

Chapter 3

The Armed Revolt 1990-1997

**The high grass may hide a partridge, but it will not smother his shriek.
Fulani proverb**

Having looked at the historical, socio-economic and political background to the problems of northern Mali, it is time to see what happened during the years of violence and uprising. We have tried to achieve a balance and to focus on the most significant events, without denying the complexities. It is difficult to choose between massacres when it is your friends and colleagues who are often the victims, and sometimes the perpetrators. On a global scale, the violence in Mali was small. Plenty of people suffered, but this was never a civil war (in time it might have become one). Often there was more noise than action. Our proverb could refer to the propaganda surrounding the troubles, but throughout the conflict and the making of peace, we have kept in the forefront of our minds the cries of the widows and orphaned children, whose suffering is the greatest and whose scars are the deepest.

3.1 1990: The Revolt of Young *ishumar* Against the *nomenklatura*

The seeds of revolt, sown by French conquest and by the massacres of 1963-64 under Mali's First Republic, had time to grow and multiply. The droughts of 1974 and 1984 increased the number of young men forced into emigration. Many went to Libya. Col Muammar Gaddafi's desire to be recognized as a leader of the region had led him to declare in 1980 that Libya was the natural homeland of all Touaregs, and to offer them Libyan nationality. 1981 saw the creation of a phantom political movement: the Popular Front for the Liberation of Central Arab Sahara. Meanwhile many of these young men were recruited into Gaddafi's Islamic Legion, seeing active service in Chad, Lebanon or Afghanistan.

A more Mali-centred organization appeared in 1988, called *Mouvement Populaire de Libération de l'Azawad* (MPLA). The Secretary-General was

Iyyad ag Ghali who, on the night of 28 June 1990, launched the Mali rebellion with two attacks by about fifty armed men seeking to liberate some interned comrades from Niger: four people were killed at Tidermène, fourteen in Menaka of whom four were Malian soldiers. Some days later, the bodies of two elderly peasants were found under a tree near Ansongo. They had sat down in the shade for a chat. Somebody had slit their throats. These were terror tactics. The Malian authorities knew about the MPLA, but no one was prepared for this. President Moussa Traore (like the rest of Mali) was stunned, his understandable first reaction was anger. Mali's soldiers unleashed a campaign of violence with all the freedom that the declared state of emergency provided. Nomads who had heard nothing of "rebels" from Niger or Libya were killed in Tejaret and Taikaren, in Telemse and Adghagh. Within a few weeks the Malian army had created hundreds of new "rebels", as Touareg youths fled into the hills to escape massacre. It is important to understand the indiscriminate nature of this violence, in order to follow subsequent events. Among army officers who became hated in the North, the late Siaka Koné gained a particular notoriety. (He died in a parachute accident near Bamako, which was interpreted throughout the North as God's justice.)¹ He is believed to have doused a group of Dawsahak with gasoline near Talatayt. Before setting them on fire, the soldiers announced that they did not want to waste bullets. The army made no distinction between Touaregs from Kidal and elsewhere, nor between Touaregs and Arabs, forcing the latter to join in a rebellion which had nothing to do with them at all. The Malian government could have used the Arabs against the Touaregs (as the French did): instead, it turned them into rebels.

When he realized that a swift army victory was hopeless against desert guerrillas, Moussa² initiated negotiations, under the persuasion of Touareg leaders whose authority was being weakened by the indiscriminate reprisals, and of his Chief of Staff Mustapha Deme. In September 1990, Moussa Traore went to Djanet, in Algeria, for a summit meeting with the Presidents of Algeria,

¹ Since the days of French conquest, soldiers in the North have been perceived as southerners, as outsiders. The Wollofs of the *Tirailleurs sénégalais* may have been replaced by Bambaras and Bobos, Soninké and even some Songhoy, but the army never became a part of northern society. For peace and stability in the North, the challenge of integrating the armed forces into society is as important as the integration of ex-combatants into the army.

² Clan names such as Traoré and Keita are so widespread in Mali, that given names are used: Moussa had several Ministers called Traoré. We shall allow ourselves the liberty of following Malian practice and refer to the Presidents as Modibo (Keita), Moussa (Traore), ATT (Touré) and Alpha (Konaré).

Niger and Libya. This was the famous occasion when Gaddafi appeared magnificently attired as a Touareg. The Libyan participated little in the discussions, using the meeting to project onto the world's television screens the image of himself as Chief of the Touaregs.

The Libyan threat was clear. Nevertheless Moussa believed that he could control the rebels, using the Touareg chiefs and the hierarchical system of traditional loyalties. In contrast to Modibo's unfriendly regime, Moussa had gently cultivated the Touaregs. To some extent he had restored to Intalah ag Ataher, Chief of the Iforas, the age-old role of protecting the northern frontiers of the Niger River basin. When the initial attack took place against Menaka, nearly all the Touareg notables were in Bamako, attending a Party meeting.³ It was to Intalah, now Deputy at the National Assembly and Secretary-General of the Kidal Section of the UDPM, that the President turned for mediation. The Chief changed the official vocabulary from "armed bandits", declaring that the "Maliens who had strayed from the path were youths who had made a mistake" and would soon see reason. The "youths" would have none of it, accusing the hierarchy of subservience to regimes which oppressed the Touareg people, of exploitation, of perpetuating tribalism, of incapacity to adapt to modern life. Imbued with Gaddafi's *tumast* ideology of equality, the rebels forbade anyone to identify himself with the social hierarchy. They even went so far as to kidnap Intalah (although that was not until 1994). It became evident that the revolt of these angry young men was not only against the military regime, but also against the traditional domination of the Touareg aristocracy.

But the ties of tradition proved stronger than the imported ideology of equality. The MPLA gave way to two separate organizations: the *Mouvement Populaire de l'Azawad* (MPA) of Iyyad in Kidal, and the new *Front Islamique Arabe de l'Azawad* (FIAA) based on Arab clans from Timbuktu and towards the Mauritanian frontier, who were afraid they would get a smaller share of the negotiations if they remained under the Touareg umbrella. The FIAA was the first movement to appear with a declared ethnic bias. It appeared to claim a more militantly Islamic orientation, which gave rise to talk of links with Mauritania and the FIS in Algeria, and wilder rumours involving the West's demons in Iraq and Iran and Sudan, and of course, Libya.

³ Their support of the *Union démocratique du peuple malien* (UDPM) had been assured by the freeing in 1977 of leaders of the 1963 Touareg revolt. With the creation of the UDPM in 1978-79, Touareg representation in local and national politics increased dramatically, and this was also true for other minority groups in Mali.

The armed movements

For people who are not familiar with the story, it may be difficult to sort out the various groups, and so we offer the following checklist of the main protagonists. At the Timbuktu Flame of Peace, the movements presented themselves as follows:

Mouvements et Fronts Unifiés de l'Azaouad (MFUA)

1. The *Armée révolutionnaire de libération de l'Azaouad* (ARLA) represented by its Secretary-General Abdourahmane ag Galla;
2. The *Front islamique arabe de l'Azaouad* (FIAA) represented by its Secretary-General Boubacar Sadeck ould Mahmoud;
3. The *Front populaire de libération de l'Azaouad* (FPLA) represented by its Secretary-General Zeidane ag Sidalamine;
4. The *Mouvement populaire de l'Azaouad* (MPA) represented by its Secretary-General Iyyad ag Ghali;
5. **The Mouvement Patriotique Malien Ganda Koy (MPMGK)** represented by its leader Captain Abdoulaye Hamadahamane Maiga. But the more usual initials are MPGK, or else *ganda koy*, and these are what we use in the text.

