REVOLUTIONARY MAHDISM AND RESISTANCE TO COLONIAL RULE IN THE SOKOTO CALIPHATE, 1905–6

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A wave of revolutionary Mahdism swept through the western emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate during the years of the colonial conquest (1897–1903). It culminated in an insurrection that began at Kobkitanda in French Niger late in the year 1905 and spread to Satiru, about 220 kilometres away in British Northern Nigeria, early in 1906. The revolutionary Mahdists sought the overthrow of all established authority, including the colonial regimes and local officials who collaborated with the Europeans.

The uprising of 1905–6 revealed strong divisions on the basis of class, an insight first made by A. S. Mohammad in his study of Satiru. This movement received virtually no support from the Fulbe aristocracy of the Caliphate. Instead it attracted radical clerics, disgruntled peasants and fugitive slaves. The absence of aristocratic involvement distinguishes revolutionary Mahdism from all other forms of contemporary Mahdism.

Mahdism has usually challenged established authority, and consequently its revolutionary potential in the context of the colonial conquest has been widely recognized. A suggestive study by Thomas Hodgkin first compared Mahdism, messianism and Marxism as expressions of anti-colonialism. Hodgkin contended that Mahdism was one type of revolutionary ideology, but he did not distinguish among the various strands of Mahdism. He did accurately note, however, that Mahdism could be revolutionary to the degree that it provided a universal ideology that transcended kinship, locality, ethnicity and pre-colonial state structures. Mahdism could appeal to Islamic

1 This study is part of a larger project on the economic and social impact of the colonial conquest on the Sokoto Caliphate. We wish to thank Abubakar Sokoto Mohammed, Kimba Idrissa, Andrew Roberts and David Robinson for their comments, and A. H. M. Kirk-Greene and Colin Newbury for their advice and encouragement. The research was funded by grants from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (for Lovejoy) and the Guggenheim Foundation (for Hogendorn). The authors also wish to thank York University and Colby College for their generous support.


tradition to justify the transformation of society, and it could provide a structure of ideas and institutions that drew the masses into a more active political role. We advance a new interpretation here because the evidence of class divisions among Mahdists shows that it is confusing, indeed inaccurate, to refer to Mahdism in and of itself as ‘revolutionary’.

Mahdism has not always been revolutionary. Adherents have advocated a range of political positions from (1) tolerance of established authority, despite a belief that the Mahdi would eventually appear, through (2) severe criticism of existing Islamic regimes which was often expressed through emigration (hijra) in expectation of meeting the Mahdi, to (3) the replacement of incumbent Muslim officials by Mahdist critics, often through violent means, and finally to (4) revolutionary action with the intention of destroying the Muslim state and the class structure on which it was based.

All these forms of Mahdism were in evidence in the years immediately before and after the conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate. Our purpose is to identify carefully ‘revolutionary Mahdism’ within the larger context of the colonial conquest and to show how the ‘revolutionary’ character of the uprising of 1905–6 differed from other forms of Mahdism.

The uprising of 1905–6 was a turning point in the consolidation of colonial rule in Niger and Northern Nigeria. Until then, the French and British

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5 For example, Muhammad A. Al-Haji labelled Hayatu b. Sa'id a ‘revolutionary Mahdist’, but without explanation; see ‘Hayatu b. Sa'id: a revolutionary Mahdist in the Western Sudan’, in Hasan, ed., *Sudan in Africa*, 128–41.
6 Asmau G. Saeed has recognized three groups of anti-colonial Mahdists in the Caliphate: first, the local followers of Mahdi Muhammad Ahmad of the Nilotic Sudan; second, ‘revisionist Mahdists’ who awaited the coming of the Mahdi but did not emigrate or emigrated only reluctantly; and third, ‘spontaneous Mahdists’ who followed self-styled Mahdis. Saeed has made an important contribution in recognizing distinctions among Mahdists. This article clarifies her category of ‘spontaneous Mahdists’.
7 Our reconstruction is based on a re-examination of available archival materials in Nigeria, Niger, France and Great Britain, including previously unused files in the Shillingford Papers, Mss. Afr. s.547, Rhodes House, Oxford. It is worth noting that the file on Satiru in the Shillingford Papers contains a large collection of official reports and telegrams on the uprising, many otherwise unavailable and previously unused by scholars to the best of our knowledge. A. A. Shillingford held an education portfolio, and the presence of this file in his papers, presumably a transfer made at some point from other files at headquarters, is unusual. We have attempted to balance the colonial materials, with their inevitable biases, through a reading of contemporary Hausa documents on Satiru and through a critical assessment of the scholarly literature, some of which is based on oral sources. Finally, Lovejoy, accompanied by Kimba Idrissa, conducted interviews at Kobkitanda and Karma in October 1988. These interviews confirmed and supplemented Idrissa’s earlier work. Lovejoy wishes to thank Idrissa for his collaboration, without which the interviews could not have been undertaken.
presence was fragile. As many scholars have shown, the British were successful in obtaining the collaboration of the Sokoto aristocracy in defeating the rebels at Satiru,\(^8\) while the French secured similar aristocratic support in overcoming the Mahdists at Kobkitanda and Karma.\(^9\) Most scholars agree that the suppression of the revolt re-enforced the alliance between the colonial authorities and the Muslim aristocracy. Kimba Idrissa and A. S. Mohammed have recognized that the revolt crossed the colonial frontier between Niger and Northern Nigeria, but most scholars only mention this fact in passing. J.-P. Rothiot even disputes Idrissa’s claim of a coordinated uprising within Niger.\(^10\) It is our contention that the pan-colonial dimension of the 1905–6 uprising provides essential evidence for establishing the revolutionary significance of this movement.

**The 1905–6 Uprising**

The revolt was supposed to begin on the Id al-Kabir, which fell on 5 February 1906, but in fact it began on 8 December 1905 at Kobkitanda, 150 kilometres south of Niamey in French Niger, when local villagers killed two *gardes-cercles* from Dosso. The leader of the revolt was a blind Zarma cleric, Saybu dan Makafo. The attempt to arrest Saybu and his supporters spread the revolt through much of the region between Dallol Mawri and Dallol Bosso.\(^11\)

The first sizeable action in the French zone occurred at Kobkitanda on 4 January 1906. The Mahdists lost an estimated 30 men, the French 12, including one French officer. Saybu’s followers retreated to Sambera, 15 kilometres to the south. In subsequent battles, another twenty Mahdists

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\(^11\) Idrissa, *Guerres et Sociétés*, 148, 152–3; Rapport politique du Commandant de Région de Niamey, Dec. 1905, ANN 15.2.6; Rapport politique mensuel, Région de Niamey, Jan. 1906 ANN 15.2.7; Rapport politique mensuel, Région de Niamey, Feb. 1906, ANN 15.2.7; Rapport politique, Mar. 1906, Cercle du Djerma, ANN 15.2.9; Rapport politique et administratif, Région de Niamey, second trimestre, 1906, ANN 15.2.8; Bouverot, Rapport au sujet du rattachement des villages de Sambira et Koba Kitanda, Dosso, 5 Nov. 1907, ANN 5.2.3; Boutig, Monographie du Cercle du Djerma, 15 Nov. 1909, ANN 15.1.2.
Fig. 2. The Mahdist revolt, 1905-6.
died. Saybu and many of the survivors then fled east across the nearby colonial boundary and made their way to Satiru, which they reached sometime after mid-January.¹²

A second centre of revolt erupted at Karma, a Songhay town and sub-emirate of Say that was located on the Niger north of Niamey. Emir Umaru, a loyal supporter of Saybu Dan Makafo, had resisted the imposition of French colonialism in 1904, only to suffer the inevitable subjugation. In December 1905, Saybu sent an emissary to inform Umaru of the skirmish with the *garde-cercle*. Umaru decided to join the Mahdists in an attempt to reverse the defeat of 1904; he was the only accredited ruler within the Caliphate who would do so.¹³

The revolt extended along the left bank of the Niger 400 kilometres from Sorbo Haoussa in the north to the border with Nigeria in the south. Boubon, a mere ten kilometres from Niamey, was lost. The revolt spread westward across the river to Say, Torodi and Tera and northward among the Tuareg. The French posts at Sandire and Filingue had to be abandoned, and troops from Dori had to fight their way to Niamey. On 17 January the French attacked Boubon, which was taken despite two vigorous Mahdist counter-attacks. Karma, 25 kilometres from Niamey, was taken the next day, and Umaru retreated 65 kilometres north-eastward to Delitondi Zimba, in the semi-desert region of Zarma Ganda.

Elsewhere conditions were volatile. In some cases there was open rebellion; in others there was danger that there would be. Trouble spread southward to Bariba and Dendi country and westward to Fadan Gurma. French reports also suspected that the emirates of Say and Birnin Gaoure would rise, but in fact they did not. While some Tuareg joined Umaru, many others waited to see what would happen.¹⁴

The end of the revolt in French territory came quickly in early March. A combined force of French troops and cavalry from Dosso, Filingue and other places loyal to the French attacked Umaru at Delitondi Zimba on 3 March.¹⁵

The battle lasted all day, but in the end the revolt was crushed. The next two days were spent destroying villages that had supported the revolt. Umaru and many of his troops were killed, and the survivors were taken to Niamey.¹⁶ Thereafter the French re-established an uneasy presence throughout the rebellious zone.

