

Escaping Slavery and Building Diasporic Communities in French Soudan and Senegal, ca. 1880–1940*

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Too little is known of the fate of formerly enslaved populations in the aftermath of slavery, especially in French West Africa, where slavery was abolished in 1905.¹ Even less is known about slaves who obtained their freedom before the official end of slavery. Indeed, even before the French colonial authorities abolished slavery, many slaves had begun to escape. While some slaves gained their freedom by paying a ransom to their masters, many others used the new venues of emancipation offered by the French authorities, such as settling in liberty villages or being recruited in the French army. Some were eventually able to return to their homelands.² Others founded new independent villages in the region where they had been enslaved, or migrated to wealthier areas, such as the Senegambian peanut basin.

In the 1880s, most populations in Western Sudan still found themselves caught in a stranglehold between Samori Ture's troops in the South and Ahmadu's military control in the East. When Samori Ture's wars devastated the regions of Wasulu and Sikasso in Southern Mali in the 1880s–1890s, these regions became some of the main suppliers of

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¹ F. Cooper, T.C. Holt, and R.J. Scott, "Introduction," in F. Cooper, T.C. Holt, and R.J. Scott, eds., *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Post-Emancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 2.

² On the return and the resettlement of refugees and formerly enslaved populations in the district of Bougouni, see B. Peterson, *Islamization from Below: The Making of Muslim Communities in Rural French Sudan, 1880–1960* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011). The first attempts to restrict the slave trade in French Sudan began with the nomination of Albert Grodet as French Sudan governor (1893–1895). In 1895, the slave trade was officially forbidden on the territories of French Sudan. However, the commandants did not really strictly apply this measure. Slavery abolition politics in French Sudan reached a turning point in 1899 when William Ponty became the representative (délégué) of the governor general in Kayes. It is under his administration that slaves were gradually "emancipated" and that the decree of 12 December 1905, abolishing the slave trade in French West Africa, was promulgated.

slaves in Western Sudan.³ Samori had built a vast empire in West Africa by the end of the nineteenth century that stretched at its height from Sierra Leone to Ivory Coast. Samori started fighting the French colonial conquest in 1880, but French military campaigns conducted by Marechal Gallieni against Samori and Ahmadu Seku in 1886–1888 allowed the French to establish bases in the region.⁴ Indeed, Ahmadu Seku, the son of El Hajj Umar Tall and inheritor of the Tukulor Empire in 1864, was only able to contain the French military encroachment until the mid-1880s. Continuous struggles with his relatives over his father's inheritance weakened Ahmadu Seku's position in the region, while Samori had already reached Bamako in 1883 and was pushing the Tukulor toward Segu. In 1884, Ahmadu Seku launched a successful attack in Kaarta against his brother Muhammad al-Muntaga, henceforth ruling Kaarta from Niore.⁵ With the aim of fighting Samori, Ahmadu Seku finally signed a treaty with the French in 1887 that would ultimately turn the Tukulor Empire into a French protectorate, leading later to the creation of the colony of French Sudan. Samori was eventually captured by the French and deported to Gabon in 1898, where he died in 1900.⁶

Waves of refugees and slaves were often scattered along the same routes in Western Sudan in this context of intense warfare and uncertainty. People fled before the progress of Samori's troops. They sought refuge in neighboring regions, sometimes securing the protection of the French in the military posts of Kayes, Médine, Bafoulabé, or Kita, while many others were captured and sold into slavery. Refugees who escaped enslavement were nevertheless, as outsiders, often viewed as of possible slave origin by the local landlords upon their arrival in a new village.⁷ Western Sudan had a long, skillful, and ambiguous use of the landlord-stranger relationship. It consisted of reciprocal obligations allowing protection for strangers and travellers but also creating dependency

³ Wasulu is a region stretching from the southwest corner of Mali, to the northwest corner of Côte d'Ivoire, and the northeast part of Guinea. Wasulu submitted to Samori in 1882. While Samori was unsuccessfully besieging Sikasso in 1888, Wasulu attempted to revolt because of Samori's high demands in provisions and men for the maintenance of the siege. This provoked a terrible repression by Samori's troops entailing massive enslavement and streams of refugees. On Samori's wars in this region, see Y. Person, *Samori, une révolution Dyula*, 3 vol. (Dakar, Senegal: IFAN, 1968–1975); B. Peterson, "History, Memory, and the Legacy of Samori in Southern Mali, c. 1880–1898," *Journal of African History* 49 (2008), 261–79; B. Peterson, *Islamization from Below*. See also M. Klein, "Defensive Strategies: Wasulu, Masina, and the Slave Trade," in S. Diouf, ed., *Fighting the Slave Trade: West African Strategies* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), 62–78.

⁴ Gallieni was appointed Commandant superior of Upper-Senegal (French Sudan) in 1886.

⁵ On the social and religious significance of these events in the history of the Tukulor Empire, see J.H. Hanson, *Migration, Jihad, and Muslim Authority in West Africa: The Futanke Colonies in Karta* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

⁶ On the capture of Samori and more generally on the completion of the French colonial conquest in West Africa, see J. d'Andurain, *La capture de Samory (1898): L'achèvement de la conquête de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* (Paris: Éditions SOTECA, 2012).

⁷ P. Gaibazzi, "The Rank Effect: Post-Emancipation Immobility in a Soninke Village," *Journal of African History* 53 (2012), 215–34.

and vassalage akin to servitude, especially in times of uncertainty.⁸ Meillassoux argues that the fundamental distinction between “kin” and “alien” is a question not of blood relation but of “congeneration” or being born and growing up together in the same social and economic networks.⁹ Deprived of kinship relations in the new host society, these outsiders were assigned a status almost equivalent to that of slave, except that they could leave at any moment. The similarities of status between aliens and slaves are not surprising here. As asserted by Kopytoff and Miers, as well as Meillassoux, slavery is, in many African societies, the opposite of kinship.¹⁰ Thus, strangers were most often only offered to marry slave women; the children would be subsequently considered as slaves, except when the husband was able to redeem his wife.¹¹ For the host village, it was a way to acquire new dependents without risking the loss of village women when the outsider left. Furthermore, even when slaves were freed, they often carried the stigma of slavery for decades, even as they resettled in new locations.

Historians of African slavery have rarely examined the lives and experiences of formerly enslaved populations in the aftermath of internal and domestic slavery in West Africa and the ways in which they navigated the post-slavery social landscape. Indeed, most historians have concentrated on the transition from slave labor to free wage labor.¹² Yet, these macro histories tell us little about the specific social and cultural strategies used by formerly enslaved populations to overcome legacies of slavery. Notable exceptions for Western Sudan are Roberts, Klein, and Peterson, but their analyses primarily looked at the exodus of formerly enslaved populations returning to their region of origin.¹³

This article examines those formerly enslaved populations who did not return to their regions of origin but established new communities elsewhere as a way to secure their

⁸ On the long history of landlords-strangers relationships in the Mande world, see G. Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers: Ecology, Society, and Trade in Western Africa, 1000–1630* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).

⁹ C. Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery: The Womb of Iron and Gold* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 23–25.

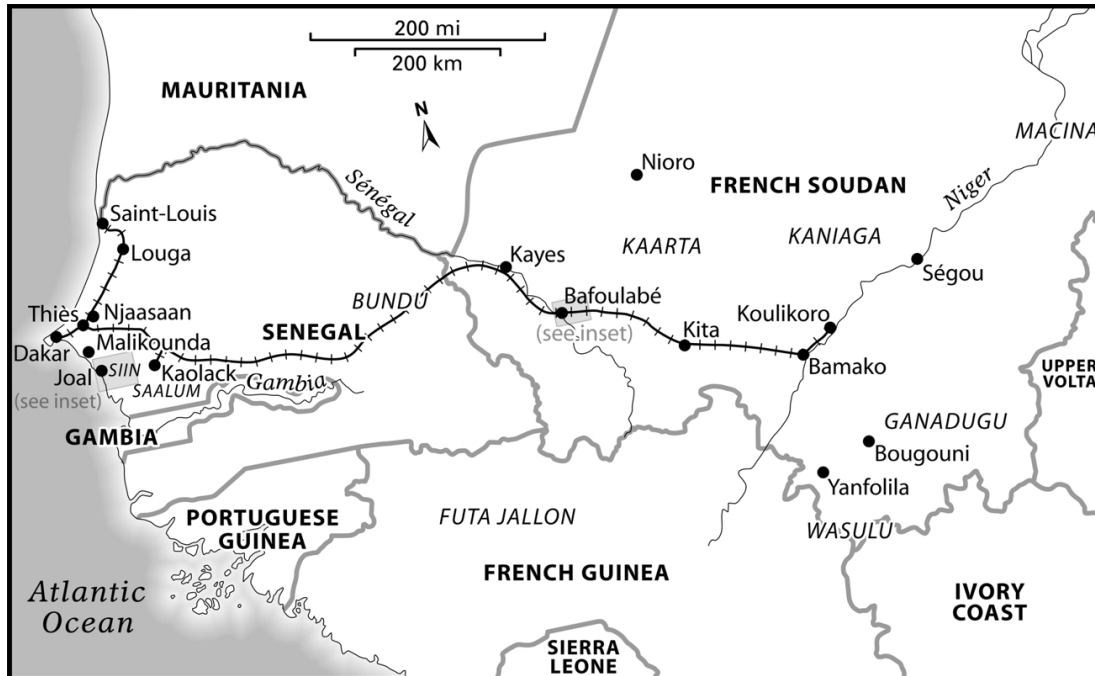
¹⁰ A point on which Kopytoff, Miers, and Meillassoux all agree. See I. Kopytoff and S. Miers, “African ‘Slavery’ as an Institution of Marginality,” in S. Miers and I. Kopytoff, eds., *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1977), 3–81; Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery*, 23–40.

