

« Colonial Rule and Ffulde literature in Futa Jallon (Guinea) »

Colloque organisé par l'*ISITA*, Northwestern University, Evanston, 15-19 mai 2002, publié in *Sudanic Africa, A Journal of Historical Sources, Language in Africa*, vol. 15, 2004, pp. 111-132, University of Bergen, 2007.

« Colonial rule and Fulfulde literature in Futa Jallon.  
(Guinea) »,

*Colloque organisé par l'ISITA, Northwestern University, Evanston 15-19  
mai 2002, à paraître fin 2005 ou début 2006, (Editions Brill).*

## Colonial rule and Fulfulde literature in Futa Jallon. (Guinea)<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction : before the colonial conquest.

A very rich Fulfulde written literature, using Arabic *ʿajamī* characters, existed in Futa Jallon before the colonial conquest. It coexisted with a considerable literature in Arabic, and manuscripts in both languages can be found in the whole area corresponding to the ancient Muslim theocratic state of Futa Jallon, which was founded during the initial *jihad* of 1727.

This Fulfulde literature is the legacy of Cerno Samba Mombeiaa who, at the beginning of the 19th century, was the first person to use the Fulfulde language in the written religious literature. Before him the clerics limited themselves to oral commentaries of Arabic religious texts. Cerno Samba's purpose was explained in the famous first lines of his main work, *oogirde malah*, a long religious poem in verses, dealing with various religious topics, and being a free translation of Arabic classical texts of *fiqh*.

*I shall use the Fulfulde tongue to explain the dogma  
In order to make their understanding easier : when you hear them, accept them !  
For only your own tongue will allow you to understand what the Original texts  
say.*

*Among the Fulanese, many people doubt what they read  
in Arabic and so remain in a state of uncertainty.<sup>2</sup>*

The local tradition from Futa Jallon emphasizes that Cerno Samba's ideas met much opposition. Al ḥājj ʿUmar Tall is said to have strongly fought Cerno Samba's program, insisting that Arabic ought to be the only written language for religious texts. It may be noticed, however, that in a later period, the growth of a written literature in Fulfulde happened at the same time as the progress of the Tijānī ṭarīqa.

Therefore, at the end of the 19th century, Fulfulde written literature was limited to religious texts. For instance Cerno Moawiyatu, born in about 1830 in Maci, was the author of the poem *Maasibo yanii yonii en, ee ke*

---

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Jim Brennan, Alfa Mamadou Diallo-Lélouma, Jean Frémigacci, Henri Médard, and Tal Tamari for their help with this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Translation Alfâ Ibrâhîma SOW, *Oogirde malah, Le filon du bonheur éternel*, Paris, Classiques africains 1971. About the religious teaching in Futa Jallon and its evolution after Cerno Samba Mombeiaa, see also Roger BOTTE, *Pouvoir du Livre, pouvoir des hommes : la religion comme critère de distinction*, *Journal des Africanistes*, 60, 2, 1990 pp 37-51.

*yurmi ! (Misfortune has struck us. What sorrow ! Alas ! )*<sup>3</sup>. Cerno Mammadu Luudaa Dalaba belonged to a famous line of descent of *walī* literate people. He wrote a lot of Fulfulde poems, such as *Tafsīru al Qur'an*. This poem written in Fulfulde emphasized the necessity of using Fulfulde in the Coranic pedagogy.

It is important to stress that a more popular literature, dealing with more varied themes, already existed at the time. Examples of such literature can be found in *La femme, la vache, la foi*, and in *Chroniques et récits du Fuuta Jaloo*, published by Alfâ Ibrâhîma Sow<sup>4</sup>

## 2. The various consequences of colonization upon Fulfulde literature

The arrival of the colonizers led to several transformations, and had an influence upon the content and the themes found in the literature written in Fulfulde. This influence was indeed indirect, as there was no attempt from the colonial power to transform that literature, for instance by creating a Latin transliteration or by trying to use written Fulfulde for rural education and development. We can in fact distinguish two periods : first a transitional period, in the decades following the colonial conquest, where, according to Alfâ Ibrâhîma Sow, writers remain in an intermediate position between two epochs<sup>5</sup> ; then the time of the modern writers, that begins in the 1940s and goes on after independence. Born after the colonial conquest, the latter were too young to have known the ancient Fuuta society.<sup>6</sup> It seems however that this evolution was much stronger among the literate and cultivated writers than in popular literature<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Poem quoted and translated by SEYDOU Christiane p 191 in "Panorama de la littérature peule", *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, T XXXV, série B, n° 1, 1973 176 à 218. As wrote Christiane Seydou, it gives an exemple of a *waynorde* (or funeral anthem), with a concise and sophisticated style that is characteristic of Tijānī literature.

<sup>4</sup> Alfâ Ibrâhîma SOW, *Chroniques et récits du Fuuta Jaloo*, Paris 1968.

<sup>5</sup> SOW, *La femme, la vache, la foi*, Paris 1966, p 77. "Continueurs beaucoup plus que devanciers, les écrivains de cette deuxième période développent et diversifient les thèmes religieux des grands maîtres et restent en définitive des intermédiaires entre un siècle de conformisme religieux et politique et une époque de conquête coloniale et de grands bouleversements".

