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A NINETEENTH CENTURY FULBE STATE

BY CHARLOTTE A. QUINN

IN the last years of the nineteenth century, on the eve of European colonial rule, the Fulbe living between the Gambia River and the Futa Jalon revolted against their traditional Mandingo rulers. Under the leadership of Alfa Molo and his son, Musa, *Fulbe Firdu*¹ in the kingdoms of Tomani and Jimara destroyed the decadent Mandingo state system over much of the Gambia's south bank and south into Portuguese Guinea in one of the few determinative conquests in Gambia's history.

A new state emerged from this revolution, based on the political dissatisfactions and ethnic consciousness of the Fulbe, its institutions moulded by the political skills and vigorous personality of Musa Molo. The purpose of this study is to sketch briefly the history of the *Fulbe Firdu* kingdom, outlining its institutional framework (which until now has been omitted from general histories of the Senegambia) and indicating the policies by which Musa Molo constructed a state system that survived into the twentieth century, well after partition and the launching of the colonial era.

Perhaps this important nineteenth century Fulbe state has been neglected by historians because it straddled Anglo-French spheres of influence, later colonial borders and the Gambia-Senegal frontier, thus falling between the linguistic and political domains of scholarship which have often divided and restricted historical research in West Africa during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Sources are widely scattered. Notes on the history of the Fulbe kingdom made by British administrators earlier in this century are preserved in the Archives of the Gambia and the Local Administration Office in Bathurst. Where originals have disappeared I have relied on copies compiled and left there by Dr P. Gamble. Other material is to be found at the Public Record Office, London (CO/87, 879 series), in the French archives in Paris (Ministère de la France d'Outre-Mer—Sénégal, I), and in Dakar (Archives de la République du Sénégal). However, most of the information on the structure of the Fulbe state and the development of its institutions has come from oral interviews conducted by the author along the Gambia river in 1966, particularly those with Musa Molo's great-grandson, Lamin Bandeh, and his family.

In the fifteenth century, the Portuguese in Senegal reported contact with Fulbe from the Futa Jalon, south of the Gambia valley. Shortly thereafter Fulbe, under the leadership of Koli Tenguella, crossed the Gambia and conquered Mandingo territories in Bondu, establishing the

¹ A Fulbe group speaking a dialect of the Fulani language (see below).

Denyanke dynasty, which ruled for almost three centuries in the Futa Toro. This migration is remembered as an exodus. It is said that the army was so large that the streams which it crossed were drunk dry by the men, their horses and cattle. This early movement was followed by four centuries of migration to the Gambia region from the south, east and north, until by the nineteenth century the river valley and the districts surrounding it had become one of the most important areas of Fulbe settlement in West Africa. Many thousands of Fulbe lived in small scattered villages, particularly in the south Gambia kingdoms of Kantora, Tomani and Jimara, where Mandingo clans had ruled for over four centuries.²

In general the Fulbe migrants formally acknowledged the authority of the Mandingo and a mutually beneficial relationship existed between them. Mandingo landlords granted use of pasturage and protection in return for services, taxes or gifts. But, although both sides could profit from this association, the relationship sometimes became onerous. The Fulbe pastoralists often complained of heavy taxes and extortion. European travellers in the eighteenth century reported that the Fulbe were being exploited. Usually, if conditions became intolerable, the Fulbe would move elsewhere, hoping for better terms. However, a British visitor to a town in Jimara during the eighteenth century found that Fulbe there, claiming that their cattle had been stolen, had destroyed a nearby Mandingo community, selling its inhabitants as slaves.³ Nevertheless, Mandingo rule continued until the second half of the nineteenth century before it came under intensive attack and was swept entirely away.

The outbreak of the Fulbe revolt occurred around 1867. By then the Mandingo ruling clans had retreated into fortified towns from which they only emerged in armed groups to collect taxes and to cultivate their fields. Near the Mandingo capital in Jimara lived a Fulbe elephant hunter, allegedly of slave origin,⁴ named Molo Egue. He had attracted a large

² Although Fulbe living in the British colony of Gambia during the twentieth century numbered over 40,000 and the size of their herds was estimated at over 100,000 head (*Gambia 1962 and 1963* (London, 1964), 120), any guess as to the size of such a mobile population during the nineteenth century would be difficult. However, Legrand's estimate of 55,000 living in Kantora, Tomani and Jimara ('Le Fouladou', *La Géographie*, xxvi, ii (1912), 250) is supported by several other sources. Maps dating back to the eighteenth century show Fulkunda (Fulbe towns) scattered throughout the Mandingo states, ranging from a few huts to villages of several thousand people. (F. Moore, *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa* (London, 1738), 30; H. Hecquard, *Voyage sur la Côte et dans l'Intérieur de l'Afrique Occidentale* (Paris, 1855), 171 ff.; H. Jarrett, *A Geography of Sierra Leone and Gambia* (London, 1964), 42; H. Reeve, *The Gambia* (London, 1912), 39, 177).

³ F. Moore, 143.

