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Sawaba's rebellion in Niger (1964-1965): Narrative and meaning

Klaas van Walraven

One of the least-studied revolts in post-colonial Africa, the invasion of Niger in 1964 by guerrillas of the outlawed Sawaba party was a dismal failure and culminated in a failed attempt on the life of President Diori in the spring of 1965. Personal aspirations for higher education, access to jobs and social advancement, probably constituted the driving force of Sawaba's rank and file. Lured by the party leader, Djibo Bakary, with promises of scholarships abroad, they went to the far corners of the world, for what turned out to be guerrilla training. The leadership's motivations were grounded in a personal desire for political power, justified by a cocktail of militant nationalism, Marxism-Leninism and Maoist beliefs. Sawaba, however, failed to grasp the weakness of its domestic support base. The mystifying dimensions of revolutionary ideologies may have encouraged Djibo to ignore the facts on the ground and order his foot soldiers to march to their deaths.

This chapter attempts to reconstruct a neglected episode in the post-colonial history of Niger. It focuses on an abortive invasion of this West African country in the autumn of 1964 by members of a clandestine political party, *Sawaba*. On the orders of their leader-in-exile, Djibo Bakary, armed commandos infiltrated Niger and tried to instigate a popular insurrection against the regime of President Hamani Diori and his ruling *Parti Progressiste Nigérienne* (PPN). Despite elaborate preparations, the commandos were caught completely off guard by the hostile reception they received from the peasant population and the government had little trouble in rounding them up with the assistance of the peasantry. By the end of November 1964, barely two months after the invasion, the *Sawaba* commandos had been routed. A dozen men had been killed, several were wounded and more than a hundred taken prisoner, while the rest had fled

across the border. Several activists faced the death penalty or long terms of imprisonment. In April 1965, a last attempt was made to oust Niger's government, when a young *Sawabist* tried to assassinate the president. The attempt failed as dismally as the autumn revolt the year before and marked *Sawaba's* definitive exile into the political wilderness.

The main interest of this episode, on which no scholarly research has ever been undertaken, derives from the insight it provides into a bitter power struggle between two rival political forces. The underlying cause was, at least ostensibly, the search for an ideological foundation and definition of the legitimacy of the new, post-colonial polity. The revolt¹ and its failure also involved certain other dimensions that make it of more than a passing interest to observers of Africa's past and contemporary politics.

This chapter argues that, despite the existence of regional, if not ethnic, cleavages and rivalries, the insurrection was caused by various factors, and regional tensions were probably only contextual. Since Niger's independence, its politics have to some extent been affected by regional fault lines that have set different regions and communities against each other. The principal fault line is the competition between the eastern parts of Niger, inhabited by Hausa-speaking communities, and the western regions of the country that are dominated by Zerma- and Songhai-speaking groups. While the groundnut-producing areas of the east constituted the main source of the country's national income at independence, it was the western Zerma and Songhai groups that took control of Niger's political system.

Nevertheless, social-generational competition may have been a more important aspect in the revolt, as this set younger people – Hausa as well as non-Hausa – apart from an older generation of Nigeriens who either belonged to Hausaland's chiefly class or had monopolized the country's public life and assumed control of the limited numbers of jobs and benefits. Part of *Sawaba's* support base in the late 1950s was thus made up of relatively young men, some of Hausa origin and in particular, recent immigrants to Niger's emergent urban areas. Many were traders, transporters or members of Muslim brotherhoods – such as the *Tijaniyya* – and retained links with their home region. As the most mobile and economically active members of their community, they resented the domination of Hausa society by the (neo)traditional canton chiefs or *Sarkis* – conservative elements whose interests did not necessarily coincide with those of the younger generation. Many youngsters, Hausas and non-Hausas alike, wanted access to modern education or aspired to wealth and new positions in society,

¹ The terms 'revolt', 'rebellion' and 'insurrection' are used interchangeably here. The concept of 'invasion' points to the mode of, and the external-spatial dimension to, the rebellion.

which neither the Hausa chiefly class nor Niger's state elite would provide. *Sawaba's* appeal, in this context, stemmed not only from the more militant strain of African nationalism that it professed, but probably also from its ability to offer these young men the possibility to go abroad to see new countries and learn new trades – an offer that the more ambitious and adventurous among them found difficult to resist. The party's ability to provide such attractive benefits depended on its charismatic leader, Djibo Bakary, who had long-established contacts with the French communist party and had managed to build up a network of contacts in the Eastern bloc.

His reliance on Eastern-bloc aid brought *Sawaba's* violent bid for power squarely within a Cold-War ambit. As discussed below, Eastern European countries, the Soviet Union and especially communist China provided the party with political and military support. In fact, for the People's Republic of China, assisting *Sawaba's* revolt represented its first violent attempt to gain a foothold in West Africa. This in itself was not unique, since the Eastern bloc was, at the time, aiding nationalist parties and liberation movements in various Sub-Saharan countries, especially those still under colonial or settler suzerainty. However, for the communist bloc, Niger represented an attractive prize. While economically weak, the country was suspected, by the early 1960s, of having important deposits of uranium, one of the most strategic mineral resources of the Cold War. Secondly, the country was strategically located in West Africa between the region's would-be superpower – Nigeria – and Algeria, France's former mainstay that had also been its first nuclear testing ground. Thirdly, since Niger's political leadership was closely allied to President Houphouët-Boigny of Ivory Coast – France's staunchest and most anti-communist ally – a successful *Sawaba* takeover in Niger would have dealt a severe blow to the interests of France, the Western world and its African allies. Conversely, part of *Sawaba's* failure to topple Niger's government also stemmed from this Cold War context, as it led the French to defend their interests in Niger by trying to thwart *Sawaba's* invasion plans.

The Cold War context of *Sawaba's* insurrection also accounted for another – astonishing – aspect of this story, namely the unfounded optimism with which the party's leadership went about its business. As argued in the last section of this chapter, this may have been tied to an understudied dimension of Marxist-inspired liberation ideologies, which involve a degree of romanticism about revolutionary struggle that can easily blur one's view of reality.

The principal cause for failure stemmed from *Sawaba's* lack of domestic support. As will be shown, the party did not really have the backing of the Hausa peasantry, something which substantially weakened its internal support base that could, in practice, only sustain a ramshackle coalition of diverse interests between its leadership and the rank and file. That *Sawaba* drew at least some of

its backing from Hausa and non-Hausa youths could not compensate for the lack of support of the Hausa populace and may well have dissipated its strength in a political system that was partly affected by regional fault lines. This weakness may have been reinforced by the fact that the party's rank and file was probably driven more by a mixture of personal aspirations and pragmatic opportunism than ethnic jealousies or revolutionary zeal *per se*. This assortment of motivations linked up with what was probably the main driving force behind Djibo Bakary's decision to instigate an insurrection – a long-standing personal feud with, and the desire to capture power from, his main political adversary. However, this assessment can only be tentative since data on the motivations of the individual actors are still sketchy, particularly those of *Sawaba*'s rank and file. Further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of what drove these men to their deaths or imprisonment.

Lastly, in trying to reconstruct the exact trajectories that the *Sawabists* followed before they met their fate, this chapter touches on two other external dimensions – one which today would probably be portrayed as a typical example of globalization, and the other involving a striking resemblance to the subversive political networks marking the regional context of some of West Africa's contemporary conflicts. Thus, the prelude of the rebellion took *Sawaba* activists to the far corners of the world, visiting, studying and training in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, North Vietnam, Chinese cities like Peking and Nanking, Cuba and, possibly, North Korea. Moreover, in the run-up to the insurrection, *Sawaba* activists spread throughout North and West Africa, keeping in touch with each other, building subversive contacts and acquiring support from different African governments.

A note on sources

Before tracing the revolt's background, planning, execution and aftermath, and providing a tentative interpretation of its internal and external features, a few words are needed on the sources on which this reconstruction is based. The reconstruction of *Sawaba*'s insurrection is hindered by a dearth of sources, especially primary source material. The sources at hand consist mainly of secondary documents such as newspaper reports and journalistic articles, which do not cite sources and are partly based on interviews by Western journalists with *Sawabists* caught after the revolt.

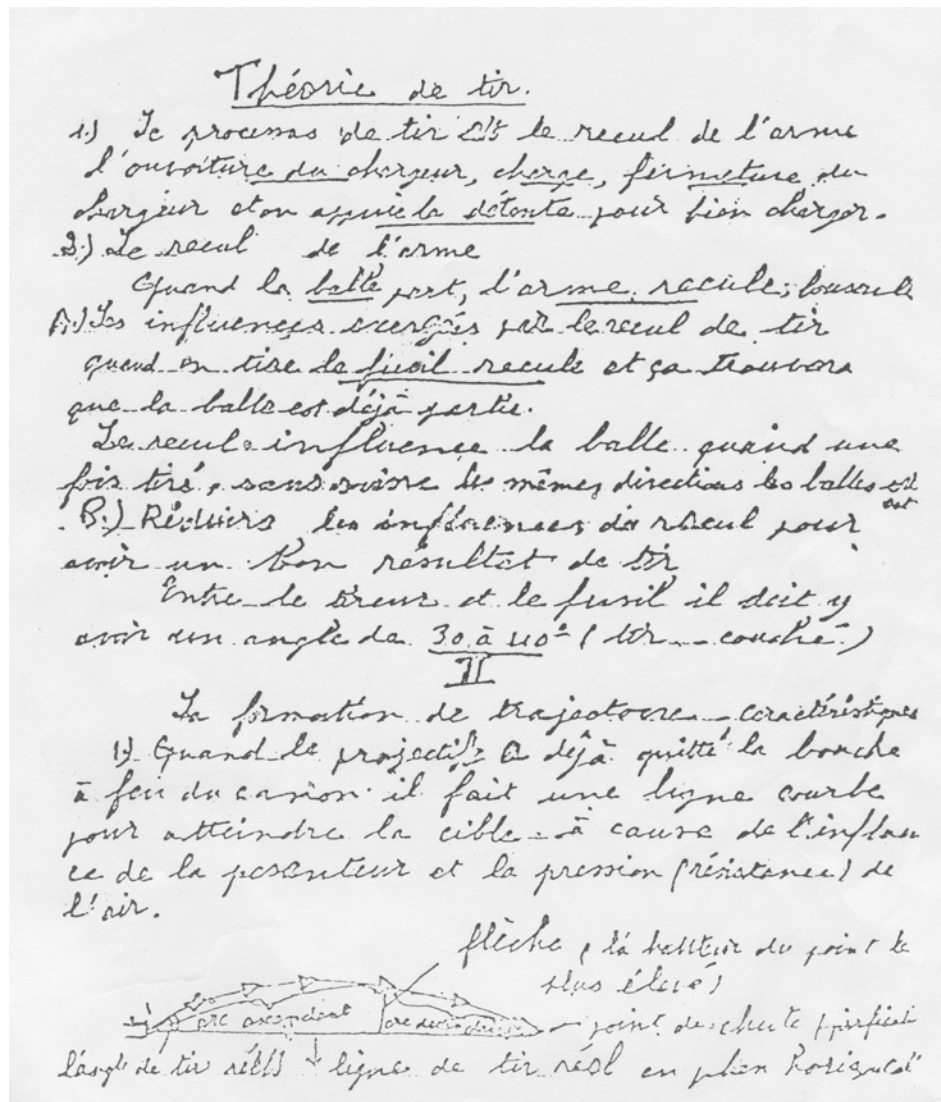


Figure 9.1 'The theory of firing a gun'. A page from the exercise book allegedly found on écolier terroriste Hassane Djibo who was taught in French by North Vietnamese instructors in Nanking.