<sup>6</sup> "nés avec le siècle, leurs auteurs appartiennent presque tous aux générations de la conquête coloniale qui n'ont pas connu l'ancien Foûta et n'ont donc pas goûté aux "douceurs aristocratiques" des temps jadis. Témoins de certains grands bouleversements du XXe siècle, tels que la deuxième guerre mondiale et la lutte de libération des peuples opprimés, ils essaient d'en rendre compte dans leurs oeuvres dont l'inspiration est devenue plus laïque et plus moderne, la forme plus libre et la langue plus populaire" (Sow page 235).

<sup>7</sup> This popular literature is in fact badly known, we can have an idea of it in

### 2.1 The bitterness of the ancient *élites*.<sup>8</sup>

The bitterness of the previous *élites* is expressed in the Fulfulde *Ajami* texts written in the decades following the conquest. In cases where colonial rule destroyed the whole political and social order and the basis of the wealth of the ancient *élites*, it entailed violent hatred. Since their military resistance could not longer be active, it moved to other fields, and particularly to the religious sphere. So the clerics wrote texts in which they tried to answer the questions raised by the scandal of the conquest of part of the *Dar al Islâm* by Christian people.<sup>9</sup> Those texts give an interesting insight into their state of mind : most of them were very hostile to colonisation, although occasionally some texts favourable to it can be found, such as *Yarloden Faransi (Let us tolerate the French !)* written by Cerno Mammadu Luudaa Dalabaa.<sup>10</sup>

Here is a summary of the principal ideas dealt with in the case of the texts written between the two World Wars we know about. Most of them - if not all of them - were written in Fulfulde, by authors of course belonging to the religious spheres.

#### 2.1.1 The reversal of the ancient social order

In 1937, Gilbert Vieillard explained why French occupation seemed unbearable to Muslim literate people, giving us the main reasons : “the

---

Alpha I SOW s' *La femme, la vache, la foi*, pages 283-335.

<sup>8</sup> By *ancient élites*, I mean the upper classes in a society where social hierarchy was congruent with the degree of Islamisation, i. e. the descendants of the people who launched the jihad in 1727. They possessed land, cattle and slaves in abundance and could live on their income, devoting their energies to war or religion. So there existed a kind of aristocracy, divided into two social-occupational groups : warriors (devoted to the jihad) and religious people (devoted to the worship of God and to teaching and writing). That is what French authors call “l'aristocratie de la plume et de l'encrier” and “l'aristocratie de la lance et de l'épée”.

<sup>9</sup> for a study of those reactions, read : Ibrahîma Caba BAH and Bernard SALVAING, O temps O moeurs ! A propos d'un manuscrit de Bambeto au Fouta Djallon rédigé en Peul : transcription, traduction, présentation et commentaire, *Islam et Sociétés*, décembre 1994, and Bernard SALVAING, Regards d'Africains musulmans sur la colonisation : le cas du Fouta-Djalôn (Guinée) et du Macina (Soudan français / Mali), *Mondes et culture*, (2002).

<sup>10</sup> published in SOW, *La femme...* pages 140-145. However, the author, Cerno Mammadu Luudaa Dalabaa, belonged to a family known for its early loyalty to French rule. It seems that he wrote this text at the request of Gilbert Vieillard, (Sow p 145).

natives reproach us with as much bitterness the emancipation of women and of the slaves”<sup>11</sup>. Therefore the literature emphasized the bad behaviour and immorality of women, who disobeyed their husband, lost their ancient love for work, were seduced by the gadgets introduced by European civilisation (*They only dream of numerous servants, numerous milk cows, beautiful houses and beautiful beds pleasant to lay upon*).<sup>12</sup>

Our authors also bitterly regret the liberation of domestic slaves, and dismiss the new society as a place where everything has become upside down : *The slaves have started disobeying and hiding themselves ; they have stopped practising religion. They lower good people, and give the first place to low-ranking people*.<sup>13</sup> At the same time the new and important role of money, symbolised by the development of local markets, especially in growing towns like Mamou, was considered blameworthy and condemned.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.1.2 The threat upon religion.

Another fundamental point is the threat colonial conquest lay upon religion. The turmoil felt by religious literate people is clear from the following quotation :

*Get rid from Fuuta those railways, and that work on the roads, ordered by the evil people deprived of the Eternal happiness*

*For the red pagans, deemed to hell's fire where they will be suffocated through torture as the tightening of a belt*

*Don't let the believers be a victim of the insults inflicted upon them by those damned kafirs that you will burn*.<sup>15</sup>

To respond to the scandal of Kâfir domination, Fulfulde literature tried to adopt an appropriate position. In fact, this literature is quite similar to the general Muslim attitude towards European conquest, very clearly described by Jean-Louis Triaud : “for the Muslims, the European conquest is the work of kâfir-s, that is the fundamental reason why they opposed it as rule... The transfer of whole regions of “dar al islâm” to the rule of kâfir-s is in fact an unbearable scandal. The rule of a “kâfir” power

---

<sup>11</sup> in Gilbert VIEILLARD, Bulletin du Comité d'Etudes Historiques et Scientifiques de l'Afrique Occidentale Française (BCEHSAOF), 1937 page 268.

