

# POETRY IN ḤASSĀNIYYAH (LƏ-ĠNA) AND ANTICOLONIAL RESISTANCE IN MAURITANIA

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*After several centuries of commercial contacts with the emirs of Mauritania, France decided to occupy the territory at the end of the nineteenth century and carried out its plan in 1902. From this date, the population started not only an armed resistance, but also a cultural battle. One of the aspects of cultural resistance was a literary defiance that used primarily, but not exclusively, the dialectal literary genre called lə-ġna. Some Mauritanian poets used this genre to denounce colonialism and the acculturation it sought to bring about in the country. This article aims to provide an overview of the situation in Mauritania during the colonial period, along with the main characteristics of Ḥassāniyyah poetry, lə-ġna, and a sample of resistance poems.*

## 1. Introduction

When French colonialism began its penetration of the Bilād Šinqīt<sup>1</sup> territories with the aim of achieving its commercial objectives and the control of the country's resources<sup>2</sup>, the French colonial power set out to impose its educational system on Mauritania by creating schools. These schools had the mission of teaching the French language and thus keeping Mauritanian children away from the Arabic language, the language of Islam and Arab culture. In this way, France guaranteed the formation of faithful adherents to its colonial policy. But given the deep roots of Islam in the population, Mauritanian society considered that their struggle was mainly to defend their religion, their culture and their language. For this reason, the population began its struggle against the presence of an unwanted invader in order to avoid the expected acculturation.

In Mauritania, as is the case in most colonized countries, the resistance did not only take a military form, but also a cultural one, focusing on reli-

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[In this essay, the system of transcription adopted by the author is rather different from the criteria of "La rivista di Arablit", due to the linguistic approach.]

<sup>1</sup> Bilād Šinqīt was the name by which the country was known before the French occupation decided to change this name to the current one, i.e. Mauritania.

<sup>2</sup> Historical research has shown that the main reason for Mauritania's occupation was economic (exploiting maritime resources, mines, having a market to export its products, etc.). See Ban 'Umar (2004: 95-111); Ould Ahmedou (1990: 7-33).

gion and traditions, using literature as a means of expression. Through the literature of resistance, the message of rejection of the occupation was conveyed to the invaders. It was also an appeal to the people to resist in all possible forms. As a result, all social strata, all ethnic groups and all regions of the country participated in this struggle. There were ordinary citizens among the nomads, in the villages, peasants, and traders on the one hand, but on the other, there were also traditional emirs, chiefs of religious brotherhoods, tribal chiefs, etc.

Once the French colonial troops occupied the country, the means of resistance diversified so that, in addition to the armed struggle against the soldiers, there was a cultural resistance that manifested itself in the refusal to send children to French schools and to collaborate in providing information to the French authorities, as well as in the cessation of the sale of gum Arabic to the French. This was also the case of the determination to compose poetry in the Ḥassāniyyah dialect: «in order to exhort the struggle against the colonizers, the poets glorify the martyrs with epic accents, sing of the bold actions of the resistance fighters and castigate the collaborators»<sup>3</sup>.

In this context, one must necessarily acknowledge the role played by the institution of traditional education called *maḥaḍrah*<sup>4</sup>, which was able to fight against acculturation by emphasizing the role of the Muslim religion and the Arabic language<sup>5</sup>.

## 2. *A Brief History of Colonial Penetration in Mauritania*

As this essay deals with a subject that brings together a colonial force, France, and a colonized country, Mauritania, we will begin briefly outlining the history of the colonial period, which extends from the arrival of the first French administrators, who occupied Mauritanian territory in 1903, to the granting of independence on November 28, 1960.

<sup>3</sup> Taine-Cheikh (1994: 294) quoting Ould Boyah (1982). Translation from French by the present author.

<sup>4</sup> On the role of the *maḥaḍrah* as a traditional teaching institution and the role it played in the resistance, see this testimony from a French author, Lecourtois (1979: 31-32): «They (the *maḥaḍras*) have been able to popularize and apply the religious teachings of Orthodox Islam. The other disciplines represent all the knowledge of the time, grammar, astrology, number science and logic were added to the original religious teaching, without diminishing it [...]. It is thus these mahadras that made it possible for the Arabic language to become the national language of Mauritania and to train most of its scholars. During the time of colonization, they were the great bulwark that enabled resistance to a foreign culture and the preservation of the national heritage». Translation from French by the present author.

<sup>5</sup> The slogan used could be summed up in the expression “Don’t touch my religion or my language”.

The current territory of Mauritania was until the colonial penetration a conglomerate of Emirates whose common denominator was the fact that they were founded by the Banū Ḥassān tribes and therefore shared the language and culture Ḥassānī. These emirates were the following: the Emirate of Trārza (southwest Mauritania); the Emirate of Brākna (southern Mauritania), the Emirate of Tagānət or Idaw‘iš (central and eastern Mauritania) and the Emirate of Ādrār (northern Mauritania).

The French colonial penetration in Mauritania and its military occupation began in 1902. It was planned, organized and directed by the French governor Xavier Coppolani<sup>6</sup>, a Frenchman originally from Corsica who had previously been appointed as colonial administration official in Algeria. As a first step, Coppolani made prior contacts with religious personalities and the emir of Trārza (near the frontier with Senegal), to whom he guaranteed respect for the Muslim religion, as well as for the customs and traditions of the Mauritanian population. As part of this strategy, Coppolani reached an agreement with the emir of Trārza, Aḥmad Sālim Wuld ‘Li<sup>7</sup>, allowing him to start his colonial project by occupying the whole Mauritanian territory (Wuld Muḥammad Maḥmūd 2001: 170). Thanks to his cunning political ambition, he managed to enter the country peacefully and without great military effort, at least until 1905.

The process of colonization was to take place from the south-west (Trārza and Brākna) towards the centre, east and then the north (Tagānət and Ādrār). Hence, after his success with the Emirate of Trārza, Coppolani also tried to come to an agreement with the emir of Brākna, Aḥmadu Wuld Sīdi ‘Li<sup>8</sup>. However, this emir joined the resistance against colonial penetration by moving to the Emirate of Tagānət where the resistance had become strong, preventing the advance of colonial troops into the territory for a while. This was due to the fact that this emirate, given its strategic geographical location in the heart of Mauritania and surrounded by the other emirates, had become the focal point of popular armed resistance (Wuld Bah 1995: 83).

Among the members of the resistance was the emir of Tagānət, Bakkār Wuld Swayd Aḥmad (1810-1905), who declared war on the French and initiated skirmishes against their troops<sup>9</sup>. He was determined to avoid colonial

<sup>6</sup> Xavier Coppolani (1866-1905) was a French military officer and colonial official. For his biography and his time as governor of Mauritania, see Désiré-Vuillemin (1962: 91-151).

