Slavery and Politics

Stigma, Decentralisation, and Political Representation in Niger and Benin

Hahonou, Eric Komlavi

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Slavery and Politics: Stigma, Decentralisation and Political Representation in Niger and Benin

Eric Komlavi-Hahonou

In pre-colonial African societies, access to village spaces and 'spaces of sovereignty' was determined by sex (men rather than women), age (older rather than younger) and social status (free men rather than slaves), and not by egalitarian principles (Olivier de Sardan, 1994). Colonialism profoundly altered pre-existing forms of governance. However, it did not call into question considerations relative to 'political adulthood' (Olivier de Sardan, 1994, 120), which continued to set the rules of competition in local political arenas even after independence and successive waves of democratisation. In spite of numerous regime changes, women, young men and descendants of slaves remained politically marginal.

From the beginning of the 1990s, donor-led decentralisation appeared to both scholars and activists as the best way to promote democratisation 'from the bottom' (Wunsch and Olowu, 1990). Democratisation was presented as a cure to all the ills suffered by centralised African states. It was supposed to increase respect for human rights, to promote 'good governance', transparency and accountability (and thus stimulate the efficient management of public resources), to stimulate popular participation in development and to empower the most destitute and marginalised groups. Decentralisation, initiated from the exterior and taken up by internal forces (e.g. the case of Tuareg revolts in Niger and Mali), was eventually implemented by African governments. In the case of Benin and Niger, the reforms announced at national conferences from the beginning of the 1990s were not implemented until 2002–2003 and 2004, respectively. In both countries, groups of former slaves, until then politically marginalised and stigmatised, took advantage of the opportunities created by decentralisation to access political power at the local level.

Based on fieldwork conducted in Benin and Niger between 2002 and 2007, this essay[1] compares the processes of political emancipation followed by different groups of slave descent. In all of the three groups discussed in this

chapter, slave descendants outnumber the descendants of old elites. While in the Songhay context the aristocracy has maintained its privileges and political power locally, former Tuareg[2] and Peul slaves were able to take over municipal councils. However, this renewal of leadership did not lead to major trans-formations in the management of local affairs. Instead, the new leadership reproduced the political culture and practices of governance that prevailed before decentralisation.

The Fieldsites

Bankilaré and Gorouol are two adjoining municipalities situated in Western Niger between the river and the borders of Burkina Faso and Mali. The Songhay sedentary population practices rain-fed agriculture and flood-recession farming along the banks of the river Gorouol. In regions where rain-fed agriculture is vulnerable to recurrent rain shortage and environmental degradation, flood-recession farming increases the subsistence security of the Songhay. Songhay farmers live in proximity to Fulbé and Kel Tamasheq groups, which used to be nomadic herders but recently became sedentary and started farming marginal lands. Historically, the Kel Tamasheq of the Niger Belt installed themselves on the Gourma bank (right bank of the river Niger) and gradually built powerful confederations that subjugated the Songhay, exacting tribute from them until the colonial conquest. Slavery played a central role in Songhay and Kel Tamasheq systems of production. Colonial domination at the beginning of the twentieth century put an end to the warrior economy, to the Kel Tamasheq supremacy and to slavery (Bernus, 1981). The country was 'pacified', and the French administration used local chieftaincies to rule the region. Sedentary populations were ruled by canton chiefs (*chefs de canton*) and village chiefs, whereas nomadic 'group chieftaincies' (*chefferies de groupement*) were created to administer nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes (Kel Tamasheq and Fulbé).

The municipality of Kalalé is situated in the department of Borgou of Northern Benin, in the Sudano-Sahelian region that borders Nigeria. The population is composed essentially of Baatombu groups (often called Bariba), Boo and Fulbé (more commonly called 'Peuls', and incorporating the Gando). Other ethnic groups in this region play a marginal political role. Local producers clear this vast forested area to cultivate foodcrops and cash crops (cotton in particular) and to practise livestock husbandry (cattle, sheep and goats) which plays a central role in the Borgou economy and Northern Benin more generally. The Fulbé are traditionally identified with semi-nomadic herding, even though they also practise subsistence and commercial agricul-ture. In pre-colonial times, Borgou was dominated by the Baatombu. The Fulbé, scattered in small groups and often without herds, provided herding

labour to the Baatonu and Boo. Gradually, by establishing patron–client relations with the warriors (*wasangari*) and peasants of the Baatonu and Boo, they gained access to land and formed their own herds of cattle. Both raided and protected by the *wasangari*, the Fulbé of Borgu remained dominated until the arrival of French colonialists. In the process of assigning each group a chief who would serve as intermediary between the administration and local populations, the French created an independent Fulbé chieftaincy ex nihilo[3] (Bierschenk, 1993; 1997). These three groups possessed slaves that are referred to, collectively, as 'Gando'.

The Fulbé, Kel Tamasheq and Songhay, as several other Sahelo-Sudanese societies (Meillassoux, 1986), shared political and economic systems based on slavery. Pre-colonial conflicts and wars provided occasions to take prisoners who, unless they were freed, would become 'slaves'. Their descendants became 'captives'.[4] According to Rouch, 'whatever their previous status, they became the property of whoever defeated them' (Rouch, 1954, 48). Slaves constituted an important economic asset and they could be bought as farming, herding and domestic labour. Gradations of status existed also within the group of captives,[5] further stratifying the social hierarchy. The colonial administration ended slavery well after the official abolition of 1905. In spite of its human-istic and civilising ideology, the colonial administration turned a blind eye to the persistence of various forms of slavery for a long time, intervening only superficially when required by circumstances and/or by colonial interests (Bernus, 1981, 108–12; Hardung, 2002; Olivier de Sardan, 1976, 15–18). Slavery, therefore, remained generally tolerated, often under various attenuated forms, even though some effort was put into limiting the abuses of the chiefs and allowing slaves who moved away from their former masters to control their own labour and the profits derived from it. This situation allowed a number of slaves to emancipate themselves economically from their masters while, at times, maintaining relations of a patron–client kind, or continuing to accept various forms of subordination. Slavery thus went on beyond colonialism, and certain forms of master–slave relationships are still observable today.[6]

Here I shall not comment on the polemic[7] initiated by Debord's film (2002) and the report of Timidria and Anti-Slavery International (2003) on the endur-ance of slavery in Niger and the magnitude of this phenomenon. It seems to me that, given the moral overtones of this subject, the ideological stance of the author tends to take precedence over methodological considerations.[8] Suffice it to note that, in the majority of cases, the people that define themselves as 'slave' (*iklan*, *maccuBe*, *jiyaaBe*, *banniyey*) in the course of an interview with an anthropologist or even a banal conversation in Niger or Benin are evoking their categorical status rather than their actual condition (people belonging to a master, working for him, lacking freedom of movement, etc.). In their survey on the state of slavery in Niger, Danda and Galy rightly point out

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that 'slavery in Niger is not completely abolished in practice, and even less in people's mentality' (2003, 106). Various recent reports indicate that this statement would be equally appropriate for Northern Benin. This essay does not attempt to demonstrate the contemporary existence of situations of enslavement. Rather, it uses three case studies to illustrate and analyse the endurance of 'slavery' in popular representations and the recent political mobilisation of groups of servile origin.

The Persistence of Stigma

The terms 'Gando' and 'Bella' designate respectively individuals and groups of servile origin among the 'red Peuls', Boo and Baatombu on the one hand, and the Kel Tamasheq societies of Western Niger on the other. These terms, borrowed from the Baatonu (language of the Baatombu) and from Songhay-Zarma, regroup under a single denomination distinct social groups with different statuses: some belong to servile categories, others have been collectively freed by their masters, others still are independent. In daily interactions with outsiders, the status nuances conveyed in Fulfulde and Tamasheq are commonly glossed over. Once these groups are collectively designated as 'slave' and their members are uniformly represented as stigmatised, mistreated and scorned, they acquire the misleading appearance of a homogeneous whole.

Among the Songhay-Zarma, the dichotomous reasoning applied to the ideological distinction between nobles and captives tends to erase internal nuances (Olivier de Sardan, 1984). The terms that designate individuals of servile status in Songhay or Zarma contexts are euphemised (*almayaali*[9]), codified (*yegga* or 'centre-forward'[10]), omitted (at a number of meetings, I noted that speakers avoided naming people of servile origin, replacing a precise terminology with a commonly understood silence), or veiled (the ubiquitous term 'thing' replaces words that are too sensitive to be used in conversation). The majority of names designating servile groups in Songhay-Zarma, Fulfulde and Tamasheq are currently taboo among intellectuals in urban contexts. This is notably the case with *tam*, *horso*, *kongo* and *banniya* in Songhay-Zarma.[11] As a result of the work of the anti-slavery oganisation Timidria among the Kel Tamasheq of Niger the use of the term Iklan (sing. *Akli*) in public is strictly forbidden, under penalty of being openly confronted. Today the neutral term *Kel Tamasheq*, which encompasses all speakers of the Tamasheq language, or 'black Tuareg' are preferred to Iklan.[12] Similarly, in Peul contexts (Boo or Baatonu of Northern Benin), some people prefer speaking of 'black Peul' rather than using the terms *gannunkeeBe*, *maccuBe*, *Fulbé*, *yobu*, *yonobu*, which describe with greater precision the particular status of these groups (cf. Hardung, 1997, 113–22). These names carry pejorative connotations that are often internalised by their carriers (Hardung, 1997, 117), and their overt

use in public situations induces considerable discomfort.

