

The Pulaku Project

Two young journalists traverse West Africa, following the path of nomadic Fulani herders to share the stories of a population daunted by development and climate change. We invite you to support this endeavour. By ordering a printed photograph you enable the Pulaku Project to yield a new cultural insight from the remote camps of Fulani herders.

www.pulaku.com

Project Description

The Pulaku Project arose through the friendship of an American Peace Corps volunteer and an exceptional young Fulani. Travelling modestly and staying in Fulani encampments, Christoph Herby and Guida Belco will give voice to a culture facing a diminishing frontier for survival. The two combine an aptitude for media and photography with the savvy of a proud educated Fulani. Their unique partnership enables intimate engagement with this flamboyant, yet reticent, culture.

Fulani herders survive today amidst the scrubby vegetation of the Sahel much as they have for over a millennium. Squeezed between the desert and agricultural development, they face daunting environmental, political, and cultural forces. This unprecedented project invites global participation through an interactive website, www.pulaku.com. On this site, documentary vignettes merge still photography with high-quality audio and video.

Though their origin remains one of the mysteries of African history, twenty-seven million Fulani occupy a unique niche at the periphery of human settlement from Cameroon to Senegal. Fulani traditions vary widely from region to region, but their diversity is linked by a common thread: a strong sense of self and firm adhesion to tradition. The word “pulaku” represents the pride, stoicism, and cultural identity of the Fulani people. The *Comité Fulfulde*, a council of Fulani elders in Benin, has endorsed the Pulaku Project as a valuable contribution to the preservation of Fulani culture.

The Fulani exemplify the plight of poor populations who suffer disproportionately from the industrial development of rich nations. While development projects pour millions of dollars into an array of struggling countries and ethnicities, the nomadic Fulani still have few dedicated schools and limited economic resources. Climate change accelerates the growth of the Sahara desert and Fulani herders often travel hundreds of kilometres in search of better pastureland.

In January 2011 Herby and Belco will depart from northern Benin. The tentative route will traverse Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea, the Gambia, and Senegal. Travelling by motorcycle to remote camps in each region, they will visit community leaders and sleep among these nomadic people. As such, the principal supporters of this endeavour will be the Fulani people who act as hosts and guides throughout the journey.

Herby and Belco are uniquely poised to shine a light on Fulani culture through deep reporting and rare intimacy. Rather than presenting an anthropological examination, this project emphasizes individual vignettes representing the stories of the Fulani people. Staying in Fulani camps and exchanging stories in their native tongue, this endeavour promises a new cultural insight. Additionally, the motorcycle journey itself promises adventure and access to remote regions that could not be documented via traditional media.

We invite you to support this project by pre-ordering a printed image. By ordering in advance, you contribute to the effort to share the unique lifestyle and challenges of the Fulani in a changing world. Upon completion of the project we will mail you the image of your choice, framed in a beautiful ebony frame. These frames are handmade by local artisans in Benin. We are counting on your contribution to fulfil our vision of promoting cultural understanding through storytelling.