⁴ *Fulbe Firdu* have been referred to as 'of slave origin' (D. Bayley, Notes on Ethnographic Divisions of the Fulas, 1939; L.G.O., Bathurst). There are varying accounts of Molo Egue's personal status. Some say he was born a slave (R. Legrand, 250; F. Brigaud, *Histoire Traditionnelle du Sénégal* (St Louis, 1962), 187), while another source claims that his mother was a slave of the Mandingo king of Jimara, his father a free man (handwritten account of an oral interview, author unknown, 1932, L.G.O., Bathurst). A member of the Balde *bulundu*, a 'free' Fulbe clan, claims that the name Bande, used by Musa and his descendants, is a corruption of Balde and was given to slaves of the Balde *bulundu* (J. Balde, Headmaster, Basse School, Basse, 21 Oct. 1965).

number of clients, friends and advisors to his settlement as he was well known for his bravery and resourcefulness.⁵

According to local traditions, the Mandingo king of Jimara one day took a sheep from Molo's herd and refused to return it. Resentment of the Mandingo landlords by this time must have been great, as the dispute, similar to many before it, quickly generalized. As the king of Jimara called on the Mandingo clans throughout the area to help him, the *Fulbe Firdu*, led by Molo, attacked his town and destroyed it. They were joined by groups of 'free' (*Lorobo*) Fulbe and the revolt spread to other districts.⁶

For a long time the Mandingo had paid tribute to the Fulbe of the Futa Jalon, a powerful Islamic state to the south, from which raiders yearly entered the Gambia kingdoms. Molo sent messengers to the Futa asking for help against the Mandingo. In response, the head of the Futa state sent his son with a band of warriors to join the *Fulbe Firdu*. It took the combined Fulbe forces some five years to complete the conquest of Tomani, Jimara and the cluster of surrounding chiefdoms which together were to become the new Fulbe state of Fuladu. During these five years Molo Egue's following grew and diversified. At its core were the *Fulba Firdu*, who now lived by raiding and warfare where before they had been cultivators and pastoralists. They were joined by other Fulbe groups from both north and south banks of the river, as well as Serahuli and Mandingo who were disenchanted with the old Mandingo aristocracy. By 1875 Molo's army was said to number some 20,000 men.⁷

At some point during this period Molo Egue changed his name to Alfa Molo.⁸ His capital was established at n'Dorna, now a small village in the Casamance. When the almani's son returned to the Futa Jalon, Alfa agreed to continue the tribute payments the Mandingo had sent in the past to the *almami* of the Futa state.⁹

The land which Alfa Molo ruled included some 5,000 square miles of fertile, rolling hills—low-lying and swampy near the Gambia, rising slowly to the escarpment of the Futa Jalon. Bounded by the Futa Jalon and Portuguese Guinea to the south, the river Koulountou (or Grey river) to the east, and the Gambia to the north, its elevation made it a clearly distinguishable geographic unit. To the west lay Jarra and Kabada and the hostile territories of the Muslim leader, Fodi Kabba.

⁵ Elephant hunting was a profession in which a man could achieve local fame and the wherewithal to build a following. The animals did great damage to crops and those who killed them were heroic figures in local society (R. Jobson, *The Golden Trade* (London, 1932, 194). Ivory was a valuable trade item along the Gambia.

⁶ C. K. Bande, Note on Alfa and Musa Molloh, G.A. (Gambia Archives, Bathurst), 1938; L. Bande, Sankulikunda, 23 Oct. 1965; T. Hopkins, Intelligence Report, Fulladu East, 1939, L.G.O.

⁷ Public Record Office, London: C.O./87/108, Kortright to Carnarvon, 29 Apr. 1875.

⁸ Alfa was a Fulbe title of respect, usually for a Muslim scholar, which could be adopted as a proper name. The usual confusion exists over the orthography of Alfa's second name, which was spelled variously Mozzo, Molloh, Mollo, and Molo. I have taken the last, which was used by the family itself as well as by several French sources.

⁹ C. K. Bande, Note on Alfa and Musa Molloh, G.A., 1938.

Although once covered by heavy forest, by the nineteenth century shifting cultivation had turned the country's vegetation into open orchard bush. The rich grazing land, with stunted bamboo groves scattered across it, offered good pasturage and few obstacles to the movements of the Fulbe pastoralists and fighting men. In the 1870s Fuladu reputedly possessed the richest economy along the Gambia. Cattle and cattle products predominated, and groundnuts, corn, wax, cotton and rubber were exported not only along the river to British traders in Bathurst, but also south to the French post of Sejou on the Casamance, and west to the Portuguese in Guinea.¹⁰

A remnant of the Mandingo clans which had once ruled the area remained in Fuladu after the Fulbe revolt. There were also Serahuli living near the Gambia and a scattering of Pakesse, Badiare, etc., on the fringes of Portuguese territory in the southwest. However, the population of Fuladu was dominated by the Fulbe.

