Without History? Interrogating ‘Slave’ Memories in Ader (Niger)¹
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Introduction

It is often argued that slaves are ‘without history’, or alternatively, that they internalize their masters’ views of history, and therefore interpret the past through ‘borrowed’ memories (see, for example, Klein 1989: 211-212, 1998: 245; de Bruijn and Pelckmans 2005:72). The Ader region of Southern Niger (Tahoua) makes no exception to this. In a comparative article on Hausa and Tuareg conceptions of the past in Ader, Pierre Bonte and Nicole Echard, two of the main students of this region, write ‘les classes sociales dominées sont-elles réellement “sans histoire”? La réponse est clairement affirmative en ce qui concerne les iklan.’(1976:269). In this paper, I would like to revisit this assumption.

My work suggests that people of slave descent are more likely to share, or have shared, their masters’ ideologies of status than their masters’ interpretations of the past. This accounts partly for the idea that ‘slaves lack history’. To some commentators, shared ideology suggests that slaves have internalized the historical views of their masters. But ideology and memory should be kept separate. Not only did many of the slave descendents I talked to have distinctive memories of the past; but ‘slave memories’ also exhibit considerable internal differences. The category ‘slave’ was not unified. It comprised a range of gradations of status and diversity of personal experiences that are cristallized in the different memories of today’s slave descendents. Reflecting on a field which received greater attention than its African counterpart, that of slave sources in the American South, Vann Woodward concludes that ‘the slave narratives can be mined for evidence to prove almost anything about slavery’ (1974:475). That is, these sources provide a broad range of recollections of the past rather than a uniform view. The concept of ‘slave history’ - or lack of it – is less than helpful.

People of slave descent in Ader may proffer alternative readings of the past from those of free people, and indeed of other slave descendents. Rather than asking whether slaves have, or lack, a history of their own, we should be asking under which circumstances the memories of free and dependent groups correspond or differ; and what accounts for correspondence and divergence, as the case may be. Even within the same social and political unit, slave- and free-descendents may, or may not, have shared memories (i.e. the actual facts recalled by different groups may differ or overlap). In either case, they may, or may not, share interpretations of these memories (the same fact may be interpreted in equal or different ways). For example, until 1917 the French struggled to subdue the Tuareg elites of the Kel Dinnik (Eastern Iullemmeden). Some slaves of the Kel Dinnik resisted colonial invasion and fought alongside their masters; others aligned themselves with local groups which had surrendered to French power. Accounts of resistance of Tuareg elites and slaves who fought with their masters sometimes differ – for instance, slaves and free may recollect different sequences of events, or attribute different causes to the eventual French victory. Moreover, different groups of slave descendents may highlight or dismiss particular factors, depending on their past and/or present circumstances.

¹ This paper is dedicated to the anonymous elders whose testimonies are reproduced in it.
However, if the notion that slaves are ‘without history’ is interpreted in the sense that slave memories are truncated, this deserves further attention. In the case of slaves, the genealogical transmission of memory (memories transmitted from parents or grandparents to their descendants) is interrupted when enslavement causes breaks in slave lineages. It is no coincidence that Maurice Halbwachs’ *les cadres sociaux de la mémoire,* originally published in 1925, which does not otherwise mention slavery, opens its preface with the story of a slave girl found in the woods near Châlons in 1732. The case of the girl, who apparently ‘had kept no recollection of her childhood’, prompts Halbwachs to ask of any slave child in her situation: ‘what will this child be able to retain if he is abruptly separated from his family, transported to a country where his language is not spoken, where neither the appearance of people and places, nor their customs, resembles in any way that which was familiar to him up to this moment?’ (1992 [1925]: 38). When I started collecting oral testimonies in Ader, I noticed that some elders began their accounts with an almost formulaic statement along these lines: ‘what I have seen with my own eyes, I can tell you, because I know that it is true (gaskiya). What I have not seen is just hearsay (jinji), I do not know if it is true or not’. On two occasions, small groups of elders stated at the outset that they could only speak of events that went back to their grandfathers, and they did not know anything about earlier periods. After some time, I realized that these statements were made primarily by slave descendents, and not by people of free descent. They could be interpreted quite literally as recognitions that their memories were ‘truncated’ at a certain point in time, possibly corresponding to their forebears’ separation from their original communities and the beginning of life as slaves.

In spite of this initial *recusatio,* the accounts that followed did not differ substantially from those of elders of free descent. I realized early in my oral history work that memory retained some accuracy\(^2\) over roughly three generations: the interviewee’s, his/her parents, and his/her grandparents. This discovery set a chronological limit to our enquiries approximately at the end of the nineteenth century. Beyond then, memories (which differed across groups) transmuted into a shared repertoire of stereotyped traditions about ancient conquerors (e.g. Askia Mohamed, Sarkin Darei, the Kanta of Kebbi, Agabba) and distant origins\(^3\) (e.g. from Mecca, or from Istamboul). People of slave descent often knew the feats of the ancient heroes believed to have ruled parts of Ader in ‘a very distant past’\(^4\), but this information is taught at school, frequently discussed in vernacular languages on the radio, and circulated in the form of a popular genre of Hausa songs. It constitutes a regional repertoire that cuts across age and status. On the other hand, elders of slave descent never claimed ancient foreign origin, and the high status connotations that go with it.

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\(^2\) By this I mean factual accuracy in the recollection of particular events, the occurrence of which could be confirmed through comparison with post-1900 colonial archives (especially *Rapports de Tournée* and the *Journal du Cercle,* where daily happenings at the Cercle level were recorded) and through extensive triangulation of interviews within a sample of roughly 40 villages.

\(^3\) In Ader, there is a relatively stable set of traditions of foreign origins that connect certain high-status groups to the history of Agadez, Istamboul, Ghat, Songhay, Mecca, etc. These traditions are presented and discussed in the work of Djibo Hamani (1975) and Nicole Echard (1975a, 1975b, 1985).

\(^4\) The chronology is very vague. This distant past, which is literally ‘immemorial’ because it consists of a set of stories removed from what people remember about their past, is often signaled in testimonies by the emphatic repetition of the Hausa word ‘then’ (*da*) in sentences like: ‘this is not today, you understand? This is then, then, then… before the arrival of the White… our grandparents were not even born… you understand? This is then, then, then…’
These origins constitute the tarichi of particular groups, and I was sometimes explicitly referred to individual elders of these groups, when I enquired about what is seen as their tarichi. On some occasions, former dependents would be able to recite the tarichi of their masters, and the version they provided usually differed from versions provided by the masters themselves. Instead, the descendents of groups of liberated-slave status (e.g. Iderfan, Ighawelen) tended to appropriate their masters’ past and ‘mould’ their own history on their masters’ tarichi, while silencing any reference to slavery. These accounts are characterized by a ‘brusque transition’ between relatively recent memories and a highly stereotyped tarichi.

Hence, I encountered two types of discourses of the past. For convenience purposes we can call them, respectively, recollections and traditions. At the level of recollections, all elders were considered as potential holders of collective memory. Irrespective of status, particular elders gained respect as sources of historical information, depending on three main factors: the variety of experiences acquired throughout their lives; present intellectual lucidity and rhetorical skill; and contact with older generations. The greatest importance was attached to elders (or sometimes even younger men) who had the chance of spending time with their grandparents or elderly parents. On the other hand, knowledge of a more distant past, which went beyond the trans-generational mnemonic continuity of recollections, consisted of orally transmitted traditions that functioned as a form of symbolic capital (see Bourdieu 1991:75-76, 106). Some elders ‘owned’ this capital (i.e. they ‘owned’ a tarichi); others tried to appropriate it; and others (primarily people whose slave descent was publicly known) lacked it, although they may have known that of others. Claims to ‘exclusive ownership’ of a tarichi or, as the case may be, to the tarichi of higher-status groups, should be seen as strategies in contemporary power struggles.

