

MIGRATION AND POST-SLAVERY IN WEST AFRICA

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The Kinetics of Slavery and Freedom in West Africa

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One way in which people of slave descent consistently tried to improve their status in West Africa has been through seasonal or permanent migrations (Klein and Roberts 1980; Manchuelle 1997; 1989; Boyer 2005; Rossi 2009). Starting from this proviso, contributions to this workshop investigate the multiple ways in which (1) ability to move reflected social status; (2) successive forms of government aimed at controlling people by controlling their movements; (3) progressive emancipation of slave constituencies implied new options of movement; and (4) strategies of social mobility involved projects of migration conceived and unfolded by migrants themselves. One of the aims of the workshop is to look at the long-term implications of emancipation (colonial and non-colonial) for labour relations across rural-urban divides. A second objective is to compare, across regions and periods, the experience of West African migrants moving in space in order to achieve economic and social mobility. This paper introduces the meeting's main themes by exploring the consequences of migration and other forms of movement for free and slave status in West Africa.

Mobilité normée, circulation contrainte : voyager en tant qu'esclave au Soudan central au 19e siècle

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Le Soudan central au XIXe siècle est une région structurée par un ensemble de déplacements complexes, liés à la richesse des activités, culturelles politiques et économiques, ainsi qu'à des données conjoncturelles et géopolitiques. La liberté de circuler ne s'y impose pas de manière naturelle, elle obéit à des conditions, est régie par des principes et dépend de la position sociale et de l'identité de chaque individu. La mobilité et l'accessibilité à l'espace sont soumises à des procédures de contrôle qu'il convient de définir en interrogeant les logiques qui les structurent, les agents qui les mettent en œuvre, leurs instruments, l'identité de ceux qui contrôlent et de ceux qui sont contrôlés. Soumis à des données conjoncturelles, ce contrôle peut prendre différentes formes, se limiter à certains moments, certains lieux ou certaines personnes ou groupes sociaux. Cette communication s'attachera à observer la position spécifique des esclaves dans ce système de contraintes en questionnant les voies de la mobilité pour ceux qui sont en situation de dépendance.

Slaves on the move: Life stories of travel, trade and manumission among Ghadames slaves in the 19th-century Niger Bend

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My paper will examine several life histories of slaves in the second half of the 19th century who acted as caravan leaders and traders in the market towns of the Niger Bend. These slaves attained greater autonomy through their travels on behalf of their masters. Able to act on their own account at times, they were also able to acquire property from the commercial activities they undertook on their own account. Ultimately, these could be paths to manumission and the slaves that I will talk about acceded to the status of free clients in the larger network of their master after he died. What is important about this story is that it helps us to

understand one of the mechanisms by which some slaves were able to rise out of slavery while maintaining relations with former masters. I suggest that these paths out of slavery were distorted with the advent of colonial rule, but that we cannot understand the actions of slaves in places like the French-occupied Niger Bend without reference to the life trajectories that were considered possible and which had moral standing for the people who lived in these societies. Travel, never wholly dependent or independent, was central to these trajectories.

A place to be free: migration and slave emancipation in The Gambia of the early 20th century

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Department of Human Sciences for Education “Riccardo Massa”

This paper employs a spatial approach to question the link between geographical mobility and emancipation from slavery in The Gambia of the first part of the 20th century. The paper looks at how the experiences of slave migrants and migrants of slave descent differed according to the particular political and economic circumstances of the places to which they migrated between the end of World War I and the early 1960s.

Some communities (i.e. the rural villages of Eastern Gambia and those in the north bank districts of Baddibu and Niani) were highly conservative, and strove to maintain the boundary between freeborn and slaves well after the legal ending of slavery in the 1930s. Immigrants to these areas faced various forms of social discrimination, such as exclusion from marriage with free women. As status was inherited matrilineally, enforced status endogamy resulted in greater ‘stickiness’ of slave status for slave descendants in these locations. Conversely, Bathurst (the colony’s capital), and the commercial settlement of MacCarthy Island (located in the middle of the river at about 300 hundred kilometers from the coast) provided better chances of social mobility to generations of slaves since before colonization. By the early 20th century, Bathurst and MacCarthy Island had developed distinct lifestyles: the former was mostly oriented towards Europe, while the latter blended European influence with a reappraisal of local cultural traditions. Less renowned localities – for instance the seat of the Fuladu West district chieftaincy or the rural communities of Kombo district - also fostered the course of emancipation. Thus, even in a small country like the Gambia counting roughly 315,000 inhabitants at the time of independence, the exit from slavery was a fairly articulated process. Its timing and success depended not only on ambiguous colonial support and slave agency (which was determinant in bringing about actual change), but also on the complex interplay between multiple local conditions that this paper illustrates.