'It is not appropriate to talk about this!' This type of remark is common in the three groups considered here. A collective taboo surrounds the subject of slavery. When everybody knows, nothing has to be said. A set of symbolic elements function as constant reminders of the social differentiations particular to these societies both at the level of spatial organisation and at that of social interaction and self-representation (hairstyle, garments, jewellery, public demeanour, etc.), or in the organisation of work.

In the village or camp, social status is inscribed in the organisation of space. In Songhay rural villages nobles and 'slaves' live in separate neighbourhoods. In Bankilaré domestic slaves are generally situated west of the nobles' camps. Instead, the Gando are usually settled at the periphery of the red Peul's camps and the Baatonu or Boo villages. They are placed at the outskirts, towards the bush: in sum, they are physically banned from these societies of which they nonetheless constituted, and continue to constitute, a component essential to their development. Here and there some Songhay villages or Tamasheq camps are locally known for being composed only of slave descendants. As Bierschenk notes with regards to the Peul of North Benin, spatial structures play a constitutive role in social processes, as they make readable, in space, the principles of social organisation, thereby 'making those who inhabit these spaces believe that social constructs are "natural" and therefore inevitable, whereas they are nothing but the product of history[13] and culture' (Bierschenk, 1999, 196–97). This analysis could be extended to the three cases studied here. An example illustrates this point. In the Borgou a number of Gando farms located between Boo and Baatonu villages and Peul camps result from the auto-marginalisation operated by the Gando themselves. It is a phenomenon that occurs particularly among the *Yonobu*, who are children of the Boo and Baatombu assigned to the Peul at an early age because they were suspected of being sorcerers. The young *Yonubu* understands subsequently that he is not a full member of his adoptive Peul family (he cannot for example hope to marry a Peul woman), he is the genetic offspring of his Boo or Baatonu parents, who had rejected him and later wished to reintegrate him (in exchange for an ox given to his adoptive family). But his reintegration into the village proves difficult because, there, he is considered a Gando, an object of daily ridicule and scorn. Therefore he chooses to settle on the outskirts of other villages, creating new camps and clearing farms on unoccupied lands. 'Neither Peul nor Baatombu' (Hardung, 1997), the Gando places himself somewhere in between these two identities. His position at the margins of dominant societies reflects an emotionally charged psychological process that, according to some interpretations, is reflected in the meaning of the name 'Gando', namely 'outside is best!'[14]

Moreover, in Songhay villages every marriage, baptism,[15] religious celebration and burial[16] reiterates a person's place and rank in society. In Fulbé and

Kel Tamasheq cultures slave women do not wear the same clothes, jewellery and hairstyle as noble women. Strict marriage endogamy also works as an expression of distance between different social categories. While noble men can marry women of servile status[17] (ennobling them through marriage), marriage between a man of slave descent and a noble woman often remains unthinkable from the perspectives of both 'nobles' *and* 'slaves' who have internalised the dominant ideology.

The social stigma attached to slave descent is also manifested in the division of labour. In Kel Tamasheq societies a free man will resist doing any farming and other agricultural labour, as this work is traditionally considered debasing and reserved for slaves. In fact, this is one of the causes for the impoverishment of the Kel Tamasheq nobles in Bankilaré: having lost their animals following the droughts, the *Imajeghen* were unable to reconstitute their herds through the profits of farming, in contrast to their 'slaves' who found a source of prosperity in this work.[18] This situation is less marked among the Fulbé of Northern Benin (where environmental conditions are not as harsh), who took up agriculture when their slaves were freed by the colonial administration. The social division of labour between elites and slave descendants is less flagrant in Songhay contexts, because here agriculture is traditionally practised by both groups. In urban centres, however, cleaning jobs and other demeaning tasks are reserved to slaves and foreigners (Hahonou, 2003).

If these aspects remain hidden or unspoken, they constitute tacit rules in the social and political arena. The whole of these 'un-saids' contributes to the production and reproduction of 'ideological discrimination' (Olivier de Sardan, 1984, 201). If, historically speaking, what distinguishes the free man from the slave is nothing but misfortune (a kidnapped child, a man defeated in war, a person born to slave parents, a child 'sorcerer' born among the Baatombu, etc.), ideology associates pejorative physical, moral and behavioural attributes with servile status. The slave bears the heavy load of being at the same time 'defeated', without lineage, without history, obscene, honourless, shameless and a liar.[19] He cannot conduct himself as a free man. He is portrayed as the antithesis of the noble (see Riesman, 1974, on Fulbé slaves; Olivier de Sardan, 1976, on Songhay slaves). As the slave *is* owned, he or she is denied the capacity to own land, to lead prayer or command free individuals. The ideology of slavery characterises the slave as an eternal outsider (Kopytoff and Miers, 1977). This set of representations fosters a 'social racism' (Botte and Schmitz, 1994, 118) that is often extended to representations of slave descendants, producing an inferiority complex (Hardung, 1997, 128) that counterbalances the feeling of superiority of those of noble descent.

The internalisation of rules by different members of a community is flexible and varies across generations and levels of education. Referring to Western Niger, Rouch highlighted the resistance of slaves to emancipation by the

French administration, as it was considered that true liberation could only come from the master (1954, 49). Olivier de Sardan emphasised the obstacles to the achievement of 'psychological independence' by the slaves (1969, 47–48). Today in the rural milieu of Western Niger, as well as in Northern Benin, older ex-slaves, often illiterate, tend to perpetuate attitudes of loyalty, deference and respect towards their masters. The inferiority of one and superiority of the other are fully endorsed and, to return to Bierschenk's notion, they appear as a 'natural' social fact. Thus, in such contexts, slave and master will spontaneously employ terms and attitudes (body language) denoting their respective status. At the harvest, a slave may choose to offer a gift of cereals to his master to foster good relations with him in the future. Today these attitudes are induced less by actual subordination than by spontaneous or interested dispositions.

> Now the masters are finished! They don't exist anymore, in this area you only find them in Bankilaré [...] This is something we don't like, because when you haven't got a big man, whoever comes can take advantage of you. We prefer that he [the group chief] remains here, among us. (*Akli*, chef de tribu *Doufarafarak*, 2003)

The colonial administration almost always appointed 'traditional chiefs' chosen from the ranks of the old masters. In contexts marked by the recurrent predations of state agents at the expense of rural populations, and more particularly of so-called 'nomadic' peoples, the 'traditional' chief is perceived as a protector, the sole recourse in the face of abuses of power, sometimes violent, enacted by the 'wearers of uniform' (police, soldiers, customs agents, environmental agents, etc.). His status, his knowledge of the administration (of which he is an essential cogwheel) and the privileged relationships that he maintains with his superiors (the *sous-preféts* in the first place) gives the chief an intermediary position.[20] The chief is the privileged link between the state and local communities. All information, service or good directed to the population has to meet his preliminary approval. The chief has the role of the gatekeeper[21] and can allow or deny the transmission of anything destined for his subjects at will. He articulates the relations between his subjects and state services and reduces (or extends) the distance that separates them, in exchange for a financial remuneration, the cost of access to citizenship (Hahonou, 2006, 104–20).

In Northern Benin the derogatory connotations of the status of 'slave descendant' drove an entire generation of intellectuals who had achieved a successful political and bureaucratic career into hiding their origins (for example, by speaking Baatonu rather than Fulfulde, changing name, living in the city and severing links with their village of origin). This attitude, rooted in the Gando 'identity complex' (cf. Hardung, 1997) is not, however, the only possible option for intellectuals. A number of Gando and Bella intellectuals

have, on the contrary, opted for various forms of resistance. In the name of the ideals of justice and egalitarianism transmitted through modern education, Bella and Gando intellectuals in Niger formed political associations or parties to denounce the ongoing domination of former slaves by former masters and to claim a more equitable access to power. In Niger this resistance[22] took the form of associational militancy in favour of the emancipation of people of servile origins and gave rise to political parties addressed specifically to the 'black Tuareg' electorate. In Benin Peuls and Gando formed a common front in a political movement that took the form of a Fulfulde linguistic and cultural seminar, until a large group of Gando distanced themselves from the red Peuls, and Gando leaders created their own movements.

