Resistance to Fulbe hegemony in nineteenth-century West Africa

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African history of the Sahel and Sudan zone appears to have been marked by political instability. Resistance to Fulbe empires was more common than the main literature suggests. The Fulbe are pastoralists and the empires of nomadic pastoralists are inherently unstable. The Fulbe emirates are often described as having been born out of the revolts of religiously inspired nomadic pastoralists against oppressive sedentary regimes. However, the resistance movements against Fulbe hegemony itself can partly be explained as revolts of the originally nomadic population who felt their cause was not well defended by the elite of these emirates. Opposition to the ideology of Islam inspired revolts of non-Islamic groups. These resistance movements were also fed by the oppressive nature of the new emirates, whose most prominent characteristic was slavery. Resistance is expressed in contemporary ritual and oral traditions, challenging the official historiography of these emirates. Political instability was the norm illustrated by three case studies discussed in the chapter.

Introduction

Fulbe is a collective term for a number of people who are culturally, linguistically and politically related and who inhabit a vast area in West Africa

We are grateful to Caroline Angenent for her detailed reading and extensive comments.
and also live in Sudan and even Eritrea. They are known in the literature under a
variety of names: Fulani, Peul, Haalpulaar and Fellata. In the second half of the
twentieth century, they gradually migrated into the forest zones of the coastal
states of West Africa such as Ghana, Benin, and Côte d’Ivoire. Their main
occupation is the herding of cattle, although nowadays this is often combined
with cereal cultivation. Throughout the Sahel, they are regarded as expert cattle
herders.

The migration of the Fulbe over West Africa probably began during the Mali
Empire in the fourteenth century, when the empire’s rulers promoted their dis-
persal to prevent them from becoming a threat to political stability. For a long
time, they remained a minority in most areas. Small groups were already
familiar with Islam which had entered West Africa via the trade routes across
the Sahara and from 1700 onwards, they began to become politically dominant
in many areas. Moreover, the political situation was highly unstable in the
western Sahel because an invasion by the Moroccans had led to an anarchical
situation. In addition, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries periods
of severe drought plagued the region, negatively affecting the political situation.

The jihads staged by the Fulbe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries
throughout the Sahel and Sudan of West Africa can thus be interpreted as a
reaction to this political instability. The Fulbe established centres of political
power, some of which developed into emirates. The main nuclei of Fulbe
power were the polities in the Senegal River Valley, the Fuuta Jallon mountains
in Guinea, the Inland Delta of the Niger in Mali (Maa sina), the north of Nigeria
and the Adamawa Plateau in Cameroon. In between these big centres there were
numerous small polities dominated by the Fulbe in the central Gourma of
present-day Mali, the north and west of Burkina Faso (Jelgoji, Boboola, Dori,
Liptako), northern Benin (Bornou), the Sene-Gambia, northern Senegal
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1 S.M. Cissoko, 'Famines et Epidémies à Tombouctou et dans la Boucle du Niger du XVIF
au XVIIIe Siècle', Bulletin de l’IFAN, XXX, série B (3) (1968), 806-21; M. Tymowsky,
'Famines et Epidémies à Oualata et à Tichit XIXe Siècle', Africana Bulletin, 27 (1978),
35-53; B.A. Gado, Une Histoire des Famines au Sahel: Étude des Grandes Crises

2 The terminology to indicate these political entities varies from empire to state, to
political realm or Fulbe hegemony, which all demand a more precise indication of what
kind of polity is meant. It is clear that the pre-colonial states described in this article are
based on their superiority in the control of violence: military power and ideological
weapons (Islam). These political entities are divided into core and peripheral areas
where political and military control were less severe than in the centre from where rules
and laws were ordered. Their basis of power was measured by the number of people
they dominated by means of violence and by religious and ideological hegemony. To
avoid the conception of these entities as stable, they are denoted as far as possible with
their own terminology.

3 A. Clark, 'The Fulbe of Bundu', The International Journal of African Historical

4 S.P. Reyna, 'Predatory Accumulation and Religious Conflict in the early 19th Century
Chad Basin', in S.P. Reyna & R.E. Downs (eds), Studying War, Anthropological
Perspectives (Langhorne PA, 1994), 127-55.

5 G. Nicolas, 'Le Modèle Mobilisateur du ‘Jihad’ dans les Conflits du Soudan Central',
Cultures et Développement, 16, 3-4 (1984), 583-610.

6 C. Nordstrom, A Different Kind of War Story, (Philadelphia, 1997), 68.

7 J.C. Scott, Domination and the Art of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts (New Haven,
1990).

Raps.
correspondence between rulers, and accounts of European and Arab travellers, none of whom were in a position to reflect on the perspectives and experiences of the common people. In the case of the Fulbe, the literature is very much jihad- and Islam-oriented.9

Three examples are taken in this chapter to illustrate revolt and resistance against Fulbe hegemony: the Timbo Emirate in the Fuuta Jallon, the Diina Emirate in the Inland Delta of the Niger in Central Mali, and the Futanke Empire which followed the Diina and the Bamana Kingdoms of Kaarta and Segou in the second half of the nineteenth century. The case studies, set against the background of inherent instability in ‘pastoral/nomadic’ Fulbe politics, reveal experiences of rebellion and their accompanying violence. We elaborate first on this background, then explain the common features of Fulbe politics and finally examine various rebellions in these polities.

