

## Introduction

This book is a study of the West African chronicle known as the *Tārīkh al-fattāsh* (The Chronicle of the Inquisitive Researcher) and its role in advancing a political project, the legitimation of the Caliphate of Ḥamdallāhi (1818–1862), located in what is now the Republic of Mali.<sup>1</sup> In reconstructing this story, I have brought together two bodies of literature that have often crossed paths, but whose relationship has not been fully explored until now. The first is the critical scholarship produced over the past hundred years or more on the *Tārīkh al-fattāsh*. The second is the scholarly literature on the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century West African Islamic revolutions and the Caliphate of Ḥamdallāhi.

Based on a thorough analysis of extant manuscript materials, my study contributes to a new understanding of the *Tārīkh al-fattāsh* and the events that called it into being. Since the time of its “discovery” by European travelers and scholars in the late nineteenth century, the chronicle has been understood to be a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century work that was subjected to later textual manipulation. In fact, as the research presented here will show, the *Tārīkh al-fattāsh* is a fully fledged nineteenth-century chronicle written by Nūḥ b. al-Ṭāhir (d. 1857–8), a Fulani scholar belonging to the elite of Ḥamdallāhi, who composed it to enhance the legitimacy of the founding ruler of the caliphate, Aḥmad Lobbo (d. 1845), during a time of competing claims to authority in the Middle Niger. Nūḥ b. al-Ṭāhir did not, however, compose the *Tārīkh al-fattāsh* from scratch, but produced it by modifying an older chronicle, which I have named the *Tārīkh Ibn al-Mukhtār*, or “The Chronicle of Ibn al-Mukhtār,” after the author

<sup>1</sup> As explained below, the *Tārīkh al-fattāsh* only exists in printed form in a flawed edition (Octave V. Houdas and Maurice Delafosse [ed. and trans.], *Tarikh el-fettach par Mahmoud Kati et l'un de ses petit fils ou Chronique du chercheur pour servir à l'histoire des villes, des armées et des principaux personnages du Tekrour* [Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1913] [henceforth *La chronique du chercheur*]).

who wrote it during the second half of the seventeenth century. Nūḥ b. al-Ṭāhir transformed the *Tārīkh Ibn al-Mukhtār* into a new work by extensively refashioning its text and introducing an authoritative prophecy dating to the time of the Songhay Empire (1468–1591), which “foretells” the advent of Aḥmad Lobbo. Eventually, he ascribed the complete work to the sixteenth-century scholar Maḥmūd Ka’ti b. al-Ḥājj al-Mutawakkil Ka’ti al-Kurminī al-Tinbukī al-Wa’kurī, known more simply as Maḥmūd Ka’ti (d. 1593).<sup>2</sup>

My unmasking of this very skillful textual manipulation represents the first historiographical contribution of my book: I unravel the complex history of the *Tārīkh al-fattāsh*, which has caused scholars to spill much ink since the 1890s, when the French journalist Albert Félix Dubois (d. 1945) first heard of it while in West Africa. However, as Marc Bloch underlines in his classic meditation, *The Historian’s Craft*:

To establish the fact of forgery is not enough. It is further necessary to discover its motivations . . . Above all, a fraud is, in its way, a piece of evidence. Merely to prove that the famous charter of Charlemagne to the church of Aix-la-Chapelle is not authentic is to avoid an error, but not to acquire knowledge. On the other hand, should we succeed in proving that the forgery was committed by the followers of Frederick Barbarossa, and that it was designed to implement dreams of imperial grandeur, we open new vistas upon the vast perspectives of history.<sup>3</sup>

In the case of the *Tārīkh al-fattāsh*, simply identifying the sections of the chronicle that were forged to support Aḥmad Lobbo will prevent scholars from using these nineteenth-century passages as evidence for earlier history. Moreover, a serious inquiry into the history of the *Tārīkh al-fattāsh* can do much more than correct potential anachronisms. The very fact of the chronicle’s production in the nineteenth century triggers a set of new historical questions: Why did a supporter of Aḥmad Lobbo and of the caliphate manipulate older

<sup>2</sup> With the generous support of a National Endowment for Humanities – Scholarly Editions and Translations grant, I am currently preparing, with Ali H. Diakité, (Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, Saint John’s University) and Zachary Wright (Northwestern University in Qatar) a new critical edition and translation of the *Tārīkh Ibn al-Mukhtār* and of the *Tārīkh al-fattāsh*.