The Difficult Task of the Political Representation of Slaves in the Songhay Milieu

In spite of the greater demographic weight of former slaves, since the establishment of party politics in Niger (1946) all the representatives of the National Assembly from Gorouol have been chosen from the ranks of the aristocracy. No slave descendant was able to emerge politically (Hahonou, 2004a and b). 'Permanent juniors'[23] in Songhay-Zarma societies, slaves are traditionally excluded from power. The slave cannot envisage his accession to elder status. He will always remain dependent upon the master or his descendants. Power can only belong to a noble. In this context it is not surprising that former colonial soldiers of slave descent, who had been appointed chiefs by colonial administrators, were targeted by acute local criticism in the 1950s and 1960s. From the point of view of the aristocratic ideology, there is a complete incompatibility between servile status and the exercise of political functions. Nowadays, in spite of change,[24] these considerations are still widespread and the descendants of Songhay or Zarma slaves remain the object of discrimination in local political institutions.

The un-saids that structure the representations of 'slaves' among noble Songhay of Gorouol result in the quiet removal of ex-slaves from positions of responsibility through various manipulations. This occurs both in the constitution of local associations and of political parties:

> It is true and always a delicate subject [the place of slaves]. When the (management committee) of the Boogu ONG was formed in 1992, a nobleman got the leadership through various manipulations. Yatakala being 90% composed of captives, it was logical that they got the management roles at the level of presidency, vice-presidency... but after a covert debate we conspired to place myself in the best position. They said: 'That's it, we want you there because Yatakala must be on the frontline for the whole district, and we can't put a "captive"! We have to set criteria so that you

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are in front, and it's up to you to meet these criteria'. So, we argued for the necessity to have someone capable of discussing with the Whites, the ONG, and reading documents.[25] There it is: during that whole time it was them [slave descendants of the village] who proposed this to me. And it is in this manner that I came to office. (member of the Boogu ONG bureau, interview at Yatakala, district of Gorouol, Niger, 2003)

Olivier de Sardan's writings on the ideological and symbolic survival of slavery in Songhay-Zarma societies remained essentially accurate (1984, 201–05). However, the multipartitism of the 1990s reshuffled local political forces. Just as in the 1990s young men of free origin tried to seize new political opportunities, the descendants of captives (mostly also young men) struggled to achieve political representation.

In Gorouol, if there are two major parties today, the MNSD and the PNDS, it is above all because of the problem of 'castes', and us… we understood this, and it's one of the reasons why we approached the PNDS [...] In the MNSD, there are older people and those who don't want to confront them. Us rebels, we side with the PNDS to try to change things. (a young politician of noble origin from Gorouol, Niamey 2003)

In Niamey the aristocratic intelligentsia militant within the MNSD Nassara[26] spread the rumour that the majority of the Songhay-Zarma of the Tillabéri region affiliated with the PNDS is of servile origin. Thus, every member of this party is suspected to be 'casted' or to sympathise with the illegitimate cause of those servile groups that are trying to overcome their conditions of origin. Thus, in Gorouol, social schisms are partly reflected in partisan demarcations. In this socio-cultural context national politicians are careful in their campaigns to subtly take advantage of existing social and political divisions to create their political clientage.

When I visit villages to ask people to support me, it must be known that I am noble… otherwise, those who consider themselves noble will not follow me. It's not easy! In introducing myself along with someone 'casted', things reinforce each other, and both sides contribute to sustaining the party. (the same PNDS politician from Gorouol, Niamey, 2003).

Yet the PNDS party did not win in Gorouol at the municipal elections of 2004. The MNSD Nassara, locally controlled by the aristocracy, gained all of the eleven seats of the municipal council. Hence all Songhay municipal representatives[27] are aristocrats or free men. In spite of the opportunities for political representation that became available thanks to the recent municipal elections, the opposition between slave descendants (*bagney*) and nobles (*borciney*) failed to find expression in the Gouruol municipal council.

The Political Emancipation of Kel Tamasheq of Servile Origin in Bankilaré

Referring to political representation among the Kel Tamasheq, Bourgeot notes that 'slaves [...] are, by definition, deprived of both political and economic freedom' (1995, 28). The 'captive' is situated outside politics (Bourgeot, 1995, 39). The repeated crises that the Kel Tamasheq have endured since 1904, such as major droughts (1900–03, 1913–14, 1931–32, 1972–73, 1984–85) and hostile colonial policies,[28] obliged masters to free a large part of their slaves (*Iklan*). The latter cleared the bush and became farmers or maintained their lives as nomadic shepherds, sometimes continuing to pay regular tributes to their masters. Some masters retained power over their economically emancipated slaves. Often this takes the form of protracted patron–client relationships[29] reflected in matters of political representation. By virtue of these relationships, the *Iklan* lend electoral support to their former *Imajeghen* masters. In the case of the Kel Tamasheq of Bankilaré, at the time of the legislative elections of 1989–91, 1993–95, 1995–96 and 1996–99, all council seats had been monopolised by the customary and religious chieftaincies. The Kel Tamasheq customary chiefs were able to take advantage of the new political deal that followed from the process of democratisation. From 1989, the eldest member of the chiefly family of the *Kel Igirer*[30] became a member of the National Assembly as his name was included in the national list presented by the MNSD party. From 1992–93, the Kel Igirer chieftaincy (*chefferie de groupement*) also managed to profit from the status of special circumscription[31] to monopolise the political representation of the group at the parliamentary level, with the support of the religious chiefs and to the detriment of the *Iklan* majority.[32] The *Imajeghen* and their allies, the *ineslimen* (religious specialists), had to rely on their tributary and patron–client relationships with dependent groups (mostly *imghad* and *iklan*) to win the elections. Moreover, the ambiguous notion of 'mixed' status was used instrumentally to oppose the increasing weight of the *Iklan* in local politics. Thus, the two representatives elected in 1993, 1995 and 1996 shared the characteristic of being of mixed ancestry, born from *taklit*[33] mothers who had been freed by their *aneslim* masters. This granted them a double claim to the support of free and *Iklan* people.

Nonetheless, in the space of a decade the local balance of forces between masters and slaves progressively changed to the advantage of the latter. In Bankilaré, at the end of 1999, the struggle for the emancipation of slave descendants led by the Timidria association[34] finally resulted in the first slave descendant winning a seat in the National Assembly (cf. Hahonou, 2004a, 41–43). Even if the elected member belonged to the 'old school', the challenge to the *Imajeghen*'s and *Ineslimen*'s political supremacy came primarily from younger generations. In addition to Timidria's action, the election of an *Akli*

benefited from the support of certain politicians from Gorouol.[35] However, the *Iklan's* victory at the legislative elections of the end of 1999 should not suggest a lack of internal divisions. Even the *Iklan* are divided into opposing conservative and progressive groups. The militant action of Timidria is still scarcely understood by many of them. For others, arrangements with the masters present more advantages than an uncertain struggle for emancipation:

> The people of Tahoua [referring to the Timidria association, whose national president is from Tahoua] come to insult people, to divide them by supporting the struggle against the 'Reds'. The Timidria, after their missions in Bankilaré, they tell women to take off the bracelets that they wear on their feet. They are in their vehicles and they stop to forcibly remove the bracelets from the women. And then, they also tell the women to remove their traditional hairstyles[36] and their clothes typical of *tiklan* women. These are the 'worst slaves' of Tahoua, who come to distribute money. One day, an old woman, one of the wet-nurses[37] of a son of the old-man [the group chief], replied to them: 'If you want me to remove the bracelets, then change the color of my skin first!' (Kel Tamasheq politician of servile status, closely related to the chiefs of the Bankilaré group, 2003).

Until 2004[38] Timidria's action in Bankilaré remained fairly discrete and localised (focused upon the camps where the association leaders have relatives), often misunderstood, and even opposed by the creation of a development association[39] led by an *Akli* loyal to the *chefferie* of the *Kel Igirer*. Often assimilated to a political party, the ideology of Timidria seems dissonant with popular representations of politics, development aid or Muslim morality.

> 1st person: 'Yes, it is slaves who joined forces [Timidria] to fight to end slavery.
> 2nd person: Really? You know, we hadn't even understood this. We thought it was a party. [...]
> 1st person: Hasn't slavery been over for a long time?
> 2nd person: Maybe it's just against saying that word.
> 1st person: It's in the Qu'ran. Unless they're going to make the Qu'ran disappear so that they don't encounter the word. Slavery disappear? That would mean that these people are against the Qu'ran, against God. (extract from a discussion between two Kel Tamasheq women, Balleyara, 2003).

The message of Timidria, which challenges the verbal discrimination against slave descendants (the pejorative character of the term *Bella* or *Iklan* used to discredit and demean a person morally), is misunderstood. Neither development broker nor political party, Timidria has long remained an atypical actor in local politics. In other regions of Niger, politically engaged development brokers were quicker to reposition themselves at the political level (Tidjani Alou, 2000b, 303).