Across the frontier in British territory, the centre of resistance was Satiru, where Saybu Dan Makafo found refuge late in January. Satiru’s location southwest of Sokoto in the direction of Gwandu placed it between the twin capitals of the Caliphate, a position dangerously close to the centres of

¹³ Interview, Amirou Tinni Nouhou, chef de canton de Karma, 1 Oct. 1988. Also see Rapport politique mensuel, Région de Niamey, Jan.–Mar. 1906, ANN 15.2.7; and Idrissa, *Guerres et Sociétés*, 155–70.


¹⁵ His forces reportedly suffered 30 killed and five wounded.


¹⁷ Mohammad (‘Social interpretation’) has estimated that the population of the town was 10,000. We believe this estimate to be exaggerated, although the influx of supporters certainly swelled the ranks; see H. S. Goldsmith, Annual Report, Sokoto Province 1906, SNP 7 2001/1907, Nigerian National Archives, Kaduna (hereafter NNAK).
political power.\(^{17}\) The revolt in French territory had engulfed the whole region surrounding French headquarters at Niamey; now the revolt in the British zone threatened the capitals of the Caliphate itself, with a potential to undermine British authority elsewhere.\(^{18}\)

The revolt at Satiru was also scheduled to begin on the Id al-Kabir, 5 February, but it was postponed, apparently because of a dispute in the Mahdist community.\(^{19}\) The dispute centred on the necessity of a revolt and the recognition of Isa, the village head of Satiru, as a messianic leader who would accompany the Mahdi.\(^{20}\) The Satiru Mahdists (Satirawa) decided the issue on 13 February, eight days after the Id, when they attacked the neighbouring village of Tsomau. A number of people were killed.\(^{21}\)

On the next day, 14 February, a unit of the West African Frontier Force (WAFF), Company C of Mounted Infantry under Acting Resident H. R. Preston-Hillary, moved quickly to deal with this rural unrest. The reasons for the violence were not known to Hillary and were clearly misinterpreted. The British were apparently unaware of the rising in French territory. Though Hillary was not exactly walking into a trap, his misjudgement of the situation was monumental. The Mahdists attacked the WAFF column; Hillary and his escort were killed, and in the ensuing battle the WAFF suffered heavy losses and was forced to retreat in disarray.\(^{22}\) In the words of...

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\(^{17}\) Lt. Gov. Ponty’s comments (Extract of report of W. Ponty, Lt.-Gov. Haut-Sénégal-Niger, p. 348, enclosed in C. F. Cromie, British Consul-General, Dakar, to Sir Edward Grey, 18 Sept. 1906, no. 34903, CO 446/57) on the apparent disunity of the Mahdists are perhaps ironic, considering the extent to which resistance crossed colonial boundaries, and the failure of the British and French to co-operate in crushing the 1905–6 rising: ‘Fortunately for us these events have once again proved that when left to themselves the natives are incapable of the combination and union necessary to carry out a preconceived plan. Otherwise the situation might have been very serious’.

\(^{19}\) Malam Isa and Saybu Dan Makafo had sent letters to Caliphate officials calling on them to join the revolt. Malam, son of the emir of Gwandu, was reported to have enquired whether or not a revolt had begun the day before the Id al-Kabir festival and was told by one of his followers that the revolt would begin the next day. British reports later credited the delay to strategy; Resident Burdon was scheduled to go on leave, and the Satirawa are said to have been waiting for his departure. See Burdon to Lugard, 5 Mar. and 15 Mar. 1906, Shillingford Papers.

\(^{20}\) The people of neighbouring Tsomau failed to appear at Satiru for the Id al-Kabir, which was interpreted as lack of support for the revolt. In previous years the Tsomau Mahdists had attended the Id ceremonies. The village head of Tsomau, Yahaya had been a student of Maikafo, Isa’s father, and Isa and Yahaya were related by marriage. Yahaya refused to recognize Isa’s leadership and particularly his claim to be the successor to the Mahdi, as in Mahdist tradition. H. A. F. Johnston’s compilation of Satiru traditions (‘Dan Makafo and the Satiru rising’, in Johnston, ed., A Selection of Hausa Stories (Oxford, 1966), 164) quotes Yahaya as saying: ‘How can we believe that you are the Prophet Jesus [Isa]…when we have known you ever since we were all children?’ The importance of the Isa tradition is examined later in the article.

\(^{21}\) Malam Yahaya, twelve other townsman, and one woman were killed. Burdon to Lugard, 15 Mar. 1906.

\(^{22}\) Total deaths included three white officers and 27 African soldiers and carriers; see Goldsmith, Sokoto Province Annual Report, 1906. Lugard to Onslow, 28 Feb. 1906, Shillingford Papers, says three white officers and 25 African soldiers. Four of the wounded were able to make their escape. For a contemporary account of the reasons behind the British fiasco, see Charles Orr, The Making of Northern Nigeria (London, 1911), 173–4. Also see Dusgate, Conquest, 242–9; Adeleye, ‘Mahdist triumph’, 200–14; Mohammad, ‘Social interpretation’.
High Commissioner Frederick Lugard, this defeat was the ‘first serious reverse suffered by the West African Frontier Force since it was raised [in 1898].’

The Satiru Mahdists also suffered heavy losses in the initial encounter: 30–40 were dead and wounded. Their leader, Malam Isa, was severely wounded. According to later reports, Isa had planned to announce a jihad at the Friday prayer, 16 February, two days after the defeat of Hillary’s expedition, and raise a green flag. Isa’s wound proved mortal, and he died on the day he was supposed to unfurl the standard of revolt. But the revolt was now firmly established in British territory, despite the death of one of its leaders.

The British feared that a tremendous upheaval would ensue from this ‘Sokoto Rising’, as the London Times headlined it. The regime was thinly spread over Northern Nigeria, and a major detachment of the WAFF was far to the southeast, engaged in a protracted campaign to subdue the Tiv. The situation appeared grave.

The Satiru Mahdists quickly regrouped, and in the aftermath of their initial victory they wreaked havoc on neighbouring towns and villages. Danchadi was burned on 6 March and Dange on 8 March 1906. Resident Alder Burdon reported that ‘all the thickly populated country between these two was devastated’. The Satirawa attempted to intimidate reluctant Mahdist sympathizers into joining the revolt, and they specifically attacked slave plantations, apparently to liberate slaves. What worried the British were expressions of support for the uprising. Officials reported signs of disaffection in Katsina and Zamfara. The loyalty of the emir of Gwandu was in doubt, and there were rumblings even in Sokoto town itself.

Despite the gravity of the situation, the Sokoto aristocracy proved loyal to the British. Marafa Maiturare of Gwadabawa, the Sokoto official in charge

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23 Lugard to Onslow, 21 Feb. 1906, in Northern Nigeria, Correspondence Relating to Sokoto, Hadejia and the Munshi Country, 1907, Parliamentary Papers [Cd. 3620]. In fact it proved to be the only serious reverse.
24 Burdon to Lugard, 21 Feb. 1906.
25 Burdon to Lugard, 26 May 1906, Shillingford Papers. Also see Frederick D. Lugard, Annual Report, Northern Nigeria, 1905–6, 371.
26 Times (London), 21, 22, 23, 26 Feb., 6 Mar. 1906.
27 Burdon to Lugard, telegram, 11 Mar. 1906, Shillingford Papers.
29 Burdon to Lugard, telegram, 28 Feb. 1906; Lugard to Secretary of State, 9 May 1906, Shillingford Papers. As one Sokoto cleric wrote at the time, ‘We have been conquered. We have been asked to pay poll tax and jangali [cattle tax]. We have been made to do various things, and now they want us to fight their wars for them. Let them go and fight themselves’. Malam Bako to Malam Jafaru of Argungu, Feb. 1906; manuscript in the Nigerian National Archives, Kaduna and quoted here as cited in Al-Hajj, ‘Mahdist tradition’, 199. The capital districts of Sokoto and Gwandu had not been subject either to jizya (poll tax) or jangali before the conquest, and their imposition under colonialism was clearly a major grievance.
of the Sarkin Musulmi’s levies, who later became Sarkin Musulmi himself (1915–24), marched on Satiru with a force of 3,000 horse and infantry on the morning of 17 February. But the Marafa’s troops refused to attack and retreated in disarray. It became necessary to await reinforcements who soon arrived from other parts of Northern Nigeria. On 10 March, a combined force of WAFF troops and Sokoto levies approached Satiru. Although the rebels had dug trenches, they did not stay behind them. Nor did they use the Maxim gun and rifles that had been captured in the first encounter. Instead, the Satirawa repeatedly charged the WAFF square, even though they already were aware of what modern weapons could do. Destructive volleys from the square, together with the rapid fire of the Maxim, struck down hundreds of rebels. Attack gave way to flight, and slaughter followed as charging Sokoto cavalry hacked to death many of the defeated survivors. The outcome was difficult to justify even from an imperialist perspective. At least 2,000 Satirawa were killed. An estimated 3,000 women and children were herded to Sokoto, many into servitude.