Slavery and immobility during and after abolition in Upper River Soninke villages (The Gambia)

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This paper analyses the consequences of slave status on migration among the Soninke of the Upper River Gambia. The Soninke have a long history of long-distance travel. However, rather than focusing on the experiences of migrants, the paper focuses on immobility. It shows that slavery has been an important factor of immobility, shaping the social position and limiting the capacity to emigrate of people of slave descent and of people categorized as such. Two, historically linked migration phenomena are analysed to show the significance of the slavery-immobility nexus. The first half of the 20th century was characterised by the progressive legal abolition of slavery and by the immigration of seasonal farmers to the upper river, a booming peanut growing region. The idiom of slavery was used to regulate the inclusion of (free) migrants who decided to settle in Soninke villages, often undergoing a loss of status. The incorporation of immigrants into servile groups also influenced the status of indigenous slave communities. Concurrently, abolition altered the legal basis of slavery, but had more limited consequences for the social and material conditions of (former) slaves. Descendants of slaves, which now included the descendants of some of these immigrants, often found themselves with independent but socio-economically weak households. Thus, when in the second half of the 20th century international migration gained momentum in Soninke villages,

many households of slave descendents were not in a position to free members from labour commitments and sponsor their travel. In addition, since marriage is endogamous within status groups, slave descendents have been excluded from the freeborn's migrant networks predicated on kinship, usually the most consolidated and resourceful ones. Finally, dominant discourse discriminates against slave descendents as prototypically immobile and dependent subjects, lacking the courage that underscores migrants' adventures.

Moving to stay: Bellah spatial strategies towards socioeconomic emancipation in northern Mali (1897-1960)

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From their arrival in the Gao region of northern Mali in the late 1890s until the late 1940s, the French largely ignored the living conditions of the Bellah, or Tuareg slaves. For several decades, the political instability of many Tuareg groups left little room in colonial reports for addressing the issue of slavery. From 1946 onward, in the wake of the war effort, the Brazzaville conference, and flourishing political activity in Gao, the Bellah manifested an increasing desire to emancipate, mainly through regional and international migration. Exploring these spatial strategies towards emancipation, this paper asks: to what extent was spatial mobility a resource for Bellah socioeconomic emancipation? How did the French administration respond to these increasing migrations, and how did this response shape the conditions and possibilities of Bellah spatial and social mobility? This paper suggests that the Bellah moved less to leave the region and their pastoralist lifestyle than to accumulate economic capital in order to stay and pay taxes, a condition required by the administration to be registered separately from their masters. Moving indeed offered the Bellah the possibility to hide part of their masters' herds, develop economic activities such as small trade and farming, or sell their labor in regional towns or in the Gold Coast. This study shows that these migrations allowed the Bellah to negotiate with both their masters and the French administration the possibility to stay in the region while becoming independent.

'Having a road': migration as a way to opt in or out of power relations amongst FulBe in the Central Malian Haayre.

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Movement is defined by power relations. People's mobility among FulBe in the Haayre was, and to a certain extent still is, related to people's status in the local hierarchy. This paper explores how mobility influenced existing power relations and ideas of hierarchy over time, by looking at three central aspects of mobility: the regulation of movement (power) to new places generating positive or negative opportunities (risk) for social mobility (status).

When someone is unable, or not allowed, to do something FulBe say: '*Omo hebbaai e laawol*,' literally 'he has no road.' 'Having a road' refers to experiencing the possibility of one's projects, having agency, or being given opportunities. Put simply 'to have a road' underscores both the symbolic road of social mobility and advancement in life, and the physical mobility to other places as a way out of existing constraints. Sometimes even over minor distances, migration provided an exit option for people who no longer wanted, or were no longer expected, to partake of localised hierarchies, and who moved in order to start new communities of their own.

