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At the Desert's Edge

'Before we used to work for the Abzinawa [elites], who sat and did
nothing; then the White [colonialists] controlled our labour; now project
agents tell us what to do. Someone is always sitting and watching us
work for nothing.'

Houssa Aboubakar, farmer of slave descent, northern Ader, 2005

This book is concerned with the relationship between ecology, politics,
and labour. The constant influence of the desert on human arrangements
accounts for continuities in Ader's history: the Sahelian environment has
been partly responsible for the resilience of the exploitative relations that
continue to haunt Houssa Aboubakar. With its arid land and its threat
of thirst, the desert influenced the productivity of labour, the need for
mobility, and the options of workers seeking to resist those 'sitting and
watching' over them. But if the desert was an impartial tyrant, successive
political regimes limited the options of some to the advantage of others.
Not everyone in Ader's society was equally exposed to the recurrent risk
of famine. Politics determined who had priority access to scarce resources,
who could move freely, and whose movements would be controlled and
constrained. Different standards applied to the work of persons of free
and slave descent, Africans and Europeans, men and women. Access to
resources, returns to labour, and the right to move freely were regulated
politically.

Politics often appeared progressive. In the first half of the twentieth
century, colonial abolitionism hindered extreme forms of labour coercion
in African societies. Yet it applied different standards to traditional prac-
tices (which it blamed for the persistence of slavery) and colonial labour

recruitment (which introduced new forms of labour coercion). Since the
1940s the ideology of development may have aimed to increase economic
productivity and improve the poor's living conditions, yet its introduction
enabled the continuing underpayment of Ader's workers. Successive
political discourses justified power by reference to the highest moral
ideals – Islamic slavery exalted conversion; colonialism invoked the
mission civilisatrice; 'aid' is branded as human development. But their
existence depended on the moralising exploitation of slaves, natives, 'the
poor'. The costs of intervention at the desert's edge were high compared
to the economic and political benefits that could be gained. Productive
outputs in Ader were limited to narrow margins by ecological conditions.
Few people voted – and votes mattered little to development bureaucrats
who were not politically accountable to the 'beneficiaries'. Political will
could have introduced welfare measures. It did not. The cost of justice
was never politically expedient or economically viable.

The productivity of resources on thin semi-desert soils is low com-
pared to richer savannah and forest lands. From a comparative perspec-
tive, Ader exemplifies the agricultural environment least likely to allow
the development of commercial farming on a large scale. Gareth Austin
highlighted the relation between the growth of export agriculture and
the accelerated ending of slavery in regions of West Africa where the
spread of cash crops made it possible for masters to become employers.[1]
This transformation took place, mostly after the colonial abolition of
slavery, in areas that supported commercial farming in what today are
Ghana,[2] Senegal,[3] Gambia,[4] and Nigeria.[5] In contrast with the contexts
described by Austin, in Ader the limitations of local production condi-
tioned the peculiar endurance of slavery and unfree labour. Ader's
predicament, then, urges us to revisit the old question of the relationship
between ecological and political factors. This amounts to asking
whether ecology, like destiny, predetermines social relations, and what
options people have to shape their history.

This study shows that Ader's workers took their destiny into their own
hands. Place may determine the productivity of labour in particular areas
and at different seasons. But because people can move, place is not destiny.
Looking at where people went reveals their aspirations. The choices people
made with their feet, when they could choose where to go, expose at once

[1] Austin, 'Cash crops and freedom'.   [2] Austin, *Labour, Land and Capital*.
[3] Searing, 'God alone'.   [4] Swindell and Jeng, *Migrants, Credit and Climate*.
[5] Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death*; Agiri, 'Development of wage labour'.

their strategies and the obstacles they faced: under which conditions do people leave or stay? Who can and who cannot move autonomously? How does politics alter opportunities *in loco*, and the capability of different groups and individuals to control their labour and movements? Looking backwards at Ader's history, if the Sahel's ecology facilitated the reproduction of exploitative labour relations, people's relative and conditional freedom depended ultimately on their capacity to move to places where new options were accessible to them and where they could renegotiate their identities.

In Ader the last two centuries saw a succession of political regimes that developed different ways of coping with the challenges posed by the desert. These regimes did not only attempt to regulate the relations between people and the land. They also created inequalities in the ability of different groups to control natural resources, labour, and movement. Ader's pre-colonial hierarchies, the French administration, and developmentalist bureaucracies in the colonial and independent era classified places and people. Their interpretations produced distinct horizons of opportunity for freemen and slaves, administrators and subjects, developers and beneficiaries, men and women. Comparing successive forms of government against the same ecological settings exposes the consequences of politics for different groups and individuals. What made a difference to poverty? There is no absolute answer to this question. Not everyone could pursue the same strategies and hope to succeed. Those who could not avert the threats of a hostile environment through migration embraced the bitter benefits of subservience. A paradoxical finding of this study is that steep social hierarchies often provided means to evade extreme destitution for those who occupied their bottom ranks. Another possibly unexpected finding is that 'aid' has not truly helped: whatever else it did, it never prioritised the interests of those most vulnerable.

ECOLOGY AND POLITICS

Place matters in Ader. The question is how, when, to whom, and with what consequences. Discussing the effects of environmental constraints on the poorer regions of the world, Landes notes that 'the world has never been a level playing field'.[6] It has not. Ader's geography influenced

[6] Landes, *Wealth and Poverty*, p. 6.

From Slavery to Aid

production, trade, and politics. It protected it from invasions and exposed
it to famines. But place is never only place. It is always also, but not
exclusively, what people make of it: how they interpret it, and conse-
quently act upon it.[7] And people are never just people. Some groups and
individuals have more power than others to decide how to represent and
shape the world. The world has never been a level playing field, but there
have always been multiple ways of interacting with any particular envir-
onment. In Ader political regimes alternating throughout the twentieth
century interacted with the environment in different ways. This should
suffice to lay to rest the ghost of simplistic environmental determinism
that still haunts African studies. Ader's history cannot be reduced to an
epiphenomenon of climatic and geographical factors. Yet, the environ-
ment, more than other factors, shaped its *longue durée*.[8]

   A long tradition in African research looks at ecological conditions
as determinants of economic and political arrangements. James Webb and
George Brooks considered how climate change made possible major polit-
ical realignments throughout West African history.[9] Focusing on the central
Sahel, Paul Lovejoy and Stephen Baier examined the relationship between
the ecology and dominant ideologies of trade, government, and slavery.[10]
Tuareg ethnographers and historians – amongst them Edmond and Suzanne
Bernus, Johannes and Ida Nicolaisen, Pierre Boilley, and André Bourgeot –
showed that Tuareg social and political organisation responded to eco-
logical requirements.[11] More generally, numerous studies argued that
Africa's ecology put a check on population growth and that high land–
labour ratios interfered with economic and political processes.[12] These

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[7] Smith, *Uneven Development*; Lefebvre, *Production de l'espace*.
[8] Cf. Braudel, 'History and the social sciences'.
[9] Webb, *Desert Frontier*; Brooks, *Western Africa*; Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers*;
   Brooks et al., 'Environment-society nexus'. For a review of the debates, see McCann,
   'Climate and causation'.
[10] Baier and Lovejoy, 'Desert side'; Baier and Lovejoy, 'Tuareg'; Lovejoy, *Ecology and
   Ethnography*; Baier, *Economic History*; Baier, 'Ecologically based trade'.
[11] See, for example, Bernus, *Touaregs nigériens*; Bernus, 'Dates, dromedaries, and drought';
   Nicolaisen, *Ecology and Culture*; Bourgeot, *Les sociétés Touaregs*; Boilley, *Touaregs
   entre contraintes*. Further works are mentioned in Chapter 2. Along similar lines, but
   focusing on southern Mali, see the work of de Bruijn et al., *Sahelian Pathways*.
[12] An influential set of writings in economic history includes the work of A. G. Hopkins (see
   Economic History) and Gareth Austin (especially 'Factor markets'). Other relevant
   studies are more politically focused and include, for example, Iliffe's introduction to
   Africans, Goody's analysis of technology and political organisation in *Technology*,
   Kopytoff's emphasis on the frontier (*African Frontier*), and Herbst's study of the African
   state (*States and Power*).

studies have shown that the power of centralised states is hindered by
ecological conditions that impose low population densities. The corollary
of this argument, examined in the following section, is that where popula-
tion density is too low, political centralisation is unviable and alternative
political rationales must inform the government of people.

A strand in the historiography of slavery seeks to explain the occur-
rence of slavery and serfdom as a function of the land–labour ratios of
particular regions. In 1900, Herman J. Nieboer published his volumin-
ous study *Slavery as an Industrial System: Ethnological Researches*.[13]
He argued that slavery is the main form of labour found in societies
where productive resources are openly accessible, because in these con-
ditions coercion is necessary to constrain people to work for others
rather than for themselves. Where land is abundant and labour and
capital are scarce, long-term hiring of free labour is non-existent
because, in Austin's clear reformulation of this argument, there is
'no wage rate which it would be mutually profitable for an employer
to offer and for a worker to accept'.[14]

It is tempting to apply Nieboer's argument to Ader's scarcely popu-
lated landscape, where slavery died so slowly that it is yet to become fully
extinct. But Nieboer's theory calls for provisos.[15] As noted by economic
historian Evsey Domar, Nieboer 'ignored the role of government'.[16]
Politics, more than population density, determined the presence or
absence of slavery and analogous forms of coerced labour.[17] Given the
enormous influence of the Sahel's environment on labour relations, this
cannot simply be stated, but must be demonstrated.

