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# Fulani people and Jihadism in Sahel and West African countries

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et du Sahel

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# SOMMAIRE

1 – THE FULANI PEOPLE.....	3
1.1 – Geographical distribution .....	3
1.2 – Fulani Empires .....	4
1.3 – Fulani way of life.....	4
1.4 – Jews of Africa? .....	4
2 – FULANI AND JIHADISM .....	5
3 – FULANI AND JIHADISM IN CENTRAL MALI: BETWEEN CHANGE, SOCIAL REVOLTS AND RADICALIZATION.....	6
4 – THE REGIONALIZATION OF THE FULANI ISSUE IN SAHEL .....	8
4.1 – Extension of the conflict to Burkina Faso.....	8
4.2 – Situation in Niger .....	9
5 – FULANI OF NIGERIA .....	10
6 – FULANI OF GUINEA.....	11
CONCLUSION.....	13
ANNEXE 1	
ORGANIZATIONS AND STRATIFICATION OF THE FULANI SOCIETY IN CENTRAL MALI ..	14

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There are just under 40 million Fulani<sup>1</sup> (also known as Fulbe, Peul or Fellata, depending on the country), present in some 15 countries in the Sahel and West Africa, as well as in Cameroon, Central African Republic and Sudan.

## I – The Fulani people

### I.1 – Geographical distribution

The Fulani are approximately 16,800,000 in Nigeria (190 million inhabitants), 4,900,000 in Guinea-Conakry (13 million inhabitants), 3,500,000 in Senegal (16 million inhabitants), 3 million in Mali (18.5 million inhabitants), 2,900,000 in Cameroon (24 million inhabitants), 1,600,000 in Niger (21 million inhabitants), 1,260,000 in Mauritania (4.2 million inhabitants), 1,200,000 in Burkina Faso (19 million inhabitants), 580,000 in Chad (15 million inhabitants), 320,000 in Gambia (2 million inhabitants), 320,000 in Guinea-Bissau (1.9 million inhabitants), 310,000 in Sierra Leone (6.2 million inhabitants), 250,000 in the Central African Republic<sup>2</sup> (5.4 million inhabitants), 4,600 in Ghana (28 million inhabitants) and 1,800 in Côte d'Ivoire (23.5 million inhabitants). A Fulani community has also been formed in Sudan on the pilgrimage route to Mecca<sup>3</sup>.

As a percentage of the population, the Fulani therefore represent about 38% of the population in Guinea-Conakry, 30% in Mauritania, just under 17% in Guinea-Bissau, 16% in Mali and Gambia, 12% in Cameroon, 22% in Senegal, just under 9% in Nigeria, 7.6% in

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, there are very different estimations, ranging from 35 to 65 million. Two main factors explain these variations: interbreeding (which sometimes makes it difficult to assign individuals to a particular ethnic group) and controversies over the origin of certain populations (should they be linked to the Fulani?).

<sup>2</sup> This is about half of the Muslim community, which itself represents about 10% of the population.

<sup>3</sup> The Sudanese Fulani community is the least studied and cannot be enumerated in the census process.

Niger, 6.3% in Burkina Faso, 5% in Sierra Leone and the Central African Republic, just under 4% in Chad and very small percentages in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.

## **1.2 – Fulani Empires**

Several times in history, the Fulani have established empires. Thus:

- ➔ since the 18th century, the theocratic state of Fouta-Djalou in Middle Guinea;
- ➔ in the 19th century, the Fulani Empire of the Macina in Mali (1818-1862) of Sékou Amadou Barry, then Amadou Sekou Amaadou, who conquered Timbuktu;
- ➔ also in the 19th century, the Sokoto Empire in Nigeria.

These Empires were, however, ephemeral and today the Fulani do not control any states.

## **1.3 – Fulani way of life**

Traditionally, the Fulani are transhumant herders, and they remain so, for the most part, even if gradually a certain number of them have become sedentary, both because of the constraints imposed on them by the progress of desertification in certain regions, because of their dispersion and mobility that encourage exchanges and miscegenation and because some governments have set up programmes aimed at settling the nomads.

