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**Author**

Tall, Hadja

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## Al-Hajj Umar Tall: The Biography of a Controversial Leader

Hadja Tall

*The life of Al-Hajj Umar Tall, one of West Africa's greatest historic leaders, has certainly been the object of much speculation, especially regarding the jihad movement he led in the region in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, this Futanke, born at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Halwar, in the Podor region of Futa Toro, has been the subject of study of various authors, each using a different approach to describe his life, his vision of Islam and his goals regarding the region. While certain authors, such as Madina Ly-Tall (1991) and Emile Ducondray (1975), describe Al-Hajj Umar Tall as an instrument of faith and defender of his homeland against European intrusion, others, such as Boubacar Barry (1998) and Amadou Hampate Ba (1991), portray him as an imperialist attempting to force indigenous societies into abandoning their traditions and adopting his beliefs. I shall therefore compare and contrast these different approaches to analyzing his life, while including my own stance, that of his descendant, whose knowledge on the topic has undoubtedly been influenced by traditional folklores and family biases.*

### Growing up in Futa Toro

Al-Hajj Umar Tall belonged to a family of Torodos in the Senegalese Futa. He was born in Halwar, next to the Podor region of Futa Toro "at a time when the almamate was in full decline" (Robinson 1985: 66). His date of birth is contested, as historians place it between 1794 and 1796. His father, Eliman Saidu Usman Tall, was a well-educated Muslim *marabout*, and was probably the leading Muslim in the village of Halwar. According to the Fulani traditions of Futa, Umar's birth was announced by exceptional rain the night before his arrival. His mother, Adama Aise, was Saidu's first wife. Al-Hajj Umar was particularly fond of Adama Aise, whom he considered an example of virtue. He declared to dignitaries in Masina that while the Futa region contained a great number of men whose worth equaled his father's, he had not met a woman equal to his mother, neither in the Futa, nor in Masina.<sup>1</sup> Umar was the seventh son and the 10th child amongst Saidu's offspring. David Robinson (1985) declares that Umar was a prodigy child. Indeed, he was born during the month of Ramadan and "immediately began to fast; he consumed Adama's milk only at night" (ibid: 70). Al-Hajj Umar was raised according to the principles of Prophet Muhammad and showed signs of precocity with regard to these principles. Almamy Yusufu, one of the most respected *marabouts* of his time, recognized Al-Hajj Umar's talents and leadership abilities while Umar was still a child.<sup>2</sup> Tradition claims that from that day forth, the grandson of the Almamy Yusufu, Alpha Umar, devoted his life to Al-Hajj Umar Tall and became one of his best warriors. Umar had a remarkable aptitude for learning, apparent to his family and friends. His most important early instructor was Lamin Sakho, an authority on Arabic grammar. When he turned

23, Umar went to study in Futa Jalon and Mauritania, where the respected *marabout* Abd El-Kerim Ben-Ahmed Naguel initiated him into the Tijaniya (Abun-Nasr 1965). The latter is also the one who encouraged Umar to make the pilgrimage to Mecca.

### The Way to Mecca

Al-Hajj Umar Tall began his pilgrimage to Mecca in October 1828 and spent two years in Mecca and Medina, performing the pilgrimage three times. He took the opportunity to broaden his knowledge. In Cairo, the doctor of Al-Azhar decided to challenge his knowledge because they felt that a black man could not know more about Islam than an Arab. According to Malian folklores, not only did Al-Hajj Umar Tall fully recite the Koran, but he even stated exactly how many times each word appeared in it; he also did the same for the *Jawahir al-maani*, the sacred book of the Tijaniya. Furthermore, while in Jerusalem, he cured the son of one of the chiefs, which established him as someone with *baraka* (blessings). He received from the cheikh Muhammad Ghali, the chief of the Tijaniya, the title of *moquadem* (delegate), with the duty of spreading Islam in West Africa (Ly-Tall 1991).