Defying the odds, blind Saybu Dan Makafo survived the slaughter, although he had been wounded in the final attack. He was captured by the local levies from Dange, whose sarki took him to Sokoto. Even then the authorities were apprehensive. Dan Makafo’s boy guide supposedly shouted out at the trial, when Dan Makafo asked for water, ‘Don’t let him have it or he’ll vanish into thin air and then I shall be the only one left for you to execute’. The report, accurate or not, captures the tension surrounding the trial.

30 Burdon to Lugard, 21 Feb. 1906.
32 It was not for lack of ammunition; also captured were two cases of machine gun bullets in belts, and the rifle cartridges found on the slain mounted infantrymen. The machine gun and the rifles could conceivably have caused considerable damage if they had been employed. (See Lugard to Onslow, 21 Mar. 1906, and Burdon to Lugard, 22 Mar. 1906.) Ironically, it was lack of water that prevented the captured Maxim from being put into action. Its jacket, through which water circulated to cool the hot gun barrel, had been ruptured during the first battle. Why the rifles were not employed by the Satirawa is unknown. The operation of a breech-leader would no doubt be difficult for people who, so it appears, did not even possess flintlocks. Yet the organization and carrying through of this revolt shows plenty of initiative, arguably more than sufficient to overcome the rather minor technological barrier of loading and firing a rifle. We have come across no evidence to explain this absence of military enterprise among the Satirawa and their commanders. Had the British been met by rifle volleys and supporting fire from a Maxim, which presumably would have worked until it overheated, they would undoubtedly have prevailed anyway given their overwhelming strength, but the effect on public opinion might have been electrifying.
34 According to Tukur, ‘Colonial domination’, 478–9, the alkali was al-Mustafa Modibbo. According to oral testimony reported by Tukur, Burdon instructed the alkali to issue a death sentence for the killing of the British personnel. The alkali is reported to have objected on the grounds that the dead were not Muslims, so that it was not possible to impose a death sentence. The issue was resolved because Muslims had also been killed by the Satirawa; consequently al-Mustafa is said to have guaranteed to Burdon that a death sentence would follow.
35 See Johnston, ‘Dan Makafo and the Satiru rising’, 166. Johnston compiled this story from a number of sources. The portion about the trial is attributed to Malam Nagwamatse, whose father was present.
The public executioner decapitated the hero of Satiru and Kobkitanda on 22 March. His head was mounted on a stake in the market to serve as a dire warning to would-be Mahdists and revolutionaries. Four subordinates suffered a similar fate. The Sokoto citizenry dutifully participated in the public humiliation of the Mahdists. As Burdon telegraphed to Lugard:

All Sokoto went out yesterday [11 March] to inspect battlefield and raze Satiru to ground. No wall or tree left standing. Sarikin Muslim [Musulmi] has pronounced curse on anyone building or farming on site.36

Thus ended the Mahdist rebellion. Today the deserted site of Satiru is on the edge of a forest reserve. It has not been inhabited since its destruction and the official curse.37 Kobkitanda remains a remote and tiny village, far from any motorable road. Karma has fared better because of its proximity to the main highway along the Niger, but it too is far from thriving.

MAHDISM IN THE SOKOTO CALIPHATE

The religious overtones of the 1905–6 uprising drew upon a common tradition of Mahdism that was current in the Sokoto Caliphate, and indeed in many other parts of Muslim Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Mahdists predicted the arrival of a messianic figure, 'the rightly-guided one', who would purge the world of unbelief. As Muhammad Al-Hajj and other scholars have demonstrated, the thirteenth century of the Muslim era, which ended in 1883, was a period of particularly high Mahdist expectations.38

Thousands of Mahdists demonstrated their discontent with the Caliphate through emigration (hijra) towards the east, the direction from which the Mahdi was supposed to appear. Many Mahdists expected the Mahdi to appear on a mountain, which was sometimes interpreted as Bima Hill in Gombe Emirate, and this may explain why Bormi, a few kilometres up the Gongola River valley from Bima Hill, became a Mahdist settlement.39 Implicitly hijra meant the rejection of the Caliphate government. Furthermore, the travels of Mahdists had the effect of spreading their unsettling doctrines throughout the western and central Sudan and, indeed, through the regions to the east as far as the Nilotic Sudan.40

36 Burdon to Lugard, 22 Mar. 1906.
37 Evidence that the curse is still being taken seriously can also be found in the recent paper by Habib Alhassan, ‘Rashin Jituwa Tsakanin Malaman Satiru da Turawan Mulkin Mallaka (1906)’, paper presented at Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, June, 1988. We wish to thank Ibrahim Jumare for drawing our attention to this paper, which reiterates the official Sokoto version of the revolt.
The culmination of much of this Mahdist activity was the creation of a Mahdist state in the Nilotic Sudan in the 1880s. At that time, Muhammad Ahmad declared himself Mahdi and gathered sufficient support to oust the Egyptian colonial regime, together with its European allies, from the Sudan. 41 Mahdistism emerged on the world stage as an anti-colonial movement, capturing the attention of Europe after the dramatic death of General ‘Chinese’ Gordon at Khartoum in 1884.

This Mahdist movement reverberated westward to the Sokoto Caliphate. Muhammad Ahmad and his officials established formal links with representatives in the Caliphate and thereby reinforced Mahdist sympathies there. Those Mahdists who pledged their loyalty to Muhammad Ahmad became identified as his ansar (followers). He received considerable support in the Caliphate and on the eastern frontier of the Caliphate, as the careers of Rabih b. Fadallah, Hayatu b. Sa‘id and Jibril Gaini demonstrate. 42

The Mahdist uprising of 1905–6 had no direct connection with this Nilotic tradition. Because many of the ansar had emigrated eastward, the supporters of Muhammad Ahmad became concentrated in the eastern portions of the Caliphate and beyond. They were especially numerous in northern Adamawa and Gombe emirates. In this article, we deal with other Mahdists who were located in the central and western portions of the Caliphate.

These other Mahdists, who did not recognize the legitimacy of Muhammad Ahmad, included many clerics, aristocrats and common people, not just those who became associated with the revolutionary cause. The colonial conquest after 1897 heightened the expectations of all these Mahdists, and numerous messengers appeared to announce the imminent arrival of the Mahdi. Sometimes colonial officials, who failed to appreciate the finer distinctions of Mahdist eschatology, thought that these messengers were claiming to be the Mahdi, when in fact they were only heralding his arrival.


43 Even among many other Caliphate officials, such as Emir Zubeiru of Yola, who did not actually join Attahiru I, there were strong sentiments in favour of this brand of anti-colonial Mahdistism. See Martin Z. Njeuma, Fulani Hegemony in Yola (Old Adamawa) 1809–1902 (no place of publication indicated, 1978), 201. Some officials, such as the Emir of Gwandu, who acceded to office after the British conquest, wavered; their sympathies.
convinced Attahiru I, who had become Caliph only the previous year, to emigrate to the east in search of the Mahdi.\footnote{Report of F. Cargill, Resident of Kano, in Frederick D. Lugard, Annual Report, Northern Nigeria, 1903, 177; Al-Hajj, ‘Mahdist Tradition’, 166–84; R. A. Adeleye, ‘The dilemma of the Waziri: the place of the Risālat al-wazir ilā ahl al-‘ilm wa’l-tadabbur in the history of the Sokoto Caliphate’, \textit{J. Hist. Soc. Nigeria}, \textbf{4}, 2 (1968), 202–4; Adeleye, \textit{Power and Diplomacy}, 283–4, 291; and Tukur, ‘British colonial domination’, 137–45.} Many officials and commoners joined his \textit{hijra} as he moved eastward through Zamfara and Kano. As Burdon reported from Sokoto more than a month after the \textit{hijra} began, ‘The farmers are still trying to make their way to him [Attahiru I] in the belief that he would lead them to the Mahdi’.\footnote{A. Burdon, Report No. 2, Sokoto Province, 30 Apr. 1903, Sokprof 2/1 23/1903, (NNAK).} In the end tens of thousands of people joined the exodus, according to the best estimates. On 27 July 1903, the British defeated these Mahdists at Bormi, the Mahdist stronghold in Gombe Emirate that had been taken only a year earlier. Attahiru I and many others died on the battlefield. The survivors continued the \textit{hijra} eastward and eventually settled at Mai Wurno in Sudan.