Source: *Fraternité Hebdo*, 14 May 1965

One should be careful in interpreting such evidence, as it was usually obtained in the presence of government officials.² These interviews, nevertheless, contain a wealth of information about the planning and execution of the invasion. The same is true for a speech given by Camille Aliali, Niger's Foreign Minister, at the extraordinary session of the OAU Council of Ministers in Lagos in June 1965, where the complicity of other West African countries in the insurrection was discussed. All these sources contain illustrative material such as photocopies of maps with the invasion plans and notes written in the personal notebooks of *Sawaba* guerrillas, which Niger's government claimed were found on activists when they were arrested (Figure 9.1). In addition to notebooks, maps and invasion plans, they also included ideological tracts of a Marxist-Maoist nature and texts of oaths that activists swore to the *Sawaba* cause.³

² The interview conducted by Wolfgang Bretholz (*National Zeitung*, Bern) with incarcerated *Sawabists* was reprinted in *Fraternité Hebdo* of 14 May 1965, the organ of the ruling party in Ivory Coast, an ally of Niger's government. Entitled 'Les Camps de Sofia, Nankin et Accra en Ont Fait un Tueur', it was conducted in the presence of the Assistant Director of Niger's *Sûreté*. Handcuffs were taken off during the interview. While treatment of the *Sawabists* was harsh, Bretholz's interviewees said they were not maltreated but that they had been sentenced to death or might face the death penalty and that they did not know whether they would be pardoned. In the second part of the interview (reprinted in *Fraternité Hebdo*, 21 May 1965, as 'Comment N'Krumah et Ses Amis Communistes Transforment de Jeunes Africains en Tueurs') other *Sawabists* denounced Djibo Bakary's 'criminal policy'. Another journalist, J.P. Ruttiman, mentioned complaints over insufficient or poor food. He also noted that, at one moment in his interview, the Director of the Bureau of Coordination in the President's Office, former French colonial governor Colombani, walked out and that the prisoners did not retract any statements. However, this interview took place in 1967 when the atmosphere in Niger had become more relaxed. Yet, this is an interesting source as it contains a description of a discussion between leadership and rank and file and their disagreements. Ruttiman also mentions that Ousmane Dan Galadima, the *Sawabist* who supervised the invasion in 1964, refused to sign the protocols of his interrogation, accusing government officials of twisting his words: J.P. Ruttiman, 'Le Président Hamani Diori Nous Déclare: "Djibo Bakary ne Constitue pas Actuellement un Danger pour Nous, Mais..."', *Afrique Nouvelle*, 1035 (8-13 June 1967).

³ See Bretholz, 'Les Camps de Sofia, Nankin et Accra' and 'Comment N'Krumah et Ses Amis Communistes', and an interview by Randolph Braumann, 'So Bildet China Mörder aus', *Rheinischer Merkur*, 18 (30 April 1965), 14. This was reprinted in French in *Fraternité Hebdo* of 28 May, 4 June and 11 June 1965 as 'Avec les Tueurs de la SAWABA'. Journalists were astonished that the *Sawabists* were caught with this material. Aliali's OAU speech was reprinted in *Fraternité Hebdo* of 2, 9 and 16 July 1965 as 'Le Contentieux Nigéro-Ghanéen'.

While this material should not be interpreted at face value,⁴ it seems unlikely, in view of the amount and wealth of detail, that it was all fabricated by *Sawaba*'s enemies. Much of it fits into a pattern of what is known about militant nationalism and movements of kindred organizations in other African states. Hence, it enables us to establish a picture of the patterns and meaning of the revolt when compared to other material, such as documentary sources retrieved from the National Archives of Ghana,⁵ whose government supported the invasion. Admittedly, the picture remains incomplete, notably with regard to the motivations of *Sawaba*'s foot soldiers. Djibo Bakary himself never publicly came back to the issue⁶ nor, it seems, did other high-ranking *Sawaba* functionaries.

'Thorez' – The prehistory to exile

In the 1950s, Djibo Bakary was a rising star in public life in Niger. The son of a Zerma chief from the west of the country, and of low birth, Djibo was brought up in the central town of Tahoua where he learned Hausa. He was a cousin of Hamani Diori, and for some time also his friend, until the two fell out. Nicknamed 'Thorez',⁷ Djibo became a charismatic nationalist, who would soon

⁴ Thus Bretholz's interviews were clearly arranged by the governments of Ivory Coast and Niger. See 'Les Camps de Sofia, Nankin et Accra'. Other journalists, like Jean-Pierre Morillon and Gilbert Comte, were openly anti-communist and sympathetic towards Niger's government, dubbing the *Sawabists* as terrorists. Georges Chaffard wrote a chapter containing the most detailed account of the insurrection in *Les Carnets Secrets de la Décolonisation*, vol. 2, (Paris, 1965), 269-332. While being less partisan and clearly having had access to some of the material mentioned above, Chaffard did not cite his sources. According to Finn Fuglestad, Chaffard was 'brilliant but not always accurate'. F. Fuglestad, 'Djibo Bakary, The French, and the Referendum of 1958 in Niger', *Journal of African History*, 14, 2 (1973), 313 n. 1. Also his *A History of Niger 1850-1960* (Cambridge, 1983).

⁵ Cited as 'GNA'. An early secondary source that sheds light on this dimension is W.S. Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy, 1957-1966: Diplomacy, Ideology, and the New State* (Princeton, 1969).

⁶ His autobiography ends in 1960 and in an interview at the end of the book, he evaded the issue. D. Bakary, *Silence! On Décolonise ... Itinéraire Politique et Syndical d'un Militant Africain* (Paris, 1992), 291. In an interview with J.R. de Benoist, he also stopped short of discussing political developments after 1960. 'Djibo Bakary Parle', *Politique Africaine*, 38 (June 1990), 98-110.

⁷ After Maurice Thorez, leader of the French communist party, PCF.

antagonize the colonial administration with his militant rhetoric.⁸ He was an active trade unionist in emerging urban areas, organizing strikes that resulted in substantial salary increases for urban wage earners. Backed by his close alliance with the French communist party and trade-union federation, Djibo was independent of the colonial administration and soon considered a major troublemaker. He tried, with some success, to penetrate traditional youth movements, women's organizations and crafts guilds, and built up some support among groundnut farmers in the west of the country.

Until the mid 1950s, however, Djibo's power base did not add up to an electoral majority. By 1956 this was in sight when his party, the *Union Démocratique Nigérienne*, merged with another political group that enjoyed backing in Hausaland, including that of many *Sarkis* or canton chiefs. Moreover, the ambitious Djibo decided to break with the communists, as association with a communist party was an electoral liability not only because of the hostility of the colonial administration but also in the face of attempts to gain a foothold in the more traditionally oriented Hausa areas.

The Hausas generally resented the domination of the Zerma and Songhai in Diori's PPN and the country's civil service, especially as Hausa groundnut production contributed the largest share to the national income. While half of Djibo's most prominent lieutenants came from other West African countries, his party was mainly staffed with Hausas, notably young, urban trade unionists who had, by the early 1960s, left the countryside and could help to spread the party message. Nevertheless, his followers now made for strange bedfellows. Besides the trade unionists, Djibo's most faithful allies were local traders and followers of the Tijaniyya brotherhood, economically active people who opposed the traditional order represented by the party's other allies, the *Sarkis*, against whom Djibo had been agitating at an earlier stage in his career. Moreover, the extent of his influence among the Hausa peasantry remained limited.

Notwithstanding this shaky alliance, the new party managed to win the legislative elections of 1957, after which Djibo was appointed government leader acting under the supervision of the French colonial governor. The victorious party changed its name to *Sawaba*, a Hausa word variously translated as 'freedom', 'independence', or 'tranquillity'. Tranquil was it not to be, however, since the French pushed through constitutional reforms allowing them to retain considerable influence over their African territories, even after their eventual independence. Djibo found it hard to accept this constitutional scenario, perhaps in part because of *Sawaba's* ideological tenets – which involved

⁸ This section is based on Fuglestad, *History of Niger*, and 'Djibo Bakary, The French, and the Referendum of 1958 in Niger'; Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*; and S. Decalo, *Historical Dictionary of Niger* (Lanham, MD & London, 1997).

relatively militant nationalist rhetoric and Pan-Africanist sentiments – and because he may have wanted the full command of state machinery to consolidate his fragile power base. While this made him oppose the plans, the French exerted heavy pressure on the population, including the chiefly class in Hausaland, to approve their reforms in a referendum. Consequently, an overwhelming majority of the electorate voted in favour of the reforms, even in the capital Niamey and the Hausa east. Djibo had to resign as government leader. When the PPN gained a majority in subsequent legislative elections, Hamani Diori succeeded Djibo in office.

Thus, *Sawaba* was abandoned by most of Hausaland's chiefs and peasants. In addition, it was now confronted by a hostile government intent on eliminating the party as an effective opposition force. In February 1959 Djibo left the country for Dakar, Senegal. Six months later, Diori's government banned *Sawaba*, accusing it of colluding with foreign forces and planning subversion. In June 1960, eighteen *Sawabists*, including Abdoulaye Mamani, Adamou Sekou and Issaka Koke, were arrested on conspiracy charges. In September, barely a month after Niger had acceded to independence, sentence was passed, with Mamani facing the heaviest penalty – two years' imprisonment – and Djibo Bakary and Ousmane Dan Galadima, *Sawaba*'s Assistant Secretary-General, being sentenced *in absentia*. Although Mamani and other detainees were subsequently pardoned and reintegrated in the administration, *Sawaba* had been dealt a painful blow.

The political significance of this was more than mere electoral defeat. In Niger's traditional political cultures, including that of Hausaland, the position of the chiefly leader depended on his ability to muster 'force' or command 'luck' (Hausa: *nasara k'arfi* or *arzika*), which in turn depended on his relationship with the invisible world of deities that formed the ultimate sanctification of political rule. Evidence of the ruler's favour with the divine beings could be his success in battle, good rains and harvests or, more generally, a flourishing political career.⁹ This political world-view provided Nigerien politics with a hard edge that rewards success and, if need be, ruthlessness but penalizes weakness and the decline of political fortune. The banning of *Sawaba*, therefore, showed to Niger's electorate that its 'luck' was up and that it did not deserve further support.

In contrast, Diori's party managed to capture the highest office in the land, lead the country to independence and maintain vital relations with the French. In order to confront potential challenges, the country was governed by a triumvirate, made up of President Diori, Boubou Hama, the Chairman of the National Assembly, and Diamballa Yansambou Maïga, the Minister of the

⁹ This interpretation is based on Fuglestad, *History of Niger*, *passim*.

Interior. Maïga was its most powerful member and also represented the leadership's ruthless core. Together with the uncompromising Hama, who was detested by segments of Niamey's population, this enabled Diori to present the regime's more benign and forgiving image.¹⁰ Yet *Sawaba* still enjoyed some support among the younger generation, the economically active, those aspiring to higher social status, and residents in the urban environment of Niamey.

External and internal preparations

In September 1959, Djibo relocated to Bamako in Mali where the atmosphere was more in tune with *Sawaba's* militant posturing than that in Dakar. The headquarters of Mali's ruling party in the eastern city of Gao served as a mailbox for Djibo and *Sawaba's* underground leadership in Niger. Djibo was allowed to broadcast once a week on Radio Bamako and, in possession of a Malian passport, travelled to the Ghanaian capital Accra where he established a section of *Sawaba* among the local community of Nigeriens. Many were regional traders or people who had fallen out with Diori's government. Djibo asked John Tettegah, leader of the Ghana-financed All-African Trade Union Federation for financial support, while trade unionists in Nigeria were asked to facilitate contacts with the Hausa communities living along the border with Niger.¹¹

Ghana, however, proved to be Djibo's best regional source of support. Its president and fervent Pan-Africanist, Kwame Nkrumah, tried to spread his ideological tenets throughout Africa. The Nkrumah government invited liberation movements from countries still under white domination to establish groups in Ghana, but extended this hospitality also to nationals from independent African states whose regimes did not share Nkrumah's political convictions.¹² To assist its political allies, the Ghanaian government had established a Bureau of African Affairs (BAA), which developed into a semi-autonomous nerve-centre for clandestine operations in other African states.¹³ Consequently, Djibo got in touch with Nkrumah and asked for training facilities

¹⁰ G. Comte, 'Les Principaux Dirigeants Nigériens: Un Triumvirat Surprenant', *Europe-France-Outremer*, 430 (November 1965), 16-20, and Decalo, *Historical Dictionary of Niger*, 157 & 201.