The vast majority of them are Muslim, almost all of them in many countries. Historically, they have played an important role in the breakthrough of Islam in West Africa.

## **1.4 – Jews of Africa?**

The Malian writer and thinker Amadou Hampate Bâ (1900-1991), himself a Fulani, evoking the way they are perceived by other communities, made a comparison with Jews, insofar as, like Jews before the creation of Israel, they are dispersed in many countries, where they give rise to recurrent reproaches from other communities that do not differ much from one country to another: they are often perceived as prone to communitarianism, nepotism, and prompt to betray.

The traditional conflicts, in their transhumant areas, between these nomadic pastoralists and sedentary farmers, as well as the fact that they are, more than most other ethnic groups, present in a large number of countries (and therefore in contact with diverse

populations), undoubtedly contribute to explaining this reputation too often maintained by the populations to which they are opposed by disputes.

The idea that they are privileged vectors of jihadism is much more recent and can be explained by their role in the recent rise of terrorism in central Mali (Macina region, Niger loop).

## 2 – Fulani and Jihadism

Throughout history, conflicts have existed all over Africa between sedentary farmers and generally nomadic pastoralists who practice transhumance. The former accuses the latter of ransacking their crops with their herds, while the latter complain of cattle theft, difficulties in accessing water points, and obstacles to their movement.

But since 2010, however, the conflicts, which have become more numerous and deadly<sup>4</sup>, have taken on a completely different dimension, particularly in the Sahel region. The continuous expansion of agricultural land, necessitated by very rapid population growth, is gradually limiting grazing and transhumance areas, while the major droughts of the 1970s and 1980s prompted livestock farmers to migrate southwards to areas where sedentary people were not used to competition from nomads. In addition, the priority given by development policies to intensive livestock farming tends to marginalize nomads.

Left out of development policies, frequently feeling discriminated against by the authorities<sup>5</sup>, transhumant herders often feel they are living in a hostile environment and mobilize to defend their interests. In addition, terrorist groups and militias fighting in West and Central Africa are trying to use their frustrations to recruit them.

However, the vast majority of nomadic herders are Fulani, who are also the only nomads present in all the countries of the region.

And the nature of some of the above-mentioned empires, as well as a certain bellicose tradition of the Fulani<sup>6</sup>, leads many observers to consider that the participation of the Fulani in the recent emergence (2015) of terrorist jihadism in central Mali is in a way the

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<sup>4</sup> Especially since fist and stick fights, or at worst dagger fights, have given way to Kalashnikov clashes.

<sup>5</sup> They do receive less attention from these authorities, as they frequently operate in countries of which they are not nationals, and, are not in permanent contact with these authorities as a result of their travel. They also generally belong to different ethnic groups than civil servants, who are most often from sedentary lineages.

<sup>6</sup> For example, they played an important role in resistance to colonization, particularly in Fouta-Djalon and the surrounding regions (the territories that would become the French colonies of Guinea, Senegal and French Sudan).

combined product of history and Fulani identity that is presented as a “bête noire”. The involvement of the Fulani in the spread of this terrorist threat in Burkina Faso, or even Niger, seems to confirm this view<sup>7</sup>.

However, the situation of the Fulani can differ greatly from one country to another, whether it is their lifestyle (degree of sedentarization, degree of education, etc.), the way they perceive themselves, or even the way they are perceived.

### 3 – Fulani and Jihadism in central Mali: between change, social revolts and radicalization

While Operation Serval succeeded in 2013 in rebuffing the jihadists who occupied northern Mali, and Operation Barkhane prevented them from coming back to the forefront, forcing them into hiding, the attacks not only did not stop, but they spread to central Mali (in the Niger loop, a region also known as Macina) and have increased since 2015. The jihadists certainly do not control the region as they controlled the North in 2012 and they are forced to hide. They do not have a monopoly on violence, since militias have been set up to fight them, sometimes with the support of the authorities. Nevertheless, there are increasing targeted attacks and killings, and insecurity has reached such a level that the region is no longer under real government control, many civil servants have abandoned their posts, a significant number of schools have closed and the last presidential election could not be held in a number of municipalities.

