That Desert is Our Country: Tuareg Rebellions and Competing Nationalisms in Contemporary Mali (1946-1996)

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On 28 June 1990, a group of armed fighters attacked the army barracks and the Arrondissement office in Tidaghmene, in the Cercle Menaka. Simultaneously, another group of fighters ambushed a convoy of four cars belonging to the American NGO World Vision. These actions were the start of what is now known in Mali as ‘the second Tuareg rebellion’, or ‘the problems of the North’. They were the result of almost two decades of organisation and preparation in exile in Libya and Algeria by the tanekra movement.

The rebellion would last until March 1996, when the conflict was ceremoniously ended with ‘the Flame of Peace’, the burning of around three thousand weapons, handed in by the rebel fighters, at a Timbuktu marketplace. This six year period will be presented and analysed in the following two chapters.

One can discern four different but partly overlapping phases in the conflict, the first two of which will be dealt with in this chapter. The last two will be dealt with in the next chapter. I have labelled the first phase, from June 1990 to January 1991, the ‘real rebellion’. In this first half year, a united rebel movement fought the Malian army, inflicting it a series of military defeats. This period will be covered in the first part of this chapter. In January 1991, a second phase started, which lasted until 1994. This three year period can best be characterised by confusion, factionalism and constant negotiation and I have therefore labelled it the ‘confused rebellion’. Both the Malian state and the Tamasheq movement were faced with internal conflicts and changes. I will describe and analyse this complex set of alterations in the second part of this chapter. In the next and final chapter, the third and fourth phases of the conflict will be described and analysed. I have spread the four phases over two chapters for simple reasons of convenience. Therefore, conclusions on the rebellion will be drawn at the end of the last chapter only.

One of the main aims of this thesis is to show the workings of contemporary Tamasheq political life and organisation. Therefore, much attention will be paid to the internal processes the rebel movement underwent during the second rebellion. The movement progressed from a strengthened unity, which had long been sought, during the first months of the rebellion, towards factionalism over the course of the second phase of the conflict, leading to extreme fragmentation on the basis of existing clan and faction structures and to increased violence in the third phase, and, finally, reunification through coercion during the last phase of the conflict.

As in the previous chapters, we will find a number of key groups in the political landscape of the Kel Tamasheq – the išhumar, the intellectuals,
and the tribal chiefs. These three groups were not internally homogenous. One can differentiate between those who were in favour of rebellion and those who were against it; those, within the rebellion, who were 'hardliners' in favour of independence, and those who were 'moderates' in favour of autonomy within Mali; and finally, those who were in favour of social changes within Tamasheq society and those who were in favour of strengthening the existing structure of society.

Within the movement, the various opinions on its goals were expressed in various break-ups, violent conflicts and renewed alliances. The reaction of the Malian Government, army and population oscillated between violent outbursts on the one hand, and reasoned discussions on on what the rebellion was about and who the rebels were on the other hand. In the six years the rebellion lasted, all issues which have been central throughout this thesis were played out in violent and magnified ways. Within the movement, discussions and conflicts centered on the desirability and realisation of a Tamasheq nation-state, and on the nature of Tamasheq social structure and the need to change or preserve it. While these were the discussions and conflicts of opinion, the events in the field showed other results – the inescapability of clan thinking, structure and hierarchy, and the primacy of (fictive) kinship over imagination of a nation on a territorial basis. Within the context of the Malian nation-state, its government and its inhabitants, the Tamasheq rebellion provoked a revival of the Malian national imagination and the return of stereotyped images of self and other, of Malian and Kel Tamasheq. In practice, but also in national discourse, the rebellion also contributed to a change in the political shape of the Malian state from a dictatorship to a multi-party democracy.

These political divisions were expressed in the various rebel movements which came into existence after the revolt broke out. Many of these movements also coincided with various clans in Northern Mali. The story told here is one of factionalism, alliances and various political currents. In order to prevent confusion, I will here shortly present the main movements and the differences which created them.
### Table 6: An overview of the movements

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<td>Front Populaire de Libération de l'Azawad</td>
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<td>MPA</td>
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<td>BAUA Base Autonome Unifié de l’Azawad</td>
<td>August 1994, after the military conflict between MPA and ARLA</td>
<td>Protection of tewsitien</td>
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<td>FNLA Front National de Libération de l’Azawad</td>
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<td>MPGK Mouvement Patriotique Ganda Koy</td>
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<td>Defending the sedentary population of the North</td>
<td>Songhay and other sedentary population of the North Kel Tamasheq bellah</td>
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The ‘real’ rebellion
June to December 1990

The first days

The start of the rebellion was originally planned for the year 1992 or 1993. Nevertheless, some men and material had already been moved to Mali in 1989. Three battalions had been created– the Kidal battalion, the Menaka battalion and the Gao battalion. However, the Malian army had been informed of the tanekra plans. In May 1990, members of the Kidal and Gao battalions were arrested, and their arms depots confiscated. Only the Menaka battalion of about 30 men was left unharmed, but it had very few arms. The commander of the Kidal battalion, Iyad ag Ghali, had managed to escape and fled to the Menaka battalion, based in the village of Ikadewan. Upon arrival in Ikadewan, Iyad ag Ghali was accused of treason by the men of the Menaka battalion and nearly executed. After convincing the Menaka battalion of his good intentions and diverting execution by his comrades, Iyad and the Menaka commanders discussed the situation the movement found itself in.

With some of their most important leaders arrested and their arms confiscated, the fighters could either cancel all plans and start from scratch, or they could move forward in attack. They chose the latter option and set the start of the rebellion for the fourth of July, the celebration of ‘aid al-fitr, the end of Ramadan. But this plan failed as well. On 27 June 1990, a Malian border patrol looking for smugglers intercepted a rebel vehicle carrying men and arms. After a short fight, the patrol managed to immobilise the vehicle, while its occupants escaped. Apart from arms, the vehicle contained a document on the plan of attack. Members of the movement, stationed in their regions of origins were supposed to attack the administrative and military posts in their area simultaneously at 04:00 PM. The intercepted car was to attack the military camp at Kidal itself.

Arrests followed, but someone must have been able to communicate the interception and subsequent arrests to the Menaka battalion at Ikadewan. The next day, 28 June 1990, the Menaka battalion came into action, attacking the administrative posts and military camp in Tidalghmene. At the wells of Tejerert, four cars belonging to the NGO World Vision were taken over. In Menaka, the same NGO, as well as the Italian organisation Zooconsult lost eight more cars. The next day, the administrative posts at Ikadewan were attacked. The attacks were successful in their aim – seizing matériel, as the movement had lost most of its stocks. The administrative posts and military camps were looted for arms, food and petrol, providing the movement with the necessary means

to start their fight.\footnote{Nous, Touaregs du Mali... (Paris 1990).}
After their successful attacks the rebels retreated to Mount In-Taykaren, a solitary mountain at the southern edge of the Tamesna plain in the northern part of the \textit{Cercle} Menaka. The rebels even left a note for the Malian army indicating where they could be found, and inviting them to combat.

\textbf{The first six months}

Between June and October 1990, the rebels were constantly on the move, attacking army camps and administrative posts on all sides of the Adagh and parts of the Azawad. On 2 July, the military post at Tin-Essako was attacked, leaving three soldiers and one rebel dead. On 16 July, the rebels attacked the gendarmerie at Tarkimt. And thus it continued: 28 July, the military post at Abeïbara was attacked; 11 August, the military post at Tin-Zaouaten; 15 August those at Tadjoujemet; 17 August, those at Telabit; 25 August, a military convoy near In-Ekker was ambushed. In September, attacks on the military posts at Abeïbara, In-Tedeyni, and In-Ghar followed. Skirmishes between rebel and army units occurred at the end of September and the beginning of October at Tadjoujemet, and Tadjnout in the Tigharghar mountains.\footnote{Based on ag Baye, 'Chronologie des événements liés à la Rébellion Touarègue au Mali' (chronologie Cheick), in annex Klute (2001), op. cit.; Boilley (1999), op. cit., 446-47; Klute (2001), op. cit., 440-41.}

The tactics of the rebels were to attack as often as possible in as many different places as possible. The underlying strategy was first of all to give the impression that they were numerous and well-organised, thus confusing the enemy, and secondly, to secure the Algerian border in order to ensure access to supplies. Except for Tarkimt, all the attacked military posts were situated in the Adagh, near the border with Algeria, the same region of combat as during \textit{Alfellağa}. The Malian army's withdrawal from the border area would secure the rebels free passage to Algeria to stock supplies, bring wounded or fatigued fighters to a safe haven and, in the case of necessity, to retreat altogether. A third aim was to seize more matériel – weapons, ammunition, petrol, cars and food – as these were still severely lacking and the number of rebels had increased over the weeks. In the first few months of rebellion, the practically unarmed fighters managed to take a large number of arms from their adversaries, and contrary to their predecessors, the \textit{ifuļaġen} of 1963, the fighters knew how to handle these modern weapons and could thus successfully pursue their campaign.