The notion that slaves are ‘without history’ has no analytical coherence unless it is appropriately qualified in relation to different types of knowledge of the past. In Ader, and possibly elsewhere, symbolic capital is derived from possession of this ‘knowledge’. This is altogether a different question from a historians’ concern with people’s memories and how these can be used to achieve a fuller insight into a past that in written form, today, represents a single perspective: the colonial one. If we are concerned with recording a variety of experiences, the recollections of people of slave or free descent have equal importance, and even ‘truncated memories’ provide meaningful information about the consequences of enslavement. Like the de-humanization of the ‘Muselmann’, the slave’s truncated memory is a ‘complete

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5 In the Hausa of Ader, the word tarichi has two meanings. It refers to ‘history’ in a generic sense, and to the traditions of origin of particular groups. While this latter sense tends to imply written Arabic form, if one asks elders of these groups for ‘their tarichi’, they will recite orally a particular story that is broadly known in the region as the particular heritage of their lineage.

6 Further triangulation and, when possible, confrontation with archival material, suggested that slave memory of their masters’ tarichi was almost invariably inaccurate about genealogical detail and succession to chiefly positions. Slave descendents tended to attribute chiefly functions to their own masters, even when these had been only relatives of the actual Amenokal or Tambari (chiefly title of Tuareg paramount chiefs). On the other hand, slave testimonies were often more reliable on, for example, the nature of the interaction between their masters’ group and French officials, whereas the masters’ descendents tended to aggrandize the behavior of their forebears.

7 *Muselmann*, literally ‘Muslim’, is the nickname given to prisoners of concentration camps who had lost a humane engagement with the world (‘staggering corpse’, ‘mummy men’, ‘living death’ are other terms applied to them).
witness’, that is, it ‘bears witness to desubjectification’ (Agamben 2002:151; cf. Ginzburg 19988). But the majority of slave descendents today are often three generations removed from their ancestors’ enslavement. In spite of a distant ‘truncation’, their memories are not shallower than those of people of free descent. Indeed, most slave descendents lack a tarichi and the higher social status that goes with possessing one. But the analytical status of a tarichi is questionable. At least in Ader, it is difficult to check the accuracy of these traditions.9 Surely, from an analytical perspective, lacking a tarichi cannot be equated to ‘lacking history’. The idea that slaves are ‘without history’ belongs to the ideological denigration of slave status. In this light, Bonte and Echard’s statement that the iklan are ‘clearly without history’ (1976:269, quoted above) exposes their uncritical acceptance of the social construction of slave inferiority.

Most of the testimonies presented below have been collected from the descendents of slaves who lived in separate settlements characterized by homogenous ‘slave’ status and attached to particular masters’ families or individuals until the beginning of the twentieth century. In these villages, elders of slave descent developed collective memories shaped by their shared experiences, and by representations of the past received from their parents. Today, the historical depth of their memories goes as far as that of people of free descent partly because, as noted, in the absence of writing there is a limit to how far back memory can be retained. This group undeniably has a collective history as slaves. Unlike the situation encountered by Martin Klein, in whose experience ‘former slaves were generally the worst informants’ (1998: 245), some individual elders of slave descent happened to have retained a detailed memory of past events and made an important contribution to my research. Partly due to slave descent, in their youths they engaged in multiple activities of historical significance, such as forced labor, seasonal migrant work, and mediation between colonial administrators and traditional chiefs. Younger people across status respect them for their knowledge. However, this respect accrues to them as individuals, and contrasts with the stigma placed on slave descent. This stigma accounts for the fact that, generally, slave descendents do not wish to reveal their history. They are, in Martin Klein’s words, ‘those who would rather forget’ (1989).

In the opening paper of a conference on the ‘usages of memory’ (Les usages de l’oubli), Yerushalmi asked if it might be possible that the opposite of forgetting be, not memory, but justice (Yerushalmi 1988). In recent times, a strong argument has been made that the public commemoration of slavery should be seen as a moral duty. For example, in the letter to the Premier opening a report titled ‘Mémoires de la traite négrière, de l’esclavage et de leurs abolition’ by the French Comité pour la Mémoire de l’Esclavage, Maryse Condé argues:

‘la très grande majorité de nos concitoyens du monde issu de l’esclavage sont convaincus que, malgré la loi du 21 mai 2001, l’histoire de la traite négrière, de l’esclavage et de leurs abolitions continue d’être largement ignorée, négligée, marginalisée. Ces concitoyens perçoivent cet état de fait comme un déni de leur propre existence et de leur intégration dans la République. En tant que citoyens, ils demandent que soit reconnu un passé qui a modelé non seulement leurs sociétés, mais aussi la France dans son ensemble’

8 I am grateful to Joel Le Corre for this and other references mentioned in this paper.
9 When written records on Ader ‘history’ exist, such as the Y-Tarichi (Peignol 1907) or the documents included in the Chroniques d’Agadez (Urvoy 1934), they too, possibly with the exception of the ‘Manuscript J’ consist of transcriptions of testimonies of traditions transmitted orally.
In recent commemorations of European abolition, for example of the 150\textsuperscript{th} anniversary France (1998) and of the 200\textsuperscript{th} anniversary in the UK (2007), silence has been portrayed as a shameful denial of the history of enslaved populations. But the student of West African slavery cannot avoid asking: shameful to whom? In some West African societies, remembering slavery evokes a sense of shame, and not of injustice, to the victims of past abuses. Discussing slave memory in Songhay society as it was represented by higher status groups (including higher status slave groups) and as it presents itself to the contemporary historian, Olivier de Sardan notes that \textit{‘l’esclave traditionnel ment parce qu’il est esclave. L’esclave, aujourd’hui, ment pour cacher qu’il est esclave’}. (1976:19, emphasis in the original). It is possible that, in contexts where past enslavement carries derogatory connotations (in the first part of the quote just given, slaves are characterised as a liars), forgetting does more justice than remembering.

Slave intellectual production exists in a hegemonic cultural context that devalues it. This devaluation results from the naturalisation of supremacy by those in power. Ideologies of hierarchy are based on the naturalization of difference, which posits that some people (e.g. slaves, women) are ‘naturally unfit’ for ratiocination and self-government. This legitimizes hegemony, for ‘exclusion based on natural incapacity was not really exclusion at all’ (Foner 1994: 444). Some West African societies justified slavery by turning it into a natural, and therefore indelible, flaw in the moral constitution of the slave person (the servile \textit{‘macula’}, see Botte and Schmitz 1994: 9, 11). A common trait of these contexts is that they put a premium on passing as a strategy of status mobility. Passing as non-slave is easier than passing as non-woman in a misogynist context, or than passing as non-black in a racist one. It is possibly closer to passing in homophobic societies, where for centuries homosexuals have struggled to hide their sexual preferences, which unlike gender and skin color are not immediately visible on the body. But while homosexuals may have wished to retain the characteristics that, if known, would have caused their stigmatization and persecution, slaves never chose to be slave and, from all angles, only stood to gain by erasing the memory of their own or their forebears’ status. Many slaves and slave descendents in these circumstances prefer silence and forgetting to resistance and political mobilization. Once again, I should emphasise that this is not a general disposition of slave societies. However, it applies to Ader and to other West African examples, where the ideology of hierarchy that underpinned social relations remained meaningful, whilst the most brutal aspects of slavery vanished. In recognition of this, and of the recency of some of the facts discussed, I have anonymised information that could connect the following testimonies to particular persons and groups. After all, at least one meaning of ‘testimony’ is that a witness should speak for himself/herself (Agamben 2002:17). Maybe future generations of slave descendents in Ader will choose to do so.\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{10} While all interviewees consented to share their knowledge with me in full awareness that I would use it to write a history book, I could not give this choice to their descendents, who may one day regret the honesty and generosity of their parents. The choice to anonymise also reflects a concern with the sensitivity of some of the information contained in these texts and with the preservation of peaceful relations between different groups.
Slavery in Ader: Past Characteristics and Present Memories

The historical characteristics of slavery in Ader and their twentieth century transformations are discussed at some length in a number of works (see Nicolas 1939, 1950; Reeb 1948; Bernus and Bernus 1975: 33; Bonte 1975: 54; Lovejoy and Baier 1975; Lovejoy and Baier 1977; Brock 1983, 1987; Rossi 2009). Here, I shall only outline the context to which the following testimonies refer to, in order to introduce how different testimonies are positioned vis à vis the facts they present.