<sup>3</sup> Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft: Reflections on the Nature and Uses of History and the Techniques and Methods of Those Who Write It*, trans. Peter Putnam (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 93.

texts? Why was Aḥmad Lobbo in need of this intervention? And what kind of state did he rule over? Answering these questions opens new windows on the history of the Caliphate of Ḥamdallāhi, and on wider issues of legitimacy, authority, and the status of literacy and its political functions in nineteenth-century West Africa – with further implications for a broader understanding of the region within the Islamic ecumene. In addition to proving that the *Tārīkh al-fattāsh* is a nineteenth-century chronicle written to bolster the Caliphate of Ḥamdallāhi, *Sultan, Caliph, and the Renewer of the Faith* seeks to answer these other historical questions.<sup>4</sup>

### The Caliphate of Ḥamdallāhi

Because this book is a study of the *Tārīkh al-fattāsh* and its production in a specific context, the Caliphate of Ḥamdallāhi, I begin with a brief historical survey of this state, which is still quite sparsely documented. To date, the most comprehensive studies are the classic work by Amadou Hampaté Ba and the French ichthyologist Jacques Daget, *L'empire peul du Macina, 1818–1853*, first published in 1955;<sup>5</sup> and the study of the historian Bintou Sanankoua, entitled *Un empire peul au XIXe siècle: la Diina du Maasina*, published in 1990.<sup>6</sup> In addition to these monographs, another important, but unpublished contribution is the 1969 Ph.D. dissertation of William A. Brown, “The Caliphate of

<sup>4</sup> I expand here on a theory that I have already sketched in Mauro Nobili and M. Shahid Mathee, “Towards a new study on the *Tārīkh al-fattāsh*,” *History in Africa* 42 (2015): 37–73; Mauro Nobili, “A propaganda document in support of the 19th century Caliphate of Ḥamdallāhi: Nūḥ b. al-Tāhir al-Fulānī’s ‘Letter on the appearance of the twelfth caliph’ (*Risāla fī zhubūr al-khalīfa al-thānī ‘ashar*),” *Afriques* 7 (2016) [<http://journals.openedition.org/afriques/1922>]; and Mauro Nobili, “New reinventions of the Sahel: reflections on the *tārīḥ* genre in the Timbuktu historiographical production, seventeenth to twentieth centuries,” in *Landscapes, Sources and Intellectual Projects of the West African Past: Essays in Honour of Paulo Fernando de Moraes Farias*, edited by Toby Green and Benedetta Rossi (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), 201–219.

<sup>5</sup> *L'empire peul* was first published in 1955 (Amadou Hampaté Ba and Jacques Daget, *L'empire peul du Macina, 1818–1853* [Dakar: Institut Français d’Afrique Noire, 1955]) and then reprinted several times. In this book, I used a 1980s reprint (Amadou Hampaté Ba and Jacques Daget, *L'empire peul du Macina, 1818–1853* [Abidjan: Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines, 1984] [henceforth *L'empire peul*]).

<sup>6</sup> Bintou Sanankoua, *Un empire peul au XIXe siècle: La Diina du Maasina* (Paris: Karthala/ACCT, 1990).

Hamdullahi, ca. 1818–1864: A Study in African History and Tradition.”<sup>7</sup> These three studies, which only provide cursory references to the *Tārikh al-fattāsh*, differ substantially from each other.<sup>8</sup> *L’empire peul du Macina* is a problematic account of the history of the caliphate, in which source-driven narratives are often intertwined with more imaginative reconstructions by the authors.<sup>9</sup> Sanankoua’s work is an expansion of her Ph.D. dissertation and, although much less comprehensive, *Un empire peul* remains a valuable account of the caliphate that dedicates ample space to its administration.<sup>10</sup> Brown’s dissertation is a very different type of work. Rough, sometimes resembling a series of extensive notes, it offers a thematic history that provides an indispensable foundation for any study of Ḥamdallāhi. [MAPS 1 and 2]

All of these works employ different names for the state founded by Aḥmad Lobbo, which extended over much of the Middle Niger, a region that can be roughly defined as the strip of land along the Niger between the Malian towns of Ké-Macina (65 miles east of Segou) and Gourma Rharous (72 miles east of Timbuktu).<sup>11</sup> Hampaté Ba and

