

The French Conquest of Northwest Ivory Coast. The Attempt of the Rulers of Kabadugu to Control the Situation.

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John M. O'Sullivan

The French Conquest of Northwest Ivory Coast

The Attempt of the Rulers of Kabadugu
to Control the Situation

The conquest of northwest Ivory Coast by the French in the 1890s is ordinarily seen as a footnote to the confrontation between the French military and their principal antagonist in West Africa, the great Malinke empire builder, Samori Turè. Such an assessment is perhaps adequate from the point of view of conflicting macro-imperialisms, but it ignores the very complex developments which occurred in the Odienné region of northwest Ivory Coast as the local rulers tried to fend for themselves in the swirling events of the struggle between these two titans.

In fact, Mōriba Turè (the local ruler) protected the interests of Kabadugu so well that its frontiers became the border with Guinea and Mali for the whole northwestern corner of Ivory Coast. Yet this story which, in the light of the above, might be seen as of purely local interest, takes on much greater meaning since many of the insights provided by B. and A. Isaacman (1977) about resistance in Southern and Eastern Africa find an echo in this West African kingdom.

The era of colonial conquest clearly is of importance in modern African history. The traumatic events of the colonial takeover set the stage for the events which are unfolding around us, in many ways, the most obvious being the sacrosanct colonially-imposed borders.

Superficial analysis has focused either on the leader, presented as a craven collaborator or the heroic resistor—seen as antecedents to nascent nationalist sentiment. Much of that is political pettifoggery, yet questions about the actions and activities of African leaders in that most crucial of eras remain valid and worthy of consideration.

Until recently, academic inquiry into the problem, even the seminal works of such a writer as T. O. Ranger, limited itself to this kind of approach. Other scholars have followed the routes marked out by this pathfinder, while some have lost themselves in the woods of political mythmaking. But, in their 1977 article, the Isaacmans did a fine job for Southern African history scholars and all Africanists interested in the problem of resistance. In that article, they summarized the arguments

up until then, and more importantly, posed new questions about resistance in the light of refined perceptions of social distinctions, class structure and social dynamics. No longer is it valid to ask about African resistance without distinguishing between the policies of (1) ruling aristocracies, (2) anticolonial militants, (3) oppressed subjects, or between types of resistance—a concept borrowed from the American South history. Furthermore, the study of 'collaboration' is replaced within African contexts, with at least five different political reasons for collaboration suggested. Finally, the whole analysis is put into a time perspective, an added essential dimension making complicated any and all of the above since all decisions were made repeatedly in a changing context.

The above points are noted at some length because this writer feels that the interpretation of the era of colonial takeover within the French military empire has proceeded on a simplistic course ignoring many variations. While the point stressed in the opening sentence of this article—the importance of the Franco-Samorian wars—remains a valid one, the work of such scholars as Kanya-Forstner (1969) and Yves Person (1968-75) does not allow us to see the trees for the forest.

For my purposes, it is that aspect of Southern African history which focuses on peripheral States stuck between conflicting imperialisms which caught my eye and clarified the situation in northwest Ivory Coast at the end of the 19th century. It then became evident that an accurate analysis of the policies followed by the rulers of Kabadugu vis-à-vis the French requires an understanding of the socio-economic situation of Kabadugu at that time. What is striking is that unless we use the distinctions suggested by the Isaacmans, then several of Mōriba Turè's choices make no sense and important clues about his actions slip by, misperceived as being irrelevant.

Thus, two important and germane points of analysis need to be considered here: (1) that of an exploitative military élite pursuing its own economic ends; (2) that of a peripheral State caught between conflicting macro-imperialisms. With these themes in mind, the inquiry into developments in northwest Ivory Coast seems less arcane. An analysis of Kabadugu's social structure—both its internal military élite and its link to the rest of the Dyula world—will complete the picture of this southern Mande kingdom.

The Kingdom of Kabadugu

Around 1845, one of the descendants of the Turè family which had moved south from Mali into Guinea and what is now northern Ivory Coast seized power and established his own kingdom (O'Sullivan 1976). His name was Vakaba Turè—hence the name Kabadugu. It was a kingdom based on warfare and the exploitation of the people conquered. Thus, I have termed the rulers of Kabadugu a military élite, though it must be

remarked that this élite (while largely Turè) did include slave generals and ruled in close alliance with the Muslim Dyula (traders) of Samatigila, the Diabi.

Vakaba's first successes brought him victory over a previous Muslim aspirant to power in that region, Mori Ulé Sisé, who had attempted to build a kingdom in the Sankarani region of Guinea, and even more importantly over the non-Muslim Dyarasuba who had ruled the country near Odienné since around 1720 as the kingdom of Nafana. The Dyarasuba were driven out of Odienné over a several-year period (1845) and subsequently established themselves in the sparsely populated region to the southeast.

Vakaba's sons ruled after his death in 1858: his first son VaBrèma ruled for only one year (1858-59), VaMukutar ruled from 1859 to 1875, and Mangbé Madu ruled from 1875 to 1893. They all continued the policy of their father until, as the traditions claim, 'there was no one left to conquer'. They populated the area immediately around Odienné, called the Sofadugu, entirely with slaves (*dyôyi*) of the royal family and the region was considered part of the *foroba* (commonwealth). On the borders east and west, north and south, villages of soldiers were set up to control trade and to protect the heartland of Kabadugu. It was estimated by early French visitors that a full three fourths of Kabadugu's people were slaves—and traditions support this image of a significant social stratification.

