Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies

Migration and Emancipation in West Africa's Labour History: The Missing Links

Benedetta Rossi
Published online: 13 May 2013.

Click for updates

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Migration and Emancipation in West Africa's Labour History: The Missing Links

Benedetta Rossi

Strategies of emancipation included projects of migration conceived and unfolded by migrants of slave descent. This article suggests that looking at how these migrants chose to move when they could control their mobility, and at the obstacles they faced, reveals aspects of the experience of enslavement and emancipation that have not yet been fully explored in the relevant historiography. While historians of African slavery have described the large-scale movements of ex-slaves that followed legal status abolition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, only few studies provide detailed analyses of these trajectories from the perspective of the enslaved. Outside the field of slavery studies, both West African labour history and migration studies have been emphasising ethnicity over status, thereby underestimating how slave descent shaped the practices and aspirations of a large proportion of labour migrants. The autobiographic testimonies of migrants of slave descent provide insights into their strategies and expose differences across gender, age and location. Through an analysis of these sources, this article highlights the missing links in our reconstructions of the history of West African workers.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, legal emancipation in the narrow European colonial possessions on the coast of West Africa gave rise to substantial displacements of slaves moving to regions under European rule.[1] In the twentieth century, following colonial occupation of West Africa and the gradual application of emancipation decrees, ex-slaves migrated within European territories. They left in order to regain their original home, when they knew where they came from, or to move to regions where they could find new opportunities. Slave agency manifested itself through massive flights.[2] Martin Klein thinks that slaves who fled to earlier homes in French West Africa between 1906 and 1911 could have been over a million.[3] Paul Lovejoy and Jan Hogendorn suggest that between 1897 and 1907, as many as 200,000 slaves escaped following the British conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate.[4]

Benedetta Rossi is Lecturer in African Studies, Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham, Arts Building, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK. Email: b.rossi@bham.ac.uk

European administrators strove to contain the emancipation movement they had pro-
voked, but 'none understood how the slaves themselves would take the issue into their
own hands or, perhaps better, their own feet.'[5] Throughout the whole of the twentieth
century, geographic mobility played a major role in the slow process of emancipation
in West Africa.[6]

Through travels arranged on their own account, former slaves distanced themselves
from slave status both physically and ideologically. Their migrations reveal projects
aimed at moving away from sites where they had been enslaved and at reaching
places where it would be possible to reap the benefits of their own labour. Emancipa-
tion induced a slow but steady transformation of social hierarchies visible in the rene-
gotiation of the interlocked mobilities of slaves and masters. How far was the mobility
of different categories of slaves controlled by their owners before legal status abolition?
What were the consequences of legal emancipation for the capacity of former slaves to
control their movements and labour? When, where and how did slaves, freed slaves
and their descendants begin to move on their own account? What did they try to
achieve? What obstacles did they face? How, if at all, did experiences differ across
gender, age and status? Did slave descent influence attitudes towards travel, labour
and property – in other words, were ex-slaves a particular type of migrant? In
order to answer these questions, it is necessary to investigate the overlapping area
between migration studies and the historiography of emancipation.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a large number of studies of labour migration in West Africa
focused on the ethnicity of migrants, but dismissed the potential influence of slave
descent on the strategies of labour migrants. An ex-slave migrant is a migrant
whose trajectory is driven by a particular set of aspirations. Yet, unlike historians of
African slavery and emancipation, students of migration have not paid consistent
attention to the social status of migrants. The status-blindness of migration studies
in favour of a primary concern with ethnicity was the outcome not only of how
researchers framed their questions, but also of strategies of emancipation of ex-slave
migrants trying to pass as free in sites where they could conceal their former enslave-
ment. Historians of African slavery and emancipation have illustrated the transform-
ation of former slaves into migrant workers.[7] Their contributions, however, tell us
more about socio-economic dynamics on a regional scale than about individual
choices and the contexts in which individual choices took shape. Recent research in
African slavery and emancipation is beginning to address the question of what
travel meant to migrants trying to distance themselves from earlier enslavement. It
is also beginning to differentiate across various categories of slave descendants,
whose age, gender, social status and the type of relationships they could establish,
influenced their options of mobility, at once spatial and social.

Building on the important contributions of Frederick Cooper, Martin Klein, Paul
Lovejoy and François Manchuelle, recent studies of the migration projects of slave des-
cendants rely upon a combination of long-term fieldwork and oral history in order to
understand how ex-slaves experienced emancipation and struggled to make it
happen.[8] One of the factors that gave momentum to this field of enquiry has been a
realisation that any study of slavery based solely or primarily on the testimonies of

slave-owners, and/or on the writings of colonialists, would yield partial and skewed interpretations.[9] Africanists' efforts to collect 'slave narratives', or rather – in Lovejoy's rewording – 'freedom narratives', followed on the steps of historians of emancipation in other parts of the world.[10] But as we strive to collect and integrate these sources into our analyses, we should be mindful of Eric Hobsbawm's warning that achieving a balance among different types of sources should not be seen as an end in itself, but as a means towards answering specific questions.[11] Only by integrating the perspectives of slave descendants in the historiography of African labour will we be able to distinguish the experience of migrants of free descent from that of migrants who were in fact ex-slaves trying to turn legal emancipation into concrete achievements and to establish how – if at all – the migration projects of these two groups differed. This information reveals continuities and discontinuities in labour relations, class formation, property redistribution and political representation that are invisible in studies that fail to stratify migrants according to status.

Through migration, some migrants of slave descent broke the chains of enslavement and entered new labour institutions and property relations. Others, however, migrated with and for former masters or faced obstacles spared to freeborn migrants. Some migrations marked ruptures with earlier forms of domination. Others, when observed close enough, reveal continuities of subservience which might have hindered – or sometimes accelerated – emancipation. Understanding who moved and who did not, why, when, how and with what results will allow us to refine, or revise, regional periodisations of emancipation. We know already that the chronology of legal abolition is of limited help in establishing a periodisation of actual emancipation. The status and living conditions of ex-slaves were not automatically transformed at the passing of emancipation laws. A history of emancipation must explain the projects of men and women, who at a certain moment – which may or may not have coincided with the passing of colonial decrees – chose to struggle to work on their own account. Recovering these projects today is generally a difficult task, but it is easier in the case of labour migrants whose movements can often be verified and are remembered by their descendants. Because movement implies choice, detailed analysis of the movements of migrants of slave descent reveals what they were up to, and what they were ultimately able to achieve by moving across specific places and social networks. Looking at where slaves, liberated slaves and slave descendants chose to go when they could control their movements, and at the obstacles they faced, sheds light on their aspirations and strategies, their struggles and frustrations.

This article argues that by reconstructing the migrations of slaves and slave descendants, we can write a history of West African labour from the perspective of workers themselves, and that this will both nuance and enrich our understanding of African labour history. This argument is developed in three successive steps. The next section discusses missing links between the historiography of the end of slavery and studies of labour migrations in West Africa. The following section analyses a case study taken from my own research on labour migrants of slave descent from the Ader region of today's Republic of Niger to show how detailed research on the migrants' choices and motivations can shed light on aspects of African labour

history that have yet to be fully explored. The third section examines recent research on the relationship between emancipation and spatial mobility, and suggests that the micro-historical scale and actor-oriented approach that characterise these studies amplify their heuristic potential. The field of labour migrations is only one of several domains that, explored in detail, can yield innovative insights on African emancipation and labour history. The same magnifying lens could also be fruitfully applied to the study of education, religious practices, marriage strategies and political struggles of former slaves and their descendants. Doing so will advance our comprehension of these diverse phenomena in particular African regions. More generally, micro-histories of emancipation will magnify the 'differences within' slaves and slave descendants, and provide a more precise account of the trajectories of emancipation followed by different categories of persons of slave descent facing different contexts of choice.

