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Citation

Kimba, I. (2003). The Kawousan War reconsidered. *Rethinking Resistance : Revolt And Violence In African History*, 192-217. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/12904>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

The Kawousan War reconsidered

Kimba Idrissa

The Kawousan War was one of the longest periods of resistance known in Niger and through it the local people – Tuareg, Hausa and others – fought to free their society from French colonial domination. Unlike other interpretations, this chapter looks at the structural causes of the war related to the ecology and economy of the area, the influence of French colonial politics on the nomadic lifestyle, and Islam. It also considers the decisive role of the individual leaders, the breakdown of Tuareg confederations and the creation of new political unities, and the reduction in the powers of the regional chiefs. The effect the Kawousan War had on regions outside the immediate vicinity of the fighting is also investigated. The causes of the war were multi-faceted and made it more than purely a religiously inspired revolt.

Introduction

The most important anti-colonial period of resistance in Niger in popular memory is the *Yakin Kawousan* or the Kawousan War, which may well have been the longest, the best organized and equipped of all previous anti-colonial wars of resistance. The military post at Agadez was under siege for about 80 days from 13 December 1916 to 3 March 1917 and the war then continued in the mountainous Ayir region, ending only with the deaths of the main leaders: Kawousan on 5 January 1919 and Tagama during the night of 29-30 April 1920. The fierce fighting and opposition to the colonial system lasted for some 40 months.

The Kawousan War was the subject of numerous reports at the time.¹ Many historians and anthropologists have taken an interest in the events that raised so much controversy.² The various interpretations have their weaknesses as they have tended to focus on a description of events, especially on political and military issues. The revolt has also been likened to a simple act of looting or pillage, or at the most to a Sanûssi-influenced³ anti-French religious movement organized by Italy and Germany against France. These judgements hide the complexity of an event whose deeper roots resurfaced at the start of colonial occupation. In this chapter I critically analyse various types of material: oral historical sources from a visit to Agadez during July and August 1985, AOF⁴ archival material in Dakar, information gleaned from the archives of the former *Cercles* of Zinder, Agadez and Niamey, documents written at the time, and other related works on the subject.

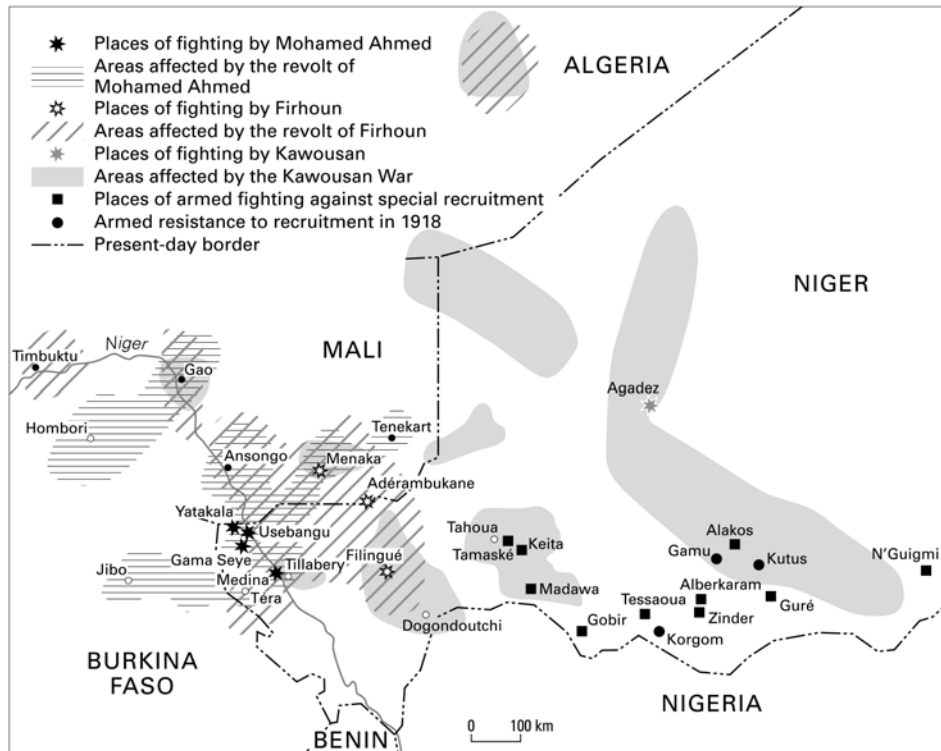
To be interpreted correctly, the Kawousan War has to be placed in the region's socio-political and economic context of the time since the actual causes of the revolt were essentially socio-political and economic and such explanations often have deep structural causes. Here I propose to show the impact of colonial domination on socio-economic life, to discuss the true role of the chiefs and local noblemen, and to describe the repercussions of the revolt in other regions. This information is used to analyse the different interpretations for the reasons behind this revolt and to propose an alternative view.

¹ M. Allane, *Relations de Voyage de Mohamed Allane à Djanet et à Ghât*, recueillie M. Abridat, officier interprète de réserve (undated); H. Boubou, 'Documents Nigériens, tome I, l'Aïr'; R. Gaffiot, *L'Aïr en Feu*, ronéo (undated); P. Mangeot, 'Le Siège d'Agadez Raconté par un Prisonnier de Kaosen', *Renseignements Coloniaux et Documents*, 8 (1930), 479-82; Colonel Abadie, *Afrique Centrale: La Colonie du Niger* (Paris, 1927).

² A. Bourgeot, 'Les Echanges Transsahariens, la Senousiya et les Révoltes Twareg de l'Aïr de 1916-1917', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 69-70, XVIII, 1-2 (1978), 159-85; F. Fuglestad, 'Les Révoltes des Tuareg du Niger (1916-1917)', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 13 (1973), 49; K. Muhammad Zubairu, 'The Kaoussen Rebellion of 1916-1918 with Particular Reference to its Impact on Northern Nigeria', PhD thesis, Ahmadu Bello University (Zaria, 1973); H.T. Norris, *The Tuareg: Their Islamic Legacy and its Diffusion in the Sahel* (Warminster, 1975); Y. Riou, *La Révolte de Kaocen et le Siège d'Agadez, 1916-1917*, ronéo (1968); J.L. Triaud, 'Un Episode Oubliée de la Guerre de Kaossen: La Lettre des Marabouts d'Agadez au Colonel Mourin (4 mars 1917)', *Annales de l'Université de Niamey*, no. 2 (1978), 263-71; A. Salifou, *Kawousan ou la Révolte Sénoussiste*, *Etudes Nigériennes* no. 33 (Niamey, 1973).

³ The Sanûssi is an Islamic brotherhood that organized resistance to the French.

⁴ Afrique Occidentale Française.



Map 8.1 Areas of resistance during the Kawousan War

The roots of the revolt

The occupation and administration of the Ayir, Kawar and Djado

To connect its possessions in North Africa with the Atlantic Coast and to build a French-African bloc, France had first to conquer the Sahara and central and western Sudan. The Sahara served not only as military and political cover *vis-à-vis* Nigeria and as a protective barrier for the Algerian hinterland but also provided a transit route and link for trade between the Mediterranean and Sudan.

The first official French military mission to the Niger Sahara is known as the Foureau-Lamy Mission and is recognized as the first act of French colonization in the Ayir region. This mission's aim was to join the Sahara with the French Sudan,⁵ and to mark the French presence in the region, thus preventing the ambitions of the Ottoman Empire in Kawar. The treaties signed between August and November 1899 with the Sultans of Agadez, Tessaoua and Zinder and the delegates of the Sultan of Bilma helped to consolidate the French position in the region. The conquest and subsequent occupation of the Nigerian Sahara had five objectives: to stop the progressive expansion of the Turks; to prevent any German ambitions in the area; to access Niger from Algeria and to find the best way to supply Niger militarily from there; to ensure the safety of caravan routes between Damergou and Damagaram and those coming from Tripoli;⁶ and to prepare for the conquest of Tibesti.

