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CONTENTS	Page
Editorial	1
The History of Nomadic Education in Kano State (1970-1999) Muhammad Wambai	3
Fulbe Culture and the Internet: A Survey Abdallah U. Adamu	13
The Past in the Present: The Legacies of Rousseau and Piaget in a Primary Science Curriculum for Nomads in Nigeria Ghajam V. Ardo	21
Pastoral Fulani and Family life Education in Nigeria: The Case of Southern Borno Nomads Abdul-mumin Sa'ad	27
Living with Itinerancy: Children of Itinerant Farm Workers in Australia talk about Moving and Changing Schools Robyn Henderson	44
Factors Militating against Effective Participation of Girls in Nomadic Education in Kaduna State Maureen N. Obiesie	50
Situational Analysis of Nomadic Education in South-Eastern Nigeria Abubakar Hamman-Tukur	57
An Assessment of Nomadic Education in Oshimili South Local Government Area of Delta State. Joseph I. Obinne and Patrick A. Moemeka	70
Situational Analysis of Nomadic Education in Adamawa and Taraba States: Implications for the Future of Nomadic Education in Nigeria Ibrahim Bulus	76
Assessing Nomadic Children's Learning Achievement: What Tools and Which Strategies? Nafisatu D. Muhammad and Muhammad I. Junaid	81
Notes on Contributors	89

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FULBE CULTURE AND THE INTERNET: A SURVEY

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This paper surveys the presence of Fulbe on the Internet. In particular, it draws attention to the pioneering works done by *peul* speaking webmasters to promote the ideals of Fulbe intellectual history and culture. Virtually all the effort in this direction were made by the Fulbe located in the Senegambia valley, covering countries such as Guinea, Mali, and Senegal. The sites reflect a variety of focus on the Fulbe, their culture and general disposition and demonstrates the way in which the Internet can be used as a medium of cultural propagation.

Introduction

This study is a survey of internet websites on Fulbe culture, rather than a structured survey of books or journal articles on the same issue. The method simply involves visiting the sites on the internet and noting their relevance to the central theme: the reflection of Fulbe culture on the internet, and the way in which net citizens are presented information, by both the Fulbe and non-Fulbe on the internet.

The Fulbe (Sing. Pullo) - who the Hausa and almost everybody call the Fulani - seem to receive the short end of the historical stick. As of 1995, there were 7,611,000 Fulfulde speakers in Nigeria, or 8.6% of the population. They are, however, glorified at various times as "conquerors" of northern Nigeria, and yet eventually lost their culture. An example of this view is given by a Christian Missionary Fulani who converted to Christianity from Islam, who in his website, argues that:

Islam is strongest in societies where a lingua franca exists and weakest in places of vernacular preponderance. For example, Islamic gains in north Nigeria occurred at the hands of the Fulani reformers in the 19th century. In the process, the Fulani assimilated to an Islamized Hausa culture and lost their own Fulfulde language.

This view, posted at an Arizona State University site represents a pseudo-analytical view of the existence of the Fulbe in Nigeria. No one seems to bear the brunt of antipodean hatred and

propaganda against "Fulani Jihadist expansion" than the late Sardaunan Sakkwato, Sir Ahmadu Bello. Historically, when the British took over the administration of the northern territories, they introduced compulsory language examinations for entry into the civil service, and these tests were sustained even after independence. Yet many Nigerians have assumed that such tests were imposed as part of a Hausanization and Islamization policy by the first Premier of the Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, and thus represent ethnic domination by the Hausa.

In the first instance, the Sardauna was a Pullo, but since we have evolved into Hausa-Fulani (whatever that means), let us not squabble over ethnic pigeon-holes. But this exoneration of the Sardauna was posted by John Edward Phillips (aka Yahaya Danjuma) of John Edward Philips, Akita University, Japan.

Further, there is the notion that the Fulbe conquered the Hausa and made them subservient. Examples of such critical discourse are seen in Okechukwu Okeke's *Hausa-Fulani Hegemony* (1992 Enugu; Los Angeles: Acena Publishers, 147 p.). Others include Pat Ikechukwu Ndukwe, *Fulani*. New York: Rosen Pub. Group, 1996. 64 p; and Oshomha Imoagene, *The Hausa and Fulani of northern Nigeria*. Ibadan: New-Era Publishers, 1990. 125 p.