¹¹ In specific cases, local clans would welcome strangers on a more equal basis, especially when they needed new allies to reinforce their own power in the region. See the case of the Dukure clan and their alliances with subsequent migrants in the Soninke region of Dyahunu, North of Kayes, in E. Pollet and G. Winter, *La Société Soninké (Dyahunu, Mali)* (Brussels: Éditions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 1971), 54–62.

¹² B. Peterson, “Slave Emancipation, Trans-Local Social Processes and the Spread of Islam in French Colonial Buguni (Southern Mali), 1893–1914,” *Journal of African History* 45 (2004), 423.

¹³ R. Roberts and M. Klein, “The Banamba Slave Exodus of 1905 and the Decline of Slavery in the Western Sudan,” *Journal of African History* 21 (1980), 375–94; R. Roberts, *Warriors, Merchants, and Slaves: The State and the Economy in the Middle Niger Valley, 1700–1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988); M. Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and B. Peterson, *Islamization from Below*.

freedom and survival. I trace the migratory strategies used by these migrants to reduce their vulnerability as slaves, formerly enslaved, and “strangers” in the region of Kayes (Mali) and in the region of Siin (Senegal) at the turn of the twentieth century. I analyze how they used diasporic practices to reconstruct autonomous communities and social networks, and to overcome legacies of slavery.



Map 1. French West Africa (Map by Don Pirius).

A series of questions therefore animate this article: What kind of opportunities were slaves and formerly enslaved populations able to seize upon to escape their status? Was migration an effective and sufficient strategy? What forms of migration were most viable? What happened to slaves, formerly enslaved populations, and their descendants after they migrated? In pursuing these lines of inquiry, I draw on both colonial documents and oral testimonies as sources. Colonial documents, however, contain numerous silences regarding emancipation strategies.¹⁴ Oral sources collected in 2009 and 2010 in the villages of Ouassala and Ouassoulou Demba of the Malian district of Bafoulabé and in the villages of Konbogoye and Ndinging of the Senegalese region of Siin have been therefore especially valuable for this research. Despite the fraught and contested nature of the subject, informants showed great willingness to share the history of their village and their family. Although informants rarely immediately disclosed a history of enslavement, crosschecked interviews and archives allowed me to place these individual histories in the broader history of slavery and emancipation in the Western Sudan. These sources help in particular to better understand the way in which formerly enslaved populations reconstructed social and family networks. The emphasis on family networks shed light on processes of

¹⁴ Most slave revolts occurring in the Kayes region between 1910 and 1940 went unnoticed by the colonial administration. See M. Rodet, “Mémoires de l’esclavage dans la région de Kayes: Histoire d’une disparition,” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 197 (2010), 263–91.

emancipation that entailed complex negotiations of kinship, marriage, and religious practices and more generally notions of belonging in the region of resettlement.

The collected family histories also highlight many complex connections that developed between successive waves of migration from Mali to Senegal. My focus is on the formation of overlapping diasporas¹⁵ in regions where stigmatization and vulnerability were deeply rooted in the history of slavery, ultimately forming a diasporic continuum from Southern Mali to the Siin in which the region of Kayes played a significant relay role due to its historical location on the main trade routes between the two regions.¹⁶ The cultural dimension of diasporas has long been observed in the Atlantic world, but it has received only scant attention with the context of emancipated slave communities in West Africa. The continuum of movements and cultural practices generated by these communities allowed the formation of specific spaces of belonging, constituting today memoryscapes of the history of slavery in West Africa.¹⁷

The diasporic communities seem to have been shaped much more by their immediate new environment and the necessary needs of survival rather than by an imagined homeland that these migrants, as refugees or slaves, had very often left in great distress. In the host regions, they created spaces of belonging by readjusting to new membership categories and choosing between pre-existing networks, for a sense of social embeddedness.¹⁸ Establishing affiliations with new kin groups, especially through marriages, resulted in an early and profound social mixing that is rarely to be found elsewhere. Furthermore, securing new forms of patronage such as colonial or Islamic support was in some cases the only viable option as a hedge against the risks and vulnerabilities characteristic of post-slavery societies. Peterson discusses how forcedly displaced and formerly enslaved populations from Wasulu returned home at the beginning of the twentieth century and had to conceal at first their conversion to Islam from non-Muslim elders in order to belong.¹⁹ In this article, some of the formerly enslaved populations under discussion also adopted Islam in migration, but most of them never came back to their region of origin. For them, converting to Islam became a way of escaping stigmatization as an “alien” in the increasingly Muslim context of the Western Sudan.²⁰ Thus, this article highlights certain aspects of the transformation experienced by

¹⁵ E. Lewis, “To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas,” *American Historical Review* 100, 3 (June 1995), 765–87.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ N. Argenti and U. Rösenthaler, “Introduction: Between Cameroon and Cuba: Youth, Slave Trades and Translocal Memoryscapes,” *Social Anthropology* 14, 1 (2006), 40.

¹⁸ Cooper, et al., “Introduction,” in Cooper, Holt, and Scott, eds., *Beyond Slavery*, 2.

¹⁹ See Peterson, *Islamization from Below*.

²⁰ Launay and Soares discuss at length how Islamization in West Africa especially accelerated under French colonialism with the development of transport infrastructures and the emergence of new urban centers. B. Soares and R. Launay, “The Formation of an ‘Islamic Sphere’ in French Colonial West Africa,” *Economy and Society* 28, 4 (1999), 497–519.

formerly enslaved communities in Senegal and Mali in the first half of the twentieth century.

Slaves? Refugees? Vulnerability in the Region of Kayes at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Twenty-five years ago, Martin Klein observed that it would be especially interesting for historians of Africa, albeit with great difficulty, to analyze traditions of migration among groups who had escaped slavery and to examine whether these groups remembered and transmitted such traditions.²¹ In this regard, the history of Ouassala and Ouassoulou Demba in the district of Bafoulabé can help us to examine such traditions and how their mode of transmission attests to the vulnerabilities of formerly enslaved populations at the end of the nineteenth century in the region of Kayes. In these villages, overcoming legacies of slavery frequently meant confining the history of slavery to a “public secret” and building on new waves of migrants and migratory networks to assert these communities as economic and cultural authorities in an often-hostile environment.

Remembering and Forgetting Slavery

Ouassala was founded circa 1887 by four heads of family who escaped Samori’s wars by migrating to the region of Kayes.²² The village was established with colonial authorization from Bafoulabé, a colonial post approximately 120 km southeast of Kayes, the first capital of French Soudan; Ouassala is located about 10 km from Bafoulabé in a predominantly Xaasonke/Maninka area. Ouassoulou Demba, located about five km from Ouassala, was founded shortly after Ouassala around 1888.²³ In interviews I conducted in Ouassala and Ouassoulou Demba in 2009, the exact circumstances of the foundation of the village remained unclear. Did these people simply flee Samori’s wars as some of their descendants claimed?²⁴ Or had they been taken by Samori and sold into slavery along the slave trade roads of Western Sudan, as colonial documents seem to imply?²⁵ According to Bouche,

²¹ M. Klein, “Studying the History of Those Who Would Rather Forget: Oral History and the Experience of Slavery,” *History in Africa* 16 (1989), 215.

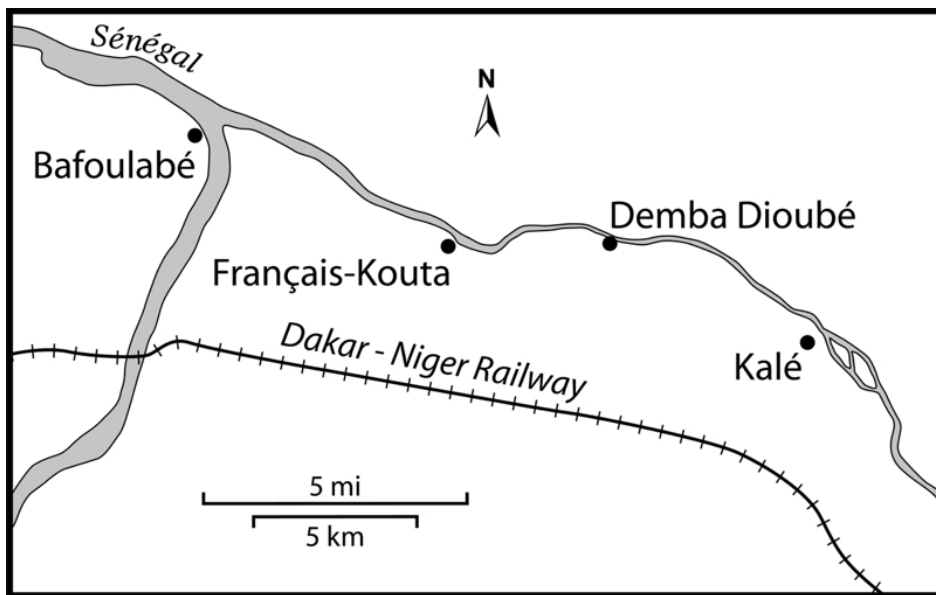
²² J. Gallieni, *Deux campagnes au Soudan* (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie, 1891), 158. See also Archives Nationales du Mali (ANM) Koulouba FA 1D32/2, Historical and geographical handbook of Bafoulabé, 1890. Collective interview by author with Boukary Diakité, Diguida Mady N’Diagne, Moussa Diallo, Noumouké Diakité, and Alama Diakité, Ouassala, 10 January 2009.

²³ ANM Koulouba FA 1E16, Political Report, Bafoulabé, 1 February 1888; 1D32/2: Handbook Bafoulabé, 1890.