According to the political and administrative plans in these regions, French colonization aimed to reduce the authority of the regional chiefs and to consciously maintain a degree of tension between the nomadic and sedentary populations, and between the warring and religious nobles. For example, the colonial administration put pressure on the Tuareg *imajaren* (warrior) clan until the start of the Kawousan War. After the repression came a period of 'political maraboutism' with the election of the marabouts' chiefs (*ineslimen*). The French occupiers could not tolerate the lifestyle of these desert populations, particularly that of the nomadic Tuareg who carried out raids, were involved in itinerant animal husbandry and observed a strong social hierarchy. This way of life was not compatible with a modern state system with the values of equality for all, and where the control of people and resources was pivotal to all political

⁵ It had to join Lake Chad with the Voulet-Chanoine mission in Central Africa and the Congo-Chad mission led by Gentil.

⁶ A.N.F. Paris, Vincennes, S.H.A., Niger 3, dossier III, Sous/dossier a, pièce 2, Sous-lieutenant Jean, commandant la colonne du Damergou: Rapport sur la Question de l'Azbin, Djajidouna, 18 mars 1904. A.N.N., Niamey, Instructions du Résident à Zinder, Peroz, au commandant du poste de Guidjigaoua, RASH Y (1972), 60.

activities. The aristocratic Tuareg, therefore, had to be disbanded. This dislocation passed for the suppression of slavery under the form of collective dependency in breaking the ties of bondage and in encouraging the autonomy of servile tribes and their dependants. In return, reports of social domestic servitude were ignored and the aristocratic Tuareg were allowed to keep their domestic slaves.⁷

The break-up of the aristocratic Tuareg followed the abandonment of confederations and the establishment, in their place, of a policy of enforced sedentarization. In the Tuareg nomadic zones, artificial political groups were created with their own autonomy⁸ and formerly independent tribes were placed under the authority of the Sultan of Agadez. In the Kavar, in spite of its low population density and an acephalous political system, previously stateless communities were regrouped into three cantons called 'sultanates'.⁹

Socio-economic causes

The decline in caravan traffic

The logic of French policy declared that the submission of the aristocratic Tuareg groups could be realized by depriving them of their military and economic power – the Trans-Saharan caravan traffic.¹⁰

Military operations were the most important factor in the decline of the inter-regional caravan traffic. Operations of conquest and pacification deprived the local people of the capital that was the main focus of long-distance exchanges, namely camels. Massive reductions in the number of camels resulted in a loss of livelihood for an important group of Tuareg who lived off this commercial trade, as well as for all the other people involved such as guides and escorts.

⁷ This emancipation of dependants remained formal. Slavery in itself rarely led to uncertainty and the trade in slaves was pursued in this region to such an extent that trans-Saharan trade kept its dynamism.

⁸ See P. Bonte, 'Esclavage et Relation de Dépendance chez les Tuareg Kel Gress', in C. Meillassoux (ed.), *L'Esclavage en Afrique Précoloniale* (Maspéro, 1975), 49-76; E. & S. Bernus, 'L'Evolution de la Condition Servile chez les Tuaregs Sahéliens', in C. Meillassoux (ed.), *L'Esclavage en Afrique Précoloniale* (Maspéro, 1975), 27-48.

⁹ Capitaine Hautefeuille, 'Les Origines de l'Islam au Kavar', *Documents du Centre des Hautes Etudes sur l'Afrique Noire*, 1654 (1950), 7; J. Chapelle, *Nomades Noirs du Sahara* (Paris, 1957).

¹⁰ Bourgeot, 'Les Echanges Transsahariens', 162-65.

Losses increased to around 40% in the *Cercle* of Zinder, 30% in the *Cercle* of Madaoua and 60% in the *Cercle* of Agadez, according to official reports.¹¹

The 1912-1915 famine

While trade was declining in the north, Niger as a whole was experiencing an exceptionally bad famine that lasted from 1912 to 1915. Fiscal pressures, problems in the caravan trade as well as levies on foodstuffs and livestock all contributed to the effects of the famine in the Ayir in 1913:

*Il sévit actuellement dans tout le cercle d'Agadez une disette qui fait de nombreuses victimes. Les habitants sont partis en masse vers le sud et il ne reste plus personne au nord d'Agadez. Ceux qui y sont encore mangent les quelques graines et fruits comestibles des arbres de la zone désertique mais cette nourriture peu substantielle ne les soutient guère et ils meurent de faim en grand nombre...*¹²

Economic consequences of the conquest of Tibesti

The conquest of Tibesti started in September 1913 and lasted until July 1916 when it was finally evacuated and then abandoned, with the requisitioning of men, food products and camels from neighbouring areas, first Agadez and later N'guigmi, Zinder and Madaoua.

*Une grande partie des animaux de l'azalai fut réquisitionnée à Bilma pour la colonne du Tibesti et bien peu revinrent: les propriétaires ne furent pas dédommagés de leurs pertes; le mécontentement qui en résulta ne compta-t-il pas pour beaucoup dans les raisons qui menèrent à la révolte? On peut le supposer... Cette question est importante et est le gros sujet de mécontentement des tribus nomades dont la principale, presque l'unique ressource est le chameau...*¹³

In 1915 the people in Ayir provided about 850 camels for the Tibesti caravans in response to 1,100 requests for animals.¹⁴ The drought and a lack of pasture exacerbated losses and resulted in a decline in the north-south caravan trade with the number of caravans being cut to half their original number between

¹¹ Archives Nationales du Sénégal, Dakar, 2 G 14-4, NIGER à AOF, Rapport Agricole, 4^{ème} trimestre 1914, 7.

¹² Archives Nationales du Niger, Rapport Politique du Cercle d'Agadez, 2^{ème} trimestre 1914, Agadez le 30 juin 1914.

¹³ Capitaine Fonferrier, 'Etudes Historiques sur le Mouvement Caravanier dans le Cercle d'Agadez', *Bulletin du Comité d'Etudes Historiques et Scientifiques de l'A.O.F.* (1932), 305.

¹⁴ Archives Nationales du Niger, Agadez, Commandant du Cercle d'Agadez au Lieutenant-Colonel Commissaire du Gouvernement Général au Territoire Militaire du Niger, Agadez le 9 juin 1916.

1912 and 1914. At the time of the 1912 annual caravan, 16,821 camels were recorded in Bilma and 6,721 in Fachi as compared to 8,220 and 2,410 respectively in 1914.¹⁵

The political and military situation before the revolt

On 27 July 1916, Sub-lieutenant Lenoir, commander of the forces at Tibesti, decided to evacuate the posts at Bardaye and Zouar and to abandon Tibesti. The official reason given was the problem in defending the post in the face of an imminent Sanûssi attack.¹⁶ Lenoir had undoubtedly seen that the political situation was giving cause for concern. Unrest was spreading in the north and the northeast and especially in the Ayir region. Echoes of the fighting by the Sanûssi in the north, the revolt by the Tuareg in the west,¹⁷ and finally the hurried departure of the French troops from Tibesti all contributed to the radicalization of local anti-colonial resistance. Regular raids started to spread from Ayir to Damergou, Ader and Tarka.¹⁸ Such acts, however, remained unpunished, testifying once again to a reduction in the power and influence of the colonizers.

The French administration was being threatened from all sides and was incapable of containing demonstrations against its presence, in part because of the influence of the First World War raging in Europe. Captain Sabatié, Captain Bosch's successor as head of the *Cercle* of Agadez as of 1 December 1916, inherited a precarious situation because the second company of the 3rd Senegalese rifle battalion based at Agadez was weak and widely dispersed. Captain Sabatié tried to reinforce the defence of the post of Agadez and demanded reinforcements from Zinder. By deciding to take a different approach from that suggested by his predecessor, Captain Sabatié displayed a certain amount of flair just a few days before the attack. Who were the leaders of this famous revolt? How was it planned and who was involved?