On his way to (and from) Mecca, Umar visited the Hamdullahi and Sokoto Caliphates. From 1831 to 1838, he stayed in Hausa land, mostly at the court of Muhammad Bello, where he read the works of Uthman Dan Fodio and studied his principles. He developed a close friendship with Muahammad Bello, who, according to Madina Ly-Tall, could not bear the thought of being separated from him.<sup>3</sup> Umar distinguished himself as an excellent scholar, advisor and military leader, and spread the Tijaniya to a small but

prestigious community. He defined the relationship between the Sheik and his disciples as one composed of love, sincerity, respect, submission and exclusive attachment (Willis 1989). When he departed, he left with one of Muhammad Bello's daughters. The identity of this woman has been the subject of much debate. Indeed, David Robinson claims that, "Muhammad Bello gave his daughter, Mariam, to Umar just before his death and that she died shortly thereafter. A second daughter, perhaps named Ramatullah, was then given to Umar, and she became the mother of Habib and Mukhtar" (Robinson 1985: 105-106). However, the Malian folklore called *Taara*, a tribute dedicated to Umar and all his descendants, identifies this lady as Hausa Bintu and tells the praising story of how she became Umar's wife. According to oral tradition, Umar asked Muhammad Bello for the hand of his daughter Bintu. He refused, claiming that she was a Toronkawa and would remain that way. Umar did not insist. Instead he told Muhammad Bello, with a smile, that Bintu was no longer a Toronkawa, but instead she belonged to the Tall lineage, not explaining what he meant. Umar left the next morning to continue his journey and, shortly after he and his men had crossed the gates of the Sokoto Caliphate, they heard the sound of a horse galloping behind them. Riding the horse was Hausa Bintu who declared her submission to Umar and insisted on leaving with him as his wife.

The melody of *Taara* was apparently given to Al-Hajj Umar's favorite male *djeli* (traditional singer) by djinns. Tradition claims that one day while the *djeli* was riding his horse (a gift from his master Umar) in the hills, he heard the melody and was amazed by it. Upon trying to find the source of the melody he ended up face to face with female djinns. He asked them if they could teach him how to play

the melody, but they refused claiming that it was not meant for human beings — it was priceless, and, even they (the djinns) only used it during their daughters' weddings. The *djeli* pleaded with them and told them that he had the honorable intention of dedicating it to his master Al-Hajj Umar Tall as a tribute to his holiness. He offered them the white horse that Umar had given him in exchange of the melody. They accepted the offer but placed a curse on the melody against anybody who would play it for a non-Tall descendant. It is for this reason that to this day in Mali, seldom do the *djelis* dedicate this song to a non-Tall individual, and, even when they do, they must ask the permission and forgiveness of any Tall member present at the time. Should no member be present or should a Tall family member refuse, the *djeli* will traditionally choose another song to perform. Tradition further claims that because the melody was obtained in exchange of a horse, all horses, including Al-Hajj Umar's, dance to the melody of *Taara*.

Umar spent most of the 1840s in Futa Jalon and settled in the village of Jegunko. There, he established another important Tijaniya Muslim community, which included adepts who came from as far as Freetown and Futa Toro, and completed his principal work, *Kitab Rimab Hizb al-Rahim ala Nubur Hizb al-Rajim* (Kane and Robinson 1984). The book deals with his pilgrimage, authorization and certain aspects of his experiences in Sokoto. This book is today a major reference for Tijaniya followers. After leaving Jegunko, Umar went to Dinguiraye, in present-day Guinea, where he built a fortress. Men of the king of Tamba, Yimba Sakho, attacked the fortress on October 27, 1851 (Soh 1913: 198). Yimba was against Islam and felt threatened by Al-Hajj Umar's proximity to his kingdom.<sup>4</sup> Madina Ly-Tall explains

that Al-Hajj Umar, unable to attack first, provoked Yimba Sakho to attack him by intensifying his recruiting amongst Sakho's people (Ly-Tall 1991). Several of Umar's followers were killed. Al-Hajj Umar decided to retaliate, not only against Sakho, but also against all the non-Muslims of West Africa. He waged the *Jihad*.

### **The *Jihad* of Al-Hajj Umar**

Al-Hajj Umar decided to make a shift in his policy and waged the jihad of the sword instead of spreading Islam through intellectual means.<sup>5</sup> According to Emile Ducoudray, Umar's goal was not to accumulate wealth through the *jihad*. Instead, he wanted to eliminate the non-believers, whom, he felt, weakened the Sudan. He was worried about the establishment of the French on the borders of the Djoliba Lake. Hence, he felt that the only way to fight against this foreign intrusion was to create a unified Islamic empire with one ruler and one God in West Africa (Mahibou and Triaud 1984). He used the *jihad* to accomplish this goal. Boubacar Barry explains that Umar's main goal was to acquire political leadership because his origins prevented him from accessing political power.<sup>6</sup>

In 1852, Umar launched his first war against the king of Tamba, the Mandika kingdom founded by the Sakho lineage in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, set between the Bafing and Tinkisso Rivers. Umar occupied Tamba and renamed it Dabatou, one of the nicknames of Medina. He then returned to Dinguiraye with bigger plans. Indeed, he intended to occupy and convert the powerful regimes of Segu and Kaarta, the two Bamana kingdoms that had established influential non-Muslim faiths in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Segu controlled the middle Niger and was the primary competitor for the caliphate of Hamdullahi. Kaarta

developed in the Sahelian space northeast of upper Senegal and played a decisive role in the Senegal River Valley.