Rethinking the place of labour migrants of slave descent in West Africa's labour history

The experience of slaves and slave descendants has been marked by their struggle to control their labour. Yet, surprisingly little research has explored how former enslavement affected the consciousness of African workers. Historians of African slavery have focused predominantly on the end of slavery and on new forms of labour control. However, they rarely followed *the same subjects* going from slave labour to occupations they chose, albeit under circumstances that were not of their own choice. The result is that we know little about how earlier enslavement influenced the historical consciousness and work habits of ex-slaves. To be sure, this issue has been flagged. In the concluding section of *Slow Death for Slavery*, Lovejoy and Hogendorn noted that in Northern Nigeria 'the process of "peasantisation" was closely associated with the transition from slavery to freedom.'[12] In a review article that preceded the publication of *Transformations,* Lovejoy asked: 'to what extent were [twentieth century labour] migrants of slave origin?'[13] Klein and Roberts' 1980 article on the Banamba exodus shows that it was at emancipation, in 1905–1906, that Maraka slaves felt secure enough to walk away *en masse* from their masters, sometimes with the intermediation of resident colonial officers.[14] But Klein and Roberts do not follow the slaves' trajectories after the exodus: it is likely that, from their new homes, former slaves started practising seasonal labour migration to centres of colonial trade and production. Martin Klein's writings document the agency of slaves who left the site of their enslavement at abolition and moved on to new occupations. For colonial French West Africa, Klein's 1998 study provides detailed reconstructions of the trajectories, at once spatial and social, of slaves and ex-slaves travelling to new places in search for new opportunities.[15] Klein's detailed historical reconstruction and his effort to capture the ex-slaves' perspectives laid the intellectual foundations of the type of research advocated here. The recent studies examined in the third section of the article are all explicitly influenced by his work.

Transformations of twentieth-century West African labour attracted the attention of researchers from different disciplines outside the field of the history of slavery. Since the 1950s, West Africanists have been discussing the relation between migration and class-formation. Yet, with the exception of Timothy Weiskel's work, contributors to this debate did not enquire into the social origins of migrants.[16] They assessed this phenomenon alternatively in terms of the economic efficiency of migration as a response to conditions in sending and receiving areas, or in terms of the progressive exploitation of the countryside by the logic of capital.[17] Neoclassical political economists asked whether migration was an efficient response to environmental and economic pushes and pulls across the rural–urban divide.[18] Elizabeth Colson suggested that migration had a positive function in areas where the potential for increases in land productivity was limited.[19] Elliot Berg reasoned that as long as African governments were unable to supply social services to stabilise un-skilled labour, seasonal migrant labour remunerated by piecework rather than contract would remain the most viable solution to the needs of both sending and receiving areas.[20] On the other hand, Africanist supporters of the *Dependencia* school suggested that seasonal labour migration was an outgrowth of capitalist development originated under colonialism: 'they emigrate because the colonial system requires money of them.'[21] They blamed colonialism, first, and then development, for the creation of a dispossessed proletariat alienated from traditional occupations and compelled to migrate by forces outside their control.[22]

For all their individual merits, both neoclassical and dependency approaches provide a selective reading of history. Emphasis on colonialism as a great moderniser or exploiter says nothing about the strategies of migrants – including slave descendants – confronted with specific institutions, only some of which were colonial. This, with Cooper, 'gives rise to the question of how far we can go in discussing coloniality when the fact of having been colonized is stressed over context, struggle, and the experience of life in colonies'.[23] The history of seasonal labour migrations is rooted in the history of dependent labour relations.[24] Because slavery was so prominent in nineteenth-century West Africa, these two strands of West African history – emancipation and 'modern' labour migrations – cannot be treated separately. Yet the debate on labour migrations and proletarianisation overemphasised ethnicity at the expense of status, and turned a blind eye to slave descent. Slavery's remarkable absence from these studies suggests that West African migrant workers may have been successful at directing the attention of researchers away from what they wished to keep secret – their past enslavement.[25]

Existing studies state clearly that some West African workers and soldiers had slave backgrounds. But in general, they do not illustrate how, if at all, this mattered to their predicament as 'free' workers. Paul Lubeck, in describing the urban growth of Tudun Wada (Kano), tells of the ongoing immigration of seasonal and permanent workers who sold their labour to the colonial state. One group of migrants was composed of 'Tuareg and Aderawa'. Groups were ethnically classified and assigned team-leaders from their constituencies. A group of labour migrants from Ader had a *Sarkin Buzu* (chief of the Buzu), and contained Hausa-speaking former dependents of the Tuareg.[26] In his study of labour in the Jos tin mines, Bill Freund also mentions

that the 'slave population taking advantage of the end of the legal enforcement of slavery', including migrants from Ader, constituted an important source of labour for the mines.[27] But again, we are not told if and how slave descent mattered in the mines. In Ader (today's southern Niger), labour migrants of slave descent tried to conceal their origins at their destination. This was almost impossible in Northern Nigeria, as locals knew how to read status on the bodies of migrants from neighbouring Ader. But colonial records did not distinguish migrants along status criteria, possibly because colonial officers could not differentiate between a poor freeborn peasant and a former slave. Today, the stories of migrants of slave descent are more easily available at the site of departure, where migrants who chose to return home were reintegrated in local hierarchies. Many successful labour migrants of slave descent never came back. As Mousa, an elderly migrant of slave descent, explained: 'When slavery was abolished, many left. Today, they have become "Aderawa" and "Hausawa": they changed their ethnicity.'[28]

Ethnic passing was one of the main strategies of slave descendants.[29] Although passing could happen in the region of origin, it worked better away from home, where people could not remember the language spoken by someone's ancestors, or their rank and occupation.[30] However, the phenomenon of ethnic passing biased scholarly interpretations of labour migration by emphasising ethnicity over status. Confronted with responses that highlighted vague ethnic solidarities but ignored status, researchers in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s set out to explain 'ethno-professionalisation' and 're-tribalisation'. They forgot that many migrants were of slave descent. Jean Rouch saw ethnic solidarity among migrants as an obstacle to class formation: 'the city [...] did not weaken tribal cohesion, it reinforced it. [...] It is not class-consciousness emerging amongst the workers, but a tribal consciousness reborn, if it had ever waned'.[31] Abner Cohen argued that the primary function of ethnicity was to serve the political and economic interests of migrants. He noted that urban migrants kept re-creating their distinctiveness in ethnic terms.[32] Immanuel Wallerstein observed that, as an economic and political strategy, immigrants were becoming 'super-tribalised', forming ethno-professional communities in their new context, and that this process ought to be seen as the development of class consciousness.[33] The fact that ethnicity appeared to compete with citizenship and threaten national integration in recently independent African states attracted considerable attention.[34] However, the focus on ethnicity overshadowed important questions, including the relation between citizenship and slave descent, and the question of class consciousness among African (migrant) labour.[35] Surprisingly, studies of class formation say little about slave descent. In 1988, Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch asked of migrant labour: 'can this mass of low-wage earners justifiably be called "proletarians" or a "working class" in the making?' She answered tentatively that

> when these people had been exploited as labourers and had been separated from their rural origins for several years, they could be said to be *ipso-facto* members of the proletariat, that is, those who have no means of surviving except by their physical strength.[36]

This conclusion, shared by other researchers, is not as straightforward as suggested.[37] Against the view that African workers should be seen as proletarians, Richard Roberts argues that

> on the contrary, the African worker differs from his metropolitan counterpart because s/he was not divorced from the means of subsistence. Continued access to land and mutual aid through kinship systems provide the clue to the nature of the unskilled labour coercive systems which characterize industrial capitalism in Africa. Indeed, continued access to the means of subsistence was part of a capitalist strategy in minimizing costs. [...] Access to the means of production reduced the wage bill such that a significant part of the costs of social production [...] was borne by production in rural areas.[38]

Others emphasised that retaining access to land and the means of subsistence was not only expedient to capitalist strategies, but also a strategy of migrant workers to resist full-scale dependence on wage labour.[39] Perhaps the peculiar resistance of African workers to proletarianisation could be explained by the fresh memory that African would-be proletarians had of slavery. This would apply whether they had actually experienced enslavement or whether, as slave-owners or enslavable commoners, they merely witnessed the plight of slaves. We know that 'for those [slaves] who remained, the key to the struggle was land'.[40] But also for those who left, access to land was a major concern in their new settings. Availability of accessible land partly directed their movements. Moreover, land was not the only form of property that ex-slaves tried to acquire. Aurelien Mauxion's research shows that the 'spatial strategies' of former slaves of Tuareg nomadic herders in the Gao region of French Soudan aimed at constituting a herd of their own by asserting claims to the herds of their masters.[41] For semi-nomadic herders, emancipation did not engender a previously unknown mobility. But it allowed them to take control over their movements by establishing new areas of nomadisation that fell outside their masters' influence. The experience of enslavement determined the nature of the emancipating slaves' movements, claims and struggles. Ex-slaves entered the free labour market determined to acquire rights upon productive resources that had been hitherto denied to them. Their specific aspirations implied resistance to proletarianisation. This suggests that, at least in some contexts, what Roberts calls 'the peculiarities of African labour and working class history' could be explained by the recent memory of slavery in the workers' consciousness.