²⁴ Collective interview by author with Boukary Diakité, Diguida Mady N’Diagne, Musa Diallo, Noumouké Diakité and Alama Diakité, Ouassala, 10 January 2009; interview by author with Galadio Diarra, Ouassoulou Demba, 7 February 2009.

²⁵ One of the main slave trade roads between French Soudan and the Senegambia was Buguni-Banamba-Nioro-Medine-Senegal River-Peanut Basin. This route has been described by R. Roberts, *Warriors*, 114–15; B. Moitt, “Slavery and Emancipation in Senegal’s Peanut Basin: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 22, 1 (1989), 33–36; Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, 53–56.

the colonial administration considered Ouassala and Ouassoulou Demba liberty villages under the name of Français-Kouta and Demba Dioubé respectively, from 1888 onwards.²⁶ The liberty villages date back to the first military campaigns in Western Sudan and were created at first to take in slaves who escaped from “enemy” territories. Once the region was “pacified,” they took in all the slaves who escaped their master, especially those who were mistreated, and threatened with or whose family had already been sold. These villages were exempt from paying head tax up to 1900 in order to encourage their further settlement. Gallieni further described the village of “Francékoura”²⁷ in 1887 as being recently founded by families originally from the region of Wasulu, who had been enslaved in Kaarta before escaping to the left bank of the Senegal River to seek the protection of the French.²⁸ An 1890 report from the district of Bafoulabé also specifies that Français-Kouta and Demba Dioubé were villages of “liberated captives” (*captifs libérés*).²⁹



Map 2. Français-Kouta and the surrounding area, French Sudan (Map by Don Pirius).

However, many of the informants in Ouassala and Ouassoulou Demba were evasive regarding the origins of these villages and their possible foundation by formerly enslaved populations. When asked why the village was founded, most informants of Wasulunke origin whose ancestors founded the village would simply answer: “Our ancestors came here because of Samori’s wars.”³⁰ Their reluctance resonates with Klein’s findings over the possibility of recovering such migratory traditions more than hundred years later.³¹ But

²⁶ D. Bouche, *Les villages de liberté en Afrique noire française, 1887–1910* (Paris: Mouton, 1968), 260. ANM 1D32/2, Historical and geographical handbook of Bafoulabé, 1890.

²⁷ The name had political implications. “Français-Kouta” or “Francékoura” means “New French Person” in the Mande languages of western Mali.

²⁸ Gallieni, *Deux campagnes*, 158.

²⁹ ANM 1 D 32/2, Historical and geographical handbook of Bafoulabé.

³⁰ Interview by author with Boukary Diakité, Ouassala, 10 January 2009.

³¹ M. Rodet, “Listening to the History of Those Who Don’t Forget,” *History in Africa* 40 (2013), 28.

crosschecked interviews demonstrate that this situation is more of a “public secret” than an effacement of these memories.³² Indeed, other informants, mostly descendants of subsequent migrants, confirmed that the village had been established by formerly enslaved families: “The French liberated slaves and gave this village to them, that’s why it’s called Français-Kouta.”³³ Or, “Ouassala it’s the same as Liberté.”³⁴

We can suspect, as Klein does, that some of these “public secrets” may have already been formed in the decades following the creation of these villages.³⁵ It was probably easier for the inhabitants to disconnect the establishment of these villages from the history of slavery, as these villages were neither located next to the colonial post of Bafoulabé, nor were they the official site for welcoming escaping slaves, as Bafoulabé-Liberté was at the end of the nineteenth century.³⁶

The colonial and local ideologies prevailing at the time of abolition and their reaffirmation during the postcolonial period prevented the stigma of slavery from disappearing. Even in these post-abolition periods, ideologies emanating from local nobility continued to exercise control over defining what a society of “freemen” had to be.³⁷ Confining the history of slavery to a “public secret” was most likely a necessary step in conveying an authoritative identity at a time when slavery had not completely disappeared. The importance of this strategy also highlights the ways in which formerly enslaved populations remained vulnerable at the end of the nineteenth century in French Soudan. Indeed, manumitted and redeemed slaves were still exposed to re-enslavement. Even as escaped slaves had alleviated some vulnerability by securing French protection, the region of Kayes was still plagued by kidnapping and enslavement.³⁸

Building Independent Communities in the Aftermath of the End of Slavery

Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff have emphasized how incorporation into quasi-ethnic groups was a way of reducing marginality, while also securing social protection among

³² Taussig defines “public secret” as knowledge widely shared within a society, but that cannot be publically enunciated. M.T. Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999). For a detailed discussion on the transmission of memories of slavery in the Kayes region, see Rodet, “Mémoires,” 263–91.

³³ Interview by author with Djibril Cissé, Ouassala, 10 January 2009.

³⁴ Liberté is the former liberty village of Bafoulabé. Interview by author with Diguída Mady N’Diagne, 10 January 2009.

³⁵ Klein, “Studying the History,” 213.

³⁶ This neighborhood of Bafoulabé no longer exists. In districts where there was a high percentage of liberation, as in Bafoulabé, the liberty village was simply a transit zone that formerly enslaved populations soon left to resettle in other villages, like Ouassala and Ouassoulou Demba. In the latter, populations were permanent or at least relatively more permanent. See Bouche, *Les villages de liberté*, 86.

³⁷ Rodet, “Mémoires,” 284–85.

³⁸ The French only controlled the left bank of the Senegal River at the time and were barely able to prevent incursions from the right bank still under Ahmadu’s military control. ANM 1E16, Report on the political situation in the cercle of Bafoulabé, 15 April 1890.

formerly enslaved populations.³⁹ Resonating with their findings, the cases of Ouassala and Ouassoulou Demba similarly reveal how the building of new kinship ties allowed formerly enslaved populations to mediate their marginality. As “strangers” in a predominantly Xaasonke/Maninka area, and especially as formerly enslaved, these populations were considered by the local nobility as a pool of enslavable people. In 1890, for example, notables in Bafoulabé continued to buy and sell slaves with impunity, even those who had been entrusted to them by the administration, in the full view of an accommodating colonial administration.⁴⁰ This is probably why the founders of Ouassala desired to establish their own village away from older settlements where local nobility ruled.⁴¹ In these times of insecurity, the families of Ouassala built a large village capable of protecting their inhabitants. The architecture of the village did not seem however to have the defensive characteristics of villages in other parts of the region, such as surrounding walls or fortified houses.⁴² As for many other liberty villages in Western Sudan, the plan of the village and the organization of the streets and compounds had been designed by the French. But following several attacks from the right bank in 1889, the French allowed the villagers to defend themselves with arms.⁴³ The founders of Demba Dioubé also wished initially to settle in Français-Kouta since they were Wasulunke and isolation could prove dangerous. To convince them to found Demba Dioubé instead, the administration explained that a population increase would merge the new village Demba Dioubé with Français-Kouta to become a large Wasulunke village.⁴⁴ Correspondingly, Français-Kouta’s population increased very rapidly in the first years of its existence; it was already a prosperous village of 600 inhabitants in 1892.⁴⁵ This population growth was probably due to the increasing intensity of people fleeing Samori’s wars in Wasulu at the time, but also to the regular incoming waves of runaway slaves from neighboring Kaarta.⁴⁶

However, the population of Français-Kouta dropped again very rapidly soon after 1892 because many refugees returned to their region of origin after the wars ended. By the end of 1894, there were only eighty-five permanent inhabitants in the village.⁴⁷ The departures in the district especially accelerated after the announcement of Samori’s capture

³⁹ Kopytoff and Miers, “African ‘Slavery,’” 26–27. More recently, this phenomenon has been observed in Ethiopia and Northern Benin. See A. Meckelburg in this special issue, as well as E. Hahonou, “Propriétés, citoyennetés et héritage de l’esclavage au Nord Bénin,” *Politique Africaine* 132 (2013), 73–93.

⁴⁰ ANM 1E16, Political Report 449, 25 August 1890.

⁴¹ Interview by author with Boukary Diakité, Ouassala, 10 January 2009.

⁴² On the defensive strategies used by the villages in Mali at the time, see M. Klein, “Defensive Strategies,” in Diouf, ed., *Fighting the Slave Trade*, 62–78.

⁴³ ANM 1E16, Political reports, Bafoulabé, 4th quarter 1888 and June 1890.

⁴⁴ The French colonial administration needed allies in this region against Ahmadu’s troupes. Demba Dioubé was strategically located between Français-Kouta and Kalé on the river’s left bank. ANM 1E16, Political report, Bafoulabé, 1 February 1888.

⁴⁵ ANM 1E16, Political report, Bafoulabé, 1 November 1892.

⁴⁶ ANM 1E16, Political report, Bafoulabé, February 1900.

⁴⁷ ANM Koulouba FA 1E120, Census of the liberty villages, Bafoulabé, 1 December 1894.

in 1898. People from Southern Mali who had settled in Français-Kouta asked the French colonial administration for permission to return to Wasulu.⁴⁸ At first, the colonial administration was reluctant to authorize their departure and tried to check this “exodus” by giving the authorization to leave but only in two years’ time.⁴⁹ These measures were meant to protect local economies in the Kayes region. From the other direction, by 1900, chiefs in the district of Bougouni were sending emissaries to Bafoulabé to encourage the mass emigration of populations in Français-Kouta and Bafoulabé back to Southern Mali.⁵⁰ As argued by Peterson, dispersed populations tried to use any available information in order to locate family members upon Samori’s defeat and sometimes undertook very long journeys in order to reconnect with them.⁵¹ If until 1900 the colonial administration was still able to bridle the exodus in the district, this was no longer the case after 1901.⁵² In addition to the desire to return home, these populations were heavily recruited for railroad construction work and famine struck the district.⁵³ The exodus especially increased following the official ban of slavery in French West Africa in 1905.⁵⁴ The most numerous departures seemed to have occurred after 1907, when the populations of the district were victims of bad harvest and subsequent food shortages.⁵⁵

Even though the exodus from Kayes to Wasulu continued until after World War I and Wasulunke from the region of Kayes also came to reclaim their family, some permanently settled in Français-Kouta.⁵⁶ Indeed, the journey to Wasulu could be very hazardous; it was a long walk (about 600 km) at a time of famine. These were perilous times: in 1908, one official reported that “julas” pretending to offer assistance, opportunistically re-enslaved returnees, especially women and girls, and sold them back into slavery in neighboring districts and colonies.⁵⁷ Often emigrants did not know where

⁴⁸ ANM 1E16, Political report, Bafoulabé, December 1898.

