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# The coming state. Reactions of nomadic groups in the western Sudan to the expansion of the colonial powers<sup>1</sup>

Georg Klute

In 1971, Michael Crowder, one of the most prominent scholars of African history, complained that his European colleagues, historians like himself, were very much unaware of the scope of African resistance to the European invasion of Africa. The military response of the Africans, if analysed at all, has been seen but as a minor obstacle to colonial occupation, and, secondly, the scramble for Africa was mainly viewed, Crowder argued, in the perspective of its implication for European history (Crowder 1971b).

Since Crowder's complaints things have changed. Crowder himself set a starting point by editing several studies about „the military response to colonial occupation“ in West Africa, underlining in particular the skilfulness of African military strategies and the bitterness of the fights, which lasted more than twenty years and in some cases even much longer (Crowder 1971a). Other publications followed, focussing either on military resistance against the white conquerors or treating military resistance as only one option in a wide range of strategies of the Africans facing the European invaders<sup>2</sup>.

As far as West African nomads are concerned, particularly the Tuareg, historians and anthropologists basically concentrated their analysis on uprisings

against the French colonial state during World War I<sup>3</sup>. The memory of the uprisings and their heroes is, interestingly enough, still alive among the Tuareg (Claudot-Hawad 1990b; Claudot-Hawad 1990a; Claudot-Hawad 1993). In the context of the contemporary rebellions of the Tuareg in Niger and Mali it even starts to be „revitalized“.

Despite the growing number of studies examining the „African side“ of the scramble for Africa and the military conquest, two main arguments can still be found in nearly all such works: – The essential causes for the scramble for Africa, and, in the end, for the European conquest, can only be explained with reference to the evolution<sup>4</sup> in the West; in this sense, it is argued, the partition and occupation of Africa reflect much more the fluctuating patterns of the antagonisms of the Occidental powers than historical events in Africa<sup>5</sup> itself. – The conquest started late and unexpectedly; its causes were hardly understood by European contemporaries and almost incomprehensible for their African counterparts<sup>6</sup>. By 1880 European powers had only conquered roughly a tenth of Africa, ten years later, however, they had occupied or, at least laid claim to the whole continent, with the exception of Morocco and Ethiopia.

Whatever the causes of the colonial conquest were, be they economic depressions in Europe (Sanderson 1985: 96ff.); political events on the European scene; advancing industrialization (including improved technologies of warfare), the mission of western Civilization; or simply scientific curiosity, Africans, particularly in inland areas, seemed surprised by and wholly unprepared to deal with determined white invaders. As late as 1885, as the Scottish traveller Joseph Thomson reported, Caliph 'Umar of Sokoto did not appear too worried by the presence of the British in the Niger delta; instead, he claimed sovereign rights to regions already firmly in the hands of Europeans (Hargreaves 1985: 285). During the Berlin Congo-conference in 1884-85, Oliver notes, hardly any African noticed the partition of their continent, and even at the beginning of the following century when colonial occupation was, at least formally, complete, only very few Africans had any idea about their new rulers and whose' subjects they had become (Oliver 1985: 1).

The goal of this paper is neither an analysis of the causes of the scramble for Africa, nor a description of colonial conquest, but to cast a look at the African side of the story. Were the Africans really unprepared for the project of colonial rule and were they shocked by military occupation, as Oliver and Hargreaves argued and as the subtitles of the venerable Cambridge History of Africa suggest?<sup>7</sup> Did no one notice the advent of the colonial state, especially in West Africa, where French administrators had ruled over a large territory in what is now Senegal since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (1783), long before Faidherbe declared the creation of the first French colony in Africa? Had nobody realized - at least in West Africa and the Sahara - the French intention of „embracing“ the inland from the Atlantic coast and the Mediterranean

shore, from where they had been advancing into the Sahara since the conquest of Algiers in 1830, in order to form a huge coherent French territory? How did Africans appraise the coming of the colonial state, and how did they react to it (if at all)? Was the coming threat unimaginable and did the various African groups really worry much more about „problems at home“, i.e. genuine African problems, as Hargreaves supposes (Hargreaves 1985: 257ff.), than about foreigners from Europe? And finally, how did the coming state influence the balance of power in Africa and the African-European relations?

My reflexions about these questions are divided into three parts. The first section treats the Africans' knowledge about Europe and the Europeans. Long distance trade requires knowledge of all kind, economic and political, for its purposes. In particular nomadic groups or polities dominated by groups of nomadic origin were engaged in trading activities and thus appear rather well informed about political and economic events in Africa and in Europe alike.

In the second section I will study the reactions of the Africans to the colonial threat. Even several decades before the actual military conquest started, there were reactions, political and military, to counter future colonial domination. These reactions, of course, were partly provoked by the physical presence of European missions in West Africa; but mainly they must be explained by a realistic appraisal by the Africans of the danger of colonial domination. Again groups engaged in trading activities, mainly nomads and groups of nomadic origin, reacted most strongly to the coming danger which they perceived as a threat to their economic subsistence.

The third section studies the impact of the incipient state on politics within the Sudan. It will be shown that diplomatic

activities in West Africa during the period under study can best be understood as attempts at keeping foreign powers out and preventing foreign domination, be it economic, political or military.

The following sections examine the period from the 1850s to the 1880s that precedes colonial conquest in West Africa. I will focus my attention on nomadic groups, the Tuareg in particular. This study is based on the travel account of Heinrich Barth (Barth 1857/58), complemented by the diary of Erwin von Bary, a German traveller who visited the Air Mountains some decades after Barth (Bary 1880), and the writings of Oskar Lenz, an Austrian, who stayed three weeks in Timbuctoo in 1880, just as Barth had 25 years before him (Lenz 1884).

### Travellers' accounts of West Africa from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

With regard to the time before colonial conquest in West Africa, travellers' accounts belong to our most important historical sources; in the absence of oral traditions they remain the only ones. It has often been argued that travellers' accounts were eurocentric and perceived Africa and the Africans either through Social Darwinist eyes or with an evolutionary bias, especially those of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Heintze & Jones 1987a: 3f.). They truly reflect the "... 'Zeitgeist', i.e. the pattern of thinking and behaviour that is dominant in a particular epoch." (Essner 1987: 197). They were influenced as much by the travellers' personalities, their ambitions with regard to an academic career, their academic education or travel situations (Essner 1987: 197)<sup>8</sup>, as well as by the audience the travellers were writing for (Heintze & Jones 1987a: 13f. + Essner

1987: 201f.). However, it cannot be concluded from this, Spittler argued (1996), that their accounts tell us more about European than African reality, and that therefore the travellers might just as well have stayed at home. Since they were European, these „filters“, that African reality was passed through are well-known, and they can be accounted for rather easily (Heintze & Jones 1987a: 4)<sup>9</sup>.

I have chosen the writings of Heinrich Barth as the basis of my study not only because we are well informed about his life and work<sup>10</sup>, but mainly because he was the most outstanding European explorer in the Africa of his time (see f.ex. Boahen 1964: 198-208). Another advantage the choice of Barth offers seems to be his more „neutral“ position and objective judgements in political matters, in as much as the German edition is concerned. As a German he was surely less involved in any colonial adventures, which, to a certain degree, is also true with regard to von Bary and Lenz. Barth's importance as an explorer is partly due to his personality, reflected in the accuracy of his writings and his complicated style, which often lacks humour and makes reading a tiring task. But more important was his academic training and instruction. As a matter of fact, Barth not only shared with some other travellers a knowledge of the sciences (physical geography, archaeology, astronomy), he, too, had a profound understanding of ancient history and the medieval Arab geographers. He also excelled as a linguist. Even before starting out on his travels he was able to read and write Classical Arabic, just as he was fluent in Colloquial Arabic.