The world, however, does not share the same view of the Fulbe. A page of University of Iowa, for instance, posts a different view of the Fulbe:

Fulani are a nomadic people who have been influential in regional politics, economics, and history throughout Western Africa for over a thousand years. They played a significant role in the rise and fall of the Mossi states in Burkina Faso and also contributed to the migratory movements of people southwards through Niger and Nigeria into far Cameroon. They were also responsible for introducing and spreading Islam throughout much of West Africa. The height of the Fulani empire was between the early 1800s and early 1900s. This power was consolidated under Usman dan Fodio and was centred on northern Nigeria. Dan Fodio was a devout Muslim who used religious fervor to ignite his troops to undertake a series of holy wars. Following the early success of Islamic warriors, non-Islamic Fulani joined ranks with their fellows to form an extensive and powerful empire.

Tragically, despite the incredible political and financial power the Fulbe possess in Nigeria, yet little is done by Fulbe academics and intellectuals to preserve their literary and cultural traditions. For instance, of the outburst of literary activity currently taking place in Northern Nigeria, there do not seem to be many Fulfulde language novels, newspapers or magazines as can be found in Hausa language.

Fulbe and the Internet

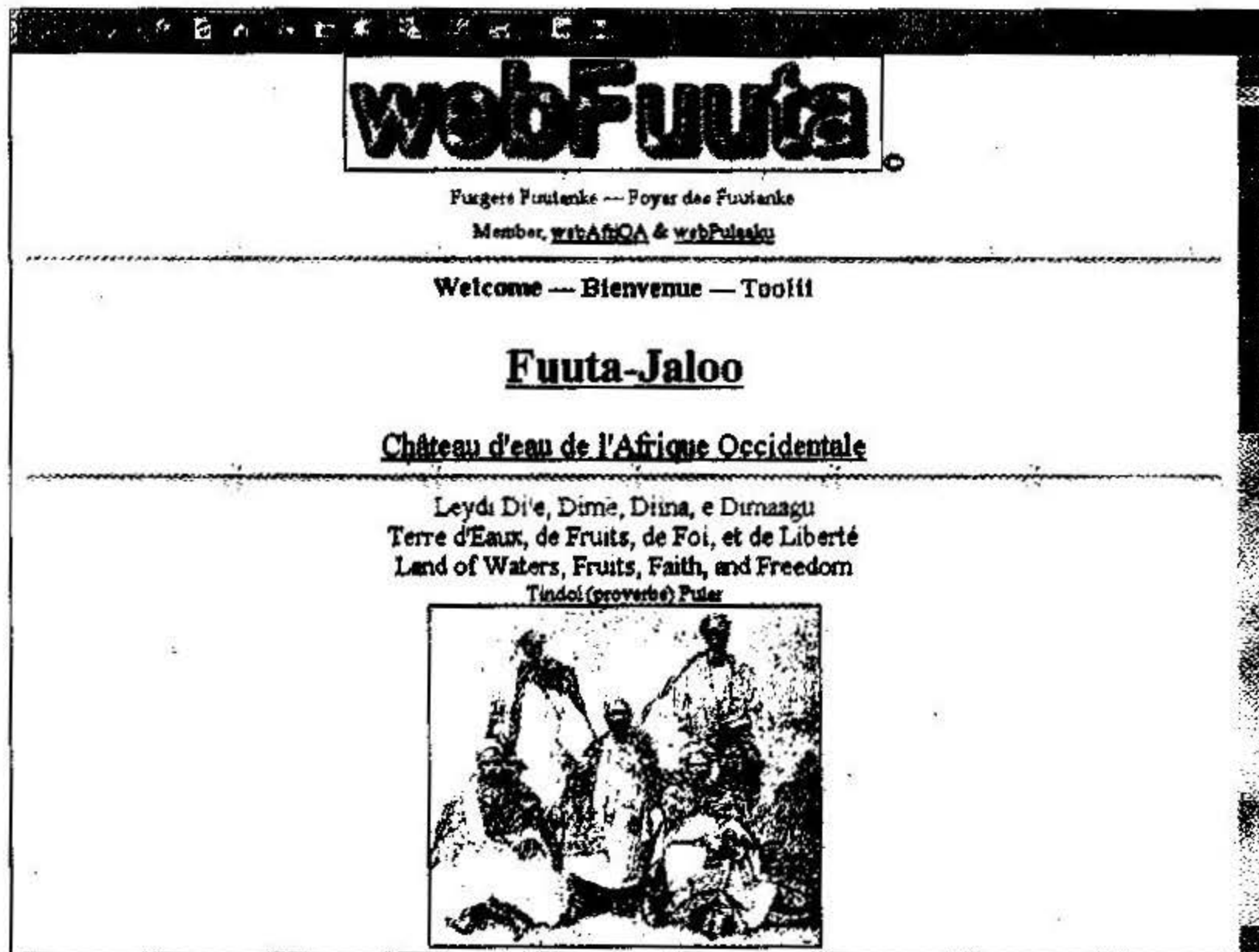
Clearly, then the search for Fulbe culture on the Internet has to be approached from a different angle. There are many sites devoted to an aspect of Fulbe language and culture; but most of them seem to be catalogs of either anthropological accounts of do' goody Peace Corps in Mali, Niger or Cameroon (writing home to mum in Michigan or else where in the US about trying to eat a local dish in the heartland of Burkina Faso). Sites in this

