

Tuareg Trajectories of Slavery: Preliminary Reflections on a Changing Field

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Introduction: Rethinking Tuareg Slavery

It is impossible to characterise contemporary Tuareg slavery in a unified way. First, the notion of 'slavery' today is used to refer to diverse phenomena, institutions and practices. It is applied to the vestiges of historical forms of enslavement; to the stigma attached to slave status; and to new forms of exploitation. Studying the place of slavery in contemporary Tuareg society requires a preliminary qualification of what is meant by 'slavery' today, and what ideas and practices are associated with it in different discursive fields at the global, national, and local levels. Secondly, Tuareg society is diversified into subgroups that developed different ways of interacting with the environment and neighbouring societies. The institution of slavery varies geographically with the social structure and organisation of different Tuareg groups. Until the beginning of the 1900s, slave constituencies had different relative sizes, functions, and characteristics across Tuareg confederations. Throughout colonialism and independence, change has been uneven in what was already a diverse social canvas. In some contexts, practices of enslavement have disappeared, while in others they continued existing in traditional or muted forms. Finally, interpretations of slavery vary vertically along social hierarchies: masters and slaves have different perspectives and interests. This is true even where dependent groups have partly internalised elite ethos and values. Most studies of Tuareg slavery tend to reflect the views of the elites (cf. Bernus 1976:85), whereas the perspectives of slaves and lower ranking groups have only started acquiring visibility over the last two decades. This is due both to changes in the research agendas of anthropologists and historians, and to the recent engagement of people of slave descent in public debate over slave status.

Recent contributions to the study of slavery in Africa remind us that we should question the potential bias implicit in the English term 'slavery'. We need to recalibrate the analytical tools at our disposition to account for possibly different notions of property, the person, hierarchy, and labour; and to analyse slavery as a dynamic phenomenon, which transforms itself along with changing historical and social conditions (Deutsch 2006:5). It will be useful to anticipate some considerations on how the concept of slavery is applied to Tuareg contexts across time and space in this paper. In Tuareg society slavery functioned primarily as a form of labour exploitation. The slave (m. s. *akli*; f. s. *taklit*; plur. *iklan*) could be required to work without his/her consent and couldn't negotiate a compensation for his/her labour (individual exceptions to his/her capacity to negotiate better conditions of treatment may occur). The notion of 'voluntary slavery' (cf. Bernus and Bernus 1975:27), which has become common in African studies, should be considered in the light of the particular *context of choice* within which enslavement is tolerated. Voluntary slavery reflecting a lack of viable or safe alternative livelihood options ought to be seen as a form of slavery. While, in the majority of cases, enslavement originated from an act of violence (war, kidnapping, raiding, etc.), violence is not the only mode of slave acquisition. Today, the categories called *iklan*, *Buzu*, or *Bella* reproduce primarily biologically.¹

¹ Tuareg pre-colonial autonomous slave settlements reproduced biologically as well as by violent capture. The existence of rules governing the inheritance of rights over a *taklit*'s offspring by the part of a *taklit*'s mistress/master signifies that also the domestic slave population reproduced biologically. Slave status was and is inherited across generations. Hence, contra Meillassoux, biological reproduction seems to have played an important role in the maintenance of slave constituencies (Meillassoux 1991: 78 ff., and 1975:18,

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. This commonly includes rights over the productive and reproductive capacities of slaves; rights over any assets they may have in their possession or use; and rights over their offspring. The ideological assimilation of slaves to chattels and their exchangeability (the possibility to sell slaves) are not necessary conditions for the existence of slavery in Tuareg society.

Finally, slavery presupposes the legal or institutional legitimacy of the exploitation of slaves. Slave status is a bracketed status, which makes it acceptable, in a particular society, to suspend the laws applying to all adult male and female members of that society to account for the slave's otherwise unjustifiable exploitation. Exploitation is suffered by other categories of free people. In contrast to the exploitation of slaves, exploiting non-slaves constitutes a punishable act. In normative contexts (including both state law and traditional or customary law) where slavery has been abolished, enslavement is considered a crime. In these cases, the illegal enslavement of people does not imply the existence of slavery as an institution. Tuareg societies today are integrated into state structures and subject to the national legislation of their respective countries. Although enslavement has been banned in all African states, legal pluralism recognises that state law can co-exist with parallel normative universes. Alternative legal frameworks operate in semi-autonomous social fields (Moore 1978), where customary law is invoked to justify the legitimate endurance of enslavement. Hence, the existence of anti-slavery state laws does not automatically imply the disappearance of slavery.

In the 1800s, the institution of slavery underpinned the structural reproduction of Tuareg society, making it possible to talk of a slave mode of production taking shape alongside household slavery.² Slavery was widespread in most Tuareg contexts until the first three or four decades of the 1900s. Its relatively recent disappearance accounts for the fact that large numbers of slave descendants are still called 'Iklan', 'Buzu' or 'Bella', even though they do not face material conditions of enslavement anymore. While stigma is usually attached to these categories, stigmatisation is also suffered by other disadvantaged groups. The categorical slave who freely controls his/her labour, property and progeny is not in the same situation as the slave. Stigmatisation on the grounds of slave status, broadly attested for the Tamasheck-speaking groups known as *Iklan*, Buzu/Buzaye, or Bellah should be kept analytically distinct from actual enslavement.