All his successors relied on his work. During his forced stay in Ghat, Erwin von Bary, for example, impatiently awaited Barth's work („If only I had Barth's travel account." (Bary 1880: 329)). And while in Timbuctoo, Oskar Lenz

deliberately admitted that „to add something new (to Barth's data about the history of the city and the surrounding countries) was impossible for me, ... ." (Lenz 1884: 119), which was, as Lenz further explained, due to his „imperfect knowledge of the Arabic language".

I shall concentrate on Barth's stay in the Air Mountains and in the region of Timbuctoo where Barth stayed longer than in any other region inhabited and dominated by the Tuareg, making comparison with the writings of von Bary and Lenz more comfortable; for von Bary had to endure a (forced) seven-month stay in Air in 1877, and Lenz spent 18 agreeable days in Timbuctoo in 1880, which belonged to the most beautiful days in his life, as he wrote later on.

Though my study is limited to these two particular regions, it was nonetheless necessary to examine the entirety of the explorers' writings. The travelogue *genre* is mostly narrative, and important information may not only be found in systematic chapters but also in descriptive parts.<sup>11</sup> The same holds true, of course, for von Bary's diary and Lenz' book.

### Knowledge of Europe and Europeans

Among all the powerful, influential or learned men Barth met and conversed with during his six years of travels in the Sudan, Abd el Kadiri, Sultan<sup>12</sup> of Agadez, was the only one who had not the slightest idea about the Occident. He had never heard of Englishmen, „notwithstanding their enormous power", and did not even know that 'English powder' (=gun powder) „was named after them" (Barth 1857, I: 440).

Abd el Kadiri, however, was an exception. On many other occasions Barth

could talk about Europe and the Europeans, differences in the way of life, African-European relations, or the political intentions of European powers. Of course, knowledge was not evenly distributed. Hardly anyone in the Sudan was as well informed as Barth's friend and protector in Timbuctoo, Ahmad al-Bakay, the spiritual leader of the city; but even in remote areas such as Kanem, where Barth chatted with sedentarized Teda about Europe, „one has got a slight idea of an 'Inglis'" though the villagers had never heard of French or Russians (Barth 1857, III: 75). A slight idea of an Inglis does not mean sound information. We therefore have to study what was known, which category of people was informed, and how knowledge was passed on.

In general, information was passed on orally, rather than through books. In Baghirmi province, e.g. Barth met a Pullo (pl. Fulbe) who had studied at Al Azhar University and read Aristotle and Plato. This man was not only well informed about political matters in the Sudan, but was also able to discuss universal philosophical issues. Eventually, he became one of Barth's most important informants (Barth 1857, III: 329ff.). Ahmad al-Bakay in Timbuctoo possessed, beside the works of Arabic authors, a book by Hippocrates<sup>13</sup>, „whom he held in high esteem", and discussed with Barth the identity of Hippocrates' plants: „In fact I may say with full conviction that the few books brought by the enterprising Scottish officer (Clapperton) to Central Africa, had a stronger effect reconciling the respected men of those regions with the character of Europeans than had other precious gifts." (Barth 1858, V: 44-45).

During his travels, Barth intended to learn as much as possible from the people he met; but the Africans as well wanted to know what kind of foreigner

he was and from which country he had come. His own books aroused much interest among the Africans, especially the Tuareg. Tuareg women, in particular, are described as being very curious (Barth 1858, IV: 131). In all the nomadic camps Barth visited he used to show illustrations of the various human races to their womanfolk (Barth 1858, V: 204) and once he was asked by „professional intellectuals”, members of the Tuareg-tribe Kal-Essuk, to read parts of his books. On this occasion Barth even recited a German poem (Barth 1858, V: 232).

But by far the most important information was passed on orally, mainly by travellers. Africans travelled a lot, over great distances and for different reasons. One category of travellers Barth often met were pilgrims on their way to, or coming back from, the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Pilgrims came from all parts of West Africa, from as far as the Atlantic coast or the inner Sahara. They brought news from the centres of the Muslim world, of countries on the Mediterranean shore where some of them stayed for prolonged periods and eventually came into contact with Europeans, and from various West African polities.

Africans went on pilgrimage in surprisingly large numbers. In general they were good informants and, thus, Barth hardly missed any occasion to exchange news with them. South of Murzuk he met the annual pilgrim caravan of 1850 coming from the region of Tuat. It consisted of exactly 114 pilgrims. In other years, he was told, the caravan had up to 500 participants (Barth 1857, I: 187). One of the Tuati pilgrims joined Barth's caravan of Kel-Ewey Tuareg going to Agadez. The Tuati gave Barth informations about Major Laing, whom he had seen in Tuat (Barth 1857, I: 274f.). Considering the population of Tuat, the number of Tuati pilgrims was surprisingly large.

Generally though, pilgrims were not ordinary people but rich and influential men, either long-distance traders or politicians who tried to gather all information they needed for their aims.

In Aïr Barth discussed with Hajj 'Abdua, who had visited Egypt on his way back from Mecca the miserable conditions of life in big cities like Cairo. 'Abdua was Annur's nephew, then the strong man in Aïr and informal leader of the Tuareg Kel-Ewey, to whom he served as an envoy. 'Abdua gave first-hand information about the kingdom of Bornu, for he was sent regularly to the court of Kukawa in order to maintain diplomatic relations between the two countries (Barth 1857, I: 414-415). While in Agadez, Barth was visited by Arab businessmen. He characterized them as „bright” and „enlightened” just because they had come into contact with the most varied regions and people, among them Europeans, on pilgrimage or business trips (Barth 1857, I: 498).

There were many other pilgrims, traders and travellers who had more than 'a slight idea of an Inglis' and gave Barth useful informations. On behalf of his informants on Bornu in particular and West Africa in general Barth wrote: „Many excellent personalities from countries far away just sojourned here (=in Kukawa), partly on pilgrimage from or to Mecca, partly attracted by the fame of the hospital and benevolent wazir.” (Barth 1857, II: 274). Apparently to document his statements, Barth later on gives more details about the life-stories of his two main informants in Kukawa: A Pullo of the ruling family in Futa Toro, who had stayed two years as a hostage of the French in N'der (=St Louis) and thus knew the French and the British. During his pilgrimage he had crossed the whole African continent. The second was a Moor from Sakiyat al-Hamra (later Span-



ish Sahara) who had travelled extensively and had come into contact with the French (Barth 1857, II: 368ff.).

Barth seldom leaves out biographical details of his informants. He not only worked with pilgrims and traders but also with adventurers and sometimes with freed slaves. The biographies of some of those are worth mentioning since they show the extent to which news about the Muslim world and Europe were spread in West Africa. From Kano to Kukawa Barth travelled with a trader from Fez (Morocco) who was accompanied by a freed slave. As a child the man had been sold to Istanbul where he came to know Europeans and learned Greek: „Indeed, slavery thus brings sometimes cosmopolitan elements into those inland countries ...“ (Barth 1857, II: 176). It was a roving diplomat, a North-African Arab, who conveyed the news about Richardson's death. Having served the king of Bornu, he had been exiled and had offered his services to Bornu's enemy, the caliph of Sokoto. He later returned to Bornu's diplomatic service, Barth reports (Barth 1857, II: 224f.).

The life of the Bambara Hajj Ahmad, one of Barth's informants in Baghirmi, even recalls the biographies of modern migrants: After having worked in the gold-mines of Bambuk, he became a trader between Timbuctoo and Tuat and conducted commerce in Agadez and Kano. He went on a pilgrimage and served as mercenary and servant to the Turkish Pasha in Medina before getting a job as a servant in Medina's Great Mosque. When Barth met him, Ahmad was on a diplomatic mission bringing eunuchs (a gift of Baghirmi's ruler) to Medina (Barth 1857, III: 329ff.). The first news of a European expedition in search of him reached Barth via a (freed) slave-woman in Sokoto. The woman had been freed in Istanbul, travelled with the expedition to Kukawa and from there re-

turned home (Barth 1858, V: 333, 334). Later he learned from inhabitants of Sokoto that another British expedition had been sent up the Benue River searching for him (Barth 1858, V: 360, 361).

