THE BITTER LEGACY

AFRICAN SLAVERY PAST AND PRESENT

Alice Bellagamba, Sandra E. Greene, and Martin A. Klein, editors

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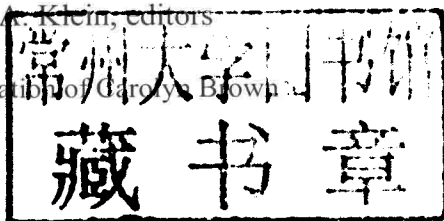JANJANGBUREH SINCE
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With the Collaboration of Carolyn Brown

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Contents

1. Introduction.
When the Past Shadows the Present:
The Legacy in Africa of Slavery
and the Slave Trade

ALICE BELLAGAMBA, SANDRA E. GREENE,
AND MARTIN A. KLEIN

After almost a thousand years of exporting human beings, enduring connections have developed between Africa, Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean. These connections have long raised strong public and scholarly interests, and today, as the Senegalese historian Ibrahima Thioub has remarked, they play an important part in the image that contemporary Africans build of themselves and of their contribution to world history.[1] Public attention was reinforced by the launch of the UNESCO Slave Route Project in 1994.[2] At the base of this initiative was the idea that, although marked by violence and subjection, the export of slaves from Africa was a major force of historical change that had to be commemorated both to honor the victims and to shed light on the significant social and cultural changes it produced across time and space. In the wake of the Slave Route Project, countries like Senegal, Ghana, Benin, and even the small Republic of The Gambia, have striven to valorize those parts of their historical past that link them with the Atlantic slave trade. European castles along the West African coast, which served as bases for Atlantic slavers, have been restored and opened to the public; tourists' itineraries have been organized; museum exhibitions have been established; and festivals have been organized to promote the return to Africa

of men and women, whose erstwhile ancestors were forcibly enslaved.[3]

This burgeoning heritage politics has focused only marginally on the issue of slavery and slave trading within Africa. Yet, the legacy of internal slave dealing and slave holding lingers in contemporary African societies. It has hampered socioeconomic development during and after colonial rule, and it has resurfaced in the civil wars and violence of the second part of the twentieth century.[4]

Unbeknownst to most, more slaves were probably kept within Africa than were ever exported. Beyond the limited academic circles of those who professionally delve into the history of African internal slavery and slave trade, however, any attempt to discuss these topics overtly is still considered politically incorrect by certain people. Some believe that a focus on the slave trade and slavery within Africa only serves to downplay the heavy tribute in labor and human lives that Africa paid for the development of Europe, the Americas, and many other parts of the world. Others object to this view. The historian Ibrahima Thioub has been critical of Senegalese intellectuals, in particular, for having long looked at slave dealing and slave holding as something not really belonging to the past of their nation. But this criticism can also be applied to many other intellectuals, those in the West as well as in other parts of Africa, as recently stressed by the Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka.[5]

While trans-Atlantic slave shipments ended in the nineteenth century, slave raiding, slave trading, and the use of slave labor within Africa continued well into the early colonial period. In spite of legal abolition, in many parts of contemporary Africa, there are people who are still called slaves in the local languages. In some cases, particularly in desert areas, this slavery is not metaphoric or historical, but quite real. People are owned, and can be sold; they are forced to work for others for no or very little compensation; some have no control over their sexuality. This occurs even though where it exists, slavery is illegal. In some areas, it is only vestigial forms of slavery that remain. Former slaves, for example, may feel they still must meet certain obligations to their former masters. Yet,

they can leave if they wish, and keep the products of their labor. In many more areas, people will refer to others as slaves, though these so-called slaves are totally free, and sometimes are even wealthier than their former masters because they were often among the first to be educated in colonial Africa. Despite this freedom and wealth, these former slaves are still often expected to treat former masters with deference. The stigma of slave origins persists. In some districts, a visitor can ask, "Where do the slaves live?" and with no objections raised at all, be directed to whole villages or to quarters of larger villages that are inhabited exclusively by people of slave descent, the children and grandchildren of the formerly enslaved. Of course, there are large areas of Africa where memories of slavery have disappeared and others where they lie buried and are only articulated during litigation over inheritance or disputes about succession to chiefly offices. But in those areas where the legacy of slavery persists, it retains a grassroots social significance and intersects in complex ways with the social inequalities of colonial and postcolonial history.