<sup>7</sup> William A. Brown, “The Caliphate of Hamdullahi, ca. 1818–1864: A Study in African History and Tradition” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1969). Another important contribution, although much more limited in scope and length, is Marion Johnson’s article on the economic foundations of the caliphate, which focuses on taxation, trade, and production: Marion Johnson, “The economic foundations of an Islamic theocracy: The case of Masina,” *Journal of African History* 17/4 (1976): 481–495. See also the short biographies of Aḥmad Lobbo: Mamadou Diallo, “Sekou Amadou,” in *Culture et civilisation islamiques: Le Mali*, edited by Abdelhadi Boutaleb (Casablanca: Organisation islamique pour l’éducation, les sciences et la culture, 1408), 163–166; Mohamed Diagayeté, “Aḥmad Lobbo (1776–1845): His works and correspondence,” *Annual Review of Islam in Africa* 12/2 (2015): 67–70.

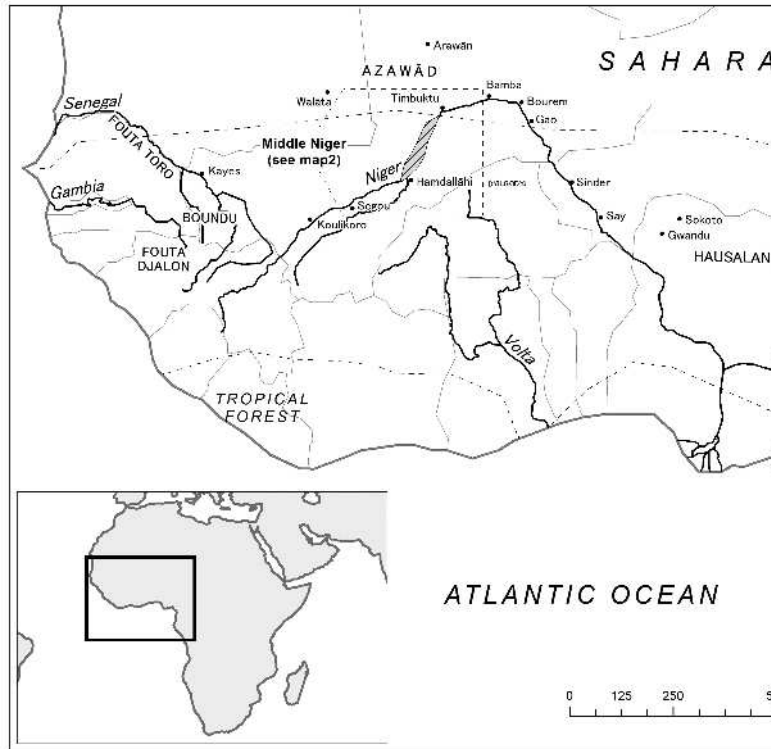
<sup>8</sup> For references to the *Tārikh al-fattāsh* in these works, see *L’empire peul*, 280; Brown, “The Caliphate of Hamdullahi,” 7; Sanankoua, *Un empire peul*, 84.

<sup>9</sup> On this aspect of Hampaté Ba and Daget’s work, see Bernard Salvaing, “La question de l’influence de la Qādiriyya sur les débuts du califat de Ḥamdallāhi” (unpublished paper).

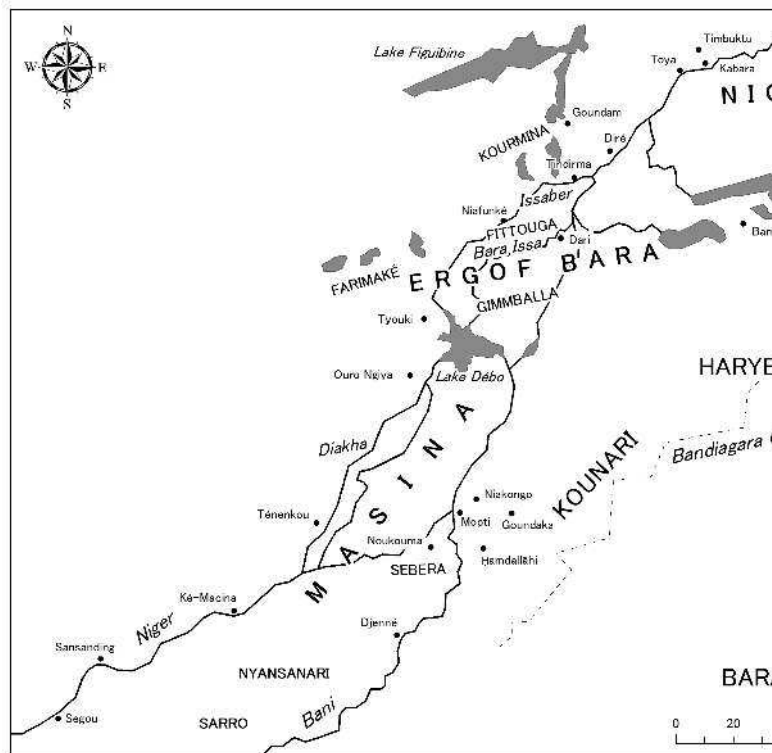
<sup>10</sup> Bintou Sanankoua-Diarrah, “L’organisation politique du Maasina (Diina), 1818–1862” (Ph.D. dissertation, Paris I – Sorbonne, 1982).

