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Stamp emissions as a sociological and cultural force: the case of Mali

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Jan Jansen

Stamp Emissions as a Sociological and Cultural Force – The Case of Mali

Introduction

Postage stamps and related objects are miniature communication tools, and they tell a story about cultural and political identities and about artistic forms of identity expressions. They are part of the world's material heritage, and part of history. Ever more of this postal heritage becomes available online, published by stamp collectors' organizations, auction houses, commercial stamp shops, online catalogues, and individual collectors. Virtually collecting postage stamps and postal history has recently become a possibility. These working papers about Africa are examples of what can be done. But they are work-in-progress! Everyone who would like to contribute, by sending corrections, additions, and new area studies can do so by sending an email message to the APH editors: Ton Dietz (dietzaj@asc.leidenuniv.nl) and/or Jan Jansen (jansenj@fsw.leidenuniv.nl). You are welcome!

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Cape of Good Hope postage stamp 1853:

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/7c/Cape_Triangular_Postage_Stamp.jpg/400px-Cape_Triangular_Postage_Stamp.jpg

Egypt postage stamp 1914:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4b/Post_Stamp_Egypt.jpg

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Stamp Emissions as a Sociological and Cultural Force – The Case of Mali

Jan Jansen

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Introduction¹

Stamps belong not only to a country's material culture, but more importantly they have an enduring impact outside that country. Even more so than currency – which for many countries is 'supranational' – stamps become the mostly widely disseminated part of a country's material culture and because of that they are deserving of scholarly attention.² This analysis therefore aims to explore the impact on a country's public image of globally distributed postage stamps. A country's global public image is extremely complex, highly dynamic, and without doubt subject to fashion and exaggeration, and sub-Saharan Africa countries have to a large extent based their public images on a mixture of wildlife, famine, exoticism, dictatorial leaders and the game of soccer. The postal system too therefore, a 'ubiquitous but humble function of governments', as I once saw it described on a Wikipedia page on philatelic literature, can be used to contribute to a country's public image. When evaluating a country by its postal system people might initially think of its delivery services but, as I will argue, postage stamps actually have a

¹ This is a strongly revised version of Jan Jansen, 'Mali by Stamps - An Inquiry into a Country's Image,' in: S. Belcher, J. Jansen and M. N'Daou (eds.), *Mande Mansa - Essays in honor of David C. Conrad* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2008), 100-112. I thank Moussa Camara, Ton Dietz, and Ruud Stibbe for discussion and for refining my argument.

² Collecting is a practice that has received some attention by social scientists. Some have called it 'ritualized consumerism', others 'fetishism' (cf. for a discussion on 'collecting' the Editorial of *Etnofoor* XI-1 [1998], and Belk 1998). These analytical concepts might explain *why* people collect, but the study of the sociological impact of the stamp collections is, as far as I know, an unexplored field of study.

more powerful sociological effect because they are relatively stable and more enduring.

It is my aim then to trace the global public image of Mali from its policy concerning the issuing of postage stamps. Every country has a particular history of stamp issues which create images among the global community of stamp collectors. Of course, stamp collectors do not usually refer to the impressions of the various countries they gain from their collecting of stamps, but the countries' policies might very well influence collectors' ideas of and therefore their attitudes to various issuing countries. Collectors' attitudes in turn have substantial sociological force, since there are many millions of stamp collectors worldwide.

This essay proposes a set of criteria collectors might perhaps have in mind in their appreciation of a country's stamp-issuing policy, and that set of criteria will be followed by a historical overview of the stamp-issuing policy in the territory of the present-day Republic of Mali. The relationship between the two variables of collectors' criteria and Mali's stamp issuing policy between them helps to shape Mali's global public image.

The collector's criteria

Each collector has preferences on the basis of personal criteria such as the following which I shall now propose. I have limited myself to the sort of 'standard stamps' for surface and airmail, such as are collected by 'mainstream' collectors. I have defined a 'standard stamp' as one that has been accepted in an authoritative catalogue such as Yvert & Tellier for the francophone world. I have based my list of characteristics of the stamp issues of the former French colonies in Africa,³ since for the most part they are the countries whose stamps tend to be collected in

³ Stamp collectors use the term 'French colonies' for both colonial and post-colonial times. On the one hand this is 'politically incorrect', but on the other hand, when it comes to stamp issuing policy and collecting it makes a good deal of sense to suggest that 'colonialism' has indeed never fully ended in the former French colonies....