The movements were mainly clan-based, composed of armed fighters and peacemakers. Alongside them lived many neutral agro-pastoralists who (in particular the women) wanted nothing more than peace of mind, a happy and healthy family, a bit of land and some small ruminants, and access to a water-

hole. Most of the Touaregs living along the Niger river never joined the rebellion.⁴

The rebels were clever enough to realize that they must negotiate while they had the military advantage, and while the Touareg population could still stand the reprisals. They came up with a 21-point declaration, composed of demands “reasonable”, “unreasonable” and “negotiable”.⁵ The first category concerned mainly improved economic development, with specific demands for better communications, health services and agro-pastoral banks. In the second category we find the demand that Touaregs should be named as Vice-President, and four Ministers: Foreign Affairs, Defence, Interior and Rural Development! The “negotiables” included things like reducing military presence, appointing locals to administrative posts in the North, the creation of Franco-Arab bilingual schools, the integration into the Malian army of “rebel” soldiers, the installation of multi-party democracy, and the proclamation of an amnesty.

3.2 1991: The End of Dictatorship and Mali’s National Conference

The end of 1990 was tough for Moussa Traore. The democrats were marching in the city streets, a free press was increasingly virulent, and the majority of his party believed that it was time to open up the political process. In August 1990, Djibril Diallo had even wanted to resign as Number 2 in the party. Moussa soon stopped that. As a military man, the President’s priority was to bring back to Bamako the troops he had sent to the North to fight the rebels. He needed soldiers to restore his authority in the streets of the capital.

On 6 January 1991, the Chief of General Staff, Colonel Ousmane Coulibaly travelled to Tamanrasset in Algeria, where he signed an agreement with the MPA and the FIAA, known as the *Accords de Tamanrasset*. Malians were left with the impression that the army had capitulated. No one knew what had been

⁴ Nok ag Agtia from Diré, one of the leading members of the UDPM *nomenklatura* (he was Vice-President of the National Assembly), replied famously when asked about the rebellion: “If there are no carp or catfish in the revolt, then it has nothing to do with me,” meaning that he felt closer to his riverine Songhoy and Sorkho neighbours than to rebelling nomads from the Adghagh (Adrar) mountains of Kidal.

⁵ We have borrowed from Coulibaly, Drabo and Alassane ag Mohamed (1995, p. 7) this categorization in three groups.

agreed, and the army was not in the habit of sharing information.⁶ Even government Ministers hadn't been involved in the negotiations, which were organized by a military coterie. When the regime fell on 26 March 1991 and Mali's new leaders published the *Accords*, they were rejected almost on principle.

The rejection came from the grass roots, rather than from the political leadership. Many soldiers misunderstood the political, financial and strategic constraints on a regular army: they were sure that they hadn't won only because they hadn't received enough weapons from Bamako. Songhoy leaders expressed dissatisfaction with the *Accords* (negotiated and signed without them) because they suspected them of re-establishing Touareg hegemony in the North, despite the fact that the text made no mention of any ethnic group. The official Malian radio spoke of "decentralization" rather than mentioning a *statut particulier* and some rebels felt they had been cheated of their "special status" (whatever that meant). Immediately after the signature in Tamanrasset, Iyyad ag Ghali was brought to Bamako. He was not given time to go back to his base to explain just what he had signed. Invited to return to the northern cities for reconciliation with the populations, certain rebels arrived as gun-toting, fast-driving hoodlums: confirming the fears and prejudices of soldiers and citizens alike. Idle fighters used their weapons to hijack vehicles. Banditry continued. While in the South there was a revolution taking place, in the North the cycle of violence resumed. Mutual confidence had already been lost before Moussa fell from power.

The military arrested Moussa Traore in the early hours of Tuesday, 26 March 1991, and they were welcomed as heroes by a crowd of 20,000 outside the trades union building, *Bourse du Travail*. There, the officers proposed to hand power to the democratic movement led by unions, political associations and lawyers, together with student and youth leaders. One of the key factors in the Malian transition was the refusal of the civilians to accept power: "The power is not yours to give: it belongs to the people. We propose that civilians and officers of all the uniformed forces should jointly accept responsibility for the transition to democracy."

The *Comité de Transition pour le Salut du Peuple* (CTSP) was a sort of collective presidency, composed of 15 civilians and 10 army officers. Lt Col Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) was elected President of the CTSP, and transitional Head of State. Places on the CTSP were allocated by consensus,

⁶ Secrecy is a Soviet inherited illness. Since the Malian Ambassador in Algiers was Sinaly Coulibaly, younger brother (same father and same mother) of the Chief of Staff, Moussa Traore was really making sure that he kept it inside the family.

with two places being given to the movements: Cheikh ag Bayes became the representative of the MPA, Hamed Sidi Ahmed for the FIAA.⁷ This inclusion of the movements in the management of the State represented a considerable gesture of reconciliation, particularly on the part of the military members of the CTSP. It was also tacit acknowledgement that the rebels in the north had been the first to act against the one-party State, and that they had made a significant contribution to the overthrow of Moussa Traore.

Cheikh ag Bayes became a leading spokesman for the North during the transition (he is, at the time of writing, working with UNHCR in Kidal). At the National Conference in August 1991, he argued unsuccessfully for the inclusion in the Malian Constitution of a "special status" for the North. The National Conference rejected all notions of federalism, and this strengthened the hand of those who harboured illusions that the army could still "win". Touareg, Songhoy and Arab alike, the northerners realized that they carried very little weight. All the political parties were anxious to avoid the topic of northern Mali, reluctant to voice any opinion which might be held against them in the upcoming elections. The proposal for a special status for the regions of the North presented to ATT by the *ad hoc* committee headed by Baba Akhib Haidara was not even discussed by the National Conference.⁸ Instead a Special Conference on the North was planned for the end of the year, to be held in Timbuktu. The subsequent negotiations highlighted the distinction between the "military" wings of the movements, which had started the rebellion, and the "political" (francophone) wings who were essentially peacebrokers. The credibility of the latter depended on their getting a hearing both from the Malian people and leaders, and from the hard men in the field. Their difficult role is illustrated by the fact that the FIAA were often not active in the

⁷ When the grass roots were able to make a careful selection of their most adequate representatives, Acherif ag Mohamed replaced Cheik, and Malainine ould Badi replaced Ahmed. On the creation of a government by Prime Minister Soumana Sacko, Mohamed ag Erlaf became Minister, perceived as the representative of the rebellion in the Transition government. He has remained a Minister in all the Adema governments since 1992 and after the elections of 1997.

⁸ As we describe later, the distinguished Malian educationalist Baba Akhib Haidara had returned from UNESCO, to be named by ATT as Delegate for the North; Algerian mediation was reinforced; and the Pisani-Miské mediation Mission was programmed (see section 4.2 below). Although preparatory meetings were organized in Ségou (25-27th November) and Mopti (15th December), the special conference in Timbuktu was never held. This period is particularly well analysed by Drabo and ag Mohamed (1997).

meetings, making Cheikh ag Bayes of MPA practically the only spokesman for the rebels.

Throughout this period the violence continued in the North, persecuting nomad and sedentary populations, Touareg and Songhoy and Bozo and Arab and *Gabero* Fulani in more or less equal proportions. The refugee resettlement “fixation” sites prepared by the IFAD-funded project PSARK were sacked. The official and non-governmental development agencies were forced to stop travelling outside the towns, or to freeze their programmes altogether. Their vehicles were stolen and their staff threatened (in some cases killed). The reaction of certain army units was unfortunate: with the fall of Moussa Traore, the military had lost status and some of them used the rebellion to retain the reality of power. Unable to catch the real bandits, they turned to killing and looting any available “red-skin”. All Touareg and Arab shops in Gao were looted. Summoned to a meeting in Léré, Touareg leaders were simply executed. The elite of the FIAA was imprisoned in the barracks in Timbuktu, and killed. The state of insecurity stretched right across Timbuktu Region to the Mauritanian frontier. Fearing to become victims of army frustration, thousands of Touaregs and Arabs fled the towns and abandoned their livelihoods, becoming displaced persons and *de facto* dependents of the rebel movements. Some of those who were driven out of their homes, retaliated against their black neighbours. Mainly thanks to army indiscipline, the seeds of civil war were sown.⁹