<sup>11</sup> The Middle Niger was a multi-ethnic region inhabited by the semi-nomadic river folk usually referred to as Bozo, the Somono, who were boatmen, the agriculturalist Bambara, Dogon, and Marka (the latter also devoted to trade), as well as the herdsman Fulani, Arabs and Tuareg, and the Songhay, who specialize in different occupations. Good introductions to the geography and the people of the Middle Niger are Jean Gallais, *Le delta intérieur du Niger: étude de géographie régionale*, 2 vols. (Dakar: IFAN, 1967); Roderick J. McIntosh, *The Peoples of the Middle Niger: The Island of Gold* (Malden, MA: Blackwell,

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Map 1: West Africa (Copyright Wataru Morioka)



Map 2: The Middle Niger (Copyright Wataru Morioka)

Daget name it the Fulani Empire of Masina, with explicit reference to the ethnicity of Aḥmad Lobbo and many of his followers, the Fulani, and to the region in which the movement emerged, Masina, a toponym often used in reference to the floodplain of the Inland Delta Niger.<sup>12</sup> Sanankoua adopts the term Diina, from the Arabic *dīn* (religion), which is the name preferred by the people of central Mali. Brown chooses the term Caliphate of Ḥamdallāhi, from the name of its capital.<sup>13</sup> I have aligned myself with Brown's choice, aware that the term "caliphate" and its definition are contentious in Islamic history.<sup>14</sup> Although originally designed to refer to the ultimate Muslim authority, as Mervyn Hiskett points out, "the title *khalīfa* became somewhat devalued in the course of the Middle Ages, in that it was used increasingly frequently by local Muslim rulers who had no serious claim to worldwide authority."<sup>15</sup> In nineteenth-century West Africa "the true significance" of the terms "caliph" and "caliphate" lies "in the fact that both of them imply absolute rejection of the secular and profane *mulk/malik*," i.e. "kingship" and "king."<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the name

1998); and Roderick J. McIntosh, *Ancient Middle Niger: Urbanism and the Self-Organizing Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> The approximate limits of the modern Inland Delta Niger are Ké-Macina and the lakes Débo and Korientzé, with a total of about 21,000 square miles. The rise of the water in the Inland Delta is the result of the increased flow rate of the Niger and of the Bani as a consequence of the rainfalls upstream of the floodplain, in the Guinea highlands and in northwestern Côte d'Ivoire. Thus, while in the Inland Delta the river stays in its riverbed during the rainy season of June–September, its water then starts to increase, and reaches its highest levels in December and January, during the coldest time of the year. Later, in February, the level of the river decreases, and eventually, in May, during the hot season, the water reaches its lowest level. For a description of the seasonal cycle of the Middle Niger and of the water regime of the river, see Gallais, *Le delta intérieur*, vol. 1, 73–76.

<sup>13</sup> The name of the capital was in fact Ḥamdallāhi, a Fulanized version of the Arabic al-ḥamdu li-[A]llāhi, "praise be to God" (Sanankoua, *Un empire peul*, 78).

<sup>14</sup> In a recent study on the shifting definition of the caliphate, Hugh Kennedy underlines that "there is no one way, no single template or legal framework that defines caliphate . . . There has never been one generally agreed view of what powers the office should have, who is qualified to be caliph and how caliphs should be chosen" (Hugh Kennedy, *Caliphate: The History of an Idea* [New York: Basic Books, 2016], xvi–xvii).