combination with those of Mali. A collector of 'French colonies' such as Mali faces the following characteristics of such policies on postage stamps:

- 1) Numerous governments in the world have had periods when they have issued stamps to generate revenue. During certain periods governments may issue quantities of stamps which might be printed abroad and go straight to international distributors so of course such stamps are not used in that country's domestic postal system. Governments nowadays issuing stamps to raise their revenues serve topic collectors. Most collectors, however, have collected stamps of *governments* that issue enough to more or less cover their countries' postal needs. If a government suddenly issues very many stamps within one year – which happened from 1970 onwards in many countries all over the world – the collector's hobby might become so financially untenable that he stops collecting.
- 2) Any postage stamp should be registered by the F.I.P, the *Fédération Internationale de Philatélie*. However, governments without properly organized philatelic services do not offer collectors the opportunity to subscribe to those countries' annual stamp issues. Such governments tend to arrange for their stamps to be printed abroad, often in more than one country and by foreign companies. Countries which arrange production of their postage stamps like that, among them many poor countries with either very weak or dictatorial governments, could easily fall into situations in which their stamp production might not be covered by the quality control of an F.I.P registration which would mean that their issues of stamps would be 'illegal'. Such 'illegal issues' might of course be bought by topic collectors as well as country collectors desperately keen to keep their collections 'up to date'. Such collectors would discover their loss of money only on publication of new stamp-collecting catalogues in which their recent acquisitions are not

mentioned.⁴ On the other hand, when stamps are subsequently given F.I.P. registration and consequently integrated into a catalogue, their value can then become relatively high.

- 3) The use of overprints is a habit in the world of stamp issue that dates back to the early days. The wide range of reasons why governments make overprints is well illustrated by the case of Benin. When Dahomey became Benin in 1975, at first the new Marxist government used Dahomey stamps with the overprint 'République Populaire du Bénin', following a normal procedure when countries introduce a new currency, perhaps, or a radical change to government. The production of such overprints is often a well-organized affair, as is the production of overprints to commemorate special events. Such 'organized' overprints almost always cover complete series and are comparable with normal issues. However, in times of scarcity and lack of supply postal services often decide to 'overprint' the stamps that they happen to have in stock with a new and in many cases higher value. If that happens at the central level the stamps are rarely anything out of the ordinary in terms of catalogue value and availability. In Benin however, in the mid-1980s when there were no new stamp issues available⁵ the larger post offices responded to the crisis by making their own overprints. Hence, among the overprints from Benin from that period there are some very rare stamps that might never have been noticed and which have remained uncatalogued. As a result it will never be possible to establish anything like a 'complete' collection of Benin stamps. In Mali, however, the practice of

⁴ An Yvert & Tellier 'Pays Indépendants de l'Afrique' is published once every three to five years and covers stamps up to the period three years before the publication of the catalogue. A collector can therefore never be sure about the status and value of issues of the previous five to seven years.

⁵ A quick look at E-bay shows that a similar situation must have arisen after 1995; overprints of 1995 stamps are offered for up to 100 euros for a single stamp.

overprinting has always been centrally organized. In 1960 the Republic of Mali made overprints of the 'Fédération du Mali' stamps, in 1985 they made overprints when the F CFA was introduced as a new currency, and in the early 1990s both because of a shortage of stamps (see below) and to commemorate special events.

- 4) Certain issues of stamps escaped the usual process of distribution, because they were not printed according to normal procedures. In the Yvert & Tellier catalogue those stamps are recognizable from an additional letter in the catalogue number added to place them where they belong historically. For instance, one may find a series of stamps numbered 704A, 704B, 704C, and 704D catalogued between stamps numbers 704 and 705. Because of their unusual production the lettered stamps have often been omitted from pre-printed album leaves – which follow catalogue numbering – for the year in which they were in fact issued, although a few years later in many cases the pre-printed leaves make room for such 'forgotten' stamps. The value of many such stamps is a little greater than comparable stamps and might be high, for instance in the case of stamps from Côte d'Ivoire in the 1970s and 1980s.
- 5) The authoritative Yvert & Tellier catalogue used to label certain issues with a black dot (•), a symbol they explain as follows (2001: 6): 'La Fédération Internationale de Philatélie (F.I.P) a pris position sur le caractère de l'émission d'un certain nombre de timbres qui ne correspondent pas à l'idée qu'elle se fait de Philatélie, émissions désignées par elle comme "Émissions abusives" (...) Les timbres ou séries signalés • ne figurant pas dans les albums "standard".' Given such a negative judgment by Yvert & Tellier it is of course difficult for both amateurs and professionals to understand why the stamps are still accepted in the catalogue. For Francophone West Africa and in particular Guinée, in the 1980s and 1990s, has numerous such 'émissions abusives'. Contrary to what one might expect from the term

