ABSTRACT: The Yangekori Rebellion was among the earliest extensive uprisings within Africa to be reported in European documents. This rebellion, which lasted for more than a decade, included domestic and market-bound slaves as well as free persons, all of whom became involved in promoting significant changes in traditional socioeconomic and political patterns. What made this rebellion unique and more informative for the present and for research relating to external slave trading and to rebellion within the diaspora, however, were its complex and local-based context, its multiple centers and its substantial involvement in a timely religious movement intent on transforming coastal society. Also instructive is the synergetic response that occurred among autocratic and otherwise quarrelsome rulers who were responsible for ending this rebellion, for re-establishing landholding patterns, and for defending themselves effectively against socioeconomic and political change.

KEY WORDS: Slavery resistance, slave trade, Islam, Guinea, Sierra Leone.

Since the mid-1980s, a sizeable literature has been published on the topic of slave resistance, whether that occurred in the form of evasion, subversion or non-insurrectionary behaviors within the slave-using system or as outright rebellion when slaves no longer were willing to tolerate ill treatment and were ready to accept the consequences of rebellion. Much of that writing has focused on the peculiarities of plantation systems that existed in the New World. Many authors have suggested that rebellion or other forms of resistance were of African origin, often assuming African context and agency to be easily identified. In general terms, slave rebellions within precolonial Africa have most often been described with reference to a trans-Atlantic commerce and as those acts related to: (1) opposition during the process of enslavement or period of capture within Africa; (2) flight or escape during the march coastward where slaves were to be warehoused before shipment; (3) rebellion while being held in pens or barracoons upon the African coast and awaiting buyers; or (4) mutiny aboard ships, either when a part of the
coasting process, when still in sight of Africa’s shore, or during the Middle Passage.  

In 1986, Bronislaw Nowak published an essay in *Hemispheres* (Warsaw) on the subject of a slave rebellion of the third type (rebellion during the holding period on the African coast) that began around 1783 in the coastal state of Moria, located in the borderlands of Guinea and Sierra Leone on Africa’s windward coast. This was a region distinguished by 1800 for production of cotton cloth, sea-salt and kola—much of which was destined for interior-based commerce—and for growth of rice consumed regionally or sold to provision ships involved in the slave trade. This also was a section of coast well-known for exporting slaves into the Atlantic market in exchange for European and American products, including tobacco, rum, firearms, gunpowder and other minor manufactured items. Nowak interpreted this rebellion as stemming almost entirely from circumstances associated with the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In his analysis, slaves had been brought coastward by interior-based suppliers in a steady fashion, but slave demands in the New World had tapered off in consequence of the American Revolution (1775–84), with the consequence that a large number of slaves had accumulated upon the coast in anticipation of buyers and were being used temporarily in commodities production. Nowak reasoned that nearly all rebels would have been destined ultimately for the Atlantic trade, that they probably had been on the coast for a long period of time and that they likely rebelled as a consequence of harsh treatment and/or foreknowledge of their probable fates.

At about the same time as Nowak’s writing, another and continuing stream of analysis focused upon opportunities for mischief and change of status that occurred within New World slave-holding systems, and for strategies of escape and survival outside them. Many writers described conditions in the Caribbean basin, but much of that analysis pertained as well to circumstances in the American South. Resistance took interesting and varied forms. Slaves could feign illnesses or stupidity as ways to irritate and slow down the system and make it inefficient and costly. They could sabotage or misplace equipment, or they could intentionally damage themselves or the crop

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through seeming ignorance. At the top of slave ranking within those systems were household servants who were generally expected to serve owners' daily requirements as tailors, barbers, cooks, horse tenders, coachmen, maids, butlers and so forth. These slaves enjoyed, if one can use that term, certain privileges, which might include access to political information, a degree of freedom to work and move about with limited supervision, and perhaps even a sense of security and permanence. Tasks were assigned, and each slave was expected to assume responsibility for his/her own chore and, indirectly, his/her own welfare and advancement. Privilege and proximity to owners, however, afforded special opportunity for harm and resistance. Almost universally, plantation cooks, for example, were Africans; most great houses expected slaves to taste food before it was served to owners and guests. Overseers or slave-drivers were also of privileged rank, obtaining rewards not available to field hands. General labor itself was divided into specialized task-oriented work (blacksmiths, coopers, stevedores, teamsters, weavers and carpenters) or more general labor gangs assigned to group projects. Those with special skills were generally given greater freedom of action/movement than were those slaves belonging to gangs.

Within the Caribbean basin context, flight from and survival alongside the slave-using system was possible through a variety of strategies. Single or even small groups of runaways who left a plantation with little or no intent to return could seek refuge in mountainous or inaccessible regions where indigenous peoples lived or where population density was low. They might become bandits. They also might flee to another island and/or the jurisdiction and protection of another slave-holding but less oppressive regime, a circumstance that made it difficult for them to return to their former status. Runaways often found competing colonial entities even willing to accommodate the existence of a small group of runaways, especially if that occurrence embarrassed rival systems or served political or economic interests. Within that context, the term grand marronnage refers to a rebellion in which slaves rose in permanent flight against a prevailing socioeconomic order, often killed owners and destroyed plantation property, and always moved


into 'less-traveled districts' where rebels might remain within autonomous strongholds for varying periods. There they built fortifications for collective defense, planted and harvested crops for their own subsistence, formalized a political and economic order and fashioned coping strategies designed to maintain social survival. Most interestingly, many maroon communities were led by former overseers or slave drivers, and generally included privileged slave classes/ranks as well as field hands, the latter generally considered, perhaps erroneously, to have been the most alienated in their previous status as a result of harsh punishments. This type of desertion differed significantly from petit marronnage which pertains to a temporary and unauthorized absence and a return to former or reduced status following appropriate punishments.