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The formation of a political party of slave descendants, the PRD Mahiba – *parti tan Iklan* or 'slave party' (as the *Imajeghen* call it) – seen as the political wing of Timidria, marked an important symbolic turn, even if they could not yet impose themselves on the local and national political chessboards. The PRD Mahiba was created in 1996 from a schism of the PUND Salama, itself originating from a division with the UDPS Amana, a political wing of the Touareg rebellion.[40] The three parties have in common the fact of being supported primarily by a Kel Tamasheq electorate. Following the Zinder congress of the PUND Salama (1995), a party of militants originally from the Tillabéri department detached itself from the leader Akoli Dawal[41] and created the PRD Mahiba. For the militants of Tillabéri (at the time, the administrative capital of the department of Western Niger), joining the PUND Salama had initially been motivated by a concern with the political under-representation of the Kel Tamasheq and their under-development compared to the Songhay. Since its creation, the party has been presided over by a native of Tillabéri. For the Bankilaré area, two state officers from the 'black Tuareg community' were its representatives (one of them was the first general secretary of the party, and it is said that the other owes his promotion in the state apparatus to his membership in the PRD Mahiba). In Bankilaré the electorate of the PRD generally followed the successive political memberships of its leaders: MNSD and ANDP, then PRD, and more recently MNSD (1999). Although it did not win the elections,[42] the emergence of the PRD Mahiba marked an important step in people's mindsets as an attempt to break with the former order. In this power quest, which follows the logic of 'political nomadism' (or opportunism), the return to the MNSD has above all allowed access to the financial resources required by the expensive and uncertain adventure of electoral campaigns.[43]

On the death of the first *Bella* representative of Bankilaré in 2001, his substitute (*député suppléant*), an active member of Timidria and of the PRD Mahiba, replaced him in office. Following allegations of corruption, the latter was disqualified from participating in the legislative elections of 2004. His successor, supporting the MNSD Nassara, was another *Bella* activist of Timidria, coming from Bankilaré and sympathising with the PRD Mahiba. This politician was a doctor in ethnology who taught at the University of Niamey and played a decisive role in the municipal election campaign of July 2004 and the formation of the municipal executive bureau of which he is said to pull the strings.

The municipal council of Bankilaré which was elected at the end of 2004, after the resumption of the July elections (due to frauds denounced by the parties in competition), is composed of eleven elected representatives and two members by right: the deputy of Bankilaré and the chief of the *Kel Igirer* group. It is heavily dominated by the MNSD (8 of 11 seats), who won the bulk of *Bella* votes, whereas the traditional chiefs and their allies, affiliated

with the CDS, had to settle for three seats only (of which one was *Bella*). The post of mayor of Bankilaré was accorded to a slave descendant from Bankilaré employed at the Prefecture of Téra. Beyond having the support of the local member of Parliament, the MNSD candidates in the municipal administration benefited from the financial support of a Pullo who was originally from Bankilaré and became influential at the national level, acting as advisor to the prime minister, Hama Amadou, for several years.

Timidria, which had been in favour of accelerating the process of decentralisation 'likely to offer marginalised groups such as former slaves the possibility of taking part in the local administration of public affairs and to progressively erase the stereotypes that oppress them' (Dandah and Galy, 2003, 72), clearly played a central role in the process of the emancipation of slave descendants in tamasheq contexts.

The Historical Revenge of the Gando of Kalalé

The political marginalisation of the Fulbé of the Borgou dates from the pre-colonial era, from the time when they were clients of the Baatombu and the Boo. Colonialism had provisionally interrupted their dependence and exploitation. In creating fulbé chieftaincies (which did not exist before), the colonial administration had allowed them to establish direct relations with the state apparatus. The suppression of the chieftaincy in 1972 under a Marxist-Leninist regime constituted a step backward for this politically under-represented group. Exploited by the post-colonial administration, victims of all sorts of extortions by the military, civil servants and a corrupt justice, discriminated against in disputes arising from the damage caused by their animals on the fields of the Baatombu and Boo,[44] regularly deceived by unavoidable local intermediaries (the 'district chiefs', 'delegates' and other 'village chiefs'), the Fulbé remained locked in a stoicism rooted in the fulbé notion of *senteene*.[45] For a long time, the Fulbé accepted the marginalisation and the injustices bestowed upon them. It has even been possible to talk of 'auto-marginalisation of the Peul' (Bierschenk, 1995, 462; cf. Hardung, in this volume), who until recently stayed away from politics, thus being unable to end the humiliations they suffered. They attribute their exploitation to the historical error they committed by fleeing the 'school of Whites' (*janirde batuure*). Like the Songhay or Kel Tamasheq chiefs, the 'red Peuls' preferred sending to school the children of their slaves rather than their own. Their children's lack of schooling deprived them of 'intellectuals'[46] capable of representing their interests *vis-à-vis* the State and other groups that exploit them (Bierschenk, 1999, 208–09).

The collective awakening of the Fulbé occurred in December 1987 with the birth of the Laawol Fulfulde movement (lit. 'the way of the Fulbé').

Considered incapable of collective action, the Fulbé generated considerable surprise when they organised a massive gathering in Kandi, district-capital of Northern Benin, and expressed their claims in the course of a linguistic seminar (Bierschenk, 1992; Guichard, 1990). This event was made possible by the post-1980s change in Benin state politics against the earlier centralising approach and towards the promotion of internal diversity of national ethnicities and cultures (Bierschenk, 1995, 462–67). This opportunity was initially seized by a small group of fulbé intellectuals who, since the early 1980s, had joined an evangelical priest's struggle to promote literacy among the rural Fulbé of Northern Benin. Thanks to the support of some politicians, and in particular of the person who would become the president of the Laawol Fulfulde and who, at the time, was national deputy, the provisional committee obtained the authorisations and material support necessary to organise the Kandi seminar. At the local level, the huge mobilisation of 'Peul' and Gando, manifested through the support of traditional chiefs, massive popular participation and important material contributions (supplies, livestock, cash), was determinant in making the event happen. During the seven days of the conference, various commissions elaborated different themes, such as 'the origin of the Peuls of Borgou', 'the life of the Peul herder', 'schooling', etc. Literacy and education were established as 'key to the emancipation of nationality' (i.e. of the Fulbé group[47]). Through literacy, education would contribute to the reduction of the marginalisation and exploitation suffered by Fulbé for decades: 'The uneducated man is a blind man!'

The great Fulbé movement of Northern Benin that initially reflected a reaction against exploitation by the *HaaBe*[48] (the 'others', the 'non-Peuls') finally highlighted a different form of exploitation: that of Fulbé by Fulbé. This consideration led rapidly to internal disagreements in the Laawol Fulfulde. Thus, the second conference held in Kalalé in 1990 was disrupted by the participants of the first. The same ills listed three years earlier were still going on. Literacy and education, always seen as avenues to progress, had hardly advanced as a result of bureaucratic inertia. On one side, young people expressed consternation *vis-à-vis* the elders' management style. The latter established the committee as a sort of traditional tribunal which 'settled family disputes over wife stealing and the like, rather than the problem of Peul access to education'. Moreover, the funds of the committee, derived from various contributions (gifts of livestock, membership fees and donations, state-funded grants, etc.), had been embezzled by various members of the bureau. The youths who had criticised the elders of the committee were ostracised from the organisation. Instead, the Gando, frustrated by their continuing marginalisation, reiterated their demands to the committee. Gando intellectuals realised that the 'Peul' did not consider them full members of their group[49] and that their integration in the Laawol Fulfulde was merely a façade of unity, behind which

divisions remained profound. Thus, the bureau of the committee remained dominated by the 'red Peuls' to the detriment of the 'blacks'. In preparation for the Banikoara conference of 1997, Gando delegations were received by the bureau committee in an attempt to overcome disagreements: 'They evoke Peul origins[50] and they don't talk about the Gando. They call us to finance conferences, but that's all! They cheat us and still dominate us...' Few things changed after this conference, and the expression of Gando frustration grew more intense as time went on.

In 2000–01 (after the death of the Laawol Fulfulde president), a restricted meeting between Gando and 'Peul' leaders took place in Parakou (the administrative centre of the Borgou prefecture, where a number of intellectuals work and live) to ensure that Gando representation be guaranteed in the management committee of the Laawol Fulfulde. However, it was another 'red' who took the leadership of the organisation. In spite of an agreement in principle following the meeting, the Gando soon afterwards detached themselves from the joint movement and formed their own organisations following the model of the linguistic conferences. This is how in this period the Idi Waadi association ('what we want has taken place') came to be formed at the following of Gando leaders from Nikki. A number of twin organisations that opposed the old order also emerged at the local level: Djanati ('peace finally come') in Kandi, Semmee Allah ('the force of God') in Kalalé, etc. These organisations served as political platforms for Gando leaders running in the municipal elections of December 2002– January 2003.

Semmee Allah is a branch of the Laawol Fulfulde created by Ourou Sé Guéné, a college professor from Kalalé. Although the name evokes the accomplishment of the will of God, the group identifies with physical strength (*semmee*) and work (*golle*), which are the positive values emphasised by the Gando to distinguish themselves from other groups, as noted by Hardung (1997, 129–35). These values constitute a key element in the contemporary construction of Gando identity. After the colonial abolition of slavery, former slaves used their physical labour to further emancipate themselves. The Gando of Borgou quickly became wealthier than their former Peul and Baatombu masters (Lombard, 1965). But it is above all education, intellectual work, that allowed the Gando to progressively achieve a reversal of power relations. Through education the Gando gradually achieved state functions (Hardung, 1997, 137). Through education and knowledge of the past they were able to accept a collective identity until then defined essentially by the discourses and practices of exclusion of other groups (Boo, Baatombu and 'Peuls'). Gando intellectuals used their individual experience and understanding of the situation to help the whole group to emancipate itself and reappropriate an ethnic identity. This process of 'ethnicisation', to borrow Bierschenk's expression (1993), is now advanced among the Gando. This group, of which Hardung said that

internal status differences constituted 'factors hindering group cohesion and the emergence of a collective identity' (1997, 117), was able to seize the opportunities offered by the processes of democratisation and decentralisation.

