

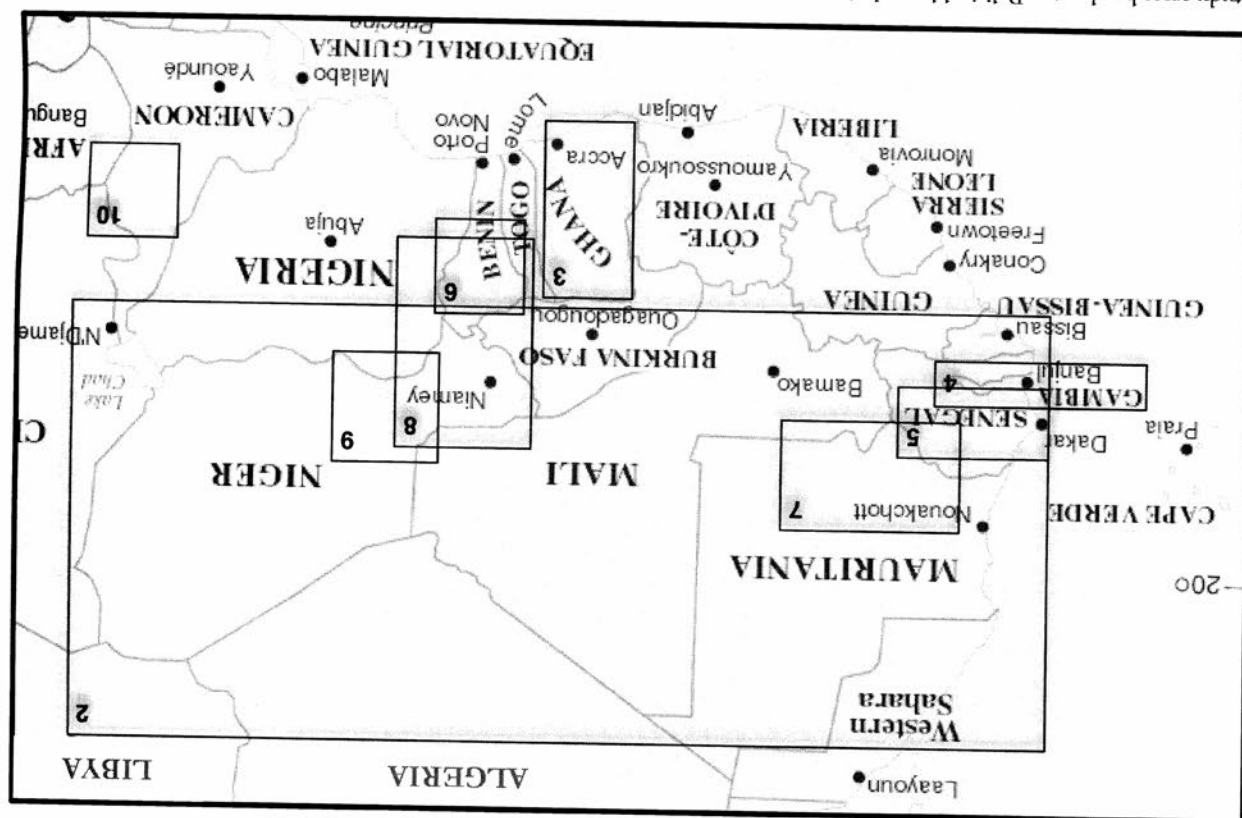
Introduction: Rethinking Slavery in West Africa

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Slavery has been pronounced dead many times in West Africa's modern history, yet it has not disappeared from research, the media, and reports of human rights organisations. This book does not retrace the aftermath of West African slavery, but rather it highlights the preliminary contours of its most recent reconfigurations. A number of publications have started documenting the new characteristics of African slavery.¹ Building on this new research, contributions to *Reconfiguring Slavery* show that, today in West African society, 'slavery' has acquired new practical and epistemological dimensions that cannot be explained by focusing solely on the end of historical forms of enslavement.²

Understanding the dynamics that define slavery's contemporary manifestations calls for new concepts and analytical frameworks. The notion of trajectory, which underlies this volume, attempts to trace transformations in how slavery has been perceived and experienced by different categories of actors in continuously changing circumstances. Most chapters focus on the trajectories followed by slave descendants. Yet, even within the same region or society, such trajectories vary. They lead not to a uniform end of slavery, but to its reconfiguration into new meanings and practices, often still identified as 'slavery', but embedded in new processes and institutions.

The notion of 'slavery' today covers a multiplicity of phenomena. New discourses of slavery, often originating outside Africa, developed around humanitarian activism and afrocentric ideas of heritage, legacy and race. Pre-colonial forms of slavery evolved differently in different societies, and within any one society, the category 'slavery' is used to characterise a variety of situations. In some contexts, the descendants of slaves are incorporated in the society of freemen, and the past is, for them, a buried memory. Elsewhere, slave status affects everyday opportunities and the sense of self of its bearers. New forms of dependence and exploitation coexist with the vestiges of 'tradi-



Study areas by chapter. Political boundaries c. 2008

tional' slavery, while 'tradition' is itself manipulated by slave descendants trying to turn inherited stigma into a political asset. In order to comprehend how 'slavery' functions in contemporary West Africa it is necessary to delimit meaningful concepts that consider both the representations and practices, as both terminologies and practices have been changing.

Some West African societies include groups whose identity is marked, collectively, by slave status.³ Yet these groups, whose name carries the stigma of slave origin, left behind most aspects of their life as slaves. Thus, against the contention that slaves are 'without history', people of slave status started articulating their own historical narratives (cf. Botte, 1994, 117ff; de Bruijn and van Dijk, 1994, 105; Verecke, 1994, 43). In some cases, the memory of free origins is retained (Botte, 1994, 115; de Bruijn and Pelckmans, 2005, 90); elsewhere, new histories have been crafted. A key factor in definitions of slavery, the inability of slaves to own property, also requires revision in the light of extensively documented disputes between former slaves and masters over the property of land and productive resources (cf. Botte, 1994, 124; Leservoiser, 1994). In some West African contexts, ex-slaves are beginning to access religious knowledge and use it to develop a reformist ideology, in contrast with their traditional position outside their masters' faith (cf. Botte, 1994, 128-32; de Bruijn and van Dijk, 1994, 99; Verecke, 1994, 36). The internalisation of the master's cultural and moral ethos, when it occurred, is being abandoned in favour of counter-ideologies that emphasise the capacity of slave groups to improve their status through hard work (cf. Hardung, 1997, 129; and in this volume). Against the view that slaves are 'without kinship', it has been noted that ex-slaves are increasingly able to forge and maintain durable kinship and affinal relations. In recent times, residual categories of West African slaves have been reproducing biologically.⁴ As the ideology of slavery progressively loses its grip on the way people think and act, it becomes possible for slave descendants to talk about their ancestry and, in some cases, reconstruct their genealogies (cf. Schmitz, in this volume). Finally, the historical denial of slaves' political participation is being replaced by growing mobilisation (cf. Botte, 1999; Lecocq, 2005; Hahonou, in this volume; Leservoiser, in this volume).