By this time the rebels had split into more groups, each with internal stresses and dissensions. The MPA had run into class-struggle. Iyyad was seen as too close to the traditional hierarchy. A group of young men, mainly of *imghad* rather than noble family and imbued with the spirit of equality which they had learned from Gaddafi’s *Green Book*, broke away to form the *Armée révolutionnaire de libération de l’Azawad* (ARLA) with Abdrahmane Galla as leader. The fighting between MPA and ARLA would be some of the most bitter. Rhissa ag Sidi Mohamed had already broken from the MPA to lead the *Front populaire pour la libération de l’Azawad* (FPLA), and he would prove over the next two years to be the most obdurate “refusenik” in the negotiations with the State. But each of these

⁹ One striking aspect of this period is the sudden silence of Radio France Internationale. Previously the “loudspeaker” of the Touaregs, RFI fell silent after the fall of Moussa Traore in 1991 signalled the arrival of what the French took to be “democracy according to the gospel of la Baule”. After the elections of 1992 RFI again took up the story of the Touaregs, with an “anti-Mali” stance which seemed to blame the newly elected government for the violence which had happened during the transition.

groups contained differences of opinion. Zeidane ag Sidalamine has explained (1994, p. 15) his disagreements with Rhissa.

In the midst of this confusion, the Algerians proved to be the best at twisting rebel arms to bring them to the negotiating table, and at the end of December 1991, Algeria accepted a request from the Government of the Republic of Mali to act as Official Mediator. The Algerians had brought all the movements together on 13 December 1991 in El Goléa, where they had formed a *Coordination des Mouvements et Fronts Unifiés de l'Azawad* (MFUA). Spokesman for the MFUA was Zahaby ould Sidi Mohamed, formerly one of Zeidane's colleagues in the Norwegian Church Aid programme in Gossi, who was in the FIAA in charge of information. In due course, Zahaby would become the "man to hate" in the Malian press. But at this stage he, like Zeidane and the other francophone intellectuals, was one of the peacemakers.

The differences between the "peaceful political" wing of the movements and the various dissident groups of military hard men, are well illustrated by the FIAA preparations for the crucial Mopti meeting of 15th December, which united for the first time on Malian territory the GRM and the MFUA (flown in for the negotiations in an Algerian government plane). On 11th December, while Zahaby was negotiating in Algeria, a FIAA group attacked the Holy City of Timbuktu. The full story emerged only much later, and history may see this as the evening when God and the 333 Saints of Timbuktu decided that Mali should be protected against ethnic civil war. It is known now that the group went to Timbuktu that evening with two missions: to destroy the diesel generator which provided the town's electricity, and then in the darkness, to assassinate a list of City Fathers, all of whom were leading Songhoy citizens. If this plan had worked, Mali might have been plunged into ethnic strife. Mali was saved by a miracle. The Arab leader of the raid had spent his childhood in Timbuktu. He knew the city intimately. Yet he attacked the wrong building. Instead of the electricity generator, he attacked the Governor's kitchen. The Governor, Lt Col Seydou Traore was at home upstairs, entertaining a group of rather grand ladies who had arrived from Bamako to mobilize their sisters in the cause of peace. To their horror, these ladies spent the next half-hour flat on the floor, while Col Traore repulsed the attack. Firing first from one window, then from another, running upstairs and downstairs to provide the impression of a substantial garrison, he succeeded in panicking the attackers. The electricity generator was supposed to be unguarded. No resistance was expected. Still firing, the rebels retreated into the desert. One hundred and fifty bullets were

collected from the Governor's kitchen, but the generator remained intact, and the assassination of the Songhoy Elders never took place.¹⁰

3.3 1992: Transition, Elections and Negotiations

Algeria and the Pisani-Miské mission (see 4.2) put enormous pressure on the MFUA to agree terms before the end of the transition. They also helped persuade Amadou Toumani Touré and his senior military aides that a new negotiating approach was needed, and on 8 November 1991, ATT made a key Address to the Nation in which, for the first time, mention was made of *un véritable Pacte national*, a National Pact, which would guarantee a negotiated peace in an undivided Mali. ATT and the CTSP wanted a peace agreement before handing over power to the soon-to-be-elected Government. Intensive negotiations in Mopti (December 1991), Algiers (January 1992) and elsewhere, led finally to the signing on 11 April 1992 of the *Pacte National*, a peace agreement between the rebels and the Government.¹¹ It is the document which would eventually provide the legal basis for the peace process. It was signed by Lt Col Bréhima Siré Traore for the transitional government and by Zahaby ould Sidi Mohamed for the MFUA. All four MFUA groups were present; although Rhissa was absent, Zeidane initialled the Pact in the name of the FPLA. Peace seemed assured, provided that the GRM was able to fund its promises: including the integration into the Malian uniformed forces of the armed rebels (who would thus get a salaried government post despite the recruiting restrictions laid down by the IMF and the World Bank), an exchange of prisoners, the return of the refugees, the development of the North, the reduction of military presence, and the policing of the peace by local people. In

¹⁰ Another version (which does not contradict our story) is that the attack was intended to lure the Timbuktu army garrison out of their barracks and into an ambush in the dunes. They refused to come out during the night. The following day, with tension high in the city, a group of soldiers rushed into the house of Mohamedoun ag Hamani and shot him, together with seven male members of his family including his 12-year-old son, and a nephew still wearing his Forestry Department service uniform. A former member of the *Bureau Exécutif Central* of Moussa's UDPM, this member of the *nomenklatura* made a very improbable "rebel" but an easy target for angry, undisciplined soldiers. With mixed garrisons, there were frequent instances of soldiers refusing to obey the orders of officers from other uniformed forces. Later the democratic government changed the structure to improve army discipline.

¹¹ We reproduce the text in annexe 2.1. Details can also be found in the *Livre Blanc*, GRM 1994, and in Diarra 1996, and a summary in Coulibaly 1995 and Rospabe 1997.

recognition of what was described as the *special status* for the North, the post of Commissioner for northern Mali was to be created in the office of the President.

In the earliest days of negotiations a cease-fire was agreed, and the Transition Government set up a tripartite *Commission de suivi du Cessez-le-Feu* (the Cease-fire Commission or CCF). Officers from Algeria, from the Malian military and from the rebel movements patrolled together to ensure that banditry was kept down.¹² In addition, an independent commission of enquiry was promised which would attribute responsibilities for the various exactions and estimate damages for the victims.¹³ In these days of 1991, immediately after the fall of the dictatorship, the Malian authorities had almost no resources available with which to support the CCF. They housed and fed the officers in Gao, but that was all they could manage. Unable to obtain enough fuel to scour the vast countryside for bandits, the officers of the CCF were frustrated (in Gao the CCF was soon nicknamed *Commission pour Chercher la Femme!*). Donors were not prepared to put money into peace-keeping. Of the ten CCF units planned, only four became operational. The principal support for the CCF (vehicles and some fuel) was provided by Algeria, showing its commitment to brokering the peace. The presence of Algerian officers also contributed to restoring a sense of dignity and discipline in the Malian army. Despite their limited resources, the CCF arrested some trouble-makers and did buy a year of peace for Mali.

Funds were promised for creating small enterprises, and for compensating victims, but without money, none of this could happen. To prepare for the return of refugees from Mauritania (and in the absence of leadership from UNHCR which was preoccupied with refugee problems elsewhere in Africa) the NGOs obtained American, Swiss and EEC funds, and set up a system of grain depots along the river valley in Timbuktu region: later, when the refugees failed to return, the grain was distributed to displaced nomads and villagers inside Mali. The fact is that confidence in the reality of peace did not return to the North. No foreign government was willing to invest in peace. Probably, they did not believe that the election process would truly bring Mali to democracy. And the GRM was broke: one year after the fall of Moussa Traore, the coffers were empty.

¹² We discuss Algeria's valuable mediation efforts in more detail in Chapter 4.2 below.