Once 'slavery' is characterised in line with the above considerations, it is possible to argue that in contemporary Tuareg society the phenomenon of slavery has not entirely disappeared, but has become highly circumscribed. Contemporary studies of Tuareg slavery highlight a variety of strategies of status transformation. These include strategies of upward mobility of former slaves trying to pass as non-slave or to conceal their own origins and the political mobilisation of people identifying as of slave origin and stating their claims on the basis of perceived shared interests. Many people of slave origin moved away, physically, from areas where their identity was known. Others found ways to conceal and/or transform their identity *in loco*, by redefining their status

'Le groupe des esclaves se reproduit presque exclusivement par apport extérieur'. Cf. Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen's critique of Meillassoux, 1997:611). Slave families were much more ephemeral than the families of free people, and they had no legal autonomy, as slave adults were considered legal minors. However, they existed *de facto*, and tended to be arranged in matrifocal clusters (cf. Oxby 1986:116). 'Slave kinship' is not an oxymoron, but should be analysed as a function of hegemonic conditions.

² For this distinction I follow Klein (1983:68).

and 'reinventing' history. In Southern Niger, ex Tuareg slaves or liberated slaves have been 'Hausanifying' as a strategy to leave their inherited slave status behind (Oxby 1986:105; Rossi, 2005 fieldnotes). In Mali, some Iklan groups have been adopting a Songhay identity (Gashoolt 2007). This suggests that in some contexts it may be easier to change ethnicity than to change status.

In this introduction, I have argued in favour of a narrow definition of slavery to be kept analytically distinct from the endurance of relations of dependence of a patron/client type, and from practices of exploitation and stigmatisation (even when these are ensued from the categorical identification of the exploited/stigmatised group as slave or ex-slave). In the remaining part of this paper this framework is applied, tentatively, to different Tuareg groups. I wish to stress the preliminary nature of this paper, and its need of elaboration by further research and debate. My comparative insight is limited by my greater familiarity with the Nigerien sections of the Ullimmiden and Kel Gress groups and my reliance on secondary sources for other Tuareg sections within and outside Niger.

Pre-colonial and Colonial Slavery

Perhaps surprisingly, given the broad geographical spread of Tuareg society, anthropological studies focusing on different contexts suggest considerable intra-Tuareg convergence in the meanings and functions of slavery. While the practical organisation of slavery followed similar principles across Tuareg groups, there are considerable differences in the terminology used to characterise different social strata from group to group. Studies of slavery written in the 1970s focus, analytically, more on social structures than on the actor's experience of such structures. These studies provide valuable interpretations of Tuareg hierarchy, but do not usually convey the slaves' experience of enslavement. As I discuss in the following section, recent studies tend to redress this imbalance.

In pre-colonial times, Tuareg elites³ controlled the greatest part of valuable resources. Some slave groups lived attached to their master's family, the women taking care of domestic chores and men providing the labour needed for their masters' productive activities, including herding, farming, and foraging (cf. Bernus 1981:92; Bernus and Nicolaisen 1982; Winter 1984:9-10).⁴ Others lived in relatively autonomous hamlets scattered in areas controlled by their masters. These semi-autonomous slave communities were particularly common in the region between the edge of the Sahel and the Sudanic savannah, where they functioned as 'outposts' for their masters' operations and as reservoirs of labour and resources (Baier and Lovejoy 1975; 1977). Their settlements were interspersed amongst the villages of manumitted slaves and the free villages of other ethnic groups. Unlike the *iklan* living with their masters, these *iklan* had to provide for their own subsistence. They held usufruct rights on the animals they herded and the lands they farmed. They represented a surplus labour force the nobles could do without in prosperous times, and relied upon in times of drought. Unlike free dependent tributaries and manumitted slaves, they could be called to join their masters' families at any time, and the masters could take with them boys and girls from slave hamlets to add them to their 'tent servants' or to sell them (Bernus and Bernus 1975: 33; Nicolas 1939, 1950).

³ I use the term 'elite' to avoid the confusion generated by terminological discrepancies across Tuareg groups over the categorical names used to designate the upper strata of society. For a discussion of the distinct meanings of the term '*imuhag*' in different Tuareg groups, see Keenan (1977:104-6).

⁴ However Bourgeot (1975:83), focusing on the Ahaggar, and Claudot-Hawad on the Kel Air (2000:241), suggest that the sexual division of labour was not stringent for slaves.

While the distinction between domestic slaves and semi-autonomous slave settlements is broadly attested, the terminology to refer to these groups varies. Most authors distinguish between *esclaves de case* or *de tente* (*iklan ehen*) and *esclaves de dune* (*iklan egef*). However in the Ullimmiden context the *iklan eguef* are generally considered free. They deny having ever been enslaved and no other group attests claims upon them. They are known for their past military role fighting with the Ullimmiden Kel Dinnik in pre-colonial wars (cf. Bernus and Bernus 1975:34; Bernus 1976:92). Similar inconsistencies occur in the case of the *ighawelen*: Foucault (1951, t. IV, p. 1747) and Bernus and Bernus (1975:35) translate *ighawelen* as '*esclave vivant librement sans etre affranchi*'; whereas Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen (1997:55), Clauzel (1962:143) and Claudot-Hawad (2000:246) see the *ighawelen* as manumitted slaves.⁵ The terms 'buzu' and 'bella' are also translated alternatively as 'slave' (e.g. Bernus and Bernus 1975:27) or 'liberated slave' (e.g. Norris 1975:6) by different authors.⁶ Contradictions across authors, and in the work of the same author, suggest that status categories cannot be evinced from terminology alone and require a case-by-case comprehensive analysis. To avoid confusion, throughout this paper I shall distinguish between domestic slaves and slaves living separately from their masters.