Ader society is composed of Hausa-speaking and Tamasheq-speaking groups that, in the nineteenth century, were integrated in a single, hierarchically stratified, political system. In the second half of the nineteenth century, at the top of these hierarchical formations there were the Iullemmeden Kel Dinnik (Northern Ader) and the Kel Gress (Southern Ader). These warrior elites constituted a narrow demographic minority, and are known as imajeghen (Tamasheq) or abzinawa11 (Hausa). A second elite constituency comprised Tuareg Islamic clerics known as ineslemen (Tamasheq), malamai (Hausa), marabouts (term used in French), or jajaye (Hausa). This last term refers to skin color and means, literally, ‘the red ones’. In its current use, it carries a somewhat derogatory connotation. The testimonies provided below are from descendants of slaves of either warrior or religious Tuareg elites, who used all of these terms to refer to their former masters. In Hausa contexts, a slave’s integration into free society was easier than in Tuareg contexts (see Lovejoy 1978: 361; Smith 1981[1954]), and Hausaisation has been a frequent strategy of status mobility for Tuareg slave descendents (Nicolas 1975: 422). Ranking below warrior and religious elites, there were Hausa and Tuareg groups of free status,12 which in the second half of the nineteenth century, fell in the area of political influence of either the Kel Dinnik or the Kel Gress (smaller areas were controlled by particular imajeghen families of these two groups).

Free dependents owed different types of tributes to the paramount chief of their region, known as amenokal (Tamasheq). Tuareg chiefs were known as ettebol (Tamasheq) or tambari (Hausa), literally meaning ‘drum’ and establishing an identification between the chief and his insignia of power. Kel Gress chiefs were called agholla (Tamasheq). It is common for people of slave descent and Hausa villagers today to use amenokal and tambari interchangeably to refer to Tuareg chiefs, while the term sarki is used mostly for Hausa and Hausa-speaking kings. The colonial role of the chef de canton is exclusively translated as sarki. At the bottom of the hierarchy were the liberated slaves (e.g. iderfan and ighawelen, both Tamasheq terms for a status that was institutionalized only in Tuareg society) and the slaves, called iklan (Tamasheq), or bayou (Hausa – it should be noted that the standard Hausa term for ‘slave’ is bawa, pl. bayyi, however in Ader the plural bayou is more common). The terms Buzu, Buzaye, or Bugaje are also used frequently. While their precise

11 In spite of its etymological derivation from Abzin, or Air, the latter term is used today with mere reference to status, even for warrior elites which, like the Kel Dinnik, did not come from Air.
12 It should be emphasized that this is a schematic summary of a highly idealized model of Tuareg social stratification. Hausa and Tuareg views of hierarchy do not fully overlap. For the purpose of this paper, suffice it to note that in nineteenth century Ader Hausa social organization was encapsulated in the imajeghen’s political rule. This is the view presented in the following testimonies, and indeed in testimonies collected from other groups.
meaning varies across speech contexts, they refer most commonly to the slave descendents of Tuareg masters.

Slaves were internally diversified and stratified. The main distinction (see testimonies 2, 6, 7) is that between slaves who lived attached to their masters’ families and slaves who formed semi-autonomous communities of homogenous slave status settled in areas of influence of their masters. These communities functioned as reservoirs of goods (cereals, when they farmed, livestock, food, and slaves) and manpower for the masters. Masters could take anything they needed from these slave settlements, at any time. What they took was not a tribute, for it was considered their property, and was only used by the slaves who lived there and had to provide for their own needs. Free Hausa villages paid tributes to the paramount chief, which were collected by the Hausa village representative from individual producers and stored for representatives of the chief to collect (these representatives were usually enadan, or ‘forgerons’-blacksmiths). The quantities were not fixed from year to year, but were determined by the number of leather bags (Hausa, sing: taiki; pl. tayukka13) brought to the village representative by the same dependents who collected the filled bags. Usually tributes were paid in cereals, but some villages gave butter, or other local products.

The imajeghen obtained different kinds of goods (including slaves) also through raids, which could target slave or free villages in one’s zone of influence or in the areas controlled by other groups. The latter case amounted to a declaration of hostility and would be followed by counter-raids and war. Before 1900, people of imajeghen status acquired new slaves through the biological reproduction of slaves in their possession and through wars, raids and kidnapping. In addition, free people of all social statuses could buy slaves at markets and privately; they received them in gift; or they could accept to ‘protect’ poor people who offered themselves as slaves during famines and other moments of hardship.14 These were called bayun yunwa, and their status is

13 Another term used by elders, which is not anymore current is cikkurushin; pl. cikkurha.
14 I collected the following testimony from a man of imajeghen status (who did not belong to any of the imajeghen groups mentioned in his speech): ‘abzinawa youths would kidnap people also to prove that they are ready to get the turban [i.e. ready for transition into adulthood]. A youth may have animals and slaves, already. He is given weapons and a horse or camel. He and his best friend, to prove that they now can wear the turban, must kidnap animals or people. When they sell them, they get married with the money they earned. Not all imajeghen kidnapped and did rezzous. The [name of imajeghen group], for example, did not. They bought slaves. And after a war, they would receive them as a share of the pillage. They also knew many rich people in the area. They would call upon rich people they knew, saying that they have a youth (attajiri) who wishes to get married, asking them to send something. Their rich friends sent one or two heads of cattle, or whatever else they could. This is how they found the money to arrange marriages. So, [their] slaves were not taken in wars. They also inherited them from rich people. If a rich man died, he left an inheritance: lands, animals, slaves. Before parting his inheritance amongst his descendent, he had to give a part of it to the [chiefly group]. For example, a certain [man1] from [village]… you know him, he is the grandfather of [man2]. When he died, he had more than 100 slaves. He left 60 slaves to the [chiefly group] – 30 males, 30 females. He collected his slaves thanks to his business in tobacco and cloth. He was a Bahaushe, so he did not raid, but had inherited and bought slaves. The Hausa also got Buzu slaves because the Tuareg obliged rich Hausa people to buy slaves from them after raids, threatening them that they would take their belongings if they refused. A Tuareg could marry any slave woman he chose. […] In [village] there are the slaves of [chiefly group] – even the parents of [man3] were both slaves of the [chiefly group], they had been given to them. A slave of the [chiefly group] is free to do anything he wants. Some stay close to the masters, others are in various villages. Some may want to pay ransom (fansa), but others do not want to obtain freedom. The [chiefly group] supported their slaves a lot, especially at marriages or other ceremonies. So many slaves, or also free people, chose to stay under their protection. The people of
sometimes considered as slightly different, at least in theory, from those of war captives and bought slaves (see testimony 2). This is how a Bahaushe of free descent described the acquisition of bayun yunwa:

‘Slaves were sold at the market of [village]. Slaves were not necessarily acquired through wars and kidnapping. There were also the so-called slaves of famine (bayun-yunwa). These were acquired in two ways. If you had slaves but had nothing left to eat, you could sell one. Or some people who had nothing to eat could go to a rich person and give themselves up as a slave in exchange for being fed. Then these people would have to pay ransom (fansa) if they wanted to marry and be free’ (Fieldnotes 08/09/2005).