The tactics of the rebels worked in their favour. All the attacks mentioned above ended in victory for the rebels, who lost few of their number compared to the losses of the Malian Army.\footnote{Cheick ag Baye estimates the number of military casualties on Malian side in the first half year of the rebellion at 441, and casualties on rebel side at 28. 'Chronologie Cheick'. Klute estimates the number of military casualties at 429 and rebel casualties at 17 during this period, 'Opferzahlen (Mali)', annex Klute (2001). These figures are highly in favour of the rebels and} The Malian armed
forces, present in the Kidal area with around 500 soldiers, were completely on the defensive and no match for the rebels. Contrary to the Tamasheq fighters who had years of training and combat experience in guerilla warfare in Lebanon and Chad, the Malian soldiers had hardly any training and no combat experience to mention.444 The heavy and slow material employed in the Adagh by the Malian forces – armoured cars and artillery – were no match for the fast and agile four-wheel-drive vehicles used by the experienced Tamasheq drivers.

In 1963, the army’s heavy armoured cars and jeeps proved almost useless against the ifulagen in the Adagh, except in the wadis. The camel mounted ifulagen could quickly withdraw over terrain inaccessible to the tanks and jeeps of the army. This time, the rebels also mostly made use of cars, transformed into so called ‘tecnicals’ – all-terrain vehicles, equipped with extra fuel and water tanks, mounted with heavy machine guns and rocket launchers, and transporting an independently operating fighter unit of around twelve men.445 Thus, one could think both sides were equally disadvantaged but this was not the case. The rebel drivers were all former ishumar smugglers who knew every small track navigable by car. The Malian soldiers, both in 1963 and in 1990, did not know these tracks and easily got lost when leaving the main roads.

A second difference in experience was the ability to kill. The Malian soldiers were trained for regular combat in large attacks with coordinated fire. In practice, this means a soldier does not learn how to aim and shoot as a sniper, but to ‘spray’ bullets in sustained fire, creating a wide ‘death zone’. The Tamasheq fighters were trained to aim and shoot at single enemies. In addition, the Tamasheq fighters were trained and experienced in man-to-man combat with personal arms. The first attacks at Menaka and Tidaghmene were made with a highly restricted number of rifles, and mostly by men armed with knives and traditional swords. To this form of fighting, in which the Tamasheq excelled, the Malian soldiers had no answer.

A last, but not the least important element in favour of the rebels that should be mentioned is the motivation to fight. The Malian soldiers were only professional soldiers in the literal sense. They were paid for their duty. A stable income, a career prospect and a few advantages in civil life were the largest instigations for a Malian to join the army under the military regime of Moussa Traoré. Patriotic motives, even an acutely felt necessity to fight, were not considered relevant. The opposite goes for the Tamasheq fighters. The ishumar did not fight for a salary, but for a cause; the

should be taken as a rough indication only. It might, however, very well be that actual casualty rates were at about 10:1 in favour of the rebels during this period.

444 After Alfellaga, Mali had fought one four-day war with its neighbour Burkina Faso between 25 and 29 December 1985. A ceasefire was signed before most troops had arrived at the front.

445 The name ‘tecnical’ is derived from the name of a Russian heavy machine gun, which was first used on all terrain vehicles by Somali fighters. The technique of technicianals is not new or unique to the Tamasheq fighters, who had first learned their use in Chad, where the troops of Goukouni Wedey and Idriss Deby made use of them.
liberation of the Tamasheq country from Malian occupation. Having started their rebellion without any means at their disposal and with only a small number of fighters, they had but two options; to fight and win or to perish in retreat and abandon the uprising with all the consequences that would bring to the Tamasheq community.

Where years of preparation had not been able to establish unity in the ranks of the tanekra, the actual fighting in these first months of rebellion succeeded. The ishumar fighting in Northern Mali achieved unity under the pressure of combat and immediate survival. Years of military discipline, which meant obeying orders when given, did the rest. As former rebel Bay ag Alhassan put it with some pride, 'At that moment, there was no movement in the country, no way. There was only one thing: The Tamasheq Revolution.'

**Bases**

After the attack at Menaka and Tidaghmene, the rebels left messages for the army indicating their location at Mount In-Taykaren. This message was almost an invitation to come and do battle, an invitation which was repeated over the radio at the conquered gendarmerie post at Tarkimt. In-Taykaren is a monolith at the edge of the Tamesna plain near the village of Tejerert. It can only be accessed through a small number of wadis which originate in this mountain, passing through a number of gorges and which for the remainder are banked by 'fields' of short, sharp pieces of stone and such like, which render the terrain virtually impassable by vehicle. It is impossible to reach the interior of the mountain, other than through these known passages. In the interior of the mountain is a small number of accessible plains or 'valleys' surrounded and cross-cut by ridges and heaps of large boulders. This terrain formed the first of a series of 'bases' the rebels set up. A second base was put in operation at Essali near Bouressa in the Adagh a few weeks later. A third one was located at Mount Tigharghar, a place that had served as a 'base' for the honour bandit Alla ag Albachir in the 1940s and 1950s, and for the ifulagen in 1963. In the later stages of the rebellion, the number of bases would be around fifteen throughout Northern Mali.

Such a base should not be imagined as a classical military base: a structure concentrated at one point with fortified bunkers and fixed defence lines. Rather, the whole mountain or strategic location served as a base. Only the outer edges and passages would be defended if necessary, but they could be abandoned to take up other positions within the mountain. The only vital points within the base were the wells, to be defended and held at all costs. Any infrastructure that was built, consisted of a few mud-brick houses serving as shelter and meetings points. Most matériel inside the bases was buried or left in small caves.

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446 Interview with Baye ag Alhassan. Menaka, 01/04/1999.

447 Boilley (1999), op. cit., 507.
In creating these bases the rebels had four main aims. First of all, they served as places where the rebels could hide men and matériel. Second, by making the location of the bases known to the army, the rebels hoped to avoid repression of civilians by the army as there was no reason for it. The army knew where to find the rebels and could not mistake civil camps for rebel units. Third, by making the location known to the population and other ishumar who had not yet joined the fighters – but who had received military training at some point in the 1980s – they hoped to attract new recruits and material support. Also, if the army attacked against civilians, these knew where they could hide under rebel protection. Finally, by setting up bases within Mali, instead of retreating into Algeria after attacks as the ifulagen had done in 1963, the rebels hoped to gain more support from the local population. These would notice that the rebels did not abandon them to their fate after 'stirring problems', while they themselves remained behind for the army to come. Clearly, the rebels had learned some tactical and strategic lessons from their ifulagen predecessors.

In chapter IV, I have described how the fighting tactics of Alfellaga followed the logic of Tamasheq ethical warfare – aqqa. We have seen that ifulagen judged their fight to be different from the second rebellion in ethics. However, the ethics of the ishumar in warfare were just as much informed by Tamasheq war ethics and honourable conduct. The ishumar saw themselves as the new illelan – the strong protectors of society who should defend the tilagiwin, the weak. By staying in the neighbourhood and offering sites of protection, the rebels ascribed to their perceived ellelu status in taking measures to protect the weak and dependent. We will come back to this subject in the next chapter.

In the first few months of the rebellion the strategy underlying the creation of fixed bases was partly successful. The Malian army accepted the invitation mentioned above to come and fight at In-Taykaren. On 17 July 1990, a large section of the Malian army arrived at In-Taykaren to fight the rebel forces. The army employed four hundred infantry and artillery units armed with truck mounted rocket launchers at the 'siege' of In-Taykaren. After four days of shelling, the infantry assault was easily countered by the unharmed rebels. The shelling had been too random and too small in scale to do any harm. The rebel forces awaited the end of Malian fire from the safety of the rocks and caves, planning to resume their positions when the infantry advanced. When the infantry attack finally came, they were shot one by one. A day of sniper activity of this kind was enough to cause the retreat of the army, which lost forty men. The operation was repeated at the end of July and beginning of August, with an even more disastrous effect. Despite hundreds of shells being fired at In-Taykaren in a week, the following infantry attack failed again, leaving a hundred Malian soldiers dead on the field.448 A similar attack at the rebel base of Essali near Bouressa was equally unsuccessful. Here, the rebels simply left the base for the surrounding mountains, only to return when

448 Nous, Touaregs du Mali... (Paris 1990).
the Army retreated, without doing battle. The Army was quick to learn that rebel bases were invincible when defended and not worth going to or staying in when abandoned.

Inversely, the Malian army quickly found out that when it set up a base itself, it was prone to deadly attacks by rebel forces. The largest victory the rebels had over the Malian forces, recognised as their worst defeat by the Army itself, came on the night of 4 September 1990, at the wells of Toximine near Mount Tigharghar. Here, a force of around 45 rebels, armed with knives and hand grenades, took on an army unit of 450 soldiers, supported by armoured cars, mortars and rocket launchers. Making use of the terrain, the internal organisation of the military camp and the element of surprise, the rebel unit managed to enter the camp, engaged in close combat with the Malian soldiers and finally dispersed the Malian forces in panic before the rebels retreated. Afterwards, rebels claimed to have killed more than a hundred soldiers at Toximine, whereas they suffered a loss of fifteen men. This might be slightly exaggerated, but the Malian army probably lost at least forty men.449

After ‘Toximine’, the morale of the Malian army was deflated, just as the morale of the rebels was boosted. Although the number of Malian army victims looks impressive, it did not amount to more than fifteen percent of the total present forces, whereas the rebels lost a third of their unit. But nevertheless, to the Malian army, ‘Toximine’ proved that the regular army was no match to the guerillas and that a quick military end to the rebellion could not be reached. Instead, negotiations had to be opened. To the rebels, Toximine brought a large amount of new weapons taken from the defeated troops, but especially an enormous victory in their form of warfare – a small group of extremely skilled warriors had been able to chase an army unit ten times its size, killing a large number of soldiers in true combat, man to man. It gave the rebels a feeling of military invincibility. Indeed, in general, one can safely say that the second Tamasheq rebellion was never defeated militarily by the Malian forces.