While these Turè were consolidating their hold on the rather limited area of Odienné, a younger cousin of theirs was showing his military brilliance in the Sankarani region of Upper Guinea. There, beginning around 1870, Samori Turè established the largest and strongest kingdom in the western Sudan. He united militant Muslim and Dyula aspirations and built a wide power base with links from Sierra Leone to southern Mali. Samori was truly in a class by himself as the personification of the Dyula Revolution and posed a major threat to all neighboring polities as he pursued his course of empire-building. Samorian imperialism reached even as far as Sikasso where the local rulers, Babemba and Tyèba, erected huge walls of defence to protect their city. There, Samori was stopped when he attacked during 1887-88.

Samorian aggressiveness ran into that of similarly inclined French military officers in late 1881 near Bamako, and until 1898 Samori continued to be the principal danger to French aspirations in West Africa. Nonetheless, it is obvious that, for most local leaders, choosing between Samori and the French was not easy, boiling down to deciding which imperialism was preferred, a choice rendered especially difficult by Samori's proximity and bellicosity.

But this was not the case for Kabadugu. The excesses of Vakaba's sons caused the people to revolt against their heavy-handed rulers in 1878-79. This revolt was put down with great difficulty by Mangbé Madu Turè, who re-established an insecure control by 1880. Therefore,

it was with a great deal of relief that Mangbé Madu and the other Turè in Kabadugu received their nephew, Samori, in July 1881. Samori presented his relatives with the possibility of an alliance and this arrangement was eagerly seized upon by the Kabadugu Turè. This alliance was sealed when Samori gave his favorite daughter, Soronasi, to Mangbé Madu as a wife.

From this date, Kabadugu resembled a peripheral State in many ways, acting on its own in terms of 'sub-imperialism', but always within the orbit of Samori's political structure. Still, the seniority and independence of Kabadugu must be stressed so that the complexity of Dyula political relations (imperial or sub-imperial) can be seen. Within the various power relations one sees a continuity from the Samorian macro-level through a mini-State like Kabadugu to the essential nucleus of all Dyula power structure—the trade center (such as Samatigila). In fact, Samatigila remained firm in its commitment to Samori and the socio-economic structure of Kabadugu throughout the whole period under consideration.

By 1890, Samori, Kabadugu and Samatigila stood together in the face of rising French pressure. Samori had weathered some serious storms (a defeat at Sikasso, the Great Revolt in his own empire), yet the main problem was the action of French military officers seeking their place in the sun for the greater glory of the *infanterie de marine*.

In April 1891, a column under Colonel Archinard spread south from French-held Soudan (modern Republic of Mali) as far as Kankan and even Samori's capital, Bisāndugu, and then retreated, leaving an isolated garrison in Kankan. Another glory-hound, Colonel Henri Humbert (Archinard's successor), resumed the attack at the beginning of 1892. In spite of yellow fever as well as a disastrous cattle epidemic, Humbert occupied the heart of Samori's empire, capturing Bisāndugu on January 13, Sanankoro and Kerwané on January 26 and Samori's arsenal, Tininkuru, on February 14, 1892 (Person 1970: 101).

In order to keep the successes of the French to a minimum, Samori pursued a 'scorched earth' policy. He ordered the destruction of all villages and crops and of anything which could not be moved, and then evacuated the whole population with as much food as they could carry. Hoping to ease the relentless pressure of the French, he decided to move his empire east, toward central Ivory Coast. Early in 1892, he arrived in Kabadugu. He remained there for a year and a half, directing the scorched earth policy and the transfer of the whole population through Kabadugu to the new area of his activity. This second empire, centered in Dabakala, lasted until 1898 when it too was destroyed by the French military, and Samori himself was finally captured in September of that year.

The arrival of Samori Turè, his armies and thousands of uprooted people made a profound impact on Kabadugu. The traditions describe his arrival in Samatigila with considerable detail. The army was so

large that it built a village near the town in a single day and also constructed a road as wide as a modern automobile road.

While Samori and his troops were in Samatigila, Mangbé Madu in Odienné asked for their assistance in completing the conquest of the Dyarasuba. Mangbé Madu had pushed Nafana into open warfare against Kabadugu by his attack of the kola-producing region of Worodugu in 1888, and had even brought together Nafana and the Senufo of Nōōlu as allies against the Turè. His army not being strong enough to deal with the Dyarasuba, in 1892 Mangbé Madu appealed to Samori for assistance.

The French had heard of this alliance and hoped to unite with the Dyarasuba and Sikasso enemies of the Turè to increase their own strength. Lieutenant Marchand was sent to Sikasso, pressing Tyèba to attack Samori in the Kabadugu region, but Tyèba refused to do anything which would compromise his neutrality between the French and Samori (Méniand 1935). At the same time (late 1892 and early 1893), several columns under Colonel Combes attacked eastward into Kabadugu in pursuit of Samori from their recently acquired conquests in his old empire. In his instructions, Combes was informed: 'Nafana would always resist and would receive our envoys. The chief declared that they would hold on against Samori until we renewed the campaign and came to their aid.'¹ This opinion was also reported in the French colonial press: 'In the beginning of the campaign as we already said, Colonel Archinard and Colonel Combes still hoped to find in Nafana a center of resistance to Samori.'²