The religious specialists assisted (through mallamanci or maraboutage) particular warrior elites and were compensated in goods and slaves (testimonies 3, 6, 7). They also obtained a zakat or tamasadak, usually corresponding to 10% of agrarian production, from free or liberated villages. They toured villages to sell talismans, and facilitate religious practices for which their presence was necessary, against remuneration. Sometimes their dependents followed them in these tours and could exercise independent economic activities (testimony 6). After colonial conquest, villagers had to pay taxes, which were collected by village chiefs (Hausa: hakimai, sing: hakimi) and by the chefs du canton, who were responsible for collections in the region vis a vis the Commandant du Cercle. In some cases, former elites continued to demand traditional tributes to their former dependents and to expect that these did not modify their behavior toward them. They continued to receive customary contributions for various life cycle rituals in their families from former dependents, and they expected to be hosted and fed if they happened to pass by a former slave village. From the perspective of slaves who lived in separate settlements, emancipation coincided with the election of their own representatives as village chiefs (hakimi), and the obligation to pay taxes through their own representatives (testimonies 1, 7). It coincided with the acquisition of the freedom move independently and the beginning of labor migration locally (cin rani) or to more distant destinations (bida) (testimonies 2, 6, 7; see Rossi 2009 for a detailed discussion of these two migratory circuits). Emancipation coincided with the transition from having to work for their masters, to being the first ones to be selected for forced labor and obligatory military recruitment (testimony 7). In the face of ongoing material poverty, this is how an elder of slave descent phrased his sentiment of continued exploitation: ‘before, we used to work for the abzinawa, who sat and did nothing; then the White [colonialists] controlled our labor; now project agents tell us what to do… someone is always sitting and watching us work for nothing’ (fieldnotes 2000).

Even after colonial and national abolition, many people of slave descent have been choosing to ransom (Hausa: fansa) themselves and their dependents from the descendents of their former masters. This practice is particularly common amongst descendents of slaves of maraboutic groups, fansa being sometimes presented as a religious obligation (testimonies 6, 7, note 16). Many slave descendents retained

[village] used to do many little works for the [chiefly group], who did not work at all, but they were not their slaves’ (fieldnotes 25/09/2005). This statement attests to a great fluidity of statuses and social relations: free people acting as slaves, slaves not trying to be freed, slaves acquired in a multiplicity of ways by various categories of people.
ambivalent perceptions about their former masters. A single interpretation of the past has not yet settled, as revealed from contradictory expressions of admiration and resentment toward the former masters across testimonies, or even within the same testimony (e.g. testimonies 6, 7). The slave descendents’ self-perception is equally shifting between pride (for their courage) and self-deprecation (statements that they were ‘like animals’ recur). Two distinctive emotions that slave descendents evoke when they talk of their past are fear and courage. Fear appears to be constitutive of slave experience, as slaves are not institutionally protected from many acts that would be considered intolerable when committed against free people (e.g. the separation of children from their parents). The slave’s institutionalized exposure to exploitation must have been a constant source of fear. In these circumstances, resistance was particularly courageous. In this respect, the frequent references to Abdo, one of the first men of slave descent to be recognized as village chief is meaningful, and Abdo is often characterized as ‘brave’. In several villages, elders of slave descent (who ignore their biological grandparents) refer to Abdo as their grandfather. I have not found references to Abdo in colonial archives. The case of Amajalla is different (testimony 3). Amajalla was a goumier of slave descent who was killed in 1917 by imajeghen related to Al Fourer, a dissident chief, when Amajalla brought his former master a convocation from the Commandant du Cercle. While this event is recorded in colonial archives, there is no reference to his slave status, which gives an altogether different meaning to this episode. The cases of Abdo and Amajalla reconfirm that it is not so much that slaves are ‘without history’, but that history has been written as if it were ‘without slaves’. The following testimonies are provided in the aim of contributing to redressing this imbalance.

It might be helpful to say just a few words on the research process through which the seven following testimonies were collected. I started working in north eastern Ader in 1997. Since then, I conducted about 3 years of field-based research focused on contemporary social, economic, and political dynamics, before starting to work on oral history. My previous research and the excellent qualities of my carefully selected assistants proved vital to my historical enquiries, as my informants knew that we were well acquainted with their society. The testimonies that follow are taken from 170 interviews made between January 2005 and December 2008 by myself, mostly together with my senior research assistant. These were semi-structured discussions with one or more (usually not more than five) persons. My enquiries were never focused solely on slavery, but slavery revealed itself as a major institution to which many informants referred to. With key informants, I conducted repeated interviews. When possible, I allowed my interviewee(s) to take the discussion in any direction they deemed relevant, and I sometimes held on to questions for months or years, if interviewees seemed uncomfortable about a topic. I chose not to ask certain questions unless informants volunteered information, which, to my surprise, they often did at subsequent meetings. In the absence of written records, my primary methods for validating information have been triangulation and integration with other types of data (e.g. genealogical information, observations of landscape characteristics and archaeological remains, etc.)
Slave memory

Different groups of slave descendants are more or less open about their slave origins. The least secretive are the ones living in close proximity to former masters, because such proximity is a constant reminder of their status. In a region where all mention of slavery is taboo, the explicitness of these situations sheds light on the conditions of continued dependence. These conditions do not necessarily involve a denial of slave historical memory. An elderly dependent descended from the slaves of a particular family may assist his younger patron in recollecting the past. This knowledge is both a source of respect for the elder and, at the same time, a service that he finds hard to refuse. On one occasion, I had arranged a meeting with a descendent of slave owners to learn about the history of his family. I did not expect to discuss slavery. While I had not interviewed him formally before, I knew him and his family well, as I was a close friend of some of his relatives. Like other high-status Tuareg, he lived in a large compound at some distance from the closest village nearby. When I reached him, he informed me that he had invited the village chief to join us, because of the chief’s old age (the chief was in his late seventies, while my host was in his late forties). The elder had been a slave of his family and had always lived next to them. The elder, my host said, might have helped us in our discussions, on aspects of the past that he ignored. When the elder reached us, the younger man introduced him to me as ‘village chief’ (hakimi) and stated that, due to his old age, the chief’s knowledge of the past was greater than his own. He then explained the relation between them, and how slavery functioned in the past. At the meeting, they both spoke.

Testimony 1, descendents of slaves and ineslemen masters (11/04/2005)

Younger host:
When [my family] came to Ader from the north, they had some slaves with them, maybe ten men and ten women, not many. They mostly bought the rest of the slaves at markets, and slowly these slaves formed the villages around them. As today one can buy cows at a market, then one could buy slaves. My ancestors would also do maraboutage work for the imajeghen, who gave them slaves in return.

Sometimes, masters and slaves lived in the same village. My ancestors were not nomads, they lived together with the slaves. The slaves would do herding, would pound cereals, and do a little farming for them.

The [imajeghen] would not touch them, their slaves, or their animals, for they were their marabouts. Even if one of their slaves was captured in war and told the [imajeghen] that he was [their slave], they would not touch him.

Because slaves were very numerous, they could not all be used as servants. Some left and formed their communities. The nobles were few. They married some of their female slaves, and that’s how they grew, but at the same time they ‘mixed’. Notre tawshit, si elle ne se marrie pas avec toawahit (femme esclave libéré) elle s’arrête. Now there are no more slaves, they are all free.