This book offers a fresh look into these delicate issues by presenting a firsthand collection of sources, which gives voice, as far as possible, either to former slaves or to men and women of slave ancestry. As argued in the following pages, the task of collecting this kind of evidence has not been easy.

Slavery before and after the Colonial Conquest

For the past forty years, historians of Africa have pursued the systematic study of African slave systems and their interaction with the external slave trade. It is now clear that slavery existed in Africa before the Atlantic and trans-Saharan export trade as it existed in most of the world. With the increased demand for African slaves, however, which developed as a consequence of external commercial linkages, the production and trading of slaves became major economic enterprises. The Atlantic slave trade contributed to the creation of military states, where power was based on the ability to provide slaves for sale. It was also resisted, which meant that

slave traders could respond to the demand for slaves only by pushing trade networks deeper and deeper into Africa, eventually covering most of Africa. These routes expanded south first from the desert's edge, then in all directions from the Atlantic, and finally, in the nineteenth century, from the East and Northeast African coasts. The external trade shaped not only the nature of the state, but it also stimulated the use of slaves within Africa. Those who grew wealthy in the trade wanted not only European trade goods, but the services slaves could provide. Women were preferred both as workers and as members of the harems of the wealthy and powerful. Male slaves became both workers and soldiers, but were often more difficult to control, and thus, constituted a greater proportion of those exported.

Finally, in 1807, Great Britain and the United States abolished the slave trade.[6] Other European nations soon followed suit, though it took more than a half-century for the export of slaves to be completely stopped. Britain, moreover, abolished the institution of slavery throughout its empire in 1833. France did the same in 1848.[7] The abolitionists hoped that both in the plantation colonies of the Americas and in Africa, productive activity would increasingly be based on free labor, but in Africa, that was not to be. The nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution increased the European demand for African products, like peanut and palm oil, but free labor was generally not available. The century increasingly saw the diversion of the trade in slaves away from export markets to internal ones.[8] Within Africa, slaves produced palm oil, harvested cloves, and cultivated peanuts, all for European and Asian markets. Others harvested kola nuts in the forests of West Africa where this commodity was marketed and sold for local consumption. Still others were used as household labor and as carriers to transport the various goods produced to market. Within a generation of one of the world's largest slave traders—Great Britain—ending its trade, prices for slaves within Africa were as high as they had been at the height of the Atlantic slave trade.[9]

Slave raiding and slave trading within Africa remained not only an important form of economic activity after the 1807 British abo-

lition of the slave trade, it accelerated. From the middle of the century, new weapons, particularly breech-loading and repeating rifles, facilitated the slaver's task. The last third of the nineteenth century was the bloodiest period in African history.[10] British and French anti-slavery legislation had ended slavery in the very small areas then under their rule, but both European powers were careful to discourage flight from neighboring African states. When they started extending their colonial domains in the later part of the nineteenth century, they were careful not to abolish slavery.[11] They forged alliances and supported African military leaders, who not only had large slave holdings, but who were unrepentant slave holders, convinced that slave labor was too important for their local economic activities to even consider abolishing it. Even after conquest, European colonizers continued to depend on slave holding African chiefs to administer their new domains. This most often occurred as an interim measure in the period after the colonial conquest, but before the new colonial authorities had established effective control. Over time, colonial officials began following what was called the Indian model. First applied by Britain in India where slavery was also an important social institution, this model was gradualist in that it simply withdrew support for slave owners, but did not formally abolish slavery.[12] Colonial regimes intervened to halt slave raiding and slave trading since these activities created insecurity, and inhibited economic activity. Public opinion in Europe also spurred colonial officials into action. Reports of slave raiding and trading in Africa were widely condemned by a European public, which by the 1880s, had come to regard slavery as immoral, and free labor as the most preferred means of meeting the needs of a productive economy. They also stopped supporting the rights of slave owners. This meant that a master could no longer ask the colonial administrator to return runaway slaves. Still, the first colonial anti-slavery measures were generally weak, and sometimes were not even enforced.[13] Efforts were made in some British areas, for example, to prevent flight by explaining to slaves that laws against the slave trade did not mean their immediate liberation.[14] The Indian model encouraged colonial regimes to believe

that by simply preventing slave holders from acquiring new slaves, slavery itself would disappear in the long run, and slaves' emancipation would occur without disruption. As a result, slavery, as a legal and social institution, ended slowly.