category include *Beyond Our Shores* (www.carmel.com.sg/shores.html).

For some bizarre reason, a great deal of the Fulbe concerns on the Internet are by Christian Missionaries hell-bent (or should it be paradise-bent) on converting the apparently "wild people" to Christianity. The links between Fulbe and Islamic reform in West Africa, coupled with the pastoralist inclinations seem to send signals to Christian Missionaries that the Fulbe are more challenging to convert than the Hausa. The *Bororo'en*, for instance, formed a special focus for Bethany World Prayer Center (www.bethany.com/) which devotes a whole web page to detailing procedures for converting them to Christianity.

Other sites devoted to turning the apparently recalcitrant "Fulani" towards Christianity included *Word for Life 3* (www.wycliffe.org.uk/html/wfl1-2.htm), *Jesus Video Language* (www.Thejesusvideo.com/languages.htm), *The Fulani People* (www.byhisgrace.com/fulani/profile.htm), *Logs of Talisman Discussions of Bahai Faith* (www.personal.umich.edu/bjrcole/talisman/t95nov3.htm) who sponsored the publication of a Fulfulde-English-French lexicon dictionary.

It is clear therefore that a more objective search for Fulbe culture will have to be tackled from a different angle. And where best to go but the spiritual source of the Fulbe ethnic group. The Futa Jallon — a mountainous region of northwest Guinea, which is also the source of the headwaters of the Gambia, Niger, and Senegal rivers. While in Nigeria the Fulbe metamorphosed into Hausa-Fulani and became less concerned with spreading Fulbe language and culture through popular media and instead concentrated on the *Hausa* bit, the *Pular* of Guinea, having received a strong dose of French assimilation, have decided to carry the fight for the spread of Fulbe language and culture on the Internet. Ironically, their assimilee status seemed to imbue in them a strong sense of ethnic cohesiveness. The starting point, therefore is webFuuta (www.fuuta-jaloo.net/):



