

Attacking the Causes of Conflict

The North Mali Programme to Ending the Tuareg Rebellion

The 'Tuareg rebellion' was one of the conflicts categorised as 'small wars, small mercies'. By African standards of the numbers of killed and wounded, the rebellion was indeed small. But it was ugly and had far-reaching consequences. Events in the border country between the white world of North Africa and the black sub-Saharan Africa influence the balance between the two parts of the continent.

The Tuareg rebellion is understood as the uprising against the Mali government that broke out at the end of the 1980s. It was instigated mainly by former members of the Islamic Legion returning home from Libya. Mali's droughts of the 1970s and 1980s, the repatriates' loss of their own living space, disappointment and resentment over underdevelopment, individual and collective prospects, military rule, colonisation from the South, and their lack of a share in power vented itself in armed attacks on state symbols. The initial targets were offices of the *commandants de cercle* and the *chefs d'arrondissement*, and above all the *perceptions* – the tax collectors' offices.

Reprisals against civilians

Moussa Traoré, the former Mali President, quickly recognised the danger and sought a conciliatory settlement by negotiation. That changed after his fall from power. The caretaker government under army general A. Toumani Touré (1991-93) preferred to take a hard line. The army responded to a Tuareg attack on the country town of Goundam with reprisal actions against civilians. Dozens of prominent Tuaregs were murdered. Most of the nomadic population fled into the bush or to Mauritania.

The rebellion began in Kidal and Mena-ka, in northwestern Mali, an almost exclusively Tuareg region, and spread towards the southwest. But quite different laws prevail in western Timbuktu, the multi-ethnic area north of the Niger inland delta. The Songhai, Bambara, Bozo, Peulh, Moors and Tuaregs meet on the vast and fertile flood plains. The most populous group are the black Bellah, formerly serfs of the Tuaregs, who are hardworking farmers and cattle breeders. In Timbuktu, Mali's sixth region, the Bellah outnumber the Tuaregs by up to six-to-one.

The Bellah and Tuaregs share the same language and culture. But the rebels quickly turned the Bellah into their biggest enemies. They raided Bellah villages to ex-

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The peaceful settlement of the 'Tuareg rebellion' in northern Mali is one of the few success stories of conflict mediation. A German development cooperation project played a substantial role in it. The authors have worked in the programme from its beginnings.

tort money and steal food. The Bellah left their ancestral homeland on Lake Faguine and all their unprotected farming areas to the north. Their flight left a no-man's-land almost 350 km long where fear and uncertainty reigned.

The rebels set up their bases in the abandoned nomad settlements. The army entrenched in the country towns along the banks of the Niger. The familiar vicious circle escalated: the rebels attacked the gendarmerie, the army, projects, vehicles and villages, and the army made reprisal strikes against the civilian population. Because of the terrain and their equip-

ment, neither side was able to win the war.

Under pressure from the French and the Algerians the combatants in the spring of 1992 agreed to what became known as the *Pacte National* between the Mali government and the by then four rebel movements. Three of them, the ARLA, FPLA and FIAA, had split off from the original one, the *Mouvement Populaire de l'Azawad*, MPA. The pact foresaw for the rebels integration in the Mali armed forces, a share in government posts, economic and social integration, and a step towards self-administration for the north.

But the army resisted integration of the former fighters in its ranks. Only a few hundred of them were accepted. The rebel movements came under pressure in supplying and paying their troops. What the Mali government did not deliver had to be 'organised'. From mid-1992 to mid-1994 the army and the rebels mainly kept quiet. But the situation did not improve; it became more obscure and unstable.

When the underlying tension reached its highpoint in May 1994 an armed, black 'people's movement' formed out of Songhai groups in the army and calling themselves Ganda Koy (Lords of the Land) confronted the rebellion. People's militia were formed, and the army gave them weapons training. A FIAA pursuit action against the Ganda Koy finally tore apart the consensus in June 1994.

The already integrated ex-rebel fighters left their barracks (where they were able to, with weapons and vehicles) and attacked local towns and projects. At the latest, this was when the conflict took on clear ethnic features. Reprisal actions became pogroms. After rebel attacks, mobs beat to death all fair-skinned people whether they were involved in the conflict or not.

