

# *Jihad*, “the Age of Revolution” and Atlantic History: Challenging Reis Interpretation of Brazilian History

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It is fortunate that I have an opportunity to reply to the comments of Professor Reis, who has criticized my article in *Topoi* in no uncertain terms. Prof. Reis has chosen to focus on specific details of my analysis rather than confront the challenge of scholarly debate over the substance of my article. Briefly, I have alleged that the scholarly analysis of the Atlantic world during the age of revolutions, not specifically the publications of Prof. Reis, has largely been distorted in two fundamental ways. First, the Atlantic world as usually conceived, with exceptions that are referred to in my article, has largely not included West African history, even though the African continent helped to shape the Atlantic basin and hence should figure as prominently in the study of the Atlantic, even the Black Atlantic, as Europe and the Americas. I have traced the origins of this failure, symbolically at least, to Eric Hobsbawm and Eugene Genovese, two prominent historians, for purposes of discussion. This is certainly obvious in my article and should have been apparent to Prof. Reis. Indeed the implication in my article is that Prof. Reis is of the same stature as Hobsbawm and Genovese in his distinguished career and hence should have been able to withstand my criticisms of his work as a sign of respect.

Second, I have argued specifically that the *jihad* movement in West Africa that coincided chronologically with the age of revolutions has been overlooked or misinterpreted, despite an extensive literature by specialists of West Africa who have argued the enormous significance of *jihad*. Prof. Reis falls into the category of scholars who have failed to appreciate this importance, although he has gone much further than many other scholars in identifying some of the factors of African history that are essential in the reconstruction of Atlantic history during the age of revolutions. Unfortunately, either Prof. Reis did not understand the basic argument of my paper or he became so defensive in the face of criticism that he lost perspective. Hopefully, my forthcoming book, *Jihad in West Africa during the Age of Revolutions, 1785-1850* (Ohio University Press), will make my arguments even clearer and give him another chance to reflect on the criticisms of his own work so that this exchange can move from being an attack on personal integrity to a discussion of scholarly discourse.

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Most of the specific details of Prof Reis's criticisms do not warrant response. Historians can judge for themselves each point and whether or not the criticisms are relevant; we are trained to do so. I know that Prof. Reis promotes discussion and dialogue with his own students, who in any event are capable of mature reflection. All of us teach each other's publications, even when mistakes of interpretation, omission of documentation, and other failures figure in discussion. Whether or not a specific scholar is sufficiently fluent in Portuguese, Arabic, Hausa, Yoruba, French, English or any other language is a difficulty we all confront but which should never impede attempts at historical reconstruction. We all do the best we can with the skills we have. I have always admired Prof. Reis's scholarship, although I have not always agreed with his interpretations. Perhaps at some point in future Prof. Reis will reconsider the main points that I presented in my *Topoi* article.

With respect to biographical details, I believe that I have copies of all of Bishop Crowther's publications and his unpublished papers. Failure to cite Crowther when Prof. Reis thinks I should have should not be interpreted as a sign of neglect. As anyone who knows my publications will fully realize, I have been publishing biographical materials on enslaved Africans and African merchants for a very long time, not only Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua, Gustavus Vassa, but many others; much of my work is based on biographies and autobiographies. Indeed the research on Baquaqua has entered a new phase and a translation of my previous publications on Baquaqua will soon be available in Portuguese in Brazil and with the inclusion of new information, while my biography of Vassa, who is usually referred to erroneously as Olaudah Equiano, will also soon be published. Moreover, I am currently engaged in a long term project, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, on the testimonies of enslaved West Africans from the era of the slave trade. The team with which I am working includes Dr. Nielson Bezerra, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Jane Landers, Vanderbilt University, Jean-Pierre Le Glaunec, Université de Sherbrooke, Femi Kolapo, University of Guelph, Kwabena Akruang-Perry, University of Cape Coast, Ghana, and Suzanne Schwarz, University of Worcester. Our next workshop is planned for this coming October in Duque de Caixas, Rio de Janeiro, where our combined database on biographies will be discussed. That database includes biographical and autobiographical accounts of over 1,000 West Africans, the materials on Liberated Africans of approximately 200,000 individuals, and baptismal and other church documentation on tens of thousands more Africans.