The French hopes were dashed, however, by the Turè troops who had already totally destroyed Nafana. Their combined forces had attacked in the middle of the rainy season (August 1892), at a time when an assault was not expected. Unfortunately, the primitive guns of the Dyarasuba used gunpowder instead of cartridges and proved to be at a real disadvantage in the wet conditions. At the battle of Kungbéni, the Dyarasuba were destroyed: many drowned in the swollen creeks and rivers as they tried to escape; Nafana, which had been 170-village strong at its height, was reduced to a mere twelve.³

The victory in Nafana opened up the eastward road and in the face of continued French pursuit, Samori and his entourage retired east where they were to hold out until 1898. According to a monograph written by Delafosse in 1905 (while he was an administrator in Korhogo), 'Aided by troops of Mango Mamadou [Mangbé Madu], Samori [. . .] came from

1. Lettre du commandant supérieur du Soudan français à M. le sous-secrétaire d'État des Colonies, citant des instructions d'Archinard à Combes, commandant de la colonne du Sud, 22 déc. 1892, Archives nationales/Section outre-mer (henceforth ANSOM), Soudan V, dossier 1 c.
2. In *Bulletin du Comité de l'Afrique française. Renseignements coloniaux*, 2, 1892: 43.
3. Interviews of Ibrahima Diarrassouba, Odienné, Feb. 17, 1975; and Isiaka Diarrassouba, Masadougou, March 12, 1975. For further information about the oral traditions I collected, see O'SULLIVAN 1976.

Odienné which he had to leave hastily in February 1893, because of the arrival of the column . . .'⁴

Colonel Combes brought havoc in the Kabadugu region. The telegram reporting to the governor general in Saint-Louis stated: 'Colonel Combes returned to Kerwané after a race in the east of 650 kilometres which lasted thirty-four days. He visited Gueleba, Ojende [*sic*] and ran through Nafana; above that, he fought the troops of seven of Samori's chiefs. . .'⁵ On February 9, 1893, Gbèlèba (Gueleba in the reports) was taken by Combes. It was already burning and the people were in flight before the troops entered it. The French continued east, trying in vain to inflict a serious defeat on the *sofa*. They also thought they could get Kabadugu to abandon Samori, and hoped that Tyèba would be spurred into action by their attack and would send his soldiers against Samori. They marched toward Odienné. When Combes arrived there on February 13, the town was already burning and all the population was in flight.⁶

The chase continued east and south through Borotu and Nafana and even as far as Koro, which was seized by an advance guard under Captain Prost on February 14. Finally the pursuit stopped and Prost returned to Kerwané in Upper Guinea because, as Combes himself wrote: 'I lost all hope of catching the troops of Samori which I was pushing in front of me.'⁷ His sweep into Kabadugu had failed to be decisive in the way he had expected.

With Mangbé Madu off in the east with Samori, power in Kabadugu passed into the hands of his brother, Mōriba Turè. Mōriba's position was difficult, to say the least. He had Samori and his brother to the east, and the French in Bisāndugu, Kerwané, Siguiri and other posts to the west. The Combes columns had already left Gbèlèba and Odienné in smoking ruins. Though a change in policy (as directed by the government in Paris) had temporarily stalled the French military conquest, the man appointed as first civilian governor of the French Soudan, Albert Grodet, was not the man to successfully control the *infanterie de marine*. He lasted only until 1895 and the final triumph of military over civilian rule in the Soudan made the continued war against Samori inevitable.

In a letter dated August 4, 1895, the French commander of the post at Bisāndugu discussed Mōriba's precarious political situation. He felt that Mōriba had been allowed by Samori to remain in Kabadugu on the condition that he prevent people from returning to the scorched earth

4. M. Delafosse, 'Essai de monographie du cercle de Korhogo (région de Kong, Côte d'Ivoire)', Abidjan, Archives nationales de la république de Côte d'Ivoire (henceforth ANRCI), p. 8.
5. Télégramme n° 947 du commandant supérieur colonne expéditionnaire du Sud-Est à gouverneur à Saint-Louis, Archives nationales de la république du Sénégal (henceforth ANRS), 1 D 136.
6. In *Bulletin du Comité de l'Afrique française. Renseignements coloniaux*, 2, 1892: 43.
7. *Ibid.* The whole operation is discussed at great length by PERSON 1968-75, III: 1387-1450.

areas between the Niger and the Sankarani rivers. People captured while trying to return should be sold for horses. 'All these chiefs [Mōriba and the chiefs of the nearby regions of Mahou and Worodugu] also received the order from Samori, before his departure for Kong, to live in good relations with the French on the Niger river and to give them all the food they demanded, to warn him of any movement forward on our part.'⁸ If the French were right, and they probably were, these were difficult directions to follow.

Furthermore, it was reported that there were tensions between Mōriba and Samori. Firstly, Mōriba had not been providing enough horses. Besides that, he had not supported a griot appointed by Samori to rule Nafana, and even wanted to kill him. Finally, 'On the other hand, the chief of Odienné, Moriba [. . .] looks forward with bitterness to the possible return of the latter [Mangbé Madu] for he will have to return the command of the country to Amadou [Mangbé Madu] and I think that he would not be unhappy to keep it.'⁹ These points make clear some of the difficulties facing the ruling élite of Kabadugu. The horse-supply problem obviously required major numbers of people to be sold for them, and the disruptive potential for Kabadugu's slave-based economy must have been serious. Secondly, Mōriba opposed any representative of Samori's who would infringe on his area of control. The final point is obvious.