The structural instability of pastoral/nomadic hegemony

A number of structural features could have contributed to the fundamental instability of Fulbe states in the nineteenth century. Any state is, in principle, liable to collapse under the impact of revolt and resistance but those established by pastoralists are inherently more likely to disintegrate than others.10 This instability emanates from the political ecology of pastoralism that prescribes a mobile mode of exploitation of resources and a flexible political organization. According to evidence from other semi-arid regions of the world where pastoralism is the dominant mode of production, pastoral economies cannot exist in isolation because of high risks in the production environment. To gain access to cereals, pastures and water, nomadic pastoralists need to engage in relations with sedentary peoples through trade, conquest or subjugation, and especially so in periods of crisis.11

Trade relations tend to be unfavourable for pastoralists since they want to exchange animal products for basic staple food. In times of ecological crisis, frequently experienced by most nomadic pastoralists who inhabit harsh and extremely volatile ecological environments, the rate of exchange of animal products against cereals drops enormously,12 and this can lead to a rapid depletion of their assets. Under ‘normal’ conditions, however, the caloric terms of trade (the number of calories in cereals one can get in exchange for a calorie from animal products) are quite favourable for pastoralists.13 To mitigate the high risks associated with equal exchange of animals for cereal products, one solution is to subjugate a cultivating population so as to have a source of labour for food production. An example of this is the oasis system in the Sahara worked by Tuareg slaves14 which required little political organization. However, in most cases an elaborate political and economic organization was needed to ensure hegemony.

The creation of a state-like structure by pastoralists tends to marginalize the pastoral way of life and can lead to the disengagement of the pastoral elites from the nomadic population. Historically relations between nomadic pastoralists and the state have always been difficult. A nomadic pastoral lifestyle does not fit the needs of sedentary political entities very well since they require the mobility of populations to be curtailed for political and military purposes. The levying of taxes on cattle, for example, undermines the viability of pastoralism. Pastoralists were often moved to the margins of political power even within the empires of their own creation, being encapsulated in a strict hierarchical order. In a number of cases, this inequality led to the collapse of polities under the pressure of internal rebellions of the nomadic pastoralists.15 The Fulbe, who were the major players in these jihads, were indeed mobile pastoralists and found themselves marginalized in the nineteenth century Fulbe states.16

This structural inequality may also have served to divide risk positions. Substantial effort has to be invested to reduce the risks of the ecological environment in which nomadic pastoralists live. Trade and political hierarchies can divert risk to lower-status groups17 and this in turn increases the potential

11 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
for revolt against the system. One would expect the oppressed and often-enslaved groups who had the highest risk position and related lack of wealth to become part of uprisings and resistance against the dominant groups.

Pastoral/nomadic polities are often situated in harsh ecological areas, making it hard for these polities to produce enough to feed their populations and to keep the hierarchy in tact. In the past, the semi-arid climate and the soil quality did not permit a significant increase in production and the creation of a surplus to maintain the state apparatus. Trade contributed very little to the revenues of the state. Therefore, the revenues of the state were based on taxes and control over the labour of subjugated people. There was a permanent demand for slaves caught during raids and wars. In itself, this may have been a source of political instability and the jihad may have been an ideological masquerade for this situation of inequality and warfare, by providing a raison d'être for slavery (they were pagans) and a 'vraie morale de la guerre' (the promotion of Islam and the fight against infidels). In such circumstances, struggles between rivals can be expected.

Thus, it may be argued that pastoral polities were inherently unstable and that revolts and rebellions were part of political life. In this chapter we further investigate whether there was indeed opposition to Fulbe hegemony in nineteenth-century West Africa, and if so, how these revolts were organized, which groups revolted and what their objectives and motivations to do so were.

The Fulbe emirates in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

Although each of the Fulbe emirates discussed in this chapter arose under specific conditions, they shared a common socio-economic and ideological motivation. The origin of most of these states was in fact a revolt against vested political and economic powers that opposed the economic and political

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18 There has been very little historical research undertaken on the economic basis of pre-colonial states in Africa. See M. Johnson, ‘The Economic Foundations of an Islamic Theocracy - The Case of Masina’, Journal of African History, XVII, 4 (1976), 481-95, for an example of research on Fulbe states.

19 Whereas in reality the jihad functions as a vehicle to find slaves so that a viable political unit can be created.

ambitions of an upcoming minority. For example, the Emirate of Timbo in the Fuuta Jallon developed from a revolt by Islamic Fulbe against their oppression by pagan Pulli (non-Islamic Fulbe) and Jallonke (the original inhabitants of the Fuuta Jallon). This emirate was, in fact, a federal state of nine provinces. Later, due to strife between two branches of the royal lineage, a system for the rotation of office between these branches was set up. This led to an almost permanent state of civil war since none of the parties was inclined to respect the system, which considerably weakened the power of the political centre.

The origins of the Maasina Emirate in the Inner Delta of the Niger are also found in rebellion, this time against the Bamana Kingdom of Segou, a political power that controlled the region from outside. For some time, groups of Fulbe had been dominant in parts of the delta, thereby creating a complex hierarchy dating back through several waves of conquest. However, due to internal warfare they were never able to organize a countervailing force against the Bamana Kingdom. In 1818, an Islamic cleric named Aamadu Hammadi Buubu united the Fulbe under the banner of Islam and fought a victorious battle against the Bamana and their allies. He subsequently established his rule in the Inland Delta and the adjacent dry lands east and west of the delta. This state appears to have had tight control over its core area, as is testified by the fact that its political and economic organization is still visible today in the organization of agricultural production in the Inland Delta. Nevertheless, the hegemony of the emirate was constantly threatened. During the reign of Aamadu Aamadu, the grandson of Sheeku Aamadu, internal contradictions weakened the emirate to such an extent that it became easy prey for the forces of the Futanke, which subsequently overthrew the Maasina Emirate.

