The quest for inclusion and citizenship: West African Antislavery Movements.

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Anti-slavery movements were amongst the first successful global transnational movements (Tilly & Tarrow 2006: 1). The British anti-slavery movement that emerged in the late 18th century resulted in the abolition of slavery and the end of the British involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. The fight against slavery was, however, far from over. Apart from modern forms of 'slavery' (forced labour, human trafficking, sexual servitude, child labour) that will not be addressed here, various forms of so-called 'benign slavery' and chattel slavery can still be found in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially in West Africa. For this reason, American anti-slavery movements such as the American Anti-Slavery Group (1994), the Coalition against Slavery in Mauritania and Sudan (1995) and the Abolitionist Leadership Council (1996) were set up to address the horrors of slavery. International and transnational organizations (Amnesty International, Anti-Slavery International, the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination at the United Nations) were also created and have exerted pressure on African governments to criminalize slavery (Bullard 2005: 756-761). Anti-slavery movements are not, however, monopolized by external and transnational actors and African anti-slavery movements have been emerging since the late 1970s, and more decisively since the 1990s, especially in Francophone West Africa.

While the study of African slavery was considered a blind spot in the social sciences until the late 1990s (Botte 2000: 8), a growing number of studies on the legacies of slavery have emerged recently (*Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 2005 (179-180); Rossi 2009). These show the resilience of slavery and its transforming patterns in contemporary Africa. Since slave status was mainly seen as an obstacle to upward social mobility, slave descents have tended to hide their origins (Rossi 2009; Pelckmans 2011a). On the other hand, slave status today has not only become an instrumental identity in local level politics but has also been revalorized (Hahonou 2011). This was more remarkable when democratization and decentralization have taken place in West Africa in the 1990s. Democratic decentralization reform has generated opportunities and room for manoeuvre for the political rise of slave descendants in countries like

Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Benin (see Leservoisier 2003; de Bruijn & Pelckmans 2005; Hahonou 2008). Several social groups that were formerly denied the right to participate in politics have seized the opportunity to access local positions of power and gain citizenship. Although people of slave origin have struggled collectively against the dominant ideology of slavery and are demanding recognition and their rights as citizens, very few studies have explored these social and political dynamics as social movements (Ould Ahmed Salem 2009).

Research on anti-slavery movements generally locates such dynamics outside Africa (Bales 2005; Quirk 2008). For social movement theorists, social movements are seen as the result of particular historical developments of state-citizen relations that took place in industrialized Western countries (Europe and North America). Social movements are therefore considered to be 'rare or nonexistent' elsewhere (Tilly & Tarrow 2006: 8). Unlike Tilly & Tarrow who exclude the social dynamics that are taking place in contemporary Africa from their analysis, we argue here that social movements do exist in Africa and that African social movements constitute an emerging field of research (Lachenmann 1994; Mamdani & Wamba-dia-Wamba 1995; Ellis & van Kessel 2009). It is worth heeding these relatively new phenomena because they are stimulating the emergence of new forms of democratic dynamics in Africa and giving birth to social change and new political actors in the public sphere and, most importantly, the interplay between social movements and authorities is generating new forms of governance.

We consider social movements as sustained collective action where claims are formulated and addressed to public authorities (e.g. central or local government, traditional chieftaincy) through public performances (demonstrations, fiscal disobedience, lobbying, the creation of specialized associations, public meetings and statements, awareness raising...) in order to influence decision making and public policies. Such movements can be spontaneous and unstructured initiatives or organized by the state, and later on re-appropriated by social actors. They may be institutionalized, are generally normative and aim to transform a social or political order.

This article analyzes the recent emergence of West African social movements that are putting social inequalities on the agenda of their respective governments. More specifically, the focus is on the social movements of slave descendants in Mauritania, Benin, Mali and Niger. We aim to develop an integrated understanding of how specific social movements known as 'anti-slavery movements' are trying to change the legacies of slavery that are impeding access to citizenship and the circumstances under which they appeared. A comparative perspective on

these movements will broaden our understanding of forms of slave descendants' agency.

The first section explains the interrelationship between politics, citizenship and slavery issues in the West African context. We then move on to our personal empirical analysis of the recent emergence of Gando (a slave descendants' group) in Beninese politics and an internationally sustained social movement called Temedt initiated by descendants of Tuareg slaves in Mali. The final section compares social movements that address slave stigma in Sahelian West Africa.

The importance of slavery in the study of West African politics and citizenship

The fact that the marginalization of people of slave descent in Africa did not end either with colonialism or with postcolonial policies has been repeatedly demonstrated (Meillassoux 1986; Klein 1998; Botte 2000; Rossi 2009). Slave descendants constitute a significant proportion of the population of most West African societies where slavery as a mode of production used to play a central role. The importance and visibility of slave descent groups have been reinforced since the territorial redistribution associated with democratic decentralization allowed them to become majority groups locally.

Historians and political scientists do not pay much attention to slavery nowadays because the issue seems rooted in the past and to be of little value for the understanding of current African politics. It is true that slavery in terms of depriving people of their freedom and as a condition of forced work has almost[1] disappeared in most African countries but empirical evidence allows the assertion that slavery and its legacy matter. Among anthropologists, the interest in slavery started quite late. The focus was on the resistance of slaves to their emancipation (Rouch 1954, Olivier de Sardan 1969; Baldus 1969, 1977). The passive attitude or psychological dependence of slaves was explained by the internalization of what has been called the 'ideology of slavery' (Lovejoy 2001). Other scholars have more recently shown renewed interest in the stigma associated with the status of slaves (Hardung 2009; Argenti 2007).