Confusion, however, is generated by the fact that these domains (memory, religion, wealth, status, etc.) have evolved unevenly among different groups of slave descendants. The capability to change one's destiny depends on the existence of viable alternative livelihood options, as well as the relative resilience of past ideologies of hierarchy. Where the masters' class remained in power after colonial abolition, the rejection of such hierarchies would close avenues of social mobility that passed through the establishment of clientelistic relations with former masters (Kopytoff, 1988, 497; Schmitz, in this volume). Today, even within the same society, different categories of actors relate to traditional hierarchies in different ways. Elders, women and vulnerable groups are more

likely to accept them than, for example, young male migrants. The ex-slaves' capacity and willingness to change status is partly determined by their assessment of available opportunities. These differ for men and women, elders and youths, more and less mobile people. Thus, the notion of 'voluntary slavery', which has become commonplace in African studies, should be considered in the light of the particular *context of choice* within which the residues of enslavement are tolerated.

This fragmentation of 'slavery' into a diversified range of circumstances and situations is poorly conveyed by existing terminologies. First, the English word 'slave' fails to express the subtle distinctions of status (gradations of dependence, age, gender, residence, etc.) articulated in certain African languages (cf. Hardung, in this volume; Rattray, 1956, 34ff.). This is not merely a problem of translation, but also of inadequate theorisation. Partly due to the denial of slave kinship (cf. note 4), we lack analytical tools to comprehend the process of creolisation, through which slaves became gradually integrated in the society of the free (cf. Klein, in this volume). As shown by Schmitz in this volume, arranged marriages between slaves and free, various forms of fictive kinship, and multiple strategies of status negotiation account for complex 'slave' (or 'part-slave') identities that have not been adequately explored. Moreover, as Burnham argues in his contribution to this volume, the meaning of words is not static but changes with other social and historical transformations. The meaning of the term 'slavery' changed in different ways in Euro-American and African contexts, retaining some of its original semantic dimensions and dropping others. 'Clashing globalised discourses on the interpretation of slavery' (Burnham, in this volume) generate ambiguities of meaning. While African Americans visit Ghanaian slavery heritage sites searching for an idealised history, their African hosts welcome them as potential avenues to an idealised wealth in Europe and the US (McCaskie, in this volume). Dreams of success in the West are crushed when young African migrants meet with xenophobia, and wonder whether they haven't left poverty behind only to become the 'willing slaves' of the West (cf. Bellagamba, in this volume). But interpretative clashes on slavery's past and present are not peculiar to transnational spaces. They occur also within the same country and community. Groups that distanced themselves from past hierarchies comment sceptically on neighbours and relatives who 'believe in slavery' (Bellagamba, in this volume), or 'cannot see with clear eyes' (Hardung, in this volume). Conversely, the ones who maintained relations with former masters reinterpret the nature of these relations, altering the meaning of 'slavery' accordingly.

Anthropologists employ vernacular terms when translations are misleading. In this case, turning to local terminologies does not necessarily provide a clearer picture. Within West African languages, status categories have been acquiring new meanings, and new identities and euphemistic expressions

have been introduced. In Mali the Tamasheq term *iklan* has been replaced with euphemisms; instead, the term *bella*, Songhay word for Tuareg of low status, was used by the French for Tuareg slaves, then by Malian politicians in the 1950s to refer to Tuareg slaves whom they sought to liberate, then by 'intellectuals of unfree origins to refer to themselves as a separate ethnic group' (Lecocq, 2005, 49). In the Gambia the term *jonyaa*, a Mandinka word commonly translated as slavery, has transformed its late nineteenth-century meaning ('the one you sell or buy'), and has come to signify, today, the 'voluntary allegiance stemming from the reciprocal recollection of former master-slave relationships' (Bellagamba, 2005, 33). In ethnically plural contexts the situation is particularly complex, as status terms are multiplied by the number of societies trying to interpret their own and their neighbours' statuses and giving rise to competing theories of hierarchy. In Niger the term '*buzu*' was used by Hausa people to refer to the slaves of the Tuareg. As the distinction between slave (*iklan*) and various categories of liberated slaves (e.g. *ighawelan*, *iderfan*) became blurred even in Tuareg contexts, the name '*buzu*' was used interchangeably for Tuareg slaves or liberated slaves (cf. Norris, 1975, 6). In some contexts '*buzu*' is used by Hausa speakers in a derogatory way to refer to free Tuareg (Bernus, 1981, 62–63), and the term '*Buzanci*' is frequently used in Hausa in place of 'Tamasheq' for the Tuareg language without the derogatory connotation of '*buzu*'. But this term also has a separate history, more relevant in southern agricultural areas where groups of Buzu (also called Buzaye or Bugaje), detached from their old masters, settled amidst Hausa farming villages. Here, 'Buzu' is seen as an ethnic category, with mixed Tuareg and Hausa characteristics (cf. Nicolas, 1962, 153, '*l'ethnie des Bouzou*'). In other contexts it has been easier to change ethnicity than to change status. Former Tuareg slaves or liberated slaves have employed a 'Hausaisation' strategy in order to leave their inherited status behind (Oxby, 1986, 105; Rossi, 2009). In Mali some *iklan* groups have been adopting a Songhay identity (Gashoolt, 2007), and similar transformations have been documented in Fulbe society (cf. Hardung, 1997, III; Burnham, in this volume).

Ex-slaves leading independent lifestyles have struggled with names that tie them to their past identity and carry stigma for them and their children. At the same time, terms used to designate slave status have changed meaning and slave descendants adopted new forms of self-identification.⁵ What is the difference between a person of slave origin successfully passing as free, someone seeking security in old ties of dependence, someone with no choice but to inhabit traditional forms of slavery, and someone using slave status as a political agenda? Thinking of all of these cases as manifestations of 'slavery' may obfuscate the fact that groups engaged, alternatively, in avoiding hunger, escaping stigma and manoeuvring politics partake of different institutions, discourses and strategies. The chapters in this book shed light on at least four

fields, each of which is regularly characterised as 'slavery' in the media, policy and academic writing:

- The persistence of pre-colonial forms of enslavement, ranging from the resilience of old hierarchies in hinterland areas to the voluntary retention of slave–master relations.
- Strategies of upward mobility of former slaves trying to conceal their own and their children's slave origins. This includes migration, the reinvention of history, the acquisition of new ethnic identities, and practices of silencing slavery.
- The political mobilisation of people self-identifying as of slave origin and seeking to state their claims on the basis of perceived shared interests.
- The introduction and manipulation of exogenous discourses on slavery. This includes the introduction of ideas of heritage and the legacy of slavery, which create new rationales and practices targeted at tourists, donors and humanitarian agencies.

This book focuses on the multiple trajectories of forms of dependence that existed in the past of the societies considered in its chapters. It does not include new forms of exploitation and coercion often characterised as 'new slavery' (e.g. child trafficking, prostitution, etc.), which nevertheless should be added to the list of phenomena currently labelled 'slavery'.

