

Seck family).³ I mention this perspective, not so much as a criticism of M'Bayo's book, but to highlight the continued importance, when writing histories of Africa's Muslim societies, of seeking out and integrating sources in Arabic and *ajami* where they exist.

With this book, M'Bayo has made a distinctive and solid contribution to the historiography of intermediaries in colonial Africa; it should inspire future studies of colonial interpreters in other contexts.

REBECCA SHEREIKIS
Northwestern University

FROM EMPIRES TO NGOs IN THE WEST AFRICAN SAHEL

From Empires to NGOs in the West African Sahel: The Road to Nongovernmentality.

By Gregory Mann.

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Gregory Mann has written a compelling new history of the emergence of international aid and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the governance of countries that comprise the Sahelian region of West Africa. Rather than see the origins of these ubiquitous features of much of contemporary sub-Saharan Africa in the neoliberal turn brought about by debt and structural adjustment in the 1980s, Mann recasts the story both chronologically and ideologically, by locating it in an earlier time period and to left-leaning politics. Using Mali as the principle focus, Mann suggests that Sahelian anticolonial political movements and post colonial states were far from weak, 'neocolonial' regimes incapable or unwilling to make a break with France. In the case of Mali, the political party that brought Mali to independence in 1960, *l'Union soudanaise-Rassemblement démocratique africain* (US-RDA), embarked on a quite radical and aggressive program of transforming Malian society in order to make way for a hoped-for rural democracy, and in establishing its independence from France by closing all French military bases on its territory and creating a Malian currency.

While it is not quite right to call these projects failures, for, as Mann shows, they continue to animate intellectual and political life in the region even today, they did not achieve their aims. When the region was hit by drought in 1973, the Malian military regime of Moussa Traoré that had overthrown the regime of Modibo Keita in 1968 was not able to meet the needs of people in the most affected regions. This provided an opening for international aid organizations who attempted to offer relief to famine victims. Some

3 Z. O. Ahmed Salem, 'Archéologie d'un espace public délocalisé: Les Maures et Saint Louis à travers les âges', in Z. O. Ahmed Salem (ed.), *Les Trajectoires d'un Etat-frontière: Espaces, évolution politique et transformations sociales en Mauritanie* (Dakar, 2004), 141–79.

NGOs used the crisis of the 1970s famine to claim political space from Sahelian governments to enact projects of various kinds that served their own institutional interests. As Mann puts it, it was ‘in the wake of independence, when African sovereignty was mostly highly prized, that some of those who had worked to establish that sovereignty began to mortgage it’ (6).

What is so exciting about this book is the way that it takes a history that many of us think we know — the growth of humanitarianism, human rights activism, international and local NGOs across sub-Saharan Africa — and offers a very different, and surprising, genealogy. Histories of humanitarianism in Africa inevitably recount a story of African suffering as an object of outsider empathy, which provoked interventions of various kinds in Biafra, for example, or in the various famines in the 1970s and 1980s. Since the early work of James Ferguson and Alex de Waal, we are attuned to the inevitable political effects of different kinds of aid. But Mann has written an African history of the emergence of humanitarianism that is focused on the power that politicians and political institutions ceded to NGOs. To do this, the first two thirds of the book focus on how Sahelian political activists came to imagine the power they would exercise, how they would attempt to reorganize Sahelian societies, and how they would claim sovereignty by controlling the movement of people outside of the new states’ borders. Once it is clear just how much power the post-colonial regime of the US-RDA sought to exercise — and over whom — we are in a position to understand the intrusion of NGOs in a very different way. NGOs did not enter a political vacuum, nor did different NGOs approach this space in the same way. But they did lay claim to some of the same kinds of power that Malian rulers had been so focused on exercising in the late 1950s and 1960s. Calling this kind of power ‘nongovernmentality’, by which he means ‘forms of governmental rationality realized through NGOs’, Mann tells the story of the expansion of NGO power as a *dénouement* in the story of African anticolonial activism and independence.

The political life of Madeira Keita, an important figure in anticolonial activism in French West Africa and a powerful member of the US-RDA regime in Mali, functions as an allegory for the larger history recounted here. Born in what is now western Mali, Keita was educated in Senegal and served as a young archivist and librarian for the colonial government in Conakry in the late 1940s. He worked with a young Georges Balandier, who would become the influential French sociologist of colonialism in French Equatorial Africa. In one of the most compelling chapters of the book, Mann explores the relationship between Keita and Balandier from 1946–47 in Guinea, arguing that each influenced the other’s later work in a generative tension between ideas and language of social science and political activism. Mann suggests that Keita developed a critical social theory of how colonialism had created certain kinds of social hierarchy to support its rule. Keita came to advocate ‘a Malian socialism that would be built up from the villages and out from the party, one which recognized that Mali’s social hierarchies existed independently of control over the means of production’ (36). For Mali to advance, these social hierarchies needed to be destroyed. Even before independence, the US-RDA government in Mali abolished the chieftaincy in 1957. In the northern parts of the country, it attempted to end enduring practices of slavery.

These bold steps alienated many and contributed to the downfall of the regime in the military coup in 1968; Madeira Keita was among the leading members of the old regime

who were imprisoned in the Sahara under brutal conditions. The international human rights activists who protested these conditions eventually helped bring about Keita's release after ten years, at which point he returned to Guinea to recuperate. He lived for another twenty years, still committed to many of the ideas he had supported in government. Mann uses this life — tragic but also resilient in its later stages — as a kind of analogy for the larger issue of Sahelian statecraft's promise and disappointment, but also its persistent hopes for a better future.

BRUCE S. HALL

University of California, Berkeley

FROM SLAVERY TO AID IN THE NIGERIEN SAHEL

From Slavery to Aid: Politics, Labour, and Ecology in the Nigerien Sahel, 1800–2000.

By Benedetta Rossi.

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The Sahel has inspired a number of recent studies that, taken together, challenge long-standing and often unspoken paradigms that have long dominated the region's historiography. They do so by focussing on how mobility and risk-management strategies help maintain social and political relations, by analysing local structures of government from an internal point of view, and by questioning the exceptional nature of the colonial situation. Gregory Mann's *From Empires to NGOs* (2015) offers an example of this approach, as does Charles Grémont's *Les Touaregs Iwellemmedan (1647–1896)* (2010). Benedetta Rossi's *From Slavery to Aid*, a study of the Nigerien Ader, can be counted among these works, and will have a similarly lasting impact.

Rossi's guiding theme is relations of personal dependence. She explores their persistence in the region, despite important political changes on the ground, from precolonial to colonial times, through the Sahelian drought of the 1980s, and then to the current period of governmental and international disengagement. In the first half of the book, Rossi convincingly links relations of personal dependence to processes of migration and mobility in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The second half of the book offers a critical analysis of the impact of a large development project in the area, showing how 'development enabled political control on the cheap' (22). This argument is not in itself new, but Rossi makes it with much tact and thoughtfulness, in a way that renders the individual motivations of all involved — including the development workers — intelligible. She also carefully analyses the historical and socio-economic constraints that influence local responses to the project.

An introductory chapter contextualizes the study by touching on labour history, the shortcomings of environmental approaches, and the relationship between mobility and governance (introducing her own term, 'kinetocracy', or government through mobility). Chapter Two follows, drawing on oral histories to outline precolonial relations of