The Bamana Empire by the Niger: Kingdom, Jihad and Colonization, 1712-1920, and: War on the Savannah: The Military Collapse of the Sokoto Caliphate under the Invasion of the British Empire, 1897-1903 (review)

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which encounters with Pacific Islanders made an impact on European Enlightenment society. Included in the volume are a few Pacific Islander perspectives, although European words and deeds still assume center stage. As the book's title perhaps suggests, both the voyage and beach remain places of European activity, while Pacific Islanders remain hidden behind the thick, seemingly impenetrable landscape.

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The Bamana Empire by the Niger: Kingdom, Jihad and Colonization, 1712–1920. By SUNDIATA A. DJATA. Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997. Pp. xv + 251. $39.95 (cloth); $16.95 (paper).

War on the Savannah: The Military Collapse of the Sokoto Caliphate under the Invasion of the British Empire, 1897–1903. By RISTO MARJOMAA. Helsinki: Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, 1998. Pp. 305. $25.00.

The books under review here are works of military history, though with radically different agendas. *War on the Savannah* is the more conventional of the two. In chronicling the British conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate of Northern Nigeria, Risto Marjomaa offers the most elaborate comparison yet drawn between a European army and that of its African enemy, in terms of "strategy, battlefield tactics, weaponry and the background and motivation of the troops involved" (p. 7). Sundiata A. Djata's monograph is quite another matter. Its overriding aims are to "legitimize" the Bamana empire of the Niger River valley, perhaps pre-colonial West Africa's most thoroughly militarized state system, and to show how the Bamana people managed to retain their identity despite being conquered by a Tukolor Muslim army in 1861 and then by the French thirty years later. In the process, we learn a great deal about the role of the military in state-building in pre-colonial Africa, and about the comparative strengths and weaknesses of the West African and French styles of imperialism. At the dawn of the twentieth century, the Sokoto Caliphate of Northern Nigeria was the largest of the handful of African states that had escaped being picked off by the European powers during the previous century. Its conquest by the African soldiers and British officers and NCOs of the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) from 1897 to 1903 is the subject of Risto Marjomaa's book. *War on the Savannah* provides readers with the first

complete, systematic, and, most importantly, comparative account of this cataclysmic event.

The conflict in Northern Nigeria pitted two civilizations against each other that differed sharply not only in terms of social and political structures and cultural values, but also with respect to military organization, technology, and methods of warfare. The Caliphate's demise, Marjomaa contends, was rendered inevitable by its strategic and tactical inflexibility. The empire was further hampered by the autonomy of its constituent emirates, that precluded the establishment of a common defense and allowed the invading British to pick them off one by one. The empire lacked a standing army and relied for its defense on walled cities vulnerable to modern artillery and feudal levies commanded by aristocratic amateurs. The latter's brave cavalry charges were no match for the WAFF square, bristling with magazine rifles and machine guns. As the British marched in, the Caliphate made none of the political or military adjustments required to give its survival a fighting chance. Military innovations such as night attacks were never contemplated, much less tried, with the result that the British held the initiative in the war from beginning to end, forcing the Caliphate's armies to fight at times and places of their enemy's choosing—a certain recipe for disaster in warfare in general, and colonial warfare in particular.

There is nothing particularly path breaking in Marjomaa's analysis of the Caliphate's defeat. The elements of his diagnosis can be found in earlier accounts such as *Concerning Brave Captains* (1964) by D. J. M. Muffett, R. A. Adeleye's *Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria* (1971), and *Warfare in the Sokoto Caliphate* (1977) by Joseph P. Smaldone. What Marjomaa has to offer is a fuller and more evenhanded history of the war, based on his careful use of British primary materials and of documents available in Nigerian archives. "I am under the impression," he writes, "that no other work is based on as exhaustive a use of military sources from both sides of the war as is the present study" (p. 7).

Marjomaa's end product, however, is something verging on a still life, or as Smaldone has written, a "snapshot." Thus, although Marjomaa acknowledges that the Caliphate had tried to arm itself with modern weaponry and had worked at developing a more modern military bureaucracy, these efforts are firmly consigned to the past, not seen as part of a process that was rudely interrupted by the British invasion. Nor does the author seem to sense the regenerative power of religion, unfortunately never fully realized, in the Caliphate's ranks. Thus, he ignores the potential for a more successful resistance that emerged when, for example, the ruler of the Caliphate, Sultan Atta-

hiru, invoked the ancient Muslim tradition of the *hijra,* mass migration to escape the enemy and regroup for future battle.

It is good to have Marjomaa's more complete, comparative account of this important colonial war. *War on the Savannah* is not, however, that elusive historical quantity, the "definitive" study. Should Marjomaa be asked to prepare a second edition, he would be well advised to temper the sense of inevitability that suffuses his narrative. Perhaps the best way to do this would be to at least consider some alternative scenarios. What, for instance, would the exceedingly cautious British government have done, preoccupied as it was with the Boers and the Russian threat to India, if the WAFF had lost a battle? Send in an army of revenge a la Kitchener at Omdurman, as Marjomaa suggests? Or cut its losses and make peace, as in the First Boer War? Roughly 1,000 km west of the Sokoto Caliphate lies Segu, the homeland of the Bamana people, perhaps better known to non-African historians as the Bambara, the name given them by the French. This region, in the middle Niger River valley in what is today the Republic of Mali, is, of course, the setting for Maryse Conde's great novel, *Segu*. In the early eighteenth century, the Bamana forged a powerful kingdom or Fanga along the middle Niger. A century later, having conquered the kingdoms of Kaarta and Khasso to the northwest, the kingdom became an empire.