A Renewed Analytical Framework

Used to cover diverse manifestations, the term 'slavery' has lost interpretative value (cf. Miers, 2004). Today slavery appears fragmented and multiplied, as if seen through a kaleidoscope. New analytical tools are needed to make sense of the possibly diverse dynamics that underpin formally similar institutions. Here it is suggested that manifestations of 'slavery' in West Africa be analysed under four different rubrics: the circumscribed resilience of historical forms of enslavement (slavery); stigmatisation on the grounds of inherited or putative slave status (classificatory slavery); forms of exploitation akin to slavery (metaphorical slavery); and exogenous discourses opening new fields of thought and action around the notion of slavery (extraverted slavery). Unlike the first category, the other three should not be seen as types of slavery but as different phenomena variously related to it. It should be noted that these concepts are merely approximate categorisations and flexible tools for analysis. They are introduced to overcome the growing limitations of the single label 'slavery' for deciphering increasingly diverse dynamics, and are not necessarily used in the same way in this book's chapters. The following paragraph briefly discusses the practical implications of these four analytical concepts in contemporary West African society.

While vestiges of historical slavery can still be found today in some parts of West Africa, cases of people born into bondage and recognised as property of their masters are rare. On the other hand, being classified as 'slave' usually carries stigma and influences a person's opportunities and self-esteem. Yet the classificatory slave who freely disposes of his or her labour, property and progeny is not in the same situation as the slave. Other characteristics, such as caste, gender, 'race' or choice of sexual partner carry stigma for their bearers. Stigmatisation on the grounds of slave status and actual enslavement should be kept analytically distinct (cf. Morice, 2005). Metaphorical slavery ranges from the use of 'slavery' as a rhetorical trope to signal dependence (e.g. to characterise the continuing poverty of African countries) to new forms of exploitation of vulnerable groups (e.g. child trafficking), which can be so extreme as to constitute actual, not merely metaphorical, enslavement.⁶ Yet exploitation, stigma and/or poverty are not always found in association with slavery.⁷ Moreover, unlike slavery in the past, these forms of exploitation are illegal.

Now that slavery has been abolished everywhere, exploiting people as if they were slaves is illegal and sanctionable. One of the main questions raised by contemporary uses of the term 'slavery' is thus whether, once slavery is banned by law, the violation of fundamental rights of *de jure* free people should still be discussed as 'slavery', or if it should rather fall under different legal rubrics. In the majority of cases, different positions in this debate are actually closer than it seems. They converge in finding intolerable practices that some authors call 'slavery' (in order to achieve greater political impact and media-shock potential) while others qualify them as similar to slavery, in certain, but possibly not all, respects (in order to highlight change in historical forms of dependence and exploitation).

This introduction opts for a narrow definition of slavery. Clearly, slavery is 'not one social status, but many' (Searing, 1993, 48). It should be studied as a dynamic phenomenon, which implies different cultural associations in different contexts and evolves along with changing historical and social conditions (Deutsch, 2006, 5; Villasanté de Beauvais, 2000, 17). Yet, for the sake of clarity, it is necessary to identify elements of a 'lowest common denominator' of slavery that would include certain phenomena and exclude others. Slavery refers to the individual or communal ownership of another person or group, whereby 'ownership' is understood to reflect culturally specific meanings and forms of rights in things and persons, as well as their modes of transmission and exchange. In the case of slavery, this commonly includes rights over the productive and reproductive capacities of slaves, rights over any assets they may own or use, and rights over their offspring.⁸ The ideological assimilation of slaves to chattels and their actual saleability are not necessary conditions (cf. Curtin, 1976, 303).⁹ It has been a historical leitmotif that what makes it

possible for a human being to be enslaved is his or her outsidership, a trait that may refer to real external origins or to ideological characterisations of slaves as intrinsically (physically, intellectually, morally) *other* than the free (cf. Cortias et al., 2006, 12ff).¹⁰ The slave as the institutionalised outsider stands outside the laws that protect free members of society from extreme exploitation. Slave status, thus, designates a condition of abuse from which all humans are supposedly shielded, *except for the slave*.¹¹ This institutionalised exception justifies the slave's otherwise unjustifiable exploitation, and is a defining characteristic of slavery across time and space.

If slavery must be institutionally legitimised, the legal abolition of slavery in all countries may seem to imply its worldwide disappearance. In normative contexts where slavery has been abolished, the illegal enslavement of people does not imply the existence of slavery as an official institution. However, legal pluralism recognises that state law can coexist with parallel normative universes. Alternative legal frameworks operate in semi-autonomous social fields (Moore, 1978), where customary law, or alternative norms of governance, are invoked to legitimise enslavement. Hence, the existence of anti-slavery legislation does not automatically imply the disappearance of slavery. This accounts for vestiges of slavery in contexts falling outside the reach of state sovereignty (for example, remote regions where traditional hierarchies are particularly resilient).

Opting for a narrow interpretation of slavery sets this work in contrast with activist positions. Activist organisations tend to adopt the legal definitions of slavery provided by national and international institutions. These definitions are phrased so as to maximise the coverage of exploited and abused people (cf. Miers, 2003, 415). If the question one asks is of an interventionist order ('what should be done about slavery?'), reference to 'slavery' is likely to raise public attention and provoke faster official reactions, at the possibly trivial cost of definitional nuances. Yet these nuances matter more if the question one sets out to answer is 'how should slavery be understood?' An example will clarify this point. Forced marriage, as a practice that transfers fundamental rights over a woman's person against her will, is sometimes assimilated to slavery. But how can we compare the forced marriage of a free woman to a master's rights over the sexuality of his slave (that he can exercise or transfer to others, against compensation) if we collapse the two under the same category?

In hinterland Niger there have been cases of traditional masters turning persistent ties to their ex-slaves into a lucrative business by selling girls of slave descent to wealthy Nigerian businessmen.¹² As today these practices are illegal, the masters pretend to receive bridewealth and pass it on to the girl's father. Instead, they keep this sum, which signifies the transfer of rights over their slave who becomes the payer's concubine. Surely, this camouflaged 'bridewealth' and the bridewealth paid for the forced marriage of a free

woman are understood and experienced differently by the actors involved. A similar case is described by Bellagamba in the context of colonial Gambia (2005, 27–30). Some of the ‘wives’ of Mussa Moloh sought to gain freedom by explaining to British authorities that they were not (free) ‘real wives’, but slaves. They provided evidence, which, in their eyes and in those of colonial officers, clarified the difference between slave concubines and real wives, who may or may not have consented to their marriage. Clearly, it is possible to assimilate to slavery various cases of un-freedom, exploitation, coercion and social stigma. But we should be able to distinguish analytically between these practices. We ought to ask *whose eyes* behold the proverbial similarities. Phenomena that appear similar to activists may look different to the actors directly involved. Any account of change must make the most of definitional and practical nuances, lest centuries of transformations be collapsed under the single referent ‘slavery’.