Despite the disaster at Bormi, Mahdist expectations within the aristocracy did not subside. The Emir of Gwandu, installed by the British and hence not committed to Attahiru’s emigration, is known to have harboured Mahdist beliefs.\footnote{Tibenderana, ‘Sokoto, Gwandu and Argungu’, 162–3, 169–70.} Undoubtedly other aristocrats secretly discussed and probably encouraged Mahdist prophecies as well. The heightened expectations of 1906, including the exhortations of the revolutionary Mahdists, arose from a general malaise.\footnote{Burdon to Lugard, 26 May 1906, Shillingford Papers; Lugard, Annual Report, Northern Nigeria, 1905–6, 371; Goldsmith, Sokoto Province Annual Report, 1906.}

Most of the ruling class accepted colonial rule, however reluctantly.\footnote{On the extent of accommodation with colonial rule, see Adeleye, ‘Dilemma of the Waziri’, 285–98; and Idrissa, \textit{Guerres et Sociétés}, 148, 179.} For those who acquiesced, the apologia of Muhammad al-Bukhari, the Waziri of Sokoto (1886–1910), addressed the dilemma of their submission to the Christian incursion. In his \textit{Risālat al-wazir ilā ahl al-‘ilm wa’l-tadabbur}, the Waziri explained that the protection of Muslims depended upon accommodation with the Europeans; emigration would turn the land into one of unbelief. It was the duty of some Muslims to stay in office, despite the

were with those who resisted, and they too interpreted their actions, at least in part, in the context of Mahdist beliefs. On the Emir of Gwandu’s Mahdist sympathies, see Tukur, ‘Colonial domination’, 233, 283–95; and Tibenderana, ‘Sokoto, Gwandu and Argungu’, 162–3, 169–70. Mahdist sympathies were widespread among the aristocracy at the time of the conquest; see the translation of Arabic letters referring to the Mahdi which were written in the last years of the independent Caliphate in H. F. Backwell, ed. and trans., \textit{The Occupation of Hausaland, 1900–1904, Being a Translation of Arabic Letters found in the House of the Wazir of Sokoto, Bohari, in 1903} (Lagos, 1927). The letter of a royal slave of Sarkin Kudu (emir of Yola) Zubeiru to the Sarkin Musulmi, which was written at the time of the British conquest of Yola ‘pledges allegiance to you by Allah and the Prophet and after you to the Imam Mahdi’ (pp. 67–8). Zubeiru fled Yola upon the British conquest on 2 Sept. 1901 and informed the Sarkin Musulmi that Imam Mahdi commanded his attention (pp. 74–5). Muhammadu Alhaji, brother of the emir of Missau, was also a Mahdist and joined Attahiru I (letter to Sarkin Musulmi, p. 77).
apparent treason involved in accepting colonial dictates. This rationalization justified the accession to office of the colonial emirs and their subordinates, who soon found themselves in direct conflict with the anti-colonial stance of many Mahdists and their belief that the Mahdi was about to come.

REVOLUTIONARY MAHDISM

Revolutionary Mahdism shared many features with other forms of Mahdism. First, there was the primacy of religious conviction, especially the belief in the imminent arrival of the Expected Mahdi. Second, revolutionary Mahdists were decidedly anti-colonial and believed that the imposition of colonialism was an important indication that the millennium was fast approaching. Like all Mahdists, they were hostile to colonial rule, but unlike some Mahdists, they were not willing to accommodate themselves to the European occupation. Third, revolutionary Mahdists, like the ansar, opposed the government of the Caliphate, both before and after the colonial conquest, but these Mahdists did not recognize the political claims of the ansar either.

Revolutionary Mahdism can be distinguished from all other strands of Mahdism in four respects. First, it exhibited a dimension of class struggle in that it drew its support from peasants, fugitive slaves and subject populations; in contrast to other forms of Mahdism, few merchants and aristocrats joined the movement. Second, there was an ethnic dimension to revolutionary Mahdism that reflected the class division; few, if any Fulbe, from whom most of the aristocracy came, supported the movement. The lack of Fulbe support stands in sharp contrast to all other instances of Mahdism. Third, revolutionary Mahdism was associated with the expected appearance of Isa (Jesus) as well as the Mahdi Himself. Other Mahdists may have recognized Isa as a Prophet, but the revolutionaries highlighted his role. Finally, revolutionary Mahdists did not encourage emigration to the east. When emigration was necessary, people moved to the frontiers between emirates or the uninhabited areas between fiefs. These features of revolutionary Mahdism coalesced in the uprising of 1905–6.

First, the class dimension is unique. As Sokoto Mohammad has assessed the situation at Satiru, ‘peasants, slaves and petty malams saw the new situation [of colonial rule] as a continuation of their struggle against oppression and exactions which they had been waging against the Sokoto Caliphate’. At Kobkitanda, according to Idrissa, opposition to Dosso, which was not part of the Caliphate, was closely associated with resistance to the French. Revolutionary Mahdism sought the expulsion of the colonial authorities and the overthrow of those officials who were collaborating with the colonial occupation.

The Mahdists in the region between Dallol Bosso and Dallol Mawri were mostly disgruntled peasants. The villages near Kobkitanda, founded in the later 1890s, swelled with the arrival of people seeking to avoid colonial exactions. People along the Niger had been forced to provide labour and

50 Mohammad, ‘Social interpretation’, 173.
51 Idrissa, Guerres et Sociétés, 175–9.
52 Idrissa, Guerres et Sociétés, 140.
food for the march on the desert and Lake Chad. The severity of the conquest and heavy taxation laid the foundation for revolt.  

The Kobkitanda Mahdists were openly hostile to Dosso, which had cooperated willingly with the French intrusion and had used the French presence to expand its control in the region of the Dallos. In particular, Zarmakoy Awta, the ruler of Dosso after 1902, antagonized many Zarma because of what they believed to be his overt opportunism. Much of the exploitation associated with the French conquest was blamed on him.

Few, if any, slaves or fugitive slaves were apparently involved in the events at Kobkitanda. French reports and local oral traditions are largely silent on the subject of slavery.  

The Mahdists may have tried to recruit slaves, however. A French army manual written at Dosso in 1910 provides instructions on how to deal with a Mahdist uprising and is clearly based on the 1905–6 revolt. There is specific mention of promises to liberate slaves as a method of recruitment.  

Appeals to Karma, Say, Birnin Gaoure, Torodi and other parts of the Caliphate, implicitly at least, called for slaves to join the revolt. These emirates had heavy concentrations of slaves. Even though the French doubted the loyalty of the emirs, none of these emirates actually joined the Mahdists. In the event only Karma rose, and at Karma, fugitive slaves were not a factor. Indeed the Karma nobles who fought the French were slave owners.

At Satiru, fugitive slaves found sanctuary with the Mahdists. As Mohammed has established, the Satirawa 'encouraged the emigration of slaves to Satiru'. In fact its radical clergers believed that slavery was a prime example of the injustice of Caliphate society. According to Maidamama Mai Zari, Dutsen Assada ward, Sokoto, 'the leaders of Satiru abolished slavery and as a consequence... slaves flocked to them. The freedom of these fugitives was effectively and strenuously guarded'. It should be noted that at this time neither the British nor the French colonial governments advocated, let alone enacted, the abolition of slavery.

Throughout the Muslim areas of West Africa, including the Sokoto Caliphate, slaves were leaving their masters in considerable numbers by the late 1890s. Both the French and the British faced a fugitive crisis, although

53 Rothiot, Aouta, 161–83.  
55 Leblond, 'Rapport destiné à l'élaboration d'un manuel tactique', Journal de Poste de Dosso, 1910, quoted in Rash, 'Établissement colonial', 210.  
56 See, for example, Milot, Monographie du Cercle de Dosso, 1909, ANN 15.1.1, where the loyalty of Emir Bayero of Birnin Gaoure was questioned.  
57 Mohammad, 'Social interpretation', 171; and Mohammad, 'Songs and poems'.  
in the context of the Caliphate, there were more slaves in the British sphere, and hence the crisis was more severe there. By 1906 slaves were still running away, although by then the alliance between the new colonial regime and the Caliphate aristocracy had begun to take hold. Controlling slaves was high on the agenda of this alliance. The fact that fugitive slaves were a major component of revolutionary Mahdism comes as no surprise.

The first British reports concerning Satiru confirmed the importance of the slavery issue. In his despatch of 21 February 1906, Burdon stated: 'As far as I can learn the adherents who at one time flocked to it [the Satiru cause] were nearly all run away slaves'. This interpretation made sense to Lugard at the time, and he therefore informed the Colonial Office that the Satirawa were 'mostly fugitive slaves, and I suppose some outlaws from French territory', a reference to Saybu Dan Makafo and his followers. In his report of 7 March, Lugard still subscribed to this theory: 'it appears that the rising was instigated by an outlaw from French territory named Dan Makafo, who gathered together a band of malcontents and runaway slaves, and forced Malam Isa, the son of a man who had previously [in 1904] declared himself Mahdi, to head the rising'. Since both Lugard and Burdon were aware of the seriousness of the fugitive crisis, their assessment should be given considerable weight.

The extent to which revolutionary Mahdism revealed ethnic friction, the second distinguishing feature of the movement, is particularly significant because of the close association between ethnicity and class in the Caliphate. As is generally accepted by scholars, there was a strong tradition of Mahdism among the aristocracy; much of the leadership of the ansar was aristocratic in origin, and of course the hijra of 1903 was led by Sarkin Musulmi Attahiru I himself. By contrast, the revolutionary Mahdists espoused anti-aristocratic sentiments. The opposition of these Mahdists was directed against the ruling class, and because the ruling class was comprised almost wholly of Fulbe and high-ranking slave officials loyal to them, revolutionary Mahdism took on the dimensions of a class struggle cast in ethnic terms.