⁴⁹ ANM 1E16, Political report, Bafoulabé, January 1899; Notice 63, 11 February 1899.

⁵⁰ ANM 1E16, Political report, Bafoulabé, February 1900.

⁵¹ Peterson, “Slave Emancipation,” 434.

⁵² Until 1901, slaves were systematically returned to their masters who came to colonial administration to claim slaves within three months from the date of entry in the liberty village. The circular of 1 February 1901 banished the practice, resulting in more slave flights. The escaping slaves no longer bothered securing liberty certificates and increasingly left the region without declaring their departure to the colonial administration.

⁵³ The inhabitants of the liberty villages were often the first targets for colonial labor requisitions. ANM 1E16, Political report, Bafoulabé, October 1901; Political report, Bafoulabé, April 1902.

⁵⁴ Decree of 12 December 1905 relating to the repression of the slave trade in French West Africa and in French Congo, *Journal Officiel de l’Afrique occidentale française*, 53 (Gorée, Senegal: Impr. du Gouvernement général de l’A.O.F., 6 January 1906), 17.

⁵⁵ ANM Koulouba FA 1E17, Political reports, Bafoulabé, February, April, May, June, November 1907, May, and September 1908, September 1909; Report of 10 May 1910 on the tour inspection.

⁵⁶ ANM 1E17, Political report, Bafoulabé, May 1913; Annual political report, Bafoulabé, 1918.

⁵⁷ *Julas* were Muslim merchants who traded goods such as gold, millet, slaves, and kola nuts throughout West Africa. ANM 1E17, Political report, Bafoulabé, October 1908.

they were heading, and settled elsewhere on their way to Wasulu, benefitting from communities of support en route.⁵⁸

In the years after their foundation, the villages of Français-Kouta and Demba Dioubé regularly took in successive waves of formerly enslaved populations as well as foreigners who migrated into the region for other reasons.⁵⁹ These latter groups were attracted to Demba Dioubé and Français-Kouta because, as strangers, they would have probably been assigned a quasi-slave status if they had settled in villages ruled by the local nobility. The populations of Français-Kouta and Demba Dioubé were also probably keen to welcome these new waves of migrants as they also had to set up marriage alliances. Indeed, the local Xaasonke nobility who ruled the canton of Guimbaya never accepted the economic and political empowerment of Français-Kouta and treated their residents as descendants of slaves, preventing therefore any possible marriage alliances. This long contentious history led leaders in Français-Kouta to have their village declared “independent” in the 1920s and to secure their own canton of Ouassouloum in 1934.⁶⁰ The village may also have benefited from the return of the African colonial soldiers (*tirailleurs*) after World War I, some of whom resettled there instead of returning to their former masters’ villages.⁶¹ In 1924, Français-Kouta was a prosperous village of 948 inhabitants.⁶²

The descendants of the founding families in Ouassala claim that their ancestors attempted to reconstruct the Wasulunke unity of the village according to the customs of Wasulu.⁶³ Their descendants still assert their nobility to justify their rights to the chieftaincy. The oldest man among the founding families becomes chief. The fact that this village was founded before the official end of slavery made it possible for the founders to implement old patterns of nobility and chieftaincy to which they aspired. In other freed slave communities of the Kayes region, village heads are elected or chosen among the oldest men of the community, regardless of their lineage.

The preservation of specific Wasulunke cultural practices was probably made possible to this extent in the region because of the large concentration of Wasulunke people, refugees or slaves, who sought the protection of the French in Kita, Bafoulabé, and

⁵⁸ Klein, “Studying the History,” 203. Français-Kouta, at the confluence of the Bafing and Bakoy rivers and near the Bafoulabé administrative post, was located on a path taken by many formerly enslaved populations moving from the Sahel towards Wasulu.

⁵⁹ Interview by author with Galadio Diarra, Ouassoulou Demba, 7 February 2009.

⁶⁰ ANM 1E17, Political report, 2nd quarter 1924; ANM Koulouba FR 1E 6, Report of census tour of the canton of Ouassouloum, 2 November 1949.

⁶¹ ANM 1E17, Political report, Bafoulabé, 1st quarter 1918.

⁶² ANM 1E17, Political report, 2nd quarter 1924.

⁶³ No such identity and unity probably ever existed until well into the post-independence period. Wasulu, a region characteristic for its highly decentralized societies, experienced extensive internal wars and enslavement during the nineteenth century, intense partisanship during the Samorian era, and continuous struggles over chieftaincies during the colonial period. For an analysis of the political and sociocultural organization of Wasulu villages, see Amselle, “L’ethnicité,” 480–81. See also M. Klein, “Ethnic Pluralism and Homogeneity in the Western Sudan: Saalum, Segu, Wasulu,” *Mande Studies* 1 (1999), 109–24.

Kayes at the turn of the twentieth century. The fact that the French believed in a specific “Wasulunke identity,” leading eventually to the establishment of an independent canton in 1934, may also have reinforced the specific local construction of a “Wasulunke identity.” Subsequent refugees and migrants ultimately adopted the “Wasulunke culture” as conveyed by the founding families of the village. People generally speak Wasulunke in Ouassala more than 120 years after its foundation, even though its population’s origins consisted much more than Wasulunke.⁶⁴ The families of Ouassala and Ouassoulou Demba do not always know the village of origin of their migrating grandparents, but they know that they were Wasulunke, Senufo, or Bamana peoples coming from Wasulu, Segu, Macina, Nioro, Kaarta, Ganadugu, Kaniaga, or even Burkina Faso.⁶⁵

But the preservation of specific Wasulunke cultural practices was also certainly undergirded by the numerous connections reinitiated and maintained with the Wasulu during the course of the twentieth century: “When our forefathers settled here, they realised they didn’t have their music instruments with them here ... and decided to go back to Wasulu to pick up the instruments.... They went to look for the horns after [Samori’s] wars.”⁶⁶ If the people who are now in their sixties may no longer have contacts with families in Wasulu, these connections were more significant in their parents’ generation.⁶⁷ The censuses of Français-Kouta taken between 1929 and 1935 also suggest migratory movements and marriage networks between Ouassala and Southern Mali.⁶⁸

These examples demonstrate the various efforts made by migrants, formerly enslaved, and others, to rebuild independent communities despite significant cultural diversity and enduring local stigmatization.

⁶⁴ They speak a Bamanankan dialect with a distinct Wasulunke accent. Most of the region of Wasulu is Bamanakan-speaking, although Wasulunke people claim Fulbe origin. J.-L. Amselle, “L’ethnicité comme volonté et comme représentation: À propos des Peul du Wasolon,” *Annales, Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 2 (1987), 465–89.

⁶⁵ Interview by author with Galadio Diarra, Ouassoulou Demba, 7 February 2009; collective interview by author with Diguïda Mady N’Diaye, Mamadou Doumbia aka Michel, and N’Di Traoré, Ouassala, 10 January 2009.

⁶⁶ Interview by author with Mamadou Doumbia aka Michel, Ouassala, 8 February 2009.

⁶⁷ Interview by author with Boukary Diakitè, Ouassala, 10 January 2009; interview by author with Mamadou Doumbia aka Michel, Ouassala, 8 February 2009.

⁶⁸ M. Rodet, “Genre, migration et réseaux familiaux au Haut-Sénégal, 1907–1950,” *Revue Diasporas*, 11, Special issue ‘Etrangères’ (2008), 25–36. If the “cahier de recensement” of Français-Kouta for this period remains a limited source, it nevertheless provides useful information by specifying over six years changes in tax residence, especially between Bafoulabé, Bougouni, Kayes, Bamako, and the colony of Senegal. On the limits of colonial censuses and demographic quantitative data, see R. Gervais, “Contribution à l’étude de l’évolution de la population de l’Afrique occidentale française, 1904–1960,” *Les Cahiers du Ceped* 23 (1993). See also R. Gervais, “Etat colonial et savoir démographique en AOF, 1904–1960,” in C. Becker, S. Mbaye, and I. Thioub, eds., *AOF: réalités et héritages. Sociétés oust-africaines et ordre colonial, 1895–1960*, 2 Vol. (Dakar: Direction des Archives du Sénégal, 1997), volume 2, 961–80.