In light of this writing on rebellion within the American context and of recently published research concerning patterns of rural protest in north-western Sierra Leone, forms of servitude or subordination (from forms of clientage and pawnship to chattel slavery) within West Africa, and the nature of slave rebellion in Fuuta Jaloo, it is expedient to revisit Nowak's primary premise and to integrate into that analysis some aspects of insurrection in the framework of a slave-using system and some contributory events that Nowak overlooked originally. In his search for causes for, and even the circumstances of, this slave rebellion which lasted for more than a decade, Nowak relied heavily upon a few published accounts, and he adhered to a

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confidence that this rebellion was principally linked to trans-Atlantic commerce. In much of his reconstruction, Nowak struggled with fragments of information from those who observed the rebellion firsthand or from those who generally identified informants. To his credit, Nowak identified deficiencies, biases and information voids when those were evident, and he made an admirable effort to piece together a narrative and analysis based upon what was then understood and available in published materials. Nowak cautioned, however, that additional data would surely exist in official and unpublished records and invited others to search those for a more complete reconstruction and analysis.10

With respect to the latter, Nowak was indeed accurate, but perhaps not to the degree or with the consequence that he might have expected. Nowak had relied primarily upon accounts from three persons who traveled in the region between 1783 and 1796, the years generally fixed as covering the main phase of the rebellion. Of these writers, Adam Afzelius and Thomas Winterbottom had visited the contested terrain during the rebellion’s closing phase; both were more interested in explaining its failure than its causes or characteristics and, as agents of the Sierra Leone Company, both opposed the slave trade. John Matthews, a person generally regarded as sympathetic to slave-holding who maintained a trading post on the Sierra Leone River and who associated closely with indigenous and European merchants in the area, may actually have lived in Moria for a short time before 1786.11 Matthews’s letters demonstrate a keen eye for personal observation and provide important insight into the type of slavery or subordination existing along this section of coast. Writers recounted stories and traditions circulating at the time of their visits, all obtained from victors, ruling classes and traders. Many of those fragments were presented in a disjointed fashion, without the vantage of distance or generality to bring them into a more meaningful focus. Multiple and corroborating sources, however, often reveal connections that require several readings to reach clarity. Interestingly, no French accounts have been located regarding this rebellion, even though several French traders lived in towns within Sumbuya and French seamen were known to have visited the Iles de Los.12

Fig. 1 provides a chronology of those who visited the coast and who left accounts of what they observed or heard about the character of the slave-owning system and how they registered what had happened during this period of rebellion.

Fundamental to any analysis of rebellion in Moria is an understanding of the region’s underlying natural commerce and the political and slave-using context for the early 1780s. From the beginning of that century, African merchants along this coast had supplied interior markets with locally produced sea-salt and kola nuts and increasingly with cotton goods, and had received cattle, ivory, gold, gum, beeswax and slaves in return.13

European travelers in Moria or bordering regions

1785 – Matthews: Voyage.
1796 – Afzelius: Sierra Leone Journal.
1806 – Alexander Smith: Unpublished ‘Journey to Furicaria by Mr. Smith, 1806', Sierra Leone Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago.

On the coast, European traders established trading centers in the estuary of the Sierra Leone River, upon the Iles de Los not far offshore from Cape Sangara, and within principal coastal river towns sufficiently open to Atlantic interaction and commerce. European, Euro-African and African traders acted as middlemen in the Atlantic-based trading network, joining the demands of interior-based Africans for firearms, gunpowder and foreign goods, on the one hand, to the demands of Europeans for African products and slaves, on the other. In effect, several trading systems intermingled upon the coast: one linked to interior demands for salt and kola; one linked to coastal demand for meat and interior trade goods; and one linked to the Atlantic slave trade in exchange for firearms and manufactures.

Into this commercial network, already operational by the 1720s, flowed Manding- and Mande-speaking Djula/Sarakuli/Susu traders from the interior who settled in existing coastal communities and facilitated greater

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interaction with interior-based trades, effectively increasing demands for locally produced sea-salt, kola and cotton cloth. In most cases, interior-based outsiders/strangers were welcomed by coastal Baga and Bullom land holders for the increased commerce that they generated and for the protection that they supplied. In the state of Sumbuya, for example, Djula/Susu lineages became military guardians for Baga/Bullom rulers, while at the same time enriching themselves as long-distance traders, middlemen in expanding Atlantic-based trades, operators of cotton and rice plantations, and producers of sea-salt and collectors of kola nuts for interior markets. Along the Forekariah, Bereira and Melikori rivers, in contrast, Manding trading lineages copied expansionist trends then current within Fuuta Jale among the Fula and carried out wars of political and territorial conquest—both under the cloak of jihād. With Fula allies, these Manding seized many towns along the coast, intermarried with or replaced ruling families, and enslaved indigenous peoples to their own political will and Islamic regime. On the coast, they produced a loosely structured state of Moria whose towns were administered by headmen from important lineages and whose state structure was governed by the Alimaami (ruler and head of the Touré lineage) of Forekariah town. While Sumbuya was technically a Baga-/Bullom-governed state protected by Djula/Susu lineages, Moria, in contrast, was a Manding and Muslim state that operated according to Manding political patterns.