Return to common sense after escalation of conflict

The madness of it all became obvious following a night occupation of Gao by the FIAA and a subsequent pogrom against a Tuareg village by the army and Ganda Koy in October 1994. Common sense began to emerge. The Songhai leaders realised that the southern army would never be able to protect them. The leaders of the Tuaregs and Moors saw that rebel attacks brought their people only murder and expulsion from their homes.

The first peace talks between the Tuareg and Songhai leaders took place in Bourrem. No representatives of the ad-

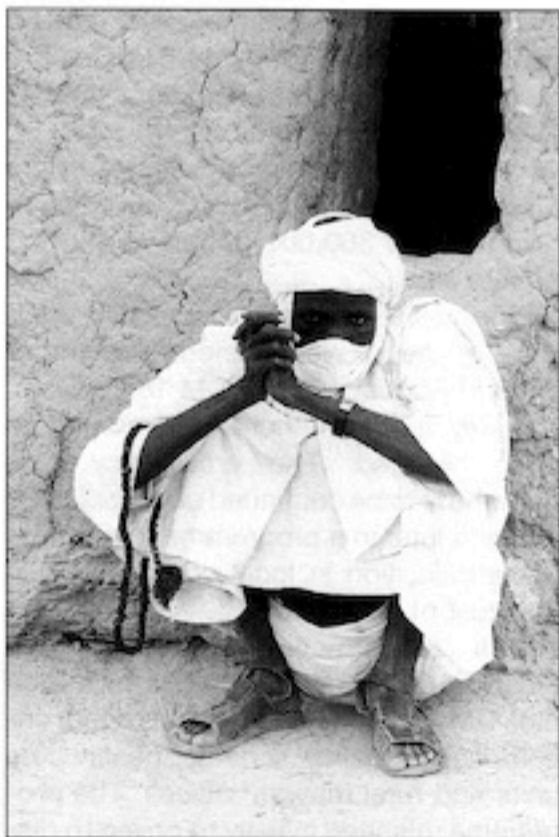


Photo: Ackermann

Tuareg in Timbuktu

ministration, the rebel movements, the army or Ganda Koy were present. The talks were followed by meetings of reconciliation, and the meetings finally by hesitant, step-by-step normalisation.

It was an act of recapturing civil power. The rebels, after all, had not only risen against the government and socio-economic distortions. They had also rebelled against the hierarchy, the gerontocracy of their own society. It was these elders of civil society who bypassed the government and took the helm again by getting together as in earlier days. Making war was the business of the rebels and the army; the elders' mission was to organise peace.

The government was at first surprised by the civil pacification and its speed, but observed and supported it. The government gave the movement a political framework at the beginning of 1995 and then a planning one from the middle of that year. The Round Table of Timbuktu in July 1995 and its weapons burning of March 1996 made the government's commitment internationally visible. Dealing with the rebellion and disarming and integrating the ex-combatants remained solely the government's business, but the UNDP helped out. The government gave wide scope to bilateral and multilateral aid organisations for their own initiatives in repatriating refugees and expellees and in reconstruction.

Features of the North Mali programme

German development minister Carl-Dieter Spranger personally got the German engagement in the north of Mali under way during a visit to the country in the spring of 1993. He held out the prospect of DM 36 million in assistance. That was followed in early summer of that year by talks between the aid ministry (BMZ), the German development bank (KfW) and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ). The talks ended up in an initial joint mission to Mali the following September.

The mission's contact point was the *Commissariat du Nord*, set up in 1992 especially for pacification of the north and located in the President's office. With direct access to the President, this commissariat is one of the institutional prerequisites for the peace process in Mali.

The mission quickly took the preliminary decision to place the important German input where the situation was most difficult: in the area between Timbuktu and the Mauritanian border. Nowhere else were there so many refugees as in Mauritania (around 40,000 at that time), nowhere else was there a no-man's-land of

similar size or such deep gaps between the ethnic groups. The area was characterised by devastation, neglect and decay, which were more the results of the weather than the effects of war. The government was no longer represented at the critical geographical locations.