Expanding Networks

Français-Kouta was also expanding migrating networks towards the Senegambian peanut basin by the First World War in order to maintain a certain economic independence. Political reports chart the migration of formerly enslaved populations from the Bafoulabé area to Senegal as early as 1909.⁶⁹ In 1918, one colonial official reported that fourteen men between twenty and twenty-five-years old, as well as two women and two children, escaped Français-Kouta for Gambia in order to avoid military conscription.⁷⁰ Français-Kouta and Dioubé Demba were close to the railway and therefore had access to transportation, communication, and knowledge between Senegambia and Mali in ways that other villages did not.⁷¹ The censuses of Français-Kouta taken between 1929 and 1935 also suggest established migratory networks to Senegal and marriage alliances with families who had settled there: of 1,084 inhabitants in Français-Kouta in 1929, thirty-five had moved to Senegal in 1935.⁷² Indeed, many families of Français-Kouta had relatives who had resided in Senegal at some point because they had been *tirailleurs* or working for the railway.⁷³ Railway workers were also able to purchase land in Senegal and many hosted *navetanes*.⁷⁴ The majority of the *navetanes* came from the districts of Kayes, Bafoulabé, Nioro, Kita, Satadoukou, Bamako, and Bougouni. These regular flows of migrants enabled a sustained circulation of information from Senegal to Southern Mali. From the 1920s when the Senegalese and Malian railways became interconnected in Kidira, the region of Kayes further reinforced its pivotal position in dispatching the *navetanes* from Mali to Senegal.⁷⁵ Ouassala and Oussoulou Demba would henceforth again play the role of relay communities for migrants from Southern Mali to Senegal.

Some *navetanes* also took advantage, as we shall see, of the presence of a large diaspora from Southern Mali already living in this region since the beginning of the twentieth century to settle permanently there. This resulted in the formation of overlapping

⁶⁹ ANM 1E17, Political report, Bafoulabé, October 1909.

⁷⁰ ANM 1E17, Report 18R of 25 September 1918.

⁷¹ B. County, "'Racial' and Social Hierarchies along the Dakar-Niger Railroad: The Challenge of Mobility in Western French Soudan, 1923–39" (Paper presented to the conference "Historical Constructions of 'Race' and Social Hierarchy in Muslim West and North Africa," Dakar, Senegal, 10–12 December 2008).

⁷² ANM Hamdallaye 5D2656, Censuses of Français-Kouta, 1929–1935.

⁷³ See also ANM FR 1E 6, Report of census tour 2 November 1949. The Malian national archives hold frequent telegrams from railway workers in Senegal who were paying the taxes of their relatives in the district of Bafoulabé. See for example, ANM Hamdallaye B163, Telegram #2859, 19 December 1938. Many natives from Français-Kouta were railway workers in Senegal and Mali in the 1950s (ANM FR 1E 6, Report of census tour, 2 November 1949). See also B. County, "'Racial' and Social Hierarchies."

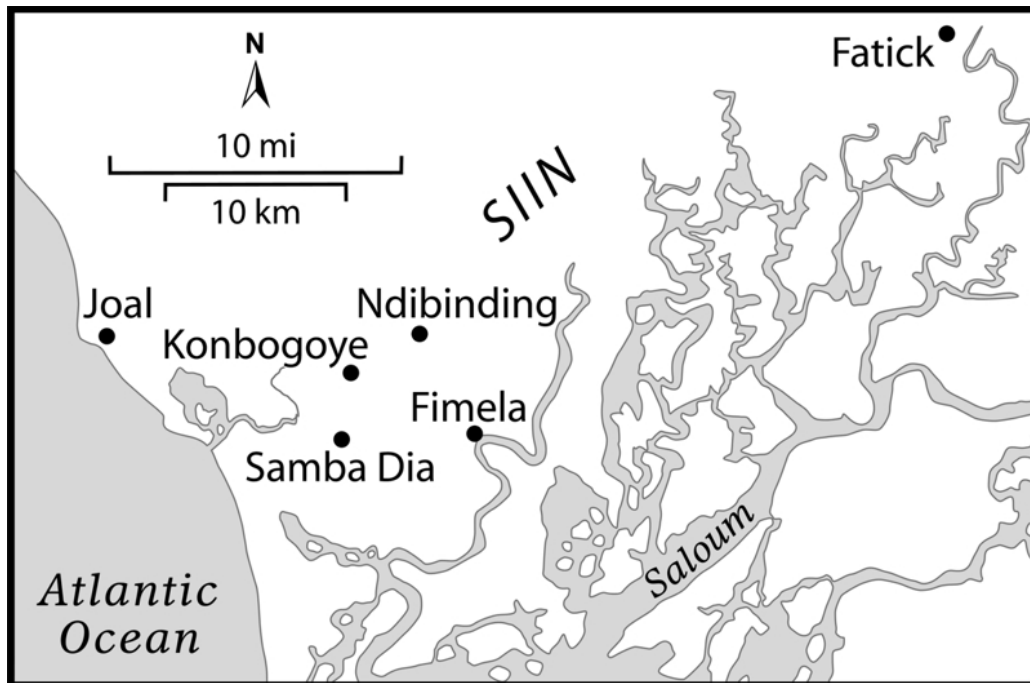
⁷⁴ *Navetanes* were young men aged from 16 to 30 who migrated on a seasonal basis to the peanut basin to cultivate groundnuts as sharecroppers. ANM Koulouba FR 1E5, Political reports, Bafoulabé, 2nd quarter 1930 and 3rd quarter 1931.

⁷⁵ Kidira is located approximately 95 kilometers from Kayes and is the border town between Senegal and Mali.

diasporas depicted by the local population and the colonial administration as “The Bambara.”⁷⁶

“Our Ancestors Came to Cultivate Peanuts”: Freedom and Belonging in Siin

Family histories gathered in the “Bambara” villages of Konbogoye and Ndibinding (aka Malikoundani) in the district of Fimela (Siin) testify to the many and complex connections developed between the successive waves of migration from French Soudan to Senegal since Samori’s wars, which allowed the building of diasporic communities in Siin. Indeed, Siin history has been written in overlapping diasporas entailing the formation of complex multi-layered identities in villages such as Konbogoye and Ndibinding.⁷⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century, many migrants to the Senegalese peanut basin were forced to migrate, were taken in Samori’s wars and sold as slaves into the Senegambia. Later, at the time of the slave exodus in French Soudan, formerly enslaved populations also left for Senegal to secure an independent living. In the 1920s–1930s, *navetanes* joined these first migrants to cultivate peanuts in the Siin and Saalum. Despite this multi-layered history of “Soudanese” settlement in Siin, the economic importance of peanut cultivation in the region in the first quarter of the twentieth century seems to have obscured other narratives. For example, most of my informants often claimed that their ancestors first came to cultivate peanuts.



Map 3. Siin, Senegal (Map by Don Pirijs).

⁷⁶ The term “Bambara” is a Pulaar or Arabic heteronym that has been taken up in French. But it has rarely been used as such by the concerned population who designate themselves as Bamana. See J.-L. Amselle, *Logiques métisses* (Paris: Payot, 1999 [1990]), 79.

⁷⁷ E. Lewis, “To Turn as on a Pivot,” 786–87. The Siin has a long history as refuge zone for neighboring regions that especially cumulated in the second half of the nineteenth century with the religious wars in Saalum.

Building Diasporic Communities

As Manchuelle asserted, from the 1910s, former male slaves increasingly took part in seasonal migrations to the peanut basin with the authorization of their former masters to whom they would then give a part of their earnings, once the season finished.⁷⁸ However, a careful study of archival documents as well as interviews in the Siin show that these supposedly seasonal migrants had already started settling permanently in the peanut basin in the first decade of the twentieth century.⁷⁹ In 1911 the Colonial administration already noticed a clear increase in the population of Siin following the settlement of *navetanes*.⁸⁰ Since access to land in rural areas had remained socially barred to former slaves, newly emancipated slaves were therefore incited to migrate to the peanut basin and to the newly developing agricultural areas along the railway routes in Senegal.⁸¹ The French appear, however, to have taken no interest in the ways formerly enslaved populations used migration to Senegal and subsequent permanent settlement to secure effective emancipation. The Senegalese colonial administration certainly encouraged the flows of migrants from the French Soudan and tried to facilitate their settlement from 1921 in order to develop a sufficient peanut culture to supply France with the 500,000 tons annually needed.⁸² But with some rare exceptions, their involvement in controlling the movement remained minimal throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Officials in both colonies often complained about the inability of the administration to channel these movements so that they would better serve the economic interests of both colonies.

The 1932 annual report mentioned 3,000 “Bambara” in the district of Dangané (contemporary district of Fimela) settled in villages around Samba Dia.⁸³ Although Konbogoye as well as Ndibinding were both founded by emancipated slaves of Senufo and Wasulunke background originally from Southern Mali, colonial documents and the local population designated them as “Bambara” villages.⁸⁴ What did the term “Bambara” mean

⁷⁸ Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants: Soninke Labor Diasporas, 1848–1960* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997), 142.

⁷⁹ M. Rodet, “Missing Migrants: The Absence of Women in the History of Rural-Rural Migrations from French Sudan to Senegambia (1900–1932),” in A.B. Zack-Williams and E.I. Udogu, eds., *African Mosaic: Political, Social, Economic and Information Technologies Issues in the New Millennium* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 152–66.

⁸⁰ ANS GGAOF FA 2 G 11-43, Political report, Sine-Saloum, October 1911. From 1910, there were regular reports of migrants from French Sudan in Senegal, especially alongside the Thiès-Kayes railroad. Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, 204.

⁸¹ ANS GGAOF FA 2G12-13, Annual political report, Haut-Sénégal-Niger, 1912.

⁸² On the colonial control of migration from the French Soudan to Senegal, see M. Rodet, *Les migrantes ignorées du Haut-Sénégal (1900–1946)* (Paris: Karthala, 2009), chaps. 3 and 7.

⁸³ ANS GGAOF FR 2G32-99, Annual political report, Fatick, 1932.