<sup>7</sup> Aḥmad Sālim Wuld ‘Li was emir of Trārza during the period from 1891 to 1905. According to Ould Cheikh (1988: 91), he was killed in 1905.

<sup>8</sup> Aḥmadu Wuld Sīdi ‘Li (1893-1903) was the last emir of Brākna who preferred to go into exile in Tagānət and fight with the resistance rather than sign an agreement with the French. See Ould Cheikh (1988: 99).

<sup>9</sup> The Emirate of Tagānət is also called Emirate of Idaw‘iš. According to Waddādī (2001: 95), Bakkār Wuld Swayd Aḥmad was one of its longest living and most warlike emirs. He was emir for sixty years. According to Ould Cheikh (1988:

penetration by fighting with weapons, so as to create an atmosphere of rejection of French colonization among the population. In addition to his military combat, his struggle was reflected in the elaboration of rules called *qānūn Latvatār* (the Law of Latvatār) by which any order coming from the French colonists had to be rejected and disobeyed.

Fearful of the power of conviction of the emir of Tagānət and the actions of the resistance under its command, Coppolani set as his main objective the physical elimination of the emir Bakkār Wuld Swayd Aḥmad in order to demoralize the resistance and to encourage the occupation by the colonial troops. The emir was assassinated on April 1, 1905 in the battle of Rāṣ əl-Vīl. A few weeks later, an anti-colonial resistance group killed Coppolani on the night of May 12, 1905 in the course of a battle of Tiġikġa (Wuld Abāh 1995: 82).

All this first stage served to establish the idea that Coppolani wished to transmit to the French government, namely, that France was engaged in a colonial process from which it could no longer withdraw, not even in the face of the unanimous rejection of Mauritanian society, nor in the face of the battles that took place from the first moment of the French presence in the territory<sup>10</sup>. Overlooking the rejection and underestimating the resistance, France decided in 1903 to put Mauritania under its protectorate. Nevertheless, it did not become a French colony until 1920 due to resistance in its different forms: military, religious and cultural.

After Coppolani's death the occupation continued, but it took on a more military character than before under the supervision of the French Governor-general of West Africa between 1908-1915, William Ponty<sup>11</sup>, who sought to subjugate the northern Emirate of Ādrār in order to eliminate resistance and control its supply centers. Ponty entrusted colonel Gouraud with the mission of occupying Ādrār<sup>12</sup>. Gouraud began his plan in December 1908, but he was not able to complete the mission until after bloody battles with the resistance. The occupation of Ādrār took place in January 1909, but the armed resistance in this region was maintained until the death of the emir of Ādrār Sīd Aḥmad Wuld 'Aydda on March 19, 1932 in the battle of Widyān al-Ḥarrūb.

Despite the occupation of Ādrār, France was still unable to control most of the territory (more than one million square kilometers) and did not achieve the security and stability it had hoped for. On the other hand, the re-

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114), he died at the age of nearly one hundred, fighting Captain Frèrejean's French troops on April 1, 1905. He still is considered one of the heroes of the fight against French penetration.

<sup>10</sup> Among these battles, the following can be mentioned by way of example: Battle of Ḥrūva (June 7, 1903); battle of Sahūt əl-Ma (June 22, 1903); battle of Alāg (December 18, 1903); battle of Māl (December 28, 1903); battle of Tiġikġa (May 12, 1905), etc. See Sīd Muḥammad al-Hādi (2018: 14-20).

<sup>11</sup> For his biography and a discussion of his tenure as governor general of West Africa, see Foster (2007: 211-233).

<sup>12</sup> For Gauraud's biography, see d'Andurain (2011).

sistance dominated many areas and were very knowledgeable of the orography of the terrain that the French and their troops, mostly soldiers from African countries, did not know. The resistance continued its intermittent attacks in scattered areas of the territory against French troops for many years. In fact, the popular armed resistance carried out against French colonialism did not cease in any part of the territory of Mauritania until 1934.

From 1934 onwards, the armed struggle became scarce due to the great pressure exerted by the French forces with a weaponry against which the resistance could no longer fight. However, cultural, religious and economic resistance which had never ceased, was increased to compensate for the end of armed struggle. The population continued its rejection and boycott of French colonial schools and its determination to support the Koranic schools and the *maḥaḍras* to which its children were sent. They also maintained the boycott of French products as a way of expressing their rejection of the *nṣārā*, term used by Mauritania to refer to the French in general and French colonialism in particular.

During the first period of the French colonization of Mauritania, which spanned from 1903 to 1934, there were many military confrontations, some of which were landmarks in that historical period because of their military significance and the relevance of some of the people who participated in them. Several names of fighters and places will appear in the sample of poems that we have selected in this paper. Among the most relevant leaders are the following ones: Bakkār Wuld Swayd Aḥmad (emir of Tagānət), Sīd Aḥmad Wuld ‘Aydda (emir of Ādrār), Aḥmad Wuld əd-Dayd (emir of Trārza), and Wuld Mayyāra.

From 1934 to 1945, the French colonial administration tried to create an administrative and educational system in the country, but little was achieved due to the large size of the country and the lack of interest shown by the population. The administrative capital of Mauritania was in St. Louis (Senegal) until the country’s independence.

The year 1945 marked the last stage of the French colonial period in Mauritania. In that year, Mauritania obtained the status of overseas territory of the French Union. The following year, 1946, Aḥmadu Wuld Ḥurma was elected first Mauritanian deputy to the French National Assembly. It took ten years before the creation of a local executive power which was possible thanks to the so-called Defferre law in 1956. The implementation of this local power was entrusted to the lawyer Muḥtār Wuld Dāddāh (1924-2003), who would win independence for his country and became Mauritania’s first president in 1960 until 1978<sup>13</sup>. Mauritania obtained internal autonomy in

<sup>13</sup> This prominent Mauritanian politician was the architect of the new Mauritania as he laid the foundations and created a new modern state. See his biography in Akyeampong; Louis Gates (2012-2: 151-153). He wrote a book of memoirs entitled *La Mauritanie contre vents et marées* (Karthala, Paris 2003), published

1958, followed by national independence granted under the Franco-Mauritanian agreements on the restoration of sovereignty, thus, giving way on November 28, 1960 to the birth of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania under the presidency of Muḥtār Wuld Dāddāh.