First, neither agricultural production nor population density are inde-
pendent of social and political factors: specific land–labour ratios do
not shape labour arrangements any more than they, too, are shaped by

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[13] Nieboer, *Slavery*, p. 418. Nieboer's emphasis on the relative availability of productive
resources is also present in Watson's study of the prevalence of slavery in relation to
systems where resources are openly accessible in his study of slavery in Asia and Africa,
cf. Watson, *Asian and African*. Igor Kopytoff's discussion of the African frontier is based
on similar premises: Kopytoff, *African Frontier*.

[14] Austin, 'Factor markets', p. 42.

[15] Patterson, 'Structural origins'; Pryor, 'Comparative study'; Domar, 'Causes'; and Austin,
'Factor markets'.

[16] Domar, 'Causes', p. 32.

[17] Engerman, 'Economic change', p. 148. See also Bolland and Green's debate over the
primacy of demographic or political factors: Bolland, 'Systems'; Green, 'Perils'; and
Bolland, 'Reply'.

social relations.[18] High population densities are sometimes found in correlation to more – not less – hostile environments, if hostile environments provide safe havens from military threats. The preferred location of some villages in nineteenth-century northern Ader was not the bottom of fertile valleys, but the arid rocky top of plateaux, from where enemies could be sighted in advance. While scarcity of sources makes reconstructions of pre-twentieth-century demographic dynamics speculative, limited extant sources suggest that during the Sokoto wars Ader received waves of immigrants engaged in what Muslims saw as pagan practices.[19] Free Asna farming communities settled in Ader in the nineteenth century could have cultivated more productive lands in what today is northern Nigeria. But the closer to Sokoto, the higher the risk of enslavement.

The northward movement of these farming immigrants attests to the high value they placed upon retaining free status. Their choice, informed by political circumstances, influenced the land–labour ratios of both the places they left behind and those to which they relocated. In both sites, access to and control over productive resources was determined by socially and politically ascribed status. If place shapes politics, the reverse is also true: Asna farmers moved from more densely populated regions where their religious identity entailed a higher risk of being enslaved to less populated areas where – as free-born immigrants – they were able to clear and appropriate new lands. On the other hand, Ader's enslaved groups were excluded from ownership rights over land and other valuable resources. These two groups were not compartmentalised: a free farmer could be kidnapped and forced into the unenviable position of a slave. Awareness of the risks present in any particular location influenced the development of protective strategies amongst the free and of resistance strategies amongst the unfree. Exposure to enslavement was not determined by population density alone, and population density does not explain why, in any particular place, risk was higher for certain groups than for others.

Moreover, 'labour scarcity' is not an absolute condition, but depends on the quantity and quality of productive resources in any given region at different times of the year.[20] In the nineteenth century, Ader's land–labour

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[18] Cooper, 'Africa in the world economy', p. 26. Goody, 'Population', pp. 535–45; cf. Austin, 'Resources', pp. 591 ff.

[19] Echard, *Expérience*, pp. 154–6.

[20] These considerations, to which Nieboer paid insufficient attention, were nevertheless known to earlier writers concerned with the consequences of the abolition of slavery in the Americas. Herman Merivale, writing in the mid-nineteenth century, considered not only land–labour ratios, but also the relative fertility of different types of soil in British

ratio was surely high.[21] But Ader's characteristic crevasses accounted for substantial variety in the quality of lands available. Valleys, glacis, slopes, and plateaux lent themselves to different uses. Yearly climatic variations and the farming techniques of traditional staples (millet and sorghum) placed heavy demands on labour at particular points in the rainy season, but there was, and is, no labour scarcity outside this period.[22]

Both Ader's population density and the productivity of its resources changed over the period examined in this book. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Ulrich Seetzen's description of southern Ader emphasised abundance of wild game and farming products – such as wheat and cotton – that require more humid conditions than the ones found in Ader today. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the Keita Lake was a permanent lake and not, as today, a seasonal pond that evaporates completely in the winter (see Figures 2.2 and 2.3). While Ader's environment progressively dried up over the last two centuries, its population grew substantially.[23]

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slave colonies. See Merivale, *Lectures*; Engerman, 'Economic change'; and Austin, 'Resources', pp. 597 ff., 615 ff.

[21] There are no demographic data for the nineteenth century. That Ader was sparsely populated can be inferred from the fact that European travellers to the central Sudan, such as Barth and Clapperton, did not record the presence of any large villages in the Ader region, and the first maps of Ader drawn by French military officers in the first decade of the twentieth century contain only few, relatively small villages. In 1901 the 'group of Tamaske', which corresponded roughly to today's District of Keita, was estimated to count approximately 18,000 inhabitants; see Capt. Brescon, *Monographie du Cercle de Tahoua*, section entitled 'Poste de Tamaske: Monographie du Secteur', p. 16, ANN 17.1.3. This 1901 census was doubtlessly unreliable, for at the time few French military officers had even started to explore these recently occupied areas. Even allowing for major miscalculations, comparison with the 2011 census figure of 303,469 inhabitants in the District of Keita suggests massive population growth. In the 1940s demographic data collection became more precise. A 1946 census of the administrative region (cercle) of Tahoua (which includes the District of Keita) gives an average population density of 1.60/km², that is, a total population of 176,303 people for area of about 110,000 km². This figure should be broken down into the northern desert region and the southern savannah region of the district: the northern 'nomadic subdivision' (*subdivision nomade*) covered an area of 80,000 km² inhabited by about 50,000 people (density 0.62); and the southern 'sedentary subdivision' (*subdivision sédentaire*) covered 30,000 km² with 118,413 inhabitants (density 3.9); see *Rapport d'Ensemble du Premier Semestre 1946*, ANN1E33. In the national census of 2011 the region of Tahoua (roughly corresponding to the homonymous colonial cercle) has a population of 2,741,922 people over a total area of 106,677 km², and an average density of 26 inhabitants per km².

[22] On agricultural techniques and seasonal labour requirements in Ader, see Raulin, *Techniques et bases*; Echard, *Etude socio-économique*.

[23] 'At the beginning of the 1860s, Shaba Valley was an expanse of wooded country, fertile and well-watered, as yet unclear [sic] for cultivation', Brock, *The Tamejirt*, p. 150. Shaba Valley, studied by Brock, is located in north-eastern Ader, just south-west of Tamaske.

Population growth and the progressive drying-up of the land shifted the balance in factor endowment ratios away from Nieboer's 'open access' conditions and towards conditions in which, according to both Nieboer and Domar, a wage economy should develop. But as the use of coercion in labour recruitment became politically impracticable, relative labour abundance resulted in migration rather the hiring of wage labour. The consequences of these changes were not the same for everyone. 'Labour' is not one group, but many, with unequal capabilities to negotiate their options. Nieboer's theory does not constitute a sufficient explanation for the prevalence of slavery in the nineteenth century, or for its slow demise in the twentieth century. Most importantly, it says nothing about the interests, agency, and strategies of slaves and masters, men and women, herders and farmers: their history is simply silenced by the assumption that land–labour ratios are all that matters.

THE IMPERATIVE OF MOBILITY

At the desert's edge, nothing is more important than being able to control one's movements, either to access resources in times of heightened scarcity, or to trade across long distances, or to avoid the constant threat of raids and enslavement. Mobility is a political and economic imperative that gives rise to a distinctive social organisation. These conditions have been described as forms of connectivity, a logic that governs the life of people who need to move safely along established social and commercial networks operating across deserts or seas.

Recent studies of Saharan societies emphasised connectivity as a precondition for survival and sociality.[24] Inspired by Peregrine Hordell and Nicholas Purcell's study of Mediterranean micro-ecologies, this literature draws a parallel between societies specialised in crossing the Mediterranean and those specialised in crossing the Sahara.[25] But if the similarities between the 'disputed desert' and the 'corrupting sea' are surely suggestive, they are also merely formal.[26] Studies of

[24] Scheele, *Smugglers and Saints*, pp. 7–18 and chapter 4; McDougall and Scheele, *Saharan Frontiers*; McDougall, 'Frontiers, borderlands', pp. 81–7; Grémont, *Touaregs Iwellemmedan*, pp. 13–22.
[25] Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*.
[26] James McDougall discusses differences between (allegedly introverted) Mediterranean and (comparatively extraverted) Saharan ecologies, but mainly to emphasise common connectivity. See his 'Frontiers, borderlands', pp. 82–4.

Saharan connectivity emphasise reliance on institutions that enable the
establishment of durable connections and collaboration across vast
spaces that cannot host large settled populations. But they pay limited
attention to particular rationales of government responsive to
the extreme aridity of the desert and the scattered and ephemeral nature
of its productive resources.