This paper interrogates the notion of different 'roads', both real and symbolic, leading to new places and statuses. The focus is on the mobility and 'roads' of one social network of people: a specific noble (*WeheeBe*) family and various groups of their former clients (*RiimayBe*). I describe the emergence of these 'roads' to status rearrangements throughout the twentieth century with an emphasis on the post-independence period.

‘My ancestors came to cultivate peanuts’: Status transformations amongst Wassoulounke freed slaves in Senegal and the French Sudan (1890-1940).

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This paper is based on recent research focused on transformations of status and identity amongst freed-slave migrants from the region of Wassoulou in Southern Mali in the period 1890-1940. The wars of Samori entailed a widespread dispersion of Wassoulou’s populations, with free people fleeing Samori’s wars and war captives being sold in Senegambia and the Western Sudan (today’s Mali). Once Samori was defeated, dispersed Wassoulounke turned to the French colonial administration to be authorized to leave the regions to which they had been forced to migrate. Most enslaved migrants regained nominal freedom thanks to French emancipation policies. Some, especially those who came from today’s Southern Mali, were able to return to their region of origin. Other freed slaves resettled in the region where they had been enslaved, or migrated to wealthier areas, such as the Senegambian peanut basin. In this paper, I examine Wassoulounke freed slaves who did not return to their region of origin, but either settled in ‘liberty villages’ created by the colonial administration or founded new villages. This process of emancipation entailed identity negotiations, which involved redefining the notions of kinship, marriage, and belonging in the region of resettlement. The paper examines these issues by looking at the transmission of family history in freed-slave families and at (dis)continuities in the memory of slavery amongst their descendants. Such discontinuities are apparent from comparing colonial archival sources to oral testimonies that I collected in Mali and Senegal in 2008-2009.

Les transferts d’argent des migrants de l’Afrique occidentale

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Comment retrouver, collecter et interpréter les sources concernant les remises d’épargne des migrants de l’Afrique occidentale française (AOF : Sénégal, Mauritanie, Soudan français, Guinée, Côte d’Ivoire, Haute-Volta, Dahomey, Niger) ? Quelles sont les conditions des transferts d’argent opérées par ces migrants ? Quels sont les canaux formels et informels utilisés par les travailleurs désireux de transférer une partie de leur économie en direction de leur pays d’origine ? Quels sont les usages et les effets sociaux de cet afflux d’argent ? Telles sont les questions auxquelles je tente de répondre dans ma communication qui s’intéresse aux transferts d’économie des sujets français circulant à l’intérieur et à l’extérieur de la Fédération.

À partir de l’analyse critique des archives de l’ancien gouvernement général de l’AOF conservées à Dakar au Sénégal, je montre que ces transferts, importants et sous évalués, contribuèrent la mise en valeur locale, au même titre que le travail forcé sous diverses formes. Pour le reste, les remises d’épargne des migrants annoncent d’une certaine manière les transferts croissants des migrants après les indépendances politiques au cours des années 1958-1960 mais qui ne devaient retenir l’attention des États et des grandes organisations internationales qu’à partir des années 1980.

The Social Mobility of Internal Migrants in Ouagadougou’s Informal Sector

Florence Boyer, IRD Ouagadougou

My aim is to analyze the links between internal migration and the informal economy in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso). In the eighties and nineties, the informal economy was seen as a possible solution for some of the problems of African cities: a class of efficient traders active in the informal sector was supposed to generate economic growth. However, the informal economy tends to produce low returns for those involved in it (e.g. low salaries and division of productive activities into a lot of tasks).

A first survey in Ouagadougou showed that internal migrants, mostly from the Mossi region, are the poorest amongst all migrants. They are not educated and they work as day laborers or hawkers and street vendors. A large part of male migrants have been based in Ouagadougou with their families (wife and children) for

many years. In recent years unmarried young women migrants (fifteen to twenty years) have formed an increasingly important group, working as domestic workers, hawkers or sex workers. Preliminary research findings suggest that these internal migrants, men and women, do not succeed in achieving upward social and/or economic mobility.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the conditions of work of these migrants and to analyze the forms of exploitation they are exposed to. My hypothesis is that the informal economy creates different forms of exploitation for the categories of migrants observed in this study. Is it possible to speak about a “new” lumpen proletariat in relation to at least some of the migrants working in the informal sector? Is the urban life they find at destination ‘worse’ than the conditions they leave behind, and, if so, in what ways?