The character of the Futanke Emirate was somewhat different, although its founding was related to the conquest of the Maasina Emirate and the Bamana Kingdoms of Segou and Kaarta in the aftermath of a movement for reform. During the reign of Aamadu Aamadu, the grandson of Sheeku Aamadu, internal contradictions weakened the emirate to such an extent that it became easy prey for the forces of the Futanke, which subsequently overthrew the Maasina Emirate.

The historians of these emirates concentrate on the political elite, the way in which they came to power, their administration and the role of religion in life and administrative affairs, and the economics of trade and taxation that formed the economic basis of these polities. The basic picture emerging from

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21 I. Barry, Le Fuuta - Jalloo Face à la Colonization. Conquête et Mise en Place de l'Administration en Guinée (1880-1920) (Paris, 1997); Rivière, 'Sociologie des Guerres'.
pastoralists, free cultivators and slaves were formed to fight invading nomads when the central power no longer functioned.\(^{30}\)

Thirdly, despite the fact that very little is known about the experiences of the people involved, it appears there was considerable resistance to the forced acceptance of Islam by these emirates. For example, many nomadic Fulbe, predominantly Wodaabe fled northern Nigeria when their liberty was curtailed and they were forced to convert to Islam following the jihads instigated by Usman Dan Fodio from Sokoto.\(^{29}\) Conversion to Islam meant not only changing one's religion but also submitting to rules dealing with all aspects of social, political and cultural life. Certainly, when the new rulers enthusiastically introduced their agenda for social and economic change in the early years of these emirates, they met with resistance and revolt. However, it is difficult to dissociate resistance against Islam from politics, since Islam was at the same time the prime ideological motivation to subjugate or enslave these pagan populations. People preferred to stick to their pagan beliefs partly because they did not want to be dominated and turned into slaves.

### The Emirate of Timbo in the Fuuta Jallon, Guinea

This emirate was the first of the Fulbe emirates in West Africa, originating in a jihad fought in the first half of the eighteenth century. Malinke and Fulbe Islamic believers went to war against the animistic Fulbe (Pulli), the Jalonke and other pagan populations. After the victory of the partisans of Islam, an Islamic theocracy was imposed on the subjugated populations in the region. The first ruler took the title of \textit{Almaamis}\(^{32}\) and resided in Timbo. People who had resisted the jihad were deprived of their rights to land except for a small piece for their own subsistence, and were reduced to servitude. The nomad Pulli lost all freedom of movement and the Jalonke lost their noble status and became \textit{slaves} (\textit{maccube}).\(^{33}\)

In the adjacent provinces of the Fuuta Jallon. The Malinke \textit{almaamis}, not the Fulbe, were in power. These \textit{almaamis} were far more tolerant than their Fulbe counterparts who dominated most of the other provinces of the empire. For the Malinke, Islam was mainly a vehicle for their commercial aspirations and the

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\(^{26}\) V. Azarya, Aristocrats Facing Change, \textit{The Fulbe in Guinea, Nigeria and Cameroon} (Chicago, 1978); Burnham & Last, 'From Pastoralist to Politician'.

\(^{27}\) Van Dijk, 'Ecological Insecurity and Fulbe Pastoral Society in the Niger Bend'.

\(^{28}\) J.H. Hanson, 'Generational Conflict in the Umarian Movement after the Jihad: Perspectives from the Fuuta Grain Trade at Medine', \textit{Journal of African History}, 31 (1990), 199-215; Johnson, 'The Economic Foundations of an Islamic Theocracy'.

\(^{29}\) Ba & Daget, \textit{L'Empire Peul}.  

\(^{30}\) De Bruijn & Van Dijk, 'Ecology and Power'.


\(^{32}\) \textit{Almaamis} is Fulfulde for Imam.

repression of their opponents was not a major concern. However, the Fulbe almaamis gradually penetrated this region and submitted it to more stringent control. They followed a policy of divide and rule by carefully subdividing the various provinces under their rule and adding a hierarchy of chiefs who lived lavishly at the expense of their subjects.

In the course of the nineteenth century, discontent among the common people increased. Division of the leadership of the Fuuta Jallon between two different branches of the Fulbe royal family – each with their followers – was perpetrated at provincial and village level, increasing the pressure of the political class on their subjects. Political oppression mounted, resulting in a loss of freedom for many of the movement’s followers. The almaamis became exploitative and imposed high taxes, and they lived for their own pleasure instead of living according to Islamic rules. This state of affairs led to a popular resistance movement called Hubbu (‘those who refuse’). The movement developed only gradually up to the middle of the nineteenth century but it persisted for almost forty years. However, it never succeeded in reaching its objectives and ultimately, resistance turned into banditry.

The leader of the Hubbu movement, Alfa Mamadu Dyuhe, was an outsider and did not belong to the political elite of the Fuuta Jallon. He was the son of an Islamic scholar who travelled from the Seeno east of Maasina (probably with his followers and taalibë) to the Fuuta Jallon and established himself in Timbo. Alfa was a pious Muslim and well respected for his intelligence. He became a fervent opponent of the almaami because of its exploitative régime, which he considered to be in conflict with Islamic ideology.