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[1] Many studies attest however that enslaved people, deprived of their freedom and forced to work for their masters, can still be found in West African countries such as Niger, Mauritania and Mali.

We argue that such contemporary legacies of slavery in West Africa are at the heart of West African politics. In Benin, Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Burkina Faso, legacies of slavery shape the everyday lives of millions of citizens. Though this was constantly been neglected by colonial administration and disregarded by most postcolonial governments, the quasi silence surrounding the issue does not reflect its political relevance.

Directly after independence in the 1960s, most successful slave descendants chose to emancipate themselves by adopting 'non-confrontational strategies' such as migration (Pollet & Winter 1971) in the hope that spatial distance and time would help them to forget their social status and descent (Pelckmans 2011). Others were able to access senior political positions in Niger (Boubou Hama, former President of the National Assembly of Niger, 1961-64), Benin (Hubert Maga, former President of Dahomey, 1960-1963), Nigeria (Ibrahim Badamasi Babanguida, former President of Nigeria, 1985-1993) and Cameroon (Ahmadou Ahidjo, former President of Cameroon 1960-1982) but they remained stigmatized due to their supposed slave origins that were constantly at the centre of rumours and gossip.

For inhabitants of countries like Benin and Mali, the slave origins of their current presidents and high-ranking politicians are public secrets. At naming ceremonies, burials, public places under the *arbre à palabres* (public places used by village people for discussions), people talk about their political leaders' origins on a daily basis. Amadou Toumani Touré (the present President of Mali, 2002-2011), Traoré (Malian Minister of Agriculture 2002-2007), Thomas Boni Yayi (current President of Benin, 2006-2011) and Issoufou Kogui N'Douro (Minister of National Defence of Benin 2006-2011) are all suspected of having slave origins. Such politicians adopt different attitudes: most hide their roots, some change their names (Pelckmans 2011a) and others try to avoid the topic because evoking slavery brings shame. Maintaining silence on the issue seems to have become a question of honour. This last attitude, we argue, corresponds to the internalization of the dominant ideology of slavery by top political leaders. Although these political leaders interact with anti-slavery activists, they do so secretly and rumours – a crucial part of African public debate – around slavery issues in villages and major cities attest to its social importance and centrality in political debate. The 'ideology of slavery' still frames West African political culture.

Things are however changing under the surface of silence or whispered public secrets. Since the 1990s, the globalization of human-rights

ideologies in combination with West African decentralization and neoliberal governance have created new niches for the political participation of marginalized actors, such as groups of slave descendants. They have engaged in 'identity politics' (Bernstein 2005) by negotiating inclusion in local politics and the state apparatus (Leservoisier 2005; de Bruijn & Pelckmans 2005). Some have actively engaged in a confrontational strategy and founded or joined social movements, such as *Timidria* in 1991 in Niger (Tidjani Alou 2000; Hahonou 2006), *El Hor* in 1978 and *SOS Esclaves* in 1995 in Mauritania (Messaoud 2000; Ould Ahmed Salem 2009), *Tazolt* in 1994 and *Temedt* in 2006 in Mali. Their goal is to re-establish the dignity and citizenship of slave descendants in political cultures and to gain access to political structures governed by discriminating aristocrats.

In the following empirical cases in Benin and Mali, the focus is on the trajectories of anti-slavery movements, the situations they challenge and the claims they address to various authorities.

GANDO'S SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN NORTHERN BENIN

The Gando are part of Baatombu society, a former kingdom that is situated in present-day northeastern Benin (known as Borgou) and in northwestern Nigeria. In pre-colonial times, the Boo (or Boko) and Baatombu (also known as *Bariba* in French and in official censuses) were hunters, cultivators, craftsmen and warriors who created a feudal-like kingdom composed of different provinces related to a central power. Each province was ruled by a member of the aristocratic class, the Wasangari (Lombard 1965). Like most African warriors of their time, the Wasangari carried out raids and invaded the neighbouring provinces of Borgou in Gurma, Temba and Hausaland to capture slaves. Slavery was the main source of income for the Wasangari. Some slaves were sold to brokers who delivered them to transatlantic traders[2] but most ended up in the hands of free men in neighbouring ethnic groups (such as Baatombu or Boo peasants) where they worked in the fields (*Yobu*) or engaged in domestic work and were kept in settlements (*Gando-gibu*) near their Wasangari masters. Debt could lead to servitude and, like other properties, slaves could also be inherited.

[2] Very few names of slaves of Baatombu or Boo origin were registered in the Ouidah house of slaves (Robin 2004).

Slaves had to work hard and obey their masters. The most privileged category of slaves (*Kiriku)* served the King of Borgou (Baldus 1977: 438-439). During the 18th and 19th centuries, Fulbe nomadic pastoralists (called *Fulani* in English or *Peul* in French) progressively moved into the Borgou area. Protected and raided by the Wasangari, the Fulbe were however integrated in Baatombu society but remained dominated. Fulbe also became slave owners through purchase, inheritance and/or fosterage. The latter is a singular mode of acquisition of slaves in African stratified systems. As Baatombu and Boo believed that children born in abnormal circumstances were witches, they eliminated them or fostered them to the Fulbe as a protective measure. The Fulbe cured the child sorcerers (*Yonobu*) and kept them as slaves to manage their livestock and cultivate for them (Baldus 1977: 439-440). The slaves of the Fulbe are generally called Maccube or Gannunkeebe.[3] An umbrella term designates all these categories of people of slave status as Gando (a Batonu term).