There have been few studies of the independent Fulbe groups living in the Gambia during the nineteenth century. Although the Fulbe are often referred to as a homogeneous ethnic and cultural unit, in fact there were wide diversities existing between them arising from differences in origin, period of arrival in the area, and cultural contacts. Fulbe in the Gambia region spoke at least nine dialects within the West Atlantic group of languages (a section of Westermann's West Sudanic). Among these dialect groups there were occupational differences as striking as those between itinerant *Labo* (Mandingo: *Laibo*) woodworkers and the scholarly *Torodo* (Mandingo: *Toranko*), who lived in more or less permanent settlements. Some groups were thoroughly Islamized (*Fulbe Futo*, *Hamanabi*, *Torodo* and *Jawando*), others were in the process of conversion (*Fulbe Firdu* and *Habobo*), while others were firmly pagan (*Doro*, *Fulbe Kantora* and *Labo*).¹¹

Among the largest of the Fulbe groups living in Fuladu were the pastoral *Lorobo* (*Fulbe Burure*) who drifted through the state in great numbers. These Fulbe were the principal cattle owners of the district. They participated in the revolt against the Mandingo, but held aloof from Alfa Molo and his followers whose Fulbe antecedents they held to be less 'pure' than their own. Eventually Alfa Molo quarrelled with their leaders, and by the 1880s many *Lorobo* were leaving Fuladu.¹²

Also important to the Fulbe state were the many *Fulbe Futo*, originally from the Futa Jalon, who had settled south of the present international

¹⁰ C.O./87/129, Carter to Hay, 11 Nov. 1886; MMC (Archives of the Ministère de la France d'Outre-Mer, Paris), Sénégal IV, 106b, Governor to MMC, Dec. 1883.

¹¹ In the Gambia, these dialects fell into three general linguistic groupings: (1) *Fulbe Firdu*, *Jombo*, *Habobo*, *Lorobo*, *Hamanabi*; (2) *Torodo*, *Jawando*, *Laube*; (3) *Fulbe Futo*. See D. Bayley, Notes on the Ethnological Division of the Fulas, G. A., 27 Sept. 1939; D. Forde, *Report on the Need for Ethnographic and Sociological Research in the Gambia* (Bathurst, 1945). For a general classification of the Fulani language see J. Greenberg, *Studies in African Linguistic Classification* (New Haven, 1955), 10.

¹² F. Brigaud, 188; A. Rançon, *Dans la Haute-Gambie* (Paris, 1894), 68.

border in the southern districts of Fuladu. For many years they moved north in bands of warriors and agriculturalists towards the banks of the river to farm peanuts and raid the settlements of the Mandingo and Fulbe living there. Alfa Molo paid tribute to the leader of the *Fulbe Futo* state in the Futa Jalon.

The *Fulbe Firdu*, or *Jawarangko* as they were called by the Mandingo, provided the core of Alfa Molo's following. They had pushed north of the *Fulbe Futo* to live permanently in Tomani and Jimara, two of the ancient Mandingo kingdoms of the Gambia valley. Population statistics of the twentieth century show some 30,000 *Fulbe Firdu* living near the banks of the Gambia river. They were a semi-sedentary group, generally staying fifteen years or more in one locality, and had extensively inter-married with other ethnic groups.¹³

The Fulbe, like the Mandingo, were divided into castes: free men (*Fulbe Foro*); slaves (*Fulbe Diado*); so-called 'caste groups', griots (praise-singers), artisans, fishermen. Members of different castes often spoke different dialects.¹⁴

The *Fulbe Firdu* and the other Fulbe dialect groups were organized into patrilineal groups called *bulundu*. Although in some cases relationships were putative, all members of the *bulundu* bore the same name. Twelve *bulundu* have been identified in the Gambia region, one of them within the *Fulbe Firdu* and *Jombo* dialect groups sharing the names of Baldeh, Bandeh and Bah.¹⁵ There were obligations of mutual assistance between *bulundu* members, and certain wells, watering places for cattle and fishing grounds were considered *bulundu* property.

The *bulundu* were divided into extended family groups which were the units for migration and the activities of daily life. Succession and inheritance passed collaterally in the male line, while virilocal rules of marriage and the levirate (wife inheritance) further strengthened these patrilineal groups.

In each living group one man held the hereditary position of *ardo*. With the advice of elders of the community, he settled disputes within the group and represented it in its dealings with the outside world. The *ardo* had very little power and, according to an eighteenth century observer, 'ruled with so much Moderation, that every Act of Government seems rather an Act of the People than of one Man'.¹⁶ His particular responsibility was to arrange favourable terms with the owners of land

¹³ D. Forde, 15 ff.; J. Balde Basse, 21 Oct. 1965; D. Bayley, Notes on . . . the Fulas, 1939; W. B. Stanley, Notes on the Political Organization of the Fullahs of the Gambia, G. A., 1907; *The Gambia—1946* (London, 1948), 7.

¹⁴ R. Legrand, 253; F. Brigaud, 187; W. B. Stanley, Notes on . . . the Fullahs of the Gambia, 1907.

¹⁵ W. B. Stanley, Notes on . . . the Fullahs of the Gambia, 1907. The other *bulundu* that he identified were: Kandi, Kah; Umballo; Jah, Jamanka; Jowo; Buaru; Sidibi; Sow; Sabali; Saidai; Dem; Garno. This classification is similar to that in H. Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa* (New York, 1859), III, 113.

¹⁶ F. Moore, 30.

so that his group, moving into a new district, could herd its cattle and plant crops there profitably and peacefully.

Thus, before the *Fulbe Firdu* revolt, Fulbe living in the Gambia region were highly fragmented, with no tradition of centralized authority. Their dealings with other groups, both stranger and Fulbe, were highly particularized, and in general characterized by either accommodation or flight.