Due to the power of these two kingdoms, Umar enlarged his armies by recruiting men amongst the Muslims and particularly the Fulbe populations of Futa Jalon, Bundu, Futa Toro and several other parts of Senegambia. Throughout the valley of Senegal, Muslim leaders multiplied the calls for the *jihad*, diffused a letter of the *Sheikh* forbidding the Muslims to ally with the French and encouraged the young people into joining Umar's armies (Ba 1991). The latter also secured military ammunitions by buying them from French and British sources on the coast. At the beginning of the campaign, Umar sent a letter to the French Governor Portet in Saint Louis, asking him for an alliance and a promise to sell Tall arms. However, the response from Portet was not positive, hence, Umar turned to individual merchants (Diallo and Wane 1977). This gave him an advantage over his opponents.

In 1855, the kingdom of Kaarta was undergoing a civil war. The king of the Bambara, Mahmady Kandja, was fighting against the Jawara of the Karounga chief. Umar sent an ultimatum to the Massassi king of Kaarta urging him to convert to Islam and destroy his idols. The Bambara answered by sending an army on the right bank of the Bafing River (Ducoudray 1975). Umar and his troops crossed the river two days later. The battle took place next to the small village of Sutukule where the Bambara army was defeated. The Massassi then employed a defensive strategy, which had proven successful in their previous wars against Segou and Massina: "They withdrew to the walled towns of the interior on the assumption that the fortifications would withstand assault and their assailants would desist in the face of the hot dry season" (Robinson 1985: 178). However, each



Massassi lineage was fighting independently, thus allowing the *jihad* to concentrate on each one of them respectively. As a result, Umar and his Futanke *talibes* successfully defeated Koniakary, Yelimane, where the Denibalen were prominent; Medina, where the majority of the population was Siralen; and finally moved toward Nioro, the center of the Monsire group represented by the reigning Kulibali king. There, he combined his operations with those of the Jawara of the Karounga chief, who long had been in rebellion against the Massassi (Robinson 1985).

As he moved toward Nioro, in early April, Umar received oaths of allegiance at each step of the way. Upon reaching the outskirts of the capital, he received the submission of Mahamady Kandja, who swore allegiance and took the necessary steps to convert to Islam. Umar, confident of his victory, marched into Nioro on April 11, 1855, and claimed it in the name of Islam. To emphasize his conviction, he ordered his new Bambara subjects to bring their household shrines to the public square where he smashed them to bits. He then established the guidelines for personal behavior in the new order: the profession of faith in Allah and his prophet Muhammad, the shaved head and cap and the reduction of the number of wives to four, as imposed by Islamic law (Willis 1989). Umar built his first mosque in Nioro, where he preached and educated his new converts on Islamic laws and duties.

However, peace was not totally secured. Indeed, at the beginning of the campaign in Kaarta, the chief of the Jawara had declared Umar an enemy.<sup>7</sup> As long as the Massassi Bambara presented the greatest danger, Karounga had fought alongside Al-Hajj Umar. After the short battle of Kharega, the Jawara broke up with the *talibes*. They wanted to live as an independent nation and refused to abandon

their gods to convert to Islam. They waged a guerrilla resistance. On both sides the losses were dreadful. Finally, in June 1856, Al-Hajj Umar pushed the Jawara toward the east toward the Bakhounou, but their chief Karounga escaped to Diagounte. This kingdom was under the subordination of the powerful kingdom of Segu. Hence, attacking it meant fighting a potential war against Segu. Al-Hadj Umar was hesitant.