In the stratified Baatombu system, Gando belonged to the category of the 'have nots'. As they were considered property, most of the products of their labour were given to the 'haves', namely the free men among the Boo, Baatombu and Fulbe. They were deprived of access to property and other resources, such as women of free origins, religious office and political rights. As in many societies that depend on slavery, the social status of slaves was inscribed in the organization of space. The Gando usually settled on the periphery of Fulbe camps and the Baatonu or Boo villages. They were placed on the outskirts and thus physically banned from groups of free men. Socially, the distance between slaves and free men was expressed in a strict marriage endogamy. While noble men could marry women of servile status (which ennobled them through marriage), marriage between a man of slave descent and a noble woman was unthinkable. Slaves were also denied participation in public decision making. Masters and slaves generally shared this 'ideology of slavery' not only in pre-colonial times and during the colonial regime but also long

[3] Interestingly, the denomination of the slaves in the Fulbe groups of Borgou is almost the same as the terms used in the Mauritanian context (Maccube, Gallunkoobe) (Leservoisier 2005). However whereas Gallunkoobe designates freed Maccube (Leservoisier 2005: 1008), Gannunkeebe is described by Hardung (1997: 109-110) as a category that regroups various slaves descendants and people of free status belonging to families of the *chef de village* (*Gannunkeebe*) who owned Maccube. According to Hardung (*op cit.*), Gannunkeebe distinguish themselves from Maccube Fulbe by distancing themselves from Fulbe culture. However the gathering of Fulbe, Gannunkeebe and Maccube during the *Laawol Fulfulde* seminar and their common claims to belong to Fulbe culture contradicts this argument. Recent empirical evidence shows that most people who claim to belong to the Gando ethnic group also claim a link to the Fulbe. For further distinctions among Fulbe slaves in Benin, see Hardung (1991).

after independence (Baldus 1977; Hardung 1997 on the contemporary subordination of slaves to their masters in Dahomey and Benin).

Dominated and often oppressed by the Wasangari, the Fulbe were clients of various Wasangari warriors who offered protection against tributes. Boo and Baatombu political hegemony was unquestionable until the arrival of French colonialists when the French administrated the territory by recognizing traditional chieftaincies and the creation of new ones. By assigning each group a chief, the French created an independent Fulbe chieftaincy *ex nihilo* (Bierschenk 1993), which improved the situation of the Fulbe but that of the Gando less so. Despite the official abolition of slavery in 1905 and the creation of a few *villages de liberté*, the colonial administration turned a blind eye to the persistence of various forms of slavery for a long time (Hardung 1997: 110). Slavery thus remained generally tolerated, often in attenuated forms. It is worth noting that slaves who moved away from their former masters were often able to control their own labour and become economically emancipated while still maintaining patron-client relations and accepting some degree of subordination. Slavery went on beyond colonialism, and certain forms of master-slave relationships are still observable today in Benin.

Reactions to these continuing forms of domination in Benin were initiated under the Marxist regime of President Kérékou who became involved in a fight against feudality. Coming from another stigmatized ethnic group (Somba), President Kérékou intentionally designated people of low social status to administer politico-administrative units (*préfectures de province*, *sous-préfectures*). Thus, a Gando officer was nominated to rule Nikki, the historical centre of the Baatonu kingdom, in the late 1990s. The *Gani*, the most important annual socio-political event in the kingdom of the Beninese Baatombu, was forbidden by the government for some time. It depended on contributions from the subjects of the King of Borgou and especially the Gando who had to provide not only food and cattle but also new slaves for the king. These actions remained symbolic. Various forms of slave subordination continued and both Gando and Fulbe were constantly harassed and exploited by civil servants (the police, the military, customs and environmental agents, nurses, judges). The victims of all kinds of extortion and discriminated against in disputes arising from damage caused by their cattle on Baatombu and Boo fields, Fulbe (and Gando) remained marginalized and even decided to stay out of politics for many years (Bierschenk 1995; Hahonou 2011). In this peripheral area of the country, unlike in other administrative centres in central Borgou such as Bembèrèkè or Kandi where a political elite of Gando origin emerged

soon after independence,[4] Gando and Fulbe remained politically marginalized for a long time in the *sous-préfectures* of Kalalé, Nikki and Segbana.

The revolutionary regime of President Kérékou again provided a stimulus for social change. In a law-oriented universalistic and socialist approach to citizenship, President Kérékou promoted internal diversity by organizing people from different ethnic groups under the banner of so-called *sous-commissions linguistiques* (Bierschenk 1995: 462-467). The ethno-linguistic groups in Benin were asked to join the revolutionary dynamic of a united nation-state composed of multiple groups (nationalities).[5] This national initiative met the demands of marginalized groups, such as the Fulbe, and in December 1987 the *Fulbe du Bénin* organized themselves into a cultural movement called *Laawol Fulfulde* (The Way of Fulfulde Speakers). They arranged a massive gathering in Kandi, the district capital of northern Benin, where they denounced their exploitation by various agents of the administration and declared claims for citizenship during a linguistic seminar in front of state representatives (Guichard 1990; Bierschenk 1989, 1992, 1995). They publicly addressed the Minister of Rural Development and condemned the abuse (arbitrary detentions, unpunished assassinations, extortion, confiscation of properties) being used by civil servants against Fulbe.[6]

From then onwards, the specificity of Fulbe as a separate ethnic group (with a separate culture and language, specific traditions and way of life, and a common history) was officially recognized by the state. As a result, Fulbe could choose representatives from among themselves (instead of representatives from other ethnic groups). Not only did Fulbe officially claim equal rights, they also wanted protection inside the state apparatus. This was the starting point of a collective awakening of both Fulbe and Gando.[7]

Whereas the organization of the movement and its recognition by the state theoretically offered an opportunity for better inclusion of Fulbe,

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[4] It is well known that most Gando who succeeded in Beninese administration and politics in the final years of French colonial rule because they were soon enrolled in schools when their masters were asked by the French administration to provide pupils.