There were no Fulbe among the revolutionary Mahdists on either side of the colonial frontier. In Niger, the rebels were mostly Songhay or Zarma, which are closely related ethnic groups whose languages are mutually understandable. Karma was a Songhay town, while Kobkitanda was Zarma. At Satiru, Hausa from a variety of backgrounds were predominant. The fact that Saybu Dan Makafo could move easily between Kobkitanda and Satiru indicates that the Zarma and Hausa supporters of revolutionary Mahdism recognized a common enemy: the colonial regimes and those who collaborated with them, including the Caliphate aristocracy and the zarma-koy of Dosso. In the context of the Caliphate, the peasantry and assimilated slaves were identified as Hausa, while aristocrats were usually Fulbe. Zarma were classified as protected people, even though Dosso itself had maintained its independence since the middle of the nineteenth century. The Fulbe referred to both Hausa and Zarma as Habe.

It is striking that no Fulbe bodies were reported among the dead

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60 Burdon to Lugard, 21 Feb. 1906, CO 446/53.
61 Conference of 28 Feb. 1906, no. 11115, CO 446/53.
62 Lugard to C.O., 7 Mar. 1906, CO 446/53.
Satirawa, nor do there appear to have been any among the fallen rebels in
French Niger on the battlefields at Kobkitanda, Sambera, Karma, and
Zimba. Burdon grasped the significance of the ethnic dimension in his report to Lugard:

Satiru was a Hausa village and only Hausas or their kindred races have joined
them. All the faces on the battlefield had Gobir, Kebbi, Zanfara, Katsena and other
such tribal marks. Not a single Fulani talaka [commoner] joined them.

Mohammed, on the basis of oral sources, presents a similar picture, with
some additions. The ethnic groups included Zamfarawa, Gobirawa,
Gimbanawa, Kabawa (Kebbi), Azbinawa (Azben), Arawa (Arewa), and
Katsinawa:

There might have been some non-Habe and non-Muslims among the Satirawa
since quite a number of the slaves owned by the Sarakuna [i.e. title-holders] and
Attajarai [wealthy merchants] were from other societies.

It is significant that other non-Hausa identities are not remembered, despite
the presence of fugitive slaves. By staying to fight, fugitive slaves in effect had
renounced their other loyalties and were fighting as Hausa.

In fact the relationship between class and ethnicity was much more
complicated. Many Fulbe were not aristocrats, while some Hausa were
wealthy merchants, and Zarma/Songhay wangari (warlords) owned many
slaves. It is also significant that the opposition of Mahdists at Kobkitanda
was against Dosso, whose aristocracy was Zarma and not Fulbe. We are not
attempting to simplify complex class and ethnic relationships, but attempting
only to identify patterns in the resistance.

The third feature of revolutionary Mahdism was the importance of the Isa
tradition. Isa was to accompany the Mahdi or to appear shortly after his
arrival to combat Daggal, the enemy of the Mahdi. Prophecies concerning
Isa were to have an important role in the uprising at Satiru in 1906.

The Isa tradition can be traced back to the 1840s in the Sokoto Caliphate,
although the tradition is found in classical Islam and was probably wide-
spread in the Caliphate throughout the nineteenth century. The earliest
known Isa protagonist was Malam Hamza, a cleric who lived in Tsokuwa in
southeastern Kano Emirate. He came to the attention of Kano authorities in
1848, when his followers refused to pay tax other than the zakka (tithe).
After tax officials (jakadu) were beaten and sent back to Kano city in 1848,
Hamza fled to the Ningi Hills. These Mahdists were known as Isawa
(followers of Isa). Isawa extremists were seized in Kano city in the 1850s

64 Burdon to Lugard, telegram, 28 Feb. 1906; Burdon to Lugard, 15 Mar., 21 Mar.
1906, Shillingford Papers.
65 Idriess, Guerres et Sociétés, 147–69.
66 Burdon to Lugard, 15 Mar. 1906.
68 For a discussion of Hamza and the Ningawa resistance, see Adell Patton, Jr., ‘The
Ningi chieftdom and the African frontier: mountaineers and resistance to the Sokoto
Caliphate’ (Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1975); Patton, ‘Ningi raids and
slavery in the nineteenth-century Sokoto Caliphate’, Slavery and Abolition, 11 (1981),
114–45; and Ian Linden, ‘Between two religions of the book: the children of the Israelites
(c. 1846–c. 1920)’, in Elizabeth Isichei, ed., Varieties of Christian experience in Nigeria
(London, 1982), 79–98; and Linden, ‘The Isawa Mallams, c. 1850–1919: some problems
in the religious history of Northern Nigeria’, (unpublished seminar paper, Department
of History, Ahmadu Bello University, 1975).
and impaled in the market, an action which demonstrates how seriously the Caliphate authorities took these clerics and how brazen the clerics were.69

Stories collected at Lokoja in the early 1880s demonstrated that the Isa tradition was widely believed. Reverend C. J. John (an African convert) of the Church Missionary Society may have been surprised when he heard the news of the prophet Jesus which I heard from the mouth of the people at Lokojah who were musulmen or Mahommedans. They said, He will come again at the resurrection of the world, and wage war with Duggal or Daggal [the anti-Christ of Mahdist tradition]. At that time the world will have peace, because he will slay the wicked people, but the good people will remain in the world. . . . Who is this Daggal? Daggal is a man who is doing all the wickedness in this world, who in the day of the appearance of Jesus Christ will make war with Him, but Jesus will slay him with all his followers.70

Jesus [Isa] would come with the Mahdi. Other stories of Isa were also common.71

One Mahdist poet, in response to the West African Frontier Force march on Zaria in 1901, equated the colonialists with Gog and Magog, the eternal enemies of the Mahdi:

Gog and Magog are coming, they approach,
They are small people, with big ears,
They are those who cause destruction at the ends of the earth,
When they approach a town, its crops will not sprout....
The fertility of the world will be taken away,
The place that once gave seventy bushels will not give seven,
Anti-Christ is coming,
He will come and have authority over the world,
The Mahdi and Jesus, they are coming
In order to straigthen out the tangle [of the world].72

The Anti-Christ was none other than the Daggal of earlier teachings.

The belief in the second coming of Isa made emigration to the east unnecessary for revolutionary Mahdists—the fourth feature that distinguishes this form of Mahdism. The revolutionaries, who sought sanctuary on the frontiers of the Caliphate, interpreted emigration as hijra, but they expressed the hijra in a very different way. Fulbe Mahdists and their supporters moved east, congregating in Gombe, northern Adamawa and areas further east still. The revolutionaries, who did not include Fulbe, sometimes moved to the borders of the emirates but otherwise stayed close to the centres of the Caliphate. Satiru, for example, was located between four fiefs, Danchadi, Dange, Shuni and Bodinga, a mere twenty kilometres southwest of Sokoto.73

70 See Jacob Friedrich Schön, *Magana Hausa, Native Literature, or Proverbs, Tales, Fables and Historical Fragments in the Hausa Language. To which is added a translation in English* (London, 1885), 161–2.
73 Mohammed, 'Songs and poems'. The location of Satiru has been the object of some confusion. Various sources have placed the village haphazardly; see, for example, Robert W. Shenton, *The Development of Capitalism in Northern Nigeria* (Toronto, 1986), 27; Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa, 1860–1960* (Cambridge, 1988), 45; and Idrissa, *Guérres et Sociétés*, map.
Kobkitanda was located to the south of Dosso, on the frontier with Birnin Ngaozure, one of the emirates in the Caliphate. Saybu's grandfather, Hangadumbo, had been the village head of Gulma, a village near Dosso. His decision to emigrate was an explicit statement of discontent, both with Dosso's territorial aggrandizement and the presence of the French. Hanga-dumbo, together with his daughter, her husband, and blind Saybu, first moved to Mayakiday and then founded Kobkitanda in about 1902. Several other villages, including Sambera, Toka, and Kofadey, were founded about this time as places of refuge for those Zarma who opposed both the French conquest and aristocratic cooperation with the French, as represented by the succession of Awta as zarmakoy.

Karma was an exception to this pattern because it was not explicitly a Mahdist community but rather a sub-emirate under Say that had joined the Caliphate only in the last years of the nineteenth century.

THE RADICAL CLERICS

The radical clerics who led the revolutionary Mahdist movement were humble in origin, in some cases perhaps of servile origin. From the perspective of the Caliphate, the more important and the most respectable Muslim clerics, the 'ulama, were closely associated with aristocrats and merchants, often being of the same families. Wealthy merchants, clerics and aristocrats also intermarried. As far as we know, none of the radical clerics was Fulbe or associated with the 'ulama-merchant class.

Malam Siba, who founded Satiru, was of Nupe origin. A second cleric, Maikaho, who was accused of declaring himself Mahdi in 1904, came from Gobir, the country which Uthman dan Fodio had subjugated. A third cleric, Malam Bawa, was from Zamfara, which had been in revolt against Sokoto on several occasions in the nineteenth century.

The antipathy of the radical clerics to the Fulbe aristocracy, even before the European conquest, is perhaps best revealed in the alleged statement of Malam Siba:

that he was fed up with the exactions of the ruling class [sic] and that he was not going to obey the instructions of anyone anymore...[but instead] was going to set up a new great regime.