Labour migration and emancipation: Ader's labour migrants to Northern Nigeria

In the Ader region of southern Niger, migrations to British Nigeria received increased attention in the first half of the 1930s. In a letter to the Governor General of French West Africa dated 21 October 1933, Adelard De Loppinot stated that since 1916, 25,000 people had left the *Cercle* of Tahoua, which he commanded. This was more than 20 per cent of the *Cercle*'s population in 1933.[42] Most migrants had moved to Nigeria, 10,000 of them to escape the military recruitments of 1916–1917. Noting that the double burden of taxes and compulsory labour had caused large numbers

of flights, De Loppinot openly criticised French labour policy in his reports of 1933.[43] In 1934, De Loppinot was temporarily replaced. Commandant Paolini, who took his place, stated dryly: 'there is absolutely no relation between the resources of which the native disposes and his fiscal charge.'[44] In 1936, the sudden growth in Niger-Nigeria migrations was a response to two main factors: the famine of 1930–1932 and the promulgation of ordinance no. 19 in British Northern Nigeria in 1936.[45] The news of conditions favourable to slaves spread quickly to French areas close to the border like Ader, which had been sending temporary migrants and traders since earlier times. Colonial reports did not inquire into the migrants' identity. However, what appeared as an undifferentiated mass of migrants to colonial administrators in fact concealed distinct groups with different projects of migration.

Ader migrants included the descendants of free Hausa long-distance traders (Hausa: *fatake*) who continued to operate along diasporic trade networks radiating to the main commercial centres of Ghana, the Ivory Coast and Northern Nigeria.[46] They also included slaves who left never to come back, and whose exodus was an attempt to leave the stigma of enslavement behind and start a new life. Here, I focus on the trajectories of slave descendants who chose to engage in seasonal labour migrations. The first generation of circular migrants stayed away two to three months every year. For men of servile status, this had been the first chance to move independently from their masters' wills. They travelled in groups of 15–20 people, although larger groups reached double this size. Compared to the organisation of roles in the caravans of the freeborn Hausa long-distance traders, the travel arrangements of migrants of slave descent were relatively egalitarian. Trips from northern Ader to Northern Nigeria lasted between 10 and 20 days. Migrants travelled on foot and feared wild animals and bandits. Their trajectories bordered villages without entering them, to avoid problems with local inhabitants who neither trusted nor welcomed strangers.

In a village that I shall call Zango, migrants used to migrate to Zaria and Kaduna carrying their own provisions in a backpack and millet porridge (*fura*) in a gourd (*gora*).[47] At night, they camped outside the walls of villages. They did not sleep in the bush. Sometimes they entered a village, but they did not stay at somebody's place: they camped in the mosque or in a public space. Although Ader's migrants of slave descent had set off to find proper occupations, they looked like a threatening and impoverished crowd to villagers settled further south. Migrants of slave descent expected hostility from the inhabitants of villages they crossed in their southward trajectories:

> When migrants saw a village, they bordered it. They searched and searched and searched (*biɗa su yi, biɗa su yi, biɗa su yi*) for a good spot where they could stop overnight, but this spot would not be inside the village, they feared meeting other people. They had their own water and flour.[48]

In Ader today, migrants are named after the very act of searching for places and opportunities, the '*ɣan biɗa*' or 'the ones who search'. The destination of labour migrations was a 'place of searching' (*wurin biɗa*). Unlike migrants of free descent, who relied on diasporas from their villages in Northern Nigeria, the

initial challenge of the first generations of migrants of slave descent was finding a local host at their destination:

> They left after the harvest. Once they reached their destination, they camped tem-
> porarily, and stored their luggage. They informed the chief of the neighbourhood
> that they were there to work. In the day they worked individually and at night
> they returned to the same place. They all lived in the same place, no one resided
> alone. They spent about two-three months at destination (*wurin biɗa*). It was prof-
> itable to go. At home there was no money, none at all. The only way to earn money,
> then, staying at home, was to sell wood or hay in Tahoua.[49]

People of free descent had other forms of capital that they could sell (part of their harvest, land, livestock). Selling wood or hay, freely available in Ader's drylands, is what ex-slaves, who lacked capital, did when they did not migrate. But migration offered better opportunities to those who dared trying their luck abroad.

The careers of slave descendants tended to go from generic manual occupations that any able-bodied man could carry out to more specialised jobs that gave workers access to local market niches. One of the most frequent jobs of the first generation of migrants to Northern Nigeria was water carriage (*garuwa*). The poorest migrant workers carried water in buckets hanging from a stick that they held on their shoulders, and sold it at markets and on the street. Some water sellers developed a network of private clients to whom they delivered water every day. The stability of this arrangement increased the security of their migrant revenues. Water sale and unskilled manual labour are what migrants did when they were not familiar with the society they found at their destination. After spending some time in a town, migrants inserted themselves in a niche in the local economy, establishing contacts with people for whom they worked and who hosted them or rented them a place to stay. This second stage in the trajectory of seasonal labour migrants marked the identi-fication of specific local connections. Testimonies highlight the exclusivity of migrant networks and occupations:

> it is only the people of Zango who used to go to Malam Sambo. Migrants from other
> villages went elsewhere. Initially, they only spent about three-four months in Zaria.
> When they started, they did not remain away any longer. The only work they did in
> Zaria was repairing household tools (*giare-giare*). They were known for this. Custo-
> mers found them outside the house of Sarkin Zaria. It is only in Zaria that they did
> this job, not back home. They even left their working tools there, they did not take
> them back. When they arrived, they picked up their tools and started working. It was
> a profitable business.[50]

An elderly migrant showed me how he fixed broken clay pots with a technique that involved sealing holes and cracks with iron wire. 'In Nigeria', he said, 'no one could do this repair job as well as us, and we were known for this.'[51] A village in northern Ader takes its name from the fact that its inhabitants were Tuareg artisans mostly of free status.[52] Former migrants from this village started migrating to Nigeria when they stopped working for the Tuareg elites on whom they had depended in precolonial times. In Nigeria, they repaired broken bowls, buckets, dishes, jugs, mortars and sifters for cereals. They distinguished between two activities known, in the Hausa of Ader, as

giartey-giartey and *giare-giare*. The *giartey* repaired large gourd bowls and mortars. Migrants who did *giare-giare* fixed large dishes. The oldest man of three who had been describing their travels recalled how he used to walk the streets of Kano as a young man, repeating a rhyming cry to attract clients: 'giartey-giartey mai ɗumkin korrey!', 'Giartey-giartey, the good repairer!'

Early studies of migrant labour in Africa failed not only to distinguish between migrant workers of different statuses but also to see labour migration as only one phase in longer career-histories. The strategies of labour migrants depended on their previous experiences and future expectations. Many migrants of slave descent began to migrate on their own account after having been recruited as forced or pre-statory labour on colonial worksites.[53] Men from the village of Kudeydey started migrating at the times of forced labour (*aikin dole*).[54] The French made them cut down trees in Ader and carry them on foot to Tahoua. It took two men to carry one tree, and the men needed two days to bring the tree to Tahoua. They remained in Tahoua overnight and returned on the following morning. Sometimes nothing else was required from them for a long period, until the village chief announced that he had to recruit more workers. Tasks varied. After carrying trees, they had to collect chalk from quarries. Those recruited spent a month working in the mines next to Bermo and then came back home.[55] When they were released, they were given a little money, as a compensation for expenses incurred while working at some distance from their own village.[56] Some of them used this sum to finance their migrations. Colonial worksites included workers from different backgrounds, who exchanged information on places they had visited and activities they had carried out. Hence, while forced labour is generally remembered as a form of continued exploitation, I collected testimonies that highlighted the emancipatory potential of encounters with workers and military supervisors from other African regions on colonial worksites. Enslavement, forced labour and migrant labour figure as mutually constitutive experiences in the biographies of some African workers. A focus on individual experience exposes the connections between these activities from the perspectives of slave descendants. Men who had experienced personal subservience to a master became aware of new possibilities on colonial worksites. These experiences influenced their migration projects. However, as they endeavoured to realise their projects, they were confronted with new obstacles.

