Misunderstood Mali

WORLD REACTION TO COUP’S AFTERMATH IS SLOWED BY BLIND SUPPORT OF DEMOCRACY

by Robert Launay (anthropology)

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All of a sudden, Mali is big news. Unfortunately, it has taken the militant Islamists’ willful, systematic destruction of historic monuments of Timbuktu to get our attention. Such radical Islamic iconoclasm, on a scale that recalls the Taliban’s demolition of the Bamiyan Buddhas, has profoundly shocked the rest of the world.

As someone whose career has been spent studying Islam in West Africa, I am intensely aware that much of West Africa’s rich history, totally unknown to most Americans, is being erased forever. But I am even more disturbed that the media have focused almost exclusively on monuments and not on the plight of millions of innocent Malians trapped behind rebel lines in the North and now under the Islamist militants’ authority.

Since the Malian army overthrew the democratically elected president of the country in March and took over the capital, Bamako, the Islamist extremists have been on a rampage in the North, brutally enforcing their narrow-minded religious viewpoint over a population that has practiced Islam for centuries. Refugees now are desperately fleeing Mali because of the rising violence.

What explains the response? The country represented one of West Africa’s showcase democracies. Of course, if we simply mean relatively free and fair elections along with peaceful and orderly transfers of power, Mali indeed deserves kudos for being a model democracy in that part of the world.

But elections in Mali were anything but ideological. Different political parties had no real differences of vision—if they had any vision at all—of how Mali as a nation should be governed.

In any case, the government had very limited power, depending largely on sources outside the country for funds. Most of the development projects in the country were financed and largely run by nongovernmental organizations, each of which has its own agenda independent of the nation at large.

To put it bluntly, they often steered clear of politicians noted for corruption.

The inability of the national government to hold off a well-armed band of rebels in the North was a real symptom of the...
limits of Malian democracy. The irony is that the military coup was sparked by the war in the North, which the Malian army was already in the process of losing. The rebels in the North were well armed, largely with weapons they obtained in the wake of the defeat of Moammar Gadhafi’s supporters in Libya.

By contrast, the Malian army was poorly equipped, poorly supplied, and, to make matters worse, poorly paid. Tired of being sent north only to be outgunned and slaughtered, the soldiers mutinied, toppling the Malian regime in the process.

The rebellion began as an unholy (and ultimately unstable) alliance of hardline Islamists, the Ansar Dine (“soldiers of the faith”), and Tuareg militants fighting for autonomy if not outright independence. The Islamists very cleverly let the Tuareg occupy center stage. Superficially, Mali appeared to be torn between a rebellion of an oppressed people in the North and an illegitimate military regime in the South that had overthrown an elected government.

How, it would seem, could the world possibly sympathize with the Malian army?

As it turned out, once the rebels established control over the North, the Tuareg rebels had served their purpose as a cover and the Islamists promptly threw them out.

In the short run, at least, this has been a substantial victory for well-armed, ruthless, hardline Islamists who, unlike the Taliban in Afghanistan, have no substantial base of popular support. Now the world is watching in horror as refugees flee from Islamic extremists with links to al-Qaida.

The French government, finally aware that the Islamist rebels in northern Mali constitute a real threat to its own national security, is belatedly considering joint military intervention with neighboring African countries. Now that the rebels are firmly ensconced, this will undoubtedly cost even more innocent lives and provoke even more destruction.

Let me be very clear: I am in no way enamored of military coups, and I am deeply committed to democratic principles. The problem is when we confuse democratic principles with elections. By punishing the bumbling perpetrators of Mali’s military coup, we opened the doors wide for the far more profoundly undemocratic—and far better organized—Ansar Dine. Our righteous indignation has cost us nothing, but the Malian people are paying a heavy price.
Working groups, faculty research grant projects explore wide range of issues

MAKING NETWORKS WORK FOR POLICY: EVIDENCE FROM AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION IN MALAWI
Led by assistant professor Lori Beaman (economics)
This faculty research grant project seeks to evaluate how best to leverage communication within networks to increase the spread of two productive but underused agricultural technologies in Malawi: pit planting for maize and improved crop residue management. The grant funds a qualitative study, implemented by local researchers, that provides an important perspective on measures of the social networks’ and farmers’ decision-making process. Specifically, collaborators at the University of Malawi will provide insights into technology transfer by investigating how power influences technology uptake and who has power.

