

denied the hand of a princess because of his lowly status, Boubou several times abducted and raped noble women. Boubou, Hubert and the almamy Noiroi imposed financed their expensive tastes by engaging in extortion and, on at least one occasion, murder. When news of what was happening in the Futa reached a new reform-minded governor, Frezouls, Noiroi was removed from office and charges were brought against Noiroi, Hubert and Boubou. Boubou died in prison under suspicious circumstances. Noiroi and Hubert were to be tried in France, where the scandal was widely discussed in the press. Charges were, however, eventually dropped. Noiroi returned to Africa, but was not given a position of authority. During his last years in the colonial administration, he was given only special assignments, which he fulfilled with his usual vigour. Hubert was not even reprimanded, but he never returned to Africa.

I disagree with David's interpretation of this stage of Noiroi's career. David approaches it largely as the product of in-fighting and personality conflicts within the colonial administration. This is certainly true, but I think that the report made by Administrator Stahl on the incidents in the Futa was detailed, concrete and damning, not only for those in authority, but for the whole French colonial structure. Noiroi was not personally implicated, though he may have been involved in an earlier assassination. Nevertheless, these acts were carried out by people under his command, and he vigorously defended Boubou Penda. His relationship with Boubou was intense and emotional. Noiroi insisted that Boubou was to be obeyed as if he spoke for Noiroi, and on one occasion, he broke down and cried because Boubou was being attacked. I am not sure whether David is naïve or simply unable to accept the flaws of the French colonial order. Unfortunately, David does not seem to read English. Though he has met me, he ignores two books of mine which deal with Noiroi as well as an important article by Emily Osborn.¹ This is an interesting, but flawed book about an interesting but flawed character.

Note

1. Emily Lynn Osborn, "Interpreting Colonial Power in French Guinea: The Boubou Penda-Ernest Noiroi Affair of 1905", in Benjamin Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn and Richard Roberts (eds), *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks: African Employees and the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); Martin A. Klein, *Islam and Imperialism in Senegal: Sine-Saloum 1847–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), ch. 8; Martin A. Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 148–50.

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Prêcher dans le désert. Islam politique et changement social en Mauritanie, Zekeria Ould Ahmed Salem, Paris, Karthala, 2013, 327 pp., €28 (paperback), ISBN: 978-2-8111-0907-3

This is an important study of post-colonial Mauritania. The first part of the book is a summary of the history of modern Mauritania focused on Islamisation. It is a bit surprising

to speak of a country that was 100% Muslim going through a process of Islamisation, but Mauritania was a nomadic country with few schools, few mosques and low literacy, though with some important centres of learning. The first government was more nationalist than Islamist, but it had to both fend off covetous neighbours and create a nation where none had existed before. The expansion of education and the adoption of Arabic first as an official language and then as the language of education were important as nation-building tools. The building of mosques, schools and centres of Islamic learning was underwritten by donations from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. With the destruction of nomadic life by successive droughts and the grouping of a large part of the population in the newly created capital city of Nouakchott, the city became the arena for public life and religious proselytisation. Islam went from being the religion of merchants to the religion of the street.

Literacy developed rapidly, a learned community evolved, and the nature of society was radically transformed. Though Ould Ahmed Salem does not use the term, a Muslim civil society emerged, and elections became important, and society became more pluralist with increasing recourse to elections. Mauritania was Islamic, but far from monolithic. Ould Ahmed Salem describes three different groups: a conservative *ulema*, a reformist group very much influenced by the Muslim Brothers, and a Salafist community. The second chapter deals with the emergence of Tawassoul, a Muslim reformist party, committed to democracy, equality, and women's rights. Ould Ahmed Salem does not define the nature of women's rights, but democracy and equality are central to rest of the book. Tawassoul was never very successful at the polls, but it represents an important force. The third chapter is largely a description of terrorist incidents and is valuable only to underline the different options and the responses of state and community.