For migrants who came from the poorest communities, travel posed major challenges and yielded meagre returns. They lacked the initial capital to cover the costs of migration. Travel happened outside the space of safe livelihood arrangements, in which one knew how to find at least one daily meal. These migrants were under pressure to find any kind of job as soon as they arrived at their destination. Their precarious status meant that migrant savings, if at all possible, were limited. They travelled to places they had not seen before, eager to operate as free agents and to learn new skills and activities that they would bring back to a home that was now their own, and not their master's. As a young man, Mousa had been recruited into forced labour several times.[57] He carried stones in Keita, dug out chalk from quarries, contributed to road constructions. Mousa started migrating at the time of forced

labour. He went to Zaria, Funtua, Malumfashi, Tchiga and Majaji in Northern Nigeria.[58] He travelled with others, but at his destination he stayed by himself, at the place of someone who accepted to host him and for whom he did casual work in exchange. There were days when he had to beg to get something to eat since he was paid very little for his work. He got a *dala* (5 francs) for a day's work. He carried water and wood. He helped a woman who traded fritters by carrying them for her to the market and helping her to sell them. Once he remained in Zaria one whole year, because he got a stable job picking cotton. Earnings were so small that he could not afford to eat meat with his meals. He did all sorts of jobs for very small payments. Sometimes he received food as pay. In the end, he always returned to his village in Ader, because he could not stand the thought of abandoning his parents and relatives:

> I ate, I was well, they were hungry back home. I could not run away. It was hunger that pushed me to migrate in the first place, so I knew how hard life was for the elders back home. But other migrants, to this day, they never came back.[59]

I asked Mousa if he had remained in contact with migrants from his village who had stayed abroad, or with their descendants. He replied that I was forgetting their origins. Those who left for good did not want to remain in touch with their past and reveal their slave origins:

> When slavery was abolished, many left. Today, they have become 'Aderawa' and 'Hausawa': they changed their ethnicity (*yanzu sun zama* 'Aderawa', *sun zama* 'Hausawa' – *sun sake*). Today there are many migrants from here in Nigeria. They left because of hunger. Farming did not yield results. They never came back.[60]

Settled on Ader's dry and rocky hills, Mousa's village is exposed to drought and famine every year, and the harvest never suffices to meet its inhabitants' subsistence needs. High rates of population growth keep increasing the need for migration remittances. In the 1920s and 1930s, these scarcely productive lands were progressively abandoned by the few families of former masters who had never exploited them for farming purposes and lost their herds during the 1970s and 1980s droughts, which hit Niger's pastoralists harshly. In Mousa's lifetime, these scarcely productive lands became his own, and Mousa kept returning to his village in Ader in-between seasonal labour migrations. His brother was the first independent village chief and did not travel. Mousa instead travelled to many destinations and learned how to farm different types of cereals in Hausa towns to the south. His village had been a camp of dependent herders who took care of their masters' animals; they were skilled herders, but did not practice agriculture and only gathered wild produce.[61] Mousa and his fellow migrants claim to have introduced farming to the village.

Permanent departures followed success at their destinations and the acquisition of productive resources that yielded better returns than Ader's arid lands. But many slave descendants in villages like Kudeydey could not gain access to property rights over land at the destination of their travels. They travelled as poor people, and were seen as such by host populations. Marrying into the free sections of host societies must have been extremely difficult. The most marginal migrants in the 1930s and 1940s only sold their

labour in their travels. Thereby they accessed revenues that they could keep for themselves and make available to their own families at their return. The stories of the ones who made it and settled abroad fall outside the remits of this article, based upon research carried out in the region of origin of migrants of slave descent. For many, low status as migrant workers prevented their permanent integration in host societies. More precisely, it denied them access to land and brides. Rather than turning into dispossessed proletariat abroad, they kept returning to Ader, where having once been owned, they could now own productive resources and be responsible for their families.

Slave descendants and freeborn migrants travelled in different ways and with different objectives. While labour migrations functioned as avenues of emancipation for Ader's ex-slaves, migration offered greater and faster economic mobility to free Hausa traders. When former slaves chose to benefit from the support of established diasporas from their region, they had to accept dependent positions. This option was not taken in the cases discussed above. Successful migrants cut ties with a stigmatising past and did not maintain relations with their hometown, or establish diasporas that would support subsequent generations of migrants from their villages. The first two or three generations of migrants of slave descent who travelled in the 1920s–1940s sought to distance themselves from their origins, when they could. This meant that successive generations of migrants did not benefit from established networks of 'their own people', but had to overcome the obstacles that confront strangers in foreign destinations. The establishment of host-migrant relations and professional niches had costs and reduced potential savings from migrant labour. During their stay abroad, the earnings of migrants of slave descent supported the business activities of their free hosts, rather than being available for investment to migrants themselves. The financial returns to labour of the first generations of seasonal migrants of slave status were negligible. However, in these travels, migrants experienced the beginning of their emancipation.

Contexts of choice: making sense of the migration projects of slave descendants

This section advances some conceptual and methodological reflections on the research approach of this article. The Ader case study discussed above shows that in order to identify the historical causes and consequences of the migrations of slave descendants, researchers have to examine the contexts in which particular migrants developed their migration projects. Focusing on contexts of choice entails at least four considerations.[62] First, contexts of choice are shaped by ideologies (of status, gender, race, honour, etc.), and this in turn implies that choices are never neutral, but are valued according to established norms that reflect overwhelmingly the point of view of dominant groups at any one time and place. In particular, we need to reflect upon the stigma attached to slave origins and how awareness of this stigma would have influenced a former slave's agency. Secondly, the social relations that individuals and groups partake of also determine the decision context in which emancipation strategies are developed. Slave descendants conceived their migration projects knowing that they could, or could not, count on the collaboration of specific individuals if

they opted for one or the other course of action, and that certain activities would have jeopardised existing alliances. The strategic alliances established in the course of migrations presupposed an informed assessment of pre-existing relations that were essentially hierarchical. Some alliances strengthened traditional hierarchies; others were premised on the renegotiation of such hierarchies; yet others denied past hierarchies and led to the creation of new ones. Individual agents shaped their aspirations according to their own perceptions of what they considered accessible or inaccessible to them. In this respect, male and female slave descendants had different expectations of the potential outcomes of migration.[63] Finally, these considerations also apply to our interpretation of sources. Just as choices must be seen as contextual and positioned, so the testimonies we rely upon convey the positioned perspectives of their authors. As we reflect critically on how the subjects of our research were positioned in relation to the events they experienced, we must also be aware of the ways in which the time elapsed between the moment when an event occurred and its oral or textual recording may have altered the speakers' perceptions of their own and other people's experiences. Below, I discuss these points in relation to recently published studies that focus on the relation between migration and emancipation.

The trajectories of social mobility available to migrants of slave descent did not exist in a vacuum, ready to be seized by enterprising young migrants. They unfolded in spaces shaped by ideologies of status, which reflected the views of dominant groups. Status ideologies were harder to escape than former masters. Ideologies followed migrants through their travels and reminded them of the dangers involved in crossing status boundaries. Cities attracted ex-slaves and slave descendants wishing to find employment opportunities in urban contexts where their origins could be more easily concealed. However, urban migration did not always erase the memory of unfree ancestry. One's past could resurface upon meeting someone from one's village in town. Where hosts had no elements to gauge the status of immigrant workers, suspicion resulted in the ascription of potential slave origins. Migrants wishing to distance themselves from humble origins faced the stigma attached to foreigner status in new host societies. Looking at a Soninke village located in the Upper River Gambia, Paolo Gaibazzi's research explores the transition between the difficult integration of immigrants into Sabi society, and the development of new projects of migration by a part of the descendants of earlier generations of immigrants.[64] At least some of Sabi's first-generation immigrants were not seasonal labour migrants, but migrants who had come to stay. This implied marrying into local households. Yet, their foreign origins often concealed slave descent – or in any case this was the assumption made by their hosts, who offered slave women as brides to newcomers. Ideologies of status permeated responses to the expectations and demands of foreigners as they had permeated relations with (ex-)slaves. Hence, permanent migrations enabled transitions across degrees of marginality more than outright exit from slavery.