¹³ It was obvious from the beginning (even to the MFUA negotiators) that it could not be operational: too many army officers and rebel leaders had done too much harm. Some people feel it is best to leave the bitterness undisturbed; others that the truth must be known, if only as a record of modern history. Malians are watching the South African Truth Commission with interest. Meanwhile an Amnesty Law was promulgated in 1997, which we reproduce as annexe 2.4.

1992 was the year of Mali's first proper elections. There was a referendum on the new Constitution, then elections for local urban councils, for a President, and for the National Assembly. All went well (especially for the winning party: Adema).¹⁴ The country remained calm. On 8 June 1992, Alpha Oumar Konaré was sworn in as Mali's first democratically elected President. The Third Republic was born. The previous week, seven Touaregs had been shot in Goundam, and just before that there were 12 killed in Gossi.¹⁵ Ten days after Alpha's inauguration, there were rebel attacks on the Gossi road. Gao was cut off from the rest of the country (even by air, since the aircraft of the internal airline, Malitas were being serviced). Banditry was frequent. The northern economy was paralysed by bandits, or by rebels, or by both. Of the dozens of horrendous problems which the new democratic government had to face, the most dangerous was the North, which threatened the very existence of Mali's Third Republic, and the stability of the entire Sahara region.

The Pact itself was far from obtaining unanimous support. Rhissa of the FPLA was openly dismissive, and the new *Commissaire au Nord*, Col. Bréhima Siré Traore travelled to Burkina Faso to meet him. Some of the military had not liked the Algerian mediation with the MFUA, from which they felt excluded, and they were not at all keen on integrating into their own forces, the rebels against whom they were fighting. Meanwhile the Malian general public was becoming increasingly fed up with the banditry and the repeated attacks which continued throughout 1992. There were reprisals in Gao, Timbuktu and Sevaré against Touareg and Arab traders: once again there was an exodus of "red-skin" populations, who went to live as best they might in the sand dunes, far from food sources and even from water. Violence is unjust to the innocent. There were even threats of violence in Bamako against shopkeepers whose skin suggested that they might be of Touareg or Arab origin. As the banditry continued in the North, it was clear that the peacemakers who had signed the Pact were having great difficulty in selling it to their military brothers.

Diplomats and journalists showed, in our view, a remarkable lack of understanding as to the regional significance for the whole of sub-Saharan Africa, of the Malian peace process. Supposedly in favour of democracy, the Western donors played a curiously negative role at this stage, providing virtually no

¹⁴ For the organization and results of Mali's 1992 elections see Diarra 1996 or Vengroff 1993.

¹⁵ The latter were mostly NGO agents, executed following an FPLA attack against the AEN. Some were victims of the attack, yet they were rounded up by the army and shot.

financial support for the democratic regime, expressing nothing but scepticism as the new President and his inexperienced ministers (appointed on June 10th) struggled with the problems of rebellious Touaregs, revolting students, recalcitrant youth groups, subversive political opponents of democracy, an antagonistic civilian administration, a suspicious military, an empty treasury and a taxation system which had not functioned for at least the past three years. The international press and human rights bodies showed a similar lack of understanding of what was happening. Sometimes they sounded as if they were still attacking the deposed military regime. Reading articles in the foreign press, or listening to the radio in Timbuktu late in 1992 (by which time RFI had again become the loudspeaker of the rebels), one had the impression that the world was not aware that Mali had rid itself of a dictatorship, had come through a model period of Transition, had brilliantly organized a National Conference and a complex series of elections, and had installed a democratic government.

To his credit, Mali's new President never reduced his commitment to peace and human rights, nor his level of optimism. Meetings continued to take place. The second personage of Mali according to the Constitution: the President of the National Assembly, Professor Nouhoum Ali Diallo (a surgeon from the northern town of Douentza) led a delegation of deputies and ministers and NGO leaders to the important (and nearly violent) meeting at Taikaren north of Gao, where the FLPA's Rhissa ag Sidi Mohamed agreed to return from Burkina, to emerge as head of the MFUA. The meeting demanded a withdrawal of troops from the north, and some reductions were made. Constructive talks took place with the dissident groups of the FPLA, and attacks diminished by December 1992 to a level where President Konaré was able to visit Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal Regions to address the people on supporting the Pact. His visit followed the United Nations inter-Agency Mission, led by Lionel Seydoux and Abdoulaye Bathily. This collaboration of the UN Agencies provided a spirit of confidence and leadership which geared up the development community for the relaunching of the northern economy.¹⁶ The Mission had a similar effect in the North, where the presence of United Nations vehicles symbolized the arrival of peace. As one of the participants remarked: "We found people living in the dunes who had not heard the sound of a motor vehicle since 1989." Thus 1992 ended on a note of hope.

¹⁶ There was also exemplary collaboration with the French IRAM Mission composed of André Marty, Dominique Gentil, Ibrahim ag Youssouf and Hamidou Magassa, and arranged by Yves Gueymard at the French Mission. Ibrahim was a member of both the French and the UN Missions, which facilitated coordination.

3.4 1993: Hopes of Lasting Peace

Looking back, we can see that 1993 was a period of relative calm... the calm before the storm. The French and UN Missions led to the very frank *Journées de Concertation pour le Développement des Régions de Tombouctou, Gao et Kidal* in Bamako's Amitié Hotel. The active participation of GRM (at minister level) and donors and movements and NGOs and the openness of the debates left us all feeling positive and optimistic: even though it was pointed out that the North might suffer acts of banditry for many years, and might never again know the peace of the 1980s.

Also in February an agreement was reached to integrate into the Malian armed forces a list of 640 officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers, in addition to 13 cadres named as Ministerial advisors. Zahaby was appointed First Deputy to the *Commissaire au Nord*. The Commissariat itself was a hive of activity, and even though there were plenty of grumbles of the "they are not really listening to us" kind, there was an impression of progress in Bamako. Although thefts of vehicles and herds of cattle were frequent, everyone was optimistic. The Cease-fire Commission (CCF) was functioning sporadically. Though only 4 of the planned 10 CCF units were functioning (and with limited resources), some thieves were caught. Hopes remained high. Even if travel was only safe in military convoys and development programmes were still handicapped, donors started making more encouraging noises about development in the North. They were beginning to get used to democracy.

Further encouragement came in May, when Rhissa ag Sidi Mohamed of the FPLA came to Bamako for a meeting with the President, and later held a press conference in which he stated his complete support for the objectives of the Pact. The first refugees also returned from Algeria. But those who came to the Kidal region returned to Algeria when they found that the sites proposed by IFAD had been destroyed during the fighting. Others who settled at Agouny, north of Timbuktu (and rather too close to FIAA training areas), fled when violence again flared up between the movements and the Malian army.

The integration of rebels into the armed forces proved to be the main headache of 1993. Official Flag Presentation ceremonies were held in Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal on 19-20th August and the MFUA elements seemed satisfied to be part of the army. With the benefit of hindsight it is clear that the passage into the army had not been well prepared. There was no basic training provided, there were no tests of competence, the new soldiers were in effect appointed by the MFUA. The army was not happy, and refused to be placated by a wave of promotions on

Independence Day, 22 September 1993. They did not in fact integrate the ex-rebels at all, but left them to their own devices, dangerously grouped together in their camps in the North.

3.5 1994: Violence Breeds Violence, and *Ganda Koy*

Frustrations were growing on both sides. While the ex-rebels grumbled in their camps, groups of them, or groups of their friends and cousins, continued to kill and steal goods and take hostages for ransom. There was growing feeling of anger in the army and among the local populations. In the prevailing insecurity, trade was paralysed except for traders protected by elements of the MFUA: which created further resentment among the influential business, trade and transport community in the towns. Illegal export of stolen livestock benefitted the economies of Burkina Faso and Mauritania, and frustrated Fulani herders began to arm themselves in self-defence. There was even talk of creating their own *Laafya* movement. Meanwhile the ARLA was fighting MPA for control of Kidal. FIAA was seeking revenge from the FPLA which had robbed Arab merchants. In short, chaos was returning to the North.