A topic on which scholars have only rarely been able to accumulate enough information to produce a book length study is resistance to the slave trade and slavery within Africa.[15] Before the colonial conquest, Africans resisted enslavement in a variety of ways. Communities hid in remote and inaccessible areas; they built stockades to prevent the attacks of slave raiders; they established networks and social connections at the regional and trans-regional level so as to facilitate the ransom of captives. Memories of such resistance efforts have often been kept alive up to the present. Emmanuel Saboro, in chapter 7, "Songs of Sorrow, Songs of Triumph: Memories of the Slave Trade among the Bulsa of Ghana," tells of a group of people in northern Ghana—the Bulsa—whose contemporary identity is based on their successful resistance to Babatu, a major nineteenth-century slave raider. Songs of sorrow remember the suffering of the Bulsa, while those of triumph celebrate their defeat of Babatu.

Slave masters and colonial officials often shared the view of the slaves as passive human beings, who lacked initiative and needed paternalistic guidance and control. Yet, enslaved men and women had their own expectations about the colonial conquest and readily grasped the change of power and the opportunities it offered. Most found slavery intolerably oppressive. With the exception of those who held privileged roles as soldiers or administrators for wealthy or powerful masters, most African slaves were harshly exploited. Those who remembered an earlier home yearned to return. Where the opportunity existed, they took advantage of it. Immediately after the colonial conquest, slaves took flight everywhere, but it was probably in French West Africa where the greatest of such movements took place. When the French stopped returning runaways to their masters, they hoped the slaves would remain where they were, but the news of successful escapes spread quickly. Between 1906 and 1912, there was a massive exodus.[16] Perhaps over

a million slaves left slave masters either to return to earlier homes or to find work in the colonial economy. These were mostly slaves who had recently been enslaved and were both physically able to make the journey and remembered their origins. Flights were most numerous in the harshest areas. In German East Africa, where there were an estimated 500,000 slaves in 1890, the Germans issued about 60,000 Freedom Letters between 1890 and 1914. By the end of this period, the actual number of slaves had dropped to about 160,000. Some had died, but most had simply walked away from slavery once it was abolished.[17]

By the 1930s, most colonial regimes had passed legislation to end slavery in their African possessions. In many parts of the continent, however, a small illicit slave trade, largely in children, persisted, both to serve markets within Africa and as a small trade conducted during the pilgrimage to Mecca.[18] Labor recruitment schemes, which strongly resembled the slave trade of the old days, also began to emerge. An indentures system, employed to provide labor to the cocoa plantations of Atlantic islands so resembled slavery that news of its existence generated a humanitarian reform movement so vocal that the League of Nations was forced to intervene. Labor recruiters then had to change their practices.[19] Zacharie Saha, in chapter 6, "Tabula and Pa Jacob, Two Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives from Cameroon," tells of two men who were sold into slavery, one to Fernando Po, and the other within Cameroon. They were freed only after the collapse of colonial rule. Even after slavery ended, many former slaves remained with their masters, either because colonial regimes discouraged flight or because of the insecurity that faced them if they tried to return home. Often, their homeland was far. Many had been born in slavery or enslaved young. They grew up in their masters' society and culture, formed families, and were reluctant to part with the forms of patronage ensured by their belonging to their masters' communities and descent groups. For those who stayed, emancipation translated into a long struggle to overcome the social boundaries that set them apart from the dominant social categories.