Because the 1783–96 rebellion had its genesis within the state of Moria, the following description of slave-using pertains to circumstances within that state, although similar but perhaps less repressive conditions prevailed in neighboring Susu-dominated regions of Sumbuya to the north and Benna in Moria’s immediate eastern hinterland (see Fig. 2).

By far the most relevant source regarding slave-holding practice within Moria around 1783 is John Matthews, a former officer in the Royal Navy, who took up employment in Sierra Leone for 2 years beginning in 1785. His observations, confirmed and elaborated by reports from numerous others in succeeding years, provide a portrait of a social and political order

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25 Rashid, ‘Patterns of rural protest’, 24; Afzelius, Sierra Leone Journal, 121.

in which the many were dominated by the few. By Matthews's account, slavery was a common practice along this coast, accounting for 'three fourths at least' of the population among the Susu and Baga/Bbullom peoples—a likely exaggeration, even in Sumbuya state located immediately inland from the Illes de Los. He estimated that the ratio of slaves to free persons within Moria was 'much greater'. Ismail Rashid assigned it at 70 to 80 per cent in the 1770s. Matthews thought it ordinary 'for a head man [Morian village chief] to have two or three hundred slaves of both sexes, exclusive of their domestics who are very numerous' and usual for 'principal men' to own up to 1,000 slaves, many of whom lived at a distance in 'slave towns'.

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17 See numerous descriptions in Afzelius, *Sierra Leone Journal*; Watt, *Journal*; Bright, 'Journal ... 1802'; Hartwig, in Mouser and Mouser, *Case of the Reverend Peter Hartwig*. 18 Matthews, *Voyage*, 149. 19 Ismail Rashid, "A devotion to the idea of liberty at any price": rebellion and antislavery in the Upper Guinea Coast in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', in Diouf (ed.), *Fighting the Slave Trade*, 140. Butscher, in Mouser (ed.), *Account of the Mandingoes*, 10–11, estimated in c. 1815 that two-thirds of Moria's population was of slave status. Watt, *Journal*, 51, estimated that slaves exceeded free men in Fuuta Jalloo at a ratio of five to one. 20 Matthews, *Voyage*, 149–50. Matthews, 93–4, also noted that domestic slaves, market slaves and free persons were generally distinguishable in general appearance, with those from the interior 'not so robust or well made as the native free men'. Hartwig, in Mouser and Mouser, *Case of the Reverend Peter Hartwig*, 63–4, estimated that Fendan Modu Dumbuya of Sumbuya owned 1,000 domestic slaves in 1806.
Of those numbers, 'domestics' were considered to be those who had been born as slaves upon the coast, and, by virtue of that status and local custom were guaranteed certain privileges and protections. Such domestics Matthews divided into two groups: those ministering to the daily demands of their masters, and those fixed to the soil – the laboring class. Matthews reported those living within the owner's compound as often appropriating the owner's name, being thought 'in some respect ... as a branch of the [owner's] family', and available for being 'hired out' for a variety of occupations (pilot, cook, sailor, bearer) to Europeans and other Africans, with wages accruing to owners.  

Slaves in the laboring class, in contrast, lived in the owner's rice- and cotton-growing and salt-production villages, or lugas (farms), and were 'held in no higher estimation than any other animal that contributes to its cultivation'. Any slave owned for less than one year possessed none of these rights, was not protected by customary law, and was considered as saleable. All domestic slaves of more than one year's tenure, Matthews claimed, constituted warriors who fought the battles of their owners. In exchange, such slaves acquired refuge, albeit within a subservient status. That status was so rigidly protected that it could be broken only for due cause (adultery, theft, witchcraft), when so judged within a customary court and according to customary law, or Islamic law in the Morian case. Writing 20 years later, Peter Hartwig, who was one of the earliest missionaries of the Church Missionary Society and who lived nearly a decade in Moria, observed that laboring slaves were governed by free overseers or by domestic slave-drivers who held privileged rank and who ruled harshly. The most severe punishments were reserved for runaways who were usually sold outright or killed, often in public executions. Plantation slaves provided allegiance and a measured amount of labor to owners, and in return received protection, security (to a degree) and an allotment of land and time to be used in individual efforts.