Bamako was so caught up with local problems, that the dangers of the North were allowed to slide into second place. On 14th January, the cfa Franc was devalued by 50 per cent, causing disruptions which are still being worked through four years later (with a steep rise in the cost of imported goods and in the cost of urban living, but with commensurate opportunities for internal economic activity and for sub-regional trade). At the same time, the students were raging, with secret financial encouragement from certain quarters. Political parties with more money than votes, had captured the political debate. Alpha Konaré's first Prime Minister, Younoussi Touré had resigned in September 1993. The resignation of Prime Minister Abdoulaye Sékou Sow in February 1994 rocked Mali's young democracy. The President appointed his third Prime Minister in 20 months: if Ibrahim Boubacar Keita had not succeeded in bringing calm, Mali's democratic experiment might have foundered. As it was, IBK applied recipes of firmness before relaunching the dialogue. He started by closing the nation's schools. Later the *Concertations Régionales* broadened political debate by taking it out of Bamako and into the regions (as we describe in Chapter 5.1). By so doing, AOK

and IBK regained the initiative which had seemed to be slipping out of their control.¹⁷

In detailed negotiations in Tamanrasset during April 1994, and again in May, the MFUA had raised the stakes by demanding, among other things, the integration into the security forces of 2,360 men, with an additional 800 civilians in the administration. In fact the main problem appears to have been rivalry between the component parts of the MFUA, with Zahaby demanding 40 per cent for the FIAA, leaving 20 per cent for each of the other three groups. Soon the Malian government delegation found itself mediating between the movements.

Subsequent events suggest that Zahaby was having great trouble in persuading the FIAA hardliners to accept the Pact, that he was being pushed by the refugees exiled in Mauritania to produce something for them, that he was running ever faster in order to keep ahead. Zahaby had previously claimed that the MFUA had 10,000 combatants, and demanded placements for 7,000 of them: 3,000 in the armed forces and 4,000 for re-insertion into society. The Malian government negotiator congratulated him on having more men than the total Malian armed forces, and wondered mildly how he managed to feed them all. On the basis of the previous inflated figures, the numbers now presented in Tamanrasset were a significant reduction. This is not how it seemed to the Malian public however, when the private press published rumours from Tamanrasset. The GRM offered to take in 1,000 for the army and 120 for the administration, rejecting all the semi-ethnic demands for ministerial posts. Even this position did not go down well with the Malian public.

The temperature moved close to boiling point when a disagreement within the garrison in Menaka led to a shoot-out between regulars and the new *intégrés*. In Gao, a young Touareg who tried to steal a Landrover near the mosque during Friday prayers was lynched by the crowd. It so happened that an army officer in his jeep had just dropped off a newly integrated Sergeant who was going to the mosque for the communal prayer, and when the crowd spotted the unfortunate Sergeant they killed him too because "he looked like a rebel". In revenge, a group of *intégrés* opened fire on a crowd of civilians at the hospital of Gao. After these incidents of course, the integrated forces disintegrated: the Touaregs withdrew to their rebel camps, taking with them whatever vehicles and arms they could grab. The military situation was back to square one... worse, it was at freezing zero.

¹⁷ The best analysis of this period is provided by Cheikh Oumar Diarrah (1996). Diarrah organised the Regional Concertations as Counsellor in the PM's office; he is now Ambassador in Washington.

The whole political chess-board changed on 19 May 1994, with the creation of a new movement called *Mouvement Patriotique Ganda Koy* (MPGK), an armed response from the sedentary population. It wasn't entirely unexpected: apart from the rumours we have mentioned about a Fulani *Laafya* movement, there had been a *Ganda Koy* manifesto *La Voix du Nord* which had appeared in 1992. The Commissioner for the North had already warned Zahaby and his colleagues, as they were demanding more and more concessions while acts of banditry occurred weekly, that "the Songhoy are dying, their parents are dying, their families can no longer get food because the Arab and Tamacheq merchants have taken control of all trade. If you are not careful, you are going to create a civil war."

A certain Captain Abdoulaye Hamadahamane Maiga deserted his post in Sevaré, taking with him part of the contents of the armoury and a couple of 4-WD pick-up trucks from a nearby cotton depot. He announced that he was Military Commander of MPGK. Although his main support was from Songhoy rice-growers, Maiga's soldiers included Bozo fishermen, Fulani herders, Bella labourers, and riverine Touareg agro-pastoralists who had little patience with the wild men of Kidal. Almost overnight, *Ganda Koy* acquired a *Committee of Elders* in Gao and a *Support Committee* in Bamako: neither of which had much real contact with Captain Maiga although they brought notoriety to their opportunist leadership, which needed to show support for Captain Maiga in order to keep credibility with their own population. Maiga's much more significant support was to be found inside the army and the state security apparatus, which were frustrated with the conciliatory approach of Mali's political leadership.

The idea of *Ganda Koy* had enormous popular appeal. A meeting organized at the Islamic Centre in Bamako was well-attended, and Touaregs were denied entry. Well-educated mild-mannered people started uttering violent opinions which were closer to European ideologies of ethnic cleansing, than to the Malian President's African consensus-building approach. Anyone who adopted a position of neutrality was attacked as "rebel sympathiser" or "spy". NGO and civil society organizations working with northern agro-pastoralists of all colours were accused of "arming the rebels". Mass hysteria was not far away. Those of us who continued to believe in the possibilities of peace, found conversations becoming strained even with some of our closest friends.

The whole *Ganda Koy* experience is packed with irony. Iyyad's 1990 revolt against the underdevelopment of "Azawad", won approval from all the populations of the North. Economic neglect affected them all. The drought hurt everybody. But the rebel leaders were largely from Kidal, had spent years abroad, and were politically naive. They made no effort to forge an alliance with their natural allies, so that along the Niger River even the Touareg populations never felt

personally involved with the rebellion. The army however, made no distinction in its reprisals, and turned peaceable sedentary Touaregs into “rebels”. In September 1993, Touareg and Songhoy leaders of civil society had tried to stem the tide of violence by the creation, at a meeting in Gossi, of the Foundation for the North. But the war-lord mentality of certain rebel leaders allowed the banditry to continue. The creation of *Ganda Koy* showed that the rebels had succeeded in alienating not only the southerners, but also their main political support in the north.¹⁸

Ganda Koy could have produced a civil war: although how long this MPGK sedentary movement would really have held together is a moot point. But its creation very quickly transformed the political situation. The MFUA leaders meeting in Tamanrasset realized that they were losing the initiative. They were told to leave the MPGK to the Government to handle. The FIAA thought it knew better. When the MPGK pursued some supposed cattle thieves and killed nineteen nomads near Tacharane, the authorities were slow to react and Zahaby led an attack against the MPGK river base at Fafa. The firing was heard by the garrison in Ansongo, and the army sent out a patrol. As Zahaby returned from the battle, his vehicles ran up against the Malian army patrol which opened fire. Zahaby escaped to Algeria, but the Chief of Staff of FIAA died in the incident, shortly before he was supposed to integrate the Malian army as an officer. Zahaby had believed that the army would stand aside, as it did in fights between FIAA and FPLA. He failed to realize that the army was not fully controlled by the political authorities, and that it was sympathetic to *Ganda Koy*.

It can be argued that the Zahaby affair provided the impetus that was needed to galvanise the peace movement. The removal of the MFUA spokesman from the scene forced other MFUA leaders to take initiatives. The Commissions described in the Algiers agreements started work on the demobilization of the rebels: planning the cantonment policy, Training policy, and redeployment into the public services. Zahaby’s wild statements on French radio made him the Man-to-Hate in Mali’s xenophobic fringe press, and changed Western perceptions concerning the threat of genocide. The Government’s lack of any coherent information system had been losing the propaganda battle, but international media coverage became more balanced from late 1994 onwards, and a rather clumsy pro-Touareg motion in the European Parliament gave the GRM the opportunity to launch a communication

¹⁸ Further irony lies in the fact that while *ganda koy* means “masters of the land”, the expression was used in the 15th century by conquering Moroccans (the *Arma*) to describe themselves as compared to the defeated Songhoy... whose culture they now share.

campaign to discredit the rebellion, playing on Westerners' sense of guilt (racism) and fear of militant Islam. Zahaby's extremism represented, in part, his continuing need to talk tough in order to maintain a level of credibility with Arab donor countries and with the FIAA military wing.