Studies of slaves' exoduses in the early phases of colonial rule emphasise the emancipatory potential of ex-slaves' departures. Yet, the new life that had to be negotiated upon arrival was fraught with difficulties.[65] Slave descendants who could rely on the

diaspora of former masters often did so at the cost of retaining a dependent position in the course of their travels. As shown in Jean Schmitz's outstanding study of emancipation strategies in the Senegal River Valley, ex-slaves who took advantage of the patronage of masters in the course of their labour migrations were sometimes able to improve their conditions faster than the ones who cut ties.[66] Different individuals opted for different strategies. Their choices must be analysed in relation to the specific contexts of choice faced by different persons at different stages in their lives. Lotte Pelckmans studied related ruling families of sedentarised Fulbe elites in the Haayre region of Central Mali.[67] Here, children of slave concubines as opposed to their siblings born from two freeborn parents were sent to French schools. This reflected a negative bias against them, as some Fulbe elites refrained from sending their children to French schools in the early years of colonial rule. When forced to do so by colonial authorities, they sent the children of their concubines as opposed to those of their freeborn wives. However, French education turned out to give advantages to children of slave concubines. Muusa Dicko, son of King Yerowal and the concubine Faata, worked as a teacher in various parts of Mali. Later in his life, he returned to Haayre and, in 2002, he became the first elected mayor of the rural municipality of Dalla. His status had unexpectedly worked to his advantage. From having been sent off to a destiny deemed undesirable, he became more influential than many of his 'fully freeborn' relatives. Although he inherited fewer and lower-ranking dependants than his siblings, his dependants partook of his own and his children's social and spatial mobility, thus rising in status compared to the ex-slave dependants of other Dalla elites.

Individual social mobility cannot be assessed in absolute terms, but only acquires meaning in relation to the hierarchies in which social actors are embedded. Moreover, the upward mobility of one person rearranges the relative hierarchical positions of others who belong to the same networks. Muusa's son, Samba Dicko, was accompanied in his studies in Abuja (Nigeria) by Souleymane, a junior member of a family of royal slaves. In his migrations, Souleymane travelled both to work independently and to move as an assistant/ servant of Samba Dicko. In Bamako, he resided at the Dicko's family compound. Souleymane's elder daughter, Aafi, was hosted at the household of Samba Dicko when she moved to Douentza to complete her secondary education. Her studies, made possible by the patronage of Muusa Dicko's family to which her father was related through ties of former servitude, may one day turn out to accelerate her emancipation, just as education had been an asset to Muusa Dicko in relation to his half-siblings. Detailed studies that follow individuals of slave descent along their trajectories of spatial and social mobility reveal worlds where shades of grey are of the essence. Researchers need to fine-tune their analytical tools to capture hierarchical nuances and see how these influenced the behaviour of agents who belonged to the very hierarchies that defined their options. Their strategies cannot be properly understood except in relation to existential contexts shaped by hierarchies that are both constraining and enabling. Paying attention to hierarchical nuances carries a heuristic premium, for nuance is often what explains who stays and who goes; who follows whom; who goes where; and how different people can move.

Enslaved women had distinct avenues of self-realisation.[68] In Muslim contexts, enslaved women and their children could be emancipated through concubinage. The slave concubines of powerful men often occupied privileged positions even in comparison to those of many women of free status.[69] Concubines aspired to being manumitted upon the death of their masters (or sooner), as under Maliki law, free status gave them privileges that enslaved women could not have, such as the right to own and inherit property, or have a legal standing separate from that of their masters.[70] Yet in societies where women lived most of their lives under the tutelage of men, and where women's activities in the sexual division of labour yielded smaller returns than those accessible to men, concubinage may have been a desirable option for slave women. Emancipated concubines often chose to remain with their master's families. Ann McDougall discusses the life of Fatma Barka, who as a child at the beginning of the twentieth century, had been purchased in the French Sudan (today's Mali) by Mohamed Barka, a Timbuktu merchant originally from Goulimine (southern Morocco). At some point in her youth, Fatma became the concubine of her master. This accrued respect to Fatma, or at least this is how she felt about her new status.[71] After her master's death, Fatma continued to run his household. She also started working on her own account, married a slave descendant and gave birth to three children, of whom only one boy survived. In her 'free' life, Fatma had to face her husband's betrayal. He stole the title to her land and sold her property, which she was able to redeem with the help of the descendants of her former master. She travelled independently and took up many jobs, she worked in a sardine factory in Agadir, she carried out business with other women, and she helped her son to get married in Goulimine, where after his marriage she worked for wages. When she died of old age in 1995, Fatma was still participating in the life of the Barka family.

It is likely that our sources over-represent the life-stories of concubines who were relatively content with their lot, and therefore chose to share their experiences with researchers. Alongside a small number of privileged concubines, concubines united to poorer men, or unable to attract the favours of their masters and his free wives, lived a bitter life. Some, like Inna Nana in Northern Nigeria, were not manumitted and at their husband's death had nothing and no one to rely upon:

> You know it is only the married women (legally married according to the Shari'ah) that are entitled to inheritance. Of course, the estate was administered and all his wives received their shares according to the law. Only a legally married wife can inherit her deceased husband [sic]. Isn't this the law? For me, I was left with no guarantee of even what to eat. I have to feed myself. You know I am also a part of the estate and can be inherited so how can I acquire property within a property clause. I received nothing from the estate.[72]

Others escaped from their masters/husbands when they had a chance to do so. It is often unclear from colonial reports how many of the runaway slave women whose 'husbands'/masters claimed as their wives were female slaves or concubines.[73] Yet a growing corpus of research on slave women in Africa indicates that large numbers of female ex-slaves walked away from their masters following colonial emancipation. Lovejoy shows that, in the early years of British occupation of Northern Nigeria, a large

proportion of slave fugitives were women: 'These runaways are all women; mostly con-cubines.'[74] Marie Rodet's study on the exodus and migration of female ex-slaves in Upper Senegal shows that *more female than male slaves* left their masters and migrated into freedom villages, cities or rural areas.[75] The fact that they sometimes left their children behind, or moved to unsafe and harsh working conditions, bears witness to their resentment of a life in bondage and the double (sexual and labour) exploita-tion to which they had been exposed.

The experiences of slaves and slave descendants reveal that individual slaves, like freeborn, were able to carve for themselves unique positions in the societies to which they belonged. Their room for manoeuvre was often narrower than that of the freeborn but, like free men and women, they tried to devise trajectories that gave them greater control over their lives. Their gender, age and individual character-istics (e.g. the strength of a slave man, or his religious inclinations and intellectual skills; the beauty of slave woman, her entrepreneurship, etc.) made certain trajectories more accessible than others. Their position in any one social network was not only marked by slavery, but also by their individual qualities and by how they took advan-tage of specific geographic, social and political circumstances.[76] Choosing if, when and how to move was a precondition for achieving greater control over their own existence. Sources often do not state explicitly if migrants were or were not satisfied with their circumstances in different locations. When sources do characterise migrations as failed or successful, such judgements may tell us more about the interests of their authors than about the achievements of ex-slaves.[77] Colonial reports emphasise the 'unruliness' of former slaves; elderly slave descendants sometimes romanticise their labour migrations as successful adventures; descendants of masters trivialise the achievements of their former dependants. These perspectives are not just subjective bias that distorts the 'facts' of history. The emotions that colour them are inseparable from the experiential dimension that this article aims to capture. The idealisation of a master's authority, or of the freedom that cities would offer, influenced decisions as much as economic calculus and political contingence. Similarly, European ideologies of race, class and slavery influenced colonial legislation and administrative practice. Bias and subjectivity shape agency, and human agency shapes history.

Conclusion

As slaves strategically moved in space in order to move up the social ladder, their status often hindered their projects. Migrations required financial and social capital. This put (former) slaves at a disadvantage. In some cases, migration granted only temporary relief from the stigma attached to slave descent. Florence Boyer described how Tuareg slave descendants from the region of Bankilaré (Niger) were able to operate anonymously at the destination of their migrations, but once reintegrated in their community, they resumed their subordinate role *vis-à-vis* former masters.[78] Migrants of slave descent who chose to rely on the support of networks from their region could not hide their slave origins abroad. This had implications for the types of activities they could undertake at their destination. Those who opted out of these support

networks did so at their own peril. They could find themselves isolated aliens in a foreign land, a condition not far from the marginality that characterised the newly enslaved.[79]

This article set out to consider how the trajectories of West African slaves, freed slaves and slave descendants could be analysed, and their constrained and contextual choices examined. Paul Ricoeur has argued that history has the potential to 'retell events otherwise' and from the other's point of view.[80] In order to do so, like Ann McDougall, historians must attempt to 'adjust their understandings' to the perspectives of the subjects of their research.[81] These perspectives change as people move in space and through life. Looking at the mobility of slaves and slave descendants places experience at the centre of the analysis. This does not reveal every aspect of the history of emancipation. But it constitutes an attempt to tell the story of emancipation otherwise, from the point of view of persons of slave descent. Once it is re-presented this way, emancipation ceases to be an abstract concept and can be studied as a dynamic process in the history of African labour.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] M'baye Guèye, 'La fin de l'esclavage à Saint-Louis et à Gorée en 1848', *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire*, Ser. B, 28, nos. 3/4 (1965): 637–56; François Renault, 'L'abolition de l'esclavage au Sénégal. L'attitude de l'administration française, 1848–1905', *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer* 58, no. 1 (1971): 5–81; Gerald McSheffrey, 'Slavery, Indentured Servitude, Legitimate Trade and the Impact of Abolition in the Gold Coast, 1874–1901', *Journal of African History* 23, no. 3 (1983): 349–68; Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), chap. 11.