STUDYING MEANING IN AFRICAN WORLDS WITHOUT LITERACY
Led by associate professor David Schoenbrun (history) and assistant professor Mark Hauser (anthropology)
This is a seminar on how scholars figure out what things, people, places, and actions meant before literacy. For archaeologists and historians, themes such as goods, ethnicity, migration, land, gender, health and healing, political formations, and exchange relations are the foundation for writing Africa’s history when a documentary archive does not exist. An impressive body of work generates narratives or draws comparative cases through such themes. This group focuses on the themes of ethnicity and migration.

STATES, SOCIETIES, AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA
Led by assistant professor Rachel Riedl (political science) and sociology PhD student Kofi Asante
This working group concerns itself with the developmental endeavors of African countries and the successes and failures attending these endeavors. It considers classic and recent literature produced by anthropologists, historians, political scientists, sociologists, and development experts working from interdisciplinary perspectives on issues of development.

ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE AS A HUMAN RIGHT: A COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION IN ETHIOPIA
Led by Center for Global Health deputy director Carolyn Baer and clinical assistant professor Juliet Sorensen (law)
With the support of a faculty research grant, faculty and graduate students from Northwestern’s Feinberg School of Medicine, School of Law, Kellogg School of Management, and Robert R. McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science are partnering with the Federal Ministry of Health in Ethiopia to evaluate how access to health can be maximized for the population of Bonga. Working with the Bonga community and health administration, Northwestern researchers are determining the need for and developing key health interventions for implementation in primary health facilities. Training and program evaluation are conducted by both the Bonga community and Northwestern faculty and supervised graduate students. The final deliverable will be a capacity-building intervention on which the Northwestern team will report, including qualitative and outcomes data. Please see the update on this group’s activities on page 8.

ORAL HISTORY IN AFRICA
Led by performance studies PhD students Andrew Brown, Nikki Yeboah, and Mbongeni Mtshali
By interviewing artists from South Africa and Zimbabwe whose work deals with the countries’ shifts to independence and their relationship throughout and after that process, this working group hopes to contribute to discussion of the role of art in resisting colonialism and in mediating the countries’ complex relationship. Its research will culminate in a weeklong installation of the interview compilations and selections/re-creations of each artist’s work, expanding PAS’s oral history and performance-as-social-action archive.
Undergraduate grant awardees report productive research visits to Africa

The PAS African Research Leadership Award program provides money for Northwestern undergraduates to develop and lead a research project relating to African studies, ideally including experience on the continent. Among the 2012 recipients were Weinberg College international studies majors Katie Prentiss and Sarah Freishtat, and Madeleine May and Jaclyn Skurie, who are combining majors in the Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications with African studies (May) and international studies (Skurie). Christina Walker, who is double-majoring in journalism in Medill and in political science in Weinberg, received a 2012 Summer Undergraduate Research Grant.

Here, in their own words, these students recount and reflect on their research experiences in East and West Africa.

DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND MICROFINANCE FOR WOMEN IN TANZANIA
by Sarah Freishtat and Katie Prentiss

In Tanzania there is a huge disparity between village and city life. Nowhere is this more apparent than when it comes to women, who have minimal rights and live under a legal system prejudiced toward men. Many village women do not finish school; they marry or get pregnant at a young age. They often spend their days collecting firewood and water, cooking meals, caring for their children, and building mud-and-wood homes.

Many locals and foreigners recognize the equality gap and are working within the social framework of Tanzania to correct it. Grassroots projects founded by locals, foreign nongovernmental organizations, and overseas funders and volunteers are common. Ranging from teaching skills to boosting local village economies, the projects have the same goal: empowering disenfranchised women.

We spent a week traveling around the north of the country, visiting projects in various villages. These included community banks run by and for women in a small village outside the town of Moshi; a beekeeping project in the Maasai village of Ololosokwan in the Serengeti; and a vocational school for women in a village near Lake Eyasi. We learned about the successes of each project as well as the room for improvement.

A Moshi woman, Mama Mrema, started a program called the Women’s Education and Economic Center. In addition to employing women to create and sell crafts, the program helps villages open VICOBAs—village community banks—run by and for women. These fund such efforts as the purchase of land where women can grow their own crops and build new houses.

In Ololosokwan, Americans unaffiliated with any organization are working to establish a beekeeping business. Beekeeping is indigenous to Tanzania and fits within the lifestyle of the Maasai tribe that runs the company, but incorporating women, who must
also find time to care for their families, is a challenge. The volunteers help teach locals not only how to gather honey and wax from the bees but also how to ensure their businesses are running efficiently. Honey and candles are produced and sold today with only minor supervision from the founders. The company sells to local safari lodges, benefiting from the country’s largest industry, tourism.