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21 Matthews, *Voyage*, 150. See also John Graf, in Bruce L. Mouser (ed.), *Journal of a Missionary Tour to the Labaya Country (Guinea/Conakry) in 1850* (University of Leipzig Papers on Africa, 1) (Leipzig, 1998), for an interesting view: 'A Home-born slave can never be sold, except for crimes which he may have committed or when taken prisoner in war; so that sold slaves are generally the criminals or cowards or idlers to whom the state of vassalage must prove wholesome to themselves and beneficial to Society at large'.

22 Matthews, *Voyage*, 150. For discussion of types of servitude, see the classical interpretation given by Walter Rodney, 'African slavery and other forms of social oppression on the Upper Guinea Coast in the context of the Atlantic slave-trade', *Journal of African History*, 7 (1966), 431-43.

23 Matthews, *Voyage*, 150-1. Watt, *Journal*, 53, contended that domestic slaves in Fuuta Jaloo were allowed to carry weapons only when outside their owner's territory, clearly indicating an apprehension that weapons in the hands of slaves might be used against owners as easily as against enemies.

24 Matthews, *Voyage*, 153; Afzelius, *Sierra Leone Journal*, 128. See also John Leyden, *A Historical and Philosophical Sketch of the Discoveries & Settlements of the Europeans in Northern & Western Africa* (Edinburgh, 1799), 213-14, whose description of rights of domestic slaves is similar to that given by Matthews in 1788.

25 Hartwig, in Mouser and Mouser, *Case of the Reverend Peter Hartwig*, 92. Watt, *Journal*, 61, noted that the punishment for insurrection in Fuuta Jaloo was to have one's 'throat cut', the same as that mentioned by Hartwig.
Runaways were especially troublesome and a constant problem along this section of coast. Islands located close by, mangrove inlets on the oceanside, and nearby highlands offered ideal opportunities for marronage, whether it be of short duration or for a longer period. Moria had the additional disadvantage of being bordered on the northwest and north by the rival Baga/Susu state of Sumbuya, on the north and northeast by the mountainous terrain of the Sangara/Yangkori Hills, and on the east by the Susu state of Benna. Runaways might seek escape through a substitution of master, either by reinventing their status as domestic slaves or by establishing a new status as 'near free' clients under the safeguard of different patrons. Matthews noted that such communities of former Morian slaves and 'run away Susu' were already living on the Iles de Los in 1785 upon lands that belonged traditionally to Sumbuya, and that former Morian slaves were fighting as allies of Sumbuya in an extended conflict then being waged between Sumbuya and Moria.26

By Matthews's account, the slave uprising in Moria, which may have included the Iles de Los slaves mentioned above, began because Manding owners had become capricious regarding customary protections and because slaves had seized an opportunity to alter their status. Novak reasoned contrarily in his 1986 analysis that the slaves that rebelled around 1783 consisted of a different slave rank without protections or privileges—those who were destined for the trans-Atlantic slave commerce, who had been brought coastward in anticipation of buyers, and who had accumulated in large numbers, perhaps as a consequence of a lacklustre 1782 trading season. To be sure, it was not uncommon that slaves destined for sale might be expected to perform manual labor under close supervision; that certainly was the case in other areas of this section of coast. It is also reasonable to infer that market-bound slaves unfit for sale abroad, rather than being put to death, would have been sent to lugars as general labor.27 Matthews's description, however, lacks any mention of such slaves, stating in 1786 instead:

The slaves took an opportunity, when the principal part of their [Moria's] fighting men were out upon an expedition [against Sumbuya], to attack their masters; several of whom they put to death, and had their heads carried before them on poles, as ensigns of victory and liberty; they then set fire to the rice which was ready to be cut [October], which reduced the Mandingoes to the utmost distress, who [the rebels] afterwards retreated to their towns,28 which they fortified in such a manner, and so effectually stopped every avenue that led into the country from

26 Matthews, Voyage, 16, 89. For more on conflict between Sumbuya and Moria, see Bright, 'Journal ... 1802', 65-7, 74, 79, 84; Mouser, 'The 1805 Foróariah conference', 219-62; Diary of Lieutenant Clarkson, R. N., Sierra Leone Studies (Mar. 1927), 97-8.
28 It is likely that these towns mentioned here were actually original slave towns operated by Manding owners and staffed with domestic slaves.
whence the Mandingoes could receive assistance, that their late haughty masters were under the necessity of suing for peace – whether they will return again to their former obedience, or assert their independence, is yet undecided.29

While this rebellion may have begun with perhaps only a few hundred participants, it expanded rapidly into a significant uprising and survived for 13 years, partly as a consequence of important strategies adopted by the rebels and partly because of advantageous opportunities on and within Moria’s borders. In Matthews’s narrative, the rebellion had started in 1785, but later accounts suggest that Matthews in all likelihood had telescoped events into a shorter period, and that they may have taken perhaps two growing seasons to be realized.30 It is probable that the rebels would have squandered some portion of their initial freedom, unless of course the rebellion had been meticulously planned in advance, even before they sought sanctuary outside Moria’s boundaries and before the rebellion’s initial phase had run its course. It is also evident that there were perhaps several rebellions, and that there was no single leader among the slaves. From a subaltern perspective, however, the rebels had little option once they had brutally slain owners, burned vital crops and sacked several villages but to obtain hasty and protective agreements with whoever was their immediate neighbor or with Moria’s primary adversary in the region, Sumbuya. It is also doubtful that leaders in Sumbuya had encouraged or helped to launch the insurrection, for no slave holder would willingly have gambled to support a slave rebellion that might spread inadvertently to his own clients. But once the rebellion had occurred, both rebels and Sumbuya sought advantage. In effect, Sumbuya’s ambiguous and longstanding military skirmishes with Moria before 1783 and continuing disputes along their common boundary as late as 1785 made it possible for many rebels to move beyond Moria’s immediate ability to respond. Some rebels, consequently, switched masters by pledging allegiance to Sumbuya and enlisting among its warriors – a conclusion already in place by the beginning of the 1785 rainy season.31

