

Ogossagou massacre exposes rising bloodshed in European-occupied Mali

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The horrific massacre in the central Malian village of Ogossagou is exposing the brutal realities of the war in Mali launched by Paris in 2013. Under French and German military occupation, this country—one of the poorest in the world—is being torn apart by a rising wave of ethnic bloodshed.

Just before dawn on March 23, a band of approximately 100 fighters dressed in ethnic Dogon garb and bearing firearms arrived in Ogossagou, a Peul (or Fulani) village in the region of Bankass, near the border with Burkina Faso. They proceeded to shoot or kill everyone they could find, from the elderly down to the smallest infants. Approximately 160 people were killed and 55 wounded.

Eighteen people sought refuge in the house of the village marabout (healer), Bara Sékou Issa, who is known across West Africa, hoping the gunmen would not attack a marabout's house. Sékou Issa had already welcomed a number of refugees from nearby villages into his home, offering them room and board. However, the attackers set Sékou Issa's house on fire and gunned down anyone fleeing the house to escape the flames. All of Sékou Issa's religious students reportedly perished in the flames inside his house.

The attackers slit the throat of the village chief, Amadou Barry, in front of his mother, aged 90, and then executed her, as well.

The village was left devastated, with houses and buildings burnt down and even livestock and domestic animals killed. Ismaïla Cissé, one of the Malian army's few Peul officers, told the press: "They want to wipe us off the surface of the earth. Otherwise, how can one explain that they killed children, the elderly, and even livestock?"

As reports of this horrific massacre spread, Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta traveled to

Ogossagou on March 25. "Justice will be done," Keïta pledged. He also fired the chief of staff of the armed services, General M'Bemba Moussa Keïta, as well as the chiefs of staff of the army, air force, and military intelligence.

Keïta's sacking of the top military leadership was effectively an admission that the Malian army, which is being trained by French and German soldiers, bore significant responsibility for the massacre. Soldiers at a nearby military base, only 13 kilometers away, reportedly were notified that the killings were ongoing around 6 a.m. However, they only arrived on the scene at 9 a.m., by which time the attackers had left.

Serious suspicions of official complicity with the forces that perpetrated the massacre—on the part of the Malian government and therefore its neo-colonial imperialist overlords—remain. Among the wounded in Ogossagou, the authorities apprehended several individuals they accused of being among the attackers. Nonetheless, they are refusing to divulge their identities.

Mopti prosecutor Maouloud Ag Najim told *Jeune Afrique*: "We interviewed most of the 45 wounded and their relatives, who are currently being treated at hospitals in Sévaré and Bankass. The military police team deployed in Ogossagou also interviewed some of the survivors. ... Among the wounded, five people were identified by the survivors as being suspected attackers. We suspect they were members of the group who attacked the village of Ogossagou on March 23."

After the massacre, Prime Minister Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga announced the dissolution of the Dan na Amassagou militia. This is an ethnic Dogon militia set up in 2016, after the French-backed government began encouraging the formation of local self-defense militias amid fighting between French troops, Malian

government troops and various Islamist militias in northern and central Mali.

The Malian government is refusing to confirm or deny, however, whether the five suspected attackers they have taken into custody belong to Dan na Amassagou, a militia loyal to the central government in Bamako and that flies the Malian flag.

A November 2018 report by the International Human Rights Federation and the Malian Association for Human Rights alleged that *donzo* hunters making up the militia had tacit state backing: “Many witness statements and well-placed individuals testify to at least logistical and financial support for the *donzos* from the Malian government, or at least from some of its members. ... Many witnesses say they have seen the *donzos* carry out military operations alongside the Malian Armed Forces.”

Yousouf Toloba, the head of Dan na Amassagou, for his part issued a statement denying that his militia had participated in the massacre and pledging to defy the state dissolution order. He said, “I am informing national and international public opinion: if those who are in the forests [terrorist groups] lay down their weapons, Dan na Amassagou will also. As long as that does not happen, we will not lay down our weapons.”

Over the course of the week, six Dogons were killed in two attacks on the villages of Ouadou and Kere Kere. UN sources wrote that in the night of Monday to Tuesday in Ouadou, “Several houses were burnt and livestock was stolen. An initial death toll lists four dead, including a young woman. The inhabitants took refuge in nearby villages.” On Tuesday, they added, “in the Dogon village of Kere Kere in the Bankass region, at least two women were killed and another wounded.”

In Mali, long-standing ethnic divisions are being inflamed and erupting into horrific violence under the impact of years of imperialist war and military occupation. The French-led war in Mali began in 2013, after mercenary militias fled the NATO war that devastated Libya, attempting to return home to Mali. As one of the world’s poorest countries funneled resources into a French-led war targeting ethnic Tuareg and Islamist militias, social conditions in Mali disintegrated.

Railway workers, teachers and public service workers have repeatedly struck to demand unpaid wages and better working conditions.

France has posted 2,700 troops in Mali and Germany 1,100, making it the German army’s largest overseas deployment, to support the Malian regime in Bamako. Presented as part of a “war on terror,” the occupation has fanned the flames of ethnic conflict, with Peul Islamist preacher Amadou Koufa’s celebrity leading to bitter accusations attacking the entire Peul ethnicity as terrorist. Ethnic violence between ethnic Peul, Dogon, and Bambara forces led to the deaths of 500 people in 2018, according to the UN.



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