These first chapters are, however, primarily an introduction to the struggle for equality. The Arabic-speaking community in Mauritania is around half servile, the servile part divided between slaves called *abd*, and *hartani*, who he defines as freed slaves, though biographical sketches in the book suggest that many of the *hartani* are essentially still slaves. Ould Ahmed Salem does not deal extensively with the *abd*, though many *abd* certainly benefited from the events and organisations he describes. A number of things helped the *hartani*. First, some benefited from colonial rule. The French carefully avoided attacking slavery for fear that abolition policies would incite resistance, but many *hartin* got an education because when asked by the French, many nobles sent their slaves instead of their sons to French schools. Many employees of the colonial state were *hartin*. Second, the drought years led to a breakdown of social control. Many *hartin* were able to cut loose from the control of their masters and profit from expanding educational opportunities. A large part of the army and the civil service were *hartin*.

The last three chapters deal with the struggle for equality. Chapter 4 focuses on the formation of three overlapping organisations. El Hor was organised in 1978 in the struggle against the vestiges of slavery. There was a toothless abolition law proclaimed in 1981, which put the issue of abolition on the political agenda. The leader of El Hor entered the government in 1985. A more activist organisation, SOS-Esclaves, was founded in 1995 and conducted propaganda both at home and abroad. It also helped slaves, whose masters did not recognise that they were legally free, to escape to the city, where they could not be recaptured. Finally, in 2007, Biram Ould Dah Abeid, the secretary-general of SOS-Esclaves, formed the Initiative pour la resurgence du mouvement abolitionniste (IRA). Abeid has a sense of theatre, which he has used to form a mass movement. He and other *hartin* leaders have based their actions on the teachings of the prophet Muhammed and on Muslim thought. In 2012, Abeid burnt several works of Islamic law dealing with slavery,

risking blasphemy charges. Abeid, Boubacar Messaoud of SOS-Esclaves, and other *hratin* leaders, have been arrested several times, but always released. They are clearly part of the political scene, and in a pluralist political system can no longer be suppressed. Their existence and the basis of their demands has forced both the state and liberal clerics to take a stand. Though members of the *ulema* have defended slavery in its traditional forms, members of Tawassoul have defended anti-slavery positions, though perhaps reluctantly. In 2007, the state criminalised slave ownership.

Chapter 5 goes into the ideological basis of the *hratin* movement, focusing on the struggle for dignity and respect, particularly in the mosque. The most interesting part is a discussion of a group of clerics of *hratin* origin and their struggle for acceptance. Chapter 6 involves family law and personal status and involves three cases. The first is a suit by the son of a Mauritanian diplomat who sought to have his slave mother recognised as a concubine, and thus himself as legitimate. The other two involve the unsuccessful efforts of noble families to annul marriages, one between a griot and a noblewoman and the second between the son of a slave and a noblewoman. These case studies provide a fuller picture of what the struggle for equality is about and how complex the issues are. In the third case mentioned above, the young woman's "tutor" was her brother, who approved of the marriage and was a friend of the former slave. The book comes out at a time when the issues are very much alive, and they are likely to continue to be important. The struggle against slavery has become important because the French colonisers have done nothing to work towards its abolition and because today servile people can mobilise. For anyone who wants to understand the struggle, this book is indispensable, perhaps the best and certainly the most textured account we have of the struggle against slavery in Mauritania.

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Party Politics and Economic Reform in Africa's Democracies, edited by M. Anne Pitcher, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, xviii + 305 pp., \$32.99 (paperback).

In the 1980s and the 1990s, a broad swathe of African states underwent parallel processes of democratic transition and market-based private sector reforms. Anne Pitcher's *Party Politics and Economic Reform in Africa's Democracies* shows how the nature of party politics in each state was related to the extent to which states' initial commitments to privatisation, often made at the behest of international financial institutions, later evolved into entrenched and durable reforms.

Pitcher's first chapter lays out the theoretical framework for the work, which operationalises Kenneth Shepsle's distinction between commitments that are "motivationally credible" and those that are "credible in the imperative sense" (Shepsle 1991). The former refers to commitments that are credible because they align with state actors' perceived interests at a given point in time. Motivationally credible commitments in private sector reform encompass such state actions as passing legislation to safeguard private property and the establishment of new institutions to guide the privatisation process. Pitcher establishes and interrogates how and why motivationally credible