Yet, Samori wrote a letter to the French stating that he had complete confidence in Mōriba, since they were relatives and members of Mōriba's family were with him at Dabakala.¹⁰ It does not seem logical for Samori to have written such a letter if he was being double-crossed by Mōriba: ordinarily, Samori dealt harshly with anyone behaving in such a manner. Nonetheless, Mōriba was not only acting as Samori's lieutenant in the region, but also trying to use the French for his own ends. In fact, he pursued his policy to the point of asking the French for help in re-establishing Kabadugu's political control in the area. This he did when he visited the French post at Siguiri on May 6, 1897, accompanied by twenty horsemen and about sixty soldiers: 'After having told him to explain the true motive for his visit, he told me that his desire would be to obtain from the governor assurances that the villages of his region which did not obey him would be punished, and besides that, the regions which used to be under the control of his father would be returned to him.'¹¹ Truly, one stands in awe at the audacity of Mōriba. He was attempting to remain on good terms with both Samori and the French, and at the same time to bolster his own local position. Instead of

8. Lettre du capitaine du poste à Bissandougou au commandant supérieur du Soudan français, 'Projet d'occupation d'Odienné', 4 août 1895, ANRS, 5 G 41.1.

9. *Ibid.*

10. The letter is the translation of the original in Arabic and is dated January 6, 1898. Samori's letter was in reply to a French letter informing him that Mōriba had switched sides.

11. Rapport politique du mois de mai 1897, fait à Siguiri le 31 mai 1897 par le capitaine Freyss, ANRS, 5 G 41.2.

pursuing a conservative policy designed to offend no one, Mōriba launched himself between two giants into a program of expansion and re-establishment of the former greatness of Kabadugu by exploiting the presence of the French. One has to admire his effort as reported by the French. 'He professed loudly his friendship for the French. I did not believe a word of it, but he declared that he was very happy to know that we were there, for as he said, our presence has freed [him] from Samori, forever. . .'¹² Alas, such Machiavellian tactics only got him in to trouble, as the French response to his request was much more than he desired or expected.

Yves Person (1968-75, III: 1733-1737) felt that there was a definite break between Mōriba and Samori. My own research tended to bear out the argument that Mōriba was playing three games at once: pro-Samorian, pro-French and pro-Mōriba, with the accent on the last. It should be noted that, when sending his delegation to the French, Mōriba did not communicate with the two closer posts of Bougouni to the north and Beyla to the west, but rather with Bisāndugu which was much farther away; he was attempting to play on administrative divisions on the French side and to keep his options open. Furthermore, the actions of Mōriba Turè during this time clearly follow the lines indicated by the Isaacmans (1977). Here we have the representative of the ruling élite trying to bolster his own political position with little regard for the needs of local people or allies. Once that game was played out and the French moved in seriously, then the really critical issue of who would get to exploit the local people was dealt with, and once again Mōriba used a strong and clever gambit but in vain.

These two moves were made in 1897. First, in May, the French dispatched an officer to get Mōriba's authorization to establish a post. Then, in September and October, another officer arrived who was willing to make important concessions to him on the slavery issue. An officer by the name of Bonnassières was sent to Odienné to inform Mōriba that if he wished the governor of the Soudan to become involved in the affairs of the region, then it was necessary that a French officer or administrator be permitted to reside in Odienné, accompanied by a few *tirailleurs*. Bonnassières arrived near Odienné on May 24, 1897, and visited Mōriba Turè the next morning. That evening he transmitted the governor's message. Mōriba pretended not to understand it and spoke for a long time about the problems he was having with his captives, his desire to reconquer certain areas, his hatred of Samori, his love for the French; but he made no mention of a resident. Finally, Bonnassières demanded an answer about that key question, but Mōriba still ignored it. Then, on May 27, he gave the lieutenant a letter in Arabic as his reply. It stated: 'I do not want you to construct a post on my territory, never, never. Only may you leave one of you at Bougouni who could come when he

12. *Ibid.*

likes each year, but he would then return to Bougouni.¹³ Mōriba recognized the importance of having a free hand in Kabadugu. From the point of view of the warrior élite and their Dyula allies in Samatigila, French presence was an unacceptable alternative. Mōriba wished to use the French for his own political ends and thus had to prevent them from putting a resident in Odienné, or they would be the rulers and final arbitrators of power there. Without them, however, he did not have the military strength to maintain the system as he wished.

Just then, he had a stroke of good fortune. Another officer, Captain Ristori, was sent to Odienné in September. Here was a classical case of an individual who (in the best tradition of the local agent affecting European imperialism) made decisions ignoring the orders of his superiors. Captain Ristori's report about Odienné is an informative, interesting document, rich in its potential implications and indicative of what Mōriba really saw as being the bottom line in terms of control of Kabadugu. Discussions took place for three weeks. By the end of the palaver, Ristori decided that Mōriba in fact *did* hate Samori and that a post was unnecessary in Odienné! He then agreed that the difficult problem of what to do about Mōriba's slaves could be dealt with by deciding that any slave who ran away after that date would be located and returned to Mōriba by the French. Here it is clearly spelled out: Mōriba, the military élite and the Muslim merchant leaders of Kabadugu knew that their economic well-being depended on their control over the masses of people they had enslaved and forced to work for them.