Elder:
When slaves went to live independently they paid a zakat, the 10% of the farming produce. Those who lived attached to their masters did not pay anything. It was like this: if one lives on his master’s farm, he does not owe a zakat (in shina gandun ubangigi nei, bai da zakat). But if he does not live with his master, he has his own things. For this to happen, he must part from the master, form his own farm (gandu), have his own animals, if what he has is enough
to pay the zakat, he must put aside the sum requested for the zakat (sai ya ware daban, ya koma gandun kai nei, sai shi bisashe nashi. In su issa zakat, sai ya hidda zakat, sai shi ba ubangigi nei).  

If a slave dies, all his property goes to his master. If he marries, the master pays his bridewealth. If there is a slave village and the master does not live in the village, the relation remains. Even if he is not there, he keeps an eye on what is going on. If his slaves need something, the master will give them, and vice-versa.

[Here, the discussion moved on to the relations between the villages that existed before the arrival of the French. My host said that the chief would be much better informed than he on this, as he was a lot older, and he left me alone with the elderly chief for a little while. In this time, the chief gave me a very interesting description of which were the oldest villages in the region, and which more recent villages had been formed from older ‘mother villages’. This discussion was inseparable from an assessment of the relative status of villages founded by slave or free people, and mixed villages. He then mentioned two chiefs who, according to him, had been important at the beginning of colonialism. One was the chief of the group of the former masters, whom the French found at their arrival. Later, there was Abdo, the first man of slave status to have acquired the administrative role of village chief (in a nearby village) in this area. At this point we heard our host who was coming back, and the elder went on:].

At the arrival of the French, the [masters] were chiefs everywhere in this area, there was no other chief but them in this land. [The discussion continued without further reference to slavery].

I found myself in this situation twice, with unrelated groups. On both occasions, the man of the masters’ class spoke primarily about his family’s origins, while the elderly slave descendant elucidated local history in early colonial times. ‘Slave memory’ was respected and seen as particularly accurate for factual circumstances. In addition to the information they convey, these encounters attest to complex social dynamics. Today the elder mentioned above is a village chief. This position gives him authority in a village inhabited mainly by other slave descendants. It also gives him a role of responsibility in the local administration. The ex masters are still attached to a past code of honor, which makes them scorn the lifestyle of villagers and the bureaucratic nature of contemporary power. They choose to keep status and relinquish a power that would constrain their freedom to dispose of their time as they please. Today, however, they cannot circumvent local administration entirely, and having a former dependent as village chief is a convenient arrangement. Thanks to the patronage of the descendents of the old masters class, the former slave is now a village chief. For him dependence and autonomy are inextricably linked. Both parties straddle between past status and modern power, between hierarchy and citizenship. The ambivalence of these situations is also apparent in the conversation. Here, in contrast with the following texts, the language of obligation is substituted by a language of accommodation and cooperation. Fansa is not mentioned. While the host is away, Abdo is presented alongside the chief of the former masters’ family. But when the host returns, the conversation changes brusquely.

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15 This discussion was conducted in three languages: French, Tamashiq and Hausa. Initially, we spoke Tamashiq and I relied on the translation of an assistant. My host, however, could speak some French, and at points he spoke to me directly in French. The host, the chief, and myself, we all spoke an imperfect Hausa, and the chief spoke Hausa to me.
Memories of slavery

Testimony 2, descendent of slaves of imajeghen (29/10/2005)

Before the arrival of the White we lived in [village1]. I do not know where we came from before then. In [village1] we lived in three neighborhoods, called [names]. In those times, in [village1] there were also two free groups: [group1] and [group2]. [Man] of [group 1] was like a village chief (hakimi) and a representative (wakili) at the same time, he was responsible for collecting bags (tayukka) for the abzinawa in a number of villages. We worked for [group1], even though we were the slaves of [group3], and particularly of [names of 6 men of group 3]. There were several tambari, but the most powerful of all was Mahaman Tambari. His main camp was eastwards, after the camps of the tambari of the Igdalen, and of Al Hourer and Baso. When [names of imajeghen] came, they stayed at the house of [hakimi mentioned above]. Some buzaye went with the imajeghen [group 3], who moved around all the time. But we stayed, we did not follow them.

Then, we moved to [village2], and went to [village1] for cin rani. The imajeghen never lived in [village2]. We were almost independent from them, we saw them rarely. We went to [village1] for cin rani, and the imajeghen always knew where we were, but we did not have to ask them the permission to go. When we were in [village 1] for cin rani, we had our families and animals with us. Someone may have asked us to keep their animals, but herding other people’s livestock it was not our main activity in [village 1]. The imajeghen’s animals were kept by the slaves who followed them around. The imajeghen had two types of slaves. Those who followed them around, and those who lived in villages. The latter were more independent, but were also poorer and had less to eat, they were more vulnerable. Those who were with their masters (bayun murfu) had no freedom whatsoever, but were always taken in charge. We were the ‘far ones’. This group does not have a generic name, slaves in this group are called their tribes’ names: like [names of slave groups]. Slaves in this group were in charge of themselves. They ate what their fields produced, and bought their own clothes by selling their own animals, when they had to. They had few rights and obligations toward the imajeghen.

The condition of the ‘bayun murfu’ was the following: their children did not inherit. They always lived attached to their masters. They married mostly with other slaves of their masters. When they married outside the group of their master’s slaves, the bride’s master was contacted, by her father if he was there. Then the bride’s master went to inform the master of the husband that one of his male slaves wanted to marry one of his female slaves. Then, they would agree on the arrangements. The master of the groom had to pay the bridewealth for his slave’s future wife. The bridewealth went to the master, not the father. The husband, who was a slave, would spend the night at the camp of his wife’s master, with his wife, and the day in the camp of his own master. But when the marriage was between two slaves of one master, usually there was no bridewealth involved. When bridewealth was paid, the amount was undetermined.

When distant slaves wanted to get married, the tambari of the groom only had to give him his authorization, but would not contribute to the bridewealth.

I have seen places where slaves and masters were buried in different sites. But in [village 1], everybody was buried in the same place.

Now all this is gone. The White banned this, and now everything is for them (Nassaru sun hana, yanzu duk nasu ne).
Our parents were the first generation to go on *bida*. They started going to Agadez, Kaduna, Jos, Maradi… they went on foot. Before our parents, we did not practice *bida*, but we accompanied the animals toward In Gall at the beginning of the rains.

Our parents did not buy the land they cultivated. It was the land of their *imajeghen*, they could cultivate it without problem. The *imajeghen* did not want the land, but they wanted a part of the harvest. This part was not fixed. After the harvest they would come to their village, and our parents gave them what they could. They did not give directly to the *imajeghen*. [Hakimi] of [village 1] would send his *makra* [*enadan*, *forgeron*, *blacksmith*] to collect part of the harvest from them. Now we do not give anything to the *imajeghen*. Since the White chased them away, we stopped giving. But when the White arrived we started giving to the *chef du canton*. The taxes paid to the *chef du canton* are more than what we used to give to the *abzinawa*. The *imajeghen* used to send a representative who was not tough, and took little. But the representatives of the *Chefs du Canton* were a lot firmer.

[…]

Not all slaves were treated in the same way and had the same status. The slaves captured in war, they had to pay *fansa*. But the greatest part of the slaves were the so called ‘*bayun yunwa*’, people who put themselves under the protection of someone powerful after famines, because of need. The *imajeghen* did not require these people to pay *fansa*, because they were not captured in war, they were not *bayun murfu*, and they had not been bought at the market. They were *bayun yunwa*. *Fansa* is necessary for those you caught in war and those you bought.