¹⁵ Archives Nationales du Niger, Niamey, Cercle d'Agadez, Rapport Politique, 4^{ème} trimestre 1912 et 1914.

¹⁶ Archives Nationales du Niger, Niamey, 21-0-29, 'Rapport du Sous-Lieutenant Lenoir commandant le confrérieur du Tibesti et le poste de Bardaye sur les circonstances qui ont amené cet officier à abandonner les postes de Bardaye et de Zouar, et à évacuer le Tibesti', Faya le 25 août 1916, 23 pages manuscrites.

¹⁷ It concerns primarily the revolt of Firhoun.

¹⁸ Archives Nationales du Sénégal, Dakar, 2 G 16-13, Niger à AOF, Rapport Politique, 3^{ème} trimestre 1916, Zinder le 28 octobre 1916.



Kawousan ag Kedda

Copyright: 'Touaregs exil et résistance', *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 57 (Paris, 1990)

The leaders and their doctrine

Mouhamad Kawousan ag Gedda

Mouhamad Kawousan ag Gedda was an Ikaskazen Igerzawen born in the Ayir towards the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁹ He did not inherit a title from his father nor was he born into a chieftdom endowed with incarnate politico-military power. His tribe was not descended from a political power. He was affiliated to a junior line that hierarchically occupied a subordinate position and could not accede to a title of *aghola* or tribal chief.²⁰ By way of compensation, his mother was a noble in the Igerzawen chieftaincy.²¹

As a young man, Kawousan had taken part in the exodus of certain Tuareg groups that wanted to withdraw from French domination and he stayed in Kanem where he participated in the anti-colonial struggle against the French. He was in Gouro when he got in contact with – or attached himself to, according to some – the anti-European El Hirwan (The Brothers) movement connected to the Sanûssi.²² This would have been in August 1909. In November of the same year, he participated on the side of Abdallah Tower, chief of the Sanûssi Zawiya of Aïn Galaka, in the attack on the French camp of Washenkale commanded by Lieutenant Moutot.²³ Progressively, and thanks to his courage and intelligence, Kawousan acquired the esteem of the powerful brotherhood's leader. He developed a strong friendship with Sidi Ahmed Sherif, the head of the Sanûssiya, who appointed him Governor of Ennedi. He was involved in the war for a while with the Italians and later was harassed by the French troops of Commander Hilaire and forced to take refuge in Darfour for nine months from August 1910 to May 1911. He left Darfour in August 1912 at the end of the conflict with the powerful sultan, Ali Dinar. Threatened on all fronts, he gave himself up to the French who put camels at his disposal allowing him to proceed towards Ounyang Kebir in the Ennedi region. The Turks had just installed themselves in Borkou, and Kawousan offered his services to their

¹⁹ All the authors then adopted, according to colonial archives, the name Wan Teggida which was unknown to the population. According to the same authors, Kawousan would have been born in Damergou around 1880. H. Claudot-Hawad, 'Exil et Résistance ou la Continuité Touarègue', *Revue du Monde Musulman et de Méditerranée*, 57 (1990), 29.

²⁰ A. Bourgeot, 'Révoltes et Rébellions en Pays Tuareg', *Afrique Contemporaine*, 170 (1994), 8.

²¹ Claudot-Hawad, 'Exil et Résistance', 30.

²² Information Rhoubéidi, Agadez, August 1985.

²³ Archives Nationales du Niger, AGADEZ, Territoire Tchad au Territoire Niger, 30 janvier 1917.

leader, Kaïmakan d'Aïn Galaka, and followed him to Ennedi. In May 1913 they found themselves involved in the Battle of Oum-Et-Adam on the side of the Sanûssi overthrown by French troops. Kawousan regrouped, left Borkou and withdrew to the oasis at Timmerin. There is no information about his activities there until April 1915 when he helped his friend Sidi Mahdi Souni, the son of Mohammed Souni, against the Italians. In February 1916, he was seen in the Tripolitanian Djebel. He returned to Ghât in August after the Italians had occupied Janet with an army estimated to be made up of 200 regular soldiers and six canons. Four months later, Kawousan besieged the French post at Agadez with the help of Sultan Tagama.

Abderahamane Tagama Ag Bagari

Abderahamane Tagama Ag Bagari was roughly 40 years of age in December 1916, about the same age as Kawousan. From a young age he had studied the Koran in Agadez and had then become involved in petty trade, following the caravans south to the markets along the Kano-Katsina-Sokoto road. He lived in Bornou and then in Kano where he resumed his studies but at a higher level. He was still in Kano when he was asked to take up the head of the sultanate. He ascended the throne in 1908 as successor to Ibrahim Ed-Dasouqi who was judged 'feeble and incapable' by the French.²⁴ Although put in place by colonization, Tagama, like his father Sultan Mohammed Al Baqary dit Bâ Sôfô,²⁵ lived modestly and was generous towards his people, especially during the 1912-1915 famine.²⁶

In addition to these two leaders, two other people who played a decisive role in this event should be mentioned. As chiefs of war, political leaders and members of the aristocracy, the participation of Fona and El Moctar Kodogo Ben Mohamed brought about a loyalty between the elements of the warring group in the Kawousan War. Fona was an *agholla* (chief) of Kel Tafidet who participated in all the major battles against the French before 1916 in the Ayir, Damergou, Agram and Tibesti. After becoming Kawousan's lieutenant, he led the resistance in Tibesti and Kawar where he participated in the sacking of

²⁴ Information Malam Yaro, Agadez, August 1985.

²⁵ 'Al Baqary est considéré comme un roi philosophe, (Waliyi-n-sarki) qui refuse de puiser sa nourriture dans les finances de la ville et qui vit très modestement. Il est l'un des rares sultans à être enterré dans le cimetière du palais.' A. Adamou, *Agadez et sa Région*, Thèse de 3^{ème} cycle en géographie (1976), 81.

²⁶ The famine was first called *Yunwa Tagama* (the 'Famine of Tagama') due to the important quantities of food the Sultan procured from his own personal resources to distribute to the people.

Fachi in 1918. Kodogo was the son of an old Ikaskazen chief. He left in dissidence, as did Kawousan.

The siege of the French post at Agadez

The revolt extended beyond the borders of the Ayir region. Virtually all the groups in the Ayir were involved in the action in one way or another and to varying degrees over time. Groups of people alone or under the leadership of their chiefs joined the resistance fighters. The Kel Ajjer made up Kawousan's original force before his arrival in the Ayir; Moussa ag Amastane was in charge of the Kel Ahaggar; Mohammed Ibrahim – the chief of the Almoukare – led the Arabs from Tahoua, and the Amenokal Al Khorar led the Kel Dinnik. The Kel Nan of Azawak, Taitoq of In Gall, Ifadayen, Toubou of Kavar and Tibesti, all people of the Damergou and certain villages in the sedentary cantons close to the desert regions of Manga and Damagaram also took part in the uprising.

How can such enthusiasm be explained? It came without doubt initially as a result of people's declining living conditions, and historical ties through religious and tribal solidarity also united these people. The role of the leaders should not, however, be underestimated. Without pretending to put the results of history down only to the role of great men, it is enough to stress the real impact politicians can have on their people and in the process of revolt. As far as Abderahamane Tagama was concerned, his role was decisive and central although this does not emerge from written documents. He was at the heart of this resistance movement because he knew how to channel the diverse dissatisfactions and to assemble around him the necessary forces required for the fight, not in order to realize his own personal ambitions but to respond to collective aspirations.