Information was spread by caravans, too. Caravans transported goods and news equally. Though short- or medium-distance caravans within the Sudan were sometimes organized by sedentary people (Mossi and Hausa roving traders)<sup>14</sup>, long-distance caravans remained the domain of nomads, Arabs, Arabo-Berbers (Moors), Teda and Tuareg.

The Tuareg of Aïr, the Kel-Ewey tribe in particular, went as far north as Ghat and Murzuk (Barth 1857, I: 436) where they had contact with other Tuareg (Kal-Ajjer), people from Fezzan, Tripolis, Egypt, Tuat or Algiers. The Kel-Ewey were engaged in the salt trade too and once a year they flocked in great numbers to the Hausa states and Sokoto caliphate, where Barth often met men whom he had known in the north: „Thus one meets Tuareg everywhere“ (Barth 1857, II: 108; see also: Barth 1858, IV: 86 + IV: 187). On many occasions Barth mentions the arrival of trans-Saharan caravans from Ghadames, Ghat, Tuat, or southern Morocco. On his way back to Tripolis he travelled with a Teda caravan between Kukawa and Murzuk (Barth 1858, V: 405).

Of course, evolution in Europe and European politics were observed with interest by Sudanese rulers and their entourage. But even in these milieus two main ideas concerning Europeans were prevalent: that of European (technical) superiority, and that of Europeans as barbarians. While in al-Bakay's camp near Timbuctoo, Barth and his friend were visited by a Pullo officer from Massina. The officer insulted all Europeans, the French in particular, reasoning among other things that they ate unboiled eggs: „It is extremely curious that the idea of Euro-

peans preferring to eat unboiled eggs is spread over all North-Central Africa, ... (Barth 1858, V: 93). In the Niger bend the idea of barbarous Europeans had been much influenced by Mungo Park's<sup>15</sup> attitude „to fire on everybody who drew near him in whatever hostile position.“ (Barth 1858, V: 202). After having spoken with the Tuareg Tin-ger-egedesh whose camp Barth visited „... they made sure that I didn't belong to the category of wild beasts; they seemed to have gotten this impression of Europeans in general from the reception they had partly received from Park.“ (Barth 1858, V: 203). The memory of Park's passage on the Niger and his fights were still alive among the southern Tuareg, although the whereabouts and objectives of the „tall white man“ remained a complete mystery (Barth 1858, V: 136).

Annur, the strong man in Aïr, behaved very friendly toward the Europeans who were his guests in Tin Tellust. He nonetheless thought of Europeans as „detestable barbarians“ because „in their wars they were ready to kill such monstrous numbers of human beings using cannons instead of spears and swords; for he took the last ones as the only weapons permitted and honorable for a man which human beings may use against human beings.“ (Barth 1857, I: 559).

Europeans in general were considered to be medical experts. Overweg, for example, although a geologist, easily established contacts with the local population because of his activities as *tabib* (= doctor)<sup>16</sup>. Conscious of his rudimentary medical knowledge, Barth prudently treated sick persons only when success seemed assured<sup>17</sup>. Sometimes he even had troubles getting rid of patients too confident in the abilities of the white doctor: „He (=the son of the governor of Zaria who was in Kano when Barth passed through) had such a high opinion of

the ability of Europeans that it was completely impossible to convince him that I had neither the knowledge nor the instruments to undertake such a cure in order to save him from his disease.“ (Barth 1857, II: 131).

The technical and military superiority of Europeans was widely acknowledged by Africans. Even a relatively unimportant ruler as the governor of Say on the Niger River with whom Barth discussed the possibility of establishing commercial relations with Britain „had heard a lot of the superiority of the European over the Arab“ (Barth 1858, IV: 250). When received for the first time by Ahmad al-Bakay in Timbuctoo, the two men already spoke about European superiority with respect to technology and organisation of society. Al-Bakay asked Barth if the city of London really had „twenty times 100,000 inhabitants“ (Barth 1858, IV: 462), which apparently he had heard or read.

In Barth's writing West Africans appear rather well informed about Europe and Europeans. Information was spread by travellers, by pilgrimage and long-distance trade, which was mainly the domain of nomadic groups. Once Barth mentions the entire nomadic tribe of the Awlad Sulayman who had come into „friendly touch (contact) with Englishmen“ (Barth 1857, III: 6) in their region of origin on the Mediterranean from where they had emigrated to the Chad basin only a decade ago (1842) (Zeltner 1993). During their raids the Awlad Sulayman had come into contact with numerous other groups in the Sudan which took them as far as Aïr until they were completely beaten and half of their warriors killed by Tuareg forces from Aïr under the command of Annur in 1850 (Barth 1857, III: 57). European politics were observed with interest in the milieu of rulers, as we shall see later. This impression is reinforced when we read Lenz' re-



marks about Timbuctoo 25 years after Barth: „In general, in Timbuctoo one is rather well informed about everything going on in Europe. The results of the last Russian war were known, of course one still spoke of the great French-German war, which is followed with particular interest because people always fear the approach of the French. ... But the continual traffic with the Arabic inhabitants of the Mediterranean countries implies that people in Timbuctoo are nonetheless promptly informed about everything without newspapers and telegraphs.“ (Lenz 1884: 140).

### The colonial threat and African reactions

It may seem strange to speak of a colonial threat in West Africa in Barth's time, 35 years before military conquest began and long before detailed plans for colonial rule had been worked out in European ministries. In many passages of his book, however, Barth had to consider the necessities, possibilities or impossibilities of future colonialism.

The extent to which the actual partition of the Sudan by Great Britain and France half a century later corresponded to Barth's indications is indeed remarkable. The traditional caravan routes through the Sahara that Barth had used were unsuitable for the development of European commerce. The best way into the interior was via river systems, in particular the Benue-Niger system, Barth wrote. Thus, the richest parts of the Sudan could be opened to British interests, leaving the Saharan sands to the Gallic cock.

We have to keep in mind that Barth travelled first as member, later as leader of an official British delegation. The del-

egation's mission was – among political and scientific purposes – mainly commercial. This is clearly expressed in the delegation's instructions: „it is the wish of Her Majesty's Government that you should specially endeavour to ascertain by what means the commercial intercourse between Great Britain and Africa might be extended and developed.“<sup>18</sup> He thus had to consider all circumstances with reference to the mission's official task. Of course, this included the registration of geographical (and climatological) obstacles that future travellers might come across.

Despite its diplomatic status and peaceful character, the British mission nevertheless encountered serious resistance from various African groups. The main motive for armed resistance, Barth argues, was fear of commercial (and political) rivals, and of military conquest.

Barth himself did not foresee violent struggles between Europeans and Africans, but expected future peaceful relationships: „Indeed, I am convinced that in 50 years European vessels will maintain regular, annual traffic from the gulf of Biafra with the great basin of the Tsad (Chad).“ (Barth 1857, III: 198). He believed military occupation to be neither necessary, nor even probable, at least not in the case of inland territories (Barth 1857, II: 610-611; 1858, V: 93-94; V: 119). The military and logistical<sup>19</sup> problems future invaders would have to come across, must have seemed insurmountable in Barth's time, making any colonial plans but a gamble.

Barth tried to analyse the impact of European activities, both commercial and political (abolition of the slave-trade), on the trade within the Sudan, which of course belonged to the mission's tasks; the swift and often vehement reaction of the Africans toward any colonial attempt, Barth experienced in

personam, must have convinced him that colonial occupation was actually impossible.