The vocational school near Lake Eyasi is a resounding success for village girls. It was started by Lightness Bayo, who grew up in the village and knows firsthand the challenges girls face. Her students—many of them mothers as young as age 14—are unable to continue on to secondary school. They seek out the school because they want to learn a trade that they consider useful and that will provide an income as they get older. As one girl said through a translator, “Now I have something to do in my life, and I want to help my child, to stay with him.” Although successful, the school still has no funding except that provided by its founder.

Each of these projects faces challenges. Mama Mrema and other directors of projects that run on volunteers must spend much of their time raising funds and attracting volunteers. Projects that rely on individual funding, such as the Maasai beekeeping project and the vocational school, must earn money to keep them sustainable once the original founders are no longer involved. This seems to be a much greater challenge for the vocational school than for the beekeeping project, which is, in fact, a business. However, the beekeeping project faces the challenge of being run by foreigners, who must find ways to not overtake the local lifestyle.

**FA M R E R  F I E L D  S C H O O L S  I N  N O R T H E R N  U G A N D A**

by Christina Walker

“Christina—welcome to Africa!” said Florence with a laugh, as I followed her through tall grass in the Palaro farming district in Gulu.

“Wasn’t I here before?”

“No, now you are really in Africa.”

It was my sixth day into a three-week research trip in northern Uganda and my first time in Gulu’s Palaro district. There Florence, a nongovernmental organization facilitator, provides assistance to small farmers through NGO-run farmer field schools. Born in an internally displaced person camp, Florence has a story similar to those of the people she helps. Many people in Palaro still feel the aftermath of a 20-year war between the Ugandan government and the Lord’s Resistance Army. Several are former internally displaced persons, and most are trying to rebuild their way of life.

Nearly 80 percent of Ugandans are farmers, many engaging in subsistence farming. Farmer field schools are teaching them new, large-scale methods to increase crop production. The schools I attended in Gulu tell these small farmers that increased crop production is the means to increased livelihood.

In the gardens, Florence encouraged farmers to overcome dependency and plant the means that would enable their future. The challenges of translating learning into application, however, aren’t easy to overcome. “It will take time,” Florence said. Not all of these farmers are applying the new farming methods exactly as taught to increase yields. Florence also expressed fear of promoting dependency. Many of the people she serves are unfamiliar with farming on a large scale and expect continued assistance.

“We will always need people to check on us, even if they aren’t supporting a program,” said Laryang Rose, who attends Florence’s farmer field school.

On the way back from Palaro, Florence asked me if I knew how watches came to be in Uganda. She explained through a slight smirk that the British gave them watches to keep time. “We kept the watches but not the time,” she said, chuckling. “We still wear the watches, but we still don’t keep the time.”
As the women began to cook their evening meal, the witch leader sat across from us—her burn scars still visible in the fading light. The elected leader of the 70 women living in Gushegu, Ghana, Mlogi Wankpan represents their needs. Wankpan’s brother exiled her from their home village more than a decade ago, as happens in many families in her village. Jealousy had sparked between Wankpan and her brother’s wives because of seemingly unfair treatment. Wankpan was beaten, thrown out of her house, and ultimately exiled to the witch camp at Gushegu. We met with her in the encampment to film her story and the stories of many others.

We traveled in Ghana for 30 days in July to investigate two witch camps north of Tamale. The goal was to film a short documentary profiling the lives of the elderly women who make up the witch camp at Gushegu. One of the most recently established camps, it provided an opportunity to explore the relations between witches and civilians of the neighboring towns.

In Ghana witchcraft is a way to explain the unexplainable. Believers in witchcraft, sorcery, and bad juju often ostracize older women, who are targeted because they are considered obsolete or because they contradict societal norms.

These women are not able to protect themselves. Once accused by family or neighbors, a woman undergoes a ritual to determine her guilt or innocence. The most common ritual is one in which a priest extorts money from the accused woman and proceeds to slaughter a fowl. If the fowl falls backward, the woman is considered innocent; if it falls forward, tradition dictates that she be exiled. More often than not, the women are found guilty and forced from their communities. The makeshift village known as a witch camp offers the only support for accused women and their children.

In the small town of Gushegu we interviewed many of the accused witches about their experiences in the camps and the reasons they were accused. We accompanied the women during their daily routines, waking up at dawn, walking with them two miles into town, and filming them as they swept up grains from the marketplace floor with basic hand brooms. Our interactions with the women gave us valuable insight into how townspeople interact with the community of witches living just down the road.