*Kawousan et Tagama ont conjugué leurs efforts. La révolte aurait pu être déclenchée sans Kawousan s'il y avait des armes, Kawousan a apporté les armes. Mais c'est un inconnu. Rien n'aurait pu être entrepris sans Tagama à qui appartient le pays et qui jouissait de l'estime des populations.*²⁷

Bourgeot supports this point of view: '*Tegama demeure un allié irréprochable sans lequel Kaosen et ses partisans n'auraient été que des bandes de pillard*'.²⁸

More so than Kawousan, Tagama was the spiritual leader and the ideological force behind the resistance, and was the most politically minded of the people

²⁷ Information Rhoubéidi.

²⁸ Bourgeot, 'Les Echanges Transsahariens', 171, note 24.

involved in the movement. He was not a professional military man but more an ideologist and an active propagandist who knew how to undertake patiently, discretely and methodically the job of mobilizing and sensitizing the local people, whose interests and positions were not always convergent. The Ayir, in spite of its relative ethnic homogeneity, did not constitute a unified political whole: three zones of political influence split the region. The eastern and mountainous areas were under the political and military control of the Kel Ewey, legally the dependants of the Anastafidet. They were constantly fighting the Tuareg of Damergou who regularly pilfered their caravans. The In Gall region was under the influence of the Kel Fadey while the Kel Ferwam was the predominant group in Agadez and in the western highlands, regions where theoretically the Sultan's power was limited. In addition, there was the original sedentary population of Songhay origin who were Hausa speaking and accounted for a large part of the population of Agadez. The town and the surrounding regions had 2,490 and 25,872 inhabitants respectively in 1916.²⁹

Tagama's chief merit was to have been able, through dialogue, to realize a large regrouping of volunteers and to organize and unite them as a group against the common enemy, in spite of the cleavages created by wars in the nineteenth century, and the policy of division and terror pursued by the French colonial administration. It is equally to the credit of these populations that they were able to reach a degree of consciousness and establish a sense of internal cohesion. It is now possible, thanks to the written evidence of witnesses received by the colonial authorities after the revolt, to assess the central role Tagama played in the events.³⁰

*Tégama était le seul maître: tout le monde lui obéissait*³¹

*Tégama commandait à tous*³²

Tagama was the movement's principal leader who, both ideologically and politically, was able to inspire people and develop strategies. He discretely made preparations before Kawousan's arrival.

²⁹ Archives Nationales du Sénégal, Dakar, 22 G 33: Niger. Statistiques Générales 1916. Annuaire de l'A.O.F. 1916.

³⁰ Archives Nationales du Niger, Niamey, 'Affaire Tegama', Cercle d'Agadez, 2-7-2.

³¹ Archives Nationales du Niger, Cercle d'Agadez, 2-7-2, no. 2, dépositions du témoin Massadou.

³² Archives Nationales du Niger, Cercle d'Agadez, 2-7-2, no. 3, dépositions du témoin Mamadou.

*Seul Tagama savait quand Kawousan arriverait. Personne n'était dans le secret. C'est un homme extrêmement discret et rusé.*³³

Available data do not allow an accurate description of preparations or of the first contacts between Kawousan and Tagama, although a letter from Sidi Mohammed El Labid to the Sultan is dated 1913 or 1914. By the beginning of 1916, Tagama was diverting the attention of Captain Bosch from the troubles that were unfolding in Ayir. From April 1916, the commander of the *cercle* issued orders demanding that the post be defended.³⁴

Tagama continued his diversionary actions until Captain Sabatié took up his position and recognized the extraordinary effort that Tagama had made to curb the colonial administration's power in Agadez without arising any suspicions and to ease the infiltration of the Sanûssi.³⁵ It was during the first part of 1916 that Tagama could skilfully have had assassinated one of his closest collaborators, Elhadj Tourawa Melle, who was on very good terms with the French.³⁶ Then Tagama undertook the construction of housing for Kawousan and his men, explaining that the building was destined to '*héberger des hôtes illustres, de grands marabouts*'.³⁷

Kawousan's army, which had to reach Agadez via Djado and Iférouwane, was made up of mainly Chaamba Arabs originally from southern Algeria, of Toubou and of Tuareg Kel Ajjer, Kel Ewey, Kel Fadey and Ikaskazen. With modern equipment (rapid-fire guns, machine guns and canons), the army was in a strong position to be able to recruit a large proportion of professional soldiers, notably deserters from the Italian army (*askaris*) and from French Saharan camelry units that had already gained some experience with modern warfare.

The first part of the column making up the advanced guard was led by the chief of a group of Tuareg Ikaskazen, Agali Touboushkouwan. They arrived in Agadez during the night of 12-13 December 1916. According to Tairou, the

³³ Elhadj Aman Bougounou, Agadez, August 1985.

³⁴ Archives du Cercle d'Agadez, Commandant du Territoire au Commandant du Cercle d'Agadez: Note confidentielle no. 99 C du 14 avril 1916. On this point it seems dangerous to say that 'le capitaine Bosch était sans doute de connivence avec le sultan Tagama', Salifou, *Kawousan*, 62, note 83. There is no proof of this.

³⁵ Archives Nationales de France, Vincennes, Fonds A.O.F. Section Niger, V: Rapport du Capitaine Sabatié, commandant le poste d'Agadez sur le siège du poste, 13 décembre 1916 au 3 mars 1917 inclus. p. 1-2.

³⁶ Elhadj Tourawa Mellé was Sarkin Tourawa (leader of the Arabs) and with this title was second in command under the Sultan. He was both Chief of War and Chief of Caravans of Bilma.

³⁷ Malam Yaro, Agadez, August 1985.

group of about 200 riflemen, who were received and put up by Tagama,³⁸ was made up of Ikaskazan, Kel Fadeye, Kel Tedele, Ifadeyan and Kel Ferwane. It was the following day that Tagama sent several missions to various tribal chiefs in order to win back Agadez. The Ikaskazan, Ifadayen, Kel Gharous, Kel Ferwane, Almousakarès and Kel Dinnik responded first and went to set up camp just outside the town. The same requests were sent to chiefs Moussa Ag Amastane of the Kel Ahaggar, Attati of the Esharifane, Kel Ewey and Kel Gres.³⁹ Tagama then gave the order to stop all people who had contacts with the French: boys, cooks, interpreters, riflemen's wives, and certain traders including the Tunisian negotiator Mohammed Allane. Most were held in prison, although a few, such as Samba the interpreter at the French post, were executed.⁴⁰

Aghali's army began to attack the post early in the morning of 13 December 1916. Captain Sabatié, alerted by Samba's widow, just had enough time to move arms, ammunition and money that had been left outside the keep. They organized the defence of the post with the equipment they had at their disposal.⁴¹

Kawousan reached Agadez with the main part of the column, the canon and the machine guns on 17 December:

*Le lendemain, grande palabre. Tégama préside, Agali et Kaossen y prennent part. Kaossen déclare être venu sur l'invitation de Tégama pour chasser les Français. Des messages écrits sont envoyés à toutes les tribus de l'Aïr, par les hommes de Tégama. Il y était dit que les Français allaient être détruits et chassés par la force; que ceux qui ne se déclareraient pas pour Tégama seraient considérés comme ennemis, attaqués et punis après la prise du poste d'Agadez. Au bout de quinze jours, le résultat était acquis : toutes les tribus s'étaient rendues à Agadez, plus ou moins volontairement. Les plus récalcitrantes (tels que les Kel Ewey) avaient été visitées par l'anastafidet Ekade et Kaossen lui-même. Un message avait été envoyé au Sultan de Kano pour le prévenir des événements qui allaient se passer.*⁴²

³⁸ Archives Nationales du Niger, Niamey, 2-7-2. Déposition du Témoin Tairou, p. 1.

³⁹ Salifou, *Kaoussan*, 61. From a document by Malam Bohary Tanode d'Agadez à Boubou Hama; see Boubou, 'Documents Nigériens', 172.