### 3. Some Features of Ḥassānī Poetry, *lə-Ġna*

Ḥassānī popular poetry, called *lə-ġna*<sup>14</sup>, or *aš-ši'r əl-ḥassānī* and often referred to as *al-adab aš-ša'bī*, is a literary genre widely used in Mauritania since its poems are composed in the Ḥassāniyyah dialect. This is the language of the majority of citizens, and is therefore within everyone's reach, unlike the *fušḥā* Arabic language, whose users are the literate<sup>15</sup>. When talking about poetry in the Arab world, the expression brings to mind that Mauritania is «the country of a million poets»<sup>16</sup>, but regardless of their exact number, it is obvious that most of the poets in this country compose their poems in dialectal Arabic, mainly because they want to be understood by all Ḥassānī speakers.

*lə-Ġna* poetry has a long tradition of oral transmission. It has been preserved for a long time thanks to the collective memory that has allowed it to reach the new generations and its composition to be renewed in the last decades. Another main feature to be highlighted is the fact that this poetry is related to the music from which it takes its name (Classical Arabic *ġinā* 'singing'). It is sung by the griots, *īggāwən*, a class of travelling poets, musicians, and singing storytellers who have developed a Ḥassānī music<sup>17</sup>. There is a symbiotic relationship between the poets and the singers because the *īggāwən* need lyrics for their music and the poets need a means of spreading their poetry<sup>18</sup>.

From the point of view of metrics, *lə-ġna* consists of verses composed of two hemistichs, called *tāvəlwiṭ*<sup>19</sup>. Four *tāvəlwiṭ* form the simplest composi-

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posthumously.

<sup>14</sup> *Lə-ġna* is poetry composed in the Ḥassāniyyah dialect. For more details on this literary genre, see Ould Mohamed Baba (2005).

<sup>15</sup> In this sense the Mauritanian journalist Ḥabīb Wuld Maḥfūz was right when he wrote in the newspaper "Le Calame" of 24 April 1995: «Ḥassānī popular poetry is more popular than poetry that is not popular».

<sup>16</sup> This expression became a catchphrase for Mauritania following an article by a journalist from "al-'Arabī" magazine, published in 1967, under the title *Mauritania: the country of a million poets* and since then it has been used as a way to refer to Mauritania.

<sup>17</sup> On the *īggāwən* (singular: *īggāw*; feminine forms, singular *tīggiwīt* and plural *tīggawātən*), known as griots in French culture, see Ould Mohamed Baba (2015).

<sup>18</sup> Poets used to attend the *īggāwən* music sessions because they were aware that when a singer sings one of their poems, it becomes known and recited by increasing numbers of people.

<sup>19</sup> *Tāvəlwiṭ* (plural: *tivəlwātən*) is the hemistich.

tion which is called *gāf* or quatrain<sup>20</sup>. When the number of hemistichs increases up to six, the resulting composition is a three-line poem called *tal'a*<sup>21</sup>. *Ḥassāniyyah* prosody is based on the number of syllables in each hemistich. Thus, the number of syllables indicates the poetic meters, which are called *lā-btūta* (pl. of *batt*)<sup>22</sup>. As for topics addressed by this poetic genre, *lā-ġna* deals with all the literary themes of Arabic literature in general, that is, *an-nasīb* and *al-ġazal* “love and nostalgic poetry”; *al-madh* “eulogy poetry”; *aš-šamt* “satire, diatribe”; *al-vaḥr* “eulogy”; *ar-riṭā* “elegy”. Furthermore, it also includes an original and specific genre which is the so-called *at-tabrā*<sup>23</sup>, a kind of love poetry composed exclusively by women. To the previously mentioned themes, one must add what is the subject of this article – the literature of resistance – as a part of a committed poetry. Mauritanian resistance poetry is called *ġna l-muqāwamah*. The French specialist Catherine Taine-Chekh defines this poetry as «la poésie engagée»<sup>24</sup>.

#### 4. Resistance Poetry in *Ḥassāniyyah*: A Sample of This Poetry

The use of literature in general and poetry in particular to express the rejection of any kind of domination or submission is part of the cultural resistance as defined by several authors<sup>25</sup>. In the case we are dealing with here, the pur-

<sup>20</sup> *Gāf* (plural: *givān*): verse composed by two hemistichs. Here is an example of *gāf* “quatrain”: it is composed, as it has been pointed out, by four *tāvalwīt* whose rhyme is generally: *tāvalwīt* (1) A- *tāvalwīt* (2) B; *tāvalwīt* (3) A- *tāvalwīt* (4) B

*hāḡi dār l-Mənt Udayka \*\* w-dyār aš-Šəlḡi yənzārū*  
*ya-l- 'aḡl iḡtar li-naḡsi-ka \*\* 'ayyu ddārayni taḡtārū*

Here are the remains of Mint Udayka’s camp and those of aš-Šəlḡi which are worth a visit.

Oh, sweetheart, you have to decide which one of the two remains you are going to visit.

<sup>21</sup> *Tal'a* (plural: *tlā'*): a poem composed by six hemistichs.

<sup>22</sup> The *btūta* (singular: *batt*) are, from the longest to the shortest: *al-batt lā-kbīr*: hemistichs of more than eight syllables; *lā-btayt at-tām*: of eight syllables; *at-taydūm*: of seven syllables; *lā-bḡbēr*: of seven syllables *lā-btayt an-nāqas*: of six syllables; *ḡaṭu aḡ-ḡrād*: of five syllables; *ḡwaywīs*: of four syllables; *batt tlāta*: three syllables; *batt ṡnayn*: two syllables and *batt wāḡad*: one syllable.

<sup>23</sup> See Ould Mohamed Baba (2014) and Ould Mohamed Baba (2020), *A Collection of Poems of Biḡān Women’s Ġazal Called at-Tabrā* (forthcoming).

<sup>24</sup> Taine-Chekh (1994: 294): «la poésie engagée : Pendant la colonisation, et en particulier au début du 20ème s., fleurit une poésie de résistance; elle était composée en dialecte pour être plus facilement compréhensible et pour circuler plus anonymement».

<sup>25</sup> For instance, Duncombe (2002: 5) defines the cultural resistance as «the use of culture consciously or unconsciously, effectively or not, to resist and/or change

pose is to reject acculturation, unacceptable for a people who feel very much attached to their language, culture and religion. Mauritanian poets, both those who write in Classical Arabic and those who use dialectal Arabic, contributed to cultural resistance, but since dialectal poetry is understood by all speakers of Ḥassāniyyah, the latter was more thoroughly employed and effective in achieving the goal of denouncing colonial policy. Most of the poems we have been able to find are anonymous. This can be explained by the fact that the French authorities arrested the authors of resistance poetry and imprisoned or exiled them. Below are some samples of poems concerning French colonial resistance in the Ḥassāniyyah dialect. A brief introduction to the author or the selected piece is followed by the text, its translation into English by the present author, and a short commentary<sup>26</sup>.