Finally, Alfa Mamadu Dyuhe had to seek refuge in the mountains of the neighbouring province dominated by Malinke and refugees of the almaami régime where he had many followers among the oppressed and marginalized. The majority of the movement were nomadic pastoralists, Pulli and Fulbe, such as slaves who had fled their masters. The movement was engaged in full-scale conflict with the almaami and even conquered the capital of the empire, Timbo, just before the death of its leader. In the end, almaami from other branches of the royal family chased them from the capital. Nevertheless, this defeat did not mean their disappearance and the movement continued to exist for forty years. Ultimately, Samoori, king of a neighbouring Bamana kingdom, stamped out the unrest because it continually made trade routes insecure.35

A number of aspects of this rebellion deserve more detailed attention. In the first place, resistance originated from within the empire and was born out of widespread discontent with the behaviour of the Fulbe political leadership. High taxes seem to have provided the main economic motive to stage the rebellion, and this excessive taxation as well as the oppressive political structure were seen as a result of the corruption of the state.

Secondly, though composed of people who were marginalized from a social, religious and ideological point of view, the movement aimed at a more pure and uncorrupted form of Islam. Its dominant objective was not a return to paganism but instead to conquer and purify the state and promote egalitarianism (however, it seems that some were more equal than others). A reduction of the tax burden and the abolition of fines were the prime measures taken in the areas controlled by the Hubbu. Slaves were part of the movement but there was never any move to do away with slavery or to change the status hierarchy. Those who profited most from the rebellion were the bush Fulbe who were able to escape the exaction of the political elite.

Motivations for the rebellion were thus economic and ideological. A third motivation may have been frustration linked to the inferior social position of Hubbu leaders. Rivière cites Marguerite Verdat to illustrate this point by imagining the reasons of one of the leaders for continuing the Hubbu rebellion: ‘il est incontestable que Tierno Aliou a souffert de la médiocrité de son origine, matériellement... mais surtout peut-être dans son orgueil. Nul doute qu'un complexe d'inériorité n'ait pesé longtemps sur lui et ne l'ait poussé à chercher passionnément à rompre le barrage que sa naissance mettait à son ambition...’.36

This rebellion was negatively regarded by neighbouring Malinke kingdoms and the British and the French on the coast. They feared the impact of this movement on trade relations in the region, as did Samoori Touré who, as we have seen, ultimately quashed it. These negative perceptions could be why so little attention has been devoted to the rebellion. It was a movement directed against the logic of oppression by a central state. Taxation formed the basis of the French colonial empire so it is logical that colonial writers and historians of the Fuuta Jallon virtually neglected the movement.37 Only in a post-colonial context under the dictatorship of Sekou Touré, who also wanted to do away

34 Taalibë is a word borrowed from Arabic meaning pupils.
36 Rivière, ‘Sociologie des Guerres’, 570.
with the traditional leadership of the Fulbe almaamis in the Fuuta Jallon, did studies by Guinean scholars of this movement begin to appear.38

Maasina or Diina, the Inner Delta of the Niger

The Maasina Emirate, also called Diina (‘religion’ in Arabic), was established by the Fulbe jihad led by Sheeku Aamadu. In 1818, his forces won a decisive victory over the troops of the Bamana Kingdom of Segou. This jihad was inspired by events in northern Nigeria where an important scholar of the time, Usman Dan Fodio, established an Islamic empire with Sokoto as its capital. Sheeku Aamadu was but one of the several potential leaders in Maasina, the Inland Delta of the Niger, where the division of power was infinite and divided between several Fulbe, led by animist ardo’en and Sonrai lineages.39 The different ardo’en fought continuously against the Bamana and their king, Da Monson, who ruled south of the delta in Segou. This chaotic period in which banditry, raids and violence dominated daily life produced important oral traditions and heroes40 and is today known by the Fulbe as the jahilaku, the time before the Diina or the introduction of Islamic rule. The jihad of Sheeku Aamadu was launched at an ideal moment to resist definitively Bambara power and to implement law and order through the rule of Islam in the Inner Delta.

One of the characteristics of Sheeku Aamadu’s rule was his drive to order life according to a strict regime of rules and laws organizing the structure of the rural areas. He introduced semi-sedentary pastoralism (though this may have been underway anyway) and forced the nomadic pastoral groups to settle not only in the Inland Delta of the Niger but also in the adjacent areas both east and west of the delta. A system of transhumance was put in place, and other productive economic activities such as cereal cultivation and fishing were structured in relation to each other.41 In current historiography, this scheme for natural resource management has been labelled ‘Diina’ and has become synonymous with Fulbe hegemony in the delta and everything attached to it. The period of the Maasina Empire was in some ways a break from the past but the previous anarchistic situation was probably related to the political ecology of the region in which pastoral production played (and still plays) an important role.

It thus seems plausible that the Maasina Empire was also unstable because, especially in peripheral areas, attempts to control natural resource management and herd movements ran counter to the basic strategy of herdsmen to respond flexibly to highly variable pasture conditions.42 This analysis goes against the dominant view of the Diina as having a natural resource management system aimed at the promotion of the interests of pastoral nomads who formed the backbone of the empire. Though we have found no explicit descriptions of nomadic resistance to Maasina,43 it can be argued that the Diina did not promote their interests.44 Another element of this form of state-building was the campaign begun by Sheeku Aamadu to bring Islam to all villages and cattle camps, with villagers being enslaved if they did not submit. During the