⁴⁰ Allane, *Relations de Voyage*, 6-9. Archives Nationales du Niger, 2-7-2, dépositions des témoins Mamadou et Massadou. They talk 'd'un sujet anglais de couleur le nommé Marc Farlane, agent de la London Kano Company Limited' who would have been assassinated by Tagama's men. Archives du Cercle de Zinder: Le Capitaine commandant le cercle de Zinder au Commissaire du Gouvernement Général au Territoire Militaire du Niger, Zinder, le 9 janvier 1917.

⁴¹ Archives Nationales de France, Vincennes, A.O.F., Niger, V: Rapport du Capitaine Sabatié sur le siège d'Agadez, p. 6.

⁴² Archives Nationales du Niger, Niamey, 2-7-2: Affaire Tégama, déposition du témoin Tairou, p. 2.

Tagama again seems to have played a pivotal role during the siege in a military, ideological and political sense. It was he who assembled the arms and ammunition, assumed the coordination of the operation and organized the fighting against the French troops sent to assist their soldiers.⁴³

Agadez was under siege, a state that would last for 80 days and even then the war would not be finished and would last for long months in the mountains, in Kavar and in Fezzan. This military episode is well known⁴⁴ so our attention now turns to the direct and indirect repercussions of the attack of Agadez on other regions.

Repercussions of the attack on Agadez on other regions

The long Kawousan War provoked violent and open actions throughout the rest of the region. In the Azawak, Tamesna and Ahaggar, numerous groups of fighters soon joined Kawousan's troops.⁴⁵ Further to the south, participation by Damagaram, Damerrou and Manga was invaluable, even decisive, in certain places. Control over this area, traditionally seen as the grain reserve of the northern region, was more than once at stake during the struggle, with both sides wanting to command access to it. The resistance forces were able to infiltrate the area and receive protection and assistance from the people near Gouré, Zinder and Madaoua.⁴⁶

In the west of Niger and mainly in the subdivision of Filingué, the sedentary *bella* people in the cantons of Imanan and Tegraza were cautious following the

⁴³ Archives Nationales du Niger, Niamey, 2-7-2: Affaire Tégama, p. 1-4.

⁴⁴ Riou, *La Révolte de Kaocen*, 19-25; Fuglestad, 'Les Revoltes des Tuareg', 96-116; Salifou, *Kawousan*, 66-157; F. Fuglestad, *A History of Niger, 1850-1960* (Cambridge, 1983), 95-100; J.L. Dufour, 'Les Confins Sahariens du Territoire Militaire du Niger pendant la Grande Guerre. Aïr, Tibesti, Kaouar, Mémoire de Maîtrise d'Histoire' (Paris, 1974); J.L. Dufour, 'La Révolte Tuareg et le Siège d'Agadez (13 Décembre 1916 - 3 March 1917)', *Relations Internationales*, 3 (1975), 57-77.

⁴⁵ F. Nicolas, *Tamesna: Les Loullemenden de l'Est ou Tuareg Kel Dinnik* (Paris, 1950), 89-104; E. Séré de Rivières, *Histoire du Niger* (Paris, 1965), 225-28. On the attitude of the leaders of the Kel Ahagar Moussa ag Amastane during the revolt, see Archives Nationales de France, Vincennes, A.O.F., Niger, V. Rapport du Capitaine Depommier, commandant le groupe mobile du Hoggar sur la conduite de Moussa ag Amastane pendant la période de décembre 1916 à août 1917; Norris, *The Tuareg*, 168-71; H. Lhote, *Les Tuareg du Hoggar* (Paris, 1955), 345-77.

⁴⁶ Archives Nationales du Sénégal, 2G17-12. Rapport Politique, 2^{ème} trimestre 1917; Archives Nationales du Niger, Cercle de Zinder. Rapport Politique du Cercle de Zinder, 4^{ème} trimestre 1917; Archives Nationales du Niger, cercle de Gouré, 4^{ème} trimestre 1917.

failure and repression of the revolt of Firhoun. They therefore had some reservations after the announcement of the siege of Agadez. The military precautions taken (and enforced by the French administration in Niamey), which included the disarming of the population and the sending of a reconnaissance patrol, hardly favoured a manifestation of open revolt.⁴⁷

In neighbouring Nigeria, Governor Lugard received a telegram on 23 December from Dakar informing him of the invasion of the French Sahara by the Sanûssi. A day later, news of the siege of Agadez arrived as well as a request from the Secretary-General of the AOF, Fournier, who demanded safe passage between Kano and Zinder for troops sent from Dakar. At the same time, Fournier informed Lugard of the instructions issued by the head of the military forces in Zinder to call on the nearby British garrison in case of emergency. Lugard, deeply concerned by the developing situation in Niger, declared a state of emergency on 3 January 1917.

Captain Faulque de Jonquières demanded reinforcements from Lugard in the middle of January 1917 and British colonial soldiers were given the role of protecting the sedentary zones of Tahoua, Maradi and Madaoua and of quashing any sign of incursion by resistance fighters in the south. Two British columns were sent to the military area in Niger. One, led by Colonel Coles, left Katsina with two mounted companies, one canon and two machine guns. The contingent arrived in Maradi on 13 January and received orders to meet at Tessaoua on 19 January.⁴⁸ The second column, coming from Sokoto, was commanded by Captain Randall and was made up of 65 riflemen on foot, a mounted company of 85 men and two machine guns. It was sent to Tahoua where it arrived on 20 January. Lugard did not want his men to intervene in the fighting around Ayir and their role was principally to offer help in patrolling and in setting up several mobile posts. After staying about four months in the military zone in Niger (from mid-January to mid-May 1917), the two British columns returned to their respective bases in Nigeria.

As a result of this cooperation with the British administration in Nigeria, the French had at their disposal some 2,000 extra riflemen, 8 machine guns, 6

⁴⁷ Archives Nationales du Sénégal, 2G17-12. Rapport Politique, 2^{ème} trimestre 1917; Archives Nationales du Niger, Cercle de Zinder. Rapport Politique du Cercle de Zinder, 4^{ème} trimestre 1917; Archives Nationales du Niger, Cercle de Gouré, 4^{ème} trimestre 1917.

⁴⁸ Archives Nationales du Niger, Niamey; Lieutenant-Colonel Coles commandant la colonne du Katsina au Lieutenant-Colonel Mourin commandant la colonne de l'Aïr et Commissaire du Gouvernement Général au Territoire Militaire du Niger. Kaduna le 1 juin 1917. The remainder of the column (100 sharp shooters) remained in Katsina ready to go to Niger.

canons, 394 camels, 109 mounted soldiers and 17 tonnes of equipment. This equipment would allow the French army to consolidate its positions in Niamey, Bilma, N'Guigmi, Filingué and Tahoua and to deploy more forces in the centre of the area of resistance⁴⁹ with the men who were already in Ayir to liberate Agadez.

Alongside this military assistance, the British authorities adopted a number of political and administrative measures in areas adjacent to the military zones likely to assist the French: a reintegration of immigrant populations into the area, the policing of nomadic groups that were allied to the resistance movement, the requisitioning of camels, horses and porters for provisioning, a constant exchange of political information of the highest importance etc.⁵⁰

What evidence is there of allegations about relations between the resistance leaders and Nigeria? The French authorities' reports are based on correspondence found after the liberation of Agadez or from their intelligence agents.

The first item in the dossier would be Kawousan's letter of October 1916 to his uncles El Hajj Mousa and Adambar in which he stated that the Germans and the Turks had to join forces at Kano with the columns coming down from Tripolitania.⁵¹ In May 1917, the chief of battalion, Laforge, asked the Ayir commander to order an inquiry '*pour savoir si Kaossen au cours du siège d'Agadez a adressé des lettres ou envoyé des émissaires à des sultans de la Nigéria et plus particulièrement à celui de Kano*'.⁵²

Accusations were laid first against the Emir of Kano and then the Sultan of Sokoto. The chief colonial officer of Niger passed his information on to Lugard and Sarkin Musulmin of Sokoto would be constantly in touch with Kawousan to whom he had promised his help if the Sanûssi managed to enter the town.⁵³ Lugard wanted to verify all the details so set off on a journey to the north of

⁴⁹ Colonial Office Records: 583/58/43044. Lieutenant-Colonel Jenkins, 'Report on the Situation on the Northern Frontier', 25 juillet 1917.