¹¹ Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 307.

¹² Details in Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy*; I.W. Zartman, *International Relations in the New Africa* (Englewood Cliffs, 1966); and K. van Walraven, *Dreams of Power: The Role of the Organization of African Unity in the Politics of Africa 1963-1993* (Aldershot, 1999), Chapters 3-4.

¹³ Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy*, 107 & 222-26.

for guerrillas who he hoped to send to Niger at some time in the future. At least in ideological respects, the two men had roughly similar, or potentially compatible, interests. The close friendship of the Diori government with President Houphouët-Boigny of Ivory Coast, Nkrumah's principal rival, facilitated the establishment of political relations with the *Sawaba* leader.¹⁴ Thus, Djibo opened a bank account in Accra, fed by local Nigerien traders and the BAA.¹⁵

Djibo also established contact with the Algerian government, Morocco, the People's Republic of China and North Vietnam. There are not many details available about how Djibo achieved this, although *Sawaba* later established military training camps in several of these countries. Djibo may have met with Ben Bella in Oujda in Algeria in 1962,¹⁶ while in January of that year he had a meeting with the chairman of the East German Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, Eggebrecht, in East Berlin. The *Sawaba* leader was promised arms in return for future repayment and preferential prospecting of Niger's sub-soil resources, once Djibo came to power.¹⁷ The year before, Salle Dan Koulou, a member of *Sawaba*'s political bureau, was sent with a delegation to a Marxist-inspired youth festival in Helsinki where he got in touch with eight Nigeriens from the Soviet Union. They impressed him with stories about insurgency training in the Eastern bloc, which Dan Koulou reported to Djibo.¹⁸

By 1962, *Sawaba*'s section in Ghana had built up some influence with the government.¹⁹ The party had to maintain a lower profile in Mali, as the government there was prepared to turn a blind eye to *Sawaba*'s presence but still wanted to improve its own ties with France. Moreover, Ardaly Daouda, a *Sawabist* responsible for youth matters, was assassinated in Bamako in May

¹⁴ Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 307, who wrote that Nkrumah was one of Djibo's friends. Thompson (*Ghana's Foreign Policy*, 245-46) denies this, however. It appears that they met each other in April 1964 to discuss events in Niger. See *Nkrumah's Subversion in Africa: Documentary Evidence of Nkrumah's Interference in the Affairs of Other African States* (Ministry of Information: Accra, n.d.), 39. R.A. Higgot ('Colonial Origins and Environmental Influences on the Foreign Relations of a West African Land-Locked State: The Case of Niger', PhD thesis, University of Birmingham (1979), 306, n. 93) speaks of a personal allowance for Djibo by the BAA of £1,500 a year as of 1962.

¹⁵ Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 309.

¹⁶ J.P. Morillon, 'La Tentative Insurrectionnelle du SAWABA', *Est et Ouest*, 342 (16-31 May 1965), 22.

¹⁷ Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 307-8. An obvious reference to uranium, the presence of which was already suspected.

¹⁸ *Le Monde*, 4 February 1965, and G. Comte, 'An Assassination that Failed', *National Review: A Journal of Fact and Opinion*, 7 (New York, 15 June 1965), 509-10.

¹⁹ An example is given by Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy*, 366.

1962, possibly as a result of an argument with Djibo over money and women, after which *Sawaba's* leader relocated to Accra.²⁰

The cadres necessary for an onslaught on the Diori regime were recruited as early as 1961.²¹ *Sawaba* emissaries, disguised as itinerant *marabouts* or traders, travelled through Niger and contacted youngsters who, as Chaffard described, were promised scholarships and the chance to study abroad. Possibly some three hundred men were persuaded to leave for Bamako, which served as the point of *rendez-vous* before they travelled on to their educational destinations. These destinations consisted, however, of a network of camps spread across West and North Africa and beyond, whose principal goal was military training and political indoctrination. The Bamako office was manned by Salou Damana, who had had trade-union education and military training in Guinea-Conakry and Morocco. He was charged with welcoming recruits and maintaining relations with foreign embassies. He was assisted by Issaka Koke, who had fled Niger after his pardon and worked as an employee of a French technical assistance scheme in the Malian capital.²²

After Bamako, some activists were sent to North Africa where *Sawaba* was allowed to use a camp belonging to the Algerian FLN (Front de Libération Nationale) in Kibdani in the north-east of Morocco, and later a camp in Marnia in the Oran region of Algeria itself. *Sawaba's* Assistant Secretary-General, Dan Galadima, had already been based in the Moroccan capital Rabat for some time. When Algeria became independent, he left for Accra, the Kibdani camp was closed, and *Sawaba* opened an office in Algiers. This was headed by Abdoulaye Mamani, who had again fallen out with Diori and fled to Bamako to escape re-arrest. Besides maintaining control over the recruits in Marnia, Tiaret and at a school in Algiers, Mamani had the task of purchasing arms and dispatching them to Ghana.²³ One Louis Bourges, described as a *métis* and transporter based in the Saharan town of Tamanrasset, was charged with the relevant liaison duties.²⁴ According to Aboubakar Oumarou,²⁵ the Algerian camps were meant for

²⁰ For the few details available, see Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 308-9.

²¹ Comte, 'An Assassination that Failed', 510.

²² Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 310.

²³ The school was the Ecole des Transmissions d'Alger. Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 309. Chaffard gives May 1961 as the date for Mamani's escape. For details, see the necrology in *West Africa*, 28 June-4 July 1993, which claims 1962 was the year of his flight to Bamako.

²⁴ Morillon, 'La Tentative Insurrectionnelle du SAWABA'.

²⁵ A chauffeur for the municipality of Niamey when Djibo Bakary was in power. Later he gave evidence on the *Sawaba* rebellion. Morillon, 'La Tentative Insurrectionnelle du SAWABA'.

political-military training of the middle cadres. In December 1962, 52 Nigeriens travelled there and were integrated in the Algerian armed forces.²⁶

Sawaba's prospective force commanders first made an astonishing itinerary throughout the Eastern bloc. Some, like Hassane Djibo,²⁷ waited for seven months in Accra before travelling on by plane, via Dakar and Prague, to the Bulgarian capital Sofia. At a trade-union school there, he was taught about Marxism-Leninism, the workers' movement, trade unionism and industrialization, before heading back – via the Black Sea resort of Varna – to Accra. Others, like Boubakar Djingaré, travelled from Bamako to Accra and then on to Moscow. Here he and ten other Nigeriens followed an eight-month training course at a trade-union institution before returning to Ghana.²⁸ Then they flew to the People's Republic of China or North Vietnam. For example, Hassane Djibo and another companion were taken by a *Sawaba* official, Issoufou Gado, to Cairo and then flew on to Karachi, Rangoon and Peking. There, they took a train to Nanking.²⁹ Another *Sawabist*, Djibo Seyni,³⁰ took a more difficult route. In the autumn of 1962 he and another compatriot flew from Accra to Prague, where they stayed for two days before taking the train to Moscow. There they were met by an official from the North Vietnamese embassy. Three days later, they took the trans-Siberia railway to Peking and then, again by train, went on to Hanoi, where they were received by three other Nigeriens who had flown to Vietnam the week before. The five of them then went on to the Ecole Nationale Militaire at Son Tay, located on the Red River, 36 km northwest of Hanoi.³¹

In China, trainers and translators helped to teach the Nigeriens, in addition to the tenets of Marxism-Leninism and Maoism, a variety of military skills, such as how to handle a rifle (Figure 9.1), make bombs, commit acts of sabotage, ambush troops and organize *coups d'état*.³² Some of the training took place in

²⁶ One other *Sawabist* who travelled to Marnia was Yacouba Dari, a companion of Aboubakar Oumarou, who was based there until September 1963. *ibid.* and Comte, 'An Assassination that Failed', 510.

²⁷ An agricultural teacher. Bretholz, 'Les Camps de Sofia, Nankin et Accra'.

²⁸ Djingaré was a 26-year-old mason from Niamey. Braumann, 'Avec les Tueurs de la SAWABA'.

²⁹ Bretholz, 'Les Camps de Sofia, Nankin et Accra'.

³⁰ A nurse by profession. Bretholz, 'Comment N'Krumah et Ses Amis Communistes'.

³¹ *Ibid.* and Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 311.

³² Hassane Djibo claimed that military training was only theoretical and that his instructors did not allow them to carry arms. However, he had been condemned to death and may have had an interest in playing down his training. Bretholz, 'Les Camps de Sofia, Nankin et Accra'. Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 311, claimed *Sawabists* were trained at an exercise ground fifteen km outside Nanking.

the so-called School of the Chinese Revolution.³³ All in all, the training lasted three months.³⁴ While in Nanking the Nigeriens were only in the company of compatriots or other Africans, but in North Vietnam they met thousands of other trainees, mostly Vietnamese, but also other foreigners.³⁵ Training there consisted of indoctrination and guerrilla warfare and took eight to nine months.³⁶ In total, some thirty Nigeriens received such training, either in Nanking or Son Tay.³⁷ Then came the return journey to West Africa, usually along the same route that had taken them to the Far East. Djibo Seyni, for example, arrived back in Accra in May 1963 and, according to him, was personally welcomed by Bakary. Seyni and his men were then taken to Mampong, north of Kumasi.³⁸

While the Nanking contingent represented *Sawaba's* force commanders,³⁹ Mampong and other Ghanaian camps trained the party's foot soldiers. The other camps where *Sawabists* would have received training were at Half-Assini, Axim and Konongo-Odumassi near Syniani.⁴⁰ If it is true that *Sawaba's* total force amounted to some 300 men, of which roughly one third⁴¹ were middle and higher cadres receiving training in Algeria and the Eastern bloc, then the Ghanaian camps could have instructed some 200 *Sawabists*. Their training involved military skills, details of which were published later by the government that toppled Nkrumah's regime. Some of the instructors may have been Russian,

³³ Bretholz, 'Les Camps de Sofia, Nankin et Accra'. Boubakar Djingaré spoke of a big school on the outskirts of the city. Braumann, 'Avec les Tueurs de la SAWABA'.

³⁴ Braumann, 'Avec les Tueurs de la SAWABA' and Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 311. Comte, 'An Assassination that Failed', 509, suggests ten months on the basis of the trainees' personal notebooks.

³⁵ Son Tay was a major North Vietnamese training site, later to be attacked by US Special Operations Forces in an effort to free POWs (1970). See the website www.sontayraider.com

³⁶ Bretholz, 'Les Camps de Sofia, Nankin et Accra' and 'Comment N'Krumah et Ses Amis communistes' and Braumann, 'Avec les Tueurs de la SAWABA'.

³⁷ Later, some people received training in Cuba. See *Fraternité Hebdo*, 9 July 1965.

³⁸ Bretholz, 'Comment N'Krumah et Ses Amis Communistes'.