38 See for example, Barry, Le Fuuta Jallon; Diallo, Les Institutions Politiques.
43 It is therefore paradoxical that in the literature related to ‘development’ the structural and functional aspects of this system are central (see Vincent, ‘Pastoureurs, Paysans’; Gallais, Le Delta Intérieur; Gallais, Hommes du Sahel; M. Forget, ‘Populations et Genres de Vie dans le Kounary (Cercle de Mopti, Soudan)’, in Galloy et al. Nomades et Paysans, 159-234; R.M. Moorehead, Structural Chaos: Community and State Management of Common Property in Mali (Brighton, 1991); M.D. Turner, Life on the Margin, Fulbe Herding Practices and the Relationship Between Economy and Ecology in the Inland Niger Delta in Mali (Berkeley, 1992); T. Vedeld, Village Politics. Heterogeneity, Leadership, and Collective Action among Fulani of Mali (As, 1997). The Diina is now being described as a balanced indigenous pre-colonial system of natural resource management corrupted by colonialism and the modern Malian state. The inherent contradictions and weaknesses when attempting to control land use in a situation where climate variability and risks associated with agricultural production are so high are completely neglected in this description (see Van Dijk, ‘Ecological Insecurity and Fulbe Pastoral Society in the Niger Bend’). Its contemporary dynamics, under the impact of political change, colonialism and the penetrating market economy, are invariably valued as negative. This is often justified because current tendencies seem to reinforce the positions of those who are already powerful and wealthy (see for example, Gallais, Hommes du Sahel). However, this may be a continuation of the situation as it was in the past.
44 Writing on the Guimballa (the northern part of the Inland Delta), Vincent remarks ‘Les combats des chefs Peuls contre Cheikou Ahamadou sont la source de toutes les légendes que les griots racontent encore’. Unfortunately, these oral traditions have not been published, Vincent, ‘Pastoureurs, Paysans’, 53.
45 De Bruijn & Van Dijk, ‘State Formation’; Van Dijk, ‘Ecological Insecurity’.
nineteenth century the number of slaves increased enormously in the Inner Delta and they formed the backbone of the empire’s economy.

Such a rigid reordering of the economic and social structure of the area did not of course go without resistance. In the literature, the Maasina Emirate is presented as being successful in establishing its hegemony in the area. Nevertheless, on further inquiry it appears there was fierce resistance to the empire from the beginning to the end. For example, the ‘official’ history of the empire compiled by Ba and Daget reads as a succession of campaigns against opposing forces to the central power both from inside and outside the core of the emirate.46

The success of these opposition groups was related to the support they gained from outside forces, as a movement in the northern part of the delta shows. Around 1820, Al-Hussein Koita fiercely resisted the power of Sheeku. Brown describes him as follows:

A Pulo of the Diawando caste (who) apparently gathered...[a] following in the Fittuga...although his intentions and relationship to Shaykh Ahmad’s movement are not clear. The movement, however, was clearly seen by Shaykh Ahmad as a form of threat, for he sent an expeditionary force, led by his cousin, ‘the son of his paternal uncle’, Al-hajj Sa’id, against Husayn whose movement was destroyed in 1822-3.47

The Koita clan in Fulbe society was responsible for trade and, as Stewart remarks, trade was hampered by the rigid political and economic order Sheeku Aamadu introduced into the area.48 This could have been the reason why the Kunta, the ruling groups of Arabs in the Azaoud (Timbuktu), supported Al-Hussein Koita and tried to mediate for him. Koita asked a member of the Kunta clan for advice and was told:

We are always remembering you and constantly we are asking God to give you victory and backing. We are going to write to al-Shaikh Ahmad Lebbu, recommending him to pay attention to you and to entrust you with the administration of the area (in which you reside [Fittuga]).49

The Kunta did not want Sheeku Aamadu too close to their own sphere of influence and at the same time they wanted to retain access to the Inland Delta of the Niger in order to keep their trade routes open. By supporting opponents, they tried to maintain some measure of control over the area and its economy. As Stewart explained it: ‘...the object of such a policy would be to undermine Shaykh Ahmad’s zealous programme of reform which seems to have offended ‘Abdullahi’s (Kunta) real compassion for the unlettered folk who were being persecuted and which also clearly threatened Kunta commercial interests on the Niger Bend’.50

Somewhat later, in 1825, the Kunta supported another revolt close to the political centre Hamdallaahi. This revolt ‘was led by Galajio (jalajo b. bodejo) [Guelaajo] who had joined Shaikh Ahmad’s [Sheeku Aamadu] movement shortly after his jihad began, embraced Islam and joined his previously conquered Bambara lands in Kunari with those of Sheeku Aamadu. He asked his former master from Timbuktu for support against Sheeku Aamadu. They were defeated finally and fled to the east where they were received by Gwandu and settled in what became the Kunari Emirate (1840).51 In the official historiography Guelaajo is depicted as a malcontent ruler who opposed the regulations of Sheeku Aamadu. His greatest misfortune was that his realm was halved in size.

The periphery of the Diina
One of the weak points of the organization of the Maasina Emirate was its dependence on different ecological zones that, because of their vastness, were barely controllable. The Inner Delta of the Niger could not sustain the herds during the wet season and floods made the area unsuitable for pasturing animals. These animals were then led to the dryland zones east and west of the delta, zones not automatically part of the emirate and that cannot be considered as having been incorporated in the Maasina Emirate.

Nevertheless, there is a tacit assumption in the literature that the sphere of influence of the Diina extended over these areas. For instance, the Hayre Seeno area to the east was already a Fulbe-dominated area before Sheeku Aamadu attained power. Some of these Fulbe chiefs willingly submitted to their new leader, whereas others did not. An example of the latter is Ba Bulkaasum52 who refused to accept the leadership of Sheeku Aamadu. According to the oral traditions gathered in the region, the main argument used for his refusal is that

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46 Ba & Daget, L’Empire.
48 Johnson, ‘The Economic Foundations of an Islamic Theocracy’, 490, mentions that there were virtually no exports from the Maasina Emirate and that consequently restrictions were imposed on imports and taxes were levied on transit trade.
49 Stewart, ‘Frontier Disputes’, 505.
50 Ibid. 506.
51 Ibid. 507-8.
he did not want to submit to another Islamic leader, since he was one himself with a longer tradition. He subsequently left the area.