74 Interview at Kobkitanda.
75 Interview at Kobkitanda; Idrissa, Guerres et Sociétés, 147-9.
76 Idrissa, Guerres et Sociétés, 148-9. 77 Interview at Karma.
78 For an excellent analysis of Caliphate class structure, see Ibrahim Tahir, 'Sufis, saints and capitalists in Kano, 1804-1974: pattern of a bourgeois revolution in an Islamic society' (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University, 1975), although his analysis should be amended in one respect: aristocrats and wealthy merchants did intermarry. We wish to thank A. S. Mohammed for his critique of Tahir's analysis. Mohammad points out that there is a common Hausa proverb: 'makudi abokin Sarki', i.e. 'the wealthy man is the friend of the sarki'. There were various alliances between wealthy merchants and the aristocracy, including political, commercial and marital.
79 In addition to the oral traditions collected by Mohammad and Idrissa, there are several contemporary accounts of Satiru, including 'Asalin Gabar Satiru', in Frank Edgar, ed., Litafi na Tatsuniyoyi na Hausa (Belfast, 1911), 1, 263-9, 431; and 'Labarin Farkon Gabar Satirawa', in Edgar, ed., Litafi na Tatsuniyoyi na Hausa (Belfast, 1913), 111, 404. To these should be added the poems and songs collected by Mohammad ('Songs and poems of the Satiru rising') and the compilation of Johnston, 'Dan Makafo and the Satiru rising'.
80 Mohammad, 'Social interpretation', 171.
Satiru did not pay taxes or contribute corvée labour to Sokoto either before or after the British conquest. The reference to ‘ruling class’ refers in this context to the Fulbe aristocracy and high ranking slave officials.

By 1900, Mahdist agents were active in Nupe, Kontagora, Zaria, Sokoto, and Gwandu. In 1902, for example, Malam Mai Zanna responded to the British occupation of Bida by calling for the expulsion of the British and the Emir. It is reported that Mai Zanna claimed to be the Mahdi. As noted above, such reports must be treated with caution. None the less, he collected numerous followers from the neighbouring villages of Bida and the lower classes in the town. This rabble was, however, unprepared for any action and the ringleaders were surprised and quietly arrested by the Emir’s dogarai [police]. The Mahdi was tried and sentenced by the Native Court to six months imprisonment in the town dungeon and the followers were fined 25 bags of cowries each.

It is likely that many of Mai Zanna’s supporters were slaves.

In January 1904, Malam Maikaho was reported to have proclaimed himself Mahdi at Satiru. The authorities quickly summoned him to Sokoto. At his trial he claimed that he was only a Mahdi of war. The significance of that distinction is not clear, but it is likely that Maikaho only claimed to be an agent, and not the true Mahdi Himself. As C. W. J. Orr, Acting Resident of Sokoto, reported to Lugard on 29 February, during the month the Seriken Mussulmin reported that a Mallam was endeavouring to set himself up as a Mahdi in the south of the Province to induce the people to rise against the Whiteman, and that he had sent messages to that effect to the Seriken Kiawa of Kaura [Namoda]. The man was arrested and is now in custody in Sokoto, but is ill, so that investigation is delayed temporarily. The matter will be thoroughly gone into and the Mallam tried in the Native Court, but I have told the Seriken Mussulmin that he is to keep me informed and will not pass any sentence without previous reference to me for the consideration and information of your Excellency. I do not look upon the matter as serious, but it bears close watching.

Orr’s report establishes that Maikaho died on or shortly after 29 February, and while foul play is not indicated in the documents, it was certainly possible that he was killed, considering Sokoto’s fears of Mahdism in the light of the disaster at Bormi seven months earlier. Lugard’s marginal note on Orr’s report approved of a trial before the Islamic (Native) court, ‘if they will punish adequately’. Maikaho’s supporters were released ‘after taking an oath on the Koran to keep the peace’. Maikaho’s son, Hassami, became

81 Burdon and Lugard realized this situation but easily convinced the Colonial Office that taxation was not a factor. See Oliver’s and Antrobus’ minutes, Conference of 7 Mar. 1906, CO 446/53; Burdon to Lugard, 21 Mar. 1906.
83 There is some discrepancy over the events surrounding Satiru in 1904. Mohammad (‘Social interpretation’, 159) claims that Maikaho declared himself Mahdi in January, apparently relying on E. J. Arnett, Gazetteer of Sokoto (London, 1920), 45. Arnett is wrong on a number of points relating to Satiru, however, and it may be, as other sources suggest, that Maikaho only came to the attention of authorities in February. As noted above, he probably did not declare himself Mahdi, only his agent.
84 ‘Labarin Farkon Gabar Satirawa’, 404.
85 Orr, Sokoto Province Report no. 1, 29 Feb. 1904, Sokprof 2/2 51/1904 (NNAK).
86 Lugard’s marginal note on Orr’s Sokoto Report no. 1.
87 Burdon to Lugard, 21 Feb. 1906, CO 446/53; and Lugard, Annual Report, 1905–6, 369.
the new headman at Satiru, and when he died in the summer of 1905, another son, Isa, became headman. Saybu Dan Makafo made much of Isa’s name, claiming that Isa was the successor to the Mahdi in Mahdist eschatology.

The Mahdists at Satiru commanded significant local support. The citizenry of neighbouring towns and villages celebrated the Muslim festivals there, and some Muslims in the area had studied under Isa’s father and had accepted his Mahdist leadership. Hassami apparently respected the 1904 order that revolutionary Mahdism be curtailed, presumably under the threat that a local fiefholder, the Sarkin Kebbi of Danchadi, would send police to break up the town if militant Mahdism were being preached. The Sarkin Kebbi was informed when Hassami died in the summer of 1905, and may have approved the succession of Isa. By this time, however, Satiru once again was beyond control. The Sarkin Kebbi had not collected taxes, and after the rebellion he confessed that he was afraid to do so. He knew it [Satiru] as a gathering of fanatical Malams, a hotbed of disaffection, and he neither took action nor made any report.

The accession of Isa appears to have marked a shift towards militancy at Satiru.

Further west, there were a number of clerics in Dosso who appealed to Mahdists in Dosso and in the western emirates of the Caliphate. Two clerics, Aman Beri of Tidirka and especially Saybu Dan Makafo of Kobkitanda, stood out. Initially, Aman Beri appears to have been the most important Dosso cleric. The French, who learned of his subversive activities from Zarmakoy Awtu, accused him of fomenting revolt as early as April 1905. Aman Beri was arrested, taken to Niamaye, and sentenced to three years in prison. He was later accused of complicity with Saybu, but at the time of Aman Beri’s detention, the French were unaware of Saybu’s existence. The arrest propelled Saybu into the role of leader, a role he filled with sufficient competence that Aman Beri’s imprisonment did not have the desired effect of preventing an uprising.

88 It has been assumed wrongly that Isa become the leader at Satiru upon the death of his father in early 1904 (see, for example, Dusgate, *Conquest*, 242), but Burdon’s report of 21 Mar. 1906 clarifies the situation.
90 Burdon to Lugard, 21 Mar. 1906.
92 This reconstruction is based on Enregistrement de la correspondance de route, 1906, Journal de Poste de Dosso, ANN 5.6.1. See especially the entries for 12 and 18 March and
As Idrissa has demonstrated, Saybu Dan Makafo played a key role in the uprising; he is the only cleric to be identified with all parts of the revolt.\textsuperscript{93} Traditions at Karma clearly establish this leadership, even though Saybu was not present, while the revolt at Satiru did not occur until Saybu arrived, though the planning of it had probably already taken place. Both the French and the British independently confirmed his central role.\textsuperscript{94}

Saybu Dan Makafo had leadership abilities that are unusual, considering his blindness. The French thought he was only about thirty years old in 1906; oral traditions remember him being about forty.\textsuperscript{95} According to French reports, he had the gift of ventriloquism which may help explain his fame as a magician.\textsuperscript{96} He reportedly had Tijani connections,\textsuperscript{97} but the significance of this is unclear, since he was a self-proclaimed agent of the Mahdi. As Idrissa has noted, Dan Makafo was considered a v\textit{wali}, a saint.\textsuperscript{98} His detractors considered him an agent of Satan, and his movement heretical.\textsuperscript{99}

Saybu’s call for a revolt was unequivocal. It was to occur on the Id al-Kabir, 5 February.\textsuperscript{100} At that time the Mahdi Musa would arrive from the east.\textsuperscript{101} In Saybu’s earlier preaching, there is no known mention of Isa, but he stressed this feature of revolutionary Mahdism once he reached Satiru. He instructed his supporters not to pay tax or contribute corvée labour. They were not to obey local officials who supported the colonial regime. A great

5 April. Also see Rapport politique du mois d’avril 1906, Cercle du Djerma, ANN 15.2.9; Rapport politique mensuel, Apr. 1906, Région de Niamey, ANN 15.2.7. Rothiot (\textit{Aouta}, 149–50) bases his information on oral sources and on Rapport politique de la Région de Niamey, Apr. 1905, and Rapport politique du commandant de la Région de Niamey, 1 Dec. 1905. Rothiot does not provide a source for the connection between Aman Beri and Saybu, but see Idrissa, \textit{Guerres et Sociétés}, 148–9. According to Idrissa, Aman Beri was arrested in May 1905 and was released from prison on schedule in 1908, but he was immediately sent into exile, where he died only a month later.