To some extent, this situation is the result of a "contagion" from the North. Dislodged from the northern cities they had occupied for a few months, having failed to establish an independent state, forced to exercise discretion, jihadist armed groups, in search of new strategies and new modes of action, were able to use instability factors in the Central region to gain influence.

Some of these factors are common to both Central and Northern regions. It would, however, be wrong to consider that the serious incidents that now regularly occur in the Centre are only the extension of the northern conflict. Other weaknesses, in fact, are more specific to the Centre. The objectives of locally based communities, which jihadists exploit, are very different. While the Tuaregs claimed Azawad<sup>8</sup>'s independence<sup>9</sup>,

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<sup>7</sup> However, while the Fulani do play an important role in the establishment of a new terrorist centre in Burkina Faso, the situation in Niger is different: attacks are now periodically carried out by Fulani groups, but they are perpetrated from the outside by assailants from Mali (see below under the heading "The Fulani in Niger").

<sup>8</sup> A region that is in fact mythical, which has never corresponded to any political entity in the past, but which designates for the Tuaregs all the regions of the North.

<sup>9</sup> Before abandoning (or mutating) this objective when they were overwhelmed by jihadist groups and understood that it was them who would benefit from independence.

the communities represented in the Centre do not advance comparable political demands (insofar as they advance claims!).

The importance of the role played by the Fulani in northern events, highlighted by all observers, is an indication of this difference. Indeed, the founder of the MLF (Macina Liberation Front), the most important of the armed groups involved, Hamadoun Koufa<sup>10</sup>, is a Fulani, like the vast majority of his fighters.

Few in the North, the Fulani are numerous in the Centre, and, concerned like most other communities by the intensification of competition between herders and sedentary farmers that can be observed in the region, they suffer more from it, because of historical and cultural specificities.

The underlying trends in the region and Sahel as a whole, which make it more difficult for nomads and sedentary people to live together, are essentially of two kinds:

- ➔ climate change, already underway in the Sahel region (rainfall has dropped by 20% over the past 40 years), is forcing nomads to seek new grazing areas;
- ➔ population growth (Sahel is one of the very few regions in the world that have not yet begun their demographic transition), which is leading farmers to seek new land, is having a particular impact in this already densely populated region.

If the Fulani, transhumant herders, are particularly concerned by the competition between communities brought about by these developments, it is, on the one hand, because this competition pits them against almost all other communities<sup>11</sup>, and on the other hand because they are particularly affected by other developments more related to State policies:

- ➔ even if the Malian authorities, unlike what may have happened in other countries, have never theorized the interest or necessity of sedentarization, the fact is that development projects are more directed towards sedentary people (under pressure from donors, generally in favor of abandoning nomadism, considered less compatible with the emergence of a modern state, and limiting access to education);
- ➔ the implementation in 1999 of decentralization, and municipal elections, which, while they provided the Fulani people with the opportunity to bring community demands into the political arena, mainly contributed to the emergence of new elites<sup>12</sup>, and consequently to the questioning of traditional

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<sup>10</sup> Which was eliminated on November 28, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> The region is home to Fulani, Tamasheq, Songhai, Bozo, Bambara and Dogon.

<sup>12</sup> This effect, of course, has been limited by the vicissitudes of the decentralization policy. Nevertheless, it has been a reality in a number of municipalities. And undoubtedly the "feeling" of such transformations is greater than their real effects, especially among the Fulani, who tend to consider themselves "victimized".

structures based on custom, history and religion. The Fulani people felt these transformations with particular intensity, insofar as the social relations within their community are old. These transformations also took place under the impetus of a State that they have always considered as "imported", the product of a Western culture far distant from their own.