⁸⁴ Interview by author with Niamantou Sidibé, Konbogoye, 23 June 2010; interviews by author with Sandigui Diarra, Ndibinding, 9 July 2009 and 24 June 2010.

here? Did it designate Bamanankan speakers,⁸⁵ or, as often in the colonial reports, did it simply designate migrants coming from the French Soudan and more generally natives from the “East”?⁸⁶ David had already noticed the considerable ethnic diversity of the “Bambara” villages of Siin.⁸⁷ As Bamanankan was the most spoken language among peanut migrants, it is also not surprising that it became the most widely spoken language in these villages and slowly a broad signifier to designate these populations. But the term “Bambara” has also a long history of praise and stigmatization in colonial records, more particularly in Senegal where they represented the “other,” and very often the slaves.⁸⁸ But from 1905, the colonial administration was increasingly reluctant to recognize the difficult question of slavery, and its legacy in the region. From then on, they relegated “Bambara” to the loose category of “refugees and migrants.”⁸⁹ This turned out to be, in many cases, in the interests of formerly enslaved families and their descendants who had no desire to officially recognize their origins,⁹⁰ especially as they had used migration in order to escape their former status.

Integrating Social Networks through Religious Affiliation

Contemporary Konbogoye was probably established around 1905, as the first children of the village were born in 1907.⁹¹ This would explain why it was not mentioned in the 1904 census of Sine-Saloum.⁹² However, of the “Bambara” villages of the district, none were actually recorded in the 1904 census, although some of them, such as Samba Dia⁹³ may have already existed but not as independent villages.⁹⁴ Ndibinding is likely to have been established a decade later, around or just after World War I. The founders of Ndibinding,

⁸⁵ Bamanankan was the language spoken by the first settlers from French Soudan in the area and was further the most spoken language among subsequent migrants. It is therefore not surprising that this language is still widely spoken in these villages.

⁸⁶ K. Swindell, “Serawoollies, Tillibunkas and Strange Farmers: The Development of Migrant Groundnut Farming along the Gambia River, 1848–95,” *Journal of African History* 21, 1 (1980), 93–104.

⁸⁷ Philippe David, *Les navétanes: Histoire des migrants saisonniers de l'arachide en Sénégal des origines à nos jours* (Dakar: NEA, 1980), 453.

⁸⁸ On the genealogy of the term, see J. Bazin, “A chacun son Bambara,” in J.-L. Amselle and E. Mbokolo, eds., *Au cœur de l'ethnie* (Paris: La Découverte/Maspero, 1985), 87–125.

⁸⁹ ANS 2 G 32/83, Annual political report, Kaolack, 1932.

⁹⁰ Klein, “Studying the History,” 213.

⁹¹ Interview by author with Arouna Fall (aka Coulibaly), Konbogoye, 9 July 2009.

⁹² ANS GGAOF FA 1G290, Report of the Kaolack district by Administrator Lefiliattre, 1904.

⁹³ The 1932 report specified that the inhabitants claimed the village had been created thirty-five years earlier by migrants coming from French Soudan.

⁹⁴ C. Becker, V. Martin, J. Schmitz, M. Chastanet, with the collaboration of J.-F. Maurel and S. Mbaye, *Les premiers recensements au Sénégal et l'évolution démographique: Présentation de documents* (Dakar: ORSTOM, 1983), 23, 29.

Lansana Diarra and his companions, first stayed in Konbogoye several months before establishing Ndibinding (aka Malikoundani).⁹⁵

Konbogoye was originally a Sereer settlement, but the population abandoned the village following political unrest. Thus, when migrants originally from southern Mali first came in the region, they encountered no difficulty in settling at the site of the former Sereer village.⁹⁶ The Siin region experienced in the eighteenth and nineteenth century periods of political instability struck by the intensification of the Atlantic and internal slave trade, subsistence crises, and military conflicts. It resulted in the withdrawal of villages and their population away from the borders of the Siin kingdom, especially from the Petite-Côte where the French had established a post in Joal in 1859, turning regions like Dangane into semi-deserted lands. Exactions by slave warriors in the nineteenth century also encouraged the local population to resort to semi-nomadic and dispersed habitat.⁹⁷ This is probably why Niamantou Sidibé declared in the interview that Sereer were nomadic peoples at the time and that his maternal grandfather, Moro Sidibé, and fellow migrants encountered no difficulty in founding Konbogoye. Niamantou Sidibé further explained how his grandfather, who was originally from Yanfolila in the region of Bougouni in southern Mali, was caught during Samori's wars at the beginning of the 1880s and sold into slavery in Futa Jallon.⁹⁸ After several years, he and other fellow slaves were, however, able to redeem themselves and soon left for Senegal, probably at the turn of the twentieth century, to join the Qadiriyya of Bu Kunta in Njaasaan, of whom they had already heard when still living in Futa Jallon.⁹⁹ Bu Kunta had the reputation of helping formerly enslaved populations to settle in Senegal.¹⁰⁰ Most migrants in the area came via Njaasaan

⁹⁵ Ndibinding is the historical name given by the Sereer to designate the area because of the two baobabs facing the north in the village. The village founders called the new village "Malikoundani." Yet, the Sereer living in the area always rejected the name. Finally the postcolonial authorities kept the Sereer name of Ndibinding. Interview by author with Sandigui Diarra, Ndibinding, 24 June 2010.

⁹⁶ Interview by author with Kaba Diakhaté, Konbogoye, 23 June 2010; Interview by author with Niamantou Sidibé, Konbogoye, 23 June 2010. The village traditions collected by Becker, Martin, and Ndène also sustained the Sereer origins of the village. C. Becker, *Traditions villageoises du Siin recueillies par Charles Becker, Victor Martin et Aloyse Ndène* (Paris: IRD, 2010), 135–36.

⁹⁷ For a detailed description of the political situation of the region in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, see F.G. Richard, "From Cossan to Colony: Exploring Archaeological Landscape Formation and Socio-Political Complexity in the Siin (Senegal), AD 500–1900" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Syracuse University, 2007). See also M. Mbodj, C. Becker, "De la traite à la crise agricole: Historique des échanges commerciaux dans le Sine," in A. Lericollais, ed., *Paysans sereer: Dynamiques agraires et mobilités au Sénégal* (Paris: IRD, 1999), 95–116.

⁹⁸ Interview by author with Niamantou Sidibé, Konbogoye, 23 June 2010. According to Person, the region of Yanfolila was attacked by Samori in 1882. Person, *Samori*, 391–95.

⁹⁹ By the turn of the twentieth century, Bu Kunta had already an established reputation in Western Sudan: one of his followers, a *tirailleur* originally from Bougouni, had already heard of him before 1900. P. Marty, *Etudes sur l'Islam au Sénégal* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1917), 352–53.

¹⁰⁰ Interview by author with Niamantou Sidibé, Konbogoye, 23 June 2010. See also T. Haidara Diagne, "Contribution à l'étude de l'Islam au Sénégal: La confrérie Kuntiyu de Njaasaan, 1884–1914" (unpublished mémoire de maîtrise, Université de Dakar, 1985), 83 and 92.

at that time.¹⁰¹ Bu Kunta told them to settle in the district. He probably took advantage of the settlement's policy initiated by the Buur Kumba N'Doffene Juuf who reigned over the Siin from 1898 to 1923.¹⁰² The Buur encouraged migrants to establish themselves on the margins of his kingdom, such as in the district of Dangane where "Bambara" migrants and *talibés* were set up in colonization villages from 1900 to 1910.¹⁰³ Encouraging settlement in any areas where land was available, especially in the semi-deserted margins of his own kingdom, increased Buur Kumba N'Doffene's own revenues and power and could only satisfy the colonial administration in terms of tax collection and expansion of the peanut culture.¹⁰⁴ Bu Kunta used the settlement of his followers in villages outside of Bawol to spread his influence in non-Islamized regions such as Siin.¹⁰⁵

This development was possible because migrants only needed to clear the land in order to claim a right to it. Attempts by the monarchy to encroach on the land rights and prerogatives of the *lamaans* (*droits de défrichage* or *droits de hache*) had already begun in the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁶ But it was at the beginning of the twentieth century that the "clearing rights" or "axe rights" seems to have increased significantly at the expense of the old *lamaanal* rights due particularly to the intervention of the *chefs de canton* (district heads) who gave the authorization for settlement.¹⁰⁷ Bu Kunta knew very well the mechanics of the colonial administration concerning land tenure and may simply have negotiated settlement rights for his followers directly with the *chef de canton* of Dangane.¹⁰⁸ This way, Bu Kunta could hope to get a part of the cleared land registered in his name with the colonial administration as he did for the surrounding lands in Njaasaan.

¹⁰¹ Villalón mentioned the presence of the Qadiriyya Sufi brotherhood in the Fatick region and its decline in the twentieth century to the benefit of the Muridiyya of Shaikh Amadu Bamba and the Tijaniyya of El Haj Malik Sy. He seems, however, to have overlooked the specific historical ties between the Bu Kunta's brotherhood and the Fatick region. L.A. Villalón, *Islamic Society and State Power in Senegal: Disciples and Citizens in Fatick* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁰² M. Klein, *Islam and Imperialism in Senegal: Sine-Saloum, 1817–1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1968), xv; L. Aujas, "Funérailles royales et ordre de succession au trône chez les Sérères du Sine," *Bulletin du Comité d'Études Historiques de l'Afrique Occidentale Française*, (1925), 508.

¹⁰³ *Talibés* are students of Islam. Buur Kumba N'doffene seems to have been open to proselytization by Muslims, though he did not convert himself. On the colonization villages in Siin, see P. Péliissier, *Les paysans du Sénégal, les civilisations agraires du Cayor à la Casamance* (Saint-Yrieix, France: Impr. Fabrègue, 1966), 205–206.