The British mission encountered the first serious armed resistance on the northern outskirts of Aïr. A fortnight before real attacks began, the mission had been warned by a member of its caravan that the inislman (=learned men of Islam in Tuareg society) of Tin Taghoda in northern Aïr „ ... had declared themselves adamantly opposed to our visiting their country, ... ” (Barth 1857, I: 297). Though threatened with death, the Christians managed to avoid the worst by paying a heavy tribute to the holy men (Barth 1857, I: 347).

The Tuareg, as all nomads, are depicted as being greedy for booty, but the main motive of the inislman of Tin Taghoda, Barth reports, was political opposition to Annur. To strengthen his position in Aïr, which was not based on formal titles but only on his military force and his natural authority, Annur was very much interested in being acknowledged by the great European power as the real leader of Aïr, and insisted that „one of us should go to Agadez in order to become friends with the titular ruler (=Sultan of Agadez, see footnote 12) of the country” (Barth 1857, I: 563; see also: I: 395, 396). The inislman, on the other hand, were afraid of potential rivals and tried jealously to preserve their crucial role in trans-Saharan trade from their base in Tin Taghoda, a now-abandoned village near Iferwan, which was „of importance for the traffic between North and Central Africa, that is carried on under the protection and the prestige of those learned and religious men with such a security that is astonishing indeed if one considers the wild and rapacious character of the inhabitants of these regions.” (Barth 1857, I: 353).

The inhabitants of Baghirmi<sup>20</sup> considered Barth as dangerous and even feared

that the foreigner might establish a reign of his own (Barth 1857, III: 280ff.), as in fact other travellers did later on. Several times people hindered Barth's advance (Barth 1857, III: 287, 296). Once he was even arrested, and while in prison, he reflected on the possibility of colonization. Obviously very angry about the way he had been treated, he openly recommends colonization (the only clear remark in his work in this respect), in order to bring 'civilization' to all parts of the continent (Barth 1857, III: 323).

No doubt the most dangerous situations Barth had to experience were in Timbuctoo. The political situation in Timbuctoo was as unstable as it was complicated and the townsfolk lived in a precarious political state. South-west of Timbuctoo dwelt the Fulbe theocracy of Massina, which had conquered the town in 1826 before being pushed back by the Tuareg in 1844. Massina nonetheless preserved much of its influence in Timbuctoo because of its geographical position, which was of the highest strategic importance for the town. Massina could easily cut off all grain supplies on which the town completely depended. The Tuareg, on the other hand, having „liberated” the town, behaved very much as conquerors and took whatever goods they liked (Barth 1858, IV: 445). In 1846 Ahmad al-Bakay, whose family of supposed sharifian origin had been called in by the citizens in 1831 to counter-balance the menace from both sides, found the following arrangements with Massina: no further threat to Timbuctoo's grain supplies in return for formal recognition of Massina's sovereignty and an annual tribute of 4,000 *mithkal*<sup>21</sup> of gold (Barth 1858, IV: 444). As agreed upon, Ahmad al-Bakay could call on the Tuareg for help against Massina, but his undisciplined allies, though of great individual courage, were just as much a burden as they were of help to the town.

In 1880 Ahmad al-Bakay's son and successor changed sides and won Massina as an ally, which still was hostile towards the Tuareg (Lenz 1884: 128, 129). After the defeat of Massina and the conquest of its capital Hamd-Allahi at the hands of Hajj 'Umar in 1861, Massina's position had become rather weak, whereas the Tuareg were stronger than ever and dominated the whole Niger bend. The idea behind the politics of Ahmad al-Bakay and his son was obviously always to play out Timbuctoo's neighbouring powers against each other to the advantage of the town of Timbuctoo and their own tribe, the Kunta.

Throughout his seven-months stay in and around Timbuctoo Barth was a playing of political manoeuvre between Ahmad al-Bakay (with his allies, the Tuareg and his friends in town) and Massina (with its Timbuctoo supporters). Massina urged the inhabitants (considered as its subjects), above all al-Bakay, to expell (Barth 1858, IV: 467 + V: 52) or take the Christian as prisoner („dead or alive“, Barth 1858, IV: 504), otherwise it would kill him (Barth 1858, V: 70). Though some people believed Barth to be a spy sent to prepare colonization (Barth, 1858, IV: 495), Massina's main reason, Barth reports, was religious fanaticism: The Fulbe did not tolerate non-Muslims within their area and were actually hostile towards all Europeans (Barth 1858, V: 93). A question Barth does not answer, however, is if the Fulbe actually were alarmed by the approach of the French who by 1845 had constructed a fortress on the Falémé River (on the contemporary Senegal-Mali frontier). It is possible that a foreign power at such close range – the French were only at a distance of a few hundred kilometres from Massina – troubled spirits as rumours about the French advance into the Sahara really did later.

Ahmad al-Bakay resisted steadfastly all the pressure put on him by his (formal) sovereign in Hamd-Allahi. He did so, Barth presumed, in order to demonstrate his independence from Massina (Barth 1858, IV: 468, 469). Once he even took Barth to Timbuctoo's port, Kabara, where Massina's influence was much greater than in the town itself (Barth 1858, IV: 483), proving by this symbolic act that he did not care about orders or threats of Massina's ruler<sup>22</sup>. When the Fulbe tried to attack al-Bakay's camp near Timbuctoo, where Barth often was taken to save him from Massina's attempts to catch him, al-Bakay called upon his tribesmen and the Tuareg for help (Barth 1858, IV: 505, 506, 509). Confronted with the determined warriors, above all the Tuareg who were as always eager to fight, the Fulbe confined themselves to verbal threats and withdrew (Barth 1858, V: 75, 76).

To strengthen his precarious position in town and to counter the colonial plans of the French, which became more and more clear, al-Bakay obviously tried to put his eggs in the British basket which he knew to be the super-power of the time. Later evidence proved that he really wished to establish friendly commercial relationships with Britain, as Barth had suggested. But probably the British did not want to intervene in a region which the French had already claimed for themselves. Al-Bakay's delegation sent for by the British Government (Lord Clarendon) in 1857 had to return from Tripolis after being refused passage to London on doubtful pretexts.

Colonial conquest in any case still seemed far ahead in Barth's time. Barth's enumeration of the military strength of various Sudanese powers must have sounded impressive even to European ears, rendering the preparation of any plans for military conquest a difficult business, if not totally impossible.

Due to the lack of fire-arms in sufficient numbers, and in the absence of artillery, cavalry was the decisive weapon in the West Africa of Barth's time. Nomadic groups were the most fit for combat because it was they who raised camels and horses in great numbers. Nomads were born troopers. The Kel-Ewey of Aïr e.g. „can without doubt, and without counting their slaves (who served as footsoldiers), gather a power of 10,000 armed and mounted men" (Barth 1857, I: 387). The Kel-Ewey's enemies, the Tuareg-group Kel Gress south of Aïr, only had 5,000 horsemen but compensated for their numerical disadvantage by the fact that they mainly had horses, which were much better suited for battle than the camels the Kel-Ewey rode (Barth 1857, I: 387, 388). The Kel-Ewey also had fire-arms (probably shot guns or matchlocks (see also: Richardson 1853, I: 316)). When Barth stayed in Wurno, the capital of the Sokoto caliphate, on his way from Timbuctoo to Kukawa, news arrived about a war between the two groups<sup>23</sup>. Rumours said the Kel-Ewey were employing 5,000 troopers and 1,000 fire-arms (Barth 1858, V: 341).