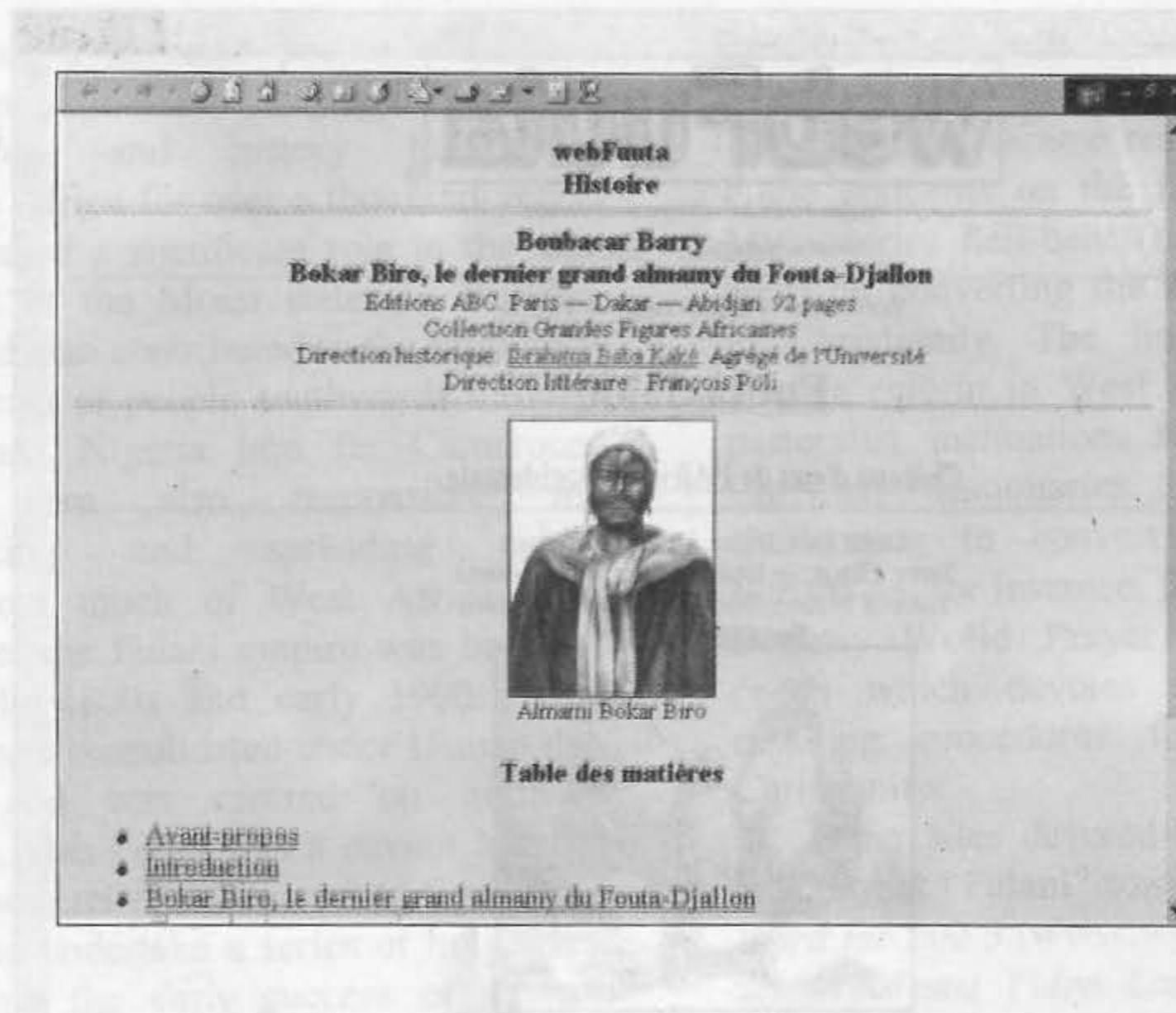
One of the most literarily visual homepages, features five of the most notable 19th century Fulbe intellectuals. The site proudly declares that:

Futa Jalon was much more than an Almamate dominated by a Fulbe aristocracy. It was a magnet of learning, attracting students from Kankan to the Gambia, and featuring Jakhanke clerics at Tuba as well as Fulbe teachers. It acted as the nerve centre for trading caravans heading in every direction. The more enterprising commercial lineages, of whatever ethnic origin, established colonies in the Futanke hills and along the principal routes. It served their interests to send their sons to Futanke schools, to support the graduates who came out to teach, and in general to extend the vast pattern of influence that radiated from Futa Jalon

The Fuuta-Jaloo webmaster is Dr. Tierno Siradiou Bah, a 52-year old Guinean Fulbe, currently living in Maryland, United States. He specialized in *linguistic anthropology*. His main areas of research interest are

sociolinguistics, folkloristics, and discourse analysis. Yet he is also adept at TCP/IP internet, LAN/WAN administration, satellite communications management, as well as being a webmaster. Dr. Tierno Siradiou Bah's labour of love in spreading the language and culture of the Fulbe is truly painstaking and well crafted. I am yet to come across a site about Fulbe culture and language as comprehensive as his. Indeed, www.fuuta-Jallo.net is a confederation of other inter-related Fulbe sites.