[5] In these revolutionary times, the term 'nationalities' was the politically correct way of designating the various ethno-linguistic groups that made up the Popular Republic of Benin (1974-1990).

[6] Speech by Djaouga Tahirou, *Séminaire constitutif de la sous-commission nationale de linguistique Fulfulde, Laawol Fulfulde*, Kandi, December 1987.

[7] The fundamental law of the revolutionary regime of Kérékou provided an alternative model to the hierarchical organization of the Borgou political system.

Gando remained marginalized and exploited by the Fulbe within the movement. Firstly, it was difficult for them to claim their specific identity and history. Secondly, Gando were treated as inferiors and systematically stigmatized and, thirdly, the executive office of the movement was controlled and dominated by nobles. Gando leaders were denied the right to participate in decision making and in the management of the resources gathered for the linguistic seminars (Hahonou 2008). The following observation was made by Gando intellectuals:

They evoke Fulbe origins and they don't talk about the Gando. They call us to finance meetings and conferences, but that's all! They cheat us and still dominate us... (a former Gando member of Laawol Fulfulde, Kalalé, June 2006)

Finally, the mismanagement and diversion of the movement's funds and various forms of neo-patrimonialism and favouritism led most Gando to split with *Laawol Fulfulde* in the late 1990s to create their own movements.

While *Laawol Fulfulde* made claims to government representatives to gain recognition and access to the benefits of national citizenship, Gando addressed their claims to the Fulbe leaders of the movement. Gando political leaders aimed to access social recognition, political participation (i.e. influence in decision making), integration, education and literacy, and last but not least a share in the resources managed by the executive office of the seminars (i.e. to benefit illicit opportunities of enrichment). None of their demands were achieved and in the aftermath of the death of the *Laawol Fulfulde* president, Gando leaders detached themselves from the movement and created separate organizations along the lines of the model of the linguistic conferences. The *Idi Waadi* (What We Want Has Taken Place) association was formed by Gando leaders from Nikki in 2001 and 2002 and a number of similar organizations that opposed the old *Fulbe* hierarchical order also emerged at *sous-prefectoral* level: *Djanati* (Peace Finally Come) in Kandi and *Semmee Allah* (The Force of God) in Kalalé.

These organizations served as political platforms for Gando leaders running in the municipal elections in December 2002 and January 2003. Municipal elections in Borgou were marked by political struggle, opposing ethnic groups as well as claims against the government. Gando elites underlined the need for an independent political representation and these elections were a 'critical event' (van der Haar 2001) in the materialization of Gando ethnicity. Indeed, electoral campaigns were an opportunity to reinforce Gando identity, denounce the injustices suffered by them in their everyday interaction with civil servants and reiterate Gando claims to citizenship. Political representation at municipal level was presented as a way for the Gando to escape marginalization. Lacking the funds required to finance the electoral campaign of their main candidate, Gando peasants

redistributed the money they received from other (non-Gando) candidates. This activism resulted in a majority of Gando councillors on the municipal council and the election of a Gando mayor, Orou Sè Guéné,[8] who was a teacher at a college in Parakou, a former member of *Laawol Fulfulde*, the president of *Semme Allah* and the former secretary of the Association for the Development of Kalalé. For the first time in the history of Kalalé, a Gando could add his name to the list of administrators of the locality.

This symbolic revenge of the Gando was not well received by the traditional political elites and nobles but the victory was not an isolated phenomenon. In the neighbouring municipalities of Nikki and Bembèrèkè, for example, municipal elections also benefited Gando who outnumbered other ethnic groups and won the position of mayor. It was also the logical result of a broader tendency in which Gando were becoming increasingly influential as a result of their demographic weight and economic power.

Until 1990 the nobles here didn't do any agricultural labour. The Gando provided for them. Even today only a very few Bariba are good at cultivating the land. When a Bariba lacks food, he finds a Gando to provide for him. They're not forced to do so but they are willing to do so. It's in their character ... They know that these (the nobles) are people you should look after. And they do it without hesitation. They know that what they give, God will give them (doubly) back. It doesn't bother them. When they're together they might say: 'How many Bariba do you feed? How many Bariba do you provide for? You think you're better than me?' (Griot, Boo, Kalalé, December 2009)

The Gando produce more than other ethnic groups. They already controlled the cotton sector (*Union Sous-Préfectorale des Producteurs de Coton*) and were influential in the livestock sector where they used to boycott markets to express their discontent or to claim their rights. The economic success of a majority of Gando who became richer than their former masters improved their social status. The growing number of marriages between Gando men and women from other ethnic groups also indicates their new position in society.

The history of the Gando movement shows that stigmatization, oppression and marginalization were the main concerns regarding mobilizing supporters. Under the Marxist regime of Kérékou, cultural seminars presented an opportunity to build a common identity with the

[8] Interestingly, Orou Sè Guéné claims to be a Gando of free origins as his ancestors were Boo warriors and hunters. However he is a charismatic leader who has taken on board the struggle against slavery and the discrimination that Gando people still encounter.