The problem with the similarity in texts between the chapter by Reis and Mamigonian on Nagô and Mina (2004)<sup>1</sup> and my paper on scarification (2009)<sup>2</sup> is indeed troubling. It is

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<sup>1</sup> REIS, João José; MAMIGONIAN, Beatriz Gallotti. Nagô and Mina: The Yoruba Diaspora in Brazil. In: FALOLA, Toyin; CHILDS, Matt (Eds.). *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004. p. 82-83.

<sup>2</sup> LOVEJOY, Paul E. Scarification and the Loss of History in the African Diaspora. In: APTER, Andrew; DERBY, Lauren (Eds.). *Activating the Past Historical Memory in the Black Atlantic*. Newcastle: Cambridge

clear that my text is virtually verbatim replication of Reis and Mamigonian, which I cannot adequately explain. Somehow in writing my paper, I inserted the text from my notes and subsequently failed to revise and otherwise summarize Reis and Mamigonian. I certainly apologize for this mistake, which is an embarrassment. However, I did indeed refer to Reis and Mamigonian in the following paragraph and elsewhere in my chapter. Moreover, I had reviewed the sources of their information, especially D’Avezac’s account of Osifekunde, as well as the shortened version that was long ago published in Philip D. Curtin’s *Africa Remembered*.<sup>3</sup> My intention in my scarification chapter was to refer specifically to D’Avezac’s original publication because of its great value. Indeed, I am currently involved in a project with Dr. Olatunji Ojo, Brock University, in preparing a new annotated edition of Osifekunde’s account, which will examine in particular the details of the Ijebu and Yoruba background.<sup>4</sup> Of course the scarification issue will be discussed in the project that I am completing with Dr. Ojo, including now a correction of my mistake in the scarification paper. However, let’s be very clear. Plagiarism is a specific and conscious theft of other people’s ideas and the use of the wording of others through a claim of ownership. In my case, I made a mistake. Hence, Prof. Reis’s specific accusation, which actually has nothing to do with the article published in *Topoi*, is misleading and is clearly a deliberate attempt to defame as a way of avoiding serious scholarly discussion. I am not impressed.

My intention with respect to first hand observations of John Lander and his account was similar. At the time of writing the scarification presentation for the conference at UCLA, I had already published the annotated edition of the second Clapperton expedition, with which Lander was a member, with many supporting documents, after many years of research with Jamie Bruce Lockhart. Although Prof. Reis does not cite this work, the annotated version of Clapperton’s second expedition was published by Brill in the Netherlands in 2005.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, at the time of writing the scarification paper, Bruce Lockhart and I were working on the unpublished papers of the Lander brothers, some of which we had collected while completing the Clapperton project. As is well known, John Lander accompanied Clapperton on Clapperton’s second expedition inland from Badagry, and indeed Lander published a volume on that expedition.<sup>6</sup> Lander subsequently returned with his brother to follow up the expedition led by Clapperton, who had died in Sokoto in 1827. The London publisher, John Murray, published an account of that expedition, and the Murray archives,

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Scholarly Publishing, 2010. p. 110-111.

<sup>3</sup> LLOYD P. C. Osifekunde of Ijebu. In: CURTIN, Philip D. (Ed.). *Africa Remembered: Narratives of West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967. p. 217-88.

<sup>4</sup> D’AVEZAC, Armand. *Notice sur le pays et le peuple des Yebous en Afrique*. Paris: Dondey-Dupré, 1845, which is readily available for free download on Gallica.