That is how the North Mali programme came into being. Its goal is to support the social and economic stabilisation process in the northern regions hit by the Tuareg conflict, and contribute to their pacification.

The rapid integration of the able-bodied target groups in income-generating measures is intended to leave humanitarian emergency assistance increasingly in their own responsibility. The will to self-help is to be strengthened in the process, and will contribute to avoid ethnic conflicts and reduce the danger of fresh violence.

Full participation of local communities

The general rules are simple: manage nothing without the people affected by it; do nothing by remote control, try to solve everything locally; support all forms of dialogue; try to reach consensus if possible, even if it takes a long time; import nothing that can be made locally; promote high local production; and revive local economic cycles.

The programme includes the following: 1) emergency aid measures for Tuareg and Moor refugees returning from Mauritanian refugee camps; 2) emergency aid measures for expellees within Mali, especially Bellah; 3) reintegration of refugees and expellees by short and long term income-generating measures; 4) economic revival by investment and assumption of start-up costs (mainly food for work); 5) an investment programme to reconstruct the destroyed infrastructure (KfW). Around 160,000 people are directly affected by the programme's measures, and the trend is rising. Some 360,000 people live in the project area.

The volume of Technical Cooperation (TC) for the six-year period, September 1993 to August 1999, is DM 18.6 million. Topping up by another DM 2 million has been pledged. The emergency programme is to be continued until April 1999 and end later in a programme to promote decentralisation in local communities in the west of Timbuktu.

The reconstruction programme from Financial Cooperation (FC) (DM 4.7 million plus DM 4 million have been pledged) encompasses mainly schools, health care units and rural mayors' offices. The programme, planned initially to cover 16 districts, is to meet the needs of at first al-

most 30 rural communities. The construction programme, covering durable buildings made of improved local materials, is under the technical supervision of a team of Mali architects. Work is currently in progress at a total of 22 building sites.

Beginning at the Mauritanian border, the programme in 1995 and 1996 pursued the peaceful recovery of the no-man's-land. Léré, about 60 km from the border and once the hub of East-West, North-South trade in the west of Timbuktu, was an exception amid the disintegration of 1994. Integrated ex-fighters of the only rebel movement to remain at the side of the Mali army were stationed there. This special unit secured Léré and the surrounding area, not only preventing banditry but also attacks on regular Mali army formations. That is why the German team was based there, where everything began. Building connections right into the black area beyond the cordon around Léré continued until the major reconciliation meeting of M'Bouna in September 1995.

The size of the area and the intended decentral working method suggested setting up local branches. Such branches consist of an enclosed, rented property with one or two permanent buildings, an inner yard, a storehouse, an office with a safe, a *Maison de Passage*, and logistics and radio link. With our 10 branches we now more or less cover the area west of Timbuktu. The branch managers come from the respective social environment and reflect the composition of the population in the German intervention area.

Responsibility for target group

The programme staff work in direct contact with the target group. Every branch manager has his own budget. Mutually binding contracts are concluded as decently as possible, and the target groups are given as much scope as possible to decide and organise for themselves. The German team rarely cooperates with the smallest groups and individual nomadic settlements (*sites*). They press for meaningful local associations, which have also formed without problems.

The tutelage exerted by the programme in this case does not mean project execution, but rather patronage. In September 1996 the tutelage switched to the newly founded *Ministère des Zones Arides et Semi-Arides (MZASA)*.

The special civil feature of the conflict mediation defined the programme. To align the programme, an informal advisory committee (*Comité Consultatif*) formed during the course of 1995, which meets every few weeks or months. Its members represent in the capital, Bamako, the ar-

ea west of Timbuktu. The committee advises the German team on all issues of principle and programme, follows implementation of its recommendations, and passes on its observations to the government and public.

The authors of this report are the only two German staff members – an economist and a sociologist – in a programme whose pyramidal structure includes many dozens of Mali colleagues. They are the advisory committee, the permanent staff, and temporary employees. Many hundreds of others are touched by the programme. They are building contractors, architect's offices, surveyors, landscape planners, and so on. Many thousands of people are affected by the programme. The German experts are first of all, and mainly, the hinge between the Mali and the German sides. Essentially, this is a task of reporting, financial planning and book-keeping. To carry out this task they have found, in joint consideration with the GTZ, a consulting solution that allows them to work freely and flexibly.