Much, of course, changed. Slave masters were limited by fear

of further flight. Where state structures were weak and authority dispersed, slavery had rapidly disappeared under the impact of the colonial conquest. In coastal Kenya, for instance, slaves could easily claim land in the hinterland and become farmers,[20] or seek wage labor in rapidly growing cities like Mombasa. In other areas, forms of slavery persisted. In desert regions of Mauritania, Niger, Mali, and the Sudan, colonial regimes were dependent on slave-owning elites and unwilling to commit the military forces that would have been necessary to end slavery. Masters were also able to control the formerly enslaved in areas where slaves had few options and colonial rulers, because of pragmatic necessity, supported powerful slave-owning chiefs, whose alliance they needed to control the territory. Hamman Yaji, a Fula chief, regularly raided for slaves from 1902, until he was deposed by the British in 1927.[21] Not far away, in Adamawa in French Cameroon, a chief passionately defended slavery in the 1950s, and persuaded the French that it was "too soon" to do anything about slavery.[22]

In most areas, the labor obligations of slaves were gradually reduced, but masters were determined to preserve their social and moral superiority. As noted by the historian John Iliffe, colonial conquest actually "increased [slave owners'] sensitivity on issues of honor and vertical rank."[23] This emerges clearly from the sources. In their contribution to this book, Alice Bellagamba and Martin A. Klein use a newspaper article and an interview to explore the post-abolition situation in Badibu, one of the regions of The Gambia considered quite conservative on the issue of slave ancestry. Badibu slave owners, and their descendants, engaged in a long struggle to preserve the social boundaries that elevated them above their former slaves and other people of slave ancestry.

In chapter 4, "To Cut the Rope from One's Neck? Manumission Documents of Slave Descendants from Central Malian Fulbe Society," Lotte Pelckmans describes a similar situation in the Fulbe Muslim communities of Hayre, located in a very arid and isolated part of Mali. Here, until the late twentieth century, men and women of slave ancestry could not make the pilgrimage to Mecca because they found it difficult to obtain from their masters the document

they needed to perform the *hajj*. They could not become imams and generally had to sit in the back of the mosque. This pushed former slaves to seek Muslim education, but it also convinced many to accept their own social and cultural inferiority as divinely determined. In other parts of Africa, like the desert regions of Mauritania, Niger, Mali, the Sudan, and also Borgou in northern Benin real forms of slavery survived the legal end of slavery, and countries like Niger and the Sudan have remained under international scrutiny for cases of slave trading and forcible reduction to slavery.[24]

Paths to Social Emancipation

After abolition in colonial times, many former slaves did not migrate to other areas, but remained within their traditional communities. Their subservient status manifested itself in a variety of ways, from restricted access to land to respect of local honor codes that excluded them from community religious and political leadership posts. They controlled their own labor and their family life, however. Freed slaves negotiated their own marriages and women were no longer forced to have sexual relations with their masters. They also benefited from their willingness to work hard and to learn new skills. A myth believed by slaveholders and many colonial officials alike claimed that slaves were lazy and would work only if forced, but their actual willingness and capacity to work for themselves enabled many to accumulate property.

For those who wanted to move up and out, the two best paths were the army and education. The armies that conquered Africa for European colonial powers were largely composed of the enslaved, sometimes freed in exchange for a long-term enlistment. This continued well into the colonial period. For example, the army of African conscripts that fought for France in World War I was about 75 percent former slaves.[25] The cadres of many colonial and postcolonial armies had a large percentage of the once enslaved or their descendants, which meant that numerous military regimes still contain many such men.[26] Education was probably an even more important path of upward social mobility. In the late nineteenth and

early twentieth centuries, a large percentage of those who gathered around European Christian mission stations during periods of military conflict were escaped slaves. They thus often became the first Africans educated in European languages. They became the clerks in government and business operations. Their sons and grandsons were a large part of the postcolonial elite. In the process, they often shed memories of slave status and the resulting stigma of slave origins. Christian missions also provided land and new identities, as did Muslim religious communities. "Serin Bamba is our liberator," say many former slave disciples of the Senegalese religious leader, Ahmadu Bamba.[27]

For other slaves and their descendants, one of the most important weapons in their hands was their ability to physically relocate themselves to a different community. After the colonial conquest, no one could force them to stay with their former masters. Desertions occurred, and continue even today as men and women of slave ancestry find strategies to cope with the enduring stigma of their origins and their social marginality. Sometimes, the formerly enslaved only moved short distances when free land was available near their original villages. Other times, groups moved further. Former slaves sought money working as migrant laborers in peanut fields and cocoa plantations. They worked as porters and filled humble positions at the bottom of the colonial labor hierarchy as cleaners, messengers, drivers, and attendants of colonial officials. When there was an opportunity, they acquired artisan skills, which allowed them to enter the growing tertiary sector of colonial urban centers.