‘abusif’ the catalogue value of those stamps is no lower than that of official stamps from the same period and in certain cases is in fact much higher. In the recent edition of the catalogue the ‘abusive’ category has disappeared and the stamps previously so labelled have come to be seen as normal...

My list of criteria that collectors might have in mind when evaluating a country’s collection is far from exhaustive and is most certainly inspired by my own experience. However, when related to the actual history of postage stamp issue in Mali it may serve very well to formulate a statement on the public image of Mali among the many millions of stamp collectors.

‘Malian’ stamps in colonial times

The area covered by the Republic of Mali is a construction from colonial times. The imposition of French rule was a process that had moved eastwards from present-day Senegal, where the French had set up their administrative centre for West Africa in Saint-Louis. Before the 1890s France issued stamps for all its colonies, the so-called ‘colonies générales’ in the catalogues, but later regional differentiation took place whereupon a very dynamic process began. Postal units in the French colonies changed rapidly and reflect the French process of colonization of territories. Issue periods of postal units were often short, lasting only for a few decades or even less, so that collecting the stamps of French colonies is certainly a good way to learn French administrative colonial history!

In the territory covered by present-day Mali the postal services follow the occupation of the area and the subsequent implementation of an administration. If Borgnis-Desbordes, the colonial officer who occupied Bamako in 1883, had sent stamped letters from there he would have used ‘colonies générales’. Sénégal issued its first stamp in 1887⁶ in the form of a 20 franc ‘colonies générales’ stamp with a

⁶ I think this date is no coincidence. After the Conference of Berlin during which the ‘partition of Africa’ was decided, France intensified the occupation and administration of its colonies.

'5' overprint; it was perhaps been among the first ever used in Bamako, Mali's present-day capital.

In 1892 stamps were issued for 'Sénégal et dépendances', which referred to all areas east of present-day Senegal where French rule was not yet strong. Those stamps must have been used in the first years of the existence of the administrative unit called Soudan Français, a name declared on August 18, 1890 as the new name for what had previously been one of Senegal's 'dépendances' named 'Haut-Sénégal' and which covered the area of the future Republic of Mali.

In 1894 Soudan Français began to issue its own postage stamps although it used the general design for stamps for the colonies, and administrative rule rapidly followed the occupation and 'development' of the area. At the end of the nineteenth century the French achieved dominion over most of the colony's territory when the rulers of Sikasso and the empire builder Samori Toure were defeated. In addition, the construction of the Dakar-Bamako railway was completed in 1904 although French rule was not yet strongly present in the thinly populated deserts of the north, where Timbouctou is still the most famous town. In 1902 the colony's area was put under the postal unity 'Sénégal et Niger' but that did not last long and only one series of thirteen stamps was issued and they too were of the general design. Clearly, the inclusion of 'Niger' in the name represents the growing French hold over the territory that we now know as the Republic of Niger. In 1906 'Sénégal et Niger' was transformed into 'Haut-Sénégal et Niger'. In 1919/1920, thus after World War I and after occupation of the whole area was complete, Haut-Sénégal-Niger was split into three administrative units each with its own postal organization. 'Niger' and 'Haute-Volta' were created and the remaining area became – or one might perhaps say reverted to – 'Soudan Français'. The postal area of the 'new' Soudan Français more or less covered the same territory as present-day Mali.

In 1944, I suspect partly as a result of an administrative policy at the end of World War II that foresaw the future independence of the French colonies within a

wider network of a French political community, one postal area was created for the eight countries which at the end of the nineteenth century had made up the administrative body known as *Afrique Occidentale Française* (AOF).⁷ That body fused *Soudan Français* with *Haute-Volta*, *Mauritanie*, *Sénégal*, *Dahomey*, *Niger*, *Côte d'Ivoire*, and *Guinée*⁸ and lasted until the era of Independence at the end of the 1950s.