Exploring each is a literary and cultural adventure, and quite challenging for most contemporary Hausanized Fulbe. This is because a lot of the materials are in French and Guinean *Puula*; very little in English, and certainly *none* in Hausa. *Puula* is certainly Fulfulde, but not as we know it. Take, for instance, the *Diina Lislamu e lukha ajamiyya* web page of the webFuuta links. This is a massive poem comprising 579 stanzas - broken into about 20 Islamic theme areas and was also translated into Ajami. *Ajamized Fulfulde* is not the only focus of the intellectual documentation of the webFuuta. Another website is devoted to another Fulfulde poet, Boubacar Barry Biro:



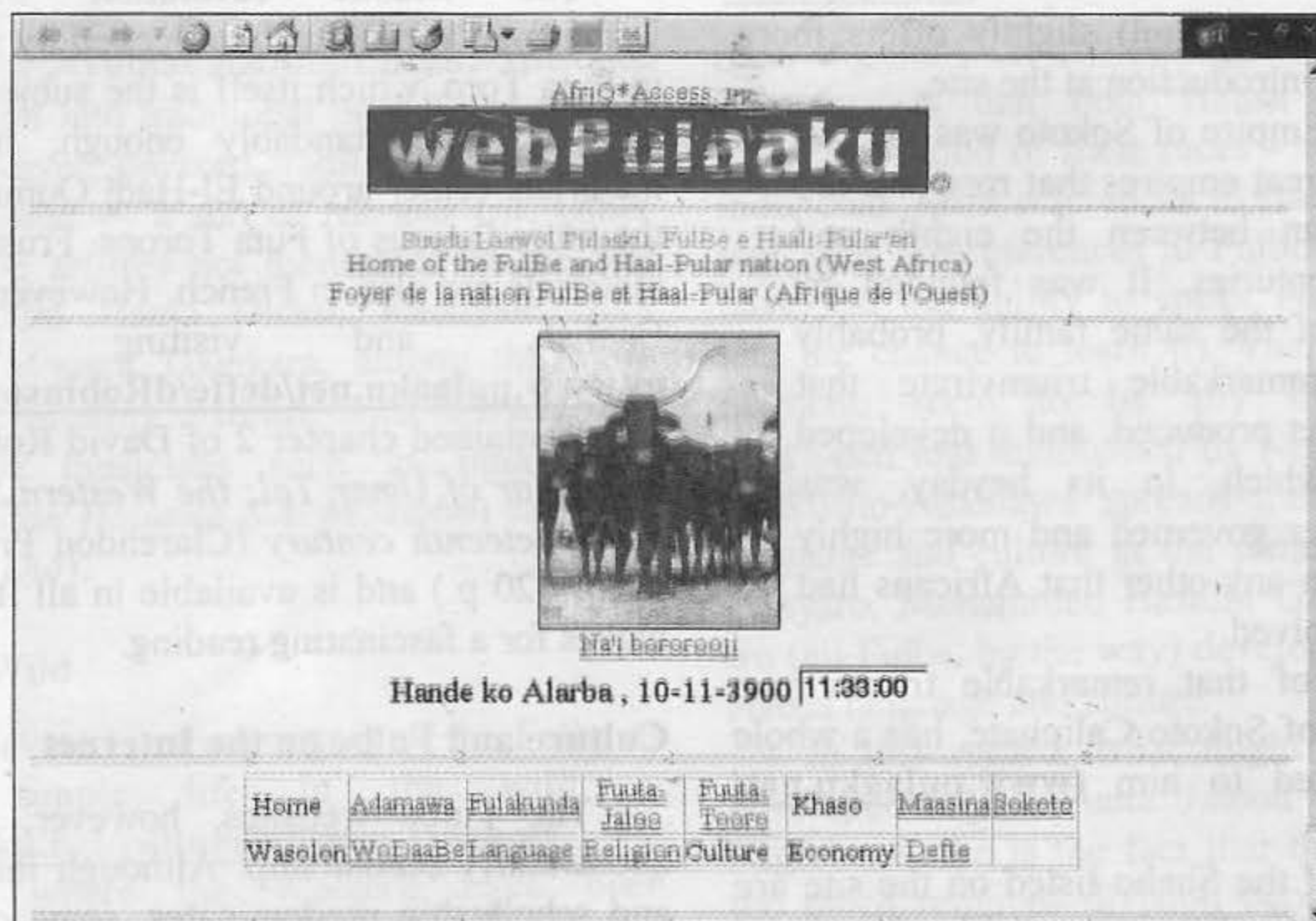
The Fulbe nationalism extends to cover contemporary intellectuals of Fulbe origin, and one example of such impressive devotion to the works of a true intellectual is that of Amadou Hampaté Bâ, part of the webPulaaku sites. Born in the Bandiagara escarpment of southeastern Mali, *Baba* Amadou was hewn from the *Dogon* stock, themselves one of the most impressive astronomers in Africa who specialized in the star *Sirius*. One of the Fulbe grand old men of Mali, *Baba* Amadou spawned off an intellectual tradition that still is unsurpassed in Mali. The Web site contains a listing of 29 of his more notable works.