Finally, historical reminiscences should not be ignored, although they should not be overestimated. In the Fulani imagination, the Macina Empire (of which Moptii was the capital) represents the golden age of the Centre. The heritage of this empire includes, in addition to the social structures, specific to the community, a certain relationship to religion: the Fulani live and are perceived as supporters of a pure Islam, in the wake of the Sufi brotherhood quaddiriya, sensitive to a rigorous application of the precepts of the Koran. The jihad advocated by leading figures in the Macina Empire, was different from that proclaimed by terrorists currently operating in Mali (which targeted other Muslims whose practices were not considered conforming with the founding text); Koufa's attitude towards the leading figures in the Macina Empire was ambiguous.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, it appears that the Islam practiced by the Fulani is potentially compatible with certain aspects of the Salafism that jihadist groups regularly claim to be their own.

A trend seems to have emerged in recent months in the Centre: gradually, the initial motivations for joining purely local jihadist groups seem to be more ideological, a trend that is reflected in a questioning of the Malian State and modernity in general. Jihadist propaganda, which advocates the rejection of state control (imposed by the West and complicit in it) and the emancipation from the social hierarchies produced by colonization and this modern state finds a more "natural" echo among the Fulani than in other ethnic groups.

## 4 – The regionalization of the Fulani issue in Sahel

### 4.1 – Extension of the conflict to Burkina Faso

The Fulani are in the majority in the Sahelian part of Burkina Faso, which<sup>14</sup> borders Mali, and also Niger<sup>15</sup> through the Tera and Tilabéry regions. A strong Fulani community also lives in Ouagadougou, where it occupies a large part of the Dapoya and Hamdallaye districts.

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<sup>13</sup> He frequently referred to it in his preaching, but he had, for example, desecrated the tomb of Sékou Amadou.

<sup>14</sup> More specifically, in the provinces of Soum (Djibo), Seeno (Dori) and Oudalan (Gorom-Goom), which border the Malian regions of Mopti, Timbuktu and Gao.

<sup>15</sup> Nigerian regions of Tera and Tilabéry.



Since late 2016, a new armed group claiming to be from the Islamic State has emerged, Ansarul Al Islamiya or Ansarul Islam, whose main leader was Malam Ibrahim Dicko, a Fulani preacher who, like Hamadoun Koufa in Central Mali, had made himself known through his multiple attacks against the Burkina Faso Defence and Security Forces and schools in Soum, Seenou and Oudalan<sup>16</sup> provinces. Ansarul Al Islamiya's leaders are former MOJWA fighters<sup>17</sup> in central Mali. Dicko is now considered dead<sup>18</sup>, and his brother, Jafar Dicko, succeeded him at the head of Ansarul Islam.

However, the action of this group remains geographically limited for the time being.

But, as in central Mali, the Fulani are amalgamated and the whole community is perceived as an accomplice of jihadists that target sedentary communities. In response to the terrorist attacks, the sedentary communities formed their own militias to defend themselves<sup>19</sup>.

## 4.2 – *Situation in Niger*

Unlike Burkina Faso, Niger does not have any terrorist groups operating from its territory, despite Boko Haram's attempts to establish itself in the border regions, particularly on the Diffa side, by winning over young Nigerians whom the country's economic situation seems to deprive of a future. Even if the country is struggling to do so, Niger has so far succeeded in countering these attempts.

This situation is explained, in particular, by the importance given to security issues by the Nigerien authorities, which devote a very large part of the national budget to them. They have allocated substantial resources (taking into account their capabilities)<sup>20</sup> to strengthening their army and police. They are very active in regional cooperation (in particular with Nigeria and Cameroon against Boko Haram) and welcome very openly on their territory foreign forces made available by Western countries (France, United States, Germany, Italy).

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<sup>16</sup> During the reconquest of northern Mali in 2013, the Malian Armed Forces were able to get their hands on Ibrahim Malam Dicko. But he was released after interventions by Fulani leaders in Bamako (including former Speaker of the National Assembly Aly Nouhoum Diallo). It was after his release that he created Ansarul.

<sup>17</sup> Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa.

<sup>18</sup> Following a joint operation by French, Burkinabe, and Malian forces in July 2017, on the border between Mali and Burkina Faso.