In short, it can be concluded that the first six months of rebellion were highly successful from the perspective of the rebels. Starting their uprising two years earlier than planned, with only a few dozen fighters and no material to mention, the rebels quickly gained the upper hand over the Malian armed forces in North-Eastern Mali. It was not their strategy to occupy terrain, except for their own logistical bases (which could, however, be temporarily left to the enemy when necessary). The tactics used were classical guerilla techniques of hit and run actions, aimed to confuse and tire the enemy. The methods and means used were perfectly adapted to the terrain and so were the fighters themselves. More importantly the method worked. In the end, the Malian army retreated to the main villages of North-Eastern Mali, leaving the desert to the rebels. Many smaller army posts were entirely abandoned. The defeats of the Malian army, combined with the troublesome situation the regime found itself in at the capital

Bamako, led president Moussa Traoré to decide that negotiations with the rebels were necessary.

The 'confused' rebellion  
January 1991 - February 1994

The start of negotiations, Moussa Traoré’s perils
Negotiations between the Malian Government and the tanekra movement started in October 1990 with a first ‘reconnaissance’ mission, and began in earnest in December 1990. The initiative was undertaken by the Traoré regime. The Tamasheq rebellion was not the only problem the Traoré regime had to face. In the capital Bamako, a democratic opposition and a free press were making both Traoré’s handling of the rebellion and his position in general more and more problematic.

In 1979, general Moussa Traoré had changed the military style of his regime to a civil one in founding a one-party state, governed by the UDPM party over which he presided. But the one-party state was as undemocratic and oppressive as its predecessor under Keita and the non-party dictatorial rule of Traoré previous to his civilian restyling. In 1990, the democratic movement gained momentum. Possibly under the influence of the Tamasheq rebellion, but certainly under the moral support of French President Mitterand’s speech at the Franco-African Summit at La Baule in May 1990, in which he linked development aid to ‘good governance’ and democratisation.

On 15 October 1990, fifteen young men took to the streets of Bamako to protest against the Traoré regime, carrying banners with slogans such as ‘Down with the UDPM’. A few days later, the student union Association des Etudiants et Elèves Maliens – AEEM – was born. In the same month, two covert political parties were founded; the Comité National d’Initiative Démocratique – CNID, followed one week later by the Alliance pour la Démocratie au Mali – ADEMA, headed by Alpha Oumar Konaré, the later President of the Republic. The already existing national labour union Union National des Travaileurs Maliens – UNTM, hitherto an appendix to the regime, rallied to the side of the democrats. Together, these organisations formed a massive front against the Traoré regime. But there was not only external opposition urging for democracy. Inside the UDPM, a large faction demanded multi-party democracy, or at least a democratisation of the party itself. Although Traoré gave in to the wish to reform the party, demands for multi-party democracy were put aside.

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A view on the interior of the base at In-Taykaren. April 1999.

The FPLA logo at the centre of the In-Taykaren base. April 1999.
The build up of pressure in Bamako, together with the demoralizing defeats of the army by the Tamasheq rebels, led to the opening of negotiations between the regime and the rebels. Probably, Moussa Traoré hoped to calm the North down as quick as possible, in order to have troops and attention free to deal with the democratic movement in the South.

The reasons of the rebels to negotiate were just as practical as those of the Traoré regime: they were exhausted. Having started the rebellion with nothing but a handful of guns, they desperately lacked resources by the end of 1990. The diminishing supply of petrol, ammunition and especially food, hampered the continuation of attacks and even the possibilities of adequate defence –

"In fact, we had expected that a solution would be found within six months of combat. And the Malians fell for our strategy. Six months, that was the maximum before the army would recuperate, and we had to make a maximum of sounding victories to bring it home, to change mentalities in Mali, and to provoke all the upcoming changes. [...] We did not expect a longer fight, first because of a lack of means, also because of strategical reasons, it was impossible to continue the fight longer than six months."452

**The Tamanrasset agreement**

First contact between the *tanekra* and the state was made through the mediation of the tribal chiefs. The meeting took place in Tamanrasset between 10 and 12 October 1990. The chiefs played their key role as intermediaries between state and society, a role the state recognised and legitimised in giving them this assignment. But to the members of the *tanekra* organisation, the tribal chiefs had no legitimacy. First of all, the modernist current within the *tanekra* movement had always been in favour of the abolition of tribal chiefs and other hierarchies in Tamasheq society. Second, from the start of the rebellion the most important tribal chiefs had made it perfectly clear that they were against the rebellion. In a declaration transmitted over radio and television in September 1990, they described the rebels as "[...] bandits and traitors, committing unimaginable follies disturbing the tranquillity and stability regained after years of merciless drought".453 Intalla ag Attaher, chief of the Kel Ifoghas, and the other chiefs of the Adagh, had immediately volunteered to tour the Adagh to inform the population about the activities of the army; to search for the rebels and to bring the young men to their senses, as they had done

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453 Declaration made by the Malian fraction chiefs and Tuareg ranks of the Gao region, 12/09/1990. Personal archives. The signing chiefs were all from the Kidal, Gao, Menaka and Bourem Circles, with the exception of Ehya ag Nokh, chief of the Immeddeghereren.
Nevertheless, the government decided to send these chiefs to contact the rebels. The meeting was indecisive as the government delegates had no mandate to accept or refute the rebel demands.

In December 1990, negotiations between the tanekra and the government were reopened, leading on 6 January 1991 to the signing of a ceasefire and declaration of intent to continue negotiations for final peace. These documents are known as the ‘Tamanrasset agreement’. This time, negotiations took place under mediation of the Algerian Government. The latter would remain the sole officially mediating state between the rebels and Mali throughout the conflict. Algeria had a direct interest in the conflict as the country hosted a large amount of new refugees and a large community of previously sedentarised Kel Tamasheq from Mali. Moreover, the movement used Southern Algeria as its ‘hinterland’ where they repleted their provisions, treated their injured and went for ‘rest and recreation’. Apart from these practical arguments the Algerian Government rose to the occasion to strengthen its importance as a regional power to the detriment of what it considered its near rivals – France and Libya. In previous chapters, I have described how Algerian implication in the creation of the tanekra movement was with an eye to use the tanekra for its own regional politics. To some extent, the Algerian state now reaped the ‘benefits’ of its earlier involvement.

The first negotiations between rebels and tribal chiefs had been between Kel Tamasheq. Thus Tamasheq could be spoken, which was not the case during the negotiations which started in December 1990. Negotiations now had to be partly conducted in French. This meant that the ishumar had to rely on the Tamasheq intellectuals who were sympathetic to the movement. These intellectuals, headed by military leader Iyad ag Ghali (himself a true ishumar, but with enough Francophone education to conduct negotiations in this language), had a more ‘realistic’ view of the situation than some of the more idealist ishumar. And of course, Iyad knew perfectly well in what state and condition his troops were.

Nevertheless, the Tamanrasset agreement of 6 January 1991 showed a radical stance from the tanekra side. The Tamanrasset agreement consisted of a ceasefire, stipulating the mutual transfer of prisoners of war; the army’s gradual withdrawal from the north and transfer of

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454 Unfortunately, a group of soldiers disarmed and molested the chiefs when they presented themselves to the Commandant du Cercle on the first day of the tour, as they held them to be rebels themselves. During their tour, the family of the Idnan chief Attaher ag Bissaada was killed by soldiers. Attaher ag Bissaada, speaking to Moussa Traoré afterwards, asked him to mention this ‘incident’ as one should look to the future and not to the past. Poulton, E-R., I. ag Youssouf, ‘A peace of Timbuktu. Democratic governance, development and African peacemaking (New York & Geneva: United Nations Publication 1998), 93.

455 From the side of the government, the negotiators most likely included Sikay ag Ekawel, Rhissa Rhatbou, Issa Ongoba (former right hand to Diby Sillas Diarra) and a number of tribal chiefs. From the side of the rebels, the negotiators included Cheick ag Baye, Acherif ag Mohamed and Ibrahim ag Litny, three intellectuals who had joined the movement from the beginning. Their delegation was headed by Iyad ag Ghali.
administration to civil servants; the withdrawal of the rebel forces to their bases; the possibility for the fighters to integrate in the Malian army and the creation of commissions to monitor the application of the agreements made. Next to the ceasefire, a document was signed which guaranteed a certain amount of autonomy to the North in the following key formulation –

'The two parties have agreed that the populations of the three regions in Northern Mali will freely administer their regional and local affairs through the mediation of their representatives in the elected assemblies, in accordance with an exceptional status consented to by law'.