There was now open fighting between the constituent movements of the MFUA. The most spectacular concerned the ambush by an ARLA commando unit, of the MFUA's most respected soldier, Colonel Bilal Saloum of the MPA, who was killed. A black Targui who spoke no French, his calm bearing and his military reputation in the Libyan Islamic Legion had made him the most important element (and symbol) in the Cease-fire Commission. Bilal was a fine officer, and a man of peace (although some claim that he was training ex-Touareg and Bella slaves, with the complicity of the army and state security, they do not say for what purpose). The military situation had been calm in Kidal. After Bilal's death, the MPA re-organized: inflicting a decisive military defeat on the ARLA forces at the end of the year. A face-saving treaty was brokered by the FPLA, and signed at Taikaren in December 1994. The ARLA's mistake had been to present itself too strongly as a movement of *imghad* seeking not only to end domination by the Iforas of Kidal, but to rewrite history so the *imghad* appear as the only genuine (slightly anti-Muslim) Berbers. Defeated by the MPA, ARLA split: the majority accepted MPA dominance and the National Pact, while a minority moved southwards into the Gourma where they made an alliance with the FPLA.

Faced with the turbulence, the Malian army overreacted. This was unfortunate, but understandable in the face of mounting public opinion against the rebels, and the increased threat which violence poses to the security forces themselves. Poorly led and poorly equipped, these soldiers from the south of Mali were in no way trained to fight a desert guerrilla war. No Malian political leader has ever seriously believed that a military solution was possible. The wisest army commanders argued discreetly that "victory" was impossible. Faced with night attacks and an invisible enemy, it is easy to see how ordinary soldiers became convinced—quite wrongly—that the rebel groups were supported and aided by foreigners, by NGOs, by development projects, by red-skinned civil servants, by the ethnic Touareg population, by anybody wearing a turban or riding a camel or travelling in an unmarked 4-WD vehicle. In their fear and frustration, they killed many innocent civilians, though it is impossible to know how many.

As violence took the place of dialogue, the army rounded up 17 Arabs in Gossi and shot them. They were mainly from the Rgagda clan. Rumour said they had been helped by informants from Bamba, with whom the Rgagda normally had excellent relations. On July 2, armed FIAA rebels drove into Bamba and opened fire with automatic weapons on the crowd gathered in the market square. There

were dozens of victims. In the most notorious of many incidents, in October 1994, an army unit assassinated in Niafunké the Swiss Consul, Jean-Claude Berberat, and his two colleagues, Amadou Gouro Sidibé and Almoubarek ag Alleyda (who were both very black). We shall know one day the true story of this assassination. Was it misunderstanding about what a development project does? Were the soldiers wrongly informed about the spread of Swiss activities between pastoral and agricultural activities? Was it greed because the Swiss were rumoured to be carrying a lot of money? Although one was a diplomat and all three victims were our friends, this incident has to be seen as just one among very many incidents of unjustified violence, undermining the installation of the Rule of Law. The same month there was the massacre at Gao of 60 Kel Essouk in the camp of the famous *Marabout* Anara, and the subsequent departure of the clan to Niger. The death of Berberat hit the international headlines; the death of Anara sent shock waves through the Sahara.

The Head of State and the Prime Minister maintained a common position of reasonable firmness, despite their extreme weakness vis-à-vis the army. They were no more in a position to control the rebels, than they were to impose discipline on the army.¹⁹ Powerless to take dramatic action to stop the violence, they repeated tirelessly their conviction that the solution was in the National Pact. The Prime Minister visited Bamba immediately after the July massacre and his visit was widely covered in the media, showing solidarity with the victims of violence. But he and the President, and the President of the National Assembly (a northern Fulani), set their faces bravely against Malian public opinion and the temptation to arm civilian vigilante groups. Married to a Maiga from Bourem right next to Bamba, Prime Minister Keita showed especial courage and tact when confronting his in-laws after the Bamba massacre. *Ganda Koy*, he insisted, was acceptable only as a movement for the promotion of Songhoy culture. No armed movements could be tolerated under the Rule of Law.

Above all Mali's leaders broadened the democratic debate and sought to lead public opinion. In July-September the Regional Concertations took place (described in 5.1). The firm lead of the Government avoided an outright rejection of the National Pact by Malian public opinion. There emerged from the 17 meetings of the Concertations, a national consensus in favour of equal treatment

¹⁹ The Minister of Foreign Affairs told Swiss journalist Keller of *Tages Anzeiger Magazine* two months later that if the democratic Government tried to arrest Berberat's assassins, there could be a military take-over. A "trade union" of NCOs had been allowed to flourish during the transition, which had replaced normal army discipline with potentially disastrous effects. It was officially disbanded at the end of 1994.

for all the populations of the North, which reinforced the Government's position and opened the way for northern peacemakers to begin the process of consulting, and then of mobilizing civil society. Among the first to take the initiative was an elder of Bourem, the late Alhero Touré who called together all the local nomad chiefs including those involved in the MFUA and MPKG. Similar credit must go to Aroudeyni ag Hamatou of Menaka. Each local chief accepted responsibility for establishing peace in his own country. As we shall discuss in Chapter 4, civil society was beginning to take the lead.

3.6 1995: Peacemaking through Civil Society

In late 1994, the Government felt strong enough to make changes in the army High Command: notably bringing in Colonel Siraman Keita as Chief of the General Staff, and promoting the Commissioner for the North to Inspector-General of the Armed Forces (and later to the rank of Brigadier-General). Little by little, all the military units which had been associated with bad discipline or excessive use of force, were withdrawn to other regions. At the same time, Police Commissioner Mahamadou Diagouraga replaced Bréhima Siré Traore as *Commissaire au Nord*. As the latter observed wisely: "He who leads the peacemaking, should not be the one to consolidate the peace. My departure was a good thing. It liberated the minds of the rebels." Most crucial of all was the nomination of the late Boubacar Sada Sy as Minister of Defence. He had the courage and the personality to restore some discipline to the army and make it respect civilian authority. The democratic institutions of Mali owe him a debt of gratitude. So 1995 began with a new team and a new atmosphere of open debate. An informal group emerged around the new Commissioner, supported by the new Resident Coordinator of the United Nations, Tore Rose (of Norway) who arrived from Algeria with a clear understanding of the geo-political implications of peace in northern Mali, and which he was able to impart to other donors.

The violence died down during 1995. The FPLA remained committed to finding a solution. After the MPA victory over ARLA, only the FIAA remained recalcitrant. The FIAA leadership was forced to reconsider how to control the divisions in their armed ranks, and how to react to Zahaby's media pronouncements. Eventually Zahaby went off to United Nations service in Haiti, and other dissidents disappeared into the refugee camps in Mauritania where they have remained disaffected but marginal. Meanwhile the main FIAA leadership issued a press release in Libya, dated 8 June 1995, which declared its intention to support the peace process.

There remained the problem of dialogue with the MPGK. Captain Maiga recorded a television interview in which he stated that he had formed *Ganda Koy* with no racist vision. Among other things, the interview had visual proof that Touaregs had also joined the MPGK, which was nothing less than the revolt of the riverine northern populations against the constant thieving and looting and killing and general insecurity perpetrated by the MFUA. The Government would not allow the journalists to show this interview on Malian television because they considered (although few soldiers perceive it thus) that Maiga was an army deserter. It was however shown privately to the Press Corps and gave rise to articles which showed a new understanding of what was really happening in the North. When certain UN officials in Bamako saw the video cassette, and realised that it provided an opening for dialogue and negotiation, the UN discreetly funded its diffusion. This was another drop of oil in the machinery of peacemaking: for it was thanks to this video that Zeidane ag Sidalamine of FPLA and the *Commissaire au Nord* decided to make personal contact with Captain Maiga. As a member of the Chamanammas clan, Zeidane was much closer to the Songhoy than the MPA leaders of Kidal. The FPLA resented the feeling that the Government “preferred” the MPA: understandable in view of Rhissa’s earlier “*refusenik*” attitude to the National Pact. Zeidane’s approach to Captain Maiga put the FPLA back in centre-stage.