The state which emerged after 1867 was the achievement of Alfa Molo's son, Musa. Although Alfa continued as leader of the Fulbe movement in name from 1875 until his death in 1881, during this period it was Musa who turned the undisciplined followers of his father into the effective fighting force which carried the Fulbe conquest over much of the Gambia's south bank. It was he who built an administrative structure that brought the disparate social groupings within the population into a durable political unity. This state structure, which concentrated power in Musa's own hands, was imposed upon a myriad of pluralistic local institutions which had survived more or less intact from the days of Mandingo rule. Its salient features were a territorial hierarchy appointed by the king, paralleled by a corps of personal agents, responsible only to Musa Molo, which served as a check on the district leadership.¹⁷

Fuladu was divided into some forty districts administered by Musa's principal followers who, by 1875 included Mandingo, Serahuli and even Wolof from the north bank of the river, as well as Fulbe. Important among these district chiefs appointed by Musa Molo was a Mandingo trader, Falai Kora, whom Musa permitted to surround his town with high walls (generally the prerogative of the paramount), and who had married one of Musa's daughters. He was a wealthy man whose gifts to Musa included a gold chain 'that reached to the king's feet'.¹⁸

Among Musa's district leaders were also members of his own family. One of his brothers ruled a large western district and sometimes served as paramount when Musa was away fighting.¹⁹

Musa received the title of *modibo*, the district leaders that of *lamdotokosel*. With Musa's approval, their offices could be inherited within their families by brothers or sons. The district chiefs were responsible for recruiting and leading divisions of the army from within their territories. When Musa went to war he always took with him these powerful territorial leaders, leaving temporary replacements who were unlikely to challenge him in his absence.

¹⁷ The material on the organization of Musa's state which follows comes from interviews with Lamin Bande, Musa's great-grandson, and members of his family in Oct. 1965 at Sankulikunda and from observations made by N. Ashton in his Historical Report, North Bank Province, 20 Feb. 1944, G. A.; T. Hopkins, Intelligence Report—Fulladu East, 1939, L.G.O.; oral interviews conducted with I. Kouroubany, Kuoba Kunda, 21 Oct. 1965; al-hajj Kisima, Alahungari, 21 Oct. 1965; C. Bande, Kuntaur, 24 Oct. 1965; J. Balde, Basse, 21 Oct. 1965.

¹⁸ T. Hopkins, Intelligence Report—Fulladu East, 1939; J. Balde, Basse, 21 Oct. 1965

¹⁹ L. Bande, Sankulikunda, 23 Oct. 1965.

Village chiefs were chosen by seniority in local village councils. They held their offices, however, only with the king's approval. There were Mandingo, Serahuli and Fulbe town chiefs, reflecting the ethnic composition of their constituencies. They were held responsible for collecting taxes and settling local disputes.

Judicial cases appealed above the village level were tried by one of a group of influential headmen who were generally Fulbe, chosen by Musa himself to act as judges. They were not paid for their work, but undoubtedly received presents from litigants. The hearings over which they presided involved the stating of a complaint, a response by the defendant and evidence given by witnesses. No distinction was made in procedure between civil or criminal cases. Appeals from such courts were heard by Musa Molo, and when the issues were unclear the king would call in two or three counsellors to give their opinions. When a defendant had no witnesses to support him, trial by ordeal (licking a hot iron) was acceptable. It was difficult for a plaintiff to get a decision in his favour, or witnesses to testify for him, if he did not come from the same district as the defendant.

Parallel to the hierarchy of territorial chiefs and officials was a widespread network of Musa's personal agents, responsible to the king alone. Fulbe tax collectors gathered the taxes from local village chiefs for Musa, and large numbers of court eunuchs and other slaves, as well as Fulbe freemen, were employed as spies and messengers throughout the districts of the state. They were sent as ambassadors of the king to Bondu or the Futa, and when Musa was out of the country his place was sometimes filled by one of these agents, the chief (*lamdo* Boraba) of a town near his residence.²⁰

Slaves held important position in the king's household. One (*Reynohe*) was in charge of all the king's properties. Another (*Dakan*), a eunuch, guarded the women's quarters; another held responsibility for the king's stables and was said to be very powerful within the household.

Musa held supreme military and civil authority in the state and dominated all aspects of its peoples' lives. He was at once adroitly flexible and crudely domineering. He could be viciously cruel and yet coolly appraising of the political options open to him. He had a lively mind and a passionate curiosity about the physical world around him. However, there is no evidence that he gave much time to the religious questions that dominated the minds of many in the Senegambia during the period of the Muslim *jihād*. His personality, as it emerges from written and oral accounts, was an important element in maintaining the unity of the state. The British noted that, unlike the representatives of traditional segmentary political systems with whom they generally had to deal, Musa made all decisions on behalf of the state himself: 'He is undoubtedly self-reliant and did not appear to consult in any way the people who came with him,

²⁰ W. Stanley, Notes on . . . the Fulas of the Gambia, 1907.

but decided all matters which we discussed without reference to any of his followers.'²¹ Musa claimed absolute power over all who lived in Fuladu. No one could trade without his consent: 'This ground belongs to me. . . Anybody who has hides and nuts is under my command.'²²