The Germans have the means available to solve the most diverse problems. For example, in the winter of 1995 they paid for the fuel for the boat the Ganda Koy needed to collect the weapons on the banks of the River Niger that their fighters

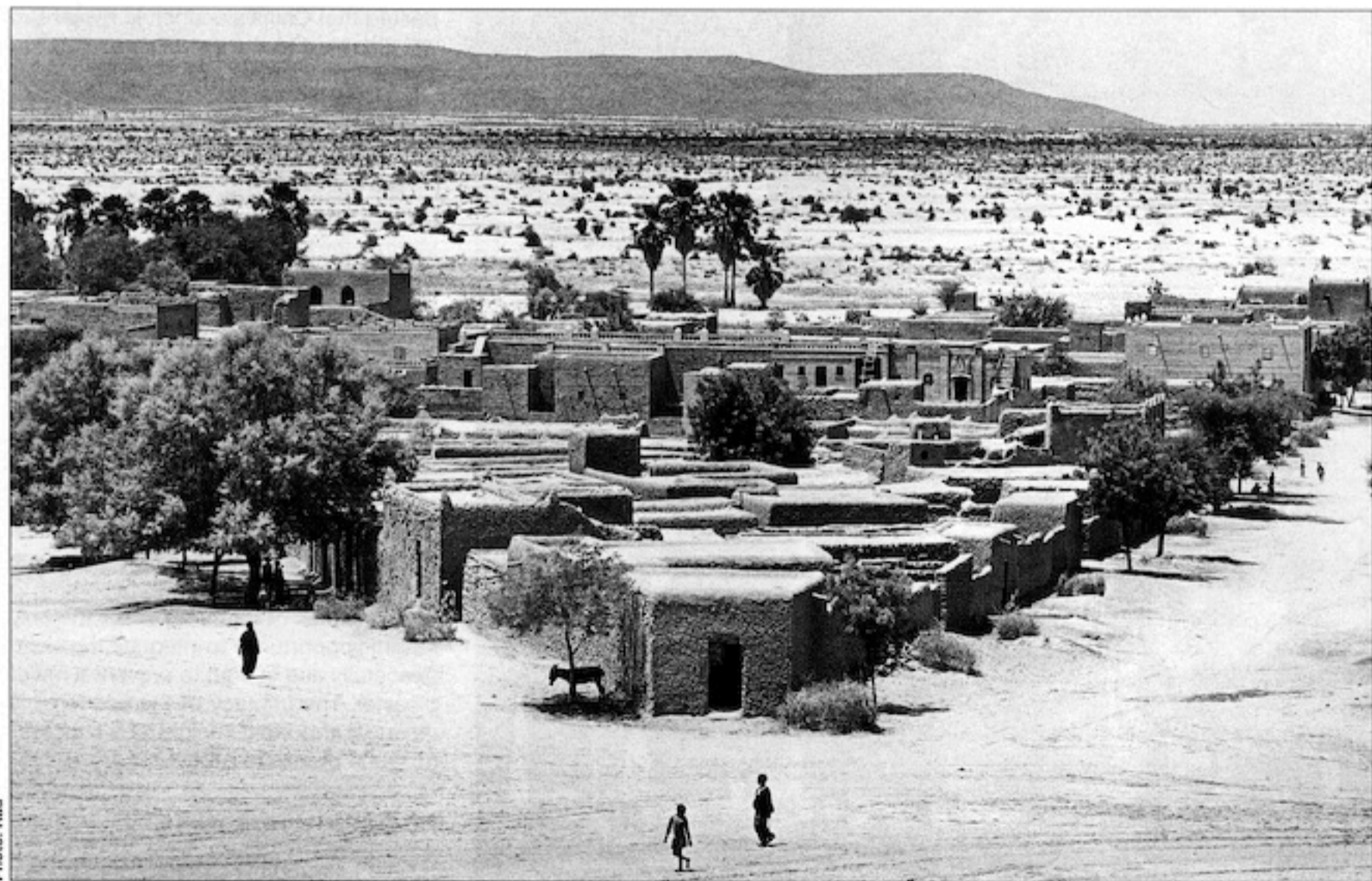
had to surrender when they went into military quarters. Recognition as an ex-combatant applied only to those who could present themselves with operational weapons at the army's collection points. Nobody else had money for fuel, but the matter was urgent for all. The most important thing was that the money was made available immediately every time it was needed. Thus, the Germans were able during the last three years to untie knots, eliminate blockades and straighten out situations without a great deal of fuss.