³⁹ Morillon gives the following names: Dodo Hamballi, Baro Alfari, Dandouna Aboubakar, Sékou Béri, Harouna Bonkourou, Issoufou Bambaro, Souley Gori, Tini (or Tine) Malélé, Joseph Akouët and Issoufou Gaho (Gado?), former announcer on Radio Moscow's Hausa service. Morillon, 'La Tentative Insurrectionnelle du SAWABA'. To this list should be added Salle Dan Koulou, who flew to Peking with eight or ten activists. *Le Monde*, 4 February 1965 and Comte, 'An Assassination that Failed', 510.

⁴⁰ Aliali, 'Le Contentieux Nigéro-Ghanéen'. Obenemasi should also be included in this list, where, for example, 50 Nigeriens were enrolled in May 1965. See *Nkrumah's Subversion in Africa*, 20.

⁴¹ Morillon, 'La Tentative Insurrectionnelle du SAWABA'.

as Chinese trainers arrived only in October 1964 – the very month of the invasion of Niger.⁴²

In Niger itself, meanwhile, political tensions were rising. In November 1963 the Diori government became embroiled in a row with neighbouring Dahomey over the sacking of Dahomeans from Niger's public services and a related frontier dispute. Domestic opposition came from trade unionists whose organization had been banned; students who accused the educated elite of having monopolized power; and Touareg resenting Zerma-Songhai domination of the country's political system. Moreover, in the eyes of the government not all sections of the army could be relied upon. Two top functionaries, both of them Peul, were considered suspect: Zodi Ikiah, the Minister of Defence, and Captain Hassan Diallo, an officer in charge of a heavy weapons unit who staged a failed mutiny to get redress for various grievances. Both men, who were interned in December 1963, were approached by *Sawaba* in a bid to secure their support against the Diori regime.⁴³ About that time, the first clandestine operation was undertaken inside Niger, either to assist in a military mutiny or to contact different opposition figures. The infiltrator, possibly the Son Tay trainee Djibo Seyni, then returned to Accra and is said to have reported negatively on the country's revolutionary potential.⁴⁴

Efforts to reconcile Niger's government with its arch enemy came to nothing, at least in part because of Djibo's own intransigence. Things turned uglier with *Sawaba* sympathizers being beaten up in Zinder and Tahoua and a terrible incident near the town of Maradi, which was in the heart of Hausaland and seen as Djibo's fief:⁴⁵ in May 1964 *Sawaba* sympathizers attacked Boubou Hama and Maïga, the two government hardliners, in the course of a local meeting, after which police moved in and some forty people, the majority of whom were not *Sawabists*, were thrown in prison. In the overcrowded conditions, 21 of them, many youngsters, died of asphyxiation. The incident scared people in the Hausa east and it was reported that several took refuge in Nigeria.⁴⁶ Gendarmes also killed Alzouma Koussanga, a vet and one of *Sawaba*'s most respected internal leaders. He was arrested in Maradi on 2 September, as were other people, and

⁴² *Nkrumah's Subversion in Africa*, 6-7.

⁴³ Details in Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 313-16; Fuglestad, *History of Niger*, 160; Decalo, *Historical Dictionary of Niger*, 118 & 332; and *Afrique Nouvelle*, 898 (23-29 October 1964).

⁴⁴ Bretholz, 'Comment N'Krumah et Ses Amis Communistes'.

⁴⁵ See *Afrique Nouvelle*, 898 (23-29 October 1964).

⁴⁶ It was said that *Sawaba* recruited among these people. *Afrique Nouvelle*, 898 (23-29 October 1964).

died in detention shortly afterwards.⁴⁷ Another leading *Sawabist*, Adamou Sekou, was again taken into custody and incarcerated in a camp in the Sahara. Boubacar Ali Diallo, a cabinet minister and former *Sawaba* militant, was dismissed on suspicion of complicity in the mutiny of the previous year.⁴⁸

These events may have convinced Djibo that discontent was widespread, while most reports of clandestine *Sawabists* suggested that the party's guerrillas would be received with open arms. Yet, while the toughening of the government did much to escalate the conflict, Djibo had possibly all along entertained the option of violent action. At roughly the time that the Maradi detainees died, Djibo, Abdoulaye Mamani and Ousmane Dan Galadima met in Porto Novo in Dahomey to review operational planning.⁴⁹ Moreover, by the summer of 1964 military training had been under way for well over two years.

The cadres assembled in Accra. In September, *Sawaba's* main forces were dispatched in small groups to Porto Novo, which could be used as a forward base as the Dahomean authorities, embroiled in their own dispute with Diori, were prepared to turn a blind eye and facilitate operations. *Sawaba* issued several communiqués and declarations, broadcast throughout West Africa, in which it announced that it would liberate Niger from the Diori regime, which was deemed 'anti-national' and neo-colonialist, imposed as it had been by 'foreign' (French) forces that together with Diori had 'illegally usurped' power in the years before.⁵⁰

Invasion

Some guerrillas would infiltrate via Dahomey, some through Upper Volta and others through Nigeria, assisted by activists of the Nigerian Labour Party. Operations were directed by Dan Galadima, *Sawaba's* Chief of Staff, in Porto Novo, where weapons would be distributed. Units would first attack Niger's border posts and then try to occupy the urban and rural centres with the help, it was imagined, of the local population. At a given signal, the internal *Sawaba* party would rise in support of the guerrillas.⁵¹ Djibo had ordered Salle Dan Koulou, Nanking trainee and member of *Sawaba's* political bureau, to dispatch

⁴⁷ Koussanga had been director of political affairs in Djibo's government. The most detailed description of this sad tale is in *Afrique Nouvelle*, 895 (2-8 October 1964).

⁴⁸ *West Africa*, 17 October 1964.

⁴⁹ Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 321.

⁵⁰ Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy*, 366; *Marchés Tropicaux*, 7 November 1964; *Afrique Nouvelle*, 898 (23-29 October 1964); *Fraternité Hebdo*, 9 July 1965; Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 321-24.

⁵¹ Comte, 'An Assassination that Failed', 510.

the guerrillas in small groups, spread along the entire length of the frontier with Upper Volta, Dahomey and Nigeria. The units would consist of ten to fifteen men each. Those in the western sector (Téra to Doutchi) were to attack the towns of Téra, Gotheye, Say and Gaya, those in the central sector Birni N’Konni, Tahoua and Madarounfa, and the eastern commandos would take on Matameye, Bosso and N’guigmi (see Map).⁵²

Those in the western sectors were to attack first.⁵³ One unit would establish contact in the Téra region with a group from Upper Volta, led by Nanking trainee Tini Malélé, and incite the local Peul and *bellas* (people of slave origin) to revolt. According to documents found later on this group, it had to isolate Téra by cutting communications, attack the administrative post of Bankilaré, capture all arms, and together with the Upper Volta group charge on Kokoro, take Téra and march on to Dargol. If it were not possible to occupy Téra, the guerrillas would try and capture its armaments, create confusion and start harassing ‘the whole of the Songhai region’. Both the population of the Téra canton and the people of Diagourou would be incited to rebel.⁵⁴

During the final stages of the operation, commandos would try and capture the capital. They would have to destroy its water supply, cut electricity and telephone lines, silence Radio Niger and destroy the Shell and Mobil Oil depots. Other commandos would occupy the airport, ammunition depots and the police headquarters. Across the country, market towns had a special importance, as they represented sources of people, ideas and money.⁵⁵ Money taken from border and administrative posts would be used for the cause and detainees freed from prison recruited for the struggle.⁵⁶ Once the various sectors had been occupied, Dan Koulou had to impose the *villayas* system – the autonomous military regions that had been used by the FLN in Algeria in its struggle against the French.⁵⁷ Some commandos were given orders to take certain people hostage or liquidate members of the government, such as the hated Minister of the

⁵² Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 321-24. At the OAU, Niger’s foreign minister referred to a western sector, a southern one (Birni N’Konni to N’Guigmi) and a northern sector (Filingué-Tahoua to Agadez), led by Abdoulaye Mamani and Issoufou Dambaro. Text in *Fraternité Hebdo*, 9 July 1965.

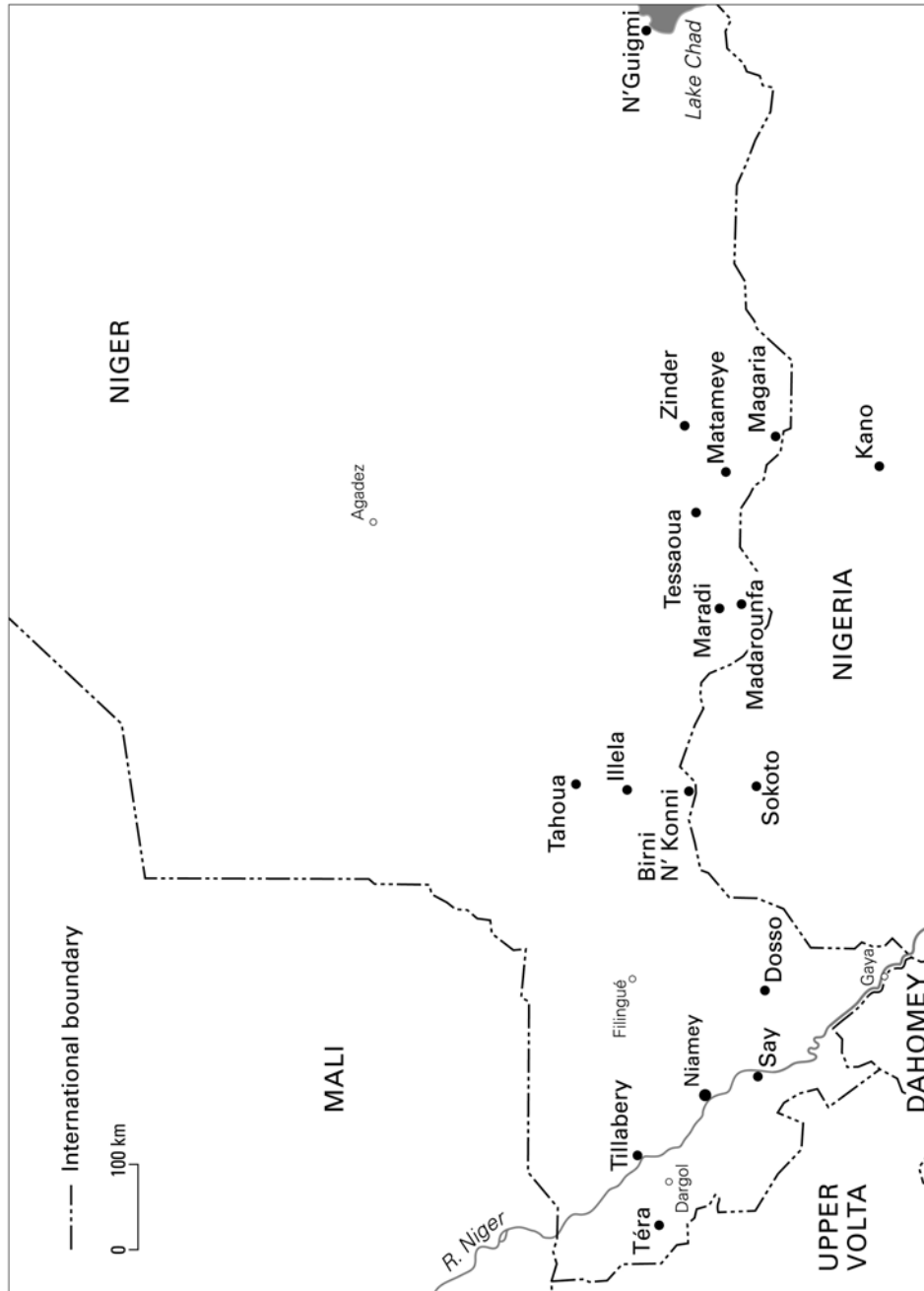
⁵³ See undated letter of Djibo Bakary to Salle Dan Koulou, printed in *Fraternité Hebdo*, 9 July 1965.