*4.1. Muḥammad Wuld Bāggā (1939-1997): A History of French Colonialism in Mauritania*

The first poet is Muḥammad Wuld Bāggā (1939-1997). This author is considered one of the most important poets of the last decades of the twentieth century in Mauritania. He wrote a long poem entitled *Tārīḥ ən-niḍāl əs-siyāsī* (The History of Political Struggle), in which he presents a history of Mauritanian resistance to colonial penetration and the political struggle against colonization. The first twenty-one verses have been chosen on account of the fact they evoke the arrival of colonialism, its objectives, the struggle and the names of some of the combatants and heroes<sup>27</sup>.

*Bism əl-lāh əl-yawm msantīn \*\* ət-tārīḥ u flək wa ahwayīn  
l-isti 'mār u-munāḍilīn \*\* l-isti 'mār u-lawn twāgīḥ  
hāḍa muddət dāgər təs 'īn \*\* sna ḥadd msanti isantīḥ  
mn-(ə)mgi l-isti 'mār mnayn \*\* santa w-asbāb mgiḥ mgiḥ  
'la bābu 'andu hammayn \*\* ilā bal aṭlāṭa v-ayḍīḥ  
šə-mn-ət-tiḡāra vāt ilayn \*\* šan 'u dāyər madda təšrīḥ  
u-dāyər bāš iḥaššal lə- 'wīn \*\* v-ši ḡāḥ (ə)bbāš ikāšīḥ  
u-bši yašri biḥ əl-makīn \*\* w-iḥallāš 'ummāl u-ya 'tīḥ  
ṭriḡ l-šə-mn əl-māl ḡdīd \*\* min-hūn 'wīnu lə-ḥdīd*

the dominant political economic and/or social structure».

<sup>26</sup> In this article, we use the following transcription system: short vowel phonemes: /a/, /i/ /u/, and /ə/; long vowel phonemes: /ā/, /ī/, and /ū/. Consonantal phonemes: /' / = ء, /b/ - /b̄/ = ب, /t/ = ت, /t̄/ = ث, /ǧ/ = ج, /h/ = ح, /ħ/ = خ, /d/ = د, /d̄/ = ذ, /r/ - /r̄/ = ر, /z/ = ز, /s/ = س, /š/ = ش, /s̄/ = ص, /d̄/ = ض, /t̄/ = ط, /z̄/ = ظ, /' / = ع, /ǧ̄/ = غ, /f/ - /v/ = ف, /g/ = گ, /q/ = ق, /k/ = ك, /l/ - /l̄/ = ل, /m/ - /m̄/ = م, /n/ = ن, /h/ = ه, /w/ = و, /y/ = ي.

<sup>27</sup> Muḥammad Wuld Bāggā's biography and the compilation of his literary work have been the subject of a book published in 2018 by Wuld əl-Maydāḥ, entitled *Muḥammad Wuld Bāggā (1939-1997) adab wa tašawwuf wa ḥikmah wa niḍāl*. For the fragment of the edited and translated poem, see pp. 16-18.



w-əl-məlḥ u-ši tāni muvīd \*\* ya 'gad gīlu vīh iwaffīh  
 rīš nhās əl- 'əlk əlli ivīd \*\* bāṭ innās itamm irawsīh  
 u-šayyad kiyyān u-tašyīd \*\* kiyyān ḡahḡāh iḡḡahḡh  
 mā wadda māh l-tkārīd \*\* šbay ' əl-hūša l-tmāšīh  
 mən hūn u-gāmu šanādīd \*\* 'līh u-ramhūh tqāsih  
 mən-hum da Wəll Hḡūr u-Sīd \*\* Aḡma-l-Aḡmad māt mnāšīh  
 'la ḡəlzū w-Aḡmal-lə-Dayd \*\* Lə-Gwayšīsi ball tlāḡīh  
 m 'āh u-Tənmād ər-Rašīd \*\* Wəll əl-Hāməd vīh išāwīh  
 u-ḡa 'Umar Tāl u-Wəll Swayd \*\* Aḡmad Bakkār u-haḡ 'īh  
 ḡəddu u-ḡəddu wā 'ər šahīd \*\* niḡāl ən-niḡāl inašwīh  
 Mayyāra 'Abdūk u- 'Assās \*\* u-Mulāy əz-ayn u-rəḡlīh  
 ət-tānīn u-lā baḡlūlu bās \*\* kəll mnādəm ḡah b-ḡazzīh

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الْيَوْمَ امْسُنْتَيْنِ التَّارِيخُ أَفْلَكُ وَهُوَ بَيْنِ  
 لَسْتَعْمَارَ وَمُنَاصِلِينَ لَسْتَعْمَارَ وَلَوْ نِ اتَّوَجِيه  
 امْنِ امْح لَسْتَعْمَرِ امْنَيْنِ سَنَتِ وَاسْتَابِ امْحِيه امْحِيه  
 اَعْلُ بَابُ عِنْدُ هَمِينِ اِلَ بِلْ اَنْلَاتُ فَيِيه  
 شَمْنِ التَّجَارَ فَاتِ اِلْنِ صَنْعُ دَابِرْ مَدَّ تَشْرِيه  
 وَدَابِرْ بَاشِ اِحْصَلْ لِعَوِينِ اَفْشِ جَاهِ اِبَاشِ اِكْاشِيه  
 وَشِ بَشْرِ بِيه اَلْمَكِينِ وَخَلَصْ عَمَالِ وَبِعْطِيه  
 اَطْرِيكْ اَلشَّمْنِ اَلْمَالِ اَلْحَدِيدِ مِنْ هُونِ اَعْوِينِ لِحَدِيدِ  
 وَاَلْمَلْحُ وَشِ ثَانِ مَفِيدِ بَعْدُ كَيْلِ فِيه اِوْفِيه  
 رِيشِ اَنْحَاسِ اَلْعَلْكَ اِلْ قَيْدِ بَاطِ النَّاسِ اِبْتَمِ اِرْوسِيه  
 وَشَيْدِ كِيَانِ وَتَشْيِيدِ كِيَانِ جَهْجَاهِ اَجْهَجِيه  
 مَا وَدَّ مَاه لِنُكَارِيهِ اَصْنَبِيغِ اَلْخُوصِ لِنْمَاصِيه  
 مِنْ هُونِ وَكُامِ صَنْدَايِدِ اَعْلِيه وَرْمُحُوه اِنْقَاسِيه  
 مِنْهُمْ ذُؤْلِ اَلْحُجُورِ وَسِيْدِ اَحْمَلْ اَحْمَدُ مَاثِ اِمْنَاصِيه  
 اَعْلُ غَلْظِ وَاَحْمَلْدَيْنِ لِكُوَيْشِيشِ بَلْ اَنْلَا كِيه  
 اَمْعَاهُ وَتَنْمَادِ الرَّشِيدِ وَنِ اَلْخَامِدِ فِيه اِشَاوِيه  
 وَحِ عَمْرُ طَالِ اُولِ اِسْوَيْدِ اَحْمَدُ بَكَارُ وَهَخِ اَعْطِيه  
 كُدُّ وَكُدُّ وَاَعَزْ شَهِيدِ نِصَالِ النِّصَالِ اِشْيِشُوِيه  
 مَيَّازِ عِبْدُوْتِ اَعْسَاسِ وَمُلَايِ الرَّزِينِ وَرُجْلِيه  
 التَّانِيْنِ وُلَا بَخْلُولِ بَاسِ كِلْ اِمْنَادِمِ جَاهِ اِبْعَرِيه