94 Rothiot, \textit{Aouta}, 179–82, has concluded otherwise on the basis of oral material. A critique of Rothiot’s interpretation cannot be presented here, but it should be noted that traditions collected at Karma and Kobkitanda in September–October 1988 and a reading of available archival materials in Niger confirm Idrissa’s interpretation.
95 Ponty, Extract of Report; Idrissa, \textit{Guerres et Sociétés}, 148. Some reports claim that Saybu Dan Makafo was not totally blind but could see shapes. The extent of his blindness is not clear, but it was certainly sufficient that he was identified as such. Traditions at Kobkitanda, however, insist that he was totally blind from birth; oral information obtained from the elders of Kobkitanda on 2 Oct. 1988.
97 Ponty, Extract of Report.
98 Idrissa, \textit{Guerres et Sociétés}, 149.
100 Idrissa, \textit{Guerres et Sociétés}, 149; Burdon to Lugard, 5 Mar. 1906. Aman Beri as well was apparently preparing for revolt on the day of the Id.
101 The Mahdist agent, Musa, arrested in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast in 1905, may have been the Musa who was expected to appear. The connection between the Musa of the middle Volta basin and the Musa of the revolutionary Mahdist tradition at Satiru has yet to be explored fully. See Goody, ‘Mahdi in Northern Ghana’, 143–56; and Terray, ‘Royaume abron du Gyaman’, 206–7.
Muslim army would liberate the country from the Christian occupation. To protect his followers, he devised numerous supernatural preparations:

To achieve this he prepared magical charms which mixed animism and Islam. They involved a mixture of plant material (roots and leaves) and Coranic verses. The participants drank it in order to make themselves invulnerable to guns (or the bullets directed at them would be transformed into water) and stimulate their combativeness and courage.\textsuperscript{102}

In fact, Saybu probably never learned to write because of his blindness.\textsuperscript{103} Rather than basing his authority on the traditions of scholarship, he relied on mysticism alone, including the charms and the encouragement of belief in supernatural protection from bullets referred to in the quotation.

There were other clerics as well, although exactly how many is uncertain. Aman Beri and Saybu were in touch with agents in the Niger valley to the immediate north of Kontagora; there seem to have been contacts with the Satiru community, where Saybu eventually fled. Similar Mahdist agents were active further west as far as Gonja, Abron and adjacent areas.\textsuperscript{104} By September 1905, Saybu’s agents were known to have been at Anzuru, Sonay, Torodi and other places such as Dokimana and Boki in the Emirate of Say. A close associate and relative of Aman Beri, Yonkori Bontammi of Sokorbe, gathered support in the Zarma villages of Hilo, Tidirka and Kaina, but otherwise his role is not known.\textsuperscript{105} Yonkori Bontammi was detained in April 1906, three months after the battle at Kobkitanda. Once the French realized the seriousness of the situation, they proceeded to round up as many clerics as possible, whether they were involved or not.\textsuperscript{106}

The organization of Mahdist resistance was thus well established in 1905. There were serious problems of co-ordination, given the state of communications and the military superiority of the colonial armies and their allies. Travelling clerics, who spread the doctrines of Mahdist resistance widely, none the less overcame these difficulties to a considerable extent. The emergence of Saybu Dan Makafo as a charismatic leader provided the spark that touched off the uprising.

\textbf{Colonial Policy and the Mahdist Revolt}

Richard Dusgate has called the culminating battle at Satiru ‘the most bloodthirsty expedition in the history of British military operations in Northern Nigeria’.\textsuperscript{107} Adeleye has concluded that British policy was characterized by ‘misjudgments, panic and miscalculations’, for which the British took ‘vengeance’.\textsuperscript{108} Margery Perham, in her biography of Lugard, has noted that vengeance,

\textsuperscript{102} Idrissa, \textit{Guerres et Sociétés}, 149. Malams at Satiru utilized similar charms and spells.

\textsuperscript{103} Interview at Kobkitanda.


\textsuperscript{105} Journal du poste de Dosso, 12 and 18 Mar., 5 Apr. 1906. Rothiot, \textit{Aouta}, 175–8, interprets these events differently.

\textsuperscript{106} Rapport politique et administratif, Région de Niamey, second trimestre, 1906; Rapport politique du mois de mars 1906, Cercle du Djerma; Rapport politique mensuel, Région de Niamey, mois de octobre 1906, ANN 15.2.7.

\textsuperscript{107} Dusgate, \textit{Conquest}, 247.

\textsuperscript{108} Adeleye, ‘Mahdist triumph’, 200.
it must be admitted, was what most of the white men in Northern Nigeria wanted [after the initial loss at Satiru], and with them in this were those Fulani [Fulbe] leaders who had accepted their rule.... It was a terrible vengeance, more terrible than Lugard knew at the time.109

Just how ‘terrible’ came out in subsequent reports which were kept secret. They found that the ‘killing was very free, not to say slaughter [italics in original]’; ‘they killed every living thing before them’ so that the fields were ‘running with blood’, while the ‘spitting of mallams on a stake’ and the ‘cutting off the breasts of women’ were typical atrocities. These reports also make it clear that Perham was wrong in her assessment of Lugard’s ignorance. Lugard not only knew the extent of the massacre; he sanctioned it.110

There were two reasons why the British permitted the brutality, and it should be noted that the results in French territory were as brutal as in the British sphere. First, there was the danger of Mahdism itself, which would continue to bother the colonial regimes for the next twenty years. Given the fact that Saybu’s movement crossed the colonial boundaries of two European regimes and threatened to engulf the heartlands of British Northern Nigeria, Lugard made the decision, probably wise from an imperial perspective, to set a bloody example. He only learned that the uprising at Satiru was a continuation of the revolt in French Niger after the Hillary expedition. Despite French offers of assistance, the British chose to act alone, and events proved they possessed more than enough resources to crush the revolt. Still, both colonial governments had cause to be concerned.

Lugard was not sure how far the unrest might spread in British territory. Mahdist activity accelerated during the period of the Satiru revolt. Malam Siba actually escaped from the massacre, due to his magical powers so it was said. He might have been a source of further agitation, but his alleged powers failed to save him from later arrest and detention in the Sokoto prison. He did continue to write and sell Islamic tracts, and he retained a following as a malam until he died in detention, but without important consequences.111

In Kontagora, a Mahdist cleric ‘drew attention to the impending end of British rule and exhorted people to stop paying taxes to the British administration’.112 Other agents were operating at Jebba, Yelwa, and Maradu.113

Yet another Mahdist agent, Malam Mai Layu, came to the notice of the authorities on 10 March, only days after the destruction of Satiru. At the

110 Edward Lugard (Sir Frederick’s brother and close confident) and William Wallace, Acting High Commissioner after Lugard was transferred to Hong Kong later in 1906, carried out the investigation in response to enquiries from Walter Miller, the C.M.S. missionary in Zaria. See Wallace to Lugard, 31 Oct. 1907, Lugard Papers, Mss. Brit. Emp. 62, Rhodes House; Edward Lugard to FDL, 7 Oct. 1907, Lugard Papers. Also see the embarrassing typographical error, or so we assume, by Goldsmith that ‘all parts of stragglers were cut off’. Presumably he meant that all parties of stragglers were cut off; Sokoto Province Annual Report, 1906.
111 Personal communication, A. S. Mohammed.
112 Lugard, Annual Report, 1905–6, 367; Adeleye, Power and Diplomacy, 322.
time, he was building a village in Dajin Gundumi, the great forest region southeast of Sokoto. Burdon considered Mai Layu potentially more dangerous than Isa and Saybu Dan Makafo. He believed that Mai Layu was a rival to Saybu, but this may have been wishful thinking. As with the other revolutionary Mahdists, however, Mai Layu’s followers were non-Fulbe; they appear to have been mostly Zamfarawa from Raba. No chances were taken, and Mai Layu was detained by the Sarkin Musulmi on 22 March, which further confirmed Lugard’s belief that most Caliphate officials had decided to support the British.

Moreover, the French were worried about Mahdism further west. They were uncertain whether or not the activities of agents there were connected to Saybu. Consequently, E. Roume, Governor General of French West Africa, took initiatives to prevent a similar crisis from spreading across colonial boundaries in the future. He proposed to the Governor of Southern Nigeria and the High Commissioner of Northern Nigeria mechanisms for policing the frontier, with a particular concern for restricting the movements of radical clerics. Although the British and French had difficulty implementing some features of this proposal, in practice colonial officials did in fact work out an arrangement. Anything that might lead to Muslim agitation was treated seriously.

The second reason for the brutality related to the issue of slavery. As noted above, both the British and the French were worried about the slave exodus. Slaves had to be kept in place in order to allow colonial policies on slavery to take effect. In Northern Nigeria, slavery was not abolished, despite a legal fiction that the ‘legal status’ of slavery was. Because many slaves ran away, the issue of fugitives was very sensitive. Therefore, it was necessary to downplay the extent of the fugitive problem in official circles, at the same time that local slave owners were re-assured about the intention of British ‘reforms’. In the French sphere, slavery was technically abolished in 1905, but in fact only the term changed; slaves were subsequently referred to as captifs.

The Colonial Office, later followed by Lugard, attempted to shift attention to other factors. While slavery was clearly mentioned as a contributing cause to the revolt in early reports, the issue was deliberately removed from later reports. Lugard’s initial cable stated succinctly: ‘The rebels are outlaw

114 Adeleye, ‘Mahdist triumph’, 211.
115 Burdon to Lugard, 22 Mar. 1906.
116 Adeleye, ‘Mahdist triumph’, 211.

fugitive slaves'.