<sup>19</sup> Thus, in early January 2019, the inhabitants of Yirgou, in response to an armed attack by unidentified individuals, attacked Fulani populations for two days (January 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>), killing 48 people; police forces were deployed to restore the calm. At the same time, a few miles away, in the Bankass circle of Mali, 41 Fulani were killed by Dogons.

<sup>20</sup> Niger is one of the poorest countries in the world (in the UNDP 2018 ranking, it ranks last) and it must strive to combine the security effort with a policy to initiate the development process.

Moreover, the Nigerian authorities – just as they have managed, more than their Malian counterparts, to take measures that have largely defused the Tuareg issue – have also shown greater attention to the Fulani issue than Mali.

Niger, however, cannot entirely avoid contagion from neighbouring countries. The country is regularly subjected to terrorist attacks, both in the southeast, in the border regions of Nigeria, and in the west, in the regions near Mali. These are attacks from outside: operations led by Boko Haram in the southeast and operations from the Ménaka region in the west (the Ménaka region is a privileged area for "maturing" the Tuareg rebellions in Mali).

The attackers from Mali are frequently Fulani. They do not have the same power as Boko Haram, but it is all the more difficult to prevent their attacks, as the porosity of the border is high. Many of the Fulani concerned are Nigerians or of Nigerian origin: many Fulani herders were forced to leave Niger and settle in neighboring Mali when, in the 1990s, the development of irrigated areas in the Tilabéry region reduced their grazing areas. Since then, they have been involved in the conflicts between Malian Fulani and Tuaregs (Imaghads and Daoussaks). Since the last Tuareg rebellion in Mali, the balance of power between the two groups has changed: until then, the Tuaregs, who had already risen several times since 1963, already had many weapons. The Fulani from Niger became "militarized" when the Ganda Izo<sup>21</sup> militia was formed in 2009. Since the latter was intended to fight the Tuaregs, Fulani people joined it (Malian Fulani as well as Fulani from Niger), many were then integrated into the MOJWA, then into the ISGS<sup>22</sup>. The balance of power between Tuaregs and Daoussaks on the one hand, and Fulani on the other, has changed and is now more balanced. As a result, clashes have occurred<sup>23</sup>, often killing dozens of people on both sides.

## 5 – Fulani of Nigeria

The most populous country in West Africa with 190 million inhabitants, Nigeria, like many countries in the region, is characterized by a dichotomy between the South, inhabited mainly by Yoruba Christians, and the North, whose population is essentially Muslim, with many Fulani who, like everywhere, are herders<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> The result of the ongoing split from an older militia, Ganda Koy, with which Ganda Izo has since sealed an alliance.

<sup>22</sup> Islamic State in the Great Sahara.

<sup>23</sup> In which international forces (notably Barkhane) have sometimes forged ad hoc alliances with the Tuaregs and Daoussaks (notably with the MSA), which have been engaged since the Peace Agreement in the fight against terrorism.

<sup>24</sup> Overall, the country has about 53% Muslims and 47% Christians.

Nigeria's "central belt", crossing the country from east to west<sup>25</sup>, is a meeting point between these two worlds, the scene of frequent incidents in an endless cycle of vengeance between farmers, generally Christians (who accuse Fulani herders of letting their herds damage their crops), and Fulani herders (who complain of cattle theft and the growing establishment of farms in areas traditionally available for the transhumance of their animals).

These conflicts have been exacerbated in recent times, as the Fulani have also sought to extend their transhumance routes southward, with northern pastures suffering from increasingly severe drought, while farmers in the South, with their particularly dynamic populations, are seeking to establish farms further north.

In recent months, this antagonism has taken a dangerous turn of identity and religion between two communities that have become irreconcilable and have been governed by different legal systems since Islamic law was reintroduced in 2000 in twelve northern states<sup>26</sup>. To Christians, the Fulani want to "Islamize" them, if need be, by force.