Others, led by a number of ill-defined leaders, adopted more complicated strategies for survival – retreat to less-traveled and less accessible regions and to land available for growing food. This also included the establishment of a socioeconomic order that would protect and prolong their existence. In that sense, these rebel groups were replicating types of marronage common in the Caribbean – as well as traditionally applied along this stretch of coast. Some slaves who had been used in mangrove rice production may have sought refuge deeper into mangrove areas, but that possibility is not mentioned in the sources. A ‘sensible and clever Slave’ named Mumby built defenses for a group of about 600 fugitive domestic slaves ‘in the very Mandingo Country, surrounded by his Masters and Tyrants’; interestingly this isolated group must have adopted unique survival strategies that permitted them to remain

30 Thomas Winterbottom, *An Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of Sierra Leone* (London, 1803), 1, 154, also dated the rebellion as 1785 or 1786, suggesting that that particular rebellion had led to a retreat to Yangekori.
31 Afzelius, *Sierra Leone Journal*, 129.
reasonably unmolested until its members were permitted to move as free persons to Benna in the interior around 1791. Still others, led by Dangasago and unnamed other leaders, moved to five or six villages in the foothills of the Yangekori Hills that belonged to Sumbuya and that were sparsely populated with free Susu peoples. There they settled and were initially welcomed for the manpower and skills that they brought with them—a situation that could not have occurred without at least Sumbuya's passive approval.

Once settled among the villages of Yangekori, Kania and Funkoo, and with a fragile cease-fire established between the rebels and Moria, the rebel leaders did what was necessary to protect their strongholds. Village defenses were assured through the building of walls and sentinel towers, and the acquisition of several cannon from traders upon the coast. Other runaways flowed steadily into these refuges, until their numbers began to concern slave holders in Sumbuya and free persons native to these villages. Firearms and gunpowder, moreover, were costly essentials that led the rebels to raid for slaves whom they could then trade at coastal factories for necessary European manufactures. When Moria initiated a policy of capturing farmers attached to these rebel villages, the latter retaliated in kind (probably in 1786/7) by attacking Morian towns and seizing slaves, and in a few cases important free persons who could be ransomed. These insults resulted in an undated large expedition from Moria, 'but they [the rebels] defended themselves so well, that, after losing several people, the Mandingos were obliged to make a precipitate retreat'. That unsuccessful attempt to overrun the Yangekori strongholds was followed by a period of 'slight skirmishes and predatory expeditions, without any material advantage accruing to either side'. For all practical purposes, a temporary stalemate had again been reached.

The circumstances of that standoff changed during the 1789/90 dry season, however, with significant consequences for leaders in all camps, whether rebels or customary elites. Beginning during the 1789 rainy season, and continuing for at least a year, this section of coast was visited by a holy man from the interior named Fatta, who claimed to have been designated a Mahdi and instructed to lead a jihād of cleansing and correction. This was also a time when sanctioned rulers of both Sumbuya and Moria had died, and both states were engaged in prolonged and contentious procedures for selecting new ones. Declaring himself a native of 'Mandugo, capital of Conya' (unidentified), Fatta claimed to be a lineal descendant of Ali b. Abu Talib and cousin of Muhammad and a fulfillment of Islamic prophecy. By the time of his arrival in Moria, Fatta had crossed the state of Benna where Susu leaders reluctantly rallied to his cause and joined his march coastward. Fatta arrived

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32 In ibid. 126, Afzelius also mentioned that Mumby, his group, and recently arrived 'run away Slaves from the Yanghia Curree' were thriving in Benna in March 1796.
33 Ibid. 122, 126; Winterbottom, An Account, 1, 154.
34 Afzelius, Sierra Leone Journal, 122, 123. Winterbottom, An Account, 1, 155.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 The dates of 1789/91 for the jihād are taken from Zachary Macaulay's journal, entry dated 12 Dec. 1793 (Schwarz, Zachary Macaulay, 1, 31). See also Winterbottom, An Account, 1, 246–50, for his account of Fatta's visit to the coast.
38 Macaulay, in Schwarz, Zachary Macaulay, 11, 18, 39–1.
in Moria with ‘a large concourse of followers’ numbering perhaps 15,000, who pitched tents, clearly sending shockwaves through coastal communities. Even the Fula were hesitant to question his authority. Each headman was required to present himself before Fatta, swear allegiance to him, and deliver gifts and tribute; and each was tested for his knowledge of Islam. Some elders were beheaded for heresy and incorrect thoughts. Supplies and provisions for his followers (army) were requisitioned from landholders. All loyal followers were required to wear yellow- or orange-colored garments, a convenient method for identifying those who had not submitted to his authority. For the moment, all disputes between states then ongoing were ended. Even European traders operating commercial establishments upon the coast were required to wear yellow clothing and to pay a special insurance fee that was imposed to protect their property.39