Continuing in the literary tradition, *Tariika*, another page of the webFuuta complex provides a visual documentary of selected traditional Fulbe intellectuals in Guinea: Poets, writers and jurists, and reformers, they form a visual celebration of a unique culture much respected all over the world

. The site also contains links to Almami Bokar Biro, which takes you to a selection of his works. Clearly, this web page calls for a similar endeavor in Usmaniyya, which can contain a collage of our notable intellectuals and scholars such as Sheikh Abubakar Gumi, Sheikh Nasiru Kabara, Sheik Isyaka Rabi'u, Sheikh Dahiru Bauchi, to begin with. Such web page can contain a bibliographical listing of their major works, including sound and video clips of various activities such as Sheik Abubakar and Sheikh Nasiru's *Tafsirs*.

Flapped Wings and Pulaaku

The concept of *pulaaku* (the Fulbe moral and ethical code) made its appearance as a web site devoted to exploring *pulaaku* ideals to the world. The web address is



With an impressive line drawing of *Na'i Baroroji* staring at you impassively in the middle of the page, you are welcomed to the "Home of the Fulbe and Haal-Pular nation (West Africa)". I hope this is a challenge to the Fulbe in Diaspora to form web sites that communicate to the world aspects of their language and culture, *from their perspectives* from where ever they are on the planet.

Interestingly webPulaaku contains *defte* web page, a mammoth biographical listing of over 420 first class references on Fulbe language and culture. Most of it is in French, although 89 are in English. I have attached these as an Appendix to this paper. The linguistic barrier, as well as lack of online connectivity made it apparently difficult to catalog works on Fulbe written in the Hausa language. Ibrahim Ado-Kurawa, for instance, has done impressive works on the various Fulani clans in Kano. As a consolation, however, Ahmed Bako's *Dambazawa in history*, privately published in 1993 (70 pp) got a mention in the listings.

Further, although both Guineans and Fulbe of Northern Nigeria speak Fulfulde, the stylistic and regional variations make them almost mutually incomprehensible. Thus, even the works written in Guinean Puula might not be

easily comprehensible to a casual speaker of Sokoto and Adamawa Fulfulde. Also, the bibliographical listing of webPulaaku impressive as it is, is not without some problems. For instance, an item that caught my attention, being in English, is Jeffreys, M. D. W. (1953), *The Jewish origin of the Fulani*, 15(4), 1715-1717. Although volume and issue numbers are clearly given a journal, the *name* of the journal is *not* listed. Other tasty morsels include Fligelmann, F. (1931), *The Richness of African Negro-Language (Fulani as a type)*, *Congrès de l'Institut international des langues et civilisations africaines*, (pp. 51-75). Paris, 16-19 oct. 1931.