⁵⁰ Archives Nationales du Sénégal, Dakar, 2G17-12, Niger à A.O.F. Rapport Politique, 1^{er} trimestre 1917, p. 14.

⁵¹ Archives Nationales du Niger, Niamey, 2.7.2; Mangeot, 'Le Siège d'Agadez', 479-82.

⁵² Archives Nationales du Niger, Agadez. Note confidentielle, Chef de bataillon Laforge chargé de l'expédition des affaires au Territoire militaire du Niger au commandant de la colonne de l'Air, Zinder le 10 mai 1917; M. Zbairu Kolo, 'The Kawousan Rebellion of 1916-1918 with Particular Reference to its Impact on Northern Nigeria', PhD thesis, Ahmadu Bello University (Zaria, 1973).

⁵³ J. Osuntokun, 'The Response of the British Colonial Government in Nigeria to the Islamic Insurgency in the French Sudan and the Sahara during the First World War', *Bulletin de l'I.F.A.N.*, XXXVI, B, 1 (1974), 23.

Nigeria to check on the loyalty of the emirs *vis-à-vis* the British administration. No evidence of their relations with Kawousan or Tagama could be detected.

Alongside these rumours and police indications, the affirmation by Séré de Rivières and by Fuglestad should be mentioned, according to whom, before the end of the siege of Agadez, *'des éléments sanûssi installés au Nigéria septentrional avaient organisé un convoi de ravitaillement destiné à Kaocen et ses hommes. Mais le convoi fut intercepté et capturé par un détachement français, assisté des Kanouri de Goudoumaria'*.⁵⁴ As far as oral tradition is concerned, the information is contradictory. While Elhadj Aman Bougounou remained quiet,⁵⁵ the others were more outspoken:

*Tagama était en relation avec Sarkin Katsina qui confectionnait les gris-gris et les envoyaient à Agadez par des émissaires. Tagama a informé Sarkin Katsina du plan.*⁵⁶

Finally, were relations between Kawousan, Tagama and the traditional authorities of northern Nigeria myth or reality? Undoubtedly the colonial authorities gave the question some thought. Whatever credit is placed on these sources, it is likely that the emirs of northern Nigeria would have been informed of the situation in Agadez. However, they reacted according to their own interests and to the situation in their own territories: with discretion and flexibility in Borno, Kano and Sokoto where Tagama had numerous contacts, but also with manifest opposition in Kabi which was clearly on the side of the colonial authorities. The situation was delicate for the emirs who had fresh and recent memories of the deportation to Ilorin of defeated colleagues who had collaborated in the revolts of 1915-1916. They had to proceed with caution and tact as 'one never knows what will happen'. Their loyalties were divided between Islamic loyalty for their Muslim brothers and their loyalty *vis-à-vis* the administration. It was the latter which ultimately carried more weight.

Interpretation

The Kawousan War extended beyond traditional political players, witnessed the use of modern armaments and received support from external sources. The involvement of the many colonial powers of the time – France, Italy, Great Britain, Germany and Turkey – and the alliance with the Sanûssiya gave it an

⁵⁴ Fuglestad, 'Les Révoltes des Touraeg', 107; Séré de Rivières, *Histoire du Niger*, 226.

⁵⁵ Information Elhadj Aman Bougounou, Agadez.

⁵⁶ Information Malam Yaro, Agadez.

international dimension, which is probably why it attracted so much attention and was so widely debated by writers at the time. Four principle theses constitute the fundamental axes of the different approaches: (i) the *bandits pillards* (plundering bandits) theory; (ii) the *révolte sénoussiste* (*Sénoussiste* revolt) theory which emphasized the religious factors and attributed the Sanûssiya with a decisive role in the conflict; (iii) the war-against-the-French theory; and (iv) the modernist theory put forward by the leaders of political parties fighting for independence as well as the recent Tuareg rebellion in Niger.

The 'bandits pillards' theory

This interpretation does not consider the Kawousan War as a revolt but more as a raid, an opportunity to plunder and loot. Fuglestad, who supports this theory, wrote that the Kawousan War '*ajouta seulement une bande supplémentaire à toutes les bandes qui parcouraient le pays*'.⁵⁷ He ignores the political dimension of the movement dismissing it as a simple pillaging operation that was essentially materialistic in origin. In this way he puts all Tuareg raiding actions down to reaction against colonial domination. At the same time it implies an ineptitude on the part of the Tuareg to rise above their internal rivalries to unite against a common enemy. This all translates into a profound misunderstanding of the double defence strategies adopted by the Tuareg from the outset of colonial penetration. This consisted in part of establishing internal and external alliances with a view to reinforcing their defences and also of organizing the raids against the enemy to weaken and defeat its army.⁵⁸ Actions varied from escape and evasion (avoiding the enemy and playing for time) to armed resistance, but also the use of submission, diplomacy, underground tactics and exile.

A Sénoussiste revolt? A Muslim plot?

Islam, and the Sanûssiya in particular, have been considered by various writers as the driving force behind the Kawousan War. This interpretation came largely from colonial sources and was subsequently reproduced in numerous publications. Abadie spoke of the *Mouvement Sénoussiste*⁵⁹ and for Séré de Rivières it was all about *un complexe de guerre sainte* (a complex religious war).⁶⁰ André Salifou's book was entitled *Kaoussan ou la Révolte Sénoussiste*, and one of the chapters in Norris's book was 'The Twareg Jihâd against the

⁵⁷ Fuglestad, 'Les Révoltes des Touraeg', 115.

⁵⁸ Claudot-Hawad, 'Exil et Résistance', 23-26.

⁵⁹ Abadie, *Afrique Centrale*, 327.

⁶⁰ Séré de Rivières, *Histoire du Niger*, 225.

French'.⁶¹ Finally Casajus describes the role of the religious engagement in the resistance.⁶² Clarification of the role of the Sanûssiya in this revolt involves returning to the political and ideological roots of the revolt and determining the nature of the alliance between the resistance and the Sanûssiya.

The Sanûssiya and their brothers – a group of individuals joined by the same doctrine and the same religious philosophy – were established in 1837 by Mohamed Ben Ali es Sanûssi el Hassani el Idrisi who was born in 1792 in Torch in Oranie.⁶³ The Sanûssiya enjoyed considerable success and its leaders had complete authority throughout Libya and northern Chad. They had numerous disciples in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, eastern Sudan and Somalia and its influence spread through Mesopotamia as far as Indonesia. In Nigeria, the Kwar, the Ayir, the Damagaram and the Damergou were the main areas of Sanûssiya influence between 1860 and 1899. Many *Zawiya* including schools and mosques were founded in Bilma and Zinder and in the Ader and Ayir.

The Sanûssiya are orthodox and similar to the Wahhâbist order set up in Saudi Arabia at the beginning of the nineteenth century by Mohammed ibn Abd-al-Wahhâb.⁶⁴ The Sanûssiya and the Wahhâbites represented '*les tendances conservatrices des mouvements islamiques prémodernistes de réforme*'.⁶⁵ Like the Wahhâbites, the Sanûssi can be identified by a rigorous adherence to a pure and primitive Islam, rejecting all that was introduced later including the cult of saints, tombs, relics etc. that are considered to negatively influence the true belief.⁶⁶ The Sanûssiya totally reject the doctrine of union with God conceived by Sufism and substitute a mystical union with the spirit of the prophet Mohammed. This is the origin of the name *Mohammediya tariqa* sometimes given to the movement. It equally rejects Islamic intellectual tendencies and preaches a direct interpretation of its origins without erudition.