<sup>12</sup> Nge'el jamanel, Notre triste époque in BCEHSAOF, 1937 pp 232-239 and in SOW, *La femme*, pp 110-117.

<sup>13</sup> ib vers 34

<sup>14</sup> See BARRY Ismaël, *Le Fuuta-Jaloo face à la colonisation, Conquête et mise en place de l'administration coloniale en Guinée (1880-1920)*, 2 volumes 965 p, Paris L'Harmattan 1997. In fact there are other unpublished texts dealing with the same themes (cf Cerno Amadu Poyé about "the French rule over Futa Jallo").

<sup>15</sup> *A Furore infidelium libera nos Domine (Ittammen Porto e Futa Dyallo)* ; in Bulletin ...1937 pp 240-247. v. 47-50.

draws serious legal problems : several solutions, advocated in the Islamic tradition, have been used to various degrees by the Muslim communities in Africa south of the Sahara. The *jihad*, first, a solution that soon showed itself impossible because of the unfavourable balance of powers ; then the "*hijra*" towards external countries in order to safeguard the existence of the community of the believers ; and eventually the *taqiya* (literally the fear), allowing the faithful if he feels his safety threatened, to cooperate with the occupier by the tongue but not by the heart".<sup>6</sup>

Most texts call for resistance (that could in fact rather be called passive resistance rather than active resistance against colonial rule). There are many texts written against taxation, or against compulsory labour. They get very violent against railways or roads, *that ploughing without seeding which is nothing but an insanity.*<sup>7</sup> The colonisers are seen as *keferbe* (kuffār), their African auxiliaries are called *baboons* or *chimpanzees*<sup>8</sup> :

*One big chimpanzee falls upon us, pushes in front of him a herd of porters  
The whip never leaves him, the big beast without fail fulfils the orders of those  
who deny God.*

The following text gives an idea of all the grievances which were accumulated against the conquerors :

*Make us happy by showing us the opposite of this wretched time of the French  
people. O Merciful !  
Take away the Red people's rule, expel them from Fuuta  
O Almighty !  
Stop the reign of the uncircumcised people, who neglect  
The religion and refuse to get circumcised.  
Take haste quickly, o my Lord, dismiss those little evil red baboons, O God !  
Let them go through torture, my Lord, expel them for ever,  
O Almighty!  
Destroy the European in the whole Fuuta, Take him away from the Fuuta,  
O helpful God ! »*

### 2.1.3 Towards a policy of accommodation

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Louis TRIAUD, *L'Afrique occidentale au temps des Français, colonisateurs et colonisés (c 1860-1960)*, Paris La Découverte 1992, pages 143-144.

<sup>7</sup> (A furore...) in VIEILLARD G, ib.

<sup>8</sup> Notre triste époque, v. 36-37. The Fulani word used for "chimpanzee" in the text is a very derogatory one. African auxiliaries are qualified as *beasts* as well as *infidels*.

<sup>9</sup> VIEILLARD G, op cit 1937, pp 241 et 243, quoted by Ismaël BARRY, tome 2 page 332.

It should also be emphasized that one important idea found in those texts was to lead later to a sort of “accommodation” with French rule : the religious writers thought that the world had in fact been divided in two parts, *ad-dunya*, the terrestrial world, where the conquerors had wealth and power, but which could not last longer than human life (or than the life of all empires) ; *al-akbira*, the celestial world, the world of religious life, much more important, and eternal, which was given to African people. This division could lead to ways of coexistence, that remind us of the famous words of Jesus-Christ : “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s ; and unto God the things that are God’s !”

To explain this submissive attitude, a witness of this time quoted the two following Fulanese proverbs : *Si a yi’ii mo cippirdaa woo a libay, a subu mo cippiraa* (He who likes to be always victorious in his fights, must know how to choose his opponents) and *Ko jemma juuti woo weetay* (However long the night will last, the day will eventually come).<sup>20</sup>

It is interesting to note that the Fulanese authors of that period insisted on the idea that French rule will be short and temporary, at the very time when most European colonizers thought they would rule Africa for centuries.<sup>21</sup>

*This world is a camp, and a camp is not a residence.*

*Many (conquerors) camped, and passed before the French.*<sup>22</sup>

Several texts recommend to accept French domination. However, let us underline with Ismaël Barry that this submissive attitude is felt more as the submission to an unavoidable fatality than to a positive evolution.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> quoted in BARRY Ismaël, *Le Fuuta-Jaloo...* page 333.

<sup>21</sup> It is difficult indeed to find in colonial literature definite indications about the date of a possible end of colonial rule. It is said that Lord Lugard was one of the rare colonizers to dare to envisage such an issue. But we know that for instance in the twenties the colonists of the *White Highlands* in Kenya, who had received lands with a lease of 99 years, thought this allotted time too short, and in the end obtained a lease of 999 years.

<sup>22</sup> *Yarloden Faransi*, v 11 in SOW, *La femme ...* p 140 and VIEILLARD, op cit.