Although preceded by a shelf full of books on the "Bambara" by French scholars, *Bamana Empire by the Niger* is the first book-length study of the subject in English. What sets author Djata's monograph apart is his effort to relate the story of the rise and fall of the Bamana Fanga from the perspective of the Bamana themselves, and his extensive use of oral history collections in Mali in crafting his account. From the beginning of its existence, the Fanga was a state built on and for war. Unlike the Sokoto Caliphate, which relied on noble cavalrymen and feudal levies for defense, the Bamana Empire boasted a large standing army centered around a musket-wielding royal bodyguard (the *Tòn*). The main use to which this formidable force was put was perpetual slave raiding and looting. One doesn't have to follow Richard L. Roberts in his description of Bamana slave raiding as a productive enterprise like shoemaking or maize tilling to recognize that this acquisitive army was the very core of the Bamana economy and political system. Warfare, writes Djata, was "the principal expression of state power and remained the primary form of enterprise, an expression of the internal cohesion of the state, and . . . an engine of economic growth" (p. 17).

In 1861, however, the Fanga succumbed to the jihad army of the great Tukolor prophet and *almamy* (leader), al-Hajj 'Umar, and for the

next thirty years constituted the unhappy heartland of a vast Tukolor empire stretching from the rain forests of Guinea to Timbuktu on the Niger bend. In 1891, the wheel turned once again and the Bamana found themselves being "liberated" by a French-led African army then in the process of taking over the Western Sudan from the Tukolors. Pious hopes that the French would leave after performing their act of liberation proved groundless, and the Bamana state vanished forever, becoming a *cercle* in the administrative apparatus of French West Africa and the favored recruiting ground for the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais,* France's black African colonial army.

Djata's analysis of the downfall of the Bamana empire is deceptive. Although the 'Umarian jihad was clearly running out of steam by 1861, one should not, as Djata does, underestimate the role of religious zeal in the Tukolor triumph. The resolutely animist Bamana were, after all, deemed the wickedest of the *almamy*'s enemies. An equally important factor in the Fanga's collapse, internal dissension within the Bamana empire, is largely ignored by Djata, who prefers to see pre-conquest Segu as "economically and politically stable," with its military prestige still intact (p. 25). Obliged, however, to explain how such a formidable state could have succumbed so quickly to invasion, Djata takes refuge in the all too common alibi of enemy superiority in modern weaponry. "The occupation of Segu by 'Umar was achieved," he writes, "due to superior weapons used by the 'Umarian army" (p. 25), by which he seems to mean the Tukolor army's possession of two artillery pieces taken from the French.

In fact, in the years just prior to the Tukolor onslaught, royal power in Segu was on the decline as long-standing praetorian tendencies of the military began to reassert themselves. Rebellion among subject peoples was also rife on the eve of the Bamana defeat. As Cissoko Sékéne Mody points out in his study of Khasso during this period, *Le Khasso face à l'empire toucouleur et à la France dans le Haut-Sénégal, 1854–1890* (1988), although they would later regret it, in the 1860s the Khassonké welcomed the 'Umarian army as liberators from Bamana tyranny.

Djata also exaggerates Bamana resistance to the French takeover in the 1890s. There was resistance, centered on the old royal family and drowned in blood, but there was also extensive collaboration, as the warrior class flocked to the French standard. The French had been recruiting "Bambara" soldiers since the 1850s, but the process accelerated greatly in the 1880s and '90s. The French ranked the "Bambara" as West Africa's premier "martial race" and, given Djata's description of the ruthless, slaving *Tòn,* it is not hard to see why. By the turn of

the century, the bulk of the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* were being recruited from the old Bamana empire and the "Bambara" language had become the lingua franca of their other ranks.

Students of both the pre-colonial and colonial eras in West Africa will welcome the appearance of *Bamana Empire on the Niger,* in spite of its shortcomings. If it does nothing more than encourage closer attention to the role of the military in state-building in pre-colonial Africa, it will have served a salutary purpose.

It should be cause for considerable shame to Markus Wiener of Princeton that the publishers of *War on the Savannah,* working in a language not their own, should have produced a book far freer of errors in spelling and grammar than their own. I can only conclude from reading the book that Markus Wiener never saw fit to engage an editor or proofreader to assist their West African author, who should not be held accountable for the many unsightly errors his book unfortunately contains.

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Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India. By LATA MANI. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1998. Pp. xiv + 246. $15.00 (paper).

Reverend W. Bampton's eyewitness account of sati performed by an "infatuated woman" recorded in 1824, some five years before the British colonial regime outlawed this "dreadful rite" in 1829, represents a common missionary discourse found in most accounts:

> A scene, the most perfectly hellish that we ever saw, was presented as way was made for the woman to the pit, and its margin was left clear; she advanced to the edge facing her husband, and two or three times waved her right hand; she then hastily walked round the pit, and in one place I thought the flames caught her legs; having completed the circle, she again waved her hand as before, and then jumped into the fire.

Sati, or "suttee" as it was spelled by Westerners, refers most commonly to a widow who immolates herself on her husband's funeral pyre, as well as to the practice itself. The debate on sati circulating in Bengal and Britain between 1780 and 1833, included East India Company (EIC) officials, Hindu *pundits* (scholars), Bengali *bhadralok* ("respectable" class, urban-based and upper-caste), *munshis* (teachers),