This vision is fuelled by the fact that Boko Haram, which mainly targets Christians, seeks to exploit militias against the Fulani opponents and that, indeed, a number of these fighters have joined the ranks of the Islamist group. Christians consider that the Fulani (with the Hausa, who are related to them) provide the bulk of Boko Haram's troops. This is an excessive perception, given the fact that a certain number of Fulani militias remain autonomous. But the fact is that the antagonism has worsened in recent years<sup>27</sup>.

The election of Mohamadou Buhari, Fulani and former leader of the largest Fulani cultural association (Tabital Pulaakou Internayional), as President of the Republic, did not help to ease tensions. The President is frequently accused of underhandedly supporting his Fulani parents, instead of instructing the security forces to repress their criminal acts.

## 6 – Fulani of Guinea

Guinea Conakry is the only country in which the Fulani constitute the largest ethnic group, but not the majority (about 38% of the population). While they come from Middle Guinea, the central part of the country that includes cities such as Mamou, Pita, Labé

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<sup>25</sup> In particular, Kaduna State, north of Abuja, Benue-Plateau State, east of Abuja and Taraba State, and southeast of Abuja.

<sup>26</sup> In force until 1960 it had been then abolished at independence.

<sup>27</sup> Thus, on 23 June 2018, in a village populated mainly by Christians (Luggere), an attack attributed to the Fulani resulted in a heavy toll: 200 dead.

and Gaoual, they are present in every other region, where they have migrated in search of better living conditions.

The region is not affected by jihadism, and the Fulani are not and have not been particularly involved in violent conflicts, except for traditional conflicts between herders and sedentary people.

They control most of the economic power and, to a large extent, intellectual and religious powers. They are the most educated. They became literate very early on, first in Arabic and then in French, through French schools. Imams, Koranic masters, senior officials from within and from the diaspora are, in their majority, Fulani.

However, we can wonder about the future, insofar as they have always been victims of discrimination since independence in order to keep them out of political power. The other ethnic groups feel encroached upon by these traditional nomads who come to tear up their best lands to build the most flourishing businesses and the most resplendent residences. In their perception, if the Fulani came to political power, they would have all the power and, given the mentality they attribute them, they would manage to keep it forever. This perception was reinforced by the violent hostile speech of the first Guinean president, Sékou Touré, against the Fulani community<sup>28</sup>.

In the first democratic elections in 2010, Fulani candidate Cellou Dalein Diallo came out on top in the first round, but all ethnic groups joined forces in the second round to prevent him from becoming President, giving power to Alpha Condé (Malinke).

This situation is increasingly unfavorable to the Fulani people, and generates frustrations that recent democratization (2010) has allowed to express.

The next presidential election, in 2020, in which Alpha Condé will not be able to stand for re-election (the Constitution prohibiting more than two terms), will be an important deadline for the evolution of relations between the Fulani and other communities.

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<sup>28</sup> From the earliest days of the independence struggle in 1958, Sekou Touré, Malinke, and his supporters faced Barry Diawandou's Fulani. Once in power, Sekou Touré assigned all important positions to Malinke people. The denunciation of alleged Fulani plots in 1960, and especially in 1976, provided him with the pretext for the elimination of important Fulani personalities (in particular, in 1976, Telli Diallo, who had been the first Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity, a highly respected and prominent figure, who had been imprisoned and deprived of food until he died in his dungeon). This alleged plot had been an opportunity for Sekou Touré to deliver three speeches denouncing the Fulani with extreme virulence (calling them "traitors" who "think only of money...").

## CONCLUSION

There is no Fulani predestination to jihadism, which would be induced by the history of the former theocratic empires.

Moreover, the Fulani complex society is often overlooked (see the annex below for Mali) and the interests of its components may differ and cause contradictory behavior, or even intra-community divisions<sup>29</sup>.

But undoubtedly they have a predisposition to ally themselves with the opponents of established orders, which is inherent to the condition of itinerants. Besides, the consequence of the geographical dispersion condemns them to remain always in the minority and, subsequently, to be unable to decisively influence the fate of States<sup>30</sup>.

The subjective perceptions that flow from this condition feed the opportunism they have learned to cultivate in adversity – facing detractors who consider them as threatening foreign bodies, while they themselves live as victims discriminated against and destined to marginalization.

