

BOOK REVIEW

Alpha Oumar Konaré. *Histoire des partis politiques au Mali : Du pluralisme politique au parti unique, 1946–1968*. Bamako: Cauris Livre, 2016. 607 pp. €57. Paper. ISBN: 978-9995260309.

Histoire des partis politiques au Mali: Du pluralism politique au parti unique, 1946–1968, by the former President of the Republic of Mali Alpha Oumar Konaré (1992–2002), is presented as the first of five volumes that will cover the history of political parties in Mali from the post-Second World War period to the present day. Although it contains a significant amount of information, some unpublished, let us be clear from the start that this is not an academic or historical work, nor even a real book. Indeed, it is in fact a succession of cards presenting the associations and political parties created in French Sudan/Mali during the period covered. Each card is built on the following model: general information on the organization (creation, general objectives, headquarters, important members); a chronology presenting the main events in the life of the organization; and associated documents (statutes, correspondence between members or with the authorities, minutes of assemblies, press releases, facsimiles of leaflets, etc.). The book contains six files on associations that served as a crucible for political activists and thirty-seven files on political parties. It is regrettable that the author makes no comments, that the page-and-a-half long introduction does not address the subject, and that there is no conclusion either.

Let us try to draw some lessons from this collection of working documents. While history has remembered that the period of political pluralism which preceded Mali's independence was marked by the rivalry between the Sudanese Progressive Party and the Sudanese Union-African Democratic Rally (US-RDA), the exhaustive list of political parties shows the profusion of organizations in existence. Some are very short-lived, while others change names or merge, illustrating the political proliferation that characterized the end of the colonial period, through the immediate appropriation of the party form, as soon as political liberalization offered the possibility.

Another aspect of political life emerges through the chronologies or the reproduction of internal documents of the parties, and that is the bitterness of the relations not only between the political formations but also within

them. This often takes on the rather classic forms of party life (antagonisms between factions, leadership conflicts, and purges), but it can go as far as physical confrontations, the most notable being the repression of the Segovian Democratic Union by the US-RDA. The latter, having initially suffered repression from the colonial administration (transfer of its militants, legal proceedings against its newspaper, arrests), reproduced this process when it took over the reins of government at the end of the 1950s (dissolution of rival political groups, trials, and imprisonment of opponents).

Finally, this exhaustive survey of political formations also makes it possible to highlight the existence of numerous parties run by and for colonists, at least until the end of the system of two separate electoral colleges (for colonists and colonized) in 1956. The rivalries between metropolitan parties might have seemed remote for their branches in the Sudan, but they seem to be quite tenacious and are sometimes reflected in the life of the administration.

The wealth of factual information presented in this book is above all an encouragement to go further, by encouraging new research on a topic/subject about which almost everything remains to be studied. It also offers landmarks and data that to the best of our knowledge have not been published elsewhere. One major problem, however, for those who wish to use this book for their own work is the lack of rigor in the presentation of sources and the absence of a bibliography. It is therefore not clear where the author got the elements allowing him to produce chronologies, nor where the sources were reproduced and where the facsimiles come from. In any case, this book provides very rich material to contribute to the history of Malian political parties, which is still too fragmented and sometimes mythologized.

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For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

- Kone, Kassim. 2017. "A Southern View on the Tuareg Rebellions in Mali." *African Studies Review* 60 (1): 53–75. doi: 10.1017/asr.2017.10.
- Moseley, William G., and Barbara G. Hoffman. 2017. "Introduction: Hope, Despair, and the Future of Mali." *African Studies Review* 60 (1): 5–14. doi:10.1017/asr.2017.12.
- Whitehouse, Bruce. 2017. "Political Participation and Mobilization after Mali's 2012 Coup." *African Studies Review* 60 (1): 15–35. doi:10.1017/asr.2017.9.