The Times of Slavery’s Transformations¹³

A study of slavery’s transformations must consider changes occurring at different rhythms in various places (cf. Klein, in this volume). It is useful to borrow Braudel’s idea of different historical temporalities: the slow time of society’s relation to its surroundings; the intermediate one of societal change; and the fast-moving time of events, ‘a surface disturbance, the waves stirred up by the powerful movements of tides’ (Braudel, 1972). These three levels are matched, respectively, by distinct reconfiguration patterns in the history of slavery. The laws and decrees that marked the legal history of abolition and emancipation can be seen as legislative events, punctuating the ‘deep-running currents’ of social change. The intermediate time of societal change interests a plurality of interrelated domains, each of which bears upon the reconfiguration of slavery. These domains include, *inter alia*, economic processes (trade and production), labour regimes and forms of governance and rule. Finally, Braudel’s first temporal scale, defining society’s relation to its surroundings, is so slow that it can be seen as opposing resistance to changes occurring at the other two levels, rather than as a level that is itself slowly evolving. Thus, the slow pace attested for hierarchical transformations in Saharan regions is due, partly, to the implications of enduring environmental insecurity, as subsistence vulnerability puts a premium on the maintenance of patronage and clientelistic relations.

In the decades following the abolition of the slave trade, some of those slaves who would have been exported were redirected within West Africa as slave labour. Moreover, dynamics internal to the Western and Central Sudan, such as the consolidation of recently created *jihad* states through extensive warfare, and the expansion of the economic activities of the ruling classes of

these states led to the expansion of internal slavery (cf. Lovejoy, 1983, 138ff.; Lovejoy and Hogendorn, 1979, 220–21). While a minority of slaves were able to negotiate with their masters limited freedom to conduct business and trade on their own account, they usually owed the masters a fee or part of their earnings. Later, with colonial control firmly established, the masters’ power to enforce their domination was progressively eroded. ‘Pacification’ (what British administrators referred to as *pax Britannica* and their French counterparts as *paix Française*) restrained the military power of previous rulers and/or warrior elites. Progressively, the old masters class had to renegotiate the terms of its relations with ex-slaves who could, and in many cases did, choose flight over continued dependence. Klein in this volume considers the factors that played a role in the choice to stay or to go, and suggests that access to land and wage labour were key to the emancipation of slave populations. This was recognised early by colonial administrators, who used land and labour legislation to exercise an indirect leverage on the slavery question (see, for example, Lovejoy and Hogendorn, 1993, 127–58, 201–13). Yet avenues to emancipation had existed within African societies before colonial occupation. They often followed different logics from the ones that characterised colonial abolition. Thus, in some large Tuareg confederations in the second half of the 1800s, ecological and political factors at the regional level determined the onset of diminishing returns to slavery, leading to the transformation of slaves into tributaries, clients and sharecroppers (cf. Rossi, 2009). In this book, Schmitz shows that in the Futa Toro’s Islamic society, pre-colonial emancipation took the form of a transition from bondage (slavery) to clientage. Becoming the clients of their masters, ex-slaves obtained access to land and, through marriages arranged by former masters, to a legitimate line of descent. In pre-colonial Islamic West Africa, religious piety offered avenues out of slavery. These avenues did not simply vanish with the introduction of colonial paths to emancipation, but persisted as alternative routes, their underlying rationales interacting in complex ways with colonial anti-slavery ideology.

At the beginning of the 1900s colonial powers in West Africa abolished the legal status of slavery. However, slavery was embedded in social processes that took a long time to adapt to decrees, particularly as colonial administrators hesitated to enforce anti-slavery laws (cf. Olivier de Sardan, 1976, 16). In both French and English West Africa, European powers initially refrained from actions that would spoil their relations with ruling African elites, and feared the political instability that could result from the sudden achievement of freedom on the part of ex-slaves (cf. Klein, 1998, 134; Klein, in this volume; Lovejoy, 1983, 271). Emancipated slaves were sometimes expected to work in colonial projects and were known as ‘the slaves of the *Commandant*’ (Cooper, 1996, 88; cf. Klein and Roberts, 1980, 383; Lovejoy, 1983, 258). Forced labour recruitment and forced military conscription particularly hit servile

and low-status groups. Local administrative chiefs were often charged with recruitment and labour supervision, and they selected those people whose support they did not need and whose resentment they did not fear (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1988, 223; Manchuelle, 1989, 101). But travel conditions had become safer and new opportunities of free employment available, not only in plantations and centres of rural production but also in cities, where slave status was not easily recognisable. Destitute free workers and slaves trying to turn the insecurity of emancipation into concrete livelihood strategies readily seized these opportunities (cf. Duffill and Lovejoy, 1985, 163). Recruitment in institutions structured by different codes of honour, like the military or some sectors of the public administration, provided avenues of social mobility to people of servile origins (cf. Mann, 2006).

By the 1940s dependence on cash had become more pressing even in rural areas; some West African cities had developed into urban poles of labour attraction; and a series of ILO reports had set the framework for the abolition of forced labour. Two related phenomena characterised the labour question (cf. Cooper, 2002): the 1935–48 strikes that joined the discontent of urban workers with the ideals proffered by nationalist intellectuals; and the less politically destabilising question of rural farmers practising seasonal labour migration. Both constituencies included ex-slaves. Both constituencies also included people of free descent who could be metaphorically likened to slaves in new social struggles against forced labour and, later, colonial domination. As slave and free people mixed, 'slavery' seemed to split into two: inherited slave status was silenced and metaphorical uses of 'slavery' multiplied. Focusing on the Gambia, Bellagamba in this volume suggests that in the 1940s and 1950s the slave origins of a multitude of recently emancipated West Africans became a 'public secret', that is,

knowledge widely shared within society, but hardly articulated except for comments, gossip, and fragments of recollections and oral traditions that might spontaneously surface in daily conversations. For a while, when the mask cracks, this knowledge becomes visible and discussed. Then manners, courtesy, and self-control bury it again in the underground of social life, together with the painful emotions associated with this kind of remembrances.

While the slavery inherited by individuals was silenced (see Schmitz, in this volume), the idea of slavery turned into a powerful political metaphor with different evocative potential in the imaginary of West Africans, still renegotiating slave identities, and Europeans, who represented themselves as a civilising force. This potential was fully realised, for example, by the group of Africans led by Félix Houphouët-Boigny advocating the abolition of forced labour: 'Millions of men have sent us here giving us a precise mandate, to struggle with all our might to abolish the slavery which is still practiced in Black Africa [...]' ¹⁴

In 1946, just two years after the Brazzaville Conference, where the Free French led by General de Gaulle revised their relation with France's West African colonies, all forms of forced labour were abolished in French Africa. After the Second World War, the new 'development' ideology was introduced to deal with the factors underpinning urban labour unrest and seasonal rural–urban migration. Yet these two domains were compartmentalised into separate 'problems', calling for different remedies. In the last two decades of the twentieth century a growing 'informal sector' has been absorbing both seasonal migrant labour and the dropouts from urban wage and contract labour. The rhetorical separation between these phenomena conceals their related causes and deflates their political significance. The increasing size of these two constituencies is partly related to the impacts of externally induced liberalisation policies. West Africans of slave and free descent have become citizens of independent African states, but ascribed status remained a determinant factor for accessing political rights (cf. Hahonou, in this volume). In many West African contexts the stigma of slavery continues to make ex-slaves 'second-class' citizens, a situation that is worse for female descendants of slaves, doubly marginalised in terms of both status and gender (Mahdi, 2008; Robertson and Klein, 1983, 5–12; Wright, 1975).