While in nomadic groups nearly every (adult) man could serve in war, a very high proportion of armed men indeed, sedentary groups provided by comparison far fewer soldiers. Kano province, then part of Sokoto caliphate and inhabited mainly by (sedentary) Hausa, supported an army of 7,000 horsemen plus about 20,000 soldiers on foot among a population which Barth estimated as „nearer to one than to half a million" (Barth 1857, II: 163). It is very probable that Fulbe (of nomadic origin and dominant in Kano since Fodio's jihad at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) served as troopers while the sedentary Hausa were mainly footsoldiers. The whole Sokoto caliphate (without Gwandu) could employ about 24,000

cavalry (plus an unknown number of footsoldiers), though it was very difficult to gather this force for a single military operation (Barth 1858, IV: 156).

The western provinces of Bornu served the central parts of the kingdom as frontier defence against raiding Tuareg; their armies had to be strong. Munio e.g. defended its part of the border with a troop of about 1,500 horsemen and 8 to 10,000 bowmen, as Barth learned from James Richardson's former interpreter, whom he met in Munio (Barth 1858, IV: 54). The best weapon against mobile Tuareg raiders was cavalry anyway, and Bornu used the (nomadic) Awlad Sulayman as a security force in the interior and against external enemies. This, however, proved to be a double-edged sword, for the Awlad Sulayman, who were excellent horse breeders and well armed with rifles<sup>24</sup>, sometimes raided Bornu's subjects too. That is why Barth believed Bornu to have instigated the Kel-Ewey to attack the Awlad Sulayman in 1850 which resulted in the latter's defeat (Barth 1857, III: 57).

But Sudanese rulers tried to get control over fire-arms too, in any case the only way to become independent of unsure nomadic allies<sup>25</sup>. During their first audience at the court of Kukawa Barth and Overweg explained their mission to the *shaikh* and his *wazir*: „Both assured us that it was their most ardent desire to establish commercial relationships with the Englishmen; but they did not hide at the same time that it was their main objective thereby to obtain fire-arms." (Barth 1857, II: 429). When negotiating the treaty between Great Britain and Bornu, the *shaikh* declared himself ready to sign (which obliged him to abandon the slave trade) under the condition that Bornu would be supplied with 1,000 guns and 4 cannons in exchange for the abolition of the slave trade (Barth 1857, III: 124). Also the Governor of Katsina,

likewise a subject of Sokoto, asked Barth for „means of war“<sup>26</sup> by which he meant - if Barth understood well - rockets (Barth 1857, II: 75).

There were modern weapons, too. In Al-Bakay's camp near Timbuctoo Barth met a group of Berabish (Moors) who nearly all possessed double-barrel guns: „- a weapon which is, as a result of the trade of the French, so common in this whole part of the desert, that the one-barrel gun, in sole use by the Arab of the northern zone, on the Mediterranean, is looked upon with disdain“ (Barth 1858, V: 66, 67).

But still cavalry remained superior to all other weapons. During his six-year stay in West Africa, Barth reports, no event irritated spirits more than the news of the „tabu“ coming nearer. The „tabu“ (in fact: *attabu*) was the army of the Tuareg Iwillimidan of Menaka, mainly composed of horsemen<sup>27</sup>, whose attacks were irresistible at least in the Niger bend. People fled trying to place their goods and themselves in safety from „the vehement host“ ... „even the nature of the atmosphere seemed to confirm the news of the advance of a numerous host; for the whole air was filled with thick clouds of dust.“ (Barth 1858, V: 62).

Though still far ahead in time and in space, people were nonetheless afraid of Europeans already in Barth's time. One of the main causes Barth discusses in many passages of his book was „the certainty that not only their slave trade, but also their whole commercial traffic, as they have it conducted until now, is destroyed as soon as Europeans, or rather the English, get free access to the Sudan.“ (Barth 1857, II: 429). This was true particularly for long-distance traders, and Barth had to struggle hard before getting the treaty between Great Britain and Bornu signed. Traders, above all Arabs, tried to thwart negotiations by spreading rumours in Kukawa that seven British

ships had landed in Nyffi (on the Atlantic coast) (Barth 1857, II: 430), which of course proved later to be wrong.

Bornu's rulers at least were not sure which way the British would come. When discussing with Bornu's *wazir* the possibility of inviting the Turks to occupy the Kawar oasis<sup>28</sup> in order to secure trans-Saharan routes from raiding Tuareg, the *wazir* expressed his fears that, as a result of the treaty with Britain which allowed free access for English traders, „a vast crowd of Englishmen would overflow their country“ (Barth 1857, III: 11). Barth, however, was convinced that Kano („the great emporium of Central Africa“) and Kukawa could be opened up to British interest more easily from south on the Benue River (Barth 1857, III: 11-12). It was precisely for this reason, the *wazir* later explained to Barth, that Bornu refused any contacts with the British on the West African coast (Barth 1857, III: 123, 124).

Britain was feared because of her economic power, and her traders were seen as potential rivals in long-distance trade. French politics on the other hand appeared to be very aggressive indeed, at least to African eyes. In 1854 French troops completely defeated the Sha'amba (who later on formed the core of the French camel corps) and advanced on Metlili and Ouargla, which they actually took. The news of the French operating in the Northern Sahara troubled people as far as Timbuctoo, at 2,000 kms distance: „as a result of these rumours, the fear of the progression of these hated foreigners and their penetration into the interior of these regions became general.“ (Barth 1858, V: 115).

People were suspicious because they thought of Barth's travels as being connected with the military endeavours of the French (Barth 1858, V: 115), and many, ignoring the difference between English and French, took Barth for a French spy



(Barth 1858, V: 124, 125). Even his protector Ahmad al-Bakay, whose character is described as 'mild', became highly furious and told Barth his plans to unite the forces of the Tuareg Iwillimidan and of Tuat in a joint attack against the French. Barth tried to dissuade him, reasoning that in his view the French would not advance further „unless they were provoked“ (Barth 1858, V: 119).

The Tuati traders in Timbuctoo worried much about their parents at home and therefore urged al-Bakay to put all his reputation and prestige into the affair. They asked him to write to the northern Tuareg of the Kal-Ahaggar and the Kal-Ajjer and to Tuat and to urge the three groups to join forces in order to attack and reconquer Ouargla. Again Barth tried his best to dissuade his friend (Barth 1858, V: 125). Though he convinced al-Bakay not to lead an attack, he could not prevent him from writing a letter to the French. Al-Bakay formally forbade the French to advance further „and to enter the desert, under whatever pretext, except as individual travellers.“ (Barth 1858, V: 125). Barth signed this letter, leaving open, however, whether he did so in his own name or in that of the British Government (Barth 1858, V: 126).

### Influence of the incipient state on politics in the Sudan

Today we know that no diplomatic activities whatsoever could have stopped the French colonial army. But in Barth's time diplomacy must have appeared a promising measure, at least from an African point of view. It was the only means anyway except fighting.

To counter colonial threats, Africans used two types of diplomatic strategies. The first one was directed outwards. In the 1850s the most promising diplomatic

option must have been Great Britain. Africans tried to use the British for their own ends in order to cope with the aggressiveness of French colonial politics. This measure probably was stimulated by the presence of the British mission and its diplomatic status. The 'British option' adopted by African rulers actually did correspond to the original political intentions of the British government, Boahen argues; for the British mission included „the thwartening of French ambitions in the Sahara and in the western Sudan.“ (Boahen 1964: 186). Two decades later when the French had come too near to be ignored, there obviously were attempts, in particular by Tuareg, to integrate France also into a system of agreements which actually aimed at preventing military conquest.

The second type of diplomatic strategy was directed inwards. It is a well-known fact that people try to reinforce internal unity in the face of threats from the outside, and that is what Africans actually tried to do. There is some evidence that the coming of the colonial state aroused new feelings of unity among the Tuareg which mark the beginning of national sentiments. Tuareg leaders appealed to settle internal quarrels and to unite in order to confront threats posed by colonial powers. These were the same Tuareg that Barth had characterized regretfully twenty years before as totally incapable of overcoming their disputes and disunity (Barth 1858, V: 42-43) and who never had managed to unite beyond the regional level before the beginning of colonial conquest.