Fulbe. Behind its cultural agenda, such an organization provided a political arena for the marginalized group, which claimed to belong to the nation-state of Benin. However access to full-fledged citizenship was not concluded as the Gando remained stigmatized and continued to be dominated by aristocrats within the *Laawol Fulfulde* movement. The building of a collective identity took another step when Gando leaders decided to emancipate themselves from the initial movement by creating specialized movements. An alternative egalitarian ideology brought about by democratization played a significant role in the emergence of Gando movements. Thanks to their economic weight, their numbers and the fact that they were led by charismatic leaders, Gando were able to play the ethnic card when democratic decentralization was implemented in 2002-2003. This same card was also played during the legislative elections in 2007, the 2008 municipal elections and, more recently, during the presidential elections in March 2011 because most people of Gando origins acknowledge the Gando origins of President Boni Yayi.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN MALI: FROM TAZOLT *TO* TEMEDT

This section describes the emergence of an emancipatory movement engaged in identity politics on behalf of former Kel Tamasheq slaves (also commonly known as Tuaregs). They describe themselves as Black Kel Tamasheq, which means Black speakers of the Tamasheq language. The socio-political organization of the Kel Tamasheq is based on a hierarchical organization that was stereotyped by the French colonial regime as 'a racialised and feudal system of hierarchy" (Lecocq 2002: 16-17).[9]

Like nearby ethnic groups that relied on slave labour and trade,[10] Kel Tamasheq hierarchy[11] consisted of various statutory groups that reflected the differences in their independence. Noblemen (*imashaghen*), Islamic scholars (*ineslimen*) and tributaries (*imghad*) had free status (*illelan*) and most of them entertained clientelistic relations with unfree groups. Those categories of people who depended on them were freed slaves (*eghawelen*), artisans (*enhaden*) and slaves (*iklan*). Each of these status groups was internally subdivided. A main distinction was made between so-called

[9] The historical context and socio-political organization described here is only valid for the Kel Tamasheq of the Western Sahel, of which Malian territory is a part.

[10] For example, Kassonke, Soninke, Fulani, Dogon, Bambara, Mandingue, Tuareg and Moors. For an analysis of the legacies of slavery in different parts of Mali today, see Keita (May 2009).

[11] For more detailed analysis of Tuareg slavery, see Bernus & Bernus (1975); Bonte (1975) & Bourgeot (1975).

‘slaves of the dunes’ (*iklan-n-ejef*) who kept their masters’ cattle in the dunes and the ‘slaves of the tent’ (*iklan-n-ehan*) who did domestic work in their masters’ tents. Slaves of the tent were economically most dependent on their masters and shared hierarchical but intimate relations.

Existing hierarchies did not change suddenly following French colonial abolition of slavery in 1905. The creation of so-called liberty villages to host slaves contributed very little to their emancipation because they continued to be taxed by both the colonial administration and their former masters (Giuffrida 2005: 813). On the other hand, sedentarization and the creation of administratively independent villages contributed in the long run to the independence of some. Although statutory hierarchies continue to exist today, slavery as a mode of production and the trade in slaves has almost disappeared. Some of the slaves and their descendants, who are often referred to as Bella or Bellahs, have enjoyed remarkable economic emancipation over time, while others have remained closely related to and economically dependent on their former masters. A lot depends on the place, time and specific individuals concerned.

Emancipation of slaves in Mali has always existed in different forms and times. Individual emancipations occurred (mainly in religious realms before, during and after French colonial occupation). Yet what was relatively new from the mid 20th century onwards was that the emancipation of slaves was collectively negotiated in the context of the emerging secular nation-state. By the end of the 1940s, Malian politicians were accusing the colonial administration of tolerating slavery but, once in power after independence, many of them weakened their radical demands for slave emancipation. Despite the first president Moodibo Keita’s explicit socialist dedication to creating an egalitarian society, his political party (USRDA) did not manage to change much for the majority of slaves and their descendants in Mali’s northern desert regions (Lecocq 2005).

This section describes how from the 1980s but especially the 1990s onwards, voices calling for emancipation in Kel Tamasheq society became louder and were heard in public. For the first time, their claims were articulated collectively in radically different ways thanks to several structural conditions (democratization, the neoliberal regime, Tuareg rebellions, droughts and the presence of development aid) that had emerged over the past three decades. These processes considerably increased the possibilities for slaves and their descendants to engage in collective emancipation through political pressure on their government and claims to a self identity. Analysis of the emergence of a Malian social

movement called *Temedt* illustrates these processes.[12] The *Temedt* association, its strategies, structure, goals and activities are described first before moving on to an analysis of the structural conditions that created the necessary space for this movement to emerge.

How it all started

Vice President Ibrahim Ag Idbaltanat was born into a Black Kel Tamasheq family in northeastern Mali where he experienced various forms of discrimination. While at university in Bamako, he returned to his village only to discover that a school for Black Kel Tamasheq children had been closed by White Kel Tamasheq leaders. He persuaded his community to send their children back to school and assumed the position of teacher. This event made Ibrahim realize how the deeply rooted habit of submission to social hierarchy prevented many people from reaching their full potential.

After working on NGO projects in the area, he then founded *Groupement des Artisans Ruraux d'Intadeyni* (*GARI*), an NGO based in Menaka in northern Mali. It enables scattered Black Kel Tamasheq settlements to set up schools as the first step to providing an alternative outlook for children in families that had always accepted their servitude to privileged members of the community. The interaction he had with other Black Kel Tamasheq intellectuals at meetings and forums led to Ibrahim's involvement in the *Temedt* anti-slavery movement.