The Contributions

The chapters in this book examine recent trajectories of slavery rooted in the processes outlined above and in more specific regional and local dynamics. The volume includes both historical and anthropological contributions, which rely on different sources and argumentative styles to support their interpretations. Even within the same discipline, personal approaches and agendas differ. This makes for an eclectic mix of essays that requires some flexibility on the part of the reader asked to shift across methodologies and intellectual frameworks. Yet such diversity joins the broader scale of historical reconstruction to the close-up look of the anthropologist. Thus, for example, Martin Klein reviews a vast cross-section of primary and secondary historical sources to show that, in a set of West African societies, codes of honour matter as much, if not more, than material wealth in the maintenance of hierarchy. In turn, Hardung's in-depth study of the Gannunkeebé provides a detailed illustration of how these very honour-codes matter, why they matter, when they cease being meaningful, and how the idea of honour works in the society she discusses. Thus, while chapters have different analytical styles, they converge in aim and purpose.

In chapter 2 Martin Klein traces the historical evolution of West African patterns of emancipation into the present. Some of his observations introduce themes that are developed in the following contributions. He notes

that change occurred in two separate ideological systems, the colonial and the Islamic (cf. Schmitz, in this volume). The availability of money incomes through cash cropping or wage labour constituted an enabling factor in the slaves' capacity to negotiate a new position. However, status distinctions persisted unless the dominant codes of honour were also changed to allow slave descendants to occupy roles from which they had hitherto been excluded (cf. Klein, 2005).

Klein's wide-ranging paper is followed by Tom McCaskie's 'history of the present'. This is a detailed mosaic of different views, statements and positions on Ghana's 'heritage of slavery'. McCaskie focuses on the work of the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) and reflects critically on the implications of certain Afrocentric professional discourses and activities. He shows how these discourses (of 'legacy' and 'heritage') project the ideological positions of their authors onto the past, and then invoke this reconfigured 'past' to interpret present circumstances. These discourses have become increasingly influential in international representations of slavery. But they conceal very different views and agendas, such as those of ABPsi members, Asante elites, aspiring international migrants, beneficiaries of ABPsi aid projects and national politicians. McCaskie's analysis is a long-overdue examination of the implications of Afrocentric discourses of slavery in contemporary Ghana.

Both chapter 3's focus on slavery in Ghanaian transnational spaces and Bellagamba's subsequent chapter on the Gambia highlight the polysemic potential of 'slavery'. As in Ghana, internal historical slavery is almost entirely silenced in the Gambia. Yet this 'silencing' of internal slavery occurs in parallel with slavery's metaphorical extension to the experience of poverty and continuing exploitation in contemporary Gambian society. The very absence of verbal registers to characterise internal slavery attests to its hold on people's imagination and its power as a political metaphor. Hence, in the 1950s and 1990s, Gambian struggles, respectively, for national independence and against poverty were expressed in the idiom of slavery. In Ghana Afrocentric discourses of slavery are introduced from the US and manipulated locally according to particular interests, without reference to the historical experience of internal slavery. In both Ghana and the Gambia, the slavery that is *voiced* glosses over *silenced* past domestic slavery, and present social inequalities between people of free and slave descent.¹⁵

In chapter 5 Jean Schmitz addresses the question of the silencing of internal slavery from a different angle. Rather than discussing slavery that is visible, he begins to unveil the concealed trajectories of internal slavery in the Senegal River Valley (Futa Toro). Schmitz reconstructs endogenous trajectories of upward mobility among the slaves of a number of Almaami. He also considers what happens to internal emancipation trajectories when new trajectories, inspired by colonial abolitionist ideology, become available

(e.g. the military and school-teaching). This chapter highlights differences and continuities between Islamic and colonial strategies of emancipation. According to an influential strand of scholarship, the ideology of emancipation introduced by colonial conquest hinges upon the slavery–freedom opposition, whereby freedom implies severing ties of dependence and acquiring individual autonomy. However, this opposition does not, in itself, provide a satisfactory interpretation of avenues out of slavery in Islamic contexts. Schmitz suggests that the model of emancipation that prevailed historically in Islamic West Africa privileged the transformation of slaves into clients, through access to productive and reproductive resources, that is, land and wives granted mostly by former masters. Colonialism made available alternative 'careers', where slave identity could be transformed and reconstructed by reference to new indices of status. Schmitz shows that integration into new ideologies of hierarchy has been a crucial element in Senegambian paths to emancipation, pre- and post-colonial. Moreover, the ex-slaves' social mobility through colonial careers was often facilitated by former masters and did not signal the outright rejection of dependence.

Christine Hardung's chapter examines the strategies of Gannunkeebe communities of Northern Benin. It explores the hold of ideologies of hierarchy on the ideas and behaviours of ex-dependent groups and addresses one of the main questions in the field of slavery studies: the persistent low status of slave descendants in spite of their economic success. At the ideological level, the authority of a Fulbe master is exemplified by ongoing belief in his power to curse and bless. Hardung enquires into the conditions for hierarchy's resilience or demise by studying changing dispositions towards the masters' perceived supernatural power across groups and generations. She suggests that, in any particular context, 'dependence' should be understood in relation to the cultural significance of 'freedom'. Some Gannunkeebe choose to maintain their tie to former masters, but try to reinterpret the meaning of this relation. Paradoxically, epistemological negotiations to alter the negative connotations of slave status presuppose the acceptance of hierarchy.

This paradox is explored further in Olivier Leservoiser's chapter on MaccuBe's groups in Mauritania. Having described the MaccuBe's position in the spheres of ideology, marriage, religion, ritual, land tenure and politics, Leservoiser discusses various forms of MaccuBe resistance. He focuses on strategies aimed primarily at *crossing* social boundaries, rather than at challenging these boundaries and the hierarchical structures they belong to. Also here, change presupposes continuity, as moving up the social ladder implies preserving this ladder in the first place. Thus, in spite of the political mobilisation of groups of servile status striving to influence politics in their own interest, the social mobility of ex-slaves fits in a conservative view of society. This argument is also supported by Hahonou's comparative study

of the contemporary political mobilisation of people of slave status in three contexts in Niger and Benin.

Hahonou describes the acquisition of a political voice on the part of slave descendants in the context of decentralisation. While the Songhay aristocracy has been able to maintain political control over its dependents, in Tuareg and Fulani societies slave descendants have now assumed the direction of municipal power. Hahonou's paper explores 'slave' politics at the micro-level and in a comparative framework. It highlights the diverse elements (social, economic, political) that play a role in the acquisition of a political voice on the part of slave descendants. The chapter suggests that associative forms of organisation are central to reshaping the collective consciousness of individuals. Yet he rejoins Leservoiser's conclusion that the strategies of upward mobility of ex-slaves do not fit a broader project of social reformism.