► **FRS Commentary:**

*The above note did not examine the situation of the Fulani people in countries outside the study area (mainly Cameroon, Central African Republic, Sudan), nor in Chad, as the issues in these countries are different.*

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<sup>29</sup> With regard to the Centre of Mali, the propensity to challenge the established order, which has been said to lead many Fulani to join the jihadist ranks, is sometimes the result of young people in the community acting against the will of their elders. Similarly, young Fulani people have sometimes tried to take advantage of municipal elections, which, as explained, have often been perceived as an opportunity to bring out leaders who were not from traditional notabilities – these young people sometimes consider their elders as participants in these traditional notabilities. It has even been possible that conflicts, including armed conflicts, have occurred between Fulani people and other Fulani people.

<sup>30</sup> And, when by exception they seem to have the possibility and believe they have the legitimacy (Guinea).

## Annexe 1 ORGANIZATIONS AND STRATIFICATION OF THE FULANI SOCIETY IN CENTRAL MALI

Like other agro-pastoral societies in the Sahel, the Fulani society in central Mali<sup>31</sup> has undergone profound changes in recent decades<sup>32</sup>. The Fulani community as an ethnic group is far from being a homogeneous group. The terminology "Fulani" itself refers to a semantic complexity from an anthropological point of view that deserves to be analyzed<sup>33</sup>.

The two main social groups of the Fulani ethnic group, the nobles (Rimbé) and the descendants of captives (Rimaybé)<sup>34</sup>, formerly called slaves or captives (*Maccube*), are each divided into several social categories. These two groups constitute the higher castes<sup>35</sup>. Each group has its own social function to play for the proper functioning of society. The descendants of slaves (Rimaybe), whose ancestors were reduced to slaves (*Maccube*) to serve the masters (Rimbe) during raids and fratricidal wars between tribes

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<sup>31</sup> By Fulani Society in Central Mali, we refer here to the Fulani community occupying the territorial space called Hayré (mountainous region). Administratively speaking, it is the Circle of Douentza and more precisely the municipalities of Haïré (Boni) and Mondoro. This area has been our field of research since October 2009. By extension, we also mention the regions of Seeno Gondo (Koro Circle) and Seeno Mango (Bankass Circle). Since September 2017, these two circles have been stealing the spotlight from the areas considered to be the epicenter of the crisis in central Mali, the Douentza (drained area) and Tenenkou (flooded area) circles, due to inter-community conflicts (mainly between Fulani and Dogon). As a reminder, the Mopti region is divided into exempt and flooded areas (Central Niger Delta).

<sup>32</sup> Mutations are often defined as changes, (from the Latin *mutatio*, de *mutare*, changer, Larousse 1983). Change is synonymous with evolution, transformation and metamorphosis, the action of transforming; it is the change from one form to another, qualified as considerable. According to F. Choay & P. Merlin, 1988, "*social mutation is the transition from one type of society to another*".

<sup>33</sup> That is why, each time we use this term, we will measure the content of the concept and try to explain the social category to which we refer. This emphasis protects us from certain epistemological obstacles, such as the homogenization of the Fulani ethnic group. To consider the Fulani as a homogeneous group is to ignore the categorical complexities that exist.

<sup>34</sup> "*The Bamans, Nonos or Markas, the Dogons, the Bobos who did not have the physical or political means to oppose this hegemonic will became, for the most part, "land captives", Rimaybe*" (Barrier and Barrier 2002, 27).