The societies living at the desert's edge did not face the same environ-
mental conditions as those living on the coast of the Mediterranean
and did not rely on similar systems of production. Even though complex
trade networks crossed both the Sahara and the Mediterranean and
developed moral economies of connectivity, the edge of the Sahara
and the Mediterranean coast are different kinds of place, where distinct
forms of government developed. The travellers who crossed the
'corrupting sea' were mostly issued from societies – be they Greek,
Roman, Ottoman, or North African – whose centralisation permeated
social and political relations. Circum-Mediterranean societies were
internally diverse, and remained so even when they became integrated
into overarching empires. But they were supported by relatively stable
natural resources whose year-long productivity encouraged intensive
methods of production and substantial investments in lands that
yielded valuable crops. Fernand Braudel showed that differences in
productive conditions defined cultural and political distinctions within
Mediterranean societies.[27] And he highlighted the 'immensity and emp-
tiness' of the Sahara that lay beyond the Mediterranean world and
imposed constant movement:

Seen from the inside, through field studies [...] desert societies, so simple at first
glance, reveal their complicated organisations, hierarchies, customs, and astonishing
legal structures. But from the outside they seem a handful of human dust blowing in
the wind. By comparison, societies which in the Mediterranean seemed so unsettled,
mountain society in particular, suddenly appear weighty and established.[28]

To be sure, the essentialising opposition of nomadic and settled societies
must be avoided.[29] Political, cultural, and ecological boundaries have

[27] 'The Mediterranean means more than landscapes of vines and olive trees and urbanised
villages; these are merely the fringe. Close by, looming above them, are the dense
highlands, the mountain world with its fastness, its isolated houses and hamlets, its
"vertical norths". Here we are far from the Mediterranean where orange trees blossom',
Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, pp. 26–7.
[28] Ibid., p. 176.
[29] Boesen, Marfaing, and de Bruijn, 'Nomadism and Mobility in the Sahara-Sahel', p. 2.

always been permeable, and desert dwellers changed their lifestyles when
they moved to urban centres. But the low productive potential and
carrying capacity of (semi-) desert regions yielded distinct political insti-
tutions. These ideas are not new. The authors of medieval Arabic sources
emphasised the distinction between desert-based societies and societies
living in centralised polities in regions that could sustain higher popula-
tion densities, and noticed the differences in their forms of government.
Arabic sources on the history of North and West Africa emphasise
opposition between centralised 'states' (kingdoms, empires, caliphates)
supporting settled lifestyles where natural resources allow higher popula-
tion densities; and nomadic societies structured into segmentary lineage
units, practising transhumant pastoralism, and stratified into hierarchies.
Ibn Khaldoun placed the tension between desert life and city life at the
centre of his philosophy of history: 'Civilization may be either desert
(Bedouin) civilization as found in outlying regions and mountains, in
hamlets (near suitable) pastures in waste regions, and on the fringes of
sandy deserts. Or it may be sedentary civilization as found in cities,
villages, towns, and small communities that serve the purpose of protec-
tion and fortification by means of walls.'[30]

   The desert eludes state rule. The tension between centralised state rule
and desert governmentalities exposes divergence in the principles struc-
turing social relations.[31] For societies living on the fringes of the desert
diversification is an economic imperative: because natural resources are
limited and exposed to the recurrent threat of localised drought, pest
attacks, or enemy raids, it is necessary to diversify one's economic activ-
ities broadly in space, rather than concentrate one's efforts and resources
in any one or few bounded farms or pastures.[32] Diversification strategies
apply beyond one person's investments: networks of binding relations,
often of a hierarchical nature, enable individuals to make claims on the
resources of others scattered across large distances and involved in a
variety of economic endeavours. Patterns of skewed reciprocities function
as safety nets when things go wrong in one or more activities.

[30] Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, pp. 84–85. For a review of how this theme is developed in
    other medieval Arabic sources, see Rossi, 'Kinetocracy'.
[31] On this tension see, for example, Lefebvre, *Production de l'espace*, pp. 322–3; Elden,
    Terror and Territory; Bovill, *Golden Trade*, p. 12; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand
    Plateaus*, p. 377.
[32] See Retaillé and Walther, 'Spaces of Uncertainty'; Retaillé, 'De l'espace nomade à l'espace
    mobile', pp. 17, 24.

Politically, desert-edge conditions stimulate the evolution of a govern-
mentality – one that I have called kinetocracy – distinct from the logics of
centralised territorial states.[33] In kinetocratic governmentalities, power is
expressed primarily as control over one's own and other people's move-
ments, because it is through such control that access to water, food, and other
assets can be secured.[34] This is not to say that past and modern states did not
attempt to control people's movements in deserts. Quirk and Vigneswaran
show that increasingly in recent decades African states have endeavoured to
manage and channel mobility.[35] But while control over movement is only
one of many defining characteristics of the state, it is the fundamental axiom
informing kinetocratic governmentality. Grémont emphasises that nomads
of the Sahara-Sahel have become progressively sedentarised. But he sees
these developments as part of a trend to extend the reach of Tuareg mobile
strategies.[36] That is, sedentarisation enables the expansion of networks
whose existence is predicated upon the axiom of mobility.

In contexts where land and other valuables are permanently vulnerable
to climatic hazards, securing access to scattered resources is safer than
securing exclusive property rights over volatile capital. Political authority
in pre-colonial northern Ader was based on three main prerogatives: to
access resources and make them available to allies and dependants; to make
others move in support of one's economic and military purposes; and to
hinder the mobility of one's enemies. Tuareg nobles fulfilled these conditions
through a combination of military might and the development of habits
adjusted to the requirements of life in the desert. Constant motion was a
defining characteristic of the identity of Kel Denneg *imajeghen* (warrior
elite): 'The *imajeghen* are incapable of immobility: they travel incessantly.'[37]

Ethnographic studies of Tuareg society highlight a lack of congruence
between Tuareg political organisation and state power.[38] Until French

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[33] Rossi, 'Kinetocracy'.   [34] Bovill, *Golden Trade*, pp. 11–12.

[35] Quirk and Vigneswaran, 'Mobility Makes States', p. 2. Retaille suggests that early
African 'empires of roads' were focused primarily on controlling movement, not bounded
territories; see Retaillé, 'De l'espace nomade à l'espace mobile', p. 17. This suggestion,
reminiscent of Coquery-Vidorovitch model of the 'African mode of production' based on
long-distance trade, forgets the importance of courts, standing armies, complex settled
bureaucracies, and permanent investment in these types of state formations, that are in
contrast with the technologies of government of nomadic societies.

[36] Grémont, 'Mobility in pastoral societies', p. 33.

[37] Testimony of Katei Ag Mohammed (*imajeghen*), cited in Nicolas, 'Textes ethnographi-
ques', part four, p. 135.

[38] See Bernus, 'Nomadisme pastorale'; Bernus, 'Berger Touareg'; Boilley, 'Droits d'un
peuple', pp. 27–8; Bonte, 'Segmentarité et pouvoir'; Bourgeot, 'L'herbe et le glaive';

occupation, only southern Ader was integrated in the Sokoto Caliphate.
Northern Ader hosted minor chieftaincies, some of which appear to have
been junior offshoots of the Agadez Sultanate and functioned as small
kingdoms with a more or less stable membership. Concurrently, Ader
hosted Tuareg confederations whose chiefs were nomadic and who con-
trolled groups of nomadic, semi-nomadic, or settled dependants stratified
according to Tuareg hierarchical criteria. In the second half of the nine-
teenth century, the two main Tuareg confederations of the Iwellemmeden
Kel Denneg in northern Ader and Kel Gress in southern Ader had become
the most powerful actors in Ader. The rulers of Sokoto established
alliances with Ader's Muslim chiefs, but they refrained from mounting
costly administrative efforts in a region where production was low and
more conveniently accessible in the form of tributes and trade than
through direct rule. Ader hosted friends, but foes were never too distant.
It was not connected to major political and commercial centres through
safe roads. Its inaccessibility was partly the result of conscious defensive
tactics. Its inhabitants turned their intimate knowledge of the territory
against external enemies.

The power of Ader's Tuareg warrior elites was centred on their ability
to control their own and their dependants' mobility: they used avoidance
as their main resistance strategy against powerful enemies whose armies
looked for Tuareg leaders in the desert like needles in a haystack and
could not foresee the lightning raids of the Tuareg resistance against
settled farming villages. Groups which lacked military strength knew
where to hide at the first sighting of armed contingents visible from
villages located near the top of plateaux or behind curtains of protective
dunes. All invaders would find after an exhausting and perilous trip into
Ader would be the poisoned water of treacherous wells and resilient flies
buzzing in the heat.

Kinetocracy was alien to French ideologies of rule. This undermined
France's capacity to control the desert. Yet its superior military strength
and reliance on logistic arrangements that did not depend solely on the
collaboration of desert societies and trade networks gave France options
that the rulers of pre-colonial centralised polities lacked. Ader's Tuareg

Bourgeot, 'Le lion et la gazelle'; Bourgeot, *Sociétés Touarègues*; Claudot-Hawad, 'Les
touareg ou la résistance'; Claudot-Hawad, 'Nomades et état', pp. 221–2; Hawad, 'Le
Tashumara'; Norris, 'Tuareg nomadism', pp. 152–5. The work of Azarya is a rare effort
to integrate detailed ethnographic studies within a broader conceptual framework,
Azarya, *Nomads and the State*; and Azarya, 'Nomadic factor'.

elites were at a greater disadvantage in their confrontation with France
than they had ever been in preceding clashes with centralised powers.