My own chapter also focuses on Tuareg society, but turns from the voice option to the exit option (cf. Hirschman, 1970). It looks at the rearrangement of axes of physical mobility as privileged strategies for social mobility. I suggest that in the Ader region of Niger particular patterns of mobility are indicative of social status. The transformations of interrelated patterns of movement of former master and slaves since the second half of the 1800s reveal the changing nature of the master-slave relationship. Today, poorer people of slave status (Buzu) choose between 'dependent movement' tied to local forms of patronage (sometimes of former masters), and independent movement to places where they often endure exploitative and stigmatising labour conditions.

Finally, in the book's last chapter Phil Burnham reflects on the evolving discourses of slavery that he encountered in different contexts in the course of his forty years of research. His continuity of research and familiarity with certain field sites in Cameroon allowed him to witness changes on slavery discourses across generations. Hence, in the space of two generations, the slave origin of a Gbaya chiefly lineage was progressively forgotten. The slave status of the chief's father went from being an issue of collective concern to a hidden memory only reactivated during disputes. This steadfast assimilation would have been difficult in Mbororo contexts, also discussed in the chapter, where an exclusivist ethnic discourse grafts the stigma of slavery onto ethnicity. Here ex-slaves are less likely to be integrated in the society of the free than to become the object of racialised discrimination. As changes in the slaves' status become possible, the meaning of the word 'slavery' is transformed, giving rise to clashing discourses of slavery across contexts. Burnham's last example illustrates a debate between festival organisers and West African guests on the role of the Oni of Ife at the 150th festival for the abolition of apprenticeship in Trinidad. While festival organisers invited the Oni, whom they saw as the contemporary analogue of a West African traditional chief, a Nigerian guest saw him as representing African middlemen who collabor-

ated with European slave traders. This chapter aptly concludes the book by showing that African 'slavery' has become increasingly fragmented, as groups variously associated with it have followed different trajectories and developed different perspectives.

Contributions to this book emphasise how particular groups and actors negotiate the experience of slavery, past and present, in their everyday lives. In spite of the diversity and complexity of these processes, the following section advances some generalisations.

Reconfiguring Slave Identities

M. I. Finley suggested that societies change, historically, from structures in which status runs along a continuum of rights in persons towards structures in which statuses are polarised around the slave and free poles. The direction of change is not teleological. Under new circumstances, a system polarised into the slave-free opposites can revert to a continuum of statuses (cf. Finley, 1964, 249). Some authors have seen this distinction as characteristic of the difference between African and Western societies. Thus Kopytoff has argued that

[...] what was deeply engrained [in African societies] was not the narrow 'slavery' of Western conceptions but the wide institutional complex of inter-related and interchangeable dependencies, containing within it numerous functional alternatives. The abolition of one of these dependencies – slavery as the West defines it – could not undermine the larger complex on which so much of the structural continuity of African societies rested. (1988, 502)

Others, however, highlighted that also in Africa some slaves 'wanted freedom in the Western sense of maximum personal autonomy' (Miers and Roberts, 1988, 30), and suggested that Kopytoff's view may come close to implying that those African slaves who 'sought to break rather than bend bonds of dependence, did not understand African society as well as the Western anthropologist' (Cooper et al., 2000, 6).

This book's chapters emphasise the prevalence of paradox and ambiguity. In Mauritania ex-slaves trying to change status reproduce ideologies of hierarchy *vis à vis* other slave descendants (Leservoiser). In Benin many Gannunkebe reassert past hierarchies in the process of reinterpreting their subordination (Hardung). A Nigérien chief of slave descent regrets the loss of power of former masters, as his village now lacks protection against outside attempts to take advantage of its people, exposing them to new exploitative conditions (Hahonou). In the Gambia, at independence, the struggle against a metaphorical 'colonial slavery' passed under silence the tensions within parties composed of ex-free and ex-slave members (Bellagamba). And while ordinary Ghanaians see African American tourists as 'white men' (*oburoni*), one Asante

chief wondered what the slaves sold by his ancestors were doing back in Ghana (McCaskey). The contradictions internal to the same country, group or even family are difficult to grasp in terms of theories that attribute fixity and unity to 'cultural' or 'local' dispositions. Surely, human choice becomes meaningful contextually. But 'the West' and 'Africa' can hardly be seen as contexts. Culturalist interpretations of 'context' are too broad and too rigid to account for the variety of situations illustrated within confines much narrower than 'culture'. Now that slavery cannot be enforced legally, this variety of situations leaves two questions open: what explains the well-documented, if increasingly rare, resilience of ideologies of hierarchy and subordination to former masters? And, when things *do* change, how is hierarchy transformed?

Contemporary vestiges of enslavement are found in correspondence with semi-autonomous fields that escape the enforcement of anti-slavery legislation. In physical environments characterised by climatic instability, production scarcity and subsistence insecurity, webs of hierarchical obligation offer protection from the risk of livelihood failure (Campbell, 2004, xxv; Klein, in this volume; Roberts, 1987, 127). Bonds to old masters might break when these become impoverished and are unable to meet the expectations attached to their status (cf. Giuffrida, 2005). But unless vulnerability decreases, new forms of patronage, sometimes akin to slavery, take shape (cf. Amselle, 1981, 14–15). *In loco* this tends to continue for as long as the system of production and labour regime change (e.g., due to climatic or political transformations, or technological innovation). Instead, for those who can move, migration represents the main alternative. This is why the history of physical mobility is so important for understanding social mobility in West Africa.

Seeing labour migrants as relics of old systems of production intermittently plunging into modernity ignores the integration of urban and rural contexts in today's West African economies, where both sites partake of equally contemporary dynamics (cf. Cooper, 1980, 9). Yet this movement may well reveal a Braudelian insight in the migrants' choice to travel from settings where certain changes (e.g. industrialisation, wage labour) have been taking place more slowly to settings where these transformations are already accomplished. Upon return, migrants of slave descent may be reintegrated in their village of origin, without a substantial renegotiation of their low status (cf. Boyer, 2005). However, at destination migrants leave their status behind and become anonymous workers, joining what scholars in the 1960s called 'ethno-professional' networks, governed by new status criteria (e.g. Cohen, 1969, 191–92; Wallerstein, 1965, 155). Here labour relations assumed new forms through rapid societal changes that are not, as it were, 'hindered' by factors that slow down social transformations. In these contexts courage and entrepreneurship may be rewarded with economic success and fast status mobility. However, less fortunate migrants of slave descent in Africa's large cities or

international destinations merely swap inherited dependence for new forms of stigma. Paradoxically, for them slave origin works as a source of 'belonging'¹⁷ to familiar patron–client relations at home, while, at destination, their 'outsiderness' exposes them to xenophobia, corruption and exploitation.