Whether a matter of answering Fatta’s summons or of exploiting an opportunity for significant change in customary practice upon the coast, rebel leaders met with Fatta and his leaders and offered their allegiance and strategic incorporation of their warriors within Fatta’s army. To be sure, rebel leaders had little option – the same choice had probably been given to ruling elites in Benna, Moria and Sumbuya.40 Even John Ormond, an important slave trader in the Rio Pongo, was summoned to Moria and paid tribute to the Mahdi. Indeed, one rebel leader was reportedly executed. But more importantly, Fatta’s policies signaled a degree of leveling upon the coast and the potential for a major remodeling of the socioeconomic landscape, albeit still within an African context. The rebel leader Mumby and his splinter group, for instance, were granted their ‘freedom’ and permitted to move to Benna territory and away from Moria proper, a circumstance that would need to be resolved later.41 The rulers of Benna, Moria and Sumbuya were humbled and humiliated, and the temporary ruler of Moria was even ordered to put his own brother to death. The military protector to the Sumbuya ruler later reported his belief that Fatta intended to execute all elders throughout the coast as a way to end the old order and effect change.42 As is often the case in iconoclastic movements, Fatta’s message of a new regime challenged the very foundations of society and provided those domestic slaves and free persons with obligations to important persons with ample opportunity to alter their status and perhaps switch allegiance to other patrons.

In effect, the arrival of Fatta with his calls for cleansing and transformation and opportunities that his policies provided to subalterns within Benna, Moria and Sumbuya to redefine the customary authority of elders and elites was an unacceptable change for landholders. Massive desertion among domestic slaves to the Mahdi’s cause and Fatta’s observed excessive demands upon landlords were additional ingredients that helped to produce a common

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40 Ibid. 1, 249. recorded a report given him by Fendan Modu Dumbuya of Sumbuya: ‘On being ordered into his presence, he [Fendan Modu] crawled on all fours for near a hundred yards in token of his veneration of the prophet, and in hopes of conciliating him by this instance of absolute submission’.
42 Winterbottom, *An Account*, 1, 249.
front among traditional elites against changes, whatever their nature. But by far the most important irritant was the perceived alliance formed between Fatta and the rebel leaders and the growing power held within rebel strongholds in the Yangekori Hills, for, from the rebels' perspective, Fatta's appearance had provided them with more opportunities than costs. Before order could be restored among domestic slaves and the power of traditional landowners re-established, however, Fatta's invincibility needed to be tested and discredited. That opportunity came in the 1790/1 dry season – interestingly enough, when a jilted lover revealed that Fatta had been wounded twice before and had scars to prove it. When Fatta learned that coastal headmen were rallying to oppose him, he fled to Benna, a supposed safe haven. But the rulers in Benna, like those in Moria and Sumbuya, also believed themselves to have been undermined by Fatta and his followers, and they combined with coastal elites to bring Fatta to justice. Still fearing his special powers, however, and 'making it a point of conscience not to shed the blood of so extraordinary a scholar by the usual mode of execution viz. cutting the throat, they dispatched him with the stroke of a hammer'.

From 1791 to late 1795, circumstances upon the coast were fluid, but most importantly, from the rebels' perspective, traditional landlords were gradually reasserting their authority among subject peoples and over territory, and joining forces to oppose runaways and, increasingly, any efforts by the rebels to consolidate their own might upon the coast. Fluid conditions, however, meant that the rebels were able to harvest crops and secure sufficient surpluses in rice and cotton with which to purchase needed firearms and munitions. In these circumstances, the rebels were forced to rely entirely upon their own resources, and to look for opportunities that weakness or lack of coordination between Benna, Moria and Sumbuya might afford. Many former slaves who had changed allegiance during the Fatta period of 1789–91 joined the rebels within their strongholds where walls were strengthened and a reserve of food was collected for the upcoming battle. By December 1793, working agreements had been reached between the rulers of Benna, Moria and Sumbuya that required that all runaways be returned to owners and that rebels be, in future, systematically deprived of rice harvests and sources of gunpowder and firearms.