Musa maintained his position with a ruthless vigour that alienated many and left him an evil reputation in both oral tradition and contemporary European documents. A source of considerable friction between him and the British on MacCarthy Island, adjacent to Fuladu, was his treatment of slaves and women, many of whom fled to the British settlement from his court. The French deplored his habit of summarily executing all whom he thought would oppose him even at some future date. Among the best known of his victims were the members of his own family.²³

From the time of his father's death, Musa's leadership was challenged from within the state. Traditional Fulbe patterns dictated that a man's brothers succeed him in his political roles and inherit his goods. Thus when Alfa Molo died in 1881, his brother Bakary became king of Fuladu and took possession of Alfa's cattle and goods. Between Musa and the kingship stood another uncle and two older brothers as well.

Musa retreated south away from his uncle's chief town and established himself at Hamdallai. He was known as a shrewd politician and adroit bargainer, and by 1883 he had placed the Casamance districts of Fuladu under nominal French protection, losing none of his own sovereignty in the process.²⁴ Soon, with the help of a French column, he had established his authority again throughout the kingdom. Together, he and his European allies drove his uncle into exile. He killed other members of the family who stood in his way and in 1893 proclaimed himself king of Fuladu. At the same time he ended the tribute payments to the Futa Jalon.²⁵

However, elements of Musa's own following proved to be undependable. During the 1870s the nomadic Fulbe of Kabu (*Lorobo*) challenged his control, but were defeated and their leaders killed. A decade later they, and other Fulbe began moving in great numbers to the north bank of the

²¹ Governor (Bathurst) to Secretary of State, 7 June 1901, Musa Molloh Papers, G.A.

²² C.O./76/128, Hay to Rowe, 20 Apr. 1886, enclosing interview 29 Mar. 1886 with Musa Molloh.

²³ See F. Brigaud, 188, for example. A play written by Momadou Lamin Sedat Jobe, 'King Musa Mollo', performed and circulated in mimeograph form along the Gambia during the 1960s perpetuates the tales on which this reputation is based. Here and in oral traditions it is said that Musa performed experiments on slaves, cutting unborn children from the womb, etc., as well as diminishing the power of those whom he considered to be rivals by murdering their children (C. Bande, Kuntaur, 24 Oct. 1965; C. n'Dow, Georgetown, Oct. 1965, oral interview, author unknown, 1932, L.G.O.; T. Hopkins, Intelligence Report—Fulladu East, 1939).

²⁴ MMC, Sénégal IV 106b, Governor to MMC, Dec. 1883; 108b, Governor to Berdrandon, 17 Feb. 1892; P. Marty, *Études sur l'Islam au Sénégal*, I (1917), 373 ff.

²⁵ C. K. Bande, Note on Alfa and Musa Molloh, 1938; General Staff, War Office, *Military Report on the Colony and Protectorate of the Gambia* (London, 1926); I. Kouroubany, Kuoba Kunda, 21 Oct. 1965.

Gambia, into Niani, Wuli and Sandugu. They complained of the heavy taxes that were being imposed on them to support the warfare Musa had begun against the Muslims.²⁶

Hostility against the old Mandingo ruling classes which had unified Musa's following in the early years of the Fulbe revolt dissipated with years of continuous victory. During the 1880s marabouts of the Muslim *jihād* fulfilled the role of 'the enemy without', while by edict and assassination Musa worked to stabilize the state structure within Fuladu.

During the 1860s and 1870s, as the Fulbe kingdom was expanding, *Torodo* Fulbe and Mandingo Muslims had attacked pagan Mandingo rulers to the west of Fuladu on both north and south banks of the Gambia, in an effort to revive Islamic beliefs and to establish a purified Muslim state. Initially the *jihād* was so successful that Islam swept the north bank of the river and on towards the Senegal, toppling traditional rulers everywhere in its path. Attempts were made to bring the war to the south bank, but these failed.²⁷ Then, in the late 1870s, a Mandingo marabout named Fodi Kabba and his father, Fodi Bakary, settled in Fuladu. They soon attracted a large following. Some months later Fodi Kabba travelled back again to the north bank of the river, hoping, it is said, to recruit allies there. He left his village and family under Musa's protection. However, fearing the Muslims' power, Musa attacked the settlement and destroyed it, killing Kabba's father and kidnapping his women and children.²⁸ On hearing of this, Kabba returned with warriors from the north and fought his way through the river districts of Fuladu, attacking Fulbe and Mandingo alike. Although his campaign was directed against Musa's followers and anyone who stood in his way, he may have made the Molos' task of consolidation easier by shattering what remained of traditional institutions without making any attempt to replace them. He left a vacuum of power on the frontiers of the expanding Fulbe state into which Musa quickly moved. Fodi Kabba settled on the border between Jarra and Kiang, west of the Fulbe kingdom, and from there continued to raid Fulbe and Mandingo villages within reach of his highly mobile and well-equipped bands.²⁹

Alfa Molo had already been exposed to Islam before Kabba's arrival. Traditions in his family claim that al-Ḥājj 'Umar, the Tijani leader of the

²⁶ F. Brigaud, 188; R. Legrand, 250; A. Rançon, 68.