⁶¹ Norris, *The Tuareg*, 162-73.

⁶² D. Casajus, 'Islam et Noblesse chez les Tuareg', *L'Homme*, XXX, 3 (1990), 7-30.

⁶³ O. Meynier, 'La Guerre Sainte des Senousya dans l'Afrique Française (1915-1918)', *Revue Africaine*, LXXXIII, 2 (1939), 227-75. His date of birth is different in other sources: 1787 in J.S. Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa* (Oxford, 1974), 159, and 1781 in A. Gouilly, *L'Islam dans l'A.O.F.* (Paris, 1952), 165.

⁶⁴ The leadership of the movement reverted to Mohammed ibn Saoud, the founder of the royal dynasty of Saudi Arabia.

⁶⁵ R. Fazlur, 'Revival and Reform in Islam', in *The Cambridge History of Islam*, volume 2 (Cambridge, 1977), 637.

⁶⁶ It could even be said that the Sanûssi were the puritans of Western Islam as the Wahhâbites are the puritans of the East. W.E. Muhlmann, 'Mouvements Islamiques et Hindous', in W.E. Muhlmann (ed.), *Messianismes Révolutionnaires du Tiers-Monde* (Paris, 1968), 158-59.

In addition, the Sanûssiya opt for the promotion of a moral and Islamic solidarity based on honesty, egalitarianism, Islamic cooperation and economic justice.⁶⁷ They thus set up cooperative farms and undertook commercial activities. The Sanûssiya relied on the Zawiya, a monastic group with places where educational retreats could be held of a religious and cultural nature.⁶⁸ Except for these distinctive traits, the aims of Sanûssiya dogma were generally the same as other brotherhoods, especially regarding the step-by-step reunification of African Muslims and the creation of a Muslim empire that would be united, pure and respectful of the authentic teachings of the prophet.

It was with all these considerations in mind that the colonial authorities at the time called the brotherhood movement '*xénophobe, militant, agressif et fanatique*' and '*anti-européen*'.⁶⁹ In reality, the newly founded brotherhood wanted to affirm its orthodoxy in relation to existing practices that it considered tainted by pernicious influences. It wanted to withdraw from these and promote emigration or jihad (holy war) and to retreat into the austerity of the Sahel to preserve the purity of an original Islam. Subsequently its anti-colonial activities were more or less force of circumstance.

It was in the name of all these principles that the Sanûssiya established contact with the leaders of the Ayir. The strength of relations before the siege of Agadez between Tagama, Kawousan and Sanûssiya chiefs is acknowledged by oral tradition and colonial archive material. Sidi Mohammed El Labid, the representative of the Sanûssiya in Fezzan, wrote a letter dated 1914 to Tagama.⁷⁰ The two had never met but their correspondence suggests a secret project dating from around this time. Let us now consider the position of the main leaders and the population *vis-à-vis* the Sanûssiya.

To fully appreciate Kawousan's relations with the Sanûssiya, it is necessary to look at his time in exile and analyse the nature of the alliances he had with the different camps. What is most remarkable is the diversity of the alliances and the different *volte-face*. Kawousan always seems to have been guided by the need to set up and maintain a strong and modern army. This was the main motivation behind all his actions. He received arms from the Sanûssi who he helped fight against the French between 1909 and 1912, then from the French

⁶⁷ Fazlur, 'Revival and Reform', 638-39.

⁶⁸ Following a policy of systematic Islamization, the Sanûssi gradually opened schools everywhere and bought young slaves in Chad who they taught before sending them back to their own country to spread the word of the Koran.

⁶⁹ Gouilly, *L'Islam dans l'A.O.F.*, 166.

⁷⁰ Archives Nationales du Niger, Cercle d'Agadez: Lettre de Sidi Mohamed el Labid au Sultan d'Agadez, écrite à la fin de kaada 1332 (1914). Traduction de l'officier interprète de deuxième classe, Gisselbrecht, Agadez le 10 mars 1917.

with whom he fought from 1912 to 1915, then the Turks and finally again the Sanûssi during his stay in Tripolitania in 1916 before going to the Ayir region. Even after the retreat of resistance fighters outside Agadez (13 July 1917) and then from the Ayir (25 March 1918), he adopted the same attitude. Initially allied to the Turks in Fezzan, he then formed an alliance with the Sanûssi who provided him with significant quantities of arms and ammunition. Kawousan played this game of double alliances until the end and eventually it was the cause of his own death. Having received vital armaments from the Sanûssi, he wanted to conclude an alliance with the Turks in Tibesti. They, however, were aware of his tactics, and attacked, captured and hung him.

In this game of reverse alliances, there is no place for ideology and Kawousan did not concern himself with such trivialities. He was pragmatic, manipulating with a rare persuasive power the Sanûssi, the Turks, the French and the Italians depending on the circumstances. He no doubt fully understood the context of the colonial complexities in which each of the camps had its own colonial agenda. His references to Islam and to the holy war in his correspondence with Tagama and other Tuareg leaders is based on political propaganda. Kawousan knew that Islam alone could convince the population to accept resistance and enrol their children in his army. In the political context of the time, only Islam could play a unifying role because it could overcome internal political opposition within Tuareg groups. In this respect, Islam – and the Sanûssi – could only have had an instrumental function and did not assume any ideological role. Elsewhere, Kawousan always rose up against the blind fanaticism of fighters who wanted to engage in a holy war and pronounced religious incantations and honour against the bullets of adversaries. He wanted a well-structured and disciplined army with soldiers knowledgeable about the tactics of modern warfare, like those led by his European enemies.⁷¹

Regarding the position of Tagama, Bourgeot may have been right when he affirmed that '*Tegama était probablement le plus senoussiste des dissidents – ce qui est inhérent à la fonction de sultan, qui doit assurer un rôle religieux?*'⁷² In Agadez, only one informant could confirm Tagama's affiliation with the Sanûssi with any certainty:

*Tagama a étudié au Borno et à Kano. Il était à Kano lorsqu'on fit appel à lui pour diriger le sultanat. C'est un grand musulman et un grand marabout. C'est une fois devenu sultan qu'il a été converti à la Sanûssiya par Sidikou, un marabout arabe de Ghât installé à Agadez.*⁷³

⁷¹ Claudot-Hawad, 'Exil et Résistance', 36.

⁷² Bourgeot, 'Les Echanges Transsahariens', 171.

⁷³ Oral information Aman Dan Mallam, Agadez, July 1985.

Elhadj Bougounou was more nuanced:

Tagama sénoussiste? Non ... C'est difficile de dire à quelle confrérie il appartenait. Il est musulman. C'est tout. C'était là la base de ses relations avec Kawousan. La raison du ralliement de Tagama à la révolte, c'est l'islam. Il ne pouvait accepter d'être un subordonné des Français, des Kafir... C'est une guerre contre les Français qui voulaient imposer leur coutume et altérer l'islam. Au moment de tirer, les résistants s'écriaient: 'La illaha illala, jihadi fi sabih allah'. C'était une jihad, pas pour le pillage ou le butin mais pour défendre l'islam. Les combattants ont fait la guerre aux Français mais pas aux musulmans.⁷⁴

This is a similar point of view to Malam Alfaki Almoustapha's, according to whom Kawousan would have obtained Tagama's agreement by stressing the following theme:

*Mou kori kafiray, mou samou kassan mou.
Guerre aux kafirs, libérons notre pays.⁷⁵*

This slogan agreed with the interests of the resistance fighters and Tagama. The rallying of Tagama to the resistance was in accordance with his political and religious beliefs. Were external threats not the main cause of the creation of the Sultanate? Ayir traditions bestowed the official title of *Imam Amir-al-Mouminin* (Commander of the Believers) on the Sultan. His legitimacy in the eyes of his people was related to his devotion to Islam. The fight also offered him the chance to increase his political power – limited until now – and to impose an authority weakened by political rivalries dividing the Kel Ayir. Alliances with Kawousan and above all with the Sanûssi allowed him to bask in his prestige. In this Muslim country, the words '*Guerre aux Kafir, libérons notre pays*' were mobilizing. It was a political programme that conformed to the immediate interests of the population. It was the religious and political duty of the Sultan to whom he had pledged to fight this war with the infidels and to liberate his country from French domination. This all conforms to the Islamic vision that divided the world into two domains: *dar al islam* (the land of Islam) and *dar ek kufr* (the land of the infidels). Islam demands that men live according to Muslim authorities. The power of the unfaithful over Muslims represents a situation of scandal in their faith. Islam preaches either jihad (holy war) or *hijra* (emigration) for believers in order to cleanse themselves of the power of the

⁷⁴ Oral information Elhadj Bougounou, Agadez, July 1985.