Ristori arrived at these decisions because he felt that Mōriba had shown his sympathy for the French by refusing to follow Samori and by the alacrity with which he was establishing relations with the French, as well as by the fact that he had brought 10,000 kilograms of grain to the French post in Bougouni. In addition, Mōriba had sent a son to the school in Kayes. Ristori also felt justified in supporting Mōriba 'because of his excellent attitude on my behalf, the good will with which he executed my orders, listened to my advice and submitted to my decisions'.¹⁴

If Ristori was approximately right in his figures, then the fact that Mōriba could deliver 10,000 kilograms of grain to Bougouni is very significant indeed. This grain would have been either expropriated or produced on Turè plantations by slaves. Either way, the degree of exploitation is significant. Then it had to be transported to Bougouni, no mean feat in itself since Mōriba obviously had no pack animals. Here again, forced portage is the obvious deduction. It is unfortunate that Ristori does not indicate the date when the grain arrived, because fitting such a transportation effort into the local agricultural calendar would be a further worthwhile indicator of what was happening in Odienné. Of

13. Rapport du lieutenant Bonnassière, ANRS, 5 G 51.1; Mōriba's letter is in ANRS, 5 G 41.5 (Arabic) and 6 (translation).

14. Lettre du capitaine Ristori au chef de bataillon Bertin, 1^{er} oct. 1897, and accompanying report, ANRS, 5 G 41.1.

course, Mōriba would not disrupt his own growing season by sending his plantation slaves, but he would not hesitate to dispatch slaves who were growing crops in their own villages. By the same token, it is not possible to be sure of when Bougouni would need grain, given the vagaries of warfare and the movement of troops.

Ristori's commander, chef de bataillon Bertin, thought that the whole thing should be ignored, with the self-serving justification that Mōriba would not hold to his part of the bargain. He believed that a post should be built in Odienné, and that Ristori's analysis of Mōriba, Samatigila and Samori was way off base. His advice was followed and a post was begun shortly afterwards in Odienné. A letter sent by Bertin to the lieutenant-governor of the Soudan noted: 'Odienné. Lieutenant Woeffel took command of the post December 19, 1897. Moriba Touré did not come and sent no one to greet him [the lieutenant] on his arrival.'¹⁵ Another report stated that the post was created on December 29, 1897 'against the will of Moriba'.¹⁶ Mōriba had been checkmated.

The written sources do not give the flavor of the event, however. One of my informants, Fakoma Dumbia, told of how two soldiers came to his village, Kotuba, to get men for clearing the bush on the construction site. Mōriba had said that the post would not be built 'except on his head'. The soldiers said that the Whites did not ordinarily build that way, then put a brick on Mōriba's head and made him dance. Until he accepted their demands, they mocked him and told him that the country was still his and that they would not change that, but Mōriba still refused to give his permission. They went and built the post anyway, in the Kamaghaté ward of Odienné. The villagers who had been assembled to work on the construction wanted to kill the Whites and take their guns. Here, Fakoma paused and laughed a little at the last statement. In one of the most poignant remarks I was to hear, he stopped, shook his head and said that when he thought of that now, his heart still trembled. He continued, telling how the Whites then addressed Mōriba. They said: 'Mōriba.' He said: 'Yes?' Then they asked: 'What does a little boy do with a bird he has captured?' Mōriba replied that the boy would play with it for a while until he was tired of doing that, and then he would cook the bird and eat it. The Whites said that he had spoken well, and that they were playing with him just like the boy was playing with the bird.¹⁷ From that time on, Mōriba refused to wear men's clothes. He took off his trousers and put on a woman's wrap saying that the Whites had robbed him of his manhood (according to a tradition very well known in the region).

In point of fact, the Whites were being over-confident, and Mōriba was being over-dramatic. He had lost the struggle to prevent the

15. Lettre du chef de bataillon Bertin au lieutenant-gouverneur du Soudan, 22 janv. 1898, Archives nationales de la république du Mali (henceforth ANRM), 1 N 167.

16. Rapport sur Moriba Touré, ANRCI, 2 EE 7.

17. Interview of Fakoma Dumbia, March 20, 1975, Kotuba.

French from constructing a station, but there continued to be an on-going rivalry between them and the Turè over who actually governed the Odienné region.

'Tubabuyi Wati' (The Time of the Whites)

A new day had dawned on Kabadugu in late 1897. The Europeans (*tubabuyi*) had come to stay, at least for a while. Even after the French had constructed their post, Mōriba insisted on reiterating his demands for French assistance and cooperation, focusing on four major issues: (*a*) that his escaped prisoners be returned to him; (*b*) that all the area captured by Vakaba be placed under his control; (*c*) that he be able to continue administering justice; (*d*) that if a column was sent against Samori, the people from Kabadugu would be allowed to return to Odienné. Even though the French never formally acquiesced, they did attempt to return Mōriba's slaves who had escaped to Nōōlu, requesting assistance from the local chief (Dégé Koné). However they soon realized that trying to deal with Mōriba and his demands would put them in a very difficult situation.

Captain Conrard took over command of the Odienné post on January 16, 1898 and wrote on March 8: 'After the country is absolutely freed from the worry of protection which the proximity of Samori requires of us, we will be able to assume the more effective execution of orders and to act more severely with respect to Moriba.'¹⁸ This indicates that Samori Turè was still the prime concern for the French in Kabadugu. Until his capture Odienné was a point of control on the supply line in the fight against him, being the base from which columns went south and east to Tōmbugu, Kani and elsewhere to cut off and pursue his troops.