<sup>15</sup> Mervyn Hiskett, *The Development of Islam in West Africa* (London: Longman, 1987), 172.

<sup>16</sup> Hiskett, *The Development of Islam*, 173. On the terms "caliph" and "caliphate," see D. Sourdel, A. K. S. Lambton, F. De Jong, and P. M. Holt, s.v.

that Brown employs captures the central claim made in the *Tārikh al-fattāsh* that Aḥmad Lobbo was a West African caliph.

The establishment of the caliphate in the early nineteenth century put an end to a period of political fragmentation in the Middle Niger begun with the Moroccan conquest of the Songhay Empire in 1591.<sup>17</sup> By 1618 the Moroccan sultans stopped appointing the *pāshās*, North African delegates who ruled the Middle Niger from their new capital in Timbuktu, and ceased sending replacements for the army – a clear sign of diminished interest in their territorial possession in West Africa. Eventually, by 1660, the one-time Moroccan “colony” became a de facto independent state on the Niger between Masina and Gao, usually referred to by historians as the Pāshālik of Timbuktu. The period of the pāshālik was characterized by the rule of more or less autonomous cities with garrisons under military leaders (*qā'id*), who were selected by the Arma, the descendants of Moroccan soldiers who had settled in the sub-Saharan region and intermarried locally, developing into a warrior class of mestizo Songhay.<sup>18</sup> The Arma garrisons' commandants acknowledged, at least formally, the authority of the *pāshā* of Timbuktu, but

“Khalīfa,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam 2nd edition*, edited by P. J. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1954–2007) (henceforth *EI*<sup>2</sup>), 937–953.

<sup>17</sup> For a study of the Moroccan conquest and of the Songhay resistance, see Lansine Kaba, “Archers, musketeers, and mosquitoes: The Moroccan invasion of the Sudan and the Songhay resistance (1591–1612),” *Journal of African History* 22 (1981): 457–75. The fall of the Songhay state and period that followed are analyzed in detail in Michel Abitbol, *Tombouctou et les arma: de la conquête marocaine du soudan nigérien en 1591 à l'hégémonie de l'empire peulh du macina en 1833* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1979); and Elizabeth Hodgkin, “Social and Political Relations on the Niger Bend in the Seventeenth Century” (Ph.D. dissertation, Birmingham University, 1987). See also Fatima Harrak and El Houssain El Moujahid (eds.), *Le Maroc et l'Afrique subsaharienne aux débuts des temps modernes: les Sa'adiens et l'empire Songhay: actes du colloque international organisé par l'Institut des études africaines, Marrakech, 23–25 octobre 1992* (Rabat: Publication de l'Institut des Études Africaines, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> Scholars, starting with Paul Marty, *Islam et les tribus du Soudan*, vol. 2: *La région de Tombouctou (Islam Songäi): Dienné, le Macina et dépendances (Islam Peul)* (Paris: Leroux, 1920), 7, derive the term “Arma” from the Arabic *al-rumāt*, plural form of *al-rāmin*, “rifleman.” Hodgkin advances an alternative hypothesis, derived from a note by Paulo F. de Moraes Farias in a personal communication, according to which “in Spanish and Portuguese arma means not only weapons but also each of the different corps within the army, the infantry, artillery, etc. In this context it should be remembered that Spanish was the lingua franca of the Arma, at least in the early years” (Hodgkin, “Social and Political Relations,” 19, n. 1).



the *qā'ids* enforced an indirect rule in these city-states, leaving the administration mainly in the hands of traditional authorities. No real influence was established outside these Arma-ruled cities of the Middle Niger and the Niger Bend, such as Djenné, Timbuktu, Bamba, and Gao.