The slaves of the *jajaye* are called [name]. It was a famine that made them ask protection to the *jajaye* who had a lot of animals and were rich, but did not have many people to work for them, and they themselves did not work at all. The *jajaye* had *bayun yunwa*, but they told their slaves that if they could they should do *fansa*, and they have the habit of taking *fansa* from them. [He recites words in Arabic, perhaps a Quranic surah, then adds:] In taking them in charge at the time of famine, the *jajaye* did something that deserves Allah’s reward. But in asking them *fansa*, they do something against Allah’s will.
Testimony 3, descendents of slaves of imajeghen (04/10/2005)

I must be 98 years old. I am more or less the same age as [man of master group], we were children at the same time. I always lived here. Until the arrival of the White, this was the camp of the imajeghen. It is here that Al Fourer lived, as well as [names]. My parents told me that these chiefs all used to come here, before they moved to [current residence]. They were here with their slaves. They did not do anything, and the slaves did everything for them, except farming. The imajeghen had absolute power over the entire area. They had no representatives (wakillai). They exacted no tributes (bodu). They took what they needed, at any time. You understand? They did not take anything in person. They sent their slaves to take, for example bags (tayukka) of millet. Only the sight of one of their slaves gave fear to the villagers. As soon as a baabzine entered a village, the villagers would rush to find what they had of most valuable to give him. They feared them. The abzinawa didn’t do anything, slaves did everything for them, and they just sat. The White abolished slavery, and it was particularly when Kountche came into power that everybody was equal, there was no more question of slavery. The Buzaye fear two things, after God: the abzinawa and the White (nassaru).

The imajeghen stayed in tents. When they moved around, they would get off their camels, and people would build their tents for them. They stayed as long as they wanted and were fed and served. Their main market was [village]. Slaves were sold in markets like animals. They could also be sold at home: someone could come to the place of a baabzine and ask him to buy slaves, and he would sell them. Everybody except a slave could buy slaves. I do not know the price. But the imajeghen were sometimes more pressed to sell quickly and leave the market than to bargain over the price. They obtained slaves for nothing, so the price was not stable, it varied a lot, it is impossible to quantify.

The [group] were the malamai of the abzinawa. They were always with them, did maraboutic work for them, gave them the authorization to make attacks on the basis of their religious knowledge and received slaves in exchange.

The French had sent Amajalla to convoke the imajeghen. Amajalla was a black working for the white as interpreter and soldier. He was an ex slave of the [imajeghen]. [Man] killed Amajalla in Fachi (close to Chimborien). The killing of Amajalla took place before killing of Afadandan.
Testimony 4, descendents of slaves of ineslemen (10/06/2005)

Before the arrival of the French, the imajeghen had power (mulki)... the abzinawa, the [name], you know... The White killed them (Nassara sunka yanke su). Once one [baabzine] passed in [this village] and grabbed a little child. The child's mother saw him, so she ran and grabbed her child’s arm. The [baabzine] hit her on the head with the flat side of his sword, but she did not let go (ba ta saki ba). So another baabzine told him to let the child go, and the child saved himself. In those times there were no village chiefs (hakimai). The abzinawa were in the bush (daji), and came to the villages to take away people’s children (suna daukan yaran mutane). The had great strength.

The imajeghen stayed in the area of [villages]. They would come and grab anything they wanted: cattle, children, food... They brought war, but some villagers were brave and resisted their attacks, so the abzinawa did not go there.

They used to sell slaves in the market of [village]. The slaves were tied to each other, sitting down on the floor. The women were more expensive than the men. The two big markets were [villages].

But if the abzinawa had taken your son, and he was sold in some market, you could go to that market and find those who bought him, and try to buy him back. They would accept, because the same could happen to them one day. This is how we would find the child and come back with him [mu samu yaro, mu komo da shi].

The White killed the abzinawa before they could make peace with them. The White called them one by one to the poste, and killed them. They killed one, two, three... then the abzinawa understood and left.
Testimony 5, descendents of slaves of ineslemen (04/03/2005)

When we came to [this village], we called it [name], meaning to hide, to escape, because we feared the incursions of the abzinawa and hid at the feet of the hills and in the forest. We are slaves, black skinned. The [group] were not slaves. The [masters] might have taken things from them, but they were not their slaves.

The abzinawa from [region] did not spend time close to here. Sometimes they would make incursions, take things they needed, or meet the [malamai]. If the [malamai] had a problem, they would inform the abzinawa who solved it for them. The [malamai] were the marabouts of the abzinawa, and prayed to protect them in war.

We didn't give anything to our masters, [the malamai], or to the [abzinawa]. No zakat or tributes. We were their slaves, and had no possessions that we could share. We worked for the [masters] 5 days on 7 on lands which were not our own. On Fridays and Sundays we could work for ourselves. All our goods, then, belonged to our masters.

It was Abdo who made peace agreements, he was a black slave. He was born in [village], from where he moved to [village]. The [masters] avoided meeting the French. The abzinawa did not have a fixed place in the past, nor did the malamai.

The [masters] never did anything at all, so they always needed slaves with them. One family of [masters] would live in a place, and their slaves, many more then them, would be all around. Even if they needed something in the night, they could get a slave nearby to do it for them. But most slaves lived in separate villages. The masters would pass, sometimes just twice or once a year, to take millet after the harvest. They also had slaves who were always with them. These they did not take from villages, they had lived with them from generations and generations.

They could take anything from us at any time. And if we displeased them, they could hang us from a tree. [One of the two elders brings a rope from inside the hut, and shows how they would be hung.] Even those who call themselves ‘malamai’ could not be real malamai because they themselves hung their slaves.

All this finished when the White arrived and Abdo signed a peace treaty with them.
Testimony 6, descendants of slaves of ineslemen (09/03/2005)

Elder 1:
We were always together with the jajaye, the [masters’ name]. We were farmers and herders. We were together, but not mixed. The [masters] had a camp, we had a village (suna zango, muna gari). The master’s camp was at the border of our village. The [masters] were herders and clerics (malamai). They moved around a lot. In the rainy season they were at the feet of the hills. After the rains, they descended to the valley. The [masters] also had herders from their village who lived with them, close to them, and followed them when they moved with the animals.

In the past, we only had one chief, the masters’ chief, not two. But our ancestors who lived separately, did not see the [masters] often. They met at the time of Ramadan, for the prayer, because the masters’ liman would pray for everyone. Our first village chief (hakimi) was Abdo. He was a black man. We do not know where he came from, but we all descend from him, he was our grandfather. Abdo made peace with the French. ['Abdo ya yi amfo’, ‘amfo’ being the transliteration of ‘impot’. They also say ya yi amana.] We started paying taxes under the French. Before, we only paid the zakat for the malamai, which was 10% of the agricultural produce. And if we had enough animals, they would give animals, too, as zakat. At the time of tax paying, the sons of Abdo would leave [Abdo’s village] and go to collect taxes in different villages, all the way to [names of villages]. Then he would take them to the French in Tahoua. The taxes were in money, a type of money they called kobo. They obtained this money by weaving tsawaye (traditional cotton bands) and selling them at markets. That’s what people wore back then. They also sold animals at markets.

Before the arrival of the White, we did not migrate nor move independently from the masters’ will. This is because it was their masters who took care of our needs in case of lack of food; because it was the masters who disposed of our time, and they would not allow us to go; and because it was dangerous to move around, as there were various groups of Tuareg who could find us.

Elder 2: the Tuareg of the Air and those of the Azawagh had agreed amongst themselves that if they found slaves they would bring them back to original patrons.