The Colonial Office announcement of the revolt stated something quite different: 'The rebels are outlaw fugitives.' A marginal note next to Lugard's telegram indicates how the incident was to be handled: 'Better say nothing of slaves'. By 9 May, Lugard incorporated this cleaned-up interpretation into his official reports. If there had been a cover-up with respect to the severity of the repression, there was equally one with respect to slavery. And the reasons were interrelated. The annihilation of the Satirawa was a lesson to slaves as well as to the aristocracy. It demonstrated to the slave population that slavery was to continue, despite the introduction of reforms that gradually resulted in the demise of the institution, and it allowed the aristocracy one last sanguine warning to those slaves who had not already fled. The destruction of Satiru was the last time the British called upon Caliphate levies to quell a disorder. Given the number of fugitive slaves at Satiru and the extent of violence perpetrated by those troops, the message to slaves and masters alike elsewhere must have been particularly clear.

There was still unrest among the slave population after the uprising, but the exodus of slaves peaked about that time. Many slaves in Say, Torodi and other western emirates under French rule fled during the rainy season of 1906, while some slaves continued to move southward from Sokoto, Kano, Zaria and other emirates in British territory as well. Whether or not the suppression of the 1905–6 uprising discouraged slaves from leaving, the extent of the suppression certainly prevented fugitive slaves from joining an organized resistance.

The collaboration between the colonial powers and the local aristocracies in confronting the uprising consolidated colonial rule. As noted above, both the British and the French received considerable support. Because of superior technology, the colonial regimes did not need this assistance from a military perspective. The danger was that the Caliphate aristocracy would take advantage of the crisis to expel the British and French. Burdon fully realized this when he learned of Hillary’s march on Satiru. At the time, he was only about twenty kilometres south of Satiru. In the evening he first received news of the Mahdist victory from Hassan, the Sarkin Baura of Dange. The significance of this fact was apparent to Burdon at the time, and the warmth with which Hassan greeted Burdon in the early hours of the morning only confirmed Burdon’s belief that the aristocracy would stand by the British. Revolutionary Mahdism provided the cement that solidified the alliance between the aristocracy and the British.

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121 Lugard to CO, telegram, 14 Feb. 1906, CO 446/52, PRO.
122 CO 446/52, p. 567.
123 Lugard to Secretary of State, 9 May 1906, CO 446/52.
124 The implications of the Satiru revolt on the development of slavery policies is explored in Hogendorn and Lovejoy, ‘Lugard’s Slavery Policies’, but will be examined in greater detail in a volume forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.
125 Rapports d’ensemble, Feb., May, June, Aug. and Dec., 1906 Cercle de Say, 16.5.1, ANN.
126 To be examined in our forthcoming study with Cambridge University Press.
127 Lugard, Annual Report, 1905–6, 373, provides a convenient summary of these pledges of support in British territory. For the importance of local military levies in the French sphere, see Idrissa, Guerres et Sociétés, 148, 179.
After the uprising was suppressed, there was some mopping up to do. The emir of Gwandu had to be deposed, the emirate of Hadejia had to be brought to its knees, and the political situation at Kano had to be stabilized. There was also trouble in French Zinder. None the less, the Fulbe aristocracy could now be relied upon, and the French alliance with Dosso was further strengthened. The policy enunciated in the famous treatise of Waziri al-Bukhari of Sokoto was firmly in place. The aristocracy would co-operate with the colonial regimes in order to protect the Muslim community and, it should be added, maintain the privileged position of the Fulbe aristocracy itself.

For his role in the destruction of Satiru, Sarkin Musulmi Attahiru II received a most curious award for a Muslim ruler. King Edward VI bestowed upon him, for his indispensable co-operation, the Companionship of the Order of St Michael and St George. Haliru, although not in the direct line of succession, became emir of Gwandu in 1906 because he provided horses and supplies in the campaign against Satiru. He replaced his father who had sympathized with Mahdist to the point that he waivered in supporting the British. The role of Marafa Muhammadu Maiturare, the official in charge of the Sokoto levies, was also praised. In one official’s assessment, ‘it was his influence and authority which was in no small measure responsible for a local disaster not ending in a general rising’. The Marafa subsequently became Sarkin Musulmi in 1915 and reigned until 1924. Similarly, Hassan, the sarki of Dange, the fief near Satiru where Burdon first realized that the Sokoto aristocracy would remain loyal to the British and the very man responsible for delivering Saybu to the authorities, was to become Sarkin Musulmi in 1931.

CONCLUSION

How ‘revolutionary’ were the Mahdist at Kobkitanda and Satiru? We have shown that there was a coordinated uprising that was organized by a network of radical clerics; that the movement revealed class tensions in Caliphate society; and that the uprising was aimed at all governments, including Dosso, the Caliphate and the colonial regimes. None the less, the movement was seriously flawed. Because the Mahdist believed in a millennial vision


130 Adeleye, ‘Dilemma of Waziri’.

131 Lugard, Annual Report, 1905–6, 373. Other emirate officials were rewarded in various ways; see Goldsmith, Report no. 31, Sokoto Province, 30 September 1906.


133 Backwell, Occupation of Hausaland, 78.


135 Burdon to Resident, Sokoto, 11 Mar. 1932; Burdon, ‘Early days in Nigeria’, 120.
and relied on supernatural powers, they undermined their effectiveness on the battlefield. As noted above, the Mahdists made fanatical charges against large and well-armored colonial forces; they made no use of the Maxim gun and other weapons that they captured, and they did not engage in guerrilla tactics that might have made the situation much more difficult for their enemies. Had they been more adaptive, they would have prolonged the uprising, with indeterminate consequences.

Despite the military weakness of the revolt, revolutionary Mahdism seriously threatened the stability of the colonial occupation. Until 1906, the alliance between the colonial regimes and the aristocracy of the Sokoto Caliphate was uncertain. The French trusted the zarmakoy of Dosso, but they doubted the loyalty of the emirs. The British thought that they had installed reliable officials, and in most cases the revolt proved this to be true. None the less, in early 1906, there was the clear possibility that the Mahdist revolt would lead to a general rising. Instead, the colonial presence became more firmly established than before.

The significance of the revolt does not rest with the military threat, but rather with the impressive set of grievances that were shared over a wide area. Clerics were able to articulate these grievances in a form that many slaves and peasants could understand, despite the complexity of different aristocracies and two colonial regimes. For one brief period, slaves and peasants participated in a movement that could have altered the course of early colonial history. The belief in revolutionary action was held so strongly that people committed their lives.136

**SUMMARY**

The Mahdist uprising of 1905–6 was a revolutionary movement that attempted to overthrow British and French colonial rule, the aristocracy of the Sokoto Caliphate and the zarmakoy of Dosso. The Mahdist supporters of the revolt were disgruntled peasants, fugitive slaves and radical clerics who were hostile both to indigenous authorities and to the colonial regimes. There was no known support among aristocrats, wealthy merchants or the 'ulama. Thus the revolt reflected strong divisions based on class and, as an extension, on ethnicity. The pan-colonial appeal of the movement and its class tensions highlight another important feature: revolutionary Mahdism differed from other forms of Mahdism that were common in the Sokoto Caliphate at the time of the colonial conquest. There appears to have been no connection with the Mahdists who were followers of Muhammad Ahmed of the Nilotic Sudan or with those who joined Sarkin Musulmi Attahiru I on his *hijra* of 1903.

136 There would be later manifestations of Mahdism, but not revolutionary in their intent. The Germans faced a Mahdist uprising in Caliphate territory in northern Kamerun in 1907, but this had no connection with the 1905–6 revolt. See Ahmadou Bassoro and Eldridge Mohammadu, *Histoire de Garoua: Cité Peule du XIXe siècle* (Yaounde, 1977), 53–60, 275–7; reports by Zimmermann and K. Strumpell, in ‘Die Unruhen in Deutsch-Adamaua 1907’, *Deutsches Kolonialblatt*, ccxxv (1907), 167–73; ‘Unruhen in Kamerun’, *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung*, 31 (3 Aug. 1907), 366; ‘Unruhen in Adamaua’, *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung*, 33 (17 Aug. 1907), 337. Similarly, the resurgence of Mahdism at Dumbulwa in 1923 was unrelated; see Ubah, ‘British measures against Mahdism’; and Saeed, ‘British policy towards the Mahdiyya’. In both these cases, the Mahdist adherents were associated with the *ansar* and maintained a connection with the Nilotic Sudan, which we have demonstrated had no direct influence on revolutionary Mahdism.
The suppression of the revolt was important for three reasons. First, the British consolidated their alliance with the aristocracy of the Caliphate, while the French further strengthened their ties with the zarmakoy of Dosso and other indigenous rulers. The dangerous moment which Muslims might have seized to expel the Europeans quickly passed. Second, the brutality of the repression was a message to slave owners and slaves alike that the colonial regimes were committed to the continuation of slavery and opposed to any sudden emancipation of the slave population. Third, 1906 marked the end of revolutionary action against colonialism; the radical clerics were either killed or imprisoned. Other forms of Mahdism continued to haunt the colonial regimes, but without serious threat of a general rising.