<sup>23</sup> Ismaël Barry page 704 gives the references of three of those texts, and writes : “Certains titres, bien qu’en faveur des Français, cachent à peine l’amertume de leurs auteurs qui appelaient, apparemment à contre-cœur, à la soumission aux nouveaux maîtres du pays. C’est le cas du poème intitulé *Yarloden Faransi*, “Acceptons les Français”, transcrit et traduit par G Vieillard et A. I Sow. Indépendamment de son contenu peu flatteur à l’égard de Français - surtout en ce qui concerne les 14 premiers vers - le terme *yarloden*, qui signifie en pular “acceptons” a une connotation de fatalité. On l’utilise chez les Fulbe à propos des événements dont le mécanisme échappe au genre humain, telle la mort. De ce fait, l’appel en faveur de la domination française ressemble ici à celui qu’un père adresserait à sa famille lorsque la mort frappe un de ses membres. La domination française fut donc généralement considérée comme un mal. Mais contre cette mauvaise fortune certains lettrés conseillèrent de faire bon cœur”.



*We have the duty to accept all divine decision,  
Either sweet or bitter. Let us tolerate the French !  
This world's house is the smallest of god's houses  
God showed us that he had given this one to the French.*<sup>24</sup>

The conservative tendency of many Islamic notables probably also appears here. They were convinced that the new state of things was the will of God, and preferred to preserve Islam's position rather than to risk losing everything in a hopeless resistance. They thought, according to an old Islamic tradition, that people had to accept the *sultan*, whatever that government might be. Moreover, it was said that French rule was a divine punishment for the sins of the ancient rulers, and that it had been prophesied.

But we must remember that through those texts literate people first speak to other literate people, and that there is among "clerics" in Fuuta Jaloo an old tradition of protest against the abuse of power and the bad behaviour of the "rulers".

#### 2.1.4 The importance of sociological background

Social and religious strategies explain both the attitude of some Tijānī marabouts. In fact, while playing their part in the French colonial system, they tried to save some of their ancient positions<sup>25</sup>. In Labé, Cerno Aliyyu Buuba Ndian, who was, even before the conquest, one of the most popular *wali* and who was a great writer, author of many religious texts, was a judge in the Labé colonial tribunal. Like Karamoko Dalen from Timbo, he was appointed a member of the *Comité consultatif des affaires musulmanes*", which was created in 1916 to give advice to the "*Gouverneur Général*". Karamoko Dalen of Timbo first became Gouverneur Ballay's Arabic secretary and intelligence agent, and Paul Marty says that in Timbo "from 1900 to 1905, he significantly aided the peaceful establishment of French rule. Later, during the First World War, he convinced young people of aristocratic origine to join the French army as *tirailleurs sénégalais*."<sup>26</sup> This double-sided behaviour, that can be observed among two religious leaders, is not an isolated attitude. Although the ancient powers were rejected by colonial power, it seems that the new *chefs de*

---

<sup>24</sup> "Yarloden Faransi", *Tolérons les Français*. (ve. 3 and 4) in SOW, *La femme...*p 140, and VIEILLARD op cit.

<sup>25</sup> About the personal strategies of African *élites* in the French colonial system, read *Pour une relecture de la rencontre entre colonisés et colonisateurs, à travers les "histoires de vie" africaines*, communication de Bernard Salvaing (in collaboration with Jean Frémigacci), "Troisième rencontre des historiens africains", (Bamako septembre 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Paul MARTY, *L'islam en Guinée*, Paris 1921, pp 247-253.

*cantons* had connections with the ancient military and religious aristocracy. Even if they were loyal to the colonizers, they had at the same time their own strategies : chiefs married chiefs' children and helped each other. They were sometimes influential enough to advice the colonial administration in appointing their friends and allies.<sup>27</sup>

As in other West African colonies, some great *karamoko* managed to keep their Islamic influence, and even increase it. Cerno Aliyu Buuba Ndian's family provided a typical example. In spite of the mistrust held by some of its members towards the new society<sup>28</sup>, it capitalised on the prestige given by the Tijānī *sikilāt* (through al ḥājj 'Umar Tall) and managed to keep pace with the "way of the world" or the various political regimes. This family has nowadays a prominent position in the religious life of Labé : Cerno Habib was imām of the first mosque of the town, and after his death his prestigious brother Cerno Abdourahmane Bah succeeded him.

Cerno Aliyyu Buuba Ndian sent several of his sons to the French school in order that they learn to speak and write French. This modern education did not prevent them from acquiring a deep knowledge of Arabic and Islamic culture. This appears in Ibrahîma Caba s' biography of Cerno Abdourahmane, where he lists the sons of the *walī*, their studies and activities. For instance, we can see that *Bappa Chaïkou is a schoolmaster in Timbo... He enjoys reading the beautiful texts. He had been the Arabic secretary of Cerno Aliou when the latter was a judge at Labé's Court. Bappa Chaïkou is a calligraphist, in Arabic as well as in French. He mastered both language equally*.

---

<sup>27</sup> cf BARRY Ismaël p 703 "De nombreux lettrés restèrent d'ailleurs liés aux chefs dont ils épousaient et défendaient les positions tout en aspirant à exercer des fonctions similaires (Président du tribunal de province, secrétaire arabe de l'administration)".