The colonial state asserted its power by delimiting and defining
space.[39] It classified and controlled forms of property and labour in
relation to territorialised resources. The desert's edge represented the limit
of the state's capacity to assert itself, as the French were well aware.
A report of 1902 stated realistically: 'For the moment our *politique* must
continue to appear indifferent toward what happens in the desert [. . .] we
cannot with our limited means engage in policing the region beyond
the settled zone'.[40] In the early stages of colonial rule, France concen-
trated on suppressing indigenous resistance and establishing its control
over the unstable border zone with British northern Nigeria. The Third
Military Territory, later Military Territory of Niger, had been invaded
primarily for reasons of geopolitical strategy and security: it was
'a territory of sacrifices, a necessary evil that we tolerate perhaps only to
avoid an even worse evil'.[41] The desert could be guarded, not governed.

The main difficulty faced by the French occupying forces consisted in
crossing long desert stretches to gain access to Ader. Moving into, out of,
and across Ader proved a major challenge to colonial armies. Until
1917 Iwellemmeden resistance counted on its superior knowledge of the
desert to resist French demands. The representatives of the empire feigned
confidence: 'You say that the French cannot come and find you in the
waterless country [*le pays sans eau*]. You are wrong. The French go
everywhere [*les Français vont partout*].'[42] But military strategies had to

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[39] On the territorial nature of political organisations, see Weber, *Economy and Society*,
vol. 1, p. 54. Territorialisation as a fundamental process in the development of the
modern Western state is discussed by Poggi, who sees as the first characteristic of the
nineteenth-century European state 'the unity of the state's territory, which comes to be
bounded as much as possible by a continuous geographical frontier that is militarily
defensible', *Development of the Modern State*, p. 93. See also Sahlins, *Boundaries*. For a
critical review of the literature on the state's territoriality, see Elden, 'Land, terrain, and
territory', pp. 799–817. The philosophical underpinnings of the distinction between space
and place are explored in Casey, *Fate of Place*. On the consequences of French colonial
territorialisation in the Upper Guinea Coast, see Sarró, *Politics*, pp. 75–80.

[40] Rapport sur la situation politique du Troisième Territoire Militaire, quatrième trimestre
1902, ANN 1E17.bis.

[41] Rapport du Lieutenant Colonel Noel sur la situation politique du Troisième Territoire
Militaire, premier trimestre 1903, ANN17.7.18. The Nigerien historian Kimba Idrissa
has shown that Niger retained a primarily strategic function in French overseas politics
until the eve of independence ; cf. Idrissa, 'Dynamique'.

[42] French command to Firhun, n. d., written between 1902 and 1908, SHD-BAT
GR5H 207.

adapt to local conditions. Tuareg raiding parties limited their size to the capacity of dispersed wells that dried up quickly. Thirst tempered the ambitions of France's imperial army.

When at the turn of the twentieth century French troops invaded Ader, they marched at night to avoid the day's high temperatures, while during the day they reconnoitred villages that had been abandoned. They suffered continuous raids by Tuareg warriors, many of whom lost their lives to French long-range rifles. Early correspondence with colonial officers shows that the right of free movement was the Tuareg elites' most valued prerogative: 'if you grant us [peace], we shall be able to stay anywhere we want in the country, and to travel wherever we want'.[43] The request of the Kel Gress was clear: 'Leave us the routes.'[44] The French understood the stakes of indigenous power. The 1902 peace agreement proclaimed by Colonel Peroz ruled that Kel Gress elites 'be allowed to return in peace to their villages and camps, and that they be left free to come and go along paths and everywhere [*sur les chemins et partout*]'.[45]

Letters exchanged between French and Tuareg leaders reveal incompatible views on the meaning of government. In December 1901 Makhammad, supreme chief (*amenokal*) of the Iwellemmeden Kel Denneg, wrote to the chief of French forces in Tahoua: 'I write to you to tell you that I do not know what is the relation between me and the French, because the latter do not resemble me.'[46] Eventually, these differences led to the physical elimination of Tuareg resistance, euphemised as 'pacification'. That done, French administrators faced the task of controlling the movements of former slaves and dependants now able to travel and work on their own account. Governing Ader required that local perceptions of government be redefined. This implied a shift of emphasis from kinetocracy to government of a population tied to a specific territory.[47] From a French perspective, 'normalising' government consisted in regularising the exaction of taxes and the recruitment of forced labour, mostly through the institution of prestations.[48]

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[43] Kel Gress Malem, Ickendo and Maiou to French command, received 4 September 1901, ANN 7B1.1.

[44] Kel Gress of Ouarzagane to French command, received 12 October 1901, ANN 7B1.1.

[45] Peace declaration signed by Colonel Peroz, Zinder, 21 August 1902, SHD-BAT GR 5H 207.

[46] Makhammad to Commandant Gouraud, 29–12–1901, ANN 7B1.

[47] Foucault, 'Leçon du 25 Janvier 1978', pp. 68–102.

[48] The prestation was a specified number of days of unpaid labour that able-bodied men had to contribute to the administration of the cercle for the implementation of works considered of communal interest.

The Indigénat Code (*Code de l'Indigénat*) functioned as a mechanism of disciplinary enforcement that gave district officers (*commandants de cercle*) arbitrary power over the application of colonial law and punishment. However, the administration's capacity to impose order across villages scattered over a large territory was limited. It struggled to control the movements of both former elites clinging to power and slaves starting to travel autonomously.

France had abolished the legal status of slavery in its West African territories in 1905. But, at the district level, French administrators relied on the maintenance of indigenous hierarchies, ultimately rooted in slavery, for the exaction of taxes and the recruitment of labour for public works. Ader's colonial administration did not offer salaries competitive with a migrant's potential earnings abroad. Most of the labour mobilised on colonial worksites was forced labour recruited by the chiefs, with ex-slaves and slave descendants the first to be mobilised. The administration supported those chiefs who did not join the resistance and did what they could to comply with French demands, resulting in tolerance of the vestiges of slavery well into the 1940s. By the mid-1930s France was under intense international pressure to abolish forced labour and prestations. Both tolerance of slavery and compulsory recruitment were a source of diplomatic embarrassment for France. Colonial officers stationed in Niger blamed the victim. A 1931 study titled 'The problem of servile labour in French West Africa' justified the endurance of prestations by arguing that ex-slaves did not know how to work as freemen: 'it was necessary to give yesterday's slaves the time to learn freedom'.[49]

Between 1916 and 1933 more than 20 per cent of the population of the Tahoua cercle was reported to have emigrated to avoid colonial exactions.[50] This situation, combined with international anti-slavery pressures, eroded the legitimacy of prestations. Commandants were consulted on how their cercles would support public works if prestations were abolished. Adelard De Loppinot replied laconically that if forced labour were replaced by badly paid voluntary labour, 'natives who could earn 4 to 5 Francs a day in Nigeria will refuse to work for 1.50 or even 2 Francs', the maximum fee that the French administration could afford to pay workers

[49] Chef du Bureau de Finances Espéret, Etude sur la situation du travail servile au Niger, 31 October 1931, ANN5E2.5.
[50] Commandant Cercle de Tahoua (De Loppinot) à Gouverneur Général (Court), 21 October 1933, ANN 1E1.

in a region that yielded no significant income.[51] The only way around these problems would have been to increase the central treasury's contribution towards the payment of wages to former forced labourers. But the colonial state would not increase investments in Ader in the name of equity alone, and without tangible returns. Tahoua's administration found it hard to relinquish coercion as its main mode of recruitment.

Ader's elites, too, continued to rely on slave labour. In a 1942 report, the commanding officer of Tahoua's Nomad Subdivision, Maurice Vilmin, acknowledged the persistence of slavery and warned against the potential anarchy that, in his view, would follow its suppression.[52] After the Second World War, an unprecedented effort to end slavery resulted in a project to make local employers adopt model wage contracts.[53] These employers were virtually all illiterate, and colonial model contracts remained a dead letter.

Producers who did not meet their families' subsistence needs in Ader migrated. Different categories of migrants faced different conditions of travel. Migrants of slave descent started travelling to northern Nigeria on their own account in the 1920s and 1930s. Their numbers continued to grow, reflecting the steady increase of Ader's population. In Ader, hard-won emancipation gave them control over their labour and movements, and rights over land and livestock. Their slave background had taught them what it meant to own nothing and to be owned. In economic terms, their utility curve was shaped by their experience of past enslavement. If they could not access property in their regions of migration, they could at least retain their recently acquired lands in Ader and thereby avoid turning into proletarians in other parts of West Africa, a condition that would have been reminiscent of their erstwhile disenfranchisement as slaves. Their historical experience increased their attachment to the meagre resources that were now their own, and their determination to resist exploitation. These migrants invested their labour in multiple locations and became integrated in complex social networks that spread across busy West African cities and quiet hamlets in Ader.

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[51] Rapport sur la suppression des préstations, Commandant Cercle Tahoua à Gouverneur Niger, 20 April 1937.

[52] Maurice Vilmin, Rapport de tournée, Subdivision Nomade Tahoua, 8 June 1942, ANN1E26.

[53] Gouverneur Géneral Niger to Commandants de Cercle, Circular No. 73, 7 May 1946, ANN5E2.5; Haut Commissaire de la République to Gouverneurs Mauritanie, Soudan, Niger, Dakar, 17 August 1949, ANN5E2.5.

FROM SLAVERY TO AID

In 1946, forced labour was abolished. The colonial state had to pay wages to workers employed in its projects. The abolition of forced labour did not extend to local employment practices: in 1948, Tahoua's commandant de cercle still thought that 'the entire economic future of the country' was conditional on solving the slavery question.[54] The French administration strove to promote the transformation of African slave owners into employers of free labour. But while it put pressure on former Tuareg masters, it struggled to practise what it preached. The introduction of developmentalist governance[55] rescued Tahoua's administration from a seemingly impossible task: paying local labour standard wages.