⁵⁴ Morillon, ‘La Tentative Insurrectionnelle du SAWABA’ and *Le Monde*, 4 February 1965.

⁵⁵ G. Comte, ‘Les Carnets de Nankin’, *Est et Ouest*, 357 (16-28 February 1966).

⁵⁶ Morillon, ‘La Tentative Insurrectionnelle du SAWABA’ and *Le Monde*, 4 February 1965.

⁵⁷ Djibo Bakary to Salle Dan Koulou, undated. Malélé’s instructions, of Chinese origin, also spoke of creating ‘free zones’. Comte, ‘An Assassination that Failed’, 510.



Map 9.1 Niger

Interior Maïga, on whose comings and goings domestic activists had collected valuable information.⁵⁸ All commandos were ordered to hide their documents before crossing into Niger. Djibo himself was to monitor infiltrations from Porto Novo.⁵⁹

The central units were to be led by men from *Sawaba*'s highest political hierarchy, as this region had provided considerable electoral support in the past. Hence, Dandouna Aboubakar, a former trade unionist and Nanking trainee, would attack Birni N'Konni, Salle Dan Koulou would take on Madarounfa and, if all went well, Maradi; and, further to the north, Abdou Iddi, a Son Tay trainee and political commissar attached to the guerrilla force,⁶⁰ would infiltrate Djibo's political stronghold at Tahoua.⁶¹

Thus, eight commando units went on the attack between late September and mid-October.⁶² On 27 and 28 September attacks took place in the west of Niger.⁶³ Between Say and the border with Upper Volta, one guerrilla unit was intercepted, five commandos were caught and their leader, Hassane Moussa, was killed. According to documents found on Moussa, the unit had planned to attack Say and incite a rebellion. It had infiltrated as two groups, one from Malanville in Dahomey and the other from Upper Volta.⁶⁴ Further west, a group of fourteen men, who had to establish contact with Tini Malélé's unit from Upper Volta, penetrated the Téra region.⁶⁵ On 2 October 1964, seven commandos, who had infiltrated from Upper Volta, attacked Gotheye in the west, 70 kilometres northeast of Niamey. They shot several PPN cadres and were heading for Téra when they were nearly all captured by armed villagers.⁶⁶ On 4 October, Salle

⁵⁸ Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 324.

⁵⁹ Djibo Bakary to Salle Dan Koulou, undated.

⁶⁰ According to Morillon, 'La Tentative Insurrectionnelle du SAWABA', Iddi had been trained in Nanking from 22 November 1962 to 4 May 1963, together with Yacouba Issa, Amadou Boubé, Souley Chaibou and Amadou Chaibou.

⁶¹ Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 321-25. One of these central units also included Dodo Hamballi, a *Sawaba* delegate from Zinder-Magaria. Aliali, 'Le Contentieux Nigéro-Ghanéen'.

⁶² Chafard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 325. Morillon, 'La Tentative Insurrectionnelle du SAWABA', speaks of nine. A few more could be counted, depending on what constituted a commando unit.

⁶³ *Marchés Tropicaux*, 7 November 1964.

⁶⁴ Aliali, 'Le Contentieux Nigéro-Ghanéen'.

⁶⁵ *Le Monde*, 4 February 1965. The fourteen could have been the total of both groups or Malélé's group alone, as Comte ('An Assassination that Failed', 510) speaks of Malélé's 'fourteen armed partisans'.

⁶⁶ Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 324. According to Niger's foreign minister (note 61), at least four groups penetrated from Upper Volta, and at least three from the town of Sokofé.

Dan Koulou's unit struck the post of Madarounfa in the central sector. It consisted of twelve men assembled in Kano, Nigeria, at the end of September and was armed with grenades and machine guns.⁶⁷ In the eastern sector, *Sawaba* commandos overran the customs post of Bosso near N'Guigmi around 8 October,⁶⁸ wounding several people, killing two officials, and capturing ten old rifles. They were led by a former chief, Katchella Abba Kaya, and assisted by smugglers active along the border with Chad and Nigeria. This unit had originally assembled in Kano, left the city on 14 September and regrouped at the Komadougou River before the attack.⁶⁹ Matameye, in the Hausa heartland, was attacked on 12 October by guerrillas armed with grenades and automatic rifles who had also left Kano, two days earlier.⁷⁰ Other guerrillas charged on Magaria⁷¹ and Ayorou, having crossed the border from Watagouna in Mali.⁷²

On 11 or 13 October, Dandouna Aboubakar and ten guerrillas, who had entered Niger from the Nigerian city of Sokoto, attacked Dosso in the Birni N'Konni region and shot the schoolmaster of Dibissou, who was considered to be pro-government. On this party more information is known thanks to an interview by a Western journalist with one of its captured members, Boubakar Djingaré, and the speech by Niger's foreign minister at the OAU. Djingaré's group left Sokoto on 14 September, travelling to the towns of Amaroua and Gamdawa, before it crossed into Niger and headed for the town of Illela. The commandos hid in the fields for several days, avoiding all contact with villages, while their commander and political commissar went off during the evening. Then the unit attacked a land rover and drove through the night to a homestead where a peasant had prepared a hideout.⁷³

The Bosso operation mentioned above could be interpreted as the high-water mark of *Sawaba's* invasion, as all other attacks backfired, were prevented or could not be followed up with forward action. Thus, one group was discovered by peasants only three days after having entered the western sector from Malanville. While eleven managed to escape, three were caught, among them

⁶⁷ *Le Monde*, 4 February 1965; Morillon, 'La Tentative Insurrectionnelle du SAWABA'; and Aliali, 'Le Contentieux Nigéro-Ghanéen'.

⁶⁸ The dates vary from 7 to 10 October. *Marchés Tropicaux* (7 November 1964) gives the night of 8 to 9 October. *Le Monde* (4 February 1965) mentions 8 October.

⁶⁹ Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 325; *Le Monde*, 4 February 1965; *Afrique Nouvelle*, 898 (23-29 October 1964); and Aliali ('Le Contentieux Nigéro-Ghanéen') who said the two victims in Bosso were a nurse, shot in his dispensary, and a defenceless peasant.

⁷⁰ *Le Monde*, 4 February 1965, and Aliali, 'Le Contentieux Nigéro-Ghanéen'.

⁷¹ Morillon, 'La Tentative Insurrectionnelle du SAWABA'.

⁷² Aliali, 'Le Contentieux Nigéro-Ghanéen'.

⁷³ Braumann, 'Avec les Tueurs de la SAWABA'; *Le Monde*, 4 February 1965; *Marchés Tropicaux*, 7 November 1964; and Aliali, 'Le Contentieux Nigéro-Ghanéen'.

Djibo Seyni.⁷⁴ From Madarounfa, Salle Dan Koulou was supposed to press on to Maradi. On 6 October, however, the Nanking trainee brought about his capture by accidentally firing his gun, killing one of his men and in the process betraying the unit's presence.⁷⁵ He was shot – possibly by a woman⁷⁶ – wounded and arrested with at least three other guerrillas.⁷⁷ Four of his comrades were killed. Djingaré's unit could not use the hideout prepared by their peasant friend, who feared that villagers would find out since the guerrillas had arrived during daylight. They were forced to take cover in the bush and after a few days left in the direction from which they had originally stolen the land rover. This time the men attacked a farmstead but peasants caught up with them.⁷⁸ They were all arrested, including Djingaré, a certain 'Momon'⁷⁹ and one Amadou Diop. The unit's leader, Dandouna Aboubakar, was interrogated and beaten to death with sticks.⁸⁰

Several others hid in the countryside, demoralized by the hostile reception they had received and at a loss as to what to do.⁸¹ On 6 November at Gaya on the Dahomean border, one guerrilla was attacked by dogs and caught by peasants.⁸² Another was killed near Tahoua on 28 November.⁸³ His commander, Abdou Iddi, had shot himself in the mouth but was captured alive.⁸⁴ Possibly around mid-October, security officers arrested Dodo Hamballi, Nanking *Sawabist* from Zinder-Magaria, while he was trying to smuggle weapons into the country.⁸⁵ On 24 October, the group of fourteen men in the Téra region,

⁷⁴ Bretholz, 'Comment N'Krumah et Ses Amis Communistes'.

⁷⁵ Morillon, 'La Tentative Insurrectionnelle du SAWABA'.

⁷⁶ According to Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 325. No other information is known on this.

⁷⁷ *West Africa*, 31 October 1964, and *Marchés Tropicaux*, 7 November 1964.

⁷⁸ Braumann, 'Avec les Tueurs de la SAWABA'.

⁷⁹ Possibly trained in Algeria. The people from this group, who according to Djingaré constituted seven in total, not ten, would also have included Balkara (or Boukara) Abdou, a Nanking trainee, and one Djibo Hassan (not to be confused with Hassane Djibo, who was in a unit that went from Malanville to Botou in Upper Volta and from there into Niger [Bretholz, 'Les Camps de Sofia, Nankin et Accra']). These events were reconstructed from Braumann, 'Avec les Tueurs de la Sawaba' and the original article in the *Rheinischer Merkur*, 'So Bildet China Mörder Aus'.

⁸⁰ According to Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, this took place on 9 October, which does not tally with other sources that give 11 or 13 October as the date of his attack.

⁸¹ See, for example, Bretholz, 'Les Camps de Sofia, Nankin et Accra'.

⁸² Possibly he was part of the unit that penetrated from Malanville on 6 November. Aliali, 'Le Contentieux Nigéro-Ghanéen'.

⁸³ Perhaps from the unit that crossed the frontier with Mali at Ménéka. Ibid.

⁸⁴ Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 325.

⁸⁵ Comte, 'Les Carnets de Nankin'.

possibly led by Tini Malélé, was intercepted by PPN youth cadres.⁸⁶ Six days later, another group of five, who were armed with Russian machine guns and had been ordered to take the administrative post of Say, was captured, among them Hassane Djibo, the trainee from Nanking and Sofia.⁸⁷ Commandos who attacked Bosso were caught some three weeks later. Numerous others hid in the countryside for weeks, chased and starved, before being taken prisoner. Of some 240 guerrillas, 136 were captured and a dozen or so killed, while the others fled back across the border. A wide assortment of weapons was confiscated.⁸⁸

Interlude

The response of Niger's authorities was swift and harsh. They benefited from the fact that they knew well in advance that the guerrillas were coming. Despite its elaborate planning, *Sawaba* had trumpeted its attack with communiqués broadcast throughout the region. French intelligence had also kept a close watch on *Sawaba* activities and French officers still occupied various positions in Niger's security structures. Colombani, the former colonial governor, held a high-level position as Director of the Bureau of the Presidency, being responsible for state security.⁸⁹ In other West African countries, too, French officers continued to man high-security posts, maintaining a network of political and military informers. French troops were stationed in Dahomey and in several cities in Niger right up until the autumn of 1964.⁹⁰

West African governments were equally aware of the guerrilla training courses taking place in Ghanaian camps and even had their own spies there. West African diplomats posted in Accra were, according to a scholar who interviewed them in the mid-1960s, well informed about what was going on.⁹¹ The governments organized in the so-called Entente, at least those of Niger, Ivory Coast and Upper Volta, also kept in close touch with each other. Moreover, Nkrumah's government constituted a ramshackle administration with

⁸⁶ Morillon, 'La Tentative Insurrectionnelle du SAWABA'; *Le Monde*, 4 February 1965; and Comte, 'An Assassination that Failed', 510.

⁸⁷ Comte, 'Les Carnets de Nankin'.

⁸⁸ Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 325 and G. Comte, 'Treize Années d'Histoire Nigérienne', *Revue Française d'Etudes Politiques Africaines*, 72 (1971) 35. *Le Monde* (4 February 1965) speaks of 150 men who travelled from Ghana to Niger. For a list of weapons, see Aliali, 'Le Contentieux Nigéro-Ghanéen'.