Elder 3: Some of us tried to travel in bida, even before the arrival of the White. The furthest they got was Zaria in Nigeria. But when they returned, the [masters] could take everything they had earned, if they found out. It is with the arrival of the White, the cessation of abzinawa incursions, and the abolition of slavery, that we started traveling independently more frequently. This is true for everybody in this region.

Elder 1:
When our grandparents were the slaves of the [masters], before the white, they were not free to do bida. But cin rani they did. They started accompanying their masters in their trips to the south, but they never went beyond Madaoua. The masters went there to do mallammanci and collect alms from villagers. They camped all together at the outskirts of the village, the slaves with their families and, some of them, some small livestock. The masters lived in the village, and even slept there. They returned to their slaves only for specific needs. So, while the masters were staying in the village at their hosts’, the slaves worked as village herders for some people of the village. They herded their animals, and were paid at the end of the season. They got money or produce. One botte [damma] for small ruminants and two bottes for cows. They carried as much as they could back to the village on donkeys. If they could not use donkeys, they would sell the cereals and return with the money. This type of cin rani lasted about 6 months. The masters did not forbid them to work for villagers. But upon return, the masters would take their earnings from them.
It was different to be slave of abzinawa and of jajaye. The abzinawa were nice to their slaves, they showed kindness (kyauta) to them. The slave of a baabzine had the same clothes as his master. The slave of the jajaye was in rags.

Also, the slaves of the imajeghen were freer, because the imajeghen traveled all the time, they did not stay in one place. Their slaves would see their masters once a year. For the remaining time they were almost free. This is why the people of [village] were able to go on cin rani to [village] independently [reference to village of testimony 2]. A baabzine would have few slaves with him, to help him with his daily needs. But many other slaves, settled in villages, were de facto independent.

But young men today do not go cin rani anymore. They mostly go on bida. It is because they have no more animals, so they can go. [A young man says it is because he does not want his family to get tired and humiliated].

Now fansa is still done by many people. And everyone gets a document attesting to payment. For a man, it is about 15,000, today, as a friendly arrangement. But for a woman is between 40,000 and 50,000. People are still doing this not so much because of fear of being treated as slaves by their ex masters, but because noone will marry their daughter unless she has been ransomed.
Testimony 7, descendents of slaves of ineslemen (03/03; 04/05; 28/10/2005)

Father:
In the past, we only ate milk and meat. We also collected wild herbs and grains. We ate what animals like monkeys (biri) eat on the trees. We did not know agriculture, and did not eat cereals. In the rainy season, we stayed here. After the rains, we left with the animals, then we returned back here. This village was the camp from which people left and to which they returned. If someone died in transhumance, his corpse would be brought here on a camel, he would be buried here. In those times, there were few other villages around here. Even Tahoua was a village of a few straw huts (bukoci) and only buzaye lived there.

We lived with the [masters], who weren’t many, as their slaves. The [masters] didn’t do anything, and we did everything for them, we kept the animals and gathered wild plants.

The abzinawa and the [malamai] were together, they formed a united front. The abzinawa would tell the [malamai] what they intended to do, and the malamai would pray for them and recite powerful verses. For example, if the Tuareg went to a foreign region, the malamai would arrange for them not to be seen, to be invisible. They could make special prayers (raka) and foretell the future (duba).

We never paid a zakat, partly because there were no cereals, but primarily because we did not own anything, we could not give anything because we had no ownership over anything at all. We could not even marry. After the arrival of the French, if we wanted to become independent we could try to pay a sum (fansa) to the master, and the master would have to free us. Money was rare, back then, so one would give animals. But before the French, ransom was not possible because we had nothing, we could not earn anything either. There were no marriages between the [masters] and us. But if the [masters] liked a woman, they could just take her, and her children would be free and of the masters’ status. The other way round would not occur (a freeborn woman could not marry a slave man).

Before the arrival of the French noone went either in bida or cin rani. Life was different, and a slave had no independence. A slave was like one of the animals of his master. He could not move without his master’s agreement. It was like this: every master family had a main camp. Next to this camp, all his people (relatives and slaves) were buried. Even if they died far away, their corpse would be transported back on a camel and buried here. It was the same place and the same ritual for masters and slaves. There were two main migratory circuits. Before leaving, the abzinawa would beat the drum in different camps, as a sign of departure. The rhythm would be different from that of a war. At the beginning of the rains, masters and slaves went northwards, toward the Azawagh. Then they started returning southwards, and in the dry season they went toward the valley (fadama) of [villages], but they never went beyond Madaoua at the border of Hausaland (bakin Hausa). At any time, there were different groups in circulation, and some people (elders, children, and few youths who were tired of traveling around) who stayed in the main camp. At any time, some people could return, stay a few days, go back... But, before the arrival of the French, a slave could not move around – anyway, why would he move around? There were no markets, no need for money. People had animals, drank milk, did transhumance. Clothes and necessities were mostly provided by masters.

Slaves would not marry between them. The master would tell them to take this one or that one and that’s it. A slave could disagree and eventually get with someone else.

Son: You see those heads of cattle on that field [pointing]? A couple gets together and breeds, then they sort of hang together – that’s how it was.
Father: This happened between the slaves of one master. They did not see the slaves of other masters often. Sometimes a slave woman would be pregnant, the master would give her to a male slave, just to find a father for the kid. Children born from slaves did not belong to their father. There may or may not be a naming ceremony, depending on the master’s will. Anyway, it is masters who named slave children. Some named them real names, but most of them gave them names which were very different from their own. They named them after plants or animals, or gave them funny Tamasheq names. Or the name of the day when he was born. Slaves would be called names like these:

Akkokoz: [imitating the cry of roosters]
Eggur: castrated animal
Aggaruf: small plant with thorns
Amajalla: can’t be bothered, he is useless
Amatteya: the one who does not die
Anafaran: the chosen one
Imboran: good farmer

As surname they used the name of a maternal uncle, because the father was uncertain. Marriages were promiscuous. A master could dispose of the children of his female slaves, and their [slave] father had no rights upon them. Slave couples got together almost secretly, without testimonies or formalities. It is after the arrival of the French, that some slaves started taking the courage to tell their masters that they would like to marry a certain woman. The master could agree or not. If he agreed, the master could help to arrange the marriage and find something as bridewealth. Because they were working for the master but were not paid, they expected the master to cover their needs. But if the master did not help, the slave could migrate (bida) to find some money to pay for his bridewealth. After the arrival of the White, he could leave without his master’s authorization. That’s because masters would be afraid to forbid their slaves.

[I ask if slaves ever revolted]. In any case, I never heard that slaves revolted in this region. The abzinawa were not many, but they were a lot stronger then us in war. Their weapons were superior, and Allah guided their blows – they never missed, they killed, they were strong and protected. When the abzinawa went on a war, sometimes the Eklen Egef and slaves (bayou) fought next to them. The abzinawa were grouped in the valley, the slaves and Eklen Eguef were the first to be hit, they were aligned on the sides of the hills – this is why the Eklen Eguef are called this way, because they would wait on the hill’s slope guarding the area (they guarded the hill). They would receive the first impact, and the abzinawa at the centre would fight afterwards.

Different types of slaves were treated differently. They are all called ‘iklan’. But those who stayed close to the masters, and were always with them, taking care of all their daily needs, were also called wendausen [Tamasheq ‘inferiors’?]. Those who lived in a settlement nearby, could be called inaragan [Tamasheq: neighbours, people who live next to you?]. The masters were a lot kinder with the slaves who were always with them, they treated them like relatives and looked after them. Those who lived detached got almost nothing, while at the same time they did not gain much more freedom. Not all the slaves who used to be close to their masters did fansa. Some remained with their masters, as they gained protection and food and it was easier than being on their own. If they were well treated, they could have chosen to remain attached to their masters. An old master is obliged to feed his slaves. Even I, after my mother and father, the first person I prefer staying with is my master.