Autonomous slave settlements had to recurrently pay tributes to their masters. Scholars disagree on the quality and quantity of such tributes. Bernus and Bernus, referring to the Ullimmiden context, mention a 90-100 Kgs. bag of cereals at the harvest (1975:33); Guillaume, focusing on the Tuareg of the Immanan (originally Ullimmiden who migrated to the Dallol Bosso in the early 1800s) suggests that the amount of tribute was not fixed. My own research in the area under Ullimmiden control in the Nigerien region of Tahoua shows that ad hoc agreements were made with each dependent village, on the basis of the nature of the relation between masters and village representatives and their relative status *vis a vis* other local groups.

Unlike slaves captured in wars or kidnapped, domestic slaves were not usually sold (cf. Nicolaisen on the Ahaggar 1962:100; Winter on the Malian Kel Agheris 1984:12). Traded slaves were often exchanged for other goods, such as horses (Guillaume 1976: 124); camels and livestock (Bernus and Bernus 1975:32), or millet (Rossi, 2005 fieldnotes). Elite Tuareg denied full human status to slaves. This criterion functioned so as to differentiate them from the *ilellan* (free), also after they had been freed (cf. Bernus and Bernus 1975:31-32).⁷ Slaves had no political voice (cf. Bourgeot 1975:81), and did not usually receive religious education, even when their masters where of maraboutic status (Bernus and Bernus 1975:38). According to sources focusing on the Algerian Ahaggar, corporal punishment was very rare (Nicolaisen 1963:441; Lhote 1984:53; Bourgeot 1975:85).⁸ However, in various parts of Niger, corporal punishment has been widely reported in surveys conducted by the NGO Timidria (cf. Abdelkader 2004).

⁵ Elsewhere, Bernus casually refers to both Iklan Egef and Ighawelen as '*groupes affranchis*' (1981:87).

⁶ Nicolas, commenting on the Ullimmiden, identifies three groups of 'freed slaves': Iklan-Egef, Ighawelen, and Iderfan, and categorises the first two as Buzu or Bella (1950:190).

⁷ Claudot-Hawad argues that manumission was the arrival point in a process of becoming through which slaves were integrated in the masters' 'humanities' (cf. 2000:246). This interpretation seems more relevant in the case of domestic slaves, who, living with their masters, could assimilate their values. However, available studies suggest that spontaneous manumission of slaves through social integration was not the norm. Masters tried to keep their slaves enslaved, resorting to manumission only if this was economically expedient.

⁸ Some interpretations should be assessed in the light of the researchers' loyalty towards the elite groups who hosted and supported them. For example, a few paragraphs after having stated that the *iklan* are 'well treated' by their masters, Lhote notes that 'The Iklan have highly corrupt habits; they indulge in pederasty and other vices. To steal and to lie is instinctive to them. Hence, they have a habit of suckling the goats they are herding. In some camps, they do not receive milk, because it is supposed that they already helped

Some Iklan held usufruct rights over livestock and other productive assets. At death, none of these rights could be transmitted to their offspring, but would return to the master (Lhote 1984:53; Bourgeot 1975:89). Slaves had the right to be fed, clothed, and protected by their masters (cf. Bernus 1976:93). It would be dishonourable for a master to mistreat his/her slave, and a mistreated slave could change master by scraping or cutting a small part of the ear of another free man's camel (cf. Nicolaisen 1962:101-2; Lhote 1984:54; Bourgeot quoting Nicolaisen 1975:85; Claudot-Hawad 2000:241). Some authors underline that masters and slaves wore similar clothes and ate similar foods (Lhote 1984: 53; Nicolaisen 1963:442). However, clothing, and material conditions of life in general, reflected status differences.⁹ Some iklan carried weapons and fought in wars with their masters. Nicolaisen, referring to the Ahaggar and Kel Ajjer, suggests that this was generally the case for all slaves (1962:102), whereas Guillaume argues that some categories of slaves (*inezziyen*) did not take part in conflicts, while other (*isaha*) fought as infantry (Guillaume 1974).

All slaves were considered legal minors unless they had been manumitted (Claudot-Hawad 2000:240). This status is reflected in their habit to address their masters by the terms father/mother (Nicolaisen 1962:103; Bourgeot 1975:89). Rules of fictive kinship also applied to the regulation of slave marriages and marriage payments (Nicolaisen 1962: 104; Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen 1997:609). A *taklit*'s offspring belonged to the master of the female slave. The genitor role of the male slave was downplayed culturally, reflecting his incapacity to assume legal fatherhood (Bernus and Bernus 1975:37). Even though slaves were the classificatory children of their masters, male masters were not prohibited from marrying their female slaves. Nicolaisen and Lhote, both commenting on the Ahaggar, differ in their interpretation of the status of the children born from such unions. According to Nicolaisen, they took the status of the free father (Nicolaisen 1962:105). Lhote instead, considers that the offspring born from the union of a free man and slave concubine is free, but acquires a new, inferior, status ('*iborelliten*', cf. Lhote 1984:53). Guillaume, studying the Tuareg of the Immanan in the Dallol Bosso, notes that a free man who married another person's *taklit* was obliged to ransom (*fansa*) her first at a fixed rate (1976:118). This custom is similar to what I have recorded in areas of Ullimmiden influence in the Ader. Marriage with a *taklit* did not contradict endogamic principles. Because the master had full rights over his *taklit* (or over another person's *taklit* that he had acquired), this type of marriage reinforced the groom's patriline (Bonte 1975:53 on the Kel Gress), as the offspring belonged exclusively to the father's *tawsit*. Marriage strategies played a pivotal role in the structural reproduction of hierarchy. Endogamy was essential to the retention of privileges in the hands of few elite families, as it denied the redistribution (through mixed marriages) of the surplus extracted from different categories of free dependents (Bonte 1975:69; 1976:149).