### Translation of the poem

Let's get started! Today we are going to make an orderly and simplified history of colonialism, of the fighters of colonialism, of how it was fought and how it lasted almost 90 years.

First, we will talk about his arrival and why he (colonialism) came.

He clearly came for two purposes, if not three. He had goods of his own making that he wanted to sell; he wanted to obtain reserves for the future so they can buy machines; pay workers to create new wealth.

From here he will take iron, salt and other useful things.

Which he will insist on and complete:

feathers, copper, rubber.

He founded an entity, but founding an entity will induce him into a misunderstanding.

And only lead him to the covenant that will cause his departure from here.

Valiant men rebelled against him and dazed him.

Among them are Wuld Ḥġūr; Sīd Aḥmad Wuld Aḥmad who died honorably while standing up to him, Aḥmad Wuld əd-Dayd who fought against him in the battle of Lə-Gwayšīši.

Wuld əl-Hāməd during the battle Tənmād əṛ-Rašīd harassed him; then we must mention ‘Umar Tāll, Bakkār Wuld Swayd Aḥmad and bravo to him honoring his supreme status because he was a martyr of the struggle that the fight stimulated.

Mayyāra, ‘Abdūk, ‘Assās, Mulāy əz-Zayn and his other companions, all fought ferociously; each of them engaging his troop (Wuld əl-Mayddāḥ 2018: 16-18).

#### *Commentary on the poem:*

In a tone that is both didactic and firm, in this poem the author presents the occupation of Mauritania, the objectives of colonization, the struggle waged by the inhabitants of all social classes and ethnic groups in all regions of the country. Among the combatants mentioned are emirs of the three main emirates of the country at the time of the arrival of the French: Sīd Aḥmad Wuld Aḥmad (emir of Ādrār killed by French troops in 1932), Aḥmad Wuld əd-Dayd (emir of Trārza), Bakkār Wuld Swayd Aḥmad (emir of Tagānət), killed by French troops in 1905.

#### *4.2. Two Anonymous Samples*

The following two anonymous poems deal, firstly, with how Mauritanian society dealt with colonialism since its arrival and, secondly, with how harmful and unbearable it was.

*l-Isti ‘mār mnayn l-ġāna \*\* qāwəmnā-h b-lə-qlam w-əs-sayf  
u-b-əl-basāla yawm lgā-na \*\* w-əl-qitāl gbāl əl-‘anīf  
w-əl-‘azm u-raqd əl-ḥiyyāna \*\* u-ḥnagnā-h ila kād iġīf  
mā ḥallaynā-lu makāna\*\* u-hārəbnā-h v-lə-mdun w-ər-rīf  
u-lā gaṭ dḥal zall m ‘ā-na \*\* mā ra māhu laḥīb əṣ-ṣayf*

الاستعمارة امتنين الجان \*\* فأومناه ابقلم والسيف  
والبسالة يوم الكان \*\* والقتال اقبال العنيف  
والعزم ورفض الجيانه \*\* واخنتناه الكاذب جيف  
ماخلينال مكانه \*\* احرارنا اقلمدن والريف  
ولاكط اذخل ظل امعان \*\* مازماه لهيب الصيف

When colonialism invaded us, we fought against him with our pens and swords;

with our courage in battle and the violent fighting, with determination and rejection of all treason.

We strangled him [colonialism] to the point of suffocation;  
we left him no refuge, neither in the cities nor in the countryside;  
he never had a moment's rest, only the scorching heat of summer<sup>28</sup>.

The following *gāf* “quatrain” describes the damage of colonialism:

*Mən l-isti 'mār ašbah lə-bla \*\* wāna da wassāni u-ḥlāš  
zərri tall u-zərri gəbla \*\* w-əz-zərr əl-gəbli vīh ər-rāš*

مَنْ لِسْتَعْمَارٍ أَشْبَهُ لَيْلٍ      وَأَنَّ ذُو سَانَ وَخُلَاصٍ  
زُرْتُكَ وَزُرْتُكَ      وَالزُّرُّ الْجَيْلُ فِيهِ الرَّاصُ

Better a calamity than colonialism and I was definitely split in two,  
one part is to the East and one part is to the West;  
The part in the West is the one in charge<sup>29</sup>.

#### 4.3. Emirs against Colonialism

As mentioned above, several emirs took part in the resistance against colonial penetration. Two of them were killed in the fighting with French troops. The emir Bakkār Wuld Swayd Aḥmad was one of the first martyrs of the struggle against French colonial penetration. He was killed in 1905 by French troops at the well of Rāš əl-Vīl, located about 650 km East of the capital Nouakchott, in Tagānət's Wilāyah.

With regard to the emir of Ādrār, Sīd Aḥmad Wuld 'Aydda, he also was a poet and fought fiercely against colonial penetration. Wounded in battle, he was imprisoned in 1912 in Saint Louis of Senegal, a city named Ndaṛṛ in the Ḥassānī dialect. After his release, he returned to his Emirate and, on arriving at the borders of his territory, he declared the following *gāf*:

*Ḥāməd l-Aḷḷāh əllī b 'ād \*\* Ndaṛṛ u-zaynn dyār-u  
u-vrağ lə-mḥār<sup>30</sup> u- 'ād zād \*\* yūra manba b-ḥḡā-ru*

<sup>28</sup> Poem communicated to me by the historian Elemine Moustapha (on December 20, 2018).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Regarding the word *mḥār* (singular: *mḥāra*), “shells”, in a large part of the southwestern region of Mauritania, especially in the areas near the Atlantic coast, the land is covered by a discontinuous layer of shells. According to the oral tradition, the border between the Wilāyah of Trārza (former Emirate of Trārza) with the Wilāyah of Ādrār (former Emirate of Ādrār) is where the presence of shells ends and the rocky terrain begins (Ādrār is a mountainous region). The end of the shell land means that the emir is in Ādrār, his native land, and, therefore, he is safe from the French colonial power that had imprisoned him in Saint-Louis for his rebellion against France's presence in Mauritania.