The French were also concerned about Mōriba's seemingly deliberate attempts to slow down (or even stop) the building of a station at Odienné. For example, according to a report of January 21, 1898, he was making every effort to block construction and would only send a few workers. It was also said that he was constantly making palavers. The French became concerned that he would try to join Samori (as reported on January 24). This fear became even more acute when one of Samori's most famous generals, Bilali, appeared not far from Odienné with some troops. By March 15, Mōriba was said to have gone to Tyèmé to establish contact with him.

Throughout 1898, the noose continued to tighten around Samori. In June of that year (after hearing of the fall of Sikasso), the *almami* broke camp and fled west. He abandoned Boribana, his stronghold near Marabadyasa, because he knew that he could not withstand an attack by the French. Shortly afterwards, his new empire collapsed like a house of

18. Copie du registre, 2, 4^e trimestre 1898, ANRM, 1 N 167.

cards. He, his army and hundreds of thousands of his people fled west in a vain hope to find sanctuary in Liberia.

Beginning in August, refugees began to appear in Odienné: 200 of them arrived on the 13th, 115 on the 18th, 133 on the 20th, and 30 on the 30th. On September 8, Mody Swarè Turè (the brother of Mangbé Madu) reached Odienné with thirteen people who were also fleeing from Samori's debacle. September 13 saw Brèma Dyakité arrive with 490 followers. Finally, the end came; Samori was captured at Géulé along with thousands of followers, including Mangbé Madu, on September 28. According to the register: 'This news produced immense enthusiasm in the country.'¹⁹ But another of my informants told it a bit differently: he said that when Samori was captured, people whispered the news into their neighbor's ear and did not say it out loud, for Samori was too powerful to risk offending him by shouting the news about.

Samori was then taken to Dakar, where he was tried and subsequently sent to Gabon. He died there in June 1903. Mangbé Madu Turè was exiled to Tombouctou and remained there until 1905. He then returned home to Odienné where he lived peacefully until his death in 1912.

With the war against Samori finally over and with Mangbé Madu arrested and in exile, one would expect that the French administration of Kabadugu would proceed much more smoothly. They seemingly held all the cards and could dictate any policy they wished to Mōriba Turè and the people of Kabadugu. That they did not do so indicates a certain degree of success for the political efforts of Mōriba as well as very real confusion and incompetency on the part of several of the administrators. The problem for the French initially began with Captain Ristori's acquiescence to Mōriba's demands back in late 1897. While these demands were never formally ratified, they became the basis for French-Kabadugu relations and repeatedly frustrated French policy.

It must be emphasized that the French were not at all clear about the nature of the institution with which they were dealing. A letter from Lieutenant-Governor Clozel remarked: 'First of all, it seems well established to me that one does not find in the colony of the Ivory Coast any individuals in the state of slavery or of captivity, in the sense that we attribute to these words.'²⁰ To be sure, in a country such as Ivory Coast with its seventy or more linguistic groups, one would not expect the institution of slavery to be identical to what the Europeans practiced in all cases. Nonetheless, the essential reality of 'unfreedom' has been established in another article (O'Sullivan 1980; see also Klein 1978; Cooper 1979). Kabadugu was built on the historical development of slavery in northwest Ivory Coast. Vakaba, his sons, the warrior élite

19. *Ibid.*

20. Lettre de M. Clozel, lieutenant-gouverneur de Côte d'Ivoire, au gouverneur général de l'AOF, 'Rapport sur l'esclavage dans les cercles de Côte d'Ivoire', 2 janv. 1904, ANRS, K 21.

and their merchant allies lived off the labor of Malinke and Senufo people who had been enslaved in the wars of conquest of these same Turè.

Given this economic and social base—as repeatedly demonstrated by Mōriba's actions—the French's sensitivities about this problem reveal a colonial prejudice against seeing either the forest *or* the trees. An additional problem with their colonial policy was that their military followed local customs and distributed captives to their soldiers, the *tirailleurs*. In a word, their military machine ran on slavery just like everyone else's. Not only were they caught in the contradiction of claiming to create an empire in order to abolish slavery while using slavery to reward their soldiers, but they also found that their armies could not move without porters to carry food, weapons and other goods. To this end the so-called *villages de liberté* ('freedom villages') were created to house captives who had fallen into French hands and who then were used by the French army as forced portage. They became slaves of the army and were exploited mercilessly in this very arduous work (Bouche 1968: 146-168). In reality, the whole story of the *villages de liberté* is much more complicated than that. It is filled with the contradictions of idealism and exploitation, of missionary fervor and military expediency which is so much a part of the European expansion into Africa. Furthermore, potentially serious economic problems were also to be considered. Lieutenant-Governor Clozel wanted to know how the colony was going to reimburse the slave owners if slavery was abolished, and the French were very concerned about the effect the liberation of the slaves would have. Clozel feared that agricultural production would collapse and that the freed slaves would threaten the security of the colony. Besides that, no one would be able to pay taxes anymore. This fear was felt very strongly in Kabadugu as well. 'Their departure [that of the slaves] will make a desert of Kabadugu which will be ruined and this without great advantage for the countries where they will seek refuge.'²¹

