

## **HISTORY**

**Klaas Van Walraven. *The Yearning for Relief: A History of the Sawaba Movement in Niger*.** Leiden: Brill, 2013. vii + 968 pp. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$136.00. Paper.

In much of 1958, the Nigerien nationalist movement popularly known as Sawaba appeared poised to join its Guinean counterpart in opposition to the emergent French Fifth Republic. In France, the institution of the Fifth Republic was to become the final sanction for Charles de Gaulle's return to power, while in the empire the new republican constitution promised a reconfigured metropolitan–colonial relationship marked by the benign term *communauté*. The so-called French Community was to be an alternative to territorial independence via a constitutional declaration of the shared historical and cultural bond linking France with its colonies. In the referendum to approve the constitution, only Guinea voted “no,” with all of its other neighboring colonies approving the measure by wide majorities. Klaas van Walraven's *The Yearning for Relief* seeks to understand why and how Niger, with a radical socialist and anticolonial movement on a par with that of its Guinean neighbors, did not join its western counterparts. In doing so, van Walraven also details the ramifications of the referendum for Sawaba and Nigerien nationalist politics, presenting the vote as setting the stage for the political upheaval that characterized much of Niger's first decade of self-rule.

*The Yearning for Relief* contains three parts, comprising a total of fourteen chapters followed by an epilogue. The first chapters detail the formation of Sawaba, with a focus on the party's leaders and its rise to “revolutionary supremacy” in Niger in the 1950s. Unlike other parties in Niger, Sawaba, as van Walraven regularly reminds readers, was a national party, uniting diverse regions of the country behind the program of nationalist mass mobilization. In this context van Walraven presents what is perhaps his most forceful critique of Nigerien historiography as he seeks a holistic approach for understanding the country's midcentury politics. As the only mass party with a national reach, Sawaba had no choice but to adapt to a diverse array of political and cultural mores in order to thrive in the vast, sparsely populated Saharan country. To do so, as the book's first two chapters illustrate, Sawaba relied on popular religious and cultural imagery (i.e., the Prophet Muhammad and the camel); groups of women, workers, and youth; and the establishment of transnational connections with other dissident political groups in French West Africa and beyond. As a result, by the mid-1950s no other political party in Niger was able to compete on as wide and diverse a stage as Sawaba, culminating in the party's formation of Niger's first African-led government in 1957.

France's systematic subversion of the Nigerien political process during the constitutional referendum, and Sawaba's resultant political downfall—which van Walraven presents as Africa's first coup d'état—are the subject of

the final chapters of the book's first part. The second part focuses on Sawaba's move underground, while the third part emphasizes the party's shift toward guerilla warfare. It is these two parts of the book that are perhaps the most rewarding for the reader, who is led to confront issues ranging from questions of political legitimacy in the postcolonial state to the changing definitional nature of nationalist movements themselves. Can Sawaba, as a party and movement in exile, still remain an organic, popularly supported Nigerien nationalist movement? The historiography that van Walraven challenges seems to suggest it cannot, and it has largely cast off Sawaba as a relic of the pre-referendum 1950s. Yet *The Yearning for Relief*, with its richly detailed analysis of Sawaba's vibrant (and sometimes fraught) local and international connections as a government in exile, reorients the narrative of Nigerien nationalism through an explicitly transnational, extra-metropolitan lens.

As a whole, *The Yearning for Relief* is a monumental achievement. It is difficult to imagine a more thoroughly researched and multifaceted study of one of West Africa's more underresearched "first-generation" nationalist parties. Yet one of the unfortunate consequences of such a detailed project is the book's massive size (nearly 1,000 pages), which makes it extremely difficult to utilize in a classroom environment, even at the graduate level; it is a specialist's book. Furthermore, van Walraven periodically invokes historiographical straw men to set his work apart from other studies of Sawaba and African nationalism. This tendency is exhibited most clearly in the introduction's decrial of various unidentified histories, which are presented as sacrificing empiricism for the sake of "corroborat[ing] a theoretical proposition or satisfy[ing] a contemporary fixation" (9). With that said, *The Yearning for Relief* stands alongside the recent works by Elizabeth Schmidt, Meredith Terretta, and Frederick Cooper in helping us rethink issues of nationalism, decolonization, and postcoloniality in midcentury Francophone Africa.

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doi:10.1017/asr.2014.106

**Samuel Kalman. *French Colonial Fascism: The Extreme Right in Algeria, 1919–1939*.** New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013. ix + 268 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$95.00. Cloth.

While the extreme politics of the OAS during the Algerian War of Independence are well known, the longer history of extremism within the settler community of French Algeria has not been widely studied. Samuel Kalman's *French Colonial Fascism* seeks to rectify this imbalance through an examination of extreme right-wing political parties and organizations in