حَامِدٌ لِّاللهِ الّٰهِي اَبْعَادُ      اَنْدَرُ وُزَيْبِنِ اَدِيَا  
وَأَفْرَعُ لِمَحَارِ وُعَادُ زَادُ      يُورُ مَثَبَ بِحَجِّ مَازُ

Thank God, Saint-Louis and its beautiful houses have become now far away;  
The land of shells has been crossed and we can now see rocky prominences<sup>31</sup>.

Eventually, the Emir Sīd Aḥmad Wuld 'Aydda was killed in 1932 by French troops in the site of Wədyān əl-Ḥarṛūb<sup>32</sup>. He is considered one of the martyrs of the resistance against the French invasion, reflected by the poet Ḥaymūda Wuld Nqaymīš in the following *gāf*:

'Agli l-əmattan tulāh-u \*\* gəllət 'arbi yašrah lə-glūb  
attāli mən lə-ṛab rāhu \*\* madvūn v-Wədyān əl-Ḥarṛūb

عَگْلِي لِمَتَّيْنِ نُّلَاهُو      كَلَّتْ عَرَبٌ يَشْرَحُ لِكَلُوبِ  
التَّالِي مِنْ لِعَرَبِ رَاهُو      مَدْفُونُ افودَيَانِ الْخَرُوبِ

My soul is tormented by the disappearance of a warrior who can gladden hearts.

For the last of the warriors is buried at Wədyān əl-Ḥarṛūb<sup>33</sup>.

Likewise, the poet Muḥammad 'Abd Arraḥmān Wuld Ġiddummu (d. 1936) also wrote the following *gāf* of *riṭā'*, or elegy in his memory:

Mā ḥāləg 'arbi v-əl-wuḡūd      kīvət Sīd Aḥmad v-hyātu  
u-lā ḥāləg wāḥəd lāhi i 'ūdnamātu kīvət mamātu

مَا خَالِكِ عَرَبٍ فِي الْوُجُودِ      كَيْفَتِ سَيِّدِ أَحْمَدِ فِخْيَاتِ  
وَلَا خَالِكِ وَاحِدٌ لِأَهْ إِعُودُ      مَمَاتِ كَيْفَتِ مَمَاتِ

There is no Arabic Ḥassān in the universe that is as valuable as Sīd Aḥmad in his life  
and no death will equal his death either<sup>34</sup>.

#### 4.4. Disobedience of Sufi Brotherhood Leaders

The various religious brotherhoods present in Mauritania demonstrated a fierce cultural resistance by opposing any contact with the occupying force. A

<sup>31</sup> This *gāf* is published in the link: <https://www.elhourriya.net/52441.html> (01/03/2020).

<sup>32</sup> Wədyān əl-Ḥarṛūb place located 450 km North of the city of Zwayrāt (belonging to the former Emirate of Ādrār).

<sup>33</sup> Transcription from a recording of the Mauritanian Radio archives.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

meaningful example of this issue is the poem written by al-Šayḥ Sa‘dbūh (d. 1917), the most important leader of the Brotherhood al-Qādiriyyah. Born in 1848 in al-Ḥawḍ al-Šarqī (East of Mauritania), he became one of the spiritual leaders of this particular Sufi brotherhood in the region of Trārza (South-West of Mauritania). He had many outstanding disciples, either in Mauritania and West Africa, and his influence is reflected by the fact that his mausoleum is still nowadays visited annually by hundreds of members of the Qādirī brotherhood (Ban Aḥmad Zarrūq 2005: 97-100). During the French protectorate, he was summoned by the Governor of Saint-Louis (the French governor of Mauritania in Senegal) and was provided with a safe-conduct for the trip. However, he refused to go to see him and expressed his mistrust in the following poem:

*Šayḥ Ndar ‘īāni tasrīḥ \*\* u-gāl ənn ət-tasrīḥ šhīḥ  
yəfləš bī-h əl-gāyab w-irīḥ \*\* mən masla vī-ha zəlm u vī-h  
u-‘rəvt ənnu dāk l-gāyəl rīḥ \*\* yağayr āna gā‘ abadīḥ  
vəlsī kənt əllā v-əl-ğalīl \*\* gbayl u-tākəl kənt ‘lī-h  
u-l-kənt b-vəlsī vī-h gbayl \*\* əllā mazəlt b-vəlsī vī-h*

سُبْحٌ أَنْدَرُ أَغْطَانِي تَسْرِيحٌ      وَغَالٌ إِنَّ التَّسْرِيحَ صُنْحِيحٌ  
يَقْلِبُنِي بِيَهُ الْغَايِبِ وَيَرِيحُ      مِنْ مَسَلٍ فِيهِ ظَلَمٌ وَفِيهِ  
وَاعْرِفْتُ أَنَّ ذَلِكَ الْغَالِيلَ رِيحٌ      يَغْيِرُ أَنْ كَاغَ أَبْدِيهِ  
فَلْشِي كُنْتُ أَلَا فَالْجَلِيلِ      أَكْبِيلُ وَتَاكِلُ كُنْتُ أَغْلِيهِ  
وَأَلْكَنْتُ أَبْفَلْشِي فِيهِ أَكْبِيلُ      أَلَا مَزَلْتُ أَبْفَلْشِي فِيهِ

The governor of Saint-Louis gave me a pass on my way out.  
And claimed it is authentic.  
That it provides reassurance  
that there will be no injustice done to me.  
I am sure what he is saying is not true,  
but I have always trusted in God  
and I am counting on him;  
I have always believed in him.  
and I still believe in him<sup>35</sup>.

#### 4.5. Tribal Chiefs against Colonialism

The chiefs of some tribes did not agree with French colonial policy and consequently suffered unjust punishments. This was the case, for example, of Muḥammad al-Muḥtār Wuld əl-Ḥāmid (d. 1915)<sup>36</sup>. Chief of the Kənta tribe, he opposed the colonial occupation and fought the French soldiers. At the Battle of al-Rašīd (17 August 1908), he was able to escape and emigrate to Ādrār, but in a confrontation with the French army, he composed the following *gāf* in response to a treatment not suited to his rank:

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> About his biography, see Wuld Waddādi (2019: 5-6).