Tuareg elites controlled sets of stratified groups by establishing, through military conquest and peaceful alliance, their supremacy over specific geographic areas. Iklan labour maintained and transformed the productive property (herds, land) of their masters and was used in the organisation of caravan trade (Nicolaisen 1962:102-3; Bonte 1976:145). Tuareg elites also

themselves. To guard themselves against theft, some masters did not hesitate to chain the mouths of their herders by perforating their lips. Around forty years ago in Ahaggar lived a woman who had been thus mutilated' (1984:54, my translation).

⁹ For instance, different parts of a killed animal were distributed to slaves and masters, the former receiving lesser quality meat (Nicolaisen 1962:103). The clothes and hairstyles of slaves also differed from those of masters, making it possible to 'read' status on a person's appearance (cf. Komlavi-Hahonou, forthcoming; Harding-King 1903:295). Feasts used to be celebrated separately, and iklan would sometimes wear 'good clothes' given or lent to them by their masters (Bernus and Bernus 1975:39).

received tributes from free dependents established in their area of control, and could count on the work of dependent groups of craftsmen for the provision of weapons and productive tools. Different confederations varied in the internal organisation of production. Most Tuareg economies depended on extensive trade networks to diversify consumption and have access to goods that they did not produce. Large cycles of transhumance allowed herds of camels to exploit different pastures and resources across seasons. It is possible to identify a north-south gradient, from high internal economic specialisation in the Ahaggar, to greater internal diversification amongst the Kel Gress.¹⁰ The relative internal specialisation/diversification of production was balanced out through external trade.

Dependent groups were stratified according to gradations of dependence. Slaves occupied one end of this range of statuses, and were in turn internally stratified. Masters could dispose of the productive and reproductive capabilities of their slaves at will, and the most marginal amongst them could be sold. Up to a certain number of slaves were controlled individually by their masters. However, some elite *tawsiten* controlled entire hamlets of slaves, functioning as reservoirs of labour and resources for their masters. This system was common in regions at the desert's edge, such as the Northern Ader under Ullimmiden influence, where climatic variability across years turned these 'reservoirs' into a drought coping strategy (Baier and Lovejoy 1977). Masters had priority access over scarce resources in times of drought, and could take what they needed from slave settlements at any time. This possibly accounts for the relatively brutal conditions of enslavement in these contexts. Where the slave/master ratio was high and the land productive, slaves were more easily manumitted and turned into tributary dependents or sharecroppers. While these did not have to be fed or protected, elites could still appropriate farming surplus by setting the terms of the hierarchical relation. In contexts characterised by large cohorts of free or freed tributary dependents or sharecroppers, endogamy was essential to the maintenance of political and economic hegemony in the hands of a small minority. This explains why terminological discrepancies between authors over the term 'Ighawelan' in neighbouring Ullimmiden and Kel Gress contexts are not minor issues of translation. While the difference between a 'slave living an autonomous existence' and a 'freed tributary' may be minimal in terms of rank, the former did not own any of his/her possessions, which could be seized at any time. From the masters' perspective, marriage with this group reinforced the endogamic principle, keeping privileges in the patrilineal line. On the other hand, the freed tributary or sharecropper may have owed a large share of harvest to the master but, at least *de iure*, formed an independent political and economic entity. Marriage with it would have diluted, through redistribution, elite supremacy.

Changes affecting the regional economy of different Tuareg groups induced rearrangements in the social structure. Thus, according to Bourgeot, the loss of control over caravan trade led to the increasing emancipation of slave labour, which had been primarily employed in herding and long-distance trade, amongst the Algerian Kel Ahaggar. Emancipated slaves became sharecroppers, under conditions that in the mid-1800s were extremely favourable to the landlord (who owed 1/5 of the crop to the sharecropper) but improved with time (Bourgeot 1975:95; cf. Nicolaisen 1963:198). The conversion of slaves into free sharecroppers allowed the Imuhag to maintain their control over the ex-slaves, while dropping responsibility for the slaves' subsistence. This readjustment in the form of Kel Ahaggar domination led to the continued exploitation of a class of dependents. But the new status of independent sharecroppers laid the foundations for the development of class-consciousness (Bourgeot 1975:96). Also amongst the Malian Kel Antessar the introduction of sharecropping functioned as a double-edge sword. It created new relations of

¹⁰ The early importance of farming in the South is attested by Barth, who describes Buzu farmers working for their Itesan masters (1858/I: 367).

dependence that supported the interests of the Kel Antessar elite, but it also transformed slaves into free (dependent) labour, with all the political, economic, and psychological consequences that this entails (Giuffrida 2005). In the Immanan, increasing reliance on agriculture created the possibility for the transformation of slaves into free farming tributaries (Guillaume 1976:126-128). As mentioned above, similar considerations are made by Bonte with reference to the Kel Gress (1976:145). In the second half of the 1800s, some large slave constituencies started turning into tributary farming dependents, suggesting that the emancipation process had begun before colonialism.¹¹ One could argue that in some 1800s Tuareg confederations, ecological and political factors at the regional level determined the onset of 'diminishing returns' to slavery (seen, here, as a system of production). In the long run, the transformation of slaves into free dependents contributed to undermining the elites' hegemony. Yet it is difficult, retrospectively, to discern the relative role played by internal change from the consequences of colonial conquest.