Al-Bakay demanded from Barth that he filed a petition to the British authorities „immediately“ asking them to install an English consul in Tuat. Barth refused, arguing that he did not believe the English capable or even wishing to prevent the French from attacking and conquering Tuat, though Tuat was in the

British 'sphere of interest'. At that time, however, Barth lets the reader know, he did not yet know about the recent 'entente cordiale' between France and Great Britain (Barth 1858, V: 125).

Though al-Bakay was his best African friend, Barth felt that Bornu (and partly Sokoto) was much better suited for the expansion of British trading interests. Before leaving for Timbuctoo, Bornu's ruler and his *wazir* asked him to stay at the court in Kukawa when returning from his trip to the West. It was Barth himself who had encouraged this demand because he had expressed his wish: „that the English Government feel bound to send a consul to Bornu, and I raised their hopes on that.” (Barth 1858, IV: 4).

Also, 'Aliu, ruler over Sokoto, favoured the British option. He welcomed the British mission and gave his permission for it to continue on its way to Timbuctoo; he did not hesitate to sign a charter that Englishmen might carry on 'free trade' in the caliphate (which was what Barth had asked for). In addition to that, he wanted to repair the bad impression the British might have got by the way Clapperton had been treated by Aliu's father and predecessor, Muhammed Bello (Barth 1858, IV: 137). Clapperton had not been allowed to advance from Sokoto to Kukawa as he had wished, for even at that time long-distance traders (Arabs) at Sokoto's court feared for their profits in trans-Saharan trade, in case the Sudan would be opened up to British traders from the South (Barth 1858, IV: 154). 'Aliu even supported the British mission with a gift of 100,000 *kurdi*<sup>29</sup> for its subsistence while he was absent on campaign against Gobir (Barth 1858, IV: 140).

In general, people in Aïr behaved friendly toward the members of the British mission. Annur's Kel-Ewey in particular treated the Europeans obligingly

(Barth 1857, I: 395-396). Once, when a night thief stole some of Richardson's boxes, Barth sounded the alarm, and the whole male population of Tin Tellust (Annur's seat) ran to the foreigners' aid (Barth 1857, I: 398f.). Annur himself did his best to facilitate the mission's tasks and even corrected the explorers' notes (Barth 1857, I: 558). When Barth visited Agadez, he was also treated „in an extremely friendly manner indeed, if one takes into consideration that I was the first Christian who visited the town” (Barth 1857, I: 465).

Richardson, however, did not appreciate the treatment the British mission received in Aïr. He described the behaviour of its people, that of Annur in particular, as a „flagrant series of exactions” (Richardson 1853, I: 292). This bad impression was very much influenced by the fact that the mission had to pay about thousand dollars for protection to Annur and his Kel-Ewey alone. In this context, Richardson complained that „it is somewhat embarrassing to act with persons who share in your councils without sharing in your responsibility” (Richardson 1853, I: 292-293), by which he obviously referred to his German colleagues.

There is little doubt that Annur soon realized the opportunity of making the British<sup>30</sup> his trading partners. In November 1850, he signed a treaty which ensured security and freedom of movement for British traders in his zone of influence. As Annur was only the informal leader (but not the titular ruler) of Aïr, Richardson probably overestimated his first diplomatic success (Boahen 1964: 204). Annur's efforts to secure trading routes, however, clearly demonstrate his intentions. Barth reports that it was through his influence and intelligence, that Annur even managed to reconcile the Tuareg Kel-Ewey and Kel Gress<sup>31</sup> (Barth 1857, I: 466f.). Annur united the forces of the Tuareg of Aïr (Kel-Ewey and

Kel Ferwan) and the Kel Gress and fought western Tuareg groups which raided caravans between Agadez and Hausa land (Barth 1857, I: 471, 477, 479, 481). The Sultan of Agadez recalled the objectives of their fight in a letter he wrote to the tribal chiefs of the united force: to check freebooters (i.e. raiding Tuareg) in order to secure caravan trade and peaceful traffic, and to preserve the community of the people of Aïr" (*'anikel'*?) (Barth 1857, I: 478). Having to face external threats and perhaps stimulated by the presence of the British, the Sultan demanded unity of his people, the people of Aïr. He did not ask for the unity of the whole nation though, as Tuareg facing the advance of colonial powers actually did later.

It is remarkable that nearly all polities in the West Africa of Barth's time tried to play the British card. Even the tribal group of the Tuareg Tademekkat in the Timbuctoo region signed a charter "for every Englishman whosoever" (Barth 1858 IV: 520), though Barth did not believe this charter to be of great use. More important was the treaty he concluded with the powerful group of the Tuareg Iwillimidan of Menaka that allowed free access for British traders (Barth 1858 V: 234, 235). Barth, however, did not answer the Iwillimidans' demand that the British should send three vessels in order 'to encourage the trade'.

The only important polity that remained hostile against all foreigners, British and French alike, was Massina. The main reason for Massina's hostile position against all 'unbelievers', i.e. Non-Muslims, Boahen argues, was its fanatic religious zeal (Boahen 1964: 244). There were, probably, other reasons than just religious fanaticism. Though inhabited by nomads or people of nomadic origin (Fulbe), Massina's economy relied to a much lesser extent on long distance trade than that of other West African polities

inhabited or dominated by nomads. Massina was simply not very interested in establishing economic and diplomatic relationships with European powers. More important than economic reasons seem to be political ones. Even in Barth's time, Massina was directly threatened by French colonial politics which, by comparison, must have appeared as very aggressive indeed, and by military conquest. That is why, I suggest, Massina avoided all contacts that might have led to future domination and the beginning of military conquest.

After the withdrawal of the British from the Sahara and the Western Sudan in the 1860s (Boahen 1964: chap. IX), Africans had to deal directly with the French too. When von Bary visited Ichenuchen, the chief of the Tuareg group Kal-Ajjer in Ghat in 1876, he expressed amazement that Ichenuchen "spoke a lot about the French" (Bary 1880: 235). The Tuareg explained to von Bary European politics, as he saw it, and told him that Prussia and Russia were allies, standing as well against France as against the Turks. He wondered for his part how the Prussians had managed to beat France in the Franco-German war of 1870/71 (Bary 1880: 324). Von Bary believed Ichenuchen to be naïve and 'childish', but obviously did not know what had happened since Barth had passed through; for it was the same 'childish' old man<sup>32</sup> who had signed a treaty with the French on behalf of the Tuareg.

In 1862 Maréchal Pelissier, then governor of Algeria, and Ichenuchen concluded a treaty (known as 'the Treaty of Ghadames') which allowed French (or Algerian) traders free passage through the country of the Tuareg and guaranteed free access to Sudanese markets in return for the payment of the usual tributes ('droits coutumiers'). The Tuareg were engaged to facilitate and to protect French caravans within their territory

and as far as Sudanese markets. They also had the right to rent their camels out and to provide other paid services (Stühler 1978: 94).

Concerning the right of passage of armed groups or military expeditions, the 'Ghadames treaty', however, was interpreted differently by each of the two parties. While the French thought of this point as excluded from the treaty (which implied that they could send out whatever groups they wanted), the Tuareg held the opinion that armament of travellers was prohibited (Gardel 1961: 177). They therefore could believe to be in their full rights when they stopped the heavily armed French 'Mission Flatters' in 1881 by military means. Flatters' misfortune shocked the French public and led in France to a lively discussion about the pros and the cons of colonial politics<sup>33</sup>; in any case it made the French hesitate and retarded the military occupation of the Sahara (In Salah in the Central Sahara was only occupied in 1899, 18 years later).