Towards the end of the heyday of the Diina, when the regime was becoming increasingly oppressive and exploitative, popular movements started to appear. The story about Maamudu Nduuldi, a pastoral leader in the middle of the Niger Bend in Booni, is clearly resonant of growing discontent. Maamudu Nduuldi is known as a hero with magical powers who fought and defeated the invading Tuareg from the Niger Bend several times. His movement developed in protest at the difficult economic conditions. Not only nomadic pastoralists but also runaway slaves of the Fulbe and Tuareg joined his forces, and impoverished sedentary cultivators united under his banner. According to local traditions, he brought prosperity by distributing the booty his army collected during its raids. Eventually he developed into a kind of independent warlord living on the fringes of the Diina but opposing it at the same time. He nearly went to war to fight the Hayre, the polity to which he belonged. The people here kept to magical practices and did not build a mosque or settle in camps. In short, they did not adhere to the rules imposed by the Diina.

'The weapons of the weak'

Alongside these violent and open forms of resistance to the Diina, it seems plausible that people also had other channels for opposing the state. These are not recorded in the literature but analyzing contemporary rituals of the region combined with their stories about the past reveals some evidence. This is a field of study needing more in-depth analysis than is possible here. For example, there are important methodological questions attached to the problem of whether one can infer the logic and meaning of specific cultural forms in the past from their present-day existence and functioning. Nevertheless, one could argue that these forms are part of a cultural and historical repertoire which people draw on for specific purposes. Thus not all that one observes today has been 'invented', rather, people use memories of the past to solve current problems.

A curious example of this can be found among the Dogon of the Bandiagara Escarpment. The Dogon are a group of pagan sedentary cultivators in the drylands east of the Inland Delta. Frequently the victims of slave raids, they always opposed the Maasina Emirate and the small Fulbe chiefdoms

53 Curiously, these feats have been claimed for the Maasina Emirate as well. In Ba & Daget's book L'Empire, he is described as a warlord serving the empire. However, in Booni, the capital of the chiefdom he ultimately founded, any connection with the Diina of Seeku Aamadu is denied. Given the chronology, we are inclined to go with the Booni version of the story.

54 See also De Bruyn & Van Dijk, 'Power and Ecology'.
surrounding them. Since they were not able to resist these rulers and contest their power militarily, they retreated to the inaccessible rocky areas of the Bandiagara Escarpment and Bandiagara Plateau.

The resentment this provoked among the Dogon is still recognizable in various Dogon cultural expressions. During the funerals of old men and especially the Hogon (the spiritual leader of a Dogon community), a great deal of aggression is expressed against the Fulbe. In one ritual, a dog – representing a Pullo – is killed in a particularly violent manner. Other examples of resentment are visible in the Dogon mask dances where the Fulbe, both men and women, are ridiculed: the mask representing a female Pullo only collects cow dung and has no interest in the world except for the back end of a cow; the mask representing a male Pullo expresses laziness and stupidity. Possession cults are found everywhere in the region, especially to the north. During the reign of Sheeku Aamadu, a ruthless campaign was started against pagan expressions that were unacceptable to Islam and that could not be tolerated as competing religious cults. It seems that Sheeku Aamadu accepted only certain forms of possession, for example healing rites, but no others. Today, possession cults are accepted healing practices.

Whether the cultural expressions manifested in these possession cults were a sign of resistance, of opposition to the dominant ideology of Islam or whether they were accepted and integrated in Islam is not clear because both forms of religious expression had co-existed before the Maasina Emirate.

These cults must have been brought together in resistance to the force of an Islam that sought to take root in the smallest villages. Before this time – much before the nineteenth century – Islam had been the religion of princes and had been contained in the larger urban areas.

A story about the confrontation of Sheeku Aamadu with one of the most important cult priests of the time suggests that the possession cults were tacitly accepted. However, this cannot be taken for granted: ‘...the Fula domination of the last century, a memory still strong in the follower’s minds, had probably not been as pacific and conciliatory towards Waada Samba (the priest) and his followers as legend would lead one to believe’. Many of these cult’s priests are riimaybe or former slaves of the Fulbe. Today the possession cults are indeed presented as a counterculture, which distinguishes riimaybe from the Fulbe nobles. This presentation of the cults also serves as a ‘reinvention’ of history in which the power of the Fulbe chiefs is contested and in which riimaybe heroes are presented as being neglected in mainstream history. This contestation of old power relations and the redefinition of a riimaybe identity independent of their masters is a field of study that deserves more attention.