The Tamanrasset agreement was never fully applied, but it remained a blueprint for future negotiations. The importance of the agreement does not lie in what it was supposed to lead to, but in what it did lead to in practice. In 1998 and 1999, many of my interlocutors who had participated in the tanekra movement and the rebellion from its first days onwards, insisted that the 'real' rebellion ended with the signing of the Tamanrasset agreement.

With the benefit of hindsight, one can indeed conclude from the developments after the signing of the Tamanrasset agreement, that this observation contains some truth. The ishumar reaction to the Tamanrasset agreement can be summed up as negative for the most part. Many ishumar fighters were at least disappointed, but many more were outraged by what they perceived as a 'sell out' from the side of the 'intellectuals'. After 'Tamanrasset' the second phase of the rebellion started. The Tamasheq movement, united in the first six months of fighting, split internally over the goals of the rebellion.

**Kel Tamasheq and Moors, MPA and FIAA**

In the first six months of the rebellion, the movement had no fixed name. The Arabic terms al-Jebha – the front, and ath-Thawra – the revolution, or the Tamasheq term tanekra – the uprising, were used internally. To the outside world, the names Mouvement de Libération Touareg, Mouvement de Libération de l'Azawad, and even Mouvement de Libération Maliën were used. Slowly, consensus was reached with the name Front Populaire de Libération de l'Azawad – FPLA.

The Tamanrasset agreement changed this. Although only one man signed the agreement on behalf of the rebels, Iyad ag Ghali, he did so in the name of two movements; the Mouvement Populaire de l'Azawad – MPA, and the Front Islamique Arabe de l'Azawad – FIAA. Where the MPA represented the Kel Tamashiq, the FIAA represented the Moorish members of the movement. The Moors feared that their contribution to the movement might be underestimated and that they would be left out of negotiations with the Malian authorities, despite sharing the problems of

their Tamasheq *ishumar* colleagues. The problem was solved by creating a separate movement, with its own name, to represent the Moorish section within the movement. The FIAA was nevertheless represented by the paramount leader of the movement, the Tamasheq Iyad ag Ghali. The creation of the MPA, both the name and the movement it came to represent, is more complicated.

**'Moderates' and 'hardliners', MPA and FPLA**

The Tamanrasset agreement did not bring an end to hostilities. In February 1991, rebel units attacked the village of Bourem. In March, the villages of Tonka and Goundam followed. The attacks were claimed by the *Front Populaire de Libération de l'Azawad* (FPLA), a name the movement had sometimes used previous to the Tamanrasset agreement. Where the creation of two movements during the negotiations in Tamanrasset – one Kel Tamasheq and one Moorish – had not been the result of a serious political or ideological divide within the movement, the creation of the MPA and FPLA can be analysed as resulting from ideological and political differences within the movement. These can be retraced through the negotiations leading to the Tamanrasset agreement. The ideological conflict within the movement boiled down to the principles of the rebellion – fighting for independence, or not. The start of a hot debate can already be read in the minutes of the meeting between the movement and the chiefs who were the envoys of the Malian Government in October 1990 –

*The year nineteen hundred and ninety, the 12th of October at two hours took place in Tamanrasset: The closure of the meeting between the Malian delegation (fraction chiefs and Tuareg representatives) and the delegation of the movement called Mouvemen t Populair e d e l'AZAWE D - MPA (not having any territorial demands) ...*  

Placed casually between brackets, the movement’s envoys had apparently written off the initial goal of the movement – Tamasheq independence.

While the October meeting had been inconsequential, the Tamanrasset agreement was not. The minutes of the meeting between Malian and *tanekra* envoys, which form the heart of the Tamanrasset agreement, stated the view taken by both parties on the conflict.

Representing the Malian Government, the Malian Chief of Staff Colonel Ousmane Coulibaly – 'After having expressed the wish of the Malian

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457 It is in fact unclear whether or not Moorish representatives were present during the Tamanrasset negotiations. One informant even stated that the Moors only joined the movement and the negotiations at the last moment, in fear of being left out. During the preliminary contacts between the movement and Tamasheq tribal chiefs, no Moorish representative was present. However, during the later phases of the rebellion, the FIAA and its representatives would play crucial roles.

Government to find a lasting solution to the painful situation, stressed the necessity to preserve national unity and Malian territorial integrity. The formulation speaks for itself and needs no explanation. On behalf of the MPA and FIAA, Iyad ag Ghali – ‘accentuated the principal reasons that led his movement to take up arms against its country.

Diplomatic and subtle, Iyad ag Ghali implicitly recognised that his movement had taken up arms against its own country, a formula which placed the Kel Tamasheq within the framework of the Malian nation-state, and thus abandoning Tamasheq nationalism. If the initial talks between the movement and the envoys of the government in October 1990 must have been hard to accept for many fighters, the end result of the Tamanrasset agreement was unacceptable to a number of hardliners. These hardliners remained within the FPLA.

Being confronted with this hard line within the movement, Iyad ag Ghali and other moderates carried on negotiating under the name MPA – Movement Populaire de l’Azawad. The difference with regards to goals and means becomes clear from the names adopted. Whereas the FPLA stressed its military nature by adopting the term ‘Front’, the MPA insisted on politics and negotiations by adopting the term ‘Movement’. The idea was that, eventually, if the democratic movement in the south were to succeed in its goals, the MPA could transform itself into a political party within Mali. The FPLA, seeing itself as a front, remained focused on independence to be reached through military action.

The FPLA hardliners declared that they had not been represented at the negotiations at Tamanrasset and were therefore not bound by the agreements made.

'We have created [the FPLA] after the failed treason of the Azawad people [by the MPA] and we have called it the Front Populaire de Libération de l’Azawad, in reaction to what is called “the Tamanrasset agreement” which seems to us to be a treason of some kind to our revolutionary principles: It is a reactionary position, our objective being the liberation of the people of the Azawad from the oppression it is suffering since the French have left'.

**FPLA, diverging interests relocate the conflict**

From the start of the rebellion in June 1990 to the start of negotiations in Tamanrasset in December that year, almost all attacks against the Malian army took place in the Adagh. This changed after the Tamanrasset agreement in January 1991. The military campaign launched by the FPLA

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460 Ibidem.

in February 1991 was concentrated on the Azawad plain and the villages at the banks of the Niger. From there, the attacks spread further south and west, towards the Région Timbuktu and the interior of the Niger Bend. In May 1991, the FPLA even struck as far south as Gossi and Léré.

The relocation of the conflict is linked to the schisms within the movement. The schism which brought about the FPLA in January 1991, meant a separation between the Kel Adagh and all the other Tamasheq fractions in the movement. However, local politics within the Tamasheq community, tewsit affiliation and the logic of Tamasheq society played their part as well.

The larger part of the FPLA fighters came from fractions residing in the Azawad and Tamesna plains, and the Niger Bend. The most important fractions and tribes represented in the FPLA were the Kel Intessar, the Chemennamas, the Ishidenharen, the Dabaka and the Daoussahak. The Kel Intessar had been at the heart of Tamasheq political life during the late colonial period. Their amenokal, Mohamed Ali ag Attaher Insar and his younger brother Mohamed Elmehdi had been among the most politically active Kel Tamasheq in the 1940s and 1950s. Mohamed Ali had also been involved in organising and supporting Alfellaga. The Chemennamas, Ishidenharen and Dabakar fractions live in the Azawad and Tamesna plains east of the Adagh and towards Gao. In fact, Djebock, the hamlet falling victim to the FPLA’s second attack, is seen as the ‘capital’ of the Chemennamas. This is not coincidental either, as the leader of the FPLA, Rhissa ag Sidi Mohamed, was a Chemennamas. In order to understand the division between the Kel Adagh and the other fractions we should look at the history of the movement and to the Tamanrasset agreement.

**Movements and tewsit ten**

As we have seen in virtually all previous chapters, Tamasheq resistance against the Malian state had been largely a Kel Adagh affair. They had started Alfellaga in 1963, they had been at the basis of the creation of the tanekra movement, they had delivered most volunteers for the Lebanon contingent and after their return, these fighters had revived and restructured the defunct movement in Libya. However, their leadership within the movement was contested.

Particularly after the second drought of the 1980s, the number of non-Kel Adagh had risen within the movement. The new recruits were mostly from the Chemennamas, Ishidenharen, Dabakar and other fractions from the Tamesna and Azawad, although a small number of them had joined earlier. These men had different experiences in the tanekra and to them, the leadership of the Kel Adagh was not a foregone conclusion.

Most attacks in the first six months of the rebellion took place within the Adagh, which reconfirmed Kel Adagh leadership over the movement and gave the rebellion the look of ‘another Kel Adagh affair’, probably to the discontent of the fighters from the Menaka battalion. The negotiations at Tamanrasset again proved Kel Adagh leadership. The majority of negotiators on behalf of the movement were Kel Adagh, with Iyad ag Ghali signing the treaty.
As I have noted elsewhere, leadership and hierarchy among tevsiten and fractions form the core of Tamasheq social political life. The leadership position the Kel Adagh claimed within the movement could thus not be without consequences for internal hierarchy and organisation. Those men resisting Kel Adagh leadership and control over the movement simply opted out to create their own front.