Just like the Kel Tamasheq of Bankilaré of servile origin, it was through associationism that the Gando began their process of political emancipation. Initially integrated in the unitary Laawol Fulfulde movement, where they could not fully express themselves,[51] the Gando progressively and collectively developed an ethnic identity of their own: 'neither Baatombu, nor Peul', but Gando. They took control of an ideological difference that until then had placed them outside, or banned them from the Boo, Baatonu and Peul societies. Nowadays, they assert their distinctiveness, confirming the tendency noticed by Hardung (1997, 137–38). As their repeated negotiations with the bureau dominated by Laawol Fulfulde aristocrats failed, they created an alternative movement founded on their ethnic uniqueness, particularly *vis-à-vis* the Peuls. As had happened with the organisers of the first linguistic seminar, the intellectuals who initiated the Gando movements became its leaders.

The composition of the Kalale municipal council reflects the demographic preponderance of the Gando:[52] of 17 municipal seats, nine are occupied by Gando. Orou Sé Guéné[53] – head of the RUND party[54] – fought his electoral campaign, working closely with his Gando 'brothers', under the banner of Gando political emancipation, struggle against the mismanagement of the cotton business, protection against the iniquities of the *HaaBe*, etc. He won seven seats and made a coalition with the delegates of two minor parties which had four seats in all, becoming the first elected mayor in the Kalalé municipality at the beginning of 2003.[55] However, the election of Orou Sé Guéné did not depend merely on the electoral weight of the Gando, but also on his capacity to recruit voters from other ethnic groups (Boo, Baatombu and other minorities).

If, for the descendants of the local aristocracy, the victory of a Gando threw shame on Kalalé, a slave descendant at the head of a collectivity was not an entirely new occurrence in Borgou. In Nikki, a neighbouring locality that had belonged to the Baatombu kingdom, a man of slave descent had achieved the highest position in local authority a few years earlier (at the time[56] Nikki was a *sub-prefecture*). Yet this historical precedent was short-lived because the sub-prefect was quickly replaced by a Nikki 'prince', promoted by the Minister of Interior Affairs. The latter seized the occasion of the expulsion of the Gando sub-prefect to reiterate publicly the incompatibility of individuals of servile status with leadership functions. This case caused great controversy in the Gando community of the Borgou, which took its revenge a few years later by 'voting ethnically' on the occasion of the municipal elections. Hence, the rise to power of slave descendants belongs to a tendency older than the recent trend induced by decentralisation.

New Elites, Old Forms of Governance

The appearance of municipalities in the institutional and political landscape of Benin and Niger is a recent phenomenon. One might think that it has led to the renewal of the local ruling elite. But in fact municipalities constitute only partial innovations, as local political arenas were already governed by a decentralised administration (the *sub-prefectures*, the *postes administratifs*), by a group of associative-style organisations and by the so-called *chefferie traditionelle*. Therefore, municipalities did not fill a political, administrative, organisational and institutional vacuum. Rather, they added themselves to multiple existing organisations in which local elites had already carved their niches. These multiple actors of local governance managed economic enterprises (organisations of cotton producers and herders) and the transport system (syndicates of transporters), they participated in public investment, administrated communities, etc. They immediately tried to take over the municipal bodies to which all of these sectors were legally transferred. On the one hand, the officers of the under-financed local administration converged around municipalities (to which the bulk of the resources of previous decentralised institutions had been transferred). Thus, former sub-prefects, general secretaries and other administrative officers of the sub-prefectures, as well as agents of technical services of the state, threw themselves into the political struggle for the first communal elections. Some of them were able to assume the main executive positions of the new municipalities (mayors and adjunct mayors). The profiles of newly elected municipal staff suggest that the leaders of the main local organisations took advantage of the political influence they had acquired within their old institutions to access new influential roles in the municipal councils (Hahonou, 2006b). Hence there wasn't an entire renewal but rather a displacement of local elites to new institutional positions. The migration of political actors to municipalities is inscribed in the broader transfer of competences and resources occasioned by the decentralisation process in Benin and Niger.

As local elites conquered the municipalities, they transposed their conceptions and practices of administration of public and collective resources to them. Thus, the administration of decentralised collectivities follows the logics that prevailed before their establishment in the administration of the sub-prefectures as much as in the organisations of cotton growers, water management committees, etc. Municipal governance inherited the dynamics of the political culture and moral economy which was anchored in local institutions in charge of the allocation of common property resources. These local practices are characterised by the diversion of funds, the systematic recourse to 'over-billing', the non-reimbursement of credit, various forms of neo-patrimonialism and nepotism, forms of clientelism that determine the redistribution

of resources… These strategies are generalised and observable in all activities and all sectors.

In Benin the cotton sector is fairly indicative of these dynamics, which are part of the 'corruption complex' (Olivier de Sardan, 1996, 99) and rooted in forms of representation of the management of common resources down to the village level. 'In the village, becoming secretary of the village collective has become the ultimate ambition of the young students' (the mayor of a Borgou municipality, June 2006). The secretary of the village cooperative (*Groupement Villageois* or GV) is responsible for the administration of all inputs related to cotton farming (seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, country credits) as well as the management of incomes. The concrete aspects of these tasks allow the secretary and the other members of the management committee to enrich themselves under everyone's eyes with impunity.[57] Since the 1990s the conspicuous consumption of resources misappropriated by the administrative staff of producers' associations (funerary ceremonies, purchase of vehicles and audio and video equipment, etc.) has provoked the young cotton farmers' condemnation of the practices of the elders. These young, educated groups dismissed the old administration or formed new associations, where they reproduced the same practices and perpetuated the same 'model' of rapid social achievement.

> In all the North, it's like that. And it's tied to corruption. In certain GV, the presidents have been in office since 1984, when the texts allow for three-year mandates. But they don't want to leave. As everybody wants to be the boss, new networks are created so that people can lead! (former director of the Municipal Union of Kalale Cotton Producers, current 1st adjunct to the mayor of Kalalé, June 2006)

In Kalalé Gando leaders also fit in this dynamic of management turnover of the producers' associations. Of 74 producers' associations, more than half are Gando. It was to some of these groups that the Gando leaders, such as Ourou Sé Guéné, turned to finance their campaigns and enrol voters for the municipal elections of 2002. These associative organisations are real political instruments that allow for rapid personal enrichment, but also, and most of all, constitute a platform for the establishment of patron–client networks. In fact, the leaders of these structures have the tacit mandate to redistribute the associations' resources to their supporters, who turn to them when they need protection and/or assistance. Redistribution occurs primarily among relatives, as well as friends and allies recruited from within one's social or ethnic group. Neither the management of associations of Gando producers nor that of Gando cultural and identity movements (Idi Waadi, Djanati, Semmee Allah) could avoid this dominant model. 'They [the Gando] created their own way but they made the same mistakes by copying the behaviours of their masters.

They did the same thing, if not worse!' ('red' Peul, dissident member of the Laawol Fulfulde, April 2007).

These associative logics and practices are reproduced in municipal institutions, which, because of the competences and resources transferred to them, are seen as new income opportunities by local actors. Whatever the rhetoric used to access municipal power, the administration practices of elected Gando leaders do not differ from those of other administrations. They had not yet reached the end of their first mandate when this was already clear for all to see: '80 per cent of the mayors came to enrich themselves!' (officer of the National Association of Benin Municipalities, June 2006).

Since 2005, and after having already evaded dismissal by buying off some of the municipal advisors,[58] the Gando mayor of Kalalé was deposed following a 'vote of defiance' by the municipal council (14 votes against 3). As with a number of other mayors of Borgou, the mayor of Kalalé was blamed for his 'individualistic management' (*gestion solitaire*), that is, his tendency to keep for himself the benefits of his dominant position, 'binging alone' and excluding other municipal councillors from opportunities to 'devour the till' (i.e. municipal budget). His dismissal, orchestrated by central state powers via the prefecture of Parakou, was part of a series of depositions that affected particularly, but not exclusively, the Northern municipalities and was a political move aimed at destabilising the opposition before the presidential elections of March 2006. However, the transactions generated by these dynamics suggest that the redistribution of resources to political supporters had not been satisfactory from the viewpoint of the municipal council. In effect, it is generally expected that a mayor, 'put in business' by his allies in the council, will ensure an equitable distribution. In the political culture of municipalities, the 'accountability' of mayors is defined in terms of their capability to redistribute goods and services to other elected officials, as well as to their electors.