At the beginning of the 1900s, colonial powers in West Africa abolished the legal status of slavery in the colonies. The position of French authorities toward slavery was ambivalent (cf. Bernus 1981:108). Officially, the representatives of the French Republic condemned slavery. On the other hand, they feared the political instability that could result from the sudden achievement of freedom by the part of ex-slaves and captives (cf. Klein 1998:134). Emancipated slaves were sometimes asked to work in colonial projects and were known as 'the slaves of the Commandant'. Forced labour recruitment and military conscription particularly hit servile and low status groups. 'Pacification' eradicated or limited substantially the military power of Tuareg warrior elites. Those elites who proved more docile were compensated and maintained in power. Those who refused to collaborate were crushed: the Kel Dinnik are a case in point (cf. Bernus 1976:95). Colonial rule abolished the organs of Tuareg political control and established new administrative structures, carrying out a census and imposing a head tax. It put an end to Tuareg incursions and it granted rights to land to groups willing to collaborate. Emancipation per se did not affect labour relations as much as the consequences of French occupation on pre-colonial forms of governance and production. Colonial economic policy was extractive, levying taxes also in years of drought and food deficit. It was not until after World War II that France established a development fund (first FIDES, then FAC). The droughts of 1968-1973 and 1983-85 significantly reduced Tuareg herds. By then, the elites' capacity to reconstitute their herds and resume economic and/or political control over their old dependents had been permanently undermined.

Contemporary trajectories of slavery

Terminology, Identity, Status

Are there Tuareg 'slaves', today? There is no agreement on how to answer this question. This is partly due to the different intellectual positions of activists and researchers, resulting in debates over counting and naming 'slaves'. Anti-slavery organisations take a normative perspective. Starting from legal definitions of slavery provided in international conventions and national law, they strive to establish the magnitude of the phenomenon and to take appropriate policy measures. On the other hand, anthropologists and historians disagree over interpretations of slavery. Disagreements reflect sociological differences across research contexts as well as the idiosyncratic inclinations of the researcher and his/her primary informants.

¹¹ In the Gourma, herding was by far the most important economic activity and locally the adoption of farming was not an option (Winter 1984). Winter suggests that in these circumstances, and lacking a herd of their own, Kel Agheris slaves were able to detach themselves from their masters much later than in contexts where farming represented a more viable option.

Bouman (2003), who conducted fieldwork in the second half of the 1990s amongst the Iklan of the Udalan (Burkina Faso), argues against translating 'Iklan' as 'slave':

'the consequence of a direct translation of the term Iklan as "slaves" or "captives" is that after the abolition of "slavery" the Iklan are assumed either to disappear from the scene or to integrate completely into the other strata of society. The fact that Iklan remain Iklan even after the official abolition of "slavery" by the colonials causes some confusion: the authors speak of "voluntary captives" or "free slaves" and doubt their position within society overtly. A solution offered by some authors is to translate Iklan as "former slaves" but often they do no justice to the contemporary status of the Iklan, freezing their status into a "slave status". But if slaves are "free" aren't they free men?' (2003:57)

The Udalan is particular in that the Iklan constitute the majority of its Tamasheck-speaking population (Bouman 2003:86). Where master groups are no longer present, or have lost the (material or ideological) requisites sanctioning their role as masters, either the appellation 'slave' is dropped in favour of another name, or the term 'slave' acquires a new meaning. Even within the context studied by Bouman, while some informants accepted being called Iklan (but advanced a new interpretation of the term), others wanted to be called Kel Edawra and took offence at being addressed as Iklan, a term they understood to signify 'slave' (ibid. 51-53). Researchers studying contexts where 'slaves are free' resist talking of 'slavery', even if an anachronistic terminology has remained in use locally. In some regions the names Iklan or Buzu/Bella have lingered behind while the actual status of their bearers has changed. In these circumstances, authors highlight a discrepancy between language and practice. Hence, amongst the Kel Antessar of the Cercle de Goundam (Northern Mali), previous masters lost their earlier power following political and environmental upheavals. Instead, people of slave descent have been particularly resourceful in the face of adversities. Although the formalities of the relation between old masters and slaves have been partly maintained, Giuffrida notes:

'Bien que les hiérarchies statutaires traditionnelles continuent à se manifester dans les relations quotidiennes, l'esclavage de tente a totalement disparu tandis que les ex-esclaves ou bellah ont connu une mobilité économique remarquable. Il serait donc erroné d'interpréter les discours à la base d'une idéologie statutaire comme une survivance de l'esclavage.' (2005a:805).