The outcome of the Tamanrasset agreement can be advanced as a second reason for the division between the Kel Adagh and the other Kel Tamashq. The ‘moderates’ leading the negotiations in Tamanrasset had opted for the acceptance of de facto Malian citizenship, on the condition that Northern Mali would gain a large amount of autonomy. This condition was met by the Malian state in the form of decentralisation of the hitherto highly centralised state. To word this mutual agreement, a rather strange formulation was used in the agreement.

‘The two parties have agreed that the populations of the three Northern regions will freely administer their regional and local affairs ...’

At the time, Northern Mali was administratively divided into only two regions; Timbuktu, the VIth region, and Gao, the VIIth region, which included the Adagh or Kidal Cercle. In Tamanrasset, what had been arranged for, was the promotion of the Cercle Kidal to a fully fledged VIIIth region. The Tamanrasset agreement speaks of three regions as if the Région Kidal was already existent. The new Région would come into de jure existence in August 1991, but de facto with the Tamanrasset agreement. Thus, the Kel Adagh had not only opted to remain part of Mali, but to do so apart from the other Kel Tamashq communities.

This manoeuvre did not earn the Kel Adagh any gratitude from the side of the other tevsiten in the movement and will have undoubtedly contributed to the split between the Kel Adagh and the others. Apart from ‘hardliners’ fighting for independence, the FPLA could attract those ‘moderates’ who were not Kel Adagh. These had no interest in an administratively autonomous Région Kidal since this would leave the Kel Tamashq in the ‘old’ Région Gao a smaller minority against a majority of Songhay and other sedentary populations.

Modernists, traditionalists, illelan and imghad – MPA and ARLA

In the introduction and in chapter II, I have described to what extent the French and Malian administrations controlled the internal social political dynamics of Tamashq society. Under colonial rule, the dynamic hierarchical structure of tevsiten had been altered through an effective

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463 The creation of the eighth Région Kidal was confirmed in an article on the Tamanrasset agreement in an article by Kaboré, G., 'La paix fragile de Tamanrasset', Jeune Afrique (16-22/01/1991).
ban on raiding and the restructuring of tewsit'en into fractions and tribes which could be made and unmade at will. At the same time, the colonial administration's racial perspective on Tamashiq society had led to the relative rise in status of less noble or imghad groups, on the basis of their 'whiteness'. The rise in status and political consciousness of the lower strata of society had been furthered by the Malian administration under Modibo Keita on different grounds. The Keita administration had favoured the bellah and imghad - the weak or tilaqiwin - over the illelan or nobles.

In contrast, the imghad were under-represented in the leadership of the tanekra and bellah were almost entirely excluded from the movement. Leadership within the movement was claimed by the Ifoghas.

"In fact, objectively, the Ifoghas are the spearhead of the Adagh and the Adagh n Ifoghas is the spearhead of the Tuareg in Mali in general. This is a fact. [...] The other side of reality is that the other tribes exist and that they are more numerous than the Ifoghas."464

In November 1991, those groups excluded from leadership within the Kel Adagh movement MPA founded the ARLA. From its moment of creation, the ARLA was joined by the majority of all the Kel Adagh fighters, thus creating a divide between the Ifoghas and the other Kel Adagh. The MPA now represented a minority movement of "moderate" Ifoghas. As a consequence, the ARLA was able to oust the MPA from the Tigharghar base, the most strategic location in the Adagh. The MPA was now seen as the Ifoghas movement, whereas the ARLA stood for the other Kel Adagh. The existence of the ARLA was mostly justified in its approach to the revolution within Tamashiq society.

As has been argued elsewhere, the teshumara and tanekra were not only meant as a nationalist movement against the Malian state. The ishumar felt a need to reform Tamashiq society as well. This reform should lead to the equality of all the Kel Tamashiq, the abolition of caste structures and tewsit hierarchy. Chiefs had to be abolished and democracy should prevail. Unsurprisingly, the strongest advocates of this internal restructuring of society could be found among groups disadvantaged within 'traditional' Tamashiq society - the imghad, bellah and lower-placed illelan tribes such as the Idnan. Also to no surprise, ideas on equality and democracy were strongest among the intellectual elite of the ishumar. These were generally also of imghad origins, as they had put up less resistance against education and had been favoured by the Keita regime. The secretary general of the ARLA, Abderrahmane ag Galla had been educated at Bamako's institutions of higher education before joining the tanekra, as was another founder of the ARLA, Ibrahim ag Litny.

It is hard to evaluate the impact of the revolutionary rhetoric and administrative practices of the Keita regime on the Kel Adagh, but they had undoubtedly had an influence. As I argued in chapters II and VI, the

Keita administration had especially accentuated the liberation of the bellah by creating separate bellah fractions. But in the absence of a large bellah population in the Adagh, the uplift of the 'labouring masses' had been largely concentrated on the imghad. These also not being numerous in the Adagh (the illelan Ifoghas form half the Adagh population), the administration had to some extent included the other illelan tribes of the Adagh – the Idnan, Taghat Mellet and Ibotenate – in its idea of the class of 'oppressed masses'. The ishumar from these tewsiten were most concerned with the internal social revolution, which led to the full development of the previously discussed concept of timgheda or 'imghadness', and to the creation of the ARLA.

Timgheda postulated the virtues of the imghad over the illelan as being more concerned with equality, being more industrious and being more Berber. The illelan, particularly those of the Adagh, were seen as feudal, lazy and Arab since they stressed the importance of their lineage and being descendants of the prophet Muhammad.

Naturally, the more 'conservative' Ifoghas, notably the ruling families, fiercely objected to these social projects. In their turn, they developed the tefoghessa concept, or 'Ifoghasness'. The tefoghessa idea was developed by ishumar intellectuals from the Ifoghas tewsit, which included Iyad ag Ghali. The latter had come to believe (or perhaps had always believed) that the chiefs and other traditional authorities were indispensable to Tamasheq society –

'The wise men who are seen by some as "outdated" remain the pillars of society until the contrary is proven. They remain as unavoidable to the movements as they are to the administration. First of all, it was they who were at the start the principal mediators between the rebel forces and the authorities. They also played a principal role in reducing the tensions between different communities [tewsiten or movements]. Personally, I believe their role to be fundamental in installing a definite peace and that is what we most need these days'.

A more fundamental reinterpretation of the meetings between the chiefs who had been sent as envoys and the movements of October 1990 is hardly possible. From backward colonial and neo-colonial collaborators, the chiefs had now been reinstalled in the mind of Ifoghas ishumar as the true leaders of Tamasheq society. Hardliners and modernists begged to differ.

The fall of Moussa Traoré and the advent of democracy
The Tamanrasset agreement brought temporary relief to the besieged Traoré regime, but it came too late. In Bamako and other cities in Mali, the democratic movement had only grown stronger. Starting from December 1990, the democratic movements CNID and ADEMA organised several

465L'avvenire du Nord. La société civile est incontournable affirme Iyad ag Ghali', l'Essor, 06/10/1993.
marches in Bamako and other cities. On 18 January 1991, the students and workers trade unions and the opposition movements joined forces to organise a demonstration ending in riots, the sacking of a number of party leaders’ villas and the death of several students. The next day, CNID and ADEMA organised a demonstration in Segu. In alliance, the trade union proclaimed a general strike. As the demonstrations continued over the months and as the number of participants in the demonstrations grew, the regime reacted more violently. On 23 March 1991, a mass demonstration ended in severe riots which continued over the next days. The army was employed against the demonstrators, leading to several hundred deaths. The riots ended in a coup d’état against Traoré on 26 March by Lieutenant-Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré, commander of the airborne division. Moussa Traoré and his wife Mariam were arrested. After 31 years, dictatorship and single-party rule came to an end.\textsuperscript{466}

The new ‘strong man’, Lieutenant-Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré, did not act alone. He immediately formed a \textit{Conseil pour la Reconciliation National} (CRN), including representatives of all the democratic movements in Mali (which, at that point, excluded the Tamaskheq rebels). Touré proclaimed he would lead the CRN through a transitional phase, during which a new constitution would be written, political parties could be founded and democratic elections for parliament and presidency would be organised. He himself would not propose his candidacy as president. After the presidential elections, he would step down and join his post in the army. All this, so he promised, would be done within nine months. Touré did what he promised to do. In May 1991, the former associations CNID and ADEMA were transformed into political parties. In January 1992, a new constitution was adopted, followed in February by elections for parliament and president in which Touré, as promised, did not participate. On 6 June 1992, 14 months after he took power, Touré stepped down in favour of Mali’s first democratically elected President, Alpha Oumar Konaré. Mali started its third Republic. However, for Touré to organise his democratic tour de force, a lasting peace in the North was necessary.

**The National Pact**

In order to appease the \textit{tanekra}, Touré offered place to two representatives of the Tamaskheq movement in his interim government and he assured that the Tamanrasset agreement would be respected.\textsuperscript{467} However, the Tamanrasset agreement was ‘only’ a cease-fire which had

\textsuperscript{466}Traoré and his wife were tried for crimes against humanity and for economic crimes. They received the death penalty in the first case, which was transferred to a lifetime sentence, which was also the penalty in the second trial. At the end of his term in 2002, President Konaré has pardoned and released the Traorés.