43 Bright, 'Journal ... 1802', 97. Bright, 48, wrote that the person who struck the fatal blow was Brama Sayo of Benna. Winterbottom, An Account, 1, 250, reported that it took some time for many to believe that Fatta was in fact dead. While most welcomed his departure, many continued to revere him as a prophet, and collected his teeth, hair, nails and various other parts of his body as relics and grign to protect them from harm. Macaulay, in Schwarz, Zachary Macaulay, I, 20, wrote: 'But even when they saw his skull shattered to pieces they could not persuade themselves that he was dead, they cut his body in a thousand pieces, and by many it is still believed that though Mahade has disappeared for a time, he will shortly return, to take vengeance on his murderers, and to establish his kingdom'. C. B. Wadstrom, in An Essay on Colonization (New York, 1968), Part 2, 86–7, who reported mainly from works of others who had visited the coast, claimed that Fatta's 'generals' contended for power after his death, with losers being sold to 'a French slave-ship, lying off a factory near S. Leone'. The same account as that given by Wadstrom appeared in Sierra Leone Company, Substance of the Report ... 1794 (London, 1794), 96–7.
Zachary Macaulay, then governor of the British settlement at Freetown, wrote prophetically and hyperbolically:

The present combination of African chiefs to crush these people and the gallant struggle it is likely they will make for their liberty will form a parallel to the history of Europe at this moment [1793]. The only difference seems to be in the number of combatants, the game and the stakes are the same.44

While the configuration of this 'combination of African chiefs' is unclear, it is certain that significant efforts were made during the period between 1793 and 1795 to consolidate agreements among as many rulers as possible and to resolve longstanding differences between states. This was also a time for states to replace temporary sovereigns with those sanctioned by regional landlords. Those efforts were significantly advanced during the 1794 rainy season, moreover, when yet another holy man from the interior arrived in Moria, proclaiming 'himself a prophet sent by God'.45 This time, coastal rulers and electors responded differently from how they had when Fatta first appeared. Experience had clearly demonstrated that chaos could spread easily when a religious zealot proposed significant changes in customary systems of land use and rule. On this occasion, perhaps to manipulate developments to their own advantage and gain control of the process, the new ruler of Moria, Sitafa Morani, convened a conference of regional leaders and electors and summoned the self-proclaimed prophet, named Karimou, to present his mission before the 'meeting of all chiefs', which would judge the validity of his claim.46 For whatever reason, Karimou failed to appear at the meeting. But the conference itself, probably the first of many such conferences that were to follow, emboldened landlords and new rulers with new-found authority and increased their determination to resolve their common rebel problem and remove the sanctuary that the Yangekori marronage had provided domestic and market-bound slaves. Adam Afzelius wrote during this period that many slaves were leaving their owners' fields to join rebels at Yangekori, and that those defections and rumors then circulating upon the coast had caused general alarm among owners that more would take flight if a combined troop loyal to customary elites was not formed quickly. As a consequence, and repeating Afzelius's characterizations, Mongé Simba of Wonkapong, acting ruler of Sumbuya, was named 'Commander in chief of the combined forces', and Alimaami Sitafa of Forékariah, the newly designated ruler of Moria, was appointed 'General of the attack'. 'All the headmen of the Suso and

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44 Schwarz, Zachary Macaulay, ii, 30-1. On 12 December 1793 (31), Macaulay noted: 'The deserters having enjoyed three years of repose since Mahadi's death have cultivated rice of which they have now a good stock on hand and with their overplus they have been laying up store of arms and ammunition'. In a personal communication (3 Apr. 2006), Paul Richards wrote: 'Macaulay's comments were rather astute - and might have been as applicable to DFID [Department for International Development of the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office] post-rebellion strategy of chiefly restoration in AD2000 as to the global revolutionary climate of the late 18th century! How little life has changed'.


46 Ibid.
Mandingo towns' combined with the allied force and provided troops. Dala Modu Dumbuya, son of the protector to the ruler of Sumbuya, said that 'five Kings' participated in this conference, and it was then that he was given the charge to 'take the place [Yangekori]'.

The assault against remaining rebel villages began after the rice harvest of 1795/6. Several small towns (among them Kania and Funkoo) that were loyal to the rebels were easily overrun, and captives were either killed or sold. The major assault against Yangekori town by 2,500-plus alliance warriors went slowly and took more than 5 months to succeed, for the town was newly fortified on three sides (the fourth faced the mountain) with 12-foot walls and three sentinel towers, and was well supplied with food and munitions collected in advance. A new well had been dug within the town's walls. Some who had escaped capture elsewhere expanded the ranks of the rebels within their last significant stronghold. But some at Yangekori concluded that defense was impossible, and these sought refuge among Mumby's group in Benna. At Yangekori, rebels repelled repeated attacks, with a steady loss of life on both sides. Beginning early in 1796, the allies changed tactics from that of frontal attacks to that of a blockade. They built a palisade about a mile outside the rebel's defensive walls, cut down trees and brush around the town, and reduced the size of the allied force to 1,000 warriors in order to starve the town's population of approximately 500 people, or to wait for a final attack or a surrender.