[2] Martin Klein and Richard Roberts, 'The Banamba Slave Exodus of 1905 and the Decline of Slavery in the Western Sudan', *Journal of African History* 21, no. 3 (1980): 375–94; Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chaps. 10 and 12.

[3] Martin Klein, 'Slave Descent and Social Status in Sahara and Sudan', in *Reconfiguring Slavery: West African Trajectories*, ed. Benedetta Rossi (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 29. For statistical data on the movements of ex-slaves in different regions of French West Africa, see Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, 170–4.

[4] Paul Lovejoy and Jan Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery: The Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897–1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 61.

[5] Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, 140.

[6] François Manchuelle, 'Slavery, Emancipation and Labour Migration in West Africa: The Case of the Soninke', *Journal of African History* 30, no. 1 (1989): 89–106; Benedetta Rossi, 'Slavery and Migration: Social and Physical Mobility in Ader (Niger)', in *Reconfiguring Slavery: West African Trajectories*, ed. Benedetta Rossi (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 182–206; Florence Boyer, 'L'esclavage chez les touareg de Bankilaré au miroir des migrations circulaires', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 45, nos. 3/4 (2005): 771–804; Daouda Gary-Tounkara, *Migrants soudanais/maliens et conscience ivoirienne: les étrangers en Cote d'Ivoire, 1903–1980* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008); Marie Rodet, *Les migrantes ignorées du Haut-Sénégal, 1900–1946* (Paris: Karthala, 2009); Lotte Pelckmans, *Travelling Hierarchies: Roads in and out of Slave Status in a Central Malian Fulbe Network* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2011).

[7] Frederick Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya 1890–1925* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1980); Ahmad Sikainga, *Slaves into Workers: Emancipation and Labor in Colonial Sudan* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); François Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants: Soninke Labor Diasporas, 1848–1960* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997); Rodet, *Les migrants ignorées*; Richard Roberts and Suzanne Miers, 'Introduction: The End of Slavery in Africa', in *The End of Slavery in Africa*, ed. Richard Roberts and Suzanne Miers (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), see especially the editors' discussion of these issues at pages 27–47. See also Brian Peterson, 'Slave Emancipation, Translocal Social Processes and the Spread of Islam in French Colonial Buguni (Southern Mali), 1893–1914', *Journal of African History* 45, no. 3 (2004): 421–44; Bernard Moitt, 'Slavery and Emancipation in Senegal's Peanut Basin: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Century', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 22, no. 1 (1989): 43–4; Johnson Asiegbu, 'British Slave Emancipation and "Free" Labour Recruitment from West Africa', *Sierra Leone Studies* 26, no. 1 (1970): 37–47.

[8] One of the main advocates of the focus on experience in the history of labour has been Edward P. Thompson, see preface to *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1963) and Edward P. Thompson, 'The Poverty of Theory: An Orrery of Errors', in *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, ed. Edward P. Thompson (London: Merlin Press, 1978), 193–397. In the history of African labour, this perspective has been advocated by John Iliffe:

> a labour movement has its roots not in politics, but in work. It grows out of the nature of work, the economic and social position of the worker, and his response to his position. To view it solely from the 'top' is to miss the dynamic which powers the movement. This history of a labour movement must therefore be based in a history of work, and the most profound sense of change within it is the changing character of work in which men are engaged,
> (John Iliffe, 'The Creation of Group Consciousness: A History of the Dockworkers of Dar es Salaam', in *The Development of an African Working Class: Studies in Class Formation and Action*, ed. Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen (London: Longman, 1975), 49)

[9] Some of this work has been integrated in a research project organised by Alice Bellagamba, Martin Klein, Sandra Greene and Carolyn Brown. They have run conferences in Bellagio, Toronto and Buea in Cameroon, in which over 80 scholars participated and contributed their research on African sources on the history of slavery and the slave trade. This project will produce a number of outputs, including a collection of primary sources: Alice Bellagamba, Sandra Greene, and Martin Klein, eds., *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[10] Sandra Greene defined 'slave narratives' as 'oral and written texts produced by or in collaboration with the (formerly) enslaved and their descendants about their experiences with the

institution of slavery', Sandra Greene, *West African Narratives of Slavery: Texts from Late Nine-teenth and Early Twentieth Century Ghana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 3. Lovejoy suggested that at least some of these sources should be re-labelled 'freedom narra-tives', see Paul E. Lovejoy, '"Freedom Narratives" of Transatlantic Slavery', *Slavery and Abolition* 32, no. 1 (March 2011): 91–107.

[11]   ... to recapture what we can of the ways in which the labouring poor lived, acted and thought, is important, and insofar as it is now producing a spate of 'oral history' or even [...] memoirs actually written by men and women from the working class, an essential widening of our perspective. And yet these things are not ends in themselves, however excited we may feel at discovering what has been hitherto unknown. If we do not formulate questions first and look for the material in the light of these questions, we risk producing merely a leftwing version of antiquarianism, work which is the equivalent of that of amateur folklore collectors.
        (Eric Hobsbawm, 'Labor History and Ideology', *Journal of Social History* 7, no. 4 (1974): 375)

[12]   Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery*, 286.

[13]   Paul Lovejoy, 'Indigenous African Slavery', in *Roots and Branches: Current Directions in Slave Studies*, ed. Michael Craton (Toronto: Pergamon Press, 1979), 53.

[14]   Between April and the end of May 1906 an estimated 3,000 slaves left Banamba and the nearby Maraka cities. The plight of these slaves was often desperate. Dispos-sessed, they often went for days with little or nothing to eat. Many slaves probably ended up in Bamako where demands for labour were easily met that year. Most undoubtedly made it back to earlier homes.
        (Klein and Roberts, 'Banamba Slave Exodus', 391)

[15]   Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, see especially pp. 66–74, 150–1, 164–76, and all of chaps. 12 and 13.

[16]   Timothy Weiskel, 'Labor in the Emergent Periphery: From Slavery to Migrant Labor among the Baule Peoples, 1880–1925', in *The World-System of Capitalism: Past and Present*, ed. Walter Godfrank (London: Sage, 1979), 207–31.

[17]   For a broader discussion of these perspectives, see Frederick Cooper, 'Africa and the World Economy', *African Studies Review* 24, nos. 2–3 (1981): 22.

[18]   Michael Todaro, 'A Model of Labour Migration and Urban Unemployment in Less Developed Countries', *American Economic Review* 59, no. 1 (1969): 138–48.

[19]   Elisabeth Colson, 'Migrations in Africa: Trends and Possibilities', in *Population in Africa*, ed. Frank Lorimer and Mark Karp (Boston, MA: Boston University Press, 1960), 63.

[20]   Elliot Berg, 'The Economics of the Migrant Labour System', in *Urbanization and Migration in West Africa*, ed. Hilda Kuper (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 174.

[21]   Samir Amin, 'Migrations in Contemporary Africa: A Retrospective View', in *The Migration Experience in Africa*, ed. Jonathan Baker and Akin Tade (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1995), 31.