Postage stamps in the colonial period illustrate a tendency that has continued until today, that many of the different colonies issued stamps with the same images. In the early phase, roughly speaking the period before World War I, the stamps had the same design but differed in the names shown in the overprint. Although each French colony had its own stamps from the 1920s onwards there also were a number of issues of topics shared with other colonies, within the AOF colonies or wider,⁹ a strategy of combining particularity and similarity that continued in the AOF period. Without doubt, the postage stamps of the French colonies were produced in the 'metropolis' and clearly reflect French colonial policy. Much attention was however paid to administrative 'sub-units', as is illustrated by the four 'Soudan' images from an AOF series of nineteen stamps (see illustration 1).

⁷ The AOF as an administrative entity was established in 1895 and officially inaugurated in 1904.

⁸ In 1936 the colonies of Gabon, Tchad, Congo, and Oubangui-Chari (future Central African Republic) had initiated common postal services for *Afrique Equatoriale Française*. Cameroun and Togo remained untouched by such reorganizations during French colonial occupation. Those last two colonies had a different status in international politics (they were mandatory zones), because they were not taken from the Africans, but from the Germans, during World War I.

⁹ Yvert & Tellier catalogues call these issues 'Les Grandes Séries Coloniales Françaises'. To give a few examples of them: series for the 1931 and 1937 International Exhibits in Paris, a 1938 stamp of the Cury couple to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the discovery of Radium, a series to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the French Revolution, and a number of series commemorating events in World War II.