²⁷ An attempt by the leader of the north bank *jihād* to invade the south bank kingdoms in 1863 was beaten off by the Bandingo of Kiang (Kwinella). The reform movement that appeared in the coastal areas of Combo on the south bank addressed itself to local issues. Its leadership, recruited within the district, held itself aloof from the marabouts fighting elsewhere in the Senegambia.

²⁸ As Musa's son has written: 'Foday and King Alpha were bosom friends, but in suspicious terms . . . both were ruling the same empire . . .' (C. K. Bande, Note on Alfa and Musa Molloh, 1938).

²⁹ See 'A History of Fuladu East, c. 1932, Local Government Office, Bathurst (L.G.O.); T. Hopkins, Intelligence Report—Fulladu East, 1939; C. K. Bande, Note on Alfa and Musa Molloh, 1938; M. Kurubali, Oct. 1939, L.G.O.

Senegal, spent several days with Alfa before the Fulbe revolt against the Mandingo. Alfa is said to have taken the Tijani oath after instruction by 'Umar himself. Soon after this Alfa allied himself with the devout Muslims of the Futa Jalon and assumed the Islamic title-name of Alfa. Nevertheless, for over twenty years his son, Musa, fought against the expansion of Muslim rule, whether led by fellow Fulbe or the Mandingo.³⁰

Eye-witnesses describe the desultory character of this struggle on the south bank of the river which ended regularly with the beginning of the rainy season and involved little or no changes in territorial jurisdiction. Fighting was carried on by small bands of warriors who avoided open conflict, preferring to plunder villages, extort exorbitant taxes and commandeered part of each year's harvest.³¹ The cumulative suffering of the population over the period was great. The Sanneh clan of eastern Fuladu, for example, lost the district chiefship when Alfa Molo killed the clan head holding office at that time. The dead chief's eldest son was killed in turn by Fodi Kabba for refusing to convert to Islam and join the Marabouts against the Fulbe.³²

Each side expended vital energies in the struggle, which soon became a stalemate. The Muslims never constructed a viable state structure on the south bank of the river, and the Fulbe were unable to complete their conquest of the lower Gambia valley. Although in the bitterness of internal rivalries within the Fulbe state, Musa's brother, Decore, was persuaded to 'surrender himself to God and his messenger', joining Fodi Kabba with 200 followers, neither side was able to win a decisive victory.³³

Nevertheless, despite dissatisfaction among the pastoral Fulbe, this continuing warfare provided a convenient outlet for Musa's political ambitions as well as a means of supporting his army of followers who came to live off the spoils of his wars.³⁴ Not only did he fight with Fodi Kabba and the Muslims, but he also devastated Kantora, the Mandingo state east of Fuladu, which had once been the trade centre of the upper Gambia river, leaving its population decimated and its economy destroyed.³⁵

Musa tried but never succeeded in establishing himself on the north bank of the Gambia, although he involved himself deeply in its politics. On occasion he sent troops to support factional leaders among the Muslims

³⁰ C. K. Bande, Note on Alfa and Musa Molloh, 1938. According to A. Le Chatelier (*L'Islam dans l'Afrique Occidentale* (Paris, 1899), 172), Islamic observances began to fall off soon after 'Umar's departure, although Saad Bouh-Mahfoud and a Mandingo Marabout, Cherif Bekka, later joined Musa's court for a time (P. Marty, 38).

³¹ Imam Ba Fofana, Sankwia, 19 Oct. 1965; T. Hopkins, Intelligence Report, 1939; W. Patchett, Report on Fodi Cabba, 3 Nov. 1890, Government House, Bathurst.

³² D. Sanneh, Note to Senior Commissioner, Bathurst, 27 Sept. 1945, L.G.O.

³³ Mitford to Knutsford, 10 Oct. 1889, G.A.

³⁴ Benefits from the continuing warfare with the Muslims have also been noted by P. Marty (373): 'Ces luttes contre l'étranger avaient eu pour resultat curieux de rapprocher les castes de nobles et de clients, vaillamment unis dans la lutte, et d'amener ainsi chez les Foulas une certaine fusion sociale.'

³⁵ History of Fulladu East, 1932, L.G.O.

who were fighting there for control of the *jihād*, and as more and more Fulbe left Fuladu to settle in Niani and Wuli, he became increasingly ambitious to extend his authority there.³⁶