Missing from the listings also is Sa'ad Abubakar's monumental work *The Laamii\e of Fombina: A Political History of Adamawa (1809-1901)*. However, to make up for this omission in the listings, a whole web page was devoted to Sa'adu Abubakar's book! Due to copyright issues, only the table of contents of the book are posted on the site. Indeed, Sa'adu Abubakar's book as the lead item is the main focus of webAdamawa (). Other entries on the site are all in French and still in development, and deal with aspects of language and culture of the Fulbe in the Cameroon and Adamawa.

On the other hand, webSokoto (www.pulaaku.net/leydhe/sokoto/index.html) slightly offers more. According to the introduction at the site,

The Fulani Empire of Sokoto was the last of the five great empires that rose and fell in the Sudan between the eighth and twentieth centuries. It was founded by three men of the same family, probably the most remarkable triumvirate that Africa has yet produced, and it developed a society which, in its heyday, was perhaps better governed and more highly civilized than any other that Africans had until then evolved.

The leader of that remarkable triumvirate, also the founder of Sokoto Caliphate, has a whole web page devoted to him (www.pulaaku.net/ubf/index.html):

The works of the Shehu listed on the site are in French, and the list is available for direct download. However, a real bonus is the creation of webSokoto (www.pulaaku.net/leydhe/sokoto/index.html) as part of the webPulaaku mega site. As in the case of Sa'adu Abubakar's treatise and webAdamawa, it would seem that H.A.S Johnson's *The Fulani Empire of Sokoto* is the main focus of webSokoto whose link (www.pulaaku.net/defte/has.Johnston/toc.html) leads to the *entire* book:

Another monumental listing is David Arnett's Literature in Fula, in *Literatures in African Languages: theoretical issues and sample surveys*. B.W. Andrzejewski, S. Pilaszewicz, W. Tyloch (eds.), Cambridge University Press. 1985. p. 72-97. The *entire* chapter is posted at www.pulaaku.net/defte/dwarnott/fula_literature.html. Similarly, webGuinee subset of the Fulbe web sites contains William Derman's *Serfs, Peasants, and Socialists: A former Serf Village in the Republic of Guinea* University of California Press. 1968. 280 p., a fascinating Meadian analysis of growing up as a Fulbe in Guinea (which begs comparison with Margaret Mead's 1928 anthropology classic, *Coming of Age in Samoa*). To own Derman's book, point your browser at www.guinee.net/bibliotheque/sociology/derman/, and take it from there.

The Islamic revolution that created Usmaniyya was actually preceded by similar event in Futa Toro, which itself is the subject of another website. Understandably enough, most of the materials center around El-Hadj Oumar Tal, being the more famous of Futa Torons. Frustratingly, the materials are also in French. However, one was in English, and visiting it leads to (www.pulaaku.net/defte/dRobinson/toc.html). This contained chapter 2 of David Robinson's *The Holy War of Umar Tal: the Western Sudan in the mid-nineteenth century* (Clarendon Press. Oxford. 1985. 420 p.) and is available in all its entirety. It makes for a fascinating reading.

Culture and Fulbe on the Internet

The Fulbe websites, however, are not all about stuffy scholarship. Although intellectualism and scholarship predominates, some contain links to fun (although no games!) things like music. A *culture & musique* link of the *webPulaaku* leads to a page devoted to contemporary Fulfulde fusion musicians, particularly Baaba Maal & Daande Lenyol.

Baaba Maal (a sort of "nigga" fashioned along American rap artistes) is a popular guitarist from Senegal and leader of *Daande Lenyol* (Voice of the Race) rock fusion band. It is clear, of course, that the web site is still under development. This is because of the monumental omission of more famous Fulbe fusion musicians from the Gambia, Mali, Guinea and Sierra Leone quadrant such as prince Salif Keita (a sort of Mandike-Fulbe, much the same way we have Hausa-Fulani), Kante Manfila, Sekouba Kandia, Kasse Mady, Adama Yalomba, Saadou (made famous by the CD, *Bori* and its outstanding Fulfulde track, *Yallero*) and the most famous of them all, Ali Farka Toure, a modern Fulbe blues guitarist. I hope also that in future this site will include modern fusion female artists, such as Aichata Sidibe, Ami Koita, and particularly the most famous female Fulbe artist of them all, Oumour Sangare.