<sup>35</sup> On the question of castes in general, see Gilles Holder (2001); Even if his article does not focus specifically on Fulani society, he refers to comparative accounts between Fulani and Dogon societies on, precisely, the men of Caste, by Lieutenant Louis Desplagnes, the first European to have tried in 1905 to describe Dogon society. This comparative analysis shows that men of castes in Fulani environments (griots, artisans, woodworkers, shoemakers, etc.) are part of the social hierarchy and fully play their role for the proper functioning of society. Most of them are certainly economically dependent on their masters (nobility) but in return they offer their know-how to the nobility so that the latter can be what they are. Holder Gilles, "Gens de caste" or "Personnes-Blanches"? Esquisse du statut de l'étranger natif du pays dogon ", In : *Journal des africanistes*, 2001, volume 71, fascicule 1. Les empreintes du renard pâle. . pp. 121-148 ; doi: <https://doi.org/10.3406/jafr.2001.1255> [https://www.persee.fr/doc/jafr\\_0399-0346\\_2001\\_num\\_71\\_1\\_1255](https://www.persee.fr/doc/jafr_0399-0346_2001_num_71_1_1255)

See also Tal Mari, (1997) on West African castes.

before French colonization, freed themselves from this domination over time and through the abolition of slavery under colonization<sup>36</sup>.

Nevertheless, the "nobles" or "free" in the literal sense (singular *dimo*; plur. *rimbe*)<sup>37</sup> are the politically dominant lineages.

In addition to these two main groups, which could be described as social classes<sup>38</sup>, there is a third component, the griot group (*Nyeenube*), which is considered to be the lower castes. The category of *Diawambé* (*cattle traders, courtiers and sometimes advisors to Fulani dignitaries*), which is transversal, and nowadays found in other areas in southern Mali, is frequently ignored.

In the history of Fulani society, the issue of slavery is essential. Landowners were generally sedentary and highly Islamized Fulani, hence their status as religious leaders (*marabouts*), while their captives were mostly from non-Islamic populations such as the *Bozos*, *Dogons* and *Bamans*. The tensions prevailing in central Mali, between Fulani and various sedentary communities, are partly due to this historical fact. Collective memory in a sedentary environment retains this ephemeral memory of the Fulani hegemony that enslaved several sedentary communities during the glory of the Fulani Empires in the 18th century. The recent Fulani jihadism in central Mali is perceived by other communities, mainly sedentary ones, as a sign of a willingness of the Fulani to restore their hegemony with all its corollaries, including raids and the "slavery" of the Black communities. In the collective consciousness of the people, as among the *Tuaregs*, the black communities, "*baleebe*" (not in terms of skin colour, but because of their Sudanese descent), are perceived in the same way as slaves, since most of their slaves are from these communities.

The conjunction of the question of Islam, slavery and the "enhancement" of the colony is closely established. Thus, with the abolition of slavery – which was one of the watchwords of the colonial conquest and the so-called civilizing mission of colonization – the *Marabouts* (*Modibaabe*) and local elites (*Ardo* and *Wehebe*), who drew their wealth

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<sup>36</sup> Despite the abolition of forced labor in French-speaking Africa, which implies slavery, through Law 46-645 known as the Houphouët Boigny Law of 11 April 1946, some Fulani and Songhai kingdoms, whose agricultural production and physical labor were the lifeblood of their economies, requested a special derogation from the colonist to keep their slaves so that they could fully discharge their fiscal duties (taxes and duties). Without slaves, there was no production. Without agricultural production, there was no money to pay taxes to the colonizer. This is the case, for example, of the *Boni* and *Hombori* leaders. This special exemption was granted to these two chiefdoms, which continued to exploit their slaves. (De Bruijn & Van Dijk, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> M. Brossier, C. Jourde & M. G. Cissé, "Relations de pouvoir locales, Logiques de violence et Participation politique en milieu peul (région de Mopti)", Raoul Dandurand Chair in Strategic and Diplomatic Studies-UQAM, Centre FrancoPaix en résolution des Conflits et missions de paix, Rapport du Projet Stabiliser le Mali, May, Montréal (Québec), May 2018.

<sup>38</sup> The notion of social class refers, in its broadest sense, to a large social group (which distinguishes it from simple professions) within a *de facto* rather than a *de jure* social hierarchy (which distinguishes it from orders and castes). Social class is a sociological concept that identifies a broad set of individuals who share certain criteria related to social position, such as income and occupation, and are hierarchical.

and prestige from the exploitation of their lands by the Rimaybes, believed that they had to reorganize themselves and find strategies to perpetuate their status and privileges without recourse to slavery.