¹⁰⁴ On the importance of tax collection in the reinforcement of colonial and local authorities in Siin, see C. Diouf, "Fiscalité and domination coloniale: L'exemple du Sine. 1859–1940" (unpublished mémoire de maîtrise, Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar, 2005).

¹⁰⁵ Haidara Diagne, "Contribution," 67.

¹⁰⁶ Richard, "From Cosaan," 668.

¹⁰⁷ C. Becker, M. Mbodj, I. Sarr, "La dynamique du peuplement sereer: Les Sereer du Sine," in A. Lericollais, ed., *Paysans sereer: Dynamiques agraires et mobilités au Sénégal* (Paris: IRD, 1999), 58.

¹⁰⁸ On the relationships between Bu Kunta and the colonial administration for land ownership, see Marty, *Etude sur l'Islam*, 360–362, and Haidara Diagne, "Contribution," 61–65, 81.

Inhabitants in Konbogoye used to work (willingly) on a field of the village for the Njaasaan's Marabout and his successors until ten years ago.¹⁰⁹

Historians and anthropologists have analyzed how formerly enslaved populations and their descendants embraced Islam in Western Sudan to overcome the legacies of slavery.¹¹⁰ Scholarship on Islam and slave emancipation in Senegal has predominantly focused on the role of the Muridiyya brotherhood of Shaykh Amadu Bamba and the incorporation of formerly enslaved populations as *navetanes* and shareholders into the peanut economy.¹¹¹ Much less, however, is known on the role of the Qadiriyya brotherhood of Bu Kunta in slave emancipation in Senegal especially. Nevertheless, some scholars acknowledged it as a precedent in destroying slave labor systems through maraboutic enterprise in the colonial peanut economy.¹¹² The foundation of Konbogoye is a striking example of this process, but more research is still needed on other similar villages in Siin and more generally in Western Sudan.

Bu Kunta's period of ministry was relatively short (1885–1914), nevertheless he was able to exert influence very rapidly from Njaasaan up to Southern Mali and Guinea. In 1917, his brotherhood had representatives in many cities of Senegal and French Soudan such as Dakar, Thiès, Djourbel, Kaolack, Saint-Louis, Kayes, Ségou, and Bougouni.¹¹³ These representatives were important intermediaries for the propagation of Bu Kunta's influence in both colonies by directing potential followers and *navetanes* to Njaasaan. Some new followers of Bu Kunta resettled in French Soudan, especially in populated areas

¹⁰⁹ Interview by author with Niamantou Sidibé, Konbogoye, 23 June 2010. Richard argued that the penetration of *navetanes* and other "colonizers" resulted in the creation of new villages, which did not follow the Sereer system of land partition and taxes. Richard, "From Cosaan," 394. Reinwald also noticed the tremendous social and economic changes entailed by the expansion of the peanut economy in the Siin, especially regarding land tenure, family organization and gender relations. B. Reinwald, "Changing Family Strategies as a Response to Colonial Challenge: Microanalytic Observations on Siin/Senegal 1890–1960," *History of the Family* 2, 2 (1997), 183–195.

¹¹⁰ See J. Berndt, "Closer than Your Jugular Vein: Muslim Intellectuals in a Malian Village, 1900 to the 1960s" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Northwestern University, 2008); Peterson, "Slave Emancipation," 421–44; J. Schmitz, "Islamic Patronage and Republican Emancipation: The Slaves of the Almaami in the Senegal River Valley," in B. Rossi, ed., *Reconfiguring Slavery: West African Trajectories* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 85–115.

¹¹¹ See among others Moitt, "Slavery and Emancipation," 44–45; D. Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880–1920* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 208–27; J.F. Searing, "God Alone Is King": Islam and Emancipation in Senegal. The Wolof Kingdoms of Kajoor and Bawol, 1859–1914 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), 195–229; T.R. Getz, *Slavery and Reform in West Africa: Towards Emancipation in Nineteenth-Century Senegal and the Gold Coast* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004), 154–56.

¹¹² Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation*, 213; Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule*, 200; Searing, "God Alone," 241.

¹¹³ Marty, *Etude sur l'Islam*, 350–53. In Djourbel, Kaolack, and Saint-Louis, his representatives were "Bambara" originally from French Soudan. It shows the potential influence of Bu Kunta in this colony.

such as Kayes.¹¹⁴ In 1917, a former *tirailleur* from Bougouni who had traveled throughout West Africa during his military career declared that, upon his retirement, he would become a marabout for Bu Kunta's Qadiriyya Sufi order. He promised to propagate the order in Bougouni where some *talibés* already resided.¹¹⁵ As noted by Peterson, social categories among the returnees to Wasulu often overlapped: a former slave may have become a colonial soldier, migrant peanut farmer, and even a trader or marabout and bring this different new knowledge back to his region of origin, forging new diasporic links.¹¹⁶

Bu Kunta offered them a new form of belonging and social embeddedness guaranteeing them access to land in exchange of religious and economic loyalty. This would have been impossible in the region where they had been sold in slavery as the nobility continued to control land rights. Abolition had certainly been promulgated but the conditions of social and economical emancipation were not yet fully established.

European observers at the time were unlikely to understand this movement to Njaasaan¹¹⁷ and to keep track of such diasporas except within the colonial framework of the peanut trade. The administration was typically convinced that its abolitionist policy was the only possible channel for emancipation. It is therefore not surprising that any kind of action undertaken outside of these official channels of emancipation remained barely visible in the colonial documents.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, these specific migratory movements were probably somehow lost and imbricated in the massive outmigration experienced by French Sudan at the time. The colonial authorities soon became obsessed by this so-called "exodus" that they could not control; an exodus fuelled primarily by tax burdens, forced labor, inter-generational tensions, rapacious chiefs, local disputes, and environmental crises (famine, drought, disease).¹¹⁹

Economic Power and Social Mixing

The "Bambara" villages experienced further economic development in the immediate decade following their establishment. Located 15 kilometres from Joal (Petite Côte) and 40 kilometres from Fatick (Siin), Konbogoye was close to the heartland of peanut expansion in Siin, especially as roads as well as railways were built to intersect in the region.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ P. Marty, *Études sur l'Islam et les tribus du Soudan*, Vol. 4: *La région de Kayes. Le pays Bambara. Le Sahel de Nioro* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1920), 10.

¹¹⁵ Marty, *Études sur l'Islam*, 352–53.

¹¹⁶ Peterson, "Slave Emancipation," 435.

¹¹⁷ The relationships between Bu Kunta and his followers were described as abusive by Marty. He argued that Bu Kunta, as a "Moor," further considered his "black" followers as slaves and did not hesitate to exploit the workforce of his young *talibés* without providing an appropriate Islamic education in return. See Marty, *Étude sur l'Islam*, 346–47.

¹¹⁸ Rodet, "Mémoires," 265–77.

¹¹⁹ Rodet, *Les migrantes ignorées*, chap. 2.

¹²⁰ Thanks to the completion of the Dakar-Saint Louis railway in 1885, the Petite Côte had already been able to take part in the first stage of the peanut economic expansion. The arrival of the Thiès-Niger railway to Djourbel (1908), then Kaolack (1910), allowed the Siin to complete its full integration into the peanut economy. The Siin was the first producer of peanuts in the Siin and Saalum region in 1912. See J.-M.

Furthermore, as *navetanes* came through Bafoulabé, Kayes, or Tambacounda, they encountered railroad workers who had colleagues in Siin who wanted *navetanes* to work their holdings. In 1929, there were 100 *navetanes* distributed in three villages in the district of Dangane.¹²¹ The 1934 report outlined the presence of 9,119 strangers in the subdivision of Fatick.¹²² In French Soudan, food shortages, economical crises, forced labor and army recruitment in the 1920s and 1930s may have encouraged further permanent settlement in the peanut basin.¹²³ The district of Dangane was more difficult to access than Kaolack and the *terres neuves* (new lands), which were henceforth well connected to the transport networks.¹²⁴ Nonetheless, its specific geographical situation away from colonial control and the fertility of its land encouraged permanent settlement. This allowed first settlers and former *navetanes* to build independent communities on their own terms.

The peanut expansion provided the first settlers with economic power. The “axe rights” and rights to chiefdom gave the founders of the village who had escaped slavery a status equivalent to that of nobility. This development was possible because all they had to do was to clear the land to claim a right on it according to the colonial authorities.¹²⁵ Subsequent migrants who came to these villages as *navetanes* were dependent on their first *jatigi*¹²⁶ if they wished to settle permanently and secure permanent access to land. One way of securing such access was to marry women of their *jatigi*’s family or women affiliated with the village’s founders. Their local stigmatization as “Bambara” prevented them from intermarrying locally with Sereer families. Indeed, marriages between Sereer women and outsiders were only tolerated as long as they remained temporary.¹²⁷ Thus,

Gastellu, “Politique coloniale et organisation économique des pays serer, Sénégal, 1910–1950,” in C. Becker, S. Mbaye, I. Thioub, eds., *AOF: Réalités et héritages; sociétés ouest-africaines et ordre colonial, 1895–1960* 2 Vol. (Dakar: Direction des Archives du Sénégal, 1997), Vol. 1, 565. M. Mbodj, C. Becker, “De la traite,” 101–104.

¹²¹ David, *Les navétanes*, 67.

¹²² ANS 2G34-87, Annual political report, Fatick, 1934.

¹²³ Rodet, *Les migrantes ignorées*, 248–56.

¹²⁴ ANS GGAOF FR 2G26-68, Annual report, Kaolack, 1926; ANS 2G32-99, Annual political report, Fatick, 1932; ANS 2G33-70, Annual political report, Fatick, 1933. Peoples settled in Siin started migrating to neighboring regions, especially to the Saalum and the *terres-neuves* in the 1930s. Interview by author with Sandigui Diarra, Ndibinding, 24 June 2010. See also ANS GGAOF FR 2G43-76, Annual political report, M’Bour, 1943.