Independent Niger depended heavily upon French financial assistance channelled through the Fonds d'Aide et Coopération (FAC).[56] Ader was one of the first desert-edge regions targeted by integrated development programmes directed at halting desertification. A 1964 strategic document entitled 'Reflections on the prerequisite options for the development of the Ader Doutchi Majiya region'[57] raised, yet again, the problem of recruitment. Local labour responded positively to the new development initiatives, but this was because they thought that the employment created by the new projects would be paid:

Many applications [by local labour seeking jobs] have already been received. But these applications are based on the locals' assumption that the project will open worksites employing paid labour, rather than implement development actions aimed at improving their lands through their own work, the benefits of which [actions] will become visible only at the harvest.[58]

The concept of 'human investment' (*investissement humain*) was introduced, and with it the idea that development beneficiaries should be volunteering their labour as an investment in their own future.[59] Ader's populations had resisted slavery and forced recruitment. Now they

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[54] Capitaine Delon, Rapport de tournée, Cercle de Tahoua, 11 February 1948, ANN1E37.22.

[55] For a discussion of how the idea of development turned into a rationale of government in the 1940s, see Cooper and Packard, 'Introduction', pp. 6–9 and 18; and Cooper 'Modernising bureaucrats'.

[56] Higgott, 'Structural dependence', pp. 43–58.

[57] Procès verbal de la séance du 21 Décembre 1965 du Comité de l'Ader Doutchi Majiya, ART 1W6.56.

[58] Ibid., p. 9, footnote 1.

[59] Quatrième leçon: les perspectives décennales, p. 13, ART 1W7.18.

resisted demands on their voluntary labour in the name of development
goals. Their resistance was attributed to backwardness: the Aderawa were
'not mature yet' for voluntary work.[60] Used to recurrent scapegoating,
local labour refused to work in new projects unless they were paid. An
arrangement was found for compensating workers by paying them
roughly half the standard wage for one day of field labour:

When we launched this initiative, we had foreseen that the community would
carry out gratuitously all required non-specialised works; but we had forgotten
the need for cash that [locals] usually meet through seasonal migration [...]
Preliminary evaluations had shown that by paying workers a half-salary [*un
démi-salaire*] – and hence retaining half of their labour as human investment –
the cost of labour for one hectare of soil restoration varied between 8,000 and
10,000 francs.[61]

In the 1970s, the late Diori Hamani regime sought to distance Niger from
France and pursued a politics of diversification of its aid donors.[62] The
droughts of the late 1960s and early 1980s attracted the attention of
international donors and multilateral aid organisations to Niger. The
Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (or
CILSS, the French acronym for Comité Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la
Sécheresse au Sahel), the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United
Nations (FAO), and the Italian aid agency visited Ader in 1983. This visit
laid the foundations for the establishment of a new Integrated Rural
Development Project of the Ader Doutchi Majiya, known as the 'Keita
Project', financed by Italy and implemented by the FAO. The project
started its activities under the dictatorship of Colonel Seyni Kountché,
who referred to the entire nation as the 'Development Society'.

   National mobilisation in the name of development was unprecedented:
in 1984, the Department of Tahoua hosted 1,015 Village Development
Councils and 1,671 Mutual Assistance Groups (*Groupements Mutua-
listes*). The president of Tahoua's Regional Development Council at the
time was the Chef de Bataillon Mamadou Tandja, future president of
Niger.[63] Under Kountché's authoritarian regime, the labour problem did
not figure prominently in official records. Wages could be fixed politically

[60] Procès verbal de la séance du 21 Décembre 1965 du Comité de l'Ader Doutchi Majiya,
p. 6. ART 1W6.56.
[61] Demande de financement FAC 1969–70, Projet Ader Doutchi Majiya, appui aux collec-
tivités villageoises, p. 2, ART 1W25.20.
[62] Higgott, 'Structural dependence', p. 52.
[63] 'Politique de développement du CRD de Tahoua: La récupération des eaux pluviales',
Bulletin du Comité National de Développement, No. 25 (décembre 1986), p. 20.

or simply declared to be unnecessary. Prefect Mamadou Tandja expected the people of Tahoua voluntarily to dedicate their labour to national reconstruction efforts: 'popular participation will be massive and voluntary'.[64]

Kountché's death in 1987 did not change the developmentalist orientation of Niger's governance. On the occasion of his visit to Tahoua on 19 January 1988, Kountché's successor, General Ali Saibou, characterised the Department of Tahoua as exemplary of national development policy: 'The Department of Tahoua always demonstrated its will to be at the forefront of the fight against desertification, as well as for development [...] This Department constitutes a real laboratory for testing the strategies of the Supreme Military Council and of the Government.'[65] After 1983 this 'laboratory' was financed by the Keita Project that targeted most of the Ader region.

The Keita Project recruited local labour in establishing anti-desertification infrastructure. As a consequence of the pattern of male migration, the project workforce consisted mainly of women, who were remunerated in 'food-for-work' provided by the World Food Programme (WFP). Food-for-work rations were worth less than the national minimum wage.[66] However, they represented an important resource for the groups most vulnerable to famine, low-status women who did not migrate. Women workers sometimes referred to the project simply as 'work' (*aiki*). In the poorest villages of northern Ader women employed on project worksites in the 1980s and 1990s wished they could continue working there: 'We want work' (*muna son aiki*), 'because it is useful' (*shina da amfani*), 'because it brings us food-for-work' (*an banmu taimakon abinci*).[67] When the Keita Project halted its infrastructure-building activities, northern Ader became a target for emergency aid operations that in critical years distributed free food to undernourished children.[68] The most vulnerable individuals and groups turned to past strategies of survival, and reactivated ties of dependence with former masters, new elites, or development agents.

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[64] '"Que mille cuvettes se remplissent" – Le Président du CRD de Tahoua le Lieutenant Colonel Tandja Mamadou reçoit le Bulletin du CND', *Bulletin du Comité National de Développement*, No. 26 (janvier 1987), p. 20.

[65] Saibou, *Discours et messages*, p. 53.

[66] The cash value of a standard ration distributed in Keita in the first two Project phases was FCFA 429, or approximately US$0.86 in 1997 (PDR/ADM 1997).

[67] Villagers referred to food for work in Hausa as '*taimakon abinci*', literally 'help of food'. Field notes, July 1995; 1998–9.

[68] Rossi, 'The paradox of chronic aid'.

Some aspects of Ader's history are explained by the economic and
political behaviours imposed by the specific demands of its desert-edge
location. Vulnerable resources at the desert's edge yield low returns
to labour, and therefore place a premium on mobility and dependence.
Mobility and dependence are different phenomena, but they operated
as functional alternatives in Ader's economy. Labour tends to move
(or be moved) to places where its productivity is higher. But who
can move, when, and how is determined by socially ascribed status.
Until the abolition of slavery and the consolidation of colonial
rule, the movement of vulnerable groups was dangerous: freemen
travelling in unsafe regions risked enslavement, slaves who escaped
risked being recaptured. Following abolition change was gradual, not
only because colonial laws were not always applied, but also because
migration was not equally accessible to everyone as an alternative to
dependence.

This book contributes to the historiography of African slavery
and emancipation by showing why slavery has been so resilient in the
Sahara-Sahel. Here loyalties of a personal nature afford security, and
hierarchy ties people into safety nets that for decades have proved more
effective than national and international interventions. Personal subservi-
ence offers benefits that outweigh the cost of independence in contexts
like Ader, where economic activities yield comparatively low returns
for the majority of workers, and colonial and post-colonial state insti-
tutions did not provide reliable protective measures against the risk of
livelihood failure.

The advent of colonial rule altered the tension between centralised
state control and desert hierarchies to the latter's disadvantage. Pre-
colonial Saharan elites lost their political power and their capacity to
monopolise the organisation of trade across the Sahara.[69] The decline
of the trans-Saharan trade changed the terms of the relationship between
centralised states and desert societies, or societies settled on the ecological
border between desert and savannah.[70] The introduction of new tech-
nologies of trade and transport eroded pre-existing incentives, for central-
ised polities, to tolerate the forms of social organisation characteristic of

[69] If new forms of legitimate trade, travel, and exchange bypassed the operation of desert
societies and their connecting functions across the Sahara, these societies and their logics
continued to govern many unofficial and illegal connections in trans-Saharan geopolitics.
On this point, see contributions to McDougall and Scheele, *Saharan Frontiers*.
[70] Capot-Rey, *Sahara Français*, p. 291; Grégoire, 'Major Saharan networks'; Bourgeot,
'Rupture du couple ecologie-economie'.

desert regions. By policing borders and curtailing mobility, modern states undermined the fundamental economic strategies of desert dwellers. 'Development' offered little solace.