*Kabbulāni ya-ġaylāna \*\* māṛət 'annu māhu wā ī*  
*dāyər mənni ṛā 'i w-āna \*\* māni gā ' l-ṛāṣi ṛā ī*

كَبُّلَانَ يَعْجُلَانِ  
 مَارَاتٌ عَنْ مَا هُوَ وَا عِي  
 دَائِيْرُ مَنِّي رَاعِي وَإِنْ  
 مَا نِي كَاغِ الرَّاصِي رَاعِي

Coppolani, O beloved, is mistaken.  
 He wants to make me a shepherd,  
 while I am not able to keep an eye on myself (Wuld Waddādi 2019: 33).

A second example of this resistance poetry genre is the following anonymous *ṭal'a* (poem of 3 verses or more) dedicated to a spiritual leader called Brāhīm Wuld əš-Šayḥ al-Ḥasan:

*Šayḥ-kum sābəg ən-nšāra ṭaṭla ' \*\* u-mnayn ṭal'u ən-nšāra mā nḥla '*   
*u-mnayn gālu lə-n-nās təġtmā ' \*\* b-Zwāyāha u-b-Ḥassān-ha*  
*gāl-lhum mā ḥāv u-lā ṭma ' \*\* mmāybīn mānna mwāsīn-ha*

شَيْخُكُمْ سَابِغٌ أَنْصَارَ تَطْلَعُ  
 وَأَمْنَيْنُ تَطْلَعُ مَا أَنْخَلَعُ  
 وَأَمْنَيْنُ كَالِ لِنَاسٍ فُجْتَمَعُ  
 بِأَرْوَائِنَهُ وَحَسَانَهُ  
 كَالِ الْهُمِّ مَا خَافَتْ وَلَا أَطْمَعُ  
 أَمَائِبِينَ مَانَ أَمَوَاسِيْنَهُ

He was your spiritual guide before the French occupation and when the French came he was never afraid.  
 And when the French ordered all the tribes Zwāya and Ḥassān to gather, he told them fearlessly, “we completely refuse to do it”<sup>37</sup>.

In the various regions of Mauritania, the population was acting against the colonial administration's attempts to establish the infrastructure that would allow them to settle in Mauritania. An example of such actions took place in Walāta, in eastern Mauritania, where the inhabitants of the town destroyed the office of the French administration built at the beginning of the colonial era, which would be destroyed over again every single time it was rebuilt. During these acts of resistance, the Walatians sang the following *gāf*:

*əl-Ḥūba ḥlāt \*\* u-ngṭa ' mül-ha*  
*w-ilā btnāt \*\* nwallul-ha*

لُحُوبٌ خَلَّاتْ  
 وَنُكَطِعُ مُوَلَّةَ  
 وَإِلَّا بِنْتَاتْ  
 نُؤَلِّلُهُ

The office has been destroyed, and there is no hope of repairing it.  
 And if it is rebuilt, we will come back to destroy it<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> Transcription from a recording of the Mauritanian Radio archives.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

#### 4.6. Rejection of the French School

As mentioned previously, among the collective reaction against colonialism was the refusal of the population to send their children to colonial schools so as to avoid acculturation. This was a reaction against one of the measures recommended by colonial administrators as a means of imposing French culture among the indigenous people of Africa. However, it was strongly opposed by the Biḏān (the Arabic-speaking population of Mauritania), who systematically boycotted this colonial education while paying more attention to their traditional education system<sup>39</sup>. One of the poets of the resistance evokes the subject in a poem written on the occasion of *tvaṛṣi*, the French program issued to enforce Mauritanian families to enroll their children in French schools. As an anonymous poet stated in the following poem, people were in fact hiding their children so that they would not be sent to French school:

*Da əl-kāvər mən mətn əš-šab 'a \*\* tāhəm 'annu gā ' blā rəb 'a*  
*gəddāmu ḥadd əlli yas 'a \*\* vī-h əllā našr əl-ma 'āšī*  
*u-ṭlabna na 'ūh arəb 'a \*\* mən 'iyṣəl-na u-lhum ḥāšī*  
*gəyr āna yağ 'al vī-ha ḥayr \*\* hāda ən-nəṣrāni lə-m 'āšī*  
*gəḥəd 'anu wəlli yağayr \*\* māni gəḥəd 'anu rāšī*

تَاهِمٌ عَنْ كَيْدِ ابْنِ رَبِيعٍ	ذَ الْكَافِرِ مِنْ مِثْنِ الشَّبْعِ
فِيهِ أَلَا تَشْتَرِ الْمَعَاصِي	كَيْدًا خَدَّ اللَّيِّ يَسْتَعِ
مِنْ عِبْلَانٍ وَالْهُمَّ حَاصِي	وَأَطَابُ سَنَ نَعَطُوهُ أَرْبَعِ
هَذَا الْبَصْنَرَانِي لِمُعَاصِي	غَيْرُ أَنْ يَجْعَلَ فِيهِ خَيْرُ
مَآئِي جَاجِدُ عَنْ رَاصِي	جَاجِدُ عَنْ وَلِي يَغْيُرُ

This unbeliever, because of his arrogance, believes we are within reach.  
 From someone whose sole purpose is to spread sin.  
 He asked us for four of our children, which he listed.  
 But I, while praying to God to protect me, to this unholy author of sacrilege,  
 I'm hiding my child, but I am not hiding myself<sup>40</sup>.

The rejection of the French school system imposed during the colonial period and inherited by the new Mauritanian state continued to be rejected and criticized by poets. An anonymous poet of the 1970s (a decade after independence) wrote the following verses:

*w-Ahl əd-diṛāsa məğtam 'in \*\* yağrāw u-lāhi təgriyya*  
*gaṛāyət-hum barrāniyyin \*\* u-grāyət-hum barrāniyya*

وَأَهْلُ الدِّرَاسِ مَجْتَمِعِينَ يَغْرَاؤُا لِأَهِّ تَغْرِيَّ

<sup>39</sup> According to Elemine Ould Mohamed Baba (1984: 58), «pour préserver leur religion et leur culture ils (les biḏān) ont opté pour le refus de l'école française. C'est pourquoi le recrutement d'élèves a été assimilé au prélèvement de l'impôt [...]».

<sup>40</sup> Transcription from a recording of the Mauritanian Radio archives.

كُرَائِيهِمْ بَرَّانِيْنَ      اَلْكُرَائِيهِمْ بَرَّانِيْ

All students without exception receive an inadequate education because their teachers are foreigners and the teaching given is foreign<sup>41</sup>.