Many events that von Bary apparently did not comprehend or misunderstood become more comprehensible if interpreted as attempts at preventing colonial occupation. In von Bary's time the Tuareg had to face two colonial powers: France and the Ottoman Empire. Von Bary did not understand why the Tuareg refused to let the Turks intervene as mediators in the 'war'<sup>34</sup> between Kal-Ahaggar and Kal-Ajjer (Bary 1880: 239). But the Tuareg had got to know the Turks to be as greedy as the French; for in 1875 the Turks had gained ground in supporting one side by sending 800 (Arab) horsemen from Fezzan (Southern Libya). As a reward they had required the important commercial town of Ghat, which they occupied the same year with a 200 soldier garrison of regular troops<sup>35</sup>.

The Tuareg preferred to settle their quarrel themselves which they suc-

ceeded at in 1878. Influential men from different groups went on peace missions. While preparing his departure for Aïr, von Bary met people from Aïr, among them *inisliman* from Tin Taghoda, who had come to mediate in the conflict (Bary 1880: 239). People from Aïr, in particular the Kel-Ewey, but also groups south of the mountains, above all the Kel Gress (Bary 1880: 238), were as interested in establishing peace as the Northern groups. The nation was to unite in order to preserve control over essential parts of the most important trans-Saharan route and to keep foreign powers out.

This is clearly expressed in a letter sent by Ahitaghel, chief of the Tuareg Kal-Ahaggar to Ichenuchen<sup>36</sup>. Ahitaghel offered peace, arguing that the French, the Turks and the Tubbu (or Teda) observed the Tuareg from the outside, delighted over their disunion and internal weaknesses. He wanted peace, Ahitaghel wrote, not because of fear, but because he regretted seeing the Tuareg exterminate each other, thus opening their country to foreign powers. Ahitaghel proposed negotiations and invited not only all influential men of the Kal-Ajjer and Kal-Ahaggar but also three chiefs from Aïr, to a common meeting (Bary 1880: 325).

Von Bary dismisses the causes of the conflict and the Tuaregs' attempts at somehow finding solutions to the conflict contemptuously, arguing that both sides competed mainly for economic reasons, i.e. for the right to levy tributes on caravans. He thus anticipates later French interpretations, which also explained Tuareg politics vis-à-vis colonial powers with internal reasons only and described their society as an anarchical mess in which each group egoistically tried to outdo the other; even the 'treaty of Ghadames' was seen not as an attempt to keep foreign powers out but to counterbalance internal competitors (see f.ex. Dubief 1956: 99).



Kawar but also the whole country of the Tuareg.

## Conclusion

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Africa was considered the 'dark continent' by European contemporaries. Only little information was available about Europe's southern neighbours, and large parts of the African inland were completely unknown. If the 'civilized world' lacked information about Africa, the Africans' knowledge about Europe was supposed to be nonexistent. In this sense, the idea of 'dark Africa' is also a connotation which reflects that the African was ignorant.

European explorers, in particular Barth, were surprised to learn how much Africans knew about the world outside their continent. Barth tells us that not only African rulers and their entourage, but also ordinary people, travellers, pilgrims, traders, adventurers, and even freed slaves observed the evolution in Europe and gathered informations of various kinds.

The goal of this paper being an attempt at casting a look on the African side of the story as against the views of Hargreaves, Oliver and the Cambridge History of Africa, who maintain that Africans were not prepared and totally surprised by colonial conquest, I have the following points to make.

Between 1850 and 1880, the period prior to colonization, Africans and Europeans had known each other for too long, be it in the field of trade, diplomacy, slavery, or scholarship. It is therefore surprising, when European scholars assert that Africans might not have been prepared and totally overtaken by their colonizers. The presence of the French in Senegal at the time and their expansionist intentions since the conquest of Algiers in

Though there actually was economic competition, the Tuareg were also much concerned about staying autonomous and keeping control over trans-Saharan routes. The Tuareg considered Englishmen and Germans as their clients since Hornemann's travel and the passage of the British mission (Richardson & Barth), and since by the 'treaty of Ghadames' the French had become their clients too (Bary 1880: 239). The passage of Europeans was a profitable business, for each Christian had to pay a tribute of 100 Prussian 'thalers' for protection (Bary 1880: 239), while Muslims only payed seven to ten thalers' (Bary 1880: 233, 235). The Tuareg were much better off with clients to protect (though their protection very much resembled racketeering) than with foreign powers that would try to protect (and racketeer) themselves. In this sense the 'treaty of Ghadames' can be interpreted as a diplomatic attempt at transforming aggressive colonial invaders into dependent clients.

In Aïr von Bary was forced to stay four months in Bilchu's<sup>37</sup> camp in Adjiru. Von Bary tried to convince Bilchu to let him go, mentioning his good relations to the Turkish governor in Ghat. Bilchu told him that no Tuareg liked the Turks. If the Turks would start imposing taxes, the Tuareg would block trans-Saharan routes and stop all trade. "For his own country, he (Bilchu) does not seem to like the nearness of the Turks." (Bary 1880: 363). Obviously Bilchu referred to a possible colonial conquest of the Turks, in particular the occupation of Kawar which was of crucial importance for the Kel-Ewey (and the Kel Gress) because of its salt production. He was right to fear occupation, for even in Barth's time foreign powers (Bornu, Great Britain, and the Ottomans) had thought about depriving the Tuareg of their control over Kawar. In the end it was not the Ottoman Empire but France that conquered and occupied not only



1830, aroused mixed feelings in the Sahara and West Africa.

The nomadic groups in this region whose economic mainstay involved particularly long distance caravan commercial activities and who had detailed knowledge of their business partners, feared future political and economic domination, and/or rivalry, from foreigners, be it from Europe or the Ottoman Empire. In order to cope with future aggression, most nomadic groups procured modern weapons, reorganized themselves, resisted militarily, and took diplomatic measures as an attempt to ouwit foreign powers.

The Tuareg, in particular, tried to integrate foreign powers, Britain, France and the Ottoman Empire alike, into a system of arrangements which aimed at preventing foreign domination. The coming of the colonial state aroused feelings of national unity even among those nomadic groups which until then were not organized beyond the regional level.

## Notes

(1) I would like to thank Victor Azarya and Gerd Spittler for their comments on earlier drafts of this work; I would also like to thank Gordon Whittaker and Joseph N'Kwenti for their help with the English script.

(2) For a review see the „Bibliographical Essays“ in Fage & Oliver, 1985: 775 and their rich bibliography pp. 824-891.

(3) See f.ex. Aouad-Badoual, 1993; Bourgeot 1978; Brock 1990; Dufour 1987; Fuglestad 1973; Salifou 1973; Spittler 1989.

(4) One of the most cited examples, beside the employment of steam as source of energy, is the development and industrial production of the famous „maxim-gun“ in 1888, the first viable

automatic weapon, which gave the Europeans military superiority over their African adversaries (see f.ex. Gann & Duignan, 1967: 193).

(5) John Lonsdale is one of the few who refers to events within the continent: the spread of Islam and Christianity; the growing trade and its political consequences; periods of famine and epidemic diseases (Lonsdale, 1985: 682ff.).

(6) Even today the African historian John Ki-Zerbo, after discussing the causes of colonial conquest, seems perplexed when he concludes: „and finally one conquered to conquer.“ (Ki-Zerbo, 1979: 444).

(7) Significantly, Volume 6 of the Cambridge History of Africa, dealing with the partition and colonial occupation, treats the period between 1880 and 1905, and thus starts with an European event, namely the Berlin conference.

(8) Spittler analyses the impact of travel situations on the results and methodology of exploration, opposing systematically travel groups, expeditions and caravans (Spittler 1987 + Spittler 1996).

(9) For a discussion of problems and merits when using European sources for the study of African history see volume 33 of „Paideuma“, edited by Heintze & Jones (1987).