⁸⁹ Ruttiman, 'Le Président Hamani Diori Nous Déclare'.

⁹⁰ *Afrique Nouvelle*, 895 (2-8 October 1964).

⁹¹ Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy*, 375-76.

various interests and self-serving institutions led by loose-tongued militants – a situation not conducive to discretion.

Thus warned, Niger's police, military and PPN cadres could mobilize the population, a fact that explains the hostile reception the guerrillas received from the peasantry. Those guerrillas that survived the encounters were quickly rounded up and incarcerated while awaiting trial. On the night of Monday 12 October, the State Security Court sentenced to death the four *Sawabists* who had been caught the week before at Madarounfa, including the wounded Salle Dan Koulou. The following evening they were shot, watched by a crowd of 10,000 people who had been incited to assemble by a police loudspeaker touring the capital. The body of Dandouna Aboubakar, who had been lynched by peasants in Birni N'Konni, was exhibited in front of the new police headquarters and lay there for three days.⁹² This move was clearly meant to intimidate the government's enemies and anyone sympathizing with the *Sawaba* cause.⁹³ After this, a special court was constituted to try the remaining guerrillas. Although they would be allowed defence counsel, there would be no right of appeal, not even in the event of the death penalty being handed down.⁹⁴ In total, eleven *Sawabists* were sentenced to death but only ten were executed as the eleventh was lucky enough to be forgotten about and left in his cell. He was subsequently pardoned.⁹⁵

The political consequences of *Sawaba*'s autumn attack reverberated across the region as Diori's government waged a diplomatic offensive to improve its strategic position. Undaunted, Djibo issued a hollow statement in Accra announcing that his men had inflicted 'severe losses' on Niger's government and appealing to the population to take up arms.⁹⁶ The party's leadership had, in fact, envisaged a second invasion for June or July 1965, which would apparently be supervised by the Ghanaians and members of the Nigerian Labour Party.⁹⁷ In a

⁹² Ghana's ambassador to Niamey wrote that Aboubakar's body lay in front of Niger's parliament. GNA: N/POL 65, Ambassador B.L. Placca to H.E. M.F. Dei-Anang, African Affairs Secretariat, 14 April 1965.

⁹³ *Afrique Nouvelle*, 898 (23-29 October 1964); *Africa Research Bulletin*, (1964), 166 & 171 (here only of Political Series); *Marchés Tropicaux*, 7 November 1964; and *Le Monde*, 15 & 16 October 1964.

⁹⁴ However, those sentenced to death would not be executed before the government had decided on a possible commutation of the sentence. *West Africa*, 7 November 1964.

⁹⁵ Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 326. I do not know the names of those executed, apart from Salle Dan Koulou. One activist condemned to death was Hassane Djibo, who was still alive in 1965 and was interviewed by Bretholz. Boubacar Ali Diallo, the recently dismissed cabinet minister, was arrested. *Africa Research Bulletin*, (1964), 171. He died of a fever in prison on 11 May 1965. Decalo, *Historical Dictionary of Niger*, 117.

⁹⁶ *Afrique Nouvelle*, 898 (23-29 October 1964).

⁹⁷ Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 326.

letter from *Sawaba's* leadership to the BAA, it was observed that the party would gain political power through 'the revolution', which would lead to a social and economic transformation that would give it 'complete revolutionary victory'. In order to achieve this, however, the leadership intended to change strategy.⁹⁸ With still some 250 to 300 *Sawabists* in Ghanaian training camps,⁹⁹ the training of recruits continued, now with the help of Chinese instructors. Ghana Airways was requested to transport men and armaments to Cotonou, Dahomey, and the BAA was asked to follow up on its recent gift of £25,000 and resolve the party's financial difficulties.¹⁰⁰

Things did not run smoothly, however, as the catastrophe of the autumn had led to tension inside *Sawaba's* leadership. In February 1965, Dan Galadima and Abdoulaye Mamani¹⁰¹ met with Djibo in Accra and criticized him for overestimating *Sawaba's* popularity and underestimating the strength of Diori's regime. According to them, he had also purchased arms of poor quality, declined to make full use of training possibilities and failed to boost the guerrillas' morale. In addition, they accused him of spending too much time and money on women.¹⁰² The upshot of these exchanges was that Issaka Koke, the *Sawabist* based in Bamako, would take control of party funds.¹⁰³

Climax

The second invasion never took place as it was superseded by a dramatic turn of events. At 9 a.m. on Tuesday 13 April 1965, during celebrations to mark the Muslim Tabaski festival, a *Sawabist* threw a grenade at President Diori who was present at a gathering of more than 20,000 people in the Grand Mosque in Niamey, on the very spot of the 1964 executions. As the American grenade fell

⁹⁸ Some activists dispatched to China and Cuba for instruction had returned to Accra under the guidance of one Salifou Abubakar. Excerpts of a letter dated 31 October 1964, in *Fraternité Hebdo*, 9 July 1965.

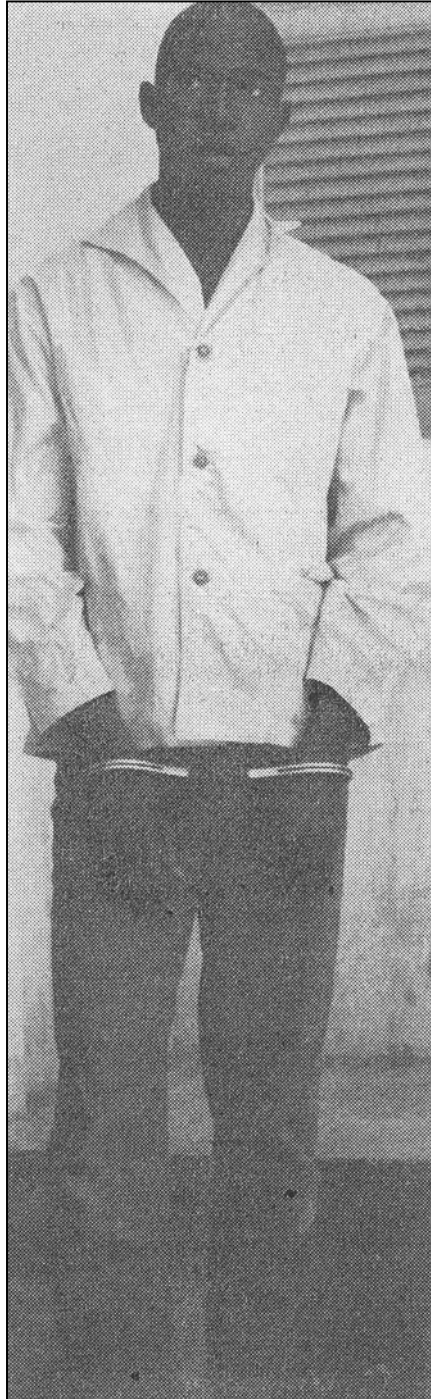
⁹⁹ Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 326.

¹⁰⁰ Excerpts of the same letter (note 98) in *Fraternité Hebdo*, 9 July 1965.

¹⁰¹ Apparently, the latter had not been in Niger during the autumn infiltration, as Niger's foreign minister had claimed, or he had escaped.

¹⁰² It was rumoured that he sent a monthly cheque of 50,000 FCFA to a woman in Ouagadougou and purchased cars for two female friends. Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 326. Ruttiman, 'Le Président Hamani Diori Nous Déclare', speaks of a 'beautiful red sports car'. The personal use of funds was also echoed in a letter of the Ghanaian ambassador in Niger to his government in Accra. GNA: N/POL/66, Ambassador B.L. Placca to H.E. M.F. Dei-Anang, African Affairs Secretariat, 16 April 1965.

¹⁰³ Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 326 and G. Chaffard, 'La Subversion au Niger en 1965', *France-Eurafrique*, 190 (December 1967), 36.



Amadou Diop, who tried to assassinate President Diori
Copyright: *Rheinischer Merkur*, 18 (30 April 1965), 14

three rows behind him, Diori – who was in the middle of praying – escaped injury. The projectile exploded and killed a four-year-old boy. Three Nigeriens were wounded, including a member of parliament, as well as three members of a Malian basketball team on tour in Niger. Having missed Diori, the *Sawabist* threw a second grenade but it failed to explode.¹⁰⁴

According to the Ghanaian ambassador to Niamey, the perpetrator, who went by the name of Amadou Diop, had missed his target as he 'was probably both nervous and incapable of stretching his arms fully'.¹⁰⁵ The ambassador cabled to his superiors in Accra:

From all accounts, Amadou Diop is the suicide type and was fully aware and prepared for the consequences of throwing the bomb at President Diori at such an open space and from among such a crowd as at the prayer congregation. He bit his finger hard in expression of disappointment at not getting his target and that sums him up.¹⁰⁶

The assassin was immediately arrested and stripped naked. A pistol was found on him. The crowds were asked through a microphone to remain calm and the area was quickly cordoned off. With the exception of the president and the chief Imam, everyone, including cabinet ministers, was searched before being allowed to leave the grounds. Three more people were found carrying grenades and pistols.¹⁰⁷ Interrogation of the assassin yielded several details about his background and planning: Diop was from the Zinder region, his mother was Nigerien and his father Senegalese. In the early 1960s he had left Niger to

¹⁰⁴ GNA: NC/47, From Ghana Embassy Niamey to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Accra (for Dei-Anang from Placca), 14 April 1965; GNA: N/POL 65, Ambassador B.L. Placca to H.E. M.F. Dei-Anang, African Affairs Secretariat, 14 April 1965; *Fraternité Hebdo*, 9 July 1965; Comte, 'An Assassination that Failed', 509; and 'L'Attentat Manqué contre M. Hamani Diori est Vivement Ressenti en Afrique', *Afrique Nouvelle*, 924 (22-28 April 1965). Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 327, speaks of five wounded. GNA: NC/47, From Ghanaian Embassy Niamey to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Accra (for Dei-Anang from Placca), 14 April 1965 speaks of 7 wounded. A Malian, Mohamedine Sylla, was slightly wounded in the face. The Malian arbiter, Alioune Diouf, sustained a serious injury to his liver. 'L'Attentat Manqué contre M. Hamani Diori'.

¹⁰⁵ GNA: N/POL 65, Ambassador B.L. Placca to H.E. M.F. Dei-Anang, African Affairs Secretariat, 14 April 1965.

¹⁰⁶ GNA: N/POL/66, Ambassador B.L. Placca to H.E. M.F. Dei-Anang, African Affairs Secretariat, 16 April 1965.

¹⁰⁷ GNA: NC/47, From Ghana Embassy Niamey to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Accra (for Dei-Anang from Placca), 14 April 1965 and N/POL 65, Ambassador B.L. Placca to H.E. M.F. Dei-Anang, African Affairs Secretariat, 14 April 1965. *Le Monde*, 16 April 1965, spoke of one other accomplice being arrested.

receive training abroad. The places and countries mentioned included Marnia, Nanking, Son Tay and North Korea.¹⁰⁸ In China, he had served as an announcer for Radio Peking's Hausa service. From China, he had returned to Ghana and received training in Mampong.¹⁰⁹

As mentioned above, he was arrested in October 1964 when peasants caught up with his unit and beat to death its leader, Dandouna Aboubakar, whose body was exhibited to the public. Diop, who was described as Dandouna's assistant,¹¹⁰ had been imprisoned but escaped. He had fled to Nigeria¹¹¹ and returned to Accra and was said to have sworn to avenge his comrades and their families who, *Sawaba's* leaders would have told him, had all been shot.¹¹² Diop left Accra again either on 19 March or some date in February, travelled to Kano and entered Niger at the beginning of April 1965.¹¹³ He arrived in Niamey with a party of eight men, who were carrying twelve grenades each. He would have admitted that he got the grenades from an undisclosed source in Nigeria and that he had originally planned to kill the president at the airport upon his return from a visit to Abidjan.¹¹⁴ Since Diop originated from the Zinder area, few people in the capital knew him, which could explain why he had been able to come so close to the president.¹¹⁵ Ghana's ambassador wrote that activists had planned to throw grenades simultaneously in all the district capitals during Tabaski prayer meetings. Underground activists would have openly warned the government that 'their number was great' and that these actions would continue.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁸ *Africa Research Bulletin*, (1965), 279. The only reference, so far, to *Sawaba* training in North Korea.