Other situations are more ambiguous. Oxby discusses the Southern Kel Ferwan of the Dakoro District of Niger, where, at the time of her research (1973-1974), people of Iklan status lived attached to their masters providing most of the productive and reproductive work in their masters' camp. Oxby notes that the people she studies 'are still referred to by the term eklan, which in the past was used for slaves.' However, she argues,

'[i]t is no longer appropriate to translate this term as "slave", firstly because eklan are no longer sold and secondly because if they prefer an alternative way of life they can find a pretext for leaving the family they work for, and the national laws will protect their independence. Because eklan provide most of the labour force in the wealthy Tuareg households in which they live, and because they are rewarded with food, clothing and occasional gifts rather than with a regular salary, it is suggested that the most appropriate translation of the term today is "domestic servant".' (1986:100).

When Oxby conducted her research, many Kel Ferwan iklan still worked for their masters and lived in the same compound. They were considerably poorer than their masters. Oxby's article, which provides a rare and valuable study of the interaction between kinship and labour, does not tell us which alternative opportunities would have actually been available to slaves if they wished to abandon their masters, nor if national laws would actually have protected them. It describes a situation whereby slaves belonged to particular masters and were inherited by their offspring, and iklan spouses were forced to split to follow their respective masters. Although they were not sold

anymore, the rights masters held upon them at the time of Oxby's research were unlike the rights that could be exercised over any other category of adult person.

Ole Martin Gaasholt conducted his fieldwork in 1999-2001 amongst the Imghad Kel Gossi and their dependents and Iklan in the municipality of Gossi of the region of Timbuktu (Mali). He describes a heterogeneous situation (Gaasholt 2007), whereby some Iklan gained considerable wealth and have come to occupy positions in the local administration. Few Iklan still work as domestic slaves for their masters. Many use earnings derived from seasonal migrant labour to form their own herd and live independently from their old masters. Those who could not take up new opportunities continued carrying out tasks characteristic of slave labour, for their old masters or other wealthy families who could afford to hire labour. In spite of this diversity of practices, most Iklan tried to assume a new, less stigmatising, identity. Some try to pass as Songhay, others adopt the denomination 'Kel Tamasheck'. Neither of these strategies is fully successful, as in the local arena people's identities are known. Although the situation of the Kel Gossi Iklan seems more diverse than the one described by Oxby, and possibly more favourable to the Iklan, Gasholt opts for translating Iklan as 'slave' because the notion of individual ownership of the Iklan was still evident at the time of his research (ibid:3).

Ownership is not the same as exchangeability. Scholars have different views on whether exchangeability should be seen as a necessary condition for slave status. When Nicolaisen conducted fieldwork (1950s-1960s) in the Algerian Ahaggar and Tassile-n-Ajjer, slaves provided most labour and were 'owned' and transmitted through inheritance across generations of masters, but were not usually sold (Nicolaisen 1963:100). Commenting on Nicolaisen's data, McDonough observes that 'the notion that the slave be continually exchangeable as a capital commodity is unessential in defining a slave mode of production' (1979:47; cf. Bourgeot 1975:83). He translates iklan as slaves on the basis of the iklan's lack of control over their own labour, bodies, and valuable assets. A similar reasoning is followed by Winter commenting on the Malian Kel Agheris (1984:12). Extensive rights of control over the labour, mobility, sexuality and offspring of adults can only be held upon groups designated as Iklan. This consideration leads to the continued use of the term 'slave' to distinguish them from other free dependents.

In circumscribed cases, people of iklan status are still the object of transactions. In the Nigerien department of Tahoua, I was told that a wealthy Nigerian trader had paid to take a girl of slave status as concubine. The payment was camouflaged as bridewealth. But the girl's master, rather than her father, received the sum. In the Tahoua region, people of slave descent, collectively known as 'Buzu', occasionally pay ransom (*fansa*) to their traditional masters to manumit themselves or their future wives. The cost of ransom varies from case to case and is generally more expensive for women than for men.¹² This is because a woman of slave status who has not been manumitted finds it harder to marry. Men fear the potential claims of (ex-) masters on her offspring, primarily, but also on her belongings, labour, and sexuality. The majority of people of slave descent in the Ader region of Niger (Tahoua) do not accept being called 'Iklan' or 'Buzu', as these terms have a derogatory connotation. Many ex-Iklan have Hausanified over the last two generations, and today speak Hausa as their mother tongue. However, some villages settled on poor quality lands have maintained strong ties with their former masters, primarily of maraboutic status. They accept dependence, as 'insurance' (Klein 1998:241) in times of crisis and out of fear

¹² I recorded cases of ransom paid in the 1990s of FCFA 20,000 to 25,000 for men, and of FCFA 40,000 to 50,000 for women. On some occasions, ransom is paid in kind. In the mid 1980s a man of Buzu status ransomed his bride by giving a cow to the traditional masters. Elders who manumitted themselves in the 1950s or 1960s had to pay more expensive fees. Today these practices are carried out in extreme secrecy, and the masters' fear of being discovered is reflected in a drop in ransom prices.

of the master's religious power. Although their condition has changed substantially from that of slaves at the beginning of the 1900s, the fact that they feel compelled to pay ransom is meaningful. These circumstances, which are becoming increasingly rare, should be seen as the last vestiges of traditional forms of enslavement.