#### 4.7. Exiled Poets

Some poets were exiled as a means to prevent them from writing and spreading the poetry of resistance. The poet Sīdiyā Wuld Aḥmadu Wuld Quṭrub was exiled in the North of the country. In the following text, he complains about the French Colonel<sup>42</sup> who chases him wherever he goes, although at the same time he also manifests that, no matter how much he dislikes his new whereabouts, he finds it acceptable as long as the Colonel is not around:

*Sallak-ni ya-ṛṛabb mn-ən-nāṛ \*\* āgəb ɖa mən rawg əl-kuffāṛ  
maṛṛag-ni kulunal dyār \*\* māni bāgi 'an-hum narḥal  
gəst aṭār u-ḡāni v-Aṭār \*\* u-trakt Aṭār l-kulunal  
u-gəst ət-tall u-kārəh diḥliḥ \*\* u-lā nəbgi naw 'ad kənt ət-tall  
yaḡayr blad kāməl mā fīh \*\* kulunal illā mət 'addal*

سَلَّكَ نِي يَالرَّبُّ اَمْنُ النَّارِ      عَاغَبْ ذَمِنْ رَوْعِ الْكُفَّارِ  
مَرَّ كُنِي كُنْتَلْ اَدِيَارِ      مَانِي بَاغِي عَنَّهُمْ نَرَحَلْ  
كُيَسْتْ اَطَارُ وُجَانِي فَطَارِ      وَاَتْرَكْتْ اَطَارِ الْكُأَنَلْ  
وَكَيْسْتْ النَّلُّ وُكَارُهُ دَخْلِيهِ      وُلَا يَبْغِي نُوْعَدْ كُنْتْ النَّلُّ  
يَعْتَرُ اَبْلُدْ كَامِلْ مَا فِيهِ      كُنْتَلْ اَلَا مَتْعَعَدَلْ

O God protect me from hell after all interactions with the unbelievers.  
The Colonel drove me out of a land I didn't want to leave.  
I moved to Atar; he joined me and I left Atar to him;  
I settled in the northern part of the country I did not like, but any place where  
the Colonel was far away became a good place to live<sup>43</sup>.

Another example of the poetry of resistance by exiled poets worth recalling here is that by Sīdi Wuld Sīdi Wuld əš-Šayḥ al-Qāḍī. This poet engages in a conversation with his mare, named Uḥḥ Ḥṛays<sup>44</sup>, who has always accompanied him in battle. He tells it that he understands perfectly well that it is annoyed because of the fights, but that it is helping him to fight the infidels.

*Ləzm-ək ya-ḥḥ Ḥṛays ət-təḡlāḡ \*\* u-rvūd əl-waḡra w-alaḡlāḡ*

<sup>41</sup> Poem communicated to me by the historian Elemine Moustapha (on December 20, 2018).

<sup>42</sup> The colonel to whom the author of the poem refers is the French officer Gauraud who was the one who occupied the Wilāyah of Ādrār in 1909, as mentioned above. For his biography, see d'Andurain (2011).

<sup>43</sup> This poem is published in this link <http://rnmoritania.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>44</sup> Uḥḥ Ḥṛays is the name of a mare trained for battle.



*amḡāl-ək yakūn f- 'lāġ \*\* ya-umḡ Ḥṛayṣ mṛadd əl-kuffār  
u-kān əġġalaġti mā təḡtāġ \*\* 'līk āna ḡəṛṛ u-l-aḡṛār  
mā yəmtəlku kāvīhum mulk \*\* əl-Lāḡ əl- 'azīz əl-qahḡār  
u-lā yəġri zād 'lī-hum səlḡ \*\* l-aḡṛār mṡan mən dāk mṛār*

وَأَرْفُودُ الْوُغْرَ وَالْجَلَّاحَ	لِزْمِكَ يَوْمَ الْخَرْيَصِ الْجَلَّاحِ
يَوْمَ الْخَرْيَصِ أَمْرَدُ الْكُفَّارِ	أَمَّا لَيْكَ يَكُونُ الْفِعْلَاحِ
أَعْلِيْبُكَ أَنْ جِرُّهُ لُحْرَارُ	وَكَيْفَ أَنْ أَعْجَبْتِي مَا تَحْتَأَجُ
اللَّهُ الْعَزِيزُ الْقَهَّارُ	مَا يَمْتَلِكُ كَافِيَهُمْ مَلِكُ
لُحْرَارُ أَمْتَنْ مِنْ ذَلِكَ أَمْرَارُ	وَلَا يَجْرِي زَادُ أَعْلِيْبُهُمْ سَلِكُ

You have good reason to be annoyed, Oh! Umḡ Ḥṛayṣ, for the endurance and the lack of respite during the torrid moments.

But aren't you participating, Oh! Umḡ Ḥṛayṣ, in the struggle to repress the infidels.

It is reasonable that you should be angry, for I am thy rider, I who am free, and free men submit only to Allah, the Worshipful and Unstoppable, who is their only Lord.

They cannot suffer from any other vassalage.

Free men are much more pugnacious<sup>45</sup>.

The author tells his mare Umḡ Ḥṛayṣ that he recognizes that there are times when he sees her tormented and worried. Yet he also explains to her that he is a free man and will not surrender to colonialism which submits the Mauritanian population.

### 5. Conclusions

These poems all share the idea of rejection of the colonizer, the courage and determination of the combatants and faith in the various forms of resistance (cultural, social or military). Furthermore, for the most part, they specifically share a common idea, which is the need to get physically away from the French, as expressed in the example examined previously by the poet Sīd Aḡmad Wuld 'Aydda: (1) «Thank God Saint-Louis and its beautiful houses have become far away»<sup>46</sup>; and by exiled poet Sīdiyā Wuld Aḡmadu Wuld Qutṛub (2) «I settled in the northern part of the country I did not like, but any place where the Colonel was far away became a good place to live».

In addition to these general observations on the poetry of resistance, it is necessary to make an urgent appeal to researchers in Mauritanian literature to proceed to collect all this literature which only remains in oral tradition since it has not been written or recorded to date.

<sup>45</sup> Transcription from a recording of the Mauritanian Radio archives.

<sup>46</sup> Saint-Louis symbolizes the presence of the military and civil governor and, consequently, also of the French army and administration. The author expresses his great joy at being away from the French.

Once collected, this work should be continued in order to discover, as far as possible, the names of those authors who remained anonymous in the past for security reasons, for at present there is no reason to conceal their names. Moreover, this poetry should be published to make it available to the public because it is a part of the struggle against colonialism and it allowed the country to gain its independence and sovereignty. Ḥassānī popular poetry, or *lə-ḡna*, is a relevant witness of the Mauritanian literary, cultural and historical past.

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