Among other examples, let us point to the following anecdote : Tierno Dalaba (a famous and powerful *chef de canton* in the town of Dalaba) played an important part in the appointment of his friend Tierno Saydou Baldé as *chef de canton* in Koubia (Futa Jallon). Al ḥajj Muhammadou Baldé, who is a son of Tierno Saydou Baldé, still possesses a copy of the letter of reference sent by Tierno Dalaba to the Governor of Guinea. (source : interview in Companya with al ḥajj Muhammadou Balde (1995). Al ḥajj Muhammadou Baldé s' autobiography will be shortly published, in collaboration with Bernard Salvaging).

<sup>28</sup> for instance shaykh Manda, a grand-son of Cerno Aliyyu Buuba Ndian, and the author of texts in Arabic and Fulfulde, felt for a long time a deep mistrust towards Western schools and science. According to one of his children, he began to change his mind at the end of his life, in 1980's, in particular after his first travel on aeroplane between Labé and Conakry. (interview in Conakry, 1985, with Shaykh Manda s'children).

<sup>29</sup> Bah Ibrahîma Caba, page 26.

This strategy is in fact summed up in 1947, by Cerno Abdourahmane Bah in *Fuuta bettū Buutu*, (*Hymn to peace and Futa Jallon*),<sup>30</sup> where he shows the possibility of a Renaissance, a Revival of Fuuta Jallon upon new bases including modernity.

*Teach the Qur'an to your children :  
help them know how to know the acts of devotion.*

*Teach them French; so that they understand how to handle their common affairs  
successfully. (v 78-79)*

*Our country will be more awake  
when educated people will be numerous, it will find again it's prominent role.  
Lawyers and engineers,  
doctors and school teachers, as well,  
and People like them, when they will be numerous in our country,  
it will recover its sovereignty, and will be prominent again.*

## 2.2 The evolution of Fulanese literature.

### 2.2.1 The "administrateurs-ethnologues"

It does not seem that the colonizers were able to influence Fulanese literature significantly. They did not show any great interest in it, except for a few *administrateurs-ethnologues* who specialized in Fulanese studies : Gilbert Tauxier, Henri Labouret, Henri Gaden, Gilbert Vieillard, who collected a lot of Fulfulde *ajamī* manuscripts (now in Dakar, at the IFAN). Although those French *administrateurs* were often non-conformist (especially Gilbert Vieillard) and that there was not in the French system a systematic use of specialized ethnologists as in the English colonial system, it would be false to think that their passion was dismissed as politically incorrect by the official administration. Gaden and Labouret became governors, and Gilbert Vieillard s' scientific studies -if not his administrative activities- were highly appreciated by the *Gouverneur Général*, who even wrote about him "*C'est un véritable génie en matière de travaux ethnographiques. Il observe remarquablement et transcrit magistralement. Il doit être maintenu dans cette spécialité où il est irremplaçable*".<sup>31</sup> After having worked as a classical District Officer, especially in Futa Jallon, Gilbert Vieillard was discharged from any administrative work, and in fact employed as a

---

<sup>30</sup> (v.83-85). *Fuuta bettū Buutu*, in BAH Ibrahīma Caba, pp 86-95, and SOW Alfâ, pp 250-261. In fact Cerno Abdourahmane Bah did not go to the French school, but he can speak French fluently.

<sup>31</sup> quoted page 395 by CORNEVIN Robert, in "Pierre-Francis Lacroix et les foulanisants français", in *Itinérances en pays peul et ailleurs*, Mémoires de la société des Africanistes, Paris 1981, (2), page 391-398.

researcher. As he said “*Autrefois j’avais toujours un motif de service. Aujourd’hui j’ai simplement l’ordre d’ouvrir les yeux et les oreilles et d’aller où bon me semble*”.<sup>32</sup>

So we must not ignore the influence of people like Vieillard, Théodore Monod (in fact a biologist, not a District Officer) and a few others, who were pioneers in the collecting of data, oral and written texts, and strongly supported men like Amadou Hampâté-Bâ. The connection between this trend of mind and the foundation of the IFAN is here quite visible.

### 2.2.2. The making of a French-speaking élite.

Those authorities played no part in trying to appropriate Fulfulde, such as replacing the Arabic script with Roman script, and encouraging new and more secularized literature in Fulfulde. That can be easily explained, if we recall that the French colonial system wanted to introduce the use of French language, not only at school but also among the chiefs, who were chosen not only for their loyalty but also to their knowledge of French language.

While in the English colonies vernacular languages were taught in the first years of the elementary school, it is well known that in the French system, French language was compulsory as well at school as in the administration. The keystone of this policy is the *Circulaire William Ponty* in 1910 prescribing the compulsory use of French at school and in the administration. “*Il faut essayer de donner au plus grand nombre possible de nos sujets sinon l’assimilation, du moins l’empreinte française. Il n’est pas, je crois, trop osé de vouloir que notre langue soit parlée aussi loin que s’étendent nos conquêtes coloniales.*”<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> ib p 396. Those quotations are to be found in O’REILLY Patrick, *Mon ami Gilbert l’Africain*, Dijon 1942.