But 'marginality' (spatial, economic, political) is not the only reason for the resilience of traditional hierarchies. And migration is not the only pathway to emancipation. Religion plays an ambivalent role. Vestiges of slavery are found in association with communities headed by maraboutic and religious groups (cf. Boyer, 2005, 78; Hahonou, in this volume; Rossi, 2009). Hahonou reports some slave descendants' assumption that slavery originates from the *Qur'an* and cannot therefore be challenged. Hardung (in this volume) suggests that the belief in the supernatural power to curse of the Fulbe masters underscores the fear of disobeying them or denying their superiority, even where ex-slaves have attained economic and political emancipation. On the other hand, Islam has generated important pre-colonial reformist movements. Schmitz mentions 'emancipation through religious piety' as one of the main axes of emancipation in the Futa Toro. Burnham reminds us that Islam predicated the emancipation of converted slaves and that in some contexts it facilitated the adoption of an 'inclusivist' attitude towards slaves, blurring status differences within the Muslim community.¹⁸ However, in contexts where identity was not primarily defined along the believer/non-believer axis, exclusivist ethnic attitudes act as obstacles to the assimilation of former slaves (Burnham, in this volume). Ongoing prejudice against ex-slaves accounts for the ethnicisation of identities that originally implied slave status (Burnham, Hardung and Hahonou, all in this volume). In such situations, legacies of slavery have a tendency to mutate into racism and discrimination rooted in the body and physical characteristics of the stigmatised group.¹⁹ Accordingly, changing ethnic affiliation becomes a precondition for social mobility.

As paradoxical and ambiguous as the trajectories discussed above may be, they are not inconsistent. Everywhere, even when they appear to hang on to past hierarchies, slaves or ex-slaves strive to change their status. They do so either by moving up local hierarchies, or by entering new ones in which they were never categorised as 'slave' and where they can assume new positions. Hierarchies have properties of indexicality. They use signs (e.g. physical traits, demeanour, clothing style, speech variety) to 'point to' social status.²⁰ Mobility 'from within' implies the alteration of indices of status: when ex-slaves remain in the same hierarchy, they strive to reinterpret the 'signs' of their subordination as positive signs of value, or to lessen their negative implications (cf. Hardung, in this volume); or they try to pass as non-slave by acquiring the characteristics of higher status groups (cf. Leservoisier, in this volume). Alternatively, they can enrol in new hierarchies, to which they move through migration or which become available from the outside (e.g. through colonial

conquest or the introduction of exogenous ideologies). Here ex-slaves use their skills to attain new identities in new ideologies of hierarchy (e.g. in the military, in education, in political associations – see Schmitz and Hahonou, both in this volume).

The cases discussed in this book illustrate the multiple trajectories through which such repositionings have occurred, and continue to occur, in some West African contexts. Such patterns often reveal strategic detours that defy conventional understandings of emancipation. Several chapters illustrate how status mobility within the same (spatial and social) system of reference can be achieved through the patronage of ex-masters (cf. Schmitz). This pattern requires willingness to negotiate change on both sides, master and slave, patron and client. It is noteworthy that this path requires belief in hierarchy on the part of slave descendants as well. Insofar as status promotion is obtained through the support of social superiors, the latter's superiority must be taken seriously, as well as the inferiority ascribed to others (cf. Leservoiser). When status ideologies are changed from within, transforming the meaning of slave status requires epistemological negotiations. Burnham's changing 'keywords' belong to this pattern. So do Hardung's examples of Gannunkeebe who reinterpret the implications of slave labour, turning it into a 'gift' to masters who 'need their (ex-) slaves' to perform demanding tasks. Finally, as illustrated by McCaskie, change may occur through confrontation and interaction across different rationales. In this sense, the sociological implications of clashing international discourses of slavery remain to be seen.

The chapters of this book do not provide a representative sample of West African states or societies. The main omission is Nigeria, and particularly the case of Osu groups in Eastern Nigeria. This introduction and Klein's historical overview do not focus on any single group or state. Following the order in which they are presented in the book, reference is made to the history of the regions falling in the following contemporary West African states: Ghana, the Gambia, Senegal, Benin, Mauritania, Niger and Cameroon. It would be reductive to classify contributions according to the Anglophone–Francophone divide derived from colonial domination, even though this aspect underlies the analysis of all chapters. Arabic language and Islamic influence also play a major role, as well as internal divisions within African societies. Some societies are better represented than others. This is the case of the Fulbe or Haalpulaar'en and their various ranked sub-groups, which are discussed in four contributions (Burnham, Leservoiser, Hardung, Schmitz). Tuareg groups are discussed in two chapters (Hahonou and Rossi). Other societies examined in the book are Asante, Gbaya, Songhay and Hausa. Burnham's wide-ranging comparative chapter contrasts two West African contexts with events witnessed in Trinidad; and Bellagamba's paper is more geared to Gambian political dynamics than to 'ethnic' or cultural divisions.

Reconfiguring Slavery derives unity from its intellectual purpose. The chapters' findings and conclusions suggest that after the 'end of slavery' there still is 'slavery'. This reconfigured 'slavery' acquired new meanings in distinct historical trajectories and today partakes of contemporary social processes. Some of its general features and broader implications have been preliminarily advanced in this introduction, and are explored in greater depth in the chapters. It is hoped that further research and debate will elaborate, and possibly correct, this book's hypotheses.

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- 'out of slavery', are Campbell, 2004; Cooper, 1980; Cooper et al., 2000; and Deutsch, 2006.
- They include the *iklan* (Tamasheq), *bella* (Songhay) or *buzu* (Hausa) in Tuareg society; the *macuBe*, *rimaibe*, Gando, or Gannunkebe in the Fulfulde-speaking world; groups referred to as *abd* by the Arab-speaking Bidan nobility of Mauritania; the Songhay *horso*; the Mande *wolos*; and so forth.
- Contra Meillassoux (1991, 78; 1975, 18), biological reproduction seems to have played an important role in the maintenance of slave constituencies also in the past (cf. Botte, 1994, 111; Botte, 1999, 59; Doyle, 2007; Nicolaïsen and Nicolaïsen, 1997, 611). Slave families were surely more ephemeral than the families of free people and had no legal autonomy, as slave adults were considered legal minors. This does not mean that 'slave kinship' did not exist, but only that it had to function in hegemonic conditions (cf. Oxby, 1986).
- This is not a specifically modern phenomenon. Under particular historical and social circumstances, categories once 'hooked' to certain social referents can become 'unhooked' from reality and acquire new meanings, as a result of human projects or unplanned processes, as happened in the case of the name 'Zanj' (Farias, 1983).
- Metaphorical and classificatory slavery are conceptually related. Categories have metaphorical qualities, they extrapolate one characteristic shared by the units of a group and make it stand for the whole group. This characteristic is often derogatory, generating stigma and abuse. Thus, misogyny turns certain aspects of female sexuality into a social handicap, and racism constructs physical traits as a 'sign' of inferiority. In the case of slavery, it is particularly hard to essentialise common characteristics for the highly diverse category of 'slaves' and thereby root the exploitation of slaves into a supposed shared 'nature'. Hence, slavery has always been more contested and unstable than other forms of inequality. Critiques of slavery and various forms of anti-slavery activism developed in relation to all historical forms of slavery. Despite the obvious relations between metaphorical and classificatory slavery, here I choose to keep them separate to highlight that while classificatory slavery is defined by the consequences of the category used to identify a group of slave origin (e.g. *iklan*, *macuBe*, etc.), people whose identity is not associated to slavery (e.g. migrants, prostitutes, etc.) can be compared to slaves due to the exploitative conditions in which they work or live (metaphorical slavery).
- For instance, the *servi caesaris* of ancient Rome and the royal slaves (e.g. Hausa *bawun sarki* or Wolof *fékk bayyettif*) attached to the rulers of West African kingdoms and polities proudly enjoyed privileges well above those of many free commoners (cf. Finley, 1964, 247; Searing, 1993, 41ff; Smith, 1954, 274; Stilwell, 2004), and slave warriors were usually more powerful than other slaves (cf. Klein and Lovejoy, 1979, 192; Roberts, 1987, 35; Searing, 1993, 33).
- Article 1 of the 1926 Slavery Convention defines slavery as 'the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised' (text available at <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/fasc.htm>). John Grace noted that concepts of property in West Africa have not always or not everywhere been the same as in Europe (1975, 6), a point substantially developed in Kopytoff and Miers (1977). More recently, Joel Quirk insightfully criticised the Convention's definition on the grounds that 'it is [...] by no means clear how far a "right of ownership" extends, since this could theoretically include married relationships, or even professional athletes whose contracts are bought and sold' (2006, 568). This point is reminiscent of Kopytoff and Miers' argument (1977) that African societies were characterised by a continuum of rights in persons, and that slaves were not substantially different from other people, as specific sets of rights were held by any particular category of actors on other social categories. Yet, both quantitatively