Among these disaffected emigrants from Fuladu was the well-known Muslim scholar, Simotto Moro, a *Torodo* Fulbe who, like Fodi Kabba, had attracted a large group of disciples while living in Fuladu during the 1860s. By the end of the decade, Musa is said to have seen that Simotto Moro could become a threat to his monopoly of power in Fuladu. Before action was taken, however, the Muslim leader crossed the Gambia with several thousand followers and installed himself on the Wuli-Sandugu border. There he established Toubacouta, a heavily fortified town which became a centre of learning and of trade, and attracted Fulbe from the south bank who were disenchanted with Musa's leadership. After Simotto Moro's death in 1881, his son and successor involved himself in French-Marabout politics. He welcomed to his town Mamadu Lamine, a Muslim leader from Bondu, who had twice been defeated by the French. A French column pursued Lamine to Toubacouta. Musa Molo, as an ally of France, seized the opportunity to offer his assistance, crossing the river with an army of 2,000 men to punish Fulbe fugitives from his kingdom and to seek political advantages on the north bank of the river. The attack on Toubacouta took place in 1886. The French and their allies succeeded in taking the town and, according to one tradition, Musa himself disposed of Mamadu Lamine by decapitation.³⁷ After a time during which Musa and his men lived by raiding the agricultural communities of Niani, Musa accepted a commission from a dissident faction of Muslims in the eastern part of the state to kill their chief, Madu Jowla, replacing him with a leader of the rebel group.³⁸ Although Musa succeeded in killing Jowla, he did not remain long on the north bank of the river to enjoy his role as king-maker. There was unrest at home and, as the 1880s ended, changing conditions in the Senegambia forced him to shift from the politics of military conquest to manoeuvring for survival within the dimensions of European colonial rule.

³⁶ C.O./87/113, Rowe to Hicks Beach, 15 Aug. 1879; MMC, Sénégal IV, 87b, Lt. Col. Gallieni, 'Deux Campagnes au Soudan Français', *Le Tour du Monde* (Paris, 1889), 401. In 1879 Alfa Molo had joined the *almani* of the Futa Jalon and the king of Bondu in a campaign which took them through Kantora, east of Fuladu, and across the river to Wuli and Niani. The 'alliance of the three kings' was short-lived, however. The Fulbe of the Futa sold out their allies, who were defeated by the Mandingo of Niani as a result (War of the Three Kings, Court Clerk, Sandu, L.G.O.; A. Rançon, 115 ff.).

³⁷ A. Rançon, 43 ff.; N. Ashton, Historical Report, NBP, 1944, G. A.; M. Lamin, Court Clerk, Sandu, L.G.O. P. Marty, on the other hand, writes that it was Musa's *griots* who surprised Lamine as he fled from Toubacouta and killed him (373).

³⁸ R. Legrand, 250. According to the French traveller, A. Rançon, Musa's attack on Mamdu Jowla (Mody Fatouma) had been instigated by the French who were eager to place a candidate of their own in the chiefship of Sandugu (108 ff.). In an account preserved from the files (now in L.G.O.), of the Court Clerk, Saneu Musa is said to have lured Jowla to his camp with courteous messages and to have killed a bull in his honour. Then, seizing the Muslim leader, Musa threw a rope around his neck and ordered 'younger men to pull until the king was dead'.

During the early 1880s French, British and even Portuguese competed for an alliance with Musa Molo. After negotiating with all three for their support against a group of dissident villages on the borders of his kingdom, Musa formally acknowledged the partition of the Senegambia by signing a treaty with the French. He agreed to live on their side of the international border and to turn over half his tax revenues to them. In 1892 French troops supported him in putting down the rebellion of his brother Decore. In 1901 Musa joined a combined French-British force in the final defeat of his old enemy, Fodi Kabba, and the destruction of the marabouts' last fortress.³⁹ Thus, Musa used his French connection to remove the last rivals to his supremacy in Fuladu.

For several years Musa was left to rule his kingdom as before. The French found him useful in keeping order in Fuladu while they turned their attention to pacification elsewhere, although they had doubts whether in the end he would prove a valuable ally or an endless source of trouble.⁴⁰ Other observers were less sanguine about the alliance: 'il (Musa) utilise à son profit et avec un art consommé toutes les ressources administratives et militaires françaises de la région, et, sous notre couvert, tue son frère Dekori, chasse son oncle Bakari, soumet les rebelles, les dissidents . . . tous ceux qui n'admettent pas sa tyrannie. . . .'⁴¹

Nevertheless, as the net of colonial administration drew closer around the Senegambia, Musa's options became fewer. French residents placed at his court complained that they still had no influence on his actions, and that his methods were increasingly distasteful. They reported that thirty villages had moved out of French territory to the British and Portuguese colonies during the 1901-3 period alone because of Musa's 'tyranny'.⁴² Finally, in 1903 it was decided that a French military post would be set up at Hamadallai, Musa's capital town, to establish a measure of control over the independent Fulbe leader.

After a heated confrontation with the Commandant of Sejou (French Casamance), Musa demanded to see the French Governor at St Louis to protest against the decision. Before this could be arranged, realizing that effective power was shifting to the French, Musa unexpectedly deserted his town, taking several hundred women, clients, slaves and his cattle with him. As a parting gesture he burned Hamdallai, n'Dorna (Alfa Molo's town) and other villages along the way, cutting the telegraph cables and temporarily isolating the Casamance from the French colonial centre at St Louis. Although the French greeted his departure with relief, they continued to administer Fuladu through the structure

³⁹ MMC, Sénégal IV, 107c, MMC to MAE, Oct. 1888; Senegal IV, 131, Governor-General AOF to MMC, 22 June 1903; History of Fulladu East, 1932, L.G.O.; P. Marty, 374.

⁴⁰ MMC Sénégal IV, 108b, Governor to Bertrandon, 17 Feb. 1892.

⁴¹ P. Marty, p. 373. Marty claims that Musa's part in killing Mamadou Lamine was the only 'return' the French ever had from their troublesome ally.