¹²⁵ ANS 2G12-13, Annual report, Haut-Sénégal-Niger, 1912.

¹²⁶ *Jatigi* designates the head of the family hosting the *navetanes*. But more generally, it means “host” in Bamanankan. In the context of the *navetanat*, it refers to the landowning patron of a patron-client relationship that could last for years, if not decades. *Navetanes* would return to the Soudan after the harvest and come back to Siin the following year in the farming season. They often returned to the same *jatigi*. In this case, the patron-client relationship was maintained over time and over space in the two colonies.

¹²⁷ Aujas mentioned that even in the case of temporary marriages, the only possible unions for outsiders were with old, sterile or prostitute women. Aujas, “Les Sérères”, 319. On the contrary to other regions of Western Sudan, outsiders could not be “integrated” into Sereer societies of the *canton* of Dangane through marriages with their female slaves as, according to Niamantou Sidibé, the Sereer families in the

marriages began early on between descendants of formerly enslaved populations and new migrants from different ethnic backgrounds, who would be seen as “outsiders” and “Bambara” by the local Sereer population.

Furthermore, migration to the Siin and access to new chiefdoms there allowed the first settlers to escape the stigma of former enslavement and to transmit identity markers to their descendants of which they did not have to be ashamed. They especially seemed to have built “positive” histories of their enslavement on the distinction between being born into slavery or not, and about self-redemption by work. Niamantou explained that his grandfather was born free and was able to redeem himself, it was therefore not a shame that his ancestors had been enslaved: “They were not born into slavery, the circumstances made them slaves. They bought their freedom back, they cultivated to buy their freedom.”¹²⁸ This statement seems to confirm Iliffe’s analysis of honor and slavery: honor is not only linked to the power that the master may have, as in Paterson’s examination of slaves/masters relationship.¹²⁹ Honor is also entrenched in processes of differentiation among slaves. This horizontal dimension of honor among slaves seems to have been asserted in West Africa particularly between those born in slavery and those who were still able to remember a free genealogy. This sense of honor linked to a free ascent may have comforted some slaves in their diverse attempts to gain freedom. Here, remembering this genealogy appears central to strategies of emancipation, which is at odds with common historical assertions that slaves lacked history.¹³⁰

The first settlers who arrived from Futa Jallon came as single men, but as soon as they decided to settle in Siin, they returned to Futa Jallon to marry.¹³¹ As it was not possible at the time for outsiders to marry local Sereer, men were obliged to bring wives back from Futa Jallon and to marry their daughters to future migrants once they had settled. Marriages with Sereer and Wolof women only began after World War II, whereas alliances between migrants of noble status from French Soudan and daughters of the first settlers occurred very rapidly. This move was probably the easiest as, historically, people of noble status regularly married women of slave status in Western Sudan. More research is yet necessary to verify whether male descendants of formerly enslaved populations could also marry female descendants of migrants of noble status in the early history of these villages.

region owned no slaves. Indeed, almost all slaves and members of “caste” groups seemed to have been living in Gelwaar and ceddo settlements and not with Sereer commoners in the non-centralized communities on the margins of the Siin kingdom. Sidibé’s remark may have been reflecting this distinction. Interview by author with Niamantou Sidibé, Konbogoye, 23 June 2010.

¹²⁸ Interview by author with Niamantou Sidibé, Konbogoye, 23 June 2010.

¹²⁹ J. Iliffe, *Honour in African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 119–20. O. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

¹³⁰ On a discussion of “slave memories,” see B. Rossi, “Without History? Interrogating ‘Slave’ Memories in Ader (Niger),” in A. Bellagamba, S. Greene, M. Klein, eds., *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 536–54. See also Rodet, “Mémoires,” 277–85.

¹³¹ It is how the following migrants knew about the possibilities of resettlement in Siin.

The Diarra Family: A History of Intergenerational Diasporic Practices

The history of the Diarra family in Ndibinding can be seen as characteristic of the kind of mobility experienced by formerly enslaved populations and their descendants in Western Sudan between southern Mali, Kayes, and Siin, in the first quarter of the twentieth century. This family history is exceptional; it encapsulates most of the mobility patterns previously described. Lansana Diarra was the founder of Ndibinding. He was originally from Yorobadougou in Southern Mali but was captured while still a boy. He was then sold to Niakane, a village near Kita in the region of Kayes.¹³² While telling his grandfather's life story, Sandigui Diarra explained: "At least my grandfather was a courageous man as he did not flee as many other did, that's why he got captured. Only strong men get enslaved as all others run away." Sandigui's grandfather married in Kita but he finally left his pregnant wife there to leave for the Senegalese peanut basin. As abolition had been promulgated, he was no longer willing to stay in the region where he had been enslaved: "All he had in Niakane were his former masters; it was not his home." He travelled from Kita to the Senegalese Peanut Basin via Kayes and Saint-Louis. On the way, he met other fellow migrants, most of them were Senufo. Some stayed in Saint-Louis,¹³³ while others went with him to Malikounda (district of Thiès) to work as *navetanes*. On the way to Saint-Louis he also married another woman, a Bamana in Fouta Toro. He stayed for five years in Malikounda ("village of the people from Mali" in Bamanankan) and probably became a follower of the Qadiriyya Sufi order while he was there.¹³⁴ Then he and fellow migrants left for Konbogoye. They finally established their own village, which they called Malikoundani ("small Malikounda" in Bamanankan), currently identified with a Sereer name: Ndibinding.¹³⁵ Lansana Diarra never returned to Mali but his son, Suleymane Diarra, the father of Sandigui, decided to trace the route his father took in order to find him. When he finally found him in Malikoundani, he came back to Mali to retrieve his mother and reunite the family in Senegal. While in the Siin, Lansana also married another Bamana woman, Nematou Taraolé, who was born in Sokhone (Saalum). It is also in the Siin that migrants from Wasulu told Lansana about his sister who had remained in Wasulu. He never saw her again, however, because she lived too far away. Nonetheless, one of his sister's sons came and stayed in Malikoundani for three years, and then continued to travel back and forth between Senegal and Mali.

¹³² Interview by author with Sandigui Diarra, Ndibinding, 9 July 2009.

¹³³ There was a Senufo neighborhood in Saint-Louis called "Sénéfoubougou" where a "Bambara" hosted his compatriots. H. Yague, "Christianisme et abolition de l'esclavage à Saint-Louis" (unpublished mémoire de maîtrise, Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar, 2009), 16.

¹³⁴ According to one of Grosz-Ngaté's informants, Bu Kunta asked one of his *talibés* to settle in Malikounda, where he established the neighborhood Karifabugu. See M. Grosz-Ngaté, "Religious Practice and Ethnic Diversity in the Bu Kunta Branch of the Qadiriyya (Senegal)" (Paper presented to the 7th International Mande Studies Conference, Lisbon, Portugal, 24–28 June 2008).

¹³⁵ As noted by Becker, Martin and Ndène, the inhabitants of Ndibinding are followers of the Qadiriyya of Bu Kunta. C. Becker, *Traditions villageoises*, 126–27. However their marabout does not seem to have interfered in the settlement of Malikoundani.

The different case studies presented here help us to better understand what kinds of strategies formerly enslaved populations used in order to rebuild villages and communities in regions where they migrated and tried to escape the stigma of their former status. Migration networks and diasporic practices secured permanent flows of peoples, goods, and experiences back and forth between Mali and Senegal and intermarriages over several generations between the two colonies.¹³⁶ As noted by Peterson for returnees in Wasulu, the scattering and migration of freed slaves in Western Sudan resulted in profound social mixing that had longstanding effects on religious and marriage practices as well as ethnic identities.¹³⁷

Conclusion

In this article I have demonstrated how dispersed populations from southern Mali were able to build new diasporic social spaces along ancient slave trade routes, stretching from southern Mali to Senegal, in order to overcome the legacies of slavery. The history of these mixed communities of “foreigners” in the regions of Kayes and Siin give us a sense of cumulative and overlapping migration experiences. Overlapping diasporas have certainly blurred and obscured the tracks of the first migrations, but new waves of migration were probably a necessary step to secure the survival of these communities as independent villages. In return, they contributed to the continuing construction of specific identity markers. In Bafoulabé, the dispersed freed slaves and subsequent waves of migrants established “Wasulunke” villages, while in the Siin at the same time, formerly enslaved populations from Southern Mali as well as *navetanes* were building “Bambara” communities. This research shows that these communities were probably shaped more by their immediate environment than by an imagined homeland with which contacts remained altogether limited, despite some connections through incoming migrants.

In order to establish social networks, formerly enslaved populations often had to secure new patronage such as allegiance to the colonial administration for Ouassala or to Bu Kunta’s Qadiriyya order for Konbogoye. This allowed them to secure chieftaincy and become the new patrons of future “outsiders.”

This article does not claim to cover all of the complex strategies used by formerly enslaved populations and their descendants to overcome the legacies of slavery and how mobility played a central role in this aspect. Some strategies might unfortunately no longer be recoverable. Nevertheless, much work remains to be done on the freed slave communities that developed in the aftermath of the end of slavery in Western Sudan. These communities produced diasporic cultural spheres, which today surely constitute memoscapes of the history of slavery in Western Sudan.

¹³⁶ Brandon County also argues that mobility made possible by railroad labor and travel allowed people to move from slave status in French Soudan to new statuses in Senegal in the context of industrial labor and Islamic knowledge. B. County, “‘Racial’ and Social Hierarchies.”

¹³⁷ Peterson, “Slave Emancipation,” 429.