The current president of *Temedt*, Mohammed Ag Akeratane, has a degree in psychology and worked at the Ministry of Culture in 2007. He describes the following sequence of events that preceded his involvement in *Temedt*:[13]

In 1994 I founded the association Tazolt, which refers to the black line we (i.e. Black Kel Tamasheq) put on our eyes to protect ourselves from dust, disease and evil spirits and at the same time is supposed to improve one's vision. After the 1994 elections, our community was only represented by one deputy (Almawlud), which demonstrates how we continued to be underrepresented in national politics. The goal of Tazolt was to strengthen the position of the black Kel Tamasheq in politics, but several members who worked in the national administration feared for their jobs if they openly presented themselves as being of slave status. Temedt was created precisely to change this attitude: The concrete occasion that made us create it was following the 2002 elections when a person from the Black Kel Tamasheq community was elected as a mayor. Several noble

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[12] The data presented are based on online data (press releases) and personal interviews with leaders and activists in the social movements described.

[13] Mohamed Akeratane, interview in French, Bamako 2007.

Tuaregs threatened him and, as a result, he left his position and fled from Mali to Niger, fearing prosecution. Even though there was media attention for the above-mentioned case, the man who left was replaced by a noble Tuareg.

Frustrated by this, some Black Kel Tamasheq intellectuals decided to start a new association called *Temedt*. Its goal was to integrate Black Kel Tamasheq intellectuals in the national administration as cadres. *Temedt* tried to unite all Black Kel Tamasheq intellectuals at one time so that they would strengthen each other (*L'union fait la force*). *Temedt* was officially launched at a forum organized in August 2006 by these Black Kel Tamasheq intellectuals in Essarakane near Menaka. The main activities for the 4,000 visitors ranged from debates over parades and folklore evenings to the experiences of a brother organization of Black Kel Tamasheq from Niger called *Timidria*. In a national context where it is forbidden to organize politically along ethnic lines, political correctness forces people with separatist ethnic aspirations to disguise them in an association with cultural aims.

Temedt is a Tamasheq word that literally means 'placenta' and, by extension, stands for 'genealogy, lineage' (Lecocq 2002: terminology).[14] *Temedt* members chose to present themselves as Black Kel Tamasheq but this explicit racial reference that contrasts Black and Whites oversimplifies the hierarchies in Kel Tamasheq society, where slave and noble status do not necessarily converge according to the colour of one's skin.

Temedt's first official problem statement emphasized the difficulties that Black Kel Tamasheq experience, such as insecurity due to rebellion and the flourishing trade in arms, poor management of collective resources, and weak participation in different national and local elections. They signal how Black Kel Tamasheq are marginalized in public affairs despite their demographic weight, economic contribution and their intellectual cadres. They were officially established as a national Malian association on 21 September 2006.

The provisional board of *Temedt* in 2006 consisted of 37 intellectuals with positions ranging from deputies to doctors, lawyers, journalists, engineers and teachers. Although most of the board members of *Temedt* live and work in the Malian capital of Bamako, the association organizes its activities in northern towns and villages. *Temedt* issued 18,000 membership cards in 2007 but also cooperates with other institutions,[15] ensures access

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14 At its broadest, this can be interpreted as 'solidarity', which is the translation used in international press releases.

15 In the Human Rights Report on Mali 2009, *Temedt* is mentioned among other Malian human-rights associations. See: http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/af/135964.htm,

to the national and international press and is in regular contact with organizations in the sub-region.[16] International partners, such as Anti-Slavery International, also strongly support them, both morally and financially.

Temedt tackles the issue of slavery at three levels: grassroots, civil society and government. To reach their goals, they organize public training courses, forums, discussions, community activities and annual cultural festivals to celebrate Black Kel Tamasheq identity. In addition to public meetings, it engages in awareness-raising campaigns and brings together Black Kel Tamasheq to engage in public dialogue on taboo topics. Challenging slave practices in public is dangerous for members' personal safety so the association ensures security and increases its legitimacy by inviting local government officials, NGO representatives and White Kel Tamasheq leaders to such events. With high visibility and a large community turnout, most invitations are accepted.

Journalist Gamer Dicko researches cases of abuse and publishes them in his *Faits Divers* column in the Malian newspaper *L'Essor*. *Temedt* reports these cases to local and national authorities and other human-rights organizations in Mali and sometimes finances special assignments with police forces to resolve cases.[17] *Temedt* members were closely involved in a study for a national report on slavery in Mali,[18] on the basis of which the association claims that at least 2 million Malians can be considered as (passive or active) slaves, the majority of whom live in the north. Increased political participation by Black Kel Tamasheq is another important goal and the association promotes sedentarization and education. Finally, *Temedt* is trying to make progress in a legal context by putting lawyers on cases brought by slave descendants that have not been heard by Malian courts. In 2008, *Temedt* started a campaign insisting on the criminalization of slavery and excuses put forward for tolerating slavery by the (Malian) government. Their claims were covered by the national and international media and their press releases received comments and support from Internet surfers.

A thriving membership led enthusiastic volunteers to set up field offices across the country and in 2008 *Temedt* gathered enough community support and visibility to appeal to the government for help. They are

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accessed March 2011.

[16] Such as *Timidria* and *SOS Esclaves*, which are discussed below.

[17] They pay policemen's fuel costs, for example, to enable them to take a 4-wheel drive and look for refugee slaves in the vast desert area.

[18] Unpublished report, Keita (May 2009).

currently working towards the first law in Mali that would criminalize slavery. However their president, Akeratane, sees the continued underrepresentation of Black Kel Tamasheq among politicians since the wave of decentralization in Mali in the 1990s as a sign of continued exclusion.