(10) The collected edition by Heinrich Schifffers cites, besides the publications by Barth himself, 68 publications about him already in 1967 (Schifffers 1967: 496-499); the book contains articles of different kind, ranging from biographical essays to Barth's contributions to various domains of science (Schifffers 1967).

(11) Schifffers took the trouble to count the different parts of Barth's work: 1664 pages of travelogue, 1100 pages of (systematic) description, 770 pages annexes, and 30 pages foreword (Schifffers 1967: 67).

(12) The appellation 'Sultan' is somehow misleading. The Sultans' role is not that

of an absolute monarch, as the etymology would suggest, but that of an arbiter (Bernus 1981: 82-83; Nicolaisen 1963: 418-419).

(13) The book was brought to Africa by Clapperton who gave it as a present to Sultan Bello of Sokoto; Bello gave it to Ahmad al-Bakay.

(14) Mossi traded with donkeys as far as Timbuctoo, Massina and Azawad; their donkeys also served as beasts of burden (Barth 1858, IV: 291ff.). Hausa roving traders (*fataki*) used donkeys too or carried their merchandise themselves.

(15) Concerning the life and travels of Mungo Park see Kenneth Lupton's excellent biography (1980); concerning Park's behaviour in the Niger-bend see in particular pp. 224ff.

(16) See Barth's remarks on Overweg's strange medical methods (Barth 1857, I: 601).

(17) Concerning the treatment of sick "natives" see Barth's warnings to other travellers (Barth 1857, II: 371).

(18) Instruction for Richardson, Lord Palmerston to Richardson, 30 November 1849, cited in Boahen 1964: 185-186.

(19) We are conscient that Barth's enumeration of the armed forces of various African polities are only rough estimations; they can however used as indication of their respective military strength.

(20) In Barth's time an independant polity south-south-east of Lake Chad, mainly inhabited by Muslims.

(21) The Timbuctoo-*mithkal* corresponded to the weight of 96 grains of wheat (Barth 1858, V: 22f.), i.e. approximately 4 grams of gold (Lenz 1884: 88-89).

(22) Al-Bakay proved his fine humour when sending from Kabara a coat as a gift for the ruler's uncle in Hamd-Allahi (Barth 1858, IV: 484).

(23) Barth explains the war between the two groups by the fact that the Kel Gress had started to support Gobir, the last

independant Hausa-state, against Sokoto. Spittler refers to competition for the control of the salt-trade in which both groups were engaged, mentioning in particular the access to Sudanese markets (Spittler 1984: 148ff.).

(24) When leaving Fezzan (southern Libya) in 1842, the Awlad Sulayman possessed 500 horses and 1,000 muskets (Zeltner 1993: 73 + footnote 152 quoting Overweg's estimation in a letter to His Lordship (1851)).

(25) For an anthropological discussion of this question see Jack Goody (1971) who treats the West African context too.

(26) It is interesting that the governor used the same term (*magani* = medication) for medical, magical and military means.

(27) Even in the beginning of the following century, when colonial conquest started, the Iwillimidan possessed very few guns.

(28) Actually Barth filed a petition to the British Government to intervene in Istanbul in favor of a Turkish occupation of Kavar.

(29) *Kurdi* is the hausa-term for cowries, then the common currency in Sudan. In Barth's time, 1,000 *kurdi* were equivalent to 10 American dollars; 2,500 *kurdi* to one Austrian (or Spanish) 'Thaler' (Barth 1857, II: 160f.).

(30) Through her commercial agents on the Mediterranean Great Britain controlled the greatest part of European imports brought by trans-saharan-caravans into the Sudan. As indication I give an estimate (based on Barth's data) of the value of annual import of European goods to Kano, the most important 'emporium' of West Africa: 3.830,000 American dollars, equivalent to 153.200 Austrian 'Thalers' (see Barth 1857, II: 153ff.).

(31) Both groups competed for the control of salt-trade and access to Sudanese markets; they had waged numerous wars against each other since the 17<sup>th</sup>

century (Spittler 1984: 149). Peace did not last long, though, as in 1854 already a new war between the two groups broke out.

(32) Von Bary gives Ichenuchen's age: 102 years in 1876 (Bary 1889: 231). Ichenuchen died in 1886 (Gardel 1961: 169).

(33) Concerning the circumstances of Flatters' mission, its fate and the French reactions to it see Grévoz 1989.

(34) In fact not a war between the two groups but an internal quarrel about rights to tributes for passage within the Kal-Ajjer in which also some of the Kal-Ahaggar took part (Stühler 1978: 95).

(35) In 1886 the Tuareg reconquered the town and killed all soldiers of Turkish origin (Gardel 1961: 171).

(36) Von Bary never saw this letter himself; he reports hearsays.

(37) Bilchu was Annur's successor and like him informal leader of the Tuareg Kel-Ewey and the whole Air; he was even more respected than Annur, mainly because of his military genius.

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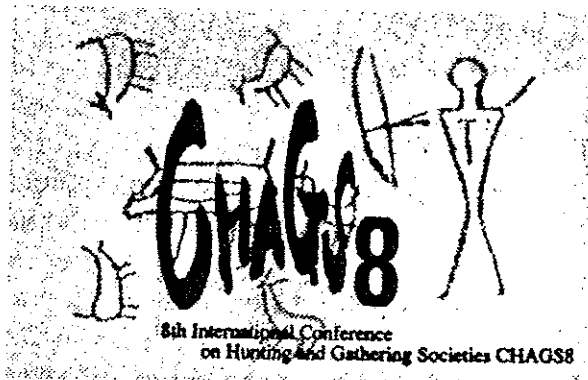
## Resumen

La literatura sobre el colonialismo no se refiere a la partición y las conquistas del continente africano en relación a los procesos históricos en Europa. Sin embargo, la penetración y ocupación militar reflejan más los antagonismos entre los diferentes poderes europeos que los hechos históricos en el Africa mismo. Con la finalidad de analizar las reacciones africanas frente a los avances de los poderes coloniales, en particular la de los grupos nómades, el presente artículo se basa en los relatos de viaje de exploradores europeos, en primer lugar los de Heinrich Barth. Los grupos nómades del Africa occidental observaron de pleno todas las tentativas coloniales por parte de los poderes extranjeros. Para contrarrestar las actividades coloniales, utilizaron todas sus habilidades diplomáticas para llegar a negociar con Gran Bretaña y más tarde también Francia un sistema de contratos y arreglos. El avance militar provocó finalmente reacciones que pueden ser consideradas como un debut de un sentimiento nacionalista también por parte de los grupos nómades, que sin embargo no continuó en forma de una organización regional.

## Résumé

La littérature traitant du colonialisme n'explique les causes profondes de la conquête du continent africain, de son démantèlement et de sa réorganisation qu'en se référant à l'évolution en Europe. Dans ce sens, on estime que la pénétration et l'occupation militaires reflètent beaucoup plus les antagonismes entre les différents pouvoirs en Europe que des événements historiques en Afrique même. Afin d'examiner les réactions africaines, en particulier celles des groupes nomades, à l'avancée des pouvoirs coloniaux, cette étude part des récits de voyage des explorateurs européens, en premier lieu de celui de Heinrich Barth. Il en ressort que les groupes nomades en Afrique de l'ouest observaient de près toute tentative coloniale de la part des pouvoirs étrangers. Pour enrayer la menace coloniale, ils utilisaient surtout des mesures diplomatiques en intégrant d'abord la Grande Bretagne et plus tard aussi la France, dans un système de contrats et d'accords. La progression militaire finit par provoquer des réactions que l'on doit considérer comme le début d'un sentiment national, même parmi les groupes nomades qui, jusque là, n'avaient connu qu'une organisation régionale.

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