The Futanke Empire

Many regard the Futanke or Toucouleur conquest of the western Sudan and Central Mali as a ‘reform movement’. In fact, the jihad led by El Hajj Umar Tall was meant to establish the hegemony of a new Tijaniyya brotherhood over the dominant Qadiriyya (in Fuuta Jallon, Maasina, Sokoto, the Kunta, etc.). In the first instance, it can be interpreted as a resistance movement itself: ‘[T]o the ruling groups Umar was a dangerous revolutionary whose activities should be curtailed’. By the time he started his campaign, El Hajj Umar was residing in the Fuuta Jallon, which he did not subjugate. One of the reasons why this campaign developed into a real conquest was the presence of the French, who provided the Futanke with weapons through trade with the aim of using them to conquer the interior of the western Sahel. The first of El Hajj Umar’s successes were in Segou, Kaarta and Maasina. However, internal rivalries between the different Futanke leaders led to a continuous struggle for control over the state apparatus and the exploitative regime built up in these areas led to further resistance against oppression. In Maasina, anti-Futanke resistance came within months of the establishment of Futanke rule. El Hajj Umar died in 1864 while fleeing to the Bandiagara Plateau (east of the Inner Delta of the Niger) following a serious rebellion staged by a coalition of forces of the Maasina Emirate and the Kunta federation from Timbuktu. After his death, the emirate was divided in three

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56 Gibbal, Genn.
57 Ibid. 25.
58 Ibid. 27.
59 Similar stories exist concerning the confrontation between Islamic scholars and the French colonial regime and between Islamic scholars and other kind of djims (see for example, A.M. Yattara & B. Salvaing, Almami. Une Jeunesse sur les Rives du Fleuve Niger (Brinon-sur-Sauldre, 2000).
60 Gibbal, Genn., 34.
62 Ironically the Kunta and the Maasina Emirate were opposed during the heyday of the Maasina Emirate.
The coalition between the rulers of Maasina and the Kunta was finally suppressed by El Hajj Umar’s successor, Tijani. In Segou the Diarra family, whose government was in exile, led the resistance while in Kaarta, the Futanke drove the opposition underground. More resistance came from the Massassi dynasty that operated from areas that were not conquered. These various resistance groups did not coordinate their actions but operated independently. This was partly due to the differences in organization of the various kingdoms that were overthrown, and their hostility towards each other, which resulted in internal fighting among the rebels. As already mentioned, the Maasina Emirate had always been an opponent of Segou’s, and had been fighting against the Kunta federation. These revolts could persist and withstand the pressure of the Futanke because the French, whose interest in the interior of Africa was growing in the second half of the nineteenth century, were providing them with arms. The French policy was one of weakening the big empire they wanted to submit.

There are various explanations for the reasons for resistance. In the first place, it was resistance against outside conquerors but it may also have been inspired by the hostility between the various Islamic brotherhoods represented by the Futanke (Tijaniyya) and their opponents (Qadiriyya), and finally the clashes may have had their origins in ethnic opposition. Evidence of this is difficult to find since Islamic rhetoric supersedes any other possible point of friction in the available documents that were controlled by the Islamic clergy. Based on the few popular sources such as songs, poems and prose of the common people (soldiers and the like), it may be concluded that some differences did exist on the basis of ethnicity.

Pushed ahead by the slow penetration of the French into the interior of West Africa and faced with all these pockets of resistance, the Futanke Empire remained in a constant state of war and emergency from its beginning until its gradual collapse. The string of emirates gradually gave in to French colonial forces and in 1893 after the conquest of Kaarta and Segou, the last remnants of the Futanke state, Bandiagara, were turned into a French protectorate. In local storytelling and oral traditions in Central Mali, the period from 1862 to 1893 is remembered as particularly dangerous and violent. Because of the absence of control over the peripheral areas, raiding groups of Tuareg and local rulers had a free hand in raiding and oppression as long as people in their own regions paid their taxes, the soldiers and slaves required by the Futanke rulers. The Futanke forged coalitions with the pagan Dogon on the Bandiagara Plateau and Fulbe from the east to withstand the pressure of the Maasina Fulbe.

The Futanke were also actively involved in raiding and plundering activities. The Inland Delta of the Niger, where the Kunta-Maasina opponents were particularly strong, was a continuous battleground and plagued by slave raids. The spatial organization elaborated under the rule of Maasina was profoundly disturbed and the establishment of the capital of the Futanke in Bandiagara on the cliffs allowed them to control areas to the east and to compete for control over the Inland Delta. This earned their rule qualifications like ‘une guerre de pillage et massacre’.

Internal resistance from the Futanke themselves against their own rulers also existed, though hardly any research has been done on this topic. There is, for example, a document written by a maabo, a Fulbe weaver, who fought as a soldier in the El Hadj Umar war. It was not published during the time of the Futanke Empire but it seems that the document was written at the court of Aamadu, but was not appreciated. It expresses grievances and critiques the war and its associated cruelties. We do not know whether this discontent was shared by a wider group of common people, and soldiers that did not want to continue the war. It is not known whether these soldiers presented serious resistance to Futanke rule or whether their opposition was only expressed in words and writing.

Internal unrest in the Futanke state of Kaarta has also been interpreted as a generational conflict. The older generation – the people who were soldiers during the conquest of Kaarta – became a wealthy landed elite who managed important trade routes and large agricultural enterprises. They opposed the war and its cruelties because it hampered their commercial ambitions. The younger generation consisted of Futanke soldiers who were newly recruited in the Fuuta Tooro and still wanted to fight to defend and expand the empire’s territory and have their share in the booty before settling down as a landed elite. This generation formed a potential nucleus of resistance against the Futanke Empire from within, though for thoroughly mundane reasons.

63 Robinson, The Holy War.
64 Oloruntemehin, ‘Resistance Movements’, 133.
66 Hanson, ‘Generational Conflict’. 
Discussion

Four elements warrant further discussion. In the first place, sources on revolt and resistance from a local or a popular perspective are limited, although numerous documents describing political unrest and leaders of revolts do appear. However, documents we collected in Central Mali only reflect the viewpoint of the political elite in power and it is therefore difficult to prove that revolts were related to the disparities created by these empires. This relationship can, nevertheless, be inferred from the fact that leaders of revolts and resistance movements were repeatedly able to mobilize a following of discontented people. This is clearly second best to eyewitness accounts. The other way to trace the existence of a counterforce is to look at the hidden transcripts in the form of ritual, storytelling and other cultural expressions. As we have indicated, there are methodological difficulties attached to this approach.