Is there a decisive bilateral or even specifically German input over and above the considerable funds involved? The answer is yes. As foreigners, the Germans may violate cultural norms (within limits) and provoke one or the other discussion which otherwise would not take place. In many long and laborious talks from place to place, and extremely gradually, a generally accepted discussion culture has emerged in which one may tell the truth without being penalised for it.

The German side, unlike the French, is not regarded as a party to the conflict that pursues its own objectives and seeks advantages. They are also not part of the old colonial system with its more subtle, mostly linguistically conveyed, forms of exercise of cultural domination.

The North Mali programme is the biggest project aimed at overcoming the armed conflict and its aftermath in Mali. That is why west of Timbuktu the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) affords it the role of lead agency. The programme's standing among the public in Mali is due to five things:

1. It was already operational when emergency aid was most needed in 1995 and 1996.
2. In its area it soon took an undisputed leading role in repatriation, reintegration and reconstruction.
3. Its focal point from the start was economic revival and investive (as well as labour-intensive) measures.
4. The funds it needs (GTZ/KfW) were and are available to it.
5. It works decentrally, the target group participates to a great degree in decision-making and is represented in a programme advisory committee. In addition, what appears important is:
6. The North Mali programme was founded solely to reduce conflict and organise repatriation and reconstruction. Its funds are not bound tightly to predetermined specifications of costs/inputs, but can be used openly. This flexibility differentiates the pro-



Provincial town of Goundam, scene of an early Tuareg attack

gramme from all other projects in North Mali.

7. While it is true the programme is one of emergency aid, it is not designed for the shortest term possible, but for several years.
8. For its temporary task it has built up a decentralised organisation structure. It is linked with the political and administrative environment via a network (tutelle, advisory committee and individual consultants).
9. Operationally, it is independent and not tied to an authority.
10. The German team discuss everything with those affected and experts, in often repeated talks, until both sides are clear about what they have agreed upon.

11. The contradiction often postulated in Francophone Africa, of *urgence* (emergency aid) versus *développement* have never applied here. Also in emergency aid, measures are avoided that make no sense either in the short or long term.
12. Among other things, it was learnt that no measure is so urgent that it would not be worth quiet consideration in advance.

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Free Trade as Peacemaker

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these voters, every immigrant endangers the solvency of social security funds, from which they as citizens hope to benefit.