<sup>33</sup> quoted by Denise BOUCHE in *L’enseignement dans les territoires français de l’Afrique occidentale de 1817 à 1920 : mission civilisatrice ou formation d’une élite ?* Paris 1975, page 569. See also the Camille Guy’s speech in 1902 : “*Mais il y a mieux, parler français, mes jeunes amis, c’est penser en français, et penser en français, qu’on me permette de le dire avec orgueil, c’est être quelque chose de plus qu’un homme ordinaire, c’est s’associer à la noblesse de la destinée de notre pays, c’est vivre de notre vie nationale. La pensée française a dominé vingt siècles qui viennent de tomber un à un dans l’abîme des temps. C’est elle qui a enseigné au monde que le droit est plus respectable que la force, que la justice est plus forte que les intérêts, et que les petits et les vaincus ont droit à plus de respect et d’égards que les triomphateurs et les conquérants*”. (in Denise Bouche, ib p 568). This firm policy is to be compared to the much more hesitating attitude of the French in Madagascar (See Faranirina V. Esoavelomandroso, *Langue, culture et colonisation à Madagascar : malgache et français dans l’enseignement officiel (1916-1940)*, *Omaly Sy Anio* (3/4) 1976, p 105 sqq.

In fact, those differences can be explained by the history of European influence in Madagascar. In the nineteenth century, the *London Missionary Society* translated the Bible into the *Merina* language, written in Latin script. Although there were several dialectal

African languages were strictly forbidden at school, and every transgression to that regulation was immediately punished by wearing the *symbole*, for instance a dunce's cap. So strict was that regulation that the school teachers ignored their pupils' language. For instance Bokar Cissé, who was a teacher during the fifties in the *écoles nomades* in the north of the *Soudan français*, says that in ten years he could not learn *Tamachek* language, while his whole family became quite fluent in it.<sup>34</sup>

That is the reason why we meet no attempt to replace Arabic letters by a Latin transliteration, the old religious texts being only a matter for scientific investigations of a few District Officers interested in local history and literature.

Indeed, to westernize and modernize Fulfulde literature would have been giving it a new life, a new impetus and a new respectability. This would have been the opposite of the constant will and aim of the French : to destroy the ancient culture - dismissed as *féodale, obscurantiste* and so on - and to create a linguistic and cultural assimilation of the new *élites*, the educated people who had to write in French. Comparable policies to that of Germans and British in Tanganyika (with Swahili) or British in Nigeria (with Fulfulde) cannot be found.

### 2.2.3 The evolution of Fulfulde literature

Nevertheless there is an evolution in Fulfulde literature, for some French influence did exist, although not in a direct way. But before describing this evolution, let us insist on the fact that most of the old themes and ways of thinking persist in the great majority of the texts. *ʿAjami* Arabic letters are not replaced by Roman script. And French educated people write in French, although there is no major Fulani writer : the

---

differences, especially between the Eastern and the Western regions, only one language was spoken on the whole island. The Catholic missionaries, who worked among the lower social classes, could not but apply the same policy. Much later, when the French colonizers came at the end of the same century, they decided to develop the French language. The first change occurred in 1916, when the colonizers feared that the French language might become a vehicle of nationalism (it was the epoch of the V.V.S Malagasy nationalist association of educated people). They decided to use the *Merina* language, written in Roman script, for teaching as well as for administration. After 1929, a new shift occurred : the colonizers decided to use the *Merina* language for the first level of instruction in the *Ecoles de villages* and the French language for more advanced studies, in the *Ecole Régionales, Ecoles Primaires Supérieures*, and in the *Ecole Normale Le Myre de Vilers* (the equivalent, and in fact the model, of the *Ecole Normale William Ponty*).

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Bocar Cissé, Bamako, april 2002. (These interviews will be published as Bocar CISSÉ s' autobiography, in collaboration with Albakaye Ousmane KOUNTA and Bernard SALVAING).

Guinean Camara Laye, the famous author of *L'enfant noir* is not from Futa Jallon. At school, Guinean pupils read French books, such as *Terre Noire* by Oswald Durand - a book written by a French District Officer, about the introduction of the plough and modern agriculture in Futa, in spite of the resistance of old and conservative people. It does not seem anyway that we can find many texts written by Fulanese people in French : see the scarcity of texts written by authors from Fuuta Jaloo in the *Bulletin de l'IFAN*.

#### 2.2.4 An example : Cerno Abdourrahmane Bah.

In order to have an idea of the evolution of Fulfulde literature, we can have a look at the work of the major writer of that time, Cerno Abdourrahmane Bah (still alive in Labé), who is a great poet writing in Fulfulde. And it is even possible to compare his work to the writings of another great author, his father Cerno Aliyyu Buuba Ndian, dead in 1927 while his son was still a young boy.

In his poem *Fuuta bettii Buutu*, written in 1947 (*A hymn to peace and to Futa Jallon*), he describes the suffering of people in Guinea during the Second World War and praises the Allies' generals who managed to destroy Hitler's power. This poem met a great success, the *talibaabe* made many copies of it and recited it weekly at the markets to crowds gathered in bunches to listen».