Another page of the webPulaaku is devoted to more acoustic, traditional and folk Fulbe music, called *Bards and Troubadours* at [18](http://www.fuuta-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

jaloo.net/Pular/Nyamakala/index.html. This site gives an insight into traditional pure Fulbe music. The site, however, covered traditional artists like Sarsan Wurekaba — a sort of *Haruna Uji*. Other acoustic Fulbe artistes not mentioned in the site include Ibrahim Hama Dicko, Kaouyate Sory Kandia and Moussa Tounkara, among the more notable ones. Missing also are notable traditional Fulbe female musicians such as Inna Baba Coulibaly (*Allah Hollame Sidi Modibbo*) and Ami Koita (*Mory Djo*).

Born to be Wild

A site devoted to the imagery of the Fulbe as living a simple life in the wild is [www.pulaaku.net/culture/nilsson Dauber/index.html](http://www.pulaaku.net/culture/nilsson_Dauber/index.html), where the Wodaa'e have been covered by Christine Nilsson & Maximilien Dauber in their book *Le Sahara des Peuls* (Editions René Moser. Paris. 1982. 93 pp.). This was a pictorial account of the Wodaa'e whose life was more comprehensively covered by Stenning, D. J. (1959), *Savannah Nomads: A study of the Wodhaabhe Pastoral Fulani of Western Bornu Province, Northern Region, Nigeria*. London Ibadan Accra: Oxford University Press. Thus the entire pictorial atlas of "the Fulani of the Sahara" received a whole web site. Subsequent pages of the site provide numerous pictures of everyday life among the Wodaa'e.

Swiss-Fulbe

A most unusual Fulbe website is one created by a Swiss-Pullo. This was maintained by a Swedish woman married to a Pullo from The Gambia. Despite the radical difference in cultural perceptions, she is able to zero down on *pulaaku* as the most advertisable trait of the Fulbe and encourages her children to propagate it not only in Sweden, but also to all net citizens.

Conclusions

So what happened to *Hausa-Fulani*? This paper studiously ignored the issue of whether the Hausa have formed into a fusion race with the Fulbe to form the Hausa-Fulani race that is now

receiving the short end of Nigeria's political stick. The fact is that both Hausa and Fulbe are staunchly proud of their races - whether fused or individual. Most references to Hausa in the Hausa web sites are references to Fulbe in Nigeria, who have lost the ability to speak Fulfulde (or never had the chance to learn it). There do not, at the moment, seem to be any Internet websites developed and maintained by Nigerian Fulbe (i.e. Sakkwato-Adamawa spread) that promote Fulbe language and culture in the same way that Salisu Danyaro, Mohammed Hashim Gumel and Isma'il Iro (all Fulbe, by the way) develop similar sites for Hausa language and culture.

In this regard, what might make web sites developed in the Fuuta Jaloon less palatable to Nigerian Fulbe is the fact that there has not been too much religious division between Muslim and non-Muslim Fulbe or other ethnic nationalities in the Fuuta Jallon, especially as there are other ethnic nationalities in the Fuuta Jaloon. These included the Mandinke (the original "Maguzawa" of the area, who spawned the legendary 13th century leader, Sundiata Keita), the Dogon, the Susa, the Kpelle, and the Loma, to mention just a few. The Fulbe in these areas have borrowed a lot from these nationalities, such that the Fulfulde spoken has a lot of dialectical variations with Sakkwato-Adamawa Fulfulde. That is probably why most of the Fulbe language information on the web sites seem difficult to understand to Usmaniyya Fulfulde speaker.

In Nigeria, the division between mainstream Hausa and the "original" Hausa Maguzawa is so sharp that it is not easy to locate a genuine *Bamaguje*, at least in towns. Consequently, web sites and cultural literary activities maintained by Hausa anywhere are actually maintained by Hausanized Fulbe, or what is irritatingly called Hausa-Fulani.

The Internet is a powerful tool. It is also a strong ideological platform. It is now, more than ever, accessible to us to tell the world the truth about the Fulbe, whether Hausanized or pure.

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