General French policy about slavery was even more confused in Kabadugu given the French promise to uphold the Turè claim to their slaves. As noted in a report written in 1901, 'After having studied the pretention of Moriba concerning the neighboring provinces (Nohoulou, Nafana, etc.), he was promised that he could keep captives won in war—captives of the Crown. Part of these captives had been given to friends of the Touré, the other part (approximately 4,000) constitute a heritage which is the personal property of the reigning chief and work for him alone.'²² The French in northern Ivory Coast made considerable effort to follow up their commitments. 'I have given instructions to the commander of the post that he make known the engagements we have made with the Touré family to whom we said that their captives will always be respected. I also told him to oppose, by all the means at his disposal,

21. Rapport mensuel, janv. 1901, ANRCI, 1 EE 91.

22. Rapport sur Mody Towaré (*sic*), chef de Kabadougou, ANRCI, 2 EE 7.

the departure of these latter [the captives].'²³ This undertaking, so strong in theory, proved to be an entirely different matter in reality. Mōriba Turè wanted to use his *dyōyi* as he saw fit; just as he had always done. If it meant selling a slave, so be it, since this was a fundamental right of a slave owner and was very much a part of the reason for having slaves. Since warfare and enslavement were important to production in Kabadugu, to try to refrain Mōriba from selling slaves was absurd. A clash was inevitable, particularly in the context of Mōriba's failure to help the French build their post.

Tension rose immediately between Mōriba and Captain Conrard, the commander at Odienné since January 1898. By February 1899, Conrard was writing in the register of the station that Mōriba was stealing captives and selling them: 'From the tenth to the twentieth of February, twelve persons, women and children, were kidnapped.'²⁴ He could not discover who was responsible. Then finally, a *sofa* of Mōriba said that two of the stolen people were at the chief's camp fifteen kilometres northeast of Odienné. Two of his griots admitted that it was he who was stealing the people in order to sell them. According to one of the griots, 'Moriba had said to Kourami Moro, his last *sofa* leader, in front of him, "I can no longer sell my subjects. Find me some captives such that no one will know that it is I who take them". . .'²⁵ Conrard, however, did not feel that he had a large enough garrison to intervene.

Finally, on March 24, 1899, Mōriba was arrested along with Kurami Moro. Ismailia Turè was named as temporary head of the region and 455 *sofayi* were disarmed. Mōriba was sent to Siguiri to be tried. There was no public manifestation of hostility following his arrest. He was removed from his post as chief of Kabadugu and exiled to Bafoulabé on May 6. He was subsequently moved to Bingerville where he was pardoned by the governor general of French West Africa on June 11, 1901 and allowed to return home. He arrived in Odienné on August 10.

If Captain Conrard was so sanguine as to think that French problems in Kabadugu were ended, he was sadly mistaken. It was not until 1903 that a chief was finally chosen who was acceptable to both the French and the people of Kabadugu. In order to try to get some control of the situation, Conrard arranged that an election be held in April 1899 to find a replacement for Mōriba. As a result, 'Mody Touré [. . .] was elected April 15 to replace Moriba Touré who was deposed because of his numerous acts of extortion. This election was held contrary to the desire of the commander and of the population. It occurred only in respect for tradition.'²⁶ While such concern for 'tradition' is too self-serving and obvious, Conrard really wanted to name Ismailia Turè as chief but could

23. Rapport politique, oct. 1901, ANRCI, 1 EE 73.

24. Capitaine Conrard, 'Dossier relatif à l'affaire Moriba Touré, ex-chef de Kabadougou', extrait du registre du poste, 22 fév. 1899, ANRCI, 2 EE 7.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Affaires politiques, cercle d'Odienné, 1901-1903, ANRCI, 2 EE 7, dossier 3.

not since he was not a descendant of Vakaba, so Ismailia was named assistant chief. However he died very soon afterwards (May 8) and was replaced by Lanténé Sidiki Turè, a younger brother of Mody.

The administration of Kabadugu continued to be a problem to the French after the election, since Mody Swaré Turè was not a useful tool in French hands. By July it was reported that he did not know how to command, and that with the loss of Ismailia, he was really hopeless. He had spent most of his life away from Kabadugu and was not familiar enough with the region to manage it effectively. He was even unaware of the existence of some villages. In November, Captain Allain wrote that Mody Swaré Turè seemed to be having difficulty fulfilling his functions as chief since he did not seem to have much influence. Captain Donnet, in December of the same year, confirmed that Mody had not any, but did not see this as a problem. By 1901, the French felt that Mody Turè was abusing his power and was failing to do what they wanted him to. They claimed that he was responsible for the death of a village chief as well. All his faults would not have been quite as serious had he been a useful tool to the conquerors, but he was not. A major part of the problem was that he seemed to be appropriating a good portion of the taxes which should have been coming in, but since he was responsible for tax collection, it was difficult to determine how much he was actually taking. He also failed to provide porters for the French. In November 1900, the commander in Odienné had asked for permission to replace him but had not been permitted to do so. Finally, on January 16 of the following year, Mody was arrested and sent to Séguéla where he was kept in forced residence.