In this poems are described the sufferings endured during the war effort, as it can be seen from the following extracts :

*Remember the rubber and these sufferings  
that destroyed the family ties as well as those of couples.  
If one had a cow, it was sold, a part of it  
becoming rubber, the rest going to taxes. (v. 26 and 27)  
Or remember Senegal, and how  
they were compelling, forcing people to go to the death. (v. 33) .*

Besides this nationalist inspiration, poems dealing with the wonders of nature and with the rural life in Fuuta can also be found. Here Cerno Abdourrahmane is comparable in his inspiration and his agrarian ideal to a sort of Guinean Virgil. Those themes are particularly visible in his poems written in the seventies<sup>35</sup> but were already expressed in "*Fuuta bettii Buutu*" (1947) where he praises Fuuta and "those flowing rivers with waterfalls",

<sup>35</sup> *Fuuta bettii Buutu*, in BAH page 86 sqq... and in SOW page 255 sqq.

<sup>36</sup> BAH p 73-75.

"those fruitful trees and their fruits made so sweet", "the beauty of valleys and everlasting mountains"<sup>37</sup> (v. 62 to 68)

In his poem *Kaaweeji jamaanu bannde* (*The marvels of our time*), written after independence, he celebrated modern innovations as marvels : planes, bridges, roads, new houses, and even the conquest of the moon.

Those new themes coexist with older ones, similar to those found in his father's poems : *Praise of Muhammadu, Madina wa Makka* and so on.<sup>38</sup>

That means a will to be open to the external world, to accept modern innovations such as radio, urban life. Those attitudes are also characteristic of other authors, and we can also notice a change in the language : the traditional metrics often disappear, new words are used even by "traditionals" poets : for instance Cerno Jaawo Pella uses *persidan* (from the French *président*) to name the president of Islamic judges in a region.

### 2.3 Towards a Fulanese nationalism

Nevertheless it is quite visible that the literature in Fulfulde was an instrument for the reassessment of Fulanese identity and an expression of the increasing craving for freedom.

#### 2.3.1 The "Amicale Gilbert Vieillard"

The connections existing between Fulanese texts and the action of the *Amicale Gilbert Vieillard* can also be mentioned. It was a cultural association, that was created at the Sebikotane *Ecole Normale* just after the Second World War, by educated Fulanese people, *pour la renaissance et le développement de la saine foulanité* (for the rebirth and development of a healthy Fulanese identity), as Ibrahîma Caba Bah, nephew of the poet, wrote in his biography. Cerno Abdourahmane Bah, who had great prestige as a poet, but also as the son of the great *wali* Cerno Aliyyu Buuba Ndiyan, was an active member of this association. He wrote for this *Amicale* political poems, such as the already mentioned *Funta bettii Buutu*. This poem created a great enthusiasm among young people, and conversely great indignation among elders and among the *chef de cantons* who tried to fight against the *Amicale*. Such a turmoil was certainly more the sign of a gap between two generations than of a split among two social groups.

Cerno Abdourahmane Bah wrote a poem *For the Amicale* (*Amicale ko faabo*) : as an introduction, he wrote those significant words : *It is not*

<sup>37</sup> in BAH page 92 and SOW, *La femme...* p 256 sqq.

<sup>38</sup> Some examples of those more modern tendencies of Fulanese poetry are given in Alfâ Ibrahîma SOW, *La femme...* (p235-28), in BAH Ibrahîma Caba, Cerno Abdourahmane Bah, *Éléments biographiques...* pp 85-145, and in DIALLO Boubacar Biro, *Gimdbi Pular* (1974 ?).

*because I do not know Arabic that I compose poems in Fulfulde, but because Fulfulde is what everybody hears and understands. And because Fulfulde is the language I like better than any other language.»*

The following extract shows how Fulfulde poetry served a growing nationalism together with a deep religious feeling :

*If the Amicale lived, it would have a beneficial effect upon our country, beneficial for our people, beneficial for the believers, much beyond their hopes..*

*..The Amicale is a sun that rose thanks to God over our country / Let it illuminate us, let us come together and never more disperse !*

*The Fulanese, alas ! have been wiped out for many years / None of us was consulted about what he had to do.*

*They have been led as animals, exploited to satisfy every need, going up and down, without knowing the reason why !*

*And now the Almighty Lord comes to our help /*

*Through the Amicale and He answers in our name when we are called.*

*Among all the nations, so numerous in the world, we were chosen :*

*We are the black people, to work hard, and to supply contributions that cannot be known «.*

### 2.3.2. A new interest to local history.

The authors also took a new interest in local history. This interest focused rather at the level of the whole Futa Jallon area, whereas before its scope was limited to the family or the village level. The poem written by Cerno Jaawo Pellel, born in 1900, *waajordî jÿyaabe wonbe e rewbe wurdo mo maayataa*<sup>39</sup> is equally famous. It was translated by Alfâ Sow with the title *Conseils aux sujets fidèles du Vivant qui ne meurt pas (advice to the faithful subjects of the Living who does not die)*. This is a poem of 410 verses, praising and commemorating saints, writers or chiefs of Futa Jallon. It is interesting to notice that in the eighties, Cerno Abdourahmane wrote *yeewirde Fuuta (Consideration upon the Fuuta)*, dealing with a similar subject.

*The History of the Fulbe in Fuuta Jallon*, an important work written in Fulfulde by Moodi Amadu Laria of Labé (1920-1974)<sup>40</sup> and the historical

<sup>39</sup> translated from *Pour l'amicale*, Amicale ko Fâbo, in BAH Ibrahîma Caba, Cerno Abdourahmane Bah, *Éléments biographiques suivis de quelques poèmes avec une traduction en français*, Labé, Defte Cernoïa, 1998 page 96.

