

negotiating a peace treaty. That window of opportunity has now obviously been closed indefinitely.

Jørgen Jensenhaugen

Lasserre, Isabelle & Thierry Oberlé (2013) *Noire guerre secrète au Mali. Les nouvelles menaces contre la France* [Our Secret War in Mali: New Threats Against France]. Paris: Fayard. 248 pp. ISBN 9782213677941.

On 11 January 2013, the French government launched its *Operation Serval* in Mali. One year earlier, Tuareg rebels and Islamist fighters had taken control of the northern parts of the country displacing a weak Malian army. Islamists were now advancing south and the French, who had troops in Chad, were called upon. The swift French reaction seemed to have emerged out of the crisis. This book shows, however, that a French operation in northern Mali had been in the planning for a couple of years. The book is written by two journalists specialized in Saharan politics and working with the newspaper *Le Figaro*. So what were the root causes of French intervention in Mali, apart from the emergency? Northern Mali was increasingly becoming a zone of attraction for Salafists not only from West Africa, but also from the suburbs of Paris and elsewhere. The North Africa branch of Al-Qaeda (AQMI) was beginning to threaten France, leading to an increasing worry about an attack like 9/11 on French soil. In addition, Islamist groups in the Sahara control a large part of the cocaine supply to Europe, and EU countries have spent millions of euros to free hostages in this region in recent years. Cocaine and kidnapping are problems in themselves, but these sources of income have also helped Salafist groups buy arms and attract new recruits. Finally, French economic interests in West Africa, such as the need to control the uranium mines in northern Niger, were also important. This book provides new information on French motivations to intervene and is also an excellent overview of the increasingly complicated political economy of the Saharan region.

Tor A Benjaminson

Manski, Charles F (2013) *Public Policy in an Uncertain World: Analysis and Decisions*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 199 pp. ISBN 9780674066892.

Concepts such as evidence-based policy and research impact are currently in vogue, but practice often falls short of aspirations. Manski criticizes the 'incredible

certitude' prevalent in much policy analysis and provides suggestions for more honest analysis, reflecting the uncertainty and the problems involved in decisionmaking under partial knowledge. The first section of the book reviews common problems in policy analysis, including point estimates with no indication of uncertainty, a conflation of science and advocacy, and a failure to justify the assumptions that inferences hinge on. The second section provides a largely non-technical illustration of problems in policy analysis, including selection into treatments and the rationale and limitations of different approaches to causal inference. Manski highlights how theory is often insufficient to make strong predictions about future outcomes without additional assumptions. Conventional economic theory, for example, does not provide direct answers to how labor supply responds to changes in income tax without additional assumptions about the relative preference for income versus leisure. Many simplifying assumptions, such as invoking single-peaked preferences, may be less credible than often asserted. For example, Manski points to plausible scenarios where this may not hold, in heterogeneous populations where some respondents prefer to maximize expected outcomes while others seek to minimize risk or wish to avoid ex post unequal treatment. In my view, everybody can benefit from engaging with this concise and largely non-technical book. The flawed examples of policy analysis reviewed should induce greater skepticism and humility among consumers. Although there are unlikely to be any simple and uncontroversial fixes, the book provides a host of helpful advice for more rigorous and honest policy analysis.

Kristian Sereide Gleditsch

McHugo, John (2013) *A Concise History of the Arabs*. London: Saqi. 352 pp. ISBN 9780863568893.

In this elegant work of history, John McHugo traces Arab history through the centuries. He starts with the period prior to the prophet Muhammad and follows the rise and fall of the various Islamic Empires via the colonial era, taking the reader through to the present day. McHugo's account of Arab history is thorough, yet still an easy read. It is an introductory history for newcomers to the field, but it still manages to take up some of the most significant debates without making them banal. This combination makes this book one of the more recommendable introductions to Arab history. Despite the brevity of the book, McHugo does not shy away