\textsuperscript{467}The first two representatives of the movements were Cheick ag Baye and Hamed Sidi Ahmed. They were replaced by Acherif ag Mohamed and Malainine ould Badi. When Touré formed a government (prior to the election of Konaré in 1992), Mohamed ag Erla\#f ag Idnan from the Adagh with relatives in the movement, became Minister. He remained in the various governments under Konaré on various Ministerial posts as a sign of inclusion of the Tamaskheq movements and society in the Malian state. Poulton & Youssouf (1998), op. cit., 61.
been violated by both sides before the ink had dried. New negotiations were needed. These ultimately led to the signing of the *Pacte National*, the National pact, on 11 April 1992, only days before the presidential elections.

The National Pact has never been fully applied. The significance of the National Pact lies in the road leading to it, and the consequences of its structural non-application on the internal development of the rebel movement, Tamasheq society in general and their relations with the Malian state. It led to two years of structural negotiation by a group of men who had less and less contact with the communities or state bodies they formally represented, and could therefore hardly be considered as representative in real terms.

In order to build democracy in Mali, and especially to discuss on which grounds it should be based, Touré organised a National Conference (*Conférence National*) in July 1991. These National Conferences were much in vogue in the early 1990s all over francophone West Africa. Democracy took sail under the wind of the Franco-African summit at la Baule. The Malian National Conference gathered representatives of all the new political parties and civil movements in the country, including the *tanekra*, which was represented by Iyad ag Ghali.

On one hand, the principle outcome of the National Conference with regards to the North was a certain amount of recognition for the role the rebellion had played in bringing about the fall of Traoré. Yet, on the other hand, the conference rejected the Tamanrasset agreement, on the grounds that it had been anti-constitutional and too lenient towards the rebellion. Iyad ag Ghali, representative of the rebellion at the National Conference, pleaded for federalism as the new form of state rule, or at least economic and political autonomy through the creation of regional assemblies which had already been proposed in the Tamanrasset agreement. The conference could not agree to these proposals and would not go further than to propose a decentralised form of state administration. Decentralisation would become a key term in further negotiations. Indeed the Malian state finally applied decentralised administration in 1999; three years after the end of the rebellion, and mostly because by then the term ‘good governance’ had replaced ‘democracy’ as a key demand by donor countries.

The National Conference agreed on the need for a solution to the rebellion and a majority of delegates agreed this should be peaceful. A series of meetings took place between the rebels and the Malian Government in Algiers between January and March 1992. Mediation was provided by the Algerian Government and two independent mediators – the Frenchman Edgar Pisani, director of the *Institut du Monde Arabe* in Paris (and personal counsellor to France’s President Mitterrand); and
Ahmed Baba Miské – a dissident Paris-based Mauritanian politician. These led to the signing of the National Pact on 11 April 1992.

**MFUA, Ishumar and intellectuals**

Negotiations leading to the National Pact started in December 1991 in the Algerian town of El Golea under the auspices of the Algerian Government. They were pursued that same month in the Malian town of Mopti. The main issue during these two initial rounds was who the Malian government should negotiate with. By December 1991, the once united tanekra had become divided into four movements – MPA, FIAA, FPLA and ARLA. Under pressure of the Algerian mediators, the four movements tried to overcome their differences by creating an umbrella organisation that would conduct negotiations on behalf of all movements. This organisation was called the *Mouvements et Fronts Unifiés de l’Azawad* – MFUA. The MFUA united intellectuals and military leaders of all fronts, and even from outside the fronts, with the sole purpose of negotiating with the Malian state. As such, it became a sort of semi-autonomous diplomatic corps, only partly controlled by the movements, but acting on their behalf.

The creation of the MFUA and its role in conducting negotiations meant a shift in importance within the movements from the *ishumar* towards the intellectuals. The MFUA’s first secretary general and spokesman was Zahaby ould Sidi Mohamed, the newly elected political leader of the FIAA. Before Zahaby entered the FIAA, he had been consultant to the AEN, the Norwegian Church development organisation which ran large projects in the Niger Bend. Zahaby was a typical intellectual.

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468 The first round of meetings took place between 22 and 24 January, the second between 12 and 15 February and the last between 15 and 25 March 1992. The Miské-Pisani mediation was unsuccessfully aborted before these rounds took place. Their intervention would be the last French attempt at mediation in the conflict.
Perhaps the clearest example of the *ishumar* retreat and the rise of the intellectuals, is the signing of the National Pact by the ‘hardliner’ movement FPLA. Rhissa ag Sidi Mohamed, military and political leader of the FPLA had refused to sign the National Pact, condemning it as yet another attempt to sell Tamasheq independence in exchange for some small privileges. Nevertheless, the FPLA signed the National Pact, under the signature of Zeidane ag Sidi Alamine, also a former employee of the Norwegian NGO AEN and a relative to FPLA leader Rhissa ag Sidi Mohamed.

‘Describing himself as a man of peace, Zeidane explains he left his post with the AEN project in Gossi only in 1994. In June 1991, three months after the fall of the dictatorship, Zeidane decided to take a trip into the desert to see the state of the population, and to find out why the cycle of attacks and reprisals was still continuing. [...] Early in 1992, he persuaded Rhissa ag Sidi Mohamed, leader of the FPLA to meet the Malian Government delegation. Zeidane explains that he and Rhissa disagreed over the 1992 National Pact. Zeidane travelled to Bamako and signed it on behalf of the FPLA. Rhissa only came round to supporting the Pact in 1994, but "since 1992 I have consistently worked for the application of the Pact, which provides a good framework for integration", says Zeidane’.

Zeidane most likely meant it all well. But from the perspective of the FPLA, notably from Rhissa himself, Zeidane’s action could only be seen as a coup against Rhissa, a Lebanon veteran and *ashamor* of the first hour. The FPLA therefore continued its attacks against the Malian army. Its fighters also engaged in a new tactic – attacking the road linking Bamako, via Mopti and Gossi to Gao. Most ambushes were carried out in the vicinity of Gossi, where Zeidane had been working with the AEN, a clear sign that the FPLA did not like Zeidane’s interference.

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Leaders and fighters

The non-implementation of the National Pact and the constant renewal of negotiations between the MFUA intellectuals and movement leaders created substantial friction between, on the one hand, the MFUA members and the movements’ leaders and their fighters on the other. As many military leaders left the bases in the Adagh and Azawad for longer periods of time in Bamako, Algiers or Tamanrasset, discipline within the bases dropped. The MFUA and movements’ top brass were often housed in luxurious villas and hotels in Bamako, while the fighters were still living on a military diet and sleeping on the rocks of Tigharghar or In-Taykaren. Despite long protracted negotiations no result was made. The Malian Government was reluctant to meet new demands and promises already made were never fulfilled, which led the ‘common’ fighters to look with mounting suspicion on the intellectuals of the MFUA, and to accuse them of selling out the Tamashiq cause to meet their own interests. But distrust of the ishumar also rose from the side of those fighters who had only joined the rebellion after its outbreak and who did not share the ishumar experiences in Algeria, Libya, Lebanon and Chad. The result of waning discipline and morale in the rebel bases was the temporary desertion of many fighters, who started for themselves, attacking merchant convoys, tourists and villages. These attacks were quickly denounced by both the Malian Government and the MFUA members as being ‘acts of banditry’, having nothing to do with the rebellion, since it was being solved politically. Both the MFUA and the Malian Government had every interest in making these declarations, as the Malian opposition parties were eager to attack the government over the way it dealt with the rebellion and as the MFUA members did not want to lose what they thought they had won in negotiations. However, many of these ‘acts of banditry’ were seen by the rebels as a mere continuation of the fight. In the end, the difference was blurred between ‘regular’ rebel attacks on military goals as a sign of discontent with the peace process and ‘banditry’ by rebel deserters.

Konaré’s constraints

The ‘problems in the North’ as the Tamashiq rebellion was referred to after the signing of the National Pact, was far from the only problem facing the Malian Republic and its President Alpha Oumar Konaré.\(^470\) The total lack of implementation of the National Pact after its signing, which ultimately led to the intensification of the conflict in 1994, was not only due to remaining insecurity in the North, as the Government argued. Implementation of the National Pact was severely hampered by a plethora of problems, a lack of funding and outright political hostility from the side of the opposition parties and even government members in Bamako, leaving no space for political or diplomatic manoeuvring to Konaré and the MFUA. The problems which the Malian Governments had to face during 1993 and 1994 merit a book of their own. With the benefit of hindsight,

\(^{470}\) Unless indicated, the following section is based on Manley, A., *Economist Intelligence Unit Country Report: Mali* (London 1st quarter 1993 to 4th quarter 1994).
the successful Malian transition to democracy and political stability in the 1990s is little short of a miracle.

Konaré’s Government was founded on the sole ADEMA party in 1992, under the leadership of Prime Minister Younoussi Touré. The Touré Government was replaced by one under Abdoulaye Sekou Sow in April 1993, which included the CNID and the (refounded) USRDA. Less than a year later, Sow was replaced by Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. The latter managed to stay in charge until 1999. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita’s stable Government could and should have led to a more stable and governable country if it wasn’t for political boycotting from the side of opposition parties. These regularly sent their supporters to the streets to riot and protest against virtually everything the government proposed.¹⁷¹ Part of the oppositional clientele was organised into various pressure groups, the most important of which were the AEEM, the students union; the ADVR, Association de Défense des Victimes de la Repression; and the ADIDE Association des Diplômés Initiateurs et Demandeurs d’Emploi.