¹⁰⁹ GNA: N/POL 65, Ambassador B.L. Placca to H.E. M.F. Dei-Anang, African Affairs Secretariat, 14 April 1965. Also Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 327.

¹¹⁰ *Africa Research Bulletin*, (1965), 279.

¹¹¹ GNA: NC/47, From Ghanaian Embassy Niamey to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Accra (for Dei-Anang from Placca), 14 April 1965.

¹¹² Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 327.

¹¹³ *Fraternité Hebdo* (9 July 1965), citing Niger's foreign minister's speech (Aliali, 'Le Contentieux Nigéro-Ghanéen'), gives 19 March as the date of Diop's departure from Accra and 10 April as the date of his arrival in Niger. GNA: NC/48, For Dei-Anang from Placca, 15 April 1965, gives February as the time of departure for Nigeria and says that Diop's party arrived in Niamey 'since' 5 April. Kano is mentioned as a forward base in *Africa Research Bulletin*, (1965), 273.

¹¹⁴ However, when he was spotted at the airport, he disappeared quickly from the scene. GNA: NC/48, For Dei-Anang from Placca, 15 April 1965 and N/POL 65, Ambassador B.L. Placca to H.E. M.F. Dei-Anang, African Affairs Secretariat, 14 April 1965.

¹¹⁵ 'L'Attentat Manqué contre M. Hamani Diori'.

¹¹⁶ GNA: NC/47, From Ghana Embassy Niamey to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Accra (for Dei-Anang from Placca), 14 April 1965 and N/POL 65, Ambassador B.L. Placca to H.E. M.F. Dei-Anang, African Affairs Secretariat, 14 April 1965. A source of the

Aftermath

By now the high point in *Sawaba's* war had come and gone and Niger's government lashed out at its enemies. Disagreements in the country's triumvirate healed overnight, with Maïga and Boubou Hama uniting behind the president. On 25 May, the State Security Court sentenced five people to death, including Zodi Ikiah, the former Minister of Defence, and Captain Hassan Diallo, who had both been interned for the 1963 mutiny. Fourteen people were sentenced to life imprisonment, 28 received sentences ranging from four to fifteen years, while eighteen others were acquitted.¹¹⁷

While the government was busy rounding up activists, it also turned its attention to foreign quarters. It consulted Western governments, mended relations with Mali and Dahomey and improved diplomatic ties with Nigeria, where *Sawabists* were arrested after a shooting incident in Kano.¹¹⁸ Ghana was isolated through action in the OAU. When Ben Bella was toppled in a *coup d'état* in Algeria in June 1965, *Sawabists* there were ordered to desist from political activity in return for their right of abode.¹¹⁹

More dramatic were the consequences of Nkrumah's fall from power the year after. With Nkrumah toppled, *Sawaba's* men were effectively trapped inside Ghana, and only a few leading figures and assistants managed to escape to the country's Eastern-bloc embassies.¹²⁰ In April 1966 some sixty¹²¹ handcuffed *Sawabists* were deported to Niamey.¹²² Dan Galadima, *Sawaba's* Chief of Staff, was arrested in January 1967.¹²³ Djibo had found temporary solace in Accra's Bulgarian mission. Later, he managed to leave Ghana. At the end of 1966, he

Ministry of the Interior said that 'similar terrorist activities' had taken place in many parts of Niger on the day of the attempt on Diori's life. *Africa Research Bulletin*, (1965), 279. I am not aware of any evidence of this.

¹¹⁷ Presumably all *Sawabists* or *Sawaba* sympathizers. *Africa Research Bulletin*, (1965), 298.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 335.

¹¹⁹ Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 329-30.

¹²⁰ Comte, 'Treize Années d'Histoire Nigérienne', 36-37 and *idem.*, 'Ou en Est le Niger?', *France-Eurafrrique*, 175 (July 1966), 11, which mentions the Cuban and Albanian embassies.

¹²¹ A. Faujas ('La Politique Etrangère du Niger', *Revue d'Etudes Politiques Africaines*, 72 (1971), 46) speaks of 34 *Sawabists* being deported as of March. These would have included eight commandos who had participated in the 1964 invasions. *Africa Research Bulletin*, (1966), 485.

¹²² Comte, 'Ou en Est le Niger?', 11.

¹²³ It is unclear in which country. *West Africa*, 22 July 1967. In that same year he was in prison in Niger, to which he was presumably deported. Ruttiman, 'Le Président Hamani Diori Nous Déclare.'

was spotted in Algiers, where Abdoulaye Mamani was still based, and early in 1967 he left for Dar es Salaam.¹²⁴

The party's staff base had shrunk from some 300-400 people to possibly twenty or thirty diehards.¹²⁵ As of 1966, the government began to pardon individual activists, while others were thrown in prison.¹²⁶ The partial clampdown continued until the end of the decade. In 1969 the authorities organized trials in Tahoua and Agadez, following which 134 people were sent to prison for several years. Two years later, 53 of these were pardoned, Amadou Diop's death penalty was commuted to life imprisonment and 81 life sentences were reduced to twenty years' imprisonment.¹²⁷

'In search of estuaries': Interpretation and conclusion

At the time of the invasion, outside observers saw *Sawaba*'s actions as evidence of a regional-ethnic conflict, placing east against west and the northern Touareg against the south, with the Zerma majority in government accused of favouring the ethnic communities in the west.¹²⁸ The government's inner circle was staffed mainly by Zermas and Songhais, while *Sawaba* specifically aimed to incite members of minority ethnic groups (Peul) or people of inferior social status (*bellas*). Moreover, there were tensions in the Hausa east in the run-up to the invasion. There were, however, also other cleavages that cross-cut with these ethnic-regional divisions and, hence, reduced their salience. The government had also adopted a profoundly conciliatory attitude towards Hausaland's chiefly

¹²⁴ Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 331 and idem., 'La Subversion au Niger en 1965', 37. Both men returned to Niger in 1974 when Diori's regime was toppled, but a little later were incarcerated and spent several years in prison before being released. Mamani died in 1993 and Djibo in 1998.

¹²⁵ Comte, 'Ou en Est le Niger?', 11. However, in the Ruttiman interview Diori estimated Djibo's followers to be between fifty and seventy. Ruttiman, 'Le Président Hamani Diori Nous Déclare'.

¹²⁶ Comte, 'Ou en Est le Niger?', 12, and 'Treize Années d'Histoire Nigérienne', 3. On 10 August 1967 Hassan Diallo had his death sentence commuted to life imprisonment. The same happened to Zodi Ikiah. Both were released in February 1971. Boubacar Ali Diallo, former *Sawabist* and cabinet minister arrested after the 1964 invasions, had died of a fever in prison on 11 May 1965. Adamou Sekou, incarcerated in the Sahara, was released and reintegrated into the administration. *Le Monde*, 21-22 February 1971; Decalo, *Historical Dictionary of Niger*, 117-18 & 332-33; Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 328 & 331.

¹²⁷ *Le Monde*, 21-22 February 1971. Also C. Raynaut, 'Trente Ans d'Indépendance: Repères et Tendances', *Politique Africaine*, 38 (June 1990), 9.

¹²⁸ See the editorial in *Le Monde*, 16 October 1964.

class,¹²⁹ something that weakened *Sawaba's* power base in an area where its support among the peasantry had never been strong.

In this context, *Sawaba* agitation was less the expression of regional-ethnic deprivation than a revolt against the social-generational dimensions of the status quo in Hausaland itself, a dimension that was also much broader than the cultural confines of Hausaland. It should be noted, for example, that while many activists appear to have been Hausa, several others were not. Some even originated from other countries. That generational tensions¹³⁰ were present in Nigerien politics in the 1960s had already been noted by contemporary observers, who referred specifically to people in their twenties and thirties, with relatively high levels of education and good incomes.¹³¹ Looking at *Sawaba*, one may conclude that this conflict was much wider and involved youths of lower status. While the available evidence is sketchy, one is struck by the relatively humble backgrounds of the guerrillas. They had had vocational training and included masons, nurses, gardeners and agricultural instructors with an aspiration for higher education. Most claimed they were lured with promises of schooling abroad, an assertion not so extraordinary in view of Djibo's international linkages. In their confessions, the arrested guerrillas presented themselves as eager, gullible youngsters who were intent on going abroad and enrolling in foreign institutions, but were kept dangling until they found themselves in Eastern bloc schools studying, not their desired courses in agriculture or architecture, but Marxism-Leninism and *agit-prop*. Once they discovered the true reasons behind their travels, they could not opt out and return home since they were financially dependent on their benefactors. Hence, they decided to make the best of it.¹³²

This should not be dismissed outright as disingenuous. In Niger and West Africa generally, then as now, one could not lightly dismiss an offer of a free

¹²⁹ S. Abba, 'La Chefferie Traditionnelle en Question', *Politique Africaine*, 38 (1990) 56.

¹³⁰ These were specifically noted by *Le Monde* (16 October 1964) in relation to the insurrection.

¹³¹ V.T. Le Vine, *Political Leadership in Africa: Post-Independence Generational Conflict in Upper Volta, Senegal, Niger, Dahomey, and the Central African Republic* (Stanford, 1967), 31-32 & 84-85.

¹³² See the interviews conducted by Bretholz and Braumann. A tendency to make the best of it could also be observed in other contexts and periods. See for example, C. Dunton, 'Black Africans in Libya and Libyan Images of Black Africa', in R. Lemarchand (ed.), *The Green and the Black: Qadhafi's Policies in Africa* (Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1988), 150-66, especially 159.

education or foreign travel.¹³³ Moreover, a contemporary eyewitness who went to study medicine in the People's Republic of China reveals the misunderstanding over the true purpose of these journeys to Eastern bloc countries. Many had expected they would be taught a profession but to their surprise faced sub-standard courses and political indoctrination.¹³⁴ This part of the testimony may, therefore, well have been genuine.

Whether this was also true for the journeys to the Far East, which were follow-up visits for the higher cadre, is open to question. The testimonies consistently pleaded ignorance about military training as the objective of the long road to China, although they are not unambiguous.¹³⁵ Perhaps the guerrillas were just blessed with a mixture of personal aspirations, ideological conviction and pragmatic opportunism. In addition, *Sawaba's* recruits were subjected to what appeared to be stiff discipline. The *Instructions et Directives aux Missions* found on arrested commandos included what Gilbert Comte quoted as 'Le Serment du Combattant Nigérien', which provided *en detail* the text and procedure of the oath of allegiance that the party's soldiers had to swear before *Sawaba's* flag. It came down to an unconditional subjection to the party's leadership, on pain of unspecified sanction – more or less along the lines of the dogma of democratic centralism as practised in communist parties.¹³⁶ Several of the arrested guerrillas complained about the discipline they had been subjected to.¹³⁷ One *Sawabist*, who had provided his leaders with intelligence running counter to party analysis, was treated as a 'counter-revolutionary' and 'defeatist'. He was reminded of his oath and the money spent on his education.¹³⁸

Nevertheless, their oath of allegiance and military preparations made it clear that the *Sawabists* had come to kill if necessary. Hope of attaining good domestic positions as veterans of a victorious army and a certain eagerness to

¹³³ See, in other contexts/periods for example, Dunton, 'Black Africans in Libya' and K. Peters & R. Richards, "'Why We Fight': Voices of Youth Combatants in Sierra Leone', *Africa*, 68, 2 (1998), 183-210.