Then, the same year, Ahmadu III, third king of Masina, sent an army in defense of Karounga and to thwart Umar's troops. Ducoudray (1975) explains that Ahmadu feared Umar's progress toward the Joliba; thus, he decided to adopt an offensive strategy in order to warn Tall. Robinson agrees with Ducoudray's explanation as he declares, "The Umarian threat was obviously the principal impetus of this intervention" (Robinson 1985: 262). Umar took up the challenge and sent Alpha Umar to fight the battle. On August 9, 1856, the latter surprised and vanquished the troops of Masina. Victory was achieved so quickly that Karounga did not have time to combine his forces with those of Ahmadu III. Umar immediately decided to invade Diagounte in an attempt to capture the Bambara King once and for all. Simultaneously, he sent a letter to the king of Segu contending that his offensive was not directed at him and that he was merely fighting the Jawara (Ly-Tall 1991). Al-Hajj Umar occupied Diagounte on August 19, 1956.

At that point, Umar decided to interrupt his operations as his troops were exhausted from three years of uninterrupted warfare. He established Alpha Umar as his principal lieutenant in Nioro and explained to his other heads of war the necessity to recruit additional men from the Futa and accumulate extra ammunitions. Indeed, bad news was received from the West: In September 1855, the French

General Faidherbe contacted the ruler of Khasso, Dyouka Samballa, and signed an alliance with him. The latter rejected the Muslim faith and was providing refuge to the Massassi from Kaarta. Faidherbe also bought four acres of land in Medina and built a fortress there. "It was realized that the economic and political interests of the French would be in danger if Umar succeeded in removing Dyouka Samballa and installed his anti-French brother, Kartoum Sambaala" (Oloruntimehin 1972: 97). Umar launched the battle for Medina "to oust the French from their position of power in Khasso, and generally in the Senegambian states" (ibid: 94), but decided that the Dyonfutu, his personal guards, would not participate in it.

The war lasted from April to July 1857, during which Umar organized a siege around the fortress. The battle was intercepted by the French General, Faidherbe, who had arrived with heavy artillery to break the siege. The troops of the Shaik were too weak to confront the overwhelming technology of the French and had to retreat on July 15, 1857. Umar sent the Dyonfutu guards to protect the retreat of his army and calm the arrogance of Faidherbe. On July 23, 1853, The Dyonfutu thwarted the progression of Faidherbe three kilometers away from Medina. The French troops did not insist and retreated to Medina. The army was exhausted and discouraged. But on April 15, 1858, the army regained its confidence when the troops of one of the chiefs, Ousman Dhadie, brought back two canons taken from the French in the region of Boundou. The same year, Umar declared his son Ahmadu his successor and assigned him the task of managing the conquered territories (Ducoudray 1975).

In late February 1859, Umar and his troops left for Nioro. Upon their arrival, they were welcomed with bad

news: the Massassi exiled King Karounga was supported by the Bambara of the kingdom of Segu, led by Ali Diara, and was pursuing guerrilla warfare in the region. "Another important moving force was Ahmad al-Bekkey, who watched in growing alarm the approach of the Futanke forces" (Robinson 1985: 262). These rebels' main center of operation was in Marcoia. Hence, on November 20, 1859, the Umarian troops organized a surprise attack on Marcoia and occupied the village the same day due to the advantage provided by the canons (Ducoudray 1975: 56). Four months later, Umar's nephew, Sire Adama, and 300 of his *talibes* were killed in battle against the French in Guemou. Umar did not retaliate. Indeed, his main concern was over the "pagan" kingdom of Segu and the inevitable war he would have to wage against it.

The decade of the 1860s began with negotiations between Umar and French officials regarding their respective positions as ruling powers in the upper Senegal valley (Hanson 1996). Ly-Tall (1991) contests this and declares that Umar vehemently opposed negotiations and any peace with the French. In March 1860, Umar declared the campaign against Segu. His chiefs of war were willing to participate, but they were shocked by his decision to leave behind the women, children and elders whom he considered to be an impediment to his free mobility (Ducoudray 1975). After having successfully conquered Sekubala, Markona and then N'gano, the *Sheikh* was 45 kilometers away from Segu, in Woitala, which was said to be invincible due to its strong fortress and also due to its location on the right bank of the Joliba. Ducoudray (*ibid*) explains that the leaders of Segu were confident that Umar would not venture to cross the Niger River during the rainy season in order to attack Segu.<sup>8</sup> Woitala was the hope of Segu; hence, the better part of its

armed forces was sent to protect the fortress. In September 1860, Umar moved toward Woitala, which became the tomb of his troops as the *talibes* were vanquished. Malian oral tradition claims that to ensure the indestructibility of Segu, 60 live young men as well as 60 virgin girls had been immured in the foundations of the city, and that the magical protection of the palace extended to the fortress in Woitala. Umar launched a new attack on Woitala five days later, to which the latter could not resist. On September 9, 1860, Woitala fell into the hands of Umarian troops. Umar took as an ally Koro Mama, the Maraka chief of Sansanding, an important commercial city in the region, which allowed him to place an embargo on Segu in October 1860. Ducoudray (1975) explains that the cause of the 'infidels' of Segu seemed lost.<sup>9</sup>