<sup>5</sup> LOCKHART, Jamie Bruce; LOVEJOY, Paul E. (Eds.). *Hugh Clapperton into the Interior of Africa: Records of the Second Expedition 1825-1827*. Leiden: Brill, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> LANDER, Richard. *Records of Captain Clapperton’s Last Expedition to Africa*. Londres: Colburn and Bentley, 1830. 2 vols.

which are not open to the public, contain important manuscripts of historical relevance.<sup>7</sup> I had intended to refer to the Lander manuscripts in the scarification paper, including the journal that was lost in the Niger River when the Lander brothers were enslaved at Kiri before being taken to the coast in 1830.<sup>8</sup> This material has been on the website of the Harriet Tubman Institute for many years. While I inadvertently retained the text from the Reis-Mamigonian chapter in my paper, I had meant to provide additional information that was drawn from this unpublished manuscript material. Somehow I was diverted and did not include the unpublished references in my chapter on scarification. Hence, this was my mistake. I do not believe either Prof. Reis or Dr. Mamigonian has realized that this unpublished material is available, and they seem to be unaware of the edited Clapperton material as well.

In the passage that Prof. Reis cites that is a duplicate of a passage in their chapter, in a book in which I also published, there is also a textual note "ibid." to which I am at a loss to explain. That detail alone should have been sufficient to have caught my eye at the proof stage for the chapter, but clearly I missed that signal, as well. Moreover, while I have learned a lot from my discussions with Prof. Henry Drewal, who is an excellent scholar, my reference to him was a note, to myself, that I had consulted with him to verify some of the details of scarification, which he indeed confirmed. He helped me on a number of other points, based on his own field work. The reference does not make this clear, again because I mistakenly used my unedited notes. In scholarship, it is unacceptable to refer to and indeed to quote the work of other scholars without attribution. Hence there can be no real excuse for my error, although I trust that this explanation will help to explain the context. I certainly welcome the opportunity to correct the mistake. Should the chapter be republished, I will of course correct this error and suitably acknowledge the mistake in a note, and as already stated, in the publication of an annotated edition on Osifekunde, whose biography is of course important in Brazil, I will also make this clear.

As I emphasized in my article in *Topoi* and as I do in my forthcoming book with Ohio, the misunderstandings with respect to Islam and indeed *jihad* have profound consequences in today's world. I have argued that *jihad* was a major force in the history of West Africa at

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<sup>7</sup> LANDER, Richard; LANDER, John. *Journal of a Narrative to Explore the Course and Termination of the Niger*. Nova York: J & J Harper, 1832. 2 vols.

<sup>8</sup> See Jamie Bruce Lockhart, Documents Relating to the Lander Brothers' Niger Expedition of 1830, Available at: <[http://www.tubmaninstitute.ca/documents\\_relating\\_to\\_the\\_landers\\_niger\\_expedition\\_of\\_1830](http://www.tubmaninstitute.ca/documents_relating_to_the_landers_niger_expedition_of_1830)>, including Journals or Journalism?: The Landers' Niger Journal (1834); John Lander's Journal in John Murray Archive (National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh); Richard Lander's Journal in the Wellcome Library (London), Correspondence in John Murray Archive" for the period 1830-31; Provenance: Recovery from the River Niger of the Two Lost Journals, which were retrieved from the Niger River at Kiri at some point in 1831, as well as extracts from John Lander's Journal Book n. 2. Also see *SHADD: Studies in the History of the African Diaspora – Documents*. Available at: <<http://tubman.info.yorku.ca/publications/shadd/>>. Also see the additional letters by the Lander brothers that are in the Sierra Leone collection at the University of Illinois at Chicago, which have since been added to *SHADD*.

a time when many enslaved Africans were sent to Brazil and Cuba. I am greatly concerned that the issue of *jihad* and knowledge of Islam from an historical perspective is so poorly understood, as Prof. Reis's response clearly reflects. What does it take to emphasize the role of Islam in history? How does the neglect of different perspectives shape a distorted view of the contemporary world in which *jihad* is a global force? Surely, Prof. Reis should consider these questions in his interpretation of Brazilian history.

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