In Bankilaré or in Gorouol municipal institutions had only just been set up before embezzlement was already a routine affair. As municipalities were perceived primarily as a way to 'stuff one's belly', the embryos of municipal institutions established in Gorouol and Bankilaré sufficed to satisfy the objectives envisioned by local elected officials: to share municipal resources among themselves. In the municipalities of Benin and Niger considered in this essay the practices and modalities of distribution are very similar. In Kalalé and in the majority of the Benin municipalities executive power is limited to the posts of mayor and his adjuncts. The executive committee had to find a way to involve the other members of the municipal council in the management of resources. Some of the councillors (generally those belonging to the local branch of the governing party) were named 'district chiefs' and made responsible for the collection of municipal taxes at village markets. This allows two-thirds of the council to participate directly in the collection of local funds

and to 'dip' into the 'municipal pot'.[59] In Niger the councillors of Gorouol decided to assign their substitutes to the position of collectors of market taxes. This decision, formalised by an ordinance signed by the mayor, ensures the provision of 'political rewards' expected by the substitutes. The decision was positively welcomed by the national direction of the MNSD Nassara, Niger's governing party. It is common knowledge in Niger that the market tax collectors, whose official remuneration should be a percentage of the taxes collected, actually set their own 'salary'.[60] Of course these measures, taken by the municipal councils, are hardly compatible with the stated objective of increasing municipal income.

> Subsitutes: they are nothing in the municipality. But this, it's the spirit of sharing, it's to maintain their respect. It presupposes that the councilors fatten themselves, and give tickets to substitutes in compensation. It's a political recompense! (Chief of the Gorouol district, Kolmane, September 2006)
>
> This mess is not unique to these two communes [Gorouol and Bankilaré], you also find it in Méhana and Dargol, it happens a little bit everywhere! (General Secretary of the Téra prefecture, Niger, September 2006)

In the practice of municipal administration, being of slave descent or not is inconsequential. Municipalities are political arenas endowed with resources that ought to be seized. In Kalalé or Bankilaré, belonging to a servile category is no longer an obstacle for accessing these resources, and it might, in fact, be an asset (identity as a political resource and as a means to gain votes). Those who had to settle for the neck of the sheep can now obtain choice cuts.[61] It is in this sense that a historical revenge has taken place.

The relations established between governors and governed in the municipalities are in continuity with past habits. They are characterised by a 'feudal' political regime, that is, following Maquet (1961), they are relations organised 'between two parties with unequal power, relations of patronage on one side, and of loyalty and service on the other'. What counts most is the personal tie between patron and client. Yet in most cases today the patron is no longer the master and the client not necessarily the slave or vassal. The examples discussed above show that these patronage relations are highly variable (alliances between young nobles and slaves, struggles internal to chiefly groups, opportunism of migrants, factionalism) and unstable (contestations, counter-alliances, depositions). Access to local powers by people of servile origins obliged to protect their voters will probably have an impact on their social integration (intermarriages, political and religious functions and roles). It will initiate a centripetal movement of these groups from the margins to the centre of society, bearing witness to the progressive erasure of servile stigma and gradual access to citizenship on the part of servile groups, a process that political anthropology will have to investigate and document.

Conclusions

From the perspective of the aristocratic ideology, which is still widespread in local societies (including among individuals and groups belonging to less stratified societies), slave status is seen as incompatible with political leadership. Relegated to the lowest ranks and the least desirable jobs, slave descendants remained stigmatised and until recently marginalised in the political space. The recent municipal elections in Benin and Niger highlighted a number of meaningful social and political changes. The principle by which the social position of a group may entail its marginalisation at the economic and political level seems not to apply any more. In various contexts, groups that appeared to be the least likely to exercise power have finally seized it. Today in Bankilaré the aristocratic elites are a small minority in the municipal council, which is largely dominated by people of iklan status, and in Kalalé there isn't a single Pullo nobleman on the council. On the contrary, noble Songhay still dominate the municipal political arena in Gorouol.

Differences across contexts (Songhay of Gorouol vs. Fulbé of Kalalé and Kel Tamasheq of Bankilaré) indicate that democratisation and decentralisation per se are not sufficient conditions for the emergence of marginal groups in local political arenas. They merely constitute favourable frameworks for the expression of dynamics already at work at the local and global levels, including long-term transformations of past hierarchies, political hegemonies and subordinate relations in stratified societies. The introduction of new rules of access to political power (equality of social actors as voters, electoral premium on demographic weight, role of education) is likely to bring about a profound transformation of the social order. New hierarchies and social inequalities are beginning to take shape: the political leaders of servile origin dominate local political arenas and have started to impose themselves at the national level, to the detriment of former masters progressively relegated to a political minority. A counter-ideology affirms itself and new legitimacies appear: 'Who is a slave today? If the noble is illiterate and poor, he will become the slave of a slave!' (Gando leader of Kalalé, May 2007).

In the contemporary discourses and representations of the majority of Gando or *Iklan*, slavery figures as bound to poverty. This association changes the original meaning of the institution. As relations of patronage are no longer based on traditional status hierarchies, the question of citizenship will undoubtedly pose itself as primary. However, in spite of the appearance of new actors in positions they did not occupy before and of the social 'reshuffling' this entails, uses of power and administrative practices tend to remain the same. The struggle for change is less about changing the modes of local governance than it is about the gaining of a share of political power by those who had been excluded from it.

The study of the political emancipation of slave descendants requires a long-term approach. Colonialism and the abolition of slavery incontestably set a break with the past, allowing the physical liberation and economic emancipation of slaves without truly disrupting social hierarchies. In Kel Tamasheq and Fulbé societies the political emancipation of (male) slaves occurred in the broader context of the impoverishment of the masters, who constitute a small minority of the population, and the relative economic ease of the ex-slaves; the dissolution of tributary and dependent relations; and most importantly the development of movements defending the interests of social groups that were long subjugated (the Tuareg rebellion; the creation of Timidria in Niger; the Fulbé cultural and linguistic movement; as well as the Gando associations of Northern Benin). These political arenas functioned as privileged spaces for the emergence of collective consciousness in the dominated class. Within it the psychological passage from the 'identity complex' to the affirmation of the self achieved at first by individual intellectuals transformed itself in a collective movement that undermined past ideological constructs. The intellectuals of servile origin who became leaders of these movements were able to develop or strengthen patron–client relations based on kinship, ethnicity and social proximity. They developed an emancipation rhetoric that reversed the previous discourse. The new 'enemy' is easily recognisable: in Bankilaré it is 'red', it collects taxes, extorts its subjects rather than protecting them, monopolises politics without redistribution; in Kalalé it is again the 'reds', who at an earlier stage had substituted themselves for the *HaaBe*, who despise the Gando, cheat them and exploit them. A wind of revolution and revenge has blown. Politically active former slaves seem anxious to restructure traditional hierarchies and erase progressively the social stigma cast upon them.

A new egalitarian ideology that values instruction, economic power and demographic (electoral) weight today dominates the aristocratic ideology. It is improbable that the Songhay of Gorouol will be able to resist the changes that have transformed neighbouring societies once a community of slave descendants is able to affirm itself there, too, by breaking silences and taboos. These societies are witnessing profound socio-political changes that increase the complexity of identities, progressively transforming local governance, access to citizenship and ways of practising politics locally and in Africa as a whole.

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Notes

1 Translated from French to English with the valuable and much-appreciated help of Benedetta Rossi.

2 Local actors often employ the contrast red/black (or its variant white/black) to characteriSe ethnic and moral distinctions. The ethnonyms 'Tuareg' or 'Peul' usually evoke 'reds'. From the point of view of intellectuals of servile origin, the politically correct term to designate all social categories of their society is Kel Tamasheq, that is, individuals who speak the Tamasheq language. Similarly, in Fulbé society (the term Peul, used in French, comes from 'Pullo', sing. of Fulbé), there is the same emphasis on colour distinctions (exaggerated and empirically unfounded). People talk of 'red Peuls' and 'black Peuls'. These categories have in common that they speak the same Fulfulde language. There is no such distinction in Zarma and Songhay societies where masters and slaves have the same complexion. Here I shall use the emic terms Fulbé and Kel Tamasheq to designate the whole population of native speakers of Fulfude or Tamasheq. I use the term 'Peul' to highlight the contrast with the Gando group.

3 Village and camp chiefs were designated locally, as well as a superior Peul regional chief (Bierschenk, *op. cit.*).

4 Meillassoux (1986, 325) uses the term 'captive' in the different sense of the person who has been captured but has not yet been acquired by a master. It is generally acknowledged that at the beginning of the 1900s the difference between 'slave' and 'captive' in official colonial discourse was broadly artificial and tied to the ideology prevalent at the time. In current Nigerien French usage, the terms 'slave' and 'captive' tend to be used interchangeably. In this essay, I use the term 'slave' to imply a particular social status: categorical slavery.

