with Gallab’s call for peaceful resistance to the Sudanese government and limits our ability to describe adequately the political and religious experiences of the Sudanese people.

_The First Islamist Republic_ will likely interest academics and activists alike. Due to its highly specialized content, this work is recommended for advanced scholars and graduate students.

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In 1956–57, on the eve of national independence, the Muslim preacher Asekou Sayon launched a movement to destroy anti-Islamic objects and practices among Baga people of coastal Guinea. “Fetishes,” in the form of masks, sculptures, and headdresses, were burned, tossed into the river, or sold to white traders. Sayon and his followers chopped sacred silk-cotton trees and demolished the round hermetic huts in which sorcerers were suspected of hiding with their magical possessions. Bush areas where powerful spirits dwelled and initiation ceremonies occurred were cleared and mosques often constructed in their places. Sayon held all-night, musical religious ceremonies (called _kalima_, after the Islamic declaration of faith or _shahada_) to encourage Baga conversions and impose harsh punishments on those who resisted Islam. Even the Baga’s _amanco ngopong_, the great male spirit that had been represented in masquerades by a twenty-meter construct, was demolished—or was it?

Ramon Sarró’s _The Politics of Religious Change on the Upper Guinea Coast: Iconoclasm Done and Undone_ provides an anthropological history of the events preceding and following Sayon’s iconoclastic movement. Iconoclasm entails destroying sacred objects and images in order to cleanse society of its prior symbolic resources, yet Sarró argues that the outcome of an iconoclastic movement may not be entirely destructive. Sayon’s movement eliminated some distinctive practices and characteristics among Baga people, but doing so helped prepare them for their tempered incorporation into Sékou Touré’s postcolonial and predominantly Muslim state. Sarró therefore suggests that an additional outcome of an
iconoclastic movement, beyond destruction, can be revitalization through the establishment of a new social, political, or religious order.

Around the time of Sayon’s movement in the mid-twentieth century, a majority of Baga people became Islamicized, and the rest were likely affiliated with Catholicism. Nevertheless, Sayon’s intended eradication of spirits, fetishes, and witchcraft from coastal Guinea remains to be completed. Baga masks and headdresses continued to make public appearances and have their connections to powerful and perhaps dangerous spirits debated through the 1990s. Elders explained the endurance of local spirits by noting that Sayon erred in assuming that the objects he destroyed and the spirits they represented or contained were one and the same. Spirits like the amanco ngopong are detachable from and more durable than their possibly re-creatable material manifestations.

A great strength of the monograph is Sarró’s placement of the iconoclastic movement in an especially broad historical context, from precolonial times through 2007, which allows him to propose several reworkings of typical assumptions about historical ruptures and continuities. To counter readers’ expectations that the Islamic movement would have necessarily produced a dramatic break from a traditional Baga past, Sarró shows that Baga had been familiar with and accustomed to resisting Islam for centuries, at least since their eradication by eighteenth-century Fulbe jihadists from the adjacent Fouta Djallon highlands. Much of what came to constitute Baga “custom” was a colonial-era invention, a point resonant with contemporary studies by historians and anthropologists of other sub-Saharan cultures. Even the idea of iconoclasm—that it was necessary to destroy Baga symbolic representations for the sake of social advancement—both preceded and followed Sayon’s movement, and was manifest in the state policies of Touré’s Guinea.

While cradling Sayon’s iconoclasm in historical continuities, Sarró emphasizes that the notions of continuity and rupture are themselves political; they are emphasized or enacted by social actors because they have real consequences for present-day distributions of status. Male Baga elders, for example, garnered power in colonial times by maintaining connections to the fetishized spirits that gave them legitimacy. Male youth, who felt oppressed by their elders and the colonial system, often joined Sayon in working to annihilate the elders’ authoritative base through iconoclastic rupture. Later, in the 1990s, a group of educated and urbanized Baga (known as ressortissants) tried to revitalize continuities to Baga traditions, claiming that doing so was necessary to preserve their culture and