Their discussions led to a broader interpretation of that paragraph of the Pact which called for the GRM to recruit the widest number possible of northerners into government service. Later President Konaré would decide to “integrate” MPGK members as well as those from the MFUA who were signatories of the Pact and of the Algiers agreements (although the statistics do not suggest that the Songhoy are under-represented in either the civilian or military arms of government). *Ganda Koy* presented the President with the two-fold difficulty, that it aspired to equal recognition and privileges as a movement, and that it had now become a far-from-negligible card in the hands of certain political parties with an audience in the North.

The reasons for the armed revolt were disappearing. Poverty had not disappeared, but the North was no longer marginalized. Peace can never be exactly the same as it was before, of course: there has grown up in West Africa a familiarity with automatic rifles and their use, which may long remain. But a new level of peaceful stability arrived as *Ganda Koy* and the FPLA in partnership, joined forces with Government and NGOs, and above all with the elders who guide the organs of Mali’s traditional civil society, in the search for peace. The very important *Accords de Bourem* signed 11 January 1995 by FPLA and MPGK came about partly as a result of the UN-video-stimulated discussions between the

leaders and partly thanks to the afore-mentioned peace dynamic initiated by the Elders of Bourem. Other such meetings took place, such as the reconciliation in Inekar initiated by the *Commandant de Cercle* of Menaka and the FPLA between the nomadic communities Imajarem and Dawsahak (some of whom have allied with the MPGK). Many more followed, as we describe in section 4.5.

The authorities were not inactive. While the President wanted to leave space in the field for civil society to practice peacemaking, the GRM sought UNDP and donor support for peace diplomacy. The Geneva donors' Round Table in November 1994 was followed by the Timbuktu Round-Table of July 1995. Both were aimed at convincing Mali's development partners that the GRM was following a coherent strategy for peacemaking: not seeking donor funds, but asking for their support for the subsequent peace-building and development phase. This *Rencontre de Tombouctou* had especial symbolic significance, for it proved that violence had abated sufficiently to allow donors to meet *in situ*.

After the Timbuktu meeting, the UN Resident Coordinator (in conjunction with the UN Department for Political Affairs: a partnership which has had considerable impact on the donor community) set up a Trust Fund for peace-building in the North, especially for the resettlement of ex-combatants which we describe in Chapter 5. By the end of 1995, the cumulative effect of half-a-hundred community meetings had placed civil society firmly in the driving seat towards peace. The armed combatants had, for the most part, presented themselves and surrendered a weapon in one of the four cantonment sites. These are the weapons which were burned on 27 March 1996 in the Flame of Peace.

3.7 1996-1997: Peace-building Begins

By early 1996 the armed ex-combatants were out of the cantonment sites and in military training, as we describe in Chapter 4.6. Meanwhile thousands more young men without arms ("potential rebels" as one UN official dubbed them) were registering for assistance with "re-insertion" into society in accordance with the quotas negotiated for each movement. Collaboration between the FPLA and MPGK was now so good, that the FPLA—never large in numbers—is rumoured to have filled up its quota with names provided by the MPGK. There are even a few women on the lists, which is helpful: for what we are talking about is really some investment in the North, some sort of compensation for years of economic marginalization. Nobody needs this more than the women of the North, many of whom are widows with children to feed. Experience has proved time and again,

that women make better use of investment funds than their menfolk. And we have observed earlier that women are society's peacemakers.

In late 1995, the UN Trust Fund began to receive donations, pushing money and training out through the PAREM²⁰ programme in the direction of the ex-combatants. These processes are discussed in detail in later chapters; by mid-1997 the PAREM appears to have been surprisingly successful in getting ex-combatants' economic projects funded and functioning. Time alone will show how many of the projects supply long-term prosperity (or a minimum living) to their promoters, and how many young men find it difficult to settle down to a stable civilian life.

During the early part of 1996 the UNHCR initiated a dynamic policy for resettling refugees. Their previous concentration on the population of the camps, gave way to a new emphasis on the resettlement zones. It was realized that semi-nomadic refugees and their herds have more need of water than of transport facilities. Contracts were given out to experienced field-based NGOs to sink or repair wells in the areas to which refugees were intending to return, and UNHCR became the principal coordinator of actions to relaunch the social economy of northern Mali. The main donors have continued to prove slow movers. There are said to be \$200 million pledged to development in the North, but 1997 began with barely a dribble (from the Dutch in Menaka, the Germans in Timbuktu.... and with contributions to the Trust Fund less than \$10 million of the \$12 million needed). The United Nations has set itself an urgent objective of helping the GRM to get security established in the region, in order to encourage donors to release their promised funds.

1996 was also the year when peace-building really got underway on the political front. On the initiative of the Malian President, the United Nations organized and sponsored a whole series of sub-regional activities, which are helping to create an atmosphere of peace and collaboration around, and on both sides of, Mali's borders. In October 1995, the Mali Peace Process was presented at a High-Level Consultation in New York, which was presided by Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali in person, and attended by ambassadors from most of the West African and donor nations. In June 1996 there was a conference in Bamako on civilian-military relations, which produced the preliminary version of a Code

²⁰ The PAREM *Programme d'Appui à la Réinsertion socio-économique des Ex-combattants du nord Mali* is responsible for funding the re-insertion into society and into the northern economy of 9,423 ex-members of the combatant movements, according to the project's Report for 1996, dated February 1997. We discuss the PAREM in Chapter 5.

of Conduct (which we reproduce in Annex 2). The leaders of Mali's military forces appear to understand that a new role is needed for the armed forces, that safe frontiers are best protected through good-neighbour relations, and that the fundamental requirements for internal security (and for strong, well-equipped uniformed forces) are a sound economy and good governance.

Mali's leaders—political and military—have also realized that they can become the leaders in peacemaking throughout the sub-region. On 27 March 1996 in Timbuktu, the small arms surrendered in the cantonments were consumed by a Flame of Peace which has burned itself into the consciousness of all Africa. This Flame burning in the historic university and religious city of Timbuktu, illuminated the Malian peacemaking model which is now cited across the world. The model responds to African culture, based as it is on community reconciliation leading to disarmament and cantonment, the joint civilian-military Transition from dictatorship to democracy, and a new model for society based on decentralisation and a return to cultural values of political consensus (highlighted by the National Pact, the National Conference of 1992 and the Regional Concertations of 1994). The Mali model also reaches across frontiers to establish new partnerships for cooperation, micro-disarmament, and the control of illegal small arms. As the global economy forces everybody to reassess their economic relations, and in the wake of the 1994 Fcfa devaluation, sub-regional economic integration is emerging as the realistic way to pursue the Pan-African ideal. While Nigeria, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire may possess an economic weight which Mali cannot match, the Malian example can supply the moral leadership for which Mali's history and social capital provide the foundations.