5 For an exhaustive description of different servile categories, see Rouch (1954) and Olivier de Sardan (1976; 1984) for the Songhay; Bernus (1963; 1981) for the Kel Tamasheq of the Niger belt; Baldus (1969; 1977) and Hardung (1997) for the Fulbé of North Benin.

6 I was able to observe cases of domestic servitude among Nigerien Kel Tamasheq, and particularly the *Ineslimen* (religious specialists) and certain *Imajeghen* (warrior aristocracy) at the outskirts of Bankilaré. Florence Boyer's writings (2005) also attest the occurrence of this phenomenon among the *Ineslimen* of Ingui— Ezak, near Bankilaré. Such situations are still widespread in various regions of the country and it is not uncommon to come across herders of servile status taking care of the herds of their 'master'. Today these dependent relations are marked by ambiguity (Hahonou, 2006).

7 The documentary 'Masters and Slaves', directed by B. Debord in 2002, stages 'slave liberations' by the anti-slavery association Timidria. These freed 'slaves' are female 'domestics' who serve in the home of their masters where they carry out various kinds

of household chores, and water and wood transport, without being paid. Both this film and the report by Timidria and the ONG Anti-Slavery International (2003) were contested by the Nigerien intelligentsia and several anthropologists.

8   This also applies to Botte's 2003 article on Nigerien slavery, based on highly controversial evidence that fuelled a heated debate. 'Negationists' deny the contemporary relevance of slavery, claiming that the 'proofs' supplied to document the phenomenon are inadequate. To be sure, it is misleading to say that in Bankilaré 'the *iklan* are forbidden to drill wells, reserved for "nobles"; they must settle for a contaminated lake...' (Botte, 2003, 129). On a short research tour accompanied by members of Timidria, Botte was probably unable to gather adequate information. In fact, some *tiklan* women from neighbouring camps do take water from the lake, but they do so primarily to avoid having to pay the fee collected at the well by an administrator, who happens to be of slave descent. Water here is provided in drums of 20 litres or barrels of 200 litres, whatever the social status of the clients. Yet the social division of tasks is so marked that it is only the *iklan* who go to fetch water at the well, just as only *tiklan* women grind millet.

9   The term *almayaali* refers to all dependent groups (cf. Olivier de Sardan, 1982).

10 The term *yegga* (which designates the number 'nine' in Zarma-Songhay language) is used to refer to people of servile status. Dominant ideologies portray slaves as incomplete beings. The number 'ten' (*iwey*) characterises completeness and is sometimes employed to qualify an accomplished man (*timme*). However, in Niamey young people use *yegga* to refer to the 'centre-forward' (the number nine corresponding to the position of centre-forward in football). Status ideologies are deeply rooted, and old expressions are adapted to changing times and made relevant to the culture of younger generations.

11 For more details on the distinctions between 'slave' and 'captive' in Songhay -Zarma, see Rouch, 1954, and Olivier de Sardan, 1975; 1976; 1984.

12 These expressions are factually inaccurate insofar as it is possible to find black 'masters' and red 'slaves'. Status is tied to a person's history, not to his/her skin colour. But the red/black opposition is used ideologically to simplify and naturalise differences.

13 The emancipation of slaves in Fulbé and Kel Tamasheq societies during the colonial period occurred through progressive departures of slaves from their masters' camps (Bernus, 1981, 111–12; Hardung, 1997). Today physical mobility remains a means for the *iklan* of Bankilaré to evade their masters' impositions (Boyer, 2005).

14 Other meanings associated with Gando are discussed in Hardung, 1997, 122.

15 At baptism or marriage ceremonies, *griots* reconstruct the genealogies of the families involved. As descendants of slaves are 'without ancestors', they cannot conduct ceremonies in the same manner as free people.

16 In a number of Gorouol villages nobles and captives are not buried in the same places. This is true also for the Kel Tamasheq, whereas among the Gando small burial details distinguish a noble's tomb from that of a commoner (Hardung, 1997, 115).

17 In each of the societies studied the offspring descending from the union of a noble man and a slave woman inherits the status of the father.

18 This is also true for the Gando of the Borgou who have become wealthier than their former masters (Hardung, 1997, 133–34; Lombard, 1965, 405).

19 In Peul, Kel Tamasheq and Zarma-Songhay societies the slave is supposed to lack shame and reserve (*haawi* in Zarma, *senteene* in Fulfulde).

20 See Gluckmann, Mitchell and Barnes, 1949, and Mair, 1968, for early studies of the chief's intermediary role in Africa. While Van Rouveroy van Niewaal (1999) applies this analytical framework to contemporary African chiefs by highlighting the negative implications of this position, I am inclined to see it as advantageous and a potential source of power for the chief.

21 This notion is used by Bierschenk, Chauveau and Olivier de Sardan (2000, 18) who develop Mendras' (1976) idea that notables act as 'screens' in French rural societies. The image of the gatekeeper is also in Robinson (1975, 291–92), who qualified the interme- diary position of the traditional administrative *chefferie* in Africa, and particularly in Niger, as a 'switch' joining electric circuits. For an application of the notion of gatekeeper to the religious *chefferies* of the Maraboutic groups of Bankilaré, see Hahonou, 2004a.

22 Not to be confused with the 'Touareg rebellion' of Niger (1991–95), during which status distinctions in Kel Tamasheq society were generally erased.

23 Expression of Olivier de Sardan (1975).

24 As a consequence of the schooling of slaves and their recruitment in the colonial administration, at Niger's independence Songhay and Zarma masters and slaves shared power at the top levels of the state apparatus. But slaves, with few exceptions (for example Boubou Hama, president of the National Assembly under the First Republic, who was, however, under constant attack for his servile origins), tended to occupy secondary roles (cf. Olivier de Sardan 1984, 205).

25 Contrary to the majority of noble Songhay Peul or Kel Tamasheq families, the Songhay of the Gorouol started sending their own children to 'the White's school' (the nearby French Catholic Mission) very early. In this case, the descendants of nobles were better prepared than other groups to assume positions of power at independence.

26 The MNSD Nassara is the former state-party (1989–91). Having lost influence after the 1993 presidential elections (won by Maman Ousmane of the Rahama CDS) and under the Baré régime (1996–99), since the 1990s the MNSD has become the dominant party in Gorouol and Bankilaré, and in Niger as a whole. The PNDS Tarraya is a party that claims to be of socialist inspiration. Led by a native of Tahoua, it gained considerable power at the national level with the exception of Western Niger.

27 Somewhat paradoxically, the communal council of Gorouol is headed by its only Bella member (i.e. a Kel Tamasheq of slave descent), who took advantage of the incessant struggles between the two rival wings of the Songhay *chefferie de canton* (cf. Hahonou, 2007).

28 Colonial policy was ambiguous and sometimes contradictory on this issue (cf. Bernus, 1969, 40–42). For example, after 1908–09, several *Bella* tribes were declared independent in the Gourma, whereas in the 1940s in the surroundings of Bankilaré the colonial administration decided to support Tuareg religious owners of *Bella*, in contradiction of France's egalitarian principles, to avoid setting in motion rapid social changes that would have been difficult to control.

29 Tentatively, I am inclined to interpret contemporary axes of electoral support and patron–client relations as originating from the ties of fictive kinship between former domestic slaves and their masters (Nicolaisen, 1962, 8; Olivier de Sardan, 1984, 12). Relations of fictive kinship obtain also between Peuls and Gando in North Benin (survey data).

30 In colonial and post-colonial administrative reports the *Kel Igirer* are collectively called *Tinguereguedesh* (sometimes *Tinguereguedesh-Logomaten* or *Loghmaten*). The ethno- logical literature generally followed this convention (cf. Bernus, 1963; Urvoy, 1936). However, this is a truncated expression provided by the local Kel Tamasheq, defeated and suspicious of colonialists. The term *Tinguereguedesh* (which signifies 'I am under the protection of') designates the 'tent slaves' who carry out domestic chores in the masters' camps, and who situate themselves generally in the immediate proximity of the camp. The same thing happened in the case of the *Doufarafarak* (literally 'behind the livestock enclosure'), who today prefer being called *Kel Ansongo* (Hahonou, 2004a, 15–16). To be cautious, masters gave colonialists the names of their slaves, which then remained. The same attitude is at the origin of slave children's attendance at school in the place of the sons of chiefs.

31 The status of special circumscription was accorded to the PA of Bankilaré in 1992 by the ordinances n. 92-058 and 92-059 of 9 December 1992, becoming an electoral district and obtaining seats at the National Assembly. These legal measures have allowed local minority groups to benefit from a special representation at the National Assembly since the 1993 legislature.

32 Due to the sensitivity of this subject, the proportions between 'nobles' and 'slaves' are highly controversial. Concerning Songhay societies, Olivier de Sardan argues that 'the captives formerly represented more than half the population' (1983, 132). Referring to the Kel Tamasheq, Bernus (1981, 388) notes that in the 1960s more than 80 per cent of the Kel Tamasheq of Western Niger were *Iklan*. Numerous originally servile groups of the left riverbank fled their masters and placed themselves under the protection of dominant groups of the right riverbank, acquiring liberated status (Bernus, 1981, 395), which distinguishes them from the *Iklan* acquired in wars and raids or inherited. Bernus (1981, 393) classifies the *Imallagazan* and *Ibahawan* as *Iklan*. In fact, the latter two groups were the slaves of the *Imghad Iloghmatten* at their arrival in the Gourma (cf. Hahonou, 2004a).