The AEEM, the students union, made demands for student grants far exceeding the government’s financial capacity.¹⁷² Student protests in April 1993 led to the burning down of several educational institutions, government buildings including the National Assembly, and the fall of the Younoussi Touré Government.

The ADVR, Association de Défense des Victimes de la Repression, was an association working on behalf of the victims of the March 1991 uprising against the Traoré regime and their bereaved. The ADVR demanded a financial recompensation from the government for each ‘martyr of 26 March’, amounting to CFA 15,000,000 for the relatives of those who lost their lives in the revolt and a monthly stipend of CFA 200,000 for those who had been wounded. In March 1993, the government met these demands by allocating CFA 10,000,000 for each ‘martyr’ and a monthly stipend of CFA 100,000 to the wounded. A similar fund to compensate the victims of the rebellion had been installed under the National Pact. However, this fund remained empty and payments were never made.

The ADIDE – Association des Diplômés Initiateurs et Demandeurs d’Emploi, probably the best organised employment pressure group in Africa, took regularly to the streets to demand jobs. Falling state revenues and IMF austerity measures led to a ban on recruitment within the army and civil service, and a salary cut of fifty percent for the remaining civil servants in September 1993. In the eyes of the ADIDE, rebel demands for the insertion of even a few hundred of their own in the civil services and a few thousand within the army and security forces, with acceptance determined on the basis of being Kel Tamasheq rather than qualifications, were intolerable. But then, in the eyes of the rebel negotiators, so was the


creation of a thousand temporary jobs for ADIDE adherents by the Konaré Government in March 1993.

Pressure groups in Bamako, by threat and implementation of riot and arson, demanded money from the government, but there was none. From its predecessor, the Third Malian Republic had inherited an international debt surpassing its financial capacities, an economy in shambles and one of the most corrupted civil administrations in West Africa. Furthermore, the new government faced great difficulty in tax collection (as ever) and falling export revenues. The price of cotton, Mali’s main export, fell throughout the early nineties. Revenues from Mali’s second largest export, livestock, fell as well, as one of its main production areas was the North. To top these financial problems, the CFA franc underwent a fifty percent devaluation in January 1994. The Malian Government depended for more than a third of its budget on international donor money and credits. However, the donor countries and agencies keeping Mali financially alive were reluctant to finance Mali’s democratisation and the National Pact. As Poulton & ag Youssouf rightly point out, ‘no foreign government was willing to invest in peace. Probably, they did not believe that the election process would truly bring Mali to democracy’.473

The (non) application of the National Pact (1992-1993)

Far more elaborate than the Tamanrasset agreement, the National Pact consisted of six clauses, various subclauses and a total of 86 paragraphs. The National Pact dealt with six main issues. I will here briefly describe these issues, implications and (non) application. As I have said above, the interest of the National Pact only lies in its non-application and the effects thereof on relations between state, rebels and society. Its non-application finally led to the outburst of what Klute has labelled ‘unlimited warfare’ in early 1994.

I: Special social economic and administrative status for the North

The idea reflects the weakened intent of the rebels to gain a form of autonomy for the Kel Tamashq within the framework of the Malian state. The Malian Government and general public however, were extremely hostile to any idea even hinting at the dissolution of national unity. One of the clauses in the National Pact was explicitly called ‘De la consecration de la solidarité et de l’unité nationale dans le Nord du Mali’. The idea of autonomy to the North was tacitly reshaped into administrative decentralisation of the state. Not only in the North, but in all of Mali. Ironically, the decentralisation process started first in the Southern regions of Mali, before being applied in the North. Only in June 1999 were local elections held in the four Northern regions for the positions of mayor and council members of the Communes (counties) embodying the decentralised state. Nevertheless, these elections were enthusiastically received. These were the first elections ever in Mali where the Kel

Tamasheq could elect a Kel Tamasheq representative of their own choice into power.

II: Tax exemptions for the inhabitants of the north for the duration of ten years

The demand had been made by the MFUA to alleviate the economic need of the inhabitants of the North, struck by four decades of rebellion and drought. The tax exemption had been granted, but never applied formally and was more or less informally dropped as a demand by the MFUA with new rounds of negotiations. However, as in the decades before, tax collection in the north remained a futile effort.

III: The creation of two special funds to reconstruct the North

The first fund, the Fonds de développement et de réinsertion, was meant to support former rebels financially in their efforts to enter civilian life once the conflict was settled. The second fund, the Fonds d’assistance et d’indemnisation aux victimes du conflit, was analogous to the fund created to alleviate the needs of the victims of the demonstrations that brought the fall of Moussa Traoré in March 1991. Both funds for the North were formally created, but remained empty. The Malian Government claimed it did not have the money to fill the funds and looked for donor aid to provide funding. Donor countries were reluctant to provide the necessary means. Only in 1995 did money become available for the reintegration in civil society of former rebels. The fund to alleviate the victims’ needs remained a dead letter.

IV: Decreasing deployment and withdrawal to a limited number of northern towns of the Malian armed forces

The reaction of the army to the rebellion was at first very similar to the options chosen during Alfellaga. The tactic of installing a ‘forbidden zone’ in which everyone present would be considered a rebel could not be employed effectively as the terrain of operation was no longer confined to the Adagh, but included all of North-Eastern Mali. Nevertheless, the army tried to install ‘concentration zones’ around the main cities and villages of the north and ‘zones of free circulation’, next to ‘combat zones’. Further measures to the same effect were taken. By the end of July 1990, the state of emergency was declared in all of Northern Mali, as was a curfew after 11pm. Trucks needed special


permits, as did other cars. In practice, this meant a stop to most motorised transport since almost all vehicles used in the North are four-wheel-drives or trucks.

In order to extinguish the rebellion, civilians were interrogated and executed. When these executions made the Malian and European press, they were often ascribed by the authorities as committed by 'uncontrolled elements of the army'. Some of these executions might indeed have been the result of frustration and stress among the Malian soldiers. The majority of these executions however, were part of a deliberate campaign, similar to the reign of army terror during Alfellaga, to undermine civilian support for the rebellion and to discourage the fighters. Spokesmen for the Tamasheq and Moor civil population accused the Malian army of having started a campaign of ethnic cleansing in the Région Timbuktu in July 1990, entitled Kokadjè in Bambara, which indeed means 'cleaning'.

Whether or not this was actually the case, other sources confirm that Malian soldiers had no trouble in employing any means necessary to end the rebellion and stop civilian support. The largest 'cleaning operation' took place at In-Abalan, near Tin-Essako in July 1990, where the army killed an estimated 94 nomads. The ghastliness of these executions were in accordance with methods applied during Alfellaga as well. On 29 July 1990, a unit of airborne soldiers passing the camp of the chief of the Idnan tribe, Attaher ag Bissaada, let the inhabitants of the camp dig their own grave, after which they were killed by throwing in hand grenades. An anonymous witness in a Le Monde article of 15 August 1990, states that eleven people were executed in Gao. Their bodies were run over by a tank after which –

'...the people picked up pieces of the corpses, one a finger, another a head, and went to wiggle them about in front of the doors of Tuareg families'.
Estimates of the number of civilians killed by the army during the first two months of rebellion alone range between 125 and 262.\(^{481}\) The estimated number of civil victims on both sides in the conflict made by Klute, ranges between 2,500 and 3,500. However, the number of Tamashiq civilians killed was ten times the number of sedentary victims.

**Table 7: Estimated number of civilian victims. June 1990 - October 1995**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confirmed Tamashiq victims</th>
<th>Unconfirmed Tamashiq victims</th>
<th>Confirmed Sedentary victims</th>
<th>Unconfirmed Sedentary victims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2,374</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Klute (2001), annex Opferzahlen (Mali).

After the signing of the National Pact, the Malian armed forces did indeed withdraw from a number of towns and barracks in the North, concentrating on Gao, Menaka, Kidal, Tessalit, Ansongo, Bourem and Timbuktu, which meant that the Adagh, Azawad and Niger Bend were left to the control of the rebel forces. Security would be provided by so-called mixed patrols of integrated rebels and army soldiers *(infra)*. To be sure, army patrols still ventured out of their barracks, and retaliation on civilians after rebel attacks or 'acts of banditry' did not end. Although they were stationed in a smaller number of barracks, troop strength in the North only increased.

**V: The creation of structures to secure the gradual return of refugees after the end of the conflict**

As army repression grew, more and more people saw themselves with no other choice than to either flee or join the rebel forces in their bases. Waves of refugees coincided with various phases in the conflict. The first wave consisted of Kel Adagh who fled to Algeria during the second half of 1990. They mainly settled in the border towns of Bordj Mokhtar, Tin-Zaouaten en Timiaouen, from where it was easy to move back into Mali if conditions were favourable. The 'Tamanrasset agreement' meant a temporary end to fighting in the Adagh which lasted until 1994.