¹³⁴ E.J. Hevi, *An African Student in China* (London & Dunmow, 1963), 119-43. Translated excerpts of this book were published *in extenso* in *Fraternité Hebdo* in the spring and summer of 1965.

¹³⁵ 'C'est vrai ... les dirigeants nous ont envoyés en Asie sans préciser le caractère de notre formation. En apprenant là-bas qu'il s'agissait d'entraînement militaire, nous ne pouvions pas prétendre avoir été induits en erreur.' Ruttiman, 'Le Président Hamani Diori Nous Déclare.'

¹³⁶ G. Comte, 'Un Plan de Destruction du Niger', *France-Eurafrique*, 161 (April 1965), 9-10.

¹³⁷ Ruttiman, 'Le Président Hamani Diori Nous Déclare'.

¹³⁸ Djibo Seyni to Bretholz ('Comment N'Krumah et Ses Amis Communistes').

return home after several years in exile may have given them the final push. In addition, some activists, like Amadou Diop, may have been motivated by revenge for what the authorities did to fellow activists. However, as Diop had come straight from Accra and arrived in Niamey with several other men, the attempt on Diori may have been approved at the highest level of the party.¹³⁹ That the act was carried out during a Muslim prayer meeting – a fact met with contempt among Nigeriens, including *Sawaba* sympathizers¹⁴⁰ – shows the degree of hostility between *Sawaba* and Niger's political leadership.

Ideological justification for this violence was provided by a cocktail of militant African nationalism, Marxism-Leninism and Maoist beliefs. Many of the party's arguments centred on the degree of foreign (French) influence in Niger, which had 'imposed' a 'neo-colonial' regime on its people. In addition, Maoist and Marxist-Leninist doctrines suggested an analysis of Niger's political situation involving a systematic justification for *Sawaba*'s war as historically correct. That these ideological perspectives were unsuited to the circumstances pertaining in Niger is beside the point, as the evidence suggests that the Chinese and, perhaps, *Sawaba*'s officers, *thought* they were appropriate. When Niger's authorities arrested the party's commandos, they found various documents and personal notebooks faithfully reproducing Maoist and Marxist beliefs. The notebooks, embellished with dragons and pagodas, contained heavy ideological prose copying Chinese views on such outlandish issues as Peking's quarrels with the Soviet Union and Soviet-Yugoslav 'revisionism'. Alternatively, the handwritten notes reproduced more stereotypical and unsuitable tenets as the vanguard role of the proletariat and the identification of imperialism, feudalism and the 'comprador bourgeoisie' as the targets of *Sawaba*'s revolutionaries. The fact that these notes were found alongside *gris-gris* (personal fetishes meant for protection against evil) shows that if these Marxist beliefs had been internalized by the party's fighters, they were at least part of a blend of discursive imaginations of reality.¹⁴¹

In the past, doubts have been expressed about the sincerity of Djibo Bakary's own ideological convictions.¹⁴² They involved a militant-nationalist interpretation of Niger's situation, the portrayal of Diori's presidency as a neo-colonial usurpation of power and occasional references to Pan-Africanist tenets. Djibo's militancy may also have been fed by the experience of exile. The sketchy evidence on his behaviour during this period paints a picture of an

¹³⁹ See Ruttiman's interview with Diop ('Le Président Hamani Diori Nous Déclare').

¹⁴⁰ GNA: N/POL/66, Ambassador B.L. Placca to H.E. M.F. Dei-Anang, African Affairs Secretariat, 16 April 1965. See also Comte, 'An Assassination that Failed', 509.

¹⁴¹ Comte, 'Les Carnets de Nankin'.

¹⁴² Fuglestad, *History of Niger*, and 'Djibo Bakary, The French, and the Referendum of 1958 in Niger'.

uncompromising personality, driven perhaps by revenge, and intent on capturing power from a rival politician by capitalizing on resentment among certain sections of Niger's population. Even after the disastrous autumn invasions, Djibo did not show any signs of soul-searching or regret about the fate of his foot soldiers.

Sawaba's analysis failed to grasp the weakness of its support base, which was flawed as a result of its inability to penetrate the Hausa peasantry, hold the backing of the *Sarkis* and gain a significant foothold in the west of the country. The rising tensions in Hausaland in 1963-1964 did not, therefore, provide enough ground for a successful revolt. Exile may have militated against realistic appraisal. While the party possessed a network of internal spies, its command structures precluded careful processing of information. In many cases, informers tried to please the leadership by feeding it data confirming its analysis,¹⁴³ while contrary intelligence was ignored.¹⁴⁴

Despite meticulous planning the execution of the invasion was marred by mistakes and inattention to detail. Many of the rank and file had not been paid for some time and before reaching the targeted entry points in Niger had to fend for themselves.¹⁴⁵ Weaponry was insufficient¹⁴⁶ and a possibly fatal error in strategy was the decision to attack along the entire length of the southern and western frontiers. While this required considerable capacity for planning and coordination, it also diminished the strike power of *Sawaba's* forces. The decision to attack the western sector first, possibly induced by a desire to reach the capital as quickly as possible, diminished any chance of success even further, as it was here that the party enjoyed least support.

Nevertheless, guerrillas and leadership appeared to display shocking confidence in the run-up to the invasion. The guerrillas had expected to be received with open arms as they would have been told by the party leadership that they could expect a triumphant welcome.¹⁴⁷ This anticipation may have been part of the reason why *Sawaba* thought that it could gain control of a country the size of Niger with only 240 men at its disposal. It could also explain why guerrillas claimed that they had been fooled by their leaders. The rank and file were possibly convinced that things were about to change. Hence, they were eager to leave their Ghanaian base camps.¹⁴⁸ This psychology of coming home, which nobody who has experienced years of exile can fail to ignore, may have

¹⁴³ Ruttiman, 'Le Président Hamani Diori Nous Déclare.'

¹⁴⁴ Djibo Seyni to Bretholz ('Comment N'Krumah et Ses Amis Communistes').

¹⁴⁵ For complaints about this by arrested commandos, see Ruttiman, 'Le Président Hamani Diori Nous Déclare'.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. and Morillon, 'La Tentative Insurrectionnelle du SAWABA'.

¹⁴⁸ Chaffard, *Les Carnets Secrets*, 322.

driven them to their death.¹⁴⁹ This could additionally explain why many of the leaders headed the units that infiltrated the country and why no one bothered to destroy their papers as they had been instructed to.¹⁵⁰

The actions of Djibo himself appeared influenced by naive – even romantic – conceptions about the nature of revolutionary struggle. While he was instructing Salle Dan Koulou to introduce the *villayas* system of autonomous military regions, *Sawaba*'s commandos would not have had the possibility of applying a system that drew its inspiration from a very different war of liberation. Coupled to his years in exile, this romantic touch led to what Ghana's ambassador in Niamey deemed Djibo's dependence on miracles rather than political organization.¹⁵¹ Yet a belief in miracles may have been a crucial part of *Sawaba*'s inspiration. In fact, it had that romantic dimension in common with most Marxist-inspired ideologies of revolutionary liberation, which were fashionable at the time and stipulated the need for a radical break with the past, but with little precise guidance. Colburn notes, in this respect, that Marxism-Leninism amounts, or amounted, more to a *mentalité* than a coherent plan of government, which explains the millenarian ideas of revolutionary elites and their ignorance of how to realize society's Herculean transformation.¹⁵² Imbued by such conceptions, revolutionaries could be seen as the mystics of the twentieth century.¹⁵³ Consequently, as the nationalist agitator trained in the best French communist tradition, Djibo could be considered representative of or at least affected by a dreamy framework that urged him to walk inexorably towards the attainment of his burning desire – the capturing of political power.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Thus in 1962, a homesick party activist gave himself up to Niger's authorities. Ibid., 308.

¹⁵⁰ Alternatively, retention of their writings may have been an act of self-assertion, as induced the behaviour, for example, of Alice Lakwena's followers. H. Behrend, *Alice Lakwena & the Holy Spirits: War in Northern Uganda 1986-1997* (Oxford, 1999), 4.

¹⁵¹ GNA: N/POL/66, Ambassador B.L. Placca to H.E. M.F. Dei-Anang, African Affairs Secretariat, 16 April 1965.

¹⁵² F.D. Colburn, *The Vogue of Revolution in Poor Countries* (Princeton, 1994).

¹⁵³ As phrased by Edmundo Desnoes.

¹⁵⁴ As *Sawaba* had contacts with Castro's Cuba, Che Guevara's popularity at the time may also have added to this romantic streak. It is not inconceivable that Djibo and Che met, as Che visited Ghana and Dahomey, among others, while on an African tour between December 1964 and March 1965 – according to a US State Department memorandum of 19 April 1965 (copy in W. Gálvez, *Che in Africa: Che Guevara's Congo Diary* (Melbourne & New York, 1999), 136-37).

The same buoyancy characterized the Chinese, whose leader Mao Tse Tung enjoyed exceptional prestige among Third World revolutionaries.¹⁵⁵ In the same decade as the Cultural Revolution, the creation of chaos would have fitted into Chinese ideas of revolutionary advancement through conflict and destruction.¹⁵⁶ If *Sawaba*'s commanders presented, at best, a rather mediocre picture of the party's intellectual forces, this was certainly matched by what appeared to be a complete misunderstanding by the Chinese of African conditions – something that can partly explain their spectacular failure.¹⁵⁷ Thus, instructions found on *Sawabists* assured the latter that the revolutionary potential of the rural areas was 'inexhaustible', as the peasant masses were eager to shake off the forces of imperialist domination. Inspired by their own history, China's instructors advised *Sawaba*'s men to conquer the countryside and then encircle the cities; and just in case the situation should turn against them, they were advised to establish support bases in mountainous regions or areas with 'networks of rivers, lakes and estuaries'.¹⁵⁸

Predictably, once on the ground, the *Sawabists* appeared to be at a complete loss¹⁵⁹ and were destroyed as much by their own ineptitude as by the government's forces. Shooting each other by accident and stumbling on hostile peasants, they were beaten to death in a lynching party or captured alive, stripped naked in public and shot by firing squads and their bodies laid to rot in desecration. They met total humiliation, demonstrating for all to see that *Sawaba*'s luck had run out. If contemporary observers found the idea of desperate guerrillas seeking refuge in Niger's imaginary estuaries amusing,¹⁶⁰ later authors were perhaps closer to the truth when judging it pitiful.¹⁶¹ This, of course, does not transform *Sawaba*'s men into moral champions. They were, after all, carrying arms, shot their enemies and wounded others. While this is not the place to engage in conjecture, one wonders what would have happened if the invasion had turned into a rout of the PPN. War is ignorant of romance.

¹⁵⁵ C. Clapham, 'Introduction: Analysing African Insurgencies', in C. Clapham (ed.), *African Guerrillas* (Oxford, 1998), 8.

¹⁵⁶ Colburn, *The Vogue of Revolution in Poor Countries*, 10-11.

¹⁵⁷ That such a misunderstanding was mutual was shown by Hevi, *An African Student in China*.

¹⁵⁸ Text in Comte, 'Les Carnets de Nankin', 29.

¹⁵⁹ *Le Monde*, 4 February 1965.

¹⁶⁰ Comte, 'Les Carnets de Nankin', 29.

¹⁶¹ R. Colin, 'Dynamiques Populistes et Cristallisations Institutionnelles (1960-1990)', *Politique Africaine*, 38 (1990), 31.