<sup>40</sup> Amicale ko Fâbo, in BAH I. Caba, ib page 97.

<sup>41</sup> in SOW Alfâ Ibrâhîma, *La femme...* pp 152-207. According to Alfâ Sow, (page 77) *L'expression concentrée de toutes ces caractéristiques (celles de la littérature des "écrivains de la transition") reste le dictionnaire biographique des saints et des hommes illustres du Labé, poème de 409 vers par Tierno Diâwo Pellel, dont la lecture attentive donnera, mieux que toute autre oeuvre de ce recueil, les renseignements les plus complets sur l'intelligentsia musulmane du Fouuta-Djalon.*

<sup>42</sup> translated in French by his daughter Hadja Aminatou Diallo BAH, and now



note *Fii Hubbu no feenyirnoo* by Karamoko Dalen written at Saint Louis in 1916<sup>43</sup>, can also be mentioned among other examples<sup>44</sup>

It seems that those poems must be compared to the new interest for history shown at the beginning of the century, for instance the still unpublished but fundamental *tariké* written by Cerno Aliyyu Buuŋa Ndian. We do not know whether he decided to write it on his own inspiration or whether he was encouraged by a French enlightened *administrateur*. (Muusa Kamara was encouraged in his enterprise by the Governor Henri Gaden and by Maurice Delafosse)<sup>45</sup>. Anyhow it seems that under colonial rule, and by reaction to it, there was a strong will to show to contemporaries the historical and cultural roots of the community, in order to reassert Fulanese identity. Most of those texts however were not written in Fulfulde but in Arabic.

Is this tendency very different from what can be observed among some other historical works, for instance those written in Nigeria or Gold Coast by Christian educated people ? Let us mention *the History of the Yorubas* by Samuel Johnson, the *History of the Gold Coast and Asante*, by C.C. Reindorf<sup>46</sup>, and also the studies of Casely Hayford and so on.

The comparison needs to be enlarged. In his *History*, Samuel Johnson tried to explain the arrival of the Christian people as an expression of the will of God, that was foreseen by prophecies. In the same way, some of the manuscripts written in Fulfulde in the twenties and thirties underlined that the coming of Christian people was the will of God and written from the beginning of the world.

### 3. As a Conclusion : the consequences of Independence.

To conclude, let us say that with the coming of independence, Sékou Touré decided that elementary schooling would take place in the local language. So Guinean began to write fulfulde in Roman script, with an

---

available on the Internet : see <http://www.boubah.com/guineenews:HistoirePeule.html>

<sup>43</sup> SOW Alfa, *La femme...* p 222-229 first published by Henri Gaden in *Outre-mer*, 1929.

<sup>44</sup> Published with a French translation in SOW Alfâ I, *La femme...* op cit pp 209-221. We can find other historical texts in his chapter "Les chroniqueurs de l'aristocratie".

<sup>45</sup> See Shaykh Muusa KAMARA, *Florilège au jardin de l'histoire des Noirs, Zubûr al-basâ'în*, tome dir J. Schmitz, Paris CNRS 1998. The influence of H Gaden and M Delafosse upon the decision to compose this work is mentioned on p 29.

<sup>46</sup> *The history of the Yorubas* by Samuel JOHNSON (London 1921), written in the end of the 19th Century, and the *History of the Gold Coast and Asante*, Basel 1895 by C.C. REINDORF.

effort to adapt Roman script to the specificity of their language. For instance the specific sounds which are written, in the international alphabet since the *Conférence de Bamako*, with crossed letters, are in Guinea written as bh, dh, yh, nh. Therefore new books were produced for schools, and the government tried at the same time to secularize their themes, in order to use them in rural development, and also for Guinean nationalism and socialism.

After Sékou Touré's death and the collapse of the revolutionary regime, the *Comité militaire de Redressement* decided to suppress the teaching in vernacular languages, replacing them by French at all the levels of teaching. Nowadays it can be said that Fulfulde texts written in Arabic script coexist with numerous booklets and texts written in Roman script.

Bernard Salvaing  
Centre de Recherches Africaines  
Université Paris 1.

## Colonial rule and Fulfulde literature in Futa Jallon.(Guinea) Summary

By destroying the whole political and social order, Colonial rule induced a violent hatred among the ancient *élites*, and the manuscripts written in Fulfulde at the beginning of Colonial rule give us an interesting insight into their state of mind : most of them are very hostile to the *Kuffâr*, although some rare texts advise to tolerate the French.

The colonisers did not try to influence that literature. They played no part in trying to appropriate Fulfulde, such as replacing the Arabic script with Roman script, and encouraging new and more secularized literature in Fulfulde. That can be easily explained, if we recall that the French colonial system wanted to introduce the use of French language

Nevertheless we can find evolutions in Fulfulde literature : in Cerno Abdourrahmane Bah s' poems, new themes coexist with old religious themes : some poems played an important part in the expression of growing nationalism, while others deal with the wonders of nature and with the rural life in Fuuta. We can also notice among the writers a new interest in history : by reaction to colonial rule, there was a strong will to show to contemporaries the roots of the community, in order to reassert Fulanese identity.