⁷⁵ Oral information Malam Alfaki Moustapha, Agadez, July 1985.

infidel. Kawousan and Tagama opted for a holy war because it better fulfilled their purposes. Islam or Sanûssiya served to overcome political opposition, to assemble and mobilize the people, and to recruit fighters.

How did the people interpret this resistance? Firstly, popular history remembers this period by the name of *Yakin Kawousan*. This highlights the importance accorded to Kawousan, who is considered the one who won the war at Agadez and was seen as the main military leader. Secondly, when analysing the same oral sources, it becomes apparent that Tagama was showered in eulogies for the period prior to the resistance but judgements were severe and criticism harsh when one considers the revolt. The Sultan would have brought bad luck to Agadez by allying with Kawousan and by wanting to fight the French who were judged as being too powerful. Informants described the opinion of the people of Agadez at that time as follows: '*Tagama ya cu ce mu*' meaning 'Tagama has hurt us'.⁷⁶ Oral tradition retains the negative character of the war to highlight the harsh repression that was endured by Agadez and the whole of the Ayir. Responsibility for this is laid squarely on the shoulders of Tagama who wanted to fight the French who were clearly too strong for him. The Ayir was ruined and the region lost half its population. However in no way was the resistance seen as a religious war supported by the Sanûssiya.

Between Tagama, Kawousan and the Sanûssiya there was a tactical alliance, a convergence of military, political, religious and economic interests. The Sanûssiya certainly supplied Kawousan's army. However all the objective conditions of a revolt were laid down well before Kawousan and his men's arrival in the Ayir. Identifying the resistance as a Sanûssiya movement appears to be too hasty a conclusion to draw and diminishes the complexity of the revolt at the same time as simplifying its meaning and its extent. To consider the Kawousan War as a *Sénoussiste* revolt tends to corroborate the thesis of a war led from outside by the Sanûssi supported by Turkish-German agents of which Kawousan was a part. Adherence to the Sanûssiya and adhesion to the resistance movement do not cover the same reality. This false interpretation of the revolt led the French troops to indiscriminately exterminate all Muslim groups in Agadez. More than 100 Muslim scholars assembled in a mosque were massacred in March 1917 even though they had told Colonel Mourin in a letter that they denied all responsibility for what had happened.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Information Elhadj Aman Bougounou, Agadez, August 1985.

⁷⁷ Triaud, 'Un Episode Oubliée', 263-71.

An anti-French war?

This theory sees the revolt as a simple prolongation of the First World War, a movement armed and financed by the Germans. For the French, the causes of the war were external. In their opinion, it was a vast Muslim plot supported ideologically by the Sanûssiya, and materially by Turkey and Germany.⁷⁸ It is only colonial mythology that involves people like Dr Frobenius with the revolt and magnifies facts to make it appear as if the revolt was due to the power of the Sanûssiya or was an alleged holy war backed by a German-Turkish alliance to attack French bases in Africa.⁷⁹

The authorities in Niger do not agree with this interpretation:

...On ne peut guère admettre que ce soit là le vrai mobile qui ait poussé les insurgés. Il est vraisemblable et même probable que ces mouvements ont été encouragés par les nationaux allemands et turcs de la Tripolitaine, mais ces encouragements sont restés jusqu'ici purement platoniques ou tout au moins de bien faible importance. Il n'y a pas de lien entre la guerre européenne et les événements de l'Aïr. Les causes sont purement locales.⁸⁰

Two further reasons allow the European war and the Kawousan War to be separated. The Sanûssiya, as already mentioned, were militarily weak and politically in crisis. Additionally, any Sanûssiya alliance with a particular European country should not be overestimated. Sanûssiya alliances during the war experienced various fluctuations: they fought against the English in Egypt and in Sudan, then against the Italians in Libya until 1928. In 1943 they collaborated with the English and the French against the Italians in Libya.

The War of Kawousan and contemporary nationalist movements

For the leaders of the political parties who fought for independence and for the leaders of the recent Tuareg rebellion in Niger, there was more continuity between the different periods of resistance. They all identified with the Kawousan War. The *Sawaba* party led by Djibo Bakary declared in one of its publications:

C'est de ce passé glorieux [les résistances anticoloniales], parfois douloureux et dramatique, que nous pouvons puiser à la fois des leçons de courage et de patriotisme et des éléments nécessaires pour réhabiliter notre culture et notre Histoire...N'étaient-ce pas les valeureux guerriers de l'Aïr, conduits par Kaoussen

⁷⁸ Abadie, *Afrique Centrale*, 327-28.

⁷⁹ Séré de Rivières, *Histoire du Niger*, 224-25.

⁸⁰ Archives Nationales du Sénégal, Dakar, 2G16-12. Niger à A.O.F. Rapport d'ensemble annuel, 44.

*et Tegama, qui, en 1916 infligèrent aux troupes françaises de dures défaites et vinrent mettre le siège devant Agadez où les Français durent s'enfermer dans un fort?*⁸¹

The leaders of the Tuareg rebellion in Niger established a link between the anti-colonial revolts and recent rebellions. They have made a personalized history of Tuareg society based on the Kawousan War and still see this event as a step in the long process of a search for a certain modernity at the heart of Tuareg society in which the rebellion was inscribed and which continues to this day. Kawousan is considered as having brought an egalitarian society and democratic opposition to the conservatism represented by the aristocracy who wanted to maintain a social hierarchy directed by the old code of honour. Kawousan has been given the role of liberator, the federator seen as the unifier of the Tuareg world.⁸²

Conclusion

The Kawousan War was undoubtedly the longest period of resistance ever known in Niger's previous military history, extending beyond colonial frontiers and even traditional politics. However, its root causes were purely internal, linked to colonial domination and to local economic and political factors. Economically, the Ayir region had faced a long period of decline in the living conditions of the local pastoralists and agro-pastoralists whose wealth was principally based on the trans-Saharan caravan trade that was declining significantly due to military operations in the area. French colonization had upset the way of life of these populations by the introduction of a policy of divide and rule, the breakdown of Tuareg confederations, the imposition of a policy of sedentarization, the creation of artificial political unities, the suppression of lines of bondage and the trafficking in slaves, the introduction of a double tax (a poll tax and a tax on cattle) and the huge requisitioning of men and livestock. In the eyes of the locals, these changes symbolized the establishment of dependent relationships and by extension, a policy of dependency and of servitude.

Neither a raid conducted by *bandits pillards* nor a *Sénoussiste* revolt, the Kawousan War was more than a simple Tuareg revolt. It was an anti-colonial

⁸¹ *Sawaba* Parti Politique, 'Pour l'Indépendance Effective du Niger: Les Raisons de Notre Lutte' (Bamako, 1961), 14.

⁸² Claudot-Hawad, 'Exil et Résistance', 32-33.

war through which the local populations attempted to free themselves from the yoke of colonialism and in particular French domination that had resulted in the loss of their main source of wealth – control of (trans) Saharan resources and trade – as well as their political independence.