and qualitatively, the range of rights that can be held upon the slave and the limited obligations of the master towards him/her constitute an extreme case, singling out slaves as disposable beyond what is considered acceptable for free people. While it can be argued that free people are also partially 'owned' – in the sense that claims can be made to their persons and capabilities – the type and amount of rights exercised upon the most marginalised slaves is so encompassing and unidirectional as to make (pervasive, unreciprocated) ownership a defining characteristic of slavery. This 'prototypical' slavery did not, in practice, apply to all actual slave-master relations, as trusted or second-generation slaves acquired more rights and were treated with less rigour (e.g. see Roberts, 1987, 123, on the (skewed) reciprocity of slave-master relations in Maraka society).

9 However, in particular social and historical contexts, it is exactly these accessory conditions (assimilation to chattels and saleability) that became defining characteristics of slavery. Arguably, this is the case for slavery in the American South, which provided a template for modern definitions of slavery in Euro-America.

10 The rhetorical 'othering' of slaves, or of groups considered potentially enslavable, provided an ideological justification for their economic exploitation. However, in some cases the enslavement of *actual* outsiders (raided or imported foreign populations) was a more efficient strategy in purely economic and/or political terms (see Austin, 2005, 160–62). Cf. Searing's discussion of the enslavement of local and foreign peoples in the Senegal river valley (1993, 30).

11 In classical legislation this sometimes takes the form of a distinction between the law of nature (*ius naturale*), by which all humans are born free, and the *ius gentium*, which introduces slavery (cf. 1, Justinian Institutes; *Digesta*, 1.1.4).

12 I recorded this practice in my 2005 fieldwork in the region of Tahoua. Similar practices are mentioned in the responses to Timidria's survey discussed in Abdelkader (2004). Another example is the case of Hadijatou Mani, forced to be the slave concubine of the man who bought her from her mother's master and unable to remarry even after she had been liberated. In April 2008 Hadijatou Mani brought her case before the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice, claiming that Niger had failed to enforce existing anti-slavery legislation (http://www.antislavery.org/archive/briefingpapers/Niger_case_at_ECOWAS.pdf). It should be noted that these cases illustrate persisting gender inequalities as much as they shed light on the vestiges of slavery (cf. Mahdi, 2008).

13 In chapter 2, Martin Klein provides a detailed reconstruction of the historical configurations of slavery in West Africa. Here, I shall merely situate the book's contributions within some broader regional processes.

14 Letter to the French colonial minister quoted in Cooper, 2000, 138.

15 Ibrahim Thioub (2007) identifies two main intellectual strands within African historiography that contribute to this 'silencing' of domestic slavery, while emphasising Atlantic slavery. The first strand is that of nationalist and pan-Africanist historiography, which espoused an idealised view of 'black' African internal hierarchies as humane and paternalist until they are brutally disrupted by 'white' colonisers. The second strand fits in the dependency paradigm and sees African domestic slavery as playing a minor role in the production of Africa's structural underdevelopment. Both schools of thought, as Thioub cogently shows, build their arguments upon simplistic 'chromatic' assumptions (black/white opposition) and reduce the historical role of African societies to one of victims, dismissing internal differences of status and strategies. See also Manning, 1990, 2.

16 On the term MacacuBe, see Note on Language, p. xi.

17 Kopytoff and Miers (1977) argued that the opposition between slavery and freedom is not a characteristic of African slavery. With Vaughan (1977), they suggested that what

distinguished slave status in African societies was the 'institutionalisation of marginality', i.e. the slave's alienation in contexts where sociality is defined by belonging, more than by individual autonomy (freedom). This perspective seems to imply that, unless they are part of solid migrant networks, some slave-status migrants are more marginalised and, hence, 'slave-like' abroad (where they are 'free' from the memory of their past identity) than back home where their slave past now constitutes a form of belonging. This is less paradoxical if the emphasis on belonging is not contrasted to a supposedly 'Western' emphasis on freedom, but considered in relation to high levels of insecurity in Africa, affecting the decisions of people of both free and slave status (cf. Klein and Lovejoy, 1979, 184).

18 Whether the conversion of slaves was encouraged or discouraged by Muslim masters remains a contested, and to a large extent contextual, issue. Discussing the Hausa-Fulani context, M. G. Smith argues for the relatively smooth conversion of slaves and assimilation into the free (Smith, 1954, 249). For a broader comparative discussion of this debate, see Fisher, 2001: 64; Levzion, 1985.

19 Looking at different ideologies of enslavement within Islam, Willis comments on the greater rigidity of ideologies that racialise slavery, as opposed to ideologies that assimilate the slave primarily to the infidel, without strong racial connotations: 'while the bane of infidelity might dissolve in the healing waters of Islam, no rational refutation could hope to dissolve a simile shaped on the premise of racial superiority' (Willis, 1985, 10).

20 Charles Peirce provided many definitions of the index. Yet his focus on 'pointing' underestimates the political implications of indices ('The index asserts nothing – it only says: "there!"' Peirce, 1992, 226). Clearly the index does not just lie in a sea of grammar. If, indeed, indexicality of contexts produces a meaningful social world that does not imply context dependence (Giddens, 1984, 100), meaning is generated through interactions between actors who have different capacities to influence official visions of the social world (cf. Bourdieu, 1998, 75). Hence, 'pointing to the blackness or coarseness or cowardice believed to be characteristic of the slave may be, with Peirce, a 'mere' assertion. But such an assertion becomes a dominant stereotype and a stigma as a consequence of social inequalities and political struggles.