[22]   Samir Amin, ed., *Modern Migrations in Western Africa* (London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1974); Claude Meillassoux, 'Development or Exploita-tion: Is the Sahel Famine Good Business?', *Review of African Political Economy* 1, no. 1 (1974): 27–33; Jean-Loup Amselle, 'Famine, prolétarisation, et création de nouveaux liens de dépendance au Sahel: les réfugiés de Mopti et de Léré au Mali', *Politique Africaine* 1, no. 1 (1981): 5–22; Michael Watts, *Silent Violence: Food, Famine, and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Jean Copans, 'The Sahelian Drought: Social Sciences and the Political Economy of Underdevelopment', in *Interpretations of Calamity*, ed. Kenneth Hewitt (Boston, MA: Allen and Unwin, 1983), 83–97; Thomas Painter, *Migrations, Social Reproduction and Development in Africa*. Development Policy

and Practice Research Group, Working Paper No. 7 (London: Open University Press, 1987); H.A.C. Main, 'Workers, Retrenchment, and Urban-Rural Linkages in Kano, Nigeria', in *Inequality and Development: Case Studies from the Third World*, ed. Kenneth Swindell, J.M. Baba, and Michael Mortimore (London: Macmillan, 1989), 223–42; Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

[23] Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 17.

[24] To my knowledge, the best early study in support of this point is: François Manchuelle, 'The "Patriarchal Ideal" of Soninke Labour Migrants: From Slave Owners to Employers of Free Labor', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 23, no. 1 (1989): 106–25. Manchuelle used primarily archival data, complemented by testimonies collected in his own field research.

[25] For an insightful discussion of how African intellectuals, too, contributed to the 'silencing' of African slavery, see Ibrahima Thioub, 'Regard critique sur les lectures africaines de l'esclavage et de la Traite Atlantique', in *Les Historiens africains et la mondialisation*, ed. Issiaka Mandé and Blandine Stefanson (Paris: Karthala, 2005), 271–92.

[26] Paul Lubeck, *Islam and Urban Labour in Northern Nigeria: The Making of a Muslim Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 136–7. 'Buzu' is a Hausa term that refers to Tuareg of slave descent.

[27] Bill Freund, *Capital and Labour in the Nigerian Tin Mines* (Harlow: Longman, 1981), 51–2.

[28] Interview with Mousa, Zangon Sama (pseudonym), November 26, 2008.

[29] Enslaved persons' attempts to 'pass for free' are well documented in American historiography, see, for example, Amani Marshall, '"They Will Endeavor to Pass for Free": Enslaved Runaways' Performances of Freedom in Antebellum South Carolina', *Slavery and Abolition* 31, no. 2 (2012): 161–80.

[30] I provide an example of emancipation of Tuareg slave descendants through intermarriage with free Hausa and ethnic passing across three–four generations in Benedetta Rossi, 'Being and Becoming Hausa in Ader (Niger)', in *Being and Becoming Hausa: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Anne Haour and Benedetta Rossi (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 113–40.

[31] Jean Rouch, 'Migrations au Ghana (Gold Coast)', *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 26, nos. 1/2 (1956): 164, my translation.

[32] Abner Cohen, *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa: A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 191.

[33] Igor Wallerstein, 'Migration in West Africa: The Political Perspective', in *Urbanization and Migration in West Africa*, ed. Hilda Kuper (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 155.

[34] In addition to the authors mentioned above, see literature discussed in Bill Freund, 'Labor and Labor History in Africa: A Review of the Literature', *African Studies Review* 27, no. 2 (1984): 6.

[35] Recently, this question has been revived in Frederick Cooper, Thomas Holt, and Rebecca Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor and Citizenship in Post-Emancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); see also Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) and Gary-Tounkara, *Migrants soudanais/maliens*.

[36] Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 223.

[37] Cf. Adrian Peace, 'Industrial Protest in Nigeria', in *The Development of an African Working Class: Studies in Class Formation and Action*, ed. Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen (London: Longman, 1975), 41.

[38] Richard Roberts, 'The Peculiarities of African Labour and Working-Class History', *Labour/Le Travailleur* 8, no. 9 (1981): 317–8. See also Cooper, *Decolonization*, 273.

[39] Bill Freund, *The African Worker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 16; Cooper, *Decolonization*, see in particular 383–86; and Cooper, 'Africa and the World Economy', 32–48.

Keletso Atkins published a study of South African labour in Natal that privileged the perspective of workers themselves, K. Atkins, *The Moon Is Dead! Give Us Our Money! The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843–1900* (London: James Currey, 1993).

[40] Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, 208.

[41] Aurelien Mauxion, 'Moving to Stay: Iklan Spatial Strategies Towards Socioeconomic Emancipation in Northern Mali, 1898–1960', *Journal of African History* 53, no. 2 (2012): 195–213.

[42] Commandant de Cercle de Tahoua De Loppinot to Gouverneur Générale AOF Court, 21 October 1933, Archives Nationales du Niger (ANN) 1E1.

[43] Comm. de Cercle De Loppinot, rapport de tournée, 14 February 1933, ANN 1E15.65. Comm. de Cercle de Loppinot, rapport de tournée, 4 April 1933, ANN 1E15.92.

[44] Comm. de Cercle Paolini, rapport politique du deuxième semestre 1934, ANN 1E16.67.

[45] With Ordinance No. 19,

> 'all persons born in *or brought into* Northern Nigeria' were free. It was no longer necessary for individuals to pay their ransoms or acquire certificates of freedom in the Islamic courts. Ordinance No. 19 was the last piece of legislation in the long history of legal-status abolition in Northern Nigeria.
> (Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery*, 30 (Note 113), 261).

The North–South movement of 1936 could not, instead, be related to harvest failures in Northern areas, as 1936 was characterised by exceptionally abundant rains, reaching 231 mm in Agadez and 611 mm in Tahoua (Edmond Bernus, 'La zone pastorale touaregue: évolution ou mutation?', in *Les dynamiques du changement en Afrique sub-saharienne*, ed. Claude Arditi (Paris, 1996), 48. See also Mansell Prothero, *Migrant Labour from Sokoto Province* (Northern Region of Nigeria: The Government Printer, 1958), 18–19; Kenneth Swindell, 'Farmers, Traders, and Labourers: Dry Season Migration from North-West Nigeria 1900–33', *Africa* 54, no. 1 (1984): 17.

[46] Hereafter, all vernacular citations are in Hausa. The commercial strategies of nineteenth century *fatakke* are known to us from several sources and studies, including Eduard R. Flegel, *The Biography of Madugu Mohamman Mai Gashin Baki*, trans. and ed. Mark Duffill (Los Angeles, CA: Crossroads Press, 1985 [1885]); Abdulkarim Umar Dan Asabe, 'Comparative Biographies of Selected Leaders of the Kano Commercial Establishment' (MA thesis, Department of History, Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria, 1987). The Agalawa community studied by Dan Asabe was originally a Tamasheq-speaking group from Ader. I am thankful to Professor Paul Lovejoy for sharing with me his copy of Dan Asabe's thesis. See also Emmanuel Grégoire, *The Alhazai of Maradi: Traditional Hausa Merchants in a Changing Sahelian City* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1992).

[47] Interview with anonymised elders, Zango, November 28, 2008. Due to the stigma attached to slave descent and slave descendants' attempts to conceal their origins, I anonymised interviewees of slave status and their villages. I discuss the ethical implications of this choice in Benedetta Rossi, 'Without History? Interrogating Slave Memories in Ader (Niger)', in *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade*, ed. Alice Bellagamba, Sandra Greene, and Martin Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 536–54. Migrants travelling with a gourd in which they carried water and porridge (*fura*) figure in the expression quoted by Abraham with reference to seasonal migrants, 'masu tuma da gora', lit. those who jump around with a gourd, which Abraham translated freely as 'fast traveling Adrar people', and Prothero corrected, noting that Abraham must have been referring to migrants from Adar (not Adrar); Roy Abraham, *Dictionary of the Hausa Language* (London: s.n., 1949), 722; Prothero, *Migrant Labour*, 254, footnote.

[48] Interview, Goudou (pseudonym), November 27, 2008.

[49] Interview, Goudou, November 27, 2008.

[50] Interview, Zango, November 28, 2008.

[51] Interview, Goudou, November 27, 2008.

[52] Interview, Goudou, November 27, 2008.

[53]   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.

[54]   Interview, Kudeydey, December 1, 2008.

[55]   Town situated roughly 100 km east of Keita.

[56]   As early as 1912, French colonial legislation concerning prestations established that workers working further away than 5 km from their village had to receive a daily food ration or be compensated in cash, see Article 3 of the decree of 25 November 1912, J.O. AOF 11–1–13, no. 1930(6) portant règlementation de la prestation des indigènes dans les colonies et territoires du Gouvernement général de l'AOF. Archives Nationales du Sénégal, K77 (26).

[57]   Interview with Mousa, Zangon Sama, November 26, 2008.