As Frederick Cooper has shown, development enabled continued colonial control over African societies when the racist premises that had legitimated Europe's imperialism could no longer be defended.[71] The mission to develop replaced the mission to civilise. Yet because development was not premised on racial distinctions, it could be appropriated by African political elites. Kountché's vision of the entire Nigerien nation as the 'Development Society' was an attempt to rebrand development as a purely Nigerien concept and nationalist ideal. This, however, was a chimera. At best, development functioned as a strategy of extraversion,[72] through which international revenues could be directed to aims defined by donor agencies. The official purposes of development interventions were set abroad, and African bureaucrats and villagers developed various forms of 'brokerage' to access aid funds through a process that Olivier de Sardan and others termed '*courtage en développement*'.[73]

Brokerage, or *courtage*, did not – could not – solve the labour question. In this respect, Ader was not a special case. Monica van Beusekom showed that intervention in the name of 'development' justified the forcible recruitment of settlers in the Office du Niger in the French Sudan before 1946.[74] After the abolition of forced labour, workers in the Office became indebted and impoverished, showing that whatever else the scheme did, it did not benefit the poorest settlers it employed.[75] In French West Africa, developmentalism made possible the mobilisation of work as a voluntary 'human investment' for a nominal salary. In her study of Sierra Leone Christine Whyte shows that 'community development' achieved similar results in British West Africa.[76]

It is tempting to ask for how long development is allowed to get it 'wrong' before it eventually gets it 'right'.[77] This is a legitimate question, but it fails to recognise the nature of the developmentalist enterprise.

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[71] Cooper, 'Modernising bureaucrats', p. 70.   [72] Bayart, 'The state in Africa'.
[73] Bierschenk, Chauveau, and Olivier de Sardan, *Courtiers en développement*; Lewis and Mosse, *Development Brokers*.
[74] Van Beusekom, *Negotiating Development*, pp. 67–79.   [75] Ibid., pp. 103–10.
[76] Whyte, *Whose Slavery?*, pp. 187–216.
[77] I am paraphrasing a question mentioned in Hilton, 'Ken Loach and the Save the Children Film', p. 8.

Development is a form of government, best understood in Michel Foucault's broad sense of government as the 'conduct of conduct'.[78] As James Ferguson has argued, by adopting a language that focuses on apparently technical problems (such as increasing agricultural production, halting desertification, or improving livestock commercialisation) developmentalist regimes conceal their primary effect that consists in the 'expansion and entrenchment of bureaucratic state power'.[79] Like colonialism before it, developmentalism introduced new ways of representing, and intervening upon, African regions and societies.

The analysis presented in this study supports Cooper's insight that developmentalism was a reconfiguration of colonialism that went hand in hand with Britain and France's withdrawal from the functions that modern states are expected to fulfil towards their citizens. Development enabled political control on the cheap. Following independence, one consequence of this process has been the depoliticisation of Africans' relations with their elected representatives and with development donors. 'Beneficiaries', unlike voters or employees, have few rights. Their participation in development schemes is represented as a contribution to efforts supposedly designed in their own interest. But only certain forms of conduct are acceptable and included in official discourse and planning, and these forms of conduct are quintessentially apolitical. Those who opt out of the measures devised by donors and national political elites, and try to make ends meet outside the regulatory framework of the state, are branded as actors in the 'informal economy' – a category that encompasses most of the economic activities of Ader's migrants and traders.[80]

As a side effect, this process has diluted the claims of specific groups, such as ex-slaves. Their class-specific struggle for economic emancipation has no place in international political rhetorics about generic African 'peasants', 'poor', and 'informal' people. They also have no place in nationalist propaganda mobilising 'all Nigeriens' in national development programmes and downplaying internal social divisions. But the 'African peasant', the 'poor', the 'Nigerien', the 'migrant in the informal economy' are labels with a short history. They have been introduced through processes that originated outside of Ader's society. Different groups and individuals in Ader have appropriated these notions and tried to customise their value. These identities and the

[78] Foucault, 'The subject and power', p. 341; Gordon, 'Governmental rationality', p. 4; Foucault, 'Leçon du 1er février 1978', p. 112.
[79] Ferguson, *The Anti-politics Machine*, p. xiv.   [80] Rossi, 'Tubali's trip'.

governmental rationales that generated them co-exist, in Ader, with a historical consciousness rooted in pre-colonial hierarchies. Within these hierarchical world views, it is still possible to defend slavery as a legitimate institution that regulates relationships between (former) masters and slaves, including concubines.

From the viewpoint of labour history, the transition from slavery to aid replaced another potential transition from slavery to wage labour. The fact that the latter did not happen in Ader (and, to different degrees, elsewhere in Africa) was not problematised. Instead, a generic discourse of 'African poverty' expanded, with its grotesque cast of aid experts and poor, informal, sick, and starving protagonists. Under colonialism, the emancipation of former slaves was sidetracked through the establishment of double standards for European and 'traditional' labour practices. Following the legal abolition of slavery and forced labour, the labour question and the legacies of slavery were yet again sidetracked as the emphasis was shifted to the goals of 'development' and the methods of 'aid'.

Ex-slaves themselves strove to take advantage of abolition and started migrating. But change was gradual, not only because colonial laws were not always applied, but also because migration to areas where paid jobs were accessible was not an option for everyone as an alternative to dependence. People economically too vulnerable to arrange safe independent travel, or ideologically denied access to independent mobility, embraced subservience to avoid exposure to extreme destitution. In Ader 'place matters' by making movement more necessary and dependence more acceptable. Yet, for some, migration was so costly that loyalty to old masters-turned-patrons made more sense, especially as it became possible to negotiate more humane treatment.

Social institutions produced steep inequalities in the options available to different groups and individuals.[81] Gender and social status influenced people's ability to opt for exit, voice, or loyalty.[82] In African societies where low population densities encouraged the development of frontier logics and an appreciation of wealth in people, until recently exit (through migration) and loyalty (in relationships of patronage and dependence) have been more prominent than voice (political mobilisation).[83] The combination and balance between these three options changed over time. Under legal slavery society could exact such high penalties for either

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[81] See Berry, 'Social institutions and access to resources'.   [82] Hirschman, *Exit*.
[83] For a discussion of some of these points, see Herbst, 'Migration'.

'exit' or 'voice' that both strategies tended to be repressed by those most likely to benefit from them. In these conditions, serving one's master could hardly be defined as an act of loyalty, whose 'very existence is predicated on the possibility of exit'.[84]

Loyalty came into play when slavery was outlawed and effective checks began to hinder an employer's capacity to use force to recruit labour. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s healthy adult men of slave descent opted increasingly for exit.[85] When former enslavement could be turned into a patronage relationship with concrete benefits to ex-slaves, loyalty to former masters and their descendants facilitated access for former slaves to productive resources in Ader and safe employment opportunities abroad.[86] Women of slave descent did not have the same choices as men. Gender ideologies limited their ability to choose if and how to move and to make their voice heard. While *some* women opted for either voice or exit, women had greater incentives – such as the relative benefits of concubinage, or the threat of separation from their children – to display a loyal behaviour towards former masters. The exit and voice options were, and have remained, less accessible for women than for men.

This book traces the historical transformations that turned a society rooted in slavery into one partially governed by the goals and methods of 'aid'. It foregrounds how this transformation was experienced by different groups and individuals in Ader, including those at the bottom of social hierarchies. One cannot make sense of the trajectories of these groups without a comprehensive analysis of the pre-colonial institutions that structured social relations. This past explains how Ader's subjects interacted with colonial administrators and how they perceived, and acted upon, conditions effected by colonialism, the independent state, and developmentalist regimes. This book interrogates these processes from the viewpoint of Ader's history. Doing so is an act of recognition in the original sense of *anagnorisis* – that is, recognition of the existence of a different subject, and of what this subject stands for and strives for in his or her own world.[87]

[84] Hirschman, *Exit*, p. 82.

[85] Recent work on the political mobilisation of slave descendants suggests that the 'voice option' is increasingly chosen as a form of protest; see Hahonou, 'Slavery and politics'; Hahonou, 'Past and present', and Hahonou and Pelckmans, 'West African antislavery'.

[86] The enduring influence of patronage rooted in former slavery in the organisation of slave descendants' migrations has been documented by Lotte Pelckmans, *Travelling Hierarchies*, and Jean Schmitz, 'Islamic patronage'.

[87] For a discussion of the theoretical implications of different translations of this concept, see Jameson, *Valences*, p. 568.

Fredric Jameson has suggested that the emergence of hitherto silenced agents, such as slaves, as historical subjects in their own right

constitutes the strong form of historical anagnorisis or recognition as such [...] This question is not only a 'scientific' one, in the Marxian sense of the appropriate categories to be used in this analysis [...] It is also a political question, one which involves the identification of the actors or agents of history, at the same time that it presupposes their recognition as just such 'subjects of history'.[88]

By shedding light on Ader's social history – so rarely mentioned in academic research, aid publications, and the international media – the subjects of this history are recognised as interpreters of their own circumstances and agents whose projects contributed to shaping slavery, emancipation, colonialism, and aid. Such 'recognition' enables a (re-) discovery of slavery, abolitionism, and developmentalism from partial desert-edge perspectives.

FOR A PERSPECTIVAL HISTORY

Historical and socio-anthropological studies of Ader are caught in a tension between two master narratives: traditionalist and modernist. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive. In developmentalist literature a frozen view of tradition is often contrasted with a mirage of progress envisaged *tota simul*, as some kind of software update supposedly necessary to bring Ader's 'traditional society' up to speed with a particular view of 'modernity'. On the other hand, traditionalist approaches dismiss process in favour of uncritical portraits of 'tradition'.[89] Most historians and anthropologists of Ader have tended to portray 'traditional' institutions as timeless, while generally failing to document the social history of commoners and formerly enslaved persons.[90] These studies petrify history in snapshots plucked uncritically from the family albums of Ader's recent elites.