The ruler of Segu, Ali Diara, asked for the protection of Ahmadu III, king of Masina, and converted to Islam. Ahmadu III felt contempt for Umar. Tradition holds that in 1839, while Ahmadu III was six or seven years old, Umar visited Seku Ahmadu, Ahmadu III's grandfather. The child is said to have defiantly looked at the *Sheikh* and refused to shake his hand apparently seeing in him a future adversary. In November 1860, the ruler of Masina sent a messenger "to warn Umar that it would be in his best interest to leave the region of Segu, since it was under his protection and had converted to Islam, and to return where he had come from with his arms and luggage" (ibid: 71).<sup>10</sup> Umar, who "obviously had no intention of yielding to Ahmadu's demands, but ... did wish to avoid confrontation for as long as possible" (Robinson 1985: 264), answered by inviting Ahmadu III to join him in his *jihad*. But the latter considered this an insult and responded with an ultimatum: Either the *Sheikh* accept living under his jurisdiction like Ali Diara, or he had to return to from where he came. As stated by

Ly-Tall (1991), Ahmadu III threatened to make Umar endure a gallopade of men and horses that he would remember for a long time as he claimed that the Prophet Muhamad ordered him to destroy people like Umar.<sup>11</sup> Al-Hajj Umar took this response as a declaration of war. Ahmadu III responded by appointing "his paternal uncle, known as Balobo, as leader of the army and began to march towards Segu" (Hanson and Robinson 1991: 35).

On March 9, 1861, after defeating the unprepared troops of Balobo, Umar seized Segu and publicly destroyed the fetishes from the palace of Ali Diara to show that the latter had never converted to Islam. He then destroyed the palace and built a mosque in its place. The *Sheikh* also found proof of collaboration between Ahmadu III and the Kunta leader, Ahmad al-Bekkay, in a joint effort to support the kingdom of Segu against him (Mahibou and Triaud 1984). Umar did not forgive this betrayal by his Muslim brothers and during 1861-1862 he demanded that Ahmadu III surrender the Bamana King, Ali Diara. The ruler of Masina refused, and Umar launched a campaign against Hamdullahi in 1862. On May 15, 1862, Umar conquered Hamdullahi and Alpha Umar captured Ahmadu III, who was on his way to Timbuktu. According to Malian folklore, the latter covered his face in a veil and declared that he preferred to die rather than to have to look at the "Lil' Futanke from Toro" as he contemptuously referred to Al-Hajj Umar. Alpha Umar sent him to Mopti where he was decapitated. The people of Masina declared their submission to Umar and he controlled the kingdom for a year.

However, in May 1863, Bekkay organized a revolt with his Masinanke followers and killed most of Umar's *talibes* as well as his brave chief Alpha Umar, who was on his way to Timbuktu from a victorious battle in Namandiyi where he

had gone to assist one of the young officers, Alpha Ardo, who was encircled by enemy troops. Umar could not recover from this loss as he had invested most of his ammunition and the majority of his men with Alpha Ardo, then with Alpha Umar, "Ahmadu Sheku, soon to be tied down by revolts in Segu and Sinsani was in no position to bring relief" (Robinson 1985: 309). The Masinanke and Bekkay then established a siege on Hamdullahi from June 1863 to February 1864. During the night of Saturday, February 6, 1864, Umar and a small group of about 100 relatives and *talibes* escaped after the coalition lit fires around the palace. They reached Degembere, where they hoped to meet the troops mobilized by his son Tijani. But Balobo and his troops forced them into the cliffs on February 10, 1864.