We also took a trip to Gambaga, the largest of all the witch camps and the one most frequented by foreign tourists. More than 150 women live in the compound east of Tamale, often with their children and grandchildren. The children range from 19-year-old boys living on their own to infants clinging to their mothers’ skirts. We had the opportunity to speak with these nontraditional families about the challenges of growing up in the camp.

Foreign tourism has greatly affected the women who live at Gambaga, and our interactions with the accused witches were closely monitored by a religiously affiliated nonprofit. Overcoming the challenges of constant supervision was a struggle.

We are thankful to Northwestern for providing us with the opportunity to gain reporting experience on the ground in West Africa. In the next few months we are executing a variety of projects based on our experiences. We plan to finish the documentary in March. We are also making a slideshow illustrating the lives of Gambaga’s children and are writing a piece on the effects of tourism on witch culture. Next spring we will travel to South Africa to participate in Medill’s Journalism Residency Program in Cape Town and Johannesburg.
Faculty travel to Doha conference on African Islam

M. Sani Umar (religious studies and Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa), Robert Launay (anthropology), and Scott Reese (Buffett Visiting Professor of International Studies) traveled to Doha, Qatar, in May to participate in the international conference “The Revival of Islamic Tradition in Africa.”

The meeting aimed to push the boundaries of academic research in the field of African Islam while fostering debate in the Middle East about Islam in Africa and the larger meaning of the Islamic tradition. Conveners Zachary Wright (Northwestern University in Qatar) and Samer Karanshawy (Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies, which organized the conference) sought to challenge the false dichotomy, often present in commentary on African Muslim societies, between global Islamist reformers and vestiges of local, distinctively “African” Islamic cultures.


“The conference, which was supported by the Qatar Foundation and Northwestern University in Qatar, “gathered the extended ISITA family in a novel environment,” Wright said. “Many participants, despite the deep mutual respect shared, had not seen each other for decades. The conference became an opportunity for elder professors in the field to reflect on the changes they have witnessed in the study of Islam in Africa over the last 40 years, while also allowing for the exchange of new research concerning epistemology, teaching and learning practices, and textual production in African Islam.” Wright and Andrea Brigaglia (University of Cape Town) are preparing the papers for publication as a volume titled Legacies of Learning: Teaching and Living Islam in Africa.

ISITA hosts Fulbright scholar for six months

ISITA is hosting Fulbright African research scholar Elemine Moustapha of the University of Nouakchott for six months, until March 2013. He is the executive adviser for the National Archives of Mauritania.

Educated at the Universities of Nouakchott (BA, English), Dakar (MA, history), and Provence, Aix-Marseille I (PhD, history), Moustapha has research interests ranging from sociolinguistics to the 11th-century Almoravid movement to the historical study of the social function of personal and place names in the Mauritanian context. He has experience in Mauritania and abroad as a professor, manuscript archivist and conservationist, and consultant and expert on education, cultural heritage, and development issues.

At Northwestern, Moustapha will continue his latest research on aspects of religious expression in public space in Nouakchott, using the Herskovits Library and consulting with PAS faculty, including Robert Launay (anthropology). He aims to contribute a fresh perspective to Mauritanian studies by taking everyday expressions of religiosity—in broadcast media, music, mosque discourse, public preaching, and items like phone cards that carry Islamic labels, for instance—as the starting point for exploring how Mauritania’s religious heritage is interacting with Islamic revival influences. He will also continue to collaborate with ISITA visiting scholar Charles Stewart on the sixth volume of the series “The Arabic Writings of Mauritania and the Western Sahara” (forthcoming in 2013).

Emeritus professor John Hunwick (left) with Elemine Moustapha in Dakar in the 1980s
Richard Asante is the third visiting scholar brought to the Evanston campus with proceeds from the Global Encounters Mellon Grant shared between PAS, the Department of Performance Studies, and Northwestern University Press.

Asante received a PhD in political science from the University of Ghana in 2010 and is currently a research fellow and lecturer at its Institute of African Studies. His research interests include the political economy of African development, state-society relations, ethnicity and public-sector governance, and the local dynamics of conflicts and their resolution. He has conducted field research in Ghana for his scholarly work and as a consultant and research collaborator with the Oxford University Centre for Inequality, Human Security, and Ethnicity; the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development; CODESRIA; and other organizations.

Asante will be at Northwestern until June 2013. He plans to revise his dissertation for consideration for publication as a monograph by Northwestern University Press and will teach an undergraduate course on the political economy of African development.

Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué, a visiting predoctoral fellow at PAS, is completing a PhD in sub-Saharan African history at Purdue University, where she has taught history and women’s studies.