33 *Taklit*: feminine of *akli*, which signifies slave in the Tamasheq language. On the genetrix role of the captive, see Bernus, 1981, 92. *Aneslim*: Kel Tamasheq religious specialist (plur. *Ineslimen*).

34 The Timidria association (lit. 'fraternity' in Tamasheq) was created in 1991. It militates for the recognition of the rights of servile people as full citizens and members of Kel Tamasheq societies of Niger. For a general study of the discourse and strategies in favour of *iklan* citizenship, see Tidjani Alou, 2000a and b). For a more detailed analysis of Timidria's activity in Western Niger, see Hahonou, 2003; 2004a; 2005.

35 For strategic reasons the former MNSD deputy Wassalké Boukari, a Songhay from Gorouol and an ex-minister, allied himself with the local opposition to Bankilaré's chieftaincy led by Elhaji Ghoumar (who became national deputy in 1999). The alliance's objective was to win the support of the Kel Tamasheq electorate in the struggle for the 'municipalisation' of the administrative post of Bankilaré (cf. Hahonou, 2004a and b).

36 Individual status can be 'read' on the body from top to bottom. Particular hairstyles, clothes and jewels symbolise slavery and bondage, and are opposed to those of free and/or elite women. For example, ankle bracelets, often in plastic today, recall the irons formerly worn by the Kel Tamasheq slaves. While Timidria militants denounce this as an expression of hegemony, women and men of servile status may well interpret symbolism differently from masters and possibly valorise it as a source of distinctive identity.

37 Masters maintain privileged relationships with the wet-nurses of their children. This relationship (called *hasan-nda-hini* in Songhay, cf. Olivier de Sardan, 1983) is based on the notion that that milk forms a solid bond between children nursed by the same woman (the child of the noble and the child of the slave wet-nurse). The 'pact of milk' is at the basis of joking relationships and political alliances in Kel Tamasheq societies. The quote makes implicit reference to this loyalty. The oral history of Bankilaré reports that two twins, who were slave wet-nurses, were the founding ancestresses of the *Iklan* tribes closest to the *amenokal* (chief) of the *Kel Igirer*.

38 Whereas slavery has practically disappeared in the village of Bankilaré, it persists in neighbouring camps. Timidria's action (awareness-raising, surveys, creation of schools) is limited to the Kel Tamasheq camps from which the association's leaders come, and to the village of Bankilaré, which has greater media exposure. Thus, in Lemdou and Ingui-Ezak (cf. Boyer, 2005), vestiges of slavery are still observable. Slavery is particularly resilient in camps led by the religious chieftaincies (*Ineslimen*) of the *Kel Igirer* group. This is a consequence of the fear of the religious leaders' intermediary position between God and the profane (cf. Hahonou, 2006). Boyer (2005) observes that in

these camps, emancipation is often only temporarily achieved in the course of seasonal migration to Côte d'Ivoire.

39 This is the Tartit association, whose president is also the president of the Bankilaré section of the CDS (party represented by candidates of the chefferie *amajigh* (aristocrats) and the chefferie *anelism* (religious chiefs from Ingui-Ezak) at the municipal elections of 2004). As Timidria in the past, this association functions as a 'development broker', acting as contact point for some aid projects in Bankilaré,

40 Identity claims 'transcend the internal hierarchies of Touareg societies, cristallising the social convergence generated by state politics. [...] The new ties and networks of solidarity engendered the feeling of belonging to the same group, forming a community of blood and destiny' (1995, 436-440) wrote Bourgeot in 1990, in the wave of enthusiasm of the nascent Tuareg rebellion. However, identity discourses, trying to create cohesion and unify a divided people against an oppressive state, gave way to less idealistic realities in which social hierarchies are reaffirmed daily. It is in this context that another identity was reinforced, that of the Kel Tamasheq of servile origin, in pursuit of political emancipation from their masters.

41 'White Tuareg', aristocrat, former minister, founder of the PUND Salama, native of In Gall (Department of Agadez).

42 When the first municipal elections were held in February 1999, the PRD Mahiba did not gain any of the 11 seats in the municipal council (Sahel Dimanche 19/02/1999). The RDP Jama'a party of President Baré gained power after the 1996 coup and gained nine seats, whereas the MNSD and the PNDS won one seat each. These results were nullified in March and President Baré was deposed by a military coup in April 1999.

43 The first deputy of Bella origin in the Tillabéri department, which includes Gorouol and Bankilaré, was elected in 1995. He was elected as representative of the PUND Salama, known locally as 'Ce gaa party', literally the 'party of those who go by foot', with reference to the scarce financial resources of the party (Hahonou, 2005, 40–47).

44 The Baatombu and Boo were able to manipulate the structures of the modern state, revolutionary and post-revolutionary, better than other groups (cf. De Haan et al., 1990).

45 The notion of *senteene* or *semteende* (Fulfulde of Northern Nigeria) refers to the typical Peul restraint and reserve in manifesting one's needs, emotions and various physical requirements (eating, urinating, etc.); cf. Boesen, 1989; Brandt, 1956, 35; VerEecke, 1994, 30.

46 The term 'intellectual' is used in Benin and Niger with reference to literate and school-educated people.

47 Extract from the report of the Conference of the National Sub-Committee of Linguistics (Fulfulde)- Laawol Fulfulde, non-paginated. In these 'revolutionary' times, the term 'nationality' was used to designate the ethnic group. Thus, the People's Republic of Benin was conceived as a multi-national state.

48 In other contexts the term *HaaBe* or *BaleeBe*, translated as 'blacks', includes slaves (cf. Botte, 1994, 116; VerEecke, 1994, 30). Here, due to the inclusive categories adopted by Benin's administration, and to the emphasis on group unity that prevailed at the Fulfuldé conference, the term *HaaBe* does not encompass the Gando.

49 'How can they want to be Peuls? These are *je'aaBe* (slaves) and that's evident' (cited in Boesen, 1997, 42). 'A Gando is a Gando' (cited in Hardung, 1997, 112).

50 Bierschenk mentions that the presentation of 'Peul history and culture' was an important part of the programme, which celebrated Peul values, the idealisation of 'fulanity' and the construction of ethnic identity (1993, 15, 26).

51 The report of the Conference of the Laawol Fulfulde linguistic national sub-committee (December 1987) states clearly that the history of the Gando remains to be written. Bierschenk notes that the shape given by Peul intellectuals to the Kandi conference hardly left any space for possible disagreements and criticisms (1993, 33).

52 The colonial and post-colonial adminstrations classified the Gando among the 'Peul'. Today the proportions of slave descendants and nobles are still unknown. However, in Kalalé, where the 'Peul' officially represent 68 per cent of the population (census of 1992), the red Peul represent a small minority and the Gando are by far the most numerous.

53 Ourou Sé Guéné presided over the Association for the Economic and Social Development of the District of Kalalé (ADESKA) for many years. He was a member of the national bureau of the Laawol Fulfulde (responsible for propaganda and information), of the Idi Waadi association, and possibly other associations. He was always close to organisations of cotton producers, supporting the electoral campaigns of some of their leaders.

54 The president of the RUND party, who is not from Northern Benin, contributed financially to the creation of the Idi Waadi association.

55 After the legislative elections of March 2007, Orou Sé Guéné and his colleague, mayor of the neighbouring municipality of Nikki, became the first Gando representatives for their regions.

56 Another Gando had been sub-prefect at an earlier time, towards the end of President Kérékou's revolutionary regime. Coming from another stigmatised ethnic group (Somba), Kerekou had intentionally placed a Gando to administer the historic centre of the Baatombu kingdom.

57 It is not uncommon for the members of village organisations to mobilise themselves for the liberation of their leaders when these are detained by the police.

58 'Mr. Mayor, we are hungry! If you don't give each of us 300.000 F CFA as FARD Alafia did, we shall be against you in the vote for your impeachment' declared a dozen municipal councillors. The mayor had to give account for the misappropriation of 53 million F CFA that represented a subvention to the municipal budget by the Communal Union of Cotton Producers.

59 I recorded this expression at an interview with an officer of the Decentralisation Mission (Cotonou, June 2006). This metaphor, which refers to the communal budget, fits clearly within the framework of the 'politics of the belly' (Bayart, 1989).

60 The most common procedure for pocketing money illegally consists in charging traders and other market visitors more than the value printed on their receipts (inactive values). When tax collectors have to pay the money they have collected into the municipal accounts, they only turn in the equivalent of the inactive values that were officially sold.

61 In Kel Tamasheq and Songhay ceremonies, the neck of the sheep is traditionally reserved for slaves, whereas the best pieces (fillet, leg) are for the masters.