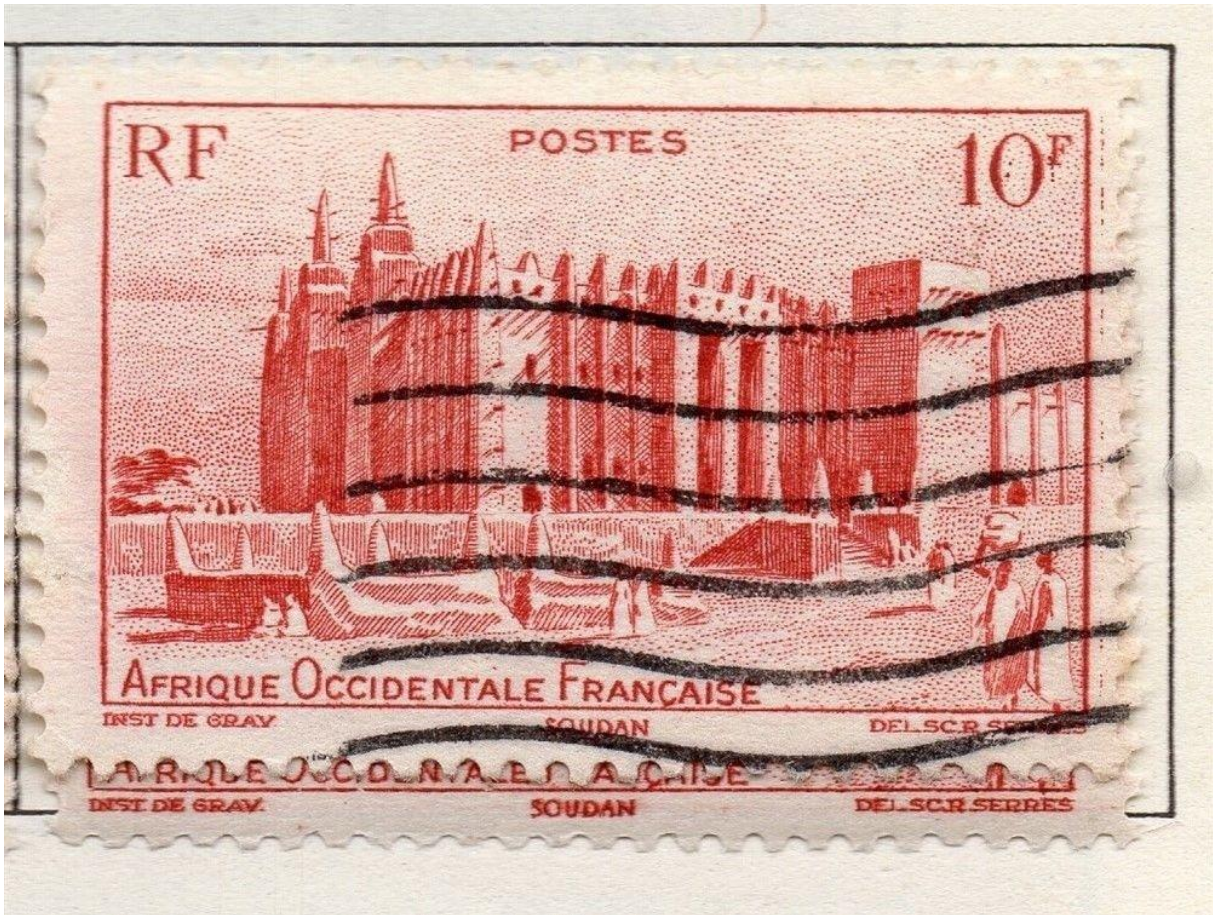


Illustration 1: two of the four stamps dedicated to the colony of Soudan Français – from an issue of nineteen stamps intended for the entire Afrique Occidentale Française. The 10 Franc stamp shows the famous mosque of Djenné, while the 2 Franc stamp depicts the wooden statue on top of the fountain at the Bamako market (for a photograph, see <http://imagesdupasse.free.fr/soudan/bamako05.html>).¹⁰

Stamp Issues of the République du Mali

Mali became politically ‘autonomous’ on November 25, 1958 but its period of autonomy saw no issues of postage stamps, although the subsequent ‘Fédération du Mali’ partnership between Senegal and Mali founded on January 17, 1959 was recorded by stamp issues. Senegal seceded on August 22, 1960 and Mali declared independence on September 22, 1960. The middle stamp shown in illustration 2 celebrates Mali’s membership of the United Nations. Noteworthy is the flag which is in red, yellow, and green but which has the representation (in black) of a *kanaga*. That flag was originally the one of the Fédération du Mali which was abolished on March 1, 1961.¹¹

¹⁰ Image of 10 francs stamp taken from [https://www.ebay.ie/itm/French-West-Africa-1945-48-Early-Issue-Fine-Used-10F-](https://www.ebay.ie/itm/French-West-Africa-1945-48-Early-Issue-Fine-Used-10F-164296/332337656712?hash=item4d60de3388:g:f4sAAOSwkepZi2TZ)

164296/332337656712?hash=item4d60de3388:g:f4sAAOSwkepZi2TZ; image of 2 francs stamp taken from

https://www.google.nl/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwizhty39qzaAhXFK1AKHYVQDdcQjRx6BAgAEAU&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ebay.ie%2Fsch%2FStamps%2F260%2Fi.html%3F_sop%3D2%26_nkw%3Dfrench%2Bwest%2Bafrika%26_frs%3D1&psig=AOvVaw1WquGLa2MLggKoAk6mrO02&ust=1523354106975761

¹¹ ‘The first flag of Mali was adopted on April 4, 1959, when French Sudan and Senegal formed the Mali Federation. This federation became independent on June 20, 1960. When Senegal seceded on August 22, 1960, it replaced the *kanaga* by a green star. Mali continued to use the tricolor flag with the *kanaga*, but abolished the black *kanaga* on March 1, 1961, and has used the plain tricolor in pan-African colors since then.’ (Mark Sensen, April 8, 1996, on <http://www.fotw.net/flags/ml.html>, accessed June 26, 2007). According to Wikipedia (‘Mali-



Illustration 2: Souvenir sheet of the three airmail stamps celebrating Mali's membership of the United Nations. This series is the only one with images of Mamadou Konaté, a leading politician who died in 1956, and Modibo Keita, Mali's first president (cf. comments to the next illustration). One notes Mali's flag in 1960 (see note 11).¹²

Like most African postage stamps from the period, those of Mali in the 1960s represent a vision in which traditions of agriculture, fishing, and artisan crafts are harmoniously combined with modernization and campaigns against lethal diseases. Moreover, such stamps highlight pan-African events, beautiful flowers and magnificent animals, great inventions and important sporting events, as well as great politicians of the world, from Lumumba to Lincoln. Most of the stamps are relatively small in physical size, often smaller than 2.5 by 3.5 centimetres. From the

Flag') the *kanaga* is a simplified picture of a human being and therefore on request of Mali's Muslim majority was removed from the flag.

