, *Far from Vietnam*, *Sunless*, *A.K.*). Introduced and moderated *Grin without a Cat*. Audience "talk back" with actors and director for Stanford Repertory Theater production of *An Inspector Calls*, 2014

Chair: "Missionaries in West Africa/Les Missionnaires en Afrique occidentale," French Colonial Historical Society Annual Meeting, May 2009

"Oral History and Muslim Societies," The Aga Khan Council of the U.S., Training Workshop on Ismaili-American History, Houston, November 2007

Invited Discussant: "Islam and the Postcolonial Public Sphere in West Africa," African Studies Association Annual Meeting, October 2007

Language

Competencies:

French: excellent reading comprehension, conversational with errors

Arabic: good reading comprehension, conversational with many errors

Portuguese: good reading comprehension, beginning conversational

Hausa: basic conversational

Bambara: beginning conversational

Dagbani: basic conversational

Twi: rudimentary conversational

Gonja: rudimentary conversational

Affiliations:

American Historical Association

African Studies Association

Ghana Studies Association

American Association of University Professors

Recent International Research Trips (since 2010):

Ghana Jul-Aug 2012, Aug-Sep 2013, Jul-Sep 2016, Apr-May 2017, Aug-Sep 2018, Aug-Sep 2019, Dec 2019-Jan 2020, Oct 2021-Mar 2022, Jan-Mar 2023

Liberia Aug 2013

Morocco Mar 2014

UK Mar 2013, Sep 2016