While the specifics of the final battle are unclear, the rebellion apparently ended quickly. In March 1796, the allied forces received detailed information concerning Yangekori's defenses from an American trader who had visited the rebels, and they assembled several thousand warriors and cannon for a final assault. Perhaps equally important in timing, however, was the arrival of an official Fula ambassador from Timbo with a demand 'to get this [trade] road open [as] soon as possible'. The general bombardment began on 22 March and an offer was given to the rebels - surrender and leaders would be put to death or sold, slaves would be returned to their former status, and free persons would be 'released'. One of the three remaining leaders at Yangekori, a free Susu, surrendered with a small group to the alliance, and apparently was treated fairly. Another leader was killed in the bombardment. On 28 March, the last rebel leader, a 'great warrior and daring fellow' named Dangasago, was betrayed by a friend, was decoyed out of Yangekori supposedly with a promise of gunpowder, and was seized. Dangasago's capture signaled the fate of the insurrection, but defenders
resisted for several days while the allies continued to await their surrender. Dangasago's destiny was ominous:

[Dangasago] was yesterday cut to pieces amidst the acclamation of the combined armies - His head was cut off and divided into two pieces and afterwards even the arms and legs were cut off and the body in this mangled situation thrown out of the camp, there to rotten or be devoured of wild beasts.55

The fate of the remaining rebels is less certain in the sources. Dala Modu claimed to have paraded the captives before the 'five Kings' and told Governor Macaulay of Sierra Leone that only 150 were killed in the final attack and that 100 boys and 15 girls were sold as slaves.56 Dala Modu also reported that the walls were torn down and the town of Yangekori completely destroyed. A few years later, Richard Bright reported significantly different figures of 1,000 of those captured being put to death, 1,000 as enslaved, and a final 1,000 as dismissed, although he may have included all of those involved in the insurrection.57 Winterbottom reported simply that, in the final battle, the allies 'rushed in, and ... cut the throats of the wretched inhabitants who survived.'58

While the chronology of events is reasonably clear, several questions regarding the course of this rebellion remain. Still uncertain are the definite dates for its beginning and for causes that led to the uprising in the first place. Rather than interpret this rebellion as a single event or as coming from a single-status group, moreover, it seems more reasonable to believe that it began as an isolated event but escalated regionally and quickly, and probably in different locations. It is also probable that it grew to include bands of domestic as well as market-bound slaves, and certainly even some people of free-but-subaltern status who were caught up in the enthusiasm and who wanted to bring about social change. Cruel treatments towards slaves and disregard of subject peoples in Moria may have been primary causes, but opportunity - during a period of political confusion and disunity within states, and warfare between states upon the coast - was a major contributing factor.

Perhaps causes were soon forgotten, for once away from 'masters', rebels, whether former slaves or subalterns, needed to adopt strategies for survival, within an African setting and context. Some placed themselves under different patrons, substituting one for another. One group, that led by Mumby, reached accommodation with former 'masters' and survived through collaboration. Others undoubtedly were defeated in battle but were unrecorded, and some became bandits. Still others must have accepted their fate and returned to the yoke of their masters.

The group that became identified as the Yangekori Rebellion lasted for more than a decade and most likely included more than one center. Its leaders developed strategies and worked within realities that permitted this to occur. They should be credited for many of their successes, but a lack of resolve, direction and cooperation among their natural opponents

55 Ibid. 130.
56 'Evidence by Dalu Mohammed'; Macaulay, journal of Zachary Macaulay, entry dated 10 May 1796.
57 Bright, 'Journal ... 1802', 81.
58 Winterbottom, An Account, 1, 158.
contributed significantly to their longevity. Current data reveal nothing of the socioeconomic order established by rebels or of their long-term objectives. It is doubtful that they were democratic or republican. Nor is it certain that they abolished slavery. At least one of its leaders was originally of free status. Nothing is known of their ethnic identities, religions, languages, rankings or gender. Successful strategies, however, demanded that rebels protect themselves with walls, warriors, surplus crops that they could use in trade, favorable agreements with neighbors, and a willingness to accommodate to local offensive and defensive norms. For example, they raided for wives and for slaves that they traded for firearms. Had it not been for intermittent skirmishes between states and political confusion within those states, however, the Yangekori Rebellion would have ended much earlier. Sumbuya permitted the rebels to remain within its nominal territory and to trade with Europeans via a corridor or through contacts with the coast—so long as Moria remained Sumbuya's enemy. In effect, as long as the Yangekori rebels remained within their confined space, Sumbuya was willing to tolerate their existence as a convenient diversion.

The Yangekori Rebellion failed, however, for many reasons. In general, slave rebellions tend to collapse eventually. In this case, perhaps there were failures of leadership. But it is generally accepted that rebellions must grow and expand to survive; they must become offensive and conquer something in order to recruit new membership and women. Perhaps leaders became complacent with Sumbuya's perceived acceptance of their solitary status. That posture worked, so long as they represented no genuine threat to the survival and status of traditional landlords. That situation changed, however, when Fatta brought his socioeconomic revolution—his iconoclasm—to the coast, and when he combined the slave armies with his own. Once the social and economic order of landlords—as a group—was gravely threatened, the stage was set for a collective decision to resolve internal political problems, destroy the rebellion, restore chiefly prerogatives and socioeconomic standing, and return to a normal but changed reality. The landlords possessed manpower, customary rights as first-comers, religious sanction, access to firearms and assistance, ability to call upon clan and extended relationships, and power to reward. An alliance of ‘five Kings’ and the ability of the combined armies to maintain an indefinite blockade sealed the rebellion’s fate. In the debate concerning African agency in slave uprising and successful marronage, the Yangekori Rebellion may supply a model that could be applied to the New World experience. But it also seems reasonably clear that the several Moria-based rebellions of this period occurred as a consequence essentially of local dynamics and not necessarily as by-products of the slave trade as such.