He was replaced by his younger brother, Lanténé Sidiki Turè,²⁷ who was about thirty-five years old when he came to power. He was the sixteenth son of Vakaba Turè. In a comedy of errors bordering on the absurd, he too was arrested in June 1902 and sent to forced residence in the French post on the Bandama river. According to a letter of May 24, 1903, written to the lieutenant-governor of the Ivory Coast, 'Lanténé Sidiki Touré, brother of Moriba Touré, who succeeded Mody Sware Touré in 1900 [*sic*] of Kabadougou, was sent to forced residence at the Bandama post in June 1902. This occurred because of the lying claims of Moriba Touré (who had returned from exile in August 1901) in addition to the incorrect information supplied by the current commander of Odienné, Sergeant Houdusse [. . .] it happened because Lanténé refused to help Moriba pay debts which he had contracted with the Duves & Chaumet store in Odienné.'²⁸ To finish it all off, Mōriba Turè was again arrested and exiled for selling people. This occurred in April and May 1903. Finally in 1903, Ibrahima Turè was appointed chief of Kabadugu.

27. Rapport mensuel, janv. 1901, ANRCI, 1 EE 91.

28. This is an interesting incident about which I do not have any further information. (ANRCI, 2 EE 7, dossier 6.)

With him, the Turè-administration conflicts ended and he remained in power until 1934.

In spite of themselves and all their hesitation and prevarications, the French finally did bring a social revolution of sorts by freeing the slaves. In May 1907, there occurred the mass liberation of the captives. Within a few months, 8,000 to 9,000 captives left Kabadugu; some to look for their families, some to return to their native countries and others simply without any goal.²⁹ Some places it came easily, some more difficultly. Samatigila refused to liberate the slaves, so the Whites went up there with some soldiers and did it by force. There are people to say that the abolition of slavery was not a very difficult problem, since many sons had already spent long hours in the fields with the slaves: according to one of my informants, the Whites made everyone *horon* (free) and with that slavery ended; everyone had to do agricultural work. This meant that they had less time to study the Koran. Still their faith in Allah kept them confident.

Another informant said that the liberation of slaves changed everything. Between Samatigila and Sananfèrèdugu, there had been many slave villages, but all these people left the area as soon as they were freed and there was no one left to do the cultivation. The women had to go into the fields and pull up the fonio themselves so that they could cook for their families.³⁰

The wounds of the past have taken a long time to heal, to be sure. Even to the present, there is a stigma attached to the name of people who were slaves long ago. From the French point of view there was not much cause for joy either, though the economy did not collapse nor was the general security threatened. 'The present political situation, though satisfactory, leaves some worry for the future. The liberation of the captives has created a muted discontent among the local inhabitants without permitting us to count on the devotion of the liberated captives whose weak support would not be sufficient compensation in any case.'³¹

In sum, then, it is difficult indeed to analyze the impact of the abolition of slavery in Kabadugu. Since it was decreed by foreign conquerors who did not really conquer the region, who did not understand the social dynamics of the situation, it was largely irrelevant to the social structures created by the Turè and their janissaries. It was a non-revolution for that very reason.

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The era of French conquest of northwestern Ivory Coast was a critical one for the people of that region. Because of the family linkages of the

29. Administrateur Le Campion, 'Monographie du cercle d'Odienné. Aperçu du pays...', ANRCI, Fonds spécial monographies, p. 13.

30. Interview of Almami Touré, Apr. 30, 1975, Sananfèrèdugu.

31. Notice sur la Côte d'Ivoire, 1908, ANRM, I D 179.

Kabadugu rulers to Samori Turè, they found themselves dragged into the struggle between two empire builders.

Thereafter, the war between Samori and the French engulfed the country as Samori moved eastward, and the rulers of Kabadugu employed several different strategies in trying to stay on top of events. The Turè family continued their close cooperation with Samori, yet as soon as French presence became significant, Mōriba Turè tried to make a deal with them in order to maintain his hold on Kabadugu. He played off political and economic goals and ultimately was willing to live with considerable French control in order to remain in possession of the many slaves of his family. In pursuing this goal he was supported by the rich Dyula of Samatigila who also saw their economic well-being threatened by the French since they, too, lived off the productivity of their agricultural slaves. Mōriba and the Diabi played a careful game of simultaneous cooperation and resistance to the French in order to achieve their own local objectives.

Mōriba was able to preserve the integrity of his kingdom and thus did set the borders of northwest Ivory Coast with its neighbors, but was unable to exploit his slaves as he wished. The problem of slavery was what eventually undid him (since the French arrested him for selling people), but even in this the French were not clear in their policy. Local administrators voiced considerable concern that Kabadugu would be emptied of its people if they were freed.

Thus the point is very obvious: both the French and Kabadugu developed policy in a very slow process of 'moves' and 'counter moves'. The French did not call all the shots, and Kabadugu's decisions reflected the narrow class interests of the ruling military élite and their merchant partners.

West Africa was a scene of peripheral States and sub-imperialism in many ways similar to Southern Africa. In the northern Ivorian context one of the imperialists was an African, but the spin-offs of these power plays was similar. Within the framework of that sub-imperialism and the French conquest, the military élite of Kabadugu and the new merchant princes of Samatigila pursued their own economic self-interest. These attempts to articulate their class interests transcend simple resistance/collaboration analysis and underscore the real dynamics of events in those turbulent days. The lesson here also parallels the Southern African situation. The logic of African responses to the European intrusion has to be seen within the context of the historical dynamics of the African societies themselves and not in a blanket African-European analysis. Class structure, economic needs, family linkages within the specific African society being studied, all help to focus that dynamics within the gross lines of European conquest. The theme of African resistance is not as meaningful as was once thought, and the problem of African resistance has been returned to where it belongs: African history.

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