In the last two decades of the 20th century, the 'voice option' (Hirshman 1970) was increasingly considered by people of slave origins in Kel Tamasheq society. Their voices became louder and were both channelled and broadcast by *Temedt*. As can be seen below for other social movements, *Temedt* emerged stronger thanks to a combination of favourable structural conditions such as the neoliberal era of good governance and democratic decentralization policies, increased international attention for anti-slavery struggles and the influence of armed conflicts (the Kel Tamasheq rebellion).

The following section adopts a comparative perspective to analyze the conditions under which anti-slavery movements emerged in West Africa by looking at the situations of the claimants, the content of their claims and the activities used to address authorities.

COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON WEST AFRICAN ANTI-SLAVERY MOVEMENTS

WHO ARE THE CLAIMANTS?

Anti-slavery activists and supporters come from different backgrounds and social conditions. What all the eight groups under study have in common, however, is that they are categorized as slave descendants but this does not mean that they all live in servile conditions or that they are actually of slave descent. The leaders of the movements often deny being of slave origin. They are all intellectuals (with the exception of Safaalbe Hormankoobe described by Leservoisier 2005) and most started as activists following personal experiences of exclusion or discrimination on the basis of their ascribed slave status. These experiences led them to found associations, NGOs or other structures to address discrimination based on slave status and they make claims in the name of the people who are stigmatized in their own ethnic groups. For example, Kel Tamasheq activists do not fight for the emancipation of Songhay or Fulbe slaves. Their ties to the ethnic group to which they belong are extremely strong and the language and culture of their former masters are the cement that bind them together and allow them to overcome their internal differences

(as descendants of bought slaves, manumitted slaves, etc.). All the groups make an explicit effort to prevent dividing the group into sub-groups and to promote a homogeneous identity. At the same time, the leaders are often the first to present themselves as being of non-slave descent.

While *Semme Allah*, *El Hor* and *SOS Esclaves* kept their names and used words from slave vocabulary, the others distanced themselves from existing and derogatory vocabulary. For example in both Mali and Niger, words like *Bella*, *Bouzou* and *Iklan* are being replaced by the ambiguous *Kel Tamasheq noirs*.

What are their claims about?

'*Slavery is not completely abolished in practice and even less in people's minds*.' This statement, an excerpt from Dandah & Galy's report on slavery in Niger (2003: 106), highlights two central issues in West African anti-slavery movements. The first deals with the resilience of slavery practices. Anti-slavery activists are attempting to free enslaved people from their masters, lobby for the legal criminalization of slavery, support slaves in court cases against their masters, and assist victims morally and financially. The second issue is related to identity politics. Borrowing from Anspach's definition (1979, quoted by Bernstein 2005: 47), we define identity politics as an array of activities led by people of stigmatized status who intend to transform both self- and societal conceptions of people with stigmatized status. The identity politics of anti-slavery movements address the stigma related to slave status. Changes in people's mentalities are seen as a key strategic action in the fight against slavery, with mentalities being seen as 'the roots of inequalities' (El Hor quoted by Salem, 2009). All activists are trying to modify the image of slave descendents among the free born as well as among people of slave origins. The latter is sometimes a difficult task and anti-slavery movements can be misunderstood by their potential supporters (Bullard 2005; Hahonou 2010).[19] A change in mentality represents a major challenge because the stigma frequently justifies the discrimination people of slave status suffer. This matters because the internalization of slaves' inferiority inhibits all initiatives for change. Significantly, some associations have chosen denominations referring to awareness raising, such as the Mouvement pour l'Eveil du monde Bellah

[19] Bullard, quoting Bales (2005: 760), gives an example of a recently freed slave woman who returned to her master after having experienced freedom in a major city for some time. Hahonou (2010: 240-241) shows how the activities and discourses of *Timidria* are misunderstood by people of slave status.

in Mali (Botte 2000: 20) and Fedde Pinal meaning 'La classe de l'éveil' (Leservoisier 2003: 174).

Activists usually denounce a system of values, societal norms and beliefs that constitute the ideology of slavery. Such a change requires a break with the ideology of slavery and adherence to alternative ideologies inspired by democratization and human-rights discourses. Charismatic leaders, whether or not connected with international anti-slavery organizations, generally provide these new ideas and ideals. Most emphasize 'modern' education. They argue that 'the uneducated man is a blind man' (*Laawol Fulfulde seminar*, 1987. unpaginated) and are promoting literacy among adults of slave status as well as the creation of primary schools and school enrolment in rural areas where the state rarely intervenes (for example, *Timidria* in Niger, *Semme Allah* in Benin). Promoting schooling also entails a strategic sedentarization for nomadic pastoral groups, which is encouraged by *Timidria* and *Temedt*.

Antislavery activists are demanding reforms ranging from land-tenure reforms (*SOS Esclaves* in Mauritania) to religious and legal reforms (*SOS Esclaves*, *Timidria*, *Temedt*) to address discrimination against slave descendants in issues of land access, property rights, inheritance and marriage. It is worth noting that their demands are not exclusively directed towards national authorities. For instance, anti-slavery movements contest and challenge traditional authorities and municipal rulers (Leservoisier 2003, 2005), religious leaders (Messaoud 2000: 304) and even political parties. Concerning the latter, the issue of political participation or political citizenship is at stake. Activists negotiate better integration within political parties (like the Gando in northern Benin). If such strategies fail, some create their own political parties, as happened in Niger where Black Kel Tamasheq created the *Parti pour le Renouveau Démocratique Mahiba* in 1996 (Hahonou 2010: 242) and in Mali where they founded the *Union Malienne pour la Démocratie et le Développement* (Botte 2000: 20). In Mauritania, the founder of *El Hor* established *Action pour le Changement* in 1995 (Salem 2009: 170). Other groups of slave descents, like the former slaves of Soninké and Haalpulaar, remain in the position of clients *vis-à-vis* their masters or chiefs (Leservoisier 2003: 173).