⁴² MMC, Sénégal IV, 131, Governor-General AOF to MMC, 22 June 1903.

of chiefdoms that Musa had created, keeping his appointees in their old positions.⁴³

Musa re-established himself at Kessellikunda in British territory and proposed to continue his authoritarian rule as before. In 1902 the British administration had formally extended the Protectorate Ordinance (of 1894) to British Fuladu, but although Musa had ostensibly given up his lands in British Gambia at the time of partition, he had continued to appoint the chiefs of the districts without interference. After his arrival in 1903, the British left Musa very much alone, even ignoring reports that he continued to dabble in the slave trade. They paid him a yearly stipend of £500, nearly ten times that of any other chief along the river.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, without his army and removed from his old power base in southern Fuladu, Musa had little scope for his energies. There was increasing friction with the British administration over its refusal to return Musa's runaway wives and slaves. Finally, in 1919 tales of 'atrocities' committed at his court provided the administration with sufficient excuse to exile Musa Molo from the Gambia to Sierra Leone. His compound at Kessellikunda was torn down and 126 women freed.⁴⁵

Musa returned to the Gambia in 1923, eight years before his death. Many changes had taken place, although his appointees still held their positions within the colonial administration. Travelling Commissioners had established courts operating under British law on both banks of the river. Mission schools had been founded on MacCarthy Island and on the mainland. Warriors were now farming peanuts and the economy was prospering. Always flexible, Musa adapted himself to the new society. An attractive description exists of his last days, his compound surrounded by flourishing fields of grain and peanuts. Numbers of young men from both French and British Fuladu continued to come each year, as was customary, to work for a few days on his fields.⁴⁶ Playing the role of 'grand seigneur' and wealthy trader, Musa retained his flair for the dramatic, and is remembered by the older generation in the Gambia today riding into the colonial capital of Bathurst on a large white horse whose tail was dyed scarlet with kola juice.⁴⁷ A photograph shows him tall, broad-shouldered and dark-skinned, dressed in embroidered blue robes with Islamic amulets encased in leather hanging about his neck.⁴⁸ Despite the nominal adherence to Islam which he still maintained, he sent a number of his innumerable children to Anglican or French Protestant schools in Bathurst and was on excellent terms with Christian missions in the area.⁴⁹

⁴³ MMC, Sénégal IV, 131, Governor-General AOF to MMC, 22 June 1903; D. Bandeh, Note on Musa Molloh, n.d. (c. 1938), L.G.O.; F. Brigaud, 189.

⁴⁴ Annual Report, Commissioner North Bank Province, 1894, G.A.; F. Bisset-Archer, *The Gambia Colony and Protectorate* (1906), (London, 1967), 197. The chief of Essau (north bank) received £83 p.a., the rest far less.

⁴⁵ Report on Musa Mollo, Commissioner Upper River Province, n.d. (c. 1919), G.A.

⁴⁶ P. Marty, 375-6.

⁴⁷ A. Kharvalho, Bathurst, 3 Nov. 1965.

⁴⁸ F. Bisset-Archer, p. 87; Governor to Secretary of State, 7 June 1901, G.A.

⁴⁹ P. Marty, 376.

Thus, the state that had emerged from the Fulbe rebellion against traditional Mandingo rule was absorbed by the European colonial administrations which had divided the Senegambia between them. Nevertheless, for over thirty years Musa had succeeded in uniting a divided and heterogeneous population within an economically prosperous and relatively stable political unit. Although the Fulbe state was submerged in the larger politics of the colonial and post-independence periods, Musa Molo's had been a brilliant, if ephemeral, attempt to unify the Gambia valley.

SUMMARY

About 1867 Fulbe living in the Mandingo kingdoms of Tomani and Jimara on the south bank of the Gambia river revolted against their Mandingo landlords. Under their leader, Alfa Molo, the Fulbe went on to destroy the decadent Mandingo state system over much of the Gambia's south bank, and south into Portuguese Guinea, in one of the few determinative conquests in Gambia history. A new state emerged from this revolution which was based on the political dissatisfactions and ethnic consciousness of the Fulbe, its institutions moulded by the political skills and vigorous personality of Alfa's son, Musa Molo.

Before 1867, the Fulbe living in the Gambia region were politically highly fragmented, having no tradition of centralized authority. Their dealings with other groups, both stranger and Fulbe, were highly particularized and characterized generally by either accommodation or flight.

The structure of the new state founded by Musa Molo concentrated power in the hands of a paramount. It was composed of a territorial hierarchy appointed by Musa Molo, paralleled by a corps of personal agents responsible only to Musa, serving as a check on the district leadership. This state structure was imposed upon a myriad of pluralistic local institutions which had survived more or less intact from the days of Mandingo rule.

Hostility towards the old Mandingo ruling classes which unified Musa's following in the early years of the Fulbe revolt dissipated with their continuous victories. For the following decade the marabouts leading a Muslim *jihād* in the Senegambia fulfilled the role of the enemy without, as by edict and assassination Musa worked to stabilize his kingdom.

Although both Fuladu and its Muslim neighbour states were superseded by European colonial rule at the beginning of the twentieth century, Musa Molo had made a brilliant attempt to unify the Gambia valley during the chaotic last years of the pre-colonial period.