This peace leadership role began to take form during 1996 and 1997, through discussions on West African small arms control and the proposal of a moratorium on the import, sale and manufacture of small arms. Bamako hosted discussions on this subject in November 1996 and again in March 1997, and Malian diplomats are pursuing the matter with their neighbours, and with United Nations encouragement. The United Nations has even brought the issue to the recent attention of the consortium of arms-exporting countries, known as the Wassenaar Arrangement, where the idea will be discussed. We argue in Chapter 7 that it would be in the best interests of everybody except the arms salesmen (and maybe even theirs). An army has greater need of economic progress and social peace, that it has of guns: for when the security forces have guns, the bandits are encouraged to bring in more guns. Violence breeds violence. The great challenge is for West African societies to avoid the unending cycle of violence which exists in Liberia, which has already been exported to Sierra Leone, and which may spread throughout the region. If community leaders and customs officers are collaborating

across frontiers, the spread of weapons may be slowed. To be effective, the security forces need vehicles and fuel and radios more urgently than they need firearms, and they need good salaries and good training and good support from the communities they are trying to protect. You need guns to keep order only if the normal patterns of society have failed. This is a message which not all of West Africa's military have understood.

There is yet another Malian initiative during the Year of Peace-building 1996-97, which may have regional impact, and this is the political and social leadership which will help Africa's armies to redefine their roles under a system of democratic governance. The Code of Conduct for civilian-military relations is still in preliminary form,²¹ but it is likely to provide the springboard for new initiatives in training both military and civil society organizations in peacemaking and peace-building across West Africa. The whole culture of education and schooling in the region will receive an injection of new ideas, which will give greater value to African traditions of governance and conflict resolution (such as we explore in Chapter 6), to community cultural values, and to the wider community whose shared frontiers may become links and not barriers.

All of these elements received full discussion during the 1997 Week of Peace, which celebrated from 24th to 28th March the anniversary of the Timbuktu Flame of Peace. These activities of peace-building are spreading the influence of the Malian example. International personalities have sanctioned the peace process: President JJ Rawlings of Ghana lit the flame in Timbuktu in March 1996; President Henri Konan Bédié co-presided the ceremonies of March 1997, where UNESCO's Director-General, Frederico Mayor gave a memorable key-note address. Meanwhile the message has been taken abroad: notably by President Konaré in his distinguished contribution in November 1996 in Paris to Leopold Senghor's 90th birthday party; by Foreign Minister Dioncounda Traore to the OAU summit in Harare in June 1997; and by Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT), who travels the world explaining how the peace process in Mali worked, how a peaceful transition to democracy can take place, and bringing his mediation skills to difficult problems such as the Central African mutiny in late 1996.

At the time of writing, Mali is the United Nations' favourite Partner for Peace. The question we are all asking is: "Will the peace hold firm?" The answer to this question is largely economic, depending partly on decentralization and good

²¹ We produce an early draft in annexe 2. Further refinement will take place at a Bamako meeting in late 1997 and then each country must adopt -- and adapt -- the Code and conduct an intensive training programme to make it widely known and to ensure that it is followed.

governance, partly on the annual rainfall and the river levels, and partly on the strategies which donors will adopt to support Malian civil society, the social economy, and the relaunch of the North. Despite Mali's international renown, 1997 did not start particularly well. During the whole of 1996 there were about 30 vehicle thefts in the North; there were nine during the first two months of 1997. Then on 25 May 1997, the UNHCR Delegate in Kidal, Martin Buccumi of Burundi, was kidnapped and beaten up. An elderly Touareg woman found him, and she walked 60 kilometres to Kidal, to call a vehicle to collect Martin and to get him medical treatment. The following morning, a Care Mali vehicle was stolen in Kidal. This type of lawlessness poses a direct challenge not only to the security forces, but also to the government's PAREM programme for ex-combatants, and to its UN sponsors. Actually the 1997 hijackings are highly symbolic, emphasising the need to relaunch the economy of the North. Here is the old story of the chicken and the egg: for economic development will not be able to take off, unless the GRM and its supporters are able to achieve "security first". As we explore in Chapter 6, this requires reinforcing and equipping the security forces, as well as the mobilization of the leaders of civil society to create a climate of peace.

The key to success may well be the organization and mobilization of women and women's associations in favour of peace. Women are the wives and the sisters, and above all the mothers of those who handle weapons. Women can bring reason to the ex-combatants on the rebel side, and women should participate in education and training of the security forces, who must be the guardians of Mali's democratic governance. Although we, the authors, are men, we believe that political institutions in every country suffer from the defects of male domination, and that it is the mobilization of women's energies which holds the secret to achieving peace.

Additional opportunities for instability are provided by the 1997 elections for the National Assembly and for the Presidency, and those of 1998 for local councils. On 11 May 1997, President Konaré was reelected for a second (and final) five-year term, receiving 85 per cent of the votes cast. But will Mali's political opposition support the continuing democratic process and allow the government's strategy for decentralization to go ahead? Are Malian political leaders mature enough to promote national reconciliation ahead of narrow personal ambition? African oppositions have always shown great reluctance to spend time working on policy alternatives and building up local electoral machines, while ruling elites seldom encourage reflective opposition and open debate.

There is no denying that Mali's 1997 elections were mismanaged. The April legislative elections were annulled by the Constitutional Court. The re-run in July received judicial approval despite the boycott of radical opposition parties: giving

Adema 130 of the 147 seats in the national Assembly. The 17 remaining were won by parties in alliance with Adema. Riven by internal dissent, it is doubtful if the radicals could have won more than a handful of seats. *Le Monde Diplomatique* observed²² that Mali's principal opposition parties include two which have held power in the past: the USRDA of Modibo Keita (whose 1997 declared presidential candidate Seydou Badian Kouyaté, elderly author and poet, was one of Modibo Keita's Ministers in the 1960s) and the MPR of Choguel Maiga, who claims political descentance from the UDPM of General Moussa Traore. Neither has a democratic past, but Mali's electorate could at least compare their track records to that of the recent Adema government, and might have made an informed choice if the USRDA and MPR had not supported the boycott.

While bad politics and disruption in Bamako encourage instability,²³ it is banditry which remains the biggest problem. The culture of the gun has not vanished. Peace-building has only just started in the North. Much depends on Mali's development partners, and the enthusiasm with which they are prepared to invest in community programmes which back up the positive results achieved by the PAREM project: by which the GRM and United Nations have funded the socio-economic reinsertion of individual ex-combatants. If the donors are too slow, or if they fund only prestige projects which do not promote long-term growth, then the rest of the painstaking work will be wasted.

Peace does not seem to occupy much space in the opposition tirades which dominate political life in the capital. Consensus may yet be achieved through the President's consistent and repeated appeals to that majority of the population who are neither lawyers nor politicians, and who do not even speak French. When Mali's politicians stare into the abyss of the civil wars and failed states which surround them in Africa, they may decide to step back from confrontation and return to the "palaver tree". The process of discussion and negotiation has already succeeded in the north of Mali. Final peace has to be won during 1997 and 1998 and beyond through consensus-building, but above all through the relaunching of the neglected, drought-damaged northern economy.

²² See Ramaro's article in the 4-page supplement on Mali of May 1997.

²³ More than one opposition leader has made noises in favour of military intervention and at least three attempted coups against democratic governance have been averted since 1991: the latest being in August 1997 at the instigation of a group of non-commissioned officers.

This chapter has followed the chronological story of the years of violence in northern Mali. We have described how the original revolt against a despotic regime turned into a series of internecine squabbles among Touareg and Arab factions whose violence lost them the support of the northern populations. Patient negotiation brought about the National Pact of 1992, but not peace. Mali's young democratic Third Republic was almost destroyed by the continuing violence, as the armed movements and the armed forces perpetrated massacres across the North. Malians' powers of negotiation and reconciliation proved stronger than those of violence, although acts of banditry continue to show how fragile are the beginnings of peace-building. We shall now describe how disarmament and peacemaking came about, before returning to the theme of peace-building and development in the longer-term.



Soldiers douse the pyramid with gasoline, in the presence of UN weapons certifiers General Henny van der Graaf of UNIDIR, Geneva, and Prvoslav Davinic, Director of the UN Centre for Disarmament Affairs in New York.



Mali's President Alpha Oumar Konaré, in the presence of Guest-of-Honour John J. Rawlings, President of Ghana and of ECOWAS, receives from the UN's General Henny van der Graaf a signed Certificate guaranteeing the safety of all the weapons which are about to burn.