Geographic mobility increased after World War II, with the rapid growth of African cities. In search of opportunities, people of slave ancestry joined the rural-urban exodus of the 1960s and 1970s, moving first inside and then outside Africa. This process of social change is explained in the interview on Badibu slavery that Bellagamba and Klein present in their chapter. Many of Badibu slave descendants are today better off than the descendants of slave owners: hard work and migration have radically changed their economic and social standing both at home and in the diaspora. Still, the linkage between migration and social mobility of freed slaves and peo-

ple of slave ancestry needs to be further explored.[28] Life-course is one of the variables to be considered. Some urban and international immigrants, as they aged, became sick and isolated. Many had to return to communities where their ancestors had lived as slaves to take advantage of local support networks at the price of accepting their own subordinate status.[29] Structural factors, and the specificity of each historical period, are important as well. In the first part of the twentieth century strangers moving into the villages of the Upper River Gambia were usually assumed to be slaves and were incorporated into the slave class.[30] Makhroufi Ousmane Traoré, in chapter 10, "Memories of Slavery and the Slave Trade from Futa Toro, Northern Senegal," presents us with accounts of slavery from both master and slave descendants in contemporary Futa Toro, an area of Senegal where the resilience of old-status distinctions has been long observed in spite of the fact that men and women from Futa Toro early ventured out of their home villages. They sought opportunities in the cities of Senegambia, in other African countries, and in Europe as well. Relocation to other areas has not always obliterated previous slave identities, in part because they often migrated with support networks controlled by traditional elites and re-created traditional hierarchies in their new homes. Migration to Ghana was, for Mossi villagers of the late 1950s, instrumental to the consolidation of homeland hierarchies between nobles, commoners, and former slaves.[31] While carrying out research on the associational life of early 1960s Bamako, Claude Meillassoux, found men and women of slave ancestry who not only retained their identities as slave descendants but who during family celebrations performed the very dances associated with only slaves in earlier days. Old status distinctions were also significant among Futa Toro and Soninke immigrants in Dakar, and in France, which were in the 1960s, important destinations for Futa Toro and Soninke migrations.[32] Recent works on Senegalese Futa Toro have shown that migration has in many cases reinforced existing social inequalities, but migrants of slave background are more likely to invest in the education of their offspring than in their place of origin, unlike members of the elite.[33]

11

Struggles for Democracy and Political Participation

Struggles for independence, which most African states achieved in the 1960s, and the processes of democratization that followed the end of the cold war in the late 1980s, provided people of slave ancestry with opportunities to take part in civic debates on citizenship, political participation, and the role of the state. At independence, most nationalists were anxious to transcend and if possible, ignore divisions of ethnicity and social class. Many new constitutions included prohibitions of slavery. Some of the more radical regimes, like the Tanganyika African National Union, Mali's Union Soudanaise, and Guinea's Parti Democratique de la Guinée, took more forward stances and actively attacked slavery. The anticolonial struggle had mobilized social forces on the margins of the colonial state, like workers, women, youths, and socially excluded groups like slaves. Descendants of slaves, however, still had to struggle against discrimination by former dominant groups. Attitudes proved hard to change, especially in rural areas.[34] In the very conservative Futa Jallon highlands of Guinea, there were slave revolts even in the precolonial period. When during colonial days slavery ceased to be legal, freed slaves and their descendants strove to overcome their subordination to former masters; yet, at the time of Guinean independence in 1958, slavery was such a relevant social issue that the new government restated its abolition. The epithet of "Fulbe of the 28th of September" (the day of national independence) was a way to depreciate that part of the Futa Jallon citizenry which was of slave ancestry. Roger Botte's research, carried out in the late 1980s, testifies to the resentment of Futa Jallon slave descendants toward enduring discrimination as well as to their commitment to keep alive the memory of their enslaved ancestors by not changing surnames in order to hide their origins.[35]

In the last years of the twentieth century, democratization forced African polities to deal with the vestiges of internal slavery.[36] In Ghana, where there have been several peaceful and democratic political transitions and where the heritage tourism industry and the efforts of local scholars have highlighted the existence of indige-