Her dissertation, ‘‘Don’t Cross Gutter Skirts’: Fashion, Beauty, and Gendered Nation Building in Western Cameroon, 1960–82,” places women at the forefront of nation-building efforts. It argues that Anglophone women in western Cameroon played a key part in the country’s development processes by actively interpreting and redefining the meanings of national identity, unity, and modernity in the early postcolonial period. Her second ongoing project explores how American missionaries in Cameroon influenced the dynamics of women’s gender-specific roles in the 1950s.

Noelle Sullivan, new lecturer in anthropology and global health studies, is a critical medical anthropologist who explores the impacts of development aid and state health-sector reform on provision of healthcare within resource-deficient, government-run health facilities in Tanzania. Her dissertation research at the University of Florida used ethnography to investigate how global, state, and local processes interacted to shape how healthcare is understood and delivered in a semi-urban area.

Sullivan’s current research focuses on how resources and funding for pregnancy, birth, and postnatal services are allocated in Tanzania, where maternal mortality rates remain high despite large development aid for maternal health services. Her project contrasts the funding allotments and distribution of resources and infrastructure with concrete effects on the ground. The aim is to examine...
Helen Tilley has joined the Department of History as associate professor with affiliations in the Science in Human Culture and Global Health Programs. She had been on Princeton University’s history faculty since 2002. Her work examines medical, environmental, racial, and anthropological research in colonial and postcolonial contexts, emphasizing intersections with environmental history and development studies.

Her recent book, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago, 2011), explores the dynamic interplay between scientific research and imperialism in British Africa between 1870 and 1950. She has also written articles and book chapters on the history of ecology, eugenics, agriculture, and epidemiology in tropical Africa and is editor of Robert Gordon’s *Ordering Africa: Anthropology, European Imperialism, and the Politics of Knowledge* (Manchester, 2007).

Her current project seeks to explain the scientific studies and legal interventions in the 20th century that originally helped to construct "traditional medicine" as a viable category of research and policy making, especially in the contexts of decolonization and the Cold War.

Lauren Adrover (PhD candidate, anthropology) presented “Net and Nettles: Two Conceptions of Community and Entrepreneurship” at the 16th World Economic History Congress in South Africa in July. At the African Studies Association conference in Philadelphia in November, she presented “Authentic Cultures, Constructed Cultures, and Contested Cultures: A Social History of Recreational Music in Ghana.”

Richard Joseph (political science) contributed the epilogue “The Logic and Legacy of Prebendalism in Nigeria” to *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria: Critical Interpretations*, which follows up on a 2011 conference in Lagos. The volume will be published by Palgrave Macmillan next February. Joseph spoke on “Governance, Development, and Transformation in Africa: Research, Learning, and Policy Priorities” to kick off a one-day workshop at Brown University in October. In November he delivered the annual C. L. R. James Lecture at St. Lawrence University on the topic “Freedom Work: My Journey as a Caribbean-American Scholar and Activist.”

Robert Launay (anthropology) published “The Roots of Islamophobia in Côte d’Ivoire” in the July 5 issue of the online *Cultural Anthropology*, whose theme was “Hot Spots: Côte d’Ivoire Is Cooling Down? Reflections a Year after the Battle for Abidjan.”

David Peyton (PhD candidate, political science) cowrote “Building Africa’s Airlift Capacity: A Strategy for Enhancing Military Effectiveness” with Birame Diop (director, Partners Senegal) and Gene McConville (Africa Center for Strategic Studies). It appeared in the August issue of *Africa Security Brief*, a publication of the ACSS.


Undergraduate research and language grant application deadlines announced

The Office of Undergraduate Research, which helps Northwestern undergraduates find research opportunities, is announcing deadlines for Undergraduate Language Grant and Summer Undergraduate Research Grant applications. Grants may be used for independent projects during the academic year or the summer, to travel to conferences, for intensive language study, or to work as faculty research assistants. Research ranges from lab and archival work to interviews, documentaries, and projects such as screenwriting and choreography.

Applicants for Undergraduate Language Grants, which support intensive and experiential study of foreign languages abroad or in the United States, are due January 31, 2013. Learn the details and view videos of grant winners at http://undergradresearch.northwestern.edu/ulg.

Summer Undergraduate Research Grant applications are due March 8, 2013. Winners of the grants immerse themselves in projects in the laboratory, the library, or the studio, on campus and around the world. All Northwestern undergraduates are eligible to apply. Learn more at http://undergradresearch.northwestern.edu/summerurg.