Umar declared he would surrender if he was allowed to pray and prepare for one more day, but his foes were informed that it was an attempt for him to gain more time for Tijani's return (Ducoudray 1975). Hence, they set fire to the mouths of the cave. Umar disappeared in the cliffs of Degembere, near Bandiagara. For this reason, those of Al-Hajj Umar's descendants named after him are usually addressed by the *griots* as "Umar, from Halwar and from Degembere." His body was never found. Tijani did arrive within 24 hours of the incident and defeated the coalition, but it was too late for his father. Much speculation surrounds the fact that his body was never found. The Masinanke declare that the fire exploded the gunpowder of Umar (Robinson 1985), while his family declares he was seen one last time galloping toward the east covered in a white coat. In any case, to this day, the Dogon have taken up the responsibility of guarding the entrance to the cave, which they consider sacred.

### **Conclusion: After the *Jihad*, the Impediments to the Formation of a State**

Al-Hajj Umar had designed a *jihad* to spread Islam by destroying non-believers. He had the vision of a unified Sudan under one ruler, one God and one faith. In the process he was more preoccupied with mobilizing troops for war and he overlooked establishing political institutions, thus foresaking the establishment of an Islamic state. This lack of structure presented an impediment to his sons who were unable to retain authority after his death. Today, Umar Tall's legacy persists in West Africa primarily for the followers of the Tijaniya. Much religious guidance is expected from members of his lineage. Politically, in much of West Africa, especially in Mali where he led the most brutal campaigns, an unspoken resolution to allow members of the Tall family access to the political arena persists out of fear of history repeating itself. Personally, as a female member of the Tall clan, Umar Tall's *jihad* provides me with a sense of pride but also a religious responsibility toward Islam. Therefore, despite the controversy generated by his *jihad*, and the debate over his real intentions, Al-Hajj Umar still remains one of the great figures in West African history, whose life is worth studying, if for nothing else, to learn how great kingdoms, such as those of Segu and Masina, fell to Islam.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> « Le Fouta compte un grand nombre d'hommes de la valeur de on père. Mais une femme comparable a ma mère, je n'en ai pas laissé dans mon pays et je vous assure qu'il n'y en a pas non plus chez vous » (Ly-Tall 1991: 77).

<sup>2</sup> « Regardez bien cet enfant, il avait dit, car il vous commandera un jour! » (Ducoudray 1975: 18).

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Bello « ne voulait plus s'en séparer, allant jusqu'à comparer une telle séparation a la mort » (Ly-Tall 1991: 118).

<sup>4</sup> Madina Ly-Tall explique, « Plus craint qu'aime, Yimba fut lâché par un grand nombre de Jallonke et de Manding des l'installation de Saiku Umar a Dingiray » (Ly-Tall 1991: 179).

<sup>5</sup> « Je ne fais pas la guerre pour avoir de l'or. Si j'avais le seul désir de m'enrichir ou de commander, je pourrais maintenant me reposer. Ce n'est pas cela que je veux. Ce que je veux, c'est faire la guerre aux infidèles et aux mauvaises gens. Ce que je veux, c'est les détruire eux, leurs chefferies guerrières, leurs royaumes décadents et querelleurs qui affaiblissant le Soudan ... J'ai appris pendant mon séjour en Orient ce dont étaient capables les Toubabs et quelle était leur puissance. Des chefs du Soudan qui se comportent plutôt comme de ruses marchands pensent que les Toubabs s'en tendront seulement a leurs comptoirs du fleuve... » (Ducoudray 1975: 29).

<sup>6</sup> « Shayk Umar était exclu des le départ, par ses origines, du pouvoir politique par la classe dirigeante héréditaire » (Barry 1998: 225).

<sup>7</sup> « Les ennemis de mes ennemis sont mes amis » (Ducoudray 1975: 37).

<sup>8</sup> « Jamais Al-Hajj Umar ne se hasarderait, en pleine saison des pluies a traverser le Niger pour marcher sur Segou, avec dans le dos, la menace permanente que ferait peser sur ses arrières une armée concentrée a Oitala » (Ducoudray 1975: 65).

<sup>9</sup> « La cause des infidels de Segou semblait perdue » (Ducoudray 1975: 72).

<sup>10</sup> Al-Hajj Umar himself declared, « Ahmad prétendait que si nous ne renoncions pas au gihad contre ces infidèles, il n'y aurait plus d'autre issue entre lui et nous que la guerre » (Mahibou and Triaud 1984: 76).

<sup>11</sup> « On lui ferait subir une galopade d'hommes et de chevaux dont il se souviendrait longtemps, car le prophète Mohamed ordonne de détruire les gens comme lui, Omar » (Ly-Tall 1991: 300).

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