The rebellion continued after 'Tamanrasset', but the stage of fighting was replaced to the Tamesna, the Azawad and the Niger Bend. The renewed hostilities provoked a second, larger wave of refugees, this time mainly towards Mauritania and to a lesser extent to Burkina Faso. These countries were closer to the concerned areas. In Mauritania, three refugee camps were created at Bassikounou, Aghor and Fassala-Niéré. In June 1991, the number of refugees reached about five thousand.\(^{482}\) By October,

\(^{481}\) The number of 125 is advanced in *Le Monde*, 15/08/1990. The number of 262 is advanced in 'chronologie Cheick'. Klute estimates the number of civilians killed in the first months at 181. Klute (2001), annex Opferzahlen (Mali).

this number had increased by a factor of six.\textsuperscript{483} In Burkina Faso, most refugees ended up in the neighbourhood of Gorom-Gorom and Saan Yogo. Between August 1991 and the end of 1994, their numbers rose from about ten to thirty thousand.

The conflict reached its high point in mid 1994 with the advent of the sedentary Ganda Koy movement (\textit{infra}). The Ganda Koy had as one of its main objectives to chase the Tamasheq and Arab populations from cultivable land in the Niger Bend. They were utterly successful. By the end of 1994 the number of refugees in Mauritania reached an estimated seventy thousand, with two thousand new arrivals a week in August 1994.\textsuperscript{484} By then, fighting had flared up again in the Adagh as well, provoking a new wave of Kel Adagh refugees to Algeria. Some estimates of the total number of refugees by the end of 1994 reach one hundred and sixty thousand.\textsuperscript{485}

The refugees were not accorded official refugee status by international organisations such as the UNHCR and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent. They were labelled ‘displaced persons’, which had consequences on the amount of help they received. Material assistance in the camps was often inadequate. The Algerian Red Crescent, for example, could only muster a hundred tons of semolina, 7,500 kilos of sugar and 115 boxes of corned beef to feed a population of 5,700 souls at the refugee camp at In-Guezzam during the whole of 1992, without any further assistance.\textsuperscript{486} In 1992, the UNHCR had freed a budget of 4 million US dollars to support the refugees in Mauritania. Unfortunately, a quarter of this budget had to be spent on transport from Nouakchott to the camps at the Mali-Mauritanian border.\textsuperscript{487}

In response to the National Pact clause on refugee repatriation, the UNHCR freed a budget of 3.5 million US dollars. The various NGO’s occupied with aid to the refugees set up a programme to facilitate repatriation. A series of granaries destined to feed the returnees was set up in the North. Eventually the grain was used to feed internally displaced Malians as the refugees refused to return. Despite the signing of the National Pact, the fighting and executions had not ended as the hardline movement FPLA did not respect the National Pact, and neither did the army.\textsuperscript{488}


\textsuperscript{486} ‘Camp des refugies, l’entassement’, \textit{Algerie actualité}, 21/10/1992.


\textsuperscript{488} Poulton & ag Youssouf (1998), op. cit., 65.
In May 1993, the FPLA agreed to adhere to the National Pact. The Algerian and Malian authorities judged it safe for the refugees to return. Algeria was eager to see its 'guests' leave as their presence was seen to be the cause of rising insecurity in Southern Algeria itself. A project was set up to repatriate 12,000 refugees from Algeria between July and December 1993. In May 1993, a 'pilot project' repatriated 468 refugees. Upon arrival in Mali, these almost immediately returned to Algeria. In August a second group of 1,000 was sent home, and these too had returned to Algeria by November as the sites of reinstallation in Mali had been destroyed. The project was aborted and no new attempts to return the refugees were seriously undertaken until the effective ending of the conflict in 1995.

Without wanting to trivialise or diminish the refugee problem, being a nomad refugee had some advantages. As the conflict dragged on, many fled in a pre-emptive attempt to save their lives and possessions. They brought part of their herds, their tents and goods with them. Although the living conditions in the camps were harsh, they were not much different from those the refugees were used to. The refugees were often without medical assistance and diseases such as cholera, smallpox and tuberculosis took their toll, but many had been without medical assistance in Mali as well. Food remained a problem as relief rations were often inappropriate to Tamasheq dietary habits. The UNHCR even shipped canned herrings to the camps, which for many was their first ever encounter with fish. As the conflict continued, the camps started more and more to look like Tamasheq and Moorish villages, waiting for better days. The end of the conflict and a series of particularly good rainy seasons in the North led most refugees to return of their own accord, without much assistance.

VI: Integration of former rebels in the Malian armed forces and administration

In the years following the signing of the National Pact until the final peace in 1996, the integration of former rebels in the Malian state was the main issue and the main bone of contention for all parties involved. Originally, the MFUA demanded that all former rebels be integrated within the Malian armed forces and administration. The demand of the MFUA to integrate 3,600 men outraged the Malian public and government. The various movements also strongly disagreed on how many rebels should be integrated and, especially, from which movement. The internal quarrels over the number of men who could enter the Malian army from each movement even contributed to the creation of new movements, such as

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489 'Tam: la passoire', Algerie actualité, 21/10/92. Much of the smuggling and car theft was executed by Algerians and could also be connected to the rise of the FIS and GIA in the same period. Many former Tamashiq rebels counter the accusations made by stating that the presence of their armed forces, together with the local authorities successfully blocked FIS and GIA presence in the South.

the FULA and FNLA, out of the FPLA. The members of the *teusiten* which adhered to these new movements – Ishidenharen, Dabakar, Daoussahak and Kel Intessar – felt they had been cheated on by the more numerous Chemennammas when it came to proposals of who would be integrated and who would not.

On 11 February 1993, almost a year after the initial signing of the National Pact, the Malian armed forces finally integrated a total of 640 rebels from the four main movements. These men were deployed in three so called 'mixed patrols' of regular army soldiers and integrated rebels. Matériel was provided by the Algerian and Malian state, and partly by the movements. These mixed patrols formally fell under the command of Algerian officers. Also formally, responsibility for the mixed patrols was in the hands of the *Commission du Suivi du Cesser le Feu* – CCF, also provided for in the National Pact, and manned by MFUA members. However, the mixed patrols were, again formally speaking, part of the Malian army. In practice, control over the mixed patrols was totally unclear and so was their deployment. To some extent, the mixed patrols formed an extra army, half within the Malian system and half within the movements, that could be tactically and politically played out by all politicians in the Northern Malian field. For long, the creation of the mixed patrols and the CCF were the only measures of the National Pact to be applied, to the dissatisfaction of a number of different groups: the rebels, who wanted more; the army who wanted less integration and more combat against the rebels; the Malian public who thought this was giving state means to the rebels; and the Tamacheq population, who did not see much improvement in security. Nevertheless, as Ag Youssouf and Poulton conclude, the mixed patrols and the CCF ‘managed to buy a year of (relative) peace for Mali.’

In 1994, hostilities in the north would reach a climax, starting with troubles over the integrated rebels. In April 1994, a group of integrated rebels clashed with regular army units in the city of Menaka, ending with the desertion of the integrated rebels, taking their cars with them. In May 1994, a few rebels tried to steal a car in the centre of Gao, killing two bystanders. The rebels were apprehended and lynched. When the lynching mob took their own victims (the two bystanders killed by the rebels) to Gao hospital, they were surprised by a group of armed rebels who opened fire, leaving eleven people dead. Rightly or not, the attackers were said to be *intégrés*, which resulted in the lynching of more *intégrés* by army soldiers in garrisons in the North when the news about the ‘Gao massacre’ spread. Those *intégrés* who had not already done so, subsequently deserted, taking cars and arms with them. These events all directly contributed to the renewed violence in the North that is the subject of the next chapter.

Despite the resistance from the side of the army against the integration of rebels and the general disapproval of the Malian public on the same

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491 Ag Youssouf & Poulton (1998), op. cit., 65.
issue, the MFUA kept insisting on rebel integration. In May 1994, after the clashes in Menaka and Gao, a new round of negotiations was opened between the MFUA and the Malian Government about the implementation of the National Pact. The discussions were entirely focused on the number of rebels who would qualify for army integration. MFUA leader Zahabyould Sidi Mohamed, eager to get results, claimed the number of rebels totalled 10,000. He demanded integration of 3,000 men into the army, and development projects leading to reinsertion in civil society for another 4,000. The Malian negotiators congratulated Zahaby for having an army twice the size of the Malian armed forces and asked him how he managed to feed them all.492

The insistence on the integration of rebels in the Malian armed forces from the MFUA side was probably their worst public relations campaign in the whole conflict. It gave many Malians the impression the rebels were nothing but a bunch of unemployed mercenaries from Qadhafi (which they had been said to be from the start) demanding employment from the Malian state. Many Kel Tamashiq got the impression the rebellion had never been about the problems of the Kel Tamasheq, but only about the ishumar and the intellectuals within the MFUA demanding jobs, to the detriment of the safety of the Tamasheq civilians. More over, many rebels got the same impression. The revolutionary music of the teshumara, al-guitara, found a new source of inspiration: the division and treason within the movement.

I live in hard times
In which kinship is untwined
In which my maternal kin hates me
When you have nothing left, they sell you
With the heavy burden you carry
you support no one
Nothing is done together
The world cries like young animals
which leave the tent to drink493

492 Ibidem, 70.