[88] Jameson, *Valences*, p. 568.
[89] This is particularly true of the studies of Francis Nicolas, Edmond Bernus, and Ghoubayd Alojaly on the Iwellemmeden Kel Denneg: Nicolas, *Tamesna*; Bernus, 'Récits historiques'; Alojaly, *Histoire*; also of Guy Nicolas's writings on Asna weltanschauung, focused on Maradi, but largely relevant to the study of Ader's Hausaphone society: Nicolas, *Dynamique*; of Nicole Echard's extensive work on Ader-based Hausaphone groups: Echard, *Étude socio-économique*; Echard, 'Notes sur les forgerons'; Echard, *Expérience*; of Hamani's *Contribution*; and of Pierre Bonte's historical ethnography of the Kel Gress: Bonte, 'Esclavage et relations de dépendance' (see also Bonte's unpublished thesis, *Production et échanges*).
[90] An important, though unpublished, exception, is Lina Brock's *The Tamejirt*. See also Brock, 'Children of men'.

There are exceptions: insightful studies of the evolution of ties of
dependence authored by Pierre Bonte for the Kel Gress[91] and Edmond
and Suzanne Bernus for the Iwellemmeden Kel Denneg[92] examine change
in social relations. But their emphasis is on changing structures more than
on historical processes, and their interpretations are based on the views of
chiefs and elites. Stephen Baier's analysis of transformations in the eco-
nomic history of central Niger is directly relevant to Ader, but Ader
occupies a marginal place in Baier's book.[93] Two seminal papers by
Stephen Baier and Paul Lovejoy on desert-edge economies at the north
of the Sokoto Caliphate capture with acumen and accuracy Ader's place
in regional history, but do not focus specifically on Ader.[94] National
histories of Niger, particularly the classic studies by Edmond Séré de
Rivières[95] and Finn Fuglestad,[96] situate Ader in broader regional trans-
formations. But in doing so they rely on the specialised studies of Djibo
Hamani and Nicole Echard, and inevitably inherit their faults.

If Ader is the subject of relatively few academic publications, from
the 1950s onwards, its villages never ceased receiving development con-
sultancies that yielded a large number of unpublished reports. Develop-
mentalist literature represents Ader's society as homogeneously poor and
in need of external intervention. Individual studies are instrumental to
the kinds of activities visualised by donors, or researchers employed by
donors. Today developmentalist rationales dominate publicly accessible
representations of Ader. They paint a caricatural portrait of Ader's
society, devoid of historical depth and sociological distinctions between
the different components of Ader's population. Development discourses
resound with binaries resting ultimately on the opposition between self-
proclaimed saviours and victims in need of assistance. As Mitchell has
shown for Egypt, this duality opens up a distance that enables external
'expertise' to intervene in African society – characterised as peasantry,
target population, or simply 'the poor'.[97] The present volume looks
critically at developmentalist representations of Ader, and sees them as
one viewpoint amongst many – albeit one with major consequences for

[91] Bonte, 'Esclavage et relations'.
[92] Bernus, 'L'évolution des relations'; Bernus and Bernus, 'L'évolution de la condition
servile'.
[93] Baier, *Economic History*.
[94] Baier and Lovejoy, 'Tuareg of the central Sudan'; Baier and Lovejoy, 'Desert-side econ-
omy'.
[95] Séré de Rivières, *Histoire*.   [96] Fuglestad, *History of Niger*.
[97] Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, p. 15; see also Kearney, *Reconceptualizing*, p. 116.

policy. Studying Ader's diverse society, including outsiders who played roles in it, must rest on a pluralist conception of history and engage critically with a variety of sources.

This book includes different types of sources in each chapter in an attempt to elicit the perspectives of a variety of actors.[98] Clashing interests and perspectives are apparent in different sources, such as colonial archives, written documents produced by colonised groups, and oral testimonies. Each type of source raises specific interpretive problems, and some sources are more accessible than others. Contemporary observations of past events are accessible primarily, although not exclusively, through colonial writings, because colonised groups did not leave as many written records as French administrators.

Archival sources that illustrate the onset of colonial rule in Ader provide scarce evidence of how integration in the French empire was perceived in Ader's society. While colonial archives constitute a necessary support, they present Ader history from the perspective of French administrators. An example will clarify these statements. In the course of negotiations for the submission of Iwellemmeden 'rebel' elites, on 16 January 1917 the commandant de Cercle de Tahoua sent a message to Elkhorer, paramount chief (*amenokal*) of the Iwellemmeden Kel Denneg, through the intermediary of a local recruit called Amajallad, a former slave in the Kel Denneg confederation. When Amajallad reached the *amenokal*, who was travelling with some companions, he was decapitated and his body was set on fire. Amajallad's execution and other acts of resistance precipitated the brutal repression of Tuareg

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[98] When this book was in production, I accidentally stumbled upon an article by Lina Brock that used the term 'perspectival' in relation to the author's historical analysis of Kel Denneg history. In a footnote, Brock stated that 'After searching unsuccessfully for an appropriate and adequate term to characterize this aspect of Kel Denneg historical discourse, I coined the term "perspectival" which I hereby use as an adjective in the sense of "that which has the quality of a perspective [*ce qui possède la qualité de mise en perspective*]"' (Brock, 'Histoire', p. 72, note 3). It is surprising that Lina Brock and myself, both of us working on slave descent in Ader, independently chose to adopt a perspectival approach in our study of this region. It is even more surprising that one of the examples provided by Brock in her article is a testimony that mentions the case of Amajallad. I plan to discuss this peculiar convergence in a separate article. But I should mention here that, unlike Brock, I do not consider perspectivism as a characteristic of Kel Denneg historical discourse. I see it more generally as a mode of historiographic writing that emphasises the different positioned perspectives of various individuals and groups. I developed my thoughts on perspectivism through reading a broad range of historical and anthropological works, including texts by Karl Mannheim, Mikhail Bakhtin, Hayden Whyte, Donna Haraway, and writers in postmodern anthropology.

resistance that culminated in the massacre of Tanout in June 1917. Colonial correspondence makes a brief reference to the death of Amajallad: 'two clerics [*marabouts*] of the chief Alfourane [sic] beheaded the guide Amajallad of the mounted section, who was bringing an order to Alfourane'.[99]

To French authorities this accident was yet another proof of the insubordination of Ader's former chiefs. But this episode had different implications for various local groups. To the *amenokal* and his companions, Amajallad was not only a traitor, but also a slave who dared to defy the authority of his masters. The brutality of the punishment inflicted upon Amajallad was at once an insult to the French and a reassertion of principles of status. The same event assumes different connotations from the perspective of people of slave descent. At colonial occupation many former slaves remained loyal to their ex-masters. Some of them shared the masters' ideologies of status and accepted dependence without challenging the authority of *imajeghen*, from whom they hoped to receive protection and support. Other slave descendants took advantage of opportunities offered by colonial conquest to abandon former masters and start a new life.

By enrolling in the colonial army, Amajallad moved from one hierarchy to another: he went from being a slave of the Iwellemmeden to being an indigenous recruit in French military ranks. His killers reasserted their hierarchical world view on Amajallad's body, thereby denying his attempt to reposition himself against their will. Although there exists no record of the thinking of former slaves in the first decades of colonial rule, many slave descendants have not, to this day, forgotten this event. It is not only that the destiny of Amajallad was marked by colonial conquest. Amajallad's tragic fate deterred other ex-slaves from joining French ranks; pushed some to lend their support to *imajeghen* resistance; and encouraged others to leave Ader rather than try to achieve a free life under the threat of retaliation by former masters whose actions could never be held to account effectively by a distant colonial state.

Amajallad's case is only one example that highlights different possible interpretations of a particular incident. Processes that fall under the rubric

[99] Journal de renseignements de la Subdivision de Tahoua, 1912–1919, ANN 17.8.9; Fieldnotes 30 September 2005, Alela; 4 October 2005, Intougouzout; 10 October 2005, Abalack. This event is also discussed in Alojaly, *Histoire*; Nicolas, *Tamesna*, pp. 91–2; and Brock, *The Tamejirt*, p. 181.

of conquest from a colonial perspective fall under different rubrics – defeat, emancipation – in the accounts of local groups. Similarly, the experience of forced labour can be accessed by interviewing elders who worked in colonial worksites as youths. These texts differ in many ways from colonial registers detailing the organisation of worksites. They differ from the nostalgic poems of Tuareg elites decrying lost control over the labour of former dependants. Testimonies of forced labourers of free and slave descent reveal subjective, often unexpected, interpretations. All of the elders I interviewed on this subject found their experience exploitative. However, forced labour figured in autobiographic narratives of *emancipation* offered by a few elders who had been born into slavery. They emphasised encounters with people from different backgrounds and the establishment of egalitarian relations with co-workers on colonial worksites.

Labour meant different things at different moments to slave and master, or to forced worker and colonial guard. African history cannot be reduced to a string of events linked together, 'like the beads of a rosary',[100] by the causal imaginary of colonial writers. It must, as much as possible, inquire into how these events were experienced by those involved. Sometimes different versions of the same event contain explanations for its occurrence that went unnoticed by contemporary colonial witnesses. For example, in the 1920s and 1930s colonial administrators reported a massive increase in migrations out of Ader. Only when we engage the memories of migrants does it become apparent that these travellers were not merely trying to avoid fiscal obligations and recruitment in colonial worksites. A large number of slaves and slave descendants left because, for the first time, they could control their own movements independently of the will of their masters. They left to start new lives beyond the stigma of slavery. It is undeniable that the migrations of the 1920s and 1930s are episodes of resistance against colonial abuses. But they are more than that. Some of these migrant journeys belong to the history of emancipation and this, for better or worse, can only be gathered from local testimonies.