Demands for integration in party politics are related to the capacity of the political community of slave descents to take part in decision-making institutions such as municipal councils, Parliament and national government.

CONCLUSIONS

While the ideology of slavery in Africa was deeply internalized by most slave descendants until the 1990s, a growing number of slave descendants today are contesting the inequalities of the socio-political order and challenging major aspects of the ideology of slavery. In contrast with the past when West African slave descendants were emancipated in silence, they are now benefiting from the emergence of anti-slavery movements to emancipate themselves collectively using the so-called 'voice' option.

We argue that several structural factors have constituted a favourable context for the creation of anti-slavery movements. Firstly, democratic decentralization processes have played a major role. Although an emancipatory movement such as *El Hor* (in Mauritania) emerged clandestinely in the late 1970s under a dictatorial regime, most anti-slavery movements appeared in West African countries during the transition to democracy in the 1990s. The territorial and electoral reorganization resulting from democratic decentralization reforms in the late 1990s have created opportunities for new political deals. Slave descendants who until then were minorities at national level (except in Mauritania) suddenly became an unavoidable political force and sometimes even the majority group at municipal level. In the same vein, it is worth noting that the neoliberal climate in the 1990s guaranteed freedom of expression for the first time, with a growing number of independent newspapers and private radio stations as important outlets. Secondly, associational life was especially important for slave descendants who seized the opportunity to organize themselves into identity groups (Hahonou 2008). As noted by Ellis & van Kessel (2009: 4-5), this international context and the flow of resources and development cooperation were of considerable importance for African social movements. It was also thanks to cooperation with NGOs and development brokers that today's activists acquired experience, moral support, organizational skills and financial assistance. Thirdly, actions by international activists (Free the Slaves, Anti-Slavery International) to support victims of slavery in Africa are being increasingly coordinated by local anti-slavery movements that have benefitted from international funds to fight slavery and its legacy.

In this climate of liberalization of West African political regimes, the upsurge of audacious political entrepreneurs who wanted to end chattel slavery in their own nation-states has resulted in the legal criminalization of slavery in both Mauritania (2007) and Niger (2003) and in a proposal to revise the penal code in Mali. Anti-slavery activists have not only addressed their claims to their national governments but also initiated

change at local level. In this respect, democratic decentralization reforms were significant because they allowed educated anti-slavery activists to appeal to their brethren to unite, mobilize and fight. Their struggles have rarely taken the form of armed rebellions, like in Mauritania in the early 1980s. Instead, members of anti-slavery movements with slave origins have accessed positions of power through peaceful electoral processes. People of slave origins have gained ground in local politics in a number of municipalities and in areas where anti-slavery movements had raised awareness, this political emergence was easier. Indeed the fight against a 'slave mentality' was a major challenge everywhere and a crucial step to mobilizing groups of slave status as a united force. Changes in political structures and cultures (or 'mentalities') go hand in hand.

Anti-slavery movements' sustained collective activities have thus had a profound impact on West African politics. Gaining access to political representation at various levels (municipal councils, Parliament, government and regional administration) of the state apparatus has been a significant step. Importantly, people of slave status who were formerly denied the right to participate in politics have obtained (political) citizenship. Today, people of slave status can influence decision making and public policies. Anti-slavery movements are contributing to societal and political transformations, constituting new political forces that are injecting social changes in the daily governance of municipalities and nations in the West African Sahel. Although anti-slavery movements do challenge the aristocratic ideology that characterizes most African political cultures, they do not pretend to radically transform dominant patterns of governance. They are instead participating in political dynamics and the redistribution of resources (Leservoisier 2005; Hahonou 2008, 2011). In this sense, we argue that anti-slavery struggles concerning identity are not replacing struggles over material issues, as observed by social movement theorists in European contexts, but are closely interlinked. In African contexts, demands for recognition of new identities are often seen as a way of accessing resources.

As argued earlier, rumours and gossip that feed public debate in Africa are important indicators of what is at stake in a given society. The legacies of slavery do matter in the Sahelian West African context and anti-slavery movements are playing out social tensions and conflicts surrounding the issue of slavery. The appearance of these new social actors in West African political arenas has not only transformed the social and political order but also introduced ideology into African politics, a domain that used to be characterized by the absence of ideological cleavages. Moreover, we insist that African anti-slavery movements are playing a

major role in the formation of new social identities, sometimes resulting in the creation of new ethnic groups (like the Gando in Benin).

This article has attempted to fill the gap between the arrival of social movements in Africa and the relative lack of theorization. Most scholars that are tackling the dynamics of slavery in contemporary West Africa use the term 'social movement' in a descriptive manner without referring to social movement theory. In our view, African anti-slavery movements are in many respects related to what Adam *et al*. (2001: 7-8) call 'transgressive contention'. What we are observing in Sahelian West Africa is that newly self-identified claim makers are engaging with the government (or other public authorities) to defend the interests of their community and gain access to citizenship as well as symbolic and material resources. As in Europe and the US, social movements in Africa are historical phenomena, with their own specific context and rationality. However against the particularists, we believe that social movements have become generalized and that social movement theory needs to include African social movements. Therefore we call for more cross-disciplinary and cross-geographical comparisons of social movements in Europe, the US, Africa and elsewhere.