Not only have traditional forms of slavery evolved differently in different Tuareg contexts, accounting for the different interpretations put forth by researchers, but within any one Tuareg group the term 'slavery' has been stretched to cover different situations. Lecoq showed how colonial misreadings of social categories and statuses in Mali were re-appropriated by local groups. The Tamashek term *iklan* was avoided and 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' (Lecoq 2005:49). In ethnically plural contexts 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 the Tahoua region of 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 (eg. *ighawelan*, *iderfan*) becomes blurred, the category 'Buzu' may include both slaves and low status freed slaves. In some contexts, Buzu is used by Hausa speakers in a derogatory way to refer to any Tuareg (Bernus 1981:62-3), and the word 'Buzanci' is frequently used in Hausa in place of 'Tamashek' for the Tuareg language without a derogatory connotation. However, the term 'Buzu' also has a separate history, more relevant in southern agricultural areas where groups of Buzu, detached from their old masters, settled amidst Hausa farming villages. Here, Buzu is seen as an ethnic category, with mixed Tuareg and Hausa characteristics (Nicolas 1962:153 '*l'ethnie des Bouzou*').

The debate outlined above is not merely on terminology. Today, an anachronistic terminology is commonly applied to Tuareg of slave descent. Confusion is generated by the fact that the names 'Iklan', 'Buzu' or 'Bella' refer to diverse situations. In some cases, the name is all which remains of its carriers' dependent past. Accordingly, researchers studying these contexts refrain from translating 'Iklan' as 'slave'. Other contexts are more ambiguous, and dependent relations have been maintained in practice. This is often the case when the alternatives to continued dependence have comparatively high opportunity costs. Social identities are shaped by ideology, with concrete implications for livelihood opportunities. Transformations in the relative economic status of master and slave groups are critical to processes of emancipation. Yet, ideological change lags behind changes in the material conditions of life. This forces Iklan to engage in epistemological struggles over the redefinition of identity.

Aid, Voice, and Migration

Iklan groups seem to have lacked a shared political vision. With the exception of the 1946 revolt at Menaka (Klein 1998:234) and of the recent events of the 1990s 'Tuareg rebellion', I have not come across references to Tuareg slave revolts expressing ideological resistance against enslavement. Opposition to the Imajeghen's power and related political hierarchy came from Islamic reformist movements. For example, Muhammad Al-Jilani's ideal of the equality of all classes in the jihad has become proverbial in Tuareg and Hausa folktales (cf. Norris 1975:148; Bernus 1990:41). Al Jilani opposed the Imajeghen, whom he is reported to have called 'serfs (buzu) of God' (Urvoy 1934:205). However, these movements were neither led nor inspired by Iklan, who only recently started to express themselves politically as a separate interest group.

Over the last twenty years the political mobilisation of Tuareg of slave descent has taken both violent and peaceful forms. The expression 'Tuareg rebellion' is commonly used to identify a hybrid movement, which articulated distinct visions and agendas, and had violent repercussions in Mali and Niger in the 1990s. Clandestine movements of Tuareg groups envisioning the political autonomy of the Azawad region seem to have been at the origin of the events that escalated into the rebellion (cf. Giuffrida 2005b: 534-535). In 1990, the violent repression of such movements by the part of the Niger government ignited the Tuareg rebellion in Niger, which spread quickly to Mali. The Malian government's repression was supported by the Songhay militia *Mouvement Populaire Ganda Koy* (MPGK) and targeted specifically 'white' Tuareg civilians. Many ex servile Tuareg groups are recorded to have joined the attacks against their old masters and elites (cf. Giuffrida 2005b; Klute 1995; Claudot-Hawad 2000). Political and economic tensions were expressed in the idiom of race, reducing divergent historical interests to a clash between peoples of black and white complexion (cf. Claudot-Hawad 2000: 256-266). It should be noted, however, that 'white' elites have not always been the victims of ideological manipulations of race. More importantly, racialised rhetorics fail to convey the complexity of recent hierarchical permutations. When large numbers of 'white' Tuareg were forced to flee Mali, some iklan helped their ex masters¹³ or followed them in their flight (cf. Randall and Giuffrida 2005:454). The tensions that became manifest in the first half of the 1990s had matured over a much longer period; they had mixed genealogies; and gave rise to heterogeneous reactions amongst both ex-elites and ex-servile groups. The 1990s uprisings caused enormous bloodshed and did not lead to any improvement in the social and economic status of Iklan groups. Instead, new research suggests that the process of decentralisation in Mali (1996) and Niger (early 2000) may lead to durable changes in Iklan status.

The initial impacts of decentralisation in Mali and Niger have received mixed commentaries. Giuffrida highlighted the increased dependence on aid and the tendency of aid to be more firmly anchored to the municipal level, to the detriment of long-established strategies of mobility based on extra-municipal networks of support (2005b). However, even before decentralisation, foreign aid projects were localised structures that targeted primarily settled populations (cf. Boyer 2004:7). The consequences of aid and decentralisation on iklan status should be analysed separately. At least since the 1980s, populations based in marginally productive areas of the Sahel have been accessing two main sources of revenue: the revenue earned by circular migrants and the revenue made available *in situ* by various types of aid interventions. In contexts characterised by structural unemployment and chronic production deficit, the survival of the poorest sections of the population depends upon accessing either of these sources. Access is based on alternative strategies: cyclical migration allows migrants to earn money by selling their labour in urban centres and regions where demand for labour exceeds the local supply. Aid revenues, instead, are accessed through *stratégies de courtage* (cf. Bierschenk, Chauveau, Olivier de Sardan 2000) that require people to coalesce around (localised) aid interventions and reproduce aid logics. From the perspective of people based in scarcely productive regions, the presence of a project makes it possible to stay put and rely on temporarily available aid-funds. In the absence of aid, unless they are economically self-sufficient, they either rely exclusively on migrant remittances or they are forced to move.