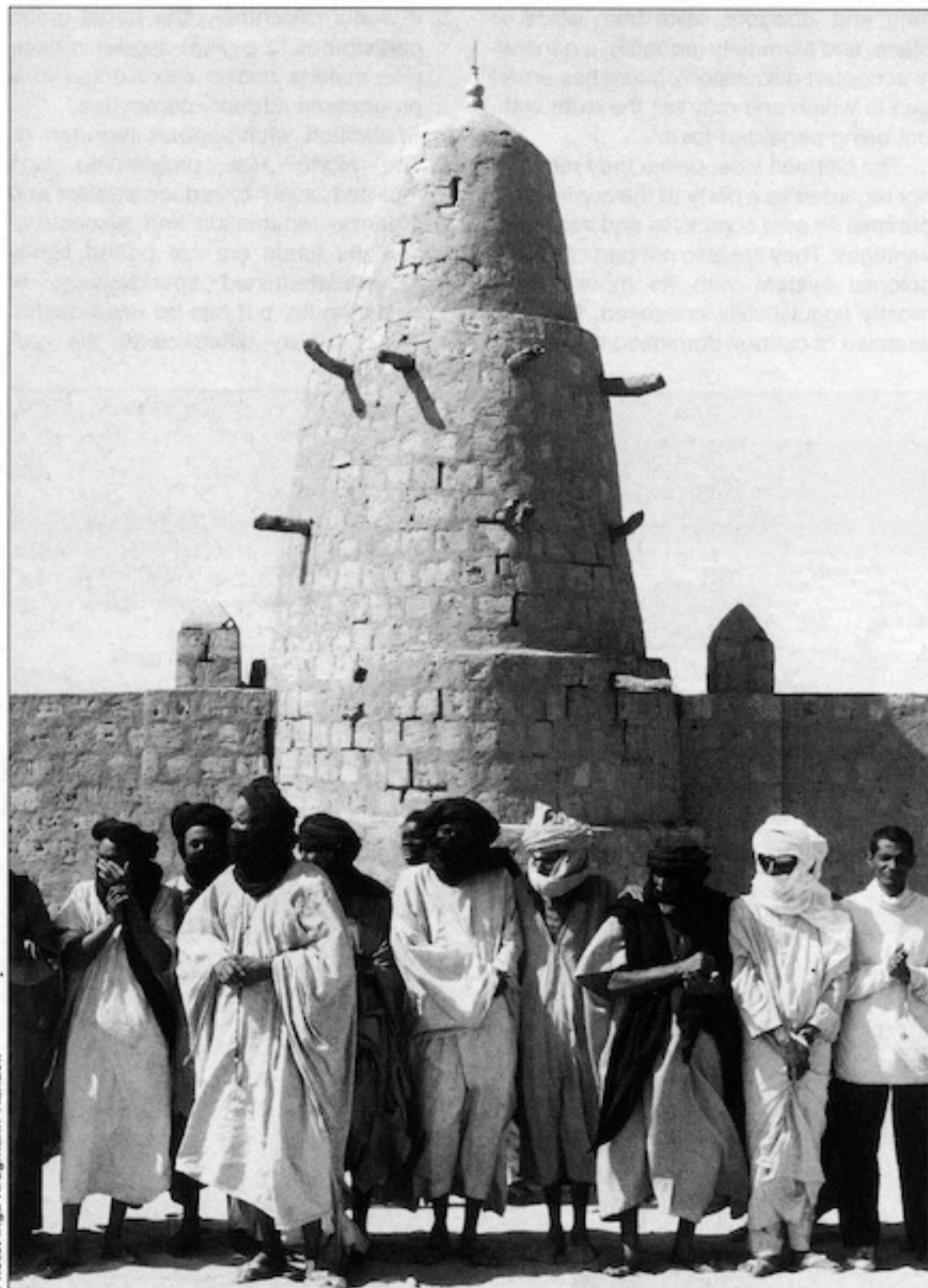
In this regard, one should not underestimate the provincialism of the rich world's democracies. No party in Europe or North America would win an election with the argument: "We must be as poor as the Third World." But if the per capita GDP of Third World countries continues to grow at present rates, the gap between the average income in those countries and that of the rich nations will narrow. There is no more effective mechanism for reducing inequality in the world.

Of course, this still does not say much about income distribution within the countries. In a country like China, which at least in name is still Communist, there are now glaring differences between rich and poor. But the poor have not become poorer. The poverty of the days of Mao is already totally unimaginable for the young Chinese of today. Meanwhile, it can be expected that China's economic dynamism will also lead to the establishment of social welfare facilities along western social state lines. Rapid economic growth is also needed in order to be able to finance them.

The market and access to it are peaceful sanctions of the world economic system on the basis of free trade. Those who are hungry and have nothing more to lose are more of a danger to world peace than those who have eaten their fill. The ruse of covering up domestic problems by cross-border military aggression will become less attractive to the degree that a country's own economy is integrated in the global economic system. The more countries are economically dependent on each other, the more unlikely it is that they will wage war on each other.

Globalization by free trade according to the principles of the WTO offers the only realistic opportunity to integrate the world peacefully and in time to prevent a major disaster. The primacy of the economy is the most important vehicle for a successful world domestic policy.

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Timbuktu, cultural centre of Mali