[58]   I could not identify the last two locations.

[59]   Interview with Mousa, Zangon Sama, November 26, 2008.

[60]   Interview with Mousa, Zangon Sama, November 26, 2008.

[61]   Edmond Bernus, 'Cueillette et exploitation des ressources spontanées du Sahel nigérien par les kel tamasheq', *Cahiers ORSTOM* 4, no. 1 (1967): 31–52.

[62]   The notion of 'context of choice' was developed in liberal political theory to argue in favour of group-differentiated rights, see Will Kimlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 164–6. In this article, this notion is used more generally along the lines discussed by Katherine Fierlbeck, 'Getting Representation Right for Women in Development', in *Getting Institutions Right for Women in Development*, ed. Anne Marie Goetz (London: Zed, 1998), 223–34.

[63]   For a theoretical discussion of this point, see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), Book 1, chap. 1.

[64]   Paolo Gaibazzi, 'The Rank Effect: Post-emancipation Immobility in a Soninke Village', *Journal of African History* 53, no. 2 (2012): 215–34.

[65]   The two main works I know of which examine in detail what happened to former slaves after they reached the destinations of their migrations are Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters* and Sikainga, *Slaves into Workers*, both of which focus on East Africa. For West Africa, even the most exhaustive study of the relation between migrations and status mobility – Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants* – does not discuss the consequences of slave descent in Chapter 7 on the conditions of urban migrants in 1930–1960. Two papers of this author address this topic more explicitly: Manchuelle, 'Slavery, Emancipation, and Labour Migration in West Africa' and Manchuelle, 'Patriarchal Ideal of Soninke Labour Migrants'. For Ghana, there exist several substantial studies of the conditions of migrant labour at destination, but they say little about the consequences of slave descent for the workers in question, see, for example, Rouch, 'Migrations au Ghana'; Polly Hill, *Migrant Cocoa-Farmers of Southern Ghana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963); Gareth Austin, *Labour, Land and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante, 1807–1956* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), see particularly chap. 19. A noteworthy exception to the tendency of authors to dismiss slave status as they follow migrants' activities at destination is Daniel Delaunay, *De la captivité à l'exil: histoire et démographie des migrations paysannes dans la moyenne vallée du Sénégal* (Paris: ORSTOM, 1984). However the author's demographic approach, while interesting, provides scarce information on the personal, experiential dimension of migrations. The question of how the changes brought about through migrations affected the status of migrants of slave descent, and vice versa, how their status affected their movements, only started being addressed recently, see Meskerem Brhane, 'Histoires de Nouakchott: narrations de hrâtîn sur le pouvoir et l'identité', in *Groupes serviles au Sahara*, ed. Mariella Villasante-de Beauvais (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2000), 195–234; Yaya Sy, 'l'esclavage chez les soninké: du village à Paris', *Journal des Africanistes* 70, no. 1 (2000): 43–69; Benedetta Rossi, 'Slavery and Migration: Physical and Social Mobility in Ader (Tahoua)', in *Reconfiguring Slavery: West African Trajectories*, ed. Benedetta Rossi (Liverpool: Liverpool

University Press), 182–206. The most extensive study of this issue is Pelckmans, *Travelling Hierarchies.*

[66] Jean Schmitz, 'Islamic Patronage and Republican Emancipation: The Slaves of the Almaami in the Senegal River Valley', in *Reconfiguring Slavery: West African Trajectories*, ed. Benedetta Rossi (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 85–115.

[67] Pelckmans, *Travelling Hierarchies*, see in particular chaps. 3, 6, 8 and 9.

[68] The study of women and slavery in Africa has received growing attention in recent years. Some of the main studies in this field are: Clare Robertson and Martin Klein, eds., *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); Marcia Wright, *Strategies of Slaves and Women: Life Histories from East/Central Africa* (London: James Currey, 1993). Joseph Miller, Gwen Campbell, and Suzanne Miers, eds., *Women and Slavery*, vol. 2 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), volume one contains cases from Africa. Patricia Romero's *Life Histories of African Women* (London: Ashfield Press, 1988) includes testimonies of enslaved women; and Marie Rodet's monograph focuses on the history of female migrants of slave descent, Rodet, *Les migrantes ignorées.*

[69] Beverley Mack, 'Hajiya Ma'daki: A Royal Hausa Woman', in *Life Histories of African Women*, ed. Patricia Romero (London: Ashfield Press, 1988), 47–77. See also Beverley Mack, 'Service and Status: Slaves and Concubines in Kano, Nigeria', in *At Work in Homes: Household Workers in World Perspective*, ed. Roger Sanjek and Shellee Colen (Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association Monograph Series, 1990), 14–34; Beverley Mack, 'Royal Wives in Kano', in *Hausa Women in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Catherine Coles and Beverley Mack (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 111–29.

[70] Cf. Paul Lovejoy, 'Concubinage in the Sokoto Caliphate (1804–1903)', *Slavery and Abolition* 11, no. 2 (1990): 172.

[71] Ann McDougall, 'A Sense of Self: The Life of Fatma Barka', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 32, no. 2 (1998): 288.

[72] Inna Nana, as cited by Ibrahim Hamza, 'Concubinage and the Legal Status of Property Inheritance in the Northern Nigerian Emirates' (Unpublished paper presented at conference 'Tales of Slavery: Narratives of Slavery, The Slave Trade and Enslavement in Africa', University of Toronto, Toronto (Canada), May 20–23, 2009).

[73] The distinction between these two statuses is clear in Maliki law, whereby concubines occupy a privileged legal position in relation to other categories of enslaved women, see Jonathan Brockopp, *Early Malicki Law. Ibn Abd al-Hakam and His Major Compendium of Jurisprudence* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 192–207; Joseph Schacht, 'Umm al-Walad', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 4, ed. Martijn Houtsma, Arent Wensink, and Hamilton A.R. Gibb (Leiden: Brill, 1936), 1012–15.

[74] Webster, Nassarawa Report, December 1904, as cited by Paul Lovejoy, 'Concubinage and the Status of Women Slaves in Early Colonial Northern Nigeria', *Journal of African History* 29, no. 2 (1988): 249.

[75] Rodet, *Les migrantes ignorées*, chap. 1.

[76] See Frederick Cooper, 'Commentary Two', in *Roots and Branches: Current Directions in Slave Studies*, ed. Michael Craton (Toronto: Pergamon, 1979), 82.

[77] As with all oral sources, slave testimonies and biographies must be subjected to critical analysis. On collecting and analysing African slave testimonies, see Philip Curtin, ed., *Africa Remembered: Narratives of West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967); Richard Roberts, 'Reversible Social Processes, Historical Memory, and the Production of History', *History in Africa* 17 (1990): 341–9; Andrew Clark, 'The Challenges of Cross-Cultural Oral History: Collecting and Presenting Pulaar Traditions on Slavery from Bundu, Senegambia (West Africa)', *Oral History Review* 20, nos. 1–2 (1992): 1–21; McDougall, 'Sense of Self'; Susan Rasmussen, 'The Slave Narrative in Life History and Myth and Problems of Ethnographic Representation of the Tuareg Cultural Predicament', *Ethnohistory* 46, no. 3 (1999): 67–108; Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press, 2009), chap. 1; Brian Peterson, 'History, Memory and the Legacy of Samori in Southern Mali, c. 1880–1898', *Journal of African History* 49, no. 2 (2008): 261–279; and see papers in the special issue on 'jeux de mémoire' edited by Marie-Aude Fouéré, *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 197 (2010). Sometimes information on the movements of slaves and ex-slaves is found in colonial archives or Islamic written documentation. Different types of sources raise different exegetic problems. The literature on this is extremely vast. For an overview of the main issues, I find particularly useful Karin Barber and Paulo-Fernando de Moraes Farias, eds., *Discourse and Its Disguises: The Interpretation of African Oral Texts* (Birmingham: CWAS Publications, 1989).

[78] Boyer, 'L'esclavage'.

[79] Igor Kopytoff and Susan Miers, 'Introduction: African Slavery as an Institution of Marginality', in *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Igor Kopytoff and Susan Miers (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press), 3–84.

[80] 'L'histoire apporte la capacité de raconter autrement [. . .] et dans le point de vue de l'autre', Paul Ricoeur, 'Mémoire, oubli, histoire', VHS, Canal du Savoir, Art et Education, (Paris: Mairie de Paris, 2000).

[81] McDougall, 'Sense of Self', 286.