How are iklan groups positioned *vis a vis* these different strategies? At least since the 1960s, studies of Sahelian economies documented a less clear-cut distinction between pastoral and farming societies (Baier 1976; Bernus 1974:138, 142; Bonte 1976:31). Having little reason to hang on to a past of exploitation, dependent groups adapted more easily to change than their

¹³ Even in the 1916-1917 resistance, the French military crushed groups of armed Iklan in the Tahoua region who had remained loyal to their old masters (cf. Fuglestad 1973:96).

masters. Almost everywhere, ex dependent groups have been the greatest diversifiers and started engaging in long distance seasonal migration from its earliest stages (cf. Bernus and Bernus 1975:43). When aid is available, households rely on diversification at the household and extended family level. Florence Boyer's study in Bankilare and my own observations in Keita converge in showing that long-distance iklan migrants are almost exclusively men. Women do not migrate and try to become involved in development activities (Boyer 2004:10). Harvest failures and economic retrenchment, as well as reduced employment opportunities following liberalisation policies, inflated the phenomenon of migrant labour and extended the duration of the migrants' stay abroad. At destination, migrants tend to coalesce into ethno-professional groups, where shared cultural characteristics partly override traditional status boundaries. However, returning ex-slave migrants may be unable to renegotiate their low status (cf. Boyer 2005a).

In contemporary Ader, I recorded examples of small migratory circuits that reproduce the trajectories of slave groups following their masters. While today such movements usually reflect the autonomous choice of contemporary migrants, their inferior status is implicit in the nature of the relations established through this type of migration. Long distance migration offers men of slave descent a temporary break from a context where their identity carries the stigma of slavery. However, young migrants emphasise the hardship and humiliations suffered abroad, where many of them become victims of xenophobia, corruption, and insecurity. Stories of 'failed' or difficult migration reinforce the idealisation of life in the village and the acceptance of hierarchical relations at home. Instead, successful migrants bring back substantial earnings of up to one or two million Fcfa, which can be seen as endogenous 'projects' of economic development (Boyer 2005b). Their experiences abroad push them to reflect critically both on the persistence of traditional hierarchies and on the potential impacts of international aid programmes.

Until recently, old elites have been able to maintain a privileged position in the local administration and the so-called *chefferie traditionnelle* (cf. Komlavi-Hahonou, 2007). Even where old elites lost their past political authority at the local level, they were rarely replaced by ex-slaves, as the low status of the latter made them unlikely candidates for political office. Administrative positions grant priority access to funds and projects. Where groups of slave descent achieved a social and economic role overall comparable to that of traditional elites, ex-slave and ex-elite constituencies compete over access to aid revenues (cf. Giuffrida 2005a). Alternatively, decentralisation has opened new political spaces for groups of slave descent organised informally or joining new political parties explicitly defending (ex-)slave interests. Based on research in the Municipality of Bankilare, Komlavi-Hahonou (2007) suggests that the evolution of associative forms of organisation plays a central role in shaping iklan collective consciousness and introducing new ways of talking about slavery, hierarchy, and status. His research in villages close to the ones studied by Boyer suggest that iklan mobility is slower in more remote areas and in contexts dominated by wealthy maraboutic groups, who use their religious influence to maintain the status quo.¹⁴ However, his evidence also suggests that when slave descendents reach positions of influence they do not necessarily promote a broader project of social reformism. Rather, they reproduce aspects of the *politique du ventre* that characterise elite political behaviour.

¹⁴ Komlavi-Hahonou, personal communication. Cf. Boyer 2005a:782. This coincides with my own observations in Tahoua.

Conclusion

Tuareg society underwent major transformations in the course of the 1900s. The emancipation of slaves had begun in the late 1800s as a consequence of the political expansion of some Tuareg confederations, which favoured the development of (exploitative) share-cropping and tributary relations with free or freed dependents. Colonialism induced or amplified three main processes: it undermined the system of production which supported the political supremacy of Tuareg elites (cf. Bourgeot 1994); it stimulated the growth of migrations amongst slave constituencies through the monetisation of the economy and, until the 1940s, forced labour and recruitment; and, after the 1940s, it set the bases for the development of a new aid governmentality. The *iklan* followed different routes. The majority have been more resourceful than their old masters, adopting strategies of diversification and gaining access to new opportunities and ideas through migration. The most successful *iklan* are those whose stories will never be told, but will remain buried behind new identities and statuses. The persistence of slavery is circumscribed to the most vulnerable people living in the poorest areas, where the benefits of dependence, to borrow Bouman's expression, outweigh the risks of independent initiative. Such 'benefits' are greater for elder than for youths, for women than for men. Recently, ex-slaves started to mobilise politically. The fact that the reformation of old hierarchical logics is not their primary target should not surprise us, as their continued social mobility is predicated upon new hierarchical logics. Over the last fifty years, aid and migration have been these logics' playing fields.

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