¹² Image taken from <https://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/Mali-Proclamation-of-Independence-and-Admission-into-UN-MS-SG-MS25a/292281774638?hash=item440d59f22e:g:kfUAAOSwA2hZ118w>

fact that stamps with the same topics and images were issued in many of the former colonies at the same time, I conclude that to a major extent stamp issue policy was still determined in the former 'metropolis'.

Like most of the other former colonies¹³ Mali did not issue large quantities in the period 1959-1969 and I can illustrate Mali's modesty by comparing it to France and The Netherlands. In that period France issued almost 500 different postage stamps for surface mail, plus 6 airmail stamps while the Netherlands, at that time highly thought of among collectors for its stamp designs, issued about 250 surface mail stamps and 1 airmail stamp. Meanwhile Mali was issuing only 215 stamps although 83 of them were airmail stamps. Those numbers perhaps show¹⁴ that Mali's postal services were more internationally focussed than European postal services, and that Mali did not issue a large number of different stamps in order to raise revenues via collectors.

Airmail stamps from Mali were of relatively large size and compared to surface mail stamps their topics were directed more towards international events and organizations. However, they must have been printed in smaller quantities

¹³ Guinée was as well modest in producing high numbers of stamps, although it had a stamp issuing policy different from those of other former colonies, which can be explained by Guinée's to collaborate with France after independence. This refusal had placed Guinée on a different political trajectory from that of other former French colonies; it became a socialist state that collaborated with the Soviet Union. Without France's economic support Guinée might have turned to stamp production as a source of revenue – as was done by countries behind the Iron Curtain – but this didn't happen.

¹⁴ I am uncertain to what extent airmail stamps were ever mandatory for letters to be sent by air. I have several envelopes in my own collection of letters sent abroad with surface mail stamps. Probably those letters were sent by train and mail boat. I possess a number of envelopes on which surface and airmail stamps were mixed – certainly during my first fieldwork in 1988-1989 both types of stamp were accepted for airmail. At the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s the issuing of airmail stamps was abandoned worldwide.

since their catalogue value is substantially higher than that for surface mail stamps from the same period which have a lower catalogue value.

Stamp collecting enjoyed something of a heyday at the end of the 1960s and into the early 1970s as many people all over the world bought large quantities of first-day covers as investments. As a result governments all over the world issued more stamps, and stamps of higher values, than they had done before, and that is true for Mali too, as well as most of the 'French colonies' – although Guinée was an exception (cf. note 11).

A few years later the market value of stamps dropped dramatically and collectors stopped buying them in large quantities. The collections meticulously assembled in the 1960s and early 1970s are now often sold for prices much lower than their original value, especially if inflation is taken into account. However, governments seem to have developed a routine of issuing stamps, since countries all over the world continued to issue in the 1970s and early 1980s larger quantities than they had done before 1970. Mali again followed the international pattern and in a modest way, as before. From 1970-1979 Mali issued 226 surface mail and 190 airmail stamps, and from 1980-1984 only 151 surface and 128 airmail stamps.

In the mid-1980s Mali's stamp issuing policy decreased dramatically, which had structural parallels with developments in the other former French colonies. First, Mali slowed down its process of stamp issue. From 1985-1993 fewer than a hundred surface mail stamps were issued and 14 of those were overprints of previous issues. In 1993, for the first time Mali had a series of stamps not registered according to standard procedures, namely Yvert & Tellier 595A-K, a series of ten stamps showing the statue on the Place de la Liberté in Bamako. Fewer than 60 new airmail stamps were issued in that same period, with 11 overprints among them.

During the last years of Moussa Traoré's regime, in particular from 1990-1995 and during the first years of the Third Republic, only a few stamps were

issued each year; indeed overprints dating from those years outnumber new issues. The most interesting stamp from that period is probably the 1990 issue of 'Pont sur le Niger et portrait du chef d'Etat' (Yvert & Tellier), the only stamp with Moussa Traoré's image (see illustration 3).



