
MADORE Frédérick. — *La construction d'une sphère publique musulmane en Afrique de l'Ouest.*

Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2016, 208 p., bibl., ill.

Robert Launay



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafricaines/25055>

ISSN: 1777-5353

Publisher

Éditions de l'EHESS

Printed version

Date of publication: 14 March 2019

Number of pages: 299-301

ISSN: 0008-0055

Electronic reference

Robert Launay, « MADORE Frédérick. — *La construction d'une sphère publique musulmane en Afrique de l'Ouest.* », *Cahiers d'études africaines* [Online], 233 | 2019, Online since 14 March 2019, connection on 14 March 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafricaines/25055>

This text was automatically generated on 14 March 2019.

© Cahiers d'Études africaines

MADORE Frédéric. — *La construction d'une sphère publique musulmane en Afrique de l'Ouest.*

Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2016, 208 p., bibl., ill.

Robert Launay

REFERENCES

MADORE Frédéric. — *La construction d'une sphère publique musulmane en Afrique de l'Ouest.* Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2016, 208 p., bibl., ill.

- 1 Muslims were a minority in Burkina Faso upon its independence. Its first president, Maurice Yaméogo, was Catholic, and indeed a Catholic elite dominated the entire state apparatus. Islam and Muslims were distinctly marginalized. Fifty years later, more than half the population is Muslim, mosques have proliferated in the capital and throughout the country, while Islamic organizations occupy a highly visible—if not dominant—place in the national landscape. Madore's book chronicles this rise to visibility in the public sphere through a detailed and incisive analysis of three cohorts of Muslim leaders in Burkina Faso.
- 2 His account focuses primarily on the advent and proliferation of Muslim associations, beginning with the creation of the CMHV (Communauté musulmane de Haute Volta) in 1962. Throughout the book, he dwells on the nature of schisms dividing the Muslim community, both within and between associations, in many ways an index of broader religious cleavages within Burkinabe Muslim society. At the time the CMHV came into existence, the major divide, he suggests, was between "traditionalists" and "reformists." (His use of quotation marks indicates a certain discomfort with such labels, not least because the actors themselves do not use such terms to characterize their religiosity.) Like many other analysts of contemporary trends in Islam in Africa, Madore does not really give the so-called "traditionalists" an entirely fair hearing. Their emphasis on

principles of seniority, hereditary religious leadership and reliance on distinctly non modern modes of Qur'anic education, are alien not only to “reformists,” but also to most European analysts. Be this as it may, Madore’s analysis, focused as it is on the formal associational realm where “traditionalists” are often at a disadvantage, quickly moves on to other bases of division within the Burkinabe Muslim community.

- 3 During the Yaméogo regime, the CMHV, virtually the only Muslim interlocutor to those in power, carefully maintained an apolitical stance, manifested by public expressions of support for the government in place. Throughout the proliferation of Muslim associations of different stripes, this attitude, Madore notes, has remained consistent, as one regime has replaced another, usually as the outcome of a *coup*. The first such *coup*, under Sangoule Lamizana, opened up a space for Muslim visibility in the public arena, not only by replacing the firmly established Catholic elite in power, but also by reversing its foreign policy towards the Arab world. Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, and also Libya donated oil money to build mosques and to fund the education of students from Burkina Faso in their countries, especially at Medina in Saudi Arabia, fostering the development of a Salafi “Wahhabi” movement in Burkina Faso. The new division between Salafis and Sufis was not a mere reiteration of differences between “traditionalists” and “reformists,” but rather one that reflected cleavages within the “reformist” umbrella as well.
- 4 Madore insightfully demonstrates how the articulation of difference over the past fifty years has shifted, not only by the emergence of new sites of conflict, but also the accompanying resolution of others. For example, generational differences opposing those who systematically favored senior leaders with those who clamored for the emergence of younger ones, pronounced among both “traditionalists” and “reformists,” have been systematically tempered over time. Simultaneously, cleavages between Arabic-speaking and francophone modernizing leaders, those educated in the Arab world as opposed to those educated in secular schools, grew more intense before, in turn, abating.
- 5 His analysis of the paradoxes of the increasing utilization of mass media by Muslim associations is particularly astute. On one hand, the establishment of several radio stations, and even a television station, affiliated to several Muslim associations has clearly contributed to the visibility of Muslim preachers, at least of those who have access and know how to use such media to their advantage. On the other hand, such broadcasts are easy for the central government to monitor, leading to self-censorship that not only precludes oppositional political stances, but also doctrinaire condemnation of other Muslim tendencies (apart from the Ahmadiyya, consistently disparaged, if not berated, as heretical by all other Muslim groups). The result is an increasing promulgation of a sort of generic Muslim discourse, avoiding confrontation but also melding divergent religious tendencies into a more homogenous voice.
- 6 Madore’s book is a highly perceptive account of the shifting terrain of Muslim leadership in Burkina Faso over the past fifty years. But is leadership quite the same as the “public sphere”? Habermas’s original use of the term centered on the historical formation of the elusive and sometimes illusory category of “public opinion,” one that focused on consumption as much as production, on followers at least as much as leaders, but also on the nature of those who were implicitly or explicitly excluded as well as those who were included. Madore’s account has little to say about followers. We learn about the building of mosques, but not attendance; about the production, but not the consumption, of mass media. We are not given much insight into how, over these fifty years, Islam was transformed from a minority to a majority religion in Burkina Faso, surely not an issue

that can be divorced from its emergence in the “public sphere.” It is somewhat unfair to reproach Madore for not raising, much less for not answering these questions, which are largely beyond the scope of his inquiry. This is really a detailed, authoritative, and perceptive account of the emergence of Islamic leadership in Burkina Faso. The story of the “public sphere” remains to be written.

NOTES

1. J. HABERMAS, “The Public Sphere: an Encyclopedia Article,” *New German Critique* 3, 1974, pp. 49-55; *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1989; “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere,” in C. CALHOUN(ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1992.