[I ask ‘why?’ He replies]: food (abinci).

I did fansa for myself. I gave two oxen, and received a paper as guarantee. My son paid fansa for his second wife when he married her, because otherwise her children would belong to her master. I never heard that a master turned down fansa. When the [development project] came
and people from this village got food for work to work on the worksites, many people, men and women, saved money so that they could ransom themselves. Today, if a male slave marries a free woman, the kids are free, only the father is slave. If a man marries a slave woman, her kids belong to her master, unless her husband ransoms her first. This is why his son ransomed his wife.

[explains ‘sadaka’ marriage]

People still have to pay fansa because if someone wants to go to Mecca, he must have done fansa. Religion demands fansa (addini shina son fansa). And even if it is outlaw in the government, the laws of the Quran are more important than the government’s laws. And, until tomorrow (har’ gobe), if fansa has not been paid, a slave can expect from his master that he pay for his ceremonies. And his master will expect that his slave work for him.

Addo was my grandfather. Initially, he was a slave of the [name of masters] and went to [village] with the masters. But he was the only one brave enough to talk to the White. The Tuareg feared them and escaped or hid when they came. Addo asked the [malamai] and the [imajeghen] to see the White and accept to make peace with them, but they refused and left. Addo went to see the White and made peace with them. […] But before this, there were no markets for us, and no money. The White brought onions (albasa) and sweet potatoes (dankali). We began to use a currency, which the White brought, called ‘jamil’, which consisted in small coins of bronze, that looked like the 25 fcfa coin (cuire, ja karfi, kaman dala biyat). At the time of the White, we built the dam of Adouna. In the past there were lakes which did not dry even in the hot season, and that’s where we brought the animals. People did not travel far until the arrival of the White. Only after they arrived, we started to move around. This is how we began to farm… two men from this village had traveled all the way to Kano, and observed farming practices. They saw millet and sorghum, and they took some back. They copied more or less what they had seen, but they were not skilled farmers and only produced five bottes. As back then people were not used to eating cereals, the 5 bottes lasted them a whole year! They ate just a bit of cereals together with other things. They had no granaries either. So they dug a whole in the earth, washed it with water, put the cereals inside, and covered it with earth again, leaving a sign to mark the place. When they wanted to take cereals, they would dig them out.

I was very brave to remain in [this village]. Many times my old masters sent people to take me and bring me where they are now, because I was their slave. But I always refused. They wanted me to go with them, but I refused. […]

I did the work for the French airport in Tahoua. It was like when [project agent] was here and worked with [my son], directing him – something like that. I had many important friends in Tahoua, but I never learned French because I did not think, at the time, that it would become the language of power. Otherwise, I would have learned it and I, too, would have become someone important. Afterwards I even looked for the friends I had met in Tahoua, but they would not let me trace them. I also built the road between Niamey and Tahoua. They did not pay me. I was a great traveler! I went to Bilma to take salt, and to Zaria. My generation was the first generation which went ‘en exode’. I was amongst those who worked for the French to build the city of Tahoua. The French had African captains working for them, so I did not work directly with the French. The Afro/French chiefs I knew in Tahoua were: Anza, Tunne,  

16 See interview with intellectual of free descent: ‘Today, most of the slaves are free. But they still try to redeem themselves, to pay ‘fansa’ – which is a religious obligation if someone wants to go to Mecca. Because the pilgrimage of a slave who has not freed himself from his master is null, according to religion. Likewise, a rich man wanting to marry a slave woman would have to pay to free her first, because religiously that will make her children free.’ (Fieldnotes, 28 April 2005).
Labo, Moga, Balgagi… They spoke French, but not Hausa, so they had no common language with workers. The French would kill a bull and feed workers with that meat… I did limestone work, too. The French dug limestone [fara kasa, colcoli] toward the river, and people worked there to dig out limestone and roast it and turn it into ‘dust’ and put it in leather bags, which the French collected. In those times, this was forced labor – they used force to bring people to the worksites (lokacin nan, aikin doli ne – da karfi ana kawo mutum wajen wurin aiki).

Now many old masters are not powerful anymore. The sources of their wealth were animals and milk, which allowed them to support their dependents. But now it’s the time of money and tuwo (staple food of settled Hausa villages, a type of millet polenta). Now, the old masters are our younger brothers. We may even send each other reciprocal gifts to commemorate our past relation. Our old masters can remember about us and send us clothes or sugar. There is no more slavery. Thanks to the White, we have entered the market (mu shiga kasuwa).

Son: Everybody today wants freedom. Not a single slave would rather remain slave than be free. No-one wants to know that people look at you and whisper ‘you know, c’est un esclave’, that’s why people do fansa.

[I say, but it seems that there are some benefits in the relations with the former masters].

Son (stretching his arms forward): I have two arms. Give me one job (aiki), any job that I can do, and I will not look for the former masters again. And even if an old woman cannot work, she can still go to her relatives, rather than her masters, if they have a job and can support her.
In conclusion

It is equally misleading to think that ‘slaves lack history’; that all slave descendents share a common memory of the past; and indeed that it might be possible to distinguish neatly between slave-descendents and free-descendents. Today, historians, anthropologists, and Ader inhabitants talk of ‘slave’ and ‘free’ as if they were bounded constituencies. This is a discursive shortcut. Let us take an example. I used to visit an elder who was one of my closest acquaintances in his village. I always discussed the history of Hausa-speaking (Asna) society with him. One day, I asked him if he knew any old men as experienced as him in a nearby zone that I intended to visit. Without hesitation, he recommended a person who became possibly my most important source. They were half brothers, from the same (slave) mother and different fathers. The former grew up a free animist Hausa. The latter, whose father was a slave, grew up a ‘slave’, whose intelligence and curiosity led him to read the Quran and achieve, in his old age, a respected status. Although he was fluent in Hausa and could speak some Arabic, his first language was Tamasheq. These two elderly half-brothers were very close. I wished I never had to report the former’s death to the latter. I could cite many similar cases. They shed light of the question of what, if anything, is peculiarly ‘slave’ in the memories of slaves’ descendents. It might be appropriate to take inspiration from the words of a slave who was able to write his own story:

‘There may be humane masters, as there certainly are inhuman ones – There may be slaves well-clothed, well-fed, and happy, as there surely are those half-clad, half starved and miserable; nevertheless, the institution that tolerates such wrong and inhumanity as I have witnessed, is a cruel, unjust, and barbarous one. Men may write fictions portraying lowly life as it is, or as it is not – may expati ate with owlish gravity upon the bliss of ignorance – discourse flippantly from arm chairs of the pleasures of slave life; but let them toil with him in the field – sleep with him in the cabin – feed with him on husks; let them behold him scourged, hunted, trampled on, and they will come back with another story in their mouths. Let them know the heart of the poor slave – learn his secret thoughts – thoughts he dare not utter in the hearing of the white man; let him sit by him in the silent watches of the night – converse with him in trustful confidence, of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” and they will find that ninety-nine out of every hundred are intelligent enough to understand their situation, and to cherish in their bosoms the love of freedom, as passionately as themselves’ (Northup, Twelve Years a Slave, ed. Eakin and Logsdon, 158).

What slave memories seem to have in common is a yearning to leave slavery behind, provided that the price one has to pay is not greater than dependence and exploitation. This is how I interpret the moving words cited in the last testimony: ‘I have two arms. Give me one job…’ Confronted with hunger and destitution, people make choices that are hard to contemplate under normal circumstances. But if this is the case, then also the apparent peculiarity of slave memory should perhaps be seen not as ‘peculiarly slave’, but simply human.
REFERENCES