Oral sources often turn out to be inaccurate and more indicative of present concerns than of the past circumstances they claim to describe.[101] 'Present concerns' do not refer only to the positioned perspectives of the interviewees, but also to the agendas and methodologies of the

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[100] Benjamin, 'Über den Begriff'.
[101] There is a vast literature on the uses and limits of oral tradition in African historiography. See particularly McCall, 'Heritage of the ears'; Henige, *Chronology*; Henige,

interviewers.[102] Colonial written sources have the advantage of providing contemporary descriptions of events. Unlike fuzzy memories, colonial reports contain exact dates, census data, market prices, tax rates, yearly rainfall levels: this information allows researchers to link their reconstructions to precise data. Henige noted that the credibility of a witness depends on his/her contemporaneity with the facts observed.[103] However, as Henige also argued, eyewitness testimony is not always reliable because 'different people at the same event will remember different things'.[104] Bias is not absent from sources written by contemporary observers. Written sources were generated in specific intellectual milieus that influenced the character of the information recorded. The only possible way to address this problem is to account, as much as possible, for the situatedness of perspectives and for the function of a particular text in the context that generated it.[105]

At a general level, 'a society's sense of its past', conveyed through local genres and traditions, 'is integral to its self-production through time'.[106] Understanding *how* a society organises knowledge of its past is instrumental to interpreting its history. This is because a 'sense of one's past' influences the historical agency of individuals and groups. At the level of individual sources, identifying the interests, motivations, and purposes ('bias') behind any one source sheds light on the forces shaping its author's projects.[107] Properly accounted for, even the intentional or unintentional provision of false or unverifiable information can yield relevant insights. In Chapter 3, I cite a testimony that I obtained in the village of Alela, which describes the first colonial encounter between a chief of Sakole (the village from which the elders who spoke originated) and one of the French generals who participated

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Oral Historiography; Miller, African Past Speaks; Jewsiewicki and Newbury, African Historiographies; Barber and De Moraes Farias, Discourse and Its Disguises; Tonkin, Narrating Our Pasts; White, Meischer, and Cohen, African Words; Falola and Jennings, Sources and Methods. Contrasting arguments, respectively against and in support of oral tradition, are presented in Clarence-Smith, 'For Braudel' and Vansina, 'For oral tradition'.

[102] See Henige, 'Truths'. Robin Law suggested that literate historians change the character of the information they are recording in the process of collecting it, cf. Law, 'How truly traditional?'

[103] Henige, 'African history', p. 95.   [104] Henige, Oral Historiography, p. 111.

[105] Donna Haraway's paper remains the best conceptual discussion I know of situated positionings: Haraway, 'Situated knowledges'. On the relevance of genre and textuality, see Barber and Farias, Discourse and Its Disguises.

[106] Peel, 'Making history', p. 111.

[107] On the usefulness of bias, see Furniss, 'Typification'.

in the conquest of Ader. In this account, Almoumine, the representative of Sakole, does not hide like other local chiefs, but welcomes the French occupier:

Almoumine gave his hand to [the French general], who asked him 'What kind of people are you? No one has had the courage to shake hands with us so far.' Initially, some people from Sakole had gone to see the French who had just arrived, but they were killed. A woman in Sakole danced *bori* [Hausa possession cult], then she said – they are here in the woods, what you have to do is go home, if you do not stay home the White will find you [. . .] French soldiers arrived from the east of the village [of Sakole], west of Agouloum. Almoumine went to meet them on the road with his following. They said: 'Peace, peace . . .' [*Amana, amana* . . .] 'Peace, peace . . .' They were carrying food to offer [to the French], Almoumine walked in front. He continued saying 'Peace, peace . . .' until he was close enough to the French soldier to give him his hand. So the Frenchman asked him: 'What kind of man are you? No one dared to offer us his hand before you.'[108]

Needless to say, French accounts of conquest differ in many ways from this testimony. But what sense are we to make of this passage? The speaker is two generations removed from the events described, for he claims to retell the experiences of a classificatory brother of his grandfather. These specific events do not figure in other local testimonies. I could not find any mention of Almoumine in colonial writings. Almoumine, and others like him, appear anonymously in the writings of French officers. Their stories, if they ever happened, are concealed in passing references to native custom or notes on the 'attitudes of indigenous chiefs'.[109] Local experiences of conquest, servitude, forced labour, and emancipation, are mostly lost in the *Journal de Cercle*. Oral testimonies contain a mix of factual information and subjective perceptions. It is impossible to ascertain if Almoumine did or did not set out to meet the French, if he was or was not complimented on his bravery, or thanked for his generous welcome to a French officer stopping in his village. But if the aggrandising of one's ancestors betrays local bias, it also sheds light on how colonialism was experienced.

The account of Alela's elders confirms testimonies gathered in other villages and 'reveals the failure of official history to explain the existential experience of a majority of the rank-and-file'.[110] When available,

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[108] Interview with Almoustapha Ada and Isha Idi, Alela, 30 September 2005.
[109] Political reports of the commandants de cercle normally included sections on the 'attitudes of native chiefs'.
[110] Portelli, 'Uchronic dreams', p. 54. See also Hobsbawm, *Uncommon People*.

verifiable, objective data (chronology, rainfall levels, prices) allow us to
reconstruct contexts of choice and praxis. But people's choices are based
more on their subjective perceptions and dispositions than on any object-
ive conditions historians may be able to reconstruct and validate. If
possible, historical interpretation should be based on a combined analysis
of objective and subjective information. These two orders of data are not
subject to the same criteria of verifiability. We can, and in my view we
should, ask whether a battle truly happened, or truly happened on a
certain date; whether a meeting really took place, and who attended.
But if we want to understand why and how people fought or met, we
need to consider their statements as providing evidence on motivation and
belief, not falsity and truth. This raises questions that are at once moral
and hermeneutic.

'Hermeneutics has represented alterity as a problem to be over-
come':[111] this insight is directly relevant to Ader. For an Asna believer,
the Keita Lake is not just a reservoir of water and a vital resource for local
farming: formed following a supernatural inundation, it is the abode of
otherworldly spirits and a site of human interaction with them. This
understanding of the world has practical outcomes. Until recent times,
these outcomes included the performance of human sacrifice to protect
the communities that lived around the lake. As in the case of Lake
Bosomtwe, discussed by Thomas McCaskie, reduction of the Keita Lake
to any exogenous category – belief or magic, for example – subordinates
local understandings to an alien epistemology.[112] Moreover, Ader-based
Hausa and Tuareg societies are so diversified *internally* that researchers
have asked whether subgroups or different strata *within each of these
societies* do not altogether separate experiences of history.[113]

Can the *Asna matsafa* who performed sacrifices, the Muslim clerics
of nearby Sokoto, the Tuareg warriors unfamiliar with Hausa belief, and
the French Catholic colonial officers ever share commensurate experi-
ences of the lake? Can foreign researchers capture local experience
through the use of epistemologies alien to the world of Ader? How
can equivalence be established between the representations that populate
the minds of different subjects?[114] The study of Ader's society suggests
that alterity is not insurmountable and that people with different cultural,
religious, and linguistic backgrounds interact meaningfully in actual or

[111] Bernasconi, 'You don't know', p. 179.   [112] McCaskie, 'Asantesem', p. 75.
[113] Bernus, 'Histoires parallèles'; Bonte and Echard, 'Histoire et histoires'.
[114] See Brentano, *Psychology*, pp. 77–80.

potential cognisance of their respective purposes. The events of Ader's history were shaped intersubjectively by slaves and masters, colonisers and colonised. At any one time, this history was 'given orientedly'[115] to differently positioned actors involved in it, including its interpreters. The following chapters foreground the interpretations of different people, as much as possible in their original words, in an attempt to expose the different perspectives of the subjects of Ader's history. At any one time, these perspectives influenced the choices that gave this history its unique and unrepeatable configuration.

CONCLUSION

Ader contained valuable resources in limited quantities (valley lands, pastures). The hierarchical rationale of pre-colonial government meant that the most marginal groups were the most exposed to exploitation, but used their dependence on local patrons to achieve some security. Elites could force the bottom layers of the population to work for nothing, or merely in exchange for protection from starvation. The colonial state, too, relied on coercion to mobilise cheap labour. From the 1940s the process of decolonisation went hand in hand with the evolution of developmentalist governance. After independence, development 'aid' marked the onset of a generalised dependence on international donors. The Keita Project financed capital investment, administrative costs, and public works. When the project ended, the region of Keita faced food crises that attracted emergency relief operations. In times of crisis, social dependence continues to function as a safety net. The state cannot ensure food security, and international aid is limited and unreliable. Ader's poor still work for virtually nothing in an attempt to turn dependence to their own advantage. A study of how this history was experienced in Ader must begin from an analysis of how Ader's social structure took shape in the geopolitical events of the nineteenth century: the specific nature of local hierarchies and their integration in the ecological and political landscape of a region encapsulated between Sokoto and Agadez, Hausa and Tuareg institutions, the Sahara and the savannah.

[115] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 134.