Among the territories under the Arma's dominion, Masina was only loosely controlled. In fact, the emergence of the *pāshālik* overlapped in the area with that of nomad Fulani warrior aristocracies. Each Fulani clan was led by a chief, or *ardō* in Fulfulde, and all the *ardōs*, in turn, recognized the authority of the *ardō mawdō*, or "great *ardō*." The latter was the chief of Masina, and belonged to the military elite of the Dikko, a sub-clan of the Jalluḡe, who gravitated around the area of Ouro Ngiya, southwest of the Lake Débo. The Fulani elites never really imposed a centralized state in the region, but remained satisfied with their nomadic lifestyle. More concrete control was exercised, starting from the eighteenth century, by the Bambara *famas* ("kings" in Bambara) of Segou, first with Biton Koulibaly (r. 1712–1755) and then under the Diarra dynasty (1766–1861).<sup>19</sup>

By the late 1810s the rising discontent over the political situation of Masina, characterized by the dominion of the powerful Bambara *famas* and the local Fulani warrior aristocracy, led an increasingly large number of followers to rally around Aḥmad Lobbo, a member of the Sangaré-Bari sub-clan of the Fittoḡe, and future caliph of Ḥamdallāhi. Initially, Aḥmad Lobbo avoided entering into conflict with the local military elites, but he had an increasingly tense relationship with the religious establishment of Djenné, the most important scholarly center of the southern Middle Niger. However, the stronger the opposition of the religious authorities was, the larger the group of Aḥmad Lobbo's partisans became.<sup>20</sup> The composition of his

<sup>19</sup> On the Bambara state of Segou, see the classic Charles Monteil, *Les Bambara du Segou et du Kaarta: étude historique, ethnographique et littéraire d'une peuplade du Soudan Français* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1977), 3–102; Louis Tauxier, *Histoire des Bambara* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1942); or the more recent Richard L. Roberts, *Warriors, Merchants, and Slaves: The State and the Economy in the Middle Niger Valley, 1700–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 21–71; and Sundiata A. Djata, *The Bamana Empire by the Niger: Kingdom, Jihad, and Colonization, 1712–1920* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> For an analysis of the socio-economic discontent of the people of the southern Middle Niger at the dawn of Ḥamdallāhi, see Brown, "The Caliphate of Hamdullahi," 110–116.

supporters – rural scholars, Fulani not belonging to the warrior aristocracy, and Marka communities – indicates that Aḥmad Lobbo had gathered around him those with a shared animosity toward the Djenné elite, the Fulani nobility, and the Bambara overlords.<sup>21</sup> At the time, a reciprocal relationship existed between the Muslim scholars of Djenné, the Arma, the Fulani Dikko, and the Bambara overlords, all of whom supported and legitimized each other to maintain the status quo. The tension between the scholarly elite of Djenné and Aḥmad Lobbo eventually translated into his followers' open hostility toward the Fulani military aristocracies and the Bambara of Segou. This hostility crystallized in the aftermath of the “incident of Simay,” which took place sometime in 1816–17.

According to oral traditions, this event took place after the ruler of Djenné ordered Aḥmad Lobbo and his followers to abandon his house there. While Aḥmad Lobbo was delaying his departure, one of his disciples met Arđo Gidaađo, son of Arđo Aamadou, the acting *arđo mawđo* of the Middle Niger, in the market of Simay, a village located just north of Djenné. There, Arđo Gidaađo mistreated Aḥmad Lobbo's disciple and urged him to tell his master to leave the area. To add insult to injury, Arđo Gidaađo stole the disciple's robe. Aḥmad Lobbo, who had gained strong support among the inhabitants of the region, then directly challenged the authority of the *arđo*. He sent another of his disciples, Ali Gidaađo, to the same market the next week, with the charge of asking the *arđo* to give back the robe he had stolen. He further instructed that, if Arđo Gidaađo was unwilling, he should be killed. As expected, Arđo Gidaađo refused to return the stolen robe and began to insult Aḥmad Lobbo, provoking Ali Gidaađo to kill the *arđo*.

At this point, open conflict between Aḥmad Lobbo's followers and the Fulani warrior elite was inevitable. Arđo Aamadou successfully sought the support of Da (d. 1827), the Bambara king of Segou, as

<sup>21</sup> Scholars often describe the Caliphate of Ḥamdallāhi as the result of a Fulani upheaval (see, for example, Madina Ly-Tall, “Massina and the Torodbe (Tukuloor) Empire until 1878,” in *General History of Africa*, vol. 6: *Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s*, edited by J. F. Ade Ajayi [Paris: UNESCO, 1989], 600–635, 601; and Murray Last, “Reform in West Africa: The jihād movements of the nineteenth century,” in *History of West Africa*, vol. 2, edited by J. F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder [Harlow: Longman, 1987], 1–47, 33). However, the inter-ethnic composition of the movement led by Aḥmad Lobbo was built around the need to challenge the local authorities, both religious and political, and to revoke Segou overlordship from the area.