The second issue is that it is equally difficult to unravel the real sources of discontent. Often in official historiography, the propagation of Islam is the prime motivation for undertaking a jihad or to revolt against corrupt regimes. However, in other situations in West Africa, people also went to war for more mundane purposes unrelated to this ideology. In short, religion was not the only reason for revolt. Economic motives must have been equally important and the collection of booty was a widespread phenomenon in the Sahel and Sudan zone. As Hanson mentions, the collection of booty was an important reason for new recruits to push for action in Futanke Kaarta. The people following Maamudu Nduuldi in the Niger Bend were impoverished and fought in his army because it brought in the livestock they lacked.

Thirdly, there is a definitional problem determining distinctions between a revolt or a rebellion and a raid or expedition to collect booty. Differences between an organized state and an emirate are also not clear-cut. All three empires discussed in this chapter originated in a revolt against established powers. Taking a long-term view of their history, political stability was the exception rather than the rule. In all three cases discussed in this chapter, the oppressed who became rebels ultimately became oppressors themselves. To remain in power they had to organize the accumulation of resources to maintain some form of administration and to feed a standing army. This meant that they had to suppress their former allies and followers as the very basis of their power. As an alternative, they had to seek control over labour by raiding slaves or attempt to gain control over peripheral areas. In all cases there were costs attached to such a strategy because repercussions could always be expected. None of the empires found a lasting solution to this dilemma and political instability remained a more usual condition in the nineteenth century than political stability. This would indeed require a different approach to historical research.

Lastly, something should be said about the role of Islam. Why was Islam such a powerful vehicle behind these jihads and later revolts against the polities emanating from these jihads? As it is today, Islam provided not only an ideological framework but also a set of ideas on how to rule. This ideological component was appealing to those who were excluded from participation in the corrupt political centre. The political component of Islam provided the idea of a 'purified' state, a clear vision of the role of charismatic leadership, and rules by which life could be governed. Ironically these movements aiming at purification and emancipation often turned into their opposite. These observations from the past are relevant even today for an understanding of all kinds of events not only in Africa but also in Central and South-East Asia and recently even in Europe and North America.

From this modest investigation into resistance and rebellion in three areas of Fulbe hegemony, it is clear that the Fulbe and their associates were not able to establish stable states or empires. In the cases examined in this chapter, not only did the inherent instability of a pastoral state play a role but also the social hierarchy and its related 'class' oppositions. The relations of exploitation embedded in these hierarchies and the related feelings of inferiority seem to have been an important motive for fighting one's way up the hierarchy. Therefore, it is difficult to distinguish between a revolt against an oppressive political hierarchy and the more common wish of people in the nineteenth-century Sahel to exploit another group. It is telling that in none of the revolts studied was the basic principle of social inequality questioned. Within the Hubbo movement slaves continued to play a subordinate role. The slaves of the Fulbe and the Tuareg who supported Maamudu Nduuldi in the Niger Bend are still of inferior status in Mali today.

Often an important drive for these revolts seems to have been an attempt to escape from the pressure of Islamic reform. However, in many cases this was the ideological justification behind more mundane motivations like the escape from economic marginality and the removal of structural limitations imposed upon one's freedom to undertake what one wanted and to raid others who were less powerful.

It is equally difficult to make a clear connection between ethnicity and revolts though this may have been important in some instances. The complexity

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70 The sources used by Kane et al., 'Une Vision Iconoclaste' and Hanson, 'Islam, Identity' are exceptions rather than the norm.
71 Cf. Reyna, 'Predatory Accumulation'.
72 For the moment, we skip the issue of ecological instability, which is an important additional factor contributing to political instability.
of the various layers of ethnic identities, which arose over the centuries and which is largely unknown, is only beginning to unfold through new research. In a number of instances the opposition between strangers (conquerors) and the original population may have been an important dividing line. In summary, the daily reality for the ordinary people living under Fulbe rule in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries must have been one of conflict and political instability, in which they sometimes participated actively and of which they were at other times the victims. How this influenced their daily lives will forever be hidden as there is a silence about their fate in the oral traditions and written sources of these times.

Colonial conquest in central Madagascar: Who resisted what?

Stephen Ellis

A rising against French colonial rule in central Madagascar (1895-1898) appeared in the 1970s as a good example of resistance to colonialism, sparked by France’s occupation of Madagascar. Like many similar episodes in other parts of Africa, it was a history that appeared, in the light of later African nationalist movements, to be a precursor to the more sophisticated anti-colonial movements that eventually led to independence, in Madagascar and elsewhere. In the light of the later history of nationalism, however, it is instructive to revisit the rising of the menalamba in Madagascar and to reconsider the episode.

On 22 November 1895, less than two months after French colonial troops had taken the Merina royal capital at Antananarivo in their conquest of Madagascar, there was a violent uprising in a district immediately to the west of Madagascar’s premier city. The violence was directed at local officials of the royal government and at prominent Christian converts, but what most shocked Europeans was the murder of other Europeans: the local missionary family, British Quakers who had lived in Madagascar for more than twenty years. William Johnson, his wife Lucy and their baby daughter were hacked to death by a mob of perhaps a thousand people. French troops retaliated by laying waste the area surrounding the scene of the Johnsons’ murder, burning houses and killing people more or less randomly in the belief that severe punishment would prevent any repetition. Nevertheless, throughout the following weeks there were reports from many parts of central Madagascar of local disputes of various