Illustration 3: The 1990 stamp to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of Mali's independence. This stamp is the only one showing Moussa Traoré's portrait. Leaders of Mali seem to have been reluctant to allow their portraits to be placed on stamps, a phenomenon which cannot be explained simply by Islam's prohibition of pictures of people (cf. note 10) for many countries presenting themselves as Islamic issue numerous stamps showing portraits of their Heads of State.¹⁵

In 1994 Mali changed its stamp issuing policy more dramatically and interference by one or more foreign companies must have been the reason for that. Apart from a few series per year all commemorating national events (for instance, the 1992 elections, [in a 1995 issue, see illustration 4] and the 'Flamme de la Paix' in 1999) Mali issued in less than ten years more than 1,000 stamps of relatively large size,

¹⁵ Image taken from

https://www.google.nl/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiema_59KzaAhXJYlAKHRLfBr8QjRx6BAgAEAU&url=https%3A%2F%2Fconnect.com%2Fen%2Fstamps%2Fstamp%2F527220-

[New_Bridge_of_Bamako_and_President_Moussa_Traor%25C3%25A9-30th_Anniversary_of_Independence-](#)

[Mali&psig=AOvVaw35FFawUipgkjCA_RvsbEXD&ust=1523353711076598b](#)

with images of film stars, rock stars, flowers, the Olympic games, mushrooms, butterflies, dinosaurs; and there were Pope John Paul II, ‘Lady Di’, chess, space travel, painters, cartoons, scouting, and many other topics – often in combinations on the same stamp. Those stamps were issued quite definitely to serve collectors of topical stamps.



Illustration 4: This stamp from 1995 celebrates the 1992 election of Alpha Oumar Konaré as president of Mali. It was printed in Switzerland and so far is the only stamp from Mali dedicated to Mali’s first democratically elected president.

With such an intensification of issues, Mali effectively undermined its status as a country whose postage stamps are collectable. New stamps were not centrally distributed by the national philatelic service so that it became impossible to subscribe to Mali’s First Day Covers. Moreover, collecting Malian stamps had become an expensive hobby since so many were being issued.

The commercialization of stamps ‘from’ Mali lasted from 1994 until 2000, when the number of annual issues suddenly fell so that according to Yvert & Tellier (2007) from 2001-2005 only 35 stamps were issued.¹⁶ However, numerous new issues of ‘topical stamps’ from that period keep turning up for sale on E-bay. Although there is apparently a market for them, those stamps haven’t been F.I.P. authorized.

¹⁶ Reading the Yvert & Tellier catalogues one gains the impression that this lapse occurred in many ‘French colonies’. Again, Guinée is an exception.

Mali's public image as analyzed from stamp emissions

Before 1993 Mali was a stable and well organized presence in the world of stamp collectors. Official procedures were followed and all new issues – of which there not very many – were registered at the F.I.P and were distributed via official channels, with no 'émissions abusives'. In fact Mali was able to maintain all necessary international standards until 1993. While Mali did follow philatelic fashion and international trends in stamp design and production, that was done in a modest, perhaps even rather reluctant way; the issuing of stamps was certainly never exploited as a major source of revenue.

The reduction in new stamp issues in the early 1990s announced that the 'Golden Age' of Malian philately would soon be over as the commercialization of stamps began in Mali in 1994 – rather later than in most countries that fell victim to the same process. Moreover, as far as I can see, since then the commercialization has not been as intensive as elsewhere; an annual issue of a few hundreds of new stamps is far fewer than what some other countries have produced. I have the impression that Mali is less commercially exploited than comparable countries, both within and outside Africa.¹⁷ That period of commercialization stopped in 2000 and from 200 onwards Mali has produced only a few issues per year.¹⁸

I conclude therefore that among the millions of stamp collectors, Mali, being much less capricious than numerous other countries in Africa – and beyond for that matter – is thought of as a stable and decent country. Before 1993 Mali's stamp issuing policy was organized almost perfectly but between 1994 and 2000 the country fell victim to a global process of commercialization, though less

¹⁷ In relation to the commercialization of stamps from Mali, it should be added that this is part of an international trend: 'well organized' philatelic services (such as the Dutch) also issue annually dozens of regular stamps plus dozens of special emissions (that will never see an envelope).

¹⁸ Although these recent emissions don't have a high catalogue value, I haven't been able to acquire them, in spite of many efforts in the period 2008-2012. Moussa Camara, the friendly director of Mali's philatelic service, told me every year that I visited him, that he has no information at all about Mali's stamp issuing policy.

dramatically than comparable countries. In the twenty-first century Mali has not pursued an active policy of issuing postage stamps, probably because to a great extent they have simply gone out of use. But as a cultural and sociological force postage stamps continue to have an impact, both within Mali itself and outside the country, as a national heritage shared and preserved by the global community of collectors.

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